



NEWSLETTER TO SUPPORTERS: JULY 2016

Prison suicide and self-harm

Our supporters are probably aware that the suicide rate in prisons has gone up in recent years: five years ago, 58 prisoners took their own lives; but this rate has risen steadily so that there were 88 suicides last year.

Last month, the National Offender Management Service invited Prisoners' Penfriends to its headquarters in London, to speak to a group of prison officers about the service we provide. As was pointed out in last year's report on our work by the University of Warwick, not only do penfriends contribute to prisoners' well-being but also, because the Prisoners' Penfriends service checks prisoners' letters, it can offer an early warning system when a prisoner seems to be so low that he or she is in danger of suicide or self-harm.

The group of officers who heard about our work are the "lead" safer custody officers in the various regions where the prisons are situated. These "leads" are now inviting Prisoners' Penfriends to meet the individual safer custody officers in each prison in these regions.

This is a new route for us to get into prisons and reach the prisoners who need to have some contact with the world outside prison. As one of our prisoner-penfriends has recently said:

"I feel great getting letters from someone. Being a penfriend has meant a lot, making a new friend, getting letters where otherwise I would not, feeling wanted and cared about, knowing we can't meet up but we can always write to each other when down. Everyone in prison should be made aware of Penfriends."

21K

Prisoners' Penfriends has now forwarded 21,000 letters. Many thanks to everyone who has made this possible – and continues to help us perform this vital role, helping to keep prisoners safe and also reminding them that they are still members of the wider society.

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