



Prisoners • Families • Communities  
A Fresh Start Together

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# Fresh Start

The supporter newsletter of the Prison Advice & Care Trust (Pact) -  
the national Catholic prison charity.

# Championing change in prisons

**If you are a regular Fresh Start reader, you will know that we have been saying that the prison system is in crisis for many years now. And now, finally, it is official, as the new government is saying it too. And so, we are promised 'change'.**

We offer the government our insights and wait for policy and system change to happen, which must include urgently needed investment. Meanwhile, thanks to your support, we carry on, as we always have, sleeves rolled up on the prison wings and landings. The change we make happen every day is in the human heart. People only change when they believe it is possible and when they find the motivation.

In this edition of Fresh Start, we hear from Nathan. Nathan is one of a number of Pact workers who know what it means to have been on the wrong side of a prison cell door. He now makes a difference every day, supporting men and women in prison to become Pact 'Peer Support' volunteers while they are still serving a sentence. In some

prisons, these Peer Support Volunteers are called 'Pact Champions'.

Our idea is simple. For each man or woman we equip to become a Pact Champion, we offer the opportunity to turn the worst of experiences into a fresh start and new direction. It's a chance to demonstrate kindness, support others, and 'pay back.' And for every man or woman we train in this way, dozens of others in prison and in society will benefit. They encourage other prisoners to use their time well, to think about what they can do to make it better for their families, and to keep hopeful. They show simple kindness in a cold place.

Nathan's work, like so much we do, depends on the charitable donations and gifts we receive from people like you. With your continued generous support and Nathan's determination, our ambition is to one day see teams of Pact Champions in every prison wing in England and Wales.

**Andy Keen-Downs, Pact CEO**



# From prisoner to peer:

## *Nathan's journey of redemption*

**After spending years in a revolving door in and out of prison, Nathan now works for Pact. He works with people in prison, training them to support their peers. Here, he reflects on how he uses his experience to give others a fresh start.**

I've found out that my story isn't uncommon: a tough upbringing, a single-parent home, ending up in the care system, and going on to a life of substance misuse and crime. I first went to prison at 17. I remember that feeling of terror when I first went in. The prison was like a big castle on a hill, and I was just a kid. But that fear wasn't enough to stop me from offending again. Prison wasn't a deterrent, and I ended up back in prison 15 times over the years.

Prison can be a cold, heartless environment. There was no love, no help, no support. People get hurt or stabbed, and everything just carries on as normal. Friends and families often turn away after a certain point, leaving you with absolutely no one. I recently spoke to a family travelling 300 miles to visit a loved one. You can see why visits get rarer over the years.

But there were people I remember along the way who offered me kindness. There was a social worker who visited me when I was in prison, a teacher who tried to get through to me, and a couple of prison drug workers. I remember one saying, "You might as well try something new; what you're doing keeps landing you back in here!". I thought, "How dare he talk to me like that!?" When I calmed down, the penny dropped. He was absolutely right. These people stood out for their warmth in a cold environment.

From then on, I began to look for opportunities to turn my life around. Looking back, my journey has become useful. I've been able to turn all my mistakes into experiences that can benefit others. I can talk to people in the same hole I was in and tell them there is another way. My work as Pact's Peer Worker Quality and Development Manager builds on that. Our Peer Workers support our family services. They are trained to support vulnerable prisoners as they are orientated into prison. It is fantastic for reducing stress and pressure on new prisoners, and it gives the peers the opportunity to develop professional skills and gain work experience. Watching them grow and choose a new way of approaching life is just wonderful.

We need to ask what we want to achieve with prison. What is it for? The current prison model isn't reducing crime. We have the same group of people who keep going back in, so the idea that it provides a deterrent doesn't wash. I don't believe that people would willingly choose the misery and degradation of the cycle of crime and prison. We take the most damaged people in society and inflict more damage on them and their families as a punishment. Then we let them out of prison and hope they'll behave themselves! I believe that if we can offer them a real alternative to that hamster wheel, they'll willingly take it. I was thrown out of school without a GCSE, so if I can do it, I'm sure anyone can.

I love Pact's values of believing in the innate dignity of each person and how we invest in keeping families together. We have a lot of kind, loving, committed, creative people who really believe in the difference our work makes. I often think about what is needed to fix our broken criminal justice system. It will take investment, that's for sure. We need fresh thinking and approaches, and it won't happen overnight. We have begun to look at the principles of restorative justice but have only scratched the surface of how it might help.

For those of us working in the system, though, we can be that person who shows love and kindness to people who have often stopped loving and caring for themselves. Those little acts of kindness and generosity along the way can make such a difference. The little acts all add up and can help people to change their lives.

Pact's work makes a real difference to prisoners and their families at what is often the most difficult time of their lives, just like the people who showed me kindness along my journey.







# Prisoners' Sunday

13 October 2024

**Serve those affected by imprisonment**  
*this Prisoners' Sunday*

**Our prisons are in crisis. There are record numbers of people behind bars. Inspectors regularly report instances of vermin, violence, self-harm and people languishing in cells with nothing to do. At the same time, too many people are released with no home, no job, no family and no hope.**

The ripple effects of this crisis are felt well beyond the prison walls. The lives of hundreds of thousands of families and children are affected as they, too, serve a hidden sentence. Having a loved one in prison can have a devastating impact – more than half of families tell us they are struggling to afford the basics for themselves and their children.

As the leading Catholic charity in prisons, we have been helping people in need for 125 years. We support prisoners and their families, offering them hope and the chance to turn their lives around. Our work at Pact draws on the values of our faith: dignity, solidarity, and subsidiarity. We believe that everyone can make a fresh start.

Last year, our dedicated staff and volunteers supported more than 485,000 visits, took over 33,000 calls to the Prisoners' Families Helpline and helped over 400 people with emergency welfare grants. Our work is a lifeline for thousands of people struggling to stay afloat or make a fresh start.

The theme for Prisoners' Sunday this year is "Today you will be with me in paradise". It reminds us that while Jesus was dying on the cross, He was still comforting those who believed in Him and promising eternal life. Jesus could have ignored the two thieves beside Him and focused on His own pain, but instead, He comforted the prisoner.

Jesus said in the parable of the sheep and goats that to have a life worthy of the reward of Heaven, it must involve actively helping people in need – "I needed clothes, and you clothed me, I was sick, and you looked after me, I was in prison, and you came to visit me."

Prisoners' Sunday is an opportunity to put your faith in action and consider how we as individuals, as a Church, and as communities serve our brothers and sisters affected by imprisonment.

By supporting Pact and Prisoners' Sunday, you can help to bring light to those in prison and their families.

**We need your help now more than ever. You can:**



**Invite us to speak** in your church on or around Prisoners' Sunday and hold a second collection for Pact. Get in touch at [parish.action@prisonadvice.org.uk](mailto:parish.action@prisonadvice.org.uk)

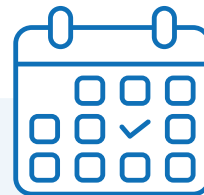


**Donate** to our Prisoners' Sunday appeal



**Pray** for prisoners and their families.

## Events and dates for the diary



Go to  
[www.prisonadvice.org.uk/events](http://www.prisonadvice.org.uk/events)  
or scan the QR code

- **13 October 2024**  
**Prisoners' Sunday**

Mass will be celebrated  
for Prisoners' Sunday in the  
following Cathedrals:

**Arundel and Brighton** (10 am),  
**Birmingham** (11.30 am),  
**Clifton** (11.15 am),

**Hallam** (12.30 pm),  
**Leeds** (11.00 am),  
**Nottingham** (10am),  
**Northampton** (11 am),  
**Southwark** (10 am),  
**Wrexham**

- **15 October 2024**  
**Prisoners' Sunday Mass at Westminster Cathedral**

- **3 December 2024**  
**Pact Carol Service, Our Lady of Victories, Kensington**



**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.

member  
**caritas**  
social action network



## 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, you can get in touch by:

**Telephone:** 07710 170 942

**Email:** [fresh.start@prisonadvice.org.uk](mailto:fresh.start@prisonadvice.org.uk)

**Post:** Pact, 29 Peckham Road, London, SE5 8UA

**Website:** [www.prisonadvice.org.uk](http://www.prisonadvice.org.uk)

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