



**PRISONER  
SOLIDARITY  
NETWORK**

**RETROSPECTIVE**

**2020 - 2021**

# PSN Retrospective 2020-2021

*Critical reflections on the last 1.5 years*

The following document aims to summarise some of PSN's activities over the last 2 years. The objective is to reflect on the work we've done thus far and spark discussions about our future. Activities have been grouped into the following categories:

## **1. Rebrand**

## **2. Campaigns**

## **3. Fundraising**

## **4. Demonstrations**

## **5. Outreach**

## **6. Inreach**

## **7. Statement from John Bowden**

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# Rebrand

## IWOC London rebrands as Prisoner Solidarity Network (March 2020)



Following a meeting in March 2020, and after feedback from members and non-members, we decided to change our name from 'IWOC (Incarcerated Worker Organising Committee) London' to the 'Prisoner Solidarity Network' (PSN). We felt this was a clearer and more accessible name for the group, that would help us communicate our work to people.

## Our website is launched (April 2020)

Our website was launched a month later, where people can see updates on our activities, read our principles, download a digital copy of our intro pack and contact us.



### ABOUT

The Prisoner Solidarity Network is a group of people committed to dismantling the criminal justice system and building a society based on collective care. Our members include people inside and outside of prisons. Some of us are ex-prisoners and some are children, partners, or friends of people inside. Many of us are survivors of interpersonal and state violence. Some of us come to this work through our values rather than direct experience of the prison system.

We want to build a society where conflicts can be resolved without resorting to imprisonment and punishment, where our relationships with each other are not shaped by capitalism and where we are not divided by race, class, or gender.

# Campaigns

## Joint campaign with @bluebaglife about poor hygiene and extreme heat in cells (April-July 2020)

Working alongside @bluebaglife we raised awareness of the appalling hygiene conditions experienced by prisoners at HMP Coldingley. This lead to a BBC Radio 4 report by Zoe Conway highlighting the conditions. The report featured testimonies by inmates that were collected by @bluebaglife and voiced by actors.



Following the report, cells were searched for phones, but the negative press led to changes in the regime. One prisoner reported: 'It's the cleanest the jail's ever been. The toilets are unblocked and being cleaned regularly. They also gave us buckets and soap. The regime has slightly changed, they let us out two at a time from 9am to use the toilet, brush teeth and to fill up water. Then we got exercise five at a time in the afternoon for 15 mins. Fresh air.' When asked 'Do you think the prison was scared about the press coverage?', the prisoner responded: 'Yeah, because they're getting exposed for how they got us living on this lockdown'.

The campaign later pivoted to focus on the extreme heat experienced due to poor ventilation at HMP Coldingley, HMP Frankland, HMP Highdown and others.

## Open letter highlighting avoidable death of babies in prison and demanding the release of pregnant prisoners (Sept 2020)

### Baby dies in UK prison after inmate 'gives birth alone in cell'

Following the avoidable deaths of two babies at HMP Bronzefield and HMP Styal, PSN launched a campaign raising awareness of the issue and calling for the release of all pregnant prisoners. The launch took the form of an open letter signed by activist groups, prisoners/ex-prisoners, academics and healthcare professionals. This issue has now been taken up by other campaign groups and is getting national attention

Police investigate unexplained death at Bronzefield women's prison in Surrey



▲ HMP Bronzefield is Europe's largest women's prison, holding up to 557 inmates. Photograph: Mark Harvey/Alamy Stock Photo

# Campaigns

## Joint campaign with Undod about persecution of Welsh language speakers at HMP Berwyn (Jan-March 2021)

Having been made aware of ongoing harassment and separation of first language Welsh speakers by staff at HMP Berwyn (Wales), we campaigned alongside left wing Welsh independence group Undod to raise awareness of the issue



The campaign had a broad reach and was picked up by outlets such as the BBC, S4C, The Canary and Inside Time. The issue was also brought up by Llyr Gruffydd MS at the Senedd (the Welsh Parliament), leading to The First Minister of Wales, Mark Drakeford, to order the Welsh Language Commissioner to meet HMP Berwyn representatives to discuss the situation.

One of our key inside sources was assaulted by prison officers two weeks after stepping forward to speak publicly on the issue. We then immediately ran a campaign to ensure the prisoners safety and hold the prisoner officers accountable. Following this campaign, the Berwyn administration offered concessions to the prisoner and relocated them within the prison away from the prison officers concerned.

### Prisoners 'told by staff not to speak Welsh'

Inside Time Reports 5th October 2020 0 \*Newsround



### HMP Berwyn: Welsh-speaking inmates 'threatened with sanctions'

28 September 2020



NEWS UK  
Welsh language speaker alleges discrimination at Britain's largest prison



NEWS  
HMP Berwyn 'failing Welsh speakers' Senedd member says

04 Feb 2021 3 minutes Read



# Fundraising

## COVID-19 Fundraiser (March-Nov 2020)

When Covid-19 hit the UK, we knew that it would impact people in prison in a lot of ways. One issue was keeping in touch with loved ones outside: visits to prisons had been cancelled, which meant prisoners were having less contact with family and friends at an incredibly difficult time. Phone calls are extremely expensive and many people inside simply can't afford extra calls to family in the absence of visits. We set up a fundraiser to send money to people for phone credit, food and hygiene items, which many prisons weren't providing.

The fundraiser opened in March 2020 and was promoted via our social media channels. @bluebaglife collected testimonies from prisoners and their families about their conditions. These were made into sharable Instagram posts that directed our followers to the fundraiser page.

We received **689** donations totalling **£20,174** which allowed us to make payments to over **600** people who applied to our emergency fund.

The decision was made to close the campaign in November before it became an unsustainable drain on our capacity, and so that we could focus on other solidarity work. It was also made significantly harder to administer because during the period we were running it the system for sending money to prisoners was changed to make multiple donations much more difficult.

### Covid-19 Prisoner Emergency Fund

**£20,174 raised**

Share

The organiser has disabled new donations to this fundraiser at the moment.

Sam Rabin £20 · 10 months ago
Simon Timmins £10 · 10 months ago
Bevan Lal £10 · 11 months ago
Anonymous £25 · 11 months ago
Anonymous £25 · 11 months ago

[See all](#) [See top donations](#)

Prisoner Solidarity Network London is organising this fundraiser.

The impact and uncertainty of the Covid-19 pandemic is difficult for us all, but for people in prison the effects will be felt even harder.

As people begin to self-isolate and avoid travel and public spaces, many friends and family members are unable to attend visitation. We also anticipate the possible cancellation of visitation by some prisons. This means that prisoners are having less contact with their loved ones at a time when they will likely be worried about them.

**COVID-19 IN UK PRISONS: PRISONERS & FAMILIES SPEAK OUT**

“...we were told just recently by the guy that if we think we may have covid we have to self isolate in our cells, luckily I am in a single cell!”

“He hasn't been allowed out of his cell (except for 10 mins for a shower) since 330pm yesterday. I am not allowed to exercise today and tomorrow isn't looking great either. He was told 15 extra would go on credit but they won't give it. They're still only getting cold food on weekends.”

**Stop avoidable deaths in prisons!**

**COVID-19 IN UK PRISONS: PRISONERS & FAMILIES SPEAK OUT**

“My dad just phoned. 15 minutes to make a call, get water one on site in cell, and have a shower. Not even give toilettes in cell. First time he be let out today.”

“In this cell no phones in cells, five mins calls a day, no payment for visits like credit or anything, need to release more people family ties is most important...”

“My brother just ring. First time out since Friday 3pm. Had to sit in his shower and only allowed to have 10 minutes today to shower and make one phone call, no exercise either. He didn't sound good. Head very low. It's terrible, I'm worried.”

**Stop avoidable deaths in prisons!**

# Demonstrations

## PSN co-sign and attend 'Free Kevan Thakrar/End Solitary Confinement' demos outside Royal College of Psychiatrists (March 2020 + June 2021)

These two demos were largely organised Payday Men's Network and Kevan himself. Also in attendance were JENGbA, the IWW, CAPE, FRFI, Global Women's Strike, Legal Action for Women, Kev's parents and others. The aim of these demos were to get the Royal College of Psychiatrists to stop legitimising solitary confinement by providing Close Supervision Centres with 'enabling environments' accreditations. And to officially recognise that the highly restrictive and isolating environment of the CSC has a serious detrimental effect on the mental health of those held within it. Further actions are planned.



# Demonstrations

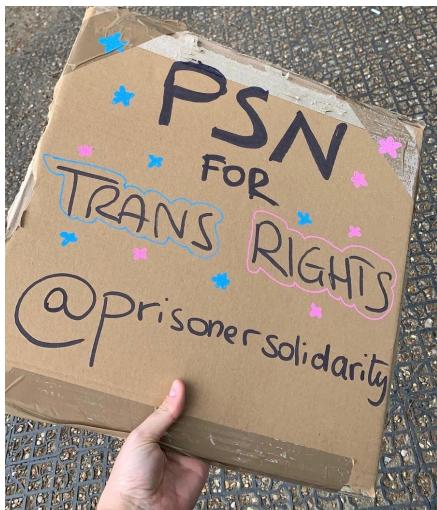
## PSN and CAPE organise demo outside the Ministry of Justice in solidarity with Kevan Thakrar (April 2021)



In early 2021, guards at HMP Full Sutton moved inside member Kevan Thakrar from his CSC cell to a segregation cell with no toilet lid and no electricity. In response, PSN and CAPE collaborated on a demo outside the ministry of justice. Kev's parents, Payday Men's Network and FRFI were in attendance. We used this opportunity to film interviews with Kev's mum and Sam from Payday Men's Network that were later used in PSN film about Kev's case. The demo was reported in the Canary.

## PSN attend numerous demos including #KillTheBill, Trans Pride, Black Lives Matter and others (2019-2021)

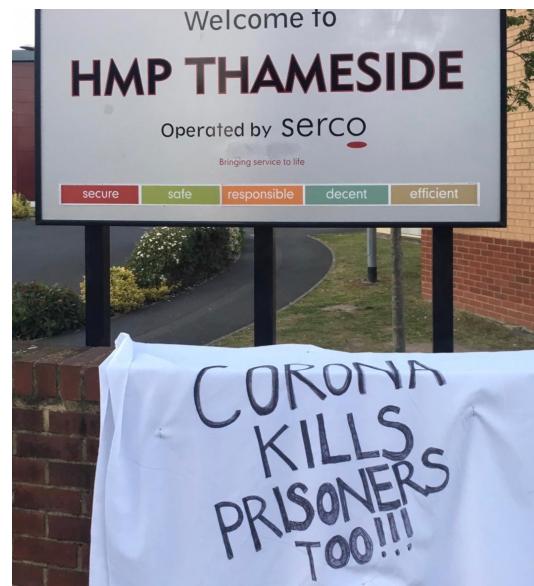
In an expression of solidarity with adjacent movements, PSN have attended numerous demos. Our new, large banner making our presence more noticeable.



# Demonstrations

## Innumerable banner drops by Sarah Jane Baker outside various locations of the UK Prison Estate (2019 - 2021)

Following her release in September 2019, Sarah Jane Baker has campaigned tirelessly. Amongst other things, Sarah has done countless banner drops outside various locations in the Prison and Youth Justice estate.



# Outreach

## Sarah Jane Baker appears on numerous podcasts (2019 - 2021)

In addition to banner drops and speaking at demos, Sarah Jane Baker has been interviewed on a number of podcasts and YouTube channels. These include the James English Podcast (40k views), Shaune Attwood Podcast (48k views), the Thomson Reuters Foundation (11k views) and others. Whilst she's generally invited on to speak about her own personal journey and experiences, Sarah never misses an opportunity to champion any current PSN campaigns. Our comms team have clipped some of these appearances and shared relevant clips via our own social media channels. These clips have received further views and engagement.



# Outreach

## John Bowden appears on numerous podcasts and panel discussions (2020 - 2021)

Following his release in March 2020, John Bowden has continued to devote his life to the prison struggle. John has appeared on countless panel discussions on behalf of PSN including: 'From Arrest to Abolition: The Struggle for a World Without Prisons' (London Kurdistan Solidarity), 'End Solitary Confinement' (Payday Men's Network), 'Transformative Justice Workshop Weekend' (Solidarity Collective), the 'How Not Podcast' and many others. John has also been interviewed on Novara Media and written articles for Lumpen, FRCI and others.



NOVARA MEDIA

INTERVIEW

**40 Years in Prison, 40 Years of Struggle: An Interview with John Bowden**

by Connor Woodman  
19 November 2020

*John Bowden, a long-time prison organiser and member of the Prisoner Solidarity Network, was recently released after 40 years of incarceration. While all those who were sent down with him were released after 20 years, Bowden was kept back as punishment for his anti-prison organising.*

Connor Woodman sat down with Bowden to discuss the prison system, including the dynamics of struggle between guards and prisoners, the role of gangs in today's prisons, and his involvement in an uprising in one of the most repressive segregation units in the UK.

**CW: Based on your 40 years in the UK prison system, what would you say the function and purpose of prison is?**

**JB:** If there is a relationship between prisons and public protection, it's very much an inverse one. Prisons actually create and produce alienated and de-socialised individuals.

We're dealing with people that already exist on the margins of society and have for most of their lives. To put them into a total institution, to disempower them, brutalise them if

# Outreach

## PSN YouTube channel (March 2021 - )

It was decided that we should consider producing our own video content, to be published on our own YouTube channel and existing Instagram and Twitter accounts. So far, four videos have been produced. Three of them have involved John being filmed outside HMP Brixton, HMP Pentonville and HMP Wandsworth. In these videos, John shares his experiences of being imprisoned in these institutions, the distinction between Abolition Vs. Reform, the history of the UK prison system, the brutality implemented by prison officers and much more.

The fourth video is a short (5 minute) documentary film that focuses on the case of our inside member Kevan Thakrar. The video details his conviction under the racist 'Joint Enterprise' legal doctrine, his resistance to violent attacks by prison officers, his transfer to the Close Supervision Centre and recent imprisonment in the segregation unit. The film featured Kev's mum, Gloria Morrison from JENGbA (Joint Enterprise Not Guilty by Association), Sam Weinstein from Payday Men's Network and Kevan himself (via telephone).

The videos have received a total of 6.6k views on YouTube and a further 8k views on our Instagram account. Further videos are planned on topics such as drug decriminalisation, youth custody, sex work decriminalisation, IPP sentences, the true nature of the Probation Service and much more.

# SOLIDARITY

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Prisoner Solidarity Network
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Kevan Thakrar (Joint Enterprise + CSCs)

291 views • 4 months ago

CC



Ep. 3 HMP Wandsworth 'The Hate Factory'

1.6K views • 4 months ago

CC



Ep. 2 HMP Pentonville

2.5K views • 5 months ago

CC



Ep. 1 HMP Brixton

2.2K views • 6 months ago

CC

# Inreach

## **Increased membership via JENGbA and Books Beyond Bars Newsletter (2020-2021)**

Our inside membership has grown considerably in the last 1.5 years. A considerable amount of the new recruitment has come from our inclusion in newsletters by Books Beyond Bars and JENGbA (Joint Enterprise Not Guilty by Association), following a New Year's Eve letter writing project. Our attempts at advertising in Inside Time and Jail Mail were unsuccessful, with Inside Time saying: *'Thanks for your enquiry, however this is not something that we would be interested in featuring within Inside Time as we can't see of what benefit it would really be to prisoners'.*

We've also seen increased recruitment due to the hard work of our inside members, many of whom have been distributing our intro pack to other prisoners on their wing.

## **Monthly round-up (2021 - )**

At the start of 2021, we decided to start using the [emailaprisoner.com](http://emailaprisoner.com) site to send a monthly round-up of our organisation's activities. This has proved to be a valuable way of staying in touch with our inside members, many of whom reply and feedback. It's been great to have an additional line of communication on top of our buddy system.



# Statement from John Bowden

‘Probably the worst feeling and experience as a prisoner, apart from the sense of total isolation from the world outside, is the feeling of total powerlessness over ones life and the forces that dictate ones daily existence. As prisoners we exist almost as inanimate bodies, subject to the power and authority of those who enforce our imprisonment, and that feeling of disempowerment can reach into our minds and soul, eroding our essential human dignity and feeling of self-worth. In such a dehumanising physical environment, defiance of spirit and mind can be an incredibly liberating and empowering experience. How then is that defiance of mind and spirit to be nurtured and nourished? By the belief and understanding that even within an institution so structurally designed to force submission and total powerlessness upon its captive inhabitants resistance is possible once the belief is embraced that solidarity and unity can transcend and overcome the forces that imprison us. Radical and transformative change of the prison system is possible when prisoners themselves instigate and initiate that change through self-organisation and collective resistance, and the support and solidarity of groups like the Prisoner Solidarity Network here on the outside will provide a voice for your struggle in whatever way we can. You are not alone and we are absolutely committed to transcending the walls that imprison you by creating a movement of prisoner solidarity out here where your voice will not be silenced. We are with you and here for you, so keep fighting and resisting.’

John Bowden,  
Prisoner Solidarity Network



# Contact Us

If you have any questions about the Prisoner Solidarity Network, or you agree with our principles and would like to get involved, please contact us.

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Facebook: [facebook.com/PrisonerSolidarityNetwork](https://www.facebook.com/PrisonerSolidarityNetwork)

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