



CARL PORTMAN

ECF Manager of Chess in Prisons



Who am I?

I am a chess mad optimist currently living in Oxfordshire. I served for 30 years with the Ministry of Defence in the UK and Germany but am now a 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 in schools. I have served in many administrative roles in chess over the years and on the playing front I am a former county champion, club champion (with several clubs) and have represented my country playing for the UK in the NATO Championships in France 2012. Chess has influenced my life and allowed me to meet many wonderful people. I was honoured to receive the ECF President's Award for Services to Chess in 2015. So, I am no grandmaster but I have enjoyed many precious moments.

What am I doing 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...*

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 across England. Chess should be available to all, whether you are a primary school child, a prison inmate or living alone on a desert island! I should add that although I have never experienced being in prison myself as an inmate, I do know the unique power of chess and what it can do for people. Chess changes lives.

What are my plans going forward?

Much progress has already been made and I want to continue doing more of the same. The prison estate is large and its resources limited but I always relish the challenge of making change. My work on behalf of the ECF is conducted on a step by step 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 absolutely in line with government thinking and that we really do make a difference. I want to ensure that the new incumbent, MP Liz Truss feels the same way.

I will continue to try 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 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*'. In my own way I know I am 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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