

Integrated Family Support Service

Evaluation report



June 2012



Maintaining family contact between a prisoner and their family reduces the likelihood of future offending and can aid a reduction in the level of anti-social behaviour of the children of prisoners. Prisoners who receive visits and have family support on release are far less likely to reoffend. In addition, many of the families affected by imprisonment are in need, delivering services to these 'troubled families', will improve outcomes for children.

The Integrated Family Support Service (IFSS) is a unique and complex project involving very different prison types across a large geographical area. It started in May 2011 with funding from the Department for Education (DfE) and the National Offender Management Service (NOMS). The project is being delivered by a partnership of two voluntary sector organisations, NEPACS in the North East of England, and pact in London, the South of England and Wales.

The IFSS provides a two pronged family support intervention: one in the prison and one in the community. In the community there are six Integrated Family Support Advocates (IFSAs - based in the London boroughs of Islington and Wandsworth, as well as Kent and the North East of England). In prisons there are eight Integrated Family Support Workers (IFSWs - in Belmarsh, Bristol, Deerbolt, Eastwood Park, Frankland, Low Newton, Maidstone and Wandsworth). In Wales there is an Integrated Family Support Coordinator based in Swansea prison, this is a role that combines the work of the community-based advocates and prison-based workers.

This interim report presents the emerging findings from across the service providing evidence of the impact of the work to date.

The Integrated Family Support Workers

The IFSWs work in different establishments across the country, including local category B prisons, women's prisons, high security prisons, a young offenders institution, and a category C training prison. The Workers provide a range of support, from one-off interventions and advice, to intensive case-work, family mediation and conferencing, to both prisoners and visitors, generally focussing on family contact. If a prisoner has lost contact with their children or parents, if they want to take a parenting course or receive

family visits; if a visitor is worried about the welfare of a prisoner, or needs some form of family help, the Workers will support them with these issues.

In 12 months, the Workers have had a considerable impact on the prisons and visitor centres where they work, on prisoners, their families and children. In total, 2700 people have received some level of support from the Integrated Family Support Service; approximately half are prisoners and half are family members.

Impacts of the IFSWs include:

- Reducing the risk of self-harm and suicide: by facilitating family ties, the IFSS reduces the likelihood of suicide and take practical steps to resolve the problems that contribute to self-harming behaviour. IFSWs are skilled individuals who are able to deliver potentially upsetting news clearly and sensitively, reducing the risk of harm that is normally heightened in such situations.
- Improving prisoner behaviour: IFSWs resolve issues and problems that have led to poor behaviour amongst prisoners and have reduced the number of adjudications. Prisoners across the Service reiterated this point, discussing how the IFSW they worked with operated as a calming influence on them, that problems that had previously been bottled up and allowed to fester, were now being talked about and resolved.
- IFSWs reinforce the learning process of prisoners who begin to understand the impact of their offending on their family and are therefore more likely to desist from crime in the future.
- IFSWs develop positive working relationships with prisoners in a way that uniformed staff responsible for locking them up cannot. IFSWs clarify situations to prisoners (even highly distressing ones) in a way that is sympathetic to the situation the prisoner is in.
- IFSWs contribute to the work that goes on in

prisons as part of the Children and Families pathway. IFSWs act as a catalyst for a renewed focus on the importance of work with children and families.

- The IFSWs provide additional support and help to the parenting courses that exist in the prison. IFSWs have been responsive to the needs of their individual establishments, adapting courses where possible. IFSWs have also been proactive in accessing additional services that meet the needs of the prison population in relation to parenting and family courses.

Improving prisoner behaviour

Ruben* found out about the family support service through the information put up around the house block he was in. Prior to prison he had lived in Portsmouth with his partner and children. Since imprisonment the relationship with his partner had broken down, and she had moved to London. He was having trouble contacting his children, who were known to Social Services and had expressed a wish to see their father. Ruben was becoming increasingly agitated about the lack of opportunity to see his children and prison staff were concerned that his behaviour was increasing the risk of a potentially violent interaction.

The IFSW contacted the social worker to discuss the possibility of prison visits. Both the social worker and the mother agreed that visits could take place, however, neither wished to facilitate them by bringing in the children to the prison themselves. The IFSW therefore worked with Ruben and the mother so that a mutual friend could be identified as someone to bring the children in. She then arranged for the friend, mother and social worker to meet for agreement to go ahead. The visit took place and went very well. There was an improvement in Ruben's relationship not only with the children but also with his ex-partner.

Improvements in his behaviour were noted by the house block staff who said that following contact he was significantly less agitated than he had been when visits were not happening. He went on to be a model prisoner, becoming a cleaner and getting Enhanced Status. There was ongoing contact with the children and no further concerns were raised about his anger.
*not real name.

- Added value is provided by IFSWs through seeking additional funding to develop courses that meet the requirements of the prison population more specifically.
- IFSWs have been integral to ensuring Family Days take place. They have supported, or in some instances taken full responsibility for, the planning and arrangement for the days. They have been creative in the way Family Days have been run, in terms of the types of activities that take place during the day, as well as what constitutes a 'family'.

- IFSWs provide first contact between family members some of whom are unaware that a person is in prison. Visitors report that IFSWs are the first contact that they have had with the prison, that they feel is sympathetic, responsive and helpful.
- IFSWs provide a range of information to visitors that is difficult to locate elsewhere thereby minimising concerns and problems about visits.
- IFSWs add value to prison visitor centres by improving the environment, providing more intensive work with visitors and working closely with centre managers.
- Working with prisoners and their families supports a more productive and healthy visit as stress is reduced on both sides.
- Prisoners concerned about their family members have a sense of relief that someone is supporting them.
- Through offering a service to the families of prisoners, the IFSS meets the aims of the 'Troubled Families' agenda, reducing the likelihood of intergenerational crime and anti-social behaviour, and ultimately leading to the successful resettlement of an offender.

Information about service user satisfaction indicated a very high level of service satisfaction; nearly 90 per cent of service users said that they were satisfied or very satisfied with the service that they had received.

Integrated Family Support Advocates

In the community, the Integrated Family Support Advocates are facilitating the development of a workstream that supports the children and families of offenders. They work with local authority agencies and partnerships, such as Integrated Offender Management units and Troubled Families groups. The objective of the work is to improve outcomes for children and families and to break the cycle of intergenerational crime. A foundation of this work is the Hidden Sentence training which is a training course for professionals who work with prisoners' families. It provides a range of strategies and resources to help support them and is the first step in raising awareness and developing a local service response to prisoners' and offenders' families.

Most of the Advocates' work involves networking, profile raising and policy development. For example, making sure there are local authority area policies and strategies about the need to support the children and families of offenders, or bringing key people together, such as senior Children's Services staff and Reducing Reoffending Coordinators to ensure services for offenders' families are integrated and targeted. There is also operational work. For example, supporting the development of user groups or ensuring information is available for visiting families that can direct them towards family support. Expanding the agencies carrying out Common Assessment Framework (CAFs) on families affected by imprisonment is also an area of work.

Raising awareness

Since the inception of the service over 400 people have attended the Hidden Sentence training. The Advocates have been particularly successful in raising awareness of the needs of the children and families of prisoners; this is the first step towards capacity building and service provision. 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"; "Quite a few changes that I will make to my work after today's training that will positively impact on children/parents with a family member in prison".

This interim evaluation has found that the policy and operational development carried out by the Advocates is having a direct impact on the services received by children and families affected by imprisonment. Raising awareness and increased access to services for children and families in the community ultimately results in better outcomes and less risk for both adults and children.

What is also noteworthy is that the work of the Advocates is making a hidden population visible to services. A consistent theme throughout much of the existing research on prisoners' families has been that local authority agencies do not know how many prisoners' families there were and where they lived; they were essentially a hidden population. This is echoed by others, for example, the Scottish Commissioner for Children and Young People, commented recently: 'The truth is we don't really know [how many]. The reason we don't know is we simply don't count them, and the reason we don't count them is because they are invisible' (Barnardo's, 2009: 3). By working with local agencies, bringing together children and adult services, increasing awareness by delivering Hidden Sentence training, the Advocates are making a hidden population increasingly seen.

Impacts of the IFSAs include:

- Policy work to facilitate greater inter-agency cooperation: for example, the Submission of a policy report to the Safe Durham Partnership's Think Family Operational Group and Reducing Reoffending Group.
- Ensuring the needs of children affected by imprisonment are recognised and met by piloting the use of the pre-CAF by Probation, Integrated Offender Management Service and prisons.
- Raising awareness of a hidden population by running training about the impact of imprisonment on families, both inside and outside prisons.
- Developing innovative responses about how to get more accurate data and ways of identifying prisoners and families in need, such as through peer support in prisons.
- Piloting a questionnaire that asks whether someone has children at the point of Police charge.
- Piloting a prison questionnaire where, on reception into prison (both remands and those receiving a custodial sentence) prisoners will be asked whether they have children, and, where consent is given, this information will be recorded and shared with Children's Services who will scope the services needed according to age profiles etc.
- Setting up multi-agency policy groups at a local level.
- Development of a Children and Families of Offenders Strategy and Action Plan that has sign up from the relevant parties in order to take the work forward and inform future commissioning.
- Undertaking local needs assessments and gap analyses against guidance.
- Development of offender management hubs to support pathways into Children and Families services.
 - Submitting consultation responses to local and central government on children and families of prisoners.
 - Acting as parenting lead in local forums.
 - Seeking additional funding sources to ensure that the needs of children and families of prisoners are more systematically met.



Prisoners on the parenting course at HMYOI Deerbolt pose for a picture

Conclusion

The Integrated Family Support Service is a groundbreaking initiative. Creating a community and prison response to the needs of children and families of offenders has never been attempted before. Already the results have been very encouraging; developing workstreams and providing for prisoners' family related needs.

In less than a year the IFSWs have offered a service to well over 2700 people, demonstrating a service focused on families is in great demand. IFSWs have been flexible in the way they work with prisoners and visitors and have provided support based on a range of needs that support the successful resettlement of prisoners, and help to curtail the intergenerational cycle of crime. The service has already led to a change in prison culture and attitudes. Prison staff in some establishments had been very sceptical about the work of the IFSWs at the beginning of the project. However as the project has matured, Prison Officers have witnessed the impact of the work and the number of referrals from Officers has increased considerably. The presence of an IFSW makes the job of the prison staff easier: prison staff lack the time to respond to prisoners' concerns relating to families, or it is outside of their remit. The interventions provided by the IFSWs result in less tension and a calmer and better behaved population. Whether this is due to a prisoner re-establishing contact with an estranged parent, increased contact between a parent and their child, or a mother finally knowing that the outcome of Care Proceedings has resulted in her child being adopted. The interventions result in either increased contact or the prisoner knowing and understanding about a decision. The latter, whilst it is often bad news, can allow closure and a moving on. This in turn leads to better Safer Custody and better prison outcomes - less self-harming and less violent incidents. A calmer prison population and prisoners who do not self-harm also benefits the work of the prison.



Practising nappy changing

For more information on the evaluators, Barefoot Research and Evaluation and University of Roehampton, see: www.barefootresearch.org.uk and www.roehampton.ac.uk

The Advocates in the community are bringing previously disparate agencies together to develop policies and coordinate service delivery to families affected by imprisonment. Action plans are being developed, user groups formed, publicity produced, CAFs implemented and staff are being trained about the effects of imprisonment. This all results in a more effective response to the needs of Troubled Families, many of whose family members end up in custody.

A recent New Economics Foundation economic assessment of the IFSS, paying particular attention to the work of the IFSWs, calculated that the service delivers a return of £11.41 for every £1 invested. The predominant source of this impact is in cost savings from reductions in reoffending due to IFSS work encouraging and supporting visits and the consequent maintenance of family ties. Potential social and health care savings related to prisoner's families were also identified, as well as cost avoidance based on resettlement-focused planning.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this interim report five recommendations have been made.

- The IFSS should be a national service
- Data collection protocols should be in place between the prison service and IFSS
- Family days should be made available to those without children and not related to Incentives and Earned Privileges
- Provision of casework supervision and training to IFSWs
- Consideration should be given regarding where Workers and Advocates are best located

All of these are expanded upon in the full evaluation report.

For more information

For more information about the project or to receive a copy of the full interim evaluation, contact:

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