

Families Outside National Conference

December 2015

The Views of Families

Families Outside held its biannual conference at Perth Concert Hall in December 2015. The focus of the conference was “By Families, For Families”. The purpose of the day was to share the views, opinions, and experiences of families affected by imprisonment.

The day included round table discussions, led by family members themselves where possible. To encourage and focus discussions, each table had a topic which was structured under three broad headings. These included:

- Practices which they didn't find helpful
- Practices which they felt useful and would like built upon
- Practices which they would like to happen or be introduced



This took the form of a RAG – Red, Amber and Green – process.

These discussions were facilitated by Families Outside as well as Prisoners Abroad; the Family Help Hub at HMP & YOI Cornton Vale; and Vox Liminus. We have collated all the information captured from the day and outline the findings here along with some of the artwork from the day from Graham Ogilvie (www.ogilviedesign.co.uk).



Arts and Criminal Justice

Negativity

Creating barriers

Thinking short-term

Seeing art and creativity as a 'treat' or a 'perk'

Trying new things and being creative

Finding passions inside prison which can be continued on the outside

Understanding the benefits for the whole family in the creative process

Process over product

Two-way creative conversations about the role of the arts

Rolling out what works

Creating Connections

Inequality for opportunities to learning across different wings (i.e. protection v mainstream)

Personnel that change jobs within the prison - lack of continuity

Communication

Continuation of arts projects within the prison which can be translated into exhibitions outside

Helping retain links between the prison and the community

Helping retain links between the prison and families after release

Including siblings and allowing them more involvement in their family member's sentence – acknowledge that a sibling may be having separation difficulties just as much as a parent/child

Families at a Distance (Prisoners Abroad)

Inconsistencies throughout the UK

Judging and gossip in the media

Isolation

False promises and expectations regarding cross-border transfer

Corporate language

Poor communication between NOMS and SPS

Reducing stigma attached to female prisoners

Information about rights

Information about different prison systems

SPS – more emphasis on maintaining family ties

Provisions for families travelling a long distance to visits

Housing

Lack of communication

Discrimination against young people

Misinformation

Inconsistencies

Friday liberations

Empowering individuals

Maintaining services

SVQ in tenancies and citizenship (Shelter accredited) – roll this out

Community facing prisons

Improving the housing situation

Advocacy (some places)

Advocacy services available everywhere

Consistency of approach

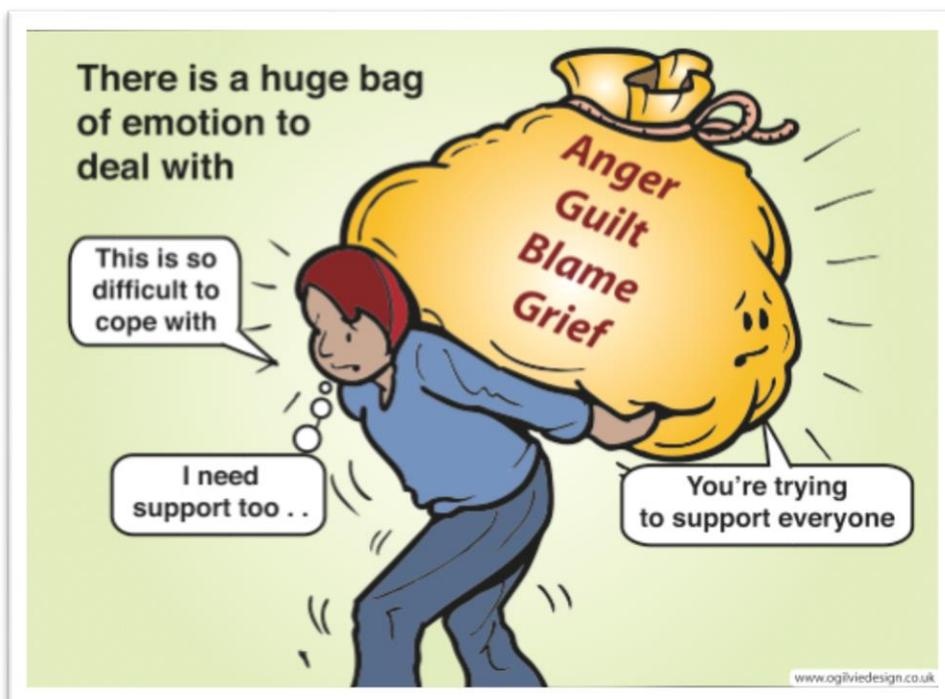
Release plan

More support

Sensitive letting

Broader communication

Providing furnished tenancies on liberation



Health Matters

Lack of communication with family

Stop using 'confidentiality' as a reason to withhold information from families

Different agendas – all need to focus on health

Different health board authorities working inconsistently

Poor support for people with learning challenged difficulties

Blips in access to medications, for example when the health centre runs out

Involving prisoners in action plan (HMP Kilmarnock)

Health and wellbeing days involving families

Case conferences being arranged and involving families when there are medical concerns

Extra training for prison staff to deal with mental health issues

Closer working between health centre and SPS

Appoint an NHS co-ordinator to liaise with family when someone taken into hospital

Extending induction period to enhance family involvement

Providing contact details for families

Prison should gather information from the family about a prisoner's medical history

Involving families in case conferences

Communicating to families how to lodge a complaint – perhaps display information on this in the visits room/ visitor centres

Health centres to tighten up in terms of ensuring medications are available

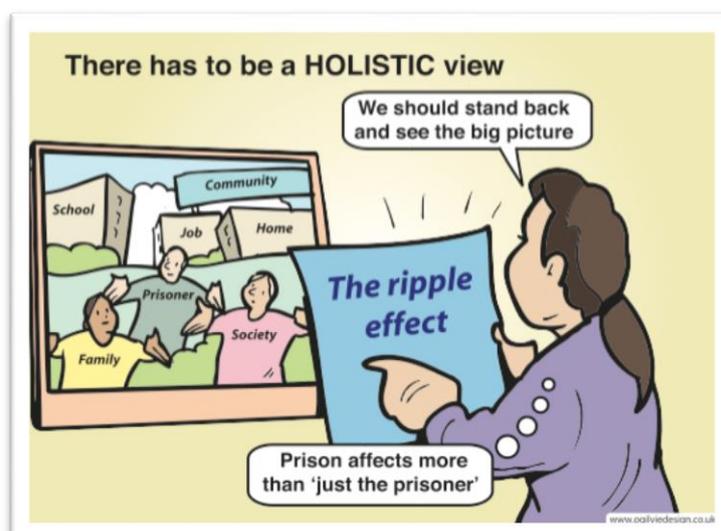
Training hospital staff in treating prisoners

Educating ward staff on protocols when prisoners are in hospital

Educating NHS/prison staff on sharing information with each other

Improving mental health provision in hospitals

Increasing funding around health provision



Families of Long-Term Prisoners

Lack of support for families in preparation for escorted home leave
Home leave being made difficult due to differing attitudes of escort staff
Short-term prisons not liked by many long-term prisoners
Different culture regarding visits in some local prisons
Communication channels being unclear
Having ICMs at times which do not fit in with families schedules
Relying on prisoners to invite their families to ICMs – encourage families to invite themselves

Bonding visits
Meals as a family during visits
Families felt valued when visiting Shotts – this is in comparison to other prison establishments
The environment is key to helping visitors feel comfortable and to establishing relationships between family and prison staff
Better Together Shotts – involved in preparing families for transition from closed to open conditions
ICM system in place
Purposeful activities for families during visits
Links with schools/ Families Outside e.g. school work/ video conferencing

Pre-visit family members before escorted home leave to explain the process
Look at training for G4S staff in their role during escorted home leave
Distributing information to family members before escorted home leave
Follow up phone calls from prison to check how the escorted home leave visit went
Family focus groups with inspectorate to understand families perspectives
Visitor charter for all prisons
Home visits undertaken by SPS staff who know the prisoner – family need a familiar face
Involvement of throughcare officers in home visit process, liaising with families
Holding ICMs in the evening
Better FCO training package – clarify the role of FCO

Mental Health & Addictions

Discrimination

Stigma

Imprisonment when there is a better alternative – prison is not always the right place for people with mental health conditions. Should be looked at on a case by case basis

Prison as a primary route to care

Access to peer support for the families of prisoners

Being able to speak with an FCO after visits

Family involvement in NHS meetings

Make sure families are aware of what's going on

Improve communication

Stronger partnership working

Better links between healthcare and prisons

Linking in with employees

Throughcare for those with addiction issues and poor mental health

Working with families to develop throughcare strategies

Celebrating success and sharing good practice

Moving towards family led visits instead of security led

Encourage families to engage fully with family inductions

Holding gate meetings with any support services which are already in place

Naloxone training for families

Holding first time offenders in a separate area within the prison

Reconsider Friday/ bank holiday liberation dates

Decriminalisation of drugs - promote drug treatment rather than imprisonment

Family support training on addiction

Displaying posters to let family know they can approach staff with any concerns

Person-centred approach

Services available on weekends

Preparing for Release

Differences between local authorities
Disjointed services
National bodies accessing families
Difficulties in justifying support for the whole family
Poorly co-ordinated resources
Putting as many people in prison
Rotation of staff – this causes issues
Transition between services – throughcare and aftercare
Non-cohesive thinking at policy and funding level
Duplication due to policy making and co-ordination issues
Cycle of offending barriers
Higher thresholds for youth offending
Lack of understanding of impact on families by services
Lack of information available from SPS about family members due to data protection/permissions
Location and timing for family visits
Lack of throughcare support for some prisoners
Focusing on statistics – focus should be on people

Improved relationship working
Striving to do better
Early intervention work
Improving integration and co-ordination
Broadening SPS strategies ensuring they engage with national strategies
More cohesive working
Prisons being responsive to family work
Being pro-active (SPS)
Prison visits being more structured for fathers
The use of the open estate
Structured family support
Clarity for prison staff, prisoner and prisoner's family
Throughcare approach to individual offender's release

Preparing for Release (contd.)

More support for families pre-release
Clarity of roles and responsibilities of agencies
Social development, empowerment education and learning
Improving resources and use of funding
Properly co-ordinating and integrating services
Improving referrals and signposting
Improving communication
Work on/finance 'Year of the Dad'
Early stages of family recognition
Looking at other countries models of engagement
General overarching principals
Linking up agencies and families for information and transport
Better communication and partnership working
Co-ordination of agency planning on release, and follow this up
Case management should define roles of support
Life skills courses involving families
Cultural learning
Develop inter-agency and SPS communication
Lib-rite services such as at Addiewell Visitor Centre
Recognise when families are stressed, even when they are presenting 'normally'



Prison Visitor Centres

Stigma
Media attention
Inconsistency
Grey areas
Promoting prison information
Refreshments
Communication with families
Children's visits
Sustainability
Sharing of good working practice
Visual information in the visits room for families
Virtual visits & skype visits
More activities during visits
More visitor centres/ family help hubs
More full time FCOs

Stigma and the Media

Printing names and personal details including photographs and addresses, particularly when there is a child living at the address
Printing names and personal details for alleged crimes
Publicity prior to release
Tabloid sensationalism
Broadsheets which provide a more balanced view
Publishing good news stories – use the media positively
Keeping personal details of the accused private
Requiring signed consent prior to printing information
Change in law
Consultation on the number of people affected by the media – linked to family impact assessment
Supporting families to speak in the media
A 'coping with the media' helpsheet
A 'Prisoners' Families Week'
Meetings between newspaper editors and families
Making prisoners human – more than their offence

Prisoners as Parents

Focusing all support solely on the prisoner

The next generation from repeating the same mistakes

The stigma of imprisonment – it should be discussed more

Visits are stressful. Families can't have a private conversation – particularly stressful at the end of visit

Organisations being unrealistic about what services should be involved in supporting families

'Post code lottery' access to support services

Phased home release

Sharing information with children appropriately and timely in a supported environment

Asking the family and prisoner what they want and need

Preparing families for the range of emotions which can be experienced

More support and preparation for prisoner's release

Helping families and prisoners to address their issues in a supportive environment

Educating teachers about imprisonment as they have an important role to play

Encouraging parents to communicate honestly and openly with their children

Parenting/mediation classes

Father's groups

Implementing the Caledonian System Nationally

Willow – women's service – in all prisons

Building on existing work with families of sex offenders

Preparing families for what to expect from EHL – be creative and holistic about how it is facilitated

Commissioning services in a strategic way

Shouting loudly about the ticking boxes approach – this does not work

CPD sessions

Offering services to support remand prisoners as parents

Asking families, children and young people what they want

Using named person legislation to implement change, and support children & young people

Gathering more evidence for prisoners on the impact of not telling children the truth about their parent's imprisonment

The Start of the Journey

Lack of communication – both family members and professionals struggle to find out which prison someone has been sent to, and have difficulties passing on messages to prisoners/getting information about prisoners to ensure their safety

Lack of personal touch; very rigid

Culture of assumption that 'someone else is doing it'

Lack of support services in rural areas

Not every prison has a visitor centre/ family hub

Family members feeling judged by prison staff

Information is there – it is just not made widely available to all family members

Peer family support taking place in visit rooms – you are not alone in your feelings

Family induction sessions – family member and prisoner together – available in some prisons

Human Adjustment Factors in long term prisons – trialling similar in other prisons – need similar for family members to help them come to terms with having a loved one in prison

In some prisons there are programmes looking at employability skills – start pre-release and build relationships that then continue post-release in the community

Frozen bills/ debts of prisoner during initial weeks in prison, while the family member sources support to deal with them

Immediately sending out an information pack to families when a family member goes into prison, containing relevant information and details of support services

Universal standard across all prisons for family members – different prisons are better than others at providing information and support to family members

Share and advertise much more widely that support is available

More respect for family members – family members should be made to feel welcome when they visit prisons

Similar human adjustment factors for family members

What about the kids?

The taboo being reinforced for services and individuals

Children's events and visits, creative visits

Faith centres

Community involvement

Understanding child development

Imprisonment being a mainstream social issue taught in schools, to break down the barriers faced by school pupils

Life skills being taught to parents

The use of Skype for virtual visits

Post-release work with children

More throughcare support officers

Visiting Time

Negative treatment of families

Poor communication between SPS and families

The attitude that family matters are the sole responsibility for FCOs

Using data protection as a reason to withhold information from families

Making adjustments where possible to accommodate families' needs

Positive working relationships

Prison visitor centres

Children's visits

Family Contact Officers (FCOs)

Positive communication between FCOs and families

Volunteer transport service more widely available

Consideration of families in the transfer process

Visiting times to accommodate visitors, not solely to suit the prisons

A 'family room' to discuss sensitive issues and disclose bad news to a prisoner etc.

Children's visits out with school times

The opportunity for prisoner to be involved in nappy changing

Transport for families with disabilities

Skype visits

Longer visiting sessions

APVU volunteer transport service

Full-time FCOs in all establishments



Working Together to Support Families

Assuming that people know what is available

Using lack of funding as an excuse – improvise – use existing resources

Being aware of own limitations and where to find appropriate people to help

Working in a safe, secure environment – e.g. PVG staff have a duty to pass on to SPS breaches of security and areas of concern

Partnership working

Services being approachable

Better information that is better publicised

Better communication

Sharing good practice and rolling it out across prisons

Improvements on customer relations at front of house

Involving families on next steps

The availability of confidential areas for family members and organisations to meet and discuss

Standardising family services across prison estate

Use more visual and audio messages for providing information

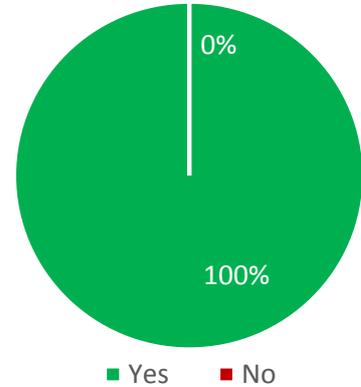


Feedback from the day

Conference delegates were provided with a feedback form and asked to complete and submit this at the end of the day. Sixty seven forms were submitted and here are the findings:

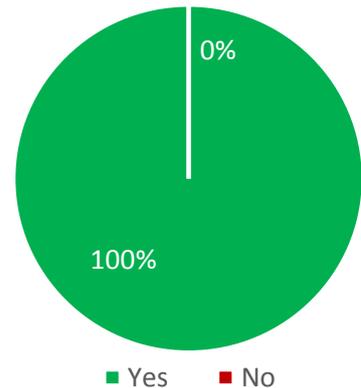
Q1. Overall did you like the conference?

Liked most...	Liked least...
round table discussion content and time	no opportunity to meet young people from KIN project
family member plenary	availability of only two round table subjects – wanted more
networking	morning/afternoon presentations alike
sharing good practice	acoustics and catering



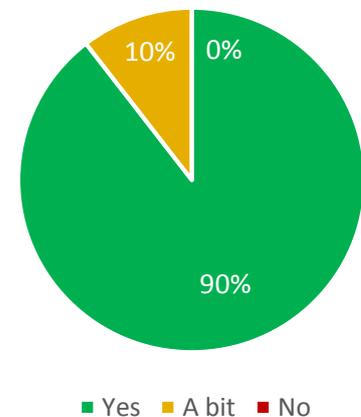
Q2. Did the family focused format work?

Worked best...	Didn't work...
having family member on each round table	some family members seemed to have a biased viewpoint about prisons
cartoonist drawings	postcards
my story videos	technology
theme maintained well throughout the day	lack of balance to highlight the good work that is done in prisons



Q2. Did you learn anything from the conference?

I learnt about...
the huge impact that imprisonments has on a family
resources available that I never knew existed, locally and nationally
the work carried out by prison visitors' centres to support families
the Prison Service sharing experience – what is best for families
communication – the key to improving the experience for families



Q4. If you could take forward one action from the conference what would it be?

increased pressure on prisons and Government to create more visitors' centres

talk more with other agencies and share best practice

establish a family focus group for Her Majesty's Inspector of Prisons in Scotland

work together better – fragmentation of services is a waste of resources and fails the people in need

better communication for families throughout the whole criminal justice process

lobby for a reduction in the prison population

challenge the media representation of families – change opinion

Q5. Do you have any suggestions for future events e.g. topics to cover?

cover the subject of how families cope with a prisoner once they have been released

more input about programmes and facilities available at the existing prison visitors' centres

prison perspective – how they support prisoners and their families with examples of good practice

focus on the media perception on families affected by imprisonment – challenge bad press

a survey of family members to show views of bad and good practice within prisons

stories for ex-offenders about their experience and the impact their actions had on their families

what support is there for prisoners and their families when they are reunited after imprisonment

Thank you to all the delegates who provided us with feedback
on their experience of the Families Outside Conference 2016.

Support & Information Helpline

Freephone **0500 83 93 83** (answerphone if not available)

from May 2016 our helpline number will change to 0800 254 0088

Email support@familiesoutside.org.uk

Text **FAMOUT** then your message to 60777

For more information visit:

www.familiesoutside.org.uk

