An Evaluation of Jigsaw Visitors’ Centre’s Drama Project delivered to prisoners and their children at HMP Leeds

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Executive summary

The Jigsaw Visitors’ Centre commissioned the Centre for Health Promotion Research at Leeds Metropolitan University to conduct an evaluation of a Drama Project delivered to prisoners and their children at HMP Leeds.

Data for this evaluation was collected using a combination of methods including pre and post questionnaires with prisoners attending the course, a questionnaire for children attending the course and face to face interviews with prisoners, Jigsaw staff, a prison officer and a focus group with the three drama practitioners who ran the course. Access to the various participants was negotiated and facilitated by Jigsaw and HMP Leeds.

There was a very positive response to the drama project from the prisoners who took part. They highly valued the time it enabled them to spend with their children. It helped them to maintain their family bond with their children. Prisoners have recognised that they can still play an important role in their child/children’s life. After attending the course, the majority of prisoners felt that they could still be a good father from prison. The project improved the self-esteem of all of the prisoners who took part. It was a fun and enjoyable experience for both fathers and children, that was enhanced by employing a third sector organisation (external drama practitioners) to deliver the project. The drama practitioners were seen to be friendly and non-judgmental and offered a wealth of knowledge and experience of drama.

Key findings

- Prisoners valued the time they got to spend with their children. This time allowed them to bond and build upon their relationships.
- The project provided a sense of normality to the prisoners and their children’s lives
- Some prisoners gained confidence from taking part in the project
- Using third sector organisations to deliver such interventions was thought to be key to the success of the project
- All prisoners would like to attend the drama project again

This drama project delivered within HMP Leeds was positively received by prisoners and their children and showed that initiatives like this can help develop stronger bonds between imprisoned fathers and their children. Given the potential benefits of maintaining family ties, including reductions in re-offending, it is clear that the project should be repeated.
Context
Supporting prisoners’ relationships with their families has been consistently supported by the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) and the National Offender Management Service (NOMS). There are many benefits when prisoners and their families remain in contact during imprisonment (McGuire, 2009). Firstly there is a humanitarian perspective of enabling family members to see each other, but further benefits demonstrated in the research literature include: reductions in re-offending rates (Bales and Mears, 2008, Duwe and Clark, 2011, Mears et al., 2011), better chances of resettlement on release (Niven and Stewart, 2005) and improved mental health outcomes for prisoners (Woodall et al., 2009). Another important consideration, highlighted in the Government’s recent Green Paper, is the possible reduction of intergenerational offending when family bonds are consolidated during imprisonment (Ministry of Justice, 2010).

The benefits of arts-based intervention in prison settings has become increasingly recognised (Nugent and Loucks, 2011) and has been utilised successfully in addressing family issues and family bonding (McGuire, 2009). This small-scale evaluation set out to evaluate Jigsaw Visitors’ Centre’s Drama Project delivered to prisoners and their children at HMP Leeds. This initiative forms part of a portfolio of activity being managed by Jigsaw to enable prisoners to maintain robust family ties. This project continues to cement Jigsaw’s status as a model of excellent practice in delivering family support work in prison (Woodall et al., 2012).

The project at HMP Leeds invites a selected group of prisoners from HMP Leeds (that meet security requirements) to spend time with their children under the facilitation of a drama practitioner. This particular drama project was delivered three times, lasting for a duration of five days between April 2011 and February 2012. (The course was delivered to 15 prisoners, this report contains data collected from 11 of these prisoners) Through drama work, the project aimed to develop deeper bonds between prisoners and their children and to strengthen family ties. The Institute of Health and Wellbeing at Leeds Metropolitan University was asked to undertake an independent evaluation of the project.

Methodology
A pre- and post-questionnaire survey was administered to all prisoner participants in the project and was overseen by a member of staff from Jigsaw. Completing the questionnaire was optional and prisoners had the right to withdraw from the evaluation at any point. The aim of the questionnaire was to determine any changes in perceived family connections as a result of the project. In addition to this, the children involved in the project were also invited to complete a short questionnaire after the project had finished. This questionnaire drew on recognised principles of ‘draw and write’ which has been used extensively to explore the perceptions of younger children for whom more traditional research methods may not be appropriate (Pridmore, 1996). Although not without its critics (Backett-Milburn and McKie, 1999), it can be a useful device for enabling children to express their perceptions, especially for those with limited reading and writing skills. Descriptive statistics were performed on the questionnaire responses from the prisoners using SPSS 19 and qualitative data was analysed thematically. Drawings and comments from the children’s responses were coded and again organised thematically.

One to one semi-structured interviews were conducted with six prisoners who attended the project, one prison officer who oversaw the project, two members of the Jigsaw team who lead the project and a focus group was conducted with the three drama practitioners who delivered the project. One to one interviews were selected on the basis that rich, in-depth information might be sought and so that the interviewer could probe issues of interest to the evaluation (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). The interviews were undertaken in order to gain an insight into whether there are any changes in perceived family connections as a result of the project and to identify any suggestions for improvement.
A standard topic guide was used to help focus the conversation on key issues in line with the overall aims of the evaluation. Topics for discussion included:

- Changes in perceived family connections
- Benefits of taking part in the project
- Aspects of the drama project that could be improved

Each interview took an average of 15-30 minutes to complete. The interviews were digitally recorded after receiving consent from the participants. The interviews were transcribed verbatim and the data was analysed using the thematic analysis approach as outlined by Tesch (1990). This resulted in the identification of a number of themes from the data which are presented in the findings section of this report.

**Ethical considerations**

Prisoners are a vulnerable sub-section of the population and it is clear that extreme sensitivities are required when conducting research with this group (Smith and Wincup, 2002; Liamputtong and Ezzy, 2005). It was highlighted to prisoners, both via an information sheet and verbally before the interview, that taking part in the research held no advantage or disadvantage to them or their period of custody within the institution and that if they decided to withdraw from the study this also had no impact on them or their period of custody in any way. The study conformed to recognised ethical practice by ensuring: informed consent, confidentiality, secure information management, attention to risk reduction and the right to withdraw from the research.
Findings

Findings from quantitative data
In total, eleven prisoners completed the pre- and post-questionnaires. Three participants were aged between 21-29 years, three participants aged between 30-39 years and five participants aged between 40-49 years. The majority of prisoners were defined themselves as White British (6) White Irish (1) Black/Black British: Caribbean (1) Black/Black British: African (1) and Mixed: White and Black Caribbean (2).

Whilst recognising the limited sample size, the key findings from the questionnaire responses are presented below.

Meeting expectations
Prior to the project commencing, prisoners were asked what they anticipated gaining from the project. All eleven participants hoped to develop deeper bonds with their child/children from undertaking the project and six also hoped to improve their communication skills and boost their confidence. Qualitative data collected after the project seemed to suggest that this had been achieved as demonstrated by the quotations from some of the participants in the box below: This is further explored in the analysis of the qualitative interviews (see page 9)

What was the best thing about the project?

“Spending time with my son, I have been in prison loads of times and this is the best experience I have ever had, the kids and staff were great”

“Spending quality time with my son and taking part in building and finishing the play”

Being a parent in prison – the impact of the drama project
A series of identical questions were asked to prisoners prior to and after the project in relation to their feelings about being a parent and the relationships they have with their children. The findings from these question responses are below.

The prisoners were asked the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with the statement ‘I play an important role in my child/children’s life’. Figure 1 illustrates that the number of participants who ‘strongly agreed’ with the statement increased from eight respondents before the project to eleven respondents after the project. The percentage increase in the number who strongly agreed was 38%.

Figure 1. ‘I play an important role in my child/children’s life’
Participants were asked the extent to which they supported the statement ‘I am an important role model for my child/children’ and again, a more positive overall response was seen with more prisoners strongly agreeing with the statement after the project (see Figure 2). The percentage increase in the number who strongly agreed was 14%.

**Figure 2. ‘I am an important role model for my child/children’**

![Bar chart showing the number of participants who strongly agree and agree before and after the project. Before the project, 7 participants strongly agreed and 4 agreed, while after the project, 8 participants strongly agreed and 3 agreed.](image)

Participants were also asked the extent to which they supported the statement ‘I don’t know how to play with my child/children’ and again, a more positive overall response was seen with more prisoners (25%) strongly disagreeing with the statement after the project (see Figure 3).

**Figure 3. ‘I don’t know how to play with my child/children’**

![Bar chart showing the number of participants who disagree and strongly disagree before and after the project. Before the project, 3 participants disagree and 8 strongly disagree, while after the project, 10 participants disagree and 1 strongly disagree.](image)

Finally, prisoners were asked before and after the project the extent to which they agreed with the statement ‘I can still be a good father from prison’. This particular statement produced mixed responses (Figure 4) as whilst the number of participants who ‘strongly agreed’ with the statement increased from five before the project to seven after the project, this was an increase of 40%. The number who ‘agreed’ with the statement increased from one before the project to three after the
project. However, the participant who ‘disagreed’ with the statement before the project ‘strongly disagreed’ with the statement after the project.

Figure 4. ‘I can still be a good father from prison’

Individual outcomes from participating in the project
Although acknowledging the small sample, there was an overwhelming sense that the project provided positive outcomes for the recipients of the intervention. Qualitative responses reflected this and the finding that eleven (100%) of the participants believed that more projects like this should be offered within HMP Leeds is a glowing endorsement for the work.

Table 1&2 show the project outcomes in detail and shows that the entire sample felt a sense of achievement as a result of the project and felt that they had spent quality time with their children. The project had also improved the self-esteem of all respondents. All prisoners also strongly disagreed with the statement ‘this project will not help my family relationships on release from prison’.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>This project has improved my self-esteem</td>
<td>(6) 55%</td>
<td>(5) 45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have felt a sense of achievement</td>
<td>(10) 91%</td>
<td>(1) 9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This project has helped me bond with child/children</td>
<td>(9) 82%</td>
<td>(2) 18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have spent quality time with child/children</td>
<td>(10) 91%</td>
<td>(1) 9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I think my child has enjoyed spending time with me</td>
<td>(10) 91%</td>
<td>(1) 9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Not Sure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>This project will not help my family relationships on release from prison</td>
<td>(9) 82%</td>
<td>(1) 9%</td>
<td>(1) 9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Projects like this do not help to build a bond between fathers and their children</td>
<td>(10) 91%</td>
<td>(1) 9%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have gained very little from this project</td>
<td>(11) 100%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Finally, the delivery of the project was generally praised with all respondents reporting that they had been treated with decency and respect throughout.

Findings from qualitative data
This section presents the findings from qualitative interviews and a focus group.

Overview of the findings:
There was a very positive response to the drama project from the prisoners who took part. They highly valued the time it enabled them to spend with their children. It helped them to maintain their family bond with their children. It was a fun and enjoyable experience for both fathers and children, that was enhanced by employing a third sector organisation (external drama practitioners) to deliver the project. The drama practitioners were seen to be friendly and non-judgmental and offered a wealth of knowledge and experience of drama. These issues are presented in greater detail below.

Providing a positive and welcoming visiting experience.
Most prisoners reported that the drama project differed greatly from the standard visits they received at HMP Leeds. The project provided the prisoners with an improved environment and an opportunity to interact with their children in a more relaxed and natural way. This was welcomed by the prisoners as it was felt that their standard visits are restrictive and allow them very little physical contact with their children.

“The visits are not a nice environment they are noisy but with that project it was much more relaxed.” (Prisoner)

“It is more personal you can speak to your kids without an officer coming and telling you let go and keep your hands off and stuff like that. There was no officers hovering over you or nowt. It was more personal like that and you’ve got to interact with other families as well.” (Prisoner)

“You could just do what you wanted. It was like being in any other group outside. There was nobody watching over you so you could feel comfortable. So that is a massive benefit. The kids don’t feel restricted in anyway but they do on a visit because they know they have got to be good but in there they feel comfortable. It is a million times more relaxed.” (Prisoner)

Sense of normality
Prisoners spoke about their experience of the project providing a sense of normality for them and their children. They benefitted from being able to talk and play together within the prison and compared the experience to ‘life on the outside’.

“To my daughter it was like we were at home [...] it just brought some normality into her life really.” (Prisoner)

“It felt normal being there. It doesn’t feel normal in a visiting room.” (Prisoner)

One prisoner commented that whilst he was taking part in the drama project he did not feel like he was in prison.

“With it being civilians and with the Jigsaw not in their uniform, they are in their own clothes and you kind of feel a little bit free. For the couple of hours that you do that you don’t feel like you’re in prison.” (Prisoner)
The prison officer described the project as a way for prisoners to be ‘free to just be a family and express themselves’. She felt the drama project provided the prisoners with an opportunity to let their guard down, forget about portraying a macho prison image for a few hours and just focus upon being a father, and nurturing their children.

“I think it’s nice sometimes for the men to have that softness again, that nurturing, that fathering all that kind of stuff. Rather than constantly having to put on that macho bravado type of thing and just that little bit of normality really.” (Prison Officer)

**Key benefit of the project: An opportunity to spend quality time and bond with their children**

A major benefit from participation for the prisoners was seen to be the opportunity to spend quality time with their children, and to bond and build on their relationship. All of the prisoners valued the quality time they got to spend with their children. They explained that there were no other courses or opportunities within the prison that would give them a week with their children.

“It’s the quality time you get to spend with your child, you can’t do that in here, nothing like that is offered in here, you just don’t get that sort of time and quality. He is acting up at home but that week he were brilliant and he made new friends as well and they got on well.” (Prisoner)

Many prisoners explained that even when they are outside of prison they would not have a week to spend with their children due to work and other life commitments, therefore the drama project provided a rare opportunity to be with their children.

“Being on the outside time restraints and working, it would be really hard for you to do something like that on the outside. You’d have to have time off work and everything else just to do that.” (Prisoner)

The prisoners described how being on the project for a week with their children helped them bond and improve their relationships.

“The drama project is brilliant because it’s just pure bonding time” (Prisoner)

“I got to spend a lot of time with my kids and I learnt a lot of stuff with regards to doing the acting and stuff. It made me bond a lot more with my kids, they haven’t been to see me a lot and when they have it’s just been the other side of the table. It cheered my kids up no end and it cheered me up to.” (Prisoner)

“It’s helped me with the kids anyway, just being able to act daft and stuff round them.”

“There’s fathers that are in prison that don’t have the bond that I have with my kids and it’s a perfect opportunity for them to get a closer bond with them and to have fun with them.” (Prisoner)

Additional quotes from prisoners demonstrating the positive effect of the project on relationships is provided in Box 1 on page 12.

Some prisoners reported that the project had led them to consider the extent to which they had been involved in their children’s lives in the past and it provided them with a better understanding of their children’s interests:
“it gives a different view of ‘right I do need to spend a bit more time with my daughter or son’”

“It shows more to what I can do out there to my boy. I don’t really do much with him out there”

…”it has shown me more what my little boy likes to do and stuff like that, and not what I like to do”

“I wouldn’t really play much out there with him, with like toys and stuff like that since I’ve done that it’s just changed a bit, well while I am in here but when I get out I have to look at it with another perspective”.

Participation in the project had led to one prisoner thinking about his child more, reflecting on his crime and the resulting separation from his son. He said:

“.. I think more of my kids and that. Crime doesn’t pay because it is putting me away from him”. (Prisoner)

One prisoner spoke explained that although as a result of participating, he had been reminded that he was missing out on seeing his children grow up, it had encouraged him to become more engaged in his son’s life.

“Thinking about my kids, I’m in prison there’s nothing I can do about it but watching him get brought up with me not there changes everything. So this jogs your memory of what you’re missing and stuff like that […] it has shown me more what my little boy likes to do and stuff like that, and not what I like to.” (Prisoner)

The project also built upon the relationships between prisoners who attended the course. One prisoner explained that he still talks about the drama project with other inmates.

“We still talk about it, there’s some good memories in a way.” (Prisoner)

One prisoner further highlighted the need for these kinds of projects and believed the prison authorities had also begun to recognise the importance of maintaining prisoner/family relations.

“I think they are starting to realise that they do need to focus on people’s families and children. My punishment, having me in here at the end of the day, this is not punishing me it’s punishing my family. They are punished more than what we, they need to think about family and the structure of family and try and do as much as they can to keep the family group together rather than just breaking down.” (Prisoner)

The Prison Officer added:

“I know these things can cost quite a lot of money but the benefits to the family, the children, the guy who is locked up, it is priceless. I can’t think of a better way and you are doing it in a way that they are not realising that rehabilitation is happening.” (Prison Officer)
Box 1: Prisoners comments on the effects of the drama project on their family relationships

“It’s brought us closer together”

“It’s got to when you’re in prison you’re not seeing your kids much are you so the more time you can spend with them, the better the relationship is going to be with each other so it definitely improved it”

“We have a good family life and all that but it has definitely helped while I have been in prison to bring them closer to me because the less you see them then you become distant”.

“You can spend more time with them and learn more stuff with them and see them bonding with the other kids that were on there”.

“It’s made me closer to my little boy and I’ve started thinking about him and not myself”.

“All these things that are done by Jigsaw are all worthwhile because it does bring you closer together and you do learn more about yourself”.

Increased confidence and gaining a sense of achievement/satisfaction

In addition to benefits in terms of bonding and inter-personal relationships, prisoners benefited on an individual level.

Some of the prisoners discussed initially being apprehensive about taking part in the drama project because they would have to act in front of other people. They described how the drama practitioners used icebreaker games to put them at ease and encouraged them to get to know the other prisoners and their families.

“I think they go through a development process as well and confidence stuff. You can’t help but not when you’re doing a drama project because you go from not having performed to putting on a performance, the sense of achievement.” (Drama practitioners)

Several prisoners reported an increase in confidence as a direct result of attending the drama project. They reported feeling more confident in; their own abilities, speaking to other people and in being able to relax and ‘make a fool of themselves’ in front of their children.

“[The benefits were] Family time, quality time with my kids, I feel more confident doing things like that. I feel more confident as a person...Showing other people that you can do things like this and have a laugh, and breaking down walls and making them feel easier about taking part. A lot of people don’t want to get involved and they put a shell up and say no. I find it easier to do now.” (Prisoner)

One prisoner reported that since going he will be more likely to register for other courses and activities within the prison.

“Well I sign up to everything now. I just want to progress myself, that’s what jail is about really improving your skills.” (Prisoner)

Most of the prisoners expressed a real sense of satisfaction around creating and delivering a play. They all spoke positively of their experience and no one had any negative comments about the play.
“It was brilliant we made it up from scratch and it was excellent to say we did it in a week, we did a really good job.” (Prisoner)

“It were a fabulous experience and I’d do it again.” (Prisoner)

Perceived outcomes for children
All of the prisoners who took part in an interview indicated that their children spoke very highly of the drama project. The main benefits mentioned were being able to spend time with their father, and being able to see their fathers having fun and dressing up in costumes.

“They loved it, I could tell they were excited to come each day.” (Prisoner)

“She just couldn’t wait every day to come and participate. She just loved everything about it really. She found her dad having to dress up and wear a wig, she was amused by it. She was amused by everybody playing their part. She was telling all the family what she had done.” (Prisoner)

They also commented that they enjoyed many aspects of the drama implementation such as; team building games, games focused around voice projection, acting on stage in front of an audience and also being able to play with other children.

“She loves acting anyway and playing and interacting with other children and grownups so she found it really exciting...” (Prisoner)

“They were happy to be there not just to see me but for the drama classes as well, they were enjoying it.” (Prisoner)

One father spoke about how his son had been less boisterous since spending a week with his father on the drama project. He said that spending this time with his son not only helped build upon their relationship but it also had a wider impact on other members of the family as his partner noticed a positive change in his behaviour at home.

“My little boy is a bit better within himself and he has just had a week with me.” (Prisoner)

The prisoners described their satisfaction with seeing their children enjoying themselves on the project. Several prisoners not only valued the time they got to spend with their children but also watching their children interact with the other children and prisoners.

“Yes the fun and seeing the smile on everyone’s kids faces. Not just my kids, seeing everyone’s kids having fun was good. It made you happy.” (Prisoner)

Reassurance about prison life
Nearly all of the prisoners who took part in an interview suggested that the drama project was a useful tool in easing the worries their children might have around their father being in prison. It provided an opportunity for their children to watch them interact in a relaxed environment both with other prisoners and a prison officer. One prisoner described how he felt that the drama project had changed his daughter’s perception of prison life, specifically around the potential treatment they might receive from prison officers and other prisoners. It reassured her that her father is safe and happy whilst he is in prison.
“There are a lot of kids out there who are wary of prison and thinking that prison life is a harsh life. It’s not easy but it’s not exactly hard, but for them to experience this and show them there is a difference to prison.” (Prisoner)

“Yes because they don’t think it’s as bad for their dad. Obviously everybody has got their own idea of what prison life is like and it makes them feel like their dad is not having so much of a hard time.” (Prisoner)

Taking part in the project also allowed the prisoners to focus on being a father and enabled them to dedicate time to bond with their children, an experience that does not often occur within the prison setting.

“Everyone was making a fool of themselves and I think it showed a different side of me to the kids. I was willing to make a fool of myself when usually I am not.” (Prisoner)

Involvement of partners
Another aspect that made the project unique was that it was specifically implemented to allow prisoners to spend one to one time with their children. When asked whether it would have made a difference if their wives/partners had attended the project the prisoners unanimously stated that it would have changed the dynamic of the project. They liked the fact that their wives/partners were not present as it enabled them to focus on their children.

“If my wife had been there it would have been more of a distraction as we’d be talking about things.” (Prisoner)

“I love her to pieces but it were time for him to bond with me because he is missing me.” (Prisoner)

One prisoner’s wife expressed her delight at the level of bonding her husband did with her son during the course of the project.

“She said it’s helping me and him bond more. All she gets from him now is ‘he’s going to see his daddy’. She said she’s never seen me bond as much as we have this time.” (Prisoner)

The prisoners enjoyed having one on one time with their children and acknowledged that it gave their wives/partners a break from looking after their children.

The future
When asked about whether attending the project will affect their lives after release, the prisoners provided a mixed response. Some prisoners said it would not change their life in anyway. However, as highlighted previously, for some being on the project has helped them to focus more upon their children and that on their release they hope to spend more time with their children. One added:

“I’ll probably get my son involved in stuff […] makes you realise how much fun you can actually have, it doesn’t have to be about going to the pub or eating in the pub, you can do better stuff.” (Prisoner)

“I wouldn’t really play much out there with him, with like toys and stuff like that since I’ve done that it’s just changed a bit, well while I am in here but when I get out I have to look at it with another perspective”(Prisoner)
One prisoner suggested that if the course was run several times a year it could encourage offenders’ good behaviour as all of the prisoners who attended the course view it as a privilege.

“It would give a lot of the prisoners something to look forward to, it might make people think about their actions while they are in prison, so they might think I have to be a respectable person so that I can go on this project.” (Prisoner)

**Third sector organisations**

Prisoners credited the drama practitioners for treating them with respect and dignity. The drama practitioners were described as ‘polite’ and ‘friendly’. It was agreed that it is appropriate to use third sector organisations to deliver interventions such as the drama project. There was a general consensus that the project would not have been as successful if it had been run by staff within the prison.

“The actors [drama practitioners] that came in they were brilliant. They got on so well with the kids and they didn’t treat us any different. [...] You weren’t spoken down to, they weren’t any better than you, they were on the same level as you which were good.” (Prisoner)

All of the prisoners commented that having a programme printed containing photographs of the drama project and receiving a dvd of the play is beneficial for both the prisoners their children and their family. These provide memorabilia of the play that can be cherished.

“It’s something that she really enjoyed, it’s something that will stick in her mind and she’s got the leaflet at home.” (Prisoner)

“Prison doesn’t have many nice memories but they can look at the video and think my dad is in there but he’s not as bad as I was thinking.” (Prisoner)

**Suggestions for improvement**

When asked about suggestions for improvement there was an overwhelmingly positive response. None of the prisoners had any negative things to say about the project. Two prisoners said that they would like the drama project to be longer in duration with one suggesting that the project could be spread over a two week period to give more time with the children and to enable the play/production to be longer.

“I don’t think there was anything bad about it. I think the whole thing was brilliant.” (Prisoner)

“It could have been a bit longer I suppose but I would say that so I could see my son a bit more. The people that came were brilliant, the staff were brilliant, the food were alright, it was all good I can’t give a bad comment on it.” (Prisoner)

One prisoner suggested that the project could be better promoted within the prison. He suggested that using the words ‘drama project’ could be off-putting to some prisoners as it implies that the project is focused around drama and performing arts, thus creating a barrier to recruitment. He suggested that promotion leaflets/posters could enhance recruitment through explaining that the drama project is a fun and enjoyable experience that provides prisoners with a chance to spend quality time with their children.
“I just think it needs advertising more and putting across to people more. It comes across as a bit more daunting than just being able to spend time with your son or daughter. It’s games and fun.” (Prisoner)

“I don’t think people apply for it because it doesn’t tell you what it’s about it just says a drama project and acting on stage. The main thing is you’re seeing your family, you get a week with your children.” (Prisoner)

Key findings

- Prisoners valued the time they got to spend with their children. This time allowed them to bond and build upon their relationships.
- The project provided a sense of normality to the prisoners and their children’s lives.
- Some prisoners gained confidence from taking part in the project.
- Using third sector organisations to deliver such interventions was thought to be key to the success of the project.
- All prisoners would like to attend the drama project again.

Discussion

The data overall suggests positive outcomes as a result of the drama project delivered to the eleven prisoners (who filled in the pre and post questionnaires) and their children at HMP Leeds. However, given the small sample size and the pre- and post- design of the evaluation (without a control group) some caution needs to be taken with the findings. Nevertheless, the findings from this project adds support to the growing evidence base which advocates the use of arts-based interventions in prison settings (Nugent and Loucks, 2011).

The overall aim of this project was to develop deeper bonds between prisoners and their children and to also strengthen family ties. Qualitative and quantitative data from this evaluation would suggest that the aims of the project have been achieved given the positive changes in prisoners’ response to statements such as ‘I play an important role in my child/children’s life’ and ‘I am an important role model for my child/children’. Many prisoners reported feeling more involved in their children’s lives after the project, and they were unanimous that the project had delivered positive outcomes in relation to parent-child bonding and in terms of improving their own self-esteem.

The evaluation team suggest that in addition to the plethora of interventions being delivered by Jigsaw within HMP Leeds (for further detail, see Woodall et al., 2012), this work is contributing to enabling prisoners to maintain contact with their family and we hypothesise that this positively impacts on reductions in re-offending.
Conclusions

This drama project delivered within HMP Leeds was positively received by prisoners and their children and showed that initiatives like this can help develop stronger bonds between imprisoned fathers and their children. Given the potential benefits of maintaining family ties, including reductions in re-offending, it is clear that the project should be repeated.

Recommendations

• The advertisement of the project could be amended to ensure that the promotional material informs the prisoners that the project provides a chance to spend quality time with their children.

• Given the importance of prisoners staying in close contact with their children and the direct benefits reported by prisoners, it would be beneficial for the drama project to be repeated with other suitable prisoners within HMP Leeds.
References


