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"My befriender has seen in me what I could not see in myself. She helped me change the script now I see what she saw. BLESS HER"

Covid 19

As we were writing the annual report in March 2020, the country went into lockdown and restrictions meant that we had to transfer our team to home working and suspend all our face to face support group meetings. Volunteers visiting those they befriended were immediately stopped as the prison service did all it could to protect everyone in prison.

We decided that producing our conventional annual report is no longer appropriate and that we would issue a short version with a commitment to a fuller two year report to cover 2019 and 2020 in 2021 when we are able to work more 'normally'.

To assure you, though, we are meeting challenges head on. Volunteers are more engaged than ever, support groups 'meet' virtually every month and we have doubled up on sending letters, emails and cards to people in prison for whom lockdown is much more severe. We look forward to reporting this fully next year.

"Getting your letter was a massive pick-me-up"

Chairman's note



If you have only a few minutes to give to this, stop reading what I have written and turn to "Are You Jane?" which says more about what New Bridge does than anything I can say.

For a couple of years I have been saying that the main aim of the Board has been to grow our befriending work. It is not realistic to think of us linking every single person in prison who would welcome letters and visits with a volunteer befriender but we know that we can do more and we want to do more. We need to recruit, train and support more volunteers. That began – more modestly than we would have liked – in 2019. Before Covid 19 intervened we were set to do even better in the first half of 2020. We are determined that the effort we have had to put into keeping the show on the road in the unforeseen lockdown will be seen in time to have held us up for a few months but will not have put us off growing befriending.

The more befriendees we have the more staff time we will need. As well as fundraising, admin and keeping the books in order we have to support both people in prison and volunteers. We run on a shoestring and rely, perhaps

more than we should, on our staff team of four being “flexible” about the hours they put in. We don’t have a clock-watching culture but, in order to have a fair, sustainable working pattern and to handle the problems that inevitably arise, we can only go so far without paying for additional staff time. It will help enormously if our faithful supporters are able to increase the help they give us and we will continue to make the need known to potential new donors.

This is my last message to New Bridge supporters as chairman. I stood down as a trustee in April though I continue as President at least for the time being. I am delighted to welcome Helen Boothman as my successor.

Helen has completed a long stint on the Littlehey IMB. She has been involved with IMBs nationally and has extensive experience as an employee in both the private and third sectors as well as volunteering for charities. Helen combines recent experience of the prison sector with great commitment to our befriending work. The trustees, the excellent staff team, the volunteers and the people they befriend will be in good hands.

Joe Pilling

Chief Executive Report



New Bridge continued, throughout 2019, to deliver its befriending service for people in prison – during a time when they are spending longer in prison for the most serious crimes and when more people are being recalled to prison after release. The growth of very long sentences is by no means risk free. Violence, suicide and self-harm, disorder and radicalisation all pose a challenge as people struggle to come to terms with their situation, and seek out meaning, forgiveness, hope, identity and love, whilst facing the prospect of many years of confinement.

People turn to New Bridge when they have little or no contact with family or friends. During the year, our volunteers befriended 677 people through letters, emails and visits and we supported a further 290 whilst they applied for and waited for a befriender. Overall this was a 6% growth in activity compared with 2018. Our waiting list peaked at the end of 2019 when more than 70 people waited allocation.

276 volunteers provided this unique service during the year – inevitably people come and go: 61 joined us and 58 departed. Our constant challenge is to grow and not just to maintain our volunteer pool - we’re fortunate that

volunteers generally stay as long as they can. Younger ones for about 19 months and the over 30s for an average of 5 years. We now canvass leavers' opinions of New Bridge:

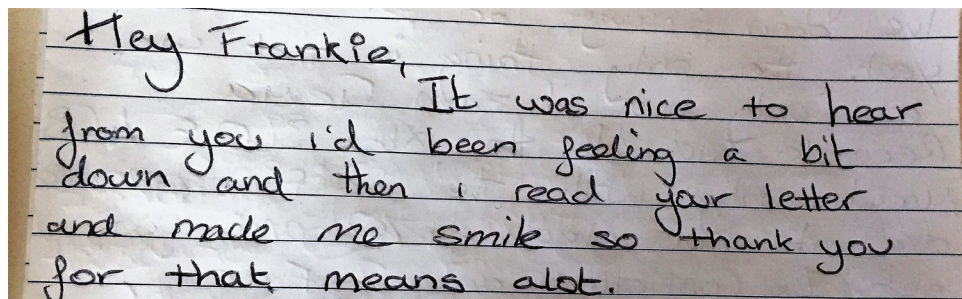
"Over the 10 years I have seen NB grow and become very professional. Support groups are a great forum to discuss any issues and I enjoyed hearing other volunteers' updates. The best part was knowing that you could be that link that stops a person reoffending."

In 2020 students and staff from Nottingham Trent University will be analysing a major New Bridge evaluation which will help us to understand much more about our volunteers and develop new initiatives with and for them. To every one of our volunteers who exchanged nearly 9400 letters, visited people more than 400 times, gave up 12,750 hours and travelled 126,000 miles – thank you, what you do goes above and beyond anything anyone could expect.

Keeping in touch with the outside world when you're in prison is increasingly difficult – around half of all those there describe problems with sending or receiving mail and only 20% receive weekly visits. However, in-cell phones had been introduced in 33 prisons by the end of the year – call charges are cheaper than phones on wings - and people have reported that relationships became more resilient as a result of their use. So, during the year New Bridge, in conjunction with the Ministry of Justice, developed a phone befriending service to be trialled with people who had no one on the outside to call. We trained 20 volunteers to befriend by phone and will be able to report uptake during 2020 / 2021. We're supported in this initiative by the Prison Phone Co.

New Bridge continues to need your support - if this year's report inspires you please give every thought to becoming a regular contributor or to making a one off financial donation.

Judith Smith

A photograph of a handwritten note on lined paper. The text is written in black ink and reads: "Hey Frankie, It was nice to hear from you i'd been feeling a bit down and then i read your letter and made me smile so thank you for that means alot." The note is written on a piece of lined paper with a yellow border on the left side.

Hey Frankie,
It was nice to hear from you i'd been feeling a bit down and then i read your letter and made me smile so thank you for that means alot.

Are you Jane?

Jane is a volunteer with New Bridge

Last month I went to Pete's funeral. I befriended him for over 3 years. Pete was well into a 22 year sentence for a sexual offence, anticipating a parole hearing in 4 years, planning where he might live and work, there would be restrictions. Pete had been a landscape gardener and was in touch with a former employer.

About a year before his death Pete's offender manager told him he should call his ex-wife, tell her what he had done to their daughter. It became apparent to him he should tell his other children. Contact from his family had been minimal. After he told them it ceased altogether. During a visit he sadly told me he had sent each of them a mug for Christmas, but got no response.

Two months before he died I received what turned out to be my last letter from Pete. Our mutual interests were gardening and painting, we both toyed with acrylics and watercolours. Much to his surprise Pete won a Koestler prize. We usually concluded with comments on the state of the world - Brexit, rugby, the latest clanger from Trump.

I continued writing. A month later I realised I had heard nothing. I wrote proposing my next visit and sent an email to the prison requesting a visit. The following morning the prison replied - a visit was not possible, Pete was in hospital. I contacted New Bridge office to discuss options: would a card reach him in hospital? The manager agreed to contact the prison and find out.

Next day she called to let me know Pete had died the previous night. I was stunned. His death was attributed to lung disease. The prison said Pete's daughters had been with him at the end. Would I want to go to the funeral if this was acceptable to the family? I said I would.

Some weeks later the prison chaplain, Laura, contacted me about the arrangements. I began thinking of what I could say to the family to give meaningful support, without breaching confidentiality.

On a sunny winter day, I stepped off the train and took a taxi to the crematorium. I was the first to arrive. An elderly couple came in. Then Laura (I noted her dog collar) came in with John, the deputy governor. We introduced ourselves. The elderly woman called to me 'Are you Jane?' I nodded. She was Pete's cousin. He would phone occasionally and had mentioned Jane. She said she thought the work that New Bridge did was wonderful.

The service was quite full. Many small children were running around, but not intruding on proceedings. The director of the crematorium gave the address, talking of Pete's life - his upbringing, family, sad divorce, and love for gardening, how he rose early and worked hard. There was no mention of prison or an offence.

After the service Laura was speaking to the two heavily pregnant daughters, saying how popular Pete had been on the wing. His fellow residents wanted his family to know. As I approached one of the sisters asked 'Are you Jane?' The second sister asked the same question. Yes, I was Jane. I told them it was a lovely service and it would have meant a lot to their father that they were with him at the end.

An older woman, I assumed Pete's ex-wife, grasped my hand. 'Are you Jane? Because we have some things at home.' Perhaps my letters. I told her I had been grateful to have known Pete. The children were in and out of the family group. Her grandchildren? How many? '23' she said, then pointed at her daughters, 'Another in March, one any moment'.

Later I emailed Laura to thank her and asked if she had arranged for Pete's daughters to be with him. She told me that when it was clear Pete had little longer to live, she contacted the family and with a prison officer had driven a five hour round trip to collect his daughters. They could not have made it by train. Next day 2 prison officers did the round trip to take the daughters home after a night awake at the hospital.

I was amazed. I found it uplifting to learn the astonishing lengths the prison service had gone to in caring for one of their prisoners.

New Bridge Befriending Service Evaluation 2019

Each year New Bridge reviews the experience of people in prison befriended by its volunteers and invites suggestions on how to improve its service.

184 individuals contributed to the 2019 evaluation, serving predominately long-term sentences for offences, including those of a serious violent and sexual nature. For over half (53%) this was their first time in prison. Prior to contacting New Bridge, 28% had no contact with the outside world, and around two-thirds (63%) had never had a visit during their time in custody.

When asked why they applied to New Bridge for a volunteer befriender, five key themes emerged: (1) someone to talk to independent of the prison service; (2) help to reduce feelings of isolation; (3) distraction from the monotony of prison life; (4) to improve communication skills; and, (5) the joy of letter writing.

Participants said that New Bridge had positively affected their lives in prison and thoughts about the future:

- Reduced feelings of isolation (95%)
- Improved emotional health and wellbeing (77%)
- Boosted confidence (68%)
- Better understanding of attitudes and behaviours (67%)
- Gained motivation to contact friends, family, or people from other organisations (63%)

98% would recommend this service to others – especially for those entering prison for the first time, those who do not have family support, and those struggling with mental health.

Improvements suggested included raising awareness through talks and posters; eye catching adverts in Inside Time making clear that the service is open to anyone; email and phone contact as well as letters and visits.

Sophie Gregory, Course Leader Criminology, Policing & Investigation, and Security Studies, Birmingham City University

"I used to isolate myself a lot and often didn't care what was going on in anybody else's life. Prison has changed that and I want to be different in the future"

Newbridges.

Without your care
and without your friends
theres no one here
Just more pretends

You embrace our weakness
and give us a try
Ever when we're
NO tears left to cry

You encourage us
to be the best we can
And now you have
a number one fan

So I mean this
from the bottom
of my heart.....

Thank you John
Thank you Newbridge

..... If thats a start.

You more than welcome to share this poem
and use it for New bridge service.
Simon.

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"Thank you for
providing this service-
I truly believe this has
saved lives"