

Keeping Safe

“Prison right now is a very dangerous place, it’s unsafe for staff and us inmates and it’s all to do with shortage of staff and the legal high called ‘spice’ as it’s ruined the prison system.” Prisoner



Juliet Lyon CBE

Just because you are in prison you don’t have to be dragged down into a cycle of drugs, violence and debt. Last year the Keeping Safe partnership, the Independent Advisory Panel on Deaths in Custody (IAP), Inside Time, Prison Radio and the Samaritans, heard from 150 people across 60 prisons. Your views on how to prevent suicide contributed to a hugely welcome drop in the number of self-inflicted deaths in custody. But self-harm and drug-related deaths continue to climb. So your help is needed once again.

Drugs and debt leading to threats and violence leading to self-harm and even death is on everyone’s mind. In March, Inside Time was filled with dire warnings: ‘Everyday there is at least 3 or 4 Code Blue’s, or a load of lads walking round like zombies’. A prisoner wrote to the IAP: “My suggestion is, obviously they need to stop the use of spice in prisons ‘cause that’s why a lot of people deteriorate; that happened to me. I am very lucky to be here this day. I was actually cut down from hanging but mine was purely down to spice use. So if we can get a grip on that in custody then I feel like that could be one thing that could stop it ...”

The Chief Inspector of Prisons noted in his annual report that: “ ... in most of our surveys, significantly more prisoners than previously told us that they felt unsafe ... Much of the violence could be attributed to drugs and associated debt ... “ And the harm to mental health has been highlighted by the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman as well as Parliamentary committees.

The impact on family and friends is devastating. One prisoner wrote: “I have no power! I can’t take away all the phones that keep the drug trade going inside here, giving everyone concerned problems which include family, friends etc who are sent text messages demanding money for ‘spice’ that their loved ones have built up to pay so they don’t get a beating. So when the visits come and you’re sat on the visit trying to explain why you’re in debt and leaving the visit with so much guilt you can’t cope anymore, and if by chance you get out without too many problems, you are then faced with the addiction you got while in prison.”

There are solutions and you are best placed to know what they are. How do we stop drugs coming into prison? How can we avoid the problem of debt? How can we tackle violence? How can we reduce the risk of self-harm and drug-related deaths? And, most importantly, how together can we keep people safe?

Write to IAP FREEPOST and I promise that your views and solutions will reach people in authority who can change things for the better.