



Kilmarnock prison – residential areas

We at HMP Kilmarnock try and provide access to a full spectrum of services designed to provide a safe, secure and humane environment focussed on challenging offending behaviour whilst in custody and providing opportunities for the rehabilitation of offenders both during custody (and after their release.)

Today I will describe the residential function.

Prisoners live in Wings of about 60 cells, 4 Wings to a Houseblock. Each small cell has a metal bed, table and locker as well as access to a toilet and sink. Definitely not a holiday camp, every effort is made to keep the wings, clean and tidy. With 596 prisoners it can be hard work!

The Residential Officer is based on the Wings. They will have to cope with a demanding work schedule, prisoners who can be angry, depressed or even violent as well as withdrawing from drugs and in some cases acutely mentally ill. It is not an easy job.

We know that many of our prisoners have a difficult time adjusting to custody and for some it is a period of abject misery. However with immense interpersonal skills, humour and experience officers work to make their time in custody useful. Residential Officers (PCO's) are not merely turnkeys but are highly trained individuals with excellent people skills. On a daily basis the Residential PCO can expect to be called upon to provide or facilitate services such as;

Personal Officer – Each Residential Officer is allocated a number of prisoners on his Wing for individual care and responsibility.

This means that the Officer becomes the first point of contact for advice and support, as well as providing information on the prisoner's progress (sentence management). The officer is required to provide weekly written reports as well as written minutes of a monthly personal interview with the prisoner. As well as these they are also required to record any significant events or changes in the prisoner's personal circumstances. Getting to know prisoners is crucial and can help towards preventing the next crime or supporting prisoners through to non-offending.

Being a Personal Officer can be one of the most rewarding and challenging jobs in the jail. It can also be the most fun – humour is an essential part of dealing with difficult situations and staff and prisoners use this powerful tool together.

Challenging offending behaviour – Personal responsibility is important and another function of the Wing Officer is ensuring that prisoners take responsibility for themselves. Part of this is making sure prisoners are aware of prison rules and that they behave in accordance with these rules. If a prisoner breaches or is suspected of breaching prison rules then the officer has a duty to report and challenge the behaviour by way of breach of discipline report or warning. This takes prisoners to the Orderly Room where a Senior Governor adjudicates on the issue and if found guilty makes an award. However the most powerful tool available to the Wing Officer in challenging offending behaviour is very often good interpersonal skills, humour and commonsense.

As important as the above functions are, they form a small part of the core duties of a Residential PCO. For instance during the festive period officers organised a series of games and competitions; there is nothing like watching a group of prisoners concentrating on playing bingo - you could have heard a pin drop.

Finally the Wing Officers also encourage prisoners to be charitable - over the last year prisoners helped to organise a series of charitable events to raise money for a range of charities; The Lighthouse foundation, CHAS to name but a few.

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