



Supporting a positive future
for prisoners and their families

Integrated Family Support in the North East: *evaluation briefing*

This is a summary of an end of year three evaluation report for Nepacs' Integrated Family Support project 2013 to 2016. It represents the final report of a three year intervention period which has been funded by the Big Lottery Fund. The evaluation finds a project which has developed into a mature family support intervention model and which is well integrated into prison regimes. It has become a central feature of Nepacs' family support offer in a selection of the region's prisons and the community alongside support offered at the courts, in the visitor centres, to young people who have a parent in prison and now when the prisoner is heading home.

The project

The project consists of three Family Support Workers (FSWs) and two Integrated Family Support Advocates (IFSAs). FSWs are located in three prisons in the North East of England: HMP Holme House; HMYOI Deerbolt; and HMP Kirkclevington Grange. These provide prison-based family focused casework to inmates, most of whom self refer into the project. The IFSAs are located in the north and the south of the region. Their objectives are to raise awareness within community agencies of the needs of prisoners families and their support requirements and to help them develop and deliver services. A

key way of the achieving this has been through the delivery of Hidden Sentence training, which highlights the impact of a prison

sentence on the family. The family support work has been instrumental in supporting and improving conditions for prisoners who are parents, delivering new or adding value to existing visiting opportunities such as parent child visits, delivering parenting courses and advocating for the needs of prisoners' families at strategic opportunities within prisons.

Outputs

The substantive outputs of the project between 2013 and 2016 have been: across all establishments, support provided to a total of 1379 prisoners focusing on maintaining and strengthening family relationships; similar support provided to a total of 301 families in the community; Hidden Sentence training delivered to a total of 594 people in community venues and in prison. There were also a number of agreed Big Lottery Fund targets, which were successfully achieved.



LOTTERY FUNDED

Impact

Based upon the last three years of project outputs and outcomes data, the evaluation makes the following substantive findings.

Family support work is now embedded in the host prisons: this project has enabled Nepacs' work in prisons to become integrated into the prison system and its regimes. Prison senior and operational staff have developed familiarity, trust and respect for the organisation and the work, which has facilitated effective delivery. This demonstrates that there is a 'fit' between the project and a prison regime with key objectives of safety and humanely holding a custodial population and reducing future reoffending. Prison governors in all the establishments where family support is located spoke highly of Nepacs' work and placed value on its impact on: safer custody and supporting vulnerable prisoners through increasing the support available to them, ensuring where possible the involvement of the family and improving their mental health and wellbeing; taking pressure off prison staff who are increasingly only able to focus on their security role as a result of diminishing staff numbers; and improving prisoner behaviour and regime compliance, through a calming, advocacy and information giving role.

Increased awareness of the issues of parental imprisonment and family impact: as a specialist charity providing support for prisoners' families, a key organisational objective is to build awareness of the issues and hardships experienced by those families and the importance of maintaining relationships. Through the advocacy work funded by the Big Lottery, and in particular through the Hidden Sentence training, there has been considerable success in this area over the last three years. There are more organisations now who have an

awareness of these issues, there are more services, better existing services and more strategic linkages concerning prisoners' families than before the project.

An effective delivery model: the Big Lottery funded project period has enabled Nepacs to confirm, consolidate and refine the family support intervention model. The Nepacs model was first developed between 2011 and 2013 with pilot funding from the Ministry of Justice and Department for Education and grant support from the Pilgrim Trust and Lankelly Chase Foundation; this current Big Lottery funding has enabled it to become a more mature and sophisticated initiative. There is now a confidence that a model has been developed and tested which has proved to be effective and can be transferred to other prisons. This has created a foundation which can be built upon and continually improved, which indeed has been happening over the last year in the development of the homework clubs, fathers wings and new fathers visits. An important aspects to this refining of a delivery model has been a recognition that there are effectively two types of family support intervention: a brief intervention; and a longer, more substantive support intervention.

Evidenced beneficiary impact: the project has been responsible for important outcomes for prisoners and their families. As a result of the family support work, there are:

- Prisoners who have either started family relationships where previously there were none, or have improved and stronger family relationships and as a result of this they have improved wellbeing and are more regime compliant (more likely to behave themselves because they are less angry/stressed about important situations which they previously felt were beyond their control);
- Prisoners and families are better prepared for release because they have more realistic expectations of each other and with support they have been able to better communicate with one another;
- Prisoners involved in care proceedings have a greater understanding of the process and as a result they are better able to process what is happening to them and have subsequent improved mental health and are less likely to self harm;
- Children have seen more of their parents in constructive situations, spending more quality time with each other. As a result of the project there have been more child parent and family visits, family days and homework clubs. Increased contact leads to greater understanding and being better able to process and come to terms with

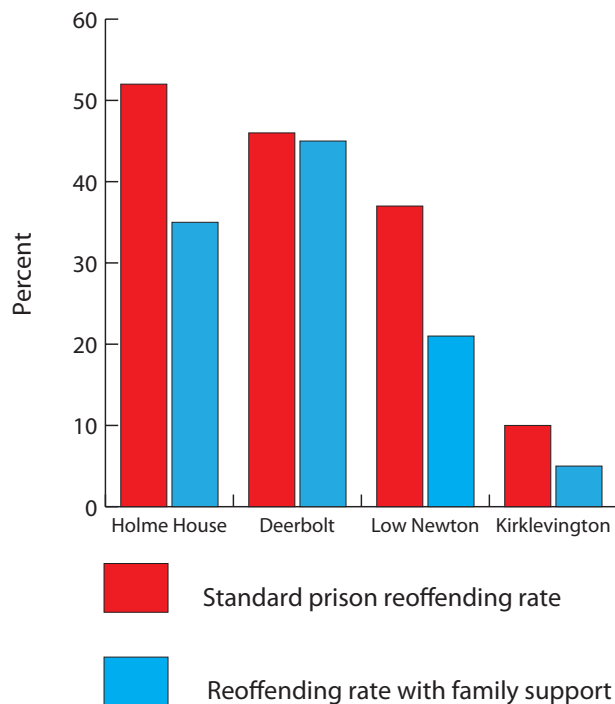


having a parent in prison, which has subsequent psycho social benefits. We are relying on a child psychology research and evidence as a measure of the benefit of the intervention for children; we are able to independently verify that as a result of the project, more children have been able to spend longer times with their parents in prison and they have judged this contact to be beneficial.



Impact on reducing reoffending: we have been able to access police data that indicates the project is having an impact in reducing reoffending with the prisoners who receive support. Using the standard Home Office measure of reducing reoffending (offences committed in the 12 months following release from prison): we identified 140 prisoners who had received family support and who were released in the 2013/14 calendar year and who spent a minimum of 12 months in the community. We put these names through the Police National Computer to look at their offending behaviour post release (number of convictions). As can be seen, comparing the individual prison rates of reoffending with prisoners who have received support, the project has had positive impact on reducing reoffending in all of the prisons where family support is provided by Nepacs (we also looked at HMP&YOI Low Newton as Nepacs deliver a Ministry of Justice funded family support service).

Project’s impact on reoffending rates, 2013 to 2016



We also compared Nepacs’ brief with substantive interventions and found that the more in-depth and longer term support has more of effect on reducing reoffending. Although not surprising, this is valuable

information as it indicates that reducing reoffending works better when longer term support is provided. Again, this is important to consider when and if family support contracts specify a certain number of prisoners in a workers caseload, i.e. higher numbers mean only brief interventions can be delivered, whereas low caseloads mean substantive work can be provided and hence have a meaningful impact on reoffending.

Continued to build organisational reputation: over this three year period and with the consolidation of the workstream, Nepacs has developed their reputation; both building an awareness of the existence of the organisation in agencies who did not know about them, and increasing the strength of reputation amongst others who were able to witness the delivery of this project. During the project period, the organisation has delivered two high profile regional events, one in conjunction with i-HOP Barnardo’s about supporting prisoners families and the other in partnership with Open Gate about women in prison. Nepacs was also a winner in the 2015 North East Charity Awards and was a national CLINKS case study of best practice in voluntary sector criminal justice work. Thus, the Big Lottery investment has contributed significantly to the strengthening of an important North East voluntary sector organisation.

An effective and cohesive project team: it is a considerable achievement to maintain a committed and high performing project team in such a pressured environment with a dispersed staff contingent. In spite of some significant periods of sick leave due to serious illness in two staff members, Nepacs has been able to maintain a team where morale is high, stress related sickness is low and performance is of a high standard. This has ensured that project outcomes have been achieved. Working in a prison environment in the male custodial estate can be challenging on a professional and personal level; staff can face intimidation from both prisoners and prison officers. In addition to this, they are the only Nepacs staff member working inside the prison and

Conclusion

We have been fortunate to be able to evaluate the Integrated Family Support Project over the last three years. We now understand many of the impacts of the programme on prisoner and family behaviour and wellbeing. We also understand that Nepacs has played a driving role in the development of a North East family support programme, which is the subject of a forthcoming article in a special edition of The Probation Journal on children and families of offenders (September 2016). We need to further understand the impact on reducing reoffending and on children with whom they work: what are the effects of support in mitigating the negative impacts of having a parent in prison. From a funding perspective, the evaluation has demonstrated that Nepacs has fulfilled the agreed targets of the funding agreement. These have been achieved during a three year project period which has been affected by staff sickness and some staff turnover, demonstrating a proactive and effective management system. This has been noteworthy; that Nepacs has a sufficiently resourced and effective management structure to ensure good project morale and smooth delivery in an often pressurised prison-based environment. We look forwards to the next three years.



can feel isolated. Also, the nature of the work can be very emotionally draining and they need to feel supported and able to offload any issues. The Nepacs' management structure and the supporting ethos of the organisation has created and maintained a highly professional and effective staff team.

“

It's the hardest thing about being in jail, being away from your children”.

Prisoner with an eight year sentence

About NEPACS

NEPACS has been working in the North East of England for 130 years. NEPACS works to support a positive future for prisoners and their families. NEPACS strongly believe that investment must be made in resettlement and rehabilitation to ensure that there are fewer victims of crime in the future, and less prospect of family life being disrupted and destroyed by a prison sentence. More recently, NEPACS has developed significant expertise in a new work stream and are now established as a voluntary sector provider of prison based family support services, representing significant value for money.

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For more information on the evaluators, see:
www.barefootresearch.org.uk