

# explore...

lasting relationships and marriage

20/November/12

Dear Mr Rogers,

I understand that you have recently been appointed as Governor of Winchester Prison. My wife and I send you our good wishes for your future success in this challenging role.

I am writing to you in connection with the recent announcement by the Justice Secretary, Chris Brayling, to the effect that "every prisoner released in England and Wales should have their own mentor to help them get their lives back on track".

My wife Sarah has been involved with a Langley House Trust project for ex-offenders called Elderfield at Otterbourne for some 17 years. She has also been attached to the Chaplains Department at Winchester Prison and was, for a time, an Official Prison Visitor (OPV) also at Winchester. She is currently in touch to a greater or lesser extent with some 20-30 ex-offenders in what could best be described as a befriending/mentoring capacity. There have been a number of remarkable success stories of ex-offenders who, with her help, support and encouragement have managed to turn their lives around.

We have a handful of friends who like Sarah have a deep concern for these men most of whose life chances

have been bedevilled by rejection by their parents, homelessness lack of education etc etc.

The plan put forward by Mr Brayling envisages involvement by private and voluntary sector groups. However Probation Officers whilst welcoming the idea have expressed doubt as to whether enough mentors could be found. Re-offending as we all know is a huge problem as ~~we all know~~ with almost half of adult prisoners being re-convicted within a year of release.

I would suggest that it is beyond the scope of the probation service to deliver on this plan. I would also suggest that it is highly unlikely that there will be a ~~great~~ queue of people out there who are prepared to offer themselves for the role of mentor to ex-offenders.

Here in Hampshire is a ready made group of people who have had considerable experience in mentoring ex-offenders who are prepared to offer their services. But it has to be a partnership and there has to be a strong element of mutual trust and respect between the appropriate staff within the prison responsible for rehabilitation and the Winchester Prison Mentoring Group. If some form of training could be made available in the initial stages that would obviously be highly desirable/essential.

You may wonder at this letter heading. I am the Founder of Explore whose mission is "to enable young people to explore the realities of lasting relationships and marriage in the context of today's society". Explore has worked in 14 prisons over the years, including Winchester, and is currently involved at Brixton in Whitechapel and the Verne at Portland. I am sure the relevant staff

at those locations would be happy to speak of the value of the work which Explore is doing for them.

There is a substantial body of evidence to show that one of the main things that helps an offender get his life back on track is to establish a lasting relationship with a member of the opposite sex and to create a family of his/her own.

I am sure that you have come to Warrington to find an enormous pile of stuff, all of it urgent, sitting on your desk requiring your attention in short order. However if you felt that the ideas to which I endeavoured to put forward in this letter have any merit perhaps a meeting to discuss them around the table would be a useful and constructive next step.

with kind regards

Yours sincerely,

Lex Chester