

Damh the Bard:

So I am on Zoom with Wendy Shrubbsall. We've been friends for 250 years, or at least it feels that way. I've known you a very, very long time.

Wendy Shrubbsall:

Yeah.

Damh the Bard:

You've been a member of our grove here in Sussex. You moved to Wales, but lots of people who are listening to this show won't know who you are. So, can you tell us a little bit about yourself and about your path into druidry? Before we get onto the guts of it, which is what I want to talk to you about your role as a pagan chaplain, but let's have a little bit about who Wendy is.

Wendy Shrubbsall:

Okay. So I guess my journey started right at my earliest memories. I was always absolutely fascinated by nature and I spent a lot of time looking at the detail of nature and being amazed by it all, and I think a lot of people my age, so I'm now in my 50s, my 50s, were brought up in a British society that was very Christian based. My parents did the thing that they thought was right and took me to church. My Nan, my grandmother on my paternal side, was a Christian scientist and a reader in her church. So I got drawn into some of that early on, but it never felt right. It never felt right. I always felt very lost and felt that there was definitely something missing.

Wendy Shrubbsall:

And I guess for a lot of the people that I grew up, my friends and a lot of people around me, we started wondering what else there might be. And the lure of the occult and weird stuff drew us along to explore things that just fascinated us, that were not in the public domain and not really accessible to most people. So I think coming into, realizing that I was a pagan, I started looking into what did that mean? How could I get training? And back then, there were very few books in the bookshops. There were very few groups advertising what they were doing. I remember going to a Mind Body and Spirit fair and somebody saying to me, "No, you're not allowed to buy Tarot cards."

Damh the Bard:

Yes, you have to get them as gifts. Is that right, wasn't it? Yes.

Wendy Shrubbsall:

Well, where's my gifts then? And oh no, you can't just join a coven, your teacher will arrive when you are ready. And it was all very mystical and all very not spoken about, very, very secretive. And that drove me nuts. So I was very lost for a lot of my youth I think. I loved Britain, I loved British countryside, I love the British people. There's something very magical about these lands, and yet I felt very disconnected from them and everywhere I looked to try and get some stability in that, it was like the doors were shutting in my face.

Wendy Shrubbsall:

I used to go and watch the sunrise on the summer solstice because it was the right thing that I thought I should do. And so I did that for a few years just on my own, not knowing what I was doing, but felt like I

had to. And so in my 20s, I kept doing this, I started rebelling and feeling more and more lost and was creating bad relationships with myself, for my friends and my family, got into doing things that I shouldn't have been doing, as I think a lot of us do, and ended up very ill, very sick, and ended up having a breakdown.

Wendy Shrubbsall:

And then it was part of that breakdown process that I realized that I had to change. It was a necessity because either I was going to end up the other side of the bars or in a box, and I didn't like either. And so one summer solstice, I think it was about 1997, I'd been out, watched the sunrise. I'd come back home, was getting ready for work, had the television on, Channel 4, The Big Breakfast, and Ivan McBeth, bless Ivan McBeth. He was on The Big Breakfast talking to Johnny Vaughan about druids and the summer solstice.

Wendy Shrubbsall:

And I suddenly heard people speaking about a spirituality that resonated so much with me. These guys looked like they smelled of wood smoke. They looked like they had mud under their fingernails. They weren't all fluffy and pretty and la. They were real, earthy people doing their stuff and not just talking in riddles and rhymes and saying that nobody could get involved. And so it was Ivan who was then speaking about OBOD, because of him I then got the introduction pack from the order and the rest was a very healthy journey into a better way of being for myself.

Damh the Bard:

Wow. Wow. I didn't know that Ivan had been on The Big Breakfast. That's amazing.

Wendy Shrubbsall:

I'm sure it was Ivan. I think there was about four or five of them. If anyone could tell me who they were, I'm absolutely sure it was Ivan. Yeah.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah. Well, what an amazing man. He was so lovely, wasn't he?

Wendy Shrubbsall:

Yeah, he was. Yeah.

Damh the Bard:

So after seeing Ivan on the telly, somehow you ended up in Sussex with Anderida Grove, how did that happen? Because I don't really know that.

Wendy Shrubbsall:

Okay. So I created a new life for myself. I was living in South London and had to turn my back on a lot of the friends I had then because it was all very unhealthy, and found a new age shop in Croydon and they were running women's groups or evening rituals or something. And I got invited along and it was there that I met other, I think, and one women's group, there was about 10 of us and it turned out that eight of us that were there were all members of OBOD without any of us really knowing. Bizarre.

Wendy Shrubsall:

And so from that meeting, there was a girl that lived locally who used to go to the Long Man of Wilmington. And I jumped into her car one Imbolc, 2001, and then 2001, no, 2001, ended up down in Sussex and met you guys at the Long Man, which it blew me away. It blew me away. And as everybody who is involved in druidry says, it was like going home. I met some of the best people that I know and was doing funky stuff that inspired me and felt real and I suddenly started feeling really connected. And you and Cerri invited me to your housewarming party, bonkers, and then that was it. And suddenly I found myself in Anderida Grove.

Damh the Bard:

That sometimes happened. You just come along to a house warming party and suddenly you're in the grove. So now some years from Imbolc 2001, you obviously are a lot more experienced, you've moved to Wales, so much has changed in your life. How does druidry reflect in your life now on a kind of day to day basis?

Wendy Shrubsall:

So I think for me, it has been... I live in the middle of nowhere now, you know where I live, Damh, it's a tiny weenie village of about 50 houses set in a beautiful valley in north Wales. And being that step further away from the hustle and bustle of growing up in South London has done me the world of good. So living in the countryside, having that time to breathe, slowing right down has been really healing for me. And every day when I come home from work, the roads coming into the valley, they open up, don't they? And every day I stop and give thanks to this journey that I've had and the landscape that I now find myself in because it takes my breath away every day and I don't ever want to take that for granted.

Wendy Shrubsall:

But daily, I say to the people that I work with, start your day with blessings for someone. It's so simple. It could be for yourself. It could be for families or friends or for a something, or for something that you've seen in the news that has affected you. Give something out, ask for something for somebody else or a bit of strength for you, and then end the day with gratitude. Just so simple, but I think it keeps you really connected to the flow of life and to stop being inside your head and yourself so much.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah. That connection, it can drop sometimes. When you're so busy, one of the first things that goes often is your spiritual practice because it just doesn't feel like it's up there with all the other things that are demanding of your time. And I find that I've spoken to a number of people who have lost connection to their path, and that's the reason, it's called a practice for a reason. It is a practice. It's something you do as well as something you are. And I think doing those things. Every morning now I let it drop myself for a while and started to feel disconnected. And having that morning sense of just connecting with, I connect with the four elements during a gratitude prayer every morning, and it just starts the day really well. Really does start the day well. So-

Wendy Shrubsall:

I love the blog posts you've been writing recently, your green grimoire writing about stopping to welcoming in the elements. What is that all about? They're here all the time. So it's just that stopping and becoming conscious of what you are experiencing.

Damh the Bard:

And your place within it as well, where you are at that time.

Wendy Shruballs:

Yeah, absolutely. And also I think we get so hooked up on creating fantastic rituals and processes that we should go through every day and make all our spiritual belief really complicated. And it just doesn't need to be. It can be the simple things work so much more powerful. But is it human nature to make it really complicated? I don't know, but-

Damh the Bard:

I think so. It feels like I've started to see things like myth and the poetry of Taliesin and the stories. And I've started to view those as keys. They are the keys to the mysteries, but it feels sometimes we spend so much time pawing over the keys rather than actually using the keys, opening the door and see what's in there for ourselves.

Wendy Shruballs:

That's true. And using that as inspiration rather than worrying about the detail and the text.

Damh the Bard:

Exactly. Yes, yes. If you look at all, not all of Taliesin's poems, because obviously there was like, "Yes, the English were horrible," and all that kind of thing, but there's also a lot of his praise poetry and a lot of his prophetic texts are all about what we're talking about, a connection to the natural worlds. And I kind of include the otherworld in that as well. I don't see that as separate from the natural world.

Wendy Shruballs:

Absolutely, because I'm a big believer in that there's so much going on that's outside of our human understanding that we don't see that is there all the time. When you see these photographs of insects looking at flowers and all these different colors that are going on, that are there, but we just don't see them. That is their world, so is that another world? Why do we think that what we see as humans is the be all and end of what this experience is?

Damh the Bard:

Yeah. Yeah.

Wendy Shruballs:

I can't get around that.

Damh the Bard:

How pigeons can see the magnetism of the earth. They can see, I can't see, I don't even know where they are, I probably walk through it and I don't know, and they see these things, it's incredible.

Wendy Shruballs:

Yeah, or swifts that are born on the continent and just know where to go.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah.

Wendy Shrubsall:

Why do we think we are so important on this land? I don't get it.

Damh the Bard:

Some might call that magic, but let's not go there.

Damh the Bard:

Anyway, okay, so I have asked you to be on Druidcast because your path has led you from the OBOD course and from being involved in the order, but it's now led you to being a pagan prison chaplain. So really, there's lots of paths of service that people can offer. People can be celebrants with handfastings and things like that. And then you've gone down the route of the pagan prison chaplain. What made you choose that path of service?

Wendy Shrubsall:

A certain amount of insanity. In all honesty, so I did 16 years working in health and social care and education for people with learning difficulties and disabilities, which was amazing and I've learned so much about the differences of human beings, how complex we all are and the little quirks that make up our differences. And I think that's given me really good understanding of people for working in the prisons.

Wendy Shrubsall:

I also did some counseling training, some other therapeutic training, but it was a friend of ours, Bracken. If you remember Bracken who's now in Australia, hello, Bracken. It's all her fault. She said to me a long, long time ago, maybe I don't know, 2011 or something. She said to me, "You'd be really good as a prison chaplain." And I said, "Nah, they'd never have me." And she said, "No, no, honestly. You'd be really good. You've got some really good qualities that are needed within that environment." And I honestly thought that there was absolutely no way they'd have me because I've got past, I've got history, and working in the prisons, it's becoming part of the establishment, something that I've kind of kicked back against for a lot of my life. A lot of what we see goes on absolutely infuriates me, and so why would I want to become a civil servant in part of the establishment? Very strange.

Wendy Shrubsall:

But yeah, so every time I saw her, well not every time, but she used to say to me, "You'd be really good. You really should think about it." And I never believed her until she was emigrating to Australia and I thought, well, I need to find out then. I need to find out. I need to be brave and maybe I just need to give it a go. So I did and it's made me quite fearless now.

Damh the Bard:

I bet.

Wendy Shrubsall:

Because the vetting process to get into work in prisons, specifically chaplains, is really quite intense. We are vetted along the same lines as the Imams and obviously we've got the whole issue with extremism within the Islamic community that hits the front page of the news far too often. And there are rumblings of that going on within the pagan community as well, so we're all vetted to counter terrorist level.

Damh the Bard:

Wow. Okay.

Wendy Shrubsall:

So they go through everything.

Damh the Bard:

Okay. Okay. So I'll ask how it happened later, but what is a prison chaplain? What's the role of the prison chaplain within the prison and also for the prisoners?

Wendy Shrubsall:

Okay. So we are chaplains to everybody in the prisons. So the prisoners and all the staff.

Damh the Bard:

Okay.

Wendy Shrubsall:

To open a prison, if you're going to set up a new prison, you have to have a governor, a doctor, and a chaplain. So within the establishment, we are very highly respected for what we do, even though sometimes some of the officers think we're a bit fluffy. Day to day, so all prisoners are entitled, legally entitled to corporate worship sessions. So that would be your Sunday service or your Friday prayers, whatever that might be. So for us, I do the eight festivals. So that's our corporate worship sessions.

Wendy Shrubsall:

Plus they're entitled to an hour's teaching each week. So I have to come up with lots of ideas about what can I teach these people? So that's the faith-based stuff. On top of that, it's a multi-facet team, it's quite extraordinary. The conversations that we have are phenomenal. I work with Roman Catholics, Anglicans, Baptists, Imams, Rabbis, Sikhs, some extraordinary people, Jehovah's Witnesses, Buddhists, Rastafarians. It's quite extraordinary, as you can imagine probably, the conversations that we have over lunch sometimes.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah, I'll bet. And all of those different paths have a different chaplain in the prison or does one chaplain represent various paths?

Wendy Shrubsall:

Some faiths don't have enough chaplains to cover all the prisons, and we don't have enough within paganism. I think there's like 140 prisons currently in England and Wales, and I believe there's

something like 18 pagan chaplains. So I cover three prisons, there's very few of us that manage to only work full time in one prison.

Damh the Bard:

Right. Yeah.

Wendy Shruballs:

Busy old job.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah. I bet.

Wendy Shruballs:

On top of the faith-based stuff, we have what's called statutory duties. So we see everybody come in inductions, all the admissions to make sure that they're okay, that their family know where they are, find out who their next of kin is, make sure that's all sorted. And if they've got any particular problems, try and sort them out for them. Then we see the leavers as well, find out where they're going, if they've got a faith-based community they're going to, if they've got an approved premises. Some of them don't know whether they're going to be homeless or not. It's quite tragic sometimes.

Wendy Shruballs:

We also sit on review meetings for people in crisis. So people that are self-harming, try and find ways of supporting them through those times. We visit everybody in healthcare, so that's normal hospital healthcare and psychiatric healthcare every day. We visit everybody in segregation every day. And then we do deal with all the bad news and family illnesses. So we look after people, trying to arrange for people to go out to visit dying relatives or go to funerals. So it's-

Damh the Bard:

Wow. That's a lot. That is a lot. Yeah. I think when people think of chaplains, I think they just think people who go into the prison and maybe sit with the prisoners and do an Imbolc ritual or something like that. But it's far more involved than that then.

Wendy Shruballs:

It's huge. It's huge. So the multi-faith stuff, we deal with everybody of every faith and those of none. I sat for, there was one lad that I went to see, he'd been on food refusal for five days and liquid refusal for three days. And I just sat with him on the wing, he was on 24-hour watch. And I just sat with him and just talked to him and by the end of our conversation, he was eating and drinking.

Damh the Bard:

That's got to be great to feel that. Yeah.

Wendy Shruballs:

That's what the work's about, and it's because I have the time in my role to sit and work with people like that. Whereas, counselors and mental health nurses, they've got a lot of tick boxes, a lot of paperwork to do, but my job is that people support and it's making-

Damh the Bard:

It's all about welfare. I mean that does bring us on, I'm sure there are people listening to this podcast right now. Everyone has different opinions on these kinds of things, as we see on social media all the time, and there'll be people listening to this who fall down on the side of, a prison is there for punishment, for a crime, and there will be other people listening to this podcast who come down very much on the restorative justice, that people are there to learn so that when they come out, they don't do it again. Where does the chaplain fit in with that kind of point of view?

Wendy Shrubbsall:

So my view is they've been to court, they've been judged, and the punishment is to be in prison. Prisons are horrible places. They're not nice. They're really not nice. If you want to read the front page of the papers and say, "Oh, let's put the old people in prisons because they'd get three meals a day and it'd be warm and they'd get access to GP services," honestly that is not the case at all. They're not great places. There's an awful lot of mental health problems in there.

Wendy Shrubbsall:

When they closed all the psychiatric hospitals back in the 90s and late 80s, early 90s, the prison population exploded. There's an awful lot of problems. There's a lot of people that are very lost and have had a really rough time. So as chaplains, I go in and I say to them, I say to them all, I work with your robbers and your rogues, I work with murderers, I work with sex offenders, the whole everyone, everything you could possibly think of, I work with. But I say to them all, "I do not care what you've done." And I genuinely don't care because I don't think I could do my job if I pay too much attention to the detail of what some of these people have done.

Wendy Shrubbsall:

But I say to them, "I do care how you behave with me now and how you're going to move forward." So I don't take any nonsense. If they start playing up and start trying to manipulate, but yeah, you prove to me that you can be a better person and I will give you all the time in the world. Yeah.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah. Yeah. So I'm sure your everyday work as a pagan prison chaplain, it must have very incredible highs of moments like helping that young lad with his situation. And it must also have incredible lows that must be challenging. It must be very hard to leave those things at the door when you walk out at the end of the day. Do you have support as a pagan chaplain with any kind of way you can talk to other people about it or therapist or anything like that?

Wendy Shrubbsall:

So, all the teams that I work with, all the other chaplains, I am incredibly fortunate that I work with some amazing people and people that have been in the job a really long time and we tend to support each other. So if something happens, we'll shut the doors and a few people will come in and you'll kind of offload and get it out. And we'll share experiences, they are genuinely fantastic people. There are

counseling and support services if I needed it, and to be honest, I've been doing the job now just over two years, and I don't feel I've needed it.

Damh the Bard:

Okay.

Wendy Shrubsall:

Which is extraordinary. We as chaplains have an incredibly fortunate position within the prisons that, because we don't wear a uniform, we are not part of the establishment. We're not there to enforce rules with these people. We're there to support them. And I think I said to you, one time we were talking about it, the majority of the time I'm a lone worker and it blows my mind that we have managed to build up the respect from the offenders. They know that we are there for them, and so they don't push the boundaries. If they do push the boundaries, woe betide them because the other prisoners will pull them up. You just don't mess with the chaplains. And they talk to us, they genuinely really talk to us and open up because we don't do the judgment stuff.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah. You're a pair of ears. We all know how much that helps, just to have someone to really listen and not try and fix it or anything like that, just to listen to the situation. Yeah.

Wendy Shrubsall:

And a lot of these people have never had. They've been brought up in very dysfunctional families, lots of abuse, whether it had been sexual, verbal, physical, whatever abuse it might have been, loads of abuse. And they've never been listened to, they've never been respected. They've often been told that they're not good enough, they're bad people. The whole way through, you start believing that you're a bad person, don't you? And then you go out and you do bad things because you're a bad person. And why is anyone surprised? Because you've all told me I'm a bad person.

Wendy Shrubsall:

So there's a lot of that kind of stuff, the baggage that people carry. And you have to find a way, a little hook in to get past the prison, the big boy prison persona, and find the real person underneath and nurture that and support that and encourage that part of people to grow, which is tough. It's tough sometimes, but I've seen fantastic changes in people in the couple of years I've been doing this. Amazing. And that is down to OBOD because if it wasn't for OBOD who saved me, I couldn't do this to help save other people.

Damh the Bard:

Wow. That's something. Amazing. So, there may well be people listening to this show who their ears have picked up and thought, "Oh, I'd like to do something like that." Obviously it's different in every country. I think in the States, I would probably point people towards maybe Circle, Selena Fox, I know she has chaplains and training for chaplains. But here in the UK, where would people start to start adding to your 18 pagan chaplains for 148 prisons?

Wendy Shrubsall:

So currently we have to be endorsed. So the same way as the Christians go to theological college, there has to be some sort of endorsement process. Currently that's being done by the Pagan Federation. I had to fill out something like a 20-page application form to prove what I knew, to write ceremonies, to write funeral rites, just to prove that I could do the job and provide details of references of people that could verify that I could do that. And yeah, that's all done by the Pagan Federation currently.

Damh the Bard:

Right. Yeah. So, that's a good point. I mean people listening to this, again, they might not know of the PF. I've known of the Pagan Federation for years. A lot of people see that potentially it's a quarterly magazine, Pagan Dawn, that comes out now. But I have to say that looking back for decades now, the PF have worked with the government to help increase the perception and relationship between government bodies and the pagan community.

Wendy Shrubsall:

And they've done some fabulous work over the years.

Damh the Bard:

They absolutely have.

Wendy Shrubsall:

Yeah. If it wasn't for the PF, then paganism wouldn't be a recognized religion in Britain. And so we wouldn't have legal standing, we wouldn't be paid chaplains. I'm a paid chaplain. I get paid for my job. I don't do this for free at all. I get paid quite well for this job. And if it wasn't for the PF, yeah, I wouldn't be in this position.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah. So that's why the PF have got that relationship with the prison service is because they developed that over the years. And so that's the routine at the moment is through the Pagan Federation. Yeah?

Wendy Shrubsall:

That's right. Yeah. Yeah.

Damh the Bard:

Okay. Okay. And once that happens, where does it go from there?

Wendy Shrubsall:

So the pagan Federation have the Prison Ministry's Officer who all of that endorsement process goes through. And then that is directed through to Prison Service and Security. And then they start doing all their checks and there's a whole heap of other paperwork to fill out and they get access to all your social media and all your bank accounts and everything.

Damh the Bard:

Well, there's something to watch then. Oh my word.

Wendy Shrubsall:

And this is kind of why I thought they'll never let me in is you've got to give them access to all of this stuff. Was I that arrogant to think I was that important? To think they wouldn't let me in? Obviously I'm not as interesting as I thought I was.

Damh the Bard:

There you go, there you go. So that's the way to do it, or at least the way to make a start towards it. But of course, prison doesn't last forever. At some point, a prisoner is released into the community. You may have seen them throughout their time in prison, and we have had discussions about that process and whether or not the pagan, druid, heathen, Wiccan, witchcraft, whatever it is, communities are aware of those things and how that can be helped. So, go on, the floor's yours, how do we do that?

Wendy Shrubsall:

Okay. So we all know that within paganism, we are rubbish at organization. We are pretty poor at doing things officially. And I think it's paganism is still relatively new as an official religion in the UK. So we've got a long way to go. So as it stands at the moment, what will happen is the prisoner will have a conversation with their probation officer and their probation officer may say to them, "Do you have a faith? Do you want to have support from your faith-based community when you get outside?" And if that prisoner says yes, then the probation service will contact a faith-based group that will accept ex-offenders into the community. So there's discussion then between the faith-based community and the probation services that faith-based community can say, "No, don't want anything to do with them," or, "Yes, under certain circumstances." And bearing in mind, dangerous people don't get released unless their risk is very low. I have to say that as well.

Wendy Shrubsall:

So what happens is there's an organization called the Welcome Directory and they were a Christian organization that could see that ex-offenders needed support to get back into the communities. So they've set up a fantastic program, they do free online training for faith-based communities or anybody that's interested in working with ex-offenders. Completely free, it's about four couple of hour sessions. And if you sign up with them, you get access to all safeguarding policies that you can put in place. And through them, their directory that they've set up is now a multi-faith directory. So, faith-based communities from all over the UK can sign up and say they are prepared to welcome ex-offenders.

Wendy Shrubsall:

Then you'd get one person from that faith-based community who would be classed as a champion. And that champion would be the liaising person between the ex-offender, probation services, and the faith-based community. And that person would be the only person that would know what the offender's crimes were. So people don't need to know, and I agree with that. If you're found guilty, you've done your time, you should be allowed to have a clean slate and move on. There's a lot of people in prison that have made stupid mistakes, they're not big mistakes that are going to cause massive harm to loads of people. How many of us really can say we've never done anything wrong?

Damh the Bard:

Well, thankfully, you're talking to the right person here. Define wrong for a start.

Wendy Shrubsall:

Well, exactly. And also we have a conversation saying what we define as wrong, and thinking about historic sex crimes. So behavior that was going on in the 60s and 70s that now people are being found guilty for their behavior back then, what are we doing now that in 30 years' time could be classed as inappropriate? And you just start looking at our behavior and thinking, I think we've just got to be really careful how judgemental we can be sometimes.

Wendy Shrubsall:

Now, so long as that person has signed up to having support from a faith-based community, we can monitor that behavior in them and we can support them and the faith-based community to ensure that hopefully nothing happens. What we, as chaplains, are concerned about now is that, because within paganism we have so few groups signed up to support ex-offenders that people can slip through the net and nobody would know. And that's what worries us is that I believe we, as pagans, need to up our game and take our faith more seriously.

Wendy Shrubsall:

Because for me, my faith is incredibly precious and I will do whatever I can to protect it and I don't like the fact that sometimes I have to work with the establishment, but I also see that this is the society we live in and there are protecting factors that can look after us within that and I think it's really important.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah. Yeah. Well, I think like you say, it's a very young community, first off, but it's made up of people, many of whom don't want to join anything. Or let's face it, they don't want, like you, they have an inbuilt suspicion of the establishment, which is why many people have turned away from mainstream religion and found their homes within paganism because no one's there to tell them what to do or what to believe, but when it comes to things like that, that might be necessary or something like it, but it doesn't exist at this moment in time is what you're saying, right?

Wendy Shrubsall:

Yeah. It's really tricky, isn't it?

Damh the Bard:

It is, very.

Wendy Shrubsall:

Because both you and I, we are so passionate about our spiritual path and we've seen the changes that it can do for people, how people thrive. And yet, we're then given it with one hand and encouraging, encouraging, and seeing what value it can do for people, but then taking it away with another. And we're very aware that... So at the moment, there are only two groups in the UK that are signed up to the Welcome Directory as pagan groups, two. One in South Wales and one in Essex and we are acutely aware that this is a really loaded subject.

Damh the Bard:

Well, yeah.

Wendy Shruballs:

Really loaded. And all we can do is to start conversation and try and just educate people that not all prisoners are murderers and rapists.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah.

Wendy Shruballs:

There are some people that have genuinely made really stupid mistakes or had a really rubbish upbringing that's led them down a path that would seem to be the only option for them, but now give them something different-

Damh the Bard:

Looking for a bit of compassion. I mean it doesn't always have to be big organizations like the PF who do this. So there might be groves and seed groups and covens and groups of people who are listening to this who think, "No, we would be open to that. We would be open to being on that list." Is that something that those groups can apply for as well? Is that okay?

Wendy Shruballs:

Absolutely. And I think the smaller groups are where we need to start the conversation. I've become a huge believer in, I can see that they're... I can't solve the world's problems, as much as I want to, but I can look after my own little square mile and that can spread. I'm a huge believer in that. And that's where we need to start, having these conversations with the small groups on the ground. If there are a few people who will start having this conversation and maybe meet some ex-offenders and see for themselves who these people genuinely are.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. So how would they contact the Welcome group if they wanted to find out more about that?

Wendy Shruballs:

Yeah. If you just Google all the Welcome Directory, it should come up and there's an interactive map that will show you where all the groups are around the country that have been set up within that. So that, yeah, they're great, Welcome Directory, great.

Damh the Bard:

Great. OBOD, we have a specific course that Philip created to go into prisons called Beyond the Ninth Wave. For years and years and years, we used to send the course in there as well, but it became problematic because on a number of levels really, one of them is that prisoners have a lot of time on their hands. And when we used to send a course into prisons, we used to end up with absolutely bags full of mail from all over the world of people who are writing in, which is lovely, but unsustainable when there's just like three or four people in an office to keep an order running. So we developed this other course, which I think really helps. They do have access to somebody to write to, who has taken on that kind of communication side of things. So we don't abandon prisoners, we try and honor that relationship.

Wendy Shrubsall:

And a lot of the prisoners have got access to the Beyond the Ninth Wave course, and they do really enjoy it. But again, like you were saying, they have a lot of time on their hands so they'll work their way through the course and then they'll say, "Yeah, but now what?"

Damh the Bard:

Yes. Now what? Exactly, exactly. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

Wendy Shrubsall:

The resources within the prison, the resources are small. They have access to a library, but again, it takes time for books to come in. The resources actually within paganism are very small. We don't have a faith-based community that provides literature. We don't have free Bibles, do we? We don't have any liturgy? We have nothing. We literally have nothing and I have been begging the pagan community to hand over books that they might be thinking of sending to charity shops just to fill some of the shelves that we can have for the men.

Wendy Shrubsall:

So within Christianity, they provide a yearly diary, and also the Muslims get a yearly diary as well, specifically faith based. What we've done over the last couple years is set up something called the Pagan Chaplain's Association. And within the Pagan Chaplain's Association, our first project that we've been working on is getting a specific pagan calendar for all the prisoners. So last year we raised nearly 1,000 pounds and that paid for a diary, or a wall calendar for every pagan prisoner inside, which-

Damh the Bard:

Oh right. Wow.

Wendy Shrubsall:

... was phenomenal. We're doing it again this year. We've just gone to print for next year's calendar, so they're available if you want to buy one for the fantastic price of 10 pounds.

Damh the Bard:

Okay. Where would people get that?

Wendy Shrubsall:

So if you go the paganschaplainsassociation.org, there is a bit about some of us and a link to the order form for the calendar. And also there is a link to a GoFundMe where we are raising money, again, to buy resources for the prisoners.

Damh the Bard:

Brilliant. Well, thank you for that. I'll put those links in the show notes as well, so people can find them in the show notes.

Wendy Shrubsall:

Thank you, Dave.

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Damh the Bard:

I love what you're doing. I love what all of the pagan chaplains are doing and really a valuable, valuable resource for the community. So thank you, Wendy.

Wendy Shruballs:

Thanks, Dave.

Damh the Bard:

And thanks for coming on the show. It's been a pleasure to talk to you and I will see you along the road, I'm sure.

Wendy Shruballs:

Yeah. See you in a field very soon.

Damh the Bard:

See you in a field very soon. Catch you later.

Wendy Shruballs:

Bye.