

Prison
FELLOWSHIP

IN:SIGHT

SPRING 2023



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WE BELIEVE THAT NO ONE IS BEYOND HOPE, DO YOU?

Prison Fellowship's (PF's) mission is to show Christ's love to people in prison by coming alongside them and supporting them. We seek through prayer and practical care to help, support and develop a Christian ministry to restore people in prison, their families and their communities.




Our network of around 3,000 volunteers is delivering life-changing services to people in almost all of the 121 prisons across England and Wales.

Volunteers are connected through local groups. As well as supporting prisons in prayer, groups run PF's programmes *Sycamore Tree*, *Angel Tree*, *Letter Link*, *Prayer Line*, *Bible Studies* and *Chaplaincy Support*.

Together, we are restoring people's lives. No one is beyond hope.

PRISON FELLOWSHIP

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Photos of people in prison and/or their families are models to protect their identities.



Peter
Peter Holloway
Chief Executive

MINISTRY OF KINDNESS



Often, when talking about PF's work, I am asked about the impact of our programmes. While we can quantify the number of *Angel Tree* presents sent out to children and celebrate the connections the programme has renewed and strengthened, it is much more difficult to measure the overall impact the work of our volunteers is having in the lives of people in prison. This is particularly the case when we consider 'unofficial' ministries.

I am a firm believer in the transformative power of the ministry of kindness. One of the easiest ways we can show kindness is through a smile. A simple smile to someone in prison, or to the person at the supermarket checkout can have an amazing effect. Research into the power of smiling has shown that it is neurologically contagious—when we smile, or see someone else smile, we mentally reciprocate the action and feel happier. Even if we are not feeling happy ourselves, the very

act of smiling can boost our mood and cultivate a feeling of happiness. For people in prison, just a kind, smiling face can help improve their mood and bring a spark of joy to their lives.

WE SEE WONDERFUL ACTS OF KINDNESS THROUGHOUT THE BIBLE—PARTICULARLY FROM JESUS. I FIND IT VERY EASY TO PICTURE HIM SMILING AND EMBODYING WHAT KINDNESS LOOKS LIKE.

But I have a little more trouble picturing God as kind. When we

read through the Old Testament, it can create a picture of God the Father being a punitive judge or a powerful creator. Often, kindness is not the main characteristic that we ascribe to God.

But God is kind!

There is a beautiful image in Genesis 3 where God 'made garments of skin for Adam and his wife.' I picture this as God sitting down and sewing together animal skins for them to aid their predicament. This is quite different to the actions of God in Genesis 1 who 'spoke' things into being. Here we have an incredibly relational and—I would argue—kind image

of God where he 'makes' instead of 'speaks.'

It is this relational element of kindness that I found myself reflecting on after asking some of our volunteers what they think kindness in action looks like. The top three answers were listening, compassion and caring.

All three are beautiful expressions of Godly kindness that we can seek to outwork in whatever context or ministry we find ourselves. And remember, even just a smile is an act of kindness that can help to turn someone's day—or even life—around. ■



THANK YOU
FOR BRINGING
HOPE TO

2,659

PARENTS IN
98 PRISONS
BY HELPING
THEM TO SEND

4,792

CHRISTMAS
PRESENTS TO THEIR
CHILDREN IN 2022.



AN INCREDIBLE MILESTONE

While Christmas may feel well and truly in the rear view mirror, *Angel Tree* volunteers have been hard at work reviewing and collecting feedback from last year. Hearing the impact of the project from parents in prison and parents/carers at home is a reminder of how much *Angel Tree* makes a difference in families' lives.

Through the incredible work of *Angel Tree* volunteers and your generous donations, we delivered **4,792** presents to children on behalf of **2,659** parents in prison. Last year also saw *Angel Tree* run in **98** prisons across England and Wales—five more establishments than in the previous year.

It is amazing to think that *Angel Tree* began in just one prison back in 1994 and is now reaching thousands of families. Since its humble beginnings, we have now delivered over 100,000 presents—each and every present helping to grow connections in a family separated by a prison sentence.

We are most grateful to everyone who supported *Angel Tree* last year and over the last 29 years that have helped us reach this incredible milestone. We've received amazing feedback from beneficiaries to show how much your support means. ■

Our *Angel Tree* Christmas appeal runs every Autumn, but you can give to this programme throughout the year! prisonfellowship.org.uk/insight

'She absolutely loves [her present] and she's so overwhelmed by receiving it with a sticker written by me. Thank you so much.'

—Parent in prison

'My kids were made up with the gifts thinking that they had come from Dad. Thank you.'

—Parent/Carer

'I would just like to say a massive thank you for the gifts. It's a fantastic thing to be doing for the prisoners and children. It's made me feel a lot better that we remain somewhat a family unit while he's in prison.'

—Parent/carer

'They loved the fact that Daddy was able to send them a gift even though I was at work (prison) and I thought of them.'

—Parent in prison

VIEW FROM THE CHAIR



Peter
Peter Harlock
Chair, PF Board
of Trustees



The first six months in my role as Chair of Trustees at PF have gone by very fast. Here are some of my reflections so far:

Receiving Peter Holloway's monthly updates of all the developments and progress post-Covid with our volunteers reaching into virtually every establishment in England and Wales is reinforcing my view of what a powerful tool PF is for the Gospel.

Before Christmas, I observed and helped as group facilitator in my first Sycamore Tree (ST) course. I personally saw the impacts on many participants and the professional and relaxed way the other volunteers led the whole thing. Being a volunteer chaplain at HMP Wayland in Norfolk, I find I am still in touch with several from the course.

What a blessing ST is to so many! It is an example of how God is enabling us to build back our volunteer activity to pre-Covid levels. In the financial year ending March 2023 we will have run 90 ST courses in 50 establishments. We are seeing increasing requests from chaplaincies to provide even more courses—both in prisons where ST is well established and in new establishments too. We are seeking God's provision of additional volunteers to turn these requests into courses.

I experienced my first Angel Tree Christmas at HMP Wayland. Once again, I saw the amount of time and effort given by volunteers working alongside chaplaincy to reach out widely in the wings and engage those in prison. The men were

clearly grateful for the care shown to them and their families—and I found it also enabled a wider introductory conversation.

I see the Prayer Line prayers that are shared every day for us to pray for. My heart goes out each day to those asking for prayer as I see many of the same concerns as those I meet in Wayland.

Showing love and care through Letter Link is also growing, and at our latest board meeting, we discussed how technology might help us reach even more people in the future.

I am also more convinced than ever of the huge value PF volunteers provide to Chaplaincies generally through administration, Bible Studies, and weekend service support. Chaplaincy teams are more

stretched than ever. And so this support is much appreciated. Personally, I also find that it opens up great opportunities for one-to-one discussions with people in prison.

Recently, I had the joy of visiting HMP Thorn Cross near Manchester at the invitation of the Managing Chaplain, Shawn Verhey.

HOW INSPIRING IT WAS TO MEET SEVERAL OF THE VERY EXPERIENCED AND FAITHFUL LOCAL VOLUNTEERS WHO IT IS CLEAR ARE HUGE APPRECIATED BY SHAWN.

And how encouraging that senior prison staff take the ST course so seriously and were pleased to engage with us.

At our quarterly meetings with Peter Holloway, the Board of Trustees receive updates on PF activity and finances while also discussing different topics. One such topic is the Strategic Listening process that is now underway which, over the coming months, will inform the development of the next five-year strategy by the PF Support Team. We look forward to hearing your own inputs to this process as it gains momentum.

On behalf of the Board, I would like to take this opportunity to recognise especially PF volunteers who have for many years served faithfully in prisons and who are now at that stage of transitioning post-Covid into the equally important prayer and support ministries. And similarly, I want to

voice a big 'welcome' to new volunteers and supporters who are joining the PF family. May God bless you and use you greatly in this ministry.

As you can see from all the above, I find myself encouraged, as I hope you do too, in how God is protecting and using PF in His service to come alongside people in prison—and how He might use us even more in future. May God bless us all in His service in the coming months. ■

It would be great to hear from you. Please feel free to reach out with your comments, suggestions or questions.

**chairoftrustees@
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CATALYSTS FOR IMPROVEMENT

Mental Health Awareness Week is taking place from 15–21 May. As a society, much has been done to reduce the stigma around mental health and making support available for those who need it. But while society has moved forward with its awareness and provision, the criminal justice system is struggling to keep up.

The most recent *Bromley Briefings*, the flagship publication from the Prison Reform Trust that brings together the latest facts about prisons and the people who live in them, makes for concerning reading. It reports more than two-thirds (67%) of people in prison surveyed said they needed support with their mental health in their current prison. But only around a third (35%) said they had received help.

Claire struggled with her mental health before prison. Her offence was linked to her poor mental health. She found her first

weeks in prison incredibly challenging as she waited in uncertainty for six months to be sentenced.

Having no control of her life became Claire's norm. Every day, she would wait to be unlocked from her cell. This would often happen late due to a shortage of staff. The unfamiliar environment and the constant noise from the neighbouring cell led to continual uncertainty. 'It all kept drilling home the loss of liberty, the loss of hope and the overwhelming sense of having no control over my own life,' Claire admits.

To cope, Claire turned to self-harm. This coping strategy is common in prison. The *Bromley Briefings* reports record high levels of self-harm as well as thoughts of suicide. This is something Claire also faced, and her experience is not uncommon when you consider that 46% of women and 21% of men in prison report attempting suicide at some point. In

the general population, the figure is 6%.

Claire was placed on medical hold and was added to a waiting list to start counselling. But, as soon as she was sentenced, she moved prisons. She told us how challenging she found this, and it resulted in her 'kicking off.' Because of this, she spent most of her time in the next prison behind her door with no contact with anyone except staff. 'This had a huge detrimental effect on my mental wellbeing,' she shares. 'I ended up being in a very dark place again. I felt there was no hope for me, no future.'

Claire's experience is not an isolated incident. 76% of women in prison and 51% of men reported they had a mental health condition. Yet a Justice Committee report found that only around 10% of people in prison receive treatment for mental illness. 'The impacts on residents like myself can be profound,' comments

one man in prison. 'This is a particular concern for me as the invisible harm is harder to address than the visible.'

'The worst cases are getting put in segregation and we hear the screaming which is awful,' notes one woman in prison.

READING ABOUT THESE EXPERIENCES IS DIFFICULT. BUT, IT IS ENCOURAGING TO KNOW THAT CLAIRE IS NOW OUT OF PRISON AND HAS TURNED HER LIFE AROUND.

She pinpoints the moments she was offered opportunities for training and learning and was given a job in the prison as catalysts for improvement: 'This gave me a sense of belonging, a sense of purpose and a bit of self-belief that maybe I wasn't a monster.'

Claire also began to attend chapel. 'I am not a church goer per se. But I would

often attend chapel to get out of my cell and to have a chance to sing and relax.'

And, when anything major happened in her life—such as a loss of a relative—the chaplaincy team provided support and comfort. 'That meant so much,' Claire comments, 'it made me feel like I mattered.'

Claire was able to make positive changes in her life. When positive environments are created for people in prison, good things can happen. And we can see many more lives transformed.

During this year's Mental Health Awareness Week, would you join us in praying for people in prison? For the many who struggle with anxiety, depression and other mental health conditions with insufficient support. Pray that they would receive the help they so desperately need and would be given opportunities to engage in meaningful, restorative activities while in prison. ■



PRAY WITH US

God of seen and unseen struggles, Christ in all things.

We pray for all those in our prisons, whose mental health is a constant battle.

We lift up those who are visibly troubled, and those who struggle in the dark.

In moments of grief, may they know Your compassion.

In times of depression, may they know Your presence.

When faced with addiction, surround them with Your grace.

Bless those who work to lighten those burdens and may we be compelled to do likewise.

AMEN

THANK YOU!

Thank you to everyone who took the time to fill out our *In:sight* feedback survey included in the last edition.

We are grateful for all the encouragements and helpful pointers that will allow us to continue to improve the magazine in the future. ■



'A GLOBAL WORK OF GOD'

At the start of the year, our Operations Manager, Stephen Hawkins, travelled to Alicante to take part in the Prison Fellowship Europe and Central Asia Leaders Forum. This was the first time the group had been able to gather since Covid with 54 people representing 26 countries in attendance.

'It was such a blessing to spend time with brothers and sisters doing Christ's work in prisons throughout the world,' affirms Stephen. 'We are Prison Fellowship after all! Connecting with each other is so important and at the heart of our ministry.'

Throughout the five days together, national ministries had an opportunity to share the outlook in their country and to learn from and encourage one another. 'Having an opportunity to share about what God is doing through Prison Fellowship England and Wales was a further reminder of the amazing things He is accomplishing through the work of our volunteers. It was such a privilege to share stories of God's transformation to everyone present and to be reminded that we are part of a global work of God.' ■



AN EXCITING INITIATIVE— THE VITAL WORK OF PASTORAL CARE

We are delighted that PF has been asked, alongside the bereavement support charity Cruse, to support HMPPS Chaplaincy in their pastoral care for people in prison.

The nature of being in prison leads many to experience profound feelings of loss. This may arise from a bereavement or from simply being separated from family and friends. Whatever the cause, people in prison are often deeply affected by the emotional impact of loss and prison Chaplains play a key role in their pastoral care.

During April and May, experienced PF volunteers will be trained to support Chaplains in this vital work in their local prison. Their

experience in supporting those in prison in this way will then be evaluated, enabling us to develop and rollout a nationwide pastoral care programme at the end of 2023.

PLEASE WILL YOU PRAY ABOUT WHETHER THIS IS WORK THAT GOD MAY BE ASKING YOU TO DO?

Perhaps you know of someone in your church who might consider becoming a PF volunteer in support of this new programme? After successfully passing through the selection process, new PF volunteers will be required to undertake PF's basic volunteer training, specific training for pastoral

care and then to obtain the required security clearance.

Details on how existing PF volunteers can apply for this work will be communicated in a few weeks' time. New volunteers should apply using the application form at prisonfellowship.org.uk/get-involved/volunteer

Our Operations Manager, Stephen Hawkins, is leading the programme rollout. If you have any questions about this initiative, please email Stephen at stephenhawkins@prisonfellowship.org.uk and he will be happy to discuss it with you. ■





Jo Henderson
PF Fundraising
Officer

A LASTING IMPACT




As a valued supporter of our mission to show Christ's love to people in prison, would you consider leaving a gift to Prison Fellowship in your Will? By doing so, you will ensure your passion for walking alongside people in prison continues for generations to come.

Your legacy gift will make an impact in the lives of those we support in prison, giving them, their families and the communities around them hope for a brighter future. If you would like to discuss supporting people in prison through legacy giving, please get in touch by email at legacy@prisonfellowship.org.uk. ■



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