



# Annual Report 2020

1,058  
People in  
Prison



9%

304  
Volunteers

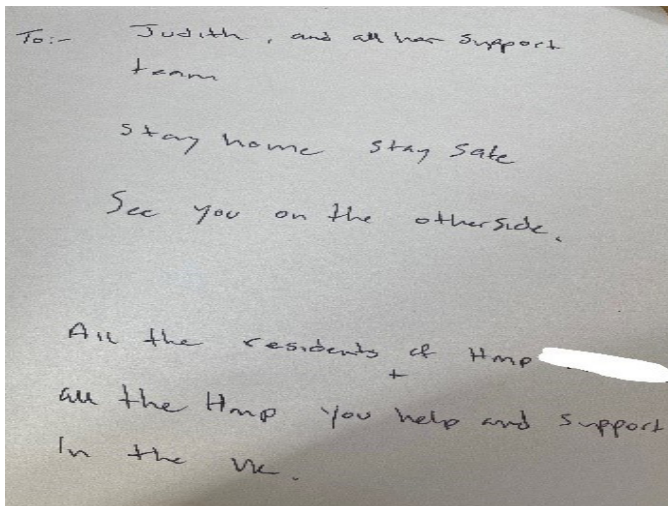


10%

12,908  
letters  
& email



24%



## Chair's report



Lock down, self isolating, loneliness, Words that have crept into our everyday parlance during the past year but we could still get out or open a window to breathe fresh air when we chose, pick up the phone, learn how to Zoom to keep in touch with loved ones. As a prisoner life has been very different.

I cannot imagine what it would have felt like to be in prison during this past year, from the fear of being a sitting target for the fast spreading virus, to the 23 hour lock downs and limited association time, no visits and the frustrations of limited timed phone calls. A dark place to be indeed.

New Bridge volunteers have helped shine a light by offering their time to keep in touch with those prisoners who request a befriender. Please read just a few of the comments which highlight the impact this can have, offering hope that you are remembered, and that someone cares enough to write to you, speak or visit you. Making you feel less lonely.

As this has been my first year as Chair for New Bridge, I have been amazed at the number of volunteers who have come forward, all ages, from different walks of life – all with the same objective of wishing to help another human being. I would like to acknowledge and pay personal tribute to all the volunteers, new and long serving, for what they give. Sometimes we never know the impact we can have on another person's life but by reading just a few of the comments I hope all the New Bridge volunteers can feel immensely proud of the role they play.

For Judith and the staff at New Bridge, work felt a very dark place at the start of the pandemic, just maintaining a core 'business as usual' felt like a challenge. With determination and drive in the knowledge that one letter can make a difference, new ways of working were created and implemented. Bringing forward some much-needed investment in the technology to support these new ways of working mean that New Bridge is now in a better position to help train more volunteers to support more prisoners. A huge thank you to the staff, supported by the Trustees for all the hard work helping lay these foundations to light the 'road map' to a future where more volunteers are able to befriend more prisoners and our vocabulary focuses on 'hope', 'belief', 'caring'.

None of this could happen without our supporters.

I would like to thank warmly the individual who remembered New Bridge in their will and many people and trusts for their gifts large and small in 2020. Each gift was vital for our work. The past year has underscored the need for befriending prisoners. Please stick with us in 2021 and beyond.

**Helen Boothman**

# Chief Executive Report



New Bridge is proud of its achievements in this strangest of years, boosting the number of our volunteer befrienders and reaching more people in prison than ever before.

Lockdown in prison has a resonance that we cannot comprehend. Letters became even more important as a connection to the people inside, to keep the candle of hope burning and to show compassion and care. So we mobilised supporters, friends, trustees to join with our volunteers and write lots of letters and cards, sending poems, pictures and puzzles. The response from prisoners was enthusiastic. And the sheer number of letters and emails exchanged was amazing.

Whilst there were very few visits, telephone befriending grew until 70 people in prison were regularly ringing their volunteer by the end of the year. Befriending is about human connections and we kept our network of volunteers connected online. Monthly support groups continued so that volunteers could share experience or questions about befriending prisoners. Two more support groups were started.

Being in the room has always been fundamental to New Bridge's training weekend for new volunteers. Two days to absorb information, techniques and tips, meet other volunteers and especially to gain some insight about life inside from listening to the experience of an ex-offender who has been befriended by New Bridge. Not straightforward to combine all of those elements into an online approach. But we did it and we had run six courses by the end of the year. Additional support measures were put in place for new volunteers so they could articulate points in private which might have been daunting on screen.

Interest in becoming a New Bridge befriender has grown, perhaps reflecting the surge in volunteering over the past year. We always need more volunteers because we always have a waiting list of people in prison. If you have ever wondered about becoming a befriender yourself or you know someone who might, please apply.

Let the people we befriend tell you the story of **New Bridge & me in 2020**. Around 50% of them responded to a survey about why they applied to New Bridge, their experience of befriending and what support they received during this year especially.

Here is their story.

## Judith Smith

"Dear Sue, Sara, Colin, Judith. Thank you for all your correspondence (letter, notices, cards, pictures), i want you all to know i'm grateful and even that is an understatement. The service is amazing-it means the world"  
L, HMP Wakefield.

# new bridge . . . . .

- I applied because I wanted someone to talk to as I do not have anyone on the outside and I wanted to feel normal by receiving a letter. It has made me feel like a normal person.
- I wanted to talk to and make friends with someone different who did not judge me on my past.
- Some level of non-judgemental discourse with someone who is not part of the prison service. This has been achieved.
- As I have no living family and no friends, I desperately need someone to write to, to help me keep sane and up to date with the world. It has been a great help to me and long may it last.
- I suffer from social anxiety and find it difficult to make friends. I hoped that New Bridge would help me manage this, which it has, and has far exceeded my expectations.
- To start building relationships, friendships with adults; to not be ashamed of myself for what I have done; to build self-confidence up; to chat to someone so I do not feel lonely or alone.
- To have a connection with someone outside as I do not receive letters or visits from anyone else. I have never looked back. It is the best thing I could have done - a simple letter can be a real lifeline.
- I hoped to get a friend and to be productive in my prison time by preparing myself, by talking to sociable individuals so that I have more confidence. To be able to talk to sociable people when I hope fully get released, as well as improving my writing and reading.
- I needed something to prove that I still existed. I have found the exchange of letters, which I see as a conversation, interesting, supportive and less isolated.
- I wanted a friend, a pen friend, someone of good character and trustworthy.
- I heard it reduces reoffending, so I thought I would give it a go. My befriender is really understanding and compassionate and does not judge me for my offence.

## ••••• & me •••••

- One of the best things about New Bridge is that they do not just palm you off with a random person. You are given someone with similar interests so that gives you plenty to talk about and debate. I have been in prison for 5 years and still have many years before my first parole. My befriender has been a blessing for me; times are really tough now and like most people around the world, I have recently lost family and friends from Covid.
- When I first came to prison I did not even know what to expect because it is my first time. My befriender believes in me, gives me hope, so the way I think is more positive.
- I have become a better person and helped me stop self-harming.
- I do not get so hot headed as I used to when I was on the outside. I have learned to talk to other people about my issues.
- I am a lot more empathetic towards others and mindful about their feelings. I know I am not in this alone.
- I used to try to commit suicide on a regular basis but my befriender helped to stop this by caring and thinking about me.
- I have always been aware that, for me, isolation breeds isolation. When I spend any length of time away from positive social interactions, I tend to close myself off and isolate myself further, often leading to depression. Letters from my befriender help fight this tendency.
- My befriender has helped me with my attitudes towards life. It has changed so much because I never thought I could trust.
- It helped me realise that I am valued and cared about, by another human, who knows about my past and no judgement felt!
- Over the past 18 years, I have had fantastic bendifenders who have always been there for me.
- I am not single minded anymore. If I had a crossroads in life, I now know there is more than one way to tackle the obstacle, such as asking for help.
- Since the 23 hours lock-up came into effect I have been waiting for letters like a dog waiting for a toy. When they arrive I get very excited and read them several times before replying. The letters truly are a lifeline that I cherish and the support I receive through them has given me a much more positive outlook on my future post prison.

# .....in 2020

- Covid-19 has affected my life. No work, too much lock-up, can not self-cook, lack of gym. Thank God I have New Bridge to help me get through it.
- I was in hospital in June. I was really ill. On returning to prison the first letter I received was from my befriender. We had never spoken before but he cared. Confidence comes when you are cared for.
- I used to self-isolate, but my befriender helped me to try and get out of bed and use my time wisely.
- Struggle more but cope in a better way.
- The phone service although I was really nervous.
- I have been the subject of much name-calling and bullying whilst in lock down, yet I tend not to suffer too much otherwise. My befriender helps with this too.
- Gives hope that things change, and the country and this situation will change, by talking through issues it helps resolve them in my mind.
- As a transgender woman, I have gained confidence especially through the pandemic and this has been bolstered by the external support I have received from my volunteer.
- Being written to by someone outside who is also experiencing the isolation of a lock-down and the downside of life, whilst also demonstrating the benefits of positivity and hope.
- Sending me the occasional letters from other staff at New Bridge and still remembering me at Christmas (this meant a lot!)
- The newsletter that you sent from time-to-time helps.
- I receive birthday and Christmas cards from New Bridge which is nice. Even before I had a dedicated befriender I received a letter from New Bridge.
- Being able to phone them once a week. They have sent me pictures, puzzles etc. - it has been a true lifeline.
- It has helped me to be realistic when I was starting to feel despondent. It has helped me to stay positive.

## After release from prison

### Jamie & Ben from the New Bridge podcast

**Jamie:** I just felt so happy that someone going about their daily life would sit down at some point in the day and write to me. He didn't know me from Adam. All he knew was what was on that referral form and what I was in prison for. So still to write, it gave me hope. Now Ben has been a constant in my life for 5 ½ years. I haven't had any drink, any drugs. I couldn't go 5 ½ days without getting arrested when I was younger. I have my own place and I have my own painting and decorating thing going on.

**Ben:** To see someone come out of prison with all those labels, with all those stigma and then go on to lead professional working lives and fulfil themselves. Yes, it's lovely. It's absolutely lovely. I really, really think that what New Bridge does is so important.

Jamie contributes his experience to training courses for prospective volunteers and Ben continues as a befriender and group chair.

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**I had burned all my bridges. All family ties ruined.  
I have spent years in prison for violence and many other crimes.  
My New Bridge volunteer was a constant positive in a very negative life and a new bridge was formed by her consistent support throughout my sentences and post release. I, in turn, have befriended someone in prison and I now help train prospective volunteers to befriend prisoners.**

### Alex Hayden 2018

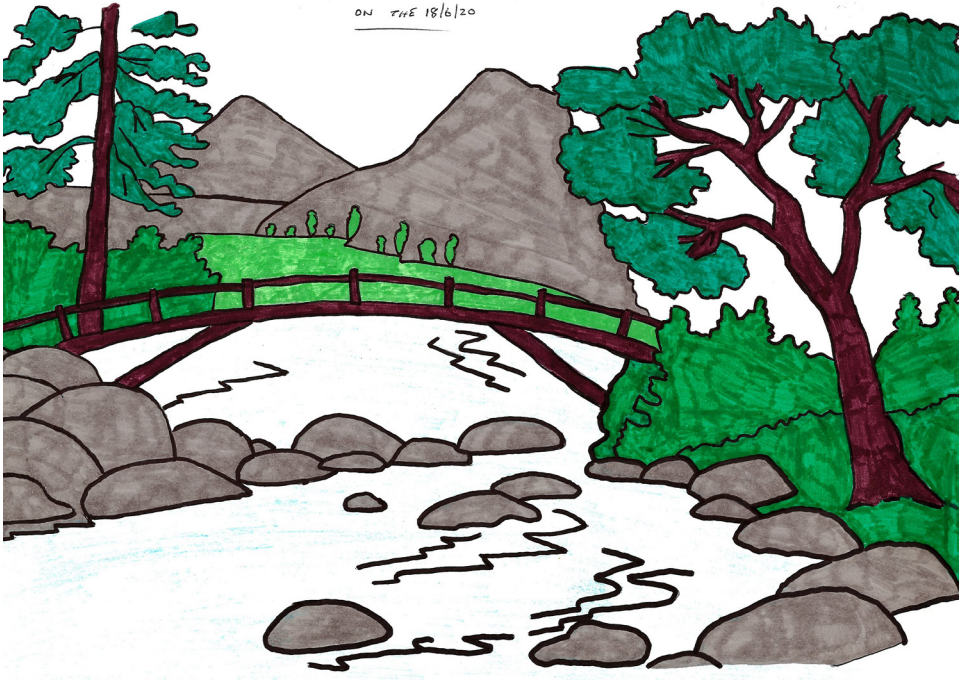
Alex sadly died in 2020. He made a huge contribution to New Bridge and is much missed. His influence will live on in the work of New Bridge, and we will never forget him or his warmth, humour and friendship.



“He was a real inspiration and a testament to how befriending can change lives” – volunteer following Alex's last training event with New Bridge



DRAWN BY PADDY  
ON THE 18/6/20



"Thank you for all that you guys do in making my time in here more comfortable to deal with. I know I can speak for others as well who have received letters and cards from you. It was a truly lovely surprise for me and very nice of you" G, HMP Swaleside  
04/05/20

"Hi Faye, Many thanks for your recent letter about Black History Month and the Black Lives Matter movement – I found it really interesting reading. I keep in regular touch with my befriender and we have a laugh whenever we write to each other. Thank you and everybody at New Bridge for your splendid work" B,HMP Long Lartin

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