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**GOOD PRACTICE IN  
PROJECTS WORKING WITH  
PRISONERS' FAMILIES**

**FULL REPORT**

**MONICA BARRY**

**on behalf of The Robertson Trust**

**May 2009**

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## **CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION**

### **CONTEXT OF THE RESEARCH**

The value of addressing the root causes of offending and understanding factors which encourage desistance from crime is becoming all the more apparent amongst policy makers, practitioners and academics alike. Positive family ties, not least those which can be maintained whilst someone is in prison, strengthen family relationships and the likelihood of reduced offending on release, but also improve relationships between prisoners and prison staff (Loucks, 2004). However, whilst a growing body of academic and policy literature relating to imprisonment focuses on the value of working with prisoners' families as a means of encouraging longer-term desistance for the prisoner, it often fails to highlight the inherent need of agencies to address the shorter-term problems facing families themselves where one member is incarcerated. This latter gap in addressing the needs of families of prisoners which are 'imprisonment-related' can be most readily addressed by the presence of visitor centres at prisons (Loucks, 2002; 2004). Research in California suggested that visitor centres often provide the only means of support and encouragement to prisoners families (Loucks, 2004). Nacro (2000) found that families of prisoners are highly unlikely to seek such support within their own communities and that visitor centres are not only readily accessible during visiting times for families potentially needing support, but also provide a means for community-based agencies to engage with this otherwise 'difficult to reach' group.

However, visitor centres, where they exist at all, mean different things to different people, from an unstaffed area or room with leaflets and a vending machine to a facility which is independently run, in or just outside the prison grounds, providing facilities such as booking in, storage, childcare and catering, as well as information and support for visitors from independent providers regarding welfare, financial, health and other needs of families who are affected by the imprisonment of a family member.

Families of prisoners are increasingly being seen as a vulnerable group in their own right because of the effects of imprisonment. Loucks (2006) has found various key factors in the typical profile of families of prisoners:

- most families of prisoners come from disadvantaged and marginalised neighbourhoods;
- families suffer additional mental, material, emotional and financial stress as a result of the imprisonment of a family member;
- such families need emotional and practical support in order to cope;
- the impact on children and young people is significant in both the short and longer term.

Yet there are few agencies responsible for prisoners' families *per se*. These are increasing, however, with prisoner family helplines, the Prison Reform Trust and Action for Prisoners' Families in England and Wales and Families Outside in Scotland coordinating support services to this group. Families of prisoners face a multitude of problems when one member is incarcerated, and given the fact that men make up some 90 per cent of prisoners in England and Wales, and 95 per cent of prisoners in Scotland, and the caring role within the family usually falls on women, it is estimated that women bear the burden of caring for prisoners both whilst in prison and on release (Codd, 2007). Equally, it is women who are expected to support released prisoners in the process of desistance: they are, as Codd describes them, 'instruments of penal reform' or 'agents of correctional control'. As well as women bearing the brunt of usually men's incarceration, children of prisoners are also singled out in the literature as suffering the absence of a parent or carer, in terms of loss, increased responsibility within the family, and stigma and marginalisation within the community.

For families visiting prisoners, there are additional stresses in terms of the financial burden of meeting transport costs to and from the prison and providing clothing, money or other personal effects for the prisoner, as well as the mental stress of possibly being perceived by some prison staff as 'guilty by association' (Codd, 2007), through being searched, being bound by prison rules and possibly being treated with disrespect.

In a recent UK Parliamentary Briefing (*Action for Prisoners' Families et al.* 2007), it was estimated that some 160,000 children in the UK are separated from a parent because of imprisonment, with over one tenth of these parents being mothers (Loucks, 2005). In Scotland, over half of prisoners of both sexes have dependent children and about 16,500 children lose contact with a parent through imprisonment every year, more than those who lose contact with a parent through divorce (Families Outside, 2009). Over 40 per cent of prisoners lose contact with family members once incarcerated (SEU, 2002), because of distance, travel costs, lack of awareness of prison visits, poor prison staff attitudes and unwelcoming regimes (Loucks, 2005).

Historically within the UK, family-focused prison policies have stressed the ultimate goal of rehabilitation of prisoners rather than of alleviating the problems for families associated with imprisonment. Prisons, the argument goes, are for containment, restriction of liberty and public protection, not directly concerned with the aftermath of imprisonment as experienced by those on the outside, but some prisons are more 'community facing' than others. It is thus not surprising that different prisons take on the family-focused mantle to differing degrees, with some regimes being supportive and others being more hostile towards families (Codd, 2007).

The Prison Services within the UK have in recent years sought to develop more family-oriented policies regarding visits, parenting classes, family involvement in prisoner case management and signposting to relevant support within their communities. In Scotland, the Scottish Prison Service established a National Children and Families Development Group in 2008 which includes representation from outside agencies. This group is in the process of developing a Family Strategy and a set of standards for family work within prisons. Although still in draft form, these standards include the need for children and families to be treated with respect and dignity; to be offered information, support and induction in a professional and proactive manner; to have clean, child-focused and comfortable surroundings whilst waiting for and having visits; and to be consulted on services for visitors as well as sentence planning for their relative in prison. The Scottish Prison Service (SPS) is also currently considering a Family Contact Service in every Scottish Prison (Nicholls, 2009, pers. comm), to support prisoners and their families, prison staff and external agencies, and to ensure

that families are able to access consistent, quality information from the most appropriate and skilled provider on the problems and opportunities facing them.

## **AIMS OF THE ASSESSMENT**

The specification from The Robertson Trust required an assessment of good practice in relation to the work being undertaken by 4 charities working with the families of prisoners currently accommodated in 4 prisons across Scotland – Perth, Edinburgh, Barlinnie and Kilmarnock. These charities are:

- Crossreach, Perth Prison Visitor Centre;
- Salvation Army, Edinburgh Prison Visitors' Centre;
- HOPE, Barlinnie Prison; and
- The Lighthouse Foundation, Kilmarnock Prison.

The Robertson Trust has provided funding for these 4 projects for up to 5 years and is concerned to ensure that their future roles, where representing good practice, are secured as far as possible through alternative sustainable funding. The key objectives of the report are therefore to report on best practice across the 4 projects; to highlight challenges and barriers to effective practice within the 4 projects; and to make recommendations for future action by the projects and other relevant agencies.

## **METHODS**

This assessment is based on previous evaluations of the 4 projects funded by The Robertson Trust which were undertaken by Dr. Nancy Loucks. These evaluations were as follows:

Crossreach, Perth Prison Visitor Centre:

- 2007 – visitor questionnaires;
- 2008 – visitor questionnaires and telephone interviews with visitors.

Salvation Army, Edinburgh Prison Visitors' Centre:

- 2008 – visitor questionnaires and interviews with project staff.

HOPE, Barlinnie Prison:

- 2006 – prisoner evaluation forms and interviews with prisoners, prison staff and family members;
- 2007 – analysis of case files;
- 2008 – progress report.

The Lighthouse Foundation, Kilmarnock Prison:

- 2006 – visitor questionnaires and database analysis for 2005-2006;
- 2007 – analysis of case files;
- 2008 – telephone interviews with visitors and progress report.

The size of the samples on which these evaluations were based depended to a large extent on the remit of the project and the numbers of participants involved (as staff, visitors or prisoners), and the fact that observation, questionnaire distribution and interviews took place usually over only a few days. Numbers tended to be small and therefore unrepresentative, but the qualitative analysis overall seemed to suggest certain commonalities or trends between projects which will be elaborated on in this report.

As well as drawing out the key findings from these previous evaluations, this current assessment also relied on 60-90 minute face to face discussions with the 4 project workers, a member of SPS Headquarters staff concerned with family issues, and Dr. Loucks, the author of the previous project evaluations, as well as a telephone interview with a member of Serco staff. These discussions explored the remit of the projects, their target group and interventions, liaison with the prison, barriers to effective practice, monitoring and evaluation and potential sources of future funding. Where available, updated statistics on referrals and other key duties were also collated for 2008-09.



## **LAYOUT OF THE REPORT**

Chapter 2 describes each project in turn, under the headings of funding, remit, target group, referrals, prison liaison and inter-agency working. Apart from the section on funding, each subsequent section briefly describes good practice and explores the challenges and barriers to good practice. Emerging themes from each of the 4 project summaries are discussed in more depth in Chapter 3, including location, flexibility, perceptions of prison staff, perceptions of visitors and inter-agency working. In conclusion, Chapter 4 draws together the key themes and lessons to be learnt in terms of targeting prisoners' families, the role of projects in prisons, prison policy on families and the financial sustainability of such projects, before making recommendations for future action.

## **CHAPTER TWO: PROJECT SUMMARIES**

### **CROSSREACH, PERTH PRISON VISITOR CENTRE**

#### **FUNDING**

Crossreach (Church of Scotland) has received £67,500 from The Robertson Trust since 2007 which contributes towards a full-time Centre Manager of the Visitor Centre located within the grounds of Perth Prison, as well as a contribution towards a 20 hour per week assistant post, both funded by The Robertson Trust up until the end of 2009. There is also a part-time (20 hours per week) Tayside Family Support Project Worker paid for by the Gannochy Trust and 8 volunteers are also currently working within the Centre. The Robertson Trust funding enabled the Centre to reopen in early 2007, following a two year closure because of adverse publicity surrounding violence and drugs within the Centre under previous management.

#### **OVERVIEW**

##### **Remit**

The Centre's remit is to offer information and support to visitors for the duration of a prisoner's custodial sentence, most commonly for a period of three months, and often by telephone. The Centre also provides a comfortable waiting area for visitors, with free tea and coffee and play facilities for children.

##### ***Good practice***

The Centre's opening hours are from 11.00am to 7.00pm Tuesday to Friday, and 1.30pm to 5.00pm on a Saturday, to ensure that staff cover the vast majority of visiting times to remand and convicted prisoners on the busiest days.

Findings from the Crossreach evaluations in 2007 and 2008, albeit based on small numbers, suggest that having a comfortable and welcoming place to wait for visits and being offered free refreshments were important to families and other visitors, as was access to information and support. Whilst the Centre is located near the gate and within the prison grounds, it is not necessary for visitors to go there in order to book in or to use essential facilities such as lockers, and therefore those that do come into

the Centre do so either for refreshments, a comfortable place to wait, or for information and support. The high quality of staffing and the ambience within the Centre is crucial to its current success and support is given to families on a daily basis with such issues as form filling, resolving family tensions and responding to emotional, practical and financial concerns. It is not uncommon for prisoners themselves to visit the Centre on release from their sentence to say ‘thankyou’ for the support offered to them and their families, and approximately 10 per cent of visitors return at the end of their visit to prisoners to clarify or raise any issues following that visit<sup>1</sup>. Equally, the Centre is seen by visitors as a crucial source of information and support on issues that may arise when the prisoner is released.

As well as supporting families in person and by telephone, Visitor Centre staff also receive approximately 20 phone calls per week from the public seeking information on services to prisoners at HMP Perth both in custody and on release. The emphasis on a telephone service to visitors is one of the Visitor Centre’s strengths, since this could be seen as a cost-effective means of keeping in touch with and supporting families of prisoners outwith visiting times.

### ***Challenges and barriers to good practice***

One of the challenges for a visitor centre of this kind – where visitors do not have to book in for visits other than at the prison gate – is to attract visitors requiring information or support. The location of the Perth Prison Visitor Centre is currently somewhat obscured within the prison grounds because of refurbishment of the prison itself and many visitors may be unaware of its existence. In this regard, one of the barriers to good practice is the fact that SPS does *not* require the Centre for any essential service such as for booking in, as it does at Edinburgh Prison.

For health and safety reasons, there need to be two people within the Centre at any one time (either two members of staff or a member of staff and a volunteer), and in exceptional circumstances, the Centre may have to close occasionally because of a lack of staff cover. This shortage of staff restricts contact with both the prison and the

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<sup>1</sup> If a prisoner, for example, threatens suicide to his visitor, that visitor may return to the Centre to seek support. In these circumstances, the project staff are obliged to phone through to the prison staff to report these concerns.

community. Thus, Crossreach is heavily dependent on volunteers to ensure that two people are covering the Centre opening hours at any one time. Appointing, training and keeping volunteers is a challenge for the Centre, given the need for skills appropriate to working with such a vulnerable group. Many volunteers do not see the value of ongoing training or cannot commit themselves to longer-term involvement, thus making it difficult to improve their knowledge base as well as to retain them.

### **Target group**

When the Centre reopened in early 2007, it took a while for visitors to learn about and use the Centre but since late 2008 numbers have been in the range of 240 – 340 per month. The overall numbers visiting the Centre in 2007 was over 1,600 and over 3,000 in 2008. There are relatively high numbers of visitors with children (14%) coming through the Centre, and a play area with toys and books is available for younger visitors.

### ***Good practice***

Despite its location away from the booking in area for prison visits, the Visitor Centre is proving highly successful in attracting visitors seeking support or a comfortable place to wait for visits. There is also a high number of women and children visiting the Centre, both of whom are seen as the most vulnerable groups in respect of the needs of families of prisoners.

### ***Challenges and barriers to good practice***

One of the barriers to targeting families in need as a result of imprisonment of a family member in Perth Prison is the fact that the Centre is not required for the booking in of visitors, as per Edinburgh Prison. A presence at the gate or better publicity in the visits room may therefore be beneficial to help publicise the services and support available.

### **Referrals**

Referrals come from family members themselves, from the Family Contact Development Officers (FCDOs) and from the prison Chaplain, the latter of whom refers some 30 per cent of all families.

### ***Good practice***

Numbers of referrals have increased year on year, with families presenting mainly with emotional, practical and financial concerns. The fact that the Chaplain is a major source of referrals suggests that SPS recognises the need for independent support to prisoners' families which can be provided by Centre staff.

### ***Challenges and barriers to good practice***

Again, as noted above, families in need of practical or emotional support during a family member's incarceration may not necessarily know about the Centre or are not referred by the Chaplain (who is the only major source of referrals outwith the Centre).

### **Prison liaison**

The Centre is situated in the prison grounds and SPS pays the phone bill for the Centre (which can be high given the emphasis on telephone contact between Centre staff and family members), as well as other utilities. If staff cover allows it, the Centre Manager would like to contribute towards prisoner and staff induction programmes, and although SPS is agreeable in principle to this, such input has yet to be negotiated. Quarterly steering group meetings take place as detailed in the Service Level Agreement with SPS staff, chaplaincy, Families Outside and church representatives where the work of the project is discussed.

### ***Good practice***

SPS acknowledges the valuable role that the Centre plays in supporting visitors, not least in providing the building, paying for the Centre's utility bills and including an information leaflet about Crossreach in its visitor packs. The Visitor Centre at Perth was reviewed by SPS staff at the private request of the Governor in July 2008, to ascertain the extent to which it would fit with the planned new visits hall and with the FCDO role. This review concluded that it would fit, and indeed was a 'positive asset'. Plans for the new visits facility in the prison do not incorporate a Visitor Centre as such, although the authors of the SPS review of the Centre recommended that consideration be given to including the Crossreach Centre in the new visits complex. The proposal by SPS to redefine the FCDO role and the recent presence at all visits of

a Children and Families officer at Perth Prison may improve collaboration and communication between prison staff and the Centre.

### ***Challenges and barriers to good practice***

There tends to be little liaison currently between Crossreach and senior management, (although strong ongoing support has been received from several key members of SPS staff), or between Crossreach and the FCDOs and Children and Families officers at Perth Prison, the latter mainly due to the limited hours available to these prison staff. Equally, there is currently little contact between the Centre staff and prisoners (for induction or programme work, for example).

### **Inter-agency working**

No outside agencies currently use the Visitor Centre, except Women's Aid. The Centre Manager gives talks to outside agencies about the Centre, but this is mainly to raise awareness of the Centre as a source of referrals rather than to encourage such agencies to have a presence within the Centre. Agencies to which Crossreach refers visitors include Women's Aid, Phoenix Futures (which runs drug and alcohol treatment services within prisons), Citizens Advice Bureau, Tayside Families Support service (also based in the Centre part-time) and Rape Crisis.

### ***Good practice***

The Centre Manager is developing closer links with outside agencies, thus raising awareness of the Centre with agencies working with families. The signposting service that the Centre provides to visitors is a fundamental part of its remit and there is close liaison with agencies to this end. The Citizens' Advice Bureau is planning to hold a monthly surgery within the Centre in 2009.

### ***Challenges and barriers to good practice***

There is limited space and privacy within the Centre for agencies to run 'surgeries'. Plans to involve agencies such as Relationships Scotland and Fairplay within the Centre for joint work between prisoners and families are limited by security issues and local prison policy on voluntary sector involvement, although Crossreach is hoping to secure funding for Fairplay to work with families within the Centre in the near future.

## **SALVATION ARMY, EDINBURGH PRISON VISITORS' CENTRE**

### **FUNDING**

The Salvation Army received a donation of £10,000 per year from The Robertson Trust towards the costs of a Development Worker from 2007 – 2010. The Gannochy Trust also contributes to the funding of this post. The SPS funds the Centre itself and Lothian and Borders Community Justice Authority funds a Family Support Worker employed by Families Outside, who is based in the Centre to support prisoners' families in the community.

### **OVERVIEW**

#### **Remit**

The Development Worker's role is to develop and manage a programme of support to families in addition to improving access to information for visitors to the Centre, and building links with outside agencies for families of prisoners, either in the Centre or in the community. The Development Worker liaises closely with the Family Support Worker who offers direct support to families visiting relatives in Edinburgh Prison, who are seeking information or support on, for example, prison regimes, prisoner welfare, financial concerns and court or Children's Hearings procedures. The Development Worker tends to work from 9.00 – 5.00 Monday to Friday, with occasional evening and weekend cover, although these hours are currently under review.

The Centre also has a staffing compliment of 2 full-time and 3 part-time (non-SPS) staff to book in visitors to prison visits, to provide informal support, and to run a café.

#### ***Good practice***

The findings from previous evaluations suggested that the Centre was well received by visitors with 86 per cent using the café and 68 per cent using the lockers. The play area was used by 24 per cent of visitors, which is consistent with the fact that over a fifth of visitors to the Centre are children. The use of the Centre as an information resource (regarding the prison regime, transport schemes, welfare, etc.) has risen

dramatically since 2006, with 16 per cent of visitors to the Centre suggesting they would access information in the Centre in 2006, rising to 82 per cent in 2008 (Loucks, Nugent, and Stalker 2009). Since October 2008, the Family Support Worker has given support to 38 families, half seeking information during visits and the other self-referring or being referred by the Development Worker for longer-term intervention.

Staff were seen as friendly, approachable and helpful and the Centre overall was somewhere where visitors could relax either before or after what can often be a traumatising process (the visits themselves may be upsetting, but equally the process of booking in, being searched, waiting within the prison to be called and being monitored within the visits hall can be equally difficult to handle for many visitors).

### ***Challenges and barriers to good practice***

The Development Worker's role is primarily to liaise with SPS and outside agencies that may be able to support prisoners' families in their communities. A balance needs to be struck therefore between supporting families to engage with services in their own communities and also making best use of the Visitors' Centre as a focal point for prisoners' families.

The Visitors' Centre is currently under-utilised in the mornings, and it may therefore be beneficial to change opening hours to fit more with prison visits, along the lines of the opening hours at the Crossreach Visitor Centre in Perth Prison. This would not necessarily impinge on the Development Worker's ability to liaise with agencies during office hours, and may enable greater liaison between herself, the Family Support Worker, SPS, agencies and families of prisoners.

### **Target group**

The target group for the Development Worker is agencies who can support families in the community. These include the Community Links Centre (a voluntary service for prisoners and ex-prisoners), the Legal Aid Board, NHS Lothian (a healthcare project for prison leavers and their families) Caledonia Youth (a sexual health service for under 25 year olds) and Clan (a literacy and numeracy project). A further target group for the Development Worker is prisoners' families through, for example, facilitating self-help or peer support groups.



### ***Good practice***

The Development Worker has been successful in liaising directly with prison staff at all levels and working closely with some 20 agencies, both local and national, in the community (see Inter-agency working below). Many of these agencies may not have considered the families of prisoners as a priority without the links made via the Development Worker. Having a dedicated building for visitors also means that agencies can access prisoners' families more easily.

### ***Challenges and barriers to good practice***

One of the barriers to engaging with agencies is the fact that the Visitors' Centre and prisoners' families are the focal point, and agencies may not have the time or the staff to hold surgeries during visiting times. As the Development Worker tends to work office hours, because of her remit to liaise with external agencies, she is less likely to come into contact with families of convicted prisoners when she is in the Centre, as their visits are in the evening. She does liaise, however, with families of convicted prisoners through family induction, bonding visits and evening visits, when available.

### **Referrals**

The Development Worker is proactive in referring visitors to the Family Support Worker and the FCDOs, either directly from the Visitors' Centre or through information gleaned from external agencies. The Family Support Worker receives self-referrals as well as referrals from local authorities, health professionals and Families Outside, the latter of which runs a helpline for prisoners' families.

### ***Good practice***

Having a visitor centre in the grounds of a prison is an obvious point for contact with prisoners' families. This Centre is potentially able to support a large number of visitors to Edinburgh Prison as a result of the booking-in facilities for visits being housed in the Centre. The Centre is the only purpose-built centre of its kind in Scotland, and is also the only visitor centre in Scotland to take on this role of booking in visitors – with some 60,000 adult visits and 15,000 child visits annually.

### ***Challenges and barriers to good practice***

As mentioned above, several agencies that the Development Worker liaises with are unable to provide support to families within the Centre, but require onward referral to their community-based projects. This lack of an immediate presence within the Centre may discourage some families from seeking referral to outside agencies, although this cannot be ascertained without further research. Although 68 per cent of visitors said that in theory they would approach outside agency staff if they were located in the Centre (Loucks *et al.* 2009), such approaches are dependent on the ability of agency staff to engage with visitors.

In terms of monitoring visitors to the Centre, there is currently no system in place other than the need (when time allows) for booking-in staff to tick off visitors as they come in. This mainly captures the numbers of adults and children coming through – rather than using – the Centre, and may be an underestimate if staff are not able, or do not understand the need, to record details in every case. Although the Development Worker and Family Support Worker hold records of every individual worked with, it is difficult to compare the numbers seeking additional support with the overall number of visits to the Centre.

### **Prison liaison**

The Development Worker currently contributes to family induction, with input from a family member and as of mid-2009 will contribute to prisoner induction in order to inform new prisoners of the service that the Centre can offer to their families and friends.

### ***Good practice***

SPS managers at Edinburgh Prison have been very supportive of the Centre, not least because of its role in booking in visitors (which frees up space and staff within the prison itself) and are looking at ways of increasing financial support to the booking-in and café staff. The Development Worker has been successful in negotiating input to prisoner and family induction programmes which will raise the profile of the Centre generally and of the Family Support Worker in particular. SPS pays for the printing of an information booklet for visitors, which augments the family induction programme.

The Development Worker also enables closer liaison between visitors and prison staff regarding the progress and welfare of prisoners which is seen as an important aspect for visitors and prison staff alike. She is also represented on both the Lothian and Borders Community Justice Authority's Family Group and the Edinburgh Prison Children and Families Strategy Group, the only project of the four to be represented on such local prison strategy groups.

### ***Challenges and barriers to good practice***

Prison staff may see the Development Worker post as 'added value', as they do not necessarily see it as integral to the philosophy and operation of the prison. One suggestion to improve relationships with SPS staff would be to ensure that joint sessions between prison officers and Centre staff are held regularly to enable a greater understanding of each agency's role, ethos and requirements. This has taken place in the past but has proved difficult to maintain over time.

### **Inter-agency working**

The Development Worker has worked in partnership with relevant agencies in the community, some of which attend the Centre on a regular basis to speak to families or to run surgeries. The dedicated FCDOs also run a surgery from the Visitors' Centre twice weekly in the afternoons.

The Development Worker has been highly successful in initiating a Family Support Group, including families and agencies. A family member from the Centre's Family Support Group, which was set up by the Development Worker, is also present at the HMP Edinburgh Children and Families Strategy Group, on the Lothian & Borders Community Justice Authority Families Group and during family induction sessions.

### ***Good practice***

The Development Worker has established good working relationships with a range of agencies covering health (mental, physical, sexual health and relationships), housing, prisoners' families, employment, legal aid, debt management, childcare and education. These links have resulted in agencies offering input within the Centre, or enabling Visitors' Centre staff to signpost families to the most appropriate resource in the community. Many of these agencies display information and posters within the

Centre for the benefit of visitors, or hold one-off events. The Centre's ability, in collaboration with other agencies, to offer information and signposting to visitors is thus one of its strengths.

***Challenges and barriers to good practice***

Although the Centre works with some 20 outside agencies, this tends to be within office hours, thus restricting the capacity for agencies to reach families who visit in the evenings. Whilst some agencies will attend the Centre in the evenings, others can only attend for afternoon visits, although the Development Worker offers all agency staff an introduction to the Centre at a time when it is fully functioning. Centre staff also suggest there may be a reluctance on the part of visitors to approach outside agency representatives within the Centre, possibly because of the lack of privacy, a lack of engagement or understanding by agency staff, and the potential stigma attached to approaching, for example, a debt counsellor, a literacy and numeracy support worker or a Legal Aid Board representative.

## **HOPE, BARLINNIE PRISON**

### **FUNDING**

HOPE has received £247,000 since 2005 from The Robertson Trust for two part-time (25 hours per week) posts: a Family and Addiction Coordinator and a support worker, to support families primarily affected by imprisonment but also by addictions of imprisoned family members. This funding from The Robertson Trust is secure until September 2010.

### **OVERVIEW**

#### **Remit**

The main intervention of HOPE is support to families in the community, most of whom are accessed via project staff either at the gate during visiting times, or through approximately 5 courses per year which are run by SPS addictions staff for prisoners and to which HOPE give input. This input is provided for two hours every week of the course to offer parenting and relationship support to the group participants. The intention is that these participants will refer their families to the Project, since families are the priority for HOPE, rather than prisoners *per se*. Once they receive referrals for family support, HOPE staff will either meet those people prior to or following a visit to Barlinnie or offer telephone support.

Families of prisoners who are supported by HOPE within the community receive support on a range of issues of importance to them, including employment, drug use, housing, information, advocacy and childcare and on coping with the imprisonment of their relative. It also helps to build their self-esteem and provides a 'listening ear'.

#### ***Good practice***

The groupwork provided by HOPE is the only parenting input that prisoners in Barlinnie currently receive and is seen by SPS staff as 'excellent', both in terms of group work and follow-up work. The evaluations in 2006/2007 also suggested that the high quality and commitment of project staff was a major key to its success, and this has resulted in the staff gaining the confidence and respect of the SPS Addictions staff running the course.

According to the evaluations undertaken in 2006 and 2007, prisoners said they learnt much from the course which made them think about relationships and parenting issues in greater depth. They appreciated the informal support with housing and finance and enjoyed the relaxed atmosphere and style of the workers. Some also commented on the positive engagement of the prison officers during these sessions which helped to build bridges between prisoners and prison staff.

### ***Challenges and barriers to good practice***

The workers do not know the characteristics of the group participants before they start the course, which means that participants may come from all over Scotland and not necessarily need support in parenting and relationships. Rather than recruiting participants with children or relationship difficulties for a separate programme, it is expedient for the Project staff to offer their input ‘on the back of’ an addictions course already running.

Project staff perceive there to be a possible mistrust by families of discussing family concerns with project staff at the booking-in area although such initial engagement is crucial in offering ongoing support in the community.

### **Target group**

The main target group is the participants on the 5 addictions courses per year, which usually have around 10 participants. One worker also distributes leaflets about the project to visitors in the waiting room at the gate twice a week, which can generate some 30 per cent of overall referrals.

HOPE not only offers input to a prison-based programme within Scotland’s largest prison and support to those participants prior to and post release, but it also gives support to families within their communities. This dual role of targeting both families and prisoners is a viable means of engaging both parties with the issues for families, and especially children, faced by the imprisonment of a family member.

### ***Good practice***

The focus on contributing to a prison-based programme for prisoners has been effective in engaging not only with prisoners but with prison staff, and indeed prisoners themselves refer other family members to the project where deemed appropriate. Project staff have also been successful in engaging with, and maintaining contact with, families in the community.

### ***Challenges and barriers to good practice***

The groupwork within the prison is used as a vehicle for gaining family member referrals but also benefits families indirectly, through the training given to the prisoners. Such input to a small group of prisoners is not the ideal means of publicising what HOPE does, not least when perhaps only 2 participants out of 10 might refer their family for support. If the main target group is families, the time spent on groupwork with prisoners may not be cost-effective in reaching the right audience. However, that said, in addition to the indirect benefits for families, the groupwork does raise HOPE's profile with prison staff and prisoners, thus enabling a wider source of referrals to families.

Initially, the Project had a base in the waiting room at the prison gate but felt that the 'clinical' atmosphere, the fact that visitors could not carry a leaflet with them to the visits hall and the lack of engagement of visitors who were otherwise distracted by the impending visit, all conspired against them engaging effectively with potential clients and this arrangement was stopped. However, HOPE staff do distribute leaflets to visitors at the end of visits.

### **Referrals**

Seventy per cent of HOPE's referrals in 2006 were from prisoners but they also received self-referrals (24% in 2006) and referrals from outside agencies (6% in 2006). Recent figures for 2008-09 suggest a shift in the source of referrals, with 18 per cent referred by either a prisoner or a member of his family, 74 per cent self-referring and 8 per cent being referred from outside agencies. Thirty-eight percent of family referrals came from the gate, whether from project staff or from prison visits staff informing families about the service.

### ***Good practice***

In the first course delivered in 2009, 4 of the nine participants referred their mother or partner to HOPE for support. This was a significant increase in the previous year where none of the participants actively referred a family member to the project. Referrals also came from families who had accessed HOPE's website, as well as from leaflets and outside agencies.

### ***Challenges and barriers to good practice***

Although the source of referrals seem to fluctuate year on year, especially from prisoners and outside agencies, the Project acknowledges that it needs to publicise its services more effectively and more widely than through an addictions course in prison.

Although HOPE workers receive feedback from group participants, and record the type of support offered to clients, they also need a more rigorous monitoring and evaluation tool which better reflects the type and source of referrals to prisoners and families both within and outwith the prison environment. Guidelines issued by Action for Prisoners' Families (2007) offer an effective evaluation tool for such work.

### ***Prison liaison***

Barlinnie Prison staff have been very positive about the parenting and relationship input that HOPE provides and are obviously increasingly family-focused, not least in the excellent work of their Children and Families Group, the close liaison between FCDOs and the project, and the prison's recent desire to develop a visitor centre within its own grounds. Prison staff also allow project staff to re-visit ex-participants on a course to follow up on support needs, which allows for continuity throughout the prisoner's sentence.

### ***Good practice***

The fact that HOPE has negotiated input into a prison-based and prison-run addictions course demonstrates both its good reputation with the prison and the prison staff's recognition of the value of independent input into parenting and relationship support for prisoners. The Governor or Deputy Governor also attends an end-of-course



Awards Ceremony for course participants, to which project staff and families are also invited.

### ***Challenges and barriers to good practice***

HOPE's aspirations to expand its services to include families in groupwork with prisoners are restricted by SPS programme availability, access to a suitable venue and issues of security. Project staff are also restricted in their scope to provide other prison-based programmes, because of the presence of other agencies doing similar work (such as Relationships Scotland), although SPS has invited HOPE project staff to speak to other such course participants about the services HOPE can provide to prisoners and their families.

### **Inter-agency working**

In 2008-09, over 20 per cent of clients referred to HOPE were subsequently referred on to other agencies. HOPE also received some 8 per cent of its referrals from outside agencies in the same period. The Project has the details of some 100 organisations with whom they have either been in touch to publicise their services or to make referrals on behalf of visitors or prisoners. These include employment, housing, health and advocacy organisations as well as other prisons and criminal justice agencies, both locally and nationally.

### ***Good practice***

The number and range of external agencies with which HOPE staff liaise is impressive and can only encourage greater inter-agency cooperation.

## **THE LIGHTHOUSE FOUNDATION, KILMARNOCK PRISON**

### **FUNDING**

The Robertson Trust has been funding The Lighthouse Foundation since 2005, to provide a family support project for visitors to the privately run Kilmarnock Prison, and has contributed £240,000 over five years. Serco, who runs the prison, has no financial input to the project.

### **OVERVIEW**

#### **Remit**

Lighthouse employs a full-time (35 hours per week) Support Worker based in the town centre and a part-time (32 hours per week) Family Advisor, who works with visitors in the prison Visits Centre<sup>2</sup>. The Family Advisor's main role is to advise prison visitors seeking support or to refer them on to the Lighthouse Support Worker in the community, although he also accompanies the Support Worker on home visits where appropriate. Within the Visits Centre, he also distributes magazines and leaflets and offers competitions and activities for children.

The remit of the project is to offer support to families of prisoners where drug or alcohol misuse is an issue for the family, although this is loosely defined. As well as offering face to face and telephone support to families during a family member's incarceration, the project staff will continue to work with the family, where requested, once the prisoner is released back into the community, although the latter support is usually, but not always, by telephone. Staff are also involved in prisoner induction, with 631 prisoners being given a presentation about the services offered by The Lighthouse Foundation project staff in 2008-09. During this period there were 47 referrals made to the project and 74 clients were registered on their database.

#### ***Good practice***

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<sup>2</sup> This is not a visitor centre as exemplified by those at Edinburgh and Perth prisons, but a portacabin sited on the other side of the road to the entrances to the prison, and manned by prison staff for the booking in of visitors.

Staff from the Lighthouse Foundation were seen to have a good rapport with visitors who engaged with them, with the vast majority of clients seeking help with relationships and prison regimes. Whilst project staff offer day to day practical and emotional support to visitors whilst someone is incarcerated, a high number of visitors (notably family members) seek practical support, *in anticipation of* the prisoner's release, in relation to housing, employment, relapse prevention and financial concerns. Lighthouse also has the capacity to offer a service to prisoners and their families *on release*, thus providing continuity for families between the period of imprisonment and reintegration into the community.

Having a member of staff based in the Visits Centre and one in the community is a highly productive and collaborative means of engaging with prisoners' families, not least when the Family Advisor can refer visitors to the community-based project, as well as support them before and after visits to the prison.

The fact that Lighthouse staff are involved in prisoner induction is also an effective means of publicising their work with prisoners, who may then refer family members for ongoing support during and beyond the period of their family member's incarceration. Such input also enables project staff to be known by, and gain the confidence of prisoners, prior to engaging with the family on any matters relating directly to the prisoner.

### ***Challenges and barriers to good practice***

Whilst the project emphasises its work with families experiencing problems as a result of drug misuse in its publicity, this was not a presenting problem for clients, suggesting that such an emphasis may be misplaced. The 2006 evaluation of the project suggested that visitors were confident in the ability of other drug-related services to address prisoners' substance misuse whilst in prison, and preferred to seek broader support from Lighthouse staff.

It was felt by project staff that visitors easily disengage from Lighthouse support; they may move away or just feel that they no longer need support. Despite this feeling, some 50% of visitors were still registered with the project after 2 years. Project staff highlighted that they needed the full cooperation and trust of the prisoner himself to

work in the best interests of his family (thereby emphasising the need to contribute to prisoner induction), but also stressed that prison *staff* induction is also crucial in terms of sustaining good family relationships.

### **Target group**

As mentioned above, although the target group for this project is prisoners' families where drug or alcohol misuse is an issue, and although some 80 per cent of prisoners in Kilmarnock have been involved in drug or alcohol related offending, drug misuse was not the presenting issue for any of the project's clients in 2008-09. The main presenting problems for the majority of families referred are relationship issues and enquiries or concerns about the prison regime/rules – the latter of which constitutes nearly half of all issues that Lighthouse staff deal with. Although prison staff should arguably be able to help with such concerns from visitors, they are perceived by many visitors as being authoritative, and such visitors would prefer to ask the Lighthouse staff to mediate on their behalf.

### ***Good practice***

Giving presentations to over 600 newly incarcerated prisoners in one year is an effective way of publicising the project's work with prisoners, although the extent to which such information is passed on from prisoners to their families cannot be easily gauged unless projects ask on referral how families originally heard about the project.

### ***Challenges and barriers to good practice***

Lighthouse staff currently are unable to contribute to staff induction courses, which is deemed essential in raising awareness of the project within the prison staff team and breaking down any barriers to collaboration with the voluntary sector. Prisoner induction input is also limited in its ability to reach families of prisoners, which is arguably more effectively done through speaking to families directly in the Visits Centre (see Referrals below) or through family induction.

A further barrier to supporting visitors to the prison is the fact that the Family Advisor has neither the capacity nor the privacy, within the confines of the Visits Centre before and after visits, to engage meaningfully with visitors other than to refer them

on to the town centre-based Support Worker, who will contact that visitor if contact details are supplied.

### **Referrals**

The main source of referrals to Lighthouse are through the Family Advisor, with some 53% of families being accessed via the Visits Centre in 2008-09. Self referrals are the second most common source of accessing families, constituting 30 per cent of all referrals. Prisoners refer 8 per cent of family members, and other agencies 5 per cent. Prison staff refer 3 per cent of families and one per cent come from other Lighthouse staff.

### ***Good practice***

The Family Advisor is a key element in linking prisoners' families with the community-based support that Lighthouse can offer, whether such referrals are directly negotiated by the Family Advisor or subsequently by families themselves.

### ***Challenges and barriers to good practice***

Just under one per cent of all prisoners offered induction were known by the Project to have referred their families (although such information may have been passed on to families and recorded as a self-referral). It would seem, nevertheless, that the project is more dependent on referrals from the Visits Centre or from families directly than from prisoners. Because Lighthouse does not have a 'base' as such in the prison where they can have a more permanent presence for prisoners' families, the staff in the community are often reliant on referrals from the Family Advisor at the Visits Centre. However, he is only part-time and does not necessarily cover all visits within the prison timetable, namely evening visits (from 5.30pm – 9.30pm) and weekend visits. Lighthouse thus needs a sustainable bank of volunteers to work in the Visits Centre, thereby increasing the number of visiting times they can cover.

### **Prison liaison**

Prison liaison tends to be confined to negotiations with the Deputy Director, Operations, with little contact at other management levels. The Family Advisor works closely with prison officers at the Visits Centre and will liaise with other prison staff on behalf of families who cannot attend prison visits themselves. Although project

staff were under the impression that FCDOs had been withdrawn from the prison because of their inability to effectively address wider family matters, the Serco representative stated that they did in fact still exist, and were trained to deal with family issues.

### ***Good practice***

Discussions with the Serco representative in the prison suggested that the input from Lighthouse was integral to the work of the prison and its policy initiatives relating to families/visitors. There are good relationships established with the visits staff, even though new prison staff have no induction input from Lighthouse.

Negotiations are currently underway in respect of developing a Service Level Agreement between Serco and The Lighthouse Foundation which should lead to a clearer understanding of their respective roles. This should help stabilise the Project and develop closer working relationships between Project staff, prison staff and prisoners alike, and such an agreement is preferable to the alternative suggested by the prison - direct line management of Lighthouse staff by Serco – which would undermine the independence of the service provided by Lighthouse and would also be inappropriate due to Serco's lack of financial input into the service.

### ***Challenges and barriers to good practice***

Lighthouse currently has no written contract with Serco and limited scope for negotiation and communication with senior management. This has made it difficult for project staff to work effectively with prison managers and officers to provide an independent service to prisoners' families. Although Serco pays the costs of printing the leaflets that Lighthouse has designed for visitors as well as associated administrative input, no other funding is forthcoming at present.

### **Inter-agency working**

The project staff are in touch with some 16 agencies in the community, and will refer clients on to more appropriate agencies where required. They also have the capacity to liaise with other agencies in order to arrange holidays for families as a means of respite, and have a caravan on the west coast for such purposes.

### ***Good practice***

Inter-agency working and advocacy are important aspects of the community-based worker's role and she is currently able to refer clients to agencies dealing with, for example, family, caring, transport, resettlement and legal issues. Project staff also liaise with Scottish Court Services on behalf of families and with other prisons in Scotland where families seek support or information following the transfer of a prisoner to another establishment.

### ***Challenges and barriers to good practice***

Because the Support Worker is giving face-to-face and telephone support to families, her role to liaise and develop links with outside agencies is limited by time and resource constraints. Nevertheless, without a physical base within the prison, along the lines of the Edinburgh or Perth Prison visitor centres, it is difficult to make constructive links with outside agencies for the purposes of supporting prisoners' families.

## **CHAPTER THREE: EMERGING THEMES**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Five themes have emerged from this assessment which are common to most, if not all, of the projects and which can either enhance or hinder good practice in working with prisoners' families. These are discussed below under the following headings: location, flexibility, the perception of prison staff, the perception of visitors and inter-agency working.

### **LOCATION**

The main aim of each project is to access visitors through the auspices of a named prison and then to work with those visitors (mainly families and children of prisoners) who request support or information. There are important differences though as the Edinburgh Prison Visitors' Centre and Kilmarnock Prison Visits Centre are where visitors must book in for visits, thus making identifying and accessing visitors much easier. The independence, ambience, information and support offered within centres such as those at Edinburgh and Perth prisons are important factors in visitor engagement. HOPE, however, is partly dependent on offering groupwork to prisoners in order to access families, since it has no official base within the prison grounds.

### **FLEXIBILITY**

#### ***Office hours***

The flexibility of office hours kept by project staff is a deciding factor in how effectively they can work with families. The development worker at Edinburgh Visitors' Centre is primarily concerned to access external agencies and hence works mainly during office hours, and Lighthouse staff can no longer cover evening visiting times at Kilmarnock Prison because of staff shortages and Crossreach has chosen to adapt its workers' office hours to coincide with the most popular prison visiting times at Perth Prison.



### ***Telephone support***

The telephone service offered by several projects, including Lighthouse, HOPE and Crossreach, which use telephone contact to augment limited community-based support staff, is a very cost-effective and coordinated means of keeping in touch with prison visitors who need either immediate information or ongoing support.

### ***Work with prisoners as well as families***

For projects to be able to work with prisoners as well as with families in the community is an effective means of not only accessing families in need but also highlighting to prisoners themselves the issues that their incarceration may have on their families. HOPE is well placed in this respect to not only contribute to a prison-based course but also to work with visitors accessed at the gate. The Edinburgh Prison Visitors' Centre and Lighthouse staff are also involved in prisoner induction which gives them the flexibility to access both prisoners and families. Whilst Crossreach is negotiating with SPS regarding prisoner induction input, it currently has no official locus within the prison to work with prisoners.

### ***Resettlement and aftercare***

Whilst there is an increasing onus placed on families to help in the desistance and reintegration of ex-prisoners, these 4 projects all dealt with visitor anxiety about release arrangements and aftercare of the prisoner. Lighthouse, HOPE and Crossreach offer a post-release service, not only to families in general but also to released prisoners themselves, although in the case of Crossreach, this support can only feasibly be offered by telephone or via referral to the Family Support Worker. Such resettlement and aftercare support is seen as crucial in reducing reoffending and encouraging desistance, and it is perhaps more relevant that those workers who have known the family or prisoner in prison should offer that continuity from prison back into the community, a role that prison staff cannot adopt. There was scepticism by project staff that families would (or should) themselves seek support from community-based agencies (where these exist), not least if such agencies are not known to, or trusted by, those families. The flexibility of the remit of these projects can thus enable continuity and consistency of support and advocacy for those families of released prisoners who do require this level of additional support.

## **THE PERCEPTIONS OF PRISON STAFF**

All 4 projects suggested that they had good working relationships with a number of prison officers who could facilitate access to potential clients through circulating publicity, recruiting groupwork participants, informing prisoners and visitors alike about the project, and acting as a 'go-between' for project staff wishing to liaise with prisoners and vice versa. Such good relationships are encouraging and reflect not only the importance in prison officers' eyes of sustaining prisoner/family relationships but also the tenacity and communication skills of project staff in their dealings with gate staff, hall staff, chaplains and FCDOs in particular.

Several projects suggested that liaison with middle management and above was often challenging. The new minimum standards for services to children and families drafted by SPS acknowledge that prisons cannot deliver to families in isolation and that there are some areas where take up of services by families could be improved if the service provider is seen to be independent of the prison. This argument also applies to those families who are reluctant to engage with Social Work in the community, so voluntary sector providers would be critical here too. Once prisoners return home, it is perhaps unlikely that their families would continue to seek support in a prison or even a Visitors' Centre. By supporting families to make links with services near home at the earliest opportunity, they can be helped to develop a network of support that will continue post-release, and therefore establishing links with senior staff in community-based agencies is as vital as links with prison based staff.

## **THE PERCEPTIONS OF VISITORS**

### ***The limitations of visiting times***

The ability to meaningfully and proactively engage with a visitor during the narrow window of opportunity prior to or following a prison visit and to offer confidential and non-stigmatising support to vulnerable people in a very public place such as a prison visitor waiting area, can challenge the most professional of staff. However, experience suggests that independent service providers such as these 4 projects are best placed to offer such support at times when prison staff are otherwise employed in the processing of visitors at visit times.

### ***Confidentiality issues***

It is also felt by the voluntary sector that visitors can be wary of confiding in uniformed or prison-paid staff who they find difficult to engage with. However, it is acknowledged that visitors will always perceive some staff (however dressed or paid) as more approachable than others. Indeed, Loucks (2002) found that visitors are more likely to approach uniformed staff in visitor centres, for example, if they have a regime-related enquiry, but less likely to approach uniformed staff for more personal support. Visitors can also be wary of confiding in other support staff *within* the prison walls about prisoner issues, however independent those staff are of the prison regime.

### **INTER-AGENCY WORKING**

Projects which had access to a designated building within the prison grounds (namely Edinburgh and Perth visitor centres), are better able to display outside agency information for visitors. Visitor centres can also provide a base for surgeries held by external agencies, but surgeries proved less effective, however, in engaging visitors' attention, partly perhaps because of the perceived stigma attached to approaching a named agency within a public space, irrespective of whether that agency was from the statutory or voluntary sector, and partly because such agencies may not consider it cost-effective to have a member of their staff available 'on the off chance' of being approached by visitors for information.

## **CHAPTER FOUR: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE ACTION**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Prison providers do not have a role in giving proactive support to families of prisoners within their own communities, and indeed, statutory services more generally within the Criminal Justice system have no official locus or funding to work with prisoners' families. This makes the task of projects such as those highlighted in this report all the more difficult in terms of statutory recognition, credibility and funding. The Robertson Trust in this respect has filled a gap in supporting these 4 projects, and this report highlights the difficulties that can arise in working not only with a vulnerable group of families within the community who have been affected by imprisonment of a family member but also the difficulties faced by voluntary sector projects in collaborating with their statutory sector partners.

However, the report concentrates on the relationship with prison establishments rather than with community-based statutory services, since it is argued here that prisons are the most obvious point of access to vulnerable families. Prisons exist first and foremost to confine and rehabilitate another vulnerable group, namely prisoners. How these two organisational aims (of projects and prisons) compete with or complement each other are played out in various ways, and this concluding chapter attempts to summarise the issues in terms of targeting prisoners' families, the role of the projects in prisons, prison policy in relation to families and the financial sustainability of projects working with prisoners' families.

### **TARGETING PRISONERS' FAMILIES**

Targeting prisoners' families is a moveable feast, not least because prisoners themselves come and go, their length of stay in any one prison determined as much by their status as remand or convicted prisoners as by the seriousness or persistence of their alleged offending. Prison capacity is also a defining feature in whether prisoners are transferred between prisons, often at short notice and invariably without prior notification to their families.

### ***Visitor centres***

It is easiest to make contact with families at the point of entry to the prison, ideally within a visitor centre, whether designed for booking in purposes or for convenience prior to a visit. Such facilities are undoubtedly the most conducive location for offering support and information to families of prisoners in comfortable and neutral surroundings. The most effective visitor centres are arguably those sited on 'neutral territory', albeit within the grounds of a prison, which can complement prison policy on visitors and families and work collaboratively with prison staff at all levels.

Prisoners' families are considered to be a vulnerable group, with particularly intense needs during times of incarceration of a family member, and for staff to be able to address those specific 'custody-generated' needs as well as wider needs of families in their communities is one of the key strengths of visitors' centres such as at Edinburgh Prison. Requiring visitors to book into the Edinburgh Prison Visitors' Centre prior to visits has raised its profile as an additional support mechanism not only with visitors but also with prison staff. However, it is equally evident that a visitor centre as such should be seen by visitors, prisoners and prison staff as also providing an independent and neutral service for support and information that is situated in both a confidential, neutral and relaxing environment.

### ***Working with prisoners to access families***

Directly accessing prisoners' families is difficult when a visitor centre is not available, and one way around this is to focus on prisoners as well as on visitors as a means of targeting families. Prisoner induction seems to be a viable and crucial source of referrals to families, not least because families themselves may be unwilling to confide in a project (whether about their own or their imprisoned family member's concerns) without the expressed permission of the prisoner. Contributing to induction programmes (not only for prisoners but also for families) is equally effective in gaining recognition by prison management and targeting families in need, although such input at the start of a prison sentence can also usefully be reinforced by group work programmes for prisoners.

## **THE ROLE OF PROJECTS IN PRISONS**

Vulnerable groups, not least families of prisoners, have often experienced stigma, marginalisation and discrimination by the general public and are often unwilling to seek support from statutory agencies whose primary role is perceived to be a controlling one. It is often suggested by voluntary sector workers in particular, and is backed up by research evidence, that prisoners and their families are less trusting, less open and less willing to voice their concerns to ‘agents of the state’, such as prison officers, social workers, benefits staff, etc. Part of the inherent value of voluntary organisations is that they tend to be seen as independent in the eyes of vulnerable groups, a ‘buffer’ between vulnerability and authority. Such a mediating role is therefore crucial in terms of its advocacy potential for individuals in trouble, and (also backed up by research evidence) its ‘diffusion’ potential for statutory agencies who ideally need the compliance, if not the cooperation of individuals within their ‘care’. These projects often act as a mediator between prisoners, visitors and prison staff, by voicing the concerns of and reassuring prisoners and prison visitors, arguably to the added benefit of prison management.

Whilst these 4 projects have a primary aim to work with families, a significant element of their work is thus also directly or indirectly beneficial to prisoners and to the smooth running of the prison. However, prison managers have the capacity to restrict or block initiatives proposed by community-based or voluntary organisations, and it seemed often to be an uphill battle for such projects to establish a foothold, however tenuous, within the prison system. Given that these 4 projects undertake at least some of their work within the prison grounds, whether with visitors or prisoners, it would seem expedient, if not fruitful, for SPS and other prison providers to collaborate with such projects in pursuit of common goals such as prisoner compliance, reduced offending and family reintegration. SPS is already developing a family induction programme which will involve projects such as these, alongside prisoner induction programmes. It is acknowledged, however, that there are quality and monitoring issues for SPS when working with outside partners in addition to the need to co-ordinate the number and type of voluntary sector interventions which are available to both prisoners and their families. Indeed, The Robertson Trust is currently collaborating with SPS, the Lothian and Borders Community Justice Authority and

the Criminal Justice Voluntary Sector Forum on improving relationships between the statutory commissioners of services and voluntary sector providers.

## **PRISON POLICY ON FAMILIES**

Whilst prisons in the past have tended to focus on the secure confinement and containment of remand and convicted individuals, leaving resettlement and future desistance to outside agencies within the Criminal Justice system and beyond, their role has now shifted to focus more on reducing reoffending, encouraging desistance, education, family reintegration and prisoner aftercare. They aim to do this in house, with the active cooperation of voluntary sector and other community partners as well as families where at all possible.

Whilst it is beyond the scope of this report to comment on the policies of privately run prisons, the recent SPS draft standards for Families and Children which have involved a broad range of partners including families themselves, make the following recommendations for supporting prisoners' families:

- that visitors are offered signposting to relevant community-based services by qualified and informed personnel;
- that there are comfortable surroundings for visitors, and age appropriate activities and play areas for younger people, in both the waiting rooms and the visit halls;
- that prisons have an identifiable Family Contact Service to support prisoners and their families; and
- that SPS develop closer relationships with voluntary sector partners and other agencies in the community to support the delivery of services to families, with such outside agencies being represented on key working groups within prisons.

These are recommendations which have been welcomed by the projects featured in this report but which may take years to implement across the prison estate, as the

culture of prisons also needs to change to welcome the involvement of families and provide them with support.

Arguments made by SPS for wishing to improve their own services to children and families, rather than outsourcing such services, include financial constraints which restrict the building of new visitors' centres<sup>3</sup> and the desire to consolidate positive and ideally non-mediated relationships between SPS staff and prison visitors. SPS has stated that it wishes to contribute to maintaining appropriate family ties, erode barriers and encourage a cultural shift to benefit families, improve parenting and relationships, develop better visitor information, ensure families can access appropriate and professional guidance when they need it, develop a family-friendly focus in prison and improve visiting experiences for children and families. In addition, SPS has undertaken to signpost visitors to services in the community, since they live in the community and their imprisoned family member will return there on release. It is vital that SPS focuses not just on the needs of families as they relate to prisoner welfare, but also the equally pressing needs of the families themselves that result from the imprisonment of a family member, as the two cannot be easily separated. To this end, having project representation on all family strategy groups within SPS and the respective Community Justice Authorities (CJAs) would further demonstrate SPS and CJA commitment to prisoners' families and the voluntary agencies who work with them.

In the future, prison providers, together with CJAs, will increasingly wish to develop their own means of being 'family friendly'. It is to be hoped that this will be in conjunction with voluntary organisations to support the families of prisoners, whether within the prison grounds or in the community, and that strong partnerships will be developed recognising the strengths that the different partners have to offer. The future of these projects depends not only on the goodwill of prison management and Community Justice Authorities to engage proactively with external agencies supporting prisoners' families, but also on securing future funding, as discussed below.

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<sup>3</sup> This is arguably a moot point, as prison visitors' centres can be privately funded. Edinburgh Prison Visitors' Centre, for example, was built on SPS land but with funding from the Tudor Trust.



## **FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY**

None of the 4 projects had an effective monitoring system in place that could help them in terms of applying for future funding, ascertaining whether they were targeting the right people for the right reasons, and gauging the impact of their work on clients. Guidelines issued by Action for Prisoners Families (2007) suggest that recording and monitoring of information, interventions and outcomes are a key factor in promoting good practice and therefore achieving financial sustainability. All four projects would benefit from adopting a similar monitoring and evaluation strategy along the lines of the Action for Prisoners' Families evaluation guidelines (2007).

Whilst funding from private or voluntary sources is a crucial element in continuing the valuable work of voluntary organisations such as the 4 highlighted in this report, there should undoubtedly be a longer term financial commitment from the statutory sector (through Service Level Agreements) - in particular, central government, CJAs, local authorities, health boards and prison providers. Such a commitment would ensure support to prisoners' families and thereby promote desistance from crime, encourage compliance with prison regimes and enable continuity of care for families and prisoners on release. Currently none of the statutory agencies within the Criminal Justice system have an official remit to work with prisoners' families. The National Strategy for the Management of Offenders places the onus on CJAs to improve the lives of offenders' families and all 8 CJAs have given priority to this in their most recent Area Plans. CJAs are thus best placed to both fund and coordinate services for this particular group. It is also essential to have the goodwill and commitment of SPS and other prison providers as well as the co-operation of prison staff in individual establishments to further the needs of prisoners' families.

In conclusion, the current involvement of projects – and indeed visitors - in identifying and addressing issues of concern to visitors and prisoners alike, and negotiating where necessary with prison staff, is integral to furthering prison objectives to become more 'community facing' and family focused, objectives which are key to public protection and prisoner reintegration. Such work also exemplifies the need to identify prisoners' families as a specific group in need of specific services. There is sound research evidence not only that families are an important factor in the

compliance of current, and the desistance and resettlement of former, prisoners but also that they have specific needs as *families of prisoners* which require to be addressed *in their own right*.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **The voluntary sector:**

1. Voluntary sector providers supporting prisoners' families should collaborate with their colleagues in other similar projects so as to pool resources (staff, programme work, outreach, training and funding applications) more effectively and efficiently. Families Outside is the obvious choice of organisation to adopt the role of enabling such collaboration.
2. Outside agencies should offer 'cascade training' to the 4 projects on a regular basis in respect of the former's remit, role, referral criteria and publicity, in order to lessen the need for such agencies to attend visitor centres (where operational) or waiting rooms for 'surgeries'. Again, Families Outside could have a role in co-ordinating this, alongside local service providers.
3. The projects should adapt their opening hours to maximise access to families during visiting times.
4. The projects' strategies for recruiting, training and sustaining a pool of volunteers could be overseen and supported by the proposed new Families Outside Volunteer Coordinator.
5. All such projects should ensure that they have a comprehensive IT system and adopt a consistent means of monitoring the qualitative and quantitative aspects of their work, using the Action for Prisoners' Families evaluation tool, or similar. Families Outside should consider designing and implementing a Quality Standards Framework for all voluntary agencies working with families of prisoners to adhere to, and evidence, good practice. Prison providers and relevant

community services should also recognise the value of a common and consistent quality framework.

6. Projects should seek to develop local links with statutory agencies including CJAs, social work and health to improve knowledge of their services and to be in a position to attract statutory funding.
7. Projects should be more proactive in engaging with prison staff at all levels, but have the commitment and encouragement of prison management in order to work more collaboratively.

#### **Prison Providers and Statutory Authorities:**

8. Prison providers should acknowledge the inherent value of visitor centres in providing the independence, space, neutrality and ambience to engage with visitors in need of support or information.
9. Prison providers should recognise the value of the independence of the voluntary sector in supporting prisoners and families, in terms of resettlement and aftercare, thereby easing the transition from prison to the community.
10. Joint training and meetings between prison staff and project staff should be undertaken on a regular basis in order to better understand each organisation's ethos, operational parameters and expected outcomes.
11. Project staff should be able to contribute to prison staff induction, prisoner induction and family induction programmes on a regular basis and should sit on local and, where appropriate, national SPS and CJA family strategy groups.
12. Prison providers and social work should offer their trainee staff the opportunity to work on placement with project staff, to ensure a broader and more 'hands-on' understanding of the needs of prisoners' families.

13. Prison providers and the projects should ensure that promotional literature and other documentation of relevance to visitors and prisoners is conveyed in spoken as well as written form, not least for the benefit of those who have problems with literacy or for whom English is a second language.
14. Voluntary agencies offering support to prisoners' families should be attached to every prison in Scotland, to work collaboratively with prison providers in providing services to families of offenders.
15. The contact details of a named representative at the Headquarters of prison providers should be given to all project managers working with prisoners' families to enable any local prison difficulties relevant to the effective working of the projects to be resolved at a national level. The Offender Outcome Manager – Offender Relationships would be the most appropriate contact person within SPS.
16. CJAs should ensure that dedicated sustainable funding is provided through their partners to voluntary agencies within the community to work with prisoners' families.
17. Commitment and recognition should be given through Service Level Agreements to the valuable role the voluntary sector plays in supporting prisoners' families.

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