





BUCKINGHAM PALACE

As Patron of The Butler Trust since 1985, I have visited many prisons, probation offices and youth justice services throughout the United Kingdom, including during the coronavirus pandemic. While largely hidden from view, the people who work in them perform a critical public service which is difficult and demanding in normal times, and Covid-19 has added further pressures of its own.

I have always been struck by the dedication, skill and camaraderie shown by the managers and staff I have met. The way they have drawn on those qualities, and the fortitude they have shown, in rising to the challenges presented by the pandemic, on behalf of the people in their care and the country as a whole, has been consistently impressive.



The Princess Royal made five prison visits between lockdowns.
(Photo: HMP Bullingdon, September 2020)

FOREWORD

When coronavirus reached these shores there were very real concerns about how the sector would cope. Yet the people working in our prisons, IRCs, probation services and youth justice settings, right across the UK, did far more than cope.

Looking back at this exceptional time, many will say they were just doing their jobs. But their response was genuinely outstanding. In talking with dozens of people, a remarkable picture emerged. And, though we've changed their names, this is their story.

It's an extraordinary story; one repeated right across the country. It shows people at their very best, working together with courage and commitment to keep a crisis at bay.

It's a story that needs to be told, and remembered. And, since they would never tell it of themselves, we're telling it – in tribute to each and every one of them.

They truly are #HiddenHeroes.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'S Shepherd', with a long horizontal line drawn underneath it.

Simon Shepherd
Director, The Butler Trust

October 2021

STEPPING UP

The world's falling apart and so many people just continued to come into work. They put themselves in the firing line. It was something I'd never really seen before: you only see it when you put people under pressure.

'Are you willing to do your job and your duty?'

And I think we answered.


Mark, Prison Catering Manager

When the pandemic landed, Mark's young son had to be shielded. The only way Mark could find to protect his son and still work as a catering manager, in a prison with over a thousand hungry people, was by living in a caravan on the drive of his mother-in-law – who was also shielding.

Barely a week into his prison's lockdown, a close member of Mark's team, Phil – a much loved, valued, and "very funny" colleague he'd known for many years – began to feel unwell. Five days later he was hospitalised. Within the week he had died of coronavirus.

"It was awful. A massive blow", recalls Mark. As well as trying to comfort and support Phil's wife, he found himself grappling with the inevitable but "torturous" questions: "Who's next?"; "Is this the last one?"; "How many are we going to lose?"; "Is it coming for me?"; "Will my family be okay?"

"I felt a lot of pressure," he says, "as well as a duty to carry on. I didn't want to desert my team. I felt the responsibility to keep going."

 You can fight people and fight wars – but you can't fight something you can't see.

David, PE Instructor
(and ex-Para)



Looking back, he is much less interested in his unlikely caravanning experience than in what he learned from this extraordinary crisis. And the word he kept reaching for was pride: “The pride you feel finding so many people who were brave, and had the ability to work through it, and keep coming in, and just do it”.

“But”, he adds, “I didn’t do any more than them, and I wasn’t any braver. I just feel like I’m one of them – all those people who pulled together – I’m just proud to be part of it.”

At the height of World War II, Winston Churchill urged people to “never give in” and “never yield to the apparently overwhelming might of the enemy”.

Faced with a new, and invisible enemy, the #HiddenHeroes in our prisons, Immigration Removal Centres (IRCs), probation offices and youth justice settings, kept doing their duty, on behalf of the people in their care, and the public they serve.

They did not give in. They did not yield. They stepped up, walked the extra mile, and kept walking... And together, they achieved something remarkable.

“There isn’t enough room in my heart for the pride I feel for what my staff have done”, as one manager puts it, echoing the sentiments of his colleagues up and down the country, “I’m absolutely humbled by them.”

IN THE BEGINNING

People had vivid memories of how it started. “My group director’s staff officer rang late on the Sunday night to set up a conference call – at midnight!”, one Governor remembers. “Then it was: ‘You need to lock down everything. We don’t know how long – but you need to do it right away.’”



From the outset, he says, “there was a collective understanding that this was a nation in crisis – and we were all in it together.”

“I felt like I was in a film”, recalls one staff member. “People were anxious and fearful. Everything was moving so fast. At one point it felt like six weeks had passed, so much had changed, but it was only 48 hours”.

We all faced the challenge that this was terrifying – and we didn’t know how it would go.
Ros, Probation Manager

“Nobody knew how bad it was going to be”, says PEI David. Predictions of quite how bad things *could* get were rife, with one suggestion prisons would end up like “18th century breeding grounds of disease” and literally thousands of prisoners and staff might die. Meanwhile, Italy had already seen riots in their jails, triggered by restrictions on

visits, which led to the deaths of twelve prisoners and sixteen escapes.

All the prison staff we spoke to talked of their fears when the pandemic first hit, not only for themselves, but also for their loved ones, and the people in their charge.

But it wasn't only in prisons. Staff in IRCs and Approved Premises (AP), too, faced many of the same challenges and fears as their prison-based colleagues.

Meanwhile, for those working in community settings – in probation and youth justice – the primary concern, beyond the disease itself, was keeping the public safe, and meeting the needs of service users, while largely confined to their homes.

“Managing someone who’s a real risk to other people, or themselves, is stressful and difficult at the best of times”, explains Denise, a Probation Officer, “but it’s ten times harder when you have to do it online, in your living room, and without the support of your colleagues next to you”.

And then there were “the hidden ‘hidden heroes’” as one AP manager calls them. The support staff “who did

not have to keep coming in”, but did so, “on modest pay, and travelling by public transport, to cook, clean, clear blocked toilets, and do whatever else needed doing to keep the place going”.

While many of the rest of us fretted about toilet rolls and tea bags, the #HiddenHeroes in our justice sector had altogether more important things on their minds. And they truly were “all in it together”.

Thank you



Probation

Rainbow heart posted to www.HiddenHeroes.uk



Flying the flag, outside HMP Huntercombe

UNDER PRESSURE

The pandemic put extra pressures on everyone, at every level, throughout the sector. As well as increased workloads and added stresses at work, there were challenges at home too, like looking after loved ones with Covid, protecting those who were shielding, and juggling childcare when the schools were closed.

And for those in leadership roles, with the added sense of responsibility for the safety of their staff – and those in their care – there were sleepless nights, and difficult days.

“At times it was like living in the middle of a horror story”, recalls one senior manager; “it was the hardest thing I’ve ever had to do,” admits another. A third says, “You were just hoping each day that

you were doing the right thing – and then I’d worry all night that I hadn’t”.

And what kept them going throughout the darkest days? Time and again, the answer was the same:

“The staff, they just inspired me, seeing how they just got on with it”.

“We all felt the pressure, but the staff were just superb”.

“I would present them with a problem, and they’d just do it”.

“The commitment they showed was remarkable”.

One Governor remembers telling a group of Officers that he needed “to turn their wing into a protected isolation unit – full of suspected cases.” He said they could come off the wing, “but not a single one did. They had families, and they stood up. I would have totally understood if anyone hadn’t wanted to do it. They were just magnificent.”

A fellow Governor – in comments echoed by colleagues across the sector – highlights the resilience staff showed, particularly, as she points out, “when they couldn’t access their usual outlets to manage stress, like going to the gym, and getting together after work”. “The way they handled the pressure”, she says, “was truly outstanding”.

“On some days you’d see an example of something wonderful – and that gave me the strength to carry on as a leader.

A senior manager

ON THE INSIDE

The pandemic was hard on prisoners as well. They were aware of what was unfolding outside, and concerned about their loved ones – they had also heard the apocalyptic predictions about what it might mean for them.

One tells of worrying there might not be enough supplies, or staff, to keep them fed. “We were all stressing about it – buying up food to share it if we had to.” Panic buying, it seems, was not confined to the supermarkets.

“Just a message to the prison staff here at HMP

Featherstone, to let them know that they are doing an excellent job of keeping us prisoners safe in these strange times. As much as it kills me to admit it, thanks for what you have done and continue with the good work.

Letter to Inside Time

Added to that, as one Governor puts it, “On March 22nd, basic prison life ceased”. Visits; the gym and exercise; purposeful activities like education, training and work; and association – all were dramatically curtailed, or stopped altogether.

Yet the thousands of deaths never materialised, and we didn’t witness the riots and disturbances many feared. In fact, something remarkable happened. Key indicators, like violence, bullying, suicide, and self-harm, all began dropping, markedly, even as a global pandemic took hold.

Many of the people we spoke to recognised the contribution made by the prisoners themselves. The prisoners, though, gave the credit to staff.

“The Officers? They were great” one tells us; “They didn’t need to come in”, adds another, “they had families at home, but they still came in and looked after us” – sentiments repeated time and again, in letters to Inside Time, and shoutouts posted, via National Prison Radio, on the HiddenHeroes.uk message board.

They may not always see eye-to-eye, but in the teeth of the pandemic, prisoners knew how much they needed the staff, and recognised what they did.

To all the amazing Staff of A-wing
and our amazing NHS workers
We just wanted to say that we are very Grateful
Thankyou for being here for us and doing great work
in these very hard times
hope you are all Safe
a BIG THANKYOU

Letter to staff at HMP Nottingham

HMP YOI SWINFEN HALL

**THANK YOU FOR KEEPING
OUR LOVED ONES SAFE
DURING LOCKDOWN 2020**



MADE BY EL

To staff at HMP/YOI Swinfen Hall

St. Austell probation officers
3 King Avenue
St. Austell
PL25 4TT



Dear probation officers

I am writing to thank you for looking after
people who have been probationed.

From a member of the public to NPS South West

SPECIAL DELIVERY

This huge global disaster – caused by a microscopic virus – made small things seem big: the daily walk; ‘essential items’; a neighbourly check. And everyone learned that little things really matter.

In prisons, extraordinary circumstances demanded – and got – extraordinary responses: “The response was genuinely incredible,” says a Governor, who remembers thinking “whatever happens, we’ll get through this with compassion and decency.”

Throughout the sector, phrases like ‘decency agenda’ and ‘duty of care’ took on a new and vital urgency. Finding ways

to keep people healthy – physically and mentally – became absolutely critical.

Everywhere, it seems, people were going beyond the call of duty, bringing small acts of human kindness and a fresh creativity into play – “wee bits and pieces, that made all the difference”, according to another Governor.

Bits and pieces as simple – and important – as some extra reassurance, a friendly chat, more intensive welfare checks, a bit of help with something. A new normal that was like the old normal – but more so. “They worked wonders – really, just brilliant. Hats off to them.”



Left outside HMP/YOI Portland

“Acts of kindness were contagious,” says a third Governor, and a colleague recounts, by way of example, how a local group gives ‘thank you’ gifts to staff each Christmas, “but in 2020, every one of them gave theirs to the prisoners instead”.

Meanwhile, activity packs – “tens of thousands of them; they’re everywhere!” – helped people keep occupied behind their doors; carefully calibrated tweaks to the regime allowed a few more precious minutes out for phone calls and exercise; PEIs brought socially-distanced gym classes to yards, association areas, and even cells (“Just like Joe Wickes!”); and with libraries shut, books were delivered to the wings instead.

Many staff found themselves stepping into new roles to keep things going, covering for sick colleagues, or taking

on work usually done by prisoners, like preparing and delivering food, cleaning the wings, and maintaining the gardens. “Together, they made sure prisoners still got their food and fresh air, and they, and the prison, were kept clean and safe”.

“Staff kept using their initiative”, recalls an Officer. And those thousands of small changes made a big difference.

Out in the community, the challenges for those working in probation and youth justice were often different, but just as pressing – how could the public, and vulnerable service users, be kept safe, while offices were closed, and staff, as well as clients, were in lockdown?

“We did whatever it took”, one Youth Justice Manager explains, “it was about doing the business wherever and however possible”.



support groups, baking competitions, exercise classes, and much more besides.

With support services shut, new gaps emerged, and staff, says a senior probation manager, “were hugely creative” in filling them – like providing a 7-day helpline for those in need, and ‘dignity packs’ of essential items including food, baby formula, nappies, and sanitary products.

And while simple acts of kindness were everywhere, one

Phone calls and video chats became the default way for staff to keep in touch with and support service users, as well as each other.

Face-to-face meetings continued with the most vulnerable, and highest risk, offenders. But with offices shut, homes out of bounds, and doorsteps often far from ideal, staff quickly found other solutions, from walks in the park or nearby allotments, to sitting on a bench with a take-away coffee (and “sometimes even cake!”).

As in prisons, activity packs and ‘projects in a box’ helped keep people occupied while they were unable to leave their homes, alongside online courses and

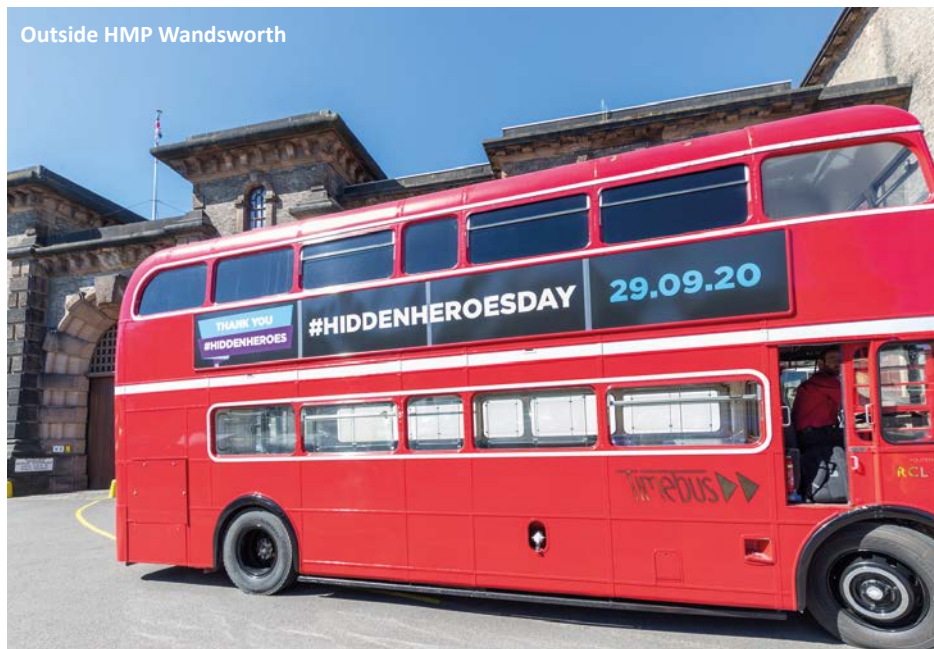
Probation Officer in Cornwall quite literally went the extra mile – and many more – for one especially vulnerable client. In a one car household, used by his wife who worked in the NHS, he took to walking miles in each direction, to give him the personal support he needed.

Whether going the extra mile or the extra inch, it all counted. It all added up. It made a difference. And it mattered.

“People have done brilliant work all over the place.

Abbie, resettlement manager

Outside HMP Wandsworth



From Lucy, aged 10, on www.HiddenHeroes.uk



Staff 'away day' – HMPs Bristol and Leyhill

TOGETHERNESS

In any crisis, when push comes to shove, human qualities are the ones that really count: the care and support of colleagues; the way teams come together through thick and thin; how relationships become deeper and more meaningful. And that's exactly what happened in the pandemic.

Ann, a special needs teacher in a prison, volunteered to help out on the landings when classes were stopped. She remembers "watching the teamwork of officers – it was unbelievable. I was just stood there in awe, making tea!" And the camaraderie was "really special. I was living on my own so they were the only people I saw for six months, and we

became a kind of family. A dysfunctional one, sometimes," she laughs, "but still a family."

"It was the power of teamwork and the support we gave each other that got us through", explains a Governor.

Another recalls how many of his older staff, who had moved into roles away from the front line, "wanted to go back to the landings and do their bit, rather than leaving less experienced staff to do it on their own. They were semi-retired and 'putting on their coats' and yet they came back in. And their experience and jailcraft really made a difference."

“It was all about
how we could
support each
other as a team, as a service,
and as a community.

Edwin, Youth Justice Worker

A third, describing the support of his colleagues, states simply: “I’ll be grateful to those people for the rest of my life.”

“Staff were brilliant at looking out for each other – we were like a big support bubble”, says PEI David. “We all felt like this was a real time”, recounts Marie, an AP worker, “real friendships, a real bond – the team just tightened”.

And while Prison Officer Grace was worried about returning to work after contracting Covid early on, “what happened was amazing – from the moment I stepped through the gate, there was love and friendship. I couldn’t have done it without them – and we got through it as a team.”

In talking with dozens of people across the sector about their coronavirus experiences, not one failed to speak about the power of people, about their colleagues, their teams, and the vital support of others – from a butty or a cup of tea, to a shoulder to cry on.

People come together in an emergency, and everyone wanted to acknowledge how much that meant.

A tasty treat for staff at Lincs NPS





MY NANA

A LAST WORD

This is a sector that rarely takes time out to pat itself on the back.

The people who work in prisons, probation, and youth justice, don't think of themselves as heroes. But they are.

Heroes do the difficult things. They protect and defend. They do what's right. They do not yield, they do not give in. They stand up in the face of adversity, hold their ground, and do their duty – whatever it takes. And that's exactly what they did.

The #HiddenHeroes in our justice sector did something truly remarkable in the

pandemic – and it took truly remarkable people to do it.

And while they may not think of themselves as special, they do recognise those qualities in their peers – “this superb bunch of people”, as one staff member puts it.

In the words of another, speaking (of course) about her colleagues rather than herself, “they have been a credit to themselves, a credit to their families, and a credit to the country.” And they say the same about her.

*I've grown and I've forged new relationships.
I've gained respect for my role and for others too,
who have all done things I didn't expect them to.*

*At the start you really found out a lot about people:
'Are you the kind of person who can stand up, who can do this?'
'In a fight or flight situation, have you got what it takes?'*

*And they had got it, and they did it.
And I was part of it.*

Mark, Prison Catering Manager

This is one of a series of publications recognising the *#HiddenHeroes* working in custodial and community justice settings across the UK, and is part of the Butler Trust's wider work to celebrate all that you do on behalf of both the public you serve, and the people in your care.

You can find out more about the Butler Trust and our *#HiddenHeroes* programme, as well as our Annual Awards for staff, and our work to share good practice across the sector, at www.butlertrust.org.uk and www.hiddenheroes.uk.



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