# Quakers in Criminal Justice

## Shining a Light in the Darkness



**Newsletter 122 Spring 2026**

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# Editorial

**Greetings to Friends and all readers of this newsletter.**

We have an interesting mixed bag for you, as usual.

This includes news of the worrying cuts to prison education, the pernicious application of Anti-Social Behaviour Interventions, current legislation and the crack down on protest – which has affected many Friends. I got drawn in in 2018 when an arms fair relocated to my town and here I am (below) with my placard ready for action at the NEC arms fair this February.

Several contributions come from serving prisoners, one writer encourages us not to lose hope, another (from the perspective of N Ireland) offers a pathway to a reduction in recalls to prison. I could not agree more with his statement: *If a person is not a danger to the public or has not committed a further crime, then there should be other approaches rather than recall*; this remains an area of concern for the working group within QICJ. Fergus McNeil urges the CJS to promote 'connection' and 'belonging' rather than relying so heavily on incarceration.

In this newsletter we look back to Churchill's famous quote on the state of the nation, as seen through the lens of its prisons, and find out the latest news from the Alternatives to Violence Project and an update on current legislation. We can also read about using the arts within Restorative Justice, which was demonstrated during a moving anniversary celebration.

Other uplifting items include an account of Maggie Hunt's service to prisons, the applications of the Enneagram, and recognition of outstanding volunteering at Prison Phoenix Trust. Within the prison education article from DWRM, the enabling of those with lived experience to make a real contribution is most encouraging, and a model which QICJ wholeheartedly supports.

This positivity directs us towards our **2026 annual conference at Hinsley Hall,** Leeds (booking form and details on website https://www.qicj.org/events.html ). Under the overall title 'Care, Support and Therapy within the Criminal Justice System', we shall pick up on the issue of Adverse Childhood Experiences, look at Restorative Justice settings and hear about post-release support – among other areas of interest, such as the popular Updates.




In future newsletters, it would be good to balance input from prisoners against insights from victims' groups; at our last conference, we all learned a lot from the journey of a victim of serious crime.

**Melanie Jameson**
**Newsletter Editor**

# 2. Spotlight on Prison Education

***Ruth McFarlane**, co-director DWRM (Do What Really Matters), raises the alarm about education in prisons but offers a ray of hope.*

We at DWRM are increasingly concerned about the state of prison education in England and Wales, where recent funding cuts have led to an inevitable decline in provision. The Ministry of Justice recently awarded new Prisoner Education Service (PES) contracts which have gone to the three incumbent providers, albeit with some changes to the prisons they work in. So, Novus, Milton Keynes College and People Plus continue to manage prison education, while Weston College has opted not to bid for the new contracts.

Although we might be comforted by the familiarity of the providers and some promise of continuity, we share the concerns expressed by the Prisoners' Education Trust and the Independent Monitoring Board (IMB) who have written an open letter to the Prisons Minister, Lord Timpson, about the significant cuts to education budgets. They highlight that redundancies and reductions in staffing have been widespread.

Although these contracts officially started in April, disputes over the arrangements meant that prisons have been in a state of flux for the whole of 2025, with staff only being informed by the end of October whether they still had their jobs, while many staff are being moved over to different contracts as providers change the prisons they work in. This uncertainty has obviously meant that many people in prison have been denied access to regular education provision for much of the past year, and this now means that there are fewer staff available to provide support to rising numbers of people, as prison populations continue to rise under increasingly punitive sentencing policies.

His Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons has identified that the current system lacks clear accountability, with education divided across central teams, individual prisons, and providers, but nothing is likely to change until the next set of contracts are awarded in four years time. The overall picture is one of an education system recognised as crucial for rehabilitation and reducing reoffending, but chronically under-resourced, poorly coordinated, and failing to reach the prisoners who need it most.

As the IMB Board identified, prisons' responses to the cuts have varied significantly. Some hope to plug gaps in provision with assistance from charitable organisations or an increase in peer support, such as the use of Shannon Trust peer workers to assist with learning to read. However this places a significant financial strain on the charities and third sector organisations involved, and the IMB warns of the dangers of over-relying on peer supporters rather than fully-trained teachers.

For us in DWRM, a social enterprise focusing on supporting further and higher education in prisons, our determination to overcome the many barriers to study remains as steadfast as ever. We are working closely with prisons to look at how we can support higher level students without relying too heavily on prison staff. We already

make good use of our varied communication formats, including our freephone number and Email a Prisoner, which enables students to contact us directly. We are also establishing student-led Learning Communities, creating opportunities for informal learning and collaboration through student forums, study support sessions and seminars led by our partner universities to give a taste of and a connection to university life. Our staff team consists mainly of people who have direct personal experience of the prison system and who have benefited from studying during their sentences, so they not only have a clear understanding of the challenges and the benefits, but they are also uniquely placed to promote these to people in prison who might be unsure whether to embark on such a programme of study - which also requires payment of university tuition fees via a student loan (only available to those within 6 years of release).

This relatability has also enabled us to develop a proposal for a new book, based on student feedback – a Study Skills Handbook for Learners in Prison – for which we have secured a publishing contract with Policy Press. Each chapter will cover a different topic (academic writing, critical thinking, referencing etc.) and will focus on how this can be achieved in the prison setting, with all the chapters' authors being current or formerly incarcerated scholars, supported by academics with experience of teaching in prisons. We are delighted to be able to support this voice of experience to lead the drive for higher standards and improved provision, even against the challenging backdrop of cuts and overcrowding in our prisons.

Visit www.dwrm.org.uk for further information.




*"Are you working to bring about a just and compassionate society which allows everyone to develop their capacities and fosters the desire to serve?"*

# 3. Restorative Justice and the Arts




***Marian Liebmann*** *travels to Belgium for an anniversary conference*

For several years, the European Forum for Restorative Justice (EFRJ) has taken an interest in arts applications of Restorative Justice. I have the same interest, as alongside my RJ and mediation experience, I am also an art therapist, specialising in work with anger and conflict. I run occasional Art Workshops focusing on these two areas.

So I was keen to go to their REstART conference in December in Leuven, near Brussels. The EFRJ was also celebrating its 25th anniversary, and as I have been to most of their conferences, that was another draw for me.

The programme included a wide variety of workshops, films, plays, storytelling, music and discussions, and even a dance workshop by a dance therapist who works in prisons.

One of the films took place in a small prison used for remand and short-term prisoners. The prison was built in 1880 and its design was so familiar, just like British prisons of the same era. We watched the film with a group of prisoners. However, there was little time for the intended discussion owing to delays in the prison – also familiar! But the film was really interesting, made in a French prison, about homicide perpetrators and victims (not of the same events) meeting over several sessions – very moving.

One of the workshops was led by an artist who produced work related to the long-term Basque conflict. Her art work included T-shirts representing stages of the group process over several meetings to resolve conflicts. She had managed to locate some local shop dummies to wear the T-shirts, these were brought to the conference by bike trailer – everyone in Belgium rides a bike.

There were two story-telling sessions. One told a story of two farmers who fell out and were brought together by a mysterious carpenter who built a bridge between them. The other was an enactment of the life of a Liberian woman who wanted to be a paediatrician, but was unable to train because of conflicts and wars, and ended up as a renowned peacemaker.

The 25th anniversary celebration took place on the same evening as a music concert. This was performed by young people from Rondine Cittadella della Pace, a village in Italy where young people stay for two years to study peace. They are invited in pairs from countries in conflict, and part of the work is learning to live together with people labelled as 'the enemy'. As well as the music, they read some very moving poems.

The final workshop centred round the story of Minamata in Japan, where industrial pollution left thousands ill or disabled. The facilitators, who had travelled from Japan, placed 100 photos on tables for us to choose, to make up our own Minamata story. They then gave us all a smaller set of the 100 photos to take home with us.

Leuven is a small city but a very interesting one. It has many colleges, set up in the 14th, 15th and 16th centuries as theological colleges, now taken over by the university. I was also fortunate in being able to stay with a mediator with whom I stayed 20 years ago – lovely to renew our friendship.

*"There is inspiration to be found all around us, in the natural world, in the sciences and arts, in our work and friendships, in our sorrows as well as in our joys."*



# 4. Membership Report

We have gained one new Member since the last Newsletter – Helen Burrluck of Oxford. Our Membership stands at 151, including 9 who are currently in prison, plus 35 Meetings and Organisations, and 12 other people and organisations with whom we share information. We circulate just short of 300 Newsletters and other information.

At our AGM in Leeds, we will discuss whether or not to continue printing members' postal addresses and geographical phone numbers in the Membership Booklet. Some have asked that only their emails and mobile numbers plus their AM or maybe their town be shown. Please have a think about this, and let Simon or Jonathan know if you have any strong feelings, or if you'd prefer to continue to have your address shown.

# 5. Use of Custody for Vulnerable People

***Dr Rona Epstein*** *highlights the pernicious consequences of ASBOs, soon to be added to by Respect Orders, which also give rise to concern*

The Manifesto Club https://freedomineverydaylife.org has published various reports by academics at the Universities of York and Coventry, which found that people are being imprisoned for anodyne actions such as feeding the birds or asking for 50p. These imprisonments were for breach of a Civil Injunction, a power contained in the Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act. To add to The Anti-social Behaviour Injunction there will soon be Respect Orders, currently passing through parliament; it is our view that Respect Orders will make such unjust imprisonments even more likely.

One of the most striking cases in these previous reports was that of Ms Reilly, a homeless woman imprisoned on 18 December 2024 for 18 months, for entering and attempting to sleep in Peterborough YMCA. She had repeatedly breached an injunction banning her from staying overnight in Peterborough YMCA (see Spring 2025 Edition of the QICJ newsletter).

In order to get the full facts of the decision to imprison Ms Reilly, I sought to obtain the court judgement. Although judgements are supposed to be 'published in timely fashion', this was not publicly available until 15 July.

This briefing summarises my analysis of the judgement and the context surrounding it, in which I established that:

- Ms Reilly was not present at the hearing, nor was she represented;
- The judgement states that Ms Reilly believed she had a right to enter and sleep in the YMCA, but did not consider the reasons for this belief;
- The judgement did not consider Ms Reilly's state of mental health, or her homeless situation;
- In total, over the past 9 years, Ms Reilly has been committed to prison on seven occasions for this breach;
- Aside from these breaches, Ms Reilly was found to be of 'past good character'.

My briefing also notes that Ms Reilly was given a prison sentence of similar length to recent criminal court convictions of a serious nature: a man who caused death by dangerous driving; a man who caused grievous bodily harm and significant brain injuries; and a man who carried out two sexual offences on women. This is clearly disproportionate, since Ms Reilly's action did not injure or hurt anyone.

Injunction breach is tried as 'contempt of court' in the civil courts, lacking the ordinary protections of the criminal courts (such as a right to legal aid, a requirement that defendants must be offered representation if they risk a prison sentence, and

protections for vulnerable defendants). Ms Reilly was convicted of breaching a court order, and not of committing any crime.

I conclude: We must ensure that our legislators reform the law of contempt so that county courts no longer have the power to impose imprisonment on homeless people who have not committed any crime. There must be a system guaranteed to ensure effective oversight of the decisions to commit to prison made in the County Courts under civil law, where the long-established protections for defendants under criminal law do not apply.

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Dr Rona Epstein is Honorary Research Fellow at Coventry Law School, Coventry University, and Honorary Visiting Research Fellow, York Law School researching Human Rights and Penal Reform. She invites anyone with an interest in this subject to contact her on lawresearcher23@gmail.com and suggests the following links to understand the wider implications of law changes and the continual eroding of personal and public freedoms:

https://www.filia.org.uk/latest-news/2022/1/25/the-rich-go-to-rehab-the-poor-go-to-prison

https://www.thejusticegap.com/anti-social-behaviour-law-punishing-the-poor-and-vulnerable/

https://www.thejusticegap.com/women-in-prison-remand-in-custody/

ohrh.law.ox.ac.uk/brutality-and-false-imprisonment-welcome-to-the-uk/

*"Remember that each one of us is unique, precious, a child of God."*

## SAVE THE DATE – QICJ CONFERENCE

**Our 2026 Conference will be held at Hinsley Hall in Leeds from 20-22 March.**

**The theme will explore aspects of therapeutic care.**

**email Simon for Booking Form if you don't have one.**

**At this crucial gathering, we shall hear about art therapy, care for prison leavers, and education opportunities, as well as the now popular Updates session, with time for sharing news, views and experiences.**

# 6. Never Give Up on Your Dreams

*Encouragement from **Prince**, a serving prisoner*

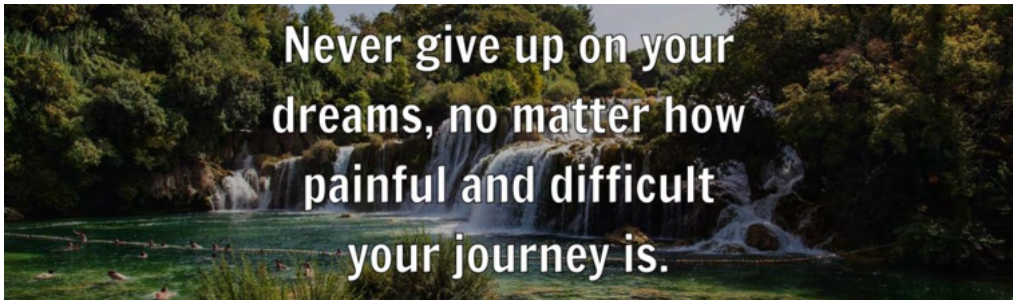
Sometimes, the difficulties and struggles we face can bring us down, affecting our mood, state of mind, decision-making and relationships. We must remember that life is a divine curriculum. There is always a lesson to be learned in every situation, even in the darkest of times.

We may have hopes and goals that we want to achieve, yet we don't know how. There is always a path, though we may not see it just yet. Do not give up on your dreams. Remember, there is always someone worse off, who has overcome seemingly insurmountable difficulties to achieve their dreams. History has shown us many well-known people who have experienced turbulent hardship and abject poverty. Yet, despite shocking obstacles, they never gave up. They persisted. Their determination eventually turned into unthinkable success.

I would like to share a personal story with you. Someone I knew well, wanted to have a child but was unable to conceive. She had many painful miscarriages and tried IVF to no avail. She visited international specialists, and tried many spiritual healers. None of this worked, but she never gave up. Fifteen years passed, yet her determination was resolute. She was so dedicated that she even purchased a pram, cot, baby clothes.

Suddenly, she fell pregnant with twins. What happened? Can it be explained? Was it a miracle? This was her ultimate dream, and her persistence defied the odds. She said to me: “Never give up on your dreams. Keep trying. You can achieve even when people say 'no' to you.” I felt useless, but I never gave up. I held onto the inner light although people insulted and humiliated me. I knew deep down that the universe would grant my only wish. My only lesson to you is never give up on your dreams.”

As I write this article in a small prison cell, I realise just how blessed I am at the things I have achieved. I know that one day I will achieve my dreams. I will never give up on my goals. So, Friends, my lesson to you is never give up on your dreams. Do not lose hope; have faith. You just do not know what you can achieve and how many people you can help. As you all read, allow your inner light to guide you.




*“When you recognise your shortcomings, do not let that discourage you. In worship together we can find the assurance of God’s love and the strength to go on with renewed courage.”*

# 7. Churchill's Rehabilitation Speech



***Mike Nellis*** *looks behind Churchill's attitude to penal reform and his controversial legacy*

At our 2025 QICJ conference at Ammerdown, Ann Horton used a famous quote from Winston Churchill in her very moving workshop, 'Hearing from the family member of a prisoner', about being the adopted grandma of a young man serving a harsh, Kafkaesque sentence of Imprisonment for Public Protection – IPP (in England). Churchill's words always resonated well with earlier generations of Friends – usually by way of contrast with bleak penal realities, as Ann herself used it - and I thought modern Friends might like to know the background to it. This is the full quotation:

**"The mood and temper of the public in regard to the treatment of crime and criminals is one of the most unfailing tests of the civilisation of any country.**

A calm and dispassionate recognition of the rights of the accused against the state and even of convicted criminals against the state, a constant heart-searching by all charged with the duty of punishment, a desire and eagerness to rehabilitate in the world of industry all those who have paid their dues in the hard coinage of punishment, tireless efforts towards the discovery of curative and regenerating processes, and an unfaltering faith that there is a treasure, if only you can find it in the heart of every person – these are the symbols which in the treatment of crime and criminals mark and measure the stored-up strength of a nation, and are the sign and proof of the living virtue in it."

Winston Churchill, aged 35 at the time, said this as part of his House of Commons maiden speech as *Liberal* Home Secretary on July 20, 1910. Although no mean writer and orator himself, Churchill was almost certainly influenced by the then very famous playwright John Galsworthy (1867-1933). He began corresponding with Galsworthy,

another Liberal, after seeing, and being influenced by *Justice*, the latter's play about the ills of solitary confinement. This was a powerful piece of Edwardian theatre which had attracted much attention earlier in the year when it had played in London. It recreated a typical prison cell on stage, in which a young male prisoner – a sad, middle class cheque forger with whom theatre audiences might identify – agonisingly loses his mind. Churchill felt enabled by the public reaction to compel the reluctant head of the Prison Commission to curtail, if not end, the number of months that new prisoners of various types spent in solitary at the beginning of their sentences (ostensibly to thwart them bringing news from the outside to already serving prisoners).

Churchill had originally been a Conservative and was only briefly a Liberal, later 'crossing the floor' in Parliament back to the Conservatives. His time as Liberal Home Secretary (1910-11) lasted only 20 months: he was sacked by Asquith, the then prime minister. His incumbency of this great office of state was uneven. He covered up police brutality at a suffragette demonstration by insisting that all charges against the arrested women were dropped, so that no evidence could be given in the magistrates' court by either side. He antagonised striking miners in Tonypandy, Wales by sending 300 London 'bobbies', and later soldiers, to break the strike. He was briefly a eugenicist – as were many liberals and socialists in this era - favouring compulsory sterilisation of 'the feeble minded' for the good of the British 'race', though in later life he regretted endorsing this.

Ironically, however, he made a small contribution to prison reform: thanks to Churchill, prisoners spent fewer hours in solitary confinement. Fewer offenders went to prison at all. Churchill reduced the total prison population, something that has eluded most of his successors. (Lord Lexden, reviewing Charles Stephenson's 2023 book, below)

Some have rooted Churchill's critical, 'liberal' attitude towards imprisonment in his own experience of imprisonment in 1899, while working as a journalist during the Boer War. But it was only for one month, after which he escaped, as patriotic duty required. Certainly, Churchill's temperament was unsuited to confinement, but a case can be made that the eloquence and compassion of the now neglected John Galsworthy, a deeply committed social and penal reformer, eventually a winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature, and the first president of International PEN (which supported imprisoned writers and intellectuals) was at least comparable to, and possibly of greater, influence on Churchill's famous speech in 1910.

If you wish to learn more, please see:

John Galsworthy (1910) *Justice: a tragedy in four acts.* London: Duckworth and Co.
Mike Nellis (1996) *John Galsworthy's 'Justice'.* The British Journal of Criminology, 36 (1) pp 61–84.
Charles Stephenson (2023) *Churchill as Home Secretary: Suffragettes, Strikes and Social Reform 1910-11***.** Barnsley: Pen & Sword History.

*"If pressure is brought upon you to lower your standard of integrity, are you prepared to resist it? Our responsibilities to God and our neighbour may involve us in taking unpopular stands."*

# 8. The Criminalisation of Protest

***Nicola Grove**, of QICJ and Quaker Palestine Solidarity, offers some thoughts*

Quakers have always been at the forefront of peaceful protest, and are prominent amongst the 2700 arrested for resisting the designation of Palestine Action (PA) as a terrorist organisation. We are witnessing unprecedented attacks on the freedom of assembly, as documented by Defend our Juries, Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, to name but a few of the organisations expressing alarm. Coupled with the plans to limit the use of juries – who since the landmark Penn-Mead trial of 1670 have often acquitted when cases involve freedom of conscience and social justice activism – the criminalisation of protest represents a real threat to civil liberties.

Moreover, the treatment of the hunger strikers arrested for taking direct action against Elbit weapons manufacturer has violated basic principles of legality and humanity. Anyone concerned with prison conditions should be shocked at the holding of those on bail in custody beyond the usual limit of 6 months, the censorship of reading materials and correspondence, denial of medical treatment and capricious relocation to a prison far from family.

Quakers in Britain have made representations to government – so far ignored – on the way in which the planned legislation infringes our right to religious freedoms and action of conscience. Protest, as they stated, is a spiritual as well as a social act. It is likely that members of both Quakers in Criminal Justice and of Quaker Palestine Solidarity will be directly affected by this draconian legislation. Perhaps in the future we may explore ways of working together for change.




**Note from editor:** *From what I hear, Probation is struggling with evaluating protesters, when this is based on the use of the standard offending behaviour risk assessment tool. It is also problematic to formulate supervision programmes for these a-typical 'criminals' who do not fit the standard procedures. Maybe this also reveals what a mistake it was to criminalise them in the first place! NB – The designation of PA as 'terrorist' has now been declared unlawful, but only the government can lift the ban. Will they …?*

"*Respect the laws of the state, but let your first loyalty be to Gods purposes. If you feel impelled by strong conviction to break the law, search your conscience deeply. Ask your meeting for prayerful support to give you strength as a right way becomes clear.*"

# 9. Alternatives to Violence Project (AVP)

***Sarah Lane*** *updates us on the scope of this cherished initiative*

AVP is described as a process for managing anger and handling conflict, delivered by a network of trained volunteers. Since Covid, when we introduced zoom workshops to help at least some people, things have changed significantly at AVP Britain. We were surprised that the zoom workshops helped people to a degree above our expectations. It is never as powerful as face-to-face, but it does allow access to people who couldn't travel to attend a workshop for whatever reason (disability, cost, time or distance).

Once Covid was over, our main London employee who ran the 'Facing Up to Conflict' (FUTC) correspondence course for prisoners left for South America where he spends six months each year. He still worked from abroad, but it meant there were no salaried staff in the London office. He has now left altogether after many years of hard work for AVP Britain. A replacement for him has been found who coordinates any face-to-face, zoom or correspondence courses. The main London course coordinator also left and moved to New Zealand, leaving another empty space.

The FUTC distance learning course remains very popular with prisoners, and several hundred people are being helped by this each year. We have designed an 'Easy access' version for people with reading difficulties, and for whom English is a second language.

The regional centres which were in Scotland, Wales, and Manchester ceased at the time of Covid, and the time and energy to revive these has not been found. A huge shame. Online and face-to-face workshops in London are continuing. There are four online level 1 courses between now and July, one online level 2 workshop and two face-to-face at level 1. Further workshops will be announced later in the year.

There has been a huge drop in active facilitators, and the new trustees are working hard to establish a robust and workable model for AVP Britain. Several new facilitators have been trained, but those not close to London would like to lead workshops closer to where they live.

At present there are very few workshops being run in prisons. This is largely because of lack of prison staff who need to be present for safety reasons, lack of funding and lack of any resource to get them up and running from the prison side. AVP workshops would be welcomed by many prisons, but they just can't do it at the moment.

Some of the longer-serving facilitators have become involved with AVPI, the international hub of AVP, which has meetings and provides many resources for AVP groups throughout the world, and helps run some workshops overseas by Zoom. One or two facilitators still travel abroad to facilitate.

I still have a great belief that AVP is a good model, and that it does help people to manage conflict in their lives better. Funding as ever gets harder and harder, but the new trustees are keen, so I hope that, with renewed vigour, AVP will continue to thrive.

# 10. Phew! Job Done

***Maggie Hunt** looks back on her years of service*

Wednesday October 8th. A normal workday for most people, but greatly significant for me. After 23 years, my active involvement with the prison and justice systems came to an end. At 84 years old, the spirit is still greatly willing, but the body is not! Hey ho!

It all began when I was a Samaritan volunteer in Winchester, Hants. I'd just retired from a career in education, and was asked to help train men in the large local prison (over 700 people including a women's wing) to become Listeners – in-house Samaritans whose role is confidentially to support other prisoners. The statistics at the time showed that those who became Listeners very rarely went on to reoffend.

This led to Hants Area Meeting asking me to take on the Quaker Chaplaincy role at Winchester, where my first meeting was with Jamie. He was a young man who had embarked on a long journey, as a Lifer, to come to terms with his offence and his hideously adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) which can be seen as an underlying reason for his bad choices, but not as an excuse. I came to discover that this was almost invariably the experience of others, too.

I moved on in 2004 as a Voluntary Quaker Chaplain in HMP Kingston, Portsmouth, which was a much smaller prison, only 250, all of whom were Lifers. Because of the seriousness of their offences, they tended to be a regular group. As a consequence, with weekly sessions plus a Meeting for Worship in the evening when Friends from both Alton and Portsmouth joined us, the group became established. What did we do on those afternoons where I got to know, at a deep level, many of the best people – but also, admittedly, one or two of the worst? We sat quietly, chatted, had refreshments, explored a whole raft of issues, had some fun, looked at photos of the outside world, all of which led to some powerful poems (one included below). The young Chaplaincy Orderly, G, who provided the tea, had a fit of the giggles when confronting on the sidelines his first silent meeting. I'm still in touch with him all these years later – quite against the rules … but when did Quakers always keep those?!

Then I trained as a volunteer for Circles of Support & Accountability. A very effective programme of long-term weekly support (1-2 years) for released sex offenders to ease them back safely into society. Once again, early statistics showed that those who were supported very rarely reoffended sexually. During my time, I worked with 4 'Core Members' whose ages ranged from 22 to 74! This would also be a really positive experience for released Lifers, but … sadly …!

HMP Kingston closed in 2013 – and that was the year we moved to Staffs. My last role was in HMP Stafford, another large prison housing sentenced sex offenders. As an Official Prison Visitor (OPV), it was a mixed experience to establish, with other OPVs, trust with some members of the employed Chaplains – challenging and frustrating, though greatly improved with the latest Lead Chaplain who is a Roman Catholic woman.

This involved fortnightly visits working with 4 people on a one-to-one basis for 30 minutes each. Phew! That was the easy part … but getting there and back from Leek (2 hrs), getting in and out of the prison (30 mins) … but, my goodness, how rewarding it has been! I've seen one intelligent young man regularly for over 3 years. It has been a joy and a privilege to see him working so hard to find a different way forward … and he has just become a trained Listener! Full circle.

What a life experience! Frustrating at times, but always enriching, joyful, and a great privilege.

All done – and that feels better. Did you get to the end? If so, thank you!

## In The Beginning of My Time

**A Poem by Peter**

I believed
But found the time for doubting
I made no sound
I heard the devil shouting

I wanted the glory
I walked in the hell
And now I tell my story
I sing sad songs
I did not write the music
I find sad words
Waiting – just inside my mind

I played my part
But seldom did I choose it
I held a gun – call it fate
Or destiny –
I did not use it
And if you should look into my eyes
By chance, you might just see a sad
Sad soul that shed its tears
Yet let the heart go free
And yet between them, if you should look
And read my mind, you know the soul
Still sheds its tears
For deeds left far behind
But if you see the eagle there
Then don't ignore the dove
For now that all the killing's done
There's nothing
But LOVE



*Maggie*
*on a 'normal working day'*

# 11. License Recall Crisis: The Issues

***Declan**, a prisoner in N Ireland, explores factors leading to the high rate of recall to prison.*

I am a life sentence prisoner and have served approximately 23 years in prison, now in the last stages of an exhausting process. I appreciate the rehabilitative focus of this prison where I volunteer for Quaker Service N Ireland, which links prisoners who do not get visits with a Quaker Befriender; we also run a course in personal development, goal setting and conflict resolution called Making Correct Moves Project.

I attend the Trauma Talks with Start 360's AD:EPT Team. We focus on Adverse Childhood Experiences and how they may lead to addiction, homelessness and an increased risk of going to prison. I volunteer with healthcare's 'Ask Him' Project and work on creative writing (including this article), Koestler Awards, *Time In* Magazine, and other projects through the Prison Arts Foundation. I also play a role within the Spanner in the Works Theatre Company. Without the input from staff and the Prisoner Safety & Support Team these projects would not exist. I intend to volunteer on release.

In the North of Ireland, many prisoners come from a community of poverty and drug addiction, and may have complex mental health issues; this community has few opportunities for social mobility, and little hope for the future, with many living day-to-day trying to survive.

Coming to prison is just another difficult time to try and survive; some end up in debt, and get caught in a series of never-ending burdens. Many people, when they first come to prison, lose their home or can't return to their area; they are then released to live in more poverty, with no employment, they do not feel part of a community, and mental health and addiction are still there. Or worse, they may have developed or added a new addiction for the first time while in prison.

**The Licence Recall process: When should a person be recalled to prison?**

If a person is not a danger to the public, or has not committed a further crime, then there should be other approaches rather than recall. Moreover, if someone on licence had served a sentence for violence and has proved themselves during the sentence and on licence, but then picks up a minor offence with no connection to the index offence (e.g. shoplifting), there might be a reason why. Has there been a mistake? Is this person actually at risk of committing more serious offending?

The consequences of returning to prison might unravel all the good work done over the years in custody such as gaining stability, finally having a home, or forming a stable relationship. Having sorted yourself out, then being recalled to prison: is this actually the best choice for rehabilitation?

The individual should be met immediately to see how they are coping, as they may have lost hope or started taking drugs to ease the pain. I ask: how would you cope?




**Barriers**

Before any meeting, such as a case conference, case discussions, or hearings in front of the parole board, could the recalled prisoner not have a meeting with a small group of stakeholders? These could include AD:EPT, NIACRO, Chaplaincy, Quakers, Prisoner Safety & Support Team, so that when a case conference is called, the prisoner will be well prepared and have a positive attitude. This might prevent them from getting frustrated, angry, saying something they later regret, and /or storming out of the meeting.

**Things that go wrong when on Licence**

Things will never go the way you want – that's life. When things go wrong, Check: The reasons why? What can I do? Who can help? How do I restart? Those on licence often feel rejection and exclusion in their community: Shame, Fear, Embarrassment, Hopelessness, Anxiety, Feeling left out, Guilt.

**Why bother?**

What can be done when we find ourselves back in prison? Firstly, you need to understand that some things are out of your control, e.g. court dates, Public Prosecution files being ready, but there are some things that are in your control. We all suffer from embarrassment and shame from being in prison. I could talk about anything, although when it came to the offence that I committed I clam up and get selective amnesia. When dealing with others, I have seen so many do exactly the same thing. However, we need to understand that it's our fault, so take responsibility: the path to the wrongdoing began long before the act was committed: Did you lose your job? Start using drugs or alcohol again? Feel unwanted in society? Have a relationship break-up? If you can identify the reasons why, you can do something about it.

*"Are you following Jesus' example of love in action?"*

# 12. Parliament Watch: What's New?

***Melanie Jameson** keeps an eye on current legislation and the Secretary of State*

Two important pieces of criminal justice legislation are lumbering through the protracted parliamentary process at present: the Sentencing Bill (which has now received royal assent) and the Crime & Policing Bill.

What changes can we expect from these? Let's start with what is now the **Sentencing Act** which builds on David Gauke's Independent Sentencing Review. A prisoner I see monthly at a prison Meeting for Worship has long said: "If we are punished with extra days on our sentence for bad behaviour, why can't we be rewarded with days knocked off for good behaviour?" Well, some version of this is finally happening, known as the **earned progression model,** whereby individuals on standard determinate sentences who have kept out of trouble, will now spend a third of their time in custody, followed by a period of 'robust community supervision'. During the final third, they'll be subject to continued community supervision or be under restriction orders. There will be greatly expanded use of electronic monitoring to achieve this, but the company which is the main contractor to date, SERCO, has shown itself to be woefully inadequate, and grossly fraudulent in an earlier contract. Why does this not disqualify them?
In addition, there will be more emphasis on 'tough' unpaid work under supervision, but the publishing of names (i.e. naming and shaming) has thankfully been withdrawn.

Fixed term recalls to prison have been streamlined and set at 56 days. The working group within QICJ continues to participate in the Recall Coalition and has joined it, hoping (in vain?) to see amendments relating to unnecessary recalls to prison in this legislation. Other elements are a presumption against short sentences, and an increase in timescale for suspended and deferred sentences. The Act will not take effect immediately, giving the Probation Service time to prepare for the incoming changes.

The most publicised aspect of the **Crime & Policing Bill** for those of us involved in Extinction Rebellion, Defend Our Juries, etc. is the proposal that 'cumulative protests' are to be banned, along with face coverings during protests. The Bill includes further measures to tackle knife crime, anti-social behaviour, economic crime and criminal exploitation of children, in particular sexual abuse – including the duty to report incidents – along with prohibition of sexualised AI-generated images. And the Bill will be 'tougher on drugs'. How many times have we heard the promotion of this failed approach - and the reiteration of terms such as 'tough' and 'robust' in every aspect of these bills. Is this to reassure a right-wing press, or is there a (false) presumption that society as a whole is punitive?! This large piece of legislation seems to require many days in the Committee Stage in the Lords; as I write it has yet to emerge for the Report Stage.

Returning to supervision and Probation: notwithstanding the vast extension of 'tagging', another model for Probation is on the table. **Our Future Probation Service Programme** envisages returning to the priority of the two core probation areas: supporting rehabilitation and protecting the public. Staff will be encouraged to 'build meaningful engagement with those they supervise'. Back to the future?

Meanwhile the National Audit Office has commented: *Since the (Probation) service was brought back under full public control in June 2021, performance has declined, with significant staffing shortfalls and high workloads. 'Our Future Probation Service' is a bold and innovative approach to increase resilience'.*

I shall conclude this section with a success story. Four **Intensive supervision court pilots** have been running, three focused on substance misuse and one on women with complex needs. Key elements include multi-agency involvement, and dedicated probation staff. Evaluation has brought out positive impacts on the lives of court-users in the areas of health, wellbeing and employment prospects. Let us hope that any model that keeps people out of prison, and addresses their needs, will expand, though in the name of sanity let us drop the (hitherto inevitable) punitive rhetoric.

Moving on: what does the Secretary of State have to say about the criminal justice system? Well, on Dec 16 David Lammy came before the Justice Committee to answer searching questions, so we had a chance to find out. The main message was '*we need to invest and reform across the system'*. He was concerned about Probation which is 23% (!) below capacity, and still largely paper-based, rather than digital. The terms 'uplift' and 'reset' were frequently used.

Lammy continued with a long list of challenges: The court backlogs continue to be unacceptable. We need court repairs, more sitting days, judges sitting alone without juries in a very few cases. Magistrates should be able to try cases with sentences up to 24 months and a big recruitment drive is needed. Legal Aid solicitors are so badly paid that they are leaving in droves; there will be £34m of investment in this area. There will be more use of bail and tagging instead of remand – currently there are 17,700 prisoners on remand (a sixth of the prison population). Women's Centres are essential.

Finally he concluded with the importance of housing, employment and mental health support for people leaving prison. We have known this for decades. When is it going to happen?



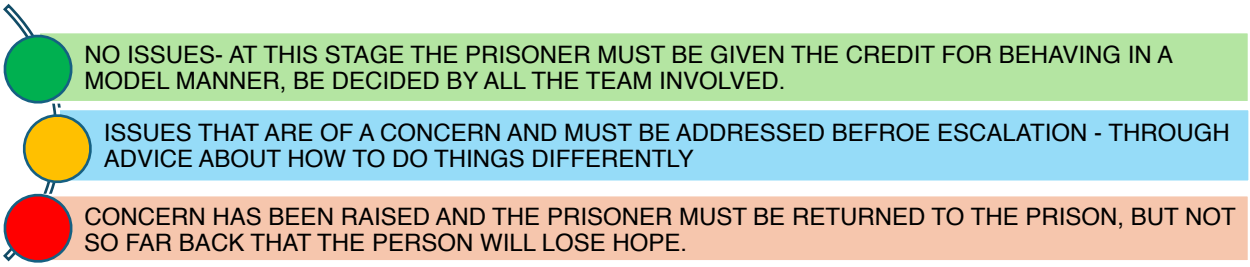
*"Remember your responsibilities as a citizen for the conduct of local, national, and international affairs. Do not shrink from the time and effort your involvement may demand."*

# 13. License Recall Crisis: A Better Way Forward

***Declan** shares his thoughts on a multi-disciplinary approach to reducing recalls*

**The Traffic Light System**

If a clear and logical system can be organised – such as the traffic light system below – it will be easier to identify and address difficulties and demonstrate a pathway:




If a prisoner has support in the community, set up from within the prison, there should be more than one temporary release date per month; trying to get your life sorted out with just one opportunity per month is virtually impossible.

**Communication**

When a person is recalled they do not know what is going on. Although they are told the reason why, their mind starts to ruminate and they immediately become self-protective and in denial. But if they were able to feel they could trust the process and knew exactly what was going on, then they would engage much earlier, and be more honest concerning what had occurred.

However, there may be a warning here: if the person is facing more charges, then there is a comprehensive process that must be followed. If there are no new offences and the person is recalled for another reason, the prisoner is trying to piece together his own version, his solicitor's advice, probation, Governors, and the landing solicitor (who see themselves as the most qualified). On top of this, the recalled prisoner is also trying to navigate their own feelings around being recalled, loss of employment, the stigma of the community (*yeah, it didn't take him long to go back to prison*), family breakdown, loss of home, relationship break-up.

If there were a process of clear communication, amounting to a pathway, it would smooth the path for the person involved and provide hope that all is not lost. The aim would be to have a plan in place that will satisfy the Parole Commissioners at the next hearing. The Commissioners would agree to accept input from a Crisis Pathway Team.

**Northern Ireland -- Crisis Pathway Team formation**

If there is an issue/problem/incident, a crisis team is set up. According to needs, this may include: Governors, Psychology (Healthcare), the prison and probation services, Independent Monitoring Board, organisations that the prisoner is working with in prison such as those I have mentioned above.

**Parole Commissioners' relationship with N Ireland Prison Service (NIPS)**

There must be a clear association between the Parole Commissioners and NIPS; many of those recalled feel that the bar the Commissioners want the recalled prisoner to jump over is virtually impossible. For this reason, there needs to be a quick response, because the longer the prisoner is recalled, the harder it will be for them to accomplish release and resettlement because of loss of home, employment, voluntary placement, community support and relationship breakdown. In these cases, the Crisis Pathway Team must be able to give an up-to-date account of behaviour.

**Role & benefits of Crisis Pathway Team Northern Ireland**

To take a holistic approach, all stakeholders in the community and PSNI criminal justice system should have input into a timetable of repair so it is focused, supported, funded, and pathway-driven. The prisoner should have input from his solicitor – to stress the importance of hearing and following the rules. This would save huge amounts of money in legal fees (judicial reviews) and resources.

Prisoners would feel safe to raise issues and not hide any problems from PSNI. They need to believe that all services would work proactively to resolve and move the person forward, rather than putting on the handbrake and taking a long time to resolve issues, such as awaiting Parole recommendations.

Have a time limit for the crisis team to meet (2 weeks) so it does not interfere with the next planned temporary release, and if the person misses that he should be allowed an extra allocation to make up.

To bring prisoners back and have them stagnate is not advantageous to rehabilitation, reintegration and restoring the person to who they were before a crime was committed. Success of rehabilitation and reintegration is the prisoner being a respected member of their community.

The Crisis Pathway Team could assist probation so that recalls would be avoided in the future, giving the prisoner self-confidence that he can be a success. This system would be easy for the prisoner to understand. The Team should be solution-focused around what happened and how the concerns can be addressed, so that all are in a win-win position: safer community, fewer victims, less recidivism and former prisoners moving on with their life.

*(Edited version due to length)*

*"Bear witness to the humanity of all people, including those who break society's conventions or its laws."*

# 14. Transformation Inside and Out

***Judy Roles*** *writes of a tried and tested model for personal change: the Enneagram*

Last autumn Gloucestershire AM Quakers' Criminal Justice Group held a presentation for two charities who use the Enneagram in their work with victims and offenders: *Escaping Victimhood* and *The Enneagram Inside UK.* It was a lively and inspiring morning, focusing on hope and transformation for those impacted by the justice system, and it raised awareness of the Enneagram as a profound tool for anyone interested in inner work and in understanding relationships.



To give those unfamiliar with the Enneagram an overview: the presentation began with an introduction to some key aspects. Its spiritual roots lie in the perennial wisdom tradition, and this is integrated with modern psychology, including attachment theory and trauma to offer a map of personality, which helps us see how the ego distorts our perception of reality and limits our full potential. The Enneagram reminds us that at the centre of each of us is a divine essence.

There is a Sufi saying, 'The personality is meant to be a transparent jewel through which the light of the Universe shines.' We each have essential qualities and gifts, an essence which manifests 'that of God' in each of us. When we are more present and self-aware, we are connected with our truest, authentic Self. Self-awareness and self-compassion are two of the keys that unlock the wisdom of the Enneagram to all of us.

The charity *Escaping Victimhood*

www.escapingvictimhood.com

was co-founded in 2007 by our Friend and ex-prison governor Tim Newell to help victims of serious crime overcome the trauma of their experience. The Enneagram is used as part of a 4 day residential workshop to help victims understand the emotional and physical impact of trauma, and how friends and family cope differently in their reactions to what has happened. Tim shared moving stories of how participants appreciated this lifeline back to a fuller life, no longer stuck in the past. They regain the hope and resilience which they feared they had lost.

Although *The Enneagram Inside* charity works with the perpetrators of crime, there are parallels in their journey of personal change. A significant difference lies in an individual's capacity for resilience and self-regulation which we now understand through research into Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and the impact these have on brain development and long-term health conditions.

Sue Braithwaite, a trustee for the charity and a facilitator of the *Enneagram Prison Project* course,

www.Enneagramprisonproject.org

described the restorative circles of trust needed for this work to create a safe space for offenders to step out of their shell of shame and begin the work of understanding their patterns of behaviour, through practising self-awareness and self-compassion and using tools to regulate emotional responses. We heard the story of Alex who was in custody for 26 years and how the Enneagram enabled him to understand and change himself, leading to his successful release. He is now a mentor and back supporting those still inside the system.

In a lively Q&A there was clear appreciation for the work of both charities and the hope that they can continue and extend their reach. They are both targeted where there are no other organisations doing this work in the UK. Criminal Justice has been a Quaker concern throughout our history, and we have many Friends actively involved in campaigning for fundamental reform of the prison system. But here is quiet work being undertaken in small restorative circles, where vital and transforming work takes place. I hope QICJ Friends will consider supporting their work individually and through Meetings' donations.

*"Every stage of our lives offers fresh opportunities.*
*Responding to divine guidance, try to discern the right time to undertake or relinquish responsibilities without undue pride or guilt."*

SPREAD THE WORD!
Invite fFriends to our
Special Interest Group
via Zoom
Thursday 26 March at 4pm (16.00)

We shall continue to shine a spotlight
on the various sectors
of the Criminal Justice System

Please put it in your diary NOW!

# 15. Bridges Not Bars

***Fergus McNeil**'s presentation to the Scottish Parliament during Scottish Prisoners Week.*

Many of us in this chamber *(the Scottish Parliament*) have been victims of crime; a few will have sought a remedy through the criminal justice system. In these circumstances, we cry out both for justice and for safety. Though nowadays we prefer the term 'justice', the Latin root of the word 'revenge' is interesting: it refers to the desire to vindicate the victim; freeing them from hurt, releasing them from vengefulness, settling scores. Paying back is also supposed to liberate the offender from indebtedness.

17 years ago, the Scottish Prison Commission recommended that the default form of payback in Scotland should be community payback. Rather than relying on the pains of imprisonment to exact retribution, they urged us towards more constructive forms of reparation; through compensation, service to communities, and the hard work of rehabilitation. Yet, despite stable or falling crime rates, the prison population has grown again to record levels, and we find ourselves awaiting the recommendations of a new Commission.

Why, then, is the prison still our preferred apparatus of punishment? As a criminologist, I know that it cannot be because prison 'works': because, holding other things equal, the evidence shows that imprisonment is more likely to generate reoffending than rehabilitation. The bars and walls don't make those of us on the outside safer; and they don't improve the lives or characters of those inside. I think we persist with imprisonment for two other reasons. Firstly, we've bought into the mythology of the prison as a magic box in which to dump social problems and "make them disappear". Secondly – and more fundamentally, if we're honest -- we just do not feel that community payback adequately satisfies our thirst for punishment.

But here's the rub. Like most of us here and most people in prison, I've been a victim, a witness and, yes, an offender. I've also worked in criminal justice for almost 40 years. And I've never met a person who was truly liberated by another's suffering. What I have experienced is suffering people who are freed by connection and belonging, and by repaired and reciprocated trust.

**We need bridges not bars between people.**

When Jesus was asked to condemn a sinner to suffer being stoned to death, he said: 'Let the one without sin cast the first stone'. No-one dared. Maybe the recognition that we are all sinners should also be the beginning of our investment in bridge-building rather than imprisonment.

*Fergus McNeil is Professor of Criminology & Social Work, University of Glasgow.*

*"Are you honest and truthful in all you say and do? "*

# 16. Prison Phoenix Trust Volunteer Awards

Congratulations are due to Yvonne Dixon, who has been highly commended in the BBC 'Make a Difference Awards' for her 22 years of voluntary service supporting people in prison to practice yoga and meditation. Yvonne, a former Quaker chaplain at HMP Grendon, has been writing letters to people in prison for over two decades.
This mentoring by correspondence is one of the core services offered by The Prison Phoenix Trust (PPT), alongside yoga classes, meditation guidance, and access to specialist resources such as books, DVDs, and newsletters.

**Celebrating hope and connection**
Yvonne's recognition is one of three major awards celebrated by PPT in 2025. In October, Simon was recognised with a Prison Reform Trust Hope and Fulfilment Award for his dedication teaching yoga and meditation to his peers in prison. And in May, yoga teacher Emma won the British Wheel of Yoga "Heart of Yoga" Award for her work teaching young offenders. Together, Emma, Simon and Yvonne's achievements highlight the power of human connection, compassion, and personal growth in the rehabilitation journey.

**From personal healing to helping others**
Yvonne first connected with PPT when she ordered books on yoga and meditation. What began as a personal interest soon became a lifeline during a time of crisis.
*"I experienced an extremely painful life event, and I turned to the books," Yvonne recalls. "They got me through what was really quite a crisis. Meditation helped me stay sane, and reconnect with spirituality. It became a solid part of my daily routine."*
Over time, Yvonne's practice has simplified. *"I'm no longer searching for new techniques — a simple practice with the breath is enough."*

**The art of listening and reflecting**
Over 22 years, Yvonne has written to more than 15 people in prison, often maintaining contact even after their release. She treats every letter as a spiritual practice, creating space for reflection and compassion.
*"I sit for a moment in prayer or meditation before I read a letter," she explains. "There might be all sorts in there — from the profound to the everyday. I try to find the most important thing this person wants me to hear, then reflect it back to encourage their spiritual life to unfold."*
Yvonne believes the rewards are mutual:
*"The gratitude I hear is incredible — gratitude for the small things, like hearing traffic, feeling rain, or choosing your own food. These reminders deepen my own appreciation for life."*
She also treasures the slower pace and intimacy of letter-writing:
*"In a fast world, writing and receiving thoughtful letters feels sacred. It's a privilege to connect with people this way."*

**The Role of Volunteer Mentors**

Yvonne is one of 12 volunteer mentors at PPT. Each mentor writes letters to people in prison, offering encouragement in yoga and meditation. Mentors are not pen-friends — their purpose is to help others reflect and grow through mindfulness, silence, and self-understanding. *"The key*," says Yvonne*, "is openness and welcoming everyone as they are. My role is to create a space of quiet contemplation and compassion, so they can turn within."*

**Simon: a role model for others in prison**

Meanwhile**,** Simon's award reflects his outstanding contribution to the wellbeing of others in prison – his dedication earning the respect of his peers, a prison officer, and the prison governor. While serving his sentence in two prisons, he created and led the *Inner Strength, Movement and Breathwork* course — a programme that uses yoga, meditation, and mindfulness to build resilience and emotional strength among his peers. Simon began working with PPT in 2021, supported by volunteer mentors. Through their guidance, he developed a daily practice of simple yoga stretches and breath-focused meditation. These practices helped him manage stress, rebuild self-worth, and regain a sense of personal responsibility. His transformation inspired others on his wing to join him, as they recognised the calm and confidence that yoga brought into his life.

*The Prison Phoenix Trust encourages people in prison to* ***use yoga and meditation as tools for wellbeing, self-discipline, and inner peace****. Through letters, classes, and resources, the charity helps people cultivate calmness, compassion, and a renewed sense of self. In addition to mentors, volunteers also support the charity's office work, newsletters, and outreach events. Currently, 11 people also serve as trustees. Learn more or get involved:* [www.theppt.org.uk](http://www.theppt.org.uk)







*"Seek to know an inward stillness, even amid the activities of daily life."*

# 17. Book Review: Right from Wrong

***Tim Newell*** *reviews Jacob Dunne's story, now a bestseller better known as The Punch*

Jacob Dunne served a sentence in prison following his conviction for manslaughter in 2011. The victim of his single punch died shortly after the assault. Jacob has since developed a relationship with his victim's parents through a restorative justice programme. With their encouragement he earned a first-class degree in criminology. Now he is a Community Ambassador for Nottinghamshire Violence Reduction Unit and spends his time mentoring and advising young people and prisoners about the perils of violence, exploring with them how to turn their lives around. He has delivered TED talks and lectured at Cambridge University. He recently presented a highly acclaimed and award-winning podcast about his story called 'The Punch 'for BBC Sounds.

His book is readily readable and gripping. The style is immediate and very personal, so one can imagine him telling you his story of childhood deprivation, gang culture and drifting teenage years. This resulted in one punch, supporting his colleagues after being called to help them out. The single punch resulted in the death of the victim and his eventual trial, conviction and sentence to young offender experience. During this time, he had one spiritual experience in the chapel when the chaplain invited him to pray about his victim. Otherwise, the sad experience of custody reflected another lost opportunity.

On release Jacob was well supervised; eventually the parents of his recent victim sought some answers about their son's death through the charity **Remedi**. The process of providing an account led to a wish to meet through a restorative event. The impact of this, with the accompanying support, enabled him to develop further opportunities. He was involved with the Forgiveness Project and became more reconciled with the parents of his victim. Seeking further opportunities, he gained a first-class degree at Cambridge and became a husband and a father.

This is a story of achievement, reflective of the experience of working-class boys across the country. By reflecting on his story, Jacob hopes he might help people avoid the kind of mistakes he made. He points to societal reforms needed in order to avoid an endless life cycle of criminality and hopelessness.

'*Right from Wrong'* is a deeply humane and honest book. The sad experience of years of schooling and of detention had an adverse impact upon Jacob. It was through personal reaching out from his victim's parents that the opportunities emerged that established in him the will to learn and change.

*Publishing details: Harper North Pb ISBN:978-0-00-847214-6*

*"Stand firm in our testimony, even when others commit or prepare to commit acts of violence, yet always remember that they too are children of God."*

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*"Be patterns, be examples in all countries, places, islands, nations, wherever you come, that your carriage and life may preach among all sorts of people, and to them; then you will come to walk cheerfully over the world, answering that of God in everyone."*