

Annual report – October 2020

What an extraordinary year we're having. Lots of people said to me that this awful virus would affect us for 12 months and that there would be a second wave, but I don't think I really thought it would happen. I still hope we will be back in the prison early next year, but perhaps I'm just being too optimistic.

I was very sad that we had to cancel our annual meeting scheduled for 13th October. Of course, we have also had to cancel our April meeting and our summer outing in July, which means that the last time I saw you, if you came, was at last year's Christmas dinner. I'm particularly disappointed to tell you that we have to cancel this year's Christmas meal as well as I think we could all do with a nice fun meal out.

Enough of that - we need some good news.

We really appreciate the way so many of you have been keeping in touch and responding to various communications from Jane. It is great to know that you're there and still supporting FOPP, even though we are unable to support residents and staff directly. Jane reported at our recent board meeting that she has had a number of enquiries from people who are interested in joining FOPP, and we hope this will continue, even though it's difficult to go through the recruitment process at the moment.

We're very pleased that FOPP has received its annual financial support from Sodexo. I think this really shows how much Damian Evans (the prison's director) values our contribution and that he wants us to be able to return to the prison in due course. This second wave has definitely put everything back. In fact, Jane had an email recently from a manager at the prison saying that moving into the next stage and reinstating certain activities had all been put on hold. When we do return, we will need to make sure everyone is as safe as possible, and that will involve certain costs for providing volunteers and staff with PPE and carrying out careful risk assessments. FOPP is very keen to make sure people feel safe about returning to volunteering.

Jane, our Volunteer Coordinator, has been doing a brilliant job of keeping in touch with us all and updating us with any prison information she receives. At the end of March, when lockdown began, Jane was working her normal hours from home and continued to do this until mid-May, when directors took the decision to furlough her. Mary, our Tea Bar Assistant had been furloughed from the start of the scheme and unfortunately has been unable to work since the lockdown began, as the Tea Bar has been closed. Jane has been working from home three hours a week since the beginning of July. For the last few weeks, she has also been popping into the office at the prison for an hour or so each week, taking all the appropriate Covid precautions.



Supporting prisoners, their families and friends

Normally in this annual report I would mention some numbers related to, for example, volunteer sessions attended, customers served at the Tea Bar and one or two others. However, this year so far we've only been able to report one quarter's figures which on their own are not really very meaningful. Anything that we've wanted to communicate with you has either been sent via email or put on the website, or more often than not we've done both.

I've been so pleased that we have our new improved website. It really is a great resource, and if you haven't already signed up as a member I would urge you to do so. You will probably have seen an email from Jane recently about this. I really appreciate the endless work David Hobbs has put into this. He keeps it up to date with all relevant FOPP information, making it fresh and useful. Our annual accounts, carefully prepared by Mick Farley, are up there in the members area as well. David also improves the site and recently spent a few days converting the website to use a secure protocol for communication, not because we are exchanging sensitive information but because it is the modern standard for all websites.

The next get together we were due to hold is, of course, our Christmas meal. I think we all had fun last year and enjoyed some good food at the Gordon Arms on the Oundle Road. It is such a shame that we won't be able to meet up, but it's going to be even more of a shame if we can't get together with our families and friends over Christmas. Let's try to stay positive and hope that things will have improved by then and celebrations will be able to take place. I hope you've seen Jane's email of 15th October with a suggestion to hold a virtual Christmas get together. Please do get back to her with your thoughts.

Anyway, enough from me and over to you - please keep in touch and let us know how things are going for you in these very tricky times.

Jen Robertson
Chair of FOPP

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