

AUGUST 2017

This report is based on an independent evaluation carried out by qualified researchers using a mixture of quantitative and qualitative research methods.

ABOUT PRISON VOICEMAIL

Launched in October 2015, the Prison Voicemail service aims to facilitate more frequent communication between prisoners and social contacts outside of prison through the exchange of voicemails. It is currently offered in 100 prisons across England and Wales.

As of August, 2,138 people hold an active account, meaning over 4,000 people (prisoners and their contacts) have use of the service.

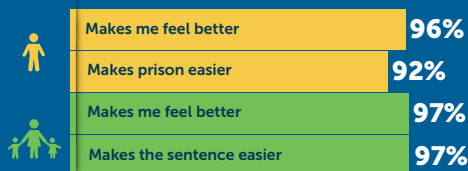
This research was designed and carried out by Lauren Mumby and Professor Todd Hogue of the University of Lincoln.

AREAS OF IMPACT

HEALTH & WELLBEING



A clear sense that Prison Voicemail was used to improve health and wellbeing within prisoners and their families.



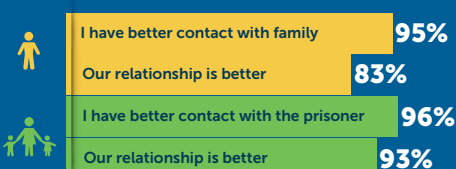
"Some days he's felt down in there so but in prison he can't show emotion so he'll listen to voicemail and he says that listening to me at the time, he says it puts a smile on his face and lifts his spirits." (Interview 5)

- Helps to relieve some of the pain and challenges of imprisonment on families and prisoners
- Helps prisoners to be less worried about family and vice-versa;
- Provides a sense of normality through a challenging situation. It has taken away some uncertainty and given back some control.
- For some, it became a way of helping to manage their mental health.
- Prison Voicemail also increases feelings of positivity.

RELATIONSHIPS & SOCIAL TIES



It was apparent that Prison Voicemail increases contact and ties with people in prison and their families.



"My daughter, she's not long turned 9. If she's having one of those days where she's been naughty and sort of kicking off, I'll say, 'right I'm ringing your Dad'. Obviously I'm not talking to him but he can still hear the gist of the conversation that we're having and he still feels part of the family and that he's still very much important when it comes to discipline and ground rules . . . keeps him part of the family circle." (Interview 9)

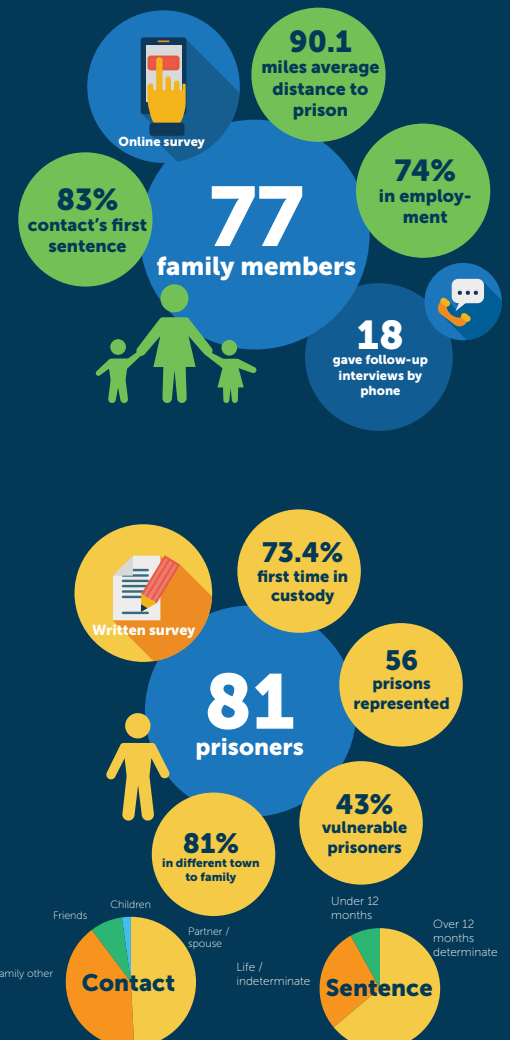
- Prison Voicemail helped maintain feelings of connection between people in prison and families in the outside world.
- Particularly for families who work during the day, often when prisoners had the best chance of being able to use a phone
- It has demonstrated the ability to support the involvement in family rituals, to share family events and good news
- Prison Voicemail was particularly important when children were present in the family unit. It was used to share positive updates by both parents and children
- One family also demonstrated using it to show to their son that life is better outside of prison by way of encouraging him to stay out of trouble

AT A GLANCE

- 96% of prisoners said voicemail **makes them feel better.**
- 95% of prisoners said voicemail **helps them have better contact.**
- 83% of prisoners said **relationships are better because of voicemail.**
- 63% of prisoners said voicemails **help them to behave better in prison.**
- 97% of families said voicemails **make them feel better.**
- 93% of families said **relationships are better because of voicemail.**
- 97% of families said **voicemail is making the sentence easier.**

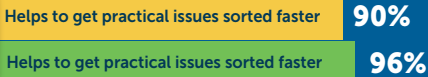
WHO WAS SURVEYED?

Survey data collected Feb - June 2017
169 surveys sent to prisoners
169 surveys sent to family members



RESOLVING PRACTICALITIES

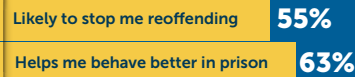
There were several examples of Prison Voicemail assisting prisoners and their families to resolve practical issues and to gather information.



"He gave me permission to talk to his probation officer. . . so I was able to put a heart to save that message and then probation could listen to the message to say I've got permission. I said how can we do this quickly coz a letter is gonna take a few days. I was able to scroll through and find the heart cos I'd marked it and she was able to listen to it there and then." (Interview 7).

BEHAVIOUR

Some indications from prisoners and families that voicemails could positively affect behaviour.



"We wanted to show by communications that life is still going on outside . . . trying to show him that outside is good and its worth not getting into trouble for. In the world outside we are still cracking on with life, there are some highlights and these are the bits you could be enjoying when you come out." (Interview 15).

ACCESSIBILITY

The fact that messages could be left at any time seemed particularly valued by participants.

"It's really handy to be able to leave messages at any time of the day for him to be able to pick up. . . it's very good if you think of something at six o'clock at lock up time, you can leave a message and then he'll listen to it in the morning." (Interview 7).

- Families also valued being able to replay their messages at any time.
- Prison Voicemail can be used anywhere and the actual practical use is discrete.
- More specifically, the fact that Prison Voicemail could be used abroad was also incredibly valuable to families.

SURVEY RESPONSES

A graphical representation of the results of the evaluation statements section of the survey. Positive responses indicate favourable views (agree or slightly agree) to using Prison Voicemail with the exception of statement three which was a reversed scale.

81 PRISONERS



Prison Voicemail...

77 FAMILIES



INTERVIEWS & COMMENTS

There was a clear sense that Prison Voicemail was used to improve health and wellbeing for prisoners and their families.

“Just keeping in contact with him, making sure he knows he’s loved and missed . . . if he can’t phone me at least I can tell him every day that I love him . . . it does make you feel happy. Even though they’re in prison they still need to know that they’re loved and wanted.” (Interview 5).

“It helped loads, the fact he was brutally taken away from us, we never ever been separated before the three of us so it was a shock, it provide us with emotional support to know we can leave him messages at any time . . . it helped us tremendously, it was like a little straw we could grab”. (Interview 2)

“It was like a little straw we could grab”

“It’s definitely helped take some of the stress out of the situation.” (Interview 3)

‘Since we found out about the service, we have used it constantly. It has been absolutely brilliant for myself and wife to keep in contact everyday between our main phone calls and visits. Thank you, it has made my sentence a lot easier to deal with’. (Prisoner survey)

It reduced worry on both sides...

‘It gives peace of mind for both parties’. (Prisoner survey)

“Its particularly useful if I’m gonna be out because if he can’t get hold of me then he panics. I leave a message and he knows I’m fine, I’m just not at home. . . He’s not going to panic if he can’t get through to me.” (Interview 17).

“He knows I’m fine... he’s not going to panic...”

...and provided a sense of normality.

“Its lovely because it sort of feels like normality and I haven’t had that before.” (Interview 3)

“It keeps me in sort of you know, control of leaving him messages because I’ve got bad OCD and when I’m having a bad day, I can just ring up and say I’m missing him and everything is really good. I’m glad I set it up.” (Interview 8)

“People don’t realise you’re just relying on them to call and if you don’t get that call, your mind goes all over the place . . . so by leaving a message it feels sort of like normal life in a surreal situation.” (Interview 3)

It increases feelings of positivity.

“I feel very happy and excited because I’m managing to leave him a message and I haven’t got to wait.” (Interview 13)

“The voicemail system introduces a little novelty and excitement into our day as it means both parties can receive the surprise of someone reaching out to them.” (Prisoner survey).

It was clear that Prison Voicemail increases contact and ties with people in prison and their families.

“I’m at the mercy of when he can get to the telephone before we started using and if I was going to hospital and if there was other important information I needed to get to him, I just couldn’t do that before . . . it’s another way of keeping on contact with him and letting him know what’s going on because we’re away from each other.” (Interview 3)

“It’s an added way to keep in touch. More than anything we use Prison Voicemail 2-3 times/day.” (Interview 9)

‘A helpful and meaningful way to enable users to stay in contact and develop bonds with those they care about.’ (Prisoner survey).

It was particularly useful where children were present in the family unit.

“I think he likes listening to voicemails from the kids, so they’re his nieces. He enjoys that because if he calls they don’t really talk openly on the phone but on voicemail they leave him loads of silly messages like what they’ve been up to at school, what they’ve watched for dinner, silly things but it makes him feel like he’s watching them grow”. (Interview 6)

“...it makes him feel like he’s watching them grow.”

“My daughter, she’s not long turned 9. If she’s having one of those days where she’s been naughty and sort of kicking off, I’ll say, ‘right I’m ringing your Dad’. Obviously I’m not talking to him but he can still hear the gist of the conversation that we’re having and he still feels part of the family and that he’s still very much important when it comes to discipline and ground rules . . . keeps him part of the family circle.” (Interview 9).

‘Just like to say thank you, my wife really enjoys the service and she often captures my youngest (5-month old girl) first words which is simply amazing’. (Prisoner survey)

PERSONAL STORIES

Julie Interview 3

- **Uses Prison Voicemail to communicate with her partner when she is in hospital**
- **Feels able to go on holiday for the first time in 6 years due to Prison Voicemail**

Julie communicates with her partner in prison. She described how Prison Voicemail helped “take some of the stress out of the situation”. She described how she has regular hospital appointments but prior to Prison Voicemail, she was at the “mercy of when he could get to the telephone” and therefore could not always tell her partner what was happening when she was away from home.

She went onto describe how she has not had a holiday in 6 years but because of Prison Voicemail she now feels she can because she will be able to use Prison Voicemail to let her partner know she has arrived safely, even if its late, and he can pick up the message at any time.

Julie said Prison Voicemail has given her peace of mind and helps she and her partner to, “safeguard ourselves against any problems”. She said it has provided them with some feelings of normality that she hasn’t had before.

Kirsty Interview 13

- **Partner uses Prison Voicemail to help manage his mental health**
- **Partner uses Prison Voicemail to ask her to help him with things**

Kirsty said Prison Voicemail has been fantastic for both her and her partner. She explained that he sometimes struggles with self-harm and finds it hard to express himself. However, when he leaves a message, he is able to express himself. She said this has definitely helped to reduce his self-harm. She said sometimes it can be hard to listen to his messages if he is having a difficult time but there are happy ones and good ones too.

Kirsty said they also find it useful because he can let Kirsty know if there is anything that he needs such as sorting things with solicitors.

Alison Interview 15

- **Used Prison Voicemail to keep the connection with her son**
- **Used Prison Voicemail to explain to her son that the outside is good and is worth not getting into trouble for**

Alison said she used Prison Voicemail whenever something came into her head, even if was mundane. She explained that she just wanted to connect as a Mum and keep that emotional connection. She used Prison Voicemail to reiterate to her son that she loved him and would still be there for him. She said sometimes she felt like she was doing it more for herself than for him. However, he also used it if he wanted to ask his family look something up on the internet, to ask for some money to be sent in if he was running out or to confirm a visit.

Alongside this, Alison described how she also used Prison Voicemail to talk about family occasions and wanting to let her son know that life was still going on outside the prison and that outside the prison is good and worth not getting into trouble for.

Alison’s son has now been released from prison but she said the service was invaluable.