
The evaluation of the Community Support for Offenders' Families service

Summary

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Context

This summary sets out the findings from an evaluation of the Community Support for Offenders' Families (CSOF) service.¹ CSOF was a time-limited service, jointly funded by Barnardo's and the National Offender Management Service (NOMS) Commissioning Strategies Group (CSG) using grant monies, which aimed to complement custody-based models of family support by developing capacity and capability in a community offender management context.

The CSOF service was developed in recognition of the need to provide effective support for offenders and their families in the community, and in light of growing evidence showing the serious impact of parental imprisonment on children and the wider family, and the role of family relationships in desistance.

It was established in three areas: Bristol, the Isle of Wight and south east Wales. Each project differed in terms of its location, geographical coverage and the make-up of the local population. In Bristol, the project covered the Bristol City Council area (population 430,000); on the Isle of Wight, it covered the whole island (population 140,000); and in Wales, it covered eight local authority areas (total population 800,000).

Within each area, the projects sought to work with local agencies to raise awareness of the needs of families affected by the imprisonment or offending of a parent/carer, to facilitate the development of procedures and practice, and to provide support to a small number of families with children aged 0 to 18 years who had a parent or carer in prison or serving a community sentence. The pilot phase ran from August 2012 to March 2014 in Bristol, January 2013 to March 2014 on the Isle of Wight and from April 2013 to March 2014 in Wales.

The evaluation

The evaluation sought to answer the following research questions:

- Has CSOF contributed to improved outcomes for offenders' families?
- Has CSOF influenced the local service response towards offenders' families?
- Has CSOF resulted in increased professional awareness of the support needs of offenders' families in each locality?

The evaluation adopted a mixed methods approach. Data were collected from the three CSOF areas using a range of methods, including: qualitative interviews with stakeholders, staff, and families; case reviews of service user data; questionnaires; feedback forms; telephone interviews; and an online survey for professionals who had participated in training and/or awareness-raising activities. Case examples were extracted from the data to illustrate how the CSOF service worked with families and the outcomes that this achieved. The evaluation was conducted by a research consultant from Barnardo's Training and Consultancy, seconded to Barnardo's Strategy Unit for the duration of the work. The evaluation was overseen by a research advisory group that included members from NOMS, Barnardo's and Wales Probation Trust.

The CSOF Model

A theory of change for the CSOF service was developed in conjunction with staff from the service, as part of the evaluation. This set out the intended outcomes in the short and medium term, and how those outcomes could contribute to achieving the long-term aims of the service.

While the long-term overall aims of the service were to improve the life chances of offenders' children and reduce re-offending,

¹ Throughout this report, where reference is made to a specific operational site, the term 'project' is used. When discussing the three projects as a whole, the term 'service' is used.

the evaluation focused on the intermediate outcomes, which evidence suggests can contribute towards these results. The intended outcomes that were identified for the service in 2012 were informed by NOMS guidance on factors that promoted desistance and strengthened family relationships², as well as earlier Barnardo's work with children of prisoners. The key intermediate and short-term outcomes that were addressed are identified in the theory of change for the CSOF model. Intermediate outcomes were: reduced isolation/stigma; improved parenting capacity; improved parenting knowledge and strategies; improved parent/carer-child contact and/or relationships; and children having improved confidence and self-esteem.

The key activities of the CSOF service were:

- providing support for families with children who have a parent/carer in prison or serving a community sentence
- facilitating the development of local procedures and practices that take into consideration the impact of offending on family members
- raising awareness of the needs of children affected by parental imprisonment or offending through training and other awareness-raising activities.

Findings

Operational delivery

A total of 79 families were referred or self-referred to the CSOF service for family support during the pilot period. Across the 79 families, 134 individuals received support, with the length of intervention ranging from less than a month to 12 months or more, depending on the issues the family was facing and other support available to them. In the majority of cases, the service was working with partners/ex-partners and their children, but where possible, direct work was also carried out with the offenders themselves.

The nature of the support provided was wide ranging and determined by the needs of the family. It included therapeutic interventions for the whole family, the parent or child, parenting advice, liaising with other services on the family's behalf, and facilitating prison visits or contact with the offender. The CSOF service also made referrals to, and worked with, a wide range of agencies on behalf of families who required family support, as well as providing advice and information to practitioners from other agencies to assist them in supporting families of offenders.

In order to facilitate the development of local procedures and practices that took into consideration the impact of offending on family members, the CSOF service undertook work to establish relationships with professionals who had strategic and management responsibility for relevant areas of work, as well as practitioners who had day-to-day contact with offenders, their children and families. This was achieved through networking and participation at key meetings and forums.

Training and awareness-raising activities were also held with a range of different services to increase understanding of the impact of offending on children and families and the role of family relationships on desistance. A total of 25 one-day training sessions were conducted and 362 professionals trained across the pilot period. In addition, an estimated 1,000 practitioners and managers were engaged through shorter awareness-raising briefings and sessions.

Service outcomes

For families

Family support by the CSOF service filled an important gap in service provision, and there was evidence of a number of benefits for families who engaged with the service, who were often struggling with multiple

² National Offender Management Service. (2012). *NOMS commissioning intentions for 2013-14: Discussion document*. London: Ministry of Justice.

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and complex issues at the point of referral (including self-referral). Families spoke of their relief at being able to talk freely to the Project Workers without being judged. The CSOF service was able to assist families in addressing practical or financial concerns, provide advice and strategies to help build parenting capacity, and facilitate contact and/or address concerns regarding contact with the offending family member. The service also had an important role to play in building the self-esteem and confidence of the children and young people who had been negatively affected by their parent's offending, and in tackling the isolation and stigma experienced by families of offenders.

Developing the local service context

The evaluation highlighted that the CSOF service played an important role in bringing together different agencies to review overarching systems and processes, as well as encouraging individual organisations to review their own practices. There was evidence that a number of agencies in the three areas covered by the CSOF service had reviewed and adapted their recording and assessment practices as a result of the service's input. Other ways in which the service influenced the local service context was through promoting and developing the role of Single Points of Contact – or 'Champions' – for children and families of offenders in probation services and other partner agencies. It also produced charters for organisations working with families of offenders and developed procedures for recording, an information sharing protocol, and a toolkit for Offender Managers working with offenders' families.

Raising awareness

There was evidence that the training and awareness-raising activities carried out by the service were effective in improving practitioners' understanding about the impact of offending on families, and equipping them with the skills and knowledge to identify and support families more effectively (including making referrals to the CSOF service and other agencies). Following the training,

participants indicated areas where they were planning on making changes to their practice. Data collected as part of the evaluation demonstrated that many had gone on to make these changes in areas such as reviewing caseloads with family offending in mind, offering targeted support to a child or family, or sharing information with colleagues about the support needs of offenders' families. Their engagement with and commitment to reviewing practices within their own organisations was testament to the positive impact of the training and awareness-raising work carried out by the CSOF service.

Learning

The major learning points of the evaluation are set out below. They highlight some of the best practice and challenges faced by the service and its evaluation.

Service formation and development

- Changes in resourcing during the lifetime of the service meant that only the Wales project included a full-time Offender Manager. Consequently, almost all development of procedures and protocols happened in Wales, and their joint work/information sharing was stronger
- The re-organisation of other services and uncertainty around this had an important impact on the service. The preparation for the transformation of the probation trusts into the National Probation Service and Community Rehabilitation Companies meant that there were changes in personnel and additional demands on Offender Managers' time.
- The differences in implementation in the three local services and varied emphases, for example on training professionals versus direct family support, across the three sites resulted in difficulties in assessing the overall impact of CSOF's work.
- There were some gaps in service user data and inconsistency in the use of outcomes, which had an impact on data analysis.

Awareness raising and engaging with partner agencies

- Awareness-raising activities underpinned much of the work of the CSOF service.
- Engaging senior staff in other agencies and gaining their commitment was critical to the delivery of the service.
- The presence of the CSOF service in probation offices, either as an office base or at drop-ins/surgeries, was an important factor in encouraging referrals.
- The secondments and gifted time of Offender Managers helped to reinforce CSOF'S relevance for criminal justice agencies and enabled the service's aims and activities to be communicated in a meaningful way.
- The limited staff resources and wide scope of the CSOF service restricted the time that could be committed to engaging all agencies. Schools were identified as key services but engaging with them was particularly resource intensive due to their large number and diversity.
- The awareness-raising briefings and training were successful in reaching a large number of professionals and in improving their knowledge and understanding of the needs of offenders' families. Participants were able to illustrate how they could apply their learning in their practice.
- The *Bristol Charter for Children of Prisoners* was an example of an effective way of focusing attention on the child's voice.

Working with families

- Self-referral proved to be an important pathway to support for some isolated families, including families with significant support needs, but only a small number of families from black and minority ethnic groups accessed the CSOF service.
- The Project Workers accessed a range of services, tools and resources to support families. Applying their specialist knowledge, advising other practitioners

and drawing on the expertise of other providers were all important in achieving positive outcomes for families.

- The number of referrals illustrated the demand for the service and the outcomes data demonstrated a variety of needs. The qualitative analysis found that families reported positive outcomes as a result of the CSOF service's input.
- Particular learning can be gained from CSOF interventions where a family member had been convicted of a sexual offence. Feedback from CSOF staff and the families themselves suggested that these families are particularly isolated, face complex issues and require a range of practical and therapeutic support.
- The fact that a large number of families were separated as a result of imprisonment or family breakdown meant that the projects had no direct contact with the offenders in almost half of their cases.

Identification and assessment

- Feedback from stakeholders highlighted some of the complexities and challenges in identifying families of offenders, including families' own reluctance to be identified.
- Changes to enable agencies to identify and assess children and families of offenders were often dependent on key individuals taking the initiative, and the benefit was often realised at an individual level rather than enabling systematic identification and assessment.

Information sharing

- Casework with families highlighted the need for criminal justice agencies and children and family services to share information effectively.
- CSOF casework highlighted the potential for workers to come across information that needed to be shared with probation, the police and social services departments as part of their intelligence.
- Service staff experiences suggested the need for a specified point of contact within the newly formed National Probation Service and Community Rehabilitation Companies, in order to facilitate a two-way process of information sharing.

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- CSOF was able to develop an information sharing protocol and procedures that would enable contact with family support services to be recorded on the Probation Service case management system.

The evaluation

- This evaluation should be seen as a contribution to the growing area of research on intermediate outcomes linked to desistance. Systematic collection of personal information by services, as well as longer-term monitoring of offending of parents and future offending of children, would be required to establish the relevance of outcomes achieved by the service in the short and medium terms.
- CSOF services should, in future, ensure more rigorous measurement and recording of outcomes for service users.

Implications

The major implications of the evaluation findings are as follows:

- The CSOF community-based model of family support and service development was effective.
- The multi-dimensional role of the CSOF service contributed to its success.
- The combination of a child and family-focused Project Worker and an Offender Manager within the service was important.
- Awareness-raising activities and training were central elements of the service.
- There were agencies (especially schools) that CSOF were not able to reach during the pilot period.
- Awareness raising and joint working combined to have an impact on offender management practice.
- Communication with Offender Managers is key to the assessment of risk and engaging with offenders.
- Procedures need to be in place so that information about risk can be shared with family support services.
- Working with other agencies, the service has identified resources and developed practice knowledge and

expertise that could be applied in other localities.

- Long-term monitoring would be required to determine whether the intermediate outcomes have an impact on desistance and intergenerational offending.
- The service demonstrated the need for changes to probation systems to collect, record and share information about offenders' families.
- Identification of children of offenders continues to be done ad hoc, and further work is required to ensure it is instead done systematically to build a comprehensive picture of need within the group.

It will be important for the new probation providers – Community Rehabilitation Companies (CRCs) and the National Probation Service (NPS) – to understand how the learning from CSOF can inform development of services in the new Transforming Rehabilitation operating model. Barnardo's has committed to fund the CSOF service for a further two years from April 2014. In Wales the CRC has extended the secondment of a full-time Offender Manager into this team up to March 2015, where it is anticipated that this will complement other community-based initiatives and contribute to effective resettlement of offenders as part of NOMS's integrated offender management approach³. Discussions are taking place in a number of areas, and in Wales a new role of Consultant Offender Manager has been proposed, with a specific brief to provide consultancy to other OMs, to ensure that Hidden Sentence training is embedded and to ensure updated practice directions are appropriate in relation to children and families. This role could act as a key link to children's services and other family support services, including any Community Support for Offenders' Families teams, maximising benefit for the offender management process as well as for children and families.

3 See <https://gov.uk/integrated-offender-management-iom>

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