



Positive Justice Gloucestershire

Aims:

- to encourage the use of restorative and therapeutic practices within the criminal justice system, in order to reduce crime and its impact on victims.
- to act as a pressure group: balancing negative representations in the popular press, and raising public awareness of, and support for, positive initiatives within the criminal justice system, particularly alternatives to imprisonment where appropriate.

Objectives

- to organise regular public meetings, and informal discussion forums
- to disseminate accurate and up to date information regarding crime and the community;
- to cooperate with other community/voluntary groups;
- to act as an information point for those who wish to get involved with the voluntary sector; to promote positive policies to the media and to policy makers by writing letters, putting out press releases and through our website.

PJG's previous public meetings:

2008 - 'Crime and punishment – where's the justice?' with Erwin James

2009 The Challenge of Freedom: after prison ...?

2010 Women in prison with Baroness Corston

2011 'War on drugs: Time for Peace?' with David Nutt

2011 the Forgiveness Project exhibition in Gloucester cathedral

2012 a debate on the motion, 'this house believes that prison works.'

2013 meeting on 'Prison – punishment or healing?' with Ben Gunn

Lunchtime forums:

Restorative Justice

'Beyond Reason - Addressing the roots of criminal behaviour'.

Alternatives to Violence Project,

Victims of crime,

Growing old in prison

'Changing Tunes' – music in prison

Arts in prison

Children in custody

Government green paper 'Breaking the cycle' with a PJG response.

The reoffending cycle.
From positive justice to restorative justice
Legal discrimination – is it fair?

PJG Nov 2013 – 2014

From our chair:

PJG has held its usual three meetings this year: two Saturday morning meetings with a speaker or speakers, followed by discussion over a shared lunch and a larger evening meeting which normally takes place in Prisons Week in November.

For our major public meeting of the past year, 'Prison - Punishment or Healing?' we secured as a speaker Ben Gunn, a writer and campaigner on issues related to prison life and justice. Convicted at the age of 14 for murder he spent 32 years in prison, 20 more than his tariff, since when he has been out on licence - so if anyone knows about it, he should! Held in Cheltenham this meeting was chaired by Dave Turner, course leader in criminology at the University of Gloucestershire.

In April we met at the Gloucester Quaker Meeting House at 11.30 in the morning to learn more about Restorative Justice and how it works in practice. The concept of restorative justice seems to have at last been accepted by our justice system and our prison service. We heard from two Quakers who were enabled to visit a young man who was in prison for committing an arson attack on the Gloucester Quaker Meeting House. This had caused considerable damage and we heard of the very positive results of this meeting. We also heard from an ex-offender about how a meeting with the victim of his break-in changed his life. He is now an effective facilitator for restorative justice and together with his erstwhile victim has produced a video and a book about his experiences, recounting his upbringing to a life of crime and the amazing change that has taken place.

We held our July meeting in the Watson Hall in Tewkesbury, a new venue for us and a very pleasant one. This meeting was entitled 'Legal Discrimination, is it Fair?'. Our two main speakers were both ex-offenders who described most movingly the extraordinary difficulties of life after prison. We were not surprised to learn of the near impossibility of getting employment, but it seems that nearly *every* aspect of life is coloured, and not *just* for the ex-offender, but, if he or she is lucky enough to have a supportive family, their lives are blighted too. For those who have no-one or who have been rejected, the outlook is truly bleak, small wonder that so many end up back inside. We were told that a prison sentence, however short, is like a tattoo: every sentence a life sentence. There were also positive contributions to this meeting however: an ex-offender in the audience who had been in jails, both here and in the States, told us how much better, in his experience, ours are than theirs with humane prison officers and no apartheid! He is now in employment as a result of his record not despite it, running a Restorative Justice Programme in prison and looking for a house for his company Halfway House for newly released ex-

offenders. A police officer described how in Gloucestershire, young people who are deemed to be at risk of becoming involved in crime are being shown the likely consequences, by being introduced to Court procedures and talking to prisoners and ex-offenders, though there is some evidence that this practice may be counter-productive!.

All in all, despite the 'cuts' and certain government policies, it seems that some forward steps are being taken.

I made a mistake

I made a mistake, got convicted and spent time in prison serving my sentence and that should have been the end of it; but in reality the real sentence only started after my release from prison.

Facing family and neighbours is hard enough, still being judged for your crime but the real problem starts when trying to find a job, its hard at the best of times but with a criminal record, there is nearly no chance.

If you lucky enough and fill out an application form, you come to the dreaded question "Have you ever been convicted of a criminal offence " well you have no choice then to tick yes and at that moment you already know that there is no chance of getting that job .Because all they see is at tick against the yes box, they don't know you and don't even read further on to see what qualification you have .

I was lucky to get an interview and the dreaded question was never ask .I got the job worked hard and was even praised by the area manager for my hard work. After six weeks I felt really settled and comfortable in my role and got on well with every one . Until one morning arriving to work my manager ask me to come and see her, she had a computer print out about my crime and ask me to explain it to her which I did but I still lost my job.

Back to square one, knowing that this will happen all over again. I thought spending time in prison I would have paid for the crime, apparently not, will I ever? I don't thinks so, if society has got anything to do with it . So how will an ex-offender ever be able to become a upstanding member of society and a taxpayer again? Having a job would surely stop re-offending.

A ex- offender has to overcome so many hurdles when trying to rebuild there lives without any one else adding to that task . If I discriminate against some one on the grounds of race or sex, I would commit an criminal offence, so what makes this legal discrimination fair and above the law?

By ex-offender, who for obvious reasons, does not wish to give her name .

Legal discrimination - is it fair?

In the last few weeks before you leave prison you are told that you have paid your debt to society, served your time, now go and rejoin the world and once again become a member of society and get on with your life again, you are a free man. Perhaps they should say that now the next part of the sentence begins, you wont see the bars, but you will feel them, you will be victimised, looked down upon, judged and discriminated against by all manner of society, the system and society now wants its pound of flesh, so

go away and don't come back.

There are some that leave and just slip back into life, sadly these are not that many, most if not all who leave prison suffer some form of unfair discrimination and in many cases from people and areas you would least expect.

Conviction history remains one of the few, if not the only, area where employers can legally but not morally discriminate against applicants when recruiting. This has a negative impact on employment rates amongst ex-offenders and causes not only problems for the individual, but also for the families, employers and society as a whole

One of the major causes of re-offending is lack of employment, which means being on benefit, housing issues, and other related social and economic problems. It is no surprise that so many feel totally dejected and rejected when so many wish to re-build their lives and once again become members of society. Most if not all ex-offenders do not want special treatment or to be felt sorry for, all they ask is for the chance to get on. to be treated fairly and not judged by their past. If society wants people coming out of prison to become a fully functioning member once again, then society needs to be prepared to give us a second chance.

Despite the social and economic benefits of helping ex-offenders into employment 75% openly admit discrimination against them.

An estimated 9.2 million people in the UK have a criminal record, (the estimated population of greater London is only 8.4 million)

The cost of re-offending, courts, prison, etc is in excess of 11 billion !!

(To put this into some context:

the Crossrail project in London	13.2 billion approx
public health services	2.7 billion
extra cash for flood defences	140 million
council tax support	3.7 billion)

Ex-offenders are 8 times more likely to be unemployed and this should be addressed. If re-offending costs could be reduced by even a small amount think of the saving and the better use of tax payers money.

74% of newly released remain jobless.

65% of young offenders are jobless before prison.

60% re-offending rate amongst short term prisoners.

It is estimated that over 80% of people leaving prison will be on some form of benefit during the first year, roughly 170,000 people a year and increasing.

The social exclusion unit noted many prisoners see a criminal record as a major barrier to employment, 57% had experienced trouble finding work on release due to having a criminal record.

The Scottish parliament in its code of practice includes a persons offending history should not deny the equality of opportunity.

NACRO says employers are willing to employ ex-offenders but are reluctant to develop policies for their employment, to do so openly could lead to getting a critical and hostile response from the general public. These are some figures for employer

perceptions:

60% say they perform better than non offenders.

Only 10% will never employ an ex-offender

They say they work harder to prove they are reliable, have a good eye for detail, are grateful for the second chance, and give 100%.

Benefits of employing ex- offenders:

86% fitted well with work mates

82% worked well

81% were very reliable.

Research by the cipd (chartered institute of personnel and development) concluded that 66% of hr managers had a positive experience of employing an ex-offender, less than 10% had a negative experience.

So why is it so hard for us to be given a second chance?

Martyn, an ex-prisoner.

Restorative justice

How the Gloucester citizen reported our April forum:

Quakers in Gloucester have forgiven £150,000 arsonist for torching city meeting house



Warden Martin Skeues at the Friends Meeting House in Greyfriar's after the 2012 fire

QUAKERS in Gloucester have spoken of their forgiveness after a man torched their meeting house two years ago.

The place of worship in Greyfriars has been refurbished to the tune of £150,000 since James Bryan's arson attack in September 2012.

Volunteers Elyn Mitchell and Maggi Holiday gave a talk at the Grade-II listed building about why they chose to use restorative justice to educate him about the effect of the offence and to find out why it was committed.

"At first we had no understanding of who had done the deed or why it had been done and it felt like a violation of our collective worship and what it stands for," said Mrs Mitchell.

"As soon as we started to think about our reactions to the fire, some of us knew the restorative justice was the only way we could go.

"But against the advice of his solicitor, James wrote to us apologising which was wonderful and was the start of the correspondence. Being able to give him a name made it much easier to work towards forgiveness."

Restorative justice helps cut reoffending and the process brings those harmed by crime or conflict and those responsible for the harm into communication, giving victims the chance to explain to offenders the impact of their crime, to get answers to their questions and an apology.

Bryan, 23, from Alma Place, in Gloucester, pleaded guilty at Gloucester Crown Court to the attack on the historic Friends Meeting House.

fire gutted the building, putting it out of use for months and rendering many community groups homeless.

But since the incident, the Quakers have kept in touch with Bryan, who they described as being articulate with a "sharp sense of humour".

Mrs Holiday said he faced personal issues at the time of the crime, some drug-related, and that he is now writing the story of his life which is both "moving and upsetting".

She said a bond between the Quakers and Bryan has formed and he explained he wanted to do everything he could to raise money for the Quaker house.

At a meeting with him at a Devon prison, Mrs Holiday said he "apologised profusely" and explained that he was out of character that day.

"That's what drugs do, they make you behave out of character," Mrs Holiday said. "We told him the thing we most wanted him to do was to forgive himself and that can be really hard to do.

"He was aware a considerable number of people had been affected by the damage and closure but his body language, when he was given a list of people affected, showed he was really taken aback by the impact."

The public talk held at the meeting house on Saturday morning was chaired by Becky Beard, of Restorative Gloucestershire, who said around 40 cases per month use the restorative approach

Elyn Mitchell and Maggi Holiday offered the following as part of their talk.

Summary of restorative justice principles. Using information provided by Marian Liebmann

Principles of Restorative Justice

- Victim support and healing is a priority
- Offenders take responsibility for what they have done (as opposed to having justice “done” to them)
- Dialogue to achieve understanding
- Attempt to put right the harm done
- Offenders look at how to avoid future offending

Benefits of Mediation / Conferencing

Victims:

- Put a face to the crime
- Ask questions of the offender
- Express their feelings
- Receive an apology / reparation
- Educate offenders about the effects of their offences
- Sort out any conflicts

Benefits of Mediation / Conferencing

Offenders:

- Own the responsibility for their crime
- Find out the effect of their crime
- Apologise and / or offer reparation
- Reassess future behaviour

Giving 'VOICE' to the Rubies at Eastwood Park by Alma Hageman



Having worked now for 3 years as a RECOOP Project Worker with the Rubies - the women Over 50 at HMP Eastwood Park - I am more than ever convinced that purposeful activity and special creative work is a fantastic restorative tool and therefore I use it regularly in my groups.

Creativity inspires, empowers, nourishes, brings about social engagement, it can be thought-provoking, reflective and it gives the possibility to learn new skills, confidence, new interests, enhances wellbeing through relaxation and self-expression! It can be challenging and boundary testing (this was strongly experienced when we worked with mosaics last year.)

Over the last months I used it specifically as a tool to give people the possibility of growth in self-esteem and confidence and also in order to give 'VOICE' through self expression and self reflection.

Examples of growth in confidence:

Late November I brought in a riot of coloured autumn leaves; a true feast for the eyes! I also brought in good quality pastels. One of the Rubies, who in all her 6 months coming to the group never dared to do anything, just couldn't resist playing with the pastels, although she kept saying: "I can't draw". "Just play with them, use your fingers or hands" I advised her. To her amazement she ended up with a fantastic autumn-drawing, which was nearly as rich in colour as the leaves and as beautiful as her proud smile. Another experience with pastels was when I held a very simple guided session; we all ended up with 'DAWN', using black, blue, red, orange and yellow. All drawings were different, all were beautiful.

Examples of giving voice:

- A small poetry bundle was produced and published '**RUBY-RED**'- a year of poetry by the Rubies at HMP Eastwood Park.
- An amazing quilt was made, giving voice and expression to thoughts and feelings the Rubies had after they had seen the quilt made by some 130 'Holloway-sisters'. The inspiration for this had been a quilt made 100 years ago by the Suffragettes, containing the names of the women imprisoned in Holloway as a result of their public protest for the right to vote.

Our Ruby quilt includes squares with words including:

- When life gives you scraps, make quilts
- Almost unbearable
- Solitude-isolation
- As I forgive those who me
- Tick tock; with lots of words expressing the passing of time/ non-passing of time
- Maternal, beautiful, hormonal, feminine
- We all come together to fly
- Free get out of jail, go straight to jail
- Years go by-life goes forward not back
- Lonely but never alone
- Empty without your family
- Soulful purple, joining hands and hearts in EWP
- Wanted, love and gentleness
- And others

The border on the top in big letters says RUBIES and at the bottom: ***creativity works as all women have velvet in their hearts*** and the sides: ***safety, resettlement, respect, purposeful activity.***

We did a lot of recycling too: the green squares that carry the words (all hand embroidered) were cut from old prison sheets; the black borders in between were cut from officers used and discarded uniform trousers.

The middle, centre square is, yes indeed, the bottom pocket of one of these uniforms! To lighten and brighten the whole thing we sewed happy strips of colour all around it.

It has become a master piece; a true voice of the Rubies at a given point in its 'history'.

'Catching dreams' - Koestler Exhibition 2014



Many people in prison spend a lot of time dreaming. Some dream of a new life, not involving crime, and for some this comes through entering the annual Koestler awards for art from those in prison, secure patients and detainees.

This year the exhibition runs from 24th September to 30th November at the Southbank Centre (Spirit Level at the Royal Festival Hall) and is entitled 'Catching Dreams.' I found it profoundly moving.

The picture above, used to advertise the exhibition is called 'My Dream' and is by someone in HMP Schotts. The artist said of the work: 'I was experiencing a profound sense of loneliness and a feeling of isolation, since I was missing my family. This led to

me dreaming about far off places, which I visited with them.’ If you look carefully, you can see faces hidden in the exotic landscape.

Another piece which I particularly remember is an installation entitled ‘Lights Out’ - nothing to do with the recent imposition of a bedtime lights out time at 10 pm for those in Young Offenders Institutions. It is a small room with poems on the walls. Every two minutes the lights go out, and visitors are plunged into pitch darkness. You can no longer read the poems, but then other poems appear, projected onto the walls. Two minutes later these disappear as the lights come on again and the original poems reappear. Carl, of HMP Full Sutton wrote of this work, ‘it is said that everybody comes to a point in their life where one second, one step, one decision will shape how the rest of their life will pan out. As true as that sounds, there’s more than one point and it’s NEVER too late to change your future. Only your past.’

Tours of the exhibition were led by ex-offenders, specially trained and recruited by the Koestler Trust to work alongside Southbank Centre exhibition hosts. They helped to choose which winning entries should be in the exhibition and are eloquent in explaining their choices. Their personal insights offer a first-hand account of how arts can reflect and enrich the lives of people in secure criminal justice settings.

This year there were 8,789 entries, a record number, which is reassuring as last year for the first time there was a drop in artwork entered for the award. The exhibition is clear evidence of the power of the arts in the rehabilitation of offenders, and should be noted by those currently tempted to cut access to art within our penal system.

We must congratulate the Eastwood Park Rubies and Alma: they won a platinum award for the quilt they have made together! Well done Alma and the Rubies.

The exhibition is well worth a visit. You can read more at:

<http://koestlertrust.org.uk/pages/exhibitions/catching-dreams>

Mary brown

POSITIVE JUSTICE GLOUCESTERSHIRE

Application for membership:

Name: (PLEASE PRINT)

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Signed:

I enclose £5 (cheques payable to Positive Justice Gloucestershire)
Additional donation £

Please return to: PJG Treasurer, c/o Quaker Meeting House, Chestnut Hill, Nailsworth, GL6 0RA

Tick here if you are willing to serve on the committee

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