

Appendix E

Prison Families Learning Programme: Supporting your child's education while in prison

The Family Learning Programme is a proposed initiative designed specifically to help fathers in prison support their child's educational development while simultaneously addressing their own learning needs. Accordingly, its aim is to develop family learning opportunities that directly support successful school learning for the child while also supporting the father's prison education endeavours. It should be noted that the programme is not envisaged as a 'parenting' programme, rather it should be seen as a 'learning' programme. The focus at all times will be on the 'learning' involved; the learning of both the child and that of the father.

While the proposed project is small-scale and localised, it is grounded in an effort to improve the quality of civic engagement and social inclusion of male prisoners both during and after their prison sentence. Its broad overarching aim is to develop a collective strategy and constructive partnerships that will allow prisoners be critically-reflective and active learners while in prison and develop the skills and competencies to become engaged citizens following release.

Aims and objectives:

- Enable prison fathers to proactively participate in their child's learning and development.
- Develop learning opportunities that enhance the child's learning while simultaneously bolstering the father's skills and competencies and allow them put their own learning into practice.
- Strengthen family bonds, maintain positive relationships and improve the quality of family interactions while in prison.
- Establish connections between education providers and create social networks that provide positive and meaningful learning experiences that will nurture a love of learning and promote participation in lifelong and lifewide learning.

It is envisaged that it will be a collaborative project primarily involving the Prison Education Service and local national schools.

There are three key strands to the proposed project.

Strand 1.

Personnel from a local national school will deliver a series of workshop to the prison fathers which will outline key aspects of children's learning, literacy and general development in order to the set context for exploring the national school curriculum. In essence, the workshops will explain what the child is being taught, how the child is being taught and most importantly why the child is being taught those particular skills in those particular ways. Participants will be grouped according to the age of their children and the workshops tailored accordingly.

Strand 2.

Meanwhile, the prisoners will attend a complementary series of workshops delivered by teachers in the prison Education Centre during which they will identify appropriate educational gifts and make and develop curriculum and learning tools, games and materials designed specifically to support

their child's learning and development. For example, developing the Storybook Dads scheme¹, making puppets, carving jigsaws, etc.

Strand 3.

Occasional family learning days will be organized to reinforce and sustain both the child's and the father's learning. They could perhaps be organized as a graduation event for the fathers on completion of their QQI course. While the event will no doubt be a social fun day, it will be designed as a learning opportunity and specific learning activities and events will be incorporated into it.

Piloting the project.

It is proposed to pilot the programme in Mountjoy Prison with a small group of regular school attenders, many of whom will have completed QQI Level 5 Human Growth and Development and are currently taking Level 5 Family Studies. We would be keen to involve this group from an early stage so that they can contribute actively to its design and development and take shared responsibility for its success.

While there are clearly many security and parental access concerns that need to be considered when devising any such project, it is hoped that they can be addressed by taking a multidisciplinary approach and engaging as many services (prison management, probation, psychology, etc.) as possible in its design and delivery. Mountjoy Education Service will take the lead working in piloting the project in cooperation with St. Laurence O'Toole's BNS who have expressed a keen interest in becoming involved.

¹ **'Story Book Dads'** is a well-established scheme whereby the prison parent records a bedtime story on CD or DVD for the child to listen to at home (see <http://www.storybookdads.org.uk/>). In the proposed project, age-appropriate stories will be identified by the national school liaison who will work in conjunction with the father to identify / devise some follow-up activities to foster and support the child's learning, and which the parent and child can 'work' on during phone calls or prison visits. The scheme can be developed further by facilitating the parent to design a book to accompany the CD, or to write / illustrate an original, personalised story. Similarly, musical parents can produce CD's with age-appropriate songs and pieces of music and so on. There are many such possibilities involving the creative arts, each of which can develop the father's storytelling, art and music skills as well as enhancing their literacy and oracy skills.