



Evaluation of the Youth Project: Support for children and young people with a parent in prison

September 2017

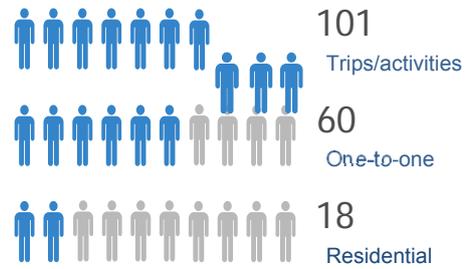


Project infographic, 2015 to 2017

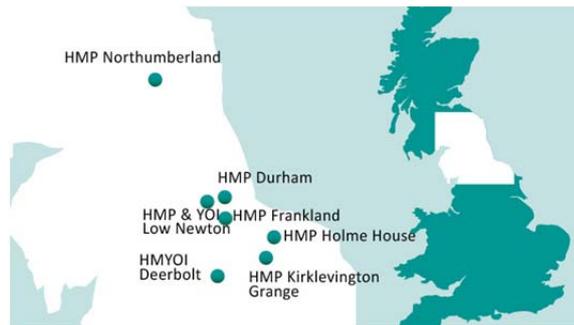
Children & young people have shown IMPROVEMENTS in:



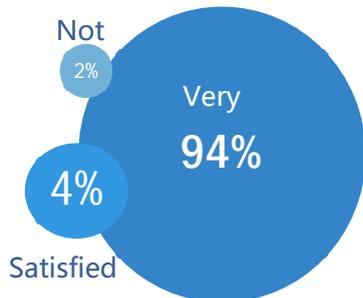
Type of support



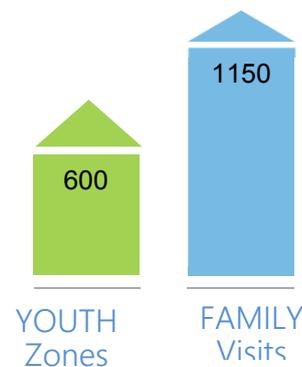
Prisons with youth support



Satisfaction



Numbers using YOUTH ZONES & FAMILY VISITS



“ We do really fun things with Nepacs, just kind of normal things really but you’re with people who are in the same situation as you, so it’s relaxed. It’s great. ”

SUMMARY FINDINGS

- **A successful establishment of a youth programme:** there are considerable benefits to the organisation, the young people and their families which come from the creation of the youth programme.
- **A learning project:** there has been significant learning about how to develop and deliver a prison and community based youth project.
- **Positive impacts on the young people:** this is the most important element of the project and after two years of delivery, we are starting to see the nature of that impact. For the young people, this has included:
 - **Improvements in self worth, confidence, levels of depression and resilience.**
 - **Improvements in coping** with day-to-day problems.
 - **Improvements in reduced anxiety and improved understanding** of issues surrounding the imprisonment of a parent.
 - **Increases social networks.**
 - **Shared experiences**, where the benefit was being with other young people who had similar experiences.
 - Involvement in the project gave young people the opportunity and enabled them to **better express their feelings** about having a parent in prison.
- **Positive impacts on parents and carers:** the impact that the project has on young people also benefits those who provide care, and not just through a respite function. Less distress and mental health issues in young people creates less stress in the household and easier relationships, amongst other things.
- **Positive impacts on prisoners:** parents who are incarcerated are happy that their children are receiving support and positive activities, in a trusted environment.

There are more findings and recommendations in the main body of the report.



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1.0 Introduction

This is an evaluation of Nepacs' Youth Project carried out at year two of a three year project, which started in September 2015. The project is funded by Comic Relief and Children in Need and is delivered in the North East of England. Nepacs' provision of services to prisoners and their families has grown considerably 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 and family support work in prison and the community. This current Youth Project has allowed them to further extend their suite of family support activities, enabling them to provide a truly wraparound service for all people affected by imprisonment.

This evaluation presents the output and outcome figures for the first two years of the project together with an examination of impact. We have contextualised project data and evaluation findings within the broader emerging research in this field, to give the results deeper meaning. This permits us to understand the role of the project in a broader context of family support in prisons and in mitigating the impact of parental imprisonment on children and young people (CYP).

1.1 Evaluation methodology

We used a mixed methodology to conduct the evaluation, made up of both qualitative and quantitative techniques. The former consisted of semi structured interviews and focus group interviews with a range of stakeholders, including project staff, prison personnel, 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 activity 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 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, 2013). 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. We held a focus group interview with three parents in prison who had been involved with developmental work in HMP Kirklevington. This interview was held in the chapel in the prison. We also conducted an in-depth interview with the senior prison officer in charge of rehabilitation activities in the prison.

We used Grounded Theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) 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, 2011). We also conducted a literature review in line with contemporary Grounded Theory (*ibid*, 2011).

In addition to the qualitative work, project statistics were interrogated and analysed and are presented in the report.

1.2 Background and literature review

There are many children and young people affected by imprisonment in the UK with an often quoted figure of 200,000 children with a parent in prison in England and Wales (Barnardo's, 2014; Williams et al, 2012), although we think this is an underestimate based on an increasing prison population and our experiences of prisoners with children. For children, having a parent in prison increases the risk factors that may lead to a number of negative outcomes, including:

- Antisocial behaviour
- Offending
- Mental health problems including anger, depression, anxiety, attention and sleep disorder
- Substance misuse
- Unemployment
- Increase in poverty
- Feelings of loss, confusion and trauma
- Increase in caring responsibilities
- Experience of stigmatisation and bullying
- A decrease in school attendance and attainment (Loureiro, 2010; Murray and Farrington, 2008; Nesmith and Ruhland, 2008).

These are thought to be caused by factors including: trauma of parent-child separation; children being made aware of their parent's criminality; family poverty caused by the imprisonment; strained parenting by remaining caregivers; stigma and stresses involved in maintaining contact with the imprisoned parent (Murray and Farrington, 2008). In one study, children and mothers spoke about significant emotional difficulties which manifested themselves in bedwetting, crying, needing lots of reassurance, finding relationships difficult to maintain and worrying about people finding out (Morgan et al, 2014; Robertson, 2007). Nepacs has found CYP with a parent in prison can publicly exhibit either withdrawal or excessive bravado

behaviour. However when CYP are engaged through play or discussion, common expressions are of isolation, secrecy, emotional suppression and confusion. In addition to these risk factors, children who experience parental imprisonment are more likely than any other group of children to experience overarching disadvantage, are more likely to come from families with complex needs and are less likely to meet child wellbeing indicators (Morgan et al, 2014; Murray et al, 2009).

When a parent goes to prison, CYP may also lose social support systems including friends and family (Morgan et al, 2014, Scharff-Smith and Gampell, 2011). This may leave many CYP in a situation where they are unable to express how they are feeling to others because they are worried of the response they may get or because they have been told to keep their parent's imprisonment a secret (Morgan et al, 2014, Scharff-Smith and Gampell, 2011). The remaining parent/caregiver may also be struggling to cope (Smith et al, 2007) and the CYP may not want to burden them with how they are feeling. As a result, CYP may have to deal with very difficult emotions without adequate emotional support (Morgan et al, 2014, Loureiro, 2010) and this may contribute to the increased levels of mental health problems (Murray and Farrington, 2008). CYP may also find themselves in a position of carer themselves for their mother, grandparents or siblings which has its own implications of burdens and negative child outcomes.

The results of these impacts can be serious and long-lasting, with some research studies suggesting that some of these CYP start on the trajectory toward their own incarceration in their adult years (Murray and Farrington, 2008, Greenberg, 2006). Other impacts include poor attachment, dysfunctional relationships, and enduring mental health problems among other things (Burke, 2017; Wildeman et al, 2006).

In terms of mitigating the negative impacts of parental incarceration, there is evidence that interventions may prevent adverse outcomes for children of prisoners. Such interventions include provision of financial assistance, social

support, parenting programmes, improved prison visiting procedures, and alternative forms of punishment (Murray & Farrington, 2008). In the absence of such programmes CYP's emotional reaction to incarceration can be tempered by maintaining contact with their parent, and research reflects that CYP can experience fewer problem behaviours and overall improved life chances (Mignon & Ransford, 2012; Edin, Nelson & Paranal, 2004). However, despite the likelihood of CYP with a parent in prison needing additional support (Murray & Farrington, 2008), provision for this group is generally patchy (Scharff-Smith & Gampell, 2011) although it has improved in recent years as the prison service recognise the importance of families in desistance and resettlement. For example, Barnardo's, the national children's charity, is now involved with the children of prisoners and among other things run the i-Hop information service (www.i-hop.org.uk).

However, if provision for children of families affected by imprisonment is patchy, services for older children and young people is almost non-existent, with few examples around the United Kingdom. This absence means that children and young people who are at the critical junctures of puberty and adolescence, when they are making sense of themselves and are making decisions which will affect their lives, are generally unsupported. Feeling isolated with little social support, carrying stigma, experiencing loss and prolonged stress can have severe short and long-term impacts. The implications of absence of services to Nepacs are twofold: firstly there is an absence of inter-agency learning, no measures or models to follow; and secondly that the North East and Nepacs once again are at the forefront of prison family provision. It is within this context that this evaluation takes place (Hartworth et al, 2017).

2.0 Youth Project

The Nepacs Youth Project developed from the experience of running prison visitor centres across the North East, providing play services at routine and special prison visits and providing a prison-based family support service since

2011. This experience highlighted a gap in services and interventions for older children as activities were generally focused on pre-school and play. Nepacs first efforts took the form of creating youth spaces at the visitor centres and efforts to create some provision at special visits. During this experience, it became clear that a more strategic and wide-ranging level of provision was necessary as it was evident that older children, between eight and 19 years, had their own set of needs. Many of these agreed with those presented in the preceding section 1.2.

Nepacs created a project outline consisting of a Coordinator and two part-time youth workers and were successful in an application made to Comic Relief and Children in Need; work started in September 2015. These were tasked with creating a youth programme across the North East prison estate. Whilst Nepacs had employed a youth worker in the past this initiative has been the first attempt to implement a coherent programme. The Coordinator started work creating systems, processes and protocols including a monitoring and evaluation system, with the assistance of an external research organisation. The project then developed a series of activities and interventions in each of the region's prisons to respond to the needs of young people and their families. These are delivered by paid staff and also some very high calibre volunteers.

2.1 Activities and approach

The project has put in place activities with a range and depth to suit different needs depending on age, gender and location (e.g. in prison and community). These consist of: monthly trip based activities, such as visits to the cinema or 10-pin bowling; one-to-one support; youth zones in the visitor centres; and an annual residential. In the prisons, support consists of: CYP activities during special visits including, mother and child visits, family days and homework clubs. There have also been occasional chaperoned visits, i.e. a youth worker accompanying an under 18 year old to visit their parent.

In the individual prisons, activities have consisted of:

- HMP Durham: youth work input into the monthly homework club.
- HMP Holme House: Youth Zone at the visitor centre, which is soon to have a dedicated youth cabin/building.
- HMP Frankland: Youth Zone at the visitor centre.
- HMP Kirklevington Grange: youth activities provided during the quarterly family visits (there is currently no visitor centre).
- HMP Low Newton: Youth Zone at the visitor centre; youth activities provided during the weekly mother and child visit, and quarterly family visits.
- HMP Northumberland: youth activities provided during the quarterly family visits.

There is a complexity to the activities and interventions which requires exploration. Firstly, the objectives of the intervention depends on the situation, and subsequently the approach is tailored to the activity and its objective (see following table). Secondly, the approach to youth work employed by Nepacs differs from a generic youth work approach because the objectives may not always match those of standard approaches. For example, if a game of '*pool killer*' is set up during a family day, it would help all the young people engage with each other and have a good time but not spend time with their Dads/Mams making the day a youth day rather than a family day. The games

chosen and emphasis therefore are those that encourage parent and child play and interaction. As the project is unique, most of the developmental learning is carried out within the project. Added to this, is a barrier created by prison security that does not allow most ingredients of a youth workers tool box (e.g. scissors, balloons, stapler, string etc.). The project therefore either adapts or reinvents traditional youth activities.

Table 2.0 Activity, objective and approach

Objective	Activity and approach
Increasing attachment between child and parent.	Games aimed at encouraging play between child and parent during prison special visits.
Improving internal qualities of: confidence, resilience and self esteem.	Activities, one-to-one support and trips to increase understanding, introduce enjoyment and happiness.
Increasing social networks of young people.	Increasing opportunities for mixing with peers and encouraging peer-to-peer support.

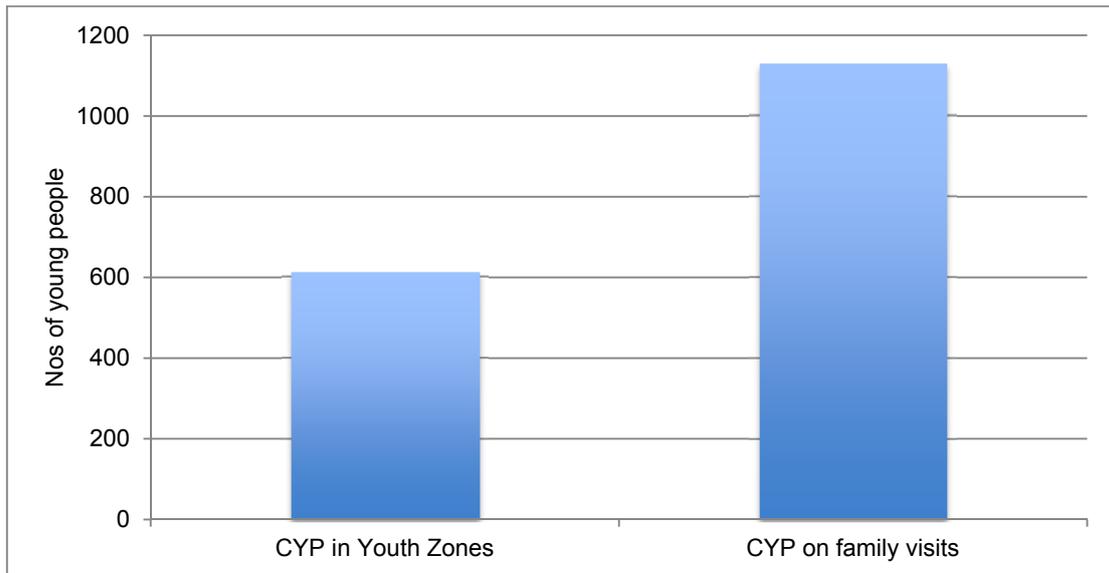
A key element of the approach of the Youth Project is to encourage openness amongst the young people to counter the sense of secretiveness, isolation and stigma associated with parental imprisonment. For example, during the trips, which are often started with a coach ride, the youth worker may begin by encouraging discussion about visiting their parents in prison. During the activities, at the visitor centres or prison, the CYP have the option of asking for one-to-one support. This can also be requested through a referral from other agencies such as schools. The support delivered at an appropriate venue, enables issues to be explored and worked through with a trusted adult.

2.2 Outputs

The first elements that we look at during evaluation are project outputs, which gives an appreciation of the number of project beneficiaries and their

characteristics. Outputs also present the nature of that support and the range of activities provided. As can be seen, over the last two years, just over 600 CYP have participated in the Youth Zones in the region's visitor centres. There has been over 1100 attendances recorded by CYP attending family visits between 2015 and 2017.

Figure 2.0 CYP participating in youth zones and family visits, 2015/17



The next figure shows that there has been 100 individual CYPs benefiting from trips and activities (outreach), 60 CYP who have attended one-to-ones and 12 who have been on two residentials, in 2016 and 2017.

Box 2.0 Explanations from the Youth Coordinator about different working contexts

Family days: these are complex sessions as there is a variety of people, a range of ages (babies to grandparents) and family group numbers which vary from two to 10 people, that all need to be involved in some way. As a result of this, we tend to have a big selection of games/activities that we can play at their tables. Examples of games would be 'minute to win it', balancing games, fast thinking games and various puzzles. The objective is to get all the family playing together.

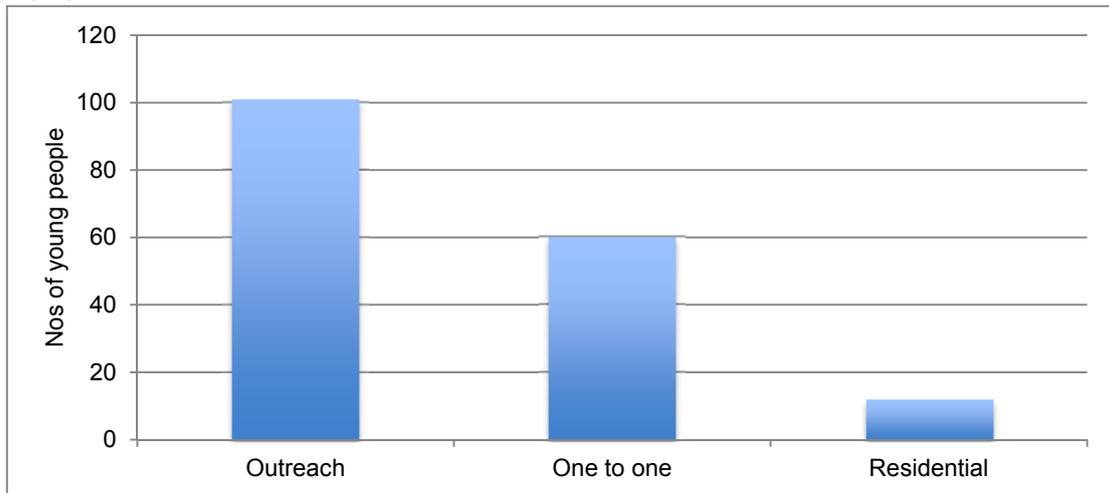
Mother/father child visits: the objectives of these sessions are to unite the families and help young people build strong relationships with their Dad/Mam. To achieve this we have games that challenge the parent's thinking and allow the children to be silly. Some examples would be hard treasure hunt games, sport competitions in which one person is blind folded and the other has to guide them and so on. We purposely do not let children play these games unless their parents join in to encourage parents to do so. Some parents ask other children to take their place but we do not allow this.

Trips and activities: the aim of these are to help young people make friends with others, build confidence and improve peer-to-peer interaction. The games involved are more generic and similar to those you would find at a youth centre, such as arts and crafts with plenty of prizes.

Homework clubs: these sessions are quite unique as they merge formal education (not popular in youth work) with informal education which is the basis of youth work. It is a constant balancing act between getting Dad to become an educator and helping their child/ren with homework and making the session fun so young people do not become bored. Parental literacy deficits need to be considered so we always provide alternatives such as biology, geography and history which can use pictures and stories.

One-to-one support: as youth workers we try to avoid direct confrontation and 'over the table talk' with young people. To do this we constantly develop new games that can be played at the table or in a local McDonalds while chatting. This helps young people not to feel interrogated and have an 'escape plan'. We try and 'support while doing'.

Figure 2.1 CYP benefiting from outreach, one-to-ones and residentials, 2015/17



As can be seen in the following figure, there has been a similar number of male and female CYP accessing the project, demonstrating a gender parity. The figure that follows on from this gives an idea of the ethnicity of the young people. As can be seen, there are 7.6% of total beneficiaries who are not White British, which is slightly higher than the regional total of 4.7%¹ but lower than average non-White British prison population of 13%.

Figure 2.2a Demographics of beneficiaries, 2015/17: gender

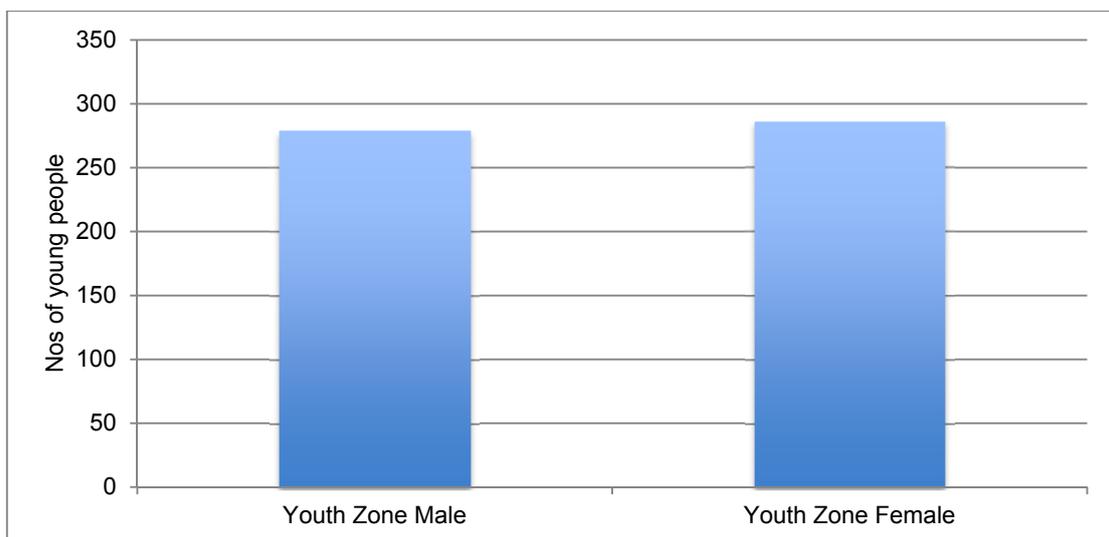
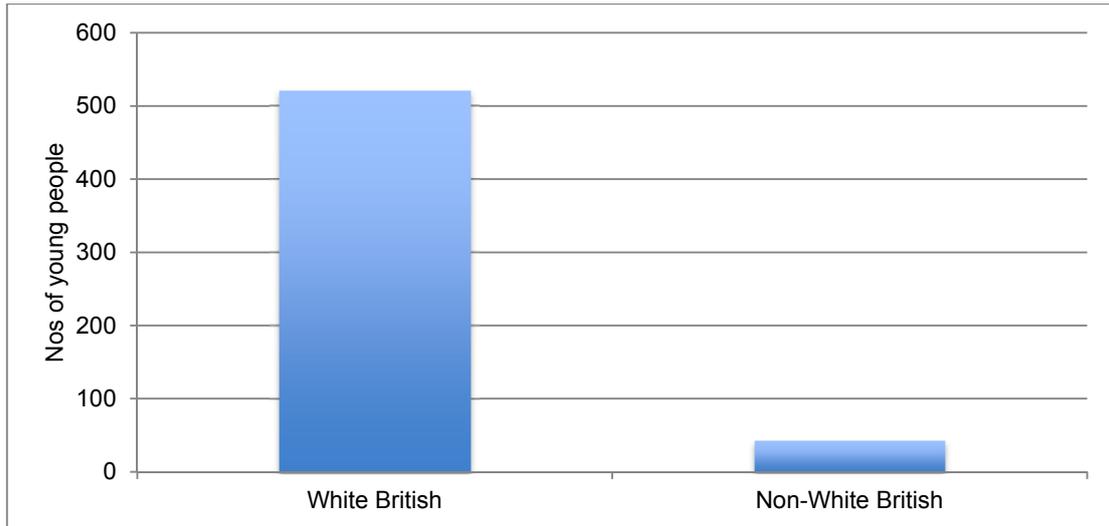


Figure 2.2b Demographics of beneficiaries, 2015/17: ethnicity

¹ Office of National Statistics, 2012.



The two following figures present satisfaction levels of young people using Nepacs' youth services. As can be seen, satisfaction levels are very high with 93% (n=102) rating services as great or good and 82% (n=92) saying that they would definitely repeat the activities.

Figure 2.3 Service user satisfaction with activities, 2017

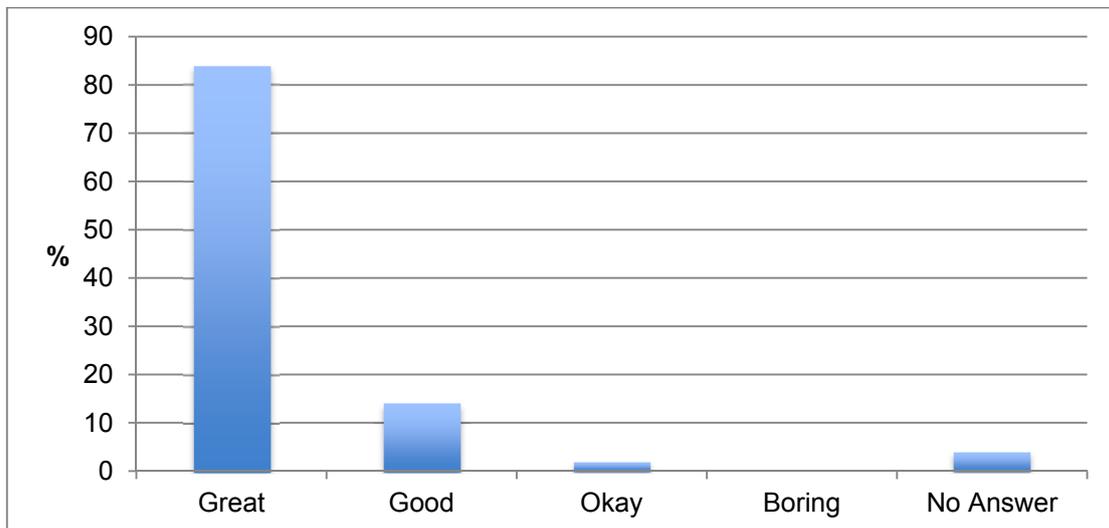
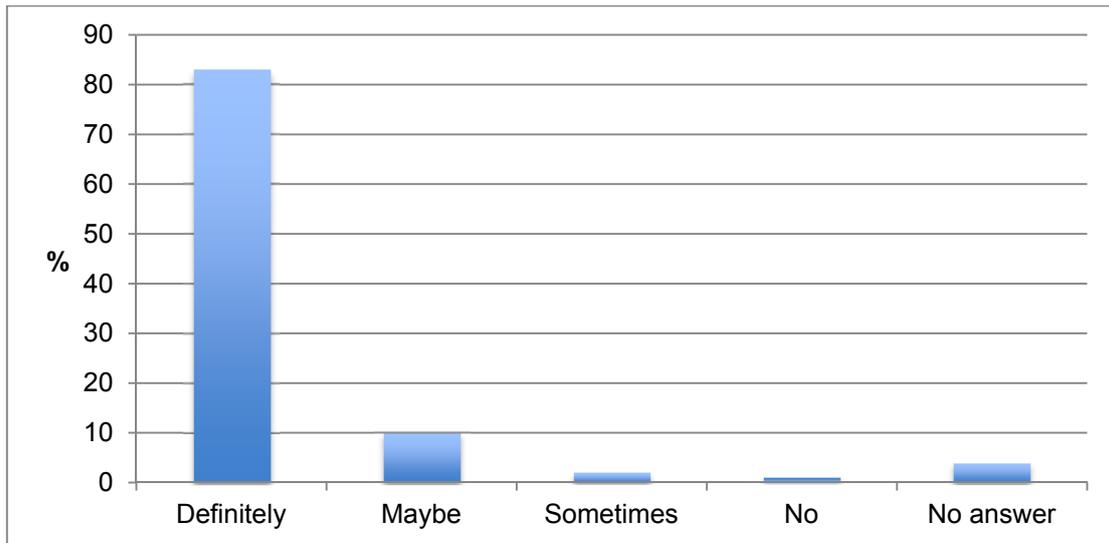


Figure 2.4 Service user satisfaction; would you repeat, 2017



3.0 Findings

Based on the research conducted for this evaluation using a Grounded Theory approach, we make the following findings:

A successful establishment of youth programme: there are considerable benefits to both the organisation, the young people and their families from the creation of the youth programme. Firstly, organisational capacity has been increased and strengthened from the creation of a series of resources and policies and procedures. Nepacs now possesses a youth programme which few other family support organisations can offer. This complements and completes the offer from the organisation to the prisoners families; they have adult support and training, play facilities for young children; and now they have a service to offer young people. They have had an individual youth worker in the past, but provision has been limited to discrete activities. The current project contributes to raising the profile of the organisation and continuing innovation and development in this area.

A learning project: there has been significant learning over the last 24 months about how to develop and deliver a prison and community-based Youth Project. There has been little to learn from other projects as there are few (if any) other similar interventions and there are no youth work standards or guidance in relation to youth work with CYP affected by imprisonment. The majority of the organisational technical capacity development has been learning by doing. For example, at a mother and child special visit, the selection of games initially led to children participating in the youth worker-led activity; an alternative selection of cooperative games was subsequently put in place to encourage play between mother and child.

In the first 24 months, there has been an organic alignment of activities and approach with the key ingredients (or 'moderators') that research has identified mitigates the negative impacts of imprisonment. The first of these moderators is attachment (after Bowlby 1969, 1973, 1980) and social bonding

theory (Hirschi, 1969), which suggests that parent child separation is harmful for children (Murray & Farrington, 2008). Separation because of parental imprisonment can be particularly damaging as it is often unexpected, sometimes violent at the time of arrest, and often unexplained, and because CYP are severely restricted in their contact with imprisoned parents (Shaw 1987, Murray & Farrington, 2008). One study (Farrington, 2005) found that boys separated because of parental imprisonment had higher rates of antisocial behaviour, mental health problems and poor life success than boys separated from parents for other reasons, even after other risk factors were controlled (Murray & Farrington, 2008). Nepacs provides opportunities not only for CYP to visit their parents in prison for prolonged periods, such as during special visits, but also to increase their attachment during visits. As described in section 2.1, the youth workers ensure the parents engage with their children, through conversation, play or other activities which build attachment and social bonding. This has been particularly impactful with parents (generally fathers) who have felt uncomfortable or unskilled when faced with spending extended time engaging with the children.

Another moderator is understanding and knowledge amongst CYP about their parent's imprisonment. Research (Murray & Farrington, 2008) 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, 2005) 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, 2005). By encouraging openness, for example explained in section 2.1, providing one-to-one support and an enabling environment, the Youth Project develops an understanding and an awareness amongst CYP that encourages attachment. This was done to great effect during the 2017 residential where CYP were engaged in reflection about the effects of having a parent in prison.

Another important moderator is strong social peer networks, which is encouraged by the project. Resiliency research suggests that secure parental attachment together with positive peer relations (Garmezy & Rutter, 1983, Murray & Farrington, 2008) are good ways of increasing resilience. As shown in the following figure presenting self-reported outcomes, resilience is an area that was scored highly by project beneficiaries.

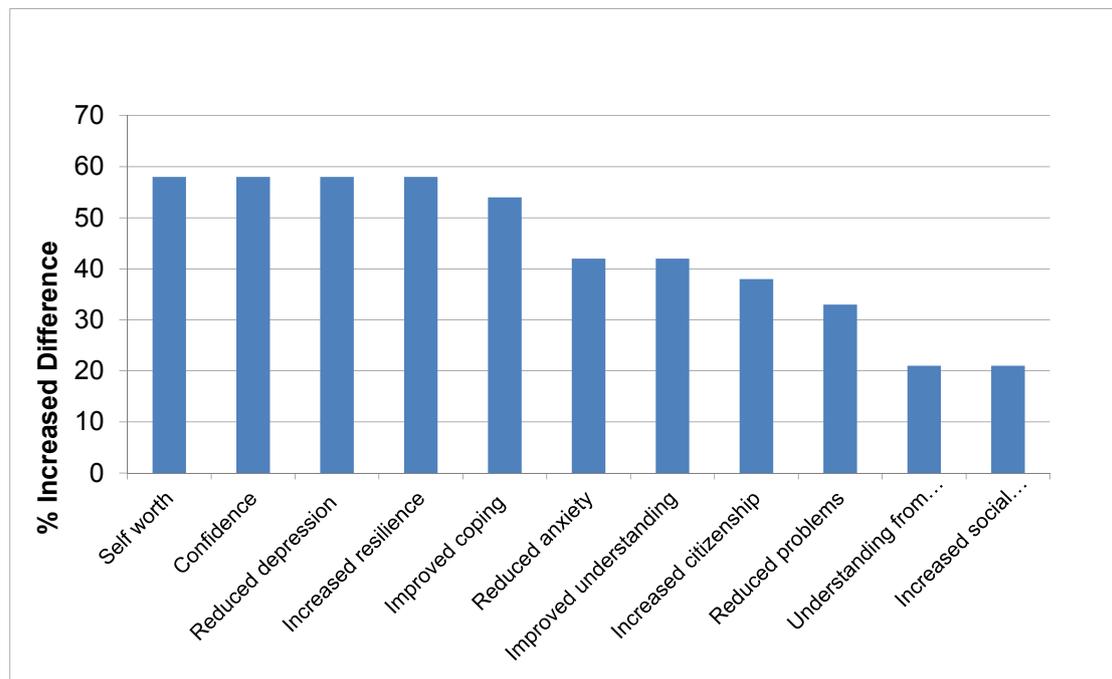
Positive impacts on the young people: this is the most important element of the project and after two years of delivery, we are starting to see the nature of that impact. Nepacs has been careful to collect data to evidence impact in a number of ways across the project, from self-administered questionnaires and outcomes stars, to interviews and focus groups.

The following figure presents self-reported outcomes by young people using the Youth Project. The data is produced from two questionnaires which measure progress across different areas, e.g. self worth, increased resilience, etc. (presented along the X axis below). The young people produce a score between zero and 10 in these areas before and after contact with the project. In this way we gain an appreciation of the impact and distance travelled by the young people in key areas.

The following figure shows that:

- A total of 58% of young people have shown **improvements in their self worth, confidence, levels of depression and resilience.**
- A total of 54% of young people have shown **improvements in how they cope** with day-to-day problems.
- There have also been **improvements in reduced anxiety and improved understanding** of issues surrounding the imprisonment of a parent **(in 42% of the young people).**
- There were lower **increases in understanding from others and increased social networks**, but increases nonetheless.

Figure 2.5 Self reported outcomes, 2017



From qualitative research with the project beneficiaries, we can start to understand these in more detail.

Increasing social networks: despite a relatively low percentage increase, in the self completed questionnaires, in face to face discussions, CYP said that involvement in the Youth Project has developed new and strengthened existing social networks. CYP quite simply said they had met new friends during their time with the project and enjoyed spending time with CYP they already knew at Nepacs. 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. During a focus group when asked about what the best things were about being involved in the project, participants said:

“Meeting new people and making new friends.”

As we have seen in the section on learning, strong social networks are a key moderator of the damage that can be caused by parental imprisonment.

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

Again, knowledge and understanding is a moderator of problems caused by having a parent in prison and subsequently is a valuable contribution of the project.

Shared experiences: the CYP said that a benefit from the project was being in an environment with other CYP who had similar experiences. This they said was unusual and not something they had done before. They said that knowing that other CYP with a parent in prison made them feel at ease and comfortable. The CYP said that mostly they keep their parent’s imprisonment a secret, and share it with only a few best friends. The CYP 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.”

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

Expressing feelings: the CYP 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. 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. As a 13 year old said:

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

This was also evident in the residentials, where reflective sessions were held and opportunities were given to talk about the feelings associated with parental imprisonment. Some of the young people took advantage of this and said that as a result that they felt better, less anxious and more in control of their emotions. Allowing CYP the opportunity and space to do this plays an important role in moderating the negative impacts of parental imprisonment as discussed previously.

Positive impacts on parents and carers: the impact that the project has on young people benefits those who provide care, and not just through a respite function. Mothers and grandmothers expressed great appreciation for the youth services provided by Nepacs. A key response was the impact the project has on introducing a level of normality to the children’s lives and providing something that they were not able to do. For example, one mother said:

“I simply do not have the money to do the things like go on trips, go bowling, to the cinema, so the kids miss out. They [Nepacs] also do

things that their dad would have done with them and I don't do. It makes it all a bit normal."

It was described how if the children were happy and less distressed, it created less stress in the household and easier relationships. Families were happy and reassured that their young people could enjoy activities and be supported in a safe and caring environment. One parent said:

"I have so many things to do, sometimes I just don't have the time or I'm too upset, I know that it's bad on them but sometimes I can't do anything about that and it makes me feel awful and so if they can have some happiness, that's great and if they are happy I'm happy."

It was also apparent that awareness was raised in parents and carers of the effects of imprisonment on children and this developed a more sympathetic environment which in turn had therapeutic impacts. For example, one grandmother said:

"It's made me think more about how she's feeling and how it's affecting her, her dad being in prison, I'm a bit more patient because of that I think."

It was apparent from the research with parents and carers that they were aware of some of the negative impacts of imprisonment but they felt helpless or unable to counteract them, through their own emotional unavailability or financial constraints. This knowledge had further negative impacts on the parents and carers in addition to those caused by imprisonment of a partner or son. They reported that Nepacs mitigated these and improved lives. As one parent said:

"They are a godsend."

There was also an expression of appreciation from the parent whose child had received one-to-one support on how helpful this had been. The mother described how a Nepacs youth worker had supported her child in school who consequently was coping much better with the imprisonment of his father. She said that it was important that he had a strong male figure in his life for guidance and explanation.

Positive impacts on prisoners: parents who are incarcerated are happy that their children are receiving support and positive activities, in a trusted environment. They are content that there is no stigma associated with the activities and are aware that it helps with behavioural and emotional issues. This ultimately has an impact on their own mental health and behaviour. One prisoner said:

“I am really grateful to Nepacs and the things they do for my son, I know he loves it because he talks about going out with them. Just to know he is enjoying things means the world to me.”

There was also an appreciation from prisoners about the impact the support has on the parent/carer in the community. For example, one prisoner said:

“She has no money to do anything nice with them, going out with Nepacs means he gets to do what other kids do and that makes her feel better.”

Positive impacts on stakeholder organisations: this is a result of the Youth Coordinator delivering aspects of the Hidden Sentence training as it relates to young people and when there are young people-focused participants, for example, schools or health services. This has resulted in referrals from such organisations into the project, which demonstrates increased awareness and understanding, and a need for the service. Work in schools about parental imprisonment is an area that has been identified and encouraged by research, for example, Morgan et al (2014) recommends that awareness of this group of

children and the challenges they face needs to be raised amongst education professionals so that schools are able to more effectively offer support. Furthermore they echo the recommendations of the United Nations (2011) that appropriate training on the support needs of children of prisoners should be made available to all staff in schools (Morgan et al, 2014).

Providing a referral route for organisations that work with young people:

although it has been widely accepted that imprisonment has a detrimental impact on young people, there has been little provision and scant attention as to what to do about it. Most of the work has concentrated on supporting adults both in prison and the community. Nepacs Youth Project fundamentally addresses these negative impacts by providing a focused and targeted support intervention for young people. Where parents or carers become aware of issues caused by parental imprisonment, they can refer into the project. Similarly, organisations such as schools can do the same. This has been evident in the first 24 months of the project and is likely to increase as the project becomes better known and more firmly established in the region.

The low hours of the Children in Need funded sessional youth workers has had a detrimental effect on delivery:

the project has found it difficult to attract and maintain good quality staff because the hours are so low (10 and 13 hours respectively) and outside of normal hours (i.e. on Saturdays and Sundays). There has been a significant amount of time devoted to recruitment and training new staff, leaving less time for strategic planning; an inefficient use of management as youth worker responsibilities and duties have to be covered by the Coordinator, meaning a Level Six salary scale position is providing Level Three work; inability to create lasting relationships with young people which is crucial in this type of work, where vulnerabilities and mistrust may be extensive; inability to develop human resource capacity and build skills within staff; and cancelled activities and events as a result of insufficient staff.

Involving young people: the project has been very receptive to proposals and input from young people. They do this through systematic evaluation,

focused reviews after each activity with young people and a general 'enquiring and listening ear'. In relation to service user involvement, a project working with this client group is different to other projects who are more likely to possess a consistent group of young people. For example, once the parents have been released, there is little incentive for the young people to maintain their involvement. Indeed many wish to entirely forget the experience. However, research suggests that there is a need to maintain support services for a period of time following release, and that there should not be an assumption that things will 'get back to normal' for the family (Morgan et al, 2014). It may be the case that problems will develop around the time of the parent's release particularly if the parent may have been violent. The services available for CYP with a parent in prison should therefore be available for a period of time from arrest until long after release (Scharff-Smith & Gampell, 2011).

4.0 Conclusion and recommendations

4.1 Conclusion

There are strong indications that the Nepacs Youth Project is having a positive impact on the children, young people, parents and carers, and mitigating some of the negative impacts of imprisonment. Although, there is comparatively little research in this area, what does exist corroborates the approaches taken by Nepacs and the emerging findings of this evaluation. The table below shows some examples of how the project has moderated the impact of imprisonment, reducing the harmful effects on children.

Table 4.0 Moderators and project impact

Moderator	Project impact
Attachment	Improves the quality of contact between a child and parent and creates positive shared experiences.
Social support	Provide opportunities to create friendships and share experiences.
Openness and expression	Creation of a safe place to be open and honest.
Understanding	Helping a young person work through their feelings and reactions to parental imprisonment.

An important contribution of the project appears to be the extent to which it can help reintroduce a level of normality into the lives of families, helping children and young people enjoy similar things to others. This was contrasted to the general feeling of things being 'not normal' as a result of imprisonment.

It is increasingly common and mainstream to hear about the importance of families to resettlement, desistance and the criminal justice process in general, e.g. the recent Lord Farmer review. 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. Nepacs is now advancing the work and focusing on the young people affected by imprisonment, also known as the 'forgotten victims' of the criminal justice system (Morgan et al, 2014). Without support, the negative impacts that imprisonment has on these people and their parents/carers will be felt for many years to come. With support however, it may be possible that we can minimise and mitigate the damage and attempt to confine the impact of imprisonment on the perpetrator, not their family.

4.2 Recommendations

These recommendations relate to the pilot nature of the project and the need for increasing capacity and resources.

Increase staff hours: this would solve a number of issues, including allowing the Coordinator to coordinate, enabling team meetings, which currently do not happen, allowing intra-project learning and support, staff retention and improved delivery which ultimately impact on CYP. Therefore, it is recommended that youth worker positions are increased to 30 hours each in an effort to attract and maintain quality youth workers. There was also a proposal that the region could be split into north and south, with a Coordinator for each area, and that new youth support roles are developed, which may resolve some of the issues raised.

Improve project planning: CYP sessions require detailed planning in terms of equipment, resources and timing. This is made difficult within a prison environment because of security conditions. However, the project can be as prepared as it can be for all eventualities and this starts with session plans,

which include contingency, and resource maps. This would build confidence within the project, parents, carers and CYP, and from external agencies.

Improve provision and resources: there was an expressed need for more current and age-appropriate project resources for young people; currently many resources are in short supply, age inappropriate, and old and worn. It was also identified that there was a need to specifically increase provision in HMP Frankland, ensuring that the youth room is open during visits, as a minimum.

Increase service user involvement: it is good practice to involve project beneficiaries in service delivery and a service user group is often an effective way of doing this. We therefore recommend that the project explores the development of such a group with either/and children or their parents/carers. During the research, we did identify parents/carers who are interested in being part of such a group and progressing issues they felt affected them as families, for example, a shortage of family provision in HMP Frankland that was impacting upon the relationship between a father and his eight year old daughter.

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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. He can be contacted via:

Email: Christopher@barefootresearch.org.uk

Phone: 07813 789529

Twitter: @barefootres