



## Integrated Family Support in the North East

### EVALUATION BRIEFING

*helping prisoners maintain family relationships and supporting children and families affected by imprisonment*

NEPACS has developed an Integrated Family Support Programme that works in prisons and in the community across the North East of England. NEPACS currently has Family Support Workers (FSWs) in four prisons in the North East and two Integrated Family Support Advocates (IFSAs) working across 12 North East local authority areas. This began in 2011 with a number of funding sources and has recently been awarded Big Lottery funding until 2016. This is a summary of an evaluation of the first phase of that work.

### Introduction

The objective of the FSWs is to increase the contact and improve the relationship between the prisoner and their children and family. They do this by working with prisoners and visitors, to help them overcome a range of family-related problems. The objective of the IFSAs is to build capacity and encourage local authority agencies to deliver services to prisoners' families. This is done through policy and strategy development, facilitation and coordination of agencies using a partnership approach. The aims of all this work are to improve outcomes for children and reduce reoffending.

### Outputs

Between January 2011 and March 2013, the FSWs at all prisons have provided support to a total of 652 prisoners and 161 visitors. Between June 2011 and May 2013, the IFSAs have worked in every North East local authority, have worked across Children's Services, family support and criminal justice agencies and have developed a number of

policy and operational mechanisms which aim to improve the services delivered to the children and families of offenders. They have also developed awareness and understanding of issues relating to children and families who are affected by imprisonment through the delivery of Hidden Sentence training.



# Case study: Karla

In August 2012, Karla\* received a four year drug related prison sentence. She has three children, two of whom (a seven year old girl and a three year old boy) are being looked after by her mother. As a result of her substance misuse, her youngest child had been removed into local authority care and was in the process of being found adoptive parents. Early in her prison sentence, a final contact visit had to be arranged between the child and his mother. Social Services contacted the FSW to let her know. The FSW gave support to Karla, explained what was going to happen and was with her when the final visit took place. The FSW provided support after the visit had happened.

Clearly, this was a very traumatic event but Karla valued the support of the FSW. She said *“she helped, explained things, was with me, let me know what was happening ... gave me peace of mind”*.

\*Not real name.

## Impact

We have found that the **Family Support Work** has:

- Increased contact between a prisoner and their children and family.
- Increased children and family provision in prisons.
- Resulted in self reported outcomes of a reduction in reoffending and increased happiness and well being of children.
- Improved prisoner behaviour and the mental health and well being of prisoners.

**Integrated Family Support Advocacy** has:

- Increased the awareness of the issues faced by children and families of prisoners as a result of the Hidden Sentence training.
- Created new policies within Children’s Services and criminal justice agencies (for example, Integrated Offender Management and Probation)

to support children and families of prisoners.

- Changed working practices of Children’s Services to begin to try and support children and families of prisoners.
- Created a focus and a workstream on the children and families of offenders where there was previously none.

**For the prisons**, the project has:

- Resulted in a prison population that is calmer and easier to manage.
- Introduced a valued addition to the prison regime which has also impacted on changing a hard edged prison culture in certain establishments.
- Has changed and influenced the prison regimes to be more family friendly, including more training for staff and more family provision for prisoners.
- Energised, added value to and in some cases started the Children and Families Pathway.



**For local authorities**, the work has:

- Provided a valuable source of advice and expertise, where none previously existed.
- Stimulated new work areas which have improved performance in targeted areas of support, for example in Troubled Families.
- Improved and increased cooperation and coordination of services particularly between children and families and criminal justice agencies.

These multifaceted and wide reaching impacts indicate that the evidence base upon which this programme was developed was sound and well informed (i.e. NEPACS found a need, developed a workstream and delivered that work and the impacts were numerous). They also confirm that NEPACS' new area of expertise in prison based family support and family advocacy is effective in improving outcomes for prisoners and their families, i.e. NEPACS is achieving what it set out to do. We also see that there is an appetite for this work in both the prisons and in the community. Stakeholders feel it is good and worthwhile work to be involved in.

However, it needs to be pointed out that there is much more work to be done to continue the work across the region. Worthy targets would be to standardise policy and provision across the 12 North East local authorities and to have a FSW in each prison in the North East. A solution also needs to be found to identifying families affected by imprisonment in the community.

## Recommendations

On the basis of this evaluation, we make several recommendations:

- In order to get a robust measure of the project's impact on reducing reoffending, we need to follow those who have received support and compare them (and their future offending) to a cohort who have not, or to the national average. We need to access data on individual prisoners supported, after a period of 12 months (the standard measure of reoffending) from the Police National Computer.
- The Advocates need to monitor the impact of their work on changing practice. This would necessitate contacting those agencies who have been worked with at regular intervals to ask



them if there has been any practice changes and importantly how many families affected by imprisonment have been supported.

- The project needs to pay continued attention to the support of the FSWs. It can be a difficult and sometimes emotionally demanding job, which requires a good level of support and opportunities for sharing experiences.
- There needs to be FSWs in HMP Durham and HMP Northumberland.
- To ensure adequate support to the FSWs and local authority areas, there needs to be two full time equivalent IFSA's (currently this stands at 1.5).

## Final note ...

This NEPACS delivered programme is complex and far reaching and as such has considerable detail in its delivery. This summary presents just the headline findings. We therefore invite you to read or at least leaf through the main evaluation report to get an idea of its complexity and reach in both the region's prisons and in the community. Copies of the report can be requested from NEPACS.

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*Honestly, I think your kids are the most important thing in your life ... my head's been battered ... but it's better now”.*

Prisoner who had not seen his daughter for two years and is now receiving regular visits from her





“

*It's the hardest thing about being in jail, being away from your children”.*

Prisoner with an eight year sentence

## About NEPACS

NEPACS has been working in the North East of England for 130 years. NEPACS works to build bridges between prisoners, their families and the communities that they will return to upon their release. NEPACS strongly believe that investment must be made in resettlement and rehabilitation to ensure that there are fewer victims of crime in the future, and less prospect of family life being disrupted and destroyed by a prison sentence. More recently, NEPACS has developed significant expertise in a new work stream and are now established as a voluntary sector provider of prison based family support services, representing significant value for money.

For more information or for a copy of the full evaluation, contact:

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**N • E • P • A • C • S**

**Building bridges for prisoners,  
their families & the community**



For more information on the evaluators, see:  
[www.barefootresearch.org.uk](http://www.barefootresearch.org.uk)