



# The Prisons Awareness Course

Session 1: Taster  
Session 2: Experience  
Session 3: Action

Updated Jan 22

*The Welcome Directory. Helping faith communities welcome and support people leaving prison*



# Welcome to Session 1: Taster

**The Prisons Awareness Course**



# About The Welcome Directory

The Welcome Directory has a simple yet powerful vision:

To help faith communities become places where people who leave prison find **acceptance**. A place to **belong** that not only **nurtures faith** but also offers appropriate practical support.

**People** are at the very heart of this work; people who have found the benefits of being part of a faith community whether inside or outside the prison gates. Those leaving prison have a **name**, a **story** as well as **hopes and dreams** for their lives beyond the prison gate.



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# Aims & Objectives

For faith communities to explore the themes, ideas and information surrounding prison, imprisonment and release, leading to a greater understanding of the issues, such as the consequences of a prison sentence and the difference that support can make.

The aims of this session are to:

- Explore attitudes towards prison and prisoners
- Understand the reality of prison and the conditions
- Recognise why The Welcome Directory exists
- Consider the issues surrounding resettlement for the prison leaver
- Consider the scale and backgrounds of prisoners and how this impacts them prior to imprisonment and upon release
- Consider your own faith and how it can provide guidance on how to respond towards people leaving prison
- Consider some of the ways to be part of a compassionate response



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# Overview

- Welcome & Introductions
- Beyond the Prison Gates
- Reflections & Activities
  - Starting Place Survey
  - Everything Changes at the Prison Gate
  - Understanding Backgrounds
  - Experience Q&A
  - What Do Faith Communities Teach and Do?
- Summary, Next Session & Questions





# Beyond the Prison Gates

**What do you think about people leaving prison?**

Many prisons stand enclosed behind a **25ft fence** and unless it is an open prison, most prisoners are confined to often **cramped cells** for much of the time, **hidden away** from the general public; **forgotten**.

Unless we have experienced it for ourselves, it can be **hard to understand** the consequences of a prison sentence and what support can make a difference.





# Starting Place Survey

Begin by becoming aware of where you are at. Allow your mind to bring some of your thoughts and feelings about prisons and prisoners to the surface, recognising that it can sometimes be **very hard to voice your honest thoughts**.

Spend a few minutes filling out The **Welcome Directory Attitudinal Awareness Survey**. Your responses have the option to remain anonymous and will help us work towards a rehabilitative society.





# Starting Place Survey

## **Note your position between 1 and 7**

1. If someone who has left prison came to your faith community would you...  
*(1 keep your distance/ 7 accept them)*
2. If someone who had left prison told you their story would you...  
*(1 be sceptical/ 7 seek to understand)*
3. In your heart of hearts how do you feel towards people with a criminal past...  
*(1 judgemental/ 7 impartial)*
4. If someone who had left prison and sought your help would you...  
*(1 point them in the direction of others/ 7 offer care and support)*
5. If someone who had left prison sought your friendship would you...  
*(1 keep them at arms length/ 7 be open to being a friend)*
6. If someone told you that they had been to prison would you allow that information...  
*(1 influence the present/ 7 be left in the past)*





# Starting Place Survey

## Complete the sentence

7. Prison is .....
8. Someone who has left prison .....
9. If someone who has left prison wanted to become a member of your faith community they would .....





# The Purpose of a Prison Sentence

The **Criminal Justice Act of 2003**, Section 142 makes the purposes of sentencing very clear. Any court dealing with an offender in respect of their offence must have regard to the following purposes of sentencing:

- (a) the punishment of offenders,
- (b) the reduction of crime (including its reduction by deterrence),
- (c) the reform and rehabilitation of offenders,
- (d) the protection of the public, and
- (e) the making of reparation by offenders to persons affected by their offences



Her Majesty's Prison Service website says that "it serves the public by keeping in custody those committed by the courts. Our duty is to look after them with humanity and help them lead law-abiding and useful lives in custody and after release."

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# A Snapshot of Prison

These statistics are collated by the Prison Reform Trust and are intended to give a snapshot of the reality of prison and the current conditions:

- **5,620 fewer staff** looking after more than **800 additional people**
- The prison population in England and Wales is **78,037**
- The prison population has **risen by 82%** in the last 30 years
- The prison **daily food budget** is **£2.02 per person**
- **66%** of prisons in England and Wales were **overcrowded**, the majority doubling up in cells designed for one
- **49% of adults** are reconvicted within one year of being released. For those serving sentences of less than 12 months this increases to **58%**. For under 18-year-olds, **68%** are reconvicted within a year of release.
- The prison population is projected to grow by a quarter in the next five years.

*Since 2010*

*June 2021*

*2015-2016*

*2016-2017*

## Winston Churchill, 1910

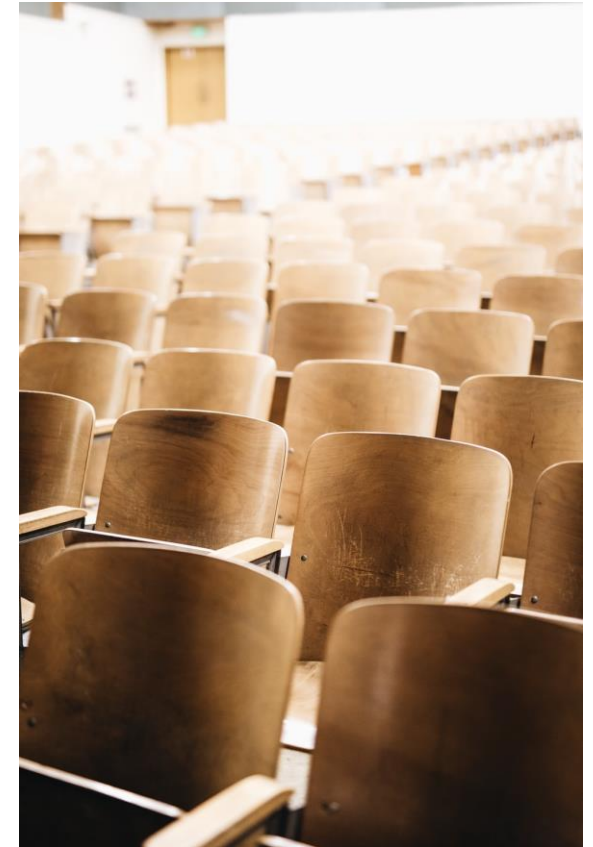
“We must not forget that when every material improvement has been effected in prisons, when the temperature has been rightly adjusted, when the proper food to maintain health and strength has been given, when the doctors, chaplains and prison visitors have come and gone, **the convict stands deprived of everything that a free man calls life**. We must not forget that all these improvements, which are sometimes salves to our consciences, do not change that position....”

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# Everything Changes at the Prison Gates

- **Why does The Welcome Directory even exist?**
  - Approx. 15% of our prison population attends worship of some kind every week
  - Approx. 7,950 people with faith who worship in prison, leaves each month each year
  - Approx. 660 every month or 150 every week!
  - Yet only 20% join a faith community upon release
  - That's 120 people per week not connected with a welcoming and supportive faith community upon release every week







# Everything Changes at the Prison Gates

## Talking Points:

- **What do you think changes** for people when they leave prison? Think about the practicalities of life and their relationships.
- How might those changes **affect the way prisoners feel about making connections** with a faith community?
- **What are the practical barriers** for someone who has left prison in building connections with a faith community?





# Understanding Backgrounds

Study the **Prisoner Factsheet** on your own.



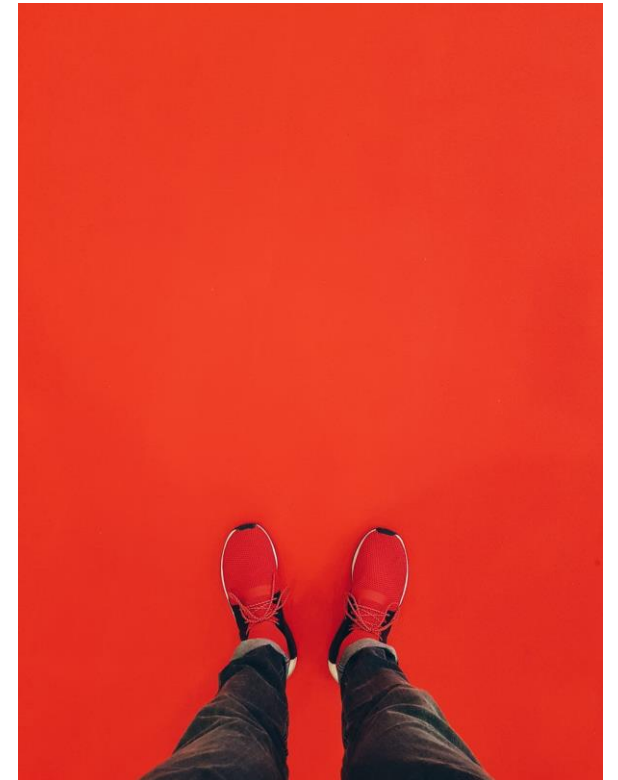


# Understanding Backgrounds

In your group choose two of the subject areas on the “Prison Factsheet” to discuss: housing, education, work, mental health, alcohol and drugs, finance and relationships.

## Talking points:

- **What would it feel like to have the issues mentioned on the ‘Prisoner Factsheet’, in the area you are discussing?**
- How might those issues create **barriers for people rebuilding a positive life** after release from prison?



# Experience

From a chaplain...



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# What Do Faith Communities Teach and Do?



These ten words begin to highlight some of the important themes that communities can consider as they prepare to welcome people leaving prison:

**ROLLERCOASTER**

**INCLUSION**

**ACCEPTANCE**

**EXAMPLE**

**SOLIDARITY**

**DIFFICULT**

**DISEMPOWERING**

**BEFRIENDING**

**TRUST**

**BELONGING**

# What do Faith Communities Teach and Do?



In your group choose **three** of these words to discuss:

**ROLLERCOASTER**, **INCLUSION**, **ACCEPTANCE**, **EXAMPLE**, **SOLIDARITY**, **DIFFICULT**,  
**DISEMPOWERING**, **BEFRIENDING**, **TRUST**, **BELONGING**

## Talking points:

- **What does your religion/fait**h teach about those words, and how might that **affect your response** to people who have been in prison?
- How have faith communities you know of **addressed these issues**?
- Do you think there is a **gap between what your faith community teaches and what it does** with regards to welcoming prison leavers?

**Important question:** In what way can you help your faith community address at least one of the issues we have just discussed?

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# Summary

- Opportunity to explore your own views and attitudes
- Understanding of backgrounds of prison leavers and statistics
- Understand the challenges of release
- Reflect on what your faith and beliefs say about prison leavers
- Opportunity to consider how to respond





# Next Session: Experience

## Connecting with Local Faith Communities

- Prison Leavers
- Prison Chaplains
- Community Chaplains
- Members of Faith Communities

## Video: Connections





# Questions

