

Overview

Back in March 2014 when I took up this post on a voluntary basis, I wrote my profile on the ECF website stating who I was and what I wanted to achieve with chess in prisons. In essence it is about fostering interest in chess and encouraging chess in prisons across England.



I have given a great deal of my time and effort between then and now in managing the demands of the task. It is now time to give an update on what I have achieved to date.

Itinerary when I visit a prison

On each occasion that I visit a prison, I donate chess equipment and magazines on behalf of the English Chess Federation and Chess & Bridge of London. Without their kindness prisoners would have fewer sets and therefore fewer opportunities to play the game. I also give a Question and Answer session and finish up giving a simultaneous exhibition match against all comers. I try to get access to prison governors and directors when I visit. I have also written a booklet for chess in prisons which can be used by all.

Prisons Visited

Thus far I have visited HMP Coldingley HMP Wandsworth HMP Full Sutton HMP & YO1 Bronzefield and HMP Leicester. I have helped to set up chess clubs in each of these prisons and chess is being played in prison as a result. I am told that it is making a real difference.



Other information

I am trying to influence not only prison governors but government Ministers and Ministry of Justice staff to bring more chess into prisons and to recognise the education value of the game. I want chess to be on the educational prison curriculum and to make it easier for inmates to purchase chess sets and books. Chess in prison is always a good news story.

Chess Correspondent

I am proud to be the Chess Correspondent in my own right for InsideTime, the Prison Chess Newspaper which has a readership of some 60,000 people. I receive a huge amount of correspondence from inmates in response to this column and the chess puzzles I set and their stories are quite remarkable. It is hard to believe in this day and age that inmates still make chess sets out of toilet roll and soap, but they do. Chess has saved lives in prison – this has been made clear to me by more than one prisoner. The very reason I took this job on – to make a positive difference and bring chess to the prison community – is still the reason I am continuing. I know that the ECF and my work are literally changing lives.

I said in my first profile that it is not enough to complain about the dark, we should light a few candles. I am so proud to say that light is being shed in prisons all over England – and indeed the UK. I even received correspondence from an inmate in a US jail. That is how far reaching this initiative has become. Rome wasn't built in a day and this requires a tremendous amount of work – but as one inmate said "Since your chess page has been about I am flooded with other prisoners asking me about chess" so the work continues.

I can be contacted at manager.prisonchess@englishchess.org.uk if you want to donate chess books or equipment for this very worthwhile cause. You will make a difference.