

The Olympics: 64 years on

Helen Mills and Tammy McGloughlin introduce this issue of *cjm*

In just over a month's time London will be the centre of international focus as athletes from over 200 countries arrive for the Olympic Games. The last Olympic Games held in London was in 1948 – in the same month the National Health Service (NHS) was established. It is a tragic coincidence that the Olympics returns to London in the same year as the Health and Social Care Act was passed, legislation the chairman of the British Medical Association described as likely to be 'irreversibly damaging to the NHS as a public service, converting it into a competitive marketplace that will widen health inequalities and be detrimental to patient care' (Buckman, 2012).

This is not the only interesting parallel between the last London Olympics and this Summer's Games. The 1948 Olympics became known as the 'Austerity Games' due to the continued post war rationing and poor economic outlook. Competing countries were requested to bring their own food, with any surplus to be distributed to British hospitals (Lane, 2010).

In anticipation of the Olympics, it is particularly timely that this issue of *cjm* considers the issue of sport and harm in a themed section introduced by **Peter Francis**. Sport is perhaps usually associated with something undertaken or watched in our free time, a pleasurable leisure activity or distraction from 'the real world'. However the contributors to our themed section make a good case for taking sport seriously. They encourage understanding of the less positive aspects of contemporary sport and particularly focus on the 2012 Olympics and professional football. As the contributors amply demonstrate, sport does not transcend the wider social world, nor the harms which are part of this.

This edition's topical section features three articles which, in different ways, recognise a gap between the commitment to human rights in international treaties and the problematic realisation of these supposedly universal rights in Britain today. Following research about young people's experiences of bullying in schools, **Anita Hobson** finds the mechanisms for challenging homophobia in schools wanting. Hobson considers schools' commitment to tackling homophobic bullying must not depend on (likely limited) targeted resources, a condition which will undoubtedly apply to many sought after reforms to publically funded services in the coming period. Given the much derided notion of prisoners' human rights, particularly in some sections of the media, it may be understandable that some seeking progressive change for those imprisoned attempt to make some prisoners sympathetic to the wider public. **David Scott** sets out in his article why this is a flawed approach to ensuring human

rights for those incarcerated. The right to freedom from discrimination is a theme continued in our third piece by **Jackie Patiniotis** and **Kay Standing**. They share the findings from a feminist action research project about women's experiences of areas with a high concentration of lap dancing clubs. This work demonstrates the more subtle impact lap dancing venues have for women's occupancy of public space and their feelings of safety.

This issue also sees the first 'Perspective' article – a contributor sharing their own experience of contemporary social and criminal justice issues. **Pamela Davis** explains her experience as a mother subject to a child protection investigation and the lessons for the future she has drawn from this incident. We positively encourage contributions from others willing to share their experiences of criminal justice and its related fields as important, and as Davis points out often absent, voices in critically thinking about criminal justice and social harm.

Did you greet the reprieve of the Youth Justice Board (YJB) in November last year with a shout of glee or more of a groan? In our debating section five contributors give their perspectives about the YJB's survival and offer both encouragement and some reservations about the Board's track record to date and its likely future challenges.

Earlier this year the Centre published *Reducing the numbers in custody: looking beyond criminal justice solutions* (available to download from our website: www.crimeandjustice.org.uk), exploring social and economic explanations for the numbers we imprison and considering the implications of this perspective for those engaged in work to reduce the use of custody in England and Wales. It is from this publication that **Marsha Weissman's** article, reproduced in the In Focus section, originally appeared. Weissman was one of four campaigners working outside the UK we asked to share their learning about campaigning to challenge mass imprisonment from a wider social and economic perspective. Citing the expansion to specialist courts in America as an example, she urges caution about seeking to tackle high prison numbers by improving the criminal justice process or by advocating 'ever expanding alternatives to incarceration'. ■

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References

- Buckman, L. (2012), 'British Medical Association letter opposing NHS reforms', *The Guardian*, 1 March.
- Lane, M. (2010), 'How to stage the Olympics on a shoestring', BBC website, 26 July.