

SPURGEONS

A case study of volunteer involvement in work with families at a local prison

June 2016

**Valuing
volunteers
in prison**

Spurgeons supports families affected by imprisonment in multiple prisons in England and Wales. This case study, covering their work in HMP/YOI Winchester, will be especially interesting to readers who wish to:

- build procedures to recruit large numbers of volunteers from local organisations like universities
- build robust volunteer recruitment and training procedures
- work gradually with a single prison's staff to build understanding of and support for volunteering.

About Spurgeons and HMP/YOI Winchester

Spurgeons is a national charity that has been supporting marginalised and disadvantaged children and young people for over 145 years. The charity currently delivers over 90 high-quality services in partnership with 27 local authorities in England.

In April 2011, Spurgeons was funded to set up the Invisible Walls Family Support Service in two prisons, HMP Kingston in Portsmouth and HMP Winchester, in partnership with three local



authorities. Following the initial grant period (2011-13) there have been considerable changes and now our service is based exclusively at HMP/YOI Winchester and funded by the Big Lottery, with additional support from two local authorities and Hampshire Police and Crime Commissioner

HMP/YOI Winchester is a local category B holding prison with a resettlement category C unit. There are daily releases and new intakes and the prison has the capacity to hold 700 men.

About the project

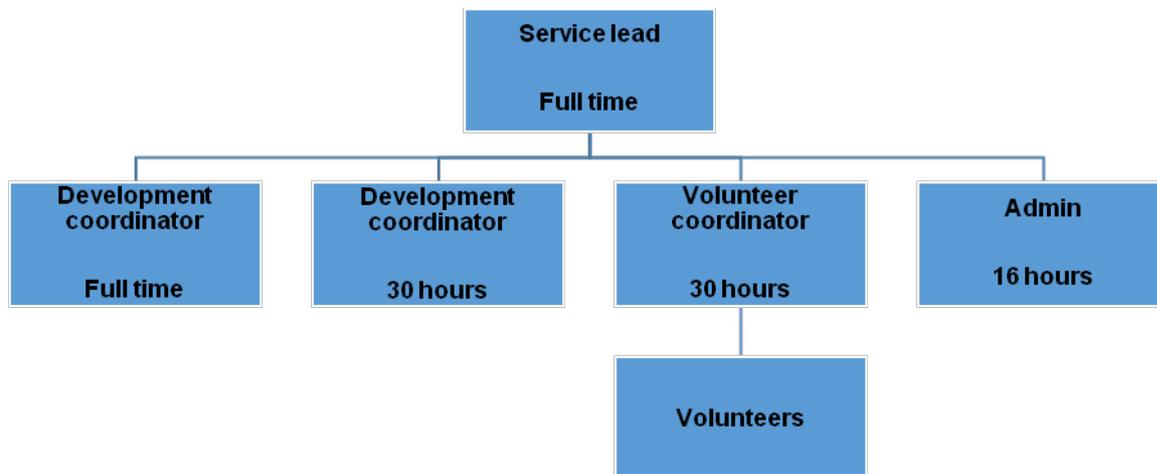
Invisible Walls aims to improve the lives of children and families affected by

imprisonment at HMP/YOI Winchester and to reduce the risk of fathers reoffending on release through strengthened family relationships.

Before our service started in 2011, there was no Visitors Centre or service for the prisoners' families. The prison had no volunteers supporting visitors outside the prison, and no specific provision was made for fathers inside or their families. The Play Area inside the visits hall was managed by the prison.

In 2013 the prison approached Invisible Walls and asked us to manage the Play Area and volunteers. We took on the management of the Play Area and the Visitors Centre and its volunteers, resulting in 25 Play Area volunteers coming under our remit.

The project's staff and volunteer structure



Scope of volunteer involvement

From the start of the project in 2011 up to March 2016, volunteers have supported a total of 30,878 adult visits and 7,326 child visits.

The Visitors Centre, which is staffed by volunteers, aims to open every day from 12.30pm – 5.00pm. Volunteers offer a wraparound service in the centre, from a welcoming first point of contact, free refreshments, and positive play opportunities for children. They also provide information, support and guidance, as well as signposting. Two volunteers staff the centre at any one time.

The Play Area, situated inside the visits hall, provides a bright, welcoming space for children aged from two years old. It is open daily from 2pm – 4pm and staffed by volunteers. Volunteers supervise children offering positive play opportunities. Two volunteers staff the Play Area at any time.

Both the Visitor Centre and Play Area are open subject to availability of volunteers.

Parenting support is delivered by Invisible Walls staff working one-to-one and in group settings inside the prison with fathers, offering pre and post release support to them and their families.

Monthly Family Days are held on Saturday and Sunday mornings in the visits hall. Family Days are an opportunity for the men that have engaged with the Invisible Walls project to spend quality time with their children and families. The men are allowed to move freely around the visits hall and play with their children. The prison provides a meal for the family to eat together. The Family Days are supported by at least two volunteers providing refreshments and play opportunities, as well as prison and Invisible Walls staff.

The Homework Club is run fortnightly and supported by a regular volunteer working alongside Invisible Walls and prison staff. This maximises the time fathers spend with their children doing homework and the session is well resourced and relaxed.

Having a large population of volunteers is fundamental to our service delivery, allowing the Visitors Centre and Play Area to be open 362 days per year. Volunteers are first recruited into roles in the Visitors Centre and Play Area. Those who have relevant skills are then invited to help deliver our Family Days, Parenting Courses and Homework Club.

Service users

The Invisible Walls service works with children and families from diverse backgrounds, whose needs may be overlooked within the Criminal Justice System.

The volunteers support any visitors to the prison. Access to the Visitors Centre is voluntary. Visitors are encouraged to come into the centre for warmth, free refreshments, toilet/change facilities, play provisions, information, guidance and support.

Families wanting to access play supervision within the visits hall sign their children into the Play Area. Children are supervised by the volunteers while they are in the room. At any time the children can leave the room, they then become the responsibility of the parent/carer. Children do not have to come into the Play Area as we also provide toys for children who want to sit at the visits table to play with their family.

Fathers can apply to Invisible Walls to access support. This support is aimed at helping them to engage and be involved with their children whilst they are in prison. This support is individualised

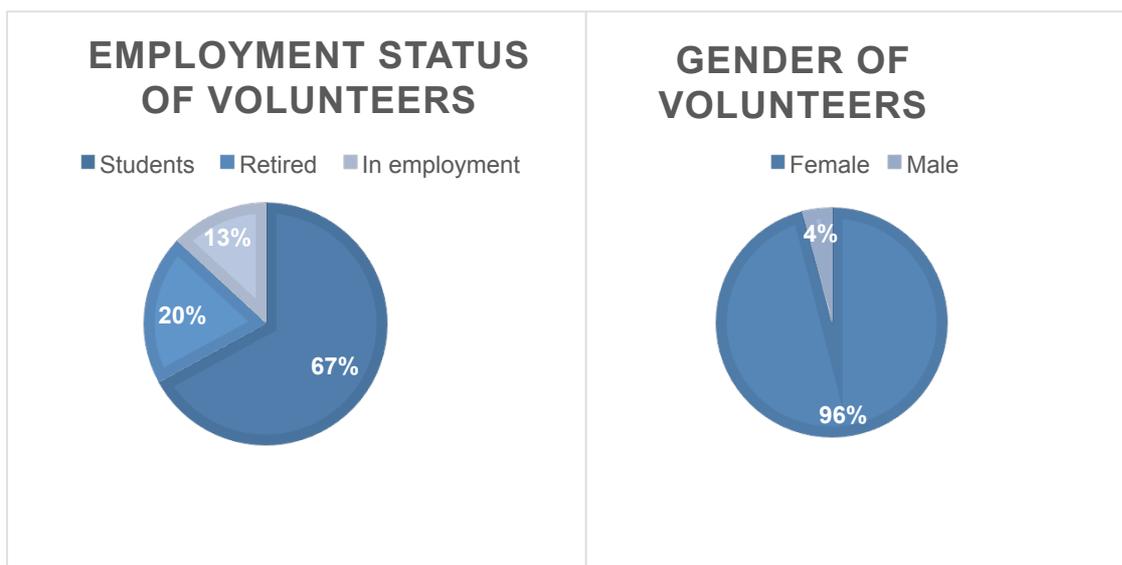
and may involve addressing family issues, accessing support for them and their families through one-to-one work or parenting courses, and supporting them to use the Family Days and Homework Club. Fathers serving community sentences, or who are newly released into the community, may also be referred to one of our community parenting groups by probation.

Volunteer numbers and backgrounds

Currently, we have 88 volunteers. Of these, 62 are regular active volunteers, with 12 waiting to receive their full security clearance before starting and 14 are casual volunteers. Many volunteers perform more than one role.

The volunteer number breakdown is as follows:

- 39 in the Visitor Centre
- 39 in the Play Area
- 19 as Family Day volunteers
- 1 as a Service Delivery volunteer, supporting parenting courses and the homework club.



Most volunteers fall into one of the following categories:

- those wishing to develop their skills/gain experience to boost their CV or career prospects
- those wishing to reciprocate support they, or someone close to them, has received in similar settings
- those who want to give back to those who find themselves in less fortunate circumstances.

Many of our employed and retired volunteers come from supportive careers such as education, social care, and medical backgrounds.

Volunteer recruitment and security vetting

We advertise our volunteering roles through:

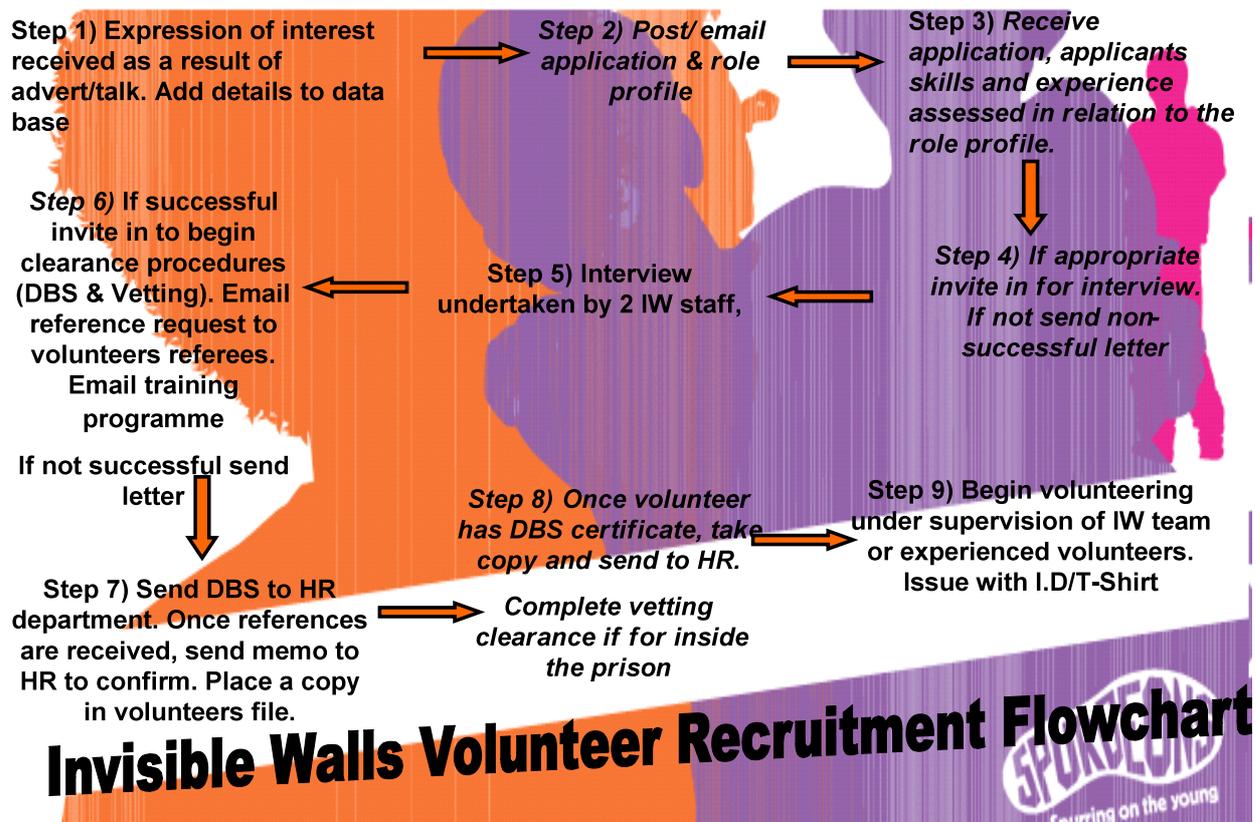
- three local universities
- national online volunteering agencies
- word of mouth, often through current volunteers
- local volunteering agencies
- delivery of our Hidden Sentence training to professionals
- events and open evenings at the prison
- local media
- local churches.

Our current volunteer workforce have been recruited from the following sources:

- universities = 50
- volunteers who came under our remit when we took on the Play Area = 9
- national volunteering agency = 7
- word of mouth = 6
- local volunteering organisations = 4
- training = 3
- prison open event = 2
- local churches = 1
- don't know = 3

We use a carefully designed process to recruit volunteers. The process aims to match volunteers to suitable roles, and to ensure that training and necessary security vetting is conducted efficiently.

The diagram below summarises the recruitment process.



All volunteers have to complete an Enhanced DBS application. They supply a minimum of two references from individuals who have known them for at least two years. The two references and enhanced DBS certificate clears volunteers to work in the Visitors Centre. If they are interested in going into the prison as a Play Area volunteer, or to support our work inside, they go through NOMS security vetting. NOMS vetting has presented significant challenges.

Volunteer training

We offer training consisting of online modules and 12 hours of session-based learning. This is supported by training that consists of on-the-job shadowing and training.

Online modules include:¹

- health and safety
- equality and diversity
- safeguarding
- data protection
- data security.

Training sessions cover:

- introduction to volunteering co-delivered by Invisible Walls staff member and the prison, covering the roles of the Visitor Centre and Play Areas
- safeguarding delivered by Invisible Walls, covering volunteers' safeguarding responsibilities
- prison security, manipulation and conditioning delivered by a security officer from the prison, covering security and reporting procedures which are essential for volunteers inside the prison.

Optional training includes:

- Hidden Sentence training delivered by Invisible Walls, exploring the impact of imprisonment on families
- a prison tour co-delivered by Invisible Walls and the prison, covering the visitor's experience of a prison visit.

Training is well received by volunteers, and regular feedback is collected at training and on exit from volunteering.

Induction

Volunteers get an induction pack and sign a volunteer agreement. They are given a bright orange T-shirt with the Spurgeons logo on the front, which clearly identifies them as a volunteer. This ease of identification is helpful to visitors and prison staff. Most staff respect the time and effort that volunteers give. Volunteers are also given a Spurgeons ID badge and lanyard. This has been

¹ Online training lets volunteers unable to attend training sessions at set times to complete some modules at home. Even those without access to the internet can be sent a printed version to complete.

particularly useful for prison gate staff in identifying volunteers going inside to volunteer in the Play Area.

When a volunteer starts they shadow either a member of Invisible Walls staff or two experienced volunteers. They are then closely monitored for at least their first 10 shifts.

Volunteer time commitment and volunteer retention

Volunteers are asked to commit to one shift every other week, for a period of at least six months. The Volunteer Coordinator will agree a set day and then rota them in for fortnightly shifts.

We maintain a bank of casual volunteers who are ready to fill in where there are gaps, or to cover for others unable to do their shifts for whatever reason. The majority of casual volunteers have already completed six months of volunteering and, due to changes in their circumstances, can no longer commit to a regular shift but would still like to support the project as and when possible. The majority of our volunteers are students so we ask for a realistic minimum commitment of six months. 78% of volunteers stay beyond the six months, many for much longer.

The importance of communication with volunteers

It is vitally important to communicate clearly and quickly with volunteers. This helps to make them feel a valued part of the team, supported and listened to, and reinforces their commitment to the project. It enables us to pick up on any issues and deal with them quickly and effectively. The large number of volunteers means that several methods of communication are required.



Communication methods:

- daily handover files are kept in the Play Area and Visitor Centre and are checked regularly by the Invisible Walls staff team
- a quarterly newsletter
- regular networking and social events are organised, such as coffee mornings and seasonal gatherings
- emails are responded to in a timely manner.

All communication to the volunteers is through Spurgeons, the prison does not communicate directly with volunteers.

Arrangements for volunteer supervision

It is important to ensure that volunteers receive regular supervision and support.

Every six months volunteers are offered formal one-to-one supervision with the Volunteer Coordinator. These meetings are structured and recorded.

We also have an open door policy so volunteers can seek support and guidance on any issues at any time. Invisible Walls staff members are in the office on most days and able to offer support if needed. In the absence of Invisible Walls staff, prison staff are available in the main gate and Operational Support Grade (OSG) staff in the booking-in room.

Feedback and service evaluation

We gather regular feedback from volunteers through supervision, social events, evaluation forms from training sessions and also via a leaver exit form. This feedback has helped us evaluate how we work with, and support, our volunteer population. Feedback supports the continued development and improvement of our work.

We regularly seek the involvement, and feedback from, our service users to help develop the service we deliver. Initially visitors were asked what they wanted and needed from the Visitors Centre. We now formally ask service users to give us quarterly feedback, which we use to monitor the effectiveness of our service. Day to day, comments books are also left out for visitors to write in. Feedback from visitors about what information they would find helpful has led to the creation of a frequently asked questions document, which is given to all new Visitors Centre users.

More recently, in partnership with the prison, we conducted a visits survey asking visitors to feedback on their experience of the whole process of visits and to make suggestions on areas for improvement.

Thanks and recognition for volunteers

It is important to ensure that volunteers feel recognised and are thanked for the work that they do and the time that they give up to work with Spurgeons. One way in which we do this is through awards. We organise our own volunteer awards and also nominate volunteers for external awards, including through their universities for student volunteers or through national third sector awards schemes. The volunteers have won a total of 15 such awards.



Developing a partnership with the prison

Over time, Invisible Walls has become a valued service within the prison, both among senior managers and the majority of prison staff.

Prior to the creation of the service in 2011, there was no focus on support for children and families of prisoners, and very little understanding of what volunteers could contribute to the security-led focus of prison life. The Invisible Walls team has worked hard to develop mutual trust and respect.

Central to this has been to ensure that the prison saw volunteers as a valued asset, and not as an added security risk. The volunteer recruitment process and training has helped create confidence in

the service they provide. The visibility of the volunteers has also helped to ensure that prison staff are aware of their work and associate them with Spurgeons.

It has been important to have good cross-organisational arrangements in place with the prison. These have evolved over the years, but were initially initiated through a Memorandum of Understanding that supported the clarification of the roles and responsibilities of each organisation. Over time, relationships have developed and the prison has become more involved in a number of ways, for example by supporting training, or by seeking Spurgeons support with other work.

Volunteering is now recognised as a crucial element of a valuable service. This has given Spurgeons the opportunity to feedback any issues regarding volunteers and volunteering, and address any issues regarding visiting. The service manager attends key strategic meetings within the prison and reports monthly to the Reducing Reoffending Strategic Group. Support from the prison's management and Governor have been a fundamental element of the success of the project. The open and ongoing dialogue between Spurgeons and the prison facilitates any issues or concerns to be raised and dealt with.

Overcoming barriers to volunteering

There are a number of key factors that have underpinned the success of volunteering within the Invisible Walls service.

1. **Supporting the security vetting process.**

In the early days of the service, this proved very challenging, for not only the volunteers but also the Invisible Walls and prison staff. Many volunteers found the form very complex to use and the prison's Vetting Contact Point would only deal directly with the volunteers, leaving the project staff with limited understanding of what issues volunteers were encountering and how these might be solved. Prison staff also found it hard to allocate time to support a large number of volunteers to complete the forms, particularly where the volunteers had limited IT skills and required access to IT facilities outside the prison. This became an urgent problem because frustrations with vetting led many volunteers to withdraw the offer of their time.

We have overcome this by building strong relationships with the prison vetting team. We have agreed that the Volunteer Coordinator can support the volunteers with completing the security form, and take copies of supporting documents. Only then are the completed application packs handed to the prison to process. This has worked well and reduces the likelihood of volunteer dropout.

2. Employing a member of staff to maximise volunteer capacity.

Volunteers work in their own time and can withdraw from timetabled shifts when it is not convenient for them. We also have a large number of student volunteers, many of whom are only available during term-times. Volunteers are often only available at particular times, which are not always those during which we most need cover.

We have dealt with this by understanding that the same expectations cannot be placed on volunteers as on members of paid staff, and by planning around the difficulties we have encountered. We recruit a large pool of volunteers so as to be able to cover the rota, and ask new volunteers to make a minimum time commitment so that we can plan ahead. We have also developed a system of casual volunteers to fill gaps.

Time and money has to be invested into volunteers and their management. Even when a member of the prison staff was responsible for a cohort of volunteers, they did not have the capacity to carry out the management of the volunteers effectively. This role can often be bottom of the list, but really must be invested in for it to be done effectively. Creating a dedicated Volunteer Coordinator post has allowed our project to be successful in its development of an effective and substantial volunteer workforce that has allowed paid staff to focus on developing other areas of work.

3. Support from prison staff and the importance of recruitment and training.

Staff capacity has to be devoted to a robust recruitment process, so that we can recruit volunteers who have a genuine desire to help, gain more experience or do something meaningful with their spare time.

There are limitations to what is appropriate for volunteers to do, but perceptions about this may differ between organisations. We have found that identifying a clear and high-quality training programme, and involving the prison in delivering it, has helped to generate greater assurance that the volunteers are understanding, non-judgemental, and sensitive to the challenges of partnership working. This means there is greater confidence in their ability to do their roles safely and without posing a security risk.

The rigorous recruitment process and training offered to all volunteers has helped to create confidence in the service they provide and, as a result, means we have a very skilled volunteer workforce, effectively supporting visitors to the prison. We have benefited from the full support

of the prison's senior management team and Governor, which has supported the development of such a large cohort of volunteers working effectively at the prison.

4. Communication, support and supervision.

Often volunteers are not familiar with prisons when they first get involved. Even after taking part in training, they still need support and supervision, particularly at the beginning. Some require a lot of support; others take to the roles more quickly. It is important to get to know volunteers and treat them individually.

Having a paid Volunteer Coordinator role, alongside making sure volunteers receive clear communication and enough opportunities to feed back about what they are doing and how they are finding the work, is key to providing high quality support to volunteers. We invest significant time and effort in enabling volunteers to network with each other, providing enough social opportunities to make their volunteering enjoyable and mutually supportive. We also invest in ensuring that they receive thanks and recognition for what they do.

Volunteers in the play area who have recently transferred across to Spurgeons, report greater levels of satisfaction with their involvement with the Invisible Walls service, compared to before. Indeed, volunteers in general report that they feel a valued part of the team.

Barriers to volunteering

Barriers to volunteering include:

- **Expenses**

Many organisations will cover travel expenses for volunteers, but we are unable to do so owing to the number of volunteers we have on our books. At least five have withdrawn as a result of not being able to pay for their own travel. Some volunteers have also had to leave due to not being able to find childcare, and understandably not being willing to pay for this simply to enable them to volunteer.

- **Lack of onward referral routes for interested volunteers**

There is a lack of coordination of volunteer roles inside the prison. Each area may have its own opportunities, but there is no clear direction to anyone outside the prison on who to go to and what roles are available. For example, an open evening at the prison was really good and could have led to the recruitment of more volunteers. Although paid roles were advertised, many people attended looking for voluntary roles that did not exist or staff did not know of them.

If there was a key person with an overview of all voluntary roles within the prison, they could direct all enquires to the right areas, or be able to inform and match the right roles to the right

people. We are often asked by volunteers about what roles might be available if they wish to move on into a role within the prison. However, we are unable to direct them because there is no clear contact point. Prisons and their staff must be ready to embrace the role of volunteers and value what they can add to the service.

- **Vetting**

Despite the measures we have put in place to smooth the vetting process, there are still challenges. Technical issues can arise for some volunteers, especially those that have been retired for some time and 18-year-old students, who cannot show any recent employment history. We also find it almost impossible to complete the vetting procedure for foreign national students and those who have spent more than three months in the last six years abroad. This is because the clearance procedure requires them to provide a police certificate of good conduct, in English, from the countries resided in or visited. So far, in almost five years, only one volunteers has been able to provide this type of police certificate.

The benefits of involving volunteers

Our effective use of volunteer hours means we can provide a wide range of support in a cost effective way. We would not be able to achieve the level of service we have without the volunteers. By employing one staff member for 30 hours a week, we have developed a volunteer workforce which covers a further 60-70 hours per week. Combined with the use of placement students and interns recruited through our university partnerships, volunteers contribute, on average, around 81 hours per week to our services.

Volunteers are able to bridge the gap between uniformed prison staff on the one hand, and prisoners and their families on the other. In our experience, service users respond far more positively to the volunteers than the prison staff, precisely because they are volunteers. The fact that individuals are giving up their time freely to help offenders and their families helps break the stigma of prejudice many experience, and reminds them that people do care and want to help.

Volunteers often comment on the value they see in the project and the positive effect they have witnessed on the families we come into contact with. Our volunteer base gives us support and links in the local community, and in some cases volunteers have gone on to raise funds for the project as well as gaining local donations from businesses that have heard about us from volunteers.

“The children and family intervention that is now delivered by Spurgeons and all of their volunteers is seen as an integral part of the prison’s delivery and regime.

The recruitment and excellent management of the volunteers is key to the success of the service. We could never have achieved what we have if it had not been for the quality of the management and support offered by Spurgeons to the volunteers.

The Prison fully appreciates the precious time the volunteers give and the additional fundraising they have done to help finance extra activities and resources for children and families. This would not have been possible within current prison funding constraints.

We remain fully supportive of the Invisible Walls service and their extensive volunteer workforce who have impacted so positively on families visiting HMP/YOI Winchester over the last four and a half years.”

(Joanne Bird, Senior Leadership Team, Head of Learning and Skills, HMP/YOI Winchester)

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