

Innovations in Working With Families Conference  
 Parents Plus, Thursday 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2015  
 Croke Park

***A Multiagency Experience of Delivering  
 a Parents Plus Programme in a Prison  
 and Community Context.***

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 Jason Deasy (Limerick Prison).**



**Overview:**

- Overview of Family Links;
- Experience of delivering PP within the prison;
- Experience of delivering PP within the community;
- Challenges and success.



## Background to Family Links:

- Based on recommendations from IPRT;
- National and Local group established which aim to:  
“Strengthen family supports to facilitate on-going contact with prisoners while in custody and their reintegration post release, with appropriate supports and programmes.”
- Funding from Katherine Howard Foundation and Community Foundation of Ireland;
- Interagency approach.



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## Family Links:

Evaluation by University of Limerick



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## Preparatory Work:

- All stakeholders on board – prison staff – probation, psychology; teachers; Bedford Row; Tusla;
- Advertising within the prison;
- Advertising in waiting areas and in Bedford Row;
- Shortlisting participants – those that have children; ages of children; relationships with children, geography...



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## Continued:

- Cross referencing with Probation re: child protection concerns;
- Consulting with Bedford Row re: contacting partners;
- Establishing protocols to remain/be removed from the course.



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## Experience of Delivering PP Within the Prison:

- Some have 'pre-course development' needs;
- More awareness to their partners' needs outside the prison environment;
- More attentive towards their partner and children during visits and phone calls;
- A better understanding towards parenting;
- More willing to break the cycle of imprisonment within the family;
- Feelings of being powerless and hopeless diminished.



## Experience of Delivering PP within the Community:

- Family cohesion and stability is affected by imprisonment and related factors e.g. addiction;
- Support needed in very challenging circumstances as well as the cognitive elements of Parents Plus;
- For mothers, a major focus on the quality of the relationship between partners - and how it affects their children;
- Preparation for release - usually more stressful for families than the imprisonment itself.



## Interim Findings:

- Children always know their Dad is in prison, but they keep it a secret if that's what mum wants;
- The peer sharing and support is hugely important, especially for the mothers;
- Self-care becomes a focal point for women;
- There is a need for further awareness raising and training in relation to child protection;
- Aspects of the formal parenting programme need to be adapted for the needs of the target group.



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## Challenges:

- Prisoner's family profiles can be complex so following up in the community can be time-consuming;
- Helping fathers improve their parenting skills when they have limited access to their children;
- Logistical issues re: inside/outside delivery;
- Concerns re: child welfare/protection issues;
- Balancing a family-friendly approach alongside the need to maintain security;
- Culture shift within prison re: role in relation to families.



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## Successes:

- Seven fathers and mothers completed the PP course;
- A further six commenced in November;
- Fathers continuing to implement learning from the course during visits and phone calls;
- Mothers group continuing;
- Interest within the prison growing.



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