

'Missing You'

An evaluation of Film It and the Parents in Prison Project

Dr Anita Wilson

Spring 2008

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Acknowledgements and Profiles

There are a range of people without whom this project, its success or its future progress and dissemination would not have been possible. Film It would therefore like to acknowledge the support of the Families Division at the Department for Children, Schools and Families for funding this project. We would also like to thank the governors, education staff and officers at HMP Bullwood Hall, HMP Holloway and HMYOI Hindley for their support and co-operation. Finally, a big thank-you goes out to all the prisoners and families who took part in the project.

Film It!

Film It is a national charity aiming to educate, engage and enthuse 'hard to reach' young people through the creative arts. We run workshops in film, photography, performance, songwriting and storytelling, helping young people to produce work which uses the reality of their life experiences to generate change.

Film It projects are designed to tackle a wide range of social issues: offending behaviour, incarceration, parenting, drug addiction, homelessness, mental health, literacy problems, creative learning and re engaging with communities. The work that we do is focused on creative approaches to learning, health and regeneration. Each project results in the production of high quality educational materials designed to raise the users skill base and create positive change: in the participant group, in the professionals that work with them, in social organisations, government and the wider community as a whole.

Dr Anita Wilson

Anita Wilson is a prison ethnographer. She has applied her knowledge to academic research, national training strategies for prison staff, and the application of research to practice such as prison education, parenting, and mental health and well-being. In this work she has been funded by the Home Office, the Youth Justice Board, HM Prison Service, the Women's and Young Persons Team. She also has an interest in the efficacy of the creative arts and their ability to uplift and empower the most vulnerable and marginalised groups in society. Her work in this field has been sponsored by Neighbourhood Renewal Funding and Regeneration Budgets, the Paul Hamlyn Foundation, the Trust for the Study of Adolescence and the Arts and Humanities Research Council.

Summary

The Film It project was funded by the Department for Children, Schools and Families under their 'Strengthening Families' programme and ran for 3 years. It had two inter-related aims: to enhance parenting and parent-child relationships by helping partners to improve the support they provide one another during a prison sentence, and to improve family support at a time of acute family stress.

It drew on the experiences of people in prison, family members, and the professionals who cared for them. It focussed on two main groups - women in prison and young offenders. It was undertaken at four sites - 2 female prisons, one mother and baby unit and one establishment holding young men. It used film as a medium for video messaging, through which people could share their thoughts about family separation, how they coped, and the difficulties they were presented with by the system. Each project was tied to an individual event within the prison but all three were brought together under the guiding principle that shared video messaging and DVDs between parents, prisoners, and children could help to alleviate the stress of absence and separation.

The project achieved its aims through succeeding in gaining access to families and offenders, in the exchange of video messages between parents and children, in the up-skilling of participants in film and creative endeavour, and in encouraging team work between the prison, the prisoners, their families and friends. It collected ample proof of what it had achieved. It benefitted from a sensitive and ethical approach which

- ❖ Was responsive to the needs and wishes of everyone involved
- ❖ Paid close attention to issues of ethics and safety
- ❖ Brought a collaborative and egalitarian ethos to its work

It also achieved more than it set out to by

- ❖ Highlighting issues about parenting from prison, such as the immediacy of separation, the long-term effects of incarceration on families, the particular problems of foreign nationals, and the difficulties of maintaining quality contact with family and friends.
- ❖ Highlighting issues of being the parent or partner of a prisoner, such as the logistical difficulties of staying in touch, the worries of re-offending and further separation, and the emotional strain of added responsibility
- ❖ Highlighting the difficulties experienced by children or siblings of prisoners, such as the trauma of separation, especially at certain times of the year such as Christmas, the short duration of visits and contact time with the parent, and the need to reinforce the existence of the parent during long periods of absence.

Main messages are

- ❖ A creative and sensitive approach such as that taken by Film It is essential if this kind of work is to succeed
- ❖ Successful interventions such as this should be embedded with core prison business
- ❖ Success can be achieved as much through humour and humanity as by focusing only on crime and negativity
- ❖ Those who have direct experience of parenting from prison or have family members in prison have insightful and important messages for everyone work on family issues within criminal justice.

Introduction

Maintaining family relationships can help to prevent ex-prisoners re-offending and assist them to resettlement successfully into the community. However, 43 per cent of sentenced prisoners say that they have lost contact with their family as a result of going into prison. Approximately 150,000 children are affected by the imprisonment of a parent each year. Many of these have significant relationships with their parent, who may sometimes be the primary carer. Separation in these circumstances can be extremely traumatic for the child, leading to problems with mental health, school performance and at worst, delinquency and inter-generational offending (Home Office 2004:37)

Enforced family separation is traumatic for anyone. But for those for whom separation is linked to the distress and alienation of imprisonment, the emotional effect can be considerable and the impact widespread. The issues - like the prison population itself - are complex and far-reaching. Worry about a child's progress, concerns as to their welfare and care, and the helplessness of not being able to play an active role in their developing life are all exacerbated by the lack of contact imposed by a parent's prison sentence.

The effect on women, as primary carers, is particularly significant. It is estimated that their imprisonment affects around 18,000 children each year. Many of these children are taken into care, an additional trauma that has often already been experienced by their mothers (Corston 2007). In a recent study of over 500 female prisoners, 11% said their children were in care, 23% said that their children had been split up and were being looked after by various people, 14% said that their children were living alone (Plugge et al 2006).

Equally, the effect on incarcerated youth, as children themselves, is also severe (Howard League 2006). Approximately 11,000 young people under the age of 21 are currently imprisoned, effectively disengaging them from their family units. Some are parents themselves, with an estimated 12% of young men and 5% of young women in custody having reported having children of their own (www.crimeinfo.org.uk). Many express concern about their abilities to be a 'good' parent, with aspirations of 'being there' for their children rather than 'spending my boy's life in prison' (Meek 2007:377).

Separation from siblings is often keenly felt and lack of contact between young prisoners and their younger siblings is known to have a detrimental effect on incarceration (Howard League 2006). The fact that some young prisoners are already taking on the responsibility of looking after their parent further complicates the issue, while others recognise that much bridge-building needs to be done within their family networks (Arnall et al 2005).

For families outside, the logistics, brevity and trauma of prison visits together with limited avenues for contact beyond phone calls and letters, means that family members are often the 'forgotten victims' (Mills & Codd 2007) and feel that they too are 'doing the time'.

Furthermore, many family-related issues extend beyond the simplistic notion of parent and child. Cultural norms and chosen lifestyles often mean that prisoners have extended families that include close friends, girl or boyfriends, partners and step-families, many of whom are able only to maintain distanced or tenuous links. It is ironic, for example, that a girl may be the partner of a young prisoner and the mother of his child, but if she is under 18 she is not able to visit him alone but must be accompanied by an adult.

Evidence suggests that retaining positive links with family and friends has a positive impact on helping an offender to maintain a law-abiding life on release from prison (SEU 2002) and attention is currently being paid by policy makers as to how to encourage and maintain positive links and relationships with families as a protective factor against re-offending. The National Offender Management Service (NOMS), for example, identifies children and families as one of its 7 Pathways towards the reduction of offending, recognising that 'children and families can play a significant role in supporting an offender to make and sustain changes' (NOMS 2004). The government sponsored Parenting Fund also supports various projects with a target group that includes offenders. It aims to improve the experiences of young parents, particularly fathers, supporting them in improving life skills, and developing an understanding of parenting roles and responsibilities.

In the outside world, the Assisted Prison Visits Unit, the Partners of Prisoners and Families Support Group (POPS) and Action for Prisoners' Families (APF), offers practical help and advice to families. An informative website www.prisonersfamilieshelpline.org.uk can also be accessed and publications such as the APF/NACRO booklet 'Outside Help: Practical Help for the Families of People in Prison' offers material resources and advice.

It is a well established fact that the creative arts can be used successfully to engage offenders and marginalised groups in informative, educational and empowering ways (Wilson & Robertshaw 2006). The eminent anthropologist Shirley Brice-Heath notes that 'hard-wired into participation in arts work are emotionally beneficial learning experiences' and within prisons, drama and creative writing work undertaken by Safe Ground, such as Family Man and Fathers Inside, has been found to raise awareness about family issues, contribute to prisoners' accreditation portfolio and be much valued and appreciated by prisoners themselves (Halsey, Ashworth & Harland 2002). Programmes such as Storybook Dads, and Storybook Mums running in various prisons in England and Scotland, also use creative methods and help support incarcerated parents to retain links to their children outside, while developing prisoners' reading and writing ability.

The work and aims of the Film It project, therefore, is therefore timely in that it reflects the current concern in providing appropriate support for prisoners and their families, and joins an existing raft of agencies and interventions using the creative arts to assist in encouraging and maintaining family ties during imprisonment.

But Film It is also unique in that it combines the best of both approaches. At its core is a desire to promote strong family links between prisoners and those outside who care about them. But it also recognises that the creative arts has the capacity to allow people to express themselves, offering a practical way for people to maintain appropriate, meaningful and accessible contact with children, partners and other family members.

What this report evaluates

This report evaluates the work done by Film It on the 'Parents in Prison' project. It does so in a number of ways. We could, purely on the basis of a completed project and appropriate paperwork, assume that Film It did a good job. But this would fail to give the reader a sense of how this success was achieved or how others might benefit from taking forward and applying the ethos of the Film It approach. We could simply match the aims and objectives to hard outcomes, but this would fail to fully encompass what has truly been accomplished. For example, listing the number of parents and children that agreed to take part in the filming would 'hit the target', but this would fail to hear their common-sense advice about the system and how it affects them as parents or children. Presenting an objective bar chart would show the number of project participants who felt they had 'had fun', but this would fail to encapsulate the rich and personal experience of 'having such a laugh with you when we did the puppet show and everything'.

In an effort to evaluate some of these more nuanced achievements, this report falls into a number of sections. It begins with an overview of what Film It set out to achieve and a brief description of each project. It then evaluates the Film It approach. It goes on to make two further evaluations. The first looks at aims, objectives and hard outcomes. The second highlights the key messages that emerged from the project and what these messages can offer to all those concerned with the importance of family relationships in prison settings. The report closes with some recommendations.

The Film It project

This innovative project will enhance parenting and parent-child relationship by helping partners improve the support they provide one another during a prison sentence... the project will improve family support at a time of acute stress' (Extract from the Film It Proposal)

The Film It project was funded under the Sure Start 'Strengthening Families' programme. It had two main aims, firstly to 'enhance parenting and parent-child relationships by helping partners to improve the support they provide one another during a prison sentence' and secondly to 'improve family support at a time of acute family stress'.

Three inter-related individual projects were conducted at four sites, each keeping to these overall aims, thus giving the whole enterprise a coherent, cohesive and collaborative framework;

- ❖ Each individual project began with extensive consultation with a range of stake-holders, including prison personnel, external agencies, and prisoners.
- ❖ Preparatory, collaborative meetings were arranged at each prison, which acted as the pre-cursor to the workshops with prisoners and staff.
- ❖ At the heart of each project was the making, giving and receiving of family messages. In the prison setting, these messages were linked to and embedded within a prison-specific event.
- ❖ Video messages produced by prisoners - in the form of a DVD - were sent out to family members to watch. In two cases these were accompanied by extra gifts. Family responses to these messages were captured on video.
- ❖ Video messages from families were then taken back to the prisons and shared with prisoners and staff.
- ❖ Finally, the various processes, discussions and actions were turned into a documentary film, and subsequently distributed to prisoners and their families.

The Individual Projects

Each project followed this generic framework, but Film It took into account the specifics of each prison, adapting the remit accordingly for best fit. Prior to this, pilot studies had been undertaken in HMP Wormwood Scrubs and HMYOI Huntercombe.

Locked up Love - HMP Bullwood Hall

*'I'm missing you
I want to come home
Stuck here in this place
I'm feeling alone...*

The first project took place in Bullwood Hall (at the time it was still a women's prison). Many women were serving longer sentences. The project emerged from meetings between the Film It Director and practitioners running a parenting course at the prison. It was felt that film would be an appropriate medium through which to devise a parenting course. For women prisoners, the separation from family can have a particularly devastating effect and it is well documented that family ties between prisoners and the outside world tend to loosen over time. The filmed scenario of one long-term prisoner and the emotional link forged by the sharing of the DVDs between her and her daughter who she had not seen since she came to prison is a most poignant moment.

The project was a collaboration between the prison, the Education department, the women and Film It. The remit was for the women to create and read a story onto film, and to record a personal message for their child/ren and family members in the outside world. After discussion, a joint decision was made to send the messages out in story sacks. In addition to the story and message on DVD, the sacks also contained a teddy bear, and games that the women had made. The follow-up was to take the DVD out to the child and family, film them watching the DVD and invite them to record a message for the incarcerated family member. The final scenario was to make a visual record of the women watching the messages received from their families.

Despite the complex logistics of such an enterprise, including meeting the family of a foreign national prisoner, all the steps were achieved, resulting in a documentary of the process and the accomplishments entitled 'Locked up Love'.

A Christmas Wish - HMP Holloway and HMP Holloway Mother and Baby Unit

'We were able to spend quality time laughing, playing and learning with our child/children as we worked constructively to produce a Christmas play. This experience has helped us women tremendously'

The second project was undertaken with women at HMP Holloway and HMP Holloway's Mother and Baby Unit, and the children and babies of some of the women. It emerged from discussions with the women at Bullwood Hall that an intervention at Holloway would be particularly appreciated. A number of the women at Holloway were also serving long sentences, often far away from their home countries. Many had existing difficulties in maintaining their family relationships, with stories of children being looked after by other family members, of babies being taken directly from birth to foster care, and of transient and uncertain care for their children.

The project was again collaborative, with the prison, the staff, the education department, the women and their families taking part. From conversations with the women it emerged that Christmas was an especially bad time both for them in prison and also for their children who had to spend Christmas away from them. The remit was to take part in a play; scripted, filmed and performed by the women and their children, complete with costumes and music. Children were sent 'video invitations' asking them if they would like to take part. They then sent 'video acceptances' back to their mothers. The performance was videoed and copies given back to the women and to the families.

The positive relationship between the Film It team and the prison was no more apparent than when conventional timetabling of prison visiting was set aside and the women were allowed to spend a number of full days with their children. A documentary film entitled 'A Christmas Wish', charting the development of the project was produced and shared with the women and their children.

Small Change- Big Difference - HM/YOI Hindley

'I have really learned a lot in the week that we did our messages ...I've found a hidden interest in cameras that I didn't know I had...it was nice to have a change from our daily routine'

The third project involved young men at HM/YOI Hindley and their families in the outside world. Hindley was chosen for two reasons. Firstly, Film It were keen to work outside the Home Counties and secondly because statistically, young men are not only the hardest to reach but are most likely to lose contact with their children and families during and after incarceration. The project offers a snapshot view of the young offender population overall with its prevalent issues of mental health, persistent offending, difficult life histories

and problems with substance misuse. It also highlights the natural angst and aspiration of adolescence and the efforts of both the boys and their parents to deal with separation, difficult circumstance and the reality of everyday life.

After discussion, the young men were encouraged to make a 'Box of Hope' for their family members. The boxes contained a video message, gifts and photographs. The DVD which documents both the making and receiving of the boxes weaves together the concerns and worries expressed by the young men and their families, and their views and experiences of the ability of the system to fully understand their lives and problems.

Again, collaboration was a key feature. In prison, there was significant rapport between the young men and various prison staff on the residential units. Equally, in the scenes from the outside world, comments from siblings, parents, grand-parents and friends added considerably to the overall impact of the end product. A particularly poignant moment was captured in the words of one young woman as she sought to advise her brother on how to stay out of trouble;

'I just hope that he gets his head down, gets a job, gets a girlfriend, has a baby, just turns his life round, just be normal'

The resulting DVD 'Small Change - Big Difference' was circulated between family members and screened to young men in prison and their peers.

The Film It approach

'myself and my family would like to thank the film crew for being given the chance to experience something that has never been thought possible considering the circumstances...not only was this an emotional experience but it's something that will remain with you for ever'

Project evaluations understandably give most attention to identifiable outcomes and tangible outputs. This, however, means that little attention is given to the influence of the company or its approach on the success (or otherwise) of the project overall. Questions as to **how** outcomes have been achieved or **why** a project has been successful are rarely asked. Given the considerable success of the Film It project, it seems only right to begin by a brief evaluation of their approach and how this made a positive impact and significant contribution to the success of the project overall.

Prison is a notoriously difficult place to be, to work and to engage with. It has idiosyncratic rules and regulations, which when breached deny all further access and it is a credit to Film It that they have been allowed to return to selected prisons to undertake further work. Evaluation of the Film It approach therefore uncovers a template for others who may seek to work successfully within the prison environment. There are four significant strengths to highlight, with some points to consider for the future.

Experience

Film It has a strong pedigree in relation to successfully working with marginalised young people (Neustatter 2005) and with women and children in prison (Drakakis 2007). The company, founded in 2005, has already made a number of films with offenders. For example, 'Your Induction' is an informative documentary for women prisoners about the processes of being received into prison. 'Boy, Life Just Got Serious' centres of the views of young men in prison about family commitment. Film It returned to one of those prisons for this project and being invited back is a significant indicator of acceptance. From the comments of participants involved in these films, the professionalism of Film It was something that was noted and the overwhelming feeling was that there should be 'more projects like this'.

Suggestions for the future

Film It might consider more work with the adult estate, where separation and dislocation from family is a significant issue for many long-term men in prison. It is estimated that 45% of adult prisoners lose touch with their families while in prison (SEU 2002)

Equity

Film It takes an inclusive and collaborative approach to its work and their project pays proper attention to fair representation of the prison population in terms of ethnicity and culture. Male and female perspectives are also drawn in through the experiences of offenders and participants' family members such as partners and brothers. Film It's representation of 'the family' is equally broad, taking into account various family constellations including siblings, step-children, partners and older and younger family members. Age is also a consideration with a broad spread of participants from 16 years of age upwards and a range of family members from small children through to grandparents.

In this project, rather than coming in with a dictatorial or hierarchical attitude and a set agenda, Film It assumed its more egalitarian approach, described by one prisoner;

'we thoroughly discussed what our objectives were, ideas people had, equipment we would use, what we hoped to achieve...we were joined by a Governor of the prison who authorised full access to film...at that point I felt that the group of inmates realised for the first time we would be able to have our voices heard without bias.'

Suggestions for the future

Film It might consider extending its role to managing and overseeing projects run by the prisons themselves. This is already happening in one prison from this project.

Ethics and safeguards

Film It adopts a strong ethical framework in order to ensure the informed protection of its participants. This framework includes building in some lead-in time, offering participants a copy of the Film It Code of Conduct, obtaining signatures on a Sign Off document outlining the use to which the film will be put, and collecting signed Release Forms for participants and their children. Furthermore, all employees and volunteers working with Film It are required to have Enhanced CRB checks and a comprehensive child protection policy that staff have to read, sign and adhere to.

Prison is also a sensitive environment and female prisoners and young offenders are particularly vulnerable. The topic of family relationships is also very emotive. As a precautionary measure, on one occasion in this project, Film It enlisted the help of a prison officer trained in managing emotions.

Suggestion for the future

Film It might consider having debrief meetings with participants or team debriefs with all workers involved in the project.

Evidence

Film It makes a point of collecting a wide variety of evidence to support its claims of a successful project including questionnaires, evaluations, and workshop briefs, as well as appropriate and detailed interim reports on how the project is progressing. In this project, the 3 DVDs provide a concrete example of an appropriate 'hard outcome' for the project, and are one element of a larger body of evidence that have assisted this evaluation. Other data included reports to the funder, yearly interim reports on the progress of the project, pre- and post-course evaluations from participants, written comments from tutors and prison staff, unsolicited letters from participants and examples of course and workshop sessions.

Suggestion for the future

Film It might consider bringing in the evaluator at the beginning of the project, to undertake staged evaluations at suitable milestones. More attention could be paid to the design of questionnaires and evaluation tools, for example some questions about current work and housing situations were inappropriate and in other cases were duplicated across questionnaires (something that having built in evaluation would solve). On a multi-sited project such as this, tools such as questionnaires should have equivalency and comparability.

Dissemination

Evidence of success is further evident in the wide range of dissemination that Film It undertakes. Their work has already been showcased in the national press through Young Minds Magazine and an article in The Big Issue. A number of films from previous projects are already in circulation to a wide variety of audiences including criminal justice professionals, organisations working with prisoners' families, policy makers and the judiciary. In this project, DVDs have been sent out to all participants and families and screened to wider prison populations and selected audiences.

Suggestion for the future

Film It may need to consider public reaction to films which include high-profile prisoners and seek ways to ensure that this does not stand in the way of public dissemination of their work.

Impact of the Film It approach on this project

When organisations undertake projects, they often have an influence beyond their stated objectives and in prison, this influence is most keenly felt. It is an environment in which every day remains the same and the introduction of something new runs the risk of having a positive or a negative effect.

Evaluating the comments from prisoners and staff, in this instance, Film It created a number of lasting positive impressions.

Dealing with Stress

Prison is notoriously stressful. On the one hand it can be dreary and boring and on the other highly emotional and volatile. Either way it is demanding with few opportunities to alleviate the pressure. Participants felt unreservedly that the Film It attitude had helped to balance this out and give people something else to turn their mind to. Comments were made such as 'this workshop or project is good for inmates dealing with stress inside' and 'this really helped me deal with the pressures of prison'.

It's the Boom!

Prisoners often feel cut off from the rest of the world. Visits are infrequent and phone calls expensive. New faces coming in to the prison and offering something relevant are cherished. The degree of appreciation of what Film It was doing was almost tangible. Virtually every participant made an expression of thanks at some point on their evaluations. These ranged from 'It's the Boom!' and 'I loved every minute of the work that we done - God Bless the Crew' to 'it was very good - thanks very much'.

Having fun!

There are few opportunities in prison to have fun. For young offenders, as one member of staff noted, maintaining an air of detachment is the most common strategy for getting through prison time. For women, coping with the anguish of separation from their children, there are few opportunities for enjoyment. However, Film It offered an opportunity to 'have such a laugh with you', which was shared among families members who sent smiles as well as serious messages between inside and outside worlds. Evaluation forms showed that 'having fun' was as strong an outcome as learning new skills.

There's still a buzz around

Importantly, Film It created a positive mood, sufficient to inspire people to want to carry on their good work after they had left or indeed voiced strongly that Film It crew should return or even become a central part of the prison day.

Meeting the aims and objectives

The culmination of past experience, together with the Film It approach means that in a simplistic way, Film It was virtually guaranteed to meet its aims and objectives for this project. The success and experience of previous projects paved the way to further access to prisoners and their families. The attention to ethics and equity fulfilled prison requirements, supported the roles and responsibilities of the project workers, and eased the minds of the participants. The richness and range of the data provided tangible proof that the project met its overall aim to enhance aspects of parenting and parent-child relationships and improve family support at times of stress. As a crude measurement, Film It met its key objectives of undertaking the 3 year project: working with 4 prison Units, undertaking workshops with incarcerated parents and families outside, and producing hard evidence - such as DVDs - to prove it.

In its proposal Film It also made 3 bold statements as to how it would judge its success -

- ❖ Reach
- ❖ Distribution
- ❖ Qualitative Impact.

Reach

Film It estimated that it would access 60 prisoners, 60 partners and 30 children. However, as stated above, undertaking work in prisons can be stressful and unpredictable and Film It was required to make some adaptations along the way. The prison population is complex and emotionally volatile and during the course of the project 10 participants were moved to other prisons, while others were prevented from attending to due bad behaviour. In another instance, one location had to be re-negotiated due to internal problems at a previously selected establishment.

However, in addition to the substantial number of prisoners who did take part, screenings were also held at each prison to large groups of additional prisoners. These resulted in further discussion about parenting and a workshop on how to keep families together. One prison also set up its own video messaging course as a result of the project and at the current time over 60 prisoners there have been able to create video messages for their families.

Furthermore as also stated above, Film It takes a broad view of what constitutes a family. In addition to immediate relatives of the prisoners involved, the DVDs have been watched by an increasing number of interested family and friends, to the extent that - while undocumented - it seems safe to

assume that the projected figures are an underestimation. This suggests that Film It has far exceeded the number of offenders and family members that it originally set out to reach.

Distribution

Distribution of information and material resources reflected the equitable and collaborative approach that is a trademark of Film It Within each project, information was distributed prior to commencement and made available to everyone - staff and prisoners 'on the inside' and families and friends 'on the outside'. DVDs were distributed to every person involved in the project. In its proposal Film It hoped that there would be 'other avenues for distribution in addition to the prison screenings'. In 2007, 6 training courses for 90 prison staff and Youth Offending Team practitioners across England ensured the wide distribution of information about how video messaging can support families and offenders at times of stress. Each person who attended not only watched but got a copy of the films. Furthermore, each person went back to train a further 10 practitioners, suggesting that around 900 professionals working in youth justice are aware of the Film It! project and what it can offer.

Additional screenings have also been shown to prison audiences, prison family/parenting charities such as Action for Prisoners' Families, and presented to the audience at a 'Families Under Stress' national conference.

At the public level messages from the DVDs have been distributed through the sponsoring of a screening at the Everyman Cinema, Hampstead by Doughty Street Chambers to an invited audience of barristers, judges, policy-makers and practitioners.

Qualitative Impact

Film It wanted this evaluation to assess the impact of the project from the perspective of the participants and their parents. The issues that have emerged in relation to their perspectives have been found to be substantial, valuable and thought-provoking, sending important messages out to those concerned with the impact of incarceration on family relationships. They deserve their dedicated section below, entitled ' Key Messages'.

First, however, the report touches on other Film It predicted outcomes, i.e. the assessment of technical skills such as IT, camera work and lighting, the development of basic skills such as reading and writing, and the building up of personal and social skills of participants such as team work, listening, and self-esteem.

Technical ability - 'a hidden interest in cameras'

Routes into offending and re-offending, for many prisoners, include lack of qualifications and lack of practical skills. The Government is already taking steps, as part of its action plan, '*Reducing Re-Offending Through Skills and Employment: Next Steps*' (DIUS Press Notice 2006/0189) to upskill the offender workforce and there is considerable interest in initiatives that promote a career or training in creative industries for ex-offenders (Clean Break, London Shakespeare Workout, and The Other Side Gallery, for example). Although one participant in this project said he already done some film-making with his Youth Offending team which he felt was 'very good', most people had no previous experience. The introduction of a new skill which required practical application and concentration had considerable benefits. One person felt that he had 'really learned a lot in the week that we did our messages. I've found a hidden interest in cameras that I didn't know I had'. Others felt that 'time flew quickly throughout the course as it was so enjoyable'. The opposite view - but for the right reasons - was that time had gone too quickly and people would have liked the courses to last longer so that they could develop their technical skills further.

Developing new skills was also seen by prison staff as particularly influential in motivating young offenders to engage with further education and training. Comments suggested that an introduction to film making might be integrated into future plans. As noted

The young people have gained an insight and an interest in film making and photography...it showed them that college courses in this field are available, when they had not previously considered this as an option.

Prison staff also felt that continuation was of prime importance, saying

'Follow up projects once young people leave custody would be beneficial to keep them focussed and hopefully help them to not re-offend'

The development of technical skills was touched upon further by parents who felt that 'an apprenticeship' generally would be the most appropriate way of keeping their children out of trouble. Just as the filming experience with the YOT team had encouraged one young man, the Film It experience may well go on to influence the education and training choices of others upon their release.

The seeds of this have already been sown in previous Film It projects and participants have been given employment with Film It in areas such as office work, being runners and 2nd Assistant Directors on film shoots and employed as actors on shoots. From the Parents in Prison project, one family member has been used as a runner and one participant has been used as an actor since his release from prison.

For the women, however, interest in technical skills was often over-ridden by the film-making offering them the chance to engage with their families in a more naturalistic way. Some, however, expressed an interest in continuing to develop technical skills including camera and sound work, set design and prop making, script writing and acting. One person said she would also like to go on to do 'make up and costume design'.

Basic Skills

There is considerable evidence to suggest that many offenders have not had an opportunity to develop their literacy skills, and this in turn is often seen as one more barrier on the road to reducing re-offending (HM Government Green Paper 2005). Equally, prisoners are often reluctant to re-engage in an activity in prison which already has negative connotations for them in terms of bad school experiences, truancy or exclusion. The Film It project allowed people to engage in reading and writing in a non-threatening way, so that learning took place informally through the personalised activities of writing stories for their children. In some cases, this was developed further, in correspondence to the Film It team or through more formalised computer-generated descriptions of the work, undertaken by some of the women on the project. Unsolicited correspondence from participants in these activities is one more indication of Film It's non-threatening and motivational approach.

Personal and Social Skills

Data from the self-completed questionnaires suggest that the process of being engaged in the Film It project helped prisoners in their personal development. The main areas identified were

- ❖ An improvement in listening skills
- ❖ An improvement in the ability to deal with stress
- ❖ An improvement in the ability to support others
- ❖ A perceived increase in patience

Development in these areas are significant in that they are likely to have an impact not only on parenting skills and interaction with family members but also on the ability to cope with current prison life, thus having an immediate as well as a long-term effect.

Collaborative working has already been identified as a strength of the Film It approach and positive changes in prisoners' attitudes towards team work in these projects were noted by prison staff and participants. Prisons throw disparate people together who often have little in common other than the experience of incarceration and working together is not always easy. Even when some participants felt that they had had to deal with 'other people's childish behaviour' or sometimes felt 'a bit moody' themselves, they still persevered. Difficulties were overcome and staff noted that

[the course] enabled [people] to work as a team, greatly enhanced their self-esteem and confidence and it enabled them to reflect on how their behaviour impacted on others, such as friends and family and gained a better awareness of how changes would positively benefit themselves and their families'.

Responses from the questionnaires also revealed that participants felt that the Film It project would also benefit prisoners other than themselves.

However, while the evaluation above illustrates that Film It achieved what it set out to do, and that it met its key objectives, the report would be incomplete without giving proper attention to the strong messages that Film It elicited during the making the DVDs and from the comments of prisoners and their families about the difficulties they experience and the support they value. It is fitting that this evaluation draws to a close with the voice of those involved and the key messages they wish to be heard.

Key messages

The Film It! projects and the integral events and conversations that occurred within and beyond the prisons provide a much needed opportunity for people who rarely get the chance to make their views heard and their concerns aired. A number of key messages came to light, drawn from the DVDs and the comments on various evaluation forms. Not only do they highlight some of the frustrations and stresses experienced by prisoners and family members, they highlight the fact that the Film It projects offered a therapeutic and non-threatening medium through which to share these messages and articulate their concerns. The issues can be grouped under three sets of issues - stress-related issues, personal issues, and bigger issues.

1. Stressful Issues

- ❖ *'I went to my friend's house, got arrested, sent into custody, and I never returned'*

Much research has been done on the long term separation of children from parents (Gabel and Johnson eds.1995; Caddle and Crisp 1997; Stanley & Byrne 2000). But the impact and stress of imprisonment on both the family and the parent often begins at the moment of arrest. Mothers had left children in the care of others, assuming that they would return. Women spoke of being separated 'straight away', of children being 'put into the system', and of carers going back on their word and leaving children on their own. The Film It project highlights an often ignored aspect of incarceration - the speed at which a parent can be separated from his or her child or children. Video messaging can reassure a child that 'mummy is alright' and reassure an incarcerated parent so that 'it makes me happy to see my daughter - seeing that she is fine makes me stronger'.

- ❖ *'If you don't live here like me, it's the only link you have. Without this I would never have seen my baby'*

Around one in five women in prison are foreign nationals. Most are serving long sentences. Many are mothers. Many have not seen their children since coming to prison (Corston 2007:22). Lack or absence of visits adds considerably to the trauma of incarceration and in this project a number of mothers had left children in other countries, while others were only able to see them infrequently. Furthermore, the stresses of separation at certain times, such as Christmas, were also noted by the women and acted as the catalyst for 'Christmas Wishes'. The value of a 'reminder' such as the DVD was made very strongly by one parent in prison who said

[my son] said "when I miss you Mum, I'm gonna put on the DVD and then I can see you' - and I said to him " Same for me" - when I miss him I can see him. I'm serving a long sentence and it's good you know'.

The practical resource and 'living proof' provided by the DVDs reinforce the value of the Film It project as a way of bridging geographical and emotional distance and giving people the chance to physically connect, if only in a virtual way.

- ❖ *'it's 100 miles from [my home town] my Mum can't see me 'cos she hasn't any money'*

Many prisoners are housed in establishments some distance from their homes and families (Prison Reform Trust 2006) and the additional stress this places on the practicalities of visiting was a theme that ran through the comments from this project both from prisoners and their families. Lack of visits are known to have a detrimental effect on positive resettlement (Niven and Stewart 2005). There is no doubt that considerable efforts are being made by the Prison Service to encourage contact between family members with parenting programs and family days. But as one woman pointed out '24 hours in a year I see my kid'. In answer to a question asking what would help people stay in contact, the overwhelming response was for 'more phone calls'. However, phone calls from prison cost on average five times more than an equivalent call on the out (Prisons and Probation Ombudsman's Report 2006 - 2007) and as one young man noted 'credit goes too quick'. The stress of being unable to visit was tempered by the video messages, giving prisoners a chance to 'see' extended family members that they had not seen for some time and to hear messages of love and support.

2. Personal Issues

- ❖ 'The prison doesn't know what family life's like on the outside- I think they should visit the parents' (mother of a young offender)
- ❖ 'We don't know what they're going to go back out to- it's opened my eyes today' (Prison governor)

While prisons make considerable efforts to break down the barriers between inside and outside worlds, as the quote above shows, there is still a wide knowledge gap between family understandings of prison life and prison's understanding of family life. The experiences of family members in the Film It DVDs illustrate this strongly. For children outside there was a reassurance that the parent in prison was alive and well. As one mother noted, 'my daughter was able to see me'. For a parent outside, the moment when their incarcerated child gave a virtual 'guided tour' of their cell, was particularly poignant and went some way to give her a sense of where her son was 'living', especially as she had not seen him for some time. Equally for prisoners, video messaging gave them an opportunity to link back to familiar surroundings, to see their homes, friends and family, and gain some reassurance that their families cared enough to send them a personal message.

❖ *'I feel like a dickhead holding this kangaroo!'*

Prison is a place where people do not wish to be singled out. To stand out from the crowd invites unwanted attention and encourages bullying. People take on a prison identity. As one prison governor remarked 'in here they have to be macho'. But taking on a prison identity, however, runs the risk of becoming 'institutionalised' and losing touch with the human self. The Film It project gave people the chance to return to their human selves. People became film-makers, script-writers and creative people. For young men, it gave them a chance to drop their guard and risk looking 'like a dickhead' while making their video messages. For some of the women, making the videos and taking part in the activities it gave them the chance to 'do silly things and funny stuff' - not something that occurs often in the prison setting. The evaluation revealed overwhelmingly that people had had fun!

❖ *'When he's in prison I get my son back'*

For young people, males in particular, the high re-offending rate (around 80% according to the Youth Justice Board) and relatively short prison sentences means that they often have little time to re-establish contact with family and friend before returning to prison. Nor, it would appear, do they necessarily spend time with their family when they are 'on the out', often falling back into the traps of drug or alcohol addiction or being unable to resist the temptation of peer pressure to re-offend. Film It gave both parents and young offenders a 'private space' to talk to each other as individual people, able to share personal thoughts, hopes and wishes. Family members and the young people were visibly moved talking of their experiences and giving and receiving personal messages. Equally, Film It gave the women the chance to vent some of their emotions about seeing, missing or re-connecting with their children and families.

3. Big Issues

❖ *'still acting like a parent'*

Regardless of whether it was a parent waiting for a child to be released from prison, an imprisoned mother waiting to be reunited with her child or a young woman waiting to be released to return to her siblings and family members, messages from the Film It DVDs suggest that everyone still felt that their place within a family and their responsibilities towards it was central to their identity. People felt they 'still acted like a parent' while they were imprisoned, still had concerns that their child was doing well, worrying that the child was stressed by separation. Parents on the out still wanted 'what's best' for their children regardless of their involvement with the criminal justice system. These expressions of responsibility fly in the face of a common misconception that family members do not care or give up on their responsibilities. In line with the results of other studies (Lyon, Dennison and Wilson 2000:7), parents in this project felt frustrated that they were being blamed for everything that had gone wrong. As one said, 'it's hard for parents, but it's hard for these children...once they get into this cycle, they can't break it...but as a parent you can't break it either'. The Film It work provides a powerful 'real world'

testimony that could raise awareness of these issues for other professionals working in the field.

❖ *'Make it longer than a week next time'*

It is a sad indictment of the attitude towards sustained interventions, that projects can only run for short lengths of time or that projects run as a 'one-off'. Prisoners who had moved to other jails had succeeded in creating new interest and had tried - unsuccessfully - to persuade their prison to bring Film It in. Given the success of this project, it seems a waste of resources not to be able to make its future secure. While Film It seeks to involve staff and share their expertise, nevertheless, they *are* the experts and projects need to be supported and minded if they are to continue to achieve continuing positive outcomes. Furthermore, Film It works both inside and beyond the prison walls, and sustained intervention would fit well with the current emphasis on 'joined up' thinking and act as a strong link between prison and community. Comments on the importance of an embedded approach suggest that more preparation time would have been appreciated, that more time spent in the prisons would have been beneficial and that 'we should have [the Film It project] as a main part of education'.

❖ *'I really enjoyed myself, as did my children. It helped me through a bad Christmas'*

At Bullwood Hall, the main aim of the Film It project was to bridge the gaps brought about by absence and separation. At Holloway, it was to alleviate the pain of family separation at a particularly difficult time of year. At Hindley it was to maintain the fragile relationships between young men and their families. While each was concerned with supporting families in times of stress, the overwhelming feedback from the Film It project was that it had responded to individual need and listened to what individual people had had to say. The comments from prisoners highlight the fact that Film It did not merely arrive with a generic 'one size fits all' programme but responded to the wishes and circumstance of each prison and each individual prisoner within it. In brief, people had felt recognised. This in turn allowed them to be seen as and also to act as individuals.

Prison is not a happy place. But while the difficulties of being in prison and keeping in family contact have been well documented in this project, the fact that people got pleasure from being part of the project is a significant outcome. The mother above said, she had 'enjoyed' herself, as had her children. The DVDs showed humour and happiness which did not take away from the serious issues that were being discussed. Mental deterioration is a constant concern in prison, often exacerbated by separation and absence from loved ones and family and any intervention that helps to combat distress and depression is to be recommended.

❖ *'the people we are not the crime that we're in for'*

Hard outcomes such as DVDs and questionnaires can provide concrete evidence of a job well done. However Film It approached its work in a more

sensitive way than merely going for hard evidence. As Heath points out ' the arts have the capacity to touch us emotionally ...and open us up to what we can be' (Wilson & Robertshaw 2006). While the strong messages emerging from the project need to be heard, it is equally important to remember how they have been elicited. Using creative arts and the medium of film in prison is rare and fraught with difficulties, but it is to the credit of Film It! that they succeeded. People felt strongly enough about the issues to confront the camera and their own fears and shyness. People felt strongly enough about their families to record their feelings onto film. People felt confident enough to commit to the Film It approach, and in doing so offered deep insights into the problems of family separation and stress than more conventional methods would have been able to offer. The reward was to uncover the humanity of everyday life of prisoners and the families who care about them.

Recommendations

- ❖ ***Remember that parenting does not stop at the prison gates***
- ❖ ***Remember that prison and families still have a lot to learn about each other***
- ❖ ***Remember that the creative arts have the capacity to ease the distance between parents and children in prison***
- ❖ ***Remember that parents and children can not 'do the work of parenting' alone***
- ❖ ***Remember that 'having fun' and 'doing silly things' are important, especially in a prison context***
- ❖ ***Remember that Film It has a proven track record of successfully working with families in the prison context***
- ❖ ***Remember that Film It and video messaging can make a significant difference to the way that families can continue to support one another when faced with issues of incarceration***

A successful project such as this will take on a life of its own. Its ideas will weave themselves into other projects. Prisons will reflect on its impact long after the intervention has finished. Workers will adapt the Film It approach to new challenges. Participants and their families may feel empowered enough to tell others about the work they have been involved in and may be inspired to learn more about how film can influence everyday prison life.

This evaluation hopes to encourage all those keen to develop the work undertaken here and thanks them in advance for taking up the challenge of working creatively with families and supporting parents in prison.

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