

OFFERING HOPE & A NEW BEGINNING

The Silent Casualties

It's Sunday afternoon and five-year-old James is playing in the waiting area while his grandparents have their paperwork checked. The room is filled with family members waiting to be called. Some look tired from the long drive while others seem anxious. They make this trip regularly and are concerned for the well-being of their loved one. But this is precious time, and each will make the most of it.

The clock shows 2pm and an Officer calls them through the security gates. James hesitates. His grandfather holds his hand as they walk through the large metal gates and past the scary dogs. James rubs his eyes as he is led into a bright room. The tables there have board games and colouring books, but James holds onto his grandfather. At the end is a closed door. James stares at it, waiting. Finally, it opens and the women prisoners come in. James's face lights up. His hands reach out as he runs.

"Mummy."

James is just one of *crime's invisible victims*. There are many like him, ranging from several weeks to 18 years-old with a mum in prison. The family is torn apart and often grandparents fill the parental roles. Children have to deal with the emotional effects of their mum's decisions. Many have difficulty understanding why their mum would want to be away from them and some will think it's their fault. Some have vivid memories of visiting their mum inside or living in the foster care system.



Instead of having fond recollections of growing up in a traditional family setting, children like James remember the times spent with their mum once a month. They recall the awkward hugs and trying to hold back the tears as their mum was led away to that closed door.

Children like James grow up with the stigma that their mum's 'home' is a place that society considers disgraceful. They feel ashamed and rejected, angry and confused, alone in a world that doesn't really understand their situation.

At Prison Fellowship we care about families of prisoners. Our two Family Workers, Tracie and Sandra, are committed to making regular visits. Last year 557 family visits were conducted across Northern Ireland offering ongoing support to 287 families, including 83 new families. This is a vital part of our ministry. As one mum said *'The relationship I have with my family worker has been crucial to getting me through this awful time. My family member in prison is supported by PF staff and that's helped us stay connected as a family.'*

Pray with us that we will secure the resources to appoint another Family Worker to help bring the Hope of Jesus to broken families.

The Role of a Family Worker

In 2008 I heard Norman speak at my Church about Prison Fellowship; it was an answer to prayer for me that there were people praying for prisoners as I had a couple of friends in prison. I felt, at last, support in my burden in praying for those in prison.

I started to attend the monthly prayer meeting and helped at Christmas time delivering hampers to families in Derry.

Taking on the role of Family Worker by visiting mums and those whose partners are in prison is a privilege. Mums can often feel quite isolated, especially if the victim is also a family member. They appreciate that we visit, so they can talk about the difficulties and challenges they are facing in their family life.

Some are struggling with mental health issues and don't leave their home much. These ladies are grateful for the support we give and appreciate prayer, and it is lovely to see them begin to have Hope.



Some families have had generations of family members in prison. To see a young person expect that for themselves is heart-breaking. All they have known is a home with emotional or physical abuse and living with parents with addiction problems. They expect their lives to be the same. However, we want to tell them about Jesus and His Love for them. He won't let them down.

As family workers we cover a large area and don't get to support families as often as we would like. We would hope for volunteers to fill the gap. If you are compassionate and a good listener, GOD can use you in this ministry.

Tracie

A day in the life of a PF Family Worker



Monday mornings mean an early start because that's when we get together for staff devotions. I try to work the same days each week so that I and those that I work with have continuity. That said, one of the biggest advantages in my work is the level of flexibility to arrange my family visits, do administrative work, and other PF commitments.

Because I don't live in the geographical areas that I cover, on average I travel an hour to begin work; I enjoy driving so this isn't an issue for me. In some ways no two days are the same and yet in other ways it can feel a little like groundhog day! Most days include a fair bit of driving and visiting up to two or three families.

The role of a Family Worker isn't physically demanding (except for Christmas Hope, but I love it), however, it can be tough on your head and heart. I'm learning more and more that, devastating as it is to have a family member in prison, so often the challenges that families face when a loved one is released are equally demanding.

As a Family Worker I love what I do but I don't find it easy. It can be difficult to not only listen to what a wife, mother or sister is dealing with but often their pain is etched on their faces and that is heart-breaking to witness. Very often I have my days planned, confident I know what's happening that day, but it can all change very quickly.

The freedom as a Family Worker to speak about Jesus and pray with folk, who in many instances have little or no contact with the Church or Christians, is incredible. There is something very special about being able to pray with someone and through prayer to speak of who God is and His love for those He has created. I have seen women begin to live again, not because of me but because of the hope offered to us all through the gospel. It doesn't get much better than that!

Sandra

Welcome Helen & Gordon

Our Board members come from a wide variety of backgrounds and are responsible for the overall strategy and direction of the work of Prison Fellowship. Gordon Reynolds and Helen Dunn are our new board members and we asked them to share about themselves and how they ended up in Prison Fellowship.



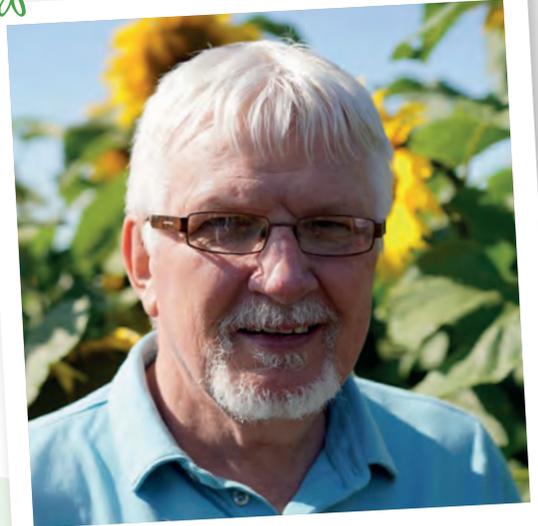
My name is Helen Dunn and I'm a member of Glenabbey Church. I have lived in Carrickfergus all my life and am married to Mervyn. I have two adult children, Michael and Rachel, and a Shih Tzu puppy called Bella.

For over thirty years I have been employed in various social work roles in the area of Family and Child Care in both the statutory and voluntary sectors. I am currently employed in the statutory sector on a part-time basis. My main interests are in Family and Parenting Support but also in fostering and adoption.

I first came into contact with Prison Fellowship when I worked for a children's charity which delivered Parenting Programmes in prison settings. I became part of an inter-agency Children of Prisoners Group where, with a range of organisations, we sought to work collaboratively on those issues. Since then, even though I moved on to other work in early years family support and working with young people, I have always taken a keen interest in the work of Prison Fellowship.

Outside of work my main interests are in supporting local charities who help young people in the community and another that supports foster carers and adopters. I also enjoy the countryside, walking, swimming, genealogy and watching sport. I have to admit to being an avid Manchester United fan but nobody's perfect....right?

I feel really honoured to be asked to be a member of the Board of Prison Fellowship and hope my knowledge and experience over the years will be of some help particularly with prisoners' families. I would really appreciate your prayers as I gain more knowledge of the work of the organisation and that I can be an asset to the team going forward.



I was born, raised, and educated in Enniskillen and in 1975 I met and married another 'Enniskillener' – Patricia. We have two adult children, Tim & Melanie, and two grandchildren.

Raised in the Church of Ireland, I was saved in 1971. Following a call to full-time ministry with The Salvation Army, I completed two years at their Bible College in London and subsequently pastored in various congregations in the 70's. In 1980 I returned to 'school' and qualified in Social Work, leaving the pastoral ministry to go into correctional social work as a Probation Officer, working both in the community and in prison-based welfare work for about ten years.

In 1992, on a three year sabbatical, the Reynolds family moved to Chatham, Ontario to work in the community for the local Salvation Army church. After a temporary return to Ireland in mid-1994, we returned permanently in 1997, and I continued in vocational ministry as Director of Salvation Army Community and Family Ministries, with responsibility for a Food Bank, Money Management Program, Social Housing Support, and a Teen Drop-in Centre.

In July 2005, I founded a Restorative Justice Program, developing and managing a community-based program for bringing together young offenders, their victims, and trained community volunteers, to resolve offending behaviour. The following year I took up responsibility as an Associate Pastor at Gregory Drive Christian & Missionary Alliance Church, Chatham, and in January 2008 – following a course of theological studies – I was ordained within the denomination and became the Senior Pastor.

In June 2016, I retired as Senior Pastor, and after 24 years in Canada we returned to N. Ireland to be closer to our children and grandchildren. We made our home just outside Portadown and fellowship at Portadown Elim Church. Nine months after our return home, however, after a short illness, Pat died very unexpectedly. Since then, as well as providing 'pulpit supply' in a variety of church settings, I also volunteer with Victim Support NI on a weekly basis – not to mention child-minding my grandchildren one day a week!

My contact with Prison Fellowship NI came through a random conversation between my daughter and a friend, who is a PF worker, who knew the PF Board were recruiting new members – and the rest, as they say, is history!

I believe that everything we experience in life is a preparation for the next 'season' in the will of God, and so I look forward to the unfolding of His will as I endeavour to contribute to the tremendous ministry of Prison Fellowship as a member of the Board. I am praying – and invite you to pray with me – that I will quickly adjust to PF Board business and find a niche where God can use me and to help further the overall ministry to prisoners and their families in Northern Ireland, to His glory.



'Prison Fellowship Lebanon,' says **Joanne**, 'has a fantastic rehabilitation centre for individuals coming out of prison who have a drug addiction. They are also using 'The Prisoner's Journey' (a version of Christianity Explored adapted for prison use) and they shared amazing stories of inmates who have attended the course. It was wonderful to hear encouraging reports of how God is at work and lovely to meet the staff who are making a huge impact for Christ within the prisons as well as in the local community.'

While I was there, I also visited a woman's prison with the staff and volunteers from the Lebanese prison ministry. It was extremely humbling to meet and share with 70 of the 100 female prisoners at their Bible study. I shared testimonies of what God is doing back home in our prisons and had the honour of sharing the Gospel message, assuring these women that God would forgive them if they asked Him and of the new beginnings in Christ. After speaking to the ladies, we had the opportunity to spend time listening to some of their stories and praying for them.

Although thousands of miles from home, what really struck me was the similarity with the stories of ladies in Hydebank. I met women in the Lebanese prison experiencing the same problems as the ladies in prison here. While I was reminded and saddened that issues like abuse, suicide, and self-harm are worldwide problems, I was also wonderfully comforted in the truth that our God is at work worldwide. He is changing lives and calling individuals to himself across the globe.

The opportunity to meet and share with these ladies is one which has impacted my life and I'm hugely excited about the work the Lebanese prison ministry is doing. I'm hoping there will be opportunities in the coming months to take medical teams, hairdressers, and warm clothes for the ladies in the prisons, to show care for the inmates in a practical way and support the Lebanese Prison Ministry in their ongoing work.'

It is truly incredible how God connects believers with each other worldwide. It's our prayer in Prison Fellowship NI that this is just the beginning of ongoing links with Prison Fellowship Lebanon, L.S.E.S.D and Prison Ministries Lebanon, as we each in our own context seek to, in Jesus' name, "Offer hope and a new beginning."

From Belfast to Lebanon

In February Joanne had the opportunity of going on a ministry trip to Lebanon with John and Pamela who work alongside the Christian organisation Lebanese Society for Education and Social Development (L.S.E.S.D). While there she met with Prison Fellowship Lebanon and Prison Ministries, Lebanon. Both these ministries do incredible work and it was a privilege for Joanne to get alongside them and see what they are doing in the local prisons.

