

Keeping Safe

Looking after your mental health



Juliet Lyon CBE

The Independent Advisory Panel on Deaths in Custody (IAP) working with Inside Time, Prison Radio and the Samaritans called for prisoners' views on how to prevent suicide and self-harm. Almost half the messages we received from 150 people across 60 prisons were about the importance of responding to unmet mental health needs.

A recent National Audit Office (NAO) report - Mental Health in Prisons revealed that 31,328 people (37% of the average monthly prison population) in prison report having mental health or well-being issues at any one time, based on HM Inspectorate of Prisons surveys. NHS England records show that around 8,000 prisoners are receiving treatment for mental illness.



“ Jail is not a mental hospital. Well, it shouldn't be. But it is at present. ”

Many of you were clear that treatment and care needed to be offered way before people got in trouble with the law. One person wrote to the IAP: “As a Listener but also as a Peer Mentor for Mental Health Wellbeing I see many men who struggle daily to retain a semblance of their humanity within a system that fails and who for most come from a society that has failed them from early childhood.” And another pointed out: “Spending money on our mental health services could prevent so many people resorting to crime in the first place.”

The IAP promised to make sure that prisoners' views and solutions reached people in authority who could change things for the better. So a quick update: in the last few weeks we have held meetings to discuss Keeping Safe concerns and solutions with the head of NHS England and mental health leads; the Prisons Minister and senior prison service officials and we are setting a date with the Public Health Minister to visit a women's centre with counselling services and access to mental healthcare.

By the time you read this article, we will have had a meeting with the Chair and CEO of the Magistrates Association to examine under-use of mental health treatment orders in the community. These are not meetings for meetings sake and I will make sure you hear, through Inside Time, about actions taken and changes made. For far too long prison has been used as a so-called place of safety for vulnerable people in need of treatment and care.

Juliet Lyon is Chair of the Independent Advisory Panel on Deaths in Custody (IAP)

'Your views on how to prevent drug-related deaths and self-harm are important and will make a difference. Keep them coming to 'FREEPOST IAP'