

# **An Evaluation of Parenting and Children Together (PACT)**

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### Introduction

1.1 The National Parenting Development Project (NPDP) and the Scottish Prison Service began to develop jointly-run parenting programme work in Scotland's only women's prison in April 2006. Three group based programmes have taken place, facilitated by NPDP and HMP and YOI Cornton Vale Programmes Unit.

1.2 This programme is unique in Scotland as it was developed to work specifically with women prisoners; it draws upon NPDP experience of parenting work with vulnerable individuals, particularly those affected by substance use and adapts it to the prison setting. It also benefits from the expertise of the Programmes Unit in delivering programmes in prison.

### Policy

1.3 The programme aims to directly address national policy directives which include:

- The development of partnership work between SPS and other agencies to address the needs of prisoners affected by substance use who are also parents; the programme is highlighted as one of the action points in *Hidden Harm: Next Steps* (Scottish Executive, 2006);
- The provision of effective aftercare arrangements for appropriate support for women drug users and their children after release; the programme aims to encourage women to take up such supports;
- The inclusion of all children in service developments aimed at promoting their safety, health and nurture, as outlined in the *Getting it Right for Every Child* vision for children; this includes the needs of children who have a parent in prison.

### Aims and Objectives

1.4 The broad aims of the programme were to assist participants:

- In their understanding of parenting;
- In understanding the impact of imprisonment on their children;
- To continue in a constructive parenting role during their sentence;

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- To explore issues of drug and alcohol use as they impact on parenting.

### 1.5 The objectives of the programme were:

- To create as safe, positive, supportive and participative a group environment as is possible so that group members can work on their difficulties together;
- To increase group members' knowledge and understanding of their children's needs and development, including the impact of separation through imprisonment;
- To raise participants' self esteem, confidence and motivation to parent successfully;
- To increase participants' communication skills and ability to manage family visits and family contact.

## Key Points

1.6 While this evaluation is based on limited data and a small number of respondents, there are a number of issues which can be identified from the development of the work and the initial programmes:

- The collaborative nature of the work and the programme content contributed to national policy objectives within this area of service development;
- The process of establishing the programme demonstrates the complexities of undertaking inter-agency work and highlights the need for sufficient time to be allowed for establishing and planning the work;
- The process for referral to the group was adjusted across the lifespan of the three groups, however the numbers of women eligible for referral were constrained by short sentences and early release, an issue common to all programme work in the prison;
- The programme added to practice knowledge in relation to the effective engagement of participants, for example, the importance of undertaking two to three individual assessment sessions prior to the group work in order to increase knowledge of the participants' background history, build trusting relationships and minimise anxiety about the content of the group and the benefits of facilitators participating fully in all aspects of the group;
- Many of the women benefited from the peer support offered by the programme; this resulted in an on-going support group being formed, partially run by the women themselves with some assistance from prison staff;
- The impact of the programme was potentially most significant in relation to improved communication and contact between participants and their children; many of the women were not likely to resume care of their children,

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at least immediately on release, if at all, but positive contact between them was clearly important for children and women alike;

- Interventions which enhance and encourage effective communication for women and their children are likely to have longer term consequences, in terms of reduced rates of reoffending, reduced likelihood of juvenile criminal involvement, and improvements in the lives of these children and young people;
- Overall, women reported:
  - Increased and improved quality of contact with their child(ren);
  - Learning new and improved ways of communicating;
  - The group experience provided peer support and sharing experiences with facilitators and other prisoners was viewed as beneficial;
  - Having facilitators from two agencies brought different perspectives to the group, however, the qualities of the individual facilitators were more important than the agency to which they belonged;
  - Increased confidence in seeking support for themselves and their children.
- Linking support from prison to the community is important in delivering an Integrated Care package; where geographically available, women were encouraged to access appropriate support services, including those provided by Aberlour, on release from prison. However there is no evidence that women are taking up these services on release.
- Women continued to be reluctant to access services, particularly statutory ones, as they felt that asking for help reflected an inability to cope and that their care of or contact with their children might come under greater scrutiny; given these anxieties ways need to be found to enable women to link in with existing or developing services;
- There was clearly scope for developing integrated post-release services to enable women to continue their learning from the programme and access support for their care of, or contact with, their children; there was evidence of services for women offenders being established in a few larger cities which women might link into on an individual basis and potential for pilot work to be developed which adapted the programme content for use in the community.

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## 1. BACKGROUND

### Introduction

1.1 This report provides the findings from an evaluation of a pilot parenting programme, set up in 2006 by the National Parenting Development Project (NPDP) in partnership with HMP and YOI Cornton Vale Programmes Unit in Scotland's only dedicated prison for women. This pilot is significant as it is the first programme of this type to have been established for women in prison in Scotland and builds on NPDP expertise in intervening with 'hard to reach' parents who typically have difficulty in accessing and engaging with services, and the Programme Unit at Cornton Vale's experience in providing programmes in prison. This report builds on an interim report produced in 2007.

1.2 In Scotland, a number of programmes have been introduced in male prisons to meet the needs of imprisoned fathers. These include: the *Healthy Fathering Project*, which held parenting groups in HMP Barlinnie and provided consultancy to aid the establishment of parenting programmes in HMP Greenock and Polmont Young Offenders' Institution (Aberlour, 2002). Current programmes run by the Scottish Prison Service (SPS) include *Positive Parenting* (HM Polmont YOI), *Encouraging the Long-term Father* (HMP Shotts), *Parenting from Prison Programme* (HMP Greenock). Other initiatives include the *Families United* Pilot Programme at HMP Edinburgh (Loucks, 2006a).

1.3 While recent developments in the introduction of parenting programmes in prisons resulted from recognition that many prisoners were parents, this was given further impetus with a range of policies and guidance intended to provide interventions with substance using parents – both in the community and in prisons. Emphasis was given to the need to work with parents to protect and support children from the potential effects of parental drug use, with particular attention to the need to intervene with women. The report of an inquiry by the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs (ACMD, 2003) *Hidden Harm*, outlines:

- the need to take the safety and wellbeing of any children a woman may have into account when a custodial sentence is being considered;
- potential non-custodial sentences for drug using women with children should be explored;
- facilities should be available in women's prisons to enable pregnant drug users to receive the same standards of care that would be expected in the community;

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- suitable resources should be available to enable children to visit their mother in prison and, where appropriate, accommodation should be available to allow an infant to remain with his/her mother;
- effective aftercare arrangements should be in place to ensure appropriate support is provided for women drug users and their children after release.

1.4 The Scottish Executive Response to *Hidden Harm* (Scottish Executive, 2004b) outlined the developments that had been or were taking place in Scottish prisons to meet the expectations outlined in the report. These included:

- A review of the Scottish Prison Services (SPS) policy on prisoners with drug problems who are also parents (building on the guidelines set out in *Getting our Priorities Right, 2003 and 2005*) in partnership with other agencies;
- Working more closely with families through the SPS Inclusion Policy;
- Utilising Family Contact Development Officers (FCDOs);
- Developing the role of prison-based social workers in line with National Standards;
- Increased provision for family visits and development of resources such as video or audio recordings of stories by the parent (Storybook Mums and Dads);
- Increased training for prison staff

1.5 In 2006, the Scottish Executive outline progress made with local partners to bring about the improvements needed and identified further action to be taken (Scottish Executive, 2006). The report indicated that a parenting programme would be introduced in HMP and YOI Cornton Vale in partnership with the Aberlour Childcare Trust for women prisoners affected by substance misuse by summer 2006. The programme – initially called the Parenting Programme but subsequently renamed PACT: Parents and Children Together – began the first group work in November 2006. The programme design took into account evidence of both the impact of parental substance use and parental imprisonment on children. It also acknowledged the challenges that imprisonment itself can impose for women as parents and for familial relationships more generally.

### Impact on Children

1.6 Recent emphasis has been given to the impact of parental substance misuse on children and parental capabilities (Scottish Drug Misuse Research Programme, 2006; Russell, 2006a, 2006b). The resilience of young people in such circumstances has also been noted (Bancroft et al, 2004). More generally, there has been increasing awareness of the issues facing children and young people when their parent/s are caught up in the criminal justice system through substance misuse or related



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offending. In particular, increases in the prison population have been accompanied by concerns about the impact of the imprisonment of a parent on children and young people.

1.7 It has been estimated that around 13,500<sup>1</sup> children and young people are affected in Scotland each year by the imprisonment of a family member. Consequent stress can affect the health, educational achievement and both short and longer term life chances of these young people, and may increase the risk of their own involvement in crime (Families Outside, 2006). There has been some recognition of the importance of support services for the families and children of prisoners when visiting prisons and in their lives outside the prison (Peart and Asquith, 1992; Buist, 1996; McCulloch and Morrison, 1998; Loucks, 2004b and 2006b).

1.8 However, the wider consequences of the imprisonment of a parent can continue to affect the child/young person in profound and far-reaching ways. Human Rights Watch (2002: 11) indicate that:

‘In addition to the feelings of abandonment, grief, fear, guilt, and anger that they share with children of divorced or deceased parents, children of incarcerated parents also may experience intense anxiety, shame and unique fears about the conditions under which their parents live’.

1.9 Smith et al (2007) illustrate the ways in which prisoners’ families experience financial instability, poverty and debt as well as potential housing disruption following the imprisonment of a family member. The researchers concluded that criminal justice and social welfare policies impact on prisoners’ families and children in particular, by increasing potential impoverishment, disadvantage and exclusion.

1.10 Internationally, evidence reflects the short, medium and long term impact on children and young people who lose a parent or carer to imprisonment (Johnston, 1992; Chambers et al., 2001; McCulloch and Morrison, 2001; Laing and McCarthy, 2003; Goulding, 2004). This can include the need to take responsibility for younger siblings and/or the remaining adult if they struggle to cope with the imprisonment of their partner (Human Rights Watch, 2002; Taylor, 2004). There may be more negative effects where repeated separations are experienced due to repeated arrests (often as a result of substance abuse).

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<sup>1</sup> Current figures are not available and it is likely that this figure will be a significant underestimate given the increase in the Scottish prison population in recent years.

## Women in Prison

1.11 Bloom et al, (2003: 79) note that:

‘The majority of women under criminal justice supervision are mothers of dependent children. Many women try to maintain their parenting responsibilities while under community supervision or while in custody, and many plan to reunite with one or more of their children upon release from custody or community supervision’.

1.12 Internationally, between 65-70% of women in prison have children. Many of these women have more than one child and are frequently single mothers with between half and two-thirds having custody of their child(ren) prior to entering prison. Mothers are more likely than fathers to have been the primary carer of children prior to imprisonment; when a man goes to prison his children are likely to be cared for by the mother. It is less likely to be the case that children will be cared for by their father should their mother be imprisoned ((Laing and McCarthy, 2003). In England and Wales, while 92% of fathers in prison reported their partner was looking after the children, this was the case for only 25% of mothers (Home Office, 2004a).

1.13 For prisoners, the importance of family visits and the maintenance of contact with family and friends impacts on both prisoners’ morale, behaviour in prison and future risk of re-offending (HM Inspector of Prisons for Scotland, 1996) and there is an increasing recognition that the maintenance of prisoners’ family ties reduces their risk of reoffending on release (Loucks, 2005). This is likely to be highly significant for women in prison.

1.14 The circumstances of women in the criminal justice system have been extensively examined internationally (Bloom and Covington, 1998; Loucks, 1998 and 2004a; Covington, 2002; Human Rights Watch, 2002; Swedish Ministry of Justice, 2000; Bloom, Owen and Covington, 2003; Queensland Government Department of Corrective Services, 2003; Goulding, 2004; Loucks et al., 2006). Women are often judged more harshly than their male counterparts, not only for breaking the law, but also for going against expected behavioural stereotypes. As Covington (2002: 128) indicates: *“Many will automatically label a woman who has been convicted of a crime as a bad mother simply because she has violated the law. However, a male offender is not automatically labelled a bad father”*.

1.15 Separation from and ongoing concerns about the well-being of their children are considered to be among the most damaging aspects of prison for women. The main concerns women have about the effects of their imprisonment on children

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include: financial issues; living arrangements, disruption and loss of their involvement in everyday parenting (Laing and McCarthy, 2003). Perceived problems are frequently exacerbated by lack of contact during the period of imprisonment (Goulding, 2004). Reasons for a lack of visits during incarceration include: geographical distance to a prison, lack of transport, the relationship between the prisoner and the person looking after the child. While grandparents will often assume responsibility for the children, this is not always the case and a number of children/young people will end up being looked after and accommodated. Siblings are sometimes separated from each other and in some cases the imprisonment of a woman will result in a permanent termination of the relationship with her child(ren) (Covington, 2002; Human Rights Watch, 2002; Goulding, 2004). Higgins (1990: 2) indicates that

‘the longer a woman is incarcerated, the more likely it is that her family ties will disintegrate and that her children will not live with her when she is released’.

1.16 The prison environment is not generally conducive to positive contact between mother and child, although there have been considerable improvements in Scotland in recent years with the development of the Family Contact Development Officer (FCDO) post and the availability of ‘bonding’ visits. As Human Rights Watch (2002: 7) highlighted:

‘Maintaining strong, continuing contact with their parents can help children survive the emotional and developmental hazards of parental absence because of incarceration’.

1.17 This contact is also likely to support the prisoner on his/her return to the community. For many women, the hope that they will be reunited with their child(ren) on release is a key source of hope and motivation during a period of imprisonment and, it has been suggested, provides an important opportunity to intervene in the reintegration of women to their communities.

1.18 Current developments in Scotland which are aimed at integrating support between prison and the community include the *Management of Offenders (Scotland) Act 2005* and the development of Community Justice Authorities which are intended to support processes of reintegration and in doing so, reduce re-offending. The Scottish Prison Service has also introduced Integrated Case Management which is intended to facilitate closer co-operation and joint working practices between criminal justice agencies.

## **Developing Parenting Programmes in Prisons for Women**

1.19 There has been a growing recognition of the need for gender-sensitive approaches to interventions in prison and the importance of addressing the different needs of female prisoners in the design of programmes. As the Scottish Executive (2006) acknowledged, the issue of parenting responsibilities and practice, and the impact of imprisonment on children requires careful consideration and a sensitive and integrated approach.

1.20 It has been recognised that it is often difficult to achieve open and trust-based relationships in a prison environment where security is a priority and the development of trust may be a challenge (Malloch, 2000; Covington, 2002). Developing close relationships between the prison and community is also a requirement of any integrated response and is particularly important when addressing the needs of women prisoners and their families. Covington (2002:143) highlights a number of key features necessary for the development of gender-responsive programmes for women. Among them, she argues for:

- An emphasis on parenting education, child development, and relationship/reunification with children (if relevant);
- Child friendly environments, with age-appropriate activities designed for children;
- Focus to be given to building long-term community support networks for women.

1.21 The introduction of the Parenting and Children Together (PACT) programme in HMP and YOI Cornton Vale aimed to address these issues by: drawing on the combined expertise of the Programmes Unit working with women in custody and NPDP experience of providing parenting programmes for substance using women and 'hard to reach' parents.

## 2. THE EVALUATION

### Aims of the Evaluation

2.1 This study formed part of a larger and ongoing evaluation which examined the range of services provided by NPDP (see Burgess and Malloch, 2008). The evaluation of PACT set out to:

- Outline and explore the process of setting up the programme, with particular reference to inter-agency collaboration and approaches;
- Examine the particular issues which need consideration when undertaking parenting work in the prison environment;
- Obtain the views of programme leaders about their experiences of running the programme and of participants in undertaking the programme, in order to inform future programme development;
- Explore the feasibility of measuring the impact of the work, in terms of enhanced contact between parents and children and the influence of this on broader outcomes for families.

### Methods

2.2 A range of methods were employed to obtain data from the three parenting programme groups which have taken place to date:

- Interviews took place with the NPDP manager overseeing the project and the programme leaders (two Programmes Unit Prison Officers and two Aberlour workers);
- Interviews were conducted with two prison officers not connected to the programme and with one worker from a voluntary agency working within the prison;
- Telephone interviews were conducted with four workers from community-based voluntary agencies to gauge their views about how the parenting programme work might be developed post-release through integrated work in the community;
- Individual interviews with three programme participants from each group (nine in all);
- Telephone interviews with two community-based social workers involved in the lives of children whose mothers had attended the programme;

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- Recorded information was collated on all participants' circumstances, reasons for their referral to the programme, comments on progress from programme leaders and, in most cases, evaluation forms completed by the participants;
- Family Grid esteem measurements were taken pre and post intervention; additionally, a questionnaire-based measurement tool was designed and used with participants of the second group programme to measure effectiveness.

## 3. FINDINGS

### Establishing the programme work

3.1 The development and implementation of the PACT programme took longer than had been anticipated. Nevertheless, two programmes were completed by September 2007 with a third programme undertaken from February to March 2008. A further programme was planned for May 2008.

3.2 Workers recognised the need for sensitivity when providing a programme which would undoubtedly raise difficult and challenging issues for the women and it took time to develop appropriate material and methods of delivery. It was noted by one programme leader:

‘The main (challenge) was making the content fit for purpose, given the vulnerability of the client group and their need to be emotionally defended. It’s hard enough for men in prison but even harder for women, given the way they are viewed – as being out of control and if mothers, even worse, seeing themselves negatively and with substance misuse issues even more so. So they have reasons to be emotionally defended and we unpick all this at our – or rather their – peril’.

### Circumstances of Participants

3.3 In total, 20 women participated in the three group based programmes which ran in November 2006, August 2007 and February to March 2008. The women’s ages ranged from 21 years to 48 years. Their home areas, prior to imprisonment, were mainly from within the central belt of Scotland, although four originated from the north east and one woman’s home base was in England.

3.4 The women were serving sentences which ranged from 10 months to Life; with 10 women serving three years or more and 10 women serving two year sentences or less. The first two groups to take place were similar in that they contained both women who were due to be released soon after the programme ended and women who still had several years of their sentence to serve. The participants of the third group were all due for release within a year of undertaking the programme. Reasons for imprisonment covered most offence categories including Breach of Probation, Assault and Robbery, Misuse of Drugs Act offences and theft, although one group participant was serving sentence for murder.

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3.5 The programme participants had between one and four children. The total number of participants' children who were aged 18 and under was 37. The ages of the children ranged from eight months to adults. Most of the younger children were being cared for by grandparents or other family members, although three children were in residential school or with foster carers. All the women had some form of contact with their children, by way of visits or phone calls, although it was noted that two of the women rarely had contact with their children. The future care plans for children were often uncertain.

3.6 Information collated from the participants' files revealed that<sup>2</sup>:

- 19 of the women had substance use issues;
- At least three of the women had been on a methadone programme prior to their incarceration;
- Homelessness was an issue for at least two of the women;
- A history of family violence was a feature for at least two women;
- Some of the women had only intermittent contact with their children prior to their period of custody, due to their unsettled living circumstances.

3.7 Programme leaders indicated that the diversity of women's ages, sentence length and extent of contact with their children did not prove problematic in relation to their experience of the group. Differences were openly acknowledged and it was suggested that the participants were comfortable with this and generally supportive of one another.

## **Referral process**

3.8 Promotional materials, leaflets, referral forms and posters were displayed around the prison to encourage women to take part in the programme and inform prison staff. Programme leaders also indicated that some promotion took place by women who had attended the first group or who had attended groups run by the Programmes Unit on other topics. Encouraging women to take part could be challenging, as there was some understandable apprehension about what a parenting programme would entail. Participants of the third group stated this clearly in their interviews and felt strongly that the name of the programme should be changed to reflect its content and to avoid potential participants being put off attending. This point, also made by other professionals and emphasised in the Interim Report (Malloch and Burgess, 2007), has been addressed by programme leaders; the programme is now renamed PACT (Parents and Children Together).

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<sup>2</sup> This is likely to be a significant underestimate given that these figures only allude to information recorded in programme files.



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3.9 One woman commented:

‘I was quite offended when I heard that I was being put forward for a parenting class, like I was a bad parent or something. But I understood what it’d be about better when I did the one-to-one sessions before it started. The group did a new poster for it, gave it a new name- PACT Parents and Children Together’.

3.10 The programme leaders indicated that the referral process had not been entirely straightforward and that the two agencies (NPDP and SPS) may have had different expectations about how the process would work and how the programme should be presented and promoted.

3.11 While women were often interested in taking part in the programme, circumstances such as changed liberation dates or involvement in other programmes had to be taken into account. It was also necessary for programme leaders to check with social workers in the community about child care plans and information received could preclude women from taking part.

3.12 The difficulty in obtaining initial referrals may have impacted on the appropriateness of the first cohort. One woman, for example, who participated in the course, was not eligible for release until some years hence. However, once the management of separation was identified as a key focus for the programme, the release date of participants seemed less important, and workers hoped that where appropriate, women who had gone through the programme with a significant amount of time left to serve, could assist in future programme delivery.

3.13 Information about referrers to the programme was not always available, although a number of the participants interviewed said they had been told about the programme by Programmes Unit officers. Some aspects of the referral process had changed by the time the second group was scheduled, for example rather than making direct referrals, Family Contact Development Officers (FCDOs) sent a list of all women with children under 16 years of age to the Programmes Unit for the programme leaders to decide who might fit the criteria. By the time the third group took place, other workers in the prison had become more aware of the programme; of the third cohort, four participants were referred by Phoenix Futures addictions support workers based in the prison.

3.14 Other prison-based workers had differing views on the appropriateness of the referral criteria. One commented:

‘The criteria are too restrictive. In my view, some of the women may not have contact with their children now but in a few years may have more children so then they would have had the benefit of the course. Then you might have women on it who really need it. Some of the women who have done it haven’t had such severe problems with their children’.

3.15 Length of sentence and expected date of release can provide challenges for programme recruitment in women’s prisons where the majority of prisoners are sentenced to short sentences which can often exclude them from programme involvement. The numbers of women eligible for the programme were clearly restricted by factors such as the numbers on remand, early release due to the use of Home Detention Curfews and the extent of women’s contact with and future care plans for children. There is a standard process for assessing women’s eligibility for any programme which takes into account their involvement in education, with counselling services such as Open Secret, and the sequence and planning of programmes across their sentence. This filtering process results in a relatively small pool of eligible women particularly when the criteria for the parenting programme include substance use and contact with children. A further selection or opt-out stage occurred after the initial orientation session.

‘In relation to selection, sometimes women select themselves out once they know who else is in the group. And the leaders always have an eye to group dynamics when forming a group. I met them for an informal chat and then we drew up a short list. We looked at how they responded to the orientation and all went on to attend, including one woman who other staff thought would not manage (programme leader)’.

## **Assessment**

3.16 Women who are accepted on to the programme undertake a one to one assessment with group leaders. The process is considered important in increasing women’s engagement and in enabling workers to find out more about the women’s circumstances – which could allow relevant issues to be addressed during the programme. The assessment framework used with the first cohort was considered to be overly complex, and it was subsequently agreed that it would be ‘streamlined’. For the second group a parenting work book was devised and used as an assessment tool which simplified the process. However, the facilitators of the second group suggested that they still needed to find the right ‘tool’ for effective assessment and,

most specifically, ways of engaging women with particular communication needs or who had suffered traumatic life experiences.

‘It would be useful to have more communication tools for use in the assessment as we are asking very personal and direct questions at an early stage of forming a relationship. Having only two sessions for assessment, it’s a lot to ask to expect women to be open and disclose what may be an abusive or chaotic past. Sometimes the barriers go up and one woman didn’t even make eye contact with me during the first session. I see the assessment process as being about relationship building and assessing the woman’s suitability for the course and it may be that deep disclosures might come later – an on-going individual assessment more (programme leader)’.

3.17 It was also noted that a potential gap in the assessment process was the absence of views of the children concerned, or anyone outside the prison who was involved with the children on a regular basis. However, contact was made with social workers or other key workers who had contact with family members in the community, where this involvement was in place.

3.18 On-going programme review enables clarity about the purpose of the assessment and materials to be used in the process to be refined and reviewed. By the third group, the programme leaders were positive about the assessment process and materials, clearly seeing the advantages of this for relationship building prior to the group starting as well as for gathering information about the women’s individual circumstances.

‘I think it’s very good to have more than one one-to-one session with the women, which the assessment provides. The women get more used to the leaders and vice versa and this group were very motivated by the time the group started and gave 150%. The usual anxieties when the group starts weren’t there. The Constructs programme includes this pre-group preparation time too (programme leader)’.

## **Programme Content**

3.19 The content of the nine programme sessions brought together material from a range of sources including NPDP work with parents affected by substance use, and from other Aberlour project work with children whose lives are affected by parental substance use, some of whom have been imprisoned. As the programme was focused on parenting within the context of a parent’s imprisonment, it was

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recognised that an important element was in providing women with support in the management of separation from their children.

3.20 Emphasis was placed on creating a safe and supportive group environment which would help participants to understand more about their children's needs and increase their confidence in their parenting ability, particularly in relation to communication and contact with their children. The first session included introduction exercises and discussions about expectations and ground rules for the group. Each session started with a 'mood check' and the chance for participants to talk about one good thing and one not so good thing that had happened since the last session in relation to being a parent.

3.21 Ten group sessions took place, in the main twice weekly. It was planned to change this format for future groups to enable a longer time span for women to have contact with their children, utilise the skills they had learned in the programme and feedback to programme leaders any differences this made. The content of the sessions of the first group was refined and approved by the SPS for use in the second and subsequent groups. Topics covered included:

- exploring the general pressures and rewards of the parenting role;
- enhancing participants' knowledge and understanding of child development;
- looking at participants' knowledge of their children and the implications of other influences on children;
- reflecting on participants' own experiences of being parented and generational changes in the parenting role;
- communication with children and exploring children's feelings about their parent's substance use;
- exploring, through participation in play activities, the role of play in communicating and interacting with children;
- dealing with services and agencies; exploring with participants support services available in the community and encouraging them to make use of them.

3.22 Craft work was an integral part of the programme and was intended to introduce a 'lighter side' to the work while also being a recognised therapeutic approach; in addition, it gave participants the opportunity to make things for their children and themselves. At the end of each session participants were given the opportunity to talk about how they felt and whether their 'mood' had improved on a scale of 0-10. They were offered individual time with a group leader if any difficult issues had arisen for them. There was also a follow-up session at the end of the group at which feedback was sought and post intervention measurement forms completed.

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3.23 At the outset, there were some reported differences in workers expectations of the programme:

‘My idea was that it was about child development, child care and techniques. During the assessment the women seemed to know all that stuff so I wondered what the point was...It took a while for me to catch on to the therapeutic side and at first I wasn’t too sure about it. If they were reflecting too much on how they had been parented for example and there had been abuse or other traumas, then we might harm them. But it turned out to be quite the opposite – it was valuable for them and seemed to meet their needs’ (programme leader).

3.24 By the second group the objectives of the programme were clearer and were considered by group leaders to: improve women’s self-confidence and self-esteem; increase their motivation to parent; and enable women to see things from a child’s point of view. It aimed to enhance the women’s ability to communicate with their children and to feel more able to ask for help from agencies without feeling that they have to cope unsupported until a crisis was reached.

3.25 The women who had participated in the three groups were asked for their views on the content of the course and what they particularly remembered.

‘I can *understand* better now why children act in certain ways, like trashing their rooms when their mum gets *sentenced*. We learnt tips about talking to our children, even on the phone, like asking them open questions, getting the conversation going’  
(programme participant).

‘The session where we played games like skipping and hopscotch and it showed us that it didn’t cost any money to have fun with our kids. When you’re a parent on drugs you just think I’ll give them money, but they want time with you not the money’  
(programme participant).

3.26 The participants also identified the importance of peer support:

‘At first we were nervous about whether we could trust each other and if the others would go out and tell personal things but by the second or third week we earned each others’ trust so we could get emotional’ (programme participant).

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‘It was a good atmosphere. If one person was down, the others tried to cheer her up. If they put a sad face up, you were more cautious about what you said, it made you think of others’ (programme participant).

### 3.27 Other aspects of the programme were challenging.

‘The videos brought home how it felt for the children – like mine, always on the move from house to house and losing all our things. It opened my eyes, how it was for them and never giving them time to say what it was like from their point of view. Some of us were upset at the video but it was good to face it (programme participant)’.

### 3.28 The programme leaders commented that there were ways in which some of the sessions could be adapted or improved.

‘There’s a need to clarify the rationale, aims and objectives behind each session so that the facilitators know where they are going with each session. And developing tools for different learning styles, such as role play and practical exercises so that we can be flexible if required’ (programme leader)

3.29 In relation to programme content, it was felt after the second group that additional material could be added to one or two sessions to improve group participation. However, members of the third group participated in a full and active way in all the sessions, taking part in lively discussions and volunteering to write notes on the flipcharts, and no extra material was required. It was thought that future groups might benefit from a session about how women talk to their children about being in prison, as this had been an important issue for the third group.

3.30 In relation to all the groups, individual assessment and group programme sessions were generally well attended. Where sessions were missed, this was due to early release on the Home Detention Curfew (HDC), attendance at a Children’s Hearing, illness. Two women who began the programme completed the work on an individual basis due to difficulties they experienced within the group setting.

## Impact of the Programme

3.31 Information about the impact of the programme on participants was obtained through interviews with women, programme leaders and other prison-based workers; in addition, the results of the pre and post intervention Family Grid and self-completion questionnaire used with the second group were analysed to

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measure changes in a range of areas including self-esteem, understanding of children's problems and ability to cope with separation. The feedback forms completed by participants were also made available to researchers.

3.32 Programme leaders felt that the majority of participants engaged well with the programme and appeared to benefit from the opportunities it gave to discuss separation issues, for mutual support and to enhance women's ability to communicate with their children given their separation. The feedback forms and the interviews with women confirmed this. Women spoke about their increased awareness of the needs of their children, how to communicate with them more effectively and about learning new parenting approaches.

'I learnt not to shout at them but speak to them as you want to be spoken to. You feel like a child when the prison officers shout at you, so you know how a child must feel when you do it'.

'[I learnt] how to talk to my daughter and listen to her and find out what matters to her; I realised I didn't know her very well at all'.

'Making changes like being consistent, having ground rules and knowing what's important in a child's life. When I come out I'll make up for lost time, but not by compensating with giving material things as my son is now saying that it's me he wants'.

3.33 Programme leaders stated that, although it was possible to obtain some informal feedback about how women had benefited from the programme, for example by writing more letters to children or using craft materials to engage them during visits, the long term impact of the programme could only be fully assessed once women had returned to the community and were caring for their children in the context of other pressures.

3.34 A telephone interview was conducted with a community-based social worker with responsibility for the children of a woman who had been released shortly after participating in the programme. The children were living with their grandparents but had contact with their mother with whom they were described as having a loving relationship. The social worker's view was that the woman, since release, appeared to be determined to obtain increased access with her children. However, the children had been let down by their mother in the past and as their needs had to be paramount, the risks of this happening again had to be minimised. The woman had not discussed her participation in the programme but the social worker was hopeful that it may have had some impact especially as the woman was pregnant. Locally based parenting support work was viewed as important for this woman (dependent on available funds), which it was hoped would build on the material used in the

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prison-based programme.

3.35 A further telephone interview took place with the family social worker of a second participant; the children were being cared for by extended family members and were unlikely to return to their mother's care. While their mother was in prison, the children kept in touch by telephone; the children's relationship with their mother was important to them. The social worker stated that some aspects of the parenting programme may have been beneficial for this woman for example, in the development of communication skills and interaction with children.

3.36 Other prison workers were asked about the potential impact of the programme, as evidenced by interaction between the women and their children at visits. They were limited in their ability to do this:

'I have contact with some of the women who have been on the programme, but they haven't really talked about it, not to me anyway. So I don't really have any feedback to report. I've not noticed any differences but that's not to say there aren't any. One woman did bring craft stuff from the Aberlour course with her to do with her child on a visit but didn't talk about the actual course. But I may be seeing changes without realising it'.

3.37 Other workers also made the point about the need to look at how outcomes are sustained in order to measure effectiveness in the longer term.

'You wouldn't know about any impact on them until they get outside and try to sustain it, and I wonder if most can. I'm quite sceptical about them sustaining it. In here it's different – they can talk a good game, but one woman I know was on the programme has had a negative drugs test since so lapses do happen. And another has had loads of chances but cannot remain drug-free, even though she's got a great relationship with her child'.

3.38 Although interviews with community-based workers and prison officers did not yield actual evidence of the impact of the programme, the Family Grid results (where completed), generally showed an increase in self-esteem and improvement in attitudes towards children. The programme leaders and one of the women interviewed found the use of the Family Grid tool to be valuable.

'The results were as I thought – my feelings about the oldest and youngest of my children were very similar as before but there was a big improvement in my relationship with the middle one. It was emotional for me to see it but helpful too as I could really see the difference. I could see it in the visits too – she always used to keep to one side so I made big effort to include



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her and her gran also noticed the change. It was encouraging to get this sort of feedback' (programme participant).

3.39 Results of the pre and post intervention self-completion questionnaire, designed specifically to evaluate changes resulting from programme completion, were available for 11 participants. A total of 21 questions were asked which broadly addressed the following areas: confidence in parenting, understanding of own children's lives and problems, communication with own children, consistency and ability to set boundaries, coping with separation and ease of talking about feelings/usefulness of support. The results indicated that some of the women derived benefit from some aspects of the programme while others appeared to benefit from quite different aspects. However, examination of the overall results for each individual participant, indicate mixed results. The small numbers and distribution of results make it difficult to conclude that any particular aspect of the programme is more effective than another.

3.40 Evaluations completed by participants at the end of each session and given to programme leaders indicated that they:

- Valued the group highly;
- Reported increased confidence;
- Reported increased willingness to face and explore the impact of their imprisonment and their problematic substance use on their children;
- Reported improved communication with and knowledge of their children;
- Reported improved ability to seek support.

3.41 The evaluation forms completed by women indicated their appreciation of the programme:

'I really feel it has helped my children more than they know because it has helped me to understand more where they are coming from and to appreciate their feelings more and needs from me as their mother and I really thank you (programme leaders) for it'.

### General Views

3.42 Prison staff (not involved with the programme) who were interviewed had some comments to make about the timing, process and nature of parenting work in prison in relation to the programme, their own role and the work in general.

'I would say- get it done quicker; with this programme you have to make a referral, then wait for the group to start whereas (we) have input on an ad hoc basis when it is needed. We don't have lots of training; just draw on

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being parents ourselves and our own experience. It's done on an informal, drop-in basis – we are very accessible. Even social work here you have to book in advance to see them. Quite often a phone call to a child is all they need – you can't leave women hanging for three days'.

3.43 Timing was also considered significant in relation to dealing with separation issues:

'I wonder about the timing – separation issues need to be dealt with at the start of the sentence ideally as it's about learning how to cope – it's not going to go away. But certainly it should be done at the start of the programme and I'm not sure at what point it comes in'.

3.44 Prison respondents made reference to other ways of approaching parenting and separation work:

'The Health Visitor used to do an informal drop-in session for women with young children – they did crafts etc and talked about feelings, ways of handling things – the women were learning but didn't know they were. It was supportive – like a toddler group without toddlers. It worked well and the environment was nice, informal and not a classroom. She still does individual work and could do groups again, but hasn't the time. I haven't seen the Aberlour groups – they could be okay'.

3.45 In contrast, another prison-based worker reported that all the women who had been referred to the programme by her agency had indicated that the programme had been 'excellent' and were very enthusiastic about the support they had received; referrals for the next (fourth) group were in the process of being passed on.

3.46 An Open Day that had been held at the prison in November 2007 had included a presentation about the programme and contributions from women who had taken part. This was attended by 37 social workers from 17 different areas and feedback about the work had been positive. However, some of the less positive comments reported by prison officers (not involved with the programme) suggest that there may be benefits from more collaborative work within the prison in addition to developing external links.

## **Partnership working**

3.47 Differences were evident initially between individual staff approaches, based on different organisational and professional cultures. But the impact of partnership working was considered favourable overall, by both programme leaders and group participants. The combination of a prison-based worker and a worker from outside the prison worked well, as did the combination of experience and expertise brought by the workers. Workers employed skills in counselling vulnerable people, experience of group work, and specialist skills such as working with children, adult learning, and knowledge of the prison system.

‘It was good having someone come in from outside the prison to run it with an officer but what really made a difference was what they were like as a person, that they were good people (programme participant)’.

3.48 Programme leaders also emphasised that the joint work was important:

‘We started off poles apart but were thrown together and it gelled’.

‘We worked well together and got over pre-conceived ideas we both had. It was very much co-facilitation’.

‘The co-working worked well; having the two agencies made it two for the price of one with two different slants – the child and SW perspective and the through-care perspective as well as the prison one. This is where partnership comes into its own. I don’t think it would work if run by only outside agencies as they wouldn’t understand the prison environment so well’.

3.49 Workers felt that there was a shared ethos and approach to the work and that bringing their own, different experiences made running the group interesting, positive and a learning experience for both of them, in addition to the benefits it brought for group participants. The workers who ran both the second and third groups stated that there were clear benefits in running the group together for a second time; for example increased confidence in the material and in one another as working partners. One of the workers acknowledged that preparation of paperwork and session materials had not been particularly evenly distributed across the agencies but stated that time constraints and workload priorities were the reason for this.

## Engagement

3.50 The workers expressed the view that a number of factors contributed to most women engaging well with the programme. These included:

- The relationship building during the assessment stage which showed that the workers were interested in participants as individuals;
- The atmosphere of trust and support which was established through workers being open and honest about their own parenting and being non-judgmental;
- An approach which aimed to enhance self-esteem and self-confidence;
- Workers willingness to take part in all aspects of the programme themselves;
- Inclusion of interactive and fun elements, such as the play session.

‘They engaged because they really enjoyed, and needed, to talk about their children, even though it was painful at times. There was a trusting atmosphere, helped by us talking about our own children. One of the reasons that they maybe don’t talk about their children in other forums is that they feel they have to protect them from some other prisoners, by not showing photos, for example (programme leader)’.

3.51 This was reiterated by the participants themselves, who noted the importance of workers sharing a bit of their own experience which encouraged the women to ‘open up’ and talk about themselves and their children. The women commented:

‘Their approach was brilliant – it was non-judgemental. They took our feelings into account and our circumstances, and didn’t label us as bad parents. There are difficult things for everyone about being a parent’.

‘They had a good manner –you could discuss things with them and they offered a 1- 1 if anyone had anything they wanted to discuss after – quite a few women did. You need someone to sound off to and not bottle things up’.

‘We got close to the leaders because they themselves were really into running the group; it had a different feel to some of the other groups, where people were moaning and groaning and not wanting to be there. We helped each other out and we worked hard’.

## **On-going support**

3.52 One of the aims of the programme work was to encourage women to make use of support services on release and, where possible, offer them information about agencies which they might contact on release. Women were provided with information about services in their local area where these existed but in some cases there were no appropriate services or women did not wish to be referred on at that stage. It was suggested by one of the staff from a voluntary agency with links to the prison that women are sometimes reluctant to become involved with statutory agencies as they are fearful that by asking for help they will be seen as not being able to cope and will come under scrutiny.

3.53 Participants interviewed reflected a mixture of attitudes:

‘I would be willing to go to services for support when I came out but I’d prefer it not to be social work. I already have a social worker that I don’t get on with but I’ve been on courses at a Family Centre and that was okay’.

‘I’m not against social work, they’re there to help you. The group has made me think differently about social workers really’.

3.54 Another staff member from a multi-agency support service working with ex-prisoners commented that most women do not immediately resume care of their children and that the emphasis of support work is more about helping women increase contact with their children, who are often living with carers or relatives under a statutory order with social work services clearly involved. However, even though women did not always live with their children, it was nonetheless important to encourage positive contact.

3.55 A significant development, was the formation of a Peer Support Group, which was initiated by two women who attended the parenting group and which continued to run once a week on an on-going basis. The focus was on substance use but one of its founder members was keen to include a parenting angle and the effect on children of substance use by mothers. The women took it in turns to chair the meetings and there was a core attendance of eight women and others who attended from time to time; two of the core members had moved into the Independent Living Units (based outside the prison) but continued to attend. The group was supported by prison staff and management and a member of the Programmes Unit attended to facilitate a degree of structure to the meetings.

## **Developing Integrated Post-Release Support Services**

3.56 There was support for the development of the parenting programme, with its inter-agency perspective, to be developed in a way that enabled women who had participated in the programme to be offered opportunities to continue the work and make use of similar supports once back in the community. Four agencies which work with women offenders with substance use issues were contacted to seek information about what services were currently available, how agencies worked collaboratively and to ascertain staff views about how parenting support might be continued.

3.57 Formal avenues of support exist across Scotland through services such as Throughcare Addiction Services, some of which are run for local authorities by voluntary agencies such as SACRO and Turning Point. These services try to mirror work that may have started in prison and help ex-prisoners make links with other agencies who offer support with employment, housing and family/parenting issues, if required. Agencies such as Phoenix Futures will make links for individual women leaving Cornton Vale and liaise with social work services and other agencies. While there are few, if any, services which focus on family and parenting work alone, there are projects in some of the larger cities such as Glasgow, Edinburgh and Dundee which are well-situated to make links with the prison-based programme and continue to support women on release.

3.58 Prison based workers expressed a range of views about the appropriateness of ongoing group work for women with substance use issues. One view was that it could encourage women to resume substance use and that their objective was, where appropriate, to link women in to local family support groups. Suggestions were made about how women who had taken part in the group could be identified, for example at pre-release case conferences and then linked in, if they were willing, to Outreach projects or services such as SACRO Community Links in Edinburgh. There was scope for a pilot in at least one area which could use the material developed for the Cornton Vale programme, amended for use in the community. The programme leaders indicated that there might be potential for them to run adapted programmes in the community with women on probation or on bail. There could also be a role for facilitators to accompany and introduce women with whom they had worked to services in their local area after their release.

3.59 The NPDP project management have held discussions with Criminal Justice Authorities to explore collaborative working options which might include continued programme delivery within the prison or partnership delivery in the community as an alternative or follow-on to custody. It is considered that this would help deliver

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policies which require improved outcomes for offenders in relation to family support. There are a range of options that might be pursued if appropriate funding streams can be identified; the nature of short-term funding can, however, sometimes be a barrier to developmental work of this type. Indeed throughout the development of this programme continued funding for the wider project, NPDP, was uncertain and was a priority for all involved.

## 4. CONCLUDING POINTS

4.1 While this evaluation is based on limited data and a small number of respondents, there are a number of issues which can be identified from the initial programmes:

### The Programme

- It was recognised by programme leaders and women participants that the programme provided an opportunity to address ‘separation issues’ and to assist women to address these issues, and find better ways of maintaining contact with their children during their imprisonment;
- There has been a high level of commitment among participants and programme leaders;
- The programme has added to practice knowledge about engagement e.g. pre-programme individual sessions, leaders being willing to fully participate, building trust;
- The women’s instigation of the Peer Support group indicates the need for ongoing support which addresses substance use issues;
- The programme has developed women’s awareness of contact and communication issues; many of the women are not likely to take care of their children immediately;
- Women’s views about referral to community services indicate ongoing reluctance to access statutory services, especially if related to the care of their children.

### Organisational issues

- The programme adds to practice knowledge about working through the complexity of inter-agency collaboration;
- Support for the programme has increased within the prison as workers have become more aware of the work undertaken; however there continues to be some scepticism about the potential outcomes of the work
- The three groups have enabled the referral process to be adjusted but other constraints such as sentence length and early release have impacted on the criteria for the programme.



## **Broader strategic development**

- The programme tackles an area of significant importance for women in prison and, consequently, for their children, as evidenced by national and international research findings;
- Interventions which enhance and encourage effective communication for women and their children are likely to have longer term consequences, in terms of reduced rates of reoffending, reduced likelihood of juvenile criminal involvement, and improvements in the lives of these children and young people;
- Linking support from prison to the community is important in delivering an Integrated Care package; where geographically available, women are encouraged to access appropriate support services, including those provided by Aberlour, on release from prison. However, this needs to be more systematic and requires longer-term integration and resources.

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