



# Annual Report 2021

# Foreword

2021 was another challenging year for so many of us. Those outside prison faced a further winter and spring of strict coronavirus restrictions, with more time separated from loved ones, grappling to acclimatise to the new normal of home-schooling, remote working and remote socialising. Those inside prison faced continuing coronavirus restrictions too, with 23-hour lockdown in cells, and the majority of the year with no possibility of receiving visitors. As the months progressed, those of us outside prison experienced the relief of restrictions lifting and life moving slowly back towards normal. However, people in prison continued to endure 23-hour cell lockdowns and a high level of social isolation.

New Bridge saw applications from people in prison rise to their highest number ever, as the pain of isolation grew. However we also saw our highest ever number of engaged volunteers, helping us to meet this demand.

Lucy joined New Bridge as CEO in February 2022, following the retirement of Judith Smith. Judith led the organisation for five years, two of which encompassed

**“ the sense of isolation and abandonment I felt, and continue to feel, was mitigated by regular letters from the outside. At present we have reverted to COVID stage 4, and coping once again with 23hr lockdown in our cells. As well as regular, fulsome, and jam-packed letters, my volunteer also sends me postcards and emails. This connection with the “real” world provides a life-line, a tenuous touch of normality in what is fast becoming isolation chambers of misery in UK jails ”**

**“ It gives you a sense of remaining human, someone genuine is invested in you and does not judge you because of your offence. New Bridge has given me self-belief and esteem that I had lost for so many years and I appreciate the support my Befriender has given me ”**

the pandemic and the enormous change in our service delivery which this necessitated, and everyone at New Bridge is grateful for her dedication and unwavering focus during this time, and wishes her the very best, wherever her future takes her.

**Our ever growing community of dedicated volunteers need to be celebrated for their ongoing commitment to the people they befriend, even through the turbulence of their own lives during the pandemic.**

We are indeed privileged to work with so many people who give so much of their time.

The impact of the work that we do is evident in the heartfelt evaluations which prisoners send us every year. Indeed, 98% of evaluation respondents said they would recommend our service to others, and a third reported finding out about our support after a recommendation from another prisoner. We are passionate about helping New Bridge reach even more people who can benefit from our support, by continuing to increase our community of dedicated volunteers and creating new funding partnerships. We hope you enjoy reading this report, which explores our work in 2021 and the impact that it has had on the people we serve.

**Helen Boothman** Chair  
**Lucy Ball** CEO

# About New Bridge

“ Thank you to New Bridge for being there for us prisoners who don't have anyone on the outside ”

“ My experience of being in touch with my volunteer is that I find her encouraging and inspirational. I am always impressed by her balanced views, and this does give me determination to make the very best of every opportunity that is offered to me while in custody ”

## What we do

The New Bridge Foundation is a charity which works with people in prison across England and Wales, providing them with a trained volunteer to act as a 'befriender' to provide a non-judgemental social connection at a time when they can be most isolated, through a combination of letter writing and prison visiting. Our service allows people in prison the opportunity to discuss their feelings, hopes, aspirations, fears and reflections on themselves and their past – as well as more social topics. **Our volunteers can often be the only individual outside of the prison service who the person in prison speaks to with any regularity.**

We believe that engaging with our service allows people in prison to rebuild fundamental trust in others and skills around self-expression which enable them to go on to access further programmes of support provided by the prison service and other charities. This helps them

to progress through the prison system and reengage more positively with society on release.

## Why we're needed

This work is vitally important. The current prison population sits at just under 80,000, and we are seeing an increasing number of prisoners serving longer sentences. It can be easy for people in prison to lose hope and feel very alone, particularly during the increased isolation of covid-19 restrictions. The proportion of prisoners reporting mental health conditions sits at 52%, and we know both that having a mental health problem can increase your chance of feeling lonely and that feeling lonely can impact your mental health. With 31% of prisoners not having any visitors, we know that there are nearly 25,000 people in prison facing potential loneliness and social isolation.

“ Having someone to forget about prison life it made my mental health better asking me what my plans are after my release and made me think I can do better than coming to jail, I should be out there having my freedom, living in my own place being with my family, my kids, having a 9 to 5 job, be able to go anywhere I want in the world and think about what I can be and who I can be and to forget about the past and think about the future that I can have and to make sure I keep on the right path and not ever go back on the wrong path without my volunteer I would not be thinking of all this and not be the new person I am today so I am very grateful for everything she has done for everything she has said, the advice she is giving ”

# 2021 in Numbers

“ I am so grateful that you allowed me to be a ‘normal person’ not only a prisoner ”

6,113   
hours were spent volunteering

We trained  
★ 78 ★  
new volunteers

  
779  
people in prison connected with a befriender

Applications from people in prison rose by  
52%  
Compared to 2020

  
11,026  
letters and emails  
were exchanged between people in prison and their volunteer

We supported  
1,107  
people across  
74 prison sites



  
375  
phone calls were made

318  
volunteers worked with us

An increase of  
6%  
Compared to 2020

“ I cannot tell you how many times I read the same letters or emails again and again. This gives me pleasure and happiness every time ”

# Prison Visits

“ *...nice to receive a visit, to break up the monotony of prison and to have a natural conversation with someone, not associated with prison* ”

“ *It is good to build a rapport, have a natural conversation, and sit together for a short while. A letter is more formal, whereas a conversation is less so and more relaxed perhaps* ”

We know that people in prison who receive visits are less likely to be reconvicted after release, but we also know that **31% of people in prison receive no visits from family or friends**. New Bridge volunteers can start making prison visits after building a relationship with a person through six months of letter writing.

Visits to prisons were not allowed for the vast majority of the year, meaning our volunteers only managed to connect with people in prison face-to-face on 47 occasions. In our last pre-Covid year this figure (with a 13% smaller volunteer base) was 404, with volunteers **travelling a total of over 126,000 miles**.

The miles covered by our volunteers are so high because they will **support the same person wherever they get moved around the prison estate**: this can mean volunteers attending several different prison sites around the country over the years, while working with one person. This is an essential part of our service: the connection between volunteer and person in prison is maintained at a time when the person being moved is experiencing huge change and disruption to routines.

Our evaluation this year included questions about the value of visits, and whether our beneficiaries were keen for visits to resume once restrictions are lifted.

**The overwhelming majority (91%) of people who had previously been visited said that they would like more visits**, and that visits provide a positive and refreshing supplement to their volunteer's letter-writing.

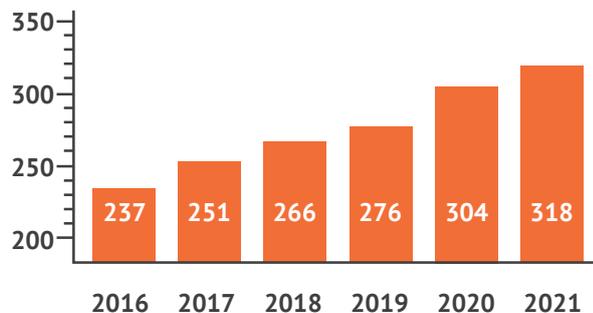
With the continuing easing of restrictions, our volunteers have resumed visits in 2022, and we are pleased to see the number of visits beginning to rise.

“ *I was so nervous at meeting her for the first time but we seemed to get on with each other straight away. The visit was a wonderful experience and it proved to me that not everyone is judgmental* ”

# Volunteers

Our volunteers are our lifeblood. They give their time and compassion to bring hope into the lives of the most marginalised. The impact they have on the people they support is evident from the heartfelt quotes peppered throughout this report.

Our volunteer community is growing every year, and in 2021 our number reached 318.



**Our volunteers come from all walks of life, and range from undergraduates through to retired people, all of whom share the same belief in supporting people experiencing some of the darkest times of their lives.**

Volunteers undergo a comprehensive training session, building an understanding of the criminal justice system, and the principals of safe boundaries for befriending relationships. They are then allocated to one of our 25 support groups which are spread across England and meet monthly. The groups allow volunteers to share how they are supporting their person in prison and get support from their fellow volunteers.

#### Updates can range from this:

*“The person I am supporting is preparing for release at the end of this year after serving a 40 year sentence. He will be in his mid seventies when released, and during our letters and phone calls we have been discussing practical things like learning to use a mobile phone or a cash machine, how he will manage his finances and the*

“ *My befriender has more than given me someone to share my story with. She is the one who picks me up when I’m down, she always gives words of wisdom and I have just recently had a visit from her and she’s a real star. To give her time up to write to prisoners she should be given an award* ”



*sort of accommodation he will be able to find, as well as his feelings about preparing for reintegration’*

#### To this more unusual scientific exchange:

*He phoned me to discuss the letter he sent me with some ideas on how, if the brain was able to detect phase shift in photons entering the two eyes from the same object, it would be able to have an awareness of distance via some sort of implicit trigonometry. It’s an interesting theory but I couldn’t work out how one gets around the problem that the wavelengths of visible light are in the nanometre range and I’m not sure the brain would be able to keep track of the number of integer wavelengths in the path length difference’*

Applications from people in prison arrive every week, and we need more volunteers to help us meet the demand. If you would like to become a volunteer, please sign up here: [www.newbridgefoundation.org.uk/Pages/Category/apply-now](http://www.newbridgefoundation.org.uk/Pages/Category/apply-now)

# Volunteer Profile

**“Dad what are you doing volunteering in prison? Why don't you play golf like all the other Dads?”**

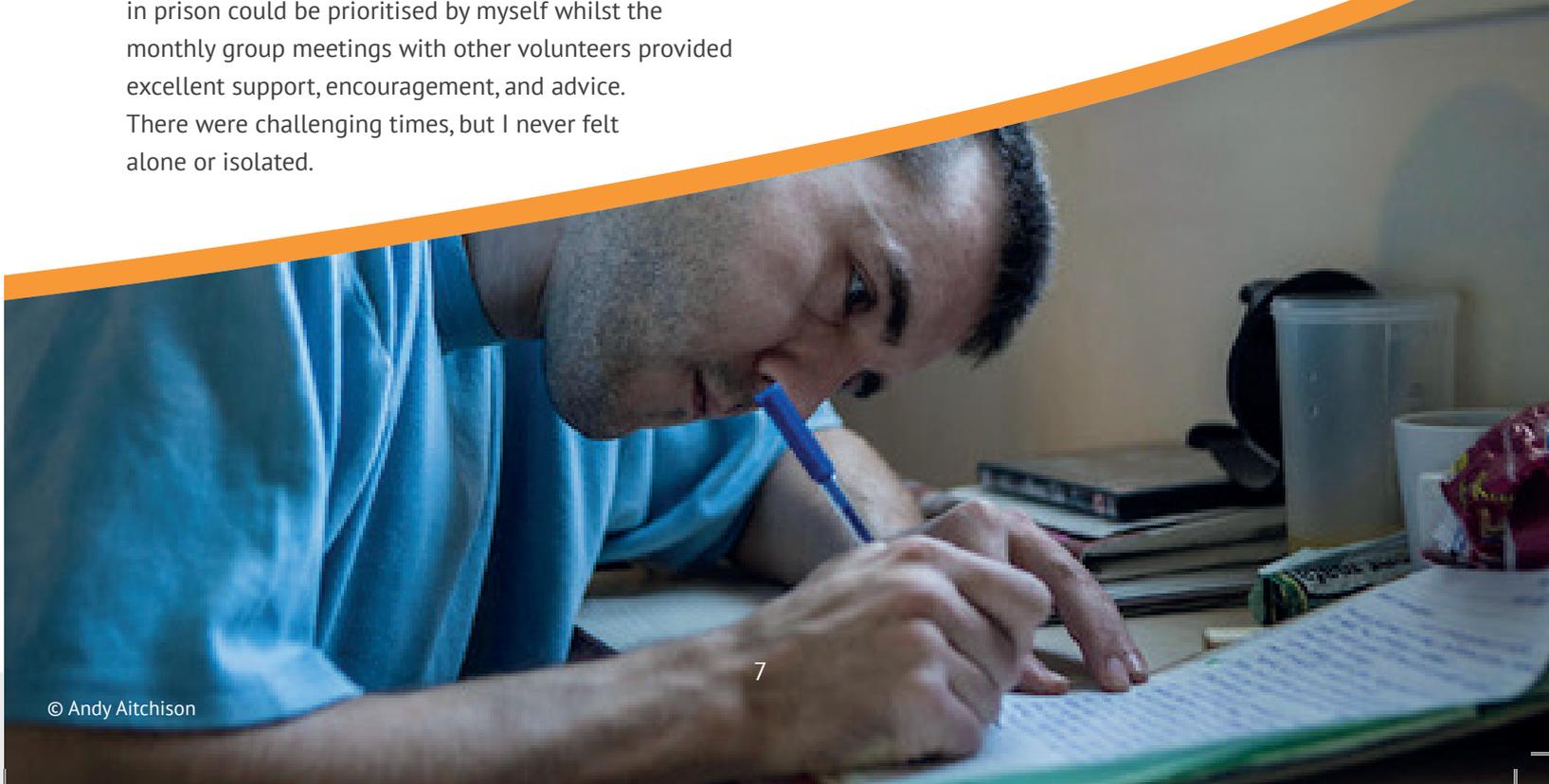
That short conversation with my daughter still stays with me after thirteen years working voluntarily with New Bridge. Those years have certainly fulfilled my expectations of the role. After a career in education, I once again enjoyed a new challenge, learning new ways of working, engaging with a diverse and often forgotten sector and giving something back to society. It gave me self-worth and a purpose in my life beyond my previous work. Meeting new people in prison and challenging the negative media images of those in custody, supported by a fantastic local group of similar minded people ensured my time working with New Bridge has been productive, challenging and extremely rewarding.

Why New Bridge? In many ways it fulfilled my personal aim to give something back to society. It also offered me flexibility to support my growing family and a little time for myself. Writing letters and visiting those in prison could be prioritised by myself whilst the monthly group meetings with other volunteers provided excellent support, encouragement, and advice. There were challenging times, but I never felt alone or isolated.

My first visit to a high security prison opened my eyes to the reality of the context of my work. Dogs, bars, endless doors slammed and opened, body scans and rub downs seemed to never end. However, they soon faded as I met a lonely, sad face in the hectic visiting hall. What a place to meet a stranger! But a smile and friendly greeting immediately broke down any barriers and resulted in a wide-ranging conversation about so many aspects of life. This was not a prisoner but a lonely man who had done a terrible thing but had also lost contact with the outside world, had no visitors, never received letters, and had the lowest self-esteem. I went into that place full of fear of the unknown I came out with a real buzz and eager to write him another letter.

I still don't play golf, but I still enjoy and value my voluntary work with New Bridge. It is a great organisation that does the most valuable work for a very forgotten sector of our society.

*Peter*



# 2022 and Beyond

We are excited to be returning to a more business as usual operation in 2022, with volunteers resuming visits to prisons, and support groups having the option to meet in person.

This will also be an important year for New Bridge as we undertake a project in spring/summer to design our strategy for the next three years.

*“ It helps my mental health to know there is a human being taking the time to write to me, especially when I was not a people person before prison. ”*



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**Our new strategy will outline key areas we want to focus on, including:**



## Reach

Increasing the number of people in prison we reach with our service, and scaling up our community of volunteers.



## Innovation

Exploring new ways of working and delivering, finding new efficiencies to allow us to spend more time supporting our growing number of beneficiaries and volunteers.



## Sustainability

Diversifying our income, and securing new, long-term partnerships to deliver our work.



## Excellence

Seeking out new ways of measuring the impact of our work, so that we can ensure we are providing the best service possible to people in prison, and the best support possible to our volunteers.



## Diversity & Inclusion

Recruiting volunteers from even more diverse backgrounds to better represent our prisoner population; ensuring we are reaching all people in prison who can benefit from our service.

# Our Supporters

We couldn't exist to impact lives in the way that we do without the generous financial donations of our supporters.

**Last year we were grateful to receive donations of over £1,000 from the following:**

- 1772 Charity
- 29th May 1961 Charitable Trust
- Albert Hunt Trust
- B Pilling
- Charles Irving Charitable Trust
- Christopher Rowbotham Charitable Trust
- City & Metropolitan Welfare Charity
- Constance Travis Charitable Trust
- Enterprise Holdings Foundation
- G M Morrison Charitable Trust
- Jessie Spencer Trust
- Leigh Trust
- Lord Faringdon Charitable Trust
- Michael & Shirley Hunt Charitable Trust
- Noel Buxton Trust
- Oak Trust
- Oakdale Trust
- Peter Stebbings Memorial Charity
- R Truefitt
- S Stead Ellis
- Sir James Reckitt Charity Trust
- Sir James Roll Charitable Trust
- T Pakenham
- William A Cadbury Charitable Trust
- Worshipful Company of Basketmakers
- Zochonis Charitable Trust

We are keen to build further partnerships in 2022. If you are interested in supporting our work, please get in touch via [info@newbridgefoundation.org.uk](mailto:info@newbridgefoundation.org.uk)



“ I am very grateful to New Bridge for giving me the opportunity to run the London Marathon to raise funds to support the valuable work that so many volunteers undertake. I was able to spend time training and had hoped to complete the run in less than three and a half hours. The weather was kind, the support from spectators and volunteers was great, and I completed the distance in 3:18. I was very pleased with the outcome and even more delighted to have raised in excess of £3300 for New Bridge ”

Matt

Huw Littleby  
Huntingdon  
Perry

Dear New Bridge

Hello its from Huw Littleby.

I am writing this letter as I am almost leaving prison after four years inside, I am due for release Friday

I wanted to take the time to write to say a massive thank you for this service and the wonderful penpals that you provided.

I have enjoyed talking regularly to my penpal who has nothing to do with the prison, this has left me feeling like a human and not just another number. It has been a amazing support to me through some tough times, and I believe that my sentence would have been a lot harder without having my penpal(s), so a massive thank you

Also a massive thank you to the staff at New Bridge office who has ~~worked~~ worked extremely hard through out covid issue and this service is a massive help to so many, I have often recommend New Bridge to others whom have no-one to talk to and its made a difference to them aswell.

Please keep running this service for those in need, and finally once again a massive thank you and hopefully I wont need your services again in the future as your service has let me grow and change for the better.

many Thanks for your time and once again a massive thank you to everyone

**“** *No visitors or people to talk to, was feeling down frustrated, lonely and isolated. Meeting my volunteer and exchanging mail has exceeded expectations and made me feel life is worth continuing with* **”**



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**“** *I have been able to clarify my thoughts and challenge myself as well, with these discussions and I really get a positive experience from each letter and our visit. I enjoy both styles of letter, the more day-to-day and the deeper discussions* **”**



**[info@newbridgefoundation.org.uk](mailto:info@newbridgefoundation.org.uk)**

**[www.newbridgefoundation.org.uk](http://www.newbridgefoundation.org.uk)**

**020 8671 3856**

New Bridge Foundation, 1a Elm Park, London SW2 2TX

New Bridge Foundation, 1a Elm Park, London SW2 2TX  
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