



Children of Offenders

1. Introduction

This paper has been written to give the reader an overview of how imprisonment affects an offender's child. The reader will be provided with hard facts relating to real lives and real people. The report also provides case studies of agencies currently providing services to meet the needs of offenders' families and their children. A comprehensive list of additional reading material is also available should more information be required.

2. What are the issues?

Over 150,000 children, and rising, are affected by the imprisonment of a parent in the UK every year. Sadly, many of these children will experience negative consequences that affect their physical, emotional and social well being, resulting in them being some of the most vulnerable children in society. Unfortunately, services that are meant to look after children often aren't trained to spot characteristics and behavioural traits that can be the consequences of losing a parent to the Criminal Justice System.

A number of factors can affect the way in which a child will be affected by, and will view the imprisonment of a parent. These can include:

- The age of the child at the time of imprisonment
- The length of the parent's sentence
- The disruption to home life
- Availability of family support
- Nature of the parent's crime
- Witnessing the arrest
- Lack of information
- Any previous experience of the imprisonment of a parent
- Distance away from home that parent is held
- Poverty as a result of imprisonment

Whilst the very young children and babies will not understand what is happening in their lives when a parent goes to prison, they will be affected by the stress around them, especially during the initial period of custody. Additionally, there will

be the added stress of having to adjust to a new routine and possibly even a change of primary care giver.

Even slightly older children won't have the skills needed to understand the situation and will not be able to make the link between the crime and the outcome. Witnessing the arrest would be especially distressing and children may find it difficult to understand why their parent, who loves them and cares for them, is being taken away. It can be devastating for a child to realise that an outside force can come into their home and split their family up by taking away a parent.

“I heard a bang on the door and it woke me up. Policeman ran upstairs with dogs. My brother had a bleeding nose. Then they all went downstairs and took dad away. I was angry, not surprised. Mum was surprised and very upset.” (12-year-old boy) ¹

“Five-year-old Adam cried the entire week his mother was detained awaiting a bail hearing. Four months later, Adam wants Power Rangers to kill the police officers who took mummy to jail and the prison workers who kept her there.”²

Children of junior school age have more of an awareness of the situation and therefore may be more conscious of the stigma often associated with having a family member in prison. On an emotional level they may be learning to deal with new thoughts and feelings such as shame, isolation, confusion and grief. These feelings can often manifest themselves in the child's behaviour, especially when the child has, through moving, been separated from friends or siblings or had to adapt to a new environment and care giver, thereby making them feel like they have no one to confide in. Such behavioural changes might include; aggression, difficulty concentrating and bedwetting. Additionally the child might become anxious, withdrawn and clingy towards the remaining parent or care giver.

Sometimes, a child will not be told their parent is in prison at all and might be told that 'mummy is working away' or 'daddy is in hospital'. This may be easy to maintain if the child is very young and the sentence relatively short, but as the child gets older the truth may be more difficult to hide. It will be especially hard if the child learns the truth from someone other than his/her main carer – the person they have trusted to support them and keep them safe at a time when they feel particularly vulnerable.

Some children are made aware of the whereabouts of their mother or father but do not get the opportunity to maintain and build on their relationship due to the breakdown of their parent's relationship. It is documented that 22% of prisoners

¹ Ref. *No One's Ever Asked Me*, Brown.K, Action for Prisoners' Families 2001

² Ref. *Invisible Children: The Children of Women in Prison* Alison Cunningham, Director of Research & Planning and Linda Baker, Executive Director Centre for Children & Families in the Justice System December 2004

divorce or separate as a result of their imprisonment, and 45% of prisoners lose contact with their families whilst serving a custodial sentence.

“I remember visiting my dad in prison. It was horrible. We had to sit there on our chairs while mum and dad argued about things. Dad never really took any notice of us and I felt it killed any relationship we ever had. He was in prison for five years but we did not visit him long, as my mum met someone else and dad was just forgotten about. When he was released and tried to contact us we could not be bothered with him as we did not know him”.³

However old a child gets, they still have the same emotions and anxieties to deal with. The more independent they feel, sometimes down to having to adopt an adult' role, caring for siblings or helping to run the home, the more they will feel they have to cope alone.

Adolescents might find themselves developing their own methods of coping. Without support from others; family, friends or professionals, these methods can sometimes be far from healthy.

Alcohol and drug use, thrill seeking, seeking sexual intimacy and criminal activity can all help to suppress the feelings of anger and shame felt at having a parent in prison.

3. What Support Is Available?

Partners of Prisoners and Families Support Group (POPS)

Partners of Prisoners and Families Support Group (POPS) was set up in 1988, by a group of families trying to support a loved one in prison. Their aim was to try to help each other to cope with the stress, isolation and stigma attached to having a family member in prison. This was the very early and organic beginnings of POPS. Our grass root level of development has enabled us to have intrinsic experience and understanding in how imprisonment affects families, offenders and the community.

Twenty years on, and with the prison population standing at around 80,000 POPS is still providing pioneering services to families. We have built an excellent reputation, which enables us to influence on a local, regional national and international strategic level.

POPS currently influences on a local, regional, national and international level.

³Service user. Partners of Prisoners and Families Support Group 2006.

- **Locally** – We chair Manchester Reducing Reoffending Action Plan Children, Families and Social Support Pathways and influence Salford and AGMA RRAP, on a consultancy capacity.
- **Regionally** – We chair North West RRAP Children, Families and Social Support Pathway.
- **Nationally** – We are members of the Family Ties Consultative Group, HMPS Race and Equalities Action Group, NOMS Advisory Group, Alliance for Reducing Re-offending Group and NACRO board.
- **Internationally** – We are involved in the European Network for Social Inclusion group, which meets three times a year to influence and share good practice within the EU.

Visitors' Centres/Play Areas

POPS staff supported over 300,000 families in their Visitors' Centres and Play Areas last year alone. **POPS** work in the following prisons.

- HMP Buckley Hall
- HMPYOI Forest Bank
- HMYOI Hindley
- HMP Liverpool
- HMP Kirkham
- HMP Rislely

POPS Play Areas are attractive and welcoming to children of all ages and different social backgrounds. They provide a stimulating environment, which makes the experience of visiting a prison less traumatic and more enjoyable for the children of offenders.

“When he first came to prison I was pregnant. Joanne has seen me through my pregnancy, got to know my children and helped me with so much.”⁴

POPS Play Workers encourage the children to move back and forth between the play area and their parent during the visit in order to maintain and develop the relationship with their mother or father and share the visit experience with them.

“When I saw my son, he had the biggest smile on his face. It was so strange to see him being able to hold his son. His girlfriend and me took a back seat and just let him play with him...my son had the chance to be a real dad.”⁵

⁴ Family member. Partners of Prisoners and Families Support Group 2006.

⁵ Family member. Partners of Prisoners and Families Support Group 2006.

Telephone Helpline

POPS forms one third of the team responsible for the, national, Prisoners' Families Helpline alongside Ormiston Children's and Families Trust and Action for Prisoners' Families (who coordinate the service). The Helpline is currently funded by the Big Lottery Fund and helped over 13,500 families last year.

Some of the main queries broached with Helpline staff by families face with the imprisonment of a parent are:

- When is the right time to tell my child?
- How shall I tell them?
- Should I take my child to visit?
- How will my child feel after the visit?

Staff are aware that one of the most difficult things to face when someone is imprisoned is what to tell the children. Whilst appreciating that every child and every situation is different, staff can provide support and guidance to those wishing to tell a child where their parent is.

“Thanks again for all your help and support. Me and my daughter have never had to deal with anything like this before, and never thought we would have to. I am grateful that we have someone who is prepared to listen and give me positive advice.”⁶

Additionally, staff can also provide the following publications: “Telling the Children”(information sheet), “Visiting Dad”, “Telling the Children” (book), and a series of worksheets for children (produced by Ormiston Children's and Families Trust).

Family Link Workers

POPS has Family Link Workers at several North West Prisons.

Family Link Workers helped over 2000 families last year.

POPS Family Link Workers:

- Are based in prisons and act as a broker between families and offenders ensuring that families are able to support the offender effectively. POPS believes that families can play a significant role in the reduction of reoffending if included in the sentence planning of the offender and acknowledged as an 'Offender Supporter.

⁶ Helpline Email. Prisoners' Families Helpline. 2006.

- Are introduced to offenders at the induction stage when they are informed of the services that are available to them.
- Can send out information packs to families within 48 hours of the prisoner's introduction to our service.
- Are able to signpost and refer families to other services.
- Can provide both emotional and practical support.

POPS Family Link Workers play a major role in supporting the children of offenders by way of organising 'Family Visit Days'. Family Visit Days present the opportunity for mums and dads in prison to spend some quality time with their children free from the normal constraints of a prison visit.

"These days are great cos it enables me to build a relationship with my son and show him that coming to see dad can be fun. I feel sad though when the visit comes to an end because I know next time I see him I won't be able to get up and go into the play area to have some fun with him. We need more of these days."⁷

POPS Family Team at HMYOI Hindley recently won the overall award at the 2006 Community Care Awards for its provision of 'Dad's days'.

"With the Dad's Day I get to see my child enjoying herself. I get to see her smiling and laughing and it is all down to the scheme at Hindley"⁸

The first Dad's day took place in July 2004. Inmates made individual applications, and those who were successful were allowed to play with their children in a more relaxed setting than they have ever experience whilst in jail. The session was a huge success and lead to several others being arranged. One of these sessions, in December 2005, saw dad's playing with their children at a Christmas party in the prison gym where face painting, craft activities, games and making reindeer cakes were all on offer.

"When I came to Hindley my daughter was only 11 months old; she is now 3 years. She is so independent and has her own little personality. It is sad that I have missed out on so much of her upbringing. I feel so proud of her and never want the visit to end. I feel like I have really let her down by not being around for her"⁹

"I felt so proud to be able to sit my daughter on my knee and read her a story; it is something I want to continue when I am released"¹⁰

⁷ Service user. Partners of Prisoners and Families Support Group. 2006

⁸ Service user. Partners of Prisoners and Families Support Group. 2006

⁹ Service user. Partners of Prisoners and Families Support Group. 2006

¹⁰Service user. Partners of Prisoners and Families Support Group. 2006

Family days are now seen as best practice for keeping relationships going between parents and children and should be encouraged at all establishments where operationally practical.

Ormiston Children's and Families Trust

The Ormiston Children's and Families Trust run a 'Children of Offenders Programme' which is an initiative by the Eastern Region Families Partnership to promote greater awareness and more effective responses to the needs of children of prisoners.

Launched in 2002 the programme has expanded work to eight of the region's twelve prisons and has established community support for children and young people in two counties.

They Provide:

- Good quality visiting and contact opportunities for children to spend time with their imprisoned parent/carer or family member
- Support and information for children and families, including specialist community programmes in two counties
- Accredited courses for parents in prisons to explore how they can best maintain a role in their child's life
- Resource material to support families and those who work with them
- They are working to:
- Promote the importance of the role of families in sentence planning and resettlement
- Raise awareness of the needs of children and young people affected by imprisonment. This includes working with schools, health, social care agencies and voluntary organisations so that they are better able to meet the needs of children and their families
- Give children and families a voice and influence through consultation and research¹¹

Time for Children & Young People (Essex and Norfolk)

This county wide initiative provides support to children aged 5-13 years with a parent or carer in prison. The aim is to provide the most appropriate and effective support and this will be adapted depending on each child's or young person's situation.

Specialist workers provide both one-to-one support and group activities enabling children and young people to benefit from meeting other youngsters affected by the imprisonment of someone close.

¹¹ Ormiston Children and Families Trust. 2007

They take referrals from schools, health and social care agencies and families are welcome to contact them direct.

Action for Prisoners' Families

Action for Prisoners' Families produce a number of publications aimed at supporting the children of offenders.

Finding Dad

“Finding Dad tells the story of 8-year old James Orchard who turns detective to find out the truth about his dad, who disappears with the police early one morning. James’ mum will only say that he has gone on a secret mission, sending James off into his imaginary world as he tries to track dad down. An exciting adventure story for all children.”

Tommy's Dad

“The story of a young boy and his sister whose father is sent to prison. It explores their feelings of loss, anger and frustration at not being told what’s going on, until their mother finally decides to take them to see their dad.”

Danny's Mum

“Danny's Mum is the first in a series of unique story books dealing with issues affecting children with a parent in prison. It tells the story of Danny, whose mother has been sent to prison.”

Dads Inside and Out (Leeds Animation Workshop)

“This 13 minute animated video resource pack looks at the difficulties facing fathers and stepfathers who are in prison, and their children. It deals with the effects of imprisonment on both fathers and children, and how parents can help children to cope. It is designed for prisoners and their families, in groups or at home. It also provides a resource for professionals and volunteers, and a way of raising awareness and starting discussion in education, training or conferences for those who work with prisoners and their families.”

Additionally, Action for Prisoners Families produce a series of reports and resource packs also aimed at supporting the children of offenders.

- *No ones ever asked me – Young People with a Prisoner in the Family*
- *Exploring the needs of young people with a prisoner in the family.*

- *YOUNG PEOPLE'S SUPPORT SERVICE: Supporting young people with a prisoner in the family.*
- *STARTING WHERE THEY ARE PROJECT: Supporting young people with a prisoner in the family.*
- *RESOURCE PACK: Supporting young people affected by imprisonment.*
- *I DIDN'T THINK ANYONE COULD UNDERSTAND MISS: Supporting prisoners' children in school.¹²*

All reports are available through the Action for Prisoners' Families Website.

Contact

Contact is a Cheshire based prisoner's families support group. They provide services to families in two North West prisons in addition to being able to:

- Provide practical and emotional support.
- Information on the criminal justice system.
- Court support.
- Meet and befriend families.
- Listening support.
- Escort children in care, who have a parent in prison.
- Help maintain relationships between families and prisoners
- Support families who have difficulties with relatives who have special needs, who are or could be offending.
- Put families in touch with someone who has experienced the imprisonment of a relative.
- Provide advice on housing and financial issues.¹³

Grassroots Family Days and Support Project

The Grassroots Family Days and Support Project supports the families of offenders who are serving sentences at HMP Preston, HMP Lancaster Castle, HMP Wymott and HMP Kirkham, and who live in Lancashire.

Family support is provided by a dedicated team of Coordinators and trained Family Support Volunteers. They provide support throughout a sentence and after release by:

- Supporting a family with any problems they have

¹² Action For Prisoners' Families 2007.

¹³ Contact Cheshire Support Group

- Supporting a prisoner to use their time more constructively
- Involving a family with prisoners in sentence planning
- Encouraging and supporting a family to attend a Family Day if eligible.

Family days are a chance for a prisoner and his family to meet and address any issues that will support the prisoner towards the ultimate goal of successful resettlement into the family home and local community.

In addition to providing a relaxed family focused environment, they aim to enable prisoners to access information and advice and build positive links with agencies in the community to prepare them for release.¹⁴

KIDS VIP

KIDS VIP works to enable relationships between children and their imprisoned parents to be sustained and developed, by promoting good practice in play areas and support to prison play workers. They also raise awareness of prison staff of how the imprisonment of a parent affects prisoners' children and the importance of families to prisons, especially for resettlement.

NEPACS (*Taken from NEPACS website*)

In addition to staffing play areas within visits rooms, NEPACS facilitates special children's visits at Durham and Low Newton where children enjoy one-to-one contact with their imprisoned parent in a relaxed situation. In Durham there are monthly morning Child/Father visits, which take place in the prison chapel, and all-day Child/Mother visits held during school holidays. At Low Newton Child/Mother visits are held every week. NEPACS supplies toys, refreshments, and helpers. These visits provide vital contact time, and ideally they would like to make sessions available to many more parents and children.

Last year a unique two-year pilot project, financed by the Princess Diana Fund, on the needs of teenagers with a family member in prison, based in Durham, 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, magazines, television, etc. A part-time youth worker leads a small band of volunteers to make the room available at weekends and as far as possible during school holidays during the period around visits, supplying much needed diversion, information, support and advice for this very vulnerable and rather overlooked group. Meanwhile negotiations are taking place for a designated space for young people within the prison visits room.¹⁵

¹⁴ Grassroots. 2007

¹⁵ NEPACS. 2007

Storybook Dads

HMP Dartmoor

Storybook Dads based at HMP Dartmoor gives prisoners the chance to record themselves reading a story for their children.

“Daddy’s done a CD for me which was The Frog Prince and he did Jack and the Beanstalk for my brother. They’re both really good. He says he will do another one for us for Christmas.”

“It’s daddy’s special present for me. I listen to it every night.”

“I miss my dad. When I’m lonely I listen to the story and it makes me feel better.”¹⁶

In addition to enabling dads to still perform a parenting role from behind bars, the scheme also reduces the anxiety felt by children by reminding them that dad still cares and that they are still loved and thought about.

The scheme is currently running in over 20 prisons and over 1,700 prisoners have taken part so far.

4. Examples of Good Practice – Internationally

Australia

Australia has an organisation called ‘SHINE for kids’, which was originally created as the ‘Children of Prisoners’ Support Group’ (COPSG). The organisation, which is based in Sydney, receives ongoing funding from the Department of Corrective Services, the Department of Community Services and others.

Shine for kids offers:

- Groupwork - Groupwork happens after school and it is usually a mix of craft, games and talking. Groupwork and schools work, in particular, have enabled children to address the issues they are facing in a supportive, team environment.
- Daytrips – Monthly daytrips help children to have fun, and to interact with other children and young people who also have a parent in prison

¹⁶ Storybook Dads. 2007

- Supported Children's Transport - The service involves transporting children to visit their imprisoned parent(s) or carer(s)
- Pen pals - The Pen Pal Program gives the children and young people of SHINE for Kids the opportunity write either to their imprisoned parent or to another young person who has a parent in prison.
- Video Visits - Video conferencing is a new way to stay in touch with a family member who is in prison. Video Visits allow inmates and their families and children to see each other on a television screen while talking.
- Child and family support and advocacy
- Child/Parent Activity Days held within Correctional Centres
- Family Days held within Correctional Centres
- Activity Centre in Sydney and Central West
- Drop in Centre in Sydney and Central West
- Toy Box – entertainment and support for children on long/all day visits with mums ¹⁷

Most of the services offered are free.

5. For the Future...

POPS – Invest to Save Bid (New project proposal).

Supporting Vulnerable Children ...preventing cycles of offending behaviour.

The aims of the proposed new project are as follows:

- Set up a new innovative pilot project in Salford
- Reach vulnerable children and families specially those connected to offenders in the Criminal Justice System and those who may have been affected by domestic violence and/or abuse.
- Prevent these children and families, with the appropriate intervention and support from entering the Criminal Justice System.

¹⁷ SHINE for Kids. 2007.

The project will provide the following services:

Children/Youth Workers

The Children/Youth Workers will work on a one to one and group basis with the children and young people beneficiaries. Their main role will be to provide support, information and advice in a non-stressful, safe environment. The Children/Youth Workers will also arrange activities days to take place.

The Children/Youth Workers will enable children to:

- Access the information they need
- Participate in high quality experiences and opportunities
- Be empowered and engaged in youth and community activities; and
- Have their informal learning activities recognised.

Community Family Link Worker

The Community Family Link Workers' role will be to support the families of the children and young people that are accessing the service.

The Community Family Link Worker will provide:

- Support for families to help them cope with supporting each other and their children
- Support for the families to help them to support the offender if appropriate
- Information about services that are available to them
- Support for the families to help them understand their situation and how to make critical changes
- Understanding of their children's behaviour and needs

Activity Days, coordinated and arranged by the children/youth workers will provide a series of activities that will aim to meet the needs of the families and children that we will be supporting. The aim of these days will be to:

- Engage with beneficiaries on an informal basis with an activity they would not normally have access to
- Build confidence
- Learn new skills
- Reduce stress
- Improve communication
- Evoke thought
- Improve behaviour
- Motivate

- Have fun

Additionally, the project will provide a **Training and Development Officer** who will devise training and awareness raising programmes for the agencies in Salford working with children and families.

A **Peer Support Team** will consist of a team of 5-8 young volunteers who have had a personal experience of supporting a family member/friend in prison or have been a victim of domestic violence/abuse.

Useful Websites

www.partnersofprisoners.co.uk

- Partners of Prisoners and Families Support Group

www.ormiston.org

- Ormiston Children and Families Trust

www.prisonersfamilies.org.uk

-Action For Prisoners' Families

www.prisonersfamilieshelpline.co.uk

- Prisoners' Families Helpline

www.nepacs.co.uk

-NEEPACS

www.storybookdads.co.uk

-Storybook Dads

www.contactcsg.org

-Contact

www.shineforkids.org.au

-Shine for Kids