



**Trustees Annual Report 2023-24**  
**BEST, Befriending and Support Team for Foreign Nationals in HMP Wandsworth**  
**Registered Charity No: 1177625**

**Foreword**

The year began well with a major improvement in fund-raising, more than doubling our previous best and, subject to one or two brief interruptions, this meant we could keep providing emergency funds for prisoners throughout the first three quarters of 2023. Our core activities remained much the same as in previous years, and we were able to consolidate further BEST's truly excellent working relations with Officers on the Wings and the Healthcare team, as well as Chaplaincy and the partner organisations we work with. Our official duties included twice-weekly conduct of Day 3 Inductions for Foreign Nationals, and throughout the year there was an increase in our involvement in SASH cases and ACCT reviews, which came to account for nearly 25% of casework. BEST volunteers continued attending visits to inmates in the Social Visits Hall, with the active number of volunteers conducting regular prison visits remaining at just over 20.

The Table below summarises BEST work in the prison over the first nine months of 2023.

**BEST at a glance: 1 January to 30 September 2023, HMP Wandsworth**

Inductions	Referrals			TOTAL
	Direct from the kiosk and prisoners on the Wings	From Wing staff	From Chaplaincy and partner organizations	
436	737	330	715	2,218

Source: BEST statistics as supplied each month to the Equalities Department

As part of a wider growth strategy, we had planned to launch our first major fund-raising campaign in the build-up to Christmas, but decided we had to shelve this after 26 October, when our Director, Geoff Smith, was escorted to the Gate by Security after the Governing Governor and Deputy Governor decided earlier that day to withdraw his keys. During a ZOOM call with the Trustees on 22 December the Deputy Governor told us he would never be allowed to work in the prison again. Following prolonged discussion at a Trustees' meeting in early January, we eventually came to the unanimous decision these circumstances unfortunately left us with no choice but to suspend our charitable activities.

We felt that, as BEST would no longer be able to have a full-time representative working in the prison, it would be impossible for BEST to continue functioning effectively e.g. we would no longer be regularly receiving essential details from within the prison, like names and numbers of men requesting a Social Visit from our volunteers, or be able to follow up on support needs as detailed in volunteer reports following a Social Visit, or get information from the official inductions conducted by BEST, or from BEST surgeries or Foreign National Reps etc. Without a full-time BEST representative working in the prison, giving us access to essential information of this nature, we felt the quality of support provided by BEST would be so massively downgraded that we had no choice but to suspend charitable operations.

As Trustees we wish to make clear the following:

- We never had any clear explanation why, after nearly 7 years of full-time work in the prison and so much support from virtually all staff, including the previous two Governing Governors, it was suddenly decided to take away Geoff Smith's keys at the end of October and exclude BEST from working in the prison, or who actually took this decision
- We wish to stress that neither Geoff nor anyone connected to BEST has been involved in any misconduct and, to the best of our knowledge, notwithstanding the decision to exclude BEST from the prison, BEST was and we believe still is well regarded across the prison, not just by prison and healthcare staff, but also, of course, the prisoners
- The abrupt, arbitrary and aggressively disrespectful way this was handled has seriously shaken our confidence in the rule of law: everything surrounding these events has been excessively secretive - "all cloak and daggers", as one member of prison staff has called it - and in our view showed disturbing disregard for due process, decency, fairness, and justice in the proper sense of the word
- We also believe the decision was taken without anything remotely resembling proper regard for what staff at HMP Wandsworth thought, and that it has been clearly harmful to the prison - harming the morale of already hard-pressed prison and healthcare staff and, obviously, prisoners, and we believe removal of BEST as an organisation clearly playing an important role in helping to reduce incidents of SASH and violence can only lead to a worsening of the prison's already disturbingly poor conditions
- We wish to thank all who have volunteered with BEST, and those who have supported and taken an interest in our charity, including our generous donors, especially the Quakers, AB Charitable Trust, 1845 Charitable Trust, and All Saints, Fulham
- Finally, we wish to thank all in HMP Wandsworth who have helped BEST so much and supported us so strongly over the years - it was truly our pleasure to work with so many decent, talented and committed colleagues: we will always value your cooperation and the courage, commitment, and professionalism shown by so many of you

BEST Trustees:

Isobel Smallacombe

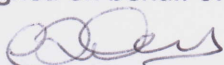
Christine Julian-Huxley

Clare Howarth

Caroline Ayerst

The Trustees declare that they have approved the Trustees' Report above.

Signed on behalf of the Trustees.



Christine Julian-Huxley, Trustee

8<sup>th</sup> February 2024