

Geoff Leeming obituary – The Guardian



Geoff Leeming set up projects across Devon to provide former offenders with work experience and training

Michael Vizard

Tue 22 Sep 2020 19.46 BST

My former colleague Geoff Leeming, who has died aged 76, lived and worked in [Plymouth](#) for nearly 50 years, contributing to the lives of vulnerable people through his work with Devon Probation Service and then at the Harbour Centre, Plymouth's substance misuse charity. He was described by Gordon Read, former chief probation officer for Devon, as "an unpretentious man who revealed the golden eggs in the city and the county".

His early career was as an apprentice engineer with Cammell Laird shipbuilders on the Wirral. He was born in Birkenhead and educated at the Birkenhead Institute. His mother, Marjorie (nee Atkinson), was a shop worker before her marriage, and his father, Charlie, a boy soldier at the Battle of the Somme who became a merchant seaman and then a joiner at Cammell Laird; he died when Geoff was 13.

In 1972 he moved with his wife Val to Plymouth, where he became involved with [Devon](#) Probation Service, initially as a volunteer with probation teams, and then as a community service project officer.

Geoff used his extraordinary negotiating skills to good effect with Plymouth council, Plymouth Housing Action, church groups and local trades unions, setting up projects for those under supervision to create resources for the community, thus helping them to turn from their often chaotic lives to greater stability - through work experience, skills training, education, and attention to personal and social issues, especially offending patterns.

He then led Devon Probation's new community development team, supporting initiatives across Devon for former offenders, including a job creation scheme for the Oak Villa Community Centre development, redecoration of pensioners' flats, and opportunities with Astor Hall Disabled Fellowship, Stonham housing association and Plymouth Art Centre.

Associated with his advisory work on a probation service report on dangerous people under supervision, he negotiated with Devon and Cornwall police, health and social services to set up a joint committee to provide £360,000 over a three-year period to enable the police to refer arrested drug users for early assessment. Similar funding was provided to engage with those arrested for serious sexual or violence offences.

Leaving probation work at the end of the 1990s, Geoff joined the team at the Harbour Centre, bringing his characteristic thoughtful and respectful approach to those with drug-related problems, and assisting with the centre's long-term development.

Geoff was a keen Liverpool FC supporter. He played football and cricket and enjoyed camping, pub quizzes, music, politics and current affairs. He achieved an MA in Policy and Organisational Studies at Plymouth University in 1992.

He is survived by Val (nee Brooks), whom he married in 1968, his daughter Gemma, grandchildren Leon and Silvie, and his brother Graham.