

PRISONERS' ADVICE SERVICE

THE INDEPENDENT LEGAL CHARITY PROVIDING INFORMATION AND REPRESENTATION TO PRISONERS

JUSTICE BEHIND BARS

PAS Winter Newsletter 2019

Welcome to PAS' winter newsletter. We all here hope that all of our friends and supporters enjoyed a joyous and refreshing winter break!

At this time of the year, when we are concerned for older people, PAS needs assistance providing services for the elderly in prison. To read about PAS' crucial work with older prisoners, and to make a donation, [please do so here](#).

Thank you.

News

Justice First Fellow Starts at PAS

Further to our news in the previous edition of our newsletter, that PAS would host a Justice First Fellowship from January 2019, we are delighted to welcome Alice Gambell as a trainee solicitor at PAS.



Alice is an old hand at the charity, having volunteered at PAS from 2014 to 2016.

She has also volunteered at Inquest, Prisoners Abroad and Hammersmith Law Centre. More recently she has worked as a paralegal in both criminal defence and actions against the police, supporting clients who find themselves caught within the criminal justice system.

Her training contract at PAS, which began 14 January, will run for two years and is being funded by The Legal Education Foundation (TLEF), to whom PAS is most grateful.

Now into its fifth year, TLEF's ground-breaking Justice First Fellowship programme aims to create future leaders of the legal profession. Alongside their legal training, Fellows will also complete a project aimed at increasing access to justice, and receive additional training in skills such as communications, fundraising and business planning.

2018 Services Update

Telephone Advice Line

Throughout 2018 our telephone Advice Line continued to serve as a key channel through which we were able to advise prisoners on their rights and, where necessary, pursue justice for them. Last year saw an unprecedented volume of demand for our Advice Line, with 30,794 callers making use of the service. 3% of calls came from women prisoners.

Letters Clinics

PAS' Letters Clinics continued to offer a lifeline to a large numbers of prisoners. We received some 4,000 letters in 2018, sending out 9,446 in response, including quarterly *Prisoners' Legal Rights Bulletin* mail outs to 950 subscribing prisoners. The reach of the service extended to more than 100 prisons across England and Wales.

Outreach Clinics

In 2018, we delivered a total of 116 legal advice Outreach Clinics across the male and female estates, providing one-to-one advice or education to 1,026 prisoners across 20 prisons: HMPs Belmarsh, Brixton, Bronzefield, Downview, Eastwood

Park, Erlestoke, Guys Marsh, High Down, Huntercombe, Isis, Kirkham, Lewes, Leyhill, New Hall, Pentonville, Send, Styal, Thameside, Wandsworth and Warren Hill.

Feature

Trainee Taher Gulamhussein gives us an insight into life at PAS...

As Taher's training with PAS is extended until the end of May 2019 – by which time he will have qualified – he provides us, here, with a brief insight of his time with us so far.

“I got my first ever experience in a legal environment volunteering at PAS in 2010. That involvement with the charity inspired me to train as a legal aid lawyer. I am indebted to PAS and feel privileged to return as a seconded trainee solicitor from Birnberg Peirce almost ten years later.



“Most days at PAS involve writing advice letters to prisoners, answering queries regarding legal issues where there is no Legal Aid available. Thousands of prisoners would be left unaided without advice from PAS. Some days involve writing pre-action letters for Judicial Review (the process under which executive or legislative actions are subject to review by the judiciary), or talking to prisoners on the Advice Line (with calls

following one another in rapid succession!) Other days have involved visiting a prison to take advice from a client and then to represent him at an Independent Adjudication. I have also been able to work with a range of vulnerable and marginalised prisoners – people suffering from mental health crises, from racism and discrimination, LGBT+ people and those that are disabled. I have also been able to become more hands-on with cases and have learnt a lot from the experience and expertise of the Caseworkers here.”

Taher continues to extol our virtues - even after spending quite a few months at PAS! “If you are looking for a challenging and rewarding place to work, then PAS is the place. Thank you for the opportunity!”

Success Stories

PAS Helps Vulnerable Young Prisoner Secure Safety

Prisoner A is a vulnerable young person currently on license recall for a 40 month sentence in a London prison. He was brought up in an insecure family environment where he suffered abuse as a child and spent some time in care.

After completing the custodial portion of his sentence and a prior recall, Prisoner A was recalled again after a minor infringement of his license conditions, despite the fact that he was known to have difficulty with understanding and comprehending complex ideas. He was then placed in a Category A establishment for nearly three months despite having been given Category C status, and, after a while, he started receiving threats of violence from other inmates due to the charge associated with his conviction. The risk had become so great that he was put in a segregation unit for his own safety, and prison officers were required to escort him from place to place in order to ensure that he was not assaulted or worse.

After his situation became totally untenable, Prisoner A got in touch with PAS and asked for our assistance in securing his safety. PAS made representations to the prison regarding the safety of the prisoner and the fact that he was being held in a prison two categories more secure than his actual designation. In response, Prisoner A was finally transferred to an appropriate Category C facility where he was held in safer conditions more appropriate for a vulnerable prisoner.

PAS is committed to ensuring that all prisoners that get in touch with us are allowed to serve their sentences in safe and appropriate conditions without fear of physical violence, and in an establishment that is proportionate to the level of their risk.

PAS Successfully Petitions for Inaccurate Prisoner Record to be Amended

Prisoner B is an inmate at a London prison, who suffers from multiple mental health issues and a potential personality disorder. Prisoner B got in touch with us in some distress as he had discovered that his prison risk assessment, prepared by his probation

officers, contained multiple factual inaccuracies and fabrications. These inaccuracies were two-fold. Firstly, they artificially and inaccurately inflated his risk to the public. Secondly, the information held on record contained incredibly upsetting false information about his life and background; for example, it alleged that he had been sexually abused as a child, which was not the case.

Inaccurate risk assessment information can adversely affect a prisoner's potential parole proceedings, recategorisation to open conditions and release on Home Detention Curfew, as well as other important factors. Despite submitting multiple complaints and attempting to go through the formal grievance procedure, Prisoner B received no response and had no choice but to get in touch with PAS.

On hearing of the prisoner's plight, PAS wrote to his probation officer to politely remind him, or her, of the Probation Board's legal obligations under General Data Protection Regulation. GDPR legislation states that all information held about a subject by a given organisation's Data Controller must be entirely accurate.

After our letter, the probation trust responsible for Prisoner B responded to confirm in writing that all inaccurate information on file had been amended and to offer an apology to Prisoner B for the distress caused to him.



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