



### Transcript:

#### Children of Prisoners: Release

Narrator: The identities of children featured in this film have been protected. The children of prisoners face many emotional challenges when a parent is taken into custody which can have a negative impact on their development. In most cases at some point the parent will be released but it doesn't necessarily follow that life will revert to normal for the child.

#### Deborah Sharples, Community Support Worker, Partners of Prisoners

Deborah Sharples: I think with the children they have such an expectation of when somebody's coming out of prison and they think that everything's going to be okay now. Dad's coming home and we'll all be okay and really it puts a massive ... can be another massive strain on the family.

Female Speaker 1 My daughter she were like because she were used to being just me and her it ... I think she got a bit jealous that he were here because it was just us two all the time and you know when they're in prison they can ... they're not you know controlling the kids in any way are they they've no say in the life at all so when they come home if their dad does tell them do this or don't do that it's like well you know you've not been here for god knows how many months so who are you to tell me sort of thing and I think they do have that bit of jealousy.

Female Speaker 2 My youngest daughter isn't going to know no different she's only ... she's only going to know me being at home she's going to be almost a teenager when he comes home. If kids don't want him here then he's not ... he can't come back to us. It's their ... it's going to be their house they don't ... he's going away ... is away for that long that it's not going to be his home no more.

Narrator: One woman with a wealth of experience in prisoner family advocacy is Farida Anderson who started up Partners of Prisoners or POPS twenty years ago as a way of supporting families through custodial sentences after the father of her own children was imprisoned.

**Farida Anderson, Chief Executive, Partners of Prisoners**

Farida Anderson: The woman had become more independent managing the bills, managing the finances, what was his role, what was his purpose. Now that can create the friction, the friction possibilities for that are for the children too so unless we do the re-integration of somebody being released that's got massive factors for both child and family.

Narrator: Children of prisoners and especially boys are more likely to offend than other children who've been separated from their fathers. For Bev the challenges facing her son are all too real.

Female Speaker 2: I think my son's going to grow up thinking it's alright to go to jail that's ... that's all I can say. I don't know ... I don't know with [unclear 02:37] he's, he's turned him violent it's turned him from a really nice little boy to a ... he's just nasty, he spits at me and swears at me and kicks me and stuff and he never used to. But I think he's ... that's going to carry on. I don't know how to get out of this circle with him like I said with his behaviour. The school are aware of his behaviour but they say that he's really good at school but I think it's ... and I think he's going to go down the same road as his dad and end up in jail

Narrator: Although the experience of parental imprisonment can be damaging not all children are adversely affected but release brings it's own challenges.

Farida Anderson: Ironically the release bit is still an area that people don't always follow through. They always have a perception that when they leave prison life will be happily ever after. It's the one thing that you live for when you've supporting somebody in prison that they're all going to come home and live in this harmonious family and actually that's when the most help's needed and POPS tries to work on that by

referring people to agencies like Barnardo's, by Sure Start but families have to be willing for that. There's nothing worse than a forced relationship and it's much better when families are receptive to wanting the help. I mean I think that's the success of some of the third sector. They come to us with us having no statutory powers to influence or change but what we can do is when they're ready to work and change is to point them in the right direction.

Narrator: Another approach to reducing the cycle of offending is employed at Bristol Prison where men have the chance to learn and reflect on the responsibilities as a father in preparation for their eventual release.

**Natalie Leitch, Social Skills Tutor, HMP Bristol**

Natalie Leitch: They have to think about how their children might be feeling and we go quite deeply into the questions that children might have like where is dad, why isn't he here, what's he doing and just things like does he love me, does it ... because he's gone away does that mean that I've done something wrong, does it mean that he doesn't care about me, why can't I see him, when's he coming back, what's wrong with mum, why is she upset. All of that just the way it affects different people and yeah we do think quite a lot about the way children feel in that situation and that can be really quite a hard hitting time for individuals on the course. Their eyes are opened and they realise may be for the first time that what they've done and where they are now is really impacting their family.

**Christopher Allen, Learning and Skills Officer, HMP Bristol**

Christopher Allen: Quite often we see them on a big emotional journey. We've had certain prisoners in the ... a prisoner in the past that's re-engaged with his son that he lost contact with for many many years and, and actually that that contact is, is still going on now and he ... and he's showed us letters to prove it. You know again I suppose that's full awareness of his responsibility to that ... to his child he hadn't been in contact with for a long time.

Natalie Leitch: We do quite a lot of drama and role play kind of acting out different situations that might happen in a family.

[Role play situation]

*Sarah would you like to get out of that bloody bed and get yourself downstairs you're going to be late for school again. Alright, alright mum listen get off my case I'll be down in a minute.*

Natalie Leitch: The sketch about the single parent which is a mum dealing with her children on a school morning came about when we were talking about roles I think and we were thinking about how a parent or a mother's role changes when her partner's goes into prison.

[Role play situation]

*I do not need this stress first thing in the morning it is not good for us.*

Natalie Leitch: The stress of that and just all the different children's needs that are all coming on the mum.

Male Speaker 1: Everything now because of this course is focused around my partner and my child they're the most important people for me in my life and it's not I ... it's not all about me now. It really isn't about me and the responsibilities I have as a father goes a long long way.

Narrator: One of the practical parts of the course gets the prisoners to think about how they'll resume life on the outside without causing further disruption to their children.

Male Speaker 1: Myself and my partner when I finish my sentence I'm going to get ... we've talked about a period of re-integration may be shared housing accommodation and may be for a period of time, say a couple of months ... because my daughter is quite young still and I mean I don't want to throw a load of confusion her way but I mean she sees daddy once a week, once a fortnight now and I don't want to confuse her by just coming out and going full pelt back straight into the family house because it will be very confusing for her.

- Male Speaker 2: It might not be a big deal to be in prison to be banged up twenty four hours a day but the impact you're making on your family is a big deal and, and anybody can sit behind a door all day you know but the, the impact it's having on your family out there I think that's part of the sentence. That's part of the sentence it's not just being behind a door and not being able to go out when you want and stuff you know and, and I think it's important to really understand that and when I grew up I had a few people in my family who were in prison yeah and I don't know what they took from going to prison but they kept going back. It made it look to me as if it wasn't that bad prison it was like well it's just my dad's been there, my uncle's been there, everybody else has been there. I was with my mum I was fine you know but it's not until I've come in and I've [unclear 08:00] and I thought to myself it had a bigger impact on me than I realised at the time.
- Christopher Allen: They are challenged on what they've done in the past and obviously they've made mistakes but what the course focuses on is them thinking about the other people in ... within the family not just themselves all the time and also what they need to do so they don't make the same mistakes again in the future.
- Farida Anderson: If you think about it the family is the only thing and the child that will have been with that person from the point they've been arrested until the point that they're released. All other agencies only have points of intervention they are not a continuum but the family's been there all the way through and what we feel so important is is to see and harness and we think the families are the most stable factor.
- Narrator: Losing a parent to imprisonment can a life damaging event for a child but it doesn't have to be. High quality child centred visits to prison and support in the community can make an enormous difference to the life chances of the children of prisoners. Organisations involved with providing services to children will be teaming up in new ways and it's vital that they share information. Sure Start children's centres are often an excellent place for parents to access a wide range of help and support.

[End of Recording]