

The Solicitors' Company Charity – The Hardman Trust grant report 2024–25

Thank you for supporting The Hardman Trust as we help people with long-term prison sentences take their next steps in life. With sentences becoming increasingly longer and over 2,000 people being released annually following a sentence of 10 years or more, the need for our work is growing.

The Solicitors' Company Charity's generous grant of £2,000 has enabled us to make meaningful progress over the past year, strengthening our internal infrastructure and enhancing our capacity to support prison leavers more effectively.

Since its formation 30 years ago, the charity has largely maintained its original ways of working. While this consistency brought stability, it also meant the organisation had not evolved organically in response to the rapidly changing external environment. In today's world, continued development and strategic innovation are essential to ensure our relevance, resilience, and long-term impact.

Over the past 30 years, prison populations have risen by 93%, and sentences are getting much longer. England and Wales now have more people serving life sentences than Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Russia, and Sweden combined.

The introduction of early release schemes, designed to ease pressure on the prison system, has had unintended consequences for long-term prisoners. Those who have spent years or even decades in prison face complex and enduring resettlement needs, which are often worsened by the lack of preparation before release. Without proper planning or support, these individuals struggle with isolation, instability, and a higher risk of reoffending. Without essential resources or guidance, the abrupt transition back into society can overwhelm even the most motivated individuals. Tailored support is crucial to addressing these challenges, helping individuals rebuild their lives, secure employment, and reintegrate into their communities.

We remain the only charity in the UK dedicated specifically to supporting individuals on long-term sentences, providing specialised support as they prepare for release and rebuild their lives. Our focus is on meeting needs often overlooked by mainstream services, and we are committed to expanding our reach to make a lasting difference for this underrepresented group.

We are deeply grateful to The Solicitors' Company Charity for its investment in our long-term vision. We are pleased to share the following updates and achievements for 2024–25:

- Over the past year, we supported 286 people in prison across England, Scotland and Wales:
 - We supported 130 individuals serving long-term prison sentences by providing grants of up to £1,500 to help them with employability and wellbeing opportunities as they take their next steps in life.
 - We supported an additional 156 people through our penfriends scheme, with over 1,652 letters exchanged between people in prison and volunteers over the year.

- Across all UK prisons, 1,400 Hardman Directories are available in the prison library and on wings to support individuals planning for life after release.
- Our digital Hardman Directory is available on Virtual Campus, located within the education department in 122 prisons across England.

Jane's Story (Name and identifying details have been changed to protect confidentiality.)

Jane was sentenced to 18 years in prison as a teenager. Prison was a frightening and unfamiliar world for her. The early days were especially challenging, but with the allocation of a mentor, Jane began to find her footing.

Despite the harsh realities of the prison regime, Jane gradually adapted. Her mentor played a key role in encouraging her to engage with the support services available and focus on her personal development. Jane took brave steps to work on her mental health and emotional stability, and over time, began to rediscover her self-belief.

Through educational programs in prison, Jane found her passion: working with animals. She pursued animal-related qualifications with dedication, gaining a deep sense of achievement. However, the prison's learning opportunities in this area were limited. Determined not to lose sight of her goals, Jane reached out to a Hardman Trust worker. With their guidance, she learned about the support the Trust could offer. Jane began preparing for life after prison. She found it cathartic to reflect on how far she had come, writing down her achievements and planning for her future.

The Hardman Trust awarded Jane a vital grant to help her complete the next stage of her learning. The prison highlighted that completing this course could strengthen her case for Release on Temporary Licence (ROTL) and significantly enhance her employability upon release.

Jane is now working toward finishing the course and is full of hope for what lies ahead. She has expressed a strong desire to give back by becoming a Hardman Trust peer mentor, supporting others who face the same challenges she once did.

"Words can't explain how thankful I am for receiving the grant. At the beginning of my sentence, hope was lost, and so was I. But now, as I reach the end, this funding has concreted the hope of achieving a dream role in the animal industry.... and for me, it is a literal lifesaver. This will give me more confidence and the freedom that I had always been afraid of in the past, but thanks to you, I can spread my wings and soar into a brighter future."

We are pleased to share the following outcomes based on direct feedback from individuals supported by The Hardman Trust.

- 100% reported that support from The Hardman Trust helped them achieve their goals
- 100% said our support positively impacted their lives
- 64% have found employment
- 43% have completed training or educational courses
- 29% are currently enrolled in training/educational courses
- 7% have begun volunteering

As a result of this:

- 100% reported improved confidence
- 93% feel more positive about their future
- 100% have an improved sense of independence
- 100% experienced improved well-being and mental health
- 65% reported stronger social connections

Service Delivery

Grants programme

- We have updated our grant eligibility criteria for women based on feedback and a review of external data. In our review process, we collaborated with the Prison Reform Trust to gain insights into current trends within the prison system. These changes align our criteria with the average sentence lengths of the current population, allowing us to work with more women. We remain committed to listening to and learning from individuals in prison to improve our efforts and understand their needs. Last year, we supported 17 women, an increase from the 8 women we supported the previous year. We issued £160,696 in financial support to women and men on long-term prison sentences. Our grants covered the cost of training and educational courses, tools and equipment for work, or items that supported well-being. All these funds were used to help people with their resettlement after prison or to improve the purposeful use of time and mental well-being while they were still in prison.
- We supported 28 individuals serving indefinite public protection (IPP) sentences, providing £29,372 in grants. These funds supported opportunities focused on employability and wellbeing. IPP sentences, which have now been abolished, have been widely criticised for their lack of a clear end date, making it difficult for individuals to plan their lives after prison.
- Over the past year, we completed a full audit of our grant process. Following this, we have been conducting awareness-raising activities across the prison estate to ensure broader understanding and accessibility. We plan to continue and expand this work throughout 2025–26.
- We have continued to expand our delivery sites in Category C prisons across the UK, enabling us to build core relationships with our cohort of prisons. We recognise the importance of establishing relationships with designated prison staff. By doing so, we can provide better support services for individuals on long sentences. Our focused delivery strategy has started to see an increase in the number of applications for 2025–26.

Hardman Directory

- We have finalised the latest edition of The Hardman Directory and begun the distribution process to all prisons across the UK, totalling 1,400 copies. As new prisons, such as HMP Millsike, open to address overcrowding in the prison system, we will provide them with copies. This comprehensive resource, produced in collaboration with our partner agencies, plays a crucial role in ensuring that individuals in prison can access the necessary support services as they prepare for release.
- Our new digitised version simplifies the process for individuals who have internet access, helping them access the necessary support and opportunities to reintegrate into their communities.
- The Directory now features more entries than ever, with a 59% increase in services since the previous edition. It offers assistance with housing, employment, addiction, mental health, and other key areas of need. It supports informed decision-making and contributes to more positive outcomes upon release.
- We continue to work in partnership with Inside Time, the prison newspaper, to ensure that every prison receives copies of our Directory and that the resource remains accessible, relevant, and responsive to the needs of people in prison. Our shared goal is to reduce reoffending and promote successful community integration.

People on long sentences have consistently highlighted the difficulties of release after many years in prison. Many express heightened anxiety and fear about re-entering a society that has changed around them. In response, we have collaborated with Approved Premises over the past year to create two new tools to complement the Hardman Directory. Our 'How To' guide and accompanying 'Workbook' are designed to support autonomy and self-direction in planning for release. They can be used independently or with the assistance of a support service.

Penfriends

- We are in the final stages of transitioning the Penfriend's secure online system to our new Salesforce platform. This integration will enable us to connect various aspects of the service, enhancing our support, monitoring, and evaluation. While developing our bespoke CRM system has taken longer than anticipated, we are making substantial progress.
- As part of this work, we conducted a comprehensive review of the Penfriends scheme and identified key areas for process streamlining. A major development was the incorporation of Penfriends into Salesforce. We collaborated closely with our developer to ensure all necessary data was captured accurately and efficiently within the new system.
- Over the past year, we recruited 23 new volunteers through our new volunteer programme. Each volunteer has completed our onboarding process, which includes training in confidentiality, safeguarding, and safety.

Operations

- Over the past year, we have begun to strategically strengthen our organisation to ensure we have the right expertise and structures to deliver high-quality, impactful services. This has included reviewing our operations, identifying key gaps, and investing in staff development to enhance efficiency and long-term sustainability. As a small charity with big plans, we are building and nurturing a skilled, well-structured team that will enable us to scale our impact as we provide more support to individuals preparing for release. We have begun working with Apogee Development to tailor our Salesforce CRM system to the specific needs of our service. As our support offerings expanded, we identified the importance of an integrated system connecting all our work areas (for instance, Penfriends and the London Support Project). This ensures we can maintain a high standard of service across our community. Through this focused development, we have also identified additional areas within our service where strengthening our foundations will enable us to enhance our procedures and processes further.
- Our new system will enhance our monitoring and evaluation capabilities as we develop it, enabling us to use data to inform decision-making, measure impact, and continuously improve service delivery.
- As part of our commitment to better processes, we are implementing a new HR system to better support and empower our staff team. This enhanced system will streamline key processes, improve accessibility, and help ensure our team has the tools and support they need to thrive.

In January 2025, our CEO, Kerry Wotton, stepped down after three transformative years of modernising and shaping our strategic vision. Her leadership laid a strong foundation for the next phase of our journey, and we are grateful for her lasting contribution.

We are pleased to have welcomed Alice Dawnay as our Transitional CEO. Alice brings a wealth of experience in organisational leadership and change management, and her appointment ensures continuity and focus as we progress through this important period of transition. Since joining us, Alice has worked closely with our senior team to reinforce our organisational infrastructure and identify opportunities to strengthen internal systems. Her focus has been on improving operational efficiency, streamlining workflows, and ensuring that our internal structures are fully aligned to support the delivery of our 2023–2026 Strategy.

This transitional phase represents an opportunity to consolidate our progress, strengthening our foundations to deliver greater impact, support sustainable growth, and uphold the commitments made possible by your generous support.

Our learning

In 2022–23, a review of our service highlighted that since our formation in 1994, our internal infrastructure has remained largely unchanged. This reflected the consistency and dedication of our team over the years. However, as the criminal justice landscape and the wider external environment change, it presents a valuable opportunity to strengthen and modernise our structures. By doing so, we can ensure we remain

resilient, adaptive, and equipped to meet current and future demands more effectively.

Over the past year, we entered a period of transition. In April 2024, we undertook a restructuring to ensure our staffing model aligned with our strategic priorities and positioned us to better serve our community. During the recruitment and onboarding phase, our capacity to deliver the full breadth of our services was temporarily reduced, resulting in a dip in the number of individuals supported during the first two quarters.

The introduction of new roles marked the beginning of a broader effort to professionalise and standardise our procedures, ensuring that our internal infrastructure can support increased reach across the prison estate. This work is vital given that our internal structures have not been significantly updated for several years, making this moment a crucial step in our organisational development.

In parallel, we increased individual grants for eligible people in prison from £1,000 to £1,500 in response to the cost-of-living crisis and rising costs faced by those leaving prison. While this enabled us to offer more substantial support, it also meant a reduction in the total number of grants awarded.

As part of our commitment to improvement, staff regularly review our processes to align our work with our new roles and responsibilities. Through this, we identified an opportunity to strengthen our capacity to support and report on impact, for example, by better linking our London project and penfriends programme with our grant provision. This reinforced the need for responsive systems within a dynamic criminal justice environment. In response, we have invested further in Salesforce and enhanced our monitoring and evaluation processes to improve agility and transparency.

This has been an invaluable learning period, prompting us to streamline our internal procedures and enhance our ability to respond to emerging issues in real-time. We used this period as an opportunity to begin growing and strengthening our internal infrastructure, refining systems, processes, and data tools to enhance quality, consistency, and impact. We also focused on improving staff onboarding, reviewing our delivery model, and prioritising depth of impact over volume.

While these actions led to a temporary reduction in short-term reach, they have laid the groundwork for more sustainable and effective service delivery. We are pleased to report that since January, our numbers have been steadily increasing, reflecting renewed capacity, improved systems, and a strengthened team, all of which are better positioned to meet the evolving needs of our community.

With sentences becoming increasingly longer and over 2,000 people being released following sentences of 10 years or more, the need for our work is growing. We're the only charity in the UK specialising in the needs of people on long-term sentences as they leave prison, and we have ambitions to do more to support this group, working towards our vision; ***a future where everyone can achieve their potential within and beyond prison.***

I would be happy to discuss any questions you may have about this report. Again, thank you for your generous support and commitment to our mission.

Kind regards,

Suzanne Duffy (Fundraising and Communications Manager), Alice Dawnay (Transitional CEO)