

PET podcast written, presented and produced by Andrie Morris

Sept. 2014

*Higher Aims, Further Goals: part 1*

**Twenty Five Years of Prisoners Education Trust:**

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**Duration:** 5:07

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**Presenter:** Andrie Morris

**Contributors:**

David Burton: co-founder, Prisoners Education Trust

Julia Braggins: former Trustee, Prisoners Education Trust

Jason: PET-funded serving prisoner

**PRESENTER:**

**This is a podcast from Prisoners Education Trust, with me Andrie Morris.**

**In this edition: how the charity got started, and gives prisoners access to higher and further education courses, through distance learning.**

**This is also a look at how education contributes to ideas about rehabilitation, through the eyes of PET-funded students, PET's members and its influential friends.**

**To start with, some background to the founding of this remarkable charity.**

**South London, 1984. HMP Wandsworth is a local prison holding around sixteen hundred inmates. Most are serving more than eighteen months; they could wait up to four years for transfer to one of the few training prisons better equipped to cope with long term prisoners.**

**The education department offers two types of learning: basic maths and English, and Open University degree courses.**

**There's not much on offer between those two choices, for capable prisoners facing a long stretch.**

**It was a gap in provision noticed by the deputy education officer, David Burton.**

**DAVID BURTON:**

**Prisoners would find themselves in a situation whereby they were offered a job, if they could get a certain qualification. It might be a plumbing qualification; it might be a brick-laying course, motor vehicle mechanics, that sort of thing, and so it was really rather**

frustrating for them because one or two people, their families would pay for the course and we'd facilitate it but an awful lot of people didn't have the money, and we realised that Wandsworth wasn't the only place that had these problems; there was a big demand for education that simply wasn't being supplied.

**PRESENTER:**

**In addition to his day job, David was studying an MA at Middlesex Poly. And that's how he struck up a friendship with fellow student and barrister, Vernon Cocking.**

**DAVID BURTON:**

Now, he and I used to travel on the Victoria line up to Enfield three times a week and we used to chat about these things. He was quite a giving person. He was quite concerned about other people. He was also very interested in prison conditions and in making prisons work better, do their job better.

**PRESENTER:**

**Vernon put up the money for PET's charitable status, which finally came through in 1989. His legal know-how, plus David's inside experience of the prison education system made for a good partnership. Their next step was to start building a team:**

**JULIA BRAGGINS:**

I was running a course called Basic Education in Wandsworth Prison.

**PRESENTER:**

**Julia Braggins, an early PET Trustee and its first Treasurer.**

**JULIA BRAGGINS:**

To start with we were just raising money through – we had concerts as far as I remember, but they were hundreds of pounds, not thousands of pounds. Once we got charitable status and we got a bit of money coming in, we were motoring. And at that stage, to our immense relief, it was felt possible to get a part time director and a little office – that seemed like a huge landmark; we had a room in Wandsworth I think, or a room or two rooms. What we had to do was to assess the applications we had received against the funds we held to see which would be lucky. We had to do quite a lot of research into the wide range of correspondence colleges to discover which ones offered a quality product. We had to do a lot of work on seeing would this person see it through? If they didn't see it through, that

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was a big waste.

**PRESENTER:**

**Prisoners Education Trust was set up to be a very focussed enterprise; it was simply about raising money for those who wanted to do distance learning.**

**You'll hear about the next phase of PET's development shortly, but first, listen to why its work matters.**

**This is Jason; he's got funding to do a course in feature writing.**

**JASON:**

I was writing for the prison newsletter but because prisoner education only generally goes up to Level 1, Level 2 you're not really encouraged to pursue education beyond that unless you're able to get the funding. So I was fortunate enough to receive the funding from Prisoners Education Trust which enabled me to start the course. I think it's really important to see that education can actually be the vehicle which can actually lead you to get to where you need to be. I think sometimes some people in prison can be quite short-sighted and they don't realise that it can potentially not just only get them out of the cell, it can potentially also lead them into a new way of life which is far more positive than the lifestyle they were living prior to being in custody.

***DURATION: 05'07"***