

The Nurturing Programme: a prison based pilot

An evaluative commentary

A Report for Family Links

Jonathan Nicholls
Programme Director – Mental Health Promotion
Mental Health Foundation

September 2005

Contents

Acknowledgements	3
1. Introduction	4
1.1 Purpose of this report	4
1.2 Overview of the course run in Styal Prison	4
1.3 Methodology for the review	5
2. Background and context for pilot	6
2.1 History of the pilot project	6
2.2 The education context for the pilot	6
2.3 Stakeholder aims for the pilot project	8
Recommendations from Chapter 2	8
3. Establishing a prison based Nurturing Programme	9
3.1 Accessing the prison	9
3.2 Resourcing the Nurturing Programme	10
3.3 Other issues	10
Recommendations from Chapter 3	11
4. Stakeholder experiences from the Styal Pilot	12
4.1 Recruiting the participants	12
4.2 Experiences of the course	13
4.3 Impact of the course	16
4.4 Attendance rates	18
Recommendations from Chapter 4	18
5. Recruiting, training and supporting Health Visitors	20
5.1 Selection of Health Visitors	20
5.2 The need for flexibility and acceptance of the prison context	21
5.3 The need for Prison Craft	22
5.4 The need for good classroom management	23
5.5 Tensions faced by Nurturing Programme facilitators	24
Recommendations from Chapter 5	25
6. Issues for further consideration	27
6.1 Timing of the course	27
6.2 Limited access to children and partners	28
6.3 The emotional support in prisons	29
6.4 Course content	31
6.5 Follow up on release	33
6.6 Rolling out the Nurturing Programme	34
Recommendations from Chapter 6	35
Summary of Recommendations	36

Acknowledgements

This project would not have been possible without the support and assistance of the Director and Programme Director at Family Links; the Family Learning Co-ordinator from HMP Wolds; and the Education Department at HMP Styal. The time they made available for interviews, the access they provided to Styal Prison, and their informal reflections of parenting courses and the prison context have been invaluable in shaping the project.

Thanks are also due, of course, to the women who were participating on the Styal pilot of the Nurturing Programme, who brought a rich and vibrant perspective on the value of the Nurturing Programme.

1. Introduction

1.1 Purpose of this report

“My vision would be that every – to begin with – woman would get this programme a few months prior to going home”

Family Links Director

The Nurturing Programme, as developed in the UK by Family Links, is an emotional literacy training course for parents and children. This has traditionally been run in schools, but Family Links has also piloted the programme in a number of other settings, include a children’s home, and most recently, Styal women’s prison in Cheshire.

The focus of this report is the pilot in Styal Prison. Family Links are keen to explore the possibility of taking the Nurturing Programme into other prisons, probably to be delivered by Health Visitors who are already established as experienced Parent Group Leaders. It is anticipated that this will raise a series of issues, such as: the practicalities of delivering the course in prison; whether the course needs to be adapted for a prison setting; what additional training Health Visitors would need to deliver the course; and so on. Family Links therefore wanted to draw together the lessons from the Styal Pilot to inform any future roll out.

The aim of the report is to provide that commentary – identifying the issues to emerge from the Styal pilot, together with the questions that Family Links will need to address as they seek to establish the Nurturing Programme in other prisons. These lessons, issues and questions have been organised under a number of themes, including:

- the context for the pilot
- the lessons from establishing the pilot project in Styal
- the experiences of the pilot programme from the perspective of different stakeholders
- training and support needs for Health Visitors delivering the programme
- issues that are likely to need further reflection

These themes have been used as the basis for the chapter structure in this report. In addition, each chapter identifies a range of recommendations both for action or consideration.

It will also be noted from the quotation at the start of this chapter that a longer term aspiration for Family Links is that parents doing the course in prison would also get follow up Nurturing Programme support once they had returned home. While this bridging between prison and community goes beyond the scope of the Styal pilot, the question of the transition back home was also explored as part of this study, and a number of emerging issues are also reported briefly in this report.

1.2 Overview of the course run in Styal Prison

This report is intended neither as a full description of the Nurturing Programme, nor as a formal evaluation of the impact of the pilot. Rather, its focus is principally on the lessons learned from taking the programme into a prison setting. Readers looking for further details about the Nurturing Programme are referred to the Family Links website (<http://www.familylinks.org.uk/nurturing/>), or to the book that accompanies the course (*The Parenting Puzzle*¹).

However, to make sense of some of the following discussion, it is necessary to make some brief descriptive and observational points about the course in Styal, and some references to how it was different to courses in the community. Key points are as follows:

- the Styal course was co-facilitated by the Family Learning Co-ordinator from HMP Wolds and one of Family Links’ Programme Directors

¹ *The Parenting Puzzle*, Candida Hunt (2003), ISBN 0-9544709-0-7

- it ran for five full days over five weeks – in contrast with ten shorter sessions over ten weeks when run in the community
- a training day lasted nominally from 9am to 4pm, with a two hour lunch break in the middle of the day; in practice, the start time was often delayed as several of the course participants had to wait for medications
- the course was delivered in one end of a kitchen used for training prisoners in home skills
- the aim of the programme is to develop parents' awareness and confidence with the Four Constructs of: self awareness and self esteem; appropriate expectations; empathy; and positive discipline
- the main methods for doing this include:
 - participants' reflection of the own experiences of being parented as a child
 - doing a series of exercises around specific parenting skills
 - nurturing and valuing the mothers through the course, so that they are better able to nurture and value their children
- in a community setting, this is complemented between sessions by the parents practicing the skills they have learned with their children; this leads to further reflections about their parenting which are explored in subsequent sessions of the course
- in the prison setting, the opportunities for this "homework" were considerably limited

1.3 Methodology for the review

This review was conducted in June to July 2005, using the following methods:

- telephone interviews with the Family Links Director at the start and on completion of the pilot
- telephone interviews with the Family Links Programme Director at the start and on completion of the pilot
- a field visit to HMP Styal on the last day of the course, which included:
 - an interview with the Family Learning Co-ordinator from HMP Wolds
 - an interview with the Education Manager from HMP Styal
 - a focus group with the four of the five women who were participating in the course on the final day (the fifth of the course participants was called out of the room for the period of the focus group)

All interviews were recorded and reviewed against a number of themes identified with Family Links at the outset of the project. Illustrative quotes were selected and are included in the following report. As the focus of the study was on the lessons from within the prison, the majority of the quotes have been drawn from the interviews and focus group that took place during the field visit – although quotes from the Family Links team have also been included as appropriate.

As is usually the case in qualitative studies, it should be born in mind that the sample sizes in this review were very small. Hence, while the findings described below present considerable detail about this particular case study, care should be taken when generalising these findings to other settings.

2. Background and context for pilot

2.1 History of the pilot project

Three main parties were involved in establishing the Nurturing Programme Pilot in Styal Prison, each of which came to the pilot from a different perspective. In many ways, the main instigator was the Family Learning Co-ordinator from HMP Wolds. Her commitment to running the Nurturing Programme in prison settings, however, also played into the agendas of Family Links and the Education Department in HMP Styal. These perspectives can be summarised as follows:

- The Family Learning Co-ordinator had been running a range of parenting interventions in HMP Wolds. When she heard of the Nurturing Programme, she recognised it as something that could use in her role at the prison, and she underwent the Nurturing Programme training. Having run the course with a group of fathers in HMP Wolds, she recognised that the emotional elements of the course were challenging in the context of a male prison. Nevertheless, she appears to have become something of an advocate for extending the Nurturing Programme into other prisons, particularly female establishments.

“I gave it a trial run in the male prison but didn’t think it worked, basically as it’s quite a touchy feely programme, while a male environment is very sterile². ... But I did think perhaps it would work better in female prisons. So I ended up persuading a local prison to pay for me to do the course and see how it went.”

Family Learning Co-ordinator

As the Family Learning Co-ordinator became aware of the potential demand in the Prison Service to run the Nurturing Programme, which would outstrip what she herself could deliver, she contacted Family Links to explore how she could support their work getting Health Visitors into prisons to deliver the Nurturing Programme.

- from Family Links’ perspective, they have now trained around 1500 health and community practitioners as Parent Group Leaders to deliver the Nurturing Programme in community settings, and as an organisation they are interested to explore other settings where the programme would be useful. With Primary Care Trusts taking responsibility for prison healthcare, there is now an opportunity to take the Nurturing Programme into prisons, to be delivered by Health Visitors from the PCT. The particular vision here is to provide a bridge between the prison and home settings, so that prisoners can receive consistent parenting support as they make this transition – the aim being to:

“... draw together the people who are part of the resettlement process and give them a generic training so they’re more skilled and confident and consistent in the advice they give to people when they get home.”

Family Links Director

- from HMP Styal’s point of view, the new Education Manager was looking to expand the prison’s education provision beyond the more traditional literacy and numeracy curriculum (as outlined below). When the Family Learning Co-ordinator from HMP Wolds approached them about piloting the Nurturing Programme, it fitted well with this agenda, building on the home-based training that some of the prisoners were already receiving.

The pilot therefore addressed a number of agendas. This report seeks to take account of these in considering what has been learned.

2.2 The education context for the pilot

In understanding the context for the Nurturing Programme pilot, it is useful to briefly discuss the evolving context for education in the Prison Service. This is important as it gives some indication of the opportunities that may open up for extending the Nurturing Programme to other prisons.

² This issue is discussed further in Chapter 6

In Styal Prison, all the inmates are required to work. As education classes count as work, there is a considerable incentive to attend training. According to the Education Manager, there was traditionally an expectation, both in Styal and other prisons, that this training would focus on basic skills:

“When I started [9 months ago], we were very heavily English and Maths based – a lot of basic skills. And that’s developed over quite a long time over the last few years, because we’ve been required to meet certain Key Performance Targets we’ve been set for basic skills. And the government’s said they wanted so many basic skills entries, level 1s, level 2s. So most education departments have geared themselves up to achieving those. ... And what had happened here was that it had gradually progressed until all the money was going into basic skills.”

Education Manager

However, recently, there has been a recognition that this approach may have a limited impact:

“So now people start looking and saying, ‘Hang on, if people have failed for the last 12 years, they’ve done 12 years of education and the still can’t read and write, why would they want to come and do 25 hours a week reading and writing? Maybe that’s why we’re not getting the attendance in classes’.”

Education Manager

Instead, there is a growing focus across Prison Education on broadening the range of training provision available – to include a wider array of social and life skills, including parenting. This appears to have arisen partly because the need for broader education has been recognised; and partly because these more other, more engaging subjects may be a better way to deliver basic literacy and numeracy skills training:

“Unfortunately, for a lot of the girls here, and the men, their parents have been here before them. And so they’re learning from the parents but not the right skills. They’re learning the wrong skills, so people are now realising that maybe it’s important.”

Education Manager

“You can put basic skills into anything”

Education Manager

The Nurturing Programme would appear to fit this emerging requirement in prison education. Furthermore, it also meets a requirement for community work.

“Prisons have got a tick box on parenting and on community work, so if we can tick two boxes, save on money, but at the same time give Health Visitors some extra support, then actually we’ve got a good system going”

Family Learning Co-ordinator

This all suggests there are a number of ways that the Nurturing Programme can be presented to the Prison Service, to highlight how it is relevant to their education agenda.

Interestingly, neither of the prison staff interviewed made reference to any specific national policy documents driving this change of emphasis in education provision in prisons. Such national documents can obviously be highly influential in shaping the agenda, so it would be useful for Family Links to explore whether such drivers exist, and consider how the Nurturing Programme supports any such national agenda. In this context, it may also be useful to establish links with other relevant organisations. A web trawl identified a number of organisations, such as Action for Prisoners’ Families (www.prisonersfamilies.org.uk), and the Forum on Prisoner Education (www.fpe.org.uk) and such links may be useful to explore further.

2.3 Stakeholder aims for the pilot project

As noted, the three main stakeholders had somewhat different perspectives on the pilot project. Similarly, when asked to reflect on what they wanted the pilot project to achieve, they each expressed somewhat different priorities:

- the Family Learning Co-ordinator had already run the Nurturing Programme in several other prisons, so was already well experienced in taking the course into a prison setting. Her main areas of interest were: to ensure the women on the course had a beneficial experience; to demonstrate the value of the course to Styal prison; and to share her experience of running the course with Family Links.
- from Family Links perspective, the aims were related but different: to gain experience of delivering the Nurturing Programme in a prison setting; and through this to identify the issues they would need to address in taking the programme into other prisons. Issues of particular interest included what additional training Health Visitors would need to deliver the course in prisons; and whether there was any need to adapt the course for a prison setting.
- from the prison's point of view, they had identified a number of success criteria for assessing the pilot: whether the prisoners enjoyed the course; whether attendance levels were good; whether the course actually benefited the prisoners, in terms of their knowledge and skills around parenting; and how well the course met the prison's need to provide social and life skills training.

“If the girls come back and say they hadn't benefited at all we'd look at whether it was worth it ... I'd like to ask if they're thinking of changing after the course, and whether they think it's useful for them – how they thought they would implement anything they'd learned.”

Education Manager

“There's other feedback there. So we look at the voluntary attendance, if that's good over the five sessions, that's an indicator they've found it useful.”

Education Manager

Hence, each of the main parties had complementary but distinct interests in the pilot project. As far as possible, these different interests have been addressed through the remainder of this report.

Recommendations from Chapter 2

It would be useful for Family Links to pay particular attention to understanding the current social and life skills training agenda in prisons. This will assist in “selling” the Nurturing Programme to prisons. In addition, it would be useful to highlight how the Nurturing Programme can support prisoners in developing basic skills, and help prisons engage in community work

If the Nurturing Programme is able to support prisoners in developing literacy and numeracy skills (eg through reading the *Parenting Puzzle*, and through the written exercises), it would also be useful to highlight this when “selling” the course, as this support the prison agenda of providing training in basic skills.

Similarly, it would be useful to understand more fully what requirements prisons have for community work, and to identify how the Nurturing Programme can best be presented as meeting this requirement.

It may be useful for Family Links to familiarise themselves with any national policy documents shaping the prison education agenda; and to extend links with other organisations with interests in prisoner families and education.

3. Establishing a prison based Nurturing Programme

3.1 Accessing the prison

In the case of the Styal pilot, the initial contact was between the Family Learning Co-ordinator at HMP Wolds, and the Education Manager at Styal. This link into Styal prison was seen as particularly important to introducing the Nurturing Programme smoothly – both in terms of setting the programme up, and organising it within the prison:

“If you’ve got someone in the prison who supports it, then setting it up is no big deal – there’s got to be a person who’s willing to take on all the set up, getting the women”

Family Learning Co-ordinator

Conversely, without this in-prison champion, it was suggested that setting up a programme would be far more challenging. In such situations, it was suggested the Women’s Estate Committee, which oversees the running of the female prison estate could be useful in encouraging prisons to adopt the programme

“If you haven’t got that lead person inside the prison, it just won’t happen – which is why Women’s Estate Committee is a key lever”

Family Learning Co-ordinator

It was not possible within this study to explore the role of this committee further, nor whether a similar committee exists for the male estate. However, it would appear useful for Family Links to explore this link further: if such committees became advocates of the programme, it would be likely to increase take up rates by prisons.

While the Family Learning Co-ordinator does not have the capacity to continue running Nurturing Programme courses across different prisons, she was interested in supporting Family Links in rolling out the programme. As a prison “insider”, she may well be able to provide useful links to such committees.

In terms of gaining entry to a particular prison, the two most important contacts will be

- the Head of Learning and Skills, a governor grade, employed by the Home Office, and is responsible for ensuring learning and training take place in their prison
- the Education Manager, employed by a local college, and purely concerned with the development and delivery of different training courses

In Styal, the relationship between these two is good, and by agreement, decisions about whether to set up particular courses are delegated to the Education Manager. This is not the case in all prisons, however, so when Family Links approaches prisons about introducing the Nurturing Programme, it will be important to identify where decision making rests in that prison. Also, even if the decisions lie with the Education Manager, it would be useful to ensure as far as possible that the Head of Learning and Skills is an advocate of the programme: as a governor grade, they will be able to provide senior management backing for the programme, and are likely to increase the credibility of the course in the eyes of prison officers.

It will also be important to remain aware that different prisons appear to retain a degree of autonomy, and that the prison governor will heavily influence which programmes get taken forward:

“In this prison, it depends very much on your number one governor – the top guy – how he sees his establishment going”

Education Manager

3.2 Resourcing the Nurturing Programme

One issue that will need to be considered when approaching prisons is what funding is available. If the programme has to be funded by the prison, it was pointed out that the prison has a tight education budget, and obligations to deliver training in social and life skills, literacy and numeracy. If the Nurturing Programme can be fitted within this remit, then there is a chance that it could be funded from within the prison – though it was noted that prisons would be unlikely to have *additional* funding for it. This means that if the prison had to fund the Nurturing Programme, this would probably only be as a replacement for an existing course (and that this would be most likely if the existing course had poor attendance).

Given these tight resources, and the requirement on prison education departments to get as many prisoners into training as possible, there was considerable interest in the Nurturing Programme being delivered by Health Visitors (and therefore funded through a different budget):

“If someone could put a health visitor in here once a week, then great. I’d want to put an education staff in there at first to support them, till they’d learned the environment. Then I’d pull my staff out and I’ve then got eight girls out of their cells, and I can use my member of staff to get another eight girls occupied. It would be expanding what we could do.”

Education Manager

This does, however, raise a further issue. The Family Links standard for running the Nurturing Programme is that it should be delivered by *two* facilitators. However, it is open to question whether a PCT would provide two health visitors to run the course; and as noted, the Education Manager in Styal would be seeking to free up one of her members of staff rather than have them co-train on the Nurturing Programme. This echoes a point made by the Family Learning Co-ordinator that “no one will pay for two people to deliver” the course. It is therefore difficult to see how the Family Links standard of two facilitators can be met in a prison setting – so this issue needs further consideration.

3.3 Other issues

A number of other issues were mentioned during the interviews which are likely to make it easier for Family Links to engage prisons in a discussion about introducing the Nurturing Programme. These are noted briefly below:

- prison staff stressed the importance of “prison craft” (what you can and cannot do in a prison setting – see chapter 5), appropriate boundaries with prisoners, and the ability to manage the classroom setting. It would be useful for Family Links to show an awareness of these issues when approaching prisons.
- for the Styal Education Department at least, there is a strong commitment to get as many women out of cells and into training as possible. Courses that promise high attendance rates are therefore attractive. As discussed below, the attendance rates on the Styal pilot course were very good; it would be worth highlighting this when talking to prisons about the course³.
- it is also likely to be attractive to the prison service that the course can be delivered in a regular, structured way, at this will fit with the structured environment of prisons
- another advantage of the Nurturing Programme is that it is also run in the community. References were made to some qualifications that can only be gained in prison – and people are reluctant to disclose these “on the outside” as it indicates they’ve spent some time in prison. In contrast, the Nurturing Programme certificate does not have these associations, which presumably would make it a more attractive course to the prisoners

³ It should be noted that there is some evidence from the Family Learning Co-ordinator that attendance rates are not always so high. For a fuller discussion, see Chapter 4

Several of these issues are discussed more fully in later chapters.

Recommendations from Chapter 3

It would be useful to explore the role of the Women's Estate Committee, and any equivalent for the male estate, as these may be useful advocates for the Nurturing Programme. If so, it would be useful to build links with these bodies.

When approaching individual prisons, it will be important to identify whether decision making about setting up new courses rests with the Head of Learning and Skills or has been delegated to the Education Manager. Wherever this decision making sits, building links with the governor grade Head of Learning and Skills will be important to ensure as far as possible that there is senior management backing for the programme.

Delivering the course through a Health Visitor is likely to be attractive in prisons, as it is seen as providing additional training resource, and therefore potentially increasing the number of prisoners in training. However, if Family Links wishes the course to be delivered by two co-facilitators, they may need to consider further how this can be achieved.

In approaching the prison service, it will be important to demonstrate that Family Links are sensitive to a number of issues that are important to prisons. These include "prison craft"; boundaries and classroom management; attendance rates on courses; and structured delivery of courses. It would be useful to highlight that Family Links trained Health Visitors will be well used to issues of classroom management, maintaining appropriate boundaries and working to a defined course structure.

4. Stakeholder experiences from the Styal Pilot

This chapter provides a descriptive account of the experiences of running the Styal pilot, from the perspective of both the participants and the facilitators. Also, while this study has not been a formal evaluation of the Nurturing Programme, this chapter provides an account of the benefits the participants felt they got from the course.

4.1 Recruiting the participants

How participants were chosen for course

From the participants' point of view, they had simply volunteered for the course when they heard about it. This was "just a few days" before the course began, and they had relatively little information on it, knowing only that the course was "just on parenting" and that it lasted 5 weeks.

At the same time, both the Family Learning Co-ordinator and the Education Manager indicated that this particular group of women had been targeted to come on the course as they were already doing related "home based" training which included things like cooking, house management skills, and social skills.

"... so the move to the Nurturing Programme was natural, it fitted in well"
Family Learning Co-ordinator

The Family Links Programme Director also noted the participants had been security checked, to avoid child abusers coming on the course.

Another group the Education Manager had tried to target was the women in the Mother and Baby Unit at Styal. Unfortunately, it was not possible for these women to attend as the prison was only able to provide half a day of childcare at a time for their babies; as the course ran for a full day, these mothers could not therefore attend. In setting up future courses, it would appear useful to identify whether there were any particular groups in the prison that should be targeted to attend the course. If so, it would be important to structure the course in a way that made this possible.

Advertising the course

The Education Manager also noted that the course had been advertised widely across the prison but that there had not been any take up from this route. Given that the participants reported there was quite wide interest from other inmates during the course, this suggests that the advertising may not have been high profile enough, or it may not have been presented in a way that engaged the women.

The Family Learning Co-ordinator noted that when she advertises the course, she "sells" it as "nurturing yourself" or "helping your child succeed". Even though this has only partially presented what the course does, it appears to have been successful in engaging people:

"The feedback has been, this hasn't been what we thought it would be, but we've enjoyed it anyway."
Family Learning Co-ordinator

She went on to suggest that if the course were being delivered in prisons by Health Visitors, it might be useful to present the course as "a health thing". This was combined with a suggestion that if you present it as a parenting course, people may feel they will be criticised.

"Perhaps by doing it as health issues, it's not quite as scary."
Family Learning Co-ordinator

There is, however, a broader question about whether advertising is the most appropriate way to bring prisoners on to the course. Given the Family Links vision of the course being offered pre-

release, with follow up contact once the prisoner is back home, it may be most useful to target or hand pick the prisoners who are at the right point in their sentence, rather than advertising the course more widely. It would probably be the case that such prisoners would have to volunteer to take part, but this would ensure that the course was being delivered at the most useful point during a prisoner's sentence.

Advantages of recruiting people in a prison setting

Interestingly, when asking about the course participants about their motivation to do the course, some made the point that they would *not* have joined a similar course offered in a community setting.

"Yeah, it's a captive audience. I know it sounds horrible, but basically, in a nutshell, I wouldn't have gone outside. And in here, I've come, and I'm really glad I did"

Course participant

"On the outside, if you'd seen it advertised, would you do it?"

"No.... (laughter)"

Exchange between course participants

One of the prison education team confirmed this, describing her difficulty trying to recruit "hard to reach" parents to similar courses in the community. One benefit of rolling out the Nurturing Programme in prisons therefore appears to be that it is a good way to access parents who might not otherwise come on such courses – a point that Family Links may want to make when advocating the course.

4.2 Experiences of the course

This section briefly describes how the course was experienced – from the perspective of the participants and the facilitators.

The participants' experiences

The four women who took part in the focus group were uniformly positive about the course, spontaneously describing the course with terms such as "interesting" and "brilliant". The women appear to have become real advocates of the value of the course, even suggesting follow up training. Comments included:

"This is the best thing I've done. I'm going to miss Fridays" (generally agreement)

Course participant

"It's the best thing I ever done. I've been to prison since '96 and it's nice to know we're getting that help now"

Course participant

"I think if you're pregnant with your first child you should have a course like this. It can change your opinion on everything can't it?"

Course participant

"Can we do "Nurturing Plus"?"

Course participant

The participants particularly appreciated the role played by the facilitators, and their style of delivery. While this style of delivery would probably be welcome in any training, it was particularly valued in a prison setting:

“They’re the perfect two to do the course, they’ve made us feel so at ease, it’s made us more open to learning. They’ve just got the right attitude. It’s how they’re being with us, big time – cos you don’t get it at all in here, often”

Course participant

Factors appreciated by the women included: hearing about the facilitators’ experiences with their own children⁴; not being talked down to; and not being treated like they were a bad parent. In addition, there was a recurring theme in the discussion about how the women felt heard and valued during the course. This was particularly welcomed by the women, as noted in the following animated exchange:

“You know every Friday that no matter how you feel, you’re gonna feel better at the end of the day.”

“And it’s not like on a one to one basis, it’s the whole group.”

“Yes it is, isn’t it.”

“It’s like we’re equals and we all get a choice – we won’t leave this class unless our opinion has been put across.”

“And she’s like that with every one of us.”

Exchange between course participants

Again, the women contrasted this to some of their other experiences in prison:

“Some teachers don’t do that [listen to us]”

“They’ve treated us as equals to them – which makes a hell of a difference to in here you know. They’ve really treated us well”

Exchange between course participants

“Even the fact that you get a coffee break is important because it makes you feel equal, cos it’s usually the teachers that get a coffee break, we don’t get one”

Course participant

This is not to be critical of the environment that the women were in at the prison: the role of prison may well leave its prisoners feeling less than equal. Rather, the point is the opposite one: that in the context of a prison, the Nurturing Programme appears particularly *potent* at giving people an experience of being heard and valued.

It is also worth noting that the course generated a degree of interest in the prison beyond the participants themselves. While some of the other prisoners “couldn’t be bothered” with it, others, particularly the prisoners with children were interested. According to one course participant, when they were reading a book called *Daddy’s working away*, “the whole house was queuing up to look at it – literally they were queuing at the door to borrow it.”

The facilitators’ experiences

Both facilitators were experienced in delivering the Nurturing Programme, one predominantly in the prison setting, and one in the community. These different experiences meant both facilitators had somewhat different reflections on the Styal pilot, both of which provide some useful learning.

One trainer, the Family Learning Co-ordinator, had delivered the Nurturing Programme several times before in prisons. Her reflection was that anyone delivering the course needs to be prepared from some frustrations – such as the constraints on what you can and cannot do in a prison setting, and the lack of control facilitators will have over some aspects of the environment (see later discussion). Nevertheless, she also felt there were real advantages to the prison setting, which make it a positive experience for facilitators. For instance, when asked how the course compared with running it in the community, she responded:

⁴ Although note the discussion about boundaries later in this report

“This feels better – more open. They’ve got nothing to hide. They’ve all been tried, hung, drawn and quartered by the media or whatever – so they’ve got nothing to pretend about. You know, they’ve already had their child taken away from them, so how low can you go? ... So I’ve found them more honest and open, and I’ve found it very rewarding. I think the Health Visitors will love it.”

Family Learning Co-ordinator

She did, however, point out this was predicated on good class room management (see next chapter for fuller discussion):

“Once you can get the class room management sorted, there’s a warmth and a real appreciation.”

Family Learning Co-ordinator

The other trainer, a Programme Director from Family Links, did not have previous experience of running the course in a prison. This meant her situation was similar to that of a Health Visitor delivering the course in a prison for the first time. It is useful to highlight some of her experiences of the course, as they indicate some of the issues a Health Visitor may face when they first go into a prison. These are all therefore issues that Family Links may want to include in the additional training they will provide for Health Visitors going into prisons. These issues may also need to be supported in the Health Visitors’ clinical supervision when delivering the course.

The key issues were:

- the **pragmatic constraints** – what you can take in, the environment, break times, having to ask to be let into the toilet, etc – and the need to be flexible in response to these. The following comments illustrate:

“Prison is all about what you can’t do. When you go in, you can’t assume you can take stuff you normally do, like blutak or candles”

“You’ve got to be prepared for a room that isn’t an ideal one. You’ve got to be incredibly flexible about timings.”

Family Links Programme Director

- a **lack of control** over some aspects of delivering the course, particularly around the women’s attendance – start times being late and unpredictable because the women first had to get their medications; participants being taken out of the course, sometimes abruptly and with little explanation (eg for court appearances); fixed break times to fit into the prison timetable; some women not being able to complete the course (because they were transferred – or released!); having to take on new course members mid-way through the course; security alerts and lock downs preventing prisoners from attending at all.
- the presence of a higher level of **mental health problems** and addiction than would be found in a community setting.

“My sense is that there are more of them that are more damaged. ... 100% have some major emotional issues in their life.”

Family Links Programme Director

- the **different value** some things may have in prison, for instance where the participants all wanted to keep the plastic spoons used in one of exercises.

“Things become incredibly valuable to you”

Family Links Programme Director

- a **sense of apprehension** as a trainer about how some of the exercises will translate to a prison setting – and a reassurance that the exercises *do* work.

“I was very worried about Personal Power. What power do you have in a prison? But they were fantastic – lots of ideas.”

Family Links Programme Director

The Family Links trainer also noted that there had been a number of changes to the course content, compared with how it is delivered in the community. This issue – and particularly the degree to which the course needs to be adapted for a prison environment – are discussed later in this report.

While this highlights some of the challenges a Health Visitor may face going into a prison to deliver the Nurturing Programme, it is also important to note that the Family Links trainer was still very positive about the benefits and the experience of the course.

“It just shows the flexibility and relevance of the programme. There isn’t a sector we’ve come across that the programme doesn’t impact.”

Family Links Programme Director

Furthermore, the course participants themselves recognised that despite the constraints of a prison setting, the facilitators had still been able to deliver a very positive course.

“There’s not really a lot they can do cos they’re working under such strict guidelines. I think they’ve took them to the edge, which is brilliant.”

Course participant

4.3 Impact of the course

As well as whether participants enjoyed the course, an important question is whether they actually benefited from it, and whether their parenting behaviours would change as a result of the programme. While this study was not a formal evaluation of this, it did produce a range of personal accounts of the perceived benefits of the course.

It should, of course be noted that the predictive power of these accounts is open to question: does what a parent says in prison accurately predict their behaviour when reunited with their children? A different sort of study would be needed to answer this. Nevertheless, what this study does indicate is that the women on the Styal course had become familiar with a range of the parenting concepts advocated by the Nurturing Programme. This would be a necessary first step to changing their behaviour, so suggests some useful learning was taking place.

The women’s perceptions of the benefits of the course

When asked what they had learned from the course, the participants tended to talk in quite general terms – possibly because they had relatively limited direct contact with their children during the course (limited to occasional prison visits). Comments on what they’d learned, and how they would behave with their children, included:

“Like how to treat a child and that – it’s all different from how I was treating my child”

“To be patient, to be more understanding about my little girl”

“I learnt to praise my little girl more”

Comments from course participants

There was also an indication that some of the women had become more empathic towards their children:

“Instead of thinking, oh get on with it, I say well why you feeling like that son?”

Course participant

There was also an indication that the women felt they had directly benefited themselves from the course, for example:

“Before, I had no back up, now I’ve got goals, I’ve got achievements, I’ve got proofs, I’m proud of that me”

Course participant

Also interesting were the women’s comments about *how* the course had worked. This appeared to be in line with the philosophy behind the course. At the start of the research, the Family Links Director had explained that the course gave participants a safe space to reflect on their own, sometimes painful experiences as a child, and use this to reflect on their current behaviours as a parent.

“Women receiving the programme have a much greater awareness of how their childhoods impact on their adult parent roles”

Family Links Director

A range of comments during the focus group suggested that the course had indeed been working in this way. For instance, there were indications that the course had worked through some difficult personal experiences for some of the women:

“Some of it’s been hurtful, you know, emotional.”
“You normally try to block it out, but here we’re dealing with it”

Comments from course participants

Some of the women also appeared to have developed an understanding that challenging behaviours in their children may have been at least in part a response to their own behaviours as parents:

“Our relationship with our children, that what’s important, and us feeling good and monitoring our behaviour. Children pick up our behaviour patterns.”

“The two ladies that run the course were brilliant ... they’ve really put across that how you react is the reaction you get back. It makes you feel in control in a way”

Comments from course participants

Furthermore, there were indications that the course had provided moments of insight for some of the parents, as noted in the following exchange:

“We talk about things that we wouldn’t talk about...”

“Yeah and how we treat our children, and things like [inaudible] that’s probably why he’s being like that, so if I take this attitude, he’ll be different”

“It makes sense doesn’t it”

“It makes you click doesn’t it”

“Yeah that’s right, you click”

“It’s body language, it’s behaviour, it’s everything in one”

“It’s all stuff that deep down makes sense, cos it’s common sense, but we don’t always think of it in that way”

Exchange between course participants

Hence, while it’s not possible with this study to determine the long term impact of the programme, there are indications that the course was raising the women’s awareness of their role as parents in a useful way. It is also worth noting that for at least some of the participants, the certificate awarded at the end of the course was seen as an important validation of what they had learned.

The Family Learning Co-ordinator's perspective

The impact of the course was also explored with the Family Learning Co-ordinator, from her experience delivering it in several prisons. She acknowledged that identifying the impact was sometimes "a bit warm and fuzzy", but that often you could tell from people's comments or reactions that they were gaining insights and benefits from the course. For instance

"I've had men on the verge of tears, and you know there's been an impact"
"One woman said you've saved my life"

Comments from the Family Learning Co-ordinator

The trainer also recounted examples where prisoners changed their parenting behaviour as a direct consequence of the course – for example one mother who had done the "Choices and Consequences" exercise on the course:

"Next day, she had home leave and she just put it into practice. And she came back and she was just absolutely on the ceiling, she said you will *not* believe what's happened, she said her boyfriend's mouth dropped and he said what's happened to you? And her little boy did as he was told, and she said we had a fantastic time and it worked."

Family Learning Co-ordinator

4.4 Attendance rates

Another indicator of the prisoners' engagement with the course was their attendance levels. It is compulsory that prisoners attend training or other forms of work in the prison – but for uninspiring courses, it was suggested that prisoners will often claim to be sick, resulting in low attendance levels. For the Styal pilot, however, voluntary attendance levels were consistently high.

This indicates that the prisoners found the course of value. Also, given the Education Department's interest in getting prisoners engaged in training, it is a useful selling point for Family Links (although it would be useful to explore further with the Family Learning Co-ordinator whether she also experienced high attendance rates in other prisons).

At the same time, it should be noted that this referred to *voluntary* attendance rates – and that *actual* attendance rates did suffer as women were moved to other prisons, released, or called to attend court. This may have been in part because Styal is a dispersal prison, and so the prison population at Styal is comparatively fluid.

"We take everyone from the courts. ... They're here on average for 6 weeks then moved on. A very short stay here and they're very hyper, they come in in various states of health, withdrawing from drugs, various issues with their family. ... So the clientele can be very highly strung, very emotional – though that would be less problematic in Buckley hall, once they've settled into their sentence."

Education Manager

In rolling out the Nurturing Programme to other prisons, it may therefore be useful to particularly target non-dispersal prisons, where the prison population is likely to be more stable.

Recommendations from Chapter 4

When planning future programmes it would be useful to identify whether there are particular groups in the prison who should be targeted to attend. If so, the course structure should be designed in a way that allows this (eg if only half a day's childcare is available, the course should not be set up for full days).

If advertising the course, it may be more effective to present it as about health, looking after yourself, or helping your child succeed rather than focusing just on parenting skills.

Targeting the course on particular prisoners (rather than advertising across the prison) would mean the course could be delivered to prisoners at the most appropriate point in their sentence.

A useful message for Family Links to point out when advocating establishing the course more widely in prisons is that it appears an effective way to engage parents who would not normally engage in a community setting.

In training Health Visitors, it will be important to prepare them for a number of issues related to delivering the course in a prison environment: the pragmatic constraints on materials, timings, the environment; the limited control over attendance; the presence of higher levels of mental health problems; and the different values prisoners may put on things compared with a community setting. It will also be important to acknowledge some of the anxieties Health Visitors may have about delivering some aspects of the course in a prison. Health Visitors' clinical supervision may also need to take account of some of these issues.

Given the prison service's interest in getting prisoners consistently engaged with training activities, there is an opportunity for FL to make much of the high voluntary attendance levels of the Nurturing Programme, when "selling" it to the prison service.

In rolling the programme out, it would probably be helpful to target non-dispersal prisons, where the prison population is more stable – the lower turnover of prisoners would probably ensure more people were able to complete the training course.

5. Recruiting, training and supporting Health Visitors

If the Nurturing Programme is to be rolled out to other prisons, it is likely that it will need to be delivered by external trainers rather than prison education staff. Both the prison staff interviewed in this study saw this as the most attractive way forward, with Health Visitors identified as the most appropriate people to do the training. This was partly because this was seen as a Health Visitor's role, and partly because it freed up other people in the education department to deliver other training. For instance:

“So I don't think the best thing to do is train someone in the education department, as they've got too many other things. The Health Visitors are on the spot, they've got to do it anyway, and it would be relatively cheap if they did it. It's a win-win and it's got potential for the future. I think this is the beginning of it, and we could build up a stronger network, so that when they do go out, they can get a Health Visitor”

Family Learning Co-ordinator

An important aim of this study was therefore to identify what additional training and support Health Visitors would need to be able to deliver the course in a prison setting. A number of issues have already been described in the previous chapter; this chapter reviews these questions in more detail.

5.1 Selection of Health Visitors

Several points were made about the attitudes Health Visitors will need to be able to become successful trainers in prisons. It is suggested that each of these is considered when selecting Health Visitors to deliver the programme in prison settings. Some of the key factors that a Health Visitor would need were identified as follows:

- a **motivation and enthusiasm** to work in prisons. It was suggested that people either love or hate working in prisons, and that this is not something you can fake. Furthermore, it was suggested if the Health Visitor is doubtful about being in a prison, this will, be sensed by the prisoners, and undermine their ability to manage the training group.

“That's the thing in prison, you either love it or you hate it – the thing is, they sense weakness.”

Family Learning Co-ordinator

- a **realism** about the prisoners they would be working with. On the one hand, this means not becoming overly fixated on the fact that the course participants are prisoners: they don't need rescuing, and many of their issues are the same as in a community group. On the other hand it means recognising that some of the prisoners will have more challenging needs. This diversity is expressed in the following quotes:

“The other thing you don't want is people coming in who think they're going to sort these poor women out. There's got to be a realisation that people in prison are just people – they've not got three heads. ... When people realise that it could be any one of us, it'll be fine, they've just got to realise it's not *Bad Girls*.”

Family Learning Co-ordinator

“They're not different at one level: they're parents and they care about their kids. At another level there's an addiction culture. Most prisoners are in for non-payment of debt or because of addiction ... so their history is different to a community group”

Family Links Programme Director

“You may have a higher concentration of Mental Health issues – especially in the female estate, including abuse – you need awareness of that “

Education Manager

- the ability to maintain strong professional **boundaries**. As noted above, the women in the Styal pilot really valued the quality of the relationship with the facilitators. It was also noted that the facilitators could experience this, and that this could cause difficulties if not properly handled. For instance, the closeness of the work can create:

“... a feeling of intimacy – which could be a problem as well – cos then you might start feeling attached and feeling I can really help this person. But I think Health Visitors will be realistic enough to handle this – as they’ll have dealt with similar people on the out”

Family Learning Co-ordinator

- the need to be **flexible**: given the constraints imposed by the prison environment, it is important that the facilitators are flexible in how they deliver the course.

“Projects will operate that can be flexible – which means the people running it need to be flexible – because we operate within a very strict regime”

Education Manager

- the need for **optimism and resilience** given what can feel like set backs in the prison setting: health visitors need to be prepared for disappointments in terms of people being moved on, missing sessions and so on.

“There is a frustration sometimes – for instance, the course has to keep going even when it’s down to one person, you can’t cancel like you would in the community”

Family Learning Co-ordinator

- all of these add up to a need for the Health Visitors going into prisons to be **highly experienced**: it was suggested that Health Visitors should only deliver the Nurturing Programme in prisons once they had gained some experience of the course in a community setting.

Some of these issues are discussed more fully below. The point here is that these are the key qualities identified as necessary for delivering the Nurturing Programme successfully. These criteria should therefore be used when selecting Health Visitors to run the training in prisons, and should be reinforced through any additional training they receive. In addition, both the prison staff suggested that the Health Visitors should get the opportunity to visit one or two prisons, including “a slightly scarier one” before committing to deliver the course.

5.2 The need for flexibility and acceptance of the prison context

As already discussed, two of the issues noted by the Family Links trainer in the Styal pilot were the constraints and loss of control that arose from working in a prison (see Section 4.2) – and as noted, Health Visitors will need to be flexible when delivering the course to work around these issues.

Underlying this, however, is another important issue. Going into a prison for the first time, a Health Visitor may perceive some of the actions in the prison as unduly restrictive – and it may be tempting to think that over time, they might be able to challenge or change some of this. It is probably important, however, for Health Visitor to remain aware that this is not their role – and that what they perceive as harsh may primarily reflect that the institution has to function as a prison. Both prison staff interviewed in this study were keen to point this out, identifying that they in education had to work within this ethos, and that Health Visitors would have to too.

“The overall purpose of the organisation is to run a prison. So the additional things we do have to fit in. Education is not the priority. Making sure the girls don’t escape is the priority!”

Education Manager

“I think what they [the Health Visitors] would have to do is come in and realise they’re a visitor here – so whatever system is going on, we’re not there to change it. So last week an officer just came in and said, “Oi, out” – and she just got up and left. ... That’s how it is, and we’ve got to work with that – because there will be things that we don’t like about how people are treated.”

Family Learning Co-ordinator

The important point here is that to a large degree, Health Visitors going into a prison to run the Nurturing Programme have to accept this relative powerlessness, rather than challenge it. To some extent, as they become established in the prison, it is likely they may be given some more latitude in how they run the course – but this will depend on building good relationships with the prison staff, and developing a reputation as a safe pair of hands. If, on the other hand, they are seen to be overly challenging of the prison ethos, this is likely to generate resistance towards the Nurturing Programme.

A corollary of this, is that some Health Visitors may need a degree of additional support and clinical supervision outside the prison setting to deal with any frustrations arising from working in this context.

In addition to this, Family Links may try negotiating some form of contract or agreed working practices with the prison at the initial stage of negotiating a new programme. This might include a range of issues important to the effective running of the course, such as not being expected to take new participants mid-way through the course. Another example identified by the course participants was that there were often considerable delays waiting for the medications – and they suggested the prison might be asked to make sure they received their meds first. That said, given that the Education Department itself had to fit in with the broader prison regime, there may be limits to what such a good practice agreement would achieve.

5.3 The need for Prison Craft

A recurring theme through the interviews – and a specific example of flexibility needed to deliver the programme – was what you can and cannot do in a prison, what the Education Manager referred to as *Prison Craft* – “the knowing it”. It is worth drawing together the different aspects of Prison Craft mentioned by the different participants during the research.

Materials

One part of prison craft were a range of controlled items that cannot be taken in to the prison, or can only be with agreement from the prison. Some of the items identified in this study included:

- scissors and other implements with sharp points
- any tools in the prison have to be ordered and etched
- any book with a metal spiral binding (as the binding can be turned into a weapon)
- retractable pens, as they contain metal springs
- any items with straps (such as sports bags)
- calculators (as some can be used as incendiary devices)
- mobile phones
- any medications

Some of these items are more obvious than others – so the guidance for a Nurturing Programme Health Visitor would have to be to declare all items and materials to the prison, and negotiate what could or could not be taken in.

“We have to abide by the rules ... it’s all got to be above board, and we have to ask whether we can do this, that and the other, and not make assumptions.”

Family Learning Co-ordinator

The Education Staff did point out that, if an item cannot be taken in, it usually possible to find an acceptable alternative – so it will be useful to build strong relationships with them when planning the course.

Interactions with prisoners and boundaries

Similarly, the prison staff both mentioned the importance of maintaining professional boundaries. The two main boundaries mentioned were:

- not sharing personal information
- not having any physical contact with the prisoners

Both gave reasons for this in terms of protecting the people working in the prison:

“There’s a whole range of reasons people are here for. It’s all very well telling someone here for fines where you live, but you don’t want them phoning their friend who breaks into houses to say, oh, she’s going on holiday, she lives in ...”
Education Manager

“No names – I have daughters 1,2,3 and 4, and a husband and that’s it. One mistake I did make was say my husband’s name on a course may years ago. One of the lads in the group, after a while he’d say “can I have this or that”, and I’d say no, and he’d say, “I bet [name] would let me have it”. I felt exposed, what he was doing was manipulating and using a bit of personal information”
Family Learning Co-ordinator

“No physical contact ever – you can then be very relaxed cos no-one expects the physical contact.”
Education Manager

Training in Prison Craft

Finally, it is useful to note that it appears it is comparatively straightforward to deliver training in Prison Craft; indeed the Education Manager had delivered such courses before for people coming to work in the prison. It is recommended that when Family Links gives additional training to Health Visitors who will be working in prisons, it should include a module on Prison Craft.

5.4 The need for good classroom management

The Family Learning Co-ordinator also stressed that good classroom management skills were particularly important in a prison, suggesting that sometimes the social norms of a group (or some members of a group) were different to what a trainer might find in the community. The following comments illustrate this:

“If there’s ever a chance to make a buck or two, *some* of them will use it, so you’ve got to be ready for it – it’s like “form an orderly queue”. In the community, you might expect people to do that because of the social norms.”

“Another thing I found, particularly in the men’s prison, is that in discussion sessions, people would just talk at you all the time. So you’d be in a class and have to go whoa whoa whoa, let’s just have one at a time ... If you or I did that, one of would just say, sorry, and back down. But there’s no backing down there.”

“Some of these characters won’t have had social norms – how to say please and thank you and how to moderate your language.”
Series of comments from the Family Learning Co-ordinator

The Family Learning Co-ordinator went on to stress the importance of dealing with these classroom management issues, suggesting it could undermine the training if the trainer did not enforce these boundaries:

“If they sense that you’re hesitant ... there’s always one in the group, and you have to handle it, or they’ll sense it as weakness. There’s one in this group and they were quite surprised when I handled it”

Family Learning Co-ordinator

The Family Learning Co-ordinator also seemed to have some mixed feelings about whether Health Visitors delivering the course would be effective at managing the classroom, as illustrated by these two contrasting quotes:

“They got up one day while [the other trainer] was talking to get up to make a drink – and I said “oi, excuse me”. ... I don’t know how that would work with health visitors.”

“These things need to be managed. Now if you’ve done the Nurturing Programme in other settings and you’ve handled difficult characters, then it’s not a big deal – but I guess if you’re scared of the environment and not comfortable with it, then that might well be an issue.”

Comments from the Family Learning Co-ordinator

This reinforces the point that the Health Visitors selected to deliver the programme in prison need to have had considerable prior experience running the programme in the community, *and* to be comfortable in the prison setting. In addition, the Family Learning Co-ordinator suggested paying particular attention to setting the group ground rules at the start of the training, and she suggested it might be useful to give them some additional training specifically around class room management strategies. That said, she also indicated that the important issue is to select the right people to deliver the training:

“I guess what you’re talking about is character.”

Family Learning Co-ordinator

One final suggestion from the Family Learning Co-ordinator was classroom management would be most effective if a sole person was leading the course, as with two co-facilitators, it can be less clear who is in the lead. At the same time, it is recognised that the Family Links standard is to deliver the course with two co-facilitators: the Programme Director noted that this both allows for more emotional support for the participants, and means that the course can still take place even if one of the facilitators is off sick.

5.5 Tensions faced by Nurturing Programme facilitators

Even with good management of personal boundaries, and sound classroom management, the particular nature of the Nurturing Programme does raise a number of tensions when delivered in a prison setting. It’s suggested Health Visitors are made aware of these, and how to deal with them, during the training they receive before delivering the course in prisons. The Family Learning Co-ordinator in particular identified several tensions:

- having to trust the prisoners, and see the best in them, in order to create an open, trusting course environment – when the experience of prison staff is that some prisoners can be manipulative.

“Trying to think the best of someone all the time puts you in a very difficult situation, and in a sense there’s a tension there between not being cynical and negative, and looking for the best in people, but always keeping one foot on the ground.”

Family Learning Co-ordinator

- the programme involves the facilitators being open and sharing their personal experiences with the group – while Prison Craft boundaries mean you have to limit what you can say.

“So the course is about being open, but then you’re having to be closed, and that’s the tension there – and something that the Health Visitors will need to be trained in – they’re not in a normal environment. They need to be wary and not give personal details – but at the same time be open and encourage people.”

Family Learning Co-ordinator

- the facilitators are trying to create a permissive environment where people will readily contribute, but at the same time also need to be managing the class firmly.

“... because you do need to be firm but at the same time, you still need to maintain a good relationship – so again, it’s that tension”

Family Learning Co-ordinator

- it was even suggested that the nurturing treats (chocolates, hand cream, etc) “can get you into trouble ... as it gets you into ‘can you bring a bit more of that next week?’”

Because you can’t really do the chocolates each week and the rewards that Family Links would love to do, for the reason I told you – it can be seen to be giving preferential treatment ... You see all that can be misconstrued.”

Family Learning Co-ordinator

None of these tensions are insurmountable – as proved by the fact that the pilot ran successfully and was well received by the participants. It does, however, reinforce the importance of checking with the prison about all materials brought in for the course. Furthermore, it stresses the importance of prison courses being delivered by experienced facilitators – who will not be naïve to some of the tensions that might be coming into play.

“You’ve just got to have reality checks, and not think the worst of people, but don’t be too naïve.”

Family Learning Co-ordinator

Recommendations from Chapter 5

Health Visitors need to be assessed and selected against a number of criteria in order to deliver the Nurturing Programme in prisons. These include: a motivation to work in prisons; a realism about who the prisoners are; strong professional boundaries; flexibility; and optimism and resilience. It is likely that to achieve this, Health Visitors will need considerable prior experience of the Nurturing Programme to be able to deliver it effectively.

In the training they receive, Health Visitors need to be prepared for the nature of the prison regime, and the fact that they are likely to have relatively little control over this – and they will need to be able to work within this regime if the Nurturing Programme is to be accepted. Some Health Visitors may need additional support or clinical supervision outside the prison to deal with any frustrations arising from this lack of control.

It may be worth Family Links trying to establish a good practice agreement or contract with the prison when setting up the programme to ensure the prison supports the course as effectively as possible.

Before working in the prison, Health Visitors will need to be trained in “prison craft” – the materials that can be taken in and the boundaries that need to be maintained.

To ensure they are comfortable with the prison setting, Health Visitors should get the opportunity to visit a prison before committing to deliver the Nurturing Programme. Once in place they should initially work alongside an experienced prison trainer to get a first hand experience of how “prison craft” should be put into practice.

As well as selecting experienced Health Visitors to run the course in prisons, it is also important that the people selected have the presence or “character” to manage the classroom effectively. It may also be useful to give them additional training on classroom management strategies.

6. Issues for further consideration

The discussion so far has focused on the more direct lessons and observations from this study. This chapter focuses on some of the more challenging issues that Family Links will need to address if it is to roll out the Nurturing Programme across the prison estate.

From the comparatively limited amount of contact with the Styal pilot, this chapter does not attempt to provide definitive answers to these issues. Rather, it seeks primarily to raise the questions that Family Links will need to consider as it takes the programme into other prison settings. It may be that to answer these questions, Family Links will need to conduct further pilots, to test out different models for delivering the Nurturing Programme.

A recurring theme in this chapter concerns the content and structure of the course, and whether these need to be adapted when it is taken from a community setting into a prison. These questions are being considered more fully by the Family Links Programme Director. The following is intended to provide an external perspective about some of the key issues.

6.1 Timing of the course

The Nurturing Programme is typically delivered in ten sessions over ten week. In contrast, in the Styal pilot, it was delivered in five full day sessions over five weeks. In part this was for pragmatic reasons, as it was impractical for the Family Learning Co-ordinator to travel down ten times from HMP Wolds. However, there was some debate over the appropriate length of the course in prison.

From Family Links' point of view, there were specific reasons for designing the course to last ten weeks. In particular, it allowed participants to reflect on their own experiences, and bring their reflections back to the group over a series of weeks. It also gave participants, at least those in the community, sufficient time to see the impact of different parenting strategies on their relationship with their children. Family Links therefore had some concerns about the shorter duration of the course in the prison pilot.

“There’s less time longitudinally for the programme to sink in.”

Family Links Programme Director

There was also some suggestion that it could be very intense doing a full day, and that some of the material might need to be adapted as a result. There was a concern that this could reduce the impact of the course.

“It’s quite demanding to have two sessions back to back. I think that’s the thought behind the video.”

Family Links Programme Director

The Programme Director did go on to note, however, that “it feels like a whole day is viable, on balance.”

The Family Learning Co-ordinator was more comfortable with running the course in full day sessions, but she too made the point that the participants needed time to reflect. She noted that initially, Styal prison had suggested running the course for five successive days. Her view was that this would undermine the course, but that five full days over five weeks was appropriate in prisons as the women did not have regular access to their children.

“They [Styal] wanted to do it for a week. The problem is you do need time to reflect, but that’s not such a big issue when you don’t have your children to practice on. So I think the day works quite well.”

Family Learning Co-ordinator

The participant themselves had mixed feelings about whether five successive days would work. When asked what they thought of doing the course every day for a week, they replied:

“No I don’t think...”
“That would be brilliant”
“It would be too much, that – too much pressure”

Exchange between course participants

From the prison’s point of view, certainly by the end of the pilot, there seemed to be some flexibility on timing. For instance, the Education Manager noted that ten half days would work – and that it would mean mothers in the Mother and Baby Unit could attend (because childcare was limited to half a day – see earlier discussion). But both she and the Family Learning Co-ordinator noted this would increase the likelihood that participants would be moved on during the course.

The participants themselves were content with the full day, with the suggestion that this was appropriate in a prison setting.

“I suppose that with the half day in the community, you’re going home and trying it out with your children, so you’re still working – whereas here cos we’re not ... I dunno, I like the full day.”

Course participant

In summary, four different models were discussed during the study, each with strengths and weaknesses:

- 10 half days over 10 weeks: this equates most closely to the community model and allows time for the participants to reflect on their experiences. However, it is the option most susceptible to “losing” participants as they are moved on in the prison system
- five successive full days: this is the least susceptible to losing people, but both of the pilot facilitators agreed it did not allow sufficient time for the participants to reflect
- five full days over five weeks: this allows some time for reflection, though less than in community courses; also full days may be quite demanding, and may reduce the impact of some sessions
- ten half days over five weeks: follows the community model of ten sessions, although leaves less time for reflection between session

Other options are also likely to exist. In going into other prisons, it’s likely that Family Links will need to be flexible on timing, especially given the earlier discussion about the need to fit in with each prison’s regime. That said, Family Links also need to be clear about their “bottom lines”: how far can the timing of the course be varied before it starts to significantly reduce the impact of the course?

6.2 Limited access to children and partners

One of the obvious contrasts between the prison pilot and a community programme was that the mothers on the course had very limited access to their children and families. Contact was limited to occasional prison visits of around an hour’s duration (which not all the women had had since the start of the course), and limited phone calls. So the women had little opportunity to try out any new approaches to parenting their children; and even though several of them indicated they wanted to discuss the course with their partners, they found this very difficult to do in practice. For instance, when asked if she had discussed the course with her partner, one woman said:

“No, because not enough credit on the phone, pure and simple (laughter) – but when I got home, I would discuss this, big time”

Course participant

This lack of access to the children meant that it was not possible to use “homework” in the same way as community courses – and consequently, that some of the exercises in the course would not work and needed to be changed.

“For instance, giving out the Starry Skies for Kindness cards didn’t work back at the pad – so there are some definite areas need changing”

Family Links Programme Director

The Family Learning Co-ordinator also mentioned that because of this, some of the course content needed to be addressed by “making things general statements” rather than through the more experiential learning that women are likely to get in the community.

It’s difficult to assess what impact this had on what the women gained from the Styal course. From their accounts (see earlier in this report) they clearly felt they, and their relationships with their children, benefited from the course. But it also seems reasonable to assume that, as the women had little opportunity to try out and reflect on different approaches to their parenting, an important aspect of the course will have been diluted.

Because of this, it would be useful to explore whether there are ways to integrate more child contact into the course when it is being run in a prison. This study would certainly suggest there is some potential in pursuing this. For instance:

- the Family Learning Co-ordinator mentioned that with other types of parenting work she had done at HMP Wolds, she had had some success at bringing partners and children into sessions with the prisoners.
- the Styal Education Manager also mentioned that “this prison actually has family visits organised – they bring the family in for half a day” (rather than the normal hour’s visit). These visits would need to be negotiated with prison security, but could be used to engage the mother and the child. (It was also noted this would depend on the category of the prison, and whether the governor was prepared to sanction this.)

This suggests that when Family Links approach prisons to set up the Nurturing Programme, an important part of that negotiation should be around whether the prison can find ways to bring parents and children together. While this may not be possible in all cases, it would certainly appear worth exploring, as more opportunities may exist than initially appear. It would be particularly useful to have an in-house advocate within the prison to support this.

6.3 The emotional support in prisons

A more challenging issue is the emotional level at which the course operates. According to Family Links’ Director:

“The course works by connecting the parents back to their childhood and asking how that informs you now as a parent”

Family Links Director

This approach can bring up a range of distressing experiences and emotions, particularly for a group of participants that may have had more difficult childhood experiences and who are currently imprisoned. For instance, Hurting Touch was noted as an exercise that could bring up some particularly powerful feelings, and the Family Links Director also recounted that:

“When [the Family Learning Co-ordinator] first did Time Out with the men, it opened up the floodgates, it was almost therapeutic. ... it’s meant to be a calming strategy, but it was very harsh for them, most of them will have had very difficult childhoods.”

Family Links Director

She went on to note that “potentially all the exercises could open the floodgates, be painful.”

This is not to be critical of such an approach. Indeed, the Styal participants themselves noted that while some of the questions they explored in the course were “a bit touchy” and could bring up emotion, they also made them think how they could have handled situations differently.

However, if the course is to work in this way, it is important that the participants are appropriately supported, including between sessions when they may be reflecting on the exercises they have done. This is particularly the case as, in this setting, some participants may have had particularly difficult childhood experiences, which may be resurfaced by the course. Furthermore, as the Education Manager noted, the prisoners spend a lot of time in their cells, with relatively little to do, so if difficult memories do come up, they have a lot of time to dwell on them.

In a community setting, participants are given a phone number, usually one of the facilitators’, that they can call between sessions, in case the course brings up difficult issues. According to the Family Links Programme Director, this was rarely used – but nevertheless, it was an available support if it were needed. In a prison setting, in contrast, such a support would not be available – partly because the participants have limited phone access, and partly because the prison craft boundaries would prohibit giving out the facilitator’s contact number.

This issue of the support available to the Styal participants was therefore explored as part of the present study. The Education Manager identified three particular sources of support:

- the prison officers have a good deal of contact with the women, particularly in the houses which provide Styal’s accommodation. It was noted that they would be able to identify if there was a problem, and report it back to the Education Department:

“There is a lot of emotional support in prison. Because of the nature of the prison, the girls live in houses. The houses have three staff – so they get to know the girls very well and the girls get to know them very well, So the relationship between the staff and the girls can be very, very good. And they [the staff] can tell if the girls start looking down, they can tell if there’s a problem.”

Education Manager

“If the girls were extremely distressed by it, I’m sure we’d get to hear about it very quickly, the officers would be on the phone to us to say this girl is very upset. They’d interact very quickly on behalf of the girl.”

Education Manager

- in Styal, there was also a scheme in which prisoners were trained by the Samaritans as listeners, and were available to provide round the clock support:

“If they don’t want to talk to a white-shirt, we have a listeners scheme. ... If a listener heard it was too much they’d approach us or a member of staff very quickly and say she shouldn’t be doing it. That would happen very quickly.”

Education Manager

- thirdly, it was also suggested that the women on the course would be very supportive – and protective – towards each other. The women themselves also indicated this.

“The girls build up a good network, and they do support each other. They can be quite nasty to each other, but if someone else is being nasty to them, they’ll very quickly support each other.”

Education Manager

“We’ve learned to support each other.”

Course participants

A further possible line of support, although not mentioned by any of the respondents during the interviews in Styal, was the prison chaplain.

Hence, in Styal Prison at least, there does appear to be a sufficient network to identify any participants who were visibly distressed by the course, and to provide a degree of support to those women. Nevertheless, there are still a number of questions that Family Links will need to consider if rolling the programme out to other prisons. These include:

- do the support systems in Styal exist in all prisons? For instance, while the house structure in Styal means that officers get to know the prisoners, does the same thing occur in other prisons?
- if a course participant was to become distressed, and this was referred back to the education department as suggested, what support would be available?
- given that prisoners can be moved to other prisons at very short notice, how would any emotional issues be addressed if a participant was moved mid-course?
- endings can also raise difficult emotions – particularly in a course such as this which can have quite a powerful effect on the participants. What emotional support is available after the programme has been completed?

These questions need to be considered particularly given that prisons are, of necessity, restrictive environments – and, for many prisoners, may not be a place where they would instinctively turn for emotional support. From a prisoner’s perspective, the environment in some prisons may be seen as quite hostile – and even though this was not evident during the field visit to Styal, there was a perception that officers were quite detached from what was taking place in the programme.

“They don’t really know or say anything about it.”

Course participant

In Styal, the Education Manager is working to build better links between officers and the education programme. However, in prisons where this link is weak, there may well be limitations to the level of emotional support that would be available should course participants need it. Consequently, when setting up the Nurturing Programme in other prisons, it would appear important that Family Links reassures itself that appropriate emotional support is available in case it is needed.

It is, of course, likely to be comparatively rare for course participants to become distressed to a level where further support is needed. However, given the nature of the course, and the life experiences that some prisoners are likely to have had, it is important that Family Links are prepared for this possibility as the programme is rolled out to other prisons. In negotiating the programme being set up in other prisons, it is therefore important that Family Links ensures that appropriate support arrangements are in place for the participants should they be needed.

6.4 Course content

One of the questions Family Links were keen to explore during the Styal Pilot was the degree to which the traditional community based Nurturing Programme course needed to be adapted when taken into the prison setting. While the Family Links Programme Director was acting as a co-facilitator for the pilot project, one of her specific aims was to assess to what changes to the programme would be needed. To a large extent, this is a question of professional judgement – and given their experience delivering the programme in this and other settings, those judgements need to be made by Family Links rather than in this report. However, this study identified a number of relevant issues, as outlined below.

To an outsider, or even a course participant, the Nurturing Programme may appear quite an open and informal process. The course is, however, actually quite tightly structured, with an extensive training manual outlining the activities to be covered. From Family Links’ perspective, this provides an important element of quality assurance.

“We expect Parent Group Leaders to stick to the guidelines in the manual, so every activity should be done, but depending on the client group, they may be modified or done in a slightly different way.”

Family Links Programme Director

The degree to which the course could be adapted was a question of real debate for the two facilitators during the Styal pilot. Both agreed that the prison course was less focused on emotional self discovery than it would be in a community setting, one particular contrast being that there was a greater use of videos than is usually the case.

Where the two facilitators differed was in the degree to which they were comfortable with this: for each, their respective professional experience led them to different conclusions. From the Family Learning Co-ordinator’s point of view, the level of emotional exploration in a community-based course was felt to be too much for a prison setting, particularly male prisons, where she had first delivered the programme:

“I think there’s a lot of emotion in the programme, which men often don’t work on that level anyway, but particularly men in prisons who have to shut down lots of emotions to cope, as a coping mechanism. So I didn’t think it worked particularly well in male establishments.”

Family Learning Co-ordinator

She therefore felt that the videos were useful for appealing to different learning styles and levels of concentration.

From the Family Link Programme Director perspective, however, one of the main benefits of the course arose from the opportunity it gave participants to explore their experiences and emotions. The videos reduced the time available for this exploration and meant that the participants’ attention was focused externally rather than internally. She had some concerns that this could soften the impact of the course.

At the same time, she also acknowledged that some changes to the course may be necessary in the prison setting. As noted above, there are some questions about the nature of the emotional support available in prisons – and consequently, it may be necessary to work less intensively with the emotional content of the programme. Also, given that the sessions lasted for full days, it may be too intense to explore emotions at the same level as in a community setting. If the course does need changing, however, she raised the question about whether other exercises might be introduced instead of videos. When exploring this further with the Family Links Director, one suggestion was that it might, for instance, be valuable to give women the skills to nurture themselves “in their heads”, as a way to deal with some of the challenges of the prison environment.

In considering what level of emotional content is appropriate for the course, it is perhaps useful to draw together some of the particular challenges of delivering the course in a prison setting. These include:

- the possibility of the course being delivered by only one facilitator
- the level of emotional support available to course participants in the prison
- the limited opportunities participants have to reflect on the course with their partner or family members
- the greater amount of unoccupied time the participants have – leaving them with more time to dwell on difficult issues
- the fact that participants can be pulled out of the course at very short notice
- the fact that session end times are strictly defined so there is less opportunity for informally supporting a participant at the end of a session

Taken together, these would suggest that when considering what level of emotional content is appropriate, there are a number of factors that would argue for reducing this to some extent, compared with community-based courses. On the other hand, Family Links may take the view that to be most effective, the course still needs to have a high level of emotional exploration – in which

case they would need to ensure they have put in place safeguards in relation to the factors listed above. To resolve this issue, further piloting may be necessary – for instance, running another prison-based programme with a higher level of emotional content than in Styal, and exploring what other issues this raises.

Finally, in relation to the specific question of the videos, it is worth reporting that the participants themselves thought they were useful:

“They’ve been brilliant, they’ve really pointed out points.”
“It really makes you look at it differently.”

Comments from course participants

The videos therefore do appear to play a valuable part in the course – although there is no way to assess how they would have found other, more experiential exercises if these had been used instead.

6.5 Follow up on release

As has been noted, one of Family Links’ aspirations in rolling out the Nurturing Programme to other prisons is to provide some continuity of support, with parents receiving the course both pre-release and on their return to the community after release. The Family Links Director referred to this as a “second phase” of their piloting work.

As the present pilot only took place within a prison, it was only possible to explore this issue to a limited degree. However, a number of issues were identified. Two challenges in particular were identified:

- the first relates to geography and practicalities. The inmates in any given prison are likely to come from a wide geographical spread – so it may well be difficult to consistently link prisoners into Nurturing Programme courses in their local communities: courses may not be run in a particular locality, or the timing may not match the parent’s release from prison. That said, this difficulty would be likely to ease if the Nurturing Programme were to become more consistently established across the country – and the Family Learning Co-ordinator, partly based on her experiences of parenting work in HMP Wolds, was optimistic that the necessary links *could* be made:

“A health visitor could put them in touch with other health visitors – so there are ways of giving them help on the outside. It’s not ideal, but nothing in the prison system is ideal.”

Family Learning Co-ordinator

- even so, it’s possible that some women would be reluctant to make those links when they returned home – as it could publicise the fact that they had been in prison. Both the prison staff interviewed in the study alluded to the notion that when prisoners are released, many want to set a clear boundary between their prison and community lives, and so may not welcome their prison-based education continuing back at home.

That said, the participants in the Styal pilot did not seem to have such concerns, and indicated they would welcome some follow up post-release:

“It would be brilliant – maybe a follow up session before we left or when we were out there – to tell them how your doing and whether it’s working.”

Course participant

Furthermore, as noted previously, one woman asked whether there was a “Nurturing Plus” course – which suggests there was at least some interest in going into the course material in more depth.

Allied to this, the new National Offender Management Service is seeking to provide “end to end offender management”, and a “seamless transition” between the prison and home settings⁵. This implies there may well be a current opportunity to develop innovative service models which link the prisoner’s experience pre- and post-release.

6.6 Rolling out the Nurturing Programme

The current context may provide a useful opportunity to roll out the Nurturing Programme to other prisons. However, this study has identified a number of further questions Family Links will need to address if they are to do this successfully. These include the following:

- the need for **further piloting**: Styal represents one type of prison (female, dispersal), and it may be useful to test further how the programme works in other settings. There is already some suggestion from the Family Learning Co-ordinator that men are less willing to engage with the emotional aspects of the programme, so it may be useful to explore this further. It may also be useful to pilot how the course works with a higher level of emotional content.
- identifying the **right model for transition**: there are a range of challenges in delivering the course to bridge the periods pre- and post-release, and probably a range of options for how to meet these challenges. These questions were beyond the scope of the present pilot, but will need further attention if the programme is to be rolled out in this way.
- given there is a case for reducing the emotional content of the course in prisons, and given that the women in the Styal pilot expressed an interest in a follow up course, one particular model may merit further consideration. Pre-release, prisoners would get a “primer” course which familiarises them with the Nurturing Programme concepts, but with less emotional exploration; then, on release, they would follow this up with the full course in the community which would give them the chance to do the more exploratory emotional work.
- **obtaining access** to prisons to get their commitment to include the Nurturing Programme in their training for prisoners. The HMP Wolds Family Learning Co-ordinator may be able to act as a useful link person to support this.
- if the course is to be delivered by Health Visitors, ensuring that both the prisons and Primary Care Trusts are prioritising the course, are communicating with each other effectively in a way that supports the course, and are providing the staff and funding needed to sustain the programme over the longer term.

“I think the issue may be how well do PCTs and the prison communicate with each other to the point at which prisons are happy to let Health Visitors in to do the course.”

Family Links Programme Director

- ensuring **minimum standards** are observed: as noted, in a prison setting, facilitators will need to be flexible in how they deliver the course. However, Family Links may need to identify some “bottom lines” – such as the course should be delivered by two facilitators, and new participants cannot join part way through the course. This will provide a basis for entering discussions with the prison service, and provide a degree of quality assurance.
- over time, it would be useful to generate some more formal **evaluation data** on the impact of the course (both pre- and post-release). This should strengthen Family Links’ arguments for rolling out the course.

⁵ From the Home Office website (<http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/inside/org/dob/direct/noms.html>): “Central to NOMS is the principle of offender management. This ensures offenders are managed in a consistent, constructive and coherent way during their entire sentence. Pre-sentence, this will include assessing offenders and judging risk so that the courts can reliably target sentences. At every stage an offender manager has responsibility for planning the offender’s supervision, whether they are in custody or in the community and for the interventions and services they receive, ensuring there is no breakdown and that none of the advances by an individual are lost.”

- Family Links needs to determine what its **on-going role** is once the programme is being rolled out to other prisons (as at that point, delivery will be in the hands of the PCTs). It is likely that Family Links will wish to retain a role in advocating the Nurturing Programme, and in ensuring quality standards are being met when the programme is being delivered in different prisons.

Hence, a number of questions still remain. Nevertheless, given the findings of the present review, and the context provided by the new National Offender Management Service, it would appear to be timely for Family Links to be exploring how best to meet this challenge.

Recommendations from Chapter 6

Family Links will need to be flexible about the timing of the course in a prison setting. At the same time, they also need to be clear about their “bottom lines”: how far can the timing of the course be varied before it starts to significantly reduce the impact of the course?

When approaching prisons to set up the Nurturing Programme, Family Links should explore what possibilities exist for creating extended contact time between the course participants and their children, particularly to allow opportunities to practice the skills developed through the Programme.

In setting up the Nurturing Programme in other prisons, it would appear important that Family Links ensures appropriate arrangements are in place for providing emotional support to the participants between sessions, should it be needed.

Family Links needs to determine the appropriate level of emotional content when delivering the course in a prison setting. There are a range of factors that suggest it may be appropriate to reduce the emotion content of the course (such as the nature of the emotional support available in prisons, or the fact that participants can be pulled out of the course at short notice). On the other hand, if Family Links are committed to maintaining the emotional content of the course, they will need to put in place safeguards in relation to these factors.

If Family Links intend to maintain the level of emotional content in the course, it would be useful to conduct a further pilot of the programme, delivered with this higher level of emotional content, to determine whether this raises further issues in a prison setting.

Given the new National Offender Management Service agenda of providing “end to end offender management”, it appears to be a useful time for Family Links to explore models of delivering the Nurturing Programme that bridge pre- and post-release.

In rolling out the programme further, there are a number of questions that Family Links will need to address. These include: a possible need for further piloting; identifying the right model for bridging the transition from pre- to post-release; obtaining access to prisons; ensuring that prisons and PCTs are working together effectively and providing the necessary resources for roll out; ensuring minimum delivery standards are defined and met; and generating more formal evaluation data to support the arguments for rolling out the programme. Family Links will also need to determine what its role is once delivery is in the hands of the prisons and PCTs; at a minimum, this is likely to include advocacy and quality assurance.

Summary of Recommendations

Recommendations from Chapter 2: Background and context for pilot

It would be useful for Family Links to pay particular attention to understanding the current social and life skills training agenda in prisons. This will assist in “selling” the Nurturing Programme to prisons. In addition, it would be useful to highlight how the Nurturing Programme can support prisoners in developing basic skills, and help prisons engage in community work.

If the Nurturing Programme is able to support prisoners in developing literacy and numeracy skills (eg through reading the *Parenting Puzzle*, and through the written exercises), it would also be useful to highlight this when “selling” the course, as this supports the prison agenda of providing training in basic skills.

Similarly, it would be useful to understand more fully what requirements prisons have for community work, and to identify how the Nurturing Programme can best be presented as meeting this requirement.

It may be useful for Family Links to familiarise themselves with any national policy documents shaping the prison education agenda; and to extend links with other organisations with interests in prisoner families and education.

Recommendations from Chapter 3: Establishing a prison based Nurturing Programme

It would be useful to explore the role of the Women’s Estate Committee, and any equivalent for the male estate, as these may be useful advocates for the Nurturing Programme. If so, it would be useful to build links with these bodies.

When approaching individual prisons, it will be important to identify whether decision making about setting up new courses rests with the Head of Learning and Skills or has been delegated to the Education Manager. Wherever this decision making sits, building links with the governor grade Head of Learning and Skills will be important to ensure as far as possible that there is senior management backing for the programme.

Delivering the course through a Health Visitor is likely to be attractive in prisons, as it is seen as providing additional training resource, and therefore potentially increasing the number of prisoners in training. However, if Family Links wishes the course to be delivered by two co-facilitators, they may need to consider further how this can be achieved.

In approaching the prison service, it will be important to demonstrate that Family Links are sensitive to a number of issues that are important to prisons. These include “prison craft”; boundaries and classroom management; attendance rates on courses; and structured delivery of courses. It would be useful to highlight that Family Links trained Health Visitors will be well used to issues of classroom management, maintaining appropriate boundaries and working to a defined course structure.

Recommendations from Chapter 4: Stakeholder experiences from the Styal Pilot

When planning future programmes it would be useful to identify whether there are particular groups in the prison who should be targeted to attend. If so, the course structure should be designed in a way that allows this (eg if only half a day’s childcare is available, the course should not be set up for full days).

If advertising the course, it may be more effective to present it as about health, looking after yourself, or helping your child succeed rather than focusing just on parenting skills.

Targeting the course on particular prisoners (rather than advertising across the prison) would mean the course could be delivered to prisoners at the most appropriate point in their sentence.

A useful message for Family Links to point out when advocating establishing the course more widely in prisons is that it appears an effective way to engage parents who would not normally engage in a community setting.

In training Health Visitors, it will be important to prepare them for a number of issues related to delivering the course in a prison environment: the pragmatic constraints on materials, timings, the environment; the limited control over attendance; the presence of higher levels of mental health problems; and the different values prisoners may put on things compared with a community setting. It will also be important to acknowledge some of the anxieties Health Visitors may have about delivering some aspects of the course in a prison. Health Visitors' clinical supervision may also need to take account of some of these issues.

Given the prison service's interest in getting prisoners consistently engaged with training activities, there is an opportunity for FL to make much of the high voluntary attendance levels of the Nurturing Programme, when "selling" it to the prison service.

In rolling the programme out, it would probably be helpful to target non-dispersal prisons, where the prison population is more stable – the lower turnover of prisoners would probably ensure more people were able to complete the training course.

Recommendations from Chapter 5: Recruiting, training and supporting Health Visitors

Health Visitors need to be assessed and selected against a number of criteria in order to deliver the Nurturing Programme in prisons. These include: a motivation to work in prisons; a realism about who the prisoners are; strong professional boundaries; flexibility; and optimism and resilience. It is likely that to achieve this, Health Visitors will need considerable prior experience of the Nurturing Programme to be able to deliver it effectively.

In the training they receive, Health Visitors need to be prepared for the nature of the prison regime, and the fact that they are likely to have relatively little control over this – and they will need to be able to work within this regime if the Nurturing Programme is to be accepted. Some Health Visitors may need additional support or clinical supervision outside the prison to deal with any frustrations arising from this lack of control.

It may be worth Family Links trying to establish a good practice agreement or contract with the prison when setting up the programme to ensure the prison supports the course as effectively as possible.

Before working in the prison, Health Visitors will need to be trained in "prison craft" – the materials that can be taken in and the boundaries that need to be maintained.

To ensure they are comfortable with the prison setting, Health Visitors should get the opportunity to visit a prison before committing to deliver the Nurturing Programme. Once in place they should initially work alongside an experienced prison trainer to get a first hand experience of how "prison craft" should be put into practice.

As well as selecting experienced Health Visitors to run the course in prisons, it is also important that the people selected have the presence or "character" to manage the classroom effectively. It may also be useful to give them additional training on classroom management strategies.

Recommendations from Chapter 6: Issues for further consideration

Family Links will need to be flexible about the timing of the course in a prison setting. At the same time, they also need to be clear about their “bottom lines”: how far can the timing of the course be varied before it starts to significantly reduce the impact of the course?

When approaching prisons to set up the Nurturing Programme, Family Links should explore what possibilities exist for creating extended contact time between the course participants and their children, particularly to allow opportunities to practice the skills developed through the Programme.

In setting up the Nurturing Programme in other prisons, it would appear important that Family Links ensures appropriate arrangements are in place for providing emotional support to the participants between sessions, should it be needed.

Family Links needs to determine the appropriate level of emotional content when delivering the course in a prison setting. There are a range of factors that suggest it may be appropriate to reduce the emotion content of the course (such as the nature of the emotional support available in prisons, or the fact that participants can be pulled out of the course at short notice). On the other hand, if Family Links are committed to maintaining the emotional content of the course, they will need to put in place safeguards in relation to these factors.

If Family Links intend to maintain the level of emotional content in the course, it would be useful to conduct a further pilot of the programme, delivered with this higher level of emotional content, to determine whether this raises further issues in a prison setting.

Given the new National Offender Management Service agenda of providing “end to end offender management”, it appears to be a useful time for Family Links to explore models of delivering the Nurturing Programme that bridge pre- and post-release.

In rolling out the programme further, there are a number of questions that Family Links will need to address. These include: a possible need for further piloting; identifying the right model for bridging the transition from pre- to post-release; obtaining access to prisons; ensuring that prisons and PCTs are working together effectively and providing the necessary resources for roll out; ensuring minimum delivery standards are defined and met; and generating more formal evaluation data to support the arguments for rolling out the programme. Family Links will also need to determine what its role is once delivery is in the hands of the prisons and PCTs; at a minimum, this is likely to include advocacy and quality assurance.