



# family newsletter

Prisoners Abroad is the only charity providing practical support and campaigning for the welfare of Britons imprisoned abroad.

Dear all...

**Welcome to the winter edition of the family newsletter.**

The most important things to tell you about this issue is that we have a new free phone number. You can use this number to call us free of charge – your call will be put through to your caseworker or someone who will be able to deal with your call.

In this issue, we also have a report on the two Family days held in 2002. The special feature on Family linking and the article on Working with the Media are summaries of new family briefing sheets that we have written this year.

I hope you enjoy reading this newsletter. If you have any comments or suggestions for articles for editions next year, we would be very happy to hear from you.

**Alan Hooker**

Editor

Tel 020 7561 6862

Prisoners Abroad is here to support you through difficult times...

**Our new  
FREEPHONE  
number is:-  
0808 172  
0098**

## **Request for help – our 25th anniversary**

2003 is our 25th Anniversary. During Prisoners Week which commences Sunday 16th November, we are hoping to contact some parish churches up and down the country who would be willing to pray for prisoners and their families and to possibly donate one week's collection to the work of Prisoners Abroad during this period. If any of you attend a parish church or know of a vicar who would be willing to be contacted by us, please contact Rebecca on 020 7561 6834 or email [rebecca@prisonersabroad.org.uk](mailto:rebecca@prisonersabroad.org.uk)



# Working with the media...

## Rebecca Swenson, Communications Officer at Prisoners Abroad offers some advice on Working with the Media...

As a family member or friend of someone in prison overseas, the media in any of its forms – radio, TV, national press or local press – may contact you wanting to hear your story. It could also be that you are keen to actively make links with the media to publicise your relative or friend's case.

prison or whose close relative is currently in prison. It is in these situations that Prisoners Abroad may contact certain families and ask them if they would like to get involved with media activity. **We have a strict confidentiality policy and would never pass on names or details without permission.**

When a journalist wants to cover a story about our work quite often they will want a 'human interest angle' and will want to talk to someone who has either been in

Before you agree to get involved with the media it is important to weigh up the consequences and benefits of talking to the media.

### PROS

- It may persuade influential people such as MPs to get involved
- Helps us to highlight issues such as poor health in prisons
- Informs the public of the consequences of getting in trouble overseas
- Media interest will show your relative that they are not forgotten

### CONS

- It will not get your relative out of prison – it may even attract negative attention in the country in which they are held
- You will have much less control over who knows about your situation
- There may be difficult questions – remember you do not have to answer them
- Sometimes the interview will not even be published / broadcast

If after weighing up the pros and cons you would like to get involved with the media, please contact your Caseworker who will be happy to go through any questions you may have.

When a journalist contacts the Communications Officer at Prisoners Abroad, she will speak to the Caseworkers to see if they know of anyone who may be willing to talk to the press. Your Caseworker may then contact you and put you in touch with the Communications Officer who will then be the liaison between you and the journalist.

You will only be contacted if your personal story is relevant to the journalist's request, we will not be bothering you on a weekly or even monthly basis.

If a journalist contacts you directly and you would like some advice regarding their request please feel free to call either your Caseworker or the Communications Officer.



A more detailed briefing sheet on the media is available. To receive a copy please contact your caseworker.

You may also find it helpful to contact an organisation called The Presswise Trust who provide assistance to those with complaints about inaccurate, intrusive or sensational coverage in UK newspapers, magazines and radio or television programmes:

#### The PressWise Trust

38 Easton Business Centre

Felix Road

Bristol BS5 0HE

☎ 0117 941 5889

Fax: 0117 941 5848

Website: [www.presswise.org.uk](http://www.presswise.org.uk)

# Prisoners Abroad on the Road...

"We wish to thank you all for the Family Day – Manchester... it was especially good to meet those to whom we have spoken on the telephone, or those who have been particularly involved with our daughter's case"

"I found it very interesting and was very impressed with the day's events"

"Thank you for the opportunity to speak to people who understand and also care about my son"

## Family Days in London and Manchester

Prisoners Abroad hosted two Family days in 2002; one in London in October and another in Manchester in November. Both were a success in terms of feedback from the families and staff that attended. From my own perspective as a member of staff, it was an enlightening experience, having the opportunity to hear what family members had to say face to face rather than over the telephone. Evaluation forms completed by the family members who attended tell us that they appreciated the experience too.



*Ian Acheson, Director - talking at the London Family Day*

The main aim of both days was to give families information on our work and to give them the opportunity to meet and talk to staff members who had prepared presentations for the occasion, talking about resettlement, working with the media, casework and direct services. We were especially

please to be joined by two other agencies: the Prison Service in London who presented a workshop on prison transfer and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in Manchester who spoke about their pro bono legal panel. Both sessions were very well received.

We would very much like to build on this year's success. We have worked hard this year to develop our services to families and this newsletter and regular family days are two of the means through which we hope to achieve this objective.

Providing we are able to raise the necessary funds, we would like to hold further Family days next year. I hope to see you all there.



*Relatives chatting at the Manchester Family Day*

**Steven Szumski**  
Head of Service Delivery

**Dee Humphreys is a trustee of Prisoners Abroad – her son was in prison in Hong Kong between 1996 – 1999. She spoke of her experiences in the opening session of both family days.**



this time when we all felt so fearful and anxious for his welfare. We had decided from the start to tell the truth to everyone who asked and received without exception a

very concerned and helpful reaction from relatives and friends, which was an enormous comfort.

### **One families experience**

In September 1996 my son, the youngest of three children, was arrested in Hong Kong on charges of trafficking in drugs. He did not tell us what had happened until November when he at last seemed aware of the gravity of his situation. Our first concern was about his legal representation and I was able to go to Hong Kong in early January and find a solicitor to act for him. His trial took place six months later and he was sentenced to five years imprisonment. His appeal was heard in November 1998 and was dismissed, but his sentences were then set to run consecutively instead of concurrently. At this time of concern over the transfer of Hong Kong to Chinese rule he decided to apply for repatriation, transferred to the UK prison system in April 1999 and was granted parole at the end of that year.

As his mother, my first reaction was extreme anger and shame over what he had done, soon to be superseded by anxiety, fear and then of course guilt. My daughters were extremely practical and supportive throughout

Problems of communication were at the root of most of the difficulties we had at this time. We were fortunate to find a solicitor in whom we had confidence and in getting legal aid granted and were grateful for the support from Prisoners Abroad in understanding the legal implications of his charges, of the appeal procedure and of the repatriation process. A lot of worry and frustration came from the difficulties in making contact with my son in the prison. He was moved several times, mail was not received in either direction and information about his health and general welfare was hard to get. However, I am very aware that we were more fortunate that many people in that our ordeal took place in a country where the legal framework was close to that of the UK and where many people in the system were English speaking.

Finally our experience has been that the re-adjustment process needs time and space for the ex-prisoner to recover and move on, but there is light at the end of the tunnel for us all.

**Dee Humphreys**

## Your caseworker

**Your caseworker is available to help you with the issues that arise during your friend/relative's imprisonment. Here is a list of the geographical areas or countries that they have responsibility for.**

### **France**

**Alan Hooker**

alan@prisonersabroad.org.uk

### **Spain, South America, Cuba**

**Eleanor Openshaw**

eleanor@prisonersabroad.org.uk

### **Asia, Middle East**

**Theo Cresser**

theo@prisonersabroad.org.uk

### **Rest of Europe, Africa, Caribbean**

**Claus Kirschner**

claus@prisonersabroad.org.uk

### **USA, New Zealand, Australia**

**Kate O'Reilly**

kate@prisonersabroad.org.uk

**We also provide assistance to families preparing for the release and return of their relative or friend from prison abroad. If you have any questions or concerns about this, please get in touch with your caseworker on:**

**FREEPHONE 0808 172 0098**

## Special Feature - family linking

The experience of having a relative or friend in prison abroad can be devastating. Feelings of shock and distress in the early stages of separation can lead to a longer-term sense of loss, anger, guilt and grief. People often find it difficult to talk about their experience of having a relative in prison abroad, with those around them. The Family Linking scheme is designed to connect relatives with others who find themselves in a similar situation.

There may be several reasons why you may wish to get in contact with other family members. It could be to talk to someone who knows what it is like first hand to have a family member or friend in prison abroad; or to talk about the conditions in the prison where your relative is

being held; or for practical reasons, such as finding out about travel arrangements for visiting a prison for the first time.

We envisage people will contact each other by phone, e-mail or letter. If you are interested in linking up with another family member or friend, please contact us. We will send you an introductory letter along with a short questionnaire, and will then do our best to link you up with someone who is most suited to the type of support you are looking for.

If you are interested in receiving a family linking form, or would like to discuss the scheme further, please contact your caseworker at Prisoners Abroad.