



voicing the needs  
of families affected  
by imprisonment

**Families Outside**

**Family Support Work in Lothian and Borders:**

**Review of the First Year**

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Kerry Knox  
Family Support Worker  
Families Outside

# **Families Outside Family Support Work in Lothian and Borders:**

## **Review of the First Year**

### **Introduction**

In 2008 Families Outside, along with other partner agencies, recognised a need for a Family Support Worker in the Lothian and Borders area to provide direct support for families affected by imprisonment. The Family Support Worker would work with families of prisoners and ex-prisoners in supporting their family member in resettling back into the community. The Support Worker would also recognise and help address the needs of prisoners' families in their own right.

Initial funding for this post was secured from the Lothian and Borders Community Justice Authority, and the Family Support Worker was appointed in October 2008.

### **Location**

The Family Support Worker is primarily based at the Edinburgh Prison Visitors' Centre, which is a purpose-built centre for families visiting Edinburgh Prison. The aim of the Visitors' Centre is to improve access to information and support for these families. This has been the ideal location for the families to engage with the service from the Family Support Worker.

### **Referrals**

In its first year, the Family Support Worker had 100 referrals. Of these referrals, 23 families have required more intense support because of the complexity of their cases. This meant the Family Support Worker carried an ongoing case load. At the time of writing, the case load consisted of 11 families. So far, the longest period of intervention from the Family Support Worker has been one year, with that case still requiring intense support.

The majority of the referrals have been families who can access support in the community because they are already involved in services for other issues such as substance misuse or child protection. Importantly, however, three individuals accessed support from the Family Support Worker purely because of the effects of their family member's imprisonment. Consequently no agency in their communities could offer support solely on this basis.

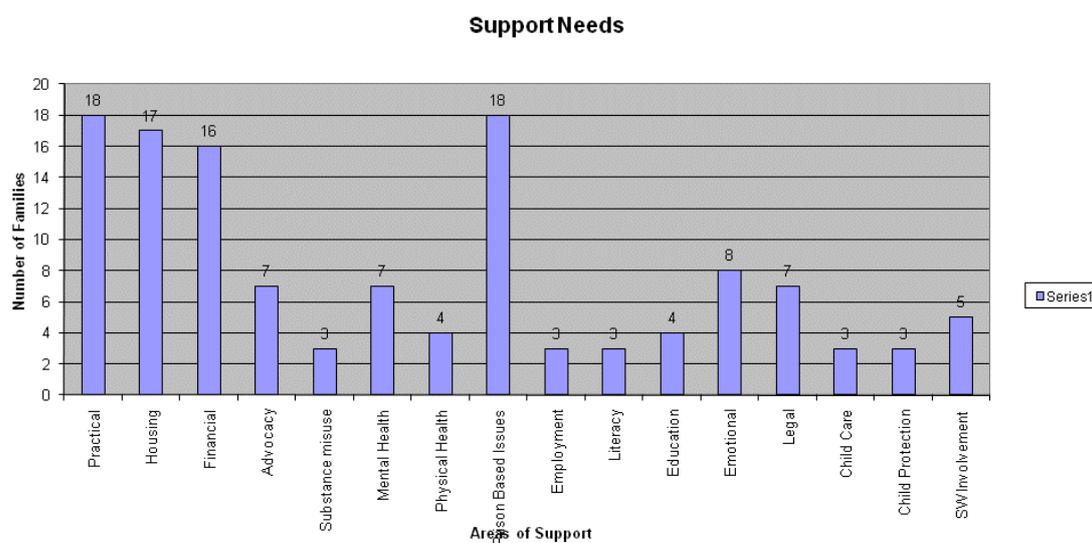
Referrals came from a number of sources, detailed below:

Referral Source	Number of Cases
Families Outside Helpline	8
Self-referral (at Visitors' Centre)	57
Family Induction (at Edinburgh Prison)	7
Visitor Centre Staff	20
Health Visitors	1
Prisoner	1
Family Contact Development Officer	1
Other Community Agencies	5

Having a worker based at the prison Visitors' Centre clearly generated the highest number of referrals, both from the families themselves and from the staff based at the Centre.

## Support Needs

The graph and key achievements below shows the range of needs of the 23 families that required more intense support.



The graph shows that practical, housing, financial and prison based issues were the highest needs the families identified. Some of the key achievements to date with regard to some of these issues are detailed below.

## Housing

Over the last year, the Family Support Worker worked to resolve housing issues with 18 families. To date, 12 of the families' housing issues have been resolved. One

family stopped engaging when their family member was released from prison, and the remaining 3 cases are ongoing. Some of the issues that the Family Support Worker faced when addressing the housing needs of families/individuals were:

- Poor Condition of Tenancy
- Temporary accommodation without appropriate support and advice from Local Authorities
- Local Authorities not following Homeless Code of Conduct regarding Temporary Accommodation and not taking responsibility for the problem
- Tenancy being in Prisoner's name
- Vulnerable families not knowing their rights regarding housing/homelessness
- Family member not being able to afford payments because of loss of income

The Family Support Worker worked in partnership with Scottish Legal Aid Board and Shelter to try and achieve the preferred outcome for a number of these families.

### **Financial Difficulties**

Research shows that families affected by imprisonment are likely to suffer financially (Seymour and Hairston 1998; Loucks 2004). Sixteen of the families were concerned in some way regarding their financial situation. The Family Support Worker assisted these families in a number of ways, which are listed below:

- Linked families in with Scottish Legal Aid Board for more serious concerns
- Supported applications when applying for social funds
- Assisted with applying for benefits
- Accompanied families to appointments with benefit agencies
- Prepared practical budgets with families
- Sourced charitable organisations for furniture donations and food parcels

### **Prison Based Issues**

The majority of the families at some point when working with the Family Support Worker raised issues regarding difficulties they were having with prison systems. This was usually due to lack of knowledge on their part or the necessary information not being available from the prison. Some of the issues included:

- Procedures for handing in property and money into the Prison
- Prisoner's medication
- Prisoner's mental health
- Concerns that the prisoner is being bullied
- Home Detention Curfew procedures
- Integrated Case Management process
- Eligibility for Bonding Visits
- Assisted Prison Visiting Scheme (Travelling to prisons)
- Complaints regarding members of staff
- Arranging of visits

In the majority of these issues, the Family Support Worker was able to work in partnership with the prison and especially with the Family Contact Development Officers to resolve these matters.

### **Other Referrals**

As previously stated, the Family Support Worker has received 100 referrals in the first year. Some of the intense support has been detailed above. This report will now detail some of the shorter interventions from the Family Support Worker.

Since the Family Support Worker came into post at the Visitors' Centre, families clearly started using the Worker's role as a 'drop in' service available to them. The Family Support Worker reports that, although the families could access support in their communities, they were more comfortable using this service at the Centre because they did not have to explain their current situation.

The main reason for the referrals being made were related to prison based issues at the time of families visiting the prison, these were always dealt with at the time in partnership with the prison staff. Families visiting the prison for the first time were referred to the Family Support Worker and in a lot of these cases it was for emotional support and to run through procedures for going into the prison.

### **Community Partnership Working**

The Family Support Worker identified that in order to provide an effective service it was vital to work in partnership with community agencies so families could be connected easily with the services available in their local area to achieve the preferred outcome. A few examples of partnership working are listed below:

- A family whose thirteen year old daughter is not coping with the imprisonment of her father. The family seek support from the Family Support Worker who uncovers that the main problem is that the family have not informed the School of the situation. The Family Support Worker initiates a meeting with the school and attends with the family; identifies the main problems and makes a referral to the Young Carers Project and schedules regular meetings with the school and the project.
- A lady was visiting partner for over a year and, while talking to her informally, the Family Support Worker learns that she is isolated in the community because of her partners' crime, which is having a detrimental effect on her physical and mental health. Family Support Worker looks at small local community health projects, and the lady signs up for a walking group and sewing group. The lady now has more confidence, has lost weight and is happier to be out in the community.
- The Family Support Worker is working with two families who are involved with the Children's Hearing system and regularly attends Core Group Meetings which are multi-agency. From these meetings the Family Support Worker will take on any practical areas of support that is within their remit.

- As mentioned earlier, the Family Support Worker has worked with the Local Authorities to resolve housing matters as well as revenues and benefit issues.
- The Scottish Legal Aid Board has received a number of referrals/enquiries from the Family Support Worker relating to issues such as, housing law and family law.
- The Family Support Worker has access to a CLAN session worker through the Edinburgh Prison Visitors' Centre Development Worker and has made referrals for families who experience difficulties with literacy.

This gives brief examples of the types of partnership working that the Family Support Worker is undertaking. She continues to build stronger and wider links within the community.

### **Prison and Visitor Centre Partnership Working**

The Family Support Worker has seen the Family Contact Development Officers' (FCDOs) role as a welcome resource to the work that they carry out. Without their expertise on the prison procedures, the Family Support Worker would have found it extremely difficult to assist families fully when it came to dealing with prison based issues.

In partnership with the FCDOs, the Visitors' Centre Development Worker and the Prison Librarian, the Family Support Worker is involved in organising 4 family events within HMP Edinburgh. These events have so far included 2 storytelling events which saw both parents and children spending time together with an emphasis on literacy; a Christmas party for children with their father being able to wrap a Christmas present and enjoy time with their family; and a family picnic event.

The Family Support Worker has accompanied a few families to the Integrated Case Management meetings and is working alongside the Integrated Case Management officers to try and increase the family participation at these meetings. Ways in which they are looking to do this is for the Family Support Worker to be given a copy of the names of prisoners who will have their meeting the following month. This will allow the Family Support Worker to approach the families to ensure they know what it entails.

In partnership with the FCDOs and the Visitors' Centre Development Worker, the Family Support Worker co-facilitates the newly convicted prisoners families induction morning within HMP Edinburgh. This session allows for each partner to describe how they are able to support families and to alleviate any worries they may have. Alongside this, the Family Support Worker has an allocated time with the Development Worker to speak with the newly convicted prisoners about the service they can offer to their families.

HMP Edinburgh has nominated the work done by the staff at the Visitors' Centre for a Butler Trust Award. Included in this is the work that is carried out by the Family Support Worker.

The Family Support Worker is a participant on a number of groups including the Children and Family Strategy Group Meeting for HMP Edinburgh and at this can raise any concerns that have been fed back to them from families. This allows for families views to be taken forward on a strategic level. The Visitors' Centre has been developing its services, and this has seen two working groups set up to assist the process. One of the developments is to introduce professional play provision for children and young people visiting HMP Edinburgh. The other development is to change the existing tea bar within the Visitors' Centre to a healthy eating café at affordable prices for the families visiting HMP Edinburgh. The Family Support Worker is involved in both of these working groups and offers assistance where required. For the play provision group, The Family Support Worker will be the link for any families that the Play Worker or Play Development Worker identifies as needing support.

The Family Support Worker is also a member of the Visitors' Centre Advisory Board. Attendees bring to that group any updates on their post and looks for advice and assistance if there is anything needing to be taken forward.

### **Promotion of Service**

As well as providing a direct service to families, it has been important that the Family Support Worker promotes this resource to partner agencies. To date this has been done to a group of Criminal Justice Social Workers, who see this as a resource they could use when trying to link families into the Integrated Case Management process, and to two levels of Health Visitors across the City of Edinburgh, who again said that they would be happy to make referrals to the Family Support Worker.

The Edinburgh Voluntary Organisation Council asked the Family Support Worker and the Development Worker at the Visitors' Centre to run informal awareness sessions on their roles and the Visitors' Centre as a facility for other voluntary organisations. This is still in its infancy stage, and only one session has taken place, but with positive feedback from the participants.

### **Challenges and the Future**

Whilst working with families in the Lothian and Borders area, the families can be visiting not only Edinburgh Prison but also the national establishments such as Polmont and Corton Vale. The Family Support Worker has been looking at ways in trying to support families visiting these prisons, but it is having some difficulties. The main problem being that there is not a facility similar to the Visitors' Centre in Edinburgh at either of the other prisons. Therefore the Family Support Worker does not have a place in which she can easily engage with families when they are visiting. The Family Support Worker has met with two existing support workers for prisoners at these establishments and is hoping that, by promoting the service through them, they will be able to make referrals for families where appropriate.

It is also possible to look at the two other prisons' Induction processes that they have for families. If it was deemed appropriate for the Family Support Worker to feed into this, then that could possibly be another way forward.

## **References**

Loucks, N. (2004) *The Tayside Family Project*. Dundee and Edinburgh: Tayside Criminal Justice Partnership and Families Outside.

Seymour, C. and Hairston, C. F. (1998) *Children with Parents in Prison: Child Welfare, Policy, Program and Practice Issues*. New Brunswick, USA: Transaction Publishers.