



TIME FOR FAMILIES

Home Together

A one day workshop for prisoners and their partners to prepare for release

The Workshop

The workshop provides couples with an opportunity to talk through some of the issues that they will face when the prisoner is released.

- Contributes to meeting Accommodation KPIs by reducing the risk of unexpected breakdown
- Reduces the risk of licence breach
- Provides support for Families and Finance Pathways

“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, March 2006)

“Research shows that stable family relationships are an important factor in reducing re-offending and can also help with securing other resettlement outcomes such as employment and accommodation. Families themselves can be left feeling bewildered and unsupported, increasing the likelihood of the next generation offending” (NOMS, Reducing Re-offending in London)

The Home Together Workshop

The Home Together workshop is for prisoners nearing the end of their sentence and their partners. It provides an opportunity, in a structured setting, to discuss and prepare for some of the issues that they will face together when the prisoner is released.

Content

The workshop is based on the Action for Prisoners' Families DVD, "Homeward Bound". This DVD has been shown in many prisons. However, the issues it raises need to be discussed by the prisoner and his partner; if the partner is not present, the prisoners may dismiss the concerns of the partner (and the children).

In our workshop we cover:

- Work
- Money
- Relationship with partner
- The practicalities of living together
- Relationship with kids
- Avoiding re-offending

Delivery

The ideal course size is between ten and twelve couples. The format consists of highly visual presentation that link to a simple workbook that participants follow as they proceed through the course.

The course is usually delivered by a qualified trainer, who has gained a PTLLS qualification. The trainer is supported by a group of mixed gender volunteers. Time for Families ensures that there is a very high ratio of participants to learning support – a key to the success of the workshop. Volunteers are trained and supervised by the trainer.

Selection

The prison would identify prisoners within six months of release (ideally, before HDC or early release). The course is designed for prisoners who will be returning to a relationship. We consider the course is unsuitable for men with a history of domestic violence or sex offenders.

Security

Clearly, there are security concerns with bringing partners into the prison. We strongly emphasise to partners the vital importance of not bringing contraband into the prison. Over three years we have not had a single incident.

There are also concerns over the behaviour of the couples on the course. It is helpful to have a full-time officer when running the first couple of courses 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 impact will the Workshop have?

Some prisoners are released and return home to pick up their life again. However, many experience great problems and these can lead to enormous stress for the prisoner, their partner and children. In some cases this leads to the relationship breaking down or even the prisoner committing suicide (recently released male prisoners are eight times more likely to commit suicide (Shaw,2007)).

The main outcome of the workshop is for couples to talk through the difficult areas and start preparing emotionally and practically for the release. In some cases, the Programme may lead the couple to break up. This clearly is painful but is better while the prisoner is still incarcerated so that alternative resettlement plans can be worked out.

Evaluation

The aim of this Programme is to improve the resettlement of prisoners. This should mean that there are fewer licence breaches and less re-offending.

However, this is extremely difficult to measure because of the problems of creating a control group, and so, for now, we are evaluating the workshop from the end-of-workshop satisfaction surveys.

What is required from the prison?

The Homeward Bound Programme has been specifically designed to run in prisons. The course is unique in that prisoners are allowed to invite their partners to participate in the course with them. This has to be carefully negotiated within each prison, to fit in with local security procedures.

Time for Families has found that it is important that the workshop is understood by and supported by the prison authorities. It requires considerable commitment from the prison to set up the necessary administration and screening processes to allow the workshop to go ahead. The criteria below are essential:

- The prison is responsible for the selection, screening and invitation of suitable prisoners. Time for Families is responsible for inviting the partners (see separate sheets for guidance on criteria and suggestions for recruiting participants). The prison is responsible for security checking the partners when they enter the prison
- There needs to be a Liaison Officer to provide a link for Tff
- The prison needs to flag participants to avoid them being transferred before doing the workshop.
- The prison needs to provide a supervising officer to be responsible for security for the day. We have found that prisons usually start with a full-time officer but can move successfully to intermittent supervision.
- Prisoners must be allowed to participate the whole day and not return to their cells at lunch time.
- A suitable venue (ideally, with two toilets)
- Lunch to all participants

What does the prison gain?

Strong relationships reduce offending

Research (Farrington & West, 1995) has shown that a strong relationship can reduce the risk of re-offending by 35% and that if the relationship breaks down the offender is about 40% more likely to offend. It makes sense to improve the chances of successful resettlement by ensuring the couple relationship is as strong as possible before the man is released.

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 will 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.

This workshop reduces the risk of the partner refusing to have the prisoner return.

Children and Families Pathway

NOMS aims to:

- Maintain family relationships to help prevent re-offending
- Encourage the inclusion of life skills, including parenting and relationship skills, within mainstream support for offenders
- Engage VCS and faith communities in supporting children and families
- Develop better material and advice and guidance for children and families

This workshop provides an opportunity for the couple to discuss how the children will respond to the prisoner's release and how the man will approach fathering once he is back home.

Finance, Benefit and Debt Pathway

Two of the key aims for NOMS in this Pathway are to:

- Improve access to financial and advice services for offenders in custody and in the community and their families
- Address financial literacy for offenders in partnership

This workshop will explicitly address how the couple will handle money together once the man is released. This will include the issues of spending the discharge grant, changing benefit status and how financial decisions are made once the prisoner is released.

Employment Pathway

This workshop will discuss the expectations of the prisoner and the partner for the prisoner to start work, and also the attitude of the couple to the partner continuing to work (if applicable), and with the prisoner being responsible for child care.

Price

Time for Families has been successful at obtaining development funding from DfE and various charitable trusts. The cost of the course is over £1,000 but, by matching funding from other sources, we can offer it to prisons for £500.

The maximum course size is 12 prisoners plus partners.

References

Sampson, R, J Laub, and C Wimer. "Does marriage reduce crime? A counter-factual approach to within-individual causal effects." *Criminology* 44, no. 3 (2006): 465-508.

Shaw, J. "Suicide in Mentally Disordered Offenders (National Study of Suicide in Recently Released Prisoners). Summary number 1785." 2007.