

It's Everybody's Business

What Is Your Role in Supporting Families Affected by Imprisonment?

Families Outside Conference 2011 Report

On 1 November 2011, Families Outside hosted its national conference at the Falkirk Wheel. The conference, chaired by the HM Chief Inspector of Prisons for Scotland, Brigadier Hugh Monro CBE, hosted approximately 220 delegates as well as speakers from throughout the UK. This included people from a broad range of interests including families, practitioners, policymakers and academics from the fields of criminal justice, social work, health, education, and children & families.

The conference aimed to show how all varieties of agencies and interests come into contact with families affected by imprisonment and how everyone's input can make a difference. The event was designed to be of benefit to practitioners and interest groups both in and out of the criminal justice system and, of course, to children and families affected by imprisonment.

Feedback from the day was exceptionally positive based on the feedback forms as well as verbal and written comments we received subsequently. Below is a link to the summary of the feedback forms:

[LINK: FEEDBACK FORMS](#)

Other comments we received included the following:

[LINK: E-MAIL FEEDBACK](#)

The purpose of this conference report is to give people who were unable to attend an insight into the content and to give those who were there a reminder of the day. We have attached links to all of the notes and presentations from plenary speakers and workshops where available along with notes of Question & Answer sessions.

Introduction

Following brief welcomes and introductory statements from Gill Stewart CB, Chairman of the Families Outside Board, and Dr Nancy Loucks, Chief Executive of Families Outside, Hugh Monro started the day by thanking Families Outside for its work and outlining the context and format for the day. Notes from his introduction are as follows:

“This is a really exciting day, not least because of the 20th Anniversary of Families Outside. The conference is taking place at a really stark time: there are record prisoner numbers in Scotland, we're in a dreadful financial situation and have a difficult, but not impossible prisons budget. So we have to think laterally, as the solution is not in a cheque book. However, today gives us lots of wonderful stuff to listen to and real opportunities for you to become involved and get your views across.

“I just want to pay tribute to the work of Families Outside over the years. It has achieved so much and made so many links, the most recent example of course was the intervention made at Geneva in front of the Committee for the Rights of the Child Day of General Discussion about children of incarcerated parents. This was a truly global conference, and I know that Nancy made an inspirational intervention on our behalf on Scotland’s behalf, and we should be proud of what Families Outside continues to achieve.

“I don’t want to say very much at this stage except to talk very briefly about the reality I see in prisons. If you have not got a copy I urge you to read my Annual Report, a strong piece on the need for improved family links in prisons and for Prison Visitors’ Centres. I have lots to say about exclusion from school, about violence in our communities and of course about family contact and the need for Prisoner Visitor Centres.

“I am still struck by the sheer scale of the issue for families, for mothers, for children. The whole issue of travel to prison, loss of income and job and house. How do children survive this dreadful situation? Where do you get help in a very stigmatised situation? No wonder that I often see visitors leaving prison in real states of distress.

“Yes, of course I see fantastic support from many visits staff in our prisons, both public and private. I am beginning to feel a much greater acceptance that family contact needs to improve that there needs to be more help and support for families. I even sometimes get optimistic that we can get more Prisoner Family Visitor Centres at our prisons, something woefully lacking at present.

“If families are at the very centre of reducing reoffending do we feel that due account is taken of this by the police, by the prison service, by the courts? Given that money is short, is an improved way of including families a better way forward in terms of getting offenders back in to communities in the best possible way? Do we need to do things in a more horizontal way across service boundaries rather than in our very vertical and stove-piped fashion? This is truly Everybody’s Business across Scotland, and we are going to address that today.”

Children Of Imprisoned Parents: European findings

Dr Linda Moore & Dr Una Convery from the University of Ulster presented findings from European-wide research into the impact of imprisonment on children and families that had just been published. Their presentation focused on responses from families in Northern Ireland, but these showed clear parallels to findings in other countries, including previous research in Scotland and the rest of the UK.

[LINK: DR LINDA MOORE & DR UNA CONVERY POWERPOINT](#)

Doing It Differently: Health Approaches To Reducing Violence In Families

Karyn McCluskey, Co-Director of the Scottish Violence Reduction Unit, spoke about the value of using a public health approach to supporting families. By this she meant involving families in interventions that affect them, for example in the Violence Reduction Unit’s planned pilot of ‘SCRAM’ alcohol bracelets (Secure Continuous Remote Alcohol Monitoring for people who commit offences under the influence of alcohol. In particular she emphasised the need to build resilience in families to cope with the challenges they face when they experience violence in the family or have a family member in prison. She noted the positive efforts being made to support families but said that, to follow a public health model, support that proved successful should be ‘scaled up’ rather than treated simply as pilot projects.

Family panel

Fiona Punton of the Church of Scotland Guild chaired a panel and Question & Answer session with five family members. Three of these stepped in at the last minute following cancellation that morning from a family of three (two parents and their son, who was recently released from prison). We are very grateful for the input from all of the participants.

Main points the family panellists raised were:

- Recognition of the impact of imprisonment on families and consequently support for families can be limited, even where the imprisonment has an immediate and detrimental impact (for example on care arrangements for children).
- Revocation of family contact should not be used as a threat or a punishment for prisoner misbehaviour, as this punishes the family. Bonding visits (parent/child visits) should be seen as a right of the child rather than a tool for the prison. (NB: The Scottish Prison Service Good Practice Guidelines support this stance but as yet has no 'teeth' to enforce it.)
- Young people can experience particular difficulties, as they are often not told what is happening. Having someone to speak to at school is very important.
- Travel to prisons for visits can be very challenging for families. Efforts to make the experience easier for them, such as the Breakfast Club for children visiting HMP Shotts, are very much appreciated.
- Family Contact Officers can be a great source of support. Attitudes of prison staff and professionals in general make a huge difference to families.
- Family experiences will vary widely, including how they react to a family member's arrest and imprisonment. Some will have long-standing issues with the family member (e.g. substance misuse, mental health) and may feel very angry and frustrated with their behaviour.
- Delegates at the conference should follow up on issues raised during the Family Panel, using what they hear to inform and develop practice.

Cross-Party Group on Families Affected by Imprisonment

The morning plenary finished with a speech by MSP Mary Fee, chair of the Cross-Party Group on Families Affected by Imprisonment recently set up in the Scottish Parliament. The text of this speech is available here:

[LINK: MARY FEE MSP - SPEECH TO DELEGATES](#)

Workshops

After lunch, the conference broke into workshops, which focused on the 'prison' stage following arrest and court. Speakers' notes and PowerPoints are attached where available, and notes taken during the sessions are available for each.

Workshop 1 - Police, Social Work and prisons

[LINK: WORKSHOP 1 NOTES](#)

[LINK: JIM ROYAN POWERPOINT](#)

Workshop 2 - Courts, Social Work and prisons

[LINK: WORKSHOP 2 NOTES](#)

Workshop 3 - Social Work and prisons

[LINK: WORKSHOP 3 NOTES](#)

Workshop 4 - Health, wellbeing and prisons

[LINK: WORKSHOP 4 NOTES](#)

Workshop 5 - Early years, schools and prisons

[LINK: WORKSHOP 5 NOTES](#)

Workshop 6 - Communities, faith groups and prisons

[LINK: WORKSHOP 6 NOTES](#)

'Fun@Work': The Importance Of Attitude

Motivational speaker and comedian Gavin Oattes, Managing Director of Tree of Knowledge, delivered the final session of the day. With a background as a primary school teacher, Gavin has no experience of criminal justice at all. However, his message applies across sectors, stating clearly that how we approach our work, and indeed our lives, makes a tremendous difference both to ourselves and to those around us. Through his interactive session he demonstrated that 'the system' will present barriers and that the people and situations around us may prove equally difficult. If we want to make a difference, however, this difference starts with ourselves and how we choose to approach the barriers we all face.

More information about Tree of Knowledge, the workshops they deliver and resources they provide is available at www.treeof.com.

Conclusions

Brigadier Hugh Monro closed the conference with a brief summary of the day's discussions.

Families Outside would like to thank our sponsors (The Big Lottery, Sodexo Justice Services and the Robertson Trust) for their support, which allowed all delegates to attend for free.

Thanks also to everyone who attended the conference, whether as delegates or presenters. We hope you will find our future events equally rewarding. Please feel free to direct any queries or requests for further information to us here at Families Outside.

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