

# The Befriender



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## Message from Jen

Dear Volunteers,  
I'm delighted to introduce myself as the new Befriending Coordinator. I started at the beginning of April and have managed to get to quite a few support group meetings around the country so far. I hope to get around to all remaining groups within the next few months and look forward to meeting all of you in due course.

My main aim over the next few months is to review the Befriending Administration systems, Recruitment & Training and Policies & Procedures and to update where necessary.

Should you have any ideas or suggestions regarding any of these areas, I'd be happy to hear from you. Likewise, if there's anything at all I can assist you with regarding your volunteering with New Bridge; please don't hesitate to contact me. My email address is: [jen@newbridgefoundation.org.uk](mailto:jen@newbridgefoundation.org.uk).

I look forward to working with you all.

Kind regards,

Jen Cohen

## New Bridge news:

### Seminar

This year the seminar will be held on **Saturday 10<sup>th</sup> and Sunday 11<sup>th</sup> October** at Luther King House, Manchester. Volunteers have asked us for plenty of notice to get the date in diaries, so we are hoping for a good turnout this year. Several groups have also mentioned that a change from the usual Manchester venue would be helpful and mean an easier journey and less travel costs. We have been looking at alternative cities and venues but as yet, have not found anywhere that offers the suitability, quality and value for money of Manchester. Chris Thomas decided it was preferable to give volunteers an early idea of the date for this year, rather than continue the search. We hope that the 2010 Seminar will be at a new venue. It will be held outside London. Look out for details of the 2009 programme in this newsletter, on the website and at Group Meetings.

### Web site upgrade

We are pleased to announce that work is underway to update and improve our website. The current version is very limited and does not give us the opportunity to easily add photographs, documents or in future, audio and video clips. We have appointed design group Hudson Fuggle, who have a wealth of experience in the charity and education sectors. The new site will have a Members Area where volunteers can access news, copies of policy documents and other special features. It should be live in July.

## INSIDE THIS ISSUE

- 2** Visiting Tales
- 3** More news from Medway Street
- 4** Helping New Bridge

## Visiting Tales

*Damien Mckenzie from London Group 2 describes his first visit to a prisoner, last year.*

The train raced out of Kings Cross station leaving behind the skyscrapers and urban life of London. As I sat daydreaming, looking at the window with stations rushing past me, my thoughts were interrupted ferociously by a young woman ticket inspector saying, "Tickets please Sir." Returning to reality I reached into my pocket showed her the ticket and it then dawned on me as she stamped that this was to be my first prison visit. I have been a New Bridge Befriender since early September 2006 and though I have always had prisoners I had written to, I always wanted to build up a relationship so that we might have something to talk about on the visit. These thoughts came into my mind as I sat on the train to visit my prisoner that I had been writing to for a year based in Littlehey in Huntingdon.

Arriving at Huntingdon I boarded a local community bus which took us directly to the prison. Everyone that boarded gave each person they passed a smile which soon disappeared as it was clear that this business was not a happy one; my smile if faded was due to the nervousness in which I hid. The visitors centre was a flurry of activity, inside I informed a staff member it was my first time so she talked me through the procedures of the prison. I asked a few questions and carried out the procedures as instructed. I grabbed a cup of tea and waited for my group to be called to go over to the prison. I looked around the room and it was clear that these people (mainly women) did this regularly from listening to the conversations. As my group was called I was handed back the V.O. and proceeded over to the prison. Inside the prison smelt of cleanliness, disinfectant and order. I got searched, sniffed by a Labrador and patted down all in 10 minutes.

The visitors hall was arranged into four arm chairs behind a small coffee like table with the prisoners sat behind them in their blue and white pin striped shirt and blue jeans. I walked into the visitors hall and nervousness rang all over me. I handed the prison officer my V.O. as I entered and was told table 14 and the walk was no more than three tables in and I kept thinking please don't trip, don't fall, arriving at the table I saw a fresh looking face smiling and as I sat down we began to converse.

2 hours, 2 Mars Bars, 2 Cans of Lilt, packet of mini cheddars, 2 sausage rolls later, it was clear it was time to go. I was afraid that I would not be able to sustain two hours of conversation but it was clear it flowed naturally and as I stood to shake the prisoner's hand it was clear how much of an impact I had made just by turning up. I wish I had longer to stay and talk to him but I'm saving that for the next visit and letter where we can finish off the conversations and subjects matters we started.

It was evident as I boarded the bus from the prison back to Huntingdon train station that the staff were friendly and helpful and well aware of the situation the visitors were all in. As a first visit I'm glad I had Littlehey as it was not too far from home and I look forward to my second visit back there.

### **Sir Peter Lloyd – surprise treat for former Chairman**

In the last edition of *The Befriender*, we told you that Sir Peter Lloyd stood down as Chairman of New Bridge at the end of December. To mark his departure and say 'thank you' for 14 years of dedication to the charity, staff and volunteers organised a trip to a special theatrical performance. Intermission Youth Theatre takes young people 'at risk' from the London area and takes them to an adapted church in Knightsbridge every Saturday to work with professionals from the West End. New Bridge took over their production of 'Wasted', an adaptation of Julius Caesar on 24th April. The play was devised by Darren Raymond, a former prisoner turned writer. It was a wonderful event with stunning performances from the young people. The evening was fitting tribute to Sir Peter, which featured in the May 2009 issue of *Inside Time*.

## Phone number hell

In recent months a few volunteers from Groups around the country have had problems from prisoners and ex offenders who have their phone number. There have been reports of frequent, unwelcome and harassing calls and texts at all times of day, at night and at weekends. There have also been calls from prisoners who have obtained mobile phones from within prison. **We cannot emphasise enough the importance of not revealing your number.** You may think you know and trust the prisoner but you do not know how they might use the number or what pressure they may be under from others to hand over information. We are here to support prisoners during a very difficult time in their life and it will often be tempting to do more. Giving your number changes the relationship; you lose control over contact and risk dealing with calls at times when you least want them, in the middle of the night or when spending time with family. You can ignore the call or switch off the phone – but if a distressed message is left for you, what do you do? If you feel under pressure to give your number, you can discuss it with your group or contact the office for advice or simply say that New Bridge will not allow you to give them that information. Volunteers often tell us that a prisoner has their number and ‘everything is fine, there is nothing to worry about’. We are also told ‘this was not covered in training’. It is always covered in training and **our policy is simple: prisoners and ex offenders should not be given your phone number.**

*Chris Thomas*

## London to Amsterdam Cycle Challenge 18<sup>th</sup> to 21<sup>st</sup> September

Chris Thomas is once again heading across Europe on his bike to raise funds for New Bridge. It is not too late for you (or someone you know) to join him on this three day, 300km mission. All the details, including the all important information on how to sponsor Chris is on the web page [www.bmycharity.com/cyclechris09](http://www.bmycharity.com/cyclechris09) (You are also welcome to donate ‘off line’ if you wish!)

The challenge is organised by Classic Tours who provide all the back-up, logistics and accommodation en route. In 2007, Chris and two volunteers, Ben Owen and Ann Bryant raised over £5,000 for the befriending service. Fundraising could not be easier and the ride is described as ‘fairly challenging’. You will need to be reasonably fit, or be prepared to train! For more information on how to take part, please contact Chris in the office.

## New group in Bristol

New recruits from the Bristol area mean that a befriending group for the city has been established. Existing volunteers from the area were either going to London or heading up to the Wolverhampton group! This takes our total to 16 Support Groups nationwide and is a result of the huge numbers of new enquiries we are receiving through the volunteering web site [www.do-it.org](http://www.do-it.org)

## Pink Plea

Please remember to take pink forms away with you at meetings and make an effort to complete them in advance of your next meeting. Meetings are about listening to other volunteers and have them listen to you to offer each other support and advice. Please respect your fellow volunteers by not filling in your form when other volunteers are reporting! Thanks

## HELPING NEW BRIDGE

**Everyclick.com** is a fundraising tool that enables any charity to raise additional funds. Every month 'everyclick' gives 50% of its gross revenue to charities listed on their website.

Go to <http://www.everyclick.com/uk/newbridge> and set 'everyclick' as your home page, selecting New Bridge as your charity, every time you search the web New Bridge benefits. There is no cost to us or you.

**Bmycharity** New Bridge now works in partnership with Bmycharity, which makes raising money very easy by giving supporters the chance to donate on line and set up events to raise money. Call the office for details or click on <http://www.bmycharity.com/new-bridge>

**Classic Tours** more energetic volunteers can help by taking part in sponsored treks or cycle challenges organised by Classic Tours, the originators of worldwide charity challenges. Call the office for details or log on to [www.classictours.co.uk](http://www.classictours.co.uk) We are specifically looking for people to take part in the London to Amsterdam Cycle Challenge, September 2009

# new bridge

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## In the next issue...

The full line up for this year's Seminar

Further case studies

All the latest news from Medway Street and around the country

*New Bridge was founded in 1956 to create links between the offender and the community. The intention is not to forget the victims of crime but to prevent more people becoming victims.*