

Eastern Region Families Partnership

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Ormiston Children and Families Trust

HMP The Mount:  
Visits & Family Ties Survey

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Spring 2007

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## 1.0 Introduction

This report has been prepared by Ormiston Children & Families Trust's action researcher as part of its programme of work with offenders and their children and families and in response to The Mount's wish to develop their existing services to families. It reports on the outcome of consultations with prisoners and visitors at HMP The Mount about current facilities for promoting and strengthening family ties for prisoners and their families and aims to identify possible ways in which these might be enhanced.

The researcher would like to express her appreciation for the help and cooperation of staff at HMP Mount in facilitating this consultation, particularly the Visitors Centre Manager, Jane Taylor.

## 1.1 Ormiston Children & Families Trust

Ormiston Children and Families Trust is a voluntary organisation providing both community and prison-based services for children and families in the eastern region. It has been engaged in work with families of offenders in this region since 1989.

This programme of work is part of a region-wide initiative established by, and funded through the Eastern Region Families Partnership (ERFP). The Partnership combines the funding power and strategic goals of three organisations: Ormiston Trust, the LankellyChase Foundation and the Prison Service, to meet the needs of the children and families of offenders.

Ormiston supports families affected by imprisonment by working within prisons and in the community, and with partner agencies such as schools, social and community services. Key aims of the initiative are the provision of good quality visiting and contact opportunities in prison, and delivery of support and information for children and families. The initiative also provides parenting courses in prisons, and is working to enhance the role of families in sentence planning and resettlement.

This initiative now manages projects based in eight prisons, as well as community based posts providing support to schools, information and support for families and action research.



## 1.2 HMP The Mount

The Mount Prison opened in 1987. It is a male Category C Training prison on the outskirts of Bovington village, Hertfordshire. It takes prisoners who have a minimum sentence of two years with at least twelve months left to serve.

The population of The Mount is 720 (30.01.07), of whom approximately 68% come from the London area. Currently 60% of prisoners are from black and minority ethnic (BME) groups and 40% are foreign nationals (FNs).

### **Visitors Centre (see 3.1)**

There is a purpose built staffed Visitors Centre, with a refreshment bar, lockers, baby-changing facilities, toilets (including disabled provision), a children's play area, where children remain the responsibility of their parents or carers; and a range of information for visitors in different languages. This includes information about the prison, family support and books to provide information and reassurance to children visiting. Information about APVU (financial help with visiting) is also provided on tape.

Staff are all trained in counselling and offer a friendly welcome to visitors and emotional support if required. They see an important part of their role as advocacy on behalf of visitors in their interface with the prison. CARATs<sup>1</sup> staff from the prison also attend on a regular basis.

The Visitors Centre is run by one full-time manager, 3 part-time staff and 14 volunteers. It was managed by an Independent Management Committee until August 2006 when it was taken over by the Prison.

Since the change in management arrangements some services have been reduced or removed, such as relaxation sessions for visitors, thrift stalls, sales of prisoners' work and the hot snacks previously offered in the tea bar.

More recently visitors have been able to book visits in person at weekends in the Visitors Centre, which visitors have found very helpful.

### **Visits Hall**

The Visits Hall has 53 static tables, a closed visits area and an enclosed children's Play Area to one side, staffed by a voluntary organisation, HACRO. This is not open for all visits. When open, children are usually permitted to bring toys back to the tables if they wish. Children under 2 years old are not allowed in the play area but bouncy chairs for small babies are available.

Refreshments are provided by a catering company.

### **Inspection Report**

An unannounced full follow-up inspection of the prison took place in September 2006 and reported in February 2007. The report<sup>2</sup> described a much improved, safe, clean purposeful prison which was focussed on resettlement. It commented on its sound reintegration facilities and good use of information from OASys (offender Assessment system), although little use is made of release on temporary licence (ROTL).

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<sup>1</sup> CARATs: Drug rehabilitation services (Counselling, Assessment, Referral, Advice and Throughcare)

<sup>2</sup> Report on an unannounced full follow-up inspection of HMP The Mount 18-22 September 2006. HM Chief Inspector of Prisons

The inspection report expressed concern about the “starkly more negative perception of the prison held by BME, foreign national and Muslim prisoners” and highlighted the need to “ensure and demonstrate the appropriateness and impartiality” of work with these groups.

Regarding family issues, most of the recommendations previously made about visits arrangements were said to have been achieved, but the report noted that “the telephone booking line was still very frustrating to use”. (see 3.1)

Many staff were said not to be aware that Foreign Nationals could have free telephone calls instead of visits or airmail letters. The process of applying for these was said to be “overly bureaucratic” and was little used. In response to concerns expressed about the high cost of overseas telephone calls the prison was trying to source a cheaper international phone card. (see 3.4)

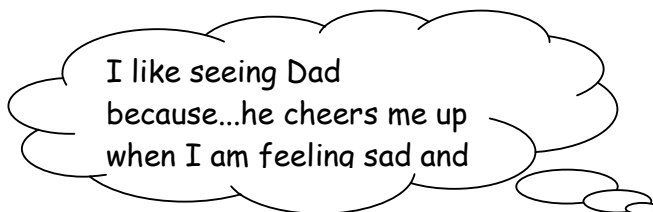
Since the Inspection report, Lifer days have been introduced as a means of involving families in preparation for release.

## 2.0 Methodology for the consultations

### 2.1 Visitor survey

The Visitors Centre Manager has conducted surveys of visitors’ views on an annual basis for the last few years as part of an on-going evaluation of the Visitors Centre. With her full cooperation, it was decided to use this format again, with only slight amendments to the questionnaire, to facilitate comparison with previous years’ responses. Visitors were invited to complete the questionnaire in the Visitors Centre over a two week period, with help offered by staff or volunteers if required. Encouragement was offered by way of entering all survey forms into a draw for a small prize.

Visiting children were also invited to express their views about “Visiting Dad” through colouring sheets, which were again entered into a draw. A total of 52 responses were received from adults and 18 from children. Of the 52 participants 28 (54%) were from a BME background and 23 (44%) from a non BME background (and 1 unknown).



A summary of the visitors’ survey results is given in appendix 1; the full results are available from the Visitors Centre Manager.

A Visitor Survey was also carried out by the prison’s Forensic Psychology Unit in Jan/Feb 2007. The primary focus of this survey was to examine how visitors - social and professional - perceive the way HMP The Mount deals with race relation issues. It also

explored how visitors feel they are treated by staff and how visits sessions are run. A total of 87 visitors completed the survey. Where appropriate, findings from this survey have been taken into account in reaching conclusions and recommendations about responding to visitors' needs.

## **2.2 Prisoner consultations**

The views of prisoners were sought via their Wing representatives. Two meetings were held with a group of prisoners representing every Wing to explain the purpose of the consultation and encourage feedback from prisoners - including those from all backgrounds and cultures, with a particular focus on the views of prisoners with children. The meetings were facilitated by Ormiston's researcher and a Governor seconded from the Prison Service to the post of Operations Manager in Ormiston.

The Wing representatives undertook their task with both enthusiasm and sensitivity and reported back views and suggestions on a comprehensive range of issues related to ways of promoting and strengthening family ties in The Mount. These are included in this report.

It is intended that both visitors and prisoners will be kept informed about the outcome of these consultations, including recommendations made and action plans developed.

## **2.3 Staff views**

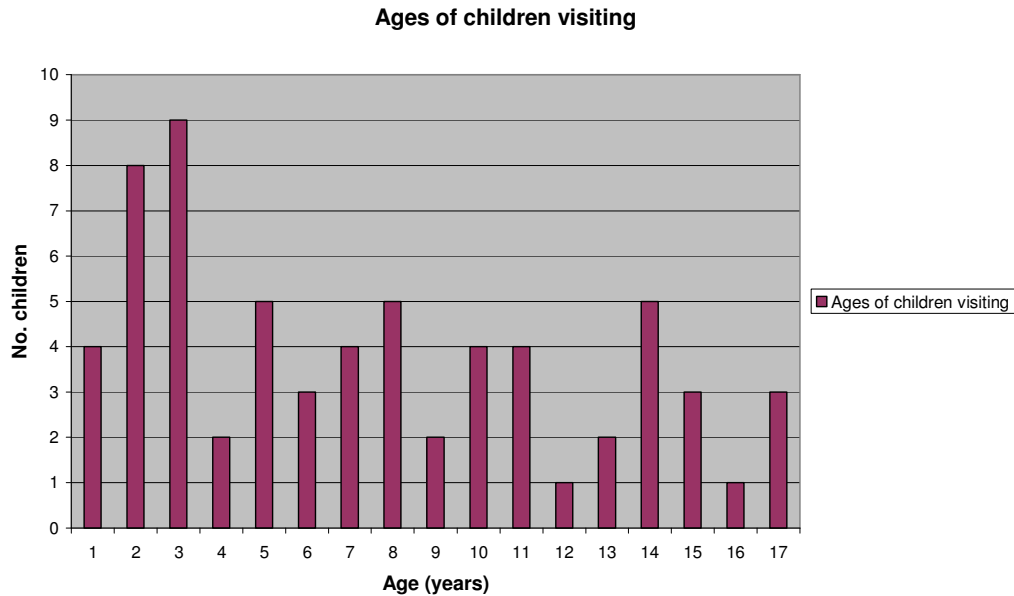
For the purposes of this survey, input was mainly sought from the Deputy Head of Operations and the Visitors Centre Manager.

## **3.0 Analysis of Findings**

The views of the visitors and prisoners surveyed have been grouped into the key topics - the Visitors Centre, domestic visits, children's/family visits, and other types of family support/family liaison. Because of the specific issues faced by foreign nationals, these are considered separately. Where the survey highlights gaps in provision or areas where family support or involvement could be enhanced these are summarised in the recommendations at the end of this report. Some issues identified indicate a need for further resources to be invested while others may point to changes of approach or organisation.

### **3.1 Visitors Centre**

Three quarters of those taking part in the visitors survey said they often or sometimes brought children to visits and the children's ages ranged widely across the spectrum:



Overall visitors spoke highly of the Visitors Centre and its **facilities for babies and children**, which were considered clean and safe and welcoming. Parents stressed the importance of keeping the children occupied and happy before a visit, eg *“relaxes them before the visit”, “makes the visit less daunting”, “makes coping easier because the children don’t get bored waiting.”*

Although the majority of children visiting are toddlers, more facilities for older children or teenagers in the Visitors Centre would be welcomed. Suggestions included board games, play station, jigsaws or magazines.

Most visitors found the **refreshments** in the Visitors Centre adequate but would have welcomed more substantial snacks or hot food after long journeys. This was also highlighted in the prison’s visitor survey and the Centre Manager feels the reduction in facilities since the change of Management is linked with a drop in the number of visitors returning to the Centre after a visit. This is significant because visitors are less motivated to seek emotional support or advice from the Centre staff following a difficult or distressing visit. The new procurement arrangements for food for the Centre do not appear to be at all satisfactory.

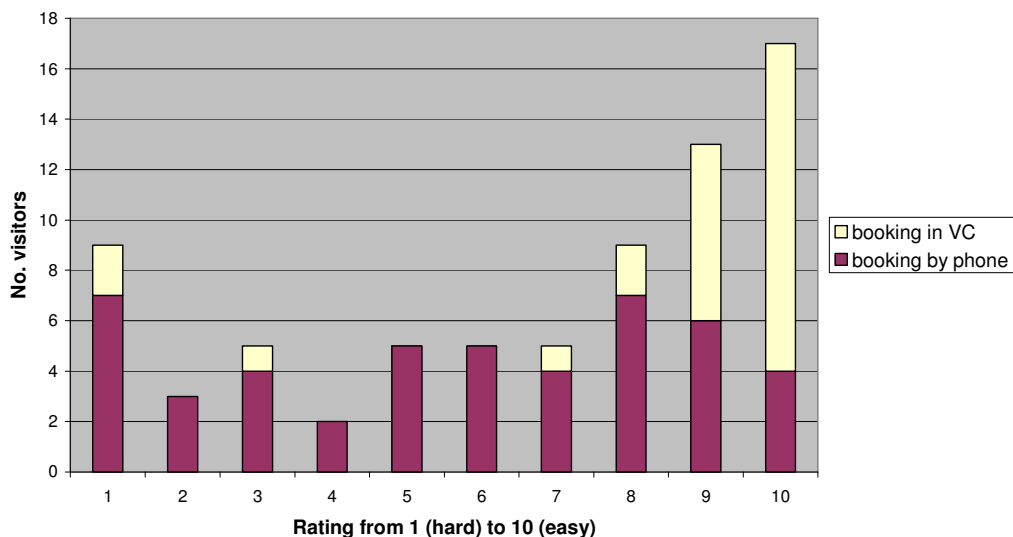
More than a third of visitors said they had received some form of **support** in the Visitors Centre, apart from written information, confirming that this as a key role for the Centre. Almost universally visitors felt the Centre played an important role in helping them feel more relaxed during visits and in understanding the rules and procedures for visiting. Many emphasised the friendliness and helpfulness of the Visitors Centre staff and volunteers but their **advice** and expertise were also highly valued.

The Centre has been able to retain most of its volunteers throughout a difficult period of transition. Efforts to increase the recruitment of volunteers from different ethnic backgrounds to reflect the diversity of the prison population have proved difficult, largely because only 4% of the local Dacorum population are from minority ethnic backgrounds.

Two thirds of visitors surveyed said they had read some of the **information** leaflets in the Centre and more than half had been able to make use of this information and found reassurance from this, especially the information packs for new visitors. A small number said they would like to see leaflets produced in other formats or languages such as Bengali or Urdu.

Since the last survey carried out by the Visitors Centre it has been made possible to **book the next visit** in person in the Visitors Centre at weekends as an alternative to using the booking line. The survey produced a very enthusiastic response to this change, eg *“brilliant, just fill in form, hand over and collect on the way out, couldn’t be easier. Far preferable.”* Visitors expressed a great deal of frustration with telephone booking, typical comments being *“you can never get through”, engaged constantly.”*

Visitors' rating for ease of booking visits by phone or in person



A substantial number of visitors had not experienced booking visits in person or were unaware that this was possible - this may be because they were not visiting at weekends but may indicate a need for better promotion of this facility.

Visitors Centre staff also noted that booking visits in person made it much easier to ensure that all ID and spelling of names were correct, reducing the incidence of problems at the time of visits.

Another suggestion to overcome the difficulties with telephone booking was to offer an online visit booking service.

### 3.2 Domestic visits

Consultations with prisoners and visitors focussed on provisions for families in visits arrangements. The play area and its staff were highly praised by many, but concerns were expressed that it is often closed and there is a lack of provision for older children. Boredom for children of all ages is an issue when they are restricted in their movement,

and most families would prefer to see activities which would encourage children to engage and bond with their fathers, such as card or board games or computer games.

Several visitors commented positively on the attitude of prison officers, eg *“officers are nice and treat our children good”* and said *“the prison is clean and welcoming.”*

### Transport

Transport to visits was raised as a major issue by visitors in both visitor surveys and on their behalf by prisoners. Many visitors travel long distances, particularly from the London area, using trains and buses. Visits starting at 9am are very difficult to get to and public transport on Sundays is very poor. The problem causing most frustration is that visits times do not fit well with the times of buses to the station. Visitors have to cut their visits short by 15 minutes in order to catch the bus or face long delays to catch later buses and trains or use taxis which are very expensive. The prison is aware of this problem and has sought changes to the bus timetable with the bus company but without success.

Other options need to be explored, such as either changing the time of visits by 15 minutes or providing a dedicated mini-bus to pick-up and drop off families from the station for visits. There may be an opportunity to consider changing visits times when staff are next re-profiled; there are also examples of other establishments (eg HMP Littlehey) where local voluntary organisations provide transport for visits from the nearest station.

### Delays

Visitors and prisoners raised concern about delays in starting visits and lengthy waiting times. When added to the problems of long and expensive journeys, especially travelling with small children, any reduction to the length of visits causes stress and frustration and is likely to discourage families from visiting. Ways to minimise delays to visits (for example, starting the processing and searching of visitors earlier, or having prisoners in a holding room prior to visitors' arrival) could be considered when re-profiling is carried out.

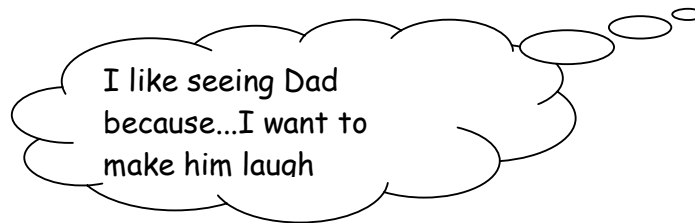
Additional points raised by prisoners concerning domestic visits:

- ✚ Canteen food and drinks are considered too expensive
- ✚ Searching - could this be made any less distressing or time-consuming for families?
- ✚ Prisoners should be told promptly when a visit is cancelled to reduce distress and frustration
- ✚ Prisoners would like to be able to make gifts for their children and bring them into visits

### 3.3 Children's Visits / Family Visits

Currently the prison offers 'Family Visits' fortnightly for enhanced prisoners only. The visits, for up to 8 families, are 2 hours long on Thursday mornings. Toys are available and prisoners are allowed to leave their seats to interact with their children. There are

also occasional **Lifer Family Days** which run from 10.30-16.00 with activities for children such as art and crafts, face painting, games on the sports field, etc.



Visitors and prisoners expressed a very strong desire to see these arrangements extended and enhanced for the benefit of families with children. Several respondents had experienced 'Children's Visits' elsewhere and felt they played a very important role in strengthening bonds between fathers and children and improving the quality of the visiting experience for children.

### **Timing/duration**

There was a strong preference for holding Children's Visits during weekends and school holidays, so children don't have to miss school (which is damaging educationally and stigmatises them), and around special occasions such as Mothers Day or Christmas. Prisoners have a strong preference for all-day visits such as those held, for example, at Wormwood Scrubs. Prisoners suggested preferred times: 11am - 4pm or 10am - 3pm as morning visits are difficult for families and especially impractical for 2 hour visits.

### **Venue**

There are advantages and disadvantages to using the Visits Hall. Prisoners and families find the formal layout with fixed tables and hard plastic chairs and hard flooring uninviting and not child-friendly. Alternative venues suggested by prisoners include the chapel (now used for Lifer visits) or gym (but these may be in demand at weekends) or portacabins used by education during the week, which also have an area which could be used as an outdoor play area. Prisoners are very willing to help transport, set up and clear away toys etc before and after visits.

However the Visits Hall does already have a well-resourced, fairly large play area with sink and running water which facilitate activities such as painting and handwashing, a canteen for refreshments, toilets, disabled access and the route there for visitors, including search area, is established and risk-assessed.

The prison have indicated a willingness to explore alterations to make the Visits Hall more attractive for Children's Visits. Options include:

- Removing some fixed tables to create a play space at the front of the Hall by the windows which would be light and airy, but would benefit from carpeting; this wall is attractively decorated with paintings by prisoners;
- Removing partitions and cubicles at the rear of the Hall previously used for police interviews but now defunct; this would create considerable space but there is little natural light to the area.

All options deserve further consideration and costing and advice from experienced play staff (eg from HACRO or from an Ormiston project which delivers Children's Visits) as well as assessments by security staff.

### Activities

Prisoners and families would like to see a range of toys, games and activities for all ages of children, especially younger ones who are in the majority; a variety of specific suggestions are included in the survey summaries (appendices 1 & 2). Enjoying food together as a family is considered important and prisoners said they would be very happy to contribute to the cost if this could be provided centrally.

Also in line with practice elsewhere, prisoners and families would greatly welcome the opportunity to have a family photo taken during Children's Visits. These are important to both children and adults and again, prisoners are very willing to pay for these. This facility has recently been made available to Foreign Nationals at The Mount.

Prisoners would like to be able to dress in their own clothes for Children's Visits to make it a more 'normal' atmosphere for their children. (This is also permitted elsewhere - eg HMP Wayland; prisoners there participating in Children's Visits have their photos attached to their applications to assist in distinguishing them from visitors).

### Eligibility

Currently only enhanced prisoners at The Mount are eligible for Family Visits, which are used as part of the Incentives and Earned Privileges (IEP) scheme. Children's Visits managed by Ormiston in other establishments are offered to prisoners with children regardless of their IEP status (subject to security checks), to avoid children potentially being deprived of the opportunity for quality visits due to their father's status. However, prisoners themselves did express concern about Children's Visits being put at risk of being 'messed up' or even withdrawn because of bad behaviour if all prisoners were able to apply and felt that it was reasonable to expect prisoners to work for a Children's Visit, thereby demonstrating a certain commitment to their families.

Additional points raised by prisoners concerning children's visits:

- ✚ Families are willing to donate children's toys and books for use in visits. (or could have a toy swap/donation of outgrown toys in the Visitors Centre); this would need to be advertised to families so all could get involved
- ✚ Enable prisoners (eg many lifers) who have older children or grandchildren or young siblings to take part too

### 3.4 Foreign Nationals (FNs)

Foreign Nationals comprise 40% of the population of The Mount and the prison is committed to ensuring that they are not discriminated against in their access to the services available to all prisoners, but also to ensuring that their very specific needs are addressed in relation to family matters.

Because of the inter-linked difficulties faced by FNs of language barriers, uncertainties related to immigration and deportation and the likelihood of being at greater distances from their families, they tend to have significantly more problems with keeping in touch with their families. Many of these difficulties were highlighted in a recent national report by the Prison Inspectorate (2006)<sup>3</sup>. It showed that FNs in many prisons were unsure about their visits entitlement, were often not getting their full visits entitlement, had problems keeping in touch by telephone because of language barriers, time differences and expense, and had difficulties with sending and receiving letters. Consequently many feel extremely isolated and there is a high level of anxiety and mental health needs.

The Mount has a FN Co-ordinator (Jo Hudson) who holds weekly immigration surgeries for FNs and offers 1:1 contact on the Wings to address some of these issues. A Family Visit day specifically for FNs and their families is planned for the summer. However, the prisoner representatives consulted for this survey identified several outstanding issues relating to FNs and family contact:

- ✚ FNs reported difficulties in receiving visits from Prison Visitors.
- ✚ FNs have a particular need for family liaison support, eg to assist those who have difficulty making or maintaining contact with their families
- ✚ Prisoners whose first language is not English would like to have the same opportunity as other prisoners to send storybook tapes to their children in their own language
- ✚ Overseas phone calls are very expensive

The prison does in fact make available a phone card for FNs to give more beneficial rates when phoning abroad, but this may not be widely known by prisoners. This facility may need to be promoted at induction time.

Prisoners expressed some disquiet about the proposed Family Days for FNs; whilst recognising that FNs have some distinctive needs in respect of family contact, the rationale behind separate provision for family visits was hard to understand and it was felt this may cause resentment by other prisoners.

Prisoners reported that they would like to set up a group to assist any prisoners who would like help with writing letters to their families, eg because of language or literacy difficulties, and felt this could be of particular assistance to FNs.

Other suggestions to assist FNs in keeping in touch with their families include contact via email and video conferencing, which are being explored in a number of prison establishments.

The survey conducted in the Visitors Centre, like the Psychology Unit's Visitor Survey, revealed no significant differences in views between BME and Non-BME visitors. Questions relating to the behaviour of prison staff suggested that "visitors believe they are treated with respect and in a professional manner." The latter survey concluded

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<sup>3</sup> HM Inspectorate of Prisons (2006) Foreign National Prisoners: a thematic review.

that “there are good Race Relations at this establishment and that all visitors are treated equally, regardless of race.”

### 3.5 Family liaison / other family issues

Prisoner representatives reported concerns that an undue emphasis on security in the prison is resulting in a lack of compassion in responding to family problems, eg bereavement. A family liaison or support worker could help to verify circumstances and advocate for a prisoner in this type of situation.

The important contribution which families make to the successful resettlement of offenders is now recognised in the Children and Families Pathway of the Reducing Reoffending National Action Plan.<sup>4</sup> One of the objectives in the regional Pathway plans is the involvement of families in the offender management and review process. Visitors were asked in the survey if they would welcome the chance to be involved in the prisoners’ sentence planning reviews, and 28 out of 52 (54%) said they would. 8 (15%) were unsure while 5 (10%) said no.

Visitors were also asked what they thought would most help them or their family when the prisoner was released. The most frequently mentioned replies concerned help with getting employment (8 replies) and accommodation (5) and financial support/benefits (3). Other types of support identified included:

- ✚ An idea in advance of when he is to be released
- ✚ Spend more time together nearer to the release/get involved into his reintegration in the community
- ✚ Guidance to mentoring
- ✚ A week home leave maybe/tag so early release to get used to life at home
- ✚ Support in assisting us to return to some sort of normality
- ✚ To be able to contact someone regarding behaviour/knowing you are not alone regarding problems

Other replies indicated no desire for support:

- ✚ As long as he’s out - that’s the main thing
- ✚ To be left alone/don’t see why authorities can have a position on personal decisions
- ✚ Nice to see him around/will be good for his future
- ✚ Stability/peace of mind
- ✚ Male role model who looks after us
- ✚ Once he comes home everything will be fine

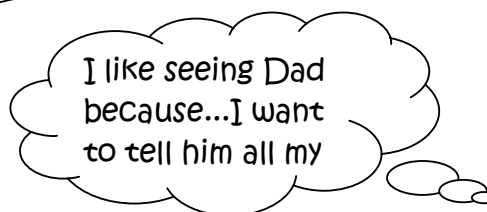
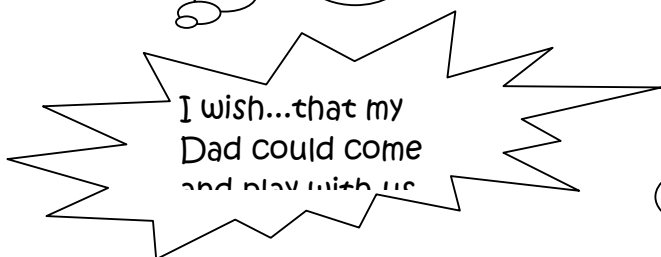
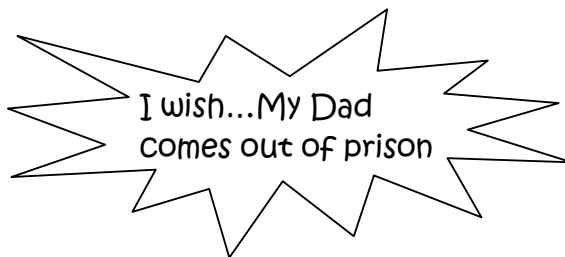
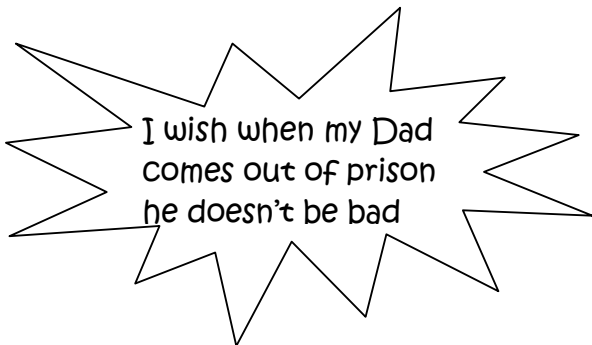
### 3.6 Children’s views

Visiting children were also invited to express their thoughts or views about visiting the prison or why they liked seeing their Dad. While few comments related specifically to the areas covered in this report, they do serve to highlight the feelings of loss of many

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<sup>4</sup> Home Office (2004) Reducing Reoffending National Action Plan

children with a father in prison and the need to try to minimize the negative impact of imprisonment on children and young people:



## 4.0 Conclusions and recommendations

This consultation has enabled prisoners and visitors at The Mount to identify their needs and express their views about how to strengthen or maintain family ties. There are many positives - visitors from all backgrounds praise the Visitors Centre and its staff very highly, despite some concerns about the impact of changes in its management. It will however be important to continue to monitor this impact to ensure that the needs of visitors remain its paramount function and that its important role as advocate for visitors and families is not lost or overridden by competing priorities in the prison service.

The report highlights a number of areas in which development could promote good quality family contact. Some require an input of additional resources whilst others are dependent on changes being delivered within the prison. The recommendations listed are those which have arisen directly from this consultation, but of course any development plans at The Mount in support of family ties should not preclude consideration of additional initiatives which may not have been specifically raised here.

**The key recommendations from the consultation are summarised below:**

### Visitors Centre:

- ✚ Reinstatement of previous high standard of refreshments, including hot food
- ✚ Maintain and if possible extend the popular facility for booking visits in person
- ✚ Maintain or extend the Centre's support, information and advice functions
- ✚ More facilities are desirable for older children/teenagers

### Visits Hall:

- ✚ Open the play area more often
- ✚ Address problem of transport links - either alter time of visits to fit local bus timetable or seek alternative transport to station after visits (eg minibus)
- ✚ Reduce delays to start of visits
- ✚ More facilities are desirable for older children/teenagers

### Children's Visits:

- ✚ Introduce regular extended child-friendly visits for families, preferably at weekends and school holidays
- ✚ Offer a variety of games, toys and activities for all ages to encourage interaction between fathers and children
- ✚ Provide food for families to enjoy together
- ✚ Offer family photos for families and prisoners to keep
- ✚ Prisoners to pay towards food and photos and assist with setting up visits

### Foreign Nationals:

- ✚ Offer family liaison to support prisoners' contact with their families
- ✚ Increase awareness of the FN's phone card enabling cheaper overseas phone calls

- ✚ Offer help with letter writing if required (eg prisoners' group)
- ✚ Explore possibilities for family contact via video-conferencing and email

**Other:**

- ✚ Offer family support to all prisoners to help maintain family ties and address family issues around resettlement
- ✚ Invite families to contribute to the sentence planning and review process
- ✚ Information about all provision should be available in a range of languages and non-written formats to be accessible to all ethnic groups and those with disabilities

Appendix 1:

**HMP The Mount Visitors Centre Annual Visitors' Survey 2007 (summary)**

1 Are you: Male 7 Female 45

2 How long have you been visiting this prison?

0-2mths	2-6mths	7-12mths	1-2yrs	2-5yrs	over 5yrs
15	11	15	12	1	0

3 Is the person you visit?

Husband	Family member	Friend	Other	Not Indicated
15	15	9	9	4

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Fill out the following section only if you bring children, otherwise go to Question 13

4 Do you bring children with you when you visit? Yes, often 28 Yes, sometimes 11

5. What are the ages of children brought to visit:

Under 1 Yr= 4, 1Yr= 8, 2Yrs= 9, 3 Yrs= 2, 4Yrs= 5, 5 Yrs= 3, 6 Yrs= 4, 7Yrs= 5, 8Yrs= 2, 9Yrs= 4, 10Yrs= 4, 11Yrs= 1, 12Yrs= 2, 13Yrs= 5, 14Yrs= 3, 15yrs= 1, 16Yrs= 3

6. On a scale of 1 to 10 where 1 is very low and 10 is very high, what do you think of the facilities for older children or teenagers in the Visitors' Centre?

1	4	2	2	3	3	4	3	5	8	6	1	7	3	8	4	9	4	10	0
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What would need to change to increase your rating?

- ✚ Facilities for older children i.e. teenagers and clean toys for babies also clean high chair.
- ✚ Play Station or Game Station for older children
- ✚ Maybe have TV on or board games and jigsaws
- ✚ I think the Visitors Centre is more tailored to the needs of toddlers
- ✚ Not a great deal for teenagers. Perhaps some teenage magazines?

On a scale of 1 to 10 where 1 is very low and 10 is very high, what do you think of the facilities for older children or teenagers in the Visits Hall?

1	3	2	4	3	3	4	2	5	5	6	0	7	2	8	5	9	2	10	1
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What would need to change to increase your rating?

- ✚ Maybe computer games and a pool table

- ✚ *There was nothing that I observed that could engage teenagers on visits with their fathers - card games; board games would be a good and useful bonding tool for both children and fathers. The shop has a good stock of goods.*
- ✚ *Older children need more things e.g. Play Station*
- ✚ *The children's area is closed a lot (x2)*
- ✚ *I don't think there is anything for teenagers (x2)*
- ✚ *It does get a bit boring for older children and teenagers. The crèche for younger children is great*
- ✚ *My son is 12, a big lad. When I take him upstairs he is very bored and isn't allowed to go and do colouring*

7 How satisfied are you with the play area in the Visitors' Centre?

	Very satisfied	Quite satisfied	Dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied
	15	16	3	1

- ✚ *The toys are all very dirty also the highchair*
- ✚ *There is a good supply of toys and books (x4)*
- ✚ *Last time I brought children here they were very very happy. They were enjoying it so much they didn't want to come home.*
- ✚ *Keeps the little one busy for ages (x3)*
- ✚ *Not enough for older children (x2)*
- ✚ *Confined space (x3)*
- ✚ *Some places don't have anything for children*
- ✚ *It enables kids not to be bored while on a visit and give them something to do*
- ✚ *It's organised and helpful (x2)*
- ✚ *Good for young children*
- ✚ *Staff are friendly and helpful and it's always clean and tidy(x2)*
- ✚ *Very clean and safe play area*
- ✚ *Because it has heaps to do*

8. What difference does the play area make to the children?

- ✚ *Not much difference. One child is too young the other two are too old.*
- ✚ *He can play with other kids*
- ✚ *It relaxes them before the visit. (x2) It helps to make good conversations*
- ✚ *A huge difference (x4) Without the play area my children wouldn't want to be here.*
- ✚ *It stops them getting fed up. Keeps them busy. (x4)*
- ✚ *Keeps them occupied and makes a more friendly place (x6)*
- ✚ *My granddaughter doesn't get bored whilst waiting to go in.*
- ✚ *Provides entertainment for young children while waiting (x3)*
- ✚ *You are able to check in as there is something to entertain them*
- ✚ *It gives them a distraction and something to do*
- ✚ *Make the visit more fun, less daunting*
- ✚ *Very educational area of play*

9 What difference does the play area make to you?

- ✚ *I can book in easily*
- ✚ *It's good to watch the children play and helps me make conversation with other parents, visitors.*
- ✚ *It's good watching children wake up from the tiring journey and gives me a chance to have a coffee and watch my child play.*
- ✚ *Without the play area my children would be bored and it would make my life harder*
- ✚ *It makes the visit enjoyable when the little one is happy and occupied*
- ✚ *It gives us time to speak to our son and boyfriend (x3)*
- ✚ *Less of a distraction for adults*
- ✚ *Lowers anxiety, occupying children with activities*
- ✚ *Keeps the kids active and entertained (x3)*
- ✚ *Makes coping easier because the children don't get bored waiting*
- ✚ *It makes my kids feel ok*
- ✚ *A lot. (x2) Happy child means happy adults.*
- ✚ *I observe - assume allows couples and adults time privately together*
- ✚ *None (don't have young children) (x2)*
- ✚ *Not quite at the moment as mine are too young*
- ✚ *If Micky's happier, I'm more relaxed*
- ✚ *Can relax knowing children will not get bored (x3)*

10 If you bring children with you, have they entered the colouring competitions?  
 Yes 6 No 26

11 Have you used the baby changing facilities? Yes 13 No 16  
 If yes, was it adequate? Yes 13 No 0

## 12 Children's visits/family visits

We hope to introduce 'children's visits' at The Mount, where children and their fathers can play and bond together, in addition to normal domestic visits. If you have children, would you welcome such visits? Yes 23 No 0 Not sure 1

Please add any comments (eg preferences about activities, ages, length of visit, your children's views, experience of similar visits at another prison, or any other comment):

- ✚ *Games room, movie i.e. video or DVD showing facilities. Quiet area with books and bible to read*
- ✚ *The visits need to be longer in order for the children and fathers to bond (x2)*
- ✚ *At present visits hall is unsuitable for children 1 - 2, as not allowed in crèche. Too difficult to keep children sat at the table. I am disappointed that games for older children were not allowed into the hall for father and son to play*
- ✚ *Would aid quality time to maintain bond*
- ✚ *Games, play station, competitions*
- ✚ *At Wormwood Scrubs they had family visits (x2) which were more relaxed and special days 10 - 4pm with entertainers, play areas and the men can play games like cricket. Also there was a special 'couples only' evening with no children allowed, with coffee, tea, vegetarian food*

- ✚ *At a previous C cat prison my son had family visits and for a charge of approximately £2 a photo of him, his wife and daughter was taken so that in the future they had photos of them together*
  - ✚ *I don't have young children but think it's a great idea.*
  - ✚ *It would be nice if toys could be used on these visits as it would be nice for inmates to bond and play with their children*
  - ✚ *We had 2 of these in Bedford and it was good to see him play with dad*
- 

### The information in the Visitors Centre

13 Have you read any of the information leaflets available in the Centre?

Yes	No	Don't know/can't remember
30	18	1

14 Have you been able to use or follow up any of the information given?

Yes	No	Don't know/can't remember
12	10	2

If yes, please provide details:

- ✚ *I have read a leaflet about release of prisoners, reinforcing advice given for families which was nice.*
- ✚ *I was a bit worried about my friend being in prison but the leaflets reassured me he's in safe custody*
- ✚ *Information on solicitors*
- ✚ *Only read to pass the time*
- ✚ *How to send in money*
- ✚ *Regarding the rules*
- ✚ *Will read when I have glasses with me*
- ✚ *N/A but useful*
- ✚ *Times of visits etc*

15 You answered no to question 13. Please tick any of these statements about the information leaflets if you agree with them:

I was not interested in them	8
I did not know about them	3
I had seen them before	3
I could not read them	2
Other (please state)	

- ✚ *It's my first time so I haven't been able to read them yet.*
- ✚ *There wasn't anything relevant that I felt I need to read, otherwise I would have.*

16 Would you like the leaflets to be available in?

- a) Some other format, for example, audio tape: Yes 1 No 16 Don't know 15  
 b) Another language: Yes 2 No 12 Don't know 10

If yes, please provide details of other formats and languages

- ✚ Bengali, Urdu
- ✚ N/A but good idea - high % of visitor's languages - survey?

- 17 Have you been given a 'New Visitor Information Pack? Yes 20 No 25  
 If yes, was the information helpful: Yes 18 No 1

### Support

18 Have you been given any support from people in the Centre, apart from written information?

Yes 17 No 26 Don't know/can't remember 1

If yes, please provide details of how that support helped you?

- ✚ *Couldn't open the locker. I missed the bus and one of the staff gave a lift to the bus station.*
- ✚ *Information on where everything is*
- ✚ *I had a helpful home visit*
- ✚ *Arranging the appointments here on a Sunday*
- ✚ *The help with booking our visit made us feel very welcome. Lovely to our children. Give good advice.*
- ✚ *About transport and the APVU*
- ✚ *Help try to get information about a taped phone call*
- ✚ *Just general helpfulness and kindness (x2)*
- ✚ *Informed that we could add a person to a VO as 1 visitor is aged 17.1/2 and classed as a child*
- ✚ *The long wait was explained (at the end of the visit) but it's not right to keep us there*
- ✚ *About sending in a cheque to my son, explained how it will be easier for me to book a visit at the Centre when I get some VOs, explained about APVU*
- ✚ *My teenage daughter was upset during one visit and staff were great*
- ✚ *In answering question that I asked on matters involving prison*

19 Please state how far you agree with the following statements. You may tick more than one answer.

The Visitors' Centre helped me:	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Not applicable
a) find help from another service	5	16	6	1	15
b) obtain welfare benefits or other					

financial assistance	5	9	4	2	19
c) understand better the regulations for prison visiting	15	26	4	0	1
d) feel more relaxed and at ease during visits	21	26	1	0	0
e) feel more welcomed into the prison	21	26	0	0	0

### Facilities in the Visitors Centre

20 If you have used the refreshment tea bar, were the facilities adequate?  
 Yes 39 No 8

- + Adequate, thank you
- + Need to have more to each such as sandwiches, toasties as we travel.
- + Not enough choice
- + Miss toasted cheese sandwiches
- + Could do with hot food

21 Please state why you have not used the refreshment tea bar (e.g. bring own food, cost, variety).

- + Minimum choice/healthy eating?
- + Not hungry

22 Have you used the toilet facilities? Yes 47 No 4

If yes, were they adequate? Yes 39 No 4

- + There was no liquid soap in the dispenser, very unhygienic
- + Very dirty
- + Need a toilet soap dispenser, more hygienic than a soap bar
- + Nice and clean

23 Are there any other facilities you would like to see provided? Yes 8 No 31

- + Television
- + Something for older children to do while they wait
- + Much better toilets as there are people who travel far and use the toilets each visit
- + To open up the Visitors Centre earlier as I am always early

24 The main purpose of the Centre is 'to provide a comfortable and safe environment where visitors' and their children can prepare for their visit in to the Prison or relax after the visit before travelling home'.

Do you think we achieve this? Yes 45 No 1

25 Ease of Booking Visits

On a scale of 1 to 10 where 1 is very hard and 10 is very easy, how easy did you find it to book a visit on the telephone?

1	7	2	3	3	4	4	2	5	5	6	5	7	4	8	7	9	6	10	4
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	----	---

- ✚ *A lot of the time when ringing, phone is busy and have to keep trying to get through. (x7) Can sometimes take up to 20/30 mins.(x5)*
- ✚ *Sometimes the phone keeps ringing without response. Sometimes you could be trying for ages before being able to get through. (x4)*
- ✚ *Quite straight forward.*
- ✚ *I could not hear the person/ too quiet*
- ✚ *Booking on a visit is a lot easier.*
- ✚ *They answer the phone quickly (x3) and they're very helpful*
- ✚ *Takes a very long time to get through, sometimes the phone just rings and rings, no one picks up.*
- ✚ *Its always very busy and when it rings no one answers, then it's busy again. After days I manage to book*
- ✚ *Sometimes easier than others*
- ✚ *Good service once the phone is answered but often constantly engaged*
- ✚ *Only one number to try and get through to*
- ✚ *You can never get through because there is only one person working on the phone*
- ✚ *From work - difficult, line is often busy*
- ✚ *Telephone booking easy*
- ✚ *Not open long enough on Wednesday*
- ✚ *Normally get through on 2<sup>nd</sup>/3<sup>rd</sup> time*

On a scale of 1 to 10 where 1 is very hard and 10 is very easy, how easy did you find it to book a visit in the Visitors Centre?

1	2	2	0	3	0	4	1	5	0	6	0	7	1	8	2	9	7	10	13
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	----	----

- ✚ *Easy as abc*
- ✚ *Very helpful*
- ✚ *Have not tried this method (x10)*
- ✚ *It's much easier than the phone*
- ✚ *I did not know that you could book in the Visitors Centre*
- ✚ *The person sits there, so you can go and book the visit promptly*
- ✚ *Brilliant, just fill in form, hand over and collect on the way out, couldn't be easier. Far preferable (x3)*
- ✚ *You can book a month's visits at a time - excellent*
- ✚ *A lot easier but sometimes you forget to bring the VOs*
- ✚ *Only used once, didn't always know dates in advance*

26

Please indicate your ethnic origin on the form below.

Asian or Asian British		Please tick one of these
	Indian	2
	Pakistani	3
	Bangladeshi	2
Black or British Black	Any other Asian Background	3
	Caribbean	4
	African	2
Mixed	Any other Black Background	2
	White and Black Caribbean	2
	White and Black African	0
	White and Asian	2
White	Any other Mixed Background	2
	British	23
Other Ethnic Group	Irish	2
	Any other White Background	1
	Chinese	0
	Gypsy/Roma	0
	Traveller	0
	Irish Traveller	0
	Any other (please indicate)	1
	No Ethnicity Indicated	1

### Prisoner/Family Support

27 Would you welcome the chance to be involved in the prisoner's sentence planning reviews (i.e. when progress is reviewed and decisions made about future plans)?

Yes	No	Not sure	Not appropriate
28	5	8	0

28 What 2 things would help you or your family most when the prisoner is released?  
See report section 3.5

29 Please add any further comments here: (eg: public transport)

#### **Transport issues:**

- ✚ A Sunday Service bus would be very helpful and less expensive than getting a taxi (x4)
- ✚ Sunday service (public transport) is no good. An alternative transport system needs to be organised for Sundays.
- ✚ If you are on an early 9am visit the transport is very hard as we're coming from Luton. Bus service starts at 10am direct from Luton to The Mount. Otherwise it costs too much money and stress to get here on time
- ✚ Public transport could be improved by reducing the waiting time for the bus (x2)
- ✚ I find the public transport not good as the buses do not run in time with start or finish of the visits here. Precious time can be lost on visits. (x2)

- ✚ *Bus service is too sparse. I have to cut visit by 15 mins to make sure I catch the bus at 4pm (x2)*
- ✚ *No issues, I drove here*
- ✚ *Inadequate parking for disabled people*

### **Visits**

- ✚ *My visit is only an hour and by the time I go in there is hardly anything left (in the visits hall teabar)*
- ✚ *Dislike the Hall - suitability for children is low*
- ✚ *Children's area in the visits hall should be staffed both morning and afternoon*
- ✚ *All the staff are friendly and helpful - the prison is clean and welcoming (x2)*
- ✚ *Officers are nice and treat our children good*
- ✚ *We should not have to wait fifteen minutes before being allowed out of the prison. Our hands are checked (hand stamp) therefore they know we are visitors, not prisoners*
- ✚ *Not too bad*
- ✚ *Wish the staff would start earlier so we could get 2 hour visits*

### **Visitors Centre**

- ✚ *Love the Centre*
- ✚ *Staff are great and you get a lovely cup of coffee. I travel 300 miles to visit so a bacon sandwich and coffee are very welcome*
- ✚ *People are nice and welcome us every week (x4)*
- ✚ *Its very comfortable and definitely relaxing, the staff are very friendly (x2)*
- ✚ *Staff always very friendly and helpful (x5)*
- ✚ *People are very polite and you can sit and wait for transport to arrive without getting wet and cold*
- ✚ *Nice place, clean and tidy (x3)*
- ✚ *Think it's excellent. Thank you to all workers and volunteers*
- ✚ *Very helpful, offer good advice.*

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