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Using audiovisual technology to help offenders maintain family ties and learn new skills: HMP Lowdham Grange

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Brief description

This example demonstrates how the prison's high-quality audiovisual technology helps offenders to maintain strong family ties through the 'Story-Time Dads' project. Accreditation in video editing qualifications at levels 1 and 2 also enables offenders to gain skills that support successful resettlement.

Overview – the provider's message

'For some time, we have had a small project which allowed offenders to record stories on a tape recorder that they could send to their children. However, this approach didn't exploit the available benefits of more high-quality audiovisual technology to help them to maintain strong family ties and gain skills that supported successful resettlement. About three years ago, we were lucky to receive a Butler Trust Award and prison funding to kick-start a project that addressed these limitations. In addition, HMP Dartmoor coached two of our staff through the intricacies of DVD production. We now have a project that offenders value as a means of keeping in touch with their family and gaining new personal and technical skills. My advice to others is to make sure you have a member of staff who is both technically competent, a good teacher and very enthusiastic to drive through the project. Also, ensure you set up a room as a dedicated recording studio rather than try to use available classrooms. Don't underestimate the high standard everyone expects of DVDs and therefore recruit offenders as editors with good IT skills, especially those with video or multimedia experience.'

Elaine Tinsley, Acting Senior Education Manager

The good practice in detail

The DVDs are produced in-house and offenders pay £4 towards production costs. The project is managed by a full-time member of staff, assisted by five offenders who act as editors. The editors have varying degrees of expertise and have worked on the project for different lengths of time. Accreditation in video editing qualifications at level 1 and 2 is available.

In 16 months, 850 DVDs have been produced, 391 of them for Christmas. The DVDs contain stories told or read by offenders for their children or for their nieces, nephews or other children. They are also used for messages and greetings on special occasions, such as anniversaries, birthdays and Valentine's Day.

The room in which the editing suite is housed contains a good selection of well-displayed children's books that are used by many offenders for the stories. Before the books can be recorded, the prison obtains the necessary permission from authors and publishers.

Continual investment in IT equipment and software ensures that the DVDs are produced to a high quality. A small recording studio has been established adjacent to the editing suite in which offenders record their stories or messages. The studio reflects commercial conditions and includes a 'green wall' and relevant lighting.

Editors are involved in all stages of the DVD production process including the use of puppets to interact with the offender who is reading the story. Editing is used well to support the quality of recordings and extend the participants' skills. For example, an offender who could neither read nor write, repeated the words of a story in short sections, after they were spoken by a learning support worker. Editors then erased the learning support worker's voice from the recording and the offender's voice remained as the storyteller.

The service has forged links to other projects and regularly uses its facilities and expertise to produce in-house publications. In 2008/09, offenders were encouraged to join a creative writing project entitled 'Making It Up' which focused on writing, drawing and performing for children. This complemented the 'Story Time Dads' project and was also aimed at reducing re-offending behaviour. The project resulted in the compilation and production of a high-quality illustrated book of stories for children including, *The Adventures of Harriet and Fred*, *Bluebell Woods*, and *Ruby's Day at the Zoo*. The book has been professionally published and the proceeds are donated to a children's and young persons' hospice in the East Midlands.

The 'Story-Time Dads' project has successfully strengthened family ties and has provided a unique experience for fathers and their children. The offenders are particularly complimentary and their feedback has been positive, as has the feedback from their families.

Provider background

[HMP Lowdham Grange](#) is located near Nottingham. It is a category B prison for convicted men and was expanded in 2010, when the prison population increased by 300. The current operational capacity is 976 with an average length of stay of two years. Typically, offenders serve sentences of between 10 and 12 years.

Are you thinking of putting these ideas into practice; or already doing something similar that could help other providers; or just interested? We'd welcome your views and ideas. Get in touch [here](#).

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