

North Wales 'Sofa Singers' founder wins PM award for virtual lockdown choir

Press release

Music teacher from North Wales who set up a global online choir receives Prime Minister Boris Johnson's daily Point of Light award.



A music teacher from North Wales who set up a global online choir to lift people's spirits through isolation will today receive Prime Minister Boris Johnson's daily Point of Light award.

James Sills created 'The Sofa Singers' after seeing images of people singing on balconies in Italy and realising the power of music to bring people together while they have to be socially distant. Over 7000 people from over 50 countries have joined his twice weekly singing groups since they began in March.

In a personal letter to James, the Prime Minister said:

I want to thank you for the brilliant way you have used your gift for music to bring people together from the safety of their sofas.

One of the great hardships in staying at home has been a loss of social contact with others. But your wonderful chorus has helped many to overcome that sense of isolation, while playing their part in the vital mission to protect our NHS and save lives.

Inspired by the spontaneous creativity of the balcony singers in Italy, you have curated a magical moment each week that has seen hundreds of people around the world sit apart, yet sing together as one.

Reacting to the Prime Minister's announcement, James said:

It is a real honour to receive this award and I would like to dedicate it to the thousands of Sofa Singers around the world. It's wonderful to hear how the sessions are helping people to feel more connected and positive at this difficult time. Life is better when we're singing together!

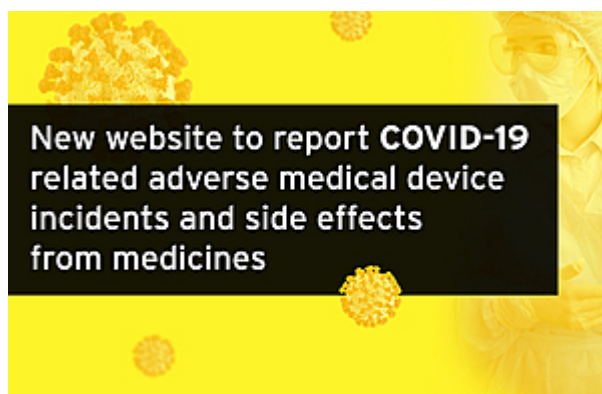
The Prime Minister's UK daily Point of Light award was first launched in April 2014 to recognise outstanding individuals making a difference where they live. James is the 1364th person to be recognised. As Britain unites to fight the spread of coronavirus, the award is focusing exclusively on people serving their community through the pandemic.

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[Coronavirus: new website for reporting medicines side-effects and equipment incidents](#)

Press release

A new online reporting site, dedicated to reporting any suspected side effects from medicines, future vaccines and incidents involving medical equipment relating to COVID-19 treatment, has today been launched.



The new and tailored [Yellow Card COVID-19 reporting site](#) makes it quicker and simpler for healthcare professionals, patients and carers to report side-effects or incidents.

The site has been developed as part of the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency's (MHRA) work to protect the public through enhanced COVID-19 vigilance and in preparation for large-scale use of

potential new or repurposed medicines, medical devices, diagnostic tests and future vaccines.

In our commitment to ensuring that the medicines and medical devices that people use are safe, we will use the COVID-19 Yellow Card reports to monitor the safety of healthcare products being used in COVID-19 treatment. In doing so there will be rapid identification of new or emerging risks, which might not have been previously known about and will take appropriate regulatory action, where necessary.

Dr June Raine, MHRA Chief Executive said:

“While our aim is to ensure that potentially lifesaving COVID-19 treatments and medical equipment reach patients as quickly as possible, patient safety is our highest priority.

“I encourage healthcare professionals and patients to use our new dedicated site to report problems with medical equipment, including ventilators or testing kits, as well as any suspected side effects from medicines used to combat COVID-19.”

To make a report or find out more about the Yellow Card COVID-19 reporting site please visit: coronavirus-yellowcard.mhra.gov.uk

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[Border force seize cocaine worth £4.86 million at Harwich](#)

News story

Border Force officers at Harwich International Port have prevented an attempt to smuggle approximately 54 kilos of cocaine into the UK.



On Thursday (30 April), officers at the port stopped an Irish-registered lorry carrying a load of frozen food which had just arrived on a ferry from the Hook of Holland. They noticed anomalies in the trailer doors and conducted a search. Inside the trailer they found 47 wrapped packages concealed in metal lined containers.

The contents of some of the packages were tested and proved positive for cocaine. The drugs had a potential street value in excess of £4.86 million.

Chris Philp, Minister for Immigration Compliance said:

This was a fantastic bit of work from the team. They have succeeded in taking a large amount of cocaine off our streets, where it can cause significant harm to both individuals and communities.

Every year Border Force officers seize Class A drugs worth hundreds of millions of pounds. Working with law enforcement colleagues like the National Crime Agency we will do all we can to stop drug traffickers and bring them to justice.

A British man was arrested and the investigation passed to the NCA. He was interviewed and released under investigation.

Jacque Beer, NCA Branch Commander said:

This seizure shows that organised criminal networks involved in international drug trafficking continue to pose a threat to the UK, even with the restrictions brought about by the coronavirus pandemic.

Working with partners like Border Force we will continue to use all the tools at our disposal to disrupt and dismantle crime groups involved in drug distribution.

Border Force officers use hi-tech search equipment to combat immigration crime and detect banned and restricted goods that smugglers attempt to bring into the country.

They use an array of search techniques including sniffer dogs, carbon dioxide detectors, heartbeat monitors and scanners – as well as visual searches – to find well-hidden stowaways, illegal drugs, firearms and tobacco which would otherwise end up causing harm to local people, businesses and communities.

Anyone with information about activity they suspect may be linked to smuggling should call Crimestoppers on 0800 555 111 or [online](#).

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£5.4 million to support legal advice sector during the COVID-19 pandemic

The money will be distributed to those most in need through not for profit organisations and Law Centres across England and Wales.

We are already seeing an increase in people seeking advice for social welfare cases during the coronavirus outbreak and this is expected to further increase demand from the legal support sector.

This funding will therefore help organisations to continue to provide vital legal advice throughout the pandemic, increase capacity, and deliver services remotely.

Justice Minister, Alex Chalk said:

Law Centres and charities in the advice sector play a vital role in helping people access justice and resolve their legal problems. That is why they should be supported to continue to operate safely and effectively during the Covid-19 pandemic

This additional £5.4 million support fund will help do just that – giving providers the support they need to boost remote capability and help as many people as possible during these challenging times.

Funding allocated to the Community Justice Fund will be administered by the Access to Justice Foundation and the Law Centres Network will oversee funding earmarked for law centres.

This is in addition to a recently signed grant agreement to provide more than £3.1m in funding to organisations that support unrepresented defendants in the courts, known as Litigants in Person.

Specialist legal advice providers focuses mainly on areas of social welfare law, for example housing, debt, employment, discrimination and special educational needs.

Chief Executive, The Access to Justice Foundation, Ruth Daniel said:

We are delighted with this support for specialist social welfare legal advice agencies who are providing essential help to people and communities at this difficult time. The Community Justice Fund will work in partnership with the sector to support organisations

with their response to the current challenges they are facing and aims to help the sector to emerge from it stronger and more resilient than it was before the crisis.

The Law Centres Network, Chair, Helen Rogers said:

We thank the government for this vital support, which will allow Law Centres to continue to defend people's homes, lives and livelihoods. The pandemic's uneven impact is a grim reminder of the deep inequality in our society that affects every aspect of life. This support recognises the key role of legal assistance in reducing inequality and bringing justice for all.

[Parole Board Chief Executive's blog – May 2020](#)

This week, the Parole Board has shared its 2020 to 2022 business plan which includes our strategic aims and priorities. It is worth noting, given the current climate, that while the current situation with Covid-19 will have a significant impact on the timings of the delivery of this plan, the aims and objectives still remain relevant, perhaps even more relevant, and the Parole Board continues to work towards the aims shared in the plan.

Firstly, I would like to reiterate that our top priority, as always, is to keep the public safe by only releasing someone when we are satisfied that imprisonment is no longer necessary for the protection of the public; and in undertaking fair and independent reviews ensure that continued detention is lawful.

We have 3 strategic aims that help us to achieve this:

1. We make independent, impartial and quality decisions
2. We work efficiently and effectively and provide value for money
3. We seek to be as open and transparent as possible

The Board makes independent, impartial and quality decisions by ensuring they are fair, respect the rights of the prisoner but always put public safety first. We operate like a court by making difficult, impartial decisions by considering evidence without fear or favour.

To help us make the best decisions we plan to:

- Increasingly use research to inform our understanding of, and approach to, risk;

- Provide members with a revised framework for decision making about risk;
- Provide more legal training and support
- Launch a rigorous and open recruitment processes to recruit new Parole Board members that represents the public that we serve.

To improve our efficiency and effectiveness we will:

- Ensure that all 26,000 cases heard per year are processed in a timely manner
- Ensure decisions are fully informed and based on all evidence available
- Improve the forecasting of our workload;
- Ensure we have better dossiers on prisoners and better case management and deployment of our resources.

Openness and transparency is also a huge part of what we do and we have made major strides in this area in recent times, which we are determined to build on. We already:

- Provide a service to produce around 100 summaries per month to explain our decisions to victims, the public and the media.
- Publish an accessible annual report each year and regularly publish performance data so that we are accountable for our decisions and open about our performance.
- Publish a full listing of our members.
- Publish our reconsideration decisions.

Unfortunately the Parole Board is often misunderstood by victims, the public and sometimes in Parliament, because there is a lack of understanding of the work it does. I am therefore determined and committed to ensuring we raise greater awareness of the work we do. We strive to improve this so that all those affected by our decisions understand how we make them.

By April 2021 we will look to provide better information about Parole Board decision-making to prisoners, their families, victims and the public; and implement a robust system for providing information about individual cases; make parole hearings more open and provide better access to data.

As previously mentioned, the timescales above may vary due to the current public health situation but I would like to assure everyone that the Parole Board continues to process a huge number of cases despite the restrictions in place and everyone is and will work to achieve the goals set out in the business plan.