



Sussex Prisoners' Families

Impact Assessment: Data Analysis and Recommendations

SOCIAL RESEARCH HUB

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Introduction

Sussex Prisoners' Families (SPF) is a community interest company that provides practical and emotional support to local families with a family member in prison. Among other services, SPF runs community support groups/advice drop-ins (hereafter support group) and provides a telephone advice line (hereafter First Stop Advice Line). In order to assess the impact of these services, SPF designed and distributed a questionnaire to users of these services. This report provides an analysis of the data gathered, its limitations and recommendations for future action.

Analysis of Support Group Data

A total of four responses were received from the support group questionnaire. The responses indicate that the respondents found out about the support group from a range of sources, including word of mouth, the internet and a visitor at HMP Lewes.

All respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the support received helped them to feel less anxious, less isolated, more confident and better able to cope with a family member in prison.

All respondents strongly agreed that the SPF staff member they interacted with was friendly and approachable; a good listener who understood their concerns; and sympathetic and caring. Positive interaction with the SPF staff member was repeatedly emphasised in the written sections of the questionnaire:

"From the first day they have been there for me. I don't think I could have coped with all the diff [sic] situation we came across."

"A huge thank you to [SPF staff member's name] and everyone for all the support and kindness! Don't know how I would have survived without the group."

"It has helped me enormously to come to terms with what is happening and to have someone help when I could not get information."

All respondents agreed or strongly agreed that it was helpful to talk to other families in a similar situation and that by meeting other families they were able to make new friends,

discuss their situation with people in a non-judgmental setting and get advice from other group participants. Two of the written responses specifically refer to this as being the main benefit of attending the group.

All respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the support groups are run at a good time of day, that the venue is accessible and that a monthly session is suitable. However, it was noted in a written response from one respondent that the timing of the drop-in session was not ideal for them due to work commitments.

The responses indicate that SPF was able to provide all or most of the support and advice the questionnaire respondents needed.

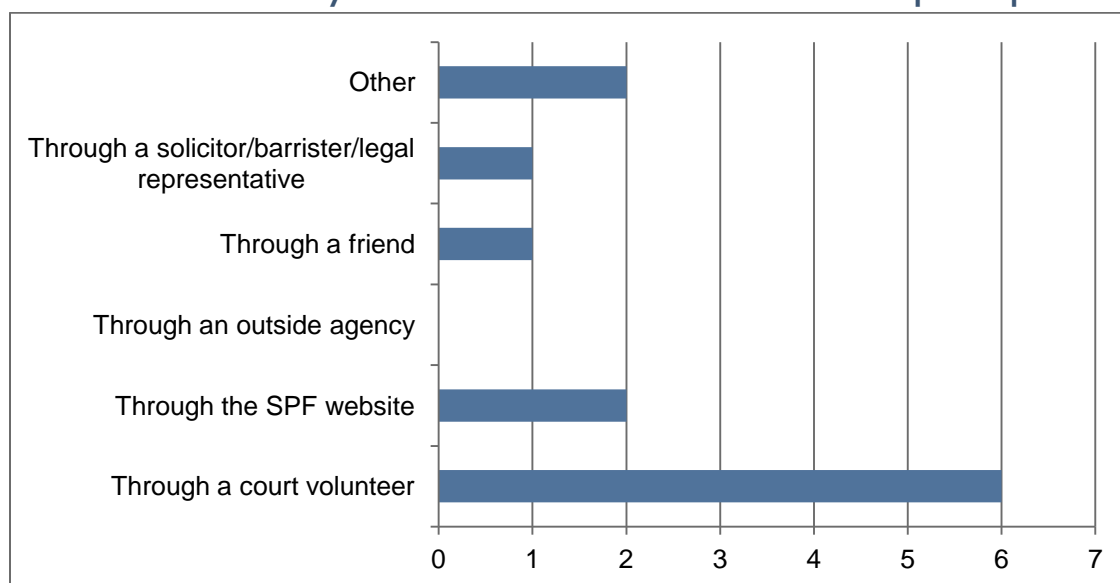
All of the respondents agreed that they would recommend the support group service to others.

Analysis of First Stop Advice Line Data

A total of 10 responses were received from the First Stop Advice Line questionnaire, out of 50 people who were contacted directly. A link to the questionnaire was also provided on SPF's website and Twitter feed.

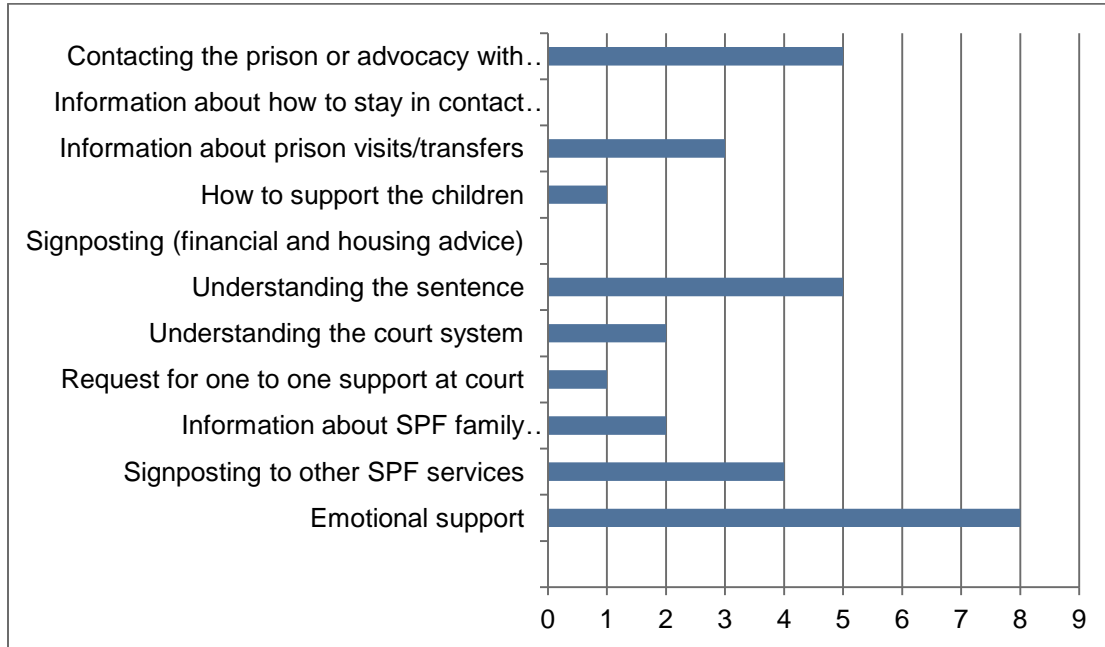
The responses indicate that the majority of respondents found out about SPF and the First Stop Help Line from a court volunteer (see Table 1). This is a useful data point and would be worth cross-referencing with other information about the court volunteer programme to highlight the positive impact it is having.

Table 1: How did you find out about our First Stop Help Line/SPF?



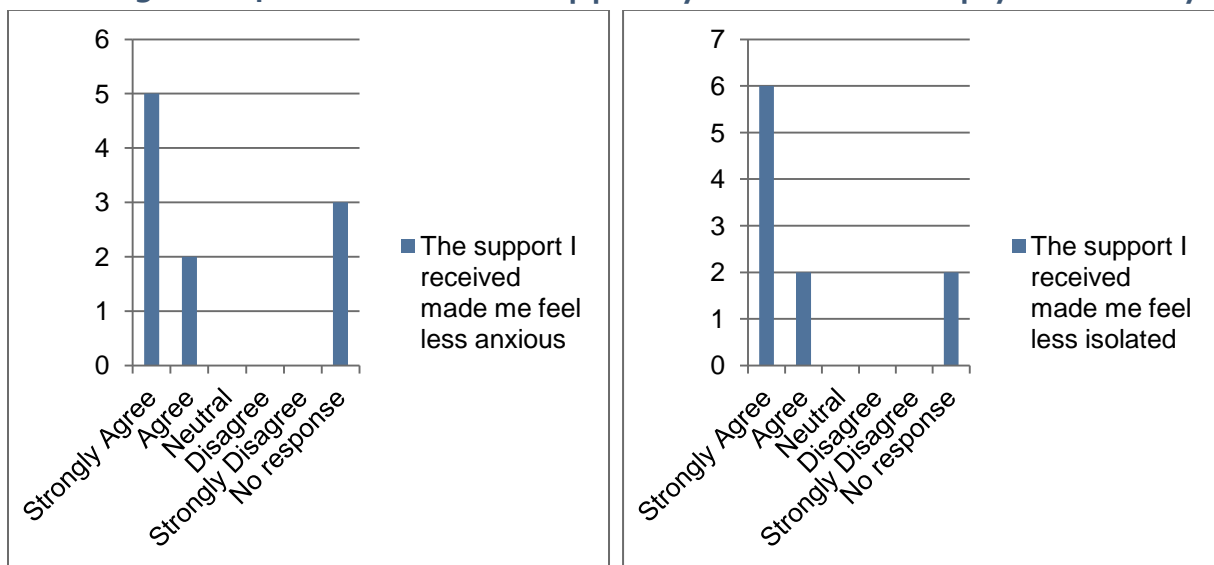
The responses from the questionnaire indicate that the majority of respondents contacted the First Stop Help Line for emotional support (see Table 2).

Table 2: What support/information did you receive from SPF?



In terms of delivering this support, the majority of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the support received made them feel less anxious and less isolated (see Tables 3 and 4).

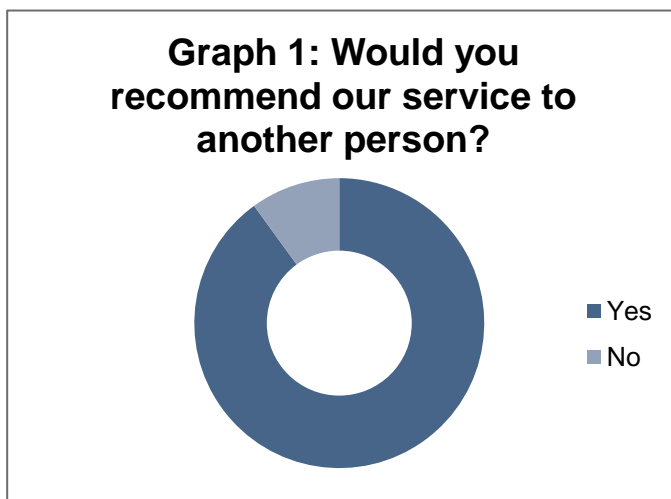
Tables 3 and 4: How did the support you receive help your family?



The responses from the questionnaire also indicate that the majority of respondents received information that was clear and easy to understand and addressed their concerns.

The majority of respondents (9 out of 10) would recommend the First Stop Help Line (see Graph 1).

The respondent who indicated 'No' went on to explain that they were unable to attend any of the support group meetings due to work commitments. This was not necessarily a reflection of the First Stop Help Line but, as indicated above, does suggest that increased variability in support group scheduling could be beneficial.



Limitations of Data Analysis

Due to the limited response rate (20% response rate for the First Stop Advice Line questionnaire and just four respondents for the support group questionnaire), it is difficult to draw generalisations from the data gathered. However, in addition to the questionnaire responses, three emails were also received that provided positive feedback about SPF's service. The responses obtained in the other feedback/comments sections of the questionnaires were also very positive. This suggests that, while the dataset is insufficient to produce compelling statistics about impact, the qualitative data does provide lots of evidence of the positive impact of SPF's work.

Reasons for Low Response Rate

A number of factors could have influenced the low response rate. For example, the timing of the questionnaire might have been problematic, since it was sent over the summer holidays when people tend to be away or busy. It is also possible that, for some of the people contacted, too much time had elapsed between using the service and being asked to provide feedback. This is particularly the case if people have now moved on from an emotionally challenging period and do not wish to re-visit it. It is also possible that the questionnaires themselves may have been asking the wrong or too many questions.

Recommendations

Drawing on the analysis of the data gathered, and the challenges presented by the low response rate, the following recommendations are made:

Recommendation 1

In order to mitigate the problem of low response rate, SPF should try to integrate feedback/data gathering into their processes. For example, users of the First Stop Advice Line should be contacted for feedback soon after they have used the service and their responses stored in a database for periodic review.

Recommendation 2

Integrating impact assessment into SPF's processes will create an additional strain on resources so a proportion of the budget should be allocated for gathering feedback in future funding applications.

Recommendation 3

Questionnaires should be simplified for future surveys in order to avoid partial nonresponse. In addition to a low response rate, some of the questions and sub-questions were skipped over by respondents.

Recommendation 4

SPF should try to capitalise on the depth of qualitative responses by performing a more in-depth analysis using interviews or focus groups.

Recommendation 5

Based on the feedback received, SPF should consider expanding their Support Group services to offer a wider range of times or a more varied schedule in order to cater for those who are unable to attend the regular monthly meetings.

Recommendation 6

SPF should cross-reference the positive feedback received here about their court volunteers with additional information/statistics about the court volunteer programme to highlight the positive impact it is having.