

Vegan Prisoners Support Group

NEWS - November 2010

ITS NEARLY 17 YEARS SINCE VPSG SET OUT TO REFORM THE CARE OF VEGAN PRISONERS

No reform is an easy task BUT the VPSG team continue working hard to ensure equal opportunities for vegan prisoners are in place. Our office opens 6 days a week to deal with prisoner problems, to give advice to prison kitchens and to provide a helpline to vegans attending court.

Some of our successes

No More Leather Shoes!

After much lobbying on our part, vegan prisoners no longer had to wear leather shoes or use unsuitable hygiene products as we were given permission to provide vegan footwear and parcels of vegan toiletries. Before VPSG was established it wasn't uncommon for a vegan prisoner to be without suitable toiletries for up to THREE MONTHS!

Nutritional Recommendations

Every prison has been issued with a copy of our Catering Information booklet, which contains a wealth of knowledge on the requirements of a vegan diet. In addition we recommend the following each week:

- 3½ L fortified soya milk (to provide sufficient calcium and B12)
- 200g (7oz) mixed nuts and seeds (to provide omega 3 fatty acids, and important vitamins and minerals)
- 250g (9oz) mixed dried fruit, plus 14-21 pieces of fruit.

Vegan Toiletries Suitable For All Prisoners

We have successfully campaigned for the toiletries (shampoo, hair and body wash, toothpaste and deodorant) issued free on prison wings to be suitable for vegans.

Vegan Goodies Now Available In Prison Shops

A whole range of vegan items are now potentially available in the prison shops where prisoners spend their weekly 'pocket money'. However, it is up to each prison which items they choose from this range. Therefore if a prisoner arrives at a prison where there have been no vegans for a while, the list might need some updating. We are always willing to step in and help prisoners experiencing difficulties in having vegan items added.

New prisoners

New prisoners are provided with our *Guide for Vegan Prisoners* (how to survive in prison) as well as a copy of our *Catering Infor-*

mation Guide (which we produced and sent to all prison catering managers to assist them in catering for vegans).

Diet sheet records

We ask all new prisoners (and prisoners experiencing problems after a prison move) to complete our diet sheets for four weeks

and then return them to us for analysis. We then advise the prison how they can provide a varied nutritionally sound vegan option.

Emergency arrest line



Our Emergency Arrest Line (07984 733 008) is available 24 hours a day. Once we are informed that a vegan has been arrested, we telephone the police station and then fax details on how to cater for their needs.

Keeping catering managers up to date

Regular Prison News Sheets are sent to all catering managers, updating them with agreements we have made at our meetings with the Prison Service, and informing them of new vegan products available to prison kitchens.

Yuletide in prison

We have just despatched a Yuletide recipe booklet to catering managers, containing tasty suggestions for 25 and 26 December and New Year. The booklet is also available on our website. Enclosed is a selection of the recipes, we hope you will try them!



Prisoner work/Prison reform

This past year the VPSG team has been concentrating our efforts on helping vegan prisoners on our list with problems that they have encountered and also on prison reform. Therefore, this is the first opportunity we have had to update supporters. However, we can't stress enough that without your support we would not

be able to stay in existence! Any donation, however small, helps - just like small drops of rain, together they create a pool and then a stream so each and every donation is important to help us continue our vital work!

Why we need your help

VPSG already provides prisoners on our list with a monthly allowance to enable them to purchase healthy items such as nuts, seeds, dried and fresh fruit, Nut Luncheon or the occasional vegan chocolate bar. These items and many more have been added to canteen lists after our discussions with Prison HQ; as well as the addition of two newly approved mail order companies.

Making the best of their time

We also try to assist prisoners who would like to further their education by helping them with course fees or relevant study books.

Keeping fit

Although we can advise prisons on how to provide a nutritional vegan diet, prisoners need to keep themselves fit by being encouraged to use the gym - this means, where possible, financial assistance is provided to help with vegan gym shoes and appropriate clothing for them to be able to make use of this facility. Time in prison can drag by - as well as studying, what better way than keeping fit!

Two new mail order companies approved

Honesty Cosmetics (who stock items suitable for both men and women) and Holland & Barrett have now been approved by Prison HQ, so prisoners are able to order goods directly from them.



HONESTY
cosmetics

HOLLAND & BARRETT

However, it is not mandatory for prisons to permit prisoners access to these mail order companies and therefore the VPSG is busy networking with prisons on this issue. Prisoners, of course, do try to apply for permission themselves, but we have found that without our assistance their success is very limited.

Visitors' centres

We have been writing to all Visitors' Centres (which are shops in the halls where visitors can meet prisoners) to encourage them to stock vegan items such as soya milk for tea/coffee, flapjacks, chocolate flavoured soya drinks and vegan chocolate. Several prisons so far have taken up the challenge, amongst them the Visitors' Centres at HMP Downview, HMP Bronzefield, HMP Littlehey and HMP Coldingley. We are planning to write to the rest of the prisons asking them to follow their example. More info in the next newsletter.

Caseworkers

Volunteers are needed to be trained as Caseworkers due to the volume of calls for help that come to our Helpline from prisoners experiencing problems, possibly with their food, being given permission to have access to herbal remedies etc. etc.

Anyone able to offer help would need to be available during office hours, have their own computer with basic Microsoft Word, e-mail and internet access and general office experience. Should also feel confident (with training) to contact prisons to help the prisoners on a variety of issues.

What does a caseworker do? Caseworkers need to keep in regular contact with the prisoner(s) they have undertaken to help during their sentence. They may need to discuss any dietary shortfalls with the prison kitchen staff, help to implement vegan items on the full canteen listing where their allocated prisoner is being detained and try to sort out any other problem which might require our assistance. Call Jo-Ann for a chat on 020 8292 8325 between 10am-6pm Monday -Friday.

