



CARL PORTMAN
ECF Manager of Chess in Prisons

Who am I?

I am a chess player, author, and columnist living in Oxfordshire. I served for 30 years with the Ministry of Defence in the UK and Germany. Now I am Co-Director of my own small consultancy business along with my wife, Susan. Well known on the chess circuit, I am passionate about the game. I play in and organise chess events as well as coaching chess in schools, prisons and privately. I have served in many administrative roles in chess over the years, and I am proud to be a former (Shropshire) county champion, club champion (with several chess clubs) and have represented my country playing for the UK in the NATO Championships in France, Hungary and America (the final two as captain). Chess has opened many doors in my life and allowed me to meet many inspirational people. I was honoured to receive the ECF President's Award for Services to Chess in 2015. I am also very 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. As such I strive to get chess on prison agendas using whatever resources I can.

Why am I doing it?

It is about giving something back. Chess has given me so much, and it is important to me to return the joy. Ever since I read 'The Grass Arena' by John Healy I have been driven to help take chess into prisons. I have seen the difference it makes. Prisoner testimony in the form of hundreds of letters since March 2014 reinforces my view that chess is a force for good and can even rehabilitate.

What are my plans?

Significant progress has been made since 2014. The prison estate is large and its resources limited but I relish the challenge of building chess activities in prisons. I continue to garner support at senior levels in the prison system including at ministerial level. Now, the ECF and Chess in Schools and Communities (CSC) work together in prisons for the benefit of the inmates and this includes managing teams for the World Online Prison Chess Championships – something unheard of years ago. We also work with FIDE and the 'Chess for Freedom' initiative and participate in forums and online conferences at a global level, sharing information and experiences.

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 darkness, light a few candles.'

I can happily report that the ECF is lighting candles! I am always open to ideas and if you wish to contact me on the issue of chess in prisons please do so at:

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