



Family Learning in Prisons and Community Settings

Introduction

Family Learning can benefit offenders; their literacy and numeracy skills may improve, they may develop a greater understanding of how their children learn and gain parenting knowledge and their family relationships may be strengthened. These findings emerged from a 2004 study carried out by the National Foundation for Education Research (NFER) for the Department for Education and Skills (DFES), which also suggested that "Family Learning programmes offered considerably more benefits to participants than the family contact experienced during normal visits." (Halsey et al 2004, p1). Family Learning provides an opportunity not only for family interaction but quality time and quality interaction for those involved.

"For many offenders, maintaining strong links with their families and communities is a key factor in enabling rehabilitation. Conversely, the breakdown of these links, and the ensuing isolation, can increase the risk of re-offending." (DfES 2005, p11).

Aims and Objectives of the Project

The aims of the project were to:

- reduce re-offending;
- break the intergenerational cycle of under-achievement through Family Learning;
- improve the physical and mental health of offenders and their families.

The objectives of the project were to:

- provide prisoners with opportunities to retain and strengthen family bonds;
- encourage parents to support their children's learning development;
- develop good parenting skills;
- develop a broader knowledge of activities that meets the needs of males and females;
- further develop literacy, language and numeracy skills of parents in the two contexts (prison and community).

This project has used a multi-agency approach working with prison and community settings to roll out FLLN learning, reflecting the common policy and practice aims in Family Learning for offenders. Partners have included Heads of Learning and Skills (HOLS) at prisons, personnel in Probation Services, local colleges, local authority Family Learning co-ordinators,

ROWA! staff, prison staff and other organisations which included SureStart and Primary Care Trust personnel. In addition, the LSC and the Campaign for Learning have been partners.

The prisons involved were HMP Nottingham, HMP Leicester, HMP Foston Hall, HMP Gartree and HMP Lincoln. In addition, the ROWA! Learning Bus visited HMP Foston Hall and the Aspley community in Nottingham.

Probation services in Nottinghamshire, Northamptonshire and Lincolnshire were also involved in the pilot project. Offenders were supervised in the community by Probation Service staff, often after release from a custodial environment. The ROWA! Learning Bus, for example, was taken out to a Nottinghamshire Probation Service reporting session in Aspley, Nottingham.

Attendance at the sessions in July 2006 was as follows:

- HMP Nottingham - 11 offenders attended Working with my Family and one family had lunch together;
- HMP Leicester - 58 offenders attended sessions;
- HMP Foston Hall - 5 mums and 9 children visited the Learning Bus;
- HMP Gartree - 6 offenders and their families attended sessions;
- HMP Lincoln - 7 offenders attended a Working with my Family module.

"Very well organised, good interaction with the family - made fun and interesting for all ages. Pleasant to have a relaxed atmosphere - unlike normal visits. Have at least one of these every month. Something for the children to look forward to ... especially during the summer holidays. Maybe have a day visit." (Family at HMP Gartree).

Examples of activities delivered

Working with my Family

The Working with my Family course was specifically developed for use in a prison setting and consists of five, two-hour sessions. Modules have an explicit literacy and numeracy focus with topics including speaking and listening, reading and writing, numeracy, supporting my family, and staying positive upon release. The last sessions considers the support available to offenders following release from prison such as progression onto further learning opportunities, developing positive relationships with schools and at home, self-help and a celebration of the completion of the course.

"They said it had made them think about things a lot more, consider problems from another angle. They actually got the time to think about how it felt for their wives and their children." (Prison Librarian)

"I think they all said that the thing they enjoyed the most was the time to discuss their children and their role as parents and discuss issues relating to family... they're often very interested to look at their role as dad and to

take time out to think about how they can make a better job of being parents themselves. They're interested in the whole subject, which is really good, because they're desperately missing their families." (Dad's Reading Prison Project Worker).

K'NEX Challenge

In addition, ROWA! developed K'NEX Challenge, a two-hour sessions for parents using K'NEX kits to support their children's numeracy learning. ROWA! also has a ten-week K'NEX Family Numeracy course.

ICT Taster Sessions

ICT taster sessions were also designed for use on the ROWA! Learning Bus. Software such as Storybook Weaver was used to engage families in learning activities. Storybook Weaver aims to stimulate creativity with suggestions for stories. It also includes sound effects and music which can be added to the stories.

"I did receive a phone call from a prisoner who was involved in one of the workshops. He had since been released and called me about further family learning/parenting programmes that he was interested in. He spoke very highly of the workshop and how it had given him a taster of what was possible and quite clearly wanted to carry on learning." (Family Learning Co-ordinator, City Council).