Inside Stories: an overview

Background
There is significant evidence that suggests that prisoners and their children often have lower levels of literacy than the general population. Most prison visits for children offer little in the way of child-centric activity or family interaction and activities such as reading with your child are rarely encouraged. Maintaining family ties has been shown to be a significant factor in reducing re-offending by ex-prisoners. Approximately half of all prisoners are re-convicted within a year, however regular family visits have been found to reduce re-offending by around 39%. Pact/Kids VIP pioneered the development of supervised children’s play areas, along with child-centred visits and family days to allow parents and children to play together positively. The Inside Stories Programme was developed at the end of 2012 with the aim to: ‘bring a love of books, and the joy of sharing children’s books, to 200 children with a parent in prison, and to create an inspiring, replicable model for a prison-based family intervention centred around book-sharing and book-gifting.’ The programme aims to achieve this by delivering a book-sharing and book-gifting programme for prisoners and their children, with the following benefits:

- Child-centred family days in prisons with a focus on sharing books and story-telling
- Establishing the precedent and expectation of children’s book sections in prison libraries and borrowing libraries for use in standard ‘social’ visits areas.
- A ‘book-gifting’ programme whereby parents in prison are supported and enabled to select appropriate children’s books and give them to their children.

Proposed outcomes
The Inside Stories Programme aims to achieve the following outcomes:

1. Increase families’ engagement with library services.
2. Increase families’ understanding of the importance of reading with your child.
3. Increase families’ understanding about the appropriate reading material for their child/ren.
4. Increase incidences of parents and their children enjoying sharing books together.

Programme delivery

- Prisoners attend two-day workshops. The first workshop includes sessions on the benefits of reading and how to read effectively with children. The prisoners are also given the opportunity to choose a book for their child/ren to share during a Family Visit. During the second workshop prisoners have the opportunity to make their child additional gifts to accompany the book (such as puppets and book marks) and create a personalised book plate.
- The second workshop is followed by a Family Visit where prisoners have the opportunity to give their child their book and share the story with them.
Outside agencies such as local libraries, writers, story-tellers, and organisations providing drama and performance workshops for children are also invited to attend the Family Visit to promote reading with children.

The books selected by Inside Stories are also made available for prisoners to access in the visit hall and prison library to encourage prisoners to continue reading and sharing books with their children.