

PRISONERS' ADVICE SERVICE

THE INDEPENDENT LEGAL CHARITY PROVIDING INFORMATION AND
REPRESENTATION TO PRISONERS

JUSTICE BEHIND BARS

Dear Friend

As coronavirus settles in for the winter, the suspension of our Outreach Clinics remains in place and additional Caseworkers continue to focus on PAS' Advice Line. Latest call figures show that the number of women prisoners reaching out to PAS is consistent with the doubling of figures we have seen across the service since lockdown. Phone data from the woman's estate for the two quarters pre- and post-coronavirus show that, from 23 December 2019 to 22 March 2020, 678 calls to the Advice Line came from women's prisons, while, between 23 March and 22 June 2020, 1,271 calls to the Advice Line came from women's prisons.

With the usual lack of information available to them, prisoners and their families continue to be fearful of the prevailing nature of the virus. PAS is working hard to allay the fears of all those who call.

News: PAS Receives Moving Expression of Thanks in Potential Discrimination Case

PAS recently received a letter of thanks from a woman, Prisoner A, for whom we successfully argued that a move to open conditions was justified. Prisoner A had written to us when the prison refused to grant her request to be moved to open conditions and she wanted to appeal the decision. It appeared that the refusal was made on the grounds that she had more than two years to go before her release date. We contacted the prison to point out that the new Framework on Categorisation for men laid down that men could be transferred to open conditions when they were within three years of their release date rather than two. As there had been no similar update for women, we argued that this was potentially discriminatory and that the prison's decision was therefore unjust. As a result of our intervention, the prison granted Prisoner A's appeal, who then wrote to PAS to express her heartfelt gratitude:

"Just to say you are amazing! Thank you for your help. Moreover, thank you for hope. In the world of [the] prison service where chaos, confusion, misinterpretation, reluctance, indifference are frequent occurrence[s], the role of PAS is priceless.

“I wrote to you in despair without [the] slightest hope you’d even respond. I am amazed how efficiently you dealt with my matter. Reading your latest correspondence made me cry. Really. Once again, thanks for hope and [the] knowledge that someone cares.”

PAS Lobbies for Prisoners’ Rights During Lockdown

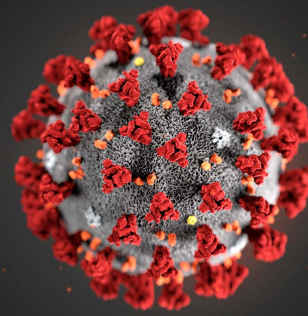
Several prisoners in one of the largest prisons recently contacted our Advice Line, complaining of the internal policy relating to time out of their cells and access to video visits. Prisons have been running restricted regimes in response to the coronavirus, but this prison had a written behaviour management policy, whereby access to time out of their cells – 30 minutes each day – and access to video visits were restricted where prisoners were deemed to have breached this policy.

Although there have been some legislative changes to prisoners’ regimes, time out of cells, which is a statutory minimum, is unaffected.

PAS wrote to the prison in question to remind it that time out of their cells was a statutory right to which prisoners are entitled and which could not be restricted except in very limited circumstances. We also made the case that video visits, a new initiative in prisons, were intended to ameliorate the stinging loss of face to face visits during the lockdown and ought to be viewed as having similar status to mandatory rights. The prison governor responded to our letter stating that they had reviewed the behaviour policy and removed the loss of time out of cell and access to video visits as sanctions.

Community Justice Fund

PAS is delighted to announce that –



ECTR Pauses

In the last issue of our newsletter, we told you about an adult male prisoner, whom PAS assisted in obtaining rightful End of Custody Temporary Release (ECTR), enabling him to help his partner to care for their disabled child during this unprecedented crisis. We argued that the lack of transparency surrounding ECTR applications was causing distress to prisoners and their families. Since then, on 19th August, the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) and Her Majesty’s Prison and Probation Service announced that the ECTR scheme was being paused, with releases being made until Thursday 27 August. PAS sought clarity from the MoJ on what this means in practice for prisoners eligible for release with either outstanding applications or those still waiting to make one.

The MoJ confirmed that all eligible applications already received were progressed and final cases submitted to the Minister for sight on Friday 21st August. No new applications will be considered and the final release under ECTR took place

with the assistance of the [Community Justice Fund](#) – it has retained the services of two Letters Clinic Caseworkers. The two posts, one of which – that of Supervisor – has been filled by PAS retiree, Anna Fairbank, are both fixed-term positions, ending in Spring 2021, and have been designed to assist with the backlog of prisoners' letters to PAS that had begun to accumulate due to our loss of volunteer capacity during lockdown.

The second post has been filled by PAS "supervol", Constance Collard.

Currently studying to be a barrister, and with a Graduate Diploma in Law already under her belt, Constance had been volunteering at PAS for a year prior to the coronavirus crisis.



PAS "supervol", Constance Collard

The Community Justice Fund award marks the first that PAS has received from the many pots of money that have been made available to charities as a result of the coronavirus crisis by generous funders, whose response to the situation has been exemplary.

Alongside assistance from existing PAS supporters, the National Lottery Community Fund and The Persula Foundation, this award will ensure that our services remain available to all

on Thursday 27th August. If an individual has not already been informed of an outcome, then their application is no longer being considered.

Website and Social Media

Between June and August, PAS continued to see sustained online activity, mainly through the [website](#) and the PAS [Twitter](#) account.

The PAS website had over 16,000 views in the last quarter, with our Information Sheets proving popular. The website hosts a whole range of resources for prisoners and their families, which are regularly updated as new regulations come into place. These include our Family Law Guides, Self Help Toolkits, and the 33 Information Sheets. Information on PAS' services, as well as latest news, can also be found on the website.

Our Twitter account continues to attract new followers, with a total of 2,566 followers to date. Our tweets made almost 43,000 impressions in the last quarter. PAS tweets crucial information for prisoners and their families, as well as prison news that will be of interest to those who follow us. Help us reach 3,000 followers by clicking [here](#).

Please do remember to like our [Facebook](#) page too!

prisoners who need them.

Justice First Fellowship

As PAS welcomes Anna and Constance, it says goodbye to the charity's Justice First Fellow, Alice Gambell, who was admitted to the rolls of solicitors in July this year. Funded by [The Legal Education Foundation](#) (TLEF), Alice has been a trainee solicitor and valued Caseworker with PAS since January 2019. Her time with us will formally end on 2 October, when she will begin studying for her Masters (LLM) in Health, Law and Society at the University of Bristol.

PAS is most grateful to TLEF for this wonderful opportunity, and to Alice for her hard-work and dedication to the charity.



PAS' telephone Advice Line is run by caseworkers four days a week. Our telephone number is globally cleared within all prisons throughout England and Wales. **Please note: In order to assist a prisoner, we need to be contacted by them directly before we can discuss matters with family members.**

NUMBER: 020 7253 3323

OPENING TIMES

**Monday, Wednesday and Friday
10:00-12:30 and 14:00-16:30;
Tuesday Evening 16.30-19.00**

Prisoners' Advice Service is a registered charity (No: 1054495) and is a company limited by guarantee (No: 3180659).

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