

Bulletin

NATIONAL PROBATION SERVICE
for England and Wales



West Midlands

For probation service staff in the West Midlands

May 2003

INSIDE:

Page 2

- Shaping Up for New Challenges

Page 3

- Charter Mark Status for Welford House
- Putting the Focus on Community Punishment

Pages 4 and 5

- Focus on Bilston for the Future
- Creative Corner

Page 6

- Never too Old to Learn
- Help for the Black and Minority Ethnic Victims of Crime

Page 7

- Supporting People, Improving Performance
- A Tribute to Ben Faulkner

Page 8

- Employee Assistance Programme
- Real Growth In Budget



An offender on a Community Punishment Order is interviewed by Suzanne Page from Central News

Raising Awareness

Shaping up for new challenges

“In a period of significant change in the way we work, we have made good progress in many key areas.”

**Chief Officer
Hilary Thompson**



CONTINUING to improve performance will be the main priority for us in 2003/04, as the organisation shapes up to a challenging national agenda.

Since the National Probation Service was formed in April 2001, the former West Midlands Probation Service has undergone fundamental changes in almost every area of its work.

The changes have been demanding for existing staff, but the organisation is now well placed to deliver continuous improvement.

Over the next year we will be prioritising key areas such as:

- the enforcement of court orders;
- *Basic Skills* (reading, writing and numeracy) for offenders;
- increasing the number of offenders who complete the service's Accredited Programmes;
- more *Drug Treatment and Testing Orders* (DTTOs);
- the introduction of *Enhanced Community Punishment* (ECP);
- local issues such as hate crime, gun violence, persistent offenders and the street crime initiative.

The modern Probation Service is about meeting expectations old and new. We are known for the core services we provide in courts and for our hostels, our regular contact with offenders, community punishment schemes and our work with victims.

Since my arrival in 2000, many of these areas have undergone fundamental changes and there are more to come.

We have introduced an entirely new Case Management model (called *Next Steps*) throughout the Area and new nationally *Accredited Programmes* for the rehabilitation and treatment of offenders, as well as a comprehensive risk assessment tool for use by prisons and probation (OASys).

No organisation can implement change on this scale without some short term disruption. Despite this, we achieved some significant improvements in 2002/03 (shown below).

This year, targets will rise again with the aim of ensuring that 1,500 offenders start the new *Enhanced Community Punishment* (ECP) scheme, 1,300 complete programmes, 588 begin DTTOs and 785 complete new *Basic Skills* awards.

Meeting targets like these is essential if the Probation Service is to maintain and improve confidence among our key stakeholders and contribute to the reduction of the growing prison population.

The views of sentencers,

the public, our partners, offenders, victims and our own staff are all important. They need to know we are doing the right things in the right way.

Schemes such as ECP and our range of programmes are an important part of this process, as their development is based on evidence of best practice that has been proven to be effective.

Over the next year, we will be looking at our management capacity, our business processes, and the way we work with each other and with our partners to ensure that our services are delivered in the best possible way.

Some Major Achievements in 2002/03

- **A total of 388 offenders began new Drug Treatment and Testing Orders.**
- **Since last summer an average of 95 per cent of victims of serious crime were contacted by liaison officers within the target time of eight weeks.**
- **1,564 offenders were referred to Accredited Programmes.**
- **100 offenders completed the Drink Impaired Drivers Programme.**
- **364 offenders completed the general offending behaviour programme called *Think First*.**
- **The service has doubled the percentage of 'breach' cases where the necessary action has been taken and the court contacted within the target time of ten days.**

Charter Mark Status for Welford House

WELFORD House has been awarded a prestigious Charter Mark.

Welford House reserves ten of its 19 beds for long term stays by drug users, who can benefit from an intervention and treatment programme run in conjunction with Addaction drug services, but the

- Welford House staff met the following criteria to achieve Charter Mark status:**
- Set standards.
 - Be open and provide full information.
 - Consult and involve.
 - Encourage access and the promotion of choice.
 - Treat all fairly.
 - Put things right when they go wrong.
 - Use resources effectively.
 - Innovate and improve.
 - Work with other providers.
 - Provide user satisfaction.

Charter Mark is recognition of the high quality service offered to all residents.

One hundred per cent of residents surveyed during the Charter Mark application said they felt safe and secure at the hostel, and 96 per cent said they were given good help and support by staff.

Says hostel manager George Branch, a senior probation officer: "We are delighted to have received Charter Mark status for excellence in customer service. The independent judging panel is satisfied that the hostel provides an exceptionally high quality of service for users.

"The whole process brought us together as a team and improved staff



George and some of his team

motivation and morale. It assisted us in service delivery to our users, made us focus more on our users and ensured we that we continue to improve and provide value for money. Awards like this are not won easily and it is a tribute to the hard work and commitment of all my staff."



The camera captures the moment.

Putting the Focus on Community Punishment

OFFENDERS appeared on Central News after they were filmed removing graffiti as part of their Community Punishment Orders.

A Central News reporter and cameraman were at Babb's Mill Recreation ground to capture the launch of a graffiti busting project that will target sites in Chelmsley Wood and Solihull. The team of offenders and probation supervisors aim to remove up to 129 cases of graffiti from public areas which include shopping centres, health centres, youth and community

centres, social services buildings and churches.

This is just one of many examples of Community Punishment work that enable offenders to give something back to their community. In the Black Country, elderly and disabled residents have had their gardens transformed by CP teams.

Barry Warmer, a supervisor at Netherton Community Punishment Unit, works with teams of offenders to convert gardens so that they can be easily maintained. Barry gained his inspiration for the

project from his previous job, where he planned and supervised improvements to elderly people's gardens.

Olive Southall (82), who lives in Halesowen, is full of praise for Barry and his team. She says: "Barry's heart is as big as a bucket. His team were magnificent. Everyone was so lovely. They were all true gentlemen and treated me like a lady.

"They did lots of jobs, but didn't complain at all. Now my garden is easy to manage and it looks beautiful."

Barry adds: "The offenders have also gained much from the project. One said he had never lifted a slab before in his life, but really enjoyed doing this work."

Sue Hughes, from Short Heath, Willenhall, had her garden made 'wheelchair friendly' by offenders

supervised by Brian Halford from Walsall Community Punishment Unit. Offenders built raised flowerbeds so that she can access them from her wheelchair.

Sue says: "They've all helped to change my life completely. It was difficult for me to do gardening before but now I can do it whenever I like. It's a dream come true for both my daughter Katie and myself."

If you have some recent good news about Community Punishment, please contact Gavin Pearce or Jack Tarr in the Communications Unit - Tel: 0121 248 6570.

Offenders who volunteer must sign written consent forms before taking part in any public relations activity.

Focus on Bilston for the Future

"WE'VE had all kinds of people stay here," says Dave Sharman, Probation Officer and Deputy Manager of Bilston Approved Premise. "We've even had 'celebrities'. Well, almost. A few residents have claimed to be relatives of the rich and famous."

With all this talk of showbiz, it's fitting that the spotlight is on Bilston, with a cast including Dave, Ted Ashby (SPO and manager of Bilston and Stonnall hostels), three PSOs, four contracted supervisors, catering and cleaning staff and a pool of



Dave at work

essential relief workers. Bilston is, in fact, one of eight *Pathfinder Hostels* (including Carpenter House) that are blazing a trail to the future of Approved Premises.

The *Pathfinder* scheme aims to discover ways of achieving more consistency among all Approved Premises. It also aims to gather evidence of their effectiveness in reducing offending and to discover which regimes work best for hostel residents.

Pathfinder hostel staff are being trained to deliver the same group work programmes, which will be filmed and analysed by the National Probation Directorate. The NPD will then combine this knowledge with research by The University of Kent's Criminal Justice Centre.

Researcher Robin Saunders explains: "We will compare what happens in the *Pathfinder* hostels with the situation in a group of broadly similar hostels. We will then study any variation in

reconviction rates and seek to determine why they may have occurred."

The views of staff and residents also form an important part of the study. Adds Robin: "We welcome their co-operation, as the research is set to continue until the middle of next year."

In autumn 2001, the *Pathfinder* began at Bilston with an intensive staff training programme. The sessions follow principles (known as *Pro Social Modelling, Motivational Interviewing and Cognitive Skills Learning*) that encourage change

and motivation in residents. One such programme being delivered by staff is called *Living Here: Moving On*. This nine-session course aims to enable residents to transfer what they have learnt about positive behaviour and problem solving to their life beyond the hostel.

Dave explains: "These principles are all about negotiating the behaviour change in residents. They are based on international research and can be used by staff in group work sessions and also during everyday contact with residents."

Staff have been coached by Canada's Liz Fabiano, a leading specialist in motivational interviewing and cognitive skills



Part of the team: Iris Tracey, Jayne Weston, Maria Thompson, Dave Sharman

training. "Much of the staff training and theory is now complete and the team is ready to put their knowledge into practice," adds Dave.

The *Pathfinder* may pose a challenge to staff, but they are used to facing challenges as Bilston can accommodate up to 15 high risk offenders over the age of 18. Residents may be on licence, bail or a Community Rehabilitation Order, and most stay for a period of months before moving on.

A poster in the hostel's main office reflects Dave's philosophy.

It states: "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed people can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has."

Dave explains: "The nature of our residents and the ongoing changes to the

service mean teamwork is vital. I feel that it's important for staff to show goodwill and a duty to co-operate because their behaviour affects residents' attitudes. I also

The Bilston team are:

Ted Ashby – Senior Probation Officer and Hostel Manager
 Dave Sharman – Probation Officer and Deputy Hostel Manager
 Probation Service Officers: Maria Thompson, Alex Austins, Janet Butler
 Contracted Supervisors: Paul Turley, Len Sealey, Paul McKetty, Iris Tracey
 Chef/manager: Jayne Weston
 Weekend chef: Diane Fellows
 Cleaning operatives: Jeanette Garrison, Jennifer Williams

HELP US to HELP YOU

Bilston Approved Premise requires the following information before accepting a referral:

- Give as much notice as possible
- Give us a "moving on" date
- Give us a resettlement plan from the hostel
- Give us an up-to-date risk assessment (ACE/OASys since January 2003)
- Give us the PNC number
- Give us the CRO number
- Tell us why your client needs a place at an approved hostel

think it's essential for us to have effective communication with field probation officers who hold residents on licence."

Dave's teamwork ethic is also evident in Bilston's relationship with the local community. Hostel staff are in regular contact with local places of worship and police. An offender manager from the local Community Safety Bureau visits weekly.

Residents can engage in a variety of activities during their stay. This ranges from playing board games and pool to arts and crafts sessions. Those wishing to be more active can take part in weekly supervised trips to the local leisure centre, where swimming, keep fit and circuit training are on offer at appropriate times.

Residents' education is also catered for. Visiting speakers include local clergy, emergency service representatives, drug and alcohol advisers and health authority staff.

There are weekly literacy and numeracy classes led by a Basic Skills tutor and regular visits by an employment officer. At the time of writing, five residents are employed and one is on a full time college course. "I find that it's contagious – when one resident finds work many follow," says Dave.

The high quality of service offered by the Bilston team means that there are many satisfied customers.

"We get a lot of positive feedback from ex-residents, who often visit or call us," explains Dave. "It could be just to say hello, and thank you, or to seek advice. The fact that they bother to do so suggests their stay was worthwhile, and their time here was not solely punishment but a way for them to get their lives back on track."

Creative Corner...

Remembering 'Old' GCH

- G** et me out of here!
R eception, resilient
E nthusiastic
E ffervescence
N ever giving up!
C amaraderie, co-proxamol, codeine
O nerous
A nally retentive
T irade of abuse, tumultuous
- H** olistic approach
O wen
U rgent telephone calls.
S andwiches have arrived, stress, Stratford road
E nergy

And...sheer poetry.....

The building may be falling down
 The toilets a disgrace
 But there's something rather special
 Greencoat's saving grace.

It's more than camaraderie
 It's more than just support
 It's something that you can not fake
 Something that can't be bought.

In spite of all the pressure
 The stress, the work, the cr*p
 There is a limitless resource
 Into which we all can tap

They're more than just your colleagues
 They're folk that keep you sane
 They're the ones you have a laugh with
 And the ones who share your pain.

So when you hear the negative stuff
 That Greencoat's falling down
 Don't listen – it's really not the truth
 It's the best damn office in town.

The wind of change comes and goes
 But Greencoat House even through its lows
 Will always glow and grow

And one more...

Like a phoenix that's been put to rest
 In a fire of chaos and unrest
 Greencoat House will rise gain
 Hopefully without the chaos and mayhem
 To become Probation's treasure chest.

'Never Too Old to Learn'

By Ashleigh Semmons

ON 4th March 2003, Samantha Waterhouse, a TPO from Dudley, scooped the star prize in the NPD Diversity poetry competition for her impressive effort entitled *Just out of Reach*.

Sam, a 'good hearted', remarkable woman, has enjoyed writing for a long

time. She draws upon her life experience to create simple, thought provoking poems.

Sam gained inspiration for the poem while preparing for a *Think First* Programme. She found it difficult to understand many of the concepts, which challenged her to adopt a new way of thinking.

However, Sam has a 'stick to it' nature and was determined to get around these obstacles. She says: "I want to be who I am, and I want that to be a part of what I am doing."

At a swish ceremony in London, Sam was presented with a large replica painting, a certificate and £100, "which was a lovely surprise". All in all Sam had a very prosperous day and is set to continue writing poetry.

Growing up with strict Victorian values and the belief that a woman's place was in the home, she postponed going into higher education.

However, our Sam is an



Samantha Waterhouse

ambitious woman who had her eyes set on an industrious career. So at the age of 41 she embarked upon a degree in Law and West European studies. "I studied for a career not just for an education," she adds. Proving her point, she passed with flying colours.

Sam hoped to become a solicitor. However, she was destined for greater things. Once she had completed her degree, Sam grasped an opportunity to work in the prison service. She also found time to complete her second degree, this time a BSc in Sociology. Again, she passed with top marks.

Entering into the prison service on a fast track system, Sam enjoyed her work with a passion. She was working at Brinsford Prison, where she became interested in the work of the Probation Service - to the point where she decided that she would enjoy a career as a Probation Officer.

Sam hopes to graduate this summer as a Probation Officer with a BA in Social Justice, while gaining her third degree in the process.

As the oldest student on the programme, she finds that many younger students look up to her. She is proof of the old saying: "One is never too old to learn".

It was very remarkable talking to Sam and I really admire her ambition. It is very encouraging to see her going for the gold and not taking the easier option. One last question to Sam: Where do you see yourself in ten years time?

"Something managerial would be ideal. But I like working with prisons because that is where I started, so an Inspector of Prisons or Probation would be perfect for me. Young offenders and prisoners will one day return into society, so we need to focus on rehabilitating them. I don't intend to retire any time soon, so I can still reach my goal."

Just out of Reach

It's different, it's new, it's strange and rare
The difference all around me, swirling in the air,
Strangeness and strangers, colours in the mist,
All around me close by me, newness with a twist.

How do I see these new happenings around
Do I go with the flow or just stand my ground?
Can I move with the times, will I need to re-learn,
Or can I just show the ability to turn.

I value the old and mistrust the new,
I want to be all things, clever and true
I need to remain were I've been all along,
I know the words and I know the song.

But wait, what's that noise that's becoming so loud,
Lots of people, many colours, a whole new crowd,
I think I'll join them, the possibilities are grand,
I'll leave behind the old and join this new band.

I am the old way, they are the new,
But I can give and learn from you,
So let's put it together and then we'll advance,
We'll welcome diversity and learn the new dance.

Help for the Black and Minority Ethnic Victims of Crime

The Area Victim Liaison Unit (AVLU) has launched a directory of community groups committed to helping black and minority ethnic victims of crime.

The Minority Ethnic Directory West Midlands includes places of worship, resource centres and community centres that will encourage black and minority ethnic victims of crime to seek support, and important information about the perpetrator, from the AVLU.

Thousands of BBC Asian Network

listeners became aware of the directory after its launch at Birmingham's Rotunda Building on 7th May.

Radio reporter Gubs Hayer interviewed the SPO and manager of the Area Victim Liaison Unit Pat Brown-Richards, the Chairman of the West Midlands Probation Board Charles Jordan, Chief Officer of Probation West Midlands Hilary Thompson and Ranjit Sondhi CBE, a BBC Governor with responsibility for the regions.

Supporting People, Improving Performance:

Jack Tarr interviews Catherine Holland

"GOOD performance is about good people management, and this means valuing, developing and supporting staff", says Catherine Holland, our new Director of People and Performance.

Catherine joined us at the beginning of April and is a member of the Area Executive Team with a wide brief covering several aspects of the service including personnel, training, communication, information and the wider performance agenda. She brings a wide range of skills and experience from 19 years in social work and related fields.

"When I saw this job advertised, I thought that's my job, it could have been written for me," said Catherine. "Probation is being required to modernise, work to a performance agenda, work in partnership and be more flexible. Investing in our workforce is the only way to achieve this. I'm looking to promote more joined-up working and to ensure we utilise the right skills in the right places so that hard-working staff can

be more effective."

Catherine began her career in 1984 as a care assistant in residential services for people with learning difficulties. Keen to see people 'speak up for themselves', she is a believer in self-determination and ran group work sessions teaching skills such as advocacy.

In the early 90s, Catherine moved to new role with a housing association in Newport as a Community Services Manager.

Her career took a new direction with the move to Dudley Social Services in 1995, as Training Officer working initially in NVQs and writing and delivering new training courses on gender issues and disability equality.

A restructuring of personnel and training saw staff from both units take on wider HR roles, and Catherine became an HR manager.

Specialising in employee and trade union relations, she was able to draw on both her managerial experience and years of active membership in

UNISON as a representative and delegate at annual conferences.

"I believe managers and unions in public services basically have the same objectives at heart," she added. "They both want a happy workforce performing effectively. We need to find ways of working together to achieve this."

Following further promotion to the Assistant Director role, Catherine assumed wider responsibilities for communication, policy and review, finance, IT and equality issues.

So what has the transition to Probation West Midlands been like? For now, she is heartened by her first impressions of the service. "I found this is a friendly organisation, very supportive towards me and each other," she said. "I am



Catherine Holland

impressed with the working relationships and commitment of the staff. We are all part of one service and staff at all levels and from all disciplines have a valid contribution to make."

She added: "We need to be more

flexible in the way we work. Admin and support staff are often undervalued and we cannot afford to be hamstrung by what has always been done by probation grade staff. We also need to do a lot more on workforce planning."

Outside work, Catherine lives with her partner in Whitmore Reans in Wolverhampton and enjoys the cinema, theatre and mountain biking and walking.

As she settles into her new role, she is now determined to achieve her other main ambition of cycling across Mongolia sometime next year. It's hard to say which one will be more challenging.

A Tribute to Ben Faulkner by Grant Hickman from CAF/CASS

BEN Andrew Odin Faulkner, born on 11th June 1965, joined the West Midlands Probation Service in September 1994. He worked at Birmingham's Saltley office, before transferring to the Family Court Welfare Division at its Printing House Street office in July 1997.

During this time he reduced to four days a week working so as to spend more time with his young family. He remained with this team until his untimely death at the age of almost thirty eight.

During his period in family work, Ben was first NAPO branch Vice-Chair and then Joint Chair. He was involved in the representation of many members and his tenacity in the pursuit of a fair outcome and in debate was always to be admired.

He was often at the forefront of developments in health and safety, training and, latterly, the National CAF/CASS Section. His eye for detail was legendary, as were his drafting skills. Ben nonetheless always had time for the individual practitioner and their problems, as he was

always 'human' in his care for others.

Ian Latham, NAPO National Vice Chair, says: "Ben loved music but he would insist on playing The Strawbs song "You don't get me I'm part of the union" to the new intake of trainee probation officers. We agreed on most things but had some lively discussion about that!"

His ready wit mingled with an intensity and a hustle and bustle that made for a complex character, but one who was always sincere and reliable.

Ben was someone of considerable intellectual ability and integrity, who made a significant contribution to almost everything he became involved in.

Ben transferred to CAF/CASS in April 2001, with high hopes for the fledgling service. He worked as hard as anyone to bring about the reality of a service for children and families and made many new friends and members of colleagues in Public Law work.

Family was always central to Ben. No one who worked with him could fail to know

about his wife Barbara, and their two sons Josh, aged seven, and Seth aged three, whom he would often phone in the course of the day with some cheery or soothing message.

Ben's Christian faith was not just something for Sunday, as he lived out his belief in all he did. He supported and promoted *Free Trade*, and believed in equality and a common humanity for all.

His interests outside work were prodigious. He was on many committees involved with his church and with Addullum Homes (a charity working with a range of people with housing difficulties). In addition, he acted as a consultant for the local Diocesan Centre and was a Lay Reader with his church.

Ben was a popular colleague who is being very much missed by his colleagues and friends. Many have had difficulty in coming to terms with the fact that he took his own life during a period of illness. Our thoughts and feelings are with his family at this traumatic time.

Employee Assistance Programme - A service to help you

WITHIN the UK, at any given time, as many as one quarter of an organisation's employees may be affected by personal problems. These can include marital and family issues, alcohol or drug problems, and career or financial stress. Whether the source of the problem is at home or at work, the result is often the same:

- Reduced employee productivity
- Increased absenteeism
- Poor timekeeping
- Accidents at work
- Low morale and motivation

Probation West Midlands is providing the Employee Assistance Programme as part of the *Rewarding and Valuing Staff* initiative. We recognise that employees may need help to deal with challenges in life, both practical and emotional.

This service gives access to a number of qualified and experienced counsellors (male, female, minority ethnic) who can provide support on a range of personal issues including:

- **Financial** - money management, tax advice, negative equity, child support
- **Legal** - consumer complaints, insurance claims,

neighbour disputes, motoring offences, child custody, divorce law

- **Relationships** - family, work, partners
- **Family care** - child care and elder care, education, financial concerns, state benefits and allowances
- **Work** - career matters, maternity, harassment, pressure

The service is run by Corporate Support, an independent external organisation that works to a professional code of strict confidentiality.

Anonymous statistical data on the usage of the Employee Assistance Programme will be



*The number to call
for support*

made available to Personnel Department, but individual confidentiality will not be breached.

You, your partner and any family members who live with you can use the service.

To access support and professional guidance please call: 0800 1079011, Minicom users should call - 01455 896062. The service is free.

Real Growth In Budget - But Is It Enough?

Andy Nelson, Director of Finance, tries to answer the question

OUR budget for 2003/04 is £41m. This represents just under nine per cent growth in real terms from last year. Of that, the budget for the main service is £34.6m, which includes a £1.1m special performance allocation provided to Metropolitan areas like the West Midlands as part of a performance delivery agreement.

£3.1m represents the cost of running our seven Approved Premises. £3.3m is the cost for Trainee Probation Officers, of whom 66 are due to qualify this autumn, 60 next year, with another 73 currently being recruited to start their training this autumn. Allowing for the filling of vacancies and turnover, these 199 new officers constitute a significant growth for us.

There are six main areas of change from last year's budget. We have £1.2m for pay awards (we have allowed for 3.5 per cent) and inflation.

There is £700,000 set aside for property, as the new arrangements will cost us extra and we have a new way of being charged - £180 a year for every square metre we occupy and £7,500 for every bed space in our hostels.

There is £400,000 for the IT upgrade. We need this desperately but it will not be until after September that the NPD provides new servers, new networks, new equipment, new versions of Word and Excel for every user and the latest version of Lotus Notes. At least, now, that improvement is in sight.

We lost another £400,000 last year through the Performance Link to the budget,

by not meeting certain targets. We could lose up to £900,000 next year as a result of this year's performance. Add in the extra £1.1m and that is £2 million of our budget linked to performance, hence the concern.

We have got about £1.1m of savings, which include £400,000 from the Budget Exchange Scheme for underspending last year and a £350,000 contribution to overheads for TPOs. These are genuine savings and no area of the budget has been cut.

After all that has been taken into account, we are left with £2.7m for 'real terms' growth, almost all of which in one way or another is going into staffing:

- £540,000 to pay for the newly qualified probation officers starting this autumn;
- £350,000 to pay for more PSOs;
- £150,000 for more admin staff;

- £210,000 for the cost of the Admin Review;
- £218,000 for more management capacity - the new Director post, more new Senior Probation Officers, etc;
- £100,000 for the PSO Review;
- £600,000 (£200,000 each for extra staff for Basic Skills, Enhanced Community Punishment and DTTOs);
- £100,000 for *Rewarding and Valuing Staff* initiatives;
- £200,000 for new partnerships projects, the *Street Crime* initiative and the Criminal Justice Board proposals.

It is a lot of money, but we are all too aware of the demands made upon us as a service, particularly with performance targets. Meeting the demands of the coming year will be a real challenge.

Swimming for Charity By Simon Lomas

For the recent swimathon I completed 5,000 metres in one hour and 36 minutes. This was not a personal record, but I nevertheless raised just over £100 for Macmillan Cancer Relief and The Swimathon Foundation. Saltley's Malcolm Slater PO and Tessa Mitchell SPO swam as a team to raise about the same amount.

The only funny part was that I booked Malcolm and Tessa in for the event and told

them it was Sunday. It was not until the day of the event that they realised that Moseley baths were closed on a Sunday and they were, in fact, swimming with me!

Unfortunately, both had been drinking the night before (separately) and they were still hung over. However, as well tuned athletes they overcame the poor preparation and completed the swimathon without sinking. It was Tessa's longest ever distance.