



Shannon Trust sponsors the Toe by Toe Reading Plan in Prisons

# Shannon News

## JK Rowling Endorses Toe by Toe

We were delighted that Harry Potter author, Jo Rowling visited HMP Edinburgh in March to present certificates to Toe by Toe mentors and learners.

She spent time chatting to the Toe by Toe team and was clearly impressed. When asked to sign a Toe by Toe manual she wrote, ‘

*one of the most important books I have ever signed’*

Jo Rowling is a well-



respected figure in Scotland, and her visit received wide coverage in the Scottish press. Her official quote in the

papers was;

*‘ I am pleased to be able to support the Shannon Trust’s work, it was a very positive experience to go and see the Toe by Toe scheme in action. Learning to read represents a significant turning point in anyone’s life’.*

Our thanks go to Serena Naismith and James Crawford for their roles in building such a positive relationship with staff at the prison.

Spring 2008

### Shannon Trust in numbers

**99** total number of volunteers

**28** volunteer applications currently being processed

**120** people have enquired about volunteering with us since 1st January 2008

**3** number of new area co-ordinators we currently need.

## Leeds Seminar Success Rolled Out

Last September we held our first seminar in Leeds, to which volunteers and prison staff were invited. The input from prison staff was excellent and raised our discussions to a new level.

Participants said that they particularly enjoyed the talks from Kerry Hemingway and Brian Wreakes who run Toe by Toe in Resettlement at HMP Doncaster; and Rose Dickinson from the Education Dept. at HMP Styal.

Leeds was followed by seminars in Bristol, Rugby, London and Scotland. Whilst the format was similar for all, the speakers differed.

In Bristol we learned about the success of Toe by Toe at HMP Usk and we were lucky to have an extremely informative work-

shop on ‘Dyslexia and Offending’ delivered by Melanie Jameson, our volunteer at HMP Long Lartin.

In London, volunteers Shirley Rowcliffe and Sue Carless entertained us with stories of their experiences of working together at HMP’s Downview and Highdown. We also learned a lot from the Wormwood Scrubs Toe by Toe team.

In Rugby, volunteer Suresh Nesaratnam and three staff from HMP Woodhill gave us an insight into how Toe by Toe can be effectively run in a high security prison.

Of the 114 people who attended the seminars, 53 were Shannon Trust volunteers, 54 were prison staff and 7 were from other organisations.



Sharing good practice at our seminar in Leeds

We collected some very useful feedback. Participants valued the opportunity to hear about the experiences of others and to learn more about prisons from the people who work in them.

We also collected suggestions for topics for next year’s seminars, which we hope to run in early spring 2009.

## Can your mentors recognise visual stress?

One of the reasons why some adults have failed to learn to read is because they have always found reading extremely uncomfortable, and for some, it can be painful.

I used to teach reading, writing and spelling to prisoners and I always asked my non-readers "what happens when you look at a page of text?" Answers to this question often included:

"I feel sick,"

"I get a headache,"

"my eyes water,"

"everything starts to move on the page,"

"everything goes blurry."

Such responses indicated that

these prisoners were suffering visual stress, also known as 'scotopic sensitivity syndrome'. The syndrome is prevalent in people with dyslexia but others may also suffer from it.

Those who have this condition (and many can be found in prison) will struggle with Toe by Toe. The good news is that a coloured plastic overlay, cut to fit the manual, and then placed over the page will reduce the glare from the page and make reading more comfortable.

When mentors first meet their learners they should be checking for signs of scotopic sensitivity. It is quite easy to do as we have a

simple checklist (enclosed with this issue) that they can use.

Shannon Trust can also supply each mentor with a pack of overlays from which the learner can select the colour that makes looking at Toe by Toe most comfortable. Please order these from the Office.

It is amazing to see the difference a small piece of plastic can make to a learner's progress.

To find out more go to:

[www.essex.ac.uk/psychology/overlays](http://www.essex.ac.uk/psychology/overlays)

Julie Carthy

April 2008

### Diary Dates

#### 5th to 9th May

#### Prison Officers Association Conference

We will be there for the whole week raising awareness and hopefully persuading some prison officers to help us in their establishments.

#### Saturday 24th May

BBC Radio Ulster is broadcasting a one hour 'fly on the wall' documentary about HMP Magilligan. Volunteer, Sam White was interviewed for the programme. You can listen on [www.bbc.co.uk/radio](http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio) after it has been broadcast, for one week,

### Find Out More

#### [www.prisonofficer.org.uk](http://www.prisonofficer.org.uk)

This is not an officially recognised or approved website but it is recommended for its collection of articles on prison issues collected from local and national media. It gives a useful insight into the working day of a prison officer and contains some interesting discussion.

#### HMP Usk

Carl Evans impressed us at the Bristol seminar when he told us about the way he very successfully facilitates Toe by Toe at HMP Usk. He is happy for Shannon Trust volunteers and their facilitators to visit him at the prison to learn more.

Contact the office for details.

## New Faces at the Office

### Emily Kerr Muir

As many of you will know,

Linda James resigned from the Trust earlier this year. Her work has been very ably covered by Emily, who has done an excellent job in establishing many new office procedures.

Emily has created the 'Facilitators List' which has been sent to every Toe by Toe facilitator and volunteer. Emily is leaving us to work for the HIV charity 'Body and Soul'.

### Yasmin Aktar

We have recently appointed Yasmin as our new administrator.

She has valuable experience in charity administration gained in her previous job as an Administrative and Finance Officer for FORWARD, an International NGO which campaigns on health rights for women in Africa.

Yasmin will take over from Emily on 28th April.

### Ivy Ansell

If you have ever telephoned the office on a Monday you may have spoken to Ivy who very generously gives up her Mondays to help out in the office. Her main job is to deal with the resource orders and post them off.

We are extremely grateful to her for all the hard work she puts into helping us out.

## The West Midlands Reading Network

Shannon Trust has secured 3 years of funding from the Paul Hamlyn Foundation to create a working network of Young Offenders Institutions (YOIs) in the West Midlands to facilitate the effective delivery of Toe by Toe.

Susie O'Hagan has been appointed by Shannon Trust to manage the project.

As well as the usual challenges of running the Toe by Toe Reading Plan in a prison, YOIs often struggle to find and retain suitable mentors, especially as sentences can be very short. The project will initially involve Brinsford, Stoke Heath, Swinfen Hall, Thorn Cross and Werrington.

It aims to identify good practice in:

- learning and mentoring continuity after transfer or release;
- national awareness raising;
- tracking monitoring & data collection;

and to improve communication



HMYOI Brinsford, the hub of the project, has successfully run Toe by Toe since 2004

between the YOIs, and with other agencies that support Young Offenders (YO's).

There will be an emphasis on identifying and promoting the wider benefits of Toe by Toe for YO's.

The project's innovation budget will fund a Youth Committee at Brinsford to ensure that the YO's are fully involved in the project. It will also fund other creative ideas to attract greater YO involvement.

The good practice identified by the project will ultimately benefit the whole UK prison estate.

[susie@theshannontrust.org.uk](mailto:susie@theshannontrust.org.uk)

## 3 x 6-Book Challenge Success at The Mount!



Finding space and time for Toe by Toe is a real challenge for the team at HMP The Mount. But thanks to the commitment of basic skills teacher Gaye Molloy, three prisoners have succeeded in learning to read.

Oral Richardson, Homer Morris & Patrick Cameron were all non-readers when they met Gaye who says 'they have worked extremely hard and through their own determination are now competent readers.'

So competent in fact that each has

just completed the prison library's Six Book Challenge!

**'Reading is one of the most important things in the world, as you have to use it every day. It is also very good and important for a father to read to his children, as it will make them love to read also'**

**Patrick, Toe by Toe Learner 2008**

The challenge is targeted at emergent readers—adults who can read but who have yet to build reading stamina and experience.

It runs from January to June each year and successful readers like Oral, Homer and Patrick are presented with a certificate and entered into a prize draw. The prison also rewarded them a small bonus.

Find out if your prison library is involved because it is a great way for Toe by Toe learners to show off their new skills. It is run by the Reading Agency, an independent charity which 'inspires more people to read more.'

[www.readingagency.org.uk](http://www.readingagency.org.uk)

## Gerard Raises Funds Step by Step to Greenwich

It's a long walk from the source of the Thames along its banks to Greenwich—184 miles in fact!

Gerard Downes is well aware of this but is not put off by the prospect of a few blisters and a couple of aching legs because on 6th May he will set off to do the whole walk to raise money for Shannon Trust.

He anticipates that it will take him two weeks to cover the



**The intrepid Gerard Downes spotted recently at our London seminar**

distance walking for an average of five hours a day.

Gerard, who looks after HMP's Winchester and Kingston for us, has already raised over £11,000 in sponsorship. He hopes to raise

enough to purchase a set of books for emergent readers for every prison in England.

These books are extremely useful in encouraging Toe by Toe learners to apply their newfound decoding skills and increase their confidence in reading.

Gerard is currently breaking in his new walking boots and we wish him lots of luck!



# Success for a New Volunteer

## John Sidwell learns the true meaning of 'dogged does it'



I had the good fortune to join Shannon Trust just before the great Conference in Rugby last spring. The speeches by Officer Neil Lodge, Eric Allison of the 'Guardian' and Lord Ramsbottom gave me the inspiration and determination to get started.

Christopher Morgan asked me to look after HMP Gloucester, a cat B-local with 300+ prisoners. He advised me 'when dealing with the prison service one has to be patient', as ever his advice comes from the heart after many years of toil, and it is so true.

It was not until the autumn that I found a supporter within the Education Department, Fay Shaw who introduced me to wing officer, Graham Wilson. He is highly committed to Toe by Toe and it is to his credit that we have made such good progress to date.

Our first team meeting in January 2008 highlighted three major challenges at Gloucester:

- prisoners often stay for just 6 to 8 weeks;
- the prison buildings are elderly (circa 1787) so space is limited;
- lack of Toe by Toe visibility within the prison.

We arranged to meet the new Governor, so to prepare, Graham and I wrote a document outlining the benefits that Toe by Toe brings, the challenges ahead, and the ways Shannon Trust can help. Most importantly we clearly identified the

OUTCOME REQUIREMENT which requested:

- mentoring time;
- 100% awareness throughout the prison;
- a target to achieve three mentors per wing;
- payment for mentors;
- suitable space for learning to take place;
- time for Graham to facilitate it within his work schedule;
- an agreement that Toe by Toe would be counted as 'purposeful activity'.

After a few delays we finally met Governor, Mike Bolton in March. It was well worth the wait! Already aware of the benefits that Toe by Toe would bring to his establishment having seen its success at HMP Featherstone, he recognised how it fits perfectly into his current theme for the prison which is 'Chances: Choice and Making Changes'

Toe by Toe will be on the agenda of the next full staff meeting as the Governor expects every member of staff to support Toe by Toe.

As a further measure of his support he agreed to the following:

- to put a stop on the transfer of mentors;
- to make meeting rooms available;
- to pay mentors;
- to schedule facilitation time for Graham.

We agreed a target of thirty learners for our first year. We currently have five established mentors with two more starting soon.

**'When dealing with the prison service one has to be patient'**

I have also established a good band of supporters which include the Head of Interventions, Partnership Co-ordinator, the Chaplain and the IMB Chair.

Luck has given me a keen Governor and an effective Officer. It has been an exciting and very enjoyable challenge. Now we are rather like Hillary when he reached the North Col of Everest—the hard work is ahead of us and it is very much up to team effort.

I'm not sure how things will develop from here but I am sure I will need Christopher's patience and tenacity as we deal with the numerous hurdles ahead.

John Sidwell April 2008

### Editors Note

**This is the first of what we plan to be quarterly newsletters for our volunteers. We would really appreciate some feedback from you. Please let us know how we can improve on it.**

**We would also like some contributions from you, particularly good news from your prisons and tips to pass on to others**

**E-mail your comments, suggestions and contributions to:**

**[Julie@theshannontrust.org.uk](mailto:Julie@theshannontrust.org.uk)**

**THANK YOU**

