

# The Society of Sports Therapists

## Press Release

### Palace Honour For Society Member Tony Heffernan

Tony Heffernan, a Member of The Society of Sports Therapists and Physical Education officer of Her Majesty's Northern Ireland Prison Service has received the prestigious Butler Trust Award for his outstanding contribution to the effective care of young offenders at H.M. Young Offenders Centre, Hydebank Wood, Belfast. He received his award from Princess Ann, royal Patron of the Trust at Buckingham Palace.

Working in conjunction with the healthcare department at the Hydebank Young Offenders Centre, Tony who is a PE Instructor, has been instrumental in devising a medical referral system which is now recognised and accepted as demonstrating best practice in all Northern Ireland prisons to date.

With his Sports Therapy training, Tony has been able to specialise in upper and lower extremity problems and spinal injuries. One of the area in which he has focused is on young offenders who have suffered punishment shootings and vigilante attacks by paramilitary organisations. These offenders did not previously have access to specialist treatment due to a lack of expertise on site and long NHS waiting lists. As a consequence, they then suffered serious joint injuries and subsequent bone and tissue degeneration. Tony has been able to assist these inmates to recover from these beatings by devising rehabilitation programmes which cater for their individual needs.

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Tony commented:

'This area of my work has given me a great deal of satisfaction. Seeing an inmate return to sport or even simply to walking freely gives me enormous pleasure.'

Joining the Prison Service 1980, Tony became a Member of The Society of Sports Therapists in 1996 when he successfully completed a Diploma in Sports Therapy. Professor Graham Smith, Chairman of The Society had no small part to play in convincing Tony that he had a career in this specialist field.

Delighted to hear about the award, he said:

'I am so pleased to see Tony honoured in this way. I first had the opportunity of meeting him when I ran a rehabilitation course for the Northern Ireland Prison Service in 1992, Tony then became an active member of The Society soon afterwards and he has put himself through several educational programmes to further his knowledge and skills. He has worked hard to achieve this recognition, not only in sport but within his own workplace. He is a credit to Sports Therapy, to The Society of Sports Therapists and to the Northern Ireland Prison Service Physical Education Branch.'

Tony was nominated for the award by Robert Lester, the Sport and Recreation manager at Hydebank where Tony has also dedicated time to looking after his own colleagues. Running a clinic during his lunch break he has provided a service for staff that has allowed them to bypass the long NHS waiting lists and helped them to return to work much earlier than anticipated.

Robert commented: 'Tony's work contributes greatly to the Northern Ireland Prison Service policy of 'Management of Attendance'. A lot of staff who have benefited from Tony's work with them would testify that had they not received such care their period of absence would have been prolonged.'

Sport is very much Tony's blood and, a keen rugby player himself, he has coached a team of young offenders to play in a 7's rugby tournament and has also taken part in a duathlon.

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Tony was accompanied to the Palace by his wife Mary. He said:

'This has been a very special day for Mary and myself and one which we will always remember. I feel extremely proud to have been honoured in this way.'

Our congratulations to him and we wish him continued success in his work in Belfast.

Tony's citation read:

Anthony Heffernan - Prison Officer PEI

HMYOC HYDEBANK WOOD

'Tony Heffernan has studied in his own time for several years to acquire a range of sports therapy and medical exercise therapy qualifications. These have enabled him to provide effective treatment for upper and lower limb dysfunction and spinal injuries. Young offenders with serious joint injuries from punishment shootings and beatings have benefited from Tony's expertise. He also provides remedial and compensatory treatments for staff with a wide range of minor to chronic conditions. Bypassing NHS waiting lists has speeded up their return to work and Tony continues to assess them up to full recovery. In the last year he has treated 200 staff and 300 young offenders.'

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## References:

### 1. Butler Trust Award

An annual award Scheme for the UK Prison Service encouraging the effective care of prisoners.

### For further press enquiries contact:

Maggie McNerney or Henna Akhtar

Charles Whitney Sports Marketing and Public Relations

Tel: 01582 659555

Fax: 01582 659659

Email: [info@charleswhitney.com](mailto:info@charleswhitney.com)



### **The Society of Sports Therapists**

16 Royal Terrace,

Glasgow, G3 7NY

Tel: 0845 600 2613

Fax: 0141 332 5335

[admin@society-of-sports-therapists.org](mailto:admin@society-of-sports-therapists.org)