

Site

HMP/YOI Hindley

Name of project / initiative

Autism Visits

Overview

Prison can put real strain on family relationships, with adverse impacts for all concerned, while maintaining strong family links can play an important role in helping reduce someone's risk of reoffending after release. Visits are an important part of that, but can be a challenging experience for family members, in particular for children, and especially for children with autism. Led by an Officer with a keen interest in the area, we have started regular (monthly) visits specifically for families with children with autism. Our approach is informed by research and draws on that taken by [HMP Maghaberry](#) (which won the 2021 Ruth Mann Trophy). Numbers on the visits are kept low, visits staff have been trained about autism, and ahead of each visit are briefed on each of the children due to attend and specific "triggers" for them (which the child's family note in an "autism passport"). The visits room is adapted to the needs of the children, including sensory toys, a calming (artificial) fish tank, and soft furnishings, and the children are given a short guide before attending, written in a child-centric fashion, to help prepare them for the experience.

Longevity

The first visit took place in 2022.

Benefits

The impact has been profound. To quote one prisoner; 'my family and I really valued this and it was the best experience I have had in prison. It gives me goosebumps just thinking about the day we had and the special time I had with my children in a less stressful way.

Uniqueness

We believe that this is the only initiative of its kind currently operating in England and Wales – although it draws on the approach taken at HMP Maghaberry.

Applicability

This approach could be applied in any prison across the custodial estate.

Requirements

It does require a small investment in materials (including toys and furnishings) children, and some training for visits staff. Most of all it needs the leadership of a committed staff member.

For more information:

Contact: Officer Nick Cooper, Autism visits lead – Nicholas.Cooper1@justice.gov.uk
See also: [KnowX.uk/Hindley-RMT22\(1\).pdf](#) [Autism passports (for parents to complete)];
and [KnowX.uk/Hindley-RMT22\(2\).pdf](#) [Guidance for visiting children]

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