i-HOP: Assisting CJS commissioners to consider children and families of offenders

A focus on children and families

“There is still stigma... People would think that everybody in the family [is] like that.” Mother

Children and families work has long featured in the Criminal Justice System, as a reducing re-offending pathway. Recently the importance of families was recognised in NOMS’ 2014 Commissioning intentions, with an emphasis on prisons working with local authorities to support offenders’ families. Furthermore children and families have been highlighted in the Transforming Rehabilitation evidence around reducing re-offending, with a focus on family visits and home leave.

The economic case for supporting offenders in regards to children and families has also been documented. Research carried out by the New Economics Foundation into the Integrated Family Support programme run in prisons by Pact found that the programme gave a return of £11.41 for every £1 invested. The high costs to the state, local government and society of offending means family-focused outcomes have a clear social value:

- **Reducing re-offending**: The Ministry of Justice reported that those prisoners who had visits from their families in custody are 39% less likely to re-offend than those who do not receive family visits. This study also reported that family support improves a prisoner’s employment chances and reduces homelessness after release.
- **Reducing inter-generational offending**: 65% of boys with a father in prison go on to offend. The children of prisoners face specific challenges and have varying needs – it is important for this to be recognised at an early stage in order to improve outcomes.

Children of offenders

“We was there when he got locked up” 7 year old girl

It is estimated that there are 200,000 children that experience the imprisonment of a parent every year in England and Wales. Currently there is no routine identification of who these children are and therefore no way of ensuring their needs are met.

Research increasingly shows the impact that parental imprisonment can have on these children – poorer outcomes, stigma, isolation, health and financial difficulties.

Considering the needs of children and families

“I’ve took them to [the prison] every time because I think it’s lovely there, plus those child-centred visits – they’re brilliant.” Mother

Offenders’ family relationships and the needs of the children and families themselves should be recognised in service specifications and Key Performance Indicators with families identified as targeted service users. This would work to ensure a consideration of children and families is effectively embedded in service provision – rather than as an afterthought or ‘add-on’. Through early intervention the best outcomes are made possible for both offender and families.

Parenting programmes offered in prisons are usually popular and well received. And as well as developing essential parenting skills and parents’ bonds with their children, they have also been known to contribute to prisoner stability. High quality family visit days can provide the appropriate environment and time for significant parent-child interaction. Furthermore, after release the support of families and friends can help offenders successfully reintegrate back into the community, with through the gate and community based services in a good position to support these family ties.

Effective multi-agency working across statutory and voluntary agencies can often be a crucial factor in achieving positive outcomes for offenders and families, and ensuring effective safeguarding.

How can i-HOP help?

i-HOP is a national one stop information and advice service and free helpline for all professionals working with children and families.
of offenders, funded by the Department for Education. It brings together information that can assist commissioners in considering children and families of offenders:

- details of **existing services and interventions** in prisons and the community that promote family relationships
- up to date **policy frameworks, government guidance and recommendations**
- **guidelines and toolkits** for developing effective children and family practice within criminal justice services
- details of **programmes for offenders** that can be delivered in prisons or the community
- **research, evidence based practice, and evaluations** to inform the development or commissioning of children and families work
- details of local multi-agency **training for staff** regarding the impact of imprisonment on families

Please contact us directly if you would like support from i-HOP in regards to framing service specifications and service design focused on improving outcomes for offenders and their families: polly.wright@barnardos.org.uk

### Examples of existing services

**HMP Wolds Family Learning Programme** includes a weekly visit in a relaxed environment for fathers and their children, allowing them to bond and interact, in their capacity as parents. Both the parent in prison and the parent outside learn about parenting skills, and complete tasks to receive an OCN certificate.³

**Northumbria Probation Trust** has been allocated 3 social workers to work with families where someone is subject to probation supervision in one Local Delivery Unit. Probation staff work with the social workers to target appropriate cases. Whilst each agency maintains its own focus, work is more ‘joined up’ with enhanced communication between practitioners involved.

**Note:**
Children’s and parents’ quotes are taken from interviews with children and families in a Barnardo’s report: Owen Gill, *Every night you cry: Case studies of 15 Bristol families with a father in prison*, Barnardo’s, 2009

**References:**
7. Social Exclusion Unit, Reducing re-offending by ex-prisoners, July 2002

**Visit i-HOP**

Visit [www.i-hop.org.uk](http://www.i-hop.org.uk) to find out more and discover a range of information regarding offenders’ family relationships and support for children and families of offenders. Sign up to become a member to receive free monthly i-HOP e-news and view case studies.

**Pick up the phone**

If you require information about developing practice or supporting children of offenders, contact our helpline on: **0808 802 2013** (Monday to Fridays, 9am – 5pm).