

Family Outreach Service, Introduction and background:

Recommendations from previous impact reports by the Social Research Hub, and the University of Brighton, alongside feedback from family members, suggested some families' preferred face to face support rather than relying upon telephone support from the First Stop helpline. We were also conscious that networking across the large geographical area of Sussex was adding strain to our capacity, yet we were aware of the value of networking and raising awareness of the issue of family imprisonment and gaining knowledge of local support services to signpost families to. Additional strain was felt with supporting volunteer inductions in the court and networking in court with court teams and legal services.

The Board reviewed these concerns and agreed to create a pilot Family Outreach Service that would increase capacity for networking, enhance our court presence and offer individual face to face support for family members in their local community.

Subsequently, with funding from West Sussex County Council Members Big Society Fund, The Foreshore Trust, East Sussex Reducing Health Inequalities Grant, and Eastbourne Borough council, we piloted a small Family Outreach Service in West Sussex and East Sussex during 2018.

There were three posts of one day a week in three areas, West Sussex North (covering Crawley, Horsham and Mid Sussex), West Sussex South (covering the coastal strip from Worthing, Littlehampton, Bognor Regis and Chichester), and East Sussex with a focus in Hastings, Rother and Eastbourne.

Three part time staff (0.2) were recruited in October 2017.

As the role was part time, the staff team had other jobs and commitments. Over the year we have had six different people in the roles, three who moved on to other jobs. With the delay in recruiting and inducting new staff, the inconsistency was evident and noticed by stakeholders in each of the localities, although the new team members made considerable efforts to rebuild connections with local networks.

In the summer of 2018 the Family Outreach role took in another function. Sussex Prisoners' Families worked in partnership to support a new visitor's centre run by Spurgeons' that opened in HMP Lewes in July 2018. The Family Outreach worker spent time at the centre meeting and greeting families', familiarising new visitors with the prison visiting procedures and offering emotional support and practical advice about arranging visits and community based support.

Each of the six Family Outreach workers in the role discussed the function of the role in supervision meetings and gave feedback on their experience of the role.

Although the remit of the role appeared wide for a one day a week position, each of the team stressed how much they enjoyed this variety of contact and the diversity of people and organisations they met. The professional learning, knowledge gained of community services and other professional roles and the increased individual confidence they developed, was highly valued.

Two people who moved on to other employment highlighted that the experience gained was significant in helping them to obtain full time posts in their chosen field.

Each of the Family Outreach workers highlighted that the opportunity for professional development with SPF is huge, relaying back that it is therefore not surprising that they became more employable and moved on. Although two gave feedback that despite wanting to, they simply could not afford to stay, indicating that more hours for part-time staff would help with retention and continuity of service.

“I’ve learned so much in my short time with SPF and become more aware of what I want to do in future, which is work with families!” (Outreach worker)

“Before working for SPF, I had little appreciation for how stigmatised and isolated families of prisoners’ can be in the community, it’s been such a personal learning curve!” (Outreach worker)

Outreach with families:

The Family Outreach team provided individual face to face support in the community to nine family members.

The Family Outreach worker would meet a family member in a community venue, usually a café, community centre or park, providing emotional support and a non-stigmatising contact for a frequently isolated and marginalised family. Practical information on communicating with or visiting prison was provided alongside supported signposting and referral to community services for financial, housing advice and counselling.

The Family Outreach worker supported parents with how to talk to their children about having a parent in prison or preparing them for a prison visit. They also provided resources (books, videos) to help with this.

A significant proportion of the families supported by the Family Outreach workers are related to sex offenders. These families are often uniquely isolated and stigmatised, and the journey

of acceptance can be very complex. This role offers a distinctive opportunity to reach and support these families more so than many other support agencies.

The majority of the referrals to the Family Outreach service were made following initial contact with families at court, or those who contacted the First Stop Advice Line and recently with Spurgeons staff at HMP Lewes. This indicates an intrinsic link across Court Support, the SPF First Stop Advice Line, HMP Lewes Visitors Centre and the outreach service, providing a seamless connection to advice and support for families as they navigate the intricacies of the criminal justice system.

“We really enjoyed the day out on the pier so much. It was lovely being out with the kids and being able to talk to people without feeling embarrassed or ashamed, who knew what we were going through. Thank you for inviting us, it’s been worth it” (Family member)

“The meal was the first time I’ve been out for two years. It was good to meet others who I could talk to and who understood, you’ve been such a great help through all this” (Family member)

“In this role I have been able to build a relationships with families, and this has changed the work we do because we can tailor our approach to provide the right kind of support at the right time and in the right place, depending if the family are attending court or prison or getting support in the community, such a benefits and housing advice. They say what a big difference this makes to them being able to cope.” (Outreach worker)

“Once we meet family members face to face, they tend to maintain contact with us and make use of other support services. This includes family days out, peer support groups and assistance with the practicalities of visiting prison” (Outreach worker)

Outreach with professionals:

A family support worker asked the SPF staff member to attend a home visit to talk to a young person (aged 11 years) whose father was in prison and who had many questions she could not answer. We said we could offer free consultation and help her with these answers, but she stressed she did not feel confident in responding to the child’s questions. We attended the home visit, taking age appropriate books and resources that helped the child understand what prison life was like and discussed his feeling about his father’s imprisonment. The interaction reassured the child who had spent a year holding these questions and also modelled how to discuss the impact of family imprisonment with children, helping his mother and the family worker talk more confidently with the children.

The Family Outreach team attended 78 network events in West Sussex and East Sussex. These included events organised by Voluntary Action Arun and Chichester, Worthing CVS, Brighton Community Works, Crawley CVS, 3VA, Rother Voluntary Action, Hastings Voluntary Action.

This also included being invited to attend team meetings to present about Sussex Prisoners' Families. Through these events the outreach team raised awareness about the impact of imprisonment to over 1,000 professionals across West Sussex and East Sussex. The outreach team also met individually with over 50 other professionals to share information about each other's' services and discuss referral pathways.

The West Sussex research 'Scoping the Needs of Prisoners' Families in West Sussex' (2018), identified a lack of awareness and confidence in professionals to identify, engage and support prisoners' families. The regional placing of the Family Outreach team meant they were well placed to meet other professionals and volunteers at a variety of networking events, and team meetings in each locality, building relationships with colleagues that eased the referral process.

Recently, we have seen an increased contact from professionals seeking support for children of prisoners'. These children appear to fall below the threshold for therapeutic support and children's services workers appear to lack the understanding of the criminal justice system to respond to the questions children are asking.

"When I think of prison and prisoners', I never thought about the families. Talking to you (outreach worker) has opened up a whole new world." (Teacher)

"This is all new to me, do you do any training?" Professional who subsequently attended 'Hidden Sentence' training and has referred families for support.

Outreach at court:

The Family Outreach role offered a valuable function in the courts. All the outreach workers had previous experience of the Court role with Sussex Prisoners' Families as volunteers. New volunteers were able to shadow the Family Outreach worker in court and learn about the role, becoming familiar with the court environment and getting to know the court staff. Volunteers gave feedback on how important this was for them building the skills and confidence to approach families in the stressful environment of a court. The Family outreach workers were also available to accompany families in court, often on the first or last day of

the trial. They are also well equipped to support families dealing with the press in court, which is another element of support no other support agency addresses.

The Family Outreach team were able to spend time building relationships with Court Staff, particularly Probation, security, court clerks and court ushers. Court staff gave feedback that the outreach workers increased their familiarity with Sussex Prisoners' Families, and they could confidently provide information and leaflets about our services to defendants' families when we were not present in court.

Over the year the outreach team were in post, 418 families received leaflets from court teams with practical information about contacting and visiting prison and Sussex Prisoners' Families, an increase of 40% over the previous year.

As the individual 1-2-1 work with families became prioritised, we found that the Outreach workers were not able to sustain the court element of the role due to their limited hours.

"Thank you so much for all your help in court and at the prison. When I was so scared with all the horrible things that were happening, you put me at ease and made me feel like I was able to cope, Thank you" (Partner of Sex Offender)

"As a court volunteer, I was able to alleviate huge amounts of stress simply by familiarising families with the court beforehand, explaining what was likely to happen next and helping them understand what had just been said in court" (outreach worker)

"I have helped family members during sentencing by managing the press, and explaining exactly how to arrange prison visits. Not only did the family have no idea how to do that, but they didn't even know to which prison their loved one had been taken. No-one tells them anything." (outreach worker)

"It is not unusual to see family members of defendants being completely ignored in court. No-one even asks how they are and no-one is there to look after them. This contrasts sharply with the way that the family of the victims are treated by court and police officials. SPF court volunteers are sometimes the only friendly faces that families see on what could be the worst day of their lives." (outreach worker)

Learning and Challenges:

- The most pressing challenge was staff retention. The pilot was disrupted by people leaving to other jobs and due to other commitments and financial pressures, which was understandable given the extremely part-time nature of the role.
- Having a Family Outreach role in the HMP Lewes Visitors Centre has provided a bridge for families between the prison and community support. The outreach worker has been able to 'get to know' family members who have welcomed contact and support outside the visits in the community. The outreach worker has built relationships with Spurgeons staff and a smooth reciprocal referral pathway has emerged. The opportunity to engage families at the Criminal Courts and HMP Lewes Visitors Centre as well as in the community, is a uniquely valuable way of engaging this hard to reach group, particularly families of sex offenders.
- The Family Outreach worker worked with adults only. Whilst parents were grateful for this, their feedback described being so overwhelmed by other financial, emotional and social issues, that they and their children would benefit from a support worker being able to engage and support the children directly.
- It is noted that the First Stop Advice line receives calls from professionals seeking advice about working with children with a parent in prison and given the capacity and thresholds for children's mental health services, stakeholders and professionals are increasingly asking if we work, or can work, with children.
- The Family Outreach team are well placed to reach out across the multiple CVS, professional and volunteer networks in Sussex to raise awareness of the impact of imprisonment upon families and develop reciprocal referral pathways to support isolated families access community based support services.

Recommendations:

1. To maintain and build a Family Outreach Service across West Sussex, Brighton & Hove and East Sussex providing family support in the court, community and at the prisons, and networking with professionals across the county.
2. The role should also include a presence at HMP Lewes, HMP Ford and HMP Bronzefield family days and visitor centres. This would raise awareness of SPF in the prisons and with the families, adding an additional referral pathway.
3. Build the roles into more substantive posts. This will allow a greater presence and increase capacity for family support, engaging with professional in the community and in court, and volunteer induction. A more substantial post is likely to aid recruitment. Given the experience of the outreach team and reflecting on workload, a three day post is recommended.

4. Given the increased demand from parents and professionals, the outreach role should include the capacity to work directly with children. From the 'Families Together' events we have been able to engage more young people, with the possibility of establishing a bespoke young person's support group – similar to the monthly adult support group.
5. Following the success of 'Hidden Voices', 'Families Together' and 'Families Connected', and the popularity of fun family activities bringing families together, the outreach role should be used to provide a point of contact with families' during these events, with the opportunity to offer long term, community-based support as required.
6. An Outreach role should be developed to support families in Brighton and Hove. Given there is a regular monthly 'support group' meeting in Brighton, the outreach staff would be able to build this group and organise family activities with them.
7. The Outreach role is also able to link into the 'Families Connected' digital platform we have developed, connecting the Family Outreach worker to the online community to provide advice, share information, and build relationships that facilitate engagement with staff, volunteers and other families at the 'Families Together' and 'Hidden Voices' community activities.

Summary

The Family Outreach service added a new dimension to the work Sussex Prisoners Families undertakes with prisoners' families and local stakeholders. The capacity to engage families through each stage of the offender journey resulted in deeper connections between our service and the family. Most pleasingly, and in retrospect, families who were at risk of being extremely isolated, began engaging with our community projects and meeting others in the same situation, building a peer support network which has been critical to their wellbeing and ability to manage their trauma and anxiety.

The opportunities for developing the Family Outreach Service and the transforming impact the role can make for families, particularly children and young people, as well as professionals, is truly exciting.

We have now integrated the Family Outreach service as a key element of our service menu, with the outreach workers being powerful conduits and connectors for families, and professionals, to our services and projects, as well as to each other.