

## **Quakers In Criminal Justice Conference 2020 and a review of LOCK DOWN (the play) by Journeymen Theatre**

Taking place a mere two weeks before the current Covid-19 lock down, this conference entitled 'Challenges and Helping Hands' was attended by around 55 members of QICJ.

The opening Friday evening session called 'The Magistrate's Perspective' and given by Patricia Bradbury was excellent and surprisingly informative. Many of those gathered are not new to the Criminal Justice system but most were surprised to learn that 95% of criminal cases are dealt with entirely in magistrates courts. The remaining 5% of cases go to the Crown Court and those are the the cases which we read about in the papers.

Saturday was the day we learned about the differences between **Learning Disabilities** and **Learning Difficulties** as experienced in the CJ system. We heard from Neisha Betts of the Key Rng Living Support Network that learning **disability** equals impaired intelligence and social skills or in practice, an IQ of below 70. Many prisoners hover fractionally above 70. Around 10% of prisoners rate below 70 and shockingly 25% of incarcerated under-18s fall into this category. CJ systems everywhere are 'paper focussed' which from start to finish tend to penalise those with disabilities and difficulties.

Melanie Jamieson took us through a presentation of specific learning **difficulties** which can undermine the process of rehabilitation. Some with specific difficulties may have faced obstacles in education and the wider society but be of high intelligence. With their areas of difficulty being 'specific', they may, if the system permits, function very well in certain areas. We learnt the term '**Neuro Diversity**' which is fairer and more favoured and removes that sense of judgement. Dyslexia, Dyspraxia, Dyscalculia and ADHD are all interlinked. Mild versions of some of these 'dys's' were acknowledged by those present who experienced some light bulb moments - I was one such!

Small group sessions were held throughout the weekend and helped the attendees to unpack and process the presentations.

Three workshops were on offer for the Saturday afternoon 1) The Prison Phoenix Trust with Sam Settle. I chose not to attend this one because I had previously attended one of Sam's excellent workshops on the role of yoga and meditation within the CJ system. Instead I chose to learn about 2) The role of Quaker prison chaplains with Judy Roles based at HMP Long Lartin. The work that Friends and others do with prisoners is creative, innovative and worthy of a separate article. I was profoundly impressed by the commitment shown by prisoners and chaplains alike to ensure that the system does not strip away the basic human right to faith and worship. We heard from Marc of 3) The Medaille Trust - an organisation working to combat modern slavery. Here too the statistics reveal a shocking picture:

- There are approximately 40 million slaves in the world today
- 250,000 modern slaves are in Britain
- Most common countries of origin are Albania, Vietnam and the UK itself
- Albanians are most likely to be trafficked for sex
- UK young people (often children) are organised to operate county lines (drugs)
- Vietnamese are organised to work in nail bars, brothels and cannabis factories

The Trust has 9 safe houses and supports victims throughout criminal justice proceedings. As an indication of how much work needs to be done, in 2018, 7000 victims came forward resulting in only 2 convictions.

Before Marian Liebmann helped us to reflect on the conference on Sunday morning we had the privilege of attending Journeymen Theatre's play LOCK DOWN commissioned by Positive Justice Gloucestershire. Journeymen Theatre *is* Lynn and Dave Morris. Many Cornwall Friends will recall their showing of 'THE BUNDLE' here in Cornwall - a play about asylum seekers and the hostile environment they meet with in the UK.

LOCK DOWN dealt with true stories based on research heard from prisoners, chaplains and staff. The play considers particularly the increasing number of elderly male prisoners (mostly no threat to society) who'll never be released partly because of a logjam in the parole system but largely because there is no provision for them on the outside - some would certainly die on the streets. The oldest current inmate is 104 and the oldest person to be sentenced for historic sexual abuse is 101.

A full review deserves a separate article but post-pandemic we could organise a showing of this play here in Cornwall and invite the Journeymen once more to raise awareness through entertainment. It was painful though often humorous to watch the two characters developing. Ron the elderly inmate and Kathy the newly appointed Quaker prison chaplain with everything to learn. We watched their relationship develop revealing much about the characters and the system but without offering solutions to the problems. Very moving, very witty and very beautifully performed. With a passing nod to lager drinkers, '*Journeymen Theatre refreshes those social themes that other theatre companies cannot reach...*' When on the other side of the pandemic lock down, let's consider inviting Journeymen once more to Cornwall where their work needs to be seen by readers of The Daily Mail. Although 'ROCK AND A HARD PLACE' dealing with the cycles of domestic abuse and domestic violence in a hard-hitting but entertaining way might generate more interest post Covid lock down.

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