

## THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE PRISONER SUPPORT SERVICE

In the late 1990s the current Chair, Gill Vine DL, was invited to a Gavel Club meeting at HMP Springhill to speak about BACO. She met two serving prisoners there who expressed a keen interest in the work of BACO. They were invited to the next Executive Committee meeting, and continued to play an active role in the development of BACO activities, bringing the needs of prisoners in HMP Springhill that were not being met by official sources to BACO's attention.

It was from this early meeting and the suggestions from these prisoners that the Prisoner Support Service developed. Its primary purpose was to meet the prisoners on a one to one basis to receive requests for grants.

It began in HMP Springhill in the Autumn of 2000, and was run by BACO volunteers. The Executive soon realised that this was a service that could be expanded to other prisons and a bid was made to the Lankelly Trust to employ a worker. This was successful and in November 2001, Sharon Hallam became BACO's first and only employee. She recruited and trained four new volunteers to complement the four original volunteers, and managed to expand the Service for a brief time to HMP Woodhill, and to AYOI.

The funding for her post was limited so Sharon decided to move on after 18 months. This left a huge gap. *What was to be done?*

BACO reverted to being an organisation run solely by volunteers, but by this time BACO had established itself in the eyes of the prison service as a professional body and not merely a 'bunch of do-gooders!'

Fortunately a new volunteer, Ted Vine, expressed an interest and became the Prisoner Support Service Co-ordinator.

### BACO IN HMP GRENDON

Ted had a particular interest in HMP Grendon where he has developed the Support Service in many innovative ways. In November 2007 the first BACO Wing Representatives were appointed with their Communities' backing. They hold the application forms to meet BACO.

In February 2008 BACO was invited to attend the ***Interwing meetings*** which helped maintain and improve contact with Grendon Staff and Prisoners.

The ***Prisoner Support Service*** meetings are on the second Thursday in the month involving one or two volunteers, Ted Vine with Olwen Jenner, depending on numbers. On average some 140 prisoners are seen during the year.

BACO members who have been security cleared now have an open invitation to attend ***Wing Socials***. Members gain a good understanding of how Grendon works from direct contact with the men. BACO support is greatly appreciated by both prisoners and staff.

***The BACO Art Fund*** was set up with donations from prisoners and BACO members. Art materials were purchased to the value of £700 and distributed equally to the five Therapeutic Communities.

BACO donated a ***Communities Challenge Cup*** to HMP Grendon. This is a 'University Challenge' style competition which was an idea proposed by a prisoner at an Interwing meeting. BACO participates in the competition and invariably wins the wooden spoon! A ***Chess Cup*** has also been donated.

## BACO IN HMP SPRINGHILL

### **Town Visits**

BACO volunteers spend the day with the prisoners concerned in local towns. This is a vital service for those men who have no family or friends to take them out for the necessary 2 town visits which are essential in the rehabilitation process leading to community work and paid work.

The **Prisoner Support Service** meetings are on the last Thursday in the month involving three volunteers, Ted Vine with Keith Westbury and Olwen Jenner. On average some 176 prisoners are seen during the year.

There is a **BACO Orderly** in HMP Springhill who deals with applications for the Support Service, Town Visits and Clothing, and manages the BACO clothing store, which was set up in response to prisoners' requests. Some clothing is donated by members and some by chain stores.

BACO is invited to attend Focus Meetings together with other voluntary organisations working in the prison.

## **BACO IN AYLESBURY YOUNG OFENDERS INSTITUTION (AYOI)**

In 2006 the Prisoner Support Service was set up in AYOI but failed to take off largely due to lack of structure and support.

In early 2010 the Support Service was restarted and with greater support is slowly making progress and gaining ground.

In 2010 **Wing Representatives** were appointed in each of the 8 wings.

As the population of AYOI is more fluid than HMP Grendon many of them are only in post for relatively short periods.

Both the Library and Wing Reps hold application forms to meet BACO. There is a post box for the applications in the Library. The Librarian leaves any applications at the Gate for collection by BACO.

## **BACO IN HMP WOODHILL**

Sadly no Prisoner Support Service is yet established, but a number of grants are being made through Resettlement.

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*All grant applications for serving prisoners received by Support Service volunteers are sent to the BACO Grants Secretary with recommendations, and are then processed and approved by the Committee.*

## **PROBATION**

Applications for grants for ex-offenders are made to the Grants Secretary by email from Probation Service staff for processing and approval by the Committee.