



CARL PORTMAN

ECF Manager of Chess in Prisons



Who am I?

I currently reside in Oxfordshire and I served for 30 years with the Ministry of Defence in the UK and Germany. Now I am Co-Director of my own Limited Company along with my wife, Susan. Well known on the chess circuit I am passionate about the game. I play, organise events and coach chess in schools and prisons. I have served in many administrative roles in chess over the years and am proud to be a former (Shropshire) county champion, club champion (with several clubs) and have represented my country playing for the UK in the NATO Championships in France 2012 and Hungary in 2017 – as Captain. Chess has opened so many doors in my life and allowed me to meet so many wonderful people. I was honoured to receive the ECF President's Award for Services to Chess in 2015. I am also proud to be a certificated European Chess Union School Chess Teacher.

What am I working on with chess in prisons?

My remit is to foster the pursuit of Chess in Prisons across England. My dictionary definition of 'foster' is to *encourage the development of...* and I work to get chess on prison agendas.

Why am I doing it?

Why not? Chess has given me so much since I learned the moves at the age of twelve. I am giving something back. Since I first read 'The Grass Arena' by John Healy I have been driven to help introduce chess into prisons. Chess must be available to all. I have never experienced being in prison myself as an inmate but I am well aware of the unique power of chess and what it can do for people – inmates write and tell me so! In short, chess can and does change lives.

What are my plans going forward?

Real progress has already been made and I shall continue to forge ahead. The prison estate is large and its resources limited but I relish the challenge of making change. My work on behalf of the ECF is conducted on a voluntary basis. I shall continue to garner support at senior levels in the prison system including at Ministerial level. I received a personal letter from the Secretary of State for Justice (Michael Gove at the time) stating that our work is perfectly at one with government thinking and that we (the ECF) really do make a difference. I want to ensure that the new incumbent in the Ministry feels the same way.

I shall continue to work to secure 'buy-in' from Prison Governors and their staff to discuss ideas and options for chess in prison. I am grateful to the ECF, All governors and staff and the general public for their support of this vital initiative. I want also to thank those inmates who try to better themselves and others through chess. In that sense, we are all in this together. As fide say '*Gens una sumus*'.

As the chess columnist for the prison newspaper 'Inside Time' I receive a large amount of post from inmates, and I use that feedback to measure how chess features in prisons. As one inmate wrote "*It has taught me to think ahead and not make rash decisions*".

My motto for life has always been '*Don't complain about the dark, light a few candles*'. I can report that the ECF is doing this. I am always open to ideas and if you wish to contact me on the issue of chess in prisons please do so at manager.prisonchess@englishchess.org.uk

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