



Ormiston Time for Families

The Eastern Region Families
Partnership 2002 - 2005

Executive Summary of an evaluation by

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March 2005

INSIDE COVER

Executive Summary

Background

The **Eastern Region Families Partnership (ERFP)** is a 7-year partnership between the Prison Service and 2 grant-making trusts - the Ormiston Trust and the LankellyChase Foundation. It was formed in 2001 for the purpose of locking in resources which would enable support services to prisoners' children and families, and to prisoner rehabilitation in the Eastern region, to become sustainable.

This programme of work, known as *Ormiston Time for Families*, began in Spring 2002 and will continue until 2009. The partnership commissioned this external evaluation of its first 3 years of operation in order to assess the effectiveness with which its programme and operational practices have been established, and the extent to which its 5 stated objectives (below) have so far been met.

2 Objectives of ERFP

- 1** To consult extensively with children and families, including prisoners, and to develop a range of prison-based and community-based programmes that respond to their needs and expressed choices.
- 2** To enable children to maintain relationships and regular contact with an imprisoned partner/carer.
- 3** To recognise and value prisoners in their parenting role and to enable them to recognise the impact of their offending behaviour on children and families and to retain an active sense of family and parental responsibility throughout and following their sentence.
- 4** To ensure that other service providers (schools, health professionals, social workers) and community-based groups become aware of and responsive to the experience and issues faced by children/families with a member in prison.
- 5** To demonstrate - to government, policy-makers and the general public - the longer-term impact of supporting families with a member in prison and the value of investing in family support services as a resource in the process of rehabilitation.

The *Ormiston Time for Families* programme

The programme aspires to promote awareness of, and effective responses to, the impact of a relative's imprisonment on the family, especially the children. It operates through a range of prison and community-based projects across the Eastern Region, and through working with other relevant agencies and partnerships to develop services which meet families' expressed needs. Building, in its early stages, on existing projects developed by the Ormiston Children and Families Trust (OCFT), the programme has established a range of services comprising:

- Visitors' Centres
- Children's Visits
- Family Visits
- Crèche and play area facilities
- Prisoner induction
- An accredited prisoner parenting programme
- Family liaison
- Advocacy
- Community-based one-to-one support for children and families
- Telephone helpline

During the first 3 years, the prison-based services have operated on 6 sites, and the community-based services in 2 counties. The imminent aim is to extend the work to 6 further prisons and to increase the availability of community-based services.

Research aim and method

In order to assess the effectiveness of the ERF and its programme of work during the first 3 years of its projected 7-year life, a wide range of data was elicited and analysed from: organisational documentation; comparative literature and research; direct observation of the organisational processes and practices; semi-structured interviews with staff, volunteers and service users; questionnaires or semi-structured interviews with Board members, regional 'stakeholders' and national 'players'. The 117 respondents comprised: a representative cross-section of staff (28 out of 42); all non-operational Board members (8); a purposive sample of regional 'stakeholders'

such as sentencers and social care professionals (41) and of national 'players' (7); and random samples of programme volunteers (4) carers of prisoners' children (14), their children (6) and their prisoner fathers (9) - some involved and some not involved in *Ormiston Time for Families* projects.

Three key components were studied: the **programme**, the **process** and the **product** of the work. The executive summary will encompass this format, integrating (where appropriate) some illustrative quotations from staff, service users and external commentators, followed by recommendations for future development.

The programme

■ The value base

Finding: There is a high congruence of individual staff and organisational values. Staff are strongly committed to their work and focused upon the prime aim of supporting the children and families of prisoners. Debate about the prioritisation of values is explicitly recognised, providing evidence of a healthy organisation.

Illustration: I believe that generally (staff and organisational) values are shared, but may not be in the same order which can lead to tension. (Staff member)

(I believe in) the human rights of children to maintain contact with their parents, and that maintaining and strengthening family relationships contributes to the reduction of re-offending. (Staff member)

Implication: This is a notable strength of the organisation, not to be taken for granted. The commitment to its continuation via effective staff selection procedures and forums for open debate, both within and beyond the organisation, needs to be nurtured and widened. Enhanced application to project work and interaction with service-users would be the important end-result.

■ Prison-based projects

Finding: The OCFT's long-standing experience of providing and researching support services to the children and families of prisoners has meant that the *Ormiston Time for Families* Programme has had a head-start in this field.

Additionally, the work of the Action Researcher (a specialist post) has identified families' needs before new services are put into place. As a consequence, proven successes have been built upon, established inter-agency networks have strengthened existing capacity and appropriate new projects have been developed. Families without access to such projects expressed a need for them. Those who had used such projects almost universally felt helped and supported:

Illustration: Having just returned from my first Children's Visit I felt compelled to write to offer my sincere and heartfelt thanks to you and your assistants for making a very difficult and emotional time infinitely more bearable. I know that I speak for my wife and my three young daughters as well as myself when I say that your invaluable help has enabled us to maintain a close family bond where otherwise that bond would have been severely strained.

Implication: At the time of writing the programme of work is being extended to prisons for specialist groups (juveniles and sex offenders) and to the private sector. There is a parallel need to level up service provision within individual prisons and across the Region in the interests of affording children and families equal rights. Clearly, it is important to monitor these developments carefully to ensure that such expansion makes the best use of the partnership's limited resources.

■ Community-based projects

Finding: Several types of good practice have been demonstrated here. One is the successful transition of a regional OCFT-led telephone helpline for relatives of prisoners to a national service co-ordinated by Action for Prisoners' Families, showing a commitment to appropriate and effective partnership. Two substantial and innovative county projects providing support services to children aged 5-13 have been successfully launched, integrating an excellent quality of monitoring, evaluation, and professional and service-user feedback to their sponsors (the Children's Fund) substantiated by glowing past and present user feedback to the research team. Further measures of success are one project's school liaison leading to the 'mainstreaming' of support by that school, and the planned transformation of a families support group to an independently funded and managed self-help group.

Illustration: I give them ten out of ten. We'd never have got through this without them. We used the Visitors' Centre and the Family Visits at the Prison and the Senior Project Workers (SPWs) were great. From this project, (SPW) came once a week and stayed for as long as it took. She played games with Dean (aged 9) gave him a calendar to put sticker footballs on key dates, and gained his confidence. He really opened up to her, even when he wouldn't talk to anyone else. Sometimes he would talk, sometimes not; sometimes he just cried and she explained to him that all this was normal. He used to get frightened about what happened to his Dad behind that locked door, but the Visiting my Dad book which (SPW) put together, showed

pictures of prisoners doing normal things, like playing pool and going to church. (SPW) also came with me to Dean's new school to support me in explaining things to the teachers. Now the school has taken over where (SPW) left off. This kind of support should be available to everyone - there's nothing like it anywhere else!

Implication: These projects all show the value of partnership - whether with other voluntary organisations or with service-users - as well as the potential for producing good-quality outcome evidence. There is scope both for developing the community-based work and for spreading the impetus and the model of these successes to other projects.

■ Responding to the needs and choices of children, families and prisoners

Finding: The work of the Action Researcher, including the production of 10 research reports in 3 years, has been one of the several successful innovations of the Partnership. The findings have presented the views of families, including children (though to a limited extent) and prisoners, and new projects in particular have been able to develop in response to these, in a way which builds rather than imposes upon existing good services. Staff on both new and long-standing projects have generally sought ongoing feedback from users, which has invariably been positive.

Implication: The Action Research model is an exemplar for other organisations and should be promoted in the interests of reaching wider groups of users and eliciting their

views. Identifying a reliable means of establishing children's needs and wishes is a particular challenge to which innovative solutions should continue to be sought.

■ Black and ethnic minority families

Finding: Black and ethnic minority prisoners currently constitute a highly disproportionate 25% of the prison population, yet their families, particularly those whose first language is not English, are often located in the 'hard-to-reach' population. Monthly monitoring returns produce some data about these service-users, though it is not always clear what use of this information is made by projects. Staff do not often refer to this group in interview, though some good examples exist of recognition and provision for cultural difference.

Illustration: We try to respond to special requests for visits around special occasions such as birthdays, and these can include special religious or cultural festivals (e.g. Eid). We monitor food provided by the kitchen to ensure that this is suitable for all visitors, taking into account cultural and religious requirements. For some prisoners their culture encourages extended family ties and we try to provide for this by, for example, allowing extra photographs for grandparents, aunts and uncles of overseas relatives (Project Leader).

Implication: It is important for ERF to ensure that it is equipping itself with the policies and information needed to help it reach these often doubly disadvantaged

groups - and a newly-appointed Training Coordinator, who will be reviewing all aspects of staff and volunteer training, has been asked to take these matters forward. Ethnic monitoring could be quality-assured for accuracy and its usage clarified. Innovative research methods, engaging the partnership of black communities in the region, could be developed in the process of learning more about those who do and do not use *Ormiston Time for Families* services.

■ Monitoring and evaluation

Finding: In common with most new organisations, this has tended to be a piecemeal process, which now requires consolidation, standardisation and development. There is a need for an acceleration of the process of instituting reliable project evaluation systems, if valid and reliable data are to be available to inform strategic and management decision-making over the next 4 years.

Implication: Senior Managers are aware of the need to address this issue with some urgency and this work does need to begin now to ensure that relevant information feeds into the future direction of the Partnership. It is a key activity, which itself should continue to be externally monitored and evaluated.

The Process

■ Organisational policy and part-time staff

Finding: *Ormiston Time for Families* staff, most of whom are part-time, are employed by OCFT and work to its policies. Some of them have split roles and also work for OCFT in other parts of their time. Retaining the same policy framework for both has the advantage of clarity which is key to operational effectiveness. There are, however, some complicating issues which have been identified about part-time and split-role working. These include the potential for isolation, missing out on important information, having 2 sets of meetings to attend, and overlap/confusion as to identity.

Illustration: I feel 90-100% heard! (Staff member)

I still think we need a better level of communication between far-flung locations, because we're all in different places. We try and keep everyone in the loop via email &c. but it doesn't always work. The new staff intranet should help and we could also develop video-conferencing. (Staff member)

Implication: An organisational process that is working should obviously continue! Some of the more complex factors outlined above may, however, have contributed to uncertainty about the extent of individual responsibility for integral tasks such as generating funding, PR work and evaluation. Further work on clarifying and developing organisational identity and the *Ormiston Time for Families* 'brand' will be of help here.

■ Strategic decision-making

Finding: Board members demonstrate commitment to the corporate endeavour of the Partnership, are able to identify tangible achievements over the first 3 years, and openly debate important developmental issues such as resource allocation and sustaining the model. Their strategic decision-making draws appropriately on budgetary, research and other information but they are aware that improved evaluative project data could strengthen this work. This is particularly so when the current political climate is uncertain, and financial security needs to be retained.

Illustration: (We are) a group of people prepared to push the issues in a manner which seems to carry the day with minimum antagonism of powerful blocking agents. The Board cares very much about doing a good job for overlooked people.

What's most exciting is the face-to-face contact with the children and families - seeing staff support them in their desperate plight - and getting the message over to Government about the value of working with children and families of prisoners in terms of re-offending. The rate of re-offending is high and the cost is £11 billion per annum. We need to get this over to the public via hard facts. I bring a businessman's attitude to the Board and ask the awkward questions about the nitty-gritty financial aspects of the Partnership.

Implication: Moving into its fourth year of operation, the Board could now be setting a

timetable for generating new funding for Programme and model sustainability. There is also some urgency about linking strategic outcome measures with evidence-based commitment from staff and considering how this may be brought about.

■ Management decision-making

Finding: Senior Management demonstrated that they could address emerging problems in the organisational process by restructuring in a range of ways - and staff responded well to this. Regular supervision and appraisal via the Project Review and Planning Portfolio system, which the researchers observed, is valued by all, but the former sometimes is omitted because of pressure of events and, again, more emphasis is needed on an evidence-based approach to performance and quality assurance. In respect of prison-based projects, it was suggested that the seconded Governor, whose presence on the Programme had greatly facilitated relations with prison staff, might be well-placed to gather some of these data.

Implication: Senior Management's willingness to examine and rearrange its own structures and the positive staff response is again a sign of a healthy organisation; it is important that these review systems are retained and acted upon. Supervision and appraisal need to remain at the centre of any organisation in order for staff to feel valued, supported, professionally developed and held to account. In the interest of all these elements, and in order to feed into decision-making processes, the collection of good evidence for effective individual and project performance is key. The full implementation

of PQASSO (Practical Quality Assurance System for Small Organisations) and its co-ordination by a single manager is crucial here.

■ Programme leadership

Finding: The leadership of *Ormiston Time for Families* moved from a full-time 'Development Director' to a 2-days-a-week Operations Director after the first year, when the Development Director left the organisation. This decision was reviewed and retained in mid-2004. However, there is some (non-personalised) concern about the message that part-time leadership gives to the staff and, at times, a need for swifter decision-making than can take place in a part-time post.

Implication: Given the need for considerable developmental work and, on occasion, swifter decision-making noted in the evaluation (much of which is not new to Senior Management) perhaps the time is now right to consider restoring full-time status to this post. At the time of writing, it is understood that this review process is beginning.

■ Openness, consultation and job satisfaction

Finding: Staff openness and non-defensiveness in relation to the research process was a particularly impressive feature of the evaluation and a clear sign of a healthy organisation. This was supported by the very high degrees of job satisfaction reported at all levels. Operations Managers

felt well-consulted by Senior Management. Below this level, staff were not dissatisfied but felt there was room for improvement, particularly about issues extending beyond their own projects.

Implication: It is crucial to do everything possible to retain this high level of staff job

satisfaction, which is frequently related to a congruence of individual and organisational values, and a sense of connectedness with colleagues at all levels. It is in the nature of this organisation that values are likely to remain central, but dynamics can change, as can the balance of power in partnerships, and vigilance is always required.

The Product

■ The Partnership endeavour

Evidence cited about the effectiveness of both the Programme and the Process show that both are operating to good effect, with some identifiable areas for development, as the first 3 years of the ERFPP draw to an end. The 5 objectives appear relevant and robust in format but would nevertheless benefit from a review in the near future to confirm or negate this position. The Partnership itself appears to be functioning effectively, despite the challenges of working across the statutory and voluntary sectors but further work may be needed to secure and systemise the co-operation of some prison staff. Nevertheless, what has happened over the last 3 years is that support services to children, families and prisoners have become normalised in the Eastern Region and, on the whole, taken seriously by other agencies who know about them.

***Illustration:** I have referred families who were known to our Family Support Team - tier 2 CAMHS [Community Adolescent Mental Health Services] - either for joint work or for individual work. I have had positive feedback from families about the role, for example, help with planning and arranging visits to father in prison when family relationships were very complicated. It is also helpful to be able to give a leaflet and contact number to parents, even if they do not want to make contact at this stage. (Social Worker)*

I'm aware of the Ormiston Trust(sic) through some very useful material that came to our school. I haven't yet referred

anyone to their services but it's good to know they exist. I don't think many of my colleagues in the county know about it though. (Head Teacher)

Implication: There is much to celebrate and publicise about the achievements of this unique Partnership. It must also share the lessons it has learned in order to acquaint others with necessary underpinnings such as well-targeted information dissemination. This may also be an optimum point at which to review the continued relevance of the 5 objectives.

■ Recognising and encouraging prisoners in their parental role

Finding: This issue is the focus of Objective 3, and includes the implementation of the accredited Parenting Programme (see §3). There has been a limited amount of follow-up of the effectiveness of parenting programmes; this is often a difficult research group to locate and more work is needed. Family liaison work is in its beginning stages at some prisons to support the parenting task. A newer challenge is to engage families fully in the prisoner's Sentence Planning process, and to participate in the NOMS (National Offender Management Service) Resettlement and Rehabilitation agenda. *Illustration:* There's a need for professionals to work intensively through a sentence with the prisoner and family together (Senior Project Worker).

Implication: Although the prime focus of *Ormiston Time for Families* is on the children

and young people, it may be that a stronger focus on work with prisoners is sometimes desirable in those youngsters' longer-term interests, since it is not clearly the role of any other professional. The ERFPP could also press for Government and others to sponsor longitudinal outcome research on both families and prisoners who have used its services.

■ Engaging other service providers

Finding: This task is the main thrust of Objective 4. Through the innovative role of the specialist Education Lead and the ground-breaking work of the community-based projects, some excellent contacts have been made with education providers, Probation and Social Services, but there is some way to go to raise awareness among professionals on a regional basis. Promotion and communications activity is clearly central here. Significant strides have been made in the new post, though current uncertainty across the board as to the format of new services and professional structures emanating from Every Child Matters and NOMS does not make it easy accurately to target this activity. How far staff identify themselves and the communications task as an integral part of their *Ormiston Time for Families* role is also an issue. Communities taking on responsibility for their prisoners' families would, however, constitute a notable measure of success in this field.

Implication: In addition to increasing community-based projects, interaction with statutory services such as Health, Social Services, Probation and Education could be improved via the establishment of protocols.

Extending the Education Lead's pioneering work in schools, there is considerable potential influence in presenting material about *Ormiston Time for Families* at in-service training sessions held by other relevant professional groups such as lawyers, children's service managers, social workers, GPs and health visitors.

Strategic co-operation with NOMS and other relevant bodies at regional level presents both opportunities (e.g. to tender for funding to deliver services) and threats (e.g. to be sidelined by the introduction of 'contestability') to the voluntary side of the partnership. The identity and branding issue is being taken up by the Promotions and Communication Lead and probably needs to be prioritised at this stage of the Programme's development. *Ormiston Time for Families* has plenty to be confident about and must go out and present that confidence to those it seeks to influence. It must also move towards deciding to what extent it wishes to promote its model nationally.

■ Demonstrating that support services to prisoners' families contribute to rehabilitation

Finding: Central to Objective 5, this goal was viewed by respondents as the hardest and most long-term, for which it would be difficult to produce significant evidence after 3 years. However, the time has come to rise to this challenge. Sentencers' views suggested scope for ERFPP influence to be brought to bear on the criminal justice process. National 'players' were complimentary but some felt ERFPP needed to 'bang the table' more. These views would

suggest that the gathering of evidence needs to become fully integral to the Programme's work, together with the will to present it at national and regional levels and to find ways to get it into the public domain. The price of failure in this department could be the non-sustainability of this unique service to children and families of prisoners.

Implication: Notwithstanding the need for longitudinal research measuring reconviction and reduction in criminogenic need, the ERFPP is currently seen as a good news story which other areas are seeking to follow and now must be the time to capitalise on this through promotion, presentation and dissemination. This work could usefully be tracked through further evaluation.

Conclusion

The findings from this study have demonstrated that the Eastern Region Families Partnership, and its programme of support services *Ormiston Time for Families* have taken an educated approach to setting up their project work, and have made an impact on the lives of some of the children, families and prisoners they have reached. They have been able to build on their expertise and tried and tested organisational processes not only to consolidate their experience but to experiment and innovate. Many of their achievements have been listed herein and they now have far-reaching decisions to make to ensure the sustainability of their service delivery, whether by themselves or in partnership with others.

Their model of partnership between two grant-making bodies, an operational voluntary agency and the statutory sector in the shape of HM Prison Service is the product of visionary thinking, hard work and a very large dose of determination on all sides. It has not all been plain sailing but a strong spirit of co-operation and goodwill has pervaded the first 3 years of operations. Its strengths and its developmental needs are openly discussed and are now published for others to learn from. In the remaining 4 years of its life it needs to reach a much wider clientele, to share and mainstream its services and to produce as much follow-up evidence as possible. This evaluation finds it in a healthy state to rise to the challenge.

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