

Ben Jarman from Westminster meeting is one of our current grant recipients. He is using his grant to help fund a PhD in Criminology, looking at the situation of life-sentenced prisoners and why it is that some are more able than others to find positive, meaningful experiences while imprisoned.



The UK holds thousands of prisoners on indeterminate sentences, with long and explicitly punitive minimum terms, and complicated release conditions which make it very difficult to get and stay released. As a Quaker, Ben felt led to question how justly these powers are used against a very highly stigmatised group, who have in common that they were convicted of serious offences, but who often also have their own experiences of victimisation and illegitimacy pushed to the margins.

Punitive cultural attitudes and political ‘common sense’ encourage us to think of life sentences in terms of punishment or safety, not redemption or justice. Ben has spent hours interviewing men serving life-sentences for serious crimes, hearing how some find meaning and redemption in their experiences, while others think of their imprisonment as meaningless suffering. What are the differences between these two groups, and what needs to change – in them, in prisons, and more broadly – to transform the outlook of the second group?

Helping to understand these issues, and to broaden the focus from punishment and exclusion alone, is Ben’s long-term aim. You can read more about his work on his blog <https://changinginside.co.uk/>