

# PREPARING FOR SESSION TWO

The following information is meant to give you an overview of prison so that you can get the most out of session two. Take some time to absorb the contents of this preparation sheet.

## A snapshot of prison

These statistics are collated by the Prison Reform Trust and are included to give you a snapshot of the reality of prison in terms of its population and staffing.

- Her Majesty's Prison Service has lost 13,730 (30%) staff since 2010 as the prison population has increased.
- On 23 October 2015, the prison population in England and Wales was 85,106. Since 1993, the prison population has increased by more than 40,000 people.
- Prisons are faced with high sickness levels amongst staff. In 2014-15 the average number of working days lost to sickness absence by staff was 11.1 days. This compares to an average of 4.4 days per worker in the labour market as a whole.
- The average sentence length has been increasing, it is now nearly four months longer than twenty years ago at 15.9 months.
- At the end of September 2015, 70 of the 117 prisons in England and Wales were overcrowded.
- The number of children (under-18s) in custody has fallen by over two-thirds in the last seven years. Children are also committing fewer crimes—with proven offences down by 72% from their peak in 2005-2006. At the end of August 2015 there were 971 children in prison.
- The women's prison population in England and Wales nearly doubled between 1995 and 2010, from 1979 to 4236. More recently the numbers have declined a little—with 3948 women in prison on 23 October 2015.
- People aged 60 and over are the fastest growing age group in the prison estate. There are now nearly triple the number there were 15 years ago. People over 50 and over currently make up 14% of the prison population.
- Approximately 200,000 children had a parent in prison at some point in 2009. In the same year more than double the number of children were affected by the imprisonment of a parent than by divorce in the family.
- It is estimated that more than 17,240 children were separated from their mother in 2010 by imprisonment.
- 50% of the total prison population are Christian, 15% are Muslim, 2% Buddhist and 30% report having no religion. 3% are from other religions.
- Prison has a poor record for reducing reoffending—45% of adults are reconvicted within one year of being released. For those serving sentences of less than 12 months this increases to 58%. Over two-thirds (68%) of under 18 year olds are reconvicted within a year of release.
- 45% of women leaving prison are reconvicted within one year. This rises to 58% for sentences of less than 12 months and 77% for women who have served more than 11 previous custodial sentences.
- There is greater disproportionality in the number of black people in prisons in the UK than in the United States of America.

These statistics are taken from *The Bromley Briefings 2015: The Prison Reform Trust*. Apart from the last statistic which is taken from EHRC (2011) *How fair is Britain? Equality, Human Rights and Good Relations in 2010. The First Triennial Review*, p.172. For more information read *The Bromley Briefings* which is a report published every year and available online as a free download. [www.prisonreformtrust.org.uk](http://www.prisonreformtrust.org.uk)

## What is a prison there to do?

There is often confusion in society about the reasons why prisons exist. However, prisons have a very clear mandate and a long history. What follows outlines what the purpose of prison is as laid down in UK law and expressed on the Her Majesty's Prison Service website.

## The purpose of a prison sentence

The Criminal Justice Act of 2003, Section 142 makes the purposes of sentencing very clear.

### Purposes of sentencing

- (1) Any court dealing with an offender in respect of their offence must have regard to the following purposes of sentencing—
  - (a) the punishment of offenders,
  - (b) the reduction of crime (including its reduction by deterrence),
  - (c) the reform and rehabilitation of offenders,
  - (d) the protection of the public, and
  - (e) the making of reparation by offenders to persons affected by their offences.

It is very clear that prison sentences have multiple aims, from a form of punishment right through to rehabilitating the offender and repairing relationships through restorative justice practices and other interventions. Prisons have their work cut out for them as each one of those aims is a complex task in its own right.

Her Majesty's Prison Service website says that "it serves the public by keeping in custody those committed by the courts. Our duty is to look after them with humanity and help them lead law-abiding and useful lives in custody and after release." This statement is printed on the back of every chaplain's ID card. See more at <http://www.justice.gov.uk/about/hmps/>

## The role of the prison chaplaincy team

In order for a prison to be a functioning legal entity, according to the 1952 Prison Act, it needs a governor, a chaplain and a medical officer. The freedom to worship in prison is a statutory requirement laid down in law and the following rights are afforded to prisoners:

- *A chaplain must see each new reception as soon as possible after they are received into prison.*
- *Prisoners must have the opportunity for corporate worship or meditation for one hour per week.*
- *Prisoners located in Segregation Units or Healthcare Units must have the opportunity for corporate worship or meditation for one hour per week and be visited everyday.*
- *Recognised religious feasts, fasts and festivals should be observed.*

There are exceptions to these rules. However, opportunities to worship or meditate should be the norm for the majority of prisoners for most of the time.

## Multicultural Britain reflected in our prisons

Since the 1952 Prison Act was written into law, Britain has changed and become a truly multicultural society. The many faiths represented in our society are reflected in our prison population too and it has therefore been important to have representatives from all faiths as part of the chaplaincy team. Prison chaplaincy teams work together as respected colleagues with their faith in common. When asking prison chaplains to explain how the team works together, some of the answers given were:

*“We accept we are not the same and respect each other and do not try to convert each other.”*

*“We work together and show solidarity and protect the 'sacred spaces'.”*

*“We practice in public our religious beliefs and support of each other.”*

*“We enable others to practice their religious beliefs.”*

## Almost everyone in prison will leave at some point

It may surprise you to know that the majority of the prison population changes every year with nearly 80,000 people returning to a community. It is important to be aware of this, understanding that leaving prison is a very common, everyday occurrence.

Sadly, for many people who leave prison, the reality is very difficult and they find themselves staring up at a cliff face; the path to resettlement is one with a steep incline. Climbing expeditions are usually aided by good guides who know the route and conditions, good holds, ropes and equipment as well as fellow climbers. In the same way, those leaving prison can benefit greatly from mentors, key workers, the foot-holds of accommodation, training, employment and positive supportive friendships as well as a broader community of friends. The climb is still challenging, but the chances of success are greatly increased with a supportive group alongside.

## Preparing for release

An important aspect of a chaplaincy team's role is to prepare a prisoner for release and resettlement. Leaving prison can be a very big ordeal and all kinds of things can come to the surface as the day of release approaches.

Chaplains have a duty to help prisoners link up with faith communities who will be able to continue to support their faith in the context of an accepting community.

## Connecting with local faith communities

Another important aspect of developing a prisoner's faith whilst in custody is a duty to ensure that prisoners have the opportunity to engage with members of their faith group from the community.

The official guidelines say that “members of outside faith communities should be encouraged and enabled to attend faith and other activities, by agreement with the appropriate chaplain. This is intended to contribute to pro-social modelling and behaviour and assist with normalisation and re-integration of prisoners.” It goes on to say that: “Faith communities may be involved in the induction process, pre-release planning and community re-integration where appropriate.”<sup>3</sup>

Session two is an attempt to develop that connection. It is wonderful that you have chosen to visit the prison with a few others from your faith community. Go to the session with an open heart and mind and know that what you are doing is valuable in and of itself. You will meet people from all kinds of different backgrounds and experience and other people’s experience of the session will be richer because of what you yourself bring!

Having said that, ensure that you remember to bring your I.D. with you and conform with any other instructions you have been given.

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<sup>3</sup> PSI 55/2011, p12