

Social Impact Report

Supporting Prisoners' Families



Prisoners' Families
and HMP Altcourse
Visitors' Centre

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In writing this report, PSS has relied heavily on the empirical doctoral research findings of Dr. Lorna Brookes, whose research was conducted alongside her role leading PSS support programmes for prisoners' families. Her unpublished thesis, entitled "Bubbles, Brick Walls and Connectivity: Families affected by parental imprisonment and their experiences of community-based support" is available on an Open Access basis from UCLAN and is pending publication.

Section 1: What is impact reporting?

At PSS, we're committed to helping people change their lives for the better.

We want to provide services that strengthen communities and empower individuals, and we're always on the hunt for new ways we can help create real improvements in society. To make sure we're doing this, we need to measure how many people we reach, how effective we are at what we do, and the value of the services we deliver. This will show us our social impact.

We prioritise social impact reporting because:



We often hear stories of the changes we have helped make in the lives of our service-users. We shine a light on these stories as part of our impact reporting process, helping to make them clearer and allowing them to show us what we're doing well and what we need to do better for our service users. This social impact report looks at the work done by our Prisoners' Families Service team, and the team who run the visitors' centre at HMP Altcourse. Although we use the term 'prisoners' families' here, the majority of the outcomes we talk about in this impact report relate to prisoners' children. There are, however, unquestionable benefits for the parents or carers of these children, and for the prisoners themselves.

The ultimate aim of this report is to look at what we do and be able to answer the question - **are we doing any good?**

Section 2: **Who we are**

We started our Prisoners' Families Service in 2013 when we identified the need for a service that works with children who have a parent in prison, or children whose parents have been in prison and have recently been released.

Our service provides:

- ✓ **Advice on what to tell children about imprisonment.**
- ✓ **One-to-one support for children to discuss their feelings and wishes regarding contact with their parent in prison.**
- ✓ **A peer-support group for children where they can meet others who share their experience whilst having fun.**
- ✓ **A support group for adults who have a loved one in prison.**
- ✓ **Advocacy support (we can speak to prison, probation and other services on behalf of families).**
- ✓ **A Family Recovery Programme which parents, including both the parent/carer and the prisoner parent post-release, are welcome to join.**

Our 'whole family' model means we offer support to the child, their parent/carer and, where possible, to the parent who has been in prison, after they have been released.

How is our service funded?

For the first two years, the Prisoners' Families Service was funded internally with money from our innovation fund, which we use to help kick-start new services that addresses unmet needs.

After two years of delivery, we had established our 'proof of concept' and in February 2015, successfully secured funding from Children In Need. The service has predominately focused on the effects of parental imprisonment on children and has continued to go from strength to strength, significantly raising the profile of the project and PSS throughout 2016-2017.

The HMP Altcourse Visitors' Centre

The HMP Altcourse Visitors' Centre has been ran by PSS since 2009 and is commissioned by G4S, who run the prison.

The visitors' centre is the first point of call for all visitors coming to visit a loved one in prison, so plays an important part in making sure everyone has a positive experience, right from their very first visit. We aim to provide a high-quality, friendly and professional visitor service.



Section 3: Why our service is important

There are many ways children and families can be affected by having a parent, or partner, in prison³:



Our aim is to support prisoner's families as a whole, but the primary focus is on the children for whom this project has been commissioned.

Emotional and behavioural impact

Children with a parent in prison can suffer a wide range of emotional problems, including:



Section 3: Why our service is important

There are approximately **3,000** children in Merseyside with a parent in prison at any one time ³

Children with a parent in prison are **twice as likely** to experience behavioural and mental health problems, and less likely to do well at school ⁴

It is estimated that **200,000** children are affected by parental imprisonment across England and Wales ⁴

Children with a parent in prison are **three times** more likely than their peers to suffer with poor mental health

Behavioural problems at school are common, and children are often the victims of bullying by other children. Children with parents in prison are therefore often reluctant to attend school or are unable to reach their full potential. This often affects how they interact with their peers, and many children of prisoners are suspended or expelled because of their behaviour towards others.

“The bonds that children have with their family or carers when they are young or growing up help them to feel safe, secure and loved. These feelings are known as ‘attachment’”.

Research has shown that children who experience secure attachments tend to have better outcomes than non-securely attached children in social and emotional development, educational achievement and mental health ¹.

In the case of prisoner’s children, this is a really high risk because of the nature of how these relationships can be affected. Parental relationships can be severed quickly, caregiving can be provided inconsistently, there may be differing stories about the parent’s whereabouts and in many cases children may experience little or no contact with their parent ². Separation caused by parental imprisonment may be even more harmful for children than other forms of parent-child separation, as it tends to be highly traumatic, as the children may witness violence and be frightened ³.

Added to this, financial difficulties, stigma and school moves can also contribute to children feeling insecurely attached and adding to their feelings of isolation.



Section 4: **What we are looking to achieve**

These are the outcomes we want our service to support the children and families of people in prison to achieve. These outcomes and themes are derived from the unpublished doctoral thesis by Dr Lorna Brookes “Bubbles, Brick Walls and Connectivity: Families affected by parental imprisonment and their experiences of community-based support”³.



Families' voices are heard...

- ✓ Families are listened to and their views are valued.
- ✓ Families are collaborated with in search of solutions.
- ✓ Children's views are listened to, especially about contact with their parents.
- ✓ Children are supported to make their feelings known to their parents.



Families are safe and supported...

- ✓ Families, including children, are supported to attend prison visits through the HMP Altcourse Visitors' Centre.
- ✓ Children are better able to cope with their feelings and to keep themselves safe.
- ✓ Families are advocated for and supported without judgement.



Families are kept informed...

- ✓ Families are informed about the experience of prison, and are able to inform one another.
- ✓ We provide information and support to families about criminal justice processes and the potential effects of parental imprisonment.
- ✓ HMP Altcourse make people aware of the process they will go through in a sensitive way.



Families feel like they belong...

- ✓ Families are able to maintain relationships with one another.
- ✓ Families can access peer support.
- ✓ Families can use their experiences to contribute to the wider community.
- ✓ Children will maintain positive friendships and relationships.
- ✓ Children will have healthy contact with their imprisoned parent.

Section 5: Who we work with

Our Prisoners' Families Service runs from February to January, in line with the funding. Therefore, all of the figures we use in this section are from 01/02/16 until 31/01/17.

On 31st Jan 2016:
We were already working with **15 families** and **58 individuals**.

From 1st Feb 2016 - 31st Jan 2017:
We received a further **28 family referrals** involving a total of **95 individuals**.

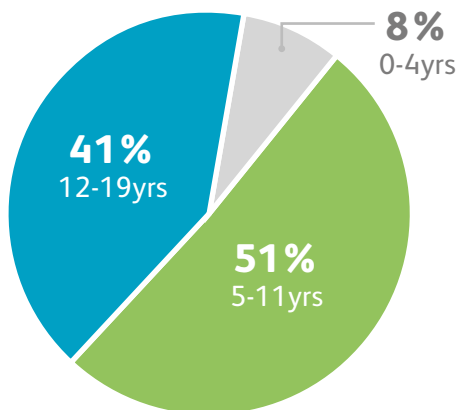
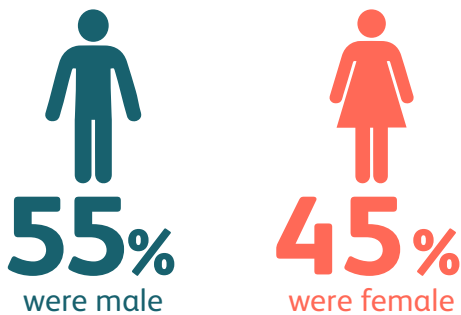
In 2016-2017, our Prisoners' Families service worked with a total of:



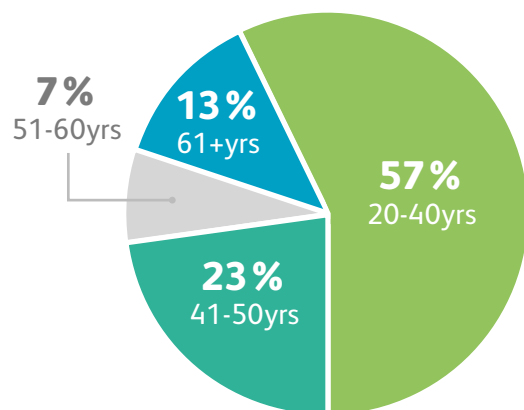
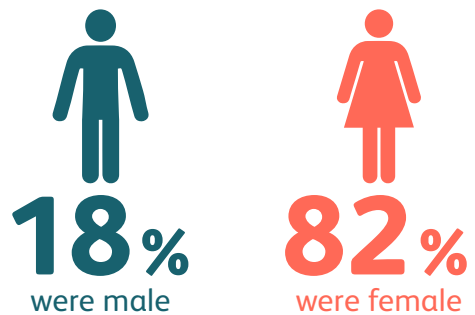
of which:



About the 97 children we worked with...



About the 56 adults we worked with...

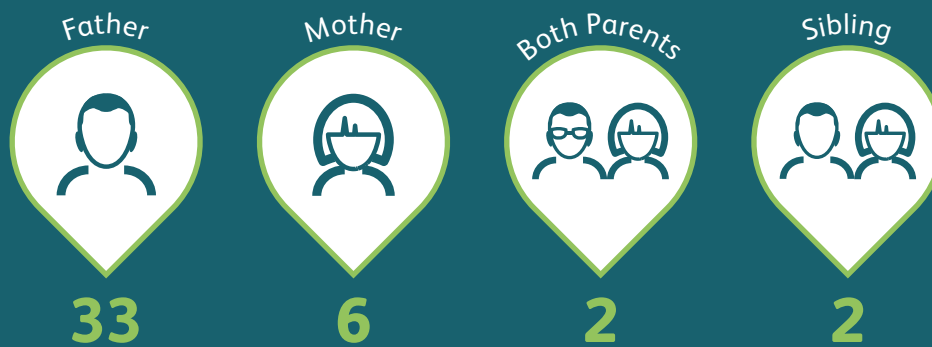


About the 43 referred families we worked with in 2016-2017...

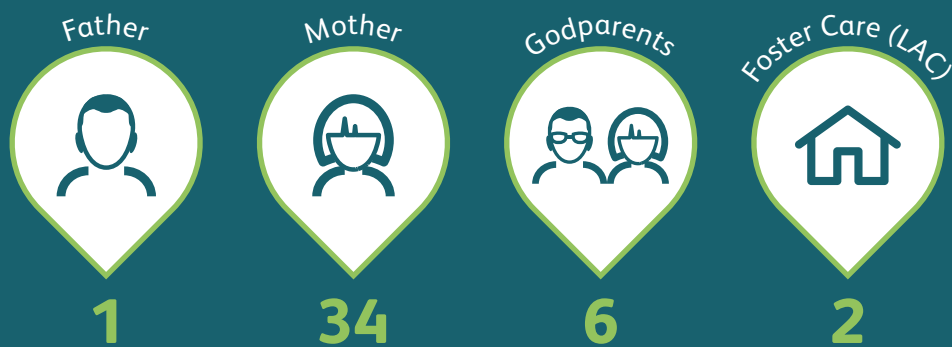
How they were referred to us:



Family member in prison:

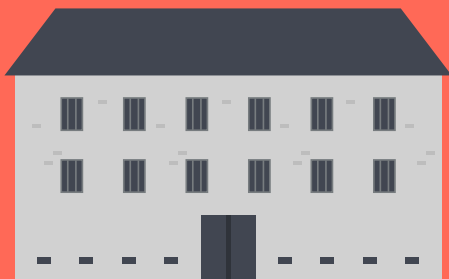


Primary caregivers:



Information about HMP Altcourse can be found in Section 7.

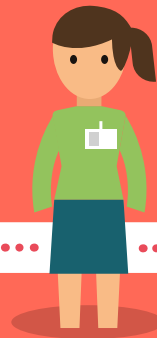
Section 6: Our children and families' journey



Stage 1: We become aware that a parent is due to go prison, in prison, or has been in prison.

1

2



Stage 2: Any professional working with the family can refer families into the service; most referrals come from social workers and schools. The only criteria is that the child has a parent / family member in prison, or one that has had or due to have a custodial sentence.

Stage 3: We'll make contact with the child's primary caregiver straight away to find out more information about the family and what they want to get from the service. We take note of any important information and get consent from the caregiver to contact the child.

3

4

Stage 4: If consent is given and the family are willing to work with us, a more formal assessment will be done with the child. In the assessment, we focus on **a)** the child having healthy contact with the parent in prison, **b)** maintaining healthy friendships and **c)** ensuring that the child is better able to cope with their feelings. Children are also asked questions with scores which are tracked on an evaluation tool which sets a baseline for outcomes to be achieved. Often, the child's caregiver is also there when the assessment is being done.



5a

5b

Stage 5a: We support the child. The team agree the level of support that should be provided, which could include peer support, one-to-one support, support in school, support to contact the parent in prison – or a mixture of these.

Stage 5b: We support the caregiver. The remaining parent or caregiver can also be supported by the peer support group (Stronger Together) or family interventions.

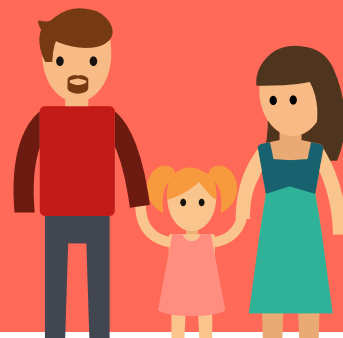
Stage 9: Families can be referred back to us if there is another incident of imprisonment.

6

7

Stage 6: Children and families can receive support for the duration of their family member's prison sentence, and their needs will be reviewed (at least twice a year) throughout the time they're working with us.

Stage 7: The end of the intervention often happens after the parent has been released. When everything is in place for the family to support them, children will often be asked some questions as part of the closing evaluation tool – to determine the impact the service has had on them.



9

8

Stage 8: Once the parent or family member has been released and work has been done to encourage bonding, the family can be signposted to other service to support them.

Section 7: Spotlight on HMP Altcourse Visitors' Centre

HMP Altcourse Visitors' Centre, run by PSS, is the first port of call for visitors to the prison. The service responds to the children's and families' needs, supporting them through their visit from the moment they enter the building, during their visit and as they leave.



Family days

In partnership with G4S, we also run family days, which have now formed an integral part of the prison regime. This is where the prisoners with children are able to spend time each month with their children as a whole family. During normal visits everything is very formal and secure but the family days are much more relaxed and create a much nicer environment for the children to interact with their imprisoned family member.

“ We run family days at Altcourse Visitors' Centre every month, and they're such an important thing for both the prisoners and their families. We always put on interesting and unique activities, like the bird of prey trainer coming in. We aim to make the day into an experience that the families will remember positively. The team work incredibly hard on these days and their dedication is one of the things that helps make the day so special. ”

Jan Curzon, Family Impact, Specialist Practitioner @ Altcourse Visitors Centre

To join in with the family days, imprisoned family members have to complete the family programme within the prison environment and must maintain good behaviour and discipline. The family days are a positive incentive to do so; with no incidents recorded in the last eight years. HMP Altcourse is one of the few prisons that actively encourages strong family contact in order to reduce the level of re-offending.

Section 7: Spotlight on HMP Altcourse Visitors' Centre

What the families have said about HMP Altcourse Visitors' Centre

"This was our first time on a family visit, and me and my 4 children have loved it. All the staff have been brilliant and couldn't have wished for a better day."

...

"I liked the day because I spent it with my daddy."

...

"I enjoyed being able to spend quality family time with husband and the boys. It felt 'normal' and the people who help to organise it are lovely."

...

"Fantastic day with good food and I loved going into the play area with the kids. Being able to get up and walk around with no bibs was really good - it was a lot more relaxed."

What we can do better at HMP Altcourse Visitors' Centre

"The atmosphere was very relaxed."

...

"It was nice to sit and have cake and coffee with the other people after a long journey."

...

"The staff were really clear and helpful."

...

"The play area is amazing... the staff are helpful and friendly and there is lots to do."

...

"The staff have, at times, gone above and beyond for us as visitors and also for our family member."

What people have said about HMP Altcourse Visitors' Centre

"Décor at Altcourse could do with improving."

We have improved the décor after receiving some funding to update the visitors area with the painting and decorating being completed by the Princes Royal Trust.

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"Not enough information being given in advance and incorrect information on the website."

We are finalising our information pack which we hope will be available throughout the justice system, and are liaising with G4S to update their website. Information is also included for the prisoners on the prison computer system.

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"Long waiting times."

Due to the number of people we have to process every day, including new visitors, this can sometimes take a while – but we try to make sure all visitors are processed as quickly as possible.

Section 8: Our achievements this year

Raising awareness

In November 2016, as part of Children In Need week, our Prisoners' Families service starred in a special documentary by BAFTA-nominated film-maker, Catey Sexton, called 'Prison, My Parents and Me'.

“We are very encouraged that an issue we feel passionate about is getting the national recognition it deserves and it was terrific to work with the team at True Vision Productions.”

Prisoners' Families Service: PSS

The film gave a fantastic insight into what it's really like to lose a parent to the Criminal Justice System and the impact that this can have. It told the stories of several children with a parent in prison, including Alex (11) and Kyra (8). The sisters attend the support group run by the Prisoners' Families Service here at PSS and, as they tried to understand their dad's imprisonment, were encouraged to tell him how they feel.

Also featured was Ruby (7), who was coming to terms with her dad's recent arrest and worried that he may never come home.

“While there's little government support for children with a parent in prison, there is a great need. By providing help and support early on, these young people can look forward to a bright future and avoid more serious issues for families further down the line.”

Prisoners' Families Service: PSS

PR value

Prison, My Parents and Me highlights the work of PSS and the Prisoners' Families Service. It's not only effectively demonstrated the impact of imprisonment on children and families, but has also increased the number of referrals to the service and raised awareness of the issue to a huge audience on television and radio.

How many people did we reach?

**BBC1 - Children in Need
'Prison, My Parents and Me'**

1.1 million viewers
on the airdate.

BBC Radio Five Live

Live interview and phone-in with Lorna Brookes (PSS project lead) – approximately
6 million listeners.

**BBC1 - Children in Need
'Prison, My Parents and Me'**

100,000 viewers
on BBC iPlayer.

In total, we reached **7.2 million** people

Prisoners' families and children feel heard

Children have a right to maintain a personal relationship and direct contact with both of their parents on a regular basis, except, of course, if it's not in the child's best interests to do that, and we must make sure we respect this.

It's really important that a child's views about visiting their parent in prison are heard – whether they want to visit or not. This is set out in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which says children have a right to be heard and have their views taken into consideration ⁵.

However, the need to be heard applies not just to children communicating their wishes to their families and imprisoned parent; but to families as a whole, too. It's important we hear families' stories about the challenges of having a family member in prison. Prisoners' families are high-risk candidates to being marginalised, and the PSS service aims to limit that risk.

What we did		What children and families achieved	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> When there's been no suitable family members to support a child with visiting their parent in prison, we have taken the child along, accompanied them and supported them through it. We have participated in a documentary called 'Prison, My Parents and Me' on BBC1 in 2016, enabling children to tell their story and underlining the importance of ensuring children are heard. 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In 2016-2017, the PSS project directly took 13 children to visit their parent or family member in prison, as well as directly supervising the contact between 22 children and their parents. Eight children participated in the documentary and made their voices heard, not only to their parents, but a wider audience, too, raising awareness of the challenges they faced. 	
Who have we helped?		Outcome and Value added	
Criminal Justice System	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Research suggests that having family ties whilst in prison can reduce the likelihood of re-offending by 39% ⁶. Therefore promoting positive contact promotes stability within the prison environment as well as reducing reoffending. 		
PSS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Since the BBC documentary was aired we have seen a significant increase in the number of referrals to the service, demonstrating the positive outcome of children's stories being heard. 		
Prisoners' children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Children have been able to have contact with their parents and family members who are in prison, promoting more positive attachments and the ability to explain how they feel. Of the children who completed the 'Child Assessment Form' which is a questionnaire that looks at the impact of the service, 50% had experienced a significant improvement in the quality of their contact with their parent, with a further 25% stating they were starting to experience improvement. 		

Lucy's story...

Lucy, who was aged 17, was referred to Prisoners' Families after the imprisonment of her brother. Since his imprisonment, Lucy was having trouble in school, had lost the confidence and motivation to complete her exams and was getting into arguments with her mum and step-dad. Following her referral and our initial discussion with her, Lucy was interested in trying one-to-one support, to see if it would provide her with an opportunity to express herself and share how she was feeling.

When our family worker first started visiting Lucy at school, the main aim was to let Lucy and the family worker get to know each other. We gave Lucy a safe space to talk freely and openly about what she was going through and, by actively listening in a non-judgemental manner, chatting to our family worker helped Lucy to have an outlet for the frustrations and emotions she had harboured.

In the past, Lucy had experiences of her trust being abused, and therefore the only person she felt she could trust was her brother. Following his imprisonment, this coping strategy was no longer available to her. However, Lucy was able to share this with the family worker, and between them, they figured out some alternative coping strategies. Over time, Lucy began to trust her family worker and felt comfortable speaking with them. As her confidence grew she became more positive about the future and more motivated to do well in college.

Lucy's family worker also facilitated prison visits, to enable her to see her brother more often than she would have without support. This had a positive impact on Lucy's emotional well-being as the relationship she had with her brother, while restricted, was not completely lost.

Near the conclusion of Lucy's support, Lucy had successfully started at her new college, was getting on better with her parents at home and felt comfortable with the reality that her brother was in prison. Providing Lucy with a platform with which to speak and be heard enabled Lucy to explore her feelings and build up her own personal resilience.

Lucy expressed that since receiving the support of her family worker, she had become more comfortable working out solutions to problems herself and felt like she was more independent and capable. She also said that the family worker had challenged her perception of who she can and can't trust and felt more able to form positive relationships with others in the future.



Prisoners’ families and children feel safe and supported

Helping children and families to maintain positive contact with a family member in prison happens best when families feel safe. This involves not only safe contact with the family member within the prison itself, but also when families feel free from judgement and that their situation, and information, is handled sensitively and with care.

One particular concern prisoners’ families tend to have is that they are judged as though they too are criminals, and can experience negative perceptions and behaviour from their local community. Worrying about perceptions social services may have of the family and the remaining parent’s ability as a caregiver can make parents feel unsafe and concerned that their children will be taken into care. This can often result in families becoming more isolated and withdrawn, as they feel that the agencies who should really be there to support them actually know very little about them, creating an atmosphere of anxiety and mistrust.

A key objective of our Prisoners’ Families Service is to develop positive, honest relationships with prisoners’ families and enable them to share their stories, experiences and feelings in a safe environment.

What we did		What children and families achieved	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Running ‘family days’ within HMP Altcourse every month to enable family engagement to take place in a safe environment. Letterbox service run by social work students at Altcourse to promote safe and secure contact between prisoners and children. 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Empathetic engagement through the PSS project has enabled families and children to feel emotionally safe to discuss their situation and their feelings. HMP Altcourse have successfully processed and enabled over 10,000 children’s visits to the Prison, and 44,000 visits overall; ensuring safe and orderly visiting; as well as the letterbox scheme promoting positive and safe contact for children. 	
Who have we helped?		Outcome and Value added	
Criminal Justice System	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Giving prisoners the chance to participate in family days in a safe environment has resulted in greater stability within the prison, particularly as, to take part, prisoners must complete the ‘family programme’. Imprisoned parents also have the benefit of the ‘whole family’ approach and we can support them after they have been released. 		
PSS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We’ve gathered a large amount of qualitative evidence to show the level of attachment and connectivity between the PSS programme and the prisoners’ families; particularly in relation to how we have made families <u>feel</u>, rather than based on what our staff have said or done. 		
Prisoners’ children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Children have improved their ability to explain how they feel and cope with those feelings and emotions. Of the children who completed the ‘Child Assessment Form’ questionnaire which looks at the impact of the service, 65% said they had significantly improved how they were able to cope with their feelings. A further 20% told us they had started to experience progress in this area. 		

David's story...

David became involved with the Prisoners' Families project during his transition back into the community after being released from prison. Children's social services needed David to have some supervised contact sessions with his daughter, and a PSS family worker from our Prisoners' Families Service helped to facilitate them.

At first, David was worried about how the supervised contact sessions would go, as he had previously had some negative interactions and experiences with other professionals. He didn't have confidence that people would treat him and his family with dignity and respect. As a result, David was reluctant and guarded in response to the supervised contact.

Throughout the supervised contact sessions that took place, the family worker worked with David, his daughter and his wife, in line with the 'whole family' approach that the Prisoners' Families team uses. David and his family were provided with the opportunity to talk freely and honestly to the family worker together, as a family unit.

David's family worker prepared and submitted written summaries of the contact he had with his family to the allocated social worker, and David and his wife were also provided copies of this information, so they could look through it themselves. David was very appreciative of the honesty and transparency the family worker showed in doing this. After that point, he trusted our family worker to advocate for and represent him in situations where he was not able to attend.

This was a significant event for David - he felt safe to be himself and speak openly without fear of judgement or reprisal. David said that this was a feeling he was not expecting to have and he was happy in the knowledge that the family worker would not treat him as a 'lesser person', but as an equal.

David found this especially helpful when he experienced significant challenges with his mental health problems which, compounded with the separation from his family, resulted in a very traumatic time for him. However, with the support of his family worker, David worked to overcome these obstacles and was then able to return home to his wife and child. The family worker remained involved for a time after this transition at the request of the family, supporting them to relocate to a new area and make a fresh start.



Prisoners' families and children feel informed

When someone in the family is sent to prison, one of the things those left behind need most is information; to understand what is happening to their loved one and what to expect - especially in terms of when and how they can contact them ⁷.

Families may feel put off attending visits at first, because they don't know what to expect, or because the process is inconvenient, unclear and potentially unpleasant, especially for young people. There is a clear need for families and children to feel informed about what to expect.

However, there is another dimension to this; often parents may not want to tell their children that their other parent or family member is in prison. Researchers and prisoners' families support groups commonly argue that children are better off knowing the truth about their parent's imprisonment, rather than not understanding what is happening, and experiencing confusion and deceit which can cause greater issues further down the line.

A third, and very important element, is that the imprisoned parent is also kept informed about what is happening with their family, and about the support available to the whole family.

What we did	What children and families achieved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of 'Don't Worry', an award-winning resource aimed at children to explain the experience of going to prison to visit a family member. • 31 peer support groups held within the year for children to share their experiences. • PSS support workers can often find out information for children and families from the imprisoned parent's personal officers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 10 children and young people were involved in the production of the 'Don't Worry' booklet. • Prisoners' families have stated that they feel comfortable asking for information from PSS. • Information is now included on the prison computer system for prisoners to access, enabling them to access information independently.
Who have we helped?	Outcome and Value added
Criminal Justice System	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The information on visiting procedures and times are clearly outlined on the HMP Altcourse website. • Information has been provided on the prison computer system. • Feedback that the support provided through ensuring visitors are informed leads to less stressful visits and contributes to good discipline within the prison.
PSS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Follow-up calls made to visitors who have been distressed at the visitors' centre, offering further support and information. • Help-desk in the visitors' centre available for people to discuss issues and concerns.
Prisoners and their Families	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children have told us that they have felt better and more relieved when they have been informed of what is happening. • Imprisoned parents have stated their appreciation for being kept informed of the support available to the family and that they felt that they have mattered in the process.

Sara and Kyle's story...

Sara and Kyle were referred to the Prisoners' Families Service by their grandma, who was concerned about their emotional wellbeing following the imprisonment of their mum for a long sentence.

Sara and Kyle were provided with one-to-one support at school by a PSS family worker and, at their request, they attended the PSS support groups together as they wanted to support one another. During the sessions it was revealed that Sara and Kyle knew very little about the whereabouts of their mum and had not seen or spoken to her for a number of years. Unfortunately, it is common for families with a parent or other family member in prison to receive a negative response from the community, which can often be a source of misinformation and rumours. This was true for Sara and Kyle and they would often hear rumours about their mum's whereabouts and circumstances from people in the community or from friends at school. This generated tension between them and their grandma; they felt like she was hiding something from them.

Not knowing where their mum was, how to get in contact with her or whether she was still in prison presented many difficult questions and emotions that Sara and Kyle struggled to come to terms with, as they did not have the information they needed to help them understand their own situation. Sara and Kyle found this experience to be distressing, and at the time, their grandma - who was their responsible guardian - was opposed to the idea of establishing contact between Sara, Kyle and their mum. This was because she had let them down in the past and the children had found this experience quite traumatic.

The children had mixed emotions about whether they wanted to speak to their mum again, and if they did, what they would say to her or ask her. The family worker supported Sara and Kyle to explore this in support sessions, to help them to understand the situation as best they could.

The family worker involved supported Sara and Kyle to expand on how they felt about the situation and this was then respectfully communicated to their grandma, with the intention of trying to come to a resolution and alleviate the confusion caused by the misinformation Sara and Kyle were hearing from people in the community.

Although Sara and Kyle's grandma was worried about the possibility of them being let down by their mum again, the family worker reinforced the potential harm that the misinformation could cause to Sara and Kyle and the potential benefits that knowing the truth would provide towards gaining closure on the situation. Sara and Kyle were eventually, after much discussion, given permission to contact their mum.

Through careful and respectful collaboration with the family, PSS was able to support Sara and Kyle to understand the truth about where their mum was and how she was doing. This not only alleviated the effect the rumours had on them, but empowered them to make an informed choice about the relationship they wanted to have with their mum.



Prisoners’ families and children feel like they belong

One of the most fundamental social needs people have is to feel as though they ‘belong’ – that they are accepted, loved and can connect with others. Having a family member in prison can result in feelings of loss, isolation, powerlessness and judgement, resulting in the families affected feeling ostracised and as though they no longer belong in their community.

In some cases families have stated that they felt as though their community and even their families ‘turned their backs’ when their family member was imprisoned.

The Prisoners’ Children Service aims to help families not only remain connected to each other, but also to realise that they are not alone in their journey, and that that they can continue to belong in society and make a contribution to their community. By enabling the prisoners themselves to remain connected to their families, this also helps them to maintain their feeling of belonging to the family unit, and not that their role is no longer needed.

What we did		What children and families achieved	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 31 support groups held within the year for children to share their experiences with peers and others going through the same thing. • Supporting family days and prison visits to enable families to remain connected. 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive feedback from children that the peer support had reassured them and had given them useful advice and support prior to their first visits. • Prisoners’ families have stated that they feel comfortable discussing their issues with PSS due to the commonality of experience. 	
Who have we helped?		Outcome and Value added	
Criminal Justice System	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research has indicated that where prisoners are reassured of their role in the family through visitation, it reduces the stressors in prison and encourages prisoners to adjust within the environment. 		
PSS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive facilitation of relationships between children and families experiencing a family member in prison. 		
Prisoners and their Families	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Of the children who completed the ‘Child Assessment Form’ questionnaire which looks at the impact of the service, 50 % said they had made significant progress in forming new friendships and improving their current friendships, with a further 20 % stating they had started to experience progress in this area. 		

Alice and Kelly's story...

Parental imprisonment is never an easy experience and Alice and Kelly found the imprisonment of their dad very difficult to come to terms with. Our Prisoners' Families team became involved after receiving a referral from their school on their behalf.

In the one-to-one support sessions we provided, we saw that Alice and Kelly felt isolated and that they were the only ones who were going through the trauma of their dad being sent to prison. They expressed feelings of jealousy and anger around the experience. An important element of helping Alice and Kelly to process these feelings was to introduce them to other children of a similar age who also had a parent in prison, with the hope that they would not feel alone in their experience. The support group was formed to encourage children to support each other and learn from one another's experience, enabling those who often felt isolated at school to feel a sense of belonging. Alice and Kelly found the support to be very beneficial and it helped them to feel less alone.

In addition to this support, their mum, Kirsty, was also invited to attend a group for adults, to encourage her to form a support network with likeminded people and prevent her from becoming socially isolated. Alice and Kelly's dad was kept informed about what they had got up to with the support group on a regular basis, in the form of letters or cards. The Prisoners' Families staff posted these letters and cards to the prison where their dad was.

In terms of maintaining a sense of belonging; not only was support for Alice, Kelly and Kirsty essential, but supporting their dad to stay connected to his children and wife was also important. This had benefits for not only him but for Alice and Kelly as this helped alleviate the feeling of isolation and separation from their dad, and though the knowledge that he is in prison was difficult - they still felt connected to him and he to them.

The family's sense of belonging was not only important in respect of the wider community but also in maintaining a sense of belonging in one another's lives. Through consistent support from family workers and the support of peers within support groups, Alice and Kelly have come to terms with the imprisonment of their dad and are now a strong support for other children within the group.



Section 11: Our economic and social impact

Quantifying the economic and social impact of the Prisoners’ Families programme is quite complex. The economic benefits that the service could produce would be found through:

- A reduced tendency for the family member in prison to commit another crime;
- Improved bonds between the prisoners and their children;
- Prisoners’ children doing better at school;
- Improving prisoners’ children’s social wellbeing and ability to cope with what they’re going through;
- Preventing prisoners’ children from becoming offenders.

However, these are all long-term benefits, and due to the nature of the service and the funding available, tracking families and participants in a longitudinal way is not possible. The Prisoners’ Families Service delivers activities which research indicates is likely to be beneficial and produce positive outcomes; but it is not a research project or controlled study of families who are involved.

Financial indicators of impact from research

Whilst the programme is unable to look at specific families or individuals and state the specific social or economic benefits, the research available indicates the potential for social and economic impact. The summary table below uses national statistics and costs to show potential cost savings, value to the families involved and to the public sector.

Family contact and reducing reoffending: benefits to Criminal Justice System			
Input →	Results in →	Meaning →	Impact
PSS facilitates prison visits and family days.	Stronger connections between family members and reassurance.	Likelihood of reoffending is reduced by 39 % when strong family ties are maintained ⁸ .	The cost per place at HMP Altcourse is, on average, £32,832 ⁹ .
PSS worked with 43 families with a family member in prison. If 39 % of those 43 family members did not reoffend (17); this would represent a potential annual saving of £558,144 to the Criminal Justice System.			

Family contact and reducing reoffending: benefits to family			
Input →	Results in →	Meaning →	Impact
PSS facilitates prison visits and family days.	Stronger connections between family members and reassurance.	Likelihood of reoffending is reduced by 39 % when strong family ties are maintained ¹⁰ .	The average monthly cost to families to visit prison is £175. Furthermore, the loss of prisoners’ or partners’ earnings averaged £6,200 over a six-month period ¹¹ .
PSS worked with 43 families with a family member in prison. If 39 % of those 43 family members did not reoffend (17); this would save the families £2,100 in visiting costs and potentially increase household income by £12,400 in the year.			

Family contact and reducing reoffending: benefits to wider society

Input →	Results in →	Meaning →	Impact
PSS facilitates prison visits and family days.	Stronger connections between family members and reassurance.	Likelihood of reoffending is reduced by 39% when strong family ties are maintained ¹² .	The cost per family over six months, including the cost to agencies and the cost of support provided by family and relatives, is estimated to average £5,860 ¹³ .

PSS worked with 43 families with a family member in prison. If 39% of those 43 family members did not reoffend (17); this would create value within the other agencies and families of **£199,240** per annum.

Based on the figures for 2016-2017, the PSS Prisoners' Families Service, through facilitating visitation and encouraging families to remain connected and communicating, could reduce reoffending and create economic and social value of **£771,884** per year for this outcome alone.

There are other economic and social risks associated with the children of prisoners, which could also be positively impacted by the PSS Prisoners' Families Service.



While we've not carried out in-depth research or a longitudinal study into the outcomes for the children and families we work with, the evidence-based practice that we apply, the research it is based on and the feedback we have received from children and families assures us that the work we do creates real value for the people we work with.

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