



voicing the needs  
of families affected  
by imprisonment

**Families Outside**  
**Support and Information Helpline**  
**Review of April 2013 – March 2014**

**“Thank you again for putting my mind at rest.  
God knows how I would get through this nightmare if I didn’t have  
Families Outside to turn to.”**

# **Families Outside**

## **Support and Information Helpline**

### **Review of April 2013 – March 2014**

#### **Introduction**

Over 37,500 people are committed to custody each year in Scotland.\* Those imprisoned leave behind them children, parents, partners, and other family members whose experience of imprisonment can be significant and enduring.

The imprisonment of a relative has an impact on the social, emotional, financial and, especially for children and young people, educational development of the remaining family members. Calling the Helpline can make an immediate and positive difference to a family member who can find themselves isolated in their communities and made to carry the stigma and shame of their loved one's offence.

#### **What we do**

The Helpline is designed to (among other things):

- Provide practical and emotional support to families affected by imprisonment throughout Scotland;
- Support professionals who come into contact with families affected by imprisonment;
- Where appropriate to the families' needs, support them to maintain contact with their family including encouraging them to take children to visit;
- Provide information to families about how to get to the prison and how to arrange visits;
- Provide information on prison regimes and clarify how prisons operate;
- Promote the Assisted Prison Visits Scheme with families and professionals;

\*Scottish Government (2012) *Prison statistics and population projections Scotland: 2011-2012*. Edinburgh: Scottish Government. <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2012/06/6972/0>

- Facilitate family contact with the prisoner through joint working with key personnel e.g. Family Contact Officers (FCOs);
- Provide support to families by listening to their concerns; and
- Where appropriate, intervene and act directly on a family's behalf with the prison establishment.

***The Helpline's work is guided by the beliefs that:***

1. Families are not guilty; anyone can have a family member go to prison.
2. Families should not be judged or discriminated against because of having a loved one in prison.
3. All families, parents, and children affected by imprisonment should have access to information, resources, and services at the point of arrest and through to release.
4. Children and families play a significant role in supporting people in prison and should be actively involved in the person's time in prison from reception through to release.
5. Where appropriate to the families' needs, relationships with their relative in prison should be actively supported and maintained and recognised as a significant contribution to reducing reoffending.
6. Children separated from a parent due to imprisonment have the right to maintain their relationship with an imprisoned parent (as determined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child).
7. Families and children of people in prison need to be seen as families first and have their needs met accordingly.

**“As I left the Sheriff court on that day that my partner was sent to prison, I was at a loss as to how to calm myself down and couldn't stop thinking about how frightened and alone she must have been feeling. I soon found myself totally immersed in despair, and I couldn't cope.**

**“On my first prison visit, I noticed the Families Outside poster on the wall of the waiting area. Next day, I rang the number and what a relief it was to hear an understanding and sympathetic voice!”**

## Helpline activity

### Number of Helpline contacts

Our Freephone Support and Information Helpline is open 9am-5pm Monday to Friday and is an independent support service for families and friends affected by imprisonment. In the 2013/14 financial year, we received 1,810 contacts from individuals at varying stages of the criminal justice system looking to access help and for someone to talk to about their experience. Figure 1 below shows the annual call volume and how families reach us.

Figure 1: **Annual Call Volume**

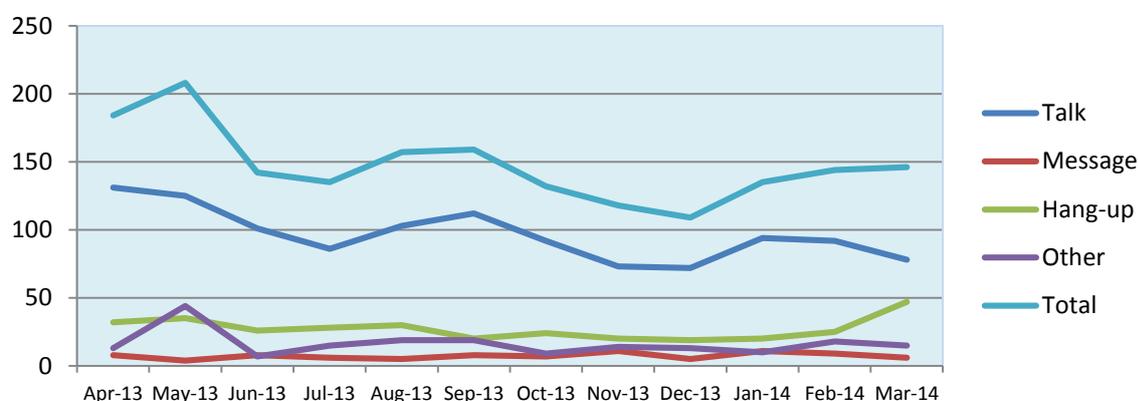
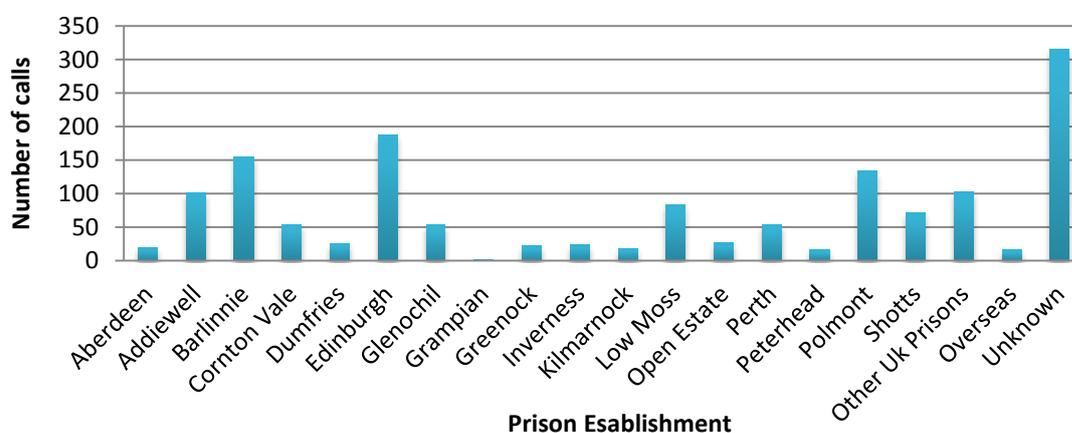


Figure 2 below provides a further breakdown of Helpline calls and represents the call volume generated by each prison establishment over the last year.

Figure 2: **Calls per prison**



Important to note is that call volume does not necessarily reflect the quality of a prison's support to families: family support can both promote the Helpline as a resource for families but also negate the need for families to ring the Helpline.

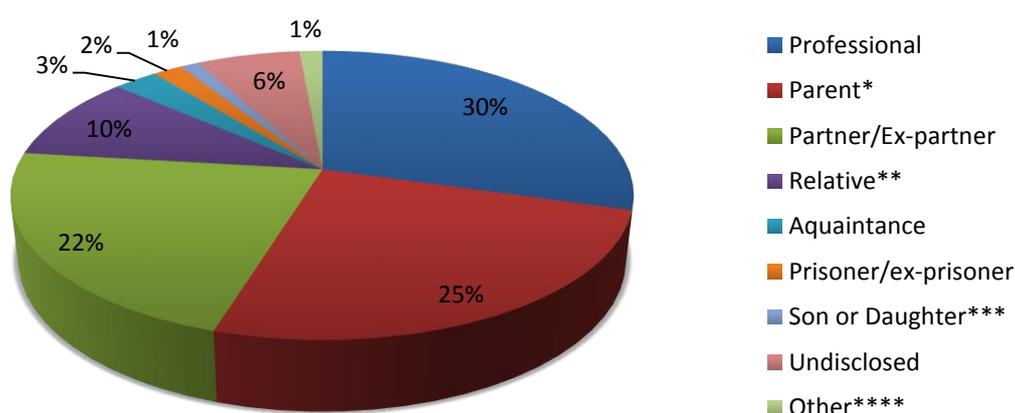
Over the full financial year, **66%** of callers accessed telephone support via our Freephone Helpline and our main office number. **18%** of calls were hang-ups (mainly out of hours calls) with an additional **6%** of callers leaving a message on the answering machine. A further **10%** contacted the Helpline by other means, for example email, letter, text, and social networking.

### Helpline callers

Over half of all calls (**58%**) to the Helpline are from close relatives (parents, partners, sons, daughters, grandparents and siblings), as Figure 3 shows below. However, the Helpline also receives calls from professionals (**30%**) looking to make a referral on behalf of family member or to seek guidance regarding support for the vulnerable families they come in to contact with. Professionals include prison staff, social workers, teachers, child welfare officers, health visitors, and other voluntary organisations.

“No one ever asked me if I was ok.”

Figure 3: Callers' relationship to prisoner



\*'Parent' includes natural and step

\*\*'Son/daughter' includes natural and step

\*\*\* 'Relative' includes natural, step and in-law grandparents, in-law parents, uncles, aunts, nieces, nephews and cousins

\*\*\*\* 'Other' includes neighbours, colleagues, and family friends

**“Thank you for caring and understanding. I feel so much better having spoken to someone.”**

This year, Families Outside has had a focused approach towards our colleagues in Education and has run a number of Continued Professional Development events in prisons across Scotland for teachers (co-hosted by the Scottish Prison Service and Families Outside). This initiative has helped raise awareness amongst teachers regarding the impact of parental imprisonment on children which, in turn, has resulted in an increase in teachers contacting us directly for support for pupils in their school.

The teachers that have contacted us have raised concerns that their pupils are having difficulty coping with imprisonment, are truanting from school, displaying aggressive behaviour, are being bullied or excluded by their peers, and are self-harming. The Helpline has responded to primary and secondary teachers' concerns by making referrals to our own Family Support Team as well as other specialist agencies such as Child & Adolescent Mental Health Services, Place to Be, and Seasons for Growth, as well as more locally based organisations that offer counselling and play therapy.

**Anna was signposted to the Helpline by her grandson's head teacher. Anna's son is serving a long-term prison sentence and, as a result, she has taken on care of two of her son's dependent children.**

**Anna is facing a number of challenges, as she has cancer and is appearing as a witness against her son's ex-partner, who is being investigated for neglect. She lives far from the prison and can't travel via public transport due to her poor health. She also lives quite close to the victim's family and is isolated in her community.**

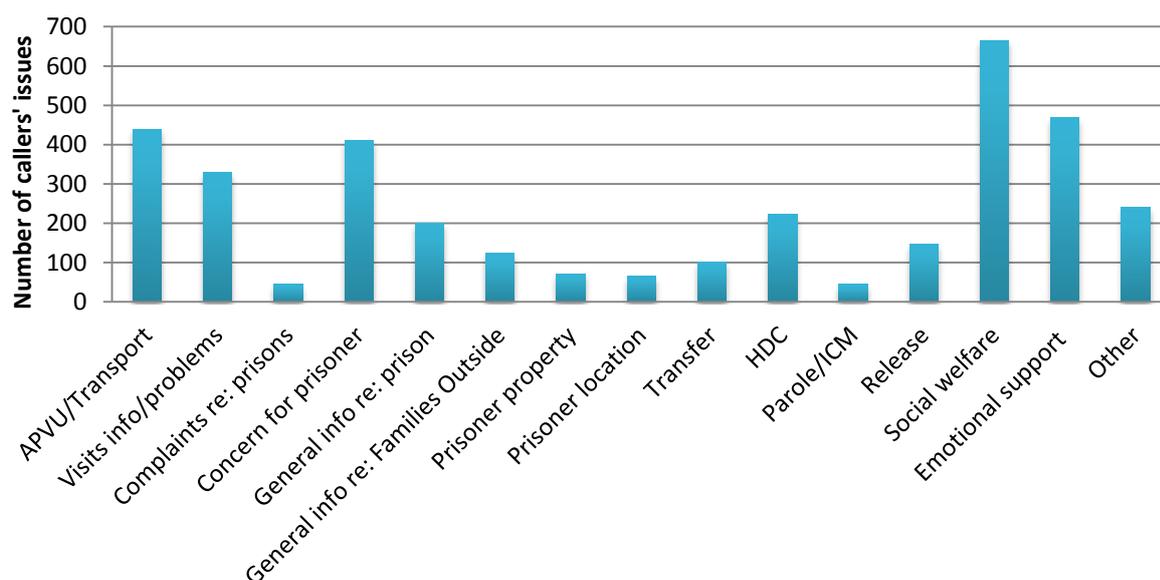
**The Helpline liaised with the prison to arrange Accumulated Visits at her local prison and referred her to our Child & Family Support Manager to work collaboratively with the Head Teacher to support the children in her care, and to look into the possibility of Anna and her grandchildren having a 'virtual visit'.**

## Reason for contacting the Helpline

Calls to the Helpline can be considerably complex in nature, with the majority of calls covering two or more issues. A single call to the Helpline can involve a worker researching up to date, accurate, and often specialist information to provide holistic and solution-focused support to each caller based on their individual needs. This can also take a considerable amount of time, especially when support is difficult to source or identify.

Overall, most families reach out to the Helpline when their relative is serving a prison sentence or is in custody on remand, though many contact us while their relative is out on bail or following their release. Common calls to the Helpline focus on a need for emotional support; social welfare issues such as health and wellbeing for families and children; housing and financial difficulties; as well as more prison based issues including information around visiting procedures, parole, Integrated Case Management, Extended Home Leave, and Home Detention Curfew. This year the Helpline has supported callers with over **3,574** issues. Figure 4 highlights the reasons families most often contact us.

Figure 4: **Callers' issues**



Families are often most disadvantaged when their loved one is located in a prison far from home. Our Helpline not only supports families all over the world with a relative in a Scottish prison but also Scottish families who have relatives who are located elsewhere in the UK.

Joan contacted the Helpline after her brother was remanded in a Young Offenders Institute in England, where the offence was committed. Joan had a number of concerns about her brother, as he is autistic and wasn't coping with the prison regime. He was refusing food, self-harming, and disclosed that he has contemplated taking his own life.

The Helpline encouraged Joan to contact the prison and raise her concerns about her brother with the Safer Custody Officer. We also arranged for the local organisation that ran the Visitors' Centre at the English prison to meet her before her first visit and facilitate back-to-back visits.

The Helpline assisted the caller with planning her journey and claiming travel expenses through the Assisted Prison Visits Unit (APVU) as well as making a referral to our Family Support Team for Joan's mum, who was her son's main carer and was struggling to cope with his imprisonment.

For many callers, one or two calls help them to address the questions and issues that are troubling them, but others may need more help. The complexity of the issues they are struggling with often means they need more time and emotional support, particularly when their relative has been accused or convicted of a very serious offence or where there has been a lot of media attention.

The Helpline provides a follow-up intervention service comprising ongoing telephone contact to provide short-term focused work with callers. This allows them more time express their feelings openly and to recognise their own needs and what support they might require.

Margaret initially contacted the Helpline with concerns that her son's health needs weren't being met in the prison and that he needed counselling for (recently disclosed) child sexual abuse. She had tried speaking to a number of prison and health care staff about this but was growing frustrated that they couldn't discuss anything with her due to the Data Protection Act.

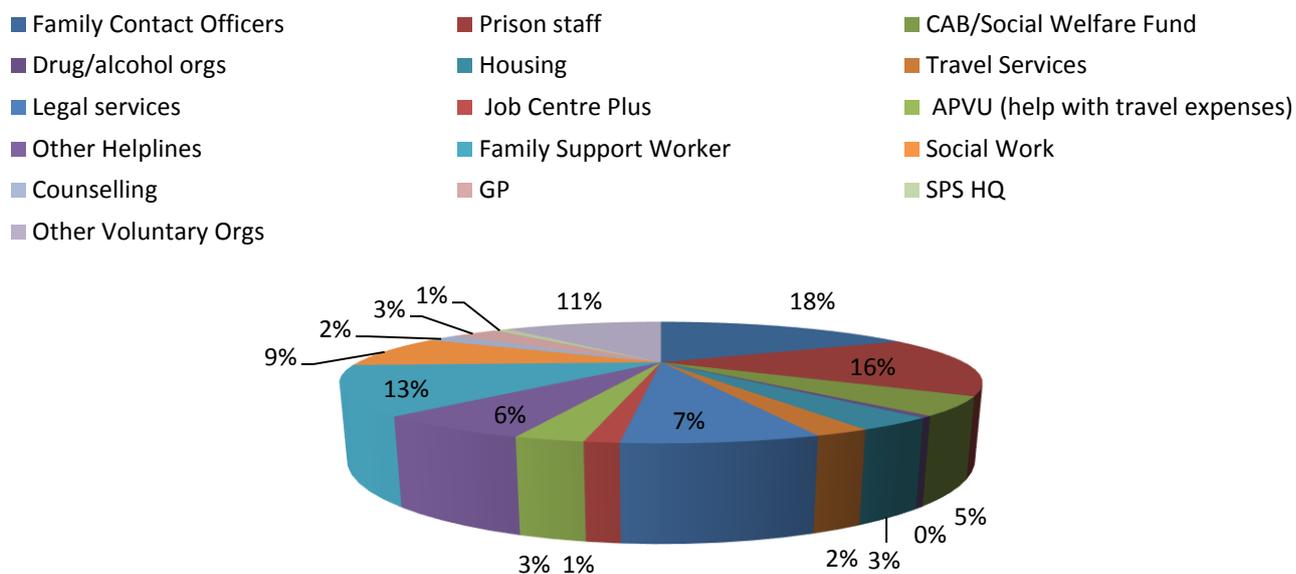
The Helpline acknowledged Margaret's anxieties and frustrations and explained who her son could speak to and how he might be able to resolve situation.

The Helpline learned that Margaret had very little social support because of the nature of her son's offence. Margaret also disclosed that her son was pressuring her into sending him money and to buy items she couldn't afford. The Helpline encouraged Margaret to send in only what she could afford and suggested she visit her GP, as she had lost weight and wasn't sleeping. The Helpline supported Margaret over a number of weeks, giving her the time and space to acknowledge gradually that she felt her son was manipulating her on an emotional and financial level.

For more long-term support, the Helpline will make a direct referral to the Family Support Team or signpost or refer families to other organisations that can offer them additional or more targeted help in accordance with their needs.

As Figure 5 demonstrates, Family Contact Officers, Family Support Workers, prison-based staff, and other voluntary organisations with a remit to working with families affected by imprisonment (e.g. The Lighthouse Foundation and Circle) were regular features of such referrals, but more specific needs such as legal, financial, and housing advice were also met in this way.

Figure 5: **Signposting to other services**



The Helpline will always try to encourage families to contact other agencies themselves in order to promote self-efficacy, but in many instances the Helpline will liaise with other individuals and organisations on the families' behalf if they were, for various reasons, unable to do so for themselves.

Mary contacted the Helpline, concerned for her safety after she received a threatening letter regarding her partner's drug debt. She was concerned about contacting the police, as she had disposed of drugs found in her home after her partner returned to prison from Extended Home Leave. She was also questioning her relationship with her partner and didn't know who she could talk to or where she could turn for help.

With the caller's permission, Helpline staff were able to liaise directly with the authorities to resolve the situation and to provide ongoing telephone support with the caller regarding her relationship issues.

### **Feedback to relevant bodies**

Families Outside's Helpline provides information and feedback to many relevant organisations and interest groups across Scotland. Some of these

include the Scottish Consortium on Crime and Criminal justice, the Criminal Justice Voluntary Sector Forum, facilitation of the Parliamentary Cross-Party Group on Children & Families Affected by Imprisonment, and input into the Scottish Prison Service's National Suicide Risk Management Group. These are a few examples of strategic work with relevant bodies, but Helpline data is both relevant and influential at all levels. Our Regional Coordinators utilise Helpline data at (SPS) Children and Families Strategy groups, and real information about the issues for the families of offenders is extremely helpful for the Prisoners' Week Planning forum, to which we also contribute. Information from our database also feeds into ad hoc requests for specific information, for example more recently identifying case studies regarding health and throughcare and prisoners with high care needs.

### **Thank you to our Funders and Supporters**

The Helpline could not undertake the work it does without the good will of contacts within the Visitors' Centres, the Scottish Prison Service (SPS), and all the agencies we have been involved with throughout the past year.

We would also like to thank all the organisations and individuals who have supported us via representation on our Helpline Advisory Group.

Our thanks to them.

**“I’m very grateful that Families Outside helped me through this nightmare; looking back at the start was some of the darkest days I’ve experienced, so to have come through it I’m proud.”<sup>i</sup>**

---

<sup>i</sup> In this report, we have included examples of calls made to the Helpline to illustrate the kinds of issues calls to the Helpline can feature, how we approach them and (if known) the outcome. All examples are real case studies; identifying details have been changed to preserve confidentiality.