

The Befriender



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Annual Seminar – stars of TV's 'Banged Up' head for Manchester

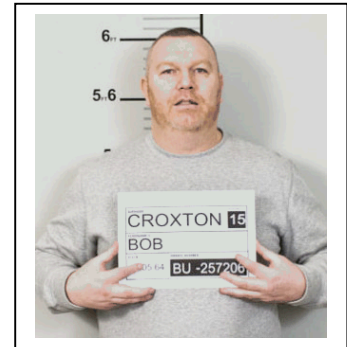
Manchester's Luther King House will once again be the venue for our Annual Volunteer's Seminar on 18th and 19th October 2008.

Many volunteers have been hooked on Channel 5's 'Banged Up' series covering the journey of a group of young offenders 'imprisoned' for ten days and gaining the support of ex-offender mentors.

We are delighted that Daniel and his mentor Bob will be speaking about their experiences at this year's seminar. This will be a great opportunity to hear their stories first hand and learn how mentoring has turned lives around.

'Banged Up' also featured New Bridge Vice President, Professor David Wilson as the prison's governor. David will be hosting the seminar again this year.

It is not too late to book a place. Residential places are £60 (£30 concessions) including accommodation and the day rate for more local volunteers is £5.00 for



Daniel and Bob, appearing at this year's volunteer seminar

Saturday and £15 for Sunday. Providing you choose the more economical option, all travel expenses will be reimbursed too.

In addition to speakers, the seminar will also feature the usual range of workshops. It is an excellent chance to meet volunteers from the around the country and share your views on befriending, prisons and criminal justice.

Booking forms were sent to volunteers in June. If you would like another copy, or more information, please contact Heidi at Medway Street. 020 7976 0779



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Befriending After Release

In the last issue of The Befriender we asked for views and experiences on befriending prisoners 'through the gate' and into their lives in the community. The advent of our 'London Through The Gate' project supported by Big Lottery Fund has further generated debate on the issue in group meetings.

Here are two of responses we received. The first explores the emotional help and support that newly released prisoners may need. The second offers some practical suggestions, based on years of experience.

Of course, supporting a prisoner through the gate and on release is not an expectation for befrienders. There are no New Bridge policies and guidelines on this issue.

The views expressed here are those of the authors and not New Bridge.

"Talk of Pauline's new 'Through the Gate' project and some discussion in our group on the merits of 'follow up' after discharge, prompted me to examine my experience of working as a volunteer for ten years with an 'insider' with that of the contact we have maintained in the ten months since his release. Not only do I find it difficult to identify the angry individual I first met in Brixton all those years ago with the man who emerged from open prison ten years later, I have observed a further dramatic transformation during those recent months of freedom.

In the early months of friendship during visiting time I was aware that the person in front of me was extremely angry with the world in general but as the anger diminished and he began to trust me I realised that there was so much I did not know or understand about his personality. He was always welcoming, articulate and honest but it was as if he was wary and guarded. I have often been told by other prisoners that you do not set out to make real friends in prison, it is far too risky. For some inside it seems that "hell is other people" and that self-preservation dictates that one reserves an aura of secrecy and independence about one. However, surrounded by other people, prisoners and staff at least there is structure and

company during the day. It is hard to envisage what it must feel like to re-enter the world again and take responsibility for one's own life. In this new situation my role has been simply to be there for him and to help him increase his confidence in the new environment.

As a volunteer the contact I have had with this man since his discharge has consisted on a day exploring the city together he now finds himself living in, chatting and eating. We have also maintained regular phone contact. I am reminded of a butterfly appearing out of a chrysalis. The defences of the prison days are shed and the bright colours determination, humour and intelligence now seem to have full reign. Communication seems to be easier for us both. I suspect this contact has been helpful during some of the painful experiences that have taken place since the date of his discharge. He tackled those setbacks with incredible fortitude and maturity. I feel that this contact will gently diminish with every month that goes by and as his reintegration into the community is completed. I am left wondering if the years of visiting an inmate were as important as the lighter contact we have had since. He is the only person who can answer this question"

"I always offer to meet my correspondents on their release and I allocate 2 days to do this. They often refuse the service at first but most change their mind. Release after several years in prison without any access to the outside world often creates a feeling of 'intoxication'. They are often quite high! The nearest experience that I can recall was when I was released from National Service.

On day one I take them to Probation and then to their accommodation, or start searching for accommodation, whichever is appropriate. I give them a good lunch without alcohol. Some have to observe a curfew and it is important to make allowances for this.

On day two I take them to the Job Centre and often go through jobs with them. On one or two occasions I have taken them to job interviews.

Although it costs £65+ to get a passport, I encourage all my mentees to open a bank account and get a passport. One was unable to work on a building site

because he had no means of identity. Another could not find accommodation for the same reason.

I encourage all my mentees to take up a pastime or sporting activity. Two have expressed interest in amateur dramatics. Others have been encouraged to take up part-time courses. This can become a social activity.

At first I communicate with them two or three times a week until I am happy that they are fairly well set up. I then indicate they should contact me rather than the other way round. If this does not happen, I might give them a ring after four weeks or so. **I give them my mobile number but not my private landline number. I never give my home address.**

Avoiding becoming a person's prop is something to bear in mind. The mentee has to live his/her life and it is better they make mistakes. Often mentees lack confidence to do things. Encourage them to do it for themselves and they gain the confidence they need."

Best Prison to visit?

Visiting prisoners can be stressful and difficult at times. On other occasions at certain prisons it can be a joy.

Last year, we awarded HMP Grendon our first 'Best Prison to Visit' Award. Where have you had a good visiting experience? Where have you found helpful staff, eager to ensure your visit goes well?

Contact us at Medway Street and tell us which prison you think should be awarded the prize in 2008.

The winner will be unveiled at the Volunteer Seminar in October

Mileage rate increase

Following recent increases in the cost of petrol and diesel, the mileage rate for volunteers has been increased to 25p per mile. This rate will remain in force until at 31st December 2008

Family Matters

The **Family Matters** parenting programme is an accredited course, specifically designed for offenders and tackles the issues of being a parent in prison. The course can act as a catalyst for change in the attitudes of participants to family life. New Bridge has been running this course since the early 1990s.



We are looking for volunteers to train to run courses in prisons around the country. The following are prisons which are running courses or have expressed an interest:

HMP & YOI Holloway, London

HMYOI Portland, Dorset

HMP Woodhill, Milton Keynes

HMP Wakefield, West Yorkshire,

HMP Whitemoor, Cambridgeshire

HMP Holme House, Dorset

HMP Bronzefield, (women) Surrey

If you would like to find out more about courses and how you can help, please contact Lesley Dixon on 0191 346 4056



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 We are specifically looking for people to take part in the London to Paris Cycle Challenge, 26 to 29 June 2009

In the next issue...

Visits to prisons are an essential part of your role as a volunteer. We want to hear more about your experiences, good and bad. Already, we have tales of first visits and tales of strange things happening! What has been the best or worst of your experience? Send us a letter or e-mail to the usual addresses.

We will also have a full-round up of this year's Annual Seminar in Manchester.



new bridge

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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.