

# Update

Winter 2014/15

## Does prison work for women?

Nepacs worked in partnership with Northumbria University, Opengate, User Voice and the PORSCH network to organise a major regional conference debating 'Does prison work for women?' on 11 December 2014.

Over 120 people attended the event with keynote speaker Vicky Pryce, who was sent into prison for lying about speeding points incurred by her then husband, ex MP Chris Huhne, and has written *Prisonomics*, questioning the sense of imprisoning so many non violent women offenders when it is a very expensive and ineffective way of cutting women's offending.

We also had video clips from Northumbria Police and Crime Commissioner Vera Baird, and Simon Hughes MP, the Justice Minister with responsibility for women offenders, which gave some commitments to continuing to endorse a women-focussed approach. Campaigner Jenny Earle, from Prison Reform Trust also spoke, as did a number of other practitioners, on the effectiveness of non-custodial sentences in supporting women to



L/R - Louise Ridley from Northumbria University with Vicky Pryce.

deal with the root causes.

The conference also reported on Nepacs' work at HMP&YOI Low Newton, including Gill Ismail's role as family engagement worker. We provided a stall for the event and made many useful contacts. Hopefully this will have helped raise the profile of our work both with conference delegates, but also through the local media.

Perhaps the highlight of the event was a presentation from Catrina Mc Hugh and Cheryl (ex prisoner) from Open Clasp theatre, who spoke about their production 'Key Change' which was developed at Low Newton. Cheryl, one of the actors

who had inspired the production, was the absolute star of the show! Her talk about her own experience was very funny (while acknowledging how tough the experience of imprisonment is for women). Typically, she had not been expecting to be sentenced to custody, but ended up spending 12 months in prison. She found the experience of being involved in 'acting out' her experiences of domestic violence and prison life far more cathartic than all the counselling she had received previously.

*Continued overleaf.*

## Does prison work for women?

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Louise Ridley, senior criminology lecturer from Northumbria, summed up some of the key themes of the day, "Women are mainly imprisoned for low level crimes, such as theft or handling stolen goods, which are often linked to their domestic situation. The types of crimes are very different to men's offending but we know that even short custodial sentences for women leads to immense damage, including loss of home and losing contact with children.

"When men are imprisoned there is often a network of mothers, girlfriends or wives who are caring for their children, paying bills, and keeping their lives going so that they can more easily slip back into their family life when they are released. When women come out of prison they need support to rebuild their lives.

"Studies have found that children with mothers in prison are more likely to go on to offend than those with just the father in prison. Due to the smaller female prison population - women make up only 5% of all prisoners in England and Wales - there are fewer women's prisons and so most female prisoners are based in institutions between 60-120 miles away from their homes, making family visits difficult.

"Women have a greater need for community and close relationships and we have to question whether removing them from their communities is the best way to rehabilitate them."

We hope is that the need for women-specific services, the need for more schemes diverting women from custody, the need for more support for family relationships and the need for better resettlement support, will be taken on board by the new providers delivering services through the newly-established Community Rehabilitation Companies.

## Youth project update



**From 27 to 29 October 2014 our youth team organised and delivered a three day and two night residential at Dukeswood House in Northumberland.**

A residential event is now a regular feature of our yearly youth provisions.

Over the course of the three days, 10 young people aged 9 to 17 took part in a range of activities, aimed at confidence building, improving communication skills, team working etc.

The young people also provided



the Nepacs youth team with invaluable information on their knowledge/experience of our youth services and also their needs, which will hopefully inform future Nepacs youth provisions and practice.

Everyone enjoyed taking part in a range of indoor and outdoor activities, including our staff and volunteers, which included an assault course/team challenge high wire course, orienteering, fencing, movie nights, a scrapheap challenge, archery, a zipwire, quad biking, 3G swing and nightline (where the group were blindfolded and had to navigate across a course).

Thank you to Martin, Whitney and John who helped to make this event a big success. We are now looking forward to our 2015 programme!

**Iftikhar Hussain**

## Northumberland team praised by HMIP

We are delighted to report that in the recent HMIP inspection of HMP Northumberland the inspectors praised the services provided by Nepacs staff and volunteers in supporting individual prisoners, children and families.

The Northumberland report said that: "Visiting arrangements were good with one visits session on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday and two sessions at the weekend. The visitors' centre was large and clean. It was run by NEPACS (formerly North East Prisons After Care Society), which offered information, support and signposting to all visitors, particularly first timers."

**Well done to all the Nepacs staff and volunteers at Northumberland. This praise is well deserved.**

**There are many ways to get involved in the work of Nepacs .....**

**Fundraise Volunteer Donate  
Membership Fundraise Volunteer  
Donate Events Membership**

**Find out more at [www.nepacs.co.uk](http://www.nepacs.co.uk)**

## “Our prisons may be secure, but are they safe?”



This was the title of an address by Frances Crook, director of the Howard League, at our annual general meeting and public meeting which took place on 6 November, at the Gala Theatre, Durham.

We also enjoyed a performance by the NECA Recovery Choir, which includes people who have been in active addiction and served numerous prison sentences for 10 years or more prior to coming into recovery. The choir's main aim is to sing together to raise the profile of recovery and reduce the stigma of addiction.

Our annual report 2013-2014 was formally received at the AGM and copies are available on our website or from head office.

## Tea Bar of the Quarter

Congratulations to the Deerbolt tea bar team for winning Tea Bar of the Quarter for July to September 2014.

The award was presented to the Deerbolt team for the innovative and varied menu of products they offer to families with limited space and resources, and the ongoing commitment to excellence in customer service. Well done.



## Spotlight on ... HMP Durham's family learning visits

In October 2013 HMP Durham in partnership with Nepacs, started a Family Learning Visits scheme on Friday evenings. The session, which now has around 15 dads attending, has received outstanding feedback from prisoners, children and schools, on the benefits of the initiative.

The weekly visit, organised by family links officer Fiona O'Neill, is unique because for the first time ever visitors have been allowed to bring in items, in this case, homework.

Any prisoner with a child (including Granddads) can apply to go on the visit (with the exception of those with Child Protection Measures). During the two hour visit, children bring in their paper based homework, reading books and projects, to allow dad to contribute towards their learning and keep up to date with the progress his children are making at school.

Nepacs play a huge part in the visit, supporting parents, providing refreshments and the all important stationery that allows the children to complete their homework.

One mum whose child attends the session has said that her son's teacher has commented that his school and homework has improved greatly over the last few months. Mum said the family learning and dad helping has certainly contributed to this.



L-R: Fiona O'Neill, Christine Slassor and Michelle Rousseau

Fiona says: “For a child where dad is in custody, it's sometimes the simple things that can make all the difference - such as dad helping with homework. That interaction can contribute towards their behaviour at home and help cope with the loss of dad. And for us it's a perfect opportunity to reduce the risk of intergenerational offending.

“Studies tell us that initiatives that focussed on maintaining quality relationships with families not only enhanced the parent and child's connection to family life, but reduced anxiety while also improving behaviour within the prison.

“I would like to think that the Family Learning Visits here at HMP Durham are contributing towards that improvement.”

# Meet the Trustee

**The former chief executive of Durham and Tees Valley (DTV) Probation Service, Russell Bruce, has taken up a new role as a trustee of Nepacs.**

Russell has lived in the north east all his life and held a number of positions within the probation service throughout his 31 year career. He was well known in the north east for leading DTV probation service from 2010 until his retirement in 2013.

His career started in 1982 with the then Cleveland probation service, where he worked with the community service as well as in the family courts. He then went on to manage the court, accredited programmes and supervision teams in various locations in the County. In 1999, he was appointed as assistant chief officer with the County Durham service and in 2006 he was appointed as chief officer.

Russell was influential in the decision to create the DTV Probation Trust and was appointed as chief executive officer in 2010. As chief executive of the County Durham and Tees Valley probation trust he led one of the best performing probation teams in the country - recognised as providing good performance, high quality, cost effective and increasingly evidence based services.

Helen Attewell, Nepacs chief executive, said: "We are delighted to welcome Russell Bruce to our board of trustees. Through our work with probation services we have worked with Russell in the past and are confident that his extensive skills and experience of working with offenders and their families will be an asset to Nepacs.

"The criminal justice system is facing



unprecedented changes which will create opportunities for charities like Nepacs, and I am confident that Russell will be a huge support for us when navigating our way through potentially stormy seas."

Russell Bruce calls himself a probation 'lifer', in that he spent his whole career in the probation service. Of his time in probation, he said: "To me personally, as important as 'what' we did, was the 'way' we did it. By this I mean, while meeting performance targets and understanding costs was essential in a modern day probation service, I was always clear that we should manage all those under our supervision in a spirit of 'fairness and justice'. Providing traditional probation values in a modern context and a culture which promoted, encouraged and delivered that!

"When invited to join Nepacs, I was delighted to do so. My main driver was the values we hold as well as the work we do. Lots of our literature focuses on us doing 'good things' for families of prisoners but what we do are the 'right things'. They may not be fashionable. However all my experience tells me they are essential. Recent evidence highlights families as being central and vital in helping to aid resettlement of prisoners back into the community on release and reduce reoffending! I hope my experience will help in a small way and I look forward to working with colleagues to that end."

## NEWS in brief

### Durham Autumn Fair

This year's Nepacs Autumn Fair which took place on 1 November at Elvet Methodist Church Hall, Old Elvet, Durham City managed to raise a fantastic £869.22.

Thank you to everyone who contributed and to all the staff and volunteers who helped make the event a success. All proceeds will go towards our grants project.

### Do you know someone sent to prison?

Nepacs and Middlesbrough Council's Health and Wellbeing team have produced a handy guide for families explaining what will happen once their loved one is sent to prison.. The booklet - titled Do you know someone sent to prison? - is available online from the council, prison visitors' centres, Middlesbrough Courts and in community venues in the Middlesbrough area.

If you would like copies of the booklet call 0191 332 3810 or email [tyoung@nepacs.co.uk](mailto:tyoung@nepacs.co.uk)

### Durham Courts volunteer service

Nepacs has launched a volunteer support service at County Durham Crown Court.

The service is delivered by Claire Moore and a small team of volunteers on Fridays. As with Teesside, the aim is to offer emotional support to families, but also practical information on visiting. The hope is that this will be a big support for first time families who have had no previous experience of the prison system.

Find out more about volunteering with the courts project on our website.

## Get in touch

If you have comments or suggestions for future issues of Update please get in touch with Tina Young by emailing [tyoung@nepacs.co.uk](mailto:tyoung@nepacs.co.uk) or telephone 0191 332 3810.

For more information on the work of Nepacs visit: [www.nepacs.co.uk](http://www.nepacs.co.uk)

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