



Improving outcomes for prisoners and their families

Key lessons from the Integrated Family Support Service



Contents

Foreword	2
1 Context	4
2 Evidence-based good practice	6
3 Awareness raising	8
Key issues in developing good practice in awareness raising	11
4 Early interventions	13
Key issues in developing good practice in early intervention work	15
5 Efficient service delivery	17
Key issues in developing good practice in efficient service delivery	20
6 Achieving cultural change	21
Key issues in developing good practice to achieve cultural change	25
7 Improving family relationships	26
Key issues in developing good practice to improve family relationships	29
8 Service user involvement and peer support	30
Key issues in developing good practice in service user involvement and peer support	32
9 Staff supervision and support	33
Key issues in developing good practice in staff supervision and support	35
References	37

Foreword

Andy Keen-Downs, CEO of Pact

There is an oft-quoted statistic that says that 6 out of ten children of offenders will go on to offend. It isn't quite true, but like many statistics that are repeated frequently enough, it is widely believed. What is true is that there is a greater risk to the children of offenders that they will suffer poor mental health, poverty, interrupted education and family homelessness – all of which of course are fair predictors of offending behaviour. We also know that many offenders have experienced life in the care system as children, chaotic home lives and poor parenting, and we know that learned patterns of behaviour are likely to be passed on to the next generation. There is a clear link between stable, supportive family relationships, and reduced re-offending. It is not a co-incidence that prisoners who receive regular family visits are nearly 40% less likely to re-offend than those who receive no or few visits from family. Any experienced prison governor, housing worker, or probation officer, will tell you how important good family relationships are in terms of resettlement and rehabilitation.

And yet for so many years, whilst we have seen investment in other areas, ranging from cognitive behavioural therapy to CARATS teams, supporting the maintenance of family ties, and work to build relationship and parenting skills, has been a focus of a handful of voluntary sector organisations, but has had little recognition in terms of joined up Government strategy or commissioning.

But things are beginning to change. From the early days of charities setting up ad hoc local services at prisons to ensure that families weren't left standing in a queue in the rain, we now have minimum Ministry of Justice specifications and guidance for prison visits support services. During the last decade, charities such as Pact and Time for Families, who have now merged forces, have pioneered prison-based relationship education programmes, with strong emerging evidence that this approach reduces re-conviction rates. And since 2009, Pact, together with NEPACS in the north east, and Jigsaw at HMP Leeds, have pioneered a prison based casework service, with funding from NOMS, charitable trusts and foundations, and prison governors. This work has been evaluated and reviewed by nef consulting (the consulting arm of the New Economics Foundation), by Barefoot Research, and by Roehampton University. The results have been so positive that the Ministry of Justice now recognises 'Family Engagement Workers' as a bona-fide practitioner role within prisons, and a commissionable service worthy of public funds.

This Good Practice Guide is for all those who wish to share in our learning from the work to develop prison-based family support. We

believe that even a cursory study of desistance theory, academic studies and MoJ resettlement data, reveals a truth that all of us instinctively understand as human beings. That however we label ourselves, whether as offenders, ex-offenders, or upright citizens, it is only through the bonds of family, friendship and community that we can have an identity, and a sense of connection and hope for the future. Being able to tell a different story about oneself, and to replace labels such as 'prisoner', 'criminal' or 'ex-offender', with labels such as 'father', 'colleague', husband or partner, is key. Having a family at the gate on the day of release, with a home to return to, is also critically important for many. Being able to develop the skills and behaviours to enter into and maintain mutually supportive relationships is vital. And for many, being offered the chance of employment or support with education by a relative, who knows your history but will give you the chance of a fresh start anyway, provides opportunities for many that are so often otherwise denied. Families and relationships make a difference to re-offending. With sufficient focus on this, alongside vital work on through the gate support, education, addiction, housing, and other issues, we could hope to make a serious impact on reducing re-offending. Without it, I fear that whatever reforms are made to the system, we will continue to see too many people leave prison only to return again and again, and too many children placed at risk, or following in their footsteps. We hope that this will guide will be useful to you in your important work.

1 Context

Supporting and maintaining links between offenders and their families can help reduce reoffending. Doing so can contribute to tackling inter-generational offending by addressing the poor outcomes faced by children of offenders.

(Ministry of Justice 2012: 41)

Maintaining contact and offering timely interventions to prisoners and their families can have a significant impact on offending. Firstly, prisoners who receive visits and have family support on release are nearly 40% less likely to reoffend (May, Sharma and Stewart 2008). Secondly, by improving the outcomes for the children of prisoners the likelihood of future offending is reduced. Children who have a parent in prison are significantly more likely to get involved in offending and are three times more likely to engage in anti social behaviour (Murray and Farrington 2008).

Stable family relationships can help to alleviate some of the emotional and mental health impacts associated with incarceration. However, many families affected by imprisonment are themselves in need. Moreover, they can experience a range of problems due to the imprisonment of a relative, such as economic hardship, social stigmatisation and emotional difficulties (Mills 2004). Delivering services to these 'troubled families' will: improve outcomes for children, reduce the likelihood of intergenerational crime, and, ultimately, lead to the successful resettlement of ex-prisoners.

The Integrated Family Support Service (FSS) started in May 2011 with funding from the Department for Education (DfE) and the National Offender Management Service (NOMS). The project consisted of

Integrated Family Support Advocates (FSAs), based in the community, and Integrated Family Support Workers (FSWs), based in prison. It was delivered by a partnership between Pact in the South of England and Wales and NEPACS in the North East.

The Integrated Family Support Service was new, innovative, wide-ranging and experimental. It aimed to improve the outcomes for the children and families of offenders by helping to ensure that prisoner's and their families:

- were known to local authority services to ensure early interventions could be offered
- could access all of the local resources to which they were entitled
- gained better and more efficient access to support services
- worked together to decrease the chance of reoffending and intergenerational crime

The service sought to act as a bridge between prisons and communities.

Since its inception in 2011 the Family Support Service has increased its coverage both in the number of prisons and local authority areas it operates in and has diversified its funding streams. An interim evaluation report on the FSS was published in 2012.

2 Evidenced-based good practice

It can be a bit daunting when you start, I felt like I didn't know anything. Didn't know who to contact, who would be willing to meet with me. It was difficult to get going, more advice and pointing in the right direction would have been invaluable.

(Family Support Advocate)

The aim of this briefing paper is to draw together learning from across the Integrated Family Support Service (FSS) in order to highlight evidence-based good practice in working with prisoners and their families. This has traditionally been a neglected area of policy and practice. More recently however, the important role that families play in the lives of prisoners, and the impact that imprisonment can have on the wider family, in particular children, has been recognised. It is therefore timely to identify key areas of effective practice in working with prisoners and their families.

Family Support Workers were based in the full range of prisons including the high security estate, women's prisons, Young Offender Institutions, Category B and C prisons. Support was provided to prisoners and their families across a range of issues such as family contact, visits, prisoner welfare, family mediation, accessing community support and services, emotional help and support, as well as advice regarding accommodation, mental health and substance misuse.

Advocates were based in inner London boroughs and city and county councils across the South and North-East of England and Wales. The Advocates supported local areas in their work with the children and families of offenders particularly in relation to policy work. They also delivered Hidden Sentence training, which introduced the workstream

to local areas and reinforced the need for policy and operational action.

Based on a substantial evidence base, this briefing paper presents key lessons from the FSS to promote good practice in improving the outcomes for prisoners and their families.

- In total the FSS provided help, advice and support to over 7000 service users. These were relatively evenly split between prisoners and families.
- A service user satisfaction survey showed that 91% were satisfied or very satisfied with the service they had received.
- All those involved in delivering the service, whether in the community or in prisons, were interviewed individually and as part of focus groups.
- 34 interviews with other professionals who could comment on the service were undertaken.
- 72 service user interviews were undertaken, 49 with prisoners and 23 in the community.

This briefing paper focuses on a number of areas relevant to improving the outcomes for prisoners and their families these are: awareness raising, early interventions, efficient service delivery, achieving cultural change, improving family relationships, service user involvement and peer support, and staff supervision and support. Key issues in developing good practice are considered under each of these headings.

This briefing paper is aimed at those working in family support services, local authorities and prisons, as well as those interested in commissioning family support services.

3 Awareness raising

Before attending the Hidden Sentence training I wouldn't have asked the question about whether someone in the family was in prison, now I will.

(Statutory Services worker)

Families play an important role in prisoners' lives. There is evidence that maintaining family relationships throughout custody can not only help prevent reoffending, but also reduce the negative impact of incarceration. It is therefore important that consideration is given to the mechanisms available for facilitating contact and involvement of families whilst someone is in prison. This is also relevant because providing support to families can minimise the detrimental effect that parental imprisonment can have on children (Williams, Papadopoulou and Booth 2012).

A core part of the work of the Integrated Family Support Service was to raise awareness of the needs of children and families of prisoners. A major element of this work has been the delivery of Hidden Sentence training. This training is delivered to professionals and has been designed to raise awareness and increase understanding of the issues affecting families of prisoners, both during the time of sentence and when the prisoner returns home; it also encourages reflection on the implications of their own working practice.

Since commencement of the service, Hidden Sentence training sessions have been held across all locations covered by the FSS, and in some areas that are not, as word has spread about the value of the training. Over a thousand people have been trained from a vast range of statutory and voluntary organisations.

The training explores how services can be better coordinated in order to support children and families affected by the imprisonment of a family member, through the use of the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) and existing support agencies and resources. The course gives a clear overview of the issues facing prisoners' families and provides a range of strategies and resources to help support them.

Learning outcomes include:

- awareness of the context of the criminal justice system and the offender's journey
- understanding of the impact of imprisonment on children and families
- better recognition of specific issues for children with a family member in prison which may present barriers to them achieving Every Child Matters outcomes
- ability to identify the support needs of the family and how these can be met by statutory/voluntary provision and practice.

Feedback about the training has been overwhelmingly positive.

Comments included:

"Thank you, I will be able to provide a better service... a real eye opener for me."

"Every probation officer should go on this training."

"I will make quite a few changes to my work after today's training that will positively impact on children/parents with a family member in prison."

The training has been adapted and developed to suit different audiences. For example, the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) has been applied to the fictional family in the Homeward Bound DVD used in the training. The completion of a CAF based on the scenario of a prisoner's family had major impacts on attendees who were able to see the necessity of completing CAFs with families affected by imprisonment.

Hidden Sentence training was also occasionally delivered in prison, this proved to be highly popular with professionals, many of whom had little direct experience of prison prior to the training. It has also been adapted for prison officers. This encouraged them to consider issues about families that came up in the context of their work and provided information about where prison officers could refer on to. This meant that not only did they gain better understanding of the impact of imprisonment on families but on the resources that could aid their work.

Findings on school exclusion and truancy indicate that interventions at, around, or before the point of exclusion could have a positive effect on young people's lives, reducing their likelihood of future offending or reoffending (Williams, Papadopoulou and Booth 2012). Nonetheless, there are problems associated with getting engagement from schools due to high demands on their time. This led to Hidden Sentence training being offered during school holidays, when teachers are more available, and offering school-specific training which recruited only those working within education.

Alongside Hidden Sentence training, a number of prisons have worked with the FSS to facilitate the 'Family and Offender Journey', where professionals involved with children and families of offenders can experience prison from both the family and prisoner perspective. These

three-hour visits start at the visitors' centre to mirror the family and friends experience of visiting a prison. The offender journey includes a visit to reception and the induction wing. This allows those who have little knowledge of prisons to gain insight into what family members and prisoners go through.

Such unique opportunities as this help services to infiltrate the often closed and difficult to navigate world of the prison, helping to erode the walls between prisons and the community. Moreover, staff within prisons are given the opportunity to meet with, and learn about, the diversity and range of support services available in the community. Specialist 'Family and Offender Journey' visits have also been set up for particular professional groupings such as Head Teachers.

On occasion, specific events have been held in prisons. One event was held for social services personnel who were invited to come in and see the visits process. It was reported that following this a far more positive response to having children visit the prison was forthcoming. Previously, with little or no knowledge of prison, social workers had been more likely to refuse a prison visit from a prisoner's child.

Key issues in developing good practice in awareness raising

- Delivery of training should be of high quality (a training the trainers course is available) and each session should be evaluated and feedback regularly reviewed. Where possible someone based in a prison who offers family support work should deliver the training alongside someone who has knowledge of the local area and services.

- Training should be adapted to meet local and specific needs. For example, if engagement from social workers or teachers is proving difficult, social service specific or education specific training should be provided. Think creatively about timing and location. Prison based training is particularly popular. Offering training to teachers in school holidays is more likely to get a positive response.

- Consider the context within which attendees are operating. People are busy, so think about ways in which increased knowledge and understanding about issues affecting children and families of prisoners can be incorporated into existing workstreams and priorities.

4 Early interventions

The key for us is getting to children who need support before they become children who are causing problems.

(Local Authority Service Manager)

Most prisoners have children, with 54% reporting that they have children under the age of 18. Approximately 200,000 children experience a parent's imprisonment each year, with 90,000 children affected at any one point in time (Williams, Papadopoulou and Booth 2012).

A joint priority review on the children of offenders (DCSF and MoJ 2007) found that these children are three times more likely to have a mental health problem than their peers; have a heightened risk of anti social behaviour and offending; and experience high levels of social disadvantage. Parental imprisonment can cause distress and instability, bullying and stigma, as well as financial hardship and disruption in housing and schooling.

The cost of early interventions with families is significantly less than the financial and social costs associated with problems that have been left to entrench and escalate. Therefore, the point that a parent is sentenced to prison is an important moment when children who may be in need, and families who may be troubled, can be identified and offered support to mitigate the risk of poor outcomes.

In one prison, the worker had a named contact in each local Children's Centre who they could refer families with under five year old children to. In other prisons, workers were proactive in completing the Common Assessment Framework (CAF), which is key in delivering front

line services to children and young people.

In one county council, the Advocate had worked closely with Children's Centres whose workers were trained in asking about whether the family was affected by imprisonment. A flyer about services, support and advice for families affected by imprisonment was also included in the registration pack that all those who had contact with the Children's Centre received.

In another area, work had been undertaken with the library service regarding the provision of information and advice books about imprisonment and families. Every library in the local authority, including mobile libraries, now offers free access to these resources, which include, for example, a book to help parents and carers tell children about a parent's imprisonment.

Early Intervention Work: Case-study

A protocol has been set up in one local authority, which aimed to make an offer of support to children and families affected by the imprisonment of a family member. In the development of the protocol, a proposal outlining the rationale for early interventions and a step-by-step process that linked criminal justice stages, lead agencies, requests for consent to contact families, information sharing protocols, CAF assessment processes and offers of support was set out.

An attractive leaflet was produced specifically for those in prison custody. This included a referral and consent section so that families could be contacted and details about children collected. Those with children under five years of age are referred to a local Children's Centre. Those with children who are 5-19 year olds are referred to the

Families First service.

The leaflet set out what types of needs families can face and what help could be offered. The leaflet could be completed with the help of a prison officer or other worker within the prison if needed. It is then put in the General Applications or specific Family Support box on the prison wing and collated by the Family Support Worker.

A single point of contact for both Children's Centres and Family First was set up which the FSW could refer to. These dealt with all prison cases to ensure continuity and the development of specialist knowledge.

This model of offering support could be adapted and used in other boroughs to ensure that the outcomes for children affected by imprisonment are improved through the offer of early interventions and support.

Key issues in developing good practice in early intervention work

- Where possible link into existing strategies and priorities. For example, although not all prisoners' families could be considered 'troubled families', the Troubled Families agenda offered opportunities for work with families of prisoners to be taken forward.
- Recognise and seek to work within existing organisational priorities and approaches. For example, prisons are operationally driven whereas children's services are focused on risk and the need for holistic assessments; understanding the different

approaches within services is key to getting early buy-in when change in practice is being sought.

- Identify key personnel that need to be brought on board when developing new strategies and work programmes.
- Successful early intervention work requires sharing information across services and organisations. Information sharing protocols should be developed where required.
- Many prisoners and their families are concerned that involvement from services means that their children will be removed from them. Reassuring prisoners and their families that offers of help are about supporting families is a key message that all those involved with prisoners and their families need to reiterate.

5 Efficient service delivery

You can't do anything from a jail cell, in prison it's really difficult to get anything done, but [the worker] is great with that, they'll do it, not all the people in prison will do things for you, even if they say they will.

(Serving prisoner)

Pressures in delivering an efficient service are somewhat different depending on the location of work. In the community, Advocates frequently discussed that it took time to have an impact. Nonetheless, there were numerous examples of successful outcomes in terms of awareness raising and policy development. For example in getting additional questions about imprisonment included in various assessment forms and policy documents (such as Education Welfare referral forms, Health Visitor forms, Substance Misuse services and on a Public Health survey), this took a significant amount of time and required 'proving yourself of worth' in the first instance.

Perseverance and the ability to lead and coordinate multi-agency efforts are needed. Acting as a single point of contact in relation to children and families of offenders was seen as invaluable. Other professionals reported that by operating in this role Advocates were visible and offered added value to the work of others.

Similar to some local authorities, some prisons can be slow moving and bureaucratic entities. Due to concerns about security, getting things done can take an inordinate amount of time, plus prisoners, officers, and others working within prisons may not necessarily know where to turn to for advice and support regarding prisoners and their families.

Working in prisons, the Family Support Workers, were not only the 'face of family support' inside the prison, but with high levels of knowledge and the ability to create effective working relationships with prisoners, their families, agencies and services, action was taken more quickly than is the norm in prison. There is, however, a need to balance a high level of demand for the service with the careful management of a caseload. For a full-time worker based in one prison a caseload of around 40 is optimum, although this may vary due to the complexity of the work involved.

Prisoner interviews highlighted that acknowledgement of their concerns, an explanation of what the FSW planned to do, a speedy response with a clear explanation regarding the outcome of the request, made a significant impact on the prison experience including reductions in anxiety, fear and anger. A number of prisoners specifically mentioned that their mental and emotional health had improved as a direct result of the FSWs intervention. One prisoner who was mentally unwell on arrival into prison could not remember the contact details of his family. The worker managed to locate the family, helped to arrange a visit, and supported his family in visiting and with their own needs in the community.

Both prisoners and other professionals linked the work with a reduction in offending. One prisoner said: *'having contact with the service has helped me think about what I've done to my family, I can't go back to using [drugs] and offending.'*

Another prisoner said: *'[the worker] is fantastic at doing his job, everything he does is perfect. The following day you get a result. If you want to contact someone he will contact them for you, everything is very quick. He was able to contact my friends and found a barrister for*

me'. A large number of prisoners said that they did not think their family would know they were in prison if the worker had not contacted them.

The impact of the work undertaken on behalf of families and prisoners was recognised by a range of fellow professionals. The chief executive of a voluntary sector organisation said that the role of the FSW was *'essential... [they] should be in every prison'*. The head of learning and skills in one prison said that: *'prisoner problems would be manifested in different ways without the support. Prisoners raise issues sensibly and learn a more structured approach'*.

A number of prison officers recognised that prisoners and their families do not, necessarily, want to speak to a prison officer about their needs or concerns about a prisoner. Whilst a safer custody manager stated: *'it's brilliant support, particularly for those who are struggling, it helps avoid self-harm and violence'*.

Commenting on the work of Advocates in the community, a Local Authority Service Manager said that bringing together different organisations from across the statutory and voluntary sector had a significant impact on the ability of services to deliver to families in need.

Work with some prisoners, such as those who had committed certain sexual or violent offences, meant that the prisoner could not have contact with children. This required close liaison with the Public Protection Unit (PPU) within the prison. The maintenance of boundaries was needed as well as clear delivery of information explaining why this was the case. In some instances, decisions about refusing visits from children had been made with little knowledge of the specific case of the prisoner. In these situations, FSWs worked with prisoners seeking

further explanation about why decisions had been made and the processes of appeal where this was possible.

Key issues in developing good practice in efficient service delivery

- Positive working relationships with prisoners and their families need to be developed so that potential service users feel willing and able to discuss their needs and are more likely to respond to offers of support and advice positively. Both prison staff and service users said that these types of relationships would not be possible with uniformed staff who were responsible for locking them up.
- Even highly distressing information or news could be passed on to prisoners and their families in a way that was considered, sympathetic and helpful. Making time to clarify a situation, ensuring news was given in a private space, and making immediate offers of support helped to reduce problems that would normally be associated with this.
- Acting as a single point of contact in the community Advocates are valued for offering specialist knowledge and advice to other professionals. Particularly by those practitioners who worked with those affected by imprisonment but who had little knowledge of the criminal justice system.
- Developing extensive specialist knowledge FSWs make the service invaluable to prisoners, their families and other professionals working with prisoners and their families.

6 Achieving cultural change

[The family support worker] makes the establishment think out of the box, about the importance of families in reducing reoffending and of the importance of maintaining family ties. She doesn't bring a prison service mentality to the work; she brings "lets think about this!" She's taught us new things, made us think in a different way.

(Prison Service Senior Resettlement Officer)

Working with children and families affected by imprisonment is likely to have a number of positive outcomes for both prisoners and their families. Although achieving organisational change is notoriously difficult, dedicated professionals can work to create the right conditions whereby the needs of the children and families of offenders are met in the community and in prison.

The significance of maintaining family and community links in order to prepare a prisoner for safer release has been recognised for some time, and was included in the 1993 Home Office National Framework for the Throughcare of Offenders in Custody Document.

In the community, the government's 'Troubled Families' agenda offers financial support to local authorities who identify and work with families who are experiencing problems.

Prisons, with a focus on security and management of prisoners, have not traditionally facilitated the active engagement and support of the family or been particularly family friendly environments. Local authorities have not prioritised families and children affected by imprisonment as a core group who need to be considered in service

development and delivery and there has been little linking in regards to the reducing reoffending agenda with the rights of the child.

Advocates have helped shift the attitude of community services in relation to imprisonment. Prior to the commencement of the FSS a number of services had perceived the imprisonment of a family member as a moment of relief or reprieve for other family members. For domestic abuse services, for example, if a perpetrator is sent to prison this had been seen as a point in time where work can cease, as family problems are perceived as resolved. One agency reported the cultural shift that they had experienced: *'we all give a sigh of relief that we can forget about that person whilst he's in prison...out of sight and out of mind... now it's a case of when the person is in prison, we have to do work with the family'*. The positive impact of recognising that needs do not, necessarily, come to an end at the point of imprisonment, and that in fact this might be a time when more intensive support is needed, was seen as a direct response to working with an Advocate in the community.

A further mechanism utilised by Advocates in creating cultural change was the bringing together of disparate services to develop a common agenda around children and families affected by imprisonment. In one area the Advocate arranged for the probation service and Children's Centres to meet. Following this, it was agreed that where appropriate joint visits could be set up. Moreover, the probation service was encouraged to refer relevant cases to the Children's Centre. Similar arrangements have been created in other locations, for example bringing together probation and domestic violence services and the co-location of a probation worker once a week in a family service.

Inside prison, workers played an important role in the various structures

of prisoners' management. They attended safer custody meetings, discharge boards, and induction. They provided a calming influence on prisoners, improving behaviour, restoring mental health and reducing stress.

A significant number of prisoners reported that they were less likely to self-harm, lash out at others, and that their mood had been lifted because of the direct interventions of the FSS. The impact of these changes were recognised by others working within the prison who also commented on improvements in prisoner behaviour, reduced incidents of self-harm and the generally calmer, less confrontational environment that had been created.

Working with prisoners and their families supported a more productive and healthy visit as stress is reduced on both sides. FSWs also reinforced the learning process of prisoners who began to understand the impact of their offending on their family and were therefore more likely to succeed in terms of future desistance.

FSWs also contributed to the work that goes on in prisons as part of the Children and Families pathway. FSWs act as a catalyst for a renewed focus on the importance of work with children and families, for example in taking the lead on Family Days. They acted as the key point of contact within the prison regarding families and added value in terms of training and accessing funding. They helped to improve the physical environment of Visitors' Centres, organised play materials, provided more intensive work with visitors and worked closely with Centre managers.

Staff awareness of the service and of the role of families increased. This meant that more referrals came from officers and also that they heard

directly from prisoners that the service has been helpful. Early suspicion about the service from prison staff was replaced with a far more positive and supportive outlook on the work.

External verification for family support work has been forthcoming from HM Chief Inspectorate of Prisons and OFSTED. For example, in HMCIP thematic review on women (2010) mention is made of the need for more family support work within the women's estate.

The provision of placements for social work students in a number of prisons provided a real opportunity for cultural change within social services. Future social workers learned about prison systems and the importance of maintaining family ties.

Achieving cultural change: Case-study

Ryan had been placed in segregation due to violence and aggression. He was on a five-person unlock which meant that five prison officers needed to be present when he was let out of his cell. The Family Support Worker received an application to see Ryan. On arrival, Ryan started to shout and spit at the officers, the FSW told Ryan that although he was there to help him, he was not prepared to listen to him abuse the officers.

Ryan calmed down and afterwards the officers who had been present said that it had been the first time that they had heard anything rational out of Ryan.

The assertion of boundaries also provided prison officers with an opportunity to see a different aspect to the role of family support work.

Ultimately it was found that Ryan had a urinary tract infection which had caused the change in his behaviour, the worker was able to feed this back to the prison officers so that they were also aware that Ryan's behaviour appeared to be due to this.

Key issues in developing good practice to achieve cultural change

- High level strategic change is more likely achieved by making effective on the ground, practical changes. Evidence-based good practice is needed to demonstrate the importance and the impact of working with prisoners and their families.
- The ability to negotiate across services with few organisational demands on the FSS itself allows for networking, joint working and more creative responses to complex issues and problems.
- Acting as an expert on prisoners and their families provides an invaluable resource to other professionals working inside prison and in the community.
- The delivery of Hidden Sentence training was a catalyst for cultural change within organisations.

7 Improving family relationships

It's so important to keep families together; it helps to break the cycle of offending. Potentially it could help to reduce reoffending.
(Prison Service Wing Officer)

Working with families of prisoners could represent significant savings for society as a result of the costs of reduced reoffending and other outcomes, including health, family breakdown, poor child outcomes and inter-generational offending (Ministry of Justice 2009). The Ministry of Justice Green Paper, *Breaking the Cycle: Effective Punishment, Rehabilitation and Sentencing of Offenders* (2010), reiterated the importance of familial ties in helping to reduce reoffending and in assisting successful rehabilitation.

In the community, Advocates have been raising the profile of the needs of children and families affected by imprisonment, which has directly impacted on relationships within the family group. Services are now more able and willing to ask if a family is affected by imprisonment and to offer support where needed.

A range of family and parenting courses were run or supported by the Family Support Service. These included Family Man, Fathers Inside and Time to Connect. Frequently these were adapted to meet the needs of those they were targeted at, for example Time to Connect has been adapted at Eastwood Park prison for women. Although the delivery of these courses can be time-consuming they offer a way of accessing potential service users and of making the FSS better known within the prison establishment.

Family Days are designed to be more informal than regular visiting sessions and can last all day. These visits are aimed at strengthening and maintaining family ties between prisoners and their families, are important events in a prisoner's life and offer a unique opportunity to maintain significant relationships.

Family support workers within the prisons have taken a proactive, flexible and responsive approach to family days. In a number of locations they have taken on full responsibility for planning and arranging the days, working with prison security to ensure clearance is arranged well in advance. Feedback from those attending has been sought and fed into reviewing mechanisms to ensure that ongoing needs of families are met. Different family types have also been catered for in developing Family Days, for example, adult children days and Father and Baby days. The frequency and quality of Family Day visits has also increased in a number of the prisons. Photographs of families are often taken and prisoners are keen to receive these pictures. One woman said that having this memento of the day '*makes the whole thing really special*'.

A range of other work is undertaken to improve family relationships. Bridging services between prison and the community has been an area of work that has directly benefitted family relationships. For example, through advice about housing, information about other services, such as debt management, as well as emotional and other help and support. Workers also facilitated access to information about schooling for parents. In one prison, Relate, who help people develop healthy relationships, supported prisoners and their partners as a result of the intervention from a FSW. Prisoners reported knowing more about their children and being able to be more involved with them as a result of the FSS.

Being available to talk to family members, keeping them updated with how things were going and talking through concerns that they may have about a prisoner's welfare were all part of the FSS. One family service user said: *'it's great, I didn't know where to turn before, we'd never known anyone go in prison, but [the worker] told us clearly what we could bring in and when I was worried about [the prisoner] she was the first person I turned to'*.

There was evidence to demonstrate that the FSS reconnects families by tracking down and making contact with family members, mediating between prisoners and their families and through practical assistance such as accessing Assisted Prison Visits, which can help towards the cost of visiting someone in prison. Prisoners concerned about their family members and how they were coping reported a sense of relief that someone was able to support them.

A number of prisoners are reliant on social services for bringing in their children for visits. In many instances, without the intervention of a FSW, these visits would not have happened. With their negotiation and advocacy, however, decisions could be turned around and much desired visits would then take place.

Improving family relationships: A case-study

Jerry was about to be released homeless because he had fallen out with his family before he went into prison. The worker rang his family, who were unaware that their son was in prison. When Jerry was due for release a family conference was set up in the prison facilitated by the worker. On release, Jerry returned home and additional support was set in place for his family.

Jerry remains out of prison and the family received the necessary support to help them.

Key issues in developing good practice to improve family relationships

- Families need to be supported inside prison and out to ensure that their needs are met. Families should not be seen only as a source of improved outcomes regarding reoffending. Improving outcomes for the family are important also.
- The provision of parenting courses is important, these should be adapted to meet the need of the client group and evaluated to ensure that they are meeting identified needs.
- FSWs are highly skilled and creative in running Family Days, which should be held regularly and be flexible in terms of what constitutes a family. Family days should not be seen as a privilege and attached to the Incentives and Earned Privileges scheme.
- Advocates based in the community, and FSWs based in prison, can bridge the gap between services to aid the development and maintenance of stable family relationships.

8 Service user involvement and peer support

I used to talk to the young un's on the landing, you know, telling them stuff, like I was the daddy of the landing, they'd come to me cos I've been around so long. And now, I do the same thing [outside of prison] telling them that are getting into trouble what it's like in prison. They learn what it's like, and I get something out of it too.

(Ex-prisoner)

The importance of service user involvement and peer support is increasingly recognised across a range of sectors as important for service development and improvement. Many prisoners and their families have the characteristics of social exclusion and the experience of imprisonment is itself exclusionary, service user involvement and peer support can therefore be of particular importance, it can encourage prisoners to take responsibility and helping them to reconnect with society. It can also provide a valuable way for prisoners and their families to support each other.

There are a variety of ways in which service user involvement and peer support can be facilitated. Most of this work took place inside prison as Advocates were not direct service providers.

In one prison, prisoners were actively involved in the induction wing. The FSW worked closely with these prisoners and had provided training to them in relation to issues affecting prisoners and their families. It was these prisoners who spoke to new arrivals about issues that might impact on their families and who asked incoming prisoners about any children they had. This helped to reduce the anxiety that many prisoners experience telling a professional worker that they have

children, and about the problems that their family may be experiencing. Concerns that such disclosures might lead to the removal of children from the family home are persistently high at the point of imprisonment. The induction wing prisoners could reassure them that this was not the case, and in fact, support was available if needed.

There were examples of different types of work in other prisons. A serving prisoner worked alongside one FSW helping organise Family Days, training and appointments. In another a Fathers' Rights Group had been organised.

A number of prisons had set up regular meetings between family members and prison personnel so that family members could feed directly back into the prison system about their experiences in terms of visits, help and support needed, and concerns about prisoners.

Workshops for young people have been facilitated between the FSS, prison and the Borough Intervention Team. The workshops were delivered by serving prisoners released on temporary licence and ex-prisoners, and were targeted at young people at risk of offending or offending.

Additional support was given to an ex-prisoner to deliver sessions with young people not in education or employment through a community organisation based in another borough. This involved a twelve week education, skills and employment programme for young people across London and the ex-prisoner delivered a session on his experience in prison and the impact it had on his life.

On an informal basis prisoners increasingly supported each other regarding family issues and promoted the service to those who could benefit from it. A number of referrals came from prisoners who had a support role in the prison – such as those working on induction or Listeners. There were also self-referrals from prisoners who heard about the service from other prisoners who had received support and recommended the service to them.

Key issues in developing good practice in service user involvement and peer support

- Prisoners and their families have a great deal of knowledge and may be best placed to help each other. Service user involvement and peer support should be embedded not only in service delivery but in the wider operations of an organisation such as in policy groups and management committees.
- Clear guidance and training should be provided in developing service user involvement and in setting up peer support activities.
- Given the sensitive nature of some of the information relating to families a balance needs to be struck between peer support and professional engagement. For example, new prisoners may feel more comfortable disclosing that they have children whom they are concerned about to well trained prisoners.
- The development of transferrable skills whilst involved in service user and peer support work should be made clear so that those involved are aware of the additional skills they are gaining that can be utilised in alternative settings, including future work applications.

9 Staff supervision and support

It's important to have clear lines of accountability. It's difficult for them [those who work for the FSS] being employed by one organisation, placed in another. They've done a great job, but it can't have been easy.

(Local Authority Manager)

Key to building an effective service is providing up to date, accessible and relevant support, guidance and opportunities for employees. High quality supervision for staff is one of the most important drivers in ensuring positive outcomes for prisoners and their families. It also has a crucial role to play in the development, retention and motivation of the workforce.

Supervision and appraisal meetings are helpful to both employees and managers in identifying learning needs early on and in valuing the work of the employee. Supervision meetings enable a performance problem to be identified and give the employee an opportunity to give feedback on their progress to date.

Supervision and appraisal forms are useful in collating information from discussions with employees. Progress, objectives and feedback can all be captured on these forms, which can act as a record for further discussion meetings.

Developing the skills of management is essential in relation to personal and communication skills and managing people and resources (NCVO n.d.).

There were a number of mechanisms of support utilised by the FSS including practitioner meetings, which focused on casework and sharing good practice, and job specific meetings (for Advocates/workers), as well as one to one supervision. Some locations also had other potential support networks, for example the Wales Practitioners Network.

Both Advocates and FSWs generally worked alone, with no one else in their respective organisations doing the same work as they were. Sometimes they worked in teams with managers who were very busy and had little understanding of the work that was being undertaken. Some locations that people worked in were quite isolated and at a significant distance from where organisational head offices were based.

It is important to locate Advocates and FSWs in the place that is most suitable to them and the service. This may not always be the same location but decisions should be based on access, to ensure the service has greatest impact, as well as support from someone who understands and is prepared to champion the work. So, it is less important to site all FSWs inside prison, or in Visitors' Centres, but to be aware of how they can work with both visitors and prisoners and who is most likely to understand and be supportive of the work that they do. This was the same for Advocates, where it was suggested that being based in Children's, Families or Criminal Justice settings mattered less than having someone who would help them in identifying and accessing key people that needed to be worked with.

FSWs frequently had to deal with distressing situations and hear about traumatic life experiences. Across all prisons, workers had to deal with demanding situations on a daily basis. This was particularly marked in the female estate. For example, FSWs were called upon to be involved

in Final Contact visits between a mother and her child who was being adopted. These were particularly challenging visits that had not always been handled with sensitivity by social services or the prison. In some instances, in recognition of the distinct needs of the female estate clinical supervision had been agreed.

The work undertaken by Advocates and FSWs can be complex and difficult. Resilience, calmness, confidence, good interpersonal communication skills and the ability to influence relationships across multi-agency organisational boundaries were necessary attributes for these roles.

Alongside the importance of receiving good supervision, many of those involved in the FSS also supervised staff. Advocates provided line management to FSWs and a number of FSWs managed volunteers and social work placements. A number of volunteers and social work placements were interviewed and all reported good supervision support. Nonetheless, ongoing training, as well as regular supervision for those involved in management duties is necessary.

Key issues in developing good practice in staff supervision and support

- Supervision should be local, regular and structured. Notes should be agreed between supervisor and supervisee.
- Training and development opportunities should be provided to staff. All those involved in supervision and management duties, including those who manage volunteers or placements should be provided with specific staff management training.
- Consideration should be given to requests for clinical supervision.

- The location of staff both in the community and in prison should be mindful of where staff are most likely to get the support they need to develop an effective service and to get the day to day help that they require.
- A range of meetings may be needed to ensure the smooth running of the service, to share good practice and to discuss particularly complex cases. These should be timed and located in ways that recognise the national spread of the service.

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