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Learning Together

Editorial Comment

This is the first opportunity Prison Service Journal has had to pay tribute to Saskia Jones and Jack Merritt, who lost their lives in the attack at Fishmongers' Hall in London on 29 November 2019, as well as to state our solidarity with the Learning Together community and all of those affected.

PSJ aims to draw connections between research and practice, it is concerned with the everyday experiences of those who live, work and are affected by imprisonment, and it promotes progressive penal values. These are characteristics that are shared with the Learning Together community.

Learning Together was started in 2015 by Dr Ruth Armstrong and Dr Amy Ludlow, both based at University of Cambridge. They set out to reinvigorate the connections between universities and prisons, in particular by bringing together people in criminal justice and higher education institutions to study alongside each other. As well as offering high quality academic sessions, the intention was to create meaningful social connections where people could learn with and from each other through dialogue and the sharing of experience. From those beginnings, there are now over 20 partnerships between universities and prisons across England and Wales.

The early evidence indicates that Learning Together can offer positive opportunities. For some people in prison, this can provide progression and pipeline opportunities to nurture individual growth and to challenge social disadvantage as a barrier to learning. Equally, university students individually benefit from learning with and alongside people who may have different life experiences but who, just like them, are seeking to expand their horizons and maximise their potential. Together they can form lasting academic friendships and support networks. Bringing people together in this way is at the heart of Learning Together. As Ruth and Amy

described in an article published in PSJ in May 2016, 'Learning Together is not trying to change people. We are learning with, from and through each other. This changes us all.'

The true spirit of Learning Together was seen in the aftermath of the terrible attack in November. The spirit was there in those members of the Learning Together community who put their own lives at risk to intervene and protect others. It was there in the actions of those who gave help to people who had been harmed. It continues to be there in the love and support that they offer to one another.

Jack Merritt and Saskia Jones were people who embodied all of the values and aspirations of Learning Together. They were both talented students, committed to working within the criminal justice system and promoting change from within. Both had completed the Learning Together criminology course at HMP Grendon while studying at Cambridge. Jack went on to become the Convener of the Butler Law Course, a Learning Together initiative involving students from Cambridge University and HMP Warren Hill. He published an article in PSJ in March 2018, in which he addressed the use of segregation for young people in British prisons. The article is a carefully constructed, clear sighted and forensic analysis of the legal, policy and medical issues. The article is also fired by a passion for justice, a desire to challenge the harms of the prisons system and promote change. In his work and writing, Jack's values and energy are plain to see. Jack's father, David, paid tribute to him, saying, 'Jack's death was a tragedy but his short life was a triumph'. Saskia also embodied a passion for helping others. During her studies she spent her free time working voluntarily to support victims of sexual abuse and during her time as a Learning Together student she helpfully disrupted binaries between offending and victimhood. Her continued involvement in the

Learning Together community showed her commitment to playing her part in building the kinds of communities that can help to reduce harm. Saskia was set for a career in the police, where she would have continued her quest to promote change from within the system, working directly with people and for progressive reform. Professor Lorraine Gelsthorpe, Director of Institute of

Criminology at University of Cambridge described Saskia's 'determination to make an enduring and positive impact on society in everything she did'.

This edition of Prison Service Journal is dedicated, with love and in solidarity, to Saskia Jones, Jack Merritt and the Learning Together community.