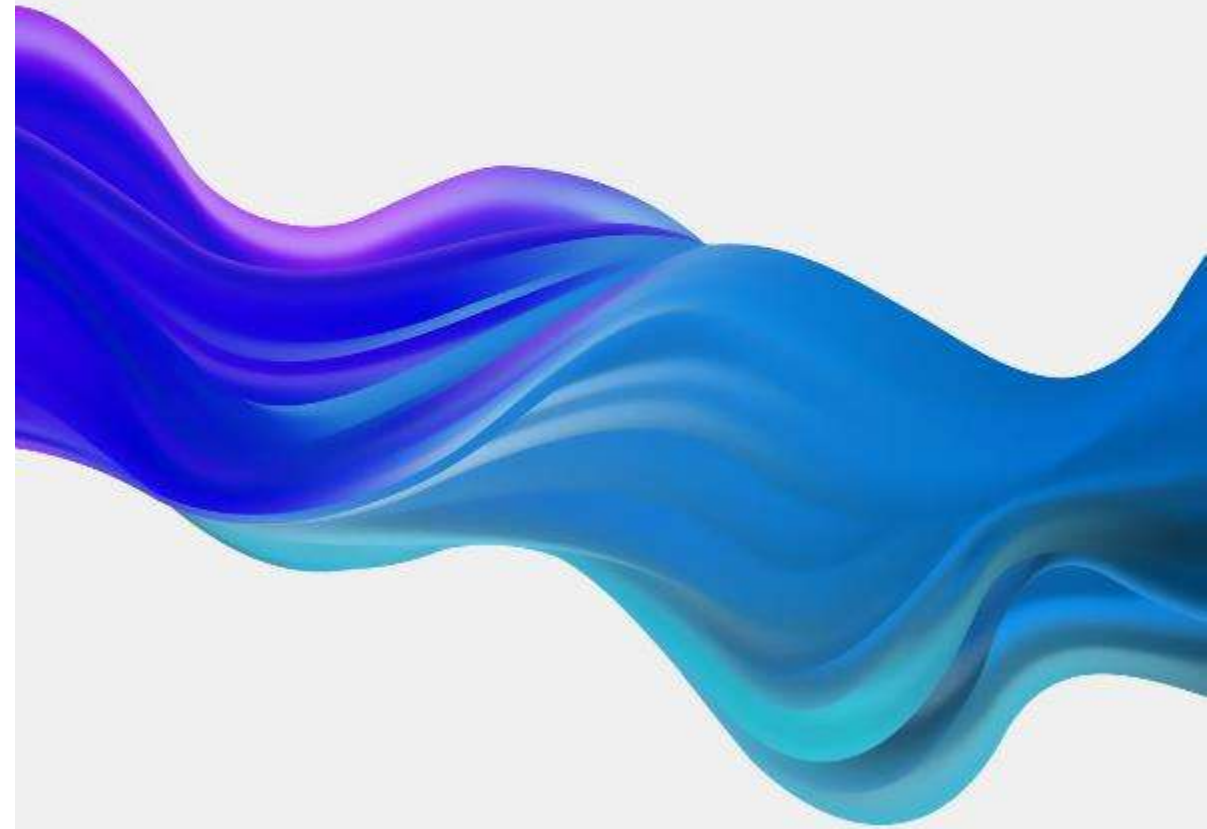

STRUCTURAL FINDINGS FROM AN EVALUATION OF A FAMILY COMMUNICATION SKILLS INTERVENTION IN PRISON

Dr Fiona Donson

(with Dr Daragh Bradshaw, Dr Elaine
Rogers, Dr Aisling Parkes & Lynn Fenton)



WHAT WE DID - EVALUATION

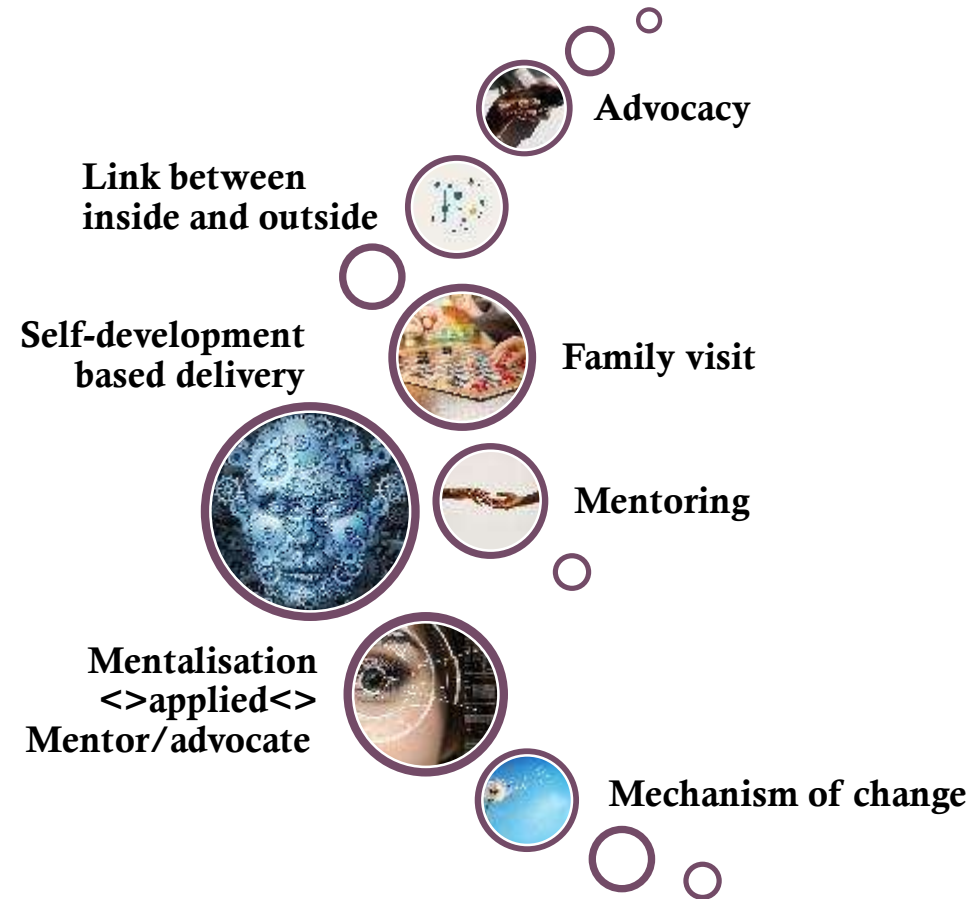
- FusionCPL Reach Out Programme, delivered in 3 prisons (closed prisons: 1 female, 1 male, open prison: 1 male)
 - Interviews:
 - 20 fathers
 - 15 mothers
 - 9 family members (including 2 children),
 - 11 prison officers/staff
 - 4 Fusion staff
-

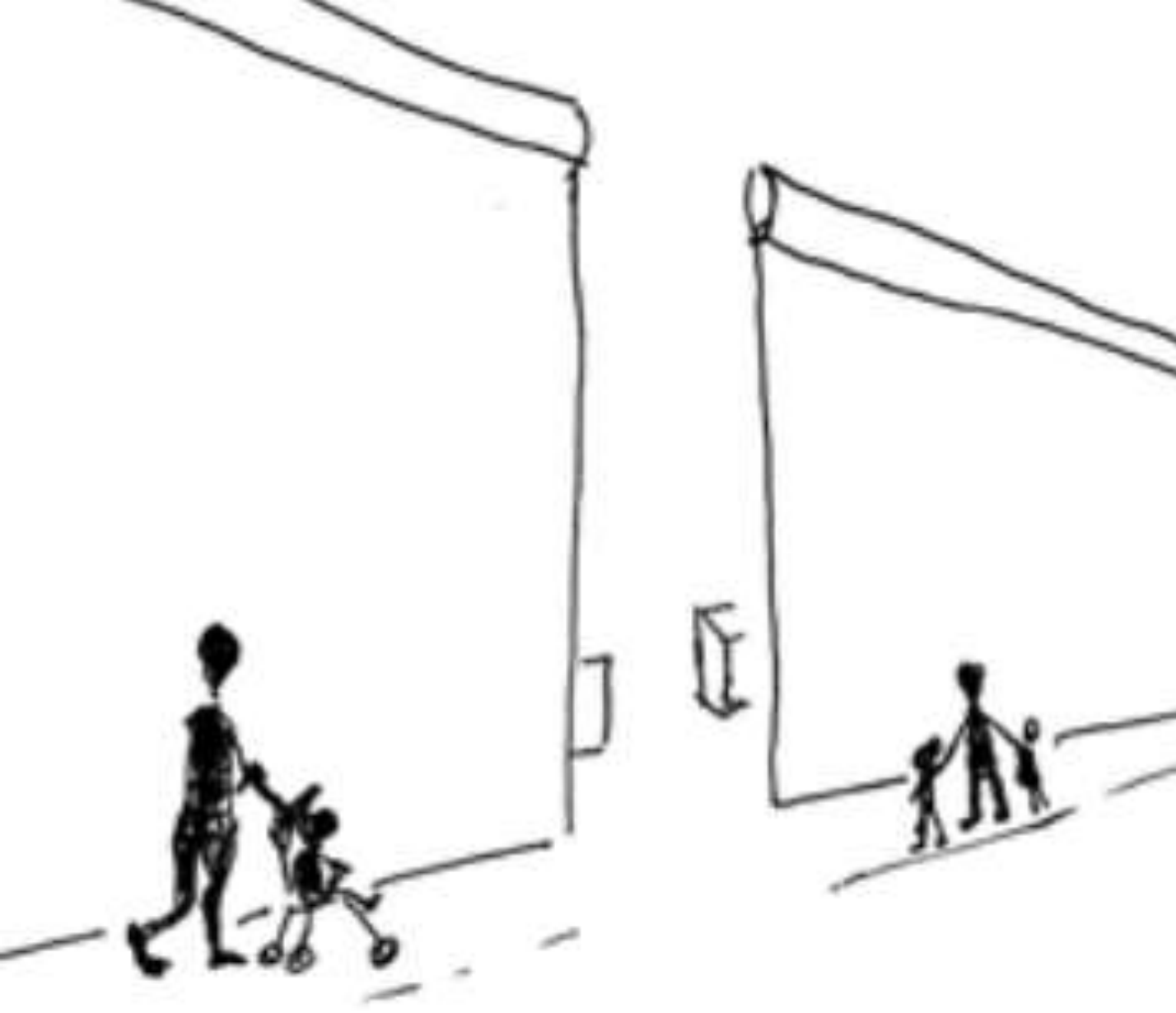
THE INTERVENTION

- Family Communication programme involving:
 - Classroom based education and linked workbooks on
 - Child development
 - Communication skills
 - Child interest surveys - research showed that parents in prison felt they lacked information about their child's daily activities and needs creating distance and a vulnerability at the heart of their capacity to engage with their child.
 - Mentoring – supporting parents through providing mediation and goal orientated planning strategies, crisis management, family problem solving, and perspective based communication practices.

The programme is based on therapeutic principles and involves self-development work on the part of participants. Critical is the programmes ability to provide support parents in self-development through education and associated skill development that could then be implemented in visiting contexts.

UNIQUE CONTRIBUTION OF REACHOUT





STRUCTURAL FINDINGS FROM THE RESEARCH

THE IMPACT OF GENDER STEREOTYPING AROUND PARENTS

Differential implementation facilitated by prison authorities:

- Family day visits – only allowed in women's prison

Staff specifically voiced their belief that there is a difference between men and women in terms of the impact of separation and the importance of being a parent for mothers over fathers:

Bigger for the women than it is for the men...much bigger care for their children on separation, much more obvious with the women than it is with the men

Women make an effort hail rain or snow whereas the dads don't

The research suggests that this has the potential to impact the way projects are allowed to develop

PRESSURE ON AGENCIES TO ADAPT RATHER THAN PRISON SYSTEMS TO ADAPT

- Resultant power differential can inhibit programme development
 - Reliance on prison permissions
 - Security trumps everything
 - Prison overcrowding crisis is a never ending challenge for implementation
-

LACK OF EXTERNAL OVERSIGHT AND ACCOUNTABILITY

- How do families complain about treatment?
- How are families supported?

Our research found that family members experienced a range of challenges such as cancelled visits, refusal of entry, inconsistent practices, a failure to provide lockers for visitors, lack of toilets for children in visiting spaces and currently a lack of visitor waiting areas. Yet they have nowhere to go with these problems, no supports, no voice.



THANKYOU

