

‘Made for prisoners by prisoners’

**AN EVALUATION OF THE
SAFE GROUND PARENTING AND
FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS
PROGRAMME**

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Executive Summary

Background

- This report contains an evaluation of the **'Parents for the 21st Century'** initiative, run by Safe Ground, a drama-based education charity. The initiative involved the development of two courses, one with a focus on parenting – **'Fathers Inside'**, the other on family relationships – **'Family Man'**. Although the evaluation covered both courses, it should be noted that only in the case of **'Family Man'** was a final version produced. **'Fathers Inside'** is still in the processes of refinement.
- The evaluation was divided into two distinct phases. The first focused on the process of development, whereby inmates played a major role in the production of the course materials. At one establishment, inmates formed a script group, which generated a story line for the course video. Prisoners then went on to produce and act in the video. Meanwhile, at another prison inmates convened a marketing group which was concerned with the programme image and the production of all associated publicity materials. The aim of this evaluation phase, therefore, was to assess the impact on those involved as **'course developers'**.
- The second phase of the evaluation concerned the trialing of the programme, during which time the programme was delivered by non-Safe Ground personnel at several establishments across the country. The evaluation aims at this stage were to determine the impact on **'course participants'** and also to investigate whether teachers (including non-drama teachers) found the course materials usable.
- Four research methods were employed – structured interviews, observations of the course, collection of relevant documents and a questionnaire to assess any changes in participants' contact with their families.

Programme development

- All interviewees agreed that there was a need for family relationships and parenting education in prison. Some based this belief on the observed **'selfish'** attitudes of inmates, in particular the tendency for prisoners to think more about themselves than their families. Others suggested that prisoners were a particularly vulnerable population, due to a lack of positive parenting role models. Parenting education was also deemed necessary because it could help break the cycle of offending which sometimes runs in families. Lastly, interviewees thought that parenting education could help preserve family links whilst prisoners are serving a sentence.
- Prisoners were pleased to be involved in developing the course, because it gave them something constructive to do with their time and they were producing materials which would have a long term application within the prison system.

- Through the experience, course developers gained a sense of pride, improved their team working skills, grew in confidence and also acquired some specific skills in the areas of marketing, computing and film production. In the longer term, some prisoners were more motivated to continue their education.
- The development of the course did not proceed without some difficulties. Interviewees acknowledged that resistance can sometimes be encountered by outside agencies attempting to launch new initiatives within the structure of a prison system. They stressed that parties must appreciate the different priorities at play and work within the boundaries of the regime. For such initiatives to succeed it was considered important to have the full backing of the prison and to promote initiatives to all staff involved.
- The contribution of prisoners to making the programme was seen as beneficial for a number of reasons. Firstly, prisoners were more likely to possess an understanding of parenting in a prison setting and could therefore pinpoint the specific needs of this target group. Because of this, their input made the final product more credible and realistic to participants. Hence, those viewing the materials were able to relate more to its content.

Teaching the pilot programme

- The majority of the five trial prisons involved in the evaluation had an experienced drama teacher on board. To an extent, this limited the capacity of the evaluation to fully consider whether or not the course could be used by non-drama teachers. Furthermore, those that lacked drama experience had attended the pre-programme training, which would have exposed and prepared them for a drama-based course. However, during the interviews, experience of teaching social and life skills (SLS) to prisoners, and all the sensitivity that that implies, emerged as the most fundamental requirement for any teacher of the Safe Ground programme. This was seen to be at least as essential to the effectiveness of the course as familiarity with specific drama techniques. However, given that the positive participant outcomes were equally reported across all five prisons (including those where the programme was run by non-drama teachers), it could be said that non-drama teachers (supported by the pre-programme training from Safe Ground) were able to deliver the course equally as well as those with drama backgrounds. More important, it would seem, was the personality of the teachers and their ability to strike up a rapport with participants.
- Overall, teachers were enthusiastic about the parenting programme's potential and felt that most of the difficulties they had experienced stemmed partly from the fact that the course was still in the process of evolution. The reservations they expressed related mainly to the course materials and to the course duration. Many of them had contributed comments and suggestions for the process of revision, and it was widely believed that the final pack would be much more attuned to teachers' and prisoners' needs. As experienced teachers, interviewees generally felt that teaching the course would be considerably easier the second time round because they would be familiar with the course approach and content.

Participants' experiences of the pilot programme

- Prisoners signed up for the course primarily because they wanted to learn more about parenting and to become better fathers. Beforehand, some were worried about the demands of drama, although this fear subsided as the course progressed.
- The most memorable and enjoyable aspects of the course were the drama, the course video, the team spirit which grew out of the experience and the story of the selfish giant.
- Less enjoyable were activities where the learning objectives were not clear, the perceived over-use of warm-up games, activities which touched on personal/sensitive issues and sessions which were repetitive.
- Whilst the written work was generally valued in the course, because it served to reinforce learning, many participants found there simply was not enough time allocated to completing the portfolios. This was particularly the case for inmates who struggled with reading and writing.
- The video made a strong impression on some participants, who could identify with the scenario portrayed and as a result had re-evaluated their attitudes to parenting from prison.
- Where involved, the presence of prison officers was well received, although this was attributed to the calibre of the specific individuals. It was recommended that the same officers be used for the duration of the course and that the chosen officers should have a good rapport with prisoners.
- Drama was believed to be an effective part of the course because it was accessible to all prisoners (regardless of their literacy levels), it was also an effective communicator and it could be used to illustrate the perspectives of others. Furthermore, drama was said to boost the confidence of participants and encourage positive group dynamics through team work.
- Interviewees perceived two potential drawbacks to using drama as a teaching tool. Firstly, it may exclude less confident, more introverted participants – although teachers should be able to overcome this problem by offering encouragement and creating a comfortable learning environment. Secondly, the potency of drama may bring difficult emotions to the surface and again, teachers will need to think carefully about how to handle sensitive issues and participants must be given the chance of withdrawing if they feel uneasy about the subject matter.
- Those interviewees who could contrast the course with others, all thought that it was better in some way. The Safe Ground parenting and family relationship programme was seen as distinctive because of the team work element, the use of drama and the broad emphasis on family relations. From a teaching perspective it was different because the teaching materials came ready made.
- Prisoners were universally happy to recommend the course because of the benefits it generated, as well as the accreditation opportunities, the chance to see things differently, to work as a team and to have fun. Teachers were also prepared to

recommend the course, following revisions to the manual and accreditation elements.

- The most frequent suggestion for improvement was that the course should be extended in length and more time given for the completion of course work.

The impact of the pilot programme

- Generally, prisoners confirmed that they had acquired a better understanding of family relationships and parenting as a result of taking the course and during interviews they gave many examples of how their attitudes and perceptions had been altered. Some prison staff interviewees, however, felt there were inevitable limitations given the short-term nature of the course.
- Half the prisoners interviewed mentioned having learnt new parenting skills and knowledge. In particular, they made reference to an awareness of different parenting styles and advances in their ability to communicate with children, highlighting the importance of honesty, listening and openness.
- Through a questionnaire, it was established that 18 out of 24 respondents (75 per cent) experienced improvements in the frequency of their family contact – they were either phoning more often, sending more letters home or receiving more visits. Some prisoners had re-established contact with family members, whilst others were allowing their children to visit them in prison. Additionally, interviewees suggested the quality of contact had also benefited – e.g. they were now reserving time to speak to their children during phone calls and they were writing letters with younger readers in mind e.g. including stories, quizzes, drawings, etc.
- Following the course, some interviewees spoke of taking their parental role more seriously and that they were more committed to their families. This change in attitude arose from a greater awareness of the perspectives and needs of others. Thus, course participants were wishing to spend more quality time with their children.
- Prisoners also reported skill improvement in the following areas: confidence and communication, literacy levels and team work.
- For resistant learners, the course served as a launch pad to other education opportunities. They realised that education was within their reach and further still, they now had the confidence to seek out courses which interested them.
- Although some of the men who participated in the course had welcomed the opportunity to enhance their formal qualifications, and were able to tell researchers exactly which certificates they had obtained, the majority of those interviewed, across all trial prisons involved in the fieldwork, appeared vague on this aspect of the course, and relatively indifferent to accreditation itself. From the participants' point of view, the overwhelming impact of the course related to their personal and social development, and the insight they had gained into family relationships

- In the longer term, there was the suggestion by some interviewees that the course may positively impact on offending behaviour, as prisoners were now better able to consider how their actions affected others.
- More widely, prison life generally was said to have been touched by the course, as other inmates were now making enquiries about the programme; where prison officers assisted in the course relationships between participants and officers were said to have improved and changes in prisoners behaviour was seen to transfer onto the wings.
- For staff, interviewees reported development of their own parenting skills, a greater confidence towards role play and they also felt they had learnt a new, innovative approach to teaching family relationships and parenting.

Accreditation

- There was general consensus that the intensive nature and short duration of the course made it impossible for teachers to provide the individual feedback and support required to make any recognisable improvement in literacy skills. Some interviewees thought that men were put off by the requirement to do Key Skills (KS) and that it may be counter-productive to the core aim of improving participants' parenting skills and family relationships. It could also put too much pressure on less literate participants with good oral skills. Significantly, prisoners also expressed concerns in this respect.
- With regard to both Social and Life Skills (SLS) and KS, the oral assessment which took place during the course itself appeared to have caused fewer problems than assessment of the written work in the portfolios. During the sessions, as often as possible, teachers discussed written work with individuals as the need arose, but several pointed out that sometimes this prevented the men from participating in a SLS activity.
- Those teachers who were familiar with the assessment process for Basic and Key Skills found assessment of the KS component less '*onerous*' than inexperienced colleagues. Some teachers were able to offer the men continuing support after the end of the course to enable them to complete their portfolios. Other teachers, however, had no time to assess portfolios, because they were too busy fitting lesson preparation in on top of their other teaching commitments.
- In relation to external verification, Safe Ground had found that standards varied. This regional variation was said to have caused problems in terms of promoting a national standard in the system of accreditation.
- The introduction of an end test for the assessment of KS was perceived to have caused considerable problems. For some inmates, such formal assessment was reminiscent of negative experiences of education at school, and it was seen as a potential deterrent to joining the course. The fact that this national examination was held only five times a year was an issue for education departments, as the date frequently did not coincide with the end of the course. Prisoners were often

transferred or released before the exam date and it was administratively extremely difficult to ensure that they were able to take it.

- It was found, as indicated to NFER researchers, that the assessment for two discrete sets of criteria often involved a very heavy workload for teachers, particularly where it involved producing assessments of larger groups of more than ten participants.
- In terms of accreditation outcomes, 85 per cent of participants who completed the course in Year 1 gained certificates in SLS. Forty per cent of participants who completed the course in Year 1 gained certificates in literacy (i.e. an increase of 15 per cent on the original target of 25 per cent).
- A total of 220 participants completed the course in the trial prisons in Year 2, and of these, 93 per cent achieved certificates in SLS. By 1st February 2002, it was possible to confirm that 56 men, that is 25 per cent of the total number of participants who completed the course in Year 2, had gained a certificate in KS. A further 29 participants, were still waiting for their portfolios to be returned from external verification.
- The requirement for individual prisons to meet specific targets related to accreditation, was thought to affect the degree to which it was possible to follow the principle of open recruitment. At the same time, some teachers referred to the problems inherent in teaching the course to mixed ability groups. If the course were limited to those who could perform at the desired key skills level, then interviewees were concerned that some men would be deprived of valuable parenting education. The dilemma emerging for the prison service seemed to be how much to ‘*get out of*’ a single course in terms of specific accreditation, and how much to lay the emphasis on unmeasurable outcomes relating to individual participants’ personal and social development.

Future courses and their promotion

- The long-term sustainability of the course depends on prisons agreeing to run the course and for sufficient numbers of prisoners to express an interest – any marketing strategy needs to address both elements.
- Inmates will hopefully be attracted by a course designed ‘by prisoners, for prisoners’. Other publicity devices include orange T-shirts for participants, so that a visual presence is created around the prison; recruitment leaflets with images of the course which communicate an instant impression of the programme and other inmates and prison staff are invited to view the end presentation, thus sampling the course and its approach. One strategy to increase participation may be to link the course to sentence planning, thereby requiring prisoners to complete the programme.
- The value of the course could be sold to prisons by the fact that it offers accreditation in three certificate areas. The course is also free to prisons, apart from staff time, and it comes as a ready-made resource for teachers.

- To maximise the initial uptake of the course, it may be necessary to permit a degree of flexibility with regards timetabling, opting for a part-time, as opposed to a full-time delivery.

Conclusion

- To conclude, therefore, the Safe Ground family relationships and parenting course owed much of its success to its evolutionary history – it rose out of the ideas and experiences of prisoners. The resulting materials were subsequently well received by participants, who saw them as relevant, credible and easy to relate to. This in turn contributed to the overall impact of the programme and men were prompted to change their behaviour, or at least question their attitudes to parenting. At the same time, however, the trialling of the programme generated a heavy workload for teachers, compounded by a large, ever-changing manual and a short delivery time. It is understood that Safe Ground have responded to these identified problems – and in its revised form, the course should make a valuable contribution to parenting education, providing an interactive and exciting approach, through the medium of drama.

Chapter 1

Background to the evaluation

I first got arrested when I was 10. I am 37 years of age and I have thrown in the towel, that's 27 years, do you understand? ... I have never been there for my children's birth, any of my kids and that's something that I deeply regret and I have been selfish. I put my hand on my heart and I will be the first to admit I have been selfish. I was given that story to read of the Selfish Giant. I have never ever heard of that story ... and I thought to myself 'this is for kids', but when I read the story I thought to myself that's all about communication and how we communicate with our loved ones and maybe, because of the lack of it, is why I neglected them and have taken them for granted for so many years (prisoner).

1.1 Family relationships and parenting education in prisons

Prisons are a setting in which parenting and family relationship skills have particular relevance – many prisoners come from difficult family backgrounds and may have had few positive educational experiences or opportunities to discuss parenting (Devlin, 1995). These negative educational experiences may in turn impact upon their ability to alert their own children to the dangers of offending behaviour. Furthermore, the fragmented nature of prisoners' contact with their children puts an additional strain on family relations. Recent research by the Social Exclusion Unit (2002) has found that two-fifths of prisoners lose contact with their families during a prison sentence. Thus, to break the cycle of poor parenting and offending behaviour, prisoners in particular could benefit from support and guidance on parenting.

Safe Ground is a drama-based education charity, staffed by four individuals, including an administrator. Over the years, Safe Ground personnel have worked on a variety of prison projects, several involving the use of puppetry. It was during a stay at HMP Wandsworth that prisoners asked Safe Ground to consider turning their attention to parenting. One-off drama productions by prisoners had proved successful, but they had the disadvantage of being 'ephemeral' and not particularly cost effective. Hence, the idea of a video was mooted, with the advantage that it could be circulated throughout the prison system and seen by a much wider audience. Safe Ground approached the Prison Service with their ideas and in 1999 they were commissioned to write, pilot and deliver a new parenting programme.

1.2 The Safe Ground Family relationships and parenting programme

The 'Parents for the 21st Century' initiative was subsequently conceived and developed over a two year period. Overall, the project sought to achieve three main objectives:

- to improve prisoners' parenting skills
- to meet the Prison Services demands for programmes that reduce offending behaviour rates
- to provide prisoners with opportunities to gain training, qualifications and work experience.

In addition, Safeground were required to write a programme that met both the learning outcomes of the parent craft and family ties units of the Prison Service Social and Life Skills curriculum. Consequently, two versions of the programme were produced – 'Family Man', which linked to parent craft and 'Fathers Inside' which corresponded to family ties. Both courses shared the same underlying approach and teaching techniques. Drama was employed as the principle vehicle for addressing parenting/family issues and included the use of role play, poetry and story telling. Both courses ran for ten days which was increased from seven to allow for the inclusion of a literacy qualification (the final versions have again been increased and will now be delivered over a three week period).

The production process fell into two distinct phases:

- **programme development**, with direct input from prisoners
- **trailing** of the programme at nine prison sites, to identify areas for further improvement.

Programme development

Year one of the initiative concentrated on developing the programme by tapping into the knowledge and experience of prisoners. The high level of prisoner involvement was a particularly distinctive feature of the project and Safe Ground worked from the principle of '*listening to prisoners*' so that the resulting programme corresponded closely to their needs and interested. The main focus of prisoner input centred on the production of a video, which was later used as a teaching resource within the programme. A team of men from HMP Wandsworth formed a script group to construct a story line. Prisoners then went on to act in and produce the video. A second group of inmates from HMP Gartree operated as a marketing group to formulate a product image, from which a logo was created and supporting publicity materials produced. At the same time, Safe Ground delivered the parenting programme at three prison sites and based on feedback from participants, continued to modify its content.

Trialling

Year two of the project was used to pilot the parenting programme at nine prisons. On these occasions, the courses were delivered in-house by prison education staff. This provided an important testing ground for the programme, as it would establish

whether or not the course materials would provide sufficient guidance for teachers to run the course.

1.3 Aims of the evaluation

The National Foundation for Educational Research was asked by Safe Ground and the Prison Service to specifically investigate nine key aspects of the Parents for the 21st Century initiative. In planning the evaluation, however, it became clear that these areas of interest could be organised into two distinct phases of research, corresponding to the development and trialling stages of the project.

Phase one: Programme development

The first focus of investigation concerned the effects of the project on **programme developers** – those prisoners who were involved in the production of the course video and lesson plans, followed by the editing and marketing of those materials. In addition, these prisoners also experienced the programme first hand, as participants. The main emphasis of this evaluation phase, however, was to extrapolate the effects and outcomes for prisoners undertaking a major development role in the programme.

PHASE ONE – Main aim:

- **to examine the impact on prisoners involved in the development of course materials.**

Within this aim, the evaluation also addressed the following research questions:

- Has the contractor met the specifications as agreed in the contract between Safe Ground and the Prison Service to produce teaching material for the Social and Life Skills Units, Parenting and Family Ties?
- Do prisoners achieve the Social and Life Skills Units of accreditation as per the specification of the contract (Units 2, 3, and 4)?
- Do prisoners achieve Basic Skills and/or other Key Skills accreditation (AEB, RSA, City and Guilds, etc.)?
- Do prisoners now have a better understanding of parenting six to 12 year olds?

Phase two: Course participation and mediation

The evaluation sought to explore the experiences of those trialling the programme. More specifically, it investigated the usability of the materials from the perspective of **course mediators** – i.e. teachers (including non-drama teachers) in the trial prisons who had agreed to pilot the programme. At the same time, the evaluation also assessed the impacts on those prisoners who were involved as **course participants**.

PHASE TWO – Main aims:

- **to examine the extent to which non-drama teachers were able to utilise course materials to deliver a parenting/family relationships course to prisoners and whether such teachers found the materials relevant and helpful.**

- **to consider the impact of the parenting/family relationships programme on course participants in the trial prisons.**

In assessing participant effects, the evaluation addressed the following research questions:

- Do prisoners achieve the Social and Life Skills Units of accreditation as per the specification of the contract?
- Do prisoners achieve Basic Skills and Key Skills accreditation?
- Are the Learning Outcomes and Assessment Criteria of the Social and Life Skills Units Parenting, Family Ties and Working With Others, achieved by following the teaching material, lesson plans, student portfolio and video?
- Do prisoners now have a better understanding of parenting six to 12 year olds?
- How has taking part in the programme affected prisoners' contact with their children (letters, phone calls and visits)?
- How has the programme impacted on prisoners' families?
- How has the initiative impacted on the prison regime?

The principle thrust of the evaluation, therefore, was to tease out the range of impacts experienced by developers and participants and to garner teachers' perspectives on the course materials as a teaching resource. To compliment this data collection, a number of additional issues were explored within the evaluation. For example, interviewees were asked to suggest areas for improvement, comment on the value of drama to teach social and life skills and to consider sustainability issues, in particular how the course could be rolled out nationally.

1.4 Methodology

Four different research methods were employed to meet the evaluation aims:

- **Structured interviews**
- **Observation**
- **Collection of documents**
- **Questionnaire.**

Structured interviews

Interviews were conducted with key participants involved in both the development and trialling of the programme. Safe Ground personnel were interviewed at the start of the evaluation to furnish researchers with vital background details on the programme, in terms of its origins, initial development and basic approach. This information then informed the design of subsequent interview schedules.

For the development phase of the evaluation, interviews were conducted with a minimum of four participants per prison, in addition to any prison officers, prison education staff and governors who contributed to the initiative.

Five trial prisons were visited for phase two of the evaluation. Two non-consecutive visits to each site were completed, with the first taking place as the course ran into its second week. At this time, teaching staff and, where appropriate, prisoner officers were interviewed for their impressions of the programme. The return visit took place between one and two weeks after the course had ended and concentrated on speaking to between four and eight participants about their experiences.

During participant interviews in phase two, prisoners were asked whether they would be happy for a family member to be contacted for a telephone interview. They would then be invited to give their views on the course, in particular whether or not their contact with the prisoner had changed in any way. Those prisoners who agreed were later sent a consent form and were asked to provide a telephone number for their nominated family member. The achieved sample size was small because some prisoners were going through family break-ups or were separated from their partners and it was therefore inappropriate to request a family interview. In other cases, whilst prisoners were originally happy with the request when asked during interviews, follow up consent forms were not returned.

Lastly, interviews were again conducted with Safe Ground staff towards the end of the evaluation, this time focussing on feedback from the trial prisons and a prison service representative was interviewed to give their views as the contractor of the project.

Observation

To assess how the course materials were used by teachers and received by prisoners, parts of the course were observed as they were delivered in the trial prisons. A researcher sat in on half a day's activity and took notes during proceedings. This allowed the researcher to observe the course *in situ*, rather than through purely retrospective accounts.

Collection of documents

Researchers also gathered together any documents which related to the course, such as the course manuals and accreditation records.

Questionnaire

To investigate more medium-term changes in family contact, the evaluation included a brief one-page questionnaire. The questionnaire was left with course teachers who circulated copies to all participants who were still at the prison one month after the course had finished. Respondents were asked to indicate any changes in the frequency of their telephone calls, family correspondence and visits.

The sample

In all, 80 interviews were undertaken. A breakdown of the different participants involved in these interviews for the two phases are shown in Table 1.1.

Table 1.1 Interviewees in the two evaluation phases

Type of interviewee	Phase one: Development	Phase two: Trialling
Prisoners	16	30
Education staff	6	11
Governors	3	-
Prison officers	4	-
Family members	-	4
Safe ground staff	2	4
Totals	31	49

Source: NFER evaluation of the Safe Ground family relationships and parenting programme

The five prisons involved in the trialling of the programme were classified as:

1. Category C
2. Category B local prison
3. Category C training prison
4. A privately run, category B local prison
5. A large, local remand prison

The report

When reading this report it is important to bear in mind certain caveats, especially in relation to the timing of interviews and the process of course development.

Prisoners who were interviewed as ‘programme developers’ had, at some point, also taken part in the family relationships and parenting course, typically prior to their development input. They were therefore interviewed about their experiences of course participation as well as course development.

However, the course they experienced was a much earlier version – over a two year development period, the course was continually refined and evolved steadily into its present form. In terms of evaluating the current course therefore, feedback from programme developers was felt to be less relevant, compared to the comments of prisoners involved in the more recent trials. Essentially, the ‘course developers’ were referring to a different version of the course and there was also a considerable time lapse between the programme developers taking the course and being interviewed for the evaluation. Consequently, the recollections of ‘programme developer’ interviewees were not as vivid as inmates who were interviewed at the trial prisons.

Because of these discrepancies, it was decided to focus on feedback from the trials when reporting the experiences and impacts of course participation (Chapters 4 and 5), teachers views on the course (Chapter 3) and use the ‘developer’ interviewees solely for the purpose of reporting the development process and its specific impacts (Chapter 2). This distinction ensured that the evaluation was dealing with the course at one stage of its development, rather than reporting comments which referred to earlier drafts.

The evaluation findings are presented under the following chapters:

Chapter 1: Background to the evaluation

This chapter sets the scene for the evaluation. It outlines the background of the parenting/family relationships course, the stated aims of the evaluation, the chosen methodology, sample sizes and the report structure.

Chapter 2: Developing the programme

This chapter starts by relaying interviewees' views on the need for parenting/family relationships education in prison and proceeds to document the process of course development, the reported impacts, as well as any challenges encountered. It ends by considering the perceived advantages to be gained from involving prisoners in the development of educational materials.

Chapter 3: Teaching the pilot programme

This chapter concentrates on teachers' perspectives in the trial prisons. It covers their thoughts on the training and support they received in preparation for running the course, their views on the course materials, any problems they encountered during the experience and the relevance of the course to the learning outcomes of the Social and Life Skills units.

Chapter 4: Participants' experiences of the pilot programme

All aspects of course participation are dealt with in this chapter, including the elements which were most enjoyed, least enjoyed, thoughts on the value of drama, comparisons with other programmes and suggestions for improvement.

Chapter 5: The impact of the pilot programme

This chapter chronicles the full range of impacts generated by the course, including those experienced by prisoners, staff and the prison as a whole. It also includes comments from family members.

Chapter 6: Assessment and accreditation

This chapter focuses on the process of accreditation, accreditation outcomes and any issues which arose in relation to accrediting the course.

Chapter 7: Future courses and their promotion

The report draws to a close by considering the long term future of the parenting/family relationships programme, with interviewees' thoughts on how best to promote the course to other institutions.

Chapter 2

Developing the programme

Introduction

This chapter covers the process and experience of programme development. At HMP Wandsworth a script group was established to write a storyline for the course video. The video was then filmed at the prison, with inmates taking on central roles and others assisting in the production. Meanwhile, at HMP Gartree a marketing group concentrated on designing a logo to represent the programme, as well as producing supporting materials (leaflets, posters, etc). HMP Woodhill was then used as an initial test site for the programme and prisoners were encouraged to communicate their thoughts on the course and make suggestions for improvements. This section begins, however, by considering the perceived need for family relationships and parenting education in prisons.

2.1 A need for family relationships and parenting education

Staff interviewees, in both phases of the evaluation, were questioned as to whether or not they felt there was a particular need for family relationships and parenting education in prisons. Education staff and prison officers generally answered in the affirmative.

The most frequently stated rationale for a prison-based parenting programme was the tendency for prisoners to think quite selfishly, with little regards of how their situation may be affecting the whole family. Staff suggested that some prisoners would benefit from adopting a new perspective, one which moved away from dwelling on their own predicament, towards **considering the needs and perspective of others**.

Well the main thing is about the families, because I don't think a lot of inmates realise that their families suffer on the outside. And they are not just thinking about themselves really, because I think a lot of inmates think it's them that's being punished and only them, but there's also a big world out there with their family in it who are also being punished (prison officer, Fathers Inside).

A lot of the times we get guys who are inside who can be quite selfish and they don't really see. They can't really put themselves into the eyes of members of the family. They see it from their own particular selfish perspective and they don't really have the cognitive awareness to be able to step outside of that and to actually look at what problems they create, not only for themselves but for the family members. They don't really have great social skills or the skills of interacting with members of their family, and it puts a lot of pressure on them, but they all come away with a little bit more insight into their own motivations (prison officer, development prison).

Another reason cited as justification for family relationships education in prisons was the fact that prisoners could be categorised as an ‘**at risk**’ group. One prison officer commented on the large number of inmates who grow up in broken families or the care system. Consequently their childhood experiences of parenting may have been less than positive and in terms of bringing up their own children, the interviewee felt that prisoners could benefit from some additional advice and guidance:

A lot of the lads who come into prison come from either broken homes or they have come from children’s homes and would benefit from learning more about the advantages of having good family relationships and that in turn would then give them a chance to actually pass onto their children, better parenting and family relationship skills, ones that they have maybe not picked up in their formative years, that they can hopefully, at this point, give to their children (prison officer, Family Man).

Parenting education for prisoners was seen as necessary by two other interviewees (a governor and teacher) because of the tendency for criminality to transfer from father to child. One interviewee believed that in some families offending behaviour became a normal way of life and that something was needed to **break the cycle of crime**:

Because many criminals, many convicted criminals, it runs in the family. They are brought up by parents who commit crime, who it is a normal part of the family structure that dad vanishes to prison on regular occasions and they accept it as the norm and they in turn pass it onto their children as the norm. I believe there is a need to break the pattern. Prisoners, when you have been in prison for a number of years, you see the same ones come in like time after time, and eventually the majority of them stop coming because they just grow up. They realise their own responsibilities, how much of their life they are wasting, and suddenly it comes to them that they need to break the cycle they are in and they actually need to fit in with society and you see, or I see, lots of people that come to prison for a number of years on various sentences, and then suddenly they will stop (governor, development prison).

Regardless of whether or not prisoners are deemed a particularly vulnerable group, interviewees made the point that parenting is perhaps one of the most demanding and responsible jobs that anyone can undertake – yet it is rarely taught. Furthermore, our single frame of reference comes from our own personal experiences of family life. For this reason, interviewees believed that parenting skills warranted attention simply because they were ‘*essential life skills*’:

We need to learn how to cope with kids. If lads have got kids out there, they need to know how to cope and everything. You don’t get taught it from school about that (participant, Fathers Inside).

Two staff interviewees, however, felt that parenting courses should not necessarily be made available on a universal basis. Caution was heeded by one interviewee with regards inmates who had committed family-related offences, with the implication that discussions on parenting and family members may stir up difficult emotions. Another interviewee felt that parenting was not always appropriate for lifer prisoners.

Interestingly, an interviewee from the same prison held exactly the opposite view. They suggested that lifers, especially so, were in need of parenting courses because it would help them maintain family links whilst they were detained:

A great deal of men are put away for a large number of years ..who have got families that they had to leave behind because of obviously being sentenced, and to help them understand that the family still goes on and to develop their level of thought as regards their family, because you can get ensconced really in the idea that you are just in prison and that's the be all and end all, and a lot of men tend to, over a period of time, cut off then, particularly long term prisoners I am talking about (prison officer, development prison).

Indeed, two other interviewees recognised that a prison sentence, no matter how long, can impinge on family relations. Immediately, the prisoner is distanced from his family and some prisoners are reluctant for their children to visit them in a potentially unsettling and intimidating environment. Yet, whilst they may perceive this to be in their children's best interests they are effectively denying themselves and their children of valuable family contact. Hence, parenting education was seen as necessary because it could perhaps help men resolve this dilemma and **maintain their family relationships**:

I mean one of the things that prisoners do suffer from when they come inside is social isolation, the breakdown of family relationships. I mean wives don't want to come and visit their husbands in a place like this and they certainly don't want to bring the kids in here, and it can be very, very difficult (prison officer, development prison).

I see them with their families and there are quite a number of wives left behind and children. I've spoken to quite a few who will not let their children come and visit them, as they don't want them to see them in this sort of surrounding, but then they had to give in because they miss their children and the kids want to know (prison officer, development prison).

In summary, staff interviewees generally shared the opinion that parenting and family relationships education was a relevant and necessary activity for the prison population. This belief was based on the purported egocentric attitudes of some inmates, coupled with a lack of consideration for their families. Interviewees also saw that some prisoners were disadvantaged by their own family backgrounds, with an absence of positive parenting role models. Thirdly, it was hoped that parenting education may possibly avert the well-documented transmission of offending behaviour down the family line, from father to child. Aside from the above, parenting and family relationships education was deemed valuable because it would help fortify the prisoner's bond with his family, in an environment where family relations will inevitably suffer. Lastly, very few men, in general, ever receive parenting education and interviewees implied that anyone who has children would benefit from parenting guidance.

2.2 How prisoners were involved

The three prisons that were involved in the development process were chosen for different reasons. HMP Wandsworth was near to the Safe Ground offices and was convenient for working closely with a group of men over several months.

Furthermore, prisoners there had expressed an interest in the parenting programme. At HMP Gartree a marketing team was established because of access to desk-top publishing facilities and HMP Woodhill was used to test out the programme because Safe Ground had worked there in the past. Involving three different institutions was seen as advantageous because it would help ensure that the programme would be applicable on a national scale and that it would be acceptable and appropriate for a wide range of offender types (e.g. lifers, young offenders and men from different ethnic groups).

Prisoners were generally invited to take on a development role, based on their performance within the course (prior to prisoners involvement, Safe Ground had developed an early version of the course). Ideal candidates were those that showed enthusiasm and demonstrated the necessary skills and ideas for a creative process. A Safe Ground staff member described the type of input they were looking for:

Those that we thought had the ability, the propensity to be able to be involved in putting a script together. Obviously, we had to have a rapport with these men. They had to feel comfortable with us. They had to be people who were giving ideas, you know, the top of the class basically, not necessarily academically, but street-cred, streetwise, street ability, good performers, creative people (Safe Ground, staff member).

For the prisoners, it was an opportunity to do something constructive with their time and create a product that would have practical applications and longevity within the prison system:

The amount of people that come to prison and go through their sentence doing absolutely nothing of any good, of any use, and then they go out when they have done nothing whilst they are in here and they then come back, it's quite sad. So from that point of view, for me to be able to do something, to get involved, to do something that's going to be there for X amount of years. The film is going to go around to all the prisons. It's something that's worthwhile doing. So, that was my main reason for getting involved (developer, script group).

The actual development process, within both the script and marketing teams, was one which encouraged equal input from all members – as a result, the end product was a culmination of group effort and democratic discussion. The marketing group received guidance and support from a professional advertising agency, which came in to the prison to talk about design and help the team produce a ‘creative brief’. Within the team men assumed different roles depending on their particular talents and interests, e.g. copy writing, logo design, administration and writing press releases. The following accounts illustrate how the two groups operated. The first describes how prisoners worked together to write a dialogue between two central characters in the ‘Blinder’ video. The second excerpt from a prison desk-top publishing tutor, explains how the programme logo came into being.

Script group

Like we would get one situation and ... say like Frank was saying something to Jill – we would both write down Frank and Jill, we would do a conversation between the two of them, all of us ... then we would give it to [Safe Ground staff member] and then we would all look at it, and it would be, like, part of my question can go in and a part of someone else. We were looking at it that way. So it weren't just like a single person. It was like a group thing and that's what [Safe Ground staff member] wanted, not just so one person put more input, it's all of us putting in the same amount of input, working as a group (developer, script group).

Marketing group

The image was a bit of a contribution from everybody. Everyone came up with an idea for a logo. Once they'd come up with that idea we then just literally plastered the wall with all the various ideas and from that, no one idea was actually chosen, but what did happen then, people started to discuss it and say I like that, but it would be better if it was a bit more like this one over here and in the end they came up with a consensus, based on their own individual efforts. At the end of the day, the logo they came up with was one that they all agreed upon. There were no major disagreement (DTP tutor, marketing group).

Thus, the Safe Ground parenting and family relationship programme grew from the ideas of the intended target group – prisoners. Prisoners were given the unusual opportunity to say exactly what they wanted, what they needed and how it should be presented. ‘*Made for prisoners, by prisoners*’ was the overarching ethos of the project, a strategy which was designed to culminate in a resource with a high level of consumer relevance (as discussed in section 2.5).

2.3 The experience of being a course developer

Interviewees were asked what they had enjoyed about their time as course developers, whether they had acquired any new knowledge, skills or qualifications from the experience and whether it had made a difference to their family relationships or long term futures. Prisoners from HMP Woodhill did not take on a specific development role, hence they were unable to comment on any impact arising from programme development. This section therefore reports the experiences of the script and marketing group only. In particular, they highlighted:

- **being involved in a worthwhile and purposeful project**
- **a sense of achievement/pride**
- **increased confidence**
- **development of team work skills**
- **acquisition of marketing, computing and film production skills**
- **opportunity to reflect on family relationships**
- **long term effects.**

What the men appreciated most was the chance to work on a project which had a real life application, rather than working on theoretical exercises. Consequently, developers saw the purpose behind what they were doing and liked the fact it could

benefit others in the future. Staff interviewees also highlighted this particular dimension of the project:

Being involved in a worthwhile and purposeful project
<i>They were given the opportunity to do more than they perhaps would have been. They were able to come up with ideas and develop ideas and have ideas appreciated, to see them being used for practical purposes (DTP tutor, marketing group).</i>
<i>It was good to do something that was, I suppose, worth something, rather than just messing about or doing something I am told to do. It was nice to be a bit creative I suppose and come up with different designs for something (developer, marketing group).</i>
<i>Being able to have the input into something that was being created and getting the feedback that things that we was doing was benefiting other people (developer, marketing group).</i>

Seeing their ideas transformed into a usable end product also fostered a sense of achievement for some prisoners. One prison officer spoke of the group pride which emanated from doing something constructive and that produced tangible results. It was said that for many of the men, *'they have felt more useful than they have felt in a long time'* because they could see the fruits of their labour, in the form of posters and leaflets. At the same time, prisoners saw that others would benefit from their work *'we initialised a course and they are benefiting from it, then they gives you a bit of extra smugness if you like'*.

A sense of achievement/pride
<i>Well after the production, there were four of us left from this original script writing group and [Safe Ground] wanted us to help set up the parent craft course and so we kind of set up ... and we was the ones with the ideas of putting the posters up in Wandsworth – it's all our ideas coming out on paper (developer, script group).</i>
<i>Just realising the whole project from writing the script to seeing the film made, it's kind of an achievement, it's something that I was happy to be involved in (developer, script group).</i>

The success of the team and the status that was attached to the whole project had boosted the confidence of two prisoners from the script group. It showed them what they were capable of and instilled in them the belief that they could succeed in other areas:

Increased confidence
<i>There's this thing about working with such a close knit group and having so much money backing us. It gives you more of a confidence within yourself, to know you can do something. There's a lot of money in it and, you know, you can do it well. Yeah, it's given me a lot of confidence with myself and my ability to go on and do whatever I want, you know (developer, script group).</i>

It has already been mentioned that the development process was very much a team enterprise and the opportunity to work with others was seen as valuable because it developed negotiation and liaison skills. A prison staff interviewee, commenting about the progress of a particular inmate, related his improved thinking skills to being part of a team, perhaps for the first time in his life:

Development of teamwork skills
<p><i>I think the skills he developed which came out of his involvement with Safe Ground initially, was he could structure his thought. He, for once in his life, was becoming part of a team that had a function to perform (prison officer, development prison).</i></p> <p><i>Arbitration skills, because when there's a lot of people sitting around all with their own idea, you have to, kind of, be a little diplomatic at times, so that was something that came from that, from the script group (developer, script group).</i></p> <p><i>From a personal point of view I could see that it would help with a person's perception of people around him and how they react, in social interaction (developer, marketing group).</i></p>

Three prisoner interviewees mentioned having acquired marketing, computing, writing and film production skills through their involvement in the programme:

Skill acquisition
<p><i>Yes, I have definitely enhanced skills like computer literacy skills and stuff because there was a lot of stuff to be done on computers (developer, marketing group).</i></p> <p><i>I learnt how to work cameras and, just by watching them, the fellas on the film were showing me 'this is how this works, this is what you use for that', things like that, so I learnt a little bit there (developer, script group).</i></p> <p><i>Just different ways of putting things down on paper, different ways of saying things without going into depth, so basically being blunt, that's what it's like. Looking at different ways of putting a product to somebody so they would be interested in it (developer, marketing group).</i></p>

Two interviewees stated that taking part in the development of the programme had impacted on their family relationships. It gave them an opportunity to explore parenting issues in greater depth and whilst preparing the course, to reflect upon their own family relationships:

Opportunity to reflect on family relationships
<p><i>Then, we had to write a letter. All of us had to write a letter to Frank to Wayne, on a certain thing, but like I started writing a letter and things were coming out as like I was doing the same thing as Frank. I built a wall around myself and I wouldn't let no one in and it was like 'I have got to break that wall down' it was helping me look at it, that's how it was helping me (developer, script group).</i></p>

In addition, some long term effects were reported. After the marketing team had disbanded, one man had been able to take what he learnt and apply his desk top

publishing skills to his every day prison work in the computer shop. Another interviewee believed the whole experience had a motivational effect, in that he had moved closer towards realising his educational ambitions and was taking A levels:

Long term effects

I work in the computer shop, like I say, so I can and I do every day use a computer, so a lot of what I learnt is now transferred into my general everyday work. At the moment it's just been changed to Braille and I am just arranging images for Braille to be put on pages, but up until last week it was desk-top publishing, so we had to be pretty creative anyway. So it did help me a lot with that (developer, marketing group).

Since then I have taken my education forward, I am doing A levels at the moment. From that respect, it has, it's helped me sort of want to achieve my goals and stuff like that (developer, marketing group).

Overall then, the Safe Ground project enabled prisoners to invest their energies in a project which included both educational elements and work experience opportunities. What is more, their efforts were to have a real world application. Knowing that they were creating a needed and usable resource, furnished developers with a sense of pride and achievement. Prisoners felt empowered and more confident as they took part in a democratic, team based, prisoner-led initiative.

2.4 Challenges encountered

Whilst there are clearly benefits to be gained from involving prisoners in programme development, interviewees also signalled a small number of difficulties. These largely related to an external agency coming into prison and attempting to kick start a new initiative. Two prison staff members pointed out that Safe Ground had the immediate disadvantage of being an outsider in an environment which was, by necessity, highly structured and stable. Anything which upset the *status quo* was likely to meet with resistance:

Certainly, you come into a prison establishment and straight away you have got a cultural barrier before anything else comes into it. Certainly, in a place like this, anything new is perceived as threatening and it's actually very difficult to get anything up and running (prison officer, development prison).

However, both interviewees believed that Safe Ground had ultimately overcome this obstacle through perseverance and the fact that the programme had demonstrated its worth:

They have seen inmates come on the course and at the end of the course they go back and they are more thoughtful and responsible adults than maybe the irresponsible person who started the course. They actually see the benefits to the inmates and to the discipline of the prison (governor, development prison).

It was stressed however, that outside agencies must appreciate and work within the parameters of a prison environment. This was raised by two other prison staff interviewees. One highlighted the need for good communication to ensure that prison

officers could be released for meetings and staff cover arranged. This particular interviewee expressed a desire to have been more involved with the programme, but felt he was not always kept informed:

More notice, more planning would have saved 95 per cent of any problems. I mean sometimes, they would turn up at the prison, go in the workshop and both me and [name of prison officer] or one of us at least would have been here and we never even knew they were here. It was just the lads coming back from the workshop to tell us (prison officer, development prison).

The other interviewee felt that Safe Ground needed to acknowledge that within a prison their work was just a small part of the overall regime and that both staff and prisoners may have other priorities:

We are subject to other parts of the regime. We work in the workshop areas and we are just a part of the overall prison system and everybody has demands and that often means that people you need and want aren't always available at the time you want them. Members of staff don't always have the time to put in the effort that's required. You've got a situation where [Safe Ground staff] are very, very enthused people. This was their baby. This was the most important thing in their lives. The problem was, to other people within the prison, it was just a part of that day. It wasn't a big thing. It was a small thing. That caused some frictions (education staff, development prison).

From the perspectives of prisoners, the only difficulties mentioned concerned the team dynamics and that sometimes, certain individuals could dominate proceedings. Also, two interviewees (one prisoner and one member of prison staff) felt that the project did not always have the backing of the prison and it was made difficult for the team to meet and that the project lost momentum during its the latter stages. The prison staff interviewee felt that the whole project could have been promoted more extensively to both staff and prisoners from the outset:

I think initially we would have sold it harder to the staff at [name of prison], because there are people there who ... 'I don't want to get involved with that, its too much work' and whatever, but a lot of people, if you actually told them exactly what it was all about and spent a bit more time doing it, it could have sold it (prison officer, development prison).

Finally, in one prison, a staff interviewee commented that it was a problem getting men involved initially and finding enough prisoners who had the appropriate level of skill.

For outside agencies intending to work in prisons, it is important to recognise the cultural differences which undoubtedly exist between the voluntary sector and a prison regime. With good reason, a prison environment is structured and systemised. It may therefore require careful negotiation to integrate smoothly into the existing regime, so as to minimise disruption and avoid friction. The implementation of initiatives by outside agencies would be assisted by an initial promotion phase, followed by regular communications with prison staff at all levels.

2.5 The value of involving prisoners

This chapter concludes by presenting interviewees' thoughts on the general value of involving prisoners in the production of a parenting programme. Interviewees in both the development and trial prisons were asked to consider whether it would make any difference to the finished programme and whether it was important to involve prisoners.

Most obviously, interviewees commented that inmates were in perhaps the best position to identify the particular problems and feelings associating with being a parent in prison. One of the major advantages, therefore, of involving prisoners in developing a parent programme, was that they possessed an:

- **understanding of parenting within a prison context**

In terms of the final programme, interviewees commented that prisoner input made the programme:

- **more credible**
- **realistic**
- **easier to relate to.**

'Prisoners know what prisoners need' (programme developer) – The input of prisoners to programme was seen as crucial because they had first hand experience of prison life and were therefore able to pinpoint the needs of fathers in this environment. Interviewees believed, therefore, that consultation with the target group would ensure the programme focussed on those problems which were most often encountered by prisoners:

Understanding of parenting within a prison context
<i>It's so vital to anything like this. With things like this, you have always got two sides to it. You are always going to have the academic side of it, those who can put the research together, those who can implement it and do that and do all that sort of stuff, all that goes into a project like this, but you also need the client group involved as well. They are the ones who are going to be benefiting from the course, they are the ones who are going to be able to tell the people who are putting the course together, what the problems are of living within families where there is more crime occurring. There are more teenage pregnancies. There is more drug taking going on, there are lower levels of education, and these are frustrations that we face. These are the problems we face. These are the roles we have in our family (teacher, Family Man).</i>

In terms of the video, prisoner interviewees maintained that using inmates as actors added a touch of realism to the production. After all, they know how it feels to serve a sentence and how prisoners act. Having this direct personal experience to draw from was thought to make the video more genuine because the actors were not just playing a part:

Well, the difference it makes is obviously they know how a prisoner feels about his family. Whereas if you just get actors from the outside, they don't know

what that prisoner thinks. They don't know what goes through his head. Whereas a prisoner does, because he has been through ... he has lived here, he knows exactly how he is thinking, so yes, I think better to have the prisoners do the acting than outside actors because they make it real (participant, Family Man).

Yes, you couldn't get a big Hollywood actor and say do that. They would do a good job because they were a professional actor but their heart wouldn't be in it. The understanding wouldn't be in it. They have never experienced a feeling like that. Like, I was talking to one of my pad mates once and I goes even though you can be with thousand inmates, every night when that door shuts you know you that you can be in a 26 man dorm and on a night, when that door shuts you are alone, do you know what I mean ... but I am surrounded by all these lads. I have got lads there, lads there, up and down, I am still alone at night when that door shuts, that final clunk you are on your own then (participant, Fathers Inside).

Interviewees concurred that because prisoners had conceived the video storyline, taken on performing roles and worked on the programme image, the resulting course was one with added credibility, 'people take more notice when it's prisoners doing it for other prisoners'. Prisoners were also thought to be less resistant towards a concept generated by their own 'peer group', as opposed to one made by 'the system'. The following comments illustrate this point.

More credible

Well, it could have been normal actors, but the fact that ... this is about prisoners and because prisoners have done it, I think – well I can only speak for myself on this – I think I appreciate that more than I would have done say if it had been actors, to actually know, especially I am a prisoner myself and to see other prisoners doing it. So yes, it means more to me I suppose (participant, Fathers Inside).

I don't know really, because at the beginning you are always suspicious whether it's just going to be more brownie points for the prison to be honest like, but once I actually watched it and I realised that it was something that the lads had come up with, I was quite impressed (participant, Family Man).

If you're running a course for prisoners you need feedback to know how to get their attention. They'll leave if they're not interested (programme developer).

Furthermore, the input of prisoners ensured that the content and style of the video was true to life. Thus, because of its origins, the course had built in street-cred and the slogan 'made for prisoners by prisoners' may prove to be an effective recruitment strategy. Indeed, the video was commended for its portrayal of prisoner mentality:

More realistic

Well prisoners can relate more to a prisoner can't they than they can officers or actors or people who don't really know. It did have a lot of prisoner mentality and attitude in it (participant, Fathers Inside).

Well it made it more realistic, from first hand knowledge, what things are like, what visits are like, what phone calls are like, people from the outside would have no idea really (participant, Family Man).

An accurate reflection of prison life also helped course participants to relate more easily to the central characters. Everything they saw on the video was real – the cells, the prisoners, the prison officers. Further still, the script used the everyday discourse of prisoners, their slang, their phrases. One interviewee, therefore, hinted that the film had a particular resonance with prisoners because it depicted their circumstances in an honest way:

Easier to relate to

If you see programmes like 'The Bill' and 'Eastenders' and all that, its just built on a hearsay thing of what goes on in everyday life, but the filming was done in prisons. It's proper cells, it's proper officers and it's proper prisoners, you know what I mean, so you can only sit down and say, 'well, fxxx me, it's the truth' – it's the truth looking at you (programme developer).

Well they are actually prisoners, so there's no better person to do a prison scene than a prisoner and I think you can relate to it more. They know the slang, they know the way you talk, they know how the prison works and you can just tell that (participant, Family Man).

The fact that prisoners could relate so strongly to the video caused some to reflect upon their own actions and in some cases adopt a new perspective. Perhaps the most powerful illustration of this came from a prisoner who, up until the course, had been estranged from his two oldest sons:

I know this might seem strange, but because of that programme and because of that course, it was like I was outside me. I was looking at what I had done and I thought blimey, when I seen that course, I thought 'that's me'. ... It was really weird. I thought 'that's me doing this, it's me' and I gone straight out and phoned my kids and I learnt off that course. I am grateful for that course, for what I have learnt (participant, Fathers Inside).

Thus, as a direct consequence of the course, this particular prisoner had been prompted to re-establish communications with his children.

Interviewees also considered prisoner input as valuable because it gave prisoners ownership of the course and three interviewees suggested that those in the audience may be motivated to initiate similar projects, having seen the efforts of fellow inmates: 'You'd think if they can do it, then I'm sure we could do it'. Another inmate felt that the video represented an important showpiece for what prisoners could achieve and that despite being 'inside' they experienced the same feelings and were equally important members of society:

When people talk about prisoners they don't think they are capable of doing anything, because they are prisoners, they are criminals, but prisoners doing that, it just goes to show that they are still human beings. They still have feelings. Just because they are in prison that doesn't make them any different from any other human being and that did touch me, that meant a lot to me (participant, Fathers Inside).

It should be noted that three interviewees (two prisoners and one teacher) asserted that prisoner involvement '*didn't make a difference really*' to the end product or to their viewing experience. Finally, just one interviewee (prison staff) expressed concerns that a prisoner-produced resource may be slightly 'inferior', in the sense that it may fall short of professional standards.

In summary, it has already been reported that those involved in course development gained personally from the experience. However, a prisoner-generated course was also believed to have more broader implications. Any commercial product needs to consider its customer – what do they need, what do they want, what appeals to them, what will they respond to? The answers can only be found by consulting the target audience. Safe Ground did this – they listened to prisoners, learnt about their families, their problems and identified what their needs were. As a result, the course was deemed to be more realistic, easier to relate to and in the long run, more credible for participants.

SUMMARY OF DEVELOPMENT

- All interviewees agreed that there was a need for parenting/family relationships education in prison. Some based this belief on the observed 'selfish' attitudes of inmates and the need for them to consider their families, as well as themselves. Others suggested that prisoners were a particularly vulnerable group, due to a lack of positive parenting role models. Parenting education was also deemed necessary because it could help break the cycle of offending which often runs in families. Lastly, interviewees thought that family relationships education could help preserve family links whilst prisoners are serving a sentence.
- Prisoners were pleased to be involved in developing the course, because it gave them something constructive to do with their time and they were producing materials which would have a long term application within the prison system.
- The development process, within both the script group and marketing team, was one which encouraged equal contributions from all members – as a result, the end product was a culmination of group effort and democratic discussion.
- Through the experience course developers gained a sense of pride, improved their team working skills, grew in confidence and also acquired some specific skills in the areas of marketing, computing and film production. After their time in a development role, some prisoners were more motivated to continue their education.

- The development of the course did not proceed without some difficulties. Interviewees acknowledged the resistance encountered by outside agencies wanting to launch new initiatives within the structure of a prison system. They stressed that parties must appreciate the different priorities at play and work within the boundaries of the regime. For such initiatives to succeed it is important to have the full backing of the prison and to promote the initiatives to all staff involved.
- The contribution of prisoners to making the programme was seen as beneficial for a number of reasons. Firstly, prisoners were more likely to possess an understanding of parenting in a prison setting and they could therefore pinpoint the specific needs of this target group. Because of this, their input made the final product more credible and realistic. Hence, those viewing the materials were able to relate to its content.

Chapter 3

Teaching the pilot programme

Introduction

After the initial development phase it was decided that the course should be piloted at nine trial prisons by prison education staff. Up until this point, the course had been delivered by Safe Ground personnel and it was important to establish whether or not the materials could be used by teachers unfamiliar with the course. Trialling the programme served three functions in all. Firstly, it tested the usability of the course materials – could teachers pick up the manual and deliver the course with relative ease? Secondly, piloting the course across the country would determine whether the materials were relevant and applicable on a national scale. Thirdly, prisoners who took part in the trials would receive positive outcomes, in the form of accreditation.

The family relationships and parenting programme was piloted between spring and autumn 2001 and researchers visited five of the nine institutions during the period between April and October. The sample of five prisons were selected following discussions with Safe Ground and the Prison Service. They were chosen for reasons of timing, geographical location and the decision to remove young offender institutions (and their unique context) from the evaluation.

This section of the report, concentrates on the perceptions of education staff who agreed to pilot the programme. The chapter discusses:

- **the production of teaching materials**
- **training and continuing support for teachers**
- **the teachers and their prior experience of drama**
- **views on teaching the course**
- **relevance of the course to Social and Life Skills units**
- **teachers' overall views.**

It is important to bear in mind that, throughout the trial period, Safe Ground carried out their own evaluation of the course's effectiveness, and the course materials were subject to a continual process of revision and refinement. Consequently, during the second round of interviews with Safe Ground personnel, they were able to confirm that many comments and suggestions made by prison education staff had been incorporated in the production of the final teachers' pack. The final pack itself, however, was unavailable for researchers to see before their evaluation report was completed.

3.1 The production of teaching materials

In terms of meeting the contractual obligation to produce the specified 'Key Deliverables' (Specification of Services p. 1 and p. 14), both the video and early drafts of lesson plans had been produced by the end of Year 1. The quality of the

video was particularly commended by prison education staff, who appreciated Safe Ground's professional expertise. While there was recognition that '*potentially ... the teaching material, lesson plans and video ... will be of a very high order*', there was concern at the amount of time required to produce the final version of the teaching manual which had meant that the contract had had to be extended. According to the Specification of Services, the Project Teacher's Responsibilities (p. 9) include 'advising on the content of the New Programme to ensure it meets the learning outcomes of Unit 2 and 3 of the Prison Service Life Skills Course'. Thus, Safe Ground were expected to draw upon the specialist skills of prison education staff in this specifically pedagogical area, but it seems that, in terms of the timescale envisaged for the production of the course materials, this process took longer than originally anticipated.

3.2 Training and continuing support for teachers

Bearing in mind that, in the interests of '*sustainability*', the course was intended to be accessible to non-drama teachers, Safe Ground held a two-day training course which offered prospective teachers of the course the opportunity to learn five '*generic techniques*', such as role play, for teaching drama. According to Safe Ground, there were two main priorities. The first was to instil confidence in the use of these techniques and familiarity with the associated '*jargon*'; for many prisoners it was the use of drama which gave the course its distinctive appeal, and its credibility would depend on the self-assurance of the teachers in its deployment. The second was to show non-drama teachers how to '*pull learning points out of an improvisation*', in order to ensure that the activities were closely related to the stipulated learning outcomes of the course.

As the course was new, time was also spent in discussing the practicalities of introducing it into education departments in different types of institutions. Participants '*pooled*' potential difficulties, and were felt to have appreciated the opportunity for peer support.

In retrospect, Safe Ground staff considered that although they had succeeded in generating enthusiasm, the course itself was too short. They felt it would have been helpful to have had enough time for teachers to experience the parenting course as prisoners would themselves, and to have included a 'teaching practice', in which they experienced teaching the course in a 'safe' environment, with a group of carefully selected prisoners. Although team teaching occurred in some institutions, it was also felt that practice in this area would benefit teachers who usually worked one-to-one with their students. If a week could be set aside for training, time could also be made available for review and reflection while the training course was in progress.

While teachers had enjoyed the course and it had certainly '*fired them up*', there was no preparation for '*the amount of paperwork*' involved, or any guidance on administration of the assessment requirements for either of the qualifications. In some cases, this aspect of the course had caused considerable stress, coming as it did on top of teachers' regular workload. Many said they would have liked advice on how to overcome specific difficulties in terms of teaching and administration, which were related to the fact that the course was so intense. It is to be hoped that many of these concerns will have been resolved by the recent extension of the duration of the course

into three weeks, and the comprehensive revisions to both the course materials and the assessment system.

Teachers generally agreed that, apart from familiarising them with the Safe Ground approach, the training course had been a valuable opportunity to meet education staff from different types of institutions, to share ideas and benefit from an atmosphere of mutual support. In some cases, this had continued into the period when they were teaching the course in their respective institutions.

There was considerable praise from a number of teachers for the continuing support offered by Safe Ground during the teaching of the course. While the prevailing feeling was that they must *'iron out the problems for themselves'*, many teachers, nevertheless, found it reassuring to know that Safe Ground were always at the other end of the telephone, and that if they had any queries there was a ready response: *'it's nice to know they are there'*.

Overall, teachers had appreciated the training course as an insight into the potential of drama as medium for teaching social and life skills, but would have liked guidance on administration of the assessment requirements. Safe Ground themselves would have preferred to have extended the training course over a week, in order to give teachers the opportunities both to experience the course as participants, and to practise teaching it to a group of selected prisoners in a safe environment.

3.3 The teachers and their prior experience of drama

Just three of the ten teachers involved in teaching the pilot programme were already experienced drama teachers. One individual, for example, taught Key Skills (KS) through drama, and another used drama as a tool for teaching social and personal development. A Social and Life Skills (SLS) co-ordinator who was acting as internal verifier pointed out that teachers in prisons *'have to be generalists as well as specialists in order to cover for each other'*. Those who were not drama teachers were often experienced in the teaching of Social and Life Skills and the sensitivity of approach such a responsibility requires. Teachers who were already teaching drama agreed that while that aspect of the training course had not been personally relevant, it was a good grounding in *'acquisition of techniques'*, and they had appreciated an insight into the specific content of the parenting programme. For others, it had been a source of *'good ideas'* and an opportunity to broaden their repertoire.

Teachers with no drama experience were generally enthusiastic about the skills they had acquired; in one case, this provided the confidence to teach the course rather than advertise for a specialist drama teacher. One interviewee noted that experience in teaching Social and Life Skills was at least as important as expertise in drama, because of the delicacy and emotional resilience required to handle potentially explosive role play situations (e.g. such as the custody of a child, where a range of intensely experienced and often deeply painful individual emotions could be at stake).

It should be noted that the three drama teachers were, in fact, based at three different prisons. Thus, overall, the majority of prisons included in the evaluation had an experienced drama teacher involved in the trial. To an extent, this limits the capacity of the evaluation to fully consider whether or not the course can be used by non-

drama teachers. Furthermore, those that lacked drama experience had attended the pre-programme training, which would have exposed and prepared them for a drama-based course. However, during the interviews, experience of teaching social and life skills to prisoners, and all the sensitivity that that implies, emerged as the most fundamental requirement for any teacher of the Safe Ground programme. This was seen to be at least as essential to the effectiveness of the course as familiarity with specific drama techniques.

3.4 Views on teaching the course

The approach to teaching the course was seen to vary between institutions. While a minority of teachers said they had followed the manual closely because it was a pilot, the majority were more selective. In some cases, the way the course was timetabled affected the amount of material that could be fitted in; this meant that certain activities had to be left out or covered in less depth. In one institution teachers had had to ‘*chop and change*’ because the lesson plans were designed to last two hours and their sessions lasted three hours each. This section will consider teachers’ views on the following aspects of the programme:

- **Were the course materials easy to use?**
- **The video**
- **The use of drama**
- **The presentation**
- **The teachers manual and portfolios**
- **Finding a suitable space**
- **Timetabling**

3.4.1 Were the course materials easy to use?

As explained in Chapter 1, it is important to remember that, throughout the fieldwork period for this research, Safe Ground were in the process of revising and refining the course materials, so many of the teachers’ comments and suggestions here are deemed to have been incorporated in the final pack.

Teachers repeatedly emphasised the need for experience in Social and Life Skills teaching, and extreme delicacy in working with emotionally vulnerable inmates. As one interviewee observed ‘*unlocking the doors*’, in the psychological sense, can place you on ‘*dangerous, dangerous ground*’ and you need to know exactly what you are doing. Another warned of the serious consequences of using drama for a teacher unfamiliar with dealing with ‘*very, very sensitive issues*’:

... you can end up putting people in situations where they are talking about things that they are not prepared for, or the group isn't prepared for, or if you haven't explained an activity properly, you could have a man thinking about something which is very, very personal, very difficult for him, and you say 'OK, now we are going to share that', so that could be very, very dangerous or very damaging to that individual, so the negative things for me is usually when things haven't been explained properly or possible outcomes haven't been anticipated.

A flexible approach was crucial to allow an experienced teacher to judge on the appropriateness of an activity, and if necessary *'to find an alternative ... they're comfortable with'*. One interviewee stressed the importance *'of ensuring that people in the group understand that they have control over what they put in'*, and that they know they do not have to participate in an activity or share any personal feelings unless they feel comfortable to do so.

In some prisons, teachers normally tended to work with inmates one-to-one. Safe Ground staff pointed out that the course was more appropriate for those non-drama teachers who were experienced in working with groups. There was general agreement among teachers that if both Key Skills and Social and Life Skills were being taught, the course needed two teachers to share the workload, partly in order to help individual participants while the course was in progress, partly in order to carry out the individual assessments for two certificates at the same time, and also because teaching the course, *per se*, could be emotionally exhausting. At the same time, however, the teachers concerned needed to agree on their approach to the course material and to be very clear on one another's roles. In at least two cases, one teacher had the main responsibility for the drama work, while the other led on Key Skills. In one of the observed sessions, for example, one teacher led a series of games and then a group discussion. After the break, the other teacher gave a more traditional *'lesson'* on writing a formal letter, using a whiteboard and both teachers then helped the men to write their own versions, either individually or in pairs. It was felt that well-established rapport underpinning a complementary relationship made sessions *'fairly seamless'* in terms of continuity.

3.4.2 The video

The video was universally commended by education staff for its professionalism and also for the credibility it derived from the involvement of prisoners in its production. In one of the observed sessions, an experienced drama teacher facilitated a role play based on the video involving four prisoners. Two men took the parts of Frank and his partner and then the sequence was repeated with one of the other two men standing behind each one, improvising their respective inner feelings to highlight the contrast between what the characters said and what they actually felt. The room was silent; the men involved were totally absorbed and those who were watching gave them their undivided attention. From the discussion afterwards, it appeared that many of the men in the room could empathise with such a lack of communication. Section 4.6 presents participants' thoughts on the course video.

3.4.3 The use of drama

Teachers were unanimous in their recommendation of the value of the drama. It was *'refreshing'* to have an alternative approach, and they agreed it was a very powerful medium for learning parenting skills. During another observed session, everyone, including the researcher and a prison officer who was acting as a participant, sat in a circle, and two of the men role played a father trying to find out from his child whether he had been stealing. Both men were totally immersed in their roles, and the rest gave their full concentration to what was happening, even though the teacher asked the men to repeat the scene several times. This led to a lively discussion of the characters' respective feelings, and the most effective way for the father to handle the

situation. Section 4.8 discusses in greater depth the value of drama from a participants' perspective.

3.4.4 The presentation

Both teachers and prisoners felt that the presentation at the end of the course was more than worth all the hard work it required to make it happen. One member of Safe Ground explained that the structure of the pack reflected a development towards the presentation, and emphasised the importance of the teacher's confidence in the use of drama techniques in order to inspire sufficient confidence in the men. The experience of the presentation, and the sense of achievement it brought, had often uplifted teachers as much as the men themselves. One teacher, for example, for whom the course and associated administrative difficulties had been particularly hard work, was on *'a complete high'* after the presentation. The other staff, including the governor, were so impressed that they had asked her to run it again, and she had arranged to run two more courses within the next six months.

3.4.5 The teachers' manual and the portfolios

Negative comments related to the content and presentation of material in the portfolios and the manual, and the mapping of the Key Skills requirements onto the Social and Life Skills Units. The manual was unanimously voted as *'too long-winded'* and experienced teachers also felt it was *'too prescriptive'*. There was a compelling need for *'flexibility'* so that the time needed for any one session could be adapted to suit individual prison regimes and classroom contexts on particular days. One experienced drama teacher highlighted Safe Ground's dilemma in writing for a variety of teachers with different skills; she could see that *'the fact that it is so rigid and it's pre-set ... for some people would be an absolute godsend'*, but for her, as for other experienced drama teachers, *'the bare bones of the lesson'* would be much more helpful, leaving them free to develop it themselves. Another believed the *'pre-set'* material should be included as an option for those who felt less confident. Some of the activities were felt to be inappropriate for using with adults, for example, or in their assumption of prisoners' familiarity with traditional family structures. Several teachers asked for resources to be supplied with the pack to save valuable time spent producing their own flashcards or photocopies.

According to Safe Ground, the final version of the pack will now include an introduction intended to outline the philosophy behind the approach of the course through drama, and an explanation of the mapping of Key Skills onto the original material. The pack will also include *'a countdown, week by week, from two weeks before the course starts, to help teachers plan and set things up in advance'*.

Safe Ground staff stressed the importance of making sure that *'the script we provide them with, and the teachers' manual, is something they feel they can absorb and use, rather than literally follow.'* Accordingly, the new teachers' manual is *'lesson-based'*. Each lesson plan is divided into two sections: the first is concerned with preparation, and relates the aims for each lesson to the requirements for the SLS and the KS certificates. The second contains instructions on how to deliver each activity during the lesson so that there is a clear progression related to a specific theme. At the end of the pack a *'model portfolio'* provides *'model answers'*. This has the

advantage of offering teachers the opportunity to extract a single lesson as a self-contained unit for their own purposes, and thus enhances the sustainability of the course through its capacity to be used as a *'flexible resource'*.

Safe Ground reported that the portfolio had been through an *'organic'* process of development before the final version was achieved. This involved *'listening'* to individual prisoners, in order to shape the material into the form which would *'represent their sort of interests'* and use of language. Partly in response to criticism from prisoners, who disliked the fact that some of the material in the portfolios was photocopied, the portfolios are now produced on good quality paper. This improvement is also intended to please teachers, who had found the task of photocopying in preparation for lessons particularly time-consuming. Safe Ground expressed their appreciation of the support and suggestions they received from teachers in revising the course. At least one had written a *'detailed evaluation'*, and another had offered to read through and comment on the revised version.

3.4.6 Finding a suitable space

The space available for teaching the course varied between individual institutions. In some cases, teachers had access to the prison chapel, but in others the only room available might be very cramped, and uncongenial for creating an atmosphere which encouraged prisoners to relax and express themselves. One interviewee outlined her *'ideal'* space:

... have a big open space for doing the drama, with an adjoining classroom where you could actually go into a formal setting, where they could sit down at tables and you could actually do some teaching ... actually do some class teaching, then help the individuals and do it more formally.

3.4.7 Timetabling

Many teachers found it very exhausting to cover the content of the course and the assessment requirements for both certificates within the space of ten days. They also agreed that although the intensive approach was beneficial in offering the men a *'safe'* opportunity to focus, it put too much physical and emotional pressure on many individuals, who often needed longer to come to terms with painful feelings which may have been buried for a considerable period of time. In addition, the task of completing the portfolios to the required standard within such a short space of time made no allowances for the range of ability among many groups of students, or for the fact that some inmates might not have engaged in any written activities since they left school. Consequently, the final version of the course had been designed to last three weeks, in order to accommodate teachers' and prisoners' needs.

Overall, teachers were enthusiastic about the parenting programme's potential and felt that most of the difficulties they had experienced stemmed from the fact that the course was still in the process of evolution. The reservations they expressed related mainly to the course materials and to the brevity of the course duration. Many of them had contributed comments and suggestions for the process of revision, and it was widely believed that the final pack would be much more attuned to teachers' and prisoners' needs. As experienced teachers, interviewees generally felt that teaching

the course would be considerably easier the second time round because they would be familiar with the course approach and content.

3.5 Relevance of the course to Social and Life Skills units

During the interviews, teachers were asked whether they felt the Learning Outcomes and Assessment Criteria of the Social and Life Skills unit (SLS), Parenting and Family Ties were achieved by following the teaching material, lesson plans, student portfolio and video. Education staff generally agreed that this was the case. Some expressed regret that it had taken so long to map the learning outcomes for Key Skills onto the original course. The aim for the updated version was to ensure that a single activity, such as a group discussion could be used as evidence for both qualifications.

Although they all had serious reservations about the workload at the stage before the pack was comprehensively revised, ensuring that enough evidence was collected did not appear to be a problem in itself for experienced teachers. Education departments varied in their approach to the level of the course. Accreditation for Social and Life Skills was available at three specific levels: entry level; level 1; and level 2. Safe Ground had *'pitched'* the parenting programme at level 1. In one prison, this was seen to be appropriate for most of their short-stay inmates because they could reach the level within the time of their stay. In another institution, the teacher had set the course for level 2 to suit the level of her particular group of students. She did this by covering the material in more depth and by asking the men to produce longer pieces of written work. Elsewhere, a teacher explained that every few days she would *'recap'* on everything covered so far, look at the learning outcomes and the assessment criteria, and then ask the men, *'right, how much of this do you feel you have done?'* If any of them felt that they had not fully understood the content, she would spend some time discussing it, and then ask them to write it out and stick it in their portfolios.

3.6 Teachers' overall views

In spite of difficulties intrinsic to the task of covering the sheer volume of work within a course perceived to be of disproportionately short duration, teachers were unreservedly enthusiastic about the potential of the course content and approach. The pack was seen as *'a source of excellent ideas ... to dip into'*, and as a very creative approach *'which gets so much out of them'*. Some teachers valued its uniqueness as a course that had already been *'written for you'* with prepared lesson plans and activities. Most teachers believed that the teaching, as with any other education programme, would be easier the second time round. The extensive revisions to the pack, and their own familiarity with the materials, would enable them to *'pace themselves'* according to the needs of the individual teaching situation.

Having witnessed such a strikingly positive impact on the men, education staff were very enthusiastic about the parenting programme's potential. In spite of the problems associated with its development, it was *'a breath of fresh air'* and very definitely worthwhile. One experienced (non-drama) teacher said the course was *'absolutely wonderful'* and that she had *'loved'* teaching it. Significantly, some interviewees also affirmed that teaching the course had made them reappraise their own approach; it had made them rethink their role as a teacher and a parent, and had been a valuable

experience in this respect. Another non-drama teacher summarised the experience of many, for her the course had:

... a lot to recommend it ... very thoughtful ... you can feel the men had had a lot of input ... and there's also quite an academic strength to it ... but be prepared for some real highs and lows.

This section has considered teachers' views on the experience of teaching the course. The next chapter section will discuss the experiences of prisoners who completed the programme.

SUMMARY OF TEACHING THE PILOT PROGRAMME

- Teachers had appreciated the training course as an insight into the potential of drama as medium for teaching social and life skills, but would have liked guidance on administration of the assessment requirements. Safe Ground themselves would have preferred to have extended the training course over a week, in order to give teachers the opportunities both to experience the course as participants, and to practise teaching it to a group of selected prisoners in a safe environment.
- The majority of prisons involved in the evaluation had the benefit of an experienced drama teacher. To an extent, this limits the capacity of the evaluation to fully consider whether or not the course can be used by non-drama teachers. Furthermore, those that lacked drama experience had attended the pre-programme training, which would have exposed and prepared them for a drama-based course. However, during the interviews, experience of teaching social and life skills to prisoners, and all the sensitivity that that implies, emerged as the most fundamental requirement for any teacher of the Safe Ground programme. This was seen to be at least as essential to the effectiveness of the course as familiarity with specific drama techniques.
- Overall, teachers were enthusiastic about the parenting programme's potential and felt that most of the difficulties they had experienced stemmed from the fact that the course was still in the process of evolution. The reservations they expressed related mainly to the course materials and to the brevity of the course duration. Many of them had contributed comments and suggestions for the process of revision, and it was widely believed that the final pack would be much more attuned to teachers' and prisoners' needs. As experienced teachers, interviewees generally felt that teaching the course would be considerably easier the second time round because they would be familiar with the course approach and content.

Chapter 4

Participants' experiences of the pilot programme

Introduction

This chapter deals with a wide range of issues relating to participants' experience of the course as it was trialled at five prisons. It considers the positive dimensions, those aspects which were well received, as well as those deemed more problematic. In the main, it is the prisoners' views which are covered, but where appropriate, comments from teachers, prisoner officers and Safe Ground staff are also included.

Prisoners were initially asked about their expectations of the course and whether, in reality, the course deviated from these preconceptions. On a general level, they were asked to summarise what they remembered most from the whole experience and then specify the most enjoyable and least enjoyable activities. The interviews then probed deeper to ascertain prisoners' views on particular course features, namely the written work, the video, the use of drama to teach parenting/family relationships and where appropriate, the involvement of prison officers.

After presenting participants' thoughts on the actual course, the chapter moves on to present participants' views of the course, comparing it with their previous educational experiences. Interviewees were also asked whether they would be prepared to recommend the course to others and finally, they were asked to make suggestions for improving the course.

Participants' experiences of the course are therefore reported under the following headings:

- **Reasons for involvement**
- **What participants remembered most**
- **Most enjoyable activities and useful activities**
- **Less enjoyable or least useful aspects of the course**
- **Written work**
- **The video**
- **The involvement of prison officers**
- **The value of drama**
- **Comparison with other courses**
- **Recommending the course**
- **Suggestions for improvement.**

4.1 Reasons for involvement

Prisoners were made aware of the course through a number of different avenues. Eleven participants were informed by a course teacher. Six men in two prisons were already involved in a drama class and wished to pursue more drama related activities. Three men were attending another parenting course and again wanted to build on this area of interest. Another three men had read about the course in promotional material in the form of leaflets and a prison newsletter. At one prison, the officers involved had helped promote the course on the wings and draw in men that were neither in work or education. At another prison, teachers reported that about half the men were referred from sentence planning.

In terms of future recruitment, a teacher interviewee suspected that the pilot programme would generate enough interest amongst other prisoners, for men to enquire about courses themselves. At another prison, where men had been interviewed briefly to ascertain their suitability for the course, an assessor recommended a more rigorous process. Specifically, they thought the selection procedure could take account of men's literacy levels, so that those who could realistically meet the assessment criteria would be selected. At the same time though, the interviewee recognised that this would exclude less able men who could still benefit from the parenting component.

The prime motivation for attending the course amongst participants was a desire to acquire or improve parenting skills, as expressed by half the men interviewed:

Well initially I just thought OK, I am here in prison and I am not doing nothing much really, so the least I could do is to do anything that could possibly help me to be a better person on the whole and I thought the course would possibly help me to be a better father (participant, Fathers Inside).

Tips on how to be father really, because like I say, I haven't actually been a father to my son yet. This is a quite a big step, because when I came into jail I was a drug addict and now I am going out a father, do you know what I mean? So just help really, pick up on a few things (participant, Fathers Inside).

Two individuals were specifically attracted by the drama component, whilst two others were keen to take part in an accredited course. Two interviewees thought the course might help their confidence grow, through performing in front of others and working as a team. Two men signed up for the course with an open mind and were curious as to what it could offer them. Finally, two interviewees admitted that a place on the course simply gave them something to do with their time.

Interviewees were asked whether they harboured any pre-course concerns. Of the ten men who reported some apprehension, most commonly their fears related to the demands of a drama-based course. Some felt nervous or embarrassed at the prospect of having to speak in front of an audience, others were just less confident because drama was new to them:

When we got there it was all role acting, but that's the only problem there really but then only to start off with. It was only the first couple of days and then after that it turned out OK. What started off as embarrassment turned

out to be funny, you know what I mean, so through that we learnt (participant, Fathers Inside).

Generally though, these fears subsided as the course progressed and men felt more comfortable with the group. Four prisoners spoke of other concerns that they had prior to the course starting. One man hoped that the course would respect his confidentiality as he was not particularly willing to discuss his family with other inmates. In retrospect however, he was able to let his guard down as the course '*wasn't an intrusive course*'. Another prisoner was worried about the potential for conflict as people exchanged different viewpoints on parenting. Again though, his fears proved to be unfounded as any disagreements which did arise were said to be dealt with well. Finally one man was just worried because he did not know what to expect and another thought his concentration span may let him down.

Sixteen participants (just over half) found the reality of the course to be different from what they had expected. All but four, (who were surprised by the amount of written work) found it to be different in a beneficial way. Four interviewees thought the course went much deeper than anticipated, adding that the content was meaningful and that it covered the whole family. Others commented that they had gained more from the experience, had more fun and thought the approach was more positive than they had initially expected.

To maximise recruitment rates, therefore, it is important to outline the full scope of the course, as well as address any pre-course concerns. Potential recruits need to be aware of all the different areas touched upon, that the course is accredited and that based on the testimonies of past participants, the course is fun and upbeat. Meanwhile, the drama approach, whilst a selling point amongst some participants, may discourage others – teachers should therefore explain the amount of drama involved, the benefits of using drama to look at family relationships and parenting and that ultimately, participants are free to choose how much or how little drama they take part in.

4.2 What participants remembered most

In order to identify the highlights of the course, interviewees were asked what they remembered most about the experience. On the whole, their responses referred to positive features, with particular reference to:

- **the inclusion of drama** (7)
- **the 'Blinder' video** (4)
- **team work** (4)
- **particular course activities e.g. coverage of different parenting styles.**

Given the high profile of **drama** within the course, it is not surprising that it was nominated as its most salient feature (mentioned by seven participants). The reasoning behind the nomination was that drama had made the learning process easier and more enjoyable. Section 4.8 discusses in more detail the value of drama in teaching parenting and family relationship skills.

For four interviewees, the course **video** was particularly notable, largely because of its relevance to their lives and the fact that they were able to relate closely to its theme. Some prisoners felt as though they were looking into a mirror and seeing their own thoughts played out in front of them:

I did see myself in the video, because you can't help but close yourself off in these places (participant, Family Man).

The thing that stuck out more than anything was the Blinder video. Frank was there and he was all depressed and he was staying away from everything. He was blacking everyone out and not realising as well and to see that, which I have seen many times while I have been in prison, people like that. It's just purely selfish and that, but that's what stuck out more than anything, because I have seen that so many times before (participant, Family Man).

The third most remembered feature (four nominations) was the way in which the course enabled participants to gell together as a group. Men were surprised that, although participants were drawn from different wings of the prison, they were able to function successfully as a **team** and as a result, a sense of unity emerged:

Everyone was together and that's what stuck out, the way everyone was pulled together and we all worked together to like get... it wasn't the best outcome we had – the play we put forward, but it was like a team effort where everyone put into it but it did come together in the end and it did turn out alright (participant, Family Man).

Ten interviewees mentioned specific parts of the course content as particularly memorable. For three it was information on different parenting styles which stood out, largely because they were unaware of the distinctions (permissive, authoritarian, etc). Two interviewees cited the custody court scene, although for one individual this was remembered in a negative light as he felt the activity was upsetting for some participants because of their related personal experiences. Others found the family dimension of the course notable, as they could now appreciate a wider viewpoint and consider the impact of their custody from the perspective of their families. Lastly, in terms of course content one man singled out the family tree exercise, as it had led him to discover more about his family history and two interviewees recollected the end presentation as the most prominent feature of the course.

Overall then, for a third of interviewees it was the approach of the course which stood out in their memories – they recalled, in particular, the use of drama and the fact that the course was team based. Both these 'process' dimensions are perhaps rare in educational contexts, at least, those experienced by the prisoners and for that reason they had a particular salience. At the same time, half the interviewees nominated aspects of the course 'content' as being especially memorable – either because it was new knowledge e.g. different parenting styles, or because it struck a chord with them e.g. the 'Blinder' video.

4.3 Most enjoyable and useful activities

In an attempt to home in further on the most popular and successful activities, researchers questioned interviewees as to what they found the most enjoyable or helpful parts of the course. The most frequently nominated activities were:

- **the drama** (7)
- **video** (6)
- **the whole course** (4)
- **story of the selfish giant** (3)
- **letter writing** (3)

In terms of **drama**, interviewees mentioned having liked the role play component because it allowed them to look through another persons eyes and it was good fun. They also took pride in the final presentation:

The final presentation that was top stuff that ... like everyone was nervous and that, but in the end it all come through and it was a lot better than what we had rehearsed. So we only had like a day and a half to like rehearse it and do it. So, it come together really good that (participant, Family Man).

The **video** was rated as useful because it looked at how to manage a visit and get the most out of limited time. One man found the advice on writing things down beforehand especially helpful, because it ensured you said everything you needed to.

Three prisoners valued the story of the **Selfish Giant** because it was emotive and had encouraged them to evaluate their own selfish behaviour:

About the Selfish Giant, putting up barriers and when I stood back and looked at it, that's exactly what I had been doing and I had not let me kids come to see me (participant, Family Man).

I thought like the Selfish Giant, what a story, cor that's fantastic. I want a copy of that and I am going to send that to my children. Why it's so sad at the end, isn't it – you have to read it. I was nearly crying ... you know what I mean. She had to read it to a guy that couldn't read, so she had to read it and it really touches the heart that one doesn't it, you couldn't have picked a better one. It certainly gets the old emotions going that one (participant, Fathers Inside).

Sessions on grammar and **letter writing** were welcomed by three interviewees as this was an area they had previously struggled with. Once their skills had been refreshed, they felt better equipped to express themselves in writing:

That letter writing, that's going to stand out. I have never been too clever at that, like now I can sort of be more involved with my children now I can do that (participant, Fathers Inside).

I am like 30 now and I haven't done stuff like that for ages and it's like where it says use capital letters and lower case letters, remember where to use them. Well, since I have been in here I don't write joined up, I just write in capitals,

which of course is useful in the sense of it's got me back to doing joined up writing properly, instead of this writing in capitals. So it's kind of made me want to write properly and we had to read books as well, which I don't think I have read a book for ages, so it's useful in that way too (participant, Fathers Inside).

Other parts of the course which were nominated as useful or enjoyable by at least one interviewee were sessions on:

- Child development
- Children's rights
- Parent's rights
- Writing vows to a child
- Child illness
- Parenting styles
- Writing a children's story
- Dealing with children's behaviour
- Communicating with children
- Court scene
- Learning about the history of the programme.

More broadly, at least one interviewee also mentioned having enjoyed discussion groups, seeing peoples' confidence grow during the course, the team work and learning to consider situations from the viewpoint of others.

Again then, the drama dimension and the course video took poll positions in participants' ranking of enjoyability. Like the video, the story of the Selfish Giant made a strong impression because prisoners could relate to its central message and it was pertinent to their own lives. The materials, issues and scenarios used in the course seem to show a close correspondence to the lifestyles and concerns of prisoners and for that reason, they were able to penetrate the thinking of participants.

4.4 Less enjoyable or least useful aspects of course

Two-thirds of the men were able to identify parts of the course which they either did not enjoy or found less helpful. These main criticisms were:

- Activities where the learning objective was unclear (4)
- Too many warm up games (4)
- Unnecessary repetition of topics (3)
- Activities where the subject matter was more personal (4).

Four interviewees expressed some frustration over activities for which they could see **no purpose or rationale**. They specifically mentioned exercises concerning vows to a child, having to walk like a baby and a poem which one interviewee did not understand. When reflecting on these exercises, they made the following comments: *'I couldn't understand where that went at all', 'I just thought that was mad', 'I thought that was a bit pathetic'* and *'what was the use of that one'*. It may be that the teachers failed to adequately introduce and follow up the sessions or it may be that the specific activities need to be re-designed. Whatever the case, it is clearly important

that the learning objectives are made explicit to participants at some point in the proceedings and that they see them as relevant.

At three different trial prisons, four interviewees questioned the inclusion of **warm up games**. Whilst some acknowledged they had a place, particularly when the course started, it was generally felt that at times their use was excessive. Furthermore, one prisoner felt the games were pitched at the wrong level and were ‘silly games for grown up men’. Instead, interviewees expressed a desire to by-pass the ice breakers and get straight into the heart of the course:

Everyone was just standing round. They were bored just doing it, just looking at each other saying ‘can’t we just get on with it’ and that’s what we were all saying ‘come on [name of teacher] this is useless, get on with it’ (participant, Family Man).

Teachers may therefore need to use their own judgement in deciding when or if to include icebreakers, depending on the profile of the group and the stage of course.

Of all the course activities, the **family tree** proved to be the least popular as participants complained it was impossible for a 21-year-old to imagine life 60 years ago. It is understood that Safe Ground have since modified this section of the course.

Three interviewees criticised the course for being **repetitive** – this again, may reflect the particular delivery style of the tutors as the comments came from the same trial prison, or it may suggest that the course would benefit from some consolidation:

I think it went over the same issue a lot. You would be doing something one day and then you would come back the next day and it would be the same thing, but titled different (participant, Fathers Inside).

Another four interviewees found parts of the course touched on more **personal issues**, issues which the men had previously buried and their resurgence proved difficult to deal with:

Talking about, do you know like, we started having a discussion about our parents and bits and bats would come up. It did affect me. It affected me in a funny way. It was just thinking about what happened to me, like my mum and dad and stuff like that, that did go deeper, made me think. I didn’t really like that (participant, Fathers Inside).

The only thing I found unpleasant was we had a discussion on death and how to deal with it and how to tell people and I had a bad experience from once before when I was in prison, when my grandmother died. I was actually in prison. So, unfortunately I had to leave that session (participant, Family Man).

Although this discomfort was reported by a relatively small number of interviewees, it does signal the importance of a sensitive and well thought out delivery. The teaching manual should perhaps mark clearly which activities broach difficult issues and teachers should reassure participants that they have the option of withdrawing from any discussions or activities that they feel less comfortable with.

Lastly, there were individual criticisms of activities which excluded prisoners who did not have children; the large amount of paper work involved; and the fact that the course lasted all day.

The criticism directed at the course related partly to its content and partly to its delivery. Even where the content was at fault, it was more an issue of quantity than actual content per se. For example, participants felt the warm up games were at times superfluous and that some topics were repetitive. These aspects of the course, therefore, do not necessarily need to be removed but perhaps streamlined. Other problem areas could be solved by a slightly different delivery – such as clearly outlining the purpose of each activity and preparing men for sessions which broach more delicate issues.

4.5 Written work

In order to achieve the Social and Life Skills units and the key skills accreditation, participants were required to complete a portfolio of work. Prisoners were asked how they had coped with this side of the course and whether they felt a balance was achieved between practical activities and written tasks.

Nearly half the prisoner interviewed (12) valued the inclusion of written work as it served to reinforce their learning:

I am more able to take that in. I can take that in much better by thinking about it afterwards and knowing I have got to write about it. It sinks in much more rather than just talking about it and moving onto the next thing, it's like getting back to the video. If we just watched a video and got on about it, it would not have sunk in, but because after the video we went away and wrote different pieces on it, answered questions and different things and created different scenarios on paper for each individual character, what they would say, how they would answer something. I found that fairly enjoyable and it really sunk in (participant, Fathers Inside).

Furthermore, three interviewees enjoyed the chance to express themselves more fully on paper and stated that they found the written work interesting. For one participant, the written work helped forge a friendship between him and his cell mate:

Certain times we were asked to take work back and write certain things and me and my pad mate would sit down and discuss them and I mean that surprised me. I got to know my pad mate a little bit better over certain things like (participant, Family Man).

Although it was generally agreed that writing had a purpose within the programme, just under half the prisoners felt there was not enough time allocated within the ten days to adequately complete the portfolios. They suggested either extending the course, or at least reserving sessions for the completion of course work. Under the current arrangements, men were having to complete the majority of the work in their cells and in some cases were rushing through the portfolios to get them ready in time:

It is a lot of paperwork, you haven't got the time, if you had a longer period of time to do it in, keeping the paperwork that was there, but in the short time it was a very demanding two and half weeks (participant, Fathers Inside).

The lack of time was perhaps more of an issue for those inmates who were less able. Two interviewees explained that they struggled with the written work because their spelling and grammar were not up to scratch and it, therefore, took them even longer to complete the portfolios. In one case, a prisoner had to help his fellow course mate complete the work, because he could not read or write:

I have actually done two files because another person, he couldn't actually read and write, so I have been helping him do the written work (participant, Fathers Inside)

In contrast, there were some participants who were more than able and actually requested a greater proportion of written work, as they felt they could be more challenged. Bearing in mind these comments, teachers running future courses may wish to stream groups so that the written work can be pitched at an appropriate level or at least allow enough time for men who find the written work more of a challenge.

Overall, the general consensus regarding the written work was that it was a necessary and valued feature of the course, but interviewees emphasised that participants must be given adequate time to complete the portfolios.

4.6 The video

The 'Blinder' video was a central discussion piece within the course and for that reason, prisoners were asked for their general impressions regarding its value. A third of prisoner interviewees (11) agreed that they found the depiction of prison life realistic and that they were able to identify with the characters – the video was said to have 'hit home', 'struck a chord' and 'it were true to life'. For three particular individuals, the video was an opportunity to look upon their current situation more objectively and seeing their own lives played out on screen had prompted them to reassess their past behaviours and attitudes:

Because that's the way that you sort of are when you go on a prison visit ... I don't see it from that side, I must admit, but to actually sit and watch it on the video brought some home truths out of how I had been (participant, Fathers Inside).

The following prisoner had previously decided it was best for his son not to visit him in prison, but after watching the video he was now reconsidering how that decision would affect the child:

That was one of the things that actually had me start thinking about whether or not I had in fact made a correct decision, like I said to you, it's actually a decision that I made. And just based on the fact that when his son [in the video] came to see him in jail and clearly his son wasn't happy at the fact that he like kept that he was in jail away from him. Yes, and that really started

making me sort of think whether or not I am actually acting in the best interest of my child (participant, Fathers Inside).

Two other prisoners believed that the video was an effective communication tool, in that it had successfully conveyed a message and had later served as a catalyst for discussion.

Eight prisoners offered some criticism of the material. Two were surprised at how much the production had cost, whilst three took issue with the general quality – specifically mentioning the acting, the sound and one man thought it had been made a long time ago. Two prisoners and one teacher (from the two prisons running Family Man) felt that the amount of time dedicated to the video was excessive, although they maintained that the video in itself was helpful:

They didn't mind watching it the first time and we discussed it and it was good because we had to relate it to the Selfish Giant story that we had read, when they then realised that they had to watch it again, to look at a particular scene, they were like 'do we really have to watch this again?' (teacher, Family Man).

Lastly, one man suggested that more background information on the characters was required for the portfolio work. Without this context it was hard to speculate how key characters felt or why they behaved in a certain way.

Overall however, the 'Blinder' video was considered one of the most memorable and enjoyable parts of the course. Further questioning confirmed that for many participants it bore a close resemblance to their current situation and it had prompted them to re-evaluate their own decisions and behaviour. It was perhaps the amount of prisoner input during the development of the course which resulted in a resource with a high degree of consumer relevance.

4.7 Involvement of prison officers

Prison officers were involved in just two of the five courses that were visited as part of the evaluation. In both cases, the inclusion of an officer worked very well, although interviewees suggested this was largely due to the calibre of the characters involved:

Well, every prison officer is different, just like every inmate, but [name of officer] did really well on that course. He really stood out and he helped and he might as well have had a shirt on really and been a civilian. He did really well actually for an officer (participant, Fathers Inside).

I mean [name of officer] was game to join in and he did actually. In the end, he got up and read a poem out. He was brilliant (participant, Family Man).

Prisoners stressed that whilst the chosen officers had performed 'brilliantly' and contributed to the course in a very positive way, there were many other staff who would not have been suited to the experience. It was important therefore to have an

officer who could mix well with the prisoners and was happy to participate fully in the programme:

[Name of officer] was one of the ones he will sit down and he will have a laugh with you and as long as that respect is still there, we are prisoners and he is a prison officer, there was no problems (participant, Family Man).

It's important that you choose the right one and I think we had the two. We couldn't have asked for two better officers, but I can name about another 100 who you put them in there and it wouldn't have worked (participant, Family Man).

A teacher running the course offered further advice when using prison officers to help run the programme. S/he emphasised the importance of continuity, so that prisoners dealt with the same face each day and could therefore build up a relationship with the officers. Secondly, all participants, including the officers needed to agree ground rules from the outset, particularly regarding confidentiality so that the men would feel at ease talking about personal matters. The experience of one prison officer also suggested that a clear delineation of roles was required. Outside of the classroom he had to discipline participants who were involved in a bullying incident. He then found it difficult to return to the class and revert to a more egalitarian stance.

Future courses may therefore wish to consider using officers to help run courses, because one of the bi-products would appear to be improved relations between officers and inmates. However, it would seem that such outcomes were dependent on the officers' full commitment to the course and their ability to mix well with inmates.

4.8 Value of drama

Drama was used as the main mode of delivery for both courses and it is likely that many of the impacts reported in Chapter 5 will be linked to its inclusion. Interviewees (from both phases of the evaluation) were asked to consider the relative merits and potential difficulties of a drama-based course.

The benefits

By far, the advantages of drama outweighed any problems which were reported and drama was viewed as a valuable learning tool for the following reasons:

- **Accessible to all**
- **Effective communicator**
- **Illustrates the perspectives of others**
- **Confidence builder**
- **Team based.**

Accessible to all

Drama was most frequently credited by interviewees (14) because it embraced all learners regardless of their abilities. Participants were not excluded because of low

literacy levels, but instead could contribute equally to the group, through the universal language of drama:

The man who may not be very confident in literacy levels, it enables them to be just as active within the group as anybody else, because you are allowing them to use verbal skills. I think that's because they can give as much or as little of themselves into the role plays. That is a great advantage, yes (teacher, Family Man).

Because it's a different approach and it gives people who maybe aren't very good at writing and putting things into words, it gives them a different way of doing it, because a lot of people have some good ideas but they just don't know how to write about it or even talk about it sometimes (participant, Family Man).

Drama, therefore, provided a communication channel for people who may have been hampered by more traditional learning techniques. In contrast to the latter, drama was interactive, lively and inclusive. Teacher interviewees believed that drama was more likely to attract resistant learners because of these qualities, aided further by the fact that it was not necessarily perceived as an educational activity. Once engrossed in the drama however, men could be exposed to educational content in a more subtle and less threatening manner:

I think it helps to get the message across. I think if they do it through drama, it's obvious it's something they enjoy and it gets them into education without probably realising. Like I said earlier, they are learning things (teacher, Family Man).

Effective communicator

The second strength associated with drama was its ability to successfully communicate a message and therefore ultimately achieve the educational objectives of the course. Rather than transmitting information solely through 'chalk and talk' methods, drama enabled participants to experience parenting and the associated issues in a more direct and personal manner. Because of this, prisoners were able to make the connection between their own lives and the content of the course. As a result, they tended to grasp the topic of discussion more readily:

I think it brings it home to them, because as I said before, you are actually seeing people playing you if you like. I suppose they could sit there and say 'yes that's me that' whereas if you just sit there and discuss it you may miss points, whereas if by doing the little role plays they can sit there and look at it, if they are not performing it, they can look at it and say 'well yes, that is me' or 'that could be my dad or my grand-dad' (prison officer, Family Man).

Hence, drama was considered a particularly effective learning strategy, one which promoted the maximum absorption of course content and one which made the experience more memorable. One man, for example, had taken an English class which relied on students copying down information as the main mode of delivery. Despite having written everything up, the man found that once he returned to his cell,

most of the details had been forgotten – with the role play however, ‘*I haven’t forgot nothing*’. Other men told a similar story:

You watch it and you listen to it more cos people are acting it out instead of just sitting down talking one to one. So, I think that you take more in and you realised what the subject is more about than rather than just sitting there (participant, Family Man).

The actual drama bit does stand out, but I gained a lot from it in all different ways, but it was the fun side of the drama that sort of made me think about it, but when we was actually acting that I thought it was being stupid. It’s not that way. It was making me remember certain aspects of it (participant, Fathers Inside).

One prisoner interviewee wanted to know whether ‘*this whole thing about improvisation*’ was a ‘*modern approach*’ to teaching, because he believed it was a winning formula, one which could be applied to other subject matter. He observed that:

A lot of people especially those in prison tend to get bored quite easily and I think things like that sort of keep people alert and sort of like thinking and having a laugh at the same time and yes, I think also that people tend to remember things for a longer period of time using the sort of method that you used rather than if you used like the classroom approach (participant, Fathers Inside).

Illustrates the perspective of others

Interviewees also concluded that through drama it was possible to experience situations from an alternative viewpoint, because participants could assume the identity of a family member, other than themselves. By walking in some one else’s shoes prisoners could truly appreciate how that person felt and it was possible to acquire a greater understanding of their specific needs within the family circle:

I think from a practical point of view, people can really learn through drama as opposed to sitting listening to it, listening to somebody talking from a book or from experience. For me personally, I could see other people’s points of view, or I could understand other people’s points of view but I couldn’t see it until we actually went through the improvisation (participant, Fathers Inside).

It gives you an opportunity to step out of your own person and into somebody else’s position, where a lot of time you wouldn’t be able to do that. ... It gave you that chance of looking at it from somebody else’s point of view, so I think drama is a major player in the course itself (developer, marketing group).

Thus, taking on the role of a wife, mother, or son brought participants closer to that person’s way of thinking. A prison officer asserted that this process was actually very powerful, quoting the specific example of a prisoner who had to imagine how his wife felt coming on a prison visit. The officer explained that prisoners rarely see the scenario from the wife’s perspective, instead ‘*they are just looking at it from ‘I am in*

here, you are out there, you should be coming in to see me because I need it', it's all I, I, I. By reversing roles however, prisoners were able to 'step away from that' and their ability to empathise with that person subsequently increased.

Confidence builder

So far, drama has been rated because it was successful as a learning approach. It was also commended, however, for the outcomes it generated. Namely, those engaged in drama were believed to grow in confidence:

I mean some of the lads it brought them right out of their shell. You know, because as I said, it's not an easy thing to jump up in front of an audience like, but some of them rose to the challenge and were quite good, so I can imagine ... I didn't really think of it myself because I more enjoyed it than took it as a challenge, but some of them they rose to it and I can see the confidence coming out of them (participant, Family Man).

Teachers suggested that this new found confidence could then be channelled into their family relationships, empowering them to assume a more self-assured fatherly role. As well as developing confidence, drama-based learning also offered a platform on which to put social skills into practice:

Advantages of using drama as a tool are reinforcing the whole thing about the social and life skills which is confidence building, self esteem. By using drama you are actually putting all those things that you are trying to install in the lads. You are actually putting them into actuality. You are actually saying 'well get up on that stage and use those self confidence skills and self esteem skills' and what have you, or if they haven't got them already, let's try and build those. Let's try and as a group bring you all on. Get you all gelled together and hopefully bring your self confidence skills up and what have you. Drama is one of the best ways that you can do that (course assessor, Family Man).

Chapter 5 gives further examples of participants who reported gains in their overall confidence and assertiveness as a result of taking the course.

Team based

Drama naturally demands team work and cooperation. Three interviewees (two prisoners and one teacher) regarded the sociability of drama as a positive factor because it facilitated group cohesion. Furthermore, because the final goal of the course was to stage a group presentation, the success of this hinged on the combined efforts of all team members. Hence, each man had a stake in the course and a prisoner concluded that the drama served to harness men's commitment to the programme, because 'in there you have got a team, you are all working together'. Another man speculated as to how things could have been without the drama dimension:

I think the drama side of it brought everybody closer together. We got to know each other better by the acting. If you had just sat there, you sat at that table and I sat at that table, it would have been a bit ... and the end of the lesson, I

wouldn't have known any more about that fella there as I did sitting there now, day one, but I did by the acting and everything, the drama and everything (participant, Fathers Inside).

In summary then, drama clearly played a critical role within the programme and no doubt, many of the positive outcomes (see chapter 5) will have been linked to its inclusion. Comments by one participant support this association and suggest that it was the drama which made the course stand out:

Drama is the key to that course. Without that drama, that course wouldn't be that course. Without that drama, it would just be the normal course where people are sitting in to pass time (participant, Fathers Inside).

The disadvantages

Interviewees saw two potential drawbacks in using drama to teach parenting skills and family relationships. Firstly, 17 interviewees highlighted the difficulty of involving participants who were perhaps more introverted and for that reason, felt less confident about performing in front of others:

There were a couple of lads who were, like, very shy and the thought of performing in front of people was embarrassing. I mean, towards the end, a lot of us opened up a lot more and we were a lot easier with each other, but there was still a couple who were a lot more reserved. That's why we made poems and stuff like that (participant, Family Man).

Everybody has their fears, I mean me, I was just the same. You know, sort of acting out in front of people, the audience as it was, you know. I wasn't used to that and I was quite scared myself and I know other people were. So once you get over that, you need to get over that barrier first (participant, Fathers Inside).

A teacher also suggested that the profile of drama in the course may dissuade men from signing up. However, she felt this could be avoided by careful wording – more specifically, ditching the phrase ‘role play’ which many people find threatening. Amongst those men who found the drama a little unnerving, most generally felt that initial apprehension was overcome within the course, as men got to know each other. One prisoner was helped by the encouragement of teachers, who gave frequent positive reinforcement. As long as prisoners could work within their own comfort zone and take on as little or as much drama as they liked, then the drama was not seen as an alienating aspect of the course:

I think at the beginning all of us weren't really sort of like ready for that sort of thing. But I think by the gradual breaking in methods that the tutors used, I think that everyone... well, I know that everyone really got into it towards the end and yes, I really do think it's a very good method of bringing a class together (participant, Fathers Inside).

It has already been noted that drama, with its role play and re-enactments, somehow brings the learning experience closer to the individual and it has the power to

penetrate a learners thinking, perhaps more so than the written word. Whilst it can, therefore be an effective teaching tool, its potency can also trigger negative emotions which a prisoner may find hard to deal with. Four prisoners agreed that the course could, and had, at times brought bad memories to the surface. Specially mentioned was a court scene where a couple were negotiating for custody of a child. Some of the men had actually gone through this experience, and therefore, found it painful to re-live the scenario for a second time. Also mentioned as an area for caution, were discussions on smacking, where participants had suffered a degree of physical abuse as children. One prisoner, for whom this had happened, acknowledged that drama could, at times, lead to upset:

Some can get a bit close to you and leave you feeling upset or whatever ... and if you are acting it, it could still hurt you, but I think the acting it, would hurt you more because it's actually there again. Do you know what I mean, so it would be like a flashback. So even though it's nothing like, it could feel that to the person involved (participant, Fathers Inside).

From a teaching perspective, however, interviewees believed that this problem could be averted by careful handling. One teacher stated that it was important to try and foresee any negative outcomes, where more sensitive issues were being dealt with and then explain each exercise very carefully to the participants. Another teacher said that prisoners must be able to withdraw whenever they felt uncomfortable with the material or when a particular topic hit a raw nerve:

You have to say 'cut, we'll come back to that tomorrow if you want to or you don't have to be involved'. Like today, somebody didn't want to be involved in a particular scenario for his own personal reasons. I would never ever force that person (teacher, Fathers Inside).

At two trial prisons, the teachers thought drama was actually a good way to handle more delicate issues, because the prisoner could de-personalise the issue by shifting the focus away from themselves onto a fictitious character. In this way, drama offered a safety net for 'who may not feel comfortable in sharing':

I think by doing it like this we will still have very heated moments, but by acting it out, in a way although it brings it close to them, it also removes it from them with the film and with it being a different family, it's not too personal and people aren't always having to refer to themselves. They have got that family theme as a buffer (teacher, Fathers Inside).

Meanwhile, some prisoners linked the effectiveness of the course to its emotional content, which was potent enough to infiltrate their thinking and touch their consciences. For example, shortly after the course, one man felt a compulsion to write to his stepdaughter, because, through the drama, he had realised how important it was to express love for your children:

The plays brought out so many emotions, dug up old wounds sometimes and things like that and I think it made me slip back into how I felt as a child for a little while and how important it is to let your kids know that you care and I

wanted to do that in a letter because at least that way she could read it and read it if she needs to (participant, Fathers Inside).

On balance, therefore, whilst there are some potential pitfalls associated with drama-based learning, overall its contribution would appear to be positive. The reliance of drama on verbal as opposed to written communication means that it can embrace all learners, regardless of their literacy levels. Furthermore, by bringing the learner closer to the material (e.g. role playing) drama is better able to convey the educational message. In the context of the family relationships and parenting, drama was valued because it encouraged participants to adopt the perspectives of other family members and thus appreciate their specific needs and interests. Lastly, drama was commended because of the additional effects it generated – namely team spirit and confidence. In terms of the disadvantages, the problems of drama and the threats it poses to some potential recruits should be heeded. Prisoners need to be prepared for sessions which touch on more sensitive issues and given the option of withdrawing if they feel uncomfortable.

4.9 Comparisons with other courses

Twenty-two interviewees (including prisoners and staff) were able to contrast the Safe Ground family relationships and parenting course with other courses they had experienced in the past. All found that the course compared favourably. Specifically, they commented that the programme was better for the following reasons. Four interviewees liked the fact that the course promoted team work. Other courses, by comparison, were typically solitary pursuits, where men worked alone:

Also, I don't know whether it was just the group we had, but you know the bonding in the group was brilliant, you don't get that in other courses (participant, Family Man).

Four interviewees highlighted drama as a distinctive and positive feature of the course. One man had attended another parenting programme and he concluded that the Safe Ground version had been better because not only did they talk about parenting issues, they were able to act them out, which in turn accelerated the learning process. Someone else implied that drama was in fact the active ingredient of the course, stating *'I think the drama has done a lot of work by itself'* (participant, Fathers Inside). Lastly, drama was believed to have added appeal and one man suggested that *'if they did more courses with drama, I think they would get a better response'* (participant, Fathers Inside).

The range of the course, in the sense that it covered the whole family, was seen as another positive dimension by three interviewees (including one prison officer). The course was not solely focussed on the needs of the prisoner, instead they were encouraged to consider their place within the family and the needs of others:

The difference about it is all other courses seem to concentrate on yourself, what's good for you. Yes, what's good for me. This isn't just about what's good for me, it's about what's good for you and also what's good for the rest of the family who are important to you (participant, Family Man).

Individual interviews commented that the course was ‘better’ than others because it came with a ‘touch of realism’; it was fun; more intensive; there were more opportunities for discussion; and there was not as much writing. Lastly, one man had found the course to be a lot ‘warmer’, so much so he no longer minded discussing more personal, family matters:

This one was a lot more personal. I mean when I was on the problem solving course, it was all about the crime and all that and you have got no problem talking about crime in front of anyone, but I wouldn't have dreamed talking about my family, where it wasn't like that on this course, I didn't mind (participant, Family Man).

On a negative note, a teacher thought that the programme was less able to deal with the individual needs of inmates. This particular teacher ran their own family relationships course, which was delivered on a one-to-one basis and the Safe Ground course was more prescriptive in terms of which issues were addressed and the accreditation awarded. However, the interviewee conceded that there were advantages to the course, in that its short-term delivery ensured that men had their minds clearly focussed on parenting for a whole two-week period.

Another teacher commented that the Safe Ground parenting course was different, because unlike other courses, the materials were being provided. Past experience of running similar courses, entailed hunting around for materials and then writing lesson plans. Hence, a ready-made manual was greatly appreciated:

I means it's very good that you have actually got something that's there and ready for you. That's great, I mean somebody new to it I am sure could take it on (teacher, Fathers Inside).

The final word should perhaps go to a participant, who initially expressed some reservations about the course – he anticipated it would just be like any other. However, after the experience he concluded:

I think it's the best course I have done since I have been in prison and I have been in a long time now and I think it's by far the best and I have learnt more off this course than I have off any course (participant, Fathers Inside).

The reasons underlying this commendation were partly the level of team work demanded of participants, which in turn secured their commitment to the course objectives and partly the fact that ‘this course is me, I can use this personally, this is something what I can use’.

As an overview, it is worth stressing that those interviewees who could contrast the course with others, all thought the course was better in some way. They tended to refer to its distinctive features – in particular, drama and the team work, features which have been consistently credited throughout interviews. This particular target group clearly seems to respond well to these teaching strategies and other prisoner-focused courses may wish to consider capitalising on this approach.

4.10 Recommending the course

A meaningful gauge of the programme's success, relevance and value was whether or not interviewees were prepared to recommend it to others. All were happy to endorse the programme, but occasionally interviewees (particularly teachers) attached a proviso.

Eight interviewees (five from the development prisons) stated that they had already mentioned the course to other inmates, with some acting as ambassadors for the programme:

Yes I do, because I wear the t-shirt. I have got like a couple of the t-shirts I wear and people come up and ask me what it is. I have explained to them what the course is about, what you do on the course, how the course is made, that other inmates helped me make the course and not like told to do it, told them to think about doing it, if they want to do it I will get you an application to fill out. I have just got a load of applications off [Safe ground] to give to people who have asked me (developer, script group).

Yes, I have spoken to a few other people and they would be interested in doing it. Quite a few people is interested in doing the parenting course (participant, Fathers Inside).

Twelve interviewees stated that they would recommend the programme because of the benefits it generated. Prisoners had personally gained from the course and they believed others could extrapolate the same positive effects. One prisoner asserted that 'every man who comes to prison would really benefit from a course like this, every man' because either they already have children, or would do so in the future. Specific reference was also made to the courses ability to improve communication skills and enhance confidence:

They have got nothing to loose. They learn how to express themselves, build confidence in themselves, be able to talk to people better and communicate with the family. You learn things that you thought you knew but better ways of doing it (participant, Family Man).

Being able to talk to your children, because obviously there's a lot of pressures that you get. Prison puts a lot of pressures on you as a parent, and to be able to put those aside and deal with it from another angle or whatever, the course gives you that other angle. So yes, I think that they would benefit (participant, Fathers inside).

Two prison staff interviewees felt the course was a useful and stimulating means of achieving accreditation and for that reason would recommend it to other institutions:

I think it's an exciting way for men to achieve accreditation. It's the type of course where men can actually acquire knowledge and experience results straight away (teacher, Family Man).

Another distinctive effect was the way in which the course challenged men's thinking and encouraged them to re-evaluate their attitudes and beliefs towards their family relationships, as highlighted by four interviewees:

It helps you to kind of think about things from other people's points of view, then it's a good thing. So from that point of view everybody should give it a try (developer, script group).

What I would say was it was a very good course, very effective, it did work. And it's helped me to see how to bring my child up in a different light and I think the course would be good if other prisoners could do it as well (participant, Fathers Inside).

Group learning and the subsequent 'bonding' of the group was cited as another selling point for the course. A prison officer who had assisted proceedings at a trial prison noted that by working together, participants were able to share experiences and support each other outside of the course. Prisoner interviewees also welcomed the chance to learn from others:

Because generally I thought it was a good thing to do, to learn other people's interests ... learning from other people's mistakes, that's generally what I thought was good about it (participant, Fathers Inside).

They seem to be talking to each other 'what are you going to do for your son?', rather than just one person being told about his family and what he should be doing. In a group they seem to be getting together as a unit (prison officer, Family Man).

Finally, four interviewees were pleased to recommend the course simply because it was enjoyable. Whilst highlighting the potential to have fun, prisoners were also careful to point out the more serious value to be derived from the course:

You can have a laugh. You have got to take it serious, but you can also have a laugh as well (participant, Family man).

I enjoyed the course for ... it was a good thing to do. I am glad I done it. I have got quite a bit out of it, along with other courses I have done. It does add into it and it will help me with the other courses I have done to be a better person when I leave. Do you know what I mean? I think it has helped and it's done a bit for me and I would recommend it to other people because it's enjoyable, you enjoy doing it. You do get a bit out of it and it's worthwhile doing (participant, Family Man).

Six interviewees were happy to recommend the course but attached various conditions. One teacher suggested that the manual be reduced in size, so to be more user friendly; another teacher generally felt the course needed polishing and a teacher from one of the development prisons felt the key skills elements needed to be 'tidied up'.

Apart from those teachers who recommended the course, subject to some revision, all other interviewees were pleased to give their full endorsement to the programme. Positive feedback will no doubt assist the promotion of the programme throughout prisons, as men communicate its value by word of mouth.

4.11 Suggestions for improvement

This section concentrates on participants' ideas for improving the course (teacher recommendations were presented in Chapter 3). Again, it must be stressed that since the interviews were conducted, Safe Ground has already responded to many of the suggestions. Areas for improvement were concerned with the timing of the course, aspects of its delivery, topics for inclusion and topics which could be removed or scaled down.

Timing of the course

Two-thirds of all participants believed that the timing of the course needed revision. Nine simply suggested the course should be extended in length – participants realised there was a vast amount of work to get through and they found it frustrating that some activities had to be rushed:

We were trying to bust through too many things too fast and we missed a few things out in the portfolio and it was something that like we were all interested in. No one put across the attitude 'oh it's boring this'. We were all interested in it, and we like all did want to do it, but we had a certain set time to do it (participant, Family Man).

Four others felt that the written work suffered as there was very little time to complete portfolios in class and men had to take work back to their cells. Meanwhile, another four suggested a move away from an intensive full time course, to one spread over a number of weeks. This would allow for the continuation of other prison commitments, such as going to the gym and men would also have more time to complete the written work. The fact that participants were asking for a longer course is a sign that they valued what the course addressed and that overall the course was well received.

Aspects of the delivery

A third of prisoners made recommendations concerning how the course was delivered. Some felt that proceedings were a little slow at the beginning and parenting/family relationships needed to be brought to the forefront much sooner. They felt there was a danger of losing people if participants could not see results immediately.

Three participants called for more rigorous selection procedures to filter out prisoners who were not sufficiently motivated. Interviewees believed that some participants were on the course because it offered time out of the cell and it was seen as a '*skive from work*'. Consequently, less committed participants formed a disruptive element within the group. Another reason for careful selection was that men could be assessed for their literacy levels and allocated to appropriate groups based on their needs.

Two participants thought that prisoners could have a greater say in which topics were to be discussed, rather than following a pre-determined agenda. Lastly, one man recommended that the course be delivered in a single location (moves were disruptive and atmospheres different) and two participants felt that course tutors themselves should have children, because they could draw on their own experiences and overall their credibility as parenting tutors would be enhanced.

Additions to the course

Interviewees made several suggestions for additional topics which could be incorporated into the course. However, it must be noted that already the course covers a wide range of issues and often the recommendations were related to men's own personal circumstances. Participants suggested that the course could also include:

- parenting of children under six (e.g. babies)
- relationships with grandparents
- issues associated with being a step parent
- access rights where parents are separated
- drug use
- more on children's schooling
- being a parent in prison
- more practical advice on communicating with children.

Suggested omissions

Interviewees were asked if there was too much time spent on any particular part of the course. Already, the suitability of warm up games has been questioned – and accordingly four participants suggested that they could be less of a feature, particularly once positive group relations were established. Two participants felt the drama could take a lower profile within the course as they were primarily interested in the parenting component. Two others felt '*bogged down*' by the amount of paperwork and suggested a reduction. Individual recommendations also included spending less time on the video, taking out the key skills element to reduce paperwork, revise the family tree exercise and make the course less repetitive.

The most frequent suggestion for improvement related to the timing of the course, which has already been addressed by extending its length to three weeks. Some did suggest making the course less intensive and in some establishments it may be worth considering a part-time delivery, depending on the type of prison, prisoners and staff availability.

SUMMARY OF PARTICIPANTS' EXPERIENCES

- Prisoners signed up for the course because of their desire to learn more about parenting and become better fathers. Beforehand, some were worried about the demands of drama, although this fear subsided as the course progressed.
- The most memorable and enjoyable aspects of the course were the drama, the course video, the team spirit which grew out of the course and the story of the selfish giant.
- Less enjoyable were activities where the learning objectives were not clear, the over use of warm up games, activities which touched on personal/sensitive issues and sessions which were repetitive.
- Whilst the written work was generally valued in the course, because it served to reinforce learning, many participants found there simply was not enough time allocated to completing the portfolios. This was particularly the case for inmates who struggled with reading and writing.
- The video made a strong impression on some participants, who could relate to the scenario portrayed and as a result had re-evaluated their attitudes to parenting from prison.
- Where involved, the presence of prison officers was well received, although this was attributed to the calibre of the specific individuals. It was recommended that the same officers be used for the duration of the course and that the chosen officers should have a good rapport with prisoners.
- Drama was believed to be an effective part of the course because it was accessible to all prisoners (regardless of their literacy levels), it was an effective communicator and it could be used to illustrate the perspectives of others. Furthermore, drama was said to boost the confidence of participants and encourage positive group dynamics through team work.
- Interviewees perceived two potential drawbacks to using drama as a teaching tool. Firstly, it may exclude less confident, more introverted participants – although teachers should be able to overcome this problem by offering encouragement and creating a comfortable learning environment. Secondly, the potency of drama may bring difficult emotions to the surface and again, teachers will need to think carefully about how to handle sensitive issues and participants must be given the chance of withdrawing if they feel uneasy about the subject matter
- Those interviewees who could contrast the course with others, all thought that it was better in some way. The Safe Ground parenting/family relationship programme was seen as distinctive because of the team work element, the use of drama and the broad emphasis on family relations. From a teaching perspective it was different because the teaching materials came ready made.

- Prisoners were universally happy to recommend the course because of the benefits it generated, as well as the accreditation opportunities, the chance to see things differently, to work as a team and to have fun. Teachers were also prepared to recommend the course, following revisions to the manual and accreditation elements.
- The most frequent suggestion for improvement was for the course to be extended in length and more time given for the completion of course work.

Chapter 5

The impact of the pilot programme

Introduction

This section documents the different types of outcome reported by interviewees involved in the trials of the family relationships and parenting courses. First and foremost, attention is given to the impact on the target group – the prisoners – but broader impacts such as those on staff and the prison regime are also included. The specific evaluation aims relating to impacts were:

- **Do prisoners now have a better understanding of parenting six to 12 years olds?**
- **How has taking part in the programme affected prisoners' contact with their children?**
- **How has the programme impacted on prisoners' families?**
- **How has the initiative impacted on the prison regime?**

What follows is a detailed audit of all reported impacts. Many related to the above aims, but additional outcomes also surfaced during interviews e.g. enhanced confidence, improved attitudes to education. Table 5.1 compiles all those impacts which emerged as a result of the course.

5.1 Parenting and family relationship outcomes

Interviewees spoke of four major ways in which their parenting or family relationships had been affected following the programme. They mentioned improvements in their:

- **understanding of family relationships and parenting**
- **parenting skills and knowledge**
- **family contact**
- **commitment to the family.**

Understanding of family relationships and parenting

Interviewees were asked whether they felt that, having done the course, they had developed a better understanding of parenting/family relationships. Overall, most participants felt that this was indeed the case. Education staff and prison officers were less certain, with interviewees signalling the inevitable limitations of a short-term programme and that the application of parenting skills depended on the individual. Prisoners, whilst believing that they had acquired a greater understanding, also suggested there was more to learn and that only on departure from prison would their understanding truly be tested:

Yes, well we will see when I get out won't we, see if I am not the selfish person I was before (participant, Fathers Inside).

I think I have got a better understanding before coming on the course, yes. I wouldn't say I am a perfect parent yet (participant, Fathers Inside).

Well it's helped me out along the way, don't get me wrong, but you know, I don't think you can cram that much in two weeks and know everything, because you can't. It's impossible to do, but it has given me a head start, like (participant, Fathers Inside).

Table 5.1 Reported impacts and outcomes

ON PRISONERS AND THEIR FAMILIES	
Understanding of family relationships and parenting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a better understanding of the parental role and its responsibilities
Parenting skills and knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> different ways of communicating with children, including the importance of honesty, listening and openness knowledge of different parenting styles
Family contact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> improvements in the frequency of telephone and written communication, as well as more regular visits enhancements in the quality of contact (e.g. writing letters that appeal to children)
Commitment to the family	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a desire to become more involved in children's upbringing appreciating the importance of spending quality time with children
Team work skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> development of team working skills such as cooperation development of social relationships through team work
Confidence/ communication skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> enhanced confidence, which in turn improved men's ability to communicate with others
Understanding the need and perspectives of others	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a less selfish attitude, coupled with a greater understanding of other people's needs
Literacy skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> advances in reading, spelling, grammar and letter writing skills
Attitudes to education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> an interest in pursuing further education opportunities the confidence to access other education courses
Long term impacts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a possible reduction in offending and the likelihood of future re-incarceration better fathers in the long run
IMPACTS ON PRISON	
Other inmates	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> positive feedback from the course generated interest from other inmates and enquiries to education
Relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> enhanced relationships between prison officers involved in the course and participants
Atmosphere	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> improvements in participants behaviour transferred onto the wings
IMPACTS ON STAFF	
Confidence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> more confident to partake in drama activities
Parenting skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> development of parenting skills
Teaching practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a new approach to teaching parenting and family relationships

Teachers running one course, however, concluded that the prisoners had most certainly gained a better understanding of parenting *'without any shadow of a doubt'* and they cited specific examples as evidence of this effect. One man was experiencing marital difficulties but had previously felt compelled to stay in the relationship for the sake of the children. Since doing the course, however, he appreciated that there were many different ways in which he could be a father and he did not necessarily have to remain in an unhappy family situation. The teachers also believed that they had conquered the widely held assumption that to be a good parent you had to shower your children with expensive gifts. Instead *'at least 50 per cent of them were convinced that spending time with the children was far more important than buying stuff'* (teacher, Fathers Inside).

Parenting skills and knowledge

Half the prisoners interviewed (15) mentioned specific parenting skills and/or knowledge that they had acquired from the programmes. Very often the course had highlighted different ways of interacting with children, giving prisoners new ideas and providing them with a *'little backpack'* of parenting strategies. Furthermore, these strategies could be used from inside prison, as well as on the outside. For example, one prisoner found it difficult to communicate with his three-year-old twins, as they were too young to hold a conversation over the phone. Through the course, however, he had explored alternative means of communication which enabled him to maintain the parent-child bond. He had started to send drawings home and had written a story in which his children featured:

I really enjoyed doing it and I have never done anything like that before, written a children's story and being able to incorporate my children into that made it so much better, so much more special (participant, Fathers Inside).

Another experienced father found that the course had helped him look at parenting in a new light and think more deeply about how children should be spoken to:

I honestly think that I will go out and be a better father, because to be quite honest I've been a dad for nine years now and you learn as you go along, but this course has made me stop and think about things and it has taught me a lot of other things like how to present yourself to children, how to talk to children (participant, Fathers Inside).

Indeed, several men felt that they now approached communicating with their children in a different way. Specifically, they highlighted the importance of honesty, openness and listening to their viewpoint, so they could appreciate the child's perspective. The men realised that by opening up to their children and taking on a more active listening role, the relationship as a whole would benefit.

Probably the main thing I have learnt is actually give them a chance to put their point across as well as mine, being an adult. Give the child its view as well and why they are upset and why they want this (participant, Fathers Inside).

Well for me personally, I am sort of, like, more open to sort of, like, listening to my child and where as before I would be sort of, like, what they call an authoritarian sort of parent, I would tend now not to make decisions for my child. I would more or less say, 'what would you like to do', rather than say 'OK you are going here today' ... because I think children should be allowed to make choices from an early age (participant, Fathers Inside).

I think now I have found this new way of listening to my children. I think that is going to benefit both me and my children through the visits, because now instead of pushing them to one side or not wanting to hear what they have got to say, I think now maybe I am going to listen to that, listen to them more. (participant, Fathers Inside).

The last remark came from a man whose children had already detected a change in his manner. The interviewee relayed his daughter's words after a recent telephone conversation:

She said to me 'Dad, you sound different, you sound really like as though ... I can't explain it' she says 'but you sound really different and you sound all uplifted and you are talking to me like I am a human being' (participant, Fathers Inside).

In terms of new knowledge, a father of five was surprised he did not know more about the developmental stages that children pass through. He thought that because of his life experiences, he would have no problem with an exercise on the subject, but in fact he struggled with the task. The same man also welcomed the session on child-related illnesses, because his partner's oldest child suffered from dyspraxia. During an interview with his wife, this issue was raised and she was grateful that her husband was made aware of the condition, as he was now more understanding of the associated problems (see section 5.11 for more family reported impacts).

Different parenting styles was another topic covered within the course and interviewees found this a helpful concept:

I didn't know the different types of parenting groups they put them into. I didn't realise ways to deal with children's behaviour. It was definitely well worth doing and definitely opened my eyes up a little bit (participant, Fathers Inside).

Family contact

Evidence of increased family contact came from two sources. Firstly, prisoners were asked about any changes during the interviews. Secondly, between one and two months after the course had finished, a questionnaire was circulated asking participants again to indicate whether their telephone calls, letters home or visits had changed in any way.

The results of the questionnaire are shown in Table 5.2:

Table 5.2 Self-reported changes in the frequency of family contact

Type of contact	Frequency since taking the course n= 24		
	Telephone calls	Writing letters	Visits
More often	10	11	6
No change	13	12	17
Less often	1	1	1

Source: *NFER family contact questionnaire*

In total, 18 out of 24 respondents (75 per cent) reported some kind of increased contact as a result of the course – 10 were making more family phone calls, 11 were writing more letters home and 6 were receiving more regular visits from family members. It should be noted that respondents who reported ‘no changes’ were already in regular communication with their families (at least once a week). Hence, there may have been no perceived room for improvement. Amongst this group, however, there were comments on the questionnaire which pointed to enhancements in the quality, if not quantity of contact. One person felt that visits were ‘*better*’; someone else wrote to their son ‘*differently*’; and one man stressed that while ‘*there is no change in the visit, when I get out there I plan to spend time with my son to make up for the wasted years, when I didn’t spend enough time with him*’.

The respondent who reported a decrease in contact put this down to the general strain of being away from the family and did not attribute it to the course: ‘*time away is always going to damage a relationship*’.

Lastly, the questionnaire included an open-ended item where respondents could make a general statement about the course. They chose to mention improvements in the quality of their contact, for example, being able to speak more openly to their family. They also indicated a greater understanding of the families perspective and a willingness to invest more time in their families generally. A selection of their comments are contained in the following boxes.

Improvements in the QUALITY of contact
<p><i>Try to speak to them more about what I want and going to change in myself for when I get out. As I now know, I need to, and want to change and retire from crime and stay out for my kids and families sake, as well as my own.</i></p> <p><i>Since the course ended my visits have become slightly more frequent and I find that I pay more attention to my daughter during the visit and still have time for the rest of my family.</i></p>
Improvements in FREQUENCY of contact
<p><i>Since completing the course I have contact with my children from my first marriage and regular visits.</i></p> <p><i>I've always been very close with my family (mum and dad). I've been in contact with my kids a lot more that I usually do.</i></p>
Commitment to parenting
<p><i>I'm trying to put more into them.</i></p> <p><i>The course has made me realise what an important role in my children's growing up I play.</i></p>
Understanding the needs of the family
<p><i>Very informative, helped open my eyes with regards to the way my family was coping whilst I'm in prison.</i></p> <p><i>I have been in contact more with my family since doing the course and I understand more the needs not just for me but for my family.</i></p>

Finally, one man took the opportunity to praise the course in the questionnaire, stating that *'the Safe Ground Fathers Inside course is the best and most constructive course I've done whilst I've been in custody'*.

The interview data revealed similar levels of improved contact with approximately half the participants reporting changes in either their phone calls home, their letter writing or their visits.

Telephone contact

During the interviews, men reported phoning home more frequently and that they were also dedicating part of that call specifically to their children, rather than speaking just to their partners. Hence, they were phoning earlier in the day, to make sure their children were around to talk and they were consciously trying to engage them in conversation. In doing so, they were receiving more details about their children's lives, which in turn helped develop the relationship and strengthen their connection with their family whilst away from home:

Well, it's increased a lot more. I always used to ring quite late on, but like now I tend to ring so that I can speak to the children and, like, I have asked to keep the children awake so that I can speak to them (participant, Fathers Inside).

It has increased. First I used to phone every second day, but now I have started phoning everyday to talk to my child ... And I talk to him, how are you doing, what have you been doing today and that's helped a lot (participant, Fathers Inside).

I have always just spoken to my girl like, she will say 'say hi ya to the kids' and I will just say 'hi ya' and then they always pass it back to her. Now last week, I spoke to them. I spoke to the three of them and then I spoke to my girlfriend (participant, Family Man).

Letter writing

In terms of written communication, participants tended to correspond only with their partners prior to taking the course. But afterwards, they reported writing to their children as well. Moreover, they were using their imagination to write letters which would be appealing to children, in the hope that an exchange of letters would ensue. For example, they were incorporating stories, quizzes and drawings.

I've started writing letters to my children, and I wrote that story for the children as well, for basically my children. So I'm going to set that up now and send that off to them. So it's made me sort of like think to do more for my children even though I'm in here like. So, that's a good thing for me (participant, Fathers Inside).

Visits

It has already been noted how prisoners sometimes decide to distance themselves from the family whilst they are inside. This stems from the belief that children should not be exposed to a prison environment and that it is better for them not to know about their father's situation. The course addresses this issue and makes the point that the children may in fact suffer more, from the lack of contact. The message certainly reached one participant, who, after two years of not seeing his children, was prompted to break the silence:

Well I didn't want my two lads to know I was in prison, so I said to my wife now, who I am with, 'I don't want my kids to know'. I haven't seen them for over two years and when I done that situation I have come straight out of that class, phoned my kids up and they are coming on a visit to see me (participant, Fathers Inside).

This interviewee further claimed that if it had not been for the course, the wall he was building around himself would have got 'bigger and bigger'. The video in particular had the strongest influence, because it reflected his own attitudes and for the first time he was 'looking on the outside, looking in, on where I went wrong'. His children were now visiting him in prison.

Another participant went through a similar experience. He believed it would minimise the hurt if he shut himself off from his children whilst serving a sentence. Since the course, however, he realised this was a damaging decision for all involved and was therefore in the process of arranging a family visit. Again, it was the video and story of the Selfish Giant which had led to a change of heart:

I think it was Blinder actually, about the Selfish Giant, putting up barriers and when I stood back and looked at it, that's exactly what I had been doing and I had not let me kids come to see me and I have since then. I am arranging for my kids to actually come and see me, purely through this course really because otherwise I would have carried on going through with a narrow mind as far as that is concerned and not letting them see me while I am in here. So it's benefited them and me (participant, Family Man).

Even partners were seen to benefit, as one man had started to express himself more 'poetically' to his wife:

I have always written letters, but I have written more. It's increased it. To my wife I have kind of written more romantic letters ... the poetry has made me become more poetic (participant, Family Man).

From the staff angle, interviewees were not really in a position to comment whether family contact had improved because typically their involvement with the men was confined to the course. However, four interviewees felt the course would certainly encourage men to be more aware of their family needs and generally give them food for thought. In terms of contact, one teacher concluded '*it opened a lot of people's eyes to what they actually can do*'. Meanwhile, a prison officer had overheard men discussing their ideas for improving family contact:

Already I have heard them talk about how they are going to do more with their kids, send more letters to the children, you know send an individual letter to the kids and I have actually heard them all talking and saying what they are doing, again, very, very positive (prison officer, Family Man).

A teacher at the same prison was confident that family contact would improve because plans were afoot for follow-up work. After the course, the men were going to send recorded letters home and design writing paper for children.

Commitment to parenting

More generally, participants (13 out of 30) expressed a greater commitment to parenting and their families since taking the course. Some prisoners wanted to be more involved in the upbringing of their children, whereas previously they had abdicated responsibility to their wives. One man felt disempowered as a parent because he was away from the family home. The course, however, had highlighted other ways in which he could continue to play a fatherly role (see comment below). Others were now able to appreciate the value in spending quality time with their children. The course had introduced them to more subtle ways of being a good parent, beyond the basic provision of clothing, toys, holidays, etc. They had learnt

that putting time aside to interact with their children would often mean more to a child than material affection and it would form the foundation for a long term relationship.

Well to be honest it made me realise I was being a bit lazy because I was thinking to myself that I am not really – how can I put it – I was getting into that way of thinking where I was thinking ‘I am not that much of an influence anyway out there because I am here, so I am better leaving things to her and I was starting to withdraw, I mean I do phone calls and letters visits, but there’s a lot of other things I could do (participant, Family Man).

Q: What has been the main thing you have learnt from the course?

A: *Spending quality time and showing them that you love them, that’s going to lead to friendship all your life. You can show a child that you really love them and are prepared to protect it whatever and you have definitely got something there, a special bond there (participant, Fathers Inside).*

It’s made me realise what I have missed actually with my own family, my children and that. Because I have always been out and worked and things like that. It’s made me realise now, you know little things like reading bed time stories and things like that, it’s what I have missed (participant, Fathers Inside).

The course, therefore, had clearly influenced men’s thinking towards their families and their ability to interact with their children: when asked if the course had made a difference to them personally, two-thirds of respondents referred to improvements in their understanding of parenting and in their parenting skills.

5.2 Team work skills

The capacity of the course to facilitate effective team working skills was noted by half the prisoners interviewed. They were often surprised that you could assemble a group, with seemingly little in common, who by the end of the course, developed a real sense of comradeship. This did not always happen on other prison courses, where learners tended to function in isolation. The parenting programme however, demanded a group effort. During exercises and for the final presentation, participants had to work together and cooperate. Hence, they got to know each other well which made it easier to talk about more personal or emotional issues, again something which was not commonplace in a prison environment. A staff interviewee also commented that the typical approach to a prison existence was an ‘*all for one*’ attitude and that men tended to be very insular. A major outcome of this course therefore was that men learnt to interact and work as a team and generally, prisoner interviewees felt that the groups had bonded very well:

It actually brought the group if you like closer together, because I know a lot more about the 20 that finished it than I did on day one ... than I did on other courses I have been on, sat in for a few days, I didn’t know anything about the people (participant, Fathers Inside).

It brought us closer together because I made friends with people that I wouldn’t normally talk to or I wouldn’t bother talking to, but through that I

did get to know them and found out they were alright. I like them (participant, Fathers Inside).

You don't get that in this environment, in the prison environment, the chance of sitting down and talking to somebody about vaguely emotive issues, doesn't happen because everybody has got to be macho at these classes. So, it was quite good (participant, Fathers Inside).

The second advantage of a team-based course was that participants could learn from each other. Every member of the group came from a different family background which when pooled, provided a wealth of experiences:

I mean other people who have done different crimes, there was people of all ages up to 68 there was. I was the second youngest out of the whole group ... [X] from a different culture, he was on about how in his country he could have three wives and all that. I mean it was learning from each other and getting to know different people (participant, Family Man).

In summary then, the approach of the course succeeded in breaking down some of the macho barriers of prison culture and instead men were encouraged to function as a team for the greater good of the group.

5.3 Confidence and communication skills

These two outcomes were clearly inter-related because prisoners tended to mention them side-by-side during interviews. Having to perform in front of others had boosted confidence levels, which in turn gave men the skills and self-assurance to express themselves more effectively. More reticent members of the group had initially felt apprehensive about the drama component, believing it was beyond their capabilities. However, they had overcome their fear of public speaking and as a result were more able to interact with others. Assembling a group of men together had also shown participants that they were not alone and that others shared the same worries and concerns. Consequently, they were more inclined to engage with others. Generally, men spoke of communicating with confidence:

I was always quite shy and that, so it's, sort of, brought me to be more social, to mix with a lot of different people, because at the end of the day in here I was always like, I kept with one crowd but now I tend to mix with other people because they are in the same situation with their children and everything. So it's brought me out (participant, Fathers Inside).

I will get up in front of anyone and do it now, but before that I wouldn't even dreamed of it. I have watched plays and sat there and watched them and thought 'I wouldn't do that' but then when you actually get up and do it, it's different isn't it (participant, Family Man).

When usually I talk to someone, I will either look away or just look at the floor, even with my girlfriend. Now, I will look at people (participant, Family Man).

I have learnt to stand on a podium and like speak to people without like going beetroot red, which is what I would do in the past (participants, Fathers Inside).

Staff interviewees confirmed that enhanced confidence and communication skills were indeed two major outcomes of the course. One interviewee, who taught the basic skills sessions, had gone through the same transformation herself. At the beginning of the course, she was slightly nervous of role play but this feeling soon diminished as the course progressed. From an observer's perspective, other staff interviewees had noted the emergence of confidence over the duration of the course:

That more than anything I think is the amount of confidence they gained and the way in which they communicated improved dramatically over the two and a half weeks, very much so (teacher, Fathers Inside).

I think again a lot of the personal skills are developing, their communication, being able to listen to each other, communication, confidence and being supportive and sensitive as well (teacher, Family Man).

I felt quite embarrassed at first, but when I got into it I liked it and ... when the men said ... 'right we have been doing this, you have got to do it', so we did one and I didn't really mind. So I think if it gave me confidence, it would probably give them confidence as well (teacher, Fathers Inside).

Although not an explicit aim of the course, men had improved both their confidence and communication skills as a result of the experience. The source of these outcomes would appear to be the drama component which encouraged participants to project and express themselves clearly.

5.4 Understanding the needs and perspectives of others

Fifteen prisoners felt that the course had made an impression on how they perceived their role as a father. Prior to the course, there was a propensity to think of 'me, me, me, me to be honest'. Prisoners admitted at times they were selfish, dwelling on their own problems and with little contemplation of how their families were feeling. However, the course had encouraged them to think beyond themselves and interviewees claimed that the course had 'woken me up a little bit', that they were looking at things 'from a different angle' and that 'it's made me think more than anything'. Thus, men were questioning their past behaviours and were redirecting their focus of attention away from themselves, towards the needs and perspectives of others:

It's made me realise that I am not the only one who suffers. In fact, I miss my lad. I miss my girl. I miss my mam, but the worry and the stress that they go through worrying about me (participant, Family Man).

I will spend a lot more time trying to keep people happy and not think about myself so much (participant, Fathers Inside).

You mainly think about yourself and how you are going to cope in here. So I mean it got me thinking of how it is affecting them out there (participant, Family Man).

A greater understanding of other people's needs resulted in a desire to be a more caring, more sensitive parent and in the case of five participants, they were now prepared to let family members visit them in prison:

When I came in here, I didn't want any visits from my wife or family because I am not happy about being in prison and I feel well, if I settle in too much and be so confident, I would feel as if I am depriving myself and there would be nothing to be gained for me after coming out of prison, but watching the film I have realised that it's not just me, because my partner wants to see me (participant, Family Man).

It was the Frank situation on a video that actually prompted me to start having my own children come into visit me. So it worked in that way (participant, Family Man).

Many participants, therefore, appear to have undergone a shift in their perspectives. It is, perhaps, this realignment of priorities, away from themselves towards their families, that ultimately causes men to express a greater family commitment.

5.5 Literacy skills

In addition to the acquisition of parenting skills, literacy related skills were also thought to have been enhanced through the course. Seven men reported improvements in their reading, spelling, grammar and letter writing abilities. One man, quoted below, would previously have avoided letters and forms, leaving his wife to deal correspondence. The course, however, had covered the basic principles of letter writing and he now felt competent enough to tackle them himself:

Like when you fill in an application form, like before I have always sort of passed it onto my partner. My partner used to sort that out. Like things like that, with the doctor and that I have always just passed it onto her. I didn't really want to face up to it. I wouldn't sign the form and things like that but like now, I can do it (participant, Fathers Inside).

Oh yes, they have improved. It's just getting a formal letter together. It has shown me how to do that. ... But yes my grammar has improved slightly. It needed improving (participant, Fathers Inside).

When I came in here I wasn't all that ... I had never wrote anything for ages. I had sort of lost the touch, but I have got back on track and it's helped me a lot with my grammar and punctuation (participant, Fathers Inside).

For some prisoners, therefore, the course served as a valuable refresher, reminding them of basic grammatical rules and the principles of letter construction.

Chapter 6 provides more details of the actual accreditation achieved by prisoners. It is worth noting, however, although some of the men who participated in the course had welcomed the opportunity to enhance their formal qualifications, and were able to tell researchers exactly which certificates they had obtained, the majority of those interviewed, across all trial prisons involved in the fieldwork, appeared vague on this aspect of the course, and relatively indifferent to accreditation itself. As one of the men observed, he valued the course *'because it was interesting, and it taught me ways of dealing with things and how to look at it'*. The biggest impact of the course related to their personal and social development, and the insight they had gained into family relationships.

5.6 Attitudes to education

One of Safe Ground's hopes was that the programme may attract resistant learners who would normally overlook education opportunities. A teacher who piloted the course saw the same potential – she was considering using the course as *'an introduction to education'* because the parenting dimension would have wide appeal. Furthermore, participants would feel *'more relaxed'* taking this kind of course and at the same time, their confidence would improve, at which point:

The same group of men [could be] steered into things like basic skills, basic education and then maybe go off down different routes according to their ability and their level (teacher, Fathers Inside).

Indeed eight prisoners reported a greater desire to continue their education, once the programme ended. They had not necessarily held this view prior to the course and one man had actually requested a cell transfer so he could register with education. This rush of interest was confirmed by a prison officer who noted that several men were now *'begging her to get them on the courses'*, whereas before *'a lot of them wouldn't have even thought about doing any drama or education'*:

I will tell you what it did get me to do. I am doing the education now. Once I had started the course, I arranged with [name of teacher] for me and my pad mate to be moved ... and we started the education the day we finished the course (participant, Family Man).

For some, the interest in education was already present, it was their confidence that was in short supply. However, through the course they had proved to themselves that they could in fact take part in education, and spurred on by their success they were looking to extend their learning. Hence, the course had *'opened doors'*:

When I come out of parenting, I have just gone for the enhanced thinking skills course, that's more or less the same thing. That's role plays and everything else again.

Q: Would you have done that before this programme?

A: *No, I'll be honest with you, I do feel I can ... like if there's a classroom of people in there I can talk in front of them and I don't feel bad, but I wouldn't have done that before. I really wouldn't have done it (participant, Fathers Inside).*

The above comment came from a prisoner whose wife expressed surprise at the kinds of courses her husband was signing up for. She explained how he had completed a first aid and a listener's course, neither of which were in keeping with her husband's character. Hence, she concluded his confidence must have improved. Another family member, this time a mother of a participant, also believed her son's confidence had benefited from the course. Since the course, he had signed up for writing skills and was looking into a catering course. Previously, he was not involved in education, '*I think he lacked motivation and lacked any confidence*'.

A course, therefore, which is perceived to be drama-oriented, rather than academically geared, can be an effective device for enticing prisoners who would have previously dismissed educational opportunities. Once on board, it is possible for prisoners get a taste for education as well as the confidence to pursue further studies.

5.7 Long term impacts

Interviewees inevitably found it hard to speculate as to whether the course would have more far reaching impacts later in their lives. Three prisoners however, implied that it could lead to a reduction in offending and in the case of two this was in relation to their own criminal behaviour. One man could now comprehend the impact of his lifestyle on his family and he no longer wished to cause further distress. He, therefore, summarised that the course would go '*a long way*' to promoting a '*crime free*' existence.

Another man, who had previously been caught receiving drugs on a prison visit maintained he would never repeat the action because he realised the effect on his children. During a role play he had been asked to take on the role of a child who was caught up in a drugs transaction during a prison visit – he could now appreciate the consequences of his behaviour:

I think the most powerful scene on there was the visits. We done a visit and we done a getting drugs in on a visit and the child was there. The child had a scene and I have been through that and that hurt and I had to do the child's role. So it gave me a kind of an insight into what the child felt – I will never do that again (participant, Fathers Inside).

When asked to consider long term effects, seven other prisoners simply predicted they would become better fathers, in keeping with the course objectives. Meanwhile four interviewees were unable to specify the exact nature of long term impacts, but were confident that they would certainly take something anyway from the course:

I think part of the course like learning you to be more open will help you outside. I will definitely be a better parent, there's no doubt about that, definitely (participant, Fathers Inside).

Well just bringing up my child basically and like being sort of like constantly aware of different ways of bringing up kids and just remembering the course. I have learnt from the course and applying it to the upbringing of my child (participant, Fathers Inside).

Yes, it's bound to make a difference, bound to. All that I have taken in I have never really thought about before, things what we have talked about. Yes, it's going to make a difference (participant, Fathers Inside).

During one observed session, three 'graduates' of an earlier course were invited to address the current group and answer any questions. One man, who described it as a 'hell of an experience' had now reconnected with his family – because of his long sentence he had gradually grown further apart from them. It is worth noting that the men had completed the course six months previously, yet they still recalled the course with great affection. It is possible, therefore, that the effects and experience of the course will continue to be felt by participants further down the line.

Two teachers, however, raised the intrinsic difficulties of a short-term programme. One felt that prisoners needed further opportunities to practice newly acquired skills, once the course had ended. The other teacher felt that any long term impact could be mitigated by external forces such as unemployment and poverty. Those running future courses may wish to consider how best to follow up learning and think about how to promote the long term sustainability of impacts (see section 5.12).

5.8 Impact on prison life

There were three ways in which prisons were thought to have been affected by the course. Firstly, six prisoners believed that relationships between inmates and prison officers had improved because the two parties worked alongside each other, on an equal footing. The normal hierarchy of prison had, to a certain extent, fallen away and inmates got to know officers as people, rather than 'uniforms':

I mean we felt that we were achieving something ... prison officers and prisoners that were working together. It felt very privileged. It was a good thing... It built relationships between prison officers and prisoners, you know (participant, Fathers Inside).

It helps build relations between prisoners and staff, things like that, the prison officers getting involved with them and I personally would like to see more of that in other areas (participant, Fathers Inside).

Yes, I mean you could see things were becoming a lot easier between us. You know what normally people couldn't talk to them, all of a sudden they were having conversations with them that they wouldn't dream of (participant, Family Man).

Secondly, at three prisons interviewees reported a surge of interest amongst other inmates who now wanted to sign up for the course. This suggests that once a course is run, the positive recommendation from participants could help future recruitment:

The men talk about it on the wing. I have had loads of inmates coming up and going 'are you doing this again [name of teacher], when is it happening again?' (teacher, Fathers Inside).

Lastly, two interviewees suggested that the course would benefit the general atmosphere of prison. For one teacher, this was based on her general observations of past drama courses where the volatile behaviour of some participants had been moderated, so much so that officers on the wings commented on the changes. Another teacher suggested that the course had brought prisoners together and created a rapport which would continue outside of the classroom. Comments from a prisoner suggested that the course had indeed helped participants look beyond first impressions:

When I originally went in there, I would look at certain people and think 'I am not going to bother with you', but you find there's more to these people than what you originally thought from working with them (participant, Fathers Inside).

I am sure when they go round the prison and bump into the other prisoners from a different wing on the course that there will be a rapport there, when there wouldn't have been before, so I think it has broken down some of those barriers (assessor, Family Man).

I think that is a very important point to be made – you know for the last six years I have been using drama in the prison and the amount of officers who will comment on the change in inmates on the landing, on the wing, you know. Where inmates previously fly off the handle over something and officers will recognised that they are actually taking a step back, they are thinking before they speak, so it does have a knock on effect, other staff are aware of it and officers are aware (teacher, Family Man).

More widely then, prison life was seen to have been affected by the course, as other inmates were now making enquiries about the programme; where prison officers assisted in the course, relationships between participants and officers were said to have improved and changes in prisoners behaviour was thought to continue outside of the course.

5.9 Impact on staff

Staff involved in the delivery of the programmes were also asked whether they had been impacted in any way from the experience. One teacher felt that they themselves would become a better parent based on what they had learnt from the course. Two interviewees (a basic skills teacher and prison officer) had seen their own confidence grow during the course. Two interviewees thought the course had shown them a new and innovative way to teach parenting. Indeed, one person was reluctant to return to the old teaching approach:

It makes the prospect of going back to teaching it in the classroom as I do now, a very daunting prospect really, but I certainly intend to use a lot of Safe Ground's materials, albeit I won't be able to do it in a drama way, but I will certainly bring in a lot of their methodology to it, because I just think it's just so good (teacher, Fathers Inside).

Another teacher made the point that you could take the basic principle and apply it to other topics, such as drug use and offending. This individual already used drama extensively and was also pleased to see its use officially evaluated:

Q: Could you apply any of it in your professional life?

A: *Yes, loads of it, absolutely loads of it and one of the sessions that we did today which was the one looking at the poem and the men writing their own poetry was absolutely brilliant and you could use that in any area. To be honest all of it, because again you just take the structure and change the issue then you should be able to use this, whether you are looking at offending behaviour, drug use or whatever* (teacher, Family Man).

More broadly, one teacher had relished the whole experience and the fact that so much could be achieved by one person:

I have benefited greatly from it. I have benefited from meeting the Safe Ground people. I have from seeing that it can only.. it only needs one person to pull it together, for me it's been a wonderful experience (teacher, Fathers Inside).

Staff, therefore, were also able to experience positive impacts as a result of the course. Interviewees reported development of their own parenting skills, a greater confidence towards role play and they also felt they had learnt an alternative approach to teaching family relationships and parenting.

5.10 Negative impacts

Staff interviewees were asked to consider if the course generated any negative impacts. Although some problems were highlighted they were considered negligible compared to the overall benefits. Two interviewees mentioned how the course could lead to feelings of guilt about not having been a good parent in the past:

I suppose you could say the only negative side would be lads sitting there stopping and thinking and maybe thinking in their own minds they should have done this, they should have done that (prison officer, Family Man).

At one prison, there was a rumour that the course was for sex offenders – a misconception which perhaps needs to be considered in recruitment literature. Other interviewees mentioned how the course could be more demanding for quieter participants; that there would be some disruption to prison regime, particularly in terms of finding adequate space for a two week programme; and that some members of staff were dismissive about these types of courses. Lastly, two interviewees detected some fears amongst participants towards the written work, namely that they would not be able to cope. Again, it is perhaps important to outline the course requirements clearly during recruitment so that less able prisoners do not feel excluded.

5.11 The family story

As part of the evaluation a small number of family interviews were conducted (4). All interviewees spoke positively about the course based on the feedback they received from their husbands/sons and the family contact they had had since the course. Their interviews provided corroboratory evidence of the effects already identified by participants. It is notable that the effects of the course were detected by family members, three to four months after the programme was taken. This suggests that the course may in fact instigate some real, long term changes in terms of how men communicate with their families and how they perceive their parenting responsibilities. The boxes below contain edited illustrations of these impacts.

PARTICIPANT 1

This first set of comments comes from a prisoner's wife. The prisoner had been married twice, with older children from a previous marriage and step children with his current partner.

NEW KNOWLEDGE
<p>Interviewer: just generally, how do you think he felt about the whole experience and the whole course, what sort of feedback did he give you?</p> <p><i>Wife: I think he learnt an awful lot. He learnt a lot about his relationship, not only with his own children, but with my two boys, because one of the two things that he did learn about was ... one of my children, my eldest son has got dyspraxia which [husbands name] had never heard before, although we had talked about it, he had not really known what it was all about, and that was mentioned during the course and he learnt more about that. So, he has become a lot more understanding with my eldest lad than he was before, just because of that, because he understands what the disease is about.</i></p>
LISTENING SKILLS
<p>Interviewer: So that was one useful thing, did he mention any other aspect of the course that he found particularly helpful?</p> <p><i>Wife: I think in relation to his own children, I mean his children vary in age from 21 I think they are down to twins at 15. He is getting on better and understanding more about how they are and things that they discuss, even just generally talking with them, he is so much nicer. He is so much more relaxed about things, instead of just automatically biting at them but ... well he didn't jump down their throats but he was always on top of them about everything, whereas now he will sit and listen to their side of it, and whatever they have got to say, which I have found. I think it's lovely, is so much nicer.</i></p>
INCREASED FAMILY CONTACT
<p>Interviewer: And would he also write to his children and your children and his older ones?</p> <p><i>Wife: Yes, he does and he writes to his own, the five of his own as well, which is more than he was doing.</i></p> <p>Interviewer: And did he always write to your children as well or is that a new thing?</p> <p><i>Wife: He used to do an occasional, not to mine, but it's more often now and he will talk to them on the phone, whereas before when he used to ring here he would only want to speak to me, but now he will actually have a chat with them if they answer the phone.</i></p>
IMPROVED VISITS
<p><i>Wife: On a visit, like I just took my boys with me on Saturday, now before they would get bored after an hour or so they are bored, and it used to upset him, that they used to say 'can we go now' but it doesn't now. He is more understanding that they are bored. It's not that they don't care about him and they don't want to be there, it's just that they have done everything that they can in there. They have said everything. They want to go, and he is more understanding of that now than he was before.</i></p>

PARTICIPANT 2

This second set of comments comes from a prisoner's mother. The prisoner had no children. Despite this, the course had a positive impact on his extended family relationships, specifically with his nephew and niece.

IMPROVED COMMUNICATION
<p>Interviewer: The course, I think it finished around September time, so since then would you say you have noticed any changes?</p> <p>Mother: <i>Yes, straight away. I noticed his communication skills with his niece and nephew who were aged one and three, and his patience with them, and I noticed that he physically touched them more, you know, cuddled them, showed them a lot more affection. And he seemed to listen to the three year old, seemed to take that bit of time to listen to them.</i></p>
<p>Interviewer: More generally do you feel his relationship with you has changed in any way, or other members of the family?</p> <p>Mother: <i>Well I have noticed he is more approachable and he listens more and I think listening skills is important and he lacked a lot of confidence in that direction before.</i></p>
IMPROVED CONTACT
<p>Interviewer: OK. Has he tried any other ways of communicating with them, actually they are quite young aren't they, I was wondering whether ... did he phone them?</p> <p>Mother: <i>He phones Georgia regularly yes.</i></p>
<p>Interviewer: OK, and was that something he had done previously?</p> <p>Mother: <i>No, not really, he spoke to her mother and sort of bypassed the children you know, and he does ask for more frequent visits with the children.</i></p>
<p>Interviewer: OK, so that's great because I think one of the aims of the course is to try and improve family contact, whether that be through phone calls or letters or in visits.</p> <p>Mother: <i>Well it definitely has improved.</i></p>
A NEW PERSPECTIVE/WANTING TO BE INVOLVED
<p>Interviewer: He sounds like he really does want to have quite a good relationship with his nephew and niece, again is it something that you feel has come about from the course ... how was he before, how did he feel about them prior to doing the course?</p> <p>Mother: <i>He didn't really mind if they didn't visit before, now he does mind if I don't bring them.</i></p>
<p>Interviewer: Right, ok. I wonder why ... has he sort of explained why he feels more like that and wants to be more involved with them?</p> <p>Mother: <i>Because he realises that they are part of our family and he doesn't want to miss any opportunity of seeing them and communicating with them.</i></p>
<p>Interviewer: Right. Would you say his contact with any other family members has improved, I don't know if there are any other close family that ...</p> <p>Mother: <i>Oh yes, he rings his brothers more regular, his younger sister, all round there's more visits.</i></p>
<p>Interviewer: Right, and did they come from him, did he request visits?</p> <p>Mother: <i>Yes, he approached them.</i></p>

5.12 Sustaining the impact

One issue which perhaps needs some thought is how to provide participants with follow up learning and ongoing support once the course has ceased. The intensive nature of the course means the participants do appear to experience real changes, however there is a danger that they are then left high and dry. Indeed, the mother of

one participant explained how her son was very keen to build on what he had learnt because *'he felt that he enjoyed it that much he would like to go back and do it again'*. She felt it would be a shame if there was nothing for him to progress onto.

At some prisons staff had already taken steps to follow up prisoners learning. One establishment organised a father's day at the end of the course, which proved to be very popular. This gave men some extra time with their families and they were allowed greater freedom than is normally permitted on visits:

They sat on the floor and had a picnic, just with their families, so they were scattered all around, so they had their own little space if you like, which was their territory and it was just for them, just like being on a picnic somewhere (teacher, Fathers Inside).

Prisoners were therefore able to practice their newly acquired parenting skills and interviews with family members showed that this time was greatly appreciated:

I have to say the family visit that we went on was absolutely magical. It was so nice to be able to sit on the floor all together and to walk about together (wife).

Interestingly, the success of this event, had led the governor to reconsider how visits were organised, as he had realised *'there is a more humane way of conducting visits'* (teacher).

At another prison, one of the course tutors had approached the Governor with a plan to do further work in the visits centre, working with families so that *'you can build on what they have done in Safe Ground, so we could do something else that leads on from that'*. Other interviewees thought it would help if men could be followed up shortly after the course to find out how family relationships were going and to offer words of encouragement.

Future tutors may therefore wish to think about ongoing support or at least direct men towards further educational opportunities and in doing so, capitalise on the motivation generated by the course.

SUMMARY OF IMPACT

- Generally, prisoners confirmed that they had acquired a better understanding of family relationships and parenting as a result of taking the course and during interviews they gave many examples of how their attitudes and perceptions had been altered. Some prison staff interviewees however, felt there were inevitable limitations given the short term nature of the course.
- Half the prisoners interviewed mentioned having learnt new parenting skills and knowledge. In particular, they made reference to an awareness of different parenting styles and advances in their ability to communicate with children, highlighting the importance of honesty, listening and openness.

- Through a questionnaire, it was established that 18 out of 24 (75 per cent) of respondents experienced improvements in the frequency of their family contact – they were either phoning more often, sending more letters home or receiving more visits. Some prisoners had re-established contact with family members, whilst others were allowing their children to visit them in prison. Additionally, interviewees suggested the quality of contact had also benefited – e.g. they were now reserving time to speak to their children during phone calls and they were writing letters with younger readers in mind e.g. including stories, quizzes, drawings, etc.
- Following the course, some interviewees spoke of taking their parental role more seriously and that they were more committed to their families. This change in attitude arose from a greater awareness of the perspectives and needs of others. Thus, course participants were wishing to spend more quality time with their children.
- Prisoners also reported skill improvement in the following areas: confidence and communication, literacy levels and team work.
- For resistant learners the course served as a launch pad to other education opportunities. They realised that education was within their reach and further still, they now had the confidence to seek out courses which interested them.
- There was the suggestion by some interviewees that the course may positively impact on offending behaviour, as prisoners were now better able to consider how their actions affected others.
- More widely, prison life generally was said to have been touched by the course, as other inmates were now making enquiries about the programme; where prison officers assisted in the course relationships between participants and officers were said to have improved and changes in prisoners behaviour was seen to transfer onto the wings.
- For staff, interviewees reported development of their own parenting skills, a greater confidence towards role play and they also felt they had learnt a new, innovative approach to teaching family relationships and parenting.

Chapter 6

Assessment and accreditation

Introduction

Having considered the Safe Ground programme in terms of impacts on prisoners and their families, on prison staff and prison life in general, this section turns to the specific accreditation achieved by prisoners following the programme, and the process of assessment it entailed.

In relation to accreditation, the aims of the research were:

- **to investigate the extent to which participants in the course achieved the Social and Life Skills (SLS) units of accreditation, as per specification of the contract**
- **to determine the extent to which participants achieved Basic Skills (BS) and Key Skills (KS) accreditation.**

The Safe Ground course was originally conceived to help inmates improve their parenting and family relationship skills while they were 'absent fathers'. However, it was important for the Prison Service that the course made a contribution to help individual prisons meet specific targets, based on the evidence of Key Performance Indicators, (KPIs). While the parenting course fulfilled requirements relating to 'purposeful activity' and 'addressing offending behaviour', it was felt to be important that it should also meet the criteria for improving prisoners' Basic and Key Skills (Specification of Services p. 2).

From the outset, the Prison Service established that the programme would need to be very closely linked with accreditation in Basic Skills. Thus, the course materials and the system of accreditation were initially devised to relate to the Basic Skills qualifications and Wordpower. However, towards the end of Year 1, the national system of accreditation gradually changed from Wordpower to Key Skills. The assessment for this qualification included a national end test, which was introduced by QCA (Qualifications and Curriculum Authority) in September 2000. At the same time, the prison service created a new Key Performance Indicator (KPI) as a target for individual prisons, concerning the achievement of Key Skills accreditation in communications and numeracy. In the light of these changes, the course materials and the system of assessment had to be revised, in order to accommodate the new Key Skills qualification, with the emphasis on communication skills.

The chapter discusses the following areas:

- the assessment process
- teachers' views on the assessment process

- accreditation attained
- recruitment strategies and implications for accreditation.

6.1 The assessment process

As already explained, the Safe Ground course offers prisoners the opportunity to gain two qualifications at the same time. These are the Social and Life Skills (SLS) certificate, either in Parenting Skills ('Fathers Inside'), or Family Relationships ('Family Man'), from the Open College Network, and the City and Guilds certificate in Key Skills (KS). In addition, every man receives Safe Ground's own certificate on completing the course. It was originally hoped that participants would have the opportunity to gain a further qualification in SLS, Working with Others (Unit 4), and according to Safe Ground, this additional unit has been incorporated in the course since the end of the trial phase when the research took place.

The account of assessment given below records perceptions of the process as it operated in the trial prisons. Throughout this period, teachers continually confirmed that the system was being revised and refined. For both the SLS and the KS qualifications, assessment took place in three discrete stages.

Stage One

The teachers assessed participants' work while the course was in progress and immediately afterwards. Assessment of the SLS component involved two specific tasks:

- **Assessment of portfolios:** for evidence of understanding and application of the course content in relation to the prescribed learning outcomes and assessment criteria, in order to determine the specific level at which students would be eligible for a final certificate (entry level, level 1 or level 2); and discussing with individuals where they needed to make improvements.
- **Assessment of oral/practical activities (participation in oral discussion and pair/groupwork):** for evidence of understanding and application of the course content as above. Evidence for accreditation included tapes and videos as well as the teachers' witness statements, which were filled in on sheets provided with the course pack.

Teachers were required to make three witness statements during the course, on an individual's contribution to discussion, and its relevance to the various assessment criteria. For example, one of the criteria for a prisoner to achieve SLS level 1 was to show that he could '*identify the major responsibilities of parenthood*'. A discussion based on this theme would be an opportunity for the men to give evidence of competence in this respect. The teacher would observe the discussion, and record the relevance of each individual's contribution to that particular set of criteria.

The first stage of assessment for the KS qualification also involved two discrete tasks:

- **Assessment of portfolios:** for evidence of the specific level (level 1 or level 2) of competence in written skills; discussing with individuals where they needed to make improvements in order to reach the standard required.
- Assessing each individual's participation in oral discussion and group activities for evidence of the specific level of communication skills required to achieve the certificate.

As with the SLS assessment, the teacher had to provide witness statements which testified to each individual's competence in terms of the various criteria. However, for KS the requirements were more rigorous. Each man had to conduct a one-to-one discussion and a group discussion. Teachers had to make a specific assessment in terms of body language, ability to hold a conversation, listening skills, and the use of questions. As a member of Safe Ground pointed out, while experienced Key Skills tutors would know exactly what they were looking for, and would have '*a mental tick list*' of appropriate phrases for describing participants' behaviour, providing this kind of evidence could be very demanding for those less familiar with this process.

Stage Two

Once all the portfolios were completed, moderation was carried out by internal verifiers, who were frequently the SLS and KS coordinators. When the internal verifiers were satisfied that the portfolios were all at the level required, they were forwarded to an external verifier for final accreditation. In some cases, external verification took some time, and it was not always possible to inform the men whether they had gained their certificates before they were transferred or release.

Stage Three

In the case of KS, the second stage was followed by a third, which involved completion of the new formal examination. This was held at several points in the year, sometimes a considerable number of weeks after the end of the course itself. The practicalities of ensuring that men were available to take the exam were difficult to overcome, especially if they left the prison before the examination was held.

Assessment tools were provided by Safe Ground to help with planning. These included '*a tick list*' for recording assessments of individual prisoners as they were completed, the witness sheets referred to above, and a weekly planner for assessing small groups of men at a time. The way these tools were used in the trial prisons varied. In one institution, for example, the teacher had followed the planner; only three or four men were assessed during a single session and the teacher had written the assessment directly onto the witness sheets. In another prison, the weekly planner had been used to check which activities were coming up, and one of the two teachers involved had written notes during the lessons and then transferred the notes onto the witness sheets afterwards. In one or two cases, education staff had decided to run the course without the KS component. Where both components were included, the requirement to carry out assessment for two separate qualifications in addition to the teaching itself, was seen to make the availability of two teachers for the full duration of the course more or less essential.

In accordance with prison service accreditation requirements, the programme was originally devised to enable participants to achieve both the SLS certificate and the Basic Skills (BS) qualifications and Wordpower. Towards the end of Year 1, the course materials were subsequently revised to accommodate the new Key Skills (KS) qualification which was introduced nationally to replace BS. Accreditation for both certificates involved continual oral assessment and assessment of written work in the student portfolios. Accreditation for the KS certificate also required performance in a national examination introduced in September 2000. Some education departments chose to omit the KS component of the course. Where it was included, teachers agreed that the workload required the commitment of two teachers for the entire duration of the course.

6.2 Teachers' views on the assessment process

As has been stated previously, it is important to bear in mind that throughout the trial phase Safe Ground carried out their own evaluation of the course's effectiveness, and, with guidance from prison education staff, the course materials were subjected to a continual process of revision and review. Consequently, Safe Ground believed that many of the following comments and suggestions had been addressed in the production of the final teachers' pack

Pitching the course at the right level

Safe Ground had pitched the SLS component of the course at level 1. While in some cases, teachers felt the level of the course was appropriate for the men recruited, in others they adjusted the level of the course for one or both certificates from level 1 to level 2, in order to accommodate the level which the majority of prisoners had already attained. With regard to KS, in some prisons, the men were assessed for basic literacy skills as soon as they arrived. In others, teachers had to carry out basic skills assessment during the course to see whether the men were capable of working up to the level of the KS component. In at least one case, the men who joined the course were new to the prison and had not been to the education department before, so there had been no time for them to have acquired the '*underpinning literacy skills*' which would have enabled them to be entered for KS level 1.

Views on the inclusion of the KS component

A range of views emerged on the requirement to include the KS component. Some teachers took the decision to leave it out, because some of the participants had already obtained the qualification while others lacked the basic skills to enable them to reach the standard required in such a short space of time. The oral element of the KS requirements did not appear to be a problem. This was seen to benefit prisoners' ability to manage contact with their families, one-to-one or otherwise, and to handle other kinds of social interaction, such as disseminating information or presenting themselves at interviews to prospective employers. But there was general agreement that the intensive nature and short duration of the course made it impossible for teachers to provide the individual feedback and support required to make any recognisable improvement in literacy skills. One interviewee said the requirement to do KS made some of the men '*panicky*' and that it could be counter-productive to the core aim of improving participants' parenting skills and family relationships. It could

also put too much pressure on less literate participants with good oral skills. Such men could gain from, and contribute considerably to, the course, but often tended to *'go to pieces in front of a piece of paper'*. Significantly, prisoners also expressed concerns in this respect. One observed that the KS component had *'frightened off'* some of his fellow-inmates, who had initially been keen to learn parenting skills, and attracted by the approach through drama.

Fulfilling the assessment requirements

With regard to both SLS and KS, the oral assessment which took place during the course itself appeared to have caused fewer problems than assessment of the written work in the portfolios. During the sessions, as often as possible, teachers discussed written work with individuals as the need arose, but several pointed out that sometimes this prevented the men from participating in a SLS activity. Ideally, all the portfolios were to be completed by the end of the course. In some institutions, the men took them away to work on in their cells; some of them resented *'homework'*, but others found the opportunity to reflect on the session in private very helpful, both in reinforcing their understanding of the content covered, and in analysing their personal response towards it.

Those teachers who were familiar with the assessment process for Basic and Key Skills found assessment of the KS component less *'onerous'* than inexperienced colleagues. One interviewee thought that assessment for the new KS qualification was *'fairly straight forward'*, because it did not require a large amount of material, and the number of activities ensured that there were plenty of discussions, talks, letters and stories from which to choose the evidence.

Some teachers were able to offer the men continuing support after the end of the course to enable them to complete their portfolios. In some cases, at this stage, it was possible for teachers to provide enough feedback and extra tasks for individuals to upgrade their portfolios, so that they met the criteria for level 2, rather than for level 1 at which the course had been taught.

Elsewhere, however, teachers had no time to assess portfolios, even if they were completed, before the end of the course, because they were too busy fitting lesson preparation in on top of their other teaching commitments. Many reported that it had often been very hard work to go through each portfolio once they had resumed their normal timetable. Moreover, this sometimes had the undesirable effect of returning a discouraging number of corrections to an individual all at once. Although material to be assessed for each respective certificate was indicated by a symbol on the sheet, some teachers had found it very time-consuming to sift through each portfolio in order to separate the material for each qualification for each of the two internal verifiers, and a lot of time had been spent on photocopying.

In relation to external verification, Safe Ground had found that standards varied. While one region might adopt *'a stringent approach'*, elsewhere it would be *'a little more laid back'*. This regional variation was said to have caused problems in terms of promoting a national standard in the system of accreditation.

The end test

The introduction of an end test for the assessment of KS was perceived to have caused considerable problems. For some inmates, such formal assessment was reminiscent of negative experiences of education at school, and it was seen as a potential deterrent to joining the course. Teachers pointed out that completing the portfolio in itself could be demanding enough academically for many participants, and one interviewee thought that an examination for her group of students, orally confident and perceptive though she felt they were they were, was '*ludicrous*'.

Introducing the prospect of the examination seemed to have worked best when it had been discussed at the induction session, so that participants fully understood that it was compulsory for anyone who wished to achieve a certificate in KS at the same time as the SLS qualification. Several teachers had offered the men the option of taking a '*mock exam*', for practice. They perceived this strategy to have been very useful, particularly in cases where a number of weeks had elapsed between the end of the course and the date of the examination, and the men were in danger of losing any improvements they may have made during the course itself.

The fact that this national examination was held only five times a year was a real '*bugbear*' for education departments, as the date frequently did not coincide with the end of the course. Prisoners were often transferred or released before the exam date and it was administratively extremely difficult to ensure that they were able to take it. During Year 2, for example, eight men from one of the Safe Ground courses were submitted for the KS qualification from one institution, but only two were able to take the test, and therefore gain the certificate, because the others were released within two months of the end of the course. In addition, the fact that registration for the exam had to be done before the start of the course, meant that teachers had no time beforehand to assess individual students' capability of taking it. It was alleged that the QCA was currently considering the possibility of '*block booking*'. Under this system, a certain number of students could be registered without submitting any names. Any places booked, but later left unfilled, could be taken by students who were ready to do so at short notice. It was felt that the introduction of such a system might be a considerable improvement.

Streamlining the assessment process

In order to streamline the assessment process, Safe Ground asked teachers whether they had found the assessment tools useful, and whether they had adapted them or developed a system of their own. They also asked whether teachers had had any previous experience in assessing Key Skills and, in cases where two teachers ran the course, how the responsibilities for assessment were shared between them. Teachers were also consulted about any changes they would make to the assessment process.

It was found, as indicated to NFER researchers, that the assessment for two discrete sets of criteria often involved a very heavy workload for teachers, particularly where it involved producing assessments of larger groups of more than ten participants. The assessment tools were gradually refined to increase the opportunities for assessment of one set of criteria to be carried out while participants were working on a specific aspect of the other. An example of this '*cross-referencing*' would be a discussion intended to assess oral skills according to the KS criteria, where the content of the

discussion was relevant to the SLS criteria. According to Safe Ground, with the final pack, the teacher would now be able to use the same sheet for a single discussion, to assess an individual's communication skills for KS, and to assess the content of his contribution for SLS. Another adaptation would now offer teachers an opportunity for multiple assessment from a single activity, so that a number of men could be assessed for reading, writing and a one-to-one or group discussion at the same time. This was also intended to help participants to concentrate, because teachers would be able to discuss the skills to be assessed in advance, and use other activities for practice.

6.3 Accreditation attained

In terms of the number of certificates achieved at the end of the course, the results were inevitably '*context-bound*'. They reflected changes in the system of accreditation taking place in prison education over the two years of the evolution of the course which, in turn, reflected changes in the wider world of education. The results also reflected changes taking place in the teaching and assessment of the course itself as it progressed.

According to Safe Ground, the requirement to map the KS component onto the original course had had an '*enormous impact*' on the number of men obtaining certificates. It had made the course more rigorous in academic terms; this, as researchers discovered, had made it considerably less appealing to some of the less academic inmates, who were otherwise very enthusiastic about the SLS content, and the practical way in which it was taught.

In the tables below, it will be seen that the number of men recruited in each prison may not always correspond with the number of men who completed the course. According to Safe Ground, this could be for several reasons: inmates may have been released or transferred before the course ended; they may have dropped out, or they may have been taken off the course either in the interests of security or for other reasons associated with the prison regime.

In the same way, the number of men in each prison who completed the course may not necessarily correspond with the numbers of those who achieved certificates. Again, Safe Ground explained that this could be for several reasons: the inmate might not have completed the portfolio, for example, if he was released or transferred immediately after the end of the course, or if he needed extra individual tuition for which teacher time was unavailable while the course itself was in progress. Some men were less interested in the portfolios, seeing the practical activities as the most valuable learning experience the course had to offer.

At the teacher's discretion, in cases where the men had completed their portfolios to the standard required, and the teacher had had time to carry out all the necessary assessments of both written and oral work, it was possible for them to achieve accreditation without completing the course. This process could be applied in cases where men were aware they would be transferred to another prison before the end of the course. Their portfolio could be submitted for accreditation for the SLS certificate along with those of the other participants. Accreditation for KS for transferred prisoners was more difficult to organise, because of the compulsory examination.

The following tables present the information on accreditation supplied by Safe Ground and record all results available from Safe Ground by 1st February 2002. Three individual tables are presented to show the attainments achieved during Year 1 of the initiative, as the course was delivered by Safe Ground (Table 6.1), the results of Year 2 where Safe Ground personnel delivered the programme (Table 6.2) and Year 2 results where the programme was trialled by prison education staff (Table 6.3). The main findings can be summarised as follows:

Table 6.1

Year 1: Accreditation figures for courses delivered by Safe Ground (1999-2000)

- 84 per cent of the original contract participation target number completed the course in Year 1.
- 85 per cent of participants who completed the course in Year 1 gained certificates in SLS.
- 40 per cent of participants who completed the course in Year 1 gained certificates in literacy (i.e. an increase of 15 per cent on the original target of 25 per cent).

Table 6.2

Year 2: Accreditation figures for courses delivered by Safe Ground

- 58 per cent of the original contract participation target number completed the course (participation and completion figures were lower in the second year due to recruitment difficulties at two prisons e.g. workshops in prison being given a higher priority than a parenting/family relationships course)
- 89 per cent of participants who completed the course gained SLS certificates.
- the total number of participants who gained certificates in KS was not confirmed in time to be included in this report.

Table 6.3

Year 2: Accreditation figures for courses trialled by prison teachers

- 58 per cent of the original contract participation target number completed the course.
- 98 per cent of participants who completed the course gained certificates in SLS.
- 42 per cent of participants who completed the course gained certificates in KS.

Table 6.1 Year 1: Accreditation figures for courses delivered by Safe Ground 1999–2000

	Trial prisons and dates of parenting courses	No. recruited	No. attending on Day 1	No. completed course	Social and Life Skills			Key Skills	Wordpower*		
					No. attain. entry level	No. attain. level 1	No. attain level 2	No. attain. level 1	No. attain. level 1	No. attain. 306	No. attain. entry level
1	prison A/Aug	25	23	21		20		6			
2	prison B/Sept	27	21	17		16			7		
3	prison B/Oct	33	21	15	2	10	1		5	1	
4	prison B/Nov	34	21	19		18	1		6	3	
5	prison B/Dec	29	22	18	2	9			8		
6	prison B/Jan	35	20	18	1	13			9	1	
7	prison B/Feb	30	25	22	10	9			19		
8	prison B/Mar	24	18	16		13			n/a		
9	prison B/Apr	27	17	17		7			n/a		
10	prison B/May	37	23	17	4	10			n/a		
11	prison C/June	25	20	12		12		3			
12	prison C/June	26	24	10		10		2			
13	prison C/July	25	22	15		15		9			
14	prison B/July	30	21	18	2	14		14			
Totals		407	298	235	21	176	2	28	6	54	5

Participation targets

Contract project participation target	No. recruited	No. attending on Day 1 of course	Total prisoners completing P421C
280	407	298	235
%	greater than %100	greater than %100	84%

Completion and certification results

Total prisoners completing P421C	Total Social and Life Skills Certificate	Total Literacy Certificates (target 25%)
235	199	93
%	85%	40%

Source: *Safe Ground*

* There are three components to the Wordpower qualification: 304 reading; 305 writing; 306 oral skills. The process of mapping 304 and 305 onto the SLS course had not been completed when these men were participating so these qualifications were not yet available. Moreover, some of the men's literacy skills may have been inadequate.

Table 6.2 Year 2: Accreditation figures for courses delivered by Safe Ground

	Trial prisons and dates of parenting courses	No. recruited	No. attending on Day 1	No. completed course	Social and Life Skills (no. certificates attained)			Key Skills Portfolio no. attaining level 1
					Entry level	Level 1	Level 2	
Family Man								
1	prison D/Oct	20	18	17		14		4 submitted results waiting
2	prison B/Nov	29	21	17	1	9	3	4 submitted results waiting
3	prison C/Dec	34	19	13		12		12
4	prison D/Jan	22	20	14		14		
5	prison B/Feb	30	10	9		6	1	8 submitted results waiting
6	prison B/Mar	32	19	12		10		7 submitted results waiting
Fathers Inside								
7	prison D/Apr (cancel)							
8	prison B/May	38	15	14	3	11		6 submitted results waiting
9	prison C/June	15	9	8		5	2	
10	prison D/July	20	18	11		11		
Totals		240	149	115	4	92	6	To be confirmed

Participation targets

Contract project participation target	No. attending on Day 1 of course	Total prisoners completing P421C
200	150	115
%	75%	58%

Completion and certification results

Total prisoners completing P421C	Total Social and Life Skills Certificate*	Total Literacy Certificates (target 25%)
115	102	To be confirmed
%	89%	To be confirmed

Source: *Safe Ground*

* Achieved by those who completed the course

Table 6.3 Year 2: Accreditation figures for courses trialled by prison teachers

	Trial prisons piloting parenting courses	No. recruited	No. attending on Day 1	No. completed course	Social and Life Skills (no. of certificates attained)			Key Skills Portfolio (no. of certificates attained)	
					Entry level	Level 1	Level 2	Level 1	Level 2
Family Man									
1	prison E	22	21	18		18		14	
2	prison F	25	22	8		8		n/a	
3	prison G	13	12	12		10		n/a	
4	prison H	20	20	18		18		13	
Fathers Inside									
5	prison J	35	28	7		5	2	n/a	
6	prison E	18	18	17		17		n/a	
7	prison K	23	21	8		2	6	1	5
8	prison L	11	10	7		7		7	
9	prison M	11	10	10		10		4	
10	prison N (cancelled)								
Totals		178	162	105		95	8	39	5

Participation targets

Contract project participation target	no. attending on Day 1 of course	Total prisoners completing P421C
180	162	105
%	90%	58%

Completion and certification results

Total prisoners completing P421C	Total Social and Life Skills Certificate*	Total Key Skills Portfolios submitted and passed*
105	103	44
%	98%	42%

Source: *Safe Ground*

* Achieved by those who completed the course

The abbreviation 'n/a' ('not applicable') in Table 6.3 denotes cases where the Key Skills component was not included in the course for one of the following reasons:

- education staff were already teaching Key Skills (e.g. in one prison one of the Key Skills team was already teaching Key Skills through drama)
- the students were not sufficiently competent
- the teachers preferred to pilot the course for SLS only while they became familiar with the course pack
- the teachers preferred to use the time available to concentrate on family relationships and parenting.

Accreditation overview

Finally, the following two tables compile data relating to Year 2 of the initiative, in order to give an overview of the accreditation achieved (combining the results of those delivered by Safe Ground and those trialled by prison teachers). Table 6.4 below shows that the target recruitment of 380 was more than achieved, with 418 initially recruited to the programme. On day one of the course 311 attended and of these 220 completed the programme (58 per cent).

Table 6.4 Summary of Year 2 recruitment and completion

	Total recruited	Total attended on Day 1	Total completed
No. of participants	418	311	220
% of target number (380)	greater than 100%	82%	58%

Source: *Safe Ground*

Meanwhile, Table 6.5 below details the overall attainment totals for Year 2 of the initiative (i.e. the trials). It can be seen that a total of 220 participants completed the course in the trial prisons in Year 2, and that of these, 93 per cent achieved certificates in SLS. Moreover, in spite of the difficulties associated with mapping the KS component onto a programme which originated as a parenting course, and notwithstanding delays caused both by administrative difficulties at the stage of external verification, and by the timing of the compulsory end test, Safe Ground achieved the stipulated target for KS: by 1st February 2002, it was possible to confirm that 56 participants, that is 25 per cent of the total number of participants who completed the course in Year 2, had gained a certificate in Key Skills. A further 29 participants, (see Table 6.2), are waiting for their portfolios to be returned from external verification

Table 6.5 Overall totals of accreditation achieved in Year 2

	No. of SLS certificates gained				No. of KS certificates gained		
	Entry level	Level 1	Level 2	Total	Level 1	Level 2	Total
No. of participants achieving	4	187	14	205	51	5	56
% of participants who completed (220)	2%	85%	6%	93%	23%	2%	25%
% of target number (380)	1%	49%	4%	54%	13%	1%	15%

Source: *Safe Ground*

Because the course was revised throughout the trial phase, teachers were constantly having to make adaptations while it was in progress. Bearing this in mind, and the fact that the materials were new to them, the majority of education staff affirmed that they would find the course considerably easier to teach, and to assess, the second time round. In spite of the multifarious demands on their time and energy, they had all found the experience both stimulating and worthwhile. Thus, the results for the end of the trial period would seem to be very encouraging.

6.4 Recruitment strategies and implications for accreditation

The course was originally conceived as an ‘*open programme*’, in line with other SLS courses offered by the prison service. However, in practice, this principle of recruitment varied between individual institutions, according to individual regimes and contingencies at the time the course was introduced. Some teachers believed that a range of abilities created an atmosphere of ‘*co-operation, rather than competition*’, and that the oral component of the course ensured that there were opportunities other than written work for individual strengths to emerge. However, a number of teachers referred to the problems inherent in teaching the course to mixed ability groups. In one case, some of the men were working at level 2 and were unable to achieve the corresponding certificate because the course was set at level 1. One teacher pointed out that some students needed more time than others to grasp a concept or to reach the required standard of written skills in their portfolios. In some education departments, teachers were able to offer inmates continuing support to help them complete their portfolios after the course had ended, which enabled them to reach the level required to achieve a certificate, but this option was not available at all prisons.

A number of education staff underlined the importance of adhering to the standards of accreditation. In terms of KS, it was crucial to award certificates only to the men who had shown they were capable of achieving the requirements, in order to maintain the credibility of the qualification. One teacher was hoping to obtain funding to run a basic skills class prior to the course to ensure that all the men were ‘*up to standard*’. It was felt that learning outcomes were bound to vary in accordance with individual ability, temperament, circumstances, and commitment: ‘*some guys will benefit more than others, as in drug rehabilitation and everything else*’. The internal verifier quoted here believed that the men should be interviewed more thoroughly to find out

who would benefit most from the course. He and a number of other interviewees felt participants needed to be at level 1 already for Key Skills, as there was not enough time on the course for them to improve in these areas, if they were to benefit from the SLS content and associated activities. He suggested that, through interviewing individual applicants, it might be possible to differentiate between the men capable of achieving certificates at level 1 and at level 2, and then to run two courses, one at each level. He thought this would make a significant contribution to meeting the prison's Key Performance Indicator (KPI10) relating to basic skills, and that the process would also generate further information, which could be used to work out how a prison could meet such targets.

The requirement for individual prisons to meet specific targets related to accreditation, was held by a number of individuals to affect the degree to which it was possible to follow the principle of open recruitment. Quantifiable evidence of improvement was held by the prison service as crucial for the viability of the Safe Ground course. In terms of recruitment, one teacher pointed out that the only way to achieve the KPI for accreditation was to select men who were assessed to be capable of getting certificates, not the '*basic men*'. She believed such a strategy '*goes against the whole policy of taking basic men, teaching them literacy and numeracy so that they can get jobs*'. In order to enhance the men's '*transferable skills*' in the context of a parenting course, she preferred to nurture confidence and oral skills, '*how to speak properly ... present themselves*'. A teacher elsewhere felt that men joined the course primarily to learn about parenting. Including the KS component could mean excluding those who thought their basic literacy skills were inadequate. In her view, the men weakest on basic skills were the most likely to be those who '*need the parenting skills far more than the rest of them do*'. Several teachers, and prisoners, recommended running two separate courses, one with the KS component and one without it, so that all inmates could benefit from the SLS component. Another interviewee felt that the pack '*could have taken more account of the female population*', and that this would have enhanced its appeal across the prison service as a whole. The issue for the prison service would seem to be how much to '*get out of*' a single course in terms of specific accreditation, and how much to lay the emphasis on unmeasurable outcomes relating to individual participants' personal and social development. For one satisfied participant at least, the priorities were very clear; the course had been '*... a qualification in life ... [something] you can't measure like a step forward*'.

SUMMARY OF ASSESSMENT AND ACCREDITATION

- There was general consensus that the intensive nature and short duration of the course made it impossible for teachers to provide the individual feedback and support required to make any recognisable improvement in literacy skills. Some interviewees felt men might be put off by the requirement to do key skills and that it may be counter-productive to the core aim of improving participants' parenting skills and family relationships. It could also put too much pressure on less literate participants with good oral skills. Significantly, prisoners also expressed concerns in this respect.
- With regard to both SLS and KS, the oral assessment which took place during the course itself appeared to have caused fewer problems than assessment of the written work in the portfolios. During the sessions, as often as possible, teachers discussed written work with individuals as the need arose, but several pointed out that sometimes this prevented the men from participating in a SLS activity.
- Those teachers who were familiar with the assessment process for Basic and Key Skills found assessment of the KS component less '*onerous*' than inexperienced colleagues. Some teachers were able to offer the men continuing support after the end of the course to enable them to complete their portfolios. Elsewhere, however, teachers had no time to assess portfolios, even if they were completed before the end of the course, because they were too busy fitting lesson preparation in on top of their other teaching commitments. Many reported that it had often been very hard work to go through each portfolio once they had resumed their normal timetable. Moreover, this sometimes had the undesirable effect of returning a discouraging number of corrections to an individual all at once.
- In relation to external verification, Safe Ground had found that standards varied. While one region might adopt '*a stringent approach*', elsewhere it would be '*a little more laid back*'. This regional variation was said to have caused problems in terms of promoting a national standard in the system of accreditation.
- The introduction of an end test for the assessment of KS was perceived to have caused considerable problems. For some inmates, such formal assessment was reminiscent of negative experiences of education at school, and it was seen as a potential deterrent to joining the course. The fact that this national examination was held only five times a year was a real '*bugbear*' for education departments, as the date frequently did not coincide with the end of the course. Prisoners were often transferred or released before the exam date and it was administratively extremely difficult to ensure that they were able to take it. In addition, the fact that registration for the exam had to be done before the start of the course, meant that teachers had no time beforehand to assess individual students' capability of taking it.

- It was found, as indicated to NFER researchers, that the assessment for two discrete sets of criteria often involved a very heavy workload for teachers, particularly where it involved producing assessments of larger groups of more than ten participants. The assessment tools were gradually refined to increase the opportunities for assessment of one set of criteria to be carried out while participants were working on a specific aspect of the other. According to Safe Ground, with the final pack, the teacher would now be able to use the same sheet for a single discussion, to assess an individual's communication skills for KS, and to assess the content of his contribution for SLS.
- In terms of accreditation outcomes, 85 per cent of participants who completed the course in Year 1 gained certificates in SLS. Forty per cent of participants who completed the course in Year 1 gained certificates in literacy (i.e. an increase of 15 per cent on the original target of 25 per cent).
- A total of 220 participants completed the course in the trial prisons in Year 2, and of these, 93 per cent achieved certificates in SLS.
- By 1st February 2002, it was possible to confirm that 56 men, that is 25 per cent of the total number of participants who completed the course in Year 2, had gained a certificate in Key Skills. A further 29 participants, were still waiting for their portfolios to be returned from external verification.
- The requirement for individual prisons to meet specific targets related to accreditation, was held by a number of individuals to affect the degree to which it was possible to follow the principle of open recruitment. Furthermore, some teachers referred to the problems inherent in teaching the course to mixed ability groups. However, if the course were limited to those who could perform at the desired key skills level, then certain men would be deprived of valuable parenting education. The dilemma emerging for the prison service would seem to be how much to '*get out of*' a single course in terms of specific accreditation, and how much to lay the emphasis on unmeasurable outcomes relating to individual participants' personal and social development.

Chapter 7

Future courses and their promotion

Introduction

Those involved in the 'Families for the 21st Century' initiative hope to see the course widely disseminated to other establishments and experienced by prisoners across the country. The next challenge therefore is to market the finished product and maximise its uptake by both prisons and their inmates. This final chapter therefore considers promotion strategies and issues of long term sustainability.

7.1 Promoting the course

The course requires promotion on two levels. Firstly, potential participants need to be targeted so that prisoners feel motivated to enrol on the course. Secondly, the effects of the course must be publicised to prisons so that Governors feel inclined to include the course within the existing education curriculum. Detailed below are interviewees thoughts on how best to promote the course.

To the prisoners

The development process has already taken into account the importance of a product image, with input from a prisoner-led marketing team to produce promotional materials. For the course to succeed it is essential that prisoners respond to advertising and sign up for the course. Thus, materials that were generated '*by prisoners, for prisoners*' were deemed more likely to hit the target.

Safe Ground are recommending that future courses continue to provide orange T shirts for participants as this serves to generate interest amongst other inmates. The profile of the course will instantly be raised within the establishment as the course logo circulates around the prison. Similarly, the final end presentation, where prison staff and other inmates are invited to watch, can also be exploited as a publicity opportunity – it gives an even wider audience a taster of the course and its distinctive approach.

Recruitment leaflets will include photos of prisoners taking the course – this was said to give potential recruits an instant impression of the course, more readily digested than written descriptions. Thought was also given to the course titles – Family Man and Fathers Inside were adopted because they were considered more catchy than family relationship and parent craft.

The credibility of the course and therefore its acceptance amongst prisoners will hopefully be assisted by its production history – prisoners played a major role in development. Their contribution will be acknowledged within the course materials, with the first names of all developers printed. Again, this will help convey to other

prisoners that their peers had a significant input and that the course was designed specifically for them.

Some interviewees recommended linking the course to a prisoners sentence planning, because then *'it becomes something he virtually has to do'*.

Lastly, one inmate suggested showing a video of the course during induction so that prisoners got a real sense of what the course entailed. He believed you would have a captive audience and it would avoid uncommitted prisoners signing up for the course.

To the prisons

Before the course can be sold to prisoners, it needs to win the approval and support of Governors. From the perspective of two governors, this hinged on the ability of the course to furnish prisoners with accreditation opportunities and therefore meet key performance targets. The course now offers three certificates – parentcraft/family relationships, key skills communication and working with others.

Another selling feature of the course is the fact that the materials are free and teachers are provided with a ready made, off-the-shelf manual. The materials have been written, tested and revised so that teachers can simply run with the course as it is presented. However, the intensive nature of the course does have implications for staffing, as teachers will effectively be removed from other responsibilities for a three week period. Equally, the routines of prison officers may also be affected as staff are required to escort participants in some prisons. In recognition of this potential difficulty, one interviewee recommended allowing a degree of flexibility with regards how the programme is implemented. Whilst there are established benefits in running an intensive full-time programme, some institutions may simply lack the staffing infrastructure to do so. Where this is the case, it may be better to go with a part time model, such as mornings only, or spread out over a 4 week period. By offering different options, establishments may be more inclined to take on the course.

Lastly, although the course was developed with male prisoners in mind, one interviewee believed it could be adapted for female inmates or young offenders, *'the potential is massive'*. Thus, the course could have an even wider target group, which in turn would contribute to its long term use within the prison system.

SUMMARY OF FUTURE COURSES AND THEIR PROMOTION

- Sustainability of the course depends on prisons deciding to run the course and for sufficient numbers of prisoners to express an interest – any marketing strategy needs to address both elements.
- Prisoners will hopefully be attracted by a course designed specifically for them – by their own peer group.
- Publicity devices include orange T shirts, leaflets with images of the course and inviting other inmates and prison staff to view the end presentation.
- One strategy to increase participation may be to link the course to sentence planning, thereby requiring prisoners to complete the programme.
- The value of the course could be sold to prisons by the fact that it offers accreditation in three certificate areas.
- The course is also free to prisons, apart from staff time, and offers a ready made resource for teachers.
- To maximise the initial uptake of the course, it may be necessary to permit a degree of flexibility with regards timetabling the course, opting for a part-time, as opposed to a full-time delivery.

Conclusion

Within the overall aims of the two phases, the evaluation was set the task of investigating nine aspects of the Safe Ground family relationships and parenting programme. By means of a synopsis, this final section aims to summarise answers to these key research questions that have been discussed in more details in the main body of the report.

- 1. Has the contractor met the specifications as agreed in the contract between Safe Ground and the Prison Service to produce teaching material for the Social and Life Skills Units, Parenting and Family Ties?**
 - In terms of meeting the contractual obligation to produce the specified 'Key Deliverables', (Specification of Services p. 1 and p.14), both the video and early drafts of lesson plans had been produced by the end of Year 1. However, to date, only one course, Family Man, has been produced in its finished form. The contract was extended to allow for final revisions to the second course, Fathers Inside. It was felt that the mapping of key skills onto the programme had proved particularly time consuming and that this had partly caused a delay to the production process.

- 2. Do prisoners achieve the Social and Life Skills Units of accreditation as per the specification of the contract (Units 2, 3, and 4)?**
 - Eighty-five per cent of participants who completed the course in Year 1 gained certificates in SLS. A total of 220 participants completed the course in the trial prisons in Year 2, and of these, 93 per cent achieved certificates in SLS.

- 3. Do prisoners achieve basic skills and/or other key skills accreditation (AEB, RSA, City & Guilds, etc.)?**
 - Forty per cent of participants who completed the course in Year 1 gained certificates in literacy (i.e. an increase of 15 per cent on the original target of 25 per cent). By 1st February 2002, it was possible to confirm that 56 men, that is 25 per cent of the total number of participants who completed the course in Year 2, had gained a certificate in Key Skills. A further 29 participants, were still waiting for their portfolios to be returned from external verification.

- 4. Are the Learning Outcomes and Assessment Criteria of the Social and Life Skills Units Parenting, Family Ties and Working With Others, achieved by following the teaching material, lesson plans, student portfolio and video?**
 - Education staff generally agreed that this was the case. Some expressed regret that it had taken so long to map the learning outcomes for Key Skills onto the original course. The aim for the updated version was to ensure that a single

activity, such as a group discussion could be used as evidence for both qualifications.

5. Are the materials of use to non-drama teachers?

- Overall, the majority of the five trial prisons involved in the evaluation had the benefit of an experienced drama teacher. To an extent, this limits the capacity of the evaluation to fully consider whether or not the course can be used by non-drama teachers. Furthermore, those that lacked drama experience had attended the pre-programme training, which would have exposed and prepared them for a drama-based course. During the interviews, experience of teaching Social and Life Skills to prisoners, and all the sensitivity that that implies, emerged as the most fundamental requirement for any teacher of the Safe Ground programme. This was seen to be at least as essential to the effectiveness of the course as familiarity with specific drama techniques. However, given that the positive outcomes were equally reported across all five prisons (including those where the programme was run by non-drama teachers), it could be said that non-drama teachers (supported by the pre-programme training from Safe Ground) were able to deliver the course equally as well as those with drama backgrounds. More important, it would seem, was the personality of the teachers and their ability to strike up a rapport with participants.

6. Do prisoners now have a better understanding of parenting 6 – 12 year olds?

- Generally, prisoners confirmed that they had acquired a better understanding of family relationships and parenting as a result of taking the course and during interviews they gave many examples of how their attitudes and perceptions had been altered. For example, they now realised the value in spending quality time with children and participants expressed a commitment to meeting their parental responsibilities. Some prison staff interviewees, however, felt there were inevitable limitations given the short term nature of the course.

7. How has taking part in the programme affected prisoners' contact with their children (letters, phone calls and visits)?

- Through different data sources, the evaluation established that greater family contact was a major outcome of the course. The questionnaire showed that 18 out of 24 respondents (75 per cent) experienced improvements in the frequency of their family contact – they were either phoning more often, sending more letters home or receiving more visits. Interviews with participants and their families added further evidence that prisoners were now making more effort to communicate with their families. In some cases, prisoners had re-established contact with family members, whilst others were allowing their children to visit them in prison for the first time. Additionally, interviewees described ways in which the quality of contact had also benefited – the course had signalled new and better ways for prisoners to express themselves to their partners and immediate family members e.g. they were now reserving time to speak to their children during phone calls and they were writing letters with younger readers in mind e.g. including stories, quizzes, drawings, etc.

8. How has the programme impacted on prisoners' families?

- Although only four interviews were conducted with family members, it was notable that all interviewees had seen changes in their husbands/sons since the course, changes which continued to be maintained three to four months after the course had ended. Already, it has been proved that family contact increased – yet it was the testimonies of family members which illustrated the far reaching implications of the parenting/family relationships programme. They noted how the prisoners were more interested in the family, that they were communicating more expressively, their listening skills had improved and generally, they were more engaged with their families.

9. How has the initiative impacted on the prison regime?

- It is unlikely that a short two-week programme would have a marked impact on the external prison regime. However, there were some signs that its influence was felt – other inmates were seen to be making enquiries about the programme; where prison officers assisted in the course, relationships between participants and officers were said to have improved and positive changes in the behaviour of prisoners were thought to have continued once the course had ended.

SUMMARY

To conclude, Safe Ground met their contractual commitments to produce a family relationships programme (Family Man). The parenting version of the programme (Fathers Inside), however, was not fully completed within the original timescale. This was partly due to the requirement to include key skills and partly due to the course increasing in length from 8 to 15 days. The production process, therefore, took longer than anticipated.

From a participant's viewpoint, prisoners reported many positive impacts as a result of their involvement in the programme. Successful outcomes appeared to be linked to the evolutionary history of the project – it rose out of the ideas and experiences of prisoners. The resulting materials were subsequently commended by participants, who saw them as relevant, credible and easy to relate to. This in turn contributed to the overall impact of the programmes and men were prompted to change their behaviour, or at least question their attitudes to family relationships and parenting.

At the same time, however, the trialling of the programme generated a heavy workload for teachers, compounded by a large, ever-changing manual and a short delivery time. The programme was not piloted with enough non-drama teachers to conclude whether or not teachers without a drama background could use the materials (the majority of trial prisons visited had the benefit of a drama teacher). However, interviewees felt it was generally more important to have prior experience of social and life skills education.

It is understood that Safe Ground have responded to many of the problems identified by teachers – and in its revised form, the course should make a valuable contribution to family relationships and parenting education, providing an interactive and exciting approach, through the medium of drama.

References

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