

### **Malcolm – HMP Oakwood - St Giles Trust ‘prisoner mentor’ (and OU graduate)**

Over the last six weeks the Open University visited Oakwood in the form of a lecturer and three diligent students from their Law facility. A group of us were invited by our IAG (Information Advice and Guidance) Tutor and St Giles partner, to meet the students and pose questions of law or special interests. This was not only a novel way to have legal questions answered but an opportunity to engage with students from the community and an OU lecturer who turned out to be extremely pleasant and very knowledgeable. As a group we decided to task the students with 4 lines of enquiry these being issues that we found of interest either because they affected us personally or because we thought they would be of use to the wider Oakwood community; the subjects were; the IPP sentence, Joint Enterprise, Racial profiling (for those that come into contact with the criminal justice system) and lastly, the subject of court transcripts and who has access to them.

The OU group visited us on three occasions the first being an introduction and opportunity for us to set their task, the interim visit to give a progress report, indulge in our company and eat our biscuits and the final session to give a verbal report of their findings and to hand over a well presented package of information relating to the lines of enquiry and any other related pieces of information they felt would be useful to us.

As an exercise in the breaking down of barriers between the incarcerated and the community it was extremely successful, the students and their lecturer were delightful and spending time with them was a great distraction from the normal routine. The students assured us that their perception of a ‘prisoner’ (the word is pejorative but serves in this instance) was much changed and they enjoyed the encounter. But as an exercise in the dissemination of new and ground breaking legal facts it was not that successful.

The reason for my negative remark is in no way a reflection on the work done by the diligent students but merely a reflection on the access we now have to information; the residents here have a telephone in their room and most know someone they can phone who has internet access. Most questions can be answered in this way from the comfort of your room. The staff here at Oakwood are also able to assist in the provision of information and if it is pertinent to you rehabilitation they will download relevant data upon request.

However, we are extremely grateful to the students and lecturer for giving their time and resources to provide us with the information we requested. We all took great pleasure in the exercise and hope that further engagement with the OU will be possible. We wish the students luck in their studies and hope they all reach their goals.