



AS WE APPROACHED OUR SIXTH BIRTHDAY, IT WAS TIME FOR SUSSEX PRISONERS' FAMILIES TO STOP, TAKE A BREATH AND THINK ABOUT THE FUTURE.

FACILITATED BY CHANGE SPECIALISTS, 'CULTURE SHIFT', WE BROUGHT TOGETHER FAMILIES, OUR BOARD, STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS TO CONSIDER WHAT WE ARE DOING WELL, WHAT WE CAN DO BETTER AND WHAT DO WE WANT OUR ORGANISATION TO LOOK LIKE IN FIVE YEARS' TIME. AND WE WANTED TO TAP INTO THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF THE FAMILIES TO EXPLORE THE VALUES AND CULTURE OF SUSSEX PRISONERS' FAMILIES.

'BE THE CHANGE'

On the morning of May 7th 2019 we got together at the BMECP Centre in central Brighton to share our experiences of Sussex Prisoners' Families, as a family member, a volunteer or a member of the staff team or board.

We opened by giving a little background about when and why the organisation was set up, our first volunteering recruitment and how over the last five years we have built our services by listening to families.

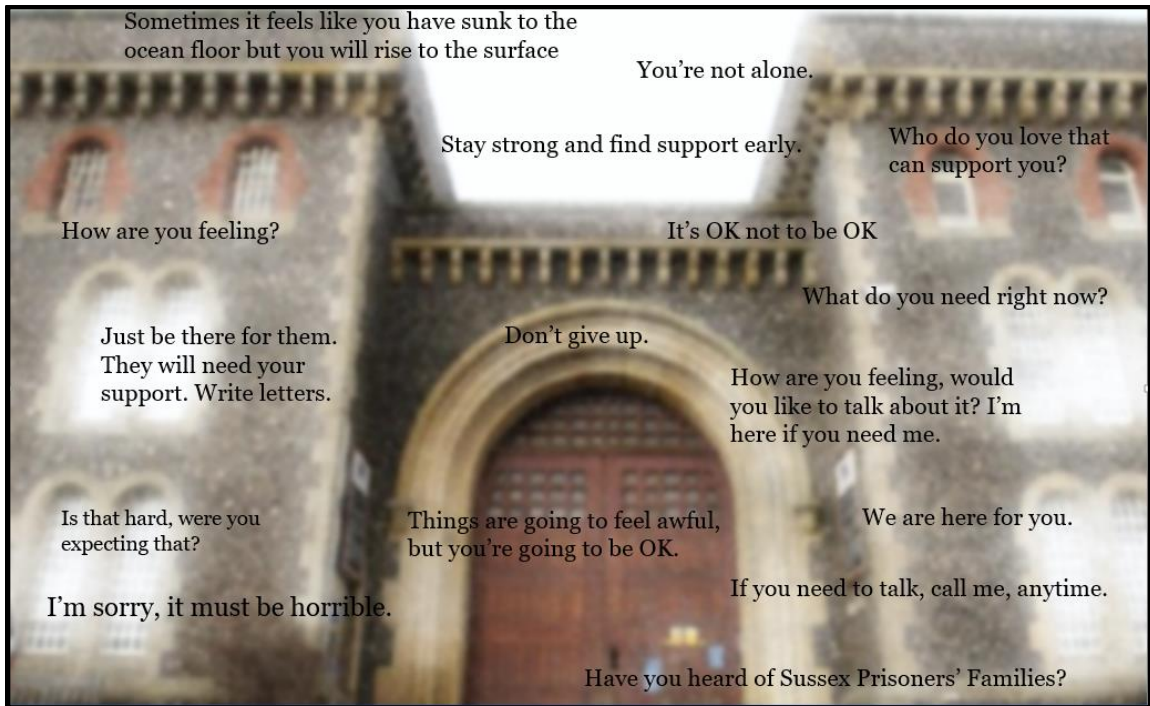
Julia Roberts from Culture Shift facilitated the event with lots of interactive workshops that got us talking, thinking and sharing and mixed up the groups so board, staff, volunteers and family members were able to meet each other and hear each other's views and experiences.

We did lots of working through what SPF does best, what our values look like, what areas of development and growth there are and what we might say to a family member needing help.

At the end of the morning we shared lunch together, feeling positive about the direction SPF was taking, confident that we are giving the right support and with great ideas for the future.

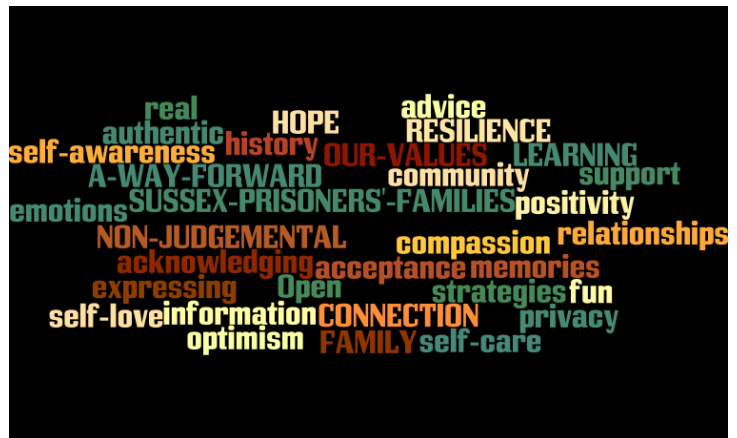


What would you say to a family you just met who were experiencing the loss of a loved one to prison?



What values and words express what SPF does?

-
1. Family (in the widest sense)
 2. Safe, open, non judgemental
 3. Resilience (practical information and strategies)
 4. Connection (to relationships)
 5. Learning (advice and information so we take control)
 6. Optimism (a positive way forward)



In the conversations we heard that families appreciated the compassion shown by SPF, which was complemented by practical information and an ability to communicate with the prisons on behalf of families, something that alleviated lots of stress. Families say they grew stronger from sharing with others in the same situation and from the knowledge they received as they navigated the criminal justice system, which helped them cope better.

We asked, what does SPF do best and how do we meaningfully help families?

Be listened to and not being judged.	Provide practical information.	Bring families together, gets people together to share experiences.	They're welcoming and compassionate through a frightening experience.
Give us a voice.	Alleviate fear and anxiety through providing emotional and practical support	Bring a community together.	Spread the word and show support and compassion for our community.
Raise awareness of the families' situation through education about the system and impact on families	Normalise the situation and it's OK to play and have fun.	Provide an insight into the system and the life changing experience we have to cope with.	Challenge misconceptions of offenders' families across different agencies, and bring agencies together
Finding direction and building resilience through being given advice and support.	Learn about the journey from each other	Connect us with each other, with our family and with SPF to help us cope.	Provide an insight into the system and the life changing experience we have to cope with
Challenging misconceptions (about families) in court and prison.	They give us optimism and a sense of positivity and fun.	They're a safe place.	They help you have a focus and a vision of life, that there is a way forward.

It was clear how strongly the families felt about their 'community' and how they value the opportunity to meet with each other to share experiences without being judged, have fun and give each other support. This sense of 'connection' and the practical knowledge obtained, played a big part in helping individuals cope with their stress, anxiety and loss, and over time, made them begin to feel optimistic.



We have a menu of services that we have designed by listening to families, but we know more needs to be done. We talked about what else we can do to reach and engage more families.

Knowing about SPF before the trial and before custody. Get agencies such as Police and Probation to provide information to families.

Raise awareness among the different teams and agencies.

Provide SPF information at arrest, when solicitors are involved and at the police station.

Reach into the community to find the most isolated and vulnerable families through the police, appropriate adults and solicitors and in the prison through the chaplaincy, listeners, a 'wing' newsletter and at the induction.

ADHD and Autism – where is the support?

Dealing with the press and media attention. Workshop on dealing with the press in anticipation of release.

Have 'Ask Me' ambassadors and 'befrienders' who can help other families.

We'd like to spend more time together as a community.

Work with probation to help us at the point of custody and at release.

More learning and workshops to help us understand the system and what to expect in the future.

Have the court volunteers at court more regularly.



Small groups worked together and suggested these Mission Statements:

'We are on your side'

'Supporting families through the
Criminal Justice System'

'If you have a family member in
prison we can support you'

'Removing stigma, offering hope for
the future'

This was the first opportunity we have had for everyone involved in Sussex Prisoners' Families to meet and share experiences and explore what has gone well and what we can do more of.

We were touched by how positive everyone was about the organisation and what it has achieved in a short time, but we are motivated by the work that still needs to be done to reach more families and to do this that we need to build partnerships with the police, probation, prisons, legal services, the judiciary and schools and community organisations across the county.

What emerged from the discussions was a strong sense of community, a shared vision and a burning desire to improve the system for anyone with a loved one in prison or going through the criminal justice system.

- We will expand our services to reach more friends and families.
- We will take this wonderful learning and the brilliant ideas and include them in our new delivery plans.
- We will set up a regular platform for families to come together to provide feedback and reflections on SPF and new areas of work.
- We will use the contributions for funding applications, to show potential funders and our stakeholders that our services are influenced and supported by families.

And vitally, we are committed to working together to build a community of friends and families and services that connect to each other with compassion and optimism.



**A big thank you to Julia and Culture Shift for facilitating
our 'Be The Change' workshop.**

