

Understanding the needs of prison visitors: Edinburgh Prison Visitors' Centre

This report demonstrates the findings of research into the experience of Prison Visitors at HMP Edinburgh. Findings are based on qualitative research derived from interviews with visitors to the prison

As well as exploring the ways in which information and support are accessed and the subjective experience of service users, this research also examines the impacts of the centre's wider objectives inherent in its Community Development Approach

This report offers seven recommendations for the future development of this work.

Nicola K Ceesay BA (Hons) Research
Associate: The University of Edinburgh

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1.0 Introduction to research

This report illustrates the findings of research carried out at the Visitors' Centre facility at HMP Edinburgh. The aim of the research was to assess the impact of the centre in meeting the information and support needs of individuals visiting the prison.

The report supports previous research findings (see, Loucks, 2009, Stalker, 2006) in that the prison Visitors' Centre is strategically placed to facilitate both the transmission of information and provide support to individuals affected by imprisonment. As well as exploring the ways in which information and support are accessed and the subjective experience of service users, this research also examines the impacts of the centre's wider objectives inherent in its Community Development Approach.

This report will consider five key subject areas:

- The general functions of the Visitors' Centre
- The ability and ways in which visitors access information
- The ability and ways in which visitors access support
- Education based provision for children and families
- Recommendations for future developments

Prior to presenting the research findings, this document will acknowledge, funding for the research, methodology and the wider context in which the research is located. It is intended that this research will contribute to the existing body of literature (See, Dixey and Woodall, 2009; Barry, 2009; Shaw, 2012; Woodall et al. 2012) which discuss Prison Visitors' Centres and will be used to inform 'good practice' guidelines for future development of work in this field.

1.1 Funding

The funding which made this research possible was awarded by the Carnegie Trust to graduate student Nicola Ceesay (BA Hons Community Education) from the University of Edinburgh, researcher and author of this work. The need for research was identified by Visitors' Centre Coordinator Kerry Watson BA (formerly Development Worker) at HMP Edinburgh.

1.2 Research methodology

The research undertaken for this project was conducted after a period of intensive observation and integration, during which, the researcher spent approximately 240 hours over a 12 week period observing the visiting process and developing dialogue with visitors to the Edinburgh Prison. The purpose of this period of observation was twofold. Firstly it aimed to identify a matrix of generative themes which were identified through close observation of the visiting norms and procedures. These would inform the research questions and the method of data collection. Secondly, it was an attempt to

dispel the suspicion that can arise during qualitative research which impedes the collection of accurate data (see, Hood et al, 1999; Lee, 2000; Dickson-Swift et al, 2010). It was thought that this approach would lead to a more natural dialogue between the researcher and the researched.

This research is an attempt to understand subjective experience. The method of data collection designed for the study consisted of numerous informal semi-structured interviews with visitors willing to take part.

Interviews were conducted over the period of four weeks with families and other visitors visiting both remanded and convicted prisoners. Participants in this research were approached by the researcher and asked to participate as they came to visit a prisoner. Two of 96 persons approached by the researcher stated that they would not participate. Participants were selected at random in an attempt to obtain a natural data sample representative of the different socio/economic and racial/ethnic backgrounds of the visitors. Ethical considerations safeguarded the integrity of the visiting population by ensuring anonymity and confidentiality. It was explained to participants that they were under no obligation to answer questions which they felt intrusive, and at any point they could skip a question or terminate the interview.

1.3 Data Analysis

The thematic analysis paradigm as described by (Strauss and Corbin, 1990) was utilised for analysing the accounts of subjective experience and opinion. This assisted in both organising the findings into themes and subthemes and for theoretically framing certain aspects of experience. The data was cross-referenced and then compiled into categories for presentation.

2.0 Contextualising the Edinburgh Prison Visitors' Centre

It is estimated that approximately 40,000 visitors have visited HMP Edinburgh this year traveling from all over the UK and beyond (*Annual Report 2012: Edinburgh Prison Visitors Centre*). Edinburgh Prison is one of 16 prison facilities in Scotland and hosts a population of 950 male and female prisoners on a ratio of 8:1 respectively. Edinburgh Prison Visitors' Centre (EPVC) is the only purpose built Visitors Centre in Scotland operating a mandatory booking in facility – although there are designated areas for visitors in other Scottish prisons which are termed as such. The EPVC has been managed by the Salvation Army since 2004 after they secured the tender to deliver the service. Historically the Salvation Army have delivered services to a host of vulnerable groups, and it is keen to forward an agenda of social justice in this field. The organisation has a small staff team consisting of two full time, three part time members of staff, and a chaplain. The Centre is also open 363 days annually. At the EPVC the Salvation Army works in partnership with the Scottish Prison Service (SPS), Families Outside and a range of other external agencies to support family members who are affected by imprisonment. In 2007 a development worker with a background in Community Education was introduced who sought to apply this discipline to work in a criminal justice setting - a field traditionally dominated by social work and health care provision (Connolly and Harms, 2011). For clarity, Community Education has been defined as;

A process designed to enrich the lives of individuals and groups by engaging people ...who share a common interest [or experience] to develop a range of learning, action and reflection opportunities, determined by their personal, social, economic and political needs. (CeVe 1990:2)

The development worker identified the EPVC as having the potential to work with people by using a community education/development approach which traditionally involves work with vulnerable or 'hard to reach' populations (Hayes, 2006; Tett, 2006; Elliot et al. 2010.)

While 'hard to reach' does not characterise all visitors and families who are involved in criminal justice there is substantial evidence to suggest that prison populations disproportionately represent those from the lowest economic percentile in Scotland and elsewhere (*Her Majesties Chief Inspector of Prisons: Annual Report (2009-2010)*; Wilkinson and Picket, 2010; Friestad and Kjelsberg, 2009; Waquant, 2009). That is, prisoners and their families are likely to suffer from social and economic disadvantage, exclusion, poor health outcomes (including drug and alcohol misuse), have low education attainment and correspondingly low levels of literacy (Henderson and Hurley, 2008). Estimates suggest that as many as 80% of prisoners in Scottish Prisons have low levels of literacy and 65% have numeracy difficulties (*Scotland's Choice (2008) What works to Reduce reoffending? A summary of the evidence*).

2.1 EPVC model: Community Education and Development

Adopting a Community Education approach at the EPVC throughout the last 5 years has met with successful attempts at engaging the service users with the centre program. As such, many of the developments of the centre are a direct response to the expressed needs and interests of families and other visitors who are affected by imprisonment. Engagement with individuals on their own terms vis-à-vis their own needs is a central tenet of community education theory and practice (See Freire, 1970).

This approach sees user involvement as a vehicle for encouraging individual and social change for those who lack social power. By working on needs-related issues which have socio-cultural, economic and practical relevance to the individuals or the 'community', the centre promotes participation, and involvement to develop social capital, cognitive and creative skills and personal confidence (Evans and Kruger, 2012).

Notably, this model is based on the avoidance of what has been termed as a 'deficit' model (indicating personal or socio-cultural pathology) of individuals and communities (See Lisman, 1998). By contrast, based on an 'assets' model, it is recognised that individuals have the experience and resources which can be tapped into to develop an educational program which is defined and developed from the grassroots – not imposed by professionals or policy makers. Fundamentally important is the recognition that 'needs groups' are key to shaping services that suit their needs.

Examples of the community development process in action at the EPVC include;

- Development of relevant information

- Family learning activities – Homework club for children and imprisoned parent
- Family Fun Days
- Improving bonding visits
- Health Promotion (oral health/café/ health information)
- Changes to the café facility
- The development of a family support group
- Crèche/play workers in Visitors' Centre and Visits room

The success of such work is reliant upon the utilisation of this holistic non-threatening approach and the development and maintenance of professional relationships which support partnership working with the SPS and external agencies.

2.2 Information and Support

It is integral to the centres' purpose to ensure the provision of information and support for service users. In addition, it is recognised that the ability to obtain accessible information related to imprisonment contributes towards a reduction of powerlessness which is reportedly felt when a family member is incarcerated (Breen, 2008). Accessible information also increases the capacity for friends or family members to make informed decisions in relation to imprisonment. It is documented that information has been traditionally difficult to access for individuals in this setting (Henderson and Hurley, 2008). This has improved in quantity in recent years (a main source being from Families Outside) - and now covers a plethora of prison related issues. That said, there are concerns about the accessibility of much of the information in its written form (*Ibid*, 2008).

The EPVC provides a wide range of information which includes the verbal transmission of information and paper based information sourced through its partners such as the aforementioned Families Outside and the Scottish Prison Service (SPS). Salvation Army staff are trained to have adequate knowledge of practical prison enquiries and are able to offer additional support (Chaplaincy). Salvation Army staff work in partnership with the SPS namely the Family Contact Development Officers (FCDOs), Families Outside and other voluntary services who also deliver information and in some cases provide intensive 1-1 support to visitors to the prison.

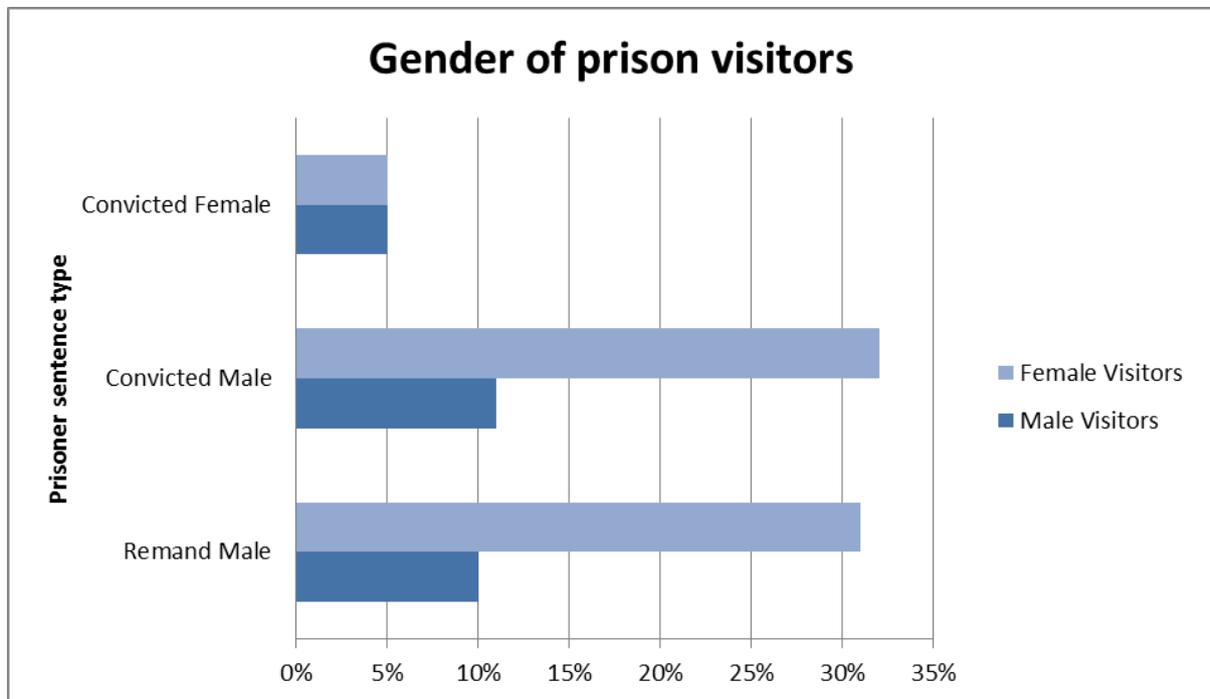
What is more, the provision of accessible information demonstrates a shift towards prisons becoming more community facing. This is an ideological break from the previous ways of working and is an attempt to work more holistically with all partners involved in criminal justice including family members. As such, this marks an incremental shift in criminal justice policy which brings the ethos and values of the Community Justice Authorities closer to those of Community Education.

3.0 Research findings

The research findings are derived from qualitative interviews with a total of 94 adult family members visiting the prison. Calculating the weekly average adult visiting population for August 2012 (353) and

dividing by average visit (n) entitlement for remand (r) or convicted (c) prisoners ($n = r/6$) + ($n = c/2$) this is proportionate of approximately 37.5% of the visiting population during this period.

The following table illustrates a breakdown of respondents in relation to prisoner gender and sentence type, and the gender of respondents.



The above chart indicates that the vast majority of those visiting the prison during this duration of this research are female. Additionally, the research interviewed similar numbers of males and females visiting remand and convicted prisoners.

The gendered nature of the collateral effects of imprisonment is documented in this research. The following impact statements assist in the characterisation of such experience

'you might think that it's our men that are doing the sentence, but we do the sentence with them; running up here, paying in money and all the rest of it'

'We need support, because it's we women that have to stay strong for our kids, if we don't get the help then we cannae help them [referring to their own children]'

'This is hard coming up here, and it's expensive and I'm on benefits. I've begged borrowed and stole [not intended literally] for to keep my man in clothes, [to wear]... in the jail'

'Last month it was a Celtic top. This month, he wants a new pair of trainers because he sold the last pair to someone in his hall. I cannae keep doing this, I'm on benefits and...it's not fair when a ken he wouldnae dae this if it was me in and out of the jail every five minutes'

3.1 General Facilities

Visitors to the centre responded positively to enquiry about the general facilities, including the seating area and the café with 59.5% of individuals stating that the facilities are very good. It was stated consistently that there has been a marked improvement in the quality of hot food served which is thought to be beneficial, particularly when visits coincide with meal times. However some individuals indicated that the price of food has increased, which was viewed negatively.

There were 36% who were ambivalent about the general facilities and 4% of individuals unhappy with various aspects of the centre's facilities. These included complaints about toilet facilities and children's toy room. Overwhelmingly, the response from the discussions about the general facilities demonstrates that the centre serves functions beyond its utilitarian purpose. In relation to the following question; *How does this centre impact upon how you feel when you visit the prison?* Emerging themes included; emotional support, a place to relax and de-stress, and a safe non-judgemental environment.

Many described how having access to the facility provided them with the opportunity to engage with individuals in a similar situation. Related to this, 10% of families described a sense of solidarity felt during this time, with one respondent stating 'getting support from each other really helps because we're all going through it and understand how it feels'.

The research found that families were reported to support each other in relation to prison procedures, problems with visits, proforma's, with Integrated Case Management (ICM) and the verbal transmission of other information.

The Visitors Centre, it was reported, is also a place where women - offer each other support and advice in relation to socio-emotional/relationship difficulties and financial stress. It was reported that these factors are exacerbated by the imprisonment of a family member.

Importantly, a total of 12% male visitors and 47% of female visitors stated that they experienced emotional stress on a journey to the prison. Stress described originated from a variety of different sources: road traffic, travelling long distances, travelling with children, financial pressure, and apprehension about seeing the prisoner.

The respondents stated that the general ambience of the centre including the reception from the staff promotes a relaxing environment which allows them to 'de-stress' before the visit. They stated that a reduction of stress at the Visitors' Centre is enhanced by being able to access convenient services such as the café and toilet facilities. 38% of those interviewed who have visited other prison establishments stated that the Visitors' Centre makes visiting HMP Edinburgh a more positive experience than any other prison visited previously. In addition, 34% of visitors stated that they had not expected to find a facility such as the visitors centre prior to visiting the prison.

Statements include;

'It is a lot more relaxed than I imagined it to be and you've got time to get yourself together before a visit'

'It is really comfortable; it brings prisons into the new age'

'I feel like this centre supports visitors because if someone gets upset the staff are right over'

Respondents also remarked that Edinburgh Prison 'has better facilities than other prisons' and is 'less intimidating than HMP "Cornton Vale", "Polmont", "Shotts", "Barlinnie" and "Glenochil".

There were two instances where respondents had reportedly felt that the centre was not welcoming; this was a direct consequence of interaction with centre staff at the booking in desk leaving them feeling unsupported. That said, many comments made about the environment of the Visitors' Centre include instances where respondents stated that they felt more comfortable being assisted by the Salvation Army as opposed to prison staff.

In terms of general facilities the general feedback about the facility is positive. Importantly it identifies how families and other visitors view it in terms of three dominant themes as follows; 'a safe non-judgemental environment,' it offers 'a chance to relax and de-stress', and it is a place where individuals can access 'support' networks offered by other visitors. Importantly it also serves the necessary functions of providing restroom facilities and serving hot food particularly for those visiting at meal times.

4.0 Information

This research aimed to consider ways in which visitors to the prison access information and assess how effective it is in meeting their needs. As previously stated, it is recognised that inability to access information contributes to stress placed on families and other visitors who are already under considerable pressure. As one visitor stated;

[Being in this situation] can only be explained as a fucking nightmare. We are in the dark for everything, there's not enough [information] about transfers, visit rules, bringing in stuff, how he is being treated, if he's got his medication and all that. I mean ...imagine if it was your son"

There are two main strategies for conveying information at the centre; verbally and in document form. In response to questions relating to access to information 61% of respondents stated that they read the notice boards for information, while 38% respondents stated that they do not. When this concept was probed further, it was found that 59% individuals said that they would prefer information transmitted verbally. Respondents advanced various reasons for this as follows;

'I remember it (information) much better when it's explained'

'On the first visit you're way too stressed to take in information from reading, and it's not just that but some of the information is not clear or easy to understand and there's too much written on one sheet'

'The first time I was told he had to get a proforma for clothes and stuff, I was like "proforma" what is that? That is really annoying ... why can't it just be written in a way you can understand'

'Property and cash deposit information should be given when you first come up, and there is stuff that is not explained like what happens on closed visits'

Additionally, 5% of individuals suggested a lack of information about extradition procedures which contributes to stress for partners and children.

It is clear that there needs to be a rethinking of the ways in which information is presented to make it more easily digestible.

4.1 Increasing accessibility

Respondents were asked: *Would it be useful to have information in a folder or on a website?*

They stated the following;

- 19% have no internet/computer access or are not able to use a computer
- 65% stated that a website or a folder with clear and updated information would be better
- 16% stated that neither a website or a folder would be useful (would prefer verbal information)

Those interviewed were asked if they had seen the basic prison information leaflet (they were shown a copy) and asked about its usefulness.

64% of respondents stated that they had not seen the basic SPS prison information leaflet, yet those who had seen it were satisfied with both its information and presentation. Other respondents advanced the following:

'The general problem with all the leaflets that it doesn't tell you in a language you understand [pertaining to complexity] and there is so much crammed onto a sheet with tiny writing'

'I went to the SPS website for information and when I got here (to the prison) I was told the information I had was out of date'

Highlighted here, are important issues relating to the accessibility of information. Main features arising are the over complication and presentation of written information, and the reduced ability to assimilate information when under stress. Also, low literacy skills may be a contributory factor in accessing

information and which may account for a high percentage of those interviewed stating that they would rather have the information verbally explained.

Overall it appears that accessibility to information is problematic. In addition it is evident that the majority of respondents would prefer verbal information. A notable percentage of respondents did state that they read the notice boards for information but that the information may be more useful in a folder where it would be 'all in the one place'. This may also be complemented by a short induction for individuals when they present themselves at the desk as first time visitors.

5.0 Centre Staff/Accessibility to support services

As many as 80% of respondents stated that the centre staff are welcoming, friendly and stated that they received a good service. Respondents explained that having staff which are sympathetic and non-judgemental is a great advantage to the centre. One respondent noted that;

'Staff talk to you like you're a person and dinnae judge you. They seem to appreciate that it is not you that's committed the crime'

Another explained;

'We are judged out there (community) and we're judged by them (officers) in the jail, sometimes we're judged by other visitors, but we're no judged by them running this place, that's what is really important to us for coming here'

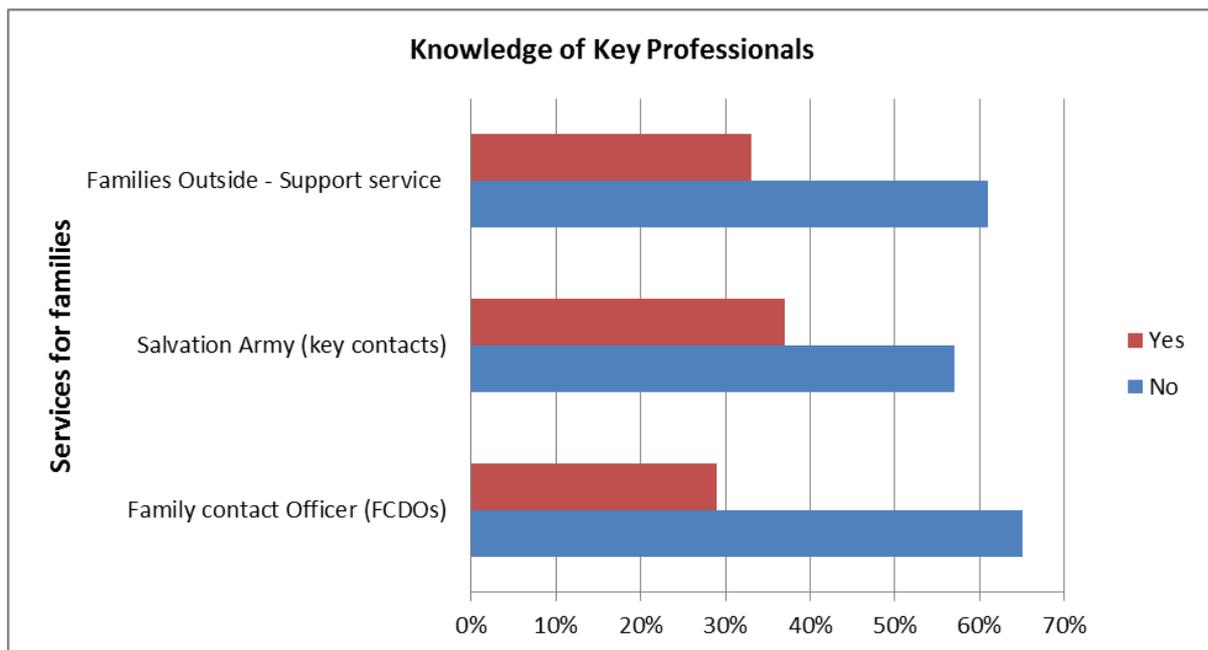
Visitors were asked: *Which staff would you approach if you wanted general information?*

The research demonstrates that individuals would approach Visitors Centre staff (Salvation Army/general assistants), with 90% persons stating this to be the case. 5% of respondents were not sure about what to they would do, whereas 6% stated that they would try to find out through the notice board, or locate information through an online source.

Overwhelmingly the enquiry into the relationship between the visitors and the Salvation Army staff demonstrates that they are perceived as a valuable asset to the centre; contributing towards its description as a 'safe' and 'non-judgemental'.

5.1 Knowledge of key professionals

This research shows that there an apparent lack of knowledge amongst the visitors in relation to identifying key members of the Visitors Centre management and of key support services and respective contacts available at HMP Edinburgh. This finding is also reflected in visitors' knowledge of other services such as those offered by the Family Contact Development Officers (FCDOs) and Families Outside. The graph below illustrates this succinctly.



This raises a number of questions about the expectations placed on 'hard to reach' individuals to identify services for themselves, and the current mechanisms in place for the promotion of such services and respective referral processes. It also demonstrates a lack of knowledge in relation to all services - knowledge of key contacts within services (Salvation Army) and of key services themselves (FCDOs and Families Outside).

5.2 Family Contact Development Officers (FCDOs)

Of the 22% of individuals who had used the FCDO service 13% stated that their experience was positive, suggesting;

'They are very helpful, they are good. They sorted out the problem that I had at the time'

There were 3% of respondents who were ambivalent about the quality of the service that they received with one responded stating;

'Their service is neither a plus or a negative, it depends which one [officer] you get'

Of all respondents, 7% of individuals considered their experience of this service negatively. The following statements assist in the characterisation of such experience;

'I would not rate them highly, anytime you phone the number nobody picks up. So I'd rather just ask at the Visitors Centre desk to see if they can do something'

'I have contacted them and my message was not passed on when they said it would be'

Other respondents indicated varying degrees of scepticism about the service but it was unclear as to whether such opinions reflected the FCDO service objectively or rather a perceived unfairness relative to the criminal justice system more generally. There were however, two allegations of racism and bullying

which had been made worse as a result of a family member making this known to the FCDOs. Respondents did not make such allegations about FCDOs directly but stated that these two situations worsened as the result of actions taken by SPS colleagues based in the prison halls.

Although most of the respondents who have been assisted by the FCDOs viewed the service positively, it is clear that there is a gap in knowledge about the service – the remit of which is intended to provide advice, support and information. Training may be a requirement to improve this service.

5.3 Families Outside

13% of individuals who had been given Families Outside support all responded positively with regards to their experience - advancing the following about the service;

‘The support I got was great she responded well to the all the questions I asked’

‘She was good; it is an all-round service which I would say is valuable and helpful’

Again while there is positive feedback in terms of this service, this research again highlights gaps in knowledge amongst the participating cohort about the wide ranging information and support on offer.

5.4 Concerns and Complaints procedures

This research sought to establish whether individuals are aware of how to raise any concerns which they may have about a prisoner and the protocols for complaint procedures.

The research found that there was widespread uncertainty about courses of action which would need to be taken in circumstances where there is concern for a prisoner. 33% of individuals stated that they would not know what to do should they become concerned about the wellbeing about a prisoner. 53% stated that they would raise the concern with the Visitors’ Centre staff who may liaise with the prison service on their behalf, and 15% stated that they would attempt to contact a governor.

Following the discussions related to complaint procedures it emerged that there is widespread doubt about what to do under such circumstances. As follows;

- 32% stated that they would not complain
- 23% would write to a governor/manager
- 41% would obtain advice from Visitor Centre staff

This demonstrates a level of uncertainty which again likely stems from both the issues raised about information and the lack of awareness of interagency support mechanisms which are available to offer support and advice on these issues. The research also indicated that there are incidences where visitors were not aware that they had the right to complain while others expressed fear of authority and/or the consequences of complaining.

6.0 Services/resources for children and parents

At the Visitors' Centre it has been recognised that developing and implementing good practice based on support and education may have a positive impact on children whose families are affected by imprisonment. Previously, the Visitors' Centre implemented a service provided by Barnardo's which offered parenting advice, support and play work services for children in the Visitors' Centre and visits room. This service discontinued in 2010 and has not yet been reinstated.

The Salvation Army is in the process of recruiting a Children and Parent's support worker who will be responsible for developing services in this area to make up for the short fall in the centre program. This research made a number of enquiries directed at visitors into the potential nature of children and parents provision at the centre.

Respondents were asked about the types of activities that they think should be developed for children. Examples were offered during the discussion and included; arts and craft based activities, homework projects, support and information for parents and educational resources and toys. 95% of those interviewed responded positively advancing a number of further suggestions such as;

- Play workers in the centre and the visits room; new toys/resources in the visits room; improving the children's area in the visits room to make it more child friendly; a range of interactive toys for the bonding visits; selection of books in the visits room.
- 5% responded to the aforementioned suggestions by stating that children have enough resources
- 9% of respondents stated that they *do not* or *would not* bring their children to a prison

Overall, the majority of those participating in the research responded positively to the suggestion of this type of service and improved resources specifically designed to meet the needs of children visiting the prison.

6.1 Access for prisoners' children to services in the community

In consideration of the wider implications of imprisonment on children this research aimed to enquire into whether such children have access to extracurricular learning or community based sports/activity clubs. Respondents were asked: *Does your child/children take part in any activities outwith school including youth clubs, activity or sport clubs of any kind?*

This research found that the children visiting the prison have limited access to such provision. Overall, 7% of the 27 visitors who attend with primary school aged children reported that their children attend extra-curricular activities, whereas the majority attend no extra activities. In addition, those that visit the prison with children stated the following about their children's experience of visiting the prison

- 18% of those attending with children felt that their children were ambivalent 'ok' about visiting
- 30% stated their children were bored

- 30% stated that they felt their children were stressed visiting the prison
- 15% advanced that their children enjoyed visiting
- 7% N/A (attended with infants)

This indicates that the majority of children whose parents were involved in this study do not attend extra-curricular learning or leisure activities. Additionally, with a large proportion of families stating that their children are either bored or stressed when visiting the prison this may be an opportunity to engage children in a number of activities which they may be missing as a result of visiting the prison.

6.2 Learning for parents

The respondents were asked if they attend any support groups or have accessed community based learning as a means of personal development. This research found that of the 94 participants who took part in the research one individual attends a community based group which is a source of emotional support. Further to this the research aimed to assess the general attitude towards becoming involved in information sharing or learning groups for parents and other adults. Two suggestions were advanced by the researcher; informal information sessions concerning prison based issues and/or learning related to child development and parenting. Findings were as follows;

- 48% stated that they would like to become involved in group sessions
- 27% gave a definite no
- 26% were unsure if they would be comfortable being involved in groups in this setting

This research suggests that the participants in this study do not engage with community based services which are instrumental in the engagement of vulnerable and hard to reach communities. In addition, this research demonstrates clearly that there may be further opportunities for the development of relevant grassroots work with adults who use the centre.

6.3 Bonding visits and Prison Induction

The Edinburgh Prison offers 'bonding visits' which are especially designated visits for prisoners with young children. The purpose of such visits is to develop and maintain parent/child attachment and is an opportunity for prisoners to have more freedom with their children than possible in a standard visit setting.

This research found that 60% of those attending with children did not know about bonding visits.

In addition, HMP Edinburgh offers 'family induction sessions' for the families of convicted prisoners. These sessions are designed to inform families about how the prison works, how to obtain support, information and allows families to ask any questions. These sessions are also an opportunity to meet the FCDOs; Visitors' Centre co-ordinator; and Families Outside staff. This is an opportunity which enables families to find out what services each party have on offer. In this research it was found that only 5% of

eligible participants have been to the family induction program. 30% of those visiting convicted prisoners were not aware of the induction sessions. This issue needs to be addressed as a matter of urgency.

7.0 Summary of conclusions

This research demonstrates that the Visitors' Centre is viewed positively by the majority of visitors to Edinburgh Prison many of whom experience stress and anxiety. Generally speaking the findings indicate that Salvation Army employees have created a culture which is safe and non-judgemental for individuals visiting a prison. Furthermore the Visitors' Centre is ideally placed to offer important services such as information, support and other amenities. That said, the research highlights that universal access to information can be problematic: this is particularly evident with regards to the expressed inability to comprehend and assimilate the written information which is available from multiple sources. Expressing difficulties in processing large volumes of written information the majority of respondents have stated that it would be more appropriate and effective to receive information verbally.

While some visitors state that notice boards are useful for accessing information, they did suggest that it may be useful to have simplified information in a folder or website where they could access all the necessary information in the one location and form part of an induction session.

In analysing the impacts of additional support services such as those provided by the FCDOs and Families Outside the research findings are twofold; an assumption that 'hard to reach' individuals can identify and seek out support and information by themselves, and a deficit in knowledge about these services amongst this cohort.

There is also a need to reconsider how bonding visits and prison inductions are promoted and how the services of partner agencies can be targeted more succinctly to meet the needs of prison visitors'.

The research also highlights a lack of awareness amongst visitors about standard processes relating to potential concerns about the wellbeing of a prisoner and complaint procedures. While many respondents expressed that they would consult Salvation Army staff at the centre if they had a concern about a prisoner; many respondents expressed fear of retribution to the prisoner should they pursue a complaint.

In relation to children's work the majority of those participating in the research responded positively to the concept of a service specifically designed to meet the needs of children visiting the prison. In addition, it was expressed that there are insufficient resources such as toys in the Visitors' Centre, in the visits room and for bonding visits.

Incidentally, this research found that the majority of children affected by imprisonment in this cohort do not attend extra-curricular learning or leisure activities. The Visitors' Centre setting is a valuable opportunity to engage children in a broad range of educational activities from which they appear to be currently excluded. Similarly, it is evident that adults in this study largely do not engage with community based services which are instrumental in the engagement of the vulnerable and hard to reach. This

research demonstrates that there may be opportunities to engage with adults which will help to strengthen the current practices within the centre.

The key feature of the Edinburgh Prison Visitors' Centre is the mandatory booking in service which is utilised by staff as a tool for engagement with visitors. It is this facility which is instrumental in the engagement of socially excluded individuals. Moreover, the continuation of a non-threatening approach at the centre which seeks to build positive relationships with prison visitors is a fundamental tool in the diversion of potential future crises for many children, families and other individuals who find themselves in this situation.

8.0 Limitations

The findings in this research are representative of the experiences of a limited number of the annual visiting population at HMP Edinburgh. This research further acknowledges that the prison Visitors' Centre is a demanding environment run by a small staff team. In addition, the visiting population can be transient which necessitates a need to churn information to large volumes of visitors.

9.0 Key Recommendations

While overall the EPVC has a number of examples of good practice evident in the research, this report offers seven key recommendations by which the centre and partner agencies can expand and improve services and ensure better targeting of information and support. The recommendations are as follows;

Recommendation 1: Information and support

There is urgent need to rethink the strategies which promote the various support and information services in the Visitors' Centre. This will require more face to face work with service users to ensure the inclusion of individuals who are currently excluded from accessing information and services. The development of more robust strategies should include a rethinking of current practices which place the responsibility on prisoners to convey information succinctly to family members, and on families and other visitors to identify support for themselves. Where prisoners are concerned, this includes protocols related to Integrated Case Management, Prison Inductions and Bonding Visits. In both contexts the 'responsibility' cannot be decoupled from demographic indicators which suggest that low levels of literacy are prevalent amongst prisoner populations – and their families (*Adult Literacies in Scotland 2020: Strategic Guidance*).

Recommendation 2: Building upon the Community Development Approach

More work should be undertaken to build capacity within this group and to develop relationships based on mutuality, dialogue and trust, which may serve as the starting place for individual, community and social change. Awareness raising sessions between those offering support services such as the FCDO service and Families Outside would lay the foundations for developing capacity and needs based information *with* and not *for* service users. Measures should also be taken to ensure (given the transient

population) that strategies for engagement/events are facilitated on a frequent basis to ensure that information flows in cyclical fashion corresponding with the transient population.

Recommendation 3: Alternative information points

For those visitors who find accessing written information or electronic information helpful the development of folders and a website would be useful.

Recommendation 4: Resources for children and adults

This setting boasts a unique opportunity for the development of work with children and parents. As noted earlier, the Salvation Army are recruiting a Parent and Children's worker which will complement the work at the centre. It is recommended that the work with children at the centre is engaging, holistic, and fun for children who feel stressed or threatened as a result of visiting the prison. Furthermore the children's work should be underpinned by an ethos of education and draw upon the key themes of the Curriculum for Excellence and the Early Years Framework. Additionally, the principles of GIRFEC should be firmly embedded in work in this field.

Recommendation 5: Opportunities specific to parents

Non-threatening opportunities for parents to become involved in education concerning parenting, child behaviour and development; and understanding the psychological impacts of imprisonment on children would be highly valuable. It is recommended that such provision should be implemented drawing upon the National Parenting Strategy for Scotland (2012), and local authority parenting programs.

Recommendation 6: Developing public and voluntary sector links

It is recommended that strong links be made between the Visitors' Centre and community sector agencies which offer support to vulnerable individuals and families in local communities. The development of these links will be instrumental in supporting individuals and families, particularly when a prisoner is released and there is no requirement to use the centre.

Recommendation 7: Research and Evaluation

Evaluation of the new Parent and Children's work at the centre is recommended to build up a portfolio of evidence to present to potential funders and to quantify outcomes for the project. Lastly it is recommended that a correlatory longitudinal study should be undertaken to quantify the effects of practice based methods and approaches in supporting this particular needs group.

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Research conducted by Nicola Khadijiah Ceesay

Research associate: University of Edinburgh

Contact for further information at

nkcesay@hotmail.com