



project news

January 2007

It's been a while...

Our last newsletter was some time ago. A lot has happened since then but much of the work has been around recruiting and establishing a project team, team building and building relationships with partners.

It has also been important to carry out preparatory work before actually delivering any of the project's interventions or services, including reviewing the ways things currently happen, the reasons why they happen and the methods used to measure how effectively they happen. It is only by doing this that we can attempt to ensure the project has the greatest chance of achieving long term impact in terms of sustainability.

We want children and families to be less reliant on short term funding and have equality of services irrespective of where they live or their family member is detained. Establishing an evidence base is critical if we are to make a strong case for sustainable support services for offenders and their families. Achieving this in what is a very complex and challenging environment is no mean feat and requires careful planning.

General project newsletters like this will be bi monthly from this issue onwards, so the next one will be early March. We will also publish additional newsletters from time to time giving more detail on specific areas of interest. We'll try to give advanced notice of these so partners can include relevant articles etc.

So, what's been happening?

Well, we have progressed work in a number of areas, turn the page to find out more.....

in this issue

- In prisons
- In the Community
- Research
- Parenting & Education
- News & Events

“Working together to improve outcomes for offenders and their families”



How did you get this?

If you received this newsletter directly, you have found your way onto our contact database. If you received this via an alternative route, please register your own or your organisation's interest by visiting www.familiesdomatter.co.uk You can unsubscribe at any time.

Prison Based Activity

The project is currently working in five establishments: HMP Birmingham, HMP Shrewsbury, HMP Drake Hall, HMYOI Brinsford and HMYOI Stoke Heath. Our Project Officers are based within the establishments and have been busy over the past few months getting to know their prisons and the staff and agencies working within them.

The prison based project team has undertaken a comprehensive review of both the prison visiting process and the quality of the experience for visitors. This review included multiple observations of the process from end to end – i.e. from first contact on booking to departure. We looked at the policy, procedure and practice involved – e.g. evidence of identity required for entry, searching and prisoner/visitor property. We assessed the facilities provided, both in general terms and those specifically for children and families. Annetta Bennett from **Kids VIP** helped us with this, participating in observations at all sites, offering her professional advice specifically on facilities for families with children. We also explored potential barriers to visiting such as cost and travelling. Many detailed face to face surveys were conducted by the team with visitors at each establishment to get a sense of their personal experience and how these influence the quality and frequency of their visits. The team surveyed visitors on a selection of visits days, including weekends, to ensure a diverse and representative sample. The views and ideas of staff working within the visits process have also been captured, those of both prison staff and staff/volunteers of partner organisations. We also looked to other establishments for ideas and good practice, including some outside the West Midlands region.

Of course, we are also concerned about families not visiting. Shortly, surveys will be conducted with prisoners in our pilot establishments, not only to obtain their views of visiting procedures and their own experiences but to also help us better identify families not visiting and the reasons they don't come. This survey, coupled with a review of reception and induction processes will help us to better assess and understand the needs of families and will enable us to work towards achieving equal opportunities for family support services, including those provided in the community.

As a result of this work, an improvement plan is underway at the pilot establishments with the aim to achieve improvements in both the quality and consistency of services and facilities for families across our pilot sites. We also wish to achieve greater consistency in prison policy, procedure and practice relating to visits with better communication. This should result in far less uncertainty, fewer failed visits and a more positive experience for both visitors and staff. It will also improve the prospects for a common set of information materials for visitors – leaflets, displays etc, which would be cost effective to produce, allow more format and language options, be easier to manage in terms of content and distribution and above all be more accessible and helpful for families.

Research & Evaluation

Remember the project's Mission Statement :



To provide evidence of the longer term impact and benefit of supporting offenders to maintain and strengthen relationships with their children and families. This includes establishing the cost benefit of investing in family support services as a resource in the process of rehabilitation, crime reduction and creating safer communities.

Therefore, research & evaluation will be an important factor in the success of the project. However, prior to any research, the project must try to put in place a monitoring framework that will allow us to better measure multiple partner involvement and interventions. Evidencing impact on offending of family relationships and identifying positive benefits for families is very difficult, even when agencies are specifically targeting offenders/prisoners, such as in a prison setting. Including the family and partners in the community setting makes it much more difficult. Therefore, the project is commissioning a piece of research/consultancy to establish/ carry out 3 important tasks:

1. An assessment of the partnership of agencies that support or have potential to support offenders and their families and its ability, capacity and willingness to work in a truly joined up way – the ideal partnership model.
2. An assessment of the capacity of the partnership to evidence what it does collectively, so that we can measure impact in terms of outcomes for families and try to establish the significance of both individual and collective interventions and where success of one intervention is heavily influenced by the availability of others.
3. An assessment of the key risks, issues and barriers that may hinder development of this model.

In other words

- *Can we do it?*
- *Can we prove we did it?*
- *What might get in the way of us doing it?*

This work will cover all of the project's areas of activity but will identify and focus on the more challenging areas of the project: where the most significant changes are proposed, where the partnerships supporting the work are more complex and diverse, where existing research is lacking and where outcomes of collective interventions are more difficult to monitor. These areas will include the multiple partner community setting and addressing the needs of black, minority, Asian and ethnic families and other excluded or otherwise hard to reach groups.

Community based Activity



The project had a major boost when two areas selected for the project as pilots - Coventry and Telford and Wrekin were awarded Parenting Early Intervention Pathfinders. The application for grant from Telford & Wrekin specifically included prisoners and offenders and their families at the request of the project. The DFES have selected 15 Local Authorities to trial the delivery of one of 3 selected Parenting Programmes to 8-13 year olds identified as 'at risk' of negative outcomes. The pathfinders provide real scope for increasing family support to offenders and their families and to develop further opportunities for referral to other forms of help and advice. The evidence based approach of the Pathfinders also gives us a real opportunity to share knowledge and experience across establishments and communities and establish impact and benefits for families collectively. For more information on the Parenting Early Intervention Pathfinders please visit www.dfes.gov.uk

Telford & Wrekin were chosen as our first community area to target. The project has built good relationships locally and a local partner has agreed to provide accommodation and facilities for our locally based Project Officer. We have gained the support of the local Safeguarding Children Board, whose role extends beyond safeguarding to include the welfare of children, including the outcomes contained in "Every Child Matters". Such boards exist in every local authority, are required to

produce both a strategic plan and a training plan and all our key partners are typically members. Using existing structures like these gives the project the greatest chance of sustainable change.

Work hasn't progressed in this area as quick as we would have liked but we are now moving into active working in Coventry and Stoke on Trent.

Parenting/Relationship Education & Training



The project has completed mapping of all family-type courses delivered within the prison setting in the region, with current courses reviewed against areas such as selection of students, structure, content, accreditation, evaluation and links to other related activities e.g. family days.

This initial mapping has revealed a wide range of courses on offer. There are key differences in aim, content, training methods, design and selection of participants. Common to all the establishments is a strong commitment to these types of courses and a belief in the value of the course for offenders. The diversity of the courses and lack of external evaluations reflects the national picture. The project has also reviewed community based parenting programmes, many of which have undergone national and international evaluation. With our partners, we are now looking to developing tools and materials that are not only applicable to our five pilot areas but with wider consultation and work, should have regional and national application and ensure that prison based courses complement support available in the community (and visa versa).

To make a solid start in this area of work, the project is now focusing on developing an evaluation framework which will be applicable to all five pilot establishments. This will enable a shared understanding of the impact on course participants and where appropriate their families before the project's parenting programme gets underway.

Partner Events & News



Event Report

Action for Prisoner's Families Conference – Does Every Child Matter? Oct 2006

As a newly recruited member of the project, I attended this event with others in the team as an introduction to this new area of work. My recent background was as a manager of a busy section within a large Crown Court, with little opportunity to work with the voluntary sector. My first impression was that of the enthusiasm and commitment of those attending which also came across loud & clear later in lively discussion!

The features of the conference that I found most enlightening and moving were the **Clean Break** segment which included a reading from a serving female prisoner and the screening of the **Homeward Bound DVD** which I found very realistic. The video was commissioned by "Action for Prisoners' Families" and copies can be obtained from their website at www.prisonersfamilies.org.uk. As I adjust to this new challenge and area of work, I shall draw encouragement and purpose from this event which gave me an insight into the numerous issues encountered by the families and in particular children, who shoulder the burden of having a parent in prison.

Janet Chinnock
Communications Officer

Families For Our Time

National Family Learning Network Conference, with help from the BBC Child of Our Time Team, **Monday 12 March 2007**, QE11 Conference Centre, Westminster, London.

This year's national conference showcases some of the excellent work being delivered across the country with offenders and their families, to support the Children and Families Pathway to Reducing Re-offending. Contributions will include the Families Do Matter Children & Families of Offenders Project, the work of Action for Prisoners Families and new Family Learning initiatives working from custody to community.

For further information please email jking@cflerning.org.uk or ring the Campaign for Learning on 0121 773 3133. This event is likely to be oversubscribed, so please do register your interest early.

Join the National Family Learning Network and receive a quarterly newsletter. It's easy to register on-line and it's FREE! Go to www.familylearningnetwork.com

Staffordshire Youth Offending Service – County Seminar

The Staffordshire YOT is hosting a County Seminar to develop joined up approaches to work with families who are at high risk of involvement in crime and anti-social behaviour. It will link into the Priority and Other Prolific Offenders Strategy for Staffordshire and the Government's Respect agenda.

The seminar is to be held in the Boden Room, at The County Showground, Weston Road, Stafford on **Wednesday 7 February 2007**.

Further information can be obtained by contacting Natalie Platt on her e mail account at Natalie.platt@staffordshire.gov.uk or telephone her on 01785 358310.

Publications



Action for Prisoner's Families has a new audio book recorded by Michael Palin available with immediate effect.

"Finding Dad", tells the story of eight year old James who turns detective to find out why his dad disappeared with the police early one morning. James' mum will only say that he had gone on a secret mission, sending James off into his imaginary world as he tries to track dad down. This exciting adventure story, aimed at 8-11 year olds, but suitable for all children, is a recording of a book by Dan Lee and beautifully illustrated by Korky Paul.

For more information contact Lucy Gampell or Diana Ruthven at Action for Prisoners' Families on 0208 812 3600 or Sam Hart on 07740531250 or visit the APF website at www.actionpf.org.uk

To include details of an event or publication please contact Janet Chinnock, Communications Officer – see contact details overleaf.



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Our HMP Birmingham Project Officer post is currently vacant.

We'll provide contact details for community based project staff and partners in future issues as the community work progresses.