

Yatin, *The Key to Your Future*. 2019. Collage.

# Foreword

# 2.

Prison education can open up opportunities, broaden horizons, transform life chances, and personal identity.

As adults, we often see education as belonging to our past something that we have completed. In prison, it has the potential through which people can shape their future. The way education is organised in prisons, varies a great deal. Fortunately, some organizations, like the Prisoners' Education Trust, try to keep the level, quality, and offer of education high, through their Distance Learning courses.

The theme of this commemorative booklet is the celebration of the 30th anniversary of Prisoners' Education Trust, and the transformational impact of Distance Learning courses on HMP Pentonville residents, since 1998.

This project was built around active collaborations led by the Creative Arts class tutor, Helena Baptista, and Art & Design class tutor, Kirk Lawrence, with support from the Prisoners' Education Trust.

Prisoners took a central and active role in the production of this booklet; they were an integral part of its planning, research, and content.

The production of the booklet was innovative, in the sense that, for the first time, a five-month project involved two classes, and the wider prison community, collaborating and contributing in equal terms. It proved that when different stakeholders come together, success happens.

In the words of one prisoner involved in the project: *“Learning in prison has been like a duvet on a winter night; it is something comforting when everything appears bleak.”*

Happy 30th anniversary to the Prisoners' Education Trust, and may your amazing work continue for a long time!



3.



Russell. *Partners*. 2020. Pencil and collage on paper.

# Introduction by Jordan

# 1.

This book was created by the students from the Creative Arts and Art & Design courses at HMP Pentonville, to commemorate the 30th anniversary of the Prisoners' Education Trust (P.E.T.). In this book, you will find illustrations showing what education means to the men, facts & figures, poetry, testimonies, a case study, and quotes from alumni and students about the meaning of education in prison. P.E.T. was founded in 1989, and the collaboration with HMP Pentonville started in 1998. The first course taken at HMP Pentonville was a Microsoft Certificate in IT, by a 24-year-old man. This partnership fulfilled the potential of many men for 21 years, and it looks as though this will carry on for another 21 years! So, sit back, and enjoy reading our thoughts, opinions, and beliefs, on education; how P.E.T. and HMP Pentonville have championed academia since the late 1990s, and how the power of education has transformed the lives of so many prisoners.



Femi. *The Right Track*. 2020. Watercolour on paper

# Past to Present

# 5.

*Every prisoner a learner, every prison a place to learn.*



Some charities are started around a kitchen table, others in a local pub. But Prisoners' Education Trust is unique – its origins can be traced back to a tube journey. In the late 1980s David Burton and Vernon Cocking commuted together from Wandsworth prison, where David was the Prison's Education Officer. They hit upon the idea of an organisation working closely with Prison Education Departments to offer grants to prisoners wishing to study distance learning courses. On 19 April 1989 Prisoners' Education Trust was officially formed with friends and colleagues drawn from the education and penal system.

Pentonville Prison was established by Act of Parliament and received its first prisoners on 21 December 1842. It was the first radial design prison, and over 60 other prisons in this country, and many more around the world owe their design to Pentonville. The influential prison administrator Major Joshua Jebb was the designer of Pentonville prison. Pentonville was also unique in being established specifically for the purpose of rehabilitation, and was created to implement the 'separate system' which aimed to reform prisoners prior to their transportation to Australia. Today the prison's design remains largely untouched. Pentonville celebrated its 175th Anniversary on 21 December 2017.



Mathias, Lawrence, *Pentonville*, 2019.  
Pencil on paper.



Obeney. *Education is Key*. 2020. Watercolour and pen on paper.

# PET & HMP PENTONVILLE THEN AND NOW

by Ali

# 7.

## 1998

1 student funded for Microsoft IT course.

5 students funded by NEC, Wolverhampton University and Capernwray School. Courses in Bible Studies, Law and Adult Psychology.

## 2002

## 2005

7 students funded by NEC, The OU and Learn Plumbing. Courses in Maths, Plumbing, Film and Accounting.

5 students funded by Stonebridge Associated College and Linguaphone. Courses in Business Studies, Languages and Art.

## 2008

## 2011

15 students funded by The OU, Mosaic Partnership and St John's College, Nottingham. Courses in Counselling, Business Studies and Bible Studies.

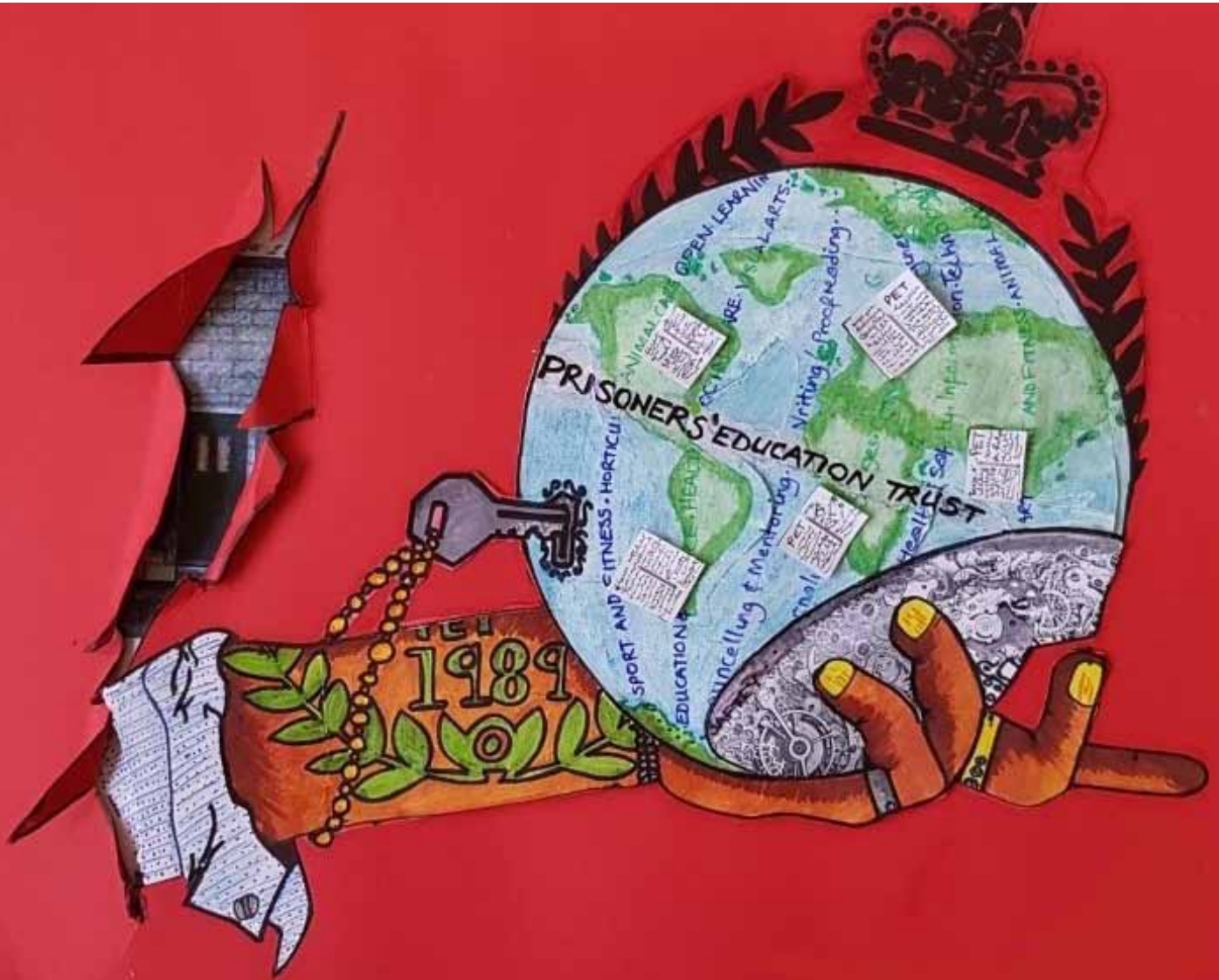
36 students funded by The OU, NEC and ATM Safety & Environment. Courses range from Science, Maths and Technology to Personal Fitness.

## 2016

## 2019

44 students funded by HFE, Electacourse, The OU, NEC and MOL. Courses in Law, Gym Instructing, Webmaster and Languages.





Ali. *The Globe*. 2019. Pencil and collage on paper.

# Facts & Figures by Femi

9.

**13th October**  
**1998**

The inaugural education course  
at HMP Pentonville begins  
- Microsoft Certificate in IT -

**Plumbing  
Installation  
Theory**

The most popular course

**40**

Educational institutions conducted  
courses in conjunction with P.E.T.

**77 years old**

The oldest student enrolled since  
1998.

He studied Proofreading and  
Copy Editing with the  
Writer's Bureau Ltd.

**55** have studied with  
Stonebridge Associated Colleges

**50** have studied with  
The Open University

**18 years old**

The youngest student  
to take a course  
since 1998

# 10.



Moss. Art Materials. 2019. Pencil on paper.



# Monologue no. 1 by Jordan

11.

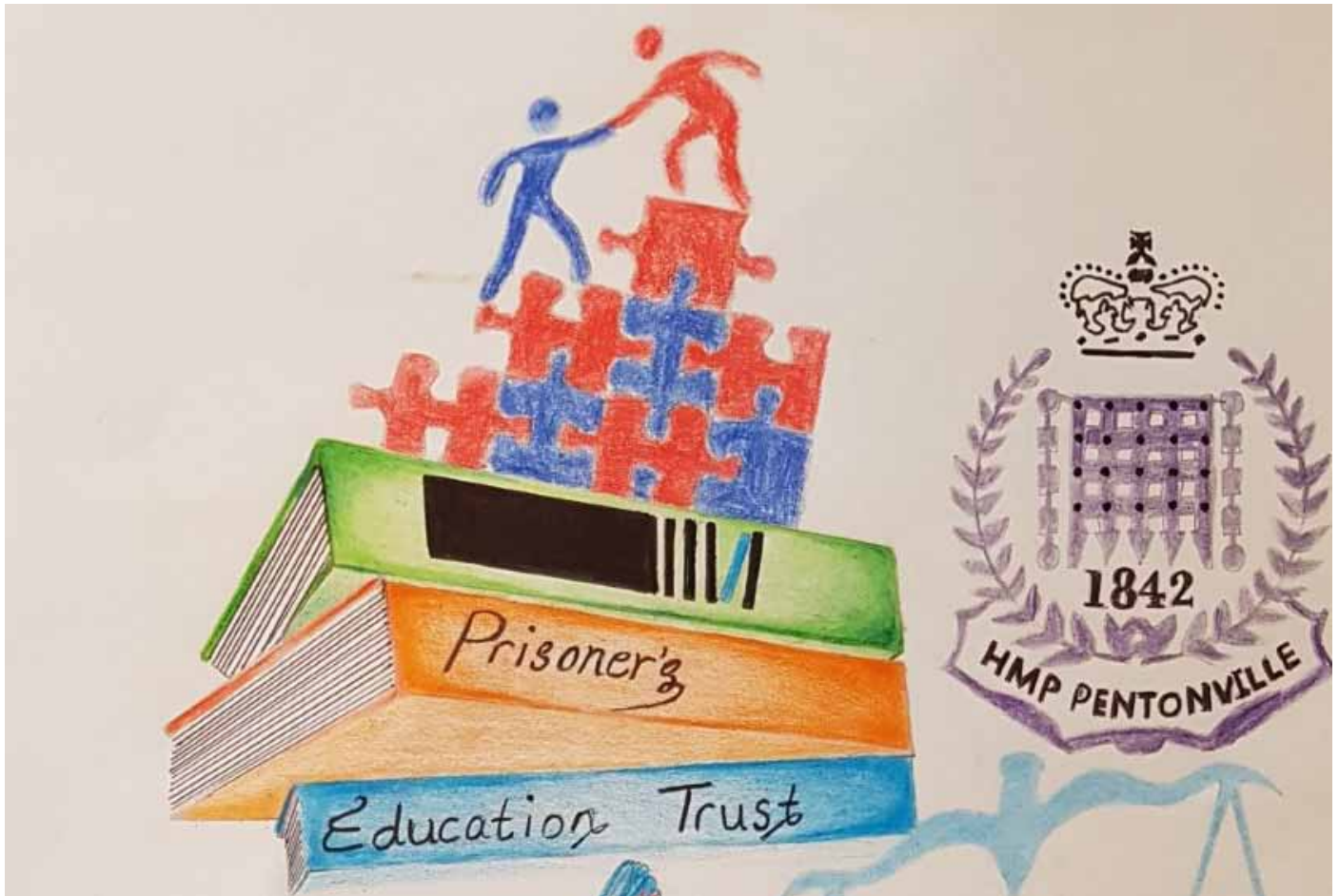
We all have a responsibility to learn as much as possible in the short amount of time we are alive. For a lot of people, educating themselves is not the priority in their day to day lives. The question of academic fulfillment rarely comes into question. I made a conscious decision to apply myself to education by doing whatever courses were put in front of me. I know my situation is different from most other people in that I am in prison and all I have is time, but I made the choice to use it constructively to transform my future with the power of knowledge. I've had a difficult relationship with learning in the past because it has been overshadowed by my behaviour in school.

I was always seen as a naughty kid, and was barely ever told that I was smart or good at anything. My journey from school to prison is chillingly similar to other people my age, and it is invaluable in understanding the importance and weight of education and, more depressingly, the state of our schools. Having a first-hand experience of prison life, I can tell you that education is the key to unlocking prisoners' capabilities and potential. The way education is delivered is not effective enough (barring the Open University), because the option of gaining knowledge isn't sexied-up enough, made to look attractive. I only managed recently to open the door, and get as much as possible from my experience in jail; this should not be the case for anyone who wants an education.

The door needs to be wide open with a sign saying **'ALL WELCOME, COME AND GRAB YOUR LIVES BACK'**. The education staff at Pentonville are dedicated and sincere in their constant push to help as many people as possible. Making my point perfectly is the comparison of a Pupil Referral Unit teacher, to a Prison Education teacher: the PRU teacher wants the person to behave well in a toxic environment; the prison teacher wants the person to learn well in a toxic environment. I have met plenty of both types of teacher so this isn't an empty, meaningless assumption, it's my life experience. My education has been given wings because of the support I have, support that has its arms open to anyone who wants to invest in their future and be better off for it.



# 12.



Yatin. *Help to Succeed*. 2019. Pen and pencil on paper.

# SCHOOL TO PRISON AND BACK TO SCHOOL 13.

## Russell's story

The word degree is an intimidating one, especially for someone expelled from school at 13, and sent off to the destructive environment of a pupil referral unit. Because of this, I barely scraped by in my GCSEs, and never realised my predicted grades. As a student, all my school reports made for familiar reading: ***“Russell can be disruptive in the classes, and his behaviour distracts the other students, however, Russell is intelligent, and finds the classwork easy when he puts his mind to it.”***

I have made a lot of wrong turns in life, but I refuse to regret any bad decisions. Without all the trials and tribulations, I would have never become the man I am proud to be.

If I was to regret one thing, it would be the fact I have never reached my full potential in terms of education; something I am taking steps to rectify. I have always had a natural talent for art, and by the age of 11, I was working at GCSE level. Unfortunately, I was never able to see it through.

For the last couple of years, I have been working hard to achieve academic qualifications, and I see this degree as a vital part of the puzzle. Since I arrived at HMP Pentonville, I have studied Philosophy and

Criminology. This experience has given me confidence in my ability and, for the first time in my life, I feel comfortable in an educational setting.

I had not picked up a pencil in 15 years, but, in Pentonville, I have fallen back in love with art, and for the last eighteen months, I have been the Art & Design class-assistant. This degree I am starting will help me to achieve my goals in life, and to find work involving art, after being released.



Russell. *Education is the Key*. 2020. Pen on paper.

# SCHOOL TO PRISON AND BACK TO SCHOOL 14.

## Jordan's story

School has started and I'm sitting at my desk looking at the back of the boy's head in front of me, debating whether to stick a pencil in his ear, or not. Things haven't been going all that well for me recently. I'm in year seven and the start of secondary school has been one giant dung heap. I fight all the time, mum doesn't know what to do, and my brother, Michael, who's three years above me, doesn't have any answers either; the only difference is Mike gets a front row seat when I fight in the school yard, and mum doesn't. I can tell the teachers have had enough of me. I could be struck by a bus, and die for all they care. I am truly a lost cause!

The Pupil Referral Unit I've been sent to has a weird smell to it. Like fresh paint and the dust bag of a Hoover. The kids here are the manifestation of the word... never mind, the kids are just as bad as me, one is even worse. He bit a teacher the other day and I heard the teacher whimper. A big, bulky man he was too. The whole concept of this school is doomed to fail, or so my mum says. She said to the head teacher when I first came here, **"You can't put bad children in with other bad children and expect them to come out good. It just doesn't make sense"**. The head teacher stuttered for a bit, said "Hmmm", and looked down to her notes. Her face was red and kind of purple as well when she left the room. My mum said to me before she left, "tell me straight away if they do anything wrong darling, okay? ANYTHING!" She said it in her angry, strict voice but I knew she was on my side. When it came to teachers, she always was.

I'm in prison, on the second recall this time and my mind has been well and truly battered and bruised. My saving grace has been the education and the different courses I've been doing. At the moment, I'm the assistant editor of 'The Voice of the Ville', I'm doing a Criminology course with the University of Westminster, and I'm going to be starting an Open University course called 'Combined Stem', which is basically math, science, engineering and tech all rolled into one stonker of a course. I'm very excited, the practicality and the sheer terror on anyone's face whenever I tell them what the course is makes it an attractive prospect for me to flex my brain muscle. I've done a lot of spoken word, poems, articles and written stuff, but I think I'm only working out the creative side of my brain. The OU course on the other hand, will work out the facts, stats and numbers side. Now that I've discovered the joys and more importantly the *buzz* of education, there's no limit on how far I can go.

# SCHOOL TO PRISON AND BACK TO SCHOOL 15.

CC's story

## ***For young people, being excluded from school is a struggle***

If you like football, you will most likely end up with the footballers, if you like art, you will mostly end up with the artists but if you tend to get in trouble, you will probably end up with the trouble makers.

Being expelled from school doesn't leave you with many options: it will be either learning in a PRU or getting homeschooled. Both leave you vulnerable to getting involved with people you shouldn't, things you shouldn't, maybe even the police. There are opportunities in prison that you may decide to take on because you have the time, and you may never have thought about it when you were free.

You can study and take GCSEs, or take them for the first time if you never got the chance. You can do courses in construction or engineering, and learn a trade, or you can study languages. Prison isn't easy but can be extremely useful.



D.S. *Untitled*. 2019. Collage, pen and pencil on paper.



Yatin. *Help to Succeed*. 2019. Pen and pencil on paper.



# 16.



Moss. *Prison Bus*. 2019. Pencil on paper.

# Word on the Wings

# 17.

## The Prison Officer

As an officer, whilst every day we unlock countless prisoners to go off to education, we don't very often get to see the inside of a classroom. However, we do get to experience prisoners returning from class and talking about their experience of learning inside these walls. Whether it is one of my key workers talking about how much he enjoys ESOL, or a guy on my landing, returning from the philosophy class after battling with the ideas of Hegel, education always seems to have a positive effect on people's experience of prison. The level of creativity that comes out of the art classes, or the writing for *The Voice of the Ville*, it is something that always impresses me. I believe it's great that a prison can be a place of learning and development for the guys serving time here, importantly, can break up the monotony of time behind the door. Education is fundamental to that process, and I believe that this is something that we should appreciate and prioritize. **PO J. S. - Unlock Graduates**

## The Student

My experience as a student in prison has been an interesting one to say the least. In my first couple of years in prison I only did the bog standard courses. Maths, English, IT, that kind of thing. I didn't really have any drive or passion at all. I've been in prison for six years now. The drive is there in force and I can't wait to see how far it can take me once I get out. This is all down to the people I have around me. I would find it very easy to fall into depression and lounge around all day, but the teachers and some wing staff wouldn't allow me to. They've seen me at my lowest. They know how bad I can get, and that's why it's them whose opinion matters to me, it's them who I trust and confide in like they're an extension of my family. The teachers provide the foundation and materials for us to build our futures, all we have to do is choose what kind of future we want. I haven't had a bad day in weeks and I know it's due to finding my drive and ambition, having people around me who want me to succeed, and not letting adversity get in the way of progress. **Jordan**

## The Teacher

Among the countless advantages of education in prison is the fact that prisoners gain an overall sense of progression, development, and control of their lives. Some prisoners argue that, with education, they are not in prison anymore. They link education to an 'escape' or 'a way out'. Others are surprised by how, once on a course, their motivation and interest in life increases. P.E.T.'s Distance Learning provides an exciting opportunity for prisoners to access courses similar to those offered outside prison. For most prisoners, such an opportunity is a blessing as it is a prospect otherwise never thought of, and can unlock their hibernating potential. Education can transform lives. **George T.**



# Word on the Wings

# 18.

## The Librarian

Our library demonstrates a strong working partnership with the education department in particular the Distance Learning program. Education Consultant and Distance Learning coordinator Jose Aguiar uses the space as a 'learning hub', bringing many different projects into the space. This helps to achieve our shared goal of supporting life long learning in prison. **Mona B.**

## The Probation Officer

Distance learning gives prisoners the opportunity to pursue an education that they have been unable to achieve in the community for various reasons, including chaotic lifestyles, a lack of support, and low self-worth. OU/distance learning provides prisoners with a structure to focus on, whilst incarcerated, and hopes that they can choose a different pathway in life. **Liz R.**



Antonio. *Brain Game*. 2019. Pen and pencil on paper.



## **“To say the OU changed my life is an understatement.**

OU student David Breakspear had been in the criminal justice system since he was a child. Determined to break the cycle, he began studying during his sentence. He is now an active and passionate campaigner for criminal justice and social reform, using his experiences to help inspire and educate others. As one of the speakers who took part in the TEDx Open University event in November 2019, we asked David to share his story.

**“In 2015, I found myself homeless and living in a church doorway. I was relying on soup kitchens for food, my drug use got worse, and I was in a bad, bad way. I knew I should not be living this life.**

I realised, you might say it was an epiphany, that there was only one place to go to change my life and that was back to prison. I knew I had to go back for the right reasons though.

I've been in prison before and have been a prison reform campaigner. But I have also been a criminal. I never really focused on what I wanted to do with my life, which is why I kept making mistakes.

Believe it or not, I was a better person when I was in prison. I had more tolerance, more patience, more empathy and could be more understanding. At that time, I had more of a social obligation when I was in prison than when I was in society. Being institutionalised builds that sort of feeling. So I knew prison was the perfect place to not only work on myself but to begin rebuilding relationships with my family and children, without the temptation of making any mistakes.

I wanted to campaign for prison reform, and I realised that the best way to achieve this was to go down the

degree route. I had the skills and experience, but I wanted to learn how to best build my argument in an intelligent way, so that the people I wish to influence would understand me.

I began, whilst on remand and with funding from the excellent Prisoners' Education Trust, with an access module. I then began studying for an Open University BSc Hons degree in Criminology and Psychological studies while still serving as a prisoner.

I started out quite tentatively in what I was doing. You have to understand that I never really went through the education process before and was kicked out of school aged 14. I was lackadaisical in my attitude and questioned whether I could do it. Well, completing a module showed me that I could!

I was released on 9th June 2017 and completed my licence in April 2019. I am still studying in the community now that I am free. It has been a change and I admit, when I first logged into StudentHome I did feel overwhelmed and buried my head in the sand. I spoke to some fantastic people in student support about the mental health side of things and decided to continue with my course and give it another go. In the meantime, I've been doing OpenLearn short courses to keep my nose in and help me navigate studying online with less pressure. I'd love to contribute to one of the courses on there!

**“Life-changing' is an understatement.**

To say that embarking on the education journey I chose changed my life is an understatement. This is the first time, from the age of ten, where I have never had anything to do with the criminal justice system. Well, except for my voluntarily jumping back in to help campaign for reform!

Something that I said in my TEDx talk is: how can we expect people in prison to change their lives around if there is no hope at the end of it?

**“I want my journey to give others hope. To think, 'wow this guy has been kicked out of the education system at 14, went through all of these systems, and there he is at the end with a degree and a book.**

I love using my stories and experiences, both negative and positive, to inspire and influence others. I think it goes to show that the prison system can work. I always say, I am who I am because of prison, not in spite of it.”



# WHAT THEY SAY

# 20.

“*Education is the key to success in life on the outside so it's vital in terms of rehabilitating prisoners.*

**Karneil - Open University Access: Understanding people, work and society**

“*To ensure that time incarcerated is not wasted and that I step out of the gate when it is time with positives. It means a lot and I would like to grab this opportunity with both hands. This is my opportunity to turn a negative into a positive.*

**Ben - Essential bookkeeping**

“*Education is key. Education has been my sole reliable company during my sentence. Through education there is hope. Before I attended education classes, I had a business idea; through education, I have learned how to create a business plan and the mechanics of a business. The transformation is exciting because I'm able to learn new ideas and skills. This has given me a sense of purpose and confidence. More opportunities are occurring as my ideas and skills are being developed. I make sure I am always involved with educational activities and explore knowledge in new areas.*

**Piers - Level 3 - Certificate in Foundation Journalism**

“*I want to improve my mind and the way I see life as a whole and better myself. Me having this opportunity, it builds up my self-confidence and lets me know I can achieve anything as long as I put my mind to it. I believe outside I would not find the time and I would not even think about it. Inside I got a lot of time on my hands and it benefits me by keeping my mind active and working.*

**Mafuta - Creative Writing**

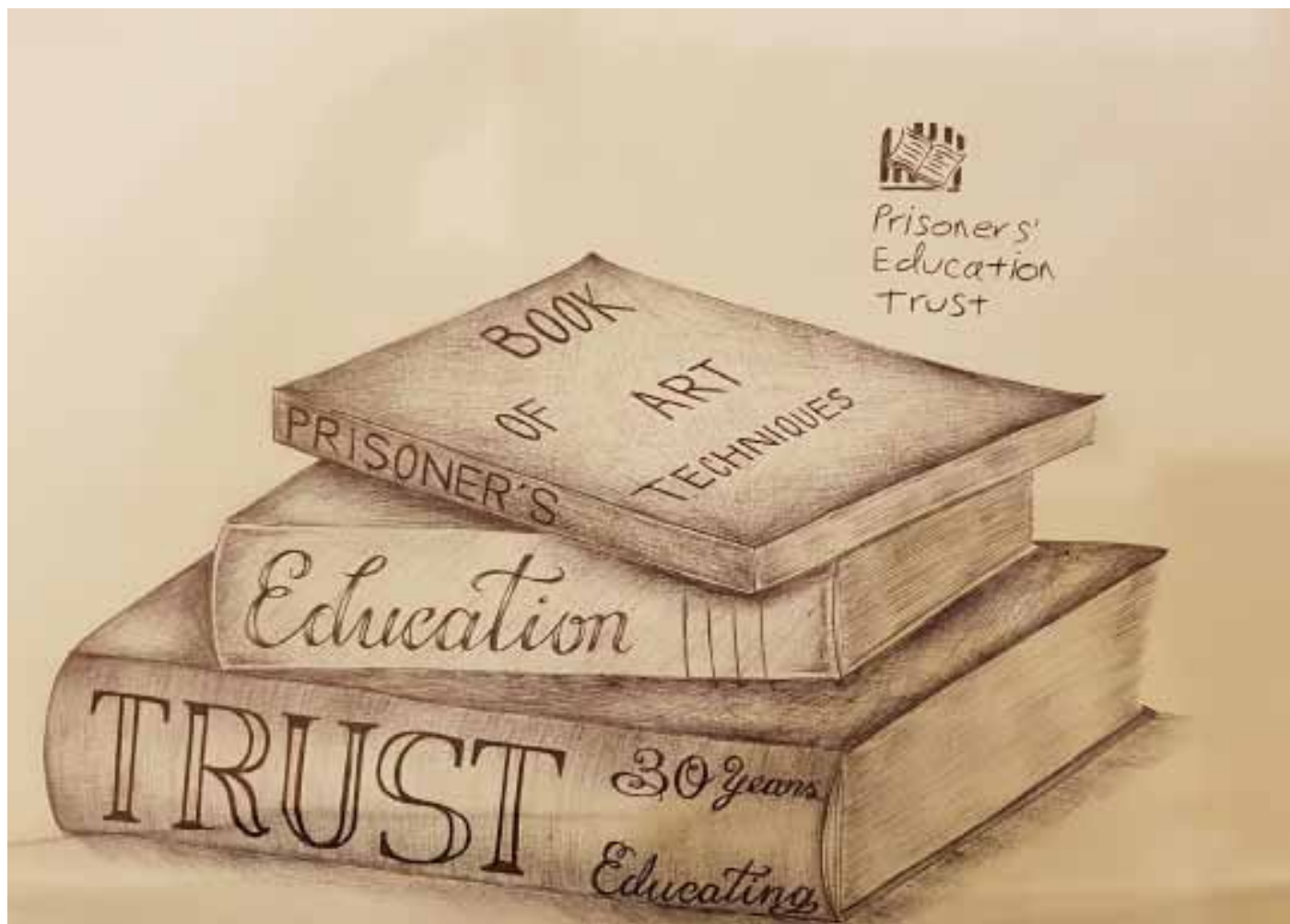
“*Education is my escape, it allows me to take my head out of the walls, locks, and bars. It is one of my pleasures, and I'm currently doing something that I want to pursue on the out. I'm extremely happy to get an understanding of my "new trade". I've always been empowered by education.*

**Wayne - Certificate in Understanding Addiction**

“*This education class has shown me there's more to me than just getting into trouble and coming to jail, and that I have far more potential than I have ever known before.*

**Ali - Plumbing Installation Theory**

# 21.



Russell. *The Books*. 2019. Pencil on paper.

# THE EDUCATION MANIFESTO 22.

by Carl

## EDUCATION IN PRISON...

PUT YOURSELF IN SITUATIONS WHERE LEARNING IS REQUIRED TO **SURVIVE** AND **THRIVE**.

ENCOURAGE YOUNG ADULTS **UNDER THE AGE OF 21** TO ENGAGE WITH EDUCATION.

**THE HIGHEST PAID ACTIVITY.**

SHOWING UP IS JUST THE BEGINNING.

**BESPOKE. TO. MEET. THE . NEEDS. OF. THE. LEARNER.**

~~THE MOST VALUED~~  
**ACTIVITY.**

**UNDERPINS EVERYTHING THAT HAPPENS IN PRISON.**

~~ACCESS TO MODERN TECHNOLOGY~~  
~~ACCESS TO THE INTERNET.~~

# LEARNING FORUMS.

STRONG LINKS TO THE LEARNING PROVIDER IN THE LOCAL AREA.

**VARIETY OF COURSE PROVISION.**

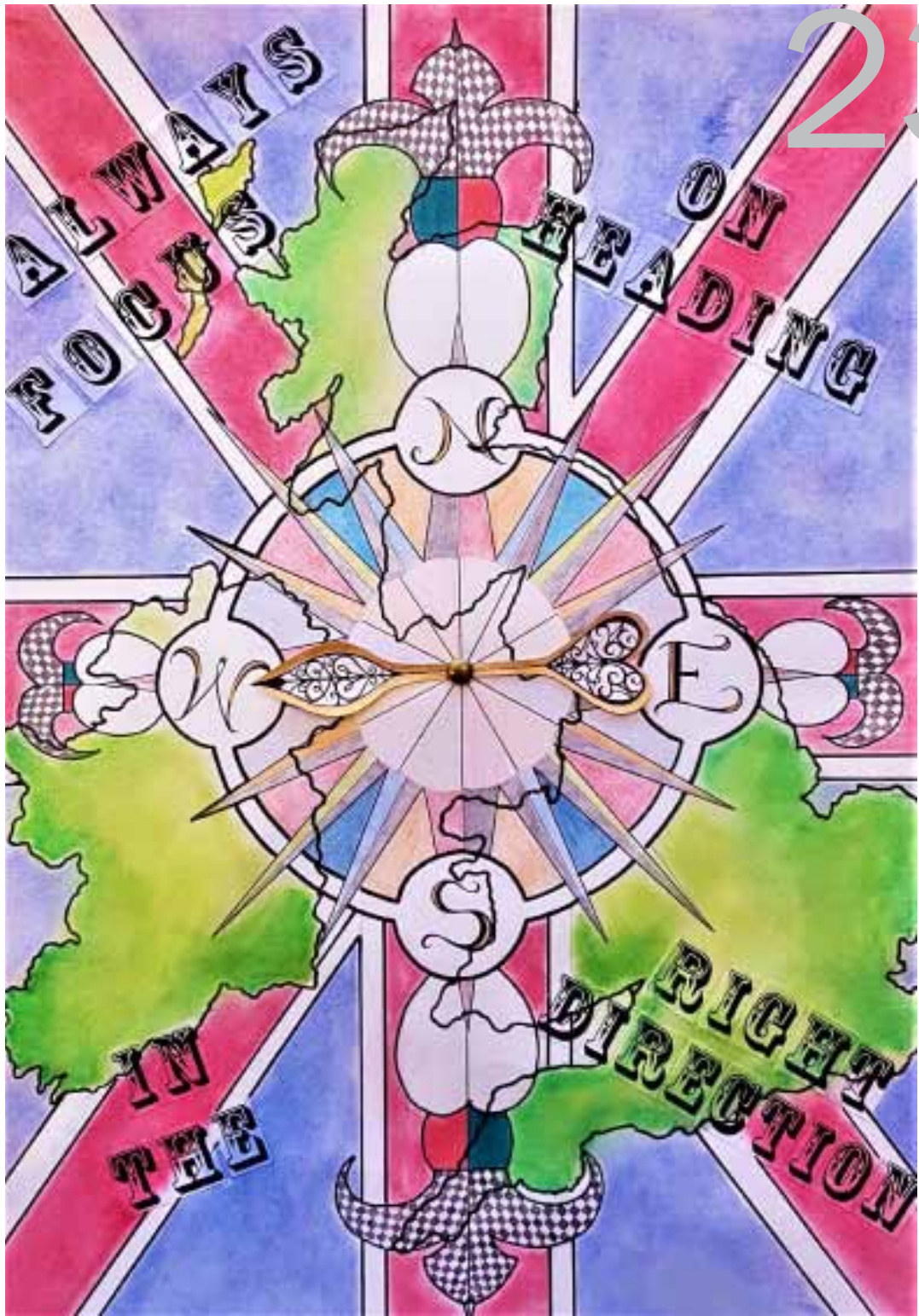
**RECOGNISE GOOD TEACHERS AND RETAIN THEIR SERVICES.**

VALUABLE TOOL FOR **SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT.**

**RESPECT AND POSITIVE REGARD FOR ALL UNDERGOING EDUCATION.**

**REGULAR OPEN DAYS and EDUCATION AND TRAINING FAIRS.**

CLEAR PATHWAYS TO ALLOW STUDENTS TO CONTINUE EDUCATION UPON RELEASE.



23.

A. Always. 2019. Collage and watercolour on paper



24.



D. S. *A Place of Solace*. 2020. Pen on paper.

## Dalton

Studied: Access Arts and Languages

Currently: continuing his studies

“*To me, learning inside, was like being given a set of keys. I felt myself walk out the door of my cell and finally breathe fresh air. I learnt to reconnect with myself and create an identity of student not prisoner, not villain, not scum.*”

## Kenny

Studied: Business

Currently: working in prison law

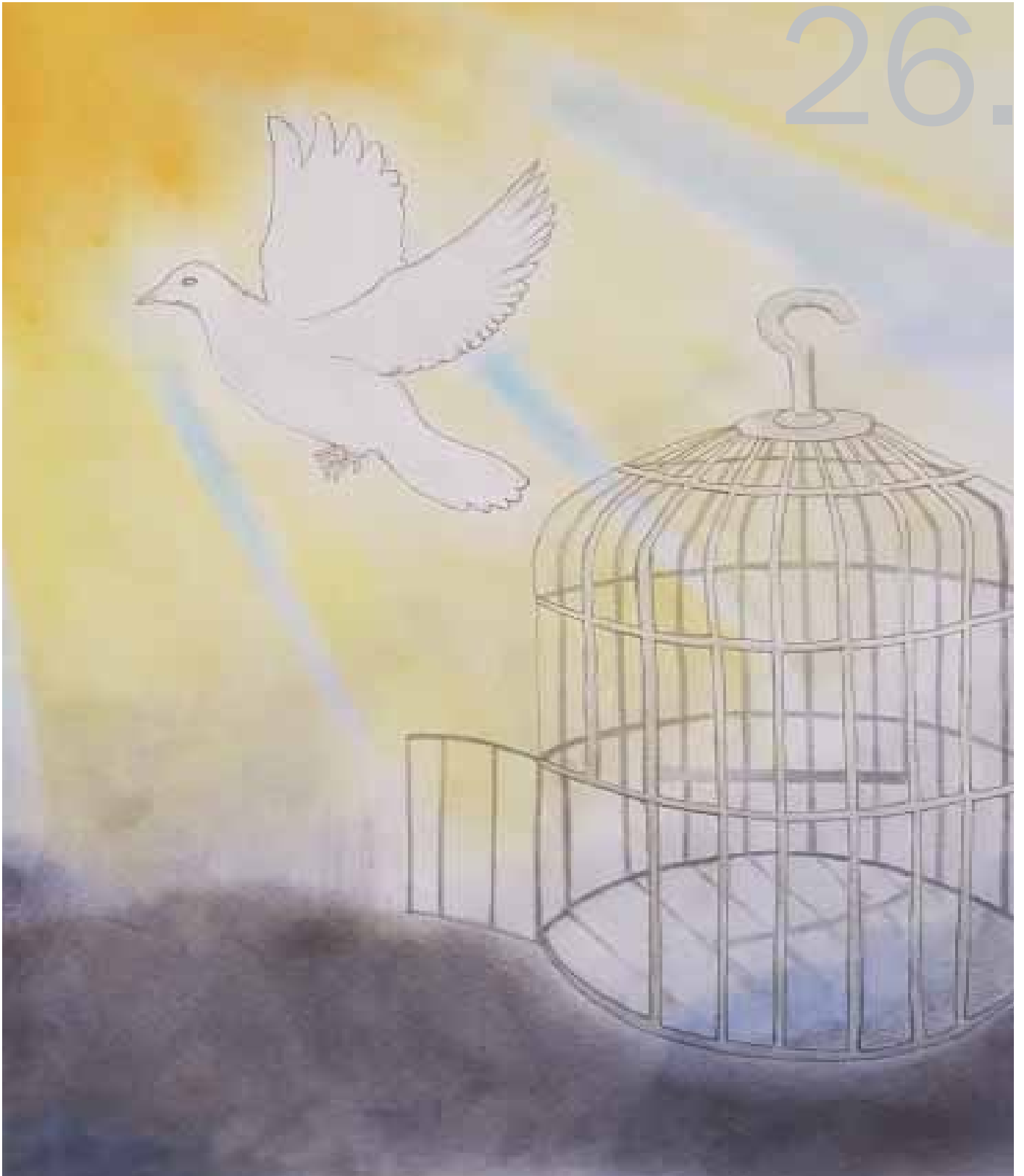
“*I spoke to friends and family for advice. I did not study at school so it was important to complete my Level 1's and 2's, and then an “Entry level” OU course. Step by step – put time aside.*”

## Seun

Studied: Surveying

Currently: working as an SOS caseworker

“*Understanding that it will come to an end, but being prepared. Learning, or gaining a skill, will have you ready for the outside.*”



Femi. *Hope...* .2019. Pastille, pencil, acrylic on paper.

# Monologue no. 2 by Carl

# 27.

Not sure how I would have coped without education during my time in custody. ***Learning has been like a duvet on a winter night; it is something comforting when everything appears bleak.*** My sister likes to call me a recidivist on account of completing a Criminology degree. I am someone who has been on the re-offending carousel for too long. My saving grace has been the support of wonderful teachers, who believed in me when I was at my lowest ebb and unable to believe in myself. Their faith prevented me from dwelling on self-pity and motivated me to make the most of every moment.

The support of the Prisoners' Education Trust has enabled me to continue my studies, and fan the embers of hope that I retain. I am well on my way towards a degree, and this means an incredible amount to me. It shows that I have not completely wasted my time inside, and have put it to good use. What I have achieved, with the support of the Distance Learning Coordinators I have had the pleasure of being assisted by, and the Prisoners' Education Trust, cannot be taken from me. In prison, it is so easy to think the worst of myself, but the faith P.E.T has placed in me signifies that I can accomplish all that I have set my mind to achieving.



Obeney. *Jail, Blessing in Disguise*. 2019. Acrylic on paper.



# The Gate by Michael

# 28.

*A gate slams, and a call for meds,*

*Time to start the day, and move from your bed.*

*The door opens for just a mo; now's the time for the unfree to flow.*

*Let the learning begin: arts, maths and business, to name a few,*

*There's so many courses designed for you*

*For pay, or just to get out of your cell.*

*You pick a course that will bring you out of your zone,*

*It's good in so many ways, and just may help you see out your days.*

*Then, you leave this place with degree in hand, and a spring in your step,*

*You can plan your life knowing you won't be back, again...*



Ali. Butterfly. 2019. Pencil on paper

# 30 Voices - 30 Choices

# 29.



# Thank You

to everyone who made this  
book possible:

# 30.



**PO J.S.** - Unlock Graduates  
**Liz R.** - Probation Officer



**Calum Walker**  
Media & Communications Manager



**George Tsourous**  
Business Enterprise tutor

Project Lead - **Jose Aguiar**

Project Coordinators:

**Helena Baptista** - Creative Arts tutor - Art editor

**Kirk Lawrence** - Art & Design tutor - Art coordinator

In Education

**A. - Ali - Antonio - Carl - C.C. - D.S. - Femi - Jordan - Michael - Moss - Obeney - Russell - Yatin**



**Mona B.** - Librarian

**David Breakspear** - Prison Reform Campaigner

**Lawrence Mathias** - Artist

**Katy Oglethorpe** - Head of Communications at NLGN (formerly at P.E.T.)