

# 700 Happier Families

We are proud that we have now had 1,000 couples through our courses and around 700 of them are happier with their relationship.

We have now been running our six day course, *Building Stronger Families*, for five years in prisons across the country. We have done extensive evaluation and we know that **around 75% of participants benefit**. Nothing works for everyone; for the couples on our course, over 70% became happier (just under half much happier), 20% didn't seem to change much (although they did say they enjoyed the course), and around 8% became less satisfied with their relationship.

## Money is the problem

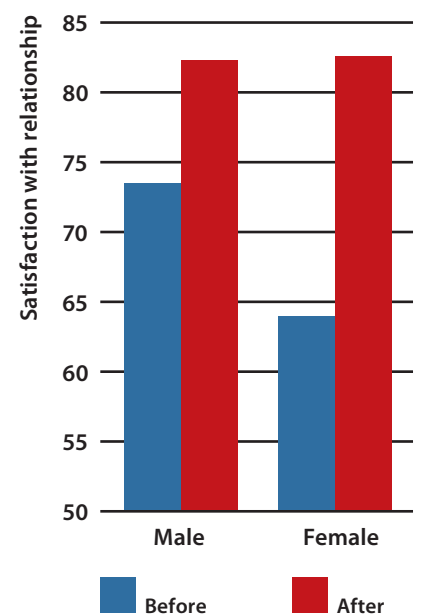
We have also followed up some of the couples to find out what they remember a few months after the course. Overwhelmingly, it is about money. For most of our couples, money is at the root of the offending and often, arguments around money are a major iceberg

for their relationship. They found it a relief to be able to talk about money in a way that helped them avoid arguing.

### Our evaluation has also shown that:

- Relationships are strengthened substantially
- Women are unhappier with the relationship than men before the course; after the course men and women are equally happy
- People from all ethnic groups benefit equally
- It doesn't matter when in the sentence they do the course – the benefits are similar

Change in relationship satisfaction before and after the course



Time for Families wants to strengthen prisoners' relationships.

This reduces the risk of re-offending and increases the chance of the prisoner having a home to return to. Equally important, as one Governing Governor put it, '*Time for Families makes my prison a happier place*'.

If you would like to contact us about running a course in your prison, please telephone 01803 525701 or email our CEO, Simon Pellew: [simon.pellew@timeforfamilies.org.uk](mailto:simon.pellew@timeforfamilies.org.uk)

[www.timeforfamilies.org.uk](http://www.timeforfamilies.org.uk)

## Claire Vallente – strengthening families in Durham

In 1999, when Claire Vallente started work in HMP Durham, she felt 'quite daunted – it was worlds away from my Family Court work. Now I love it, especially being on the Prison's Family Links team, whose aim is to help keep families together.'

Claire was introduced to Time for Families three and a half years ago: 'It was the nearest thing I'd found to what I joined the Probation Service for 26 years ago. You too help keep families together and you provide a rare opportunity to do this in prison.'

'Prisoners' families are forgotten victims, often thought guilty by association' Claire says firmly. She gets lots of encouraging letters from couples: 'Durham Prison have taken it upon themselves to show families they really care and they do want to help. This is like a lifeline every prison should have'.

One couple thrown this lifeline are Peter and Sophie. Very much the 'brains of the family', Peter took complete charge of household finances: 'I managed everything and I was always right'. Now he is inside, Sophie has had to start from scratch. 'But she is a fast learner and much more sensible' Peter admits. 'Things will be radically better when I get home'. Sophie sees she must learn to be 'just a bit more forceful towards Peter, and not give in to him so much.'

Getting the balance right between couples is crucial, not just in handling money matters, but also how they communicate with each other and with their children. Time for Families is keen to help every couple gain a better understanding of who they are and what their role is in their relationship. Claire shows us another letter: 'Many thanks to all in Family Links, Rob and Lynden, and NEPACS\* for the help and support during J's time in Durham, we have learnt so much and will be a better family when he comes out.'

Rob and Lynden Askew with Karen Bruin run our courses in Durham. Claire says 'I so enjoy working with them; their enthusiasm for family life stirs up every couple taking part.'

\*North-East Prisoner After Care Services



## 'a real answer to the Family Pathway'

## Banking on families – Father Robert Lasia talks about his experience of setting up Tff courses at HMP Forest Bank

'The real heroines are the women' says Father Robert Lasia. 'They're the ones who have to organise transport, job cover and childcare to get here every Wednesday. Coming all the way from Liverpool or Leeds isn't cheap.'

Fr. Robert Lasia is the Chaplaincy Manager at HMP Forest Bank. This is a large prison in Salford chiefly for adult males, and contracted out to Kalyx.

Fr. Robert started as a part-time chaplain shortly after the prison was built in 2000, but only became the Chaplaincy Manager two years ago. He is keen to make sure the Chaplaincy makes its mark in helping reduce re-offending.

'I first heard about Time for Families when Kate Quigley\* gave an impassioned talk about your work in June 08 at the Chaplains' Conference. She then visited me, and from early last year Brian

Eccleshall (see below) has worked extremely hard to keep plying your message. He's spoken across the board to Directors and Senior Management, Wing Managers and Officers, so he and I could get your first course going last June.'

'There may have been doubtful faces to begin with' Fr. Robert smiles, but was happy to admit no hitches so far. 'We've had great support from the Senior Managers, indeed all the departments.'

'Brian has skilfully drawn out good responses from each couple. **One man was so enthusiastic about the course, he reapplied on the last day!** Fr. Robert confirms. 'Your last 2 days on Money Management are very important. Flare-ups may happen, but that's because it's a real issue!'

The course runs morning and afternoon in the Chapel; the lunch together is a highlight of the



day. In most prisons, the couples have a sandwich lunch together; in Forest Bank, Garry Cope (who trains prisoners in catering skills) offers lunch in the prison's own 'Food for Thought' restaurant. So the couples sit down to a restaurant-standard meal.

'Time for Families is a real answer to the Family Pathway' Fr. Robert says. 'Seeing couples so enthusiastic and grasping the point of your course is the definite upside. Even if you can't work with a large number of our prisoners, it's worth us making this positive stand.'

\*Kate Quigley, a Prison Service officer, is seconded to Time for Families.

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When Fr. Robert and Brian went round the wings together on 12th January, 29 men applied immediately for the next course.

## 30 second interview

Brian Eccleshall is Regional Manager, covering the North-West, East and West Midlands

### How long have you worked in prisons?

Since 1998, nearly three years at HMP Birmingham, Winson Green - a large city centre Local - then over seven years at Brinsford, a YOI near Wolverhampton.

### What sort of work did you do in HMP Birmingham and YOI Brinsford?

I was Education Manager at both. 'The Green' was a big, busy prison, though the Education department was then quite small. Brinsford was smaller, but, because it was a split site (half Young People, half Young Adults), the Education Department was huge.

### What particularly stretched you?

I agree with the Governor at Brinsford who thought teaching a class full of Juveniles the hardest job in the prison. The teachers were the heroes more than the Manager.

The men at 'The Green' were more sensible, more reflective. Often they were asking themselves serious questions about what their future held.



### What sort of responses did you get from your students?

Almost invariably respectful and appreciative when 1-to-1; even the most troublesome lads responded well. This changed when they were part of the group dynamic, in sharp contrast with men in the adult estate, who often grieved over chances spurned in their youth. If only 17-year olds could grasp what 25-year olds understand!

### And what reaction from the officers?

The 'not really prison staff' label still lingers, but things have altered, thanks to the impact of different collaborative projects supported by the officers. What was once 'Education's a privilege, to be offered/withdrawn as we decide' is now much more 'How can we make up for their poor learning?'

### What was your best moment in the prison?

I loved it when young men felt the pride of earning their first-ever certificates for effort (I saw some displayed like shrines in their cells) or simply watching a lad who had started without the faintest idea of how to look after himself now taking meticulous care cleaning a cooker and sink, carefully folding the J-cloth in a Cookery class.

### Why did you make the change to Time for Families?

My first reaction when I heard what Tff did was: 'Impossible!' But when I saw a course in action, I was immediately convinced. For a long time I've noticed how loving relationships exert a wonderful power for good in prisoners; the lack of them is very destructive. What Tff does is intense and takes effort, but it's 'impossible' not to see the value.

### Now you have made the change, are you pleased?

It's a shock to find how difficult it is to get the right contacts inside now I'm on the outside – even when the Governor says 'I want this in my prison'. But, when it comes together, the clear benefit to the couples, their kids and wider families - eventually to all of us – 'Yes, definitely'.

You can contact Brian at [brian.eccleshall@timeforfamilies.org.uk](mailto:brian.eccleshall@timeforfamilies.org.uk)

*'Money is one of the main argument starters in a relationship...'*



## Power, love and money

Money is a big argument starter in relationships. It isn't just worries about money itself, although they can be bad enough. Money is also symbolic – it represents power, commitment and love. It's hard not to think that the size of the engagement ring represents how much the man values the relationship. And, of course, in prison, money becomes even more important.

### Power shifts

If the man controlled the money outside, then when he is inside, power shifts to the woman. Although with the power comes responsibility for the bills and handling all the hassle, many women are extremely reluctant to surrender this power when the man is released and comes home.

Added to these problems, people vary tremendously in their attitudes to money. Some people enjoy spending money on things and others on experiences (such as a holiday or feeling secure). Some are tight with money, others are loose. These differences

can easily blow up into arguments over what is the priority for the family – a new Blu Ray, a holiday in the Caribbean or saving for a rainy day. A partner on one of our courses came in one day and proudly declared she had bought a TV license for the first time in her life; for her this represented a serious attempt to order her life.

### Size of the engagement ring

A third issue is our history over money. Couples come into a relationship with many assumptions about the way things should be done. These were picked up, usually totally unconsciously, from their own families. Arguments over pocket money for the children, or how much to spend on Christmas, can often, at their root, be battles over how it was done when they were kids.

On our course, we get couples to talk through together some of these issues. Money is one of the main argument starters in a relationship, but if the couple can begin to understand each other, it needn't be such a destructive force.

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### Women's Prisons: First course a huge success

'Time for Families has really made us realise what we have and that we're going home to something strong' exclaimed one woman participant after doing our course in HMP Down View. Seven men and three mums joined their partners and daughters for all four sessions.

This is our first course in a female prison. We thought the course would mainly appeal to mothers, and even the women themselves did not really expect the men to turn up, but they all did and they all said how much they got out of the course. 'I'll be completely honest with you' said one. 'I thought I'd get to spend the day with my girlfriend, but within 2 hours, I knew I was getting a whole lot more'.

It is not just the course participants who are happy. The prison has asked us to run two more courses.

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