

John McCrae

Custodial Manager, Probation Service (HMPPS)

Can you tell us a little bit about your job and your career journey?

I am a Custodial Manager with 21 years' service in HMPPS. I am currently based at HMP Onley, a 742 bed Category C Adult Male prison in the Midlands. My main role is to provide opportunities for individuals to change, rehabilitate and break the cycle of re-offending whilst serving a custodial sentence. Prior to joining HMPPS I had a background in the haulage industry as a driver and operator.

What did you want to be when you grew up and why? Who inspired you?

Growing up I wanted to be a tree surgeon, this was because my uncle was a qualified tree surgeon and my dad worked within the horticultural industry for all his working life.

What have you learnt from volunteering with Inspiring the Future about yourself and about young people?

I personally have learnt a lot about myself. I used to hate public speaking! I've developed as a person, becoming adaptable to the different age groups and my own knowledge has increased through the questions I am asked and topics I sometimes deliver talks on.

I have learnt that young people are more switched on than we might believe. I have also learnt that the young people go home and talk to their parents about their day, as some parents have thanked me via social media.

What difference did you want to make for yourself and young people through volunteering with Inspiring the Future?

I believe in giving something back, reaping and sowing etc. I participate in charitable events etc previously and still do, but I was looking for a more long-term commitment. Through opportunities within prisons I became an able public speaker and trainer and I had been invited privately to speak in a school setting.

Once I had witnessed the engagement and positivity from the children and for myself, I realised I could make a difference, so I explored volunteering opportunities further and signed up with Inspiring the Future. My 21-year service allows me, through my experiences to not only broaden to minds of children through exposing them to this area of work but can also highlight the pitfalls of making wrong life choices and the consequences of such choices.

How long have you been volunteering with Inspiring the Future?

I joined Inspiring the Future in 2014

What events and activities have you taken part in?

I participated in careers fairs, world of work events, career insights, speed networking, 'What's my Line?' and mock interviews. I have delivered inspirational, aspirational and motivational talks to students of all ages.

What has been the best part about volunteering?

It is the reward of giving back, giving up my time to help others in whichever way I can. It is about seeing people grow and develop and learn from their interactions with those they would not normally come into contact with. It's about giving people hope and raising their aspirations for the future through exposing them to new experiences.

What has been the strangest/funniest/best question you've been asked?

FUNNIEST QUESTION 'Have I ever locked up Superman or Iron Man?'

BEST QUESTION 'What is the worst crime?' – I push this question back to the students, this then sparks a debate on what they believe are the worst crimes.

How have you benefited from volunteering with Inspiring the Future?

I have improved my public speaking skills, I have become more flexible and adaptable with my talks, responding to the needs of the audience. Through volunteering with Inspiring the Future it has enabled me to highlight all the positive work that takes place within the criminal justice system rather than the negativity often portrayed.

Describe Inspiring the Future in five words

Innovative, rewarding, fun, essential and exciting.

Who or what inspires you today and what is the reason?

The men in my care, the men I lock up, inspire me as I can see them change and develop as individuals. Wanting to change their lives and gain hope for their future, hopefully leading them to live law abiding lives upon release.

What's the one message you feel is important to share with the young people you speak to?

Don't let anything hold you back and anything is achievable if you put your mind to it. There is a big wide world out there waiting to be explored so go and explore.

What would you say to other volunteers thinking of volunteering with Inspiring the Future?

Just do it, it is so rewarding. Everyone should give something back in their lifetime so why not make a difference with young people, after all they are the next generation, and we need to invest in them.

What difference do you think you've made to the lives of young people who you spoke with?

I would like to think that I have exposed them to a career path they might not ever of considered, whilst inspiring them to think about their own futures and where they want to go in life. I also believe I have highlighted the dangers in making bad decisions in life and the consequences of such actions.

It's about giving people hope and raising their aspirations for the future through exposing them to new experiences.