



Supporting Families and Friends of Prisoners

Action
For
Families
Enduring
Criminal
Trauma



Registered charity no. 1097087

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AFFECT NEWS

Sharing news and support for families

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Notes from the Chair

Spring is here but, at the time of writing, it looks wet and grey out of the window. However, tulips, crocuses and daffodils are emerging, which lifts the spirits. Of course, our loved ones inside, or struggling on release, are ever in our thoughts and these signs of nature's emergence can fill us with bitter-sweet feelings and emotions.

Affect has been particularly busy recently; we have had an influx of new service users and, to meet the need, an appointment drive for Telephone Support Worker (TSW) volunteers. Welcome to our two new recruits, Veletta and Sarah.

The Lottery Fund bid has been submitted for the next 2 years. We await the outcome with fingers crossed. Our support from the National Lottery Community Fund has enabled us to 'buy-in' a Supervisor of TSWs (Kathy), and a Project Development Manager (Shannel). However, funding remains an issue, and I urge you to consider a donation, particularly a regular monthly amount, however small, e.g. £2 or £5. Our bank details are below¹.

We continue to engage with research; the latest projects being:

- Prison Visiting Design
- A campaign to raise awareness of the impact on families of having a loved one in prison.

To demonstrate our organisation's valuing the work of TSWs, a small reward voucher was given to each of them, prior to the December holiday. As with other charities, recruitment and retention of volunteers is a constant challenge, requiring considerable time and energy from the Trust Board. My very best wishes go to you all, and my hope that you can maintain a positive outlook, even in the face of adversity. Spring is a time of nature giving us positivity and hope.

Love,
Carol

Affect Charity, sort code 20-69-40, account number 40893048

'How to appeal'

Provides simple, accessible information on the appeal system and procedures – for prisoners and those who advise them. The booklet is in a simple question and answer format – reflecting the main questions asked by prisoners. It will also be invaluable to anyone who may be asked to give advice on how the criminal appeal system works. Single hard copies are free to convicted people and their families. For more information:

<https://justice.org.uk/our-work/publications/how-to-appeal/>

Free Legal Advice

The Criminal Justice Clinic project sees students research and advise on live criminal cases under the direct supervision of a solicitor. Students consider the evidence and unused material on a live criminal case where the convicted defendant continues to protest their innocence. They then carry out research and apply legal principles to determine whether there are any grounds for referral to the Criminal Cases Review Commission or for an appeal to be made. <https://www5.open.ac.uk/open-justice/news/open-justice-centre-parliament-prestigious-awards>

"Why *are* our prisons so full of young men?"

(Written in response to a suggestion by Brenda, who facilitates Group Gatherings.)

As a participant in a recent Gathering, and as a Telephone Support Worker, I have been struck by how many loved ones of Affect members are serving long prison sentences for violent offences committed when they were young, often very young men. Thanks to modern imaging scanning, and the way it has increased our understanding of how brains develop, it is becoming ever clearer that not only is the human brain the last organ to mature, but that for men, especially, the pre-frontal cortex, which controls behaviour, is not fully developed until they reach their mid-twenties.

So, someone who is, and looks like any adult can still be prey to impulses most often associated with children.

As a society, we seem to have come to accept as normal a prison population which is overwhelmingly male, predominantly young, and rising in number. Fully half of all incidents of wounding are committed by persons under the age of 24².

In his 2023 book 'Determined- life without Free Will', Robert Sapolsky, who has spent a lifetime studying primate behaviour, states that '*behind every thought, action and experience ..lies a chain of biological and environmental causes*' and that '*it makes no more sense to punish people for antisocial behaviour than it does to scold a car for breaking down.*'

Lindley.

The Koestler Awards

The Koestler Awards for arts in criminal justice started in 1962. Each year over 3,500 people in custody and in the community share their creative work by taking part. The Koestler Awards provide feedback and encouragement to entrants of all abilities in visual art, design, writing and music.

Deadline: **Friday 12th April 2024**

<https://koestlerarts.org.uk/get-involved/koestler-awards/enter-the-koestler-awards/>

Urgent action for HMP Bedford

After inspectors visited in October and November last year, Charlie Taylor issued an Urgent Notification ordering the Government to take immediate action.

Bedford is a Victorian prison holding around 400 men and is known to have a troubled past, including riots in 2016. The report published on 14th February described filthy floors and serveries, numerous cells with broken windows and furniture, inappropriate graffiti, inhabited cells with mould (one of which smelled overwhelming and moist to the touch), and evidence of a cockroach and rat infestation.

Inspectors criticised the use of sandbags on the Segregation unit, utilised to manage raw sewage caused by heavy rainfall. Inspectors said whilst staff did their best, the dark, damp, and dilapidated cells hold mentally unwell men in “completely unsuitable” conditions.

Inspectors found that prisoners at Bedford spend far too long locked in their cells. Unemployed prisoners were unlocked for less than two hours a day. Prisoners are unable to access a good standard of education. Being placed on waiting list to access education course places particularly in English and Maths. Leaders failing to provide local skills needed, accredited vocational qualifications and appropriate career or pathways. Staff shortfalls are impacting prisoners' ability to maintain family contact. Restricted time out of cell is impacting on prisoners' problems being solved. Contributing to assaults on staff which is one of the highest rates in the country. The amount of force used by staff is also high.

Inspectors concerned with a rise in self-harming and the inadequate level of support for vulnerable prisoners with mental health. Findings show 30 per cent of prisoners released from Bedford are instantly made homeless affecting their mental health and increasing the possibility of drug taking and reoffending.

The report said that Ali Barker, who has been the Governor of the prison since January 2023, had a “reasonable understanding of the many challenges facing the jail” but was “not visible enough” around the wings.

A Prison Service spokesperson said: “The findings of this inspection are unacceptable, which is why we’re taking urgent action to address the concerns raised.” They said extra prison officers would be deployed to reduce violence, while refurbishment would improve living conditions and access to education would be improved.

Research participants wanted

The Mums Project’ aims to shine a light on mums’ experiences which are often overlooked, and we started by interviewing mums whose sons or daughters are serving time for murder.

We are now expanding this to includes mums whose adult children have been convicted of manslaughter, to ensure that a wide range of experiences are represented, and wondered if you might be in touch with any mums who would be interested in taking part? Please contact Natalie.Tambini@hearst.co.uk

DISCLAIMER

From time-to-time, AFFECT is approached by media outlets, asking us to canvas our supporters for help with their studies and or programmes. We may forward their approach, and reasons, to our supporters, but **ONLY** by blind copy email. We **NEVER** divulge any contact details of AFFECT supporters. **We leave it entirely to the discretion of you, our supporters to contact any such third party.** In keeping our distance from those interested in research and or programmes related to our supporters’ concerns, we are drawing on long experience, that an approach initially presented as a genuine inquiry can turn out to be exploitative and damaging

Data Protection

AFFECT keeps very limited information on our members, namely name, email, and telephone details. If you would like to be removed from our records, please email affect01@hotmail.com or ring Carol on **07833 458415**

IPP prisoners feel unsupported upon release

According to a major survey Prisoners serving Imprisonment for Public Protection (IPP) feel they are not being prepared appropriately for release. The ex-offender-led charity User Voice interviewed 111 IPP prisoners sentenced across 11 prisons. The group described individual experiences leaving them feeling 'hopeless, living in fear and devastated'.

They felt let down by a lack of preparation for release within prison as well as staff failing them in key areas such as finding accommodation and financial advice. Those who have progressed through open prisons found it easier to adjust.

Concerns were made regarding the Parole Board. "Goalposts kept moving," with frequent adjournments and key staff changing, resulting in "pessimism and hopelessness." This delayed IPPs from presenting their best case and missing opportunities to progress.

Approved Premises were deemed as expensive and unhelpful environment. The lack of support in the outside community contributed to finding it difficult to adapt. Many voiced having their probation officer frequently changed finding it distressing and unsettling. Those who had the same probation officer said they found them to be supportive and flexible.

Recalls are causing mental health issues as they create a fear of being recalled. After experiencing a recall many had to be prescribed medications whilst others felt like self-harming. Many said their most recent recall were unfair based on not committing an offence but 'hearsay,' missed appointments and even asking for help.

Respondents in the survey agreed with the recommendation of the Justice Select Committee in 2022 that all IPP prisoners should be resentenced.

Public agrees with soft sentences for new mothers

According to a poll for campaign group Level Up and the women's charity One Small thing, the British public agrees more lenient sentences for pregnant women and mothers who are convicted of crimes.

The survey revealed 53 per cent of people questioned agreed a mother with a baby should not receive a custodial sentence. Only 28 per cent disagreed and the rest expressed no view. A similar proportion believed the long-term effect on children should be a key consideration for courts. Currently there is no duty in statute law for judges to consider pregnancy or maternity when sentencing. Although there are sentencing guidelines- imposed by the judge-led Sentencing Council, which states pregnancy must be considered.

Following a number of high – profile tragic cases within prisons for newborns and their mothers. The chances of stillbirth are seven times higher in prison than in the community. Dr Shona Minson, from Oxford University and leading expert on maternal sentencing said "A short sentence of imprisonment can mean a woman loses her home, job, and children. If she is also pregnant, her baby and herself are put at risk," she said. "This makes a custodial sentence disproportionate punishment for pregnant women."

A Ministry of Justice spokesperson commented that improvements had been made adding. "This includes employing specialist mother and baby liaison officers in every woman's prison, additional welfare checks and stepping up screening and social services support."

Change for pregnant and new mothers

Under new court rules pregnant mothers and new mothers may get reduced sentences. The change will come into force in England and Wales on the 1st of April 2024. Campaigners said the move was long overdue.

Ode to the Birds

When I noticed the birds, I saw freedom
I remembered what that felt like
I had forgot who I was
I had lost all hope
Until the moment I watched the birds through the bars on
the window.

From Ode to the Voices Inside
HM Prison Magilligan Highly Commended Award for Poetry Collection

<https://koestlerarts.org.uk/get-inspired/artforms/writing/>

BMJ states prison healthcare is not equivalent

According to the British Medical journal prisoners are not receiving an equivalent standard of healthcare as people in the community.

Kate McIntock a Clinical Lecture in general practice at the National Institute for Health and Care Research and Laura Sheard an associate Professor at the University of York wrote an article called 'Prison healthcare in England and Wales is in perpetual crisis'. The BMJ says that prisoners experience a disproportionate level of ill health this includes high number with those with long term physical and mental illness, bloodborne virus infections and substance misuse. It states that healthcare delivery is difficult in overcrowded and outdated, prisons that are challenged with staffing, security, and funding.

BMJ says healthcare quality varies, concerns regarding assessments and treatment, stigma, discrimination which is impacting poorer health outcomes and excess mortality. The editorial states: "The principle of equivalence—that prison healthcare 'should be of the same scope and quality' as services in the community—is well established but remains aspirational."

Insufficient staffing levels of prison officers is also impacting. Prison officers are unable to escort prisoners to appointments within the prison and community. In England and Wales 40 per cent of hospital outpatient appointments in 2017/ 18 were missed.

Prison healthcare careers are often considered undesirable, with no mandatory training and services varying site to site. Some services are delivered by competing NHS, private and agency providers. The terms offered by some providers including pensions, sick pay and holiday pay are unable to compete with careers in the wider NHS.

The authors conclude better work conditions for prison healthcare staff could improve the quality of care given and improve the outcomes, saying "a combined focus on the inextricably linked issues of staffing and quality of prison healthcare is now required. Reform and investment are urgently needed to improve outcomes and save lives."

Positive Quote for the day: "Nothing is impossible, the word itself says 'I'm possible!'"

– Audrey Hepburn

Prison Updates

Foreign Nationals

There are 10,500 foreign nationals in UK prisons, with Albanians the largest group. A £14m deal has been agreed between UK and Albania, with one prisoner deported, and more men with drug, rape and murder convictions will be returned to Albania to complete their sentences.

The names of people who die in prison will now be published weekly.

The move comes after self-inflicted deaths in prison increased last year, according to Ministry of Justice figures. Of 311 deaths in prison during 2023, 93 were self-inflicted, an increase of 22% on the previous year.

"Behind every person who has died in prison are bereaved family members and friends responding to the loss of a loved one" (*Inquest charity spokesperson*)