



Volunteers' Week

1-7 June

Spotlight on

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Head Office



I have made use of SCRA's Volunteering Policy to support my role as a volunteer Independent Prison Monitor (IPM) for Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons for Scotland (HMIPS). I came across this opportunity on Scotland's Public Appointments website and immediately knew it was something that would complement my work at SCRA, fit with my interests and would offer me a real development opportunity that I wouldn't find within SCRA. An IPM is a Ministerial appointment which holds statutory authority and is an essential role in Scotland's criminal justice system; helping to ensure prisoners' human rights are upheld, that Scotland's prisons adhere to the Prison Standards and that life in prison contributes to rehabilitation and better outcomes upon release from custody.

My role involves me regularly visiting HMP & YOI Cornton Vale (and on occasion HMYOI Polmont) as well as undertaking specific human rights projects, such as investigating family contact practices or opportunities to access education. As a key holder, I am afforded access to any area or person in prison (whether this be a prisoner, officer, management or the Prison Governor) and provide an independent viewpoint on the humane treatment and conditions for prisoners and I am

able to conduct investigations for prisoners to ensure they are treated fairly and in accordance with Prison Standards and human rights legislation. We report formally at the end of each visit or upon completion of any human rights project and these observations feed into HMIPS formal inspections and the UK's National Preventative Mechanism.

I have found this role to be incredibly rewarding. Being able to ensure that human rights are being respected and that prisoners are being treated fairly and humanely is something I feel incredibly passionate about and it fits with my values, whilst also providing new challenges and perspectives. Whilst I tend to do most of my monitoring on my non-working days, there is the odd day that I have to take off and this is where SCRA's volunteering leave comes in handy. I have mostly used this leave to do my annual personal protection training (which involves pushing people around in a padded room and is the source of much laughter as we role play!) and without volunteering leave I'd have had to use my annual leave and, as a mum of two, I need to keep that for the school holidays!

I think most people in SCRA recognise that many of those in Scotland's prisons are there as a result

of their circumstances and my volunteering feeds into my thinking around the impact of equalities and inclusion which I think greatly benefits SCRA as I take a holistic view of inclusion and diversity. I also get to feed into the Scottish Prison Service's (SPS) strategic vision, such as the Women in Custody Strategy and the new women's national facility and community custody units that are currently being built but I can also use my knowledge and expertise of Equality & Human Rights Impact Assessments that I have developed at SCRA to aid HMIPS and SPS in their work towards equality, diversity and inclusion.

I really view my volunteering as a reciprocal development and learning opportunity – I learn, HMIPS/SPS learn and SCRA learns. I can only see benefits from the Volunteering Policy that's available to us in SCRA and I urge all colleagues to make good use of it.

I do other voluntary work too, such as helping a new gender equality charity with their strategic planning and sitting on my local grassroots football club's Executive Committee as their Child Well-Being & Protection Officer, but I do this in my own time.

There are so many opportunities out there and there are some really impactful longer-term opportunities as well as short-term opportunities. Whatever you're interested in, there's something out there for you.

#VolunteersWeek

