Evaluation of Quaker Connections’ Befriending Project

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This evaluation commissioned by the Quaker Service focuses on the Quaker Connections’ Befriending Project which commenced at HMP Maghaberry in February 2012. Quaker Connections aims to provide isolated prisoners with an opportunity to have contact with someone who is not a professional involved with Prison or Probation services. It is hoped that visits from voluntary befrienders will help them deal better with their situation and help to prepare them for life in the community after release (Quaker Service 2012).

The aim of the evaluation is to assess the Quaker Connections’ Befriending Project at HMP Maghaberry from the perspective of prisoners, volunteers, Quaker staff and prison staff. The evaluation considers the views of participants on the Project; matching of prisoner to volunteer; training and support provided for volunteers; prisoners’ perceptions of the service and what they get from it; volunteer-prisoner relationships; when the relationship ends; organisational issues and prison service facilitation of the Project.

Befriending and mentoring are used interchangeably within the literature whereby American based research typically refers to ‘mentoring’ and UK studies use both terms and mainly draw on the experiences of young people at risk. For the purpose of this evaluation the following definition of befriending by Dean and Goodlad (1998: 13) has been adopted:

A relationship between two or more individuals which is initiated and supported and monitored by an agency that has defined one or more parties as likely to benefit. Ideally, the relationship is non-judgmental, mutual, and purposeful, and there is a commitment over time.

Based on the literature befriending is situated in between ‘companionship’ and ‘mentorship’, where the former focuses on the development of social relationships and the latter on specific objectives. There has been a growing trend in the development of befriending schemes in prison, but a paucity of research from the perspective of those involved in the schemes. Notwithstanding this, the available

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1 The authors adopt the term ‘prisoner’ to refer to those held in prison to reflect the nature of imprisonment and the terminology used by prisoners who participated in the evaluation.
evidence suggests that befriending schemes in prison provide a promising intervention on a number of levels, when delivered to a high standard albeit the outcomes are hard to quantify. For example, schemes may not impact successfully on reducing re-offending rates per se, but may be effective in increasing participants’ involvement in education, training and employment.

There are many reasons why family and friends may have limited, lost or cut contact with prisoners, but whatever the reasons, the potential consequences include feelings of isolation, loneliness, guilt, anger and despair which may contribute to difficulties such as depression, paranoia, anxiety and suicidal tendencies. This emphasises the need for alternative strategies to facilitate increased visitation and positive social interaction for prisoners who receive few or no visits.

The need to provide the Quaker Connections’ Befriending Project, due to the extent to which prisoners have lost contact with family and friends was recognised by all participants in the evaluation. There was also clear agreement that the Project should be extended to reach more isolated prisoners. To facilitate this, participants suggested that the Project should be further promoted and developed, but acknowledged that this is dependent on additional resources. These include additional provision to cover the Quaker Connections’ Volunteer Project Manager’s roles through extending the post to full-time and/or a job-share arrangement, and more paid workers, volunteers, active publicity of the Project and involvement of prison personnel.

Employed on a part-time basis (22.5 hours per week), the Project Manager has responsibility for the Quaker Connections’ Befriending and Family Support Projects. Roles include promoting the Projects, recruiting and training volunteers, as well as providing their ongoing supervision and support, meeting and briefing prisoners about their participation, and liaising with prison staff, including attending Prisoner Safety and Support Team meetings. The Quaker Service is considering increasing the position to full-time to enable the Project to meet demand, but this is dependent on funding availability. It has also followed-up on the potential to extend the Project to HMP Magilligan and has four volunteers who are interested in fulfilling befriender
roles at the prison, however resource constraints in terms of project management time requirements have prevented the extension of the Project to Magilligan.

The extent of the Project Manager’s roles and the high regard demonstrated by participants for how she fulfils these roles, not least in supporting volunteers and prisoners, clearly demonstrate the need to extend cover for the post. This should assist in the recruitment of volunteers and prisoners to the Project, the numbers of which fluctuated during the course of the evaluation due to a range of issues which included volunteers leaving due to family and/or work commitments, new volunteers being recruited and prisoners being transferred or released, reconnected with family or leaving the Project due to ill health preventing attendance at visits.

Volunteers commended the training and support they receive from the Project Manager, and a couple indicated that training could be further extended through the involvement of other independent agencies and ex-prisoners. Findings also suggest that further emphasis could be placed on befrienders signposting befriendedees to prison procedures and services. Also, consideration should be given to the issue raised by a participant that there are Foreign National prisoners who would benefit from involvement in the Project and training for volunteers on the particular issues faced by Foreign National prisoners would be useful. In addition to providing a prison tour in the training process, some volunteers and prisoners suggested that it would be beneficial if befrienders could see where their befriendedee lives in the prison.

The voices of the participants clearly demonstrate the vital role the Project plays in the lives of those held at HMP Maghaberry in reducing social isolation, providing opportunities for befriendedees to experience some relief from the monotony of the prison environment and creating a space for those most isolated to be listened to without prejudice and affording them respect and dignity. It is vital however that the Project does not act as a substitute for prisoners getting out of their cell on a regular basis and the Prison Service should give greater attention to addressing the needs of isolated prisoners.

The success of projects such as this relies on financial investment, highly trained befrienders, awareness of the Project on the prison landings and the support of
prison personnel in facilitating access, ensuring that the correct information regarding visits is provided to befriendedes and that unnecessary delays to the visiting area and for visitors held in the waiting hall when leaving are minimised. Drawing on the voices of participants, the report clearly demonstrates the significance of the Project in listening, assisting and advising. It reflects the calibre and dedication of the Project Manager and the befrienders; the positive impact on befriendedes; the importance of support for the work from the Prison Service and the need for the Project to be sustained and developed.

**Recommendations**

The following recommendations are made to Quaker Service:

1) Ensure that the Quaker Connections’ Befriending Project is enabled to sustain and continue providing support.

2) Implement plans to secure funding to increase provision to cover the Volunteer Project Manager’s roles.

3) Seek funding to invest in more paid workers to further develop and promote the Project within Maghaberry.

4) Raise awareness among prison managers, prison officers and prisoners through greater promotion of the Project by the Prison Service and Quaker Service. Promote the Project at training sessions for prison personnel, via prison personnel informing prisoners about the Project, and increased publicity using additional posters and providing leaflets.

5) Consider expanding training in relation to befrienders signposting befriendedes to prison procedures and services.

6) Consider facilitating greater involvement of other independent agencies and ex-prisoners in the provision of training.

7) Progress plans to place further emphasis on the needs of befrienders who are visiting prisoners with mental health issues, either through additional training and/or via the recruitment of volunteers.

8) Encourage systems to ensure that prison personnel keep befriendedes up-to-date with any changes to visiting arrangements and convey messages befriendedes may have to the Quaker Service regarding visiting arrangements.

9) Enhance systems to support information-sharing between the Quaker Service and prison personnel to ensure the latter are aware of arrangements in place to facilitate befriendedes’ role within the prison.
10) Formalise monitoring and evaluation systems which engage befrienders and befrienees at specific stages of their involvement in the Project, and prison personnel.

11) Have in place a formal system that monitors the support needs of befrienders and befrienees and reviews how these needs are being met and whether they change over time.

12) Explore the potential to facilitate befrienders seeing their befriender’s landing and cell where both feel this would be desirable.

13) Ensure that there is a robust system in place to manage endings in the befriending relationship including where unanticipated endings occur.

14) Progress Quaker Connections’ ongoing work with other groups to provide through-the-gate support and continued support for prisoners and ex-prisoners post-release.

15) Seek funding to progress plans to extend the Project to Magilligan.

16) Explore extending the Project further to Foreign National prisoners who receive few or no visits and include this topic in training.

17) Explore the development of a similar project for women prisoners and young male prisoners.
INTRODUCTION

The Quaker Service, in addition to its Visitors’ Centre and Prison Family Support Team at Maghaberry Prison, developed Quaker Connections, a volunteer programme, in collaboration with the Northern Ireland Prison Service. The Project was piloted in 2007 and four years later in June 2011, a part-time Volunteer Project Manager was employed. The programme, as outlined by the Quaker Service (2012: 23), consists of two projects. The first, which focuses on families visiting prisoners, ‘aims to promote the maintenance of family ties by providing emotional and practical support to make visiting the prison easier and thus more likely to continue’. The second focuses on isolated prisoners, who receive ‘very few, or no visitors at all on a regular basis’. In March 2012, 170 men were identified as not having received a visit within the previous three months. Through Quaker Connections’ befriending (volunteer visitors), the Project aims to provide isolated prisoners ‘with an opportunity to have contact with someone who is not a professional involved with Prison or Probation services. It is hoped that continued contact will help them deal better with their situation and make them more prepared for release into the community’. This report, commissioned by the Quaker Service, focuses on an evaluation of the Quaker Connections’ Befriending Project which commenced in February 2012.

Despite the growing trend for the development of befriending schemes in prison, there is a paucity of research about befrienders (volunteers), prisoner befriendedes, the workers and prison personnel involved in projects such as Quaker Connections’ Befriending Project. This report aims to examine the development of the Quaker Connections’ Befriending Project at HMP Maghaberry, the role and experiences of befrienders, the experiences of the befriendedee, and the effectiveness and challenges of the Project. It is based on a review of relevant literature and semi-structured interviews with prisoners and volunteers involved in the Project, the Volunteer Project Manager and prison officers. Ethical approval to conduct the interviews was granted by the University of Ulster Research Ethics Committee and following security clearance a prison governor facilitated access to the prison on an ‘escorted’ basis. In total 18 interviews were conducted with seven prisoners, seven volunteers, the Volunteer Project Manager and three prison officers.
The aim of the evaluation, a brief biography of the report authors, an overview of the Project, the methodology adopted, the literature review conducted and research findings and recommendations are documented below.

**Aim of Evaluation**

The aim of the evaluation is to assess the Quaker Connections’ Befriending Project at HMP Maghaberry from the perspective of prisoners, volunteers, Quaker staff and prison staff. The evaluation considers the views of participants on the Project; matching of prisoner to volunteer; training and support provided for volunteers; prisoners’ perceptions of the service and what they get from it; volunteer-prisoner relationships; when the relationship ends; organisational issues and prison service facilitation of the Project.

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THE PROJECT
The Quaker Connections’ Befriending Project commenced in February 2012 at HMP Maghaberry, a high security prison accommodating around 1000 or more men (although individual prisoners do not necessarily have a high security categorisation). It aims to support isolated prisoners through the involvement of volunteer visitors, known as ‘befrienders’ and is overseen by the Quaker Connections’ Volunteer Project Manager. The Manager is employed on a part-time basis (22.5 hours per week) and has responsibility for promoting the Project, recruiting and training volunteers, as well as providing their ongoing supervision and support, meeting and briefing prisoners about their participation, and liaising with prison staff, including attending Prisoner Safety and Support Team meetings. The Quaker Service (2014: 6) is considering increasing the position to full-time from late 2014 ‘to enable the project to meet demand’, however this change will be dependent on funding availability. It has also followed-up on the potential to extend the Project to HMP Magilligan and has four volunteers interested in becoming befrienders at the prison (p.2).

Funding is provided by a two year grant from the Pilgrim Trust and a three year grant from the Rayne Foundation, and the Quaker Service has secured further funding from the John Paul Getty Charitable Trust to continue the Project beyond three years. In addition, a Quaker funder, the Stephen Clark Trust, provided a significant donation towards sustaining the Project. Funding was also secured from the Northern Ireland Prison Service (NIPS) ‘following lengthy negotiations’ for a portacabin to accommodate the Project and from the Department of Social Development Modernisation Fund for the fitting out of the building (Quaker Service 2014: 1). The portacabin comprising an office, small meeting room and training room was installed by NIPS in the car park adjacent to the Quaker Service Visitors’ Centre in mid-March 2013 and made fit for purpose, with electrics and painting completed, by the end of June 2013. Its provision, as noted by the Quaker Service (2014: 2), resulted in the Project Manager finding ‘it much easier to manage the project’.

Prior to taking up their visiting role with prisoners, volunteers complete an interview with, and receive training from, the Project Manager. The Quaker Service Visitors’
Centre at Maghaberry when available on Mondays and the Frederick Street Quaker Meeting House in Belfast were used to deliver the training, up until the portacabin became available for use. Training methods include talks, role-playing, the use of scenarios and a tour of the prison. Volunteers attend six training sessions, usually run over three days, prior to taking up their role. Issues covered include the role of the Project, the prison security process, Project rules (for example, not to disclose personal information, not to ‘evangelise’ about religion; to listen rather than to talk too much), and stereotyping of prisoners and their families, discrimination and suicide awareness. As noted by the Quaker Service (2014: 4) and discussed further below in relation to volunteers’ experiences, ‘the work can be very challenging at times and volunteers may need a lot of support’. In relation to this, ongoing support is provided for volunteers post-training by the Project Manager via regular informal follow-up meetings and weekly or fortnightly phone/or email contact, at least two formal supervision meetings per year, and two group support meetings and two appreciation events per year, and volunteers have record cards to document a brief account of each visit.

Volunteers come from a range of backgrounds and where possible the Manager partners them with a prisoner according to their experiences and interests. They are expected to visit their befriendee once every week for three weeks and then weekly or fortnightly. New befriendships are reviewed after three months or six visits and following a review after a year, visits continue where agreed by all. Visits take place within the prison visiting area or, where considered more appropriate and agreed by NIPS, on landings. Three volunteers have gained security clearance to visit prisoners on their landings, with one of them given permission to visit their befriendee where he works in the prison gardens (Quaker Service 2014). The Quaker Service (2014: 3) welcomes visits being accommodated outside the visits’ area, believing that prisoners who ‘for various reasons, find it too difficult to attend the Prison Visits Hall to meet their befriender ... could benefit most from the service, often because they are the most isolated of our befriendedes’. It also notes that Maghaberry’s Prisoner Safety and Support Team, which has responsibility for the most vulnerable prisoners, appreciates this development. However it recognises that working inside the prison is:
Very time consuming for the volunteers and fraught with difficulties. It is often difficult to find a suitable room for a befriending visit. Also the inmate is not always available due to logistical issues.

The aim of the volunteer is to provide a ‘listening ear’ to prisoners who have self-referred or been identified by prison officers, including from the Prisoner Safety and Support Team, or by other referrers (family, professionals) as potentially benefiting from this type of support. As the Project leaflet states:

It is hoped that continued contact will help inmates deal with the pressures of prison life by providing them with a non judgemental, empathetic and interested person to talk to about their experience of life inside. In other words providing inmates with a regular opportunity to “offload” to an individual who is relatively removed from Prison and Probation services may help them come to terms with the situation they are struggling to cope with.

The Quaker Service (2014) also comments, in relation to achieving the outcome of the ‘creation of a ‘self-help’ culture’ (p.1), that through training and experience volunteers ‘can often signpost or encourage’ prisoners to make use of prison services such as the complaint and request systems, housing service, and education and leisure facilities (p.2). In addition, in relation to achieving the outcome of ‘reduced conflict’ it notes that volunteers ‘often provide a placatory “buffer zone” between visitors, prison staff & inmates’ (p.3).

There were 188 befriender visits throughout 2013 and by December 2013, 13 prisoners were engaged in the Project (Quaker Service 2014: 2). During the course of the evaluation, the Project involved up to 11 volunteers and up to 11 prisoners. Numbers changed where volunteers left the Project due to family and/or work commitments or new volunteers were recruited and where prisoners were released, transferred to another prison, reconnected with family or withdrew from the Project due to other changes in their circumstances (reasons for withdrawal raised in interviews are discussed below).

**Methodology**

This evaluation of Quaker Connections’ Befriending Project at HMP Maghaberry is based on qualitative methods, primarily semi-structured interviews with prisoners and volunteers involved in the Project, the Project Manager and prison officers. This was considered to be the best way of capturing experiences of, and views on, the
Project. Ethical approval to conduct the interviews was granted by the University of Ulster Research Ethics Committee and following security clearance the researchers were facilitated by a prison governor who arranged access to the prison on an 'escorted' basis.

In total 18 interviews were carried out with seven prisoners, seven volunteers, the Volunteer Project Manager and three prison officers. In advance of the interviews the Project Manager, on behalf of the researchers, provided volunteers and prisoners involved in the Project with information sheets about the evaluation and with their consent gave the researchers a list of prisoners' names, and volunteers' names and telephone numbers. The researchers were provided, via a prison governor, with details of prisoners' location within the prison, where prison officers facilitated contact. They met seven prisoners separately in small meeting rooms in their respective location within the prison, explained the evaluation as detailed in the information sheets, offered the opportunity to ask questions about participation in the evaluation, and sought their consent to proceed with an interview and to record it. All seven participated in a recorded interview which included questions related to how they heard about the Project and why they decided to get involved; their experiences of being visited by a volunteer; what they felt they gained from the Project; and any suggestions for change.

The researchers contacted volunteers directly by telephone and met five of them separately at the Quaker-run visitors’ centre and one at the University of Ulster, and conducted a telephone interview with a sixth volunteer. The seventh volunteer interview was with one of the authors of this evaluation who had previously been a volunteer with the Project. As for prisoners, interviews proceeded following a brief discussion about the evaluation and potential participation, and focused on similar issues including how and why volunteers had got involved; their experiences of the Project, including training and support needs, and any recommendations they had for the future. Some volunteers preferred for notes to be taken of the interview rather than to be recorded.

Interviews with three prison officers and the Quaker Connections' Volunteer Project Manager took place in their respective offices, followed brief discussions about the
evaluation, and focused on their work and experiences in relation to the provision of the Project.

In addition to interviews, the Volunteer Project Manager provided the researchers with seven Client Satisfaction Survey questionnaires completed by prisoners who had participated in visits with their befriender for at least four months and four Volunteering Impact Assessment questionnaires completed by befrienders. These are drawn upon in relation to comments provided in answer to open-ended questions on the questionnaires. The Quaker Service also provided the researchers with their monthly reports and report to the Rayne Foundation on Quaker Connections for January to December 2013.

A further aspect of the evaluation includes a review of literature which aims to provide the context within which the Project is considered. It focuses on literature related to definitions of befriending, and international research on the use and outcomes of befriending programmes, as well as literature on prisoners’ loss of contact with family and friends and the impact of limited or no visits.

Befriending services are part of the social landscape particularly in the USA, Canada, Australia and Europe. In England, the first mention of befriending used in the social welfare context is cited as early as 1879 when lay missionaries were appointed to act as advisers and helpers of offenders and their families (Hagard and Blickman, 1987). From humble beginnings befriending has been applied in various contexts but, as noted above, is used mainly with working with young people at risk of coming into conflict with the law. Also, government policy supports a commitment to ‘befriending’, but few schemes collect evidence to demonstrate their effectiveness (Armstrong and Hill 2001; Philip and Spratt 2007; Meier 2008) and Hall (2003) reports that most evidence comes from the USA.

The paucity of research in the UK can in part be attributed to the relative contemporary nature of befriending or mentoring schemes with the first versions appearing in the mid 1990s (Newburn and Shiner 2006). However, several papers in the UK have been published giving a more up to date picture of the situation (Pawson et al 2004; Befriending Network Scotland 2005; INtegr8 2006, Philip and
Spratt 2007; Meier 2008). They identify that the key underlying themes of befriending schemes are the importance of social relationships and social support. The former concerns the quantity and connectedness of social ties and the latter refers to provision of resources, for example, instrumental support, information and advice or emotional support (House et al 1988).

Drawing on the literature, the following chapter examines the definition of befriending and mentoring, the rise of befriending/mentoring schemes, the models applied to befriending programmes, evidence regarding their benefits and limitations, and the need for befriending where prisoners experience a lack of visits by family and friends.
CHAPTER 1: Befriending in Context

Definitions of Befriending

The concept of ‘befriending’, as described in the Oxford Concise Dictionary (2012), is ‘to act as a friend, to help’. In 1974, in the preface to a scheme known as the One-to-One, the purpose of befriending was identified as to assist in the reparation of a community, ‘with as little institutionalising as possible’ (Hagard and Blickman 1987: 11). This idea loosely underpins the following definitions of ‘befriending’, which in the literature is used interchangeably with ‘mentoring’ whereby American based research typically refers to ‘mentoring’ and UK studies use both terms. However, befriending in the literature is viewed to be less structured than mentoring which is organised round outcomes. The literature mainly draws on the experiences of young people at risk, with such mentoring defined as a ‘social connection between a more experienced (and typically older) mentor and a less experienced mentee’ (Hurd and Zimmerman 2010: 37; see Martynowicz, Moore and Wahidin 2012).

A more inclusive definition of mentoring is: ‘A voluntary, mutually beneficial and purposeful relationship in which an individual gives time to support another to enable them to make changes in their lives’ (The Mentoring and Befriending Foundation, 2011). This resonates with Dean and Goodlad’s (1998: 13) definition of ‘befriending’, which has been adopted for the purpose of this evaluation:

A relationship between two or more individuals which is initiated and supported and monitored by an agency that has defined one or more parties as likely to benefit. Ideally, the relationship is non-judgmental, mutual, and purposeful, and there is a commitment over time.

In the context of criminal justice, Nellis (2004: 94-95) defines “mentoring” as: ‘someone more experienced guiding, coaching and encouraging someone less experienced in the performance of a task (or role)’. It is ‘more formal than befriending but less formal than supervision – and more purposeful than mere “volunteering”’. Befriending Network Scotland (2005: 7) defines mentoring as ‘a relationship between the volunteer and the (mentee) based on meeting agreed objectives set at the outset where a social relationship, if achieved, is incidental’. It suggests that projects exist along a spectrum from ‘companionship’ to ‘mentorship’ with befriending somewhere
in between. The former focuses on the development of social relationships, whilst the latter focuses on specific objectives.

Befriending/mentoring encompasses different types of programmes and practices that vary in aims and outcomes, and can be categorised into three main models (Skinner and Fleming 1999). First, the attempt to re-engage people with formal learning and with the labour market. Second, the transformation of personal attitudes, values and beliefs to encourage commitment to the development of life-skills. Third, the befriender as a vehicle for transforming people by responding to their disaffection, lack of social connectedness and social exclusion. Such projects identify people ‘at risk’ of disengaging, or who have already disengaged and seek explicitly to re-engage them in preparation for re-entry into the community. These interventions target those who are defined as socially excluded (Phillip et al 2004).

By the early 1990s, mentoring had become a mass movement in the UK which represented a social and historical phenomenon in its own right (Freeman 1995; 1999). In the UK mentoring and befriending schemes burgeoned under the Labour government in 1997 which targeted people experiencing social exclusion or ‘disaffection’, through programmes such as Mentoring Action Project (MAP) (which formed the largest of such initiatives in Britain). By 1998, the House of Commons Select Committee on Disaffected Children stated that all programmes seeking to address disaffection should include mentoring (House of Commons 1998). It has since been promoted by four different government departments, covering education, training and employment, youth justice, health promotion, ethnic minorities and social exclusion.

In May 2007, the National Offender Management Service (NOMS) produced a consultation document titled: Volunteers Can: Towards a Volunteering Strategy to Reduce Re-Offending. The strategy aims to increase the number and diversity of volunteers; become more strategic in volunteer development; improve support to volunteers; and establish the impact of volunteering. It sets out a vision of how volunteer opportunities in prison could be harnessed to support prisoners and in turn bring additional skills and expertise to the work of the prison service. In addition encouraging prisoners themselves to volunteer whilst in prison and post-release
could not only build their confidence and self-esteem but also help others. In sum, these together provide ‘an opportunity for communities to help reduce re-offending, which is of benefit not only to offenders, but also to their families, victims and society as a whole’ (NOMS 2007: 5).

**Befriending in the Penal Context**

The literature review reveals a paucity of research on befriending/mentoring schemes applied to adult prisoners in comparison to the research on mentoring schemes targeting disaffected young people. It demonstrates that befriending schemes appear to impact positively on social relationships conferring both mental and physical health benefits (House et al 1988), build self-confidence and self-esteem (Dean and Goodlad 1998), offer opportunities for increasing social skills, allow for re-engagement for the befriendee and the process itself avails to new experiences (Heslop 2005). The shared underlying principle of the befriending process is to facilitate re-engagement, to address the absence of social connectedness as a result of offending and imprisonment, by simply pairing a befriender (i.e. member of the community) with an adult prisoner, providing the offender support and in turn altering the befriendee’s attitude, beliefs and behaviour. The interruption of the prison regime when a befriender visits allows the befriendee to converse about something other than daily prison conversation that occurs within the confines of the prison walls. It disrupts the isolation commonly felt by prisoners, allows the befriendee to meet outsiders, to practice social skills and interact or feel at ease with members of the wider community, and in turn curbs the loneliness of being a prisoner without visitors.

The literature does provide evidence, although limited, to support the benefits of befriending schemes in prison. Farrall (2004: 61), for example, notes the positive effects of programmes, similar to Quaker Connections, that build ‘social interactions between individuals and other groups and individuals’. Such programmes encourage individuals’ social connectedness, which is core to the conditions in which prisoners can successfully settle within communities on release. This form of social programme provides fiscally stretched organisations the opportunity to utilise the services of community volunteers as a way of supporting the principles of
rehabilitation and desistance. In addition, ‘some prisoners value the natural unpaid assistance of volunteers more highly than professional caring’ (Williams 1991, cited in Barter 1996: 55) and view them with less suspicion than prison or probation officers. Contacts between professional workers and their clients are usually not based on voluntary participation and are likely to be brief, structured, devoid of choice and episodic (Barry 2000). In contrast, befriending schemes are based on choice whereupon the befriender (the prisoner in this case) chooses to see the befriender and a connectedness between befriender and befriended is based on substantial periods of contact that may take place over long periods. In her review of a prison visiting scheme at Bristol Prison between 1989 and 1994 Barter (1996: 62) describes the benefits as:

Lonely men were befriended; confidence, social skills and self esteem blossomed visibly. Institutionalised prisoners gained links with the outside world. The volunteers brought stimulation and enjoyment to a wing which offered few creature comforts and little else to relieve the boredom of prison life.

The literature clearly demonstrates that befriending schemes in prison provide a promising intervention on a number of levels, when delivered to a high standard albeit the outcomes are hard to quantify (Porteous 2007; Roberts et al 2004). For example, Newburn and Shiner’s (2006) review of mentoring schemes in prison suggested that although these schemes did not impact successfully on reducing reoffending per se, they did successfully increase participants’ involvement in education, training and employment – a key pathway identified in reducing reoffending. However, little is known about what makes these schemes effective especially within the domain of criminal justice. Befriending/mentoring programmes are critiqued for not having a clear articulated definition of the concept and for failing to contextualise structural inequality (see Phillip and Spratt, 2007). As Hall (2003: 5) states:

It is clear ... that mentoring is not a straightforward concept: in many ways it is ill-defined and it occupies contested territory somewhere between those who would see it as all warm and comforting and those who regard it as an ill-disguised attempt to maintain existing power relations by shifting attention away from social inequalities to the alleged inequalities of individuals.

Similarly, Colley (2003: 538) states that power relationships within the mentoring process are unequal, with both mentor and mentee subject to broader ‘structural
mechanisms of oppression and exploitation’. In other words, while mentoring schemes may assist individuals who have come into conflict with the law, they do not act as an effective challenge to the structural conditions which form the pathways to prison, such as poverty and inequality.

Drawing on USA studies of the role of befriending and mentoring schemes outside of prison, there is substantial evidence to support the benefits of such schemes. A study by Becker (1994), which examined delinquent youth involved with the Partners, Inc. mentoring programme in Colorado, showed a 65 to 75 per cent decrease in recidivism. Lewis et al (2007) found that mentoring may benefit some ex-prisoners after they leave custody, particularly where contact is with people who have more time to pay attention to individual needs and whose distinctive contribution is often the provision of personal and emotional support.

**Befriending Prisoners who Receive Limited or No Visits**

Overall the literature review highlights the core tenets of befriending/mentoring and the positive role it can play as an alternative interventionist programme to the more formal structures of supervision. Whilst it illustrates the difficulty in quantifying the benefits of programmes similar in nature to Quaker Connections, qualitatively, the literature clearly states the positive attributes of befriending schemes. Literature relating to prison visits also provides evidence of the potential benefits of befriending schemes involving prisoners who receive limited or no visits.

HM Inspectorates of Prisons and Probation (2001) found in the UK that only about two thirds of prisoners in local prisons and about half in training prisons received their statutory entitlement of visits. They also revealed 29 per cent of men and 47 per cent of women in prison reported experiencing difficulties keeping in touch with friends and families. The difficulties children and families of prisoners face in relation to visiting prisons are evidenced by international research. Demonstrating the extent to which imprisonment may disrupt parent/child relationships in terms of lack of, or no, contact prisoners may have with their children during the period of imprisonment, Chui (2010) found that less than half of children in his study (40%) visited their parent in prison and Rosenberg (2009) notes findings from the USA that two-thirds of
imprisoned fathers had never received a visit from their child. Drawing on the literature Rosenberg (2009: 6) summarises the many factors which limit visits, including:

- Geographic distance, transportation and financial barriers, the lack of child-friendly visiting contexts, harsh and disrespectful treatment by correctional officers and generally the demanding nature of visits on the time and emotions of children and parents.

Tudball (2000) reports that due to these issues, visiting caused particular concern for carers of children, and children have been found to experience long waits before seeing their parent (Arditti and Few 2006), feeling intimidated by the prison and discouraged by short visiting times (Chui 2010). The curtailed length of visits is also raised by HM Inspectorates of Prisons and Probation (2001) as a reason for prisoners in the UK experiencing difficulties staying in touch with their family and friends. Additional reasons cited by the Inspectorates include inefficient systems for booking visits, visits confined to the daytime and difficulties experienced by prisoners accessing telephones, phone cards or money and being unable to phone mobiles.

Tewksbury and Connor (2012: 45) also identify factors that may influence the frequency of prisoners’ receipt of visits inside prison such as: prison admission type, number of prior incarcerations, and sentence duration. Noting that younger, white and more highly educated prisoners with a history of less criminal and more prosocial involvement were most likely to receive visits, and to receive more visits, they argue for more research regarding the characteristics of prisoners who receive few or no visits. Related to the reasons noted above, Mills (2005, cited in Codd 2008) argues that as a coping mechanism prisoners may elect to reduce, or not have visits from family or friends particularly when serving long-term sentences. This may be due to prisoners’ concerns about the practical and emotional difficulties visits place on family and friends, or the emotional impact contact can have on them, leaving them feeling more anxious and unsettled.

As demonstrated by the above discussion, there are many reasons why family and friends may have limited, lost or cut contact with prisoners. In addition, Mills and Codd (2008: 15) note that ‘not all prisoners have family relationships or support on which to draw ... such as those who have grown up predominantly in local authority
care ... [and] Foreign national prisoners and immigration detainees’. Whatever the reasons for lack of visits, potential consequences, identified by Codd (2008: 25), include ‘feelings of isolation, loneliness, guilt, anger and despair ... contributing to psychological difficulties such as depression, paranoia, anxiety and suicidal tendencies’. She also notes the argument that there is a link between isolation and compliance with prison rules and norms, and increased community entry problems post-release. Among others, such as Tewksbury and Connor (2012), she calls for alternative strategies to facilitate increased visitation and positive social interaction for prisoners who receive few or no visits. Based on the evidence reviewed, such action may not only help address concerns about non-compliance with institutional rules and post-release recidivism rates, but may also enhance prisoners’ mental health and well-being, the significance of which cannot be overestimated particularly given concerns about self-harm and suicide among prisoners. The significance of the Quaker Connections’ Befriending Project for prisoners in Maghaberry who receive limited or no visits is considered, inter alia, in the sections below based on interviews with volunteers, prisoners, the Volunteer Project Manager and prison officers.
CHAPTER 2: Findings from Interviews with Volunteers

The following sections document findings from interviews with seven volunteer visitors who participated in the evaluation. They discuss how and why volunteers got involved in the Project, their experiences of the Project, including training and support needs, perceptions of the impact of the Project and any recommendations for the future.

Reasons for Volunteering

Volunteers had heard about the Project in different ways including word of mouth from other volunteers; individual involvement with the Quaker Service; and from a talk on the Project delivered by the Volunteer Project Manager at the Quaker Annual General Meeting in September 2011.

All of the volunteers interviewed had a commitment to volunteering or community service prior to getting involved in the Project. Some expressed an interest in prisons, and three mentioned an interest in supporting marginalised people, with two specifying concerns about prisoners’ experiences and their rights. Some, but not all, had a religious conviction which encouraged an interest in volunteering. All, however, were in sympathy with the Quaker ethos, with one volunteer describing Quakers as:

Pacifists, they’re into challenging discrimination and basically improving people’s quality of life and eradicating social injustice.

Having heard about the Project a volunteer said they began to think about the isolation prisoners face and the impact on them and their families. Another said it led them to think:

That’s the sort of thing I’d love to be involved in ... I had a feeling of how awful prison is and the importance of upholding the inmates’ rights and needs ... I thought my skills might be useful.

A volunteer also explained that the ‘enthusiasm of a volunteer ... really sold it [getting involved in the Project] to me’ and noted:

I feel it’s very worthwhile. I think it’s excellent because there’s still a stigma around imprisonment.
The high level of commitment from volunteers towards the Project was very evident. Five of the seven volunteers interviewed had considerable experience of volunteering before participating in Quaker Connections. One volunteer had been a prison visitor (with the former Board of Visitors) and another a police custody visitor. Another volunteer had previously worked as an education provider in a prison. It was clear from the interviews with both volunteers and prisoners that the Project benefits immensely from this depth and range of expertise and experience.

**Training**

Volunteers spoke highly of the training delivered by the Volunteer Project Manager and, up until September 2013, her line manager. Their comments included that training provided ‘insight into what prison was like’ and they were encouraged to ‘try to get into the mindset of inmates and [get an] understanding of how they would feel’. One of the volunteers described the initial interview as ‘very thorough’ and focused on their desire to participate in the Project to ‘make sure you’re not doing it for dubious reasons’, and training as ‘excellent’ and ‘very engaging’. This volunteer also described the opportunities provided by the Project Manager to meet other volunteers as ‘refresher training’ and commented that the benefits of this included helping ‘you to reflect on what you’re doing and check you’re not doing something that could cause harm, but doing good when intervening in someone’s life’. A further point made was that training and meeting other volunteer visitors ‘helps you get into it and get over your nerves’. These views were supported by a volunteer who said:

> The training was really really good ... full days really worked well ... the activities were very thought provoking ... it was never boring ... I adored it and really enjoyed the full days and got to know people in the group. ... The training was well organised ... I got handouts to take home which I can read over ... Meeting up with other volunteers is brilliant ... you learn so much from them.

Another volunteer, who described the training as ‘very good ... very, very well organised’ and the support as ‘very good’, explained that training:

> Basically took you on a journey as to the kind of process of mentoring, volunteering, the nature of prisons, because it’s so artificial and how one has to understand the culture and the nuances of being in a prison and also issues arising when mentoring a prisoner and what you can discuss and what you can’t. ... There was structured support in place for all the volunteers, regardless of whether they were experienced or not.
This volunteer thought that in terms of assessing the training, in addition to a questionnaire completed at the end of their training:

It would have been good if someone had come in and asked you to fill in a questionnaire at the beginning and in the middle and then [when] exiting.

It was suggested by a couple of volunteers that some independent presenters with expertise on imprisonment could be brought in to contribute to the training alongside Project staff (although this was not meant as any criticism of the training currently delivered). One of them proposed:

Getting specialists in to talk about the culture of prison life, prison officer culture, daily life for a prisoner. ... getting somebody who was an ex-prisoner to talk about it, restrictions on liberty.

It was also suggested by a volunteer, based on perception rather than personal experience, that:

There should be more training around issues about expectations, especially if [the volunteer is] female ..., to ensure that there is no projection onto the female. ... there is always the potential for a male to ... read into that relationship something more than there is just because he’s lonely.

In relation to what was described as ‘very much a guided tour’ of Maghaberry, a couple of volunteers mentioned that they would like to have seen the house units where the prisoners lived who they would later be visiting. Nonetheless, all who went on the tour said that it provided a useful insight especially if it was their first time in a prison environment. A volunteer who had seen their befriendee’s house unit believed that the experience was beneficial:

It gives you an insight ... and helps with the empathy side of things.

Volunteers were also unanimous in praising the support offered by the Volunteer Project Manager and considered that the Project was very well run. For example, volunteers appreciated that the Manager took them through the prison visiting check-in system as part of their training and sat in on their first visit with their befriendee. As one volunteer explained, this meant they were ‘eased in nicely’ to their role. This volunteer also noted the importance of the follow-up support provided by the Project Manager:

There’s an open-door kind of policy with [the Project Manager] ... the support is there ... it’s good to be able to discuss situations that arise ... good to talk the
thing through ... to have the follow-up support ... reassurance about how you handled the situation.

Another volunteer commented that the Project is:

Well thought through ... Any feedback we do offer is dealt with very quickly. ... [The Manager] is crucial to the Project. Having someone with her high calibre in the role is crucial.

Further volunteer comments in the Volunteering Impact Assessment questionnaires reflect their respect for the Manager described, *inter alia*, as ‘caring, enthusiastic and appreciative’; ‘inspirational’; and ‘supportive, efficient and extremely helpful’.

**Matching Befrienders and Befriendees**

All but one volunteer interviewed had befriended more than one prisoner and some had befriended four or five. Volunteers befriend no more than two prisoners at any time. It was clear from the interviews that individual experiences of visiting prisoners were varied and differed according to personalities of both volunteer and prisoner. Where possible the Volunteer Project Manager matches befrienders and befriendees with common interests. By and large volunteers felt this was done ‘very well’, but sometimes volunteers were uncertain why they had been matched to a particular prisoner.

**Visits**

Four of the seven volunteers interviewed had experience of meeting a prisoner once or twice and then not seeing them again, perhaps because the prisoner had been unexpectedly released or moved, or because the prisoner did not feel that they had ‘clicked’ with the volunteer. Volunteers understood the reasons why this might happen but had felt disappointed if they had already begun to take an interest in the prisoner, and a couple wondered whether they had done anything which had put the prisoner off. One said that it felt ‘strange’ as they had tried to ‘be open, be myself’. Another volunteer commented that less experienced volunteers might feel very discouraged if this happened to them, especially if it happened more than once.

Volunteers had experience of visiting befriendees, on a weekly or fortnightly basis, and, at the time of writing, the longest befrienship was ongoing since March 2013.
All were in agreement about the usefulness of the Project for their befriendees. Typical comments were:

We bring a bit of the outside world into the prison. We’re not in uniform, not representing the prison, not there to give religious guidance … [we are there] to be a listening ear.

We’re befriending them at a time when they need some support and companionship … when they have no-one there … no family … when they need someone’s support.

It did break up the monotony of prison.

He reacted warmly to any kindness.

He was so appreciative of visits … he felt honoured to be singled out by the Quakers.

It gives the opportunity to talk, be open, get a friendship and get biscuits.

Several volunteers mentioned the opportunity for prisoners to choose refreshments during visits as one of the benefits of the Project. One mentioned that going to visits gives long term prisoners the chance ‘for a change of scene’ and to see family life which they do not see on the landing. This impression was supported by another volunteer who explained:

Not only is it [the Project] for those who don’t have visitors but it also gives those who do have visitors just a chance to get out of their cell, have a cup of tea, meet somebody who’s different. Their diet’s not great and they don’t have any choice so at least when we come and visit we can buy them anything they like from the tuck shop. It’s very small but it means a lot.

Sometimes the visits were simply about a chat and being a listening ear. Volunteers said that they try to establish what interests the prisoner has, for example cycling, sport, art or television soaps. However, several volunteers mentioned more complex situations that they had dealt with, for example, visiting prisoners who were suspicious of their motives or with mental and/or physical health difficulties. One volunteer had been involved in helping to support a prisoner on hunger strike and in resolving the dispute which had led to this. Further experiences included a volunteer visiting a prisoner who rarely came out of his cell. It had taken ‘stubbornness’ on the volunteer’s part to continue to visit until the prisoner eventually accepted his visits.
Several volunteers mentioned that isolated prisoners have often been let down a lot in their lives and seemed to test volunteers to see whether they would also disappoint them. One volunteer spoke of a prisoner who had been very distrusting at the outset, but on their final visit said ‘your visits have helped’ and gave them a hug. Noting the importance of building trust for their befriender, one volunteer commented:

For him, it was really more trying to settle in, build a relationship that was based on trust, not one that was going to condemn him. ... it was about him telling me what drugs he was taking and in a gentle way saying, well, you know, there are dangers in terms of mixing drugs.

All volunteers mentioned the importance of being non-judgemental and showing respect for befriendees as individuals. For example, this volunteer noted:

He didn't have any visitors and he was in that place for, you know, it was years, double figures. So he just had somebody from the outside who didn’t know anything about him and the reasons for being in there, it was just somebody taking him on face value, which is something we on the outside take for granted. It was a good relationship. I was sad that it had to come to an end.

The genuine commitment of volunteers was evident, some worrying about their befriender especially when the latter were experiencing difficulties such as coping with prison, family problems, bereavement, imminent release from prison or practical problems. In relation to difficulties coping with prison, one of the volunteers explained their visiting relationship involved:

Mentoring about life and different choices and looking at ways of doing time in a less kind of confrontational way, because it was just making it really hard on him.

Perceptions of Visiting Relationships
Volunteers had somewhat differing interpretations of what befriending meant. Some viewed it in its simplest form of being someone who visits, listens and provides a distraction from the experience of being imprisoned – essentially ‘being there’ and ‘providing something to look forward to’. Others, as indicated above, talked about the role as including a mentoring element. This was reiterated by a volunteer who said the visiting relationship:

Wasn't a friendship, it was contrite in the sense that it was constructed and it had a particular purpose. So my role was purely to mentor and be an advocate.
for people who are voiceless in many cases, especially if their rights are not being met.

Volunteers had divergent opinions on whether the relationship could be deemed a friendship. Some said that they did feel that friendships evolved from the visits, albeit friendships with limitations. Comments to illustrate the differences in approach include:

You are visiting to talk to the prisoner and find out how they are doing – not to be their best friend.

I’m a befriender rather than a friend ... a friendly chatty visitor, never getting into mutual dependence as a real friend does ... being careful not to raise expectations ... an enabling befriender who cares about them and is interested in them. ... It’s making sure you’re delivering that friendship in boundaries. It’s so cruel to raise expectations.

The relationships are very much a friendship.

One volunteer said that the relationship could be compared with a work friendship, as:

You don’t tell all of your work colleagues everything but you are still friends.

One volunteer was very clear that their role was not to try and change befrienees’ offending behaviour, while others described trying to encourage their befrienees to change attitudes and ‘make good’ on release, for example by advising them not to reengage with peers who had a negative influence. Some talked with befrienees about their offence, while others deliberately steered clear of this topic, with two volunteers, for example, specifying:

I was quite clear that I wasn’t here to discuss his alleged offence.

You never know what their offence is or where they are in terms of the criminal justice system.

Volunteers were also divided about whether they would like to be able to give small gifts to prisoners. Some thought that occasions like Christmas and Easter should be acknowledged, and suggested gifts including bibles, tobacco or small items of interest to the prisoner, for example, postcards for a prisoner interested in art. Others thought it important to avoid anything which could be open to misunderstandings or being compromised. One volunteer ‘against gifts’ explained:

I think personally it’s problematic because it can lead to a manipulation of the situation, a power imbalance, it can make an already kind of artificial situation
even more complex. I think there has to be boundaries and rules in place to protect the prisoner, which is the most important, also the befriender.

**Ending Visits**

Where befrienders and befrienees had built up a relationship, visits came to an end for various reasons (when a prisoner was moved or released or if they started receiving family visits or, as described by two volunteers respectively, when their befrienee took up education or a prison job; or when a volunteer’s situation has changed and they can no longer commit to visits). Volunteers recognised the importance that this situation is dealt with sensitively, so that neither party feels confused or rejected. One recounted their befrienee’s experience:

He just said that [his previous befriender] had just disappeared and he had trusted this adult, this individual, and it was yet another person who broke that continuity of care and left.

On the whole, however, volunteers reported that relationships with their befreindees had been ended with good feeling on each side – in cases where the volunteer was no longer able to continue, due to work or family commitments, interviewees reported that they had been given the opportunity to speak with their befrienee and explain the situation.

**Visiting Environment**

Volunteers were also asked about the prison environment and the general experience of visiting. Six of the seven volunteers were in agreement that the security procedures for entering the prison can be slow and tiring, and one said:

The whole process is degrading ... you’re kind of processed on a conveyer belt. I must say the family officers were good, people who were doing the security checks were very sensitive ... but I just thought going through is very barren, I think how they process you, you have to stand there, take a photograph, it’s very quick, and if you don’t know it can be a very alienating experience, especially if you’re older. If it was my mother visiting me it would be really frightening for her.

Another volunteer who felt that visiting for the first time was ‘anxiety generating’, described it as ‘a very rigid system’ with warnings about what visitors can and cannot bring in or wear to visits. This volunteer however noted that:
Officers have been OK and some are professional and friendly, ... and new [recruits], young people greet you with a smile.

All volunteers felt that their treatment during visits by prison staff was ‘good’, ‘OK’ or ‘fine’, but a volunteer noted their experience of waiting, ‘for twenty to thirty minutes’ for their befriender to attend their visit. Raising concerns about communication issues, this was attributed to delays in their befriender being told by prison officers that he was having a visit.

Some volunteers mentioned the bleak environment of the prison. One had been affected by seeing a woman lightly dressed and with a small baby in the ‘very cold’ visiting area. Another commented that after being in the prison for a couple of hours they were always glad to get out so they wondered ‘how do prisoners cope when they can’t get out’. A volunteer also raised concerns about the waiting hall, where visitors are held on exiting visits, noting all visitors are ‘carrying out emotions and you’re in that room’. This volunteer however noted that conditions in the room improved since complaints about visitors being held in the cold and for periods of time without any explanation were addressed. The provision of heating and explanations for delays in permitting visitors to leave the room were seen by the volunteer as one of the positive outcomes of the Project, though concerns remained about the ‘prison not looking through a visitor’s eyes’. The example provided to support this was that despite the otherwise ‘perfect’ prison grounds, visitors pass areas with ‘wind-blown rubbish and dog turd’. Also, another volunteer who commented that ‘the holding place going out is quite bleak ... not a pleasant room to be in’ noted that it has no toilet facilities.
CHAPTER 3: Findings from Interviews with Prisoners

The following sections document findings from seven interviews with prisoners who have participated in the Project. They were sentenced or on remand and had been detained for periods ranging from a number of months to over eleven years. All but one, who had left the Project, had a befriender at the time of the interview. Five had been matched with one befriender, one with two befrienders and another with three at different times. Their reasons for getting involved in the Project, their experiences and perceptions of the impact of the Project, and any recommendations for the future are discussed below.

Reasons for Participating

The primary reason for interviewees getting involved in the Project was due to the lack of visits they received. Three heard about the Project when the Volunteer Project Manager came to see them, one through a psychiatric nurse, two saw posters and one heard about it from another prisoner. They had no or limited contact with family or friends. One prisoner explained the Project Manager knew ‘I don't get no visits, no nothing, don't write no letters’. Another noted that because his family lives elsewhere they find it difficult to visit and indicated that he does not want friends to visit, given his perception that he needs to cut contact with them to prevent him returning to prison:

I didn't get many visits, although I did get a few but they weren't regular, as such. I might get two visits every six months from family. It's not because they don't want to see me, it's mainly I'm [not from here], it's financial and all the rest of it and travel and I've got children. And for friends visiting me ... I don't blame them for me being here but if I ever have a chance of not coming back here ... I have to change everything, including my associates.

In contrast to those who said they heard about the Project through posters, one of the prisoners who learned about the Project through the Project Manager, said ‘there's no notices up, there's people without visits, people just don't know’. A prisoner who saw a poster explained it was:

On the wall, on the landing, saying about the befriending of visitors and all that and I approached the Quakers. ... [The Project Manager] came up to see me and spoke to me and told me basically the rules of the visits and all the rest. So
I gave it a go and the first visit [she] came up and she introduced me to the man ... who visits me.

One prisoner noted that the ‘right reasons’ for joining the Project were based on a lack of visits and wanting a friend, emphasising that ulterior motives were not feasible:

You see, people think I need my visits, I need my visits for money to survive in prison, I need my visits, because they might be druggies, to pay my debts and all the rest, or to get drugs, clothes, whatever, all for their own ends. The Quakers don’t do none of that for you, so that’s a good thing because that’s vetting people to start with by saying ‘you’re not getting any of these things. Do you still want the visit?’ ... You need genuine people on the scheme that are there for the right reasons, because they’re not getting visits, because they want a friend, not because they want somebody that they can use and manipulate to their own ends.

For this prisoner, ‘it didn’t matter what [the contract for Quaker Connections] said. I was meeting somebody, I was getting a visit, I was happy’. The prisoner who heard from another said:

Another prisoner came to me and said about it, because I’m now in [a number of] months ... I wasn’t getting visits or nothing. ... My family have disowned me so it was just good to have someone to talk to, to offload on, someone that you don’t really know but ... it’s just good to offload on. A problem shared is a problem halved, as they say.

Prisoners indicated that they did not tend to share their knowledge about the Project. For example, two noted:

I’ve only told one person. And this guy, he was on remand ... he didn’t get visits, his family disowned him.

It wasn’t until I got on it that my friend ... said ‘oh yeah, I get visits off them as well’. So he didn’t even tell me.

One prisoner referred to the Project thought:

They must be able to tell who doesn’t get visits and how long people have been in for just by watching them, I guess. There’s people have been in here for years without a visit.

Further comments on the number of prisoners not receiving visits included concerns about prisoners who are disowned by their family:

There’s blokes coming in here for the first time that have just nobody, nothing and they must be really just shattered really, because I know going back to ... when I first came in if I had no visits, no contact with the outside, no nothing, I’d have been in just bits ... somebody who just had people outside, had
things, had friends, had a family and then just comes in here and gets disowned.

One prisoner explained that he thought the Project was of particular benefit for:

Somebody who just had people outside, had things, had friends, had a family and then just comes in here and gets disowned ... I just didn't even actually know what a Quaker was. Rather than just preach about doing good they actually do good in a practical way.

This prisoner raised concerns, discussed further below, that those who may benefit most from the Project do not know about it:

There is a lot of deserving people though and it's the ones that are deserving that probably don't know about the Quakers. I didn't know about them and they'd been going for a good while. ... I walked past that poster [advertising the Project] a thousand times.

The issue of Foreign National prisoners not receiving visits and the potential benefit the Project could provide them was also raised by a prisoner:

There's a lot of people coming in here with ethnicities, a lot of them don't speak English, maybe you could get someone who could speak their language ... There's plenty in this jail from all different parts of the world who don't speak a great deal of English. I'm sure they would benefit from it ... A lot of the Foreign Nationals don't get visits. ... Chinese, Polish, there's Russians, there's Lithuanians, there's Africans, there's Portuguese, there's loads of different ones in here at the minute. Angola, there's loads of them. There's probably more than that but that's just the ones I know of.

**Visits**

Of the six prisoners receiving visits at the time of the interview, most met their befriender fortnightly. Whilst one said he would like to receive 'more visits. Instead of fortnightly, weekly from different people', for another fortnightly visits suited him best:

I've been very lucky. ... At first he came every week just until we got acquainted, and now it's every two weeks, which is ideal because now the alternative week I have family visiting me. It's all worked out.

Fortnightly visits were also deemed sufficient by a prisoner who said:

If you're in here for years with just nothing, with no visits, no contact with the outside world, I feel every other week is more than okay.

In relation to the length of visits, one prisoner felt that longer visits would not be feasible given the prison experience:

Sometimes we're talking away and the hour's gone. But I think two hours would be a bit ... there's not much to talk about. What happens in these places? Every
day’s the same except a different letter, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, a different name.

All of the prisoners expressed their appreciation for volunteers’ time and commitment commenting, for example, ‘it’s nice of them to give up their time’ and, as demonstrated further below, on the benefits they experienced due to their visits. One prisoner explained:

I’m grateful to have the Quakers because I’ve got nobody else to visit me now. ... I have no ties here [in Northern Ireland] ... But it’s nice to think that there’s somebody out there that hopefully is not just visiting me for the sake of just doing it because I’m a number. I would like to think that they’re visiting me and between us we can have a conversation on any subject without feeling any harm to one another.

He felt, however, that rules applied to visits impacted negatively on conversations with their befriender, at least initially, but later in the interview noted he recognised the need for rules to protect volunteers from being taken advantage of:

We do seem to get on. We have quite a range of topics that we can talk about. We don’t talk about anything personal; that’s not allowed. ... it was explained in the leaflet, ... you’re not allowed to talk personally, you’re not allowed to ask personal things and not allowed to ask [the visitor] to get you anything or anything like that, so working around those parameters, they’re hard at first because you don’t really know then what to talk about. So generally I just sit back and wait for her to start and then I can work around her.

The last [visit] was a major struggle ... They put so many conditions on what you can and cannot do. I suppose you would have advantage taken of [the volunteer], but they seem to sort of make it that everybody is painted with the same brush.

Indicating the significance that he places on his visits, a prisoner described the negative feelings he anticipated feeling if his visits should come to an end and his desire to continue on the Project:

I think with me if [visits end] ... I’d be gutted but I’m sure [the Project Manager] would find somebody else to visit me. ... I don’t know whether I’d meet anybody again that I’d get on with like I've got on with [volunteer], but I could still meet somebody and have a decent time with them. It might not be friends ... but we’d still be civil and friendly to each other.

Another prisoner noted his frustration about prison communication, and concerns about his visitor when he had to cancel a visit and the message was not relayed:

Trying to stop an appointment is unrealistic really. No one was able to help at all, no staff, nobody knew about it and in the end I just thought no feedback, well maybe they’ve got in touch with her but they hadn’t and so she had a
slightly wasted journey. But she had someone to visit later in the afternoon so she stayed anyway. But it did annoy me in that respect, that the correspondence is very poor.

All of the prisoners reflected on the difference being given the opportunity to participate in the visits’ experience, including getting ready for the volunteer visits, makes to their lives. Examples of the benefits, as demonstrated by the following and further comments below, are having someone who ‘cares’, a connection with ‘the outside world’, and feeling ‘happier’, ‘normal’ and having something ‘to look forward to’:

For somebody who doesn’t know me, at least somebody just cares to actually come up, because, you know, I can just get a bit down in here ... It was just good. The things what people in here would be just used to, you know, for visits, getting showered that morning, put on decent clothes, being able to speak to somebody from the outside, it was just like there is somebody there still.

The Quakers is a very good thing, because for people that don’t get any visits or few visits at all, it keeps them in touch with the outside world, because visits are very important when you’re in prison, it gives you something to look forward to, it gives you a sense that you’re not forgotten and you’re not on your own ... I think the Quakers is a very valuable thing, a very valuable thing, and I’d like to see it go from strength to strength.

It makes you feel half normal, being able to get away from on the wing, just to go down and talk to somebody ... it makes you feel normal, in a way. Everyone else is getting visits. Okay, it’s someone you don’t really know but you’re getting to know them, but you’re still going on a visit and it makes you feel a bit normal.

It’s nice to think that I’ve got something to look forward to, and really the only thing that I have is the visits. I have nothing else to look forward to.

Such feelings about the Project benefits are supported by a prisoner’s observation of the impact being involved in the Project has had on another:

There was one bloke who was a bit like me - he’d nobody, nothing many months ago. So he’s actually got somebody now from the Quakers. When his visit comes he’s happy, he will dress half decently. It’s something to actually look forward to each week.

The following examples of comments, further document the difficulties prisoners experience in relation to being ‘down’, ‘lonely’ and ‘sad’ in prison and how they feel visits can help given these issues:
When you’re in here you just feel so lonely, you’ve got nothing, nobody. It’s just good to find out that there actually is people who care ... what made me happier was the Quaker visits, because I was just feeling down all the time.

It’s just the sadness of the place itself, that there is nothing in here to give you any opportunity to look forward to getting out, and that in itself is sad. But with regards to Quakers, I have something to look forward to there. Even if I’m not sure what to say or what any of us are going to be saying, it’s just a nice thought that there is someone interested just to even talk to a stranger.

Supporting volunteers’ perception, noted above, that the opportunity for prisoners to choose refreshments during visits is one of the benefits of the Project, a prisoner commented:

It makes a big difference to me, getting somebody up once a week to visit. [The volunteer] that comes up is sound. ... Just getting a visit once a week, just getting out of the cell and being over there at visits. A cup of coffee and a bar of chocolate makes all the difference, somebody to talk to, somebody other than other prisoners.

The positive benefits of participating in the Project were further evidenced in the Quaker Connections’ Client Satisfaction Surveys. As reflected by the following comments from prisoners, volunteer visits impacted in terms of enhancing self-esteem and feelings of self-worth, providing ‘a friend’, ‘a break’ and, as one indicated, the realisation that ‘someone can change’:

This made a big difference to my life, for the better.

[Quaker Connections (QC)] made me realise my worth – that I was worth something and that someone can change. I realise there is more to life than breaking the law. It let me realise I was not alone – QC was there to lean on and helped me speak. It is commendable. ... [Volunteer] spoke to me like a human being not a prisoner. I was hesitant at first but week after week I felt the non-judgemental support and importance of talking to someone. It cleansed my soul. It helped me make a decision not to offend but to treat people the way I want to be treated. My love to you and appreciation for seeing me through this.

I was sceptical about this at first but now I look forward to my visit as it gives me a break and hope for a time.

Thanks for being a friend.

Adding further support to prisoners’ comments above that volunteer visits provide something to look forward and help alleviate boredom, the Quaker Service (2012: 25) cited a prisoner who said:

Quaker Connections’ befriending is something I look forward to at the end of a big boring unexciting week.
Another prisoner, quoted by the Quaker Service (2012: 23), indicated how his faith 'in human nature' was restored:

> It can take a thousand people to destroy your faith (in human nature) but just one to renew it!

**Perceptions of Visiting Relationships**

All of the prisoners felt they got on well with their befriender. One prisoner described the volunteer visitor as their ‘carer’, but the majority described the visiting relationship as a friendship. As one prisoner put it:

> I know what it means to me. It’s a friendship that I never had and never would have known about had I not seen the poster. That, to me, was the most important thing.

This prisoner also suggested that it would be beneficial if they knew more about their befriender:

> The strange part was not knowing anything at all from the outset as to what your partner is going to be like. I don't know, I think you do need to know a little about her or him. I think you don't need to know a great deal about them but just enough to form a conversation. It would be nice to know what his likes and dislike are, for instance, with regard to reading or writing because that helps you in many ways, because it might be something that you are dead set against, or ideally you’re into the same spiritual thing as he is.

He thought if the last point applied:

> It might be a great help, say, if he comes and joins you for a morning service on a Sunday ... certainly the following week you could discuss what took place, how he felt, what did he think of the minister and all of this, so there's a lot that can be learned there.

A prisoner, who was adamant that the visiting relationship was a friendship, explained:

> We've become very, very good friends, very good friends. It’s not just a casual relationship, we actually are genuine friends, and genuine friends in the world are very hard to find so when you do find them you should cherish them. [Volunteer] is a very, very genuine nice [person] and I have been very lucky ... it’s become a proper friendship. It’s as if we’ve known each other for years and years, although it’s only been [number of] months. We have a lot in common.

Another prisoner, whilst recognising differences compared to previous friendships, described his befriender as:

> A friend really, but not a friend that I've ever known before where I've grown up with them. I suppose I am growing up with her, because like I say, this is all
new to me and ... I can't really describe it. It's a bit strange to start with but as the weeks have went on I feel more comfortable and I speak a bit more and [the volunteer is] able to see what I'm feeling. ... It’s just nice to know that someone’s there, basically, and they’re prepared to sit and listen to you and give you a bit of advice.

Notions of being a friend were also noted by a prisoner who commented:

I would talk to him now as a friend. He knows me and I know him, so I would say it’s a friendship now more than anything. I keep telling him he doesn’t have to come up if he doesn’t want to but he keeps coming up.

An insight into how a prisoner felt his befriender helped him cope, was provided when he stated:

I had a bad drug problem for years and I recently just gave it all up ... and when I’m feeling low [volunteer] would tell me ‘well, you’ve never been here before. It’s all new to you’, which it is. It just gives you a different perspective. It’s good to talk to [visitor].

One prisoner raised concerns that the relationship is ‘one way’, given the restrictions on what they are advised they can talk about:

All you want to do is sort of explain to [the volunteer] why you’re in here, what it is that we’re hoping to get out of this relationship, because it is, at the end of the day, it is a relationship we’re trying to form, albeit it will always be just a one way relationship. It would be nice if we could just relax a little bit and just talk about things.

As with volunteers, some prisoners suggested that certain occasions might be marked by a gift. One of the prisoners, who made such a suggestion, noted that he had received cards:

At Christmas maybe get you something small, or on your birthday something small. I got a Christmas card and I got a birthday card. [The Project Manager] sent one with [volunteer’s] name on it and [volunteer] sent a separate one.

Another prisoner indicated some frustration about volunteers ‘not being able to leave anything in for the prisoner, when all the prisoners’ families leave in clothes and money and all this’. This issue has been addressed by the Quaker Service (2014) and where possible it has provided befriendedees with clothes donated from Quaker Service charity shops, however, another prisoner raised the issue about having access to the same books as his visitor:

You’re not allowed to ask [the visitor] to bring anything in. And in many ways that's a good thing but it can also be a bit of a downer because you haven’t got
the access to the books that she would have on the outside. But how would the prisoner pay for them if there’s nothing set up?

Two of the prisoners advocated the opportunity to write to their befriender. One explained:

There’s times when you’re in here, in your cell, and you can say more in a letter sometimes and in a different way than you can face to face. You can put it across differently. And things will happen in that two weeks where I would like to tell [visitor] about it, as you do, you tell your friends what’s happening in your life, but I’ve to keep it all in until ... my visit. ... I think that’s the only thing that could maybe improve it, if we were allowed to write to each other ... Like everything in prison, it’s [the Project] open to abuse and maybe that’s why the letters aren’t allowed.

This prisoner also thought:

It probably would be a good idea if the Quaker visitor was allowed to come to your cell at least once, sometime at the beginning, so he could get a feel of how you lived and where you lived and what sort of person you were from your environment.

Ending Visits

The prisoner who had left the Project said his reasons were related to not wanting to waste the volunteer’s time coming to visit if he was unable to attend:

I was expecting to be out in six months. ... I thought well, six months to me is just nothing ... So I just thanked her and just stopped visits. ... I was getting locked up, sick in my cell and I thought if [volunteer] comes up that would be just terrible of me, for me to have [volunteer] sitting down there and I’m not just weighing in.

Two of the prisoners who had experience of their befriender leaving the Project indicated that they were disappointed and/or anxious when this happened, but had no choice other than to accept the situation:

I’m a passive kind of bloke. I was not too happy, I would say, but it’s just what happens. ... I seen [volunteer] maybe twice after I was told that she was leaving so I had time to wish her all the best.

There was a [volunteer] ... I confided in and then she didn’t come back, which kind of threw me off board and then I had [another volunteer]. ... I’d let my guard down ... I thought what’s she going to do with this information. ... you think all sorts of crazy stuff ... I just let it go ... I’ve no real outlet for my problems here.
Promoting the Project

When asked if there were any ways that the Quaker Service could promote the Project, all prisoners suggested using posters, with some referring to ‘more’ and/or ‘bigger’ posters, and one also advocated ‘leaflets through the cell door’. One explained:

On each wing there’s, I just noticed, boards where the screws [prison officers] put up signs, you aren’t allowed to do this ... [or] that, this is starting ... I mean, it would be good just to have a sign up on that board about the Quaker Service, because over on that side where I am, as far as I know, there’s just me and [other prisoner] knew about the Quakers, nobody.

Another prisoner, who learned about the Project from a poster on the notice board on his landing, said:

There's nothing on the notice boards, not now anyway. I think maybe that's an important thing, that you keep it constant on there and give them a name to contact or a telephone number to contact, even if it’s a prison member of staff who could then pass on your enquiry, because there’s absolutely nothing on the notice board at the moment, and that's a sad thing.

One of the prisoners, pointing to a poster, felt that additional posters might be an idea, but recognised potential difficulties:

Maybe more posters. I can see a Quaker poster from here. There’s one on the yellow door there. There is posters about. ... Most people don't read the boards. No offence to them, but 70 per cent of prisoners can’t read.

Whilst, as noted above, one of the prisoners said he heard about the Project from another prisoner and one said he told another about it, the general consensus was that it would not be advisable to rely on prisoners to raise awareness about it. One explained he would not discuss his involvement with the Quaker Service with others or tell them about it, stating ‘I don’t associate all that much in here. I just get by the best I can’.

Prisoners tended to feel that prison officers would not promote the Project. One, for example, said:

There must be some way they can let prisoners know, because the screws aren't going to say because that's not their job. They’re here to supervise and to lock doors. ... They’re all individuals; there’s good ones, bad ones, okay ones. It’s like any job in life. But I think the Quakers should advertise somewhere because nobody’s got any way to actually find out.
In contrast, another prisoner thought prison officers were in a position to identify which prisoners they could approach in relation to telling them about the Project:

Maybe the prison officer ... personal officers they used to be called. I don't know if they still do that, where every officer has so many in his charge, you know? ... They could approach and say ‘well, you don't get visitors or you don't get many visits’ if they thought it appropriate ... the staff on the landing, they're still pretty aware of who's on the landing and who's what and what's what. They've got a good idea.

This prisoner also said that whilst there are family officers:

You never see them. They work in the OMU [Offender Management Unit] or something it's called and if you put in for whatever that's family orientated they'll come and see you but they're not directly involved.

Another prisoner suggested:

There's two types of staff. ... the ones that are in it for the money, most of them are sound ... The other ones are bully boys in a way. It's the only way I can describe them. They're the ones that wouldn't pass the message on. But you get the decent ones that would pass it on to people that don't get visits. If I had known about it before I probably would have took it up.
CHAPTER 4: Findings from Interviews with the Quaker Connections’ Volunteer Project Manager and Prison Officers

This section documents findings from interviews with the Volunteer Project Manager and prison officers in relation to the provision of the Project. It covers their perceptions of working relationships and visits, including their benefits, and draws attention to issues which were also raised in interviews with volunteers and prisoners.

Working Relationships

Prison officers, as did volunteers and prisoners, commended the Project Manager’s work with one, for example, describing her role as a ‘major asset’. All interviewees noted the importance of the Project Manager working with prison staff, particularly in relation to the work of the Prisoner Safety and Support Team. Nevertheless they felt that more needs to be done ‘to push things forward’; ‘to get the word out’. This included: additional support for the Project Manager given the extensive and ‘pressurised’ roles she fulfils, and need for ‘more time to develop and promote the Project’; increased awareness of the Project among staff to provide ‘more back up in the jail’ and among prisoners to enhance participation; and ‘government support’.

A key concern, also raised in interviews with volunteers and prisoners, was communication. When asked about the potential to develop the Project, it was argued that ‘communication is the main thing’, but two interviewees noted concerns about ‘poor’ communication systems within the Prison Service. This impacted on the operation of the Project in relation to volunteers’ and visitors’ experiences, as well as on developing and promoting the Project. Lack of communication was put forward as an explanation for an example of a visit which was prevented by prison staff from taking place:

There have been a few hiccups with visits’ staff. For example, a volunteer was turned back from going to a visit by staff rather than them checking out with someone that [the volunteer] had permission … the Visits’ Manager didn’t know what had happened.
It was suggested that the Project could be ‘pushed’ more particularly in relation to raising awareness among ‘new staff coming in’ including asking prisoners to talk to staff about its ‘significance for them’, possibly at ‘awareness seminars now and again’. It was felt that:

Newer staff don’t get it. They think, ‘why would anyone want to come in here to visit?’

There was some indication that staff lacked interest in attending or were not available to attend awareness raising sessions, given that:

Four previous sessions, set up to capture as many people as possible to promote the Project, were poorly attended.

Further reasons proposed for communication difficulties were changing prison officers’ roles, in particular transferring officers who had built up working relationships and the general reluctance of ‘people’ to share information. Also, it was noted that the Prisoners’ Forum tends to be quiet about the Project possibly due to the fact that:

Some men are very embarrassed about not having family contact … and some come in and find out that their friends are not friends.

Interviewees noted the potential for awareness of the Project to be promoted further among prisoners via more posters and the provision of leaflets, ‘induction of prisoners’ and a ‘number of avenues’ which include Family Officers, Sentencing Managers, staff on the landings, the Prisoner Safety and Support Team and the Offender Management Unit.

Recognising that those prisoners who do participate in the Project may need support most when they are released, the Volunteer Project Manager explained that the Quaker Service is involved with a community support group in the hope that the group will be able to match its volunteers with prisoners post-release.

Visits

Though it was recognised that there are prison officers who do refer prisoners to the Project and play a role in talking to prisoners about it, concerns were raised about
the ongoing numbers of isolated prisoners not referred to or not aware of the Project. Comments included:

There are an awful lot of men who don’t receive visits.

There’s an amazing number of young men who have no support.

An example was provided of:

A young man who was in for five years and had no visits … he saw it as part of prison life and wouldn’t ask for help … he had a very chaotic family life … to talk to someone in the real world would have really helped his social skills.

The role of the Project in assisting isolated prisoners was emphasised by interviewees and it was noted that sometimes prisoners are ‘self-isolating’ preferring to ‘talk to a stranger as their offence may have been committed within the family’. It was also noted that family visitors may not turn up leading to prisoners feeling ‘embarrassed’ and ‘let down’, and that prisoners may have family problems or no contact with their children.

The need to provide support for isolated prisoners was seen to be highlighted by ‘increasing mental health issues, self-harm and suicide’ among prisoners. The impact of imprisonment on families was also recognised:

When someone goes to prison it’s like having a death in the family and you have to wait on them [prisoners] to contact you. It’s worse than a death. If there’s a family death people give you support but with jail there’s a stigma and people avoid you.

An example of how the Project can provide support for isolated prisoners involved a prisoner who ‘doesn’t like crowds or noise and spends most of the time in his cell and doesn’t mix’ and because of this ‘he doesn’t want to go to the visits’ area’, so the volunteer visits him in an interview room in his house unit.

All of the interviewees commented on prisoners’ appreciation that volunteers visit them and their respect for them. One recalled a prisoner asking to cancel his visit because:

His head was not in the right place and he didn’t want the volunteer to have a wasted journey.

Volunteers were also praised by the interviewees for their commitment and determination, and it was noted that this is recognised by prisoners:
The volunteers don’t give up. They keep coming back and then they [prisoners] think, OK.

Perceptions of their commitment were strengthened by the knowledge of the potential emotional impact, also raised in a volunteer interview, that visits can have on volunteers. This may be due to a ‘variety of issues’ including volunteers hearing ‘disturbing’ stories and being told about prisoners’ experiences which are ‘hard to deal with’. This further highlights the extent of the Volunteer Project Manager’s role in terms of the level of support that volunteers need. The Project Manager also advised that she is considering how best to ensure that volunteers are in a position to work with prisoners with mental health issues.

Further benefits of the Project that were identified mirrored those raised in the interviews with volunteers and prisoners. They included ‘practice in social skills’, feelings of ‘normality’, enhancing ‘self-esteem’ and ‘not feeling shut out or abandoned’. It was described as beneficial for prisoners who:

Have been in for a while and are due to get out, to learn how to make conversation again.

Prisoners knowing that ‘someone has taken the time to see me’; feeling ‘here is someone on my side’; and having contact with someone from outside the prison were seen as positive aspects of the Project:

Visits keep them in contact with the outside world … everything is not involved round jail … it’s safer to have discussions and conversations with someone who’s not laughing and making fun.

It was also noted that prisoners ‘quite often’ raise ‘grievances about staff’ and, with the volunteer ‘almost like being a buffer’, at the end of the visit they may:

Go away feeling at least they were listened to and possibly see another side or view.

As with volunteers and prisoners, interviewees recognised that for the majority of prisoners having the opportunity to go to the prison visiting area is beneficial. Comments included:

Most of the prisoners want to get way over to visits. It gives them something to get up in the morning for, have a shower, clothes ironed. It’s more normal, like everyone else.

Just to be able to offer a visit all sorts of benefits can come out of it … confidence, self-esteem ... had visit and back on landing ... feels normal.
Benefits of the Project for prison staff were also noted:

House staff see the benefit of it where prisoners are out to visits dressed and come back relaxed.

It’s very good for [prison staff to] hear about another side of them [prisoners]. For example, [prisoner] loves these visits and staff can see a different side to prisoners. They see them out of their cell and conducting themselves as if they were outside. … In the visits’ area it’s a wee bit more natural, like outside in a coffee shop.

If prisoners are settled it makes the job easier for staff on the landings.

[The Project] adds to the professionalism of our job … facilitates care of inmates. … It’s very valuable to a person who is isolated.

In relation to the visiting area, however, it was noted that ‘elements of tension’ arise, for example, with ‘drug raid officers running down to someone’, when ‘an inmate was attacked by another’ and due to ‘occasional fights’.
CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

There are many reasons why family and friends may have limited, lost or cut contact with prisoners, but whatever the reasons, the potential consequences include feelings of isolation, loneliness, guilt, anger and despair which may contribute to difficulties such as depression, paranoia, anxiety and suicidal tendencies. This emphasises the need for alternative strategies to facilitate increased visitation and positive social interaction for prisoners who receive few or no visits. The extent to which prisoners have lost contact with family and friends and the need to address the subsequent isolation of prisoners are clearly recognised.

The need to provide the Quaker Connections’ Befriending Project, due to the extent to which prisoners have lost contact with family and friends was recognised by all participants in the evaluation. There was also clear agreement that the Project needs to be extended to reach more isolated prisoners. To facilitate this, participants suggested that the Project should be further promoted and developed, but acknowledged that this is dependent on additional resources. These include additional provision to cover the Quaker Connections’ Volunteer Project Manager’s roles through extending the post to full-time and/or a job-share arrangement, and more paid workers, volunteers, active publicity of the Project and involvement of prison personnel.

Employed on a part-time basis (22.5 hours per week), the Project Manager has responsibility for the Quaker Connections’ Befriending and Family Support Projects. Roles include promoting the Projects, recruiting and training volunteers, as well as providing their ongoing supervision and support, meeting and briefing prisoners about their participation, and liaising with prison staff, including attending Prisoner Safety and Support Team meetings. The Quaker Service is considering increasing the position to full-time to enable the Project to meet demand, but this is dependent on funding availability. It has also followed-up on the potential to extend the Project to HMP Magilligan and has four volunteers who are interested in fulfilling befriender roles at the prison, however resource constraints in terms of project management time requirements have prevented the extension of the Project to Magilligan.
The extent of the Project Manager’s roles and the high regard demonstrated by participants for how she fulfils these roles, not least in supporting volunteers and prisoners, clearly demonstrate the need to extend cover for the post. This should assist in the recruitment of volunteers and prisoners to the Project, the numbers of which fluctuated during the course of the evaluation due to a range of issues. These included volunteers leaving the Project due to family and/or work commitments or new volunteers being recruited and prisoners being released, transferred to another prison, reconnected with family or leaving the Project due to ill health preventing attendance at visits. It should also help address concerns raised by volunteers and prisoners about the impact on them when some visiting relationships ended. Participants noted concerns that they were disappointed and/or anxious about the reasons some visiting relationships ended and volunteers, in particular, indicated that further follow-up would relieve such situations.

Volunteers commended the training and support they receive from the Project Manager, and a couple indicated that training could be further extended through the involvement of other independent agencies and ex-prisoners. Findings also suggest that further emphasis could be placed on befrienders signposting befrienees to prison procedures and services. Also, the issue raised by a participant that there are Foreign National prisoners who would benefit from being involved in the Project, indicates that consideration should be given to how best to ensure that Foreign National prisoners can participate and providing training for volunteers on the particular issues which they face. In addition to providing a prison tour in the training process, some volunteers and prisoners suggested that it would be of benefit if befrienders could see where their befrienee lives in the prison.

The voices of the participants clearly demonstrate the vital role the Project plays in the lives of those held at HMP Maghaberry in reducing social isolation. The Project provides opportunities for befrienees to experience some relief from the monotony of the prison environment and creates a space for those most isolated to be listened to without prejudice. The findings demonstrate both the general value of befriending and the specific role it can play in the lives of the individuals involved in the Project. For example, the Project provides befrienees with an opportunity to rebuild their social connectedness by treating people accessing the Project with respect and
dignity and by providing advice that may assist in building self-esteem. It is vital however that the Project does not act as a substitute for prisoners getting out of their cell on a regular basis to associate and engage in positive activity, and the Prison Service should give greater attention to addressing the needs of isolated prisoners.

The success of projects such as this relies on financial investment, highly trained befrienders, awareness of the Project on the prison landings and the support of prison personnel in facilitating access, ensuring that the correct information regarding visits is provided to befriendees and that unnecessary delays to the visiting area and for visitors held in the waiting hall when leaving are minimised. Drawing on the voices of participants, the report clearly demonstrates the significance of the Project in listening, assisting and advising. It reflects the calibre and dedication of the Project Manager and the befrienders; the positive impact on befriendees; the importance of support for the work from the Prison Service and the need for the Project to be sustained and developed.

**Recommendations**

The following recommendations are made to Quaker Service:

1) Ensure that the Quaker Connections’ Befriending Project is enabled to sustain and continue providing support.

2) Implement plans to secure funding to increase provision to cover the Volunteer Project Manager’s roles.

3) Seek funding to invest in more paid workers to further develop and promote the Project within Maghaberry.

4) Raise awareness among prison managers, prison officers and prisoners through greater promotion of the Project by the Prison Service and Quaker Service. Promote the Project at training sessions for prison personnel, via prison personnel informing prisoners about the Project, and increased publicity using additional posters and providing leaflets.

5) Consider expanding training in relation to befrienders signposting befrienees to prison procedures and services.

6) Consider facilitating greater involvement of other independent agencies and ex-prisoners in the provision of training.
7) Progress plans to place further emphasis on the needs of befrienders who are visiting prisoners with mental health issues, either through additional training and/or via the recruitment of volunteers.

8) Encourage systems to ensure that prison personnel keep befriendees up-to-date with any changes to visiting arrangements and convey messages befriendees may have to the Quaker Service regarding visiting arrangements.

9) Enhance systems to support information-sharing between the Quaker Service and prison personnel to ensure the latter are aware of arrangements in place to facilitate befriendees’ role within the prison.

10) Formalise monitoring and evaluation systems which engage befrienders and befriendees at specific stages of their involvement in the Project, and prison personnel.

11) Have in place a formal system that monitors the support needs of befrienders and befriendees and reviews how these needs are being met and whether they change over time.

12) Explore the potential to facilitate befrienders seeing their befriendee’s landing and cell where both feel this would be desirable.

13) Ensure that there is a robust system in place to manage endings in the befriending relationship including where unanticipated endings occur.

14) Progress Quaker Connections’ ongoing work with other groups to provide through-the-gate support and continued support for prisoners and ex-prisoners post-release.

15) Seek funding to progress plans to extend the Project to Magilligan.

16) Explore extending the Project further to Foreign National prisoners who receive few or no visits and include this topic in training.

17) Explore the development of a similar project for women prisoners and young male prisoners.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


Justmentoring http:www.justmentoring.org.uk


Mentoring and Befriending Foundation http://www.mandbf.org.


APPENDIX 1

Quaker Connections: Training Brief for Volunteers

Once the volunteers are accepted on to the programme there is an induction period for new recruits, during which they are assessed. The Befrienders attend a series of training events over several weeks which includes visiting the prison. Training methods include role play, to illustrate points and initiate discussions. During this period practical matters are dealt with such as:

1) Role of the volunteer as a befriender.
2) Standardised method of recording and assessing the meeting.
3) Support for the Befriender.
4) Opportunity for peer discussions with other volunteers.
5) Arrangements for debriefing meetings with the co-ordinator of the Befriending scheme.
6) Issues of confidentiality.
7) Procedure for the termination of an unsuccessful pairing.
8) Procedure for a closing a pairing if a Befriender has to leave.

During these training events, why pairings might fail was discussed. The possible reasons for pairings failing are as follows:

1) A befriender might be unsuitable for the particular befriended.
2) Lack of support and training may lead to errors in judgement by the befriended.
3) The befriended is unhappy with the relationship