** **

**Family Visit Report - HMP Oakwood**

**23 July 2019**

**Angela Christopher:** HMPPS National Families Advisor **Madeleine Percival:** Deputy Director for Vulnerable Offenders Policy, MOJ (covering female offender policy)  **Sylvie Rosseter:** Vulnerable Offenders Policy, MOJ (leading on implementation of the Farmer Review for Women)

HMP Oakwood is a C category prison Contracted to G4S. It has an operational capacity of 2,100 male prisoners. Our visit was in response to an invitation by the Prison Director John McLaughlin who hosted a family’s conference at the prison in May 2019. Colleagues leading on the Farmer Review for Women joined the visit to the establishment, as the family provision is deemed exemplary.

A detailed programme was organised by Sandy Watson, Oakwood’s Visits and Interventions Lead who hosted our visit. We were met at the station by a prisoner on ROTL who transported us to and from the prison in a shuttle service.

Prior and after our tour, we met with the Director John McLaughlin who gave us some background regarding the culture that he and his senior managers had worked hard to create and successfully deliver.

We visited the Family Unit, lunched with the Chaplaincy team, met with Safer Custody/Equalities team and toured Industries during our visit.

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| **Visits Centre** | * The visits centre is a vast space with a reception desk, lockers and a cafeteria area where visitors could purchase refreshments, served by serving prisoners. A project, being led by Pauline Miller-Brown, Director of Restart Enterprise ([www.restartenterprise.com](http://www.restartenterprise.com)) and former Head of Resettlement; seeks to expand the role of the visit centre – extending its opening hours and exploring how this can be used to better support families either coming to visit, or to greet loved ones on their release. This is relying on volunteer prisoners and former prisoners to support the project.
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| **Visits Hall** | * There are two very large visits halls that are bright, welcoming and are designed with the needs of prisoners and their visitors in mind. Chairs in Visits Hall 1, are comfortable and although reducing the amount of space, visits hall 2 will replace fixed seating with comfortable chairs. The aim is to make the environment one that accommodates a positive visiting experience.
* As well as a baby changing area where prisoners can change their baby’s nappies, there is a breast-feeding room and prayer and reflection room for visitors.
* Toys in the facility are donated by families and charities.
* There is a photo opportunity where prisoners and their families can take and purchase a photograph for £1.
* The team were preparing for a busy holiday period as they increase the number of visits during the school holidays. Visits increase to 3 in the morning and 3 in the afternoon during the holidays. Special additional family events are also offered such as family days at the gym, Cooking with Families, Outdoor visits and family lounges.
* Prisoners who do not receive visits (600) are also accommodated in the prison visits hall.
* Quizzes, games and other activities to engage and support prisoners who do not receive visitors help to reduce or prevent isolation, thus self-harm and other related issues are reduced.
* Dog days have been introduced for those who do not get family visits.
* At the time of our visit, only 14 of 2100 prisoners were on an ACCT documents – Ethnicity White, Catholic and Asian – Crime – violence.
* All visits take place at the same time irrespective of status (VPs). On the day of our visit, vulnerable prisoners, were scheduled to receive visits
* Other activities provided for prisoners on the VP unit includes a dancing class for residents on the VPU, but they need to have a dancing partner. The class is taught by the relative of a serving prisoner. This is considered a popular activity.

**Family Lounges*** Rooms previously used for legal visits have been turned into lovely lounges that once inside, you could be sitting in a living room. The refurbishment of these spaces is sponsored by various organisations, including BT. These rooms were painted by prisoners and furnished by the sponsor. They contain armchairs, coffee table, a floral feature, a book case or toy box. Each of the 6 lounges we saw were unique in their decoration and set-up. Each lounge cost approximately £700 which is donated by the identified sponsor. More lounges are due to become available as sponsors are identified.
* In the hallway is a repository where families can collect games or activities that are appropriate for their family needs. These prisoners are given trust, which they use responsibly to experience the benefits of this opportunity.
* A lounge visit is 2 hours duration from 9:00 – 11:00.
* Prisoners have access to this space dependent on their completion of a parenting programme, and have children under the age of 18 years.
* Parenting programmes are accessed by any family member – grandparent, uncle, brother etc.
* As this is an area where prisoners and their families can be relaxed in a normalised environment, they must have enhanced status.
* Further rooms will be adapted and become available as more sponsors are identified.

**Outdoor area*** A new outdoor area is available for visits, but as there are no indoor facilities should it rain, this has limited use.
* The furniture was made by prisoners using wooden pallets and is for sale for families and visitors to purchase on the visitor days.
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| **Family Unit** | * An 80-bed unit is dedicated to prisoners that focus on training and addressing behaviours that will enhance their relationships with partners and children. To qualify for the wing, each prisoner has to be engaged in at least one of the specified training schemes.
* They engage in parenting, safeguarding, 1st aid and cookery classes.
* As well as external support, there are strong peer relationships.
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| **Family Days** | * Family days take place on a regular basis with a range of activities and opportunities for prisoners which includes cooking and sharing a meal.
* These visits take place once a week but occur more regularly during school holidays.
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| **Prison staff** | * On arrival at HMP Oakwood, the amenable culture is evident. Staff are friendly and engaging – despite the size of the prison, staff and prisoners demonstrated respect, partnership and trust, and came across as approachable to all prisoners.
* This was particularly evident in the way that prisoners are given responsibility and encouraged to make suggestions for how the regime, cultures and behaviours are managed.
* Prisoners hold trusted roles within the prison, such as Head of Stores – they are expected to be professional and respond to opportunities of trust by self-regulation and policing of their own behaviours and that of their peers.
* Prisoners have meetings with the Director where they present feedback and evidence of progress on their areas of responsibility.
* Diversity of prisoners was evident. The majority of ‘supervisors’ were from an ethnic background.
* One could forget that they were in a prison as the mix of staff and prisoners was only evident by their uniforms. Large, busy workshops containing potentially dangerous equipment and tools were managed by prisoners who had a range of hierarchical roles.
* The trust and positive environment for prisoners makes HMP Oakwood a desired prison which has a waiting list of prisoners wishing to be transferred.
* This environment is conducive to rehabilitation and ‘normalisation’, the ethos that this prison is working towards.
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| **Benefits of family/Sig. Others service** | **No Visits*** Prisoners who do not receive visits are given an opportunity to invite a guest – this could be an officer, an offender manager – anyone that the prisoner has a relationship with - to share a three-course meal that with the help of a chef (serving prisoner) they have cooked. (This is only available for those who engage in the cooking course)
* FN prisoners who do not have relatives in the UK are given opportunities to speak to loved ones at times to accommodate time differences, they are also able to accumulate visits that are offered for time where loved ones may be in the country.
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| **ROTL** | * Prisoners on ROTL provide a subsidised shuttle service for visitors and more importantly, family members and prisoners that are released from custody with limited funds.
* The shuttle bus operates between Birmingham Train station, Wolverhampton Train station and the prison.
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| **Actions** |
| **Local Family Strategy** | * The local family strategy is very attractive and informative. Pictures provide a visual expression of what prison is like and what their loved one’s experience while in custody.

<https://www.nicco.org.uk/search?q=hmp+oakwood+strategy>**Recommendations:*** + Date the strategy
	+ Include outcomes – you said, we did, demonstrating progress and the address of concerns or suggestions.
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| **Community links** | Positive links with Re-start, an organisation created by a former member of staff, employing ex-prisoners as volunteers and on paid contract, providing essential services and support for prisoners on release.The prison may wish to explore the establishment of relationships with NHS, local authority, community organisations in the region that they are released to for continuity of the excellent support offered in custody. |