Strengthening Family Relations? Review of the Families Matter Programme at Maghaberry Prison


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Strengthening Family Relations?

REVIEW OF THE FAMILIES MATTER PROGRAMME IN MAGHABERRY PRISON.

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Executive Summary


However, how children cope with parental imprisonment is influenced by how adults interpret, react to and discuss these events with children (Jones & Wainaina-Woźna, 2013; Manby, Jones, Foca, Biegansky & Starke, 2015). For example, if parents/caregivers experience feelings of shame/stigma, this is likely to be transmitted to children, increasing the negative effects of parental imprisonment on the child (Manby et al. 2015). Research indicates that living in a stable, secure caregiving environment, having supportive relations with extended family and peers as well as opportunities to maintain positive parent-child contact predicts children’s adjustment and enhances their resilience to the effects of parental imprisonment (Jones & Wainaina-Woźna, 2013; Manby et al. 2015; Nesmith & Ruhland, 2008; Parke & Clark-Stewart, 2001; Poehlmann, 2005).

For those imprisoned, family contact is believed to be an important factor in influencing how people cope with imprisonment and their reintegration and reoffending upon release (e.g. Adams, 1992; Cochran & Mears, 2013; Liebling, 1999; 2004). Positive, pro-social family support has been linked to improved psychological well-being, less suicidal behaviour, reduced probability of engaging in misconduct in prison, reduced recidivism and increased reintegration (see Berg & Huebner, 2011; Cochran & Mears, 2013; Duwe & Clark, 2013; Liebling, 1999; 2004; Monahan, Goldweber & Cauffman, 2011; Sampson & Laub, 1993; Sykes, 1958; Visher & Travis, 2003). Research also indicates that fathers in prison tend to experience greater separation from their children than imprisoned mothers as they tend to receive fewer visits, phone calls or letters from their children and have longer sentences to serve (see Arditti, Smock & Parkman, 2005; Booker Looper et al. 2009; Glaze & Maruschak, 2008; Magaletta & Herbst, 2001; PRT, 2014).

In Northern Ireland, government policy has highlighted the need to support and protect the families of those involved in the criminal justice system to improve children’s well-being as well as encourage parents to desist from criminal activity. Since 1993, Barnardo’s Northern Ireland (NI) and the Northern Ireland Prison Service (NIPS) have been working together to help support and protect the families of those who are imprisoned. In 2012, Barnardo’s NI developed the Families Matter programme in Maghaberry Prison in conjunction with NIPS to help improve and maintain relationships between children and their fathers. The Families Matter
programme is a residential programme in which fathers take part in a range of classes and activities aimed at strengthening their parenting skills and improving relations between fathers and their children while they are imprisoned. At the time of the research, this programme was a 17 week residential programme consisting of classes and activities provided by Barnardo’s NI, NiPS and other external providers. As part of the programme, fathers reside in separate accommodation to others detained in the prison and receive family visits once a month to provide fathers with an opportunity to put into practice the skills acquired in the family focused classes and activities.

This research project examines the Families Matter programme at Maghaberry prison to:

- Examine the rationale, design and implementation of the Families Matter programme.
- Assess if programme participation can reduce some of the negative effects of imprisonment for fathers, their partners/caregivers and children.
- Examine if the Families Matter programme can help improve relationships between fathers and their families during imprisonment.
- Assess if programme participation affects order and control within the prison and quality of life and psychological well-being for fathers.
- Develop a preliminary ‘theory of action’ linking programme components and activities to short term changes at the prison, father and family level as well as potential longer term outcomes.

Methodology

A mixed methods approach was used in this research, combining observations and interviews with fathers, family members and professionals involved in the delivery of the programme. One cohort of fathers and their families were followed throughout the programme in an attempt to outline how programme components linked to observed and reported changes in fathers, families and the prison environment.

Ten days of non-participation observations and forty-two interviews were conducted. In-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with forty-two individuals, consisting of 18 fathers, 7 family members and 17 individuals involved in delivering the Families Matter programme. Five family members initially agreed to participate in the research but did not respond to subsequent attempts to contact them, suggesting that potential opportunities to work with families may be quickly lost on completion of the programme. The inclusion of observations was an essential component of the methodology for two reasons. Firstly, research reveals that how programmes are designed and delivered can hinder their effectiveness (e.g. Andrews & Dowden, 2005; Hollin, 1995; Lipsey, 1995; Lowenkamp, Latessa & Smith, 2006). By observing how the programme was delivered, it was possible to contextualise the interview findings and examine interactions and reactions to the programme, providing a visible impression of how the programme affected fathers, families and those involved in its delivery. Secondly, it allowed the research team to raise issues
participants may have felt reluctant to do so given the small sample size and potential for others to attempt to identify participants’ interview responses.

Throughout the report, attempts have been made to protect confidentiality and anonymity as far as is possible by removing names and other personally identifying information, such as whether quotes come from fathers, family members or individuals involved in the delivery of the programme. Where possible, quotes from unexpected sources have been used so as to frustrate attempts to identify possible respondents. Ethical approval for conducting the research was obtained from Queen’s University Belfast, Barnardo’s NI and NIPS and security clearance to conduct the research was obtained from NIPS. Relevant professional guidelines as well as Barnardo’s NI and NIPS protocols were adhered to throughout the research.

Findings

The research findings are grouped under three headings and these are: programme design and delivery; benefits of Families Matter programme; and potential issues going forward. The key findings under each of these headings are outlined below.

Programme Design and Delivery

With regards to the programme design and delivery, the main research findings focused on the importance of the programme setting, how the programme was implemented, provision of classes and activities as well as the monthly family visit fathers received while on the programme.

Setting
The placement of the Families Matter programme in Quoile House seemed to act as both a motivator for engagement with the programme and facilitator of change. Moving to Quoile House was viewed as desirable for many fathers and families as it allowed fathers to ‘escape the madness’ of the other houses and better cope with the strains and pains associated with imprisonment. The improved physical conditions in Quoile House, however, only partially explained its appeal as a setting for the programme.

Implementation
The culture of the Families Matter landing was viewed as being key to the success of the programme as the use of a separate, residential accommodation provided fathers with the psychological space to begin to open up and discuss their families in ways that would not have been possible within the atmosphere of the older ‘square’ houses. This in turn facilitated a culture of peer support and sharing of information which seemed to be a powerful method of engaging fathers with the programme.
content and its aims. Fathers explained that hearing the parenting experiences of other fathers was more motivating and harder to dismiss than if they had just been ‘lectured’ to by Barnardo’s NI staff who may not be able to relate to their life experiences. In addition, participants were very positive about the relationships between Barnardo’s NI and prison landing staff, fathers and their families, attributing these relationships to encouraging fathers to engage with the programme and easing families concerns and anxieties.

Involvement in the programme did appear to encourage compliance and facilitate order and control as staff were able to use dynamic security techniques to prevent/defuse tensions and disorder. Dynamic security involves staff using their interactions with fathers to identify, prevent and defuse risk (see Prison Review Team, 2011). Yet, there were limits to this as fathers weighed up the pros and cons of being involved in the programme as became evident during the course of the research. Some difficulties began to emerge halfway through the programme when as a consequence of the steps taken by Maghaberry Prison to ensure it operated within its existing financial budget, fathers began to experience an increase in the amount of time spent locked in their cells. Classes and activities were also cancelled, although attempts were made by NIPS to ensure that Barnardo’s NI classes and those provided by outside agencies continued to run. There was a great deal of uncertainty surrounding the delivery of the regime and the ability of fathers to communicate with families at this time, which had a negative effect on the psychological well-being of fathers and families. Fathers were in a routine of contacting their families at particular times and, consequently, families worried about the safety and well-being of fathers when they did not contact them as expected. Relations with prison staff became strained as fathers expressed their dissatisfaction and frustration at the situation and relations between fathers was also affected as arguments began to emerge over the use of the telephone, which had not happened previously. Prison staff on the landing attempted to do their best to facilitate communication with families by unlocking fathers where possible and passing messages between families and fathers but were constrained in what they could do. The stress of the situation was visible to see on all parties and throughout the prison. Feelings amongst fathers that their concerns about these events were not being listened to by NIPS led many to engage in a protest and, after this incident, relations with prison and Barnardo’s NI staff become more strained. Nonetheless, as these particular financial concerns eased, prison staffing levels increased and the use of lock up decreased, relations between fathers and staff again improved.

**Classes and Activities**

As part of the Families Matter programme, fathers took part in a range of classes and activities provided by NIPS, Barnardo’s NI and external providers. It was envisaged that fathers would participate in a full timetable of classes and activities which had been specifically tailored to focus on families and designed solely for fathers on the programme. Over the course of the research, it became apparent that a sizable portion of classes and activities were being cancelled, with some being disproportionately affected more so than others. In particular, classes and activities delivered by NIPS seemed to be markedly affected. The level of control NIPS had over
these issues varied due to the wider economic situation in Northern Ireland, aims of the NIPS reform programme, legal requirements of the tendering process and difficulty obtaining cover for specialist skillsets. Towards the end of the research, the easing of financial concerns meant that resources were less restricted and as prison staffing levels increased, more classes and activities began to run as scheduled. Nonetheless, there did appear to be some potential to review the scheduling of classes and activities and how it converged with other departments and providers. In addition, it is worth noting that the cancelation of classes and activities became more problematic when it was combined with an increase in fathers being locked in their cells.

A full schedule of classes and activities was an important component of the Families Matters programme not only because of the learning and development which occurred as part of these activities but also because it helped fathers cope with the difficulty topics addressed during the programme. As the programme sought to encourage fathers to consider how their actions affected their families, this could raise difficult and challenging issues for fathers and being engaged in constructive activity could distract them from issues which might otherwise have led to depression, anger, self-harm or drug use. Participants were especially positive about the Barnardo’s NI parenting classes. Many fathers initially reported being unreceptive towards the parenting classes but the structure, format and delivery of the classes led them to revise their opinion and engage with the material being discussed. All participants interviewed recounted examples of learning that was obtained from the Barnardo’s NI parenting classes and how fathers were able to apply this learning during visits and in verbal and written communication with their families. Some suggestions to improve the parenting classes including having more material aimed at older children, more practical hands on classes, lengthening the programme so as to provide more space for one-on-one support as well as targeting the programme at sentenced fathers so as to minimise disruption in attending classes and activities.

Family Visits
In addition, all participants in the research were very positive about the family visits which they received as part of the programme. For many, these family visits were the main driver behind their initial motivation to sign up for the programme and were a significant incentive for encouraging compliance and engagement. Family visits were credited with improving the psychological well-being and quality of life of imprisoned fathers, their children and partners/caregivers as most believed that family visits contrasted greatly with the normal visiting facilities. Attending normal visits raised many concerns for family members and fathers. In particular, family members were worried about being judged and the exposure of children to violence due to the potential for people to argue during visits and the need for prison staff to physically restrain individuals when security concerns were raised. Participants were worried about their children witnessing these events or accidently being in the way when these events occurred. Concerns were also expressed about the ability of children with learning and behavioural difficulties to cope with the noise level in the normal visiting area, the inability of fathers to properly interact with their children because of
restrictions on movement, the shortness of the normal visit and the tendency for younger children to play in the play area which adults were not allowed access.

In the family visits, security concerns remained significant but participants spoke of the need to wear ‘two hats’, whereby security concerns were balanced with creating a family friendly environment in line with the ethos of the Families Matter programme. The less stressful nature of the family visits seemed to benefit all parties and reduce tension in relationships. Fathers were given an opportunity to apply the skills they had learnt in the Barnardo’s NI parenting classes and bond with children which was especially pertinent for those with new born babies. Children appeared to be happier in the family visits because they could play with their fathers, improving relations that may have become damaged due to their father’s imprisonment. A culture of peer support was also evident amongst family members which they perceived as beneficial as they described the benefits of being able to share experiences without being judged and receive advice, support and guidance from others. The activities during the family visits were attributed with helping to structure the visit and create a culture of peer support as families engaged and interacted with one another in a non-threatening environment. The only recommendations that participants had about the family visits tended to focus on enhancing the facilities for very young children and teenagers, holding family visits more often (fortnightly appeared to be the preferred option) and improving the speed at which family members could leave at the end of the family visits.

Benefits of Families Matter Programme

For most participants, parental imprisonment resulted in negative effects for the family. Stories of partners struggling to cope on their own, negative behavioural and emotional effects on children, the financial consequences of having a father in prison, stigma, relationship breakdown and the worry/anxiety about the well-being of fathers and children were frequently heard. Yet, all were positive about the ability of the Families Matter programme to improve family relationships, especially between children and their fathers.

Children

Accounts of fathers becoming more attuned to the needs of the children and how children were dealing with the loss of their father were frequently heard and attributed to the Barnardo’s NI parenting classes and conversations with staff and other fathers during the programme. Additionally, the frequency and quality of communication between fathers and children was viewed as an essential part of the programme. It helped fathers meet the needs of their children and the greater flexibility afforded to fathers and families to interact during family visits was credited with making children feel happier, loved and valued, helping fathers re-establish relationships with those who had become distant during their imprisonment or establish bonds with new born babies.
Parents/Caregivers
Benefits were also evident for partners/caregivers. The Families Matter programme was viewed as bringing couples closer together due to the greater appreciation of fathers for what partners were going through and increased quantity and quality of contact. For those not romantically attached, the programme continued to benefit family relations as it brought independent verification that fathers were serious about their commitment towards their child, as families were notified if fathers failed drug tests or engaged in misconduct. Further, feelings of stigma and isolation as well as worries and anxieties about the safety and well-being of fathers were reduced.

Fathers
For fathers, the Families Matter programme was believed to have affected them by encouraging them to be less selfish, more patient, more willing to spend quality time with their children, greater awareness of signs that their child might be upset, more confident in their ability to talk about sensitive topics with their child and more willing to play with their children. The culture on the Families Matter landing was also believed to contribute to a less stereotypical, more humanised, less macho environment where fathers were more focused on their families and less selfish. In addition, Barnardo’s NI and NIPS staff also benefitted from the programme and the culture on the Families Matter landing as it brought feelings of satisfaction and reward to be involved in attempting to improve families’ lives.

While all participants in the research were positive about the potential for the programme to have a short term and medium term effect on fathers and their families, its ability to have longer term outcomes was unclear. Participants were hopeful but felt it was difficult to gauge this until fathers had been released. Longitudinal research is needed to explore this issue further.

Potential Issues Going Forward
The research findings also identified some components of the programme rationale, design and delivery which might benefit from further thought. However, it is important to acknowledge that the research was conducted at a particularly testing time for NIPS due to the need for Maghaberry Prison to operate within its existing financial budget, wider economic difficulties in Northern Ireland as well as significant changes in staffing and personnel due to the NIPS reform programme. Four main areas were identified: strategy and oversight; communication and cooperation; progression and staffing and resources.

Strategy and Oversight
All participants interviewed felt that the Families Matter programme had great potential but that some of the momentum behind it had been lost due to recent
events. There was a perception that these events had provided some prison departments with an opportunity to withdraw from the programme while, for others, the particular difficulties experienced during the course of the research, with regards to the need to operate within existing financial resources, meant that alternative areas in the prison were prioritised above the Families Matter programme. NIPS management had recognised this and had made attempts to correct this in recent months. Improvements were felt as a result of this action but some difficulties remained. In particular, challenges around the delivery of a full schedule of classes and activities continued and were described as having been present prior to recent events. Explanations for why some NIPS departments had withdrawn from the programme suggested a lack of coordination and reluctance to engage due to perceived negative consequences such involvement might have for departmental performance indicators. A concern was expressed that insufficient monitoring of attendance at classes and activities meant that full attendance at such events could not be guaranteed, affecting departmental performance indicators as well as their subsequent business case for provision of services. These difficulties were believed to have negatively impacted on programme recruitment, the motivation and engagement of fathers on the programme and its viability, given the need to demonstrate a business case for continued investment in the programme and retention of designated residential space. Attempts had been made to overcome some of the gaps in the schedule of classes and activities by using external providers but caution is required regarding the long-term sustainability of this approach and its potential to contribute to a perception that the programme could continue with reduced provision of classes and activities by the prison service.

Communication and Cooperation

During the research, it seemed that there were some misunderstandings about the Families Matter programme within the wider prison. Perceptions such as the fathers on the Families Matter programme were spoiled, the programme was a burden, those attending family visits did not adhere to the same security checks as those on normal visits and that Quoile House was ‘easier’ to manage than other locations within the prison were either stated or hinted at. This suggested that there was a need to improve understanding of and communication about the programme within the prison. Also, the tendency for those working on the programme to try to become more self-reliant may inadvertently contribute to these sentiments as well as add to the difficulties encountered when fathers required access to services beyond those available on the programme. There appeared to be a need by management in both Barnardo’s NI and NIPS to consider this possibility and review their strategic approach to inter-departmental cooperation and use of external providers to strengthen existing provision in a sustainable manner.

The issue of communication was not unique to the Families Matter programme as many felt it was a concern for most departments within NIPS. Indeed, many felt that communication was better amongst those involved in delivering the Families Matter programme than elsewhere in the prison and examples of good practice were observed through attempts to hold regular meetings to discuss the programme and inform staff of developments. Nevertheless, some suggestions for improvements were
made regarding communication between staff on varying shifts, when tasks were shared with more than one individual, the use of weekly meetings as a means of communication and with volunteers. Suggestions for improving communication amongst NIPS management were also put forward. As the work of the Families Matter programme appeared to cut across different departments within the prison, the chain of command in approving actions was sometimes described as being unclear or delayed. Steps to improve communication and cooperation between prison departments and NIPS management had been taken by NIPS and this was viewed as positive. Improvements were evident but there remained some concerns about the speed of decisions and the prioritisation of work. In addition, increasing focus was placed on encouraging prison staff directly involved in delivering the programme to take responsibility for overseeing its development and, while there was a desire to do so, it seemed that the process of obtaining approval from NIPS management hindered rather than enabled this. One suggestion to remedy this issue was to assign responsibility for the development of overseeing and developing Maghaberry Prison’s strategies, policies and programmes involving families to one individual with sufficient authority to take forward actions. Other areas where confusion and the need for greater cooperation and communication were apparent included monitoring of the attendance of fathers at classes and activities as well as the consistency of decisions within NIPS.

Progression
In addition, nearly all participants in the research felt that more thought needed to be given to the management of the progression of fathers and families from the programme once it ended. For many partners, caregivers and children, the reduction in the level of and quality of communication and interaction with fathers was experienced as upsetting and lead to a re-emergence of concerns about the safety of fathers and the appropriateness of children attending normal prison visits. Indeed, some fathers reported being worried that they would not see their children once the programme ended because children would not want to attend normal visits after experiencing the family visits and/or because partners/caregivers would not bring children to normal visits due to their concerns about these visits. Some fathers were also concerned that the transformative effects of the programme would be undone if they returned to the ‘square’ houses due to the regime, culture and potential availability of drugs in these locations. There was a feeling that both NIPS and Barnardo’s NI needed to consider this issue more, especially as one of the aims of the programme was to encourage reflection on how behaviour impacted on children. As such, there was a need for strategy in this area to be developed and for NIPS, Department of Justice Northern Ireland (DOJNI) and Barnardo’s NI to consider where the Families Matter programme sits within the wider rehabilitative process. DOJNI (2013) focus on families and other activities and supports attempting to involve families in promoting desistance and change. While there seemed to be a willingness to review this issue, progress had been patchy and staffing and resource constraints appeared to add to some of the challenges involved.
Staffing and Resources
As previously described, NIPS faced particularly acute challenges with regards to resourcing and staffing during the research which were not unique to the Families Matter programme. Nevertheless, participants indicated that while particular pressures may have emerged in these areas at that time, they were not restricted to this timeframe. Suggestions for improvements were offered for both prison and Barnardo’s NI staffing patterns, although most suggestions focused on the use of prison staff. There appeared to be three main concerns in this area:

- Firstly, it was felt that shift patterns hindered prison staff’s ability to deliver classes and activities on the Families Matter programme as originally planned.
- Secondly, perceptions that Quoile House was ‘easier’ to manage may be contributing to an underestimation and insufficient appreciation for the workload involved and difficulties faced by prison staff in addressing the very specific needs of those detained there and varying programmes operating throughout the landings in Quoile House, making it distinct to other locations within the prison.
- Third, that the potential deployment of prison staff connected to the Families Matter programme to elsewhere in the prison could hinder the delivery and development of the programme.

These issues were recognised by NIPS management and attempts made to ensure that prison staff assigned to a particular house/landing remained there if possible. However, it was argued that the cost implications and practical realities of the difficulties facing NIPS at that time restricted what was feasible, even if there was a recognition of the potential benefits involved. The potential for prison staff to be moved elsewhere in the prison seemed to add to the importance based on how senior officers were deployed to ensure there was a consistency in programme oversight, management and delivery and some suggestions were offered in this regard.

As for resourcing, the Families Matter programme was funded by both Barnardo’s NI and NIPS, with Barnardo’s NI providing half the funding for the programme. There was a recognition that extra resources were unlikely at the time of the research due to the wider economic climate within Northern Ireland and that reductions in resourcing were probable. Yet a commitment to the continuation of the programme through these challenging financial times was apparent by both NIPS and Barnardo’s NI. This intensified the need for a more efficient and effective delivery and management of the Families Matter programme by both NIPS and Barnardo’s NI. There was a feeling that more could be done to improve the programme within its existing resource if some of the strategic, communication and staffing concerns identified above could be addressed. It seemed that addressing these issues might help NIPS and Barnardo’s NI to build a stronger business case for investment in the programme by helping to improve the extent to which performance indicators were being met and tackle some of the underlying challenges that appeared to be contributing to falling numbers which may ultimately led to the viability of the programme being threatened.
Conclusion

The findings emerging from this research confirm many of the effects of parental imprisoned identified in earlier research and reinforce existing studies highlighting the role programme design and delivery play in influencing the successfulness of interventions. Involvement in the Families Matter programme did appear to counteract many of the negative effects of parental imprisoned, at least in the short and medium term while families participated in the programme. The mechanisms by which participation in the Families Matter programme reduced these negative effects included: the increased frequency and quality of contact between fathers and their families; culture of peer support on the programme; alleviation of anxieties and worries about the safety of fathers; the enhancement of fathers parenting skillset and providing opportunities for fathers to demonstrate these enhanced skills; and improving fathers well-being and ability to cope with imprisonment which in turn helped to improve communication between fathers and families.

Nevertheless, there are a number of limitations to this research which must be borne in mind when interpreting its results. These include its small sample size which will limit the generalisability of the findings and while the potential for long term outcomes to emerge from the Families Matter programme can be highlighted, firm conclusions cannot be drawn due to the need to conduct a long term follow up study after release from prison. Despite these limitations, the research provides useful insights into the role that programme design and delivery is playing in its success as well as how the programme can be enhanced to build on and develop its potential.

A number of examples of good practice were identified during the research as well as areas that may require further and a brief summary of these are listed below.

Examples of Good Practice

1. Setting the Families Matter programme in a newer building with better facilities and a design allowing more interaction between staff and fathers.
2. The residential nature of the programme and use of segregated accommodation.
3. The motivation, commitment and skills of Barnardo’s NI staff, NIPS staff and volunteers to the programme and its aims.
4. The relationships between Barnardo’s NI and Quoile House prison staff with families.
5. Level of cooperation and communication between Barnardo’s NI and NIPS staff in Quoile House.
6. Use of dynamic security by prison staff on the Families Matter landing to manage order and control on the landing.
7. Development of and promotion of a culture of peer support amongst fathers and families taking part in the programme.
8. Use of peer learning in Barnardo’s NI parenting classes and non-judgemental attitude.
9. The linking of fathers’ experiences to theory discussed in the Barnardo’s parenting classes and flexibility of Barnardo’s NI staff to take account of particular learning or mental health needs of those involved.
10. The frequency and quality of opportunities to parent while on the programme, in particular access to telephones and the family visits.
11. Provision of activities for families to partake in during the family visit and inclusion of male volunteers in these activities.
12. The use of photographs at family visits.
13. The continued motivation and commitment to the Families Matter programme by NIPS and Barnardo’s NI during difficult financial times.
14. Evidence of attempts to improve communication amongst those involved in the delivery of the Families Matter programme by Barnardo’s NI compared to elsewhere in the prison.

Suggestions for Future Development of the Programme

1. DOJNI, NIPS and Barnardo’s NI review the progression of fathers and families from the programme to ensure that progress made while participating in the programme is not undone and that appropriate connections with other rehabilitative services and supports are developed.
2. DOJNI, NIPS and Barnardo’s NI appraise existing rehabilitative, desistance and family focused strategies and policies to ensure appropriate links are made to the Families Matter programme and that plans are in place to continue to engage families beyond the completion of the programme.
3. NIPS and Barnardo’s NI consider beginning recruitment for the programme earlier and reviewing the selection criteria to take account of developments within the prison and the needs of different groups (e.g. sentenced fathers or those on remand).
4. NIPS, working with Barnardo’s NI, attempt to provide a regular routine with a full schedule of classes and activities aimed at strengthening the parenting and self-development skills as well as access to telephones for fathers. However, when this is not possible, clear communication with fathers and families, acknowledgement by NIPS management of fathers’ concerns and attempts to facilitate continued telephone contact may help to avoid the emergence of unrest.
5. The sustainability of the use of external providers in providing classes and activities must also be examined by Barnardo’s NI and NIPS.
6. NIPS, working with Barnardo’s NI, consider strategies to improve fathers’ attendance/compliance with the Families Matter programme.
7. Barnardo’s NI need to consider including more material aimed at older children and practical skills focused activities in the Barnardo’s NI parenting classes as well as providing more one-on-one support to address specific needs and assist those with social work involvement.
8. Barnardo’s NI and NIPS reconsider the use of and selection of peer mentors (perhaps called Families Matter key workers or Barnardo’s NI volunteers) as fathers who have previously completed the programme played an important
role in supporting new fathers and promoting a supportive peer culture on the landing and within the Barnardo’s NI parenting classes.
9. NIPS, working with Barnardo’s NI, need to review barriers and obstacles to inter-departmental co-operation to ensure a more efficient and economical use of resources.
10. NIPS, working with Barnardo’s NI, evaluate staffing (both at programme and class level), resourcing, communication and approval mechanisms currently being used in the prison to consider where changes may be made to address some of the concerns raised in chapter six.
11. NIPS and Barnardo’s NI review the provision of family visits to look at whether more frequent visits are possible as well as more activities and facilities for babies and older children as well as the speed by which families could leave the visit once it was over.
12. DOJNI, NIPS and Barnardo’s NI consider how normal prison visits may be made more family friendly to address the concerns raised by families.
Chapter 1: Introduction

Increasing attention has been paid to the impact of imprisonment on families and the possible role families may play in promoting desistance from crime (see Farrall, 2002; Murray, 2005; Murray & Farrington, 2005, 2008a, 2008b; Sampson & Laub, 1993; Visher & Travis, 2003; Wildeman, 2014). Official government reports and crime reduction strategies have acknowledged the need to work with families to minimise the negative effects of imprisonment, discourage reoffending and attempt to break the intergenerational transmission of criminal behaviour from carers to their children (Department of Justice Northern Ireland (DOJNI), 2013; Home Office, 2004, 2006; Ministry of Justice, 2013). In addition there is also a robust body of evidence highlighting the impact on children, in both the shorter and longer term, of being separated from a parent through imprisonment. The consequences result in children’s poorer psychological and emotional well-being, their lack of educational progress and their increased involvement in anti-social behaviour (Jones and Wainaina-Woźna, 2013; Murray et al., 2009).

In Northern Ireland, the DOJNI (2013) ‘Strategic Framework for Reducing Offending’ document highlights the need to support and protect the families of those involved in the criminal justice system. This policy document recognises that strong, positive family ties can reduce offending and encourage desistance (DOJNI, 2013). This focus is reflected in the key priority areas of the Northern Ireland Prison Service (NIPS), Youth Justice Agency (YJA) and Probation Board for Northern Ireland (PBN), with families viewed as a key priority for all during a climate of significant financial constraint due to the wider economic situation of reduced financial resources in Northern Ireland. NIPS has for some time identified the potential of families to assist with reintegration, rehabilitation and desistance from crime as well as the possible negative consequences of imprisonment on families (NIPS, 2012). In 2010, NIPS developed a ‘Family Strategy’ emphasising the need to provide timely and accurate information to families, advice and support, financial assistance, family ‘friendly’ visits as well as family programmes and services (NIPS, 2012). Examples of some of the positive action taken by NIPS to improve the experience of families include the use of family support officers, child centred visits, extended visits scheme for mothers and their children, contribution towards the cost of visiting a prison, provision of telephone calls, notification of urgent domestic or childcare needs to relevant authorities as well as the provision of support information and signposting to relevant agencies (see CJINI, 2015; 2013a; 2013b; 2012; NIPS, 2012). In addition, NIPS works in conjunction with the Probation Board Northern Ireland (PBN), DOJNI and non-government partners, such as NIACRO, the Quaker Service, Prison Fellowship and Barnardo’s Northern Ireland (NI), to better communicate with, support and protect the families of those imprisoned.

However, more recently, concerns have been expressed about the potential for NIPS staff shortages and reduced funding to affect developments in this area (CJINI, 2015; 2013a; 2013b; 2012; NIACRO, 27 March 2015).
1.1 Barnardo’s NI work in Prisons

Barnardo’s NI outcomes are focused on improving children’s lives. While Barnardo’s NI provides some similar services to NIACRO and the Quaker Service, they are unique in that their primary goal is to improve the lives of children by focusing on, developing and maintaining the links (where appropriate) between children, families and imprisoned parents. Barnardo’s NI deliver programmes directly to those inside prison with the aim of improving parent/child relationships as well as increasing parents’ capacity to meet their children’s needs. NIACRO, the Quaker Service and the Prison Fellowship provide information, advice, support, assistance with transport for families, prison visiting centres, NIPS staff training and support to those imprisoned but their primary goal is not directly focused on improving children’s lives or relationships with parents (see Bass, 2015; NIACRO, 2015, Prison Fellowship, 2015). Other services are also provided by a range of non-government organisations within NIPS, including Cruse bereavement service, the Samaritans and Start 360 amongst others, but these services do not focus directly on improving relationships between children and parents (see CJINI, 2015; 2013a; 2013b; 2012).

In 1993, Barnardo’s NI started a Parenting Matters service. The aim of this service was to increase positive outcomes for children by working with parents and highlighting needs and issues affecting children. In 1996, they expanded their work into the prison setting and began offering services in the Maze Prison. As the Maze Prison closed, Barnardo’s NI began to extend their services to other prisons and are currently providing services and support in all three adult prisons in Northern Ireland (Maghaberry Prison, Magilligan Prison and Hydebank Wood Female Prison) as well as Hydebank Wood Young Offender’s Centre/College. Through this work, Barnardo’s NI seeks to reduce the potential impact of imprisonment on children and families, create opportunities for parents in custody to continue to have a positive involvement in their children’s lives as well as provide opportunities for positive contact through family days/events/visits, where the focus is on the child and family unit.

The range of services provided by Barnardo’s NI to imprisoned parents are tailored to the specific stage of imprisonment (e.g. remand, sentenced, pre-release) and stage of parenting (e.g. new parent, parent of toddler, parent of teenager, etc.). They include a range of group based programmes as well as individual engagement with participants and families to ensure they are receiving appropriate services and supports. Barnardo’s NI works in partnership with NIPS to deliver these services and examples of some of these services include:

- Parenting and relationship courses
- Extended family day visits
- A parenting together programme which involves bringing both parents together in the prison to discuss parenting and the needs of their children.

Programmes typically cover the impact of imprisonment on a child, children’s developmental needs, parenting styles, positive communication with children, problem solving skills and discipline/behaviour management of children. These
activities have been highlighted as examples of good practice by the Criminal Justice Inspectorate Northern Ireland (CJINI) (2006; 2009; 2013a; 2013b; 2015).

Building on this work, it was in 2012 that the first Families Matter programme was run in Maghaberry Prison.

1.2 The Families Matter Programme

Barnardo’s NI in partnership with NIPS jointly developed the Families Matter programme at Maghaberry Prison in October 2012. This programme arose from the work Barnardo’s NI and NIPS had already been engaged in and drew inspiration from Her Majesty’s Prison (HMP) Parc. HMP Parc has been praised for its engagement with families by providing intensive support, transport, improved family ‘friendly’ visiting facilities, use of Skype to facilitate family contact and provision of continued support as people transition from prison back to their families (HMCIP, 2014). Interesting, HMP Parc tends to credit observing the partnership between Barnardo’s NI and NIPS as providing the motivation behind their work in this area.

At the time of the research, the Families Matter programme was a 17 week residential programme aimed at fathers\(^1\) detained in Maghaberry Prison. As part of the programme, fathers moved from their current accommodation in Maghaberry Prison to landing 3 in Quoile House to undertake a schedule of classes and activities which were family orientated, consisting of only Families Matter programme participants and were provided by NIPS, Barnardo’s NI as well as some external providers. Quoile House is a newer building in Maghaberry Prison and tends to be viewed more positively by those detained there due to its cleanliness, reduced noise level, open design, newer facilities and less restrictive regime. When the research began, programme eligibility was dependent on:

- Being a father;
- Not engaging in any misconduct for three months prior to recruitment to the programme;
- Not engaging in misconduct during the programme;
- Not involved in taking drugs and willing to submit to voluntary drug testing;
- Must be detained for the duration of the programme;
- Must not be charged with a sexual offence;
- Must agree to participate in all classes and activities delivered as part of the programme, in particular the Barnardo’s NI parenting classes.

Fathers were mostly kept separate from others detained in the prison and were supposed to receive parenting, education, cooking and workshop classes, amongst others that were specifically tailored to focus on families. All classes and activities were intended to have a family focus rather than concentrating on developing the individual skills of the person detained. It was in this way, that the range of classes and activities fathers engaged in during the programme differed from elsewhere in the

\(^1\) Throughout this report, the term fathers is used to refer to fathers, stepfathers and fathers to be.
prison and was intended to develop their skills as a parent. For example, in cooking classes delivered as part of the Families Matter programme, it was envisaged that fathers would learn how to cook low cost family meals rather than learning to cook per se. Likewise, in education classes delivered as part of the Families Matter programme, it was originally intended that fathers would cover similar topics to their children’s school curriculum so they would be able to discuss schoolwork and help their children complete homework during visits. Fathers were also supposed to be able to have more frequent telephone contact with their families due to the less restrictive regime operating in Quoile House compared to other houses in Maghaberry Prison and receive a special family visit once a month. These family visits last significantly longer than normal visits (four hours compared to one hour) and fathers were allowed to move around, play and eat with their families to a much greater extent than is permitted on normal visits. Specially trained Barnardo's NI and NIPS staff were selected to work together delivering the programme, with the intention of ensuring consistency and developing ‘right’ relations between fathers, staff and their families and volunteers are also used to help provide activities for families during the family visit.

The intention of the programme was to improve relations between fathers and their families, identify and develop the skills of fathers to contribute positively to family life while in custody and on release, as well as give fathers an opportunity to reflect on their relationships with their families and how their choices affected their families.

An initial pilot of the programme revealed that fathers’ self-reported understanding of child behaviour and development, quality of communication with their families, understanding of their parenting style and appreciation of the effect their imprisonment had on their family was enhanced through their participation in the programme (McCrudden, Braiden, McCormack, Sloan & Treacy, 2013, 2014). The fathers also reported a greater confidence in their abilities as parents and improvements in their relationships with their children’s mothers and staff in the prison (McCrudden et al. 2013, 2014). Concern was expressed about the aftercare needs of fathers and the potential limited opportunities families might face in attempting to continue to maintain positive relations during the remainder of the father’s imprisonment (McCrudden et al. 2013, 2014). In addition, the pilot did not include families and staff perspectives as the findings were based solely on fathers’ self-reported changes in their understanding, behaviour and interactions with their family before and after programme completion.

Furthermore, since the pilot was conducted, the range of classes and activities provided on the programme has been altered, significant changes in NIPS management and personnel have been undertaken as part of the wider reform of NIPS and sizable cost saving measures have been implemented due to the wider financial situation in Northern Ireland (Committee of Justice, 2013, 2014a, 2014b; DOJNI, 2014).

Right’ relationships in prison are believed to be respectful, have clear boundaries, are consistent, recognise the power imbalances in prison, address conflict rather than avoid it and explain deviations from the norm (Liebling, Price & Shefer, 2011).
This has changed the context within which the Families Matter programme is being delivered.

1.3 The Present Study

It is in this transformed context that Barnardo’s NI commissioned this research into the design, delivery and potential benefits of participation in the Families Matter programme. Barnardo’s NI are the sole funders of this research and the research team are independent of Barnardo’s NI and have no conflict of interests to declare.

The present study examines the views of fathers, family members and individuals involved in the management and delivery of the programme to investigate the potential short term benefits of programme participation on fathers, families and the prison. It is intended that the results will be used to inform future delivery and growth of the programme, progression planning and policy development. More specifically, the aims and objectives of this project are to:

- Examine the rationale, design and implementation of the Families Matter programme in Maghaberry Prison.
- Assess if programme participation can reduce some of the negative effects of imprisonment for fathers, their partners and children.
- Examine if the Families Matter programme can help improve relationships between fathers and their families during imprisonment.
- Assess if programme participation affects order and control within the prison and quality of life and psychological well-being for fathers.
- Develop a preliminary ‘theory of action’ linking programme components and activities to short term changes at the prison, father and family level as well as potential longer term outcomes.

1.4 Structure of the Report

The remainder of the report is divided into seven chapters. The next chapter, chapter two, reviews existing theory and research in this area while chapter three outlines the methodology used in the study. Chapters four, five and six present the study’s findings. Chapter four focuses on the design and delivery of the programme and chapter five explores the effects of imprisonment on fathers and their families as well as whether programme participation affected fathers, families or the prison. Chapter six concerns the wider strategic issues influencing the programme and its potential outcomes. In chapter seven, the implications of these findings for practice, policy and theory are discussed and examples of good practice and some areas requiring further thought are put forward.
Daniel and colleagues (2010: 13) stress that, in terms of child development, it is important to consider each child as an individual and argue that the fact that “a child has not reached a particular stage that is average for his age may be, but is not necessarily, an indicator of neglect, abuse or trauma”. They go on to argue that a child’s developmental potential will be influenced by a complex interplay of intrinsic factors (the child’s level of resilience or vulnerability to stressful life events) and extrinsic factors (the presence of protective or adverse factors in the child’s environment) as outlined in the matrix below (see Figure 1).

![Resilience, Vulnerability, Protective and Adversity Matrix](image)

**Figure 1: Resilience, Vulnerability, Protective and Adversity Matrix.**

The impact of adversity on child development is particularly relevant to this study and there is an increasing research evidence base demonstrating that children exposed to adversity are at increased risk of negative psychological, emotional and health outcomes in later life. This risk is cumulative in nature with the Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) study in the United States demonstrating a strong,
graded relationship between the number of adversities experienced in childhood and a broad spectrum of negative outcomes in adulthood (Felitti et al. 1998; Dube et al. 2003; Felitti & Anda, 2010). Previous work commissioned by Barnardo’s NI, the NSPCC and NCB has identified eight major areas of childhood adversity that are consistently linked with negative outcomes in later life (Davidson et al. 2012; Webb et al. 2014). These areas of adversity are poverty, debt, financial pressures; child abuse/child protection concerns; family violence/domestic violence; parental illness/disability; parental substance misuse; parental mental illness; and, of most relevance to the current study, parental offending/anti-social behaviour and parental separation through relationship breakdown/divorce, bereavement or parental imprisonment.

2.1 Parental Imprisonment

The issue of parental imprisonment has become even more pertinent in recent decades, with a 25-30% global increase in the number of people imprisoned since the late 1990s (ICPS, 2013). In the 2013 World Prison Population list, a rise in imprisonment was evident in 78% of countries (ICPS, 2013). Yet, statistical information on parental imprisonment and its effect on families is not routinely collected. Estimates suggest that between two and three million children in America and one million children in Europe are affected by parental imprisonment (Children of Prisoners Europe, 2015; Robertson, 2012). It is believed that 54% of the prisoners in the UK and America have children under the age of 18 while 26% of male prisoners and 47% of female prisoners in New Zealand are parents (PRT, 2014; Robertson, 2012).

In the UK, information on parental imprisonment is patchy. Ministry of Justice (2012) statistics recommend using a ratio of 1.14 children to one prisoner when attempting to calculate the number of children affected by parental imprisonment in the UK, although this ratio excludes imprisoned parents aged under 18. Based on this ratio, it seems that there may be 95,000 children affected by parental imprisonment in England and Wales. Yet, this is likely to be an underestimation as research by Parke (2009) indicates that 10% of boys and 9% of girls aged between 15 and 18 are also parents. In October 2014, there were 84,458 people imprisoned in England and Wales with roughly 1,100 of these believed to be aged under 18 (PRT, 2014). As such, the number of children affected by parental imprisonment is thought to be more than three times the number in care, five times the number on the Child Protection Register and more than double the number affected by divorce (see PRT, 2014).

In Northern Ireland, on the 27 March 2015, 1,741 adults were imprisoned suggesting a possible figure of almost 2000 children affected by parental imprisonment on that particular day (see NIPS, 2015). However, family size is typically larger in Northern Ireland compared to England (Office of National Statistics, 2009), so the number of children affected by parental imprisonment is likely to be an underestimation. In contrast to England and Wales, these figures are more similar to the number of children on the Child Protection Register and in care. On the 31st March 2014, there were 2,858 looked after children in Northern Ireland and on the 31st December 2014, there were 1,926 children on the Child Protection Register in Northern
Ireland (DHSSPSNI, 2014). Freedom of information requests reveal that children accounted for 20% of the total visits to NIPS during 2013 (Torney, 2014). Almost 5,000 (4,875) children visited NIPS in 2013 with the majority visiting individuals imprisoned in Maghaberry prison (Torney, 2014). Just under 2,000 (1,978) of these children visited NIPS once, with the remaining children visiting on average 8 times during 2013 (Torney, 2014).

Parental imprisonment can have a significant effect on families. It can contribute to relationship breakdown, financial hardship, stigma, bullying, isolation, deterioration in psychological well-being, increased probability of children becoming involved in crime and add to and perpetuate social inequality (Glover, 2009; Jones & Wainaina-Woźna, 2013; Kjellstrand & Eddy, 2011; Murray, 2005, Murray & Farrington, 2005, 2008a, 2008b; PRT, 2014; Wildeman, 2014).

Some of the ways in which it can affect partners and children are listed below (see Table 1).

### Table 1: Potential Effects of Parental Imprisonment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Children</th>
<th>Partners/Caregivers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Separation Anxiety</td>
<td>Loss of income</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anger</td>
<td>Extra childcare burdens</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worry about safety and well-being of imprisoned parent</td>
<td>Feelings of social isolation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behavioural disturbances</td>
<td>Difficulty maintaining contact</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deterioration in school performance</td>
<td>Relationships breakdown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stigma</td>
<td>Stigma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decrease in stable, quality parenting due to additional commitments by remaining parent/caregiver must take on</td>
<td>Added financial strain due to costs associated with imprisonment (e.g. visiting, telephone contact, sending money into prison, etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teasing</td>
<td>Divorce</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bullying</td>
<td>Moving home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased probability of being involved in crime/antisocial behaviour</td>
<td>Psychological stress as they attempt to support themselves, imprisoned individual and children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased probability of being imprisoned</td>
<td>Poor visiting conditions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: Glover, 2009; Jones & Wainaina-Woźna, 2013; Murray, 2005).

Research reveals that during periods of parental imprisonment, children and young people experience a range of psychosocial problems such as financial hardship, delinquency, truancy, mental health problems, aggression, drug use, social withdrawal, parental relationship breakdown, reduced parental supervision and support as well as poor school performance (Glover, 2009; Jones & Wainaina-Woźna, 2013; Murray, 2005; Murray & Farrington, 2005, 2008a, 2008b; Wildeman, 2014).
Parental imprisonment, compared to other types of parental separation, is a strong predictor of children’s delinquency and antisocial behaviour in adulthood, even when parental criminality and other childhood risk factors are controlled for (Murray & Farrington, 2005). Parental imprisonment itself, therefore, places children at a greater risk of delinquency and antisocial behaviour in later life and hence may contribute to the intergenerational transmission of offending behaviour (Murray & Farrington, 2005, 2008b). Parental imprisonment, over and above other types of parental separation, parental criminality and other childhood risk factors also predicts internalising problems such as anxiety and depression in adulthood (Murray & Farrington, 2008a; 2008b).

These effects are especially prevalent for imprisoned mothers as research indicates that a fifth of mothers in UK prisons are lone parents while a third of mothers are thought to have partners who are also imprisoned (Corston, 2007; Hamilton & Fitzpatrick, 2006; PRT, 2014; Social Exclusion Unit, 2001). In particular, black and ethnic women in prison (other than Asian women) are especially likely to be lone mothers (HMCIP, 2009). In only 9% of cases, are the children of imprisoned mothers believed to be looked after by their fathers with some studies suggesting that up to 70% of these children are taken into care while the remainder are looked after by other family members (Corston, 2007; PRT, 2014; Hamilton & Fitzpatrick, 2006). Unfortunately, children who are in care in the UK are particularly at risk of being imprisoned later in life (Kennedy, 2013; HMIP, 2011; PRT, 2014). In addition, the children of imprisoned mothers are believed to be more likely to be convicted of a criminal offence as an adult compared to children of imprisoned fathers (Dallaire, 2007). While there appears to be a greater recognition of the possible implications of parental imprisonment in female prisons in the UK compared to male prisons, UK prison governors do not tend to receive additional funding to provide family support work, parenting courses or family ‘friendly’ visiting facilities, with the result that such money must come from already under-resourced and over-stretched budgets for running prisons (Centre for Social Justice, 2009).

As well as gender differences, the effects of parental imprisonment are also believed to vary depending on minority and economic status with minority groups and those from lower socio-economic groups experiencing worse outcomes (Kjellstrand & Eddy, 2011; Robertson, 2012). Research in America indicates that paternal imprisonment significantly increased the risk of child homelessness and that this effect was concentrated amongst African Americans (Wilderman, 2014). Wilderman (2014) argues that the increase in the prison population contributed to racial disparities in child homelessness, black-white inequality and will likely lead to further inequality in civic and political participation. Concerns about the overrepresentation of ethnic minority people are also evidenced in the UK prison system with a prevalence rate of 26% of ethnic minorities in prison compared to 10% in the general population (Equality and Human Rights Committee, 2010; Ministry of Justice, 2014; PRT, 2014). Ethnic and religious minorities tend to report more negative experiences in prison, worse outcomes and difficulties with visits in the UK compared to their white/majority counterparts (see Butler & Maruna, 2011; HMCIP, 2010; Kennedy, 2013; Ministry of Justice, 2008; PRT, 2014). Further, statistics reveal that children visiting people in prison in Northern Ireland, and prisoners themselves, tend to
come from the most deprived areas in Northern Ireland and that there is a link between the areas worst affected by the Conflict in Northern Ireland and poverty (see Hillyard, Rolston & Tomlinson, 2005; Northern Ireland Executive, 2010; Prison Review Team, 2011; Torney, 2014). The families of UK prisoners have been found to be vulnerable to financial instability, debt, poverty and possible housing problems with an estimated cost of £175 per month to families for having a family member imprisoned (Smith, Grimshaw, Romeo & Knapp, 2007).

However, how children cope with parental imprisonment is influenced by how adults interpret, react to and discuss these events with children (Jones & Wainaina-Woźna, 2013; Manby, Jones, Foca, Biegansky & Starke, 2015). When adults maintain a positive view of the imprisoned parent, this is beneficial to children, whereas when feelings of shame and stigma are acutely felt by parents/caregivers, this is likely to be transmitted to children (Manby et al. 2015). Temperament, intelligence, problem-solving skills, humour, self-esteem and social support from family and peers can influence how families respond to imprisonment and their resilience to the possible negative effects of parental imprisonment (Jones & Wainaina-Woźna, 2013; Manby et al. 2015; Masten & Obradovic, 2006; Miller, 2007; Nesmith & Ruhland, 2008; Rutter, 2007; Ungar, 2005). Research suggests that the quality of parent-child relationships, living in a stable, secure caregiving environment, supportive relations with extended family and social networks, as well as opportunities to maintain contact with imprisoned parents, predicts children’s adjustment and enhances their resiliency (Jones & Wainaina-Woźna, 2013; Manby et al. 2015; Nesmith & Ruhland, 2008; Parke & Clark-Stewart, 2001; Poehlmann, 2005). Indeed, Miller (2006) reports that continued face-to-face contact between imprisoned parents and children can augment a child’s well-being. The role of the parent/caregiver who is not imprisoned is essential here as they tend to act as gatekeepers between the imprisoned parent and their children, judging the appropriateness of access, facilitating visits and interpreting and explaining the behaviour, emotions and attitudes of the imprisoned parent to the child (Nesmith & Ruhland, 2008). In this way, how this parent/caregiver reacts to and explains these events can be especially important in influencing how children cope with parental imprisonment, placing added pressure and responsibility on the non-imprisoned parent/caregiver (Jones & Wainaina-Woźna, 2013; Manby et al. 2015; Nesmith & Ruhland, 2008).

Further, for those coming from abusive or violent homes, the separation from an abusive parent may be beneficial for the child and partner and in such circumstances a decision may be made to not facilitate access to the child during imprisonment (e.g. Amato, Loomis & Booth, 1995; Jaffee, Moffitt, Caspi & Taylor, 2003; Nesmith & Ruhland, 2008; Wilderman, 2014). For this reason, it is necessary to speak to and respect families’ decisions regarding maintaining access with imprisoned fathers rather than attempting to encourage all families to be involved with imprisoned fathers.

For these reasons, Murray and Farrington (2005) argue that the effects of imprisonment on families warrants a major research agenda and express concern that no statutory agency has primary responsibility for supporting prisoners’ families and children in the UK, even though these children may be considered as ‘in need’ within the meaning of Article 18 of The Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995, Section
17 of the Children Act 1989 (England and Wales), and Section 22 of the Children (Scotland) Act 1995.

2.2 Being a Parent in Prison

There has been much debate about the potential effects of imprisonment for those detained there. Key deprivations or ‘pains’ thought to be associated with imprisonment are the loss of safety and security, autonomy, sexual relationships, liberty and access to goods and services (Sykes, 1958). Arguments range from viewing imprisonment as resulting in substantial long-term negative effects, to those who view imprisonment as a ‘behavioural deep freeze’ which does not really result in any long-term harm to individuals (see Liebling & Maruna, 2005; Sykes, 1958; Toch, 1992; Zamble & Porporino, 1988). Others argue that the availability of treatment and rehabilitative programmes in prison can provide some with the opportunity and support to reduce their reoffending (e.g. Andrews, Bonta & Wormith, 2011; Cullen, 2013; Mazkenie, 2000; Petersilia, 2003). What appears to be key is how individuals react to and cope with the prison environment they are confronted with (e.g. Adams, 1992; Cohen & Taylor, 1972; Liebling, 1999; 2004; Zamble & Porporino, 1988).

Depending on the nature of the regime, prison design, resourcing, adherence to human rights, levels of violence and the individual characteristics of those imprisoned, peoples’ experiences in prison can vary greatly (Bottoms, 1999; Crewe, 2012; Edgar, O’Donnell & Martin, 2003; Liebling, 2004; Liebling & Maruna, 2005; Pratt, 2008a; 2008b; Ugelvik & Dullum, 2012; Sparks, Bottoms & Hay, 1996; Wortley, 2002). Prison design, resourcing, staffing levels, overcrowding and availability of rehabilitative activities can influence the levels of violence, bullying and drugs in prison, which can in turn impact on an individual’s risk of being victimised, levels of fear and anxiety, prison culture, suicide, self-harm, staff-prisoner relations as well as the strategies use to respond to and/or protect oneself in prison (e.g. Bottoms, 1999; Butler, 2008; Edgar et al. 2003; McCorkle, 1982; Prison Offender Management Inspection, 2013; Sparks et al. 1996; Sykes, 1956; Wortley, 2002).

An individual’s coping style and contact with the outside world through visits with families and friends are believed to be important mechanisms in influencing how people cope with imprisonment and their reintegration and reoffending upon release (e.g. Adams, 1992; Cochran & Mears, 2013; Liebling, 1999; 2004). The potential of positive, pro-social family and peer support during imprisonment has been linked to improved psychological well-being, less suicidal behaviour, reduced probability of engaging in misconduct in prison, less recidivism upon release and greater reintegration (see Berg & Huebner, 2011; Cochran & Mears, 2013; Duwe & Clark, 2013; Liebling, 1999; 2004; Monahan, Goldweber & Cauffman, 2011; Sampson & Laub, 1993; Sykes, 1958; Visher & Travis, 2003). However, other studies question this relationship and have linked visitation with increased involvement in misconduct (see Cochran & Mears, 2013; Siennick, Mears & Bales, 2013). Siennick and colleagues (2013) report that being involved in prison misconduct declines in anticipation of visits but increases immediately following visits, gradually declining again to average levels. They found
this pattern was relatively consistent but was strongest for spousal visits and that more frequent visits led to a rapid decline in post-visit behaviour. Cochran (2012) found that those who had their visits discontinued were more likely to engage in prison misconduct. Further, there are also some who question the link between visitation and reduced recidivism (see Cochran & Mears, 2014).

Cochran and Mears (2014) argue that a more nuanced understanding of how family and peer visitation can affect those in prison is required. They suggest that the timing of visits (e.g. earlier in sentence versus later in sentence), differences in visiting patterns (e.g. consistent versus sporadic), the types of visitors (e.g. family versus volunteers), the experience of visitation (e.g. pleasant versus unpleasant) and the characteristics of those being visited (e.g. age, gender, ethnicity, etc.) are likely to influence the relationship between visits, prison adjustment, recidivism and reintegration but further research is needed.

In addition, to dealing with the potential effects of imprisonment and adjusting to prison life, parents in prison must also deal with the separation from their families and the associated worries and concerns that accompanies this separation (see Booker Looper, Carson, Levitt & Scheffel, 2009). Glaze and Maruschak (2008) discuss how imprisonment can lead to a dramatic decline in contact with children. Mothers may have their children taken into care while fathers may no longer be in a relationship with the child’s mother, resulting in difficulties contacting children and facilitating visits (Glaze & Maruschak, 2008; Magaletta & Herbst, 2001). Compared to mothers, fathers tend to have fewer visits, phone calls or letters from their children and worry about their role as a father due to their inability to provide, supervise or discipline their children during imprisonment (see Arditti, Smock & Parkman, 2005; Booker Looper et al. 2009; Glaze & Maruschak, 2008; Magaletta & Herbst, 2001). Fathers are also likely to receive longer sentences and experience greater separation from their families as a result (PRT, 2014).

Booker Looper and colleagues (2009) investigated levels of parenting stress among imprisoned fathers and mothers and found that fathers tended to report poorer relationships with the child’s mother/caregiver in the community, which they argued gave rise to higher levels of parenting stress as fathers worried about how the child was being looked after and their competence as a father. In comparison, women reported better relationships with the child’s parent/caregiver in the community which was believed to reduce their levels of parenting distress (Booker Looper et al. 2009). For fathers, who did have positive relationships with the child’s partner/caregiver, reduced levels of parenting stress was evident, even if contact with the child was limited (Booker Looper et al. 2009). For both mothers and fathers, levels of parenting stress were associated with higher levels of self-reported prison violence and aggression while women also experienced an increase in depressive symptoms (Booker Looper et al. 2009).

This research indicates that parental imprisonment affects all family members and can place an added strain on an individual’s ability to adapt to and cope with imprisonment. It also highlights the need for interventions which aim to reduce the number of parents’ imprisonment and where this is not possible, work with families to limit the potential negative effects of parental imprisonment, increase family resilience
and well-being as well as maximise the supportive and positive role families can play in reducing offending, encouraging desistance and promoting reintegration. In addition, it highlights the importance of maintaining and developing children’s relationships with both parents when one is imprisoned. This can assist in the promotion of the child’s wellbeing in both the short and long-term.

2.3 ‘What Works’ and Family Interventions in Prison

Attempts have been made to reduce the number of parents being imprisoned with campaigns to reduce female imprisonment and suggestions that the court should consider the impact on children before sentencing parents (e.g. Loureiro, 2009; PRT, 2014). However, with the continued global increase in the number of people sent to prison, increasing attention has been paid to developing interventions in prison to minimise possible negative effects on families, encourage reintegration and reduce offending.

Examples of such initiatives include family visits, less restrictive visiting procedures, parenting classes, activities to promote increased contact with families for those imprisoned, visiting centres and providing family support in the community (e.g. Barnardo’s, 2015; Boswell & Poland, 2007; Boswell, Poland & Price, 2010; Buston, Parkes, Thomson, Wright & Fenton, 2012; HMCIP, 2014; Meek, 2007). Research on these initiatives indicates that the programmes are generally well-received and judged to be helpful, with high satisfaction levels (e.g. Buston et al. 2010; HMCIP, 2014; McCrudden et al. 2013; 2014; Meek, 2007). Boswell and Poland (2007) report that those who participated in the programmes felt that their relationships with their children had improved as well as their ability to communicate with them. Other evaluations report that such programmes can result in improved understanding of children’s needs, feelings and development, that parents felt better equipped to respond to their child’s behaviour, reflected on their own parenting styles and also thought about their own experiences of being parented (Boswell et al. 2010; Boswell, Wedge, & Price, 2005; Clutton, 2007; Hasley, Harland, Johnson & Kaur, 2004; McCrudden et al. 2013; 2014). Unfortunately, however, none of the evaluations of prison based parenting interventions to date have employed comparison groups, control groups or randomised control trials (Buston et al 2012). In addition, little is known about how the design and delivery of such programmes can affect their outcomes. Yet, numerous studies indicate that programme design and delivered play a key role in influencing the successfulness of interventions.

Outside of the prison context, meta-analysis studies have demonstrated that parenting programmes can improve family functioning, parenting practices, and parent-child relationships, resulting in a significant impact on young people’s developmental outcomes, such as conduct problems, delinquency and imprisonment (Piquero, et al 2008; Woolfenden, Williams & Pleat, 2001; 2002). Nowak and Heinrichs (2008) found that across 55 studies, the Triple P Positive Parenting Programme promoted positive changes in parenting skills, child problem behaviour and parental well-being in the small to moderate range, varying as a function of the
intensity of the intervention. This confirmed the findings of a previous meta-analysis of the same programme (Thomas & Zimmer-Gembeck, 2007).

Kaminski and colleagues (2008) examined the programme design characteristics of effective parenting programmes. Increasing positive parent–child interactions and emotional communication skills, teaching parents to use effective time out, the importance of parenting consistency (particularly in relation to discipline), and requiring parents to practice new skills with their children during parent training sessions were associated with larger impact on children’s behaviours. The effectiveness of the active rehearsal and practice of new skills with own children has important implication for the design and delivery of prison based parenting programmes, given the structural restrictions imposed on this type of programme component. Teaching parents about child development was not associated with the programme effect size (Kaminski, et al., 2008). However, knowledge about child development may be an important underpinning to the enhancement of other parenting skills.

Research has also demonstrated that programme implementation/integrity has a significant impact on programme effectiveness (see Durlak & DuPre, 2008; Sanetti & Kratochwill, 2009). Durlak and DuPree (2008) identified an extensive list of factors that affect the successful implementation of effective prevention interventions. These include:

- community factors (policy, politics, funding)
- provider characteristics (perception of the need for and benefits of innovation, organisation self-efficacy and skill proficiency)
- the adaptability and compatibility (match and fit) of the programme
- organisational capacity (collaborative working relationship, effective leadership and the importance of a programme champion)
- appropriate training for staff and sufficient technical assistance (to maintain motivation and commitment over the longer term, supported continued skill development, and promote local problem solving)
Chapter 3: Methodology

This study used a mixed methods approach, combining observations and interviews to examine the design, content, delivery and potential benefits of participation in the Families Matter programme on fathers, families and the prison environment. One cohort of fathers was followed through the programme so that a preliminary ‘theory of action’ could be developed, outlining how programme components linked to observed changes in fathers, families and the prison environment. Ten days of observations were conducted to understand how the programme operated in practice and to contextualise the interview findings. Forty two interviews were conducted with fathers, family members and individuals involved in delivering and managing the programme between November 2014 and March 2015. A detailed discussion of the methods used, procedure, ethical issues and means of analysis are provided below.

3.1 Non-Participant Observations

Ten days of non-participant observations were conducted at various points in the programme to understand how participants were selected, the delivery of the programme and the ways in which fathers engaged, and responded to, the course content and family visits. The inclusion of observations was an essential component of the methodology for two reasons.

Firstly, research from the ‘what works’ literature reveals that how programmes are designed and delivered can hinder their effectiveness (e.g. Andrews & Dowden, 2005; Hollin, 1995; Lipsey, 1995; Lowenkamp, Latessa & Smith, 2006). By observing how the programme was delivered it was possible to examine individuals’ body language, interpersonal interactions and reactions to the programme, providing the researchers with a visible impression of how the programme can affect fathers as well as how families and individuals involved in the delivery of the programme engage with and respond to it.

Secondly, as the prison is a hierarchical institution with significant power differentials depending on an individual’s status, individuals lower in the power hierarchy may have felt uncomfortable raising issues or concerns with the researchers due to the potential for institutional ‘backlash’. Although, confidentiality and anonymity was guaranteed (with some exceptions discussed later in the chapter), the small sample size and specific nature of this research may have raised extra anxiety about the potential for those in more powerful positions to attempt to guess ‘who said what’ and the possible consequences of this. For this reason, the inclusion of observations in the research design was key as it allowed the research team to raise issues others may have felt uncomfortable doing so. This further added to the existing safeguards within the study to protect individuals’ anonymity and confidentiality as far as was possible.
However, a limitation of observations is that they do not allow researchers to question why individuals are responding in a particular manner or investigate the thoughts, feelings, attitudes, concerns or motivations behind actions. For this reason, interviews were conducted to address this potential methodological weakness.

3.2 Interviews

In-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with forty two individuals, consisting of 18 fathers, 7 family members and 17 individuals involved in delivering the programme. Further information on the characteristics of these individuals is not provided in order to protect their anonymity and confidentiality (this is discussed further in the ethical issues section of this chapter). However, all participants in the research were approached because of their involvement with the Families Matter programme and as such were well placed to comment on the programme and its potential effects. Interviews varied in length from 11 minutes to 80 minutes with an average length of 32 minutes. Five family members initially agreeing to participate in the research but subsequently did not respond to attempts to contact them to arrange a suitable time to conduct the interview. As a result, it was assumed that they had changed their mind and decided to withdraw from the study. Views on motivations for taking part in the programme, the selection process, delivery, organisation and design of the programme, family visits and effect on fathers, families and the prison environment were sought in the interviews.

Fathers participating in the programme for the first time were interviewed twice (approximately halfway through the programme and again at the end) to examine if their views of the programme changed depending on what stage they were at. While participants’ views were largely consistent between the first and second interviews, the issue of progression was much more pertinent in the second interview. All other participants were only interviewed once at the end of the programme. Some family members initially agreed to participate in the research and subsequently did not respond to attempts to contact them, suggesting that potential opportunities to work with families may be quickly lost if strategies for maintaining and building on the relationships developed during programme participation are not in place to continue this work on completion of the programme. Interviews varied in length from between 15mins to 80mins, with the average interview lasting approximately 45mins.

During the interviews with fathers, it was revealed that they had caring responsibilities for 48 children, including two stepchildren. Children ranged in ages from 7 months to 24 years, with an average age of 8.75 years. Thirty-five children took part in the family visits and explanations for why some did not consisted of lack of contact due to relationship breakdown (2), availability of family members to bring children to the visits (4), ineligible as children were aged over eighteen (3), ineligible as child was a grandchild (1) and due to social workers deciding that it was not appropriate for children to participate in the visits (3). For 11 fathers, this was their first time completing the Families Matter programme while it was the second time for 5 fathers and the third time completing the programme for 2 fathers.
3.3 Procedure

Ethical approval was sought and obtained from three ethics committees prior to the study commencing. These were the School of Sociology, Social Policy and Social Work ethics committee, UK wide Barnardo’s Research Ethics Committee and NIPS ethics committee. Full security clearance was sought and obtained from NIPS and relevant professional guidelines as well as Barnardo’s NI and NIPS protocols were adhered to throughout the research.

Potential participants were identified through their involvement in the Families Matter programme. However, specific details on how fathers, family members and those involved in the delivery of the programme were identified and recruited is not provided in order to protect the anonymity and confidentiality of those taking part in the research (see ethical issues section later in chapter). Instead, an overview of how participants were informed about the research, gave their consent to participate and how the research was conducted is provided.

Potential participants were informed and recruited to the study using a combination of mechanisms: verbal announcements, information sessions, posters and information sheets. Verbal announcements were made by the researchers, NIPS staff and Barnardo’s NI during inductions, on the landing and during family visits. Posters and information sheets were used to inform potential participants about the aims of the study, what participation involved as well as issues around confidentiality, anonymity and the voluntary nature of the research. Numerous one-to-one discussions were held with potential participants to talk through any questions or concerns they had, prior to deciding whether or not they would like to participate. The voluntary nature of the research was stressed in all communications to ensure participants did not feel obliged to take part.

To deal with potential reading and writing difficulties, a combination of verbal and written communication strategies were used to inform all potential participants about the nature of the research. When written communication was used, participants were asked if they would like the researcher to read the information to them. All participants in the research were given this option to try to minimise any possibility of discomfort or embarrassment. Given the hierarchical nature of prisons and the power dynamics involved, it was essential that the voluntary nature of the research was stressed. All potential participants were made aware that they did not have to participate in the research, that their involvement in the programme would not be affected and/or that they would not be ‘punished’ or lose privileges if they chose not to participate. Participants were also informed that they were free to change their mind and withdraw from the study without giving any explanation for doing so at any stage of the process.

Once participants voluntarily agreed to take part in the research, they were asked to sign an informed consent form. Participants were also asked if they were willing to allow their interview to be recorded and if so, they were asked to sign a separate consent form agreeing to this. If they did not want their interview to be
recorded, detailed notes recording the participant’s responses were taken during the interview. For ease and security reasons, fathers were interviewed in one of the interview rooms on the Families Matter landing. Individuals involved in the delivery of the programme and family members were given the option of conducting interviews within the prison, at their workplace, Queen’s University Belfast or their home. Interviews with family members were conducted by social work members of the research team given their experience conducting research with vulnerable young people and families. Interviews with fathers and those involved in the delivery of the Families Matter programme were conducted by the criminological members of the research team given their experience in conducting research in prison and on programme evaluations. On completion of the interview, participants were thanked for their time and where necessary were given a list of support agencies to contact for further information. All those who took part in the research were given the option of receiving a copy of the research findings once they were published.

With regards to the observations, participants were briefed on when the researcher was conducting observations and reminded of the presence of the researcher on the day the observations were conducted. The data was recorded and captured by taking detailed field notes throughout the day and writing up a detailed account of the observations based on these notes.

3.4 Ethical Issues

Due to the nature of imprisonment, it was possible that some participants may be distressed at being separated from their family and/or these feelings may emerge during the research. It is important, therefore, that a strategy was put in place to deal with this possibility. The strategy adopted required the research team to advise potential participants not to participate if they thought they were likely to become distressed and to monitor participants’ reactions during the research for signs of discomfort. If participants became distressed, the research team would pause proceedings and allow participants to choose if they would like to continue with the research, reschedule their participation to another time or withdraw from the study. If the participant was unable to proceed or no longer wished to continue, their involvement would be cancelled. In addition, a list of support agencies would be provided. However, this did not happen during the course of the research.

Only limited confidentiality and anonymity could be guaranteed as there was an ethical obligation to report disclosures of abuse or malpractice, harm to others or self and/or attempts to escape from the prison. All other information remained confidential and anonymous. If such disclosures were made, they were to be discussed amongst the research team initially to identify the most appropriate course of action. Cases involving harm to the fathers, prison staff or prison staff malpractice were supposed to be reported to NIPS, while cases involving harm to family members, child abuse or Barnardo’s NI staff malpractice were to be reported to Barnardo’s NI. Participants were aware of this limited confidentiality and anonymity through the
information sheet, consent forms and one-on-one discussions before deciding to participate. No disclosures were made during the research.

Age appropriate information sheets and consent forms were used to explain the purpose of the research, what was involved in participation and to obtain informed consent. No child under 10 years old was approached to participate in the study. While children aged between 10 and 15 could participate in the study, parental consent was required from both parents before the child could be approached about the research and the child had to give their informed consent to participate. Parental consent was not required for those aged 16 or over. Only the children of those family members who had voluntarily agreed to participate in the research were considered for inclusion in the study.

While, there was no reason to believe that adult participants would not be able to give full informed consent, given the prevalence of mental health issues and problematic family backgrounds within the prison population and those of their families, issues of vulnerability needed to be considered. Guidance was taken from NIPS, Barnardo’s NI and participants about whether they were capable of participating in the research. If the researcher became aware of any concerns about the mental health and/or emotional well-being of participants, participation in the research was postponed or cancelled depending on the needs of the individual. Researchers also adhered to NIPS Supporting Prisoners at Risk (SPAR) process which was deliberately designed by NIPS to support vulnerable prisoners. In addition, interviews with family members were conducted by social work members of the team who have a wealth of experience conducting research with vulnerable young people and families.

Strategies for dealing with potential learning, reading and writing issues as well as ensuring participants understood that participation was voluntary are outlined in the procedure section of this chapter.

Data collected during the study was stored in a secure, locked filing cabinet in the principal investigator’s office and all electronic files associated with the project were stored on a password protected computer drive at Queen’s University Belfast. No-one other than the research team and transcription company used to transcribe the interviews had access to the data collected. A confidentiality agreement was signed with the transcription company to ensure confidentiality and anonymity and a secure, password protected, encrypted programme was used to transfer data between the research team and the transcription company.

In writing up this report, care has been taken to ensure that potential identifying information has been removed from any quotes to minimise the risk of confidentiality and anonymity being breached. For this reason, information on whether information is coming from interviews or observations is not always provided and when quotes are used, information on whether the quotes are coming from fathers, families or individuals involved in the delivery of the programme is not presented. In addition, caution should be used if attempting to guess the sources of quotes as, more often than not, quotes are taken from unexpected sources in a deliberate attempt to frustrate such efforts and further protect the anonymity and confidentiality of participants. This is especially important given the small sample size in this research.
and the limited number of people involved in delivering the Families Matter programme.

3.5 Data Analysis

A theory of action approach was taken to analyse and interpret the observations. This meant that the research attempted to make links between events occurring on the programme and their actual and potential effect on fathers, families and/or the prison (see Patton, 1997 for a more detailed discussion of theory of action evaluations).

The interview data was analysed using NVivo (computer software supporting the analysis of qualitative research) and interpreted using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a qualitative methodology used to identify, analyse and report patterns or themes in a dataset (Braun and Clarke, 2006). This method of analysis was used to identify recurring patterns in participants’ perceptions and experiences of the programme, its impact on themselves, prison life and relationships with families.

Data triangulation was then used to ensure the claims, conclusions and recommendations drawn from the research are accurate and supported by the data. Triangulation is a process which attempts to ensure the reliability and credibility of research results by crosschecking the findings, using two or more different methodology approaches (Bryman, 2008). In this study, the findings of the observations were crosschecked and verified with the interview results.
Chapter 4: Programme Design and Delivery

Barnardo’s NI and NIPS jointly funded the Families Matter programme which at the time of this research was a 17 week residential programme in landing 3 in Quoile House. Fathers resided in landing 3 (also known as the Families Matter landing) in Quoile house for the duration of the programme and took part in a schedule of classes and activities which were family orientated and delivered by NIPS, Barnardo’s NI as well as some external providers (see Table 2 for a template of the timetable used in the programme). At the time of the research, fathers were divided into three groups and their timetable varied depending on which group they were in (see Table 2 for an example of how classes and activities could vary by group). Fathers were divided into three groups so as to facilitate smaller class sizes within the classes and activities, allowing facilitators to maintain order and control while simultaneously allowing facilitators to pay more attention to the particular needs of fathers within the class. Fathers did not partake in any classes and activities at weekends other than normal prison visits or family visits, which were held on Saturday between 10am and 2pm (see Table 2). Volunteers also helped Barnardo’s NI and NIPS staff during family visits by providing arts and craft activities to encourage families to play together and provide structure to the family visit.

Table 2: Timetable for Families Matter Programme during the Research

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Monday</th>
<th>Tuesday</th>
<th>Wednesday</th>
<th>Thursday</th>
<th>Friday</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Maths/Gym</td>
<td>Parenting class</td>
<td>Stress management</td>
<td>Sports nutrition</td>
<td>Fingerprint learning class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>AM</td>
<td>Maths/Gym</td>
<td>Parenting class 1-2-1</td>
<td>Gym</td>
<td>Library</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>PM</td>
<td>Maths</td>
<td>Parenting class</td>
<td>Stress management</td>
<td>Sports nutrition</td>
<td>Fingerprint learning class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>class 1-2-1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>AM</td>
<td>Maths/Gym</td>
<td>Cooking class</td>
<td>Parenting class</td>
<td>Physical activity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>for children</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>PM</td>
<td>Maths</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Cooking class</td>
<td>Parenting class 1-2-1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>AM</td>
<td>Maths/Gym</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Parenting class</td>
<td>Cooking class/Library</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>PM</td>
<td>Maths</td>
<td>Leather</td>
<td>Parenting class 1-2-1</td>
<td>Gym</td>
<td>Fingerprint learning class</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Fathers were mostly kept separate from others detained in the prison and classes and activities were intended to have a family focus. It was in this way, that the range of classes and activities fathers engaged in during the programme differed from elsewhere in the prison and was intended to develop their skills as a parent. It was also intended that while on the programme, fathers would have more frequent telephone contact to talk with their families and receive a special family visit once a month. These family visits lasted significantly longer than normal visits (four hours compared to one hour) and fathers were allowed to move around, play and eat with their families to a much greater extent than is permitted on normal visits.

The purpose of this chapter is examine the rationale, design and implementation of the Families Matter programme and assess if programme participation affects order and control in prison, quality of life and psychological well-being for fathers. It will also contribute to the development of a preliminary ‘theory of action’, linking programme components and activities to short term changes at the prison, father and family level. The programme setting is first examined before moving on to review the implementation of the programme, the schedule of classes and activities available on the programme and, lastly, the family visit.

4.1 Setting

The placement of the Families Matter programme in Quoile House seemed to act as both a motivator for engagement with the programme and facilitator of change. From the observations, the design, space and ambiance of Quoile House was notably different compared to other areas in Maghaberry Prison. In comparison to the older ‘square’ houses, Quoile House contains newer facilities, more spacious accommodation, better links of sight for supervision and interaction with prison staff, and dedicated units, such as the drug free and Donard landings. As such, the design, layout and use of space in Quoile House meant that the characteristics of those detained there varied somewhat to other houses, resulting in different challenges and opportunities. It was these opportunities that were highlighted by the majority of participants as playing a role in the success of the Families Matter programme.

Descriptions of accommodation in the ‘square’ houses depicted cramped, grubby conditions, in which intimidation, fighting, drug use, distant relations with prison staff and a lack of privacy were common. Boredom, availability of drugs, potential for arguments to occur over cell-sharing, intimidation over medication, limited ability to contact family due to lock ups and the need to avoid displays of weakness in front of others were emphasised.

“I was in one of the square houses and I wanted out of them. […] You end up going on drugs or something, you would end up taking something if you were over there because there’s nothing else to do. […] It’s just stinking. The showers

3 The drug free landing contains individuals wishing to live in a drugs free environment while the Donard landing is designed for those with specific mental health needs.
and the cells and even the bed clothes, this is completely different, everything.”

“The first question you get asked when you come into a different house is, what medication are you getting? Do you get this? Do you get visits? Do you want to buy this? […] It is hard like.”

“Over in that other house I was in […] every day there was bells going off. There was fighting. You know, there was all sorts going on.”

For these reasons, moving to Quoile House was viewed as desirable for many as it allowed them to ‘escape the madness’ of the other houses and helped them better cope with the strains and pains associated with imprisonment.

“Well it makes me cope a lot better, because just the environment and the people. It is all better people.”

Indeed for a small minority, this was given as their initial motivation for signing up to the programme.

“Will I get a single cell is usually the first thing you are asked. It is not about your cell, it is about your family. You know. So a lot of them do go for that reason and that’s fair enough, it is nice, but they usually don’t last very long.”

“I just needed a break. My head was melted over there. […] And I was like, fuck sake, I need a break here, because it is just manic all the time over in the houses, you know. It is just craziness, it is just like bells are getting hit, people are fighting, drugs, you name it. There is so much temptation.”

Although, the majority of fathers attributed their initial interest to maintaining and improving relations with their family, the potential for some to take an interest in the programme due to the improved physical surroundings was recognised by prison and Barnardo’s NI staff, and attempts were made to deter fathers signing up solely for these reasons.

“I am quite straight with the guys. I don’t sort of sugar coat things for them. […] I would say look guys, if you are just moving over here for a single cell, don’t bother. Because the focus will be your kids. It is not going to be a wee easy life for you over on the landing. Yes, your environment might be nicer, but you have to work. You can’t just pick and choose what courses you want to do, you have to do the whole thing. […] You have to realise that it is not a wee pushover programme.”

The better physical conditions in Quoile House, however, appeared to only partially explain its appeal as a setting for the Families Matter programme. The conditions in the older ‘square’ houses were portrayed as leading to a hyper-masculine, competitive culture in which fathers could struggle to cope and/or become involved in drug use or fighting. In contrast, the characteristics of the people detained in Quoile House, combined with the residential nature of the Families Matter programme and the use of a separate landing, provided fathers with the psychological space to begin to open up and discuss their families in ways that would not have been possible within the atmosphere of the older ‘square’ houses.
“In the square houses it is dog eat dog, survival of the fittest, the fastest, and it is very testosterone driven and it is very … it is just horrible. And a [father] comes over here and he walks onto the landing and he has got two […] plasma TVs under his arms, and he is the big hard man. […] He has the swagger. And […] it’s like somebody gets a valve in his neck and you hear it, hiss, and you see him starting to relax. And once you see him starting to relax you start to see the real person coming through.”

“But the other boys are sitting all around me and they are sitting talking about their kids. And I’m going, hold on a minute. […] The square houses […] over there it’s like, what the fuck did you say about my kids? I only said, were your kids up to see you? But it would be like […] right you, outside! […] You can’t show emotion. […] That’s locked. That’s fucking padlocked, aye! I don’t even have kids!”

For those few who were initially motivated to take part because of the physical conditions in Quoile House, their motivation seemed to change during the course of the programme or they tended to drop out. Those who dropped out appeared to struggle to cope with the regime and atmosphere in Quoile House. It was suggested that they found it difficult to adapt to the more open conditions and calmness of the Families Matter landing, requesting a return to the ‘square’ houses.

“People would come over here and whenever they get over here and see the way things are run, they want to go back to where they have come from. They want to return to the square houses because it is all they know. And there’s attitude and bang on the door and over here it is not like that. You know, it is more relaxed over here. So you would get people like that. […] There’s not that many goes back. There’s not that many but there’s a lot of people says they want to go back and then they don’t go back.”

Those that remained explained that the benefits of the programme’s family visits for their children outweighed their own desires.

“But when I first came over here, it [cell door] was open at nine o’clock in the morning and I’m going, what am I going to do with my day? Lock that door, will you? You want to get locked, you really do. […] I’m not used to it. I was in jail for years and years before, and see even getting out and coming home, it is like the feeling of that. […] See for the first few weeks, I moaned about saying I want to go back. I said I don’t want to be here, I don’t like it. And I told people to tell the Senior Officers in the old house I was in, get me back. […] I just sort of persevered and stuck it out until I got the first visit. And then when I got the first visit, the kids already knew about it. And I says, I don’t want to be a selfish bastard and I had to be honest with them and tell them they were going to get the visits out of me. […] So that they see me. Otherwise I mightn’t see them. Their ma might just say, listen, you are not seeing them.”

In this way, the setting of Quoile House acted both to motivate people to consider engaging with the programme and facilitated change by providing a less masculine and competitive environment in which fathers could talk about their children and how their actions affected their family.
4.2 Implementation

In addition to the programme setting, how the programme was implemented on a day-to-day basis was examined to develop a preliminary theory of action, linking programme components to its effects on fathers, families and the prison environment. In particular, the selection process, relationships with staff, culture of peer support on the Families Matter landing and involvement of fathers in a protest during the programme are examined in detail.

4.2.1 Selection Process

Various methods were used to advertise the programme to fathers and families and the eligibility criteria, including posters, emails to sentence managers, prison staff, probation, etc., presentations to individuals when they first entered prison, word of mouth and recruiting individuals directly from landings by walking around the various prison landings and talking to fathers directly. At the time of the research, programme eligibility was dependent on:

- Being a father;
- Not engaging in any misconduct for three months prior to recruitment to the programme;
- Not engaging in misconduct during the programme;
- Not involved in taking drugs and willing to submit to voluntary drug testing;
- Must be detained for the duration of the programme;
- Must not be charged with a sexual offence;
- Must agree to participate in all classes and activities delivered as part of the programme, in particular the Barnardo’s NI parenting classes.

Presentations to individuals as they first entered the prison, word of mouth and walking the prison landings appeared to be particularly successful methods of generating interest in the programme during the research.

Participants were clear on the selection process and criteria used to judge eligibility but towards the end of the programme, there was a feeling of injustice as participants felt there were inconsistencies in how this criteria was applied and that rules were changed with regards to the use of mentors and the possibility of repeating the programme. The issue is explored later in the section and in Chapter six.

All participants in the research were in favour of the residential nature of the programme, the use of eligibility criteria and keeping Families Matter fathers accommodated on a separate landing. They felt this was needed to avoid the temptation to become involved in drugs and to create a culture which allowed them to talk about their families. In fact, there was a desire to see stricter enforcement of eligibility criteria through increased use of drug testing and increased self-sufficiently by the complete separation of the programme from other landings. Research
participants felt that more could be achieved if they were confined separately and not subjected to having the regime on the Families Matter landing restricted due to prison staff shortages or incidents occurring in other landings within Quoile House. Amongst the fathers, there was concern that those detained on the landing below the Families Matter landing may be imprisoned for child sex offences and could potentially view photos of their children as people moved between the two landings via stairs. Some also felt that those detained for serious violent crimes should not be eligible to participate in the programme but this view was expressed by a small minority. In contrast, nearly all participants interviewed felt that sex offenders should not be eligible to participate and were keen to avoid people being under the influence of drugs on the Families Matter landing or at family visits.

“If you are signed up for the Family Matters landing I don’t think drugs should be an issue. But there has been guys put off the landing for failing drug tests, which is quite rightly so, but there’s other people who are not on the Family Matters course and […] they are a bad influence. […] Sex offenders or other people that have been involved in rape and stuff like that there and they are on the landing below the Families Matter landing. It doesn’t really make sense... and they are associating with [fathers] here. I think it should be separate. [...] It defeats the purpose of family.”

“First off, they are putting people on the wing before they drug test them. So they should be drug testing them before they go to the wing. And then they would know, right, he has a problem. I know they are saying that they are giving you a chance to give it up, before, like they will take somebody that’s on drugs and they are giving you a chance to give it up. But at least you would be able to see who is taking it to start off with, and then monitor them ones. [...] For being a prison service, they should be a lot cleverer.”

Nearly all participants in the research expressed a desire for more drug testing and stricter enforcement of the eligibility criteria regarding drug taking. During the research, fathers on the Families Matter programmes were drug tested but there appeared to be variations on how often and at what stage they were tested. Fathers were supposed to be tested before beginning the Families Matter programmes and should expect to be tested every two to three months thereafter but recent prison staff shortages, budget cuts and insufficient time between recruitment and the beginning of the programme appeared to affect the prison’s ability to do this, with some fathers being tested after they began the programme and others reporting being drug tested only once in the last few months. However, NIPS drug testing records would need to be examined to confirm the existence of these variations as well as any patterns that may emerge.

“If a member of staff has reasonable suspicion that somebody is abusing drugs, they are put on a waiting list to be drugs tested. [...] There is regular drug testing. [...] It is linked in with the PREPS, so if somebody is going up to different levels, they are drug tested to measure again that they are meeting the criteria for going to the next level of regime. If somebody is going say for instance on

PREPS stands for Progressive Regime and Earned Privileges Scheme and refers to the ability of fathers to earn or lose privileges depending on their behaviour while in prison.
home leave, they are drug tested to ensure that they are meeting the criteria that’s laid down by that. So [...] I would be amazed if a [father] wasn’t drug tested within a two to three month period, ongoing. [...] I hear that [...] we went to be drug tested more regularly [...] but the reality of that again is, there is a financial cost to drug testing. And on the other hand is, if you did have more regular drug testing, you would probably have complaints [...].”

“But I think maybe more emphasis has to be placed on... and it is talked about, but zero tolerance and [...] it’s not acceptable if you have young kids in a family environment and drugs, it just doesn’t mix. [...] No, they just have to be more stringent on it and they are going to have to get their numbers up and make sure that any suspects with drug are drug tested.”

4.2.2 Relationships with Staff

Overall, participants were very positive about the relationships between the prison and Barnardo’s staff working on the landing directly with fathers and their families. Both Barnardo’s NI and NIPS staff were praised by all for their dedication and commitment to the programme. These individuals were viewed as sustaining the programme when it faced difficulties and going above and beyond their duties. Fathers and families praised their approachability and ‘right’ relationships were frequently observed.

“I do think that some of the landing staff have been excellent and I think that the programme wouldn’t be running at all if it weren’t for the landing staff.”

“The regular staff have bought into this. They are pushing this big time but their hands are tied by restrictions in budgets, other people in the prison who don’t really know what actually happens on this landing and the boy at the top table.”

“The officers and the Barnardo’s NI staff and things, you were able to sit and talk to them. Or the first day we went in and they sat us in a room and explained what this is all about. [...] So it was just... it is nice, and you get to know everybody. And it was just... it was relaxed. [...] The staff were pleasant. You could talk to them about anything if you needed to. I never had any issues, but you could have talked to them about anything. [...] I would give them all the thanks in the world for doing it, because I don’t think, they probably don’t get praised enough for what they do for people.”

During the research, fathers and families were viewed discussing their concerns with NIPS and Barnardo’s NI staff members and seeking advice and support. Examples of families directly ringing the landing to raise issues of concern, pass on information to fathers or send in thank you cards were witnessed as well as former participants of the Families Matter programme ringing the landing to inform staff of their progress on release. Families explained that knowing the prison and Barnardo’s NI staff helped to reassure them of the safety of the fathers and reduce worries and anxieties.
“Their staff are fantastic. […] You automatically feel a sense of relief because it is somebody you have come across, and you are not speaking to a stranger. This person knows the type of person [name of father] is […] and like the kids, [name of child] loves all the staff, you know […] and it is nice. It is nice to know that these are the people that are taking care of [name of father] in there, you know. So it is good that way. […] It has helped us so much. […] Everybody is so nice and nobody judges you.”

Barnardo’s NI and NIPS staff seemed to cooperate well together on the landing and worked together to prepare and support fathers and families for the issues raised during the programme, family visits and moving on from the programme. These experiences appeared to help breakdown negative stereotypes, humanising prison and Barnardo’s NI staff, fathers and families as well as reduce disorder as staff were able to use their knowledge of and relationships with fathers and their families to diffuse tension and discourage misconduct.

Nevertheless there were limits to the extent to which fathers were willing to avoid breaking prison rules as was evident during the course of the research when the majority of fathers were found guilty of breaking prison rules due to one particular incident. This incident did somewhat affect relationships between prisoners, prison staff and Barnardo’s NI staff, leading some to become demotivated and less engaged towards the end of the programme due to feelings of unfairness at how these events were handled. This incident is explored in detail later in this section.

Up until this point, involvement in the Families Matter programme had seemed to be mostly improving fathers’ quality of life and psychological well-being through the improved physical conditions in Quoile House, lessened hyper-masculine and competitive culture, relations with prison and Barnardo’s NI staff, involvement in classes and activities, increased contact with families and tendency for fathers to help and support each other.

4.2.3 Culture of Peer Support

While it was evident during the observations that there were different groupings of fathers on the landing which varied in the extent to which they engaged with prison and Barnardo’s NI staff, many fathers reported a culture of peer support. They explained that others on the programme had given them advice, support and guidance, if and when desired. For many, the sharing of experiences with others was particularly valued.

“Sometimes it is therapy for me like, because you take more out of another man, you would sit here for months, but another guy sits here under the same circumstances as you, I know what it is like to talk about yourself, so another guy in the same situation, that there is powerful, because you are taking it as, what he is talking about is real. He is not bullshitting. In this jail there is a lot of bravado. When people talk about their kids, like, you can see a difference in people. If you mentioned a man’s kids, all hell would break loose in this jail, you
know. So you treat it with respect, because you wouldn’t want to be disrespected in that way yourself, you know what I mean? […] It does make you think about the person in a different way, because you go to yourself, he is a fucking oddball. And then you are going, I know now why, you know.”

Families and professionals interviewed also commented on the merit of this peer support, noting how it helped the fathers open up about their families, reduce anxieties and better cope with their imprisonment.

“They start talking, then, you know. After the family visit then during the week you would hear one coming into the other ones’ bedroom and they would be showing photographs. […] What they were doing was like, oh did you see your wee one this month, he is walking now. You would have heard them amongst themselves after the family visits, how the other kids had developed and moved on. And they were all on the same wavelength. […] They wouldn’t have done that. No, I don’t think they have, no, they would have engaged in that type of conversation if they were going back to the other houses. Because they are all on the one landing it keeps them focused. They just support each other. […] Yeah, it is OK to talk about their feelings, and that’s really good. I think because somebody is maybe finding it hard, then maybe they will talk. I think the emotional well-being for them all is important. Like they are all of the same outlook, you know.”

This was particularly important as some fathers reported learning difficulties and/or mental health issues which lead them to be very worried and anxious about speaking in front of others in the Barnardo’s NI parenting classes and/or being judged based on their responses. Speaking to those who had previously taken part in the programme helped reassure them and reduce anxiety and stress.

“But for me, I’ll be honest with you, I hated them [parenting classes] at the start. Not because of actually the way the class is run, but because I don’t like that talking in front of people. […] I was dreading it like. It actually was… it’s like a phobia. […] Before my first class I was like having panic attacks. […] I could feel my heart. I could near feel it in my voice, because it was that bad.”

The work of peer mentors was particularly welcomed in this regard and they helped to initiate discussions in classes when others were new and/or reluctant to speak out.

“There is a situation where the Barnardo’s NI are running classes where people go in and they are sitting there, their first time in the class and one of the Barnardo’s NI staff is trying to get topics going and people are sitting there [intimidated] and worried that they won’t talk about. And it takes somebody that’s done it to get the conversation going with Barnardo’s NI staff which then interacts the rest of the class into it. That was one of the reasons for having them, too, which […] makes sense.”

While some expressed concern that the term ‘mentor’ may be interpreted as implying that some fathers were ‘better than’ others, overall the evidence seemed to suggest that the use of peer support and the inclusion of some who had already completed the programme was beneficial as it helped set the tone of the landing and engagement with prison and Barnardo’s NI staff for new fathers joining the
programme. It also helped to reduce anxieties, improve well-being and provide support and guidance to others when needed. Without these individuals, it is possible that such concerns may not be voiced to Barnardo’s NI or NIPS staff and if they were, more demands would be placed on staff members to try to deal with these issues.

However, a word of caution is required as sometimes these fathers may require additional support which peers are unable to provide and which necessitates one to one work by staff.

“The build up to the family visit is very hard for a lot of fathers in here, if you know what I mean. They just maybe become anxious and maybe they have problems. [...] Maybe they haven’t got access. [...] So you have to deal with something like that there. [...] What do you do, what do you say? I talk to them and I just say listen well, there will always be the next one. [...] We do what we can [...] I am probably not qualified for this stuff, I don’t know, but just maybe support and someone to talk to. A lot of people might probably be feeling down... my partner is not coming, my kids, on days like that there, you know.”

Moreover, this culture of peer support was temporarily affected by actions taken by Maghaberry Prison to ensure that it was operating within its financial budget. Temporary restrictions were placed on staff overtime to reduce staffing costs and ensure Maghaberry Prison operated according to its financial budget. In addition, reducing staffing levels and the costs of imprisonment were recommendations made by the Prison Review Team (2011, 2012) as part of the NIPS reform programme. These actions had a knock on effect on staffing levels within the Families Matter landing as well as the wider prison and began to influence the amount of time fathers were locked in their cells and able to access the telephone to call their families. An increase in the amount of time that fathers spent locked in their cells was perceived to be directly contributing to tensions and arguments amongst fathers as they sought to use available telephones within a reduced timeframe. Feelings of frustration at these events also contributed to the fathers’ involvement in a protest during the research.

4.2.4 Protesting Fathers

Approximately halfway through the programme and shortly before the fathers received their Christmas family visit, nearly all of the people living on the Families Matter landing staged a protest in the yard. They remained in the yard for roughly fifteen minutes and a verbal confrontation occurred between some fathers and prison staff. Those who remained in the yard were charged with breaking prison rules and most were subsequently found guilty when their cases were adjudicated on nearly two months later.

These difficulties began to emerge as Maghaberry Prison sought to operate within its financial budget and the consequences of the actions taken led to an increase in fathers being locked in their cells due to staffing shortages and lack of resources to cover staff overtime. The need to operate within existing allocated
financial budgets reflected the wider economic situation in Northern Ireland, which required public sector organisations to reduce costs, as well as the NIPS reform programme aims to reduce staffing levels and operational costs.

“In many ways because of our historical context [...] we were probably cushioned. [...] Time has just caught us up, and you know, if that’s the price of peace. [...] But it is still painful. It is not nice when you are going first. [...] We were heading to an overspend at Maghaberry this financial year [...] [The prison] started to introduce a very tightly controlled staffing process that [...] October/November was about the time it really started to bite. And you could see it. It was like a shock to the system of staff. They resented it. Prisoners resented it, because whilst I say there was no cost control for staff, the equivalent of that was prisoners had a full regime. [...] Because we were spending money we didn’t have. [...] We are just coming out of it in as much as to a certain extent, now that we have clawed back significant funding, we are in the process of slightly easing the controls. [...] Here is an old loose system; here is a very tightly controlled system. Then you ease it. Everyone feels better now. Where if [the prison] gone the other way, then it is death at a thousand slices.”

The effect on the Families Matter landing was immediately obvious with fathers spending more time locked in their cells, restricting their ability to telephone their families. Classes and activities were also cancelled, although attempts were made to ensure that Barnardo’s NI classes and those provided by outside agencies continued to run. There was a great deal of uncertainty at this time as fathers and NIPS staff were unsure if fathers would be locked on any one day or, if locked, for how long, which limited the ability of fathers to inform families about when they should expect a telephone call.

“If we hadn’t been locked up I don’t think it would have happened. [...] We were the ones that decided to change to go over to this, and then we were getting locked and locked, and we were the ones that wanted to change. And then because being locked all the time and then we couldn’t get talking to our families, like my wee lad was saying to [name of mother], why is he not ringing? And I had to tell her, well I was locked and there’s nothing I could do about it. [...] I was on the phone with her in the afternoon saying right, I’ll phone you later on the night. And then we were locked. And that was making me frustrated that she was going to be sitting at home worrying, what has happened? You know what I mean?”

“A general sense, everybody was getting on edge; constant. [...] People just getting on edge in general, getting stressed out not being able to chat to their families on the phones.”

NIPS staff shift patterns meant that there was a changeover in prison staff throughout the day, potentially resulting in reduced prison staff numbers over lunch. As a result, a house operating normally in the morning may be locked down in the afternoon if prison staff called in sick or were on leave. In addition, prison staff were redeployed depending on NIPS priorities so even if all prison staff assigned to Quoile House were present, they may be sent elsewhere in the prison with the result that those
detained in Quoile House were locked in their cells. This was particularly frustrating
and distressing to the Families Matter landing as the level of contact with families was
negatively affected, which had repercussions for the psychological well-being of
fathers and their families.

“It’s is not good for people’s mental health. They didn’t know whether they
were coming or going; if they were going to be out all day. They were suddenly
out for twenty minutes and then locked again. You know, there is absolutely
no continuity at the minute.”

Prison and Barnardo’s NI staff were sympathetic to this predicament but were
limited in what they could do as budget decisions and prison staff deployment were
beyond their remit. Fathers voiced their concerns and submitted complaints but felt
their voice was not being listened to and their concerns about the effect of the lock
up on their children and families were not being properly considered. Relations with
prison staff became strained as fathers expressed their dissatisfaction and frustration
and relations between the fathers was also affected as arguments began to emerge
over the use of the telephone which had not happened previously.

“It’s making people narky with each other. […] You do find things getting tense
at times, when you are only out for an hour and there’s twenty other people
trying to use the phone like, to get in contact with their families. […] There is
inter-niggling then between [fathers] because they can’t get to chat to their
families. They just come out with a big fucking head on them. You hear the call
for unlock and everybody is coming out with a face on them, rushing to get to
the phone, so it is generally negative, like.”

Prison staff attempted to do their best to facilitate communication with families
by unlocking fathers where possible and passing messages between families and
fathers but were constrained in what they could do. The stress of the situation was
visible to see on all parties and throughout the prison.

“I phone and go, is everything OK, and they are yes, yes, there has been an
incident. Everybody is on lock down. We can reassure you it is nothing to do
with [name of father]. It is nice, do you know what I mean, that to phone up
and just be told, no, the whole prison is on lock down. […] Everybody is on lock
down. We can reassure you it is nothing to do with [name of father]. It is nice,
do you know what I mean.”

“This is the Family Matters landing. Whenever I was coming over here they told
me you would be at least able to phone home at least once a day. And then
when we came over here and you are not getting out for the phone, you know,
you are being locked. Most times it is alright but at that stage it wasn’t alright
[…] we weren’t getting out to use the phone. You were going to your class
and then you were straight locked again. You weren’t allowed to use the
phone. It just got too much, you know what I mean.”

“The staff are sort of stuck in a corner too, you know. They are getting a lot of
abuse from us. They are getting abuse from our partners. They are getting
abuse from senior staff, you know. So they are sort of stuck in the middle.”
In an attempt to ensure that their concerns were listened to, the idea for a protest was put forward. Fathers explained that they felt that they had proved they were lower risk and could be unlocked with reduced prison staff numbers. They also thought that if they protested as a group, the prison would be restricted in its ability to remove them from the programme. There was some peer pressure for fathers to stick together and support each other and as fathers were going to continue living with each other in the prison, they risked being isolated if they did not take part.

“I think there was people that were annoyed at the lock ups. I also think there was some people that […] went with the flow, you know. […] I think it was more like the need for camaraderie among their fellow [fathers], so it was like, we are doing it, so they thought they had to. […] You don’t want to be seen to be going about like you were […] that you think you are more a staff member than you are in prison, you know what I mean? […] You still have to live with the others. Staff could go anywhere. And I mean it seems that there’s good relationships there between the normal staff and the guys, but it is still, yeah, it is that kind of saving face kind of thing.”

Likewise, NIPS staff needed to be seen to be control and not allow fathers to dictate the conditions of their imprisonment.

“I think it all came down to certain people giving off to staff, and staff sort of being pushed into a corner, and you know, at the end of the day if you are pushed into a corner you have to bite back. […] I don’t believe there would have been charges if people hadn’t opened their mouths.”

As such, a symbolic power struggle occurred in which fathers attempted to have their concerns heard and addressed and prison staff needed to demonstrate authority. This incident did not affect levels of unlock and resulted in the fathers who participated being charged with a serious breach of prison rules, which had a knock on effect on home leave and parole applications. After the incident, relations with prison and Barnardo’s NI staff become more strained but as financial tensions eased, more resources become available and prison staffing levels increased, decreasing the use of lock up and improving relations between fathers and staff. As this incident occurred close to the Christmas family visit, NIPS could have cancelled the family visit but out of consideration for the families, the visit was allowed to proceed. Initially, relations were a little tense between prison staff, Barnardo’s NI staff and fathers but as family members began to arrive, tensions eased and some family members expressed their disappointment about the men’s involvement in the incident and apologised to staff.

Towards the end of the programme, the majority of fathers were found guilty of breaking prison rules due to their involvement in this incident. Fathers understood that if they were found guilty of committing an offence under prison rules, they would be ineligible to participate in the programme. Their concerns predominately related to: the lack of official communication about what was likely to happen to them as they come towards the end of the programme; delays in having their cases dealt with
through the adjudication process; being unofficially informed they were ineligible to participate before they were found guilty of breaking prison rules; being informed they were ineligible to participate despite not being charged with breaking prison rules; as well as their knowledge that a previous cohort had been allowed to continue on the Families Matter programme despite also being found guilty of breaking prison rules. These feelings were directed at NIPS more so than Barnardo’s NI, although some felt let down by Barnardo’s NI due to their acquiescence to NIPS.

“Yeah, but what annoyed me was [...] basically they have changed the rules, which is unfair, because there’s ones that obviously have done it, went on to be a peer mentor. [...] But now they have just turned round... and I don’t know whether it’s because of the adjudications that they decided just to rid the landing, but it is unfair. [...] The rules have been changed. [...] If you are going to set rules out, stick to them. Don’t just... it’s like in sport playing a game, you don’t play a game half way through and decide to change the rules, you know what I mean? Just to suit someone’s theory of what it should be.”

Delays in hearing the adjudication charges were attributed to prison staff absences, scheduling issues, long delays in hearing charges across the prison and fathers choosing to defer their hearing so that they could obtain legal counsel. Explanations for why those who had not been charged were told they were ineligible to participate included that individuals should not be allowed to take part in the programme more than once and that the use of peer mentors was being discontinued. In addition, it appeared that the delay in fathers being officially informed of what was to happen to them on completion of the programme was due to awaiting decisions from the adjudication process and a desire to avoid the potential for unrest. Yet, fathers and families had been told there was the potential to repeat the programme during their induction and, while not informing fathers about what was to happen to them at the end of the programme avoiding the possibility of lashing out at unfavourable decisions, it seemed to significantly increase anxiety and stress for some fathers and their families as well as contribute to feelings of injustice. These feelings seemed to demotivate many fathers and led some to discourage others from signing up to participate in the Families Matter programme.

There were a number of consequences arising from these events. As stated above, the handling of events after the incident led some to feel that they were treated unfairly and discourage others from participating in the programme due to their feelings of injustice and the repercussions of being unable to continue with the programme for their families (explored in chapter six). It also appeared to contribute to a view amongst some within NIPS management that the fathers had not put the needs of their families first by engaging in this behaviour, while according to the fathers, it was because they were considering the needs of their families that they protested. The issue of allowing the fathers to continue was raised as this had happened in a previous cohort but the need to ensure the expectations regarding

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5 The adjudication process refers to the formal disciplinary system in a prison, whereby charges of breaking prison rules are investigated and judgements made regarding the person’s guilt or innocence.

6 An adjudication refers to when someone has been formally found guilty of committing an offence against prison rules.
behaviour from fathers was clear and that the eligibility criteria were not fudged was emphasised by NIPS management. This meant that there was a need to do a new recruitment drive in a short space of time as those who had been judged guilty of breaking prison rules were no longer judged to be eligible to repeat the programme. This decision also appeared to have a knock on effect on the prison’s ability to complete drug testing before the next programme began. Further, the use of peer mentors was discontinued and NIPS management felt that fathers should only be allowed to complete the programme once.

There was also a perception amongst some prison and Barnardo’s NI staff that fathers had been ‘bullied’ into this behaviour and while some fathers were happy to go along with this view in the hope of receiving a lenient punishment, it undermined the strength of the fathers’ feelings of frustration at that time.

“Like I was saying about being out in the yard, and they wouldn’t come in until they took notice of the complaints and stuff. [...] I was sitting there and I was asked do I want to go out in the yard. And why not, do you know what I mean? [...] But for the tape, I was told to go out. OK? Do you know what I mean? I was told to get out there! No, look here, I was out in the yard and people, see complaint forms, you know what the complaint forms are for? [...] They were handed back to us, and that was it, and nobody was listening. So we says look, we are not going to overdo it, we will stay out here an extra ten or fifteen minutes. And there was no staff even called over or nothing like that, for us. We came in of our own free will.”

Undeniably, fathers felt peer pressure to take part in the protest to avoid alienation and isolation but up until this time, their participation in the programme had been an effective mechanism for ensuring compliance and avoiding misconduct. They had demonstrated their ability to avoid succumbing to peer pressure in other houses and, while the culture of peer support on the Families Matter programme may have made this more difficult, fathers valued the family visits, involvement in classes and activities and accommodation in Quoile House and were reluctant to engage in behaviour which risked their place on the programme. To attribute this incident solely to personal attributes of the fathers and bullying may risk missing useful points of learning on how to avoid such incidents occurring again in the future.

4.3 Classes and Activities

As part of the Families Matter programme, fathers took part in a range of classes and activities provided by NIPS, Barnardo’s NI and external providers. It was envisaged that fathers would participate in a full timetable of classes and activities which had been specifically tailored to focus on families and for this reason, the classes and activities provided were solely for fathers on the Families Matter programme. There appeared to be some variation in the classes and activities available on the Families Matter programme over time, with participants recounted various experiences depending on how long they had been involved in the programme. At the time of
the research, classes and activities were provided by NIPS, Barnardo’s NI, Belfast Metropolitan College and the Public Health Agency (see Table 3).

Table 3: Provision of Classes and Activities on the Families Matter Programme

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<tr>
<th>Barnardo’s NI</th>
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<th>Belfast Metropolitan College</th>
<th>Public Agency</th>
<th>Health</th>
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<td>Parenting classes</td>
<td>Gym</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Fingerprint learning</td>
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<td>Family visits</td>
<td>Cooking classes</td>
<td>Maths</td>
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<td>Leather craft</td>
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In this section, issues around the provision of a full schedule of classes and activities are outlined before moving on to explore in-depth the Barnardo’s NI parenting classes and Fingerprint learning classes.

4.3.1 Provision of Classes and Activities

Variations in scheduled classes and activities were reported during the research over time and explanations for this included a desire to review, amend and update the classes and activities available based on feedback from prison staff, Barnardo’s NI staff and fathers as well as the availability and willingness of outside agencies to deliver activities. Yet, the research indicated that other factors also played a role in influencing what was available.

During the course of the research, it seemed that the scheduling of a full timetable of classes and activities had been a reoccurring challenge for the programme, especially in recent times. Participants in the research offered a number of reasons for this including: financial challenges; prison staff shortages leading to classes/activities being cancelled and/or fathers being locked up and unable to attend classes; facilitators on leave/sick leave; a changeover in the contract for the provision of educational classes; and a gradual withdrawal of some providers from the programme (explored in more depth in chapter six). Over the course of the research, it became apparent from observations and interviews that a sizable portion of classes were being cancelled, with some classes being disproportionately affected more so than others. In particular, classes and activities delivered by NIPS seemed to be markedly affected and fathers were concerned that it was leading to boredom, prompting some to consider using drugs to offset boredom.

“You have nothing to do. And then you can understand why young ones are turning to drugs, because they have nothing to do. You know, I have seen it. I have seen young fellas there and their classes are getting cancelled and they
are taking drugs then they are getting threw off the course, you know. [...] They were doing stuff every single day. Like nearly nine to five. And it was great and here’s me, I can’t wait to get doing this. And then when our course started, all these classes started cancelling. Like we were on five days a week and now we’ve gone down to two or three days a week. [...] Barnardo’s NI is OK, their classes is ninety nine percent on. They are always here, but with the prison service they are cancelling too many classes, and again, young fellas are getting bored of it."

However, it is important to acknowledge that during this challenging time for NIPS, prison staff made an effort to ensure the classes and activities provided by outside agencies and Barnardo’s NI were cushioned from these organisational issues as much as was possible. Although this was viewed with scepticism by some of the fathers as they felt it was an attempt by NIPS to conceal some of their failings in this regard.

A full schedule of classes and activities was an important component of the Families Matters programme not only because of the learning and development which occurred as part of these activities but also because it helped fathers cope with the difficult topics addressed during the programme. One of the aims of the programme was to encourage fathers to consider how their actions affected their families. Consequently, fathers may also reflect on their own childhood and experiences of parenting. This could raise difficult and challenging sensitives for fathers as it may remind them of events they would rather forget. Being engaged in constructive activity not only developed their skills but gave them something to focus on and acted to distract them from issues which might otherwise lead to depression, anger, self-harm or drug use.

“I think being on this landing helped me because, again, you know, you are not locked as often. Well you weren’t locked as often and it was a bit more to take your mind off things, you know, doing different things. The first programme you could have had workshops and things to go to, you know. [...] Aye, it keeps your mind off things, you know.”

While the majority of participants did not mind some classes being cancelled as it gave them some free time to themselves or to ring their families, the frequency of the cancelled classes began to affect others as being engaged in constructive activity was part of the attraction of the programme and helped improve their psychological well-being.

“There’s programmes here that keep me busy, the likes of maths class, English classes and stuff like that there. So every day is maybe something different, you know. And it is like, it makes my time go quicker, if that makes sense. So I’m not as stressed out maybe, I am not maybe angry I can’t get on the phone. I’m busy.”

This experience was especially disappointing to those who had given up activities they had enjoyed to take part in the Families Matter programme.

The level of control NIPS had over these issues varied due to the need to operate within financial budgets, wider economic situation in Northern Ireland, legal
requirements of the tendering process and difficulty obtaining cover for specialist skillsets. Towards the end of the research, resources were less restricted and as prison staffing levels increased, more classes and activities began to run as scheduled. Nonetheless, there did appear to be some potential to review the scheduling of classes and activities and how it converged with other departments and providers and this is addressed in chapter six. In addition, it is worth noting that the cancelation of classes and activities became more problematic when it was combined with an increase in fathers being locked in their cells. It was this combination of events which seemed to lead to the protest.

When the classes and activities did run, participants were largely positive about them. In particular, the cooking classes run by NIPS and Barnardo’s NI parenting classes were highlighted as being beneficial. However, cooking classes were not being run as originally envisaged and had become more about teaching fathers to cook rather than planning and budgeting low cost family meals. This change was attributed to staffing shortages which limited the ability of those originally trained to teach this particular cooking class. In most cases, the cooking class was enjoyed because of the food fathers got to eat as part of the class. In contrast, Barnardo’s NI parenting classes were valued because of the learning that occurred.

4.3.2 Barnardo’s NI Parenting Classes

While there was some scepticism and wariness about being judged on their parenting and speaking about their families in front of others, all participants in the research stated that fathers gained additional parenting skills from taking part in these classes. At the beginning, many reported being unreceptive towards the classes but the structure, format and delivery of the classes led them to revise their opinion and engage with the material being discussed.

“Yeah, because it was, like I was saying at the start, it was putting me off the fact that I wasn’t going to sit and listen to somebody telling me how to rear my children. That was honestly my sort of thinking at the time. But there is, it’s not like that. […] It mainly was the [fathers] discussing and maybe using their own experiences […] Barnardo’s NI staff would tell you they are not instructors, they are more facilitators, so they are only there to get the conversation going.”

Barnardo’s NI staff demonstrated an awareness of the sensitivities surrounding parenting and did not construct the classes to tell fathers what they were doing wrong or how they should parent. Instead, they focused on using activities and discussions in the class to prompt fathers to reflect on their families and learn from the experiences of others.

“So the whole point of the class, I would like to think, is about learning. So you are learning from your mistakes. I made a mistake, you know, it can be rectified. […] Because you have sort of group discussions, you are feeding off other people. You are hearing other people’s views as a parent and as a father who has done time or is doing time; how do they feel about being away from
their children and their spouses and family? So you are sort of getting reflections of how you feel."

This approach appeared to encourage a culture of peer support, openness and sharing amongst the fathers and engaged fathers in a novel way to other classes and activities.

"But see the way you’ve got your own opinion, they get you to have your own opinion; that gets you to know the [fathers] a wee bit better, so it does. So doing all that there has kind of brought us all together, if you know what I mean."

"Jesus, I’m not the only one that feels like this. You know, there’s a whole landing of us that are basically feeling this. So there is a lot of positivity in the course. With the likes of the English and Maths and stuff like that, it is like being in school. [...] For the first time in my prison history, I actually wanted to learn. I actually wanted to open up my mind, and I wanted to stay up here. I didn’t want to take drugs anymore."

While a minority of fathers felt that it was important for the delivery of the classes that Barnardos NI staff had children themselves, most disagreed with this view arguing that they had received appropriate trained and because they acted as facilitators, most of the learning originated from the discussions with other fathers so it was not necessary for them to have children of their own.

All participants involved in the research were able to recount examples of learning that fathers had obtained from the parenting classes. Fathers told stories of how they had learned about the child’s stages of development and applied this in their interactions with their children. While opportunities to apply their learning were limited by their imprisonment, fathers were still able to apply this learning during visits, on the telephone and in written communication with their families. In this way, the family visit was a key component of the programme as it provided fathers with an opportunity to apply their skills in a setting that was more appropriate to interacting with children and allowed fathers move around and play with their children.

"The Barnardo’s NI class is brilliant. I’ve learned a good wee bit from it like. The ages and stages and what I should do, how to discipline them and all. Like I’ve learned a whole [lot]. I’ve been trying it out at the big [family] visits and it has been working, like. [...] I was down on just a normal visit and my wee lad started to mess about and got on the floor and all so I got down to his level and said [name of child], get up on my knee now. And he done it like that there. And before that his ma was sitting telling him to get up and he wouldn’t do it. And then I just went down at his level and he got up straight away, [...] I was actually a wee bit shocked, so I was!"

While key activities did have a considerable emotional impact on fathers (in terms of personal reflections on their relationship with their own parents, their perceptions of their role as a parent, and the developmental needs of their children), facilitators did face a number of operational challenges when running classes. The first of these relates to the level of father’s compliance/attendance within each session. In most classes observed, there were missing fathers, fathers arriving late, and
other leaving early, in addition to a range of other minor interruptions. It was rare for a full session to involve all registered class members for its full duration and without interruption. In almost all cases, non-attendance was due to the requirement for fathers to meet some other prison obligations (for example, work or a Doctor’s appointment). Such non-compliance/attendance (also referred to in the research literature as reduced exposure or dosage received) could significantly dilute the intervention provided, reducing any potential impact (see Sanetti and Kratchwill, 2009 for a review). Minor interruptions (for example, fathers having to leave the room for a few minutes, or messages being relayed to fathers within the class) also had an impact on the group dynamic within the class. Minor interruptions disrupted fathers’ concentration, permitted group members to drift of task, released the positive emotional tension established during group discussions and interactions, and prematurely ended important activities.

Secondly, facilitators worked with very heterogeneous groups, particularly in terms of the age of the children, the nature of family relationships at home, the learning style and abilities of group members and their motivation to address parenting skills and behaviours in class (which can vary over time). Cultural differences were also present within some of the groups observed. This heterogeneity places additional strains on the programme facilitator. Such participant characteristics interact with both programme components (some will respond better to some activities than others and some may find certain activities not relevant or too challenging) and programme implementation (some fathers are more likely to avoid active participation within groups through missing classes or failing to participate whilst in class). As each session is facilitated by a single staff member, the heterogeneity of group make-up places considerable demands on the skills of the facilitator in relation to adjusting the details of planned exercises to address the personal needs of the individual group members. Here, the inclusion of a second facilitator of the use of “mentors”, fathers who had previously gone through the programme, may help reduce the burden on individual facilitators. Mentors were observed successfully supporting early/introductory sessions. They helped provide individual support and instruction, offered advice and input to group members and recalled their own experiences undertaking the task. While mentors may help the delivery of the classes, their impact on the therapeutic alliance between the class and facilitators (in particular, the degree to which class members feel free to be frank and open in discussing of their own parenting practices) is unknown but interviews with fathers suggest that a culture of peer support and hearing the experiences of other fathers was important.

Activities which took account of the learning needs of individuals were used and attempts were made to accommodate the particular needs and concerns of individuals during the classes. Barnardo’s NI staff recognised that the fathers learnt at different speeds and had different topics they wanted to cover depending on the age range of their children. This recognition of the different abilities of the fathers and the modification of classes to reflect this was important to encourage engagement, comprehension and as fathers did not want to be embarrassed in front of others during the classes. There was also a recognition that sometimes it was beneficial for fathers to repeat the programme if they had struggled with the course content due
to learning difficulties, communication issues or mental health concerns. All fathers, families and those working directly with fathers were supportive of those with learning, communication or mental health difficulties being allowed repeat the course but this view was at odds with the stance taken by NIPS management who argued that it reduced the opportunity for others to take part and would probably lead to all seeking to repeat the programme.

The third challenge faced by group facilitators (and designers) is the limited opportunities within the programme for fathers to practice and rehearse specific parenting skills and techniques (e.g. parent-child communication or discipline strategies). As contact between fathers and children is limited to telephone conversations and visits, fathers have limited opportunities to implement practical parenting skills discussed and considered in class. Parenting programmes in the community, in contrast, are able to employ a wide range of strategies to improve parental skills and behaviours including role-play, modelling, video interaction guidance, couples work and homework. This placed added importance on access to telephones and family visits as a vehicle through which fathers could practice and rehearse their parenting skills while imprisoned.

There is a need to strike the appropriate balance between educational components within programmes (those elements aimed improving knowledge attitudes and understanding) with those components focused on changing behaviour and thinking (improving motivation, self-efficacy, changing parenting emotions and schemas, improving skills, and setting goals), together with the establishment of a strong therapeutic alliance based on openness and trust (see Azar, Nix & Makin-Byrd 2005; Gavita, Joyce & David, 2011 ). The classes observed focused primarily on increasing knowledge of child development, including the developmental needs of children, exploring family relationships and roles, and preparing for the extended visit. Few of the activities observed addressed specific parenting behaviours or skills. Although, as the observations of the Barnardo’s parenting class undertaken covered the end of one cohort and the beginning of another, it is not that all that surprising that the level of skills training exercises was relatively low. However, it is important that classroom activities focused on behaviours and cognitive change are activity supported and resourced within the programme given the contextual constraints imposed on such work by the prison location. It must also be recognised that while parenting skills training programmes appear to be effective, there is little empirical evidence regarding the active ingredients of such programmes with fathers (see Barrett, 2010).

Some suggestions were made to improve the classes and these included having more material aimed at older children, as some fathers felt that the classes were primarily targeted at those with younger children, and while they could contribute to these discussions and help others, they were keen for more information on how to deal with teenagers.

“Most of them classes are for people with newborns and […] well my oldest one is an older teenager now, so you can’t really tell them what to do. I am happy to learn new stuff, hundred percent, but breast feeding and all is not my street, you know what I mean?”
Other suggestions involved having more practical hands on activities such as opening and folding prams, how to heat up a bottle for a baby, etc. There was also a request for more support for fathers as some of the content of the programme could raise sensitive emotional issues. Barnardo’s NI staff seemed to be aware of these issues, warning fathers before they signed up for the programme and allowing them to excuse themselves if classes became especially difficult. This demonstrated that the programme was not an ‘easy’ programme and could be quite tough for some to complete.

“The Barnardo’s NI days. I think they are quite intense and do get quite sort of close to the bone, maybe sometimes, with some of them. Barnardo’s NI would warn them about that in the interview. There is things that we will discuss that will make you feel uncomfortable.”

“There was times whenever I was getting it a wee bit tough and I had mentioned to some of the girls and they said it was alright, I didn’t have to attend the class, you know.”

“The classes were hard and hit home.”

Barnardo’s NI staff were also seeking to lengthen the programme so that there would be more space to provide one-on-one support to fathers, address the needs of older children and focus on the individual needs fathers may have.

4.3.3 Fingerprint Learning Classes

Fingerprint learning classes explored the different learning styles of children and fathers as well as discussed the strengths and weaknesses of these different styles. These classes started towards the end of the research so fathers had only had a couple of classes before the programme ended. This meant that the fathers’ views of the classes were mixed. Some struggled to grasp what the facilitators were trying to say but they explained this was largely because they had attended only one class as they had missed the others due to solicitor’s appointments, visits, etc. This was a recurring issue across the range of classes and activities provided on the Families Matter programme and seemed to be more of an issue for those on remand. There was a desire to have fathers who were sentenced to minimise this disruption but the extent to which this happened seemed to vary from cohort to cohort.

“Yeah. Because they [fathers on remand] would have a lot more appointments to attend than what sentenced prisoners would have. That’s why we had always wanted more sentenced prisoners on the landing than remand. And our last group, funny enough, we had the bulk of sentenced. Whereas this time now we have the bulk of remand. So there is never any rhyme or reason to this place.”

Those who had attended the fingerprint learning classes tended to be more positive about these classes, explaining that it helped them better understand the different learning styles of their child and what their child’s strengths might be.
“I think it is interesting. […] It is more or less your child’s way of thinking and what way to, like your child is smart, how smart your child is. […] Like the capabilities that your child has, instead of trying to teach your child something your child doesn’t know, and won’t know. […] He explained it to me as going with the grain […] if your child doesn’t have the capabilities then there’s going to be problems. […] So it is kind of like finding the child’s strengths and then working within those strengths.”

Although some were more sceptical about the application of this knowledge in everyday situations.

“See if I am sitting here now and you are asking me questions and I am sitting gazing out the windows scratching my head, [they told me that when I do that] I am seeing smart. Right. Do you know what I mean? And I am a genius for that, because it takes skill to do that. You work that out, right!”

Unfortunately, therefore, the fingerprint classes had not been running long enough for this research to draw any firm conclusions about what fathers’ thought of these classes.

4.4 Family Visits

All participants in the research were very positive about the family visits and these visits were, for many, the main driver behind their initial motivation to sign up for the programme as well as why those who struggled to adapt to the regime in Quoile House stuck with the programme.

“I had a good chat with my mates [in prison] and all and I was saying, listen, I have to do it for the kids really, all joking aside, because I want to get the four hour visit. I needed to do it for them, because, in case this does go wrong and it ends up a long time in jail; them four hour visits, I will look back and kick myself if I didn’t do it. Because seeing them at a visit every six months, a [normal] stupid visit, it’s like a cattle market. It is no good. But in this [Families Matter] sort of environment, you can sort of talk to them, you know.”

The family visits took place in the Donard Centre in Maghaberry Prison and families were brought by bus to the Donard Centre so that they did not need to walk through the prison. While the Donard Centre was not specifically designed to be used in this way, it offered the best available space to conduct the visits as it had a dining area, association space and a number of smaller rooms for classes and activities directly off the main association area. Lines of sight for the supervision of activities were possible because of the use of glass in the design of this space. This allowed families to have some privacy to talk and interact with each other while prison staff were still able to oversee and monitor behaviour. Nevertheless, as the area was not designed for this specific purpose, the design did limit what activities could be

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7 This is an area in the prison that was specifically designed to hold activities during weekdays for those with mental health issues who were residing on the Donard landing in Quoile house.
organised. For example, it had been hoped to run some activities for babies but the design and temperature of the small rooms was not conducive to this. Despite this, the way the family visits were conducted, relationships between prison and Barnardo’s NI staff with fathers and families, the presence of volunteers to help run activities with the families and the ability of fathers to be able to move around and play with their children created an atmosphere which many described as ‘almost normal family time’. These visits were a major incentive for encouraging compliance and engagement with the programme as well as improving the psychological well-being and quality of life of imprisoned fathers and their families. These visits also contrasted greatly with the normal visiting facilities for most participants.

4.4.1 Normal Prison Visiting Facilities

The normal visiting facilities at Maghaberry Prison were undergoing renovation for most of the research, although this was completed just before the end of the project. The visiting facilities consisted of two separate areas so that those demanding separate status\(^8\) were split from those detained elsewhere in the prison. The two separate areas were joined together by a play area for children which adults were not allowed enter and was run by Quaker Service staff and volunteers. Those detained in the prison were required to sit in a designed seat for the duration of the visit and were not allowed to move. Before the renovation was complete, seating was arranged in a circle with a low circular table and because there were no sound absorbing boards in the visiting area, it could become very loud. Prison staff observed all interactions to monitor for the exchange of contraband. Attempts had been made to make the area more welcoming for visitors by hanging paintings by those detained in the prison on the walls. Those who had paintings displayed could point out their work to family and friends.

The new renovated visiting area contained sound absorbing boards which reduced the noise level at visits. The seating was also redesigned to have higher rectangular tables, approximately one metre from the ground, with visitors sitting opposite the person they were visiting to minimise contact. Visitors sat on a bench and as a maximum of three adults and three children were allowed to attend visits, it was envisaged that visiting adults would hold children on their knees during the visits. The space between the table and seating appeared to be very small which may make this problematic in practice. There was a barrier under the table to prevent contraband being exchanged and individuals were supposed to avoid touching, with a line drawn in the table to symbolise the separation between the parties to avoid the exchange of contraband. It seemed that the new design of the visiting area was primarily influenced by security concerns and some of the difficulties for families that this redesign posed was vividly highlighted by fathers.

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\(^8\) This refers to those who are connected with paramilitary groups who seek on the grounds of safety to be held separately to members of other paramilitary groups as well as those who are not linked to any such groups.
“My belly actually touches the table. [...] They are mustard like, you can’t hold your kid and you can’t play with them. The other ones [normal visits] you can still hold them and set them on your knee, and still play a wee bit, but there you can’t. And the other ones, the tables were lower. In that one the table, my child ran into the table the other day and caught the whole side of her face. [...] She run straight into it, the whole side of her face. They actually had to go and get the doctor and all, it was that bad like. The way they’ve designed it is just a fucking joke, like. [...] From her ear right round to her nose is a big bruise. [...] In the other ones, the tables were lower. [...] Nobody likes them. Nobody. You can’t hold your child. You can’t do nothing. [...] It was pure security and pure, you know, trying to squeeze as much into one room as they can. And they have that bench where they sit up and watch everything. [...] I will say it is quieter but I would rather be able to hold my child than being able to hear my Mrs, if you know what I mean.”

Attending the normal visits raised many concerns for families and fathers. In particular, families were worried about being judged and the exposure of children to violence. Visiting times could be tense if others were arguing and if prison staff needed to physically restrain someone. Participants were worried about their children witnessing these events or accidently being in the way when these events occurred. They explained that these worries and experiences had made normal visits stressful and could lead to arguments and frustrations.

“There was a wee lad in the corner of the visit and he was shouting. [...] It just worries you that something is going to kick off. Something is going to happen and before you know it the search team is in and they don’t care about anything. They just come in and they will take the problem out of it, but they don’t think of a child of that age, or any child, seeing this and what it may do to them. They are only there to solve a problem [...] It is a bit more tense.”

“The visits before the Family Matters programme were stressful, very short, very upsetting. Very upsetting, emotional, crying. Finding it hard to leave him and [...] not enough time spent as a family together. [...] All the security coming in to the prison is very stressful with a newborn baby, and obviously with the security you get searched and the baby getting searched. And you can only bring in certain items. And just having to go through all of that just to get in to see your partner is very stressful, anxiety, and then just feeling judged as a parent with a new child going into a prison. [...] Maybe it could have been like feeling sorry for me. [...] And sometimes I would have felt angry like, because of what you are going through. And lonely sometimes. [...] And all the noise in the room. [...] Shouting over the top of each other. [...] Sometimes [...] if there were security issues or anything, or something else going on in the prison, you maybe wouldn’t have got your full hour. Or you could have been sitting in the visiting room and maybe somebody was trying to pass something and people would have come in, and it could have been at the table beside you, and they just would have dragged the prisoner out. And the child could have seen violence. You know, I know [child] was still young, but if [child] had seen it, it might have affected [child].”
In addition, both families and fathers were worried about how children with learning and behavioural difficulties coped with the level of noise in the visiting area. Worries and concerns were also expressed about the inability of fathers to properly interact with their children because of restrictions on movement, the shortness of the visit and the tendency for younger children to want to play in the play area which meant that fathers did not really get to see them during the visit.

Yeah, well obviously you go to a normal visit, you are on a seat, you can’t do nothing. And with me having two younger ones, […] you will give them sweets and sit and talk to them for a while. But generally they go into the playroom which I can’t go into, so that’s where they spend most of the visit.”

“My son can’t handle noise, so when he comes up and visits, he basically, he sits there. He is basically punishing himself, you know, because he does suffer from ADHD in a way that noise really does affect his way of thinking. And I can see him putting his hands over his ears, and it hurts me to watch him. But he doesn’t want to miss the visit. So he puts himself through this and then he would have to take himself off and go into the quieter part, and he will say, I can’t handle the noise.”

It was for these reasons that those looking after the father’s children were sometimes reluctant to bring children to the normal visits. In addition, it was also why some families no longer brought their children to normal visits when they could bring them to the family visits.

4.4.2 Experiences of Family Visits

In the family visits, security concerns and the need to monitor behaviour for the exchange of contraband remained significant but participants spoke of the need to wear ‘two hats’, whereby security concerns were balanced with creating a family friendly environment in line with the ethos of the Families Matter programme. This was important as family visits represented an opportunity for contraband such as drugs to be smuggled into the prison and, indeed, it was believed that drugs were brought into the prison during one of the visits. Fathers were aware of this and did not want their children exposed to such incidents. This added to their desire for more drug testing on the landing as they felt that this would discourage others from attempting to bring drugs in through the family visits. Furthermore, they felt that if the Families Matter landing was completely separate, it would reduce the pressure from others detained elsewhere in the prison to try to get fathers to bring in drugs through the family visits. Many participants felt that those overseeing prison security may be disapproving and reluctant for family visits to proceed because of the risks it posed but the fact the family visits continued was argued to provide evidence of how NIPS had moved on from focusing solely on security to also considering the rehabilitative needs of those detained there.

“[Prison] can be decent and humane, but they are first and foremost secure. If that is wrong, society will not forgive and people will lose their jobs! Now, how
do drugs come in, contraband come in, or anything else. We all know by and large, and I do talk about by and large and there are other avenues; it is the visitors. Now when you then have a [family] visit like that [...] if [...] a security team [is not] vexed and anxious about it, they are not the right security team. Because all the ingredients actually scream, purely from a security perspective, don’t do this, don’t do this, don’t do this. But that’s why then you have leaders in the prison who will then try to balance that out, [...] to have different perspectives and to come from different directions. [...] So there is nothing unusual about that. In fact, in fairness, it is a sign of how [NIPS] have moved forward as Service. Years ago security had the veto on everything.”

Examples of how the security department had worked with the Families Matter programme to facilitate family visits were also apparent with incidents of the alarm being accidently hit by children and security checking with prison staff before responding. Nonetheless, there did appear to be some variation in participants’ experiences which hinted at some inconsistencies in approach which are addressed in chapter six.

Participants were overwhelmingly positive about the family visits, highlighting the increased quantity and quality of time they spent together as a family, the sense of normality that these family visits engendered, the activities they could take part in and the inclusion of photographs. The ability of fathers to be able to move around and play with their children in particular contributed to a more satisfying and normalised experience for the families. As children entered the Donard Centre for their visit, they and their fathers were able to run toward each other with fathers picking them up and spinning them around. Throughout the visits, fathers were observed playing with their children, walking around with them and carrying them which contrasted with the normal visits.

“You see on the normal visits he is not allowed into the playroom and he has to sit on that seat. He can’t move. So for them to see that he was able to, like he was able to greet them at the door. They would have ran to him and he would walk towards them and they would have met together. He wasn’t able to do that before, it was just sit on a seat and stay there and don’t move. And he can get up and interact with them and go into all different rooms and get them a drink or get them biscuits or go and get them their lunch and bring it down to them. And it was just, you could see them clinging to him. And daddy can you come and do this, and daddy can you come and do that? [...] That was the main difference. That he was able to interact with them all. You know, as I say even holding the wee ones in a normal visit, you feel as if they are constantly just looking at you as if you are trying to take something out of the nappy, or do something, you know, because maybe that’s the way people have took things in. I don’t know. But it’s just, all eyes are just constantly on you and it is just, it is a whole lot more relaxed. Yes, you are being watched, but you are not constantly being looked at. And it was just that. It just was, them being able to play with him and us all being there together as a family, and not feeling as if you were stepping out of line if you move one way or moved another way.”
The less stressful nature of the family visits seemed to benefit all parties and reduced tension in relationships. Fathers were given an opportunity to apply the skills they learnt in the Barnardo’s NI parenting classes and bond with their children, while those caring for the children were given some space to talk to each other and Barnardo’s NI staff about the programme, how the fathers were responding to it and their own experiences. Children appeared to be happier in the family visits because they could play with their fathers, improving relations that may have become damaged due to their father’s imprisonment. Additionally, the family visits seemed to be especially beneficial for those with new born babies who had an opportunity to bond with their children, which they may not have received to the same extent in the normal visits.

“He had a good relationship with [name of child]. He is very hyper, very energetic, so in a normal visit the [fathers] aren’t allowed to move off the chair. So he has sort of taken a dislike towards him, because he wasn’t able to, the child had taken a dislike towards [name of father] because [name of father] wasn’t able to do nothing with him. [...] So then this [family] visit, the child enjoyed it because he was able, [name of father] was able to play with him. Daddy played snooker with you. [...] He loves his snooker table. [...] The visits were a lot better because you were able to have time just with him and the kids were able to go and play with him and I was able to get time out on my own then. [...] A lot more calm and a lot more relaxed. [...] Aye, the family visits were, yeah. I would rather have them than the other visits, [...] I say it was more relaxing, and we looked forward to that one instead of the normal one. [...] And it was better for the children and it was a lot less stressful for everyone.”

In the family visits, activities were organised by the volunteers so that families could play together. There were two groups of volunteers involved in organising these activities, including Barnardo’s NI volunteers and those organised through the chaplaincy. Participants valued their contribution to the visits. The activities observed during the research consisted mainly of arts and crafts and usually there was a group event organised at the end of the visit. This could consist of a showcase whereby fathers and their children would model what they had made in front of others, quizzes, fancy dress or dancing. Toys and games were also available to play with. Nearly all participants interviewed appreciated these events as it helped to structure the four hour family visit, although some suggestions were made to expand the activities, games and facilities available to better meet the needs of babies and teenagers.

Involvement in the activities during the family visits and participation in the Families Matter programme was also credited with breaking down barriers, which helped create a culture of peer support amongst families. Similar to the fathers, this culture of peer support benefited families as they talked about the benefits of being able to share experiences without being judged and receive advice, support and guidance from others.

“Yeah. It is not so isolating, then. [...] You seen other people going through the same thing. I think that was mainly what helped me through, more so, that you could see other people in the same boat as you, and it wasn’t just all, look at my life. A lot of people are going through it. You just have to readjust and get
on with it. But it was seeing those other people that were, maybe had things worse off than me. [...] And you see other people in worse family stages and different things, and kids with problems. And I just think it was helpful for me to see other people going through the same thing. And as I say, the normal visit you don’t get to see. You see people going in, but you don’t talk to people and you don’t know what is going on in their head or their lives or anything. But you did spend more time with them on the bigger visits, and you had more time to talk to the parents and the mummies. And we all got to know each other and it was more relaxed. It just helped me knowing that there was other people going through it all the same.”

In addition, photos were taken and distributed to the fathers after the family visit. For most, this was perceived as beneficial as it acted to pick fathers up when they were feeling down, provided fathers with a record of key milestones in their child’s development (this was more relevant for those with babies and toddlers) and allowed fathers to contribute to family life by sending photos out to their families. It was believed that fathers may be particularly at risk of feeling down and demotivated after family visits as these visit could remind them of the family life there were missing while imprisoned.

“The big [family] visits is a high and a low. There is all the euphoria of the visit and then the day after is a major drop day. And that’s why any photographs are printed out on the day after. [...] They are a great idea because [...] I actually think, see if we didn’t, we would have thirty SPARS9 down there. The boys would be sheets up sort of thing. It is such a high on the day of the visit and such a drop, such a low on the day after.”

“It is good. I was always torturing my missus to hurry up and send me some photos. But then I got some that I can send her out, because she doesn’t get the chance to do any of that. So I send her out half the pictures and keep some for myself. It is good like, it is a wee pick me up in the mornings, when you wake up and just look at the pictures of the wee ones. And if I am pissed off about something I just look at the pictures and it keeps me motivated. It is like it just puts them back in my mind again when all the other stuff is in your mind.”

The only recommendations that participants had about the family visits tended to focus on enhancing the facilities for very young children and teenagers, holding family visits more often (fortnightly appeared to be the preferred option) and improving the speed at which family members could leave at the end of the family visits. Family members understood that it took time to process visitors through the prison’s security and then transport them to the Donard Centre at both the beginning and at the end of visits. However, the end of the family visit could be more difficult as children were tired and keen to return home which could sometimes lead them to act out.

9 SPARS refers to the ‘Supporting Prisoners at Risk’ policy which is applied when individuals are believed to be at risk of committing harm to themselves.
“Because the kids are tired at that time, there was a lot of kids, like there was one issue and actually the parent ended up telling the lady off behind the counter whenever we were going out. Her child was having a meltdown in the room, for about half an hour we sat there, and it was because obviously there’s other buses, there’s other visits come over at two o’clock, start at two o’clock. So they were still bringing people over, which is their priority in there. [...] But then there is two buses, so there should be one sitting waiting for us to take us back, so we don’t have that. Or even finish ten minutes earlier or ten minutes later, so that we don’t have the issue of waiting for the bus. That was really the only thing that I seen that maybe could have been changed.”

4.5 Summary

Overall, the findings indicate that the rationale, design and implementation of the Families Matter programme held great promise for engaging fathers and motivating them to think about the consequences of their actions for their family. While there did appear to be some issues that needed more thought, the programme demonstrated the potential to engage fathers in a novel way compared to other interventions and involve families in the rehabilitative process. Involvement in the programme did appear to encourage compliance and facilitate order and control but this was dependent on fathers weighing up the pros and cons of their involvement in the programme for them and their families. Participation in the programme also seemed to mostly improve the well-being and quality of life of fathers and their families, with the exception of events surrounding the protest and the management of the progression of fathers and families once the programme ended. This is discussed in chapter six. The techniques and strategies used by the volunteers, Barnardo’s NI and prison staff elicited positive responses but some suggestions for improvement were offered and the research suggested that more thought needed to be given to the issue of progression and other strategic issues which are addressed in chapter six. The short to medium term benefits of participation in the Families Matter programme are explored next.
Chapter 5: Benefits of Families Matter Programme

The extent to which participation in the Families Matter programme can reduce some of the negative effects of imprisonment for fathers, children and caregivers are explored in this chapter as well as the extent to which it helped improve relationships between fathers and their families.

The effects of imprisonment are first explored before moving on to examine how the Families Matter programme affected, fathers, families and prison staff.

5.1 Effects of Imprisonment

For most, parental imprisonment resulted in negative effects for the family. Stories of partners struggling to cope on their own, negative behavioural and emotional effects on children, the financial consequences of having a father in prison, perceived stigma associated with imprisonment, relationship breakdown and the worry/anxiety about the well-being of fathers and children were frequently heard. A small minority of participants believed that the experience of imprisonment had actually strengthened their relationship with their partner as it led them to realise what they had and value it more. Yet, for most, the experience added stresses, strains and anxieties onto their relationship. Fathers described worrying about their children and their limited ability to provide for and look after their families due to their imprisonment. Partners/caregivers talked about the difficulties of trying to cope with children on their own and trying to provide financially and emotionally for their children and fathers, while simultaneously managing their own needs, anxieties and worries. Some fathers explained that previous relationships had broken down due the stresses and strains of their imprisonment and that they had lost contact with their children as a result of the relationship breakdown. They expressed regret at this and it was a desire to avoid repeating these events that had led them to participate in the Families Matter programme.

“Me going to prison the last time caused a lot of damage [...] between me and their mother. So it just was [...] it broke down, severely, aye. And it broke the relationship up with our kids, and I am trying to avoid it this time. [...] It was terrible. [...] It is also a terrible affect now that they are teenagers and they are running into their own wee difficulties in the area that we were brought up in. I can't really have a big input. I can only do so much and then the kids are basically telling you to go away. [...] Whereas if it had stayed, if that bond had stayed through them years, then I could have had more of an influence on them.”

How parental imprisoned was described by those interviewed as effecting children, partners/caregivers and fathers is outline below.
5.1.1 Children

From the research findings, parental imprisonment affected the children of the Families Matter programme in a number of ways. Some children struggled to sleep and acted out as they attempted to deal with their father’s absence. Amongst these, younger children were believed to become more hyper, to have difficulties sleeping and to act out at school.

“Yeah, it has left the kids, it has left some of the younger ones just very, not themselves, like. They are knocked about a bit, just not themselves, harder to manage probably, at home. That’s part and parcel of it. […] A little bit [acting out]. A little bit and that’s just the stress of the situation that they are in. They are missing their daddy being in the house.”

Older children tended to engage in risky or harmful behaviours but it was difficult for parents/caregivers to attribute this behaviour solely to their father’s imprisonment.

“My oldest daughter […] started having some problems, drinking and sexuality and self-harming and stuff like that. And I could put that down to anything, but really I would put it down to me not being there, if you know what I mean. […] And my older son, he was involved in a few disputes and that outside. I just put that down to boys being boys […] but at the same time, you know, you tend to think, if I was there maybe it wouldn’t have been as bad, you know. But you just don’t know. […] You don’t know whether it’s down to me, or whether it would have happened anyway.”

Nearly, all described the children as being emotional affected by their father’s imprisonment. Accounts of children missing their fathers, crying, withdrawing into themselves, being worried about the well-being and safety of their father, disturbed by the limited communication with them and lack of physical contact during normal visits, becoming distant with their father and worried that they might be imprisoned if they misbehaved were common.

“Like it breaks her wee heart. She cries all the time now.”

“It affected the younger children, they felt it hard to, but they wrote, they wrote letters in, we are able to keep in contact by writing to each other and stuff. But the phone calls at the start was very limited and that sort of made it very difficult and left the children a bit traumatised, but that’s part of prison. […] There’s no contact [during normal visits], […] which is very, very difficult when you are close-knit family. You can’t really put a child on your knee or something. […] Yes there’s reasons for it, but there’s no common sense. […] They have been used to always getting kissed going to bed at night. […] Since time has progressed that is a serious problem.”

“He is a bit distant now, from me. […] He was always, you know, wanting to be with me. But now since I’ve come in, and I’ve been in [number of months], he sort of, he has started to forget. […] But hopefully he will grow out of that and
he will get used to me again. It’s just [...] you know, he hasn’t seen me in such a long time.”

5.1.2 Partners/Caregivers

For partners and caregivers, the imprisonment of fathers was experienced as a blow due to the additional childcare responsibilities and absence of a partner with whom they could express themselves emotionally, share romantic relationships, worries and anxieties with. For most, this was a strain and put extra pressure on their relationship and psychological well-being.

“It hit home big time. We had just moved into a new home and as I [...] was [...] pregnant, so it was like, right, what am I going to do? I am left on my own here. [...] I have just moved into a house and not a thing have I got. So yeah, it put me in a major depression, panicking about how I am getting things done.”

Fathers were aware of the extra pressure families were under because of their imprisonment, as well as how it was affecting their relationships, and accepted responsibility for this.

“It [relationship with partner] was a wee bit, it strained a wee bit, but then we just talked about it and said we will just have to get through it, like. [...] Yeah. It still is a bit hard like. She is under a lot of pressure.”

“It is my fault like, and I am the one has to deal with it.”

Additional financial burdens were also described as partners/caregivers sent money into the prison to fathers, paid money to attend visits and the potential loss of income that fathers may have contributed to the household.

“We missed him when he wasn’t here. It is stressful trying to raise a child on your own as well. But money concerns as well you know, because with just one income and having to pay rent and put clothes on the children’s backs and put clothes on [name of father]’s back, because they don’t get much in there [prison], like. [...] So it is kind of like another bill. And it is tough when you are doing it all on your own.”

“There was times that I would sit and go, where will I get a dinner from? But I wouldn’t tell him that either, because that just adds to the worry in there for him.”

Along with this, partners/caregivers expressed worry about the safety and well-being of the fathers while they were detained and how exposing children to the prison environment during visits may affect them.

“Because I would hate the thought of going in there and drugs being around my kids. [...] It was one of the things that I was thinking, drugs mainly, was, or anybody really dangerous and stuff, and you are sort of thinking [...] I wouldn’t
feel safe taking the kids into a big visit like that. […] Like I wouldn’t, the thought of maybe going in and somebody attacking you or…”

As outlined in chapter four, parents and caregivers were worried about exposing children to the potential effects of seeing others behaving aggressively during the normal prison visits and the stigma of having a family member in prison.

“II had already had a few [normal] visits before that with the kids and you are only getting half an hour and it is frantic. […] You see the guards all walking about watching you, and there’s been a few people jumped on [by prison staff] […] who were bringing in contraband. […] It had a big impact on the kids. My wee girl started crying, thinking that that was the way I was being treated. And the missus too. […] She think that jail is this big, loads of people cutting people up and everything else, but when she seen your wee man being dove on [by prison staff], it was a bit more like reality. […] [So, it made them worry] that’s what it was.”

“It is really hard when a partner goes into prison because you are left with the stigma. You have to face everybody on the outside world. […] Your children then get stigmatised by maybe their teachers. Just in general, you know, it is very hard for the partners and children, because we have to face all the stigma that goes along with that. […] You know you’d be doing your shopping and somebody could say something smart. […] And it is very hard. It is very hard emotionally.”

5.1.3 Fathers

The separation from the family also affected fathers. They described being upset at being parted from the children and their disappointment at being unable to provide for them or look after them in the same way as they would have previously.

“Och just a general anxiety in case anything happens and I am not there. Small stuff like that.”

For some, the intensity of the emotions they were experiencing had led them to initially use drugs as a means of numbing or escaping these feelings.

“When I came in here I felt depressed and I was missing home and then she would have been crying to me on the phone and all and that made me even worse. So then I just turned to drugs. And then I went for a drug test and failed it and I had to tell [name of partner] about it. So then she was crying and all down the phone. And I says right, I’ll not touch it again, and I haven’t.”

Others attempted to put a brave front on to demonstrate strength in the situation.

“Turned me inside out more or less, but there’s nothing I can do about it. I just have to keep moving forward, you know. That’s it. […] Nearly every man in here has kids, so you are not special in any way, you know. It’s just the way it is. It is the way people deal with it.”
In some cases, fathers recounted their reliance on others to bring children to see them. They explained they were limited in their ability to persuade social services, partners, caregivers or children to come and visit them and there was little they could do if they decided not to visit. While they could understand some of the concerns surrounding the suitability of the normal prison visits as an environment for children, they were worried about losing their bond with their child and the potential for children to forget them or grow distant as children grew older.

“At the end of the day, I found it hard [...] she is my daughter. Being in prison, I can understand where her mother is coming from, in the way that she didn’t want her daughter to come in behind these walls. So a large part of me definitely agreed, and I understood totally where she was coming from. You know, a little baby being strip searched, as such. So I understood totally, but there is still that other part of you that, you know, you want to bond with, it is your child, it’s your daughter, you do want to have that bond. You know, you don’t want to step outside these gates and basically frighten the child, you know. [...] She was running about asking every Tom, Dick and Harry are you my daddy? Are you my daddy? [...] So that was a bit hard to take, you know. [...] It has took its toll.”

The Families Matter programme aimed to improve outcomes for children by attempting to work with NIPS to minimise some of the negative effects of imprisonment on families, maintain and/or improve family relations while imprisoned and encourage fathers to consider the impact of their behaviour on their families. The extent to which the programme achieved these aims are reviewed next.

5.2 Programme Outcomes

All research participants were positive about the ability of the Families Matter to improve family relationships, especially between children and their fathers while they were in prison. In particular, the ability of the programme to help fathers move beyond thinking about the impact of imprisonment on themselves to focus on how it affected their family was praised.

5.2.1 Relationships with Children

Accounts of fathers becoming more attuned to the needs of the children and how children were dealing with the loss of their father were frequently heard. The extent of this change in perspective was predominately attributed to the activities and discussions occurring as part of the Barnardo’s NI parenting classes and conversations with prison staff, Barnardo’s NI staff and other fathers during the programme. While some stated that fathers were already aware of this prior to taking part in the programme, many felt that the Families Matter programme reinforced this view and better equipped fathers to meet the needs of their children by providing more opportunities for quality contact as well as adding to their existing parenting skillset.
The Barnardo’s NI parenting classes and peer support provided by fathers also gave them ideas for how they could demonstrate their continued thoughts about children while imprisoned. This was perceived to be very beneficial for children, leading them to be happier and better able to cope with the separation from their fathers.

“I think in the initial stages of him being in there, it was all, how am I going to cope? What’s life going to be like for me? How can I do this? I can’t do this. I can’t get through this. And then the course, I think, readjusted his senses to think, how are the kids feeling about this? I need to think more about them and try and make things easier for them. So the first week that we were at the big visit, they make boxes, like wee treasure boxes, and their daddy then sends them out birthday cards and letters and things, just personal to them. So they enjoy getting a letter posted through the letterbox. And [name of child] is always, she will get me to read hers, and then she will sit in tears. But she likes to have it under her bed, so she has her box and her birthday cards and everything go into it. […] So it is nice for them to have. […] It shows that we don’t forget about you. […] Just because daddy is not here he hasn’t forgot about you, and I think that’s a good thing for them. […] They are constantly thinking about him and whenever they get that through the letterbox they are thinking, well he is thinking about me too. But I really don’t think, hand on heart, that [name of father] would have thought of doing that. And I don’t think I would have thought of him doing that, unless they had said it. And then because there was people that had done the course before us […] and they were saying it was great, and our kids, their box is full, and they look at them all the time and it is just like a wee memory box for them.”

The frequency and quality of communication between fathers and children was viewed as an essential part of the programme as it helped fathers meet the needs of their children. For this reason, the ability of fathers to frequently use the telephone and the family visits were greatly valued by the majority of participants. Family members commented that fathers spoke for longer periods of time and more often to their children during telephone calls and were better able to interact with them. Telephone calls were an important mechanism by which fathers could keep in touch with families, demonstrate they were thinking about their families between visits and assist in trying to calm children down if they were acting out. In addition, the greater flexibility afforded to fathers and families to interact during the family visit was also accredited with making children feel happier, loved and valued, and helped fathers to re-establish relationships with children who had become distant during their imprisonment or establish bonds with new born babies.

“There is slight changes. He was always a good daddy anyway, but you know obviously, you know, the way he talks to him on the phone and that, he can interact better. […] It learned the guys to interact more with the children and appreciate everything more, because they are losing out on a lot.”

“It did improve [relationships with children], because that’s what I’m saying. It was like more family time. You were able to be together. You seen they were happier. It lifted their wee spirits […] it was like, just like they had him again. They were able to see him, sit with him, hold him.”
“It has just built that bond back, because he was losing it with [name of child]. He was losing that bond with [name of child] at the beginning whenever he went inside, because it was like [name of child] thought [name of father] had just left him. So then he was not wanting to see [name of father] or speak to [name of father], he hated [name of father] and resented him. So [...] with the [family] visits they regained it again.”

These accounts help to contextualise why fathers felt so frustrated at the increased lock up and loss of telephone contact, leading to their involvement in misconduct. Being able to telephone their families demonstrated to children that fathers cared about them, were thinking of them and were safe. It was also one of the few avenues open to fathers during their imprisonment to parent, reassuring them that they continued to play an important role in their family’s life while imprisoned. For some who did not have access to their children due to a reluctance by partners/caregivers/social services to bring children to visits, telephone communication and letters were the only means of parenting available to them while in prison. During the programme, children had become used to receiving phone calls at certain times and the increased lock up and uncertainty surrounding the lock up meant that this routine was disrupted, placing children and fathers on edge.

“It relieves the stress of the sentence because you can phone your wife and you can phone your kids constant, where over there [square houses] you can’t use the phone at all. You get to use the phone at night for five minutes and you are locked back up again, so your mental state isn’t good at all. [...] Then when you phone the wife you are not nasty, you are not in a bad mood. Where over in the other houses you would be in a bad mood. That’s why people’s moods here now are starting to change with the lock ups. [...] You are getting locked down at four o’clock on the weekends. You are only out at three o’clock, you are getting locked at four. And your kids have been used to you phoning every night before they’ve went to bed, at seven o’clock every night. And now you are having to phone them at four o’clock to tell them goodnight. And they are going goodnight?!? Daddy I’m only going out here! What do you mean goodnight? [...] It is not good for the kids. It’s more about the kids. I wouldn’t care, if I hadn’t got kids, it wouldn’t worry me if I wasn’t able to use the phone. [...] They get used to the times and all. They know exactly when you are going to phone, and when they don’t get that it makes them sad. And then it makes you sad. [...] It is a vicious circle. [...] It is not nice on the kids.”

Not only did this disruption to their routine of making telephone calls create unease amongst families, but it also added to tension on the landing as fathers were more likely to be snappy and short-tempered.

“It has a knock on effect. Aggravation with officers and then bang, bang, bang. [...] And then one [father] has a go at an officer, arguing with an officer, and that has a knock on effect. He lays that onto somebody else and it gets bounced all around the place and it just causes disruption.”

5.2.2 Relationships with Partners/Caregivers
Benefits were also evident for partners/caregivers. For those that continued to be in a romantic relationship with the mother of their children, the Families Matter programme was viewed as bringing them closer together due to the greater appreciation fathers had for what their partners were going through and the increased quantity and quality of contact. Many, though not all, described how imprisonment had led to tensions and strains in their relationships. Involvement in the Families Matter programme was believed to have helped ease these tensions and repaired some of the damage that had been caused by this. Some described how they felt taking part in the programme may have avoided the breakdown of their relationship.

“Yeah, it has. It has made us closer again. I was always close to my Mrs and kids, but whenever I first came in there was a distance, a gap and we didn’t really know what was happening and my Mrs didn’t know whether she was going to stick by me. But from I’ve been on the course, she is all lovey dovey again, as such. You know what I mean? [...] It was. Sitting over in the other [square] house and not even being able to phone her, and pulling your hair out, basically. [...] It [Families Matter programme] definitely has [helped].”

“Yes, we are a lot more happy. A lot more positive. I am happier. Like we want to be a family together and we want things to work out after this, you know. From doing the Family Matters programme it has let us see the importance of being a family unit for [name of child], definitely. [...] It has made us want to be together more and share those memories that we have made inside, like, outside now. [...] [Without the programme] maybe we wouldn’t be together. Wouldn’t be as close. Because them one hour [normal] visits are horrendous. [...] Yeah, we could have drifted. It would have been far easier. In a way it would have been easier just to, because they are so stressful, the one hour visits, you sort of think, you know, you go down there, by the time you get in there, the noise, he is not allowed off the seat, he can’t bond with the child, all the stress. [...] You know, I mightn’t have went up every week. The family visit like nearly made you go up.”

“It has given us back that bond again because as I say things were getting hard at home. And I am sure it is hard for him in there too, you know, but with me having to deal with everything and, so we were sort of always arguing.”

“It brought us closer again, so it did. So it brought us all closer as a family more.”

Regardless of whether or not fathers were in a relationship with the mother of their child, the programme continued to benefit family relations as it demonstrated that fathers were serious about their commitment towards improving their relationship with their child and provided independent verification that they were passing drug tests and behaving in prison. As part of the Families Matter programme, families were notified if fathers failed a drug test or were involved in misconduct. This helped to improve relationships with family members. However, some fathers with social work involvement felt that social workers varied in their understanding and willingness to cooperate with the programme and thought that further work could be done to encourage social worker appreciation of what the programme entailed.
“They think it is good, because my [name of family member] sees a change in me. Every time she is up she has seen a change and I am talking to her about the programme and what it is all about. And she goes, I’m glad you are doing it, you are seeing a different person, what I’ve told her, she is going, well that’s good. At least you are doing something good and it is going to help you for when you get out, you know. […] She is more positive because she sees me doing this and she knows, she knows, because I’ve been saying to her, she knows when I get out I am not going to be […] getting into trouble and getting arrested again.”

“It has probably made it [relationship] stronger, because, well anytime in the other houses I was passing drug tests; I think she was going, aye dead on, I’m sure you were. But they know if you fail a drug test over here. Your family gets contacted. So they haven’t been contacted so she knows. She believes me now that I am not taking stuff. […] Her mummy and all, she is more happier now, the all know now that I am not spoofing!

“It’s a good thing for my partner. It worked well for my partner because she seen that I am serious about our relationship and I am serious about being a better dad to my son, for being here […] and to her that was a big thing. […] I know Social Workers aren’t getting the image, really, but she is saying I am giving him a chance, because he has proved it to me. […] It has helped in that way, and that to me is important.”

Other benefits included reducing feelings of stigma as well as worries and anxieties about the safety of fathers as families knew the criteria for the programme meant that fathers had to be drug free and avoid misconduct. Further, as families become familiar with the other fathers, prison staff, volunteers and Barnardo’s NI staff, this reassured them that fathers were safe and properly cared after. The additional skills fathers obtained through the programme also helped to build trust between new parents that fathers would be able to properly care for children if left on their own.

“She was able to get to know the staff that are involved with the visits. The volunteers and stuff like that there. And she is now on first name terms with those people. And to her, she knows that I am happy in here and relaxed. She knows the people that are looking after me. So to her, that makes her at ease, do you know what I mean? And she can go home and be happy enough that I am looked after.”

“We are comfortable as a family together. We are not nervous. We have confidence and trust in each other. So all that has been built up through the Family Matters programme.”

“It has made us both stronger. It has made us better as parents.”

The peer support family members received from each other was also a valued outcome of the programme as families could provide non-judgemental support, advice and guidance to each other, reducing feelings of isolation and stigma.

“It has helped me. Not counselling, but in a way yeah. You know, you go in once a month. You meet people. They are familiar to you. You might say to them, well how did you get on? Oh, it was terrible, he was doing my head in.
You know, you get to bond with people. I’m not saying they are going to be best friends and they are going to be my friends for life. But they are in the situation with you. so when I am turning round and going, this is the way I feel, I don’t feel stupid saying it, because I know that somebody else is going to be there and is going to either feel worse or better or in between. You know, what I am feeling is normal. […] Everybody is so nice and nobody judges you.”

5.2.3 Influence on Fathers

Similar experiences were reported by fathers. Fathers explained that the Families Matter programme had given them a greater appreciation and understanding of their children and the difficulties their imprisoned caused for their families. In particular, the programme benefitted them by making them less selfish, more patience, more willing to spend quality time with their children, greater awareness of signs that their child might be upset, more confident in their ability to broach sensitive topics with their child and more willing to play with their children.

“Before, I thought I was a brilliant father, father of the year or whatever you call it. But as I said there before, I was maybe taking things for granted. But these courses that I have done, they are maybe about self-esteem and all and confidence building for my kid and all, and you can maybe identify if things are wrong with them more than I used to before. And at the end of the school day, I was just like go and play with your Xbox and you will be alright or whatever. Now it is more sort of, you know, well something is wrong here and you are able to communicate better with them and try to identify what’s wrong. And to me that has given me a lot more confidence to sort of, I think it has given me a better bond with them if that makes sense. It has just given me more that, want to do more for them. Especially being in here, it has given me more confidence to get out and be part of their lives more than I used to, because it was always work, home, tired, bed, you know, and stuff like that. It is more, I will do more stuff.”

“She has noticed a change in me like, so she has. […] Like I would ask more about the kids. I would ask him on the phone, I would talk more and ask what was he doing at school, how was he getting on, what have you done, have you been good? You know things like that. When I was over in the square house I would just say, have you been good? I’ll phone you tomorrow, or something. But that would have been it. […] At the start I didn’t, like [notice a change], but I suppose you don’t really notice it in yourself. You have to wait until somebody says it to you.”

All participants interviewed stated that they could see the parenting skills of fathers developing as their understanding of the various stages of a child’s development improved and gave them additional insights into why their child may be acting in a particular manner.

“Here’s me, that’s my wee girl down to a tee. And I did, I did pick up some stuff. […] Like the classes did have a big effect on me in different ways.”
This prompted some to reflect on how they dealt with their child’s behaviour and reconsider the strategies they had been using. These fathers reported a recognition that they needed to work with their child’s mother to avoid children being confused or receiving mixed messages with regards to what was appropriate behaviour.

“Because as I say, you think you know everything but when they are teaching you stuff, like parenting styles and behaviour, when you are outside you wouldn’t really think of that. Because I let my child away with everything and she was cheeky to me, and I just laughed at her. […] I just wouldn’t, never shouted at her. […] I have to change it, because as I said to you earlier, we were talking on the phone there earlier and she is being a wee shit at the moment to her mum. […] Here’s me, I have already covered this in Barnardo’s NI parenting styles. I know I have to change it, because I know you [mother] don’t let her away with things, where I do. […] So I was saying to [name of mother], when I get out we will sit down and we will talk and whatever rules you’ve got, you give them to me and we will work off each other, so she isn’t getting away with everything, you know.”

The group dynamic of the Barnardo’s NI parenting classes and culture of peer support on the landing also added to the fathers’ parenting skillset as they learnt from the experiences of others.

“My child has ADHD and I spoke about that and there was other people asked me, on my own, what way things work out because they are going through the same things. So we sort of worked off each other. […] And also about their fathers being in prison, speaking about that. What way would you approach it by telling your child are you in prison or are you away to work? Stuff like that.”

In addition, this culture and ‘right’ relationships between NIPS and Barnardo’s NI staff benefitted the fathers as it allowed them to open up and talk about their families and/or other sensitive topics, which would not have been possible to the same extent in other houses within the prison. This helped the fathers to cope with their imprisonment and improved their psychological well-being and quality of life.

“You see people coming onto the landing and apparently I was the same, […] you are a bit uptight, you know, you think, you have this sort of hard man walk about you. Because you are thinking it is still jail. But it takes you a while until you see the staff is different, you know, the people’s different and you start to loosen up and you are a lot happier and more pleasant. You are not as uptight and, you know, watching out. […] I think it is better for your mind over here. […] I don’t think I would have coped very well in them other houses, you know. You don’t have the staff to talk to. You don’t really have anybody you really want to talk to. You know what I mean? I don’t think I’d have coped that well. […] I think it does help you to be a better father, you know. I think it does. It opens you more and makes you think more about being here and making changes in what you want to do for when you get out”

“The last time I was in prison I was a bit haywire. And so it has kept me off drugs and kept me away from difficult situations that I might have faced. But at that time it was good for me. […] When I was in prison the last time […] I was gone. Drugs, my head melted about a lot of things. I was gone. And this time around
Listen, there’s a lot of weight lifted off you when you go on there [Families Matter programme], because the tension is away. You are, there is no paranoia, nothing, all that goes out the window. So even your intellectual conversation with your wife is a hell of a lot different. There would be less arguments and stuff, because in the square houses you are agitated and you pick up on wee stupid things that aren’t there. It is just natural, where over on the Families Matter programme it is taking you out of normality a wee bit, and put you into a wee bit, I don’t know, mellow. It mellows you more, do you know what I mean? So yes, it made a big difference. And then the visits and all as well, obviously made a big difference too.”

This change in culture was also noticed by others and they felt it contributed to a more humanised, less macho environment where fathers were more focused on their families and less selfish.

“The biggest change I’ve seen. […] You would have a boy standing screaming at his Mrs down the phone, trying to get a £120 pair of trainers, to prance round the jail to look good. Who is he impressing? Because it ain’t me. […] Then the next thing I will turn round and […] and they will go […] she left me twenty quid and I told her not to bother. I’ll live on what the jail gives me. I don’t want any money left in. And that’s a big difference. Where beforehand, I need money. […] You start seeing boys turning round and saying, no, I’ll live on what the jail gives me. You keep the money love. […] They start thinking of their families.”

“When they first came on they were just a group of guys and there was very little talk about their family and their children, or their partners, or what was happening in their lives. […] It was all adult male chat. […] But as time progressed, conversations were about what was happening with the children, what was happening in their lives, what was happening with their partner, you know. […] So you could see the difference. […] And the other thing was, the kids names, […] knowing the kids names and that, […] That’s where it changed from being children to individuals.”

Further, the programme helped to build up the confidence of fathers more generally as they learnt new skills from all the range of classes and activities they attended as part of the Families Matter programme. Education and maths classes provided them with qualifications and developed their confidence in these areas while others discovered unknown talents in art and/or crafts and creating paintings, ceramics, etc. to give to their children.

While all participants in the research were positive about the potential for the programme to have a short term and medium term effect on fathers and their families, its ability to have a longer term impact was unclear. Participants were hopeful but felt that it was difficult to gauge this until fathers had been released and had had an opportunity to engage in reoffending. Some fathers felt confident that they would not be returning to prison but would instead use their additional parenting skills to continue to improve outcomes for the children and relationships in the family. Longitudinal research is needed to properly explore this question.
5.2.4 Influence on Staff

Fathers and families were not the only people to benefit from the Families Matter programme. During the course of the research, it seemed that Barnardo’s NI and NIPS staff valued their involvement in the programme and that it brought a feeling of satisfaction and reward. Although, there were additional costs associated with working on the Families Matter programme as well due to the extra workload involved and demands on their time, it was apparent that both prison staff working directly with the families and Barnardo’s NI staff had bought into the ethos of the Families Matter programme and were keen to see it work. This motivated them to go above and beyond what was required of them to try and keep the programme going when it faced challenging circumstances.

“I will do my damndest to make sure it stays open. And I will do my damndest to make sure this works.”

For the prison staff in particular, while they found the work time consuming and tiring at times, they also appeared to get a sense of satisfaction and achievement from it. Moving beyond a custodial role to attempting to rehabilitate and improve relations between fathers and their children was rewarding and challenged negative perceptions held by fathers, families and prison staff.

“I joined the Prison Service and […] we were glorified security guard officers, we were there purely for containment. […] I now feel as if I am actually making a difference in people’s lives. I am actually rehabilitating people. I am actually trying to put people back out into society, that are actually going to be, well not pillars of society […] but the fact that you can turn somebody who might think twice now, and all of a sudden he is going out […] and all of a sudden he might stop and think, you know, my wee boy’s coming up and he is doing transfer tests. No, I’m not going to do that because I don’t want to upset him, because I want him to do better than me and I want him to go to a better school than I went to. And you can just see that change. And I do get a lot of satisfaction out of this. It does my head in at times, […] it is very, very mentally challenging. […] I don’t want them getting into bother, I want them to miss this opportunity while he is here.”

“It is completely something that I never thought that I would ever see in the Prison Service, is staff working the way they are with mothers, fathers and children. In all my years, we were always told […] never touch a […] child, ever. Because they will make all sorts of allegations. […] That was always drummed into us. Never touch a […] child. Now you go over there [family visits] and the wee children will hug you. Even at Christmas one wee child […] sung the Frozen song to me. […] And it was just lovely that I actually just gave her a wee hug and told her that was lovely, pet. And it’s just lovely. […] You wouldn’t get that in any other prison.”

“It was a better atmosphere to work, it really was. […] We’d have the families, well we used to have the families ringing to talk to us. If they thought there was a problem they used to ring us and ask if there was a problem. Whereas going
back two or three years, they wouldn’t even talk to us in the visits. [...] It is great. They wouldn’t do that a few years ago.”

While there was a recognition that change was needed in NIPS, there was a perception that the talents and capabilities of older staff had been undervalued in the recent reform programme of NIPS. The work of prison staff on the Families Matter programme demonstrated the potential for older staff to make a valuable contribution to the work of NIPS and transforming the lives of those detained there. Indeed, many felt that older prison staff were more confident and assured in their dealings with those detained in prison, giving those detained a better understanding of where they stood and what they should expect while imprisoned.

“They are trying to say, oh the former prison officers and all who have been there for so many years and that, they are carrying views that can’t change. But actually I have seen a lot of those guys who have been there for many years, and they have changed. [...] In order to take risks, you have to be confident. You have to be more confident [...] and you have to have the experience. [...] Experience brings so much there.”

The less macho culture on the landing was viewed as contributing to a more positive work environment, which challenged stereotypes, humanised fathers, families and prison staff, and allowed fathers to open up to prison staff should they desire to do so.

“I never, ever thought that job would be like that. I had expected to be called everything under the sun and you know, I have had fellas sit in here with me [...] because they have got family issues.”

“All of sudden you see them in a completely different setting. They are with their partner, they are with their children, their human side if you want, that softer nature comes out and caring nature comes out. [...] The Families Matter programme is a great opportunity, and I have to say I really enjoy it and I really get an awful lot out of it, and I can see the difference it makes in the lads’ lives from when they come on to when they go off. And the fact that they, these grown men, and you see them in the circumstance where they are nursing their wee three month old baby and changing the nappy, you know, they might not feel comfortable initially letting you see that side of them, you know what I mean? So there’s a whole range of things that happens over the period of the course and it’s wonderful, the transformation and the things that you see and the fact that you get interacting with their families and their partners, you know.”

5.3 Summary

From reviewing the evidence, the Families Matter programme can reduce the negative effects of imprisonment for fathers and their families in the short and medium term. It can help improve outcomes for children by providing children with more frequent contact with fathers in a child friendly environment, making children happier
and reducing some of the worry, anger, anxiety and distance that can occur between children and their fathers while they are imprisoned. It provided fathers with additional knowledge, understanding and skills to respond to and management the behaviour of their children as well as increased their confidence in their ability to speak to children about sensitive topics and make time to play/interact with children. In addition, it brought families closer together as fathers had a greater appreciation for the difficulties partners/caregivers faced in their absence and helped to counteract some of the strains placed on a relationship due to the father’s imprisonment. Fathers also benefitted from a less macho atmosphere on the Families Matter programme which allowed them to open up to each other and/or NIPS and Barnardo’s NI staff and improved their psychological well-being and quality of life for the duration of the programme. Further, Barnardo’s NI and NIPS staff working directly with families reported a greater sense of satisfaction and reward from their work. In particular, prison staff reported a sense of surprise and fulfilment from working on the Families Matter programme. All participants in the research reported a more humanised view of fathers, families and staff. However, the potential of the Families Matter programme to result in long term benefits for children and families is unclear as longitudinal research is needed to examine if the effects observed on families during the programme continue once the programme ends and after fathers are released from prison.
Chapter 6: Potential Issues Going Forward

As discussed in the previous two chapters, there were many features of the design and implementation of the Families Matter programme which were linked to short and medium term benefits for fathers, families and the prison. Yet, there were also some components of the programme rationale, design and delivery which could benefit from further thought. These are reviewed in this chapter. However, it is important to acknowledge from the outset that this research was conducted at a particularly testing time for NIPS due to the wider economic difficulties experienced in Northern Ireland, need to operate within existing financial budgets as well as the significant changes in staffing and personnel Maghaberry Prison had undergone as part of the NIPS reform programme.

In this chapter, the strategic direction and oversight of the Families Matter programme is examined first before moving on to look at issues of communication and cooperation. Next, the progression of fathers and families on completion of the programme and how this aligns with DOJNI (2013) policies and objectives is reviewed. Lastly, staffing and resourcing concerns are examined.

6.1 Strategy and Oversight

All those involved in the programme for longer than one cohort had noticed some changes in how the programme was being delivered.

“Well the first time I did it, it was brilliant, there was classes all the time. The second time they didn’t know what they were doing. You know, there was no timetable really to stick to. They were clutching at straws. I feel that there [timetable] should have been done before, all that there done before the course started.”

“A few months ago it fell apart. [...] Whenever I done it the last time it was nothing [like this]. [...] It’s collapsed. [...] It was probably to do with the budgets and things like that there.”

NIPS had undergone a significant change in its staffing levels, management structure and resourcing in recent times as a result of the NIPS reform programme and some of the consequences of this was evident in the management of the Families Matter programme. All research participants felt that the Families Matter programme had great potential but that some of the momentum behind it had been lost in recent times due to some of these changes.

“I think the potential [is] there to be something very, very good that could be an example to anywhere in these islands, if it could be got up and running properly. But that’s going to take everybody, and a bit of flexibility from everybody.”
There was a perception that these events had provided some with an opportunity to withdraw from the programme while, for others, the particular difficulties experienced during the course of the research with regards to the need to operate within existing financial resources meant that alternative areas in the prison were prioritised above the Families Matter programme. Given the complexity of Maghaberry Prison, the vast array of the needs of the different groups detained there, the wider economic climate within Northern Ireland and the NIPS reform programme, a need to priorities available staff and resources was understandable. However, while a commitment to the programme was apparent, it sometimes seemed that opportunities were missed to build on the transformative potential of the Families Matter programme or developing its potential to link into wider rehabilitative efforts and policies. This was especially apparent in the lack of a strategy regarding the progression of families once they completed the programme and will be discussed later in this chapter.

The changeover of senior staff and managers within NIPS as a result of movement with NIPS and the reform programme, combined with the promotion of new managers who were learning their craft, was believed to account for some of the difficulties that the Families Matter programme had experienced with regards to its management and oversight in the past year.

“The prison service has gone through a significant economies drive, which has also resulted in a reorganisation of the workforce and the structure. So [...] six months ago this establishment had I don’t know, twenty, thirty Principal Officers, and at least another six or seven Governors. So, because of the voluntary scheme, you went overnight from that down to twelve Governors and no middle management. [...] So I mean in management speak, it is a capacity issue.”

“Now the prison has got three or four different Governors involved and they are not interested. [...] The Governors that were left had more work to do and didn’t want to take it [Families Matter programme] on. [...] They just ran for cover when they saw what was coming. [...] They’ve got too much on their plates. I mean whereas before I don’t know how many Governors you had, Maghaberry Prison is down to a handful of Governors now and it is just more work for them. It really is. And I can understand where they are coming from, and I can understand that the Families Matter programme needs help too.”

NIPS management recognised that the Families Matter programme “wasn’t receiving the attention it should have” during this transition and had made attempts to correct this in recent months. Improvements were felt as a result of this action but some difficulties remained.

“I think there has been a lot of positives and I really want to highlight that. And the fact that what the Families Matter programme is doing in itself has been a real big thing to get achieved. [...] I think definitely having [senior NIPS management] involved [...] has been brilliant and I really welcome that. I don’t think it has made things any easier in a practical sense because I think we are still struggling with the same things. [...] So everybody thinks well that’s sorted now, and then we are still banging our head against a wall.”
While these recent changes in management and personnel undoubtedly affected the programme, the programme had nonetheless been in operation since October 2012 which raises questions about the extent to which it was embedded within the prison and received buy in from those beyond Quoile House. It was suggested by some that other parts of the prison had used the change in management as an opportunity to withdraw from the programme and that NIPS management had not properly considered why this had happened or its wider implications.

“The [NIPS management previously overseeing] Family Matters, obviously you know, have gone. And I think maybe some middle staff would say, phew, they’re away, we don’t have to do that anymore. […] You know, they [fathers] used to go to the workshops […] and the day after [previous management] transferred, they phoned and said we are not taking them anymore. But then nobody has looked at maybe the implications it had on them. It was all, oh right, we are going to do this, this and that. And these other departments will assist. But as I say, foresight. What did it mean for these other departments? What did it mean for the workshop? What did they lose out because of that?”

Decisions to withdraw from the programme were immediately felt by the fathers and, for some, this began to chip away at their motivation and engagement with the programme. Being involved in purposeful activity was part of the programme’s appeal and helped fathers cope with their imprisonment as well as the challenging issues that emerged as part of the Barnardo’s NI parenting classes (see chapter four).

It is acknowledged that this research was conducted at a particularly difficult time for NIPS due to the challenges involved in managing its resources and staying within its budget, delays involved in tendering and outsourcing activities and classes for fathers as well as the change in NIPS staffing and management due to the NIPS reform programme. Nonetheless, it seemed that the management and oversight of a full schedule of classes and activities for the programme was a recurring one for Barnardo’s NI and NIPS. The process of reviewing the provision of activities, organising and approving new activities as well as how existing NIPS provision could be utilised seemed disjointed and not as efficient as it could have been, adding to frustrations, increased workloads and delays. In addition, some of the explanations for why existing NIPS providers of classes and activities had withdrawn suggested a lack of coordination between different departments in the prison and how differing performance indicators could hinder inter-departmental work.

“Prison Service is very much, this is my department, this is what I do. This is another department, this is what we do. And that’s it. Everybody has their own wee agenda and everybody does that there. […] The different departments will look at it and they will go, I need to meet so many targets. I can’t buy into that, because if I buy into that, I am wasting so many resources. They started with thirty, that would be good at the start, but they only finished with seven. I am going to lose stats, I am going to lose figures, and then they push, they don’t want to get involved with it. If [Families Matter programme] could turn round and guarantee that they start with thirty and finish with thirty, every department would jump on it.”
Attempts to address these concerns could have included: reviewing the use of separate classes for fathers on the Families Matter programme; revising the eligibility criteria for the programme so that only those who are sentenced and more likely to be free to attend classes and activities participate in the programme; or ensuring that attendance by fathers at classes and activities is monitored and action taken for non-attendance. However, these options were not pursued while the research was being conducted, although there were discussions about the possibility of amending the scheduling of classes and activities to take account of these issues for the next programme cohort.

These ongoing difficulties with the scheduling of a full timetable of classes and activities was believed by many to have negatively impacted on programme recruitment.

“I mean there is no question the difficulties with the timetable has had an effect on promoting it [Families Matter programme].

Although, numbers were also low due to the number of fathers who failed to meet the eligibility requirements of not breaking prison rules in the three months prior to recruitment to the programme and passing drug tests. To combat this, it was suggested that recruitment should be conducted much earlier in the process so that fathers potentially interested in participating in the programme had an opportunity to change their behaviour. Low recruitment numbers ran the risk of undermining the viability of the programme due to the need to assign dedicated residential space.

“The difficulty operationally […] is it is resource intensive in the sense that if it [the Families Matter programme] takes a landing up, if can’t fill a landing that costs because it is empty space. [Maghaberry Prison] are not so bad at the moment because the population is down a little, but it was this time last year [Maghaberry Prison] were sitting at eleven hundred prisoners, which is really quite tight for this prison and were scrambling for available cell spaces. This is a committal prison, so it could all of a sudden have an influx of people. So it is actually a big commitment […] buying into the concept […] and that’s where it can be quite a resource drain in that way.”

In this way, establishing and agreeing a full schedule of classes and activities earlier on, beginning recruitment earlier and using the timetable to recruit potential fathers could help to minimise the possibility of problems and obstacles occurring at a later date.

Further, agreeing, delivering and managing a full schedule of classes and activities had the potential to contribute to the fathers’ transformative process. Those who had participated in previous cohorts and experienced a more consistent timetable spoke highly of the skills they had developed and the potential for the programme to motivate and engage them. In contrast, those who experienced a reduction in purposeful activity, confusion, inconsistency and frequent cancelations, especially when combined with an increase in lock up and withdrawal from other valued activities to participate in the programme, spoke about its demotivating effects and missed opportunity for rehabilitation.
“The programme wasn’t ready for us. And that’s the sad part about it. I mean you have a [father] like myself who basically rebelled against the system from when he has been a child, from a very young age. And all of a sudden, you know, wants to learn, wants to work with the programme, but the programme doesn’t want to work with him. So it is a sort of slap in the face. [...] God knows [...] what resources have went into putting this together. But I would say it was a lot of money, on Barnardo’s NI behalf too [...] to sit here and to watch, it is like watching a beautiful cruise liner, you know, getting on that ship and the next thing finding out there is no captain. [...] And that’s what it is like being in here, because the wheels have fallen off, and the captain has bailed from the ship. [...] They should have always had a Plan B. [...] So basically [fathers] were left like this. Getting up at half eight, walking out and sitting at them tables and looking at each other. There is only so long you want to really look at somebody.”

Barnardo’s NI and NIPS appeared to be sensitive to these issues as well as the problem of progression for fathers and families explored later in the chapter. Barnardo’s NI were limited in its ability to encourage buy in and engagement from other prison departments and it seemed that they sought to overcome some of the gaps in the schedule of classes and activities by using external providers. Their dedication and commitment to the Families Matter programme was again evident in the time and resources they put in to identifying and encouraging external providers, such as the Public Health Agency and volunteers, to provide classes and activities. Nonetheless, a word of caution is required regarding the long-term sustainability of this approach and if it will contribute to further distance, misunderstanding and/or a lack of communication/cooperation between NIPS departments and the Families Matter programme.

6.2 Communication and Cooperation

Beyond Quoile House, it seemed that there was the potential for some misunderstandings about the Families Matter programme to occur. Perceptions such as the fathers on the Families Matter programme were being spoilt and it was unfair to others, that the programme was a burden, that those availing of family visits did not go through the same security checks as other visitors and that Quoile House was ‘easier’ to manage than other houses were either stated or hinted at during the research. Such statements were vigorously refuted by those involved in the Families Matter programme and Quoile House.

“I think it is unfair to say that they [fathers] are being spoiled and it is not fair on others, because any [father] that meets the criteria can apply for that landing. So most of them, with the exception of those with a certain offence, a sexual offence, but any [father] can apply for the Family Matters. They all have the opportunity. You know, so we are not being unfair. [...] So I think that is a very unfair comment to make. [...] I think those looking on maybe see it as a burden. Oh that Families Matters, now we have to try and sort this out, that out, and the
other, out. […] I think you need to see beyond the big visits and see what we are actually doing. That’s OK for somebody sitting back in an office and saying, oh that Family Matters programme, I have to sort this out for them. […] Come to the big [family] visit and see them wee children coming in to see their daddies and what it is all about. Because I think until you are actually involved in it, you don’t really know what it actually is all about.”

“It is a risk [contraband being smuggled in through the family visit]. One of the officers said to me his fear is, it is more of a risk than ordinary visits because I don’t think they search, or the sniffer dogs go by them or anything. […] I don’t think so, because I don’t think they come through the normal visits entrance. […] He [prison officer] said that they didn’t go through the same search. […] And I don’t know that the sniffer dogs go.”

Barnardo’s NI and NIPS staff in Quoile House were limited in their ability to act on such sentiments and were dependent on NIPS management to challenge such perceptions. In an attempt to deal with the recent challenges the Families Matter programme faced, there seemed to be a move towards becoming increasingly self-sufficient and less reliant on other NIPS departments. While this could be viewed as a temporary measure to overcome the difficulties that had been experienced with regards to the provision of a full schedule of activities and budget cuts, there was the possibility this would add to and increase misunderstandings surrounding the programme and willingness to engage with the programme as: less NIPS staff become involved in its delivery; if external providers were viewed as being sufficient for the programme to run; and if the consequences of programme participation for other NIPS departments performance indicators were not addressed. Further, the requirement for fathers to take part in separate classes and activities while participating in programmes provided elsewhere in the prison was believed to contribute to these sentiments as well as adding to the difficulties that may be experienced if fathers required additional help beyond that available on the programme.

“And even [prison] scheduling unit, you know, they have been told, if they [fathers] are on Families Matter, they are off everything else. And that is very black and white to them. I had to phone them and explain about the [fathers with specific needs that required additional help beyond the Families Matter programme], that they had to come over [to different NIPS department]. That takes persuading and explaining.”

As such, there may be a need to monitor and/or renegotiate inter-departmental cooperation and develop a strategy for how external providers may be best used in conjunction with existing NIPS provisions to compliment and strengthen existing relations in a sustainable manner.

The issue of communication was not unique to the Families Matter programme as many felt that it was an issue across NIPS and was symptomatic of shift work and the recent pressures NIPS had been under due to budget cuts, change in personnel and staffing issues. Indeed, many felt that communication was better amongst those involved in delivering the Families Matter programme than elsewhere in the prison and many examples of good communication and cooperation were observed during the
In particular, prison staff in Quoile House and Barnardo’s NI seemed to communicate and cooperate very well together. Nonetheless, some suggestions for improvement were offered.

“It is a problem of getting everybody together. It is the joy of shift work, I suppose, and that [communication] is always going to be a problem.”

“Well I think that is the way the Prison Service works. It fights fire. So communication in Family Matters, I have noticed, it is not bad. Probably a bit better than the rest of the prison. It could be better.”

In particular, it was proposed that due to prison staff shift patterns and relocation of NIPS staff to elsewhere in the prison, there was a need for improvements in the handover process so that all were familiar with changes to the regime, helping to ensure an efficient regime delivery. Where possible, the prison staff on the Families Matter landing attempted to accommodate the delivery of classes and activities provided by external agencies but greater communication between prison staff, Barnardo’s NI staff and external providers may have eased this process and ensured a smoother and efficient delivery. In addition, as responsibility for tasks were sometimes shared between people, this could lead to confusion about what had been done and remained to be done, especially if communication was only directed towards one party via emails or verbal communication. This could add to confusion and delays as others were not aware of or up-to-date on recent developments, which could lead to repetition or tasks not being proceeded until the return of that party.

Weekly meetings were held over lunchtime by Barnardo’s NI staff to try to overcome/reduce these communication barriers and while these meetings and the motivation behind them were appreciated, some suggestions for improvement were offered. There appeared to be some uncertainty regarding who was expected to attend the meetings and a perception that these meetings primarily focused on preparing for the family visit. The perceived focus on the family visit led some to question what they could contribute to the meeting and consequently, the value of attending weekly meetings for them. The timing of the meetings over lunch also meant that people had to give up their lunch hour to attend. While many were happy to do so as they wanted to be informed and have input into the programme, the extent to which there was a need to hold meetings weekly was questioned. If weekly meetings were necessary to prepare for the family visit, it was suggested that not all individuals may be required to attend and that monthly meetings could be held reflecting on wider programme delivery, monitoring of attendance, needs of fathers, etc. instead. It was felt that people may be more likely to attend monthly meetings as individuals would have more to contribute and it would require less time commitment.

The research findings also indicated that there was an opportunity to improve communication between Barnardo’s NI, NIPS and the volunteers recruited through the chaplaincy to better utilise this resource. The work of the prison chaplaincy was highly regarded but the level of communication and cooperation between these volunteers, Barnardo’s NI, Barnardo’s NI volunteers and NIPS in the preparation and organisation for family visits could have been increased. While Barnardo’s NI volunteers were managed and communicated with directly by Barnardo’s NI,
volunteers recruited through the chaplaincy did not appear to be in regular communication with either Barnardo’s NI or NIPS and had minimal information regarding an induction to Maghaberry Prison or the number of, age or needs of children attending family visits prior to the visit. Information was provided through the chaplaincy but it was recognised that this was a demanding position with limited resources. While all groups worked well together and had positive relations, there was the potential to develop greater cooperation between the groups so as to develop the activities provided during the family visit to better meet the needs of older and younger children. Many volunteers were educationalists and could offer suggestions for a range of educational activities that could be provided and/or tailored to different age ranges. There were also male volunteers within the group which was believed to help fathers break down macho stereotypes about the ‘manliness’ of engaging in play with their children. There appeared to be some confusion surrounding responsibility for the oversight of the volunteers which if resolved could enhance communication and cooperation in this area as well as the range and quality of activities provided during family visits. Volunteers were also keen to develop further opportunities to work with Barnardo’s NI and NIPS to help support fathers and families as they progressed from the programme. Increased communication and cooperation could identify other avenues where these volunteers could potentially contribute to the Families Matter programme and/or other programmes in the prison.

Confusion around responsibility was also evident with regards to NIPS management. As previously stated, the changes in management structures and resourcing Maghaberry Prison had recently experienced, resulted in increased workloads for many and a need to prioritise work. The work of the Families Matter programme appeared to cut across different departments within NIPS which meant that the chain of command in approving and signing off actions could sometimes be unclear or delayed as issues went back and forth between prison departments for approval. This could be frustrating and seemed to add to the workloads of staff. Increasing focus was placed on the issue of ownership and encouraging prison staff directly involved in delivering the programme to take responsibility for overseeing its development and, while this was welcomed, the extent to which this was feasible was limited due to the hierarchical nature of the prison, lack of authority to authorise decisions and capacity issues (explored later in the staffing and resources section of this chapter). These limitations meant that attempts to take ownership were difficult and added to workloads, feelings of frustration and stress.

“But the problem with shrinking and the problem with reducing means that you then sort of, people then start to prioritise what needs done. And then look at who is responsible for doing it. Now at this moment in time it doesn’t appear to me that [NIPS] have sat down and made it quite clear who is actually responsible for what. […] And there’s an awful lot of, it just bobs along without anybody seeming to take control or sole responsibility. […] Because of the nature of the [NIPS] decision making process that has to be gone through to get things done, it has to be at the [NIPS] upper level, because they are the ones who can say yes or no. […] So you see […] that usually means more work, because [Quoile House prison staff and Barnardo’s NI staff] have to race
around trying to do things, but can’t give the people [they] are talking to a decision, and then [they] have to go back and follow up with somebody.”

There was a desire for more ownership over the direction and implementation of the programme by those delivering it but it was felt that the process of obtaining approval from NIPS management hindered rather than enabled this.

Steps to improve communication and cooperation between prison departments and NIPS management had been taken by NIPS and this was viewed as positive. Improvements could be seen in that monthly meetings with senior prison management, DOJNI officials, Quoile House management and Barnardo’s management were held, with progress on actions monitored and individuals held to account during these meetings. This was believed to be very beneficial as issues were listened to and action taken. However, there remained concerns about delays due to the need to go back and forth between different managers and the prioritisation of work. One suggestion to remedy this issue was to assign responsibility for the development of overseeing and developing Maghaberry Prison’s strategies, policies and programmes involving families to one individual who had an interest in this area and the authority to make decisions. Such an action would align with and could feed into the DOJNI (2013) focus on supporting and developing work with families as a means of promoting transformation and reduced offending.

“We have got different people, different roles, and some of them are very good and very supportive, but they don’t have the full picture of everything that’s going on. And I think a go to [NIPS] person who has both authority to do it and wants to know the detail of how it’s done. Because sometimes you will get people who, they want the bigger picture and they don’t really want to know the detail of it. And then you’ve got people who are OK with the detail but don’t have the authority to make the big decisions. So somebody there in the middle whose responsibility is for the families; all of the family work, I suppose, in Maghaberry.”

Other areas where confusion and the need for greater cooperation and communication were apparent included monitoring of the attendance of fathers at classes and activities as well as consistency of decisions within NIPS. There seemed to be a lack of clarity surrounding whose responsibility it was to monitor fathers’ attendance throughout the various classes and activities and take follow-up action if required.

“But things like that [attendance], I think there is nobody monitoring that. The guys are signing up for this full programme, and even when classes are being provided, sometimes they don’t bother turning up for them.”

Nearly all participants interviewed reported experiencing inconsistencies in what was expected of them and decisions taken by NIPS personnel. This had the potential to add to feelings of frustration, disillusionment and already pressurised workloads for staff as they negotiated processes and procedures only to be told that these were no longer judged to be appropriate and needed to be renegotiated. While it is understandable that processes and procedures are amended and updated, the frequency and prevalence of these reported experiences implied that: there was
confusion and misunderstanding about what was initially being asked; a lack of clear policies and procedures surrounding this work; that staff differed in their knowledge of, understanding and confidence in these policies and procedures; that there was a need to monitor how discretion was being used in the application of these policies and procedures; or some combination of the above.

“It [NIPS] is like a world of its own, so it is. And sometimes what happens is, they keep moving the goalposts, so what was originally what you thought was the way something was done, gets changed. You know, communication is not very good in the prison environment either, because of staff moving all the time. So you know, what you have agreed with one person, it doesn’t happen with the next person! You are going, but that’s the way that I was told I had to do that. No, no, no, that’s not how you do it. You do it this way. And you are like, OK! So it can be a very frustrating environment to work in.”

“As I say it was like different staff, different rules. So one month you had a couple and they were alright, and then the next time it was different rule and they were like, no, this isn’t happening. And as I say, my wee one is always running mad and some of them would have laughed it off and said, right, nodded at you like, can you try and keep them under control. And the other ones would have just snapped at you.”

“They [NIPS] are sticklers for rules. […] Listen, this is our rules. Are you sticking to the rules or are you not? You can’t choose. […] We are in the prison and we understand who owns the whole block here. You are the daddies in here. But that’s not the point. Is there rules […] or is there not? And if there is, we stick to their rules. You can’t come in and, like you couldn’t walk in and change a prison rule, so why is it allowed to be done the other way around?”

There was also some disappointment about how communication between fathers, families, Barnardo’s NI and NIPS was handled as they came to the end of the programme. This issue along with the broader question of the progression of families and fathers once the programme ended is examined next.

6.3 Progression

At the beginning of the research, the majority of fathers were planning on repeating the programme as they had been advised that this was a possibility when first signing up for the programme. Those who did not plan to do so were either ineligible due to being released before the end of the next programme or hoped to move to the step down facility in Magilligan Prison. However, after most (though not all) were charged with breaking prison rules, for roughly two months fathers and families were unsure if they would be allowed repeat the programme (see chapter 4). While many fathers were under the impression they would be unable to repeat it, fathers stated that they were not officially informed until the final days of the programme. This appeared to be due to the delays in hearing the fathers’ charges and judgements being made on their guilt or innocence of breaking prison rules as well as some participants suggested
it was a deliberate strategy by the prison to reduce the probability of disorder. Fathers and families wanted clarity on what was going to happen once the programme was completed and if staff attempted to informally suggest what was likely to happen, they could be accused of prejudging the father’s guilt or innocence. In addition, fathers who had not been charged were unsure if they would also be judged ineligible to repeat the programme as there was a perception that the prison “wanted to clear the landing”. This resulted in feelings of unfairness and injustice amongst fathers and families as they felt that management were not listening to fathers’ explanations for their behaviour, prejudging them as ‘bad’ and that the criteria was being amended to facilitate the removal of all from the landing (e.g. discontinuation of peer mentors and no longer being allowed repeat the programme).

As the end of the programme approached, this uncertainty began to affect relationships with fathers and families. Families wanted to know what was happening as they were worried about where the father would be sent, if he would be safe and if they would continue to receive family visits. The inability of fathers to be able to answer these questions and reassure children, partners and family members added to their feelings of frustration, injustice and annoyance. It began to create tensions between fathers and families and led some to reduce contact until they could answer their questions.

“It is putting us under pressure. Every time I phone her she is just asking is there any more development? No. Is there any chance you are getting to stay? Is there any way you can get another visit, you know, big visits? It is just putting stress [on our relationship]. [...] And that’s all you are hearing about and then you are getting to the stage where like I don’t even want to phone her, because I’ve nothing to tell her about it.”

When fathers’ and families’ involvement in the Families Matter programme came to an end, it had a number of consequences for families and fathers. All fathers and families valued the potential of the programme, the additional parenting skills acquired and the opportunity it afforded to develop and maintain family relationships even in spite of some of the challenges and difficulties they had encountered during the programme. Nevertheless, nearly all participants in the research felt that more thought needed to be given to how the progression of fathers and families from the programme should be managed. For many partners, caregivers and children, the reduction in the level of and quality of communication and interaction with fathers was experienced as upsetting and lead to a re-emergence of concerns about the safety of fathers and the appropriateness of children attending normal prison visits.

It was reported that children from all ages were upset when the family visits ended as they could no longer interact with their fathers in the same way in normal visits. Partners/caregivers described children crying, withdrawing into themselves and worrying about the well-being of their fathers. They described having to help children cope with this and the reluctance by some children to attend normal visits. Indeed, some family members and fathers reported being worried that fathers would not see their children once the programme ended because children would not want to go to the normal visits after experiencing the family visits. Additionally, as some fathers had only seen their children during family visits because of concerns by
partners/caregivers about normal visits, they were worried that they might not get to see their children when they no longer had access to family visits. Many family members believed the only negative aspect of the programme was that it ended.

“You are having to pick up the pieces at the end. […] It is good for the child but it is bad at the end because they are wondering what is happening. If you had younger wee ones that don’t understand, you are having to explain it all to them. […] And now he is asking, because it only runs for so long, he is asking whenever I am going up on the visits, is it the normal one or is it the family one. Because if it is not that [family visit] one, he doesn’t want to go. […] The programme was good. Just you know, it was very, it just seemed to end so short, we didn’t get long enough with it.”

“Aye, their heart is not in the visits at all now, where they used to really look forward to going up to see their daddy. But that’s what I’m saying. Our [name of child] is sat in the seat [during normal visit], and she was just sitting there and her face was tripping her. [Name of other child] was playing in the wee room. It is just not the same. […] There was more affection and all for them [on family visits]. The kids loved it. […] I would just love [name of father] to get back on it, to tell you the truth. It is keeping them [family] visits. I know it will probably never happen like. But it is far, far better. Like the kids aren’t even, their wee hearts aren’t into going up to see their daddy now, because there is no affection [on normal visits], there’s no nothing. Know what I mean? I just wish that he was back on it, for the kids, to tell you the truth.

Some fathers were also worried that they may be blamed by their children as they felt their children were too young to understand that their involvement with the programme was always going to end at some point.

“And as a group […] you wouldn’t really need to go back into those unfriendly visit rooms again, and the thing is, you have a child where at the end of the day you can run over and grab her, or grab him, throw them about, get them onto the mats, play, do the things that mothers and fathers should be doing. […] And then the next thing is […] Daddy can’t move. What? Daddy’s not allowed off this pink chair. […] So I think it is very cruel. You are given all this freedom on one hand, and you are giving the child, you are expanding their little minds, and then the next thing is, the child doesn’t see the bigger picture, as in the system; they see that their daddy doesn’t care about them anymore. Their daddy doesn’t want them as much as they thought. So you can actually give a child a complex. You know, you are actually abusing your own child. As much as you don’t want to, but you are, for the sake of four visits, you know, five visits. […] So there is a lot of work to be done here. A lot of work.”

Those with older children explained that their children understood that the programme had to end but were still upset and disappointed.

“But I thought my oldest [child] would be alright but she [partner] said that [child] went very quiet and just hasn’t been themselves since she told them. [Child] is a wee bit annoyed about it, I think and I actually thought [child] would be alright. I said it was just I can’t do it no more because I have to leave room
for other lads to do the same thing. And they understand that, they are alright, you know, but like I say to you, they were a bit annoyed that they won’t get the big [family] visits.”

For some, the return to normal visits was creating tensions in their relationships as they attempted to readjust to the dynamics of the normal visiting facilities.

“Well it is having an impact on [name of child] because [...] when it came to the end of the family visits, because you were playing with her for quite a bit, she was happy enough to say goodbye, and away she went. Where now, it is definitely causing problems between me and the child, like. [...] She gets upset and then I get annoyed and [name of partner] gets annoyed, and it just has an impact.”

Fathers also felt the loss of the programme, especially the level and quality of contact with their families. The inability to play and engage with their child was hard and, as mentioned above, some were worried that they would no longer see their children once the programme ended. A minority were also concerned that their transformative attempts would be undone if they returned to the ‘square’ houses due to the regime, culture and availability of drugs.

“When I go down to the visits the child wants to play. And I feel sick, you know what I mean? She is trying to take you into the wee play room. See now when she comes in, she comes over and gives me a hug and then clears off into the wee room. Whereas in the family visits I was able to get up and go and play with her. And now you can’t.”

“It is putting us under pressure. [...] Especially because they are saying we might be moving back to one of them square houses again. Like them square houses are nasty, you know what I mean. After being here and moving back to one of them places. [...] There is another fella there, he used to be on drugs, he has come off drugs, he is totally drug free and all this here. But now they are talking about sending him back to the square houses, he is shit scared of relapsing. And nobody is listening. [...] I go back there there’s going to be too much drugs about and I couldn’t cope. And they are just going, well, that’s just the way it is. [...] He is scared of telling his [partner] that he is going back to the square houses, because she knows he will relapse and then that will be him. He will be lucky if he gets to see his kids again, you know what I mean, after building up the bond.”

There was a feeling that both NIPS and Barnardo’s NI needed to consider this issue more, especially as one of the aims of the programme was to encourage reflection on how behaviour impacted on children. Some of the suggestions for how this could be addressed included: only allowing those who were coming to the end of their sentence to take part in the programme; having a step-down landing where the family focused, less macho culture could continue and if fathers adhered to prison rules they could continue to receive less frequent family visits; redesigning the timetable for normal visits so that those who had previously participated in the programme could have family focused visits which could be run slightly differently to make them more family friendly as it was argued that these fathers had demonstrated
their lower security risk in this regard through their participation in previous family visits; and lastly to develop better linkages with other activities and facilities within NIPS so that fathers could continue to develop their family relations or transformative process (e.g. child-centred visits; Magilligan Prison; drug free units).

From conducting the research, it seemed that Quoile House prison staff assisted fathers as much as they could in this process by identifying their preferences for progression and attempting to see if these options were available. However, there were limits to what they could do given a lack of official policy in this area. For this reason, there was a need for strategy in this area to be developed and for NIPS, DOJNI and Barnardo’s NI to consider where the Families Matter programme sits within the wider rehabilitative process, DOJNI (2013) strategic focus on families and how it linked in to other activities and supports attempting to involve families in promoting desistance and change. The ability of families to encourage change was evident during the research as was a recognition of its potential amongst Barnardo’s NI, NIPS and DOJNI. Yet, there did not appear to be a strategic overview of how the different services, supports, polices or stages of delivery linked together to build on and develop examples of good practice or their transformative potential.

“Probably one of the most influential positive factors on any person is their family. So if you can tap in between the prison and the family and turn possibly negatives or whatever, lapses, into positive relationships; that only has to feed into the rehabilitation agenda. […] I think the Families Matter landing is actually a novel approach. I don’t think the recognition […] that families are a big connection […] isn’t. I mean I knew that thirty odd years ago […] that you could see the impact, positive or negative I have to say, that a family could bring to the individual for which you have to care. I think the novel approach is actually the Family Matters landing.”

“So it is a vision, the family, so we are probably at its inception at this stage. We probably don’t have a strategic, maybe somebody does on the operational side have it, but from our branch here itself, we wouldn’t have a strategic overview of how the thing is, but we would certainly be identifying families as one […] that we would be focusing on.”

This appeared to be a concern of Barnardo’s NI from the initial conception of the Families Matter programme but they were limited in their ability to develop this work given the remit of their contractual agreements, funding constraints and the enthusiasm of NIPS and DOJNI to tackle this issue. While there seemed to be a willingness to review the issue by DOJNI and NIPS, progress had been patchy and the staffing and resource constraints appeared to add to some of the challenges in this area.

6.4 Staffing and Resources

All participants interviewed talked about the importance of staffing and resourcing for the success of the programme. Families talked about the relationships they had
developed with Quoile House prison staff and Barnardo’s NI staff leading to reduced feelings of stigma, worry and anxiety as well as encouraging engagement. While fathers and staff were also very positive about the development of ‘right’ relationships with each other facilitating engagement, transformation and a more humanised and rewarding work/living environment, they tended to highlight how staffing levels and staff restructuring had affected the delivery and development of the Families Matter programme. While some of these issues could be attributed to changes occurring as a result of the NIPS reform programme and the challenges involved in adjusting to these changes, others were attributed to the particular difficulties Maghaberry Prison faced as it attempted to operate within its existing budget during the research and within the wider economic climate of cuts to public sector bodies in Northern Ireland. All participants felt that these issues had hindered the delivery and management of the programme. As previously discussed in chapter 4, staff shortages, shift patterns and how staff were deployed, negatively affected the delivery of the programme as classes were cancelled, fathers were increasingly locked in their cells and the fathers’ routine was disrupted. Where possible, Quoile House prison staff attempted to ensure that designated Families Matter landing staff remained on the landing and that the delivery of classes and activities was facilitated but, as previously described, NIPS faced particularly acute challenges in this area during the research which directly contributed to the fathers involvement in an incident of disorder (see chapter 4). The particular staffing and resourcing challenges Maghaberry Prison experienced during this time were not unique to Quoile House and were evident in other houses within the prison and could be seen taking its toll on prison staff in other parts of the prison as well. Nevertheless, the participants indicated that issues around shift patterns, staff deployment and resourcing were ongoing ones and while particular pressures may have emerged in these areas during the research, they were not limited to that timeframe.

Concerns were raised about the shift patterns of both prison staff and Barnardo’s NI. With regards to Barnardo’s NI, it was suggested that it would be useful if the shift patterns of Barnardo’s NI staff could be reviewed to provide more space for one-to-one support and following up on administrative tasks such as timetabling issues, organising the family visit or attempting to negotiate access to children for those with social work involvement or strained relationships with the mothers of their children. It was also suggested that it would be beneficial if a member of Barnardo’s NI could be present on the Monday following the family visit as fathers could experience low mood and, while support was offered by landing prison staff and others fathers, the particular skillset of Barnardo’s NI staff would assist with this. It was proposed that the increased number of volunteers at the family visit might facilitate a reduction in Barnardo’s NI staff during the family visit so as to create space to allow Barnardo’s NI to come in on the Monday. However, Barnardo’s NI were reluctant to take such a step as it was felt that the presence of Barnardo’s NI staff helped to keep the family visits focused and allowed for links to be picked up on and drawn between what was covered in the parenting classes and events and activities on the family visit. Barnardo’s NI expressed concern that if Barnardo’s NI staff were not involved in overseeing the family visits, the potential opportunity to link theory to practice for fathers would be lost.
As for NIPS staff, there were three main concerns expressed. Firstly, it was felt that shift patterns hindered prison staff’s ability to deliver classes and activities on the Families Matter programme as they had originally been trained to do. Prison staff were keen to deliver these classes and activities but shift patterns, combined with staff shortages and the deployed of prison staff at short notice to other areas of the prison, meant that in practice it was very difficult to deliver such classes. Even if prison staff were present on the landing, they were not necessarily able to deliver classes depending on the number of staff present. Prison staff expressed frustration at this as they appreciated the opportunity to develop their skills in this area and found such work rewarding. Arguments were made for the introduction of domestic shifts, whereby prison staff worked Monday to Friday, as this would better facilitate the management, delivery and oversight of classes and activities. There was a recognition by NIPS that this would add to the continuity of the programme but it was stated that this argument could easily be applied to other sections of the prison and the cost implications and practical realities of this made it an unlikely option at this juncture.

“The issue is continuity and years ago [...] there was no issue with continuity because most staff worked seven days a week. [...] Time and decades move on. Now staff are on a shift cycle. They work no more than a thirty nine hour week. So no matter how you cut that, it is a thirty nine hour week. And where you have staff working a long day of eleven, twelve hours, you can see it is not an equal five days. [...] Domestic shifts for the Families Matter landing would be ideal. But you are running a whole establishment. It would be ideal for security officers. It would be ideal for the librarians, it will be ideal for Donard, it will be ideal for the CSU. [...] and I could go across footprints of the prison and now you’ve got fifty or a hundred staff on domestic shifts. And no weekends. No evenings. So now who is covering, because we are a 24/7 business. So now who is covering the weekend?”

NIPS did attempt to ensure that prison staff assigned to a particular house and/or landing remained in that house or landing but if other areas of the prison were short staffed, judgements had to be made about priority areas. This led to the second main concern.

Some felt there may have been a perception that Quoile House was ‘easier’ to manage than other houses and this may have contributed to an underestimation of the workload of staff and insufficient appreciation for the difficulties they faced. Such sentiments were occasionally observed during the research.

“Quoile House most days is fairly, a lot easier to run than some areas.”

There seemed to be many additional administrative tasks involved in working in Quoile House due to the nature of the people detained there that could lead to it being as challenging as other houses, if not occasionally more challenging due to the different needs, supports and programmes occurring throughout the four different landings. In addition to the Families Matter programme, Quoile House contained a drugs free landing, the Donard landing and a key workers landing with many foreign nationals. That meant that the focus, needs and regimes on the landing varied more within Quoile House compared to other houses within Maghaberry Prison. This meant that
prison staff who usually worked outside of Quoile House and were temporarily deployed there may sometimes struggle to appreciate the different ethos and complexities involved in the different landings, creating tensions with those detained there and a difficulty in completing certain tasks due to their unfamiliarity with the needs, regime of each landing and those detained there. In comparison, other houses tended to operate a more similar regime across all landings and between different houses, allowing prison staff normally stationed elsewhere to more quickly get to grips with the regime and outstanding tasks.

“There is a very vulnerable group of people in Quoile House who take up a lot of time. And I don’t know that that is fully appreciated always.”

“Obviously the Donard landing would be the most challenging, the most time consuming. […] You have four different landings with four different directions that they are travelling in. […] If you were in the square house, all landings are going in the same direction. All landings are doing the same routine and therefore that’s easier managed, because you are just doing the exact same thing on the different landings. Whereby in Quoile House, because there are four different landings, you have four different directions of travel. […] Then it is just more difficult to manage because people are on different landings for different reasons. Obviously people are in Quoile Four because they want to have a drug free environment. So that has got to be managed to ensure that that environment remains drug free. And you have got to have something to measure that against; that you can say well we have ensured that it is and remains drug free. Quoile Three, obviously Families Matter, so their emphasis is on their children, their emphasis is on family, and their thoughts and processes and day to day operation is based around that. Quoile Two, because they are key workers and because some of them are […] a more diverse ethnic group as well, there’s all different people up there from all different backgrounds, therefore that has its own challenges because, you know, there are seven Chinese of which only two speak English and the other five don’t. So that has its own set of problems or unique issues to deal with. And then obviously the Donard landing is all people with vulnerabilities, and that is [people at risk of suicide or self-harm]. So it’s not as if you can just say well, here’s what is going to be done and that will apply to all four landings.”

The perception that Quoile House may be somehow ‘easier’ to manage raised the possibility of this perception potentially influencing how resources were prioritised and deployed within the prison as well as perceptions about the workload of Quoile House staff.

The deployment of prison staff was the third main concern in this area. Although attempts were made to keep designated Families Matter staff on the Families Matter landing or in Quoile House, during the research prison staff were deployed elsewhere, depending on where NIPS management judged the greatest need. This was particularly noticeable when Maghaberry Prison took action to ensure it operated within its financial budget and sought to ensure the safe operating of the prison during this testing time. The placement of unfamiliar prison staff on the Families Matter programme was not always viewed as helpful due to the unease it could
cause with fathers as prison staff were unfamiliar with the unique ethos and culture, as well as the additional work it could create as fathers avoiding approaching unknown staff and tasks were not completed.

“They like to know who the staff is and it just puts them [fathers] on edge a bit [when unfamiliar prison staff work on the landing]. […] It gives [regular prison staff] a lot more work to do, because they have to catch up on work that hasn’t been done by the non-regulars. […] Because some of the fathers won’t go to the non-regulars to start with. Non-regulars don’t know the fathers so they can’t do the reports on them.”

The unlikeliness of Families Matter prison landing staff being placed on domestic shifts also added to the importance of the deployment of senior officers so that there was programme continuity and individuals who could follow-up on issues awaiting approval and/or resolving administrative issues such as the scheduling of classes and activities. The difficulties with communication and cooperation already outlined meant that there appeared to be a lot of follow-up work and renegotiation involved in managing the programme for both Barnardo’s NI and Quoile House prison staff. Unfortunately, when senior Quoile House prison staff were deployed to other houses, it was very difficult to follow up on issues related to Quoile House while placed in another house and expected to complete all the normal tasks in this role. Quoile House prison staff were willing to take ownership of such issues but, in addition to the issues outlined in the communication and cooperation section of this chapter, they appeared to be restricted in their capacity to do so due to their frequent deployment to other houses and responsibilities this entitled. Some suggestions to resolve these issues were to place one senior officer on a domestic shift and give this officer responsibility for following-up on and resolving such issues or, alternatively, assigning two or three senior officers to Quoile House consistently and allowing them to cover the different shift patterns, training and annual leave between them. Though in this case, there is a need to ensure that some of the potential communication difficulties outlined in the previous section when more than one person is involved in overseeing tasks are addressed for this to work smoothly.

Resources to the Families Matter programme was provided by both Barnardo’s NI and NIPS, with Barnardo’s NI providing half the finances for the running of the programme. The commitment of both to ensuring the continuation of the programme was obvious during the research through the willingness of both Barnardo’s NI and prison staff in Quoile House to go above and beyond what was required of them in attempting to ensure the programme functioned as well as it could within their remit. The commitment to the Families Matter programme was also evident in the upper echelons of Barnardo’s NI due to the time, commitment and effort put into attempting to resolve difficulties in the scheduling of classes and activities, etc. and to find external providers to help assist with the programme. While Maghaberry Prison had experienced some turbulence prior to and during the research, its commitment to sustaining the Families Matter programme was apparent in the willingness of NIPS management to release additional staffing resources to ensure family visits and recruitment drives could proceed and their continued commitment to maintaining a designated residential area for the programme.
“There is no question about [NIPS] not delivering that because what [NIPS] want to see is definitely that facility for fathers and their families. As I said right from the start, it is one of the three pillars of rehabilitation, is family. So there’s no question about that. But we’ve also got to do it within resources.”

There was a resignation amongst participants that extra resources were unlikely to be made available due to the wider economic climate within Northern Ireland and that reductions in resourcing were likely. This intensified the need for a more efficient and effective delivery and management of the programme as well as the programme design. There was a feeling that more could be done to improve the programme within its existing resource.

“This is done on a shoestring. The work that we are doing, [Barnardo’s NI] don’t have much money. The prison don’t have much money. So it is not an expensive programme. And [...] if we could communicate and deliver it in a better way, you know, we do need a bit more money, but we could still do more if we could do it better.”

In particular, it seemed that if the difficulties outlined in this chapter could be addressed, it would help to: embed the programme within NIPS; free up staff time; increase numbers of fathers on the programme; resolve barriers to inter-departmental involvement; and ensure the Families Matter programme is better situated within the wider rehabilitative and family strategy within NIPS and DOJNI, facilitating the smoother progression for fathers and families and building on opportunities for desistance and transformation. Resolving these issues may help NIPS and Barnardo’s NI to build a stronger business case for investment in this area as it would tackle some of the underlying issues that appeared to be contributing to falling numbers and trouble meeting performance indicators.

“They [fathers] are working and if they decide not to go to work [classes or activities] [...] then that work [classes or activities] placement fails. And it is a terrible thing to say, but that is, we cannot get funding or even apply for funding. Because the last time [...] in a nutshell they said, why would we give you additional funding for more workshops or job placements within the prison, if you can’t even fill the capacity of the ones you have got. So you are almost forcing capacity, to try and give as much opportunity as we possibly can to as many as they can, and are hoping that that increased capacity and attendance will allow us to build a business case to get more placements. [...] When you have financial arguments, you know, you are not getting any more money because you can’t even fill your capacity now. What’s difficult is, we can’t guarantee to fill every seat in education, because it is voluntary. [...] So we are trying every way to maximise attendance, maximise use of our current resources.”

6.5 Summary
Accordingly, the research findings indicate that while there is a strong commitment to ensuring the success of the programme by NIPS and Barnardo’s NI, there remained strategic, communication, cooperation, progression, staffing and resourcing issues which could be improved. The recent changes Maghaberry Prison had undergone had seemed to disrupt the momentum behind the Families Matter programme but this had been recognised and steps taken by NIPS to readdress this. These steps were welcomed and improvements were apparent. Nonetheless, the consequences of these changes, had appeared to affect the delivery of the programme which in turn had a knock influence on programme recruitment and, consequently, the potential viability of the programme and ability to build a business case for increased investment. These issues needed to be addressed as future reductions in resourcing were possible, increasing the need for Barnardo’s NI and NIPS to work more efficiently, effectively and economically if the programme was to continue and arguments for investment made.
Chapter 7: Conclusion


Similar to previous research, parental imprisonment was described as negatively affecting children’s well-being with deterioration in school performance, sleep difficulties, increased withdrawal from social interaction, worry about the safety and well-being of fathers, and involvement in disruptive behaviour all being described as effects on children. Partners/caregivers described struggling to cope, financial pressures, stigma, isolation and increased feelings of worry and anxiety, reinforcing existing research on this topic. While a small minority believed that the imprisonment of fathers brought them closer together as a family, for most, the experience placed additional strains and pressures on the family unit. Indeed, past relationship breakdown and loss of contact with children by previous partners was attributed to these strains and pressures. This is particularly concerning as Northern Ireland is following the global pattern of sending more people to prison (see NIPS, 2014). This implies that the potential implications of parental imprisonment for child development, as well as the intergenerational transmission of crime will continue to be an area of concern for Northern Ireland due to the long term negative consequences of parental imprisonment on families and children, and the greater likelihood of these children being imprisoned (see Glover, 2009; ICPS, 2013; Jones & Wainaina-Woźna, 2013; Kjellstrand & Eddy, 2011; Murray, 2005, Murray & Farrington, 2005, 2008a, 2008b; NIPS, 2014).

However, involvement in the Families Matter programme appeared to counteract many of the negative effects of parental imprisonment, at least in the short and medium term. The Families Matter programme seemed to reduce the potential for relationship breakdown, improved well-being and increased the willingness of partners/caregivers to bring children to visit fathers as the family visits were deemed to be a more suitable and potentially less threatening environment for children compared to normal prison visits. Families greatly valued the flexibility surrounding movement and contact in family visits for maintaining and/or repairing family relations and improving children’s well-being as well as the reduced probability of being exposed to aggressive behaviour or possible judgemental attitudes compared to normal prison visits. In addition, staff engagement and motivation, the design, structure and delivery of the programme, contributed to strengthening fathers parenting skills and provided them with more opportunities to parent while imprisoned, which in turn improved children’s well-being, relationships with fathers and relationship between fathers and partners/caregivers.

The mechanisms by which participation in the Families Matter programme may reduce the negative effects of parental imprisonment include: the increased frequency and quality of contact between fathers and their families; culture of peer support, destigmatising and encouraged the sharing of thoughts, experiences and information; alleviation of anxieties and worries about the safety of fathers due to
familiarity with staff and other fathers on the programme as well as the segregated residential nature of the Families Matter landing; the enhancement of fathers parenting skills and providing opportunities for fathers to demonstrate these enhanced skills and their capacity to parent; and improving fathers well-being and ability to cope with imprisonment through engagement in constructive activity, which in turn helped to improve communication between fathers and families. Extant research indicates that how adults react to and deal with imprisonment, the level of contact between parents and children as well as the amount of social support received from peers can influence children’s resilience and ability to cope with parental imprisonment (Jones & Wainaina-Woźna, 2013; Manby et al. 2015; Nesmith & Ruhland, 2008; Parke & Clark-Stewart, 2001; Poehlmann, 2005). The findings of this research would seem to support these studies and in particular, the quality of the face-to-face contact between fathers and children in the family visit appeared to help increase children’s psychological well-being as suggested by Miller (2006).

Nonetheless, the extent to which these benefits were retained and built on once involvement in the programme ended is questionable due to the need to better plan for and manage progression from the programme and review how the Families Matter programme fits into existing rehabilitation and desistance strategies within NIPS and DOJNI. Depending on where fathers were placed on completion of the Families Matter programme, the culture of peer support, increased opportunities for frequent and quality contact with families and alleviation of families’ anxieties and worries may be lost. In particular, there was a risk of potentially undoing the progress made on the Families Matter programme by returning fathers to a hyper-masculine culture emphasising power, toughness and competition while discouraging in-depth discussions of family life and emotional tenderness. This may limit the ability of the Families Matter programme to result in longer term outcomes for fathers, families and the prison, although long term follow up research is needed to investigate this further.

During the research, it was evident that meaningful relations with family members and Barnardo’s NI and NIPS staff were developed and that family members frequently encouraged fathers to adhere to the prison regime so as to avoid risking their place on the Families Matter programme. This concurs with previous studies and government policies highlighting the potential for families to influence people’s involvement in misbehaviour and encourage desistance (DOJNI, 2013; Home Office, 2004, 2006; Ministry of Justice, 2013). Yet, the difficulty experienced attempting to engage some family members once the programme ended indicated that this momentum may be quickly lost and opportunities missed to continue to involve families in the desistance process once their involvement with the Families Matter programme ended. Accordingly, there is a need to ensure that the relationships with families developed during the programme are maintained and built on, if the potential for families to play a role in encouraging desistance is to be maximised. This is important as research by Burnett and McNeill (2005) indicates that relationships are key to successful interventions and promoting desistance. The positive relationships developed with families by staff, their knowledge of these families due to their familiarity with them as well as families familiarity with staff and willingness to work with them implies that Barnardo’s NI and prison staff working directly with families may be
well placed to continue this work and/or offer possible ways forward to continue to engage these families on completion of the programme.

The research findings also confirm previous research which found that pro-social family and peer support can improve the psychological well-being of those imprisoned (see Libeling, 1999; 2004). However, in contradiction to some studies, the research findings support Cochran and Mears (2014) argument for a more nuanced understanding of how visitation can affect order and control in prison. The findings indicate that while access to family visits can act to motivate people to comply with prison rules, there are limits to this as those detained offset the potential benefits of family visits with their frequency, longevity, extent to which the prison regime is perceived as being fair and consistent, perceived impact of prison regime on individuals and families, the likelihood of being caught, charged and sanctioned by prison staff as well as individual reactions to and ability to focus on longer term goals. Given that many people detained in prison can experience difficulty in regulating their emotions, impulses, thoughts, desires or behaviours, a belief that those imprisoned should remain focused on longer term goals, despite significant temporary changes to their immediate situation, may be somewhat optimistic without appropriate communication and support. This suggests that the view that there is a straightforward relationship between access to family visits and compliance is too simplistic and does not take account of individual factors, situational influences or the complex conscious and/or unconscious calculations that individuals engage in when deciding how to act. The tendency to attribute the actions of others to internal dispositional traits, while attributing the causes of our own behaviour to situational factors is a longstanding fallacy, and can lead to situational and social factors being under-emphasised in rehabilitation and desistance programmes and policies, despite research indicating the importance of these factors (e.g. Farrington, 1992; Laub & Sampson, 2001; Maruna & Mann, 2006; Ministry of Justice Analytical Services, 2014; Uggen, 2000)

In addition, the findings of this study reinforce existing research highlighting the key role programme design and delivery play in influencing the successfulness of interventions (Buston et al. 2012; Durlek & DuPre, 2008; Kaminski et al. 2008). While many examples of good practice were observed and are listed in the next section, there were also areas that would benefit from more consideration (see later in this chapter). For instance, the scheduling and sustainability of classes and activities, the progression of fathers and families from the programme, how the programme relates to existing work within the prison, government policies focusing on rehabilitation, desistance and families as well as work with families in the community. Strengthening and developing links in these areas will add to the potential for the programme to result in longer term positive outcomes and ensure a more coherent approach to helping improve the well-being of children and families as well as attempts to reduce offending behaviour through the involvement of families.

Nevertheless, there are a number of limitations to this research which must be borne in mind when interpreting its results. While the research design allows for an in-depth analysis of how the rationale, design and implementation of the programme may lead to changes at the level of fathers, families or the prison, it limits the generalisability of the findings due to its small sample size. As only one cohort of fathers
and families were followed during a particularly challenging time for NIPS, this may limit the extent to which some of the conclusions may be generalisable to other cohorts. While the qualitative nature of the research allowed for an in-depth analysis of the workings of the programme and people’s engagement with it, it did not provide a quantitative measurement of the effectiveness of the programme or its impact. In addition, a quantitative research methodology could have examined the extent to which individual and/or self-selection effects (such as personality, coping style, pre-existing desire to minimise the negative effects of parental imprisonment, etc.) may have influenced the outcomes witnessed. This would have provided a more nuanced understanding of how the impact of the programme may vary depending on the characteristics of those participating. Further, while the potential for long term outcomes to emerge from participating in the Families Matter programme can be highlighted in this research, it is unable to draw any firm conclusions due to the need to conduct a long term follow up of fathers and families after they are released from prison.

Despite these limitations, the research provides an in-depth analysis of the Families Matter programme and how fathers, families and those involved in its delivery engage with the programme and are affected by it in the short and medium term. It provides useful insights into the role that programme design and delivery is playing in its success as well as how it can be enhanced to build on and develop its potential. It also provides a detailed analysis of how fathers, families and people involved in the programme are affected by it in the short and medium term, which can be used to inform the development of a longer term project assessing its ability to result in long term improvements in children’s well-being, families’ lives and the potential to reduce offending. The mixed methods qualitative approach also allowed the identification of a number of examples of good practice and areas that may require further consideration that are listed below.

7.1 Examples of Good Practice

1. Setting the Families Matter programme in a newer building with better facilities and a design which was experienced as less claustrophobic and allowed for more interaction between staff and fathers. This seemed to reduce some of the pains of imprisonment experienced by fathers and helped provide a setting in which barriers and stereotypes between staff and fathers could be gradually broken down and challenged, contributing to ‘right’ relationships between staff and fathers.

2. The residential nature of the programme and use of segregated accommodation appeared to be key as it directly contributed to a culture of peer support and challenged the hyper-masculine culture present elsewhere in the prison, encouraging fathers to be more receptive to the format and delivery of the programme and reducing families worries and anxieties about the well-being of fathers.

3. The motivation, commitment and skills of Barnardo’s NI staff, NIPS staff and volunteers to the programme and its aims, promoting them on many occasions
observed during the research to go above and beyond what was required of them to assist fathers and families.

4. The relationships between Barnardo’s NI and Quoile House prison staff with families which helped to reassure families, reduce concerns, worries and anxieties, and reduce feelings of stigma.

5. Level of cooperation and communication between Barnardo’s NI and NIPS staff in Quoile House which helped to ensure that the programme continued despite challenging circumstances.

6. Use of dynamic security by prison staff on the Families Matter landing to manage order and control on the landing. Dynamic security involves staff using their interactions with fathers to identify, prevent and defuse risk (see Prison Review Team, 2011).

7. Development of and promotion of a culture of peer support amongst fathers and families taking part in the programme, facilitating a more humanised environment, the sharing of information and coping strategies as well as reducing feelings of stigma and isolation.

8. Use of peer learning in Barnardo’s NI parenting classes and non-judgemental attitude seemed to help overcome initial hesitation and scepticism about the classes.

9. The linking of fathers’ experiences to theory discussed in the Barnardo’s parenting classes and flexibility of Barnardo’s NI staff to take account of particular learning or mental health needs of those involved. This seemed to encourage engagement and understanding of the issues being discussed.

10. The frequency and quality of opportunities to parent while imprisoned directly contributed to improvements in the well-being of families and family relationships as well as providing valued opportunities for fathers to interact with and parent children through access to telephones and the family visits.

11. Provision of activities for families to partake in during the family visit and inclusion of male volunteers in these activities helped to structure the visit, helped to encourage fathers to play more with their children by challenging potential masculine stereotypes and helped families to become more familiar with one another, contributing to a culture of peer support for families.

12. The use of photos at family visits helped to remind fathers of their goals during difficult times, allowed them to share these photos with their children and captured important memories of new born babies with their fathers which they otherwise would not have due to their imprisonment.

13. The continued motivation and commitment to the Families Matter programme by NIPS and Barnardo’s NI, apparent through their ongoing resourcing and financing of the programme during difficult financial times.

14. Evidence of attempts to improve communication amongst those involved in the delivery of the Families Matter programme by Barnardo’s NI compared to elsewhere in the prison but some suggestions for improvement were offered.

7.2 Suggestions for Future Development of the Programme
1. DOJNI, NIPS and Barnardo’s NI review of the progression of fathers and families from the programme to ensure that progress made while participating in the programme is not undone and that appropriate connections with other rehabilitative services and supports are developed to avoid missed opportunities.

2. DOJNI, NIPS and Barnardo’s NI appraise existing rehabilitative, desistance and family focused strategies and policies to ensure appropriate links are made to the Families Matter programme and that plans are in place to continue to engage families beyond the completion of the programme, to improve child well-being and the potential of families to encourage desistance.

3. NIPS and Barnardo’s NI consider beginning recruitment for the programme earlier and reviewing the selection criteria to take account of developments within the prison and the needs of different groups (e.g. sentenced fathers or those on remand). There should be sufficient time to complete drug tests before the programme commences and if delays with adjudications of up to two months are common across the prison, consider reviewing the selection criteria to take account of this, as delays by the prison in hearing charges should not prohibit fathers’ progression if they have not been involved in any subsequent misconduct since the date of their charge.

4. NIPS, working with Barnardo’s NI, attempt to provide a regular routine with a full schedule of classes and activities aimed at strengthening the parenting and self-development skills as well as access to telephones for fathers. However, when this is not possible, clear communication with fathers and families, acknowledgement by NIPS management of fathers’ concerns and attempts to facilitate continued telephone contact may help to avoid the emergence of unrest. Access to phones in cells or reconsidering whether all classes and activities need to be solely for Families Matter participants might help in this regard.

5. The sustainability of the use of external providers in providing classes and activities must also be examined by Barnardo’s NI and NIPS.

6. NIPS, working with Barnardo’s NI, consider strategies to improve fathers’ attendance/compliance with the Families Matter programme. This may include reconsidering the relative priorities of competing activities fathers are required to undertake, setting minimum attendance targets, incentivising attendance and other approaches to reducing disruptions during classes and activities.

7. Barnardo’s NI need to consider including more material aimed at older children and practical skills focused activities in the Barnardo’s NI parenting classes as well as providing more one-on-one support to address specific needs and assist those with social work involvement. In particular, the decision not to allow fathers to repeat the programme requires staff to provide appropriate supports to ensure that those with learning difficulties and mental health issues are able to understand and engage with the material being covered.

8. Barnardo’s NI and NIPS reconsider the use of and selection of peer mentors (perhaps called Families Matter key workers or Barnardo’s NI volunteers) as fathers who have previously completed the programme are an important source of support for new participants on the programme, helping to set the tone of the landing, challenge hyper-masculine beliefs and attitudes, promote
a culture of peer support, reassure new fathers on the landing, providing support within classes to encourage fathers to engage with the material being discussed as well as to stay with the programme in times of doubt.

9. NIPS, working with Barnardo’s NI, need to review barriers and obstacles to inter-departmental co-operation to ensure a more efficient and economical use of resources. Increased monitoring of attendance at classes and activities may also help with this.

10. NIPS, working with Barnardo’s NI, evaluate staffing (both at a programme and class level), resourcing, communication and approval mechanisms currently being used in the prison to consider where changes may be made to address some of the concerns raised in chapter six.

11. NIPS and Barnardo’s NI review the provision of family visits to look at providing activities and facilities that better meet the needs of babies and older children as well as considering if more frequent family visits, or increasing the speed at which families can leave the visits, is possible.

12. DOJNI, NIPS and Barnardo’s NI consider how normal prison visits may be made more family friendly to address the concerns raised by families and their reluctance to bring children to such visits.
References


