

#HiddenHeroes:
The Prison Officer





*#Hidden***Heroes: The Prison Officer**

Since 1985, the **Butler Trust** has been at the forefront of celebrating what's best in UK prisons. Our Annual Awards for staff are presented each year by our Patron, HRH The Princess Royal; and beyond the Awards, the Trust visits prisons around the country to meet staff and find out more about their work.

While the media focus on the negative, and staff face very real challenges every day, there is much to be proud of in our prisons too – and at the heart of it all are the **Prison Officers**.

This is a tribute to them...



BUCKINGHAM PALACE

In my three decades as Patron of The Butler Trust I have visited a great many of Her Majesty's Prisons and Young Offenders Institutions. On these visits I have seen the work of our Award Winners, and had the opportunity to meet many of their colleagues. The skill, dedication, and good humour which officers display in looking after the men and women in their custody and care is consistently impressive.

The work of prison officers is, by its very nature, largely hidden from the public they serve, and yet affects both individuals and society in profound ways. Those who undertake this demanding but rewarding role with such commitment and humanity are owed a debt of gratitude.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Anne', with a long, sweeping underline.

The Public don't normally see what goes on in prisons, but Channel 4's three-part documentary 'Prison', filmed at HMP Durham, offered a rare glimpse of life inside. Many viewers were moved by what they saw – here's what some of them had to say on Twitter about the staff:

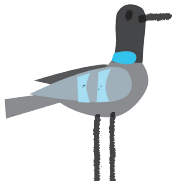
'my god what amazing staff doing a wonderful job in such difficult circumstances. *You're all heroes.*'
(Jessica)

'The work the staff do in such stressful and risky conditions is unbelievable, *they deserve a medal*'
(Erin)

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'Shows the challenges faced by staff and prisoners but just as importantly the *compassion.*'
(NMJJ)

'Immeasurable amount of *respect* to all those working in the Prison service'
(Sam)



'*credit to the incredible staff*'
(Danielle)

'I'm really impressed with the calm, *compassionate* and reasonable way the staff coped with a very, very challenging situation.'
(Celia)

‘Hats off to the staff on
#Prison, do an amazing job.’

(Chris)



‘The *hard work* that goes on inside
prison isn’t talked about enough!’

(Imogen)

*‘The staff are
incredible’*

(Tracey)

‘My boyfriend is a #PrisonOfficer
and this was a great insight into the
kinds of things he has to deal with
every day. *Very proud* of him.’

(Amy)

‘in awe of the tough job prison staff
have. They really are amazing,
courageous and resilient people’

(Kate)

‘Just wanted to say I work in a trauma
operating theatre. I’ve seen some sights.
I couldn’t do your job! Thanks so much!’

#heroesdontalwayswearcapes

(Rachael)

*‘Prison Officers are
extraordinary people’*

(Ian)

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Simon Shepherd worked in prisons throughout the 1990s. He has been Director of the Butler Trust since 2008, and from 2018 to early 2019, as part of the ‘Good Book of Prisons Project’, visited every closed prison in England & Wales to highlight and share the good work going on across the estate.



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As I saw when I worked in prisons, and continue to see at the Butler Trust, there's a lot more to prisons than you see in the media, and it's the Officers who are central to all that's good in our jails.

They're the ones who lock people in their cells when that's the last place they want to be, and open them up again unsure what they might encounter; who run to trouble when an alarm bell sounds, and put their bodies on the line if they need to; who cut prisoners down when they try to hang themselves, and worse, when they succeed – and it's they who, more than anyone else, really make a difference to the lives of the men and women in their care.

They are highly skilled public servants doing difficult, demanding, and often dangerous work on all our behalves. ”

Pia Sinha joined the Prison Service as a psychologist at Wandsworth, and having moved over to the operational side, has since governed Thorn Cross, Risley, and Liverpool. She also served for five years on the Awarding Panel for the Butler Trust Awards for staff.

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Quick to laugh off their achievements, and often reluctant to take the limelight, prison officers are a unique and special group of individuals. I have worked in eight different prisons in my 20 year career and feel privileged to have worked with some incredibly inspiring people who change lives every day by ‘just doing their jobs’ in a thoroughly decent way.

Behind the high walls, razor wire, noise and austere surroundings, lives a prison community. Hidden from the outside world, what happens inside to make this a community and a place of hope, opportunity, safety and reflection is all down to the staff who work there.

They provide safety to the most vulnerable, direction to the most challenging, and inspiration to those without hope. They say they are ‘just doing their job’ but they truly are unsung heroes.

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Prison Officers don't normally like talking about themselves, but in 2016 & 2017, the Butler Trust brought together more than 200 of them, with over 2000 years of experience between them, to look, among other things, at the skills and qualities they bring to their work. Here's some of what they had to say:

'It's more than just a job.'

'A prison officer wears many hats and *encompasses many skills*'

'It's a thousand *little different things*.'

'It's about *people skills*, being a positive role model, and knowing which hats to wear when.'

'We make a real difference.'

'There is a lot of different things we do every day that *change prisoners' lives*.'

'*We are role models*: sometimes the first and only role models that certain individuals have'

'*We are a lot more than just security*.'

'...it's the *little things* you do that, ten years down the line, might just start the ball rolling.'

'We are role models to peers and prisoners.'

'we do a good job and we *make a difference*'

'we are proud to be prison officers'

'A lot of it is based on *teamwork*.'

'Our sense of *humour* and banter gets us through the day.'

'We look after each other and *support* each other through thick and thin.'

'Engaging prisoners and offering *support* is the key role that we all do every day'

'We change lives.'



Michael Spurr joined the Prison Service as an Officer back in 1983, governed Aylesbury, Wayland, and Norwich, before becoming an Area Manager, and served as Chief Executive of Her Majesty's Prison & Probation Service from 2010 to 2019.



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Prison Officers deal, on a daily basis, with some of the most challenging, dangerous and vulnerable people in society. They have a duty to treat prisoners with humanity, enforce legitimate authority fairly and consistently, and provide guidance and practical help to motivate and support them to reform. It's a complex role requiring a 'level head', strong people skills and resilience.

Prison Officers at their best are unseen heroes – I have been humbled time and again by officers demonstrating remarkable levels of professionalism, care and dedication working behind bars.

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Sir Trevor Brooking played football for West Ham from 1965 to 1984, and was capped 47 times for England. A founding Trustee of the Butler Trust back in 1985, Sir Trevor served as its Chair from 2005 to 2010, and is now a Trust Patron.

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Prison Officers have a lot more in common with professional footballers than you might think. Both need plenty of individual skill and dedication of course, but for me, the most important thing of all is teamwork.

It was teamwork that made Leicester City into Premier League Champions in 2016: their incredible camaraderie, their commitment to each other, and the fact that they always had each other's backs and were willing to take one for the team when they needed to.

That sort of teamwork is rare, but it's exactly the sort of thing I've seen in prisons up and down the country – and that's what I think makes Prison Officers special.

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Prisoners know as much about Prison Officers as anyone, and see first-hand the impact they have. Around a third of all Butler Trust Award nominations for Officers are made by prisoners, and almost all include testimonials from them. Here are some of the things they say:

‘The help of staff gets us through difficult times’

*‘Without her **help and support** I would not be alive today’*

*‘They do the best they can to help us be the **best** we can’*

*‘it’s a **vocation** not a job’*

*‘**Professional**, inspirational, a genuine non-judgemental human being’*

*‘**He nurtures the positives, no matter how small**’*

*‘They understand, they **really care**’*

*‘**They helped me change my life**’*

*‘she’s **amazing**’*



‘He’s a *legend*’



‘These officers went out of their way to *help me*’

‘*They help you out when times are hard*’

‘*The officers on my wing are a real inspiration*’

‘He gives *100%* to his job’

‘*she really cares*’

‘He has encouraged me to move forward and make the *right choices*’

‘It’s a really tough job, they need so many *different skills*’

‘All I can say is *thank you*’

Kathy Biggar (Baker) generously funded this publication. She worked in prisons for more than 20 years and, among many other things, was responsible for the introduction of Samaritan-trained Listeners across the estate. Shortly before she died in 2018, this is what Kathy had to say...



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Prison Officers have no idea how good they are. They often say ‘we’re just doing our jobs’. But the truth is they do extraordinary jobs, extraordinarily well – and it’s a job most people can’t and don’t want to do.

Often unseen and unheralded because they operate, literally, behind closed doors, they protect the public and change people’s lives. And they do so with good humour, dedication and compassion.

They deserve our respect, admiration and thanks. If anyone merits the term ‘Hidden Heroes’, it’s them.”

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