

## Leicestershire Independent Custody Visitor Blog

It's hard to believe that it was 24 years ago when I saw an advert in the local newspapers asking for volunteers for Independent Custody visitors across Leicestershire. I applied not really understanding what the role involved but I was really interested to find out more.

I was working full time in the Civil service and while I didn't have a legal background, my brother in law was a solicitor (not in Leicester), so I knew a little bit about where he visited and how many people he saw.

Over the years, I've volunteered and still act as a school governor at an Infant school, helped with 2 local animal charities, been an education speaker for the Blue Cross, help at a local group of Riding for the Disabled (Carriage driving with horses) and am treasurer for several organisations.

After the initial training, I started to visit Wigston, which was a small custody suite with only a few cells. In the early days, I felt like a bit of a nuisance as I guess, back then, the Police didn't quite understand what the new role involved but I must say the role has evolved significantly since then as I can imagine everyone understands we are truly independent and will actively listen to all parties.

I don't recall seeing many young people at Wigston in the early days but I have noticed a change over the years. It's very clear that alcohol, drugs and mental health are now major factors with detainees across all age groups, ethnicities and genders. I suppose those problems were prevalent in the early years but this wasn't something that was discussed or noticeable.

The biggest recent changes have been the training and management which has evolved dramatically with a greater focus on the service and communication. The visits have also improved with me speaking to more detainees and visiting more than one custody suite.

I enjoy the role as it's great to be an impartial eyes and ears, be part of a wider team, widening my horizons and knowledge as no two visits are the same and I get to meet a huge array of people and life experiences. It can sometimes be challenging but with the support and training from Dharmista, the team and the office it ensures I feel confident to deal with most experiences.

My family are very supportive of my volunteering with the OPCC and some of my friends are interested and intrigued about what the role involves.

I would recommend volunteering with the OPCC as the training helps to widen your knowledge and be part of a team. You do feel that you are giving something back by being independent and listening to all parties.

More recently, I now volunteer with the OPCC Animal welfare scheme which works with the Leicestershire Police dog unit to maintain and improve standards and care of all Police dogs. The dogs are amazing so I love this new role.

Rosemary

Independent Custody Visitor