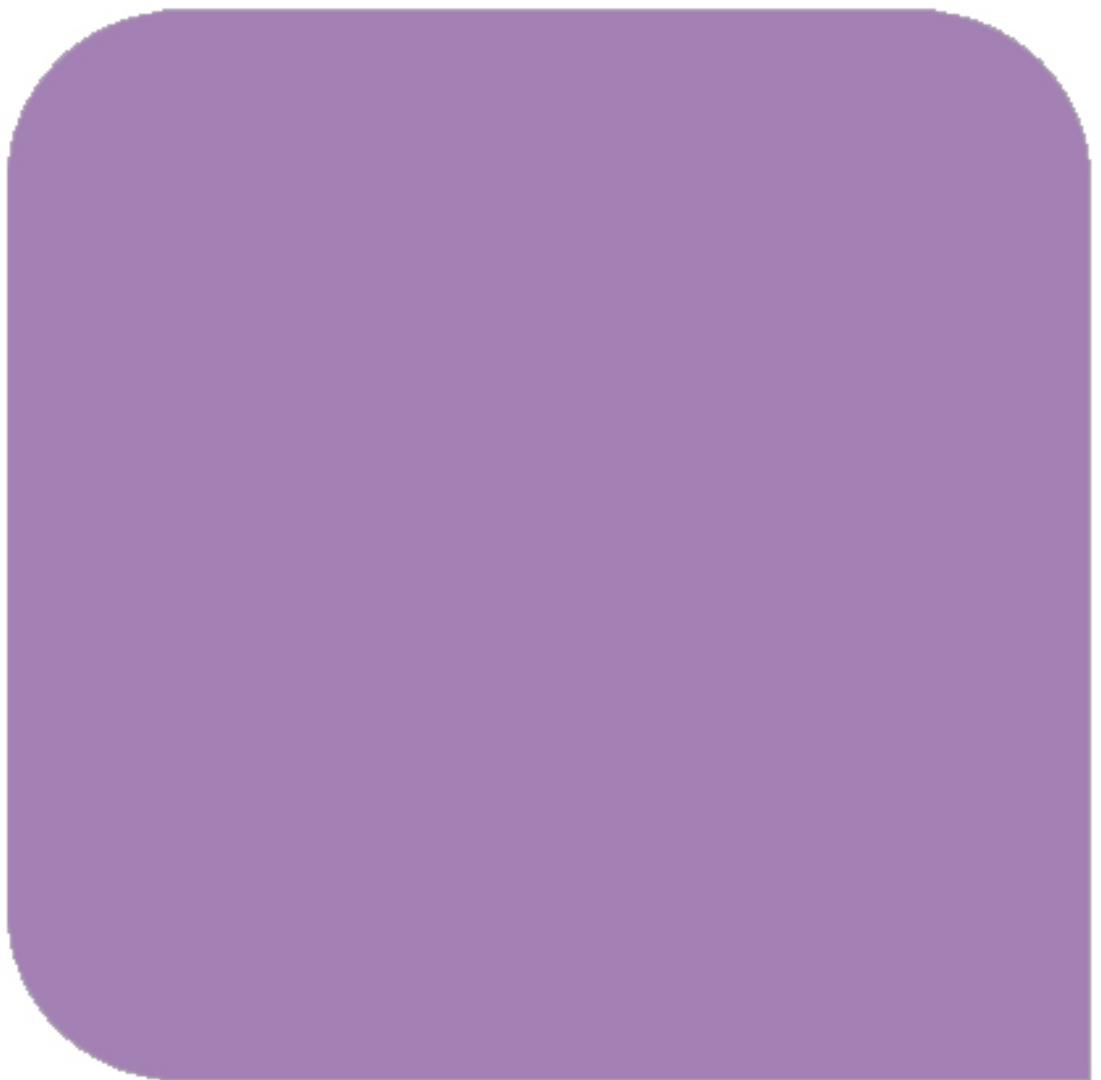


# Children of prisoners – maintaining family ties



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## Children of prisoners – maintaining family ties

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# Children of prisoners – maintaining family ties

**Published April 2008**

By Sara Lewis, Salina Bates and Joseph Murray

## Introduction

This report brings together resources and research about maintaining family ties for children of prisoners. It provides a review of literature from the past fifteen years as well as examples of practice from England, Scotland and Northern Ireland of what works to support children and their families. The findings highlight the negative impact parental imprisonment can have on children. This area of work cuts across a number of sectors and requires a multi-disciplinary readership and response if outcomes for this group of children are to be improved.

## Who is this guide for?

This guide is aimed at anyone who works with families of prisoners either directly or indirectly. This includes staff working in:

- children's trusts and teams
- the voluntary sector
- the independent sector
- schools and educational staff
- youth offending teams
- Sure Start children's centres
- health visitors
- prison and probation staff
- anyone else who might have a role to play in helping children maintain family ties, such as foster carers.

The guide also discusses the development of service delivery, and so will interest:

- inspectors for the children's services (Ofsted)
- childcare coordinators and quality assurance managers
- members of local safeguarding children boards (LSCBs)
- HM Inspectorate of Prisons.

For some children it will not be appropriate or welcome to pursue contact with an imprisoned family member. This guide seeks to provide information and resources for professionals working with children who do want to maintain

contact or where it is considered to be in the best interests of the child. In every situation, the safety and well-being of the child is paramount.

## **How will the guide benefit your practice?**

The resource guide will benefit your practice by:

- highlighting the legislative and policy background
- providing a review of the knowledge base on supporting children of prisoners
- raising awareness of the potential impact on a child with a parent in prison
- offering practical examples of where agencies have successfully supported children and their families
- supplying links and contacts to useful resources and organisations.

## **e-Learning resources**

This report also provides the evidence base for the development of a set of training tools that will shortly become available. The e-learning materials will test your knowledge of facts and figures in relation to children of prisoners, take you through the pathway from arrest to release, and provide ideas and models for developing your practice. They also bring together all the available resources in one easy-to-use online filing cabinet. The materials will be useful for a variety of practitioners working in the social, education and criminal justice sectors.

## **What this guide does not cover**

Due to the ethical restraints on involving children in focus groups, children of prisoners were not asked for their views. However, studies and organisations that have worked with and addressed the views of prisoners' children have been researched.

In this report we do not look at the effect of sibling imprisonment. The research reviewed is restricted to effects linked to parents or carers in prison. This is an area for further research.

While it is acknowledged that there are several programmes under the Safer Communities Initiative, this initiative tends to focus upon the offender rather than the family, and so it is not within the remit of this project.

## Context, background and legislative overview

There are numerous reports, guidance, legislation and documentation that cover improving outcomes for children. The group who lose a parent (or carer) to custody is a small but significant number who, for the most part, remain unnoticed and therefore unsupported. For many families this is exactly how they will want it to stay, as they are afraid of the repercussions and stigma that may result from disclosure.

Nevertheless, there is a duty of care and a duty to provide these children with the same opportunities for success as everyone else.

This section provides an overview of the context and core legislation affecting this group of children.

### Number of children affected

Not every child of a parent in prison will come into contact with services. Indeed, the majority of the estimated 162,000 children will remain unknown (2). However, numbers of children affected are not officially recorded anywhere and statutory support will only be offered if a child is currently known and deemed to be at risk or in need (see [Appendix 1](#) for detailed results of the local children safeguarding board questionnaire).

HM Prisons Inspectorate (3) found that:

- 25 per cent of female prisoners had their children's father or partner caring for their children
- 25 per cent were cared for by their grandmothers
- 29 per cent were cared for by other family members or friends
- 12 per cent were in care, with foster parents, or had been adopted.

This study was completed ten years ago and it is fair to assume that the overall numbers have increased, given the huge rise in the prison population. (3) Yet there remains no systematic way of collecting this information.

### Impact

The [literature review](#) highlights the potential emotional impact for children, and while there is no conclusive evidence of the correlation between losing a parent to prison and the adverse effects on a child, it is acknowledged that the two are inextricably linked on several levels. These include poverty, poor educational attainment, social exclusion and mental health problems.

The obvious place for children to be noticed is in school. There are numerous resources available to teachers and other school staff to help them support children but, for the most part, these resources remain unknown and unused.

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This resource is a way of bringing together everything that is available, making the information more accessible and raising awareness of a group of children whose numbers are increasing by the day.

## **Contexts – policy and legislation**

The following policy, legislation and delivery plans are 'cross-cutting'. This means there are implications and responsibilities associated for all the statutory sectors including social care, health, education and criminal justice.

### **Every Child Matters**

The Every Child Matters: Change for Children Programme (1) is the policy framework which aims to put in place a national framework to support the joining up of services so that every child can achieve the five Every Child Matters outcomes:

- Be healthy
- Stay safe
- Enjoy and achieve
- Make a positive contribution
- Achieve economic well-being.

Three of the key elements of the national framework are:

- the duty to cooperate to promote the well-being of children and young people
- the duty to make arrangements to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and young people
- the development of statutory local safeguarding children boards (LSCBs) to replace non-statutory area child protection committees (ACPCs).

Children's trusts and children's services both play a central role in trying to improve outcomes for the most vulnerable. A key measure of success will be achieving change through closing the gap between their outcomes and those of the majority of children and young people.

### **Children's Act (2004)**

The Children's Act (2004) is a piece of legislation which transforms the proposals set out in Every Child Matters, creating clear accountability for children's services, to enable better joint working and to secure a better focus on safeguarding children. The Act provides for the establishment of a Children's Commissioner and supports better integrated planning, commissioning, and delivery of children's services. The Act places a duty on local authorities to make arrangements through which key agencies co-operate to improve the well-being of children and young people and widen services' powers to pool budgets.

### **Human Rights Act 1998**

Article 8 of the Human Rights Act states that “Everyone has the right to respect for his private and family life, his home and his correspondence” (4). The Act goes on to state that:

“There shall be no interference by a public authority with the exercise of this right except such as is in accordance with the law and is necessary in a democratic society in the interests of national security, public safety or the economic well-being of the country, for the prevention of disorder or crime, for the protection of health or morals, or for the protection of the rights and freedoms of others”.

While it would seem that being in prison inevitably results in interference in maintaining family ties, it could be argued that the rights of the child and family are being ignored if they are unable to have appropriate access. Several cases have been brought by prisoners to test such a theory.

### **United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989**

This states categorically that best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration (Article 3)(5), and that they have the right to be heard and have their views taken into consideration.

Article 9 is particularly relevant and says that states shall ensure that children are not separated from their parents against their will. It goes on to say:

“States’ parties shall respect the right of the child who is separated from one or both parents to maintain personal relations and direct contact with both parents on a regular basis, except if it is contrary to the child’s best interests” (9.3).

So it is clear that the rights of the child entitles them to contact with an imprisoned parent, regardless of that imprisonment, if it is in the best interests of the child. This puts the onus on the state to ensure that this is achievable, although there is no case law to act as precedent as yet.

## **Contexts – delivery frameworks**

### **Local safeguarding children boards**

“The local children safeguarding board is the key statutory mechanism for agreeing how the relevant organisations in each local area will co-operate to safeguard and promote the welfare of children in that locality, and for ensuring the effectiveness of what they do... .Whereas the children’s trust has a wider role in planning and delivery of services, their objectives are about coordinating and ensuring the effectiveness of what their member organisations do individually and together”. (6)

It is clear that children of prisoners require a coordinated response that involves developing the interface between and across a range of services and sectors. This is particularly the case for the criminal justice, social care and education sectors, and this report goes on to highlight examples where this level of cooperation has been achieved, albeit on a practice, rather than policy or strategic, level.

### **National Offender Management Service – the children and families pathway**

“Children and families can play a significant role in supporting an offender to make and sustain changes which reduce re-offending. Many offenders’ relationships are broken or fragmented as a result of their offending and their families are left bewildered and unsupported, increasing the likelihood of intergenerational offending, mental health and financial problems”. (6)

The National Reducing Re-offending delivery plan is clear in the aim that children and families have a crucial role to play in reducing the risk of re-offending. To enable families to have this role and to enable them to visit prisons regularly, changes in the prison service will be required that move it towards a more child-centred and child-friendly reception. Several prisons have made these changes. However, the degree of change is dependent upon the individual prison governors. The result is inconsistency across prisons, which causes confusion for those visiting. If this policy was legislation rather than guidance there would be greater consistency across England and Wales.

As part of the pathway there are regional multi-agency ‘children, families and support network pathway boards’. These are composed of professionals from the statutory, voluntary and community sector who have a role to play in reducing re-offending. Some regions have had more success in developing this pathway than others. There is currently a pilot project underway in the West Midlands called Families Do Matter.

## Literature review

### Executive summary

These are the key messages from the literature review. They are grouped according to the sections identified in the practice survey.

#### *Strategy*

- The lack of a national strategy was identified and the need for the inclusion of children of prisoners as a specific sub-group into local authority Children and Young People's Plans, specifically relating to the aims of Every Child Matters.
- Young People's Plans should link directly into the Reducing Re-offending children and families pathway, and should ensure that this is an issue tackled from two different ends of the spectrum: children's services and National Offender Management Service.
- This work has a low profile and the voluntary sector is attempting to fill the gaps but provision falls very short of national coverage.
- There are some examples of a more strategic approach, and research in Scotland suggests the model adopted by the prison service is effective.
- Longitudinal studies have shown that while there is a strong association between parental imprisonment and adverse outcomes for children, it does not imply a causal effect. However, this is a vulnerable group likely to need extensive support.
- There is some concern that to provide children of prisoners with targeted services may begin to label them as offenders of the future.
- There needs to be a steer from relevant government departments to ensure a national strategy that can be translated into agreed policy and procedures across and between the sectors.

#### *Policies and procedures*

- Longitudinal studies are few and results have not been consistent. While the Cambridge study shows that parental imprisonment is a predictor of antisocial behaviour in children, this is not the case in Project Metropolitan, Sweden. However, Murray suggests this may be because children in Sweden are better protected from adverse effects through more child-friendly policies and procedures, which enable children to receive the support they need.
- The literature highlighted the lack of policies and procedures. However, there are exceptions, and models such as in Scotland and Northern Ireland, where a more cohesive response to the needs of children and offenders is encapsulated in their work to maintain family ties.

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- There are pockets of practice where there appear to have been positive outcomes, such as Ormiston covering the Eastern region of England, and some small-scale studies in the United States.
- The Gloucester Local Education Authority has a policy in place to ensure there is some communication between prison and schools, and Ormiston has produced guidance for schools to raise awareness and enable staff to better support children who are experiencing the loss of a parent to prison.
- The absence of a multi-agency approach leaves a huge gap in provision. One suggestion, echoed by several authors, is that there is a conflict between the ethos of the criminal justice and child welfare systems, and in spite of the need for greater collaboration, their priorities are too dissimilar to work effectively.
- One of the reasons for the lack of cohesion may be due to the paucity of accurate research about the numbers of children involved, and uncertainty about where responsibility would lie if systems are put into place to identify and track children who are affected.
- The overall message is a call for greater collaboration and cooperation to provide some sort of safety net for children who often remain the unseen victims of crime.

### *Funding*

- There is no mainstream provision for this work. It does not sit neatly in the remit of a particular government department or service, and consequently there is no obvious source of funding.
- At present, the voluntary sector drives the agenda for children of prisoners, and funding is traditionally short-term and often insecure. Clearly this has implications for provision and service development, and is the same across many parts of the world.
- In addition to the funding of services is the issue of economic strain on the family when a parent is imprisoned.
- Murray suggests finding ways to assist families would be a positive step and could facilitate the maintenance of family ties.

### *Partnerships*

- In Project Metropolitan, Sweden, the longitudinal study shows that children are less adversely affected by parental imprisonment than in the Cambridge study. This may be because Sweden has more family-friendly prison policies, a welfare-oriented juvenile justice system, extended social welfare system and a more sympathetic public. Perhaps this is an indication of the importance of partnerships and the strengths of working together across sectors to ensure needs of children are being met.
- Experiences in Northern Ireland and Scotland, where there are partnerships between the voluntary sector and the prison

service, have acknowledged this is an issue and actively ensured there is a far greater level of support for children by working together.

- There are other examples from Europe and the United States of successful partnerships leading to better outcomes for children and their families, but as in England and Wales, this is extremely patchy. Several authors call for greater collaboration and understanding across the systems and between services.

### *Training*

- Training and awareness-raising is an issue that emerged in the review of the literature, from across Europe and the UK to the United States. It is clear that in order for the response to children of prisoners to be effective from a range of services, there needs to be far more understanding of the impact on children, particularly in schools and statutory services.
- In addition to understanding the impact on children, the need to understand the roles and responsibilities of other agencies and systems was felt to be equally important if organisations are to facilitate working together.
- Kids VIP has developed programmes for training prison staff, to help them think more about what it means for a child to visit a prison, to demonstrate examples of good practice and encourage a more child-friendly approach.
- EUROCHIPS is working across Europe to raise awareness and encourage new ways of thinking about and tackling these issues. They also promote training and provide relevant materials and ideas for service delivery.
- Many other materials have been developed over the years. They have been designed for parents and families as well as staff in various professions. They provide a wealth of help, support and ideas, ranging from the first steps of how to tell a child a parent is in prison, to thinking about the visits and planning for release.

### *Practice*

- There are examples of good practice, ranging from small one-off pieces of work, to more established long-term examples. Many are from the United States, but equally many models are from within the UK.
- Work in prisons to develop more family-oriented practices is increasing and there are several programmes in existence that demonstrate the effectiveness of support. While these programmes depend upon the voluntary sector, they are supported by the prison service and several effective partnerships have evolved.
- Support in the community also exists in pockets, and again is heavily dependent upon the voluntary sector. EUROCHIPS

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identifies a range of projects across the European Union, and closer to home Action for Prisoners' Families, Ormiston and POPS run the national prisoners' families telephone helpline.

- The Family Links Service ensures that all families are offered independent advice and support within 48 hours of a person entering prison.

### *Challenges, outcomes and lessons for practice*

- There is a need for more research into the effects of parental imprisonment.
- The evidence to date suggests that there is a strong association between parental imprisonment and adverse outcomes for children. Compared to their peers children of prisoners have about three times the risk of antisocial or delinquent behaviour, mental health problems, and other adverse outcomes.
- Findings from three studies (the Cambridge Study, National Longitudinal Survey of Youth and the Stanton study, the latter two both US-based) are consistent with the idea that parental imprisonment has a causal effect on children, but two studies (Project Metropolitan in Sweden and the Mater University study in Australia) found no effect. Given these mixed findings, further evidence is required to determine whether or not parental imprisonment causes adverse outcomes for children.
- Evidence to date is consistent with the idea that separation because of parental imprisonment is harmful for children. However, it is difficult to separate out the effects of separation from the effects of other adversities that often follow parental imprisonment (such as loss of family income and stigma). These effects have not been successfully disentangled to date. Therefore, it is not possible to state conclusively whether traumatic separation is an important cause of children's problems following parental imprisonment.
- Although studies report that economic strain is common among families of prisoners, they have not demonstrated that this mediates the effects of parental imprisonment on children.
- Although there are only a few large-scale studies of parental imprisonment, it is clear that children of prisoners are a highly vulnerable group, and are likely to need extensive support.

### **Literature review – overview**

This overview does not cover every aspect of literature available. For example it does not deal specifically with issues facing young offenders. It is designed to offer a general overview of the topic, and to highlight the main issues.

Firstly, the research on the effects of parental imprisonment on children is explored. This is followed by a review of literature from the UK, North America, Australasia and Europe that focuses upon:

- the lack of and gaps in provision for children affected by parental imprisonment
- the need for a more central and systematic response from government and organisations with responsibility in this field
- examples of interventions and models that have been used in working with children and families of prisoners.

### *Overview sections*

#### The effects of parental imprisonment on children

Early studies of prisoners' children suggested that parental imprisonment might cause a range of adverse outcomes for children, including aggressive behaviour, depression, anxiety, sleeping problems, eating problems, running away, truancy, poor school grades, and delinquency (7–13). These, and other more recent qualitative studies (14–16 and 17–19) have raised important questions about child adjustment following parental imprisonment. Four key research questions that are addressed in this review are:

- Is parental imprisonment associated with adverse outcomes for children?
- Does parental imprisonment cause adverse outcomes for children?
- Why might parental imprisonment cause adverse outcomes for children?
- Why do some children have poor outcomes while others lead normal lives?

Given the large increase in rates of imprisonment in Western industrialized countries, especially in the United States and the United Kingdom (20), these questions should have been investigated in large-scale longitudinal studies tracing child adjustment from before parental imprisonment into adulthood. However, unlike research on the effects of divorce on children (on which, see 21, 22, 23), there are very few large-scale studies of prisoners' children, reflecting pervasive social exclusion of this vulnerable population (24). Findings from large-scale studies of parental imprisonment are summarised here (25, more lengthy reviews of the research can be found in 26). Frequent reference is made to findings from the Cambridge Study in Delinquent Development (the Cambridge Study). The Cambridge Study is a prospective longitudinal study of 411 boys who were born in 1953 and were living in a working-class area of South London at age eight to nine – for overviews of the study, see 27, 28). Study male outcomes have been assessed between childhood and age 50 using parents' reports, teachers' reports, self-reports, and criminal records of the study males.

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Parental imprisonment as a risk factor for adverse child outcomes:

The first question for research is whether parental imprisonment is associated with adverse outcomes for children. If there is no association, it is unlikely parental imprisonment causes adverse child outcomes. To test for an association, rates of the outcome need to be compared between children of prisoners and children without imprisoned parents. Associations between parental imprisonment and child outcomes can be reported using odds ratios. Odds ratios are interpretable as the increase in the odds of an outcome associated with parental imprisonment (compared with no parental imprisonment) (See [footnote](#)). An odds ratio of 2.0 or greater is considered to indicate a strong association between parental imprisonment and child outcomes ([29](#)).

Recently, Murray and Farrington investigated the association between parental imprisonment and child antisocial–delinquent behaviour, mental health problems and other adverse outcomes, in the Cambridge Study ([25](#), [26](#), [30](#), [31](#)). Outcomes were compared between 23 boys who were separated because of parental imprisonment (between birth and age ten), and four control groups:

- boys with no history of parental imprisonment or parent–child separation (up to age ten)
- boys separated because of hospitalisation or death
- boys separated for other reasons
- boys whose parents were imprisoned only before the boy’s birth.

Parental imprisonment during childhood was a strong predictor of antisocial–delinquent behaviour in the Cambridge Study ([26,31](#)). For example, of boys separated because of parental imprisonment, 65 per cent were convicted themselves between ages 19 and 32, compared with 21 per cent of boys with no history of parental imprisonment or separation. This translates into a large odds ratio (OR = 7.0) that is statistically significant (95% Confidence Interval (CI) = 2.8, 17.5).

Four other large-scale surveys of children investigated the association between parental imprisonment and child antisocial–delinquent behaviour (Huebner ([32](#)), Bor ([33](#)), Kandel ([34](#)), Murray ([35](#))). To summarise these results, Murray and Farrington ([25](#)) calculated an average odds ratio for these four studies and the Cambridge Study. The average odds ratio was 3.4, showing that children of prisoners have about three times the risk of antisocial–delinquent outcomes of their peers.

Parental imprisonment during childhood was also a strong risk factor for boys’ mental health problems in the Cambridge Study ([25](#)). For example, of boys separated because of parental imprisonment, 36 per cent had high levels of anxiety or depression at age 48, compared to 15 per cent of boys with no history of parental imprisonment or separation. There are no other large-scale longitudinal studies of mental health outcomes among children of prisoners.

Parental imprisonment was also a risk factor for other adverse life outcomes, including school failure, drug abuse, and unemployment in the Cambridge Study (25). For example, of boys separated because of parental imprisonment, 35 per cent were rated as having “poor life success” at age 48, compared to nine per cent of boys with no history of parental imprisonment or separation. ‘Poor life success’ referred to having a history of poor accommodation, poor cohabitation, poor employment, heavy alcohol use, drug use, anxiety or depression, and offending behaviour.

In summary, the evidence to date suggests that there is a strong association between parental imprisonment and adverse outcomes for children. Children of prisoners have about three times the risk for antisocial–delinquent behaviour, mental health problems and other adverse outcomes, compared to their peers.

Footnote:

Odds ratios (ORs) are calculated from 2 x 2 contingency tables using the following formula:

	No outcome	Outcome
Non-risk category	a	b
Risk category	c	d

Does parental imprisonment have a causal effect on children?

Although parental imprisonment is a strong predictor of adverse child outcomes, this does not imply that it affects children causally. Children of prisoners might be at risk because of pre-existing disadvantage in their lives, not because parental imprisonment is harmful for children. Prisoners are more likely than the general population to be unemployed, to be of low social class, to have multiple mental health problems, many criminal convictions, marital difficulties, and their own experiences of abuse and neglect (36–38). As three large-scale surveys now show, children of prisoners also experience higher levels of social disadvantage than their peers (26, 32, 39). Thus, it is necessary to consider whether parental imprisonment causes adverse child outcomes, over and above the effects of background adversities. Without experimental evidence on this issue conclusions must be tentative. However, several studies have investigated the effects of parental imprisonment on children while taking into account other risk factors in children’s lives, using statistical controls or matched-control groups on the strengths and weaknesses of these methods (see 25, 40).

In the Cambridge Study, Murray and Farrington (25, 31) found that boys separated because of parental imprisonment had higher rates of antisocial–delinquent behaviour and mental health problems, even after statistically controlling for other childhood risk factors in the Study (including low child IQ,

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parental criminality, family poverty, and poor parenting). Boys under 10 separated because of parental imprisonment also had higher rates of adverse outcomes than boys whose parents were imprisoned only before the boy's birth. Both these findings were consistent with the idea that exposure to parental imprisonment causes adverse outcomes for children.

In the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (United States), Huebner and Gustafson (32) found that maternal imprisonment significantly predicted offspring convictions and probation in adulthood, even after statistically controlling for other risk factors (including maternal smoking during pregnancy, maternal delinquency, parental supervision, peer pressure, and child delinquency in adolescence). These results were also consistent with the idea that parental imprisonment caused adverse outcomes for children. In a small-scale study (United States), Stanton (12) compared children of 54 jailed mothers with children of 21 mothers on probation, to try to disentangle effects of parental imprisonment from background risks. Compared to mothers on probation, there were large effects of maternal imprisonment on teachers' ratings of child problem behaviour, child poor self-concept, and child academic performance.

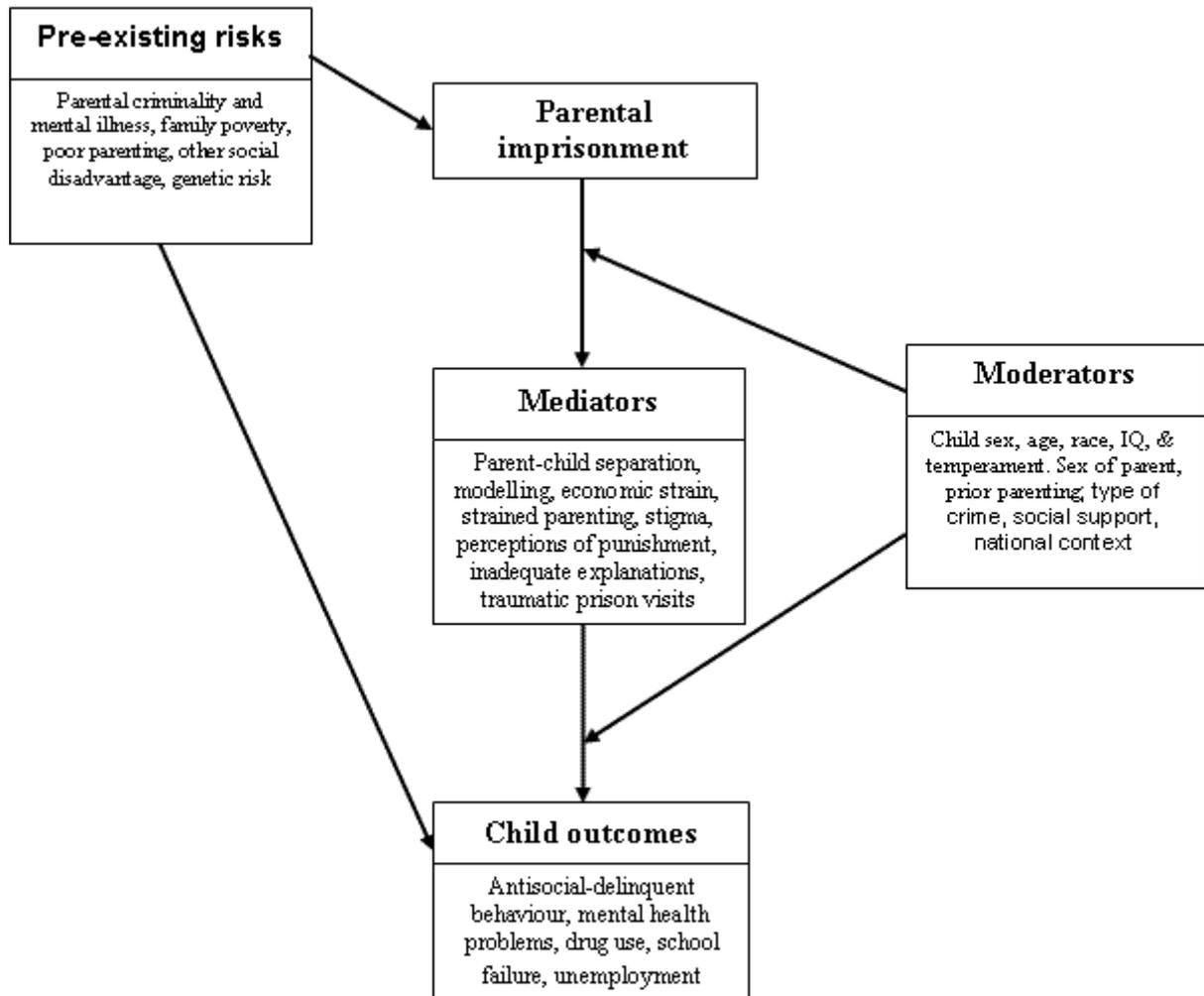
However, in Project Metropolitan (Sweden), Murray, Janson, and Farrington (41) found that parental imprisonment did not predict offspring criminal behaviour after controlling for levels of parental criminality. This suggested that parental imprisonment did not cause child criminal outcomes in Sweden; rather parental criminality explained the association between the two. In the Mater University Study of Pregnancy (Australia), Bor and his colleagues (42) also found that parental imprisonment did not significantly predict adolescent antisocial behaviour after controlling for background risks (including teenage motherhood, single parenthood at birth, family income, changes in marital status, marital conflict, and parental arrest).

In summary, findings from three studies are consistent with the idea that parental imprisonment has a causal effect on children, but two studies found no effect. Given these mixed findings, further evidence is required to determine whether or not parental imprisonment causes adverse outcomes for children.

Theories about the effects of parental imprisonment on children:

If parental imprisonment does cause adverse outcomes for children, it is necessary to understand the processes by which this comes about (43). Factors that explain the link between parental imprisonment and child outcomes are called mediators (26, 44). The figure below shows mediators that might link parental imprisonment and child maladjustment (as well as pre-existing risks (see [Does parental imprisonment have a causal effect on children?](#)), and moderating factors (see [Different effects of parental imprisonment on different children](#)). For example, the effects of parental imprisonment on children might be mediated by parent–child separation, economic strain, strained parenting, and stigma. (On these and other theories, see 25).

**Parental imprisonment and child outcomes: conceptual model, adapted from (26)**



**Parent–child separation:**

Parental imprisonment might cause adverse outcomes for children because parent–child separation is harmful for children (45–48). Consistent with this theory, small-scale studies report that children often show sadness and miss their imprisoned parent (7, 8, 11, 14–16, 49).

If parent–child separation explains the effects of parental imprisonment on children, children whose parents are imprisoned for longer periods and children whose parents are imprisoned more frequently should be at greater risk for adverse outcomes. Consistent with this hypothesis, in the Cambridge Study boys were significantly more likely to be chronic offenders in adulthood if their parents were imprisoned for longer than two months than if their parents were imprisoned for less than two months (35 per cent versus seven per cent) (50). In Project Metropolitan, the more often parents were imprisoned the more offences children were likely to commit as adults (50). However, these differences may have been caused by higher levels of

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antisociality among longer-sentence prisoners and parents who were frequently imprisoned.

Separation because of parental imprisonment might be particularly harmful for children because it is often unexpected, sometimes violent at the arrest, often unexplained, and children are severely restricted in their contact with imprisoned parents (10, 15). If separation because of parental imprisonment is particularly harmful for children, children of prisoners should have worse outcomes than children separated from parents for other reasons. Consistent with this, in the Cambridge Study boys separated because of parental imprisonment had higher rates of antisocial behaviour, mental health problems, and other adverse outcomes than boys separated from parents for other reasons, even after other risk factors were controlled for (25, 30).

Evidence to date is consistent with the idea that separation because of parental imprisonment is harmful for children. However, it is difficult to separate out the effects of separation from the effects of other adversities that often follow parental imprisonment (such as loss of family income and stigma). These effects have not been successfully disentangled to date. Therefore, it is not possible to state conclusively whether traumatic separation is an important cause of children's problems following parental imprisonment.

### Economic strain:

Parental imprisonment might cause adverse outcomes for children because it causes economic strain (lowered family income), which is consistently associated with child antisocial behaviour (51). Parental imprisonment might cause an increase in economic strain in the short term, because imprisoned parents cannot contribute to family income (51), and because families often have to pay for prison visits, letters, telephone calls (especially if prisoners call collect, as in the United States), and sending money to imprisoned relatives.

Both in the Cambridge Study (31) and in one other large-scale longitudinal survey (the Great Smoky Mountains Study, 53) children of prisoners experienced higher rates of economic strain than other children. Many small-scale studies also report that families experience economic difficulties following imprisonment of a relative (13, 54-57). However, to test whether economic strain explains the link between parental imprisonment and adverse child outcomes, it should be investigated whether economic strain increases after parental imprisonment, and whether this, in turn, increases adverse outcomes for children. No study has done this to date. Therefore, although studies report that economic strain is common among families of prisoners, they have not demonstrated that this mediates the effects of parental imprisonment on children.

### Strained parenting:

Children's caregivers often experience considerable distress during parental imprisonment (see 26 for a review) and children often have unstable care arrangements after parental imprisonment (39). Therefore, parental

imprisonment might decrease the quality of parental care and supervision children receive, and this might cause their behaviour problems (58).

In the Cambridge Study, boys separated because of parental imprisonment were more likely than those without imprisoned parents to be poorly supervised, and to have fathers with cruel, passive or neglecting attitudes, who used harsh or erratic discipline, when the boys were aged ten (31). These parenting variables were also independent predictors of boys' delinquent development in the Cambridge Study (27). In two other large-scale studies (32, 39) parental imprisonment was also associated with poor and sometimes abusive parenting of children. However, none of these studies established that parental imprisonment caused an increase in parenting risks over pre-existing levels. Hence, although strained parenting is a plausible link between parental imprisonment and adverse child outcomes, strong tests of this hypothesis are lacking.

### Stigma:

Parental imprisonment might cause children to experience stigma, bullying and teasing, which might increase their mental health problems or antisocial behaviour (7, 8, 14, 19, 59). In interviews with 127 caregivers of children with imprisoned fathers, Boswell and Wedge found that some children “got verbal abuse from other children... . The pressure was so great that the children didn't want to go to school” (child's carer, quoted in 14, p. 67). It is also possible that there is official bias against children of prisoners, making them more likely than their peers to be prosecuted or convicted for their crimes.

There have been no systematic studies of whether social stigma explains the relationship between parental imprisonment and adverse outcomes for children. However, some evidence regarding official bias comes from the Cambridge Study. If children of prisoners are more likely to be prosecuted or convicted than their peers because of official bias, there should be stronger effects of parental imprisonment on official measures of offending (convictions) than on self-report measures of offending (which are not influenced by police or court bias). However, parental imprisonment had similar effects on convictions and self-reported offending behaviour in the Cambridge Study (31), suggesting that official bias did not account for the high rate of offending among children of prisoners.

### Different effects of parental imprisonment on different children:

Children might react to parental imprisonment in different ways, depending on their individual characteristics, family environments, and wider social factors. Factors that influence how children react to parental imprisonment are called moderators (26, 44). Identifying moderators can help to explain why some children have adverse outcomes after parental imprisonment while others lead normal lives. Although there is not space to review all potential moderators here, a few key findings are noted (25).

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Maternal imprisonment might be more harmful than paternal imprisonment for children, because children are more likely to live with their mother before her imprisonment (60, 61); children are less likely to be placed with their other parent when mothers are imprisoned and are more likely to be placed in foster care (60, 61); and because imprisoned mothers are likely to be held further away from home than imprisoned fathers (61, 62), so children may be less likely to visit their imprisoned mother. However, small-scale studies report mixed findings about the different effects of maternal and paternal imprisonment on children (7, 49, 63), and there is a need for large-scale investigation of this issue.

Comparing the effects of parental imprisonment on 7,277 girls and 7,595 boys in Project Metropolitan, Murray, Janson, and Farrington (41) found that parental imprisonment in childhood was a strong predictor of adult criminal behaviour for both males and females, but the effects were slightly stronger for females. In the same study, the effects of parental imprisonment were compared according to the age of children at the time of parental imprisonment (birth to six versus age seven to 19). The effects of parental imprisonment during both age periods were very similar (odds ratios for child offending in adulthood were 2.4 for the younger children and 2.6 for the older children, and were not significantly different).

'Resiliency' research suggests that children can be protected from adversity by having an above average IQ and an easy temperament, as well as good parental attachment and bonding and positive peer relations (64-67). There is little research on resiliency processes among children of prisoners, but initial findings suggest that children may be protected from adverse effects of parental imprisonment by having a high IQ (68), high levels of hopefulness and social support (69), and stable and affectionate care (15, 70).

Two exploratory studies in the United Kingdom suggest that black families of prisoners (71) sometimes experience racism from police and prison staff, and that black children with parents in prison are particularly vulnerable to racism from peers (72). Families of foreign nationals (73) can also experience particular difficulties keeping in touch.

Using data from the Cambridge Study (England) and Project Metropolitan (Sweden), Murray, Janson and Farrington (41) compared as closely as possible the effects of parental imprisonment on child offending in England and Sweden. Children were born in the same year in the two studies (1953), and both cohorts lived in capital cities (London and Stockholm). Additionally, the samples were matched as closely as possible on child sex (male), class (working class), age at the time of parental imprisonment (birth to 19), and age at the time of outcome (19 to 30). The results showed that parental imprisonment was a strong predictor and a possible cause of adult offending behaviour in England, but not in Sweden. It is possible that, unlike in England, Swedish children may have been protected from the adverse effects of parental imprisonment by more family-friendly prison policies, a welfare-oriented juvenile justice system, an extended social welfare system, a less diverse population, and more sympathetic public attitudes toward crime and

punishment. As Bronfenbrenner (74, p. 7) argued, child development may be “enhanced by the adoption of public policies and practices that create additional settings and societal roles conducive to family life”. Further cross-national comparisons should investigate the protective effect of social policies for children of prisoners.

In conclusion, parental imprisonment is a strong risk factor for child antisocial–delinquent behaviour, mental health problems, and other adverse life outcomes. However, conclusive evidence is lacking on whether parental imprisonment causes these outcomes for children. It is possible that parental imprisonment harms children because of parent–child separation, economic strain, reduced quality child care, and stigma. The effects of parental imprisonment on children may differ according to children’s characteristics, family characteristics, and the wider social context in which children live.

Although there are only a few large-scale studies of parental imprisonment, it is clear that children of prisoners are a highly vulnerable group, and are likely to need extensive support. Policy reforms and interventions should be designed to support children of prisoners. Interventions should be based on evidence about why children of prisoners are at risk. For example, if parent–child separation is an important contributor to adverse outcomes of prisoners’ children, prisoner–child contact could be encouraged to reduce child stress, particularly through more child-friendly visiting arrangements at prisons. If economic strain contributes to adverse outcomes of prisoners’ children, financial assistance might be made available, for example through the provision of emergency benefit funds, a reduction in the costs of telephone calls between prison and home, and schemes to increase prisoner employment. If parenting strain is an important contributor to children’s problems, a range of parenting programmes could be used to support children of prisoners. On these, and various other policy options to support children of prisoners, see Murray and Farrington (75). Resiliency research might highlight other ways in which the harmful effects of parental imprisonment on children can be prevented. There is an urgent need to conduct more large-scale research on children of prisoners to provide appropriate support for this vulnerable population.

Provision for children affected by parental imprisonment:

Given the low profile attached to this area of work, it is not surprising that much of the literature comments on the lack of provision and the need for a more systematic response to this issue (76, 76). In 1990, Save the Children produced a guide for prisoners’ families, in which they identified the lack of information available to families at various points throughout the criminal justice system:

“Different stages along the continuum of the Criminal Justice System from arrest to trial to imprisonment, to release, present the family with many changing and complex problems and needs. The family is in a constant state of turmoil as it attempts to respond appropriately to these problems” (78).

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### The need for a systematic and cohesive response:

Reference is also made to the conflict between two systems: the criminal justice system with its focus upon punishment and children's services with a focus on welfare. (79). It is suggested that there is a need for greater collaboration across the systems but pressures in criminal justice and children's services mean neither are in a position to work effectively with the family unit as a whole. While this is particularly the case in England and the United States, where numbers of prisoners are consistently growing, the experience in Scotland and Northern Ireland has been very different. Here, services have recognised the needs of both the parent and child and have developed what appears to be a much more cohesive response (14). Nevertheless, in the majority of the literature reviewed, the absence of a systematic and cohesive multi-agency approach warranted comment and recommendations from a number of sources, as this is the experience of most children, whose needs are not currently being met (14, 80–84, 85, Hamilton, 2006 #1190, 86).

Ascione (80) views the children of 'incarcerated mothers' as an overlooked group of children who have special needs. The suggestion is that in America, the majority of women are imprisoned for non-violent offences and that more emphasis on punishment in the community would limit the impact on the children. The issues raised resonate with the UK, specifically the need for agencies responsible for the welfare of children to gather evidence about the numbers and location of the parent, as well as work more closely with the criminal justice system to provide a more constructive response to the needs of children and their imprisoned parents. Other research points out that child welfare and criminal justice agencies often encounter the same families. Given higher levels of cooperation, identification and tracking would be easier. This could lead to much better opportunities for positive interventions and support for children (87).

The 'Tracking Project' (88) piloted a study designed to track overlap in the use of services across health, social care and criminal justice databases. This was done with the intention of being able to improve service planning and delivery, with better targeting of those using a range of services. While records were anonymous, the study did show that of a sample of just under 100,000 people, 12 per cent were using more than one service. The authors argue that opportunities for filling gaps in provision using this data could be extremely useful for ensuring better and more coordinated services.

### Evidence of multi-agency approaches:

Leason (89) reported on suggestions that the government in Britain might think about targeting services for children of prisoners. It was felt that this would be a positive move if this was solely to support the child, but not if it would end up labelling them as offenders of the future.

However, there is already some evidence of examples of multi-agency approaches making a difference. In 1997, Tapper and others reported on an interagency collaboration strategy from the United States of America that involved schools, social services, and criminal justice agencies working within a specific neighbourhood to target high-risk adolescents. The 'system partnership model' crossed traditional boundaries and offered a much more cohesive and coordinated response to family distress. Similarly in Britain, in an evaluation of a project on supporting young people with a prisoner in the

family, Action for Prisoners' Families demonstrated the importance of multi-agency working to ensure effective support for young people (90). This perhaps reflects the range of interventions often required by vulnerable young people who may need support at school, in visiting a parent in prison, sustaining that relationship, and dealing with all of the emotions involved.

Boswell (14) interviewed a number of children who had imprisoned fathers, discussing issues ranging from their feelings about visiting their dad in prison to the effect it was having on school and family life. She suggests that there needs to be far greater understanding and awareness of the impact from schools and other formal support services who should be set up to work far more closely with parents both during and after sentence, and concludes by arguing for:

“...the integration of theoretical understanding about recidivism and the effects of disrupted child/parent relationships into a systematic social support framework which provides a dual focus on offender and family in the joint interests of child/family stability and reduced offending rates”.

In research undertaken with adolescents visiting parents and siblings in prison Brown and others (91) were very clear that this is a group of children whose needs are not being met. They suffered from isolation, a lack of support from services, and often had to take on increased responsibilities at home. Many did not tell friends for fear of repercussions and so were left to deal with their emotions alone. The authors made numerous recommendations as a result of this research, many of which focus on the promotion of better information for families and awareness-raising within organisations that can actively make a difference. Similarly, in 'building partnerships for the families of offenders', Jones (83) calls for better working relationships between the voluntary and community sectors and the National Offender Management Service. This would both reduce the risk of re-offending and meet the needs and rights of children ensuring the voice of the child is at the centre of service provision.

The call for an improved interface between different systems is not a new issue, and many models have been proposed. Difficulties are characterised by polarised priorities and agendas, limited budgets and budget cuts. However, there are pockets of practice and a range of suggestions for working models of practice. Some examples follow.

Examples of coordination:

The concept of a multi-disciplinary 'wrap-around' approach (92) was based upon a series of open-ended interviews with men and women in prison in the U.S. who were receiving substance abuse treatment, and whose children were being looked after by relatives. Smith explored a variety of issues including parent-child bonding, and impact of drug use and prison on the family, and concluded that a 'wrap-around' approach would be the best way of designing services for all involved, both during and after sentence. This means a coordinated, multi-disciplinary plan that involves the parents and

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children and helps them to negotiate the complexities of the systems in which they find themselves.

It has also been researched in 'Time for families' (84). This was a study to assess outcomes for children and young people using two of the Ormiston Children and Families Trust projects. The five outcomes in Every Child Matters (1) are at the centre of the work of Ormiston, who have been providing support to children since 1981 (see [practice survey](#)). This piece of work concluded that the support offered to children through this project produced significant differences to their lives. There are various recommendations in the report which are aimed at services both inside and outside of the prison. They include the need for inter-agency cooperation from well-trained and aware social care staff, and that "the needs of this group are considered as a priority group in the Children and Young People's plans of every authority" (The Children and Young People's plans set out the improvements that the local authority intends to make to ensure the well-being of children and relevant young persons (93)).

In the United States, where prison numbers are even greater, the problems are exacerbated, yet the solutions require a similar collaborative approach (94). Collective efforts of criminal justice, social care, community and research organisations are key to improving outcomes for children and their families. The need for cooperation is echoed by others in the United States, notably Abram and others, who explore the lessons for inter-organisational collaboration through an evaluation of two programmes that were established to better serve the children of prisoners. They concluded that for this type of collaboration to be effective, there is a need to keep numbers of people involved to a minimum, to provide training about working together and to be very clear about each other's roles (95).

In Australia, the prison population is also rising, and there is the same issue of knowing little about the children, and numbers of children affected. Cunningham (85) suggests that there is a particular need to support children who have witnessed a parent being arrested, which can be particularly distressing. She reports that the Victorian Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders has called for a de-briefing service for children to help them cope with the trauma.

The voluntary sector:

Many prisons have gone some way in recognising the role they need to play, and to that end have invested in more child-friendly facilities, better visiting centres, family visits, and building relationships with the community and voluntary sectors that provide the staff for many of these initiatives. The key to sustaining continued growth and development is secure funding which would enable a longer-term approach and more consistency across the prison estate. This is something echoed by Action for Prisoners' Families, a campaigning organisation that also coordinate a national helpline for families. They also call for prisoners to be located much closer to home and to have formal agreements between visitors' centres and the prison, with a

standardised system to make it easier for families to visit and maintain contact (96).

Heavy reliance is placed upon the community and voluntary sector, and many years of campaigning to mainstream the issue of children of prisoners has been met with resistance. In general, this has been because these children do not fit neatly into the remit of one government department. Additionally, there is no way of identifying and tracking children, many of whom will not be known, or want to be known, to statutory services. The literature indicates that the situation is the same in other countries, where children continue to be the unseen victims of crime (97), from the point of arrest and throughout the criminal justice process, with only a small number of them defined as children in need (77). In addition to the separation from the parent, the child may also be faced with the loss of their home, loss of family income, stigma, poverty, shame and bullying (79, 85).

There is clearly a role for both criminal justice and social care agencies to play to ensure the minimum impact upon a child, for example at the time of arrest, or during the court appearance. Again, there are examples of practice (see **Thames Valley Partnership** 'Information at court' leaflet) but these are few and far between.

Women:

Literature suggests that losing a mother to prison will generally have far more of an impact, and trigger a greater response from services, as the mother is often the main carer (97). The number of women being sent to prison has increased dramatically over the past decade (98).

“The number of women in prison has more than doubled over the past decade. On 24 March 2006, the women’s prison population stood at 4,392. Ten years ago in 1995, the average female prison population was 1,998. Five years ago it stood at 3,355. In 2003, 13,000 women were received into prison. Home Office research has found that 66 per cent of women prisoners are mothers, and each year it is estimated that more than 17,700 children are separated from their mother by imprisonment.” (99)

The female prison estate is far smaller than its male equivalent. The implication is that mothers will often be even further from home, making face-to-face contact even harder. For children it can mean a long and complicated journey, an early start, a day away from school, let alone the issue of who is left to look after them. It may be that grandparents and other relatives are able to step in, or it may be that the local authority is informed and a child is assessed as a child in need. This can lead to fostering, and in some cases, adoption.

“As we know, there is a strong link between local authority care and later imprisonment, so the question of who provides support to those without family ties is an important one. Encouraging prisoners' families to play a role in resettlement is clearly important for some inmates.” (100)

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In a recent study into a sample of women in HMP Styal, Hamilton and Fitzpatrick (86) undertook a needs assessment of the issues faced by women with mental health problems who were returning to Greater Manchester. It examined cycles of abuse and offending as well as “the challenges of delivering services to women with multiple needs, and the need to outline more effective interventions to support them in the community and reduce rates of re-offending”. One of the areas they explored was the women’s family and support networks, and they found the following:

- 61% of the women interviewed had partners; a third of these partners were currently also in prison.
- 64% had children; 25% cared full-time for at least one child before coming to prison; over 30% had at least one child living with a relative; 22% had at least one child in care.
- 36% of the women interviewed mentioned that they had childcare support from at least one grandparent.
- Children had been taken away from 70% of the mothers. The remainder were with family.

The authors asked the women what they felt would most be of benefit to them both before and after release, and they identified five main areas. The first and perhaps most significant is a call for coordinating support that is sustainable and needs-led, rather than crisis-driven.

Poehlmann also carried out a study of 54 children in the United States whose mothers were in prison (15). She found that children’s reaction to the separation included sadness, worry, confusion, anger, loneliness, and in some cases, developmental problems. The conclusion was that emphasis should be placed upon the need for support in families, and to promote stable and continuous placements for children. This finding was supported in research by Adalist-Estrin, who called upon extended family and community professionals to play a more significant role in the whole process (101). She is particularly concerned about older children who have to think about their own futures and the prospects they have once they have left school. Involving their parents in prison, by conference call if necessary, is essential for the child.

In the United States, a literature review identified that the experiences of children of imprisoned mothers who need community and support services are often overlooked (80). The authors refer to research done by Joseph Kampfner in 1995, who undertook a small-scale study of 36 children and found that 75 per cent displayed symptoms associated with post-traumatic stress disorder.

“Punishment is compounded for many women inmates when they are separated from children... .The secondary costs of imprisonment to children have been acknowledged but are largely incalculable” (102).

The number of visits to prisons is ever-decreasing (96), and yet most mothers will be reunited with children upon release (103). Consequently, there needs

to be far more time and support put into preparation for release, not just for the prisoner but for the family awaiting their return. McLean and others ask whether this period is a moment of crisis or a window of opportunity (104), and it is clear that if certain factors are not addressed, such as mental health, housing, finance and substance misuse, it will inevitably be the former (see also Hamilton and Fitzpatrick above).

Dalley researches women imprisoned in Montana, USA. She criticizes “gender-neutral” sentencing policies, particularly given her findings of women with deep-rooted intergenerational issues, and childhood trauma. This is further exacerbated by the distance women are placed from their children, making sustaining of the relationship with their children that much harder. She goes on to explore the need for a multi-agency approach to address the layers of issues and coordinate a response, and she calls for government to:

“Reallocate funding to improve the justice, social welfare and educational systems as they relate to imprisoned women and their children”.

Fundamental to this is the need for a transitional post-release programme, to enable women to succeed in meeting the expectations placed upon them in relation to housing, employment and parenting with adequate and targeted support.

In 2002 The Social Exclusion Unit produced a report entitled ‘Reducing re-offending by ex-prisoners’. They reported that 12 per cent of children with a mother in prison were in care, with foster parents or had been adopted; this compared to two per cent of the children of male prisoners. Overall, only five per cent of women prisoners’ children remain in their own home once their mother has been sentenced (105).

Housing is also an enormous issue upon release. It goes hand in hand with poverty and unemployment for many prisoners, and can inevitably have an impact on mental health. When children are also involved and the aim is to rebuild some sort of family life, the pressures are that much greater, and require considerably more attention before a parent has been released. O’Brien carried out in-depth interviews with 18 female ex-inmates in the United States, and identified five categories that were an indicator to successful re-entry into the community. These are finding shelter; obtaining employment or legal income; reconstructing connections with others; developing community membership; and identifying confidence (106).

Black and minority ethnic families:

For black and minority ethnic children with parents in prison these issues can be further exacerbated, and it is the responsibility of the services to provide culturally appropriate support both in the prisons and the community (81, 107).

In the United States, solution-focused groups for Hispanic children were found to be of benefit (108). Springer states that the importance of belonging to a group is essential. It can address the need for social support, diffuse the

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sense of shame and be reassuring for the child to know they are not the only ones in that situation. Similar conclusions were drawn for other black and minority ethnic groups by Mazza (81) and Travis (109).

The lack of culturally appropriate support for black and minority ethnic families, and families of foreign national prisoners, is an area requiring more research. Statistics show that there is an over-representation of black people within the prison system, as well as a growing number of foreign nationals (99). This is reflected in the establishment of the Black Prisoner Support Project by the Partners of Prisoners and Families Support Group (POPS), which was set up to offer specific support for families of black offenders. Ormiston has recognised that members of gypsy and travelling communities continue to experience racism and disadvantage, and they have been working with those communities through their travellers' initiatives in Cambridgeshire and Norfolk.

### **Literature review – examples of interventions and models that have been used in working with children and families of prisoners**

There are many examples of practice from around the world. Some have been stand-alone projects, whilst others have been longitudinal. Funding is an issue for many programmes, the majority of which rely upon the voluntary sector. This section will explore some of the work that has been done. For the purposes of this report we seek to highlight some of the innovative responses that have been made to support children who have a parent in prison, both in prisons themselves and out in the community.

#### *Programmes in prison*

Many prisons are now running 'parenting programmes' (for mothers and fathers). Whilst there may not be consistency across programmes, and there is some concern that they do not all involve partners on the outside or a chance to practice learning on family visits or days, there is some evidence emerging that these programmes are having a positive effect. Certainly, there is wide acknowledgement of the importance of maintaining family ties, and the impact that can have on reducing re-offending (105).

In a study commissioned by the Department for Children, Schools and Families into family learning programmes in prison (110), Halsey concluded that this type of programme will have an impact on re-offending rates. The programme is over and above a normal visit or parenting programme. Instead it gives families the opportunity to spend time together and undertake a range of activities, such as playing, eating and learning about a child's development. The sessions are aimed at children under five and the research suggests that there is far more chance of a family succeeding together upon release.

Watson concurred with this view (111). In HMP Wolds supporting the child is at the centre of their Family Learning programme. This is an opportunity for both parents and children under five to spend time as a family and to gain accreditation through the Social and Life Skills programme. This applies to the

imprisoned father and non-imprisoned mother. They also provide other courses for fathers with children of other ages, and have produced a guide entitled 'Daddy's working away: a guide to being a dad in prison'. This guide has been given to every prison in the country as well as other countries in Europe, and Hong Kong.

Girl Scouts Beyond Bars is an American programme that began in the early 1990s. Block and Potthast (112) carried out a two-year study to determine effectiveness in improving imprisoned mothers' relationships with their children. The aim is to provide enhanced visits between the two to:

"Preserve or enhance the mother-daughter relationship, to reduce the stress of separation, to enhance the daughter's sense of self, to reduce reunification problems, and ultimately, to help decrease the likelihood of the mother's failure in the community."

The programme was a success. It increased the number of visits, improved the mother-daughter bond, found the children were not as sad and that their self-esteem was far greater than those who were not part of the programme. The success has seen Girl Scouts Beyond Bars spread to over 40 prisons across the USA.

In Britain, there have been numerous developments and initiatives across the prison estate to support the maintenance of family ties. These range from better resources and support in visitors centres and enhanced family visits to parenting programmes. They are too many to mention individually here, but there have been evaluations on many of the programmes as well as reviews of the changes in visitors centres (96, 110, 113). You can find more details about the work of the Ormiston Children and Families Trust in [Appendix 3](#). They have done an enormous amount in this area. There is also training available to prison officers with the aim of making the environment more welcoming and family friendly. Some examples are listed below:

#### *North Eastern Prison After Care Society (NEPACS)*

Last year a unique two-year pilot project, based in Durham and financed by the Diana, Princess of Wales Memorial Fund, on the needs of teenagers with a family member in prison, came to an end. One of the results has been the establishment of a Youth Activity Room at the Durham Visitors' Centre, well-equipped with a variety of games (including electronic ones), magazines, and television.

#### *Kids VIP*

Kids VIP is a charity aiming to support children and their parents to sustain and develop relationships during the period of imprisonment. They have produced a guide called 'Children visiting prisons' (114) that identifies the benefits of maintaining ties for both children and families, as well as examples of what some prisons done, how to replicate good practice, and develop more child and family friendly ways of working. The training role they have in

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prisons has enabled prison staff to re-frame how they view children visiting the prison and offer a much more child-friendly approach.

“Kids VIP have found that where prison staff understand the issues for children visiting prisons, and consider what they would want for children known to them should they have to visit a prison, they find it much easier and are far more likely to create a child-friendly environment”. (114)

### *Story time*

Vision in the prison service is key if new ideas and innovations are to succeed. This is dependent upon the prison governor, and for those who have been able to embrace new ideas, there has been success. Time for Kids (115) began in 1999 in HMP Holme House and, with the help of a grant, enabled 50 prisoners to record a story of their choice and send it home to their children in time for Christmas. This enabled father and child to build and maintain their relationship in a unique and personal way.

Storybook Dads started in 2002 and took this idea to another level. They are winners of numerous awards, including the Overall Award for Excellence in Charity Management at the Charity Awards 2007, and now work in over 30 prisons, including several women’s prisons, using digital technology to produce CDs with both music and sound effects. Over 1,700 prisoners and their children have already benefitted from this project. Storybook Dads evaluate their work as much as possible, and feedback “reiterates the positive impact the scheme has on family relationships” (116). More information about the project can be found on their website.

### *In the community*

There is little in the way of community initiatives, other than the practice driven by the community and voluntary sector in the UK that is described in detail below. What is clear, however, is that children of different ages require different approaches. For those under school age, many prisons have developed appropriate parenting programmes, and there are extensive leaflets and books available through Action for Prisoners’ Families, Ormiston Children and Families Trust, Northern Ireland Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders and Barnados Northern Ireland about how and what to tell younger children. For older children, and particularly adolescents, this can be far more complex, not least because of the range of external factors that come into play. However, there are more resources becoming available, and so there needs to be a methodical way of making them widely available for families. In ‘Imprisoned Fathers and their children’, families are asked about their links with agencies who might be able to provide support. 64 per cent said they had no links at all (14). This is not unusual and reflects the general picture that this is not seen as a priority group of children who have particular needs.

Once again, in the United States the situation is similar, with pockets of practice in existence. One example was specifically for Hispanic children,

offering solution-focused group therapy. The programme was also based upon mutual aid, and the study of ten children showed it was an effective intervention with positive results (108).

Salmon (117) notes that when a child is in the care of the local authority, despite the duty to ensure contact with an imprisoned parent, long distances and staff shortages can mean visits do not happen. Additionally, other children rely upon grandparents and extended family to facilitate the process, which again is not always possible. She goes on to highlight the particular problems for the partners of young offenders, who are unable to visit unescorted if they are under 18 years old, let alone bring their children along. This is encapsulated by Nurse in her research into young fathers imprisoned in the USA:

“The prison environment is structured with little concern for inmates who are fathers. Instead the structure is determined by public opinion about the purpose of prison and the nature of young people.” (118)

The importance of schools and the role they play in this process cannot be underestimated. On a more positive note, Gloucestershire Local Education Authority, England has taken on board the issues that specifically affect children of prisoners in their schools. They have undertaken to support children, raise awareness among staff and identify named staff in their schools who can act as liaison. They have an agreement with HMP Gloucester to also provide a named person, and this forms part of their policy for the ‘Education of children with a parent or close relative in prison’ (119).

Ormiston have recently produced guidance for schools (and children’s services) for working with children and families of prisoners (120). It provides practical advice and tools for raising awareness and working with children, as well as a list of useful resources and information. The majority of the provision and support available in the community is dependent upon geography. The only exception is the existence of the Action for Prisoners’ Families national helpline, run in partnership with the Ormiston Children and Families Trust and Partners of Prisoners, but this still relies upon someone being able to let families know that it is there.

### *European initiatives*

“Each year, an estimated 700,000 children within the newly-expanded European Union are separated from an incarcerated parent; sometimes both parents are in prison. Yet few people are fully aware of the impact that the imprisonment of a mother or father can have on the early development of a child. The European Committee for Children of Imprisoned Parents (EUROCHIPS), funded by the Bernard van Leer Foundation, is a European-wide initiative on behalf of children with an imprisoned parent. With its network of partners active within prison-related, child’s rights and child-welfare fields in France, Belgium, the United Kingdom, Luxembourg, Italy, the Netherlands, Sweden and other countries, EUROCHIPS is seeking to boost awareness and achieve new ways of thinking, acting and interacting on issues concerning

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prisoners' children. EUROCHIPS' message is clear: the child and his or her best interests are at the heart of its action. Children are entitled to the truth about their parent's imprisonment. Above all, children must be able to maintain a link with both parents if separated from one or both, a right stipulated in the 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and the 2000 Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union” (121).

EUROCHIPS recently produced a book that brings together European perspectives on good practice from across the union. It covers issues of children visiting prison, living in prison, as well as training and campaigning. The book gives numerous examples and ideas for improving outcomes for children and their families, maintaining a child-centred focus throughout. For example, in Norway Foreningen for Fangers Parorende (FFP) is an organisation set up to support young people between 13 and 20. It provides a safe place for children and families to meet, discuss issues and participate in activities. In Sweden, the Sunflower Association offers age-specific support and group therapy, as well as activities to help children cope with the ramifications of losing a parent to prison.

### **Literature review – conclusion**

This review is not exhaustive and most of the research addresses very small numbers of children and their families. This in itself raises issues about the conclusions that can be drawn. However, what is clear is that there is a particularly vulnerable group of children with increased risk of poor outcomes in accordance with Every Child Matters, and with no national perspective about what should be done to support them.

In England and Wales, most support relies upon the determination of the voluntary sector to provide a service across various parts of the country. Nevertheless, there are many areas that do not have any provision and so children are falling through the net. In the areas that are served by the voluntary sector, there is some evidence of the positive impact of supporting children who are affected and in Northern Ireland and Scotland services have progressed to reflect the need.

## Findings

This section presents a summary of the work being done in our eight practice sites. It is followed by the key messages that came from the sites during our visits alongside the key messages from the responses to the questionnaire sent to all local children's safeguarding boards in England. A total of 32 replies were received, providing a response rate of 21 per cent.

### **The practice sites**

#### *Banbury and the Thames Valley Partnership*

The Thames Valley Partnership (TVP) brings people and organisations together to create safe and stronger communities and sustainable solutions to the problems of crime and social exclusion. The Banbury 'family matters' group was established as a result of the multi-agency awareness training delivered by TVP and provides an example of a model to support children of prisoners.

#### *String of Pearls and Devon and Cornwall Reducing Re-offending Action Plan children and family pathway group*

String of Pearls is a small charity that was able to secure funding to undertake multi-agency training about the children of prisoners and help local services to get this issue on the children and family pathway group. The latter is in the process of considering how they might respond.

#### *Halton Borough*

Although they do not have any practice or procedures in place as such, Halton Borough indicated in their response to the questionnaire that this is an area in which they are keen to progress. They are looking at ways to identify and monitor for children of prisoners who require support (not necessarily from statutory services) and welcome the opportunity for more in-depth discussion.

#### *Northern Ireland*

In Northern Ireland, provision for children and families of prisoners is extremely well established across the province. It is underpinned by solid working relationships between the prison service, probation and the voluntary sector, and an acknowledgement of the importance of the family in reducing the risk of re-offending and facilitating resettlement.

#### *Norwich and Ormiston Trust*

Ormiston works across prisons in the Eastern region with families affected by imprisonment. They provide family support services at eight of the region's prisons, enabling children and young people to maintain meaningful contact with their imprisoned parent or relative. This is achieved through the provision of child-friendly visits, parenting courses and information and support. This

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work is currently being extended to include support to families in the community, and they work across service boundaries to raise awareness with other organisations that come into contact with the children of prisoners. We were able to use their contacts to bring together professionals from organisations across the region to participate in the focus group.

### *Partners of Prisoners and Families Support group*

Partners of Prisoners and Families Support Group (POPS) work across the prisons in the Northwest region. They provide a variety of services to support anyone who has a link with someone in prison, prisoners themselves and other agencies. The aim is to 'support families to cope with the stress of arrest, imprisonment and release.' POPS was established in 1998 and it now has several family link workers in prisons across the northwest.

### *Scotland*

Work in Scotland has long been recognised as good practice in maintaining family ties. The focus group participants were a mixture of prison managers and family contact and development officers (FCDOs), as well as representatives from Families Outside, the voluntary sector agency that provides support for families across Scotland and runs the national helpline. Any prisoner in Scotland can receive support from a family contact development officer who can provide a valuable link to the family and help plan for release.

### *Telford and West Midlands*

Telford is in the advantageous position of having the Families Do Matter programme in the area. This project is sponsored by the National Offender Management Service (NOMS) and aims to provide evidence of the longer-term impact and benefit of supporting offenders to maintain and strengthen their relationships with their children and families. The focus group brought a range of people together for the first time and was an opportunity to discuss issues in detail, with a view to establishing a multi-agency response.

## **Findings – strategy**

- The vast majority of the responses indicated that the local safeguarding children board (LSCB) did not have a role in identifying and supporting children. The focus groups confirmed there is no one organisation with statutory responsibility for this group of children. Consequently, service provision rests within the voluntary sector. However, Every Child Matters and the NOMS children and families pathway should provide the framework to enable a more strategic response.
- Children of prisoners are not recognised as a distinct group by LSCBs, and they are not a distinct group in children's plans. Unless the child is already known to children's services, or presents as a child in need of assessment, they would come very

low down the list of priorities. This is a particular concern for those who are not in full time education due to exclusion as they are even more likely to fall through the net of support.

- There is no way of recording numbers of children affected, let alone identifying, and tracking children. Thus this is an unknown group in terms of resource implications for services.
- Evaluation of existing services, a solid evidence base, mapping of services and on-going research is needed into the impact of parental imprisonment on children.
- Strategy should also be based upon the views of children and families. In Northern Ireland, Ormiston and POPS there are opportunities for feedback about services, with a view to future development.
- Current strategy focuses on the needs of offenders and not the families who can be the unseen victims of crime.

### **Findings – policies and procedures**

- It is the common assessment framework (CAF) that determines if the child meets eligibility criteria and therefore if they qualify for a service. The majority of children with parents in prison are not known and so do not get a service, although research has shown the potential long-term impact of parental imprisonment.
- Any professional with concerns can initiate the CAF process.
- It is not always appropriate for children to have contact, and it is not helpful to label children or assume they require professional support.
- Sure Start children's centres are the only service with specific responsibilities. Consequently, there is very little in the way of formal policies and procedures across service boundaries. This leads to myths and assumptions about roles and responsibilities, and is a barrier to communication and information-sharing.
- All communities are scheduled to have a children's centre by 2010.
- Procedures on initial risk assessment and information-sharing by the police and probation would be helpful. There is confusion at present regarding data protection and information-sharing across some sectors.

### **Findings – funding**

- There is no specific statutory funding for this work and there are concerns about the impact upon already depleted and stretched resources.
- Provision comes largely from the voluntary sector, where funding is often short-term and from a range of sources. Consequently, services are not always able to plan for the future, jobs can be

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under threat and the services offered to children may be withdrawn.

- In Northern Ireland and Scotland, provision is funded by the prison service and probation. Although this is still applied for on a regular basis, it would seem that there is far more security in this arrangement, reflecting the need for a mainstreaming of provision.
- It has to be acknowledged that in England it is a postcode lottery as to whether children are in a geographical location with any specific services for them. This is further complicated if a child is not living in the same locality as the prison where their parent is being held as there are issues over financial responsibility.
- A pooling of resources for the children and families affected by imprisonment may result in a more coordinated and better-funded response.

### **Findings – partnerships**

- There is little in the way of service level agreements or their equivalent between the children's and criminal justice services about what should happen when a child has a parent arrested. Consequently, much of the work that does take place is based on informal arrangements, including development of local informal working relationships across sectors, and good will.
- Many assumptions are made about the roles and responsibilities of others. These myths about other services can result in a lack of coordination, communication and action. Ironically, most of the practice sites felt this was too complex a piece of work to do in isolation because of the interface between so many sectors. Consequently, a multi-disciplinary response is crucial.
- There is some evidence of good partnership working. Some is underpinned by guidance and legislation, such as the Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA). Some partnerships are based on service level agreements – such as in Scotland, Northern Ireland, Partners of Prisoners (POPS) – and some on informal arrangements and good will, such as the Thames Valley.

### **Findings – training**

- For social workers and foster carers, the consensus appears to be that there is very little formal training on working with the criminal justice system, and particularly prisons. Rather they learn and develop skills by experience on the job. Common assessment framework training does provide an opportunity to highlight the needs of children of prisoners and encourage a range of staff to initiate an assessment, although they are not a distinct priority group.

- There is a lack of awareness among staff working in social care, education, and health. Guidelines, training tools and practical materials, particularly for multi-agency working, have all been identified as requirements to fill the gaps in knowledge and ensure a better response to the issues, alongside the full implementation of the children and families pathway in the Reducing Re-offending plan.
- Social workers should undertake a training module as part of their continued professional development to raise awareness of children of prisoners. Training should be part of social work degrees, and POPS already have some input at the University of Salford.
- Tools and materials are available but not widely used or known about. Several of the voluntary sector organisations have produced excellent materials for training staff and working with children and families.
- Specific tools are available for schools (Ormiston and Thames Valley), prisons (Kids VIP), foster carers (Ormiston), multi-agency training (String of Pearls, Thames Valley Partnership) and more general training tools for working with children (Ormiston, Action for Prisoners' Families, Barnardo's and NIACRO in Northern Ireland).

## **Findings – practice**

### *General points*

- It is a statutory requirement to review the case of each looked after child. This includes the need to consider arrangements for contact and applies regardless of the whereabouts of the parent. Not all children of prisoners fall under this remit.
- There are models of practice from across the UK, although these are largely poorly-resourced local voluntary organisations taking the lead in maintaining family ties. The work being carried out by these organisations is complex and vital in helping families keep in contact with prisoners and helping to maintain stability at the point of release.
- Communication and information-sharing are seen as major barriers to effective practice as this area of work is not underpinned by policy.
- There is a particular concern about service provision to those 16- to 18-year-olds in transition in the prison estate (moving from youth offender institution to adult prison) and those leaving care while a parent remains in custody.

### *Arrest*

- In some cases the police will liaise with the local children's services assessment team in advance, if they know children are

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likely to be in a household where they will be arresting the carers/parents. This information is not always available. However, it is good practice to advise children's service wherever possible.

- Once notification is received it is the responsibility of the local area assessment team to ensure the children are placed safely until the parents or carer can resume looking after their children.
- Social workers and police should be aware of the National Helpline for Children and Families (see Section 9, Useful contacts and practical resources). This is one way of ensuring access to some support if they are not involved with the family on a longer-term basis.

### *Court*

- There is a big area of unmet need in levels of support available to children and families at this stage of the criminal justice process. There is no formal practice across the UK, and provision from the voluntary sector is patchy. Age-appropriate information leaflets for children and families are needed to explain what happens after court and what happens when they make a prison visit.
- Solicitors should perhaps play more of a role and work with the voluntary sector to increase chances of engaging with families at court and beyond.
- However, there is some practice around the UK. PACT provides some support in courts in the southwest of England, and Ormiston in the East. Some other organisations such as POPS are looking to develop services and Thames Valley Partnership and NIACRO have produced leaflets for families in courts.
- In Northern Ireland, when a person is taken to prison the family's details are passed from prison staff to Family Link workers, to enable contact to be made with the family within 48 hours.

### *Prison*

- Most local safeguarding children's boards reported that social workers were responsible for arranging contact with parents in prison in accordance with the agreed care plan for the child in question. Similarly, they would also support foster carers to help children maintain family ties.
- There is no support available for children of families not currently known to children's services.
- There are examples of models of practice from both the LSCBs and practice sites (Scotland, Northern Ireland, Ormiston, Thames Valley Partnership, POPS). They offer a range of support to connect the inside to the outside world and help maintain family ties. However, each prison is different and there is no

consistency of provision, which generally depends upon the priorities of the prison governor.

- Some prisons have embraced the need to develop more family-friendly facilities. They have visitor centres run by the voluntary sector, family days and visits, and prison officers trained in how to be more child-friendly. However, this is not the case across the prison estate, and it can remain a daunting and traumatic process for children to visit if there is not adequate support available. Having a designated contact person in prison (POPS) and having a designated officer in prison to facilitate contact (Scotland, Northern Ireland) can make navigation of the system far more manageable.
- Creative use of technology, for example videos and DVD, could be used to facilitate contact. Web cameras could be used to assist communication and reduce the need for prison visits.
- For voluntary sector agencies working in prisons, forging relationships with prison governors and staff is seen as key to the success of any initiative. Some hostility is reported, and as such, there is a constant need to demonstrate the importance of the service offered.
- For families there remains difficulty getting through to prisons to arrange contact and visits. This is exacerbated by the distance from home, financial implications and long journeys.
- Teachers are often unaware that a change in behaviour is associated with a child having an imprisoned parent. It was felt that there should be a mechanism to inform head teachers. Children spend most of their days in school and it is important for the school to be aware.
- There is a need to improve the sharing of information with schools and also to provide guidance to schools about liaison, for example how to send in children's school reports to keep parents in the loop.
- It was felt that many teachers find it difficult to talk about prison, and that children have to 'self-monitor' to keep their secrets too often because of societal/school attitudes. This can be very dangerous for a child and can manifest negatively over time.
- In Northern Ireland a prison officer has been seconded to Family Links (NIACRO) to act as a conduit for information and to inform good practice in the prison service.

### *Release*

- Support on release is limited across the UK. Most local safeguarding children's boards reported that they would help to prepare children for contact and investigate risk, especially in cases where domestic violence had been an issue, but again the level of support offered depended on the child being known to services. In the case of violent or sexual offences a MAPPA will

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be held on release. This involves prison, probation and police and other agencies as required.

- The national helpline can direct families to other avenues of support, but this is an area that needs to be developed. In Banbury the Family Matters group has developed a model of ongoing support to families once the parent has been released. In Scotland all prisoners with families will have a pre-release meeting with their family and family contact and development officer, to discuss any issues and to prepare both prisoner and family for release.
- Sure Start programmes and children's centres have a significant role to play at the point of release and this has worked well in some areas for individual cases (Banbury).
- The Telford Families Do Matter programme is working in West Midlands prisons to raise awareness and make links between prison and the community. They have identified opportunities to involve the 'outside' before release in a productive way.
- In Northern Ireland, families are re-referred to Family Links for support pre- and post-release.

The full responses to the questionnaire can be found in [Appendix 1](#). [Appendix 2](#) shows the schedule of questions that was used at each practice site, and the full record of discussion is shown in [Appendix 3](#).

## Conclusions

The following conclusions have been derived from both the literature review and the field research.

### Impact

- There is a need to establish the true number of children affected by parental imprisonment.
- While the experience of one disadvantage can create family difficulties, analysis suggests that experiencing multiple disadvantages can have compounded effects.
- While there are correlations between the effects of parental imprisonment and the impact on children's emotional and developmental needs, the research suggests this is not necessarily causal.
- Poverty and deprivation are highlighted as factors in parental imprisonment. Support for families classed as deprived is often linked to where they live.
- As the prison population continues to increase, so will the number of children affected.
- Not all children with a parent in prison require support.
- It is not always in the best interests of children to maintain family ties or be labelled as children of prisoners because of the implications for their future.
- Responses from the questionnaire reinforce the low priority held by this group as well as concern for already stretched resources.
- A growing issue across the UK is the number of foreign national prisoners in the prison population, and the added difficulties for their families.
- There is a lack of culturally specific services to families from black and minority ethnic and travelling communities.
- The prison population keeps expanding, as does the number of female prisoners; yet the prison estate does not reflect the need for mothers to be located close to their families.
- The research points to different outcomes across Europe, America and Australasia, specifically between England and Sweden.

### Strategy and policy

- Despite the existence of the Every Child Matters framework and the NOMS Children and Families Pathway, for children of prisoners there is still a lack of service provision across the UK.
- Service provision depends on where a family lives rather than universal services. This makes it difficult for families and

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professionals working with them to know where to get the appropriate information and support.

- Where a child is not known to children's services, there are questions about the legality of identifying children of prisoners and sharing information without the consent of parents.
- Many respondents felt that children of prisoners should be part of current systems of assessment rather than a group in their own right.
- There is practice across the world that addresses the issues raised in this report and supports children and families. However, it is patchy and inconsistent, led by voluntary organisations, is often poorly funded and rarely supported by strategy or policy.
- There is a continuum of practice ranging from initial thoughts about how to develop this area of work through to emerging and established practice. However, not all established practice has been evaluated and this would be required for future development and longitudinal research.
- Funding is always going to be an issue for this work. Much of what has been seen is dependent on the good will of individual and under-resourced voluntary sector organisations rather than a statutory requirement.
- In the UK, no government department has responsibility for this area of work. However, recently the Ministry of Justice and the Department for Children, Schools and Families have produced a Children of Offenders review (122) in which they call for a mechanism to enable local authorities to systematically assess and meet the child's needs to improve outcomes for children of prisoners. This supports the findings from this project.
- The common assessment framework is the framework for providing a holistic assessment of the child's needs. It can be initiated by any professional with a concern.

### **Training and awareness-raising**

- Training and awareness-raising for professionals about this group of children is absolutely essential. The lack of this was evident throughout the project.
- A change in behaviour is often the only way schools discover that a child's parent has gone to prison. No one has responsibility for communicating such information and yet schools are often the place where children spend most of their time.
- There are tools and training available for professionals. However, their existence is not widely known.
- There is a range of free resources available for helping families tell their children and deal with the criminal justice and prison process, although courts remain particularly under-resourced.

## What works?

The practice survey demonstrated that there are models of innovative and effective practice that can be replicated. In addition the research highlighted other models of practice from across the world.

### *International*

There are other models of practice in existence in Sweden, Australia and the United States some of which have been a success.

The longitudinal comparative research between England and Sweden has demonstrated that support for children of prisoners can increase the chances of positive outcomes.

### *National*

- There are campaigning organisations such as Action for Prisoners' Families who promote the needs of children of prisoners, and produce excellent materials to support children and families.
- Organisations such as Kids VIP offer training to prison staff to enhance the children's experience when visiting a prison.
- Work in Northern Ireland and Scotland demonstrates what can be achieved when children are at the heart of systems.

### *Regional and local*

- There are good models of practice in several regions of England that could be replicated on a national level. These are run by the voluntary sector. They have unique approaches based upon local need. However, there are also several commonalities such as the importance of a multi-agency approach, the need to provide information to families, raise awareness and provide training to professionals in a position to offer support.
- Examples of good practice models can be found in the Thames Valley (Thames Valley Partnership and Banbury), Eastern region (Ormiston) and the Northwest (POPS).
- Models of multi-agency training have been developed in Devon and Cornwall (String of Pearls), and the Thames Valley (Thames Valley Partnership). These models could be rolled out nationally.
- In the West Midlands, NOMS have funded a pilot Families Do Matter programme to develop better services for children and families across the region.

The conclusions drawn from this project present a number of challenges to policy-makers, statutory and voluntary organisations. Any work carried out with families of prisoners cuts across all sectors and requires a multi-disciplinary approach in order to improve the outcomes for children affected by imprisonment. The next section contains a list of recommendations drawn from the findings and conclusions of the project fieldwork and research.

## **Recommendations**

The following recommendations have evolved from the findings in the literature review and fieldwork. Implementing these recommendations is essential to ensuring that family ties are maintained and that the children who are affected by having a parent in prison are given the same opportunity as other children to meet the five outcomes of Every Child Matters. These children have a right to be safe, to achieve, to be healthy, to achieve economic well-being and to make a positive contribution. The recommendations are arranged according to sector and government department. Finally, there is also a set of recommendations on themes that cut across all sectors, once again highlighting the need for a multi-disciplinary response.

### **Department for Children, Schools and Families**

- Recognise this is a distinct group of children who are at higher risk of social exclusion than the general population and so require specialist policies and support.
- Consider the impact on children from black and minority ethnic groups and their particular cultural needs.
- Consider the development of policies to record information on children affected.
- Develop guidelines on the children of prisoners for organisations on what information can be shared, with whom and when.
- Provide guidance and clarity on the roles and responsibilities of different organisations, such as statutory children's services, in supporting children of prisoners.
- Consider the development of a performance indicator in this area of work, with attached funding.

### **Local safeguarding children boards**

- Use the multi-disciplinary membership to raise the profile of this group of children, and monitor outcomes, perhaps based upon the model of the Multi-Agency Public Protection Panels Agreement (MAPPA).
- Support the development and implementation of formal policies and procedures rather than reliance on good-will.
- Ensure boards have representation from local prisons where applicable.

### **Education**

Schools should be seen as integral to the process supporting children of prisoners and appropriate training and awareness-raising should be undertaken in all schools.

Schools should identify a member of staff with responsibility for liaison and development of relationships with local prisons and probation.

Schools should ensure training is offered to all educational staff on the common assessment framework to enable staff to access assessments for children of concern.

Schools should involve the imprisoned parent in a child's schooling, for example, send in reports on progress.

Children excluded from school will still require support if they have a parent in prison, and schools should ensure appropriate liaison with other organisations to ensure it is in place.

### **Statutory children's services**

- Promote training and awareness-raising about the impact of parental imprisonment. There should be links to continuing professional development (CPD) for staff.
- Training should also be undertaken by staff to improve their knowledge of the criminal justice system. This would give staff more confidence in working with children who have been affected.
- Training programmes have been developed for foster carers (Ormiston) and should be incorporated into their training cycle.
- The particular needs of this group should be incorporated by local authorities into their children and young people's plans.
- There should be a greater awareness of Chapter 19 of the children centre guidance, which specifically addresses the needs of the children of prisoners, and the implications for practice; consideration should be given to employing a dedicated worker who can develop the links.
- Protocols should be developed with the voluntary sector organisations who currently work with children of prisoners to enable better signposting of information and support.
- Care leavers were identified as of particular concern: better collaboration across services is needed to support the transition of a young person to adult services, with regard to the fact that having a parent in prison can make them more vulnerable to mental health problems, unemployment and more likely to offend.
- Care plans for looked after children should specify actions for children to keep in contact with parents, and specify where the funding will come from to enable it to happen.
- Ensure that the needs of children of prisoners are specifically stated in looked after children's procedures, and in training for social workers and foster carers.

### **National Offender Management Service and Ministry of Justice**

- Develop systems to enable prisoners to be placed nearer home for the duration of their sentence, given the impact family ties have on reducing re-offending.

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- Consider how best to implement the children and families pathway to ensure consistency of approach and better outcomes across the country.
- Encourage better communication and liaison across service boundaries, for example between the probation service and health and social care staff.
- At present there is little information for families in many of the courts across the country. There is a need for a better system of providing information at such a critical time.

### **Prison service**

- Ensure information about children is collected from prisoners upon arrival.
- Develop systems to decrease the need to move people around the prison estate and place them nearer to home.
- Consider the need for more flexible visiting hours (so children do not necessarily have to miss school) and a simplified booking system that is consistent across the estate, to assist families in making visits.
- Provide appropriate training to staff on improving the experience of prison-visiting for children.
- Consider the environment and the impact it may have on children, with a view to developing more child-friendly facilities.
- Consider the need for greater consistency across the country in prisons and across the agencies involved.
- Inform children's services when parents are completing parenting programmes.
- Prison family contact and development officers (Scotland) and family support officers (Northern Ireland) to be available in all prisons and their role included in the task line so that they are not therefore expected to carry out other responsibilities. Appropriate training and support should be offered.
- Prisons should provide child-friendly visiting areas, child-centred visits, family days, Storybook Dads and parenting courses in all establishments.

### **National probation service**

- Undertake training on the roles and responsibilities of other agencies outside of the criminal justice system. This would enable more effective information-sharing with other sectors.
- Probation officers should be aware of the importance of maintaining family ties in the rehabilitation of offenders as it is known to reduce the risk of re-offending.

## Health

- Training to encourage more professionals to make use of the common assessment framework for when they have concerns about children. The assessment can be initiated by anyone who has concerns.
- Training to raise awareness of the issues facing the children of prisoners, particularly for GPs and practice nurses, midwives and health visitors.
- Staff should be encouraged to work across service boundaries, such as probation and the voluntary sector to enable appropriate exchange of information.

## Voluntary sector

- Develop mechanisms to evaluate existing practice.
- Develop and promote training to encourage more professionals to make use of the common assessment framework for when they have concerns about children. The assessment can be initiated by anyone who has concerns.

## Cross-cutting themes

- Families should be involved in the design, development and delivery of core services for families of prisoners.
- Criminal justice legislators should be taking into account the impact on families when considering sentencing.
- Relevant government departments should collaborate far more, to reduce the conflict between criminal justice and social care legislation.
- Service level agreements need to cover movements between prisons to ensure families are still able to receive the support they need.
- Systems need to be made available across the prison estate with the cooperation of other sectors in the community so that families can be identified and offered support at the earliest opportunity.
- Social exclusion, poverty and deprivation are pertinent issues that need to continue to be addressed by the Social Exclusion Task Force's 'Think Family' review.
- Models of good practice exist and consideration should be given to replicating these on a regional basis (for example, the good practice seen in Northern Ireland).
- Existing practice requires evidence and evaluation in order to determine a positive impact for children according to the five Every Child Matters outcomes.
- Seek comparative longitudinal research between cohorts in England and other countries to assess causal links and long term effects of parental imprisonment on families.
- Training to encourage more professionals to make use of the common assessment framework for when they have concerns about children. The assessment can be initiated by any one who has concerns from any sector.

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## **Glossary of terms and websites**

### **Action for Prisoners' Families**

Action for Prisoners' Families is a campaigning organisation working to raise the profile of children and families of prisoners. They have also published numerous resources for children and families and for those supporting them (see [Useful contacts and practical resources](#)).

### **Advisory group**

Advisory group is the group of experts in the field who have helped and advised on the development of this project

### **Area Child Protection Committees**

Area Child Protection Committees have now been replaced by [Local children's safeguarding boards](#).

### **Assisted Prison Visits Scheme**

Assisted Prison Visits Scheme is part of the National Offender Management Service. It contributes to the cost of prison visits for families who are receiving state benefits and are on a low income.

### **Association of Directors of Adult Social Services**

Association of Directors of Adult Social Services (formerly part of Association for Directors of Social Services before the split between children and adult services) is the body that represents all the directors of adult social services in England. It brings together the accumulated wisdom and understanding of the way services for adults are managed and financed as well as inputs from a widening responsibility for housing, leisure, library, culture and, in some case, arts and sports facilities.

### **Association of Directors of Children's Services**

Association of Directors of Children's Services (formerly part of Association for Directors of Social Services) is the national leadership association in England for statutory directors of children's services and other children's services professionals in leadership roles.

### **Association of Chief Police Officers**

Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) is an independent, professionally-led strategic body. In the public interest and, in equal and active partnership with Government and the Association of Police Authorities, ACPO leads and coordinates the direction and development of the police service in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

### **Barnardo's Northern Ireland**

Barnardo's Northern Ireland provides practical advice, support and materials for the children and families of prisoners and those who are working with them (see [Useful contacts and practical resources](#)).

### **Behavioural support workers**

Behavioural support workers work in schools, with individual pupils, groups, staff and other agencies in sustaining the inclusion of vulnerable children at risk of exclusion and disaffection.

### **Children Act 2004**

The Children Act 2004 legislates the proposals set out in Every Child Matters, creating clear accountability for children's services, to enable better joint working and to secure a better focus on safeguarding children. The Act provides for the establishment of a Children's Commissioner and supports better integrated planning, commissioning, and delivery of children's services. The Act places a duty on local authorities to make arrangements through which key agencies co-operate to improve the well-being of children and young people and widen services' powers to pool budgets in support of this.

### **Children and families pathway**

Children and families pathway is pathway six of the National Re-offending Delivery Plan. It acknowledges the importance of maintaining family ties to help prevent re-offending, and aims to develop a strategic response to:

1. Encourage the inclusion of life skills, including parenting and relationship skills, within mainstream support for offenders
2. Develop better material and advice and guidance for children and families
3. Ensure that the interests of children and families are considered with the implementation of Every Child Matters.

### **Children's centres**

Sure Start children's centres are places where children under five and their families can receive integrated services and information, and access help from multi-disciplinary teams of professionals. The centres are at the heart of the Government's strategy to deliver better outcomes for children and families, building on the success of Sure Start local programmes. Guidance exists for children's centres and Chapter 19 specifically addresses the needs of the children of prisoners.

### **Children's trusts**

Children's trusts bring together all services for children and young people in an area, underpinned by the Children Act 2004 duty to cooperate, to focus on

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improving outcomes for all children and young people. They will support those who work every day with children, young people and their families to deliver better outcomes.

### **Common assessment framework (CAF)**

The common assessment framework is a key part of delivering frontline services that are integrated and focused around the needs of children and young people. The CAF is a standardised approach to conducting an assessment of a child's additional needs and deciding how those needs should be met. It will promote more effective, earlier identification of additional needs, particularly in universal services, and is intended to provide a simple process for a holistic assessment of a child's needs and strengths. Practitioners will then be better placed to agree, with the child and family, about what support is appropriate. The CAF will also help to improve integrated working by promoting coordinated service provision.

### **Department for Children, Schools and Families**

The Department for Children, Schools and Families is led by the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families and leads work across Government to improve the five Every Child Matters outcomes for children, including work on children's health and child poverty.

### **Department of Health**

The Department of Health is led by the Secretary of State for Health and provides guidance, policy and publications for the delivery of health and social care for adults.

### **European Committee for Children of Imprisoned Parents**

The European Committee for Children of Imprisoned Parents (EUROCHIPS) is a European-wide initiative on behalf of children with an imprisoned parent. It aims to raise awareness and achieve new ways of thinking, acting and interacting on issues concerning prisoners' children. (see [Useful contacts and practical resources](#))

### **Families Outside**

Families Outside is a Scottish charity that helps hundreds of families each year through research, training and the Scottish Prisoner's Family Helpline (see [Useful contacts and practical resources](#)).

### **Family Contact and Development Officer**

Family Contact and Development Officer (FCDO) is the title of the prison officers who have responsibility for working with prisoners and their families in all prisons in Scotland.

## **Family Links**

Family Links is run by **NIACRO**. Family Links, through a partnership with probation services, are sent details of all prisoners' family contacts on committal. The organisation then contacts them within 48 hours to offer practical and emotional support. Family Links will offer ongoing support to families and children who require a service through home visits, benefits advice, transport, groups and referrals to other agencies.

## **Family link workers**

Family link workers are employed by Partners of Prisoners and Families Support Group (POPS), and based within prison establishments across the North of England. Their role is to be a guide through the 'maze' of the criminal justice system and act as a broker between families and offenders, to ensure that families are able to support the offender effectively.

## **Focus groups**

Focus groups were convened to bring together a range of staff and disciplines to offer views and experiences of working with children of prisoners. The groups informed this project and its conclusions and recommendations.

## **Human Rights Act 1998**

The Human Rights Act 1998 contains a section on the rights of children and young people, which provides for children's views to be heard and to be given due weight by courts and other bodies responsible for decisions on matters such as residence and contact between children and non-resident parents.

## **Kids VIP**

Kids VIP provide training across the prison estate to prison staff about making prison visits as child-friendly as possible. They have also produced useful and practical training materials (see **Useful contacts and practical resources**).

## **Literature review**

Literature review is the term SCIE gives to the process of reviewing the research and information that is already published in the field.

## **Local safeguarding children's boards (LSCBs)**

Local safeguarding children's boards are designed to ensure children are safeguarded properly by enabling effective inter-agency working. They replace the former area child protection committees (ACPCs). The core membership is set out in the Children Act 2004, and includes local authorities, health bodies, the police and others. The objective is to coordinate and to ensure the effectiveness of their member agencies in safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children.

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### **Looked After Children (LAC)**

Looked After Children (LAC) are looked after by local authorities and are in care because of abuse or neglect. A minority enter care because of problems with their behaviour. Most looked-after children are placed with foster families. Others live in children's homes, and some with their parents.

### **Multi agency public protection arrangements (MAPPA)**

Multi agency public protection arrangements (MAPPA) enables the responsible authorities (police, prisons, and probation) to identify and manage offenders in the community through the sharing of information and expertise. This takes place at the multi agency public protection panels (MAPPP).

### **Ministry of Justice**

The Ministry of Justice is led by the Secretary of State for Justice, and is the government department responsible for both the prison and probation services, courts, criminal law and sentencing.

### **National Offender Management Service**

National Offender Management Service (NOMS) is responsible for the management of offenders in the community and prison. NOMS is the system through which correctional services and interventions are commissioned in order to protect the public and reduce re-offending.

### **National Prisoners' Families Helpline**

National Prisoners' Families Helpline is run by Action for Prisoners' Families, Ormiston and Partners of Prisoners and Families Support Group. This is a national service providing support and information to families affected by imprisonment. It is also available to those working with anyone whose life is affected by this issue.

### **National Reducing Re-offending Delivery Plan**

National Reducing Re-offending Delivery Plan sets out the Government's plans to reduce re-offending. It is based on the factors identified in the Social Exclusion Unit's report 'Reducing re-offending by ex-prisoners'. It identifies several pathways as part of the delivery, including children and families.

### **North Eastern Prison After Care Society**

North Eastern Prison After Care Society (NEPACS) is a voluntary, independent, community-based charity in the North East that supports offenders, ex-offenders and their families (see [Useful contacts and practical resources](#)).

## **Northern Ireland Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders**

Northern Ireland Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders (NIACRO) Through Family Links, transport and visitor centres offer practical and emotional support to all children and families who are affected by imprisonment across Northern Ireland. The Family Links service ensures that all families are offered independent advice and support within 48 hours of a person entering prison. In a partnership with probation services each prisoner is asked to identify family members and children affected by their imprisonment on committal and the details, if permission is given, are faxed to Family Links who contact them by telephone on the same day as well as sending an information pack specific to each prison. All families are offered immediate practical information over the telephone and ongoing support if requested (see [Useful contacts and practical resources](#)).

## **Ofsted**

Ofsted is the body responsible for inspection and regulation in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages.

## **Ormiston**

Ormiston (also known as Ormiston Children and Families Trust) works to promote the well-being of children and young people. They offer support to the children of prisoners through promoting a greater awareness and a more effective response to their needs. Ormiston are part of the National Prisoners' Families Helpline, and provide community support for children and young people (see [Useful contacts and practical resources](#)).

## **Parenting programmes**

Parenting programmes are run both in prisons and the community. They are designed to teach parents about their roles and responsibilities, and child development.

## **Practice site**

Practice site is the term SCIE uses to describe an area in which a focus group was held.

## **Partners of Prisoners and Families Support Group**

Partners of Prisoners and Families Support Group (POPS) provide a variety of services to support anyone who has a link with someone in prison, prisoners and other agencies (see [Useful contacts and practical resources](#)).

## **Prison Advice and Care Trust (PACT)**

The Prison Advice and Care Trust (PACT) is an independent charity that supports people affected by imprisonment. PACT work with children and

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families of prisoners, and with prisoners inside and on release. They provide family support workers and volunteers at several visitors' centres. Situated outside the prison gates, they can offer information and support to family members. (see [Useful contacts and practical resources](#)).

### **Prisoners' Families and Friends**

Prisoners' Families and Friends is an independent voluntary agency providing advice and support to prisoners' families (see [Useful contacts and practical resources](#)).

### **Revolving Doors Agency**

Revolving Doors Agency works to improve the lives of people who are caught up in a damaging cycle of crisis, crime and mental illness. They undertake service development, and undertake research and national public policy work.

### **Safer Communities Initiative**

The Safer Communities Initiative is conceived as a framework for providing crime and disorder reduction partnerships with funding to supplement mainstream activity, to deliver a complementary activity plan of situational and social crime reduction interventions.

### **Social Exclusion Task Force**

The Social Exclusion Task Force is based in the Cabinet Office and aims to coordinate the Government's drive against social exclusion, ensuring that the cross-departmental approach delivers for those most in need. It recently produced 'Reaching out: think family' as part of its Families at Risk review, in which it highlights children of offenders as a vulnerable group. The most recent publication is 'Think family: improving the life chances of families at risk'.

### **Storybook Dads**

Storybook Dads is a charity that uses digital technology to enable mothers and fathers to record stories for their children to listen to at home (see [Useful contacts and practical resources](#)).

### **String of Pearls**

String of Pearls is a small organisation in the South West providing multi-agency training to professionals working with children and families of prisoners (see [Useful contacts and practical resources](#)).

### **Sure Start**

Sure Start is the Government's programme to deliver the best start in life for every child by bringing together early education, childcare, health and family

support. It covers a wide range of programmes both universal and those targeted on particular local areas or disadvantaged groups within England.

### **Thames Valley Partnership**

Thames Valley Partnership brings people and organisations together to create safer and stronger communities and find sustainable solutions to the problems of crime and social exclusion. It works with criminal justice partners, local authorities, voluntary and community organisations and the private sector, and has developed the 'Family Matters' programme to promote awareness and support multi-agency responses to the children of prisoners across the Thames Valley (see [Useful contacts and practical resources](#)).

### **United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child**

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child is the first legally binding international instrument to incorporate the full range of human rights – civil, cultural, economic, political and social. In 1989, world leaders decided that children needed a special convention just for them because people under 18 years old often need special care and protection that adults do not.

### **Visitor centres**

Visitor centres can be found at many prisons across the estate. They are generally just outside the prison. Some are run by the Prison Service, others by independent charities. At some, the centre may be little more than a room with a drink and snack vending machine and lockers for leaving items during the visit. Others are staffed by volunteers and/or paid workers, and offer families a range of services. Visitor centres aim to provide a welcoming environment where visitors are treated with dignity and respect, and can obtain information, support and advice.

### **West Midlands 'Families Do Matter'**

West Midlands 'Families Do Matter' pathway project is sponsored by NOMS and is working to provide evidence of the longer-term impact and benefit of supporting offenders' to maintain and strengthen their relationships with their children and families.

## **Useful contacts and practical resources**

While this list is not exhaustive, it captures a range of useful resources for supporting children of prisoners.

### **Action for Prisoners' Families (APF)**

APF is a campaigning organisation working to raise the profile of children and families of prisoners. They manage the National Prisoners and Families Helpline, which is run with Ormiston Children and Families Trust and POPS (see below). APF offers confidential advice and support to families of prisoners, including how to keep in touch, how to navigate the prisons and systems and where to seek other support.

The helpline number is 0808 808 2003.

APF also have a wide range of publications, useful for training, awareness-raising and talking to children and families. These include a series of pamphlets about

- telling the children
- living with separation
- keeping in touch
- preparing for release
- sent to prison.

They have also produced story books to help children come to terms with their experiences, namely 'Finding Dad' and 'Danny's Mum' and 'Tommy's Dad'.

'Homeward bound' is an excellent DVD and acts out the experiences, thoughts and fears of a family where the father is due for release from prison. It is a thought-provoking tool for training, as well as something that could be of use to children and families.

APF have also developed a national directory. This has up-to-date information about services all over the UK. It includes details of prisons, visitors' centres, and other relevant services such as those offering support for substance misuse. Access to the directory and publications can be found through their website below.

### **Contact details**

Unit 21, Carlson Court,  
116 Putney Bridge Road  
London SW15 2NQ

Telephone: 020 8812 3600  
Email: [info@actionpf.org.uk](mailto:info@actionpf.org.uk)  
Website: [www.prisonersfamilies.org.uk](http://www.prisonersfamilies.org.uk)

### **Barnardo's Northern Ireland**

As well as providing services to children across Northern Ireland, Barnardo's has produced a series of excellent tools for working with children and families of prisoners, as well as materials for children and parents themselves.

- 'Family ties: information for families when a mum is in prison' is a pack containing information for children and young people, carers and mums themselves.
- 'Staying in touch' is a guide for imprisoned fathers.
- 'Supporting a child when a parent is in prison' is a pamphlet for families to help them support children.
- 'It's a tough time for everyone' is a comic-strip story, now also available in animated DVD format. This is aimed at children and young people and explores issues ranging from the emotional impact to visiting a prison.

Additionally, Barnardo's run the Parenting Matters project in three of the prisons in the province, delivering parenting programmes and preparing the prisoner and their family for release.

### **Contact details**

542–544 Upper Newtownards Road  
Belfast  
BT4 3HE

Telephone: 028 9067 2366  
Fax: 028 9067 2399  
Website: [www.barnardos.org.uk/northernireland.htm](http://www.barnardos.org.uk/northernireland.htm)

### **Department for Children, Schools and Families/Ministry of Justice 'Children of offenders' review.**

This review is considering how to support children of prisoners to achieve better outcomes.

### **European Committee for Children of Imprisoned Parents (EUROCHIPS)**

EUROCHIPS provides practical information on children separated from a parent by imprisonment, on a country-by-country basis.

### **Contact details**

4–6 Rue Charles Floquet  
BP38  
92122 Montrouge  
France

Telephone: +33 (0) 142 53 7185  
Website: [www.eurochips.org](http://www.eurochips.org)

### **Every Child Matters**

Every Child Matters: Change for Children is a new approach to the well-being of children and young people from birth to age 19. The Government's aim is for every child, whatever their background or their circumstances, to have the support they need to:

- be healthy
- stay safe
- enjoy and achieve
- make a positive contribution
- achieve economic well-being.

Website: [www.everychildmatters.gov.uk](http://www.everychildmatters.gov.uk)

### **Families Outside**

Families Outside is a Scottish charity which helps hundreds of families each year. They have developed a good partnership with the Scottish Prison Service and work closely with the family contact and development officers in each prison. Through research, training and partnership work, Families Outside aims to raise awareness of the needs of families affected by imprisonment so that they can get the information and support they need to cope.

Families Outside run the Scottish prisoners' families helpline. This is an independent service for families and friends affected by imprisonment, offering practical advice and emotional support. The helpline can be reached through a free phone number: 0500 839 383.

They have a number of useful publications, including the following factsheets:

- Where to go for help
- Worried about self-harm or suicide?
- Visiting someone in a Scottish prison
- Travel/transport to Scottish prisons
- Time in custody

- Transfers
- Talking to children about imprisonment
- Visiting prison with your children
- Home detention curfew
- Prison visits – do's & don'ts

Families Outside has also produced information for families at court, and about 'through care' (the support offered to a prisoner during their sentence).

Additionally, they have undertaken research such as 'Teenagers with a parent in prison' and 'Prison without bars': needs, support, and good practice for work with prisoners' families'.

### **Contact details**

Families Outside  
19a Albany Street  
Edinburgh EH1 3QN

Telephone: 0131 557 9800  
Helpline email: [spf@familiesoutside.org.uk](mailto:spf@familiesoutside.org.uk)  
General email: [admin@familiesoutside.org.uk](mailto:admin@familiesoutside.org.uk)  
Website: [www.familiesoutside.org.uk](http://www.familiesoutside.org.uk)

### **Gloucestershire Local Education Authority**

Gloucestershire Local Education Authority has produced a policy 'for the education of children with a parent or close relative in prison'. The aims of this policy are:

- to raise awareness of the needs of children and young people with a parent, partner or close relative in prison
- to secure their educational achievement and attendance
- to promote social inclusion.

To view the policy in full go to:

[www.gloucestershire.gov.uk/index.cfm?articleid=3801](http://www.gloucestershire.gov.uk/index.cfm?articleid=3801)

### **HALOW (Birmingham)**

Provides services to prisoners' families to help them overcome problems faced by having a family member in prison. The purpose of the charity is to help maintain good family ties. They provide a range of services in visitor centres at HMP Brimingham, Stafford, Brinsford YOI, and Featherstone.

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### **Contact details**

Halow (Birmingham)  
PO Box 7081  
Birmingham  
B18 4AN

Telephone: 0121 551 9799

### **HMP Maghaberry, Northern Ireland**

HMP Maghaberry has trained family support officers. These are prison officers with responsibility for family liaison and support, both within the prison and in linking families into agencies in the community. They are available to families by telephone and in person.

### **Contact details**

HMP Maghaberry  
17 Old Road  
Upper Ballinderry  
Lisburn, BT28 2PT

Telephone: 028 9261 6067

Website: [www.niprisonservice.gov.uk](http://www.niprisonservice.gov.uk)

### **Kids VIP**

Kids VIP provide training across the prison estate to prison staff about making prison visits as child-friendly as possible. This includes information about good practice, how to replicate it and guidance and support on setting up child-centred family visits. The aim of Kids VIP is to enable children maintain their relationships with an imprisoned parent. Training is available for:

- prison governors and officers
- visitor centre staff
- volunteers and other play workers.

Kids VIP have also produced a good practice guide 'Children visiting prisons: sharing good practice'. This is a useful tool for anyone who has contact with prisons, or is supporting children and families to maintain family ties. 'Kids visiting prison' is a DVD highlighting the issues for children visiting prison. It shows the process children have to go through in terms of security and gaining access to the institution, as well the experience of a normal domestic visit and a child-centred visit. Again, this is an excellent training tool and would be of benefit to anyone who is supporting children visiting prisons.

### **Contact details**

Kids VIP  
PO Box 51217  
London SE11 4ZD

Email: [annettabennett@aol.com](mailto:annettabennett@aol.com)

### **National Offender Management Service: children and families pathway**

This states that children and families can play a significant role in supporting an offender to make and sustain changes which reduce re-offending. However, many offenders' relationships are broken or fragmented as a result of their offending, leaving their families unsupported, and increasing the likelihood of inter-generational offending, mental health and financial problems.

This pathway raises the issue of support for offenders' family relationships and is very much linked to the five outcomes in Every Child Matters. NOMS are funding the **Families Do Matter** project in the West Midlands.

### **North Eastern Prison After Care Society (NEPACS)**

NEPACS is a voluntary, independent, community-based charity that supports offenders, ex-offenders and their families. Volunteers work to provide visitors' centres and children's play areas at prisons throughout the North East. NEPACS also organise special visits for children and families, run events and produce publications to raise awareness.

Contact details  
NEPACS  
22 Old Elvet  
Durham City DH1 3HW

Telephone: 0191 384 3096  
Email: [info@nepacs.co.uk](mailto:info@nepacs.co.uk)  
Website: [www.nepacs.co.uk](http://www.nepacs.co.uk)

### **Northern Ireland Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders (NIACRO)**

Family Links is a programme to help people cope with having a family member in prison. It is offered to the families of all prisoners in Northern Ireland and is funded by the Probation Board, the Youth Justice Agency, the NI Prison Service and the Nationwide Foundation. It is underpinned by the Resettlement Strategy Implementation Plan. The service offers both practical and emotional support.

The Family Links Service ensures that all families are offered independent advice and support within 48 hours of a person entering prison. In partnership

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with probation services, each prisoner is asked to identify family members and children affected by their imprisonment on committal. If permission is given details are faxed to Family Links who aim to contact them by telephone on the same day, as well as sending an information pack specific to each prison. All families are offered immediate practical information over the telephone and if a family member (adult or child) requires further support they can access:

- one-to-one support (in person or by telephone)
- home visits
- referrals to and advocacy with other agencies
- information on other agencies which can help, and how to access them
- advice and information on benefits, housing, debt
- transport to any of the three prisons or the juvenile justice centre
- help with childcare
- links to visitors' centres and prison visit staff.

NIACRO has also produced extremely useful resources for children and families and professionals offering support:

- 'The silent sentence' is a DVD describing the services available and the issues faced by the thousands of families affected every year by imprisonment
- 'Information about prison for people at court' is a leaflet detailing vital information for families about keeping in touch
- 'Outside help' is a booklet providing a range of practical information about maintaining contact, support services, benefits, accommodation and release.

### **Contact details**

Amelia House  
4 Amelia Street  
Belfast BT2 7GS

Tel: 028 9032 0157

Fax: 087 0432 1415

Email: [niacro@niacro.co.uk](mailto:niacro@niacro.co.uk)

Website: [www.niacro.co.uk](http://www.niacro.co.uk)

### **Ormiston (Ormiston Children and Families Trust)**

Ormiston works across the majority of the prisons in the Eastern region. They have been working successfully in this field for many years and have expertise in many areas. They staff the visitor centres, run accredited parenting programmes and special visits in the prisons, work with children in

the community and produce resources and information for families and those who work with them.

Partnership with other organisations is highly valued by Ormiston. They offer a range of training and awareness-raising, including a programme for foster carers, social work students and schools. All of the following resources are available from Ormiston:

- 'Working with children and families of prisoners – a guide for teachers and education professionals'
- A pack of leaflets available for photocopying entitled 'My Mum's/Dad's in Prison' with information about visiting prison, telling the children, being a parent or carer and specific material for younger and older children
- Visiting My Dad/Visiting My Mum
- You and Your Child parenting programme.

Ormiston have also produced research in the field:

- 'Time for Families: positive outcomes for children & families of offenders using Ormiston services in prisons and the community'
- 'Sentenced families'
- 'Dads and kids: the inside story'
- 'The Eastern Region Families Partnership 2002–2005: an evaluation'.

Ormiston are also part of the consortium that operates the national Prisoners' Families Helpline (see APF).

### **Contact details**

Ormiston  
333 Felixstowe Road  
Ipswich IP3 9BU  
Telephone: 01473 724517  
Fax: 01473 274255  
Email: [enquiries@ormiston.org](mailto:enquiries@ormiston.org)  
Website: [www.ormiston.org](http://www.ormiston.org)

### **Partners of Prisoners and Families Support Group (POPS)**

POPS provide a variety of services to support anyone who has a link with someone in prison, prisoners and other agencies. POPS aims to provide support to enable families to cope with the stress of arrest, imprisonment and release.

POPS currently run the following services:

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- Family Link Workers: POPS have 10 Family Link workers based within prison establishments across the northwest. Their role is to be a guide through the 'maze' of the criminal justice system and act as a broker between families and offenders, to ensure that families are able to support the offender effectively.
- Visitor centres: POPS run several visitor centres, all of which are based outside the main prison and offer a welcoming environment for children and families.
- Black prisoner support project: This was set up to raise awareness about institutional racism in prisons. Research into the treatment and experiences of black prisoners has been an integral part of this on-going process.
- POPS are also part of the consortium that run the national Prisoners' Families Helpline (see APF).

For more information on these projects and for copies of publications, contact POPS on the details below.

### Contact details

Valentine House  
1079 Rochdale Road  
Blackley  
Manchester M9 8AJ  
Telephone: 0161 702 1000  
Fax: 0161 702 1000  
Email: [Email POPS](mailto:Email POPS)  
Website: [www.partnersofprisoners.org.uk](http://www.partnersofprisoners.org.uk)

### The Prison Advice and Care Trust (PACT)

The Prison Advice and Care Trust (PACT) is an independent charity that supports people affected by imprisonment. PACT work with children and families of prisoners, and with prisoners inside and on release. They provide family support workers and volunteers at several visitors' centres. Situated outside the prison gates, they can offer information and support to family members.

### Contact details

Suite C5  
City Cloisters  
196 Old Street  
London EC1V 9FR  
  
Telephone: 020 7490 3139  
Fax: 020 7490 0755  
Email: [info@prisonadvice.org.uk](mailto:info@prisonadvice.org.uk)  
Website: [www.prisonadvice.org.uk](http://www.prisonadvice.org.uk)

## **Prisoners' Families and Friends (PFF)**

Prisoners' Families and Friends Service is an independent voluntary agency which has been helping prisoners' families for 40 years. The main aims of the service are to provide the families and friends of anyone sentenced to imprisonment or remanded in custody with:

- advice and information
- support and assistance at court
- support and friendship.

PFF have produced several useful resources including pamphlets on:

- 'Court to custody'
- 'Information for those with a family member or friend in prison'.

Additionally, in partnership with Islington Primary Care Trust and Age Concern, PFF have produced

- 'A guide for grandparents bringing up the children of prisoners'
- 'A guide for young people living with their grandparents while their parents are in prison'.

## **Contact details**

Prisoners' Families and Friends Service  
20 Trinity Street  
London SE1 1DB

Telephone: 0808 808 3444 (freephone helpline for prisoners' families)

020 7403 4091/9359 (admin.)

Fax: 020 7403 9359

Email: [info@prisonersfamiliesandfriends.org.uk](mailto:info@prisonersfamiliesandfriends.org.uk)

Website: [www.prisonersfamiliesandfriends.org.uk](http://www.prisonersfamiliesandfriends.org.uk)

## **Social Exclusion Task Force families review 'Reaching out: think family'**

This report, published in 2007, seeks to extend the benefits of the Every Child Matters approach to the whole family so that adults' and children's services work together to tackle the root causes of children's disadvantage that often lie in the difficulties of their parents. The report is about early intervention – breaking the cycle that is passed down the generations, by tackling the drivers in the wider family environment that contribute to poor outcomes for the children and for child poverty. It is also about never giving up on families and looking for every opportunity to support them. It specifically mentions the children of prisoners, stating that parental imprisonment disrupts contact between parent and child and is strongly associated with poor outcomes.

### **Storybook Dads**

Award-winning Storybook Dads is an independent, registered charity. It is based at Dartmoor Prison and has been steadily expanding across the prison estate. They use digital technology to enable mothers and fathers to record stories for their children to listen to at home, with the aim of maintaining family ties and facilitating learning for prisoners and their children through the provision of story CDs.

### **Contact details**

Storybook Dads  
HMP Dartmoor  
Princetown  
Yelverton  
Devon PL20 6RR

Email: [storybookdads@blueyonder.co.uk](mailto:storybookdads@blueyonder.co.uk)

Website: [www.storybookdads.org.uk](http://www.storybookdads.org.uk)

### **String of Pearls**

String of Pearls is a small charity based in the South West. They were able to secure funding from the local probation service to run a series of multi-agency one-day training sessions to teach professionals – doctors, teachers, probation officers, social workers – about the needs of prisoners' families in the community.

The aim of the training is to train professionals in offering tailored support to the children and families of prisoners that they encounter. The trainers use creative arts to bring the subject to life, including:

- audio and DVD drama
- role plays
- poetry
- an exhibition of artwork by prisoners' children and families
- a CD of music composed by prisoners' families
- audio recordings of prisoners' family members describing difficult situations.

These materials were created during workshops with prisoners' families and are available from String of Pearls through [mary.stephenson@gmail.com](mailto:mary.stephenson@gmail.com) .

### **Sure Start children's centres**

A government programme to deliver the best start in life for every child by bringing together early education, child care, health and family support. It

covers a wide range of programmes both universal and those targeted on particular local areas or disadvantaged groups within England.

Relevant guidance can be found in Chapter 19 which sets out the responsibilities for staff in Sure Start and children's centres in relation to the children of prisoners and the importance of supporting families to maintain family ties.

### **Thames Valley Partnership (TVP)**

The Thames Valley Partnership brings people and organisations together to create safe and stronger communities through identifying sustainable solutions to the problems of crime and social exclusion. Their innovative Family Matters programme works towards improving and integrating support to the children and families of prisoners and offenders.

To facilitate this process, TVP have delivered training in prisons and communities across the region. This has crossed the boundaries of traditional service provision. It has raised the profile and awareness of the difficulties faced by families, and led to the setting up of several Family Matters Community Networks (see [Banbury practice site](#)). These pilot networks are locality based and multi-disciplinary. They are child-focused and enable sharing of information and case planning about particular families affected by imprisonment.

TVP have also developed leaflets:

- 'Invisible children' is a guide for teachers working with the children of prisoners
- 'Custody – what now?' is for children of prisoners, and available at court.

Additionally, behaviour support staff and educational psychologists in Banbury have developed a series of resources for teachers and teaching assistants to use when supporting children of prisoners. It is hoped they will become available nationally.

TVP have also pulled together much of the training material and resources, identified in this section, into one pack. This is available from TVP for £40+p&p.

### **Contact details**

Townhill Barn  
Dorton Road  
Chilton  
Aylesbury  
Buckinghamshire, HP18 9NA

Tel: 01844 202001  
Fax: 01844 202008

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Email: [admin@thamesvalleypartnership.org.uk](mailto:admin@thamesvalleypartnership.org.uk)

Website: [www.thamesvalleypartnership.org](http://www.thamesvalleypartnership.org)

### **West Midlands ‘Families Do Matter’ children and families pathway project**

This project is sponsored by the National Offender Management Service and aims to provide evidence of the longer-term impact and benefit of supporting offenders’ to maintain and strengthen their relationships with their children and families. It aims to bring together partner organisations from both prisons and communities to facilitate joint working and better outcomes for families.

The project is being piloted in localities across the West Midlands, and will undertake research and evaluation on:

- providing information and support within both prisons and communities
- reaching BME communities
- training, engagement and communications.

### **Contact details**

West Midlands Children and Families of Offenders Project  
All Saints House  
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- All attendees of the following practice sites (see [Appendix 4](#) for the full list)

## Children of prisoners – maintaining family ties

- Banbury, England
- Halton Borough, England
- Devon and Cornwall, England
- Telford, England
- Partners of Prisoners and Families Support Group (POPS) - Manchester, England
- Norwich, England
- Representatives from across Northern Ireland
- Scottish Prison Service and Families Outside.

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## Methodology

This section describes how the project was carried out and the rationale for the choice of methodology. The following methods were employed:

### Advisory group

The research was underpinned by the involvement of a strong multi-agency advisory group invited to take part in directing the project and imparting vital knowledge. The advisory group contains key representatives from a range of statutory and voluntary organisations, government departments and academic representation. For a list of participants please refer to the [Acknowledgements](#).

### Scope and literature review

The first stage of the project involved carrying out a comprehensive scope to identify relevant research literature. This was completed in August 2006 and covered literature over the last fifteen years. The scope assessed a range of key social care databases and journals from the UK and the United States for information, including the following: ASSIA, Social Care Online, ChildData, IBSS, PsychInfo, SIGLE, SSCI, SSA, SWA, SocAbs, SOSIG, National Library for Health, British Journal of Criminology, British Journal of Psychiatry, British Journal of Social Work, Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal, Clinical Social Work Journal, Journal of Adolescence, Journal of Criminal Justice, Journal of Forensic Psychiatry and Psychology, The Psychologist, Social Policy and Society, Sociological Research, Youth and Society, The National Criminal Justice Reference Service, Women's Studies International Forum, Research on Social Work Practice, The Journal of Social Welfare and Family Law, Psychiatric Bulletin, Probation Journal, Community Care, Criminal Justice Abstracts.

In addition to searching journals and databases, various organisations and websites were assessed for relevant literature. These included the Department of Health, Department for Children, Schools and Families, The Prison Service, National Offender Management Service, Ministry of Justice, Youth Justice Board, Probation Service, NHS – England, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland, and the Government Social Research Unit.

The scope returned a total of 296 references. These were key-worded according to the following subsets:

- good practice
- children-focused
- consequences
- family-focused
- government
- interface

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- intervention
- mother–baby unit
- key document
- Northern Ireland
- parent-focused
- residential care
- statistics, support
- visiting
- women.

It is acknowledged that the scope was by no means able to cover all existing literature, but it provided a base to begin the literature review. Further relevant documents were added to the review via project contacts, the advisory board and additional internet searching.

### **Structured questionnaire**

The scope results were used to design the questionnaire that was sent to all local children safeguarding boards in England, with a view to building up a national picture. Ethical approval from the Association of Directors of Social Services was received.

The local children safeguarding boards were targeted for the following reasons:

- “Children can only be safeguarded properly if the key agencies work effectively together. Local safeguarding children boards are designed to help ensure that this happens...the core membership of Local Safeguarding Children Boards is set out in the Children Act 2004, and includes local authorities, health bodies, the police and others. The objective of the Boards is to coordinate and to ensure the effectiveness of their member agencies in safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children” (1).
- This is an issue that requires a multi-agency response and which crosses the traditional boundaries of service provision. The board has a role in coordinating that response and so it seemed appropriate to focus our research upon these groups rather than children’s services exclusively.
- It was important to raise this issue with boards in the hope that, if there was no provision locally, it would at least trigger some thought about the needs of these children and increase awareness of the need to take action.

There are 150 boards in England and a total of 32 replies were received. This equates to a sample of 21 per cent. Several questionnaires received some months after the deadline highlighted practice worth investigating. However,

the information was received too late for the timeframe of this project. See [Appendix 1](#) for a copy of the questionnaire and detailed responses.

### **The focus groups**

From a combination of information from the advisory group and the results from the local children safeguarding board questionnaires, a list of practice sites were highlighted. Focus groups were held at these locations and a structured range of questions were used. The focus group questions can be found in [Appendix 2](#), responses can be found in [Appendix 3](#) and a list of participants in [Appendix 4](#).

The focus groups demonstrate a continuum of awareness and practice as described below:

- little or no practice but awareness of the needs of this group of children
  - Cornwall
  - Halton Borough, Runcorn
- emerging practice
  - Banbury
  - Telford
- established practice
  - Parents of Prisoners' support service, Manchester and Northwest
  - Norwich and Eastern region
  - Northern Ireland
  - Scotland.

The focus groups contained a mix of multi-agency representatives from probation, prison, health, education, voluntary sector, young offending teams and social care.

Themes covered were:

- strategy
- funding
- policies and procedures
- partnerships
- training
- practice
- links with prisons
- outcomes
- challenges and obstacles
- lessons for practice.

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Each focus group took two to three hours and comprised between five and 15 representatives.

### **Additional field work**

The following prisons were visited and discussions held with prison governors and/or visitor centre staff. The prisons were chosen because they have specified family days and visiting areas.

- HMP Norwich
- HMP Gloucester
- HMP Maghaberry.

## **Appendix 1: Local safeguarding board questionnaire results**

This appendix sets out the full responses received from boards for each question. The questionnaire was circulated in February 2007, with a closing date for returns of 31st March 2007.

### **Question 1: Does your local safeguarding children board have a role in identifying and supporting children and families of prisoners?**

- Yes (5), Yes, but (1), No (21), Not yet (2), Not answered (2).

#### **Question 1a. If yes, please describe your role.**

- Six respondents indicated that this is not a discrete group of children and that children would be treated as 'children in need' through use of assessment tools such as the CAF, initial assessment or core assessment.
- One board indicated they have a clear role around assessment in relation to some contacts taking place in prison, either on the request of the court or prison governors.
- One board indicated that its members are in the process of devising the 2007/08 work plan. The board will now have the scope and opportunity to table in a discussion around children of prisoners and, if appropriate, this area of work will be located within one of the existing sub-groups.
- Several boards that answered 'no' indicated that there is no current role but there are plans to look at developing systems, as a result of the exercise undertaken to complete this document, for monitoring and identifying children and families of prisoners who may require support. This does not mean that these services necessarily need to be provided by the statutory agencies.
- The Probation Service OASys system does not produce this data, but only captures children who are at risk from offenders.
- The LSCB coordinates the effectiveness of how all agencies work to safeguard children and young people which will include support for children and families of prisoners.
- Two boards said that the local safeguarding board in itself does not have a role but individual members of the board do. The board may take a strategic role in ensuring that agencies are working together to promote the welfare of children of prisoners and set local priorities for inter-agency working. There may also be a role for the board to have the data reported to them on a regular basis.
- Children's social care may be involved with a family depending on the circumstances. With the establishment of multi-agency locality teams it may be appropriate to explore the support offered to families in this situation through universal services.

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- In one response the LSCB, in conjunction with the probation service and the Children and Young People's Partnership (children's trust), arranged a series of training events and held a conference. These occasions helped to raise awareness of the needs of children and families of prisoners and work is continuing to be done to maintain awareness through linking the needs of these children and families to the LSCB business plan and the Stay Safe element of the Children and Young People's Plan.
- One board has a representative for the prisons, and another indicated the family and support pathway of the Reducing Re-offending action plan, a regional document, is considering this area.

### **Question 2: Does the safeguarding board record how many children in the authority have a parent or carer in prison?**

- **Yes (0), No (30), Not yet (1), Not answered (1).**

### **Question 2a. If yes, what system is used to record data, and how many children were recorded in the last 12 months?**

- This does not happen yet, but the LSCB is planning to collate this information as part of the LSCB 07/08 Performance Management Framework
- The only information available is on care leavers. There is an internal system of weekly reporting on where young people are living and whether they are parents or carers. We also do a return on a young person's nineteenth birthday about their accommodation status.
- Note the probation service's OASys assessment tool only records children of prisoners if there is a relevant issue regarding the offence, such as Schedule 1 status.

### **Question 2b. If no, do you have any other way of knowing how many children might be affected?**

- The individual needs of children and young people who become subject of National Assessment Framework or core assessment or those subject to a Child Protection Plan as well as those looked after or subject to a supervision order, will be reflected in their planning and reviewing cycle. Where a parent is in prison, this will feature in the assessment and planning process.
- Data is not aggregated about children and young people who have a parent in prison.
- The probation service would be the key agency to inform us of issues of concern relating to the children of prisoners.
- There is no systematic way in which the department records this information. However, if required the information can be ascertained and accessed through the ICT system that is currently in place.

- The National Offender Management Service refers on any children who they identify as having needs as a result of their parent's imprisonment.

**Question 3. Do you know how many children of prisoners are in your area at present?**

- Yes, through manual check (1), No (27), Not yet (2), Not answered (2).
- This information is held by local teams and is yet to be collated centrally.
- LSCB does not currently collate this information but is proposing to measure in the future.
- No, but it is possible to find out.

**Question 4. Do you have any processes in place for monitoring and assessing if maintaining family ties is appropriate for the looked after children of prisoners?**

- Yes (21), No (9), Not sure, but (1), Not answered (1).

**Question 4a. If yes, how do you make sure access arrangements take place?**

- The majority of the responses that came in for this question all indicated that there is a statutory requirement to promote contact insofar as this is compatible with the interests of the child. This would be monitored through looked after children's reviews and if there are not satisfactory arrangements in place there are a number of systems to take issues forward.
- Arrangements will be made by social workers and managers with the relevant prison for either letter, telephone or direct contact. It is the responsibility of the child's social worker who arranges escort and transport.
- These arrangements are monitored by independent reviewing officers who check that appropriate family ties are maintained including where relevant family members are in prison.
- Another response said this is facilitated through a good relationship with a number of prisons.
- One respondent noted there is an independent advocacy service, which supports young people to ensure that they can have contact with parents who are in prison.
- One response indicated that child protection procedures and operational guidance require workers to undertake a risk assessment when requested by prison staff.

**Question 5. Do you have a service level agreement (or equivalent) with the police service and/or probation service about what happens when a child has a parent arrested?**

- Yes (3), No (21), No, but (6), Not answered (1).

**Question 5a. If yes, what is the process?**

- There is a 'crack house protocol' for when a suspected drugs premises is raided, which includes guidance around dealing with children on the premises.
- This subject matter will be taken to the appropriate heads of services for further consideration.
- If the child was abandoned as a result of the arrest, children's services would be contacted to make arrangements for the care of the child.
- We have a local agreement and sound relationships with our Metropolitan Police Child Abuse Investigation Team both locally and centrally.
- No, but where there is risk to a child or a child with no suitable care arrangement, under existing LSCB children in need processes a referral would be made to children's social care. There are good working relationships with police and probation locally.
- There is a protocol in place for safeguarding children when a parent is arrested, in terms of urgent response through the emergency duty team within children's services.
- If it is a planned arrest and the police are aware that there are children in the household they will contact the service in advance. If this becomes apparent during an arrest they contact the duty team.
- Not sure if formal protocol exists but incorporated into London probation safeguarding children policy.
- Police will usually liaise with children's social care in advance if they know children are likely to be in a household where they will be arresting the carers/parents. Children's social care would attend to ensure the children were placed safely until parents or carer could resume looking after their children. This information is not always available. If children come to the police's attention as a result of an unexpected arrest developing then they would liaise with the local assessment team or out of hours to the emergency duty team to ensure the children had appropriate support. These situations are relatively rare.

**Question 5b. What works well?**

- In general, if parents are arrested, police will contact the duty desk in children's services.
- The police will always notify us of any pending arrest wherever possible and a discussion will take place to ensure we explore the

needs of any children. When an arrest is made we work closely with the police to again ensure that the children's needs are met and that the process is as smooth as possible with minimal disruption to children.

- The Offender Management Service only deals with those prisoners receiving a sentence of 12 months or more. Information-sharing arrangements prohibit 'speculative' information-sharing. Parents retain a choice as to whether information about their circumstances is shared. A generalised approach would not seem possible.
- Good liaisons with the police exist and are facilitated by an accessible and responsive detective inspector.
- Being a geographically small authority the networks work well.
- During out-of-hours both police and emergency duty staff can be at a premium in which case there have been delays in responding.

**Question 5c. If no, what obstacles prevent an agreement being put in place?**

- The Offender Management Service only deals with those prisoners receiving a sentence of 12 months or more. Information-sharing arrangements prohibit 'speculative' information-sharing. Parents retain a choice as to whether information about their circumstances is shared. A generalised approach would not seem possible.
- During out-of-hours both police and emergency duty staff can be at a premium in which case there have been delays in responding.
- There is a lack of coordination in the police service. We liaise, but the service is not joined up.
- It is not always possible to pre-empt an arrest and sometimes events overtake planning.
- It would need a clear policy about respective roles and thresholds. A parent going into prison may not, as matter of course, require intervention or support if there is another suitable parent or carer still at home.
- The LSCB has conflicting priorities and only now is it moving from its core responsibility of child protection to its wider safeguarding remit.

**Question 6. Have your social work staff/care managers had training in liaising with prisons to secure appropriate visits for children to see a parent or carer?**

- Yes (3), No (29).

**Question 6a. If yes, what sort of training and from whom?**

- Children's social care provides a comprehensive training programme including effective multi-agency working. A multi-agency trainer provides the training. The social workers also have regular supervision by their line manager in line with the council's

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employment development programme. The frequency is monitored. The supervisory relationship is an effective mechanism for training and coaching staff.

- The safeguarding group manager is responsible for this and has undertaken training in the past via previous area child protection committee training programme.
- Staff have had extensive experience of liaising with prisons on a case by case basis. Responses vary tremendously from prison to prison.
- Social workers have not received formal training in relation to liaising with prisons to secure appropriate visits for children to see their parent or carer. However, workers are encouraged to share their knowledge, skills and experiences within informal setting such as team meetings and peer group meetings. Workers are able to transfer and draw upon their acquired social work skills knowledge and experience when working with children of parents in prison.
- No, but the appropriateness of visits is integral to planning for any child with a parent in prison.

### **Question 7. Have your social work staff/care managers had experience of liaising with prisons to secure appropriate visits for children to see a parent or carer?**

- Yes (25), Yes, but no details (1), No (6).

### **Question 7a. If yes, what sort of experience?**

- Several responses indicated this is on a case-by-case basis for looked after children or occasionally children in need. Social work staff/care managers have had the experience of liaising, organising and assisting with the arrangement and management of prison visits for children to see a parent or carer. This can be in conjunction with a foster carer.
- One replied that work takes place with NOMS as necessary.
- For one LSCB, the safeguarding group manager has established a good relationship with various prisons and established good communication channels.
- Some have requested visiting orders for young people and on occasions accompanied young people on the visit.
- There is a whole range of experiences, dependent on the nature of the prison, age of the child. An issue of concern is more about the process around the arrival at prison and getting into the visiting room. Various experiences around capacity to have closed contact sessions and not to have to use open sessions
- Normally through contacting the prison probation officer or governor to arrange.
- This might well occur in specific cases but would not be a standard experience for the staff group, certainly not frequent enough to justify a specific training programme.

- They have been requested and have undertaken risk assessments on an infrequent basis.
- The prisons we deal with will inform us if a request has been made for a prisoner to have contact with a child. We will then assess if it's appropriate and at what level.
- There is no formal agreement of protocol in place to support this.

**Question 8. Are you able to support/advise foster carers to enable them to help the children in their care maintain (if appropriate) family ties with a parent in prison?**

- Yes (24), Yes but no information supplied (4), No (2), Not answered (2).

**Question 8a. If yes, what resources are used?**

- Thirteen respondents indicated that this would be a role for the foster care workers/social workers who support, assist and advise foster carers to enable them to help the children in their care maintain family ties with parent in prison. This is done by a range of methods and on a case by case basis, depending on the age and ability of the child.
- By contacting relevant prison and determining arrangements.
- Training programmes for foster carers include the importance of maintaining appropriate family ties.
- Training via the safeguarding board as well as in-house foster care training and support groups
- Both the family placement link worker and the child's social worker will address needs of carers in relation to providing explanations to the child.
- In general it is social workers who do liaison. It would be difficult to get foster carers to visit prison.
- Advice, materials and encouragement.
- Foster carers would be supported to facilitate contact if appropriate, however, there are no specific training materials in place.
- We have a foster carer who is an experienced prison officer who could advise carers and offer support. As yet we have had no requests or experience of maintaining these ties.
- If this role is identified in a looked after children's review then support will be provided by a family placement social worker.
- The link and key workers for the carers/ child in placement would be expected to find and communicate information in this respect and ensure the carers and looked after child (LAC) received appropriate support for this.
- Nothing specific but contact would always be discussed at a Looked After Children review and we would be mindful of the issue.

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- Managed on an individual case basis by the worker involved. No formal agreement of protocol in place to support this and no formal training provided.
- In appropriate cases, fostering officers support foster carers in promoting contact through correspondence, phone calls and (although rarely) visits.
- Individual case planning and support where it appropriate for the foster carer to undertake this task. We would also look to see if a family member could do this or in some cases another worker.

### **Question 9. Do social workers/care managers have involvement with the family in the planning for release?**

- Yes (24), No (7), Not answered (1).

### **Question 9a. If yes, can you give us an example?**

- Ten responses indicated that support would only be offered if the child was looked after and part of a family system that was actively being worked with. This would involve a social work visit to prison before release to discuss contact arrangements post release; liaising with foster carers, family and children about how best this can be managed.
- Having a parent incarcerated would not, per se, guarantee involvement from social care teams.
- Twelve responses referred to risk management and the Multi-agency Public Protection Panel arrangement where individual cases are discussed with police, probation, children's services and other relevant agencies. These arrangements apply in relation to high levels of risk.
- One example was of a woman who was imprisoned for leaving her children home alone for a lengthy period. The children were the subject of interim care orders and the mother imprisoned for one year. On her release the plan was for a residential family assessment to assess parenting skills. This is ongoing.
- To an extent – this is not always possible due to the difficult relationship we sometimes have with families who do not always welcome our involvement or support.
- Probation/the prison notify children's social care and where there are issues of risk children's social care and possibly the police would liaise re planning. This may be under the auspices of MAPPA where the subject is a registered sex offender.
- Yes, when release back to the family address is being considered for those in prison for offences against children.
- Liaising with prison and probation, agreeing a plan of action and support; assisting with accommodation if necessary.
- Risk assessment and management issues in relation to persons who pose a risk of harm to children/family - for example, sex offender,

domestic violence perpetrator. More generally in preparing child for release of parent and exploring/negotiating contact issues.

- Probation would also have a role in supporting the family and checking the welfare of the children of discharged prisoners and referring to other children's services for assessment, support or intervention as required.

**Question 10. Do you offer support to the family once the parent of carer has been released?**

- Yes (22), No (5), Not answered (5).

**Question 10a. If yes, what sort of support is offered?**

1. Again, responses indicated that this would only happen if the child was looked after by the local authority, and if the care plan identified this as a need for intervention. Otherwise the child would receive the universal service provided, such as early years. Sure Start children's centres, health, school and the voluntary sector.
2. The common assessment framework (CAF) could be used as a tool to refer a child in need assessment of a higher level of intervention if required.
3. Any support would be based upon the willingness of the parent/carer and an assessment of the circumstances of the family in relation to our threshold criteria.
4. Practical support can be offered, such as advice on accommodation, arranging contact, ongoing therapy and assessment.

**Question 11. Do you think there are gaps in provision for children and families of prisoners?**

- Not sure (3), Yes (25), No (0), Not answered (3).

**Question 11a. If yes, what do you think the issues are?**

- Awareness-raising with social workers. The need to recognise the possible impact of the imprisonment of a parent on children.
- Information about support available and more focus on the child rather than offender.
- Prisons not always fully aware of the requirements for assessment and notification in relation to adults who are a risk to children.
- No support for prisoners sentenced to less than 12 months.
- No legal basis for involvement and no government guidance.
- No voluntary sector provision in the area, that may be more acceptable to the families. Would families want social care involvement?
- Barriers to contact, such as the difficulty getting through to prisons and arranging contact and visits, lack of child-centred and family-

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friendly facilities away from main prison, pleasant rooms with toys, access, distance from home, flexible contact/visiting arrangements.

- Help for prisoners to write to their children.
- Clearly a child may well have additional needs that could be supported via group work with peers or via family work or individual work. However the resource implications of this are extensive.
- There is no clear responsibility for these children – they are only identified if the prison staff raise issues and are not automatically considered to be children in need.
- The feedback from this research may have an impact upon this and also when start monitoring numbers as part of LSCB Performance Management Framework.
- Sometimes the issue does not fit the criteria for assessment under the CAF but the family need support with that issue and we don't have the resources to help them.
- Difficult to get data to effectively manage and plan services.
- The cross-boundary issue can make communication difficult.
- Lack of understanding of the impact on children such as stigmatising by peers.
- Children of prisoners are not being considered as a vulnerable group, as part of strategic planning.
- Identifying suitable times for visits which do not require children missing school.
- Given the high demand for children's social care services children with parents in prison rarely receive additional support unless there are other factors impacting on their welfare or safety.
- Particular issues for expectant mothers and those with babies or very young children from whom they are separated.
- Procedures on initial risk assessment and information-sharing by the police and probation.
- Children of prisoners are automatically children in need but they may need an assessment by universal health and education services to see if they need additional assessment or support from a specialist agency.
- Prisons not always fully aware of the requirements for assessment and notification in relation to adults who are a risk to children.

### **Question 11b. Where do the greatest problems lie?**

- Lack of awareness.
- The problem is systemic.
- The insufficient resources available to local social care agencies.
- bureaucracy, resources and identification.
- Information about numbers of children affected and support available.
- Establishing whether help is needed.

- Capacity to meet need.
- Repeated short term sentences for some less serious offenders are hugely disruptive for some children.
- Information systems.
- Trying to be inclusive to parent in prison, for example, copying them into information and correspondence, child's school reports etc.
- Having child-friendly facilities within prison.
- I think this comes back to communication and information-sharing at all levels and within each agency but also the continuing need to prioritise cases due to increasing workloads and referrals.
- Around the complexity of visiting and the movement of prisoner around the system.
- Competing agendas for LSCB.
- Clearly, the more that people are imprisoned, the greater the consequences for children.
- Prison overcrowding has consequences for the frequency and quality of direct contact.
- We have no evidence that the system of identification and referral by schools and health is not working, but it is not clear that we will always know which children are the children of prisoners as there are human rights and data protection issues here, as well as possible vulnerable children, or children in need or child protection issues.
- It is only those children at the higher thresholds of concern that would be the responsibility of social care.

**Question 12. What sort of product or tool might be helpful for you and your staff in your work with children of prisoners?**

- These children should be dealt with via assessment processes for any child in need such as CAF, initial assessment etc.
- A guide/guidelines for social work practitioners and other professionals around supporting and dealing with children of prisoners will be helpful.
- Full implementation of the Reducing Re-offending National Action Plan. In particular Pathway 6 – Children and families of offenders.
- Training resource pack for use in multi-agency training, using both theoretical material and real life issues from prisoners and their families.
- Clear designated contact persons in prison.
- Child-friendly facilities.
- Creative use of technology such as videos, DVDs and tapes to facilitate contact.
- A pack for children that is age-appropriate, to leave with carers or to use by professionals

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- information-sharing protocol to inform the local authority of which children are affected, although we may not have the resources to respond, especially in the light of our growing prison population.
- Material to raise awareness in schools and social care teams that a child will have additional support needs by virtue of the fact that a parent is in prison would be helpful. Rather than stimulating additional referrals to social care however, it would be helpful for materials to include practical advice for example to teachers on how to raise the issue with a child.
- We need to improve the sharing of information with schools and also to provide guidance to schools regarding how to record children's visits to prisons.
- Materials to be used with younger children explaining about prison and impact.
- Guidance which sets out the issues to be considered so that staff have an 'aide memoire' to prompt them when dealing with a child whose parent or carer is in prison.
- Proactive work with prisons preparing for release.
- Improved communication and liaison.
- A set of standards, multi-agency procedure/protocol and a data collection tool to enable the LSCB to monitor circumstances.
- Joint protocol with police and probation on release of prisoners and planning for children.
- There are already a number of tools/training and skills that social workers possess that relate to understanding the needs, wishes and feelings of the child that would be transferable to this situation. The issue may be more for unqualified staff or perhaps staff in probation who are less familiar with working directly with children.
- As with parents who have mental health or substance misuse problems, some child-centred information and storybooks might help.
- Training to increase an awareness of the issues.
- Information on how the needs of children of prisoners are assessed in prisons and by the police and probation at the various stages of the criminal justice system.
- Clear assessment and referral pathways.

### **Question 13. Do you know of any good practice models elsewhere?**

- The vast majority said they were unaware of any models.
- Video-conferencing.
- Web cameras to assist communication and reduce the need to visit prisons.
- High-security psychiatric hospitals have a well-developed system for assessing and supervising all child contacts within the community and hospital.

- NSPCC has done work with prisons on child protection procedures.

**Question 14: Would you be willing to get involved in this project to inform its development and comment on progress?**

- Yes (15), No (15), Already involved elsewhere (1), Not answered (1).

**Question 15. Do you have other comments?**

- We are a fairly small authority so the numbers of families who are already known to us for other reasons and who become ‘prisoners’ families’ is fairly small.
- The main focus will be with the ‘clusters’ i.e. our tier 1 and 2 services rather than ‘traditional’ social services.
- In practice the LSCBs do not undertake these sorts of activities and responsibilities. They fall to operational services such probation and children’s social care services (who might have been a better source of information?).
- Completing this made me realise how little I know about this subject and what a low priority it has.
- Local Young Offender Team involved with a regional Southwest offender management service and will reflect on this research and how it might inform its activity.
- The Reducing Re-offending Action Plan (RRAP) Group, whilst endorsed by the LSCB, continues to work on the periphery. It would be useful, therefore, if guidance could be issued nationally to ensure closer relationships exist between this work and the remits of LSCBs and children’s trusts. This would ensure consistency of approach across LSCBs in the country.
- There is an issue around carer’s assessments and need to identify unmet need and support to parents who become single parents for a period of time.

**Question 16. Would you like to receive a copy of the project report when completed?**

- Yes (31), No (0), Not answered (1).

## **Appendix 2: Practice survey**

The following questions formed the basis for the discussions and contributions from each of our eight practice sites.

### **Strategy**

- Whose strategic remit does this work come under, for example is it under the remit of the prison service, community criminal justice or social care services, or is there an equivalent to the safeguarding boards?
- Who takes the lead?
- Was research carried out to determine the level of service required? If so, what and when?
- Who completed this research?
- What monitoring and evaluation of services is done and how is this fed into future strategic work?
- What particular aspects of this strategy are effective?

### **Funding**

- Where does funding come from, and what specific services does it provide?
- How is funding allocated? Is it budgeted for annually?
- Do you have match funding? If so, from what source?

### **Policies and procedures**

- What policies and procedures are in place for the children and families of prisoners?
- Who has responsibility for monitoring their implementation?
- Which organisations have signed up to these policies, and how is their involvement monitored?
- Are you aware of the numbers of children and how is that data collected and monitored?
- How many of the children affected by having a parent in prison are looked after?
- Do you keep records of their gender, age, ethnicity etc?

### **Partnerships**

- What are the ranges of partnerships that exist to make the policies successful?
- How do they operate and how are they sustained?
- Are they covered by service level agreements?
- How are these partnerships communicated to front-line staff for implementation?

### **Training**

- What internal training do you provide on working with children of prisoners?
- What training is provided across service boundaries?
- Is multi-agency training available on policies and procedures, and specific roles and responsibilities?
- Do you have any other systems in place for staff to learn about other services?
- Is training mandatory?
- Is training accredited?

### **Practice**

- Are the care pathways explicit and understood by all relevant staff?  
For example, how a child might be identified once a parent has been arrested or imprisoned?
- How can services be accessed by children and families?
- Is it clear who has responsibility at each stage of the process?
  - arrest
  - court
  - remand
  - sentence
  - release
- What examples do you have of practice or intervention at each stage that could contribute to our guide?
- What information is there for families?
- How is information shared amongst agencies?
- What makes it effective? What are the levers?
- Are there specific resources for different age groups?

### **Links with prisons**

- What links do you have with local prisons (if applicable)?
- Are you aware of any work the prison is doing to help maintain family ties where appropriate?
- Do you know if the prison involves the family in the work they are doing?
- Will you work with the prison to help the family plan for release?
- How is liaison between prisons and community undertaken, for example, is there a 'lead professional' or link person who is able to make the links or ensure communication?
- Is there a specific agreement or procedure for children to visit a parent in prison? How is this managed if a child is in foster care?
- How many families/children receive a service annually?

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### **Outcomes**

- How do you know these systems are successful? Has an evaluation been undertaken?
- What examples can you provide to demonstrate how the intervention of services was successful?
- Are service users asked to comment on accessibility and appropriateness of the service they receive?
- What do children and families say about the service they receive?
- Does provision meet the outcomes for children in Every Child Matters?

### **Challenges and obstacles**

- What have been the main challenges to setting up the schemes?
- What are obstacles (if any) that continue to present themselves and how have they been overcome?

### **Lessons for practice**

- What messages would you give to others thinking about setting up a specific local service for children of prisoners?
- What, if anything, might you do differently?
- What recommendations and suggestions would you have for our guide?
- What would be useful for staff?
- What format should it take?

## **Appendix 3: Detailed findings from each practice site**

### **Banbury and the Thames Valley Partnership**

#### *Strategy*

Thames Valley Partnership undertook a scoping exercise across the Thames Valley and found that levels of knowledge about this issue were practically non-existent. The subsequent training brought together a range of agencies, many of whom had not met before. From this came the Banbury family matters group is made up of interested individuals who have the backing of their organisations to do this work, although for many it is not part of their organisational strategy. Consequently, much relies on good will and having an individual or an organisation such as Thames Valley Partnership to broker arrangements and agreements, coordinate and plan events.

The Banbury group identified several pieces of strategy requiring a multi-agency approach that provides a useful backdrop to the development of this work. This includes the common assessment framework, as well as national offender management service children and families pathway and several other multi-agency groups such as the multi-agency public protection arrangements, the multi-agency risk assessment committee, and children at risk of offending. Additionally, Safer Communities and Crime Reduction guidance have helped to secure some commitment, even though it is not yet on a strategic footing. What this does is bring in criminal justice agencies and this makes the interface between social care, education and health that bit easier.

The Oxfordshire Children's Plan has a remit to work with children at risk of exclusion, and children of prisoners fall into this category, which adds some strategic weight, as does the Children's Centre Guidance, Chapter 19, which sets out responsibilities and expectations on children centre staff.

#### *Funding*

Thames Valley Partnership has funding from a range of agencies, although none of the organisations involved have dedicated budgets. However, they give money through staff time, development of resources and office space for meetings. "Use what you have to create what you need" is the motto.

#### *Policies and procedures*

There is very little in the way of formal policies and procedures, although the Banbury group have developed criteria for referral as well as consent forms for families.

#### *Partnerships*

Agencies in Banbury have a history of working together and Thames Valley Partnership was able to tap into this using local knowledge. The Sunshine Centre is also a hub for local activity. This helped with their initial enquiries,

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and they were also able to tap into other multi-agency partnerships to identify key people. They also have links with other experts in the field and they have been able to use resources developed by Action for Prisoners' Families, which form part of the resource and training pack they have put together.

### *Training*

Thames Valley Partnership has provided training and awareness-raising in several parts of the Thames Valley. Not only has this been a catalyst to the work in Banbury, but several other localities are following suit. They have developed a resource pack which is a tool for the training and has been used both in the prisons and community to link 'inside out and outside in'. The training has proven to be valuable, not least because it has allowed exchange of information across service boundaries in a way that has not been done before, for example Sure Start staff training prison officers and vice versa. It also introduced the probation service to Sure Start and education.

Another extremely positive outcome is that behaviour support staff from the Banbury group have spent time developing a pack of training materials for teachers and teaching assistants for working with children of prisoners. The pack guides staff and children through the whole process from arrest to post-release. This is something they have done in their own time and which they hope will be published for wider use.

The Family Links Project will be taking on the training of children centre staff and prison officers from HMP Bullingdon for them to run the same Parenting Programme both inside and out. This is with a view to having joint sessions with both parents at the children's centre on release. This is a new programme that will be evaluated. Meeting people at training has undoubtedly helped this group to form and take on many of the issues, not least of which is the importance of the family and working together, rather than in isolation.

### *Practice*

The Banbury Family Matters group meet every three months. Members are able to raise individual families for discussion with a view to agreeing plans for support and intervention. The network first met in November 2006 and agreed terms of reference, criteria for referral, and a form for consent to be signed by parents.

Clearly, there may be times when consent is not required from the family if there is a concern about keeping a child safe, but in other circumstances, consent is required.

The network has just worked with a few families so far but early outcomes have been positive. There is an email group and so all members have contact details to facilitate exchange of information outside of the group. Thames Valley Partnership has also been working to raise awareness in Slough, Bicester and High Wycombe, and they will all be following the same model.

The forum enables a sharing of information that brings the holistic needs of the family together alongside a wealth of expertise. This is not work that can be done by organisations in isolation. It is a good model but the Banbury group felt it could do with being underpinned by strategy.

### *Links with prisons*

Thames Valley Partnership has successfully brokered links with local prisons and this has translated into useful contacts for the community. The prisons are notoriously difficult to communicate with, but at least there is now much more understanding of roles and responsibilities. HMP Bullingdon has now started family visits as a result of the commitment of one of the governors, and the training across the Thames Valley may well see other outcomes as a result of the awareness-raising and development of better local links.

### *Outcomes*

Members of the Banbury group reported that of the small number of families they have worked with, there have been changes in behaviour of parents and children and a far more coordinated and considered response from the range of agencies working to support them.

### *Challenges and obstacles*

There is still an issue about identification and tracking of children. Head teachers may not always know about parents, and it was felt that there needs to be a procedure to overcome this. What tends to happen is that information comes out as a result of a child's change of behaviour, or when there is an article in the local paper. Yet, children spend most of their days in school and it is important for the school to be aware of the information. There is a child support worker in every school, but no way of identifying children affected. Communication is seen as the biggest barrier, as information-sharing does not always take place.

### *Lessons for practice*

- Identifying this area has been useful and ensured managerial support.
- It was felt crucial to have coordination from one central point to start things off, and the Banbury group are happy that it will continue once Thames Valley Partnership withdraw.
- For the children's centre it was felt that a dedicated post would be really useful to enable prison visits.
- It was felt that perseverance is essential to engage with the wide range of agencies needed to make the Banbury group effective, and particularly for getting into the prisons.
- The prisons need to let social services know about whether parents are completing parenting programmes and other interventions.

### **String of Pearls and Reducing Re-offending Action Plan children and family pathway group, Devon and Cornwall**

String of Pearls is a small charity that was able to secure funding to undertake multi-agency training about the children of prisoners and help local services to get this issue on the agenda. The children and family pathway group agreed to meet to discuss the issues in greater detail.

#### *Strategy*

It was felt that there was a lack of strategy and protocols in the area, and that this resulted in ambiguity as to who has responsibility for children of prisoners. In Cornwall the Reducing Re-offending Action Plan and families pathway group were given a mandate by the Children and Young People's Partnership and local safeguarding board to adopt the String of Pearls training as part of its 2006/07 work plan. It was also supported by the local community safety partnership and local area agreement partnership group. However, the next stage is to see if this can be developed further and getting a more formalised approach through the local safeguarding board.

#### *Funding*

Funding for String of Pearls comes from several sources: Lankelly Chase Foundation, Tudor Trust, Devon and Cornwall Probation Service, Anchor Foundation and Live Music Now! This added up to £30,000 and enabled the delivery of 30 one-day training packages across the South West. However, funding for mainstreaming this work is a key issue.

#### *Policies and procedures*

The biggest gap remains the inability to identify and track children who are affected. While schools are seen by the group as the linchpin, there is no guarantee that they will know the child's situation. The common assessment framework is seen as the assessment that should be used to generate a response and these can be initiated by the school which can refer to the common assessment framework assessment team. Every school has a child protection officer and social inclusion coordinators who should be able to facilitate communication with other agencies about contact between a child and imprisoned parent.

#### *Partnerships*

There are several examples of good partnerships across the county, mainly relating to statutory responsibilities such as MAPPA. Participants also reported good relationships with social services, and family centres and clear and positive guidance from the county-wide safeguarding board. Additionally, there is a children and young persons' partnerships strategy board, and each district has local area groups, aiming to develop a more integrated approach.

### *Training*

String of Pearls became an independent charity in 2004 when they started to run workshops for families using art to express emotions. However, more recently they have had a focus on multi-agency awareness training, with emphasis on the impact on children, housing and the distance families have to travel to visit relatives. Training carried out by String of Pearls is multi-agency and nearly 50 people have experienced the advantages of meeting those who work in very different areas from themselves. The training brought together criminal justice, social work, and education and health professionals throughout the Southwest region.

String of Pearls has produced material for their training packs, including interviews with families, a short film about young homeless people, and training exercises. The training was successful and a contacts database has now been circulated so that all participants can keep in touch and communicate as required. There are now plans to do training on practical steps that can be taken at all stages of the criminal justice system, with post-release a particularly difficult stage.

### *Practice*

There are no prisons in Cornwall, although approximately 1,200 Cornwall residents are in institutions across the Southwest region and beyond. As a result there are particular issues about distance to visit, logistics of getting there, cost (especially if staying overnight is required) and inclination when so much effort is required for a visit. Reinforcing these difficulties is a lack of communication, family splits, and a lack of awareness about how the prison system works. However, there are information packs through St Austell Social Services on prison visits and what to do. This is aimed at families.

PACT (Prison Advice and Care Trust) provides a lot of services locally, including a court service at Plymouth and Bodmin Magistrates' Courts, where they are able to see everybody. This puts them in a prime position to ask questions about children. However, there are issues around confidentiality and there needs to be collaboration to determine where any such information should go. Similarly, with the First Night Centre in HMP Exeter, PACT can ask questions, but again there is not necessarily anyone to pass the information on to. Consequently, any identification requires a strategy to underpin the sharing of information.

### *Links with prisons*

PACT is the main link but is struggling to maintain its funding for the future. As ever, a lot of this work depends on the prison governor.

## Children of prisoners – maintaining family ties

### *Outcomes*

The only outcomes focus upon the success of the training and the importance of using the experience to keep this issue on the agenda of relevant policy makers.

### *Challenges and obstacles*

The challenges and obstacles identified by the group are many, and not least who has responsibility for raising the issue of children of prisoners with the local safeguarding board. Other issues are:

- transition for 16- to 18-year-olds, where there is a major lack of service provision
- care leavers are a particular concern
- short sentences are the norm and an average three-month sentence means the prisoner is only in for six weeks. Invariably, no services are available and homelessness an issue.
- funding and knowledge: where to go and who is the main contact?
- distance to prisons (80 to 180 miles away)
- no prevention services available
- impact on benefits
- cost of transport to prisons
- logistics on getting to prisons
- assumption of exclusion from family unit.

### *Lessons for practice*

- String of Pearls multi-agency training proved to be more successful than training for single professional groups. The free training (otherwise funded by training/pooled budgets) was successful in allowing a range of people to attend. However, this does need to be a rolling programme with some follow-up, and it seemed to fulfil its aim to demonstrate the need to train professionals who come into contact with families and children of prisoners.
- String of Pearls found that 16- and 17-year-olds have been hardest to reach and they have been using music as a way to reach out to this group.

## Halton Borough

SCIE approached Halton Borough for this survey as they had responded positively to the questionnaire for local safeguarding children boards. They indicated that this is an area in which they are keen to progress, and that they are looking at ways to identify and monitor for children of prisoners who require support (not necessarily from statutory services).

### *Strategy*

There was much discussion about the lack of a national strategy, and that this is not an issue with easy answers. Clearly not every child affected will be a child in need, although it was felt that the circumstances of having a parent in prison would add a degree of vulnerability and make the child a 'special case'. As such, services would still need to be aware of the child and if they did not fit criteria as a child in need, it would still be worth looking at what other support could be provided.

Other issues discussed included:

- facilitating contact for children with a parent in prison, where it is not part of a dedicated plan.
- lack of services available for absent parents, including those who are in prison.
- who can share information when it does come to attention of professionals?
- how do we know when a child is affected, when it is often so hidden and families do not want anyone else to know?
- should doctors have a responsibility to alert services?
- what would the rationale for sharing information be? And what would happen as a consequence?

### *Funding*

There is no current funding stream for this work.

### *Policies and procedures*

It would be difficult to establish what criteria you could put in place to determine the need for multi-agency input, and difficult to identify one agency that would have overall responsibility. Someone needs to make the call. It was suggested that the police could notify someone as they are involved at the time of arrest and should be aware of the presence of children, but there was no agreement as to whom. For adults who are sentenced to over 12 months, probation could take responsibility, but it is not clear if they could take on that role with everyone. This led on to discussion as to whether the court should take some responsibility, at least for asking relevant questions and notifying probation.

## Children of prisoners – maintaining family ties

It was felt that the common assessment framework would be a useful framework to undertake assessments, and a system developed around that might work. Alternatively, it should be covered by an 'absent parent' policy, or an 'unaccompanied children' policy. Another option is making sure information is available for the family as soon as possible, and utilising the resources that are already available.

The concern with this is that parents may not give the information as they are scared of potential consequences, such as children ending up in care. So the overriding concern for the group is determining who has responsibility for alerting services when a child is left in an unsafe situation, such as someone unsuitable being left to look after the children.

### *Partnerships*

At the time of the discussion, there were no partnerships exclusively for this work, but the local safeguarding children's board would be informed about this focus group with a view to considering what action could be taken.

### *Training*

Training for professionals in relation to identifying private fostering arrangements has been done and there has been a public awareness-raising campaign.

### *Practice*

At present there are no dedicated services for children of prisoners although there are links and small pockets of work being carried out in universal services. The remit of the local safeguarding children's board has been expanded as this is one area to be explored.

### *Links with prisons*

Not explored in the session.

### *Outcomes*

It is hoped that this strand of work can be successfully developed locally.

### *Challenges and obstacles*

Publicity and awareness-raising is key, not just for families but for a range of professionals. This includes children's services, health, education, probation and prisons. There is a need to be realistic about what can be achieved. Knowing the numbers would help, if nothing else, to allay fears that services might be overwhelmed by new referrals.

*Lessons for practice*

- facilitating contact for children with a parent in prison, where it is not part of a dedicated plan.
- lack of services available for absent parents, including those who are in prison.
- who can share information when it does come to attention of professionals?
- how do we know when a child is affected, when it is often so hidden and families do not want anyone else to know?
- what would the rationale for sharing information be? And what would happen as a consequence?
- older children, and especially boys, are increasingly at risk of being pulled into criminal activity.
- there remains a need to establish numbers.
- there is an inherent failure in the systems currently in place to identify children affected and offer support.

## **Northern Ireland**

In Northern Ireland, provision for children and families of prisoners is extremely well established across the province. It is underpinned by solid working relationships and an acknowledgement of the importance of the family in reducing the risk of re-offending and facilitating resettlement.

### *Strategy*

The prison service resettlement strategy includes families, and this work is supported by a resettlement partnership which includes the prison service, probation, NIACRO, Barnardo's, the Prison Fellowship and the Quaker Service. It was felt that a lot of good practice takes place but it is largely down to the foresight and personalities of the staff working in the prisons who allow it to happen. Each prison has a resettlement team so there is already a mindset and willingness for this to succeed.

At the time of the group discussion, a family strategy was being developed with a view to embedding into practice. It was asking questions about the needs of families, what provision already exists and what gaps remain, with the intention to publicly consult on the content of this strategy early in 2008. The new child protection policy and procedures will provide for the recording of statistics on the number of children visiting prisons.

NIACRO are starting to record statistics on children and families of prisoners. They have not carried out any research to determine the level of service required, mainly due to the small numbers of prisoners (three main prisons and one young offenders' institution, which also houses the female prison population).

The success of the work in Northern Ireland is as a result of the very effective partnership between the prisons and the voluntary sector, namely NIACRO, Barnardo's, Quaker Service and others. A very high level of support is offered to the families of prisoners and a multi-agency Family Links strategy group, consisting of senior managers from all the agencies identified above, meets to formalise processes and discuss issues.

Effective aspects of provision, in addition to good working relations includes support for families travelling to and from prisons, well-equipped visitor centres, support for social workers and carers taking children into the prisons and friendly prison staff. Children of prisoners are recognised as a distinct group of children in need in Children's Plans in Northern Ireland. This enables families to access better support and holistic interventions.

The inter-agency strategy group aims to develop links between partners and offer a universal service to all families. The process of maintaining family ties is enhanced by the prison and the systems in place to make visiting more accessible and user-friendly.

### *Funding*

Funding for family services is mainly from the prisons. The prison service funds the work in the visitor centres which is tendered on a three yearly basis and a service level agreement operated. The prison service also pays for transport and assists with the costs of families making visits to relatives in prison. The Quaker Service also receives money from the Northern Ireland Office and other donations.

NIACRO funding is from a range of sources. The Family Links work is funded by the Probation Board and the Youth Justice Agency amongst others – the Northern Ireland Prison Service (NIPS) supported this work by seconding a Principal Officer to the Family Links team. The NIACRO advice service is in partnership with the Probation Service, and provides a specialist advice service geared to the particular needs of people in contact with the criminal justice system. Barnardo's apply to the prisons annually for funding their initiatives.

### *Policies and procedures*

The prison service in Northern Ireland has more of a resettlement focus and is able to look outside for support for prisoners and their families. When a prisoner enters a prison, they are interviewed by probation, and if permission is given by the prisoner, probation can pass details of family onto the Family Links staff. They will fax this information to NIACRO in the community who can liaise with the family of the prisoner to arrange visits and provide advice. This is initially done by telephone with a follow-up information pack sent to the prisoner's family before they first visit a prison to ensure they have the information they need. While the prisoner is the key to whether information is passed along the chain, it is the family who choose whether or not NIACRO visit to offer face-to-face support.

Data is collected on numbers of children. This is being reviewed at present but age, gender and ethnicity of child is currently recorded. Assessments are completed to identify risk factor and efforts are being made to link in with the common assessment framework to assess re-offending and resettlement issues. There are great differences in provision across the three prisons, and sign-up to the family strategy for all staff is seen as critical to on-going development.

### *Partnerships*

Partnerships exist between prisons, NIACRO, Barnardo's and the quakers as part of the resettlement strategy and these are crucial to the on-going success of this work. The multi-agency resettlement strategy meeting (comprising largely criminal justice organisations) makes decisions on protocols and procedures, discusses practice issues at a strategic level and agrees on aims, objectives, timescales, milestones and resource-sharing ideas.

## Children of prisoners – maintaining family ties

### *Training*

The prison staff have training on working with families and how to support family visits. Kids VIP has provided a lot of materials, which has been particularly useful for the training of family officers. Barnado's provide joint training which is accredited and co-facilitated by Barnado's and the prison officers. This helps Barnado's staff gain access to the system, as well as broadening the view of prison officers.

Several training and parenting programmes are undertaken with both the female and male prison estates to help prepare them for release and reuniting with their families.

### *Practice*

As already indicated above, there is a system in place of offering support to all families of prisoners within 48 hours of imprisonment. The system involves the probation service and Family Link services within the prisons and NIACRO out in the community. NIACRO's advice service is the only service offering advice and support right across Northern Ireland to prisoners' families, and released prisoners and offenders in the community. It provides information, advice and representation on subjects like benefits, housing and debt. In addition to the packs of information that are sent out, NIACRO will undertake home visits to offer emotional support. Families are also able to ring in for advice.

The family support officers in the prisons also play a key part in the process supporting and advising families and providing a link between prisoners and their families. They offer one-to-one contact with families on a wide range of issues and will refer families to other support services as required. They will also help advise on visiting processes and are available on the telephone at other times. Family support officers are also involved in safer custody forums, where socially isolated families are identified and attempts made to seek positive engagement and family support. At HMP Maghaberry partner support groups are facilitated by family support officers.

At one of the prison sites the work of the family support officer Team is being supported by a new volunteer programme developed by Quaker Service. Volunteers man the Family Support Officer and help support families. Another initiative is a new isolated prison visitor scheme which has been developed by Quaker Service. One of the new initiatives at HMP Hydebank Wood, which accommodates female prisoners, is work to develop new accommodation for mothers and their children. Barnardo's have developed a range of materials for helping families cope with a parent in prison, and this includes help with how to tell younger children what has happened.

There is no provision at the point of arrest or court stage of proceedings. Support on release is limited, although there are a lot of programmes run in the prisons and this goes some way towards preparing the families for release.

### *Links with prisons*

Prisons in Northern Ireland have well-equipped visitor centres and family visit areas, fun days and annual activity days for the families. The delivery of these activities can be affected by operational pressures. Procedures are in place for children visiting parents in prison, and a visitor inmate recognition and booking system enables far more flexibility in visiting times, including booking a visit up to a month in advance.

Further safeguards in relation to children visiting prisons will be introduced in 2008 with the implementation of the new Northern Ireland Prison Service child protection policy and procedures. The solid partnership between the prisons and community organisations is essential in supporting this work across Northern Ireland.

### *Outcomes*

Systems are in place to record outcomes, for example, a visitor survey evaluates general satisfaction levels in relation to families visiting prisons. The families also get the opportunity to comment via family support officers, the Quaker Service, Barnardo's and NIACRO family visit staff.

### *Challenges and obstacles*

In spite of the obvious success of the systems across Northern Ireland, there remain areas for improvement and development. The following list identifies some of the challenges and obstacles to be overcome:

- raising awareness with and getting social services interested, particularly for the early years teams
- context and clarity on roles and responsibilities
- social work training module on professional development to enhance issues of children of prisoners
- care plans for looked after children need to specify actions for keeping in contact and where money will come from to enable contact
- need to map services and involvement
- pre- and post- release work needs developing
- championing the work
- prison as an active partner
- the hierarchical structure of prisons can cause difficulty – management and oversight structures
- establishment of service delivery targets
- information should be made available to families in relation to prison systems and procedures

## Children of prisoners – maintaining family ties

- training teachers – at present there are no links to schools or health; there is a need to raise awareness, particularly in relation to bullying in schools
- teachers are often unable to recognise behaviour associated with imprisoned parent
- there is a need for better understanding of prison dilemmas such as security vs. family
- prisoners' concerns about own children following in their steps.

### *Lessons for practice*

- care plans do not address needs to maintain contact for looked after children
- imprisoned parent not asked for opinion
- children of prisoners need to be recognised as distinct set of children in need. Protocols need to include information about impact of prison on children and families and services need to be made available to these families
- joint training of health, social services, education and youth justice staff
- acknowledge the financial impact on children
- parent support groups – parents do have a genuine fear of child protection procedures
- social services should provide resources to families rather than prisons
- ensure crèche facilities in prisons
- service users can choose whether or not to take up the services or not
- building relationships is key
- committed family officers is key
- time, credibility, trust, meeting halfway on security issues
- the need to maintain higher levels of security with particular prisoners
- partnerships give strength to arguments
- being thick-skinned!

## **Norwich and Ormiston**

Ormiston works across the Eastern region with families affected by imprisonment. They provide family support services at eight of the region's prisons, enabling children and young people to maintain meaningful contact with their imprisoned parent or relative. This is achieved through the provision of child friendly visits, parenting courses and information and support. The work is currently being extended to include support to families in the community, and they work across service boundaries to raise awareness with other organisations that come into contact with the children of prisoners. This focus group took place as a result of their contacts.

### *Strategy*

It was felt that probation are not doing much with children and families at the moment, although that may change over time with the National Offender Management Service children and families pathway, which is part of the reducing re-offending strategy. There is a National Offender Management Service families pathway group, however, at present they have no money, direction or model. Consequently, at present provision is down to the voluntary sector and specifically Ormiston. The prison service also plays a role locally and seems to have a positive relationship with Ormiston.

Children's services have no specific processes in place, and involvement only happens when a child is assessed as a child in need. If mum goes into prison there is more likelihood of involvement, but even with the youth inclusion support panel which targets high-risk children, these children need to be known to the system.

The new Safer Communities strategy will employ pre-support officers and this may pick up some children, but there is an issue with a loss of posts across children's services locally, and where cases are closed if a parent is in prison as the risk is deemed to no longer be present. The Every Child Matters principles are not really being applied and children of prisoners do come low down in the pile of priorities. Youth Matters is another avenue that supports the targeting of young people at risk and that may see strategy developed.

It was suggested that a vision from the Regional National Offender Management Service office would be helpful as they do have responsibility for partnership development.

### *Funding*

Ormiston provision is tied into funding that ends in 2008. At that point it is not clear what will happen to many of the services they currently and uniquely provide. It was felt by the group that when innovative programmes are developed, such as 'You and your child' a parenting course delivered in prisons by Ormiston, they are not financially sustainable in the long-term. Additionally, there remains a funding issue across geographical boundaries,

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for example if the child is not living in the same locality as the prison. This can result in no-one taking responsibility.

### *Policies and procedures*

There are procedures for referring children to Ormiston for support.

### *Partnerships*

It was felt that partnerships are based upon individuals rather than strategy, and that there is nothing that covers the interface between children's services and the criminal justice system. Safeguarding boards are good in terms of child protection, but nothing else, although it is still early days. The children's services plan is the main document, but it is not clear who would put children of prisoners on the agenda, as no one is a natural driver. There is still an issue about who is responsible for this area of work.

Good partnerships between Ormiston and some schools have been developed, but this has been dependent upon the school recognising the need, and finding the right person in the school, for example on the pastoral team, to take the issue forward. However, some of the more high achieving schools do not think this is an issue that affects them and they have even refused to put up Ormiston leaflets. In those instances, it is important to find other routes in, such as through the anti-bullying policy. Without a strategic approach this will always be the case.

The Youth Offending Team was given as a good example of a successful partnership characterised by strategy, monitoring and value for money. It is a multi-agency team with a board consisting of police, health, probation and so on. The children and young people's partnership is a key part of the strategy and this would be a good place to raise the issue of children of prisoners. It would be useful to have some numbers to present, and focus on every child matters outcomes. Ormiston has had its work evaluated and this would back up the need for this group to look at the issue.

Other successful local partnerships are in the voluntary sector, namely Victim Support in Norfolk, which recognises children of prisoners as victims in their own right, Norfolk Young Carers, Norfolk Parent Partnership Women's Aid, ASB Action Group, and Local Safer Neighbourhoods, which work with police to prevent young people becoming criminalised. So operationally, there are pockets of good practice.

The family solutions team offers a multi-disciplinary response to ensuring children's well-being. They work with children of school age and take referrals from a range of agencies, including children's services, although they do not do joint work with children. The work is short-term in nature – on average three months.

There was a feeling that although there are good examples of local partnerships, they are thin on the ground and are reliant on individuals and good will rather than strategy or policy.

### *Training*

Ormiston have started to deliver training to foster carers. So far they have seen 40 to 50 as part of a pilot programme. The sessions began with an introduction and icebreaker, before hearing the voices of six children of differing ages talking about their experiences of having a dad in prison. Discussions included at what stage a child should be told and how; processes of where to get support; visits and how they work. This was done as part of the normal programme of training for foster carers.

Additionally, they have developed a book 'Working with Children of Prisoners', for education professionals. This is to go to every school in the region as a way of raising the profile of children of prisoners and informing staff. Training alongside the book will depend upon the funding streams and partnership money continuing next year. Generally, at present, schools get in touch when there is an issue (assuming they know where to go for support), and this handbook will contain information, advice, resources and have a training package. Ormiston has also delivered 'You and your child' training in prisons across the region for fathers.

The social work course at the University of East Anglia receives input from Ormiston, but there are gaps in the training of teachers, health workers and community nurses.

### *Practice*

The Youth Inclusion Support Panel (YISP) is for young people (eight to 13 years) who are all pre-final warning. In other words it is for before they end up in court or known to the youth offending team. They are characterised by a range of high risk factors, including known offending, and can be referred by a range of agencies and the families themselves. Once a referral is received a two-week validation process is undertaken and intervention will follow if appropriate. The team undertake a lot of tasks that are traditionally done by children's services, although they do not have statutory responsibility for child protection. Many of these are children have a parent in prison.

There remains a big gap in information for families at court. Invariably, families are not prepared for custody and are not in a position to hear what little information is being given to them. This is an area for development.

Ormiston offers direct support to five- to 13-year-olds with a parent or sibling in prison. They currently see 22 children in Norfolk and take referrals from schools, probation, children's services, and families from across Essex, Norfolk, Peterborough and Bedford. Support can include escorting children to visits, supporting them in the home, school, and community, undertaking an advocacy role, offering emotional support and support to maintain contact

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other than visiting. They also provide outings for families to enable them to meet and offer support to each other.

From a schools perspective, Ormiston has been extremely valuable. The key for school is knowing when a child is affected. The ethos of the school and the head teacher are essential in securing support, and again it was reiterated that the key is finding the right person with whom to speak. A child's behaviour is usually the trigger for concern, as is a change in attendance, although the issues are different for children depending upon their age.

It was felt that many teachers find it difficult to talk about prison, and that children have to 'self-monitor' to keep their secrets too often because of societal/school attitudes. This can be very dangerous for a child and can manifest negatively over time. There is also a concern about the levels of support a child can get out of school, particularly when children do not meet the threshold of a child in need.

Action for Prisoners' Families provide a range of resources for children and families, including books for children and the 'Homeward bound' DVD about a dad who is due for release.

### *Links with prisons*

It was suggested that prison is the best place to find out about a family that might be invisible in the community. Prison visits are an ideal place to work with children if the prison has child-friendly facilities, family visits and activities. This would be especially beneficial if parenting in prison involved the carer on the outside.

Much of Ormiston's work takes place in the prison. The prisons partly fund the prisoners families' programme in the region, along with Ormiston and the Lankelly Foundation. As with all work in prisons, it has to be supported by the governor or it will not happen. This can make provision unstable.

### *Outcomes*

There is an ongoing evaluation of the Ormiston Children and Families of Offenders (formerly known as Time for Families) programme. In 2006 Gill Pugh, the programme's researcher, produced 'Time for families: positive outcomes for children and families of offenders using Ormiston services in prisons and the community'. This is an evaluation of the community-based work against Every Child Matters outcomes.

### *Challenges and obstacles*

One of the biggest challenges is identification of children who are at risk. It is the hard to reach young people who are not already known to services. This is coupled with those who are not in full-time education due to exclusion. A steer from the relevant government departments is needed.

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Resources are an ongoing issue, and more are needed if this is an area to be tackled effectively. There needs to be a strategic sign-up to the children's plan and some discussion across National Offender Management Service and Department for Children, Schools and Families.

### *Lessons for practice*

This was not explicitly covered by the focus group.

## **Partners of Prisoners and Families Support Group (POPS)**

Partners of Prisoners and Families Support Group work across the prisons in the North West region providing a variety of services to support anyone who has a link with someone in prison, prisoners themselves and other agencies. The aim is to "support families to cope with the stress of arrest, imprisonment and release". POPS was established in 1998 and is a registered charity.

### *Strategy*

The work has a strategic basis as part of the Northwest Regional Offender Management children and families pathway.

### *Funding*

POPS is supported by a range of funding from both statutory and charitable donations. Funding is for the national helpline (run with Ormiston and Action for Prisoners Families) and the core work of partners of prisoners' families.

### *Policies and procedures*

These are incorporated into partnership agreements with a range of organisations, and including the prison service.

### *Partnerships*

POPS has established numerous partnerships, which are essential to the success of their work. These include:

- drug and alcohol strategy team (reducing family breakdown when drug issues affect the family)
- prisons
- Department for Children, Schools and Families – family link work to help maintain relationships
- local children and families pathways
- Greater Manchester Association Against Crime – aiming to get more cohesive practice across the local authorities in relation to children of prisoners
- crime and disorder partnerships
- community safety network and crime disorder/crime reduction
- Respect agenda
- anti-social behaviour and other local networks.

### *Training*

One of the keys to the work of POPS is awareness-raising. There is a dedicated training and development worker and a good practice guide is being written, based upon 20 years of training packages. Schools, extended

schools and children' centres remain key areas to promote awareness particularly amongst staff. Additionally, training has been delivered on the social work degree at University of Salford, and to trainee probation officers.

### *Practice*

POPS employs family link workers who work with the family to help maintain family ties. At the time of arrest Partners of Prisoners are trying to get police to promote the national helpline through advertising in police stations. The helpline is also available to teachers, and the telephone number is on the back of visiting orders.

Additionally, POPS has mailed information to all local solicitors to publicise their service, and they are in the process of setting up a family link worker service in Manchester Magistrates Court to work with probation and NEPACS. At present the family link worker is not alerted until prison induction, so this is one way of trying to get a 'foot in the door' at court stage, to help and quicken the process of getting information to families.

Family link workers work with families of prisoners at all category prisons and both remand and sentenced prisoners. They have access to OASys reports, probation officers, school links and work with other agencies to support the families. Each prison is different and there are particular issues regarding 18- to 21-year-olds, as they can be seen as either children or adults.

Detained children (under 18) are covered by the Children Act. Many of them are looked after children and so have a named social worker. Generally, contact with the social worker in this instance is greater than usual, particularly as the Young Offender Institute has social work presence inside and so less contact with community teams is required. However, looked after children reviews happen all the time, bringing social workers in regularly.

Release is when POPS contact ceases. At present they are able to signpost people to the helpline and they are trying to link up with Sure Start children' centres to do the 'through the gate' work.

The allegiances of family link workers lie with the family, in the hope that the family can help with resettlement (although it is acknowledged that the family are not always a good influence).

### *Links with prisons*

POPS currently has ten family link workers based within prison establishments across the North West. Family link workers have been referred to as a lifeline for families, as they can often be their only means of learning about the prison regime and the well-being of the offender.

The basic services provided by the family link worker are:

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- sending out information packs to families within 48 hours of a new offender arriving at the prison (this pack includes a direct dial number which families can call)
- carrying out one-to-one interviews with offenders to establish next of kin, relationship with family and other important people in their lives
- Working to re-establish family ties with the offender and the families, in cases where these may have broken down. These include activities such as helping with letter-writing.

All of the family link worker teams work with the prison, other agencies and visitor centres in a multi-agency capacity to organise special 'family day' visits. These visits are designed to encourage the family and the offender to bond in a more relaxed and comfortable environment.

It was noted that social workers do bring the children in if they are looked after children, but this is rarer in men's than women's prisons. There were many examples of good social work practice, although it was also pointed out that it can sometimes be a battle to get social workers to visit.

### *Outcomes*

The following is in place to determine the effectiveness of the service:

- Data is recorded at postcode level, child's age and sex.
- Service users are asked to fill in evaluation forms.
- Focus groups and questionnaires have been held to gain feedback on the service.
- Visitor centres record the data, which is then sent to area office to inform reports. They also collate data from the helpline.

### *Challenges and obstacles*

Discussion revealed a whole range of challenges and obstacles, which have been captured in the list below:

- Teacher awareness and understanding is very low, although this could be solved through appropriate training.
- Attitude of some prison staff. Unfortunately not all prison officers believe in family awareness, but again training can be a solution.
- Families are scared of the system and possible consequences. There is often little trust.
- Partners of Prisoners' Families services are limited to families that sign up. Extra funding could see the development of a generic post so as to mainstream the service.
- Information-sharing and communication are significant barriers. Often issues of confidentiality are used to prevent helping. The solution is giving information and leaflets, getting facts right and chipping away at those who resist.

- Duplication is often because of the lack of sharing.
- Use statistics and project evaluation as evidence and to demonstrate effectiveness.
- Seek out 'champions' and put time into relationship-building.
- Ensure POPS and family link workers are seen as an asset and not a threat. Training can help particularly if it is part of the staff induction as well as prisoner induction.
- Raise profile.
- Regional barriers prevent holistic working; for example funding streams differ across borders.

*Lessons for practice*

- Research into and mapping of the issue is essential to establish the extent and pattern of need for this group, as is consultation with those who are affected. Improving knowledge and awareness in schools and other agencies with some responsibility is also essential. The prison governor should sit on the local safeguarding children's board.
- One statutory authority needs to take responsibility for these children, and communication needs to be much improved. Solicitors should perhaps play more of a role and work with POPS to increase the chances of engaging with families at court and beyond.
- It is important to notice the differences between women and men. Women prisoners receive fewer visits and are often less supported by partners.
- People need to tell their children when a parent is in prison and there are numerous resources now available to help with this process.
- Follow things through and do not make promises you cannot keep either to families or staff.
- There is a need to mainstream the services across all prisons, to avoid a postcode lottery.
- An easier booking system in prisons would make life much easier as it would decrease bureaucracy and the using of confidentiality as an excuse not to share information.

## **Scotland**

The work in Scotland has long been recognised as good practice in maintaining family ties. The focus group participants were a mixture of prison managers and family contact officers, as well as representatives from Families Outside, the voluntary sector agency that provides support for families across Scotland.

### *Strategy*

The move to be more family-focused was prison-driven back in the 1980s. The Peterhead riots led to the Wolfe Report, and comments about distance travelled for visits, reducing suicides and the acknowledgement that improved family contact can reduce re-offending rates saw significant changes in prison strategy.

The recently established eight community justice authorities across Scotland have a national strategy for the management of offenders, with a much heavier focus on outcomes and maintaining relationships. One of the main differences in Scotland compared to rest of the UK is that there is no probation service. Instead there are Criminal Justice social workers, who work for the same authority as community social workers.

The Management of Offenders Act has nine offender outcomes to do with policy and practice, development, key performance indicators and outcomes. One of the aims is sustained and improved family relationships and a future performance measure in the prison will be family contact.

There are 14 prisons in Scotland, all of which have some level of family contact officer presence. There are inconsistencies across the estate and much depends upon the governor, who determines levels of dedicated family contact development officer support.

### *Funding*

Provision for family contact officers is directly from prison establishment. Families Outside, providers of national helpline, receives funding from various sources including the Scottish Government and the Scottish Prison Service.

### *Policies and procedures*

Prisoners on licence and sex offenders do have questions on child care in their assessments. Every child visiting a Schedule 1 offender will be checked out before visiting. Each case is dealt with individually and vetted for risk/safeguards for visit. External social workers work very closely with prisons to identify risk. It was felt that this was a much easier process, as the social workers work for the same service as the social workers in prison.

Remand/untried cases are more problematic as the prison is not always at liberty to implement the same procedures and checks. However, a core assessment for all new prisoners includes child care issues, and this can lead to a referral to the family contact officers. There is a family contact development officers' hotline, and it was felt that prisoners tend to use the telephone much more easily than talking directly with a family contact officer in the visitor centre.

Child protection procedures are the same across the SPS estate. Policies are based upon statutory procedures and public protection as well as welfare.

### *Partnerships*

A number of partnerships between prisons and statutory and voluntary sector organisations exist in Scotland and many are guided by service level agreements. They include:

- the Child Care Trust to develop parenting programmes
- Families with Addictions, Lighthouse Foundation (both evaluated)
- One Stop parenting at HMP Edinburgh
- Roots out of Prison looking at life coaching six weeks before release as part of the community integration plan and including family issues.

There are also programmes in particular prisons for example counselling in partnership with Relate Scotland.

Participants reported that information about partnerships, how they work and the benefits to prisoners and families, is available to them from when they start working in their role. All participants agreed that there is good and growing partnership working between all agencies involved with prisoners and their families.

Families Outside is the only organisation to provide advice and information to families and friends of prisoners through the Scottish Prisoners' Family Helpline. Through research, training and partnership work, it aims to raise awareness of the needs of families affected by imprisonment, with other organisations, as well as supporting prisoners and families. To be effective, Families Outside needs to have particularly good links with the prisons, and as such, they are represented on various groups and panels at all levels of the prison service hierarchy.

### *Training*

Kids VIP provide training to family contact officers and other prison staff on children visiting prisons and child protection as required. Kids VIP and Families Outside regularly visit prisons to highlight their existence to the prison population as well as attend meetings with family contact officers. Families Outside also visit the Scottish Prison Service College while officers

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are being trained, to build partnership working as early as possible. It also offers training to new officers, social workers, education staff, children's panel members and Sure Start staff.

### *Practice*

There are family contact officers based in most prisons in Scotland. Their number and the time dedicated to family work varies from prison to prison, depending upon the governor. There is a national induction programme for new prison staff that includes the role of family contact officers and how to refer.

In terms of access to services, all prisoners and families are given a leaflet in court to inform them about services available to them (Edinburgh and Perth also have a visitor centre where families of prisoners can come in, ask questions and pick up leaflets about services). When a prisoner enters prison both the prisoner and their family are supplied with induction packs outlining their rights and access to and availability of services. Leaflets accessible to children are available and there is also a 'Families Outside' DVD aimed at children and teenagers about visiting prisons. Families Outside, in conjunction with the prison service, operate a national helpline where families can seek information about any aspect of family contact with prisoners, ranging from visits to release.

The family contact officers coordinate father-and-son bonding visits, in some prisons, for long-term prisoners and families. These happen before the main visits commence and the rest of the family comes in. They also organise enhanced visits and themed family days.

Integrated case management (ICM) provides opportunities for families to engage throughout the ICM process. The community-based social worker is expected to attend case conferences in the prison as well as respond to the family in the community. As such, participants reported a lot of contact with external social workers and reported good working relationships and information flow.

It was felt by the family contact officers that Families Outside have a far greater chance of engaging with families, as they are a voluntary organisation and not in uniform as part of the prison. However, there are then issues around confidentiality and communication between prison and community staff which can impact upon the service received by families. Nevertheless, they see themselves as the prisoners' advocate when it comes to family contact and would hold dialogue with the prison management on behalf of the prisoners.

In Edinburgh participants reported that on the Friday following sentencing, the family and the prisoner are invited to attend a whole-morning session to provide them with information about all the issues such as visits and prison life. These meetings are low-key and child-friendly.

In some establishments before release participants reported that there is standard practice whereby all prisoners with families will have a pre-release meeting with their family and family contact officers to discuss any issues and to prepare both prisoner and family for release.

Most family contact officers felt that contact with families has been maintained throughout the sentence where a prisoner has a family and children and they wish contact to happen. As the release date approaches, some prisoners are moved to open prisons to allow more contact and prepare both prisoner and family for release in terms of re adjustment to family life. Pre-release conferences are held with all agencies involved. Participants felt that the integrated case management is the key to better outcomes for all and will aid agencies to work together more effectively.

Family contact officers, their managers and relevant statutory and voluntary sector organisations meet quarterly to update each other on practice, to share ideas and take forward initiatives.

Families Outside offers advice through their national helpline. Recent statistics show they deal with 2,000 calls or emails per year. This service is available five days per week to anyone (family and professionals) and can be about a person in prison or in the criminal justice system generally. They have a staff team of four people for all prisons and contact can be at any point in the proceedings. Advice can include information about visits and facilities and what to expect in the prison. Families Outside have links with other community agencies, drug agencies and child care agencies, although this work tends to be more generic in nature, for example awareness-raising, rather than one-to-one work with families.

### *Links with prisons*

Families Outside has named staff to contact in the prison. They are not necessarily family contact officers as they have concerns that if this was the case there would be no cover for sickness and holidays, and this would impact upon the quick responses they currently receive.

### *Outcomes*

There has been much research and evaluation of the Scottish system which suggests the family contact officer model is a good one.

The Scottish Prison Service carry out an annual prisoner survey to establish the impact of the service and this is enhanced through asking families and children about visiting facilities and what could make them better. Additionally, family contact officers meet with prisoners regularly to discuss what improvements could be made to visiting facilities and to what is needed to improve family contact visits.

Families Outside also seeks feedback from users of their service. This includes both families and professionals, although it is anecdotal at present.

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### *Challenges and obstacles*

There are several key challenges within the Scottish system:

- If this work is not in a governor performance contract it will not necessarily happen unless the governor wants it to.
- Not all families are taking up the opportunities offered as is their right. This may well be because the family contact officers are prison staff and they wear uniforms. Additionally, many still have a security role and this can lead to areas of conflict. However, it is not clear if having full-time dedicated family contact officers would be preferable across the whole estate, as family contact is the responsibility of more staff than simply the family contact officer.
- There are only two visitor centres in addition to the visit areas in each prison. This can lead to differences in opportunities to engage with families.
- Families Outside produce information for people to take away that is very much about raising awareness about issues, such as child care, poverty and housing. It would be extremely valuable to have this as part of training for new teachers and social workers.
- Breaking down the stigma attached to a parent in prison is perhaps the hardest thing to try and achieve.

### *Lessons for practice*

This was not explicitly covered by the focus group.

## **Telford and West Midlands**

Telford is in the advantageous position of having the Families Do Matter programme in the area. This project is sponsored by the National Offender Management Service and aims to provide evidence of the longer-term benefit of supporting offenders to maintain and strengthen their relationships with their children and families. The focus group brought a range of people together for the first time and was an opportunity to discuss issues in detail.

### *Strategy*

There is little in the way of strategy in the area at present. Generally, this is an area of work that is an add-on and happens when a child comes to the attention of professionals for other reasons (usually a change of behaviour). However, it was felt that this is something that should be given attention by the local safeguarding children's board and several people in the focus group who are members of the board will take responsibility for raising it.

### *Funding*

Families Do Matter is funded both by the Home Office and by HM Treasury under its Invest to Save Budget. The total project funding available is £2 million over three years for the whole region. However, for individual agencies, there are issues about budgets and how this might impact upon already stretched resources. One suggestion was that a pooling of resources for the children and families affected by imprisonment may result in a more coordinated and better-funded response.

### *Policies and procedures*

It was noted that there are 780 offenders locally at any one time, of which 226 are in custody. There are no exclusive policies and procedures in place for the children of prisoners. Identification is by chance, and is usually aligned with negativity. The group felt that this needed to change, and it was important to develop a response for children that did not rely on referral for other reasons such as behavioural difficulties. Consideration needs to be given to how this information can be communicated and by whom, so responses are pro-active rather than reactive.

There are several other agendas with which this work can be aligned, namely the crime reduction, respect and safer communities agendas. There is also the common assessment framework which could be very useful in helping to establish and identify children of prisoners as a vulnerable group of children in need of support.

Nevertheless, how to highlight the fact that children are in this position does remain an issue. One suggestion was that this could be a role for the probation service who often knows about families even if they are not working with them. A further suggestion was to focus on people at court, and maybe utilise the presence of substance misuse workers who interview everyone

## Children of prisoners – maintaining family ties

going to prison on either remand or sentence. Additionally they track people through the system and work in the police station, community and prison. They also work with the families of offenders.

There remains the issue of confidentiality and recognising that not all families will want, or need, intervention from social services or children's services and there will, of course, be the fear of the removal of children, telling children and denial that a parent has gone to prison.

### *Partnerships*

The importance of making links across and between services was considered a vital part of being able to support families of prisoners. There are already a range of informal links but these often depend on individuals and so are not long-term solutions.

### *Training*

There is no formal training, although there is clearly a lot of awareness of the issues and the importance of maintaining family ties. Useful opportunities to broaden knowledge lie with common assessment framework training, and parenting programmes. Additionally, Families Do Matter is developing an information pack for families. The same is needed for professionals, so they can be directed to information and resources.

### *Practice*

At present, children are identified by chance. There is no one agency with responsibility for flagging up when a child might be affected, although it would seem that probation and drug services are in the best position. Drug services, in particular, are available at every point.

Most of the reasons for identification are as a result of a change of behaviour in the child, often at school, but also in children's centres, and noted by health visitors. There is a universal service for the under-fives at the children's centres and this is seen as key in ensuring everyone receives a service, even if the presenting issue is not a result of parental imprisonment.

### *Links with prisons*

One of the big issues is that no two prisons are the same. This makes consistency of approach and provision impossible. Much depends upon the governor and staff willingness to engage with community services, although there is a lack of organisations to refer to at present. Additionally, the large number of prisoner movements can preclude maintaining family ties which does contradict the principles of offender management.

Families Do Matter is working in West Midlands prisons to raise awareness and make links between prison and community, and there are opportunities to involve the 'outside' before release in a productive way. For example, there

has been some good work in involving Sure Start children's centres prior to the release of some mothers, as well as assisting children to maintain contact with fathers during a sentence.

### *Outcomes*

It is still too early in the life of Families Do Matter to report on outcomes.

### *Challenges and obstacles*

A series of challenges have been identified:

- making support for children of prisoners an integral part of practice rather than an add-on as a result of something else triggering referrals
- improving links between prison and community
- developing a direct and flexible service for families who do not necessarily have a child in need at that point
- finding a way to trigger interventions and identify affected children
- tracking people through the system
- balancing the needs of everyone from offender to family without the need to label and stigmatise children
- raise the profile of this group of children
- prevention rather than crisis management
- prepare the families for the journey as early as possible with more awareness.

There are also obstacles to be overcome:

- overcrowding in prisons and prisoner movements around the estate
- inconsistency within prison establishments
- stretched resources and other agendas
- lack of strategy from central government
- no one agency is responsible.

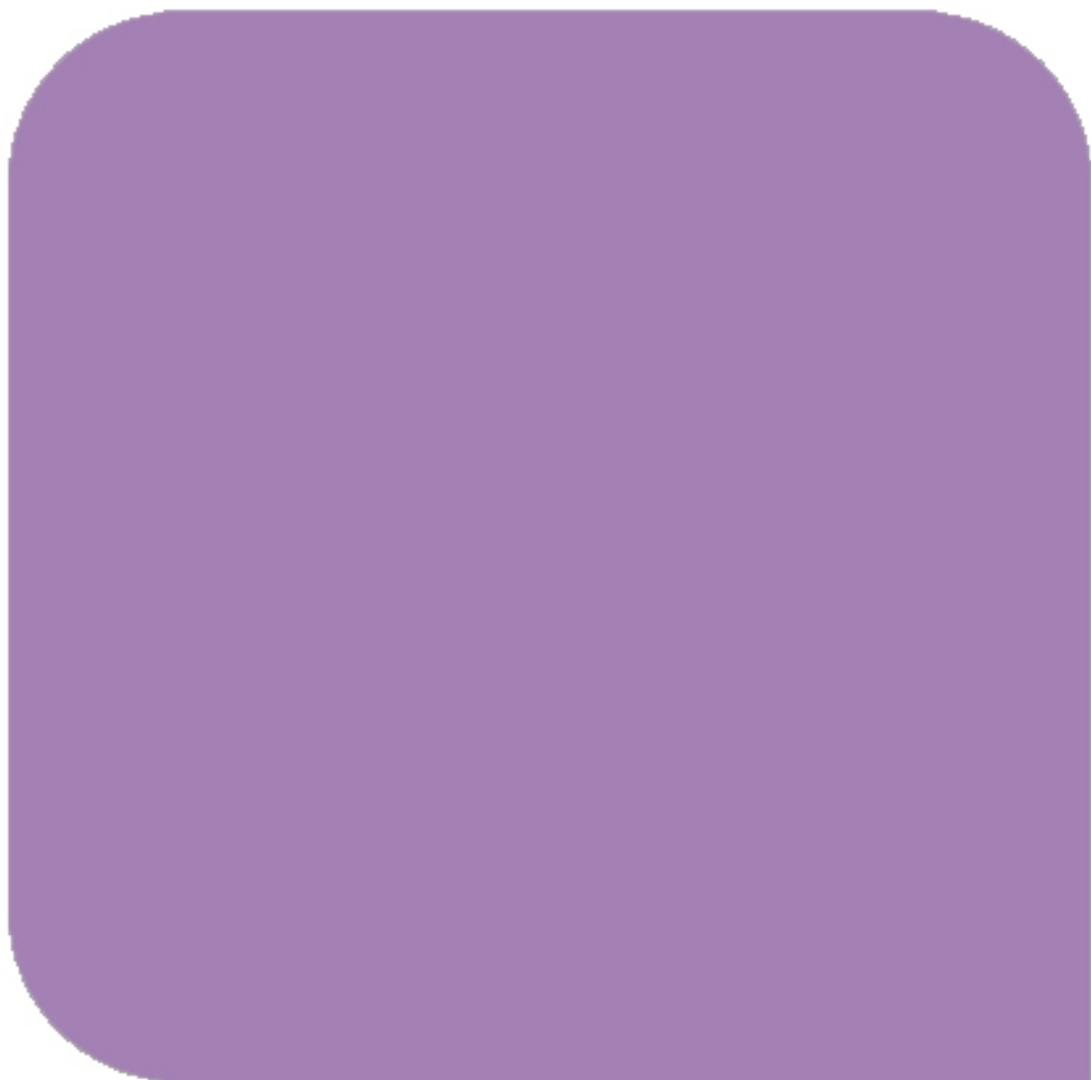
### *Lessons for practice*

While it is early days locally for Families do Matter, there are clearly signs that there are opportunities for this work to grow and there are already solid foundations to build on.

- Participants identified several avenues that are ripe for development and where support is already offered to children through other avenues:
  - children's centres
  - Connexions

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- Wrekin Housing Trust
  - health visitors
  - safer communities
  - corporate parenting
  - substance misuse services
  - common assessment framework
  - integrated children's services.
- All have examples and experience of this work that can be put to great use in developing local resources and raising awareness. Additionally, it has been identified that there is a need for this to be an integral part of assessments of need and child protection, part of universal services to be offered directly, and supported by strategy, policy and procedures. The importance of links and relationships is crucial, as is a central person with the knowledge and know-how who is able to signpost and provide information for both staff and families throughout the process.
  - Tracking of people and early identification of children is seen as essential, perhaps with a single point of contact in each local government office that can help others to navigate the system, hold all the different strands together and coordinate a response.
  - The service needs to be universalised with less stigmatising, more accessible, based on prevention, and with plans for contacts at various points before release.



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