



## **Building Stronger Families**

### **A six day training programme for prisoners and their partners**

The course aims to strengthen the couple relationship so that it survives the prison sentence.

This is an intervention that strengthens intimate relationships through better communication and developing a shared approach to parenting and money management.

The results for a prison are:

- Contributes to meeting Accommodation KPIs by helping to preserve relationships
- Provides support for Families and Finance Pathways
- Officers report positive changes in behaviour

*“The work carried out to maintain relationships between prisoners and their families in the Time for Families workshops was impressive and had clearly benefited those who had participated in this scheme.”(HMIP, Report on HMP Brixton)*

*“offending increased if there was a breakdown in the relationship and men were no longer living with their spouse” (Farrington and West, Cambridge University)<sup>1</sup>*

*“It makes my prison a happier place” (Peter Dawson, Governing Governor, HMP High Down)*

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<sup>1</sup> Farrington and West, “Effects of marriage, separation and children on offending by adult males.”

## **The Building Stronger Families Course**

Ministry of Justice research shows that strong family ties contribute to reduced re-offending.<sup>2</sup> The Building Stronger Families Course helps to strengthen relationships so that they survive the prison sentence and may lead to reduced re-offending. Furthermore, if the relationship breaks down the prisoner is 44% more likely to offend when released<sup>3</sup>.

The course has been developed from the most validated training programme<sup>4</sup>: PREP ("Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Programme"). The research has shown that negative behaviours destroy relationships but only positive behaviours create a happy relationship. Our approach focuses on teaching the participants the skills to avoid negative behaviours and use positive ones.

Prisoners and their partners work together to learn skills; the course does not provide counselling. Some couples with more complex difficulties and painful past histories may need counselling alongside or in addition to the course programme. The course can re-energize and refocus the couple to make positive choices about their relationships and plan something better for the future.

Many couples comment that they have never properly talked, especially since the man was imprisoned. The course gives each couple an opportunity to talk together about their commitment to each other, and the man's behaviour that led to his offending.

The Course has three modules tackling the main destructive issues in a relationship: poor communication and arguments over parenting and money.

### **Communication**

The first two days of the course teach couples about how relationships work and introduce the idea of positive and negative behaviours. The negative behaviours arise out of poor communication and a negative attitude towards the partner. These behaviours are addressed through the "Stop Signs" and improving communication skills.

Positive behaviours are encouraged through looking at "Love Languages", the different ways people give and receive a sense of love, understanding the emotional needs of the partner, forgiveness and commitment.

### **Parenting Together**

Many couples break up within a year of the birth of a child. Disagreements over how to bring up children are one of the main sources of conflict in a relationship. Therefore, it is essential that prisoners

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<sup>2</sup> May, Sharma, and Stewart, *Factors linked to reoffending: a one-year follow-up of prisoners who took part in the Resettlement Surveys 2001, 2003 and 2004*.

<sup>3</sup> Farrington and West, "Effects of marriage, separation and children on offending by adult males."

<sup>4</sup> Einhorn et al., "PREP Inside and Out"; Stanley, Markman, and Whitton, "Communication, conflict, and commitment: insights on the foundations of relationship success from a national survey.."

and partners learn to address these issues in a positive way. This, naturally, is particularly important when one parent is inside and the other is coping alone on the outside.

This course looks at the task of parenting and the vital importance of good relationships in raising children and young people. It covers identifying and understanding children's needs and, if necessary, changing behaviour. The course also works on improving communication between parents and their children.

### **Handling money together**

Money is a major source of breakdown in relationships as well as being a major problem for many prisoners; 70% of couples cite money as a cause of relationship breakdown.

This course works on helping couples discuss together how they should handle money. It looks at what money means within the relationship and how much each person can trust the other over money. It also looks at basic financial management and budgeting and provides signposting for debt problems.

### **Course Size and Selection Criteria**

The ideal course size is twelve couples. Time for Families provides a detailed manual outlining Selection Criteria and Recruitment Procedures. We expect the prison to select suitable prisoners using their own criteria but based on criteria agreed by Time for Families and HMPS psychologists.

### **Delivery**

The format consists of highly visual presentations that link to a simple workbook that participants follow as they proceed through the course. A major part of the course is the couples talking together to explore the issues. We find that most couples take this opportunity very seriously.

The course is delivered by a qualified Course Leader, who has gained at least a PTLLS Adult Teacher Qualification. The trainer is supported by a group of mixed gender volunteers. Volunteers are trained and supervised by the Course Leader.

### **Peer Facilitators**

For each course we encourage a prisoner and their partner who have been through a previous course to return and help as peer facilitators. This increases the impact of the training by providing an example to the prisoners of people who have made some progress. It also helps embed the course material and gives the couple a chance to work through the issues raised.

### **Course Length**

The three modules each require two days. These are ideally delivered over a six week period; a longer period increases the risk of prisoners failing to complete the course because of transfers. Running the course over a shorter period can create difficulties for the partner, especially if they are working.

## Security

Clearly, there are security concerns with bringing partners into the prison. Partners are warned that they are not permitted to bring any objects or substances into the prison for the prisoners and that a high standard of behaviour and decency is expected of all participants throughout the course. We normally have a full-time officer present to help prevent inappropriate behaviour. It is also important that the premises are easily controllable, so that couples cannot get into the toilets unobserved.

## What happens after the Course?

Our main priority is to provide support to the partners during the course through phone contact. We offer to continue this after the course and many of the women appreciate the additional support. We also arrange face-to-face support, depending on risk issues, mainly from local faith groups.

## Evaluation

We have been approved under the Interventions and Substance Misuse Group (ISMG) process.

We evaluate two aspects of our work: what happens on the course (e.g. attendance and drop outs) and how the relationship changes.

We have had over 1,000 couples through the course. We can measure the impact of the course on the relationship satisfaction. The graph shows the substantial positive impact the course makes on both the prisoners and their partners; their satisfaction with the relationship increases substantially.



## What is required from the prison?

The course is unique in allowing partners to participate in the course with prisoners. This has to be carefully established within each prison to fit in with local security procedures.

It requires considerable commitment from the prison to set up the necessary administration and screening processes to allow the programme to go ahead. The security checking is similar to running family days.

The prison is responsible for the selection and screening of suitable prisoners (see Prison Manual). Time for Families is responsible for inviting the partners.

- There needs to be a Liaison Officer. We estimate they need to spend about 8 hours before each course (normally every 8 weeks). This person need not attend the course.

- Participants must be put on hold to avoid them being transferred before completing the course.
- The prison needs to provide an officer to be responsible for security for each course day.
- Prisoners must be allowed to participate the whole day and not return to their cells at lunch time.
- A suitable venue (space for 24, reasonable acoustics, moveable chairs and with two toilets)
- Lunch for all participants and Tff staff

## **What does the prison gain?**

### **Accommodation Target: retaining accommodation**

The Social Exclusion Unit reported that 55% of prisoners say they are living with a partner before prison, yet nearly half lose contact. Frequently, a prisoner will say he has a partner with whom he plans to live after his sentence, but near the end of the sentence the partner has second thoughts and the prisoner is left homeless (and without the relationship). Retaining accommodation and preserving relationships are inextricably linked.

### **Children and Families Pathway**

Since Pathways were introduced the evidence is growing that relationships are one of the key factors in affecting men's desistance from offending. The Time for Families course is a proven and approved intervention that actually strengthens family relationships.

### **Finance, Benefit and Debt Pathway**

The Building Stronger Families course provides advice to offenders and their families on crucial issues like coping with debt and it teaches financial literacy. Perhaps more importantly, it helps the couple to examine how money motivates them and helps them talk through issues around spending and saving, and how money symbolises power within their relationship.

### **Improvements in behaviour and attitudes**

Although we have not measured this, Wing Officers have frequently commented on the change in behaviour of a course participant. For example, an officer at HMP Brixton said, "I looked at the records of 18 prisoners for the six weeks they were on the course. Although two of them had a history of self-harm and most had several adjudications, during the course there was not a single incident of self-harm nor any adjudications. This change in behaviour was remarkable."

We believe that a couple working together, thinking about their relationship, both changes the attitude of the prisoner and gives them a sense of hope for the future.

### **Participating Prisons**

These include: Wandsworth, High Down, Pentonville, Durham and Wolds.

## Price

Time for Families has been successful at obtaining development funding from DCSF and various charitable trusts. This enables us to offer courses at considerably below cost. The cost of a course is £5,000 but we can offer it at a 40% discount, reducing the cost to £3,000.

To help compare costs we have included a number of unit cost comparators:

Per course	Per prisoner (assuming 12 prisoners)	Per prisoner – day
£3,000	£250	£42