



A day in the life of an independent prison monitor

Have you ever wondered what it's like inside a prison or an immigration detention facility? One of our independent prison monitors shares his experience with you.

Although I have a full-time job, I am also on the independent monitoring board (IMB) at a women's prison. This makes me one of a group of people in the local community who go behind prison walls, to monitor how prisoners are being treated and whether they are being given the support needed to change their lives. I am a firm believer that how we treat prisoners reflects the values we hold as a society. Furthermore, once released back into the community, their experience in prison will affect not just them, but all of us.

We are a very diverse group, with different life and work experience: that's what makes us strong.

My visit starts when I show my ID at the prison gate and draw keys, giving me unrestricted access to all parts of the prison. First, I look at what has been happening in the prison over the last 24 hours.

I then head off to the segregation unit, so I can understand why those prisoners are there and check how they are being treated, before moving onto the prison wings where I interact with both prisoners and staff. People often ask me if I feel unsafe in prison, but I've always found prisoners easy to engage with; they understand we're there to support them and our presence can be reassuring.

The physical conditions on the wings are also important. Are the showers mouldy? Are the cells warm and dry? By talking to both prisoners and staff, I can check whether what I am being told is consistent with what I see and hear.

Finally, I return to the IMB office to record what I've learnt from prisoners, staff and my own observations. I share this with my colleagues on the Board and the prison Governor, who we meet every month to discuss what we've found.

Usually during my drive home I find myself reflecting on everything I've seen and heard that day in a place that's out of sight, but shouldn't be out of mind. Being an IMB member is a privileged position which leaves me with a real sense of achievement.

If you are interested in being **our eyes on the inside, a voice on the outside**, then book onto our next virtual open evening to find out more about the role and hear from some of our existing volunteers from both the prison and immigration detention estates.