

Press release: Landmark review places family ties at the heart of prison reform

- New study by Lord Michael Farmer calls family relationships “the golden thread” to help reduce reoffending.
- Research shows prisoners who receive visits from a family member are 39 per cent less likely to reoffend.

Research has shown close ties between prisoners and key family members can significantly reduce the risk of reoffending – which costs society £15 billion every year.

In a landmark review, [‘Importance of strengthening prisoners’ family ties to prevent reoffending and reduce intergenerational crime’](#) published today (10 August 2017) Lord Farmer has identified family as the “golden thread” running through the reforms across the prison estate.

In September 2016 Lord Farmer, in partnership with the membership charity Clinks, was commissioned by the government to investigate how connecting prisoners with their families can improve offender wellbeing, assist in keeping the public safe and reduce reoffending.

Lord Farmer said:

My 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 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. That principle is that relationships are fundamentally important if people are to change.

The Ministry of Justice has already started developing a strategy which will take forward recommendations from the review.

Progress is being made on a number of the recommendations, including giving governors the budget and flexibility to spend their resources appropriately to help prisoners keep important family ties.

Alongside this the government has started piloting significant relationship performance measures which will provide crucial guidance to deliver more consistent services in areas such as visitations across the entire prisons estate.

The recommendations have been welcomed by Justice Secretary David Lidington

who has set out his commitment to creating calm and ordered prison environments to deliver more effective rehabilitation.

Speaking today, he echoed Lord Farmer's view that family relationships are essential to reducing reoffending.

Justice Secretary David Lidington said:

Families can play a significant role in supporting an offender and I am grateful to Lord Farmer for his dedication and research on this important issue.

We are committed to transforming prisons into places of safety and reform and we recognise the need to provide those in our care with stable environments, and opportunities to change their behaviour.

There are numerous examples of good practice in this area, and we will continue work on a strategy to best support offender needs. That has to start with the numbers of prison officers available to support offenders which is why we are increasing staffing number by 2,500.

Lord Farmer's review reflects on progress that has been made in this area over recent years, with many prisons already having defined programmes which puts family relationships at the centre.

Innovative schemes and partnerships with local organisations are also vital vehicles for preparing men for release, and there are already proven partnerships in this area such as Storybook Dads, who help fathers keep in contact with their children, and Partners of Prisoners, who work with prisons to deliver more welcoming visitor environments.

Clinks CEO & Deputy Chair of the Farmer Review, Anne Fox said:

The Farmer Review listened to over 1,000 men in prison and their families, voluntary organisations across the UK, prison staff and academics.

The review concludes that quality family services will help people turn away from crime and it will support families to cope. Voluntary organisations have pioneered best practice for decades and now is the time to spread it far and wide.

The government has secured an additional £100 million a year investment for an extra 2,500 prison officers. With the increasing numbers of prison officers there will be more time available to directly supervise offenders, provide one-to-one support and increase the number of visits.

This, alongside the creation of Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service,

will put offender management at the centre of our reform agenda and create a necessary cultural change, bringing with it stability and security – and ultimately reducing the risk of reoffending.

Notes to editors:

- Ministry of Justice research shows that prisoners who receive visits from a family member are 39% less likely to reoffend.
- [The Prisons Reform White Paper](#) outlined that family members may encourage offenders to take responsibility for their offending, and the impact it has on their lives and the lives of those around them. If a prisoner receives visits by a partner or family member (one measure of family ties) the odds of reoffending are 39% lower than for prisoners who had not received such visits.
- Clinks supports, represents and campaigns for the voluntary sector working with offenders. Clinks aims to ensure the sector and all those with whom they work are informed and engaged in order to transform the lives of offenders and their communities. Contact details for Clinks, Ben Watson Communications Manager, 07809 332084, Ben.Watson@clinks.org
- Storybook Dads is a national charity that operates in 90 prisons nationwide, including women's prisons and Young Offenders establishments. It helps to maintain family ties by enabling imprisoned parents to read personalised bedtime stories to their children. The recordings are enhanced by adding sound effects and music and are sent to the children, so that the children can listen to their parents' voice whenever they need to. Storybook Dads helps approximately 5,000 families annually to keep in touch in this unique and meaningful way.