

## Liberty scheme aimed at Kent kids in trouble

**First-time young offenders in Kent are offered the opportunity to visit Maidstone prison and talk to long-term prisoners to find out what it is really like to do time.**

First-time young offenders in Kent are to be offered the opportunity to visit Maidstone prison and talk to long-term prisoners to find out what it is really like to do time.

The project, called Liberty, is a joint venture between police, the prison service and the county council, and has been set up to tackle the problem of offenders aged 12 to 17. Seeing all the people in there makes you think twice about doing things wrong.

During the two-hour visit, the young people are given a guided tour of the prison and are free to ask prisoners any questions they like.

PC Roger Clarke, of the police inter-agency department, said: The inmates tell them exactly what it's like to be in prison - they don't glorify the system. We're not looking to scare people. It's to show them the consequences of offending."

The idea for Liberty came from a similar project, Better Out Than In, that closed last year due to cuts in Government funding. Tracy, 15, of Gravesend, who visited Maidstone prison with Better Out Than In, said she felt sick when she saw conditions inside the cells.

"You had a bed and a little chest of drawers and no windows. The prisoners said they find about eight cockroaches in the middle of the night crawling around. It stinks. They've got toilets with no doors.

"Seeing all the people in there and what they're like makes you think twice about doing things wrong.

If successful the scheme will be extended across Kent.

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### About the team

Interviews by editors Lee Climpson, 17, Oliver Williams, 15, Julia Press, 16, Clency Lebrasse, 15, and reporters Donna Ludlow, 14, Hannah Pearce, 10, and William Baxter. A version of this article was published in the Kent Messenger.

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