



## Code of Practice

### Introduction

BEST - Befriending and Support Team for Foreign Nationals in HMP Wandsworth is a voluntary organisation that visits foreign nationals held in HM Prison Wandsworth. We focus on this group because they are particularly vulnerable and often have to cope with serious difficulties and anxieties without support from friends, relatives or having anyone to talk to.

We visit everyone in this category who requests a BEST visit for as long as they want our visits to continue.

We liaise closely with other organisations working with foreign prisoners and detainees and, where suitable, refer cases to colleagues specialising in associated areas such as law, health care, housing etc., as required.

We enjoy good relations with colleagues working in the prison service and ask volunteers to ensure we keep these relations as close and cooperative as possible.

### New members

We welcome new members and do all we can to support volunteers in everything they do on behalf of BEST. We cooperate closely with one another, prison staff and organisations we liaise with and regard this cooperation as vital for the effective performance of the service we provide.

This Code of Conduct is an introductory guide aimed at dealing with essentials. It is **not** an exhaustive reference. If at any time you require guidance on any matter not here covered, please contact the Volunteer Coordinator (see **BEST Officers**, below) and we will ensure you receive the necessary guidance as soon as possible.

### References and training

All volunteers are required to provide two character references when applying to join BEST. Once accepted, BEST provides training to all volunteers before they start visiting and an experienced visitor will accompany you on your first visit to the prison. BEST training is specifically for prison visitors and comprises a single session which takes place on a weekday evening from 19.00 to 21.00.

BEST will help you book visits and do all we can to support you as a BEST visitor, and to ensure you find volunteering with BEST an interesting and rewarding experience. We regard regular visits as essential for establishing trust and encourage our volunteers to visit once a fortnight.

We encourage volunteers to attend BEST meetings, which are held in Balham Baptist Church, Ramsden Road, London SW12 8QX, on a Thursday evening at 7.15 for 7.30 pm once every three months.

### **Important Do's and Don'ts**

#### **Do:**

Ensure we have up-to-date contact details for you.

Always cooperate with prison staff.

Always comply with applicable regulations and procedures.

Take personal i/d (passport or driving licence with photo) when conducting visits.

When conducting visits offer to buy something from the food counter at the Visitors' Hall costs are typically in the region of £3 and can be reclaimed from BEST.

Let us know as soon as possible if:

- you cannot conduct a visit as scheduled
- you no longer wish to visit a specific person
- you no longer wish to be a BEST visitor

On completion of each visit email the Volunteer Coordination Officer to confirm the visit has taken place: this ensures that, if a visit has not taken place, we contact the person concerned and notify them a replacement visit is being arranged: failure to visit someone expecting a BEST visit can damage trust which is why, when appropriate, we explain why the visit did not happen and give reassurance a replacement visit will be arranged as soon as possible.

In the absence of written authority from a BEST officer do not disclose to anyone outside BEST the name of anyone being visited or anything discussed with them: similarly, do not disclose such details to other prisoners/detainees or prison staff: this duty of confidentiality is subject to the exceptions below.

Exceptions to the duty of confidentiality:

It may be sometimes necessary for BEST to make a joint working arrangement with another organisation, involving an exchange of information about someone we are visiting: in such cases, you should explain this to the person concerned and seek their consent before sharing such information with the organisation in question.

If you believe keeping information confidential may lead to serious harm to the person we are visiting or others you must inform a BEST officer as soon as possible. If you are in doubt err on the side of caution i.e. inform a BEST officer immediately. In such circumstances, remember to keep calm and be as reassuring as possible, openly explaining to the person you are visiting that you will have to discuss the matter further with a BEST officer.

Immediately inform a BEST officer if you think it will be suitable to involve a lawyer, doctor, or other external professional whose services are required.

We encourage volunteers to attend BEST meetings: these are held in Balham Baptist Church on a Thursday evening once every two months.

Having been allocated casework do your best to ensure visits are conducted regularly i.e. approximately twice a month: regular visits build trust and are essential to the service we provide.

Share with us any ideas you may have for recruiting new volunteers, liaising better with other organisations, improving our services and generally increasing our capabilities.

Inform a BEST officer if you intend to stay in touch with someone you have been visiting after their release into the community: this applies to relatively few, but can be very important.

### **Don'ts:**

Do not disclose your private address, email or telephone number directly to a prisoner or detainee: BEST contact details are available to everyone who needs them and for security reasons these must remain the only BEST contact details disclosed to prisoners and detainees.

Do not give money or make any other gift to a person being visited.

Do not give legal, medical or any other specialist advice of a type that should only be given by suitably qualified professionals: although discussion of such matters is vitally important, we refer ALL such cases to qualified professionals and specific advice relating to such matters must be left to them.

### **BEST Officers**

**Director** Geoff Smith

**Volunteer Coordinator** Isobel Smallacombe

**Treasurer** Christine Julian-Huxley

**Head of Training** Olivia Beer

**Trustees** Isobel Smallacombe, Christine Julian-Huxley,  
Caroline Ayerst, Olivia Beer

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[www.bestsupport.org.uk](http://www.bestsupport.org.uk)