

Families Outside

Voicing the needs of families affected by imprisonment in Scotland

Bulletin – October 2016

www.familiesoutside.org.uk



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by imprisonment

Partners Make Every Opportunity Count And Win Top Public Health Award

We are delighted to announce that innovative work by NHS Grampian, Action for Children, and Families Outside to help improve the health and wellbeing of children and families affected by imprisonment has won the Elizabeth Russell prize. Presented each year at the Scottish Faculty of Public Health's annual conference, the prize recognises the best example of a collaborative approach to public health.



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Families of those in prison can become socially excluded and find it harder to access services as a result. Working together, NHS Grampian, Families Outside, and Action for Children developed a simple set of questions to encourage families to focus on how they 'look after themselves' and get the support they may need. This is shared with families using the welcoming environment of the Family Centre & Help Hub at HMP & YOI Grampian, or during home visits. The responses from families can trigger conversation and inform discussion as an integral part of the support they receive through Families Outside and Action for Children. Guidance and assistance can then be built into current and future contact with the families.

Dr Linda Leighton-Beck, Head of Social Inclusion with NHS Grampian, said "NHS Grampian is always looking to make every opportunity count for people, enabling them to look after their own health. Our collaboration with Families Outside and Action for Children is benefiting a group of people who are often overlooked. Our approach can be adapted to the needs of other community planning and community justice partners. This prestigious national award, in the name of an eminent local leader in Public Health, should give partners additional confidence that using this approach helps make every opportunity count for people who need health and wellbeing support and for those who deliver services."

<http://www.easyfundraising.org.uk/fo>

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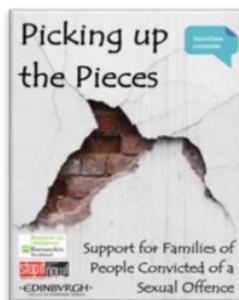
<http://www.easyfundraising.org.uk/fo>

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PICKING UP THE PIECES

Picking Up The Pieces is a new resource from Families Outside for families of people convicted of a sexual offence.

Families of prisoners almost always suffer from stigma, but no one more so than families of people convicted of a sexual offence. The marked increase in the number of requests for help from families in this situation, and the lack of support available, inspired us to develop our new 'Handbook for Families of People Convicted of a Sexual Offence'.



Written specially for families based on input from those who have lived through it, this resource is designed to help people cope with this experience.

Please feel free to **circulate** to colleagues, family members or anyone you feel may benefit from the information provided.

WELCOME TO OUR NEW STAFF MEMBER

We are very pleased to welcome Zoe Hunter-Hill to our team here at Families Outside. With a background in health and social care and working with children and families, Zoe will be joining our direct family support team. She will be based in Dumfries covering part of the south west of Scotland on both Tuesdays and Wednesdays each week. Zoe can be contacted on 07894 510379 or emailed zoe.hunter-hill@familiesoutside.org.uk



THE FAMILIES LEFT BEHIND

Families Outside, in partnership with Fife Council's Adult Basic Education and Family Community Support Team, has launched a new resource from four women affected by imprisonment or the criminal justice system. The women felt that their own experiences could help others in this situation, so we met as a Writers Group once a week for ten weeks. Over time the group members grew in confidence and found meeting with others to be a great source of support. **Families Left Behind** is the outcome of those meetings and is already proving to be a very popular resource, requested by social work, prisons, and third sector organisations.



YEAR OF THE DAD – ART COMPETITION

As part of the Year of the Dad celebrations, Families Outside has launched a collaborative art competition involving prisoners and their children. Working in collaboration, Dad or child will start a picture with the other then tasked with finishing it. The competition is designed to act as a stimulus for positive interaction between Dads and their children, promoting the Year of the Dad message around the difference a great dad can make. Entries are being collected from prisons across the country with a National Winner to be crowned in December 2016. For more information contact Tim on 0131 557 9800 or tim.haines@familiesoutside.org.uk



THE RAW AND POWERFUL STORY OF A FRIEND OF FAMILIES OUTSIDE

I was invited to visit by my youngest son, who had supported his brother throughout. He broke the law. At the jail my son checks he had ID. "You coming", he says. I get out of the car. But I could not go through the door. I spent half an hour talking to the ladies in the visitors' centre, run by Crossreach. I thought I had never felt so empty. But I had, when I would leave this tiny baby in the neonatal unit, every night for three months, until he was big enough to come home.

My son Joe had been sentenced for three years. I spent three weeks in total shock. Although he lives nearly 200 miles away, I made the decision to visit every two weeks, once I got my head round getting through the door.

Joe was 35. He would spend his birthday and Christmas in jail. But hey, I am ahead of myself! He had to get over his shame and invite me to visit. The first time was by no means the worst, but it was a steep learning curve. I found nothing untoward about the staff, the visitors, or even the prisoners in the visit room, but there was a sense of dispossession as you were asked to remove your outer clothing and leave it in a locker with your phone and bag. You sat there for an hour with no pen, no photos, no conversation point. I could not list the things Joe wanted me to bring, or send. I had to remember. But so did he!

Outside the family, I told three close friends. Not that they needed to know, but I needed to tell them. They were supportive, likening it to a temporary bereavement. I decided I didn't need to tell anyone else, and that included my younger son's in-laws and children. Imagine the shame if it came out in the playground! And so it was kept secret.

Joe rang me each week, and said he would serve half the sentence. The fog lifted slightly. Heading for winter, Joe's house would need attention, so I stayed there for a weekend, so the journey was easier. There was no electricity, and I spent a cold couple of days with candles and cold water. It is a tied farm cottage and to get the work done, the farmer had to employ temporary workers to do Joe's job. They would be moving into the cottage on Monday for six months.

We have a large family. Joe has two brothers and three sisters, and his dad, who is no longer married to me. Joe is single. He has six nephews and three nieces. Questions would be asked in the family.

During our visits I learned about the admission procedure, how they decide whether a prisoner is at risk, whether he is to have a cell-mate or not. Joe tried both, and ended up in a single cell when they decided he was low risk.

As a family we do not underestimate suicide. As the children have grown, I have not shielded them from the real world, and we lived in one of the toughest parts of Aberdeen for their formative years. Stuff happens. But there was a day, probably after Christmas, when there was a feeling of positivity. There was a release date. And so we could plan, but not become complacent.

Then there was the incident with the sniffer dog: I was picked out. It was an evening visit, my dog was in the car. Simple explanation. But, no. According to procedure there was the full search, and the upshot of this was that instead of spending an hour with Joe, my visit was cut to eight minutes. He was devastated. I was angry. So angry that I could not drive home, and spent the night in a hotel.

I complained to SPS, who redirected me to Police Scotland. I got a result. They listened, replied, and restored my confidence. The next visit the sniffer dog was there again, and the same thing happened.

In my letter of complaint I had outlined the need to ensure that visitors know the procedure should they be picked by the dog. This, I found, had been done, and I also pointed out that my son's visit had been cut short through no fault of his, and that this should also be addressed. It was. I spoke with the Governor about a lot of issues, and his explanations were all backed by policy.

A couple of weeks later I noticed an advert in the Big Issue for Independent Prison Monitors. I took the ad home and did not look at it again for a couple of months. Then I filled it in and sent it, carefully wording the Conflict of Interest.

I was surprised to be welcomed onto this pilot scheme, but they had picked up on my professional qualities and so I began training a year ago, when Joe was transferred to Castle Huntly, prior to release on HDC. Life was looking up. He could have more visitors, and come out to the car. Not long to wait.

The tag, however, was a pest. The cottage had been left in a mess, damp and cold, but easily cleaned. Joe's employers were sympathetic but the dairy farm had almost collapsed with the milk marketing crisis, and they could only pay him half his salary.

PART 2 OF THE STORY WILL FOLLOW IN THE JANUARY NEWSLETTER

NEW BOARD MEMBER NEEDED

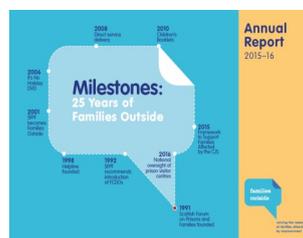
Families Outside is recruiting for a new Board member with legal expertise. Ideally you should have knowledge of charitable law and an understanding of the difficulties face by families affected by imprisonment. If Board membership of a charity is something that interests you, please [contact us](#).

CROSS-PARTY GROUP

The next Cross-Party Group on Children & Families Affected by Imprisonment will take place from 6-8pm on 7 December. To attend, please contact rebecca.joyce@familiesoutside.org.uk.

ANNUAL REPORT 2016

This has been another excellent year for Families Outside, in fact a milestone of 25 years providing support to families affected by imprisonment. Click to read our [Annual Report 2015-16](#).



Families Outside Support & Information Helpline

0800 254 0088

support@familiesoutside.org.uk

SMS Text Service **60777**

Text **Famout** followed by your message

