



High flying voices!

Podcast bringing in different points of view and fresh ideas on prisons from the too often unheard

Inside Time report

One topic, two chicks, three points of view. What does it really mean to ‘do time’? That’s how we introduce a podcast whose mission is to highlight voices inside UK prisons. Bird hatched in 2018 as a platform for people inside the UK’s prison system, and their wider communities, to speak about their lived experiences. Born from work stories shared between long-time friends Kate & Nina whilst Kate worked at HMP Pentonville. The pair have combined their careers working in

research and design (Nina) and social work (Kate) to create ‘Bird Podcast.’

Challenging stereotypes

“When you work inside the system it is easy to become de-sensitised to what goes on,” says Kate. The pair believed the microcosm of society that is prison would be fascinating to those on ‘the out’. It became obvious that these stories from prison were unique, interesting and like nothing Nina’s work colleagues had heard before. By giving voice to these important, often unheard, stories Bird hopes to challenge stereotypes, educate and inspire.

Bird aims to raise awareness and support for a better criminal justice system, one that’s focused on prisoners’ capacity for growth and change.

‘A nice bonus’

In each podcast, we hear three points of view surrounding one complex issue. Recent episodes have explored knife crime, life sentences and children’s exposure to criminality. In 2023, Bird’s third season will be recorded exclusively inside prisons and they have already collaborated with HMPs Pentonville, Preston, Garth and Wymott. Speakers are actively involved in the recording process, through workshops and discussion groups to really help them engage. A nice bonus of the workshops is discovering hidden artistic and musical talent that Bird can then showcase. This grassroots project has truly reinforced a belief in the power of collaboration.

‘Tackling the gulf’

As a society, we often shun and vilify people who’ve been incarcerated by using labels from preconceived negative representations. In doing so, we take away the human element, isolate people with convictions and hinder their rehabilitation. Kate and Nina hope to change this and tackle the gulf between the media’s judgemental portrayals and the reality the prisoners encounter both in and out of their cells. “People have the capacity to change,” says Kate “They might have done something terrible but, as a society, if we don’t believe people can change then what’s the point of rehabilitation?”

Lack of bias

Every episode is dedicated to exploring individual issues within the Prison Service; providing a balanced discussion from both a statistical and personal standpoint. For example in the ‘Care Leavers & Custody’ episode with HMP Preston, we learn about the overrepresentation of care leavers in prison. 25% of the adult prison population have previously been in care and 50% of under-21-year-olds in contact with the criminal justice system have spent time in care, this coincides with Aidan’s story of neglect growing up with his mother who was a drug user. He spoke about once being so hungry he ate a tube of toothpaste which nearly killed him. After his mum threatened him with violence in front of a teacher at school, Aidan was taken into care. He now struggles to understand how the earlier warning signs were missed even though he was always unkempt and out late, not wanting to go home. Through this balance, we are offered a rare and impartial space from which to form our own opinions. The lack of bias is so rare and refreshing when addressing such an important but sadly divisive topic.

Empathy

“There’s a lot of stigma and this actually affects so many people” says Kate. “We definitely didn’t want to put our own opinion on it, the main thing is their voices.” In Kate’s current role as Team Manager at Haringey Youth Justice Service, she is able to make the

podcast insights go further by sharing them with fellow practitioners. Episodes have been used in talking groups with young people to reflect on knife crime, gangs and disproportionality, with one of the episodes being created directly with young men of colour working the YJS. Their authentic style of delivery



makes it difficult to feel anything but empathy for the struggles discussed. The women who’ve had children taken away and put into social care due to short-term sentences for petty, non-violent crimes, the prison staff working in an under-funded system or the vulnerable child who got involved in crime due to an unsafe home. Bird provides a platform to share these experiences with no blame laid at anyone’s feet. They always ensure victims are safeguarded by removing any identifying information about the participants and being sensitive to the offences that occurred.

Building on success

The podcast goes beyond audio, with Kate and Nina expanding into events, which like Bird are sentenced around a key theme. Their most recent example ‘The Making of Me’ featured guests from previous episodes revealing their personal journey beyond the prison gates. Their events go a step further and allow more tangible and accessible interaction with the speakers and the subject matter as a whole. For Bird’s next episode, they’ll be speaking to the young adult population in HMP Belmarsh and as for the future of Bird? Kate and Nina want to build on the success of the rehabilitative nature of the podcast and devise a 6-part training course to help people in prison learn key skills to start their own podcast. The biggest revelation of working inside prisons is the enormous amount of untapped creativity - why not afford people the time to develop that whilst they have it.

Fresh ideas

Above all, Kate and Nina will continue encouraging us to reconsider our perceptions and put our own hurdles into perspective, asking us to form fresh ideas that will address the evident need for change.

If you’re interested in getting the voices inside your prison heard, Bird still has opportunities for episodes this season. Get in touch at whatitmeantodotime@gmail.com To listen to the podcast, visit, and learn more about Bird go to www.birdpodcast.co.uk or follow us on Instagram, TikTok and Twitter @birdpodcast

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