

# scottish justice matters

Volume 1 | Number 2 | December 2013

## **SPECIAL ISSUE ON DESISTANCE**

Edited by  
Fergus McNeill

### **ALSO**

Mike Nellis on  
Electronic Monitoring

Andrew Coyle on  
early prison reform in Scotland

Bernadette Monaghan on  
Children's Hearings

Interview with  
HMIP David Strang



# **DESISTANCE**

**MOVING ON: DESISTANCE AND REHABILITATION**

Scottish Justice Matters is a publication of the Scottish Consortium of Crime and Criminal Justice (SCCCJ). The Consortium is an alliance of organisations and individuals committed to better criminal justice policies. It works to stimulate well informed debate and to promote discussion and analysis of new ideas: it seeks a rational, humane, constructive and rights-based approach to questions of justice and crime in Scotland.

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ISSN 2052-7950 (Print)

ISSN 2052-7969 (Online)

Scottish Consortium on Crime and Criminal Justice is a registered charity [SC029241]

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# Visiting my son in prison

A mother



**I LIVE A LIFE MUCH LIKE EVERYONE ELSE.** I go to work, spend time with my family, struggle to pay bills, and look forward to holidays. Where my life differs from most is that my son is in prison.

My family and I have been visiting him once, sometimes twice a week for the past 10 years.

On visit nights, I go to work as usual but leave early to allow time to collect other family members booked in for the visit. I make sure that we all have valid I.D., that no one has a mobile phone in their pocket, and that we have enough change for the vending machines inside. Arriving at the prison we book in, our photographs are checked on the prison system and we are authorised to proceed. At this point, money and personal items can be handed in.

Passing through the security scanner, I always manage to set it off, so I get scanned again with a hand held scanner and on occasion get taken to a separate room for a 'rub down' search. Once this is done we all make our way to the visit waiting area where an officer advises which table number to sit at. There is another officer at the door of the visit room who visually checks inside your mouth for contraband items.

**I left home at 8am and should be home by 9:30 pm. It's a long day but it's worth it to spend time with him**

In the visit room there are a number of vending machines and a tea bar. After queuing up to use the machines for juice, crisps and sweets, I join the queue at the tea bar for ice cream. When all the 'goodies' are purchased, we settle down to wait: the door opens and in they come, all searching for their own visitors. The noise level explodes as people greet each other with hugs and hellos. As the visit settles, the room is alive with conversation, and at times it is difficult to concentrate on your own visit.

We chat about what's been going on since last time, we talk about things that have happened in the past, teasing each other about the silly things said or done, and sometimes we talk about what we'll do when he comes home.

During the visit, prison officers walk up and down between the tables, stand at the wall next to some tables, making personal conversations difficult, and generally make their presence felt. It can be unsettling and off-putting, making this precious time awkward and tense.

All too soon the visit is over and we say our goodbyes. No matter how many times you do it, it never gets any easier. Watching him go back through that door to his other life is heartbreaking. So off we go for the journey home, happy to have seen him and sad to leave him there. I left home at 8am and should be home by 9:30 pm. It's a long day but it's worth it to spend time with him. We all want him home and will do our best to keep him here when he is released.

Completely different to a normal visit are father/child 'bonding' visits on a Saturday and Sunday morning. Only four families attend, and there is a lot more interaction between my son and his children. Breakfast is provided, and everyone has a meal together. The atmosphere is more relaxed, and each family has a toy box of items purchased by us to suit the kids. They can play games together and move freely around the visit room.

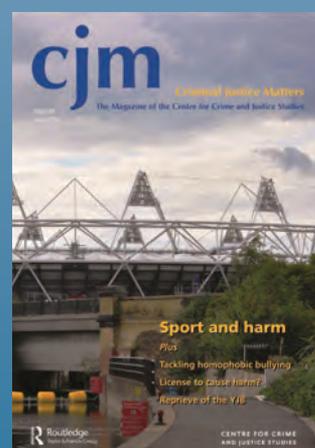
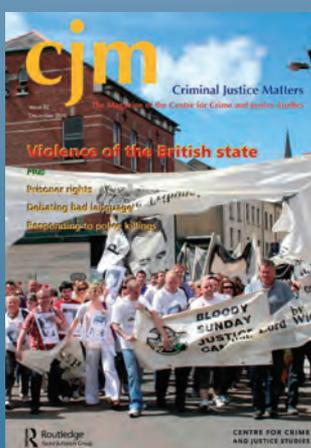
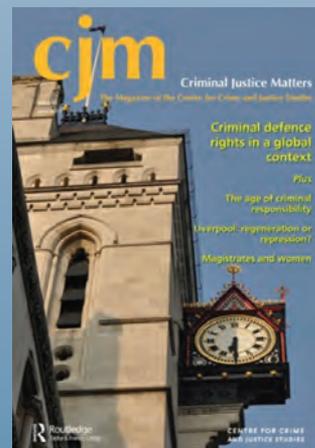
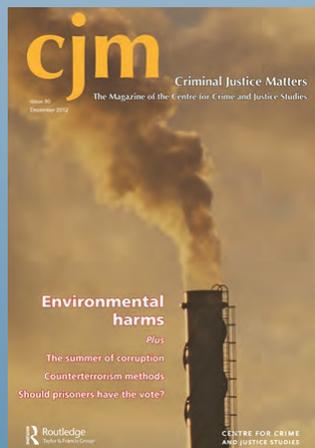
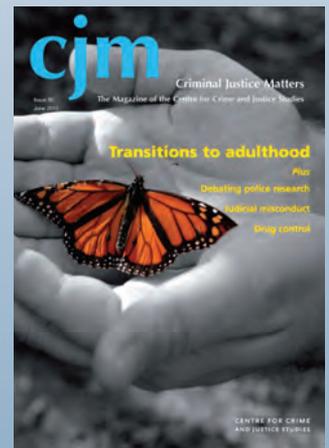
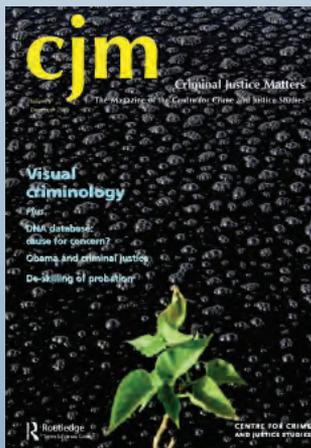
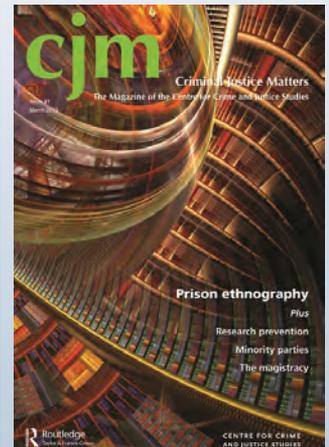
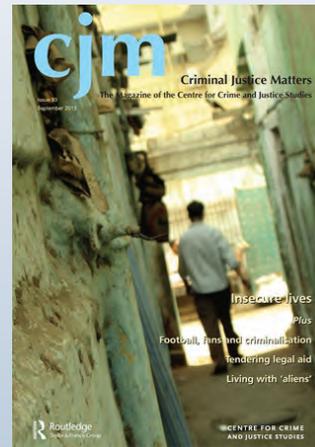
It is not easy on any family having someone they love in prison, and the stigma attached is awful. No one can fully understand unless it has happened to them. There is very little understanding of the effect it has on the whole family, from the very young to the very old.

It has been difficult with many lows and some highs and we still have a way to go, but my family have been very lucky in that we have been strong enough to get through this together, supporting each other and my son. Other families are not so lucky, and they can be torn apart.

I decided at the start that I wanted to be involved and now take part in focus groups, keep in touch with the Family Contact Officers, attend Integrated Case Management (ICM) case conferences, and do what I can to raise awareness for families affected by imprisonment.

One day this will be over and we can get back to being just another family doing normal everyday things!

'If **cjm** did not exist, someone would have to invent it'  
 Professor Tim Newburn, London School of Economics.



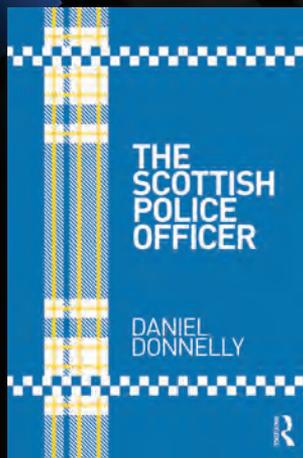
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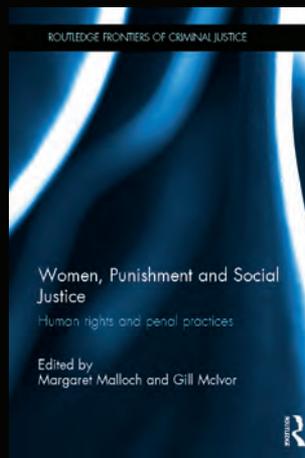
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