



“Family Links”

Evaluation Report

By Daragh Bradshaw and Prof. Orla Muldoon

2017

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Foreword

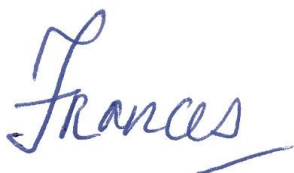
This report represents an important move in direction for the Irish Prison Service, in line with its stated strategic objective of **‘supporting the families of offenders in maintaining stable relationships by offering prisoners and their partners an opportunity to invest in the family unit’**. Recognising the impact of family relationships on recidivism underpins this initiative, alongside an overarching vision to address multi-generational offending, both of which are of huge importance, but inevitably challenging in practice.

The Family Links Initiative is highly innovative in many aspects: it’s inter disciplinary nature; the engagement of multiple stakeholders in its delivery; the direct involvement of prisoners’ families in promoting positive behaviours, and the evidence based nature of the approach all contribute to an exciting, complex and potentially highly effective intervention.

The leadership of the IPS in introducing and championing this model is to be applauded. The commitment of individual staff in the approach is evident from this independent evaluation of the implementation of Family Links in Limerick Prison and the subsequent impact on learning, trust and relationships is clearly demonstrated. The openness of the prisoner participants and their partners and children also provides us with some invaluable insights into the needs and strengths of this population, and should inform future developments and implementation.

This evaluation highlights some important lessons and recommendations for the further roll-out of the Family Links approach, which will be taken on board as the IPS and it’s partners commence the integration of family friendly approaches beyond Limerick prison.

I very much welcome this report and the vision underpinning the Family Links Initiative, and congratulate The Irish Prison Service, the Childhood Development Initiative, and the University of Limerick on providing a unique and important contribution to our understanding of how to impact positively on offending behaviour.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Frances". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

**Ms Frances Fitzgerald TD,
Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality.**

CDI Response

This report and the Family Links Initiative are fantastic examples of what can be achieved with leadership, enthusiasm and vision. Whilst we absolutely recognise the importance of ensuring that developments are appropriately resourced, and that a plan for sustainability is developed, we also know that it isn't always possible to wait for all the ducks to be lined up, for all issues to be resolved, or all challenges addressed. Initiating Family Links in Limerick Prison, and establishing national and regional structures to support its implementation and evaluation were courageous decisions, because we collectively stepped into the unknown; we were cognisant that there would be resistance to the approach, and it was apparent that the multiple stakeholders involved would offer both immense opportunity and challenges in both logistics and priorities.

The relatively small funding provided to CDI by the Katherine Howard Foundation and the Community Foundation of Ireland to support this initiative, were the catalyst that enabled us, along with the Irish Prison Service, the Parents Plus Charity, Bedford Row Family Agency, and the University of Limerick, to take that leap of faith, when it might have been far safer to wait for the ducks to line up! Our funders are to be commended for their vision in offering this motivation, and our partners for seeing the possibilities; having a view of the future which incorporates families in prisoner rehabilitation, and wanting a system which takes seriously its responsibilities in reducing inter generational vulnerabilities.

Since this report was written, some of its recommendations have already been progressed, in particular the review of programme content which involved close consultation with the IPS psychology and chaplaincy services, and the City of Dublin Education and Training Board. Bespoke DVDs have also been developed, with both products being cognisant of the learning from this evaluation, the experience in limerick Prison - in particular the teaching staff-, and the insights of the aforementioned disciplines.

Family Links builds on a model of parental engagement which CDI has been supporting at a community level for several years, and we are excited to work with the IPS and other partners to review and revise this approach. We are particularly pleased to note that since the completion of this evaluation, the IPS and CDI have formally agreed a partnership arrangement which will facilitate the integration of this approach into areas other than limerick Prison.

On behalf of CDI, I sincerely thank the families who participated in this evaluation, and who continue to gain support from each other and the agencies with whom they are engaged. Along with the Irish prison Service College we hope to build on this data, and collectively grow our knowledge and evidence regarding needs and effective interventions.

**Associate Professor Suzanne Guerin,
Chair, CDI Board.**

Acknowledgements

This report was made possible by the resource made available by the Childhood Development Initiative in the first instance and subsequently the Irish Research Council. The authors wish to gratefully acknowledge this support. The research work was very much informed by the work of the Irish Penal Reform Trust and facilitated by Limerick Prison, Bedford Row and the Childhood Development Initiative. The research presented a major opportunity for the Centre for Social Issues Research and the University of Limerick to engage in research that had regional and national impact. We are very grateful to these statutory and community partners for the trust they have placed in us that has facilitated the completion of this work. This report outlines the implementation of a new initiative designed to support parents and children affected by imprisonment. As well as reporting on the implementation, a series of interviews were conducted and analysed to examine the perceived success of the initiative. Parents, children, prison officers, teachers, sectoral leaders and support workers all gave generously of their time to contribute to this data collection effort. All of those interviewed had other demands on their time, yet gave their views willingly and openly. Without their contributions the report would not have been possible,

The authors would also like to thank members of the Expert Advisory Group for their support and advice on the development of the evaluation from the outset through to its' final stages. This group comprised of Dr. Suzanne Guerin (Chair), Mr Pat Dawson (Irish Prison Service), Marian Quinn (Childhood Development Initiative) and Prof Gary O'Reilly (UCD). It is acknowledged however, that the contents of the report and responsibility for findings rest with the authors.

Orla Muldoon,
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Centre for Social Issues Research,
University of Limerick.

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Acronyms

ACO	Assistant Chief Officer
AVP	Alternatives to Violence Programme
BRFA	Bedford Row Family Agency
CDI	Childhood Development Initiative
CFI	Community Foundation of Ireland
CO	Chief Officer
CYPSY	Children and Young People's Services Committee
EAG	Expert Advisory Group
FIG	Families and Imprisonment Group (National Structure)
FLO	Family Liaison Officer
IPS	Irish Prison Service
IPRT	Irish Penal Reform Trust
ISM	Integrated Sentence Management
KHF	Katherine Howard Foundation
LIG	Local Implementation Group
MOVE	Men Overcoming Violent Emotions
PCF	Parent Carer Facilitator
PI	Parental Incarceration
PPC	Parents Plus Charity
PPP	Parents Plus Programme
SPSS	Statistical Package for Social Sciences
UL	University of Limerick

Executive Summary

1. Introduction

In partnership with the Irish Prison Service, the Parents Plus Charity, Bedford Row Family Agency and the Irish Penal Reform Trust, the Childhood Development Initiative commenced the implementation of 'Family Links', a system of formal and informal supports for fathers in Limerick prison and their families.

Within funding from the Katherine Howard Foundation (KHF) and the Community Foundation of Ireland (CFI), these supports, here called the Family Links Initiative, can be taken to mark a sea-change in the way in which the Prison Service views and hopes to work with families affected by imprisonment. These supports include:

- Changes in visiting arrangements
- Parenting education for families
- Officer Training in communication and child protection issues
- Designated Family Liaison Officer's (FLO's) amongst prison officers.

The following report is an evaluation of the pilot of the intervention implemented in Limerick Prison from October 2014 to March 2016.

2. Methodology

Using a mixed methods design, this report aimed to capture the impact and experience of those involved in the implementation of the Family Links Initiative in Limerick Prison. In order to achieve this, fathers participating in the programme (N=15), partners of the fathers involved (N=14) and their children (N=28) were interviewed before, during and after the adoption of family friendly supports within the prison. Additionally stakeholders involved in the development and delivery of the programme were interviewed over the course of the evaluation including prison officers (N=30), prison management (N=4), teachers (N=5) and support staff at the prison (N=4), CDI (N=2) and Bedford Row Family Agency (BRFA) (N=6). A world café event was undertaken and views of participants were recorded on tape and on

paper on the day, which was attended by approximately 20 stakeholders. All interviews were semi-structured. An interview guide provided a loose structure within which to explore the topics of interest, and participants were prompted to expand on relevant and interesting responses. The interview guide for each group is available from the authors. Topics included: (1) Experiences of prison visits and visiting, (2) Impressions and experiences of being involved in 'Family Links', (3) Challenges experienced by prison families, (4) Expectations, hopes and concerns for the future for families within the prison.

A range of data was collected from the stakeholders, parents and children. Here the qualitative data is reported which includes interviews with those working within the prison system and support services; parents that completed the programme; some parents that did not complete the programme and children of participating parents. Psychometric measures were also completed by fathers and mothers and include measures such as the Perceived Social Support Scale; Parental Stress Index; General Health Questionnaire; Child Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire and Mother/Father Identity. Some observational data was also collected, in particular special reduced security visits facilitated through the programme between fathers and their families that allowed contact and interactions were videoed. Qualitative data was analysed systematically using thematic analysis and discourse analysis.

3. The Aims and Structure of the Evaluation

The evaluation team had a two part remit that is reflected in this report. One element of the evaluation is a process evaluation, attempting to document how the initiative was rolled out, where it aligned to the original roll out plan and where the context or implementation necessitated adaptation. This evaluation is reported in Chapter Two.

The process evaluation also sought to explore the implementation and operation of the programme under the headings of:

1. Utilisation: the extent to which the initiative reached its target population.
2. Organisation: exploring the management and delivery of the initiative.
3. Fidelity: the extent to which the initiative operated as intended.

The second element of the evaluation was a product evaluation which was designed to consider the impact of the initiative on stakeholders and prison families. This element of the evaluation had a number of research questions which are addressed in Chapters Three and Four. These included:

1. To what extent does the Family Links Initiative meet the needs of fathers in prison and their families?
 - a. What aspects of the initiative are of particular benefit?
 - b. What needs to change to improve the initiative?
2. What, if any, change has taken place in the prison system as a consequence of this initiative? Are there changes in terms of the knowledge, skills and attitudes of prison staff involved in the initiative in relation to supporting prisoners in their parenting?
 - a. What are the facilitators and barriers of the initiatives' success?
 - b. What changes are required at policy level for the initiative to be a success?

4. Recommendations

Three sets of recommendations are made. The first set relates to the implementation of the programme and how it can best be delivered to maximise its impact and efficacy. The second set relate to recommendations for prison wide systems for the Irish Prison Service as a consequence of the initiative. The third set of recommendations pertain to wider collaborative and interagency working in support of family relationships for those affected by imprisonment.

1. Introduction

a. Introduction

Recent decades have witnessed an expansive growth in prison population (Wildeman, 2010) which is estimated to be over 11 million people worldwide (International Centre for Prison Studies, 2013). This figure reflects an increase of between 25-30% worldwide since 2000, with 1 in 28 children in the US having a parent in prison (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2012). The unforeseen consequence is that families are becoming forgotten victims who serve second sentences alongside offenders (Mathews, 1983), the effects of which have been demonstrated to alter the life trajectories of not only the prisoner, but their partners and children too (Dyer, Pleck, & McBride, 2012). Whilst there is now a growing body of research on the impact of prison on children and families, little of this is conducted within an Irish context and so there is a reliance on international evidence.

Children of incarcerated parents are at increased risk of not only future incarceration but also they have been shown to experience negative educational, behavioural and emotional outcomes. Incarcerated fathers have the potential to act as role models with 63% of boys with a convicted father going on to offend themselves (Farrington et al., 2001). Due to the enforced absence from the daily enactment of parenting duties, the role and experience of parenting is fundamentally different for incarcerated rather than domiciliary parents. As a result, fathers who are prisoners can feel illegitimate and unrecognised in their parental identity (McCrudden, E., et al., 2014). This sense of illegitimacy can leave some imprisoned fathers with feelings of guilt, shame or helplessness (Boswell, & Wedge, 2002) and on the outside of their children's lives. The extent of intergenerational patterns of incarceration also means that many prisoners have poor role, models and experiences of being fathered themselves, thereby undermining their future parental skills, self-esteem and self-efficacy. Taken together, this can result in prisoners shutting down parental aspects of their identity (Boswell, Wood, & Advice, 2011) resulting in fathers being unwilling and unable to enact the role which in turn undermines families as a support for prisoners and as they re-enter the community. Maintaining imprisoned fathers' contact with their partners and

their children is an important component in efforts to reduce recidivism and to protect vulnerable children from criminal careers (Boswell, et al., 2011). Increasing the emphasis of a prisoner's identity as a father represents a potential avenue to stop these negative trajectories: for example, research conducted within a British context has found that imprisoned fathers who maintain a positive relationship with their children are six times less likely to re-offend (Unit, 2002).

Recognising the importance of maintaining family connections has resulted in a growing number of initiatives aimed at supporting meaningful family relationships during incarceration (Turek & Loper, 2006) such as parenting programmes (Loper & Novero, 2010), prison nurseries (Carlson, 2001), or alternative visitation schemes. However difficulties surrounding implementing such a cultural change have gone under-researched and unevaluated, while programmes which are unable to provide effective supports through which family roles can be enacted are destined to fail (Purvis, 2013).

b. Current Context

In 2012 the Irish Penal Reform Trust (IRPT) published the report "Picking up the Pieces" in which they outlined the rights and needs of children and families affected by incarceration. Echoing previous studies, children and families were identified as hidden victims of the penal system enduring their own sentence without committing any crime. The report also contained a number of recommendations and policy initiatives which could be undertaken by the Irish Prison Service in supporting families affected by parental incarceration.

Drawing on these recommendations the Irish Prison Service (IPS) created a national working group - the Families and Imprisonment Group - to oversee the implementation of changes within the Irish Prison Service aimed at supporting families affected by incarceration. This group was headed by the then governor of Limerick Prison, Pat Dawson, and comprised of members of the Childhood Development Initiative (CDI), the IPS and the Probation Service.

Recognising the importance of evaluation for the project, CDI issued a request for tender for an evaluation of the Family Links Initiative. The Centre for Social Issues Research at the University of Limerick submitted a tender and was subsequently accepted to fulfil the role of Evaluation Team. This report is the Final Evaluation Report on the implementation of the Family Links Initiative in Limerick prison.

c. Process Evaluation: Study Aim and Overall Approach

Process evaluations are designed to evaluate the activities of individual organisations or programmes (Canavan, Coen, Ozan & Curtin, 2014). They are particularly focused on the operation and implementation of a particular programme (Shreirer, 1994) with an emphasis on ‘how’ something has happened. This type of evaluation has particular relevance to programmes intent on replication (Patton, 2002). While process evaluations can be used in conjunction with outcome measures they do not in themselves assess the actual outcome of a programme on individuals or groups. (Canavan, Coen, Ozan & Curtin, 2014).

The aim of the present evaluation was to examine the implementation of the Family Links Initiative within Limerick Prison by examining the following issues:

- Stakeholders’ engagement in the Family Links consultation process (i.e. prisoners; their families; prison staff; community based service providers);
- Stakeholders’ buy in and support for the Family Links Initiative;
- IPS commitment to identify and address the policy and practice issues associated with Family Links.

d. Aim of this Report

The aim of this report is to document both the process and consequences of the Family Links Initiative. It documents in particular the roll out of the initiative in an individual prison as well as offering some insights on the consequences of the project. Rather than presenting a total evaluation of the impact of the programme, the report hopes to inform future initiatives and iterations of the initiative on a national level by assessing:

1. The extent to which the proposed changes and associated interventions met the needs of fathers in prison and their partners.
2. Those aspects of the changes and intervention that are of particular benefit and those that need to be reconsidered to improve their impact.

e. Methodology and Data Analysis

Using a mixed methods design this report aims to capture the impact and experience of those involved in the implementation of the Family Links Initiative in Limerick Prison. In order to achieve this, fathers participating in the programme (N=15), partners of the fathers involved (N=14) and their children (N=28), were interviewed before, during and after the implementation of family friendly measures within the prison. Additionally stakeholders involved in the development and delivery of the programme were interviewed over the course of the evaluation including prison officers (N=30), prison management (N=4), teachers (N=5) and support staff at the prison (N=4), CDI (N=2) and Bedford Row (N=6). A world café event was undertaken attended by approximately 20 stakeholders and views of participants were recorded on tape and on paper on the day. All interviews were semi-structured. Thus, an interview guide provided a loose structure within which to explore the topics of interest, and participants were prompted to expand on relevant and interesting responses. The interview guide for each group is available from the authors. Topics included: (1) Experiences of prison visits and visiting, (2) Impressions and experiences of being involved in 'Family Links', (3) Challenges experienced by prison families, and (4) Expectations, hopes and concerns for the future for families within the prison.

Qualitative data was transcribed and analysed using "Thematic Analysis" and discourse analysis (See Appendix I). Thematic analysis involves a number of stages of data coding in order to identify potential themes. The first stage coding remains very close to the data and involves paraphrasing utterances and identifying initial codes. Second level involves reviewing the first level codes and seeing how they can be amalgamated into overarching elements. Third stage involves identifying broader themes under which the original codes can be combined. In the final stage, detailed outlines of the final

themes are created. It should be noted that themes should not be compared to each other directly as having multiple themes in any given area does not reflect the strength of the theme but rather the spread of opinions. So for example if we looked at an area such as positives and negatives of the content and there are three themes reported for one and only two for the other, this does not mean that the content was more negative, it simply reflects the number of themes reported.

The children's interviews were analysed using discourse analysis. This method was more suitable for these shorter interviews as the analysis allows the exposure of implicit shared assumptions about the nature of the world. This was deemed to be particularly appropriate to these interviews as children often did not fully articulate their views in interview.

Psychometric measures were completed by fathers and mothers and include measures such as the Perceived Social Support Scale; Parental Stress Index; General Health Questionnaire; Child Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire and Mother/father Identity. Observational data was also collected at the family visits that participating families enjoyed. These visits were part of the project with a reduced level of security between parents and children allowing more natural interaction between prisoner fathers and their children in Limerick Prison. Both of these data collection efforts proved problematic and due to limited data at this time are not included in this report. These difficulties are outlined below.

f. Processes and People

The group involved in this report comprised of the core evaluation team of Professor Orla Muldoon and Daragh Bradshaw and assisted by Ciara Kirwan and Zara Walsh. Dr Chris McInerney prepared and hosted the World Café Event. Interview schedules were created through review of the literature available relating to families affected by paternal incarceration as well as those involved in prison parenting interventions. Questions were drawn up through a consultative process involving Professor Orla Muldoon and Daragh Bradshaw. All of the findings were presented to families and stakeholders subsequent to completion of data collection and analysis for both triangulation

and feedback. Based on the reflections of these key parties additional recommendations arose. Where appropriate these additional recommendations are identified as arising from reflection of stakeholders rather our findings *per se*.

g. Strengths and Limitations

Strengths

The strength of the initiative and indeed the evaluation is the documentation of issues related to the welfare and support of parents in a hard to reach group. Studies of parents affected by imprisonment and the consequences for their children are very limited in the international literature and largely absent in the Irish prison system. Studies of children are even more unusual due to the ethical issues and sensitives that arise when working with this vulnerable group. The spread of participants in the sample, together with the fact that data is drawn from two cohorts that participated in the evaluation is an additional strength. Further, the breadth and depth of the data collection effort is considerable and the volume of qualitative data is considerable. As such the qualitative data provides extensive, inclusive and differing views that inform our evaluation.

Limitations

Working within the prison system and within prison families has been challenging for all, including the evaluation team. Trust in the evaluation was a concern at the start of the process. Prison officers, support workers, teachers and families were all concerned about being evaluated, and it took considerable effort to communicate that the focus was on evaluation of the initiative rather than of individuals. Many of the participants and their partners that began the programme did not see it to completion. Some of these participants did not want to engage with the evaluation team subsequent to their exit. Occasionally this was reflective of issues of trust, whilst on other occasions it would appear to have been linked to anger at having being exited from the programme.

There were a number of specific issues that arose with data collection efforts. Reflecting issues of trust, the collection of observational/video data during

family visits was controversial from the outset. Additionally, families often got only one visit rather than the planned pre and post initiative visit. This resulted in very limited observational data and certainly not data robust enough to do a pre and post initiative comparison. The scale of the quantitative data collection was also much lower than anticipated, due to prisoners withdrawing or being excluded from the programme and at this time, there is not enough quantitative data to power our analysis. It is hoped that this data collection effort will continue in the year ahead. Finally, the planned inclusion only of parents with school aged children (age 6+) was not possible and to maximise participation in initiative those with younger children were included. These younger children, and in particular pre-verbal children, were not suitable for inclusion in the evaluation efforts.

h. Ethics

Prior to all data collection efforts, the research and evaluation approach received ethical approval from the University of Limerick Research Ethics Committee and the Irish Prison Service Research Ethics Committee.

i. Structure of report

This report aims to tell the Family Links story, and is summative in nature. Having established a general and methodological introduction, the report presents data emanating from the process elements of the implementation and reports on the qualitative evaluation of the initiative.

The evaluation team had a two part remit that is reflected in this report. One element of the evaluation is a process evaluation, attempting to document how the initiative was rolled out, where it aligned to the original roll out plan and where the context or implementation necessitated adaptation. This evaluation is reported in Chapter Two.

The second element of the evaluation was a product evaluation which was designed to consider the impact of the initiative on stakeholders and prison families. This element of the evaluation had a number of research questions which are addressed in Chapters Three and Four.

Conclusions and recommendations on the basis of these findings are offered in Chapter Five.

2. Process data from service evaluation

2.1. Introduction

The process evaluation documents how the initiative was rolled out, where it aligned to the original roll out plan and where the context or implementation necessitated adaptation. In this chapter we consider the implementation of the initiative by considering the extent to which the initiative reached its target population (Utilisation); documenting the management and delivery of the initiative (Organisation), and the extent to which the initiative operated as it intended (Fidelity). This evaluation highlights the complexities of working across multiple agencies and within the prison system in support of vulnerable families.

2.2 Utilisation

Family Participation

Fifteen families (nine from Cohort 1 and six from Cohort 2) with 28 children participated in the formal parenting programme implemented within Limerick Prison. Nine families (five from Cohort 1 and four from Cohort 2) completed the course. (See Table 1).

Table 1. Participating Families

Family No.	Father	Mother	Child (Gender) age	Father Completion	Cohort
1	-	**	(Girl) 5 months (Boy) 2	Yes	1
2	-	-	(Boy) 13 (Girl) 8	Yes	1
3	-	-	(Boy) 9 (Boy) 6	Yes	1
4	-	-	(Girl) 11 (Girl) 7 (Boy) 5 (Boy) 3	Yes	1
5	-	-	(Girl) 10	Yes	1
6	*		(Girl) 4 (Boy) 3	No	1
7	-	^^	(Boy) 4 Months	No	1
8	-	-	(Girl) 8 (Boy) 3	No	1
9	-	**	(Boy) 4 months	No	2
10	-	##	(Girl) 3 (Girl) 5 (Girl) 1	Yes	2
11	-	-	(Girl) 4 (boy) 2 (Girl) 10 months	Yes	2
12	-	-	(Boy) 10^ (Boy) 2	Yes	2
13	-	~	(Boy) 3	Yes	2
14	-	**	(Boy) 6	No	2
15	-	**	(Boy) 6	No	2

*Attended the graduation but was removed from the course before the completion of the final session due to a transfer to another prison as a result of a disciplinary action. Was not interviewed at Time 2.

^ Not biological father.

~ Not biological mother: child stays with partner on alternate weekends.

^Mother did not want to be interviewed at Time 1 or Time 2

**Did not want to be interviewed at Time 2.

##Only attended 1 of the sessions.

N.B. Demographic information has been removed to protect the identities of families and staff.

Officer Training

Four different officer training courses were rolled out during the Family Links Initiative: Children First; Front-of-house training; Family Liaison Officer (FLO) and Parents Plus (PP).

Children's First Training outlined the new draft child protection policy being implemented within the prison. This course consisted of one days training and was run on three occasions, (12/3/2015, 13/3/2015 & 1/10/2015). It was attended by 47 officers and six staff members of the education department within the prison.

The front-of-house training outlined the importance of positive relationships between the prisoner/staff and the visiting family. This course consisted of two days training, was run on four occasions over 11 months, and was attended by 60 officers, five staff members from Bedford Row Family Agency (BRFA), one staff member from the education service within Limerick prison and one staff member from Portlaoise Prison. Two staff members have been subsequently transferred to other prisons.

Family Liaison Officer training outlined the role of the FLO within the prison and gave staff tools to develop the role. This course consisted of two days training, was run on two occasions, (3rd/4th March 2015 & 14th/15th October 2015), and was attended by 20 officers and two education staff members.

Finally the Parents Plus training outlined the implementation of the Parents Plus Programme. This course consisted of two days training, was run on one occasion, (26th/27th March 2015), and was attended by eight officers, three members of the

education department in Limerick Prison, six staff members of BRFA, and two teachers from Wheatfield Prison.

In total, 90 officers have completed at least one element of training, with no officer completing all four elements. 58 officers completed only one element, Children First ($n=30$) and front-of-house ($n= 28$). 19 officers completed two elements of training, these being a combination of front-of-house and either Children First ($n=12$) or FLO ($n=7$). 13 officers completed three elements of training, these being a combination of FLO, front-of-house and Children First ($n=5$), FLO, front-of-house and PP ($n=8$). None of the PP group completed the Children First training (See Table 2). It should be noted that non-IPS employees, such as prison teachers (who are ETB employees) or BRFA, have their own child protection policy to adhere to.

Table 2. Combinations of Courses Completed*

	+0	+1	+2**	+3	Total
1. Children First	30	12	5	0	47
2. Front-of-house	28	19	13	0	60
3. FLO	0	7	13	0	20
4. Parents Plus	0	0	8	0	8
Total	58	19	13	0	90

*Numbers exclude outside agencies/prison and education department staff members

**13 officers completed three elements of training. These being a combination of FLO, front-of-house and Children First ($n=5$), and FLO, Front-of-house and PP ($n=8$).

2.3 Organisation

Organisational Model

The organisational framework of the Family Links Initiative comprises of a national group called the Families and Imprisonment Group (FIG) which was to be reported to by two subgroups: the Local Implementation Group (LIG) and an Expert Advisory Group (EAG), (See Appendix 2). Collectively, these structures provided governance for the initiative, drove local implementation, addressed policy issues arising, and offered a forum for strategic planning.

Arising out of the recommendations outlined in the IRPT report *'Picking up the Pieces'*, FIG was tasked with researching best practice in relation to supporting families impacted by parental incarceration (PI). Subsequent to a lengthy consultation process, through which the IPS engaged with a range of organisations regarding potential models and approaches, CDI received funding from the Katherine Howard Foundation and the Community Foundation of Ireland, to drive the development of a prison-wide initiative. FIG was established to oversee this alongside the wider recommendations from the IPRT Report. This group was to be chaired by a representative from the Irish Prison Service and was to include a high ranking representative from each of the prisons as well as representatives from the Child Protection Agency (Tusla), Probation Services, prison psychological services and the Childhood Development Initiative (CDI).

LIG was tasked with organising the roll out of the initiative on a local level and reported their progress to FIG. This group was to be comprised of stakeholders actively involved in the day to day implementation of the initiative. Meetings were to be chaired by a high ranking official from Limerick Prison and were to be attended by school father's group facilitator plus representatives from the Family Liaison Officers, the evaluation team (and Bedford Row Mothers group facilitator), Prison training college, Parents Plus, a Chief Officer (CO), an Assistant Chief Officer (ACO), an Integrated Sentence Management Officer (ISM), CDI, Tusla, and the prison Psychologist.

The EAG was tasked to oversee the evaluation of the initiative. This group reported directly to the FIG and CDI's Board of Management and comprised of members from the University of Limerick, the IPS, CDI, as well as a number of outsider advisors with relevant expertise.

Planned Changes

FIG identified a number of formal and informal measures to be implemented in order to facilitate meaningful father-child relationships and support families affected by PI. These measures included: (1) dedicated family support aimed at improving family relationships for those within the prison system, (2) families to have access to parenting education and (3) changes in visitation experiences for families with reoriented visits to focus on family contact and away from security issues.

Informal supports for parents within this model were to be supported through a dedicated post holder based on CDI's community based, and independently evaluated model of support, called the Parent Care Facilitator (PCF). The PCF has two mutually supportive aspects to their role. First they deliver the formal parents programme, second they engage with parents in the service as well as work with the staff to encourage them to think about everything from the child's perspective and to support fathers in prison to be cognisant of their parental role. In essence to plan services asking the question 'How does this fit for families?' In the Prison context the role of the PCF was inhabited by a newly created position of the Family Liaison Officer (FLO). In conjunction with the prison element of the initiative, BRFA was selected as a community partner due to their experience and expertise in working with families affected by PI. In the community setting the PCF role was taken on by the Bedford Row mothers group facilitators.

Formal supports were provided by the implementation of a formal parenting programme, in this case Parents Plus (PP) (Behan et al., 2001). The parenting programme was to be delivered weekly to both fathers on the inside as well as to mothers on the outside. The programme comprised of adapted content from the PP programme, to be run weekly for six to eight weeks culminating in a one off graduation ceremony in which both parents would participate within the prison.

Families participating in the formal element of the programme were entitled to two visits in a custom built family centred unit within the prison. It was envisioned that parents arriving for their scheduled visit would be accompanied by a FLO through normal security arrangements and on to the Family Friendly visiting room.

Officer Training and Selection

Three levels of training were identified and rolled out to staff in Limerick Prison. Training sessions were aimed at facilitating and supporting FLO's as well as prison staff in general with the new initiative (See Utilisation for a further description of the content of each training level). Training levels ran from one to three: (1) Front-of-house training focusing on communication practices with families interacting with the prison, (2) Family Liaison Officer Training, outlining roles and duties of the FLO, and finally (3) Parents Plus Facilitator training, outlining the formal parenting element. As one level of training was completed it was envisioned that staff interested in

progressing with the initiative would volunteer to partake in the next level. In this way only staff who 'bought-in' to the vision of the project would undertake greater involvement and responsibilities within the initiative. Additionally strategic posts within the prison, such as posts involved in the visiting regime, as well as officers deemed suitable by their superiors were identified and invited to participate. Follow-up training sessions assessing progress and addressing any issues arising for FLO's were planned for an unspecified date in the future. Finally, due to the involvement of children within this initiative separate training sessions were rolled out outlining the prisons' child protection policy. In contrast to the previous three levels of training it was envisioned that all members of staff would participate in the child protection training.

Prisoner Selection

Incarcerated fathers were invited to participate in the initiative provided there were no child protection issues, they had children within the specified age range, had contact with their child on a regular basis, agreed to no chaotic drug use and that their partner in the community agreed to participate.

2.4 Fidelity

The pilot scheme for the Family Links Initiative was rolled out in Limerick Prison from October 2014 to March 2016. This section explores fidelity to the initiatives' protocol, and how this impacted on the implementation of the intervention. While fidelity to protocol is viewed as an essential element within any prospective intervention, when the intervention is being undertaken within a difficult and unpredictable context such as prison, maintaining a level of flexibility can also be vital. The implicit flexible nature of the pilot scheme was seen as an important positive learning opportunity, which enabled the initiative to adapt in order to facilitate the needs of this unique environment. Equally the nature of the prison service was seen as quite unpredictable necessitating such an approach. In spite of this, remaining faithful to the original criteria was vital in maintaining a high level of credibility among stakeholders. This was particularly salient in regards to the visitation procedures, selection of officers for training and subsequent follow up as well as for the formal parenting programme participant selection, discipline and withdrawal procedures. Deviation from set parameters in those crucial areas was viewed with a level of

concern. While there were occasions when elements of flexibility were unavoidable it became evident that in such instances stakeholders needed to be kept informed as to when, why and to what extent deviations were occurring. The timing of the adjustments was another key issue as participants often became aware of deviations during or immediately prior to engaging in specific aspects of the programme. So in the strongest sense, flexibility and fidelity were seen as two issues that needed to be carefully balanced.

There was a perception among some staff that the prison environment was an unpredictable and difficult context to maintain any level of fidelity for new initiatives. This perceived lack of continuity within the prison, which officers speak about below, was seen to be a culmination of staff shortages, roster limitations, Court escort requirements as well as prisoner motivation, and transfer and release schemes. Maintaining consistency in such circumstances represented a serious challenge to schemes requiring continuity and consistency. This contrast between the perceived rigidity of some programme elements and the restrictions of the prison setting posed a difficulty for some stakeholders:

“Like continuity and consistency are kind of alien in the whole nature of prison in that you would find it very, very difficult to plan ahead.”

In such circumstances adopting a flexible formal programme which adapted to the restrictions of the context and adhered to the learning objectives of the initiative was preferable. This flexibility was also seen as an integral element in the iterative learning vision of the pilot stage of the Family Links Initiative:

“I think (Family Links) would probably need to be something that has the ability to evolve... It has the structure to evolve...”

This is not to say that flexibility was present or desirable in every area. Maintaining a degree of fidelity both to the ethos of the prison as well as the parameters of the initiative was essential in key areas such as security.

“Two guys that were caught in Limerick and were thrown off the course, that gave it a huge amount of credibility among staff because now they see, ‘Well look, if they are not compliant, if they are not prepared to stick to the rules of it

they cannot take part.’ I know it sounds horrible like and callous to say that but that was a good thing that that happened.”

By maintaining a zero tolerance policy for those who broke the rules officers felt a precedent was being set regarding adherence to discipline regimes. In this way officers were assured as to what to expect from the changes under way as well as clarity that security concerns would remain an integral part of the prison.

Such fidelity though was difficult to achieve across all elements, particularly with the formal parenting programme. In order to recruit a sufficient number of family participants the parameters surrounding selection criteria were adjusted. In both cohorts participants were selected in spite of the fact that their children were outside of the recommended age group and/or father’s length of sentence did not fall within the prescribed time frame:

“To be perfectly honest because there is no data on the ages, the IPS has no data on the number of children that the prisoners have or on their age...it was based on what age children do we mostly see in and around the prison. That was how that was decided.”

“In essence when we got down to the numbers we realised that there was, you know, we would have a very small group if we stuck rigidly to the criteria.”

Such deviation was a consequence of not having reliable up to date information regarding the nature of the target population. Deviation such as with the selection criteria was seen to undermine the programme as some stakeholders were sceptical as to the parameters and credibility of the policy being implemented. However, a number of participants/stakeholders recognised the importance of maintaining the flexibility of the pilot scheme in order to achieve a more suitable programme in the future:

“We deviated from the original criteria to be offered a place on the course. And we need, you know, obviously this was a learning experience for us all, but for the next one we need to set out clear ground rules and what the selection process is.”

While maintaining this flexibility can be seen to be a positive aspect too much flexibility was seen to be lacking in focus. This was particularly evident in the 2nd cohort when efforts to adapt the formal parenting element to the needs of the prison were made a day before the course was to be implemented with the Father's group.

“People didn't seem to be sure exactly of what they were supposed to be teaching in relation to the modules for this course...when I heard (NAME) saying well it's kind of open to you what do you want to do yourself and all this, that kind of put the thing...that put the nail in it for me being honest with you...I have delivered courses and there is no such thing as make it up as you go along like.”

“NAME said to me he said 'I'm after spending nights reading over the book he says, reading over what we are supposed to be teaching and now he says I don't know what to teach, I don't know what I should be saying'...but that is how I would have felt during the meeting the second I heard NAME saying Okay work away yourselves kinda thing, just make it work...”

Such extreme and sudden flexibility did little to promote the programme with the facilitators and prison officers in general. Furthermore, it became apparent during the course of the evaluation that three separate models of the formal parenting programme were present, the original working model, the prison model being run with the fathers, and the community model being implemented with the mothers. While the diversity between the models may reflect the different circumstances and needs of the participants and arise due to the flexibility of the initiative, it was seen to undermine the credibility of the programme.

A similar situation can be seen in regards to elements surrounding prison visits. As the pilot was seen to be constantly evolving, elements within the original criteria were open to change, particularly as the initiative needed to adapt to restrictions on the ground such as staff shortages, deployment and roster issues. When adaptations were made it was not always possible to inform all the staff members of the changes or indeed the reasons behind them.

“Like all these FIGS and FLO courses, what my understanding was they would be taking over the visits...that is what we thought because they had gone to, but none of them are doing the visits...We are staff that have no training in it, are all doing these visits. So we don't know do they want the visits to go a certain way? My way and our understanding is you can't get up on a table; you can't sit alongside them, the way it used to be.”

In such instances some officers felt ill prepared to address the changing circumstances of their working environment particularly in the absence of clear communication.

Finally it was evident during the course of the Local Implementation Group meetings that some of the stakeholders would have benefited from clarity in the form of more robust protocols particularly surrounding withdrawal procedures for prisoners who break prison regulations.

“And that is a challenge because we found ourselves at the meetings, at LIG meetings, discussing individuals, what we were going to do with them, and the reality was that they ended up being put off the course.”

While adhering to the principle of flexibility within the initiative it is clear from such comments that some stakeholders felt such flexibility and lack of clear guidelines was undermining and ultimately detrimental for participant and stakeholder alike. In light of feedback arising out of the first iteration of the Family Links, the LIG did produce a more clearly defined protocol and set of procedures, however it was unclear as to the extent to which these were adhered to.

This section explored the impact and level of fidelity/flexibility within the Family Links Initiative. It highlights how different circumstances called for different degrees of fidelity and flexibility. It also emphasised that in the event of high flexibility, the timing of the decision as well as the clarity of the communication can undermine the buy-in to the overall initiative.

3. Product Evaluation: Participants' and Stakeholders' Experiences of Family Links

3.1 Introduction

Participants (n=31) included individual workers from outside agencies as well as disciplines within Limerick Prison which were involved in the delivery of the Family Links Initiative. Agencies and departments included; CDI; BRFA; IPS Training College; Prison education department (subject to ETB regulations); IPS Psychology Department; Limerick Prison Management and prison officers. All interviews were semi-structured and included prison officers (N=14), prison management (N=4), prison teachers (N=5) and support staff at the prison (N=4), CDI (N=3) and Bedford Row (N=6). A world café event was undertaken and views of participants were recorded on tape and on paper. It was attended by approximately 20 stakeholders some of whom are also included in the 31 individual interviews. All interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. To preserve anonymity of all respondents no identifiers are attached to any quotations.

Transcripts were analysed using Thematic Analysis as set out by Braun and Clarke (2006). Data was initially open-coded coding of utterances relating to similar points. This first level of the coding stayed very close to the data, paraphrasing meaning of the utterances and marking any deviant cases relevant to the code. After re-reading the transcripts and reviewing the first level codes, we considered how they would be amalgamated by attending to evidence of conceptual commonalities between codes. As a consequence, broader themes were proposed, under which some of the many original codes might be combined, but categories were not fixed. On a final reread of the amalgamated codes, we wrote detailed outlines of three themes. These themes included: (1) Vision and Aims; (2) Buy-in, Support and Credibility; (3) Challenges to Implementation: Trust, Communication and (Dis)enfranchisement. A visual representation of the thematic analysis is presented in Figure 1 (Appendix 1).

3.2 Vision and Aims: Leaders and Stakeholders

This theme maps how stakeholders understood the Family Links Initiative and their involvement in the programme. It also explores how the Family Links vision can act as a collaborative force across and within agencies used to working in parallel. There was widespread interagency acceptance that current punitive approaches in the justice system were unproductive and potentially contributing to further difficulties ahead. As examples the two stakeholders below spoke about the need for a sea change in the approach to prisoners and their families.

“Very few people go out better than they came in so I think most senior prison officers would say yeah well that’s not working, why not try it.”

Leader, Individual Interview

“Limerick prison is sitting out there since 1821 and it hasn’t worked because people seem to keep coming back.”

Leader, Individual Interview

Furthermore there was recognition that individual agencies and departments were dealing with the same people and by adopting a unified approach on both an agency and a family level, a more effective and cohesive response to the situation could be achieved.

“We are all fighting the same battle so let’s get on with the same side and let’s have a joined up thinking.”

Leader, Individual Interview

“That would be its unique selling point, it’s unique aspect, it is family led if you like, and child centred.”

Leader, World Café

Leaders also understood and recounted that as a new departure and pilot initiative an important element within the project was its ability to evolve over time within the landscape of the prison:

“I think if you’re involved in a course and you’re happy with the concept but the actual substance of it needs to be improved, then it would, I think it would probably need to be something that has the ability to evolve... It has the structure to evolve... So if it’s something that’s written here’s the course that’s going to be run every year, this is it and if it’s the same as last year, I think (teachers) would have issues being part of it.”

Leader, Individual Interview

“I think it’s going to be a bit of a journey, you know, but it’s a really good start, you know, and I’m glad now we were involved.”

Leader, Individual Interview

However, while agencies agreed this in principle there were some tensions surrounding the initiative. Some agencies spoke about how they were in favour of the project but did not see that they had a role within. This was expressed through a reluctance to be formally engaged in the project. Frustration was also voiced about what was perceived as a lack of the shared approach and reluctance to engage in the discussion from some agencies which undermined this unified vision:

“I think that the diplomatic kind of way of describing that meeting would be that they didn’t really see it as being of any relevance to them.”

Stakeholder, Individual Interview

“People raised issues and then they were asked to come to forums to talk about the issues and they wouldn’t do that. I had a bit of an issue with that like.”

Stakeholder, Individual Interview

Additionally, the changing face of the prison was not the vision for the prison service held by a number of officers who held ambivalent or even antagonistic views. This was particularly evident when speaking with those who did not engage voluntarily with the training sessions provided:

“I am kind of conflicted in this in that sometimes I wonder is this whole notion of family friendly and face painting and fucking bouncy castles, this is a jail.”

Stakeholder, Individual Interview

“Some of them were a bit dubious, a lot of them were quite dubious about this, you know huggy bear stuff, namby pamby, you know.”

Stakeholder, Individual Interview

“Well certainly from my generation prison officers never considered families were our problem. Families were seen as a security risk and a pain in the ass, that they were coming into our prison and we knew from experience that when people come into our prison they bring in drugs, they bring in phones.”

Stakeholder, Individual Interview

Such comments reflect a potential conflict over the perception of the role of the prison service as one of security over one of care and rehabilitation. In order to accommodate such a spectrum of beliefs Family Links strove to emphasise the relevance of the initiative to current practices. It was felt that even these dissenting views could be accommodated if the initiative attended carefully to security concerns.

“This is the way we explain it to them that everything is built on security. So, the foundation stone is security and then you have your five pillars, you know community involvement, visiting arrangements, staff training, courses that fit what we’re doing and then the communications and the follow up. Then it is visits that is the core-end of rehabilitation, everything is built on security. If the security blanket is not in place properly this won’t work, for obvious reason.”

Leader, Individual Interview

3.3 Buy-in, Support and Credibility: Leaders and Stakeholders

This theme emphasises how over and above a shared vision the importance of buy in and support for the initiative. This theme captured issues related to motivation, evaluation and leadership as well as dealing with structural and procedural issues: Perceptions of these factors were at the heart of implementation efforts and for many were more important than the quality of the initiative. There is a substantive emphasis within this theme to the formal parenting programme and the visiting regime as these two areas were the most visible of the changes for staff on the ground and were sometimes understood to be flagship endeavours of the initiative.

Stakeholders saw commitment and motivation as central to the implementation of the initiative. Stakeholders were particularly concerned that once the individual short term objectives were accomplished that the long term application would wane and the sustainability of the initiative would be undermined by newer initiatives.

“But it doesn’t become flavour of the month either so we are all doing this, you know, it’s like just to keep the genuine interest in it so it doesn’t become some kind of another thing, a box they tick, you know.”

Stakeholder, Individual Interview

The ‘tick the box’ metaphor was also utilised by outside agencies referring to achieving stated objectives. While procedures were put in place agencies spoke about their lack of ability to gauge the extent to which the programme was effecting change and being followed up on:

“We definitely want to train more but my biggest concern is about, you know, ensuring that what they (in the prison) do every day is different, you know, the conversation they have and how they see their job is different than it was six months ago.”

Stakeholder, Individual Interview

There were particular aspects of the current prison system that were also seen to work against buy into the initiative. These included for example staff shortages, roster limitations, Court escort requirements as well as prisoner motivation, movement, transfers and release schemes. Maintaining buy-in represented a serious challenge to elements such as the formal parenting programme that required consistency and continuity. This need for flexibility contrasted with the perceived rigidity and restrictions imposed by the prison setting:

“Like continuity and consistency are kind of alien in the whole nature of prison in that you would find it very, very difficult to plan ahead.”

Stakeholder, Individual Interview

Stakeholders felt that while the vision might be a worthy endeavour and when they supported its implementation, if the structures were not in place or if the logistics of the prison did not facilitate a successful implementation, it was a waste of time:

“You’re under so much pressure. You’re running from pillar to post, those people will feel, could justifiably feel that you’ve neglected them. They might feel that you were ignorant towards them and it’s actually the person’s just under so much pressure, they haven’t time. So again it’s one of those things where I’m all in favour of these initiatives but they should be properly resourced and they’re not being properly resourced.”

Stakeholder, Individual Interview

Furthermore some officers spoke about a policy fatigue where policy directives were issued on a regular basis which unrealistically drew on a dwindling pool of resources. Such initiatives were often seen as short term and described in terms of “*flavour of the month*” in anticipation of the next big push in an alternative direction. In such a context it is difficult to generate sufficient credibility for new initiatives unless structures are in place to facilitate them:

“Now we have so many policies to roll out, I think we’re lacking in training, we’re lacking in resources, as in people on the ground to give true effect and quality to these policies.”

Stakeholder, Individual Interview

The existence, or lack, of suitable structures led some to voice their approval of the vision and the programme but to question the site of execution. While in favour of family supports some felt *“Limerick is not the right prison for this”*. This sentiment was echoed by a number of stakeholders who supported this assessment with reference to a high level of inmate segregation, extensive early or temporary release schemes and potential geographical distance between the prison and the prisoners’ partners who would be interested in participating.

As well as the problems associated with working within the prison system, the initiative brought together a number of different agencies each with their own philosophy and working ethos. Stepping into a caring rather than a security orientated role for an officer can be seen as counter-cultural and in such a situation it is important that officers willing to engage in such a position are supported both through the initial engagement but also in maintaining buy-in. It must be remembered that this initiative was being implemented within the prison service where prisoner as opposed to officer welfare are often seen as mutually exclusive. They also present some difficulties in attaining a consensus surrounding the suitability of any given approach:

“Now they wouldn’t necessarily be the criteria that you would use if you were running this in the community.”

Stakeholder, Individual Interview

“Well, you know, we felt we had to adapt a little bit to it, you know, because it wouldn’t be the usual way that we would work.”

Stakeholder, Individual Interview

“We’d usually work; we’d look from the experience of the families themselves, rather than actually delivering an input. We wouldn’t have an agenda when

we'd meet our clients, they would create the agenda but here it was an agenda already created which was the parenting programme. So that would be unusual for us."

Stakeholder, Individual Interview

"We don't usually work on that short time-span. We'd work on a much longer timespan where people would become much more comfortable with the process, you know."

Stakeholder, Individual Interview

"Now, your approach would have been much different than our approach in terms of how we meet families."

Stakeholder, Individual Interview

Given this clear departure from their usual working practices it is perhaps unsurprising that stakeholders sought justifications and explanations for the initiative and the approach. This was not to say they did not recognise the benefits that could be gained from the current model, rather that stakeholders felt that in the absence of adequate explanations around the approach buy-in was compromised. This became particularly relevant during inter-agency training sessions as well as within the formal parenting programme when contrasting approaches were brought into stark relief:

"The people that we're dealing with really live in crisis, you know, they are families in crisis, in crisis and living in crisis, do you know what I mean? And to try implementing the programme with these women, with the lives that they're living and all the baggage that they have and what they're going through every day."

Stakeholder, Individual Interview

Inconsistency in the initiative and its application was sometimes seen as undermining (see Chapter 3 section on fidelity). Finally, stakeholders spoke about the need for strong supportive leadership at national, local and departmental levels. The hierarchical discipline orientated nature of the prison service ensures that

individual officers report to their immediate superior and so for a successful implementation, supportive leadership is required at every level:

“If the top man in the prison doesn’t buy in that is who the staff respond to, they don’t respond to the national, they respond to their boss. The governor, the governor still runs the place.”

Stakeholder, Individual Interview

Previous comments indicated that policy directives are at times subject to change. Ensuring that key stakeholders such as governors or even local champions can feel secure in spite of the perception of changing policy directives is essential. Such supportive leadership not only drives the project forward but also assuages potential vulnerability.

3.4 Challenges to Implementation: Trust, Communication and (Dis)enfranchisement

This theme focuses on issues related to implementation that arose when leaders and stakeholders considered the project. It emphasises the relationship between the prison officer and the prisoner, inter-agency, and intra-agency and orients particularly to issues of communication and trust. Family Links draws heavily on the successful cooperation of not only different agencies but leaders and stakeholders who may not have collaborated previously. Prison officers particularly spoke about how the natural inclination of a prison officer was to mistrust both prisoners and outside agencies. This mistrust was presented as arising through experience of previous encounters and was one that had to be proactively challenged.

Achieving a level of trust was essential to implementing this collaborative initiative. Communication within the prison and between some stakeholders posed a serious challenge. For instance one stakeholder stated:

“Bits of information and people weren’t at the same page and it was very messy... it just gets legs, prison is one big rumour.”

Stakeholder, Individual Interview

This became increasingly apparent through reports from attendees to officer training sessions who regularly spoke about being uninformed around the initiative and their own training schedule:

“You’re down for this course for two days, and I said fair enough. I was going to be re-called anyway I would say. I don’t even know what it is about so.”

Stakeholder, Individual Interview

Equally outside agencies noted that communication and information flow was a challenge. Lines of communication were sometimes perceived to be one way and not adequately facilitating feedback on the initiative. Such communication practices often weakened the level of engagement as well as the implementation of the initiative in terms of evaluation procedures, and engagement with the parenting programme sessions and participant training:

“Also even within organisations and then across the organisation, so we have five organisations who all need to communicate with each other and then within each of these organisations there were different disciplines or people with different roles and that has been a very considerable challenge.”

Stakeholder, Individual Interview

In spite of this, stakeholders highlighted how cooperation was intrinsic to the roll out of the Family Links initiative, facilitating a level of better relationships between individual officers and prisoners and also on a departmental and agency level. This exposure was seen to increase levels of trust and understanding of other agency and department experiences and their associated expertise:

“Everybody sees more or less different organisations involved in this. So I think everybody has a picture now of the function of each organisation now, and where those people are actually coming from and what they are trying to achieve. And the working relationship that has, you know, I think an improved working relationship probably has developed as a result of it as well.”

Stakeholder, Individual Interview

During the course of the implementation stakeholders experienced the initiative as both a positive supportive one recognising and validating their expertise, and as a negative one overlooking or ignoring potential contributions and expertise. The former was particularly apparent when there was a relevance of the content of training offered to existing duties. By drawing on stakeholders experience and expertise a level of recognition was given to those workers:

“The one thing about our job and the lads says this, when they do the training they said, ‘Sure I am doing that for years’, all you’re doing is reminding them of how good they are sometimes.”

Stakeholder, Individual Interview

“They appreciate where we’re coming from now. We’re just not these nicey-nicey kind of people coming from outside and we understand the security issues and what they need.”

Stakeholder, Individual Interview

Such instances facilitated not only a greater knowledge of other agency roles but also provided a sense of validation and reassurance as to their role as well as how they were viewed by the other agencies. Where stakeholders felt their expertise or contribution was overlooked, feelings of disenfranchisement could result. When input was not explicitly sought from those on the ground stakeholders felt the initiative was being imposed from the outside:

“The logistics of running it and really wondering how will it work in a prison context was never really thrashed out with the people that work on the ground...the discussion wasn’t there.”

Stakeholder, Individual Interview

Additionally, Family Links commanded a significant level of support, recognition and resources from management and media. While such promotion could be considered as essential to the successful embedding of the project it was used to make

unfavourable comparisons to the level of recognition granted to the existing programmes being implemented within the prison:

“People learning to read and write and there’s no fanfare, you know. This guy’s personal development course, it’s all going on, it’s all personal development so we don’t make a big deal about it, you know. So for me this is another thing, you know.”

Stakeholder, Individual Interview

4. Users perspectives on Family Links

This chapter presents a product evaluation of the Family Links Initiative. Drawing on interviews with fathers, mothers and children we present the perspectives of the families and aim to capture the impact and experience of those involved in the implementation of the Family Links Initiative in Limerick Prison. In order to achieve this fathers participating in the programme (N=15), partners of the father involved (N=14) and their children (N=28) were interviewed before, during and after the adoption of Family Links which included the adoption of family friendly supports within the prison; training of Family Liaison Officers; the trial of low security visits targeted at facilitating contact between fathers and their children; provision of the Parents Plus Programme; as well as a support group for partners of prisoner fathers. This chapter is presented in three sections outlining the findings subsequent to the analysis of fathers, mothers and children's interviews (additional detail on the analysis is available in Appendix 1). It concludes with an overview of the video data collected during the family visits.

4.1 Father's perspectives on Family Links

Fathers' interviews were analysed using thematic analysis. There were three strong themes in these interviews which included their views on the perceived benefits of the initiative; perceived challenges for Fathers on the Family Links Initiative, and trust issues that were perceived as barriers to the initiative's success. Each are considered in turn below.

4.1.1 Perceived benefits of the Family Links Initiative

The Family Links Initiative involves working with families who are under considerable stress and where by definition parents do not cohabit. Fathers participating in the programme saw a number of benefits to their participation in the programme. This included improved understanding of their role as fathers and parents, improved understanding of the difficulties their partners faced managing children and an opportunity to engage with their families in a more meaningful way as a consequence of the initiative.

Turning first to fathers' understanding of their role as parents, fathers stated that the initiative had given them time to reflect and think about their role as fathers and

parents. In some cases, this was not something that fathers had thought about previously. For instance one father stated:

“Yea it was, a load of us were saying it afterwards do you know, it wasn’t only that as well like I think it was the surveys we were doing, we were asked questions how could we be better fathers. I never asked myself things like that.”

Father, Individual Interview

A second direct benefit of the project was fathers reporting changed interactions with their partners which appeared to be associated with an altered understanding of their parenting role, as well as allowing fathers to feel that they were taking a central role in parenting initiatives. This had an impact on the level of support fathers believed they offered their partners. For example one father stated:

“Ah Jesus yea, that kinda boosted me with her like now...I kinda look at it, it’s not like you kinda look at her as your bird or anything like that before do you know? It’s not, you are not looking at her as your bird like or anything anymore, she is the mother of your child.”

Father, Individual Interview

Corroborated by reports from the mothers (see section 4b), there was evidence that fathers were taking a more collaborative and supportive role in their families. This change was perceived to have contributed to a change in behaviour in areas of conflict and cooperation between couples. For example one father stated:

“...I’d usually snap and blow the head, but she got a visit there last Thursday to come in, she came in, I wasn’t snapping or doing nothing now. I listened to what she had to say, I advised her a bit as best I could, then worked out perfect, you know, whereas before I, someone opened their mouth wrong to her or the kids I’d blow the fucking head.”

Father, Individual Interview

A final benefit of the initiative that fathers reported was the increased support and reduced isolation for their partners as a consequence of the programme. This willingness to engage with a wider group was seen as particularly remarkable by some fathers given the generalised distrust felt by many prison families.

“ My partner was kinda shy at first like... do you know (she didn't) want to be bringing these kinda people around her and all that, there is no need of them around us...but that's in their (nature), Jesus Christ, me own mother is like that as well like do you know, that's all they do is like stick to yourself and you'll have no problems.”

Father, Individual Interview

4.1.2 Perceived Challenges for Fathers on the Family Links Initiative

Whilst participation in the initiative was seen by the men as rewarding it was also seen as both difficult and challenging. This was reflected in general comments about the initiative as well as the specific area of child discipline within the parenting programme which was often reported as the traditional remit of fathers. There were also particular sensitivities and issues that fathers perceived to create ongoing challenges.

Turning first to areas where fathers found the programme difficult. In some interviews, it became apparent that where father's partners didn't understand the difficulties they faced dealing with prison life and being removed from their families, this could become a source of contention. For example one father stated:

“She just thinks it is easy for me, I have all my friends here, I play poker, I eat dinner, my washing is done for me that's all I get, (laughs)...the missus says to me, you know, she does the kids, she takes them to school, she dresses them, she does the whole lot...that's all revolved around her.... but it isn't easy for me.”

Father, Individual Interview

A particular issue was apparent in all of the interviews where fathers (corroborated by mothers) felt that the programme was geared towards parents with routine and daily contact with their children, which offered them opportunities to practice

parenting skills. As the fathers did not have these opportunities, this led mothers and fathers to question the value of the programme. For instance one father stated:

“That course is hard, it’s hard, do you know the women that’s on the outside, they can keep up the things that they said they were going to do, do you get me?... with us we just have to wait, to get out of here.”

Father, Individual Interview

Disciplining children was an area where fathers felt they needed particular guidance and support. Child discipline was an area that was often perceived as the particular remit of fathers. Fathers reported that it was difficult to get this right during family visits, and experienced the need to get it right as a pressure, and that the programme content was not sufficient in this area. In the below interview sequence, a father who has engaged very well with the programme articulates this concern succinctly:

I: Did you do things on discipline like...?

F: No we never actually done how to correct them properly. Well we did a small bit. They asked us how would you, if they were shouting you’d say like what way would you correct them. I’d say ‘There’s no need to shout and stuff like that’ but then sometimes like, we didn’t actually see a video or a DVD or anything like that but that’s what, I was only thinking about that, how to see a DVD on that like and that’s what I said like, how could you correct them without them not liking you, say if you roar at them? You can’t roar at them on a visit if they are being bold because then they don’t want to come to you because you roared at them on the last visit, do you get me?

I: Yeah I know what you mean.

F: They don’t like you ‘No he roared at me the last time’ and that’s what they last thought of you then was you were roaring at them on the last visit because...

I: Yeah it's a lot to lose like.

It's a lot to lose yeah so you don't want to roar at them. Then when they think, when they go home then they are probably still bold for their mothers because you didn't roar at them or didn't correct them you see, so it's a vicious circle really.

Father, Individual Interview

Similarly, fathers felt that the programme content relating to disciplinary issues were not realistic; rather they were contrived and not believable. Fathers expressed the view that the poor behaviour that parents sought to manage in the DVDs was not the kind of challenging behaviour they encountered. Their sense was that problem behaviour was more extreme than represented and therefore the real behaviour they encountered was more difficult to deal with:

"I could see past that video and it's a load of bollix, cos everywhere they are acting out scenes, don't get me wrong they are doing it for... they are giving you answers for what way the answers... the kids will answer you like, if he's giving you an answer that says fuck off that shows on the video as well that... I donno I can't say."

Father, Individual Interview

Fathers also expressed concern about how the initiative was presented and about the name of the programme. The title including reference to parenting appeared to feed into the particular sensitivities that socio-economically disadvantaged and marginalised parents can have around their being to blame for their children's poor behaviour, a position readily apparent in mainstream media. This did not sit well with fathers who felt that their partners worked hard in their role as mothers. For instance one father in reported that the title of the programme was perceived as offensive by his partner:

"I said it to (name) that there's a thing coming up, do you know she got to start... .. over the name that's on it, like, it kind of confused kind of people... Because they're telling us it's a parent course but like she didn't know what way to take it as well like, cos (name) now she's

worked with kids all her life and she's in and out of crèches and she works with Barnardo's... ..So all her life like...She has Garda clearance as well to work with kids and all that kind of stuff, so like I said she's a great mother, she is, yeah... ..Because to be honest with you just the name alone was kind of offending her. Because she don't need to know nothing about parenting, she knows everything like, so that alone kind of confused her..."

Father, Individual Interview

A profound concern expressed by fathers was the need for ongoing support for those who completed the course. Resonating very much with the views expressed by both mothers and children, the potential for fathers to participate in key events in children's lives and facilitation of ongoing parental involvement was a key issue for fathers. However this was not something that fathers who had completed the programme felt was being dealt with. For example one father stated:

"... don't leave us hanging in here, cos it gives me a sense of, ... I was disheartened knowing it was (coming to an end) cos I know what it's like cos you're in prison so but if it could continue on in a certain way...we have to benefit from it like as well, I have to benefit from it someway so if it is taking us out of the daily shit that is going on in here I think that would be of benefit. The rest of it is reality, what is going on outside of the gate, I think it should continue on as a, as parents how, how to get involved for our kids communions, birthdays, confirmations, christenings; they are all big parts of life like."

Father, Individual Interview

A final area where fathers felt that they needed guidance and support was in relation to telling their children about their imprisonment. Fathers were very unsure about how best to broach this subject. All of the children and families in the initiative visited their father in prison. Families used various accounts of a father teaching, working or supporting those in prison to explain the need for these visits. Fathers worried about many issues in relation to children's awareness. They worried that children would experience bullying in school because of their imprisonment; that they were poor

examples for their children, and that their children might think they were a bad person. They also felt ill-equipped to discuss this issue and would welcome more guidance in this area. Whilst this was an issue fathers all spoke about, the below exchange exemplified both the concern and confusion that fathers feel about dealing with this issue:

F: I told him I'm in here trying to help people read and write. I think he is only going along with me saying 'Oh yeah' you know, but I know he knows.....

I: Right so it has never been properly explained at all?

F: Never properly been explained no It wasn't really explained to him it was just I had to go to work, the teacher was sick, I had to come straight in but he knows, I know he knows.

I: Just to change the topic there onto the visits, do they come up visiting you much?

F: Yeah. He'd be all over me. He'd be hugging me, kissing me and it's very hard to get him up on a visit and wanting to do what you want to do but then an officer telling you, you can't do it. They have control. The way I look at it is the officers have control over how much interaction you have with your son.

I: Yeah.

F: That's not a nice thing and on the visits he'd be asking when am I coming home and will I be out for Halloween, will I be able to bring him trick or treating and questions I can't answer like. I can't say, you know, I'm not going to be there, I can't. I'd say I don't know, you know, but then I go back to the cell and I'm thinking like I'm leaving the poor young fellow hang on to a bit of hope when I'm saying I don't know if I'm going to be there.

I want to explain it to him but yet I don't want him being around his friends and the topic of your father is coming up or my daddy did this, my daddy did that and his knowing his daddy is in prison. At least if he thinks I'm in here helping people, the teacher or whatever, teaching people, it's some bit of comfort instead of knowing that I'm in prison because even though he is only five he knows prison is a bad place like that only bad people go there.

I: I'm just wondering what do you think it's like for him coming through? What's the visiting arrangements like? Do they ever talk about it?

F: He is very strange on the visits. Like last week someone got tore off a visit by all the officers for trying to get contraband or whatever he was trying to get in over the counter. Anyway he got caught and all the officers pounced on him and my son was sitting there watching everything and you could see by his demeanour and the way he changed he was very frightened. Then when he, when that young fellow got taken off the visit he was asking like why, why did the guards come in and take him and trying to explain, I couldn't explain it because what could I say like, you know, I just had to tell him he was being bold like, you know. That has been on my mind a lot now since, since that happened that he saw that happening because now that just makes him believe more that it is a prison basically.

I: Yeah it's the things around it like.

F: I wouldn't mind explaining to him where I am and all this but it's the thought of him going around with his friends and then his friends sort of saying your Daddy is in prison and all this.

I: You think that would...?

F: You know the way like kids are, you know 'Your daddy is in prison', 'Your daddy is bold' or whatever.

4.1.2.1 Trust as a Challenge to Implementation

There is no doubt that the Family Links Initiative aimed at improving parenting skills and child parent interaction between fathers and children affected by imprisonment is working in a very complex and challenging environment. In general it can be said that prison authorities have control and prisoners have very limited power. This can and often does give rise to adversarial relations between prisoners and prison officers exemplified in the following view “...*really when you come to think about it's you against them (Prison officers) in here.*”

Father, Individual Interview

The Family Links Initiative then is operating within this context where relationships between prison officers and prisoners can be loaded with suspicion at best and hostile and antagonistic at worst. The prison system by definition is punitive. The issues of trust that arise therefore within the programme cannot be overstated as the programme is operating within a context where trust between the parties is almost counter-normative. Consider the father below, a programme participant reflecting on his experience of a family visit and how his behaviour during his family visit is always contextualised by the presence of prison staff:

“But to me I felt very insecure and when you see another prison officer sitting down in the background just sitting there listening to everything like, a lot of people when they see that wouldn't be able to open up as much like they would be holding back as well like...we can't really be too honest there cos we are giving them ammunition like to use down the line if anything kicks off then they have something they can use against us; they can throw that at us.”

Father, Individual Interview

Though the prison system by definition is punitive this does not exonerate society or the state from its welfare responsibilities towards prisoners or their families. And of course, the Family Links Initiative seeks to orient to the welfare of prisoners and their families so that partners and children are not punished for fathers' crimes. However this juxta positioning of punishment and welfare orientations is challenging and at times during the Family Links was brought into very sharp relief. This issue was particularly in evidence where fathers' participation in the initiative was terminated because of disciplinary issues. Indeed that poor prisoner behaviour resulted in partners and children not being able to participate further in the programme would appear to be directly at odds with the programme: an ethos that aims to ensure that families do not pay for the father's bad behaviour. One father that completed the programme felt that this issue tarnished the programme and made it difficult for those who remained involved stating:

"...they took everyone out of it! ...they took everyone out of it...they were just bringing people in and bringing people out like and...it wasn't nice like."

There are many advantages of the group based approach adopted in the Family Links Initiative. These include the economic ones as well as social support embedded in groups that face similar challenges (see mothers perspective section 4b). However, compromising the integrity or trust within a group either by peers or those tasked with facilitating it is likely to be particularly damaging in the prison context. In the below exchange, the prisoner interviewed speaks to the challenges of group work in this context:

I: How did that go in the group?

F: Well it was kind of, it was going to happen anyway, you know that kind of way, because they all kind of, you don't know it, you think some of them could be doing it just for the visits, try and pass over things, OK. Now, nobody knows that at the start but any of us, say the four of us that finished, as we said last week in the course, you know, we wouldn't be happy with that, if we found out there was fellas in there doing, in it for any

other reason bar their children, or even got anything got to do with taking drugs in by their children, we wouldn't, that's a no-no kind of a thing. We're there taking it serious and they're there fucking acting the bollocks, junkies things, you know that sort of way. And I said it to you from the start, we don't, I wasn't happy with it, the boys weren't happy with it, you know....We didn't know from the start but then towards the end they fucked it up themselves."

Father, Individual Interview Time 2

Related to this issue were the difficult relations that prisoners experienced with their peers in prison if they stayed on the programme. For example prison participants highlighted the difficulties of stepping away from the expected behaviour as a prisoner by participating in something like Family Links:

"If you are doing a bit of work around the prison they say 'you are this' or 'you are that'.

In short, participation could damage relations between prisoners which was seen by fathers as a potential cost to the programme.

There were examples also of where trust was built during the initiative and how it was both well received and helpful. In the below extract a father speaks about a particular Family Liaison Officer, whom many fathers praised, who worked with their group and opened up about his own experience as a parent.

"And he actually did, we went through the video, we went through the DVD and he was stopping it, suggesting it and then our, having our opinions as well. Whereas I know the girls are doing it as well, that's the absolute truth, but I don't know, it was kind of, I don't know, it was, you know that kind of way. He was saying about his own personal experiences as well as not just reading it off a piece of paper. Yeah, he was being open with us because we were being open with him that was good. The fact when we seen him opening up as an officer it was great to have, it would mean that we could because he was sound, he was A1."

Father, Individual Interview Time 2.

Overall fathers' interviews could be seen to highlight both the very real obstacles to the development of trust in the prison system, the delicacy of that trust and its' value to prisoners when it emerges.

4.2 Mothers' Perspectives on Family Links

Interviews with mothers that participated in the initiative highlighted three themes. First it is apparent that women carry a burden as a consequence of the fathers' incarceration and also that they have concerns for their children because of the situation. These included concerns about imprisonment; stigma impacting on their children, and associated anxiety about how to talk to and make their children aware of their father's situation. Second it was apparent that the Family Links Initiative had a number of benefits for mothers, and finally mothers highlighted a number of challenges and changes they would like to see to the initiative going forward.

4.2.1 Mothers' perspective on the Burden of Incarceration

A predominant theme in mothers' interviews was how hard their situation was. During many of these interviews, mothers indicated that their situation was very distressing and that they found life very difficult as a consequence of the many changes in their lives since their partners' imprisonment. Sometimes this was because of their own distress and sometimes they became upset because of their children's distress about their fathers absence. This is exemplified in the following quote:

"I don't know really, like it's, because I'm getting, myself, I'm getting by grand, just it is hard, it's hard when I'm here on my own, it gets hard when he (her son) is crying. She's (her daughter) very good now, but he's a handful."

Mother, Individual Interview

Resonating with fathers' concerns (see 4a Section 2) mothers also had concerns around the social stigma associated with imprisonment. They were very aware that the community in which they live were aware of their partner's imprisonment and this

carried a degree of stigma which they worried could have consequences for their children. This was exemplified in the following quote from one mother who stated:

"Yeah that's what I'm worrying when we are going to the school, you know, here because, you know, it's a country place. Everyone saw it anyway of course and I just, you know, don't want, you know, in the future my daughter being bullied by that, you know 'Your father was in jail'."

Mother, Individual Interview

In line with fathers' comments, a particular challenge that mothers faced around imprisonment was how to inform their children, which frequently included concerns about what to tell their children about their fathers' situation. In the below exchange this mother outlines how she had support in telling her older child and now is worried that she hasn't yet felt capable herself of telling the younger child who she perceives as being at risk of finding out in a less safe environment such as the school yard.

I: And you were saying that John (not his real name) doesn't know that his Da is in...

M: No he calls it work.... But he'd often hear Jim (older brother, not his real name) say 'in jail' ...so I would say it is in his head like ...

I: Yea, so you've to watch it.

M: Yea I think all kids would be like that. They'd take in a lot more than adults would give them credit for.

I: Is there a reason why you didn't tell John?

M: ...I...see I told Jim cos I had help from (NGO), they were helping me to say it in case I would say it wrong, now John is only hitting six, he's only six gone since Saturday. I don't have that help any more. I am here on my own now, I have no help no more like, no counselling, we're trying to set it up now I am waiting on the phone, I have filled out the forms and everything's ready. I am just waiting on the phone to get him into that, so when I get him into that I am going to ask them to help me Like I am

going to keep asking them advice cos in case I'd say it wrong.... And he is getting older now so he should be told something...cos he one of the boys could turn around and say something ...Now don't get me wrong the kids in his school are good above... but we are going to get one child, you always get a child who will say something, listening to the parents or something.

4.2.2 Perceived Benefits of the Family Links Initiative: Mothers' Views

Turning first to the value of the group meetings which mothers participated in separately, at the outset of the programme some stakeholders expressed concerns that group based facilitation of the Parents Plus Programme might be problematic due to the stigma felt by prison families, and that this stigma effectively acted as a barrier to mothers' participation in group activities. However, as the programme proceeded it became apparent that mothers viewed the group activities which centred around the Parents Plus Programme as providing an important opportunity for them to discuss everyday challenges. These groups were viewed as being important social resources:

"I found, I think the course actually brought a lot of us closer together like, knowing that people are in the same situations even though, we are in the same situations but different things are going on in our lives, like actually like I think a lot of them agree that we are able to get things off our chests as long as it was private and confidential the things what we could speak about things and we are not the only ones that are like going through the same things like so."

Mother, Individual Interview

This position was corroborated by those working with the mothers in Bedford Row who felt that the group based nature of the work was an important dimension of the programme. Women also thought that their children benefited from the group based nature of the programme. One woman stated:

"...and for the children to see that there are other families that are going through the same thing so when I think the graduation was really

good when the other children got on with the other children, they actually realised it's not just their daddy that's in prison."

Mother, Individual Interview

Corroborating father's views (see Section 4a Section 1), mothers also reported that their relationship with their partners had improved and in particular that their partners had begun to realise that the situation for their partners was hard. Mothers felt that they increased their communication and conflict resolution which benefited the relationships between parents, and between parents and children. There was a view that parents had increased their knowledge and awareness of issues related to disciplining their children:

"Yea we had an argument there the other day, stupid thing but I actually hung up the phone...but one of my goals was that if me and him had an argument I didn't want it to go on and on...like what used to happen...that changed on Sunday, he came back 'Sorry if I was tormenting you' but I think I was in the wrong as well...that now I do find a huge change and that incident is (not the only) time."

Mother, Individual Interview

Another theme articulated by mothers related to an increased understanding of the importance of self-care. This was an emphasis within the mothers' groups and the acknowledgement of self-care as important rather than 'selfish' was new to many of the women. This is well exemplified in the quote below:

"I said to one of the facilitators I said the kids, I come second, he comes third and the rest can go away...She said no, I said they do...no she says you come first...and that's when I realised then I didn't know this."

Mother, Individual Interview

On the negative side, teachers and parents alike described the programme as not having enough substantive content and with some believing that the elements of the programme were too abstract to be useful. Similarly parents and teachers felt that there was a lack of substantive content on child issues that they believed were

important to understand in order to manage their children. Specifically there was a lack of content that covered children's abilities at different ages and how this might impact on how to engage with them. A particular issue was apparent in all of the interviews where fathers and mothers felt that the programme was geared towards parents with routine and daily contact with their children, which offered them opportunities to practice parenting skills. As fathers in this case did not have these opportunities, this led mothers, fathers and teachers to question the value of the programme. Other parents expressed the view that the programme did not fit the needs of those with younger children. The advice being offered was not appropriate for those with babies in particular and this undermined the value of the programme content within the mothers group:

“Not all the rest of the girls were into it as much as some of us. See some of them had babies so they couldn't take part in it anyway. Some of them, two or three I think had babies...”

Mother, Individual Interview

The facilitators also had very different orientations to the programme and as a consequence how it was offered was contingent on the facilitator. From the point of view of evaluation and documentation of the intervention, this is a serious challenge. The material being covered in the mothers and fathers groups may be very different. An orientation to the needs or difficulties of the other partner in any relationship can be interpreted as threatening to people's sense of themselves as 'good partners' This means that both groups as well as having a different feel have the potential to grow hostility to the 'opposite parent' group. This resentment was apparent in both groups over the course of the programme and can be considered the downside of group activities:

“They wouldn't have done as much as we kinda done cos we had to bring home work and it would all be about what was happening in the house with the kids on a daily basis, sure they wouldn't know that... I don't know what way they done it, I would love to know...they are probably up there eating a load of hash browns.”

Mother, Individual Interview

4.2.3 Improving Project Delivery into the Future

Doubtless because of the positive consequence of the initiative and the support available within the mothers' group, relationships between the mothers that engaged with the initiative developed as did an ensuing sense of solidarity between the women. These mothers, invested as they were in the initiative, expressed concern about how it could be improved going forward. A key concern was it not being clear to prisoners that the father's poor behaviour could result in fathers being asked to leave the programme. For example one mother stated:

"From day one we thought that if I had brought stuff to him or, if any contact was like that then he would be taken off the course. There was nothing that if you (the father) did anything wrong (you are off the course)...."

Mother, Individual Interview

Indeed that poor prisoner behaviour resulted in partners and children not being able to participate further in the programme would appear to be directly at odds with the programme: an ethos that aims to ensure that families do not pay for the father's bad behaviour. One of the most difficult and contentious areas that arose for parents was in relation to those men who were required to exit the programme due to disciplinary issues that arose during the programme period. In some cases, parents were upset about the negative impact on their children because of the fathers' subsequent exit from the programme. For example one mother stated:

"...they are trying to hold him out for the long haul...they give you these courses and then they take them away, like they shouldn't be giving you these courses involving your kids if they can be taken away so easy...like Sarah (not her real name) knew what was coming up and then they took it away..."

There was also an associated sense of injustice that a mother could attend a single group session 'to get a visit,' whilst another mother who attended several sessions didn't get the visit because of a fathers' disciplinary offence. This position exemplified

in the proceeding quote is an anomaly that needs to be ironed out if the initiative and associated support groups are to maintain their viability.

She (Kim) never thought that if he was going to be put off that, so she was a bit disappointed now alright. She was enjoying it and she never got no family visit or anything which she should have because she done three days of it. Kath turned up once and she got a family visit, and Kim did three weeks of it and she never got a family visit. Kath never turned up to the open day above there that time, and she only turned up once and she got a family visit....It was unfair. Yes.”

Mother, Individual Interview

Perhaps not surprisingly, mothers felt the development of a strategy for dealing with those who unexpectedly exited during the project was necessary.

The self-care orientation within the mothers groups had the potential to create challenges for mothers and fathers in their relationships. This increased orientation to self-care had the potential to grow hostility to partners' limited input into parenting and their demands on mothers' time. This resentment can be considered the downside of group activities.

Indeed accepting or believing that your partners health is affected by poor behaviour can be threatening to men's sense of themselves as 'good husbands'. It is important then that a balance is struck in the mothers' group between self-care and promoting positive relationships between the parents.

4.3 The Children's Views of Family Life

The analysis of children's interviews was undertaken in a slightly different way than intended in part because of the smaller volume of interview material, because many of the children were too young to be interviewed. An additional difficulty was the highly conversational nature of these interviews, sometimes a parent was co-present and because of child protection concerns two interviewers were co-present. Therefore the meaning of particular conversations is sometimes only clear with due attention to the adult contributions.

All interviews were fully transcribed and transcripts were printed and read numerous times to ensure full understanding. Themes were constructed subsequent to line by line coding in the first instance. The data corpus was thus approached inductively with the themes identified being strongly linked to predominant and key concerns evident in the data. In line with and corroborating the views of their mothers, their father's incarceration was considered a source of distress by children interviewed. Two themes are outlined here, one related to the distress reported by children and the second relating to children's awareness of the stigmatisation associated with incarceration and the perceived need for caution about disclosing their father's whereabouts to others.

4.3.1 Theme 1: Children's Distress

Extract 1 serves to highlight the emotion stemming from children discussing their father. In the extract below two children give reasons as to why they don't tell talk to their friends about their father, citing their potential distress as the rationale. Analytically the invoked emotions stem from the conversational topic - their father. These children are not definitive about their emotions and state they 'might' and 'sometimes' cry. There is not a solid position taken by the children as to their reactions. This may reflect children's concern that their distress might not be acceptable to others.

Child 1: Sometimes I don't like to mention it because sometimes I would cry.

I: That's not good and do you like talking about your Dad to your friends?

Child 1: No.

Child 2: No.

I: And why is that?

Child 2: Because I might, I get upset sometimes.

I: Okay. Well what about you?

Child 2: Sometimes I don't like to mention it because sometimes I would cry.

I: Okay. You'd feel upset. And would you talk to each other?

Child 2: Sometimes but when we are in a mood we just stay away.

In other interviews, parents reported struggling with disclosing the father's incarceration to their children. In these instances, children referred to their father being 'at work'. In the case below, disclosure had not occurred even though an older sibling had been made aware. The mother of the 'unaware' six year old boy recounts how he had to use the bathroom during a visit so the prison officers '*actually let him into the jail part*' during a visit so that they did not have to go back out and in through the security checks. Later in the interview the same child whose mother believed he had no interest in bonding with his father as he rarely spoke about him, stated he wished that he could have longer phone calls with his Dad and reported he talked about his father everyday with his friends.

I: And would anybody talk to you about your Dad?

Child: Yes. My cousin, Patrick.

I: And do you like him talking about it?

Child: Yeah.

I: You do like talking to him about it?

Child: Yeah. And my friend Oisín. Nearly everyone.....Because Oisín and Patrick, my cousin, they're in the same school and when they say how is my father nearly every day.

I: Yeah. And you like talking to them about that.

C: Yeah.

This child who is believed to be unaware of his father's incarceration, appears to not spontaneously use his mother or family to keep his connection with his father alive. It is likely that the lack of understanding and piecemeal awareness about his father's

situation is open to misinterpretation by the child. Equally, talking to a peer about this absent father allows the child to present an account that cannot be challenged as well as offering an outlet where s/he can talk about his/her father.

The children in our sample report that their fathers are still involved in their lives, and that they see their absence in the context of the practicalities and key events of their lives. In the below extract the theme of fathers' presence and absence runs through the story of the child's preparation for First Holy Communion:

I: Yes I'd imagine he's always asking and so when you do visit him on the visits do you keep in touch with him any other way?

Child: Yeah he phones.

I: He phones.

Child: Yeah and every night, some... the last time when I was in church he rang and my Mum gave out to him.

I: During mass?

Child: Yeah.

I: Were you in mass for your communion was it, getting ready you had to go to your masses?

Child: Yeah it's the mass. Yeah but he didn't know I had mass on.

I: Because it's not usual is it?

Child: No. He only did it one time.

I: And is he excited about your communion?

Child: Yeah.. but he won't be there. I wish he would be there.

A second key emphasis in this extract is the child's defence of their father. Despite the fact that he had telephoned during mass and been given out to by the child's mother, the child defends his error and indeed emphasises that it was a mistake only

made once. This defence of the father is interesting and certainly suggests that this child is both attached and loyal to his father. It is no doubt this attachment that leads to the wish that his father could attend the event and associated sadness expressed during the interview.

4.3.2 Theme 2: Negotiating Parental Imprisonment Socially

Building on the contention that fathers' incarceration is difficult for children, Theme 2 relates to how children negotiate this. The quote below highlights a child's unwillingness to share information that her father is in prison with her peers. The child takes a firm stance on who she talks to about her father's absence: '*Just my nana and my mam*'. Indeed her supports are emphasised by the use of the possessive pronoun 'my'. Further probing by the researcher relating to external supports is met with an explanatory response: '*I don't really want them knowing what's going on around me*' (Line 5). This child does not want to share knowledge of her situation with others. Indeed the use of the word 'they' to refer to peers creates distance and separates these children in a way that is in direct contrast to the way in which 'nana' and 'mam' are spoken about. Finally the inclusion of the example of Kayla (not her real name) seems to suggest that children's peers have an expectation that Dads will sometimes be present at the school gates despite separations or other domestic difficulties. To avoid difficult questions, this child avoids the topic altogether, and in so doing effectively communicates awareness of the stigma associated with imprisonment.

I: Laura, (not he real name) do you talk to any of your friends about your Dad being in prison?

Child: Just my Nana and my Mam.

I: Just your Nana, would you ever, why wouldn't you, why would you think you don't talk to your friends?

Child : I don't really want them knowing what's going on around me.

I: What would they say would you think?

Child: They would say like, sometimes, not really that often but they might say 'Where is your dad, why isn't he collecting you?' or something like that.

I: Yeah, like the other dads collect their kids?

Child: Sometimes but my friend Kayla (not her real name) her mam and dad are split up and her dad still collects her from school and she goes to her dad's house some days for a while.

Similarly another child when asked how they would advise a peer if their father was going to prison advises that they should not disclose this information to anyone:

I: Yeah and if you knew a girl who was six and you knew that her daddy was going into prison would you have any advice to tell her?

Child: Don't tell anyone.

I: Don't tell anyone, why, what would happen if she told?

Child: I don't know.

I: You think don't tell anyone.

Child: Yeah.

I: Is there anything else you would advise her?

Child: No, just that she has to keep the secret.

It is interesting that, despite the fact that the child in this extract is very clear on the need to keep parental incarceration a secret from others, she has no idea why this is. This suggests that the child does not understand the impact of any disclosure though believes it should be avoided. Disclosure and its consequences therefore are likely to be associated with some fear or anxiety on the part of the child. Indeed the short answers supplied on this topic are in marked contrast to other elements of this interview suggesting the child wanted to close down the dialogue on this topic of disclosure. This is indicative of the child's awareness that there are negative consequences such as stigma associated with others being aware of their father being in prison.

4.4 Video Observations

All families were asked if they would be willing to have a video observation recorded of the parent and child during a prison visit as part of the evaluation (see Appendix 4 for the full visit schedule). Representative of the fidelity issues that arose because of staffing and rostering issues, families in the programme did not have a visit before the initiative commenced and after the completion of the formal delivery of the parenting programme as intended. Again this can be seen as a tension between the welfare concerns in the prison and security ones. Whilst a commitment to the family visits and the initiative were achieved, security concerns meant that these visits require staffing and management. Table 3 highlights the difficulties with the timing, spacing and videoing of visits.

Table 3: Spacing and Videoing of Visits

	No of Families	Turned off camera	Timing	Spacing
Two visits	5	Two families	All visits after commencement of programme and initiative.	Visits a maximum of three weeks apart
One visit	5	One family	All visits in week 4 and 5 of initiative.	N/A
Visits withdrawn	5			

As a consequence of the limited pre and post intervention data and the withdrawal of families from both the initiative and the video observation element of the evaluation, the planned coding based on the work of Forehand and McMahon (Forehand and McMahon 1981; Forehand *et al.*, 1978) could not be carried out. The available video data was however viewed and reviewed multiple times. As a consequence of the effort a number of observations can be made.

First, the observation of visits by both video and the prison officers are a source of concern for parents. Representing the lack of trust within the system between prisoners and prison officers, fathers appeared anxious about allowing others to have knowledge about their family situation and their relationship with their children. Parents, most often mothers, managed children's behaviour during visits. Mothers and fathers appeared to want the children to behave well and often tried to make sure that noisy or boisterous behaviour didn't escalate. Many visits appeared tense rather than enjoyable. Fathers appeared reluctant to check demanding or difficult behaviour. Where a father felt that the child was showing poor behaviour, he checked this was the case with the mother. Many planned interactions between fathers and their children were undertaken with reference to the mother rather than independently by the father.

Prisoners are of course routinely supervised and there is limited privacy within the prison environment. Prisoners appeared to be reluctant therefore to expose themselves or their families to additional surveillance. So the visit which was seen as a real benefit of the initiative was also something that prisoners appeared to have surveillance concerns about. Of course, the video observation may have added to this sense of surveillance and for this reason may not be a viable method of data collection in this population.

5. Summary, Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1 Summary and Conclusions

Interviews with stakeholders, leaders and parents make it very clear that there is a need for initiatives to support families affected by imprisonment. These families can be seen as serving a second sentence parallel to the imprisoned parent. Concerns about the welfare of prisoners as well as evidence of ongoing recidivism and intergenerational effects of imprisonment highlight the importance of orienting to the collateral damage that imprisonment may have on families. Our findings suggest that imprisonment of fathers places considerable stress on parents and children.

The Family Links Initiative involves a number of agencies working together as well as working with families where parents do not cohabit. There is no doubt that the Family Links Initiative is working in a very complex and challenging environment. The welfare orientation of the initiative, and the NGO supporting the mothers' groups, was at times at odds with the security orientation within the prison. The predominant culture within the prison remains one where security concerns are paramount. This can lead to particular difficulties between prison authorities, officers and prisoners. Without question, security concerns can be used as a way of resisting welfare orientation for prisoner families, however over time and with strong evidence and leadership, the initiatives such as Family Links are likely to bed down. There were a number of areas where particular issues arose as a consequence of the juxtaposed concerns of security and welfare. First, in considering the fidelity of the initiative, stakeholders highlighted the value of a flexible approach. This approach allowed the programme to evolve and fit to the needs of its participants. However this same orientation was also used to undermine the credibility of the programme. Stakeholders who were ambivalent about the project used the lack of fidelity to undermine it and suggested that flexibility afforded to fathers as part of the initiative presented opportunities to undermine security within the prison.

A second point of tension arose around participation and forced exit from the initiative. Here the punitive nature of the prison system could be seen to form the backdrop to the initiative. However the Family Links Initiative was embedded in an ethos where it aimed to reduce the parallel sentence served by families of prisoners. One of the most difficult and contentious areas that arose for parents was in relation

to those men who were required to exit the programme due to disciplinary issues that arose during the programme period. Mothers and fathers had understood that seeking to smuggle contraband during the enhanced family visits would result in men being required to leave the initiative, rather than this resulting from the men's behaviour within the prison during the term of the initiative. In some cases parents were upset about the negative impact of withdrawal of planned visits on their children; in other cases it appeared to damage the already limited trust between prison authorities, prisoners and their families.

An additional layer of complexity is the challenges faced by prisoner families, which tend to be both socioeconomically disadvantaged and socially marginalised. This social exclusion combined with tacit knowledge about the stereotypes of prisoner families can be associated with both mistrust of authorities and custody concerns. Taken together these concerns make working with prisoners and their families challenging. Parents can have many sensitivities including how their parenting is perceived or evaluated. It is however worth engaging with these challenges as parents clearly articulated the value of the initiative and wanted to see the efforts to connect families remain in place.

There were a number of important elements to the initiative that can be seen as central to its value and are worthy of emphasising. First the group work that the women participated in appeared to deliver benefit over and above the content of the parenting programme to which the women were exposed. Women drew strength from other women in similar situations. There were concerns at the start of the initiative about women's willingness to participate in a potentially stigmatising 'prisoners' partners' group, but on the whole these groups worked well and were seen by the women themselves to be the key benefit of participation. A second important element of the initiative that appeared to work well and that merits continued emphasis, was the focus on improving the quality of the relationship and communication between prisoners and their partners. This was a strong theme in the interviews of both mothers and fathers and was corroborated within the stakeholder interviews.

There were two other strong themes apparent in the parents' interviews. The first was that parents needed more support around how to talk to their child about their imprisonment. Parents had many concerns in this area. These included the

potential stigmatisation of their child at school, not feeling competent to discuss the issue and not knowing how to explain the one's own or ones partner's crime or misdemeanour without undermining a father to their children. Where they felt that they didn't know how to broach the subject they often avoided it. This sometimes had inadvertent consequences such as children that had no one with whom they could discuss their father's absence and active avoidance of these difficult areas when fathers and children spoke. A second area of concern for fathers' in particular was how to manage difficult behaviour and discipline children. Fathers' concerns in this area centred around the need to ensure that children were not put off visiting them if they disciplined them and the need for fathers to understand appropriate disciplining of children where behaviour was very challenging. These two concerns were expressed by many parents and are an important area for future initiatives to address.

Our final and concluding point is that there are many challenges to both multiagency work and work within the prison system. For the most part families affected by imprisonment are on the margins of the educational, health and welfare systems. There is no doubt that initiatives such as Family Links and evaluations such as the one offered here are extremely difficult to implement and deliver. However they are important. Families on the margins are those most in need and about whom the least understanding is available. The importance of continued support of initiatives of this sort and associated evaluations cannot therefore be understated.

5.2 Recommendations

- The group based nature of the meetings as part of the initiative facilitates peer support and is a feature that should be retained. This seemed to be of particular benefit to participants as it created opportunities for mothers and fathers to support each other in these groups. To support relationships between parents, opportunities for men and women to receive elements of the programme together should be made available.
- A review of programme content should be undertaken with a view to establishing content that is specific to prison populations¹. Supports in

¹ This review took place in early 2016, with the participation of CDI, the Parents Plus Charity, IPS Chaplaincy and Psychology Services and City of Dublin ETB.

relation to how to speak to children about one's own or one's partner's imprisonment should be developed as a matter of priority.

- Ongoing opportunities for peer support and group engagement should be established for both the men and the women, in order that they continue to have a space to reflect on their parenting.
- Clear protocols must be developed, explained and provided in advance of the initiative to which prisoners and partners can sign up. Copies of the agreement should be held by the families, the prisoners and the programme facilitators and it should articulate fully the ground rules and behaviours that will result in fathers exit from the programme; how this will be managed and the consequent implications for mothers' and children's participation. In particular, the management of prisoners being excluded from the programme must be clear, transparent, and dealt with consistently by all participating organisations.
- Fidelity of the initiative needs to be actively managed. Proactive management and leadership of the initiative must allow flexibility but also remain within set parameters. This should include a commitment to the flexibility and project evolution formally and building in milestones in project development that allow feedback from participants and changes to the programme year on year.
- In line with the interagency, collaborative nature of the project, it is recommended that the Family Links Initiative is managed locally by a committee that includes a prison official, a representative of the relevant NGO (Bedford Row) and a parent. This would limit damage to relationships of those involved in the programme and agencies collaborating to deliver it.
- Internal monitoring and tracking systems, to facilitate an outcomes focused assessment of the initiative must be developed.
- A comprehensive implementation guide to support the roll out of the initiative must be made available to all prisons.
- Given the centrality of strong and consistent leadership in enabling and supporting the implementation of this complex initiative, Family Links should only be commenced in those prisons which can evidence this level of leadership.

- Given the importance of trust and relationships, there needs to be an agreed lead-in time with the targeted prisoners and their partners, prior to commencing the formal parenting programme.

5.2.1 Prison-Wide Recommendations

- The Irish Prison Service needs to recognise that Family Links is essentially affecting a culture change in prisons. For this to be maintained and enabled, appropriate resources, including staffing, management and leadership, must be made available.
- Getting and keeping buy-in to Family Links, and other initiatives within the prison setting, needs to be considered at a high level, and within each individual prison.
- The IPS needs to respond to ‘policy fatigue’ and the concerns that there are regular new initiatives which become ‘flavour of the month’. A long term commitment and Implementation Plan is required with appropriate, identified resources and a strong communication strategy to maximise buy-in from all stakeholders.
- All training for prison staff must be mapped, and responsibility for this assigned to ensure relevant staff receive appropriate training. New recruits to the prison service must have inputs from relevant people (e.g. FLO’s) about how visits happen, the expectations and role responsibilities of prison officers in relation to family engagement and the importance of helping parents in prison to continue parenting. This will facilitate and embed cultural change.
- Trust between stakeholders, parents and agencies needs to be built. It is not a spontaneous available resource available to prison families and stakeholders or between stakeholders themselves. Trust was seen to be promoted where clear and open communication occurred and where stakeholders from different agencies were treated as equal partners in the decision making processes.
- The ongoing tensions between the security focus and the rehabilitative aspects of the prison regimes are indicative of conflicting paradigms, and raise questions regarding the effectiveness of the communications in relation to Family Links. Supporting prisoners with their parenting needs to be clearly and consistently communicated as central to the Prison Officer role, rather

than as an optional 'add on'. Family Links is about a mind-shift and change in culture for prisons, and it needs to be understood as something more than a parenting programme.

- Continuity of contact between parents and children pre and post release and open visits should be formalised for all prisoners.

5.2.2 Recommendations arising from Stakeholder Reflection and Engagement

- Bedding in Family Links requires promotion of the initiative as a five pillared response, which requires a multi-agency response. The IPS should not be solely responsible for Family Links, rather it must be a multi-agency, cross-departmental initiative.
- As the programme is embedding in the IPS, it is important to clarify the role of the probation service and other agencies and disciplines in Family Links.
- The initiative must engage with other organisations and systems to ensure sustainability and maximise community supports. Agencies such as Tusla and Barnardo's will then be in a position to make referrals to the programme and provide support for women in the community. Similarly engagement with CYPSSY's to embed the inter-disciplinary and multi-agency response will facilitate the success of the initiative in the longer term.
- Family relationships are central to plans for prisoner release. Re-settlement Officers play a crucial role in facilitating prisoner release and their expertise and knowledge should be brought to bear on Family Links. This will allow links between pre and post release needs, as well as communication and engagement with relevant community based organisations.
- The Initiative needs to become increasingly open to allow participation by all, including those prisoners who are not on enhanced regimes.
- Where domestic violence has been an issue, these families should not be precluded from participation. There needs to be a pathway which men can move through to allow involvement in Family Links. For example completion of AVP or MOVE before engaging in a parenting programme.

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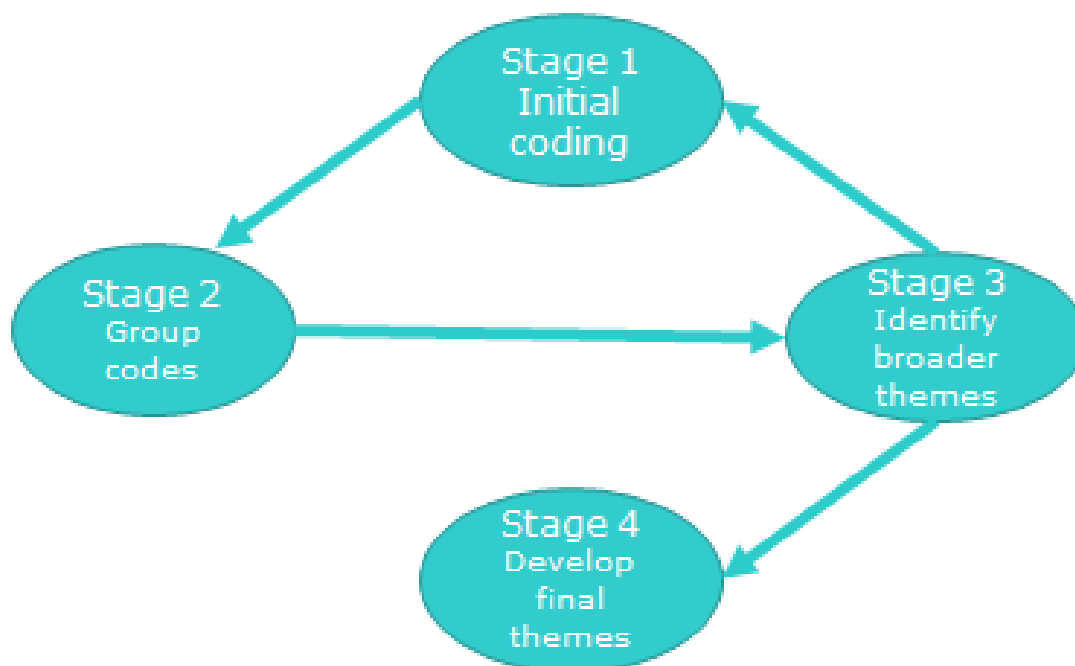
Appendices

Appendix 1: Data Reduction Process (Analysis)

Qualitative data was transcribed and analysed using “Thematic Analysis” (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis involves a number of stages of coding data in order to identify potential themes. The first stage coding remains very close to the data and involves paraphrasing utterances and identifying initial codes. Second level involves reviewing the first level codes and seeing how they can be amalgamated into overarching elements. Third stage involves identifying broader themes under which the original codes can be combined. In the final stage detailed outlines of the final themes are created. It should be noted that themes should not be compared to each other directly; having five themes in any given area does not reflect the strength of the theme but the spread of the opinions. So for example if we looked at an area such as positives and negatives of the content and there are three themes reported for one and only two for the other, this does not necessarily mean that the content was more negative, it simply reflects number of themes reported.

Quantitative data was analysed using a computer statistical software package (SPSS).

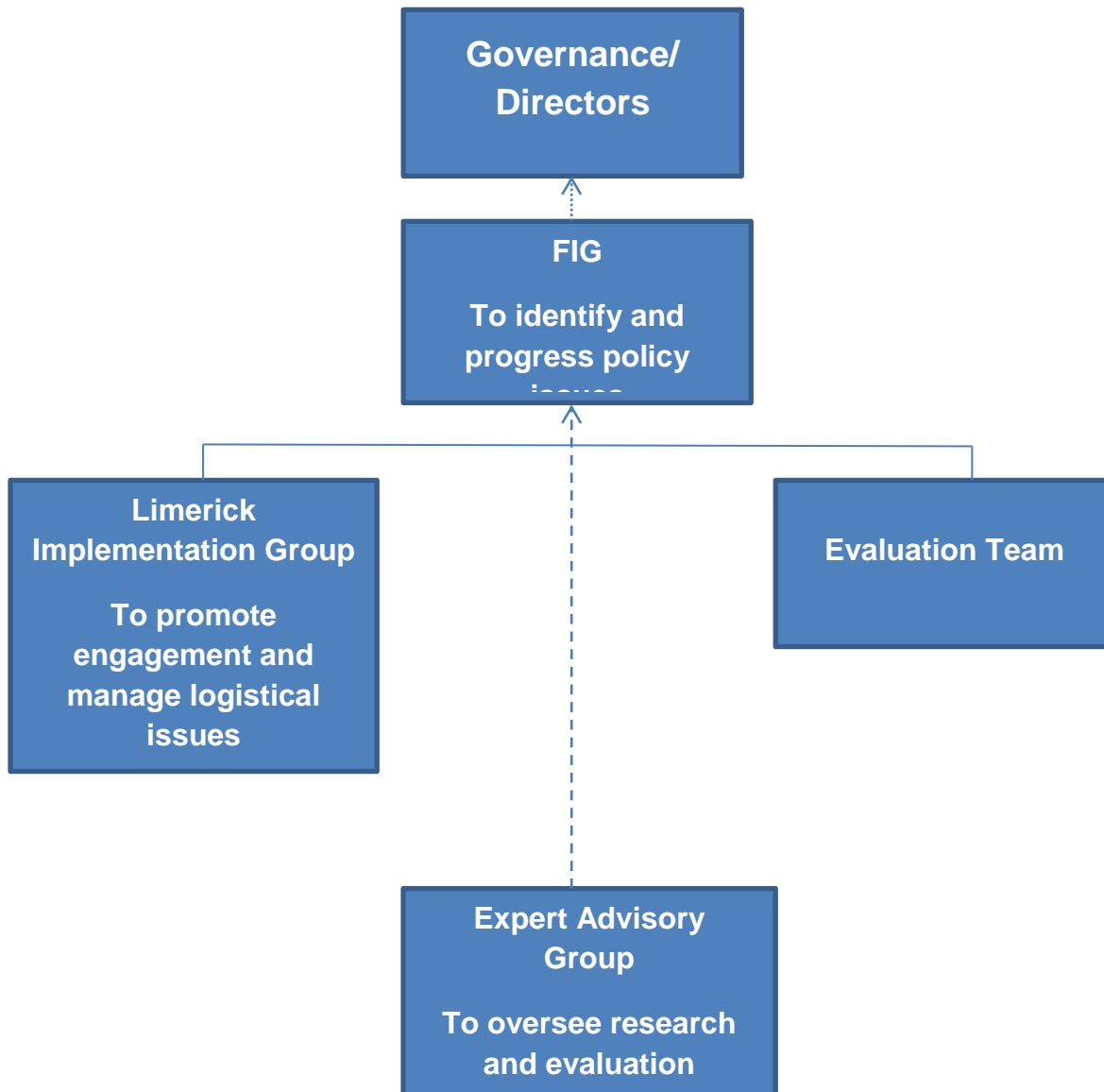
Figure 1. Thematic Analysis Pathway



Our understanding of the social world influences how we talk about it (Wetherell & Potter, 1992). Discourse analysis (DA) capitalizes on what we can learn about subjective understandings of the world from how people talk about it. Therefore DA provides a theoretical means to understanding complex phenomena (Billig, 1977). As a method, Discourse Analysis (DA) is an in-depth analysis of language within a social context (Taylor, 2001). Employing a psychological approach (DP) to discourse analysis involves an integration of both the fine-grained analysis of the way people talk - the discursive devices employed - as well as the content, to explore what is implicitly assumed to be 'a normative discourse' (Wetherell, 1998). DA focuses on the performance of language (Edwards & Potter, 1992); what the speaker achieves through talk, for example attributes responsibility, blame, justifies, or normalises. DA allows us to identify the incorporation of available narrative and discourses in young peoples' talk, and the discursive devices which are strategically drawn upon to build credibility, appear objective and to navigate difficult and sensitive topics. Further, DA facilitates the detection of implicit understandings within text (Billig, 1991). It is for this reason that it is more suited to the analysis of the children's interviews in this study.

Appendix 2: Family Links Organisational Framework

Family Links Governance Structures



Appendix 3: Participant's Visit Schedule

	Week 1	2	3	4	5	6	Time in weeks between visits	
Cohort 1								
1	Visit 1				Visit 2		4	
2	Withdrawn							
3		Visit 1				Visit 2	4	
4			Visit 1		Visit 2		2	
5			Visit 1 Turned off camera			Visit 2 Turned off camera	NA	Turned off camera
6	Visits Withdrawn							
7			Visit 1			Visit 2, Turned off camera	NA	Turned off camera Time 2
8				Visit 1				Missed Visit 2
9	Visits Withdrawn							
10				VISIT 1			NA-No visit 2	Moved to open prison
11					VISIT 1		NA-No visit 2	Released after course
12					VISIT 1		NA-No visit 2	Moved to open prison
13			VISIT 1					
14	Visits withdrawn							
15	Visits Withdrawn							



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