

Guiding defendants' families on their journey through the courts

For many defendants' families, court dates are the beginning of a long and difficult journey lasting for months or even years. The backlog of cases waiting to go to court continues to rise, and the remand population has risen to the highest level in 50 years. Families face the challenges of prolonged waiting times, often distressed, isolated, and scared to reach out to their usual support networks due to fear of judgment.

Pact supports people at every stage of the criminal justice system and has developed its Court Service to respond to growing need at the very start of the justice process. Currently active in 12 courts across London, the South East and Wales, including one Youth Court, our mission is to ensure that no one faces these challenges alone.

With funding from National Lottery Wales, Tracey and Charleigh provide a new service at Swansea Crown Court, helped by a small team of dedicated volunteers. Both women have experience supporting a loved one in prison and have previously volunteered for Pact. Tracey explains: "We are here to be a familiar face and build rapport with the families without judgment. We provide a link between the defendant and their family through court proceedings until sentencing. Families are often very anxious, emotional and in a state of crisis. We help by explaining what will happen next and demystifying the language used in court."

"We offer support at the earliest point of the justice journey and help families with the transition to custody when their loved one is sentenced. We have a fantastic relationship with the court staff, which is vital to our work. We couldn't do what we do

without it. Last Friday, we supported 41 families through court proceedings, ensuring we spoke to all of them! Our feet didn't touch the ground all day."

During court proceedings, families often feel locked out and unable to access information such as which prison their loved one has been sent to. They may also feel unable to pass on important information about their loved one's health, medication, or disabilities. Tracey tells us: "We recently had a case where the prison staff collecting a defendant found him uncooperative and stubborn – he was, in fact, deaf. We identify these issues with the family and work hard to ensure the prison is aware of them. We've created a new system that captures key information to be passed to the prison staff collecting the defendant after sentencing – it's helpful for everyone and reassuring for families."



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"It's made a real difference having the Pact Court Service here. Families are definitely better off now, and we would not want to be without them." (Court Manager)

"Getting to grips with a loved one going to prison is tough, and there is often confusion about what happens next. We've put together an information pack covering everything you could possibly need to know as a family member visiting someone for the first time: issues such as clothing, medication, what happens on visits, and the paperwork you need to understand. It's a complete guide to the process, and families have benefitted enormously from being involved in developing the pack. Simple improvements like this can make such a massive difference."

"Thank you to the Pact court trio who supported me through the worst day of my life. The help you've given me is invaluable, I wouldn't have known any of this information without you. Court can be very isolating and frightening, but Pact has enabled me to navigate it. Thank you so much, I'm so grateful!"

You must be resilient if you work in the courts. You see first-hand the impact of issues such as poverty, trauma and mental ill health on individuals and their families. As I meet people, I learn that everyone has their own story. I fear what would happen if Pact wasn't there for people, and I find it so rewarding knowing we can make a difference. We are so privileged to be doing this work at Swansea. At the end of the day, empathy and compassion are the driving force for what we do."



Professor Jim McManus appointed new Chair of Pact

We are delighted to welcome Professor Jim McManus as the new Chair of Pact! Jim is the National Director of Health and Wellbeing at Public Health Wales and has previously held a number of senior posts in the health sector.

He holds a range of academic and advisory roles reflecting his expertise in public health, psychology, influencing and strategy, at the highest levels. Jim's arrival comes at a time when Pact is increasingly focusing on the healthcare of people in prison, ensuring families can play a greater role in the care of their loved ones inside.

The health of people in prison is at historically low levels – life expectancy is 20 years younger than the general population. Half of the people in prison have a mental health problem; rates of self-harm are near record levels and one in three has a serious drug addiction.



Professor Jim McManus said: "This is a great time to be joining Pact as the charity continues to grow and provide its crucial services to ever greater numbers of people. It's an honour to represent an organisation whose staff work so tirelessly to support people in prison and their families to make a fresh start.

"The challenges facing the criminal justice system are well documented, but Pact makes a difference to people's lives every day. "I'd like to pay tribute to Phil Taylor, my predecessor as Chair, who has steered Pact through a period of significant change and growth.



CATHOLIC LEGACY WEEK 20-26 MAY

Pact is a member of Your Catholic Legacy – a group of Catholic charities working together to inspire legacy giving. Your Catholic Legacy Week is 20th May to 27th May. Gifts left to us by Catholic supporters in their wills make a lasting difference to the lives of people affected by imprisonment. If you're thinking about leaving a gift in your will to Pact, and would like to speak to us about this, **please contact Chris Dunne by phone on 07710170942 or by email mylegacy@prisonadvice.org.uk**

Prisoners' Sunday 2024

'This day...with me...in paradise'.

Luke 23:43

This year's Prisoners' Sunday takes place on 13th October 2024. We would love you and your parish to be involved!

We are working with Catholic bishops to mark the day by celebrating dedicated Cathedral Masses. Last year, inspired by the number of parishes recognising Prisoner's Sunday, Bishops led the way, bringing new awareness to the plight of people affected by imprisonment. Prisoners' Sunday Mass was celebrated in eight cathedrals across England and Wales, & we hope to increase this number this year.

Prisoners' Sunday is Pact's only annual appeal. Parish support makes a huge difference, and we are really grateful when parishes commit to holding a second collection to raise funds to support prisoners and their families. We can arrange for one of our staff or volunteers to come to speak on the day. They are able to bring Pact's work to life in a very moving & powerful way.



Prisoners Sunday 2023 has so far raised an incredible £66,729! Thank you to all who have contributed!

Please consider getting involved in some way....



Ask your parish priest to mark Prisoners' Sunday. All Catholic parishes will receive a pack in the post in September.



Invite a Pact speaker, or speak on our behalf – we will provide the support you need!



Clash with another event? No problem! Simply organise your Pact collection for an alternative week.



Organise a fundraising event, such as our parish-to-prison pilgrimage.

Please contact us at parish.action@prisonadvice.org.uk for more information.



Hello to Julia Corcoran!

Welcome to our new Head of Faith in Action, Julia Corcoran! She started with us in March and has spent the last few weeks familiarising herself with the work of Pact & our services. Julia is thrilled to be part of the Pact team working with Churches and faith communities to support prisoners, people with convictions and their children and families. Julia has worked for Operation Noah, CAFOD, the Columbans, Westminster Diocese Justice and Peace Commission, Catholic Youth Ministry Federation, amongst others. Julia also works with the Jesuits in Britain to present their Thinking Faith Podcast. She is a wonderful addition to the team - welcome Julia!

Thank you to our London Marathon runners

A huge thank you to our brave London Marathon Runners, who have given blood, sweat and tears to support Pact's work! To Kelly Groves & Dan Fox (both London Stock Exchange Group), Anna Holmes and Rebecca Smart (Kingsley Napley) Hope Oxley-Green (Clifford Chance) and Richard Bosworth. They have raised an incredible £10,956! On behalf of all at Pact, you have our immense gratitude & appreciation!

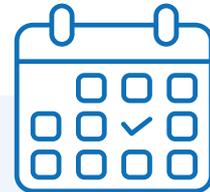


Events and dates for the diary

Go to www.prisonadvice.org.uk/events or scan the QR code



- Volunteers Week - 3rd to 9th June 2024
- Archdiocese of Birmingham Hednesford Pilgrimage - Saturday 7th July 2024
- Prisoners' Sunday – Sunday 13th October 2024



Staying in touch



We always respect our supporters' wishes and would like to know if you're happy to keep receiving Fresh Start. If you are, then you don't need to do anything.

If you'd like us to stop sending Fresh Start or if your contact details have changed, [please get in touch at fresh.start@prisonadvice.org.uk](mailto:fresh.start@prisonadvice.org.uk)

Pact is the national Catholic charity supporting prisoners, people with convictions and their children and families.

We provide caring and life-changing services at every stage of the criminal justice process: in court, in prison, on release, and in the community.

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