

IAP: Help us to help you

Juliet Lyon

After 17 years as Director of the Prison Reform Trust, I welcome the chance to work with others to focus on reducing and preventing deaths in any form of state custody in England and Wales - that is the IAP's single purpose. We do this by consulting people, reviewing research and gathering information and by providing independent advice to Ministers, officials and service leaders.

Why are we consulting Inside Time readers? Well when you think about who knows best how to prevent suicide and self-harm in prison, I believe that it is the people who are in prison. We want to hear from people in prison across the UK who help other prisoners in distress, some of these will of course be Samaritan Listeners or Insiders who we hold in high regard. We want to hear from people who have felt hopeless and desperate about what has helped them cope and deal with thoughts of self-harm. We want to hear from prisoners because you see and hear and know things about life behind bars more than all the experts - and what you say counts.

Working through Inside Time, the IAP can promise to gather your thoughts and opinions and take note of your solutions. We can make certain that these are presented clearly and promptly to Ministers,

senior officials and people in charge of services. While we cannot make changes ourselves, we know that no one wants to see rising levels of self-harm or tragic deaths in custody. The Ministry of Justice, backed by the Treasury, is investing more in safer custody. Everyone wants to help stem the tide, reduce suffering and keep prisoners safe. So if we can deliver information and a set of workable solutions to people in power, I am confident that they will want to respond positively.

The three questions

- **What do you think are the best ways to prevent self-harm in prison and respond to people's needs?**
- **What do you think are the best ways to prevent suicide in prison and keep people safe?**
- **What do you think can be done outside prison in the community that would help reduce the risk of self-harm or suicide - either before imprisonment or on release?**

It is important the envelope is addressed to: Freepost IAP
IAP **must** be in capital letters, no stamp and nothing else on the envelope

We understand that reading this article and thinking about these questions may bring up difficult feelings. If that happens, can I encourage you to talk to other people, staff and fellow prisoners, family and friends, people you know and trust - ask to speak to a Listener or call the Samaritans on their phone helpline (see ad. on this page). It is also important to assure you that what you say matters and will be taken seriously. All your letters will be read and a response made to everyone.

Lastly this isn't a one-off. The IAP will report to you for the next few months via Inside Time. We will let you know what steps we have taken. And make sure that, through the pages of Inside Time, you get feedback on progress made. In a set of articles we will hear from prisoners' families and the charity Inquest about how to care for people and from NOMS about its work to keep people safe in custody. We will look at the lessons that can be learned from reports by, amongst others, the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman, the Chief Inspector of Prisons, the Care Quality Commission, Coroners and the Independent Police Complaints Commission. We will do our best to work out how to be wise before the event rather than having to learn from tragedy. Together we can, and will, reduce deaths in custody.

Inside Time supports the Independent Advisory Panel on Deaths in Custody

Inside Time is proud to be collaborating with the IAP in order to help reduce deaths and self-harm in prisons. Last year was a hard year for everyone involved in our prisons. Perhaps one of the hardest in modern times. Limited resources and restricted regimes meant that in many of our prisons, regardless of the sentence being served, it was hard to find meaning and purpose beyond being incarcerated. Reform and change have been promised by the government, but in the immediate and foreseeable future the same challenges have to be faced.

It is still the case in this country that being sent to prison is the punishment for the crime committed. That means prison as punishment, not for punishment. But still all too often the prison experience is overly punitive. Being locked in cell for the best part of 24 hours in itself is overly punitive. Being crammed into an overcrowded prison which is insufficiently resourced to cope with more than the optimum number of occupants is overly punitive. Being forced to live in conditions where access to activities and facili-

ties is severely limited is overly punitive.

The fact remains that everyone in prison to a lesser or greater extent is vulnerable. Those with mental health issues who suffer disproportionate levels of stress and anxiety are among the most vulnerable. The unprecedented self-inflicted death and self-harm figures for people in prison in England and Wales last year demonstrates just what can happen when the most vulnerable people in our prisons are unable to cope.

As Juliet Lyon says, the people who understand prison issues best, who understand the problems and can provide the solutions, are those who live in them. We hope that this call for help in providing solutions to the tragic problems of self-inflicted death and self-harm in our prisons will be answered by as many prisoners as possible. It is easy, when you are stuck in a prison cell feeling lost, deserted, helpless or hopeless to imagine that nobody cares. In fact there is an army of people inside and outside the system who do care. So please help the IAP in its work to make our prisons safer.

Cost of a prison system in crisis

Paul Sullivan

Latest Safety in Custody figures published on 26 January and covering the whole of 2016 show record highs in every category from self-inflicted deaths to assaults. There are 28 deaths awaiting classification because they are still being investigated. The rate of 4.1 deaths per 1,000 prisoners is also the highest on record.

Deaths up 38% overall, self-inflicted up 32%
2016 has seen a record level of 354 deaths in prison custody, up 97 from the previous year. Three of these were homicides. There was a record high of 119 self-inflicted deaths, up 29, a 32% increase on 2015: 12 of these were in the female estate, another record high and up from 5 in 2015. The rate of self-inflicted deaths has doubled since 2012. The likelihood of death in custody is 1.7 times higher than in the general population, while self-inflicted death is 8.6 times higher.

Self-harm incidents up 23%

Self-harm reached a record high of 37,784 incidents, up 6,967 from the previous year. Female establishments saw a small fall of 2%. 2,583

incidents required hospital attendance, up 25% on the previous year. 10,761 individual prisoners self-harmed, up 19% from the previous year and a rate of 126 prisoners per 1,000. Self-harm trends differ considerably by gender, with a rate of 374 incidents per 1,000 in male establishments (with incidents up 31% on the previous year) compared to a rate of 1,898 per 1,000 in female establishments.

Assault incidents up 31%

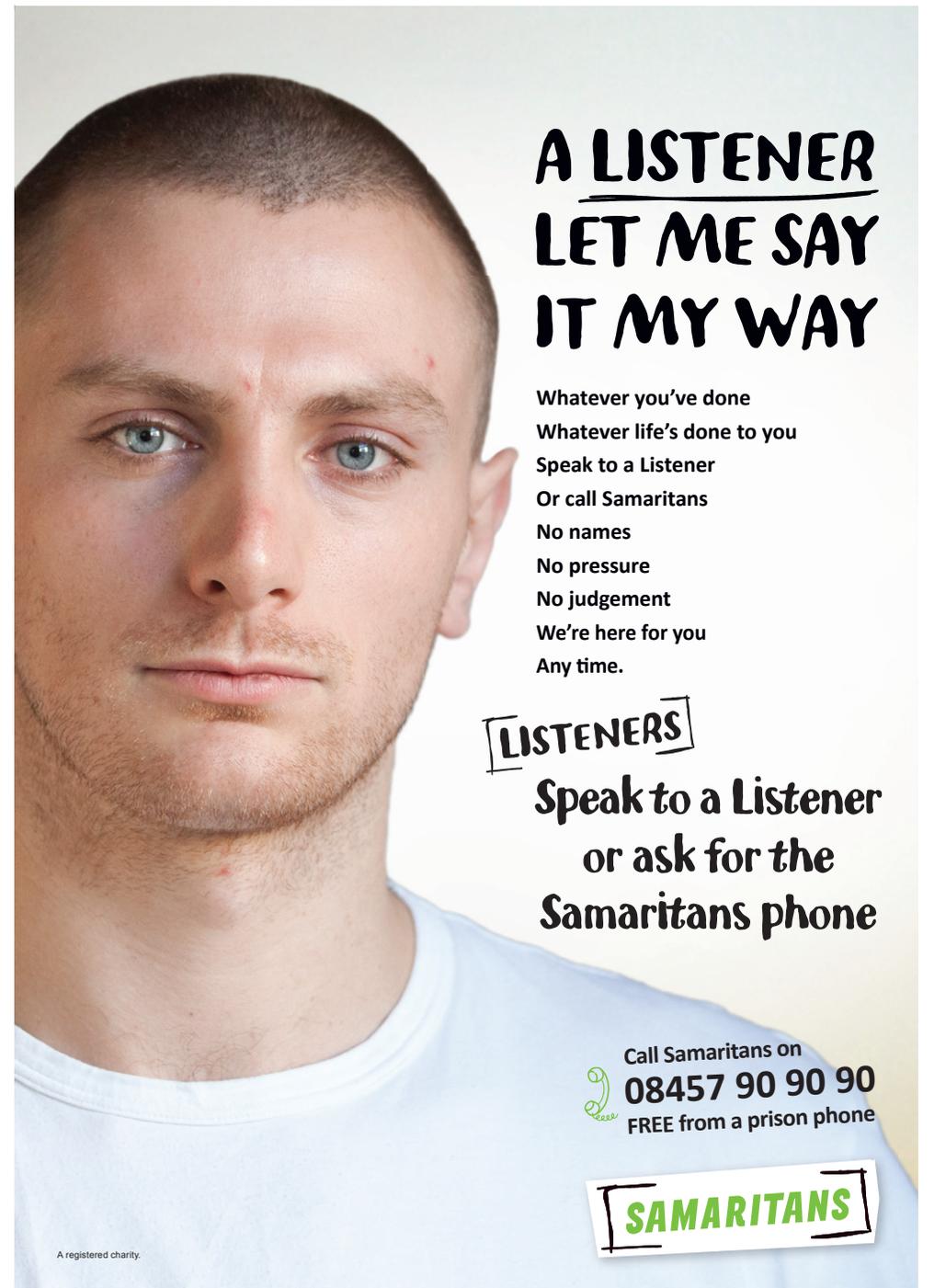
Assaults have continued to increase, reaching a record high of 25,049 assault incidents in the 12 months to September 2016, up 5,995 from the previous year. 3,372 of these were serious assaults, up 28% from the previous year. The most recent quarter and 12 months were the highest on record for all types of assault. Since 2012, the number of serious assaults of all types has more than doubled, and serious assaults on staff have trebled.

Prisoner on prisoner assaults up 28%

2016 saw 18,510 recorded prisoner on prisoner assaults, up 4,097 from the previous year, of which 2,644 were serious, up 30% from the previous year.

Assaults on staff up 40%

There were 6,430 assaults on staff, up 1,833 from the previous year. Serious assaults on staff have trebled since 2012, reaching 761 in the most recent year.



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