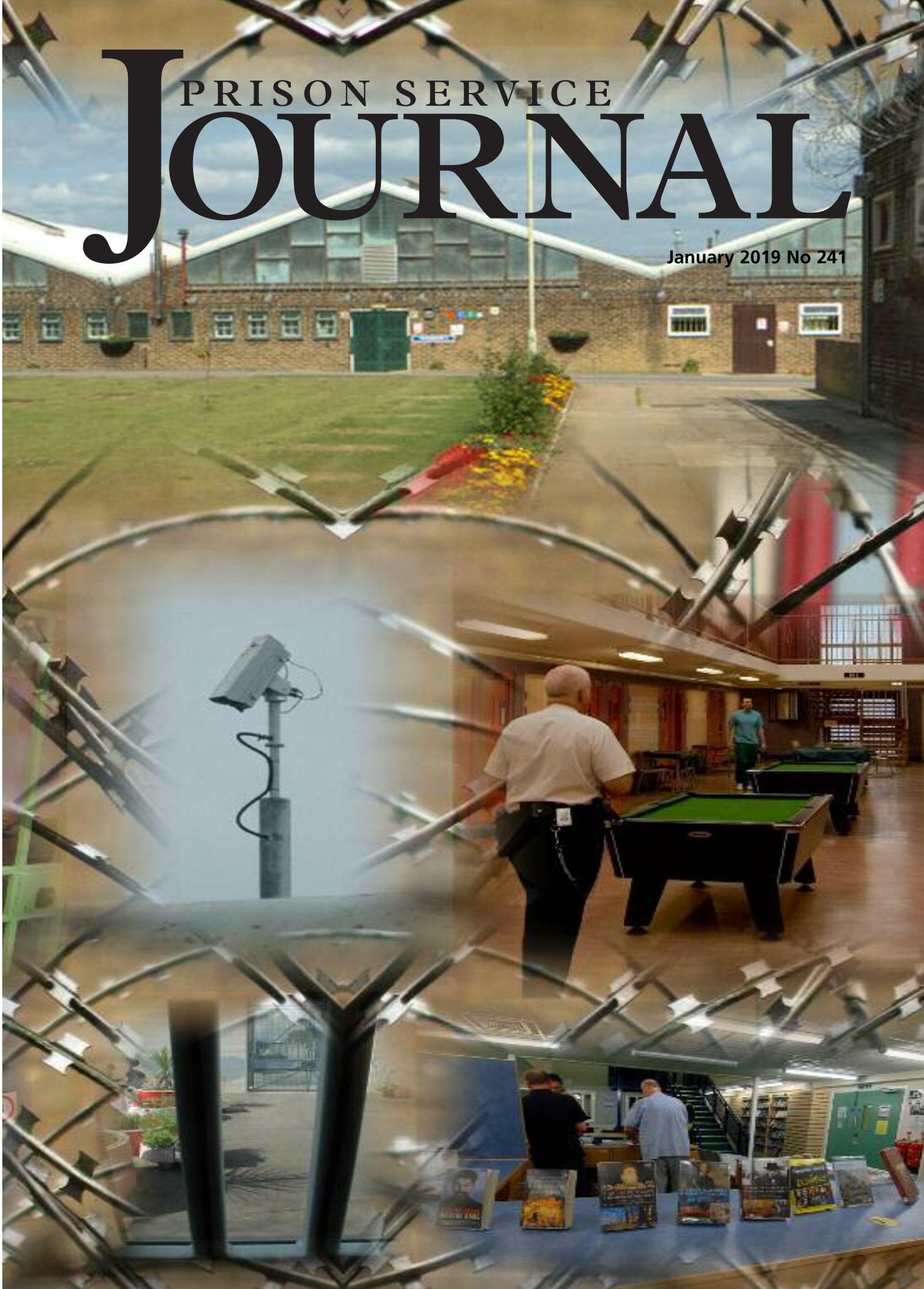


# PRISON SERVICE JOURNAL

January 2019 No 241



# The Golden Thread?

## Families, Prisons and Therapeutic Communities

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### Introduction

**This article is based on the keynote address I was asked to give at the Annual Grendon Seminar on the theme of prisoners and their families. I visited HMP Grendon whilst carrying out the Farmer Review on the importance of strengthening (male) prisoners' family ties to prevent reoffending and reduce intergenerational crime.<sup>1</sup> As a result of my visit, I became aware of the significant overlap between the principles of therapeutic communities (TCs) which make them successful, and the importance of putting families and healthy relationships at the heart of rehabilitation in all prisons.**

This emphasis on families and relationships is the 'golden thread' referred to in the title of the Annual Seminar, this article and the final report from the Review.<sup>2</sup> I shall describe how it is a resonant theme which gained early support and will stress that this initial enthusiasm must be harnessed so it can be built upon and influence other policy areas within and beyond criminal justice. The prevalence and harms of relationship and family breakdown cannot be ignored as they drive and exacerbate so many other social problems.

After outlining the remit set by the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) for the Farmer Review I will describe the overlap with TC tenets referred to earlier, in terms of the three key principles which underlie what I found and what I recommended.

Given the acceptance of the Review's recommendations by the MoJ, I will comment on the potential for further embedding of TC principles in all prisons in the light of the greater emphasis now being

laid on families and relationships. I end by suggesting that those working within prisons and in wider social policy must take advantage of this window of opportunity so that the emphasis on relationships becomes embedded and irreversible across government and other related agencies.

### The Golden Thread

The main message of the Review can be summed up as 'Families and other supportive relationships need to be the golden thread running through all processes of prisons'. The MoJ communications team picked up on the 'golden thread' theme when they launched the report<sup>3</sup> and it clearly inspired the organisers of the Grendon Seminar when determining the focus of the annual event.

Family services organisations have also popularized this concept.<sup>4</sup> Particularly noteworthy is POPS' work with families of prisoners which has encouraged them to own this phrase and apply it to themselves. They worked with children and young people from across the North West of England to produce a powerful and moving four-minute film, #WearetheGoldenThread, which is available on their website.<sup>5</sup>

The close involvement of both voluntary sector and government agencies in the work of the Review was instrumental in ensuring an exceptionally high level of stakeholder 'buy in' and support for its recommendations. Notably, senior members of the former National Offender Management Service (NOMS), now Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS), were included on the Task Group. Their personal commitment to the family agenda, often based on many

1. Farmer, M., (2017), *The Importance of Strengthening Prisoners' Family Ties to Prevent Reoffending and Reduce Intergenerational Crime*, Ministry of Justice.

2. Ibid, p8.

3. Gov.UK, (2017), 'Landmark Review Places Family Ties at The Heart of Prison Reform,' accessed on 27/9/18 at [www.gov.uk/government/news/landmark-review-places-family-ties-at-the-heart-of-prison-reform](http://www.gov.uk/government/news/landmark-review-places-family-ties-at-the-heart-of-prison-reform)

4. For example, Wainwright L, and Harriott P, (2018), *The Golden Thread*, Prison Reform Trust; Care for the Family, (2018), 'The Golden Thread', in *Stories of Us*, (1), pp49-54.

5. POPS, (2018), '#WearetheGoldenThread', accessed on 27/08/2018 at [www.partnersofprisoners.co.uk/wearethegoldenthread](http://www.partnersofprisoners.co.uk/wearethegoldenthread)

years' frontline experience in prisons, and their awareness of institutional mechanisms which ensure a Review is diligently implemented were invaluable in developing recommendations.

Upon their advice I stipulated that the Ministry of Justice produce an action plan and meet regularly with me to evaluate progress on the Review's implementation.<sup>6</sup> The same cultural change which I called for in prisons, where the importance of relationships with families and significant others becomes embedded across an establishment—and is the golden thread running through its processes—is also required in the MoJ and HMPPS. The ongoing process of 'reviewing the Review' is intended to help achieve that outcome.

### The wider social and policy context

This cultural change is also required across government, and before I describe the Review in more detail, I want briefly to set it in a wider policy context than simply the justice system. My concern about the deterioration of family relationships and the instability this brings to many children and adults' lives was a major driver of my becoming involved in politics in the first place. My work in the House of Lords focuses on the development of policies to strengthen families and prevent family breakdown, whether due to the separation or divorce of parents or their inability, for whatever reason, to give their children the safe, stable and nurturing relationships they need to thrive.<sup>7</sup>

Young people from fractured families are twice as likely as those from 'intact' families to have behavioural problems.<sup>8</sup> They are more likely to suffer depression, turn to drugs and alcohol and do badly at school.<sup>9</sup> They are between three to six times more likely to have suffered serious abuse.<sup>10</sup> Children on the 'at-risk' register are eight times more likely to be living with their birth mother and a 'father substitute' compared with others of similar income and education levels.<sup>11</sup>

Around a quarter of all prisoners were previously removed from their parents' care and looked after by the

local authority.<sup>12</sup> Among prisoners in therapeutic community settings, around two thirds said they had experienced severe physical abuse and 40 per cent sexual abuse during childhood.<sup>13</sup> Close to three quarters of them experienced the loss of or separation from their parents for at least one year before the age of 16.<sup>14</sup>

Among 30 or so countries in the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, the UK has one of the highest rates of family breakdown: only two thirds of children aged between 0 and 14 years live with both their parents, well below the OECD average of 84 per cent.<sup>15</sup>

Almost half of 15-year-olds will no longer be living with both parents.<sup>16</sup> More than one in seven were born into homes where there was no resident father and over a quarter of children live with their mother and not their father.<sup>17</sup>

When I was appointed to the House of Lords, I recognised the opportunities of that position to work with the Government to ensure family support is embedded in the everyday business of every department of government. I and other parliamentarians recently published a Manifesto to Strengthen Families signed by more than 60 Conservative MPs, a living document which aims to be a rolling programme for government.<sup>18</sup>

The Manifesto make the case that there needs to be a change in the culture of government: all departments need to recognize that positive family relationships are as important for children's and adults' lives as health, education and employment. It lays out a very broad programme and includes a section on prisoners' families which refers to the Farmer Review.

When the MoJ accepted all the recommendations from the Review and began to implement them, I saw this as an important first step for this and future governments in acknowledging the importance of family and other relationships for all they want to achieve.

I have found a high level of ministerial agreement that families, in all their diversity and complexity, are under huge pressures including but not limited to financial need. We must be very wary of a

6. Farmer, (2017), see n.1., p10.
7. Centres for Disease Control and Prevention, (2014), *Essentials for Childhood*.
8. Meltzer H et al, (2000), *Mental Health of Children and Adolescents in Great Britain*, Norwich: The Stationery Office, 2000; Hansen K, Jones E, Joshi H and Budge D, (2010), *Millennium Cohort Study Fourth Survey: A User's Guide to Initial Findings*, (2nd edition), London: Centre for Longitudinal Studies, pp165–176.
9. Rodgers B and Pryor J, (1998), *Divorce and Separation: The Outcomes for Children*, York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation.
10. NSPCC, (2002), *Child Maltreatment in the Family*.
11. Creighton S, (1992), *Child Abuse Trends in England and Wales 1988-90*, NSPCC; and Quilgar D, (2001), *Poverty: the Outcomes for Children (Child Abuse)*, Economic & Social Research Council.
12. Care Leavers Association, (2013), *Care Leavers, Looked After Children and the Criminal Justice System*, p4.
13. Shine, J., and Newton, M., (2000), 'Damaged, Disturbed and Dangerous: A Profile of Receptions to Grendon Therapeutic Prison, 1995-2000', in Shine, J., (ed.), 2000, *A Compilation of Grendon Research*, HMP Grendon.
14. Ibid; Newberry M, (2009), *Changes in the characteristics of offenders at Grendon prison 1998 and 2008*, HM Prison Service.
15. OECD (2014), *OECD Family Database: SF1.3 Further information on living arrangements of children*, OECD, Paris, accessed on 28/09/2018 at <http://www.oecd.org/social/soc/oecdfamilydatabase.htm>
16. HM Government, (2012), *Social Justice Outcomes Framework*, p6.
17. Office for National Statistics, (2017), *Estimated Number of Male and Female Lone Parent Families*.
18. Strengthening Families Manifesto, (2017), 'Manifesto For Strengthening Families', accessed on 27/09/2018 at [www.strengtheningfamiliesmanifesto.com/assets/Family\\_Manifesto.pdf](http://www.strengtheningfamiliesmanifesto.com/assets/Family_Manifesto.pdf)

defamilialisation approach to social policy, particularly in our welfare policy, which makes a virtue of people not needing to rely on other family members in order to survive: in particular, in economic terms.<sup>19</sup>

Notwithstanding all the important caveats about not expecting families to stay together when there is irresolvable conflict and violence, governments should see family stability—reliable love—as something to be encouraged. Families where, to reiterate, there are safe, stable and nurturing relationships, are the ideal place for children to be socialised and learn, experientially, how to be others-centred, rather than self-centred, how to take on and fulfil responsibilities, how to tell right from wrong and how to treat people well.

### The remit of the Farmer Review

So, against that backdrop, I undertook this Review with a very clear two-part remit from the Ministry of Justice:<sup>20</sup>

First, the importance for prisoners' rehabilitation of them maintaining relationships with their family members and significant others. British taxpayers are currently spending £15bn per year on reoffending and 38 per cent of men will return to prison after release, 65 per cent of those who served sentences of less than a year.<sup>21</sup> The Ministry of Justice's own research shows that men in prison who have visits from their family are 39 per cent less likely to reoffend than those who do not.<sup>22</sup>

Second, the need to prevent intergenerational crime: one landmark British study found that almost two thirds of prisoners' sons went on to offend themselves.<sup>23</sup> Research on adverse childhood experiences, or ACEs, which include having a parent in prison, and parental separation, has found that when four or more of these combine in a child's life, they are 20 times more likely to be incarcerated themselves in the future than someone who did not have any ACEs.<sup>24</sup> Keeping a child connected with their parent can mitigate the harm to that child of their parent's imprisonment and reduce the likelihood that he or she will end up in prison themselves.<sup>25</sup>

Finally, I was asked to focus on the majority male prison population in England and Wales for this Review.

As an aside, the Government's Female Offenders Strategy, launched in June 2018, referred to my being commissioned to conduct a Follow-on Review for the women's estate. I have been asked to tailor the original recommendations to women's needs and, given that an estimated two thirds of women in prison are mothers,<sup>26</sup> I have also been asked to consider how to support family ties while they are serving community sentences and post-release. The report from this Follow-on Review will not be available until early 2019.

### Overlapping principles between the Farmer Review and therapeutic communities (TCs)

Turning now to what I found and what I recommended, I have distilled these down to three clear principles: relationships, responsibilities and rewards, all of which are highly relevant to therapeutic communities.

In a nutshell, TCs value relationships, and are particularly alive to the influence, positive and negative, that residents' current and birth families have, both on their prior offending and on their day-to-day behaviour in prison. TCs strongly emphasise the need for men and women in prison to take responsibility for those relationships, to reflect on how they treat people, particularly

those who matter to them, and the repercussions of their actions towards them.

Finally, TCs work on the basis that there are enormous rewards to be reaped by treating relationships as an asset which should, where appropriate, influence how other important aspects of prison life are conducted, particularly security.

### Relationships

First, the importance of relationships. I say in the Foreword to my Review that:

*This report is not sentimental about prisoners' families, as if they can, simply by their presence, alchemise a disposition to commit crime into one that is law abiding. However, I do want to*

British taxpayers are currently spending £15bn per year on reoffending and 38 per cent of men will return to prison after release...

19. Lister, R., (2003), *Citizenship: Feminist Perspectives*, Palgrave, p73

20. Ministry of Justice, (2016), *Prison Safety and Reform*, p32

21. House of Commons, (2016), *Work and Pensions Committee, Support for Ex-Offenders*, p29; Ministry of Justice, (2016), *Proven Reoffending Statistics Quarterly Bulletin*, p1

22. Ministry of Justice, (2008), *Factors Linked to Reoffending*, p6

23. Ministry of Justice, (2012), *Prisoners' Childhood and Family Backgrounds*, p12

24. NHS Wales, (2015), *Adverse Childhood Experiences*, p5

25. The University of Huddersfield, (2016), *Children of Prisoners: Their Situation and Role in Long-Term Crime Prevention*, p19

26. Howard League, (2014), *The Howard League for Penal Reform, (2014), Mothers in Prison: The Sentencing of Mothers and the Rights of the Child*, Coventry University, p2 'Mothers in Prison', p2

*hammer home a very simple principle of reform that needs to be a golden thread running through the prison system and the agencies that surround it... relationships are fundamentally important if people are to change.*<sup>27</sup>

Whenever politicians talk about rehabilitation, they refer to the importance of education and employment. It is exceptional for them also to mention families and relationships. I will know my Review is really changing the culture when politicians find it impossible to talk about rehabilitation without also referring to the role of relationships because they have grasped that these provide the all-important motivation for people to change.

In the book, *Life Beyond Crime, Positive Justice* Gloucestershire's Hilary Peters says:

*I have known several prisoners who have changed their lives. They have all said that the very first step is recognising that there is someone who accepts them unconditionally ...suddenly they feel worthwhile. Then it is worth making the effort to change. That contact is like cracking a shell. The imprisoned person starts to grow...connecting is always the key.*<sup>28</sup>

The implication is that many people inside prisons have not experienced this unconditional acceptance. There is no doubt that problems in prisoners' family backgrounds, which may have contributed to their now being in prison, can cast a dark shadow over their lives, even decades later. This is acknowledged by the research on TCs and their everyday practice.

Many people who recognise they need to be part of TCs endured or witnessed harrowing and destructive early experiences, such as abandonment and abuse, which undermined their healthy emotional and psychological development. These ordeals have had a lasting influence on them, profoundly shaped how they see the world and defined who they are in their own

eyes. They have seared unhealthy patterns of how to interact with, and what to expect from others, into their relational repertoire.<sup>29</sup>

One of the TC's key tasks is to provide a corrective emotional experience by enabling residents to build reparative relationships between residents and with staff. Within this safe relational envelope, often in a group context, people feel able to be open about their lives and the hurdles which seem insurmountable and, vitally, their self-perceptions that they are doomed to fail are challenged.<sup>30</sup>

Here is a key overlap with family: the psychiatrist, Irvin Yalom, describes how 'group therapy produces group dynamics that resemble and reproduce familial dynamics.'<sup>31</sup> As basic trust and secure attachment deepens, the resident can talk about his distressing emotional baggage—the unfinished business of relationships that went wrong in early life.

More than that, the everyday relational glitches of community life provide them with ample opportunity to revisit how he or she has managed and experienced relationships in the past. While safely contained in a therapeutic frame they can experiment with new ways of relating and experiencing emotional intimacy. So, prisoners who have spent time in TCs are learning, often for the first time, how to relate constructively with others who, in

a sense, are temporarily part of their family grouping.

One element of the 'local family offer' I recommended that all governors provide in their prison is 'family learning'.<sup>32</sup> In response to the Review, the Ministry of Justice now requires each prison to publish a Family and Significant Others Strategy which must include this and the other 'family offer' elements.<sup>33</sup> Family learning refers to evidence-based programmes that enable prisoners to maintain and improve their relationships. These are often provided by the voluntary sector.

For example, Safe Ground's Family Man and Fathers Inside programmes, enable students to develop a better understanding of their role as a father. The activities and exercises men undertake, are specifically

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27. Farmer, (2017), see n.1, p4.

28. Peters, H., 'Connecting is the Key', (2017), in Crane, Paul, (ed.), 2017, *Life Beyond Crime*, Lemos&Crane, p127.

29. Bowlby, J., (1988), *A Secure Base: Parent-Child Attachment and Healthy Human Development*, Routledge.

30. Stevens, A. (2016), 'Therapeutic communities' in Jewkes, Y., Bennett, J. and Crewe, B. (eds) *Handbook on Prisons* p.497-51.

31. Yalom, I., (1995), *The Theory and Practice of Group Psychotherapy*, New York, quoted in Stevens, (2016), see n.30., p502.

32. Farmer, (2017), see n.1., p38.

33. HM Prison and Probation Service, (2017), *Delivering Effective Family Practice*.

34. Safe Ground, (2016), *Summary of How Safe Ground Programmes Support the Prison Reform Agenda*, Unpublished Evidence Submitted to The Farmer Review.

designed to increase awareness and empathy and to develop the soft skills that are indispensable for success in employment, training and education, both in prison and on release.<sup>34</sup>

Beyond a programmatic approach, I recommended that personal officers should be encouraged and trained to develop personal relationships with their prisoners. This would help to reverse the de-skilling of wing officers that has accompanied under-manning. When I interviewed prison officers they told me they had become too busy to talk even just for a few minutes about what mattered to prisoners, such as their family ties. Short, constructive, skilfully conducted conversations are satisfying for staff and help them to stave off problems. Again, this is highly consistent with the intentional building of reparative relationships between residents and staff that TCs specialise in.

Given the high numbers of prisoners formerly in the care of the local authority already mentioned, personal officers must also be aware of how to help those who are care-experienced with the psychological and other issues they often face. Their internal working models often lead them to default to the position that relationships are inherently unreliable at best, abusive at worst.

When insecurity and a sense of threat are entrenched in an offender's attachment template it is very hard to form relationships that will help them to desist from offending and integrate themselves into society after their sentence.

### Responsibilities

Turning to responsibilities, I will quote Corin Morgan-Armstrong, a serving prison officer for two decades, who was on the Task Group for the Review. His ground-breaking family work at HMP and YOI Parc has been showcased across the world:

*Even if they have destroyed their family relationships through their criminal choices, there remained something raw, intrinsic and indefatigable, a hope or desire to repair damage, to try and somehow make things better. For me, this motivation for change above all other practical motivations (accommodation, employment, education etc) is the most powerful, and critically the most sustainable.<sup>35</sup>*

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Another way of talking about this motivation for change is in terms of a newly-found sense of responsibility.

Similarly, being in a TC presents opportunities to take individual and collective responsibility. Allocation of tasks means that when people do not take responsibility, they have not offended against the anonymous prison service but against their peers and the values and customs they and their community have developed and endorsed.<sup>36</sup>

Flouting these does not just lead to an adjudication which can be laughed off. They are held to account by the group, to whom they must explain themselves and from whom they learn the consequences of what they have done. Residents are forced to abandon any notion that each man is an island when they become acutely, even painfully, aware that human beings coexist in a web of moral and relational interdependency. More

positively they experience first-hand the benefits of working collaboratively and harmoniously.

With reference to my Review, it was clear that holding men accountable for their family responsibilities produces many longer-term dividends in terms of the safe running of the prison regime. This is well-established by research and I saw it in practice.

One father I spoke to in HMP Winchester told me:

*If part of your prison routine is to do homework with your child or ring home regularly to hold a quality conversation with her, this is a strong deterrent to taking a substance that would mean you were unable to do that because you were 'off your head'.*

Similarly, a focus group of men in Frankland high security prison described how the good contact they had with their families had a restraining effect on their behaviour when something 'kicked off' on their landing. Knowing how much their families would worry if they heard about them being involved in a fight, had a strong deterrent effect to joining in:

*The first thing I think about is my family when there is an altercation.*

Technology can and should be deployed to help men fulfil their responsibilities. One man I met in prison, who was not unusual in having no visits, had been in

35. Morgan-Armstrong, C., (2017), 'Parenting is not for Cowards', in Crane, (2017), see n.28., p90.

36. Stevens, (2016), see n.30.

care as a child and had already served a sentence for 26 years. The only person with whom he had a significant relationship was his 93-year-old grandmother, but she was unable to make the long journey to see him. His prison was being digitalised (phones were being installed in every cell and tablets provided so men could order their own meals and canteen items) but they still seemed to be a long way from being able to offer skype-type or virtual visits.

It is apparent when considering such cases that the prison system must make the most of technology, not just for family members to stay in touch but for prisoners to express their sense of responsibility towards them. If a teenager is doing important exams it can be very disruptive for them to travel across the country and see their father inside. It is hard to cope with the rigours of visiting when there's a very new baby to look after. Both the teenager and the new mother need to know that the father understands their daily struggles, instead of being wholly absorbed in his own.

That is why I recommended that virtual visits using video calling technology be made available as soon as possible for the limited numbers of families where members cannot visit frequently or at all. In other countries—Tasmania, Northern Ireland and Australia for example—it is already mainstream, for example to use tablets in the visits hall.<sup>37</sup> HMP Grendon explored skype-type visits and further pioneering establishments are working with the Government to develop models for how this can be done safely across the estate.

Finally, I was determined that my Review include men who had absolutely no supportive relationships, familial or otherwise, often because they were taken into local authority care as children and found much to recommend in the approach taken by Lifelong Links, also known as Family Finding. This model, currently being piloted in nine local authorities in England and Scotland, aims to build lifelong support networks for children and young people in care. Lifelong Links team members identify and work with relatives and other supportive adults with a connection to a child in care, who are willing to make a life-long commitment to that child and give them ongoing emotional and practical support. The aim, in so doing, is to reinforce their sense of identity and

belonging. Criminal justice social workers in Edinburgh (who do the work of probation officers in England and Wales) are also testing the potential of this model to help prisoners forge new connections that will motivate them to undertake rehabilitation activity whilst inside and help them make a fresh start upon release.

## Rewards

As a metals trader for 50 years, I have spent my working life calculating the risk-rewards of business opportunities and I approached my Review in the same hard-headed way. When assessing if a deal is worth taking a risk on, one needs to look at how great that risk is relative to the potential rewards. If there is a 20 per cent risk but the reward is 80 per cent, one takes the shot.

When I looked at the evidence on the impact of family relationships a similar calculation made harnessing these seem like a risk worth taking. The short-term risks seemed to be based on the view that family work in prisons creates a chink of weakness in the prison's armour of security which a minority intent on smuggling in illicit goods can exploit. Family members can indeed be pressurised into bringing in contraband by the prisoner they are visiting, who in turn is being coerced by someone inside. However, if this is to be dealt with

effectively, security and family work should not be treated as conflicting or competing priorities.

If they are then security will and always should be the paramount concern. What can break the impasse is if a Deputy or Governing Governor vocally champions this area of prison life because of the dividends family work can pay as I just mentioned. When I visited HMP Leeds the Governing Governor told me that he used the extra budget allocated for improving safety, to place a prison officer in his visitors' centre. He knew it was vital to improve how the community outside related to prison life inside and vice versa. Experience had taught him that families can be assets which, if fully deployed, can profoundly change how men in jail see themselves and therefore how they serve their sentences. Prisoners with more stable family relationships were more likely to be stable themselves.

Again, the issue of safety is one which those running TCs have grappled with extensively. There are

This model, currently being piloted in nine local authorities in England and Scotland, aims to build lifelong support networks for children and young people in care.

37. Farmer, (2017), see n.1., p105

38. Family Rights Group, (2018), 'Lifelong Links', accessed on 21/09/2018 at [www.frg.org.uk/involving-families/family-group-conferences/lifelong-links#what-is-lifelong-links](http://www.frg.org.uk/involving-families/family-group-conferences/lifelong-links#what-is-lifelong-links)

similar security issues to consider when changing prisons' practice towards families, as there are with putting therapeutic principles at the heart of prison processes.

Prisons or units operating on TC principles have valuable experience in managing the tensions between seemingly conflictive priorities and avoiding an overemphasis on any one that will ultimately be destructive to the whole. TCs are familiar with holding in tension the priorities of 'therapy and security, care and control, the clinical and the penal.'<sup>39</sup> Both aspects of these inherently somewhat opposed pairs are always indispensable, and neither should consistently dominate or excessively intrude in ways that will undermine the other.

The need to manage such tensions well is particularly seen in carceral geography, how space is organised in prisons. A prison visiting hall might be seen as an unavoidable security risk hotspot because prisoners' visiting rights have to be fulfilled and therefore it will be staffed with a measure of reluctance. Alternatively, it could be seen as somewhere with great potential for positive change, because families and others who are significant to prisoners have a role to play in rehabilitation that is becoming increasingly apparent and valued.

Moreover, if families are to feel valued by establishments this should be reflected in the spaces they visit. HMP Grendon has extended their visits area so children can play outside with their fathers, which makes the whole experience much more healthy and enjoyable. Fathers receiving visits in good weather know they are not restricting their children to playing inside because they are in a prison.

It does not take much to brighten up the areas visitors walk through so they are not unnecessarily bleak. There are low cost solutions such as giving artistic prisoners or organisations in the community the opportunity to demonstrate their creative flair.

The Review refers to the difference between being an extrovert and an introvert prison.<sup>40</sup> I saw extrovert prisons which have developed relationships with businesses, voluntary organisations and other community bodies including universities. This can facilitate a flow of goods, services and funding into the prison. In return, it provides volunteering, research and corporate social responsibility opportunities for individuals and agencies outside the prison.

This can have the welcome result that when the visits hall—the place that's shared between the prison and the community, where inside meets outside—needs some new, obviously risk-assessed, furniture; the toy box would benefit from a refresh; and prisoners' teenage children need replacement X Box controllers which have taken a hammering, there is a wealth of other resources to draw on beyond prison budgets.

Other prisons I visited seemed cut off from the world. In one, I held a group discussion with the men inside, about how family work could be improved. Some of their suggestions depended on availability of funding, for example, the chairs in the visits hall were old, no longer comfortable and badly needed replacing. The prison officer attending the discussion was sympathetic but said the budget could not meet this need. It was clearly not in his mind that there might be community

partners who could be approached, so funding and other opportunities went unnoticed. More concerningly, if those running prisons do not realise that the outside has something to offer and they are inward-looking, such 'introvert' establishments will be at a distinct disadvantage when trying to change the culture, so that relationships, especially with families outside, are prized as rehabilitation assets.

On the broader issue of safety, lack of contact with families was viewed by respondents to my Review as a key factor not just in violence but also in self-harm, suicide and the deterioration of mental health. Families can provide vital information and insights about the risk of self-harm or suicide for prisoners.

So, my Review recommended that each prison should establish a clear, auditable and responsive 'gateway' communication system for families and significant others—a dedicated phone line that is listened to and acted upon.<sup>41</sup> It also recommended that families' concerns about mental and physical health are properly recorded and action taken. This could be run by a voluntary sector organisation or prison staff, but whoever deals with those calls cannot treat them lightly.

I met with families who were deeply frustrated that their detailed knowledge of men who had come to harm in prison had not been drawn upon. They could have provided crucial information about health needs, medication and dangerously bullying relationships and thereby prevent violence, self-harm, suicide and further

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39 Stevens, (2016), see n.30, p507

40 Farmer, (2017), see n.1., p102

41 Ibid, p13.



deterioration in health—and the vicious cycle of danger which accompanies these.

Excessive risk aversion can mean security concerns dominate how prisons relates to families to the extent that they become side-lined in the battle against the disorder and despair that help to drive violence, drug use and poor mental health—and a vicious cycle of danger.

Just as the short-term risks of security lapses should be set against the potential long-term rewards of a much more positive and rehabilitative culture, we must be willing to accept, and ready to respond to, the political risk that this whole agenda will be dismissed as being soft on crime.

When my report was launched a small minority of politicians accused me of precisely that. My rebuttal to this charge is simple: bringing men face to face with their family responsibilities reduces reoffending and means fewer victims, more children growing up with their fathers and less likely to offend themselves, fewer future prisoners, lower costs, more men taking advantage of educational and employment opportunities, so they work when they come out of prison and therefore generate more tax revenue.

## Conclusion

I have set my remarks about the Farmer Review in the context of the wider issue of family breakdown—family and other significant relationships need to be valued and better supported by policy across every government department, not just the MoJ.

With regard to the overlapping principles that make TCs successful, I have outlined the undergirding principles of the Farmer Review and how these informed its recommendations. These principles are the need to harness the resource of good family relationships and make them the golden thread running through all processes of prisons; the need to bring home to men that they have enduring responsibilities to their families; and the need to focus on the rewards that consistently good family work and a change in culture across the estate can bring.

I will close with some remarks about how this affects the Therapeutic Communities agenda. Were a major cultural change across the mainstream prison estate to be achieved, along the lines I recommend above, and these three principles guided standard practice, I suggest this would lead to many of the improvements in the wider prison system proponents of the TC agenda have been championing for decades.

Some of the ends of TC treatment will be well-served by the emphasis on family and other significant relationships I have sketched out here. After all, almost

half of the entire sentenced prison population is not serving a long enough sentence to benefit from TC treatment. Those who will only be able to make progress if they undertake treatment that is as intensive as a TC are not typical. As one researcher has expressed it:

*By the nature of their offence, sentence and psyche they are not 'normal' offenders and need a treatment intervention that goes beyond the 'normal'.<sup>42</sup>*

As awareness of the importance of relationships to successful rehabilitation grows, I am cautiously optimistic—and optimism is important in therapy—that appreciation of the specialist work that is carried out in TCs will grow, not least because there are other promising developments to build on. For example, the Offender Personality Disorder Pathway programme now includes TCs and it has been suggested that their integration into a key strand of policy will mean the number of applications to join TCs will increase, thereby boosting take up of the model. Indeed, it has been suggested that a 'spring of hope' and renewal might be approaching for this most 'special kind of prison'.<sup>43</sup>

Implementation of the 'families agenda' is ongoing—and going well. Given the synergies and overlaps between it and the Therapeutic Communities agenda it is my hope that these two vines will grow up together. The more we understand that everyone needs relationships to change, the more it will be understood that some will struggle more—a lot more—to forge and maintain these, and that therapeutic community places are indispensable.

To use the language of TCs, operationalised respect for the 'universal therapy' that healthy family ties can deliver, has been noticeable by its absence. Previous approaches to rehabilitation that only emphasised employment and education did not work.

The relational imperative the TC agenda has been proselytising on behalf of for many years, with reference to a tight framework of theory and practice, has been sorely lacking. It is this relational imperative that the Farmer Review is working to universalise.

As I said earlier, there is growing conviction among ministers in the current administration, that we need to strengthen families, given that they can undermine or bolster the aims of every department of government. However, a future administration, of whatever colour, could unravel this welcome emphasis on families and relationships. The voluntary sector, prisons and other social policy agencies must work together to ensure it becomes so embedded, both in our prisons and in other areas of policy, that the relational consensus is unbreakable—and here to stay.

<sup>42</sup> Stevens, (2016), see n.30, p500.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid, p510.