The Impact of *Fathers Inside*

An OLSU and Safe Ground Parenting Course for Male Prisoners at HMP Ashwell

An evaluation by

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June, 2004
Chapter 1. Background and Context of the Research

Introduction

A growing number of prison establishments run fatherhood/parenting courses of different kinds with a view to educating fathers or expectant fathers about practical and emotional aspects of fathering, and about being a father from prison. Most of these courses began as a result of education, prison, probation staff, or external voluntary organisations identifying a need in prisoners for practical help and relationship advice in their parenting role. In more recent years, however, they have evolved in response to Prison Service Instruction 57/1997, Prison Service Orders 4200 (17/07/1997) and 4205 (10/04/2000) on Prison Service education and training.

Parentcraft courses, as they have come to be known, now constitute Units of the ‘Social and Life Skills’ programme, accredited through the National Open College Network. In common with other such Units they require a minimum of 20 contact hours, Prison education departments may choose whether or not to offer these Units and may also determine the process and content of delivery. The overall aims of the ‘Social and Life Skills’ programme are: the development of alternative self and society views; increase in self-esteem, self-confidence, social, personal and vocational competences; and the attainment of nationally recognised qualifications.

A range of fatherhood courses for both young and adult prisoners has been researched. Early courses studied by Caddle (1991) and Mardon (1996) produced relatively optimistic evaluative and practice-based publications respectively on the value of these courses for young prisoners. Mardon’s interim measure of success on the course that she herself ran was based on long waiting lists, low drop-out rates, and positive feedback from the participants about developments in their relationships with children at visiting times.

More recently, the experiences of larger numbers of fatherhood course participants, and some of their partners have been evaluated. (Boswell & Wedge 2002; Dennison & Lyon 2003). The former study researched 5 adult and 3 young offender programmes; the latter researched 12 programmes across the young offender estate. Boswell’s and Wedge’s study found that these programmes were popular with prisoners, partners and staff; prisoners could remember key pieces of learning, both practical and psychological, after their programmes had finished. This was also true of young prisoners in Dennison’s and Lyon’s study, who were followed up 6 months after release. Though only a third of them could be traced, over two thirds were in contact with at least their most recent child and this appeared to correlate with the maintenance of a good relationship with the child’s mother, whether the young men resided with them or not. Both studies found professional support for ex-prisoners and their families singularly lacking.

Thus far, only one external in-depth evaluation of any parentcraft course constituting a Unit of the nationally accredited ‘Social and Life Skills Programme’ has been
conducted. This is of the Safe Ground/OLSU ‘Family Man’ course (2003), which was found to be making a valuable contribution to parenting and family education via the medium of drama (NFER 2002). It is important to add to this portfolio by discovering more about which aspects of which courses impact upon prisoners to the extent that it changes their thinking about and behaviour towards their children and possibly the children’s mothers also. This, therefore, is the rationale for the evaluation of the nationally accredited Safe Ground/OLSU (Offenders’ Learning & Skills Unit) Fathers Inside programme, which has been gradually developed and refined in a number of prisons since 1999, with the help of prisoners who participated in earlier versions of the course.

1.1 Research Aim

This evaluation centres around the finalised version of Fathers Inside which was delivered, independently of Safe Ground, for the first time by the Education Department at HMP Ashwell. Its overall purpose was to assess the outcome of this drama-based model of parenting education for adult male prisoners, their children and their partners. Clearly, longer-term outcomes can be confirmed only as members of the study group return to take their place in society as parents, partners, workers and so on. However, the shorter-term findings presented here, both within and beyond custody, provide indicative evidence of progress and relapse, achievements and failures.

The key evaluation outcomes of the research were identified thus:

- Levels of compliance with and completion of the programme
- The degree to which programme objectives have been met
- Changes in attitudes towards fathering
- Changes in fathering behaviour

1.2 Research Sample

The substantive study group comprised all 17 prisoners enrolled on the Fathers Inside programme running from 13-30 October 2003 and, where practicable, their partners/main carers and children. Prior to this, however, interviews were also conducted with 9 prisoners from the previous course (29 May-12 June 2003) who were still in HMP Ashwell at the commencement of the present study. This provided both a piloting opportunity and baseline data for the substantive study. Further to this, interviews were conducted with 2 life sentence prisoners, who had participated in and fed back on the 1999 course run by Safe Ground in Gartree Prison and who, now in Ashwell, were also able to provide their post-course reflections. A group of 10 key staff from the programme, the Visitors’ Centre, involved prison personnel, the Governor and Area Manager were also interviewed. All research respondents had the nature of the research fully explained to them, gave their informed consent and were assured of confidentiality and anonymity. (Thus, all names cited herein are pseudonyms.)
1.3 Method and Research Instruments

The research team interviewed each participant prisoner in the substantive study, immediately prior to the programme, gathering information about characteristics, background, expectations, and attitudes in respect of fathering. Apart from two men, who could not be contacted after their release, all were re-interviewed between 3 and 5 months after the end of the programme to ascertain its effects on their behaviour and attitudes. The others were seen again at Ashwell and, in one case, at another prison to which he had been transferred. Programme compliance and completion were also monitored, and 6 programme-related observations conducted. Partners/main carers and children (where appropriate and of at least 5 years of age) were interviewed about their impressions of the course and changes in the father’s behaviour between 2 weeks and 5 months from the end of the programme. Staff views and experiences were elicited at times most relevant to their involvement in the programme. These data were gathered through a range of instruments, including individual interview, group observation, telephone interviews, questionnaire administration and documentary analysis.
Chapter 2. Prisoners’ Expectations of the ‘Fathers Inside’ Programme

This chapter will present the findings of semi-structured interviews (Appendix 1A) with 17 men, conducted immediately prior to and during the early part of the Fathers Inside programme, which commenced on 13th October 2003. At this stage, they had been accepted for the Programme by the two course tutors. To be both eligible and accepted, prisoners have only to express a desire to undertake the programme. Most are fathers, a few are expectant fathers, and a small minority do not have children but wish to equip themselves with parenting skills for the future. If they successfully complete the programme, they are awarded a National Open College Network Certificate for the completion of the Parentcraft Unit of the Social and Life Skills Programme through City College, Manchester.

2.1 Characteristics of the Programme Participants

It is worth noting that 24 men originally applied and were accepted for the programme. Of these, however, one was unexpectedly transferred to another prison and one decided not to attend because the programme coincided with Ramadan (though it should be added that other men wishing to observe Ramadan were able to do so during the programme). A third man began the programme, but disclosed to a course tutor early on that he had experienced sexual abuse in childhood and did not feel able to continue engaging with the topic of children and childhood. (He was referred to the Prison Psychologist for counselling.) Four men were offered job or training opportunities in the prison, which they preferred to pursue. All the remaining 17 men who commenced the programme also completed it.

Tables 1-6 below show the characteristics of the 17 men who participated in the programme in respect of age, ethnic origin, sentence length, number of previous sentences, offence type and family with whom they were in contact.

| Table 1: Age range of the participants (N = 17) |
| Age range in years | 21-25 | 26-30 | 31-35 | 36-40 |
| No. in range | 6 | 7 | 2 | 2 |

| Table 2: Self-described ethnic origin of the participants (N = 17) |
| Ethnic origin | White British | White Irish | English | Black English | Black Caribbean | Afro-Caribbean | Moroccan | Mixed race | Indian (other) |
| No. in category | 8 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |

| Table 3: Length of current sentence (N = 17) |
| Length of current sentence | 6-12 mths. | 13-23 mths. | 24-47 mths. | 4-6 yrs. | 10 yrs. |
| No. in range | 1 | 2 | 3 | 8 | 3 |
Table 4: Number of previous prison sentences served by participants \( (N = 17) \)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No. of previous sentences</th>
<th>0</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>10</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No. of participants</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5: Types of offence for which current sentence being served \( (N = 17) \)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of offence</th>
<th>Tax evasion</th>
<th>Theft</th>
<th>Burglary</th>
<th>Actual/Grievous Bodily Harm</th>
<th>Possession/Supply Class ‘A’ Drugs</th>
<th>Robbery/Attempted robbery</th>
<th>Armed robbery</th>
<th>Death by dangerous driving</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No. in category</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6: Family members with whom participants are in close touch \( (N = 17) \)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Family members</th>
<th>Partner(s)</th>
<th>Child(ren)</th>
<th>Parent(s)</th>
<th>Sibling(s)</th>
<th>Aunt(s)/Uncle(s)</th>
<th>Grandparent(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No. in category</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From Tables 1-6 above, a number of features can be identified:

- The majority of the programme participants were between 21 and 30 years of age
- Just over half were of White British or Irish origin; slightly less than half were of Black, Afro-Caribbean, North African or Indian origin
- The majority were serving long sentences of between 4 and 10 years
- The majority had served previous prison sentences
- Around half were serving sentences for offences which involved actual or potential violence/bodily harm
- The majority said they were in close touch with current (and, in some cases, past) partners, and with children (though there were two exceptions here). A majority were also in close touch with siblings. A minority were in touch with aunts, uncles, grandparents and step-siblings.

2.2 Participants’ own experience of being parented

As a number of studies have found, parenting models are frequently derived from the differential experiences of parents’ own childhood (Stolz 1967; Snarey 1993; Marsiglio 1995; Boswell & Wedge 2002). In respect of fathers in particular, one of these authors notes that

... fathers use childrearing to replicate the specific positive fathering they received and also to rework and rectify the specific unsatisfactory fathering they received.  
(Snarey 1993: 304)

These studies highlight the need to ascertain something of the participants’ own experience of being parented, as a context for the parenting of their own children and for their expectations of the Fathers Inside parenthood programme.
Table 7 below, and subsequent paragraphs, set out and discuss the main characteristics of participants’ parents and upbringing.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Reared by both parents</th>
<th>Reared mainly by mother</th>
<th>Reared mainly by father</th>
<th>Reared mainly by mother and stepfather</th>
<th>Reared mainly by father and stepmother</th>
<th>In state or private care, at some point</th>
<th>In extended family care at some point</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No. of participants</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As Table 7 above shows, slightly less than half the sample were reared by both parents (largely described as a positive experience). In two cases, the parents had since separated, but the participants remained in touch and on good terms with them. Five had been reared mainly by their mothers, 3 because their fathers had left home in their early years, and 2 because their fathers had died. One had been reared mainly by his father and stepmother (a positive experience) and one mainly by his father (a less positive experience because he had had to do the parenting of his younger brother). Two had been reared mainly by their mothers with a stepfather (one a positive, the other a mixed experience). Six had been either in state, private or extended family care at some point in their lives. These experiences had been fairly negative for most, but 2 had had positive, loving relationships with grandmothers who had cared for them.

It is also worthy of note that one or both parents of 13 participants had experienced long-term employment, 2 had experienced long-term unemployment and 2 had experienced periodic employment/unemployment. The father of one had been imprisoned once during the participant’s childhood. The fathers of two others had been imprisoned several times, one of them for sentences of 4 and 10 years respectively. Both of these features are significant in terms of parental modelling: employment because many fathers still see their role, at least to some extent, as that of a breadwinner (Barker 1994; Williams 1998); and imprisonment because of a strong correlation between criminal convictions of (usually male) parents and their sons (Farrington 1995). These points having been noted, however, it is clear that the majority of these programme participants had not been exposed to negative parental role models in respect of employment and criminal conviction patterns. It is then, perhaps, more instructive to examine the nature of their relationships with their fathers and to see how this may have impacted both on their own criminal behaviour and indeed on their relationships with their own children.

When asked about their experiences of being fathered, only 6 participants (slightly less than one-third) recounted positive experiences – and all said that these experiences had positively affected their fathering of their own children. For example:

*It was good. My father provided a good example. I treat my child like my Dad treated me.*
My father was a very good father. I have good memories of him. (He died of a brain tumour when I was 9). It is important to have a balance of both parents. Mum couldn’t manage to parent very well and started drinking after Dad died. Dad was a hard-working man but he always had time for us. We went on day-trips and holidays. He was a loving man and I miss him very much. My children now live with my mother (who doesn’t drink any more) and I know how important it is to keep in touch with them, even though I’m in prison.

Some of those who recounted positive experiences nevertheless gave examples which suggested the reality was a bit more qualified. For example:

Good, although my father used to discipline me. He still lectures me on visits, for being in prison. But my Dad was a good Dad and I want to be one too, to my child.

My parents were and are very caring. They both come from large, extended families. My mother was always there for us. I suspect I’m closer to her than to my father, who was often out working in his business. But their approach has informed and helped me in my own approach to fathering children. I had a happy, settled childhood and I want this for my own children also.

In contrast, however, the majority of participants (11) recounted negative experiences of being fathered but, corroborating other studies (Snarey 1993; Boswell & Wedge 2002), all said that these experiences meant that they now behaved in just the opposite way towards their own children:

I didn’t feel that my Dad was really there for me. I used to see him during holidays when I was a child. I don’t behave in the same way as him. I try my best to be there and involved with my children.

Not good. I found it hard to talk things over with my father and stepfathers. I want it to be different for my children. I want to be there for them, do things with them. Show them love and affection and have strong relationships with them. Be known as their Dad and want each child to know their brothers and sisters, even though they have different mothers.

(Participant has 5 children by 5 different mothers.)

I thought my parents were too busy to hug me. My Mum used to be more affectionate when she became more ill and bed-bound – then she hugged me. I’ve made sure that I do all sorts with my children. I know what was missing for me and I don’t behave like that with my children. No-one ever read me a bed-time story, but I make sure I do that with my child.

Very poor. No good memories of my father. I don’t think he liked me. I really missed having a Dad. My father used to blame me for his problems. I would
run away from home and go to my father’s brother, but he would send me back home. I remember I wanted to please my parents. I used to stand in front of my mother to protect her from my father’s violence. I never want my children to experience anything like that.

In respect of this last quotation, it is worth noting that 6 (over one-third) of these men had either experienced violence from their fathers or had witnessed it being perpetrated upon their mothers. All of them had, in turn, committed violent offences, which bears out a similar correlation in other studies (Boswell 1996; Widom & White 1997). For them, the experience of being parented may well have led them into the pattern of offending which now caused their separation from their own children.

Reasons which participants themselves gave for their offending, and which appeared to link with negative experiences of their fathers, included drug and alcohol addiction and a history of getting into fights. Interestingly, the most frequently cited reason given by those who had described stable childhoods was the need to gain money to provide for their own children in the same way that their fathers had done for them.

### 2.3 Circumstances of participants’ own fatherhood

This section seeks to provide a flavour of the characteristics and nature of the participants’ relationships with their children, their partners/main child-carers and wider family, prior to the onset of the **Fathers Inside** programme. **Table 8** below shows the normal contact status of these fathers with their children, together with the number of children belonging to each father.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Normal contact status of participants</th>
<th>No. of children per participant</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Current pregnancy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residing with mother of all children</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residing with mother of some children</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residing with carer of all children</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residing with carer of some children</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-resident but in contact with all children</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-resident but in contact with some children</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No contact with any children</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total no. of participants’ children = 43</strong></td>
<td><strong>Total:</strong> 1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The ages of the 43 children referred to in Table 8 above range from unborn at the time of interview to 23 years, with a concentration around the 2-8 year range, which almost certainly reflects the 21-30 age group of the majority of the sample. It is also important to note that 3 of the participants saw themselves as having a fathering responsibility for the children of their current partners from previous relationships. Table 8 shows the very variable residential status of the participants in relation to their children, whose numbers range from one unborn to 9 belonging to any one participant. It can be seen that out of the entire group of 17, only 5 normally reside with their children and their children’s mother. A further 3 reside with the mother of one or more of their children. One resides with the carer of his two children (the participant’s mother); another also resides with his mother, who is the carer of one of his two children. Six do not reside with their children’s mother(s), but are in regular contact with their children; a further non-resident participant is in regular contact with one of his two children. None of the 17 participants claimed to be out of contact with all of their children.

Table 9 below shows the ages of these men when they first became fathers.

| Table 9: Age of participants at birth of first child |
|----------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Age            | 14    | 15    | 16    | 17    | 18    | 19    | 20    | 21    | 22    | 23    | 24    |
| No. of participants | 1    | -     | -     | 1    | 1     | 3     | 2     | 2     | 3     | 1     | 1     |

It is apparent from Table 9 that there is a cluster around the ages of 19-22 years (10 out of 17 men) in respect of becoming a father for the first time. One man had his first child by a girlfriend aged 17 years, when he himself was aged 14; five of the others were well into their twenties. Given that most had reached adulthood, it was, perhaps, not so surprising to hear from over two-thirds of them that they had always been and continued to be closely involved with all their children. The 5 who were not currently in contact with some of their children, said that they had been closely involved when the children were first born. All but one (who still retains contact with his child) described themselves as having been in stable relationships with the child’s mother at the time. Ten of the men said that the pregnancies were unplanned (either the pill had gone wrong or contraception had been used spasmodically or not at all) but that they were in all cases welcomed. The others were either all planned, or some of them were planned. Although they did not all say this, the general sense was that the couples concerned felt their relationships were stable and so they were happy to be fatalistic so far as contraception was concerned. For the father who was not in a stable relationship, however, there were somewhat complex consequences for his fathering role:

*My first daughter was the result of a New Year’s Eve relationship when I was 17. But I took on the role of her father and stayed with her mother for 3 years, during which time we had a second daughter. When we separated, the first daughter stayed with my partner, but the second one came to live with me and my Mum, as my partner couldn’t cope on her own with them both. It is difficult for me to see my elder daughter now, because my ex-partner doesn’t always agree to contact.*
Many of these men had very good support from their families, including over two-thirds whose siblings visited their children or had the children to stay with them. None of them had experienced formal parenting education of any kind, but nearly all (16) said they had learned about child-rearing from helping with their own brothers, sisters, cousins, other extended family members or friends; only one had no experience of children prior to becoming a father himself.

In terms of more formal support, 4 of the children’s mothers/main carers had contact with Social Services, though none of the men thought there was any formal contact with their field-based Probation Officers. Of the group of 17 men themselves, only 5 reported regular contact with a Probation Officer during their prison sentence. The only other formal ‘helping’ organisation mentioned (by one man) was the CARATS drug support agency.

This relative paucity of formal support seemed less than encouraging for the prospects of a group of participants among whom at least 4 were concerned about post-release accommodation, 3 about gaining work and one about returning to drug addiction.

2.4 Participants’ relationships with their children from prison

Almost all research conducted on the subject of children and their imprisoned parents has suggested that these children are damaged at some level, whether by separation from their parents, by the stigma of that parent’s imprisonment, or both. (See, for example, Shaw 1987, 1992; Richards et al. 1994; Lloyd 1995; Noble 1995; Boswell & Wedge 2002.)

When asked whether they thought their imprisonment had affected their children in any way, 13 out of the 17 Fathers Inside participants acknowledged that it had: 2 thought their children (both babies) were too young to appreciate that they were in prison; one child was as yet unborn; and one participant had not seen his 2 children for a long time and felt he could not comment on this question. Common ways in which men considered their children to be affected included their children missing them; the loss of their father to play with them and help them with homework; one child having started to wet the bed once her father had gone to prison; one 2 year old no longer sure who her father is; a 5 year old starting to realise the reasons given for her father’s absence don’t add up; and a 7 year old announcing in the school-yard “My Dad’s in prison!””. Despite the problems they had just described in their children’s lives, most of the men nevertheless spoke of ‘excellent’, ‘very good’, ‘good’, ‘strong’, ‘very close’, and ‘loving’ relationships with the children with whom they were in touch. There was only one (perhaps less idealised and more realistic) exception to this in shape of a man who said:

Not as close as I’d like. I find it difficult to interact appropriately – I don’t always know what to say. The six year old sits on my knee and chatters, but it’s a bit more difficult to know what to say to the seven year old.

(The children lived with this man’s mother.)
Contact between prisoners and their children takes a variety of forms, most frequently including visits, telephone calls, and letters/cards. A few men are also able to make story tapes and send these to their children. **Table 10** below shows the type and frequency of contact between these men and the children with whom they were in touch.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of contact</th>
<th>Visits</th>
<th>Telephone</th>
<th>Letter</th>
<th>Story tapes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Frequency of contact</td>
<td>No. of men</td>
<td>No. of men</td>
<td>No. of men</td>
<td>No. of men</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>1 (child unborn)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3 men had been able to record one or more story tapes and send them to their children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daily</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-4 per week</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fortnightly</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monthly</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occasionally</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>17</strong></td>
<td><strong>17</strong></td>
<td><strong>17</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Clearly, most of these men were able to have at least monthly contact with their children through visits, and/or telephone and/or letter. In particular, over a third made either daily, 2-4 times per week or weekly telephone contact. The only man who did not receive any visits from his children was estranged from a former partner who would not bring their child to see him, and his child by his current partner was suffering from a long-term illness and was not well enough to travel to the prison. Reasons given by the men for wanting to maintain this contact centred around loving and missing their children, wanting to maintain and nurture their relationships with them, helping and supporting them and ensuring that they didn’t become too ‘distant’ from them. Without exception, this group of men believed it was important to maintain contact with all their children, whether or not they were able to do so.

### 2.5 Participants’ views of their children’s reactions to prison visits

These men, prior to their participation in the **Fathers Inside** programme, all saw their fathering roles continuing from prison via the provision of emotional support and, where they could, material support by sending out money or presents (usually via catalogues) to their partners and children. This role would be expanded on release through the sharing of activities such as sport, help with homework, and providing for the children through employment. A majority also spoke of ‘being there’ for them and making sure they stayed out of prison in future. Most of them thought that their partners would particularly expect them to participate fully in family life – the main ‘gap’ when they were in prison. In the meantime, however, the only form of face-to-face contact between these men and their families was through the medium of prison visits. Most prisoners may have 2 domestic visits per month; some, if on an ‘enhanced’ regime, may have more than this; their accessibility to all is highly dependent upon the distance of the prison from the family home (often over 100 miles), upon transport availability and a whole range of other practical factors.
Prison visits are frequently short, crowded, lacking in privacy and their enjoyment by families hampered by security considerations. Partners and children have to be searched; prisoners are not allowed to move from their seats and play with their children. Families report mixed experiences of visiting but, on the whole, children prefer to have this contact with their imprisoned parents rather than none at all (Boswell 2002; Boswell & Wedge 2002).

Consistent with the findings reported above, these men expressed a mixture of pleasure at being able to see their children in the flesh and sadness at not being able to move around and play with them on the visit, at having to say ‘good-bye’ at the end, and at the depression which often followed. During the visit, however, they talked with their children about school and home life, friends and family, and their general well-being. Depending on ages, they played games with the children, or the children played in the crèche, or they just held them and hugged them on their knees. Giving them enough attention, when their partners were also visiting and needing attention, was sometimes problematic.

The men’s views about their children’s responses to prison visits and, indeed, to their imprisonment in general, on the whole reflected a realistic perception of the ‘pros and cons’ of this situation for the children. To give a flavour of this, a range of their comments is quoted below.

*The children have not been told I’m in prison, but Zena (the 5 year old) is querying the situation, I think. She is inquisitive and wants to know why I can’t come home. Zafiah (the 3 year old) also asks me this. The children seem happy and motivated during visits. It is important that their routines are maintained between visits for stability. They probably would not accept that I’m in prison. I think they see me as a good father.*

*I think Susie (4 years) sees it as a day out – loads of children to play with and a very good crèche on visits. I think she likes to see me and it’s a fun day out. I think she might wonder if I’m missing her. She thinks I’m in prison because I’ve been naughty.*

*Sean is only a baby and he often sleeps for part of the visit – I just hold him. When he’s older, if he finds out I’ve been to prison, he might be angry with me.*

*They (daughters, 6 and 7 years) visit because they want to see me. They are often dying to tell me things. They benefit from face-to-face contact. I’m not sure what they make of visits. I find that Ashwell has the best visiting-room I’ve been in, in prison. The children don’t get upset on visits. I think they are anxious about me being in prison though – they don’t fully understand what it really means.*
My child has not been born yet, but would probably be upset at knowing I had been in prison. I remember that I was upset and bewildered when my own father went to prison.

Daniel (aged 3) gets excited on visits. He likes to move about – which I can’t! He’s very young and I don’t think he would understand where I am at present. I think he would be unhappy if he understood his father was in prison. I’m concerned that Dan doesn’t go down the same route as me.

All 9 of my children (aged 2-23 years) have visited me on this or other sentences. I often wonder how it is for them. My 15 year old son tells people I’m a gangster – and he’s proud of me and my reputation. I do feel responsible for how what I’ve done with my life affects my children.

I have told Corrina (6 years) that if you are very naughty, you get sent to prison – so she knows where I am and why. I think the prison staff try to make searching fun and Corrina likes the (drugs) dogs, so I think she’s OK with visiting. She misses me – and she knows how much she is loved and missed by me.

These quotations illustrate the importance both to fathers and children of maintaining their relationships during imprisonment, and the pain and uncertainty for the children in particular of having to make sense of and deal with this situation in their day-to-day lives.

2.6 Participants’ contact with their children’s mothers and their current partners

Twelve of the men were in contact with the mothers of all their children; two with the mothers of some of their children; and five (including 2 whose children were cared for by their own mothers) had such contact mediated by relatives. As noted earlier, relatives were often involved in the care and/or prison visiting of a number of these men’s children. As other research has found, the maintenance of contact between absent fathers and their children is very much dependent on the mothers’ ‘gate-keeping’ role – and so where there is some level of contact between the two parents, continued contact between non-residential fathers and their children is more likely (Ahrons 1983; Kruk 1991; Arendell 1992, 1995).

Apart from the man whose child was ill (referred to above), all 13 men with current partners maintained contact with them during their sentences. Ten of these partners were the main carers of some or all of the men’s children; three were relatively new partners who were not; four of the men had no current partner. All with current partners viewed ongoing contact with them as vital, both for the maintenance of their own relationships and, where relevant, of their relationships with their children. Three men also saw themselves as playing a fathering role in the lives of their current partners’ children from previous relationships. None of them had any contact with these children’s fathers. All regarded their partners as good mothers and believed that they, in turn, were fundamentally regarded by their partners as good fathers, despite the fact that they were
in prison. One, however, whose partner cared for their infant daughter and also for her teenage son from a previous relationship, made a comment, which demonstrated that ‘good fathering’ by a convicted prisoner can present its problems to the children concerned:

Joe is Sue’s son from a previous relationship. He is making it clear to me that he doesn’t want me to live with Sue, Penny (their 2 year old daughter) and him when I get out, because the police keep calling on me. When we talk on the phone, Joe tells me he loves me, but I know he doesn’t like the police seeking me out. I’m very close to Penny and I take her out a lot when I’m home, to give Sue a break. Sue expects me to go home to her when I’m released, though.

2.7 Participants’ hopes for the Fathers Inside programme

None of these men had previously experienced parenting education of any kind. When asked why they were keen to develop their parenting skills in this way, and about their expectations of the programme, the following range of aspirations emerged.

To learn to communicate better with my children (6 men)
To learn how to be a better father (5 men)
To find out what I don’t know already (2 men)
To learn to play with my children (2 men)
To learn about child development (2 men)
The course was recommended by another prisoner (2 men)

Other men added to this list one by one as follows:

The course was recommended by a staff member
To learn how to be more involved with my children
To learn everything a Dad needs to know!
To gain a better understanding of what children want and need
To learn where I’ve been going wrong as a parent
To learn as much as possible so my children get the best out of me
To find out how I can bring them up to avoid prison
Doing the course might help in the court application for contact with the child I’ve lost touch with (previous partner denies access)
I hope it will teach me about my legal rights as a father
The family visit looked attractive!

These responses would appear to constitute an understandable mixture of general desires to be a good father, specific aims in terms of improving relationships with children, and more practical considerations to do with rights and being in contact with children from prison. Thus, the aspirations which prisoners have when they contemplate enlisting for the programme seem realistic and, for the most part, a good match with the topics which the programme seeks to address.
2.8: In summary

This chapter, then, has set the scene for the October 2003 Fathers Inside programme. It has described a group of participants aged 21-40 years, some of black and some of white ethnic origin, most serving terms of 2+ years imprisonment for quite serious (sometimes violent) offences, and most having served previous prison sentences. The majority enjoyed close family relationships and were in close touch with current (and in some cases, past) partners and with their children. Some had had positive child-rearing experiences but many had experienced difficult upbringings, which included experiencing and witnessing physical and emotional abuse, and paternal loss, sometimes via imprisonment. Some made links between these experiences and their own later offending. Although most were in touch with most of their children, there were some exceptions to this and only 5 actually lived with their partners and all of their children. Most, however, were in reasonably regular touch with their children through visits, telephone calls, letters, and a few via story tapes. They were also in regular touch with current partners and many maintained contact with previous partners who had care of their children, either directly or through relatives. On the whole, the men had a fair appreciation of the difficulties their imprisonment had caused their children (and indeed their partners) but were concerned to maintain and improve their relationships with the children and were able to articulate the ways in which they hoped the Fathers Inside programme would enable them to do so.
Chapter 3. Delivering ‘Fathers Inside’: staff perspectives

This chapter outlines the structure and content of Fathers Inside, reports on researcher observation of key programme stages, and on the views and experiences of staff connected with the programme in a range of ways.

3.1 The structure of the Fathers Inside programme

Both the structure and content of the programme are set out in impressive detail in the Fathers Inside Teachers’ Manual (Safe Ground/OLSU 2003) and will not be reproduced at length here. However, the following account will furnish the reader with its key features.

Men who attend the Ashwell programme are registered as students at Manchester City College, by which the Education Manager and her staff are also employed to deliver the Education contract within the prison. If participants complete and pass this nationally accredited programme, they will receive one National Open College Network (NOCN) Social and Life Skills (SOLS) Certificate in Parentcraft (Level 1) and one in Group and Teamwork Skills (Level 2). SOLS Certificates at Level 2 attract one credit each towards the NOCN Intermediate Certificate in Parenting and Lifestyles, a GCSE equivalent. To gain this Certificate, however, 4 Level 2 credits are needed in total. These can be achieved by attaining Certificates from the ‘Healthy Living’ Unit, which is available at Ashwell, and from the ‘Sex and Relationships’ Unit, which is not run at Ashwell because it is the experience of Education staff that adult men feel (rightly or wrongly) that they do not need to do such a course.

After prison transfers and releases, the Education Manager estimates that 25% of Fathers Inside graduates go on to obtain the ‘Healthy Living’ Certificate and, thus, a further credit towards the NOCN Intermediate Certificate. Most importantly, however, all 17 men who undertook the October Fathers Inside programme, successfully completed the Parentcraft Unit and all but one the Group and Teamwork Unit. (The man concerned did not pass this Unit because he was not able, for whatever reason, to subscribe to the group learning ethos—and was reported to have fully accepted that this meant he could not pass the Unit).

In theory, men who participate in Fathers Inside may also work towards obtaining a Key Skills Communication (Level 1) Certificate, one of the official targets for prisoner education. Many of the activities within the programme, such as group discussion, improvisation, presentation and portfolio exercises are geared towards the relevant assessment criteria. However, it is Ashwell’s experience that the accompanying written work and external testing for this qualification is too demanding for most prisoners to undertake at the same time as a very intense experiential programme, and so they do not at present offer this facility.

Fathers Inside began life in 1999 with an eight-day draft programme delivered by Safe Ground staff at HMPs Gartree and Wandsworth. Based on prisoner and Tutor response,
the programme was further developed in 2001-2 into a 15 day course which mapped and integrated Key Skills Communication, as outlined above, and was again trialled at five prisons. This version, again modified by participant and Tutor feedback, was further trialled at seven prisons. During the trialling period, the Fathers Inside Teachers’ Manual was also developed and modified according to feedback, establishing design, layout, lesson plans and the ‘house style’ of the programme. Thus, it underwent an extremely thorough piloting process to bring it to the finalised version which is now being delivered in HMP Ashwell. The programme continues to invite prisoner and Tutor feedback. It also aims to respond to participant learning styles in respect of its 30 lesson programme, which groups of around 20 men attend full-time over a 15-day period.

Prisoners are recruited to Fathers Inside via information provided by the Education Manager on induction to the prison, by posters placed around the prison 2-3 weeks before the programme is due to start and, increasingly, by word of mouth. As outlined in Chapter 2, there are no eligibility criteria other than a desire to undertake the programme – though the programme is not deemed suitable for sex offenders. In the week prior to the commencement of the programme, men are invited to a preliminary meeting to give them a flavour of what their participation will involve, so that they can make an informed decision about attending it. Most go on to do so. At the end of the programme, the men do a presentation to selected prisoner colleagues and prison staff, based on what they have learnt. Finally there is a Family Day, where their partners/children’s carers and children can come into the prison and share food, entertainment and family time.

The programme’s aims are as follows:

- To furnish participants with parenting skills
- To improve their social and life skills and key skills
- To help with sentence planning, further education and employment

Tutors receive training from Safe Ground staff as well as an all-day pre-programme briefing. The Lessons, all geared towards the programme aims, are designed to cover one half day each. Their content is set out in detail in the Teachers’ Manual, and in single page form in the participants’ portfolio, in which the men record evidence of their learning through exercises and other written work.

Participants in the programme are encouraged to work in teams so that they build relationships in which they learn to trust each other. ‘Having fun’ is a stated part of the programme ethos, but time is built in for portfolio completion so that the evidence of their learning may be recorded by the men and assessed by the Tutors (whose assessment is then internally and externally verified). The men also: keep a journal (the requirements for which have recently been reduced in volume, based on prisoner feedback); analyse ‘The Selfish Giant’, a short story by Oscar Wilde; watch and study the themes from the film ‘Blinda’ (written and acted by prisoners from HMP Wandsworth) about an imprisoned father’s relationship with his son; and participate in a range of warm-up games, discussions, poems etc., all centring around fatherhood. The assessment criteria for the work which they do on the programme will be outlined in § 3.6.
### 3.2 Programme content and process: direct researcher observation

Six observations were undertaken by one of the researchers, as outlined below. Because the researcher herself was new to the programme, an obvious test of how well its content and process were delivered and managed was whether she herself understood what was required both of the Tutors and the participants, and whether she observed them being engaged in the process of the meeting concerned. The observations took place at 6 key stages of the programme, encompassing planning, delivery and presentation phases, followed by attendance at the Family Day. These will be briefly described in turn.

**Safe Ground staff/tutor briefing meeting, Battersea – 3rd October 2003**

The pre-course briefing by 3 members of Safe Ground staff was attended by the 2 new Course Tutors from Ashwell, who had also received separate training in programme delivery from the Safe Ground Director. The purpose of this meeting was to acquaint the Tutors with the history and development of the programme; to clarify its aims, themes and desired outcomes; to explain the structure, delivery expectations and assessment processes for Tutors. In terms of the content, this information was delivered lucidly and in a way which engaged the Tutors’ own contributions via questioning and invitations to them to share their own experiences of both teaching and parenting within the group.

**Programme preparation meeting, Ashwell – 10th October 2003**

In turn, the 2 Course Tutors explained the content and process of the programme to the men who had expressed an interest in attending it. They provided an example of the kind of activity that would be expected on the programme itself, by engaging the men in 2 ‘warm-up’ games and a video entitled ‘Get on Board’ made by prisoner fathers who had completed a ‘Family Man’ programme, which has a similar format to *Fathers Inside*. They also involved a prisoner who had completed the previous course in June 2003 and spoke enthusiastically about his experience. Further written information was provided together with reassurance of additional support for those who may have literacy or dyslexia problems, or had concerns about their ability to continue observing Ramadan during the programme. Thus, the men were informed about programme content through a variety of media, and were engaged in the participatory and group processes from an early stage.

**Fathers Inside, Lesson 8, Ashwell – 17th October 2003**

Lessons 8 and 19 of this 30 lesson programme were observed, again looking at content and process. Clear evidence was provided of the way in which participants were both educated and engaged in the learning process. For example, during Lesson 8 (Day 5 of the programme), a prisoner’s unacceptable behaviour was addressed by the Tutors and dealt with on a ‘restorative justice’ basis by the group. A newspaper article was used to stimulate participants’ learning about how children acquire language skills.
Fathers Inside, Lesson 19, Ashwell – 24th October 2003

In this Lesson (Day 10 of the programme), education about the need for clarity in communication was delivered, first by asking the men to write a postcard to a member of staff, and second through an ‘acting out’ game. Participants were both supported and praised. At this point, two-thirds of the programme had been completed and men were reminded how much they had already learned, in order to bolster their sense of achievement. They were further encouraged in their portfolio work for assessment purposes, and then invited to do some planning for next week’s presentation and for the post-course Family Day, where they would be aiming to put into practice what they had learned.

Fathers Inside Presentation Day, Ashwell – 29th October 2003

The October group gave an excellent presentation, amply demonstrating their learning from the programme. This comprised sketches, role plays and active audience participation in testing knowledge about child development. The presentation was delivered to a group of invited guests which included the No. 1 Governor, the Director of Safe Ground and 2 life prisoners who had participated in an earlier course run in Gartree 4 years ago (and who have been interviewed for this evaluation). The life prisoners spoke movingly and encouragingly about the programme. They, the Governor and Safe Ground Director all praised the presentation and generally promoted the programme. This event was followed by the making of a ‘Vox Pop’ video, inviting the participants’ responses to the programme and the presentation, and organised by Safe Ground.

The presentation took place in the room where the programme had also been held – a rather gloomy association room, which was very crowded with the visiting audience. The group had to perform in the limited remaining floor space. All the ‘props’ had been hand-made – though some prisoners later commented that they thought more effort could have been made in ‘setting the stage’ and providing some more professional ‘props’ to make it a more lavish production. Nevertheless, the audience were clearly impressed with the men’s efforts, and it was very clear from the way in which they presented, that they had taken on board all of the intended learning points from the programme (which is the point of the presentation).

Family Day, Ashwell – 13th November 2003

Although this rather special day was intended to run from 12.30 p.m. until 4.00 p.m., the start was delayed, apparently because of shortage of staff. The families were finally allowed in around 1.30 p.m. but were asked to leave again at 3.30 p.m. This was upsetting to families and to the programme participants for whom this day was the culmination of their learning and a chance to put it into practice. The No. 1 Governor attended for a short while at the beginning of the event, and welcomed everybody to it.

Those invited to the day included partners, carers, other relatives and the prisoners’ children, all of whom were able to sit round the room in family groups. Each family was
provided with a tray of delicious and varied food and ate this in ‘picnic’ style at chairs and tables or on the floor. Drinks were served by kitchen prisoners, and by two men who had attended the programme, but whose families had been unable to come. There was a children’s activity corner, where parents and children were able to engage in activities such as drawing, reading or making things. The Education staff organised some games for the children, such as ‘Pass the parcel’ and a hat-making competition, for which small prizes were given.

Safe Ground had arranged for the attendance of a photographer who took family photographs, which were later given to programme participants as a memento of the Family Day. Most of the men felt that they had been able to put their learning from the programme into practice, but there was disappointment that the time in which to do so had effectively been halved, due to surrounding institutional exigency. Nevertheless, it was apparent that all concerned (including both the children and the kitchen prisoners!) had enjoyed the visit and gained a great deal from it.

3.3 Staff views about parenting education

A sample of 10 staff, chosen for their range of professional relationships with Fathers Inside, was interviewed to elicit views and experiences in respect of the programme (See Appendix 2 for staff interview schedule). This group comprised the Prison Governor, the Area Manager, the Head of Learning and Skills, the Head of Resettlement, a senior Prison Officer, the Education Manager, one previous and two current programme tutors and the Visitors’ Centre Manager.

When asked about the advantages of parenting education, the following views emerged from the staff respondents:

- Improves parenting and benefits their children
- Helps them to take responsibility as parents, where outside they tend to be self-centred
- Provides a basis for reintegration into society
- Corrects poor/dysfunctional parenting
- Improves wider aspects of relationship skills
- Provides knowledge of child development
- Positive impact on relations with other prisoners
- Provides a personal development framework
- Can help to reduce crime
- Offers understanding of how prison affects children
In respect of some of these points, these quotations are illustrative:

*You have a captive audience. Prisoners very often haven’t done anything like this before. They take being a parent for granted. Such a course raises important issues for prisoners - it helps them become aware that perhaps they can do better. Some men have previous bad experiences of being parented in their own family upbringings, and they don’t want to repeat that with their own children. It is helpful for them to discuss issues and share experiences amongst themselves.*  
(Current Course Tutor)

*Parenting education can improve knowledge and awareness of parenting skills. It may correct dysfunctional or defective parenting. It can have a positive impact on relationships with other prisoners. It may improve wider aspects of prisoners’ knowledge and skills. It provides a personal development framework. I think it is a key provision.*  
(Head of Learning and Skills)

*It teaches them how to think before reacting to a child. It helps towards an understanding of child development and of how prison can affect children. Some mothers don’t seem to understand why their children are unruly. A lot of young boys’ behaviour is awful and some mothers say to me ‘I can’t do anything with him – he used to be so good!’ It gives prisoners a lot to think about before they get out.*  
(Visitors’ Centre Manager)

Staff viewed the disadvantages of parenting education as follows:

- Limitations on the ability to parent from ‘inside’
- May raise unrealistic expectations (for prisoners, partners and children)
- May be unhelpful for prisoners to revisit own unhappy childhood experiences e.g. abuse
- OLSU doesn’t see it as a key provision
- Many prisoners don’t have access to the programme
- Some may not benefit from/cope with a psychodrama approach taken by programmes such as **Fathers Inside**
- They can’t move about with children on visits

(One staff member could see no disadvantages in parenting education)
The following quotations, based on the Fathers Inside course, illustrate some of these views:

There is too much time to look inwards during the course. They can be affected by upsetting family experiences and bad memories from the past, including abuse. Although they can interact with their children on Family Day, they cannot move about with them on any other visits. Some partners may feel threatened by men doing the course. Some prisoners might take what tutors say as advice – and we’re not legal advisors. Some prison staff can be critical of prisoners who do the course, which is unhelpful.

(Current Course Tutor)

I think there are some risks. The level at which joint parenting can be done while someone is in prison is limited. It can raise expectations in prisoners, partners and children alike, which their lifestyle/circumstances on release may make it difficult to deliver. Previous unhappy experiences may be difficult for them to revisit.

(Prison Service Area Manager)

There is a lack of access for many prisoners. OLSU don’t seem to see parenting education as a key provision. There are constraints in educational targets. Certification and achievement is over-emphasised for these learners. People should be allowed to fail, yet learn from their mistakes – it’s not all about certification. If an imprisoned father can speak to his child or the child’s school about a problem, that is an important achievement in its own right.

(Head of Learning and Skills)

Clearly the advantages listed above are numerically greater than the disadvantages, some of which cannot be helped – e.g. the limitations on parenting from inside a prison – though it is important to remember here that learning to parent from prison in the light of these limitations is the primary aim of this programme. However, it is possible that parenting programmes could adjust somewhat to work with the challenges posed by prisoner access, unrealistic expectations, the pain of revisiting early childhood experiences and the need for a range of learning approaches. These and the issue of ‘Key Provision’ may be questions for Safe Ground and OLSU respectively to consider. (It should be added here, however, that since the October 2003 programme, the new Prison Service Resettlement programme has started to take effect at Ashwell, as a consequence of which Education staff report their view that the programme is being taken much more seriously). The issue of fixed seating on visits centres around prison security considerations. It has always been controversial, often reported as upsetting and damaging to children (Boswell & Wedge 2002; Dennison & Lyon 2003) and, for this reason, its necessity should be regularly reviewed by the Prison Service.
### 3.4 Expectations of the Fathers Inside programme

When asked about their expectations for those prisoners who complete Fathers Inside, staff expressed the following views:

- Improved self-esteem/confidence
- Greater self-awareness
- Improved levels of help and support to partners
- Reduced risk of re-offending
- Resolution of difficult psychological ‘baggage’
- Inspiration to move on to new learning experiences
- Improved family relationships
- Greater respect for/interest in partners and children
- Behaviour change

The following three quotations illustrate a number of the above points:

*My expectations are that they try to put into practice what they have learned. They are better able to listen to and talk with partners and children. We encourage them to talk things over more with partners and to take more of a parenting role to their children. Hopefully, some will become more consistent in their approach with their partners and take a more responsible parenting role.*

(Current Course Tutor)

*That they take a greater interest in their children and become more socially aware. That they have a better understanding of where schools and teachers are coming from. Men get bored after the intensity and group ‘bonding’ they experience on the course. They often ask if they can do something else around parenting.*

(Education Manager/previous Course Tutor)

*I expect behaviour change. What I find encouraging is the warm but firm stance the Tutors take with course participants and, of course, peer-group pressure informs the power of the group. The groups differ greatly and it is down to the Tutors, to whom enormous credit is due, that the course is so successful.*

(No. 1 Governor)

Given these not unreasonable expectations of the Fathers Inside programme, what behaviour changes did staff actually observe in those who had attended it, and how effective overall did they consider the programme to be?
3.5 The effectiveness of ‘Fathers Inside’

The ten members of staff interviewed were asked to rate on a scale of 1-10 their assessments of the level of effectiveness of the programme in assisting imprisoned fathers to take a more responsible role in the care and upbringing of their children. Some staff chose to score between two rating levels and, in preference to rounding these scores up or down, they are reproduced in Table 11 below in the exact form given by the respondents.

<table>
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<th>Rating level</th>
<th>1</th>
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<td>Staff numbers</td>
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As can be seen, all staff scores are in the top quartile of this rating scale, with a cluster around level 8, and with three staff members scoring the programme effectiveness level right at the top end – i.e. 9·5 or 10. The latter were not, as might have been expected, those involved in actually delivering the programme, but the Area Manager, the Head of Learning Skills and the Visitors’ Centre Manager. Clearly, this is an impressive finding. It is based on staff views both of the delivery of the programme and the changes they have observed in the men who have completed it.

Views of the delivery of the programme (including methods and resources) varied according to respondents’ direct knowledge of it. A minority had little or none, and unsurprisingly, present and past Course Tutors had detailed knowledge. The views of the latter, which were mixed, are quoted below.

*It’s very concentrated over the 2½ weeks. Men have to attend for full days whilst it is running. Perhaps if they came for full days the first week, then reduced to half days thereafter, the pace for them might be better. I found it stimulating. I do think there are rather too many key words.* Also, everybody needs a break from the manual, including staff.

(Current Course Tutor)

* ['Key words’ are words used in a lesson, with their definitions, to help tutors clarify and confirm students’ understanding of particular ideas. – for example, table-laying is connected to the key word ‘activity’. They are written in bold in the activity instructions, and signal the need for the tutor to check students’ understanding, either orally or in writing on a flip-chart.]

A very good course. It is very intensive for the two tutors. It is important to build up a solid group identity. We had an above average ‘literate’ group this time round (October). It is very hard work and can be stressful for tutors as well as prisoners. There is a great deal of written work for prisoners. You
have to be careful not to put off the guys who struggle with literacy. It is important that prisoners experience other roles and that they understand how things feel from others’ perspectives. The role-play is helpful for that. I feel that a balance must be struck and that they don’t feel overwhelmed with written work. Although it is intensive over 3 weeks, I think it’s better to do it that way than to stretch it over a longer period.

(Education Manager/Previous Course Tutor)

We started with just one ‘file’ of the manual and now there are several. It was also very prescriptive initially, but now we can adapt to the men’s learning styles with a range of exercises. As a teacher, you use your intuition with students and should adapt to their learning styles. You have to respond to the men’s level of maturity and the group dynamics. The ‘dip’ occurs every time on days 4-5 of the course.

(Previous Course Tutor)

I have not seen the latest course. I don’t think they have quite so much flexibility in delivery as we had in the earlier versions. I believe it is quite prescriptive.

(Previous Course Tutor)

Those who knew something of the programme delivery, but were not acquainted with the detail, commented as follows:

I’ve seen several courses but I’m not sure that I am clear about how this new course differs from those that have run before. I found the course an ‘eye-opener’ when I first saw a prisoner presentation. It reminded me of the psychodrama approach they use in Grendon. It challenges what can be a stereotypical view of prisoners, which is good. I think some of the prisoners get a bit of a shock too (with the role-play etc.), but I’ve always been impressed by how they manage it.

(Head of Resettlement)

I don’t have this knowledge, but my staff seem very impressed. Some take an enthusiastic interest in the course and the prisoners they know who participate in it.

(Senior Prison Officer)

I am not familiar with the technicalities of the course, so cannot comment on the new version. I do wish to continue to run this course here and I think that Safe Ground have done very well to obtain feedback from participants and to keep refining it.

(No. 1 Governor)
The above quotations show that staff who know something about the delivery of the programme feel positive about it, but that those closely involved have some observations to make about its intensity and pacing, both for the participants and themselves. Impressions of effectiveness, however, are perhaps best gauged by the actual changes in behaviour and attitude which can be observed in the participants after they have completed the programme. Staff members made a range of observations about such changes as follows:

- Increased self-esteem/confidence
- Some move to become ‘listeners’ or CARAT drug work helpers in the prison
- New skills – notably social and communication – are gained
- They move beyond the offender role
- The way they speak to staff is much better
- Improvement in behaviour and thinking about the responsibilities of parenthood
- Better able to plan
- Less likely to be in trouble in prison
- They move from being angry to being positive about education
- They take up more education

Although parentcraft is the programme’s focus, these observations make it apparent that much wider and more fundamental forms of learning are taking place. Increased confidence constitutes a known building block for continued learning. Developing self-awareness helps to create a framework for reflection, planning, the treatment of others and a focus on the positive. Some of these constituents of the change process are highlighted in the quotations below.

*It is important to remember that prisoners have lives and relationships outside of the prison environment. Instead of always concentrating on offending behaviour, it is important to look at this other aspect of their lives. It is inevitable that some good will come out of that and their doing the course. It is rather difficult for prisoners, but they are encouraged to focus on their relationships and their children. Their aspirations are enormous, but they have no opportunity to test these out ‘inside’. The only way they can demonstrate change is in the way they speak to staff. I have noticed a difference.*

(No. 1 Governor)

*From my perspective in management, an expectation would be that this course stretches people and, as a result, there would be improvement. New skills can be developed. I’ve seen that in the presentations, which have been excellent.*

(Prison Service Area Manager)

*The men grow hugely between Day 1 and the end of the programme. Some men can barely look you in the eye on Day 1, but they develop into people who can present confidently. Their growth in confidence is considerable. There is only a very small percentage of men who don’t develop themselves. I obtained job satisfaction from doing the course and seeing the results, though*
these may not all be long-term. Maybe not all prisoners participate for the right reasons. The extra visit can be tempting as a means to an end - but these men are in the minority, I feel.  

(Previous Course Tutor)

There is a huge increase in confidence; prisoners find it easier to relate to staff; they communicate better; they have a far greater awareness of the responsibilities of parenthood. Men usually say after a course that they will take better care of their children - approximately 70% say this. Men come to understand the value of simple little things about parenting – e.g. playing with children. They grow to understand that it is time spent with children that matters, not merely goods.  

(Education Manager)

As well as describing change, some of these quotations also realistically refer to the drawbacks of a minority who do not visibly develop (though it is arguable that undertaking some education in order to gain a family visit at the end is not a negative aspiration) and of a course which has limited opportunity for immediate application. A more stringent initial screening process might help to reduce the number of men coming on the course for ‘the wrong reasons’, but little can be done to address the second issue, other than for the prison to increase the opportunity for family visits and for criminal justice policy to legislate for more home visits during sentence.

3.6 Staff views of the assessment criteria for ‘Fathers Inside’

In order to meet the requirements of the NOCN Social and Life Skills Parentcraft Unit, Level 1, the programme participants have to meet ten assessment criteria. This is also a means of obtaining evidence of change, both in knowledge and attitudes, and the ability to express these orally and in writing. The assessment criteria are as follows:

1. Identify the main responsibilities of parenthood.
2. Identify the individual rights and needs of parent/s, children and other members of the family.
3. Give examples of the importance of being honest with children.
4. Give examples of situations in which it is important to listen to children.
5. Identify the major stages of a child’s development.
6. Identify and outline basic techniques that might be used to cope with children’s behaviour in given situations.
7. Identify ways in which children learn through daily activities.
8. Suggest ways in which parents can help their children.
9. Identify their own needs as a parent.
10. Suggest a plan of action for beginning to meet these.

When asked whether they saw these assessment criteria as being suitable and relevant to the participants’ needs, all staff members agreed that they were. Those staff particularly familiar with the criteria by virtue of having had to teach the course and undertake the assessment, had no hesitation in agreeing that the criteria were appropriately pitched to the learning needs of these men, and should enable them to progress to further
achievements whilst in prison. However, they also reported that the task of assessment can be a heavy and complex one and that they need dedicated time in which to do it, or more staff to be involved in the process, in the context of an intensive and demanding programme.

3.7 Staff recommendations for the development of ‘Fathers Inside’

The foregoing paragraphs have illustrated a range of staff opinions about the Fathers Inside programme as they view and experience it now. However, many ideas were expressed about the ways in which parenting education, and Fathers Inside in particular, might develop in the future, as outlined below.

- Fathers Inside should be evaluated and spread across other prisons
- Every prisoner should be given the opportunity to participate
- It could play a much more prominent role in the sentence planning and resettlement processes
- Special family learning session visits should be developed
- It should not be delivered in a class-room, but in a spacious room to facilitate movement and drama
- More thought needs to be given to the fit between the men’s learning needs (e.g. if they have dyslexia) and the Level 1 skills
- There is a need to guard against the involvement of paedophiles
- Men leave the course on a ‘high’ and should be able to follow this through immediately with access to more advanced learning
- More drama-based courses like Fathers Inside should be developed
- It is crucial that Course Tutors are well-prepared, have a good relationship, model good team-working, and have dedicated time to spend on the course
- The next Education contract should include a commitment to this course.

From these ideas, a sense can be gained of staff members’ desire that a good quality programme should be enhanced, expanded and further recognised. However, they also incorporate some specific concerns, such as giving further consideration as to how paedophiles may be identified and screened out (a problem for anyone running a course about children – see, e.g. Taylor & Quayle 2003), and how men’s learning needs may be better met. Tutors’ needs also require attention in terms of proper time and space to teach and assess an intense multi-dimensional programme. The quotations below further illustrate many of these points:

I can sing the praises of Safe Ground for the way they have influenced part of my work. It has changed and opened up education. I have some extremely committed staff – my Education Manager grabbed it and ran with it. Ashwell is an ideal place to test out the course. I strongly believe that what we have here should be considered by most prisons. It is such a rewarding experience. I get something out of every presentation that participants do – they are all so different. It is a stimulating experience and it rubs off in their family life. I
can always tell when the course is running because there is a subtle shift in the prison atmosphere.  

(No. 1 Governor)

*Fathers Inside* seems to fit well with our ‘Relate’ initiative (funded by the charity ‘Action for Prisoners’ Families’) where partners and prisoners meet for a day to discuss issues about release from everyone’s perspective. Our Education Dept. and other available space to run *Fathers Inside* is very stretched and I think we should develop a strategic plan to create more suitable accommodation. What is really needed is a new building (for which we have just put in a bid) - then we could run more *Fathers Inside* courses. I would wish to acknowledge the effort and extremely hard work that I have observed put into the running of the *Fathers Inside* course. The teachers contribute some of their spare time to it too, and this is to their great credit. If you are going to make any recommendation about how we could improve the promotion of the course here in Ashwell, I’d very much like to be informed, so that we can keep on trying to make it more effective.

(Head of Resettlement)

I’d like to see an extra Saturday morning visit, where fathers can sit down with their partners and children, and perhaps read together; or fathers can help children with their homework. The emphasis should be on working together as a family. This would, though, be more of a problem where a man has several partners! I’m a huge supporter of parenting education. It is more realistic to ‘teach’ it in this style than in a school-room setting. It is an experiential course, and that’s a much better way of learning.

(Education Manager)

I think that this course could play an important part in prisoner resettlement, especially near the end of a sentence. It is a good option and an incentive in the sentence planning process.

(Senior Prison Officer)

I thoroughly enjoyed teaching the course. It is important to watch for ‘burn-out’ in Tutors, as their job is very demanding. I really believe the course should be delivered by a dedicated ‘threesome’ of Tutors. I do not feel I have been listened to on this point, but I do feel we need more support in this area. In any establishment it is going to be down to the management structure as to how the course is run and how importantly it is regarded. It should be high profile and it can bring a lot of kudos to a Department. When I taught on it there was dedicated time, with some flexibility in course delivery to adapt to some prisoners’ learning styles and needs, and this is the way I think it should be run.

(Previous Course Tutor)

The course needs: more involvement with willing partners; family learning sessions; more post-course family visits so participants can put their learning into practice; a facility to make video tapes for children; Tutors who are free
to concentrate on Fathers Inside, without having to do other teaching and other tasks while the course is running. (Current Course Tutor)

We should have more courses like Fathers Inside. I think it is very effective. I don’t think, however, that the prison has the infrastructure to cope with it adequately. This type of course can change people’s attitudes. You see them practising their skills in groups and they are sometimes not aware that they are doing that! Fathers Inside gets to the fundamental person—and it helps to change people! (Current Course Tutor)

A follow-up discussion with the Education Manager at the end of May 2004 revealed that a number of the above suggestions are now-or about to be- implemented. They included a Family literacy programme on Saturday mornings as part of a Resettlement programme for 40 prisoners in the last year of sentence; a story tape-making facility in the Education Dept; plans for additional Course Tutors to support the running of Fathers Inside; and the imminent refurbishment of the room in which the programme is delivered. The Education Manager considers most of these developments to have stemmed either directly or indirectly from the developing success and high profile of Fathers Inside both within and beyond the prison.

3.8 Fathers Inside and adult learning theory

Overall, this series of observations and staff interviews showed that the programme was well-prepared and delivered, if sometimes dogged by practical or institutionally systemic problems. In terms of adult learning theory, the tenets of Maslow (1954) and Knowles (1998) for example, are much in evidence. Maslow, a humanist psychologist, attempted to define broadly the fundamental, common properties of human nature. He theorised the ability to become self-fulfilled through learning, and other means, in terms of a hierarchy of needs. Thus, people cannot learn and otherwise fulfil themselves unless certain conditions are already present. At the first level of the hierarchy are the food and water necessary for human survival. At the next level is safety – if people do not feel safe they will not feel relaxed or free enough to learn. The third level is love and belonging, the kind of acceptance which is needed by most people in order to flourish and develop personally. The fourth level is self-esteem – and where people are put down, oppressed, not valued within a learning setting, they do not experience the self-esteem which enables them to engage positively in the experience of learning. The final level is that of self-fulfilment through personal and professional development via the process of creativity, new learning, and the acquisition of knowledge and skills.

The absence of self-fulfilment and some of the other levels of human need are liable to lead to states of alienation, not infrequently experienced by those who enter the prison system. Thus, the fact that the Fathers Inside Tutors are taught to recognise the importance of affording prisoners safety, reassurance, acceptance and self-esteem (much of which is acquired through the group process itself), as a consequence of which men
have been able through a creative process, to acquire new skills, appears to be a key factor in the successful delivery of the programme.

In his book *The Adult Learner: A Neglected Species* Knowles (1998) expressed the view that education was still largely dominated by pedagogy (the art and science of teaching children) which becomes less and less appropriate the older people get. Pedagogy, according to Knowles, is a model of teaching whose purpose is the archaic transmission of knowledge. In this model, the role of the teacher is to know more than the learner, and to teach a prescribed body of knowledge. Knowles’ preferred model of andragogy for adult learning introduced a range of principles about teaching and learning which serve as guidelines for good practice. His model, like Maslow’s, is humanistic, focuses on the self-directed learner, and emphasises the place of the self in the learning process. It espouses the following:

**The need to know.** Engagement in learning will tend to take place only where learners can see why they should spend their time and energy on particular issues and tasks, and how it will contribute to their acquisition of knowledge.

**Self-concept.** Learners must understand their own place in the learning process, be involved in its planning, and translate self-diagnosed learning needs into specific educational objectives.

**Experience.** The traditional model of a teacher with sole responsibility for the content of the learning transactions, and the learner as passive recipient is rejected. Instead, the teacher becomes an enabler, a facilitator who assists another to learn. Adults have much to contribute to the learning of others; they have a substantial foundation of past experience which can be related to the present learning experience.

**Readiness to learn.** Specific learning is only likely to occur when the subject matter is directly relevant to the concerns of the learner.

**Orientation towards learning.** This needs to elicit the concerns of the learners about the subject to be studied.

**Motivation to learn.** This is only likely to be present where learners are committed to the relevance of the content of learning, and to its final outcome.

Again, it is clear that *Fathers Inside* operates this model of learning by making tasks relevant to the fatherhood role, by facilitating men to learn from the fund of their own experience, through flexibility, listening to and acting upon the men’s own concerns, and motivating them to achieve educationally.

### 3.9 In summary

The foregoing sections have sought to describe the *Fathers Inside* programme as delivered at HMP Ashwell during October 2003. They have drawn on evidence from relevant documents, from direct researcher observation, and from staff views and experiences. This evidence shows that Tutors are well-trained and prepared to deliver the programme, and that they ‘cascade down’ to the men the andragogical teaching and learning models provided for them by Safe Ground staff, including the representation of
the ‘consumer view’. In turn it is hoped that the men will reproduce these models in their own relationships with their children – and evidence for this will be discussed in the two ensuing chapters.

The evidence shows, too, that from the point of view of a range of staff associated in a variety of ways with the programme, Fathers Inside is not only highly effective in improving fathering skills, but delivers the ‘added value’ of increased self-esteem, other new skills, improved behaviour within the prison, and inspiration to continue in education.

There is no doubt that the portfolio work for men, and accompanying assessment task for staff, is demanding on both groups but, in terms of NOCN requirements and of the longer-term resettlement implications for men of certificated achievement, it is difficult to see how this can be avoided. However, given that 2 key suggestions for improvement from staff – i.e. extra Tutors attached to each programme and refurbishment of the classroom where Fathers Inside is delivered – are apparently now due to be implemented, this should relieve some of the existing pressure on delivery and assessment.
Chapter 4. After the Programme: views from participants

The data presented in the previous chapter demonstrated overall that those observing and those involved at some level in programme delivery considered Fathers Inside to be an educationally sound and inspirational model for improving fathering skills. Their responses were, at least to some extent, based upon their knowledge of prisoners’ views and behaviour changes – but clearly, this evidence remains to be triangulated from ‘the horse’s mouth’! This chapter, therefore, presents the post-programme views of the October group participants, also incorporating data from two men who undertook the programme 4 years ago at HMP Gartree and nine who undertook the programme at Ashwell in June 2003. Eliciting the responses of the June group provided the researchers with a helpful piloting process for the substantive October group study. The retrospective views and experiences of both groups added to the fund of data about the effects of the programme and, on occasion, provided some insights about its development over time. (See Appendix 1B for participant post-programme interview schedule.)

In addition, the partners/carers of the children of eight of the 17 October group participants were interviewed, either in their homes or by telephone, between 2 weeks and 4 months after the end of the programme. (See Appendix 3 for partner/carer interview schedule.) Three age-appropriate children for whom contact details were available to the researchers were interviewed in person at their homes. (See Appendix 4 for child interview schedule.) The researchers made stringent and repeated efforts, right up to the end of May 2004, to contact the remaining partners/carers to set up further interviews with them and their children (with the addition of two released October group participants whom it had not been possible to track down). However, there comes a point when data collection has to cease and, in this case, there are enough respondents in the participant and partner data set to constitute an adequate sample from which to elicit a reliable range of views.

In the case of the children, as Table 1 (Chapter 1) shows, the majority of these men were in the 21-30 age group, with children in the age range 2-8 years. Great care and sensitivity has to be afforded to the matter of interviewing children, especially given the potential distress for them of discussing their father’s imprisonment. It is also necessary that their parents (both, if possible) feel happy about this process. Thus, for a combination of these reasons, together with families not arriving for visits on days when they had agreed to meet the researcher, complex child-care arrangements, unobtainable telephone numbers and so on, it was possible to interview only 3 children (all girls aged between 5 and 7 years) out of the total of 43 belonging to these men. This is a little disappointing, but is a difficulty experienced in other similar studies. Boswell & Wedge (2002), for example, succeeded in interviewing only around 7% of the children in their sample – a similar proportion to those in the current study – and for very similar reasons.

The data obtained from participant responses will be presented in the following sections. Partner/carer and children’s responses will be presented in Chapter 5.
4.1 The two life sentence prisoners

Two men, who were serving life sentences, had participated in an early version of Fathers Inside when it was being trialled at HMP Gartree 4 years previously. They had subsequently been transferred to Ashwell, had retained an interest in the programme’s development and had been invited to the presentation by the October group. They will be referred to here as Mike and Matthew. They are both White British, both in their early 30s and both serving life for murder, with a minimum of 3-4 years still to serve before their release can be considered by the Parole Board. Mike has a 16 year old son; Matthew has no partner and no children, but wanted to equip himself with parenting skills for the future.

Matthew, an only child, did not have a happy childhood. His parents separated when he was one year old. His father went to prison several times and Matthew felt he ‘didn’t have a Dad’. He received material goods from both his parents, but not the love and attention he craved from them. He felt that parents should stay together for their children’s sake and that he would do this himself. Matthew had no experience of children until he studied child development in a college psychology course when he was 18, and went on to become a primary school support worker, helping children to read and write. Thus, in Matthew’s case, the attainment of knowledge about children and how they develop was probably of secondary importance to the personal growth and learning he gained from the experiential dimension of the programme. Four years on, this is how he describes it:

It changed me as an individual, to the extent that I want to pass on to others what I’ve learned, and to be able to help others who experienced a rather unsatisfactory upbringing, like me. It taught me that I am an intrinsically valuable person, and can offer my skills and experiences to help others. It helped me to re-assert myself more positively as an individual, and to take more responsibility for myself and how I behave. All staff, inside prison and out, who know me, say I am a changed person. The course was fun and the two tutors were charismatic and inspirational. Every form of education is a learning curve, and it is important to apply what you learn in a practical way. We must keep kids out of prison!

Mike believed himself to be an only child, but learned, after his mother died 5 years ago, that he had a younger half-brother placed for adoption, whom he had never known about (and has still not contacted for fear of upsetting him). Mike’s biological father left home shortly after his birth and Mike has retained only sporadic contact with him over the years. He was brought up by his mother and stepfather. His mother was imprisoned twice for fraud and his stepfather was extremely strict, a heavy drinker and bad-tempered – though he looked after Mike when his mother was in prison, and some of the time they got on well.

Mike became a father when he was 16 and his girlfriend 15. They stayed together for 4 years, but Mike continued to commit offences and go to prison, so their relationship did
not last. His girlfriend, with whom his son has always lived, is now married with a second child. She has been supportive of the continuing relationship between Mike and their son Sam, and ensures that Sam comes to visit Mike at least once a month. Mike was the only prisoner to whom the researchers spoke who had positive contact with his ex-girlfriend’s partner, who clearly also helps to facilitate the relationship between Sam and his father. Mike describes some of the features of his contact with Sam, now aged 16, as follows:

Sam misses me and I know that his Mum has to deal with his behaviour as a result. It is not too drastic though, apart from some truanting from school. Sam and I have a close relationship, but he doesn’t always find it easy to open up about things. I feel my own experience had an adverse effect on my attitude to parenting. I certainly don’t treat my son like I was treated by my stepfather. I try and explain things to Sam and I try not to preach. I value our relationship. I think Sam puts up with ‘ordinary’ visits because he wants to see his Dad. He doesn’t like the experience of being searched but certainly enjoys the ‘Family Day’ visits (which life sentence prisoners are allowed twice a year).

In respect of Fathers Inside 4 years on, Mike had the following observations to make:

My biggest piece of learning was the importance of communication. Whatever the communication, it is better to be a distant rather than a non-existent father. It raised my awareness of what children are missing out on while we are in prison. I also learned how important it is to do ‘joint’ things. The course encouraged me to write more often to my son and helped me realise the importance of contact with him from the prison, as well as outside. I’m much more aware of child development issues now and I take an interest in Sam’s education. The course also gave me much more confidence generally – e.g. to speak in public.

In relation to the wider impact of the programme on life in the prison, Mike was a little more cynical:

At first, the Prison (Gartree) was very keen. I suspect ‘politics’ played a part. However, I think they gave the two course tutors a hard time occasionally – they don’t really like such dynamic people with new ideas upsetting the norm!

On a scale of 1-10 about the quality of the programme in terms of its usefulness, delivery, resources, level of learning and promotion of behavioural and attitudinal change, both Mike and Matthew scored 8s, 9s, and 10s (where 10 was ‘very high’). It was striking how much learning they both remembered from the programme after 4 years, and how Mike was continuing to apply this learning to his relationship with his teenage son.
4.2 The nine June 2003 programme participants

The June 2003 version of Fathers Inside represented the final stage of the trialling of the programme at Ashwell. The course writer from Safe Ground had attended programme lessons and interviewed participants and Course Tutors to create the final version of Lessons 1-18 and draft versions of Lessons 19-30. Based on feedback from the June programme, minor adjustments to Lesson plans and to ‘troubleshooting’ points for Tutors were made in time for the October 2003 programme. Twenty men attended the June programme, of whom nine were still at Ashwell when the research commenced in September 2003. (It is important to note here that the average length of a prisoner’s stay in Ashwell is 17 weeks, so the process of following up prisoners either for research purposes or to encourage them to progress to other relevant educational programmes at Ashwell is limited by this situation.) However, the characteristics of the nine remaining men were strikingly similar to those of the October group described in Chapter 2. That is to say firstly that there is a close correspondence between the two groups in terms of spread of ages, ethnic origin, sentence length, number of previous prison sentences and offence type (see Tables 1-5). This may well be related to the type of prisoners catered for by Ashwell, a Category ‘C’ prison.

Secondly, there is a similarity in the proportion and range of current family relationships, and in participants’ experiences of being reared and fathered themselves (§§ 2.2, 2.3). A rather exceptional factor in the life of one member of the June group however, was that he was born as a result of his mother having been raped. He never knew his natural father, but grew up believing his stepfather was his real father. His mother told him what had happened only after his natural father died a few years ago, and after his maternal grandmother, with whom he had lived for part of his childhood, also died. He was still coming to terms with this situation at the time of the programme.

Thirdly, in terms of their relationships with their own children, the ages of the June group at birth of their first child clustered around 25-28 years rather than the somewhat younger 19-22 cluster in the October group (see Table 9). Frequency of visits, telephone calls, letters and story tapes was, however, spread similarly to that of the October group (see Table 10) – though there was one man who, even after having completed the Fathers Inside programme, resolutely refused to receive visits from anyone, including his 8 year old daughter, because he considered the process to be too upsetting for everyone involved. (He did, however, speak to her by telephone 3 times a week, and was pressing for what he considered to be an overdue move to a Category ‘D’ prison, from where he would be eligible for home leave.)

The range and spread of hopes for Fathers Inside were elicited retrospectively from the June group (i.e. after they had completed the Programme) but, again, these appeared very similar in nature to those expressed by the October group (see § 2.7). As with the October group, none of these men had previously experienced formal parenting education.
Overall, then, the characteristics and hopes of the two groups for Fathers Inside were sufficiently similar for their views about the programme after completion to be treated as a single sample, with any notable differences in response trends being highlighted. Remembering that two men from the October group could not be contacted after release, it is thus a population of 24 men which forms the post-programme interview sample.

4.3 Participants’ views of the usefulness of ‘Fathers Inside’

These 24 respondents were asked to say what they found to be the most useful and least useful aspects of the programme. Where there were several answers in one category, these are listed in a bullet point section and are followed by a section which outlines a range of single answers. Short quotations are drawn upon to illustrate some of the personal circumstances of these men.

The most useful aspects of the programme were seen as follows:

- Group discussions: sharing opinions, experiences and tips; bonding with other fathers (10 men)
- Legal rights: including fathers’ rights to contact schools, receive school reports, and photographs; children’s and grandparents’ rights (8 men)
- Communication techniques with children (7 men)
- Role plays: not always easy, but providing insights into others’ perspectives (7 men)
- How to play with children (4 men)
- How to read to children: using inflection, commas etc. (3 men)
- Making story tapes: choosing/writing stories (3 men)
- Dealing with bad behaviour: offering alternatives (2 men)
- How to speak to children on the telephone (2 men)
- How to make decisions (2 men)
- Children’s health issues (2 men)
- Tutor perspectives: as teachers, women and mothers (2 men)
- General parenting techniques (2 men)

Other single comments comprised: child development; portfolio (reflective) work; explaining things to children; group rules and confidentiality; expressing emotions; answering children’s questions; motivational skills; presentational skills; understanding a child’s need for love and attention; learning about activities to share with children; the Family Day (though much more follows about this in later sections).

Clearly, a huge range of learning has taken place for these men and the following quotations highlight the centrality of the teaching/learning techniques of the programme, in which peer learning is particularly powerful:

Through the group discussions, I learned that no two fathers handle a situation with their children in the same way. I picked up some really useful tips from other Dads. I also learned how not to do things. It was so helpful to
hear about new techniques, tricks, experiences from the other guys. We really ‘bonded’ and are still supportive to each other, even though the programme finished some time ago.

The role plays were very good – sometimes difficult to do, but they brought people out of their shells. The Tutors were very good – they facilitated everything. It made me think differently about being a child and being a parent. It was good to share opinions and to reassess your own.

Many prisoners were appreciative of techniques they were taught for communicating better with their children. Here is one example:

I think that I’ve always been a responsible and responsive parent, but the programme taught me new techniques for communicating and interacting with the children. Most of all, I learned how important it is to get down on the floor with them to play, to lift them up to my level for reading books, doing puzzles etc. This has really helped me relate better to my own children.

When asked what they considered to be less useful aspects of the programme, the responses were as follows:

| No aspects that weren’t useful | (12 men) |
| Intensity of programme over a short period | (8 men) |
| The portfolio completion and ‘homework’ | (7 men) |
| Unsatisfactory room for programme delivery | (7 men) |
| Unnecessary/repetitive warm-up exercises | (4 Oct. men) |
| Certificates should be received sooner | (2 Oct. men) |

The single comments were: a smaller group would make better allowance for individual learning styles; greater clarity needed from Tutors about Lesson learning points; some Lessons upsetting for a man who had no contact with one of his children; some aspects of ‘Wayne and Frank’ (video about a child visiting his father in prison) too close for comfort; discussion on smacking children was distressing (June group participant); programme not publicised enough; programme should be part of sentence planning options; the end of programme presentation needed better ‘props’; the level of work required by the programme merits more credits.

The above responses reflect the fact that half of these men found nothing in the programme that was not useful, and that the other half listed a number of points between them. It will be remembered that those staff members most closely involved in the programme delivery commented on the drawbacks of the short, intensive nature of the programme, the amount of portfolio work and the limitations of the room in which the programme had to be delivered. Clearly, the comments of a sizeable group (although not a majority) of participants corroborated these points. The views of one man provide an example:
The programme is too intensive, too much written work, too much homework, no time for yourself, TV or socialising with friends on the Unit. I daren’t leave the homework for a night, in case I forgot what we had done before the next day’s session. I think it would be better if the programme was held in half day seminars over a longer period. Or it could be held on Mondays, Tuesdays, Thursdays and Fridays, so you’d have Wednesdays and weekends to catch up on homework and portfolio work. You’d still have personal time that way too.

The room was usually a mess from being used for Association the night before. The two Tutors had to clean it up each morning and shouldn’t have had to do this. We had curtains for the external windows, but people could still peer in through the internal windows and we felt we had no privacy and were being laughed at when we were playing games etc.

The comments made by single or small numbers of prisoners are clearly of importance, but also inevitably reflect, to some extent, personal learning styles and needs as well as discussions which have arisen within particular programme groups. It is also necessary to remember that there was a considerable ethnic and cultural mix within these two groups, which would not be untypical for other such groups in Ashwell. Perceptions through a cultural lens do differ, as one Black British Caribbean participant pointed out:

I wondered if there was a cultural difference in our group. Some fathers said they would smack their children and send them to bed for bad behaviour. I said I would just raise my voice – send the children upstairs, then when things had calmed down, talk things through with them. My son was a really ‘terrible two’ and I had to sort that out quickly. I just wondered if different approaches had a cultural link.

Fathers Inside does provide a range of ethnic images in its course materials, but this man’s comments are an important reminder of the need not to make cultural assumptions and to open such issues out for discussion. Safe Ground’s *modus operandi* is to seek feedback from each programme and to modify where necessary; it is apparent that the course content and structure is always under review. The responses of men from these two groups act as a reminder that the need to work with personal learning styles (which may also be cultural) and encourage people to talk over any individual problems is an ongoing challenge for course writers and Tutors. As recorded in Chapter 3, the programme delivery room is now being refurbished – not necessarily the ideal solution, but certainly an improvement upon the *status quo*. 
4.4 Programme influences on parental behaviour and attitudes

Participants were invited to reflect upon the ways in which Fathers Inside had influenced (if at all) their behaviour and attitudes as a parent. Only three men said it had not, but did not express this in a negative fashion, rather asserting that they felt they had always been good fathers and that the programme had reinforced this belief for them:

*I realise I’ve been lucky the way I was brought up. I don’t seem to be doing things too differently from what’s expected.*

If these fathers’ self-assessments are correct, it perhaps reinforces the research findings referred to in § 2.2, to the effect that good parenting models may well be replicated by succeeding generations.

However, the other 21 men, many of whom also considered that they had hitherto been parenting reasonably well (and were pleased to have this reinforced by the Course Tutors and their own peers), nevertheless listed between them a large number of changes in behaviour and attitude. Most of these changes were expressed in rather singular fashion, as signified by the low figures attached to the succeeding bullet points:

- **Active** listening to children (7 men)
- Talking to children as people in their own right (3 men)
- Respecting children (2 men)
- Trusting children (2 men)
- Listening to how things are for their mother (2 men)
- Communicating with children on their own (physical) level (2 men)
- Asking for children’s views and giving them choices (2 men)
- Making children feel important and wanted (2 men)
- Praising children for their small achievements (2 men)
- Realising you can still be an effective father from prison through visits, telephone calls, letters, cards and story tapes (2 men)
- Simply giving children more time [in some of the above ways] (2 men)

Two other single responses comprised teaching children through play and giving children small pieces of responsibility to help them develop.

This is a thoughtful set of responses across both groups. Clearly, particular aspects of interacting with their children have differing levels of meaning and significance to individual men. In the round, however, they show how effectively the constituents of good communication with children, based on those children’s perceptions and developmental needs, have been put across to these participants.
4.5 Effects of the programme on participants’ sense of responsibility to children and their mothers/carers

The participants were asked whether the programme had helped them to think about or re-assess their responsibilities towards their children and towards the children’s mother. The same three men who earlier said they felt they had always been good fathers reiterated here that they already took their responsibilities to their children seriously. Only one of these, however, referred to his sense of responsibility towards his child’s mother:

I am not with her any more, but she has always been a good mother to our 6 year old and we have brought her up between us. The course has just reinforced for me that I should appreciate the fact that she is amenable and keeps me and our child in touch while I am in here. It’s reminded me how important it is for parents to stay on good terms for the child’s sake.

Of the remaining 23 men, all said that they now felt a greater sense of responsibility towards their children and several mentioned a programme ‘brain-storming’ exercise about responsibility which had brought this home to them. In contrast to the reaction of the man referred to in the previous section, 2 men reported themselves profoundly affected by the ‘Wayne and Frank’ video, particularly in terms of the realisation that they could still continue to be fathers from ‘inside’. One said:

That video really made me think. I could see how much Wayne missed his Dad. I suddenly realised the effect my absence must be having on my little boy and that I should give him more time when he comes on visits. For example, I never thought of helping him with his homework before.

It was, perhaps, less encouraging that only about half of the group of 23 referred to feeling a greater sense of responsibility towards the mother of their children. This is likely to be a function of the complex and sometimes strained family situations in which some find themselves. A small number are not in touch with their children and this is usually because, for whatever reason, the children’s mothers do not wish to be in touch with these fathers. (This is a reminder of the power of the ‘gatekeeper’, as referenced in § 2.6.) It is possible that a small number of other men do not see the importance of this responsibility and of the need to concern themselves with the well-being of the mothers or carers (in a minority of cases, the men’s own mothers). One man who did see this need described it thus:

I have a 2 year old daughter, Naomi. I have never lived with my partner (her mother) and I don’t know if we’ll stay together, but I have always financially supported them and been involved in my daughter’s upbringing. I know her mother will always allow me to be a father to Naomi. But doing the programme has helped me to see that it’s not all about myself. I was very selfish. My family are part of my life and what I do affects them. I have to think more about this, discuss plans with them and make sure any decisions...
It is striking how this man speaks in the first person, a first step to taking responsibility for one’s actions. His situation, which is greatly helped by his partner’s goodwill, is nevertheless not completely straightforward; some participants in each programme are likely to be experiencing similar or greater levels of complexity. While the programme can seek to encourage responsibility towards children’s mothers/carers, it cannot aspire always to overcome some of the obstacles (particularly lack of contact) which prevent this. This is one example of the tensions which can arise in the process of teaching the ideal but working with the sometimes disappointing reality.

4.6 The effect of the programme on participants’ relationships with their children

To an extent this issue, which is about improved parenting skills – a central aim of the programme – is covered in some of the data presented in the foregoing sections of this chapter. Nevertheless, it is important to confirm here that all these men (with the exception of the same three who previously reported that they had always had good relationships with their children) considered that their relationships had improved as a result of the programme. Men reiterated that they talked more to their children, listened more to them, played with them more on visits, took them more seriously, respected them more, telephoned them more and generally thought about them more. Most considered that this new pro-activity had brought about improved relationships with their children even though they were still in prison – though, clearly, this could not be the case with those who had little or no contact with their children. Increased confidence as a result of acquiring new knowledge and practising parenting skills on the programme, however, was a feature mentioned at some point in their interviews by the majority of participants – and this served as a key building-block for development in a number of spheres:

I’ve learned so much about the importance of child development. It’s made me much more aware of how important the first 5 years of bringing up my daughter are to her future stability. I take visits much more seriously now. Before, I just thought “Oh, I’m seeing my girlfriend and baby” (12 months old). Now I make eye contact with her and talk to her, even if it’s only rubbish, whereas before I didn’t bother talking to her much. I can see her responding and I’m so glad I didn’t leave it any later to do this. This programme, together with the Enhanced Thinking Skills (ETS) programme, has helped me to look at my crime, see what’s important, and make different choices. Both courses have given me the confidence to go back to college and improve my education.

Another way in which 4 men reported that they had implemented new knowledge gained from the programme was through making contact with their children’s schools. This feedback came only from men on the October programme, which suggests that the issues perhaps received greater emphasis in that programme, or that men were more strongly
encouraged to carry their learning through into action. As one of them in particular observed:

_I’ve taken the initiative myself to contact the school and have now received a school report which I’ve been able to discuss with my children. It’s good to feel I can do something useful._

Overall, then, the men’s responses to this question afford a sense that they have not only taken learning on board but moved on to turn awareness into practice in their interactions with their children.

4.7 Help from prison staff to improve participants’ contact with children and with the resettlement process

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the views of men in respect of help received from prison staff were rather mixed. This partly depended on the individual experiences they had had, and partly on their attitudes to prison staff generally (some of which they later reported had improved during the course of undertaking the programme).

Dealing with the positive responses first, 12 men out of the group of 24 felt that prison staff had helped them with child contact; 2 specifically mentioned help with resettlement. (That the latter was not mentioned by name by more prisoners probably reflects the fact that the Resettlement Unit at Ashwell is very new and not all these participants had yet come within its remit.) One of these men commented, “The Resettlement Team do their best in Ashwell.” The other said, “They have arranged a number of courses for me and these will be helpful for when I get out.” Of the 12 men who felt that prison staff had helped them with child contact, most considered that the help had been present in the provision and organisation of Fathers Inside, family visits, story-taping facilities and the Family Day at the end of the programme. One man had received specific assistance from staff, who had allowed him to telephone his partner and child in Spain. Another had been helped to deal with arrears from a property in which he had previously lived.

There was much praise for the Family Day, which had been eagerly awaited by the men as the culmination of the programme. It was variously described as ‘brilliant’, ‘fantastic’ and ‘wicked’. Men had very much appreciated the freedom to move about, play and eat with their children and said it aided contact and communication. However, the June group had had a wholly positive experience of the Family Day, whereas the October group experienced its delay and curtailment because of staff shortages. Some of them had felt frustrated and negative about this. “Prison Service ideals are not always evident in their practice”, said one October participant. “Prison staff are not always courteous and considerate to you” said another.
Again, though, there was a small core of men who felt that contact with their children was their responsibility and not that of prison staff:

> It’s down to the individual to make sure they have a continuous relationship with their child – and I’ve always made sure I maintained excellent contact with my partner and children.

Non-uniformed staff are not necessarily viewed by prisoners as prison staff. However, most men were appreciative of the help and encouragement given to them by the Education staff, and the Course Tutors in particular.

> The Course Tutors were very patient and very good. I think it was hard work for them.

Finally, 7 men observed that they thought Fathers Inside should become part of the sentence planning process, along with other programmes, and that this would mean more prison staff becoming familiar with it and understanding what it entails for participants.

### 4.8 The effect of the programme on relationships with prison staff, other prisoners and life in the prison

Respondents’ answers to these questions tended to be along mixed lines similar to those in the previous section. In respect of fellow prisoners on the programme, the impact of the ‘bonding’ process was clearly profound, and the group members were continuing to support each other. Five out of the 9 June group and 10 out of the 17 October group participants referred to the importance of this for helping them to open up and share feelings and experiences both about being parents and about their own childhoods. This had enabled some of them to talk more openly with other prisoners outside the programme about their children and families, where previously this might have been considered a ‘non-macho’ topic of conversation. By October, the programme had become better known than it had been in June and most October participants found that other prisoners were asking them what it was like. Many were recommending the programme to others, though one man did say “I look at the type of person they are and think what they’d be like on the programme. As a result, I recommend the programme to some, but not to others!”

Most of the June group commented that they now got on well with prison staff (though some always had done so). One said:

> Doing the programme has brought me closer to staff, and they understand more about what we do. The responsible Governor knows us all better too, and involves herself in family issues. Some other prison staff have made complimentary remarks about the programme.
On the other hand:

*Most prison staff seem indifferent to what we are trying to do on the programme. And we get a bit of criticism from some staff and prisoners – for example, when they saw us playing ‘Ring-a-ring-a-roses’. Some staff have laughed at us.* (October group participant)

*I was disappointed that not one prison officer came to our group’s presentation. I thought that was awful.* (June group participant)

Four men observed that female prison staff tended to be more interested in and sympathetic to the programme than male staff, possibly reflecting the influence of gender identities in a predominantly masculine situation.

The participants were able to list a number of benefits of the programme for prison life generally, as follows:

- The programme disrupts normal prison routine; Ashwell has managed to adapt to this.
- It brings out men’s more sensitive sides and shows they don’t have to go around being ‘hard’ all the time.
- Muslims were still able to perform their prayers for Ramadan.
- Prisoners’ attitudes to staff improve because the programme teaches them empathy.
- Prisoners’ views about the programme are listened to by Safe Ground (for example, they were asked to come and talk to the research team about their experiences prior to the evaluation) – so they feel respected.
- People in the prison are seeing that a lot of fathers can (and should) benefit from doing this programme.

Overall, it would appear that *Fathers Inside* is becoming known in Ashwell, is making some (mainly positive) waves and producing a range of reactions. This would suggest that the programme is beginning to have the desired effect of its designers on prisoners, prison staff and the prison system.

**4.9 The influence of the programme on resettlement, further education and future offending**

Given the content of much of the material already presented, it is, perhaps, no surprise to find here that all 24 participants believed that the learning from *Fathers Inside* had positively influenced their attitudes and behaviour in respect of resettlement; this was true of 23 in respect of re-offending. (One first-time prisoner was continuing to maintain his innocence and had been granted an appeal: “I am not a criminal”.)

In respect of attitudes and behaviour towards future education, there were only two participants (one from each group) who said that their outlooks had not been changed by the programme, simply because they already felt positive about education. A flavour of the positive responses to these issues is provided in the following quotations:
**Resettlement**

Before the programme, the children’s mother and I used to fight, but now I feel I can take a step back and take stock before I respond. She was frightened to tell me she had a new partner, but I think she finds me OK now and this is also partly because I’m not on drugs anymore.

The Family Day really made an impact on me. I realise that the most important thing about being a father is learning to put your children first. That’s what I’ll be doing on release.

I’ve become much more open with people in general since I’ve done the course. It built up my self-confidence, which was very low before. I’d like to work with disadvantaged, disabled or elderly people on release. I used to be a chef in a Care-home and I would do that again.

**Education**

Doing both Fathers Inside and ETS has influenced me to go back to college (where I was before I got into offending). I’ve learned how to make ‘legal’ choices now and that this will improve my parenting and my home situation.

Since Fathers Inside I’ve done the ‘Family and Relationships’ course. I feel that these courses are all helping me to sort out my own behaviour problems, so that I’ll be better able to help my son with any problems he might have. The most important thing is that I can start to be a good example to my son.

Doing the programme made me realise how other people feel and especially how my children will have been affected by my absence. I was really surprised to learn how it is possible to go on being a father from prison, though, and I have been doing this through telephone conversations, cards and letters especially. But I also realised I have to educate myself into legal employment. So I have done a Community Sports Leaders Association (CSLA) course and am just waiting to hear about my assessment. I am also working towards a CSLA Gym and Sports Leaders Award, which I can use on release. I’d really like to use this in community work with 15-16 year olds.

**Re-offending**
*Fathers Inside* made me take a long look at my life and re-evaluate where I was going. It has given me an incentive I didn’t have before to avoid re-offending.

The programme has made me think. Time served in prison is time lost with my children.

I know more now about how to be a better parent and I’ve learned that you have to consider your child first before your own needs. *Fathers Inside* has also helped me develop better thinking skills, which I will use to help me stay out of prison.

Overall, these quotations from across the June-October groups show that these men are continuing to make clear links between their learning from *Fathers Inside* and the implications for their future behaviour on release. Generally, the programme is affording them access to thinking and problem-solving for the future. Some behaviour changes are already apparent – for example, in implementing parenting from prison and undertaking further education to equip participants for legal employment. What remains to be seen is whether these men’s expressed determination to prioritise their children’s needs over their own in future will translate into practice, and whether the newly-found self-confidence which many of them felt they had acquired would constitute a sure foundation for developing a more legitimate and stable form of life to the benefit of their children.

4.10 Participants’ ratings of key aspects of ‘Fathers Inside’

After the programme, participants were asked to rate on a scale of 1-10 how effective they thought it was in terms of usefulness, delivery, resources, expected impact on parenting behaviour and attitudes, and levels of learning. Table 12 below shows these results.

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<tr>
<th>Table 12: Participant ratings of the effectiveness of ‘Fathers Inside’ (N = 24)</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>ASPECTS OF EFFECTIVENESS</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Usefulness</td>
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<td>Delivery</td>
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<td>Expected impact on parenting</td>
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<td>behaviour &amp; attitudes</td>
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<td>Level of learning</td>
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<td><strong>TOTALS</strong></td>
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The bottom row of total scores shows that point 10, the highest on the scale, was most frequently scored by these programme participants, across all aspects of effectiveness. One hundred out of a possible 120 ratings were scored between 7 and 10 – that is to say, in the top third of the scale. By any standards, this is impressive. Data and quotations
from previous sections have already adequately highlighted the reasons for participants’
satisfaction with the programme’s usefulness, and actual/anticipated impact on
behaviour, attitudes and learning levels. However, some representation of their views
about programme delivery and resources is apposite here.

**Delivery**

Here, 20 out of 24 participants have scored in the 7-10 range. Most men found the style
of delivery of the Course Tutors from both programmes encouraging, warm and
facilitative, and were very appreciative of the hard work which they could see the Tutors
were putting into the programme. The 4 men who scored 6 (still in the top half of the
scale) made comments as follows:

*I felt that sometimes the Tutors were a bit short with us.*

*The tasks we had to do weren’t always clearly described to us.*

*S sometimes they let the course get into overload.*

*Where the material got complicated, they could have given us a few more practical examples.*

Clearly, it would be invidious to draw conclusions on the basis of these single comments.
Working with a group of 20 prisoners, often men with difficult and damaged
backgrounds with, as we have seen, a profile of violent offending, is a huge challenge for
any teacher. It would be surprising if their patience and good humour did not slip
occasionally. Previous sections of this report have also referred to the intensity and
demands of this programme in terms of portfolio work and ‘homework’. Again, this is
likely to produce tensions for Tutors in terms of the balance between teaching and
learning of what, to some learners, may appear to be complex material. It is, perhaps, a
further reminder of the continuing need to try and integrate individual learning styles into
the programme.

**Resources**

Again, the majority of participants (18) scored this aspect of the programme in the 7-10
range. The actual course materials were much appreciated, even though some prisoners
struggled with the work they had to put into the portfolios, journals and folders with
which they were provided. The two men who scored 1 and 2 respectively for this aspect
of the programme did not give detailed reasons for so doing: “The resources were very
poor … they could have done better” and “… the room and materials could have been
much better”.

However, it is possible to infer from other comments made by these men in their
interviews, and from those of other men in the group, that any disaffection with resources
really relates to the previously described inadequacy of the room in terms of size, décor
and privacy. One of the men who scored a 5 was disappointed that they were given re-
used A4 ring-binders in which to keep their work.
4.11 In summary

Programme participants’ scores on the effectiveness rating scale described in § 4.10 serve to encapsulate their views of its quality, and they are, clearly, extremely high. The foregoing sections have shown continuing positive and frequently enthusiastic responses to respondents’ learning on the programme, whether they attended it 4 years or 3-5 months previously. All 3 groups of prisoners could remember specific pieces of learning from the programme and were able to describe attitudinal shifts and some behaviour changes which they had already made. The self-esteem derived from the group ‘bonding’ process and from their achievements on the course had made a particular impact on them. They also described increased levels of responsibility to their children and, in some cases, their children’s mothers/carers, though there were clearly some complex family situations which appeared to preclude the kind of contact in which responsibility could be expressed. There were mixed views about the impact of the programme upon prison staff and other prisoners but, on the whole, it appeared that Fathers Inside was becoming noticed, participants’ attitudes to staff becoming more positive and prisoners becoming motivated to apply for the programme.

Their responses showed that the vast majority of these men could make clear links between the work they had done on the programme and the 3 elements of resettlement, further education and potential re-offending, in support of their re-prioritised focus upon their children. There were, nevertheless, some concerns which largely chimed with those of staff, relating to resources (mainly the ‘delivery’ room) and to programme intensity and workload. These matters require ongoing consideration, particularly in terms of individual learning needs and styles.

It is also important to note that these responses appear to constitute a fulfilment of the range of hopes for the programme set out in § 2.7, from general desires to be a good father to specific aims in terms of improving relationships with children, learning about legal rights and being in contact with children from prison.

However, important as the ‘consumer view’ is in this study it is instructive, also, to gain a view from the potential recipients of some of the learning, changed attitudes and behaviour which have been described in this chapter – the mothers or carers of the participants’ children. It is their responses to which the next chapter will turn its attention.
Chapter 5. ‘Fathers Inside’: views from partners/child-carers and children

For reasons explained at the beginning of Chapter 4, it was difficult to secure as many partner/carer and children interviews as had been originally hoped. However, the group of 8 partners/carers whose responses are described in this and the following three sections does constitute almost a 50% sample, which would normally be expected to be sufficient to represent the possible range of views across the population. However, in studying these findings, it is necessary to be aware that any sample obtained from a ‘hard-to-find’ research population may, by its nature, contain open-minded and co-operative respondents who may, accordingly, be disposed to make positive comment.

The group of 8 respondents described herein comprised 5 partners, 2 mothers and one sister of men who had completed the October programme. Two were visited in their own homes and six were interviewed by telephone for reasons either of geography or respondents’ own preference.

5.1 Partner/carer characteristics

Four out of the 5 partners were mothers of single children aged between 7 months and 2 years old. The fifth was the mother of 2 children, aged 3 and 5 years. These partners had been in relationships with the programme participants (4 of whom were of black and one of white ethnic origin) for periods ranging from 2 to 7 years. One was in a relationship with a prisoner who had 4 other children, each by a different mother, with none of whom he had ever lived (including the current partner). He nevertheless retained contact with all his children and his current partner brought one of these children to visit him, together with their own child on a fortnightly basis. A second man did not live with his partner and child but, nevertheless, he took an active part in both their lives.

Of the two participants’ mothers who were interviewed, one (together with the participant) had a Residence Order for his 2 daughters, their mother not having been able to cope with them, partly because of drug addiction; the other had the same arrangement for similar reasons, in respect of one of her son’s children, the other being cared for by both children’s natural mother. Contact with this older child was spasmodic and tended to depend on the ‘mood’ of her natural mother, who now had a new partner, also in prison. The participant’s sister, who was interviewed, lived with their mother and the sister’s own small child. Her brother’s 6 year old son had regular visiting and staying contact with their family, hence her ability to bring the child to visit his father at Ashwell. Of these 3 participants whose children were living or regularly staying with their mothers, two were of white ethnic origin and one described himself as ‘mixed race’. The ages of their children ranged from 4 to 7 years. The ages of the children living with the 5 partners ranged from 7 months to 5 years. This closely reflects the age range of children across the whole sample, with a concentration around the younger 2-8 year spectrum.
5.2 Partners’/carers’ awareness of and feelings about prisoners’ participation in ‘Fathers Inside’

It was established at the outset of the interview that none of these respondents had had any experience of formal parenting education themselves. Some had had involvement with children within their own or friends’ families; others had the experience of bringing up only their own children.

The respondents were asked whether they were aware of the prisoner’s participation in the programme, what he had told them about it and how they felt about him doing it. All respondents had been told about the men doing the programme and one man had written specially to his mother about it. Two had not been specific about the programme’s content. The other 6 had variously explained that it was intended to help them communicate better with their children, both from inside prison and on release, that it would involve doing role plays and exercises, talking about alternatives to smacking and would end with a Family Day to which they and the children would be invited. All the women in this group said that they felt very pleased that the men were undertaking this programme. The following quotations highlight some of their reasons for this:

He really is very good with the children. He always has been. He’s very patient with them – more so than me! I thought it was good that he was doing the course and I wondered if it would help him treat them even better. But he is definitely a very good husband and father already. (Wife)

I was glad that he did it. He said that he might not get on it, but we were both pleased when he did. I know that he was hoping that all of his 5 children (by different mothers) could meet each other on Family Day. Our son already knows one of them (whom I bring to visits) but he met one of his half-sisters for the first time on Family Day, and that was nice. (Partner)

I thought it was a great idea. I was surprised but pleased he did it. He was a ‘messed-up’ heroin addict in the past. He made our lives hell and the children saw it all. They knew their Daddy wasn’t well. I hoped the course would help him behave more responsibly. (Mother)

I thought it was good because before he went into prison, he had never really played a father role to Jack (his 6 year old boy). He is not with Jack’s Mum any more, but I thought it might help him to play more of a father role to Jack. (Sister)

These extracts from the women’s responses begin to give a flavour of the range of behaviours of these men towards their children before the start of the programme. One man was seen as already a very good father; another was in a complex situation with children by several mothers which made contact with and between them challenging; two others had not really adopted a fathering role with their children, one because of drug
addiction. This is a demanding set of learning and development needs for any educative programme to address.

5.3 Partners’/carers’ views of the prisoner’s current contact with his children

All the respondents spoke of regular contact between children and prisoner during this sentence. Letters, presents, cards and photographs were regularly exchanged. Telephone calls were at least weekly and, in one case, daily. All but two respondents took the children to visit their father between 2 and 4 times monthly. The other two visited as regularly as they could, but distance from the prison was a major difficulty for them.

The respondents all regarded this regular contact as crucial for the children’s sake in particular, in terms of keeping communication going until the father came out of prison. They all felt that the children had been affected at some level by their father’s imprisonment:

Jane and Jenny, who are 6 and 7 years old, know their Daddy has been in prison a few times. They were OK with that – they’re used to it. Visiting here is a day out for them. They say that Daddy looks better in prison. They’ve both seen him very ill from drug addiction. (Mother)

As Yasmin (now aged 2) was only 4 months when her Dad was imprisoned, she doesn’t realise he is in prison. But because of his absence, they do still need to bond together. (Partner)

Billy is only a baby and he is rather strange in that he won’t go to many people, but he seems to know that Craig is his Dad and he’s quite happy to be with him on visits. (Partner)

Susie (aged 4) really missed her Dad when he went to prison and cried quite often. I’m afraid I probably spoiled her as a result of this. She is a year older now and she’s into everything. We told her he was in prison and that when her Dad was good again he would be able to come home. She used to ask the prison officers when they would let her Daddy come home. They played along with her about that! (Mother)

Zena (now aged 5) was only 2 months when Ben was first arrested, but she was 4 years old when he actually went to prison! She is very close to her father and has been most affected by his imprisonment. She wets the bed and we’ve been told that probably won’t stop until her father is back home. Zafiah (aged 3) misses him but it has not affected her so much. They go to a private school, where Zena’s teacher has been very understanding about Ben and this has helped her. (Wife)

These children’s reactions to their father’s absence vary according to their ages, previous experiences of being fathered by these men and their levels of understanding of where
their fathers actually are at present. Ordinary visiting times can, in some ways, exacerbate existing relationship difficulties because of search procedures, and the men not being able to move from their seats to interact normally with their children. However, the Family Day at the end of Fathers Inside affords an opportunity for much freer communication, and most of the respondents felt that this had been beneficial for the children.

I thought it was very good. Phil could walk around and play with Jack. It was a much more comfortable visit. We ate sandwiches together. Jack really enjoyed it and Phil behaved like a father figure to him. (Sister)

I thought it was good. I could see that John had had some sort of training because he paid a lot more attention to Yasmin than usual. I actually felt a bit jealous, because he seemed to pay her more attention than me and I wanted to talk a lot with him because I can’t visit very often. But she went walking round with her Dad and she really liked that. (Partner)

It was a much better visit. They’ve got enough officers to do that normally, I think. After all, everyone’s searched before the visit and the men are searched afterwards. I think they should allow the prisoners to mix with their children on visits and move around and do things with them. Susie loved doing things with her Dad. They did drawings together and he made her a pirate hat which she brought home and she has kept it. (Mother)

It was very good. I have to say that what Don really wanted was for all of his children to be at that visit. Three of the 5 came, but Don spent more time with one friend who brought one of them than he did with the children and I was a bit disappointed with that. The three children played together though, and had a good time. (Partner)

It was good but it would have been better if Dads could have done things like change nappies on the day – for practice! It was good. Fathers and children could move about together. Billy enjoyed it, but he always enjoys seeing his father. (Partner)

It was brilliant. He could move about with the children. The food was lovely. Jenny won a prize for best hat – a giraffe she named ‘Freckles’. He went into hospital with her for a tooth removal recently. They saw the Day as a party with Daddy. Brilliant! (Mother)

This range of responses shows that, with one exception, these fathers had taken advantage of the Family Day to spend time with their children, play with them, make things for them and generally share activities with them, all of which the children had valued. The exception to this was the man who had held some slightly different expectations of the Family Day, which were that his five children should meet each other. Three of them did so (though two knew each other anyway) but it didn’t sound as if he had spent much time facilitating this process. One would have to question how he had, in fact, learned from the programme. A rather poignant aspect of the respondents’
reflections on the Family Day is the pleasure derived by children from being able to ‘walk around with their Dad’. A few years ago, prior to stringent security crack-downs because of the conveyance of drugs on visits, men could always move around and play with their children on ordinary visits. As one respondent observed, it should be possible to find a way through this problem in order that children and their fathers can interact more naturally and normally together.

5.4 The expectations and the reality of ‘Fathers Inside’ for partners and carers

Life for the partners and families of prisoners is not usually easy, either materially or emotionally, and this has been well-documented over the years (Shaw 1992; Richards et al. 1994; Noble 1995; Boswell & Wedge 2002). Partners and families nevertheless tend to be hopeful that things will improve for them when the imprisoned father is released. In the case of these respondents, they had additional hopes for the participants of Fathers Inside which comprised the following:

- To realise they are not the only people suffering
- To learn about the children’s emotions and needs
- To share sports and activities
- To have patience with children
- To see children as people in their own right and respect them
- To act as a good role model for their children.

The respondents’ expectations of the men as fathers were very much in line with the above list and so the extent to which Fathers Inside could equip men to satisfy these aspirations was of great importance. As partners and/or child-carers, these respondents also felt that the prisoners should support them in the following ways, and hoped that the programme would help to bring this about:

- Joint parenting
- Joint decision-making
- Sharing the child-care
- Taking responsibility
- Emotional and financial support.

Earlier on, it was mentioned that two prisoners had been released and could not be contacted for post-programme interviews. However, in each case, it was possible to interview the relevant partner or carer (the participant’s mother). In the second case, it was also possible to interview the man’s two children. A third man was released after his own post-programme interview, but his mother was interviewed after his release. These are clearly particularly crucial interviews because they provide some evidence for the extent to which programme learning has been put into practice.

In the case of the partner, their baby was 7 months old, a planned child within a stable 5 year relationship. The prisoner had been released on Home Detention Curfew but unfortunately, had been out of prison for only 3 weeks before he was recalled to serve the remainder of his sentence. According to his partner, there had been a problem with his electronic tag, which meant that he was wrongly believed not to be keeping to his curfew.
At the time of writing, he is again due for release. However, during his 3 weeks of liberty, his partner was delighted with his involvement with the baby. He had avoided any temptation to return to his former drug-taking habits and had spent most of his time at home, looking after the baby, getting up in the night if he cried. The one thing he would not do, however, was change a dirty nappy! He regularly told his partner of things he had learned on the programme, particularly explaining to her the notion of developmental stages in children.

The mother of the second released participant had this to say about the changes in his behaviour towards his child and herself:

_He seems more considerate towards me. He still has his ‘off-days’ – giving orders – but generally he asks more if he can do things for me. He seems to be behaving more responsibly now he’s out. He interacts more with his two girls (aged 6 and 7) and joins in with their activities more than he used to. Sometimes when he was on drugs, he wouldn’t give the children the time of day, but that seems to have changed now. He has been out for 4 months, and is starting a job soon. He’s also told me much more about the world of drug addiction he used to inhabit. He tells me he is ‘clean’ and intends to stay that way for his children’s sake. We are talking a lot more now._

The mother of the third released participant, who has care of Susie (aged 4) with whom the participant also lives, had the following comments to make:

_My hope was that Joe would take more interest in Susie – especially that he would listen to her when she talks to him! Now that he’s out, I’m pleased to say he is doing that. He reads books to her and she pretends to read to him. She shows him the pictures and talks about them to him. They definitely communicate much better these days. Joe also helps out financially, but he’s only on Benefit and so cannot afford a lot. Susie is at school daily now and Joe gets her ready, takes her there and later collects her, so that is good. He is much more involved with her than he was before and seems to have a greater understanding of children’s needs. When they are together in their own place, it will be even better._

It appeared that these three released men were putting their learning on the programme into practice and that their partners/child-carers were noticing a real difference in their behaviour. This was also true at some level of the other 5 men still in prison when their partners/child-carers were interviewed. Even the man who had not spent much time with his children on Family Day was reported to have read a story to them for the first time (though it was in monotone!) on the last ordinary visit. Another partner reported increased consideration both for her and the child.

_Craig is more mature since the course. He asks how I am coping – how I am myself. That’s new! I’m the sort of person who just gets on with things – I’m quite strong. But Craig asks about things a lot more now. He tries to reassure me he will change and _be there_ for us. He asks a lot more questions about_
Billy, about the little things he does, not just how he is. He has sent him cards, a poem and made him a toy key-ring. He takes a lot of interest in Billy now.

This final quotation from a partner serves to illustrate the changes made by a man who remains in prison:

I think Fathers Inside has done him the world of good. John has started to think more and make plans for his release. He is talking more about our future together with Yasmin. He listens more to Yasmin. On Family Day, when he was talking to me and she butted in, he took notice of her and stopped talking to me. He told me that it was important to listen to Yasmin – I had to laugh, but I was very pleased about this too!!

These extracts from respondents’ interviews very clearly indicate that men have changed their behaviour towards their partners and children, even whilst still serving a prison sentence. Together with the feedback from partners/child-carers of released men, these quotations constitute an impressive testament to the success of Fathers Inside.

5.5 Final comments from the partners/child-carers about ‘Fathers Inside’

This group of 8 respondents was asked whether they had any links with agencies that might help the family during the prisoner’s sentence and after release. Only one reported a continuing link with a statutory agency, the Probation Service. Two had had Probation Officers contacting them to check on post-release accommodation arrangements, but nothing more. One had received help from a voluntary drugs agency and another from Surestart. Three others had no such links; two relied on very supportive families and one would not have wanted to accept help if it was offered. This raises a problem reported by most studies on prisoners’ families and, indeed, other marginalised groups incorporating children (Quinton 2004). It is a reminder of the need for prison-based programmes such as Fathers Inside which have the capacity to equip prisoners to bring about changes in their own attitudes and behaviour. Other suggestions about possible provision for helping prisoners to carry out their fathering role from prison included the following:

- Build on the learning from Fathers Inside with more children’s visits, where they can also play together outside on fine days, using facilities like bouncy castles
- Introduce special father/children visits where the father and child spend dedicated time together
- Make the Visits room look less like a prison environment and more geared to children’s needs
- Allow prisoners to move around during visits so that children feel more relaxed with their fathers
- Increase the frequency with which fathers can telephone their families so that they can spend more time talking with their children
- Make Fathers Inside available to all fathers at Ashwell!

None of these suggestions is particularly outlandish and some of the features are indeed available at specific prisons (usually those housing low security category offenders). In
addition, when prisoners reach Category ‘D’ status they start to be granted Home Leave, which obviates the need for some of these facilities. However, the exigencies of security in most prisons continue to outweigh the needs of children for a fruitful, stress-free visit to their father and this situation does, to some extent, work against the tenets of the Fathers Inside programme. It is, however, now time to hear some views from the children themselves.

5.6 Children’s experiences and feelings about contact with their father

As explained earlier in the report, only three interviews with children could be secured, one with a 5 year old girl and two others with 6 and 7 year old sisters. The interviews were held in their own homes. The 5 year old’s mother was with her throughout. The grandmother of the two sisters left them to talk to the researcher on their own. Before interviewing them, the researcher ascertained their understanding of their father’s absence and did nothing to contradict this during the interview. One child (and her younger sister who was not interviewed) believed their father to be working away on a ship. (He was latterly transferred from Ashwell to a prison on the East coast). The two sisters knew that their father was in prison. The findings from these interviews are clearly fairly limited because of the age and understanding of the children concerned. However, they were interviewed not with any expectation of gaining a representative child view but to:

acquire a sense of some of the feelings and reactions they may experience about their father’s imprisonment and to provide a chance for their ‘voice’ as major players in the subject of this research to be heard. (Boswell 2002:16)

As outlined above, these children were all girls, aged 5, 6 and 7 years respectively; at the time of interview, the father of the two sisters had just been released from prison. They were first asked how they felt about their Dad being away from home. All three said that they missed their Dad very much and one of the sisters said, “We’re so glad he’s at home again”. When asked how they kept in contact with their Dad whilst he was away, 5 year old Zena said:

He’s working in a ship by the sea and we go there to see him every week-end. I look forward to that. Daddy reads to me and I read to him when I see him – I sit on his knee. I write letters to him and send him drawings. I sent him a little house with flowers yesterday. He sent me a birthday card when I was 5, but it had 6 candles on it. Daddy told me I could keep it until I am 6! I talk to Daddy on the telephone.

Seven year old Jenny replied:
I used to go with my sister Jane and my Nan to visit him in the prison at Ashwell. Sometimes we’d talk to him on the phone. We sent him pictures and photos. He sent us letters and cards.

Here, the children are clearly describing the kind of interaction promoted by Fathers Inside. However, Zena’s father was said already to have a good relationship with his children, so it is difficult to know whether he was doing anything differently on visits as a result. He was, though, the participant who said that he had learned some new techniques from the programme, such as getting down to the children’s level either by playing with them on the floor or lifting them up onto his knee to read to them. This latter appears to be in evidence in his daughter’s description of the prison visit. In respect of the two sisters, however, their grandmother had reported a considerable change in the participant’s behaviour towards them, from a previous state of disinterest, and this appears to be borne out in Jenny’s interview. The final point to note from the above 2 extracts is the issue of whether parents should tell children the truth about their father’s whereabouts. This is certainly one of the topics addressed by Fathers Inside.

When asked whether it was important to them to keep in touch with their father, all the girls said that it was, because they missed him and wanted to tell him what they’d been doing. Six year old Jane added:

It’s very, very important because me and Jenny missed Daddy so much because we love him so much. It’s awful when he’s away, but it’s great now that he’s back at home with us.

All of them said that visits, telephone calls, letters and cards were the things that helped them and also helped him to go on being their Dad. They enjoyed the visits and two of them referred to being able to have nice things to eat and drink, and playing in the children’s corner. The only thing they didn’t like about visiting their Dad was when they had to leave. In respect of the Family Day, Jane commented:

We thought it was smashing. We played ‘Pass the Parcel’, we played with Noddy, we made things and coloured in drawings. Jenny won a prize but I didn’t. Daddy could play with us. I really liked that visit. It was different from the others – much better.

Zena said:

I liked it when Daddy and Zafirah and Mummy and me played games and had a picnic together. It’s not like that where he is now.

Zena also reported playing lots of games with Daddy when he is home, taking her and her sister swimming and out to nice places:

At home, I sit on his back and we go round and round the room.
Jane observed that now her father is released:

*We play together and he reads stories. He plays on the play station and we watch him. Sometimes he tells us to go away and leave him alone and sometimes he gets cross with us. But mostly we do lots of things together. He makes us laugh too.*

Her older sister Jenny supplemented this view with the comment:

*Daddy used to be ill sometimes (he is a former heroin addict) and so we didn’t always do things with him, but now he’s at home again, we do more things together. He’s well now.*

In respect of the children’s views about Fathers Inside the researcher judged that 5 year old Zena would not understand the questions about this and so did not ask them. Jenny was able to say that she thought a course for parents should teach them to “do things with us – playing and reading stories”. When asked if she had noticed anything different about the things she and her Dad did together since the programme, she reiterated:

*We play a lot together and we read lots of books. Now Daddy is well again, we do lots more things together.*

Jane added:

*It’s nice now that Daddy’s back home, so that we can do things together again. We all go out together and I really like that. Daddy does more things with us than he did before. He’s very well now.*

Again, these comments show that the children have noticed a change in their father’s behaviour which – even if he does sometimes get cross and tell them to leave him alone – clearly represents a significant improvement for them from the quality of his previous interactions with them.

The interviews ended with the children being asked about their hopes and fears about their Dad and their family life in the future. This question attracted answers which, in their simplicity expressed both the hopes and the fears in a single sentence:

We want Daddy to stay well and be here at home with us (Jenny, aged 7)

*I want Daddy to stay well and stay with us* (Jane, aged 6)

*I just want Daddy to come home.* (Zena, aged 5)
5.7 In summary

The views of programme participants’ partners, child-carers and the children themselves have been quoted at some length in this chapter, partly because it is important that their authentic voices should be heard in this evaluation and partly because they constitute the nearest to an objective view about the participants’ attitude and behaviour after undertaking Fathers Inside. While the adults, at any rate, were dealing with the difficulties caused by the participants’ imprisonment, this was clearly not without personal cost. The children, young as they were, were also clearly not untouched by the loss of their father to imprisonment. In a minority of cases, adults and children were suggesting that the father’s behaviour had not changed hugely, but that there were nevertheless some positive signs. In nearly half of the participants, however, some changes in attitude and behaviour were corroborated by adult partners/carers and in two cases by children. The evidence in this chapter gives the clear message that Fathers Inside promotes learning which has continuous and far-reaching effects on the quality of father-child relationships.
Chapter 6: Evaluation implications and conclusion

This nine month study of Fathers Inside has sought, primarily, to establish whether the learning from this drama-based programme produces changes in parenting attitudes and behaviour from the prison setting and, aspirationally, beyond it. A range of data has been elicited from programme documentation, from comparative literature and research, from direct observation of the programme and from semi-structured interviews with participant prisoners, their partners, child-carers and children. In particular, the study examined the extent to which four identified key outcomes of the programme had been met.

Compliance with and completion of the programme

All 17 men in the substantive study group attended the October 2003 programme, completed the required portfolio work and gained the NOCN Life and Social Skills Certificate in Parentcraft (Level 1). All but one man also gained the Group and Teamwork Skills Certificate (Level 2). It is quite clear that this outcome was achieved.

Meeting programme aims

Fathers Inside has three aims which are listed with evidence for their levels of fulfilment below:

To furnish participants with parenting skills

An ethnically diverse range of participants, serving 2+ years imprisonment for sometimes violent offences variously expressed the desire to improve their relationships with their children. Many had themselves experienced poor fathering; many of their own children were unplanned; none had previously received formal parenting education. The evidence they gave after completing the programme, together with arguably more objective evidence from their partners, child-carers and children, clearly suggested that the majority had acquired new knowledge and skills, which they were already implementing from prison. The evidence of change in respect of 3 men who had been released was particularly convincing.

To improve their social and life skills and key skills

The universal attainment of the nationally accredited Social and Life Skills Certificate constituted tangible proof of this outcome. Because Ashwell does not enter men for the Key Skills Certificate, the same kind of proof is not available in respect of this aim, though individual Lesson plans and portfolio work contain many examples of key skills such as problem-solving. The process of improving their fathering skills, leading to increased self-esteem, and self-awareness often led, in the view of staff, to more generally improved attitudes and behaviour towards prison personnel which, at its best, encouraged a more supportive staff and prison culture towards the programme and the potential for wider problem-solving and repairing of family relationships.
To help with sentence planning, further education and employment

Once men undertake this programme at Ashwell it goes into their sentence planning process. It is not clear that it is identified as a learning need in advance, though this may relate to the relatively short average stay of men at Ashwell. Evidence from the men after the programme suggested that they were making clear and specific links between their learning and the process of resettlement, the need to avoid re-offending, and further education to promote legitimate employment. However, while there is some evidence of men continuing their education whilst in prison, it was beyond the remit of this research to establish whether it would continue after release, or whether legitimate employment would be obtained.

Nevertheless, it would be true to say that the first programme aim is well met and substantial elements of the other two aims met.

Changes in attitudes towards fathering

Staff, participant, partner/child-carer and, to an extent, children interviews all attested to these changes in a majority of men. Many highlighted the experiential nature of the programme in bringing about support and increased self-esteem from the group ‘bonding’ process, a building block to wider self-development. This process appears to reflect the good parenting model which is cascaded down from the Safe Ground trainers to the Course Tutors.

Changes in fathering behaviour

As set out under the first of the programme aims above, there is strong evidence from partners/child-carers in particular of these changes both from prison and after release. Fathers who have done the programme have put into practice their learning about talking with and listening to their children in visits and telephone calls, playing with them and sharing activities, sending them cards, letters and story tapes. They have also gained new knowledge about child development and, in some cases, have passed this on to their partners. The need to find alternatives to smacking, for example, has impinged on the behaviour of many of them. In general, they have gained awareness and turned it into practice.

There are, of course, exceptions to the generally positive picture presented above. There is always, potentially, a minority of men who may come to a programme of education for the accompanying benefits it offers; although the Teacher’s Manual makes it clear that this programme is not suitable for sex offenders, there is the risk of it attracting unidentified paedophiles. The study also showed that there were one or two men whose stated intentions were good, but who were not obviously yet putting them into practice with their children. Some men, too, found the programme over-intense and the portfolio work too demanding.
Overall, it is apparent that the key outcomes for this evaluation have been largely achieved. The resulting data, however, suggest a number of implications for the future as follows:

1. **Fathers Inside** has a firm basis in adult learning theory. It appears to be making a valuable and singular contribution to parenting education for prisoners. This would suggest it should be extended. One possibility would be to make it more widely available across one prison per region, such as Ashwell, to see what impact it could make on a whole prison culture. Another possibility would be to spread it more thinly across the adult prison estate.

2. The programme should go on responding to participant and Tutor feedback. Issues such as programme intensity, individual learning styles, staffing levels, quality of teaching environment, accompanying ‘homework’ and period over which the programme is delivered should remain firmly on the course designers’ agenda. The range of staff interviewed for this study has sung the programme’s praises – but some prison staff have not viewed it so positively. There may well be a job for the programme owners to do in working with prisons to market it not just to prisoners but to prison staff across the board, thus improving the wider climate in which it is delivered. Given the evidence obtained about lack of formal support systems in the lives of prisoners’ families, this would fill a gap by providing a locus of support within the prison system itself.

3. The success of the Family Day has shown the value of relaxed father-child visiting time. All the partners, carers and children in the study found such a contrast between that and a setting in which the fathers were not allowed to move from their chairs. This is often puzzling and distressing for children and, with sufficient will, perhaps could be addressed in the problem-solving fashion which the programme itself espouses. Other opportunities for fathers to apply their learning from the programme could include family learning visits, homework clubs and an expansion of tape and video-making facilities. At Ashwell, **Fathers Inside** is already seen to fit well with their ‘Relate’ initiative (funded by the charity ‘Action for Prisoners’ Families’) where partners and prisoners meet for a day to discuss issues about release from everyone’s perspective. In other prisons, Sure Start and the YMCA are also supporting pre-release projects for fathers. There is plenty of potential for other ‘joined up’ activity of this kind across prisons and associated agencies and organisations.

4. **Fathers Inside** is an innovative programme, of the kind encouraged by the Social Exclusion Unit’s report (2002), working with considerable success to change the fathering behaviour of men with unpromising offending profiles. The educational team at Safe Ground have proved their ability to operate within official educational specifications and institutional boundaries and yet utilise prisoners and their experiences as their primary developmental resource. Not only should the programme be expanded but its effective teaching and learning strategies should be disseminated to the benefit of all who are trying to improve the life chances of prisoners and their families within the rehabilitative framework.
Conclusion

The findings from this study have demonstrated the knowledge and skills which can be put across and integrated into the lives of prisoners and their families in a relatively unpromising learning environment. The drama-based and experiential nature of this learning also appears to raise the levels of confidence of groups of men, many of whom may previously have had only negative experiences of education and no experience of educational achievement. It spurs some of them to continue achieving and it inculcates in them an ability to reflect, possibly for the first time, on how others are feeling. This has the capacity to change their attitudes towards prison staff and to other people beyond their immediate family. Most importantly, however, if as the evidence herein suggests, the changes in their behaviour result in a positive experience of parenting for their children, then the work done by Fathers Inside may have spared society from potential candidates for a new generation of future damaged and disaffected prisoners.
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REFERENCES


APPENDIX 1A

PRE-COURSE INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR PRISONERS

OCTOBER GROUP

Introduce and explain purpose of research and seek informed consent
Check prisoner’s willingness to be interviewed.

Date
Prisoner name
Prison number
Age
Ethnic origin (self-description)
Sentence length
Offence
Release date (EDR/PED)

Which members of your family are you closely in touch with?

I will come back to them later in the interview but first, I would like to ask you a range of questions covering your own family background, your experience of being a father, your child(ren) and their mother(s), your current family circumstances, and the people with whom you are in contact whilst you are in Prison. If there are any questions you would prefer not to answer, please just say so.

First of all I would like to ask you some questions about your own family and upbringing:-

1. Are you still in contact with your parents/carers? If so, how would you describe your current relationship with them?
2. Are your parents together or if not, in contact with each other?
3. If you had step-parents, how involved were they in your upbringing?
4. Were you ever placed in care? If so, at what age?
5. Have your father or mother experienced imprisonment?
6. Have either of them been in long term legal employment?
7. What do you think your parents’ responsibilities are towards you?
8. Do you have any full brothers or sisters or step-brothers and sisters? If so, where do you fit, in age, in the family.

9. Are you in contact/regular contact with your brothers and sisters?

10. Do your brothers and/or sisters have contact with your child(ren)? If so, what does the contact involve? (e.g., any caring role and, if so, elaborate).

Now some questions about yourself:-

11. How old were you when you first became a father and what were your personal circumstances at the time?

12. Tell me about your experience of education and knowledge of child care.

13. How/when did you learn about parenting skills?

14. Have you ever had any past experience of parenting education?

15. Was/were your child(ren) planned? (Ask about contraception if it seems appropriate).

16. How involved have you been in the past, and are at present, in your child(ren)’s care and upbringing?

17. How many times have you been in Prison?

18. What do you think is the underlying cause of your offending behaviour?

19. a) Do you have any concerns about release?
   b) Do you or your family currently receive, or anticipate receiving, any support from Probation or other agencies?

I’d now like to ask you some questions about your child(ren) and their mother(s):-

20. Have you fathered any other children whom you are not closely in touch with? (Ask for numbers and circumstances of partners, ages and circumstances of children).

21. How old was/were (all) your child(ren) when you started this sentence?

22. Do you think your imprisonment has affected the child(ren)? If so, in what ways?
23. How would you describe your relationship with the child(ren)? (including those prisoner is not closely in touch with)

24. Do you maintain contact with (all) your children whilst you are in Prison? If so, by what means?

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25. Can you tell me why you do/don’t?

26. Are you in contact with the mother(s) of your children? If so, are you in contact with her/their relatives and are they involved in the care of the child(ren)?

27. a) What was your own experience of being fathered?

   b) How has this affected your approach to fathering your own children?

28. What do you think your responsibilities are as a father, both in Prison and on release?

**If prisoner has a current partner:**

29. Does your partner have any children from a previous relationship? If so, how many?

30. How long have you been in this relationship?

31. How would you describe your partner’s relationship with her child(ren)?

32. What do you think your current partner and her child(ren)’s expectations are of you as a father?

33. Do you know/are you in contact with the father(s) of her child(ren)?

34. Do you maintain contact with your partner whilst you are in Prison?

35. Can you tell me why you do/don’t?
Now some questions about your contact with people whilst you are in Prison:-

36. What do you find easy or difficult about seeing the children on visits?

37. What sort of things do you discuss with the child(ren) and their carer(s) during visits?

38. Why do you think the child(ren) visit(s) and what do you think they think of the visiting experience?

39. What do you think your child(ren)’s attitude might be to your being in Prison?

40. Is it important to you, or not, to maintain contact with your family?

41. Any other points you would like to make about your contact with any member of your family and/or your children?

42. Finally, can you tell me why you are keen to develop your parenting skills, and what your expectations are of the course you are about to participate in?

As part of the evaluation of the parenting programme we would also like to ask participants’ families about their experiences, so do you think your partner/parents/children’s carer would agree to be interviewed? If so, when do they visit, and could you give me an address or telephone number by which I can make contact with them?

We would also like to follow up prisoners who have participated in the programme, after release. Would you be willing to be interviewed post-release? Can you give me an address or telephone number where I will be able to contact you?
APPENDIX 1B

POST-PROGRAMME INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR JUNE & OCTOBER GROUP PRISONERS

Remind participants of the nature of the research and that they agreed to be re-interviewed after the programme. Check that they are still happy about this.

1. What aspects of the course did you find most useful and why?

2. Were there any less useful aspects and why?

3. Having completed the course, do you think that it has influenced your behaviour and attitudes as a parent? If so, in what ways – can you give me some examples?

4. Has the course helped you to think about/re-assess your responsibilities towards your child(ren) and their mother? If so, in what ways?

5. Has the course helped you to develop your relationship with your child(ren)? If so, in what ways?

6. Has the Prison Service helped you to improve contact with your child(ren)? If so, in what ways?

7. Have Prison staff helped you with your sentence or resettlement/release plan? If so, in what ways?

8. Now you have done the course, has this influenced your attitude and behaviour towards:
   a) resettlement/release (please give examples)
   b) education (please give examples)

9. How has taking part in the course affected your relationships with Prison staff and other prisoners?

10. Do you think that the course has an impact on life in the Prison? If so, in what ways?

11. Do you think that participating in the course will affect your future (offending) behaviour? If so, in what ways?

12. On a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 is very low and 10 very high, how would you rate:
   a. The overall usefulness of the course?
   b. The way in which it was delivered?
   c. The resources made available to you?
   d. The extent to which it will change your behaviour and attitude as a parent in the future?
   e. What would you say was your level of learning from the course?

13. Any other comment you would like to make about the course?

   Thank you very much for participating.
APPENDIX 2

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR STAFF

Explain nature of research and seek informed consent

Male/Female

Job Title

Brief Job Description

1. What do you think are
   a) the advantages of parenting education in Prison?
   b) the disadvantages?

2. Do you think that the Fathers Inside Course criteria, taken from the Open College Network, Parentcraft (level 1) are suitable or relevant to the needs of imprisoned fathers?

3. On a scale of 1-10, where 1 is ‘not at all’ and 10 is ‘wholly’, how effective do you think the Fathers Inside Course is in assisting imprisoned fathers to take a more responsible role in the care and upbringing of their children? (Please circle one)

   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |

4. What are the most common kinds of change you have observed in imprisoned fathers who undergo the Course (including their behaviour and interaction with staff pre and post course)?

5. What expectations do you have for the imprisoned fathers who complete Fathers Inside?

6. What is your opinion of the new Fathers Inside Course (including delivery methods and resources)?

7. What recommendations would you make for the development of parenting education in male Prisons?

8. Is there any other comment you would like to make about the Fathers Inside Course, or anything else that seems relevant to you?

Thank you very much for taking part in the research
APPENDIX 3

PARTNER/CARER INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Explain nature of research and confirm consent as follows:

1) I am one of a team of researchers from De Montfort University evaluating the Fathers Inside Course at Ashwell Prison, in which…………………………………(prisoner) participated. You may have met one of our team – Avril Price – at the Family Visit day at the end of the Course, when you were asked if you would be prepared to be interviewed for this research. Are you still prepared to be interviewed?

   Yes/No

2) I understand that you are the partner/other relative of (prisoner). Can you please confirm which of his children you have care of (state whether biological or step-children/gender/age of child).

3) Were you aware at the time of the Course that your partner/relative was participating in it? If so, did he tell you anything about the Course?

4) How did you feel about him participating in the Course?

5) Have you had any experience of parenting education?

6) What do you think a father should learn from such a Course?

7) What do you think has been the effect on the child(ren) of his/her/their father being in Prison? (e.g., behavioural change/educational/school issues)

8) What forms of contact do the children have with their father whilst he is in Prison and can you say how each of these benefits the child(ren)?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Contact</th>
<th>Yes/No</th>
<th>Benefits</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Visits</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Letters</td>
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<td>Photographs</td>
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<td>Presents/Cards</td>
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<td>Phone Calls</td>
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<td>Story tapes/videos</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other (specify)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

9) Normally Ashwell offers only ordinary visits – what did you think of the Family Visit day following the Course?

10) What was the child(ren)’s reaction to the Family Visit?
11) What are your expectations of (prisoner) in his **father’s role** with the child(ren)?

12) What are your expectations of (prisoner) in his **partner role** with the child(ren)?

13) Have you noticed any change in (prisoner) since he completed the Parenting Course? Please can you describe this and its effect on:
   
   (a) you?
   
   (b) the child(ren)?

14) What other facilities or improvements would you like to see that you think might assist (prisoner) to carry out his fathering role as well as possible whilst he is in Prison?

15) Do you have any links with agencies/organisations that might help you and the child(ren) during and after release? (e.g., Probation Service, Social Services, voluntary agencies etc.)

16) Are there any other comments you would like to make about imprisoned fathers and their children generally?

**Thank you very much for participating in this research**
APPENDIX 4

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR CHILDREN

Explain nature of research to accompanying adult and seek informed consent. Following this, explain research in simple terms to the child and seek informed consent. Involve accompanying adult in this process as appropriate.

1) What is your name?
2) What is your age?
3) How do you feel about your Dad being away from home?
4) How do you keep in contact with your Dad whilst he is away?
5) Is it important to you to keep in contact with your Dad whilst he is away? If yes, or no, can you tell me why?
6) Can you tell me what sort of things you and your Dad do together when he is at home?
7) Whilst your Dad is away, what things most help you and him to go on being your Dad?
8) Do you like visiting your Dad?
9) Is there anything you don’t like about it?
10) What did you think of the Family Visit recently?
11) Your Dad recently took part in a Course for parents. What do you think about that?
12) What do you think a Dad should learn from such a Course?
13) Have you noticed anything different about what you and Dad do together since the Course?
14) What are your hopes and fears about your Dad and your family life in the future?

Thank you very much for talking to me.

Contact details: De Montfort University Research team: gboswell@dmu.ac.uk
Safe Ground: SafeGround@aol.com
A copy of the Executive Summary can be obtained by contacting either of the above.