

# QUAKERS IN CRIMINAL JUSTICE

## SPRING 2021 EDITORIAL

Welcome to the Spring 2021 Newsletter, a chance to reflect on our experiences at the recent annual conference, which this year took a very different approach with the entire event taking place virtually. Judging by the 13 A4 pages of notes I frantically scribbled down while watching the various presentations, I can say it was of great interest to me and feedback I have received via email has been unwaveringly positive. I'm sure you will all join me in expressing a huge thanks to the committee for organising such a fantastic event in challenging times. It was great to see so many familiar faces again. I'm looking forward to seeing the same faces in person this time next year in Ammerdown.

For those not able to make it, or for those who there and wishing to reflect on the day, we have two reports on the conference. One covering the morning and one the afternoon. There is a new regular "Dear QICJ" section in which members can post short format items to the newsletter. We received a great article from Richard, about "Blue Sky Thinking" in HMP Ashfield, the powerful "Fallen on Strange Times" poem we heard read out at conference, a call for volunteers in a circles project and not forgetting book reviews, membership update, the minutes from the AGM and a whole host of other brilliant stuff.

The message of hope is a powerful one and it was great to be reminded of this at the conference. Tim Newell focuses on the subject on page 20 and it makes for great reading. I took the liberty of adding a Quaker Quizzer on page 3. Something to pass a little time during lockdown for us all. I might make it a regular thing if it is deemed suitable.

Thank you to everyone who contributed to this edition. I have been very heartened by the brilliant support from members who make this newsletter what it is through their effort and contributions. Some of you may know that my biggest concern about taking on the role of editor fully was that I would have no material to fill the editions and would have to spend my days begging for contributions. Thank you for making my task so easy!

**Jonathan Lamb Editor**



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# DEAR QICJ



**Dear QICJ**

I hope you are well, I hear the conference went brilliantly.

I wonder if this campaign by Why Me? might go in the newsletter? I am not sure when the next issue is published. Or indeed if this is the sort of thing that you would want included.

The issue is a campaign by an organisation called Why Me? to ask candidates for the Police and Crime Commissioner Elections on May 6th to sign a pledge to support provision of restorative justice services to victims of crime. <https://why-me.org/campaigns/why-me-asks-pcc-candidates-to-signthepledge/>

This action follows on from a similar action I called for in my latest blog <https://www.quaker.org.uk/blog/getting-to-the-root-of-things-peace-crime-and-justice>

my best  
Teresa

Teresa Parker  
Crime, Community and Justice Programme  
Manager  
Quaker Peace and Social Witness

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**Dear QICJ**

What's in a Word? I've been an Official Prison Visitor for three years or so now and it has been quite a steep learning curve with

information garnered from many sources. One was the then website of HMP Stafford where I visit. The site used the words "resident" and not "prisoner" and "room" rather than "cell". Meeting the men - and a trans woman - made me realise that these are not changes of labels for the sake of it but they recognise the humanity of the people in the care of the prison system. They are also ways of changing attitudes in us, the prison staff and in the residents about themselves which may, hopefully carry forward into their lives both in prison and after release.

I hope that we, in QICJ, can accommodate this change to words and attitudes that are less pejorative.

Peter Moore  
Leek LM

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**Dear QICJ**

During the recent home based conference, at lunchtime, I went to see a neighbour as it was important to to catch him when at home during daytime as we have a shared field ditch boundary. His family are from a smallish strong Christian denomination. I know they are not great social mixers within the village. I mentioned why I needed to return and that I had been a Quaker Prison minister for 8 or so years. He seemed surprised. It was that expression of surprise that was not a reaction I was expecting. Certainly within the Quaker world, involvement is some form of social or community involvement is common or at least does not cause surprise.

Within other Christian groups some form of similar work is not unusual or at least an understanding of this.

I was wondering if many others had met this 'insular' approach?

William Waddilove

**Dear QICJ**

I was glad to see the QICJ newsletter sent to our meeting.

I want to put forward a radical idea, probably mentioned before, to gradually transfer money currently allotted to prisons into the communities from which prisoners come. It would be used by the local authority to provide help for families, youth clubs, addiction clinics, hostels for ex-prisoners etc.

When considering a prison sentence, magistrates would be obliged to consider the cost of that particular sentence of imprisonment and have the opportunity of redirecting the money for that sentence back into the community.

Meanwhile instead of going to prison, the guilty would be sentenced to both contribute to their own community and receive help and advice.

It would relieve the prisons of short-term repeat offenders.

It would provide more legal activities for the young and hopefully draw them away from illegality.

Magistrates would be more aware of the cost of their sentencing and their responsibility for the direction of public finance.

By reducing the prison population, there could be a better regime for those actually sent to prison.

At the moment, because everyone is resigned to our present system and do not feel responsible for the cost and use of that money, there is little interest in change. I think the logic of finance could be the key for a radical change in sentencing.

With best wishes

Janet Arthur

**QUAKERS IN CRIMINAL JUSTICE WORD SEARCH (SOLUTION ON PAGE 16)**

C	L	A	N	D	I	N	G	E	W	J	N
C	O	U	R	O	N	R	E	V	O	G	Y
D	N	G	L	A	N	I	M	I	R	C	T
R	E	K	A	U	Q	H	Y	T	J	H	E
N	W	O	D	R	E	M	M	A	J	A	C
R	B	P	V	T	K	A	A	R	N	P	I
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V	J	I	C	U	V	H	S	T	J	A	S
O	U	D	A	O	T	I	P	S	U	I	U
G	D	N	C	C	R	N	R	E	S	N	J
S	G	P	Y	P	K	S	I	R	T	U	T
H	E	L	I	Y	E	L	S	N	I	H	C

- ADVOCACY
- AMMERDOWN
- CHAPLAIN
- COURT
- CRIMINAL
- GOVERNOR
- HINSLEY
- JUDGE
- JUSTICE
- LANDING
- PRISON
- QUAKER
- RESTORATIVE
- WOODBROOKE

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## BLUE SKY THINKING

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**Richard (HMP Ashfield)**

Two years ago a new director was appointed to run HMP Ashfield. As part of his plans to improve the running of the prison, he decided that new ideas should be sought to make life for prisoners more bearable and to enhance the operation of the prison, both for the benefit of prisoners and of Serco, who run the prison.

He decided the best source of information would be prisoners themselves, so a small group of five prisoners, (selected for their interest, ability and willingness), was assembled with the specific task of coming up with 'blue sky' ideas to improve the prison. I was one of the prisoners selected and, after 9 months experience in this role, I would like to document what we have achieved so far.



His remit to us was to come up with novel ideas, irrespective of cost or effort required to implement them. As a privately run prison, the contract with the MOJ requires that any profits received from prisoners must be ring-fenced to be spent beneficially for the prisoners. This profit is largely from sales of food, sweets and toiletries and from prisoner purchased phone credit for calls to friends and family. At the time, a substantial sum had accrued, even after previous expenditure on things like sports equipment, plants and tools for the gardens, additional computers and software and some well-received arts festivals. We therefore had a good source of expenditure available to us, although, of course, the management would be keen to avoid projects that might increase costs to Serco in the future. Projects which required prisoner generated funds to initiate them, but would then improve Serco's profits would be looked upon very favourably. Similarly, projects which enhanced the smooth running of the prison, or improved prisoner well-being would also be considered worthwhile.

Initially we had a brain-storming session covering all aspects of the prison. This brought up random ideas which could then be considered more closely.

One of the first ideas to be looked at in more detail came from a concern that prisoners with few assets or money might end up homeless upon release. We decided that a savings scheme, which encouraged prisoners to save regularly from their income and rewarded them with a bonus, could give them a lump sum on leaving prison. This might assist them to get started with a rental property. Since our income was either £14 or £17 a week, depending on job role, we decided that £4 a week was the most we could expect a prisoner to save and thought that, if the prison added £3 a week to that from our fund, it would allow prisoners to save about £350 a year, or £700 over two years. We proposed the bonus should only be added if the prisoner remained in the scheme until released, or moved to another prison. The money would be stored in the prisoner's savings account, so that it cannot be accessed or spent whilst in prison.

Restrictions, conditions and options when leaving the prison were agreed upon. The idea was then proposed to a management team for them to criticise – a little like 'Dragons Den' (only without the piles of cash on the table!).

This was considered a favourable idea but, after management further evaluated how best to operate the scheme, it was simplified before being approved. It has now been set up and operates thus: if a prisoner signs up for the scheme, every week £3 is deducted from their spending account and transferred to their savings account, along with a further £3 from Serco's

fund, added immediately. At any time, a prisoner can opt out of the scheme without losing what he has accrued,

but cannot re-join for at least 6 months. This ensures that this is a long-term commitment and not something to be stopped and started at will. By deducting the money automatically at the time of paying earned income, money was always available as long as the prisoner was being paid. No further action is required when a prisoner leaves the prison as his savings account transfers with him. (though obviously his payments in, will cease, as no other prison, to date, operates such a scheme). This money is paid out to him automatically upon release.

The scheme was publicised and well received. In its first week 235 out of the 400 prisoners signed up to join it. Whilst some prisoners may have been putting money into their savings account anyway, this scheme has probably increased savings by prisoners by about £1000 a week across the prison. Most new prisoners join the scheme.

A second proposal suggested was to increase the availability of distance learning courses. Distance learning is an excellent way for prisoners to improve their knowledge and possibly their employment prospects. At the time, most prisoners wanting to do such a vocational or educational course, possibly up to degree level, either had to fund this themselves, or apply to the Prisoners Education Trust charity to provide funding. Unfortunately, this charity is very stretched trying to fund the demand for such courses across the country. We therefore proposed an internal fund to cater for those who, for various reasons may not have been able to get funding. This, too, was approved for an initial year and £10,000 was set aside for this. Final operational details are now being sorted to put this in action.

Another suggestion came from the lack of behaviour incentives in prison. For those of you who don't know, prisoners are initially assigned to standard level. Bad behaviour can cause them to be lowered to basic level, whilst behaviour over and above what might be expected, can elevate someone to enhanced level if maintained over some months. The incentives to get from basic to standard are reasonable, particularly the ability to have a TV in your cell and your own clothes to wear. However, the benefits of achieving enhanced status are minimal.

(Despite this, about 80% of prisoners in this prison are currently at enhanced level, highlighting the good behaviour of prisoners here).

We proposed the idea of having additional items available to be purchased only by enhanced level prisoners, particularly items which don't cost a lot, but would improve well-being in the cell. We suggested an additional occupational post for a prisoner to manage this mini-shop as another responsible position, but the management team felt that this could be handled by the current staff dealing with mail-order items. We are awaiting approval of the items to be included before this goes live. (Whilst waiting for this, a new incentives scheme has been introduced throughout the prison estate, with management options at each site. Here, that has enabled us to receive an additional £2 weekly bonus. Apart from that, there is little change to the incentives offered).



Another proposal came from the fact that society, in general, considers that sex-offenders, which we are, are the worst offenders and many people consider that we cannot be rehabilitated and will be a continuing danger to the public. This means that local people are often afraid of having a sex-offender prison in their area and many employers are unwilling to employ such prisoners upon release. This is almost the opposite of the true situation. We therefore proposed a community engagement scheme. This would mean inviting MPs, local councillors, employers and others in significant positions, to visit the prison. (Some of these people already visit the prison, but such visits are purely managed by Serco staff, with little contact with prisoners). During such a visit they would be given a presentation by a prisoner. This would describe life in this prison, the types of prisoners here, their skills and mindset, their capabilities to produce items whilst in prison, their rehabilitation rates and their potential as future employees. The

visitors would then be shown around the prison to see for themselves the conditions here and some of the work in progress. They could also see the good behaviour and pleasant environment throughout this prison. In addition, the scheme would look to offer items to enhance the locality – perhaps planters of flowers for nearby roundabouts, or football shirts for local youth teams. In these ways we might start the process of changing the views of those in key positions. This proposal is currently under consideration and we have been asked to prepare a typical presentation for the next management meeting, so they can consider it further.

Recently, a new recruit to our group, replacing one who had moved on to an open prison, suggested an idea from what he had seen at another prison, whereby prisoners could purchase items of clothing from stock provided by a charity shop. In this way, prisoners who might not be able to afford new clothes, (especially those disabled or retired), would have the chance to obtain good used clothing at reduced prices. In a parallel operation, prisoners' unwanted clothes could be donated to the charity, who could check them, price them and either add them to the prison stock, or sell them in their own shops. This would enable prisoners to contribute to charity and reduce waste and environmental impact and was seen as a win-win opportunity on all levels. The practicalities of setting this up and running it are currently being sorted.

Whilst the initial flurry of ideas has slowed, we are still coming up with new ideas and have several more in various stages of development. I feel that this is an excellent way to enhance the well-being and rehabilitation of prisoners. It also utilises their skills to help the prison staff achieve a better running prison, easing their workload and making a better environment for all.

This report was prepared just before the first lockdown and unfortunately this group has been suspended until such time as we can safely meet together again, but I hope it will be reactivated and hopefully will produce some more excellent 'blue sky' ideas.

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## JUSTICE ON TRIAL

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**Nick Wilde Isle of Wight Meeting.**

### **Justice on Trial, Radical solutions for a System at Breaking Point by Chris Daw QC**

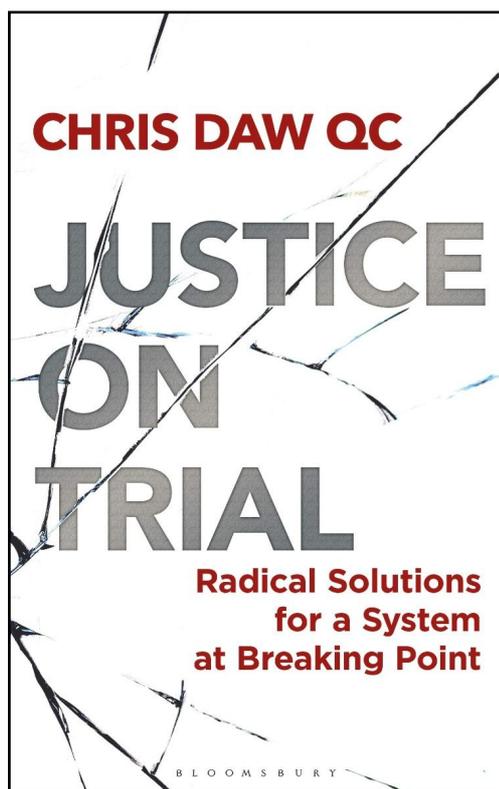
In the “i” newspaper for, Friday 30th October David Lammy, MP for Tottenham described this book as a really shocking portrayal of our criminal justice system as it stands” Chris Daw is a QC who writes on criminal justice issues for The Spectator and several other national newspapers. He has appeared on TV and Radio, recently in the series Crime: are we tough enough? (<https://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/m000dv33/crime-are-we-tough-enough-series-1-1-the-courts>) which was a confrontational programme with Ayesha Nayyar presenting the hard-line view. He was also featured in a Radio 4 programme 'The Spark ' on the subject The Abolition of Prisons at the beginning of October. (<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m000mzsm>)



**Almost everything we do and think about  
crime and punishment is wrong.**

Chris Daw has “looked into the eyes of murderers, sat down and drunk coffee with rapists, and listened to the tangled tales woven by fraudsters, money launderers and drug barons.” My thoughts when visiting have always been that the other visitors, a partner, child, parent or friend who is probably in prison for a sex offence in an Isle of Wight prison have not discarded them from their lives. The prisoners, for the most part, look quite ordinary and unthreatening. The atmosphere is relaxed and the officers friendly.

As one queues up to go in one sees individuals and families who, in the case of our prisons, may have travelled hundreds of miles and made a ferry crossing or even have an overnight stay. As a voluntary visitor we may not know much detail of the crime, but our job is to see the person and try and give them some warm human contact.



As we go in, we feel the oppression of the place. Although the prison officers are courteous, they have a job to do which is unpleasant, and the security, we feel, in our case is unnecessary, we wouldn't smuggle anything in would we?

The heavy security is there, and it changes routinely as new regulations are initiated but there is humanity somewhere, if not in the prison itself in the voluntary workers in the Visitors Centre.

The introductory chapter “A study in crime” begins by outlining a case of the money laundering of drug money recalling the first interview with the client, Stuart, whose options are 1) plead guilty and get a lesser sentence or 2) plead not guilty and risk a longer one. Stuart decides to plead not guilty. We are then left hanging on a cliff edge till the end of the book whilst there follows a short history of crime and punishment leading to chapter 2 on “Why we should close all prisons.” This is the radical solution to the problem of justice. Prison is not a cure but a training ground in which prisoners learn how to be criminals and how to be prisoners so that for many that's all the life they know. If that's not radical enough we should also legalise drugs. Most crime is related to drugs. Legalisation and regulation would remove the

need for addicts to obtain drugs by any means, and it would remove the gang culture which sustains it. An example is from Switzerland where in Zurich the city's Platzpitz Park was known as 'Needle Park' due to up to one thousand addicts injecting 24 hours a day. What really stimulated the legalisation of drug and the establishment of centre for drug addicts was Switzerland reputation and a clean country which they wanted to maintain. In a referendum the country voted for this. Daw visits the USA where more people are incarcerated for longer than the UK as well as the Nordic countries who have far more enlightened prison systems.

“Children should never be criminals” because children then join the procession through young offender institutions which start them off on a life of crime. That's putting it very simply. And almost lastly why prison doesn't work because all the attempts, or at least, most of them which try to reform prisoner are hamstrung by lack of funds as well as successive governments not seeing that a properly reformed prison system might be cheaper and more effective than that we have now. Crime is more complicated now than it has ever been, the Internet has a dark side as we all know. If this book can be taken seriously by more politicians than David Lammy, and I don't just mean Peter Laurence in “Roadkill” then we might make some progress.

By the way we do find out whether Stuart was found guilty or not guilty, but I won't spoil the story. I would recommend this book to anyone interested in criminal justice.

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# FALLEN ON STRANGER TIMES

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## A Prisoner in HMP The Mount

As you know the regime is changing  
 On Fowler wing the staff are amazing  
 There empathetic, considerate with lots of patience  
 Considering ties have fallen the strangest  
 It's not segregation but more separation  
 We stand united clapping for carers with appreciation  
 Unprecedented times and loads of speculation  
 23 hour lockdown is hard being an understatement  
 Missing family on visits having to use imagination  
 Mental health affected with no exaggeration  
 Getting wages without being at my work placement  
 But won't complain with the pandemic raging  
 One day we will look back having made it  
 Jail ain't great but the Mount is safe  
 Well done to staff and residents for being brave  
 With our friends made on the spurs we stay  
 Everyone is caring being here is a safe place  
 We conquered a virus face to face  
 Together we stood tall as one race  
 All knowing the light is at the end of the tunnel  
 Now we rebuild without no more trouble  
 It's crucial the economy builds without rubble  
 So everyone pray together and also  
 Remember no matter how hard times got  
 We were all in the same bubble




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# A DAMNING REPORT

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**Melanie Jameson**

## **Damning report on the prison estate by Commons Public Accounts Committee**

On 11 Sept 2020, the Commons Public Accounts Committee published a devastating report on the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) and HM Prison & Probation Service (HMPPS). This related to their failure to improve living conditions in a range of prisons, and was compared with the 'disastrous' probation reforms of 2014 (now abandoned and reversed).

As the report examined the underlying reasons for this situation, a number of factors emerged: First and foremost, an unrealistic budget settlement undermined much-heralded reforms that were conceived more than a decade ago. (Unfortunately the MoJ is an 'unprotected department' and has been subject to budget cuts over many years.) Despite promises to create 10,000 'new-for-old' prison places by 2020 only 206 new places had so far been delivered, with the result that many prisoners continued to be held in 'unsafe, crowded conditions that do not meet their needs'.

Secondly, once again the MoJ demonstrated its inability to contract out services successfully, and was found to be guilty of inadequate planning, unrealistic assumptions and poor management.

Thirdly, the costs of addressing the backlog of maintenance work, had risen to more than £900 million, described by the Public Accounts Committee as 'staggering'. This had led to around 500 prison places being taken out of action each year due to their poor condition.

Fourthly, the overcrowding and poor condition of many prisons, was contributing to dangerously high levels of violence and self-harm. Although COVID-19 was found to have reduced demand for prison places in the short-term (due to backlogs in the courts) this was only a temporary respite.

The Committee referred, with deep regret, to the growing financial burden of reoffending, currently estimated to cost the economy £18.1 billion annually, and to the failure of prisons to play their crucial role in rehabilitation, commenting: 'Despite our recommendations in May 2019, there was still no sign of a cross-government strategy for reducing reoffending'.

The Public Accounts Committee drew six Conclusions, with accompanying Recommendations, summarised as follows:



**1. The Prison Service tends to react to immediate crises** rather than develop a sustainable long-term strategy. Years of budget cuts have led to day-to-day operations being funded by reallocating money from its capital budget which should cover maintenance matters (I am sure this will have been greatly exacerbated by the collapse of Carillion).

Despite MoJ assurances, the Committee remains unconvinced that the situation will be stabilised by the opening of new prisons and the agreed £156 million injection of funds. They recommend that the MoJ should write to them with details of a comprehensive long-term strategy within three months of the 2020 Spending Review.

**2. The MoJ has not prioritised investment in the female prison estate** and was unable to answer basic questions regarding whether safety and other needs of vulnerable women were being met. The Committee noted that the £81.5 million raised from the sale of Holloway Prison was used to fund the Prison Estate Transformation Programme, focused on improving provision for men, and to ease pressures elsewhere in the system.

The Committee recommended that the MoJ should report back within three months, explaining how it plans to implement its promise to invest in women's prisons and community provision.

**3. The Committee highlighted the MoJ's 'naïve approach' to the outsourcing of facilities management services.** In attempting to outsource a problem rather than first understand and address it, the MoJ was found to have repeated many of the mistakes observed in its Transforming Rehabilitation programme (when probation roles were contracted out, under Chris Grayling), with long-standing consequences. In order to ensure that the department learnt from its flawed approach, the Committee recommended that, on completion of a wide-ranging survey of assets, the MoJ should inform them how it will apply its learning to improve management services and inform future commercial decisions. Also, what steps will be taken to avoid repeating past mistakes.

**4. Plans to create more capacity to cope an expected increase in the prison population may not be compatible with keeping prisoners safe.** Measures should be taken not only to reduce overcrowding but to allow sufficient 'headroom' in order that essential maintenance can

be undertaken and that there is capacity to deal with potential further waves of COVID-19. Otherwise, demand for prison places could outstrip supply by 2022–23. Reporting back due within six months.

**5. MoJ efforts to reduce the huge cost of reoffending are being put at risk by the absence of a cross-government strategy.** Although HMPPS has recently appointed a ‘reducing reoffending’ Director and is working across a number of departments there is still no sign of a coherent cross-government strategy for reducing reoffending. Lack of support on release is affecting how ex-offenders re-integrate into society.

An earlier recommendation was restated: the MoJ should publish a cross-government reducing reoffending strategy within three months, setting out roles, responsibilities, clear targets and evaluation measures.

**6. MoJ has not recovered from the long-term consequences of its unrealistic 2015 Spending Review settlement and is living with the human cost of sustained underinvestment.** The MoJ now admits that its 2015 Spending Review settlement was ‘over-optimistic and fundamentally unbalanced’, creating an insecure financial footing over the past five years. The effect has been that both prisoners and prison staff have suffered due to the maintenance backlogs, lack of capacity and pared down services. Frustration has spilled over into an 100% increase on assaults on staff between 2015–2019 and over 50,000 incidents of self-harm (2018 figures).

The final recommendation is the MoJ should write to the Committee within three months setting out how it has incorporated lessons from the 2015 Spending Review in its preparations for the 2020 Spending Review. This must include having prepared ‘robust contingency plans’, should the department fail to secure the expected amount.

**The comments of the Chair of the Public Accounts Committee, Meg Hillier MP, are worth quoting in full:**

“The scale of failure, in our prisons and in the disastrous probation reforms, is really quite staggering. The apparent disregard for the position of women in prisons is just another indictment of a clearly broken system.

“The Ministry is still reeling from the long-term consequences of its unrealistic 2015 Spending Review settlement, but our whole society is bearing the financial and human cost of sustained underinvestment. Even now, we are not convinced MoJ and HMPPS have the ingredients for an effective, sustainable long-term strategy.

“We now expect a set of reports to be made to us over the coming months, assessing the realistic costs of their mistakes to date and how to fix them, and a credible new plan for a working prison estate and system that can reduce re-offending – not just lock people in to this cycle of violence and harm.”

Full text: <https://committees.parliament.uk/work/346/improving-the-prison-estate/>

**Note from Melanie:** Three cheers for (Select) Committees! I follow the Justice Committee hearings – currently looking at the future of Probation and Legal Aid.



# QICJ ANNUAL CONFERENCE REPORT

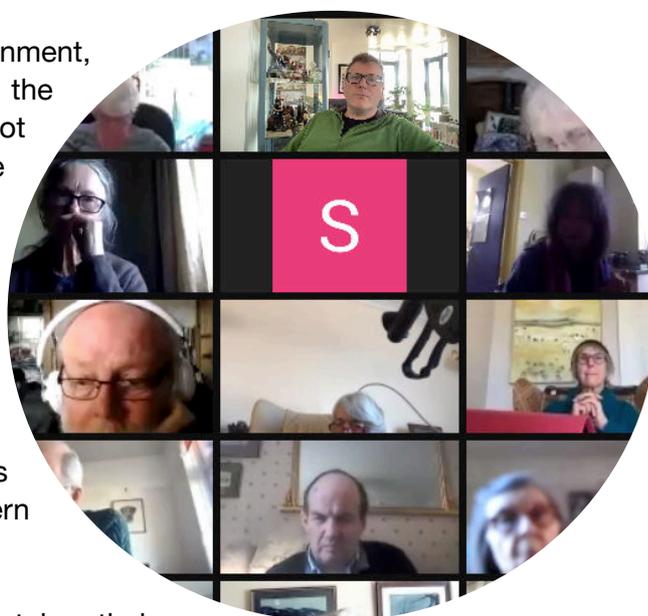
Adrian Smith

## THE SATURDAY MORNING SESSION

Sixty Friends assembled on Zoom for the Saturday morning session of the QICJ conference on 27th February. Scanning my screen, I saw a few familiar faces but many more of people who had not attended before.

Marian Liebmann introduced the first speaker, Polly Lowe, who from a varied background in education (in prisons as well as on the out), spoke on “The Impact of Lockdown on Female Prisoner Wellbeing”.

She quoted a prisoner's own words: 'Double imprisonment, double lockdown'. The recommendation early in the pandemic that 1600 prisoners should be released, got lost in bureaucratic muddle and only 300 were actually released. The alternative policy of rigorous lockdown, which the prisons adopted, has nevertheless failed to prevent the deaths of 100 inmates and 36 staff. Polly pointed out that we don't see the trauma that led to the crime, we only see the criminality. 80% of women prisoners show signs of mental illness. Many women start their journeys as victims. They don't know what love is and enter on destructive relationships. The pattern tends to replicate from one generation to the next.



I was shocked to hear that in the UK, one prisoner takes their own life every 5 days and many of the victims are women. Prison is supposed to reform people not destroy them. Self-harm has increased enormously in women's prisons during the lockdown. Many inmates face isolation 23 hours a day, with no contact with family or support from peers.

Yet potentially, prison offers advantages to people with chaotic lifestyles: accommodation, a regular routine, food, companionship. Care is often better inside than on the out. Chaplains play a key role, for example in facilitating contact with families. Religious labels are unimportant – what counts is relationship between individuals.

The second speaker, Melanie Jameson, spoke on “Smarter Sentencing”, which is the title of a recent White Paper. Proposals include a change in automatic release from half way through a sentence to two thirds, for those convicted of violent crimes; lifers to serve longer inside before being considered for release; no automatic release for those considered to represent a terrorist threat; whole life orders to be imposed on child killers and the minimum age at which such

orders can be imposed, to be lowered from 20 to 18. 'Sentence inflation' has reached 40% in 10 years. Prison overcrowding leads to the use of pods and portakabins. Thanks to coronavirus, the backlog of cases waiting to be heard in magistrates' courts has reached 400,000.

The whole criminal justice system is in crisis, with less chance of rehabilitation and a persistent culture of lack of transparency and consultation. Ministry of Justice budget cuts undermine reforms. The MOJ has persistently failed to arrange contracts successfully. The most damning comment came from the Public Accounts Committee, that the MOJ outsources problems instead of resolving them. There is a need to end 'locking people into an unending cycle of violence and fear'. Yet the current government proposes to spend £4 billion to create 18,000 extra prison places and 500 of these will be for women, although the Corston Report (2005) recommended that women's prisons should be closed down.



There are some hopeful signs: the New Futures network tackles the problem of disclosure, a serious matter when 11,000,000 in the UK have a criminal record which inhibits their finding employment. Organisations from the Third Sector, such as the Prison Phoenix Trust, have achieved considerable success. But there is a continuing lack of purposeful activity for prisoners, coupled with an ingrained sense of hopelessness and helplessness. Chris Grayling has never been called to account for the disastrous policies he tried to impose on prisons, cutting budgets by 25% and trying to remove inmates' access to books.

The third speaker of the morning, Di Asquith, was a former colleague of Marian's in the Bristol Probation Service and now a member of the Independent Monitoring Board, whose report on HMP Eastwood Park, was published this week. Her title was "Engaging with BAME Issues". With BAME (Black, Asian, Mixed Ethnicity) she included GRT (Gipsy, Roma, Traveller), all of these being groups over-represented in the UK prison population. BAME people form 16% of the general population but 27% of the prison population and among young people in custody, the proportion reaches 40%, a higher number than in the much-vilified USA. I find this shocking. 38% of 'Stop and Search' incidents involve BAME citizens and arrests of black youngsters have risen from 7% to 17% in ten years. Complaints of discrimination are not investigated. Only 7% of police are BAME and 8% of judges and prison staff.

For the last few minutes of the morning, we divided into breakout rooms. My group of six included two Friends I had long known and three I was meeting for the first time. We had hardly any time to reflect on the interesting morning's session. Cas Bottomley acted as Host and deserves great credit for enabling the technology to operate to the advantage of all, with hardly any glitches at all.

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# REDEEMABLE - A MEMOIR OF DARKNESS AND HOPE

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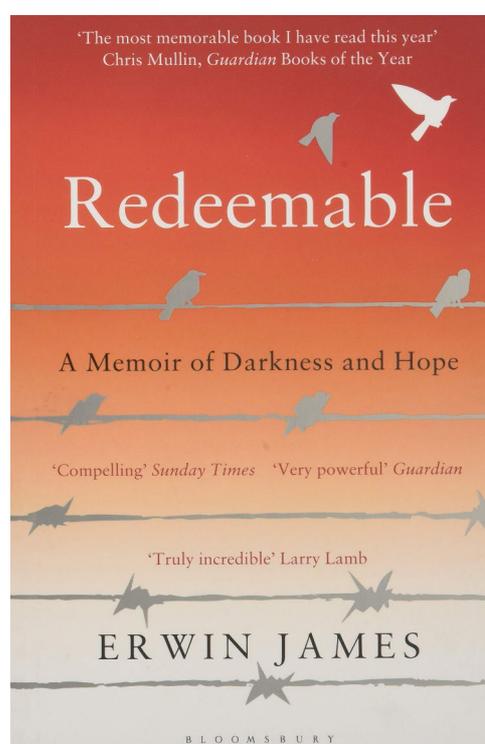
**Penny Lilley**

Unlike many QICJ members, I have never worked in a prison or in criminal justice services in the UK. I have written to several inmates on Death Row in the USA for many years. Two of the people I have written to have been executed, one of them last summer. Through my correspondence I have learned a lot about the often chaotic lives many people living on death row have endured. My friend Wesley who was executed last July grew up in an abusive family involving trauma and violence. He wrote eloquently about his life and through his writing and support from a Buddhist monk, he became a kind and compassionate man. From his death row cell he offered a huge amount of emotional support to his only child, his daughter. She has been traumatised by his execution.

Many members of QICJ will be well aware of the pattern of an abusive and traumatised childhood, that often leads to crime and incarceration as an adult. Although intellectually aware of this pattern, 'Redeemable', by Erwin James brought home to me the full painful reality of a life scarred by childhood trauma. 'A Sense of Freedom' by Jimmy Boyle, another memoir by a man following a life sentence for murder, touched me in the same way.

Some of you may have read articles by Erwin James that he wrote for the Guardian, about prison life and later, his life upon release. Like my friend Wesley, Erwin came from an impoverished, chaotic background. I live in South West Scotland. Erwin's family were itinerant Scots living mostly in England, a lot of the time in West Yorkshire, an area I know quite well. I wonder if being Scots living in England added to the difficulties that Erwin's family endured?

The death of Erwin's mother in a horrific car accident, precipitated an impoverished, barely functional family into violence and abuse. Erwin's father lived with a series of women, who already had their own children. Erwin, despite these women's often valiant efforts was neglected, along with his younger sister. Erwin's father attacked these women and Erwin himself, in drunken rages. Erwin's school attendance was minimal and while truanting, he started committing minor offences and eventually landed up in a children's home. As most of you reading this will guess, Erwin's life spiralled down into abusive, violent behaviour, further crime, self-hatred and eventually a long prison sentence.



Erwin was eventually helped to undertake an Open University Course, which led to journalism and writing his memoir, with the help of Joan Branton, a psychologist. Without her skilled work, he may never have been able to make these changes. As well as the memoir recording the life of a man from a chaotic background, it also records the careful, patient work of Joan Branton, a skilled professional working in Wakefield prison. It is a testimony to the importance of 'seeing that of God in everyone', as Quakers believe. Joan may not have been a Quaker or even a Christian, but she must have had some instinctive belief in the basic goodness within Erwin and other prisoners, to continue the difficult work that she did. The memoir is partly an appreciation of the work of Joan Branton.

Although Erwin's early life is full of trauma and hurt, the memoir is lightened by the fact that it is beautifully written and that Erwin emerged from the bleakness of a long sentence and terrible memories of his own bad behaviour and that of his father, to write journalism, later this memoir, and is now the editor of 'Inside Time', the national newspaper for people in prison. He is also a patron for Human Writes, the organisation I belong to which supports people in the UK to write to people on death row. Erwin James committed a terrible crime, but through support from his psychologist, some other prison staff and his own hard work over many years, he emerged as a compassionate man.

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## MINUTES OF 2021 AGM

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### 1) Those Present and Apologies

Present: Jo Rado & Melanie Jameson (Clerks), Rodney Mahon (Treasurer) and over 30 members. There were a number of apologies.

### 2) Minutes and Matters Arising

Further to Item 6 of the AGM 2020 QICJ has now been accepted as a Quaker Recognised Body.

Item 7 of last years AGM adopted a formal constitution for QICJ, pending an application to register as a charity. This was approved by the Charities Commission. Thanks are due in particular to Rodney Mahon, our treasurer, for all his work on these two items.

### 3) Committee matters, including Meetings held during the year

5 Committee Meetings have been held: one following the Woodbrooke Conference, two subsequent meetings on April 14 and September 23, plus 2 brief meetings, which took place on November 12th and January 14th. All except the conference meeting being held virtually.

### 4) Nominations Committee to bring forward appointments to QICJ Committee

We appoint Marian Liebmann, Simon Ewart and Robert Wilson to serve on a QICJ Nominations Committee for a triennium period from today until the end of our AGM 2024.

### 5) Appointments to QICJ Committee

We appoint Hugh McMichael (Malvern LM) and Sinead Bailey (as a representative of Quaker

Service, N Ireland) to serve on the QICJ committee for a triennium period from today until the end of our AGM 2024. The committee plan to have the majority of their meetings in future by virtual means, which will also enable our newsletter editor, Jonathan Lamb to participate. We thank the retiring members of the committee for their past service. Our present Co Clerk, Jo Rado, will conclude her service after the next Committee Meeting 09/03/2021

#### 6) Membership report.

Simon Ewart, our Membership Secretary, tells us that membership hovers around 145, an increase of 10 over last year. The majority of members have adapted to the new regime of paying subscriptions at the beginning of the year. Simon proposes to compile a new membership book for the spring of 2022, which we accept. WE thank Simon for his work on our behalf.

#### 7) Trustees Annual Report

The Trustees have presented their Annual Report, which we accept. The report is attached to these minutes. There were no questions to Rodney on this matter.

#### 8) Newsletter

Three newsletters have been produced over the year. We thank Jonathan Lamb for all his work on our behalf as editor.

#### 9) Update from the Crime, Community & Justice work of the QPSW Social Justice Committee

Teresa Parker, our staff link with QPSW's Crime and Community Justice group, has outlined the work which has been undertaken during the past year. We thank Teresa for the work which she has been able to do in these challenging times and also for keeping us informed. We are saddened at the necessary curtailment of CCJ's work due to the effect of the restrictions placed upon central work due to the pandemic. Our thoughts are with all those staff members effected. Teresa's report is attached to these minutes.

#### 10) Britain Yearly Meeting Fringe Event 2020

Marian Liebmann spoke at a Fringe Event on 26 November, around the time of BYM, arranged by QICJ. Her title was Restorative Justice - Spreading its Wings. How can this Quakerly practice be used to reduce harm in a wide range of settings? This was very well received with 25 people registering to attend.

#### 11) Britain Yearly Meeting Invitation 2021

Yearly Meeting in Session will take place between Friday 30 July and Sunday 8 August this year. We have been approached by the BYM Agenda Committee to offer a session and/or contribute to the Groups Fair this year. The session could tie in with this year's theme 'For our comfort and discomfort: living equality and truth in a time of crisis'. The theme of equality, and more pertinently inequality, resonates with us. Forms need to be submitted, in outline at least, by March 15. We therefore ask Friends to forward ideas and offers of service to our Co-Clerks by March 6th. The Committee will discuss our contribution at their next meeting on March 9th

#### 12) Future Conferences

Our 2022 Conference will be at Ammerdown from February 25 to 27 with the theme of

Adverse Childhood Experiences. In 2023 we will be at Hinsley Hall in Leeds, from February 24-26.

13) Updates & Concerns and AOB

Martin Wright has reminded us that 2022 sees the centenary of the publication of English Prisons Today, the work of a committee of Friends who served prison sentences as Conscientious Objectors in the First World War, notably Stephen Hobhouse and Fenner Brockway. He raises the issue of the formation of a group to write a comparative document in 2022. Although an excellent idea, this is a task beyond the resources of QICJ. However, we ask the QICJ Committee, at their next committee meeting, to consider how this idea might be taken forward.

14) Date of Next AGM

Feb 27, 2022, during our Conference at Ammerdown



Melanie Jameson, Co-Clerk, assisted by Simon Ewart at the table

**SOLUTION TO QICJ WORD SEARCH (PUZZLE ON PAGE 3)**

- ADVOCACY
- AMMERDOWN
- CHAPLAIN
- COURT
- CRIMINAL
- GOVERNOR
- HINSLEY
- JUDGE
- JUSTICE
- LANDING
- PRISON
- QUAKER
- RESTORATIVE
- WOODBROOKE

C	L	A	N	D	I	N	G	E	W	J	N
C	O	U	R	O	N	R	E	V	O	G	Y
D	N	G	L	A	N	I	M	I	R	C	T
R	E	K	A	U	Q	H	Y	T	J	H	E
N	W	O	D	R	E	M	M	A	J	A	C
R	B	P	V	T	K	A	A	R	N	P	I
E	K	O	O	R	B	D	O	O	W	L	T
V	J	I	C	U	V	H	S	T	J	A	S
O	U	D	A	O	T	I	P	S	U	I	U
G	D	N	C	C	R	N	R	E	S	N	J
S	G	P	Y	P	K	S	I	R	T	U	T
H	E	L	I	Y	E	L	S	N	I	H	C

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# MEMBERSHIP UPDATE

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Membership hovers around 145, an increase of 10 over last year. The majority of members have adapted to the new regime of paying their subscriptions at the beginning of the year, which makes life much simpler, thank you.

A new membership book will be ready for the spring of 2022. There are still copies of the present membership list available compiled in 2019 if anyone would like one, telephone Simon on 01736 871161 to request a copy. It is a pleasure to be your membership secretary with so many of your names becoming so familiar to me. I realise what hard work Ann Jacob, our previous incumbent, put into this job and have a feeling she knew most of you virtually personally. Something I will never be able to replicate, but I try !!!!

I look forward to seeing you at Ammerdown next year.

Best wishes Simon.

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# VOLUNTEERING OPPORTUNITY

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**Liz Hickey, National Quality Manager, Circles UK**

Readers of this publication will be aware of the successful and productive relationship between Circles of Support and Accountability (Circles) and the Quaker community over the last 20 years. Quakers founded Circles in the UK and have been consistent and tireless in their support, providing Volunteers, Trustees and financial assistance to promote and sustain this important work.

The key strength of Circles are the trained and supervised Volunteers who work directly with those individuals who have caused sexual harm (we refer to those individuals as Core Members). 4-6 Volunteers form a Circle which, meeting regularly over the period of a year to eighteen months, supports the Core Member to build a more positive and stable life whilst holding them to account for risky and problematic behaviour. The fact that ordinary members of the community are willing give their time and skills to assist some of the most risky, labelled and ostracised individuals of society gives a powerful context to this working relationship. The human contact offered by Volunteers has, of course, been made very difficult by the pandemic during which Core Members have risked being further isolated and unmonitored.

Throughout the last year, Circles Volunteers across the UK have been creative and resolute in offering ongoing support, which was demonstrated in a survey of Circles delivery in May 2020. Initiatives included virtual Circles by video conferencing (this is not always possible as many Core Members are restricted from accessing the internet due to the nature of some of their

crimes), regular telephone contact, working in COVID secure premises where face to face Circles can go ahead, meetings outside and a combination of these. The number of Circles delivered was understandably significantly lower in 2020, but referrals continue to be made and accepted, so we are looking forward to a strong recovery in 2021.

Unforeseen but positive outcomes of the pandemic are the resilience shown by Core Members (Circles Coordinators describe lockdown as being a great leveller, where those who have served prison sentences are often better equipped to deal with a deprivation of freedom than the volunteers helping them). We have also been so impressed by the determination and creativity of volunteers and Circles staff who have made every effort to ensure Core Members were not forgotten or left isolated, which could have caused both personal hardship and a potential increased risk of reoffending.



During this period, Circles providers have also invested in their Volunteers offering initial and more specialist ongoing training, newsletters and ongoing seminars and workshops. Circles Providers are in place across the South West and South East of England, including London as well as Nottingham, Lincolnshire, Merseyside, Humberside, the East Region and Wales and are currently looking for volunteers. Volunteers of all ages and backgrounds are invited to apply; good communication skills and a commitment to develop your knowledge and skills to work in this complex area are necessary.

Most Circles Volunteers find the work extremely rewarding. The following quotations come from a recent evaluation of a cohort of Circles funded by the National Lottery:

“Being a part of a Circle has helped to build my self-confidence and contribute something meaningful to an easily shunned part of society. This has built my passion to challenge myself and leap into new depths and I'm so glad I signed up to Circles! This has contributed to me finding my new job role as it's helped keep on the route I aim to follow and allows for a great scope of personal and professional development.”

“My time volunteering for circles is the best thing I have ever done and the challenges I faced were worth it.”

Due to the challenging nature of the role, prospective volunteers are carefully screened and selected. Individuals also attend a 2 day training/assessment event, and once they work as volunteers, will receive ongoing supervision, support and development from a Circles coordinator.

If you are interested in this rewarding and valuable role, have a look at the Circles UK website ([www.circles-uk.org.uk](http://www.circles-uk.org.uk)) where you will find details of all the Circles Providers as well as a contact form for each to express an interest. There is also a special report by Sky News entitled 'Inside the Circle' which offers a comprehensive insight into the work and impact of Circles and contains good footage on how volunteers work with Core Members which can be accessed by clicking on this link [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r8Hdcz\\_fXQk](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r8Hdcz_fXQk).

What other types of Circles are there? Over the past few years, in addition to the core Circles model, additional Circles programmes were developed to offer a service to people with a specific need. This includes working with young people or individuals with an intellectual disability. During the past months of lockdown, the Circles UK team has designed another new programme – called Circles ReBoot – which is specifically for adult men and women convicted of accessing Child Sexual Exploitation Material (CSEM, the term we now use for the access of abusive images of children online).

This programme has been launched in response to the exponential increase in the use of CSEM. Since the COVID-19 lockdown was imposed in March 2020, several organisations have reported significant increases in online abuse. The Internet Watch Foundation (IWF) reported an increase of almost 50%. From March to July, its hotline logged 44,809 reports of images compared with 29,698 the year before. At least 8.8 million attempts by UK internet users to access videos and images of children suffering sexual abuse were blocked during the first lockdown (IWF website).

The design of Circles ReBoot is underpinned by relevant research and will be fully evaluated. The pilot will take place later this spring and Volunteers will soon be trained to deliver it. Circles ReBoot is a shorter, more structured Circle and will require a smaller number of volunteers. It is the intention of Circles UK to present the evaluation findings at an online event to enable shared learning of CSEM perpetrators with other professionals. This will contribute to the development of an evidence base in an area which is still under-researched and understood – despite staggering statistics and the devastating impact on victims and survivors.

We hope you will consider joining the Circles community as we continue to work to prevent further victims of sexual abuse.

Circles UK, Abbey House, Abbey Square, Reading, Berkshire, RG1 3BE

Circles UK is a Registered Charity 1122641  
Registered Company Number 6457347

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website: [www.circles-uk.org.uk](http://www.circles-uk.org.uk)  
tel: 0118 9500068



BE A PART OF OUR CIRCLE

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**HOPE SPRINGS ETERNAL**  
**BUT NEEDS OUR ANGER AND COURAGE TO WORK**

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**Tim Newell**

Of the three theological virtues: Faith, Hope and Love, Hope is the greatest. Faith only tells us what God is, and Love only tells us that God is good, but Hope tells us that God will work God's will. And Hope has two beautiful daughters. Their names are Anger and Courage; Anger at the

way things are, and Courage to see that they do not remain the way they are.

At the end of the QICJ conference I ministered using St Augustin's words to help me describe my hope for the future.

We had heard such wonderful accounts in the afternoon of the progress of AVP and Circles of Support and Accountability despite the limitations of lockdown. The plans for the reorganisation of the Probation Service to restore the unified structure were also full of very welcome possibilities, restoring the culture of trust in non-custodial sanctions. The morning's sessions showed us how many issues continued to remain unjust, damaging and deteriorating, including the growth of sentencing lengths, the incidence of recall, the lack of opportunities to reduce risk, the reduced opportunities for women in prison and the continuing issues concerning Black and Minority Ethnic groups in prison. Surely enough material there for my anger at the injustice of the situation and the damaging effects of current policy.

When the pandemic led to the lockdowns we have experienced, many people hoped that the time would be used as a portal during which things could change in our behaviour as a society. Historically pandemics have forced humans to break with the past and imagine their world anew. This one is no different, a gateway between one world and the next. We can choose to walk through taking our prejudices and dead ideas, our dead rivers and smoky skies behind us. Or we can walk lightly through it, ready to imagine another world and ready to fight for it.

We have a time of increasing complexity of offending, online fraud is half of total crime in the country. There are hidden crimes as well like domestic abuse and child sexual abuse which are increasingly being uncovered in the home rather than in public spaces. These types of crime are more complex and costly to investigate.

Criminals are changing also. The overall number in front of the courts is reducing but they are more challenging than they used to be. They have more chaotic and complex lives suffering from a range of different problems like homelessness, drug and substance misuse. These require agencies in the justice system but also outside it, like housing, health and education. Criminals are becoming harder to manage than they used to be.

Society is changing in becoming more unequal between the top 5% and the bottom 5%. In some communities you're four times more likely to be a victim of crime than if you'd grown up in another part of the country. Resources have to reflect that crime is not evenly spread.

Resources have been squeezed Since 2010 the justice system has had budgets cut by a fifth. This impacts at all levels. In prisons, in prosecution services, on probation in the courts.

The criminal justice system has not reformed, with too much effort on the back end of the system - locking people up for short sentences – known to be ineffective and damaging. The resources would be better spent stopping young people entering the system. All the agencies



need to work more closely together also instead of operating as silos. All this at a time when demand is going up and resources are going down.

These challenges are enough for those seeking greater justice to be concerned about and even to struggle for change. The opportunity of the promised Royal Commission on the Justice System may give us some Hope, but it may also be, Friends, that we will have to deploy her sisters, Anger and Courage.

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## QICJ ANNUAL CONFERENCE REPORT

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**Jennifer Armstrong**

### **THE SATURDAY AFTERNOON SESSIONS**

The first of the three speakers in the afternoon session was Nigel Byford, an Assistant Chief Probation Officer, whose talk was entitled The Unification of Probation. I do not think it necessary, bearing in mind the readership of this newsletter, to set out the problems which followed the 2014 break-up/part privatisation of the probation service. The decision in 2019 for reform of that clearly flawed system provided an opportunity for a wider overhaul of the probation service, the aim being a much more unified model. Nigel spoke of drawing on recent best practice and innovation with greater openness and integration, particularly between prison and community.

The start date for the new service is 26 June but the immensely complicated number and nature of the changes, plus the added problems of Covid, mean that not everything can happen on Day 1. There will be new probation areas, new categories of service, new targets, new names (offender managers, for example, will become probation practitioners), more regular reviews, more continuous staff training. So it will necessarily be a gradual shift over time.

Several concerns were raised by participants. Is the future brighter in terms of alternative to prisons? Will the much-criticised private companies such as G4S still be involved? How are prisons to accommodate the increasing number of older, disabled people? There may not yet be clear answers to these questions. However, the new National Probation Service does hold out hope for a more joined-up and informed way of helping those who come into contact with it.

Jo Burden, CEO of Circles SW, our second afternoon speaker, started by acknowledging the contribution of Quakers, initially and ongoing, to Circles of Support and Accountability (COSAs). Again, I think it likely that most participants are familiar with COSAs, which act as an additional support system for people, almost exclusively men, convicted of sexual offences now living in the community, the stated aim being 'No More Victims'. Jo spoke of the challenges which Covid has placed on ex-offenders already suffering from isolation. As a member of a Circle myself, I am very aware of this. In my Circle we have strived to keep going, moving from initially meeting indoors to phone calls, to zoom, to outdoors again (until it got too cold and dark) and now face to face indoors, the latter thanks to the kindness of the local Baptist Church.

Jo outlined new types of Circles have been introduced in recent years, including ones starting life in prison, and Youth Circles – both to meet identified needs and also as ways of securing different sources of funding. More recent new models are Circles ReBoot for online offenders involved with indecent images of children and Fellowship Circles, initiated in partnership with the Catholic Church.



As Jo said, there is now plenty of robust evidence that Circles are successful in reducing re-offending. But the funding for them is too often small and unreliable, and some parts of the country have no Circles at all. Can we hope that the new probation framework, with its aim of more joined up working, may be able to offer more support?

Our final speaker was Robert Ordman who, as a trained workshop facilitator, updated us on the Alternatives to Violence Project (AVP), a charity which works largely with offenders, seeking to manage anger, resolve conflict and build better relationships. As with Circles, AVP has strong Quaker roots and there were several volunteers at the conference. Again like Circles, funding is the on-going challenge, with workshops in prison practically dried up. How sad this is: many of us know prisoners who have spoken of the beneficial impact of AVP courses, which were also well thought of by prison officers. Now most contact takes place by means of a 6-week distance learning course where work is posted to volunteer assessors who then feed back their comments. No one fails although some will be invited to re-submit until the learning is achieved. Kathleen Wildman, a volunteer, spoke of the importance of positive feedback and of the benefits to prisoners of learning to put trust in their assessors. AVP courses do not have a formal status in prisons but they can count where for whatever reason other courses are no longer running. This is surely another example of finding hope in difficult times.

## LIVING IN HMP DURING COVID19

### A current inmate who asked to remain anonymous

The few media articles I have seen, focus on the 23½ hour lockup in prisons and its negative impact on mental health. They paint a bleak picture with no suggestion of a workable alternative.

In the first wave, we saw the impact of Covid in closed communities like care homes and continental hospitals. An outbreak running out of control in a prison would also have serious consequences. Staff coping with illness and inmates in hospital would lose control of the prison site. Although inmates do much of the menial work to keep the site running, there is no access to or experience in, even low level management of the activity. The constant reminders that we are society's rejects has left several inmates unwilling or unable to engage in co-operative activity.

Given the challenges of the task, I want to suggest that HMPPS are doing pretty well at dealing with Covid. My experience, at least on this site, is that I am better off here than I would have been outside the wall. Dealing with isolation is a problem in prison, even in normal times. However, there have been some compensating advantages too.

The 23½ hour lockdown only lasted a few days while staff planned a new regime. We are fortunate to have a site with separate residences each housing about 80 men, mostly in single cells. Within a few weeks another residence was produced from construction workers' modular accommodation, to get everyone into single cells.

Within each building we were divided into bubbles of about 10 men. Each bubble is assigned a session out of cell for 45 minutes a day for domestics (phone, showers etc.)

Not being an old town prison, we have good outdoor spaces. There is an all weather games area surrounded by a perimeter road and well managed gardens. To maintain social distancing, the road was made one way (walking) and 2 meter markings painted all over the site! After some experimentation, we settled on a schedule that gives each building 45 minutes outdoor exercise every day. The gym staff have re-organised the gym into spaced out work areas and support activity on the games area during our 45 minutes slot.

A typical day is now a morning round with an officer checking 'bolts and bars' at about 8.30. They also check that the cell call bell works and exchange a word or two. In addition, we are out of cell to collect meals at mid-day and early evening. That's at least five contacts with staff or other residents in the same bubble every day. This is more than many people living alone outside the wall will get.

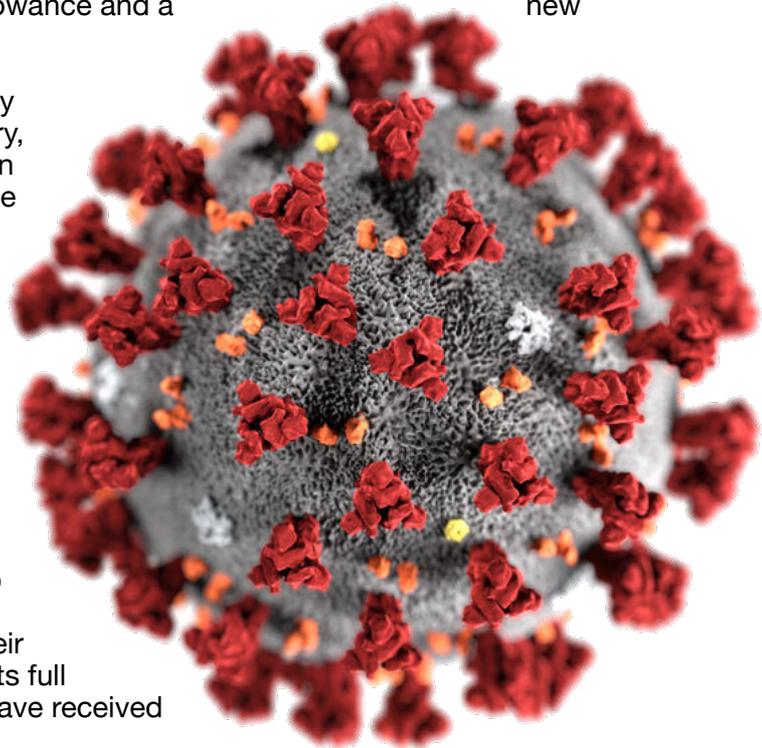
That still leaves 10 to 14 waking hours alone in cell unless you are an essential worker. Staff here have worked to make this less stressful. We have library services for requesting books, games, DVDs and jigsaws which are brought to your cell. We receive regular activity sheets and in-cell exercise advice. The kitchen has provided an extra snack pack with lunch and education staff have moved to supporting more in-cell study and activities. The number of available TV channels has been doubled and the TV rental dropped. With the loss of face-to-face visits, extra free letters, a free phone call allowance and a new on-line visits system have been introduced.

Many of the anxieties for people in the community have not affected us. Meals, newspapers, laundry, catalogue and canteen purchases have carried on just as they did in the past. Everyone still gets the same pocket money, whether they are able to work or not. No-one is facing unemployment or financial losses.

At 73, I am a vulnerable person who needs to avoid catching Covid. We are all issued with washable masks to be worn in places like the meal queues. Prison discipline is probably better than the rail companies at achieving compliance.

If I do catch Covid I will need good health care to survive it. We have our own NHS backed staff working on site. Although they have changed their way of working, the service continues to deliver its full range of services. Since the March lockdown I have received both new glasses and hearing aids.

To deal with Covid, healthcare have established a small group of barrier nursed isolation cells. A couple of staff and inmates have shown Covid symptoms but it has been quickly isolated. We have a very fast and effective track, test, trace and isolate process in place. Once again, normal prison practice has worked to our advantage.



Prison regimes don't chop and change quickly and we have been spared most of the uncertainty on your side of the wall. Covid has undoubtedly changed the experience for prison inmates. Longer periods alone are part of that change but describing it as 23½ hour lockup is misleading. Significant time alone (or locked in with a cellmate) was always part of the prison regime.

Media reporting of crime ends with the van heading off from court to prison. It ignores the fact that for the vast majority of convicts this is the start of our journey back into the community. If we don't return to the situation where we offended, we may well be living alone and isolated. Covid has forced HMPPS to focus more on helping us with managing isolation. Let's hope that is not lost when the crisis is over.

Your Committee Members for 2021 are: Simon Ewart (Membership Secretary), Rodney Mahon (Treasurer), Alice Audsley (co-clerk), Sinead Bailey, Melanie Jameson (co-clerk), Teresa Parker (co-opted from QPSW Social Justice Group), Sue Barrance, Jonathan Lamb (newsletter editor) Hugh McMichael and Polly Lowe

## Published by Quakers in Criminal Justice

**Opinions expressed are those of the writers and do not represent the views of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers), Quakers in Criminal Justice or the Newsletter Editor**

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