

TIME FOR FAMILIES

Building Stronger Families

An innovative six day training programme for prisoners and their partners

The course:

- Contributes to meeting Accommodation KPIs by helping to preserve relationships
- Provides support for Families and Finance Pathways
- Helps prisoners gain nationally-recognised qualifications
- Develops Peer Facilitators
- Officers report positive changes in behaviour
- Approved to work in Prisons

“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 Building Stronger Families Course

The course has been developed from the most validated training programme: 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. We focus on skills rather than knowledge as good relationships require changes in behaviour.

The Course has three modules.

Couple Relationship Skills

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 and forgiveness and moving on.

This is an educational rather than a counselling course. Some couples with more complex difficulties and painful past histories may need counselling alongside or in addition to the course programme. It is therefore not suggested that the course can heal deep relationship rifts but rather that it can re-energize and refocus the couple to make positive choices about their relationships and plan something better for the future.

Parenting Skills

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 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.

Financial Skills

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 teaches basic financial management but looks at it by examining the individual's relationship with money and how this interacts within a partnership. It builds on the basic skills taught during the couple relationships sessions.

We cover the practical issues of budgeting and managing debt.

Qualifications

Our course is HMPS approved. All our material is accredited with Open College Network. The prisoners and their partners can gain 3 Units at Level 1.

Delivery

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

The course is usually delivered by a qualified trainer, who has gained a City and Guilds 7407 Stage 1 in Further Education Teaching. 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 programme. Volunteers are trained and supervised by the trainer.

Peer Facilitators

We encourage prisoners and their partners who have been through the course to return and help as peer facilitators on subsequent courses. 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.

Given the sensitivity of some of the issues it is important that there are no new participants mid-course.

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 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.

We have also started involving released course participants in peer facilitation in courses we are running in the community. This improves their skills and strengthens the impact of the relationship education, as well as providing a strong positive message to the participants.

Evaluation

We evaluate two aspects of our work: what happens on the course (e.g. attendance, drop outs, satisfaction and changes in behaviour) and whether this makes a difference to the accommodation outcome. We would like to measure the subsequent impact on offending, but this requires at least three years data and a major research project. We consider that one measure of success is whether the prisoner returns home after his sentence, and whether he is still there after six months. We need the help of the Accommodation Pathways Lead to collect the data on accommodation outcomes. We are planning a research project to investigate the longer-term impact.

What is required from the prison?

The Building Stronger Families Couple Relationship course 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 course programme 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 programme to go ahead. The criteria below are essential:

- The prison is responsible for the selection, screening and invitation of suitable prisoners and their partners on the right day (see separate sheets for guidance on criteria and suggestions for recruiting participants)
- There needs to be a “link” member of staff
- The prison needs to flag participants to avoid them being transferred before completing the course.
- The prison needs to provide an officer to be responsible for security for the day for the couples and the Time for Families Team. We have found that prisons usually start with a full-time officer but can move successfully to intermittent supervision.
- Arrangements need to be made for the administration of the qualifications. Time for Families can provide advice on this if needed.
- Prisoners must be allowed to participate the whole day and not return to their cells at lunch time.
- The prison needs to provide a suitable venue
- The prison needs to provide lunch to all participants
- The prison needs to provide prison security awareness training for volunteers

What does the prison gain?

Participating Prisons

These include: Brixton, Exeter, Durham, Bristol, Dorchester, Channings Wood, Wolds, Dartmoor and Reading.

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 inmate is left homeless (and without the relationship). Retaining accommodation and preserving relationships are inextricably linked.

Our course helps prisoners and their partners improve the quality of their relationship and to discuss crunch issues, such as parenting and money, during the sentence. The research shows that this approach improves communication and enhances the stability of the relationship thus increasing the chances the inmate will be able to return home upon discharge.

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

The OASys data that is beginning to emerge indicates that many prisoners have needs identified but few have interventions (for example, in London 28% had a need but only 14% had an intervention). Clearly, the Building Stronger Families course delivers this pathway by providing a proven intervention with a good track record.

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

The Building Stronger Families course delivers both these aims. It provides advice to offenders and their families on crucial issues like coping with debt and it teaches financial literacy.

Qualifications Outcomes and Funding

Each participant can gain 3 units at OCN Level 1. We are working on mapping these units to qualification units which will enable prisons to claim funding. Normally, this

funding is £96 per learner for 9-13 learning hours; for our six day course we expect participants to achieve two qualification units, generating an income of £192.

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.

Contestability

NOMS is increasingly expecting prisons to have interventions covering all the pathways. In the next couple of years we expect to see the introduction of contestability for prisons. The NOMS contract specifications are likely to include a requirement for these interventions and also an expectation of the involvement of the VCS (similar to the current requirement for Probation and as outlined in the NOMS Stepchange Programme).

Some ROMs have commented on the difficulty in providing interventions on the Children and Families Pathway and the Debt and Finance Pathway that are likely to reduce re-offending and the need for family interventions to “move the focus of the pathway away from prison visiting arrangements towards supporting families to help offenders to stop offending” (Reducing Re-offending in London).

The Time For Families programme will improve the prison’s position in meeting the requirements of contestability.

Price

Time for Families has been successful at obtaining development funding from DfES and various charitable trusts. This enables us to offer a pilot course for free and subsequent courses at below cost.

The maximum course size is 12 prisoners plus partners. The fees for a year’s courses (7 courses of six days) are:

| | |
|-----------------------------|---------|
| Single pilot | Free |
| One year (42 days training) | £19,870 |

We can offer a 10% discount for contracts of over a year.

We can also run a one-off course for £3,300 but we do not recommend this because the prison gains a number of benefits from a series of courses. These include reduced administration for qualifications, smoother running procedures for allowing the

partners into the prison, recruitment of new participants by enthusiastic previous participants and the development of peer facilitation.

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

| | per year | Per day | Per prisoner (assuming 12 prisoners) | Per prisoner - day |
|----------|----------|---------|--|-----------------------|
| One year | £19,870 | £473 | £237 | £39 |

As stated above, the Education Department should be able to claim over £190 per prisoner.