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DAILY ECHO DorsetECHO

Billy strikes a chord as guitars kill time

SINGER/songwriter Billy Bragg sang an impromptu number to North Dorset prisoners, when he handed over a collection of musical instruments including six guitars.

He visited Guys Marsh prison near Shaftesbury to launch the Jail Guitar Doors appeal, named after the B-side of the Clash song City Rockers.

He wants to encourage other musicians to raise some cash to buy instruments for prisoners, and he hopes the initiative will roll out to the South West then eventually nationwide.

He told prisoners and officials: "It has not cost us much, about £350. Anybody worth their salt can raise that. We can make a difference, change the atmosphere for some people that are doing time."

Billy Bragg, an old Clash fan, told his audience that music had got him out of the East End of London to where he was today.

He wanted to encourage others to learn to play guitar and he wanted to mark the fifth anniversary of the death of the Clash's lead singer Joe Strummer.

Hanks Guitar Shop in London gave him the guitars at cost price as well as guitar strings, and he was able to get other instruments such as tambourines and bongos. The instruments bear the motto "This guitar kills time", in homage to Woody Guthrie's slogan "This machine kills fascists".

Malcolm Dudley, a prison drugs and alcohol counsellor, was asked to run a guitar group by Paul Kirk, the team leader of A4E (Action 4 Employment).

Mr Dudley went looking for musical instruments, and only found one guitar that could be repaired and used.

He quickly realised that loaned instruments for the group, run in his spare time, wouldn't allow prisoners any practice time.

Mr Dudley got in touch with Billy Bragg to see if he could help.

"It is going to help people change in here. Working in a group helps people to achieve something.

"It helps them to work together, to do something in a different way, to express themselves."

Prisoner Gareth Quinn, 20, said: "It will help me develop my music skills."

Prisoner Alarabi Muhamad, 29, said he hoped learning to play guitar would bring him closer to his son, eight, when he was released.

Prison governor Barry Greenberry said he was delighted that Billy Bragg had found time to visit.

"To actually have him sing to us and perform in front of us is just fantastic," he said.

If you can help with an acoustic bass or 12-string call Malcolm Dudley on 01747 856400.

7:00pm Tuesday 6th February 2007

By Louise Dunderdale

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