



project news

Special Edition
August 2007

Project Team Changes

**Message from Dr Steve Goode,
Regional Offender Manager for the West
Midlands and the Senior Responsible Owner
(SRO) for the project:**

The project team will be undergoing some significant staff changes in the coming few months. The purpose of this special newsletter is to:

- notify all of the project's partners and stakeholders of the imminent changes
- give details about the action we are taking to minimise the impact of these changes on the project and
- acknowledge the achievements of team members, who are either returning to their substantive employing organisations or are away for a while, whilst they have been seconded to the project.

Lesley Davies the Project Manager is due to return to the Legal Services Commission on 14th September. Lesley's long notice period has helpfully enabled me to begin the recruitment process early and I will be making an announcement in relation to a new Project Manager very shortly.

Some of Lesley's achievements appear later in this newsletter but these will be just a sample. Lesley has been with us since the start of the project and I know she is disappointed not to be able to see it to its conclusion. Her work has put the project on a strong footing and allows us to go forward with confidence that our objectives will be achieved in this important area.

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

in this issue

- **Team changes**
- **Achievements**
- **Revised arrangements**



Don't worry, normal editions of our newsletter will continue as usual. Jan is working on one now! If you have anything you wish to contribute to these, please do get in touch.

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Louise Winterburn, the project's Training and Engagement Manager has recently commenced maternity leave, with an early appearance by her daughter Harriet. I would like, on behalf of the whole regional team, to wish Louise and her partner Tim well with their new family. Examples of some of Louise's excellent achievements appear later in this newsletter along with details of how we are covering Louise's role during her maternity leave. I and the project look forward to her return next year.



The picture shows Lesley with Louise at her leaving presentation and lunch, attended by all the team and the Deputy ROM Lisa MacDonald.

Two other members of the project team are returning to their employing organisations on 1st October. **Rose Joyce** and **Dorothy Cox** came to the project on secondment from West Mercia Probation Service, where immediately prior to this they had both been working in the prison estate in the region for the CONNECT project. Rose has worked principally at HMP Shrewsbury and has latterly also supported HMYOI Drake Hall. The Governing Governor at Shrewsbury has personally recognised the substantial improvements Rose has helped the prison to achieve. Similarly, Dorothy has ensured significant improvement at both HMYOI Brinsford and HMYOI Stoke Heath. Further details of their achievements to date are shown below. In the meantime, I would like to extend my thanks to both Rose and Dorothy for their substantial contribution to the project and wish them well for the future. A recruitment process is already underway for replacement Project Officers to continue the work of the project. An information pack is being circulated with this newsletter. If you don't receive the pack and would like one, please call us on 0121 345 2873 or email lesley@familiesdomatter.co.uk



Dorothy Cox



Rose Joyce

Dr Steve Goode, Regional Offender Manager

I have compiled the following pages in recognition of the particular achievements of Louise, Dorothy and Rose. They don't detail everything but demonstrate just how hard they have worked for the project in this often challenging environment. Obviously the remaining project team **Doug, Jan** and **Gill** have worked equally as hard and will continue to do so. Their achievements are equally significant and will continue to be regularly reported in the project newsletters.

Lesley Davies

Rose and Dorothy

HMP Shrewsbury

The project came to Shrewsbury at an opportune time. The prison was compiling its Improvement Plan and was eager to assist with change. The prison has severe limitations in terms of its building. Therefore, improvements had to be well thought out and work within restrictions to the modifications possible. It is at Shrewsbury that the project has assisted to achieve the most radical and visible improvements at a prison, for both prisoners and their visiting friends and family.

What was it like before? (Remember it is what's there now that counts)



Visits hall



Abandoned children's play area

So what is it like now?

Well, firstly we reviewed the visiting process end to end. This bought about small but significant changes to procedure. These include now being able to arrange reception visits by telephone, a new system to encourage visitors to remain in the visitor centre and not congregate in the rain by the gate for fear of losing their place. Building improvements along the visitor route included redecoration of the prison gate entrance and holding/searching areas, the erection of a large rain shelter at the entrance to the visits hall and a review of visitor information displays. We also provided 2 new from birth buggies with full rain covers for parents, as there is no way to avoid walking outside to get to the visits hall.

The pictures below demonstrate the significant change. Prisoners and visitors now have comfortable seating with only tables fixed to the floor. The visits hall has a new carpet, has been completely redecorated and a purpose built refreshment bar is being finished which will open later in the year. The well designed and well equipped play area comes with a practical and safe specialist floor. Perspex side walls enable parents to see children and the result is well worth the lengthy debates over what to use! Importantly, all electrical outlets, heaters and other potential hazards have been re routed away from little fingers.



Equipment was carefully selected to be both practical and easy to maintain. A separate selection of toys and games will be available when the play area is supervised but a lockable cupboard with checklist inventory ensures that no unsuitable toys (e.g. choking hazards) are left out when the area has no qualified supervisor on duty.

We are grateful to Annetta Bennett from KIDS VIP for her practical advice on locating and fitting out play areas for children at all our pilot sites. Annetta also helped us with training in each establishment for officers and other staff involved in the visits process. Rose and Dorothy ensured these went well in their establishments and were well attended.



All electrical outlets, heaters, the television etc have all been placed out of the reach of children and heating/water pipes boxed in for maximum safety

We were very keen to get prisoner involvement in the improvements. Therefore, Rose arranged for the education department to enable prisoners to complete the 2 new wonderful murals for the walls. These were painted on boards away from the area, allowing for them to be refreshed in the future without disruption to the play area. We also held a competition for prisoners to design a sign for the play area. We gave a prize to the winning entry from Tay for his very thoughtful design. See the pictures on the following page for the results of their efforts.



Rose and the prison staff are working with the Pre School Learning Alliance (PLA) to develop regular supervised activity for families in the hall during visits. PLA are being asked to try a slightly different approach – to work more with families during visiting, encouraging the children to return to the table e.g. with books to read and toys to ‘show and tell’.

Rose also organised a successful Family Day on 7th August, attended by external agencies as part of work to bring the community into the prison. The families thoroughly enjoyed the day and Rose received cards and thank you letters from families to recognise her contribution in this. Rose has also written a useful guidance manual for successful organisation of future family days, to help the prison more easily integrate these events regularly into their timetable.



A healthy lunch was followed by some healthy (and messy) fun!



Rose has recently used her acquired knowledge to help HMP&YOI Drake Hall to plan for equipping their new children’s play area and choose appropriate equipment for their family days – which will be part of the Family Links pre release course we are helping to develop there.

HMYOIs Brinsford and Stoke Heath

These establishments already had some positive facilities for families visiting but we still completed a full review of the visiting process first, as we did with the other establishments and this included talking to many young offenders and their families. Engaging with Young People and Young Adults is often difficult and Dorothy has shown a real empathy with these offenders, encouraging them to participate.

Visible improvements are not quite as dramatic as at Shrewsbury but are significant nevertheless. There is now a supervised and well stocked children's play area in the visits hall at Stoke Heath with extra facilities available in the visits hall such as safe high chairs. Dorothy has been working with the prison and the Chaplaincy to encourage families with children to use these facilities during the school holidays and to introduce more family activities - exploring initiatives such as Big Book Share. Family days are being planned, including opportunities for delivery within the newly accredited Being Dad course. Dorothy has proposed changes to the visiting procedure that would speed up processing time at Stoke Heath and with Jan's help has improved information for visitors at both sites

At Brinsford Dorothy has been discussing alternative approaches to parenting relationship courses with both Education and Psychology Departments. Other improvements are in the pipeline that will further improve facilities for families, including availability of toilets, booking via email and other changes likely to result in a more efficient visits process. Also, the YJB have agreed to mixing all ages of offenders in visits, offering much greater flexibility. The project's first information review was at Brinsford and Dorothy and Jan hosted a focus group to get views on how to approach this work. The team then took the learning from Brinsford and repeated the process at Shrewsbury. This was a significant piece of work that required much effort locally within each establishment.



Rose, Sam from SHARP and Rosemary Cooney from Action for Prisoners Families

The project trialled its 'Family Information Talks' at Brinsford. These were devised to address issues raised by families and offenders in our surveys regarding availability of information and the apprehension/fear faced by families in their first few visits. Attendance was disappointing at the first trial, as families booked for the event didn't arrive due to the offender having been moved to another establishment or the offender having been on remand was convicted prior to the talk and the requisite Visiting Order could not be organised in time. We are looking at ways we can address these issues and we are also learning from the good practice example of family induction days at Swinfen Hall.

In general, Dorothy has positively engaged her establishments, highlighting areas of good practice but challenging areas for improvement in a productive way.

Louise

Louise worked hard to ensure that all our pilot establishments had Training Plans in place before she departed for her maternity leave. Some aspects of the plans built on existing provision by adding value to courses/intervention by including structured family days and other related family learning opportunities e.g. family literacy, Bookstart etc. However, Louise achieved some notable improvements for establishments in securing additional provision but in a manner that offered sustainability for the future.

At Stoke Heath, the Chaplaincy had been running the Being Dad course for some time but it had been stopped for lack of accreditation some 12 months ago. There was little likelihood of accreditation in the foreseeable future and so Louise picked this up and sought to get the course accredited under Effective Regimes with the Prison Psychology Team. This route offers a useful alternative to a more 'education' type accreditation and allows useful comparisons to be made between approaches. This accreditation has been successful and the first course is anticipated later this year. The project is now looking at the prospects for this course to be delivered across several YOI establishments e.g. Swinfen Hall and Brinsford, to test its effectiveness more broadly.

At Drake Hall, the semi open environment gives greater scope for any pre release family type course to include the opportunity for offenders (in this case women) to explore avenues of community support available to them when they return home after discharge. Louise selected the Family Links Course and has been working with a community provider to both train existing tutors at the establishment to actually deliver the course and to develop an additional module on post discharge community support to help build confidence in women regarding service provision in their home communities.

Before departing, Louise also arranged for Annetta Bennett from KIDS VIP to undertake training over the summer months at all our pilots for officers and other staff involved in the visits process.

At an event we held at the end of May, we launched the Professional Development Programme for people engaged in working with families – especially parents within prisons. The aim here is to develop a relevant qualification that meets the needs of the national standards soon to be required for working with parents and at the same time specifically deals with the issues faced when dealing with working in a custodial setting. We also want to offer a support network for prison based practitioners – such as tutors, the Chaplaincy, Prison Officers, Psychologists and practitioners from the Voluntary & Community Sector to be able to link up and share knowledge, good practice and 'what works' with their equivalents working in a community setting.



May Parenting event

I am pleased to announce that Jane Smith is joining the team, working for Parenting UK. She will be leading on this work and has it as a priority action. There will be further details of this in the next newsletter along with answers to what are likely to be the most frequently asked questions but Jane will be contacting all relevant people in the very near future to identify potential candidates for the first Development Programme.

Lesley

Well, I came to the project after a period chairing the Finance Benefit & Debt Pathway in the region whilst working at the LSC. This pathway scored an early success in securing substantial funding for debt advisors across the region for offenders and their families and I wanted the opportunity to specifically work to support offenders and their families.

I came to the project in February 2006 and I can honestly say there has never been a dull day since! Planning work in prisons is sometimes lengthy and tedious but finding a solution that works in this environment is critical for long term sustainability. I can recall endless discussion over picket fences for play areas at Shrewsbury and Stoke Heath but we got there in the end and found a solution that worked.

The community setting is an exciting arena. Local structures can be complex but PA Consulting helped the project to better understand how to operate successfully outside the prison walls and how to tie its work into important local agendas. We held lively focus groups in our pilot community pilots and have adopted approaches in each that suits the way the Local Strategic partnership works.



Focus Group at Coventry with PA Consulting

In our community pilot in Telford, our Project Officer Gill Scott has already proven that existing well resourced partnership processes can significantly benefit offenders families if sold to families in a positive way – based on **need** rather than risk. A good example in Telford is the multi agency Common Assessment Framework that incorporates a wide range of agencies, including the VCS. Also their 'Cluster' based Team Around the Child approach makes accessing services easier for families. The project is now working on the Coventry pilot area and is developing work in HMP Blakenhurst to give a pilot area a direct link with its 'local' prison.

It is unfortunate that I must leave the project at this stage. However, Steve Goode is confident that he will be able announce my replacement soon. In the meantime, all work is continuing as usual. I am

actively canvassing partners to secure replacement for Rose and Dorothy to keep the momentum going in the prison estate. I will also be compiling comprehensive handover information to ensure no learning is lost. I will maintain regular contact with the project and will return to my organisation seeking to ensure that offenders and their families continue to be recognised as a group who deserve to be supported.

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