



Prisoners Returning Home: Prisoners and Family Reintegration

Kieran O'Dwyer, Sharron Kelliher and James Bowes
for the Childhood Development Initiative

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Acronyms

| | |
|---------------|---|
| ACE | Adverse Childhood Experience |
| CDI | Childhood Development Initiative |
| CJINI | Criminal Justice Inspection, Northern Ireland |
| CYPSC | Children and Young People's Services Committee |
| FIG | Families and Imprisonment Group |
| FLO | Family Liaison Officer |
| FSO | Family Support Officer |
| IASIO | Irish Association for Social Inclusion Opportunities |
| IPRT | Irish Penal Reform Trust |
| IPS | Irish Prison Service |
| ISM | Integrated Sentence Management |
| NEET | Not in Education, Employment or Training |
| NIACRO | Northern Ireland Association for the Care and Rehabilitation of Offenders |
| NIPS | Norther Ireland Prison Service |
| NOMS | National Offender Management Service |
| PAR | Prisoner and Resettlement |
| TPI | Travellers in Prison Initiative |
| TR | Temporary Release |

Foreword

Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures, the Government's national policy framework for children and young people, envisions an Ireland which cherishes all children, young people, and their families. In particular, it strives to ensure children and young people are supported to realise their maximum potential now and in the future. The document specifically recognises the "stigma and life disruption experienced by many children and young people on the imprisonment of a parent."¹ This report also presents compelling evidence that imprisonment can have pernicious effects on the ability of individuals to parent confidently.

The work of CDI Tallaght and the Irish Prison Service on the Family Links Programme indicates the lack of family involvement in pre-release planning and post release supports. This report explores the family reintegration process, focusing particularly on the needs of the child. It also seeks to identify potential solutions to problems experienced by prisoners and their families.

I am particularly pleased to note that the report was funded by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs under What Works (formerly the Quality and Capacity Building Initiative). What Works is designed to nurture, grow and champion evidence-informed prevention and early intervention approaches. At the core of the initiative is a desire to foster persistent curiosity among those working with and for children, young people and their families.

Throughout this report, the commitment of authors Kieran O'Dwyer, Sharron Kelliher, and James Bowes to this value is clear. This report evidences detailed engagement with a specific practice problem, careful investigation of existing literature in Ireland and abroad, and wide consultation with relevant stakeholders.

I am pleased that Tusla staff in Galway and Roscommon are acknowledged for their enthusiastic support for this process. We know the significant challenges practitioners, providers and policymakers face cannot be addressed without the sharing of collective wisdom, interdisciplinary engagement between statutory services and across the sector, and a generous, collaborative approach to problem solving. The methodological approach of this report is consistent with What Works.

As Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, it is my pleasure to foreword this report on Prisoners Returning Home: Prisoner and Family Reintegration Project.

Dr Katherine Zappone, TD
Minister for Children and Youth Affairs

Minister's Foreword

I am pleased to see the publication of this report commissioned by the Childhood Development Initiative (CDI) which focuses on family reintegration and the needs of children at the end of a parent's imprisonment. The report highlights the harmful effects that imprisonment has on the children of the imprisoned. It also demonstrates evidence of a reduction in these effects when there are positive engagements with prisoner families; and the beneficial impacts on the reintegration of the imprisoned parent.

I am grateful for the opportunity afforded by the research to focus on the needs of families and children, in the context of the custodial journey and resettlement in the community and we will endeavour through our respective Departments and agencies to put the necessary services and supports in place to improve the life chances of the children of people in our prisons.

I wish to commend CDI for commissioning this important research and we also acknowledge the cooperation of the Irish Prison Service, an executive office of the Department of Justice and Equality and Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, in facilitating the comprehensive research that was undertaken.

The report acknowledges the work that is being undertaken by the Irish Prison Service in prisons to support prisoners and families at committal, during custody and in preparation for release. It identifies shortcomings in current services, such as information sharing with families, the quality of family contact during custody, and inadequate information provided to families on community based family support services.

The family supports provided by Tusla, such as the Meitheal programme and family welfare conferencing are recognised as potential models for supporting the families of prisoners. Other possible models of through-the-gate support or community-based services for families during imprisonment and around the time of release, are also explored.

The report underlines the findings of the 2012 Irish Penal Reform Trust report 'Picking up the Pieces' and shows that there is still significant work to be done in this area, by the Irish Prison Service, by Tusla and by the wider public sector. The experience of the Family Links programme in prisons to date, demonstrates that successful outcomes can be achieved when state and community services work together in partnership.



Charles Flanagan, TD

Minister for Justice and Equality

Acknowledgements

The authors wish to express thanks to the multitude of people who helped make this report possible. We were delighted to be invited to undertake the study on such an important topic and honoured to have the opportunity to contribute to improving the life chances of children of prisoners, building on the Family Links Programme. We were fortunate to be able to draw on so much previous excellent work, including that relating to Family Links and the work of the Irish Penal Reform Trust, Children's Rights Alliance and Bedford Row.

We enjoyed the support of so many people to whom we are indebted, especially Marian Quinn and all the members of the Project Advisory Group, listed individually in the introduction to this report. We conducted interviews with a host of stakeholders, listed individually in the methodology section of the report, and they gave most generously of their time and were extremely helpful with their comments and information. We greatly appreciated the help of Assistant Governor Shally and his team in Castlerea Prison in setting up interviews with staff and prisoners and likewise Governor Lydon and his colleagues in Loughan House for facilitating meetings with prisoners there. Meetings of the Advisory Group were hosted in Castlerea Prison and the Irish Prison Service Headquarters in Longford, for which many thanks are due.

Tusla staff in Galway and Roscommon deserve special mention for their willingness to support the project and their contributions, as does Anne Costello, Travellers in Prison Initiative, who shared insights based on her work with Traveller prisoners and their families and set up meetings with the Galway Traveller Movement and Bedford Row.

We are grateful in particular for the input from prisoners and their partners. They were generous with their time and extremely open and helpful in their comments, dealing with sensitive, personal issues in what have to be difficult circumstances. A number of prisoners and partners invited us into their homes to carry out the interviews which we appreciated. Their voice was essential to the success of the project.

We hope that the report does justice to everyone's contributions. Responsibility for any shortcomings rests squarely with the authors.

Kieran O'Dwyer Sharron Kelliher James Bowes

Executive Summary

This study was commissioned by the Childhood Development Initiative. It focused on Castlerea Prison and on Counties Galway and Roscommon. It builds on the Family Links Programme which was a multi-agency collaboration and is now part of Irish Prison Service policy. Family Links aimed at developing prison support services for families during the period of imprisonment, including the establishment of a prison family liaison service and provision of training and awareness-raising to parents and prison staff. The focus of the present study is on the family reintegration phase of the prison journey, and the challenges for all the family when imprisonment comes to an end, with a particular focus on children's needs.

The study has two main methodological components: a literature review and interviews with stakeholders, prisoners and prisoners' partners. The literature review recounts the detrimental effects of imprisonment on prisoners' children. They are more likely to experience negative educational, behavioural and emotional outcomes and are at increased risk of future incarceration. Having a parent in prison is acknowledged as an Adverse Childhood Experience. The review highlights evidence that prisoners maintaining positive links with children and family during imprisonment can reduce the risks for children. It also has a positive impact on the father's behaviour in prison and after release. The review looks at support services and structures in Ireland and documents reported shortcomings and recommendations for remedial action. It examines the nature of supports and services that are available in neighbouring jurisdictions and evidence of their impact: they include prison-family liaison, family visits in relaxed environments, financial support for visits, training programmes and "through-the-gate" support.

The interviews with stakeholders, prisoners and partners highlighted many positive aspects of the current system and services. There was widespread acknowledgement, however, of system shortcomings and service gaps, including a lack of information about prisoners' families on the part of State agencies. Prisoners and their partners identified needs related to family at three stages of the imprisonment journey: around committal (when they lacked information and did not know who to contact), during custody (in relation to family contact, sentence planning, services to address offending-related issues and community-based family services) and around release (in the immediate period before and after release). It became clear that the basis for successful reintegration starts as soon as imprisonment begins and is marked for failure if rehabilitative needs are not addressed. It also emerged that, without support, prisoners have limited capacity to see beyond their own needs in prison and limited understanding of their parenting role. Recommendations are made to address the needs identified, including awareness-raising programmes for staff and prisoners and their families.

The report looks at a number of models to support prisoners and their families. The Tusla Meitheal model has much to offer and is already available to families. Under Meitheal, children's strengths and needs are assessed by a person of the family's choice, a plan is drawn up with the family and they are put in touch with relevant services. Tusla has a co-ordination role. However prisoner families are reluctant to engage with Tusla because of its association with child protection and the service depends on initiation by the family. Tusla also offers family welfare conferencing where the family is empowered to find its own solutions without involving professionals in that process. However the same two drawbacks apply – reticence about Tusla and the need to self-refer. We also examine the potential development of a service provided by Irish Prison Service

staff. However, disadvantages attaching to this option include a likely reluctance on the part of prisoners and their families to engage after release and the associated significant extension of the role of prison officers into the community.

One of two possible models is recommended: either an extended role for an existing independent “through-the-gate” service such as the Irish Association for Social Inclusion Opportunities (IASIO) or a new community-based service operating along lines similar to Bedford Row in Limerick. The service would support families at any point during the period of imprisonment but especially leading up to release and for a time after release. It would work with prisoners, partners and children in prison and the community and would encourage them to engage with Tusla and other services by providing information and acting as go-between. The report includes a draft protocol governing relationships between Castlerea Prison and the new service and a referral flow chart which could serve as models for other services and prisons.

The report includes a draft protocol between the Irish Prison Service and Tusla, the Child and Family Agency.

1

Introduction



1 Introduction

1.1 Context

The Childhood Development Initiative (CDI), in partnership with the Irish Prison Service (IPS), developed and implemented the Family Links Programme in 2014 in Limerick Prison aimed at maintaining imprisoned fathers' relationships with their partners and their children, with a view to protecting vulnerable children from criminality and improving their learning and developmental outcomes, as well as reducing recidivism. The initiative has a number of elements, including delivery of a bespoke parenting programme for prisoners and their partners and training of prison officers. The training focused on the impacts of imprisonment on the child and family and how prison staff can support prisoners to maintain their family relationships while in custody. The initiative derived from the body of evidence that, first, children of incarcerated parents experience negative educational, behavioural and emotional outcomes and are at increased risk of future incarceration and, second, that maintaining positive links with children and family can reduce this risk while also having a positive impact on the father's behaviour. Following the success of the project, the IPS included the model in their 2016-2018 strategic plan (Irish Prison Service, 2016) and commenced funding it in 2016, expanding it to Wheatfield and Castlerea Prisons.

CDI undertook the present "Prisoner and Resettlement" Project to consolidate and scale up its work with families, capitalising on the positive relationships between Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, Castlerea Prison, local agencies and communities. It aimed to support these bodies to establish and embed an interagency pre-release and resettlement response that was specifically focused on children and families. Family re-integration does not always form part of the current resettlement process. Against this backdrop, an intervention aimed at managing tensions resulting from a prisoner returning home, and maximising the chances of successful reintegration, could be expected to help keep these already vulnerable families out of the Social Work system and reduce the chances of recidivism and intergenerational offending. The project focused primarily on Castlerea Prison and on Roscommon and Galway counties and surrounding areas. Identifying what would support interagency capacity and developing a specific protocol for a sustainable interagency response were key objectives.

1.2 Terms of Reference

The original Terms of Reference for the project envisaged the following tasks:-

- Consultation with key stakeholders including prisoners; their families; prison staff; probation staff; family support services;
- Identify existing interagency protocols specific to pre-release and resettlement roles and responsibilities and develop these with a focus on child and family needs, including communication pathways, signposting and formal referral pathways;
- Review of best practice and existing models of support, and development of a pre-release package to include child and family involvement in pre-release planning and recognition of their role and needs in resettlement;
- Pilot training with key stakeholders;
- Pilot interagency protocol and child and family-focused

pre-release and resettlement package with families in Roscommon, Galway and/or surrounding areas, building on the Meitheal model of child and family focused supports;

- Carry out case studies with a sample of families; and
- Assess and document learning for adaptation or potential replication.

It was decided subsequently that the present study would exclude the pilot elements regarding the training and interagency protocol.

1.3 Project team and oversight

The “Prisoner and Resettlement” (PAR) Project was conducted by three members of CDI’s Quality Specialist Panel, namely Kieran O’Dwyer, Sharron Kelliher and James Bowes under the guidance of Marian Quinn, CEO of CDI. Oversight was also provided by CDI’s Research Advisory Committee.

The work was overseen and supported by an Advisory Group which met with the researchers on four occasions. The Advisory Group membership comprised Anne Costello (Travellers in Prison Initiative), Natalie Cox (Tusla, Roscommon), Susan Forde (Tusla, Galway), Tricia Kelly (Irish Prison Service), Georgina Kilcoyne (Tusla, Roscommon), Assistant Chief Officer Des Kirwan (Castlerea Prison), Aisling Nolan (Castlerea Family Resource Centre), Chief Officer Peter Perry (Castlerea Prison), Assistant Governor Anthony Shally (Castlerea Prison), Denise Swanick (Tusla, Roscommon) and Sandra Walsh (Irish Association for Social Inclusion Opportunities), and Marian Quinn (CDI).

2 Methodology



2 Methodology

2.1 Introduction

The methodology comprised two main elements described below – literature review and interviews. Outputs consist primarily of a literature review, interview findings, case studies, possible intervention models, outline training elements and draft interagency protocols.

Ethics approval was sought and received from the Irish Prison Service Research Ethics Committee, after consultation with CDI's Research Advisory Committee.

2.2 Literature review

A review of the literature was carried out to identify best practice and existing models of support, with a view to developing a pre-release package and inter-agency protocols. The review was primarily internet based. Study visits were not envisaged in the project brief and none took place, apart from a visit to Bedford Row in Limerick.

2.3 Interviews

Interviews were held with stakeholders, prisoners and their partners over the period November 2018 - May 2019. Separate interviews were held with 18 individual stakeholders, a joint interview was held with two teachers and three group interviews were also held. Details are provided below.

Individual interviews with stakeholders were conducted with the following:

- IPS HQ: Tricia Kelly, Care and Rehabilitation, and Paul Mannering, Operations;
- Castlerea Prison: Assistant Governor Anthony Shally, Chief Officer Peter Perry, Work and Training Officer (ISM) Des Kirwan; Margaret Prendergast (Probation Service); Brendan O'Connell (Psychology Service); Sandra Walsh, Jerry Williams, Erin Gavin (IASIO); Margaret Connaughton (Chaplain);
- Tusla (Susan Forde, Galway; Natalie Cox, Georgina Kilcoyne and Denise Swanick, Roscommon)
- Travellers in Prison Initiative (Anne Costello);
- Visitor Centre, Castlerea Prison (Maureen Connelly), and
- Family Resource Centre, Castlerea (Aisling Nolan).

Joint interviews were held with two teachers in the Education Unit, Castlerea, Mary Brady and Imelda Kavanagh.

Group interviews were held with the following:

- Tusla staff in Galway (Susan Forde, Orla Curran, Aine Sheehan, Michelle Moran and Raymond Dervan);

- Bedford Row in Limerick (Sr Bernie O’Grady, Larry de Cléir, Brian McNulty and Eugene Stephens), and
- Galway Traveller Movement (Margaret O’Riada, Ann Morgan, Siobhan Madden, Ann Ward, Martin Ward and Brigid Kelly) with Anne Costello (TPI).

In order to set up interviews with prisoners and partners, information leaflets were prepared and distributed to potential participants via the prison authorities and the Visitors Centre, and information about the project was also put on public display. Similar information was also available in Tusla offices but no family participants emerged from this source. Tusla personnel in other locations were also invited to identify families who might be willing to participate, particularly if they had been through a Meitheal process, but none were identified through this channel. Prisoners had to meet two principal selection criteria: be a father and be normally resident in Galway, Roscommon or the surrounding area. Criteria for families were similar: have the father in Castlerea Prison and be from the same catchment area. The geographical criterion was extended subsequently to ensure adequate numbers of participants. Two parents of prisoners were also included. Participation was of course voluntary.

We relied on the prison authorities to identify prisoners wishing to participate. Interviewing comprised 16 individual interviews, one joint interview, and one group interview with 15 participants from the prison Red Cross group. Eight interviews took place in Castlerea Prison and six took place in Loughan House¹. Three interviews were conducted with former prisoners in the community. It proved more difficult than anticipated to set up meetings with prisoners’ partners because of the inability to contact them directly but 14 interviews ultimately took place. Those that agreed to take part responded to invitations from the Visitor Centre or were encouraged by their partner in prison to do so. A number of partners agreed initially but declined subsequently or did not respond to phone calls. Three partners of former prisoners were identified through personal contacts and agreed to take part. The father of one prisoner and the mother of another were interviewed. It had been agreed that children of prisoners would not be eligible for interview for ethical and practical reasons. Attempts were made to recruit young adults who would have been children during previous periods of incarceration of their father. This proved even more challenging than for partners and interviewing was limited to two adult sons of a former prisoner. Interviews with matched prisoners and partners were conducted in four instances.

Consent forms were devised and used and, with the exception of the Red Cross participants, interviews were recorded (with permission) and transcribed. Partners incurred no expense arising from participation as the research team met them wherever it suited them best, generally at the prison Visitor Centre, in their home or in a neutral venue such as a hotel. No monetary or other inducements to participate were offered although refreshments were provided on occasions on an ad hoc basis. Interviews were always carried out by teams of two researchers and always included the female researcher for interviews with partners.

Interviews were semi-structured and flexible. Stakeholder interviews focused primarily on client experiences of imprisonment and its impact on families, available services in the prison and community, interagency working, and how family reintegration needs might best be satisfied. State agencies were also asked about interagency protocols. With prisoners, the focus was mainly

¹ An open, low-security prison in County Cavan

on maintaining contact with their families and their parenting role while in prison, services in prison to address the factors behind their offending, and their expectations and previous experiences of returning to their families. Interviews with partners and other family members followed a similar structure, focusing on the impact and experience of imprisonment, keeping in touch during incarceration, family services in the community, services in prison for their partner, and their expectations and experiences of the father's return after prison.

The interviews are reported under various themes later in the report, primarily in Section 5 ("Prisoner and family needs during imprisonment" and Section 6 ("Meeting family reintegration needs").

2.4 Case studies

Four case studies were written up based on four specific interviews. They were anonymised and care was taken to ensure that the individuals or families could not be identified. They comprise two cases where both partners were interviewed post-release, one where both partners were interviewed but the father was still in prison and one where two adult sons of a former prisoner were interviewed.

3

Literature review



3. Literature review

3.1 Introduction

This literature review concentrates on a number of sources that are particularly relevant to identifying and meeting the needs of children and families affected by imprisonment and especially around reintegration. It starts by looking at sources relating to Ireland including commitments by the IPS, an overview of existing services and commentary by advocacy groups. It then looks at experiences in other countries drawing primarily on sources from neighbouring jurisdictions (England and Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland) and focusing on measures the authorities have taken to minimise risk of harm. The choice was made to look at a small number of areas in depth rather than to broaden the coverage and risk losing important detail. It should be noted that while there are a number of policy documents and reports on family-focused approaches in prison, evaluations are very limited.

3.2 Irish Prison Service

The IPS set out significant commitments regarding families of prisoners in its strategic plan for 2016-2018:

“One of the core values of the Irish Prison Service is to endeavour to help prisoners, where possible and appropriate, to maintain and develop positive relationships with their families. Every effort is made to ensure that prisoners are located as close to their home as possible to facilitate visits from family and friends. We ensure that these visits take place in an environment which maximises the engagement between the prisoner and visitor and that conditions for visits, as well as decisions regarding the denial of visits, are sensitive to the needs of children. We ensure that staff are aware of the need to treat prison visitors with dignity and respect and we are committed to enhancing the prison visit taking account of all appropriate security considerations.” (Irish Prison Service, 2016, p6)

The Strategic Plan also states that IPS “will work to assist the families of offenders in maintaining stable relationships by offering prisoners and their partners an opportunity to invest in developing the family unit”. Associated planned actions included developing a mechanism to seek input and feedback from families of prisoners, investing in infrastructural improvements to visitors’ areas in prisons to make them more family friendly and amending visiting times to better facilitate school-going children. Identified outcomes included improved resettlement and reintegration outcomes as well as improved visiting facilities for families (Irish Prison Service, 2016, p32, 2.12).

The IPS report of progress to the end of 2018 (Irish Prison Service, 2019, p41) notes the following:

- completion of the evaluation of the first Family Links Programme;
- the roll out of the Family Links Programme to all prisons “in progress”;
- Family Liaison Officer training provided to Irish Prison Service staff, Front of House training provided to staff to act as effective pro-social models;
- two [Family Links parenting] programmes delivered in Limerick

and Wheatfield, guidelines prepared for prisons by CDI, review of the [adapted] Parenting Plus manual carried out;

- mechanisms to seek input and feedback from families of prisoners “complete and ongoing”;
- infrastructural improvements to visitor’s areas to make them more family friendly “complete and ongoing”;
- visiting times reviewed to better facilitate school going children, and
- Child Protection Policy in place to take account of Children First provisions.

The Irish Prison Service and Probation Service Strategic Plan 2018-2020 identifies family networks and supports as key factors in influencing re-offending (p3) and commits to continued engagement with statutory and voluntary partners to “develop protocols and deliver programmes to better support reintegration of prisoners into the community on release” (Irish Prison Service and Probation Service, 2018, p7, 1.5).

A draft IPS Strategy for 2019-2021 (for external consultation in March 2019) makes less direct mention of families. It sets an objective under Care and Rehabilitation of “focus on supporting family and significant relationships as a major contributor to the rehabilitative process” and identifies as an associated outcome “greater recognition of family support”. Under the same heading it also identifies an objective “improved coordination of community integration plans in preparation for release”. Under Custody, Care and Operations, there are objectives of “greater utilisation of video-linking facilities for visits and medical appointments” but this is linked to outcomes of enhanced public safety and fewer escorts rather than family communication and is listed later under “Investment in Safety Measures”. Another objective is to “review our policies in relation to the Open Centres and Structured TR” (temporary release) with a related outcome of “Safer communities through greater levels of normalisation of prisoners” without specific mention of families.

3.3 Developments in Ireland

The Irish Penal Reform Trust (IPRT) report ‘Picking up the Pieces’ highlighted the rights and needs of children and families affected by imprisonment in Ireland and made multiple recommendations to improve the situation. It noted the absence of an accurate figure of the number of families and children affected by imprisonment in Ireland since that information is provided by prisoners on a voluntary basis on committal. It reported an estimated 4,300 such children based on extrapolations by the European Network for Children of Imprisoned Parents in 2009. It observed that in its strategic plan 2012-2015, the Irish Prison Service committed to strengthening family supports to facilitate ongoing contact with prisoners while in custody and their reintegration post release, but it also commented that very little detail had been provided on how supporting family relationships would be progressed (Irish Penal Reform Trust, 2012).

The IPRT report set its findings and recommendations in the framework of the rights of the child, and highlighted a number of principles under the 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, including Article 2 (“*State Parties shall take all appropriate measures to ensure that the child is protected against all forms of discrimination or punishment on the basis of the status, activities, expressed opinions, or beliefs of the child’s parents, legal guardians, or family members*”); Article 3(1) (“*In all actions concerning children, whether undertaken by public or private social welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative*

authorities or legislative bodies, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration”) and Article 9 (“State 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”).

Its recommendations about visiting included that child-friendly visits should be facilitated and standardised in all prisons; that prison governors should take into account the best interests of the child when making decisions about non-contact visits; that all children should be able to hear and feel safe with their parents or family members during prison visits (which was not always possible in standard visit areas), and that all prisons should have a Visitors’ Centre. IPRT called outright for a prohibition on visits being disallowed as a sanction for breach of discipline by the prisoner. Other visit-related recommendations included provision of both properly staffed phone and electronic visit booking systems; flexibility in visit times especially for remand prisoners and family visits; clear criteria on eligibility for family visits; greater humanity and dignity in searches; flexibility in prison responses to positive indications by drug dogs, and introduction of a scheme of financially-assisted prison visits. A key recommendation was that a “Family Links Officer” should be established in each prison.

The IPRT report included two important recommendations regarding family support, namely that “An agency should be established, or an existing agency expanded, tasked with ensuring that information and support services are made available to all families affected by imprisonment” and “Existing agencies that deal with families who are affected by imprisonment should receive specialised training on the rights of family and the child and the impact of imprisonment on children and the family”. IPRT also advocated for the development of Integrated Sentencing Management (ISM) and a Community Integration Plan for every prisoner and facilitation of family participation in the process. The report made several other recommendations including in relation to the role of schools in reducing stigma; children’s mental health and development of a charter of rights for children and families affected by imprisonment; public and media awareness about impacts on children and families, and training and monitoring of prison officers. It concluded that a strong commitment by the government was essential to ensure that the rights of children and families affected by imprisonment were safeguarded and urged establishment of a charter of rights as one approach.

The IPRT developed an Action Plan for Children with a Parent in Prison, in conjunction with the Children’s Rights Alliance and UCC School of Law (Irish Penal Reform Trust, 2017). It identified eleven principles of action:

1. Gather data on the current situation of children with a parent in prison in Ireland;
2. Map services in Ireland available for children with a parent in prison;
3. Increase the current knowledge base on the issues of children with a parent in prison in Ireland;
4. Develop and effectively employ mechanisms to ensure that children with a parent in prison have their voices heard;
5. Adopt a clear statement outlining a commitment to State action supporting this group of children;
6. Adopt a holistic approach to policy and service provision in order to address the needs and rights of children with a parent in prison, including commitments at policy and service levels in areas of Education, Health, Social Protection and Social Welfare;

7. Establish an inter-departmental working group led by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs to develop an inter-agency strategy to ensure better collaboration on the issue;
8. Promote the establishment of multi-agency partnerships at both local and national level which can coordinate service level approaches;
9. The state should formally recognise children with a parent in prison as a priority for monitoring needs and outcomes in accordance with basic children's rights protections in Ireland;
10. Provide children with a parent in prison with clear information regarding their rights and the services and supports available to them, and
11. Develop and disseminate information and educational resources to challenge the stigma commonly associated with having a parent in prison.

The Irish Children's Rights Alliance urged the UN Committee on the Convention on the Rights of the Child, on its examination of Ireland in 2016, to recommend

“that the State undertakes a review of its prison visiting facilities and implements reforms to ensure child friendly and child sensitive facilities and practices, including the provision of modern, appropriately equipped visitors' centres in each prison; in line with the standards set out in the European Prison Rules, issued by the Council of Europe” (Children's Rights Alliance, 2015, P59).

It noted in its commentary that the Inspector of Prisons had raised concern about the denial of family visits being used as part of discipline punishment for prisoners.

The parenting challenges for prisoners were summarised in the report of the evaluation of the 'Family Links' initiative in Limerick Prison (Bradshaw and Muldoon, 2017). The report noted that, due to their enforced absence from daily parenting, the role and experience of parenting for incarcerated parents is fundamentally different from those for domiciliary parents. As a result, fathers who are prisoners can feel illegitimate and unrecognised in their parental identity and this can leave some with feelings of guilt, shame or helplessness and on the outside of their children's lives (Boswell and Wedge, 2002). Many prisoners themselves have poor role models and experiences of being fathered, which further undermines their future parental skills, self-esteem and self-efficacy. The conclusion is that this can result in prisoners shutting down parental aspects of their identity (Boswell et al, 2011). This can result in their unwillingness and inability to fulfil the role which in turn undermines families as a support for prisoners as they re-enter the community.

The report goes on to observe that, following the IPRT report 'Picking Up the Pieces' in 2012, the Irish Prison Service created a national working group – the 'Families and Imprisonment Group' (FIG) – to oversee the implementation of changes within the Irish Prison Service aimed at supporting families affected by incarceration. The Family Links pilot intervention, a 'system of formal and informal supports' for fathers and their families, was initiated and developed by CDI, and implemented in Limerick Prison from October 2014 and March 2016. The project was run by CDI in partnership with the Irish Prison Service, the Parents Plus Charity, Bedford Row Family Agency and the Irish Penal Reform Trust. The evaluators described the initiative as 'a sea-change in the way in which the Prison Service views and hopes to work with families affected by imprisonment'. The supports included changes in visiting arrangements, parenting education for families, prison officer training in communication and

child protection issues and designated Family Liaison Officers. The Family Links implementation guide stressed the context of “a prison-wide ethos of promoting and supporting positive parenting” and “a commitment from all staff, prisoners and their partners to engage with and proactively work towards a more family friendly prison environment” (Childhood Development Initiative, 2018, p9). The positive experience in Limerick resulted in a decision to roll out the initiative to all prisons. While there was a short period of delivery in Castlerea and Wheatfield Prisons, there has been no Family Links activity in any prison since early 2018.

FIG developed an overarching approach, based on five pillars. The objectives for each pillar show clear understanding of the complexity and breadth of issues and challenges involved. Pillar 1 “Family-related courses and programmes” included on-going informal supports for prisoners through Family Liaison Officers as well as appropriately adapted courses and programmes. Pillar 2 “Staff support and training” included training for “front of house” prison staff in enhanced communication and child protection as well as development of learning communities and coaching for Family Liaison Officers. Pillar 3 “Community follow-up and partnership with community services” included improved linkages between initiatives in the prisons and those in the community, delivery of the parenting programme to fathers in prison and their partners in the community, and a mechanism for on-going consultation with visitors including children. Pillar 4 “Communications” included appropriate engagement with visitors and implementation of the IPS Child Protection Policy. Pillar 5 “Visiting facilities” included establishment of informal visiting arrangements as the norm and maximisation of opportunities for positive parent-child engagement, including consideration of Skype, Facetime or other innovative communication methods. Maintenance of security was set out clearly as an underpinning imperative.

Irish prisons rely heavily on community-based organisations and charities to support families of prisoners through the operation of visitor centres. In addition, the Bedford Row Family Project provides services in Limerick and, more recently, in Clare and St Nicholas Trust provides services in Cork. Bedford Row is a charity that receives core funding from the Irish Prison Service and provides a variety of services including hospitality in the waiting area at Limerick Prison; support and counselling (including play therapy) for prisoners, partners and children; information, referral and advocacy services; and re-integration of prisoners through meeting with individuals in prison and post-release and a ‘Family Link’ Social Worker. It also has functions as regards education, raising public awareness and research.² Key strengths lie in its focus on both the prisoner and the family, continuity of service provision during the period of custody and after and its ethos and model of working. St Nicholas Trust is a family support service that was established in 2008. Its objectives are to increase public awareness of the experiences of prisoners’ families, to provide practical information to families when a loved one is sentenced to prison, to provide a safe, confidential environment where prisoners’ families can openly discuss the issues which affect them, to advocate for the rights of children of prisoners and to facilitate positive re-integration in order to avoid further offending. The service offers support and provides information to new members, seeking to empower them rather than advise them. Services include accompaniment of first-time visitors to prison if desired, challenging of discriminatory practices, assistance with financial advice and practical issues, and discussion around telling children about their father’s imprisonment.³

² <https://www.bedfordrow.ie/our-work/>

³ <https://www.stnicholastrust.ie>

3.4 National Offender Management Service

In 2014, the UK Ministry of Justice National Offender Management Service (NOMS) reported on a study of parenting and relationship support programmes for offenders and their families (Ministry of Justice, 2014). Its findings are consistent with ours. The first point of relevance and interest in the NOMS report is that it noted consistent support in the literature for (i) a link between dysfunctional family relationships and offending and the inter-generational transmission of offending and (ii) positive family relationships being a factor in desistance, pro-social behaviour and participation in employment. As context to the report, it pointed out that more children were impacted by a parent's imprisonment than were affected by divorce and that the figure of 200,000 children with a parent in prison was three times the number in care and five times more than were on the Child Protection Register. It also noted that 7 percent of children would experience their father's imprisonment during their time at school. The NOMS report also pointed out that children of offenders were three times more likely to experience mental health problems, exhibit anti-social behaviour and more likely also to become NEET (not in education, employment or training). Almost two-thirds of boys who have had a father in prison went on to offend themselves.

NOMS developed a "Children and Families" pathway to reducing offending (one of seven such pathways), building on evidence that maintaining family relationships was a protective factor in offending and the fact that offenders who maintained family relationships and received visits while in custody were 38 percent less likely to reoffend than those who did not receive visits. A relevant factor was that 45 percent of prisoners lose contact with their family while in prison. NOMS came to view the offender in the context of the family, acknowledging this as 'a significant departure from historic practice' and recognised that families were also serving a 'hidden sentence'. It would appear that Ireland is only beginning to form a similar view and that promising statements of principle have yet to find full expression in policy and practice.

NOMS reported that at national and strategic level there was a new emphasis within the criminal justice system on partnership working with local authorities to link services for offenders to those in the wider community but acknowledged that these initiatives were at an early stage, with 'something of a gap between the national policy visions and execution at the front line' (Ministry of Justice, 2014, p3). It observed that family support services for offenders could be broadly grouped into four categories delivered by a wide variety of service providers both in custody and the community and focused on:

- maintaining relationships with family members
- parental learning and parental / relationships skill building
- transformational family-based interventions, and
- casework-based family support.

This was supplemented by a range of 'niche' services to meet the specific needs of particular groups such as those with literacy or addiction issues. (It should be noted that local authorities in the UK include responsibility for education, primary care and social services, unlike in Ireland where these remits are located in different structures and agencies.)

The report recommended that family intervention should be introduced at the earliest possible stage of the offender journey in the custodial/community environment and as soon as possible in a criminal career but it noted that there

appeared to be little structured assessment of family need within sentence planning (which appears to be the case in Ireland too) with recruitment to programmes often relying on self-referrals, which tended to be from those who were already most family-oriented. As a result, services were not necessarily reaching those with problematic relationships, those who would benefit most from support or those for whom the impact on the cycle of re-offending is likely to be greatest. It needed to be recognised too that offenders and their families had a series of family-related needs at each stage of the offender journey. The report summarised these needs for various stages from pre-conviction to post-release resettlement for offender and family. During sentence, offender needs were identified at the early and middle stages in terms of maintaining and developing their relationships and contributing to family life from inside while family needs were summarised in terms of behaviour/attainment issues, mental health, stressful visits, relationship stress and practical/financial difficulties. At the late sentence stage, the offender's needs were stated in terms of family involvement in resettlement planning and preparation for the return to family, while family needs were stated in terms of their involvement in pre-sentence planning and shared decision-making. Immediate post-sentence needs were identified for offenders in terms of re-entry to family and community and longer-term resettlement support needs in terms of an integrated family approach to a positive life-style and practical support. Corresponding needs for families for both post-release phases were summarised in terms of the return being challenging, the adjustment destabilising, problems resurfacing, relationships breaking down, and adapting to a new family model.

The study found that there was little awareness among commissioners of services of the range of services actually available. The study also found that there was little structured targeting of family services to specific cohorts of prisoners or to family need, nor a systematic approach to focusing services where they were most likely to impact on re-offending (which was a key policy focus of NOMS). It went on to attribute this in part to a lack of data within the criminal justice system on family needs, with it being 'difficult even to identify parents' (op. cit, p1), again resonant of the situation in Ireland. Encouragingly, the report found evidence that where family services had been available, they were greatly valued by offenders and their families. It also revealed a number of instances where family services had been 'life-changing and had supported desistance, working also against the inter-generational transmission of offending behaviour' (ibid, p1).

NOMS described key principles of best practice for the commissioning of services and service provision, namely that services should be:

- holistic in addressing the needs of offenders and families;
- multi-dimensional involving practical and emotional issues and short and long term needs;
- outward facing with links between prison / probation and the wider community;
- embedded in and integral to offender management, engaging for participants so as to maximise motivation and appeal;
- inclusive but also prioritised and focused, credible to prison staff and external stakeholders, and
- evidence-driven.

The NOMS study found that offenders and their family members frequently had little concept of what good parenting meant. In that context, relationship history was often of "serial relationship breakdown with few positive parenting models

or real sense of what good parenting means" (ibid, p3). Men in particular could see being a good father narrowly in terms of being a provider for the family, itself often contingent on criminal activity. The NOMS study also found that separation from family was often deeply painful and a source of significant guilt and distress, with many men cutting themselves off from their feelings, which were difficult to express in the context of the prison culture. Men felt guilty and emasculated by not contributing to their family while some suffered an acute fear of relationship-breakdown or that another man would take their place.

The UK experience was that partners and children also suffered significant distress and faced a range of practical, financial and mental health issues. Children frequently experienced bullying at school and could disengage from education and exhibit a range of challenging and anti-social behaviours. The inherent difficulties in maintaining relationships over time and distance were often compounded by poor relationship, communication and thinking skills among both offenders and their families. The study found that family interventions that addressed family needs appeared to have positive impacts. For example, initiatives focused on maintaining quality relationships with families enhanced the parents' sense of connection to family life and significantly reduced anxiety. This had the added benefit of enhancing behaviour within the prison. Short parenting courses were effective in increasing awareness and sensitivity to others, enhancing relationship and communication skills and making communications with family and children more positive. Intensive family interventions were reported as having a transformational impact on family relationships, creating a positive context for resettlement. Participants also said that they were better able to manage emotions and think through the consequences of their actions. Importantly from a criminal justice perspective, such interventions had acted as a catalyst for desistance from crime and the offenders' own change in direction had provided a more positive role model for children, mitigating the intergenerational propensity to offend.

The NOMS report identified a number of key characteristics that best practice service providers shared in their interactions with clients and that seemed to be central to positive change:

- they were based on trust and relationships;
- they were needs-led, tailored and flexible;
- they were empowering and non-judgemental;
- they emphasised participant identity as parents and people first;
- they adopted a positive stance and focused on new possibilities;
- they encouraged belief that people could influence events and their own destiny and have a voice;
- they were challenging as regards attitudes, impact of offending behaviour on family and changing behaviour;
- they stressed positive role models, and
- they focused on the whole person and whole family.

The report included four conclusions that are particularly relevant to the Irish situation. First, family support and parental learning need to be re-framed as a strategic intervention and embedded in offender management from the earliest possible stage in the offender journey. Second, mainstream services need to be engaged around the impact of parental imprisonment on children in order to create a community of interest between the criminal justice system and wider family services and that effective partnership working and co-commissioning

of services would be key. Third, a systematic framework for assessment of offenders' family needs is required both at the outset of the offender journey and over time in order that services can be optimally configured to fit with needs and timing, recognising that this requires collection of necessary data. Fourth, effective targeting is key and discrete segments of offenders with clusters of needs should be identified and services developed with a view to moving individuals through a sequence of interventions designed to build closeness to family, reframe parental and family responsibilities, address drivers of offending behaviour and equip individuals with the life, relationship and work skills to play a positive role not only in the family but in society.

In 2014, the UK Government accepted UN recommendations, made as part of a Universal Prison Rights process, to improve programmes for social reintegration of detainees (Recommendation 89) and ensure that the best interests of the child are taken into account when arresting, detaining, sentencing or considering early release for a sole or primary carer of the child, "bearing in mind that visits of a parent in prison are primarily a right of the child rather than a privilege of the prisoner that can be withdrawn as a disciplinary measure" (Recommendation 96) (Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2014). There is no information available on the extent to which the above recommendations have been implemented or the impact of doing so.

3.5 Barnardo's Northern Ireland

Similar to the NOMS report, Barnardo's Northern Ireland also noted the link between parental incarceration and a variety of poor outcomes for children (Clewett and Glover, 2009). In addition to the risks outlined in the NOMS report, they report that children with a parent in prison are three times more likely to engage in antisocial behaviour, twice as likely to suffer from mental health problems and are at risk of poor physical health outcomes. They also note an association with negative school experiences such as persistent truancy, bullying and failure to achieve in education. They state that all their service provision is grounded in an understanding that maintenance of positive family ties reduces the likelihood of prisoners reoffending on release and increases the stability of a child's life both during and after parental imprisonment. They believe, further, that children of prisoners are children in need and provision of support groups will help them to achieve the five Every Child Matters outcomes – be healthy, stay safe, enjoy and achieve, make a positive contribution and achieve economic well-being (HM Treasury, 2003). The parallel in Ireland is the achievement of the five national outcomes in Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures – active and healthy, physical and mental wellbeing; achieving full potential in learning and development; safe and protected from harm; economic security and opportunity, and connected, respected and contributing to their world (Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2014). Barnardos commented that across the UK, unless a child of a prisoner was known to children's services or presented as a 'child in need' for a different reason, they came very low down the list of priorities and were unlikely to be offered any targeted support. It added that at that time only 20 of 208 local authorities and health boards made any reference to this group in their children's plan.

Barnardo's also reported on a (then) new Scottish Prison Service standard in relation to children and families of prisoners in Scotland. Actions to establish multi-disciplinary children and families groups in every prison that would focus on improving the experience for children visiting prisons include: improving the appearance and facilities in visiting areas; provision for play and nursing mothers; information and support services, and the training of staff. The timing

and structure of visits between prisoners and their children was also to be improved, particularly preventing enhanced family visits from being withdrawn as punishment. Any material changes in the delivery of services to children and families were also to be risk assessed using a children's rights impact assessment tool.

Barnardo's 'Parenting Matters' service in Northern Ireland to support children and families affected by parental imprisonment, was funded by the Northern Ireland Prison Service to work in all three prisons, delivering training sessions to parents in prison and their partners; one-to-one support; family days, and information provision and signposting. It delivered eight group courses to provide support and advice to parents throughout the full cycle of their imprisonment. The programmes were tailored to respond to the specific needs of different groups. Its 'Staying in Touch' programme, for example, helped parents to explain their imprisonment to their child; 'Preparing for Release' helped fathers prepare for family life, and 'Partners Together' was a session that enabled couples to learn how they could parent as a team. A family event was held at the end of each course to allow service users to celebrate their achievements. Parent Facilitator Accredited training was provided in the community for prison officers on a voluntary basis to enable them to co-facilitate the parenting programmes. The training was attended by staff from a variety of agencies, including children's centres and social services, and helped to improve the awareness of prison officers of other issues that families might be facing. One-to-one support was offered to prisoners to help them work through individual concerns relating to their family, including child safety, access arrangements, and information about parenting programmes and family days. Barnardo's also offered practical advice as well as signposting to other partner services such as addiction recovery support. It reported that in 2008-09, 185 parents enrolled on Parenting Matters courses in prisons – with 341 children between them – and 161 parents were supported through one-to-one work. Ninety percent of parents completed their courses, with non-completion attributed primarily to early release or transfer to another prison. An evaluation in 2008 found that after completing the 'Being a Dad' programme, over three-quarters of parents who had contact with their children said that they were making more of an effort to maintain their relationship while in prison. In the 'Preparing for Release' programme, 95 per cent of participants reported that they felt more confident about settling back into family life after doing the course, and 98 per cent had more realistic expectations about returning home. Eleven prison officers had taken part in Parent Facilitator training (Clewett and Glover, op. cit, p7).

3.6 Northern Ireland Prison Service

The Northern Ireland Prison Service (NIPS) introduced a family strategy in 2010 (NIPS, 2010) and recently issued a consultation document on a new strategy 'Strengthening Family Relations 2019-2024' (NIPS, 2019). The original family strategy committed NIPS explicitly to working with prisoners' families. It acknowledged provision of services for prisoners' children and families from a range of sources and providers, underpinned by partnerships with the Probation Board, NIACRO, Barnardos, Quaker Service and others. The Strategy and accompanying Action Plan focused on four main aims: the provision of timely and accurate information; advice and support to families (including financial assistance with visits); arrangements for family visits; and family programmes and services. The strategy recognised that families had a vital role in helping prisoners achieve successful rehabilitation and reduce re-offending. This is given prominence in both strategy documents but the consultation document also highlights the impact of imprisonment on children and families and the fact that parental imprisonment is recognised as an Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE).

It provides the following succinct but comprehensive summary of effects of imprisonment:

Potential Effects of Imprisonment on Families

| Children | Partners/Caregivers |
|---|---|
| Separation Anxiety | Loss of income |
| Anger | Extra childhood burdens |
| Worry about safety and well-being of imprisoned parent | Feelings of social isolation |
| Behavioural disturbances | Difficulty maintaining contact |
| Deterioration in school performance | Relationships breakdown |
| Stigma | Stigma |
| Decrease in stable, quality parenting due to additional commitments remaining parent/caregiver must take on | Added financial strain due to costs associated with imprisonment (e.g. Visiting, telephone contact, sending money into prison, etc.) |
| Teasing | Divorce |
| Bullying | Moving home |
| Increased probability of being involved in crime/antisocial behaviour | Psychological stress as they attempt to support themselves, imprisoned individual and children |
| Increased probability of being imprisoned | Poor visiting conditions Perceived hostile attitudes of some prison staff towards families Problems reuniting with partner on release from prison |

Source: Northern Ireland Prison Service Consultation Document 'Strengthening Family Relations 2019-2124' p7

The NIPS strategy was based on a model developed by NOMS, adapted for Northern Ireland. It noted three developments that predated the strategy. First, dedicated Family Support Officers (FSOs) were established in each prison to act as a single point of contact for families. Second, FSOs could arrange Child Centred Visits, for 'those inmates who qualify', to allow children and parent to play together. Third, prisoners could record the reading of a story book and send the recording and the book home.

In the strategy, NIPS committed to a number of principles, including notably

- treating families with respect, decency and dignity;
- providing safe and secure visiting facilities in a family friendly, neutral environment;
- identifying and promoting opportunities for families to build and sustain meaningful relationships and be involved in key aspects of the sentence, where appropriate;
- working with young people to develop facilities and services to assist in building and maintaining meaningful relationships with relatives in custody;

- working in partnership with other organisations in the public, private and voluntary sector to support the co-ordination and integration of family services to meet the needs of prisoners and their families;
- developing and publishing minimum standards of service delivery for families when they engage with the Prison Service and auditing performance against these standards, and
- developing and displaying a Visitors' Complaint Policy.

The Consultation Document on the new Strategy reframed the principles and this time highlighted treating families with fairness, dignity and respect; including families in their relatives' rehabilitation wherever possible; recognising that every family is unique; ensuring the best interests of children are paramount in any decision-making, and committing to effective partnership as key to successful outcomes.

NIPS developed an action plan for the 2010 strategy. It set out key issues and proposed actions at different stages of the criminal justice system from pre-custody to pre-release. In court, at remand and sentencing stage, a 'required outcome' in Northern Ireland was that families are provided with information on where a person is being committed, how to make a first visit and contact numbers for further advice and support.

At committal stage, a required outcome was that prisoner needs are identified by a resettlement team member and relevant information made available to FSOs within 28 days. Where prison transfers occurred, timely information was to be provided ('where possible') and FSOs were to provide information about the new prison, any changes to procedures and an opportunity for visits familiarisation. A scheme for contributing towards the travel costs of visiting a prison was already in place and the scheme was to be promoted, with information included in the prisoner's committal pack. Assistance for families about telling children about imprisonment and visits is available in a booklet ('It's a Tough Time for Everyone') and DVD. Subject to risk assessment, opportunities were to be sought for families to be involved in events marking significant achievements by prisoners and for prisoners to be involved in significant family events. First time visitors were to be supported by NIACRO or Quaker Service volunteers. Provision was included for child-centred visits 'where appropriate'. NIPS committed to developing visiting facilities to provide an environment conducive to maintaining family links.

The action plan also provided for prisoners being prepared for release. Required outcomes were preparation in relation to returning to a family unit, opportunities for home leave so that prisoners and their families could adjust to the prisoners living at home, and prisoner referrals to relevant statutory, voluntary and community agencies on release.

It was not possible within the terms of the present study to establish the extent to which all commitments were fulfilled or their impact, but indicators of progress exist. The NIPS Consultation Document referred, for example, to external recognition that positive things were happening. In 2018, the Chief Inspector of the Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland (CJINI) and HM Chief Inspector of Prisons in England and Wales highlighted the 'continuing progress being made in working with families and also the range of positive family support initiatives currently on offer in [Maghaberry] prison'. The CJINI Inspection on Resettlement Report, also in 2018, highlighted 'other positive initiatives carried out across all establishments'.⁴

⁴ Both reports cited without reference details in NIPS (2019), p5

Resources are always an issue. The NIPS strategy stated explicitly that effective delivery was dependent on the constant availability of key staff to help drive it forward. It observed that it was essential to appoint FSOs to dedicated posts with appropriate working patterns but cautioned that responsibility for identifying and promoting opportunities for families to build meaningful relationships with their relatives was the responsibility of all staff who had contact with them, not just FSOs.

The NIPS consultation document identified themes and associated priorities and actions aimed at improving outcomes for prisoners and their families. The themes related to facilitating family contact, family inclusion and engagement, family safety and wellbeing, and promotion of positive life outcomes for children of prisoners. Actions under the theme of family contact included provision of visit areas with a range of facilities, family induction sessions, activities that encourage family integration and learning and family days and events, as well as display of contact details for relevant staff and communication of local visit processes and procedures. Actions under family inclusion included ensuring that the views of prisoners and families were considered in decision-making, including families in the planning and preparation for an individual's return to the community, and working with partners to improve transitions and outcomes following release. Actions under family safety and wellbeing concentrated mainly on those adversely affected by imprisonment and at risk of suicide and self-harm. Actions for children included provision of age-appropriate information, supporting prisoners to participate in their children's education, raising awareness of the impact of imprisonment on children and seeking to become a 'trauma informed organisation'.

The NIPS consultation document recognised that individuals have many ways of defining what constitutes a family and what being part of a family means to them. It stated a need to use a broad definition of 'family' and use an individualised and person-centred approach when assessing the needs of prisoners and their families. It also recognised that some family relationships can be harmful and a requirement to be sensitive to the needs of family members in such circumstances.

3.7 Parc Prison, Wales

'Invisible Walls Wales' is a multi-agency 'through the gate' project in Parc Prison, South Wales operated by the privately-run prison and Barnardo's, the impact of which has been independently evaluated. Initiated in 2012, the project provides support to prisoners and their families up to 12 months pre-release and 6 months post-release. The specific objectives are to reduce the number of prisoners re-offending, reduce the risk of inter-generational offending and improve quality of life and community inclusion for families. Each prisoner taking part in the scheme is allocated a mentor, who also works with the prisoner's family – children, partners and grandparents – to help sustain and rebuild connections. The mentors work with prisoners' partners, children and their schools, and social services to bring all the threads together. Within the prison's Family Intervention Unit, prisoners on the scheme have access to 19 different "family interventions", from parenting-for-dads courses to in-prison parents' evenings where teachers bring examples of children's work into the prison to show to the inmates and their families. Barnardo's works with prisoners' wider families, ensuring they are able to link into support networks within their own communities. The families were reported as being happy to work with them, as they didn't see it as stigmatising, and they built links with schools to help support children at a very difficult time. An independent evaluation found significant results after five years,

including a school attendance rate for the cohort of 93 percent, eradication of bullying, a “massive” reduction in the amount of social services support required for the children and reductions in prisoner unemployment (80% down to 25%), homelessness (17% down to 1%) and misuse of drugs and alcohol (89% down to 20%). Prisoners receiving regular visits rose to 69 percent compared with a national average of 48 percent; this was attributed to the family interventions strategy and model, as well as “simple humanist changes, such as adding colour and plants to the visitor areas to make it a place where children could be comfortable, and which is conducive to positive family engagement – and security,” (G4S, 2018).

3.8 Other good practice

A Quaker United Nations Office publication in 2009 (Rosenberg, 2009) identified a number of instances of good practice as regards supporting children of prisoners, including those set out below. It noted that most help given to the children of prisoners in the UK was not provided by the government, but by organisations within the not-for-profit sector and that numerous NGOs had begun to work jointly with prisons to develop services. The report also noted that visiting facilities were improving in some men’s prisons, indicating that perhaps a “family preservation ethos is gradually becoming an important part of the English penal system”.

- UK - Huntercombe Young Offenders Institution where the young men are routinely asked if they have children or if their partner is pregnant and caseworkers are invited to be present to meet with the parents.
- UK - award-winning ‘Storybook Dad’ scheme, through which a father can read a story onto a tape and then have it edited to produce a CD for the child. A similar Book and Tape Club in Northern Ireland teams up with the local library to offer children reading incentives. The audio approach has the advantage of including men with low literacy levels who can repeat a story after someone else and then have the tape spliced. Additional benefits are that the stories provide a stimulus for starting conversations during visits. (The scheme was introduced in some Irish prisons and “Storybook Mams” operates in the Dóchas Centre (Irish Times, 2017).)
- UK - Aylesbury Men’s Young Offenders Institution provides a 16-week ‘Parentcraft’ course that includes information on child development, parental responsibilities, masculine identity, affection and positive discipline strategies and leads to a validated Open College Certificate. It was reported as being a particularly effective example of parenting courses in prisons and young offender institutions.
- UK – ‘Family Man’ and ‘Fathers Inside’ programmes run by the ‘Safe Ground’ charity were also said to achieve encouraging results through the use of drama and video, which makes them accessible to all inmates, regardless of literacy or education. Organisations such as ‘Safe Ground’ were reported as experiencing a high uptake of their courses by men of all ethnicities, due to their emphasis on ‘family networks’ that see everyone as a member of a community.
- UK – NGO involvement in the provision of visitor centres included a ‘Sunday Brunch’ project in HMP Altcourse that evolved into an extended visits scheme, family days and child-centred visits and a Grassroots Family Days Support Project run by the Blackburn Diocese of the Church of England whose pilot project included extended visits and community-based support.

- France – the Fédération des Relais Enfants-Parents (FREPE), an umbrella organisation of 17 associations, provides childcare professionals to work in more than a quarter of penal establishments maintaining relationships compromised by imprisonment. They act as mediators, accompany children on visits, and support children in sharing their feelings. Similar bodies and services operate in other countries, including Belgium and Luxembourg.
- Italy - Bambinisenzasbarre (BSS) runs support groups for both imprisoned mothers and fathers to raise awareness of the different aspects of parent-child relationships and reinforce parenting skills; they also offer psychological and practical support.

The Quaker report specifically mentions research carried out by the Bedford Row Family Project in Limerick. Its 'helpful recommendations' included positive sentence management, having a designated family contact person within a prison, a co-ordinated pre-release programme, family friendly and extended visits, a space to discuss issues, training for prison staff on family ties and an effective complaints mechanism. With regard to children specifically, the research suggested developing guidelines for parents on how to inform their children about prison sentences, developing published information resources, training programmes for teachers, social workers and other agencies that interact with these children and the recruitment of designated staff in prisons to work specifically with children (Op. cit 28).

The Quaker report (ibid 22) describes the challenges of reintegration very well and relevant excerpts are quoted in full in the text box below. It recommends that support for the children of imprisoned parents should continue after a sentence has ended in order to help reconstruct family relationships and positive childcare. It notes that the effects of parental imprisonment on children do not automatically cease once the parent is released from prison. Rather, the family must face new challenges in negotiating and coping with the reintegration of that person, or with the consequences of not having contact with that family member if relationships have irretrievably broken down.

Challenges of prisoner reintegration

It is likely that after a prison term the father and family members will have been through changes to which it may be hard to adapt. The children will be older and expectations of how they will behave and treat their newly released father may be different for them and for their father. Children grow and change and move on, but the ex-prisoner may feel as though time has stood still. A father may want his family relationships to be the way they were before his sentence. One mother explains: 'She was three when he went in. She is now 13 years. He still thinks of her as "my baby". He cannot accept the clothes she wears and the decisions she makes. There is a need for family counselling.'

If a child is very young when her or his father goes to prison it can be confusing and alienating for them to have this new unknown presence return to the home. Another mother describes how her daughter 'was just born when he went into prison. She hardly knows him. For her it is like having to accept a stranger in the house.'

It is likely that conflicts will arise as the couple attempt to reorganise their lives and renegotiate their roles within both the relationship and the household after a prison sentence. This can be a difficult time for any children in the family. There may also be new 'father figures' that have become involved in a

child's life during their father's incarceration. In many cases this person is the mother's boyfriend but he could be an uncle, grandfather or other male relative. Qualitative studies reveal that newly released fathers often feel jealous of these other men. This can sometimes lead to them relinquishing their attempts to be involved in their children's lives. Not surprisingly, fathers have reported more frequent contact with their children after release when the children's mother is still single than when she is in a new intimate relationship.

Studies have shown that men in particular are likely to be influenced by 'hangover identities' from the prison setting. These can hinder reintegration into society and the family and are potentially damaging for their children. The prison environment is highly structured and controlled, giving fathers little autonomy in any aspect of their lives. Displays of aggression and dominance are sometimes essential to safety and success in prison and fathers might learn to withdraw socially, becoming distrusting and psychologically remote. These characteristics run counter to the qualities that are likely to support close post-prison relationships re-forming between fathers and their children.

Source: Rosenberg, J. (2009) p22

The report also comments that when children are placed in foster care, it can be hard for a father to locate them on his release since they are rarely involved in decisions regarding their placement. It recommends that support services should be put in place to ensure that this is not an insurmountable barrier to re-establishing father-child contact when it is in the best interests of the child.

3.9 Conclusion

The sources reported on in this section set out clear evidence of the detrimental impact on children of parental imprisonment and make a strong case for family support in the interests of reducing offending and breaking the cycle of inter-generational offending. A cogent argument is made for a strategic focus by prisons on offenders as family members and recognising that 'families serve a sentence too'. The sources referred to identify needs for intervention and support at different stages of the offender journey, including maintenance of relationships during custody and support around release. They identify needs for provision of accurate information, advice to families, improved family visits and family programmes and services. They recognise the need for and value of prisons working in partnership with communities and set out principles for commissioning services and characteristics of best practice in service provision. They provide examples of practical steps taken and evidence of impact of improved practices. The literature findings informed the interviews with stakeholders and the discussion of findings and formulation of recommendations.

4 Case Studies



4. Case Studies

4.1 Introduction

Case studies are presented in this section to recount the stories of four families affected by the imprisonment of the father. They provide deeper insights into the realities of the family relationships and illustrate some of the complexities and ambiguities involved. The prisoner serves time for his crime, but his children and partners are also impacted by the length and conditions of the sentence. The case studies give examples of these impacts, the needs arising and how the challenges are dealt with. Names and other details that might identify the families have been changed.

The cases have been chosen to highlight the unique experiences of couples from different backgrounds and at different stages of the imprisonment journey. Case Study 1 concerns a man who was able to negotiate the prison system constructively and he and his family had a strong support network. This family's story illustrates how a structured and family-focused experience for the prisoner and his family can reduce the chances of recidivism and support conditions for a positive post-prison experience. Case Study 2 features young parents who are very inexperienced in terms of the prison system and who lack a support network and struggle financially. They are progressing through his sentence as well as they can but need quite a lot of help and appear vulnerable to a number of negative consequences of his incarceration. Case Study 3 narrates how the children of an incarcerated parent experienced negative behavioural and emotional outcomes that affected their life opportunities. It also highlights the increased risk of future incarceration of children with fathers who spend time in prison. Case Study 4 concerns a middle-aged ex-prisoner, recently released and having spent time in and out of prison during his adult life, affected by drug and alcohol addiction and without any sustained financial security. The case demonstrates the impact of imprisonment on families during and after imprisonment and what is needed to reduce harm.

4.2 Case studies (4)

4.2.1 Case Study 1 – Sean and Alice

Sean and Alice had been together two years when Sean was sentenced to six years in Mountjoy prison. This was Alice's first experience of being in a relationship with somebody in prison. She was aware early that he might be facing a prison sentence and had committed to staying with him until he came out. He was also very committed to the relationship. Both Sean and Alice were in their mid-20s when he started his sentence. After only two weeks in prison and on her first visit, Alice told him she was pregnant with their first child. He said that "when Alice actually came and said she was pregnant, that just changed everything for me."

While Alice had her mother, friends and work to support and occupy her during the pregnancy, Sean didn't have any support in how to deal with such a significant life change.

"You get told your girlfriend's pregnant when you're locked up, it can either make you or break you, and it made me, 'cos I had to really, nothing else really to look forward to you know." (Sean)

He was, however, quite stressed at times as he had been put on protection due to perceived associations with a particular group of people in his area. He was also stressed by missing his partner's scans and check-ups. Alice missed being with the father of her child, particularly on hospital visits. They initially talked about the pregnancy and their future on the six-minute prison phone calls and on visits, which they did not find easy. But even as the quality of the phone calls and visits improved during his sentence, so too did the levels of stress. They said that there was no structured support for either of them during this time. He said that he wasn't one to speak about his personal business much and there was nothing in place that supported him to do so.

When Sean was granted a visit to Alice in hospital after the delivery of their child by caesarean, she was not prepared for what happened:

"So, he was let out and I thought he was coming up with the chaplain. No, he came up I think with six guards and he was in handcuffs, but they had him in like a little separate room at the top of the stairs and I had to bring the baby down." (Alice)

Nobody had told either of them that this was going to be the nature of the visit and afterwards Alice says she went back to her bed and 'cried her eyes out' with disappointment and embarrassment.

At the beginning, Sean was in Mountjoy main prison, and Alice said the visits were terrible:

"I was in shock, 'cos I'd never seen anything like that in my life.... Mountjoy was really tough, you know, to start, and going in pregnant, it wasn't a nice place to be, obviously. You can't even hear yourself think in the visits. A couple of weeks after she was born, I remember bringing the baby up. She was born in November, so she was in the body suit and all that. I had to strip that all off. I remember it was horrible, like it was freezing. It's like in a little shed that they have you in. You have to go through the x-ray machine or whatever. And I had to strip her off down to nearly nothing in that freezing cold." (Alice)

These initial visits proved very difficult for them. Then Sean requested to be transferred to the Medical Unit and visits improved substantially. The visiting space was screened off, so they couldn't hear what other people were saying and their own conversations were more private.

"...it's like you're upgraded." (Alice)

Later he applied to be moved to the Training Unit, a semi-open prison within the Mountjoy complex that provided work, education and training to prisoners. The quality of the visits improved further after that. Sean, Alice and their new baby daughter Cassandra were given visits in a family room (monitored from outside). There were no toys or activity items for children but there were pictures on the walls that served as a more normal background for photographs. It was here that Sean learned to change nappies.

"..we'd get the picture every time, so just to have the pictures to look like normal. And it was nice to be able to bring the baby up there, and she was able to run around and there were no other people around, so she got to know him, do you know, that sort of way." (Alice)

Alice remarked how nice and respectful the prison officers were to her in the Training Unit, putting it down to Sean's good relationship with them. She said they called her by her name and asked after her new baby, which she said made a huge difference to the whole experience. Sean suggested that some other prisoners had a poor relationship with the prison authorities and their families didn't have as good an experience as Alice.

Alice and baby Cassandra visited Sean almost twice a week every week and at Christmas, for the first two and a half years of Cassandra's life. In all, Alice felt that the high quality visits made a huge difference to the family. Sean's relationship with Cassandra grew very strong despite his incarceration.

"When he came out, Cassandra was two and a half and the first person that Cassandra called was him, because I was up so much. I was just, every visit I got I was up, and I told her, she knew who he was, and it was something for him to concentrate on as well, do you know what I mean?" (Alice)

"I needed to make sure I bonded with the baby so, which we did, and she, obviously she can't remember, she's too small, but..." (Sean)

Sean recognised early on that staying in the main prison in Mountjoy would only result in poor visits for his partner and child and a more stressful time for him as a prisoner. He said that the Gardaí had told the prison authorities that he was part of a particular gang (which was why he was put into protection and handcuffed when he visited Alice in hospital). This was later accepted as untrue and he was allowed to progress to the Training Unit. After a time he got onto a programme at PACE in Blanchardstown, a non-profit organisation that helps people leaving prison, and was approved for Temporary Release (TR) to attend PACE without escort. Alice was able to meet him with the baby at lunch or before he left to return to prison. It brought a certain sense of normality and enhanced his sense of being a father.

Sean got a number of overnight releases to help him and his family acclimatise to him getting out of prison. Returning to prison was hard, and even depressing at times, but he felt it was hugely beneficial to his eventual return home. He was helped through this readjustment by his positive relationships with some other prisoners. He started to worry about going home as his release date grew nearer. He said the day release and staged temporary releases home really helped him but even with that, he stressed about Alice, about being out, etc.

"It was kind of tough coming back but then you'd say okay, that was a good day, it was a good day out with the family. But, do you know what, and to be honest, what actually made it easier for me going back was I've had good friends in there, and that's what made it easier for me, and it did. And there was a friend, and we used to play indoor tennis in the Training Unit, the short tennis; he was a lifer, and he was brilliant, and as soon as I got back, he'd come round to me and say, 'come on, we'll have a game of tennis'. Then, he'd be asking me, 'how's your day going?' And we'd be chatting about that, so I was distracted from it, I wasn't given time to sit on me own and dwell. If you'd no friends around you then you are sitting in your own and that isn't good." (Sean)

Sean has now been out of prison for over eight years and has been working since his release. He and Alice have married and have had two more children since Cassandra. He has never been arrested since his release.

4.2.2 Case Study 2 – Mary and Peter

Mary and Peter are in their mid-twenties and have been together for approximately three years. When they met, Mary was grieving her mother who had died after a long illness. Mary became pregnant after about a year and now they have a two-year-old daughter, Judy. She has two children, five and eight, from a previous relationship. Judy is Peter's first child. Mary has no family other than Peter and her three children. This is Peter's third time in prison for minor offences and Mary's first experience of having a partner in prison. None of the children are aware he is in prison.

Peter's parents are supportive but have had to cope with many issues including their daughter's death while he has been in prison. Peter received permission to attend her funeral but chose not to as he would have been escorted by prison officers and placed in handcuffs. He didn't want to bring any more shame and upset on the family. He says there wasn't any grief counselling for him and his parents were unable to visit him for a long time after the funeral.

Peter had been in prison before but never as a parent. He said he didn't have any understanding about being a prisoner who had a child. He found it difficult to articulate the issues but did communicate that it was a challenge to be a father of a new-born baby from prison. When he went into prison first he wasn't asked anything about whether he had children or not. He was asked if he wanted to work while he was inside and was given a job.

Mary had even less understanding about how the prison process worked and spent a lot of time phoning the prison to get a visit sorted out before she realised she could only do it online. She doesn't have a computer but can organise the visit online using her phone. She said she would have liked to have been told how things worked before she spent so long trying to figure it out, particularly as it says on the IPS website to call. When she asked for advice in the prison they said they don't answer the phone and online is the only way to book.

"I didn't know half of these things and you do feel like you are alone when your partner is in prison and you are doing a sentence yourself." (Mary)

Mary spoke about how Peter was doing well and was trying to get to the Grove semi-open centre within Castlereagh Prison so that their visits could be easier and so he might be eligible for some weekends home. Peter spoke about having heard from other prisoners that there was a sentence plan for every long term prisoner and said that no-one had explained to him what he needed to do to make progress. He had some informal discussions with prison personnel about getting to the Grove but this move hadn't transpired. IASIO had been interacting with him and there was talk about accessing the Community Return Scheme. Mary felt things were very ad hoc and it was quite disconcerting for them both not to have a clear structure around Peter's sentence management.

"I think if a man (from the prison service) would come to you and tell you that you need to do this and that then it would be better – I'd like to be told, I'd love to have an input. I'd love my family to be involved but it would be very hard to get around that." (Peter)

While Mary's two older children think Peter is working abroad, Judy is young enough to be brought on visits without the couple feeling it causes her stress. Both Mary and Peter said they were grateful for the enhanced visits but they would like toys for the children to play with as between looking after the children and other children running around the place, sometimes they don't have the space to talk and discuss things.

"Visits are hard – every two weeks we get an enhanced visit – she can only come every two weeks. I can pick up Judy, the officers are ok but there's nothing in the enhanced room to keep the children amused. I'd have some stuff in the room for the kids so you can have a proper chat with your missus. The standard (visit) you couldn't have contact and she wouldn't be happy, she's not used to prison. The enhanced visits are better now than the other kind."
(Peter)

"I would love if there were some toys – it would be so simple – she wants to see daddy but after 15 mins she is bored and then I am running around after her and I feel the officers are beginning to get peed off and, even if they don't give that impression, I feel it. The last time he saw her was (before Christmas). I wanted to have time with him on my own because the last time it was so hard and I wanted us to talk."
(Mary)

Both found standard visits very uncomfortable and disconcerting.

"I felt nervous for no reason. I remember passing Judy over to Peter and the officer said hand her back quite gruff and I thought my God, it's his child. The atmosphere is completely different and I'm treated differently, better (on an enhanced visit). He seems so much more relaxed on enhanced. He told me on a visit that he feels more respected."
(Mary)

As regards getting support, Mary has friends but none of them have experienced a partner in prison. She has no family and although Peter's family help with child care, she doesn't have any emotional support. She expressed feelings of loneliness and isolation and said she was basically "holding it together all day from morning to night." When the children go to bed at night she feels like she is "going to fall apart".

"When they go to bed I am completely alone – It sounds terrible but I am glad when the night comes because that's another day over."
(Mary)

Neither Peter nor Mary were aware of the family welfare supports Tusla have in place. They were unaware of the local family centre, the Meitheal process or family conferencing. Both said separately that they would take any help they could get.

"I would keep working with the system when I get out to help my family being happy. My baby is going to stop me coming back in here. My partner is very supportive. It's so hard to change – I want to change so I can show her. If someone is going to help me be a better person I would work with professionals. I don't mind who it is."
(Peter)

4.2.3 Case Study 3 – Chris and Stewart

Brothers Chris and Stewart are in their early thirties and late twenties respectively. They grew up with their father in and out of prison for all of their childhood and most of their adult lives until six years ago. Chris was a baby the first time his father, John, went to prison. He was about three when John came home from that sentence and about seven when he went back in. Stewart was also a baby when his father went to prison for that second time and about five when he got out. This was the pattern of their father's life and they grew up without him in the family home but do not consider him an absent dad.

John was 19 when he became a father for the first time. With his girlfriend since his early teens, he says the pregnancy wasn't planned and he wasn't ready to become a father. Although he wasn't taking drugs or addicted to alcohol at the time, he struggled with his new life and eventually became heavily addicted to "hard" drugs and alcohol. He ended up in prison within months of the birth and was in and out of prison for over 25 years. He married and says his wife was a good mother to the two boys. However, she succumbed to drugs and alcohol later and died when the two boys were young adults.

John was regarded in the community as one of Dublin's top criminals, a 'hard man', not to be messed with. The sons spoke of how they loved their father but having a father who was a criminal and always in and out of prison gave rise to complicated experiences and emotions. The boys are quite different characters and perceived their father differently as they grew up. Chris, the older son, spoke of seeing his father as a role model and being proud of his father's hard man image. For Chris this was something to aspire to. They both had a loving and strong relationship with their mother, but, despite her advice and guidance, Chris ended up in prison himself for three years in his twenties.

"I just stepped into it. Like father like son type of thing, I just wanted the door that he had, I wanted it all. It was mine to take, he was after wasting in it. That's what I thought. Like I just seen the police coming through me door and all, all the time and everything else, I thought no other way like. I thought that was life. My Ma, everyone was telling me, 'Get a job, get a job'. I was like, 'Get a job? My Da doesn't have a f...ing job. A shotgun and a bike is the best way to go'. You know?" (Chris)

Stewart was a little intimidated by the hard man image and reputation. He said he is different to his brother and knew prison would be something he wouldn't survive.

"I just wasn't able for it, I wouldn't be able for prison..... I think it was my Ma really that kept me going, when I was growing up and my 'oul fella' wasn't around you know? She used to be saying to me, 'Don't be doing that s..t, see your Da and your mates be leading you out'. That's what she would be saying, 'You'll be in Mountjoy'. (Stewart)

Neither son could remember many positive childhood memories about their father. Memories retold by both young men were about him coming home from prison as a stranger or about the madness of the life they were all living. Both felt they had been loved but not supported or seen by their father. They talked about how his way of life, now that they are mature and understand more, caused them to be stuck in childhood and early adulthood, without the stability and encouragement to live a different or more productive life.

"I knew he was a bank robber anyway. I can't remember much. I think he drove up in a car he had when he got out (of prison)" (Stewart)

"Like if I had of had a Da here all the time instead of coming in with rolls of cash, finding bleeding handguns on top of my press and all. Going out the back, there's f...ing bikes out my back. C...ts running in with balaclavas on and all you're like, 'What the f...?' it was like Grand Theft Auto. Don't get me wrong, I loved it at the time but like...." (Chris)

Both boys said they wanted their father to be around more, to help them when they needed male support.

"Yeah, I wanted him to be out to work out stuff. I was on my f...ng own helping me little brother. It was me. I was living in poverty when he was locked up. When he would come home it was like yeah but it was just like, he's back like, sure he'll be gone again in a couple of months. That's how it was, in and out, in and out." (Chris)

Chris and Stewart went down different early adult pathways and it was eventually their father's influence that helped them turn their lives around. When his father finally managed to get and stay off drink and drugs in the Training Unit and turn his life around, Chris was in Mountjoy main prison.

"I seen me Dad, through the middle of me sentence, changing. One day, he was just a totally different man. I was like, what?? Don't get me wrong I was taken aback at the time but then, I was kind of thinking, he's making an effort. Yeah, was a new man. He was my Da. He was there, he wasn't all trying to chase the next thing, trying to get a few quid for his drugs. He was out and he was trying to make something of his life,." (Chris)

Chris's father was out of prison before he himself got out three years ago and has been supporting him and being a positive role model to him ever since. Chris has committed to staying away from trouble and to staying out of prison. He credits his father for helping him but his daughter is his main motivation for his turning his life around.

"Yeah, to be a criminal. I wanted to be the next big man and have this and have that and not get caught and be a thick. That's what I wanted, that's what I wanted to be. Until I get out and see me little kid. I was like, Hang on a minute, what the f...s going on? No way!" (Chris)

Stewart was delighted for his brother. He was also very happy to finally have a father that he could talk to and be his friend. He felt secure in that his father was clean, sober and staying out of trouble.

"I was delighted he was getting out clean. So, that was it, it's over now. I was happy he was going to change his life around, a few years ago. I don't really give a f... about the money or anything, f... the money. I'd rather have him out of there." (Stewart)

4.2.4 Case study 4 – John and Mandy

John and Mandy have been together almost five years. They are in their mid-forties and both have children from previous relationships. They have one son together, James, who was born just after John was incarcerated. John had been in prison twice before and had very little to do with his older sons who are now in their twenties. By his own admission he was caught up in drugs and the “drug world”. Despite short detoxes and what he calls ‘reprieves’, he had no space for his children and had no desire or capacity to connect with them. His sons had an ad hoc childhood and unstable home life. He said that they received no help around having a father in prison, who was also an addict. He intends to build a better relationship with them now that he is out of prison, clean and sober for over five years, and away from anything or anybody to do with drugs. He sees his relationship with Mandy and the birth of their son as a second chance to be a better person and a good father.

Mandy lost her mother the year before John went to prison and although she has sisters and a brother, she did not lean on them in relation to having a partner who was in prison. She was aware of John’s past but was caught completely by surprise when he was arrested early in their relationship. When her mother died, they lost the family home and Mandy and her two older girls and young son ended up homeless. She recently moved into a council home and is looking forward to some stability for her family. Having spent three years in a situation not of her making or even expectation, she is resilient, patient and positive about the future.

Mandy visited John in Mountjoy prison from the beginning of his sentence and found the experience very challenging. She also said that for the most part the officers were nice and she had no problems with them. This made a bad situation a little better as she progressed through her pregnancy and John’s sentence.

“Mountjoy was more like dirty and manky and filthy and dirt left everywhere or whatever and it’s just like you hadn’t got privacy because the people are on the visits and they’re beside you and you can hear everything.” (Mandy)

They both wanted John and his son to bond so John asked the prison officers in advance for permission to hold his child and to get some photographs. This was allowed. They both felt that these small things made a huge difference to their child and to their ability to function as a family while John was in prison.

“So fair play to him (prison officer) he went into a special room and he took a few photographs and then we went back in to the visit then. He was able to have him and feed him as well. I wasn’t happy at all, jeez I hated going up. I didn’t want to bring my child up there with people looking at you and all, you know but it was important for bonding and they never searched him so that was ok. I wouldn’t have visited if they did that.” (Mandy)

John was also grateful when he was moved to enhanced visits and was able to sit with his partner and child at a table and sometimes had access to family rooms with toys for their child. That meant he and Mandy could have proper conversations while James played. It also gave him a better opportunity to bond.

"You could start having a proper physical interaction with him. Rolling around the ground and all that. That was the first time that started..... It would have been an awful lot different (in basic), Jesus yeah. I'd say it would have been a lot more difficult (to bond)." (John)

"And that was for three or four hours down there. It was great. Especially for James. Yeah that was quite amazing, he was bonding then with his father and he (John) was making up for everything, you know he missed out on the birth, and that was horrible and then with everything else, he missed his first step and you know his first time out of nappies and stuff." (Mandy)

John felt that as a father an occasional Skype would be advantageous instead of phone calls so he could see his son taking his first step and share in such things with his partner.

These family visits spurred John on to apply for the open prison Shelton Abbey where the visits were better again.

"...bliss. I was very... When you've got kids that's great.... everyone's down on a Sunday, with the visits being Sunday. You know the dogs are out and everyone's just, like a big pantomime. You've got the right atmosphere with the kids." (John)

They experienced challenges in keeping their relationship positive at times despite their commitment:

"Well I was trying to hold it all together for him like, be strong for him. But, I was angry with him also for getting into this situation and couldn't really discuss it so, I just held it back and kept it at the back of my mind at times and just got on with it you know. (But then) I was annoyed with him, I wouldn't be talking to him if I was there too, on the phone and I'd hang up or at times I'd just walk off visits. If I was feeling annoyed with him, with all the other stuff, you know what I mean, just walk away and I know I should sit down and have a chat with him but I'd be roaring and screaming and I see people like that and it wasn't good really." (Mandy)

Both John and Mandy felt it would have been helpful to have been able to deal with problems in a more constructive manner but that this was virtually impossible given the few visits Mandy could make and the preciousness of the phone calls. This was not helped when there was an argument in prison or John did something that meant he wasn't allowed a visit or phone calls for two weeks. Mandy said that they all suffered then.

"So I was getting a slap as well. I felt like that." (Mandy)

John felt that while serving his last prison sentence, he was a different man to when he was on drugs and less mature and was more capable of accessing help. However, he also experienced a lack of proactive support inside for him or his family. He spoke also about the amount of "misguided young fellas that are in there who haven't a clue how to go about the basics" and even about how he "hadn't a clue what to do (to be a father)." In his opinion, there is help to rehabilitate and reintegrate but it's not easy, equal or equitable.

“ISM, I didn’t meet an ISM officer for two years. When you’re in the loop for something, when you’re put in for something that’s sort of where it’s been recommended through hard grafting and bleeding, just f...ing towing the line, and without crossing the line to being a lick arse. Just being straight, straight-laced. You’d want to be there for 6, 7 months to even get recognised for that. Just make a lot of noise and don’t stop, and eventually say, “what’s this course about?... In the end it’s like it would be if you had a machine. But different parts of the machine are just malfunctioning.” (John)

4.3 Conclusion

Case study 1 (Sean and Alice) is a good illustration of the contrast between standard and family visits, the importance of consistent, quality contact with children, the value of staggered home visits, the harm of poor communication (over a hospital visit in this instance), the importance of getting on with prison officers and the potential positive impact of parenthood on a prisoner. It also illustrates that a prisoner who has no substance abuse issues, is emotionally and mentally capable and has good family support can have a rehabilitative prison experience and can reintegrate at home successfully. Sean was able to make his own way, access what was available and ‘play the system’. It is the people Sean refers to as chaotic who need structured help, although Sean said he would have liked some help also!

Case Study 2 (Mary and Peter) highlights a number of issues, including notably the information deficit as regards prison procedures and community services for those new to the imprisonment experience; choices around telling children about their father (or mother’s partner) being in prison; challenges around parenting from prison; the isolation and depression partners can face in the community; the benefit of family visits, and the desire for information about and involvement in sentence planning.

Case Study 3 (Chris and Stewart) demonstrates the impact on children of periods of imprisonment over a protracted period with both boys saying their father was a stranger to them each time he came home and that they missed his support as they were growing up. It thus supports the case for ongoing contact through family visits. It also shows the negative influence of a criminal role model on one son and the positive influence when the father changed. It highlights the value of addiction services in prison and the need for and value of parenting programmes.

Case Study 4 (John and Mandy) shows the contrast between standard and enhanced visits in closed prisons and visits in an open centre and the value of family visits in terms of opportunity to bond with young children and have private conversations. Their experience also depicts the difficulties in trying to maintain a normal relationship and appreciation of gestures of kindness by prison staff. It highlights the negative impact on families of suspension of calls and visits as a sanction for prisoner breaches of discipline, as well as the desirability of proactive support by staff in engaging with services and the perceived need for perseverance by individual prisoners for access to services.

The issues raised resurface in the following sections of the report.

5

Prisoner and family needs during imprisonment



5 Prisoner and family needs during imprisonment

5.1 Introduction

This study focuses primarily on prisoners in Castlerea Prison who have children and whose families reside in counties Galway and Roscommon and surrounding areas. This section summarises the themes and issues raised in individual and group interviews with prisoners, their families, prison personnel and others working with them and their families. Findings and recommendations reported below are directly relevant to this prison and this area. It will be obvious to the reader that most of them are relevant to other prisons and catchment areas too. The broader system requirements are referenced later in the report, including as regards female prisoners, city prisons, and inter-agency protocols at national level.

5.2 Overview of findings

What do male prisoners need for successful re-integration with their families? Prisoners, their partners and stakeholders, as well as the literature review, told us that prisoners need three things – on-going contact with their families during their period in custody, help while in custody with the issues that got them into trouble in the first instance and support around release and re-integration. What do families need? They told us they need the same three things – on-going contact with the prisoner during his period in custody, help for the prisoner while he is in custody (so that he is better placed to avoid re-offending and to be a positive role model in the family unit) and support around his release and re-integration. They also need support for themselves and their children during the period their partner is in custody. Each of these is looked at in turn in the following sections with a particular focus on family needs during custody, the pre-release stage and the period immediately post-release.

5.3 Contact on committal

Interviewees explained that needs arise prior to committal to prison. Many partners spoke for example about the upset for children in particular caused by the chaos of their father's arrest in the early hours of the morning or their removal from court to prison with little or no opportunity to speak to their children. They also spoke about their ignorance about court and prison procedures, notwithstanding availability of explanatory leaflets and on-line information. In the commotion and emotion of the occasion, they are not well placed to access or absorb information presented in this manner. In some instances, partners said that they did not have any access to or contact with the prisoner for some time, sometimes days, immediately following imprisonment, during which time they were concerned about their welfare and whereabouts. They did not know who to contact and found it difficult to get through to the prison on the main prison telephone number. Some were not given the information they sought. Sometimes this was because they were not recognised as having any right to the information, in the absence of information at committal that they were next of kin or were otherwise approved by the prisoner. Access to prison information at this particularly stressful time for

partners and children needs to be examined with a view to improvement. It needs to be recognised that families came in all forms, sizes and combinations and consideration needs to be given to ways of meeting their need for information from the prison and the prisoner at the committal stage, including facilitating the prisoner to contact more than one party (e.g. parent and partner).

5.4 On-going contact

Prisoners need quality contact with their families while in custody. This is a fairly obvious point, evident from the literature review and recognised by the prison authorities⁵. Families, especially children, need contact with the prisoner just as much, perhaps even more. However, families commented on difficulties they encountered about visits and other communication. As regards visits, they reported problems understanding the visit system including booking visits, waiting times, search procedures, duration of visits (including curtailment and cancellation), supervision during standard visits, limited access to family visits, travel difficulties and issues relating to children. As regards other communication, they referred primarily to duration and number of phone calls. They acknowledged many good experiences, including notably the Visitor Centre outside the prison. They expressed appreciation of the understanding and professionalism of many prison officers but noted many inconsistencies in their overall prison experience. They recognised the need for security and safety and the abuse of the system by some but did not feel that everyone should suffer for the sins of the few. They believed that something could be put in place to avoid what felt like unwarranted broad-brush approaches to security.

5.4.1 Accessing visits

Partners reported frustration about learning how the visit system worked and how to book visits. Although information is available on the IPS website, this was not accessed or understood by everyone, often because they did not have internet access or were not internet-savvy. The website currently advises that visits can be booked on-line or by phone. Several interviewees tried to ring the prison but could not get through or on the rare successful occasions were told that they would have to use the on-line booking system. This caused additional upset at a time of already significant stress. Some spoke of arriving for visits only to find that they were not listed and were not given entry or their visits were greatly delayed. Where this occurred, it caused considerable frustration and upset. The restrictions on numbers of visitors also caused difficulty for larger families.

Visitors often have to travel long distances to get to Castlerea, many by public transport, and most arrive early for visits. The Visitor Centre plays a crucial role in welcoming them and providing shelter, refreshment and encouragement. This was greatly appreciated by interviewees. Several reported subsequent delays in getting into the prison and having to wait in areas that they, and especially their children, found intimidating and stressful. Some interviewees reported occasional negative experiences of the search area, including unsympathetic or abusive treatment by prison officers and intrusive personal searches. Several said that they did not know what to expect when entering the prison and were taken aback by the search procedures and drug dogs. Relevant information is again available on the IPS website and also in the Visitor Centre but not everyone is in a position to access and absorb the information. Information on local services is available on websites such as those of the Children and Young Person Services Committees but the inability to access the information is likely to apply to those too.

⁵ See, for example, IPS Strategy 2016-2018 (IPS, 2016) and commitment to the Family Links Programme

The catchment area for Castlerea Prison is quite extensive and the prison population also includes prisoners transferred from other parts of the country. Sizeable effort and expense is involved for most visitors, which can limit the frequency of visits. Sometimes visits require absence from work or school and the possibility of Saturday visits helps alleviate the difficulty. Several stakeholders mentioned that financial assistance used to be provided on a discretionary basis by Community Welfare Officers but that this is no longer the case. As mentioned in Section 3, schemes offering financial support operate successfully in a number of countries.

Interviewees observed that prison transfers often disrupted visiting and usually occurred at short notice with minimal or no advance notice to families. The need for proximity to family and friends is recognised in the Irish Prison Service strategic plan 2016-2018, which commits to making 'every effort' to ensure that this is achieved. Security imperatives typically dictated such transfers, due usually to pressure of numbers or the actions or profiles of other prisoners.

5.4.2 The visit experience

Official visit durations were not reported as a problem but it was claimed that they were rarely adhered to. According to prisoners and their partners, visits usually started late because of delays at entry and travel time to the visit area and were sometimes ended prematurely (often without explanation). A small number had experience of visits being cancelled at short notice because of incidents in the prison or for other unspecified reasons. This was a cause of significant upset and frustration, not least for children.

Prisoners' partners commented that they found the prison environment unwelcoming and intimidating, especially in the entrance and search areas. This had a depressing impact on them and discouraged some from bringing children with them. They acknowledged security imperatives but felt that improvements could be made without compromising security.

Interviewees had mixed experiences of the quality of actual visits. They commented that some prison officers were sympathetic and tolerant of children hugging their father or being unruly but handling of the situation was inconsistent and some officers were said to have intervened in a rough verbal manner. Some interviewees said that they were reluctant to complain in case a stricter line on physical contact would be imposed as standard or that they would be disadvantaged personally. They observed also that the lack of privacy from other prisoners, visitors and prison officers impeded discussion of family issues.

Interviewees who had experienced 'family visits' were loud in their praise. They appreciated in particular the ability to have greater privacy, space for their children to move around freely, the possibility for physical contact with the children, the relaxed atmosphere, a 'normal' setting in which to take photographs and the capacity to make tea. The family visits allowed a sense of normality and more natural interaction. Prisoners in the Grove semi-open part of the prison experience family visits as the norm but it is Castlerea prison policy that, in the main prison, prisoners have to be on an enhanced regime to be eligible for family visits⁶. Prisoners and their partners said that they would welcome a more child-friendly décor and availability of toys or games to help

⁶ The IPS Incentivised Regimes Policy provides for a differentiation of privileges between prisoners according to their level of engagement with services and quality of behaviour. There are three levels of regime – basic, standard and enhanced. All prisoners enter the system at standard level and become eligible for the enhanced level once they have met the required criteria for the preceding two months. In December 2018, just under half of all prisoners in Irish prisons (49%) were at the enhanced level.

when the children get bored and to allow the parents to discuss family or other matters in private. The Visitor Centre set-up provides a good example of what is desirable. The Irish Prison Service is committed to developing family visiting facilities across the prison estate.

5.4.3 Communication

Prisoners and their families said that they valued the regular phone calls that they could avail of but expressed frustrations around a number of issues. As regards frequency, those at enhanced regime level enjoy two daily calls which they said they found adequate, often using one for conversation with their children and the other for their partner. The majority commented that the duration of six minutes was not enough for meaningful conversations with all family members. Prisoners at standard regime level are allowed one call a day, which they found limiting. One prisoner said that he tried to reserve two minutes of each phone call for his son. He referred to the difficulty within that time of 'chastising' him where necessary while trying to maintain a positive relationship overall. It was recounted that some prisoners find filling six minutes difficult but this was not the experience of fathers who were still active in a family relationship. A number of interviewees commented that partners or other family members avoid talking about negative issues because there is not enough time to discuss and address the issues fully and they do not want the prisoner going back to his cell feeling down. A consequence is that many decisions are taken out of the hands of the father, which undermines his role and adds to the challenge of successful reintegration later.

Lack of privacy from other prisoners and damage to phones (putting pressure on those making calls or preventing contact at agreed times) were common complaints among prisoners interviewed. Some stakeholders suggested greater capacity could be developed to allow a significant increase in the number and duration of calls and enhance the quality of contact. It is acknowledged that security requirements require a degree of control and monitoring. Skype and other innovative forms of communication such as Facetime were envisaged in the overarching approach developed by the IPS Families and Imprisonment Group (see Section 3.3). Skype is used in other jurisdictions and we were informed that it has been used in some Irish prisons for foreign prisoners with family overseas. It was pointed out that its use raises logistical issues around recording and storage.

5.4.4 Child-friendly practice

Many of the issues raised by interviewees around children visiting parents in prison are similar to those identified in the literature review. They are not specific to the pre-release phase but can affect the quality of on-going contact and make successful reintegration that much more difficult. Experiences differed by age and number of children. One partner recalled being asked on her first visit after giving birth to remove her baby's nappy in what she described as 'freezing cold' conditions that were 'not the most hygienic'. Others objected to the manner in which searches of their children were conducted and the unsympathetic attitude on the part of some staff. Several interviewees said that their children were nervous of coming to prison in the first place and that it would not take much to intimidate them. They said that some children were afraid of the drug dog, especially on their first visit if they were not expecting it. A common complaint was the lack of access to suitable or any toilets for children during visits. As documented in many other studies, it was difficult for young children to understand why they could not have physical contact with their father and difficult for them to stay still for long periods. This made them appear disruptive and raised tensions. Children with conditions such as ADHD could be seen as especially disruptive. The absence of toys has already been discussed. A Tusla

interviewee said that Tusla would be open to contributing to making visit areas more child friendly by providing toys or in other ways.

5.5 Prisoner access to services while in custody

Prisoners are likely to re-offend and end up back in prison unless they get help with the factors that caused them to offend in the first place. This was a common experience for several of those interviewed and was a fear or expectation for those who were serving their first sentence. The scenario was borne out by stakeholders who had witnessed such returns, many soon after the prisoner's release. Prisoners frequently express determination to avoid re-offending and re-imprisonment and turn their lives around but they face huge challenges on release. While in prison, they need help with addictions such as alcohol; drugs and gambling; mental health; educational and vocational deficits, and behavioural issues; among other challenges. These issues re-surface on release along with other issues such as accommodation and financial problems.

Opinions differed as regards availability of services in prison. Prison authorities and service providers pointed out the many services that are on offer but acknowledged difficulties with scale of availability (e.g. long waiting lists for addiction and counselling services) and frequency of curtailment due to staff shortages (e.g. workshop closures). It was generally accepted that if all prisoners wished to avail of structured activities and treatment it would not be possible to meet demands. It was an achievement to deliver services and activities to the extent actually provided (one indicator of which was the percentage of prisoners at enhanced regime level, a pre-condition for which is participation in structured activities) and this was a reflection of the commitment of prison authorities and staff. Prisoners and their families were more critical about activity and service availability and few were satisfied with what was on offer. Activities were limited in their opinion and frequently delayed or disrupted due to staffing issues. Most said that they had not been able to access mental health and addiction services when required. They commented that lack of structured activity aggravated mental health issues and put others at risk of mental ill-health. Even where services were accessed, participation could be interrupted by transfer to another prison and continued access on release, through linkage to community-based services, was said to be rare.

According to all prisoners interviewed, sentence planning was practically non-existent. The IPS model of integrated sentence management (ISM) is that all prisoners serving sentences of 12 months or more are assessed on committal and a sentence plan drawn up for them taking account of their strengths and needs. The plans are drawn up and co-ordinated by ISM officers in consultation with the prisoners and with the various prison-based services. This was not happening as intended and prison staff acknowledged that the focus was more on short-term prisoners and on prisoners approaching the end of their sentence. Prison transfers were identified as causing difficulties as regards sentence planning and continuity of services as well as keeping in touch with family.

It is not the intention here to be overly-critical of prison authorities or service providers. Issues around the provision and take-up of services are complex and well beyond the scope of this study. Prison regimes and staffing levels are similarly complicated. The researchers were forcibly struck, however, by the futility of efforts to improve family relations without addressing addiction or mental health issues or deficits as regards work, training or education. These underlying issues are likely to become dominant for a majority of prisoners regardless of programmes and interventions to help with family issues.

5.6 Family access to services during the prisoner's custody

The reality for many families of prisoners is that their circumstances are significantly worse while the father is in prison. The impact on children in particular can be profound. They suffer from their father's absence, can be anxious about his safety and worried about his continuing support and affection for them. They see the impact on the mother. They must adapt to the new situation, perhaps taking on new roles and responsibilities. They may or may not know that their father is in prison – if they do, they must deal with issues around stigma at school, in their wider family and in the community. Partners face similar challenges but have the added pressure of worrying about their children and looking after them without the father. Some interviewees spoke of loneliness, and anxiety as well as anger and frustration, and the limited opportunities to talk about their experience. At the same time, some spoke of a relief from their partner's removal and a sense sometimes that they were actually safer in prison given everything that was going on for them in the community.

The fact of a parent's imprisonment is not a trigger for automatic referral to State or voluntary services, notwithstanding that having a parent in prison is recognised as an ACE that puts a child at risk. Imprisonment puts pressure on families but many families deal with the challenges successfully within their own resources. State services, notably Tusla, recognise this but some interviewees were fearful about drawing attention to themselves and their situation. They associated Tusla with child protection and taking children into State care. This common perception places the organisation at a distinct disadvantage in terms of offering services to families of prisoners. It is possible that some such families are accessing Tusla services without revealing the prisoner status of the father: Tusla was not aware of prisoner families engaged with their services, with only anecdotal evidence of one or two cases of such families receiving their assistance. There was a degree of surprise at the actual number of prisoners with children with Galway or Roscommon home addresses.⁷

Practically all partners and some stakeholders spoke of the financial impact of incarceration. Household income was invariably lower while expenses were higher. Social welfare payments were lower almost immediately as the partner's payment ceased on committal. Other payments could be similarly affected. Rental and other expenses did not reduce automatically and new expenses arose, including costs relating to travel to visit the prisoner, lodging money in prison for the prisoner to buy necessities from the tuck-shop and purchasing clothes for the prisoner. Some interviewees referred to extra costs relating to their children to compensate partially for the absence of their father or under pressure of older children. Some interviewees (including stakeholders) referred to a previous possibility of financial assistance from Community Welfare Officers for costs of travel for visits but, as previously mentioned, this had ceased.

Few people seemed to know where to turn for assistance. Some relied on family on occasions but this could make them feel judged and often strained relationships. One partner with three children was unaware that there was a family resource centre in her town or what might be on offer there. There was a general reluctance to access services offered by Tusla, the Child and Family Agency. Suspicion of Tusla and fear of interference regarding their children (even of their children being taken into care) were voiced regularly by interviewees and acknowledged by stakeholders including some Tusla staff themselves.

⁷ According to data received from Castlerea Prison, on 30 November 2018 across the prison estate (but mostly in Castlerea Prison), 78 prisoners had Galway addresses and 17 Roscommon addresses and they had 196 and 27 children under age 18 respectively.

Prisoners and partners were largely ignorant of family support services and/or failed to distinguish between welfare and protection services. There was a similar reluctance to draw attention in the community to the fact that their partner was in prison. This tended to accentuate feelings of isolation and depression.

5.7 Support around release and re-integration

5.7.1 Pre-Release preparation

The ISM sentence planning model provides for a pre-release component. As the prisoner approaches his release date (but well in advance of that date), the prison, through the ISM officer, should prepare a re-integration plan in consultation with the prisoner, his family, prison services and relevant community services. All interviewees, including service providers, said that things did not happen in accordance with the model. This was for a variety of reasons, not least a need to prioritise accommodation and other immediate needs of vulnerable prisoners, staff shortages, and system pressures to focus on shorter-term prisoners under the Community Return Programme and the Community Support Scheme.⁸ Prisoners were rarely involved in the way envisaged and families were not involved at all in formal planning meetings. Links to community-based services were reported to be ad hoc rather than planned, partly because services were not always available when required in specific localities. The situation of prisoners coming up to release was generally examined at review meetings that involve relevant prison staff and services, including a representative of IPS Headquarters but such meetings dealt with large numbers of prisoners and rarely involved individual prisoners directly.

As mentioned, families were not involved in release planning, bar in exceptional cases. Several interviewees commented that the first a family might hear about release is a phone-call check that the prisoner could live at their address when he was released. Release at short notice was not unusual, sometimes within one or two days' notice. This could cause major disruption for partners and children. Many interviewees called for managed, staged releases so that the prisoner and family could adjust, with progressive day, overnight and weekend visits and a debriefing of prisoner and partner after each home visit. This often happens for prisoners nearing the end of very long sentences but it was argued that it should become the norm, with exceptions only where there was clear danger to members of the public. Even in such extreme cases, it was questioned whether public safety was better served by sudden release when the system had no choice or a managed release where support and supervision measures could be tested.

Preparation for release and re-integration with family is catered for in a number of other ways including pre-release courses and parenting courses run by the prison Education Centre.

The pre-release course runs for 6-8 weeks, one morning a week, and has an average of ten participants with about 6-9 months left on their sentence. Issues

⁸ Community Return Programme is an incentivised early release scheme co-managed by the Irish Prison Service and the Probation Service. It targets prisoners serving sentences of between one and eight years imprisonment. Under the programme qualifying prisoners are released early, with a period of unpaid community work as a condition of their reviewable temporary release. The Community Support Scheme provides an option of early release for prisoners serving sentences of between three and twelve months. This provides for community support and monitoring in partnership with a Community Based Organisation. (Persons serving sentences of over eight years generally fall within the Parole Board process.) On 30 November 2018, 52 prisoners across all prisons were participating in the Community Return Programme and 58 on the Community Support Scheme (IPS 2019, p.26)

addressed are worked out with the participants and respond to the needs they identify. Typical issues are addiction, probation, debt/money advice, training and education, sexual behaviour, fitness check and harm reduction. Issues are then discussed in the group, with contributions from external speakers and from within the prison. The course includes reflection on prisoners' expectations and previous experience of release and explores what it might be like for their partners. Quotes from prisoners about returning home are used to prompt discussion. The course also discusses what it is like for partners when the prisoners are in prison and what they could do to make up for their partners' sacrifices. The teacher involved said that a few participants have little 'light bulb' moments but many have addiction issues and are self-focused. The teacher also asks about what they will do to support their children. She said that in her opinion existing programmes did not focus on children sufficiently or at all. She commented that while participants talked very lovingly of their children, they tended not to back this up by practical actions. The parenting programme runs once a week for 6-7 weeks.

The Family Links Programme described in Section 3 could be a significant element in preparation of prisoners and families for reintegration although it is not confined to those approaching release. The programme has not been repeated since its first delivery in Castlereagh prison. One of its five pillars involves family-related courses and programmes, including separate group work with partners in the community and with prisoners in custody, finishing with joint sessions. According to those interviewed, the experience with the first run of the programme in Castlereagh showed difficulties engaging with partners and the importance of incentives to participation over and above the intrinsic merits of the course. In the case of Family Links, access to family visits was a huge incentive and participants felt let down when the visits were not possible.

5.7.2 Release and post-release

The authority and capacity of the Irish Prison Service to directly support prisoners after release are extremely limited. It can provide modest financial help with travel and first-day expenses on release and ISM officers help in extreme individual cases. It does not normally provide support in respect of issues relating to family relationships and re-integration. The Probation Service works with prisoners who are subject to post-release supervision, including those 'on licence' for life, but has limited opportunity to meet partners and children; their focus is primarily on the successful reinsertion of the prisoner in the community in terms of accommodation, work/training and support to avoid re-offending. Prison-based Probation staff have hand-over meetings with their community-based colleagues and the prisoner prior to release. Other services, including the education and psychology services, try to link prisoners with corresponding services in the community, but have no remit to follow up with prisoners and have no role in engaging with partners or children.

The exception in terms of linking with prisoners before and after prison is the Irish Association for Social Inclusion Opportunities (IASIO). It is commissioned on behalf of the Irish Prison Service and Probation to provide "through-the-gate" support and is unique in that it forms a relationship with the prisoner in prison and maintains the link for a time post-release. Its dual focus is currently on (i) education, work and training and (ii) reintegration issues such as accommodation and access to State and community-based services. It does not currently work with family members on family issues.

6

Meeting family re-integration needs



6. Meeting family re-integration needs

6.1 Introduction

It can be seen from the previous section that prisoners and their families are often ill-prepared for re-integration after prison and that post-release supports in this domain are very limited. Prisoners and their partners testified to the difficulties involved in re-integrating as a family and their stories mirror those in other studies in Ireland and abroad. Some prisoners assume that they can just return home and everything will be largely as it was before. The evidence is very much to the contrary.

The majority of prisoners interviewed in the prison setting showed little understanding of what might be involved. They tended at interview to focus almost exclusively on their prison experience to date and on their own needs rather than those of their partners or children, despite prompting by the interviewers. A small number appeared to have mental health or addiction issues that possibly impaired cognitive functioning. Stakeholder interviewees confirmed that self-focus was the norm in prison and that mental health and addiction issues were common. Former prisoners and their partners interviewed in community settings recounted difficult experiences in reintegrating. Those interviewed had overcome the challenges but said that they would have welcomed better preparation and support.

Service provider interviewees also identified a need for support around reintegration for some prisoners and families. This is supported by the literature. For maximum effectiveness this support needs to be provided during and after custody and for the prisoner and his family. The literature advocates provision by a service that straddles prison and community and highlights the importance of such a service building and maintaining a strong relationship with clients.

Based on the interviews and literature review, the type of support necessary consists predominantly of support and guidance and help with signposting and accessing of services. Potential activities include programmes on parenting, relationship management, conflict resolution and release preparation; provision of information about prison policies, procedures and rights; and provision of information on community-based services for children and adult family members such as counselling, addiction or mental health services. A key objective would be a check in with the prisoner and his family about concerns and anxieties around imprisonment, release and reintegration, providing a sympathetic, confidential listening ear.

A number of deliverables need to be in place if the needs of prisoners and their families are to be met as regards successful family re-integration. These are in keeping with the terms of reference of the study and the outputs sought. The outputs concern an awareness programme around family experiences for delivery to relevant prison personnel, a programme for prisoners and their families focusing on expectations and experiences around re-integration, a model for a service that supports prisoners and their families through their specific re-integration experience and an outline of an inter-agency protocol that would facilitate successful re-integration.

Access to services would have to be voluntary and by self-referral. Voluntary participation increases chances of success and makes for greater effectiveness

but it is difficult to see any practical alternative anyway: there is no existing mechanism to require families to participate and it would be a breach of their privacy to contact them unilaterally after release even if contact details were available. Whatever service was offered would thus have to be sold on its merits. Self-referrals could be generated in three ways: by targeting of individual prisoners while in prison, by targeting of family members known to have a parent in prison, and by universal provision of information to prisoners and families. This latter two could be by means of leaflets or other communication methods in the prison environment (e.g. in waiting areas, in visit rooms, in the visitor centre or on television monitors) and in community venues (e.g. community resource centres, health clinics, State services offices).

Several models of service suggest themselves, including a Tusla Meitheal-type approach, family welfare conferencing, extension of an existing service, or a new service organised along similar lines to Bedford Row in Limerick or involving prison staff. Each of these options is examined below in turn.

6.2 Potential models of service

6.2.1 Meitheal

Meitheal is a Tusla-led process to support families to access help in the community. It is described as “a way of working with children and their families to identify and respond to their strengths and needs in a timely way” (Tusla promotion leaflet for parents and carers). It brings together people and services who can offer relevant support. Access is by means of a request from a family, usually assisted by another community-based service with which the family has had contact. A Tusla co-ordinator then carries out an assessment that looks at strengths and needs and puts the family in touch with the relevant individuals or service(s). A lead practitioner, who may be chosen by the family, arranges meetings to develop and implement a plan around needs and Tusla are not necessarily involved. Examples of challenges that Meitheal could help with include problems at school, children feeling down, parent-child relationships, difficult behaviour and ‘family problems’. (If there are concerns over child safety, a referral is made to the Tusla social work department, which is a legal requirement for any person or service, but child protection referrals through the Meitheal process were said at interview to be rare).

Prisoners’ families already have access to the Meitheal service under existing arrangements without having to reveal that the father is a prisoner. It could be expected that the father’s situation would be disclosed in most cases and we recommend that a question about imprisonment is asked as a routine part of assessment where a father’s absence is not otherwise explained. The criteria for access to Meitheal are broad enough to cater for situations of imprisonment (e.g. where children were sad or angry or acting out as a result) and could also cover situations where the primary need was to support partners and children to adjust to life after custody (e.g. through counselling, befriending or mentoring). Tusla interviewees acknowledged that the knowledge and experience of impacts of imprisonment among their staff and those in related community-based services were very limited and that an ‘imprisonment module’ needed to be developed to build the requisite level of understanding and skill.

Meitheal has primarily, if not exclusively, been a community-based process to date and sessions do not appear to have taken place in prison. Stakeholders felt that the process could be held in prison in certain circumstances and that it would be possible to find alternative ways to represent fathers’ voices in the

process and ensure their involvement at all stages. Tusla staff are experienced in visiting prisons, primarily about child protection concerns, and foresaw no great difficulty in extending visits to Meitheal welfare-related issues. Castlerea Prison also indicated a willingness in principle to facilitate Meitheal meetings in prison.

A potential disadvantage is that Meitheal is associated with Tusla, which we were told repeatedly would put families off. However, this need not be insurmountable and it is thought likely to change over time as Tusla's family support function becomes established and is more widely known and better understood. Many stakeholders felt that, while Tusla would always be involved in co-ordination and oversight, the gateway to the Meitheal process could be the growing network of Family Resource Centres. These are established across the country and exist in all prison locations. They are independent companies although funded to varying degrees by Tusla. They offer a range of services to families, are welcoming places and encourage casual dropping in. As was made clear in the interviews with prisoners and their partners, not everyone is aware of their existence and function and there is a need to ensure provision of relevant information to prisoners and their families at various locations and points in time, including the prison television system.

Meitheal requires a parent or guardian to take the initiative to self-refer but does not require the consent of both parents as long as the primary carer is on board. In the case of prisoner families, the partner could proceed without the consent of the prisoner. It would be open to prisoners to encourage their partners to engage with Family Resource Centres (or indeed a range of other existing services who can support Meitheal, such as early learning and care, schools and youth services) and with Meitheal and there would be real value in prisoners being informed and encouraged to discuss these options with their partner. This encouragement should be repeated at various stages and could be given by a variety of people, including prison personnel such as Family Liaison Officers, teachers or chaplains or prisoner peer groups (including prison Red Cross volunteers) or any new service established to support families (see below). Opportunities for discussion of, and preparation, for such options should be provided to prisoners and their partners through private visits and/or extended phone calls with as much flexibility in arrangements as possible.

Many of those interviewed advised that all prison personnel needed to be aware of Meitheal and community-based resources such as the Family Resource Centres and in a position to inform and encourage prisoners. They saw merit in ensuring that a prison representative would be a member of the local Child and Family Support Network as this would provide information about local services and contact details for relevant personnel; it would also provide a gateway to networks in other parts of the country so that prisoners from other parts of the country could be put in touch with equivalent services. It was explained that membership was not particularly onerous in terms of demands on time.

6.2.2 Family welfare conferencing

Tusla also operates a family welfare conferencing model which supports family, extended family and their own supporters to devise their own plan to deal with their situation without recourse to other services or professionals. It could be viewed as a 'Meitheal without professionals' and is designed to involve and empower family members and friends. It is modelled on the statutory family welfare conference process set out in the Children Act 2001. As with Meitheal, it is under the auspices of Tusla, initiated at the request of a family member and guided by an assessment of strengths and needs. The Tusla co-ordinator decides if a conference might be the most effective way of meeting needs, using his or her judgement, with more complex cases reserved for Meitheal. The Tusla role

at conferences is largely facilitative and the Tusla representative may be absent for much of the conference. The focus of conferences tends to be on specific problems that arise rather than preventive, relationship-building interventions. It shares with Meitheal the disadvantages of being associated with the Tusla brand and requiring self-referral to initiate proceedings. No examples were provided of cases where they were used in relation to families with a parent in prison or where they were actually held in prison but, as was the case with Meitheal above, stakeholders from Tusla and Castlereagh Prison saw no insurmountable obstacles in principle in facilitating such events. Again it would be very important to provide prisoners and families with full information at appropriate stages and facilitate private discussion between the prisoner and his partner to consider this option.

6.2.3 Service delivery by prison staff

Prison staff have a key role to play in supporting families through provision of information and encouragement about services, showing understanding of the impact of imprisonment on families and showing empathy and kindness consistent with their security duties. Prison services also make a significant contribution through parenting and pre-release courses and support. The Family Links Programme also envisaged the appointment of Family Liaison Officers (FLOs) in each prison as well as changes in visiting arrangements, parenting education for families and officer training in communication and child protection issues. Resource limitations have not allowed the roll-out of the initiative to all prisons and have halted delivery in the three prisons that had active programmes. This is expected to begin to change in the coming year and, as referred to earlier, IPS has stated its commitment to family support in its strategic plan 2016-2018 and its draft plan for 2019-2021. Considerable progress has taken place in other respects including notably in respect of its child protection policy and practice, with input by Tusla to policy development and training. A programme of upgrading visiting facilities is also under way and changes in visiting arrangements have been initiated.

The role of FLOs under the Family Links Programme was described primarily in relation to positive parenting. Training for FLOs focused on child protection, research and evidence underpinning Family Links, the parenting programme element of the initiative, developing empathy and non-judgemental approaches and knowledge of local supports and services. The envisaged family support role arising from our study goes further and embraces aspects of the Northern Ireland Prison Service family strategy discussed in Section 3.6. Specific responsibilities for Family Support Officers in Northern Ireland include:

- being available to meet families when required;
- acting as liaison between prison and outside agencies;
- holding induction sessions for families and prisoners;
- supporting prisoners with help and information;
- involvement in assessing prisoners for child-centred visits and co-facilitating them with visitor centre staff; and
- working in partnership with staff in visiting areas and visitor centres to provide child focussed theme days/weeks (NIPS, 2010, 6.2).

The list of functions does not include any role in delivery of parenting courses or otherwise specifically supporting parenting.

We envisage a combination of the two roles to support prisoners and families during imprisonment and for a time post-release. We envisage additional functions aimed at helping prisoners and families maintain as high a quality a relationship as possible, acting as friend and mentor, encouraging engagement with other services and courses, proactively checking in with the parties at intervals especially after home visits on temporary release, advocating for families at review meetings and in sentence planning, advising families of decisions that affect them and relaying their views back to the prison authorities, and possibly contacting families at committal about their immediate concerns. We also envisage delivery of awareness-raising for staff, prisoners and partners about the impact of imprisonment on families and challenges faced by prisoners and their families.

Prison officers could provide these enhanced services, including family liaison, but several disadvantages attach to this option: prisoners and their families are likely to be reluctant to engage with them after release, it would be a significant extension of the role of prison officers into the community and service delivery would be vulnerable to disruption due to staff shortages elsewhere. Some stakeholders also argued that prisoners would be reluctant to trust prison staff, especially prison officers, with personal information about their families and relationships. Prisoners and their partners strongly endorsed this view. Some stakeholders also emphasised that prison officers were unlikely to have the requisite skill set, which would resemble that of social care workers more than prison officers.

6.2.4 Enhancement of an existing prison service or development of a new service

An existing prison service could be enhanced with a view to providing on-going support to prisoners and their families in the prison and after release. The Irish Association for Social Inclusion Opportunities (IASIO) provides a number of services that bridge prison and community settings and could perhaps be developed to work on family and reintegration issues, facilitating reflection, communication and relationship re-building, as well as facilitating access to other services. It could also potentially incorporate a prison-family liaison role during the period of custody, such as that developed as part of the Family Links Programme. IASIO does not currently have capacity to offer such a service due to resourcing but could be asked to carry out a feasibility study on provision of such a service, either on a full-time or part-time basis. IASIO provides services across the prison estate and has a national management structure and database. Its different services are currently funded by IPS and the Probation Service under Service Level Agreements and sources of funding for any enhanced service and additional appropriately staff would need to be identified.

A variation on this option is to develop a new service. This would effectively resemble the IASIO option but could be delivered by a different provider. The Bedford Row model in Limerick provides an exemplar. It receives funding from the Irish Prison Service and others to provide support and counselling for prisoners, partners and children; information, referral and advocacy services; and re-integration and family links work. Key strengths have been identified as its focus on the prisoner, partner and children, continuous service during the period of custody and after, and its strong relationships with clients. A number of interviewees commented that it took Bedford Row many years to establish the reputation and trust that it enjoys today. Establishment of a similar service in another prison would not be overnight and different challenges arise in offering a similar service in rural settings. Other community-based services such as Barnardos could also potentially offer a service. The options of a new or expanded independent service are very much in keeping with the IPRT recommendation in its report "Picking Up the Pieces" (IPRT, 2012), discussed in Section 3.3.

Personnel employed would need to have relevant knowledge and skills in areas such as family well-being, family support, personal development, community development, facilitation, and communication. Personal attributes and values would include being non-judgemental, respectful and patient, a good listener, collaborative, flexible, encouraging and empowering and having a good understanding of discrimination and equality issues and the causes of poverty and disadvantage. These attributes and values pick up on some of the key characteristics of best practice service providers identified by NOMS (Ministry of Justice, 2014) and discussed in Section 3.4.

A draft protocol between Castlerea Prison and a new Family Support Service is set out in Appendix 1 (part A). The draft protocol needs to be changed if a different model of family support is decided, for example, if prison staff provide the service and work in partnership with Tusla in doing so.

6.3 Implementation

This study focused primarily on Castlerea Prison and the Tusla catchment areas of Galway and Roscommon. The insights and recommendations of the study have broader relevance for other prisons and Tusla areas across Ireland but the local context needs to be considered individually also. The needs of female prisoners require specific examination in particular as the experiences and needs of mothers who are separated from their families by imprisonment, during custody and post-release, are typically very different and more challenging compared with those of fathers. Other differences may emerge between prisons in Dublin and other areas, including for example interaction with multiple Tusla areas.

We submit that the findings and recommendations should be assessed by an inter-agency group such as the Family and Imprisonment Group and an action plan for implementation agreed. We are aware that IPS and Tusla have a number of collaboration mechanisms in place, including at Director-General and CEO level, and these clearly provide an opportunity for development of initiatives to reduce the risks and improve the life chances for children of parents who are imprisoned. A draft national protocol between the Irish Prison Service and Tusla is outlined in Appendix 1 (part B). A protocol at this level was recommended by a number of stakeholders interviewed. A comprehensive protocol involving other criminal justice agencies (notably the Probation Service) and community-based family support services could also be considered.

We did not discuss with stakeholders the question of resources for implementing our recommendations. IPS made it very clear that progress with the implementation of the Family Links Programme, including appointment of Family Liaison Officers and delivery of training programmes, was held up because of limited resources. All stakeholders anticipated resourcing difficulties with regard to implementing many of the recommendations in this report. The literature review highlights that Ireland is not unique in this respect. We recognise resource constraints but we do not expect a single agency to assume responsibility for funding the initiatives that are recommended. Many of the recommendations do not have massive resource implications. More importantly we feel that responsibility for protecting and promoting this sub-group of vulnerable children requires a whole of government approach to implementation and funding and cannot rest solely on Tusla and IPS.

7

Awareness-raising programmes



7 Awareness-raising programmes

7.1 Awareness programme for prison staff

Staff dealing with prisoners and their families need to be aware of the impact of imprisonment on families, especially children, and adapt their behaviour in order to minimise this. This is regardless of whether they are prison officers, prison management, teachers or services personnel, and regardless of where they work in the prison (e.g. visits, landings, workshops). This does not mean being lax on security or discipline. Rather it means showing understanding and empathy around family issues in their ongoing interaction with prisoners and making allowance for tensions and emotions that arise around visits and phone calls. In fact, demonstrating empathy and interest in relation to family matters is likely to enhance safety and security rather than diminish it.

This is not a new message and most staff do this in their everyday work. It is about doing it more consciously and consistently. It is also about systems and procedures being family-proofed so that issues outlined in Section 5, such as prison transfers and releases, take due account of family needs. It is also about leadership and supervision to ensure that behaviour is uniformly supportive of family relationships and challenging behaviour that is detrimental. Family-focused training needs to be incorporated into all levels of training across the Irish Prison Service and mentoring/coaching put in place to ensure integration of the family focus and ethos. That said, there are key messages related to family matters that could be delivered initially in a short awareness-raising course for staff and this part of the report looks at what they might be, drawing on the work of Family Links.

Content of Awareness Programme for Staff

Key focus: Why this theme is important – what we know about the following:

- context of prisoner reintegration reducing re-offending and intergenerational offending;
- impact of imprisonment on children and how they react – age dependent but includes anxiety about father's safety, feelings or fear of loneliness or rejection, shame, bullying, uncertainty about future, tensions with rest of family, protection of mother; child physical and mental health issues; how this manifests itself in children's behaviour during visits and more generally (and more importantly) in the community; what prison visits and phone calls are like for children and how they behave/act out; imprisonment of a parent as an Adverse Childhood Experience; knowing Dad is in prison despite being given a different explanation;
- impact on partners and change in parenting role – evidence of stress of parenting while separated; emotional, physical, financial strain; may blame prisoner; shame, lack of someone to talk to/ isolation; need to take decisions and deal with problems unilaterally; uncertainty/lack of information about prison; what prison visits and phone calls are like for partners and how they behave;
- impact on prisoner – loss of contact, worries about impact on partners and children, concerns about their place and role on release, self-focused concerns while in prison (need for money lodgements, clothes, telling about events/activities/progress in prison); what prison visits and phone calls are like for prisoners and how they behave;

- awareness of variability of prisoner/family situations, no stereo-types, cultural issues;
- experiences of reintegration in families: things will have changed during the prisoner's absence regardless of sentence length – change in roles, decision-making, household routines, children's interests/activities, relationship strengths, child independence/autonomy, child behaviour/conditions, psychological and behavioural issues (e.g. emotions such as anger and blame not dealt with), different expectations of household members; role of IPS/prison in preparing for return.

Key focus: what can be done better, why and how

- the context of responsibility of the prison service for both prisoner and family – presenting the view of IPS (e.g. strategic plan) and exploring staff views;
- the challenges for the prison – family information often lacking, not routinely provided on committal, dependent on Governor interview and what the prisoner is prepared to reveal, also on subsequent conversational interaction between prisoner and staff; the need for transparency on how and why family information is sought, stored and used;
- the role of prison in maintaining and supporting relationships – visits, calls, issues that arise from prisoner and family perspectives; explaining standard procedures and changes that might be necessary from time to time, being patient and sympathetic (and apologising where appropriate e.g. for curtailment of visits due to factors unrelated to behaviour during visits), understanding why prisoners and partners might be frustrated and angry;
- how the impacts of imprisonment outlined earlier manifest themselves in prison and how behaviour should be interpreted and dealt with by prison personnel;
- how to ensure security and good order without undermining families or exacerbating situations – interpreting rules and ensuring consistent behaviour by staff;
- developing emotional intelligence, empathy, restorative language/ approaches in building and maintaining relationships and preventing/ resolving conflict situations; limits of relationship building – keeping professional distance while showing interest in family; skill development;
- situational analysis – anticipating different scenarios during visits, after a phone call or after a home visit; role of class officers in particular in getting to know prisoners on their landing and being aware of family difficulties or tensions and demonstrating understanding and empathy;
- improving the physical environment for children;
- family visits as the norm unless there is a specific reason why not.

All family-focused staff training, including awareness raising, should use a combination of approaches consistent with internationally recognised adult learning styles including hand-outs, lecture presentations, small group discussions, practice development through role play, skills demonstration and practice reflection. A training resource package should be developed as a guide and support to trainers, building on the Family Links material.

Delivery is envisaged over one half-day and should be delivered in the prison by someone who is familiar with issues relating to imprisonment and its impact on family. That person should preferably be from within the prison, not necessarily a prison officer, with support from the IPS College as appropriate. Follow-up with participants could include discussion at individual supervision sessions or in group work where such opportunities arise. Colleagues and supervisors should be encouraged to appropriately challenge behaviour that is not consistent with IPS aspirations for family support.

Participant attitudes, knowledge and skills at the start and close of training should be surveyed on an anonymous basis in order to assess any change and feedback sought from participants about ways to improve the course.

If training is not feasible in the short term, relevant materials should be made available to staff and supervisors and managers should facilitate distribution and discussion.

7.2 Awareness programme for prisoners and partners

Prisoners and their partners could benefit significantly from awareness-raising around family reintegration issues. Reintegration is part of two existing programmes. One is the Family Links Programme, which deals mainly with parenting, including parenting while separated. Unfortunately it has been delivered with very small numbers and its implementation has been problematic as evidenced by the drop-off in participation. Furthermore, it is not being delivered at the time of writing nor is delivery envisaged within the year, although the IPS is committed to having a Family Links Coordinator in place by the end of 2019. A second way is through the pre-release course provided by the Prison Education Centre. It too reaches relatively small numbers and does not engage with partners.

The Irish Prison Service is committed to delivering the Family Links Programme and future delivery could incorporate an additional module on family reintegration, building on the materials developed to date. This would have the distinct advantage of both prisoners and partners participating either jointly or separately accessing common learning. We suggest programme content below. However that would not be sufficient. In research for this report several interviewees identified deficiencies in delivery of the programme (not its content), notably low participant numbers and high drop-off, attributed to prisoner movements and failure to meet expectations around family visits. Interviewees stressed the need for practical incentives for participants and not relying on the intrinsic merits of the programme to entice and keep participants.

The pre-release programme in the Education Centre could potentially incorporate material on reintegration. The course is designed and delivered by the teaching staff, who are employed by the local Education and Training Board, with input from a number of services such as the addiction service and MABS. If agreed, material on re-integration could be delivered by teachers or staff from other services (including any new service supporting reintegration). Some stakeholders expressed a preference for using internal services since they are already known to prisoners and are familiar with the prison setting. However, the course is for prisoners only, not their partners. The Education Centre also offers sessions on a drop-in basis on topics of interest such as grief, anger, suicide prevention and awareness and consideration could be given to occasional talks on family reintegration issues.

So, a different approach is needed if reintegration issues are to be addressed on the scale desired for both prisoners and their partners. There are challenges in delivering a short programme to prisoners' partners in rural areas, given lack of personal information, distances involved, reticence about being identified locally as having a partner in prison, and other reasons. There are even greater challenges in organising and co-ordinating delivery for partners and prisoners simultaneously. It is recommended nevertheless that a short programme be considered on a pilot basis, especially if a family liaison service is established, chiming with the Irish Prison Service Strategic Plan 2016-2018. The content of a programme would be somewhat similar to the first part for staff described above and should draw on the existing Family Links material.

Content of Awareness Programme for Prisoners and their Families

- impact of imprisonment on children and how they can react – including anxiety about father's safety, feelings or fear of loneliness or rejection, shame, bullying, uncertainty about future, tensions with rest of family, protection of mother; how this manifests itself in children's behaviour during visits and more generally (and more importantly) in the community; what prison visits and phone calls are like for children and how they behave/act out;
- impact on partners and change in parenting role – emotional, physical, financial strain, may blame prisoner, shame, lack of someone to talk to/isolation, need to take decisions and deal with problems unilaterally; uncertainty/lack of information about prison; what prison visits and phone calls are like for partners and how they behave;
- talking to their child about prisons and supporting them in visits;
- impact on prisoner – loss of contact, worries about impact on partners and children, concerns about their place and role on release, self-focused concerns while in prison; what prison visits and phone calls are like for prisoners and how they behave;
- awareness of individuality and variability of prisoner/family situations, no stereo-types, cultural issues;
- experiences of reintegration in families: experiences vary depending in part on sentence length but things will have changed during the prisoner's absence regardless of sentence length – change in roles, decision-making, household routines, children's interests/activities, relationship strengths, child independence/autonomy, child behaviour/conditions, psychological and behavioural issues (e.g. emotions such as anger and blame not dealt with), different expectations of household members; role of IPS/prison in preparing for return.

Delivery is envisaged in a two hour session. This is short but is likely to be all that is feasible in terms of availability and attention span. It should be delivered by someone who is familiar with issues relating to imprisonment and its impact on families. A number of stakeholders saw value in facilitation by more than one person, perhaps in a male/female combination. Several interviewees favoured involvement of former prisoners in delivery on the basis that they would have greater credibility and connection. Co-facilitation could potentially involve Tusla personnel. If the programme can be delivered jointly for prisoners and partners in the prison, the venue and atmosphere should be convivial and relaxed. If separate delivery is required, the same people should deliver both sessions. Ideally the programme would be delivered by the recommended new or extended service to help prisoners and families through the pre-and post-release

stages. This would help the people involved to get to know each other and build trust and thereby increase take-up of the service and enhance quality of engagement. In the absence of a dedicated family service, the programme would preferably be delivered by people known to the prisoners at least.

The name of the programme should be enticing and not imply any deficit on the part of participants. "Returning Home" was used in the information note to participants in the field work for this report and is recommended as a possibility. Teaching staff recommend inclusion of a literacy element in all programmes and providing accreditation where possible. While these are scarcely possible for a two-hour session, accreditation is already part of the longer courses and consideration could be given as to how to build in a literacy element in an extended Family Links Programme.

It is recognised that some people are unlikely to want to engage in group or classroom settings and their needs will be better accommodated through direct contact with the proposed family liaison service or other community-based service. It is important and necessary that participation in all programmes is voluntary.

It is not considered feasible for logistical and other reasons to provide a dedicated awareness programme for children of prisoners, even older children. Their needs can best be addressed in other ways, through the information provided to their parents and the provision of services in the community as discussed in Section 5. Interventions would be customised to individual family needs and circumstances. The recommended new family liaison service could consider the value of organising group discussions among children from time to time, recognising the value of peer support. The Visitor Centre could potentially play a role.

8

Recommendations



8. Recommendations

This section presents the main recommendations arising from this study. References to the relevant findings in the report are indicated in brackets after each recommendation.

Prison Service Recommendations

1. We recommend that all IPS policy and practice is developed from the perspective of the offender in the context of the family, with family support and parental learning embedded as key strategic interventions in offender management. (3.4)
2. We recommend that family information is collated on all prisoners and utilised to inform policy and service development, including an assessment of family needs. (3.4)
3. We recommend that making contact with family and providing information to families and next of kin on the prisoner's arrival is a priority for the prison and the responsibility of a designated person or service in the prison. For example, a standard text message confirming arrival at the prison, and noting how to arrange a visit, would be very helpful. Gardaí and the courts should provide information to families about procedures and provide family contact details to the prison. (5.3)
4. We recommend that the impact on families is explicitly taken into account in deciding transfers and that prisoners who have families within proximity of the prison are transferred only as a last resort. Families should be informed in good time. The text messaging service proposed above could support this. (5.4.1)
5. We recommend review of entry procedures and facilities and a special effort around first time visitors, whereby a designated person would explain everything personally in advance. (5.4.1)
6. We recommend review of the information on the IPS website to ensure that it is accurate and up-to-date. (5.4.1)
7. We recommend that visitors are given reasons for curtailment of visits unless there are security justifications for not doing so and that, where possible, visitors are notified as soon as it is known that visits are cancelled, without waiting for them to reach the prison to be told. (5.4.2)
8. We recommend that a comprehensive review is undertaken of the aesthetics of areas accessed by or visible to visitors, especially the entrance and search areas, and changes made that are informed by the children's perspective. (5.4.1)
9. We recommend that, consistent with Family Links, all prison staff in contact with families receive training on the impact of imprisonment on children and that relevant supervision and support is in place for staff. (5.4.2)
10. We recommend that Family visits are not seen as a privilege but something necessary and desirable in their own right. Family visits should not be a reward for good behaviour and families should not be punished because of a discipline breach by the prisoner. (5.4.2)

11. We recommend that family visits are the norm for all prisoners unless there are specific identified risks relating to abuse of this open kind of visit (and not breaches of discipline unrelated to visits). We recommend in the short term that prison transfers do not mean loss of family visits. (5.4.2)
12. We recommend that consideration is given to allowing visitors with small children to bring age-appropriate toys or games into the visiting area. (5.4.2)
13. We recommend that, to the extent possible, capacity is developed to facilitate a greater degree of phone contact between prisoners and their families. We also recommend the introduction of other communication methods, and the completion of the current Skype pilot and its subsequent roll-out, to enhance contact between prisoners and their families. (5.4.3)
14. We recommend that a child-friendliness audit is carried out of visit procedures and facilities and that plans are drawn up to remedy shortcomings. We recommend enhanced child-friendly environments and the provision of toys and games in family visit areas as a priority. (5.4.4)
15. We recommend, similar to many other reports, that resources are provided to ensure that existing rehabilitative capacity (training, education, treatment and other services) is consistently available and utilised and that capacity is developed to meet all needs, mindful of the interests of family dependents and breaking the cycle of offending. (5.5)
16. We recommend commitment of resources to ensure adequate sentence planning. We further recommend involvement of prisoners and their families in sentence planning, including but not confined to the pre-release stage, and wider use of managed release with feedback from prisoners and families. (5.7.1)
17. We recommend expansion of the pre-release and parenting courses so that they reach a greater number of prisoners and that the teachers who deliver them are involved in designing of any new programmes focusing on families. (5.7.1)
18. We recommend the reintroduction and full implementation of the Family Links Programme and its family-related training component as soon as practicable and that similar incentives for partner participation are offered and are followed through on. (5.7.1)
19. We recommend that all prison staff are skilled up to provide prisoners and their families with information on family services in the community and to encourage them to engage with such services prisoners are encouraged proactively in prison to motivate their partners to engage with Family Resource Centres, Meitheal and other family supports and that they be facilitated in doing so by maximum flexibility in communication arrangements. (6.2.1)
20. We recommend that all staff are given an understanding of the impact of imprisonment on families and of the dynamics and challenges of parenting and maintaining a family relationship during imprisonment. Dedicated Family Liaison Officers should be appointed in each prison with functions as envisaged under the Family Links Programme and including some of the functions of Family Support Officers in the Northern Ireland Prison Service. (6.2.3)
21. We recommend that family-focused training is on-going and integrated in all prison personnel training, initiated by half-day awareness sessions for all staff, with a mandatory module for all new recruits. We

recommend also that prisoner family issues are a standing item in staff monitoring and supervision. (7.1)

22. We recommend development and inclusion of an additional module in the Family Links Programme around expectations and experiences of family reintegration. (7.2)
23. We recommend that IASIO and the IPS carry out a feasibility study on the development and delivery of a family focused support service across the entire prison estate. (6.2.4)

Interagency and Cross-Departmental Recommendations

24. We recommend acceptance and implementation of the recommendations of the IPRT Action Plan for Children with a Parent in Prison, commencing with the establishment of an inter-departmental group, led by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs, to drive action and oversee progress. (3.3)
25. We recommend that Tusla and the IPS develop a family needs assessment process which is integrated into all service management processes. (3.4)
26. We recommend that mechanisms to facilitate engagement between fathers in prison and their children's school are considered, along the lines of the Parc Prison Initiative (3.7)
27. We recommend that discussion takes place with the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection regarding the reintroduction of financial supports in cases of hardship, not limited to costs of travel for prison visiting purposes. (5.4.1, 5.6)
28. We recommend that Tusla and the IPS develop a joint strategy for prisoners and their families aimed at raising awareness of Tusla's prevention and early intervention role and at communicating the existence of community-based support services that they can avail of. Tusla and IPS should develop mechanisms for promoting engagement with the services, highlighting benefits and positive experiences. (5.6)
29. We recommend that a protocol between Tusla and IPS is agreed so as to facilitate Meitheal sessions being held in prison and that creative methods are considered to maximise engagement of all relevant parties. (6.2.1)
30. We recommend that a communication strategy is agreed between Tusla and IPS that would enable clear, user-friendly information about Meitheal, Family Resource Centres and other family services to be supplied to prisoners and families at different locations and points in time and in multiple formats. We recommend development of a multi-agency communication strategy that would make relevant information available across a range of sites, including citizen advice services and Children and Young People's Services Committees (CYPSCs). (6.2.1)
31. We recommend that all prison personnel are informed about family resources in the community including Meitheal and that the prison is represented on the Child and Family Support Network for the local area. (6.2.1)
32. We recommend that family welfare conference options are included in information about family services provided to prisoners, their families and prison personnel. (6.2.2)

33. We recommend establishment of a family support service that straddles the prison and community settings and is seen as independent of State bodies, either through adaptation and development of an existing service or establishment of a new service. The interaction between such a service and Family Liaison Officers should be set out clearly to ensure complementarity of purpose without duplication of functions. (6.2.4)
34. We recommend that responsibility for assessing and implementing this report's recommendations rests with a multi-agency group such as the Families and Imprisonment Group, that nation-wide implementation takes account of the particular circumstances of each prison and that responsibility for improving the lot of children of prisoners is cross-Government. (6.3)
35. We recommend that awareness programmes for prisoners and their families are developed and that information about the programmes is made available in suitable locations within the prison and in the community. (7.2)
36. We recommend development of a module on the impact of prison on children and families, including proven models of intervention, and made available to the full range of relevant professionals, including teachers, social care, youth workers, social workers and Gardaí. (6.2.1)

Tusla and Family Support Recommendations

37. We recommend that a question about possible imprisonment of any absent parent forms a standard part of Tusla's assessment procedures and that summary data is analysed. (5.6)
38. We recommend that relevant staff of Tusla and other community-based services are informed through continuous professional development or otherwise of the impacts of imprisonment on families and that a dedicated imprisonment module be developed along the lines of other Meitheal modules. (6.2.1)
39. We recommend that services which work with children in the community, such as schools, early years services and youth services, have staff who are aware of the impact of prison on children, who consciously seek to identify such families, and who have the skills and resources to support the child (and possibly parents) in this experience. (7.2)
40. We recommend that Tusla addresses the widely held perception that they focus exclusively on child protection issues and that engagement with them risks having your child taken into care. A public campaign to promote the preventative nature of many Tusla services would greatly improve accessibility for vulnerable families.

9

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Appendices



Appendix 1 Draft Protocols

A Draft Protocol between Castlerea Prison and a Family Support Service

Preamble

Cognisant of the negative impact of imprisonment on prisoners and their partners and children, Castlerea Prison and the Family Support Service undertake to provide a support service to prisoners and families in counties Galway and Roscommon. This service aims to help prisoners and their families maintain as high a quality relationship as possible during the term of imprisonment and to support prisoner-family reintegration post-release. The service provided will recognise and take account of the variety of family situations that exist and service delivery will therefore be customised to meet these different needs. This protocol is guided by the best interests of the child in terms of protection and welfare. It will be delivered in full compliance with GDPR and other Data Protection legislation.

The service is in respect of prisoners who are in custody in Castlerea Prison or who have served the bulk of their sentence there. The service will be provided for an initial period of two years and will be reviewed on an ongoing basis through agreed monitoring and outcome measures and after 18 months.

Castlerea Prison

1. Castlerea Prison undertakes to promote the uptake of the service by prisoners and their families and to inform its staff and service personnel of the existence of the service and its purpose and modalities and to encourage them (in particular ISM Officers and Class Officers) to inform prisoners.
2. The Prison will make information about the service available to prisoners and visitors in appropriate formats and locations in the prison.
3. The Prison will ensure prompt communication to the Service of expressions of interest by prisoners and facilitate contact between them.
4. The Prison will confirm relevant prisoner details with the Service, consistent with GDPR requirements. The Prison will update its prisoner records with information provided by the Service about engaging and, in due course, disengaging with the Service.
5. The Prison will facilitate contacts in the prison between the Service and the prisoner and/or his family that will allow private and confidential conversations.
6. The Prison will facilitate the participation of the Service in sentence planning and review meetings.
7. The Prison will liaise with the Service in respect of other services available or being delivered to the prisoners and their families.
8. The Prison will encourage and facilitate liaison between the Service and the prison Education Centre in relation to collaboration on and development of the existing Pre-Release courses.
9. The Prison will inform the Service about decisions affecting families directly – changes to visits (including family and home visits) and phone calls, and release plans (including temporary releases for whatever purpose, e.g. the Community Return Programme and the Community

Support Scheme) — to allow the Service to inform the families and pass back their views. The Prison undertakes to give maximum possible notice of such decisions or, where immediate action has had to be taken, to inform the Service as soon practicable after the decision. The Prison will take account of family needs in its decision-making and explain the rationale for its decisions.

10. The Prison undertakes to provide appropriate incentives, as far as practicable, for prisoners to participate in pre-release programmes and other parenting/re-integration and similar programmes and to maintain incentives such as family visits in place in the interests of the family and especially children.
11. The Prison will provide appropriate office accommodation and facilities in the prison for the Service staff.
12. The Prison (or other funder) commits to funding the service for two years and to reviewing the service in conjunction with the Service and other partners, using agreed monitoring and outcome measures.

The Family Support Service

1. The Support Service undertakes to provide a support service to prisoners and families in the Galway and Roscommon area aimed at helping prisoners and families maintain as high a quality a relationship as possible during imprisonment and to support reintegration post-release.
2. The Service will be offered on a self-referral, voluntary basis and depends on a request from the prisoner and/or his family. The Service will engage with prisoners and their families jointly if both parties wish to avail of the service or separately if only one party wishes.
3. The Service will respond promptly to referrals, generally within a week at the latest. The Service will provide the support service to prisoners and their families at any time during imprisonment and up to three months after the prisoner's release, with a possibility of extension in exceptional cases and with the agreement of the funding agency.
4. The Service will meet prisoners in prison and, post-release, in the community, and will meet their partners and families in the prison or Visitor Centre and/or in the community.
5. The Service will encourage all adult parties to participate in appropriate pre-release and reintegration programmes and support them in their participation. It will deliver such programmes or provide input to such programmes as required.
6. The Service will be pro-active in systematically checking in with parties about their experiences, concerns and needs during the period of delivery of the service. The Service will debrief the prisoner and his family after any home visits and offer feedback and advice.
7. The Service will participate in sentence planning and review meetings, sharing relevant information, with the families' prior agreement.
8. The Service will liaise with Castlerea Prison, the Probation Service, other State agencies and community and voluntary groups in respect of services available or being delivered to the prisoners and their families.
9. The Service will encourage families to engage with Tusla and other community-based services and make appropriate referrals with the agreement of the families.
10. The Service will collaborate with the prison's Education Centre to provide input to and development of existing Pre-Release courses. It will

also deliver or contribute to the delivery of a training module or modules on the impact of imprisonment on family relationships and issues around re-integration in existing or new programmes for prisoners and their partners.

11. The Service will advise families of decisions affecting them directly – changes to visits (including family and home visits) and phone calls, and release plans (including temporary releases for whatever purpose, including the Community Return Programme and the Community Support Scheme), based on information supplied by the prison authorities. The Service will relay any views of the families back to the prison authorities if they desire, without compromising their right to use other avenues of communication, appeal or redress.
12. The Service will maintain, and keep confidential, appropriate files, including a record of contact details and number and nature of contacts, issues and actions and will provide the prison authorities and/or funder with regular management reports. The service will co-operate with research and evaluation of the service and provide access to relevant information. The Service will comply with all GDPR rules and regulations and maintain the confidentiality of its dealings with prisoners and their families and divulge information only with the consent of the parties or in such a way that the identities of the parties cannot be established.
13. The Service will be mindful of the needs of children where a parent has been imprisoned and provide appropriate support to or for children to the best of its ability, or support referral to other services where appropriate. It will meet fully its statutory child protection and other obligations.
14. The Service will ensure that its staff have a comprehensive understanding of the impact of imprisonment on family relationships, especially children, and are competent in providing support and advice to prisoners and their families during and after imprisonment. The Service will provide support and supervision to their staff engaging with prisoners and families and ensure provision to them of relevant continuing professional development.

B Outline Protocol between the Irish Prison Service and Tusla, the Child and Family Agency

Preamble

Children of prisoners are more likely to experience negative educational, behavioural and emotional outcomes and are at increased risk of future incarceration. Having a parent in prison is also acknowledged as an Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE). Cognisant of these negative impacts on children of prisoners, the Irish Prison Service and Tusla, the Child and Family Agency undertake to work together to enhance life chances of children of prisoners. The agencies will develop and implement initiatives aimed at protecting children, accessing appropriate support services, helping prisoners and their families maintain as high a quality relationship as possible during the term of imprisonment and supporting prisoner-family reintegration post-release. This protocol is guided by the overarching objective of working in the best interests of the child as regards their protection and welfare.

Irish Prison Service (IPS)

1. IPS undertakes to work closely with Tusla, the Child and Family Agency as regards children of imprisoned parents.
2. IPS will ensure that its staff are fully trained in Children First and ensure that its child protection policy takes account of Tusla guidance and that IPS staff fully comply with it.
3. IPS will participate in joint initiatives to underpin co-operation such as meetings at Director General and CEO level and any working groups that are in existence or might be established to develop and monitor policy and practice in this area.
4. IPS will contribute to the design and delivery of training of Tusla staff about the impact of imprisonment on children and their families and about prison procedures.
5. IPS will promote the uptake of Tusla family support services by prisoners and their families and inform its staff and other prison personnel of the existence of these services and encourage them to inform prisoners.
6. IPS will ensure that each prison is represented on relevant Tusla Child and Family Support Networks.
7. IPS will make information about Tusla services available to prisoners and visitors in appropriate formats and locations in the prisons and ensure prompt communication to Tusla of expressions of interest by prisoners.
8. IPS will facilitate contacts in the prisons between Tusla and the prisoner and/or his family that will allow private and confidential conversations, in child-centred environments if children are present.
9. IPS will facilitate Tusla input in sentence planning and review meetings in appropriate cases.
10. IPS will inform Tusla about key decisions affecting families during custody and release (including temporary releases), where consent to do so has been provided by the relevant parent or where it is in the best interests of the child.
11. IPS undertakes to provide appropriate incentives, as far as practicable, for prisoners to participate in parenting/re-integration programmes.
12. IPS will record details of all children under age 18 who are visiting prisoners, including their relationship with the prisoner, using the standardised approach agreed with Tusla and share relevant information with Tusla where concerns are raised and consistent with GDPR requirements.

Tusla, the Child and Family Agency

1. Tusla undertakes to work closely with IPS as regards children of imprisoned parents.
2. Tusla will participate in joint initiatives to underpin co-operation such as meetings at CEO and Director General level and any working groups that are in existence or might be established to develop and monitor policy and practice in this area.
3. Tusla will ensure that its staff are informed about the impact on children of imprisonment of a parent.
4. Tusla will contribute in the design and delivery of training regarding its services for prison staff and of training for prisoners and their families relevant to parenting or relationships where requested.

5. Tusla will make information about Tusla services available to prison staff and to prisoners and visitors in appropriate formats and locations.
6. Tusla will respond promptly to prison referrals to its services and will provide appropriate support services to prisoners' families during imprisonment and for a time post-release.
7. Tusla will meet prisoners in prison and, post-release, in the community, and will meet their partners and families in the prison or Visitor Centre and/or in the community as required.
8. Tusla will participate in or contribute to sentence planning and review meetings where appropriate.
9. Tusla will facilitate membership of Child and Family Support Networks by a nominated person from each prison.

Appendix 2 Flow Chart for Family Support Service

0. Pre-Referrals

Information is made available in the prison and the community about the family support service through training and education programmes, leaflets, notice boards, contact with existing services, , etc. (Information is also made available about other services such as Tusla Child and Family Support Network.)

1. Referrals

1.1 Prisoner initiates referral in prison

Prisoner asks Class Officer (or ISM officer or other person) for referral to the Service (on own initiative or responding to prompt from prison staff).

Class Officer makes referral to the Service – giving name or number and/or completing any form and confirms that the prisoner meets the criteria (i.e. has children under 18 and has an address in Galway or Roscommon) using a referral form.

Service contacts prisoner for preliminary discussion, outlining the nature of the service and getting prisoner details such as family situation, address, expected release date and whether he has a sentence plan/is engaged with his ISM officer, whether he is engaged with IASIO and/or Probation Service and whether he wishes to proceed alone with the Service and/or wishes to consult with his partner about her involvement; Service records details and prisoner signs agreement form.

If the Prisoner wishes to proceed, **Service informs Class Officer**/ISM officer of the prisoner's decision who then updates the prisoner's sentence plan and PIMS and verifies the information provided by the prisoner (i.e. family situation, address, sentence release date); Service awaits decision of partner.

If the Partner wishes to proceed, prisoner or partner advises Service, **Service arranges meeting with prisoner and partner** during next visit to the prison or arranges a professional visit to confirm agreement and share information about the family situation, expectations and concerns. Service records details and partner signs agreement form. Service provides advice and signposts other relevant services in the prison and community. Service informs Class Officer/ISM Officer who updates sentence plan and PIMS about decision to engage.

1.2 Partner of prisoner initiates referral in the community

Partner makes contact with the Service directly (prompted by information leaflet or otherwise) or indirectly (through an existing community-based service or intermediary).

Service contacts partner for preliminary discussion, outlining the nature of the service and getting details such as family situation, address, prisoner name, expected release date and, to the extent possible, his engagement with prison services and potential interest in engaging with the Service; Service records details and partner signs agreement form.

With the partner's agreement, **Service contacts prisoner** through the prison authorities and explores his interest in engaging with the Service.

If prisoner agrees to engagement, prisoner signs agreement form and **Service informs prison authorities** of the prisoner's decision; prison then updates the prisoner's sentence plan and PIMS and verifies the information provided by the partner/ prisoner (i.e. family situation, address, sentence release date). **Service arranges meeting with prisoner and partner** during next visit to the prison or arranges a professional visit to share information about the family situation, expectations and concerns. Service provides advice and signposts other relevant services in the prison and community. Service informs prison authorities who update sentence plan and PIMS.

If prisoner does not agree to engagement, **Service informs prison authorities** of the prisoner's decision who then update the prisoner's sentence plan and PIMS. **Service meets partner** in the community, discusses the family situation, expectations and concerns and provides advice and signposts other relevant services in the community and prison. Service keeps prison authorities informed through the sentence management and review processes, with the agreement of the partner.

2 Service provision

2.1 Prisoner and partner both engaged

2.1.1 Prior to release – Prisoner and partner both engaged

Service supports prisoner and family, assisting them with listening and advice and helping them make necessary contacts with other family services. This step is repeated as required. Service continues to meet prisoner and family jointly in prison and/or separately (meeting prisoner in prison and family in the community). Service is proactive at regular intervals in checking in with prisoner and family about their progress, wellbeing and concerns. Service works with both parties or with one of the parties on their own if the other decides to opt out.

Service encourages participation in any pre-release or reintegration programmes and supports them in participating, discussing how they felt about it, etc.

Service participates in sentence planning and review meetings, sharing relevant information.

Service advises family of decisions affecting them – changes to visits (including family and home visits), phone calls, and release (including temporary releases for whatever purpose), based on information supplied by the prison authorities. Service acts as two-way channel for information sharing.

Service maintains appropriate confidential files, including a record of contacts,

issues and actions and provides the prison authorities and/or funder with regular management reports.

Service debriefs prisoner and family after any home visits and offers feedback and advice.

2.1.2 Post-release – Prisoner and partner both engaged

Service supports prisoner and family, especially in immediate aftermath of release, assisting them with listening and advice and helping them make necessary contacts with other services (repeating this step as required). Service continues to meet prisoner and family jointly and/or separately in the community. Service is proactive in checking in with prisoner and family about their progress, wellbeing and concerns. Service continues to support individuals even if the other party no longer wishes to be involved.

Service maintains appropriate confidential files, including a record of contacts, issues and actions and provides the funder with regular management reports.

2.2 Partner engaged, prisoner not engaged

2.2.1 Prior to release – prisoner not engaged

If the prisoner has not agreed to engage, Service works with the partner/family in the community. Service leaves open the possibility of the prisoner engaging at a later date. Service checks with partner to ensure she wishes to continue engagement despite the prisoner's non-engagement.

Service encourages the partner's participation in any pre-release or reintegration programmes and supports them in participating, discussing how they felt about it, etc.

Service participates in sentence planning and review meetings, sharing relevant information.

Service advises family of decisions affecting them – changes to visits (including family and home visits), phone calls, and release (including temporary releases for whatever purpose), based on information supplied by the prison authorities. Service acts as two-way channel for information sharing.

Service maintains appropriate confidential files, including a record of contacts, issues and actions and provides the prison authorities and/or funder with regular management reports.

Service debriefs partner after any home visits by prisoner and offers feedback and advice.

2.2.2 Post-release – prisoner not engaged

Service supports partner/family, subject to confirmation with the partner that she wishes to continue.

Service maintains appropriate confidential files, including a record of contacts, issues and actions and provides the funder with regular management reports.



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