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**Where does the prison
system go from here?**

Special Edition

Voices from the front line

Interview: Prisoner in open conditions

*Brendan Hadley is a prisoner at Leyhill open prison. He is interviewed by **Monica Lloyd** from NOMS headquarters.*

Brendan Hadley is a prisoner at Leyhill open prison serving a four year sentence for financial fraud. He has run his own business in the past and is currently working in the laundry prior to his imminent release.

ML: From your perspective, what are the effects of the fact that we are locking up increasing numbers of people in prison? What are the consequences for you of prisons being full?

BH: People are being put in prison for what appears to me to be increasingly trivial offences; other avenues of punishment are not being explored sufficiently. They are being locked up to remove them from the public gaze and you get the impression that the prison system is being used as a warehouse. Once they're in prison no-one knows what to do with them, and then and as a consequence they're just left to rot. Because the prison is full there is less to go round; less resources and less people to manage them. It's causing a degree of frustration, anger and stress. Communication too: People don't seem to have the time to talk to you, to explain why certain things happen..

ML: Politicians often use the term 'Broken Society' Do you think this describes the world you come from?

BH: I come from an ordered, structured, goal-orientated world. I've worked for myself for 25 years so I don't personally relate to a broken society. I can see that for others it describes their whole life. They're in and out of prison and their families are used to it and it's a way of life to them. It's a difficult one to answer unless you are part of it.

ML: Do you think prisons can help with social problems like unemployment, drug use and family breakdown?

BH: Given sufficient resources yes it can. Particularly if you can give people a work ethic, discipline and if you taught trades like plumbing, electrician, plastering, HGV licence, fork lift truck. I know they're not educated jobs but we need them and they are always being advertised. There's a stigma about being a criminal so you can teach people about being self employed.

For drug users I'd let them go cold turkey. Sorry I have no sympathy. I know you have to treat them right and fair but I'm sorry I'd lock them up and they'd have closed visits until they were clean. The physical

addiction passes in seven days so I'm told. With drug and alcohol abusers I'd be quite draconian. Drugs are to blame for many problems in prisons.

Family breakdown: What you see a lot in prison is families breaking down right at the end of sentence, because you've been away and only seen the family on visits a couple of times a month. They get used to you not being around, then they realise you're coming home and they've not necessarily found someone else, but they can't contemplate life together again. So many get 'dear John' letters. Prisons could help with a lot more family days, a lot more to help maintain a family.

ML: Does imprisonment make it easier or harder for you to make positive changes to your life?

BH: The only person who can make positive changes in your life is yourself. If you're frustrated, humiliated, angry, it becomes increasingly hard to see the positive. I don't know whether counselling helps, but you need a positive attitude: If I work hard I will get this, turn my life around. So I recommend a carrot and stick approach. A short sharp shock of lock up 23/7 and then a chance to turn it around and get a positive return. A lot of the jobs in prison not proper jobs but are there purely to keep people occupied. This breeds a sense of frustration. It is frustrating when people are not working hard but are still getting paid. It's frustrating when you are trying to complete an education course and there is limited access to a computer, or you move prisons and your course work follows six months later. These problems make it harder to make positive changes in your life and maintain your resilience.

ML: The Government wants to achieve what it is calling a 'rehabilitation revolution'. From your point of view, what are the areas where more could be done to help prisoners go straight on release?

BH: I absolutely agree with it. Prison should be about stopping offending behaviour, looking at what is causing it. Sexual, violent and arson offenders are wired in such a way that you can't stop them offending unless they want to. However, a lot of burglars are not doing it because they want to hurt people; they're doing it because they have a habit. These are crimes of opportunity to feed their habit and if you take the habit away the chances are they're not going to do it again. Or it can be a lack of

education so you can't get a job. Prison itself can be part of the solution but it can't do all of it. It can provide education, it can enforce discipline, it can also further punish people for bad behaviour, so the rehabilitation revolution I agree with completely, but you've got to look at why people are committing crimes in the first place and what needs to be done to break that cycle. Some of the solutions are pragmatic. You give them the ability to earn money. You don't give them the job. You give them the skills and a work ethic. You get them an interview or you help them to go self employed. You set up a bank account for them with their earnings in it. You give them life skills and work skills and some education. It requires a multi-pronged approach.

ML: What kind of work or training do you think could be introduced to prisons?

BH: If you make people work in prison, pay them properly you could make them more responsible. If they want to eat a different diet they could pay for it, or pay for their TVs, their TV licence, pay for their bits and pieces. You only need to spend a bit in prison; if you're paid the minimum wage the rest can go into your savings so you have a bank balance when you leave. Otherwise you're released with a half a week's dole and it takes six weeks for your next dole cheque to come through. What are you going to do except go back to what you know to raise cash? Whereas if you had £2k or £3k that you'd earned and you'd instilled a work ethic then you can pay a deposit for a flat or buy a car or at least put food on the table for a couple of weeks. So the answer is prison can help with unemployment and self esteem, if it's structured properly. I know the public don't want to see lags earning large sums of money but there are ways of stopping people coming back and it costs a fortune to keep people inside. If they had the minimum wage there would be an incentive to work and you could make a contribution for your keep and there would be a balance for when you leave.

ML: Would you welcome the opportunity to 'pay something back' to the community for your crimes, either financially, through some kind of unpaid work, or by meeting your victim?

BH: Of course I would. Absolutely no problem at all. Others don't agree with me but I would have chain

gangs. It should be a condition that you have to pay back. Look at the state of the roads and public parks. If I could put one officer on site with 25 prisoners, with three people who know how to tarmac, I can redo the roads and repair the public parks. We could paint the schools in the summer when the kids aren't there, maintain the public baths. You've got electricians and well qualified people in here. Some would welcome the opportunity to pay something back. It keeps their skills in if nothing else. So the answer is yes, though financially isn't necessarily the best way as prison wages are so low, but if prisoners were paid proper money for fixing the roads or other amenities you are doing a proper job and have a degree of self esteem.

Meeting your victim is an emotive one. I'm not sure that all victims would want to meet their assailants. Most personal crimes are about control, so I'm not sure how helpful it would be for the victim when they are giving the perpetrator back some control, if only briefly, over their life. They might be remorseful but I don't know if it's a good thing or a bad thing.

ML: How has the prisoner experience shifted in recent years?

BH: I've only been in for a couple of years but others tell me that it was originally a level playing field: officers and prisoners with a clear demarcation between the two. Life was easier then; no private cash, everybody had to live off their earnings. It was more about punishment and was

more of a shock.

ML: How have prison-staff and staff-prisoner relationships changed in recent years? How do you think they could be improved?

BH: Prison staff were always Mr or 'gov', not first names. There was a clear demarcation. They will be your friend but you step over the line and they are always the prison officer. Because of the blurring of that line you can end up in trouble. People will always form relationships but the demarcation should be maintained and the erosion of it is causing a lot of discipline problems. There are some members of staff who can abuse their position, whether it's because they are upholding rules or whether they're just being petty. There should be a degree of discretion but

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where punishment is disproportionate it can lead to resentment. If everybody knew where they stood life would be so much easier.

ML: What are the aspects of being in prison that people outside are least aware of?

BH: I have to say it's the loneliness, the frustration, the humiliation, the lack of freedom. The public do get the impression that we are all in a holiday camp, but prison is a place of punishment. People outside need to be more aware of how the system actually works. Like my mate serving a life sentence. He has a tariff that's like a fixed term but he can serve any number of years beyond that and when he goes out he's on licence for the rest of his life and can be recalled at any time. That doesn't mean anything to anybody, and the newspapers don't educate people about how the system works. Lifers here are in category D because they're assessed as low risk of re-offending or of hurting anyone and are at the end of very long sentences. And they've had to do a number of courses to qualify for being here.

ML: An increasing number of prisons are potentially to be managed by private companies in the near future and there will be potentially wider opportunities for the voluntary and charitable sector. What are the benefits and risks of these changes for you?

BH: I don't see anything wrong with the private prison. As far as I'm concerned, having run my own business, they are a business and should be run as one. In my time in prison I've seen a lot of waste.

Private prisons might actually spend more money where it's meant to be spent, on rehabilitating prisoners, or it could go in the coffers to save money for the government. I'm not sure about what is best, but there are alternatives.

ML: What do you think are the biggest problems in the prison system?

BH: Inertia. Unfairness and inertia, lack of rehabilitation, lack of education. Someone has been dealing drugs to kids, he gets three or four months and comes here, he gets out and does it again and comes back, then the cycle repeats. He might go somewhere else next time, but what is he learning? That's not punishing someone for repeat offending. Some people get dealt with far too leniently; some get dealt with for too harshly.

ML: What are the things that get in the way of prisons being more like you would want them to be?

BH: It's a difficult question.

If you pay me to do a job I'll pay for the privilege of a nice place to be and I'd pay back to society. Conversely if I abuse it you take it away. Just give me the basics and everything beyond that I'll earn. You've got to teach people rules and regulations, self esteem, give them a work ethic, call it what you want.

ML: If you could do one thing to improve the effectiveness of the prison service, what would it be?

BH: Break the circle and get rid of the lethargy and inertia. That's a big thing.

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