



Evaluation of Time Matters

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Evaluation of the implementation of the Time Matters programme

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About this report

Merseyside is one of the 18 areas allocated funding since 2019 by the UK government to establish a Violence Reduction Unit. To inform the continued development of the Merseyside Violence Reduction Partnership (VRP), since its inception in the Merseyside Academics' Violence Prevention Partnership (MAVPP) led by LJMU have been commissioned to evaluate the Merseyside VRP as a whole, and selected work programme. In addition, the 22/23 LJMU were commissioned to implement additional research to fill gaps in local knowledge. This report forms one of a suite of outputs from the 2022/23 evaluation and research work programme, and specifically presents an evaluation of the Time Matters Programme. All Merseyside VRP research and evaluation outputs are available on the LJMU¹ and Merseyside VRP² websites, or via the work programme lead, Prof Zara Quigg (z.a.quigg@ljmu.ac.uk).

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The cover images and illustrations used through-out this report were created by the children and young people at Time Matters

¹ <https://www.ljmu.ac.uk/research/centres-and-institutes/public-health-institute>

² <https://www.merseysidevrp.com/>

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Child friendly summary

Children whose mum or dad are in prison can find it hard at school and feel unhappy, angry, and scared. We think about 312,000 children in England and Wales have a mum or dad in prison, but we do not know how many for certain because these children do not always have somewhere to go for help. When children have somewhere they can talk about how it feels to have their mum or dad in prison, they can become more confident, happier, and less stressed and scared.

Time Matters is a group in Merseyside for children whose mum or dad are in prison. Children at Time Matters have a mentor who comes into school to visit them and talk about how they are feeling. Children and their families can also attend groups with other children whose mum or dad are in prison and go on days out together. The parents and grandparents who look after these children can also get help from Time Matters.

We (Jane, Chloe and Zara who are researchers at Liverpool John Moores University) were asked by an organisation called the Merseyside Violence Reduction Partnership (we will call it Merseyside VRP for short) to “evaluate” Time Matters. Evaluate means understanding 1) what Time Matters does, 2) what children and families think about Time Matters and 3) how Time Matters has made things better for these children and their families.



What did we do?

We spoke to 14 children, five parents and grandparents, and five people who work at Time Matters. Time Matters also sent us information about the numbers of children it had supported. This was “anonymised” – this means the researchers didn’t see any names and didn’t know who it was about.

What did we find out?

Time Matters wants children to feel happier and have good experiences. It also helps them have a better relationship with their parents or grandparents who look after them. Time Matters also tries to make people aware of what it is like to have a mum or dad in prison and what help children need.

Last year, 57 children came to Time Matters for the first time. Every child can have a mentor and come to the group, but Time Matters makes sure they know it is their choice. Children and their families liked Time Matters because they could trust them, and they made friends with people who had the same experiences as them. They liked the mentors who understood and listened to them. Staff were worried though, that they needed more money and staff so they could keep helping children in the future.

After going to Time Matters, children felt more confident, that they weren’t alone, and that they could cope better with their mum or dad being in prison. Parents felt like they had help and could spend time having fun with their children.

Children at Time Matters also want to make things better for other children with a mum or dad in prison. For example, they have shared their stories on television, radio, parliament, and through a play. Young people and parents who have had help from Time Matters also sometimes become mentors themselves, so they can help other children.

Executive summary

Introduction

Parental imprisonment is an adverse childhood experience associated with poorer outcomes in education and health, as well as potential feelings of stigma, shame, and rejection. Parental imprisonment currently affects around 312,000 children in England and Wales. Despite this, there is no routine national assessment to identify children affected by parental incarceration, and dedicated support services are scarce and often rely on self-referral¹. There is currently little evidence on interventions to support the complex and interrelated needs of children experiencing parental imprisonment and their families¹. However, it is anticipated that such interventions could lead to a range of positive outcomes including increased young people's resilience to deal with the stress and stigma of parental imprisonment, reduced parental reoffending, an increased voice for young people locally and nationally, and increased awareness of these young people and family's needs among wider support services such as schools. Considering this, Merseyside Violence Reduction Partnership (VRP) have asked the Public Health Institute at Liverpool John Moores University (LJMU) to evaluate the Time Matters Programme in order to better understand the implementation of Time Matters (including barriers and facilitators, fidelity, and reach), the experiences and perceptions of young people, carers, and key stakeholders of Time Matters, and the intended and actual impacts of Time Matters on young people and their carers.

Time Matters

Time Matters is a Merseyside VRP funded project which provides support for children impacted by parental or familial imprisonment and their parents/carers. By providing a safe, non-judgemental space for young people and parents/carers with these common experiences, the project aims to mitigate the risk of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and support family cohesion. The project predominantly supports young people aged 5-18 years through support groups and one to one mentoring both online and in person. Children are given the opportunity to take part in cultural and sporting activities together. Parents/carers are also offered separate structured and social support including access to workshops on topics including childhood anxiety, child criminal exploitation, and trauma. Children with a parent or family member in prison (regardless of if they are in touch with statutory services) are eligible for the programme. Parents and carers can self-refer themselves and their child to the service, but most referrals come through support workers or schools. Retention into the Time Matters programme varies depending on young people's support needs once their family member is released from prison and the programme runs a peer mentor training scheme for existing clients.

Evaluation aims

The evaluation aims were to implement a process and outcome evaluation of Time Matters. The key research objectives were:

1. To monitor, document and describe the implementation of Time Matters.

- To describe the implementation of the programme across Merseyside.
- To understand the extent to which the intervention was implemented as planned (fidelity).
- To identify how much of the intervention was implemented (dose).
- To explore the uptake of the programme amongst the target population (reach).

- To elicit the facilitators and/or barriers to programme development and implementation, and adaptations to programme delivery; and,
- To identify areas for development and sustainability.

2. To assess the perceptions and impacts of Time Matters.

- To explore key stakeholder perceptions and experiences of the programme including young people, families, programme implementers, and wider services.
- To identify the intended and actual impacts of the programme on young people, families, programme implementers and wider services.

Evaluation methods

	Review of programme evidence, policies, and operational documentation
	Collation, analysis, and review of programme monitoring and progression data
	Interviews with programme implementers (n=5)
	Focus groups with children and young people (n=14)
	Focus groups with parents/guardians (n=5)

Key findings

- ❖ Time Matters takes a family-based approach to providing support to children experiencing parental imprisonment, with clear aims across the four domains of the socioecological model (underpinning the public health approach): providing emotional support and positive experiences to individual children and young people, improving parent-child relationships, providing a safe community for people experiencing parental imprisonment, and raising societal awareness of children's experiences of parental imprisonment.
- ❖ In the first three quarters of 2022/23, Time Matters received 57 referrals and in quarter three provided support to 47 children and young people and 27 parents and grandparents.
- ❖ Time Matters has evolved significantly over the past six years to provide a six-week one-to-one mentoring programme for every new referral, support groups for children, young people and parents/carers, and a range of social activities. Stakeholders also described taking an individualised approach to support which was flexible (for example providing additional mentoring sessions if needed) and empowered children, young people, and parents/carers to choose how they engaged. This model aligns well with the limited literature on effective interventions and trauma-informed approaches to care.

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- ❖ **Facilitators:** participants identified several factors they felt facilitated the delivery of Time Matters:
 - A clear sense of community built on trust, confidentiality, friendship, and shared experience. This led some parents and young people to remain with Time Matters beyond their need for immediate support in mentor and peer-mentor roles.
 - Committed and passionate staff and mentors with a range of experiences who provided children and young people with a reliable source of external support.
 - Strong links with external organisations which had been further enhanced through their partnership with Merseyside VRP
 - ❖ **Barriers:** the main barrier to sustaining implementation of Time Matters was funding. Time Matters had grown from a local support group to a larger organisation to meet increasing numbers of referrals and was implementing several strategic changes including stronger links with partners and implementing process and outcome monitoring. Time Matters currently relies on part-time staff and volunteers to deliver support. Stakeholders felt they might lack capacity to sustain good quality provision without longer term funding.
 - ❖ Participants described several positive impacts for children and young people including increased confidence to express themselves and engage in social activities, reduced isolation, increased ability to express their emotions and seek help, increased self-esteem, and improved coping skills. Promoting positive health and wellbeing was linked to positive outcomes including better engagement and performance at school and reduced health risk, violence, and antisocial behaviours. Many young people had participated in Time Matters for a number of years, highlighting the potential to capture longer-term positive outcomes and this should be explored further.
 - ❖ Parents/carers also felt that Time Matters had reduced their feelings of isolation by connecting them to parents with similar experiences, providing them with support and advice when they encountered difficulties and facilitating fun, stress-free time spent with their child. Stakeholders and parents provided multiple examples of Time Matters mediating to improve parent-child relationships at home and liaising with prison services to facilitate contact with a parent in prison (for example prison moves or home leave).
 - ❖ Time Matters has also engaged in a range of advocacy work (including visits to parliament, podcasts, workshops for police and journalists, media engagement, and plays and art exhibitions) to challenge stereotypes of parental imprisonment and raise awareness of young people's need for support. Young people valued these opportunities to have their voice heard and to advocate for positive change for children in the same situation.
 - ❖ During this evaluation, Time Matters had begun implementing an Outcomes Star tool to measure the impact of their service on children and young people. Data from this tool, supplemented by further contextual qualitative information will allow Time Matters to further evidence the positive impact of their work.

Recommendations

- Time Matters provides children, young people, and their parents/carers with a combination of one-to-one mentoring, group support, and positive social activities. This model of provision was universally well received by participants and qualitative data suggests positive outcomes for children, young people, and their families. This model of provision should continue.

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- Time Matters delivers a package of care which includes “*three-pronged*” or “*sandwich*” structured mentoring sessions over six weeks. The Time Matters programme has been developed directly from young people’s experiences and aims to achieve outcomes across the socio-ecological model. Given the lack of published evidence on effective interventions for children experiencing parental imprisonment, ongoing monitoring work should continue, and efforts should be made to share the Time Matters model as an example of best practice.
 - Young people enjoyed the opportunities to take part in advocacy work which allowed them to have their voice heard and raised awareness of their experiences. Time Matters should be supported to explore the role that young people can play in delivering ongoing training to partners across the Merseyside VRP to raise awareness of how to support young people experiencing parental imprisonment.
 - Volunteer mentors were an important part of the Time Matters model who brought varied experience and were positively received by children, young people, and their parents. Time Matters should be supported to expand their mentor training programme to ensure peer support for children across Merseyside.
 - Time Matters has benefitted from partnership with the Merseyside VRP through connections to new partner organisations and increased referrals. Further support should be provided to enable them to continue building these partnerships, particularly with the NHS as Time Matters is well placed to identify young people in need of mental health support.
 - Young people expressed a desire for a fixed base for Time Matters group activities as the organization has experienced several location changes in recent years. Partnerships with existing youth organisations at Merseyside VRP could be used to support Time Matters in finding locations that suit their needs.
 - Time Matters has shown extremely positive progress in strategically developing their organisation to meet a growing number of referrals. However, stakeholders were concerned that they could not sustain their current provision, quality of support, and ethos without more paid staff. Time Matters requires longer-term funding to allow them to embed current changes and expand to meet demand.
 - Time Matters should continue collection of Outcome Star data and qualitative feedback to allow them to demonstrate and monitor the impact of their work on children, young people, and parents/carers. This should include putting in place systems to allow them to capture longer term impacts for children/young people as retention of families for prolonged time periods is a unique and positive aspect of their provision which should be evidenced.
 - Time Matters should consider developing and validating a parental imprisonment Outcomes Star in partnership with children and young people and their parents/carers. This tool has the potential to inform evaluation efforts nationally and could provide an additional source of revenue. Merseyside VRP should implement an independent pilot feasibility study of this tool, with a view to progressing to an impact evaluation of Time Matters. This work could inform national approaches to supporting children experiencing parental imprisonment.

1. Introduction

Time Matters is a Merseyside Violence Reduction Partnership (MVRP) funded project which provides support for children impacted by parental or familial imprisonment and their parents/carers. By providing a safe, non-judgemental space for young people and parents/carers with these common experiences, the project aims to mitigate the risk of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and support family cohesion. The project predominantly supports young people aged 6-18 years through support groups and one-to-one mentoring both online and in person. Children are given the opportunity to take part in cultural and sporting activities together. Parents/carers are also offered separate structured and social support including access to workshops on topics including childhood anxiety, child criminal exploitation, and trauma. Children with a parent or family member in prison (regardless of if they are in touch with statutory services) are eligible for the programme. Parents and carers can self-refer themselves and their child to the service, but the majority of referrals come through support workers or schools. Retention into the Time Matters programme varies depending on young people's support needs once their family member is released from prison and the programme runs a peer mentor training scheme for existing clients. The Merseyside VRP commissioned the research team at the Public Health Institute (PHI) Liverpool John Moores University (LJMU) to evaluate Time Matters. The aim of this evaluation was to describe how Time Matters is implemented and assess the perceptions and impacts of the project on children and young people, parents/carers, and stakeholders.

Recent estimates suggest that parental imprisonment currently affects 312,000 children in England and Wales which equates to at least one child in every school in England and Wales (1). This is likely to be an underestimate due to a lack of systematic recording and a reluctance to disclose parental imprisonment by both parents and children. Parents are often reluctant to disclose (in court or prison) that they have children for fear of statutory service involvement (2) or negative judgement and repercussions for their children (3). Fear of judgement, rejection or scapegoating may also prevent children from disclosing that they have a parent in prison (1, 4-6). As a result, children affected by parental imprisonment are consistently referred to as an "invisible group" (4, 7-9) (who all too frequently remain unidentified by agencies which could assist them (3)).

Health and social impacts of parental imprisonment on children and young people

Children who experience parental imprisonment are more likely to face significant disadvantages, have complex familial needs, and are less likely to meet child well-being indicators (10, 11). Parental imprisonment is recognised as one of ten ACEs which have significant impact on children's long-term health and wellbeing across the life course (12). This includes increased risk of adopting health harming behaviours (such as smoking, harmful alcohol consumption, drug use, risky sexual activity, and violence), poorer mental and physical health, chronic disease, and early mortality. Importantly, the more ACEs children suffer, the greater their risk of poor outcomes later in life. Given the social inequalities in exposure to the criminal justice system (13, 14), many children of incarcerated parents are a socioeconomically and demographically disadvantaged group, even before experiencing parental imprisonment (15).

Parental separation increases the risk of poor health outcomes for children and young people. A number of factors are associated with poor health including psychological distress, inconsistent

explanations of parental imprisonment, changes in care provision (particularly when a mother is in prison) (16), loss of family income, stigma, home and school moves, and difficulties in maintaining contact with imprisoned parents (17). Research from the US suggests separation from a parent through imprisonment has a more detrimental impact on a child's well-being than divorce or the death of a parent (9). However, imprisonment does not always elicit the same sympathetic or supportive response from family members and the community, so children often do not have the opportunity to deal with or understand these emotions.

Large scale and longitudinal studies have found that children with a parent/carer in prison are at significantly greater risk of mental health problems and self-reported anxiety when compared with their peers (18, 19). Parental imprisonment is also a recognised risk factor for antisocial behaviour (7, 11, 17, 20), with one study suggesting that children with a parent in prison have about three times the risk for antisocial behaviour compared to their peers (21). Long term, parental imprisonment has been linked to an increased risk of offending in adulthood (8, 22, 23) and parental imprisonment might also have a stigmatising effect, making prisoners' children more likely to be prosecuted for their crimes (21). Parental imprisonment is also associated with decreased academic performance (24-27) linked to a number of factors including absenteeism due to isolation, peer rejection or bullying, reduced household income, parental health, and changes in caregiving arrangements (9, 10, 26, 28, 29).

Families may also experience significant financial strain due to the loss of the incarcerated parent's income. Economic strain is associated with more erratic and authoritarian parenting styles, and increasing working hours to compensate for loss of family income can reduce a parent's ability to provide emotional support to their child (29, 30). The interconnected nature of these outcomes (for example, social stigma leading to isolation, which then impacts mental health and school attainment) demonstrates the wide and significant needs of children experiencing parental imprisonment and the importance of having access to high quality support.

Interventions to support children with parental imprisonment

Despite growing recognition of the needs of children who experience parental imprisonment, the literature on effective interventions to support these children and their families remains sparse (31). Existing interventions tend to focus on providing parenting support to parents in prison and broadly fall into three categories 1) perinatal interventions to support mothers through pregnancy and birth in prison 2) postnatal interventions to allow mothers to maintain contact with their new-born child whilst in prison, for example through special housing facilities or nurseries, and 3) parenting programmes. A meta-analysis of 13 parenting programmes found that they were moderately effective in the short term in improving parenting skills and knowledge, parental wellbeing, and parent-child relationships (32) including feeling less stressed, less depressed, and having more positive parent-child interactions when compared with a control group (33). However, considerable heterogeneity across these studies (in programme content, institutional context, and parental characteristics) make it difficult to come to clear conclusions about how much parents retain the knowledge and skills they have learnt post release (31, 32).

Perhaps the greatest oversight in existing parenting interventions is a lack of involvement for children in both the parenting programme and the outcomes measured. Armstrong et al (32) found that only four of 22 reviewed interventions had direct child-involvement and these tended to be limited to the prison setting for example, through supervised play visits (Woodall et al, 2014) or educational videos (34). Similarly, Nilsen et al (35) found only four of 21 reviewed interventions examined the impact of

these interventions on children and these outcomes tended to be related to parenting success such as intensity of disruptive behaviour or consistency of discipline (36).

Children experiencing parental imprisonment have specific support needs including feelings of isolation, lack of someone to talk to, feeling judged or misunderstood, keeping parental imprisonment secret to avoid stigma, and the loss and change of a parent being in prison (37). A qualitative systematic review identified a range of coping strategies used by children with a parent in prison including choosing to maintain distance from the parent in prison, normalising the situation, seeking out supportive mentors, participation in therapy, and engaging in prosocial recreation activities (such as sports, movies, and friends) (38).

Despite this need for support, there is little published evidence on interventions to assist children experiencing parental imprisonment. Evidence from two RCTs of mentoring programmes in the US (the Amachi Texas Programme specifically for children with incarcerated parents; (39) and Big Brother, Big Sister which included a large sample of children with incarcerated parents;(40)) found that children who actively engaged with their mentors reported improvements in their behaviour, relationships, and emotional wellbeing up to 12 months following the intervention. However, school awareness and support for children with a parent in prison is variable and the majority of school-based initiatives remain unevaluated (41, 42). A systematic review identified three levels of support needed in school settings: at the systemic level (through appropriate, consistent support, training for staff and using the curriculum to reduce stigma), family level (practical/emotional support for carers and facilitating communication with the imprisoned parent) and individual level (emotional/practical support for children, supporting visits/contact in school time, considering the child's perspective when planning support) (42).

The lack of evaluated programmes for children and young people means that there is limited evidence to demonstrate what works to improve the health and wellbeing of children with a parent in prison. The evidence that is available suggests whole system and family-based approaches which incorporate mentoring, school-based support, time spent with peers who understand their situation, and prosocial recreation activities are all promising support methods. This report aims to further this evidence base through an evaluation of the Time Matters project. Time Matters was established in Merseyside in 2017 to support children aged 5-18 years who are impacted by parental imprisonment. In line with the existing evidence, Time Matters takes a whole system family approach to support combining one-to-one school-based mentoring, group discussion, and social and recreational activities for young people and their families to allow them to explore their emotions and feelings and generate positive change. Through this mixed methods evaluation, we aim to provide further insight into both the process of implementing this support for children and young people and the measurable outcomes produced.

1.1 Study aims and objectives

The evaluation aims were to implement a process and outcome evaluation of Time Matters. The key research objectives were:

3. To monitor, document and describe the implementation of Time Matters.

- To describe the implementation of the programme across Merseyside.
- To understand the extent to which the intervention was implemented as planned (fidelity).
- To identify how much of the intervention was implemented (dose).
- To explore the uptake of the programme amongst the target population (reach).

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- To elicit the facilitators and/or barriers to programme development and implementation, and adaptations to programme delivery; and,
 - To identify areas for development and sustainability.

4. To assess the perceptions and impacts of Time Matters.

- To explore key stakeholder perceptions and experiences of the programme including young people, families, programme implementers, and wider services; and,
- To identify the intended and actual impacts of the programme on young people, families, programme implementers, and wider services.

2. Methodology

2.1 Methods

To meet study objectives, a range of methods were implemented with findings triangulated to inform the evaluation.

	<p>Review of programme evidence, policies, and operational documentation</p> <p>Existing and on-going programme evidence, policies and operational documentation, were accessed and reviewed.</p>
	<p>Collation, analysis, and review of programme monitoring and progression data</p> <p>Anonymised Outcome Star, referral and contact data for children and young people accessing the service was collected by Time Matters mentors for young people referred to the programme.</p>
	<p>Interviews with programme implementers (P1-5)</p> <p>Semi-structured interviews (telephone or MS Teams) were undertaken with five programme implementers and wider partners. The interviews explored experiences of implementing Time Matters, supporting and impeding factors to implementation, outcomes and impacts, and programme sustainability. Interviews were audio recorded and transcribed.</p>
	<p>Focus groups with parents/guardians (P6-10)</p> <p>Face-to-face focus groups were undertaken with five parents/carers who accessed support from Time Matters with their children. Focus groups asked participants about their experiences of the Time Matters programme. Focus groups were audio recorded and transcribed.</p>
	<p>Focus groups with children and young people (P11-24)</p> <p>Face-to-face focus groups were undertaken with 14 children and young people. Groups were stratified by age (6-11 years, 12-16 years) with age-appropriate questions that explored their experiences of the Time Matters intervention. Children also completed a Draw, Write, and Tell exercise. Focus groups were audio recorded and transcribed.</p>

2.2 Data analysis

Quantitative analyses were undertaken using descriptive statistics. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data from the interviews and focus groups (43). The analysis is presented with illustrative quotes where appropriate to highlight key findings.

2.3 Ethical approval

Ethical approval was obtained from LJMU (REC no. 22/PHI/022). Two young people from Time Matters provided feedback on the research design, data collections tools, and information sheets before the research took place.

3. Findings

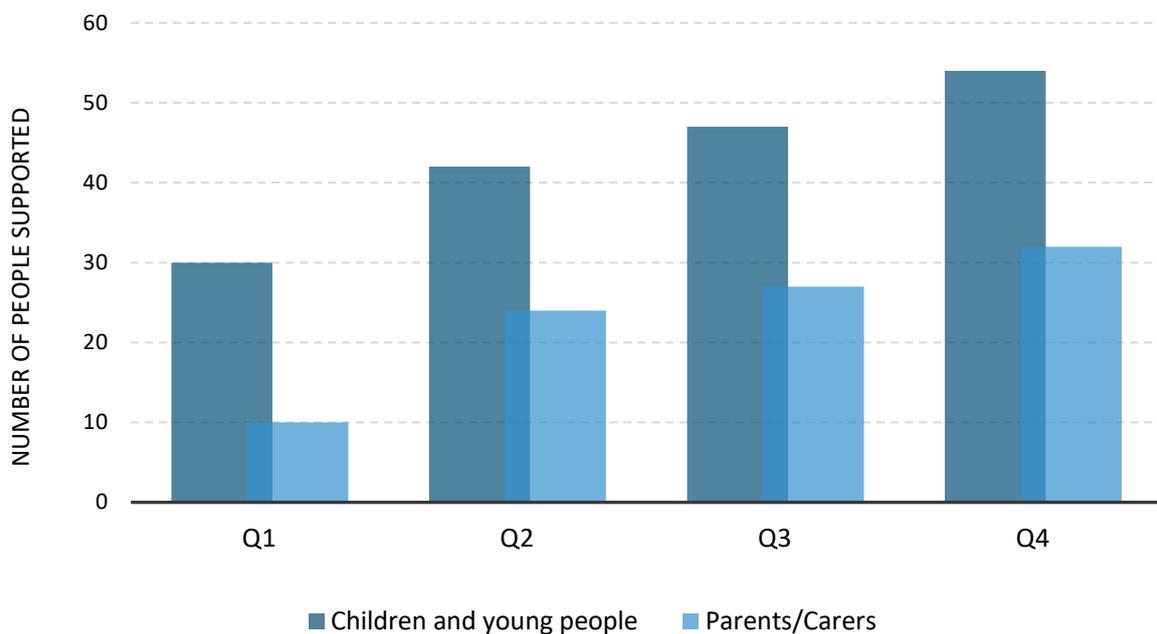
3.1 Who is Time Matters for? (Reach)

Time Matters offers support for children who are impacted by parental imprisonment, but also aims to provide support to whole families including parents and carers in the community and the parent who is or has been in prison. Figures 1 and 2 below show the number of children supported by Time Matters in the first three quarters of 2022/23, showing a small increase each quarter. Between April 2022 and March 2023, 80 young people have been referred to Time Matters (figure 1) and 54 children and young people and 32 adults (figure 2) were receiving support from Time Matters during quarter 4. The majority of these young people and parents/carers were from Liverpool (n=60), with 20 from Knowsley and 6 from Wirral. During 2022/23, 21 children and young people received school-based mentoring, 12 had online mentoring and 33 had personal bespoke mentoring. Children and young people generally receive 6 mentoring sessions from Time Matters, but some children will receive more when requested by parents/carers and when Time Matters has capacity. Approximately 200 individual mentoring sessions were delivered during 2022/23

Figure 1: Number of referrals to Time Matters April 2022 to Feb 2023



Figure 2: Number of people receiving support from Time Matters Q1-Q3, 2022/2023



All stakeholders interviewed had clear objectives for the support they provided to young people and described a holistic approach across all four domains of the socio-ecological model (individual, relationship, community and societal). At an individual level, stakeholders recognised “*every young person’s unique and individual...[and has] got different experiences and situations*” (P3, stakeholder) and described Time Matters as providing “*positive experiences to...overcome the challenges and barriers that they face daily*” (P3, stakeholder). They aimed to improve young people’s mental wellbeing by reducing self-judgement (*it’s not your fault...it doesn’t have to define you in a negative way*) P2, stakeholder) and encouraging them to express and regulate their emotions and seek support (“*it’s OK to cry. It’s OK to feel angry. And, if you need help, ask for it*”, P1 stakeholder). Equally importantly, stakeholders wanted children to have fun at Time Matters, providing them with positive experiences to strengthen their resilience when coping with adversity.

“For them to have fun and to do nice things because the research is that, you know, the more joy and the more positive experiences, positive childhood experiences a child can have when they’ve suffered a lot of trauma, the more likely they are to be resilient and be able to cope with adversity” (P1, stakeholder)

At a relationship level, stakeholders described a family approach (“*I believe like happy families, a happy child*” P3), which encouraged positive relationships between children and their parents/carers. As will be described in greater detail below, Time Matters provides a range of support to both children and their parents/carers. In particular, the mentoring programme for young people aims to strengthen young people’s interpersonal skills including “*emotions, relationships, confidence, problem solving...just looking at trying to encourage young people to communicate more when they’re struggling or when they’re happy*” (P3, stakeholder). At a community level, Time Matters was described as “*a safe place...for our local children if they’ve got a mum or dad in prison*” (P1,

stakeholder) which reduced young people’s feelings of isolation and judgement. Time Matters was often described as “*like a family*” by stakeholders, young people, and their parents/carers. The group had a code of conduct which is based on kindness: “*Children will come with a lot of trauma and difficult feelings, and they might initially present as very angry, but I think once they realized that the only way to be in this group is to be kind.*” (P1, stakeholder).

“The kids that come to the group, they know when they come in that every single child in that room has either got or has had a parent who's been to prison so...there's no judgments. They can talk. They don't have to talk about how they feel about it, but they can if they want to. And that's I think really therapeutic” (P1, stakeholder)

Finally, at the societal level, stakeholders described “*challenging attitudes in wider society*” towards parental imprisonment and “*advocacy for change*”. Time Matters aimed to challenge stereotypes in society and the media and to improve the support that was available to children affected by parental imprisonment. Children were encouraged to be “*change makers*” and “*the experts...it's about empowering them to have their voice heard if that's something they want to do*” (P1, stakeholder).

“And what I love is that it defies all the stereotypes. You know, it defies all the like children with parents in prison. They must look like they've come out of Oliver Twist, or they must be really horrible, and they must be really badly behaved...these are the kind of stereotypes we get, some kind of badge of honour that my dad's in prison and it's...the opposite of all those stereotypes. These are intelligent, polite, nice young people that have just had this difficult experience.” (P1, stakeholder)

3.2 What does Time Matters deliver? (dose)



“Help! Drawing by Time Matters child (Female, age 10)

Time Matters is an open referral service that offers both group and one-to-one support to children and young people and their parents/carers. Stakeholders described the majority of referrals coming as self-referrals by parents or grandparents and through schools and children’s services. A smaller proportion came from Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) or prison services. Each child referred into Time Matters is allocated a mentor who provides them initially with six individual sessions (although this can be extended if the child needs more sessions) either at school or online via Zoom. Alongside this core mentoring programme, Time Matters also runs group activities providing children and young people with both therapeutic support and social leisure activities. Social activities for young people and parents/carers include day trips and a summer residential. Support groups are also provided for parents and grandparents. Figure 3 provides a summary of the activities undertaken by Time Matters over the past 12 months.

Stakeholders described how the Time Matters model of delivery had “*evolved over time*” (P2, stakeholder) from “*a tiny kind of one off support group, and it just kept mushrooming from there until*

we became an established organisation...which is still, by the way going through a huge evolutionary process” (P1, stakeholder). This has largely been due to a “huge demand for support for children” (P1, stakeholder). As a consequence, Time Matters currently relies on volunteers for a substantial proportion of its mentoring and currently does not employ any full-time members of staff (see barriers section below). One stakeholder described that “the project looks different every single year” (P1, stakeholder) and even during the evaluation period, the project developed several new initiatives including a grandparents coffee morning and a free law clinic for parents/carers in partnership with LJMU. As this demonstrates, the Time Matters delivery model was flexible and responsive to the needs of families attending. Stakeholders also tried to ensure they were young person led in both mentoring (“I always reiterate it’s your choice if you want to share that, P2, stakeholder) and group activities (“when the young people raise an issue, we’re like right, you need to podcast on that” P3, stakeholder).

Mentoring

One-to-one mentoring is a key aspect of Time Matters’ delivery. Initially, children and young people had been offered a choice of group or one-to-one support but as the group evolved, individual mentoring became a standard offer. Each child referred to Time Matters is assigned a mentor for six sessions (usually delivered weekly either in school or online) before they are integrated into the group sessions. Time Matters staff generally matched mentors to new referrals based on the young person’s needs and the mentor’s experience. The mentoring sessions aimed to “get to know the child, see what their key issues are, let them get anything off their chest” (P1, stakeholder) and “give them coping mechanisms and raise their self-esteem and confidence” (P3, stakeholder). The introductory session allows the mentor to get to know the young person, and then the “middle sessions are very reflective of what the child brings to the table and the age of the child” (P1, stakeholder). Each session lasts 45 minutes and follows a “three pronged” “sandwich” structure which is described in the quote below. Mentors received training and spoke positively about the practical and emotional support they received from the Time Matters team and the mentoring resources they shared with each other. Young people receive a certificate at the end of their mentoring period and young people were usually encouraged to “have a goal, a challenge...a strategy” to work on during the six sessions.

“A three-pronged structure...an icebreaker at the beginning...like a feelings check-in or a bit of a game. And then the meaty bit in the middle...the thing we’re gonna explore. And then every session I ask the mentors to finish with a game, and it doesn’t matter even if it’s a teenager because... you might have to go into maths next or...do some homework or it might be time for bed...so...the last sort of five minutes, maybe 10, should all always be a game...I just think it kind of puts these kind of safety boundaries around that. So you don’t want to end on talking about something so deep and then just leaving the child...so, we do train mentors to have that structure.” (P1, stakeholder)

Both young people and mentors spoke positively about the mentoring sessions. Mentors described mentoring “as such a privilege... that’s massively needed for children and young people” (P2, stakeholder) and how “watching the young one’s getting support and seeing them excelling, I think that’s the best part” (P4, stakeholder). Mentoring was viewed by stakeholders as vital because “a lot of young people blame themselves and a lot of young people will keep things to themselves because they don’t want to upset mum...it’s really important that we give them an opportunity just to have their space and their say on things really.” (P3, Stakeholder). Young people agreed and all young people participating spoke positively about the time they spend with their mentor. Young people valued the opportunity to have their feelings listened to (“we just talk about how we’re feeling...because at school I would be worrying about what would be happening” P19, 6-11 years focus

group) and described a good mentor as someone “*who makes it easy to talk to them*” (P14, 12-15 years focus group) and who “*can like care for you, so if something bad happens in like school or just at home, you can always come and talk to them*” (P13, 12-15 years focus group).

Group support

Time Matters also offers group support which children and young people were generally invited to attend on completion of their six-week mentoring (although there is sometimes some overlap). Young people enjoyed the group sessions and listed various activities they had attended including day trips, residential trips, sports, arts therapy, and music therapy. Young people felt that social activities were important because they allowed the group to get to know each other in a relaxed setting which made it easier to open up emotionally (“*if it is your first time and you come on a day out, it helps you talk about everything*” P14, 12-15 years focus group). Figure 3 illustrated the group activities undertaken over the past 12 months. Time Matters have a code of conduct for their groups so young people understand what is expected of them and whether they think the group will be a good fit for them.

“So I ask the mentors to try and integrate that. Like, what do we expect out of you? Like you don't go up to another child in the group and say, what's your dad in prison for you? Kindness is key value in it. So that when they are coming to the groups and you know, we're getting to kind of engage in this. This is in time matters. This is our code of conduct. You know, this is this is the values that we hold ourselves to as a, as a service. So I think that's yeah. And it's just about obviously respect and kindness and all of that kind of stuff.” (P1, stakeholder)

As previously discussed, Time Matters also aimed to empower young people as “*change makers*” and “*the experts*” in their own experiences (P1, stakeholder) and so the group also took on an advocacy role. Stakeholders and young people described multiple activities undertaken by Time Matters to raise awareness and “*have their voice heard*” (P1, stakeholder). This included speaking with government and at international conferences, contributing to international research, speaking on the radio and in documentaries, participating in workshops for police staff and journalists, and developing a play based on young people’s experiences. Young people also spoke extremely positively about these “*change maker*” activities and saw them as an opportunity for “*publicising and showing the experiences of the group*” (P11, 12-15 years focus group). As the quote below describes, these opportunities to advocate for better services and reduce the stigma of parental imprisonment increased young people’s self-esteem and gave them the opportunity to take positive action as a result of their experience.

“I think it's flipping them from being a victim of a crime they didn't commit to going...this is awful, this is not your fault. This is a horrible situation that you're in... but not just how can we make this better for you, but how could we potentially make this better for children that you would never even meet and that I think changes somebody's level of self-esteem, that they might speak out and another kid in London that they might never meet might benefit from them having speaking [sic] out.” (P1, stakeholder)

Support for parents

Time Matters is a family-based service with just over 50 families currently registered for support. Each referral of a child to Time Matters involved communicating with parents to assess the child and families’ needs and to introduce them to the organisation. For example, P2 described how they would often “*offer them a social first, so they can pop along to the meeting, meet the community in a way that feels safe and...feel part of something*”. Time Matters runs support groups for parents and

grandparents and will also sometimes divide family events into child and parent spaces to allow both groups to seek support separately. Time Matters also run a range of family activities including days out and a summer residential trip. However, stakeholders also recognised that “*every family is different*” and parents would sometimes require more individual support “*to keep the parents able to manage everything and feel confident enough to do that and overcome challenges and problems*” (P3, stakeholder). Time Matters staff and mentors would often receive telephone calls from parents who were seeking advice on a particular family situation or problem. The three quotes below provide examples of the range of parent/carer support needs met by Time Matters including mediating to improve the relationship between a mother and her teenage son, providing advice on how to tell younger children that their parent was in prison, and liaising with prison services to move a dad to a closer prison to allow family visits.

“When I was speaking to mum she went, here’s his dad...and the dad was speaking to me while he was in prison. You know, can you please sort my kid, I will do anything...because I could sense his frustration because he couldn’t do anything...So I think from that, we thought mediation, we set up the mediation meeting with mum and himself [son]...in a pizza place, and we all have pizza together and kind of both have just facilitated a discussion about what was going on and the feedback from that was immense in terms of getting home, fixing his relationship with his dad and him getting into college again.” (P3, stakeholder)

They’ll just like want that kind of telephone support...a lot of the new referrals can be my husband’s gone to prison. I’ve got a 5-year-old child. I’ve been saying daddy’s working away from home, but now I think I need to have that conversation...How do I tell my child their parent is in prison?...It’ll be giving that mum, let’s say, ideas on how to frame that conversation...Sometimes we’ll send out resources depending on the age of the child. Sometimes they’ll just wanna sort of have that brainstorm about...how to say it, and then that might take them months...and then I’ll get a phone call months later to say...I’ve told them about your support groups.” (P1, stakeholder)

“So mine was miles away. And I had to get up, drive for three hours, sit there for two hours, go in and see him for two hours, drive back home and it was like the whole day and the kids were like, they used to dread going to see their dad. She was like tell P1 [Time Matters staff] and two weeks later he was in [prison name], 40 minutes away. She emailed them and was like no, that is not right...We used to leave in the morning and then when we got it would be time for bed...Yeah and I was driving on my own. And so he chose to not see the kids because he was worried about me driving and...I was like why don’t you want us to come and see you and he was like I can’t, I’ve put you through enough. And now he’s [moved] there we can see him every single week.” (P8, parent/carer)

Figure 3: Group events held by Time Matters April 2022-March 2023

			No of young people	No of parents /carers
April 2022				
	11 th April	Mental health support with food bags for all families	14	7
	12 th April	Easter themed support group and podcast recording on children’s views on probation for the National Probation Conference	15	8
	13 th April	Swimming and lunch	7	3
	14 th April	Roller skating at the Invisible Wind Factory	9	3
	19 th April	Mental health support followed by sports at Wavertree Aquatics Centre	5	3
	20 th April	Trip to Knowsley Safari Park	10	4
	21 st April	Trip to New Brighton with fish and chips	7	3
	22 nd April	Parents support group with pampering	-	6
May 2022				
	18 th May	Child Friendly City Children of Prisoners Roundtable Event on addresses in the media at LJMU	6	3
	25 th , 26 th , 27 th May	“Picture This; Picture Me” Photovoice workshop 3 days at Assess Education. Theme – what makes you thrive? This is being written up as a journal article for publication	12	-

			No of young people	No of parents /carers
August 2022				
	2 nd Aug	Podcast recording on the Child Impact Assessment Tool Kit used for Prison Reform Trust CIA Toolkit	8	-
	3 rd Aug	Anthony Walker Foundation workshop on the role of the police	3	-
	4 th Aug	Pottery painting support group specifically for children who live with grandparent carers.	6	1
	12 th , 13 th , 14 th Aug	PGL Adventure Centre 3-day Family residential	31	10
	23 rd Aug	Awesome Walls Rock Climbing	14	4
	25 th Aug	Trip to Alton Towers	30	12
Oct 2022				
	26 th Oct	Mental health support group with Halloween art and craft, followed by a trip to the Bowling Alley / Edge Lane	29	10

			No of young people	No of parents /carers	
Dec 2022		1 st Dec	Family trip to the Everyman Pantomime	30	18
		7 th Dec	Parents/carers meeting at the LJMU Law Centre for legal support	-	3
		15 th Dec	Junior Children Build a Bear	20	-
		22 nd Dec	Family Christmas buffet with food bags for every family and presents for the children from Cash for Kids	30	16
		23 rd Dec	Senior children outing to the cinema and Pizza Express	12	-
		28 th Dec	Sefton park walk followed by family meal on Lark Lane.	12	7
Feb 2023		9 th Feb	Parents and grandparents breakfast meeting at Papas Bistro with LJMU researchers	-	7
		14 th Feb	Mental health support Valentines themed followed by outing to the Quirky Quarter	17	9
		15 th Feb	Mental health support groups with LJMU researchers, followed by Cash for Kids grant / city centre shopping.	23	8
		16 th Feb	Trip to the Bounce House with party food	20	8
		23 rd Feb	Supportive meal for families who live in Wirral. Includes cash for kids grant for each child	5	3
March 2023		Play "8 Hours There and Back" based on the experiences of children and young people at Time Matters has been shortlisted for a City Council City of Culture Education Award – ceremony this March – winner to be announced.			

Discharge and referral

Time Matters currently does not have a discharge policy, but rather operates on the policy that “we never close the door” (P3, stakeholder) on a young person or family. Instead, one stakeholder described this as a “revolving door, people come and go whenever they want. There’s no pressure and we always try and touch base if people haven’t engaged for a while” (P3, stakeholder). This open door approach was a deliberate one because, as illustrated in the quote below, each family’s experience of parental imprisonment would be different, and they could require support at various time points including whilst a parent was in prison and post-release. However, stakeholders did recognise that Time Matters was growing due to increasing numbers of referrals and that they may not be able to continue this open-door policy without sustained funding and resources. As will be discussed in greater detail in the facilitators section, this open-door policy also brought advantages. Several young people and parents supported by Time Matters had gone on to become mentors and Time Matters now also run a peer-mentor scheme to allow teenagers to act as peer-leaders within the group to support new and younger children.

“The nature of having a parent in prison. Some people, when somebody goes to prison, they go once and once only it’s a one off and it’s an unusual part of their life and they they’re never gonna go back...you’ve got different categories of offenders, but unfortunately, you’ve got some people that do go in and out...and actually release can be as hard if not harder for children and families as the imprisonment phase. Because that brings its own set of problems...we’ve had families where...there’s been periods of calm and there’s been periods of chaos...sometimes families we might not see them for a long time and then all of a sudden, they’ll reengage. And then some people are regular attendance and attend every session without fail...we don’t really wanna close a door to anybody if we can help it, I guess because...life is up and down.” (P1, Stakeholder)

Time Matters also took a similarly flexible approach to mentoring and were open to one-to-one mentoring extending beyond the standard six sessions if they felt young people would benefit from more support. The quote below provides an example of mentoring sessions being extended to 17 sessions to provide support for siblings who had a complex family situation. While Time Matters was happy to extend mentoring if young people needed it, stakeholders were also “mindful of our limitations...the service has got quite a clear definition of what it provides like advocacy and early intervention and support...peer support as well” (P2, Stakeholders). Mentors described actively communicating with schools and social services to provide updates on their work and also liaised with external services including social services, prisons, legal advice, and CAMHS to make referrals and find advice and support for families.

“We’ve been working with two siblings since [date] in school...normally sessions are six weeks, these kind of went on a bit longer because the individual children needed that more intense support...so we have 17 sessions in total...very complex sort of family situation...the children live with grandparents under special guardianship...mum was the parent who wasn’t in prison, and she wanted to sort of to be reassessed, to have the children permanently so she needed a lot of support in the sense of building those bonds again with the children...she came to two sessions actually and...I was there with the familiar face and mentor for the children but also encourage mum and I [liaised] with different services as well to get the reassessment supported because the family didn’t really know what to do, they felt a little bit lost...that kind of support is stepping down now because assessment is under way and we’ll support for the family to get reassessed. But they remain within Time Matters and they’ve been coming to the groups.” (P2, Stakeholder)

3.3 Why does Time Matters work? (barriers and facilitators)



Facilitators

A key facilitator in the delivery of Time Matters from participants' perspectives, was that it built trusting relationships with young people and their families. It was clear from stakeholders' perspectives that they had worked hard to cultivate this trust, for example when talking about a recent pantomime trip attended by 48 young people and their parents/carers, one stakeholder felt *"they're turning up because they want to and...because we've kind of built that relationship with them"* (P3, Stakeholder). Time Matters was frequently described as like a family, as one mentor who had been with Time Matters since they were a child said *"I think that is what keeps everyone coming is that they feel like a family...it's unusual. Like it's something that like no one else's got"* (P4, Stakeholder).

As quoted below, building this trust began when a parent was first referred into the service, when stakeholders emphasised that attending Time Matters was the parent/carer's own choice for them and their child and the door would always be open to them which was seen as empowering. Similarly, stakeholders felt trust between themselves and young people was built through listening to their experiences (*"they want other people to understand what they've been through and I think it really kind of raises their self-worth and self-esteem from it"*, P3, Stakeholder) and giving them choice over how and when they engaged (*"I always say to the kids in a support group...They don't really have to do anything they don't want to do...you wanna just listen to the other kids. That's fine."* P1, Stakeholders). P5, a teacher who had referred two children to Time Matters, also felt that the relationship the mentors built with the children encouraged them to engage (*"both of the adults from Time Matters...you can see why the children will engage because, you know, they were very passionate about their role and...you could see they clearly enjoyed the time that they spent with the children"*).

"We'll just start off with a conversation with the parent who's came with the children. Tell them a little bit about the service, reassure them that it's completely voluntary... think that builds trust initially that you're empowering, let's say mum, that you know, we're not gonna judge you if you don't wanna come. It doesn't mean you're a bad mum because you're not ready for this. We're just here if you need us. So I think that that is immediately empowering...And some families will be like I'm not ready...it's making sure that families know that it's in their own time...And then I also

recommend to the families that when they're trying to kind of sell the service to their child, for want of a better phrase...just say if you want to try it and you don't like it, then it's not a problem, or if you don't wanna try it and you're not ready yet...I'm not gonna be offended. If you come and this isn't for you...group support, is not for everyone. Mentoring is not for everyone...and that you haven't got that one door...Just reach back out if you change your mind. And that means that actually everybody that wants to engage, because you, if you feel like it's your choice...I think it's absolutely crucial and that's how we build trust and how we build relationships.” (P1, stakeholder)

Young people and parents also felt this sense of trust, describing both mentors and Time Matters staff as always being there when they needed them. For example, young people discussed how they and their parents/carers had separate spaces for discussion and trusted that *“if you don't want your mum or dad to know what you're talking about, no-one will tell them unless it's serious”* (P14, 12-15 years focus group) and that *“the confidentiality on both parties...it lets them open up fully”* (P11, 12-15 years focus group). These trusting relationships also brought benefits to the Time Matters service. Stakeholders described a peer mentor scheme they had recently implemented because *“we noticed that we had this group of children...they were happy, they were healthy, the parent had perhaps now been released from prison. They didn't need us anymore, but they didn't wanna leave us”* (P1, stakeholder). Time Matters developed a training session for these young people who act as leaders within the group, supporting younger children and new members as *“an additional source of support, as well as the adults”* (P1, stakeholder). Parents and young people described their intention to continue attending the group once they no longer had immediate need of it: *“I will come back and support the group...I know what it feels like...it's not a nice life, but it's our life and we've just got to make the most of it haven't we and try and help as best we can”* (P6, parent/carer focus group). Young people training to be peer mentors also clearly felt a sense of responsibility to younger members *“because if you're young and there's something you're going through, there's always someone in the group whose been through it...make you feel better”* (P13, 12-15 years focus group).

A second key facilitator was the Time Matters team who brought passion, commitment, and varied experience to the role. Mentors described being guided by strong leadership (*“she's so committed and she's so driven and she guides us”* P2, stakeholder) and receiving regular check-ins and practical and emotional support for employed Time Matters staff (*“just knowing that people are there and they understand...and have that same motivation and support”* P2, stakeholder). In addition, mentors brought a wide range of different experiences of parental imprisonment and supporting young people, which they felt helped them build trusting relationships: *“every mentor's got something different to offer. We've got like 18 year old mentors...50 year old mentors...really varied in their experience and knowledge and it's key to allow them to be themselves”* (P3, stakeholder). A mentor who had been supported by Time Matters herself as a child felt this experience helped her *“because the situation I was in, I've had to help myself and I know how to help other kids who are in the same situation”* (P4, stakeholder).

The final facilitator identified was strong links with external organisations. The founder of Time Matters was also employed by LJMU and nurtured these connections to assist with their delivery needs. This included a 70-day social work placement student each year, student volunteers, and access to resources such as the previously described drop-in law clinic which had been accessed by families requiring legal support. Time Matters had also built connections with external agencies in other areas. In particular with schools, where they had worked to raise awareness of their services and which represented a substantial proportion of their referrals. As P5, a teacher, described *“knowing there is this charity there...that we can signpost...[that] will support the children and the family and beyond the*

school environment...it enables us to be more confident with the support...you know they're not alone" (P5, stakeholder). Stakeholders also felt that being part of the Merseyside VRP meant they were *"getting really quite known now by a lot of services"* (P1, Stakeholder) including courts, Style Prison, and a podcast for the National Probation Service. The Merseyside VRP provided Time Matters the opportunity to *"share our work through a much bigger network, gain more referrals, gain lots of expertise"* (P1, stakeholder).

Barriers

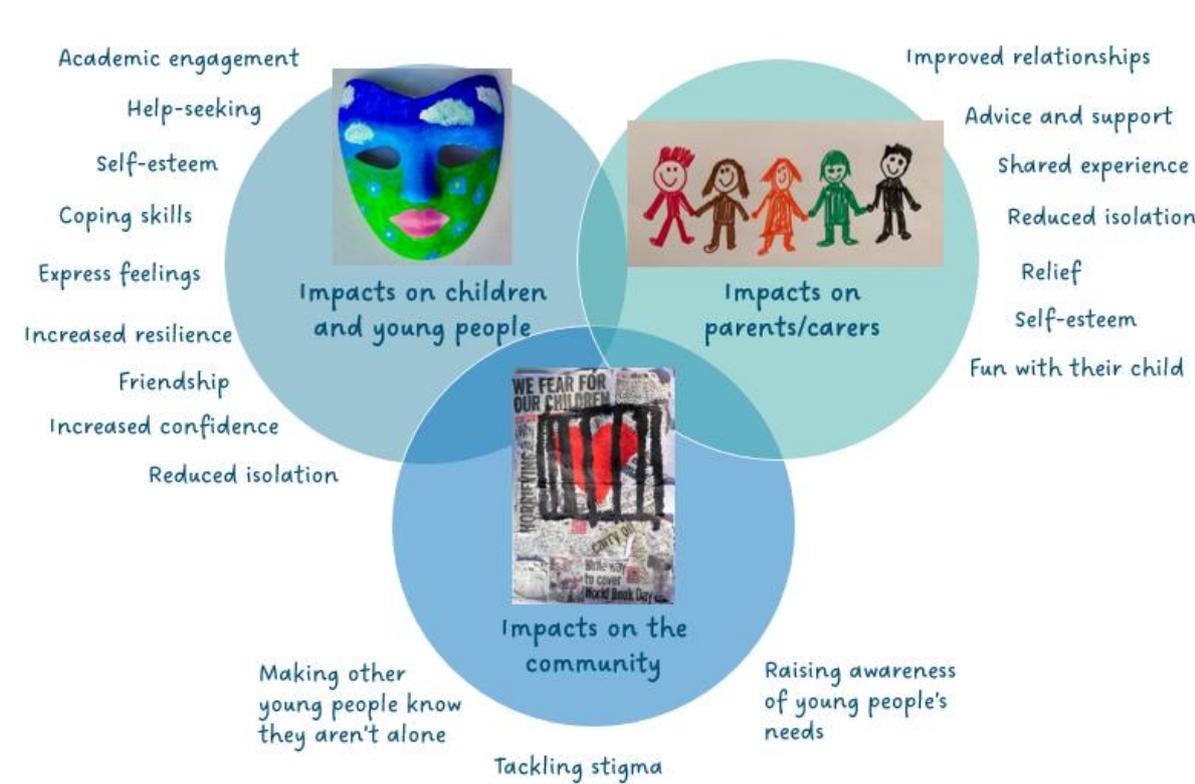
The main barrier identified in relation to delivery was having sufficient funding, time, and staff to deliver all the activities Time Matters would like to achieve (*"my biggest challenges are always gonna be time, are always gonna be funding"* P1, stakeholder). As previously described, the organisation had grown from a small local support group to a larger organisation to meet increasing demand and growing numbers of referrals. Stakeholders described a number of strategic steps they were taking to grow their organisation, including stronger links with partner organisations, building their mentor support, and introducing processes for monitoring the work they were doing and the outcomes this produced for young people. However, stakeholders felt they lacked capacity to continue with this sustained growth and to meet increasing demand without longer term funding. Time Matters currently has no full-time paid members of staff and relied on support from volunteers and student placements to help deliver their mentoring programme. This lack of a full-time workforce created time pressures for part-time staff, and stakeholders were conscious that if *"you rely on volunteers, you don't wanna snow them under"* (P3, stakeholder). Volunteer mentors also worried about *"letting them down"* (P2, stakeholder) if they were unable to make a mentoring session due to work, family commitments, or illness. Furthermore, stakeholders were conscious that they wanted to increase Time Matters capacity in a sustainable way, which did not compromise the current model of delivery or the supportive, family-based ethos.

"We're growing I'd say maybe 20% every year in terms of young people and families, there's a growth there. We're talking maybe 20 new people every year, which is growing and growing and growing and...next year we'll probably have hundreds of people on our books. It's about the capacity of what we can do. Then we don't want to dilute what we do, we want to grow, develop what we do because we think it works, it's a great model." (P3, stakeholder)

Stakeholders also discussed the barriers which impacted families accessing support, namely reluctance to seek help due to fear of stigma and judgement and a lack of access to wider support services due to high demand. Stakeholders recognised young people and families experiencing parental imprisonment faced stigma from a range of sources including school peers, service providers, and the media which meant *"it is difficult for families and young people to talk about their situation"* (P3, stakeholder). This stigma meant that families did not *"really know where to turn"* (P3, stakeholder) and *"there's a lot of closed doors and there's a lot of isolation and that can breed a lot of worry and anxiety"* (P3, stakeholder). As one grandparent described *"it's hard...and we didn't know how to go about getting help"* (P7, parent/carers group). In addition, stakeholders described families having varied and sometimes complex needs, which would require additional external support but accessing this support for families was sometimes very challenging. This was particularly the case in accessing CAMHS services where there were high caseloads and long waiting times, meaning many children and young people could not access support. This led to *"parents who are really, really frustrated...they feel like they've been pushed away and they've had no support whatsoever even though they tried to get it"* (P3, stakeholder). Stakeholders were clear that whilst Time Matters provided *"early intervention*

and emotional and wellbeing support around feelings” (P3, stakeholder) they should not be seen as a replacement for CAMHS support. P1 described some positive links they had begun to build with clinical psychologists at NHS MerseyCare but strengthening links with NHS services was a potential improvement which is discussed in greater detail below.

3.4 How does Time Matters impact young people and their families? (outcomes)



“Bright Future Ahead”, “Peer Support”, and “Stop Press” produced by Time Matters children.

During the time period of this intervention, Time Matters had begun to implement an Outcome Star tool to measure the impact of mentoring sessions on children and young people. Prior to this, the service used a combination of individual mentor reports and qualitative feedback from young people and their parents/carers to monitor their work. Time Matters staff and mentors had received training on the Outcomes Star. There were some concerns among stakeholders that the Outcomes Star was not completely appropriate for children experiencing parental imprisonment (*it just doesn't always feel like our kids*) P1, stakeholder) and in some parts was “a little bit intrusive” (P2, stakeholder), so staff and mentors had worked together to produce an adapted version. As demonstrated in the quote below, stakeholders were also concerned that the Outcome Star was designed to demonstrate linear positive progress for children and young people but because Time Matters offered an open door service with many young people engaging for long periods of time, this did not always necessarily reflect young people’s experiences and “that up and down of everybody’s lives” (P1, stakeholder). P1 also noted that while many specialist Outcome Stars existed there was not one for children experiencing parent imprisonment and that they would be keen to develop and validate one as a service because they “know immediately the kind of areas our kids need to talk about...I know exactly what our star would look like”.

“My other issue with the Outcome Star is...it’s designed to show positive progress. You know you come in and you might be a one, and then you might end up being a three and then you might end up being ideally a five. But life isn’t like that...our kids can be, like, really content, even if the parents in prison, whatever for six weeks to six months and then have a moment where they’ve heard that...their dad’s been attacked in prison, you know, this is a genuine case that we had...and obviously their mental health just went off the rails. They didn’t go in school because there were so worried about their parents while being in prison now. If you did a star with them at that point they they would go right back to like one or zero. So my issue is like. It sometimes looks like the kids are getting worse, not better, but it’s just because you’re capturing a moment in time...it’s that up and down of everybody’s lives.” (P1, stakeholder)

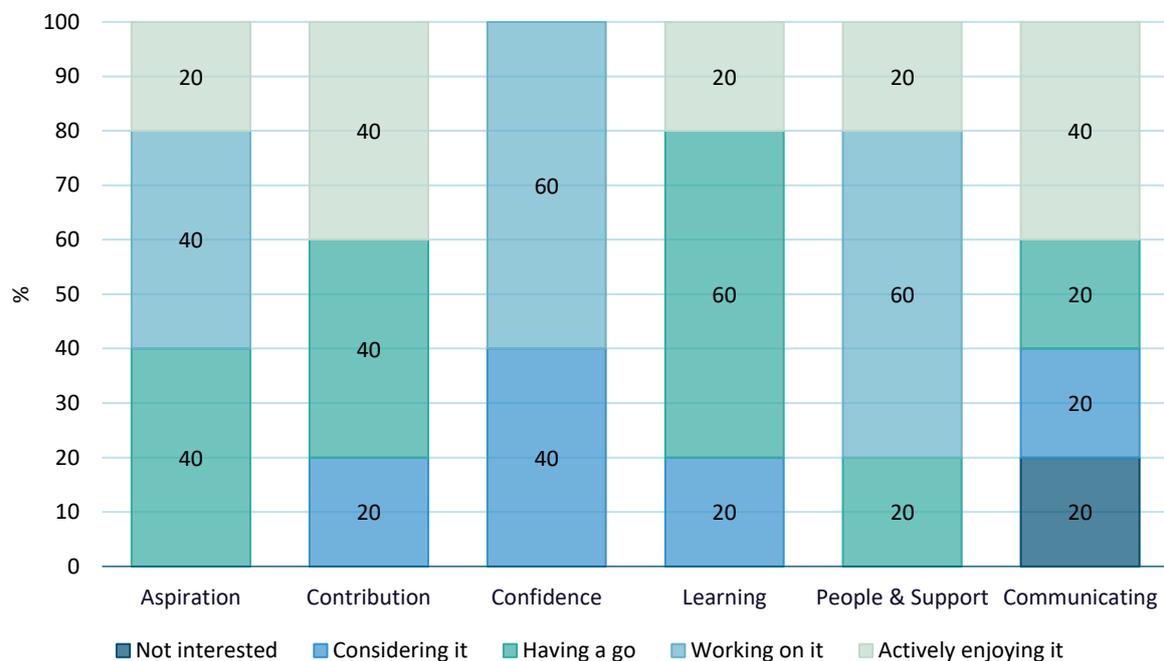
Time Matters measure outcomes using the Shooting Star™ outcomes star for children and young people. The star measures holistic outcomes and (as outlined in the box below) Time Matters staff choose the Shooting Star™ because it fit well with the work of Time Matters and focused at *“skills and personality attributes that a child might not previously considered as important”* (P1, stakeholder). Initial data collected from the Outcome Star is presented below, followed by qualitative insights from children and young people, stakeholders, and parents/carers on the impact of Time Matters.

Box 1: Outcomes measured by Time Matters using the Shooting Star™

1. **Aspiration:** Time Matters wants to challenge the negative rhetoric that children with a parent in prison will have worse educational outcomes than their peers and are at higher risk of offending by encouraging children and young people to focus on hope, goals, and aspirations for a positive future
2. **Contribution:** recognising the contribution children make through supporting each other and advocacy work.
3. **Confidence:** building confidence and encouraging children to express themselves and believe in themselves through mentoring and group activities
4. **Learning:** helping children learn new skills and access new cultural, sporting and learning experiences
5. **People and support:** core value of Time Matters UK through mentoring, family-based approach. Support, being welcome and kindness is also embedded in the Time Matters code of conduct
6. **Communicating:** helping children learn how to communicate difficult emotions, worries and anxieties and to reach out and ask for help when they need it.

Figure three below presents initial Shooting Star™ data from 13 young people who have begun one-to-one mentoring since data collection was implemented. Data was completed at their first mentoring session and shows where young people currently view themselves on their journey of change towards the six outcomes measured. The data demonstrates that at this early stage of mentoring, the majority of young people were engaging with outcomes related to “aspiration” and “people and support”, where all young people reported they were “having a go”, “working on it” or “actively enjoying it”. Increasing confidence appeared to be an important goal for young people who had just begun mentoring, with 40% “considering” it and 60% “working on it”.

Figure 3: Shooting Star Outcome data for new mentees showing stage on the journey of change, 2023 (n=13)



Impacts on children and young people

Stakeholders described how Time Matters improved young people’s mental wellbeing. The biggest initial change described by stakeholders, young people, and parents was increased confidence. Young people described becoming more able to express themselves and engage in social activities at Time Matters: *“massive difference, I went from someone that didn’t speak out or...have much confidence in myself to someone that’s pretty confident”* (P11, 12-15 years focus group). Parents could visibly see their children growing in confidence: *it’s knocked my son’s confidence where he wouldn’t speak to no-one...he’s come right out of his shell...it like the self-worth isn’t it”* (P6, parent/carers focus group). As quoted below, this growth in young people’s confidence was also seen to have a positive impact over time by teaching people to communicate effectively, to have their voice heard and be able to advocate and *“speak up for themselves in other aspects of their life”* (P1, stakeholder).

“We have support groups too...and when they come they are quiet and very sad and things and then as time goes on they get more confident and they are the first ones in the line...and their faces light up and they want to play games.” (P4, stakeholder)

“And you usually notice that those kids have been coming for years that are used to like talking about their feelings. They’re used to having their voice heard. They can articulate themselves very easily and clearly.” (P1, stakeholder)

Positive impacts included reducing young people’s isolation through having a shared experience with others in the group (*“they feel relieved that they’re not the only one, which is so therapeutic”* P1, stakeholder) and allowing them to express and work through their feelings (*“learning to talk about their feelings...it’s like the opposite of suffering alone”* P1, stakeholder). By listening to young people, stakeholders saw increases in young people’s self-esteem (*“that doesn’t mean I’m a bad person or can’t, like, achieve in life”* P1, stakeholder), their resilience and skills to cope with their experiences of

parental imprisonment and in difficult situations (*"I think a lot of people can overcome stuff once they've been able to talk to someone and been listened to"* P3, stakeholder). This is demonstrated in the examples below from parents and young people.

"I don't think we would be where we are without Time Matters. All the support...So P2 going in...let[s] them know that they're not on their own and they're not the only children. I think they're getting used to knowing that they're there to help them or you know if they don't want to talk to us about something, it's nice to know that they're there as well. We're just so grateful for all they do." (P7, parent/carers focus group)

P14: I think when I was younger I used to get dead upset whenever anyone would mention me mum but now...it has helped me to just not worry as much or not get as upset about everything...

P12: The groups also given us lots of strategies like worry boxes, books...and we've made like stress balls and we did a whole session on journalling...lots of coping strategies.

P11: Mine's more like confidence. Not really worrying so to speak and it will all be good and so it's like learning to deal with things when people say things and not losing it. So taking a step back so to speak. (12-15 years focus group)

Promoting positive behaviours, help seeking, and improving young people's wellbeing were linked to a range of positive outcomes including better engagement and performance at school and reduced risk, violence and antisocial behaviours. As one stakeholder summarised *"It's OK to ask for help. It's not your fault. You're not alone. If they can understand that, then it's a, you know, that's the start. And then all the other positive things that can happen in life, like healthy relationships and a good education. Those will come from that"* (P1, stakeholder). For example, in the quote below a teacher (P5) describes how she saw improved engagement in the classroom of children who had received weekly mentoring.

"We just have conversations with their class teachers, you know how much more chilled, focused, settled that they were. And I think happy because of having that outlet with somebody who wasn't to do with school, wasn't to do with their family...I know that they really looked forward to that session, got a lot out of it and it did transfer you know to their wider life beyond that precious time that they had...we had really positive outcomes and I think the children are still upbeat, they're still doing well so even though they haven't got that weekly hour [anymore] they're still riding that wave." (P5, stakeholder)

Finally, participants felt that Time Matters had a positive social impact through friendship: *"friendship at the core of it, because when you feel safe and you feel...a sense of belonging"* (P1, stakeholder). Young people in their teens who had been attending Time Matters since they were young children gave many positive examples of friendship and described how socialising *"got rid of the negative emotions that we feel...so that we can feel happier in the groups...and more comfortable"* (P13, 12-15 years focus group).

Draw, write and tell responses from children (aged 6-11 years)

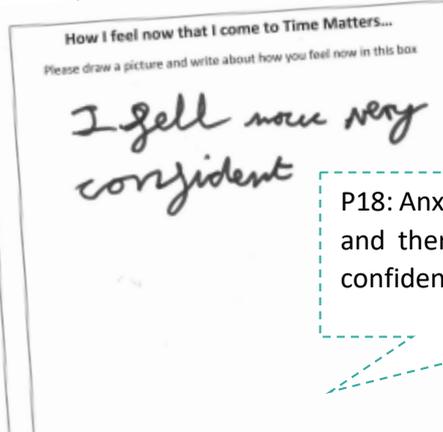
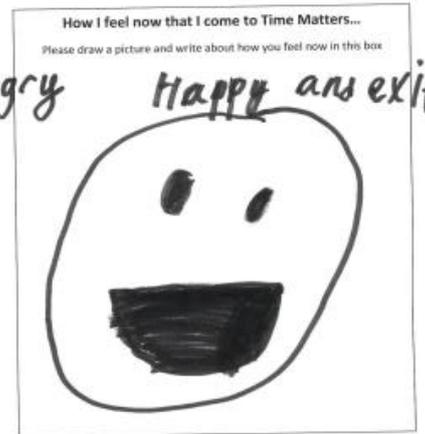
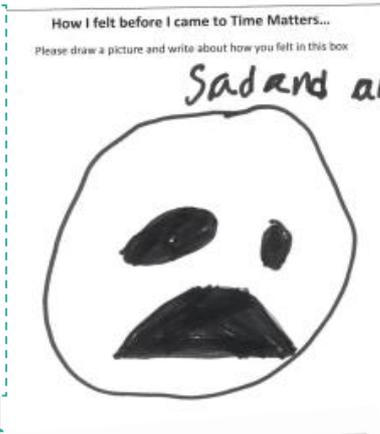
P20: Sad and angry

R2: Sad and angry and now that you've come to Time Matters you are...

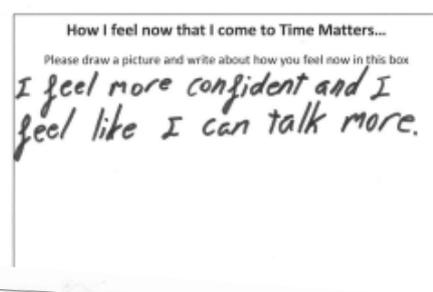
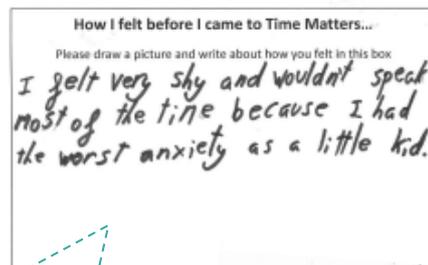
P20: Happy and excited

R2: That is brilliant. And what would you say that Time Matters does to make you happy and excited.

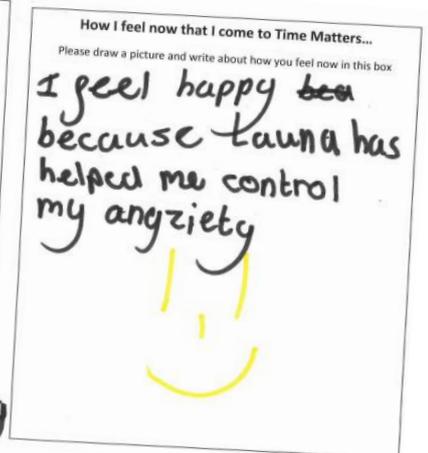
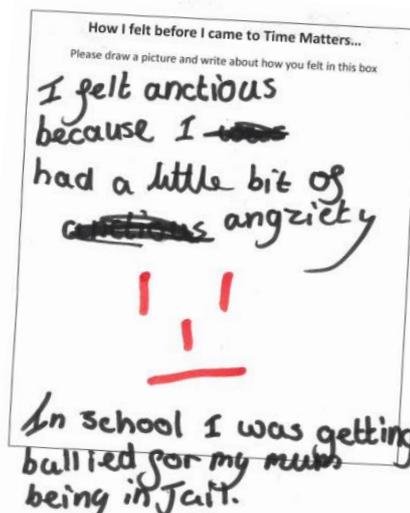
P20: They've been helping me.



P18: Anxious because I'd never met anyone and there are lots of new people...More confident...Cos I could talk about how I feel



P19: That I was shy, and I didn't speak a lot of the time...Yeah because initially I had the worst anxiety when I was a kid, and I just wouldn't speak. They've made me more confident because I feel like I can speak a lot more now.



Impacts on parents

Many parents/carers described the initial impact of engaging with Time Matters as a sense of relief. Parents often described feeling alone in supporting their children and being “*stigmatised and isolated in their communities*” (P3, stakeholder) and felt “*relief to actually meet parents who have gone through similar experiences*” (P2, stakeholder) and to see their children engaged and happy at Time Matters. Many parents/carers described this sense of relief because Time Matters made them “*feel normal*” (P8, parent/carers focus group) and reassured that when “*you are coming here, you know you’ve got support if anything goes wrong*” (P6, parent/carers focus group). The young people could also see this positive difference in their parents after they had accessed support (“*say like if we’ve had a bad morning... then afterwards...it’s just like they can get everything out*”, P14, 12-15 years focus group)

“It’s a big relief. But until we went to Time Matters, I was just I was giving up I was just thinking oh I can’t do this...But since Time Matters, we know we’ve got someone here. I’d be lost without them...Because until then we had no-one. And knowing that someone is here...and we can get support and help from them has helped my mental health like a lot. There’s not many services like this out there for families like us.” (P7, parent/carers focus group)

Participants also felt Time Matters improved relationships between parents/carers at home and in prison, and with their children. Multiple examples were given of Time Matters “*mending relationships at home or making relationships stronger at home*” (P3, stakeholder). As previously discussed, on one occasion staff at Time Matters arranged a meeting between a mum and a young person who had left the family home to repair their relationship. The example quoted below describes Time Matters staff facilitating a prison move for a dad who had been placed far away from his family to allow his children to visit him. An equally important impact from participants’ perspectives was that Time Matters allowed parents and children to come together away from the stress of their experiences of parental imprisonment, to spend time together and have fun. The quote below describes a stakeholder’s view on the impacts of a recent Pantomime trip on parents’ self-esteem and self-worth.

“One of the issues that was having an impact was their dad was in prison far away. So the children have, actually, they’ve spoke on the phone, but there was no physical contact...during the meeting with Time Matters they said they could maybe see if they could be part of and facilitate a possible move to somewhere that was, you know, a bit more accessible for the family, for the children to visit, which did happen, you know, halfway through the process. And so you know, when I spoke to the auntie she was just absolutely elated.” (P5, stakeholder)

“You stand back and watch it all and it’s magical. You know, there’s so many smiles, smiles on parents enjoying themselves. Last week at the panto, they’re all dancing with the children, you know...all the stress away. And that’s kind of magical, just giving them that really nice that, you know boost of self-esteem, self-worth and happiness. Really, that’s what we’re trying to do.” (P3, stakeholder)

Impacts on the community

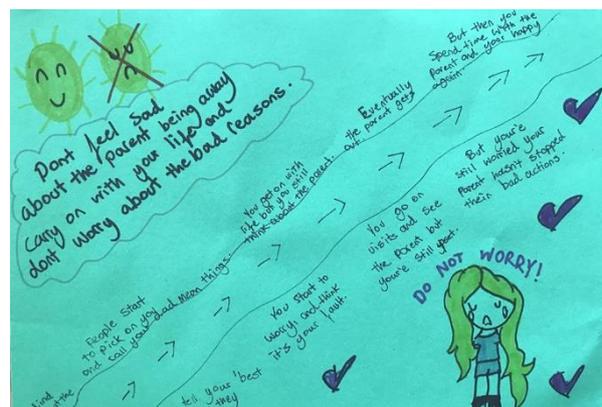
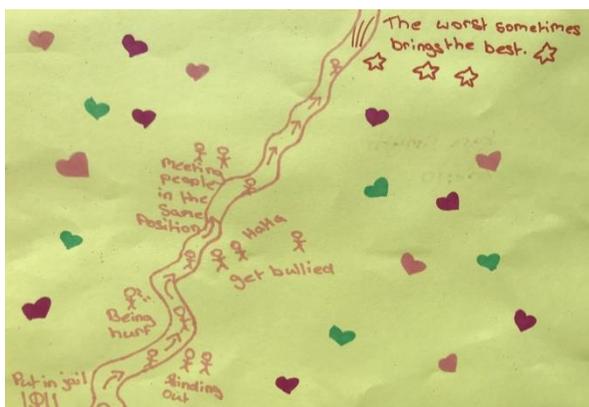
As previously described, Time Matters also undertakes a large range of awareness raising and advocacy work. Examples given included speaking at Parliament and with national organisations, workshops for professionals such as police officers and journalists, and a range of engagement activities including podcasts, radio, art exhibitions, documentaries, and plays. These activities were felt to impact the community both locally in Merseyside and nationally by tackling stigma, challenging

people’s preconceptions of parental imprisonment, and raising awareness of young people’s need for support. This activity was undertaken in partnership with young people and their families and led by their priorities. Young people valued these opportunities “to make a change” (P14, 12-15 years focus group) by raising awareness (“there’s lots of others that will have a parent in prison...if we can publicise our experiences... it will show them that there is support out there” P11, 12-15 years focus group) and tackle stigma (“people sometimes have the wrong idea about kids who’ve got parents in prison. So, we’re trying to not let people have that idea” P12, 12-15 years focus group) The first quote below describes a play based on young people’s experiences performed for a range of external service providers to challenge their preconceptions and raise awareness of how they could support young people. The second quote from a teacher (P5) shows the impact of this awareness raising work, with the teacher describing how she now felt more confident in how she could access support for children experiencing parental imprisonment.

“The play we did last year... every single scene or testimony was...an experience that one of the Time Matters kids has been through. It was absolutely amazing...We shared them with all social workers. And we invited the police, we invited schools and [P1] done a brief question time after it...and we had professionals just go oh my god, we need to change our attitude, or we need to do this, and we need to do that. And that’s all because of a young person’s voice. Because it just be so empowering, you know...and it can really bring about some change and that’s what we wanna try and do.” (P2, stakeholder)

“Knowing that there is this charity there, you know that we can signpost you know our families to that...will support the children and the family and beyond the school environment so then...we’ve got that road to go down...it enables us to be more confident with the support that we can kind of put forward to some of our families because that particular family, you know, they’re not alone. Particularly in the area that I’m working in. So, we’re 100% confident that there is an organisation there that, you know, do what they say they’re gonna do.” (P5, stakeholder)

3.5 Where does Time Matters go from here? (Improvements and sustainability)



Finally, participants were asked if there were any improvements they would like to see for Time Matters and any issues related to sustaining the programme in the future. For stakeholders, as previously discussed, the largest issue facing Time Matters was the growing demand for their service.

Stakeholders stated the need for funding and additional staff to allow them to meet this increased demand whilst maintaining the quality of their current delivery and enabling growth and innovation. Stakeholders had worked hard to expand Time Matters but admitted that the number of referrals “*can get overwhelming because we can’t close the doors...there’s referrals coming in every week...a new family and certain things they need support with*” (P3, stakeholder). Mentors were also aware that there were still large numbers of children with experience of parental imprisonment who had no source of support: “*because we’re helping more kids in, there’s so many out there with someone in prison and it affects them and Time Matters just can’t support it*” (P4, stakeholder). The part-time staff team described “*juggling three different roles*” and “*not enough hours in the day*” (P3, stakeholder).

Stakeholders described their efforts to implement more routine monitoring of their processes and outcomes (including the Outcome Star and refreshed IT systems) to enable them “*to more formally evidence the amazing stuff we are doing...so as our monitoring and evidence base grows, we will be able to hopefully attract more sustainable income*” (P1, stakeholder). Stakeholders also felt they “*had a decent team*” and were “*learning all the time...making sure we have solid foundations ... I do feel like we’ll be ready to sustain ourselves...we need to evolve more but we need time and commitment on that*” (P3, Stakeholder). However, in order to sustain the organisation in the future, stakeholders felt they needed longer-term funding rather than yearly grants (“*it would be great if we could get secured funding for say three years, if it was really decent amount of money*” P1, stakeholder) as this would allow the existing staff time to “*be this kind of strategic overview in the background*”, increase staff hours and “*retaining the staff, who are really good staff, and that’s the basis really of growth and quality*” (P3, stakeholder).

“Obviously, we’re not perfect. You need to fine tune. We’ve got heart, we’ve got drive, we’ve got creativity and vision and passion and commitment. You know, we’ve got all that, we just need maybe people who can make them decisions outside of our organisations to help with a little bit. Because it is a service which is really needed.” (P3. stakeholder)

Secondly, stakeholders felt they needed to increase their existing links and establish clear referral processes with other organisations, especially within the NHS. Stakeholders could see a clear place for their service within the NHS model of mental health delivery because “*our core values are to promote positive mental health and wellbeing*” (P3, stakeholder) and “*we’re trauma informed*” (P1, stakeholder). Stakeholders wanted to not only put more formalised referral processes in with the NHS but also would like to explore the possibility of joint commissioning arrangements with the NHS. Stakeholders recognised parental imprisonment as an adverse childhood experience and that their aim of supporting children with this experience of trauma was well aligned with early intervention mental health support.

Parents and young people were unanimously happy with the current provision. In line with the comments from stakeholders, young people’s suggested changes focused on sustaining and expanding Time Matters current provision. The location of Time Matters groups had changed several times over the years and the team were currently working to identify a new more permanent location. Both age groups expressed a desire for “*a set place*” (P14, 12-15 years focus group) which would allow them to meet in person and act as “*safe place...I can always go in there*” (P11, 12-15 years focus group). The older age group also expressed a desire to return to a regular weekly schedule for group meetings as they valued this opportunity “*to tell people what you’ve done or how you feel*” (P13, 12-15 years focus group) and “*if we have something to get off our chest, we could just get it off our chest*” (P12, 12-15 years).

4. Summary and Recommendations

As part of a range of activities to develop, promote, and sustain a whole system public health approach to violence prevention, in 2022/23 Merseyside VRP funded Time Matters. Time Matters is a Merseyside based organisation which provides support to children experiencing parental imprisonment and their families. Time Matters has an open referral policy and receives referrals from families, schools, and statutory services. Children and young people referred into the programme receive six weekly one-to-one mentoring sessions (either in school or online). Since April 2022, Time Matters has received 57 new referrals with 36 children and young people being given support and a further 10 in the process of receiving support. In the third quarter of 2022/23, 47 children and young people and 27 parents/carers accessed support at Time Matters. In addition to individual mentoring, Time Matters also provides group support sessions, social activities, and a summer residential for children and their families. Parents/carers can also access support through a parent and grandparent group and individual advice. Time Matters is also engaged in advocacy work, providing young people with the opportunity to have their voice heard and raise awareness of the experience of parental imprisonment at a local and national level. The report presented the findings from a process and outcome evaluation of Time Matters, describing the programme implementation and impacts on children, young people, and their families.

4.1 Delivery of Time Matters

Time Matters takes a family-based approach to providing support to children experiencing parental imprisonment. Stakeholders described clear aims across the four domains of the socioecological model: providing emotional support and positive experiences to individual children and young people, improving parent-child relationships, providing a safe community for people experiencing parental imprisonment, and raising societal awareness of children's experiences of parental imprisonment. The public health approach similarly highlights the importance of acting across multiple levels of the social-ecological model with interventions taking this approach more likely to sustain their efforts over time and achieve population level impact (44). Time Matters operates an open referral policy with the majority of children and young people coming from parent/carer self-referrals or schools and social services (with a smaller number coming from other statutory services). Parents/carers and children and young people described Time Matters as helping them feel they were not alone in their experiences of parental imprisonment, and many had not had access to any support prior to their referral. Their experiences concur with the wider literature, where children experiencing parental imprisonment are described as an invisible group, unidentified by agencies who could help them (4, 8). Time Matters appears to be providing vital support to these families as well as facilitating access to other services through signposting and onward referral.

Time Matters was described as having evolved significantly over the past six years, developing from a support group for children to a more comprehensive programme, including a six-week one-to-one mentoring programme, parent/carer support groups and a range of social activities. There is limited published evidence on effective interventions for children experiencing parental imprisonment but the literature available suggests whole system, family-based approaches using mentoring, school-based support, time spent with peers, and prosocial recreation are the most promising (38, 42), which fits well with the Time Matters model. However, stakeholders also described taking an individualised

approach to support which was flexible (for example, providing additional mentoring sessions if needed) and empowered children, young people, and parents/carers to choose how they engaged. Time Matters has an open-door policy, meaning young people are not formally discharged and can re-engage with the service if they need to. This approach fits well with the core principles of trauma-informed care (safety, trustworthiness, peer support, collaboration, empowerment, and responsiveness) (45) which is being increasingly endorsed in UK policy (although evidence on the effectiveness of these approaches nationally is lacking) (46).

Stakeholders, children and young people, and parents/carers identified several factors that they felt facilitated the delivery of Time Matters. Firstly, Time Matters had a clear sense of community which was built on trust, confidentiality, friendship, and shared experience. As a consequence, many participants described having engaged with the service for many years. Time Matters had recently begun peer mentoring training to allow teenagers to share their experiences with younger and newer members. A second facilitator was the mentors themselves (both employed staff and volunteers) who brought commitment, passion, and a range of experiences of parental imprisonment. Children and young people valued their mentors because they were easy to talk to, were a reliable source of external support, and were fun. Existing evidence suggests children are better able to cope with parental imprisonment when they have social support from their environment (including talking to supportive people) (38), with a large scale UK longitudinal study reporting that having continuous access to a trusted adult in childhood can dramatically reduce the impacts of childhood adversity on mental wellbeing and adopting health harming behaviours (47). Finally, stakeholders described strong links with external organisations as a key facilitator. Time Matters had strong links with LJMU and funding from the Merseyside VRP had allowed them to foster new connections (for example, the National Probation Service, courts, and Style Prison), share their work, and gain more referrals. However, stakeholders also expressed a desire to strengthen their links with local NHS services through formal referral processes and exploring the possibility of joint commissioning arrangements in the future.

The main barrier to sustaining implementation of Time Matters was funding. Time Matters had grown from a small local support group to a larger organisation to meet increasing demand and a growing number of referrals. Time Matters relies on part-time staff and volunteers to deliver their programme of work. Stakeholders described a number of strategic steps taken to grow their organisation including building stronger links with partner organisations and implementing process and outcome monitoring to evidence their work. Stakeholders wanted to increase Time Matters' capacity in a way which did not compromise their current model of delivery or supportive, family-based ethos. However, stakeholders felt they lacked capacity to continue with this sustained growth and meet increasing demand without longer term funding.

Figure 4 presents a logic model of Time Matters implementation which outlines the key inputs, activities, and long and short term outcomes for children, young people, parents/carers and the wider community.

4.2 Impacts of Time Matters

A number of positive impacts of Time Matters were described for children and young people, parents/carers, and more broadly. Increased confidence was the most frequently described change for children and young people, regardless of age and the amount of time they had been engaged with Time Matters. Young people described being more able to express themselves and engage in social activities. Time Matters was also described as reducing young people's isolation, increasing young

people's ability to seek help, and improving self-esteem and coping skills. These are positive outcomes as previous studies show that children experiencing parental imprisonment often fear stigma, shame, or ostracization and avoid or lack someone to talk to about parental imprisonment which decreases their coping abilities (38, 48). Promoting positive wellbeing and help seeking was linked to a range of positive outcomes for children and young people at Time Matters including better engagement and performance at school and reduced health risk, violence, and antisocial behaviours. These outcomes align well with existing research on ACEs, for example, a Welsh cross-sectional retrospective study found that greater childhood resilience (being treated fairly, supportive childhood friends, opportunities to use abilities, access to a trusted adult, and having someone to look up to) is associated with improved health and wellbeing outcomes for children experiencing ACEs (49). Time Matters also presents a unique perspective in comparison to existing interventions for children experiencing parental imprisonment because it also has the potential to measure longer term outcomes (35, 42). Its "no closed door" discharge policy means many young people have been engaged with the programme for a considerable amount of time; the majority of the teenaged focus group had engaged with Time Matters since their early years of primary school and many examples from parents/carers discussed longer-term outcomes including educational attainment and employment. Future monitoring and evaluation should attempt to capture these longer-term outcomes.

Time Matters was equally described as reducing isolation among parents, providing them with opportunities to speak with parents going through similar experiences, and providing support when they encountered difficulties. Stakeholders and parents provided multiple examples of them mediating to improve parent-child relationships and liaising with prisons to facilitate parental contact (for example prison moves or home leave). Social activities also allowed parents/carers and their children to spend time together away from the stress of their experiences and have fun. Previous research highlights that parents/carers providing care to children with an imprisoned parent are likely to face emotional, psychological, and financial difficulties which can put stress on their parental relationships due to reduced parenting confidence and low self-esteem (50).

Time Matters also engaged in a range of advocacy work to try and challenge stereotypes around parental imprisonment and raise awareness of young people's need for support. This is reflected in the growing number of referrals, with Time Matters having 57 children and young people referred since April 2022. Children and young people valued these opportunities to make positive changes, share their experiences, and tackle stigma. The United Nations recognises that children and young people have the right to be heard on matters that affect them and that collective action by children and young people increases their capacity to make a difference in their communities and drive change (51).

Whilst this evaluation was being undertaken, Time Matters had begun to implement an Outcome Star Tool to measure the impact on children and young people. Time Matters staff and mentors had worked to adapt the star, all staff and volunteers had received training, and mentors had begun using the Outcome Star with their mentees. Stakeholders also noted the lack of a specific Outcome Star for children experiencing parental imprisonment and were keen to develop and validate their own in the future. Monitoring of Outcome Star data in the future could provide further evidence of the impact of Time Matters on children and young people. However, stakeholders expressed caution that young peoples' experience of parental imprisonment did not always progress on an uninterrupted upwards trajectory, highlighting the need for continued qualitative monitoring to provide context to young people's scores.

4.3 Conclusion

This evaluation has demonstrated the impact of Time Matters, working in partnership with Merseyside VRP, for children and young people experiencing parental imprisonment and their parents/carers. Children and young people experiencing parental imprisonment often lack formal support and Time Matters fills a clear gap in service provision across Merseyside. Time Matters provides a good example of a public health approach to supporting children experiencing parental imprisonment with service provision that is trauma-informed and works at multiple socio-ecological levels to improve the health and wellbeing of children and their families. Funding through Merseyside VRP has allowed Time Matters to continue to provide this support, with evidence of increased referrals and expansion in their provision over the past 12 months. The evaluation found positive impacts for children and young people including increased confidence and self-esteem, reduced isolation, better emotional regulation, and improved help-seeking and coping skills. The findings also demonstrate reduced isolation among parents/carers, improved family relationships, and greater awareness of the needs of children experiencing parental imprisonment through advocacy work. Time Matters are working to implement more outcome measures (including Outcome Star) and, along with Merseyside VRP, should continue to monitor these outcomes. Further work with Time Matters is required to enable them to sustain their high-quality provision and allow them to continue to provide a safe, friendly, and trusted place of support for children experiencing parental imprisonment.

4.4 Recommendations

- Time Matters provides children, young people, and their parents/carers with a combination of one-to-one mentoring, group support, and positive social activities. This model of provision was universally well received by participants and qualitative data suggests positive outcomes for children, young people, and their families. This model of provision should continue.
- Time Matters delivers a package of care which includes “*three-pronged*” or “*sandwich*” structured mentoring sessions over six weeks. The Time Matters programme has been developed directly from young people’s experiences and aims to achieve outcomes across the socio-ecological model. Given the lack of published evidence on effective interventions for children experiencing parental imprisonment, ongoing monitoring work should continue, and efforts should be made to share the Time Matters model as an example of best practice.
- Young people enjoyed the opportunities to take part in advocacy work which allowed them to have their voice heard and raise awareness of their experiences. Time Matters should be supported to explore the role that young people can play in delivering ongoing training to partners across the Merseyside VRP to raise awareness of how to support young people experiencing parental imprisonment.
- Volunteer mentors were an important part of the Time Matters model who brought varied experience and were positively received by children, young people, and their parents. Time Matters should be supported to expand their mentor training programme to ensure peer support for children across Merseyside.
- Time Matters has benefitted from partnership with the Merseyside VRP through connections to new partner organisations and increased referrals. Further support should be provided to enable

them to continue building these partnerships, particularly with the NHS as Time Matters is well placed to identify young people in need of mental health support.

- Young people expressed a desire for a fixed base for Time Matters group activities as the organization has experienced several location changes in recent years. Partnerships with existing youth organisations at Merseyside VRP could be used to support Time Matters in finding locations that suit their needs.
- Time Matters has shown extremely positive progress in strategically developing their organisation to meet a growing number of referrals. However, stakeholders were concerned that they could not sustain their current provision, quality of support, and ethos without more paid staff. Time Matters requires longer-term funding to allow them to embed current changes and expand to meet demand.
- Time Matters should continue collection of Outcome Star data and qualitative feedback to allow them to demonstrate and monitor the impact of their work on children, young people, and parents/carers. This should include putting in place systems to allow them to capture longer term impacts for children/young people as retention of families for prolonged time periods is a unique and positive aspect of their provision which should be evidenced.
- Time Matters should consider developing and validating a parental imprisonment Outcomes Star in partnership with children and young people and their parents/carers. This tool has the potential to inform evaluation efforts nationally and could provide an additional source of revenue. Merseyside VRP should implement an independent pilot feasibility study of this tool, with a view to progressing to an impact evaluation of Time Matters. This work could inform national approaches to supporting children experiencing parental imprisonment.



“In life you should always look up high and not low” by Time Matters child (Female, aged 10)

Figure 4: Logic Model of Time Matters implementation



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