

## Information for Children and Young People's Partnerships and organisations working with children, young people and their families

### The children of offenders in Wales

Parental imprisonment impacts on the opportunities for children and young people to access their rights and entitlements, increases the risks of poor outcomes and is strongly associated with child poverty.

- Estimates of the number of children and young people with a parent in prison in England and Wales vary between 125,000 and 150,000.<sup>1</sup> Most recently the literature suggests a figure of 150,000.<sup>2</sup>
- Approximately 7 per cent of the school population will experience the imprisonment of a parent during their time in school.<sup>3</sup>

### Recognising the children of offenders as vulnerable children in Wales

Welsh Assembly Government has adopted the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (1989).<sup>4</sup> Article 2 and 9 of the UNCRC set out the ways in which children must be able to access their rights irrespective of their parent's status.

Children with parents in prison are included as children and young people 'in special circumstances' in the **National Service Framework for Children, Young People and Maternity Services in Wales (NSF)**.<sup>5</sup> The NSF includes a standard for organisations to provide inclusive services, and additional targeted services for all children in special circumstances and their families (6.4) and that peer-support groups for children in special circumstances are jointly funded and facilitated in each locality (6.2.).

The children and young people of families in difficult circumstances including families of offenders are identified as in need of additional support in '*Shared Planning for Better Outcomes*' (2007) – statutory Guidance on Children and Young People's Plans. The Guidance also includes the need to give the highest priority to

those in greatest need including those who have offended and young people at risk of offending. Prisoners' children are two and half times as likely to become prisoners themselves.

In 2006 the National Offender Management Service in Wales published a strategy for joint work to reduce re-offending and create stronger and safer communities in Wales.<sup>6</sup> The strategy is clear that 'all criminal justice system agencies and their partners have a responsibility to help children, young people and the families of offenders'. Nearly half of all prisoners lose contact with their families whilst in prison.<sup>7</sup> For women, difficulties in maintaining contact with their families are exacerbated by being held further away from home. Research shows that prisoners who maintain contact with their families are six times less likely to re-offend.<sup>8</sup> Reducing offending is central to reducing the number of children and young people experiencing poor outcomes as a result of parental imprisonment.

## **Evidence about the impact of parental imprisonment on children and young people**

Children with a prisoner in the family are likely to experience a range of issues including:

- poor emotional well-being;
- disruptive behaviour;
- low self-esteem;
- significant mental health difficulties;
- poor educational attainment;<sup>9</sup>
- increased risk of offending.<sup>10</sup>

Parental imprisonment is associated with family economic strain, and instability in children's care and living arrangements, even after controlling for parental substance misuse and mental health problems.<sup>11</sup> A recent study suggests that criminal justice and social welfare policies combine to impoverish, disadvantage and exclude prisoners' families and their children in particular.<sup>12</sup>

The children of women prisoners are most likely to be cared for outside the home while their mothers are in prison with only 5% of children of female prisoners remaining in the family home.<sup>13</sup> One survey found that 11% of imprisoned mothers had one or more of their children taken into care, fostered or adopted.<sup>14</sup>

The longer term impact of the imprisonment of a parent and a range of linked issues contribute and reinforce the propensity for poverty and social exclusion through the life-course.<sup>15</sup>

## Responding to the needs of the children of offenders

1. **Communication:** Give children's caregivers advice and information on providing clear and honest explanations about parental absence to children.<sup>16</sup>
2. **Placement:** Children need stable care arrangements during parental imprisonment, ideally with families and friends.<sup>17</sup>
3. **Contact:** Increase children's opportunities to maintain contact with their imprisoned parent, in particular through child-centred visiting arrangements in prisons.<sup>18</sup>
4. **Therapy:** Offer counselling and therapeutic services of children of prisoners to help them cope with separation.<sup>19</sup>
5. **Financial assistance:** Ensure that prisoners' families receive adequate benefits to overcome loss of income.<sup>20</sup>
6. **Reduce costs:** Provide free transport or financial assistance for prison visits. Reduce the cost of telephone calls between home and prison.<sup>21</sup>
7. **Prisoner employment:** provide prisoners with paid work while in custody and increase work schemes that employ former prisoners.<sup>22</sup>
8. **Parenting interventions:** parenting styles are important predictors of child development and parenting interventions have been shown to be effective.<sup>23</sup>
9. **Family support:** Support to assist families affected by offending reduces the risks of poor outcomes for children and young people. Supporting families with a member in prison reduces the risks of family breakdown which in turn reduces the risks of re-offending.

Young people with a parent in prison have identified the need for someone to talk to, help with visits and practical issues, to be kept informed and to have access to information.<sup>24</sup>

**Education:** Schools are not presently well equipped to recognise the needs of children who have a parent in prison.<sup>25</sup> There is evidence that children feel the need to play a supportive role in the family upon imprisonment of a parent. At the same time children may feel the need to hide their family circumstances from others, this isolates them from support. In this way children who have a parent in prison may experience many of the stresses and barriers to education associated with the young carer role.

Gloucestershire Local Education Authority has developed a policy for the education of children with a parent or close relative in prison. The policy aims to raise awareness of the needs of children and young people affected by family imprisonment, secure their educational achievement and attendance and promote social inclusion.<sup>26</sup>

**The children of offenders are vulnerable children and are at risk of poor outcomes. This group of children and young people require additional support in order to access their rights and entitlements. There is established evidence in relation to needs of the children of offenders and appropriate responses.**

**Responding to the needs of these children and young people requires commitment public and voluntary sector organisations working with children and young people in their community and agencies within the criminal justice system.**

**This document has been produced as part of the work of a multi-agency National Offender Management Service (Wales) Children and Families Pathway group. The group is taking forward action to deliver on the Children and Families Pathway of the NOMS (Wales) Strategy to Reduce Re-offending (2006). The group is also supporting those working in prisons and the wider criminal justice system in developing practice to meet the needs of the children of offenders and their families.**

Copies of both ‘*Stronger Partnerships for Better Outcomes: Guidance*’ and ‘*Shared Planning for Better Outcomes: Planning Guidance*’ are available on the Assembly Government Website at:

<http://new.wales.gov.uk/topics/educationandskills/publications/guidance/sharedplanningforbetteroutcomes?lang=en>

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<sup>1</sup> See for example Children in Wales evidence to the Welsh Affairs Committee, November 2006, also Murray, J. and Farrington, D.P. (2006), ‘Evidence-based Programs for Children of Prisoners’ in *Criminology and Public Policy*, Vol 5 Number 4 pp 721-736

<sup>2</sup> Smith, R. et al, (2007) *Poverty and disadvantage among prisoners' families*, York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation

<sup>3</sup> Action for Prisoners' Families, (2003) *Submission in response to Green Paper Consultation, Every child Matters*, APF

[http://www.prisonersfamilies.org.uk/opus554/Every\\_Child\\_Matters\\_Response\\_Nov03.PDF](http://www.prisonersfamilies.org.uk/opus554/Every_Child_Matters_Response_Nov03.PDF)

<sup>4</sup> Welsh Assembly Government, (2004) *Children and Young People: Rights to Action*, Cardiff: WAG

<sup>5</sup> Welsh Assembly Government, (2006) *National Service Framework for Children, Young People and Maternity Services in Wales*, Cardiff: WAG

<sup>6</sup> National Offender Management Service Wales, (2006), *Joining Together in Wales an Adult and Young Person's Strategy to Reduce Reoffending*, WAG, Youth Justice Board, National Probation Service, HM Prison service, WLGA, South Wales Police, North Wales Police, Gwent Police, Dyfed-Powys Police,

<sup>7</sup> NACRO, (2000) *The Forgotten Majority: The Resettlement of Short Term Prisoners*, National Association for the Care and Resettlement: London

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- <sup>8</sup> SEU, (2002), *Reducing Reoffending by ex-prisoners*, Social Exclusion Unit: London
- <sup>9</sup> See Brown, K. (2001). *No-one's ever asked me: young people with a prisoner in the family*, London: APF also Action for Prisoners' Families, (2003) *Exploring the needs of young people with a prisoner in the family*, London: APF also Action for Prisoners' Families, (2001) *I didn't think anyone would understand miss: Supporting prisoners' children in school*, London: AFP
- <sup>10</sup> Murray, J. and Farrington, D.P. (2005), 'Parental imprisonment: Effects on boys' anti-social behaviour and delinquency though the life-course, in *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 46, pp 1269-1278
- <sup>11</sup> Phillips, S. et al, (2006), 'Disentangling risks: parent criminal justice involvement and children's exposure to family risks', in *Criminology and Public Policy*, Vol 5 Number 4 pp 677-702
- <sup>12</sup> See 2 above, R. Smith, 2006
- <sup>13</sup> Prison Reform Trust, (2000), *Justice for Women*
- <sup>14</sup> SEU, (2002), *Reducing Reoffending by ex-prisoners*, Social Exclusion Unit: London
- <sup>15</sup> Walker, J. and McCarthy, P. (2005), 'Parents in prisons: the impact on children', in Preston, G. (ed), *At Greatest Risk: the children most likely to be poor*, London: CPAG
- <sup>16</sup> Poehlmann, J. (2005) 'Representations of attachment relationships in children of incarcerated mothers, in *Child Development*, 76, pp 679-696, cited in Murray, J. and Farrington, D.P. (2006), 'Evidence-based Programs for Children of Prisoners' in *Criminology and Public Policy*, Vol 5 Number 4 pp 721-736
- <sup>17</sup> Bernstein, N. (2005) *All Alone in the World: Children of the Incarcerated*, New York: The New Press, cited in Murray and Farrington, 2006, see 19 above.
- <sup>18</sup> Council of Europe, (1997), *Recommendation 1340 (1997) on the Social and Family Effects of Detention*, Strasbourg, France: Parliamentary Assembly, Council of Europe; Trice, AD and Brewster, J (2004) 'The effects of maternal incarceration on adolescent children', *Journal of Police and Criminal Psychology*, 19, pp 27-35 cited in Murray and Farrington, 2006, see 19 above.
- <sup>19</sup> Hames, C.C. and Pedreira, D. (2003), 'Children with parents in prison: Disenfranchised grievors who benefit from bibliotherapy', *Illness, Crisis and Loss*, 11, pp 377-386; Sack, W.H. et al, (1976) 'The children of imprisoned parents: A psychosocial exploration', *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* cited in Murray and Farrington, 2006, see 19 above.
- <sup>20</sup> See 21 above, Council of Europe, 1997.
- <sup>21</sup> See 20 above N. Berstein, 2005.
- <sup>22</sup> See 21 above, Council of Europe, 1997.
- <sup>23</sup> See 1 above, Murray and Farrington, 2006.
- <sup>24</sup> Brown, K. (2001) *No-one's Ever asked me: Young people with a prisoner in the families*, Federation of Prisoner's Families Support Groups
- <sup>25</sup> Dibb, L. (ed) (2001) *I didn't think anyone would understand miss: Supporting prisoner's children in school*, Action for Prisoners Families
- <sup>26</sup> See Action for Prisoners' Families (2002), *Supporting Young People with a Prisoner in the Family* [http://www.prisonersfamilies.org.uk/opus229/Guidelines\\_PRACTICE.pdf](http://www.prisonersfamilies.org.uk/opus229/Guidelines_PRACTICE.pdf)