



# Chess in Prisons

Carl Portman

# Who I represent when working in prisons



English Chess Federation (I am the Manager of Chess in Prisons)



Caissa Consulting Ltd (I do my own private and voluntary work)

## My role with the ECF is...

- To set up and co-ordinate chess in the prisons of England.
- Build on initial contacts made through the Ministry of Justice and with assistance from others
- Organise teaching and support for inmates



Independently...



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**Inside Chess**

Stephen from HMP Garth asks about rankings and ratings. Like many, he wants to know what numbers like 1500 or 1000 mean. I don't have space to give all the details here but in essence it is a mathematical

The image shows a screenshot of a chess article. At the top, it says 'Published On: Sat, Oct 31st, 2015' and 'By Carl Portman'. Below this is a chessboard diagram with a light and dark square pattern. The board is labeled with letters A-H across the bottom and numbers 1-8 along the left side. Various chess pieces are placed on the board, including a king, queen, rook, knight, and pawns. Below the board is the title 'Inside Chess' in red, followed by a paragraph of text starting with 'Stephen from HMP Garth asks about rankings and ratings. Like many, he wants to know what numbers like 1500 or 1000 mean. I don't have space to give all the details here but in essence it is a mathematical'.

Independent work: I am the chess correspondent for the prison newspaper Insidetime which aims to reach some 80,000 people monthly.

I receive and reply to a great deal of correspondence from this

Lifeline for prisoners – it is how they get their chess fix!



# What have I done to date since March 2014?

See handout but in essence:

Visits

Talks

Simultaneous matches

Q&A sessions

Set up chess clubs

Produced 'The Prison Chess Club' booklet

Networking and championing chess

Newspaper Correspondent

# Networking and 'selling' chess

Secretary of State

Ministry of Justice (MoJ)

National Offender Management Service (NOMS)

Education providers – A4e

Prison Governors

Prison staff and volunteers

Inmates

Others

# Achievements (Reasons to be cheerful)

- Chess clubs set up in several prisons and more to come
- Prisoners engaging in chess activity more than ever before
- Lots of activity with the chess newspaper column
- Prison chess booklet produced for inmates
- Appetite for more visits and more chess
- Chess on the prison Intranet
- Possible TV Documentary about redemption through chess
- Chess on the agenda in growing number of prisons

## Challenges (reasons to be busy)

- **Integrated approach: ECF, CSC and others.**
- Need to engage and influence more people at all levels (selling to people who don't want to buy)
- Chess in prisons is not on the government agenda
- Prison Budgets and resources at all time low (easy to say no but the will for chess is there)
- Need to set up a small network of people so all prisons can be covered easily (this work will be done with the ECF)
- Use more good news stories from UK and around the world

## My next steps – more of the same!

- Prison visits
- Newspaper Column
- Benchmark trip abroad
- Continue influencing and championing chess (more people to say yes)
- Set up a chess certification scheme for prisoners to show they have achieved something. This can be of great use outside.
- We need a strategic as well as tactical approach to chess in prisons.
- Voluntary Role but want to find paid work...

# Chess Behind Bars

- I am writing a book about Chess in Prisons – due for release in 2016 which is aimed at Prisoners.
- It will be a text book essentially but offer so much more.
- Includes real stories from real inmates. Plus motivations, studying chess inside and much more.
- Good too for chess players and the general public
- Publisher: Quality Chess – watch this space.

# Finally – what has chess done for inmates?

- Why do we bother with chess in prisons?
- How do we **know** if chess is making a positive difference?
- In other words - how can we measure it?
- What can we do with the information?
  
- As one inmate said – *“if you drop a diamond in the mud it is still a diamond”*.
  
- ONE LETTER – ALL EMBRACING (Excerpts to be read aloud)