

Supporting fathers in Inverness prison – with Peep Progression Pathway

by Gillian Forbes, Highland Council Peep co-ordinator & Mairianne Nairn, CALA family support co-ordinator



“I’ve really enjoyed the course, it’s made me feel more confident in being a first time dad and I have discovered lots of activities me and my son can do together.”

left to right: Mairianne Nairn (family support project co-ordinator, CALA), Conor (Parent), Stephen Coyle (Prison Governor), Scott (Parent) and Gillian Forbes (Peep co-ordinator for Highland Council)

Peep Learning Together sessions, which supports parents with their young child’s learning, have been running in the Highlands for a number of years, with 62 practitioners trained so far. However, the programme has taken a new step forward and has successfully been introduced into Inverness Prison through a partnership with The Highland Council, Care and Learning Alliance (CALA) and Scottish Prison Service. Two fathers have graduated with nationally recognised SCQF level 4 qualifications through the programme. This is the first Peep Progression Pathway group (i.e. including parent qualification units) to be delivered within a Prison in the whole of the UK, and the first Pathway for the Highlands.

Two Peep-trained practitioners, one from [Highland Council](#) and another from Care and Learning Alliance, built on CALA’s existing Prison Service links, delivering supportive group work to families with a member in remand. This led to discussions with the Prison’s Family Contact officer, who had daily contact with the inmates, about using the Peep Progression Pathway units.

Planning – and overcoming barriers

Initially we had to look at logistics: how many inmates we could have within the sessions, timings of the group, if it was viable to have the children present; and content: which developmental stage and strand/s of learning we would focus on for their Pathway portfolio.

Duration: We ran 13 weekly hour-long sessions with the families (10-11am) followed by an additional 30 mins for the dads to work on their portfolios. For some families, it was too far or complicated for them attend, which resulted in one inmate withdrawing from the programme.

Content: Due to the age of the children that were going to attend the sessions, we decided to give the families a taste of the entire Peep Learning Together programme so opted to complete Early Child Development portfolios. Two of the dads opted to complete at SCQF level 3 and one at level 4.

Retention: Given Inverness Prison is a short-stay setting and is over-crowded, we had several issues regarding transfer of inmates. However after further discussions with and support from senior managers this was rectified and any transfer of candidates that were completing the Pathway were put on hold until after the course was completed.

Engagement: Over the course of the 13 weeks, we could see the dads growing in confidence and get really involved within the sessions. On assessment of one of the portfolios, it was decided that one of the level 3 portfolios could reach level 4 with a small amount of additional work, which the dad was really keen to do as this was his first recognised qualification. Around seven weeks into the course, one of the dads had to be transferred due to personal circumstances; however, this did not impact on the dynamics of the group.

Outcomes

The two remaining dads that completed the Pathway were delighted with the outcome and were very appreciative to both practitioners involved. They both gave positive feedback and one of the dads is keen to progress on to level 5, while the other dad was due for release two weeks after the pathway finished.

- “I gained useful skills through the programme that will help me day-to-day when I’ve been released from prison. It gave me a better understanding of parenting and what can help my child.” Parent
- Inverness Prison Governor, Stephen Coyle was also very pleased with the results of the programme and said: “It has given the fathers in our care the skills and confidence to shape play in a way which is fun yet maximises the benefits to their children, whilst strengthening the bonds in the wider family group. We are delighted this work will be ongoing with a new course starting in September.”

Given this was the first Pathway for both practitioners, it has been a highlight for both involved. It has developed and strengthened joint working relationships further, with the recognition of the Prison Governor asking us to complete further Peep Progression Pathway groups.