



EVALUATION REPORT

KENT PROBATION & KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

CHILDREN AND FAMILIES PROJECT (CAFÉ)

Delivered in partnership with St. Giles Trust

October 2006 – October 2008

By

**Linda Pizani Williams
Director**

**European Institute of Social Services
University of Kent**

**KENT
PROBATION**

*Changing Lives
Reducing Crime*

St GILES TRUST

CONTENTS

Executive Summary and Recommendations	3
Introduction	4
Methodology	5
Findings	6
Accommodation	
Financial Management	
Employment	
Relationships and Safeguarding children	
Reoffending	
Engagement with mainstream agencies	
Critical Success Factors	
Case Records Review	
Stakeholder Feedback	
Case studies	9
Conclusion	12

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Although the sample in this evaluation is relatively small, the diversity of participant profiles and the complexity of needs presented which required intensive and personalized responses, provide a sound evidence base of effective practice. From the interviews with project beneficiaries and feedback from the referrers, it is clear that without the support of the CAFÉ project workers, significant demands would have been made on public services, particularly housing, education, health and children's services. As a result of this evaluation, the following recommendations are proposed:

- The project should be extended to cover the whole of Kent and Medway.
- The project should be mainstreamed and jointly funded by the Local Authorities, Community Safety Partnerships, Domestic Violence Fora and the Probation Service.
- The project should be widely publicized to potential referring organizations.
- The project should be promoted and disseminated at regional and national reducing reoffending pathway boards as a model of good practice.
- A system of evaluating outcomes across the range of indicators should be built in to the recording process to demonstrate effectiveness (e.g. Ricker scale)
- Consideration should be given to recruiting volunteers from the user group to supplement and extend the length of time that support can be offered.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Children and Families Project (CAFÉ) was established in 2006 as a 6 month pilot project to develop a service to support the children and families of offenders, initially restricted to low-income families of offenders living in rural areas of Mid-Kent. There was also an intention to try to offer particular support to the Gypsy and Traveller community.

The rationale for developing this project was the Reducing Re-offending Pathway relating to Children and Families, which highlights the positive role of maintaining a stable family life when seeking to reduce re-offending. Apart from maintaining the emotional ties between prisoners and their families, a critical aspect of this pathway is addressing and resolving the practical and social problems experienced by the families in the community.

Across the criminal justice agencies, this pathway receives little attention and the interventions which do exist are focused on prison based projects, encouraging fathers to maintain close relationships with their children. The children and families of prisoners make significant demands on other statutory services, particularly children's and education services. The CAFÉ project is innovative in that it has a multi-agency approach, based in the community. It is statutory business for the Local Authority as part of the Every Child Matters and Safeguarding Children agenda, however the Probation Service, as an enforcement agency, is not adequately resourced to meet the wider support needs of the children and families of offenders. It also links directly to the Strengthening Families; Strengthening Communities national strategy. The success of the project is due significantly to the involvement of a voluntary sector partner with experience of working with excluded families on a London housing estate.

The key areas of need which were anticipated were:

- Maximizing income and managing debt
- Maintaining (or obtaining) stable accommodation
- Accessing and engaging with relevant statutory and voluntary agencies

Following the success of the initial phase, the project was continued and expanded to other areas, with financial support from Kent County Council, Children, Families and Education Directorate and Canterbury Community Safety Partnership. This also extended the referral sources to include Community Safety Officers and Domestic Violence projects.

Although the project reports regularly to the funders on its activities, it was decided to commission an external evaluation of the sustainability of the positive outcomes achieved for the project clients.

2. METHODOLOGY

In order to ascertain the long term benefits of the CAFÉ interventions, it was proposed to approach the 30 cases which responded to the services offered in the first 5 months of the project (October 1st 2006 – March 31st 2007), with an anticipated positive response from 15 clients. This period was subsequently extended to include 2008. The positive outcome indicators were:

- Secure/stable accommodation
- Financial management
- Employment (or other ETE indicators)
- Safeguarding Children indicators (e.g. enhanced family relationships and parenting skills)
- Reduced reoffending
- Engaged with mainstream agencies (eg NHS, Surestart, Jobcentreplus)

The case records of those interviewed were also reviewed and where possible the referrer was consulted to obtain a different stakeholder perspective of the service provided by the project.

In the event, 7 clients from the first tranche returned a signed agreement to participate in the evaluation, with a further 5 giving a verbal agreement. Within this group, there were difficulties in making contact with 5 clients, but a further approach from St. Giles Trust resulted in a total of 8 clients from this group being interviewed. As these clients had all been seen by the same CAFÉ project worker, it was decided to make a further approach to more recent clients from the East Kent region, resulting in a further 4 interviews being conducted.

SAMPLE

Gender	Contacted	Responded	Interviewed	Offender	Referrer
Male	10	5	4	4	3 x Probation 1 x Bus. Link
Female	19	11	8	3	5 x Probation 3 x DV orgs

The content of the interviews followed a semi-structured format – the source of the referral and what were the problems at that time; what was the nature of the assistance given; what was the result; how long was the period of support; what has happened since the support ended and what improvements could be made to enhance the service.

3. FINDINGS

At the time of referral, all the CAFÉ clients were experiencing a wide range of practical and emotional difficulties which made them vulnerable to further social exclusion and disadvantage. These initial findings are based on the outcome indicators agreed.

ISSUES

	Housing	Finance	Family	ETE	Health	Addiction
Male (4)	2	1	4	4	2	2
Female(8)	6	7	8	4	5	2

Accommodation

Of the 12 clients interviewed, 8 had serious accommodation issues, often in conjunction with rent arrears which made it difficult to secure another tenancy. In all cases, the CAFÉ project worker was instrumental in securing stable, appropriate housing, often helping physically with the move and obtaining furniture and/or equipment. In one case, the worker wrote to the local MP asking him to support the transfer of a client who had been the victim of rape in her current accommodation.

In some cases, the accommodation was suitable, but there were difficulties in getting repairs or maintenance issues resolved. The CAFÉ workers negotiated with the landlords in these cases, at the same time demonstrating to the clients how to communicate effectively.

At the time of the interviews, all clients were still in stable secure accommodation.

Financial Management

There were a wide range of financial issues among the group interviewed from significant debts accrued over a long period of time, to complex benefit claims, rent arrears and Inland Revenue queries. Several of the clients felt overwhelmed by their financial problems and had not responded to bills or letters for a considerable time prior to their referral to the CAFÉ project.

One client had started her own cleaning business but this had led to complications with both the Inland Revenue and Benefits Agency. The CAFÉ worker helped to complete all the necessary paperwork and liaised with both organizations to ensure that the client received the benefits she was entitled to, but also complying with self-employment rules.

In 2 cases, the CAFÉ worker supported the client to apply for Disability Living Allowance, in one case attending the tribunal with the client.

Utilities bills were a frequent source of debt, but by negotiating with the suppliers, these were resolved. The clients interviewed had managed to keep control of their financial situation by dealing with issues as they arose, rather than ignoring them.

Employment

As several of the clients interviewed were mothers with young children, employment was not a primary concern for them, although there were issues regarding partners who were being/had been released from prison. This was a particular issue in 2 cases where the nature of the offence limited the employment opportunities. However, in one case the partner of a CAFÉ client was referred to a St. Giles resettlement project and completed a horticultural training course. The CAFÉ project workers had helped prepare C.V.s and job applications in 3 cases, and advised on interview techniques.

One client, with poor literacy and numeracy skills, had been helped to attend and gain a First Aid Certificate from St. John's – the first certificate she had ever received – and is now keen to go to college although she acknowledges that she will need support to achieve this. She has also applied to be a volunteer with Age Concern.

Another client, with 2 young children, started volunteering with a Young Families group last Summer, which required a CRB check. She helped to organize a family outing day and is hoping to be able to train for this type of work in the future. Her partner (who was subject to a Probation Order) has been unable to find work, but now keeps himself busy on his allotment and has not reoffended.

Relationships and Safeguarding Children

The range of support offered by the CAFÉ project in terms of family relationships varies considerably, depending on individual circumstances. In one case it involved applying for travel warrants under the Assisted Prison Visits scheme, as well as planning activities for fortnightly contact visits with a child in foster care. Demonstrating good parenting skills by helping with homework, liaising with schools regarding behavioural problems, participating in Family Group Conferences, helping complete legal forms in respect of injunctions or custody applications and encouraging open communication between partners and family members are all reflected in the cases included in this evaluation.

Several of the cases involved the victims of domestic violence and the CAFÉ worker enabled these clients to explore their feelings about the relationship and then support them in whatever decision they reached.

All the clients interviewed felt that not only were they more confident about their relationship with their partner (or ex-partner), but they also felt more in control of their children's behaviour which, as a direct consequence, had improved.

Reoffending

Of the 12 clients interviewed, 7 had previously committed offences with the remaining 5 being partners or victims of offenders. One of the clients was certain that without the support of her CAFÉ project worker, she would have continued to commit offences and would probably now be in prison; her partner has reoffended and is currently serving a 3 year sentence. Of the others, only 1 has re-offended, 6 months after her contact with the CAFÉ project ended, triggered by stress related binge drinking.

It is of interest to note that in those cases where there are adolescent children who had previously been showing signs of anti-social behaviour, they were reported to have "calmed down" and behaving in an acceptable way. This may be an indicator that the CAFÉ intervention has had an impact on generational offending patterns.

Engagement with mainstream agencies

A common feature of the CAFÉ clients interviewed is that they felt intimidated and disempowered by statutory agencies and this had a negative impact on their ability to communicate with them effectively. During the period of contact with the CAFÉ worker, they gained confidence in dealing with external organizations and therefore learned how to resolve issues before they became a major crisis.

A critical part of the intervention plan was to identify which organizations, both statutory and voluntary, could support the client after their CAFÉ contact ended. The most prevalent contact was with housing departments and/or tenancy support workers. There were also several referrals to voluntary sector support agencies, women's support groups, and the Benefits Agency.

Critical Success Factors

All of those interviewed were extremely positive about the support they received from the CAFÉ project workers. There were a range of comments but the following points reflect what appear to be the critical success factors:

- Takes a “whole family” approach
- Non-judgemental
- Always do what they say they will do – reliable
- Flexible and responsive
- Always there (particularly at low points)
- Listens
- Explains options
- Empowers

The level of support offered initially is very intensive, which is not available from statutory agencies and usually the reason for the referral. The clients are at a critical stage in their lives and the flexible and targeted support they receive through the CAFÉ project appears to make an enormous difference to how they survive. The project workers make the clients feel “like they are the only one” and it appears to be the informal, personalized approach that creates the feeling of self-worth which was previously lacking.

There are some inspiring case studies among the client group, including one who was adamant that she would have taken her own life without the CAFÉ support worker. Several said that they would have reverted to drug or alcohol abuse to deal with their problems, which may have led to re-offending.

When asked if there was anything that could be done to improve the service, several would have liked longer support, but they all said it should be available to anyone who needs it! One client wants to become a CAFÉ project worker himself if he is unable to return to his previous occupation.

Case Records Review

Overall, the quality of the record keeping is impressive and accurately reflects the level of support reported by the beneficiaries. There is clear evidence of good inter-agency co-operation, advocacy and “hand-holding” when resolving issues with statutory agencies such as Jobcentreplus, housing associations and social services.

There is also evidence of determined persistence when beneficiaries are hard to engage initially and very practical support when needed, such as moving house or decorating.

Stakeholder feedback

Referrals to the project were initially predominantly made by local probation officers who recognized the importance of a stable home and family environment in reducing the risk of re-offending, but did not have the capacity to address the issues effectively. Four probation officers were consulted as part of this evaluation process and they were very positive about the impact of the CAFÉ project and the service provided. They said that the flexibility of the project workers, being able to meet the beneficiaries in informal surroundings, able to respond to a wide range of practical problems but also provide personal support, were the main reasons for the success of the project.

Later referrals were also from domestic violence projects. Again the referrers were very impressed with the service from the CAFÉ project, providing intensive support especially when there were imminent court cases. All the referrers commented on the excellent communication and co-operation between the project and the referrer.

4. CASE STUDIES

FB – this young woman was referred by the Probation Service when her partner was in prison. There were issues concerning accommodation, benefits and employment. The CAFÉ project worker helped her to move house, worked with her to resolve the benefit debts and negotiate the necessary paperwork to start her own business. FB's teenage son also wanted to change school since the house move and the CAFÉ worker helped FB approach the education authorities to start this process. During the 18 months this case remained open, FB had to give up her own business and return to paid employment, but the CAFÉ worker responded to critical incidents appropriately and FB is currently (1 year later) in stable accommodation and employment, her son is at his chosen school and she has a stable relationship. She describes the CAFÉ support as responsive, non-judgemental and genuine.

KM – this woman was referred by her probation officer, with a history of chaotic family relationships and alcoholism, resulting in violent offending and financial crisis. The CAFÉ worker helped her to move to more suitable accommodation, keep appointments in respect of outstanding court cases and resolve debt issues with the utility companies and benefits agency. KM had previously felt intimidated when trying to resolve these debts and consequently ignored them. The CAFÉ worker helped her to develop more confidence in her communication skills and manage her finances more appropriately. She also encouraged her to join Alcoholics Anonymous, but KM admits that she is not ready to stop drinking. KM described the support as very important to her, having someone to turn to when problems felt overwhelming and who identified options which she couldn't see for herself. Unfortunately, 6 months after her contact with the CAFÉ project ended, KM re-offended for the first time in 2 years, assaulting a neighbour on New Years Eve whilst under the influence of alcohol.

TW – This woman was referred by a domestic violence project, with serious parenting issues, alcohol abuse and a continuing relationship with her violent ex-partner. Her 3 youngest children were subject to an interim care order, but living with TW's mother. The CAFÉ worker attended a Family Group Conference meeting with TW, just to offer personal support, and helped her apply for an injunction against her ex-partner. She also researched local support networks which might be helpful and liaised with the local council over repairs to the house following a domestic incident. TW appreciates the options her CAFÉ worker identifies for her, without giving advice, which she describes as empowering. She believes that the consistency and reliability of support from the CAFÉ worker has made her stronger. She has attended "core groups" run by the Social Services team, and a "Braveheart" group for victims of domestic violence and has stopped drinking.

BW – This young woman was an early referral by her partner's Probation Officer to the CAFÉ project. At the time she had a 2 year old child and expecting another shortly, living in unsuitable accommodation and facing eviction. Her partner also had an older son with ADHD who lived with them and they had severe finance and debt problems. The CAFÉ project worker helped them to negotiate with the utility companies and resolve the benefit issues. She helped them to liaise with the older boy's school to recognize his special needs and even helped the boy with his homework. With support from the CAFÉ worker, the family moved into more suitable and stable accommodation and BW started as a volunteer with a young families group last summer. She has now been CRB checked and helped to organize a families day outing for the group. She is hoping that this will help her find part time employment in a similar field in the future. BW feels that she is now able to manage her finances and is more confident in her ability to resolve problems. Her partner has not re-offended and although he has not found employment, he enjoys working on their allotment, providing vegetables for family and friends. His elder son is also more settled with considerable improvement in his attitude and behaviour. BW believes that the CAFÉ support has kept them together and made them stronger as a family unit. She feels that the support should be available whenever needed on a long term basis, not just at times of crisis.

KL – This young woman was referred by her probation officer a few months before the end of her community supervision order. Her partner was in prison, her young teenage daughter in foster care in Essex and she was living in temporary, unsuitable accommodation. Her CAFÉ worker helped her to move into her current

accommodation and ensured she had a good relationship with the housing association worker. She also helped KL plan constructive activities for access visits from her daughter and liaised with the assisted visits team to enable KL to visit her partner in prison on the Isle of Wight. KL has been diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis, which sometimes restricts her mobility. The CAFÉ worker also referred KL's partner to a St. Giles Trust resettlement worker and, as a result, he completed a basic horticultural course at Hadlow College. Both KL and her partner feel they have had an excellent service from the CAFÉ project – neither have re-offended and appear to be settled and stable.

JR – This woman referred herself to the project, but on the advice of another St. Giles Trust employee whilst JR was working as a volunteer. Initially from London, JR had moved to Kent to escape from an extremely violent husband. Although from a large family, her Mother and 3 of her brothers had died in the recent past and her 2 sisters had ostracized her. Her ex-husband had traced her and raped her in her own flat in Canterbury. JR was fragile both emotionally and mentally, and was desperate to move out of the flat in which she was raped. The City Council appeared entirely unsympathetic and when the CAFÉ project worker became involved, her priority was to get JR moved. She wrote to the local MP, explaining the situation and also complained to the police because JR was “Stop and Searched” several times without apparent cause, which exacerbated JR's fragile mental state. The CAFÉ worker also helped JR successfully apply for Disability Living Allowance, attending the tribunal with her and referred her to a women's centre which had a domestic violence therapy circle. JR also completed a St. Johns First Aid course, achieving the first certificate she had ever received. The CAFÉ project supported JR for 18 months and introduced her to an Adult Services Floating Support Worker to ensure she was engaged with mainstream services. JR describes the support from the CAFÉ project worker as “brilliant” and is convinced she would have committed suicide without it. She is hoping to be able to do some voluntary work in a local day care centre for the elderly and maybe attend college. She would have liked the CAFÉ support to continue and has been disappointed with the response from her mainstream support worker.

RM – This young mother was referred by a women's safety worker as she was at risk of being abused by her partner, had significant finance and debt problems and mental health issues. The CAFÉ project worker initially concentrated on resolving practical issues, such as negotiating with creditors, helping RM to respond to legal letters in connection with a custody hearing and clearly established a supportive relationship with her. RM went through a period of depression and appreciated the daily call from her CAFÉ worker, just to make sure she was OK. RM described the support as constant and reliable - “they make you feel like you're the only person they are helping”. Although RM has family support, she feels that the CAFÉ project focused on her and helped her to realize she was not to blame for some of the problems she had experienced. There was good interagency co-operation in this case and RM now attends the “Freedom Programme” for domestic violence victims.

SK – This young mother was referred by her probation officer, although her partner is also currently in prison. At the time she was heavily depended on alcohol and drugs, but also had problems with accommodation, debt and benefit issues. Her CAFÉ project worker helped her to complete various forms, including housing applications and resolving her benefits and debt issues. She also went swimming with her when she became pregnant and took her out for lunch as a means of encouraging healthy eating habits. SK is now enjoying being a mother, rarely goes out or drink excessively, mainly due to financial pressures, but also because she understands that she could put her child at risk if she loses control. SK describes her CAFÉ project worker as “a really nice lady” who listened and was very patient. SK believes that without the CAFÉ support she would probably be in prison now, as she was becoming out of control and at risk of more serious offending. She would have liked longer contact and is hoping that her partner will be referred to a St Giles Resettlement worker nearer his release date.

AN – This man was referred by Business Link, as he was seeking advice to set up his own business. However, he was also coming to the end of a statutory community sentence and compulsory drug counseling as a result of 25 years of drug addiction. He was referred primarily to ensure continued community support to sustain his motivation, help with employment search, and maintain family relationships. Although AN is well motivated to remain drug free, he is under considerable pressure from local drug dealers to work for them, to the extent

that they have threatened to kidnap his daughter and set fire to his house if he refuses. His CAFÉ project worker alerted other relevant agencies (school, police etc) to this genuine threat, in order to protect the family. She also helping AN with job search skills, creating his C.V. and developing interview techniques. She has also helped his wife with her C.V. and to access Learndirect to enhance her employability skills. When AN's daughter had her school locker broken into and several items stolen, his CAFÉ worker approached various local charities to try to replace them. AN is convinced that without the support of his CAFÉ worker, he would have succumbed to pressure to return to drugs and crime. He says they don't make any promises, but are totally reliable and always supportive, listening and explaining consequences.

PG - This man with mild learning difficulties is a sex offender subject to extended supervision, was referred by his key worker when living in a hostel. He had previously lived with his mother, but her house was targeted after he was convicted and the CAFÉ project worker helped to find alternative accommodation for her in a different area, offering very practical support such as redecorating the kitchen. The CAFÉ worker also spent a lot of time talking to PG when he was feeling very low, living in the hostel, and supported him when he returned to his mother's home. She helped him to complete various forms, including job applications, benefit claims etc. PG and his mother describe the support they received from the CAFÉ project as very helpful, his mother particularly as she did not feel she had any other form of help available to her.

AS – This man was referred by his probation officer to provide more intensive emotional support and help with financial issues, following his conviction of Grievous Bodily Harm on his small son. AS has mild learning difficulties, as does his partner (who receives support from another local organization) and had previously been working in a voluntary capacity at a local day care facility for people with disabilities. He lost this “job” when he was convicted, his son is in foster care pending adoption which AS finds emotionally very distressing. Most of the support from his CAFÉ project worker has been to help resolve financial problems, but to offer emotional support through some difficult times. AS says he would have liked the support to have continued longer, but nevertheless appreciates that it helped him through a very stressful period.

SM – This man was referred by a probation officer, although it is not clear that he was subject to any statutory supervision. He had suffered a serious accident some 6 years ago when his hand was crushed in machinery. As a consequence he became addicted to painkillers and very depressed which, combined with alcohol, led to a violent domestic incident. He attended a 6 month programme and was referred to the CAFÉ project to help support him emotionally, provide practical advice and support regarding benefits and any family support as required. SM's depression was aggravated by the fact that, prior to the accident, he was a well established equine dentist and horse breaker (all his family work with horses) with a financially secure future. He can no longer work with horses as he has no strength in his injured hand. His CAFÉ project worker helped him to successfully apply for DLA and the relevant benefits, but SM and his wife felt that the most valuable support was knowing that the CAFÉ worker was always there when needed and offered practical as well as emotional support to the whole family. SM still has to undergo further surgical operations and whilst hopeful that he may be able to return to his previous line of work, recognizes that this may be impossible. He was so impressed by the support of his CAFÉ project worker that he thinks this may be an alternative career path for him!

5. CONCLUSION

It is clear from the interviews with the CAFÉ beneficiaries that the service and support provided by the project workers was highly valued and beneficial in terms of resolving problematic issues.

Impact of intervention

(based on the identified issues of the interviewees)

	Housing	Finance	Family	ETE	Health	Addiction
Prior to C A F É support	8	8	12	8	7	4
A f t e r C A F É support	0	0	0	4	3	1

It should be noted that even where issues remained, the interviewees felt more confident in their ability to deal with them after the CAFÉ intervention.

The referring agencies identify the need for a level of intensive support which they do not have the capacity to provide. They may also be constrained by their own agency in terms of targeting their resources to meet organisational performance indicators. They also value the flexibility of the CAFÉ project workers in meeting the needs of the beneficiaries, but have also been impressed by the professional approach to inter-agency co-operation and communication.

All those interviewed in the process of this evaluation were adamant that the service should be mainstreamed as it clearly reduces the risk and the cost of future demands on public services.

University of
Kent



European Institute of
Social Services (EISS)