



Prisoner Learning Alliance Awards 2018

The Winners

Category 1: Young People's Estate

Nico Hughes – HMYOI Werrington

Nico, 27, is a sports tutor at HMYOI Werrington, where he has been based for a year-and-a-half. Through his work, Werrington has become the first YOI to offer Level 3 gym qualifications. Nico has also helped set young men up to work in gyms on the outside.

He says:

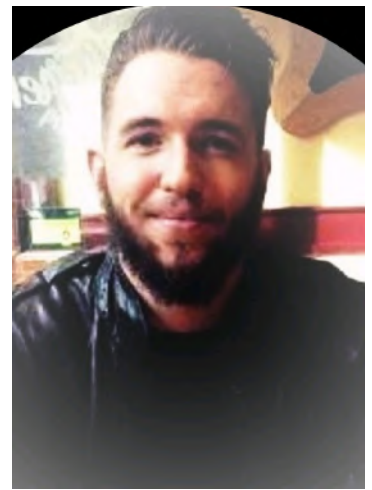
"I've come from a mainstream job in a secondary school. Working in the prison side, I get more back from helping these lads. Sometimes the kids you work with in school, you can see they don't have much structure or support. Here inside, we can be that structure and support for them."

"It's about getting them to recognise what they can be, not just what they think they should be on the outside – with pressures and influence of gangs, etc."



She says:

"At family days we speak to parents and bring work to them, showing what their son has been doing. It's always positive – the boys go all shy when mum and dad go through work. The parents say: 'I want to see more of this, I know you can do it now.' The wider effect education can have on family relationships – motivating the boys – is huge."



Nominations say:

"He helps to achieve my goals and turn my negative attitude to a positive one."

"He keeps me motivated in good and bad situations."

"Has pushed me very hard with practical and theory. Furthermore, he is lenient but has high expectancy for us."

Louiza Nener – HMP/YOI Feltham

Louiza is an employability teacher – covering how to apply for a job, write a CV and how to communicate effectively. She began work as a teaching learning assistant and became a fully qualified teacher this summer. She was inspired to work at Feltham by her brother.

Nominations say:

"She makes me feel like I'm not a prisoner and not a criminal, which makes me feel normal and more confident to do my work."

"She creates a calm, serene environment and makes work fun."

"She has made me more aware and educated on how to apply for a job when I get out."

Land-based activities team (Martin Crowther, Simon Crowther, Nic Goodinson, Steve Koleszar, Mark Wilkinson) - HMP/YOI New Hall

The gardening team at HMP/YOI New Hall receive a joint award for their work teaching the women and girls at New Hall how to maintain the grounds of the prison and grow fruit, vegetables and flowers commercially. The team embed cookery lessons, and support the women to gain qualifications up to Diploma level.

Steve says:

"Some of the girls say they think a bean grows out of the tin! And we make a joke about it but you can see at first some of them can't understand that something no bigger than your fingernail, like a seed, can grow into a lettuce or a cabbage.

"Their commitment to nominate us shows that we've come up with a winning formula. It's not just about cutting grass and pulling plants, it's very therapeutic."

Nominations say:

"The instructors are passionate, enthusiastic and caring."

"I suffer from depression and working in the gardens has helped me a lot."

"[Working in the gardens] feels like blazing a trail to a hope-filled future."

Category 2: Teacher



Lesley Bennetts - HMP Swaleside

Lesley has taught art at HMP Swaleside on the Isle of Sheppey for four years, having previously been Head of Faculty in a mainstream school. Lesley teaches art while at the same time promoting tolerance and dialogue between different groups.

Nominations say:

"She creates a space that is safe and secure that inspires tolerance and empathy, and enables prisoners to engage meaningfully with one another across an incredible range of issues."

She says:

"A lot of learners have never touched a paintbrush before they come in, but around 90% then apply for arts materials grants afterwards. I'm only a catalyst - it's great to have given them that means to express themselves.

I want my room to be a space that is not like a wing, but an all-inclusive working environment. No shouting, screaming, banging doors, they get away from that and into a better environment in which they can focus."

Andrew Morris – HMP Ashfield

Andrew has taught at HMP Ashfield for 12 years. He started as a PE teacher, and then went into Information Advice and Guidance services. Andrew works with learners on every level – he runs a Shannon Trust literacy plan, and has developed his own beginners' Maths programme. He is also supporting 35 learners through Open University degrees.

He says:

"The highlight of my job is seeing students actually achieve when they didn't think they could. You get them started on learning to read, and work up from there. People get passionate after a while, and take control of it themselves.

Orderlies who work for me, my passion rubs off on them. Then they're always coming up with new ideas, and talking to the rest of the learners about how to make education better."



Nominations say:

"He is approachable, has a persistent smile and is the epitome of happiness. He has undying positive energy and has undoubtedly turned many prisoners' dark days into positive ones."

Stephen Rogers – HMP Whitemoor

Stephen has taught at long-term, high-security prison HMP Whitemoor for 15 years. He runs the successful 'Fathers Inside' programme, teaching men parenting skills. He was nominated by 15 different prisoners, who noted that he visits men in segregation every day to make sure they don't miss out on education.



Nominations say:

"He made me realise my true potential and helped me set goals for my future life. What a great inspiration he is for all."

"We need teachers and staff to believe in us to help us change, and Steve Rogers does this time and time again."

He says:

"The fatherhood work has been my highlight. During the nine-week course you see the change in the men. The course ends with their families visiting, on that day they seem like completely different people – they're very nervous, and we work with them to keep them calm. Spending time with them, their families and children is really special.

Just getting the odd thank you from guys makes it worthwhile. They ask if you've got a dictionary, you say no but you'll be back tomorrow, and then you follow it through. For me personally that's a very good feeling; letting them know they've got someone looking out for them."

Category 3: Officer

Scott Grady – HMP Send

Scott works at women's prison HMP Send, where he started to work following a career in the army. A lot of his work focuses on the PIPE unit, with women who have personality disorders.

He says:

"It's always wonderful to be recognised for what you do. To be nominated by one of the women, it feels like it carries real weight. I don't tire of doing little things for others, because sometimes those little things occupy the biggest part of their lives. In life we cannot always do great things, but we can always do small things with great passion. In the end it is not only about making a living, it is about making a difference."

Nominations say:

"He goes above and beyond yet stays within boundaries and is always respectful."

"I am blessed to have him as my key worker, I feel he deserves this award for all he does and inspires in women prisoners."

Ali Joubert and Jayne Bruce – HMP Huntercombe

This is a joint award for two officers who work in the gardens at foreign national prison HMP Huntercombe. They guide men in maintaining the prison grounds and growing food for the whole prison. Through their work, the men can gain NVQs in Horticulture.

Ali says:

"It's not like any other job ever. You build up a professional rapport with the guys – they almost become your work colleagues. Some days the sun will be shining and they'll say 'Miss we could be anywhere in the world. For these few minutes we're not in prison.'"

Jayne says:

"I'm 60 so sometimes I feel a bit like Mum to some of the guys in here, who'll be missing their own Mums– they know that they can come and talk to me without a problem."



Nominations say:

"Miss Joubert is honest, treats everyone the same and pays attention to everyone's opinion."

"[Ms Bruce] looks after all the people. She is the best teacher."

John McCrae – HMP Onley

John has been an officer at HMP Onley for 20 years. He runs two residential units, looking after 120 prisoners plus staff. In his spare time he is a keen cyclist, and has ridden to raise money for victim awareness charities, heavily sponsored by prisoners. He also works as a social mobility ambassador in schools, talking about careers in the prison service and promoting education as a route into employment and away from crime.



He says:

"It's about seeing the change in people. There's a lot of negativity in prison, and it's about focusing on the positivity. They come into these dark places with very little hope. They leave here hopefully trying to put their life in order, and never return."

Nominations say:

"To be as proactive, positive and passionate a role model after 20 years is already testament to the man."

"Mr McCrae sees and finds potential in all."

Category 4: Other Individual

Sharon Baker – HMP Wymott



Sharon works at the Business Hub at Wymott. She set up Wymott's first Prison Information Desks (PID) to improve communication and involve prisoners in decision making, and has run schemes to improve living conditions, making sure cells were clean and equipped.

Nominations say:

"Sharon was one of the first people in the prison and wider community who actually believed in me and gave me belief in myself to do things differently."

"I have witnessed Sharon's formidable qualities first hand. Her vision, commitment and patience were crucial in ensuring a successful implementation of the PIDs."

She says:

"The fact the nominations have come from men - that's very touching, that I've made a difference when really I was just doing my job. I feel appreciated. I treat the men like human beings, I don't look at what they're in for - I take them at face value. I try to look for skills that I have on offer, so I can help them progress."



Fiona Hodgson – HMP Birmingham

As a librarian at local prison HMP Birmingham, Fiona is credited with organising author visits and creative writing courses, and taking requests from all corners of the prison, including voluntarily running a book club in the VP wing. Nominators wrote about her response to the building being damaged during riots. She “worked overtime” to clean glass and building debris from the books, so the library could re-open.

She says:

"I'm amazed, gobsmacked, to have won. It's nice to know that what you're doing makes a difference and that people are getting something out of it; that it's appreciated."

Nominations say:

"She is a constant light."

"Our wing is blessed/fortunate/staggeringly lucky to have her running our reading group, and to have her as a librarian."

George Sainsbury – HMP Lowdham Grange

George has worked for 20 years at Lowdham Grange. He is described by one nominator as “More than just a librarian”, helping with complaints and legal issues, and conducting academic research on learners' behalf.

One library-user wrote a book after release and put in the dedication: "Thank you to the library staff at HMP Lowdham Grange. Especially you, George. I shall never forget your kindness in my darkest days."

Nominations say:

"George has transformed the library into an oasis of tranquillity and normality."

"It's only when you work alongside Mr Sainsbury that you realise just how much work he does helping out all the inmates."

"A credit to his profession."



He says:

"I couldn't do what I did if I didn't enjoy it. This is the most interesting job I've had. And it's interesting because of the challenges you face – it keeps you sharp as a tack.

I've got two boys of my own and you learn how to talk to people. The guys here are the same – I like supporting them and you get to support in all sorts of ways, emotionally as well as practically. There are so many setbacks in prison, I'm amazed they're so together.

What I enjoy most: just answering questions, getting the right book for the right guy. Sometimes the right book just falls into place, it's almost as if it finds me."

Category 5: Peer Mentor

Josh – HMP Ranby

Josh is Ranby's only education red band, meaning he can move around the prison to talk to someone who hasn't attended a class, or isn't able to leave their wing. He chairs the prison's council of mentors and promotes education in induction sessions. At a recent family and friends open day, he held six different Q&A sessions. Karen Carr, Ranby's Head of Education, says: "He's got the skills that would make an ideal candidate re: working with ex-offenders. I would employ him in a heartbeat if I were allowed!"

He says:

"I wanted to take on the role of a mentor because I wanted to feel like I could make a difference in some sort of way. I'm lucky enough to be educated to a standard where I am able to help others to learn, so I guess I wanted to share that and make sure my fellow prisoners felt entitled to life progression.

What I enjoy most about supporting other prisoners is the positivity which comes from the classroom. Prison can be a very negative surrounding but through an educational course perceptions can be altered, and lads can gain a view for their future which is somewhat new."

Nominations say:

"The support provided is at the level of a tutor."

"He never says no when it comes to helping people."

Kevin – HMP Maidstone

20 separate prisoners wrote in to nominate Kevin, an education orderly at foreign national prison HMP Maidstone. Kevin helps prisoners at every stage of their learning journey, including finding resources that meant someone was able to finish a degree. His aim after release is to set up a social enterprise that helps tackle gang-related violence.

He says:

"I always feel that it is a good idea to help people, in jail and on the outside, and to support others. It is a satisfaction to see someone else achieve something; I don't do it for money, I do it because it helps someone else and it is important to see them achieve.

I enjoy seeing them achieve and handing out the certificates at the end! For some of the learners it is the first time that they have ever finished something and it is great to see them be proud of themselves."

Nominations say:

"When it's about explaining to me he does it very nicely and always when teaching me something he does it with his heart."

"He is like a lovely friend to everybody in the class."

Stephen – HMP Portland

As a peer mentor, Stephen works with men in catering, and helps support people with substance misuse issues, through one-to-one and group sessions

He says:

"How did I feel about getting the awards? Well it was a big bag of mixed emotions, I just couldn't believe it. I shouted 'woo!' but I didn't make much of a noise because of the lump in my throat. I couldn't wait to tell everyone – it wasn't just me who won this award it was the whole team.

"One of the most memorable moments was helping a guy on the wing who couldn't read or write through the performing manufacturing operations course. Day-after-day on association we sat down and went through the course. Two weeks' later he came back in tears saying he passed the course – wow that was a moment I nearly cried with him – his first ever certificate at the age of 48. He now a red band in his place of work – happy days.

It's a nice feeling being looked up to and even better feeling using that status to help others who are not so fortunate in education or have had bad luck through life's journey. It's always someone's first natural instinct to help someone if you can; it's then whether you choose to act on that instinct.

Nominations say:

"I look up to him as a good role model and like a father figure."

"Always up for a chat if I am feeling low."

Thank you to all our
nominators, and
congratulations to all our
winners!