1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Families Outside undertook a survey of visitors at Edinburgh Visitors’ Centre over the course of one week in July 2008. The survey was designed to follow up a similar survey conducted in May 2006 (Stalker 2006), both to update information on the needs of visitors to the Centre and to assess any change in perceptions since the introduction of the post of Development Worker in July 2007.

1.2 Interviews with staff were also conducted to ascertain the impact of the development worker’s role. These included discussions with two managers at the Visitors’ Centre; the service manager for the Salvation Army (the organisation responsible for managing the Centre on behalf of the Onward Trust); the development worker herself; and one prison officer regularly posted to the Centre as part of his work. Comments were also invited and received from the Onward Trust, which owns the Visitors’ Centre.

1.3 Overall 165 questionnaires were returned fully or partially completed. Questions explored the distance and time people had travelled, facilities used within the Centre, and information or points of contact used. Although the questionnaire was kept simple with as many ‘tick boxes’ answers as possible, it also included more complex open questions such as whether the visitors’ centre had changed in the past year and in what way. This paper reports on the findings of the survey and interviews and compares them, where possible, to the initial survey and to research elsewhere.

2. FINDINGS: QUESTIONNAIRES

Travel and transport

2.1 Most visitors surveyed said they had travelled more than five miles to get to the prison, and a third said they had travelled at least 20 miles. Figure 1 shows these findings in more detail.
The bus was the most common form of transport, with 78 people (48%) using this option to reach the prison, followed by 52 people (31%) using their own transport. Fifteen people (9%) said they received a lift from a friend. One woman who completed the questionnaire with a Families Outside worker said that, without her friend, she did not know how she would get to the prison, as she lived rurally outside of Edinburgh where buses did not run. Like many others, she did not know about the Assisted Prison Visits scheme (APVU; see below) to fund her travel costs. Only 4 people (2%) took the train at least part of the way, 11 (6%) took a taxi, and 6 people (3%) walked or cycled.

2.2 Most people travelled for more than half an hour to visit the prison, as Figure 2 shows below:

Specifically 43 people travelled less than half an hour, 63 people travelled from 30 – 60 minutes, 45 people between one and two hours, and 8 people travelled for more than two hours. One woman said she would have travelled for ten hours by the end of the day, explaining that the evening visit meant she could only use a restricted bus service to get home. All but one of the eight who travelled for the longest period of time stated they took the bus.
2.3 Proportions for distance to the prison, form of transport, and journey time were virtually identical to the previous survey in the Centre (Stalker 2006).

APVU

2.4 Just under a third of people who completed questionnaires (50 people, or 31%) said they had heard of the Assisted Prison Visits Scheme (APV scheme, or APV Unit/APVU). Most of these (21, or 42%) said they had heard about it through staff at the centre, while 12 (24%) said they heard both through staff and by seeing a poster. Other ways in which people heard were through prison staff, from other visitors, from other prisons, or from having been in prison themselves. Publicity about the scheme was a concern for a number of visitors when the research team made them aware of possible funding from APVU. One woman suggested that the induction for families could be better so that not so much information was given at once.

2.5 The Families Outside research team helped about ten people fill in forms for APVU during the survey. Those the team helped were not aware that funds from APVU did not affect their Benefits. They also felt that someone in the Centre should be available to help with the forms. Staff at the Centre noted that some sections of the form are not entirely clear, particularly relating to provision of evidence of Income Support and Pension Credit. A volunteer from SACRO helped to publicise APVU at the Centre, but such volunteers were not available for every session. A more consistent proactive approach may be beneficial.

Previous visiting

2.6 Most people (139, or 88%, compared to 89% in the 2006 survey) said they had visited the prison before, with 120 of these (80%) previously visiting within the past month and 19 (13%) stating that their last visit took place more than a month previously. The range of experience of visiting the prison varied. Twenty-four people (17%) visited for the first time within the last month, a quarter (35 visitors, or 25%) started visiting for the first time two to six months previously, and 20 people (15%) first visited seven to twelve months previously. Nearly half (60 visitors, or 43%) said they visited the prison for the first time over a year ago.

Has the Centre changed?

2.7 In order to assess whether the post of development worker had made a noticeable impact to visitors, we asked those who had been visiting for at least a year whether the Centre had changed in that time. Eighty-eight people answered the question (slightly higher than the proportion who said they had been visiting for at least a year). Opinions were generally positive, with 32 people (36%) stating that they thought the Centre had changed for the better in the past year. Just over half (47 people, or 53%) stated that the Centre seemed more or less the same, while seven people (8%) said it had changed in good and bad ways, and two people (1%) thought it had changed for the worse. One of the comments from a person who felt the Centre was worse was that they felt they “should not be coming here still”, which appears to relate more to the respondent’s personal circumstances rather than to the Visitors’ Centre itself. The other person who responded negatively said that the Visitors’ Centre “seemed grubbier”, while the two people who indicated that the Centre had changed in both good and bad ways commented that the toilets could be cleaner.

2.8 Overall 34 respondents made positive comments. The most frequent comment (from 14 people) was about the “friendly staff”, with most of these saying that they felt that they could get help from staff and knew staff were available for any issues that needed to be addressed. One person used the ‘comments’ section at the
end of the form to thank the staff, adding that staff were particularly helpful, putting them at ease when they first came to visit and that this support had been sustained. The development worker (Kerry) was specifically mentioned as a welcome source of support. Comments from visitors included the following:

There are more polite staff to help outside prison staff: they are friendly and try to accommodate people

Kerry is on hand most of the time and will help you tackle any issues.

Kerry has been a great support, she offers very good advice and help. Kerry has helped me cope with coming here and if they were all like Kerry it would be a great world, she is so kind and understanding.

As I’ve been coming here for 5 years I feel the staff are very helpful and there is nothing I ask that they can’t tell me an answer for.

2.9 Eight positive comments made reference to the play area, which they believed had improved:

It is so much better for to bring the kids to and they enjoy the kid’s facilities

Four people commented that the Centre was cleaner, five said the atmosphere was better than before, and three felt the facilities had improved. Two people commented that, overall, the entire Centre was much better.

2.10 Comments about the Centre from the previous survey (Stalker 2006) were largely positive as well. However one comment from that survey suggested that the Visitors’ Centre has indeed improved:

Visitors Centre is bare and clinical – its not a nice place to sit and wait especially if you’re on your own – there’s absolutely no flexibility if we’re late – needs changed (respondent in Stalker 2006)

2.11 Additionally, one woman in the current survey gave an insight into what things had been like for visitors before the Centre existed, highlighting that the Centre itself was a great improvement:

The old waiting area was like a zoo. This one is much cleaner and tidier and the staff are very helpful and always make you laugh if you are down.

Use of Facilities

2.12 Of the 155 people who responded to questions regarding facilities at the Centre, only four (3%) said that they did not use any facilities at all.

Café

2.13 Most people (134, or 86%, similar to the 87% in the 2006 survey) said they used the café. One respondent noted that “the cafe is always warm and staff working there are friendly”. However two people commented that, because of the times of visits in the evenings, it was not possible to cook their children a “hot nutritious meal” and that the cafe could usefully provide healthier options such as soup, stovies, and more fruit:
Because we have to drive a distance we would appreciate some homemade soup and crusty bread, sandwiches and fruit as we miss a meal to arrive on time for visiting.

**Information**

2.14 Most people (127, or 82%) said they used the information available within the Centre. This is a dramatic increase from the previous survey, which noted only 16% of visitors using the Centre for information. One person referred to the Centre as a good point of contact but added that this should be the case for the prison as a whole:

> The visitors centre provides a positive point of contact for visitors to the prison. There is a good balance of information and comfortable atmosphere which must be reassuring for first-time visitors. This approach needs to be carried out into the prison itself as much as possible.

In discussion with the researchers, two respondents said they preferred face to face contact rather than posters and also felt that information on posters should be clearer. One of these said that organisations such as Families Outside which directly help offenders’ families access information and support should have bigger posters.

**Toilets**

2.15 Most people said that they used the toilets (122, or 78%, compared to 70% in the 2006 survey), though two added that these should be kept cleaner. Interestingly the previous survey (Stalker 2006) highlighted use of the toilets as an area of concern due to worries from visitors about possible drug use. No similar comment was made in the current survey, and the proportion of visitors using the toilets has shown a slight increase.

**Other facilities**

2.16 Just over two-thirds of respondents (105, or 68%) said they used the locker facilities. At the time of the research, a number of lockers were broken. Roughly the same proportion (104, or 67%, up from 59% in the 2006 survey) used the waiting area. One person commented that the comfortable atmosphere helped them relax before they went into the visits.

2.17 About a quarter of respondents (37 people, or 24%) indicated that their children used the play area, and 14 people (9%) used the buggies provided for their children. Comments suggested that parents and guardians appreciated the facilities for their children.

2.18 A tenth of visitors (15 people) said they used the pay phone in the Centre. Finally, two people (1%) said they used ‘other’ services, indicating the ‘car park’. Overall the facilities at the Centre appear to be used well, and visitors seem grateful for what is available. Few made suggestions for change other than the food available in the café and methods of providing information.

**Children**

2.19 About 40% of respondents (62 people, down from 45% in the 2006 survey) said they brought children with them for visits. The ages of children they brought are

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3 The format for the question was identical.

4 Visitors can take only wallets into the prison, so the lockers provide security mobile phones and any other belongings. One woman told the researchers that better guidance should be available about what visitors could and could not take into the prison.
outlined in Figure 3 below (children from more than one age group are possible for each visitor):

![Figure 3: Age of children visiting prison (N=62)](image)

These figures show an increase in the proportion of younger children attending visits (ages 2–5 especially) and a slight decrease in the proportion of 12-15 year olds compared to the 2006 survey.

2.20 Although only 62 people said they brought children, 98 people (59%) said they were happy with the Centre’s facilities for children. Notably, only six people (4%) said they were not happy with the facilities, compared to just over 20% reported in Stalker (2006). Two of these complained that children do not have much to occupy them at the Centre. One of these suggested that activities such as drawing would be good for younger children, while another said that having someone who was trained to look after children would be valuable:

\[I \text{ know that it would cost too much but to have a trained person available to play with the children, so if us as adults have any concerns or worries about whoever we are visiting we could talk in private to someone without worrying about child/children overhearing.}\]

One person complained that people left food lying around for children to touch.

2.21 Sixty-six people (40% of the total, and interestingly more than said they brought children with them for visits) said they would use a crèche if one were available in the Visitors’ Centre, up from 35% in the 2006 survey. Many of these (27 people, or 41%) gave comments as to why they would or would not use the crèche. Eight said that they would not use the crèche because they would not like strangers to look after their children. Only one said they would not use the crèche because they felt it was important for the child to attend visits. Three people said they might use such a service depending on the quality of childcare provided. The other 16 people commented that a crèche was a good idea and that they would use it. Importantly, 5 of the 16 who said they did not bring children to visits said they would use a crèche if it were offered. One person believed they were entitled to have a crèche for their children to use, while another said a crèche would allow them time to speak to their partner, friend or family member without worrying about the children overhearing them:

\[Definitely \text{ excellent idea, as some of us have to bring our own children through lack of childcare at home, but may still want some privacy with our partners/sons/brothers/friend.}\]
Facilities for young people
2.22 Part of the questionnaire asked what facilities should be available for young people (aged 12-15). The responses from the 148 people who completed this part of the questionnaire are outlined in Figure 4 below:

![Figure 4: Suggested facilities for young people (N=148)](image)

Magazines, books, and internet access were the most frequent suggestions, followed by games and puzzles and information about age-appropriate support. Suggestions for ‘other’ facilities included a careers service, computer, football or outdoor games, and a computer with access to e-mail. Proportions of responses were similar to those in the 2006 survey.

Support accessible through the Centre
2.23 About two-thirds of the sample (100 people, or 68%) believed they would use services such as the Citizens Advice Bureau, childcare, welfare, and housing if these were available through the Visitors’ Centre. Only 23 people (16%) said that they had actually used any such services in the Centre. Most people indicated that they had used the support of staff at the desk (49 people, or 33%), 17 (11%) had spoken with the Family Contact Officer, and 14 (9%) said specifically that they had received support through the development worker. Only one person (0.6%) said they had used the help of the health worker at the Centre (though this latter post is more clearly a developmental and project-focused post rather than a support post). These figures suggest that the support available is not yet utilised to the extent it could be. In discussion with the Families Outside researchers, some respondents said they had not known about most of these key contacts and felt that awareness-raising about the help that was available needed to improve.

2.24 Most people who had received support said this was for information about prison issues (47 people, or 32% of the sample). Twenty-two people (15%) said they received support about travel and APVU, and 17 people (11%) said they had received moral support and had been able to talk to someone within the Visitors’ Centre. About a tenth of respondents (13 people, or 9%) said they had received help to fill in forms. Seven people (5%) said they were given information about services
in the community, and six people (4%) said they had been given advice about what to tell others about their friend or family being in prison.

2.25 Although the responses show that some people have been able to access help, the questionnaire also asked what additional information people would like to receive through the Visitors’ Centre. Half of the respondents (74 people) wanted to see information on prison-based issues within the Centre. About a third each thought that support groups set up through the Visitors’ Centre would be a good idea or wanted information on housing, addictions, or legal information. About a quarter each said they would find debt advice and information beneficial; that they wanted information on children to be accessible; or wanted to have information on health and mental health issues. Three people also added ‘other’ services to the list: two thought that just having someone as a point of contact for all of this information would be best, while one commented that information on ‘bullying within prison’ and how it was handled would be helpful.

Visitors’ Comments Book
2.26 Only 21 people (14%) knew that a comments book was available in the Centre, and only four people (3%) said they had ever used this.

Points of contact for questions and complaints
2.27 Most people (113, or 76%) said they would go to staff at the desk if they had a question. Eighteen people (12% of the sample) said that they would speak to the development worker in this situation, and 13 people (9%) said that they would go to the Family Contact Officer. Finally, two people (1%) said they would go to the Health Worker.

2.28 About half of the respondents (73, or 49%) said they would talk to staff at the Visitors’ Centre if they wanted to make a complaint. A quarter (36 people, or 24%) said they would fill in a form to complain, while 25 people (18%) said that they would go to the Governor of the prison. Two people noted specifically that they would go to Kerry (the development worker) first. One person said that they would go to the Family Contact Officer, while another person said that they would write to their Minister. Importantly, 35 people (24%) said they did not know to whom they would complain.

Other Comments
2.29 A number of respondents wrote comments at the end of their questionnaires. Two people believed that the induction period for families should be reviewed, as in their opinion too much information was given too quickly, with the result that they did not know their entitlements. One person felt that clearer information about what to do and what to expect should be evident for first-time visitors to the Centre. Access to information was also a concern for another person:

I would like to see each family of the prisoner receiving the rules about visiting rights as soon as possible as the prisoner is being incarcerated rules changes as quickly and are generally a small point which cannot be seen visitors e.g. need a utility bill plus to hand in clothes.

2.30 One person noted that information they had been given at the desk regarding the necessary documents for identification differed on two occasions and that such inconsistencies should be rectified. What is less clear is whether the different information was due to staff error or to actual changes in prison policy.
2.31 Some respondents made comments regarding the prison rather than the Visitors’ Centre. One, for example, believed that the policy on closed visits should be reviewed and that “Staff have to rethink attitude, we are visitors not criminals.” This person also commented about the lack of air conditioning and that children needed more space, but the previous comments made it unclear as to whether this referred to the Visitors’ Centre or to the visits hall in the prison. Two people noted that visits did not always run to schedule and that this happened frequently. Another person felt that the visits were too short. This person also said that, until they spoke to a person from Families Outside for the research, they had not known about the existence of Family Contact Officers.

2.32 The next section looks at perceptions from staff regarding how the Centre has developed and the impact of the development worker’s post.

3. FINDINGS: STAFF INTERVIEWS

3.1 Interviews with staff were conducted specifically to gauge the impact the development worker’s post had had on the Centre, if any. Participants were chosen both because of their role in the Visitors’ Centre and because of their duration in post: most interviewees had been in post before the new role was introduced. This enabled them to draw comparisons before and after the post came into being.

3.2 Questions for the interviews included the following topics:
- initial understanding of what the development worker’s post was meant to be;
- perception of what the post was in practice;
- what had gone well/what was best about the post;
- what had not gone well/areas for improvement;
- barriers to the work of the development worker;
- managerial issues (e.g. how the post fit in with existing roles);
- what would be lost if the post were to disappear; and
- perceptions of other developments that would benefit the Visitors’ Centre.

Bearing in mind the small number of staff interviewed, this section looks at each of these questions in turn.

The role of the development worker

3.3 Respondents described the development worker’s initial role as development of the Centre’s potential by doing things that the existing staff did not have time to do. This was primarily through developing more active links with external organisations that could address the needs of prisoners’ families. Another said the post was meant to develop a programme for visitors regarding rights, support, and information, researching families’ needs and developing means of addressing these either in-house or through referrals to other services. Yet another viewed the focus as more specific family support such as through coordination of peer support and creation of different groups and projects in which families could become involved.

3.4 In practice, the development worker created or coordinated a number of resources for visitors. This included an information pack for families; creation of written information and posters to take into account people with reduced literacy; collaboration with the NHS community nurse on displays and information based on monthly themes; ‘snapshots’ of visitors’ needs; attendance at relevant meetings such as a Visits Partnership Meeting, the Prison Partnership Meeting, the Equality & Diversity Group, and more recently the Children & Families Development Group;
colouring competitions for children; and a comments box and complaints forms. She
takes part in the prison’s weekly family induction sessions as well as in awareness-
raising sessions for school counsellors. In addition, the post coordinates visits from
external organisations such as Sacro and the Scottish Book Trust.

3.5 Impressions from others of how the role had worked in practice varied. The
initial perception of one respondent was that the development worker did little
beyond attending meetings at first, though believed this had improved over time.
Another acknowledged the increased activity and resources for visitors but noted that
provision tended to be somewhat ad hoc rather than consistent in terms of providing
regular sessions at the Centre. In this person’s view, the development worker still
faced the problem of external agencies expecting people to come to them rather than
providing initial contact directly in the Centre.

3.6 One interviewee commented that the development worker’s role matched the
initial concept but that this had “mushroomed a lot”. Beyond support and information,
the role had taken on issues such as health and play with the result that the Centre
had become “much more relaxing, much more fun…. It’s about the welcome of it.”
In this person’s view, the possible development of peer support was a particularly
exciting one. The post had moved beyond developing the Centre’s own remit to
getting others involved and developing a sense of ownership for visitors to the
Centre. The respondent noted a shift from the Centre as a waiting room to a place
where visitors feel welcomed and wanted and where they can “not feel their
questions are stupid”. This prepared people for their visit, which in turn should “make
the prison officers’ life a bit easier”.

Benefits of the post

3.7 For the most part, staff believed the development worker’s post had made a
material difference to the Centre. External organisations were now actively involved
in the work of the Centre on a regular basis, and visitors actively sought out the
development worker for support and information. The worker had been able to take
forward plans the existing staff had started, such as for a playroom in the Centre, and
families seemed happy to have someone specific to talk to who could take the time
to do so. The new post enabled the Centre to be more involved with the prison as
well, with the development worker able to attend meetings that staff had previously
not had time to do.

3.8 One interviewee described the best part about the development worker as the
support she was able to offer to existing staff, saying that what she had achieved
was the work they had not had time to do themselves. The development worker’s
tenacity played a large part in this, in that she would find ways to make things work
rather than give up where something had failed. Another participant reiterated this,
saying that an identified person visitors have confidence in and who has the skills
and ability to support them had proved extremely valuable. This person emphasised
that this did not denigrate the value of other staff at the Centre, but rather that the
post specified a person who had both the time and the strategic remit and focus to
develop support for visitors.

3.9 Feedback from the Onward Trust, which owns the Centre and contracts
management of the Centre to the Salvation Army, was also collected regarding the
development worker. The Trust made a written submission as follows:

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5 ‘Place 2 Be’ counsellors, who provide therapeutic and emotional support to children in local primary
schools
The Trust’s perspective is that the post has completely transformed the Centre, directly building relationships, bringing in other organisations and resources – most importantly introducing an approach which has begun to really evidence the potential of the Centre to work in the way which the Trust has always envisaged. In a short space of time Kerry has created a profile for the Centre which locates it as a key service in the range of recognised provision which will undoubtedly help to secure its future sustainability.

Areas for improvement
3.10 The main criticism of the development work to date was that most of the work was done during the day in order to link with external agencies. While this was understandable, the visits structure at the prison meant that most of the initiatives therefore benefited visitors to prisoners on remand: remand visits took place during the day, while visits for convicted prisoners took place in the evenings. Another respondent wanted more awareness and involvement from outside agencies more generally to increase options for referrals for visitors. In saying this, this respondent was concerned that running seminars and programmes in the Centre could be disruptive to its general workings: as a facility open to the public, this person believed that staff should not realistically expect others to stay quiet or out of the way when an event is running.

3.11 One concern was that the development worker tended to take responsibility for too much, combining direct support for families with wider development work. Another respondent agreed that enthusiasm to address the needs of families occasionally risked pulling the development work away from its core remit. Direct support for families could be very time-consuming, with one interviewee giving an example of a single family member talking with the development worker for two hours. The hope was that the proposed post of Family Support Worker (see below) would assist with this, dividing the roles more clearly between case work and development work.

3.12 Finally, respondents noted the need for open discussion with the prison regarding issues affecting visitors. Such discussions had taken place in the past but tended to vary with changes in prison staff. Staff at the Centre believed they should be included in or at least informed of decisions regarding visiting times and handing in of prisoners’ property, for example, though in practice such involvement was erratic.

Barriers to development work
3.13 One of the more difficult issues during the development worker’s first year at the Centre was some initial resentment from existing members of staff. This resentment was not about the specific person so much as about the perceived implication that existing members of staff had somehow not made the effort to develop support at the Centre themselves. The reality, they believed, was that existing staff did not have the necessary time to devote to the development of links and relationships, while the development worker had both the time and the remit to do these things. While staff at the Centre were generally very supportive of the development worker, some respondents believed this tension still existed to a degree within the Centre.

3.14 Also perceived to be difficult was that some prison staff were not accustomed to change or to being challenged, but that the development worker actively

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6 This practice was to enable a full working day for convicted prisoners.
questioned certain decisions and practices. While participants felt that existing practices needed to be challenged, some members of staff could make this difficult for the development worker. The development worker’s tenacity, while essential for supporting families, also “has got some people’s backs up”. Specific prison officers responded badly to this and in turn made the development worker’s post a more difficult one. Much of this has since been resolved but is an ongoing issue due to the regular turnover of prison staff responsible for visits.

3.15 In saying this, respondents believed that the development worker’s post fit in well with existing structures in the prison, for example with the prison’s induction sessions for families. The new post created a link between the Visitors’ Centre and the prison and offered the prison valuable input about visitors’ needs into meetings with prison staff and managers.

3.16 The final concern related to ongoing worries about the sustainability of funding for the post, though respondents noted that this was a risk for any post.

Loss of the post
3.17 The repercussions of any loss of the post were of concern to all but one of the staff interviewed. One interviewee believed that all the links that had been made in the Centre would “fall by the wayside” if the post were lost. In this person’s view, when staff had tried to create links before, they fell away after a short period. Having a distinct point of contact through the development worker made a real difference for the sustainability of such initiatives, ensuring that someone would follow up any lapse in contact. Another noted that many visitors would be ‘lost without identifiable support, especially where they are new to the prison. Loss of the post would also lose the potential to organise peer support.

3.18 One participant added concerns about shifting services for visitors into the main body of the prison rather than keeping them separate in the Visitors’ Centre. In this person’s view, incorporating such services into the main prison “changes the whole environment”, imposing set rules on support that, by definition, needs to be flexible. Another was concerned that loss of the independent development post “would be worse, as there would be no one to fight the families’ cause” though also believed that other staff at the Centre would try to fill the gap.

Further developments
3.19 Interviewees mentioned further improvements they believed would help the work of the Centre. One was for a crèche worker or play worker in the Centre, though the development worker’s discussions about this were already underway. Another suggestion was for better use of the Centre in the mornings, such as with a play worker or through coffee mornings.

3.20 A number of changes have taken place since the field work for this report was completed. First, the Governor acted immediately on the concerns raised regarding treatment of the development worker by some prison staff. Regular meetings between the development worker and gate staff have resumed. The prison has set up a local Children & Families Development Group to coincide with national strategy in the Scottish Prison Service, in which both the development worker and gate staff take part.

3.21 The development worker also takes part in the Family Development Group for the Lothian & Borders Community Justice Authority (CJA), linking a wide range of organisations with an interest in supporting prisoners’ families. This includes
organisations such as SNFAD\textsuperscript{7} and the Bipolar Fellowship, both of which run support groups for families and have since been in discussion with the development worker about possible demand for groups from visitors to the Centre.

3.22 An important initiative related to this is the Family Group the development worker started towards the end of 2008. Coordinated through CLAN,\textsuperscript{8} this group brings together a regular group of visitors to the Centre to discuss both needs and means of support for families. A member of this group now attends the prison’s Children & Families Development Group as well.

3.23 Through the efforts of the development worker and an NHS community practitioner based at the Centre, plans for a play worker in the Centre are under discussion. A working group has been set up to carry this proposal forward, looking at paid play provision ideally jointly with paid provision in the prison visits hall. The group includes a number of interested organisations including Families Outside, Kids VIP, Toybox, the Scottish Prison Service, City of Edinburgh Council, and Experiential Play.

3.24 Finally, Families Outside received funding from the Lothian & Borders CJA and from the Routes out of Prison Project to fund the post of Family Support Worker based at the Visitors’ Centre. This post commenced in October 2008 and is funded for three years in the first instance. The Family Worker post works in close cooperation with the development worker at the Centre, carrying out in-depth case work and consequently enabling the development worker to focus more on coordination and development.

4. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

4.1 The feedback from the visitors’ survey showed that visitors’ needs remained largely similar between surveys. Many still travelled considerable distances and for long periods to reach the prison though were largely unaware of financial support for this. Many travelled to the prison with children and needed facilities to assist with this on arrival. High proportions were in need of information and support for a variety of issues, both regarding the prison and prison rules and regarding wider issues such as transport, housing, children, and debt.

4.2 What was noticeable between surveys was that the facilities visitors used to address these needs changed measurably. Most drastically, and most importantly, dramatically higher proportions of visitors were using the Centre to access information. This is an extremely important point and shows that the Visitors’ Centre at Edinburgh is effectively achieving a primary purpose of visitors’ centres - namely to ensure visitors have access to the information they need (Loucks 2002). This raises the (very important) question of how visitors to prisons access information – if at all - where no Visitors’ Centre is in place.

4.3 Similar proportions of visitors expressed satisfaction with the Centre in the two surveys. Of interest, however, is the higher proportion in the second survey who said they used the toilets and the waiting areas and who said they were happy with the Centre’s facilities for children. This suggests that the Centre is becoming a more welcoming environment for visitors.

\textsuperscript{7} Scottish Network of Families Affected by Drugs
\textsuperscript{8} City Literacy and Numeracy
4.4 Stalker’s (2006) report on the Visitors’ Centre made a series of recommendations based on the feedback from visitors in the first survey. The job description for the development worker post was based largely on these recommendations, so they are worth revisiting to assess what the post has achieved. The recommendations were as follows:

- Have a member of staff available specifically to answer queries and signpost and/or support visitors (especially first time visitors);
- Open up the use of the Visitors’ Centre, for example use of the meeting room by support agencies, prison personnel, community groups, service providers;
- Possibly use the building as a community resource; building on local capacity, developing partnerships and raising awareness of the issues surrounding prison life;
- Improve accessibility of information, particularly for those with literacy needs, but also being aware of need for information in other relevant languages;
- Use a Visitors’ Book for comments or complaints, which can be addressed by staff at monthly meetings;
- Involve support agencies at specific times, enabling improved access to health information including mental health and addiction services;
- Coordinate representation from service providers i.e. CABx, Housing, Benefits, and other targeted voluntary agencies for specific sessions;
- Promote the Centre’s potential for reaching vulnerable and traditionally ‘hard to reach’ families;
- Facilitate further positive contact between officers and family members, especially for visitors who have a family member on remand and therefore no access to induction session; and
- Develop the Centre’s potential for contribution to the wider Families Policy agenda and the effective implementation of the Integrated Case Management system.

All of these activities are either underway or complete following the development worker’s appointment. Many of these recommendations are for ongoing rather than discrete tasks, so regular monitoring based on these points is likely to be worthwhile.

4.5 The fact that all of the recommendations in Stalker’s (2006) survey have been addressed shows a number of improvements in the work of the Centre due to the appointment of a designated worker to address such issues. Of particular note is the fact that the Edinburgh Prison Visitors’ Centre has been highlighted in the Lothian & Borders CJA Area Plan as part of a three-tiered structure for engagement of community-based services for prisoners and their families from prison through to release and resettlement. The three tiers include the Throughcare Centre in the prison; the Visitors’ Centre; and Sacro’s Community Links Centre. The development worker is ideally placed to coordinate the support from community-based services either within the Centre or through referrals. The recent addition of the Family Support Worker to work in tandem with the development worker should increase visitors’ access to support even more.

4.6 Perceptions of staff, particularly regarding interaction with prison staff and barriers to development work, are worth monitoring over time. The recent introduction of the prison’s Children & Families Development Group, the re-instatement of Visits Partnership Meetings, and the appointment of the Family Support
Worker are all likely to have an impact on what the Visitors’ Centre can achieve in its support for visitors. Interaction between staff at the prison and at the Centre can either reinforce the support given to visitors or undermine it. The frequency and quality of communication between the prison and the Visitors' Centre is therefore vital to the impact the Centre can have in supporting families. Having an identifiable point of contact such as the development worker at the Centre should assist this communication and has already made a marked difference to the Centre.

4.7 In conclusion, prisoners’ families continue to show a range of needs both related directly to visiting and related to wider difficulties. The feedback suggests that the introduction of the development worker has enabled staff at the Centre to assist families more directly with these needs, where previously they had to try to fit it in around their other duties. The feedback also shows that visitors are able to make better use of the Centre now, with substantially higher proportions accessing the information they need. Areas for improvement are still evident, for example in increasing awareness regarding financial support for transport and in maintaining good working relations with prison staff, but staff at the Centre were aware of these issues and were actively working to address them. Most importantly, the development work at the Centre shows what a Visitors’ Centre can achieve when staff have the time and the remit to fulfill its potential.
