

- Billa: This is Safe on National Prison Radio, a mini-series to help you take the best steps out of lockdown. I am Billa. And it's great to be with you on NPR. We've teamed up with the IAP for the series and they are keen to hear about what sort of things you'd like to see in prisons as restrictions are eased. Already on Safe, we heard from Celia, with the family perspective; Saul, who spent about the same amount of time as I did during the pandemic and last week, we heard from Lewis who was a Samaritan's listener whilst inside.
- Lewis: I've always come from a selfish place here where it's always me, me, me, me, me, and I've get what I want and I'll do what I want. And I want it now, do you know what I mean? And then like becoming a Listener, like kind of taught me a bit of patience and I learned a lot about myself.
- Billa: Today on the final episode in the series, we're going to speak with Jenny Shaw, a professor of Forensic Psychiatry, that is on the Independent Advisory Panel on Deaths in Custody. Hi, Jenny. Thanks for joining us.
- Jenny Shaw: Hello. Nice to be here.
- Billa: Could you start by giving our listeners an overview of your work and your experience in the criminal justice system?
- Jenny Shaw: Yes, of course. So, um, I've worked as a psychiatrist doing, uh, sessions in prisons for many years. I also do, uh, work for the courts and I do work on court reports for people with mental health problems. And, uh, from the research side of things, I've spent many years researching how to make improvements in prison, mental health, and also, um, done quite a lot of work on down farm in prisons as well.
- Billa: All right, great. Thank you. Uh, so I, I, can I take it over the last year also has been the busiest period of your life in prisons with the lockdown?
- Jenny Shaw: Yes, it's been, uh, an a very difficult period. I mean, obviously far worse for your listeners, but, um, obviously we, we've tried to, um, keep contact with people over their mental health and, uh, you know, sort of make, make sure that, um, services are still available. Um, also we've tried to continue with the research, particularly trying to sort of get views from, uh, serving prisoners about how the, uh, the COVID period has affected them. We've got a couple of projects running, um, which is looking at that about, you know, how, how it's affected their mental wellbeing, um, particularly thinking about, you know, some of the, the sort of bad outcomes such as, um, ideas of self-harm and things like that. So, yeah, we've got a few projects running at the moment, which is good.
- Billa: As you said, uh, there's been more talk about mental health since the pandemic started. Uh, what sort of positives can we hope to see from those sort of discussions?
- Jenny Shaw: Well, I think it's been very difficult for everybody. Um, the pandemic it's, uh, it's been a terrible time, but I think in particular people who, who were in prison and have spent, uh, you know, a great deal of time locked up in cells are unable to

get out to education, even association, you know, to, to have some contact with other people. And I suppose it's thinking about how we can get positives out of, of, of coming out of lockdown and what could be better. You know, it's a good thing. If there is one about this COVID period is it's given us time to think about what's important, uh, in, in our lives. And we'd really like to hear from, from people in prison as to how things need to be different within prison, you know, coming out of, of this lockdown period, you know, what, what would they like to see happen differently? And, you know, hopefully if that is a good thing that comes out of this terrible period, that things can change, that would be very positive.

Billa: Yeah, yeah thank you. Uh, just also, I mean, in your experience, I mean, what do you think, uh, are the best possibilities of coping with like the mental health issues after lockdown? What sort of interventions in your experience are, are the best sort of things that help the prisoners?

Jenny Shaw: Yeah, well, I, I think it's on a number of levels. I think, um, there's very good work as we know, um, going on in prison between peers. So, um, fellow prisoners have a lot to offer each other. Um, so I think, you know, trying to really encourage that and get that going in in all establishments, 'cause I think there's some variation over the country on that, but secondly, and very importantly, it's, you know, what can the existing services do for people, you know, mental health provision within prisons, you know, and to encourage people to get in touch. You know, if they're, if they're feeling that, you know, it's difficult coming out of lockdown, to get in touch because whilst we all think, oh, it's great. You know, things are moving, you know, where it it's becoming a bit freer including in prison. Actually we, we know having come out a little bit of lockdown in the community, but it's actually quite difficult. You know, you, you sort of, it's quite an anxious time reestablishing contact. So I suppose it's, it's encouraging that peer to peer support, but also encouraging people to get in contact with services if they're, if they feel they're not coping with it.

Billa: Yeah. No, no, thank you, Jenny. Uh, as, as you know, we've been, uh, filming over the last month interviewing different people and it's cool that you've actually mentioned these sort of same points, 'casue everybody that I've spoke, uh, highlighting these same sort of issues you've just mentioned. So, uh, thank you for that. And uh, I just wanted to say just like, uh, 'cause obviously I was a prisoner myself and I know the, the prison system, it is an overworked sort of entity. So I'm just thinking about the current interventions that are actually in place. So will they need adapting and changing with the input of what the prisoners there?

Jenny Shaw: Yeah, absolutely. And, and in fact we are a, as we speak, trying to work out for our research, I'm talking about research, but the same applies to mental health services is how can we better hear from, uh, prisoners as to what is required because it's alright we saying, yeah, we know what we know what you need, but actually, you know, what you need better than we do. And it's kind of trying to get channels so that we can hear from, uh, serving prisoners about what mental health services are needed, but also from, from my research side of things, what research is needed as well. And the two are probably in tandem with each other,

you know, that there needs to be more research on the kind of services that prisoners want basically.

Billa: Yeah, yeah, no, that's great. Great to hear. So it's just putting the pieces of the puzzle together and then, uh, you can take things forward and in the best route possible. Yes. Just also, I just wanted to ask, uh, do you think out in the, there, in the wider community, is there a great understanding from people how tough it actually is in prison?

Jenny Shaw: I, I think there's still a way to go with that. I think, um, there's a great deal of, um, sort of a, a great lack of understanding of a, you know, the kind of problems that, um, people going into prisons have, um, you know, from, from my kind of things, you know, we know that there's more of all kinds of mental illness, you know, much higher rates of all kinds of mental health problems of people actually going into prison. And then of course, as the impact of the prison environment itself on those mental health issues. And I, I don't think people understand that in the wider community. Um, you know, I think there, there still is unfortunately a great deal of, uh, stigma and lack of understanding.

Billa: Yeah. Yeah. We had a, a guest on, uh, Cleo, whose father, uh, was in prison with the mental health issues and with what I saw with mental health issues in the prison, I thought a lot of them shouldn't even be in that sort of environment. You know, it was, yeah, it was quite appalling what I actually saw, but obviously I understand it's a prison and whatnot.

Jenny Shaw: I, I think any opportunity, all of us need to get the message out there and, you know, we, we try, but perhaps we need to try harder in, in getting a greater understanding that actually, you know, a lot of people going into prison have got significant problems before they even get in there. But I think the other thing is, I mean, you are your experience of coming out of prison. I think that's the other place we need to get it. Right um, because sadly, what we've found is that actually, you know, the mental health care in prison, I mean, prisoners have said it to me that actually it's been the first time that they've actually made contact with mental health services, but then when they come out of prison trying to plug them into community services, sometimes it's very difficult. And I think we need to really work on that one because you kind of, you know, if somebody's trying to tackle their mental health problems has done so for the first time, perhaps in prison, then it needs to really continue in that difficult period when, when you go out, you know, that transition, which is tricky.

Billa: Yeah. I couldn't agree with you more Jenny. I think, uh, the, there's a few different avenues that do need to be explored like housing, um, jobs, voluntary work, um, doctors, and obviously then family ties is a massive one. And then like we were saying like the stigma that the society has on ex-prisoners. Yeah. You know, and unfortunately I saw a lot of people coming in and out of prison in my short two years, two months. And I think you're right. I think there has to be more continuity and something, in my opinion does need to be looked at, I don't know if you guys have got any like initiatives or interventions or looking into it, but I, I would welcome anything you guys do or really would, you know, to help the prisoners who come out, stay out.

Jenny Shaw: And I think you've hit the nail on the head there because I think anything that's done needs to be holistic. It needs to cover not just plugging someone into mental health services, but giving consideration to, as you say, you know, making, uh, resuming ties with families, getting accommodations sorted out, you know, plugging into substance misuse services if required, you know, so it's, it's a, it's a holistic approach in, you know, not just a single track into mental health services. I think that's absolutely right. And we, we actually did some research on that. We had a, a very nice intervention that did all of that. It plugged, you know, it tried to help people through the gate plugging into all the aspects of their life that needed sorting. Um, and, that was very successful. So more of that.

Billa: Yeah, yeah. A hundred percent. Cause I, cause obviously I've been out eight, nine months and I, I see that there is a, a gap there, uh, that needs filling up with, you know, all these positive things that we've spoke about. Yeah. And I'm not sure what the answer is, but you know, as long as we can bring awareness and bring people to the table like yourself and agencies, organisations, and, you know, together, we can make it into what it needs to be. Yeah. Uh, at the end of the day, we all got to live together all 7 billion of us on this planet. So, you know, let's try make it the best we can, I guess.

Jenny Shaw: Yeah absolutely.

Billa: Yeah. Uh, I do thank you for, you know, coming to, I think, uh, especially with the IAP, I think 'cause you guys have direct links with the people at the top with the ministers and stuff. So the feedback is really crucial. Uh, is there, uh, before we go, is there anything you, you could, uh, suggest or say to the, the, the prisoners to, you know, to keep the heads up or, you know, whatever it may be? Is there anything you, you would say?

Jenny Shaw: Yeah, I think it's just to say that, um, you know, coming out of lockdown, great thing is tricky, but if, if they can just keep, you know, pushing through, get some help if needed, if they're feeling, you know, anxious and a little bit mentally unwell in some way, get the help, push on through because ultimately, you know, it, it we're getting to a much better place. So it it's just to keep going really, um, through the difficult time.

Billa: Yeah. No. And uh, I think a few of our guests have already said that including myself, the helps out there, it's just, uh, reaching out and doing the best for yourself. So yeah. Uh, thank you, Jenny. Yeah, no problem.

Jenny Shaw: Yeah, no problem. I'm happy to talk again.

Billa: Okay. That's it. Thank you so much for listening to Safe over the last few weeks. It's been great having your company and I hope you've heard something that helps you make the transition out of lockdown. Thanks for listening and stay safe.