

Editorial

At the time of writing, we are into week two of 'Lockdown', a word that we used to think of as referring to the times when prisoners are locked into their cells and restricted from associating with one another. Now, however, with Covid-19, the term has a much wider reach. This is an immensely difficult time for everyone, and it brings increased feelings of social isolation and loneliness to those already experienced by many, including our clients.

We remain committed to continuing to provide the best possible support, and to maintain meaningful, regular and safe contact with those with whom we work even if this must be through telephone or online technology for the time being, rather than through face-to-face meetings. At this time when the challenge for us all is to re-imagine how we can be community to one another, we are grateful for your continuing interest and support, and trust that you are keeping safe and well.



Prisons, probation services and voluntary organisations across Devon, Cornwall and West Somerset are all working hard to adapt to the new challenges of Covid-19. We are working with our national and local partners to ensure we can still make a difference. Agency hubs such as the CoLab in Exeter, are having to close their doors temporarily and find different ways to support people. We are continuing to work with our colleagues in these hubs to help ensure people can still get help.

New Volunteer Mentor training

We held new volunteer mentor training in February, where staff led sessions on our work and role. We looked at the challenges faced by ex-offenders, and the obstacles they face on their journey to a new life. We reflected on what makes a good mentor, how best to understand our own prejudices and attitudes, and the practical issues of mentoring. The group worked hard and brought a wide range of professional and personal experience to the day. We hope to be running more training later in the year, so if you know of anyone who would be interested in the role of volunteer mentor, let them know and pass on our contact details!



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Chaplain's Chat

As a Community Chaplain, I regularly enter the unique world that is prison, to visit clients before they are released. Almost completely cut off from the outside world and surrounded by barbed wire fences and steel gates, the world seems to shrink when I walk in. Having gone through the various security checks, I set off past the freshly planted flowers, more steel locks, to the chapel. The Prison Chaplains greet me warmly - they are of all different faiths, but we are united in our view to care for and value the prisoners. .

I grab a cup of tea and check my in-tray for possible new clients. As I prepare my list of existing clients I chat through any potential new clients with the duty chaplain. Their wisdom and insight is invaluable. The Governor once described the chaplaincy team as the prison's moral compass, highly valued.



My first client today wants to offload his frustrations about the system. Sometimes just having the chance to vent can be the difference between holding on one more week, or letting anger get the upper hand. The next client is new, so I go through the introductions and paperwork carefully, explaining each stage. Some struggle to read or take in information, so it is important to allow for that and give time to chat through who we are and what we, as a charity, can do to support them. I have several other clients to see that day in various situations, all unique with their own worries and challenges as they get closer to their release dates.

It is so rewarding to meet a client inside, hear their hopes and dreams and struggles over the weeks or months up to release, and then to walk with them when they are released, as they battle to make some of those dreams a reality. This is the start of a fresh chapter for each person we work with, one that will almost certainly be full of obstacles and intense challenges. The ongoing support on offer from the Community Chaplaincy team, especially their appointed local Volunteer Mentor, is there to help them find the way over the obstacles, and through the challenges . . . and keep going even in the face of setbacks. We know that it can make all the difference. In the words of one client "No thoughts of going back to the old ways, down to support from Community Chaplaincy – thank you!"

Rachel Hasbury

Figures and Finance

In our last newsletter we shared with you that we had raised around 73% of the income needed for the current financial year. Now we're delighted to report that we did secure 100% of the income needed to fund our work to the end of March 2020, and made a good start to the 2020/21 financial year too, with around 60% of our income for the coming year assured. Like most small charities we don't have large reserves and so cash-flow can sometimes be an issue for us - if the majority of our income arrives in the last quarter of the year then we have a real problem sustaining our services until that point! Happily, and through the good management of our Treasurer and our Managing Community Chaplain, we are able to steer a course through this potential problem and ensure that the charity is able to operate all year round.

Simon Gant



In brief...

- Isolation is often a problem for many of the people we support. Current meeting restrictions are affecting how we can provide help, so we are keeping busy by phoning, texting, video-calling people more, and writing to our clients in prison.
- Prison visits are currently temporarily suspended, but in recognition of the importance of continued contact with family, the government has authorised 900 secure phone handsets to be sent to prisons to allow risk-assessed prisoners to speak to loved ones.

If you are a person of faith please hold these concerns and other items included in this newsletter in prayer.



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