Research and Policy Unit

Final Report

Kent Surrey & Sussex Community Rehabilitation Company

PROBATION

The Family Involvement Project:

Exploring the relationship between Probation and service users' families

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June 2020

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Executive summary

Background to the research: Family involvement has shown to be integral to desistance from crime (Burnet and McNeill, 2005; McNeill et al, 2012; Weaver and McNeill, 2015). However, what does family involvement mean when it comes to probation practice? Commissioned by the Kent, Surrey and Sussex Community Rehabilitation Company (KSS CRC or CRC), this research sought to explore just that.

Methodology: The research took a qualitative approach, and involved interviews, focus groups and written data gathered from over 50 members of KSS CRC staff, and 15 family members who had a loved one being supervised by KSS CRC. Data was collected over the course of 2019.

Results (Staff): Views and experiences of involving families in a service users' probation journey were varied amongst staff. Though most saw great value in it, particularly in the way in which families might support rehabilitation objectives by acting as an 'extended arm of probation', a number of barriers were identified too. For example, staff spoke of the challenges presented by disruptive family members, that there was not always scope for a family inclusive model in service delivery, and most significantly, that by extending the remit of probation to include families, there was a risk that staff would be seen in a social or therapeutic way i.e. a "family counsellor". However, despite these barriers, staff were generally open to the idea of connecting more with families, but wanted more consideration of how that might work in practice.

Developing a family inclusive approach saw suggestions around implementing family friendly reporting times, having dedicated family workers (thereby taking the onus of frontline staff), and where possible, providing additional locations where probation services might be delivered. Most notably, staff talked about the idiosyncratic nature of 'family work', suggesting that that not all families were going to be appropriate for involvement, with some being potentially detrimental if left unmonitored. Implementing a more family inclusive model of service delivery was suggested as best approached on a 'case by case' basis.

Results (Family members): Families were, by and large, fairly consistent in what they revealed. Key challenges were identified in terms of lacking a clear understanding about what probation is and does and, (reflecting staff concerns), typically perceiving probation as a support service. This misconception unfortunately lead some family members to feel frustration when they did not receive the help they were looking for, translating this into a perceived failing of the service. This feeling was intensified in situations where probation staff were seen to be enacting risk assessment processes and enforcement. What appeared most pressing for family members however, was the need to be acknowledged and listened to by staff when it came to the often invisible work they undertook in supporting their loved ones through their Orders. Importantly, where staff did actively engage with family members, the response was hugely positive.

Recommendations: The findings underlined a clear need for a cultural shift in promoting the value of family involvement in probation practice. Staff and families offered many practical suggestions as to how this might be achieved.

1. Modelling how family involvement might help rather than hinder probation work
2. Providing training which explores ways in which staff might work effectively and usefully with service users' families.
3. Offering mentoring from more experienced staff to help newer or less experienced staff gain confidence in working with families.
4. Empowering staff to develop frontline practice to include more face to face communication, reflecting the importance given to it by family members.
5. Developing a formalised family assessment 'tool' to enable staff to make more robust judgements when it comes to appropriately involving service users' families
6. Opening more co-locations, such that supervising officers might engage with service users and their families outside of the formal probation office setting.
7. Offering reporting times which support a more family inclusive model
8. Providing information relating to who 'probation' are and what they do, and how family members might become more engaged with the supervision process

(These recommendations and more are discussed more fulsomely in the report)

Acknowledgements

The authors are exceedingly grateful to the 50 plus members of KSS CRC frontline staff, and to the 15 service user family members who participated in this research. Your time and efforts in contributing to this research are hugely appreciated.

Acronyms

CP – Community Payback

CRC – Community Rehabilitation Company

HDC – Home Detention Curfew

QDO – Quality Development Officers

RO – Responsible Officers (i.e. probation officers and probation services officers

ROTL – Release of Temporary License

SPO – Senior Probation Officers

1. Introduction

1.1 Involving families in rehabilitation

Research supports the view that family involvement is integral to an individual's successful desistance from crime (Burnet and McNeill, 2005; McNeill et al, 2012; Weaver and McNeill, 2015). Travis Hirshi (1969), in his theorising of the bonds of the social world and the constraints they might place on an individual's likelihood of committing a crime, argued that amongst other important factors, the attachment to family provides one of the strongest tools defending against such risks. However, though that goes the theory, what is the reality?

The responsibilities of staff tasked with the supervision and management of those in the criminal justice system has principally seen the focus placed solely on the individual. It is, of course, the cornerstone of the Probation Service's approach to rehabilitation. The involvement of family members, though long considered key in the rehabilitation process from a theoretical point of view, provides a certain level of complexity when it comes to the realities of frontline practice. In a system which views successful change as coming exclusively from the recognition of personal responsibility, the involvement of family members can be argued as a contentious one.

And what of the families of those in our criminal justice system? Research in this area has been varied. Though there has been some notable focus on the experiences of families who have loved ones in prison (e.g. Annison, 2019; Monson, Nadin & Earle, 2015; Murray, 2005; Souza, 2019), there has contrastingly been very little looking at the experiences of family members who have a loved one being supervised in the community. This is an important omission given these two circumstances present quite different challenges. Indeed, though prisons create distance for family members, and by extension may invite stress as family members seek to support their loved ones from the outside, supporting loved ones through their probation journeys in the community has scope to create a host of different stresses and strains for family members. And it is here that our research interest is focused.

1.2 The research project

In seeking to address some of the gaps in knowledge identified above, the Family Involvement Project (FIP) was born. Commissioned by the Kent, Surrey and Sussex Community Rehabilitation Company (KSS CRC or CRC) senior leadership team, and launched through the KSS CRC Research and Policy Unit in October 2018, the research sought to explore the realities of how staff and family members experienced a family inclusive approach at KSS CRC. The rationale for the project was to better understand what contemporary practice looks like in relation to family engagement, with the potential to develop and adopt best practice approaches from the research findings.

The aim and research questions were therefore as follows:

Aim:

- To explore the views and experiences of KSS staff and KSS service users' families around the issue of family involvement in probation service delivery

Research questions:

1. What are the views and experiences of staff when it comes to involving family in probation service delivery?
2. What are the views and experiences of service users' families when it comes to being involved in their loved one's probation journey?
3. What do staff and family members want to see happen in future with regard to a family inclusive approach within probation services?

1.3 Layout of this report

Following an account of the methodological approach used in undertaking this research, this report is divided into two distinct sections. The first of these presents the findings relating to the views and experiences of the probation staff members who participated in the study. The second showcases the views and experiences of service users' family members. The third contains a summary of findings, some broad conclusions, and finally key recommendations for future organisation and practice. Some final thoughts and reflections are then offered at the very end of the report.

2.0 Methodology

2.1 Sample and recruitment

- Staff**:** In total, over 50 members[i] of staff participated in the qualitative aspect of this research[ii]. Recruitment was through internal advertising (e.g. all staff emails; the internal KSS CRC news bulletin 'InBrief'; the Intranet), or through directly emailing Senior Probation Officers to disperse to their teams. There was a wide range of participating staff including Probation Services Officers (PSOs), Probation Officers (POs), Senior Probation Officers (SPOs), Quality Development Officers (QDOs), Programme Facilitators and one Community Payback (CP) Supervisor. Staff came from a wide geographic spread across Kent, Surrey and Sussex. Staff were located across Sussex, Surrey and Kent.

- Family members: 15 individual family members participated. Family members were almost all women, and included female partners, mothers, grandmothers, guardians, one father, and one daughter of a service user. Some family members were contacted via a local charity, others through their relatives' probation officer, whilst others responded to posters and flyers that promoted the research project. The geographic spread of families who participated in the project encompassed Kent, Surrey and Sussex area.

2.2 Methods

- Staff views and experiences were gathered in a range of ways – through individual interviews (N=5), paired interviews (N=1) and focus groups (N=4). The individual interviews were conducted by telephone. The paired interview and the focus groups were conducted face-to-face.

- Family members' views and experiences were captured through similar methods to those of staff. The majority of data was gathered via individual

interviews (N=10). One focus group was convened (N=1) and some family members offered their perspectives in written format (N=1).

2.3 Data Collection

- Data collection amongst staff members took place between January 2019 and May 2019. Interview times and dates were agreed in advance by email, at the convenience of the participants. The focus groups were organised through SPOs, with three of the four taking place during a previously scheduled team meeting. The interviews and focus groups took place in a private room on KSS CRC property. The majority were digitally recorded and later transcribed[iii].

- With regard to families, interviews were conducted over the course of 2019. KSS CRC research ethics policy was adhered to at all times.

2.4 Analysis

A thematic analysis was used to explore the data in relation to both staff and family members. The process began with reading over the transcripts and preliminarily identifying themes. To check for any thematic differences, this process was conducted separately for the interview transcripts and for the focus group transcripts. Preliminary themes were then revisited and revised, and a set of core and subsidiary themes were agreed on. At the final stage, transcripts were coded using these themes and added to a large Excel database. The database cross-referenced participants (groups and individuals) alongside the key themes.

2.5 Ethics

- **Voluntary participation:** Participation for all involved was voluntary, with participants being invited to take part in different ways, as outlined above. With particular reference to staff, there was an 'opt-in' method, where participation was advertised through internal routes (as described in section 2.1). Here, staff

were encouraged to contact the Research and Policy Unit if they were interested in getting involved. Other staff were approached directly by the Unit. This route was taken to ensure we had an even representation of staff (at one point, almost all participating staff were Responsible Officers). The largest proportion of staff were accessed through their Senior Probation Officers by organising data collection during a team meeting. To avoid obligation to engage when using this route to data collection staff were invited to remain quiet if they did not wish to participate.

- **Confidentiality and anonymity:** All participants were informed that individual participation would be kept confidential. However, for staff, it was highlighted that the identities of some may be known given that the face-to-face data collection took place in KSS CRC premises. For all participants, staff and family members, personal and unique information was anonymized to ensure there were no identifiable cases, situations or staff members.

Important note: Within this report, staff comments are anonymised but accompanied by job role and (county based) location. Because there are significantly fewer SPOs and QDOs, their identifiers have been further anonymised to avoid comments being linked to particular individuals. SPO comments have been logged under “RO”, but their geographic area within KSS is still included. Comments made by QDOs appear without their geographic area.

3. Findings (1) Staff views and experiences

The following results fell under four core themes. These were:

1. How staff currently work with families
2. The benefits of family involvement
3. The challenges of family involvement
4. Thoughts, ideas and strategies for future family involvement

These core themes are discussed individually.

3.1 Current family involvement

3.1.1 The nature and regularity of contact with families

Most staff explained having little or only occasional contact with service users' families. This was particularly the case for unpaid work, and to a lesser extent Programmes Facilitators. For Community Payback (CP) staff, it was seen as a function of the role.

> *"A (CP) supervisor would have very little or no opportunity to engage with a family member, um, as the policy is that when working out on site, no friends, family, whatever, are allowed to turn-up and engage with you, so it's very unlikely that they would experience it..."*
>
> (CP Supervisor, Kent)

On the occasions that Programmes and CP staff were in contact with families, this was usually just in terms of facilitating administrational matters i.e. if the service user was unwell and unable to attend, or if a CP project had been cancelled. Family contact was more frequent amongst Responsible Officers (ROs) but it was still not viewed as a particularly common feature of the job (though there were some exceptions). Examples ROs gave where that they did meet or speak with service users' families included home visits, child protection conferences, and most commonly over the telephone where family members might call up to relay messages or provide 'updates'

about their family member's wellbeing. There was a notable split in the experiences of rehabilitation and resettlement officers, with the latter group having considerably more contact with families due to their involvement with Home Detention Curfews (HDCs) and Releases on Temporary License (ROTLs).

3.1.2 How staff involve families

Family involvement involved both direct and indirect approaches. Direct methods of involving families involved inviting family members into supervisions, or calling them to share and receive information about the service user. Indirect methods were considerably more common, and comprised staff discussing family (and/or friends) with the service user, and thinking through where support might best be found. Here, staff discussed techniques such as genograms, life mapping and the 'button exercise'[iv]. However, though such techniques were common practice for Programmes Facilitators (given that understanding the family composite formed an integral part of the Building Better Relationships (BBR) Programme), exploring family structures and how they might support a service user through their Order varied amongst ROs.

The ROs who did talk about strategies for involving families discussed working with service users to 'identify supporters' (i.e. any close friends or relatives who might provide help and support during their Order), and increasing their focus on home visits as a way to meet and engage with families.

3.2 The benefits of family involvement

The benefits of involving family were described in three ways, 1) the benefits to probation staff, 2) the benefits to service users, and 3) the benefits to family members. These are explored in detail next.

3.2.1 Benefits to staff – a collaborative partnership

Staff explained a particular benefit of family involvement to be the way some families would act as a partner service in helping facilitate their loved one's rehabilitation. In these instances, a multi-agency type model was communicated, with probation staff and the family being seen to work together in navigating the service user through their Order.

Family as administrative assistance: Families who operated in this collaborative way were seen both as a reliable 'point of contact' *and* a key source of information (typically around service users' whereabouts and availability). There was a sense that family members would act as something of a PA to their loved ones through scheduling appointments, supporting communication flow, and assisting with time management needs.

> *"[Service users] particularly with memory problems will often have somebody come along because they are effectively the 'memory'… [We are] organising appointments with them, rather than the service users, because they're the ones who know when the service user is available and what's going on…"*
>
> (RO, Kent)

Family as extended probation: Such families were also felt to help with reinforcement and compliance. Here, family involvement saw benefits by way of families working alongside staff to achieve probation goals i.e. to get service users to meet the requirements of their Order, and to ensure core probation messages were not only taken in but acted upon. In this way, the family operated almost an extended arm of probation.

> *"We had an agreement from the start. If you don't maintain contact with me I will contact your sister, or mum and dad."*
>
> (QDO)

> *"There's a lot of mums who do bring their sons into appointments and things. When they get here they engage quite well, but if no-one was bringing them they probably wouldn't get here".*
>
> (RO, Surrey)

"So if one of the service users was thinking, 'I don't want to do this anymore, I've had enough', and they say that to one of the family members who's come and seen the benefits of it, then they're more likely to encourage them, 'no hang on, this is something that's good'. So actually, they're more likely to finish the programme."

(Programme facilitator, Sussex)

Creating trusted relationships: Staff noted that this collaborative model had the additional effect of creating positive and trusted relationships. The family ended up being an even greater support due to a perceived reciprocity. As these Officers commented:

"I've got another young girl, she came in here, she was very upset, got her dad with her who wanted to speak to somebody… So I brought her in here, with dad, and dad was a great support […] and he's been in a couple of times since, and I actually welcomed that with him. He's said "anytime you want to ring me, ring me", and I've actually rung him and said "she's not here, where is she" – "OK, don't worry, I'll get her there". So we've got that good relationship going on and she actually endorses that, for me to be able to contact him."

(RO, Kent)

"I've got someone who's been in and out of hospital, in intensive care. I actually met his parents there, and they were so grateful that I actually took the time to go up there […] I speak to her religiously every week, and if anything happens in-between those calls she will ring me, so that's very positive."

(RO, Kent)

Indirect family involvement: Interestingly, family involvement was not always explained as a direct and active process (on the part of the family). Indeed, a number of staff placed value on family involvement in a more indirect way. In particular, they spoke about *observing* the family so as to better understand and assess the needs of the service user.

"…we had suspicions [a service user] was a deeply manipulative character and part of the thing we were trying to get out of the home visit was whether he was taking advantage of his mother that he lived with. What actually came out was that the mother and the sister are really, really strong characters and they seemed to be the ones keeping on top of him […] The visit was set-up I guess to prove it one way or the other. We were expecting it to fall one way and it actually fell the absolute opposite way, which was very useful."

(RO, Kent)

"For me doing the (service user workshop) was really good because I saw some partners came along to that as well. We talked to the partners or the people

who came in with the service users, and you got more of a feel for what was going on at home […] [It gives] you further information about someone that you might not have picked-up, and who they are actually going around with…."

(RO, Kent)

Challenging entrenched intergenerational thinking. Finally, family involvement was seen to offer a helpful way to promote 'buy-in' for anti-probation or probation-resistant families. It was felt that by allowing families in to see for themselves what probation was trying to achieve, it might disrupt unhelpful ways of thinking and doing at home.

"Because we have got families that are really anti, that are 'old-school' thinking and [involvement] might bring them into 'new-school' ways."

(RO, Surrey)

"P1: If we were explaining it then yeah, maybe it would be different
P2: We might challenge some parents."

(Programme Facilitators, Sussex)

3.2.2 Benefits to service users – support, encouragement and care

Wraparound care: Staff saw almost as many benefits of family involvement for service users as they did for themselves. By far the most common response was that family was often a continuous and dedicated source of support. Staff spoke about families being able to provide holistic, 'wrap-around' care, and pertinently, care that existed beyond the service users' Order.

"If it's right for the individual then yeah absolutely they should be involved. Supervision, it lasts for half an hour maybe once a week. It is short. But families will be there for that person when that supervision ends."

(QDO)

"I was talking to someone about this the other day but, that sense of belonging, that sense of community, I think that's what probation and family members working together would provide. Just that particular person knowing that, 'I'm getting that wraparound [support]'. Not just simply, someone comes in and 'this is the beginning, this is the end', and when they walk out the door that's it."

(Programme Facilitator, Sussex)

This holistic support was argued as being central in chronic areas of criminogenic need. As this RO comments:

> *"I just think it's really important, especially in recovery, addiction, things like that. The main thing that gets people through addiction and offending is family support."*
>
> (RO, Surrey)

Supporting additional needs: The benefit of family involvement was also felt through how family members might support loved ones with learning difficulties and/or mental health problems. It was noted that not only was this beneficial for the service user, in having that practical and tangible support, it additionally improved the service user's chance of successfully getting through their Order.

> *"I think it is good to have somebody, when they're having their down days and they don't wanna come in, or they are having trouble understanding things we have been discussing, to have the support around them if it is available."*
>
> (Programme Facilitator, Kent)

> *"…one lady with anxiety problems had difficulty coming here but found it easier with her partner. It certainly assured that she always got here."*
>
> (RO, Kent)

> *"[There's a] gentleman [who] is quite reliant on his wife in terms of reading and writing. She's the organisation of the household, as it were. So when he'll be talking about something, she'll be providing the evidence. Or he'll be referring to text that she's got, 'can you show them that luv'. Or she'll interject where there's something relevant that she's got, she can pass on, so that's been quite useful."*
>
> (RO, Kent)

In facilitating change: Perhaps most importantly, staff relayed the essential role of families in helping to navigate the desistance journey. It was highlighted that family involvement was crucial when it came to supporting the service user through any process of lasting cognitive and behavioural change. As this Programme Facilitator notes:

> *"Well not that the service users are children, but if you think the programmes are… very educational focused, and when you think there are children learning new things to do, their families are very involved in the whole process. They're seen as a support. And they are told to go to people who support them, you*

know talk to other people about it. It's a big deal. You're asking a big thing. With us, on BBR, you're asking a lot of grown men to change how they think and feel about relationships and things and a lot of them do not know how to have healthy relationships. They just don't know what that looks like. And whoever you can get to support them, whoever you can get to get that message across, everyone they're kind of involved in or that have strong links with them then surely that's a good thing".

(Programme facilitator, Kent)

3.2.3 Benefits to family members

The benefits of family involvement for the family members themselves was also discussed. Programme Facilitators were (proportionally) the most likely to talk from a family perspective, though this is perhaps to be expected given the family-focused nature of the Building Better Relationships programme. Staff explained the benefits for families in three notable ways.

Firstly, it was felt involvement might **keep family more 'in the loop':**

"It helped family know when he was doing well. She knew that when he disappeared, they could contact us too […] his parents and his sister would know when I was seeing him. He knew I would give a message to his sister to let him know 'oh I will be home for tea' – it kept that connection."

(QDO)

Secondly, it was thought to **make families feel more useful and involved:**

"Again, from my past experience too, you would find family members… they just wanna help, but they don't know what to do. You're talking about people that love someone and want to support them but don't know how to, so it would kind of empower them too, feel like they're doing something. So you could say, ok, this is what we're gonna cover in this group, discussing X, Y and Z, and when you get home maybe you could go through some scenarios or practice some skills together, so they could feel involved as well."

(Programme facilitator, Kent)

And thirdly, involvement was considered a benefit in that it offered families **a level of vicarious education,** through the service user passing on important and relevant

information.

> *"It would let the families know what [the service users] are doing, and also that message would hopefully get through to them as well. It is a support for everyone, especially domestic violence where it is so linked to family background."*
>
> (Programme facilitator, Kent)

3.3 The challenges of family involvement

Though staff identified many benefits of involving families in a service user's probation journey, it was clear that they were considered vastly outweighed by the challenges. The types of challenges described were mainly around organisational barriers, the remit of the probation service, and the difficulties, or rather realities, of involving different types of families.

3.3.1 Organisational barriers:

The involvement of families was commonly felt to be problematic due to the restrictions and policies of the organisation. Staff talked of red tape and 'hoop jumping' when it came to bringing families into a service user's probation journey, with some expressing confusion about how it would work 'in practice'.

Some organisational policies, cultural and localised practices place barriers to family involvement: Staff explained the difficulty of involving families was often hinged on the simple fact that families were not always encouraged/allowed to be on KSS CRC premises. The advent of signs prohibiting children and friends from entering the buildings are seen as both a physical *and* psychological barrier to family inclusion.

> *"I feel bad for mums and partners and nans. It's their time. It's their petrol money. It's them battling and saying, 'look you've got an appointment'. It's them encouraging the service user to get to their appointment… Then they get to the front doors and we say, sorry you have to wait outside, signs literally up in the corridors […] the service user will just agree to an appointment with us, and they won't even think if that will impact their mum, that they have to take time*

out of work or their retirement to come and drop them off. And we're just going, oh wait there."

(RO, Surrey)

One officer talked about a service user who was only there because his younger sister had pushed him to engage, yet her age (16/17 years old) meant that she had not been allowed access on to the premises. Another pointed out the 'no families' rule was particularly unhelpful as some young people were also carers. As that Officer commented, "how are you supposed to facilitate that?". It was noted by a Sussex RO? that women can go to the women's centre if they have children, with another commenting this then threw up gender issues as male carers might be excluded. It was argued that there was a need for more flexibility and autonomy when it came to making calls about allowing family member access.

Home visits not always appropriate: Though it was acknowledged that home visits gave probation staff the opportunity to connect with families, and in a more appropriate environment, several mentioned that this was not always possible. Staff talked about the barriers they faced when it came to home visits to certain communities.

"We have a huge travelling community, and at the moment, though we've just been authorised to do home visits to travelling community there's been a lot of stuff that's gone on around this way with the travelling community, so we are recommended [….] not to go up to any of those sites. Which means for us we're leaving out a massive chunk of [the] community […]. We are instructed not to go and then we are leaving out an entire family unit. It's like, how do you include them instead?"

(RO, Surrey)

A lack of guidance: Organisational barriers were also explained in terms of a lack (or paucity) of written guidance. When asked about involving families more within probation, staff talked of the personal barriers they felt in being able to do so.

"There's no worksheets. There's no structure. Especially for new staff coming in…we're reliant on ourselves and our experiences."

(RO, Sussex)

"*There is a time and a place where the service user might benefit from their family being involved but I wouldn't know how to vet that. There aren't specific questions you could ask."*

(RO, Sussex)

Indeed, this was felt even more acutely for Resettlement staff where, even when information/guidance in working with families was available, it was not always appropriate to use with their service users:

> *"… if you're looking to including families, we haven't even got a baseline to work with our cases on what the value of having a family is. We can go off our own experiences, but having any sort of structured work, where people can feel confident doing it, that's missing. We can adapt worksheets but I have really struggled. I sit there, don't I, thinking - this doesn't apply to my cases as someone who is working with someone in prison […] It's not appropriate to deliver to my middle aged domestic violence perpetrators."*
>
> (RO, Sussex)

It is important to note though, staff did not occupy a unified place when it came to calling for more guidance. Though some, as previously described, talked of the lack of such guidance leaving them adrift, others considered this to be a matter of experience. For these staff, notably longer serving staff, involving families was felt to be something an Officer learnt on the job. **Having the confidence to do the work** was seen as a major facilitating factor in successfully engaging with service users' families.

> *"Staff sometimes hope that someone will type something up and they will get a process map. They want instructions. But you can't put a process map up… You need to give staff the confidence and skills to do this. […] I have been in the service for [a long time] now. At the beginning, I was much more, I wouldn't have had the confidence. I have been in the job a long while. When you have been doing the job a while you have that natural instinct"*
>
> (QDO)

> *"If you have got somebody who has a lot of experience, 20 years of the probation service, we do have more confidence to make those judgements… During my first year I spent a lot of the time thinking, oh this doesn't make sense to me, is there any training event that is going to make sense to me. Until the penny dropped and I was like, oh, I don't think that's ever gonna happen. Oh, you know, this works for this person and that works for that person. You know, so actually, how do you explain that to somebody? How do you actually explain this job to anybody?"*
>
> (RO, Sussex)

Differing beliefs about the Probation Officer role: What stood out prominently throughout the interviews and focus groups was the different ways staff

conceptualised the RO role. There was a clear divide in what staff believed probation officers were and were not responsible for.

For the considerable majority, it was felt that probation staff should focus on service users and, for the most part, service users alone. They were the ones who needed to address and change their behaviour. They were the ones who needed to take ownership of what they had done. And ultimately, they were the ones responsible for getting themselves through their Order. Though it was argued there was a place for families, this seemed much further down the list of priorities. As these staff note::

> *"I can see how very useful it is to maybe have a little bit of support when things are difficult, or initially, but at the end of the day they are there because…they've been deemed responsible for their behaviour and have been punished accordingly, and therefore they need to be treated that [way] by probation."*
>
> (RO, Kent)

> *"Service users must take responsibility for their own actions. Like, we are giving the power to the service user to change their own life. It's not having their parents there to fight their corner […] They are responsible for themselves – that's what I was trained to do."*
>
> (RO, Sussex)

> *"I definitely think family engagement, family involvement is important but I'm not sure it should be within a probation setting. 'Cause I think it's still very much about the service user - their sentence, their responsibility, taking ownership. They're the person who has to change, and not putting that ownership on the family members."*
>
> (RO, Surrey)

One officer made a distinction between their previous role in a related agency and where they sat now as a Probation Services Officer. As they commented:

> *"Working in [a previous sector] where the focus would have been on family, then in that situation I would have absolutely spoken to the partner and we would have had a situation where I would have tried to arrange appointments whereby the partner would come in or even see the partner in the service user's stead, simply because they were the one's who were happy, or who were tasked with dealing with those administrative bits of the family life and the service user was quite happy to say "oh, talk to my wife, talk to my partner, they deal with that stuff and just keep us in the loop". I think maybe in probation where the focus is more on the individual it would be appropriate in a limited sense, but the focus is really on the offender."*
>
> (RO, Kent)

Probation work is not social work: Another concern was around the belief that involving families would blur professional boundaries. There was a consistent theme of staff not wishing to be seen as social-workers, family therapists, relationship counsellors or any other therapeutic role. It was argued that probation work was not about mending broken relationships, and by drawing families further into the Service there was a risk that the probation remit would be misconstrued.

> *"I'm a provider of information, I'm not a family counsellor."*
>
> (RO, Kent)

> *"...when you're getting involved in their relationship you become a counsellor, but you're not a counsellor, and it just becomes messy…*"
>
> (RO, Surrey)

> *"I took over a case and she would come to every appointment with him and it became a bit of a sounding board for those two to slag each other off and for me to be the go-between. I'm not a relationship counsellor. She would ring me 'oh he's done this, he's done that', or she would just randomly turn up and I had to just lay it down and say, 'you're not the service user here'. I think if it's done, it has to be done really carefully, particularly with young couples where one day they're together and the next day they're not. It's constant and she almost saw me as a friend to come and talk to - even disclosing really personal things about herself and it wasn't, it wasn't right. So I had to cut all contact with her completely. So it comes back to that, do you have one rule for everybody or do you use your discretion?"*
>
> (RO, Sussex)

As one Officer noted, not even the probation training supported that model of inclusion:

> *"Yeah to be fair, it was said to not… work with the service user and not the family. It was never said to discuss anything with family."*
>
> (RO, Sussex)

Probation work should not take place in isolation: Though most staff seemed cautious of focusing on the family to a larger degree, there were a minority who felt it to be an important part of probation's remit. It was noteworthy that most of these staff were Programme Facilitators. In line with modern behavioural change programmes which situate the individual as a psychosocial being, and therefore a product of society as much as their own individual thought and behaviour, these staff explained the involvement of family as an integral part of successful change. Though they were often limited in the work they did with families, they fundamentally supported there being a role for it.

"I think the focus is on the individual [service user], which it should be, but you can't take away the fact that [that person] has come from all the relationships, everything that has gone on in their life. They come as a package. I don't think that you just deal with the one person in isolation, especially with domestic violence where we know it's a circle. We know it's a generational thing, where it just permeates down and down and down. It'll be seen within a family context, so I think that that would just, it seems illogical not to address that. Not to involve those people in that process".

(Programme Facilitator, Kent)

3.3.2 Families working against rehabilitation goals

Irrespective of any practical or organisational barriers, involving families was sometimes described as a challenge because of the families themselves. Staff, principally ROs, talked about the difficulties caused by certain families who not only made their job more difficult, but who actively worked *against* rehabilitation goals.

Boundary pushing families: Staff spoke about some families 'crossing the line' when it came to involving themselves in their loved one's probation experience. They described family members (typically mothers) repeatedly calling up to get or give information, 'using staff as a sounding board' and in some cases, giving 'abuse' when it was felt staff were not doing their job properly.

"They sometimes have the view that their person should not even be in probation. Say mum, in a way, has been groomed by the son 'they're making me do this, do that. They're making my mental health worse'. We are asking legitimate questions. They are rehashing this to make a common enemy."

(RO, Sussex)

"[One SU] brought along his mum who was just trying to back his corner 'look at what it's doing to him', really trying to reinforce it. That's the kind of negative side, isn't it? So we got to the point where we were just 'she's not coming in'. It was the last thing we needed, because he was just being manipulative. He could do the programme no problem, she was just trying to get him out of it. But I guess that's the flip side – the ones that take over with the 'my son's not done anything, why does he need to do this?'."

(Programme Facilitator, Sussex)

Interestingly, staff also linked this to subsequent issues of confidentiality. Staff noted that mothers (in particular) often felt they had a right to discuss their child, and a right to any information held about them. This subsequently raised concerns of data protection breaches and maintaining professional trust. As these staff explain:

> *"I mean sometimes we get calls from mums, especially IOM [integrated Offender Management] cases where they've relapsed, and when, you know, the young boys have been hanging around with associates mum doesn't like, then mum will phone and tell us […] then it's about how do you approach it, because you are working with that service user and it looks like you are then colluding with the family, and then they can get that distrust."*
>
> (RO, Sussex)

> *"I sometimes feel they see us as someone that we need to tell them what's going on with their child, if their child doesn't want to disclose information. They feel like, 'I'm their mum, you should tell us'. They can sometimes cross that boundary. If they feel they have a right to that information they do kind of push for it."*
>
> (RO, Surrey)

Importantly, staff underlined that such boundary pushing was not simply an inconvenience or annoyance for staff. Intrusive parents, it was contended, ran the risk of disempowering their children by centering their own agendas.

> *"….I've experienced it most with very, very assertive mothers, with young service users and I think there's very much a sense of they're going to be there to make sure their child gets the most out of probation, they're going to make sure that this happens and that happens. There's a real risk that the service user sits back and lets mum do the talking for them. It's not really any use when you're trying to do offence focused work with the service user or get their opinion on something, it's always coming through the filter of a parent, or what they are happy for their parent to hear. "*
>
> (RO, Kent)

> *"…sometimes there's concerns that they might feel like, especially if they're a younger age range, 'oh, mum and dad are just taking over'. I'm quite conscious of that and yes, if some relatives do turn-up and I've got consent from service users there and then, that's fair-enough, but it would be after I've spoken to them on my own."*
>
> (RO, Kent)

The distinction between resettlement staff and rehabilitation staff was again apparent here. It was noted that the challenge of boundary pushing families was often

heightened for resettlement ROs due to previously established links made during the Home Detention Curfew process. As this RO explains:

> *"I feel like we have a lot of calls from, they involve themselves from the start, but I don't know if that's the resettlement side again that the HDC process is fully through that person, and obviously the majority of the prison population do get, or we do have to assess for HDC so there is that constant, they've got our number from the start. And then it's in their, they have to know about the sentence, they have to know about the offence. So I guess that initial… whereas we have cases that don't have that same [family focus]."*

(RO, Surrey)

Distracting families: Though not necessarily working against rehabilitation goals, friends and family were also cited as having potential to distract service users. This was noted as a feature of service users who were on unpaid work duty. As this CP Supervisor explains:

> *The distractions (when on site), quite a lot of the time it would be from friends, distracting them from their work, there's so many reasons. They don't want their mates to see them having to work, if they do see them they are more inclined to stop work… it just the whole distraction really. Peer pressure is huge. The vast majority of people on Community Payback are men.*

(CP Supervisor, Kent)

Permissive, collusive and enabling families: There were also concerns raised around families who were known to be collusive, permissive or enabling. It was argued such families worked against the desistance process through 'giving in' to their loved ones problematic behaviours, making inadvisable allowances and/or denying problematic behaviour - in some cases, due to having similar problems themselves.

> *"We ask questions to get an idea of home life and the family, but a lot of the time they are not honest. They normalise negative behaviour, say it's all great, but you find out that the family is not alright. They are normalising drug use, alcohol use, abusive behavior..."*

(RO, Sussex)

> *"Parents can take over, you know like protect protect protect, rescue, recue, rescue. You're not like helping this person because you're constantly, 'no no, he doesn't need to do that'."*

(Programme Facilitator, Sussex)

"We had an issue recently, on a first home visit and mum came in. It was child protection, and really risky, and mum is collusive […] condoning her daughter's really risky behaviour. And low and behold, we were doing a home visit and she came and more or less took over […] The message that she's getting from her mum is, she's not doing anything wrong. All professionals are really bad and terrible and they don't know what they are talking about."

(RO, Sussex)

Controlling and abusive families e.g. domestic abuse cases: Finally, staff raised concerns about any family involvement where there were suspected risks of coercion, controlling behaviour, abuse and violence. In these cases, not only was it underlined that family involvement should be approached with caution, it was suggested there often should not be involvement at all.

"…[in one case] dad came into the induction, with the service user, and he was very controlling… He can be really quite, I use the word aggressive, for want of a better word, but he can be very forceful."

(RO, Kent)

"I've had a situation where the dad came here and he wouldn't leave so I went down to him and I said, 'OK, say what you wanna say, but I can't tell you anything' […] I asked him to leave after that. I wouldn't engage with him."

(RO, Sussex)

Interestingly, two ROs spoke of service users who were also victims of domestic abuse. In these instances, their partner's involvement was seen as inappropriate not only because it dominated the supervision session but also because it allowed for controlling behaviour to take place within the probation environment.

"We had an interesting dynamic. It was a case a while ago and she was the person who was actually under the Order. Right from the onset, her [partner's] agenda was to tell us how crazy she was, and she needs help and she needs this. After meeting her it transpired that she was in a very controlling relationship…"

(RO, Sussex)

"…having a partner can have a negative effect. One of mine, a couple of times she's come in, and she's been so obsessed about him sitting out in the waiting room that she's asked if he can come in, so on two occasions I said 'yes', and, I've had to put a stop to it because he's, rather than coming in and just sitting in there and not letting me do what I've got to do with her. He's got himself so involved, 'it's not like this, it's like this, but you're like that, and no, you don't do this', and I've had to say to him 'hang-on a minute, this is about her' […] so now

[I've stopped him] coming in and basically overriding what I'm saying, and what she's saying."

(RO, Kent)

Such problems were often exacerbated when there was *known* domestic abuse within the family, and particularly when a Domestic Abuse and Safety Advisor (DASA) worker was not involved[v]. Staff talked here of the considerable risks that ensued when the remit of the probation service (and by extension, its Officers) was pushed.

"That's where the family engagement thing is hard because we're saying, you're the victim so we need to refer you to a support service, but we're also saying you're involved with the family, so where do you draw the boundary."

(RO, Surrey)

"If we are talking BBR service users, getting partners in is very complicated because then you're opening the door to all sorts […] If you've got kids coming in it's just, it could bring up things…"

(Programme Facilitator, Sussex)

Indeed, it was noted that in such cases family involvement had the potential to put staff in extremely difficult positions. As these staff discuss:

"Sometimes it's really difficult to be a responsible officer if you are in the middle of these two people, and they are both giving you these bits of information, and you struggle to know what you can do with it. Especially if you have a victim who's providing you with information and they very clearly want something to happen as a result of them providing that information. But they don't want you to tell social services […] that's probably why there are occasions when ROs might avoid that situation, because it is a really difficult thing to know information and not be able to do very much with it."

(RO, Sussex)

"Actually, I had this with [a named] support service for women. They couldn't get hold of a victim from one of my DV cases, so they gave me the information and said when you do the home visit, can you take another colleague and distract him and provide that information to the victim because they couldn't reach her because she's so isolated. And I actually had a chat with [my team] and said, I wasn't happy to do that. I wasn't happy to put the victim in that situation, to leave that paperwork […] I could have left her and he could have found that information."

(RO, Surrey)

Such discussions often lead on to staff reaffirming where they felt probation responsibilities lay. For example:

"P1: He could have lost trust in you…"

P2: Exactly. I'm there to support him in not perpetrating domestic violence again.

P3: I think we have to be very clear with what our purpose is in working with DA perpetrators and the victim […] I would never talk to the victim if I felt she would be vulnerable. If the perpetrator was to find out the victim was talking to the probation officer, there's just that conflict there and I feel that's putting the victim in a really unsafe place."

(RO, Surrey)

3.3.3 High caseloads/heavy workloads

Challenges were also at a staff caseload level. Family involvement activities were argued as having the potential to add to already heavy workloads. Staff talked about family work being 'resource intensive' and not easily achievable alongside other priorities. Though the will was there (staff described being open to connecting more with families), the flexibility was often not.

"I do see the benefits of it but I think if it were suggested to our team, for example, I think they would find it hard to know how to incorporate it without it having a serious, significant impact on our workload".

(Programme Facilitator, Kent)

"I'm really for it, but I'm more against how it works in reality. In terms of time taken. We already are on high caseloads and not that much time. I'd love to be able to go out more and do more home visits, but the thing is, how do you actually make that work, on a daily basis?"

(RO, Surrey)

Significantly, one member of staff linked this to the ever-changing culture of probation. It was contended that probation staff were frequently being asked to accommodate new ways of working, and this frequently had the impact of inducing both physical and mental fatigue.

"...there is a limit to people's time, and actually sometimes we don't allow things to embed very well before we are on to the next thing. That can feel disempowering if you are on the receiving end of it. You feel like you never quite get to grips with that thing before you are expected to do the next thing. And

we are talking here about service user engagement but we are forgetting another massive aspect of the job which is all the record keeping, all the admin, and all the targets […] People do get burnt out. People do get tired. It's difficult to deal with constant change. So I can see how new ideas, even with a massively important element to them, don't always get the buy in you would like. It's not even an unwillingness. It is literally, 'I'm up to here'."

(RO, Sussex)

3.3.4 The challenge of involving children

Though the majority of family involvement discussion centred on the role of partners and particularly parents, staff also commented on the issues that family involvement raised when it came to children. Particularly, children in the office environment.

Limits what can be said and done: Though staff weren't against children being part of the service user's probation experience per se, it was argued that their presence in formal meetings significantly affected how ROs were able to work. Staff spoke about feeling 'limited', 'inhibited', and overly 'conscious' about the types of conversations that could be had.

"There are so many things you cannot ask or are not comfortable to ask. We are talking about peoples' drug and alcohol taking, their sexual behaviour and their risk taking behaviour […] "*They may say "oh, don't worry, little Billy doesn't understand" but we underestimate what children do actually understand, and I think it does really put you in a very difficult position."*

(RO, Kent)

"The difficulty is age as well. 'Cause a baby isn't going to take in what you're talking to a service user about but a seven or eight year old will and they go back to school with it […] That would be my concern, trying to talk about certain issues. Children are aware, aren't they?"

(RO, Sussex)

Probation offices are not places for children: What seemed to be a rather universal area of agreement was that probation spaces were not family friendly spaces. Staff talked about the importance of CRC offices being seen as a 'formal' environment, underlining the serious work that takes place within them. It was also said that probation work had the potential to trigger tensions, frustrations and aggression in service users. They were therefore not an appropriate environment for children.

"We have had a couple of incidents where things have kicked off in reception or you get someone that's intoxicated. I wouldn't want my child seeing that and asking questions."

(RO, Surrey)

"We've got safeguarding to be mindful of. If we've got young children coming through probation offices and we've got someone kicking off because he was told he was too late for his DRR [Drug Rehabilitation Requirement], it's not the right environment."

(RO, Sussex)

It was noted that that this ran the additional risk of children coming into contact with potentially dangerous individual:

"Another thing… with the slightly older children is the risk of grooming, the risk of exploitation. We are supervising people who are having connections with human trafficking, who are connected with child sexual exploitation, who are connected with gangs. Just because we don't supervise offenders who are on the Sex Offender Register, doesn't mean we don't supervise sex offenders and I think it's really important to remember that. We have people with historic offences, with un-convicted sexual offences and it's not just sexual offending but gangs related, drug taking, and I think we're really exposing young people to potential risk, unless it was really, the health and safety would have to be so robust and we'd have to have someone really monitoring, who was trained to monitor, realistically I'm not sure that's possible."

(RO, Kent)

3.3.5 Challenges of family involvement for the service user

The challenges of involving families for the service users appeared to be framed more as the challenges for staff e.g. the limitations on what could be spoken about in supervision. Issues that were raised however, concerned the family potentially making the service user uncomfortable (e.g. feeling embarrassed or ashamed of talking in front of children, parents or partners), the family distracting the service user (e.g. kids 'playing up' during supervision sessions), and most commonly, the family inhibiting what the service user might say and do. Indeed, a Sussex based RO discussed working with a service user with a learning disability. The Officer commented that the service user's mother always sat in on the meetings and felt this subsequently "changed the conversation", with the impact that the service user was less confident to speak up.

Of interest, one Programme Facilitator noted the potential for 'rehabilitation fatigue' when it came to involving families. Though it was stated that there were clear benefits to the wraparound care offered by families, it also had the potential to become a drain on the service user due to an absence of probation respite.

> *"You might get into that dilemma of oh, your partner's reminding you of appointments and telling you what it is you should be doing, 'oh by the way last week you said you'd do this that particular thing to that Officer and now you're not doing it'. That might lead into a bit of conflict. 'It feels like now you know too much. And now I'm getting it on both sides – the nagging from probation, the nagging from you'. So it could get a little bit tricky."*
>
> (Programme Facilitator, Sussex)

3.3.6 Challenges of family involvement for families

Comments about the challenges that might be thrown up for the families themselves were around families potentially feeling ambushed or coerced into being involved, or families feeling wary of being involved because of what the implications might be at home (especially in families where there was domestic abuse).

One common issue centred on the potentiality for families to feel blamed, targeted or even criminalised. For some staff, there were moral implications when considering involving family in a probation context.

> *"Do we want the families who are pro-criminal in their attitudes, the other family members who are quite entrenched [in criminality], are we asking them to come in? Are we changing their attitudes as well? Do we have that right to challenge those attitudes of the family member, because they're not subject to an Order. That's just the service user."*
>
> (RO, Surrey)

> *"… If [family involvement] is just kind of surface level, he's here or she's here, and this is what we're gonna do with them, I think more likely to probably buy in to that but if we go in a bit deeper, people are probably gonna be 'no, I don't wanna get in to any of that because it's none of your business. I'm not the one on probation!' "*
>
> (Programme Facilitator, Sussex)

3.4 Looking to the future: What more could/should be done?

Staff put forward a range of substantive ideas as to how KSS CRC might seek to engage and involve families in future. Some of the more practical suggestions included – family reporting times; family days; school-holiday reporting; and dedicated family workers (employees and/or volunteers). One of the most popular practical suggestions was around having more flexibility in where probation services could be delivered.

3.4.1 The case for co-locations

When discussing the delivery of probation services, the belief that probation offices should remain formal environments was reiterated. However, staff acknowledged the value of being able to work with service users in *other* places and spaces. Indeed, having access to 'informal and relaxed' co-locations were viewed as a more responsive way of working with service users, and subsequently a better way to engage with their families.

Flexibility for single mothers: Co-locations were considered especially important for single mothers, who were said to be more likely to cancel or change appointments due to childcare issues. Such flexibility was also felt to be another tool in promoting good and effective supervisory relationships as service users would be able to see their unique needs being recognised and met.

> *"I've got one case, she's young, she's a single mother, she comes in every week to breakfast club and that really works. To be honest with you, I don't think I would have had near enough the level of engagement or rapport with that service user if it was office based visits".*
>
> (RO, Sussex)

Linking in with the community: Staff also spoke about flexibility in delivery through linking up with other agencies, services and community organisations. A popular model was one where confidential conversations *and* childcare needs could be catered for in the same place, and at the same time.

"…for me, what 'good' looks like is pairing-up with other agencies, and maybe we work out of different buildings, to work in that space were families can come. I know that's probably not achievable now, but it's certainly aspirational."

(RO, Kent)

"I think Children's Centres would be an amazing option if there was interview space that could be accessed, so you had somewhere confidential. A lot of them have crèches in them don't they, so you could see somebody with their children but also a bit of time apart."

(RO, Kent)

However, looking to the future was not just about making suggestions of what could be done. It was also about what might need to be considered if a more family inclusive model was introduced.

3.4.2 *A 'case by case' basis*

One of the most overwhelmingly clear messages was around the importance of robust family assessments i.e. assessing which families might facilitate a successful rehabilitation process and which families might act as a barrier to it. Time and again, staff talked about family involvement needing to be considered on a 'case by case' basis, with much discussion devoted to thinking through what a suitable family infrastructure might look like.

Assessing appropriate families: Staff talked of 'vetting', 'assessing', 'judging' and 'sussing-out' appropriate and suitable families, with several stating the need for a more formalised family assessment 'tool'. The process of assessing suitable families was described as complicated, and was said to require considerable monitoring and management. There was demonstrable concern about making a wrong assessment, with staff talking about family involvement having the potential to be 'detrimental' or 'back-fire'.

"I'm very, very aware that too much, or the wrong sort of family involvement, can be counter-productive. The last thing you want to do is set-up a relationship with a service user to fail…"

(RO, Kent)

"You think [a family member is a protective factor], but all of a sudden you get the service user on their own and it's actually a problem…"

(RO, Sussex)

Family involvement must have a clear purpose: Of note, some staff indicated that engaging families should be considered in terms of what value it might bring in supporting the service user through their Order. It was felt important that family involvement should have a demonstrable purpose.

"You've got to have a clear picture of why you would want to bring a third-party into what is essentially a two-way process, and if there isn't a good reason for bringing in a third party then, or you can't see what that reason is, I don't think that's a wise idea,

(RO, Kent)

3.4.3 Keeping the service user at the heart of probation work

Finally, it was stated that no matter what family involvement model KSS CRC might move towards, the process should be firmly lead by the service user. Ultimately, if the service user doesn't agree, there was no family involvement.

"It starts with what the service user wants and we if we haven't got permission it doesn't matter how useful the family might or might not be."

(Programme Facilitator, Sussex)

"In one case it was the parents were the ones that kept getting their lad arrested for turning up at the house when there was a restraining order preventing him from turning up [at partner's house]. And then then the parent would come to me wanting to help. But in that situation my service user, my client, says he doesn't want me to talk to his parents so I didn't talk to his parents. Simple as that. And I'm not convinced that the father would have been helpful anyway. He's one of these with a hidden agenda. But for me that was clear cut. If you don't want me to talk to your father, I won't talk to your father. I just told the father to go away."

(RO, Sussex)

4.0 Findings (2) Family members' views and experiences

The following results fall under three core areas. These are:

1. The barriers and challenges to family involvement
2. What works well for families
3. The benefits for service users

These core themes are discussed individually.

4.1 Barriers and challenges to family involvement

4.1.1 Limited knowledge of probation: Function and culture

Understanding the scope and nature of Probation was often limited, or biased to a particular point of view. There seemed to be an underlying assumption embedded in many of the narratives suggesting that probation was something akin to a support service. For example, family members would point out their loved ones were seeing their probation officers to, '*help with housing*' (mother of service user), or '*help with his drinking'* (partner of service user). Interestingly, as the following comment shows, this was occasionally juxtaposed against purported 'myths' of probation, which saw staff working *against* rather than *for* service users (and by extension, their families).

> *I mean this meeting is quite clear that you're there to really support and help, whereas I wonder whether some people might have that attitude that you're part of the problem rather than part of the solution".*
>
> *(Daughter of service user)*

Indeed, though not always made explicit, there was a silent sense amongst family members that probation stood principally as a helping service. The evidence for this

was typically found in what was *not* said regarding the purposes of probation i.e. risk assessment, risk management, and enforcement. Indeed, as will be explored later in this section, where this did occur, probation staff were viewed as part of a wider 'problem'.

However, although the majority of families indicated a limited understanding of what probation is and does, a small number had a degree of insight into not only its core tasks, but also its wider political context. Indeed, one participant alluded to the monitoring and enforcement aspects of probation, as well as the rehabilitative aspects, stating that:

> *"my understanding is that probation officers are there to monitor the offender in the community…keeping an eye on them to ensure that they are being productive, that they are staying on the straight and narrow, to support them when there might be times that are a struggle, to support them in the right direction towards employment".*
>
> *(Female partner of service user)*

4.1.2 Fear of probation

The preceding comments perhaps naturally speak of a degree of **anxiety or apprehension** within people when having to engage with an alien organisation, system or culture. This sense of trepidation was clearly articulated within the experience of one female participant who commented that, *"I was scared stiff. I didn't know what to expect. And to be honest it's nothing like I thought it would be".* Further to this, some held preconceived ideas of probation premises being, *"threatening…more austere than it was…a bit dark and dingy".* This was articulated by one family member as, *"the probation office means police as well…that is the association…Dixon of Dock Green".*

For the majority though, when they began to engage with staff on a more personal level, views changed markedly.

> *"Having met the people in the probationary service and realising that they're real people, you know, not these kind of scary, kind of law enforcers that are kind of looking to make life difficult, which is probably what some family*

members do think, probably is quite a positive experience….. I wonder whether some people might have that attitude that you're part of the problem rather than part of the solution".

(Daughter of service user)

Of interest here is how some family members perceived the role of probation services, in that they were 'part of the problem' as opposed to being central of any possible solution. The enforcement aspect of probation work appears to come into play here, and this in itself may act as a barrier to some family engagement. If the issue for some is not immediate enforcement, powers held by supervising officers, it may relate to a common belief that probation **staff operate in a constantly judgmental capacity**, above that of being supportive. As the comment below demonstrates:

"actually seeing them as people who are there to help support you through something rather than...part of that stereotype about the probationary service, […] that you have to be so careful, because they're judging everything".

(Female family member).

Should any lack of understanding about the probation service combined with any element of trepidation in engaging with its systems be overcome by family members, there remained the issue of **knowing how to get involved** in supporting their loved one. As indicated below,

"there's this cross over between… what did (the RO) actually want him to be able to achieve, and I can help with that, facilitate that. So I think that's a big important part,…they say like, 'Oh can't your family help with this, can't your family help with that'. Well no we can't, because we don't know what's going on. How can we help and support people if we don't know what we are supposed to be helping and supporting them to do?"

(Partner of service user)

Here family members seemed to be seeking further involvement with supervising officers, yet experiencing a sense of frustration or exasperation at not being informed of the best ways to do so. This issue fed into a wider issue of communication methods between service users, their families and probation staff, with clear communication certainly being seen as something that family members welcomed.

4.2 What works well for families?

4.2.1 A welcoming environment and culture

The importance of **welcoming environments** was expressed. For most family members, the first port of call was that of the office reception area. This was generally viewed as a positive experience:

> *"absolutely fine. I was quite surprised that the reception area, they've got friendly receptionists there, and the probation officers I've met, two of them, because someone came out and in the site visit before he was ever released, and the one that he has now, they're both very, very nice ladies".*
>
> (Partner of service user).

However, it was also highlighted that probation could feel unwelcoming at times. Consistency was sought in both how people are treated as well as in terms of improved communication. One particular family member stated,

> *"I tend to find it's who you're dealing with. I've had some people on reception who have been rude and unhelpful. I've had other people on reception who have been extremely helpful, and have gone out of their way to try and like resolve an issue….There's a very wide range of helpfulness within the organization and that I think is the thing. There's no consistency. Like one person will say one thing and another person will say another".*
>
> (Mother of service user)

The same individual also encapsulated the commonly expressed difficulty surrounding **children not being permitted to enter CRC buildings** and the difficulties this can cause.

> *"I couldn't enter the building because I had my granddaughter... They should at least be a place inside those building where you can stand if you've got a child, and wait for them to come down. So you're not out in the rain and the cold".*
>
> (Mother of service user)

This issue was one that appeared to cause consternation for family members who held childcare duties and responsibilities. Whatever views family members had

towards the welcoming nature, or otherwise, of probation offices and staff, they were clear about notions of **respect and dignity** being extended to their loved ones under probation supervision. This was made clear by one mother who upheld that, "*because you've committed a crime doesn't mean you should be treated as dirt, you know, because you're not, and that's their self-worth*".

4.2.2 Being listened to and acknowledged

Family members also spoke of being acknowledged as an integral element of their loved one's life. There were calls to have **their views listened to and taken on board**. For some, their knowledge and experience were seen to be ignored and thus wasted.

> *"No, I don't think they take any notice of it (my support). They're only interested in (the service user), and being there for the appointment that's been set up, and giving him another date"*.
>
> *(Mother of service user)*

> *"and when I tried to fill (the RO) in what I felt were the important points, I felt that, you know, 'what are you doing here', sort of thing. 'What's it to do with you'? That's just how I felt".*
>
> *(Mother of service user)*

Such feelings of frustration echoed through participant accounts, reflecting the primary emotional experience expressed by family members.

Families also appeared to be seeking the essentials of inclusive human interaction, such as **kindness, empathy and simple consideration**. Where this happened, families were hugely positive about their probation experiences. As these comments show:

> *"(the RO) was able to call me up and say, 'is everything OK? Are you sure? Tell me if there's anything wrong, we can work through this'. Do you see what I'm getting at? Sometimes it's just a few kind words.....It's because she was willing to talk to me, and I phoned her, and I said, 'can we do this? Can we do that? Tell me what I need to get', you know, she was just brilliant and I felt very, very grateful for that".*
>
> (Partner of service user)

"They just seemed to have more empathy, I would say. They seemed to be like, they knew there was rules they had to follow obviously, but they also understood there was certain circumstances that they had to take into account as well.....They were actually listening to what you were saying to them as well".

(Partner of service user)

4.2.3 Effective communication

When considering communication between probation staff and family members, the methods discussed were varied. These included the use of information leaflets, text messages, e-mail, websites, phone-calls, information booklets and the creation of a 'help desk'. The key subjects within any form of communication included arranging, reminding and attending supervision appointments; families seeking reassurance regarding progress on probation; families wanting to understand probation procedures; and finally, family members wanting to convey important personal information to supervising officers in relation to their loved-one subject to probation.

Most family members were welcoming of the **more personal, human interaction**, when it came to communicating, as outlined below.

"I think a phone call's much better because it's more personable, and just actually say 'I don't know whether you've been involved with the probation service before, but', you know, 'do you have any questions or any queries or anything you'd like to ask us, don't hesitate to give us a call or email us, this is our website'. But we didn't have any of that. So you know, I do think that would be helpful.....I think it would be good to have a call from probation early on, yes I do. And then they've got that number or that person's got that email and if they want to ask more questions at any time, they can".

In the absence of clear, direct communication family members expressed that confusion resulted, which in-turn created a sense of unease, and then required reassurance and encouragement to alleviate. Several respondents talked of requiring greater **consistency within communications** between different parties.

"where you're often getting that information second hand, it changes or you know, in my case, that family member was often a little bit confused about conversations they'd had so relaying that, afterwards, you didn't always get the full picture. Which was a bit of an issue. So I think I got most of the information,

but probably missed little bits. Which, for my piece of mind, would have been more comforting to have heard that first hand. …..I mean just being involved in the process though, is the most important thin, just to have that reassurance and a bit of information. It's probably quite comforting to be a bit more sure about things because you've got access to that information a bit more regularly or a bit more, just more available I suppose".

(Mother of service user)

Family members made clear that if they did not **foster and facilitate communication** between all involved individuals, some service users would not make it to supervision appointments and enforcement action would result.

"He wouldn't come if not, he'd stay at home and get re-arrested...no I have to remind him. Yesterday I told him he had it today and this morning he forgot. You know it's not done, it's just how [my son] is".

(Mother of service user)

"yeah, he's really good at time keeping, but it's like appointments, it's me who normally puts it in the calendar and makes sure that he's remembered".

(Partner of service user)

In terms of broader methods of communication, comments were offered in relation to how information could be made available. Or if already available, perhaps accessed in an easier manner. It is of interest that only a few respondents made reference to the internet, and in particular the KSS CRC website. Though the reasons were not given it is possible that this may be due to perhaps a lack of internet access, limited information on the website, or simply the internet not being their first port of call when seeking information.

"The probation and police services should be required to produce, perhaps in booklet form, a consistent description of the support available to offenders on license, the conditions for the supply of that support e.g. retraining, housing and employment,….This booklet should be consistent, at least at county level and preferably at national level. The booklet would serve to help offenders and those supporting them (such as ourselves) to understand what assistance is available and how it can be obtained....A readily available 'help desk'….should be available to both offenders and those providing support".

(Guardians of service user)

"Yeah, the systems are quite often not very clear, and when I came in here today, I said 'what I would love is a visual picture of what happens here',

something I can (see), I'm a visual learner, so 'ah, so that's that person there, that's who I contact there, that's who I'm going to'".

(Daughter of service user)

4.2.4. Face to face meetings

Some family members addressed the question of whether communication with probation officers might be in a face to face setting, e.g. being invited into supervision sessions or chatting in the office reception area. Alternatively, it was considered whether there might be other more suitable community based venues in which to perhaps speak more openly.

For some family members **the supervision session was viewed as a wholly private space.**

"No, I don't go in. I just stay outside in reception. He might want to speak about stuff that, you know…it's stuff that he wants to talk about by himself".

(Partner of service user)

"Never went in to a proper session, but they would come out and say what was going on, her probation officer and (service user). It's beneficial because you know exactly what he's been doing and there's nothing hidden at all".

(Mother of service user)

For others however, **face to face contact was viewed as invaluable.**

"get the information about what is happening in that probationary period,..... they're a bit embarrassed about talking to you about what those discussions were about, or what, how that whole system works, and I think from a sort of clarity point of view as a family member, I think it's quite useful to have that face to face, with the person dealing with that whole probationary period really.....Yeah, it's really important, it is actually, what I've found is having that face to face contact, so you're meeting with somebody who you can relate to. And I think that's really important".

(Mother of service user)

"I just follow in, yeah. Yeah because, it's no good them saying I can't go into these meetings and then expecting everything they want done. If I'm not there from the beginning, then how do I know? [The service user] can't relay it properly to me, so no I'm there."

(Mother of service user)

Despite certain family members welcoming in-person communication with supervising officers, indications were apparent that there were invisible **relationship boundaries to be established** and maintained. As suggested below, some partners were clearly anxious of not overstepping any parameters. As such, some respondents offered what for them might be the useful and appropriate level of face to face contact during any period of supervision.

> *"I don't want to do it in a way that I'm seen as a, one of these nightmare partners.....I don't want to be seen as one of those people like 'oh my gosh it's her again'".*
>
> (Partner of service user)

> *"well I would say probably the first appointment, the family member or partner goes with them....So everybody's aware of what is expected, you know, what potential difficulties there could be, you know so you're in it, 'you're in it to win it' so to speak....and then you may be, sort of have it every so often…,maybe every fourth visit, fifth visit, you're invited in to keep abreast and all the rest of it. Because it then, if you're aware of something, it's the time to mention it, you know maybe that frustration hits or whatever. And then sort of closure at the end".*
>
> (Partner of service user)

The benefits of **home visits** and some form of **community meeting hub** were also mentioned. For example:

> "*it (home visit) would be another way of making that relationship a little bit more informal and comfortable, ... I think the danger is if you always go to like a formal office space, it becomes something which is quite procedural.... so I think that just makes it a bit more…friendly maybe...completely neutral".*
>
> (Daughter of service user)

> *"Yeah, I'd definitely do like a drop in center for an hour, I'd be interested in doing that but not like, I couldn't do all day. Yeah definitely, I mean as long as it wasn't people who had like really bad issues that I were going to be sat around with a baby, but, that'd be a concern, but if maybe it were people who had been in rehabilitation, I wouldn't mind but, I'd definitely do that...yeah definitely I think it'd be a big help as to maybe, even if it's just advising me what else we could do".*
>
> (Partner of service user)

A less formal meeting space and atmosphere in which to share information and discuss issues seems to appeal to family members within the above comments, a space in which the traditional dynamics of professional interaction are amended to

some degree. The whole process would only appear to operate well as long as issues of risk are appropriately addressed, especially for women and children.

4.3. The benefits for service users

When considering the desistance journey of a service user and the role that family members feel they might play in that process, several views and experiences were captured. These were, perhaps unsurprisingly, positioned within a broader context of supportive family members having a strong desire to fully engage in their loved one's rehabilitation in the community.

4.3.1. Supporting desistance

Desistance related comments ranged from **working in partnership with probation** and the benefits of **maintaining a close family 'unit',** to what family members can learn about their loved one's behaviour. This was all within a 'framework' of support that prevents any possibility of imprisonment, as outlined below.

> *"…the more engagement I can have and where I can work in partnership with them, it's more likely to be able to set him up stably to have a positive future moving forward…I'm his partner, looking at having a future together [...] actually I need to be a part of that unit, that dynamic, because I'm part of his life. […] Now I know my partner will want me to be involved because he will want to make joint decisions, and he knows that I'll ask the questions that he hasn't thought of asking".*
>
> (Partner of service user)

> *"And I do think if parents feel that, you know, if something ain't right, you know, you're here for a reason. I do think their family members would be a help. And like get a bit of background as to why they would do things like they have [...] I think families could be important to probation, definitely. You get more of a background of the reason why people commit crimes or whatever".*
>
> (Mother of service user)

> *"because with crime it's 'fast gain but long term pain', isn't it, and I think that…if they want more communication with families, I think the whole system has got to liaise with the families. Because if you've got a supportive family, you've got more of a chance of turning your life around. And you know, and if you haven't*

got a supportive family, then unfortunately you've got more of a chance that your life, that you're going to go back inside. And you know you need to have an infrastructure around you".

(Mother of service user)

"But if you've got someone on probation that hasn't got the parents constant, and I mean constant….no wonder they fall by the wayside and do it again".

(Partner of service user)

"Where you've got people working together, and families actually working together, you see progress, but if you have somebody who's defensive and can't sort of get it, it's actually putting people together to get involved".

(Partner of service user)

5.0 Summary, key points, and recommendations

5.1 Summary of findings (staff)

5.1.1 The nature and regularity of family contact

Family involvement in probation practice appeared to be a limited practice, particularly for Programme Facilitators and CP staff where the need to engage with families was largely unnecessary. Though exploring family dynamics and family backgrounds with service users was a more regular activity within supervision and Programmes induction meetings, 'family work' typically did not progress much beyond that level. Where direct contact with families did take place, it was principally through telephone communications (related to a service user's whereabouts and availability), at child protection conferences and to a lesser degree (and more for resettlement staff), during home visits.

5.1.2 The benefits of involving families

Involvement saw tangible benefits, most significantly in the way that families might work alongside probation staff in getting service users through their Orders i.e. the family as the 'extended arm of probation'. Families were thought to be useful points of contact, purveyors of information (keeping ROs up-to-date with the service user's whereabouts and availability), and even 'pro-social enforcers', ensuring core probation messages were not only being taken in but also acted upon. However, this relationship was not felt to be one-sided. There was a reciprocity to it. Families in more regular contact with probation staff were said to better informed in terms of the service user's wellbeing and progress[vi], and subsequently better equipped to provide relevant ancillary support to their loved ones.

Family involvement was also seen to benefit service users. This was principally linked to what the family might offer in terms of 'wrap-around care'. It was noted that unlike probation staff who might only see an individual once a week or so, families had the

potential to provide year round support. Such support was felt particularly useful in cases where there were learning difficulties and/or mental health issues. Having the family there to provide practical and emotional care was often instrumental in helping service users to successfully complete their Order.

5.1.3 The challenges of involving families

The success of the 'family as extended probation' model relies on families buying-in to the aims and objectives of the organisation. Problems occurred when families were seen to act as a barrier to probation goals. For example, staff spoke of the difficulties faced when working with family members who overstepped professional boundaries, family members who were permissive, collusive or enabling (those who facilitated problematic and/or criminogenic behaviour), and family members who were coercive or controlling. Indeed, staff were clear about not involving families where there was known domestic abuse for fear of breaking trust with service users and/or putting victims at further risk.

Challenges were also at an organisational level. It was felt that the CRC itself did not always support a family involvement model. Examples given were around children and friends, (in particular), not being encouraged on CRC premises, probation offices not being appropriate environments for children, a lack of guidance/knowledge around working with families, high staff workloads, and for some, that probation work was not designed to be 'family work'. With the last example, there was a concern amongst these staff that by extending the remit of probation, there was a risk that they would be seen in a social or therapeutic role.

Finally, challenges were also highlighted at service user and family level. Family involvement for service users was viewed as having the potential to make people uncomfortable (e.g. feeling embarrassed or ashamed of talking in front of children, parents or partners), distracted (e.g. kids 'playing up' during meetings), and inhibited (in terms of what they might say and do). For families, there were concerns of them feeling ambushed or coerced into being involved, and potentially at risk due to negative repercussions at home. Staff also raised moral objections, with concerns that

families may feel blamed, targeted or even criminalised through their involvement (e.g. feeling like they themselves were the ones on probation).

5.1.4 Future work with families

Moving into the future, there were many opportunities staff saw for involving families in probation work. Practical suggestions included family reporting times, family days, school-holiday reporting, and dedicated family workers (employees and/or volunteers). There is an energy for co-locations, where it was said a more flexible service could be offered. This was felt especially important for single mothers who are seen as disadvantaged when it came to childcare options.

However, looking to the future was not just be about making suggestions of what could be done. It was also about thinking through the practicalities of what a more family inclusive model might look like.

Most notably, staff talked about the idiosyncratic nature of 'family work'. It was continually highlighted that not all cases were going to be appropriate for family involvement, and therefore each must be considered on an individual basis first. There was potential for family involvement to become detrimental to the probation process if left unmonitored, with some calling for family 'assessments' when it came to deciding whether or not a particular family would be an asset to a service user's rehabilitation.

Ultimately though, staff were clear that any 'family work' should be lead entirely by the service user. Though a family involvement model might be considered a theoretical example of good probation practice, if the service user was not on board a family inclusive approach was immaterial.

5.2 Summary of findings (family members)

5.2.1. Barriers to family involvement

The interviews revealed a number of ways in which family involvement may be problematic. Firstly, it was evident that individual family members were not fully informed about how probation services operate, both in terms of structure and function. This included a reduced understanding of probation systems and processes, and how they link with other areas of the CJS such as the NPS and prisons. More immediate to this however, was the issue of family members seeing the function of probation as being primarily supportive in nature. Of note, this issue very directly reflected staff concerns regarding the blurring of professional boundaries, where staff were seen as family counsellors or social workers. Relatedly, there was often a neglect to appreciate the functions of risk assessment and enforcement in families understandings of probation. Where these aspects of probation work were acknowledged, they were described as 'judgmental' in nature, and were subsequently framed as off-putting for families trying to engage with probation staff.

5.2.2. *What works well for families?*

Unsurprisingly, the factors that work well for family members are those that counter some of the obstacles summarised above. When family members first engage with probation services they most probably enter a probation office and speak with reception staff. The issue here is therefore one of an inviting, welcoming atmosphere and inclusive culture. This is manifest in personal and structural terms. Families welcome being treated with respect and dignity as they interact with staff. Where this happened, families were hugely positive about their probation experiences. They appreciate well maintained buildings, and clean, bright and comfortable spaces. The issue of children being welcomed into the office reception space is important for family members, as they struggle to comprehend why infants and babies are not permitted on the premises.

Within any welcoming culture family members need to be acknowledged, listened-to and involved to a certain extent. Their role in supporting the desistance journey of their loved-one needs to be recognised, their knowledge and understanding of the possible reasons driving the behaviour of their loved-one needs to be taken on-board by supervising staff, and the extent to which they choose to engage needs to be accommodated. Much of this relates to effective communication, and outside of face-to-face communication this can be in many formats ranging from leaflets, booklets, text, websites, email, phone, or in writing. What is key here is clear and consistent forms of available and reliable information sharing.

The best form of communication for families was consistently said to be face-to-face discussion. This provided greater consistency, was felt to be more immediate, and therefore provided the greatest reassurance. In-person communication, whilst being seen as most welcoming, highlights issues of boundary management within working relationships. These can be physical as much as personal. Family members chose differing levels of engagement as some wanted to enter individual supervision session on a regular basis, whilst others were happy to talk with supervising staff within office reception areas. Others were content with telephone discussions. Some substantial levels of engagement can however be at odds with staff expectations and common practices, as discussed earlier in this report. Home visits were generally welcomed by families, as were the possibilities of meeting in shared community based venues.

5.2.3. *The benefits of family involved supervision*

The desistance journey for any service user was felt to be one that required considerable support. Directly reflecting staff views on this matter, family members made reference to the importance of a ‘partnership’ approach to supporting service users. Ideas were put forward around the necessity for a service user to have an infrastructure or framework of support and encouragement around them, presumably made-up of immediate family, wider family, friends, professionals and other associates. This appeared to be of utmost importance if positive strides towards a fulfilling future were to be made, especially in relation to breaking-down the communication barriers that may exist between service users and professionals.

Family members additionally indicated that they could offer a broader understanding of a service user's background, including reasons for offending. This they believed, provided a clearer picture for probation staff about the service user, thus enabling more meaningful engagement with that individual. Some family members acknowledged too that working in tandem with professionals could and should be a two-way process, in that they might also gain further insights into their loved-one's behaviour by learning from probation staff.

Partners of service users were particularly impassioned in expressing the cruciality of their involvement with their loved-one's desistance journey. This was due to beliefs as to the deep, close and trusting relationships being founded on making joint decisions. As such, within any harmonious personal relationship with a partner, the probation supervision element was not seen as severable from other aspects of that relationship. 'Going to probation' cannot usefully be abstracted and compartmentalised within loving partnerships, as something that one partner does without reference to the other.

5.3 Key points (staff)

1. **Family involvement means different things to different people.** For some, family involvement was an indirect process i.e. families were talked about and seen, but not specifically engaged with. It was either working with the service user to map family backgrounds and family dynamics through supervision meetings and Programmes 1-2-1s. Or it was about observing relationship dynamics in places and spaces where the service user could be better understood within the context of their family (e.g. home visits). For others, family involvement was more direct. For example, having the family as a channel of communication, or for a minority, actively engaging with families to find ways to best support the service user through their Order.

2. **Many staff do not see family involvement as part of their role.** Though staff absolutely saw value to it, there were concerns amongst many that having a more family centric approach to probation practice would run the risk of placing probation staff as social workers or family counsellors.

3. **Different job roles have different perspectives when it comes to family involvement.** There was more energy for family involvement amongst Programmes staff than ROs. This is perhaps to be expected though given the family centric nature of the Building Better Relationships programme, which directly explores the service user's intimate relationships. Also, ROs were significantly more likely than Programmes staff to have to deal with difficult or challenging family members.

4. **There is nuance amongst similar job roles.** There were differences in perspectives even between resettlement staff and rehab staff, with the former group being significantly more likely to have family involvement because of ROTL and HDCs.

5. **High workloads and constant change takes its toll.** Demanding caseloads and probation change 'fatigue' may mean that some staff are reluctant to move quickly towards new ways of thinking and doing.

6. **Longer serving staff may hold different views to newer staff.** When it came to working more directly with families, having the confidence to make the call (i.e. when it was appropriate to do so, and when it was not) was seen as more effective than written guidance. Though there was value placed in written guidance, more weight was given to staff having had previous experience in doing so.

7. **Family involvement is most effective where there is family 'buy-in'.** Family involvement was seen favourably when families worked alongside staff in supporting the service user through their Order. Where family involvement was less favoured was with families who were seen to block, detract or prevent probation staff from doing their jobs.

8. **Probation offices are best kept as formal, child free environments.** There was no sense that staff wanted to change this. The best family inclusive model was thought to be one where probation services could be delivered flexibly through co-locations, or through linking in with our community spaces or local agencies.

9. **Finally, there cannot be a 'one size fits all' approach**. Family involvement should be encouraged but only where it is felt appropriate. This means equipping staff with the knowledge with which to be able to make such calls i.e. potentially through offering training.

5.4. Key points (family members)

1. **Physical surroundings make a difference**. Modern buildings with bright, clean, comfortable reception spaces, group rooms and interview rooms appeal to families and encourage them to interact with staff. They assist in overcoming anxieties relating to first-time involvement and they project a sense of dignity and respect towards service users and their families. Family members felt demonstrably more welcome when in pleasant surroundings.

2. **Clear communication is key to family involvement.** Good communication occurs across a variety of formats within the CRC and all formats are required to meet the preferred communication needs of individuals. Family members require information flows relating to the broader CJS; relating to how probation sits alongside other agencies; and information in relation to contacting individual supervising officers. Whatever information is sought by families it needs to be clear, up to date and consistent. Confused or mixed messages are not helpful. The best form of communication involves direct person to person interaction.

3. **Some family members want to be engaged and involved with probation but don't know how.** It was starkly apparent from the findings that some families want to participate in their loved-one's desistance journey, but often lack the understanding of how to do so. This issue links to that of the availability of clear communication. Where this is not apparent, feelings of frustration quickly emerge. Frustration is itself a motivational barrier to engagement, and the most commonly expressed sentiment within this study.

4. **Some family members want to enter into supervision sessions**. The above issues of clear communication and possible methods of involvement speak directly to the question of family members entering into individual probation supervision sessions. The extent and ways in which this happens varied in the experience of family members, depending largely upon the

practices of individual supervising officers. This variance was reflected clearly in the narratives of supervising officers. There appears to be a lack of consistency amongst front-line practitioners in relation to this matter, including how it works best in practice.

5. **Staff and family member relationship boundaries need to be clearly established**. If a 'partnership' approach is to be adopted, the methods and regularity by which supervising officers and family members communicate and interact must be firmly established in order to offer a strong working relationship between the two parties. Boundary formation involves, for example, the frequency in which each party speaks by phone or communicates by text; whether both parties meet in-person, where, for how long, and how frequently. It also involves who is responsible for doing what, when and where.

6. **Families like to meet in less formal venues.** Amongst those who spoke of meeting in venues other than the probation office, home visits were generally viewed as constructive experiences and interactions. A limited number of respondents made reference to meeting in community based locations such as family centres or day centres, as these were viewed as being relaxed spaces, more appropriate for families and 'neutral' in nature.

7. **Family involvement supports the desistance journey**. Perhaps inevitably, those who contributed to this project from a family perspective indicated that the support of a family or wider support network is of paramount importance in assisting a loved-one to remain offence-free and to prevent any possible incarceration. As such a communal and professional arrangement of supportive others is seen as hugely advantageous for service users within any rehabilitative process.

5.5 Recommendations

5.5.1 Cultural shift

There was a division of opinions amongst staff when it came to involving families in probation work. Though most saw value in it, many did not see it as a direct part of their role. Moreover, a minority were concerned it may prove detrimental to their job. By contrast, family members saw their role in their loved-one's desistance journey intrinsic to its success. This included becoming involved in the probation supervision process, albeit to different degrees, and through differing functions. **The first recommendation therefore, is that the senior management seek to reinforce family involvement as a positive and necessary part of probation service delivery.** This might be achieved through:

1. First and foremost, promoting a working culture in which staff members are expected to acknowledge the supportive role that family members can play in a service user's life. This includes listening to the views and concerns that family members hold, and attempting to incorporate these into the risk assessment, objective planning, and ongoing supervision process. Families should form an integral part of their loved-ones probation journey.
2. Providing staff with access to research/reading around desistance theory and/or running workshops/talks exploring these concepts.
3. Modelling how family involvement might help rather than hinder probation work, perhaps through having staff who work more routinely with families showcase how it benefits their practice.
4. Providing training during induction that explores ways in which new staff might work effectively and usefully with service users' families.
5. Offering mentoring from more experienced staff to help newer or less experienced staff gain confidence in working usefully and effectively with service users' families.
6. Developing a formalised family assessment 'tool' to enable staff to make more robust judgements when it comes to appropriately involving service users'

families (e.g. avoiding family involvement where there is known/suspected domestic abuse)

7. Addressing at department level (case-management; programmes; CP) what each staff role might be able to achieve when it comes to (increasing) family involvement, perhaps through department away days or in team meetings.
8. Encouraging frontline staff, particularly case-management, to engage in a more dedicated way with family mapping techniques, and building that conversation in more regularly to supervision meetings.
9. Empowering supervising officers to develop their frontline practice to include more face to face communication, reflecting the importance given to it by family members. A key aspect of this relates to formation and maintenance of relationship boundaries and expectations, of which guidance materials and training should be provided by the CRC.

5.5.2 Practical changes

Staff saw many practical barriers to involving families, particularly around the appropriateness of probation offices for family members, and family potentially acting as a barrier to a service user's probation experience. Whereas, family members actively sought (more) opportunities to be involved. **The second recommendation then is to offer more flexibility to staff by increasing the ways in which they might deliver a more family inclusive probation service, and by doing so ensure that opportunities for family involvement are made readily available for the families who seek them.** This might be achieved through:

1. Opening more co-locations, such that supervising officers might engage with service users and their families outside of the formal probation office setting. This might include meeting with families in, for example, community hubs, day centres, or informal 'clubs'. These additional places and spaces should preferably be close to transport hubs. Such available venues need to be the rule, not the exception.

2. Related to above, providing probation services in places where service users' children might be welcomed and catered for e.g. children's centres, libraries or other appropriate community spaces.
3. Offering reporting times which support a more family inclusive model e.g. children/family only reporting times; family days or school holiday reporting times.
4. Developing reception areas to offer some discrete, more private spaces where families can talk privately with supervising officers.
5. Providing information relating to who 'probation' are and what they do, and how family members might become more engaged with the supervision process. There is need for information provision that signposts family members towards how probation systems and processes work, how the CRC relates to other CJS agencies, and the levels and methods by which they can participate.
6. For family members who facilitate and ensure probation attendance on behalf of their loved-one's with severe impairments, financial assistance with their own travel costs should be made available.
7. Offering temporarily reduced or restructured workloads such that staff have space to develop their learning and techniques for working with families.
8. Developing clear guidance when it comes to family involvement where there is known domestic abuse.

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[i] Exact numbers were not recorded as focus group numbers varied widely, with some having people having cause to leave during the course of the focus group as they had appointments

[ii] This is in addition to the 37 members of staff who participated in the pilot questionnaire – see Appendix A.

[iii] Two of the interviews and one of the focus groups were not digitally recorded, but instead extensive notes were written.

[iv] The 'button exercise' is visual task historically used by probation officers to explore family dynamics.

[v] Cases where a DASA was involved were described as less complicated for RO staff as they could defer victim support needs directly to that person.

[vi] With the service user's permission.