



Bedford Row Family Project

Evaluation Report

2009 – 2011

Executive Summary

In association with



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1. Bedford Row Family Project

Bedford Row Family Project is a voluntary organisation (and registered charity) based in Limerick city that supports people affected by imprisonment and who may be in need of a second chance in life. It was founded by the Franciscan Friars and Sisters of Mercy in 1999. Since 2009 the Project has supported over 130 participants per year all of whom are directly or indirectly impacted by imprisonment.

The Project operates a Hospitality Centre outside Limerick Prison and was granted its current Centre in Lower Bedford Row in 2008 by the Franciscan Friars who were departing Limerick at that time. The day-to-day running is mainly funded by the Irish Prison Service and Sisters of Mercy although these are not sufficient to cover all of the costs. The shortfall is funded through smaller statutory grants and diverse charitable sources.

Bedford Row Family Project seeks to enhance family relationships, offers routes to empowerment and allows people the ability to establish a sense of safety, identity, belonging and optimism. The Project recognises that families are important and particularly important to prisoners as they can support and encourage the rehabilitation process. Families can provide emotional support, ensure children are safe and secure and provide a home upon release from prison. Extended families often provide individual assistance e.g. help to find work financial assistance e.g. buying a bus/train ticket to visit a loved one in prison etc. All of these supports help to reduce the risk of re-offending.

Participants engaging in Bedford Row have improved their lives with 6 people referencing a break with imprisonment over one year (2011) due to the interventions offered by Bedford Row Family Project during Social Return on Investment (SROI) analysis. Many families stated that Bedford Row was the only agency that they felt that they could engage with on a variety of issues concerning suicide ideation, loss, addiction, protection of children affected by imprisonment, and general overall well-being. Families engaging with Bedford Row Family Project have offered the following views of the project:

- *“A safe place to speak about issues and concerns”.*
- *“Staff are kind and gentle”.*
- *“Other people with the same experience attend and work in Bedford Row”.*
- *“Very friendly and very at ease”.*
- *“Listening means a lot”.*
- *“My son has an open door to the services in Bedford Row”.*
- *“My partner also attended – we both benefit from individual and a group sessions”.*
- *“Family meetings in a safe environment, there is nowhere else like Bedford Row”.*
- *“Gave my daughter the chance to take part in an after school group”.*

Bedford Row Family Project works by engaging informally with people who have experienced prison or who have been affected by imprisonment. The Hospitality Centre is crucial to this initial engagement. Over time, and as trust is built, the Project offers intensive person centred support including one to one counselling, individual play therapy for children, groups for children and teens, life skills training, women and men’s support groups, Christmas and Summer events, day trips, and training/capacity building in family support and crisis intervention.

Staff operate both onsite and offsite. The Project's two centres (one outside Limerick Prison and one in Lower Bedford Row) are utilised to the full and outreach type services in the community and in family homes are also available. Through these diverse engagements on-going emotional and practical support is received from staff, volunteers and sessional workers.

The majority of the benefit comes from engaging with families to break the cycle of imprisonment, such as:

- Improved self-confidence, self-esteem and social skills.
- Reduced risk of offending and homelessness.
- Reduced risk of intergenerational imprisonment.
- Improved long-term health including mental and physical health.

2. Choosing SROI

Bedford Row Family Project commissioned Gauge Ireland to conduct an evaluative Social Return on Investment (SROI) analysis in order to quantify the social value created by the Project over the three year period 2009-2011.

Gauge Ireland is a social enterprise business which helps organisations to evaluate and measure the outcomes of an organisation's work. Gauge shows the value and demonstrates the social impact. Gauge works in the Third, Philanthropy, Public and Private sectors across Ireland.

In choosing SROI Bedford Row sought to augment traditional qualitative evaluation methods by affording a monetary value to the day-to-day work of the organisation and by doing so this would:

- i) Support and challenge the Project in assessing the effectiveness of its unique engagement and support methods.
- ii) Provide vital information to prospective partners in terms of whether or not the Project is good value for money invested i.e. the value of the service to existing and new funders, and
- iii) Propose ways in which Bedford Row might improve its data management systems to enable staff to carry out future SROI analysis in house.

This SROI gathered interview and survey data about progression of participants and other stakeholder groups since 2009, and these were used as evidence to support the analysis. Progression can mean children remaining within the family unit and not entering care, engagement with an addiction service, dealing appropriately with an abusive relationship, or non-return to prison.

3. Background

Hereunder is a brief background and rationale of Bedford Row and its methods. The main body of the report offers a more extensive framing of the Project in recent and current policy context in Limerick and Ireland.

The Project commenced in 1999 following a research study conducted by the Franciscan Friars and Mercy Sisters in collaboration with statutory and voluntary organisations based in the Limerick area which focused on 'unmet needs'. Families of prisoners were identified as a group that suffered a significant negative impact in their lives as well as, often, a difficulty in engaging with services. It was also noted that the general public was mainly unaware of the gaps in services for families affected by imprisonment. Following the completion of this research the Franciscan Friars and the Sisters of Mercy made initial funding for the Project available.

Listening was identified as a key method of inculcating a culture of compassion and respect for individuals and their families. Individual family members were supported to re-build self-esteem, confidence and resilience at their own time and pace. The Project encouraged and supported families to address and understand challenges which reoccur regularly throughout their lives.

Encouraged by staff, families of prisoners soon got involved in running the Hospitality Centre, located in a prefab building, known as the 'search hut' outside Limerick Prison. Family members were engaged firstly on a voluntary basis and later on a part-time paid basis. Peer support groups for families affected by imprisonment were soon established and these groups, the corner stone of all support work in the Project, continue to this day. This results in a synergy of the direct experience of imprisonment and the professional qualifications necessary to maintain good boundaries at all times in the work.

Between 2002 and 2008 two significant events were held that put the current work of the Project in context. In 2005, Bedford Row hosted a major international conference in University of Limerick entitled '*Help is at Hand*', and in 2006/2007 research was undertaken which resulted in the launching, in 2008, of the Research document; '*Voices of Families Affected by Imprisonment*'. These were of great benefit to the Project in deciding the direction of future work and how it could be more effective.

The governance of Bedford Row is covered in the main report. The promotion of a culture of safety and trust between the Board, the staff and focus group in general has always been a goal and it is considered important to 'model', at staff and Board level, what the Project desires for families that access its services.

Similarly, the layout and décor of both the Hospitality Centre outside Limerick Prison and the Centre in Lower Bedford Row reflects the ethos and culture of the organisation and is inviting and trusting in nature. As the 'first contact' is seen as very important in building trusting relationships a genuine welcome, warmth, and sense of reassurance are offered.

4. Current Challenges

Bedford Row Family Project today faces a number of challenges. The Project operates in a climate of constant change and has done so over the last number of years. These challenges included:

- Reduced state funding in general including restructuring of Limerick Regeneration Project.
- On-going challenges with respect to drug misuse in Limerick and Ireland.
- Stigma and negative public perception of the prison community and their families.
- The downturn in the economy leading to less employment opportunities.
- Competition amongst “Not for Profit” organisations for donations.

One of the aims of this Evaluation is to assist the Project in addressing these and other significant challenges in future years.

5. Conclusions

Bedford Row Family Project identified the following key stated outcomes for the SROI analysis to address/evaluate (these are expanded upon in the main body of the report). Primary and secondary research was undertaken with principal stakeholders of whom the families were of paramount importance. Desk research was also undertaken.

Key Stated Outcomes:

- Measure and quantify social and economic outcomes of the Project.
- Record and quantify the views of key stakeholders.
- Understand and value outcomes for participants.
- Put a financial value on social outcomes.
- Understand the investment by, and the impact on all stakeholder groups.
- Make recommendations on how Bedford Row can plan for the future needs of all stakeholder groups.

SROI measures the *social impact* generated by Bedford Row in:

- Enhancing family supports.
- Building family relationships.
- Offering routes to empowerment.
- Reinforcing people’s ability to establish a sense of safety, identity, belonging and optimism.

This study demonstrates that the range of interventions and services offered by Bedford Row Family Project are cost effective. The SROI analysis estimates the total value of benefits to key stakeholders – families, extended families, support agents, Bedford Row Family Project, and Limerick Prison – to have a yearly net present value¹ of €1,302,254.13 per year given annual average input costs of €285,000 per year. This translates into an overall Social Return on Investment² (SROI) of €1,587,253.81 per year.

¹ Total present value = €4,761,761.42 over 3 years (€1,587,253.81 per year)

Net present value = Total Present Value - Total Inputs
€3,906,762.40 = €4,761,761.42 - €855,000.00

² SROI = Total Present Value / Total Inputs
€4,761,761.42 / €855,000.00 = €5.56

Briefly, this means that for every €1.00 invested in Bedford Row Family Project €5.56 of Social Return on Investment is generated. The main Report outlines in full how the above figures are arrived at.

The SROI analysis for this Project has been calculated through a clear, consistent and transparent use of financial proxies. While such analyses often do deliver positive returns which are 'greater than 1', the uniqueness of the Bedford Row combination of services makes it difficult to compare with other social projects offering similar services.

In addition to the analysis, the evaluation displayed how all stakeholders (and not only families), perceived Bedford Row to be an organisation offering a professional service delivered by warm, respectful and courteous staff through a consistent person centred approach, built on trust and belief, focusing on the needs of families affected by imprisonment and asking people to embrace change. These unique qualities assist people in making improved choices in taking control over their lives.

Significant savings are made by the state from reductions in re-offending due to the intervention of Bedford Row. Significant savings are also effected in the areas of family cohesion, social inclusion, health, education and training which have resulted in a change of direction in the lives of many affected by imprisonment.

A challenge for the Project will be to follow the recommendation that Bedford Row invests in and engages in more thorough recording methods. The main body of the report concludes that the Project is most likely being under-valued in this Evaluation due to the current methods of recording which may not be effectively measuring the full impact of the work undertaken, including the positive, longer term impacts on children of prisoners.

6. Recommendations

Hereunder is a summary of the principal recommendations offered by Gauge. Bedford Row has chosen the SROI route for this Evaluation. Implementing two of the recommendations would involve continuing this process and building it into the day-to-day work of the Project, in respect of ongoing (real-time) evaluation and action research. Other recommendations are concerned with sharing the unique skill-sets and (by now well established) organisational competencies built up over the years. The development of a formal or informal progression route for those who access the Project over a long time and, perhaps, how this could be linked to a method of assessing the contribution of Bedford Row to the wider community form the remaining recommendations. They are expanded hereunder and reproduced in full in the Main Report.

6.1 *Bedford Row attends to ongoing collection of evidence coupled with real-time use of SROI to determine impact on a day-to-day basis.*

SROI methodology offers an opportunity for community organisations to be judged on what they achieve for their stakeholders. For Bedford Row to do this it would mean that the Project would frame its work around mechanisms to consistently collect evidence of the impact of its services. A comprehensive database of participants, linked to services provided, numbers availing of services and progression over defined durations should all be collected. The database should evolve to incorporate the changing needs of clients and the dynamic nature of services provided by the Project. It is important that this information is customised to ensure that it is available for regular SROI analysis. This can be done in conjunction with Gauge and Bedford Row staff. At a practical level this would initially involve including questions relating to outcomes, indicators and value in data collection tools for stakeholders.

6.2 *Bedford Row use SROI as a tool for Action Research to enrich knowledge over the long term.*

This involves augmenting current methods of data collection to incorporate a research model i.e. directly asking participants about their experience of the service and the impacts it has generated for them or their families. It is recommended that Bedford Row consider adopting SROI as a tool which would place a *value on change*, and the effects of change for both the organisation and its stakeholder, to place an economic value on the social value which the Project creates. This would make *accounting for impact* a more straightforward task for staff.

Measurement of impact and translation into financial proxies for a much wider range of outcomes over a longer duration and looking at improvements in health and wellbeing, training or educational attainment and employability of what are now children as a result of interventions by Bedford Row would then be possible. It is essential that the value of *all* engagement and progression are fully measured. All data can be included within a database management system. In addition, to existing financial proxies developed by Gauge there still remains some work to be done around determining future quantities for progression of children through to adulthood.

6.3 *Consider how Bedford Row would share organisational competencies and skills built up over many years.*

This three year analysis has endeavoured to assign robust financial proxies through comprehensive consultation with all stakeholder groups. However it is the view of the authors that there remains additional impact to be valued especially for Bedford Row in terms of unique organisational competences, and its knowledge and skill in developing and offering services to families affected by imprisonment.

It is recommended that the Project work to share this learning in Ireland and across Europe. A potential route to move this forward includes sourcing EU funding to develop innovative programmes which will share learning and develop tools which could be used by similar organisations and their clients.

6.4 *Develop new and enhance existing informal progression routes for families/individuals in long term engagement.*

Many participants spoke about Bedford Row as if it were an extension of the family environment; a place that they could visit often and return frequently if they experienced challenges in their lives. The welcome is always warm and there is time made to ease the burden. Whilst this is a real affirmation of the hard work and effort by the staff team, it is probably not sustainable in the long-term. It should be noted that there are challenges related to creating a dependency culture amongst participants as well as how such supports might be financially supported over the longer term.

It is recommended that the Project estimate appropriate and individual timeframes over which services can be offered as well as a progression route which offers people a series of steps toward a better life and these steps should be noted when measuring outcomes. As people approach the end of their assigned time with the Project, on-going support options could be explored. This might be achieved by establishing a peer mentor scheme where volunteers could be trained to offer faded supports. A support guide or manual could also be developed and published for use by the participant and the mentor. This would free up the staff team and finance to work in developing new supports for children while providing continuity for past participants.

6.5 *Develop a tool to assess the contribution that Bedford Row Family Project makes to the wider community of families affected by imprisonment.*

Future SROI analysis and embedding should look at the local community as a stakeholder group and the impact that Bedford Row is delivering in terms of building community cohesion and social capital. There is a lot of work going on throughout Limerick in the areas of youth development and social and economic regeneration which could be attributed to some extent to the existence of the Project.

Central to the work of measuring impact for the local community will be addressing the value of the repository of local information and knowledge that is disseminated by the Project to participants. Gauge recognises that measuring impact on the community is complex and that good frameworks for doing so are few and far between. However we also know that one of the best ways to understand what difference an organisation makes to a community is to ask those in the community. This is comparable to the SROI principle of asking different stakeholder groups what value an organisation creates for them. From this engagement, Bedford Row could identify some appropriate benchmark of community change to track over time.