



Supporting Families and Friends of Prisoners

Action  
For  
Families  
Enduring  
Criminal  
Trauma

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# ***AFFECT News***

## ***Sharing News and Supporting Families September 2022***

### ***Notes from the Chair***

Dear Ones,

Summer is nearly over, and autumn beginning. Usually I love this season; crisp autumnal walks, woodsmoke in the air, chilly but not *too* cold. However, this year I am filled with dread. Energy prices soaring through the roof, cost of everyday shopping essentials rising, changes in political and monarchical leadership when stability, wisdom and experience are needed. The people most likely to suffer are those with the least resilience and capacity to thrive. That is when a compassionate society provides the necessary support network.

However, the work of AFFECT continues to provide support to families and the priorities continue to be recruiting new telephone support workers and promoting the service. Emma continues to provide much needed support to (thanks to the Lottery, and Emma), the Trust Board and the Chair. In addition, a pilot supervision 3 months is about to commence, supported financially by the Lottery and by Kathy, an experienced counsellor- thank-you, Kathy.

The recent Prison Reform Trust report provides very worrying reading. A summary is included in this newsletter. The bottom line being a reduced number of prison officers, with a high turnover leading to less experience and an increased and much higher prison population per 100,000 than any other European country.

Be assured that we will continue to work with our partners and similar organisations to influence the welfare of prisoners and provide some peace of mind to their families. We always welcome feedback from you, either by letter, email, or telephone, and we look forward to hearing from you.

Love,

Carol

## *Next Group Gathering*

Will be held on Saturday the 10<sup>th</sup> of December. To join in please reply to this invite by email: [affect@hotmail.com](mailto:affect@hotmail.com) or by calling us on 0300 365 3651 and we will give you the details you need to join the meeting. Keep your eyes on your inboxes as there may be one before this date but we will email you all to let you know!

This is a great opportunity to meet people going through similar experiences to you, and to talk in a safe and welcoming environment.

## *Prison charity asks inmates at HMP Bullingdon to donate food to people on the outside*

This short piece shows how one prison are running an event from October the 10<sup>th</sup>-28<sup>th</sup> to help those in need. They will be asking prisoners to donate from their canteen to help a local food bank. <https://www.oxfordmail.co.uk/news/22798074.prison-charity-asks-inmates-hmp-bullingdon-donate-food-people-outside/>

## *They Say I'm Mad*

This poem relates to the mental health crisis that continues to be experienced in this country and all over the globe. It has been written specifically for AFFECT.

### **They Say I'm Mad**

*By anon*

They say I'm mad. It's not so bad,  
Now, not so bold. Do as I'm told.  
I knew they were coming:  
Watching me. From the TV.  
They said kill. I had no will, but did it still.  
Be alright now. Did as I'm told.  
They came with guns. Did not run.  
In prison now. Do as I'm told.

## *Grants for Prison Visits*

Just to remind you that there may be a small grant given to assist a family member for prison visits. This is usually on a one-off basis, but it can recur.

## *TripAdvisor for Prisons*

Wouldn't it be great to have a website like TripAdvisor for prison visits?

It can be a mystery imagining a prison visit - the experience is so different to the portrayals on TV because it is wrapped up with our intense confusion of feelings about the person we are visiting. So, I will share a few experiences here.

I have visited 3 prisons so far. When my son went into remand prison in HMP Peterborough I was shocked and found it a humbling time. The check in desk was slow and the queue snaked out the building. Sometimes the computer system would "crash" and there would be long delays. I saw people turned away as they had the wrong ID - and I never forget mine as a result. Then we queued for a pat-down search in a crowded area; pressed up against others, like in the London Underground. We saw drugs changing hands and 3 arrests over 10 months. These were isolated scary moments and mostly people were ordinary and devastated like us, whatever their background. We walked in groups through several locked gates, doors and corridors to the visits centre with more security checks. We would sit at a designated table until my son came through (what a relief to see him) and could use a basic prisoner-run canteen during the visit. Sometimes you could see them poking and squashing the sandwiches before handing them over! There are plastic seats and tables in a group, fixed to the floor. My son sat on one side on a red chair, and officers watched and walked up and down with the dog. You are in a big, noisy room with other groups, but don't get distracted by it all. You are not being recorded; this is your precious time to say personal and private things. An officer gives a 5-minute warning to say goodbye, before it is time to go. The way out is quicker, just waiting for gates to unlock and pass you through, hand in your ID pass and you are out. I always feel tired as it has been an emotional afternoon, and now the long journey home begins.

Our visits to a higher security prison have been more respectful and compassionate by the staff. It is safer because they have better security equipment and more staff, so they are more relaxed and organised. My son feels safer there too, so don't believe the media hype. Your person is probably not a "monster," and it is certainly not a "mansion"!

### **Common Security Checks:**

- Photo and photo ID check (ask what is wanted when you book the visit)
- Taking off your coat and shoes for scanning.
- Pat down front-and-back, sometimes on a podium and same-sex for women.
- Two types of electronic scans
- Check behind the ears, hair tie, soles of your feet and in the mouth. Wear your best socks!
- Sniffer dog to walk past you in groups, or even closer sniffs on your arm or shoulders.
- Fingerprint ID.

I get anxious and do my deep breathing exercises through this time. There is nothing to worry about if you are not bringing in drugs of course, so just keep yourself calm, quiet and respectful and you'll get used to it. Imagine you are in an airport, but without the holiday afterwards!

## *TripAdvisor for Prisons (continued)*

### **My Top Tips**

**Top Tip 1:** Google the prison for “visitor centre services” which is often separate to the booking line. If there is a civilian service, they vary in what is offered and are run by different organisations. I find them to be run by really kind, helpful people. Ring up and ask:

- What refreshments are available?
- How much money can you bring, and does it need to be in coins?
- Do you buy a voucher, or buy things in advance that are brought to you?
- Are there lockers?
- How early do they open?
- Is your place in the visits queue prebooked or in the order of arrival?
- Are there toys for children? What rules are there about changing facilities and nappies?
- How long do visits last?

**Top Tip 2:** Go to the toilet before you are called through - don't waste precious visit time being escorted out to the loo!

**Top Tip 3:** Leave your jewellery at home and wear pull-on boots to speed things up.

**Top Tip 4:** Eat when you arrive at the visitor centre, so your limited money allowance can be spent on getting your person something nice to eat. Bring something to do while you wait, that can fit in a locker.

**Top Tip 5:** Learn a deep breathing technique.

**Top Tip 6:** Say the tough stuff at the start, then relax together and end on a happy note.

I wonder what your top tips would be?

Bev