Resisting reoffending

The fathers maintained a focus on their children’s learning and on their literacy and general development; they brought to the family event what they had learned in the preparatory workshop sessions. This affirms previous work on family literacy showing that fathers can be involved if the programme is appropriately designed for them. Of importance too, is the expressed resolve of the men to think of their role as a father differently in the future. This relates to what we already know about the positive effects of maintaining family connections on desistance and resisting reoffending.

University-trained Pact family workers run FLiP courses in women’s and men’s prisons in England and Wales and the work is being evaluated by Professors Peter Clough and Cathy Nutbrown from the School of Education at The University of Sheffield.

Collaboration between the University of Sheffield, Pact and prisons has led to effective ways of teaching imprisoned fathers more about their children’s early literacy development and to involving them in supporting their children’s learning. Male prisoners were keen to enrol and participate with a high level of motivation, leading them to reaffirm their important role as fathers in their children’s lives and learning. Literacy-oriented family visits were also shown to support them in this. This is a positive and effective approach to supporting imprisoned fathers to develop their role in their children’s lives and learning and create real opportunity for change.

Family Literacy in Prisons

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Pact’s fully FLiP trained family workers run the FLiP programme in a growing number of prisons in England and Wales.
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Our methodological approach was largely qualitative, seeking above all an understanding of what it was possible to achieve in early literacy development with fathers in prison, and to understand what was meaningful and effective in creating ways to involve them despite the circumstances of enforced absence. Interviews, observations and feedback questionnaires were used to elicit views of the fathers, their partners and their children.

Our analytical approaches first involved a rating of the participation of the fathers in the early literacy workshop sessions using an adapted rating scale (Nutbrown et al. 2005) and observation data. Second, a thematic analysis of fathers’ perspectives on the workshops was completed. Finally we drew on questionnaire and observational data to develop a thematic evaluation of the literacy-oriented family visits from the perspectives of the fathers, and their families.

The study found: that ‘take up’ of the programme indicated that there was a need for such an initiative, with target numbers for participants being reached and a waiting list of men wishing to enrol; that participation ratings were strong, with sixty-nine men (93%) judged to participate at moderate to high levels on a 1-5 rating scale.

The opportunity to see their children during the literacy-oriented family visit provided a strong motivation to enrol in the programme; ideas about early literacy development were successfully shared with imprisoned fathers thus confirming that this element of an established and effective programme could be successfully adapted for prisoners.

**Literacy-oriented Family Visits**

All families reported that they benefitted from the visits. The children focussed on: ‘spending time with daddy’, generally having fun and feeling happy; and the enjoyment of the wide range of activities. Many mentioned being given a book to take home as a gift from their fathers. The men spoke of: bonding and spending time as a family; the style of the visits; their new knowledge about early literacy; their enhanced awareness of children’s learning; and their future roles as fathers.