

The **FORGIVENESS** project newsletter

20th April 2009

Dear Friends and Supporters,

In January this year we celebrated our fifth anniversary. It's been quite a journey and it was wonderful to see so many people attend who have been part of the project since the beginning. Our patron, Lord Woolf, spoke on behalf of the charity, and Richard McCann shared some of his story which began aged six when his mother became the first victim of Peter Sutcliffe. Adding some glamour to the event, we had one of the F Word stories read by Harry Potter actor, Jason Isaacs. Guests included Tony Benn, Lord Ramsbottom (the former Chief Inspector of Prisons) plus our new patron Lady Simone Warner.



Myself and our patron Lord Woolf with Andrew Cousins. Picture on the right: Jason Isaacs with patron Lord Stone of Blackheath.

A Sad Loss

Very sadly one of our trustees, Bernie Trude, died at the beginning of the year. Bernie became a trustee in 2007 and despite his long battle with cancer, was an active and very committed member of the team. At his funeral he was described as a man of "deep humanity" and I'd certainly agree with that. I'm very glad that I met and worked with such a motivated and inspiring individual.

Prison Programme

In the past six months we've run our prison programme at HMPs High Down, Guys Marsh, Wandsworth and Featherstone. The course, which explores forgiveness in prisoners' lives, has become very popular with prisoners, officers and governors alike. Fitting under the victim awareness/ restorative justice umbrella, we find increasingly that Probation are recommending this course because the prison service itself provide very few courses focussing on developing victim empathy. A letter arrived in the office just last week from Kieron - a prisoner from HMP Featherstone who recently participated in our course. Keiron's reaction is not unusual. He wrote: "If you would have told me 2 weeks ago that my life was going to change I would never have believed you. When I first went on The Forgiveness Project course it was for the benefit of Offender Management and ticking the correct boxes. After the first introductory day I was mesmerized by it all. Listening to Richard McCann's story was a turning point in my life. I knew from that moment that I wanted to do something with my life..."

We wouldn't be able to do the work we do in prisons without a small number of ex-offenders who help facilitate our programme, and also our peer facilitators inside prison (these are prisoners who have done the course and then return to help with the next one).

In February we officially received our Open College Network (London Region) accreditation for the digital media course we run at HMP High Down. Under the tuition of TV director, Alastair Pirrie, we have produced six cutting edge films all devised and created by prisoners. Committing their stories to film is a powerful way for prisoners to strengthen victim empathy and convey remorse.

New Stories

We have collected yet more inspirational stories and posted them on our website. Read about Mary Foley whose daughter was stabbed to death in 2005,



photo: Brian Moody

<http://www.theforgivenessproject.com/stories/Mary-Foley>

And Will Riley and Peter Woolf, victim and former offender, who met at a restorative justice conference seven years ago.



photo: David Levene

<http://www.theforgivenessproject.com/stories/Peter-%26-Will>

Education

We plan in the next few months to pilot our education programme. We're interested in hearing from any teacher/school who might be interested in taking part in a workshop to help look at ways of engaging and motivating young people to explore the concept of forgiveness. We feel that in order to create a more substantial and sustainable work programme with schools we need to involve the participation of teachers from the outset. Any useful learning or resources created by the teachers and students will then be posted on our website for other schools to make use of.

In the meantime seminars and workshops continue in schools on an ad hoc basis. After The F Word exhibition was at Hampton School in February this year, the teacher organising the event wrote to say, "Thank you so much for enabling us to host this magnificent educational resource - quite the best for engaging pupils in discussion of key human themes that I have ever come across"• .

The Long Road



In November, we revived The Long Road at The Soho Theatre in London following its sell out performance in May. Written by award winning playwright, Shelagh Stephenson, the play was commissioned by Synergy Theatre Project in collaboration with The Forgiveness Project. During the first run we toured to a number of prisons, while the second run concentrated on developing a workshop programme in several London schools. The Long Road revival also benefited from a third partner, Why Me? - a victim organisation set up to promote restorative justice.

Forgiveness Research

Anna Bishop, who is undertaking research for an M.Phil in Psychology and Theology at Cambridge University, is looking for candidates to interview about the psychological barriers to accepting forgiveness and the psychological benefits of accepting forgiveness. She writes: "I would like to interview people who either have or have not accepted forgiveness, in confidence of course. I am looking for up to 30 people to talk to. Anyone interested should email me at: amb214@cam.ac.uk."

Trustees/pro bono support

We are looking for new trustees with experience of employment law/finance/human resources. Please email marina@theforgivenessproject.com if you are interested in joining our team.

Also our website is in need of a thorough re-design so any pro-bono advice/support in this area would be much appreciated.

Funding

Finally, we are, as ever, extremely grateful and indebted to our funders without whom we would not be able to continue our work. A very special thank you goes to: The Monument Trust, The Henry Smith Charity, Wates Foundation, McGrath Charitable Trust, The Pilgrim Trust, The Bromley Trust, The Rayne Foundation and Forster.

With very best wishes
Marina Cantacuzino