



Evaluation of Hidden Voices

November 2017



About Helix Arts

Helix Arts connects high quality artists with diverse communities so they can make great art together. Helix Arts is the glue that holds the artists and the many and varied communities together. We connect all kinds of groups, of whatever age and whatever ability, supporting people to find and express their cultural voice by working with artists from all genres. Helix Arts participants say their health and well-being improve while fresh pathways to employability open up. For so many, Helix Arts is the start of a lifelong, enriching artistic journey. Helix Arts is proud to be an Arts Council England National Portfolio Organisation.

More information: www.helixarts.com



About Nepacs

Nepacs has been working in the North East of England for 130 years. Nepacs works to support a positive future for prisoners and their families. They deliver a number of services in prisons and in the community, including running the visitor centres at the region's prisons, providing play workers at prison visits, resettlement services and family support at court and in the prisons. Nepacs believe that investment must be made in resettlement and rehabilitation to ensure that there are fewer victims of crime in the future and less prospect of family life being disrupted and damaged by a prison sentence.

More information: www.nepacs.co.uk



About the authors

Barefoot Research and Evaluation is a social research organisation based in Newcastle upon Tyne, working across the North East. They have carried out work on a diverse range of social welfare programmes in the voluntary and public sector. Dr. Christopher Hartworth, who set up Barefoot, has 20 years' experience of research and evaluation, beginning in developing countries in poverty alleviation programmes and continuing in the North East of England in work with disadvantaged communities. Joanne Hartworth has a First Class Honours Degree in Sociology, is a qualified teacher and an accomplished project manager, having managed projects in East and West Newcastle.

More information: www.barefootresearch.org.uk



Acknowledgements

There are a number of people we would like to thank for contributing to this evaluation. Firstly, these are the young people who took part in the project and who were forthcoming, open and a pleasure to interview. We would like to thank parents/carers and family members who talked to us at the celebration event and who were also very open about their experiences. Thank you to the prisoners who spoke candidly about their experiences in prison as a parent. Thanks also goes to the professionals who spared the time to contribute their opinions and experiences. In particular, the musicians, the Nepacs youth and family workers and volunteers and prison officers.

THANKS 

i. Executive summary

This is an evaluation of a participatory arts-based intervention project delivered in prison and the community in the North East of England. The aim of *Hidden Voices* was to produce and deliver an arts-based desistance resource to prisoners; children and young people with a parent in prison were involved in the research and development of the resource and also benefitted. The project was delivered by a partnership of Nepacs and Helix Arts and was funded through Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service with support of Tees and Wear Reform Prisons. There was a three-stage process to the project, which included:

- Stage one: setting up, gaining access to project beneficiaries (children, young people and prisoners), developing the music resource in a three-month collaboration with children and young people.
- Stage two: converting the music resource into a toolkit that can be used as a resettlement aid. The end result was a well designed mixed ability resource suitable for integration into a range of resettlement situations, that could be used either on its own in its entirety or in constituent parts.
- Stage three: delivering the toolkit to a group of prisoners.

Findings

The evaluation found that the project had a multi-layered impact on a range of stakeholders including: children and young people; prisoners; parents and carers; and prison staff. For example, for the children and young people who were involved in the development of the resource, impacts included:

- **Increasing social networks:** there was evidence to indicate that involvement in the musical project developed new and strengthened existing social networks.
- **Information exchange:** children talked to each other about their experiences of prison and transferred information. This peer-to-peer

information exchange was said to increase understanding, dispel myths and improve awareness of issues relating to parental imprisonment.

- **Sharing experiences:** the children said that a benefit from the project was being in an environment with other children who had similar experiences. This they said was unusual and not something they had done before, which acted to reduce feelings of isolation and stigma.
- **Enjoyment:** the children said that they had really enjoyed being involved with the music project. They reported that they had enjoyed: meeting other children and making new friends; meeting and working with the musicians; making music and creating a CD; and the games they played during the sessions.
- **Expressing feelings:** the children said that their involvement in the project gave them the opportunity and enabled them to better express their feelings about having a parent in prison. This was something that either never happened or did so rarely both inside and outside of the home; this increased resilience and coping mechanisms.

For the prisoners who were involved with the development of the resource, there were impacts including an increase of awareness and understanding about the effects of their imprisonment on their children. Prisoners also showed the development of a critical appreciation of one of the purposes of the resource; finding ways to engage children in meaningful discussions about these effects. For the prisoners who were recipients of the resource in the context of a resettlement course, the delivery of Hidden Voices created a thoughtful and emotional response about the impacts of the offending on their families and children. When we reflected with the prisoners about the impact of the Hidden Voices resource on desistance, they said it improved the resettlement course intervention, its content and impact. The most impactful elements of the musical content was that they had been produced by local children who had a parent in a North East prison. For the prison, the project was unusual, innovative and interesting, and accessible to prisoners of all abilities. Importantly, it was found that the project helped to reinforce the prison ethos and a general culture of responsibility and good relations.

Conclusion

Hidden Voices has been an effective, well delivered and managed arts-based desistance project delivered by two voluntary sector organisations; one specialist in participatory arts and the other in family support in prisons. There has been great value of involving prisoners in a creative process, stimulating an emotional and more thoughtful response to their offending behaviour and the impact it has on others. Prisoners also found it to be very enjoyable, despite the delivery environment and after issues of embarrassment and bravado had quickly been overcome.

However, possibly more important than this has been the impact the music development has had on the children and young people who were fundamental to the development of the resource. The research found that their involvement in a sensitively and well-delivered participatory arts process has had significant impacts on their happiness, health and wellbeing. The damaging impacts of imprisonment are often felt most keenly by the children and young people who make up the forgotten victims and it is these who are underserved and their needs poorly understood. It is also here where the negative impacts of parental imprisonment will have the most long-term effects, potentially continuing for a lifetime. The Hidden Voices project invested most time with this group and it would appear that it is here where there has been most impact; it would seem that this project would offer a valuable and valid approach to damage mitigation.

It is relevant to reflect on the links between this project and the recent Farmer Review. As an innovative intervention into the lives of prisoners and their families, with an emphasis on reducing reoffending, the most substantive contribution made by the project to the Farmer Review is an improvement in the use of evidence and data, and a contribution to the repository of information about effective family work. Helix Arts, in partnership with Nepacs, has created a novel approach which draws children into having fundamental communications with their imprisoned parents and builds the awareness of the adults of the consequences of their offending behaviour; we have found that it

is a transformative intervention. The project also contributes to the golden thread that Lord Farmer referred to in the review, that should run through all policy frameworks within the prison service. If it comes to pass as he recommended, that Governors are held to account for positive family work outcomes, then those Governors will be happy that Helix Arts and Nepacs are working in their prisons. Notwithstanding the need for investment and commissions needed to develop a more creative approach to delivering family work and reducing reoffending programmes.

The most substantive recommendation for the partners based on the research conducted for this evaluation, other than the above, is that further participatory arts-based developmental work takes place with other children of prisoners across the region and indeed the United Kingdom. This project has been novel and innovative and has demonstrated how to undertake positive interventions to moderate the negative impacts of imprisonment on children and young people as well as to increase the effectiveness of resettlement interventions.

Table of contents

| | |
|------------------------------------------|----|
| i. Executive summary..... | 3 |
| 1.0 Introduction | 8 |
| 1.1 Evaluation methodology | 9 |
| 2.0 The Hidden Voices Project | 11 |
| 2.1 Project objectives | 12 |
| 2.2 Project process..... | 12 |
| 3.0 Evaluation findings..... | 16 |
| 3.1 Findings from stage one | 16 |
| 3.1.1 The musicians..... | 16 |
| 3.1.2 Findings from children..... | 17 |
| 3.1.3 Findings from parents/carers | 21 |
| 3.1.4 Findings from prisoners | 23 |
| 3.1.5 Findings from prison staff..... | 24 |
| 3.1.6 Findings from youth workers..... | 26 |
| 3.2 Findings from stage two | 29 |
| 3.3 Findings from stage three..... | 30 |
| 4.0 Conclusion and recommendations..... | 34 |
| 4.1 Conclusion..... | 34 |
| 4.2 Recommendations | 35 |

1.0 Introduction

This is an evaluation of a participatory arts-based intervention project delivered in prison and the community in the North East of England. The aim of the project was to produce and deliver an arts-based desistance resource to prisoners; children and young people with a parent in prison were involved in the research and development of the resource and also benefitted. The project was delivered by a partnership of Nepacs and Helix Arts and was funded through NOMS (now called Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service) under their 2016 *Prison Reform and Better Outcomes for Prisoners and Their Families* fund. A condition of the grant was that it was delivered in 12 months, between October 2016 and October 2017.

Family support to prisoners and their families continues to be high on the prison reform agenda, despite the competing demands caused by reduced resourcing. Indeed, it is increasingly common and mainstream to hear about the importance of families to resettlement, desistance and the criminal justice process in general. The recent comprehensive Farmer Review (2017¹) looked exhaustively and critically into family issues across the prison estate. The Review's recommendations included governors being made accountable for positive family work outcomes and the involvement of families in sentence and resettlement planning. There were further recommendations from the review that we relate our findings to, in the conclusion. Nepacs has been part of this debate for the last 15 years and has contributed much to the policy achievements which now see family support provision in many prisons across the country. They continue to develop innovative practice and are regularly cited as a national model of best practice, e.g. they are mentioned several times in the most recent HMIP report on families in prison². In this instance and in partnership with Helix Arts, Nepacs continues to advance the work by focusing on the children and young people affected by imprisonment, also

¹ Farmer. 2017. The Importance of Strengthening Prisoners' Family Ties to Prevent Reoffending and Reduce Intergenerational Crime, Ministry of Justice, HM Government.

² HM Inspectorate of Prisons. 2016. Life in prison: Contact with families and friends, A findings paper.

known as the ‘forgotten victims’ of the criminal justice system (Morgan et al, 2014³).

1.1 Evaluation methodology

The role of an evaluation is to provide an independent and unbiased account of the impact of a project, backed up by evidence. In our efforts to do this, we have attempted to remain separate and apart from the experience of project delivery and maintain evaluation integrity. We have used a qualitative methodology to do this, using in-depth interviews and focus groups as the dominant data collection method as we wanted to explore in detail the responses to the intervention from all stakeholders. We used Grounded Theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967⁴) as an analytical framework and thematic analysis as a means of examining the data produced. Grounded Theory was chosen and used because there is little in the way of existing research and we are relying upon the findings to lead us to conclusions, i.e. the ‘grounded’ nature of Grounded Theory means that concepts are generated from empirical data rather than the literature (Visram, 2011⁵).

The first phase of evaluation activities took place after the initial developmental work was complete by May 2017. This consisted of interviews with a number of stakeholder and beneficiary groups including project staff, prison personnel, prisoners, families and most importantly children and young people. We engaged with a total of nine children, six girls and three boys, between the ages of eight and 13 years old over three separate occasions. Discussions with the young people were held before a Nepacs’ outing and towards the end of music development days. Two of the discussions were held in a comfortable area of a youth centre, either in the ‘chill out’ room, which had beanbags and

³ Morgan, J., Leeson, C., Dillon, R.C., Wirgman, A.L. & Needham, M. 2014. A Hidden Group of Children’: Support in Schools for Children who Experience Parental Imprisonment, *Children & Society*, Vol.28(4), pp.269-279.

⁴ Glaser, B. G and Strauss, A. L., 1967. *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research*, Chicago, Aldine Publishing Company.

⁵ Visram, S. 2012. *A Qualitative Exploration of User Engagement and Health-Related Behaviour Change in the NHS Health Trainers Initiative*. Post-Doctoral thesis, Northumbria University.

colourful lighting, or in a young person's common area, which had sofas and a pool table. The other was held in the visitor centre. One of the sessions began with games and the others were calm down sessions after preceding activities. An important consideration in any research with children is providing a safe and comfortable space in which they feel able to engage in meaningful conversation. Such a situation needs to be constructed by the researchers to avoid any level of intimidation or fear (Greig et al, 2013⁶). They were interviewed in groups of between two and three, enabling them to both lead and follow a discussion, contribute and build the topic under discussion and feel confident in the company of their peers. A semi structured interview guide was prepared and was used to direct the discussion. Interviews took approximately one hour.

We also held two focus group interviews with parents/carers and other family members. We interviewed a total of four mothers, two grandmothers, a father and an uncle on two separate occasions. The interviews were held during a breakout session at the celebration event at the end of stage one of the project and after dropping children off for an activity. We held focus group interviews on four separate occasions with a total of nine parents in prison who had been involved with Hidden Voices in HMP Kirklevington Grange. The interviews were held in the chapel in the prison and in a quiet office space. We also conducted an in-depth interview with the senior prison officer in charge of rehabilitation activities in the prison.

⁶ Greig, A., Taylor, J. & MacKay, T. 2013. Doing research with children, Third edition, Sage: London.

2.0 The Hidden Voices Project

As stated in the introduction, the project was a partnership project, with Helix Arts delivering the substantive intervention of the project and Nepacs providing a facilitative and administrative role as presented in the following table. The project also included an independent evaluation carried out by Barefoot Research and Evaluation.

Table 2.0 Roles and responsibilities of the delivery organisations

| Helix Arts | Nepacs |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identifying and commissioning artists • Action research with children and prisoners • Delivering participatory arts to children and prisoners • Developing participatory arts resource for use with prisoners • Project management | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing a route into prisons • Facilitating access to children and prisoners from existing caseloads and by locating new prisoners • Supporting participating children and prisoners • Incorporating resource into and delivering resettlement course, Heading Home • Contract management |

Helix Arts has considerable experience of delivering participatory arts to children and prisoners in both community and custodial settings. This project is based upon the two previous project models: Tuned In which was delivered in 2014/16 in HMP & YOI Low Newton (winning a Koestler Award) and in partnership with Music in Prisons, and Action:Story delivered in 2015/2016 with Newcastle Gateshead Clinical Commissioning Group. Nepacs has been delivering services to prisoners' families in the North East for more than a hundred years; over the last 15 years they have expanded from providing visitor centre facilities and play areas in prison visit areas, to delivering support at the courts for families at the point of sentence, family support work in prison and the community and youth work for children and young people with a parent in prison.

2.1 Project objectives

The objectives of the project were:

- To co-produce a resource pack (a toolkit) with artists and children and young people whose fathers are in the Teesside prisons cluster.

The materials that formed the toolkit were made by three commissioned artists, local children and young people who had a parent in prison and fathers in prison using their experiences and stories.

- To test the toolkit with adult male prisoners with the aim of helping them desist from crime and address their offending behaviour.

The toolkit was integrated into Nepacs existing Reconnect Heading Home resettlement course (see box 2.0) delivered by family support workers and trained volunteers. The course and the toolkit were designed to challenge prisoners' thinking about their actions and the consequences for other people, and in particular their children as well as considering actions for the future.

2.2 Project process

The process of successfully delivering a project such as this is complex and difficult, particularly over such a short time period. Access had to be negotiated with prisons concerning rooms to use, finding relevant prisoners and determining if they can participate (and the project would not affect their jobs or education duties), security clearance for the artists and for materials coming in and going out of the prison. Much of this was facilitated through Nepacs and their strong pre-existing relationships with the North East prison system. The timing of the project was inauspicious as the prison estate both nationally and regionally was going through major changes, including alterations in status, movements in regime and populations and many prisons were thus

experiencing a high level of instability. HMP Holme House was such a prison which contributed to the difficulty in accessing prisoners for the project. The project therefore focused in on the male population at HMP Kirklevington Grange, a resettlement prison just south of Middlesbrough, which provided exactly the type of prison cohort required for the pilot project, i.e. those who were not the most difficult to reach and whom had an interest in resettlement.

There was a three stage process to the project, which included:

- Stage one: setting up, gaining access to project beneficiaries (prisoners and children and young people), developing music resource.
- Stage two: converting the music resource into a toolkit that can be used as a resettlement aid.
- Stage three: delivering the toolkit to a group of prisoners.

For stage one, after selecting musicians with the relevant experience, and negotiating access into the prison, the project started with an introductory session with the children and young people in a community setting, and a similar session with a group of fathers at HMP Kirklevington Grange. Hereafter, the two musicians worked closely with a core group of approximately eight young people over six sessions in a period of three months. This was an in-depth and complex socio-musical development process with high levels of professional investment from the musicians and Nepacs youth workers and volunteers. The end product of this work was the production of four songs, recorded onto a music CD, all on the theme of the imprisonment of a parent and their associated experiences. This stage concluded with a celebration event attended by children and young people, parents and carers, and Helix Arts and Nepacs staff.

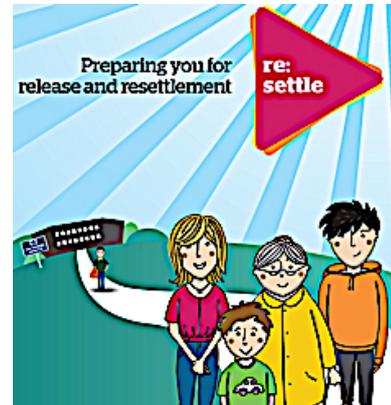
For stage two, a different artist was commissioned to convert the songs into a toolkit. The artist employed a new level of research and development, spending time with the children and young people and the prisoners and using the results of the interim evaluation findings to inform the final resource. Stage

three saw the toolkit applied to a group of prisoners at HMP Kirklevington Grange within an existing Nepacs' resettlement programme called Heading Home (see box 2.0). The evaluation followed project delivery at the end of all stages, and fed back in a formative way at the end of stage one, thus influencing intervention but thereafter remaining independent and summative.

Box 2.0 Nepacs' Heading Home

Heading Home consists of two elements: Resettle and Reconnect. The first consists of a stand alone booklet which can be worked through either alone or with a trained nepacs family support worker.

There is one version for the prisoner and another for the family. The participant is also offered follow up support or signposting.



The Reconnect course is delivered in a group setting towards the end of a prisoner's sentence with the objective of improving the resettlement process and aiding the prisoners return to the family. The course consists of four modules delivered over approximately eight weeks: the first two modules are delivered over two hours each week; followed by a short break; then a

facilitated session with a family member and the prisoner; and ending with a debriefing session the following week with the prisoner. The families are also supported to complete a workbook prior to the facilitated session.



Programme for Prisons
Family Preparation Booklet



The course has recently been evaluated and was found to be a transformative intervention. The evaluation reported feedback from prisoners including:

"It was life changing because I had never thought of things that way, the effects of what I did on people that I love."

The evaluation recommended continued efforts to expand and further integrate Heading Home into both routine family support work and sentence planning, in conjunction with offender supervisors.

3.0 Evaluation findings

The substantive findings of the evaluation concentrate on the impact of the project on its main beneficiaries, which were the prisoners and the children and young people who were involved in the artistic development. We have divided the findings according to the stages of the project.

3.1 Findings from stage one

3.1.1 The musicians

The first part of the project was led by two professional musicians, one female and one male, with different musical skill sets incorporating composition and production, singing and music technology. The musicians⁷ were experienced in delivering musical development workshops and courses to a range of disadvantaged groups, including vulnerable children and prisoners. They therefore possessed the necessary social and technical skill set. This was necessary as there was a very short timescale for delivery of the musical compositions and as such no time for professional development on the job; they had to be the finished article. Their task was to co-create four musical composition pieces, the content of which was led by the children. In order to do that, they had a dual role of encouraging a creative process and co-creating musical outputs. However, whilst engaging children in a positive social developmental process, the objective was to create musical pieces. This was to be carried out in five one-day (between 10am and 3pm) sessions.

The initial stages of the work consisted of creating a safe space and common ground for the children, to enable the sharing of experiences and ideas. This was done through games, food, discussion, play and music. This was followed by lyrical development which was enabled through the investigation and exploration of the children's experiences, examining narratives and looking in

⁷ Beccy Owen and Will Lang.

detail at the associated emotions and feelings. During this process, the children were open, enthusiastic and energetically contributed to the process. At the third session, the children began recording for their songs and by the fifth session all the four recordings were complete. The two musicians both worked in the sessions and outside to create and produce the musical compositions. The musicians also held two sessions with fathers in Kirklevington Grange prison. The project did not work with the fathers of the children taking part in the sessions because the tight timescales of the project meant there were concerns about appropriately preparing and supporting the families through the process. The objective of the sessions inside the prison was also to explore themes, and narratives and details which would help with the musical composition process.

At the end of the developmental process when the recordings were complete, a celebration event was held with the children and their parents/carers and family members. This was a very successful occasion, where parents/carers and family members responded in a positive way with sometimes emotional expressions of appreciation.

3.1.2 Findings from children

This section presents the research findings from interviews with children that were involved with the musical development. The children had been involved with the activities over a three month period and had become familiar with both the musicians and the musical task. The qualitative information that was produced from the interviews with the children was formatted into manageable data using framework analysis (Ritchie and Spencer, 1994⁸). We then used constant comparative methods (Glaser and Strauss, 1967⁹) to analyse the data to clarify meaning and examine, compare and contrast associations. Common themes became apparent and the evaluation has been structured in agreement

⁸ Ritchie, J. and Spencer, L. 1994. Qualitative data analysis for applied policy research in Bryman, A. and Burgess, R.G (eds) Analyzing qualitative data, 1994, pp.173-194.

⁹ Glaser & Strauss, 1967. *Op.cit.*

with these themes. From the research with the children, those themes included the following:

Increasing social networks: there was evidence to indicate that involvement in the musical project developed new and strengthened existing social networks. Children quite simply said they had met new friends during their time with the project and enjoyed spending time with children they already knew. They reported that as they all had something in common, they made friends in the group very quickly and easily, although there were some who were less forward than others. When asked about what the best things were about being involved in the project, a number of children said:

“Meeting new people and making new friends.”

Strong social networks are a key moderator of the damage that can be caused by parental imprisonment (Murray, 2007¹⁰). Resiliency research suggests that secure parental attachment together with positive peer relations (Garmezy & Rutter, 1983, Murray & Farrington, 2008^{11,12}) are good ways of increasing resilience.

Information exchange: children talked to each other about their experiences of prison and transferred information. This peer-to-peer information exchange was said to increase understanding, dispel myths and improve awareness. Children talked to each other about what it was like visiting other prisons and the different processes involved. There were also examples where adult delivered information and clarification was required as a result of this peer-to-peer exchange. For example, one child received home visits from his father which confused another child in the group, which required adult explanation

¹⁰ Murray J. 2007. The cycle of punishment: social exclusion of prisoners and their children. *Criminology and Criminal Justice* 4: 55–81.

¹¹ Garmezy, N. & Rutter, M (eds.) 1983. *Stress, Coping, and Development in Children*. New York: McGraw-Hill.

¹² Murray, J. & Farrington, D. 2008. Effects of parental imprisonment on children. In *Crime and Justice: A Review of Research*. Tony M (ed.). Vol. 37. University of Chicago Press: Chicago; 133–206.

about home leave. One young person demonstrated the type of knowledge that was exchanged:

“I told her what she could bring [to the visits] and what you couldn’t, what you can get at the shop and at the visitor centre.”

Knowledge and understanding is a moderator of problems caused by having a parent in prison and subsequently is a valuable contribution of the project. Research (Murray & Farrington, 2008¹³) has found that what children who are told about their parent's absence may also mediate the effects of parental imprisonment on children. In one piece of research, it was found that children who were given emotionally open and developmentally appropriate (Poehlmann, 2005¹⁴) information were more likely to have secure attachment feelings toward their caregivers than children who were given less appropriate or no information. When no information is available to children about parental absence, children tend to blame themselves, possibly increasing the risk of adverse reactions (Hinshaw, 2005¹⁵).

Shared experiences: the children said that a benefit from the project was being in an environment with other children who had similar experiences. This they said was unusual and not something they had done before. They said that knowing that the other children had a parent in prison made them feel at ease and comfortable. The children said that mostly they keep their parent’s imprisonment a secret, and share it with only a few best friends knowing. The children said that prior to meeting others, they felt lonely as a result of their father being in prison, but now they do not.

“It makes you realise that you’re not alone and other people are feeling like you and that makes you feel better.”

¹³ Murray & Farrington, *Op. cit.* 2008

¹⁴ Poehlmann, J. 2005. Representations of Attachment Relationships in Children of Incarcerated Mothers. *Child Development* 76:679-96.

¹⁵ Hinshaw, S. 2005. The stigmatization of mental illness in children and parents: developmental issues, family concerns, and research needs. *J Child Psychol Psychiatry*. Jul;46(7):714-34.

Shared experiences are related to both social networks and increased knowledge and understanding, both of which are moderators of the negative impacts of imprisonment.

Enjoyment: the children said that they had really enjoyed being involved with the music project. They reported that they had enjoyed: meeting other children and making new friends; meeting and working with the musicians; from making music and creating a CD; and the games they played during the sessions. There was a reported sense of pride about their role in developing the songs, about overcoming embarrassment or fear and about how good they thought their performances/musical contributions were. One young person said:

“It’s been fun.”

From the positive reactions of the children, it was clear that music was an excellent medium to use as a focus for achieving the outcomes identified in this evaluation. The activity both maximised enjoyment and enabled the development of a critical and relatively profound understanding of how the imprisonment of their parent affected them and others. The involvement in music also developed a technical skill creating a sense of self worth and pride. As one young person said:

“It is something I can look back on ... always be proud of it and what we did and how we have come a long way.”

We found that the addition of music development to a more general youth work approach has beneficial impacts to both engagement and outcomes achieved.

Expressing feelings: the children said that their involvement in the project gave them the opportunity and enabled them to better express their feelings about having a parent in prison. This was something that either never happened or did so rarely both inside and outside of the home (see section on findings from carers). They said their thoughts and feelings about their fathers

being in prison were rarely expressed. As a result of this, they welcomed the opportunity to be able to talk about it and express how they felt. They said that the project had helped them express their feelings.

“You have got to let your emotions out, don’t be afraid and don’t be shy, we are all friends here.”

Allowing CYP the opportunity and space to express themselves plays an important role in moderating the negative impacts of parental imprisonment.

Continuation: the children unanimously said that they would like to carry on with the activities. They said they enjoyed the sessions so much, liked that they went on over a number of weeks and got on really well with the adults, that they would like to repeat the experience. They said that they would like to try other arts-based activities, such as dance or visual arts.

“We would like to do it again, definitely.”

3.1.3 Findings from parents/carers

This section presents the findings from the research that we carried out with parents, carers and other loved ones. We used a similar analytical process to that presented in the previous section. We found the following:

Happy for their children: parents/carers said that they appreciated that their children were involved in an activity that they really enjoyed. There was added appreciation that the activity took place over a number of weeks and was not a one off. They said that the children got excited about going and looked forward to seeing people they had met and being involved in the activities. They also welcomed the opportunity for the children to be able to talk about their feelings and concerns relating to their father being in prison.

“She really looks forward to it ... it’s really nice to have something negative turned into a positive.”

Opportunities for expression: although parents/carers said that their children were able to and had the opportunity to talk about their father being in prison, it was reported that they generally did not. There were subsequent concerns expressed that children were ‘bottling up’ their emotions. In one family, who reported that prison was not an unusual occurrence for them, they said that whilst their child can and does talk about it within the context of the family, it is not on a reflective or thoughtful level. This family said that the project had provided an opportunity for such reflective thinking which they felt helped the child understand, open up and talk about how they felt about their father being in prison.

“He can talk about it if he wants and it’s no big deal ... that’s really important.”

Therapeutic: families reported that there was an element of therapy involved in the activities, providing an opportunity for expression and discussion about an important area of their lives. As a result of the children generally not talking about how they feel about their father being in prison or the effects it has on their lives, the sessions were thought to be an important outlet for developing an emotional understanding. Families also thought it was important for the children to realise that they are not alone in the experiences or feelings, which was something echoed by the children.

“They have a freedom there to talk about it where it is not a big secret ... it’s been like therapy.”

Improved behaviour: it was reported by one of the family members interviewed that they had noted an improvement in the child’s behaviour since being part of the project. There have been reports from the school that the child had appeared more settled, calmer and in a generally better mood. Whilst it was recognised that it was difficult to directly attribute impact, the behaviour improvement had corresponded with the time that the child spent with the musicians.

3.1.4 Findings from prisoners

We make the following findings from the research with prisoners at HMP Kirklevington.

Enjoyable experience: prisoners said that although they were slightly awkward and some were embarrassed in the early stages of the first session with the musicians, they soon enjoyed their participation. They spoke highly of the facilitators and their skills at getting everybody involved. They also found the end result, the music track, as being of high quality.

“It definitely puts you out of your comfort zone.”

Strengthening relationships between prisoners and staff: prisoners said that it was good that staff were involved in the activities and were sharing their feelings and joining in. They said that this increased their understanding of prison officers as people and improved their relationships.

“It was good that they did it too, it improves the way you get on with them [staff].”

Expressing feelings: prisoners reported appreciation from talking about and examining their feelings about their family and their imprisonment. They felt that this was therapeutic and renewed their connection and commitment to their family. They said that this did not happen often in prison and although sometimes difficult, they said that they could feel the benefit of doing so.

“You don’t talk about things like that [feelings], you don’t drop your guard, it is very alpha male in here so things can be a burden. Talking about it lightens the load.”

An individual experience: some participating prisoners said they did tell their loved ones about their involvement in the music making, but others did not.

They said it was something which affected them directly and not something they felt they needed to talk in great detail about to their immediate family.

“I did mention it [to partner] she thinks that what goes on in here, just stays in here.”

Increased understanding: prisoners said that they felt the sessions increased empathy with their children and partners about the impact of the sentence. They said that the sessions made them think about the effects of their sentence on their children and family, which was not something they commonly did. This galvanised their commitment to their family and reinforced the emphasis on not endangering that contact or relationship.

“I want to get on in here to help my family, to get a job so I can send money back, I don’t get involved [in any trouble] ... that’s really easy in here, have a bit of hooch [illegal alcohol], have a smoke [of cannabis], get into a fight, there’s loads of ways to get your privileges taken off you, but I won’t do any of that because I know it would affect my family. Thinking about them [because of the workshops] makes me more committed not to get into trouble”.

3.1.5 Findings from prison staff

This section presents findings from research with prison staff at HMP Kirklevington.

An accessible activity: it was reported that the workshops were accessible to prisoners of all abilities. There were a range of abilities and levels of understanding in the current cohort and the prison officer reported that everybody benefited.

“There was something for everyone. There was one lad who was not as mature as the others, but he got loads out of it, I didn’t think he would, but he did.”

Reinforcing the prison ethos: the workshops were said to be an important contributory factor to a general culture within the prison of responsibility and good relations. The involvement of prison officers in the music development activities was said to demonstrate that good relationships are encouraged between prisoner and staff in prison.

“It shows a trust which is important in this prison ... it broke down barriers.”

Contributing to rehabilitation: it was recognised that the subject matter, reinforcing relationships between a prison and their family, is an important aspect of desistance. As a prison which focuses on preparing a prisoner for a return to the community, activities which work towards rehabilitation are welcomed. The Helix Arts project was included in these and so was appreciated as a contributory factor.

“I can see nothing negative, it was all good.”

A welcomed difference: the activities of the project were said to be unusual in the prison. Although they did have one arts-based activity, delivered by Tees Valley Arts, it was not of a musical nature. It was therefore classed as innovative and interesting by the prison.

“It’s unusual, we don’t normally do things like this.”

A low take-up: it was felt that the activity did not attract many interested prisoners. Although there was no conclusive understanding as to the reasons that the attendance was low. There was a worry that if the workshops were run again, that attendance would remain low.

“I don’t know why there were so low numbers interested, maybe because there was nothing in it for them ... we had an employment

event which was oversubscribed, people went because they thought they could get jobs because of it, but I don't know why."

3.1.6 Findings from youth workers

We make the following findings from the research with Nepacs youth workers.

Benefits of longer intervention periods: youth workers reported a key benefit of the project was that it took place over a number of weeks. This was in contrast to many activities available to the children of prisoners that tended to be one off activities. It was reported that there were a number of benefits to this including:

- A developmental aspect to the activity; with relationships and knowledge which benefited from cumulative sessions, i.e. friendships became stronger and skills greater.
- Something to look forward to; as the children liked the sessions so much, it provided a positive future outlook for activity based enjoyment.
- Something reliable, regular and consistent with familiar faces; this creates a level of permanence albeit short lived, which is appreciated by the children. One youth worker said:

"With the vulnerable kids, they have very little consistency in their lives, so it's good to have something that is regular and consistent and it helps build relationships which is really important, especially as relationships with adults are often not the best for them."

Skill based activity: the youth workers felt that the music development both increased the children's skills and also added value to their existing skills. It was highlighted that the children's perception of their own value may sometimes be less than it should be and contributing to making music increases the children's confidence and self-esteem.

“You can see it that they are really proud of themselves, they are learning new things, it is all good.”

Providing respite for parents/carers: the activities allowed those responsible for the care of the children some time for themselves. As these may not be the main carer, e.g. grandmother, some respite can be valuable. This is an additional way in which the longer term nature of the activity is beneficial, i.e. giving the adults something to look forward to and plan activities/make appointments.

“It gives the single parents or grandparents a break, something to look forwards to for them, to go shopping or just relax for a bit ... life can be very stressful for them.”

Continuity of support: the children who took part in the project were already known to the Nepacs' youth workers who had supported them during their visits to prison. They had spent time with them in the play areas or youth zones in prison and in the visitor centre and so had a pre-existing relationship. During the music sessions this made it easy to engage and interact with the children as they occupied a position of trust; a 'trusted adult'. In the context of some children affected by imprisonment of a parent, such positions/individuals may be absent along with the role they play in their lives, of comfort and safety, advice and direction and role modeling. The project allowed this relationship to grow and become stronger.

“She is really pleased to see me at visit time and she will come and sit next to me to talk or draw, it is important that the children see someone they know and trust. Often the parents are highly stressed at visiting time because they have so much to talk about and some don't have time for their children. When that happens we can be there for them ... and during the project we have got to know each other better.”

Box 3.0 Stage two explanation from the artist

The arts are a powerful way for people to connect with their emotions. Hidden Voices is a project developed by Nepacs and Helix Arts. Through a series of workshops led by professional musicians, the project gave children of men in prison a chance to co-write and record songs about the experience of having their father in prison and its impact upon their lives.

The Hidden Voices songs are entitled Dear Me, Gone, We March On and Cyclone. They express the children's concerns, expectations and the impact of their father's imprisonment. One of the children who took part in the project described how writing the songs was a way for him to release his feelings and say things that were difficult to say directly to others: *"You can tell your feelings to the song. And then the song can tell it to other people."*

These songs have now been developed into the **Hidden Voices Resource**, with activities designed to be slotted into the Heading Home sessions in order to help dads focus on the impact upon children of their father's journey through the criminal justice system. However, use of the resource is by no means limited to the Heading Home sessions – the "pick 'n' mix" modular structure allows it to stand on its own. Facilitators can adapt it to suit their needs, with exercises chosen to suit the situation. If they are working with individuals rather than groups, the exercises can be adapted accordingly. They can work their way through some or all of the activities at their own pace and might choose to repeat various activities as appropriate.

Specific activities have been recommended for Session 1 (Introductory Session) and Session 3 (Family Session). For Sessions 2 and 4, the facilitator can choose from a selection of creative exercises outlined in the please **Activities Pick 'n' Mix** section. It is recommended that facilitators familiarise themselves with all the activities so that they are best able to select exercises for each session, and to prepare the necessary materials.

Source: Stage two artist, Hope London

3.2 Findings from stage two

Stage two of the project consisted of a different artist taking the songs and creating a resource aimed at parents in prison to be used in the context of Nepacs Heading Home resettlement course (see box 3.0).

The development process consisted of further development work with prisoners, some of whom had been involved with the musical development. As part of the evaluation, we talked to the prisoners that had been involved with the development workshop. We asked them about their experiences of being involved and what they thought was the potential of the resource within a family focused resettlement course. Similar to the original group of prisoners involved in the music development, they explained that they enjoyed being involved after the initial feelings of embarrassment had subsided and they had broken the ice with each other, started to understand the artist and began to feel more comfortable.

When we engaged in critical reflection with the group of men about the purpose of the resource, there was an emerging understanding of the resource and its purpose. They realised the importance of improving the quality of dialogue between their family, particularly the children and themselves. The reasons for this included that communications may have broken down, become strained and/or were more sporadic and less frequent. There was a subsequent realisation that music was a good medium through which to encourage that communication, again particularly with the children. As one prisoner said;

“If you sit your kid down and try and talk to them face-to-face, you can find a stonewall. But when you are using songs like we’re doing, you’ll be talking to them without them realising it. It just makes it easier.”

The group of prisoners said they felt the songs were powerful and that they created a strong emotional response from them. As one prisoner said:

“It brings a lump to your throat listening to them, realising what you have done to them, it’s very emotional, it makes you feel bad.”

They also said that they would be interested to see the results of this phase in action.

3.3 Findings from stage three

In the project plan, this stage represented the culmination of the development work and the creation of a standalone educational resource, or toolkit. As a result of the short project timescale, there was a limited time to convert the songs into a resource which required great skill and application. Helix Arts was able to commission an artist who had created a similar resource in a women’s prison in the North East. The end result was a well designed mixed ability resource suitable for integration into a range of resettlement situations.

The resource was designed to be used either on its own in its entirety or as constituent parts of another resettlement package or intervention. In its first application, parts of Hidden Voices were integrated into the Nepacs existing resettlement course which focused on improving family relationships, Heading Home, which consisted of three sessions with prisoners and one with the family.

Hidden Voices was used in the first session with the prisoners which dealt with the impact of their offending on family members including their children. Previously they had watched two short films about this impact and then discussed the content. In this first application of Hidden Voices, one of the short films was replaced by the song, Gone. It was explained to the four prisoners who made up this group that the song had been made by the children of prisoners in the North East in a local centre. The song was listened to, the words were read, critically appraised and discussed in the group.

The use of the songs in this context was reported to have been effective and stimulating a thoughtful and emotional response from prisoners. For example, one prisoner said:

“It was very emotional listening to the song and the words, it made you think about what you do to your kids.”

It was also explained that as the songs were locally made by children with personal experience of parental imprisonment in the North East that it made them more impactful than a film. It was reported that this created an emotional link between the listener and the songs because of where and how they had been made. One prisoners said:

“Because you knew they were made by kids around here, it just had more meaning, made it harder to take in a way.”

The facilitator reinforced this expression of impact and said:

“It was very powerful, you could see how much impact it was having on the lads ... more than the films. Maybe it was something to do with the listening not watching, but mostly I think it was because they knew it was made by local kids, it felt like they could have been their children.”

It would appear that the use of the Hidden Voices resource improved the impact of the resettlement course and the aim of the first session, which was to elicit a thoughtful response, making prisoners think about their actions. It would appear that the song did this more effectively than the existing film. One prisoner confirmed this by saying:

“I’d seen the films before and I’d say the song definitely had more impact on me than the films, because you can really hear the children’s voices.”

When we reflected with the prisoners about the impact of the Hidden Voices resource on desistance, they said it improved the resettlement course intervention, its content and impact. However, they explained that desistance was a complex subject which depends on many factors within an individual. They said that desistance is a decision reached by a prisoner when they have arrived at a certain point, which may be due to age, a relationship, an event such as recovering from an addiction or another set of circumstances. For example one prisoner said:

“I’m 36 now, I’m getting too old, I look at those other lads in here, and I think I don’t want to be like that any more. I’ve been in and out of prison since I was 15. I’ve got two kids, 10 and 14, I realise what it’s been like for them, lost years, so I want to try and get some of those back if I can.”

Once this point has been arrived at, they are open to influences, education and reinforcement of the importance of desistance. Prisoners said that realising the impact that their offending has on those closest to them, including their children, can be very hard to take but is key to their desistance. As one prisoner explained;

“After the course and thinking things through, you feel bad, you go back to your pad and you feel terrible for what you’ve done, what you done to your kids and their lives, and it’s hard, but you have to do that, you have to think those things if you are going to change. And if you’ve got kids, why wouldn’t you? Why wouldn’t you want to make things better for them?”

Therefore, by increasing the emotional engagement and thought process via the songs, Hidden Voices is contributing to the process of desistance.

There were another two activities that were taken from the Hidden Voices resource, the Word Stew and the Five-Minute Argument. Both of these were used at relevant and appropriate times and were reported to have been effective at emphasising and reinforcing family related impacts of

imprisonment. The Five-Minute Argument was used during their Heading Home course to highlight communication issues between parent and child. The Word Stew was used during a homework club as an educational based game between child and parent. This highlights the pick and mix ability of the Hidden Voices resource. The creator of the toolkit explained the importance of this function in a criminal justice environment:

“If you only have 15 minutes for a probation appointment or a couple of weeks in a resettlement programme, it depends on what you have, I designed it so it can fit in to what you have.”

This was exactly how it had been used in the context of the Heading Home course. Nepacs is now in possession of a flexible and powerful tool which can be used in a variety of contexts and situations to demonstrate the impact of imprisonment. The development of their capacity in this way will ultimately benefit the prisoners and the families with whom they work, making them a more effective organisation.

4.0 Conclusion and recommendations

4.1 Conclusion

Hidden Voices has been an effective and well delivered arts-based desistance project delivered by two voluntary sector organisations; one specialist in participatory arts and the other in family support in prisons. There has been great value of involving prisoners in a creative process, stimulating an emotional and more thoughtful response to their offending behaviour and the impact it has on others. Prisoners also found it to be very enjoyable, despite the delivery environment and after issues of embarrassment and bravado had quickly been overcome.

However, possibly more important than this has been the impact the music development has had on the children and young people who were fundamental to the development of the resource. The research found that their involvement in a sensitively and well delivered participatory arts process has had significant impacts on their happiness, health and wellbeing. The damaging impacts of imprisonment are often felt most keenly by the children and young people who make up the forgotten victims and it is these who are underserved and their needs poorly understood. It is also here where the negative impacts of parental imprisonment will have the most long-term effects, potentially continuing for a lifetime. The Hidden Voices project invested most time with this group and it would appear that it is here where there has been most impact; it would seem that this project would offer a valuable and valid approach to damage mitigation.

It is relevant to reflect on the links between this project and the recent Farmer Review. As an innovative intervention into the lives of prisoners and their families, with an emphasis on reducing reoffending, the most substantive contribution made by the project to the Farmer Review is an improvement in the use of evidence and data, and a contribution to the repository of information about effective family work. Helix Arts in partnership with Nepacs has created a novel approach which draws children into having fundamental

communications with their imprisoned parents and builds the awareness of the adults of the consequences of their offending behaviour; we have found that it is a transformative intervention. The project also contributes to the golden thread that Lord Farmer referred to in the review that should run through all policy frameworks within the prison service. If it comes to pass as he recommended, that Governors are held to account for positive family work outcomes, then those Governors will be happy that Helix Arts and Nepacs are working in their prisons. Notwithstanding the need for investment and commissions needed to develop a more creative approach to delivering family work and reducing reoffending programmes.

4.2 Recommendations

The most substantive recommendation for the partners based on the research conducted for this evaluation, other than the above, is that further participatory arts-based developmental work takes place with other children of prisoners across the region and indeed the United Kingdom. This project has been novel and innovative and has demonstrated how to undertake positive interventions to moderate the negative impacts of imprisonment on children and young people.

Other recommendations include, in relation to the development stage of the resource:

- It would be beneficial to hold briefing sessions with the musicians before the start of the workshops providing a background on the children and their individual circumstances. This will enable the musicians to avoid sensitive areas and to provide a more appropriate level of intervention. There were times in this current project where there was a lack of knowledge which occasionally caused the musicians some difficulty. They responded to this through the application of their facilitation and engagement skills although it would have helped if they would have known more, e.g. If the child was

living with grandparents or mother or the name of the prison holding the parent.

- Mothers and grandparents were only included for a very limited period in the musical development process and if the project is delivered again, they should be involved on a more profound level. The musicians felt that their absence as they may have had a different narrative or may have contributed to the themes of the children and fathers.

In relation to the delivery of the resource:

- The artist emphasised the need for training in the use of the resource for criminal justice professionals. It was reported that whilst those delivering the resource did not have to have a background in creative art, it was important that they received sufficient training to engage prisoners in a creative process. There had been one training session for Nepacs staff delivered by the artist at this stage of the project. It was felt that this element of project development was an area which required further resourcing which had implications on project impact sustainability, i.e. the impact of the songs depended upon the capacity of the professional delivering the resource.

In relation to future deployment of resource:

- We recommend a more widespread application of the resource across the prison estate, particularly in the North East of England, where it retains a strong cultural significance. It would be beneficial to test different formats of application, for example, delivering it as an integrated course, in sections and as isolated elements. This should be accompanied by testing and evaluation to determine the relative merits and range of impacts. Nepacs will carry out such application to a degree, but additional resources will enable a more widespread application and thus impact. The developmental

model and the production of the product is also highly transferable to other locations and criminal justice situations across England and Wales.

UNDERSTAND

The views expressed in this report are those of Dr Christopher Hartworth of Barefoot Research and Evaluation and may not necessarily be those of Nepacs or Helix Arts. He can be contacted via:

Email: Christopher@barefootresearch.org.uk

Phone: 07813 789529

Twitter: @barefootres

