



Families do matter

West Midlands Children & Families of Offenders Project

project news

Issue one Spring 2006

Welcome!

The West Midlands Children and Families of Offenders Project

What is it?

It's a regional project funded both by the Home Office and by HM Treasury under its Invest to Save Budget. The total project funding available is £2million over 3 years. The project is sponsored by the National Offender Management Service (NOMS) with responsibility for its delivery placed with the Regional Offender Manager, Dr Steve Goode.

The project was initially due to commence in April 2005 and last for 3 years. However, the project implementation has been delayed. Nevertheless, things are now moving and the project has gained approval for extending it into another year, giving scope to meet its original objectives within a similar lifecycle to the original.

What will it do?

The mission statement contained in the Business Case will be the guiding principle of the project:

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

The project aims to develop a sustainable regional partnership 'model' to achieve its mission:

"To provide a partnership structure and environment to design and deliver collaborative projects, that will develop new capabilities, service or business operations in the West Midlands Region that maintain and strengthen offenders' relationships with their children and families".

So, the project is really all about the partner organisations able to serve this client group working better and smarter together and this partnership properly evidencing what it achieves.

NOMS National Offender Management Service

Working together to reduce re-offending



in this issue

The project:

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"Working together to improve outcomes for offenders and their families"



Partners matter too!

The project will rely on a complex and diverse partnership of people and organisations. It is not always possible to mention them all by name but it doesn't mean they are not important. In any case, as the project grows, the project hopes to engage new partners, including ones not traditionally associated with our client group.

We have chosen a very simple logo and the strap line 'Families do matter'. Where it is used, it will represent the project and its partnership and will hopefully become trusted by our client group.

Yes, but what is it *actually going to do*?

Well, the core aim of the project is to reduce re-offending. NOMS has recognised the importance of families in offender resettlement and has included a **Children & Families Pathway** in its Reducing Re-Offending delivery plan. Each NOMS region has convened a Children & Families Pathway Group and this project aims to develop this important pathway.

The project includes all offenders but offenders in custody will be its priority. Therefore, its overarching targets are:

- To reduce the likelihood of prisoners re-offending upon release by 7%
- To increase families visiting by 7% (where it is appropriate for them to visit)
- To increase the proportion of prisoners returning to a family accommodation environment by 7% (where it is appropriate for them to do so)
- To reduce the proportion of families that breakdown as a direct consequence of imprisonment by 7%

These are very broad. There are lots of other issues the project would like to address and measure, such as financial issues affecting families during custody and on release, the impact on educational achievement of children affected by a parent in custody together with assistance for parents in custody to help them maintain positive relationships with their children. The project also needs to appropriately link into all the pathways of the NOMS delivery plan to reduce re-offending: Accommodation, Health, Drugs & Alcohol, Finance, Benefit & Debt, Employment, Training & Education, Attitudes, Behaviour & Thinking.

A regional project team of 12 will be recruited to work with partners. Some of this team will focus on particular prison establishments and some in particular geographical community areas. Locations have been selected to concentrate on the project's priority prisoner/offender types within the region, namely women, juvenile and young offenders and males serving shorter sentences. One of the project team will work specifically with BME communities. Two will focus on training and awareness raising and communication and consultation. Although a 'project team' its members will very much be part of their respective local partnership teams and recruitment will aim to ensure the team properly reflects the partnership.

Briefly, the project essentially has five main areas of activity:

Research and Evaluation

- To develop and sustain inclusive and quality services we need evidence to demonstrate the benefits (and the risks of non provision). Therefore, extensive research will be commissioned during the project.

Information & Support within prisons

- Here we will look at things like assessment of family need, increasing numbers and quality of prison visits, parenting and relationship courses and referral into community services for families.

Information & Support – community based

- Here we will look at support for families in their community, reaching families who do not visit to ensure they have routes into appropriate support services.

Reaching BME communities

- Here we will look at finding new ways of reaching and working both sensitively and positively to address issues surrounding the disparity in BME prisoners and the resultant disproportionate impact on their communities.

Training, Engagement & Communications

- Here we will look at further developing parenting/relationship training programmes for families, both within prisons and in the community. We'll also be looking to raise awareness of the needs of this client group, so that our partners delivering mainstream services are better aware of key issues and need. Communication will be a key factor, both in terms of reaching our client group but also ensuring that the partnership is able to properly influence the project. This partnership communication will include Children & Families pathway partners in other regions and those with a more national remit.

More generally, the project will look at how partner organisations can work together to maximise resources, increase the range and quality of services and improve opportunities of access. Current information materials and their distribution will be examined to explore potential opportunities for common partnership information.

Having said all that, the project cannot generally fund actual service delivery. There is some capacity to fund target parenting and family relationship courses and measure how these initiatives impact on family outcomes, in order to assess their real value. There may also be scope to pilot new and untried or innovative services or methods of service delivery, such as the use of video link/conferencing technology. Such activities will be undertaken as pilots, to assess their impact/value and therefore their suitability for inclusion in the 'model'.

What won't the project do?

The project aims to develop a **sustainable** model for services that properly meets the needs of this client group. Therefore, it will not offer funding for either existing services or gaps in services, where the funding stops when the project ends. The project aims to assess the need for services, improve referral and access where services are already available and establish the rightful responsibility for gaps in services. The project will support and develop the local partnerships that will enable these needs to be met. The project will also assess the impact of meeting the client need, making the case for sustained investment in services, including beyond the project lifecycle i.e. mainstreaming.

What now?

The **Project Manager** has been appointed. Lesley Davies has joined the project as Project Manager on secondment from the Legal Services Commission's Regional Office in Birmingham. She brings to the project experience of the advice community, project management, partnership working and the criminal justice system. She has been busy since the end of January, working on the project plans, the budget, liaising with funders, planning project team recruitment and re-engaging with partner organisations. The research activity has been mapped and the commissioning process for this work begun.



A **Project Board** has been convened but is not yet complete. Current membership consists of:

- Steve Goode, Regional Offender Manager, NOMS
- Roger Crouch, Director for Children and Learners Government Office for the West Midlands
- Colin Pinfold, Regional Manager Probation Service
- Patrick Donajgrodzki, Head of Regional Development Prison Service
- Adrian Scott, Deputy Head Community Integration Unit, NOMS

The board will be joined over the coming months by additional representatives from the voluntary and community sector local authorities and the health sector in the region.

This is the first of a regular communications bulletin, which will keep partners and stakeholders updated with progress of the project. There will shortly be a partner website available for partners to register with. This website will not just be for signing up to receive these bulletins. Its purpose will be to assist the project team to find out more about the potential project partners, what they do and the areas/issues/clients they cover. This information will help develop an inclusive project partnership and will enable the project to both raise awareness and to consult on its plans. It will also help the project team to communicate more relevant information to you or your organisation e.g. regarding the types of services you offer, your client group or your geographical area of interest. The website is not live yet but you are asked to bookmark www.familiesdomatter.co.uk or www.familiesdomatter.gov.uk and visit the site early - mid April.

What next?

Options for recruiting the project team are underway. As mentioned above, the team should be representative of the partnership and must be clear about what it needs to achieve, therefore we won't be rushing this bit.

Work on the research and evaluation will continue. An initial assessment is planned to take place in May, to ensure that our project plans are based on a sound rationale and that key issues and risks are identified from day one. This will, of course, involve consultation with partners. Another project bulletin will be issued before this work begins to let partners know who is going to undertake the work and during which period etc. A much more detailed period of research will follow once the project is up and running, probably during August – October.

If you require further information or wish to make any comments or suggestions, contact Lesley Davies, the Project Manager. However, she is currently working alone, therefore please email first where possible.

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