

# CASE STUDY OF A CLINKS MEMBER - NEPACS

Supporting the children and families of prisoners in the North East of England

November 2015



# Nepacs case study: supporting the children and families of prisoners in the North East of England

## Introduction

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Nepacs believe that families hold the key to reducing reoffending and ensuring effective resettlement. They believe that if work is done to support the children and families of prisoners, helping them to maintain and strengthen contact, then it improves outcomes for all involved, including prisons. These beliefs underpin the range of services that they provide in the North East of England, from running prison visitor services to providing play facilities for children and family support. This case study focuses on two projects of Nepacs: Support at Court; and their Integrated Family Support Programme.

## About Nepacs

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Nepacs, formerly known as North East Prisoner Aftercare Society, began in 1882 as the Durham Discharged Prisoners Aid Society that was founded by a prison chaplain, a group of local clergy, magistrates and local worthies. Their objectives then were to provide resettlement support for the men and women leaving the prison. In the 1970s, they started providing caravan holidays for prisoners' families, running prison visitor centres and providing play facilities for children visiting prison. Today, they provide a number of services to prisoners and their families across the North East, shown in the following table:



Table 1. Nepacs services and numbers, 2014/15

Services	Numbers
Visitor centres in HMP Deerbolt, Durham, Frankland, Holme House, Low Newton and Northumberland.	142,549 visits to North East prison visitor centres
Play services at routine and special visits in prisons.	27,070 child visits took place
Family support service four prisons in HMP Deerbolt, Holme House, Kirklevington and Low Newton.	760 prisoners and family members benefitted from family support
Special family and child friendly visits in prison	2,410 children attended special family visits
Support to families at crown and magistrates courts in Teesside and Durham	782 received support at the courts and 213 people received telephone befriending support
Caravan Holidays for families of serving prisoners.	34 free holidays provided
Small grants programme for prisoners and families.	744 grants awarded
Tea Bar services in prison.	At seven prison visits halls
Youth service to young people affected by imprisonment of a parent.	83 young people enjoyed external activities

These were delivered by a total of 70 staff (many of whom are sessional and part time) and 179 volunteers across the region.

## Support at Court

Every year thousands of families experience court proceedings and the impact of a custodial sentence having never been involved or committed a crime. They are described as the 'hidden victims'. They are the partners, parents and children of those who are

sentenced and are those who are left to cope with the effects of the imprisonment of a family member. The loss of income, benefit changes, moving house, custody arrangements for children, negative psychological effects, bullying and stigma often happen to the family in the community. Families report that their experiences at court were painful and traumatic and they described feeling shocked, bewildered and devastated. Many explain they were completely unprepared for their family member receiving a prison sentence and had very little understanding of what would happen to their family member or themselves.

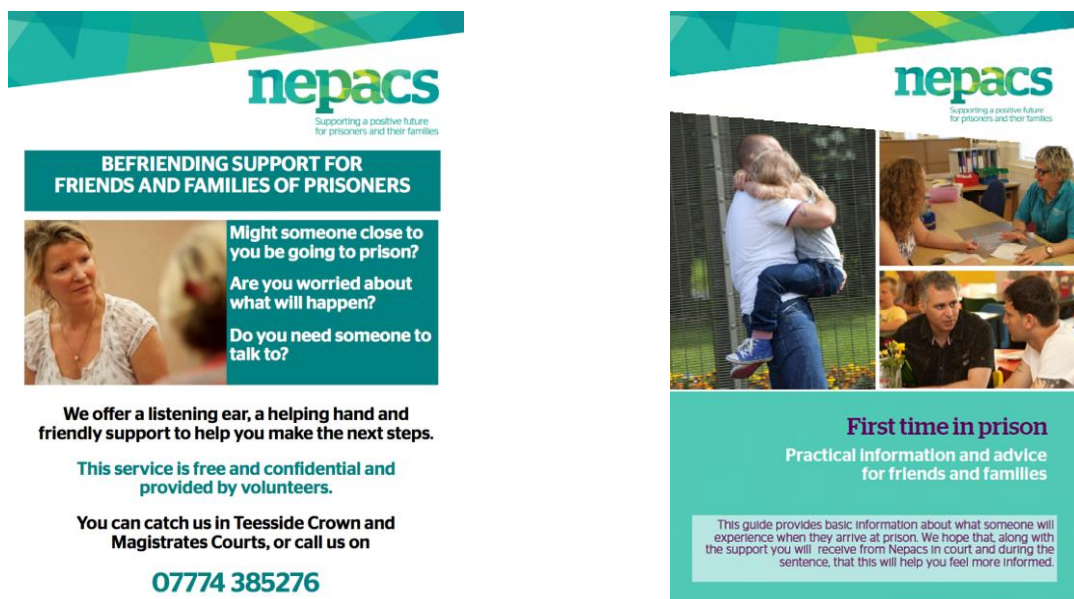
Although a highly stressful time for families, contact with the project at the point before they enter court has immediate benefits.

Nepacs' Support at Court Project aims to help transform families' experience so they have immediate contact prior to and after sentencing to help them have a greater understanding in the early stages of a prison sentence, receive support to establish coping mechanisms as well as advice and information to help them navigate the changing circumstances. The project started in July 2013 funded by Esmée Fairburn charitable foundation, and the County Durham Police and Crime Commissioner and is delivered on Teesside and in County Durham. It has two parts: support at court and telephone-based befriending and is delivered by two workers and a small team of volunteers, based at Middlesbrough Combined and Durham Crown Courts. For the court-based work, the project receives a list of offenders from the probation service who are due to be sentenced, as these may have families who face the immediate loss of a loved one. Project workers then station themselves in the area just outside the courts where families wait before entering and where they will leave from the courts. Nepacs also has a stall in this area with visible signage and information about the organisation and their service. Before they go into the court, families are approached and are offered information and support and the project's contact details. Project workers are also there after sentencing should they need anything explained or further information, which they often do.

Although a highly stressful time for families, contact with the project at the point before they enter court has immediate benefits. For example: those awaiting sentence are told to

write down the important numbers on their mobile phone as it will be taken away from them if they receive a custodial sentence; they are reminded to give any keys to the house or car; and told to write down names of any medication they are receiving. When they come out of court without their loved one, families need answers to their many questions, such as, what will happen now, where will he go, when can I see him, how can I send him things? The project workers and volunteers answer these questions, giving them piece of mind, and explain about their befriending.

Figure 1: Information available to families



The project provides telephone-based support to around 10 families at any one time. They deal with both prison-related issues such as visiting arrangements and special visits for children, travel and prisoner welfare and wider family issues such as benefits and money problems, food banks (Nepacs is a referral centre) and family support. They are linked into Nepacs' other services including family support in the prisons and in the visitor centres. Telephone support is typically frequent and intensive in the period following imprisonment, getting less as the family becomes familiar with the prison system. However, the project can be and is contacted at any time if the family has any concerns or queries. This can range from providing information to kinship carers about arranging child visits, to providing emotional support to older parents who may have nobody else to talk to.

## Box 1. Case study of Support at Court

John was waiting to go into court with his girlfriend, twin sons, who were six months old, and his father. John looked worried, agitated and had picked up a Nepacs leaflet which was on display. Jane, the Court Project worker, approached them, explained who she was, the nature of Nepacs support and made gentle enquiries about the case. John explained that although this was his first time in court, he was expecting a prison sentence and he was worried what would happen. John was particularly concerned that he would not have contact with his children. They all felt confused and anxious.

Whilst they waited for the court case to be called, Jane was able to talk to them about the prison and what to expect. They asked lots of questions and Jane told them about the support available, the process for children visiting and the different ways of keeping in touch.

In court, John was given a 10-month sentence. Later, Jane spent some time with John's girlfriend and father and gave them reassurances and explained what to expect in the first few days. On the day of sentencing, Nepacs was able to give the family the information that they needed to feel calmer and less stressed. They now know: the times and frequency of visits; how to make a visit; what ID they need; what happens at visits, such as taking fingerprints and searches; how to send money to prisoners; and how to communicate with John; and prison procedures. The family were able to ask questions in a calm environment about visits for the mother and children, so that John was able to maintain important contact with the twins as soon as possible and throughout his time in prison. They were also given reassurance that people within the Nepacs visitor centre would know they were visiting for the first time and would give them help and support at the next stage. The family support workers inside the prison would make sure that the family is supported to commence and maintain visits for the children.

Since John's admission, his children and family maintain regular contact. The family have been given additional support by the project when they had concerns about John's welfare. The family say that because of the support they have been able to come to terms with John's prison sentence and it has had less of an effect on them and their children.

Since its launch in Teesside in July 2013, a total of 782 families have accessed support and information in the courts and 213 people have received support from the befriending telephone line. The project is currently attempting to change its referral patterns, relying to a lesser degree on chance encounters outside of courts and more from direct referrals from solicitors, National Probation Service and the Community Rehabilitation Companies.

## Integrated Family Support Programme

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This project consists of four Family Support Workers (FSWs) located in both male and female prisons and two Family Support Advocates working in the community in the North East of England. The FSWs provide a multitude of tasks covering a wide variety of issues experienced by a range of different people; both prisoners and visitors. Their work is complex and includes fulfilling the role of:



- Advocate: the FSW attends meetings in the community on behalf of the prisoners, such as CAF (Common Assessment Framework) or TAF (Team Around the Family) meetings.
- Support worker: FSWs provide emotional support to prisoners who may receive bad news.
- Investigator: FSWs track down family members of prisoners or professionals (Social Workers, Solicitors) where contact has been lost.
- Negotiator/mediator: FSWs negotiate between the prisoner and the family member to clarify positions and resolve differences.
- Problem solver: if an issue is identified which has a significant bearing on a prisoner's familial situation, the FSW will attempt to solve the problem, such as timing of visits, funding for the costs of visits, the need for chaperoned visits, etc.

- Researcher: the FSWs administer questionnaires and consultations with prisoners to identify areas of need.

The objectives of the Family Support Advocates (FSAs) are to raise awareness within community agencies of the needs of prisoners' families and their support requirements and to help them develop and deliver services. They also deliver Hidden Sentence training which introduces the workstream to the local areas and reinforces the requirement for policy and operational action. The activities of the FSAs have been many and varied and they have had to identify strategic opportunities and appropriate individuals and services, contact these and convince them of the importance of developing work, advise them on how to do this and possess the courage and determination to take the lead and coordinate multi agency efforts.

The family support programme has been consistently evaluated since it began<sup>1</sup>. The most recent evaluation in April 2015 made the following findings:

### **Impacts on prisoners**

The project has delivered support to a total of 620 prisoners and 150 families in three prisons between April 2014 and April 2015. A majority of the prisoners have been parents and most of the support has concerned increasing or improving contact with their children and other family members. Support for prisoners' and families' emotional and social wellbeing has also been a very important support area. The evaluation has found the benefits of the family support work to include:

- An increase in the prisoners' knowledge of what is happening in relation to their families, whether this is who has custody of their children or how often they can visit.
- An increase in how involved they feel in their families lives, such as being able to contribute to their children's homework.

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<sup>1</sup> By Barefoot Research and Evaluation ([www.barefootresearch.org.uk](http://www.barefootresearch.org.uk)). They can be contacted for past and current evaluations.



- A feeling of having a voice in matters concerning their family, such as being able to input into child contact arrangements or a representation of their wishes with children's social care.
- An increase in real terms of the contact they have with their family.
- A subsequent reduction in their stress and improvement in their mental health.
- Feeling better prepared for release because of improved relationships with their family.
- And for some an improvement in their parenting skills.



### Impacts on families

The impact of the work on families of prisoners has also been demonstrated to result in a number of important outcomes, which have included:

- Increasing their knowledge of what is happening with their family member in prison and understanding their life in prison, and for some being involved in decisions concerning them either in prison or in preparation for release.
- Reducing family stress levels and improving mental health.
- Increasing contact between themselves and the prisoner.
- Improving preparations for prisoner release.
- And for those who were looking after children, an improvement in parenting skills.

Families also reported that the children were more settled because of support of the FSW.

## Impacts on children

For the children of prisoners, the project has resulted in increased contact with their parent and an improved quality of that contact. For example, through prolonged visiting periods which allow substantive contact between the child and their mother or father in prison. This contact has resulted in the child feeling happier and strengthening the bonds between them. Although there is evidence to indicate positive outcomes on children because of the work, more research is needed to better understand the impacts of improved contact, particularly on child mental health.

### Box 2. Hidden Sentence training

The Hidden Sentence training programme has been designed by Action for Prisoners' Families to provide practitioners with an understanding of the impact of imprisonment on children and families. The training increases participants' knowledge of the prison system, their understanding of the specific issues experienced by children and families of prisoners and their understanding of the implications to their own working practice. The training has also been developed to explore how services can be better coordinated in order to support children and families affected by the imprisonment of a family member, through the use of the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) and existing support agencies and resources. The training is aimed at all professionals who support prisoners' families, including children's centre workers, school staff, play workers, health visitors and family intervention teams. The course gives a clear overview of the issues facing prisoners' families and provides a range of strategies and resources to help support them. The learning outcomes of the training include:

- Be aware of the context of the current Criminal Justice System and the offender's journey
- Explore the impact of imprisonment on children and families
- Recognise specific issues for children with a family member in prison which may present barriers to them achieving the Every Child Matters outcomes
- Identify the support needs of the family and how these can be met by statutory/voluntary provision and resources
- Reflect on how the insight gained will affect practice.

## Impacts on agencies

The results of the Integrated Family Support Advocates in raising awareness, networking, lobbying and linking the work in the prison with work in the community have been demonstrated through a number of discrete achievements, such as supporting the development of referral pathways for children of prisoners and negotiating with Community Rehabilitation Companies about the inclusion of family support in the supply chain. The work has been underpinned by a successful Hidden Sentence training programme, which has been delivered to a number of important community agencies including schools, local safeguarding children's boards and community safety units. This has been delivered both in the community and in prison to great effect.

## Conclusion

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These projects illustrate the value and impact of just two of Nepacs' services. As an organisation, they play an intrinsic role in the contact between a prisoner and their family, to the extent that if you are a visitor to a North East prison, you will almost certainly use one or more of Nepacs' services. The range of projects is important as it means that people in need of support can be identified and provided with all the support they need, whether they are a partner, parent or child. For example, a family identified at court can be given the information they need to visit, the parent can be visited in prison by a family support worker who can arrange for special visits, the youth project can engage with teenagers in the family and when the prisoner is released they can access support to negotiate the challenges faced when 'Heading Home'. Their differentiated services enables prisoners and families to receive an integrated service, at the beginning of sentence, during custody and upon resettlement. It is this wrap around service provision which enables prisoners and families to make changes, live a life free from crime and perhaps most importantly, give their children the support and understanding they need whilst their parent is in prison.

*"The support you have given to me and my kids has kept us from falling apart as family."*

**Prisoner**

*"I feel so much more informed now and know I can contact you for support if we struggle to support the boys in school."*

**Head of Year at Secondary School**

*"My mam told me that you had been trying for us. I would have been devastated if they had not come because it's the last time I will see them for three weeks over Christmas."*

**Prisoner**

*"You stopped me topping myself literally because you sorted it all out with my kids. People don't know what it's like in here, not knowing, not able to do anything ... you kept it all together for me."*

**Prisoner**

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