



Bedford Row Family Project: **Holding the Suffering**

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contents

Contents	i
Foreword	iv
Acknowledgements	v
Executive Summary	vi
Section 1 - Introduction	1
Section 2 - Context: Imprisonment has many implications for families of prisoners and prisoners	2
Introduction	3
1. Societal Context	4
2. Family Context	4
3. Imprisonment	6
4. Transitioning out of prison	7
Section 3 - Literature review	8
Introduction	9
Society, Crime and Imprisonment	9
Prisoners	10
Women in prison	11
Men in prison	12
Children of prisoners	13
Families of prisoners	16
Models of Family Support	17
Introduction	17
What is Family Support?	18
Best practice in Family Support	19
Categories of Family Support	20
Supporting prisoners who are parents and their children	21
Reintegration /transition back into society	22
Conclusion	23
Section 4 - Methodology	24
Research aim	25
Research approach and methodology	25
Research questions	26
Data Analysis	26
Data Collection	26
Ethical Considerations	28



Section 5 – Bedford Row Family Project Model of Delivery	30
Introduction	31
Underlying Ethos and Culture of the Bedford Row Family Project	31
Model of service delivery	32
1. Organic evolution of services	33
2. Multi-site delivery	33
3. Suite of integrated services	34
4. Family orientated and intergenerational	36
5. Working in partnership with other organisations	37
6. Accessibility	38
7. Leadership and staffing	41
8. Volunteers and student placement	42
9. Training programmes	42
10. Opportunities for creativity and self-expression	42
11. Understanding gender differences in how people experience imprisonment	43
Section 6 - Impact of Engagement	44
Introduction	45
Impact of engagement for children	45
Children’s perspectives on the impact of engagement of attending the BRFP Children’s Club	45
Parents’ / carers’, staff and external interviewee’s perspectives on the impact of the BRFP on children: Preventative element for children	47
Impact of engagement on families	48
Impact of engagement for adult service users	51
1. Opportunities for adults to engage in a variety of activities	51
2. Addiction support	52
3. Empowerment and transformation of adults	53
4. Peer support, friendship, and solidarity for adults	56
5. Building resilience, well-being and positive mental health in adults	58
6. Preventive approach for adults	60
7. Support for adults in prison and with their transition from prison to home	60
8. Support for people/families with a loved one in prison and in transition out of prison	62
9. Hope	63
Impact of the Hospitality Centre for children and adults	64
Impact of the BRFP on the prison environment	67
Section 7- Suggested improvements to BRFP by research participants	70
Introduction	71
Supports and services for children	71
Supports and services for adults	73
Supports for families	74

Supports for volunteers.....	74
Supports for staff and internal operational considerations.....	75
Buildings and infrastructure.....	76
Funding and fundraising.....	78
Partnership and working with external organisations.....	78
Section 8 – Conclusions and recommendations.....	80
Conclusions.....	81
Recommendations.....	82
Appendix 1 - List of organisations that the BRFP work with.....	85
Bibliography.....	88

List of Tables

Table 3.1	Interviews, focus groups and number of participants	26
Table 3.2	Member check focus groups and number of participants	27
Table 7.1	How to improve BRFP – Supports and services for children	72
Table 7.2	How to improve BRFP – Support and services for adults	73
Table 7.3	How to improve BRFP – Buildings and infrastructure	77

List of Abbreviations

BRFP	Bedford Row Family Project
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women
CDI	Childhood Development Initiative
DEIS	Delivering Equality of opportunity In Schools
HSCL	Home School Community Liaison
ICHAS	Irish College of Humanities and Applied Studies
IPRT	Irish Penal Reform Trust
IPS	Irish Prison Service
LCFE	Limerick College of Further Education
LIT	Limerick Institute of Technology
LRA	Limerick Regeneration Agency
MIC	Mary Immaculate College
MIREC	Mary Immaculate Research Ethics Committee
PALLS	Probation and Linkage in Limerick Scheme
UCC	University College Cork

foreword

In Bedford Row we have an old saying that 'we started with a kettle' in 1999, and indeed we did, in what was then a pre-fab where visits were processed, just outside Limerick Prison!

But of course we could not have begun at all without the foresight of the Mercy Sisters, the Franciscan Friars, the Governor and Officers of Limerick Prison, and most importantly families, who in 1999, embarked on a journey of trust, and a collective belief that by working together we can bring about change.

When the Project first began I was very excited by the approach, that is, meeting people 'where they were at' before visiting their loved one in prison – a very simple yet effective way towards alleviating the distress that family members feel at that time. However, I really began to know, appreciate and love the Project when I attended a conference entitled *Help Is At Hand* organised by the redoubtable and inspiring Sr. Peggy Collins in University of Limerick in 2003. As well as the difficulties that families face, the conference described, and included examples of how, members of families affected by imprisonment changed their own and their families' lives for the better.

Following the *Help Is At Hand* Conference, our research *Voices of Families Affected by Imprisonment*, launched in 2008, gave the Project a firm mandate to protect children by harnessing the wisdom and strength of family members while supporting them through the challenges that they experience every day. It was indeed a great privilege for me to take over as Project Leader from Sr. Peggy in 2007. And in the best tradition of Bedford Row, the Staff and Board met me where I was at! Getting to know the ropes at Bedford Row was exciting and energising. I knew that I was in a special place, inspiring, provocative, creative and warm, but above all faced the challenges of imprisonment and all that goes with it with a progressive outlook, good humour and positivity.

Our *Voices* research posited the extent of the suffering of family members as they experience the imprisonment of a loved one. This suffering may be intensified by the lack of hope that anything will change and the seeming endlessness of it all. And we all know that when we suffer too much there is a risk that we lose faith in our ability to determine our own destiny, and we may grow dependent on others to change our lives for us!

The mention of 'suffering' brings me to this research, undertaken by the Transforming Education through Dialogue Project (TED), located in the Curriculum Development Unit of Mary Immaculate College (MIC). The researchers, Dr. Ann Higgins and Ruth Bourke, fully embraced the theme of the research, *Holding the Suffering*, and immersed themselves in the work of the Project to the extent that we really felt that they were part of us. I believe that their appreciation of the uniqueness of our Project and their perseverance to search for fundamentals, as well as their ability to journey with all involved in Bedford Row, ensured that the research unearthed the best of what we are about as well as offering challenges that we will face, as all good research should. We owe them a debt of gratitude for their patience and commitment.

Also, I am delighted to acknowledge funding received from St. Stephen's Green Trust that along with the support from the TED project made this research possible. The Trust has stood by Bedford Row in difficult times, financially, and their funding has assisted us in keeping our heads above water more than once!

The 'Bedford Row way' is to empower people to find a different path and dream of a world beyond imprisonment for themselves and their families, and in particular their children. I fervently hope that readers of this research will find it interesting, empowering and inspiring too!

Larry de Cléir – Project Leader – Aug 2017

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executive summary

The Transforming Education through Dialogue (TED) Project was invited by the Bedford Row Family Project (BRFP¹) to undertake this research.

The aim of the research was to identify the model of service delivery being undertaken by the BRFP, to gain an understanding of the impact of engagement for individuals and families, to situate the research within the literature and make recommendations for improvement.

The research adopted an ethnographic case study approach informed by narrative inquiry principles. Data was collected via individual interviews, focus groups, member checks and document analysis. A total of fifty-four participants took part in the interviews including children who participate in the Children's Club, adults who either participate in group initiatives such as the Life Skills Groups or the Men's Groups, or in individual initiatives such as counselling and one-to-one support. BRFP staff along with members of the BRFP Board of Management and the Irish Prison Service (IPS) were also interviewed. Most interviews were audio recorded. Interviews and focus groups were audio coded using Nvivo 11 software, and data was analysed in two cycles. Member checks were conducted with participants and the draft report was circulated for feedback.

This research describes in detail the implications of imprisonment for families and prisoners. The impact of imprisonment was found to have long and short term impact at a societal, family and personal level. At a societal level research participants spoke of the stigma, shame and isolation that families can encounter when a member is imprisoned. Families can experience reduced financial circumstances, stress and worry in relation to the person imprisoned and the impact of imprisonment on the family members. At a personal level research participants spoke of the challenges of raising children and running homes when their partners were imprisoned. Aligned to all of that are the challenges that come with visiting prison, including the cost of transport, care of children and not wanting to discuss some matters with the parent who is in prison so that they are not worried. The research also found that going to prison in some instances can provide a respite from the chaos of life and an opportunity for the prisoner to reflect on his/her life and engage with support services. The transition of a former prisoner back in to the family home or into society was also recognised as a vulnerable stage needing support not only for the prisoner but also for his/her family.

The BRFP Model of Service delivery is described in detail in section 5. The underlying culture and ethos of the BRFP was described as deeply caring, respectful and non-judgemental. The investment by staff in building high quality relationships with the people who use the services of the BRFP was identified as the foundation stone. Fundamentally, the BRFP nurtured hope and a belief that all of us, irrespective of our particular circumstances, are capable of making positive changes in our lives. The characteristics of the BRFP Model are as follows: organic in its evolution; multi-site delivery suite of integrated services; family orientated and intergenerational; working in partnership with other organisations; accessible; exhibits strong leadership and committed staff and volunteers; offers training programmes and student placement and offers opportunities for self-expression and creativity.

This research found that the BRFP had a profound impact on the quality of lives of people who used the services. The BRFP provided children with opportunities to engage with a wide variety of activities and have fun, experience empowerment along with nurturing of their emotional well-being. For families, the impact included access to the supports that promoted family well-being and cohesion. People who used services, either as group participants such as the Life Skills Groups or the Men's Group, also spoke passionately about the impact of the BRFP

¹ From this point the Bedford Row Family Project will be referred to as the BRFP.



on their lives. They said that membership built their confidence and skills to deal with the challenges imprisonment brought into their lives. Furthermore, they identified the BRFP as a place where they were not judged because of their personal circumstances, rather they were nurtured and cared for within an ethos of hope and respect. People who used the services greatly valued the opportunities afforded to them to participate in a variety of activities without charge, to build relationships with staff and among themselves. They acknowledged the web of services that can be accessed through the BRFP citing many instances of receiving support. People who used the services acknowledged the devastation that addiction can bring with it and acknowledged the support they received and the advances they had made to deal with a variety of addictions. Most significantly, people who used the service spoke of the transformational impact on their personal lives, the confidence and self-belief and resilience that they had built and their increased capacity to not only live with the reality of having a family member in prison but to be proactive in dealing with it and in planning for the future. People who used the services spoke of their realisation that they had something to offer each other, and the peer support, friendship and solidarity experienced was most evident throughout the research process. The supports offered to prisoners and to families of prisoners to manage the prison sentences and to prepare for transition out of prison and back into family and society was deeply appreciated by the people we interviewed. Essentially, engagement with the BRFP nurtured hope, built resilience and helped individuals and families to believe that a better future was possible.

The findings from the literature review strongly endorsed the findings of this study. It described the needs and challenges facing families of prisoners strongly mirroring our own findings. A number of models of supporting prisoners were identified along with the key characteristics of best practice in family support. The principles of best practice strongly echoed the culture and service design of the BRFP.

This research offers two sets of recommendations, one from research participants and the second from ourselves. Some research participants were reticent at first to make recommendations, feeling that to do so would in some way be disrespectful to a service they cherish deeply. However, once they understood that the BRFP sought this advice they offered very insightful recommendations relating to improving services for children and adults along with practical suggestions for physical and promotional improvements. We endorsed their recommendations and presented a set of recommendations relating to improving and expanding services and the physical infrastructure, building staff capacity and skills and increasing the visibility of the BRFP.

It was both a privilege and an insightful learning journey for us as researchers to undertake this work. The design of the study, an ethno case study informed by narrative inquiry principles, offered us the opportunity to engage with integrity, to learn from 'experts by experience', and to hopefully write a report which will be of value to the BRFP.

This report is available to download on the TED website <http://www.mic.ul.ie/ted/Pages/default.aspx> and Bedford Row Family Project website <https://www.bedfordrow.ie>



Bedford Row Art Class

Woke up Friday morning feeling low
Had no money and nowhere to go
Said thank God for Bedford Row

When I got there a nice smell of dinner - fair play to you Joe
Not like that other chef the one that we all know
Couldn't help but think this is a great place to go
Everyone makes you feel just like a bro
All easy-going and go with the flow

Time for dinner followed by apple tart
Then Paul shares his knowledge of the art
If you don't hear him it's your loss
But it's not your fault it's because of Doss

Then we leave in pairs going down the stairs
Some of us have to fight back the tears
When I look back I see two fine mares
It softens my heart to know someone cares
I hope that this place stays open for years

(Men's Group Participant)





Hope

Sometimes hope can feel like a candle in a hurricane
Torn and twisted, surrounded by a world of pain
When all that you have lost is much more than you gain
Sometimes all you have, is hope

Yet hope is the gift that only you can hold
A hidden ray that warms the soul when all around is cold
A faith light of promise waiting to unfold
A strength that is your own

Hope is a treasure that no one can steal away
Nor bash into a pulp without a word to say
The inner voice that tells you there will be another day
There will be another time

Hold on to hope when you have nothing to hold on to
Feed your soul with hope when starved with all things true
Let your hope shine on when there's nothing left to do
But hope

For one day you will hear the words "I told you so"
And that your "yes" was right when the world said "no"
Whispered from deep inside wherever you may go
"Never, never lose hope"

(Men's Group Participant)

section one
Introduction



The Transforming Education through Dialogue (TED) Project was invited by the Bedford Row Family Project (BRFP) to undertake this research.

The BRFP was founded in 1999 by the Franciscan and Mercy Orders. Since its foundation the BRFP has grown to offer a suite of multi-site services to support prisoners, former prisoners and families of prisoners. It is committed to: Listening to the experience of people affected by imprisonment; Allowing that experience to shape the direction of the project; Working proactively with family members of prisoners, and former prisoners, to ease their distress and assist them in making positive life choices in particular with respect to their children; Provide leadership and direction in design and implementation of programmes that work effectively with families affected by imprisonment and related matters. The vision of the BRFP is as follows:

The Bedford Row Family Project is committed to promoting the well being of individuals and families who struggle against disadvantage. In a spirit of openness, hospitality and respect we welcome all who come to us and value them as shapers of our vision. We endeavor to work collaboratively with other organisations both statutory and voluntary. In the tradition of compassion and solidarity of Catherine McAuley and Francis of Assisi, we will work towards building God's reign of joy and inclusion.

Bedford Row Family Project (2006, p.5)

The BRFP staff includes one full time Project Leader, and four additional full time staff comprising a Social Worker, Information Officer/Hospitality Centre Leader, Family Links Social Worker and Traveller Support Worker. Part time staff include an Outreach Worker, an Accounts Administrator, three Family Support Workers, an Office Administrator and a Receptionist/Maintenance person. Additionally students from across five programmes undertake placement with the BRFP. Voluntary and sessional staff included three Psychotherapists, seven Hospitality Centre and Child Care staff and one Play Therapist.

The BRFP offers a suite of multi-site, intergenerational integrated services. During 2016 they supported 169 families, 75 male former prisoners, 28 female former prisoners, 29 male prisoners, 51 female prisoners, and 9 individuals.

The TED Project is located within the Curriculum Development Unit of Mary Immaculate College (MIC), Limerick. TED seeks to improve outcomes for children through harnessing the expertise of MIC in the service of children, parents and teachers, primarily in DEIS² contexts, through dialogue and collaboration TED endeavours to unlock children's enormous learning potential. This research was undertaken by Dr Ann Higgins, Co ordinator of TED and Ruth Bourke, TED Project Support Worker.

The primary aims of the research were to identify the model of service delivery being undertaken by the BRFP,

² Schools in receipt of additional supports under the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) Action Plan for Educational Inclusion. The action plan focuses on addressing and prioritising the educational needs of children and young people from disadvantaged communities. For further information please see <https://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Services/DEIS-Delivering-Equality-of-Opportunity-in-Schools/> .

section two

Context: Imprisonment has many implications for families of prisoners and prisoners

2





Introduction

This section seeks to contextualise the services of the BRFP. Firstly, it outlines the societal and community contexts within which the BRFP operates. Secondly, it looks at the variety of personal and family challenges experienced by families who come to the BRFP for support. It then discusses the types of challenges experienced by some people who are imprisoned. Finally, it explores specific challenges associated with transitioning out of prison.

In order to appreciate the model of intervention (see section 5) and its impact on the quality of children's and adults' lives (see section 6), it is important to have an understanding of the context within which the BRFP delivers its services and of the needs it seeks to meet.

The people who come to the BRFP to avail of services choose to do so voluntarily and come for a variety of reasons. Some people are transitioning out of prison and back into society, others are family members of prisoners who come for support for themselves and for their families. Also, people who come to the BRFP for support may be living with the challenges of drug and/or alcohol addiction, for example one member of the Men's Group said *'I know there's people that come in that has a lot of issues through prison, through drugs and counselling for other things, breaking up with women or women breaking up with men or on the verge of losing their kids'* (Men's Group interview).

People hear about the suite of services in many ways including through word of mouth. People also hear about the services of the BRFP through friends, family and contact with the Hospitality Centre³ when making prison visits or through other initiatives such as the Home School Community Liaison Scheme (HSCL).⁴

The challenges encountered by people in their lives are complex. As one BRFP staff member stated the BRFP seeks to support *'people who have not been as fortunate [in life]'*. The myriad of challenges people can experience include grief that their loved ones are imprisoned, addiction problems, housing needs, the need to build confidence, life skills and home-making skills, living with the challenges of illness, sexual abuse and prostitution. Perhaps one of the greatest needs is to be listened to and heard as people can experience a sense of voicelessness because *'they are totally ignored by society in general'* (BRFP staff interview).

The BRFP recognises the need to make services easily accessible to people who may be suffering from grief or trauma or who may be living with addiction problems and consequently it provides a variety of avenues to engage with its services, for example through their drop-in facility, via phone or by appointment with specific BRFP services or through referral to other services. The BRFP is also cognisant that peoples' readiness or capacity to engage with their services is often influenced by what is happening in their lives and understand that it can take time to build up relationships with people as a foundation to engaging with the services. Additionally, staff are keenly aware that peoples' engagement may be transient and that they may come and go depending on their personal circumstances, but they may still maintain a long-term relationship with the service.

The sensitivities towards and the respect for people who use BRFP services was very evident throughout the research process. There was a deep understanding of the multiplicity of factors which may impact on peoples' capacity to approach or engage with the BRFP. There was a strong recognition that people need to be respected *'where they are at'*. As one staff member commented:

...people have not been so fortunate and for whom the cards have not fallen kindly in life don't feel they have ownership of what they want in life and that can be a difficult process for them and sometimes even threatening for them [to engage with services and believe that change is possible] (BRFP staff interview).

Indeed, as well as being alienated from society or from family, people can sometimes be *'alienated from themselves'* (BRFP staff interview).

³ The Hospitality Centre is located on the grounds of Limerick Prison, inside the perimeter gates and outside the walls of the prison. The BRFP delivers supports to visiting families, including refreshments, information and support.

⁴ The Home School Community Liaison Scheme is an integral part of DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools), and is available to all DEIS Urban Band 1, Urban Band 2 and DEIS Post Primary schools. Overall responsibility for the services rest with the Educational Welfare Services (EWS) of the Child and Family Agency Tusla, which is the dedicated state agency responsible for improving wellbeing and outcomes for children. The Department of Education and Skills is responsible for the allocation of HSCL Coordinators to schools. For further information please see <http://www.tusla.ie/services/educational-welfare-services/school-support-services-under-the-deis-initiative/home-school-community-liaison-scheme>.



This section of the report seeks to honour the lived experiences of the people who attend the BRFP services, and in so doing provide a broad insight into the complexities that having a family member in prison, transitioning out of prison, or living with the challenges of addiction can have on the lives of the people themselves and their family members.

Societal Context

The societal context relates to the stigma some prisoners, former prisoners and their families endure as well as the social issues in the communities in which some of the families live.

The BRFP delivers its services within a particular societal context. The stigma associated with imprisonment extends beyond the prisoner to his/her family, resulting in very little societal empathy for families of prisoners. Interviews revealed that prisoners' families can suffer stigmatisation, children can be excluded and family members can feel isolated from society. Indeed, many of the adult service users that we interviewed commented that they have nowhere else to go for the type of support that they need. As one BRFP staff member commented:

... because of where he [the child] has come from and this expectation of 'This is who you are, this is who you belong to' [reference to belonging to a family where a member has been imprisoned], so the images you know, and then he comes to Bedford Row and it is not necessary to fight (BRFP staff interview).

Members of the BRFP staff felt that society typically tended to identify with the glamorous side of criminality: 'drug tycoons driving BMWs with the houses in Spain'. However the casualties of criminality includes not only the victims of crime but also the families of people who committed crimes and the challenges for these families are discussed in the next section. In a very practical way society's attitude to imprisonment limits the capacity of the BRFP to fundraise in the traditional sense as 'You don't shake a box on the street cos you wouldn't get anyplace there doing that' (BRFP staff interview).

Families affected by imprisonment do not exist in a social vacuum and the context of the communities in which some of the families live and the pressures of challenging social issues in their communities can also strongly impact on their quality of life i.e., anti-social behaviour, high levels of unemployment, high levels of early school leaving, high levels of crime and addiction. Unfortunately, as noted by BRFP staff, volunteers, and prison staff, due to the insidious intergenerational nature of imprisonment some young peoples' expectations for their future may well involve going to prison. As one external stakeholder remarked about younger prisoners, 'Their expectation was they were always going to end up in prison. Everybody in their area is in prison, a lot of times their parents, one or other of the parents, nearly always the dad and sometimes both. So for them coming into prison was no huge shock. It was part of their expectation, their life expectation'.

The formidable and complex link between addiction and imprisonment was also evident across the interviews and focus groups with adult participants. Participants relayed the challenges of the 'scourge' of addiction for both those inside prison, for prison authorities, for families affected by imprisonment and former prisoners transitioning to life outside prison and/or trying to overcome addiction. As one person commented about the reasons why people are in prison:

The people [in prison], they're very ordinary. They're our brothers and our cousins, and our dads and our uncles and there's nothing different about them. Probably the biggest difference is addiction and that has driven most of their behaviour. There's very few of them that don't have [an addiction problem], whether it's gambling or alcohol or drugs. Nearly all of them and especially the women (External stakeholder interview).

Family Context

The lives of prisoners and their families are profoundly affected by imprisonment.

Families of prisoners suffer deeply as a consequence of having a family member imprisoned. They can experience great sorrow, loss and grief, and can also experience shame, fear and anger. Families have support needs at various stages including while the person is in the court process, when the person is in prison and when that person is in transition out of prison.

When we were interviewing we did not ask the participants the reasons why they chose to attend services in the BRFP. We concentrated on learning about the services people attended, the impact of the services on peoples'



lives, and how the services might be improved. However, in the course of the conversations people sometimes chose to share the reasons why they attended the BRFP services, along with their understanding of why their family members or friends attended. These reasons were varied and complex. Families of prisoners experience a variety of challenges including stigma, financial challenges and the need for supports to navigate the court and justice systems. Families may need support or advice regarding how best to inform the children that a parent or family member is in prison, and very practical help with preparing to make a 'good visit'. The parent who is looking after the family may need support in parenting, be that through direct support to the person themselves or through providing the children with a safe emotional space to play and socialise. Women from the Life Skills focus groups who had family members in prison described the suffering experienced by other members of the family when a loved one goes to prison including feelings of shame, devastation and isolation by other family members and neighbours. Suffering and fear included deep concern for the person in prison as well as for themselves and the rest of their families. Fear was related to a lack of control and the 'unknown' of the prison environment and what might happen to their loved one, as well as the fear that the person in prison may continue to 'bring trouble to your door' when they are released. Some women from the Life Skills Groups who had partners in prison at some stage indicated that although their partner was the one 'locked up', they felt they were 'doing time a lot harder' because they had to deal with the emotional and physical work of looking after their children on their own. They described how they 'carry the burden' of dealing with what is happening on the outside, and often do not tell their partner in prison certain things because they do not want to upset them as they feel they are 'helpless' inside. Some women who had other family members i.e., grandchild, son, daughter, niece, or nephew, in prison also talked about how 'you go to prison with them' because of the fear and worry you have for what will happen to them in prison e.g., being attacked or drug taking. One woman talked about learning to 'let go' of the person in prison so that you are not constantly thinking of them and living in fear for them and in a sense people can feel that 'it's like as if you're in there with them'. In some families, relationships between two parents can break down when a child goes to prison and Life Skills Groups participants also highlighted how one parent can become 'caught in the middle' between the child and other parent.

All family relationships are complex. In the situation where one parent is in prison, the complexity is magnified. The partner on the outside can sometimes be living 'on high alert' and 'afraid of the day of release' or they may be really looking forward to the person's release with great anticipation, hope and joy (BRFP staff interview). Family members may well be assuming a lot of responsibility for running the home, for raising the children, for financial management, organising legal support for the person in prison as well as organising the family visits to the person in prison. One volunteer noted that the family's whole life can completely 'revolve around the person in jail who is getting their three meals, they're sleeping. They [partner at home] have to get the kids dressed, they deal with solicitors, they have to travel [for visits]' (BRFP volunteer interview). In some circumstances, according to the BRFP staff and external interviewees, when a person goes to prison, it can also be 'a respite' for the rest of the family from the 'mayhem' that the individual can bring into their lives. The absence of this influence can in turn create a space for support agencies to step in, as the following quote illustrates:

When all that mayhem that dad brings when he's not in prison, when that's removed, it gives agencies a gap to get into that home and offer their services (External stakeholder interview).

Relationships between the people in prison and the family on the outside can be complex, with some research participants (BRFP staff interviews and External interviews) telling us that sometimes the person in prison may seek to exert control over the person on the outside through putting pressure on them to bring them money⁵, drugs or specific items of clothing. Occasionally, children's clothing can be used to try and smuggle drugs into prison so that the person in prison can retrieve it during a visit. Some men in prison can also seek to control the freedom of their partners on the outside through monitoring their movements by seeking information from family and friends. The impact of this controlling behaviour is to put extreme personal and financial pressure on the person on the outside. This behaviour may well have been evident prior to imprisonment and may also be related to addiction and not just imprisonment.

The societal attitude to prisoners may also have an impact on them as it was evident across some of the interviews that people can actually internalise stigma, for example there were references to 'the likes of us' being welcomed in the BRFP and 'the likes of us' participating in for example the art exhibition or ceremonies within the BRFP (Men's Group interview). Also, if a person goes back into prison, 'they can feel a failure, they can lose sight of hope' (BRFP staff interview).

⁵ Prisoners have a dedicated account they can use to purchase items from the prison shop. A weekly allowance is deposited there for each prisoner. Additionally, prisoners' families or friends can deposit money into the prisoners' account.



Children of prisoners have the very same needs as all children but their circumstances merit additional supports. Parents/carers spoke of the shock and loss that children can experience when a parent goes to prison, describing it as akin to a bereavement or being in 'no man's land'. They talked about the impact of separation on children and the importance of building the family unit after a parent has gone to prison. One way of supporting children is through offering them opportunities to engage with responsible caring adults outside their families who can offer emotional and psychological supports. Space to express themselves in a safe environment where they don't have to be 'on alert' (BRFP staff interview) or defensive is also very important. Children need and deserve the space to safely process whatever emotions and challenges they are facing. It was evident from BRFP staff interviews that children of people in prison can sometimes experience exclusion, for example, one BRFP staff member commented 'Some communities won't take kids like, I know one or two who are not allowed into the club because of who their fathers are, they are not saying that's why, but we all know that is why'. Another BRFP staff member relayed a conversation he/she had with one of the children who said 'I love coming to group in Bedford Row, because when I am up in school or up in the road, I have to fight, but when I am in Bedford Row, I don't have to fight'. This finding was confirmed during the children's focus groups when one child described the atmosphere in the club as follows: 'We always come here and we never fight, we are like a family' (Child focus group interview). This quote captures the child's understanding of their 'ideal' family.

Imprisonment

We did not interview anyone who was currently in prison. Our understanding of the needs of people in prison was informed by interviews with former prisoners, family members of people who were or who are in prison, BRFP staff, volunteers and members of the prison service and the BRFP Board of Management. It emerged through the research that men and women can have very different needs and experiences of prison as highlighted by the BRFP and prison staff (see section 5 - Model). There are substantially less women than men within the prison system. While recognising that they are in prison because they 'did something wrong', women in prison were described as being the 'most hard done by society' (BRFP staff interview). Some women in prison have little or no family support and they have very few visitors, 'Nobody visits them because dad pulls back' (External stakeholder interview) and their children may be placed in care because women are usually the primary care givers:

Unless granny or an auntie, or somebody looks after them, the kids normally go into care. The accommodation is nearly always in their name, it's very rarely in one of the lads [names] so they might lose that.So it depends I suppose on whether it's mum or dad locked up, on what they actually need (External stakeholder interview).

There can also be an emotional impact for men who are imprisoned. Men in prison can 'feel lost and left behind' (BRFP staff member check) when their family on the outside begin to move on with their lives and when the woman takes over the traditional male role of 'breadwinner' which he may have held prior to going to prison (BRFP staff member check). As one BRFP staff member commented 'It's like someone hitting the pause button. They were the main man on such a date when they got the prison sentence and they still see themselves in that role as a father when they come out' (BRFP staff member check). One of the interviews with the Men's Group participants reflected on this saying 'I thought I could get out of jail and go back to my family but it wasn't happening like so they kind of explained it to me here [in the BRFP]. It's going to take a long, long time, which it did like' (Men's Group interview).

The BRFP adopts a two pronged approach to supporting people in prison. Firstly, it offers supports to the individuals to manage their time in prison through providing them with the options for counselling and group work and supporting them to make 'good visits' and secondly, it seeks to prepare them to successfully transition into society.

Transitioning out of prison

People who are transitioning out of prison and their families may have a variety of practical and personal support needs.

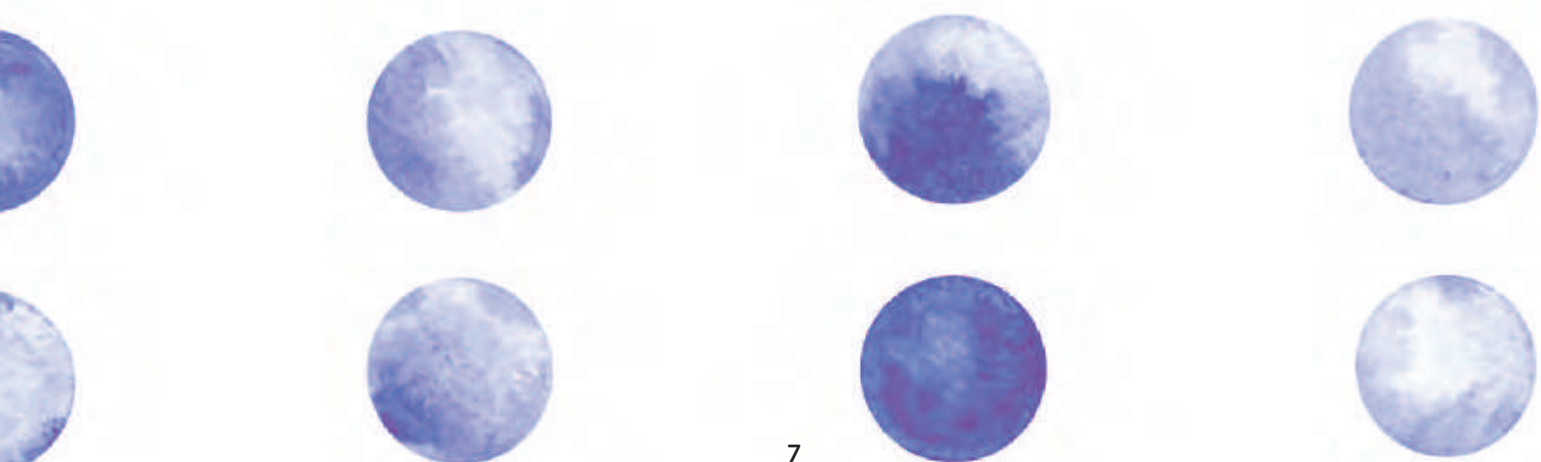
People transitioning out of prison may have very practical support needs, as *'things can fall apart when you don't have a safe place to go and they end up back in again ... they want so much [they have aspirations] when they are leaving [prison]'* (BRFP staff interview). The kinds of supports required may include accessing services such as housing, social welfare, addiction services and medical care. As one member of the Men's Group remarked *'Some people coming out of prison, don't ... they're lost d'you know. They don't know where to go. People aren't aware that if you 'go on the dole', you've to wait six to eight weeks and Bedford Row advise people to go to the clinics'*. An individual service user also commented that even when you have good family support and friends around you, people still need professional support with the transition, especially when they are dealing with addiction. Life Skills Groups participants spoke about the need for support for themselves and their families with the transition of their loved one or partner from prison to home. They described how difficult it can be for prisoners to cope when they come out because they have nowhere to go, they have no work and those with addiction issues may be tempted back into that lifestyle. They have to learn to do things for themselves as well as adjust to living with their family again. As one person commented:

But I found when he came out then he wasn't the same young fella. You know they're never the same again. Something happens to them and they find it hard to cope. D'you know it is very hard for them when they come out like because there is no place proper for them to go and they haven't got work. It's hard to learn how to cope like. They have to do things for themselves then as well and they have to learn to get used to our way of life and everything, it's very hard for them (Life Skills focus group participant).

In relation to personal needs, people re-engaging with their families and with society at large may need very specific supports depending on their circumstances and those of their families. The BRFP works to create safe spaces for people to process the emotional and psychological aspects of transitioning and re engaging with family and society. Firstly, they support people while in prison to reflect and take stock of their lives. Indeed, BRFP staff commented in the member check process that going to prison can be *'a respite for people'* from the chaos in their own lives that can *'save people'* and it can be an opportunity for them to *'get their act together'* (BRFP staff member check interview).

Secondly, the BRFP support people to build and maintain positive family relationships and continue to work with them when they are released through extending and increasing opportunities for engagement and growth.

On release, some men will find that their *'families have moved on'* (BRFP staff interview), and they can feel isolated and lost when they are released. The woman in the family may well have become the sole earner, taken up opportunities to build her self-esteem, confidence and skills (Life Skills Groups interviews) and the children will be older and their needs for parenting changed. The man being released from prison may need support to reflect on these changed dynamics so that he can actively *'make a choice'* (BRFP staff interview) around how he reintegrates into the daily life of the family. There can also be significant *'emotional blocks'* (BRFP staff interview) as it is very difficult to develop emotionally while in prison, and so both the person being released and the family may well benefit from support to navigate this critical transition phase.



section three
**Literature
Review**

3



Introduction

In section 2, we proposed that in order to appreciate the Bedford Row Family Project model of service delivery and its impact on the lives of families of prisoners, prisoners and former prisoners, it is important to offer an insight into the lived experiences of the people who use the services of the BRFP. We described the challenges faced including stigma, pressures on relationships, financial pressures and the sense of isolation that people can experience. In this section, we turn to the literature to learn about the kinds of needs that children, families, prisoners and former prisoners may have and the models of support on offer with reference to best practice in family support. Many of the needs of people who live with the challenges of imprisonment, or of being members of families of prisoners or former prisoners, of course are similar to every other family that is trying to make a home, raise children, put food on the table and live in an increasingly complex society. However, children, families, prisoners and former prisoners have specific needs related to the impact of imprisonment that other families do not need to come to terms with.

The BRFP is a family support project. It adopts an ecological perspective (Bronfenbrenner 1979) viewing people in the context of family and society and not simply as individuals with a particular set of needs. Indeed, the findings of this research reveal that the BRFP actively and deliberately seeks to build family relationships and connections through an integrated, inter-generational, multi-site suite of services (Section 5 - Model of Service Delivery). The BRFP also acts as a conduit to connect people with a variety of services, thus promoting accessibility to a wide range of services (see Appendix 1).

Society, Crime and Imprisonment

The Irish Penal Reform Trust (IPRT) views crime as a “social phenomenon – both in its causes and its effects” stating that “penal policy must be seen in the context of wider social and economic marginalisation and exclusion”(2012, p.5). Through our legislative system society punishes people who commit crimes by imprisoning them. Political responsibility is vested in the Irish Minister for Justice and Equality. The Irish Prison system (IPS), as described in its 2016 Annual Report, operates within the Department of Justice and Equality, headed by a Director General who is supported by five Directors (2016a, p.10). The mission of the IPS is to provide safe and secure custody for prisoners with dignity of care and to support the rehabilitation of prisoners for safer communities, guided by respect for human dignity (ibid, p.8).

Imprisonment is a very complex phenomenon. The literature is replete with reports and theories of the factors that lead people to commit crimes, explorations of the kinds of crimes that are punished and how, and of the crimes that go unpunished and why. A body of literature also focusses on the individuals who desist from committing crimes along with recommendations on how society might support people to desist from reoffending or indeed prevent offending in the first place. It is not feasible to offer a detailed exploration of these factors within the limitations of this report. However, we draw on pertinent literature, which we hope helps to illuminate and locate the findings of this research and offer food for thought in relation to the future direction of the BRFP.

The IPRT are concerned not only with the conditions of prisoners and penal laws but with wider questions relating to who goes to prison and why. According to their aforementioned report there is a dearth of Irish studies which socially profile prisoners, yet, it is widely known that many prisoners have endured social exclusion, including “high levels of family, educational and health disadvantage, and poor prospects on the labour market” (2012, p.6). Furthermore, they hold that “there is strong evidence that social exclusion renders individuals vulnerable to offending behaviour” along with “membership of a disadvantaged community, consistent poverty and parental conflict” (ibid, p.6). Fundamentally, the IPRT advocate a shift in focus from criminal justice to social justice stating that “white collar crimes – traditionally committed by the more privileged members of society – are much less likely to result in custodial sentences than crimes (theft, criminal damage, drug-related offences) typically committed by the poor” (ibid, p.14). The IPRT recommend that the criminal justice system should treat the crimes of the rich and of the poor with equal vigour and that imprisonment should be a very last resort (ibid, p.15).



Seeking a reduction in imprisonment and alternatives to incarceration is in stark contrast to the growing numbers of people being imprisoned worldwide. For example, Wildeman and Western report that US imprisonment has increased roughly fivefold since the mid 1970's, a phenomenon referred to as "mass imprisonment" or "the prison boom" which has been very much concentrated among poor minority men with little education (2010, p.157).

In contrast, Ireland saw a recent decrease in the prison population between 2015 and 2016, with 15,099 committals to prison in 2016 which is a decrease of 12.2% on the 2015 total of 17,206 (IPS Annual Report 2016, p.25). There were 16,155 committals to prison in 2014, 15,735 in 2013, 17,206 in 2012, 17,318 in 2011 and 17,179 in 2010 (ibid, p. 66). In 2017, the IPRT advocated for, amongst other things, a reduction in imprisonment in Ireland to 50 per 100,000 (2017b, p.3).

According to the IPRT, criminality can be linked to the relationship people have with mainstream society. They propose that people who experience "deeply-entrenched feelings of detachment or exclusion" from society "cannot be expected to have the same respect for the laws of society as people with a more vested interest in society and its laws" (2012, p.23). So tackling social exclusion is critical to building a more equitable and safe society for all. The IPRT draw on a wide variety of literature to support their claim that there are a number of risk factors known to increase the likelihood of children and young people engaging in criminal activity as they grow older including: "community disorganisation, socio-economic deprivation, family problems, academic and school issues and personal factors" (ibid, p.16).

Breen recognises the invisibility of the impact of imprisonment within society stating that the impact of imprisonment on the prisoners, and indeed on their families, is of little importance to society at large. She proposed that this lack of empathy or understanding may well impact on politicians' willingness to advocate on behalf of prisoners' rights, fearing it may damage their career prospects (2008, p.19).

Our findings confirm that people who have been in prison as well as members of their families can indeed feel isolated from society. Martyn found that children of prisoners can be teased and bullied resulting in "the child becoming aggressive towards peers and family members" (2012, p.20). Manby et al. are concerned with how children of prisoners' cope with having a parent in prison and propose that their coping strategies "are influenced by the interpretive frame adopted by the adults around them, and by how issues of parental imprisonment are talked about in their families" (2015, p.228). They propose that children are "likely to be influenced by their parents/carers' views, although these may cause conflict for them" (ibid, p.228) believing that children are likely to benefit when a positive view of the imprisoned parent is retained by their parents and carers. In contrast, parents/carers can also transmit stigma or shame to the children (ibid, p.228). This highlights the importance of the attitudes of all who aim to support children and their families. The stigma experienced by families of prisoners is also strongly acknowledged in the Kelleherassociates research *Voices of Families* undertaken for the BRFP (2007, p.22). The challenge of building a new identity and making a fresh start for former prisoners is acknowledged in the literature, with Maruna et al. recognising how infuriating it is for former prisoners who "want to make the case that they have permanently 'changed', 'reformed', or become 'new' people [as] Ex- offenders are typically treated as 'risky until proven innocent' " (2004, p.272). The Kelleherassociates report also acknowledges the impact of institutionalisation on the prisoner and the challenges of adjusting to life after prison (2007, p.34).

Prisoners

When a person is committed to prison the most obvious impact is that he/she has limited contact with his/her family members and friends and this separation according to Loucks "is often the most painful consequence of incarceration" (2004, p.4). Access to family and friends is controlled through the prison service, and may include letters, phone calls, visits⁶ and temporary release depending on a number of circumstances and prison policies. The literature highlights the importance of maintaining positive links between prisoners and their families, and when this is successful research indicates that they may be less likely to re-offend after release (Hudson 2006).

Time spent in prison may be experienced in different ways by prisoners, due to their own dispositions and attitudes, the services available to them, their physical and mental health and the conditions in the prisons themselves. The literature recognises that time spent in prison holds the potential to offer prisoners the opportunity to reflect on their lives, build skills, actively work on their relationships with partners and family and prepare to re-enter society (Muth et al 2014, Collins ND). For example, according to Muth et al, "time can be a resource for creativity or destruction, depending on how it is experienced" (2014, p.3). Echoing the findings of our research,

⁶ Prison visits can take a number of formats depending on the prison policy and facilities.

Collins et al posit that “the time spent in prison can provide an opportunity for parents to assess their situation and take account of the responsibilities for their child and family” (ND, p.3). Collins et al, in unison with our own findings, also propose that attending parenting programmes while imprisoned, offers an opportunity to develop parenting skills including listening, play and communication skills along with knowledge of child development (ND, p.3). Some prisoners are parents and this will be discussed in more detail below. In any circumstances, according to Landy et al “being a parent is a complex and important task” (2013, p.1), however, being a parent in prison or having a parent in prison brings with it a particular set of challenges and risks.

The literature on parents who are prisoners highlights differences in the impact of imprisonment on the prisoners and on their children. It is not within the remit of this report to judge whether the imprisonment of a mother or father has greater or even different impacts on their children, perhaps this is aligned to a wider debate on the traditional and emerging roles of individual parents in society. However, the literature does highlight the very practical implications for children of maternal imprisonment when their mother is the primary carer.

Women in prison

Irish women in prison are a very specific group of people. They are more likely to be from poor social backgrounds, have an average of 2 or 3 children, are less likely to be in a relationship and tend to have had prior psychiatric treatment. They are more likely to have abused drugs from a young age and are resistant to drug treatment.

Carmody and McEvoy (1996, p.23)

There are less women than men in prison world-wide but the number of women incarcerated is increasing. For example in Ireland, there was a decrease in female committals from 2,918 in 2015 to 2,546 in 2016. However, according to the IPS Annual Report there has been a steady increase overall since 2002 when 1,043 female committals were recorded (2016a, p.66).

Within the literature on imprisonment of parents some distinction is made between the experiences and needs of mothers and fathers. Women prisoners typically differ from men prisoners in terms of the crimes they have committed, their personal circumstances and how they experience imprisonment. According to Costello most women prisoners, many of whom are repeat offenders, are committed for non-violent crimes. These women experience complex needs around mental health, different types of addiction, relationships and accommodation. Additionally, they play important caring roles for family members (2013, p.18). Disturbingly, Costello goes on to claim that “one of the most alarming findings to emerge from recent Irish research literature regarding women offenders is that for some, prison is a respite from their day to day lives” (ibid, p. 18). Costello contends that the chaotic and difficult lives of these women are not improved by going to prison, the very opposite in fact, as on release typically family networks have been disrupted, children have been separated from their mothers and they may well experience homelessness and damaged employment prospects (ibid, p. 18). The consequences of women being committed primarily for non-violent offences have included overcrowding in women’s prisons and an overuse of temporary release (ibid, p.3). Drawing on Palmer’s research the IPRT state that women in Irish prisons have high rates of mental illness and are more likely to self-harm than male prisoners (2012, p.16).

Recognising the particular needs of women in prison the IPRT submission to the Examination of Ireland’s combined sixth and seventh periodic reports under the CEDAW⁷, made gender-specific recommendations including:

- Early intervention and diversion to therapeutic services should be available to women at the first point of contact with the criminal justice system;
- Gender-specific bail supports must be developed and introduced to reduce the number of women detained on remand;
- Women with mental health and addiction needs should be diverted away from the criminal justice system towards specialist treatment, including referral by specialist mental health and drugs courts;

⁷ Under Article 2(g) of the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) states should ‘repeal all national penal provisions which constitute discrimination against women’
http://www.iprt.ie/files/IPRT_Submission_in_Advance_of_the_Examination_of_Ireland_under_CEDAW_FINAL_20Jan20171.pdf



- Specific services must be designed to meet the needs of Traveller women, who are over-represented in the prison system;
- Alternatives to custody specific to the needs of mothers should be developed and introduced, to avoid unnecessary imprisonment and minimise impact on children;
- The state should introduce a subsidy scheme to financially support family visits to prison;
- A Mother and Baby Unit should be established at Limerick Prison;
- Counselling must be made available in prisons for women with experience of abuse, and outreach links should be developed between prisons and charities working with sex workers;
- Gender-specific health care needs of older female prisoners must be met;
- A multi-agency approach to structured pre-release planning and tailored post-release supports for women leaving prison, including vulnerable categories of women, is needed;
- The state should ensure that all women leaving prison custody have access to safe and secure housing on release, including supported housing where required.

(2017a, pp.2-10)

Some women in prison are mothers. This brings an added dimension to the discussion on imprisonment and tasks services to gain an informed understanding of how best to support mothers and in turn opens up a debate on the needs, and indeed rights, of the children of all prisoners. O'Malley and Devaney's research "highlights how supporting mother-child relationships can be included as part of the overall rehabilitative effort with prisoners" (2016, p.29). They recognise the critical importance of motherhood in a child's life all the time recognising the added complexities of motherhood within the prison system (ibid, p.21). They contend that imprisonment of parents can be harmful to children, and that it is seen as more likely to "compound, than to mitigate pre-existing family problems" (ibid, p.21).

Collins et al. propose that mothers who are prisoners will experience prison in a "qualitatively different" way to fathers in prison because of the "distinctive emotional and practical role a mother has in a child's life" (ND, p.5). They contend that imprisonment of a mother has different consequences for the children in the home as typically when a father goes to prison the mother is usually at home with the children, but when a mother goes to prison "the inevitable separation from the child will often result in the relocation of the child to other family members or Social Services care" (ibid, p.5). Indeed, this view was articulated by some participants in this research. However the impact on children of imprisonment of their father is also recognised within the literature.

Men in prison

There has been a significant increase in men in prison internationally over the past decade. However, the IPS 2016 Annual Report recorded a decrease in both male and female committals between 2015 (17,206) and 2016 (15,099). The number of male committals for 2016 was 10,033 and for 2015 was 11,264 (2016, p.66).

Some men in prison are fathers and parenting while in prison presents both challenges and opportunities. According to Muth et al. "the empirical evidence supporting a dormant view of incarcerated fathers is compelling" (2013, p.293). However, there is a growing recognition (Muth, 2011) of the need to recognise the active part imprisoned fathers can play in their children's lives and indeed, this was echoed by participants in this research. Muth acknowledges calls to recognise the importance of fathers' presence in children's lives, and proposes that art/literacy-based programmes can serve to empower those "otherwise marginalised and silenced" (2011, p.258). He concludes that the HH mural project⁸ saw imprisoned fathers as resources and through that project aimed to maintain and rebuild family ties and presented "new possibilities for humanising prison spaces and repositioning prisoners as engaged and responsible fathers" (ibid, p.258).

Martyn recognises the complexity of a father parenting while in prison stating that "separation may result in breakdown of relationships between the child and parent, and cause problems in rebuilding these relationships on release" (2012, p.18). Geller et al. propose that a father's imprisonment also limits men's parenting capacity

⁸ The HH (Hope House) supports a number of services in seven US prisons.

by straining family relationships” and that “romantic and family relationships are also undermined by the social stigma that incarceration carries” (2011, p.27).

Children of prisoners

Imprisonment can have diverse and profound consequences for the well-being and general functioning of children with a parent in prison.

(Families and Imprisonment Working Group Irish Prison Service 2014, p.4)

This section recognises the impact of parental imprisonment on children and advocates for the rights of children of prisoners. The literature recognises the critical importance of supporting children and parents to connect and (re) connect and build positive nurturing relationships through visits, phone calls, letters and involvement in parent/child projects. While we concur with these findings, we also wish to state that any interventions must always be in the best interest of the child.

Martynowicz’s research entitled *Children of Imprisoned Parents*, carried out in prisons in Denmark, Italy, Poland and Northern Ireland draws on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) and posits that, while the Convention holds that children should not be discriminated against due to their parental situation, many children of prisoners “often feel ashamed, unsupported, and ‘different’ because their parent is in prison” (2011, p.6).

Furthermore Martyhnowicz recognises that children may experience bullying, harassment and difficulties in school, they may be at risk of developing emotional difficulties, reduced financial security, they may live with fear, and worry and may well become “the invisible victims of crime and the penal system” (ibid, p.6).

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), to which all members of the European Union and the Council of Europe are signatories, guarantees that the child has:

- The right to be free from discrimination (Art. 2);
- Protection of the best interest of the child (Art. 3);
- The right to have direct and frequent contact with parents from whom the child is separated (Art. 9), including the right to be provided with information about the whereabouts of the absent member(s) of the family unless the provision of the information would be detrimental to the well-being of the child (Art. 9.4);
- The right of the child to express his or her views and to be heard in matters affecting their situation (Art. 12);
- The child’s right to protection of their family life and their privacy (Art. 16);
- The right of the child to protection from any physical or psychological harm or violence (Art. 19) (ibid, p. 6).

In the USA “one in ten of the nation’s children, have a parent under criminal justice supervision – in jail or prison, on probation, or on parole” (San Francisco Children of Incarcerated Parents Partnership, 2003). The San Francisco Children of Incarcerated Parents Partnership drew up a bill of rights for children which echo many of the UN Rights of children outlined above and include:

- 1 I have the right to be kept safe and informed at the time of my parent’s arrest;
- 2 I have the right to be heard when decisions are made about me;
- 3 I have the right to be considered when decisions are made about my parent;
- 4 I have the right to be well cared for in my parent’s absence;
- 5 I have the right to speak with, see and touch my parent;
- 6 I have the right to support as I struggle with my parent’s incarceration;
- 7 I have the right not to be judged, blamed or labeled because of my parent’s incarceration;
- 8 I have the right to a lifelong relationship with my parent.

(ibid, p.1)



These 'rights' offer a very good lens through which to investigate both the nature and quality of services for children along with the current experiences of children of prisoners in Ireland.

The IPS Families and Imprisonment Working Group report to the Director General highlighted the internationally recognised importance of "the rights of children to have quality access to their imprisoned parents" advocating, "in so far as security considerations permit", that children have access to their imprisoned parents to allow them to both maintain and develop relationships (2014, p.4).

The IPRT, University College Cork (UCC) and the Children's Rights Alliance⁹ ran a seminar entitled *Advancing the Rights and Needs of Children with a Parent in Prison* on Sept 6th 2017, in order to support children with a parent in prison through raising awareness of the need to develop a national advocacy strategy. A set of key principles of action for children with a parent in prison were presented at the conference which are expected to form the basis of the national strategy and include building a solid knowledge base through gathering data on the current situation of children of prisoners, mapping current support services and increasing the current knowledge base. Additionally, the current principles seek to hear the voices of children with a parent in prison through developing effective mechanisms so that children's voices inform policy, service provision and individual experiences. The principles advocate for the recognition of the holistic needs of children with a parent in prison as part of National Policy, manifested through state commitment, review of current policy and services to ensure the needs of these children are recognised and included and the establishment of an inter-departmental working group to ensure collaboration. Finally, the principles advocate for the establishment of multi-agency partnerships at local and national levels, the development of monitoring frameworks and of raising awareness of the issues of supporting these children.

The Child and Family Agency's¹⁰ *50 Key Messages to Accompany Investing in Families* recognised that the relationship that a child has with their parent can have a "significant impact on their well-being and future potential" (2013a, p.1). Evans raised concerns around the negative outcomes for children of parents in prison and highlighted their invisibility as "they are hidden, because no one counts them, and stigmatised, because their families often feel ashamed to ask for help" (2015, p.4). According to Collins et al., children may suffer short and long-term effects including "a range of emotions such as fear, guilt, confusion or shame ... stigma and fear of stigma from being associated with having a close family member in prison can create anxiety and stress" and consequently they advise that children's needs must be addressed in order to reduce these negative impacts (ND, p.3). Additionally, Collins et al. highlight that children may well experience or even fear bullying or exclusion because of parental imprisonment. They contend that children of prisoners may worry about who will take care of them while their parent is in prison, about the wellbeing of their parents in prison and about moving house, along with sharing their situation with their friends and their future prospects (ND, p.3). Geller highlights the disproportionate economic and accommodation instability suffered by children of prisoners (2009, p.1186). Martyn, in her report *Picking up the Pieces: The Rights and Needs of Children and Families Affected by Imprisonment*, highlighted the "collateral effects of imprisonment on families" (2012, p.8) and drawing on the research in this area reported that "children with a parent in prison are twice as likely to have mental health problems over the course of their life as their peers" (ibid, p.21).

While there is agreement in the literature that having a parent imprisoned can have significant impact on children, there is also agreement that an imprisoned parent can play an active role in parenting while incarcerated, and as such need not become a 'dormant parent' for the period of imprisonment (Muth, 2011). The Child and Family Agency acknowledge that "a child's relationship with their parent has a significant impact on their well-being and future potential" (2013a, p.1). Consequently, the relationship between imprisoned parents and their children deserves significant attention in order to support the child's well-being and reduce the chances of intergenerational offending. Also, this relationship deserves to be supported for the prisoner him/herself in order to build their capacity and skills as active parents. Drawing on a number of studies Jones et al. acknowledge that children can react in a variety of ways to parental imprisonment and may encounter grief, loss, sadness, confusion and anger. They may be distressed and disturbed and suffer depression, becoming withdrawn or indeed secretive. Their behaviour along with their eating and sleep patterns may also be negatively impacted. Indeed, they conclude that the children may display symptoms of post traumatic stress (2013, p.140). Jones et al. caution

⁹ "The Children's Rights Alliance unites over 100 members working together to make Ireland one of the best places in the world to be a child. We change the lives of all children in Ireland by making sure that their rights are respected and protected in our laws, policies and services" (<https://www.childrensrights.ie/>).

¹⁰ Tusla is "The Child and Family Agency was established on the 1st January 2014 and is now the dedicated State agency responsible for improving wellbeing and outcomes for children. It represents the most comprehensive reform of child protection, early intervention and family support services ever undertaken in Ireland" (<http://www.tusla.ie/>).

against the oversimplification of linking poor child outcomes to parental imprisonment, stating that imprisonment emerges within pre-existing conditions such as family instability, mental illness and high levels of neighbourhood violence (ibid, p.140).





Families of prisoners

Imprisonment is a family experience Loucks (2004, p.4)

Cullen highlights the impact of incarceration of parents on children and families including: damage to parental and family relationships; potential emotional harm or relationship breakdown; loss of family income; impact on the standard of living of the child, and on the child's access to education, healthcare and other services (2015, p.2). Martyn outlines the "detrimental consequences [of parental imprisonment] for the family", and drawing on Irish and international research concludes that the families of prisoners "serve a sentence as bad or worse" than that of the prisoner (2012, p.10). She captures the lived experiences of families coping with imprisonment, who are often described as the "hidden victims of the penal system because they must endure their own sentence, despite not having perpetrated any crime" (ibid, p.2). According to Breen, imprisonment can have a negative and demoralising impact both on individuals and their families including financial, social and emotional costs for all (2008, p.19). Fundamentally, the literature recognises the detrimental impact on families with Loucks capturing this well stating "Families are punished through incarceration even though they are not the ones who have been accused or sentenced" (2004, p.8). She believes that many prisoners' families remain hidden within larger populations of marginalised groups such as single mothers, they may not wish to be identified due to stigma associated with imprisonment for all family members (ibid, p.2).

Drawing on research and experiences of agencies working with families of prisoners, Loucks highlights the challenges and trauma experienced by families as follows: the emotional and financial costs; the need for practical help; childcare responsibilities; challenges in maintaining contact with the prisoner due to distance and finance; stigma; financial hardship; social isolation; poor self-esteem; childcare problems; health problems; relationship difficulties; domestic violence; substance misuse; and the threat of homelessness (ibid, p.2). Geller et al. concur, stating that "a parent's incarceration is likely to lead to challenges in employment, which in turn place children at risk of having unmet needs" (2009, p.1190).

While intergenerational imprisonment is well represented in the literature it is critically important not to assume that children of prisoners will in turn engage in criminality. There is a very strong case to be made to support parents who are prisoners along with their children to break the cycle of recidivism. According to Farrington steps must be taken to reduce the transmission of intergenerational offending through reducing risk factors (2009, p.123). Wildeman and Western highlight the long term impact of imprisonment for adult men including diminished earnings, poorer health, reduction in family resources and a contributor to family breakup (2010, p.157). They note that parental imprisonment also "adds to the deficits of poor children, thus ensuring that the effects of imprisonment on inequality are transferred intergenerationally" (ibid, 157).

There is no doubt that "Imprisonment represents a difficult and challenging time for those imprisoned. It also represents a traumatic time for their families and in particular for their children" (Families and Imprisonment Working Group Irish Prison Service 2014, p.4). Many people who enter prison are parents¹¹. Collins et al. recognise the need to support parents in prison, as they may be feeling frustrated with the limited opportunities for contact, they may feel inadequate as a parent, and they may lack the knowledge or ability to make the most of the opportunities they have such as writing, phone calls or letters (ND, p.3).

The Irish Prison Service recognises the importance of building family relationships, with their Strategic Plan 2016-2018 stating that "One of the core values of the Irish Prison Service is to endeavour to help prisoners, where possible and appropriate, to maintain and develop positive relationships with their families" (2016b, p.6). They seek to do this by locating prisoners as close to home as possible, providing a visiting environment to maximise engagement between the prisoner and visitors, and sensitivity to the impact of visit denials on children. Secondly, they make their staff aware of the importance of treating visitors with dignity and respect (ibid, 6).

¹¹ There are currently no statistics on the number of prisoners who are parents or the number of children in families affected by imprisonment. According to Martynowicz "it is estimated that every day, some 800,000 children across the European Union live separated lives from parents due to the latter's imprisonment. This is likely to be a conservative estimate the true number of children so affected is unknown as data is not systematically collected (or, where it is collected by prison authorities, it is not systematically analysed)" (2011, p. 6).

Models of Family Support

Introduction

Our literature search revealed a variety of models for supporting prisoners and their families including a suite of programmes in Northern Ireland prisons 'Parenting Matters Project'¹², 'Tús Nua'¹³ in Mountjoy prison (Dublin) and the 'Invisible Walls Rehabilitation Programme' (UK)¹⁴, the 'Community Return Programme' (Irish Probation Service)¹⁵ and the 'HH Mural Project' (USA)¹⁶.

The literature identifies positive outcomes for engagement with support programmes. For example, Evans's research on the Invisible Walls project found that engagement reduction in reoffending rates, and improved behaviour in prison, and once released there were improved outcomes in relation to employment, education, accommodation and substance misuse. Additionally, Evans found that children's school attendance along with well-being and health improved (2015, p.26).

The Families and Imprisonment Working Group report to the Director General highlighted the challenges and trauma associated with imprisonment for the prisoners and their families and recognised the key role "Visits, and family visits in particular, along with other related interventions", can play in ameliorating some of the suffering associated with imprisonment (2014, p.4). It recognised the importance of this support for families and also in reducing reoffending including intergenerational offending.

From a financial perspective, the value of investing in supporting prisoners, former prisoners and families of prisoners was captured in the Gauge Ireland Social Return on Investment (SROI) report which found that "for every €1.00 invested in Bedford Row Family Project €5.56 of Social Return on Investment was generated" (2012, p.8). Their findings also recorded significant savings to the state "from reductions in re-offending" along with significant savings in the areas of "family cohesion, social inclusion, health, education and training" (ibid, p.9).

The limitations of this research did not allow a wide-ranging comparison of different programmes and approaches to supporting families of prisoners, prisoners and former prisoners. However, in recognition that the core work of the BRFP is family support we endeavoured to excavate the factors associated with successful family support interventions which offered a framework with which to interpret the model of BRFP service delivery outlined in Section 5, Model of Service Delivery and discussed in section 8, Conclusions and Recommendations.

¹² The Barnardos Parenting Matters Project working with prisoners in the Northern Ireland Prison service since 1996 aims to help parents to cope with the practical and emotive issues of being a parent in prison.

¹³ "Tus Nua was established by Depaul as a result of research and visits to prisons in Dublin by the Guild of St. Philip Neri, and a St. Vincent de Paul conference, who recognised an acute need for programmes to assist women released from prison in their transition to independent living in the community" <https://ie.depaulcharity.org/tus-nua>

¹⁴ 'The Invisible Walls Rehabilitation Programme at HMP Parc uses all the available evidence on desistance from crime and the importance of maintaining strong family relationships to inform its intervention model of social and family visits' (Evans, 2015, p. 26)

¹⁵ "The Community Return Scheme is an incentivised scheme for the supervised release of qualifying prisoners who complete unpaid community work as a condition of their early release. It gives prisoners, whom the Irish Prison Service and Probation Service have assessed as being suitable and motivated, the opportunity of early - and renewable temporary release with resettlement support. It is available for those who have been assessed as posing no threat to the community; are serving more than one year and fewer than eight years, and who have served at least 50% of their sentence. The programme involves participants doing supervised community service instead of remaining in prison. If you are placed on Community Return the expectations on you are similar to that of Community Service; you must complete the work on the days assigned for the length of time it was agreed. This is usually near the end of your sentence". <http://www.justice.ie/EN/PB//WebPages/WP16000037>

¹⁶ This programme offered fathers and children an opportunity to collaborate on arts/literacy projects offering opportunities to build family relationships.



What is Family Support?

There is a broad literature on family support which recognises the evolution and complexity of defining this field of work. Canavan et al. recognise the “challenge of finding ways to articulate what is being offered to families, why it is being offered, and how it will contribute to meeting the needs and realising the rights of both parents and children” (2016, p.9). The current definition of family support used in the Irish context comes from Dolan et al. who define family support as:

....both a style of work and a set of activities which reinforce positive informal social networks through integrated programmes. These programmes combine statutory, voluntary and community and private services and are generally provided to families in their own homes and communities. The primary focus is on early intervention aiming to promote and protect the health, well-being and rights of all children, young people and their families, paying particular attention to those who are vulnerable or at risk.

(2006, p.16)

Based on the above definition Canavan et al. identify seven components which “need to be present in any family support policy and service design” (2016, p.21) including:

- Promotion of both rights and outcomes;
- Meshing with informal social support;
- Cross-sectoral integration;
- Early intervention;
- Breath of provision;
- Outreach to socially excluded groups;
- Reflective style of work based on family support practice principles.

(ibid, p.21)

Fundamentally, they believe that family support must encapsulate a style of practice and not just a description of a set of services (ibid, p.21).

Canavan et al. propose ten principles of family support practice as follows:

- Child-centred: Family support requires a clear focus on the wishes, feelings, safety and wellbeing of children;
- Needs-led: Family support interventions are needs-led and strive for the minimum intervention required;
- Strengths-based: Family support services reflect a strengths-based perspective that is mindful of resilience as a characteristic of many children and families’ lives;
- Socially inclusive: Services aim to promote social inclusion, addressing issues around ethnicity, disability and rural/urban communities;
- Partnership-based: Working in partnership is an integral part of family support. Partnership includes children, families, professionals and communities;
- Informal network-focused: Family support promotes the view that effective interventions are those that strengthen informal support networks;
- Easily accessed: Families are encouraged to self-refer, and multi-access referral paths will be facilitated;
- Responsive and flexible: Family support is responsive and flexible in respect of location, timing, setting and changing needs, and can incorporate both child protection and out of home care;
- Collaborative in development: Involvement of service users and providers in the planning, delivery and evaluation of family support services is promoted on an ongoing basis;

- Evidence-informed: Measures of success are routinely built into provision so as to facilitate evaluation based on attention to the outcomes for service users, and thereby to facilitate ongoing support for quality services based on best practice.

(ibid, p 21-22)

According to Devaney, “a key goal of Family Support is to intervene early where there are difficulties” for best effect in both preventing escalation of problems and strengthening the family’s capacity to support their children, build their own problem solving capacity and to promote the integration and accessibility of services (2011, p.20). The IPRT also recognise the critical importance of early intervention to address the “personal and social problems most closely linked to crime such as substance misuse and mental health” (2012, p.5).

Working in partnership with individuals, families, agencies and services is a key component in the delivery of effective family support services. This way of working challenges traditional professional/client relationships and holds that people have the capacity to be active agents in their own lives, embracing Freire’s core belief that:

Attempting to liberate the oppressed without their reflective participation in the act of liberation is to treat them as objects which must be saved from a burning building; it is to lead them into the populist pitfall and transform them into masses which can be manipulated.

(1972, p.41)

This is very much a strengths- based approach which, according to Devaney, emphasises and focuses on “the strengths of individual and family members, in marked contrast to models which have attempted to correct weaknesses or cure deficiencies” (2011, p.25). Another key characteristic of effective family support, as outlined by Devaney, is that services are offered to families based on need. Significantly, Devaney states that “this approach entails a focus on need as identified by family members, as opposed to the needs identified by practitioners, and recognises the role and strengths of the family in both identifying and meeting needs” (ibid, p.27). Central to any family support service are the workers and most especially the quality of relationships they build with individuals and families, “the relationship is where the work takes place, and where change can be attempted, and the helping alliance which is forged is critical in the change process” (ibid, p. 38).

Best practice in Family Support

The Child and Family Agency recognise the complexity of reviewing family support interventions due in the first instance to the variety of interventions in place and also to the measures used to evaluate them. It does however identify a range of factors most likely to promote positive family support outcomes including:

- Relationships between service users and providers is usually perceived as positive by participants, mainly due to the sense of trust that develops between individuals;
- While early intervention is usually best to tackle difficulties before they become too severe, those with more entrenched difficulties can still benefit from family support services;
- Most successful programmes are both strengths-based and needs-led and tailored to the individual needs of families;
- Programmes that are highly structured and manual-based need to maintain a high level of fidelity to the implementation of the programme;
- Comprehensive training for all facilitators, including volunteers, is needed to ensure levels of knowledge;
- Services for ethnic minorities appear to work best when there is a match in language and/or culture between participants and service providers;
- Programmes that are based on a theoretical model of change are most likely to show effective outcomes;
- For those with more complex problems longer term interventions appear to add to positive outcomes;
- For families with child behavioural problems up to and including Level 3 needs, parenting programmes are generally an effective intervention;



- A number of side benefits can also be accrued from centre based services, such as increasing friend networks and facilitating social support;
- Most interventions show similar levels of effectiveness for both individual and group style programmes.

(2013b, p.59)

Focusing specifically on the needs of children, the Department of Children and Youth Affairs' *Better Outcomes Brighter Futures, National Policy Framework for Children and Young People 2014-2020* policy document also offers a useful framework with which to review services to support children of parents who are /were prisoners. It identifies five outcomes for children including the aspirations that children are active and healthy; that children are achieving in all areas of learning and development; that children are safe and protected from harm; that children have economic security and opportunity and that children are connected, respected and contributing (2014, pp.5-6). In order to achieve these national outcomes the Department of Children and Youth Affairs identify six transformational goals to strengthen the support systems around the children and young people. The transformational goals include supporting the parents; early intervention and prevention; listening to and involving children and young people; ensuring quality services; strengthening transitions and cross-Government and inter-agency collaboration and coordination (ibid, p.7).

In 2011, Humphreys et al. undertook a comparative study entitled *How Are Our Kids? Experiences and Needs of Children in Limerick City with a Particular Emphasis on Limerick's Regeneration Areas*. The findings were stark in terms of children's outcomes. As part of the study service providers reflected on the quality of current provision for families in need of support and identified key components of high quality services including: the effective use of resources; the extent to which services are needs-led and responsive to needs, and the extent to which they are both socially inclusive and inclusive of the voices of children and their families (2011, p.220). Service providers also highlighted the value of integrated services, the rationale for which included:

- Better outcomes for young people and their families;
- Building connections between services helps to meet the needs of young people at different levels of the Hardiker scale¹⁷;
- There is reduced time lag in referrals;
- Integrated practice supports needs-led responses where instead 'of the service defining the child, the child would define the service';
- Integrative practice was deemed 'worthwhile', as it means you have a network of contacts to approach when you need to and it reduces red tape;
- Increased service uptake;
- Increased service effectiveness and hence better use of public money;
- Facilitates positive role modelling for young people when they see service providers from across the city working collaboratively.

(ibid, p. 235 -236)

Categories of Family Support

Devaney identifies a number of different types of family support ranging from formal, semi-formal or informal (2011, p.28). The importance of informal supports is highly recognised across the literature and includes unpaid support from "family, friends and neighbours, and provides the most desired type of support at times of difficulty or crisis" (ibid, p.28). Devaney, drawing on Ghate et al. (2002), describes semi-formal supports as "organised supports received from community or neighbourhood based services, which are normally voluntary and do not have paid staff" (ibid, p.29). Additionally semi-formal supports are complementary to the informal supports a

¹⁷ The Hardiker scale, devised by Pauline Hardiker conceptualises needs at four levels, with level 1 applicable at universal level (universal preventative and social development services) through to level 4, the highest level of intervention serving the needs of a distinct population (Intensive and long-term support and protection for children and families).

family may be receiving (ibid, p. 29). Formal supports for families come from state organisations and organisations receiving support from statutory sources. Key components of effective family support involves actively building and strengthening family and individual support networks, providing support and resources “in flexible, responsive and individualised manner to meet the changing needs of families” (ibid, p. 29).

Supporting prisoners who are parents and their children

The IPS, in their 2016 Annual report, recognise the need to treat prisoners and their families with respect and dignity and claim that “one of the core values of the Irish Prison Service is to endeavour to help prisoners, where possible and appropriate, to maintain and develop positive relationships with their families” (2016a, p.15). The IPS aim to achieve this by locating prisoners as close to their homes as possible, thus facilitating visits from family and friends, by being sensitive to the needs of children when considering the denial of visits and ensuring the IPS staff are aware of the need to respect visitors (ibid, p. 15).

The literature acknowledged the importance of supporting all prisoners, nurturing positive family relationships with a particular emphasis on supporting children of prisoners and addressing recidivism. Muth, drawing on the HH Mural Project research offers a set of principles related “to ways art/literacy-based programmes support families divided by prison” (2011, p.258). These principles “challenge decontextualised approaches to correctional literacy and parenting programmes that presume prisoners cannot be present meaningfully in the lives of their children” (ibid, p.258). He defines the principles as follows: the cultivation of safe projects to help incarcerated fathers and children (re) connect; the positioning of incarcerated fathers as capable and self-directed; placing trust in non-linear processes; recognising the indirect ways art/literacy projects can support identity growth; imagining new ways for prisoners and families to ‘do time’ and establishing “more vibrant ways to describe art/literacy programme outcomes that include literate thinking (ibid, 258-260).

The literature highlighted the need to approach supporting parenting skills for prisoners in a respectful manner, for example, with reference to the Parenting Matters Programme, it was evident according to Collins et al. from early stages that “women were not ready to participate in parenting work and instead a personal development programme ‘Making the Most of Yourself’, was created” to help women look at their own needs (ND, p.5). Indeed Collins et al. contend that providing parents in prison with opportunities to positively contribute to their children’s lives may in fact help to break the potential cycle of inter-generational crime and may motivate the prisoner not to reoffend (ibid, p.6). In an interview conducted by Lynn with Piera Barzano, prison expert for the United Nations Office for Drugs and Crime, Justice Section, Barzano contended that “not enough is being done to make sure that a parent in prison is still regarded as a parent. It is the duty of the state to ensure this role as a parent is preserved” (2013, p.6).

Evans’ research, *Locked Out, Children’s Experiences of Visiting a Parent in Prison*, carried out in Northern Ireland, offers a set of recommendations aimed at promoting family bonding and children’s well-being by making visiting a parent in prison as positive an experience as possible:

- All prisons should view visits as a family intervention, under the remit of reducing reoffending, rather than a security risk;
- Searches of children and babies should be made more child-friendly and proportionate to the security risks posed;
- Children’s visits to male prisoners should be separate to the Incentives and Earned Privileges scheme as they are for women’s prisons;
- The National Offender Management Service should simplify the form and process for applying to the Assisted Prison Visits Scheme;
- Play facilities and visitor services within prisons should reach a consistent national standard, and the National Offender Management Service should issue guidelines for governors, informed by advice from Ofsted;
- Children should be permitted to bring homework and school reading books into and out of prisons.

(2015, pp.4-6)

Reintegration / transition back into society

From the first day of a prisoner's sentence, he or she should be working with the prison service in preparation for release. Integrated Sentence Management (ISM)¹⁸ should be adequately resourced, with designated prison officers who cannot be delegated to security detail.

(IPRT 2017b, p. 6)

A fundamental concern of any criminal justice system must be the reintegration of former prisoners back into their families and society. If reintegration is to be addressed adequately it must not only support the individual along with his/her family, but it must also recognise the challenges faced by the former prisoner including housing, substance abuse etc., and put supports in place to address same.

The IPS in its Strategic Plan 2016-2018 recognises both the need to resettle prisoners into the community and the imperative of working in partnership with a range of services in order to achieve this (2016b, p.12). Indeed, the IPRT recognises the potential intergenerational impact of successful transitions and stresses the importance of reintegration of former prisoners as “an important step in breaking the cycle between crime, poverty, homelessness and imprisonment” (2012, p.18). The IPRT, noting that over half of women prisoners reoffend (2013, p.3) highlight the challenges faced by women transitioning out of prison including “housing, accommodation and stability” (ibid, p.3). Muth and Walker, drawing on extensive literature highlight the challenges facing former prisoners in making the transition from their prisoner identity founded on “emotional stoicism” which may have been essential for survival within the prison system, but very much “maladaptive for establishing family intimacy” (2013, p.294).

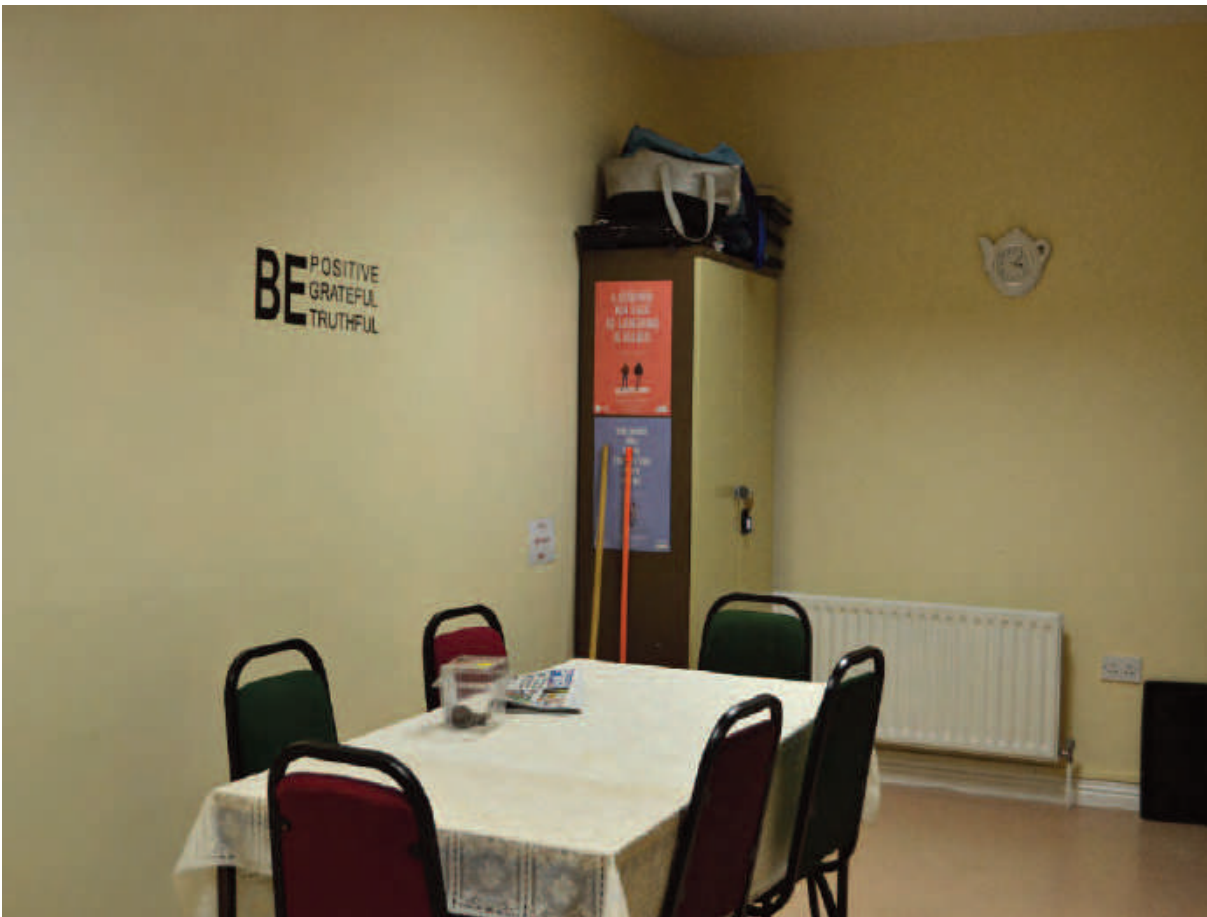
The challenges associated with transitioning out of prison and reintegrating into family and society were highlighted in Kelleher Associates BRFP *Voices of Families* research. This study catalogued the impact of imprisonment documenting the impact on family relationships both at committal and release. It highlighted the changing nature of family dynamics and responsibilities brought about through imprisonment including the need to re-negotiate relationships on prisoner release (2007, p.35) and the need to support fathers to relate to their children as their children will have grown and changed since their imprisonment (ibid, p. 36).

¹⁸ “The Integrated Sentence Management (ISM) system was developed to ensure co-ordination of interactions with prisoners based on agreed sentence plans. As part of ISM, prisoners take a greater personal responsibility for their own development through active engagement with services in the prisons. ISM involves initial assessment, goal setting and periodic review to measure progress. Under ISM, a newly committed prisoner with a sentence of one year or greater is assessed by an ISM Co-ordinator. A personal plan for the prisoner to complete during his/her time in prison is then drawn up. The plan is reviewed regularly between the ISM Co-ordinator and the prisoner, with written reports feeding in from the relevant services and agencies. Approximately one year prior to release, the ISM Co-ordinator meets the prisoner to establish his/her needs on release and a plan is put in place to assist his/her re-integration into the community”. <https://www.irish-prisons.ie/index.php/prisoner-services/integrated-sentence-management/>

Conclusion

This section offered an overview of the literature pertaining to the implications of imprisonment for prisoners, former prisoners and their families. Additionally, it explored policy and models of family support drawing on national and international practice.

Fundamentally, we found that the phenomenon of imprisonment is complex. It does not operate in a vacuum. An investigation of imprisonment and its impacts must be contextualised within an understanding of how society along with our criminal justice system operates. It must also take account of the rights, needs and experiences of prisoners, former prisoners their children and families. There is a lot to be learned from how Ireland has addressed these issues to date and national and international models and best practice.



section four
Methodology

4





Research aim

This research aimed to evaluate the impact of the Bedford Row Family Project (BRFP) on the families of prisoners and on former prisoners and in so doing identify and outline the model of support provided by the BRFP. By listening to the opinions and learning from the experiences of children, families and key stakeholders (BRFP staff, BRFP volunteers, members of the BRFP Board of Management and the IPS) this research sought to inform future developments within the BRFP. With reference to current literature, this report discusses the BRFP model of service delivery along with the impact of the service with reference to best practice on working with families of prisoners and former prisoners. The findings will be shared with other services that work with similar populations, and with policy makers and other key stakeholder organisations to ensure the voices and experiences of families of prisoners and former prisoners are heard, and the learning from this research is disseminated.

Research approach and methodology

This research adopted an ethnographic case study approach (Quinn Patton 2002; Silverman 2005; Stake 1995; Yin 2003) that is perhaps best described as “ethno-case study” (Parker-Jenkins 2016). Ethnography and case study approaches often overlap and share data collection techniques yet are demarcated by time spent in the field. Parker-Jenkins (2016, p. 6) advocates for a hybrid term which captures both ethnography and case study, “ethno-case study”. She proposes that this term

...might better convey the sense of an inquiry concerning people, which employs techniques associated with long-term and intensive ethnography, but which is limited in terms of scope and time spent in the field (2016, p. 7).

Our research was also informed by narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly 2000; Clandinin 2007) which seek to understand lived experience. The principles of narrative inquiry provided an appropriate framework to engage in this work as it attends to the nature of the relationship between the researcher and the participants, prioritising engagement through respectful, ethical relationships, and valuing the lived experiences of participants.

We regularly visited in the BRFP project in Lower Bedford Row, Limerick city in order to gain an understanding of the ethos, culture and day to day running of this initiative and to build trust with staff and service users. We also attended important events for the service users and staff including:

- Men’s Group Art Exhibition (September 2015, Central Buildings O’Connell Street, Limerick);
- Christmas Mass (December 2015, BRFP);
- Chrism Mass (Easter 2016, St. John’s Cathedral, Limerick);
- Workshop on Mental Health (June 2016, BRFP);
- Christmas Mass (December 2016, BRFP).

An Advisory Committee comprised of BRFP staff members, BRFP Board of Management representatives, MIC staff and the MIC researchers, was also established and met regularly throughout the research process. In addition, with permission from the IPS, we each made two visits to the Hospitality Centre in Limerick Prison (January & February 2016) to gain contextual understanding of the work that is carried out at this location by the BRFP staff and volunteers and the services provided by the BRFP people visiting a person in prison. We also participated in a tour of Limerick Prison in March 2016 and visited the Visitor Centre in the Midlands Prison, Portlaoise (February 8th 2017). Research participants recommended that we visit this facility as it represented a model of good practice. The visit was kindly arranged by the BRFP Project Leader and the researcher was made extremely welcome on the day.

We did not collect data during the Hospitality Centre visits, Limerick Prison visit, Midlands Prison visit or visits to the BRFP. Rather, the purpose was to give us an insight to the context within which we were undertaking this research and of the work of the BRFP and as such any observations made are not included in the research.



Prior to data collection, we also met with people participating in a number of the BRFP initiatives including the Children’s Club, Life Skills Groups and Men’s Group to verbally outline the research, distribute information and consent sheets and to introduce ourselves to the potential research participants. This offered the opportunity to address any queries or concerns from participants in relation to the research. One concern that was identified at this stage was in relation to audio-recording of focus groups and at the request of participants hand written notes were taken during one focus group.

A variety of methodologies were employed in this research including documentation review, focus groups, individual interviews and researcher field notes and reflective journals. Focus groups took place in the BRFP and the Learning Hub¹⁹, Kileely, Limerick. Individual interviews took place in the BRFP as well as Limerick Prison (with prison staff). Interviews were audio recorded (with permission) and hand written.

Research questions

The research questions explored five key areas including:

- The nature of involvement of participants with the BRFP;
- The impact of engagement with the BRFP on the lives of adult participants;
- The impact of engagement with the BRFP on the lives of children;
- Identification of aspects of the BRFP which enabled positive outcomes;
- Identification of aspects of the BRFP which could be improved.

Data collection

The following tables provide an overview of the number of interviews and focus groups as well as the length of the audio files. Fifty four people took part in the research across seven focus groups and twenty three interviews.

Table 3.1 – Interviews, focus groups and number of participants

Interviews & Focus Groups	Number of participants	Duration of interview
Individual Client Interviews x 7	7 (all female)	4.47.00
Men’s Group Interviews x 7	7	2.15.04
Life Skills Focus Groups x 4	10	1.57.54 + 1 x hand written notes ²⁰
Child Focus Groups x 3	9	1.09.23
Volunteer Focus Groups x 2	11	1.53.46
Staff Interviews ²¹ x 7	8	6.58.06
Board of Management representative x 1	1	31.34
Irish Prison Service representative x 1	1	1.18.52
23 Interviews 9 Focus Groups	54 participants	20.51.39 hours 1 x hand written interview

¹⁹ The Learning Hub works in partnership with parents, education providers, statutory agencies and the wider Limerick community to provide a safe, welcoming and inspiring learning environment where young people can reach their true potential. For further information, please see <http://www.learninghub.ie/>.

²⁰ Hand written notes were taken for one focus group at the participant’s request.

²¹ The BRFP staff interviewed have worked for many years with the project and were consequently in a position to draw on multiple years of experience rather than solely on their experiences of service users at the time of the research.

Both researchers kept research diaries which logged their engagement with the BRFP including site visits, attendance at the BRFP events and data collection dates. They also recorded field notes to aid with analysis. As qualitative research by its nature has an emotional dimension (Harris and Huntington 2000; hooks 2009; Wincup 2001) we also attended supervision and kept reflective journals for the duration of the research.

Table 3.2 details the member check focus groups that were conducted with research participants in June and July 2017. A total of twenty nine people took part in these focus groups to validate the draft findings. Verbal feedback sessions were held with children, Men’s Group members, Life Skills Groups members, members of the BRFP staff and volunteers in June and July 2017. The aim was to share the main findings of the research from each group’s perspective, as well as to discuss the suggestions for improvement made by each group respectively. Members of the Board of Management and Irish Prison Service (IPS) staff that participated in the research were provided with a draft of the research report in September 2017, as were the Advisory Committee, and asked to complete feedback templates or to contact the authors directly via phone or email if they wished.

Table 3.2 – Member check focus groups and number of participants

Member Check Focus Groups	Number of participants	Duration of interview
Men’s Group Focus Group x 1	4	00.31.47
Life Skills Groups Focus Group x 1	10	1.02.55
Children’s Groups Focus Group x 1	5	00.23.08
Staff Focus Group x 1	10	01.28.09
Volunteers	3	00.58.09
4 Member Check Focus Groups	29 participants	4.24.08

Data Analysis

The audio files of the interviews and focus groups were coded and analysed thematically using QSR NVivo 11 software. We co-developed the coding framework once all the data were gathered. This augmented definitional clarity and served as a reliability check (Miles et al. 2014, p. 84). We also met regularly during the data analysis period to ensure “conceptual and structural unity” (ibid p. 82) of coding across the focus groups and interviews.

The data was analysed in two cycles as per Miles et al. (2014). First cycle coding involved assigning codes to segments of audio data, which were also transcribed. These codes were developed deductively based on the research questions and key variables identified in the literature and inductively, with codes emerging during the data collection and analysis (Miles et al. 2014, p. 81).

The second cycle of coding involved pattern coding, which grouped together first cycle codes into emerging themes, causes/explanations, relationships among people and theoretical constructs (ibid pp. 86-87). A process of respondent validation, or member checks, were conducted with all groups of participants at this point to validate these draft findings which were subsequently considered in relation to the literature and research questions and circulated in a draft report to the Advisory Committee for feedback. The recommendations and conclusions made in the report are substantive i.e., based on the accounts presented in the findings that are grounded in the data emerging from a systematic and iterative process of analysis and interpretation

The credibility of the research findings, conclusions and recommendations was established through multiple accounts of the BRFP service delivery. The member check process as outlined above ensured that the analysis and interpretation of participants accounts were accurately represented in the report (Bryman 2008; Miles et al. 2014).



Ethical Considerations

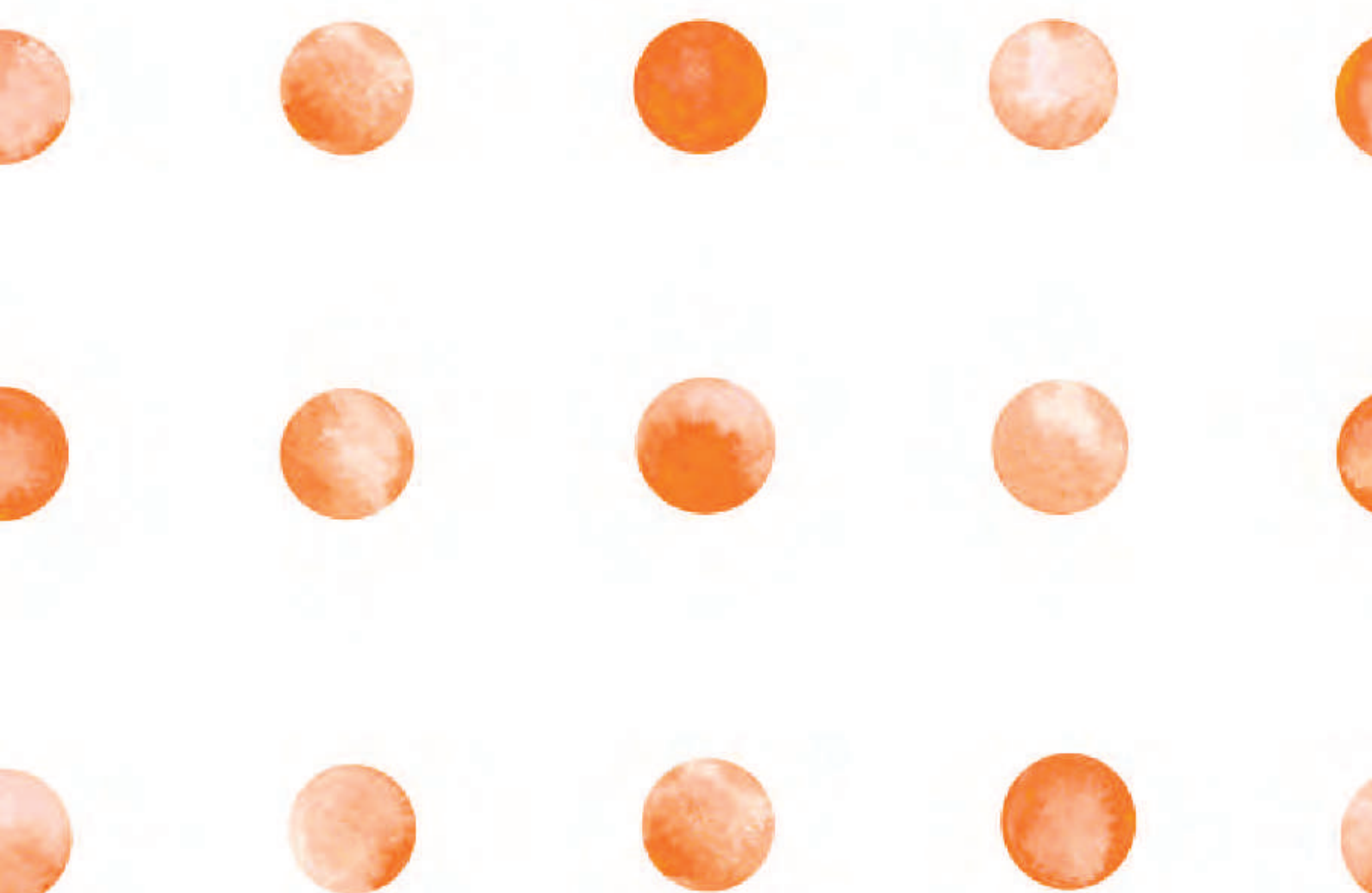
This research was conducted in accordance with the Mary Immaculate College Research Ethics Committee (MIREC) Guidelines. The main ethical issues addressed were: the need to protect all participants, including researchers, from harm; maintaining participant's privacy and confidentiality and seeking informed consent from research participants. The following steps were taken to minimise these risks:

- Field researchers have Garda clearance;
- Field researchers availed of professional supervision;
- Field researchers adhered to the BRFP Child Protection Policies;
- Participation was voluntary;
- Participants were given adequate information about the research project prior to data collection;
- A child information leaflet and consent form was designed specifically for children and both parents and children were asked for consent to participate in the study and permission to audio record interviews/focus groups;
- Where a participant indicated that they did not wish for the interview to be audio recorded, hand written notes were taken with their permission;
- Participants were offered support post interviews via the BRFP should they wish to avail of same;
- All data was treated confidentially;
- All recorded and written data was securely stored;
- All transcriptions /notes etc. will be destroyed after 5 years.

Confidentiality and anonymity of the participants was maintained by use of participant codes for data analysis and quotes used in the written report are attributed to the groups of participants e.g., children, individual service users, Men's Group, Life Skills Groups, staff, volunteers etc., rather than using alias names.

The nature and context of this research (section 2 – Context) was particularly sensitive as the individuals and families who attend the BRFP can suffer from stigma, isolation and emotional pain associated with imprisonment or may not wish others in their family or community to know that they are availing of their services. In addition, we were aware that some service users may have been experiencing complex and/or traumatic personal or family circumstances which can mean that they may be quite vulnerable. We were keenly aware of these considerations throughout the research process and great care was taken to undertake this research in a sensitive, respectful and responsive manner. Sensitive research often involves the development of personal relationships (Dickinson-Swift et al 2008, p.4) and as indicated under the research approach, we spent significant time in the BRFP to develop relationships with staff as well as to become familiar faces to service users.

We did not ask participants why they availed of the services of the BRFP or why they worked or volunteered with the BRFP. However, many of the adults shared some of their stories or experiences during the interviews. With the vulnerability of some service users and the recognition of the possible effects of interviews on people, interviewees were offered support post interviews via the BRFP should they wish to avail of same.



section five

Bedford Row Family Project Model of Delivery



Introduction

The section below describes the BRFP ethos and culture of the BRFP organisation, and subsequently outlines the model of service delivery which emerged through the research process.

Underlying Ethos and Culture of the Bedford Row Family Project

The ethos and culture underpinning the work of the BRFP emerged through conversations with research participants. The core components included investment in building high quality relationships, non-judgemental attitudes, and a transformative philosophy.

People who use the services along with staff prioritised the quality of relationships as the foundation stone of the services, with one staff member summing it up by saying, *'It's in relationships we heal'*. The desire to *'connect with people'* (BRFP staff interview), form *'appropriate professional friendships'* (BRFP staff interview), honour each person's humanity and imbue hope was evident throughout the research process. One staff member commented after reflecting on his/her work with families *'It is a privilege to be with people, in that, when people trust you enough to kind of share their story with you, there is something very sacred in that'*. One of the Men's Group interview participants captured this very well when he remarked that the staff of the BRFP *'are not ignorant or anything, d'you know, there's no barking, d'you know, they're polite kind of people you know'*.

It was evident from the research that the BRFP staff sought to model positive respectful relationships among themselves and to extend this to people who used the service and in their working relationships with other organisations. The development of respectful, trusting relationships were manifested through kindness, gentleness and acceptance. Adults and children using the services experienced supportive, empathetic, caring relationships which they valued greatly. For example, a member of the Men's Group spoke of his relationship with the *'teacher'*, *'he/she is sound. That's important as you well know, he/she is like one of us, which is cool. Today you are coming down to see the lads but you are also coming down to see [the teacher]. The staff are A1 you know. They're not above us, they're on even par with us. They're human beings like us'*.

An individual service user felt that:

The people in here are just unbelievable. You know like, they can't do enough for people like you know. They just, they're nice, they make you feel welcome, they don't judge anybody. They make you feel safe. They try put you down the right road. They tell you how it is. They're good with their support. Em, you can trust them like and that's a big thing if you go in somewhere like, you want to know that the trust is there with the people (Individual service user interview).

Members of the BRFP staff also spoke of their deliberate efforts to build relationships with the adults and also with the children and their parents/carers, for example, rather than just dropping the child at the garden gate after the Children's Club they accompany the child to their front door so that they can say hello to the parents. The BRFP staff believed that relationships *'were the defining'* thing about the BRFP service stating that *'there are real relationships'* between staff and people who use the service.

Children described a relationship of mutual respect between themselves and BRFP staff founded on children's trust in the adults and their understanding that the adults would not lie to them, that *'they care about them'*, *'are fair'* and that they *'won't leave them'* or *'let anything happen to them'*. They described the staff as kind and generous people who made them feel happy. They highlighted the strong caring relationships between themselves and the staff. They were very clear that the staff gave them their full attention for example, one child said that *'Like if we were at the park like they'd be people, like if we want to be pushed on a swing or something, they'd come over. They wouldn't ignore us and go and they do the same thing for the other person cause they need to spend time with them all, with us all'*.

The BRFP staff embrace non-judgemental attitudes when working with the individuals and families who come for support and advice. One BRFP staff member captured this ethos very well when he/she said *'when you can be accepted and not judged, challenged you know, believed in, and believe that change is possible'*. A member of the Men's



Group summarised this non-judgemental attitude stating *'There's no angle, there's no catch. No one started questioning me [when I came to the BRFP]. No one looked down on you like'*. Similarly, women in the Life Skills Groups indicated that they were made to feel welcome by the BRFP staff whose non-judgemental approach puts people at ease and allows them to *'just be yourself'*. This sense of acceptance by BRFP of who people are and where they are at in their lives gives people the freedom to come and go as they need to. One woman commented that *'There's a great acceptance of you, of where you're at really, you know. They don't want you to be somebody else, they want you to be yourself you know and you have as much to offer as everybody being yourself'* (Life Skills Groups focus group interview).

People who attend the services bring with them a vast array of life experiences and these life experiences are honoured, not judged by the staff working in the BRFP. One of the key foundations stones of the BRFP is respect: respect for the people who come to avail of the services and respect for the needs of people *'where they are at in their lives'* (BRFP staff interview). In relation to children, the BRFP staff showed very strong empathy for *'the core of who they [children] are'*, namely caring compassionate loving children who deserve the opportunities to flourish.

The BRFP embraces a transformative philosophy. It operates from the belief that it is possible for all people to manage our lives, and that fundamentally change is possible. This ethos was captured by one BRFP staff member who summarised the BRFP's aims as follows: *'It aims to 'develop customers with attitude', people who have 'belief in themselves' building peoples' capacity to 'navigate and negotiate their way through life'*. The approach adopted by the BRFP staff is supportive and empathetic. Staff understand that peoples' individual lives can be in turmoil, they can *'be alienated from their own self-worth ... and get stuck at certain places in their lives'* (BRFP staff interview), family lives can be in chaos, people in prison can be consumed by guilt, fear and anxiety, and as one staff member noted: *' People have a great capacity within themselves but sometimes they might lose sight of that because of things that happen ... or feel a failure if they go back to prison ... so I think believing in them [is core to our work]'*. This philosophy, which imbues hope, was very evident from across the interviews. The experiences of individual service users illustrated this philosophy with one person commenting that *'I thought I was in a trap, that I was never going to get out of. D'you know like. I thought I'd never be able to get away from all my addictions. Other steps as well like, with my family, believing in who I am as a person. I wouldn't, even though I've friends and things, I don't, I still need these people [BRFP] to tell me you know like ... I'm after climbing a mountain and going over the mountain, you know like'*.

One staff member summarised his/her aspirations for the people who come to use the services of the BRFP as follows: *'What I'm looking for from people ... it's about accepting themselves, believing in themselves, and relationships, helping people along with their relationships'*.

According to members of the Men's Group the BRFP *'gives us the confidence to help each other'* (Men's Group interview) and similarly, Life Skills Group members relayed how they share their experiences in order to support one another:

We share, if one person is upset, we're all genuinely upset. We all feel for each other and help each other, it's brilliant (Life Skills Group focus group interview).

The *'confidence to help each other'* is another manifestation of the BRFP's ethos and philosophy of the capacity of each human being to heal and to support themselves and others.

The children we interviewed had a very strong sense of the ethos of the BRFP. In addition to feeling cared for and nurtured by the staff, children also spoke about how they felt welcome at the Children's Club. One child noted that you did not have *'to be good at particular activities'* to participate in the club and another described the club *'like family'* because of the bond that they develop with the staff.

Model of service delivery

The section below describes individual components of the model of service delivery which emerged throughout the research process.

Organic evolution of services

The research revealed that the model of delivery (outlined below) emerged organically as a response to identified needs. The BRFP began in 1999 and at that time offered a small number of services from a prefabricated building at the gates of Limerick Prison. Over the past eighteen years, the model evolved to provide a multi-site suite of integrated services. Each of the services sprung from identified needs, responsive leadership and reflexive practice and collaboration with strategic allied partner organisations. See Appendix 1 for a list of organisations that the BRFP work with.

Another example of the organic development of services relates to services offered to children. Initially, services to children consisted of individual support to children, it then evolved to offer children opportunities to engage with 'a Club', now operating on a weekly basis and providing a wide variety of activities and finally, a model of parent child support – offering the child a six week play therapy option and the parent a simultaneous counselling option.



Multi-site delivery

The BRFP delivers its services in several locations. Firstly, in the BRFP building in Limerick city centre. This three story building has a number of facilities including a kitchen, large meeting room, a general purpose room, large garage area, small meeting rooms and office space. Secondly, BRFP delivers its services in the Hospitality Centre at the gateway into Limerick Prison. This building comprises one prefabricated building, faced in stone. The facilities include one rectangular room with fixed parallel seating, a small tea making area and toilets. The building houses a small office area for the Prison Officers who process visitors as they come and go to the prison. The BRFP also deliver services within Limerick Prison to both male and female prisoners. Additionally, BRFP staff provide outreach supports to families during court appearances, visits to agencies, medical appointments and they also visit family homes, and deliver services to children in the Learning Hub in Thomondgate. One staff member captured the aspiration of the service to be accessible to people very well when he/she noted '*you might just be dropping out to someone's house, who is not ready to come in here*', thus sharing his/her understanding of the complex personal and familial journeys in reaching for support. It was evident from the research that the journey



to accessing support differs for individuals, with some people building relationships with the BRFP staff over the phone for a prolonged period of time before directly accessing services within the centre. The BRFP also organises day and overnight trips for the people attending its services. The value of these trips was strongly acknowledged by the BRFP staff and people who use the services, as one staff member noted, *'I find the day trips, if its once a year ... [people who use the services] having space for themselves, even though they are in a group, but it is taking them away, out of here, it works wonders, even though it is one day, it's worth three months of therapy to them'* (BRFP staff interview). A member of the Men's Group focus group also commented on the trips [fishing and bowling], in relation to the fishing he said *'It was a great day out, got us sandwiches and tea and soup and everything else'*. Members of the Life Skills Groups also highlighted the importance of these trips, with one woman stating that they were important because *'We're all together and do you know we can even kind of be ourselves more and get to know each other better do you know, than just being here for the hour and a half we'll say. We can get to know each other with our own company. It's lovely and we can laugh together and things like that'*.

Suite of integrated services

The BRFP support prisoners, former prisoners and their families before, during and after the imprisonment of family members. It also supports people who have not been in prison but seek help to take more control over their lives, for example, to deal with issues of addiction or with relationships under stress.

The BRFP delivers a suite of integrated services, for example, a person might first come in contact with the BRFP through the Hospitality Centre in Limerick Prison or when they are in prison and then progress to availing of some of the other services such as the Life Skills Groups, Men's Group or individual counselling services located in the BRFP building in the city centre. BRFP staff work both inside and outside the prison which offers continuity to the people who use the services. Establishing relationships with the BRFP staff while within the prison, provides a key pathway to services once the person has left prison.

Services can be in the form of one to one counselling, group support, letter writing, advocacy, opening up access to other services, visiting in prison, or in homes. The BRFP staff indicated that much of their work with adults focuses on parenting or grand-parenting in response to individuals emerging concerns.

The variety of approaches to delivering services was seen to be successful and very much appreciated by the people who use the services as *'you can have a one to one. It's not just the group because people might be put off in front of others. Especially blokes, we're not the best at talking in front of people like'* (Men's Group interview).

Services for children

The BRFP provides individual play therapy sessions to children and also provides a Children's Club every second Tuesday (now every Tuesday) to children with a family member who is/was in the prison system. Parents/guardians of children in receipt of this support, as well as external stakeholder interviewees remarked in the interviews that this support is a very immediate response and children are not placed on lengthy waiting lists. As well as reducing the anxiety for the parent/carer, it can also be a preventative measure for children. The BRFP also provides support to children visiting prison through the provision of refreshments and activities in the Hospitality Centre. Ultimately, the BRFP aims to offer children encouragement, emotional support and opportunities for them to engage with caring adults who are *'present to the child'* (BRFP staff interview), and with other children in a fun and supportive environment. Finally, the BRFP hosts child and parent visits within its city centre building in particularly sensitive circumstances. This visiting arrangement is supported by the IPS.

Services to women and men in prison

The BRFP seeks to support women and men to manage their lives well while in prison and use their time to reflect and prepare to make a successful transition back into their families and to society, as one staff member commented *'It's great to be able to say, you know 'when you get out next month, I am going to be giving you my phone number, I will meet you at the gate if you want me to'*. While the BRFP staff understand prison to be *'an artificial*

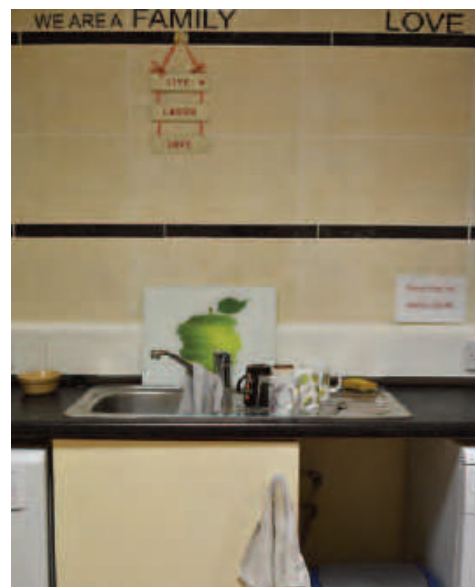
space' where 'everything is taken from them [prisoners]' they also believed that time in prison can offer people 'a respite from the chaos of their lives ... where they can begin to get their act together, and it can play a part in saving people from addiction' (BRFP staff interview).

Services to women in prison

The BRFP offers opportunities to women in prison to participate in group support sessions and art therapy sessions each week. Members of BRFP staff along with prison services, other support services for prisoners and women in prison have termly meetings as part of the Women's Voice Forum to explore women's needs in prison and to identify the supports they need to make a successful transition out of prison. Additionally, the BRFP provides women in prison with support to foster a successful transition back into society. Much of the work of the BRFP staff with women in prison is focused on supporting them in their roles as mothers. They also support women in prison to make 'good visits' with family members. In exceptional cases, this may mean collaborating with the prison staff to organise a meeting of a mother and her child/children within the BRFP facilities in the city centre. In 2017 in collaboration with the Education Unit in Limerick Prison, the BRFP delivered a more formal parenting programme in which the women in prison had an opportunity to 'feed into' the content. This programme focused on how they relate to their children, the loss experienced through imprisonment, children's loss of a parent due to imprisonment, anger within families and the effects of addiction on their lives.

Services to men in prison

The BRFP seeks to help men to manage their time well while in prison and to make a good transition out of prison into their families and society. It also supports them to make 'good visits' with their families. Men in prison are offered opportunities to engage in one to one counselling and support. Additionally, group art therapy sessions are offered to prisoners serving life sentences. The BRFP in collaboration with Limerick Prison and Childhood Development Initiative (CDI) Tallaght also offered male prisoners the opportunity to engage in an externally funded parenting programme entitled 'Family Links'²². In May 2017, in collaboration with the Education Unit in Limerick Prison, the BRFP introduced a programme for men serving life sentences focused on maintaining contact with their children and encouraging them to be responsible dads.



²² From 2014-2016, the BRFP was involved with other partners in delivery of an externally funded pilot parenting programme 'Family Links' based on the 'Parent Plus' programme. For further information, please see <http://www.twcdi.ie/what-we-offer/family-links/>



Supports to family members of prisoners

The BRFP provides a variety of supports to family members of prisoners. Family members can avail of opportunities to build skills and competencies through membership of the Life Skills Groups which offer opportunities to develop personal skills, creative expression and build relationships. Some members of Life Skills Groups also participated in the 'Family Links' programme. Family members of people in prison can also avail of individual supports. These individual supports take many forms depending on the needs of the person including attending one to one counselling, availing of the drop-in facility where a person can chat with a member of staff, phoning a member of staff for support, being accompanied by a member of staff to attend court or a medical appointment, linking with other agencies and advocacy. The BRFP provides a hospitality, support and information service in the Hospitality Centre at the entrance to Limerick Prison. Adult visitors are offered tea/coffee/biscuits, and the opportunity for a conversation and may seek information and advice both before and after visits. Children are offered a soft drink/biscuits and a colouring activity.

Supports to people who are former prisoners and people who are transitioning out of prison

The BRFP supports people transitioning out of prison through providing practical supports such as information on social welfare entitlements, housing and medical cards etc. Additionally, they support people through working with them to maintain and build family relationships. The BRFP also supports people to link with key organisations (see Appendix 1) and put in place a structure or 'package' of support for the individual to increase the likelihood of a successful transition. While acknowledging the challenges of imprisonment for both men and women, the BRFP sees time in prison as an opportunity to work on issues in preparation for going back out into society.

The BRFP also places a very strong emphasis on helping to build and maintain family relationships for men and women who are within the prison system and transitioning out of it.

Supports to people with addictions and relationship building

The BRFP has an open door policy and offers members of the public an opportunity to address their addictions through working with the BRFP staff and through referrals to other agencies. Research participants acknowledged the support of the BRFP staff in helping them with challenges in their relationships with partners or family members.

Family orientated and intergenerational

The services provided by the BRFP embrace an ecological perspective (Bronfenbrenner 1979) in that they see the person, not as an isolated individual but as a member of a family and the wider community. Consequently, the BRFP seeks to offer a comprehensive range of supports not only to the person who is/was imprisoned but also to his/her family, as one staff member observed 'We could have a grandmother, her son might come in and then her grandchildren might come in here, three generations of family we have sometimes ... different times for different things'. The approach also offers consistency for individuals and families, as an external stakeholder highlighted:

You're actually looking after all members of the family in the one place. You're dealing with the same people all the time, there's consistency. You're not just going to one place for one counselling session, you're not going to another place for something else. Everything is under the one roof and when you come here, you can avail of all the services that you require (External stakeholder interview).

Parents/carers with a family member in prison highlighted the value of the family oriented and intergenerational approach with one person commenting on the 'connection' that the approach creates between the BRFP and the family:

So I think it's fantastic because I'm doing it [individual support] through Bedford Row, and we're speaking to the same person, the kids are doing play therapy and you know and [person] then above is doing his/her art therapy. You know, so it's a family, it's all through Bedford Row and it's the one connection (Individual service user interview).

This family orientation approach recognises the importance of supporting the family unit, and in so doing recognises the impact of imprisonment not only on the person imprisoned but on his/her extended family. Through engaging and supporting family members before, during and after imprisonment, the BRFP seeks to support family relationships and to prevent recidivism by creating a connection, by 'keeping the family together' and ultimately increasing the likelihood that the person in prison will engage with BRFP services on release.

It works, it's connected. It's keeping the family together really because they are all being worked with at the one time. Then when he comes out of prison it could help him to come in faster than he would, if his wife, or his mother or his children are coming in here ... so he will probably trust us more, and then we can work with him when he comes out of prison, if there is addiction in the family or anger management (BRFP staff member interview).

The model of delivery recognises the context (see section 2) within which it delivers its suite of integrated services (see previous section) and so seeks to respond proactively, flexibly and creatively to the complex and changing needs of the people who use its services.



Working in partnership with other organisations

This research found strong evidence that working strategically and respectfully in partnerships with other agencies was a fundamental principal of how the BRFP operated. This was apparent not only from staff interviews but also across participant interviews, as one member of the Men's Group interviewees stated '*I'm always saying to people, anyone that I see, I know what it's like to be really hitting bad. That's Bedford Row, you can call in there anytime. If you've a problem with drink, drugs or anything, if they can't help you they'll get someone who will.*'

The agencies that the BRFP work with and the approach adopted by the BRFP staff was informed by the needs of the people who used their services. For example, the BRFP work closely with the Probation and Linkage in Limerick Scheme (PALLS) and Focus Ireland to support people in transition out of prison as one staff member noted '*If they have a twelve month sentence and apply for early release they are out under PALLS. If it's over twelve months, they are out under Probation, and we try to build a package around somebody as well. So if we are working with someone and they are out after eight months we would link with [staff member] down in PALLS and say 'this is what I am offering [the person who has been released from prison], and we try to put a package around and [I link with a key person] in Focus Ireland and it has the capacity to hold people to a certain extent ... I could be doing one piece of work and working away [but] it is better to work together'* (BRFP staff interview). BRFP staff recognised the need to 'guide people' (BRFP staff interview) to specialised services such as rape crisis or substance abuse services.



There was also very strong evidence of a collaborative partnership and a high degree of trust between the IPS, Limerick Prison and the BRFP staff. This was seen as a critical relationship as the BRFP is part funded by the IPS and deliver services on site in Limerick Prison to men and women and in the Hospitality Centre inside the prison gates but outside the prison walls. Additionally, in particular circumstances, the prison staff facilitate family visits of prisoners in the BRFP.

The BRFP staff were very aware that they were delivering their services within another institution and that required them to be respectful of the rules and protocols of that organisation. They strongly acknowledged the value of being able to deliver services within the prison, and appreciated the lengths the prison staff went to in order to facilitate them to work with the men and women in prison. The BRFP staff respected the challenges faced by prison staff in undertaking their duties, and felt that the aspirations of the BRFP to support families and to reduce recidivism was strongly aligned with the aims of the prison service itself (BRFP staff focus group member check).

Accessibility

Accessibility in the broadest sense was a key component of the BRFP model, with staff acknowledging that *'it is very easy to alienate people if you don't make it easy for them to engage'*. The emphasis by the BRFP to make services accessible was clearly understood by the people who use services, aptly described by a member of the Men's Group who said the BRFP *'it helps people, it looks out for people, if you come to seek the help they'll do whatever they can'*.

While the model may be perceived as complex in that it offers a suite of services to a variety of people across a number of sites in partnership with key organisations, there is fundamentally an *'informality'*, captured very well by one staff member who remarked *'there is an informality about it [the BRFP], even though my work would be very structured, there is a kind of informality, we take people where they are at and we can structure things around that'*.

A number of key components emerged which contributed to accessibility including a welcoming approach and open door policy, multi-site integrated suite of services, needs led and person centred approach, immediacy of response, central location of the BRFP services and free service.

Welcoming approach and open-door policy

The research found that the first impressions of people who come to the BRFP are overwhelmingly positive. Participants said that when they entered the BRFP building in the city centre they were met with a smile from whoever was on reception, offered a cup of tea in the kitchen and an informal chat. This warm welcome was described as follows by a member of the Men's Group who said *'It's all arms open when you first come in. They make much of you straight away. That you know you're kind of invited in to a home effect'*. One of the Life Skills Groups participants indicated that this welcome helped her to overcome any trepidation she had about coming back to the BRFP stating *'We were welcomed in ... There was no dirty looks or anything, it was the welcome'*. The welcoming atmosphere was found to extend to others coming into the centre and an external stakeholder interviewee also commented on the welcoming atmosphere in the building stating that *'You can actually feel [the welcoming atmosphere] walking up the stairs every time. I think that's why it's successful you know. It's not about a beautiful building, it's about that warmth that you can feel when you come in here. And I think we all get that'*. Indeed, as researchers, every time we entered the building, we also felt this warm welcoming atmosphere.

This welcome and informality was highly rated by the service users who stated that BRFP operates an open door policy, as one Men's Group interview participant said *'It's just like you come along and ring the bell ... just press the bell. They don't have to know what you're here for. You can just go in and sit down and get a cup of tea or coffee or whatever ... I trust it here ... I'm not just putting this place up [praising the BRFP], I would be dead like [without the support from the BRFP]'*.

This initial contact was seen to be very important by the BRFP staff who described the process of engagement as follows: *'When you come in here, you have your first chat when you come to reception, that can be an important chat, and then the cup of tea is very important and then people with other skills can be of help, but the fact that we are busy*

[a lot of people calling in], *and no one is compelled to come here must say something about us like*' (BRFP staff interview).

This is also the case in the Hospitality Centre, where people are greeted, offered tea/coffee/biscuits without charge and the opportunity for a chat should they wish.

The multi-site integrated suite of services

The multi-site integrated suite of services developed organically in response to identified needs offer a variety of opportunities for intergenerational engagement. It was evident throughout the research that the people who come to use the services of BRFP have a wide variety of needs and the multi-site suite of integrated services on offer was integral to the positive impact it was having on people's lives. Some people need one to one support, others need to build relationships over the phone before they can come to the project and others build relationships with the BRFP staff in the Hospitality Centre and then come to the BRFP city centre building and access other services. A Men's Group interviewee summarised it very well stating *'[names member of staff] will help you with anything, know what I mean? I've talked to him now a good few times like I'm talking to you here. Off on my own I'd talk to him, and if he can help he will like and if he can't he'll put you on to someone who will'*.

The needs-led and person-centered approach

Offering *'opportunities'* rather than *'programmes'* ensures that people who avail of services not only self-select in terms of engaging (engagement with the BRFP is voluntary), but are actively involved in *'making the rules and regulations'* (BRFP staff interview). As one BRFP staff member observed, *'We are not looking for them to do a, b or c, so if they come in and want to come off drugs, or are after having a relapse, we are not going to turn them away from the door. The door is still going to be open, and a cup of tea and a chat ... here they could come two hours late even if they had an appointment they are still seen, [it's about] making time for them'*. People who use the services may sometimes attend for a while and then stay away and return again a few weeks/months later so they do not have to commit to, for example, a ten week programme. As one BRFP staff member commented *'We wouldn't say "You have to come in for ten counselling sessions for one hour each week". We prefer if they had a cup of tea here at reception or up in the Hospitality Centre and we build relationships with them, because all the research shows that it's in relationships that people heal'* (BRFP staff interview).

The BRFP also works with the people to identify the specific services they need and if they are not in a position to provide it they will refer the person/family on.

The needs-led aspect of service delivery also extended to the children who participated in the Children's Club – they listed a wide variety of activities they engaged in overtime and were very clear that they had a choice to come to club or not *'You don't have to be shy ... say if you want to come or don't'* (Child focus group interview) and choices in relation to the kinds of activities they engaged in.

A member of the Men's Group graphically outlined how he feels included, describing how decisions are made in relation to group art projects he said *'We sat down and had a discussion about what we were going to do'*.

The immediacy of response

The quick response from BRFP was found to be critical to the accessibility of services. Some of the people who use the services are living chaotic, traumatised lives, and living with high levels of uncertainty and stress (see section 2 – Context). The immediacy of response provided by the BRFP ensures that once a person has gathered the courage, or indeed been encouraged, to walk up the 9 steps to the front door, or make a phone call to initiate contact, they are met with an immediate response and, in their own time and on their own terms, can be directed towards the services provided by the BRFP or by other providers. Members of BRFP staff spoke of the importance of providing an immediate response to requests for support from people who voluntarily approached the services. The immediacy of response extends to people who are already engaging in services individually or through the groups. For example, Life Skills Groups participants highlighted how they can ring the group leader



if they are having a 'bad week' between sessions with one person explaining that support is not just available during group sessions *'It's not just here, when you go home you can ring them and have a chat with them'*. Additionally, across all the adult service user interviews and focus groups, participants highlighted how they could 'drop in' for a cup of tea or coffee and 'a chat' if they need to talk to someone which gives them an opportunity to *'leave off your load'* (Life Skills focus group participant).

Parents/carers of children attending play therapy also emphasised the importance of the immediate response with one person stating that *'The ball got rolling within a week, which was excellent'* and another reporting that *'There was no waiting period ... It was like straight away. There was no delay'*.

This is a key component of the service design model and we would argue a key reason for the success of the BRFP.



The central location of the BRFP services

The central location of services in Limerick city along with the location of the Hospitality Centre was seen to contribute to the accessibility of services. While the BRFP is located close to the city centre, it is not on the main thoroughfare and so offers people some privacy in terms of accessing the service. The BRFP is within walking distance of all bus and train services and close to parking facilities. Equally, the Hospitality Centre, located at the entrance to Limerick Prison offers easy physical access. Both the BRFP city centre building and the Hospitality Centre are wheelchair accessible.

Free service

Adult participants, BRFP staff, volunteers and the external stakeholders reported that the free service alleviated the cost barrier for many families and individuals who may have a low income. They may have to travel long distances to visit their family member in prison, where they may *'not have the price of a cup of tea'* (BRFP staff interview) and if they had to pay for services, such as counselling, they may not be in a position to avail of them.

Leadership and Staffing

This research found that the leadership model embraced by the BRFP had a number of key components.

Firstly, it was seen more as a leadership and less as a management model, in that the role involved supporting, listening and responding to emergent needs, as one staff member noted *'If something didn't work out ... I could come back and say to [the leader] the good bits and I could come back and say the struggles as well ... I wouldn't feel a bit judged, I would feel understood. I feel I could be very honest and for me that is very important'*.

The leadership was seen by the BRFP staff and people who used the service to be approachable, experienced and knowledgeable. Additionally, the leadership was seen as very hands-on and engaged in the day to day life of the project and not operating at a managerial distance. Another key component was that the leadership was believed to be open to embracing change.

This research found that the staff working within the BRFP were both professionally and personally invested in the work they were undertaking, indeed one BRFP staff member commented that *'only people who want to be here are here'*. They brought a combination of both professional skills and life experience to bear on their work. They were conscious of the need to invest in positive working relationships as one staff member summarised *'If we as a team working with the [names one of the groups] group weren't working together the energy would go into that rather than into the people in the group'*. Another member simply stated *'We work as a team'*. Team working was seen to be key to delivering the BRFP's services effectively. Aspects of working effectively as a team included, appropriate information sharing, opportunities for debriefing and an openness to change in terms of what services are delivered and how.

The staff were found to embrace the ethos described previously in that they invested in building strong nurturing relationships with the people who came to use their services. This was achieved with Children's Groups by maintaining low staff / child ratios to facilitate high quality delivery. BRFP staff efforts to develop strong nurturing relationships were strongly confirmed across all interview participant groups, with one Men's Group interviewee summarising it very well *'It's easy to talk to them, the people is a big part [of the BRFP service], they've big hearts'*. This demands flexibility, endurance, resilience and a willingness to engage with change amongst staff. As one staff member commented, *'You have to be relaxed, and you have to take things as they are, you meet people where they are at, if you can't do that, no point working here ... you never know what to expect when you come in here, no two days are the same here, never, which is good. So, you have to have a feel for this kind of work'*.

Staff clearly valued the balance of experience among staff, opportunities to work in different aspects of the service over time and also that staff comprised of both male and female members. Many described the atmosphere as family-like but staff also acknowledged that while informality is a key component for people who use the service, it is still a workplace. Staff highlighted the need for self-care as they recognised that they invested heavily in building positive relationships described as *'professional friendships'* with people who use the services



of the BRFP during some of the most traumatic times in their lives and that this exacts an energy cost for staff. There is a balance to be struck and staff must be able to step back from relationships and take care of themselves as individuals and as a team. Members of the BRFP staff acknowledged that there was both a personal and organisational responsibility around self-care. From a personal perspective staff attended to self-care by taking walks, mindfulness and not being accessible by phone 24/7. From an organisational point of view they strongly acknowledged the support they get from each other as team members and from the leadership.

Volunteers and student placement

The BRFP recruits volunteers to work in the city centre building and also in the Hospitality Centre. The volunteers in the Hospitality Centre work alongside a member of the BRFP staff providing a welcome to visitors through offering refreshments to adults and children, a colouring activity to children and an opportunity to chat to visitors. Within the city centre building volunteers support the drop-in service by making themselves available at reception to meet and chat with people who visit the centre. Staff and external stakeholders acknowledged the invaluable support and commitment of the volunteers with one interviewee stating that *'Bedford Row would not be able to do what they do without them'* (External stakeholder interview).

The BRFP facilitate student placement from a number of third level courses including the Limerick Institute of Technology (LIT) Applied Social Care course, the University College Cork (UCC) Diploma in Youth and Community Studies, the Limerick College of Further Education (LCFE) Certificate in Applied Social Care and students studying Counselling with the Irish College of Humanities and Applied Studies (ICHAS). Depending on the course the students are undertaking, they are placed in the Hospitality Centre, Children's Groups, in reception and general meeting and greeting in the BRFP city centre premises.

Training programmes

The BRFP, as previously stated, does not typically deliver or facilitate the delivery of specific programmes instead offering a suite of opportunities to people who come to use the services. However, there are two exceptions to this, the Family Support and Crisis Intervention Course and a parenting programme, 'Family Links', which was co-delivered with Limerick Prison, with mothers outside and fathers inside prison (see footnote 22 for further details).

The BRFP Family Support and Crisis Intervention Course was initiated in 2009 and aims to upskill interested and motivated people to work in an inclusive and creative way with individuals and families, because of their, or their families' involvement in serious crime and imprisonment. The course is two years in duration leading to a Diploma issued by Bedford Row, a FETAC Education Centre. For further details see <http://www.bedfordrow.ie/training/>.

Opportunities for Creativity and Self-expression

This research found that offering opportunities for creativity and self-expression was a key component of the BRFP model, as one staff member remarked *'I think creativity is more of a human need than we think, in the sense it's easy for me to say in that I had the opportunity to be creative, but if I hadn't that opportunity there would be a big gap there'*.

People who attended the services were provided with opportunities to express themselves creatively in the broadest sense. Opportunities for creativity were provided through art, music, poetry, cooking and baking, drama and creative writing and also through opportunities for creative expression in ceremonies and celebrations. One of the Men's Group participants strongly acknowledged the value of having a creative outlet stating *'We were all useless [at art] but then we started expressing ourselves in the art [session] and the art stuff ended up in a gallery and everything'*. Another member of the Men's Group stated *'you can see the spirit coming out in the lads when they're doing it like [art class]'*. People in prison were also offered creative opportunities to express themselves through art therapy as detailed above. Members of BRFP staff outlined how art therapy can provide a space for prisoners

to express, explore and unpack emotions about being in prison (see section six - Impact of BRFP on families). Children were provided with opportunities for creativity through the Arts. Children acknowledged such opportunities for creativity and listed opportunities in the areas of music (music lessons, making a CD), art (clay modelling, colouring and drawing), cooking and baking. One child simply stated *'I like the people that mind us and I like getting creative with things'* (Child focus group interview).

In the most profound sense, offering creative opportunities to the adults and children to explore their own identity and to offer them opportunities to make life changes was a major site of creativity, recognising the *'more subtle creativity around being with people and building relationships'* (BRFP staff interview).

Understanding gender differences in how people experience imprisonment

The services delivered by the BRFP recognise that men and women can experience imprisonment differently and so their support needs are different. According to this research typically women have far less visitors and family support, and grieve the loss of their children deeply when imprisoned. The mother in prison may need support to deal with her grief and to prepare for visits with her children. In particularly sensitive situations, those visits may take place in the BRFP building in the city centre, facilitated by the Limerick Prison Service. When a woman is imprisoned, her children may be in care with family members or be taken into foster care, and this has a very harrowing impact on the woman who *'feels broken, and a lot of things can come up for them [the women], I suppose what is happening in their lives, for a lot of them the loss of their children ... but when they are released there is a huge challenge because there is no residential place for women, there is a hostel here, but say a specific thing [support for women transitioning out of prison] from the prison, and they may go back into chaos again'* (BRFP staff interview). This in turn impacts on the types of services women require in order to manage their prison sentence well, maintain their relationships and prepare to make a successful transition out of prison.

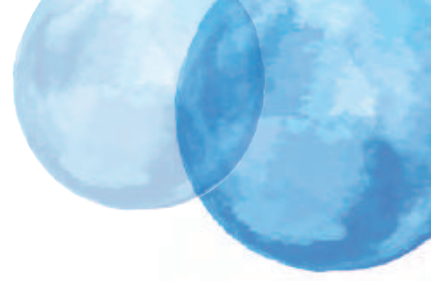
Men in prison, in contrast, often have more visitors and family support. During the research process the complexities of supporting men in prison became evident. Men in prison can react to imprisonment in a variety of ways, some proactively seeking to build their skills and maintain their family relationships through engaging with services and programmes on offer within the prison system. Others may foster more destructive behaviours, through seeking to exert control and manipulate members of their families with demands to lodge money in their prison accounts (see footnote 5), bring in items of clothing or drugs. This type of behaviour can be visible before imprisonment and closely linked to addiction. Men *'who may be out of control in their own lives'* (BRFP staff interview), can seek to control the lives of others, all the time trying to deal with the *'macho nature of imprisonment'*

(BRFP staff interview).

section six

Impact of Engagement





Introduction

The research process sought to understand the impact of engaging with the BRFP from the perspective of the children, adults and families who use its services. This section profiles the impact firstly sharing the impact on children, then on families and lastly on individuals. Feedback on the impact of the Hospitality Centre is also discussed. Finally, we offer an insight into the impact of the BRFP services on the prison environment.

Impact of engagement for children

The impact on children attending the BRFP services was gleaned from the children themselves through three focus groups (9 children) and a member check with the children (5 children) at a later stage. The impact of the BRFP on children is also informed through interviews with their parents and carers and with the BRFP staff and is detailed below.

Children's perspectives on the impact of engagement of attending the BRFP Children's Club

The findings from the children's focus groups indicated that engagement with the BRFP:

- Provides them with opportunities to engage in a wide variety of activities and have fun;
- Is empowering for them;
- Supports their emotional well-being.

Opportunity for children to engage in a wide variety of activities and have fun

Children reported that attending the Children's Club provided them with opportunities to engage in a wide variety of enjoyable activities. These activities take place in the BRFP city centre building, the Learning Hub, the city park and other venues e.g., a horse riding arena and restaurants. The activities included:

- Art – making clay, colouring, drawing;
- Music – music lessons, making CDs;
- Eating out – Supermacs, MacDonalds;
- Cooking and baking – making pizza, buns, rocky road buns;
- Outings/Trips – horse-riding, the park, feeding the ducks, match in Dublin with dads;
- Sport – kickboxing, horse-riding, soccer;
- Playing games e.g., ping-pong, handball.

Children reported that they appreciated getting treats during club e.g., sweets, selection boxes and 'stuff' e.g., t-shirts and hats. They said that they enjoyed a 'lovely lunch ... eating the chicken rolls' and 'going to Mc Donald's' and that they loved to eat dinners in the club when it was provided in the BRFP in the city centre.

The children described how they look forward to going to club, because 'it's fun' and they expressed their excitement and anticipation when they were collected by the BRFP staff. They said that they 'love all the people that work with us, and they're very caring' and children were very aware that the BRFP staff 'mind them' when they attended club.

Some children said that attending the club can provide a break from 'boredom' at home a chance to meet new friends and the opportunity to get outside and play with other children, particularly, in some instances where they can't play outside their own homes. In the children's own words:



Focus group participant 1 - I like that we go to the park.

Focus group participant 2 - I like the way em that you can get creative with the art and I like going to Mac Donalds.

Focus group participant 3 - I like eating the chicken rolls and I like doing everything else. (Child focus group interview).

I like coming cause I get to meet new friends. (Child focus group interview).

And if I'm like bored sometimes and then I get collected it's not really boring anymore. (Child focus group interview).

Empowering for children

The research found that children believed that their involvement in the club is empowering for them because they have a choice to participate in a wide variety of activities or to decline to do so. Children indicated that staff do not force them to engage in any activity unless they want to and this suggests that they feel a sense of agency and control over their attendance and over which activities they choose to participate in the club.

One child spoke about how feeling loved by the people at club in turn makes him/her feel like 'everyone thinks I am really nice and kind'. The love and care that is shown by staff in the club for children is internalised by the children and contributes to a positive self-image. In the children's own words:

Focus group participant 2 - I feel happy ... I feel like that every time when we come here that the, the teachers are always, they're always kind and nice because the always like bring us somewhere and they always like to get us things and stuff.

Interviewer - Ok and how does it make you feel when they're kind to you?

Focus group participant 1 - Happy.

Focus group participant 2- It makes me feel like, the people, especially like the people, that people love me and everyone, everyone kind of thinks I'm really nice and kind. (Child focus group interview).

Supporting children's emotional wellbeing

Many of the children in the focus groups indicated that attending the club makes them feel happy. Some children indicated that they like the club because it is a fun, peaceful, and a stress-free place for children where there is 'no arguing or fighting' and being there 'takes the pressure off your chest' suggesting that for these children, being at the club nurtures their emotional well-being.

Some children reported that if they are feeling sad when they come to club, being there and participating in the activities can help them feel happy. One child felt that being at club helps to deal with sadness but didn't elaborate on the way in which it does. Other times, children feel sad when they leave club.

Interviewer - There's no arguing and there's no fighting and it's peaceful. Tell me a bit more about that.

Focus group participant 1- We always come here and we never fight. We're all like family together.

Interviewer - And how do you feel then by the time you're going home?

Focus group participant 2- Sometimes happy, sometimes sad. (Child focus group interview).



Parents'/Carers', staff and external interviewees' perspectives on the impact of the BRFP on children: Preventative element for children

Parents and carers whose children have engaged with the service identified a preventative impact in terms of promoting children's positive behaviour. They linked this outcome to the immediate and timely response provided by the BRFP to meet children's needs. The BRFP staff also identified the preventative impact of the service for children.

Parents and carers who were involved with the BRFP due to having a family member in prison spoke of the impact of the BRFP service on their own children or children in their care. These findings relate to children's involvement across services including the Children's Club and play and art therapy. Parents and carers also highlighted the importance of providing opportunities for children to meet other children in similar situations by bringing families together for day trips and special events. Such opportunities are important because children need to understand that they are not alone in their experiences. Meeting other families also gives children the opportunity to relate to each other as one parent/carer commented, the BRFP are '*letting children know that there are other children out there, that it is not just them whose daddy is in prison ... they can actually relate to these children as well like*'. On a very practical level, these days out are also important for children whose parents may not be able to afford to take them on holidays or day trips.

Participants appreciated greatly that the BRFP provided immediate and timely support, such as play therapy, for children without any waiting period. This research found that offering a timely response made it easier for the parent/carer to engage with the interventions offered by the BRFP and reduced the worry and anxiety they can experience when children have to wait long periods for services. According to the interviewees the immediate response has a preventative impact for children, as engaging with, for example, play therapy, offered them the opportunity to express their feelings. As one parent/carer stated '*I think the no waiting time as well is big because you know by the following month the children could have been in chaos*'. Another parent/carer commented that '*One of the most important things is no waiting list because that takes the anxiousness out of you. You know when you hear children are under the weather at school, you're kind of concerned yourself*'.

Parents/carers reported that they, along with their children's teachers could see improvements in the children's behaviour, as a result of engaging with the BRFP services. Other research participants commented that the BRFP nurtures children and that staff can '*spot things*' in children's behaviour that may otherwise go unnoticed if parents/carers are caught up in trying to cope with the challenges of a family member going to prison. Research participants believed that the BRFP was a place where children were '*not stigmatised by imprisonment*', where they could '*be themselves*' and '*have fun*'. The family approach adopted by the BRFP of working with the child, parent/grandparent/carer along with the parent in prison was believed to offer hope and encouragement to the parent in prison. This was based on the multi-site model of service delivery (see section 5) adopted by the BRFP, as the BRFP staff deliver services inside and outside the prison, facilitating communication to all parents/carers around children's progress. This was also seen to impact positively on the parent preparing to transition out of prison as he/she would then have an informed understanding of what their children were going through and it could help to build a better long-term bond between parent and children. This finding was articulated very well by a carer, who stated that this multi-site delivery of services by the BRFP staff:

... will give [parent] a better involvement in her childrens' lives you know. And I can say, I can tell her on the phone or on a visit how they're getting on but it would be different with, you know she's actually speaking to someone [member of the BRFP staff] who's involved with her children so it will give her encouragement for the future as well (Individual service user interview).

This carer also believed that keeping the parent in prison informed and involved in her children's progress will:

.... probably build a better bond with [parent] and the children and it will give [parent] the knowledge of what, you know like, just in case the kids might say something to her, she'll have the knowledge then to know what they're, what's happening in their life, for them (Individual service user interview).



The BRFP staff and external interviewees echoed the perceptions of parents and carers that the BRFP was having a positive impact on the lives of children. The Children's Club was perceived to provide important opportunities for children which ensured that they had equality with their peers in terms of access to activities outside of school. Family finances, family reputation and the stigma of imprisonment, in some cases, (see section 2 - Context) were recognised as sometimes prohibiting children from availing of such opportunities.

The BRFP staff felt that the BRFP is a safe, comfortable environment for children where they can meet other children in similar family circumstances and where they don't have to hide the fact that their parent is in prison. They highlighted how, at societal level, some children and young people can become very alienated and isolated and sometimes even systematically turn on the community in which they live. They felt that listening to children and supporting them to express their feelings including any pain and anger they may experience can help to prevent them from experiencing isolation and alienation. The BRFP staff emphasised the emotional difficulties that some children may experience because they may be '*unsupported, not encouraged*' (BRFP staff interview) and they made efforts to encourage children and to listen to them and take notice of them and give them their full attention. They also spoke about how the BRFP can be an '*oasis*' for some children whose home lives might be unstable or chaotic.

Impact of Engagement on Families

Throughout the interviews and focus groups, participants gave examples of how the support from the BRFP for one family member had a ripple effect into their extended family lives. They reported that the BRFP can sometimes work with different members or generations of the same family, within and outside the prison.

Men's Group research participants spoke about how the support they received from the BRFP helped people to gain '*access to their kids*' or to deal with '*breaking up with women*' or with developing a relationship with their grandchildren.

They helped some of the lads getting access to their kids and stuff like that like and if the boys need any kind of counselling for problems they'll do that for them as well. So in this respect families come out happier as well (Men's Group interview).

Some of the women in the Life Skills Groups indicated that they were motivated to continue their involvement with the BRFP through either a desire for support to take care of their families or to learn how to look after themselves, and build their skills in order to take care of their families. Members of the Life Skills Groups reported that what they learned from the BRFP has been of benefit for their families as they can draw on that learning and apply it in their home e.g., information in relation to children's behaviour or parenting skills. Women who had participated in the 'Family Links' parenting course felt it was helping them to build a stronger family unit so that they don't revert to a '*bad circle*' when the partner comes out of prison. This particular group also spoke about how becoming stronger helps them to be a better parent and helps to break the cycle of imprisonment and prevent children from going to prison in the future.

But I think every week that I've ever come in the door with a fear, I've taken away something, you know that I could transfer onto my own family at home. I felt it kept us all together because I had the help here because I've other members of my family that are all hugely affected by [a family member's imprisonment] (Life Skills Groups focus group interview).

It's helping us where we were going wrong and our mistakes and to fix them mistakes before he comes home. Myself and with the children and us coming here to the parenting course with Bedford Row and the Life Skills. It's building us up to be stronger women today as well and fathers there. It's made us a lot stronger so that we don't go back into that rut, into that bad circle (Life Skills Groups focus group interview).

And you can help your kids better than And you can see their behavioural problems as well.

Interviewer – Can you?



You can yeah.

Interviewer – *And can you deal with them better?*

Now you can. Now you can (Life Skills Groups focus group interview).

The holistic family approach of the service was very evident in the Life Skills Groups sharing of their experiences. Participants identified how Bedford Row *'helps to keep families together'* through a focus on strengthening the family unit, supporting adults and children and building relationships within the family. The opportunity provided for fathers in prison for involvement in the parenting course highlighted the strong belief of the women who had also participated, of the importance of building relationships with the parent in prison. They emphasised the important role that the father can play in his children's lives as well as the building of family relationships as a preventative strategy for when he is released. One participant stated that *'Bedford Row actually helps to keep families together and not just separating and destroying families. They try and work through the problems and get through the problems. The main one is, you are actually a family unit and try and work through this because separation is just as hard on the kid. You can work through it step by step'* (Life Skills focus group participant).

Individual service users also spoke about the impact of the BRFP support on their family lives. Research participants reported that they had received help to address their addictions and to build their relationships and trust with their family members. In some cases, the BRFP is working with multiple generations of the same family e.g., child, parent in prison/recently released, and grandparent. The following extract from an individual with a family member in prison illustrates the positive impact of the intergenerational work with family members both inside and outside prison:

I think it's a win all round because as we said earlier you have the parent of the kids, the kids, and myself and it's helping the kids deal with their parent being in prison plus if they've any other issues. I get to offload, you know, or talk my feelings, you know of my child being in prison. And then you've [person in prison] and it just feels that with a family all working together that the children have a good outcome and the [parent] will hopefully have a good outcome and maybe a better recovery than in the past (Individual service user interview).

The BRFP staff believed that the holistic, family approach (see section 5 - Model) adopted by the BRFP helps to keep families together by strengthening the family unit and simultaneously building trust amongst different family members with BRFP. They felt that by working with the parent/carer and children outside prison, and the parent while he/she was in prison, that on release he/she would be more likely to avail of the services of the BRFP. If that parent has addiction or anger management issues, the BRFP would also support them. Echoing the perspectives and experiences of some of the women in the Life Skills Groups, the BRFP staff shared observations of how, with support of the BRFP, women in particular can become stronger and more assertive while their partner is in prison. In turn, they believed that this can impact positively on the partner, who may decide to engage with the BRFP, access support and decrease the likelihood of recidivism and the family being trapped in a *'vicious circle'* of imprisonment.

I think if you work with all the family and you work with him in prison you have more of a chance of maintaining relationships and for him to come out and not go back in (BRFP staff interview).

The family out here are stronger when he comes out, they have learned what is right and what is wrong and what to ... say for the partner or the wife 'Well I deserve better than this like, I don't deserve to be going to a prison all my life', and while she feels stronger in herself it will make him sit back and realise 'Here this isn't going to work, I'm going to lose them if I don't ... well look how strong they have come, I am going to go down there and give it a shot and see what happens'. That's my opinion anyway, that's what I think. I've seen that happen with families, and you see the families that come out that haven't ever got support while there is someone in prison and it is the same thing, a vicious circle over and over and over (BRFP staff interview).



The BRFP staff recognised that while it takes time to build relationships with parents whose children are attending the Children's Club, it can have long term positive impacts including 1) children observe staff making the connection and building relationships with parents and they find comfort in this and 2) it builds a relationship of trust with parents, and promotes parental engagement with the BRFP, as a result of good staff/parent relationships. They also spoke about the long term value of building trusting relationships.

The BRFP staff felt that the work that they do helps mothers in prison or who were previously in prison to 'bridge relationships' with their children, who may be in the care of a relative or foster care, has a positive impact on the lives of the mother and her child. For example, staff, reflecting over many years of engagement with many families, believe that supporting a mother to express her feelings, which may well include hurt and anger at her separation from her children, can help her to come to realise the importance of her child having a positive relationship with the foster carer/relative while she herself is not in a position to care for her child.

The BRFP staff also believe that facilitating visits between parents in prison and their children in the Bedford Row city centre building has a positive impact for both parent and child, particularly in very sensitive cases, because they can visit in a safe and nurtured space.

Often mothers would be very angry with social workers. We do an awful lot of work around that kind of thing ... with people, realistic kind of stuff, helping people to see why social workers are involved, helping them to understand that relationship, helping them to bridge that relationship with their children. Even though their image of foster care, all that kind of stuff and I think that has a positive impact on mothers. If they are able to see that foster parent, caring for that child in a situation where I have not been able to care for the child, the best thing for my child is to have a good relationship with this foster carer. That's again with the anger bit, there is a lot of anger in people, a lot of hurt in people, and it is creating a space for that hurt to you know, am, it's about ... that safe space (BRFP staff interview).

Say women in the prison their children might be in care with family members, those family members might be bringing their children in ... But then there are other cases where children are a bit more sensitive, if a child is in foster care and if things have been particularly difficult. So we reserve Bedford Row for those sensitive visits and the prisoner behind it, as far as resources permit, but they're very good [Irish Prison Service], I have to say, and eh, they would bring the mothers down here (BRFP staff interview).

The support that is provided for women in prison through art therapy was also perceived as impacting positively on building relationships between mothers and their children and helping to promote 'good visits'. Women who participate in the art therapy have the opportunity to explore, in a safe therapeutic space, the impact of being a mother while removed from her children. The BRFP staff believed that attending art therapy offers mothers the opportunity to explore their emotions and feelings and an outlet to express worry and confusion about what they are experiencing in the prison environment. By participating in the art therapy sessions and creating images depicting their fears, women who wish to do so can explore the turmoil or guilt they may be feeling about not being with their children. In turn, the expression and unpacking of these emotions could support them to have a 'good visit' with their child/children where they may have been reluctant or fearful to do so previously.

Girls talking about skills that they need around cooking and things like that and being a mother, what is it to be a mother and not having their kids and these are things that are constantly re-emerging in the therapy space. So I suppose how is that in a way helping them to build a relationship with their children? It's giving them an opportunity in my view to diminish something inside you, either worry or confusion they may be experiencing within a prison environment and that may be supporting them when they have a visit (BRFP staff interview).

Women are probably the most hard done by society in some ways because they're not, their kids have been taken off them and they probably have very little or no family support. Whereas if you think of the guys, their partners, or their wives or their kids are lined up outside visiting. And it's very rare for the women to have that. So with that in mind when a mother does have a visit, it actually means that much and it's very, very important like in some ways if the therapy space can support them and it may not be for everybody but it is a support that's beneficial (BRFP staff interview).



Impact of engagement for adult service users

The impact on adults who engaged with the BRFP were far reaching, and included 1) opportunities for engagement in a variety of activities, 2) addiction support, 3) empowerment and transformation, 4) peer support, friendship and solidarity, 5) building resilience, well-being and promoting positive mental health, 6) prevention of recidivism/engaging in criminal activity, 7) supports for adults in prison to prepare for transition from prison to home, 8) support for individuals/families with a loved one in prison and in transition out of prison and 9) hope.

Opportunities for adults to engage in a variety of activities

Research participants from the Life Skills Groups and the Men's Group participants described a wide variety of opportunities and activities that were made available to them including training courses (e.g., Family Support and Crisis Prevention), fun days out (bowling), artistic activities (painting, making art pieces for the St Patrick's day parade, horse installation) and sports such as horse-riding and fishing. Some participants emphasised that they may never have been able to afford to do these activities without the support of the BRFP.

Men's Group research participants detailed public celebratory events they had participated in as a group such as the Chrism Mass in St John's Cathedral, the St. Patrick's Day Parade and their art exhibition launched by a former Minister for Education and Skills. Life Skills Groups members talked about how being part of the group gave them an opportunity to have fun, offered them dedicated time for themselves and the opportunity to have trips away from home or attend retreats. Participation in the BRFP also offered members of the Men's Group and Life Skill's groups the opportunity to make friends and to get to know a group of people living with similar challenges. One participant spoke of his/her aspirations to undertake further studies at third level and how involvement with the BRFP has given him/her the confidence and self-belief to consider this option.

We weren't charged anything, and I know that same place where we went to is definitely €20 or €30 per head. So we went out there fishing one day, it was a great day out, got us sandwiches and tea and soup and everything else (Men's Group interview).

It obviously helps your frame of mind because you're meeting people and doing the courses takes your mind off of things (Men's Group interview).

Yeah there was stuff sent out from the prison, paintings and art and there was a lot of lovely stuff they sent down and it [the exhibition] was got to do with our stuff as well (Men's Group interview).

I never seen a computer til I came here ... I can fly through em now. I have all them things [certificates] up at home, which I'm proud of. D'you know what I mean? I've done every course that was here. I failed some of them as well like, but I tried them (Men's Group interview).

And I got a load out of that weekend, and it was all paid for and it was really now special now that weekend. They do brilliant things like that. There's no judgement here. You can come in here if you want even in the middle of the week, there's a room that you can just sit in if you want to (Life Skills Groups focus group interview).

Even the course I started last week, they had to get special funding for that like. I mean I could never have afforded to do that. I'm so delighted that I got the opportunity to do it like (Life Skills Groups focus group interview).

Individual service users engaged in a variety of BRFP activities including art therapy whilst they were in prison and cooking, reading, writing, and horse-riding when they engaged with the BRFP after leaving prison. Participants with family members in prison said that they had engaged in BRFP courses including the Life Skills course and Family Support and Crisis Intervention course, as well as availing of one to one support with BRFP staff.



I went the first week there [art therapy group in prison] and like t'was safe. I used go, anything to get out of the cell ... They supplied everything. You could make masks, you could do anything there but I found it fantastic (Individual service user interview).

So it's good for your mind to be occupied and anything you want, if you want reading and writing, if you want cooking classes, if you want art. Do you know what I mean like? It's all here for you (Individual service user interview).

I think things were too raw. You know, and kind of em I couldn't actually, I wasn't ready to talk you know [in counselling]... It's just that I wasn't looking at it the way [counsellor] was looking at it you know. I suppose my guard was up and I just didn't want to leave it down and I started looking at things differently after then when I had spoken to [a member of BRFP staff]. We've come a long way I suppose (Individual service user interview).

Addiction support

Members of the Men's Group and Individual Service Users who had engaged with the BRFP while in prison and continued to do so upon release, revealed that the support they received from the BRFP had been instrumental in helping them to deal with addiction and to make profound and transformative changes in their lives. With support from the BRFP staff they received treatment from and maintained engagement with other agencies such as the Ana Liffey Project, Sláinte and Focus Ireland.

This study found that the BRFP helped people reduce dependency on drugs/alcohol, provided opportunities to engage in enriching activities and encouraged people to take control of their lives and break the spiral of drinking/taking drugs and ultimately helped some of them not to return to prison. The experience of being a member of the Men's Group had supported men to deal with addiction issues by giving them hope that they can change their lives and through building their resilience, as one member said '*This place [the BRFP] has kept me out of jail, kept me off the drink, got my family back together*'. Another member of the Men's Group also highlighted that consideration for other members of the group was a motivating factor in attending the group sober stating that '*There's no point coming down of a Friday and being half asleep or not aware of what's going on around you when people are trying to help. Plus you have to think of other people then. You don't want them seeing you*'.

If I wasn't coming here now I'd say I'd still be sipping cans at home (Men's Group interview).

I wouldn't have that [a good relationship with family] only for this place, I wouldn't have it like, cause I was on the drink, drugs, and everything. So from when I started here my life has just changed like. D'you know what I mean like? I was in jail every other day (Men's Group interview).

Individuals who received support from the BRFP spoke of learning practical life skills which prepared them for moving into their own homes thereby strengthening their resilience, survival and life skills in a very practical way for life after prison. The BRFP has also helped people who have been in prison to build stronger relationships with their family members, along with simultaneously creating greater awareness amongst family members of the challenges of recovery from addiction. Participants believed that their personal journeys of growth and transformation were made possible because of their interaction with and trust in the staff of the BRFP. Research participants who had spent time in prison highlighted the importance of the BRFP's work as they believe that there is a lack of support for people coming out of prison. They also believed that the BRFP plays a very important role for all former prisoners, and proposed that even when people have supportive family and friends, they still need the support of professionals to deal with addiction issues and to support them to make a successful transition back into the family home.



I never moved out of home in my life right ... and [names the BRFP staff member] she got me through to Focus Ireland and now they're looking at a place for me in there (Individual service user interview).

Like I often smoke a 50 bag of weed a day and now I'm down to 2 joints a day. Do you know what I mean? And I wouldn't be only for [names the BRFP staff member] (Individual service user interview).

I get paid Wednesday, if I wasn't here of a Thursday, I'd go away and take drugs, it's pointless saying I wouldn't (Individual service user interview).

I wouldn't have done, what they've done for me in the last year, I've never, like I didn't think I'd be able to do with my life. I kind of found out I'm a different person from who I was. D'you know like and what I wanted in life (Individual service user interview).

You need support inside, everyone kind of needs it but you don't really show it you know. But when you get released there's not many, there's not support there for people (Individual service user).

I'd be just going back into my old ways. So in a way like they kind of changed my life. But it took a while for me to gradually realise like what they really did for me ... And without the support of [names the BRFP staff member] or anyone inside here, I don't think I would have been able to get that far (Individual service user interview).

I'm still on a road like, I know I might be at the top of the mountain but there's always a way like of kind of slipping but you know that they're always there to kind of give you that much, that step forward again d'you know. There's people like I've always, d'you know people has their good days and bad days but people slip back into their old ways d'you know. But with these people here, you can't like, d'you know they always kind of build you back up. You know that they're there to support you, they're not there to put you down (Individual service user interview).

Empowerment and transformation of adults

In addition to the transformative impact for people dealing with addiction, BRFP has helped Men's Group and Life Skills Groups participants to transform their lives. Life Skills Groups and Men's Group participants described how their involvement with BRFP had been an empowering journey for them. Some described how the experience was 'life-changing' for them stating that 'they have become different people'.

Men's Group participants cited examples of how their involvement in the BRFP built their self-esteem, empowered them by encouraging them to believe in themselves, built their confidence to engage with people in a one to one setting other than with the BRFP staff (i.e., participate in an interview), to engage in celebratory events both in BRFP and in the public arena and helped them to develop skills and capacity to take ownership of their lives and do things that staff might previously have done for them. One participant described the support from BRFP as a 'lifeline' and others indicated that they would probably 'be dead' or 'in the river' had it not been for their interaction with the BRFP where staff are 'there to support you and to build you back up' [Men's Group interviews].

All I can say is that it definitely changed my life like.

Interviewer - *It changed your life?*

It really did like, I was suicidal like. I wasn't suicidal but I wanted someone to kill me because I wouldn't commit suicide, I wouldn't do that to my family. But it was like I had a death wish or something (Men's Group interview).

At the end of the day it's a lifeline isn't it? (Men's Group interview).

Whereas if you didn't go down to Bedford Row, you could have ended up in the river or anything.

Interviewer - *It made that much of a difference?*



Yeah. It does like you have to, I didn't realise it like at the time but you know only that small bit of communication with someone, cause you have thoughts in your own mind but when you hear someone else's come across a different way, you say 'Oh yeah'. Or you can question it. But you're doing something rather than thinking negative (Men's Group interview).

I'd be locked up [in prison] or dead if I wasn't coming down here like (Men's Group interview).

I was never told we can't do that for you. And to come here now because I am a bit more educated and I just say to [members of the BRFP staff] just point me in the right road to help me out with this thing. I don't want ye to do the donkey work at all. I'll do it on my own, just show me which door to knock on. Do you know what I mean? Which I have done (Men's Group interview).

The Life Skills Groups participants indicated that they are stronger people because of the 'nourishment' they receive within their group and from the Bedford Row staff. One woman, reflecting on the changes in her home life, remarked: 'So now I'm heard at home ...That was the single biggest thing for me, to actually be heard as an equal'. Another stated that 'It's made us stronger as people. Before I first started this course, the Life Skills course, I wouldn't have known myself and today with the help of [names the BRFP staff member] and the help of Bedford Row and [names the BRFP staff member], I wouldn't be the person I am sitting here today. I wouldn't be as strong and confident as I am, it's built me up as a person' (Life Skills Groups focus group interview).

The women talked about how the experience of engaging with the BRFP has been enriching, empowering, nourishing and healing and life changing for them. They acknowledged the extent of their personal growth and development and attributed this to their involvement with the BRFP and the Life Skills Groups facilitators. They indicated that the groups have built their skills, resilience and capacity to cope with their life situations and given them the confidence to do things such as taking driving lessons, get a job and speak in public or to authority figures. They also talked about how it had developed their self-esteem. Attending the BRFP training courses was also part of the empowerment journey for some women who realised that because of the life experiences they had they were in a sense 'experts by experience', thus uniquely placing them in a very good position to help others:

Where we'll be training up, helping others that have gone through what I've gone through so my experiences as well will actually help others try and make a change in their life as well as my own yeah. So it's very powerful (Life Skills Groups focus group interview).

The women who were members of the Life Skills Groups identified a major shift in their thinking about themselves. They spoke of how they had come to the realisation that, prior to attending their Life Skills Group, they had placed themselves and their needs below those of others and that through their learning and participation they now realised the importance of valuing themselves and putting themselves first, with one woman stating that 'You have to love yourself before you can take care of the others'.

Some of the women discussed how the support from the BRFP had helped to empower them in terms of becoming stronger and more assertive in their relationship with their husbands or partners.

I had nothing, no money and come in here within that year to now. I'm a lot stronger than what I was, I'm getting a house now. I have myself set (Life Skills Groups focus group interview).

And I was able to go up and stand up and speak for all the girls. I wouldn't be able to do that only for [the BRFP] and even after that so when we were asked to join the Life Skills course, I'm after coming out a better person than from when he got out like. Before I would have said I'm giving up that but now I've got a job, I'm working away and I'm doing this course (Life Skills Groups focus group interview).

It changed my life I have to say. Because I was really into myself and feeling down and always shy like when I had to speak like and everything and then like when I got into the people like, I think they're all lovely, I could be myself and talk out more and it helped me with my self-confidence and it gave me self-esteem (Life Skills Groups focus group interview).

In a way the men don't like to see you getting stronger, they want you to be weak all the time (Life Skills Groups



focus group interview).

And I didn't realise I was putting him before my children, which I regretted. Children come first now (Life Skills Groups focus group interview).

Focus group participant 3 - I never knew that I come first sure.

Focus group participant 2 - You have to love yourself before you can take care of the others.

Focus group participant 3 - We didn't know that! (Life Skills Groups focus group interview).

I thank God for Bedford Row anyway cause I'll tell you straight, I'll stay here until I need to (Life Skills Groups focus group interview).

I'm being a lot stronger [with partner] which I wouldn't be like before (Life Skills Groups focus group interview).

And you can carry on what you are doing when your partner gets out instead of going back down and doing nothing and sitting down ... It's true like, leaving them walk all over you (Life Skills Groups focus group interview).

The BRFP staff interviews resonated with the findings of the Life Skills Groups in that staff also believed that the women had become stronger and more assertive through participation in the Life Skills Groups. They commented on the positive changes that they had witnessed in some women over the years and how they had changed their own behaviour from enabling loved ones' bad behaviour to standing up to family members/partners because they wanted to change how they lived their lives, to get a job or to get an education. Staff attributed women's capacity to make such changes in their lives to their enriching experiences of being listened to, being heard, developing a sense of ownership of their lives and to a realisation that the '*locus of decision making is within [themselves] ourselves*' as human beings. They felt that this came about because of the '*subtle*' message from the BRFP that people can change their lives and that the Life Skills Groups, and in a '*looser*', less formal way the Men's Group, created space for people to be empowered, take ownership and become agents of change in their own lives.

I've seen people coming in here, they were at rock bottom and couldn't cope any more with their life and then he was gone to prison and actually, sometimes it can be a relief that he's gone. But then if they don't come and get help, they're waiting for him to come out to start all over again. But I've seen women here who have come on in leaps and bounds in the Life Skills. My God it's brilliant, to look at them and say, look at them two or three years ago you wouldn't think like that they'd even make it and now they're brilliant and they take no crap. I've seen mothers close their doors when they would enable their sons or daughters for years and now close the door and say 'Come back when you're ready'.

Interviewer - So they won't enable bad behaviour anymore?

No, no. Because it's so easy to do without even realising you're doing it (BRFP staff interview).

It gives them a voice. They would have probably been frightened to stand up to their partners or sons or because it probably would have been a way of life for them, d'you know, that he was going out committing crimes and just say doing robberies ... That was probably the way they were brought up, their father might have been the same. And then they met their partner, learned behaviour really. Then when they come in here they realise, 'This isn't the way that I want to live, I can have a normal life if I want it, if I choose that. It doesn't have to be looking over your shoulder and when is the next raid going to be and I can go out and actually get a job and get an education and he'll come out of prison and do the same' (BRFP staff interview).



It happens by osmosis like, and that's the real power of Life Skills, where people come together and say 'I'm not going to be controlled by himself in prison, I am not going to be controlled or told by somebody 'you can't do that' or whatever. So that is the kind of start of it really you know ... because as the saying goes, the control is always closer to home you know than you think it can be, and that I can have a voice in determining my own future you know (BRFP staff interview).

External interviewees also noted that the women who participated in the 'Family Links' (See footnote 22) programme outside with BRFP became more assertive, which they attributed to participating in a subsequent course in assertiveness with the BRFP. As a result of the women becoming more assertive, prison staff relayed how the expectations of male participants about their partners had to be 'structured' for when they are released.

.... the women were doing programmes outside in assertiveness with Bedford Row and I had to structure the lads' expectations in here. I'd to go to the lads and say lads, your women are outside, they're learning about stuff like assertiveness, don't expect the same woman when you go out (External stakeholder interview).

Peer support, friendship, and solidarity for adults

The Men's Group and Life Skills Groups participants emphasised the very positive impact of peer support, friendship and solidarity that they experienced as members of their respective groups. The Men's Group participants spoke about how their group had become an 'unofficial support group' through which they gained the confidence to help each other, stating that for them the group offered solidarity, mutual support, shared understanding and valuable perspective on their own situations. Being able to offer support to each other was highly prized by all, with one man acknowledging that the BRFP staff 'give us the confidence to help each other'. They looked forward to coming to the group on Fridays as they said it offered them an opportunity to socialise with people who have had similar life experiences, as well an opportunity to have the 'craic' and they highlighted the genuine enjoyment that they got through participation. Participants spoke about how membership of their group reduces stress as they have the opportunity to 'talk to others' about their concerns instead of 'bottling things up'. They described the confidential nature of how the group operates, the respect for each other's privacy and the democratic way in which the group decide which art activity to focus on.

Coming to the group and listening to the lads talk themselves about their own experiences and losses and that, this might sound bad, but it kind of gives you a little bit of a boost when you hear it, that you're not that bad yet, you still can change (Men's Group interview).

When I wasn't doing anything sitting at home there, you kind of look forward to coming in then of a Friday, you know. Because the lads are, they're kind of in the same boat as yourself, and even though no-one says it, they're happy enough, they're delighted to come in here of a Friday, to come in for the few hours (Men's Group interview).

When you're here, it's all the slag with everyone, it's not that you're sitting there on your own or anything like that. Everyone is kind of brought into the slag and everyone is brought into the craic (Men's Group interview).

It was good help for the mind, you know.... Instead of going off the rails the courses helped and coming down here helps as well you know. It gives you a bit of time to socialise you know cause you don't see anyone when you're at home like (Men's Group interview).

It's easy enough going here and it's grand, everyone seems to get on and if anyone has a problem in the group we discuss it and we get on with it. Know what I mean? (Men's Group interview).



Similarly, the Life Skills Groups participants were very clear that their group is a safe place for them where they can talk in confidence about their lives without being judged. There was a strong sense of solidarity with one woman stating that *'We're all from the same backgrounds and it's nice to know that you're not isolated out there and that we can relate to each other. You're able to talk to these people'*. Their high levels of trust in each other, as well as in the group leaders, was evident. They outlined how there is no pressure on members to speak until they are ready to talk and share, and that the act of sharing your problems or feelings with others was both comforting and offered them perspective, as one woman from the Life Skills Group said *'Even in our group, there might be one particular person that's going through a crisis and we all help out and we all go out feeling better that we've helped that person. I mean everyone's problem in our group, is everyone's problem'*.

Another member of the group described the ethos as one of *'trust and confidentiality'*, adding that *'You know you won't be judged and it won't go outside the four walls'* (Life Skills Groups focus group interview).

According to participants the structure, format and professionalism brought to the sessions by the group leaders provided a sense of security and routine for members in that they knew what to expect from each session which is particularly important when a person may be dealing with a personal or family crisis. An appreciation of the acceptance by the BRFP staff of group members leaving and returning to the group was also expressed: *'Whereas in other groups you might be almost court martialled for not going [attending the group]. You know what I mean. Life takes over. I think Bedford Row accepts that'*.

The women expressed a very strong sense of solidarity and camaraderie with their group members, particularly when they might be going through a crisis. Bonding through sharing of experiences led to the growth of friendships and interaction outside the group on social media or through text messages. The Life Skills Groups participants described the support that they provide for each other in the group through listening non-judgementally and with empathy to each other, giving feedback and advice.

Focus group participant 1 - When someone is speaking like we really hear them out because we don't interrupt unless they ask us for support or something.

Focus group participant 2 - Advice.

Focus group participant 3 - Or if someone is speaking we can give them feedback. It's great for us to give one another feedback
(Life Skills Groups focus group interview).

The importance of being able to relate to women in similar circumstances was highlighted as it reduces isolation for some women who reported that they cannot talk to family members about their experiences. The groups are also seen as a source of friendship and fun. One woman described their group as a *'unit'* while another described it as *'like a clique'* because they had been together for a long time. The importance of trips away together was highlighted as it allowed the women to get to know each other better, and get a break from their everyday lives.

Focus group participant 1 - Our group is lovely like. Our group is nice and we can trust our group and we have a laugh together.

Focus group participant 3 - We do yeah.

Focus group participant 2 - It's a unit and we're supporting each other. We're all from the same backgrounds and it's nice to know that you're not isolated out there and that we can relate to each other. You're able to talk to these people.

Focus group participant 1 - And we all trust each other don't we?

Focus group participants 2 & 3 - Yeah.

Interviewer - Wow, so there's trust?

Focus group participant 1 - We don't name anyone like.

Focus group participant 3 - It's confidential.



Focus group participant 1 – It's confidential, yeah and we all trust each other and we don't.

Focus group participant 3 – There's em, you could say jolly or laughs.

Interviewer – Isn't that so important?

Focus group participant 2 – Friendships are built up.

Focus group participant 1 – That's the word yeah

(Life Skills Groups focus group interview).

Participants described the powerful impact the support, which they both provide and receive through the Life Skills Groups, has had on their lives. In their 'unit' they have the freedom to be themselves, they do not have to pretend or 'put on a face' or 'keep smiling'. Rather, they can lift the mask, they can cry, vent their frustration and express themselves to the other women in their groups whom they know will listen and not judge. The experience of supporting their peers contributed to a greater sense of self-worth and was seen to be personally rewarding because it built self-esteem, confidence and made them feel good about themselves. The women were also strongly aware of the value of their own expertise, that they could be a resource to others in similar circumstances who may need help and the impact this could have in terms of helping others to change their lives. Some have participated in the BRFP Family Support and Crisis Intervention Course in order to provide such support to others. Others expressed their aspiration to help people in the way that the BRFP had helped them.

So by doing this course [Family Support and Crisis Intervention] it's giving me a sense of helping other people and to let them know it's ok to come here and it's ok to talk and have the trust there. I never knew what I wanted to do before d'you know ...This is what I want, to make a change in other people's lives as Bedford Row has done for me (Life Skills Groups focus group interview).

Focus group participant 2 - We joke about it when we come here, we meet the girls. It's like a unit again where we can talk about this. You can't talk to family members about it.

Focus group participant 3 - You can cry away there and you can come out of there and you feel ten times better after the course, after the class ... Your whole body is different. You're smiling and you're not down inside or nothing like. Because you're getting support from everyone (Life Skills Groups focus group interview).

It's definitely given me a good foundation and you know I do bring that out to my community in many ways (Life Skills Groups focus group interview).

Building Resilience, well-being and positive mental health in adults

It was clear from the Men's Group and Life Skills Groups participants that the experience of peer support, sharing of experiences and opportunity to talk through issues that were causing them stress in a safe environment decreased their sense of isolation and contributed to building their resilience and sense of well-being. In addition, the Men's Group participants indicated that they found the art class therapeutic and relaxing in that it helps to relieve stress and provided opportunities for 'time out'. They described how they could 'switch off' from other responsibilities or things going on in their lives or in their families such as illness, or bereavement. In turn, this has a positive impact on their sense of well-being in that it 'eases your mind'.

There's usually about 10 or 12 of us here and we're all having a laugh with one another and chatting away. It takes the stress out of the week then that you'd had. If one of us had something bottled up we'd all sit down and talk about it (Men's Group interview).

The art kind of relaxes you, you know. And it eases them as well, it makes them feel, they go out kind of happy then after ... it eases your mind as well (Men's Group interview).



Women in the Life Skills Groups spoke throughout the focus groups about how their involvement with the BRFP made them stronger, as one member stated *'To me it is nourishment. I feel it contributes to a resilience that I didn't have before. There aren't actually words to describe the difference it has made to my life ... And I would never be able to repay the debt. The service is actually invaluable ... It's like sustenance for the soul.'*

The experience of supporting each other in their groups built their confidence and self-esteem and helped them to develop their sense of self-worth. It was evident that some of the Life Skills Groups participants had little unconditional support outside of the group and the importance of the group in these circumstances decreased their sense of isolation and contributed to their sense of well-being, with some describing it as *'nourishment'* and *'sustenance'*. They also indicated that by helping people to develop tools to cope with their personal situation, the Life Skills Groups built resilience amongst the women. One woman talked about how the group had helped her to accept her situation and develop a sense of agency through the realisation that, while she may not be able to change certain aspects of her life, she does have a choice around how she responds to the challenges in her life. Other women talked about how the Life Skills Groups helped them in dealing with their depression.

What it did provide me with was tools to cope with the situation. I have certainly grown stronger as an individual. I had thought I was reasonably strong up until then but I wasn't (Life Skills Groups focus group interview).

It also helped me to deal with my own feelings, do you know with my depressions and things and that (Life Skills Groups focus group interview).

Individual service users who had a family member in prison detailed the support they received from the BRFP with some highlighting that they have no other source of support. One woman stated that *'I have nowhere but here to come and I know that they'll listen when I say how stressed I am from the whole thing'*. Another remarked that *'It's good to have the support here like. If it wasn't here then there'd be no support. D'you get me'*.

Individual service users said that the BRFP staff provide a *'listening ear'* when they needed to share their problems and that the BRFP staff are a reliable, confidential, non-judgemental source of support in whom people have great trust. Such support helped to build their resilience to cope with their challenging situations. While the women acknowledged that the BRFP may not always have *'magic answers'* for people it still offered a very important support as *'you come out feeling a little more put together again'*.

Sometimes there so much going on especially now with court cases and that and waiting for to be sentenced and everything. Just somebody to listen to you for five minutes. It's not going to solve anything, you're still going to have to do what you need to do. You still have to go and face what you have to face but it just gives you a few minutes to gather yourself when you feel that there is nobody there that you can talk to, they are actually there. And all it is, is a matter of walking to the door and ringing the bell. If you're actually willing to come here, there'll always be somebody here to listen to you (Individual service user interview).

I go back up because they've listened to my problems, it's kept in the room and it's confidential do you get me? I've no one outside to talk to like that, cause I don't trust, there's not many people you can trust and if your fella is doing a life sentence, they'll only judge you (Individual service user interview).

Just because plan A doesn't work, that doesn't mean you can't come back in here again. You can come in for yourself.

Interviewer - Tell me about that?

You come in for yourself because sometimes there isn't anything that can be done only to endure it. But then, when you come in, you get welcomed as a human being and talked to as a human being and there's an awful lot of laughter.

Interviewer - Go on.

No but there is. D'you know, you come in and the woes of the world will be upon you and you will think you'll never laugh again but by the time you're going out you are. Nothing else has changed only you. But that's what keeping you alive, they do that (Individual service user interview).



Preventive approach for adults

Individual interviews with some of the women who engaged with the BRFP while in prison and continued to do so upon release, revealed that the support from the BRFP had been instrumental in helping them to deal with drug addiction and to make profound changes in their lives. Participants indicated that with support from BRFP staff members they had managed to reduce their dependency on drugs. They firmly believe that without the guidance and support from the BRFP they would easily have slipped back into their 'old ways' and indicated that the transformation in their lives was made possible because of the support from the BRFP staff. Similarly, some of the participants in the Men's Group directly attributed staying 'on the right road' or 'on the straight and narrow' to their involvement with the BRFP. One member also indicated his belief that he is held in more 'positive light by the Guards' because of his continued involvement in the BRFP.

Only for them I would have went off the rails like ...Well they put me on the right road or else I would have gone down the wrong road you know ... They taught me the right way to go about things (Men's Group interview).

Only for that [coming to the BRFP] I'd be still in jail (Men's Group interview).

I wonder if that was before like, if I didn't have this place, if that was before, I'd say F that you know what I mean like. I'd say that like and now it's just like if I'm changed. It's changed me like, do you know? When you get older you get wiser they say. That's what's after happening me, yeah (Individual service user interview).

I wouldn't have done, what they've done for me in the last year, I've never, like I didn't think I'd be able to do with my life (Individual service user interview).

I'd be just going back into my old ways. So in a way like they kind of changed my life. But it took a while for me to gradually realise like what they really did for me (Individual service user interview).

They guide me in the right road with treatment and things like that. Like they made me who I am today really to be honest because I didn't know who I was as a person for so many years (Individual service user interview).

Yeah, but I'm on a long journey (laughs). But I don't think, if I didn't come here, I'd still be in that trap and that frame of mind you know like. But it wasn't just about coming here. I was starting to gain up relationships and trust d'you know like. I know I can come in here and trust like what I say to [names staff member], you know. And that's a big thing like (Individual service user interview).

Support for adults in prison and with their transition from prison to home

Research participants who had been in prison and those who had a family member in prison highlighted the continuum of supports that the BRFP provides for people 'inside' and the 'aftercare' provided during transition from prison to home. Supports identified on the 'inside' included support for people who are feeling suicidal, bereavement support, arranging visits for parents with their children in the BRFP and art therapy (see section 5 - Model).

Yeah it [support in prison] is [important] because some people might feel suicidal over first being locked up (Individual service user interview).

Girls in the jail come down here to visit their children. That's very good like isn't it? My friend loved it like, because her son never knew she was in jail. So isn't it good then for people not to know that you're in jail to come down here to visit your children (Individual service user interview).

It [support from BRFP in prison] was very beneficial one of the things that kept me, you know.

Interviewer - And in what way was it beneficial?

I don't know, I just thought, while you'd be doing it, you'd be great and then, you know s/he'd tell you all about connections and it's the way s/he put everything you know. Friendships and people like, it was the way s/he did it to me now, I thought it was very good.

Interviewer - So the support that they offered, the approach?

Yeah, yeah (Individual service user interview).



Supports on the outside for people transitioning out of prison and for their family members are described in section 5 on the Model.

Research participants who had family members in prison outlined the support the BRFP provided for people in transition from prison to home, noting that while it is up to individuals themselves to avail of support, those with addiction problems may not *'be in a place to see what's best for them'* and may need a lot of encouragement to avail of the services.

They also felt that those with addiction problems who did engage with the BRFP had a *'better chance of recovery'* because of the support available to them and indeed, this was echoed in the experiences of those with addiction problems that have successfully engaged with the BRFP after their release from prison. One person remarked that *'I wouldn't be able to do that on my own. D'you get me? I wouldn't have been able to find the places or do anything like that. Only for [names a BRFP member] I'd be lost, I swear to God now'*. Another person who had been in prison stated that *'I'd say I don't need it [support from organisations]. But I actually did need it, you know. And without them [BRFP], I don't think I'd have been able to get through it'* (Individual service user interview).

If they want support, they'll still support them. I know it's up to the individual themselves, but they're not just leaving them in the prison, they're going to be with them when they come out as well. They're there for them (Individual service user interview).

And there's aftercare support for them, they're not leaving them at the gate they'll continue engaging with them. I know it's all up to the individual but they are there like (Individual service user interview).

They're preparing them [for when they come out of prison] whilst healing them (Individual service user interview).

In addition to support with addiction that some people received, participants who had been in prison highlighted additional practical areas in which BRFP had helped them on their release including sorting out social welfare payments, linking with other agencies and organising accommodation. Indeed, one person felt that *'They're very, very good. They're very good with support and they guide you on the right road you know. And there's not many offices in Limerick d'you know for support like d'you know for people on the outside or any kind of people you know that comes in through the door'* (Individual service user interview).

The personal connection which people had made with members of BRFP staff while in prison encouraged people to stay engaged with the service and also to engage with the other services on release from prison. Interviews with the BRFP staff indicated that a structured plan or package of support is put in place for people on release from prison by the BRFP that often involves working in partnership with other agencies and linking with a family member (see section 5 - Model). The BRFP staff also commented that this had an important impact for people in terms of their continued engagement with the services in comparison to when they were released from prison previously because there is a *'real solid structure'* around people.



Support for people/families with a loved one in prison and in transition out of prison.

Life Skills Groups members highlighted how their interaction with the BRFP provided support for them when a loved one or family member went to prison. Some emphasised the trauma that they experienced when this crisis occurred in their lives and their fears for the person while they were in the prison system. They said that the BRFP provided 'a listening ear' for them, somebody to talk to about their feelings, fears and frustrations during this traumatic time. Through their interaction with the BRFP staff and the support and information about prison life that they received, their fears 'lightened' and subsided and they were able to see the situation more clearly and deal with it 'that bit better'.

Listening is very important. It is like a child like, if you don't listen to your child like ... if someone don't listen to you, you give up ... it's true ... you think like 'Is there anybody there like?' ... They [BRFP staff] are very good at listening which is a very important thing. You can imagine if you don't listen to your child like, they get frustrated. 'Who am I going to turn to like, who am I going to turn to?' and you just take it out on someone, don't you? Yes (Life Skills Groups participant).

And they're not the only one that goes to prison, you go to prison with them ... You kind of live their pain d'you know. You live their pain as well and you have the fear as well like you know of them being attacked in prison, being beaten up, God only knows what. Drugs in prison and all that kind of carry on. And em it [BRFP] takes away that kind of fear you have like you know (Life skills focus group interview).

When you have someone in prison, you always kind of feel shame, and it helps like to take that shame away from you. Do you know, that you feel ashamed that you've someone in prison belonging to you and it helps like to see it at another light and it helps like you know to take that shame away and d'you know, it just makes you feel better about it (Life Skills Groups focus group interview).

It was an alien world to me, I didn't know anything ... They kind of taught me how the system works and what I can do and what I can't do (Individual service user interview).

There's nowhere else to go to talk about what we need to talk about. Nowhere else, you know. And when you get the information, it just lightens the fear ... Lightens when you get knowledge around imprisonment and what goes on behind the, in the cell and in the prison. You know all the politics around things, you know. And when you get the information around all that em for me it just gives you a kind of, puts you into a way better place (Life skills focus group participant).

Some of the women in the Life Skills Groups indicated that the BRFP staff accompanied them on Court visits or provided information and support around the legal and prison system. Non-judgemental support with court visits was particularly important for women without family support or who did not wish to ask a family member to accompany them, or indeed had no previous experience of the court system.

I nearly got a panic attack in there [courthouse], you know it's so scary ... When it comes to people and girls and they haven't anybody to help them like, to have somebody like [names a BRFP member] to go down with them. It's very good like you know to give them support. It's a terrible place, its degrading isn't it? It's really scary as well (Life Skills focus group participant).



It's nice because sometimes you can't ask a family member [to go to the Courthouse]. Bedford Row don't judge, they'll listen ... They don't ask you why you're there they just accompany you (Life skills focus group participant).

Individuals who used the services of the BRFP and who had a family member in prison also indicated that members of the BRFP staff had accompanied them with Court visits, helped them access information and expertise and provided information on prison life. One participant felt that having someone from the BRFP with him/her when visiting Court to support a family member had a positive impact because of the respect in the community for the work carried out by the BRFP stating that:

And definitely, you know, even when you're there and the Judge sees you and you're with someone from Bedford Row, it does make a difference because it says you're ... they're engaged with you, you're engaged with them, you're trying, you're trying to do something, you don't sit there and not care. Again, it's not just someone sitting beside you like, there's a lot more (Individual service user interview).

Following their initial individual involvement with the BRFP, Life Skills Groups members were offered the opportunity to participate in the Life Skills Groups which continued to provide support for them (as discussed in section 5 - Model). The women spoke of the support they received from the BRFP and the Life Skills Groups and how it helped them through providing information and advice that they shared with their family members and with managing the transition of their loved one or family member from prison to home. Members of the Life Skills Groups shared their belief that being involved with the BRFP provided hope for people, and built their aspirations that the person they care about can have a future and a better life after prison.

Not only do the Life Skills Groups provide support for women who have loved ones in prison, it continues to support them once that person leaves prison. The adjustment that prisoners have to make is discussed in the previous section. The women talked about how the support from the group helps them to support that person when they are released as well as to cope themselves with the adjustment in getting used to having the person back in their lives or back in their home.

It's alright when they're in the prison, it's when they come out that you really need help like when they come out to cope with them cause they're in there but they're kind of away from you aren't they? But when they come out then you need the help to be able to cope with them and the worry of them (Life Skills focus group participant).

He didn't know what to do with himself and they've no place to go and no one to help them when they come out. And em they just kind of get depressed, they can get back into trouble again. They really need the help and it's for the person that's at home then, they have to be able to understand then when they come out they have to be able to cope with them because it is very, very hard (Life Skills focus group participant).

And that's when you really need the help, it's when they come out (Life Skills focus group participant).

Hope

A strong sense of hope for a better life and hope for the future underpinned the focus groups and many of the individual interviews with Men's Group participants, Life Skills Groups participants and individual service users. Individuals with family members in prison spoke of how the BRFP has provided them with hope because of the commitment that they have to the people that come into the centre and because some of the BRFP staff have experienced what they have been through and 'can tell you they got through it'. For Men's Group participants who had received support with addiction, interaction with others who had been through similar experiences or who were 'worse' off than they were when they first started out with the BRFP, gave them hope that there was a better way of life. Life Skills Groups participants also commented that the BRFP gave them hope and reassurance that there was 'light at the end of the tunnel' and spoke of how now they look to the future instead of looking back into the past.



Staff also shared their aspirations for the people that come to BRFP and felt that the impact of the work that they do was to provide people with hope that their lives could be different.

There's hope when you come in here.

Interviewer - Talk to me about hope.

Hope that you'd be valued as a person. Hope that you'll have a place where you can just be. It keeps your sanity the hope that you, do you know, when I came in first, when I think about it I was looking for a totally different set of things to what I got here. I was looking for, I want this, I want that, I want the other, I want to know how to do this, this, this. They were all things. But what I got most importantly was a totally different thing. But when I was coming in, I didn't know I needed it, d'you know? (Individual service user interview).

It's just that there's somebody there to listen to you. You're not on your own. If they can help you, in any shape or form, they will. There's somebody here for everything. There's somebody has, even some of the staff probably have been through situations themselves so they know exactly what they're talking about. And if you think that there's ... when you're so down in the dumps about everything that's going on in your life and you realise that somebody has been there already and they're standing in front of you, and they can tell you they got through it (Individual service user interview).

And I think that's what they give, it's hope and support. Cause their, I think their heart is in it. That's the word (Individual service user interview).

Focus group participant 1- There's light at the end of the tunnel, it's not all doom and gloom.

Focus group participant 2 - It gives you hope.

Focus group participant 1- Yeah, yeah.

Focus group participant 2 - It'll give you hope like for the future do you know that they can get help. And if they want to when they come out, do you know, they have some place to go. But they have to want it (Life Skills focus group interview).

I'd say it gives them an opportunity to know that they do have choices, that there is a possibility of a better life

(Life Skills focus group participant).

It's a big part of your life ... Bedford Row is and I thank them to this day. I never look back, forward I'm looking instead of back and I used to always look back

(Life Skills focus group participant).

.. definitely when you can be accepted and not judged, challenged you know, believed in, and believe that change can be possible. Like what I was saying, a lot of them have internalised this failure you can see that a lot with the women, because they get back into chaos and end up back inside again ... What's going to be different here? I think that someone has to hold up something, maybe hope of something you know, and say it can be different and it will be different, you know that kind of way and maybe it's baby steps towards that or whatever

(BRFP staff interview).

Impact of the Hospitality Centre for children and adults

The BRFP staff and volunteers believed that the impact of engaging with the Hospitality Centre for adult visitors to the prison was 'huge'. They said that adult visitors really appreciated the service as it can offer 'comfort or relief' for them to know that at the end of a long journey they can have a chat and a cup of tea or coffee without any charge. The Hospitality Centre and the presence of the BRFP staff and volunteers was perceived as counteracting the formal prison system by providing a 'human touch' as some visitors view 'prison staff in one light and us in another' (Volunteer interview).

Interview participants believed that the Hospitality Centre provided a 'breathing space' for some visitors before their visit where they can sit and have a cup of tea or coffee or where their children can be distracted for a while.



People who are not making a prison visit, who may be accompanying a family member or friend are welcome to sit in a 'safe' space while waiting. The Hospitality Centre also provides opportunities for social interaction, particularly for women, who often meet the same people when they come to visit. Volunteers and the BRFP staff felt however, that the dynamic of relationships in the Hospitality Centre can at times be intimidating for some visitors, particularly for first time visitors and children, or should, on rare occasions, tensions 'blow up' between members of different families if they become verbally abusive to each other or when the prison officers may have to intervene.

The BRFP staff and volunteers outlined the types of practical supports and assistance offered to adults and children visiting the prison. For example, if the wire in a woman's bra sets off the alarm as she enters the prison, she can return to the Hospitality Centre and change in the bathroom. The BRFP staff and volunteers working in the Hospitality Centre provide information for visitors about the prison system without which there would be an 'information vacuum'. Volunteers and BRFP staff also felt that visiting the prison would be far more traumatic for people in the absence of the service as it would 'put people off completely' from visiting if they did not have the support. The consistency and continuity of the BRFP volunteers and staff was believed to help build relationships over time with visitors.

The BRFP staff and volunteers indicated that they felt that it can be therapeutic for visitors who avail of the supports of the Hospitality Centre to know that somebody cares about them and are non-judgemental. One of the possible long term impacts of delivering this service identified by volunteers was that meeting non-judgemental volunteers in the Hospitality Centre might help prisoners or families of prisoners to open up beyond the scope of the 'prison circle', and place trust in and engage with the wider community.

It's not them and us but I suppose they do see the prison staff in one light and us in another (Volunteer focus group interview).

And they do appreciate the fact of the cup of tea, you know people who come long distances on trains or buses or drive from Galway, Dublin, em just to know that I'll get a cup of tea (Volunteer focus group interview).

You know you see people kind of rushing in and they're, you know, managing the kids and managing the bags, and now they have to sit and wait but they have a chance to maybe do it as you said with a cup of coffee in their hand

(Volunteer focus group interview).

[Names a BRFP member] in particular has an incredible knowledge of how to manage situations as they arise ... People would be more traumatised without the Hospitality Centre, no one would help them find the answers and it would put people off completely ... I think it would increase the stress levels around visiting in general for everybody (Volunteer focus group interview).

I like the fact that it shows them like, in your own head you're representing everybody else just in Limerick. You know that there's other people out there. You're not the only one. If you open up to the community as well, you know they have to give a bit of give and take as well like there is people out there that are just normal people, they won't judge you. They don't have to stay in this small little prison circle ... You're doing that for them you know. You're representing the rest of the world to them ... So if they meet another person, like if you meet another person from prison or, you're going to treat them and me, all of us different to what we would have before this (Volunteer focus group interview).

The BRFP Staff and volunteers described how children can build up a relationship with the BRFP staff and volunteers through regular visits to the Hospitality Centre and how they may become friendlier with staff and will run up to greet people at the tea counter. They reported that children seemed to enjoy drawing pictures for the person they are visiting or for the BRFP staff/volunteers they meet in the Hospitality Centre. They also believed that providing colouring activities and refreshments for children can be a distraction to help to keep children calm while they are waiting to make their visit, as one volunteer remarked 'It's nice when they go out with a smile on their face isn't it? D'you know and they've their little page in their hand to go and visit whoever. It's only ten minutes but you feel like you've done something really, d'you know, yeah'. One volunteer who had previously met some children in the BRFP building in the city centre, reported that they had recognised him/her in the Hospitality Centre subsequently and that s/he feels that they felt more 'at home' because they saw a familiar face when visiting the prison.



Some research participants reported that at times children travel long distances and can be 'wired' by the time they arrive so drawing pictures in the Hospitality Centre can provide them with a distraction. Some BRFP staff and volunteers commented that interacting with children can also lead to engagement with their parents. The BRFP staff and volunteers talked about feeling empathy for children who live with the reality of visiting a parent in prison on a weekly basis and so try to 'lighten' the experience for them and make it more pleasant. They also expressed concern about the normalization of visiting prison for children and young people and how in some instances they can seem comfortable with visiting. One volunteer talked about a young boy s/he had met who was visiting family members in prison and indicated that his expectation for his future was to go to prison.

And that was the means of keeping him calm ... He'd no idea what was going on around him, he was focused on the art (Volunteer focus group interview).

I look at my child that age, and this little child and unfortunately, the circumstances that they're, you know, that this is part of her week, that every Thursday she's going in and visiting her dad, do you know, it's really, you try to make it as fun and as pleasant and kind of I suppose, lighten it a little bit (Volunteer focus group interview).

The ones that get used to you, they literally come straight in the door and run up to the window. They know what to ask for, what to get, and you know the different days that you do, they kind of get used to who is there so they get more kind of friendlier but the run straight up to the window. It kind of em, I suppose cause you're with your parents all day and a lot of them come on buses from Cork or Sligo, you know, so they're wired by the time they get in there so it's just, it's a different thing for them (Volunteer focus group interview)

It's a distraction I think for them from the parents. At least they can do something and they're not just sitting in the waiting room because that would drive children mad. Especially little ones they need to be doing something (Volunteer focus group interview).

Participants with a family member in prison spoke about the impact of engaging with the Hospitality Centre over time, their feedback verified the perceptions of the BRFP staff and volunteers. They confirmed that visiting the prison can be a frightening experience and they described the Hospitality Centre as welcoming, saying that it gave people time to compose themselves before making their prison visit. They also said that it helped to reduce stress because there was somebody to talk to, whom they trust, prior to and post visiting the prison and a 'friendly face' to greet them. The Hospitality Centre offers children the opportunity to colour pictures and have some refreshments which keeps children occupied while waiting to go in for a visit. It also helps to provide adults with some distraction e.g., a cup of tea or a chat, and to keep them calm. For those who have travelled long distances, the centre provides refreshment at no cost, which is very important for those who may not be able to afford it otherwise. Research participants also felt that having access to refreshments and support in the Hospitality Centre helped people compose themselves after a 'bad visit' as there is someone to chat with and people have time to prepare themselves before they 'go out to the outside world again'. Research participants also felt that engagement with the Hospitality Centre also encouraged people to engage with a variety of services.

They were welcoming. It doesn't matter who you are, what you are, who you're visiting, everybody is treated the same (Individual service user interview).

It's just they're so down to earth. Everybody here. As I said to you, they, now no matter how bad you think your situation is, they've been there. Somebody here has been down that road with somebody else. And they know what you need to do. But the thing about Bedford Row is, it's getting the person out there to actually come and knock at the door. That's what it is. That's what it is.

Interviewer - And what makes that happen?

The tea room up in the prison.

Interviewer - The tea room in the Hospitality Centre?

There's people going to the prison for visits and don't actually realise this [the BRFP centre] is here. So by the girls offering 'em a cup of tea and telling them who they are and what they're about, that's how they're getting their information to people (Individual service user interview).



Especially someone on their own that tea room is just so important because the girls are just so down to earth and that, that just for somebody going in that door, it's so frightening for somebody to turn around and smile at you and say hello to you, you say 'Hold on a minute this isn't what I thought it was going to be' (Individual service user interview).

It does like [make a difference] cause you're talking to someone before you go in like. You're not just walking in, sitting on the seat and then being called. Do you get me? You have the girls to talk to and if you're feeling low, you have their trust to talk to them like ... It kind of, it helps the time go by when you're waiting to be called (Individual service user interview).

They're only so glad to have a cup of tea or cup of coffee and a little chat even if it's only 'How are you?', because you know there's people out there that wouldn't have support ... There's always a friendly face (Individual service user interview).

People may not have the money to buy a cup of tea or coffee after travelling. They might just have enough for the bus fare or the train (Individual service user interview).

I wouldn't actually sit there thinking anymore. I actually, if the girls are there, the minute I come along now, once I'm booking in my name for the visit, I'm running down to the girls to say yeah I'll have a cup of tea. So I'll stand and chat to them. And before you know it you're called so you haven't time to be thinking (Individual service user interview).

If you come out after a bad visit, there's always one of them, there's someone there and they'll know by your face anyhow, well it's been a bad one. And they'll be straight away over for the cup of tea or the chat. And it just gives you somewhere to em, not to be crying in public, you know. Before you go out to the outside world again, you've had time to compose yourself. And they also help with the officer and things (Individual service user interview).

Impact of the BRFP on the prison environment

The BRFP was perceived by interviewees to have a positive impact on the prison environment and described as 'an integral part' of life within Limerick prison.

The BRFP staff were involved along with other agencies in establishing the Women's Voice Forum in Limerick Prison and advocated for two of the female prisoners to sit on the group as representatives. BRFP staff also advised that prison staff talk directly with female prisoners once every two or three months to ensure that their voice is being heard, an action that has been put into practice as the following quote illustrates:

You go over and meet all the women and they will all know that their voice is being heard and just as importantly they'll know that you care. And I said yeah, I love it. So I've been doing that and it's brilliant and it's fun. Thirty five very, very opinionated, vocal ladies who are very respectful but they come up with all the good stuff you know. I wouldn't have got that off the ground bar, because for [names a BRFP member] has been here so much longer than I have. S/he has an insight (External stakeholder interview).

A tree blessing was organised by BRFP in the prison at Christmas (2015) involving all the agencies involved in the Women's Voice Forum. This event was felt to have had a positive impact on the mind-set of the women in the prison because they could see that there were people from the wider community who care about them as the following quote from an external stakeholder illustrates 'All those agencies that came in, the women really got it that time, the really got it. They knew that, they knew that the community outside, the public, that there are actually people who care about them you know. And it was just absolutely beautiful. I was so moved'.

External stakeholders identified safety and security as the central focus of the relationship between prison staff and prisoners. In contrast, BRFP staff were perceived as having a very different relationship with prisoners founded on support, love and care. As noted by an external stakeholder 'So for me what Bedford Row brings to this prison ... for Bedford Row staff and people like that, they bring their insight and their love and their care. They can have a different relationship with people that I could never have you know'. Because of the nature of this relationship, the BRFP can help a lot of people 'who might otherwise have fallen through the cracks of society'.



Additionally, the BRFP were perceived as being a valuable support service because they are 'on the ground', they have 'such a finger on the pulse' and 'such a deep understanding of the issues, the local issues' and can adapt their approach to suit the needs of the individuals they are working with.

One of the key ways in which the BRFP impacts on the prison is that, by working in partnership, they help to 'demistify', 'destigmatise' and 'normalise' the prison environment by bringing the community into the prison and showing the prisoners that there are people in the wider community that care about them as the following quote illustrates:

So in many ways I recognise that if we want to have a relatively normal environment, as much as that can be in a prison em you have to bring the community in. This community owns this jail. It's not [name's] jail. It's ours, society's prison and society should be represented in it. And there's loads of benefits. The obvious benefit is that the prisoners know that somebody cares from the outside and I mean that's huge (External stakeholder interview).

The BRFP were also perceived by external stakeholder interviewees as part of a wider societal response to help break the cycle of addiction and recidivism and ultimately 'achieve safer communities'. The mission of the IPS was identified as focusing on 'safe, secure, dignity, care, rehabilitation of prisoners' which can contribute to safer communities in the long term. However, the limitations in what can be achieved inside the prison system alone were recognised as was the need for support from 'outside' agencies such as the BRFP because 'We can't deliver on that with just prison officers'.

BE POSITIVE
GRATEFUL
TRUTHFUL



section seven

Suggested improvements to BRFP by research participants





Introduction

All of the individuals and groups that were interviewed for the research were asked for their suggestions on how BRFP could be improved. It is important to emphasise the high levels of satisfaction that the children and adults who avail of the services expressed, with many initially reluctant to suggest improvements or commenting that it could not be better as far as they were concerned. Children in the focus groups acknowledged the amount of activity that they already engage in and adult service users acknowledged the limitations of funding for BRFP. The following sections detail suggestions that were made across the groups and individual participants, taking into consideration clarifications, amendments and further suggestions made during the member checking process.

Supports and services for children

A number of improvements relating to the Children's Club, additional activities and supports for children attending the Hospitality Centre were proposed during the research process. These are profiled in table 7.1 below. Column one details the children's suggestions and columns two and three profile the suggestions across all adult participants.

Volunteers and staff articulated that the current conditions and limited physical space of the Hospitality Centre is not conducive to interaction with children and that a dedicated play area and staff member/volunteer to work with children had potential to change the dynamic in the centre as children would be preoccupied in activities that would either entertain them or help them to keep calm and parents would have time to have a private chat with other adults or the BRFP staff and volunteers if they wished. An improvement that was suggested within the prison was to have a less recognisable backdrop than the 'grey wall' for photographs of special occasions e.g., First Communion, so that children visiting their parent in prison on their special day will have a nice photograph and more positive memory. One person commented:

Every year they have communions, confirmations and to look at the same photo as you said, people recognise where the wall is. Even though it's a grey wall, people know do you know. It would be nice if there was a... nice thing [backdrop] ...It wouldn't be that hard to do or to put in place but it would mean so much down the line to people like when they're pulling out old photos, 'That's when I made my communion' instead of hiding it in a drawer, 'Oh that's when my dad was locked up or in prison or my mam'. It would just be a nice photograph instead of a nice photograph against that wall or whatever, and bringing up old memories and trigger stuff when they look at the picture, because that's what it would do.





Table 7.1 – How to improve BRFP – Supports and services for children

Suggestions for improving the Children's Club from children's focus groups	Suggestions for improvements to children's supports from across adult research participants	Suggestions for improving the Hospitality Centre for children from across adult research participants
<p>Children suggested a variety of additional activities including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Camping, swimming, soccer, obstacle courses, go to the park/playground, horse riding every week, go to the beach, go to the farm and pet animals, have dinners instead of rolls 	<p>Services and supports for teens and adolescents e.g.,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Group support for teenagers/ adolescents • Opportunities for teenagers to develop leadership skills, share their talents and 'give something back' 	<p>Physical environment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hospitality centre needs to be modernised and upgraded • A dedicated children's play area with children's tables for art work, more games, toys, a bookshelf and books • Toys to help develop language skills • Disney characters/cartoons on the walls to brighten the place up
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children suggested meeting more often e.g., every Tuesday instead of every second week²² • Go to the Hub and Bedford Row Centre on alternative weeks 	<p>Mental health services for children affected by imprisonment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to play therapy and counselling could be expanded 	<p>Staffing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Someone to read stories with children • A dedicated staff member/volunteer available to engage with children • A Speech and Language Therapist or someone to direct parents in an informal way on how to support their children • Someone to deliver activities to stimulate children
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children suggested setting up a suggestion or idea board so that they could plan activities for the following week 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More family days out 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a dedicated children's space with dedicated staff within the BRFP city centre building 	

²² Children's Club now operates on a weekly basis.



You need to have more there for the children, more to stimulate them while they're sitting waiting you know and I think it would be great to have somebody there that might help the parents help their children you know.

A Speech and Language Therapist or somebody that would kind of direct the parents maybe in a very informal way as to how they can better help their children you know, I think that would be nice.

The aspiration to develop a dedicated section to support children, with dedicated space within the BRFP and with dedicated staff and budget was voiced. The need for this support included the need to support staff in recognition that this work is very tiring and demanding.

Supports and services for adults

Participants from the Life Skills Groups, Men's Group, along with individual service users suggested a variety of ways of improving supports and programmes for adults. These are detailed in table 7.2 below. All three groups suggested an increase in the supports the BRFP already offer i.e., meeting more often or offering art therapy in prison twice per week. Life Skills Groups participants identified the break over the summer period as a gap in provision with one focus group indicating that they felt 'at sea' during the summer and that problems in their lives do not 'get parked on 31st of May'. Childcare was identified as prohibiting some members from participating in the Friday afternoon Men's Group sessions. The BRFP staff also highlighted a creative writing group and drama as possible areas for development.

Table 7.2 – How to improve BRFP – Support and services for adults

Suggestions for supports and services for Life Skills Groups	Suggestions for supports and services for Men's Group	Suggestions for supports and services for Individual Service Users
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More one to one sessions • Additional Life Skills Groups– as soon as someone leaves, there is always someone to replace them • Life Skills Groups to meet more than once per week • Support during the summer period for Life Skills Groups members – this was identified as a gap in provision 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More activities - horse-riding, go karting, nights away e.g., a trip to the Galtee mountains • Childcare to enable Men's Group members to attend Friday afternoon sessions • Men's Group to meet more than once per week to give people a chance to get out of the house and meet each other • Develop an evening activity option 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The development services under the remit of the BRFP could help to catch young offenders in the transition between prison and home • Additional support for people with addiction issues coming out of prison e.g., someone to accompany them to post office to pay rent (maybe in collaboration with Focus Ireland staff) • Art therapy in prison could be run twice per week • Knitting

During the member check process, it emerged that one of the Life Skills Groups had come to an end. Women from this group expressed their deep gratitude to the BRFP for the opportunity and support they had provided for them over the years and the positive impact it had on their lives. However, they indicated that they had not



received any formal indication that the group would finish, that they felt it finished very abruptly and they shared their grief and loss for support of the people in the group. They acknowledged that funding was an issue, and that they could still avail of individual support if they so wished, but indicated that they would have liked some 'closure' for the group. They expressed their wish that the BRFP would learn from their experience and in future, groups be consulted and notified if they are to finish, particularly groups that may be less empowered than their group.

Supports for families

Participants that had availed of family support, such as Life Skills Groups members and individual service users, felt that they were 'very lucky' to be able to avail of the services of the BRFP and were keenly aware that not everyone who had a family member in prison was able to avail of such support. Suggestions for improvement included keeping the centre going, having more facilities like the BRFP so that other families 'like ourselves' could avail of them. More family outings with the BRFP staff were also suggested because children enjoy spending time with them.

Staff members and external interviewees identified a tailor-made parenting programme as an important support for the families that BRFP work with. Such a programme would build on previous parenting programmes that the centre has delivered in partnership with Limerick Prison and other agencies. One of the strengths of the BRFP identified was that they were uniquely placed to develop and deliver such a programme to respond to the specific needs, pressures and complexities of the prisoners and families that they work with. They proposed that this programme would also take into account the nature of the relationship between the parent inside prison (usually the father) and the parent outside (usually the mother), looking after children and support the development of healthy boundaries, building of skills and confidence, and resilience. The proposed tailor made parenting programme could be delivered in partnership with Limerick Prison.

I think they need to have their own [parenting programme] and then copyright it and have their own stand-alone because I think they can empathise more. They know exactly who they're dealing with, that they've built up those relationships ... It needs to be built up from the ground and I think that's what Bedford Row is all about and that's why they need to do it.

That's where the parenting course can fall down. It makes the assumption that everything is alright in the relationship and it's not.

Support for mothers leaving prison to develop parenting skills and build relationships with their families and children was also suggested by the BRFP staff, as well as restorative conferencing to help deal with conflict within the family and gender specific groups to address addiction.

Supports for volunteers

Induction to the Hospitality Centre is currently informal and some volunteers felt that a more formal induction would 'enhance' what they could deliver as part of the service in terms of their knowledge of the support that is offered in the BRFP as well as about the prison system.

Others described the induction as experiential learning or 'learning by doing yourself' and talked about the difficulty of learning how to gauge whether visitors wished to engage or not through 'trying to learn and watch' over time. Time spent in the BRFP learning about the supports that they provide there was also cited as a possible topic for induction or training of volunteers so that when visitors 'pluck up the courage' to ask for information, they would be confident that they could provide a knowledgeable response. One volunteer indicated that s/he 'felt like a bit of a fraud sometimes', if unable to answer queries. It was felt that being more knowledgeable and able to respond to queries, would also alleviate the number of referrals to and demands on [named a member of BRFP staff] time.



A particular concern was how to respond appropriately to visitors and the fear of 'doing more damage than good'. Communication, listening and foundation counselling skills were identified as possible areas for induction where current volunteers could be supported by the BRFP. One volunteer who had completed a basic counselling course prior to involvement with the BRFP felt that it was helpful for volunteering in the Hospitality Centre.

In the member check, volunteers suggested that clarity was required regarding procedures for different issues that can crop up in the Hospitality Centre e.g., visitors asking volunteers to mind the hand bags or personal belongings while they were in the prison visiting, whether to provide a scissors to remove the metal wire should someone's bra sets off the alarm, what to do if a parent is taken in by the Guards for questioning and their children are left in the Hospitality Centre.

Members of BRFP staff suggested creating dedicated space and time for volunteers to discuss or debrief about their experiences and concerns. This suggestion was shared with volunteers who participated in the member checking process and they agreed that such support would be very welcome and suggested a regular debriefing session followed by lunch. They felt that by sharing their experiences with each other, they would be more prepared if something they had not encountered previously occurred and that it could provide a forum through which clarification was provided on procedures in the Hospitality Centre. Volunteers were aware that they could talk to a counsellor/staff member in the BRFP if they wished but agreed that a more formal debriefing opportunity on a regular basis with a BRFP staff member and/or other volunteers could be an ongoing source of support for them.

Supports for staff and internal operational considerations

The supportive and caring leadership from management for the challenging work that the BRFP staff undertake was acknowledged in the staff and external stakeholder interviews where a number of suggestions regarding 1) supports for the BRFP staff and 2) improvements regarding operational issues were made.

1 Staff specific supports

The need to provide Continuous Professional Development / training was highlighted, with the limitations of funding and finance for same acknowledged. Suggestions included:

- Training to deal with the emotional challenges of the work people undertake;
- Training on mental health issues and learning about play therapy;
- Training on best practice approaches to dealing with addiction.

A number of personal supports were suggested by the BRFP staff, related to the challenging and sometimes traumatic nature of their work and the complex issues they encounter. The need for self-care was acknowledged because of the kinds of challenges they encounter including 'imprisonment, drug addiction, homelessness, fire arms, sexual abuse, prostitution'.

The BRFP client-led approach provides support for as long as a person continues to engage. This can of course in turn expose staff to some very sad and painful events, as one BRFP staff member reflecting on the long term relationships built with clients remarked '... consequently staff are there for some of the tragedies, some of the suicides and stuff like that so it does affect us. We are very front line and we can be very vulnerable because we are meeting people ... there are not too many structures separating us from our clients'.

Members of the BRFP staff were aware that this kind of demanding and traumatic work can for some people lead to 'burn out' and the need for external supervision from someone not connected to the BRFP was highlighted, albeit with recognition of the limitations of funding for same. Support for the BRFP staff to develop 'robustness' and nurture their capacity to work in the context on an ongoing basis was emphasised. The need for staff to bond and have fun together was also raised.



1 Operational issues

While the funding from the Irish Prison Service, the Mercy Order, Limerick Regeneration Agency (LRA) and private donors was acknowledged, the precarious nature of funding for the centre was highlighted as well as the need to continue with the successful work of the centre and to attain more stable funding to provide job security for BRFP staff, as 'No one is going to come to Bedford Row to make a career with a mortgage and kids and all, that would be very rare'.

During the data collection period, the BRFP city centre premises was in the process of recruiting a new staff member and it was felt that this would facilitate redeployment of existing staff to more effectively manage the work of BRFP. However, the need for more staff to expand the work of the BRFP was emphasised. Suggested areas for expansion included someone to undertake parenting work within the prison and in the BRFP city centre premises and the development of a full-time drop in service.

There's lots of areas that we could improve on, but because, we make the best of what we have. We could always expand if the money was there.

And I suppose also drop-in. I would love if someone was on drop-in all the time, as in when somebody comes to the door like that there is somebody there that's physically capable of making them a cup of tea and not 'I'm with a client now sorry'. It would be lovely. It would be nice to have drop-in. Now we all try to cover it, but there are gaps.

While there was broad agreement that the BRFP staff generally work well as a team, more frequent team building with an external facilitator was suggested to give staff an opportunity to engage, reflect and plan as a team. An external facilitator could also support staff to address any issues arising through this process along with setting up a dedicated time and structure to air and address any issues as they arise.

Acknowledgement was made of improvements that had already been made in relation to setting boundaries and availability of staff e.g., closing at lunchtime or not answering the phone at lunchtime unless the staff member has an appointment made with a service user.

Buildings and infrastructure

Suggestions were made across the interviews and focus groups about how the buildings and infrastructure of both the centre in Bedford Row and the Hospitality Centre in Limerick Prison could be improved if funding were available. Suggested improvements to the Hospitality Centre for children have been detailed under services and supports for children. Recognition was made of physical changes that were being made in the Bedford Row centre during data collection including painting and new flooring. However, a number of further physical improvements, subject to funding, were also suggested.



Table 7.3- How to improve BRFP – Buildings and infrastructure

How to improve the Bedford Row City Centre premises	How to improve the Hospitality Centre
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Signage - Whilst security, discretion and confidentiality were acknowledged as important, 'a nice cheerful sign' was suggested 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Signage – Internally the Hospitality Centre services need to be more clearly signposted e.g., 'Fancy a cup of tea? Come see us in the visitor centre' or 'Is it your first visit, come and see us in the visitor centre' • Printed cards for visitors with BRFP contact details
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A purpose built service with parking • A one stop shop with all the services under the remit of the BRFP that could deal with all the needs of people coming out of prison under one roof as well as family support and support provided to prisoners • More space or a bigger centre so that different groups could run at the same time and there could be interaction between groups. This would entail more staff • Update the building and office area • A computer room • Dedicated space for children in the centre e.g., play therapy room 	<p>Participants felt the Hospitality Centre needs to be modernised and upgraded. Suggested improvements included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Install comfortable seating, new tables and chairs and shelves. This would enable visitors to have a place put their refreshments safely • Changes to the layout to encourage a more relaxed environment e.g., round tables and chairs • Repair lockers many of which are out of order and this causes stress for visitors who have to leave their belongings in the Hospitality Centre when visiting. This would also help alleviate volunteers being asked to mind peoples' belongings • Background music <p>An improved physical space could accommodate:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More opportunities to offer one to one support to adult visitors e.g., more discrete discussion with Hospitality Centre staff/volunteers and meeting first time visitors • More suitable facilities for working with children <p>Comparison was made with the Midlands Prison which could offer good ideas and a model to refurbish the Hospitality Centre</p> <p>Staffing of the Hospitality Centre:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increasing the number of staff/volunteers from two to three per visiting session would ensure that there would be one person to make tea and coffee, a second person to engage with children and the third person would be a 'specialist' with more detailed knowledge of supports available for families who could engage in private discussion with adults. However, as clarified during the member checking process, this would only work if there was sufficient space. Volunteers indicated that in the current very limited space, there was greater engagement with visitors with only one volunteer present • When adults ring the prison to arrange first time visits, it was suggested that they be informed of the BRFP and advised to contact a member of the BRFP staff for advice on supports available to families. In addition, volunteers indicated that if new visitors had this information they could arrange to meet a BRFP staff member/volunteer at the gate before their first visit so they are not 'doing that dreaded walk' into the prison alone • BRFP staff to act as a go between if someone is refused a visit or late for a visit



Funding and fundraising

The limitation of funding and the difficulty of fundraising for the BRFP due to the nature of their work was acknowledged across the interviews and focus groups. The stigma of imprisonment and crime and the perceived association by the general public of families affected by imprisonment with gangland crime and drug tycoons' lavish lifestyles (see section 2 - Context) belies the extreme poverty experienced by some of the families that the BRFP work with.

Suggestions from across the interviews and focus groups on how to fundraise and raise awareness of the work of BRFP included:

- Getting members to participate in fundraising e.g., to help fundraise through sales of work at Christmas time, or through making a financial contribution to costs of tea, coffee etc.
- Adverts in the Limerick Post and using social media to raise awareness of the centre with other families who may be in need of support.

It was also felt that research such as this report could help raise awareness about the work of the BRFP to leverage funding.

It's difficult to fundraise when you're talking about fundraising for something to do with a prison and people who have committed a crime. You know, people don't want to hear that.

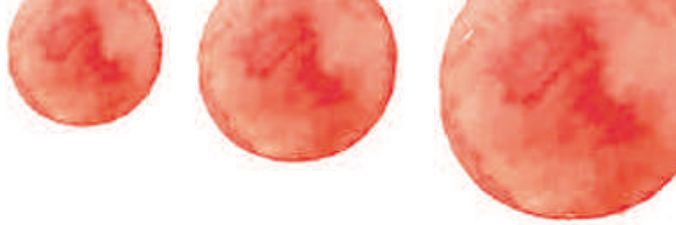
But I think they need to recognise the value of Bedford Row and I think doing research like yourselves, that is what's going to help them, make them realise the value of it and that's why this is so important.

BRFP will be expanding into Ennis. A local judge set up a fund for families affected by imprisonment that will be used to set up the service. It will be under the umbrella of Bedford Row in Limerick and the Chair will sit on the BOM. People from Clare that are in prison go to Limerick and it's hard for them to travel in here to avail of services.

Partnership and working with external organisations

The very positive relationship and partnership between the BRFP, the Irish Prison Service staff and management was emphasised by the BRFP staff and external stakeholder interviewees. One area of frustration identified, related to limited resources within the prison system which can create challenges in building and maintaining relationships with prisoners due for release. Gaining access to work with prisoners can at times be challenging as for example prison officers may be in court and unavailable to facilitate a visit by a BRFP staff member or prisoners themselves may be in court or may have moved to another prison. Members of the BRFP staff acknowledged that this was a resourcing issue at national level and commended the Prison Officers in Limerick Prison for the challenging and sometimes dangerous work that they undertake.

The suggestion of working on an outreach basis to offer services for children and also of developing links with schools was identified as one way in which the BRFP could improve its services, for example, with parental permission, there could be an automatic link with a school when a child accesses the services of the BRFP. This could help the BRFP learn more about the child at school and for the school staff to learn more about difficulties the child may be experiencing to build empathy and understanding towards the child. The key role of schools in educating children, helping them to be happy in school and helping to break the intergenerational cycle of imprisonment was highlighted. Research participants agreed that working with parents was crucial to this and because the BRFP works so well with parents, they could help to build the relationship between the school and parents of children affected by imprisonment.



Maybe that child might have resource hours for something at school. You know just to feed into what's going on while that child is in Bedford Row, what difficulties that child might be experiencing, just so there might be a bit more empathy for that child in school. I think you know the wrap around services are the best. It's when you've got that partnership approach that everything is much more successful.

Because education is the key to success. If we can educate those children, make them happy at school, and make them successful at school, they're going to stay on at school, they're not going to get into trouble you know. So you're going to break the cycle that way but you can do it in partnership with Bedford Row. And if you do that then you've got parents on side, just everything works out better.



section eight

Conclusions and recommendations

8





Conclusions

It was both a privilege and an insightful learning journey for us as researchers to undertake this work. The design of the study, an ethno case study informed by narrative inquiry principles, offered us the opportunity to engage with integrity, to learn from ‘experts by experience’, and to hopefully write a report which will be of value to the BRFP.

The fundamental finding of this study is that the BRFP fulfils its Vision Statement as we found that it was committed and effective in promoting the well-being of individuals and families. It was seen to achieve this in the spirit of openness, hospitality and respect as the BRFP welcomed all who came and valued them as partners along with its staff in shaping the BRFP vision. It achieved this through its own dedicated work and through working in partnership with others. It struck us each time we visited the BRFP in the city centre that walking up the nine steps from street level to ring the door bell was so symbolic of the invitation to people who come to the service to rise up and claim and reclaim their lives.

Imprisonment does not take place in a vacuum and its impact is far reaching. Research participants described the societal stigma faced by prisoners, former prisoners and their families in section 2 - Context and these were very much mirrored in section 3 in the literature review where the stigma, isolation, family tensions and relationship challenges were discussed. The impact of imprisonment of parents on children was also recognised by our research participants and the literature strongly advocated for the necessity to consider children’s rights to ensure the holistic needs of children are addressed. Both our findings and the literature review recognised the vulnerability of prisoners and their families at the transition stage and the need for supports for all parties to prepare for a successful transition of the former prisoner back into society.

The model of delivery embedded in an ethos of hope and respect is described in section 5. The model was described as multi-site, needs-led, family orientated and intergenerational, integrated, partnership orientated and accessible. The model was seen to be delivered by dedicated caring personnel comprising staff and volunteers guided by caring and informed leadership. Within the literature reference was made to a number of initiatives designed to support prisoners, former prisoners and their families. The literature review explored the key components of family support and identified best practice. It is our contention that the BRFP embraces best practice principles in the style of work adopted and delivers a suite of integrated services that are child-centred, strengths-based, socially inclusive, partnership-based, accessible, responsive and flexible and collaborative. The foundation stone of the BRFP’s success was found to be the quality of relationships between the staff/volunteers and the people who come to use the services as well as the organisations that the BRFP work in partnership with.

This study described the substantial impact on the quality of life for the many participants who accessed the BRFP services. Those impacts were seen to be life enhancing, and even life preserving. Our study found that involvement with the BRFP promoted resilience for adults and children. According to Lynn, “A basic definition of “resilience” is an ability to recover from or adjust easily to misfortune or change” (2013, p. 22). Families of prisoners, including the children, are forced to adjust to a new way of life, and “it is how [children] they adjust and to what extent, that demonstrates the different levels of resilience to the often difficult situation in which they find themselves” (ibid, p.22).

For children, the impacts included opportunities to engage with a wide variety of activities and have fun, experience empowerment along with nurturing of their emotional and well-being. For families the impact included access to the supports that promoted family well-being and cohesion. People who used services either as group participants in the Life Skills Groups or the Men’s Group also spoke passionately about the impact of the BRFP on their lives. They said that membership built their confidence and skills to deal with the challenges imprisonment brought into their lives. Furthermore, they identified the BRFP as a place where they were not judged because of their personal circumstances, rather they were nurtured and cared for within an ethos of hope and respect. People who used the services greatly valued the opportunities afforded to them to participate in a variety of activities without charge, to build relationships with staff and among themselves. They acknowledged the web of services that can be accessed through the BRFP citing many instances of receiving such support. People who used the services acknowledged the devastation that addiction can bring with it and acknowledged the support they received and the advances they had made to deal with a variety of addictions. Most significantly, people who use the service spoke of the transformational impact on their personal lives, the confidence and self-



belief and resilience that they had built and their increased capacity to not only live with the reality of having a family member in prison but to be proactive in dealing with it and in planning for the future. People who use the services spoke of their realisation that they had something to offer each other, and the peer support, friendship and solidarity experienced was most evident throughout the research process. The supports offered to prisoners and to families of prisoners to manage the prison sentences and to prepare for transition out of prison and back into family and society was deeply appreciated by the people we interviewed. Essentially, engagement with the BRFP nurtured hope, built resilience and helped individuals and families to believe that a better future was possible.

Recommendations

A distinct aspect of this study was to identify ways in which the BRFP could be improved. We discussed this with research participants, some of whom were reticent at first to engage with this aspect of the research seeing it almost disrespectful to a service that they valued greatly. Once we explained that the BRFP explicitly sought to hear their opinions and to improve its services they responded with a variety of recommendations for improvement including services. As researchers we acknowledge the recommendations that came from the research process that are detailed in section 7 and recommend that the Board of Management of the BRFP review and consider same. Our own recommendations are outlined below, many of which echo those already outlined.

We wish to put on record that we understand imprisonment and criminality within a societal context and as outlined in section 3 of the literature review and section 2 on the context of the work of the BRFP and advocate for a fairer and more just society where all people are valued and supported to reach their full potential, where communities are safe nurturing places to grow up and where families are supported to raise their children. Thereby, we acknowledge the injustices in society.

We recommend that the BRFP continue to deliver its suite of multi-site, intergenerational suite of services while all the time reflecting with the people who use the services on what is working well and what can be improved. We propose that the BRFP continue to creatively and sensitively respond to the diversity of needs as they emerge and to seek sustainable funding sources in order to sustain and develop its services.

In relation to the **suite of opportunities for engagement** we recommend:

- Building an evaluation element into current initiatives e.g., the Life Skills Groups and the Children's Group, ensuring that people's opinions and voices are heard;
- Reviewing current information sharing strategies with the people who use the services e.g., ensure people are informed of the start/finish/closure of initiatives;
- Reviewing the level of current provision, with a view to consolidating what is working well and identifying specific gaps in provision to be addressed e.g., consideration as to whether the BRFP might offer supports to teenagers of imprisoned parents.

In relation to the **physical infrastructure** we recommend:

- Exploring best use of space given the recommendations to expand services for children;
- Refurbishment of the Hospitality Centre including a review of the adequacy of the space, condition of storage lockers, layout and furnishing. We recommend reviewing the facility from a child-centred and child-needs perspective in relation to nutrition, games, equipment and staffing. In order to more effectively support adults who avail of the service we recommend a review of staffing to facilitate one-to-one support where requested.

In relation to **building the capacity and supporting the BRFP staff** we recommend:

- Offering staff CPD opportunities identified through a process of consultation in order to build capacity of the team;

- Creating opportunities for staff to spend some '*down time*' together in order to build on the existing team spirit and bond.

In relation to **creating a greater awareness of the needs the BRFP seeks to address and the services it offers** we recommend:

- Developing links with primary and post primary schools to increase awareness of the impact of imprisonment on children and families and explore opportunities for collaboration;
- Advertising the BRFP services through leaflets and visual displays in the Hospitality Centre and in partner organisations;
- Exploring the use of social media to educate the public about the realities of imprisonment for families of prisoners and the services of the BRFP.

In relation to **supporting families** we recommend:

- Exploring the possibility of developing a child and imprisoned parent programme;
- Developing a resource for parents to help them to communicate the imprisonment of a parent to their child;
- Continuing to work collaboratively with the IPS and other organisations (see Appendix 1) to identify ways that families can be supported including developing a charter of rights for families affected by imprisonment;
- Building on the supports offered to prisoners and families at the critical stages of committal and release in order to nurture personal and family well-being.

In relation to **working collaboratively with other organisations** we recommend:

- That the BRFP continue to work collaboratively with its existing partners and to explore other possible partnerships e.g., working with schools.

We recognise the limitations of this research, and recommend this research could be further augmented by undertaking research with prisoners who are participating in supports delivered by the BRFP and with organisations associated with BRFP.



Appendix



Appendix 1 - List of organisations that the BRFP work with List of Agencies with Whom Bedford Row Has Ongoing Contact

Statutory Agencies

(Some may also provide funding to Bedford Row)

Name	Description	Relevance to work of B/Row
Irish Prison Service	Contract secured at end of 2016 to provide services in respect of Limerick Prison for 2017, 2018 and 2019. [Core funder since 2002]	Service Level Agreement enables us to operate the Hospitality Centre and a variety of other Social and Support Work that arises from work in same
Limerick Prison	Committal prison for Limerick City and County area as well as all of North Munster [Small Grant, Halloween and Christmas]	Hospitality Centre, and, since 2013, Women's Prison and Men's Prison, supports and programmes
Probation Service	Responsible for implementing community sanctions handed down by the Courts	Frequent contact with Probation Officers on a variety of matters to do with former prisoners, people coming before the court, sentences etc.
Regeneration Agency/Limerick City and County Council	An Agency set up to regenerate the physical and social environment where many of Focus Group live [Grants received for some salaries in 2014, 2016, 2017]	Limerick City and County Council now fully in charge of Regeneration in the City
Inspector of Prisons	Responsible for improving standards in Prisons, countrywide.	Ongoing contact as needs be in respect of improvements in regimes in Prisons
HSE	Statutory body with responsibility for health and well-being including mental health	Ongoing work with HSE staff to effect better outcomes families affected by imprisonment, in particular mental health
Mid-West Regional Drugs Forum	Statutory body responsible for providing drugs initiatives in Mid-West Area	Ongoing work to improve outcomes for addicts and families, increasing contact all the time
TÚSLA (1)	Provides support to community based initiatives for loss and bereavement [Grants for counselling for bereavement and play therapy for children]	Supporting counselling within B/Row and it is hoped that this funding will continue even if reduced
TÚSLA (2)	Statutory body with responsibilities in respect of protection of children	Ongoing work with staff of TÚSLA furthering outcomes for children – incl. 'Parenting Limerick'
Limerick City Drug and Alcohol Service	Responsible for providing counselling, methadone programme, needle exchange etc. in Limerick	A lot of contact and very important in our day to day work particularly with former prisoners
Limerick City Education and Training board	Provides a range of alternative education in many centres [Small grants for teenage groups]	Good contact maintained, hours given for tutors, e.g. Art Teacher for Men's Group
Department of Social Protection	Responsible for disbursing unemployment benefit and other assistance	Advocacy on behalf of families and former prisoners



Voluntary Agencies and Charities – Local and Limerick Area

Name	Description	Relevance to work of B/Row
NOVAS	Homeless Support, Family, Individual, many families of prisoners, former prisoners and a Respite House	In contact a few times per week directly supporting prisoners' families
PALLS	Probation funded employment Project whose participants are former prisoners	A lot of cross referral and mutual co-operation. Members of CE Scheme involved in B/Row
Southill Outreach Ltd.	Probation funded street-work Project whose participants are at high risk of going to Prison.	As in PALLS
Anna Liffey Drugs Project	Addiction Counselling Centre that works in the Community.	A referral agency for adults
Merchant's Quay	Addiction Counselling Centre that works in the Prison	Vital link into Limerick Prison and thereafter treatment
Focus Ireland	Homeless hostels, visiting service and in-reach service to Limerick Prison	For accommodation and programmes for former prisoners
North Star Project	A Project to address drug misuse in the Northside of Limerick, now based in City Centre	A lot of families involved with both N/Star and B/Row.
Learning Hub	Works in partnership with parents, education providers, statutory agencies and the wider Limerick community to provide a safe, welcoming and inspiring learning environment where young people can reach their true potential	Support to children's groups
Adapt House (Southside of city)	Refuge for women and children experiencing domestic violence	Many women who suffer domestic violence have links with imprisonment
St. Munchin's Family Resource Centre	Support Agency in Northside of City (Ballynanty and Killeely)	Many families are affected by imprisonment
Barnardos	Children's Charity working with vulnerable families in four estates in Limerick	Contact maintained through Parenting Limerick.
Limerick Youth Service	Provides alternative education and youth clubs in disadvantaged areas	Some young people who access LYS have a connection with prison
Limerick Homeless Alliance	Group of professionals with common interest in respect of homelessness	Many former prisoners are at risk of homelessness
Limerick Social Services Centre	Diocesan initiative to provide support to vulnerable families in disadvantaged estates, many of whom are affected by imprisonment.	Family Support Worker seconded to B/Row during the year – commitment given to permanent move in 2017
Southill Family Resource Centre	Provides Family Support Programmes in Southside	Many participants are involved in with B/Row
Suaimhneas (Northside of city)	Refuge for women and children experiencing domestic violence	Infrequent contact but important
Milford Care Centre	Support for families who have a member who is terminally ill	Increasing contact in respect of Milford's 'Compassionate City' initiative
DORAS	Development Organisation for Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Limerick	Increasing contact due to involvement in 'City Centre Initiative' in cooperation with LSSC
Citizens Information Centre	Advises people on their rights	Generally phone calls and referral and not much direct contact
Pieta House	Support for families affected by suicide	Contact as needs be
Rape Crisis Centre Limerick	Provides support to those who were raped or sexually abused	Ongoing contact
Partners Against Unemployment Limerick	A range of services for people who are unemployed and struggling	Ongoing contact to provide services to marginalised families

Voluntary Agencies and Charities – National and International

Name	Description	Relevance to work of B/Row
Educational Trust	Fund to further education amongst prisoners and former prisoners	Project Leader is on board of Educational Trust
Children's Rights Association	Ensuring that Ireland is compliant with all international obligation in relation to children's needs	Children affected by imprisonment are a vulnerable group whose needs may be misunderstood
ACJRD	Association of Criminal Justice Research and Development – research into desistance, prisons.	Very good seminars and conferences, education etc.
Childhood Development Initiative	Provides support to children, countrywide.	Involvement with Family Links Programmes in Limerick Prison
Mercy Sisters	Major funder of Bedford Row	Two Sisters are Directors and one is Social Worker
Franciscan Friars	Granted B/Row our building	Still maintains an interest in the work of the Project
Irish Human Rights and Equalities Commission	'Watchdog' for human rights of vulnerable populations in Ireland	Have done research in Women's Prisons
St. Nicholas Trust	Support Agency for families of prisoners in Cork	Potential to provide support, in particular to women in Women's Prison
IPRT	Irish Penal Reform Trust	Contact also increasing as the years go on
ICPO	The Irish Commission for Prisoners Overseas	Sporadic contact but very necessary when we need them and vice versa
Children of Prisoners Europe	A Europe-wide Agency dedicated to the support of children affected by imprisonment	Very passionate about protection of children of prisoners. Has a lot of research done and may have funding available in future years also
Inspector of Prisons	Responsible for the welfare of prisoners and standards, quality of prisons in Ireland	Very relevant to the rights of prisoners and their opportunities for rehabilitation, as well as their wellbeing and safet



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