A day in the life of a

Prisoner Custody Officer (Prisons)

"Getting the simplest things right and ensuring there are no delays at the start can make a huge difference to the whole pattern of the day."

Ruth Jones
Prisoner Custody Officer

During our training we were shown the right way of doing things and just as importantly, we were warned against doing things the wrong way. One comment that was passed on to us was that "people are sent to prison as punishment, not for punishment". The Prisoner Custody Officers (PCOs) do not sit in judgement of the prisoners. We are there to guide and assist them through the daily routine of prison life. Which is just what much of a typical day is. Routine. We expect the prisoners to do certain things at certain times; and they expect the same in return from us.

Security is of paramount importance, so it is vital that we know how many prisoners we've got and that they are exactly where they should be. A typical day for me starts with my first task; inspecting every cell to ensure the wellbeing of the prisoners as well as physically checking their presence. This is followed by a check around the unit to make sure that everything is safe and secure before we unlock the prisoners for breakfast and the start of their day.

Employment is available in the prison workshops, along with education facilities which can cover everything from basic literacy lessons to Open University tuition. Prisoners are also employed on the residential units themselves, keeping living areas clean and tidy and serving the meals.

It's all part of improving every day life for the prisoners, preparing them for the structure of life 'on the outside' when they are released. However, at 7.30am all that is on the prisoners' minds is breakfast and it is crucial that the PCOs make sure that everything is available on time. Getting the simplest things right and ensuring there are no delays right at the start can make a huge difference to the whole pattern of the day.

At lunchtime all the prisoners return to their units for their midday meals. After lunch, all prisoners are locked up again so that another check can be made that everyone is still present. When everyone is accounted for, the prisoners return to work for the afternoon period.

At the end of the prisoners' working day, they return to the unit for their evening meal, after which the unit is open for free time/association. Here the prisoners can make use of facilities such as pool and table football. The PCOs' working day ends with the evening lock up, when prisoners make their way to their cells for a final headcount and some 'alone time' after a busy day spent in the company of their neighbours.

INVESTOR IN PEOPLE