

Families Apart Protocol:
supporting the needs of
prisoner families

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Introduction

In 2009, the Local Authority's Learning and Children's Services, commissioned Welcare to further develop the Families Apart Project and the support offered in Kingston to families who are impacted by a parent or significant family member in prison. The Families Apart project offers support and advice to local families and their children who may be struggling with a variety of issues as a result of a member of the family being imprisoned.

Part of this work was to work alongside multi agency partners to identify those families affected and to highlight the difficulties facing families of offenders and to look to improve integrated ways of working to address the needs of these vulnerable families.

This protocol has been developed in the Royal Borough of Kingston to raise awareness of the needs of children, young people and families impacted by a family member being in prison and to promote social inclusion.

It should be read and implemented, where necessary, by all staff across adult and children's service and is a useful tool to support professionals engaged with families who are impacted by a parent or significant family member in prison.

Aims of the protocol

All agencies in the Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames are committed to ensuring that all children and young people, including those who have a parent or significant family member in prison achieve their ambitions and fulfil their potential.

As many of these children and young people are likely to require additional support from services and agencies across the spectrum of universal, targeted and specialist services to achieve these five outcomes, this protocol focuses on identification of these needs at an early stage.

The aims of the protocol are:

- To raise awareness of the needs of children, young people and families with a parent or significant family member in prison.
- To secure positive outcomes for children and young people impacted by a parent or significant adult in prison in line with Every Child Matters.
- To enable all sector partners to develop a shared understanding of the needs of children, young people and families impacted by a parent or significant adult in prison and promote closer joint working relationships in line with Kingston's Information Sharing and Integrated Working agenda.
- To promote and share best practice in the support of these children, young people and families.
- To ensure children, young people and families impacted by a parent or significant adult in prison has the same opportunity to achieve positive life outcomes as other children.

- To provides a range of multi agency training to support the implementation of this protocol.
- All schools and other relevant services/agencies identify a designated person to look after the interests of children and young people impacted by a parent or significant family member in prison.

Principles

- All **professionals** who come into contact with children, their parents and families in their every day work **have a statutory duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of the child** (see Section 11 of the Children Act 2004). This applies even if the professional is not a social worker in children’s social work or a designated or named safeguarding professional.
- The welfare of the child is of paramount importance.
- Risks to children are reduced through effective multi agency and holistic multi disciplinary working and information sharing. Think Family’ means securing better outcomes for children, young people and families with additional needs by co-ordinating the support they receive from children’s, young people, adult and family services.
- To ensure that the response to children, young people and families impacted by a parent or significant family member in prison is consistent across all sector partners through the development of joint working protocols.
- All sector partners across the Children’s Trust will promote partnership working with Adult Services to ensure effective information sharing and identification of needs.
- Provision of support is central to objectives on tackling child poverty and inter-generational disadvantage.
- Where there are identified needs, children and families are best supported through a multi-agency assessment using CAF and a holistic approach using the Team around the Child (TAC) model.

National Framework

The Ministry of Justice estimates that there are 160,000 children with a parent in prison each year and expects this figure to rise to 200,000 by 2012. Around 66% of women prisoners are believed to be mothers, but nobody really knows how many school children actually have a parent in prison. Research suggests that children of prisoners experience a greater risk of depression, low self-esteem, lack of concentration, low academic performance, increased truanting and delinquent behaviour.¹

¹ ‘Don’t judge the children’: Learning Support Summer Term 2 2008.

As noted in the study published by The Social Care Institute for Excellence in April 2008, there are numerous reports, guidance, legislation and documentation that cover improving outcomes for children. The group who lose a parent (or carer) to custody is a small but significant number who, for the most part, remain unnoticed and therefore unsupported. For many families this is exactly how they will want it to stay, as they are afraid of the repercussions and stigma that may result from disclosure. Nevertheless, there is a duty of care and a duty to provide these children with the same opportunities for success as everyone else.²

Recommendations from the study demonstrate the need to ensure that family ties are maintained and that children who are affected by having a parent in prison are given the same opportunity as other children to meet the five outcomes of Every Child Matters. This responsibility cuts across all sectors, once again highlighting the need for a multi –disciplinary response.

Considerations included:

- **Recognising that this is a distinct group of children who are at higher risk of social exclusion than the general population and so require specialist policies and support.**
- **Appropriate training and awareness raising across all sectors about the impact of parental imprisonment.**
- **The particular needs of this group should be incorporated by local authorities into their children and young people’s plans.**
- **Better signposting of information and support.**
- **Encourage better communication and liaison across service boundaries.**³

In 2009, the Ministry of Justice and the Department for Children, Schools and Families published *Reducing re-offending: supporting families, creating better futures: a framework for improving delivery of support for the families of offenders*. This report outlined the Government’s commitment to a national programme of reform and culture change that involved police, probation, prisons, schools, children’s services, the NHS and job centres, working with our partners

- **To improve the identification and support of adults experiencing problems who are parents or carers;**
- **To coordinate the support that is provided by different agencies to the same family and in particular families experiencing significant problems.**

² ‘Children of prisoners – maintaining family ties: SCIE April 2008.

³ Children of prisoners – maintaining family ties: SCIE April 2008.

The vision of the framework was to develop a coherent system to support offenders' children and families by ensuring:

- **Strong national, regional and local partnerships are in place and working together on the Every Child Matters and Reducing Re-offending agendas.**
- **There is greater consistency in meeting the needs of offenders' families and there are clear routes for them to be able to access support.**

- **Families are supported within local communities at each stage of the criminal justice system, ensuring that the children are in receipt of relevant universal services and linking them with relevant targeted services to support them through the process.**

- **That all parts of the system 'Think Family' and local authorities offer targeted parenting and family support for children and families of offenders with additional needs.**

- **Children who are suffering, or are likely to suffer, harm are identified and safeguarded.**

- **We achieve a diverse Third Sector, working with offenders' families and helping us to make the case for investing in these families as part of a wider agenda to tackle social exclusion.⁴**

National Offender management Service (NOMS)

NOMS is an executive agency of the Ministry of Justice, bringing together the headquarters of the Probation Service and HM Prison Service to enable more effective delivery of services. NOMS is responsible for commissioning and delivering adult offender management services, in custody and in the community, in England and Wales.

In 2004 and 2005, the Government published Reducing Re-offending Delivery Plans, recognising that NOMS and the Criminal Justice System needed the support of a wide range of organisations and local communities to tackle re-offending. This included a pathway for the children and families of offenders, which had the following cross government aims:

- **maintaining family relationships to help prevent re-offending**

- **encouraging the inclusion of life skills, including parenting and relationship skills, within mainstream support for offenders**

- **engaging the Third Sector and faith communities in supporting children and families of offenders**

- **developing better material and advice and guidance for children and families of offenders**

⁴ *Reducing re-offending: supporting families, creating better futures: a framework for improving delivery of support for the families of offenders:* Ministry of Justice and the Department for Children, Schools and Families 2009

- **ensuring that the interests of children and families of offenders were considered with the implementation of *Every Child Matters*⁵**
- **a Working Agreement between Probation and The Families Apart Project which lays out expectations for the sharing of information regarding children who have a family member going or already in prison**

Think Family agenda

The 'Think Family' approach was developed to improve the support offered to vulnerable children and adults within the same family. 'Think Family' aims to secure better outcomes for children, young people and families with additional needs by co-ordinating the support they receive from children's, adults and family services.

This means services work together to:

- Identify families at risk of poor outcomes and provide support at the earliest opportunity
- Meet the full range of needs within each family they are supporting or working with
- Develop services which can respond effectively to the most challenging families, and
- Strengthen the ability of family members to provide care and support to each other

Think Family applies to mothers, fathers and other adults who have responsibility for the care of children and young people. This may include any adult who has a significant relationship with the primary care givers in the family as well as the primary care givers themselves.

Targeted support for parents and families and Parenting Early Intervention programmes is designed to provide evidence-based support to families experiencing problems. Too often parents pass their own problems onto their children, creating a never-ending cycle, generation after generation which becomes difficult to break.

⁵ *Reducing re-offending: supporting families, creating better futures: a framework for improving delivery of support for the families of offenders*: Ministry of Justice and the Department for Children, Schools and Families 2009

Identifying and engaging families in need of support. Guidance for professionals working with a child, young person or family impacted by a parent or significant family member in prison in Kingston

In a recent report published in March 2010 titled 'Perspectives of children and young people with a parent in prison' it was noted that the effects of a family member's imprisonment on children parallel children's experiences of bereavement. This includes deterioration in behaviour, in physical and mental health, and in social and financial circumstances. Imprisonment can also impact children's housing and care arrangements, schooling, victimisation, substance misuse, and risk of future offending.⁶

At present in Kingston, we have no clear indication of how many children, young people and families are currently impacted by a parent or significant family member in prison. In a consultation carried out by the Families Apart project with a range of multi agency partners in 2009, 23 families were identified as being impacted by a significant family member in prison. Only 28 professionals responded who noted that they knew of other families but they hadn't directly worked with them and that they didn't engage with services. Professionals were asked what the main concerns for children, young people who were impacted and in each response the main issue for parents was with regard to family breakdown followed by emotional /behavioural difficulties and parenting issues for the remaining parent/carer.

Some of the main themes Identified from the consultation exercise included:

- Families do not come forward for help or do not want professionals to know that they have a family member in prison.
- Making sure families receive the correct help and support
- Family members do not want information passed on to other professionals so it can make it more difficult to work in a multi agency way.
- The families that were identified were already being worked with at Level 4 Safeguarding and were likely to be flagged due to other issues around child protection or child in need.

All local authorities are required to have systems in place to identify children who are at risk of failing to achieve their potential and to ensure that appropriate help and support is provided at an early stage.

It is increasingly recognised in practise that a failure to share information, even regarding a low level need, may have serious consequences for the welfare of a child, if not considered together with the concerns of others. Practitioners in different agencies should therefore be encouraged to work together to share information for the safety and wellbeing of children.

⁶ *Perspectives of Children and Young People With a Parent in Prison: Tânia Loureiro on behalf of Scotland's Commissioner for Children and Young People and Families Outside: March 2010*

Where a service/professional believes there is the need for further support for the child and the family, but the concerns are not about a child/ young person being at risk of significant harm practitioners should contact ASKK (Tel: 0208 547 5888). ASKK is Kingston's Information Sharing hub that coordinates information and support for children and young people with additional needs from a range of sources to ensure that families get the help they need, when they need it.

This early identification and preventative response gives families extra support before a crisis point is reached. It is important to identify these children early and help them before the situation becomes more difficult.

The majority of children with parents in prison are not known and so do not get a service, although research has shown the potential long term impact of parental imprisonment. (Social Care Institute for Excellence)

The Common Assessment Framework is the tool used in Kingston to assess the needs of vulnerable children and young people and to broker appropriate early intervention and prevention services to meet need. Professionals working with a child, young person or family who they suspect may be impacted by a parent or significant family member in prison should consider the following:

- **Completing a CAF with the family and take the opportunity to explore the issues and its impact on the child/children in the family**
- **The professional should be aware of the different stages of a prisoners sentence such as pre arrest, arrest, sentencing ,custody, review ,pre release and resettlement which can all bring up different challenges for the family**
- **Professionals should be aware of the challenges that families face such as Housing issues, Financial hardship, behavioural difficulties in children, feelings of loss of the significant adult, secrecy around the circumstances surrounding the adult entering the criminal justice system and the perceived stigma experienced by the family**

This protocol supports the need to raise awareness of the needs of children, young people and families with a parent or significant family member in prison in Kingston, to secure positive outcomes and enable all sector partners to develop a shared understanding of the needs, promoting closer joint working relationships in line with the borough's Information Sharing and Integrated Working agenda.

If there are concerns the child/ young person may be at risk of significant harm, a referral should be made to Kingston's Safeguarding Service 0208 547 6587.

For more information and links to useful resources please see Annexes.

The Families Apart Project

Families Apart is a project based at WelCare House in Canbury Park Road, Kingston. The project offers help and advice to local families with children who may be struggling with a variety of issues as a result of a close member of the family being imprisoned. Families Apart can help make a difference to the lives of parents, children and young people by offering support around improving finances, parenting and enabling children to express their feelings concerning their imprisoned relative. Workers are available to meet families in their homes, at Welcare house or in schools and have a wealth of creative and practical resources available to pass on to families and professionals/agencies working with families of prisoners.

For further information contact Kingston WelCare on 020 8546 3258, email familiesapart@welcarekingston.org.uk or view the WelCare website at www.welcarekingston.org.uk.

Training

Families Apart will provide a range of briefing sessions and training to support the implementation of this protocol.

The local authority also offer a comprehensive programme of training in relation to Safeguarding, Integrated Working and the use of the Common Assessment Framework that will support practitioners to apply this protocol in their work

Tel: 0208 547 6092

http://www.kingston.gov.uk/browse/community_people_and_living/children_and_young_people/cf/training_programme_for_professionals.htm

Monitoring and Review

The effectiveness of this protocol will be monitored on a quarterly basis by the Families Apart Steering Group and reviewed on an annual basis.

Annex 1: Useful Resources

The Outsiders Series Booklets to help families cope with imprisonment.

Telling the Children; Sent to Prison; Preparing for Release; Living with Separation

www.prisonersfamilies.org.uk

Visiting my Dad /my Mum downloadable resources to help children talk about their visit

www.ormiston.org.uk

‘Danny’s Mum’ and ‘Tommy’s Dad’ books for younger children about having a parent in prison

www.prisonersfamilies.org.uk

‘Finding Dad’ a book and CD for older children www.prisonersfamilies.org.uk

‘It’s a tough time for everyone’ cartoon book for older children/teenagers

www.prisonersfamilies.org.uk

APF Information Sheets a set of information sheets with useful information for families (including information about serious and sex offenders) is available on the APF website

www.prisonersfamilies.org.uk

Prisoners’ Families Toolkit a very useful resource including worksheets to help children talk about their feelings <http://www.youngsouthampton.org/workforce/>

Prison Service Website contains information about all the prisons in England and Wales, including information for visitors

<http://www.hmprisonservice.gov.uk/>

Prison Reform Trust

Aims to create a just, humane, and effective penal system. Research, publications, current projects, and event information.

<http://www.prisonreformtrust.org.uk>

UNLOCK, the National Association of Reformed Offenders

The National Association of Ex-Offenders. Founded in 1999, we exist to campaign for better facilities for serving prisoners to plan for life after release.

01634 247351 <http://www.unlock.org.uk>

Inside Information

This service is designed to help prisoners, their friends and family members and anyone working in a prison related industry or service.

<http://www.insidetime.org/info-home.asp>

Annex 2: Useful Numbers and Support Groups

Offenders' Families Helpline (formerly Prisoners' Families Helpline)

Free helpline offering confidential support to offenders' families

0808 808 2003

Parentline Plus

Free helpline offering help and support to anyone caring for children

0808 800 2222 <http://www.parentlineplus.org.uk>

Affect

Offers support for families in the south affected by long-term imprisonment

01329 832254 <http://www.affect.org.uk>

Prisoners' Friends and Families Service

London-based organisation offering support and helpline

0808 808 3444 <http://www.pffs.org.uk>

Action for Prisoners' Families

Action for Prisoners' Families promotes the just treatment of prisoners' families by the prison system and society across the UK.

0208 812 3600 <http://www.prisonersfamilies.org.uk>

Safeguarding Services

If there are concerns a child/ young person may be at risk of significant harm, a referral should be made to Kingston's Safeguarding Service

0208 547 6587 Email: safeguarding@rbk.kingston.gov.uk

ASKK (Advancing Services for Kingston Kids)

ASKK provides help, support and advice to families where children may become vulnerable without additional help.

020 8547 5888 Email: askk@rbk.kingston.gov.uk

There may be other sources of support in your area. Please contact Action for Prisoners' Families or Prisoners' Families Helpline for details.

Annex 3: Supporting Prisoners' Families –Guidance for schools

Supporting Prisoners' Families

What Can Schools Do

Key Facts

- 160,000 children have a parent sent to prison each year
- More children are affected by parental imprisonment than by divorce
- These children are more than twice as likely to suffer from mental health problems than their peers
- They are at high risk of not meeting the ECM outcomes

Be aware of the issues facing prisoners' families

Please see the list of resources, help lines and support groups. Training is also available from Action for Prisoners' Families and its member organisations.

Listen

Be non-judgemental and don't ask about the crime. Respect confidentiality where appropriate but follow your school's information sharing protocols.

Help the child talk through their feelings

There are many resources to help you do this including children's books, magazines and worksheets. Please see the resource list for more details.

Information for Families

Prominently display Offenders' Families Helpline leaflets and posters and other sources of support.

Whole School Approach

All staff including governors should be aware of the issues and a named staff member should be responsible for keeping up to date resources and information.

Authorised absence

Children visiting family members in prison should be granted authorised absence, but if a child is missing too much school, could you discuss other ways of keeping in touch – letters, recorded messages etc.

Curriculum

Sensitively incorporate issues around prison, crime and blame into subjects such as PSHE.

Keep the Prisoner Informed

The prisoner is a parent too. Where appropriate, routinely send information such as reports etc. to the prisoner.

Support for the family

As part of a multi-agency team around the child or family, you may be able to put the family in contact with the prison's family liaison officer in order to co-ordinate support for the whole family, including the prisoner.

Annex 4: Families Apart –Referral Pathway



PROFESSIONALS CRITERIA FOR FAMILIES APART PROJECT

Professionals may make referrals to the project for;

1. Parents with a partner/ ex-partner in prison.

2. Families with a young person/sibling in prison

3. Grandparent's who are caring for child with parent/sibling/other close relative in prison

- 4.' Looked After Children' with a parent/sibling/other close relative in prison

5. Families with a close relative in prison overseas

6. Young person with parent/sibling/other close relative in prison

7. THEMSELVES/OTHER PROFESSIONALS: Families Apart workers will accept referrals to support professionals throughout their work with a prisoner family should the family not wish to engage with the project or if it is not deemed appropriate.

8. Families who do not wish to maintain contact with the family member in prison.

A referral to the project can be made at any stage of the sentence, and we will work with families to prepare for release.

A referral to the project may be made by telephoning Families Apart on 020 8546 3258. The project has two workers available to take your call Monday to Thursday 9.30am – 3.30pm. Workers will gather information about the family and facilitate an initial meeting with you and the family. If support is appropriate this may commence within one week of the initial meeting.

Many thanks,

Families Apart Team

familiesapart@welcarekingston.org.uk

WelCare House, 53-55 Canbury Park Road, Kingston, KT2 6LQ

FAMILIES APART

Referral Pathway for Professional Support

Professional contacts Families Apart. Phones, emails or attends drop in at Guildhall 2.



Families Apart worker provides relevant information/literature regarding prisoners' families to support professionals work.



Professional requires no further support; or agrees professional support plan with Families Apart Worker, including dates and timescales. An example would be two meetings to support professional in their work with child/young person with a parent in prison.



Support plan ends. No further support required



Professional tracked post support to measure outcomes.



Family may then decide to receive support directly from Families Apart and professional makes a referral on their behalf.

(See referral pathway for families)

Referral Pathway for Families

Contact made to Families Apart by family or via professional by phone, email or by attending drop in at Guildhall 2.



Families Apart worker provides family with relevant information/signposts to other relevant agencies. Family requires no further support or agrees to receive further support from Families Apart.



Families Apart worker arranges initial meeting within 7 working days with the family to plan support including review dates and timescales.



Support plan commences and is reviewed at agreed dates.



Support ends or is reassessed to continue.



Family is tracked post support to measure outcomes



Family may receive further support at any time during their relative's sentence if further need occurs.