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by imprisonment

**In Their Own Right:**

**Support for families with a young person in secure accommodation**

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**October 2013**

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This study was commissioned by the Scottish Government and hosted by Families Outside.

Families Outside works to mitigate the effects of imprisonment on children and families through support and information for families and for the people who work with them. Families Outside aims to ensure that families affected by imprisonment and the people who work with them are informed and supported; that policy and practice reflects the needs of families affected by imprisonment; and that children and families receive information and support at the earliest possible stage in a way they understand.

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## Executive Summary

This study was conducted between February and May 2013 and set out to identify the support available to families when a young person is placed in secure accommodation. This report considers what support currently exists, whether the needs of families are met appropriately, and where gaps in support for families can be identified.

Documentary analysis, statistical data and semi-structured interviews formed the basis for data collection. Interviews were conducted with representatives of secure units, Young Offender Institutions (YOIs), social work services and third sector agencies. Thirty-four interviews were conducted with professionals, and four written responses to requests for information were received. Although considerable time and effort was given to securing the views of family members, the number of families who participated was small, with two semi-structured interviews and five questionnaire responses received from family members.

The study highlights the difficulties that family members can experience, in particular the anxiety and worry that can accompany the admission of a young person into secure accommodation. Scottish Government policy emphasises the importance of providing support to families, and workers across all sectors (statutory social work, third sector agencies, and secure units) who took part in this study were generally sympathetic to the needs of families and did what they could to provide support, both practical and emotional. However, such agencies are required, quite rightly, to prioritise the needs of the young person who is the focus of their intervention, and in this process, the needs of family members can often be overlooked or ignored.

During the time that a young person is in secure accommodation, families reported that they are often worried and anxious. They may be uncertain about what is happening to their child; and concerned for the young person's safety in the unit, the stigma of association with social work or the criminal justice system, and fear for their child's future. They may experience trauma surrounding the events leading to the secure admission and experience a process akin to grieving following the young person's removal from the home. They may also experience feelings of relief that their child is now in a safe place.

Family members identified their need for advice and information, particularly at the point of the young person's admission to, and transition from, secure accommodation. Families also required emotional support, particularly an opportunity to discuss their worries and concerns with someone. Family interviewees highlighted the importance of having someone to talk to and noted the impact on their health and wellbeing when this was not available.

There appeared to be some confusion between 'family intervention' and support for families. Support was generally understood to mean the provision of advice and information, practical assistance (generally in relation to visits to secure units), and the opportunity to talk with someone who understood the difficulties that families could be experiencing. Although all agencies had responsibility for providing information to families, family support was often situated in relation to the needs of the young person. This could mean that the role of the family was considered in supporting any work undertaken with the young person. In some cases, families were viewed as having a contributory role in the difficulties that resulted in the young person being placed in secure accommodation. In other instances, families were viewed as peripheral to interventions undertaken with the young person. These three perspectives on the role of families, although fluid and circumstantial, could affect the support made available to them. For example, support for families could be overlooked with the emphasis placed instead on family participation in programmes aimed at 'rehabilitating' the young person. Where families were viewed as contributing to the problems experienced by the young person, they were encouraged to participate in parenting programmes, or child protection interventions were prioritised. Finally, where families were viewed as 'peripheral', they had to approach agencies for help or were left to cope without any additional support being offered to them.

While workers from all agencies generally did their best to ensure that families were informed and involved in all work carried out with the young person, no specific agency had a remit to provide information and advice to families. Family interviewees and respondents outlined different experiences in seeking help from statutory services, and in some cases the response was perceived by family members as unhelpful. It often meant that families were unsure who to ask for help in the first instance, particularly if they did not have contact with social work services via an allocated social worker or involvement with a third sector agency. Secure unit staff were often the key contact for families in these circumstances and were considered by family respondents to be very supportive.

The key gap in provision identified by this study is the need that families expressed, regardless of general circumstances, for independent advice and information. Gaps in current provision were evident in the absence of independent support for families (distinct from support services for young people). Currently, workers attempt to provide support to both families and young people. Although their remit is the intervention with the young person, in the absence of other dedicated family support, this can extend to include the wider family. This appears to be why family support and family intervention, as concepts, were so often confused in interviewee responses. What appears to be required is an impartial agency that is knowledgeable about the secure care and YOI system and can pass on information to families while also providing a 'listening ear'.

Practical and financial resources can be available to assist families with travel costs to secure units when families have limited incomes, but families are often unaware who to contact to access this and may not be informed that they can receive help. As this support is often drawn from the 'discretionary' budgets of local authorities or secure units, it may not be offered to families, requiring families themselves to ask for help. Not knowing who to ask, or what support is available, undoubtedly precludes families who may require support from accessing it.

Families indicated that the opportunity to talk with other family members would be helpful, and there is some evidence that where one secure unit had a dedicated support service for families, including a family group, that this was perceived favourably by family members. There are likely to be benefits from sharing practice in family support across secure units and ensuring that families are able to access advice and information with ease, ideally independently from the secure estate.



## **Introduction**

This scoping study explored the support available to families when a young person is placed in secure accommodation. It identified what practical and emotional support families may need when a young person is admitted to secure accommodation, during their placement and at the point of their transition back to the community or to a Young Offender Institution. The study considers what support currently exists, whether the needs of families are met appropriately, and where gaps in support for families can be identified.

## **Methods**

The scoping study used a number of methods to achieve its aims. In addition to documentary analysis, statistical data was collected from anonymised calls to the Families Outside Helpline; additional Helpline statistics were provided by Who Cares? Scotland and Includem.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 29 professional interviewees who work with young people. These included:

- Representatives of five secure units including unit managers, transition/throughcare staff, and family support workers (8 interviewees).
- Workers based at HMP & YOI Cornton Vale and YOI Polmont (2)
- Social workers and Whole System Approach (WSA) co-ordinators across Scotland (13)
- Third sector agency interviewees representing: Includem, Who Cares? Scotland, Action for Children, Barnardo's Plan B, and Time for Change (6)

Additionally, discussions were held with representatives of the Scottish Government Transitions and Reintegration Group, Criminal Justice Social Work Development Centre, Scottish Government Youth Justice team; Scottish Children's Reporter Administration (SCRA); and a systemic family therapy provider (5).

Written responses to requests for information were received from:

- Criminal Justice and Parole Unit
- Action for Children
- Time for Change
- Glenstrathie Partnership

The views of family members were collected to identify their experiences of having a young family member placed in secure accommodation. Priority was given to accessing family members, and their views were sought in a number of ways. Initially, workers in secure units

and third sector agencies were asked to pass on information about the study to families, informing them about the study and inviting them to take part in a face to face or telephone interview. This elicited one interview with a parent. Subsequently, the original interview schedule was redesigned as a questionnaire (with a reply paid envelope attached) and again, workers were asked to make these available to families. Seventy questionnaires were circulated in addition to the original information about the research project, which again invited family members to take part in the study either by meeting the researcher, speaking to them by phone or email, or sending written information with, or instead of, completing a questionnaire. The study time-line was extended to allow for families to respond. Despite the wide circulation of information and every effort being made to obtain the views of family members, at the end of the study period, information from families took the form of one face-to-face interview, one telephone interview, and five completed questionnaires (seven family responses in total). While this is a low return for the effort made to involve families, it is indicative of the challenges that can often arise in obtaining their participation in research (e.g. Brutus, 2012).

## **Background**

### *Use of secure accommodation in Scotland*

Scotland currently has 90 beds (excluding emergency beds) in the secure estate divided between five<sup>1</sup> secure units. Before a child or young person can be placed in secure accommodation through the children's hearings system, a children's panel must consider that the young person meets the legal criteria set out in section 70 (10) of the Children (Scotland) Act 1995. That is:

(a) having previously absconded, is likely to abscond unless kept in secure accommodation, and, if he/she<sup>2</sup> absconds, it is likely that his/her physical, mental or moral welfare will be at risk; or

(b) is likely to injure him/herself or some other person unless s/he is kept in such accommodation.

The recommendation of the children's panel must be authorised by the chief social work officer of the relevant local authority, which is then responsible for placing the young person.

Children and young people can also be placed in secure accommodation on remand or sentence by court. While a key part of the youth justice/welfare system in Scotland, Scottish Government statistics indicate that only a small **majority** of placements in secure

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<sup>1</sup> At present, five secure units operate in Scotland.

<sup>2</sup> The legislation refers to 'he', this has been adapted here to apply directly to young men and women.

accommodation are currently made through a Children's Hearing. An increasing proportion of admissions come via the Criminal Procedure (Scotland) Act 1995, where children and young people awaiting trial can be held in secure accommodation on remand under Section 51<sup>3</sup>. This allows a court to remand children under 16 years to the care of the local authority, and this may (although need not) be in secure accommodation. Remands are generally for an initial seven days and may extend to 110 days. Children and young people convicted of an offence under summary procedure may be sentenced to residential accommodation under Section 44 (1) of the Act for a period of up to a year, although they can only be kept in secure accommodation if the criteria of 'significant risk' or likelihood of absconding are met.

Children convicted of murder may be sentenced under section 205 of the 1995 Act, which carries a mandatory life sentence. Those convicted of other cases heard on indictment can receive a determinate length of sentence under section 208. The Parole Unit acts on behalf of Scottish Ministers to ensure that sentenced children and young people are appropriately supported to reduce their risk of re-offending and to prepare them for a successful transition into the community, or on to a Young Offenders Institution (YOI) on leaving secure accommodation.

The number of young people placed in secure accommodation under section 205 or 208 of the Criminal Procedures (Scotland) Act appears to have been fairly static over the last few years, with an average of 20 - 25 young people housed in secure accommodation under a sentence or on remand at any one time (Scottish Government, personal communication). Placements for sentenced young people are funded by the Scottish Government, whereas placements for children in secure accommodation on welfare grounds are funded by the relevant local authorities. Between 2010 and 2012, 72% of young people in secure accommodation were aged 15 or over, with 76% of all young people placed in a secure unit for under six months (Scottish Government, 2013: 25). During 2011-12, the average cost per bed per week was £5,160, with costs in individual units ranging from £5,060 to £5,410.

#### *Families and secure accommodation*

There has been very little research carried out which considers the impact on families when a young person is placed in secure accommodation. Indeed, within the context of child protection systems, families are often viewed as responsible, or at least partially so, for children's behaviour or vulnerability. The role of families has often been viewed somewhat ambiguously in policy and practice (e.g. Pawson et al. 2009). On the one hand, they are viewed as crucial support systems for young people in trouble, while on the other they are

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<sup>3</sup> Between August 2011 and July 2012, 45 young people were admitted to secure accommodation on grounds of 'committal to place of safety or temporary detention' (Section 51) (Children's Social Work Statistics, 2011 - 2012). While the use of secure accommodation appeared to reduce in recent years, it has been suggested that the beds made available have been used by sentencers to hold young people on remand (Vaswani, 2009b).

often demonised as the underpinning ‘problem’ for such young people. Policy responses have often reflected this shifting viewpoint. As Goldson (2000: 256) notes: “The history of social work with children in trouble has been influenced, if not determined, by complex and sometimes contradictory processes underpinned by competing ideological priorities”.

Previous research (Farrington, 1992; Crowley, 1998) has highlighted that a ‘disrupted’ family background is often prevalent in the background circumstances of young people in conflict with the law, frequently alongside significant experiences of disadvantage (Jacobson et al, 2010). However, Crowley (1998) and Goldson (2000) noted that parents who took part in their studies (parents referred to ‘parenting programmes’ in England and Wales) had tried very hard to control their child’s behaviour, in circumstances of poverty and often distress. Interviews with parents conducted by Goldson and Jamieson (2002: 93) highlight the impact of such difficulties on parents, who describe their inability to ‘cope’, and the effect of this on their health and emotional wellbeing. Importantly, Goldson and Jamieson also note the difficulties many parents experienced in accessing help from social services or local social workers (see also Tunstill and Aldgate, 2000; Kilkelly and Moore, 2002; Action for Children, 2013). Tunstill and Aldgate (2000) found that many families struggled for long periods of time before approaching social services for help. Those who approached social services alone were less likely to get a service than those who were referred by a professional. They also found that, while social work support was the most likely form of help requested, it was the least likely request to be met.

Crowley (1998: 49) notes that “many parents, reluctant to approach stigmatised services struggled for many years before the involvement of social services and/or educational support services”. She concludes: “In short, it was the very powerlessness of many of the parents in all aspects of their lives that enabled their children to be increasingly marginalised and excluded” (1998: 50). Action for Children’s study of neglect (2013) provided the views of parents who indicated the importance of being able to get help *prior* to a crisis and indicated that parents would benefit from a ‘spokesperson’ at meetings about their children to “help us speak up” (p20).

Despite the difficulties that families may experience when a young person is in trouble, most young people will eventually return to their family of origin on leaving secure care or custody. Indeed, length of stay in secure units (SIRCC, 2009: 36) appears to be related to placement before admission, with young people admitted to secure accommodation from home (i.e. living with parents, relatives, or friends) tending to have shorter stays in a secure unit. Walker et al. (2006) however, highlighted evidence from their ‘outcome’ study that, two years after admission to secure accommodation, 42% of young people (the largest group) were living with a parent or other relative. Notably, however, few of this group were considered by social workers to be living in a ‘stable’ family situation. One of the key implications of Walker et al.’s study was the importance of continuity for young people and their need for someone they could rely on for longer term stability:

“It was the on-going relationship with families which enabled some intensive support projects to avert admissions when crises arose, whilst the same principle was key to a step-down approach helping young people retain some of the benefits when they left a secure placement” (p10).

This can be particularly difficult for some young people. For example, Walker and colleagues identified that a particularly high proportion of young people in secure accommodation had experienced the death of a parent or close relative. Grandparents often kept families together when parents had problems coping, and the death of a grandparent could result in the accumulation of circumstances resulting in a young person being admitted to secure accommodation (see also Vaswani, 2009a and Penny, 2009).

Significant issues for girls and young women in the youth justice system have been identified (Rigby et al., 2011) with around one-third of the secure population made up of girls (Scottish Government, 2013). While young people in secure accommodation in general have a range of needs, a high proportion of girls in particular experience mental health issues, self-harm, and suicidal behaviour; similarly young women in custody in Young Offenders Institutions have poorer mental health than both their male counterparts and adult female prisoners (Mitchell et al, 2012).

The experiences of young women are frequently characterised by conflict and poor family relationships. A recent evaluation of the Time for Change service (Burman and Imlah, 2012) highlighted sporadic and infrequent family contact between the young women and their families in the majority of cases, with many of the young women referred to the project having been exposed to family conflict, physical and/or emotional neglect, and in some cases sexual abuse during their childhood.

### *Family interventions*

The Scottish Government (2011b: 15) notes: “Family work is appropriate when offending behaviour has some origins in family relationships and difficulties, and when the family can be actively engaged in strategies to prevent further offending.” This indicates a dual approach to families enshrined in policy, and as this study highlights, reinforced in practice. On the one hand, families are seen as the context where a young person’s offending behaviour may have commenced; on the other, the positive influences of family involvement are also noted as encouraging desistance or supporting young people more generally. These two roles are not necessarily mutually exclusive. The Scottish Government (2011b:16) states: “Engagement with families must recognise the fact that families will have needs of their own and should not therefore focus solely on the needs of the young person.” More broadly, family involvement in interventions with the young person has been considered of benefit to family members as well as for the young person.

Where attention is given to families in practice, however, it is often focused around the needs of the young person as a way to improve family relationships or to support families to 'manage' the young person more effectively. In general, there has been little consideration of the specific needs of families with a young person in secure accommodation or of how best to address these needs. More attention has been given to the needs of families of prisoners, with whom there are likely to be significant similarities, highlighting that prisoners who maintain contact with their families are more likely to have a place to stay on release; more likely to have social support; more likely to have financial support; and more likely to have links into employment (Hairston, 1991; Akhurst et al, 1995; Nacro, 2000; Scottish Forum on Prisons and Families and the SPS, 2000; HM Inspectorates of Prisons and Probation for England and Wales, 2001; Social Exclusion Unit, 2002; Loucks, 2004; Ministry of Justice and Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2009).

In relation to young people in particular, literature on desistance (Barry, 2006 and 2010; Smith, 2006; Farrall et al, 2010; Cid and Marti, 2012) and resilience (Daniel and Wassell, 2002; Seaman et al, 2005) shows clear links between positive, supportive relationships and reductions in offending, and more generally, the young persons' ability to overcome difficult and challenging circumstances.

While recognition of, and consequently support for, families affected by imprisonment is growing with national support through Families Outside and underpinned by regional and local organisations such as Circle, the Lighthouse Foundation, and the establishment of visitors' centres in increasing numbers of local and national prisons, there has not been the same attention to support for families when a young person is admitted to secure accommodation. This may be due to the far fewer number of secure care admissions, but may also relate to the location of secure accommodation within the youth justice and youth welfare/child protection systems and the resulting expectation that the needs of families are addressed within this context.

However, the impact on families when a young person is placed in secure accommodation is likely to echo the findings of Brutus (2012), who interviewed family members with a relative in prison as part of an evaluation of the role of Families Outside Family Support Workers. Although numbers were small, most of the interviewees reported that they had sought help from Families Outside:

“due to their extreme distress at the imprisonment of their loved one, in most cases, their son. The distress was felt in terms of 'strain', feeling 'uptight and agitated', 'depression' and at its worst in a couple of cases, 'feeling down and suicidal'” (Brutus, 2012: 16).

Being able to access support (in this case, through Families Outside) meant that families/mothers had increased awareness about the criminal justice process and what to

expect, improved access to practical support, and increased ability to cope; with workers able to respond to their needs on an individual basis.

Feedback from parents, families, and practitioners in response to the Scottish Government's National Parenting Strategy (Scottish Government, 2012: 28) highlighted families' need for help at an early stage in the process when a young person was placed in secure accommodation. Issues of stigma, reluctance to ask for help, and the fear of losing parental control were also highlighted.

Similar difficulties for families have been identified elsewhere across the UK. In 2010, Ofsted evaluated the processes of admission, discharge, and resettlement of young people placed within the secure estate in England and Wales, and into the community. The report noted that, while considerable consultation took place prior to admission with families and social workers of young people admitted on welfare grounds, this was *not* generally the case for young people admitted following sentence by the courts. In the case of the latter group of young people, admissions often took place after office hours, young people often did not know where they were being taken, and parents were not informed until the young person's arrival at the unit. Distance between units and home exacerbated anxiety and limited visits by families, thereby increasing young people's unhappiness and sense of vulnerability. Geographical isolation could also limit the involvement of families in planning and reviews.

Following admission to a secure unit, Ofsted (2010) reported that workers would engage with the family very quickly, providing them with information and guidance to help them get involved in the processes of assessment, planning delivery of services and review. Practical efforts which were highlighted as important ways secure units could help families overcome problems of distance and maintain contact with young people included: arranging taxis for families, providing refreshments for them, letting family members stay with the young person for several hours, altering meeting times to fit in with transport arrangements, and providing financial and emotional support to families (Ofsted, 2010: 14). Following discharge, parents and young people often continued to keep in touch with workers at the unit and reported positively about the informal support they were receiving. Many of the parents surveyed by Ofsted indicated they would welcome *formal* contact with the units following the discharge of the young person.

Kilkelly and Moore (2002) highlighted similar problems of family contact between children and their families in Northern Ireland, including difficulties caused by the location of the centres, understaffing, and policy and practice in individual units. Practical difficulties for families in travelling considerable distances and the cost involved meant that some young people in their study had few visits. "Some young people said that loss of contact with their family was the worst thing about being in custody" (*ibid.* 133). Difficulties getting to the centres also presented significant obstacles to parental involvement in their children's care.

The lack of support available to families more generally, was noted in Kilkelly and Moore's study, which recommended that juvenile justice centre management should "prioritise parental involvement in the preparation and implementation of plans" and that "practical measures, such as facilitating transport and refunding costs, must be adopted in order to alleviate the difficulties families experience accessing the centres" (p137).

Similar problems have been highlighted for young people in Young Offender Institutions (YOIs) where early and on-going family contact may be important. Family Contact Officers (FCOs) can facilitate contact between prisoners and their family, although encouraging and facilitating family contact was, according to one interviewee, patchy across the estate and could be improved with benefits for children's emotional well-being (see also Mooney et al, 2007).

Other sources of data collected for this study have also highlighted the importance of support for families. For example, Includem provides a telephone helpline offering a free 24-hour service available to young people and their families/carers who are working with the organisation. It is staffed locally during office hours by a Support Services Team and, out of office hours, by trained frontline Project Workers and Assistant Project Workers who will provide advice, information, and face-to-face support where necessary. A review of the Helpline (McKechnie, 2013: 12) indicated that 29% of calls to it were made by parents and an additional 28% by Carer/Workers, accounting across both categories for 57% of total calls. Interviews with parents who participated in the Includem review identified the importance they attached to the service and the follow-up support they received. Both young people and parents appreciated the helpline service and indicated that cost-free calls made a big difference to their willingness and ability to use the service.

### **Policy developments in Scotland**

The Scottish Government's Whole System Approach (WSA), which aims to support young people and reduce offending, underlines the importance of family work and engagement with the young person and their families at all stages of intervention to improve reintegration and transition (Scottish Government, 2011a: 1). Guidance issued notes:

"Young people within justice systems suffer multiple disadvantages that need to be addressed to ensure that they can become part of society and lead law abiding lives. Many of these problems can be intensified by them being in secure care or custody. Research shows that dislocating children and young people from their families, communities and from mainstream children's services by placing them in custody can contribute to their vulnerability."

Similarly, the Scottish Government's National Parenting Strategy (2012: 44) states that:



“Family involvement can make a huge difference, both to the ease of transition and to building on any gains made while in secure care or custody, and it is a priority of the Scottish Government under the Whole System Approach to provide the right support at the right time to young people who offend and to their families.”

The National Parenting Strategy (Scottish Government, 2012: 7) sets out the Government’s aims to support parents “to be the best that they can be so that they, in turn, can give the children and young people of Scotland the best start in life”. The Strategy outlines the importance of investment in support for parents across all areas and specifically in relation to responding to youth crime. Furthermore, the Scottish Government has committed to working in partnership with the Criminal Justice Social Work Development Centre for Scotland over three years, along with a family therapy training network, to deliver postgraduate, professionally accredited, foundation and intermediate level training courses in systemic practice and family interventions. This approach aims to maximise family strengths and resilience to help people overcome problems experienced by individual family members and the resilience of the family as a whole.

It was in this context that the Scottish Government made a commitment to work, along with Families Outside (2012: 14), in partnership with families of young people in secure accommodation to research the needs of this group, identify effective strategies for engaging them, and ensuring that families have the information they need to play a meaningful role in interventions with their child/young person. The next section outlines the findings obtained from this short scoping study.

### **Findings: support for families**

There was a wide recognition amongst interviewees that families had a crucial role to play in any work undertaken with the young person before, during, and after placement in secure accommodation. Generally, interviewees recognised that “engagement with the family is essential” (social work respondent). They are “key, they should be part of the whole care plan and the whole care package...” (secure unit manager).

By examining the needs of families for both practical and emotional support at different stages of the process of admission, placement, and transition from secure accommodation, it was possible to consider key areas where gaps in provision could be identified and where additional support may be beneficial. Each area is considered in turn.

#### *Pre-admission/point of admission*

Under the Whole System Approach, social work and the secure unit “should work in partnership to promote key relations for the young person and family involvement throughout their placement” (Whole System Approach, n.d.). The importance of

establishing a good relationship with the family at the point of admission was noted by interviewees who worked in secure units. But prior to admission, the role of social workers involved with the family was key in ensuring that families were informed about the process of admission to secure accommodation and were prepared for the impact this may have, both on them and the young person.

Where social workers had the time and knew the family (i.e. planned admissions), they would generally describe the unit, what the exit strategy was likely to involve, and would try to dispel parents' fears, concerns, and myths. It was suggested by some interviewees this on-going contact and communication with the family may be easier in smaller local authorities where the number of young people at risk of secure placement was small and there were relatively few gaps in provision. Lack of information about what a secure unit was like could *increase* parent's anxieties and create misunderstandings. One worker noted by way of example: "You get things like – I've often heard - well I'll just come up and take them out on Saturday. And well, you can't take them out. They are not going out".

Where a secure authorisation was unexpected, it was not always possible to prepare the family, for example if the young person was sent from court on remand or sentence; interviewees commented that Sheriffs and/or lawyers may not explain what was happening very clearly. Often the family 'don't know where to turn' and may not need/want to turn to social work services. Social workers indicated that they would try to provide support and, if necessary, parents would be referred on to independent advocacy services, which are in place across local authorities<sup>4</sup>. However, at the point of admission, parents could often be 'overwhelmed', and interviewees generally concurred that families were not always well informed about the process of admission.

Six out of seven family respondents in this study (albeit a small number) were not satisfied with the information they had received, (or had not received any information) *prior* to the young person's admission to secure accommodation, nor with the level of contact with social workers *during* the placement. None had been given details of organisations that they could contact for further information or advice, although all indicated that this would have been appreciated. One parent indicated that she did not have confidence in her child's social worker and would like to have been informed if secure accommodation was appropriate for her child and, importantly, what alternatives were available.

The one parent who indicated that s/he<sup>5</sup> was satisfied with the process overall had received information from social work services that was considered to be helpful both before and during the young person's placement in secure accommodation. The parent noted:

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<sup>4</sup> See, for example, the Scottish Independent Advocacy Alliance, <http://www.siaa.org.uk/>

<sup>5</sup> This respondent had completed a questionnaire and their gender was not specified.

“They (social work services) found a placement for my son, gave me information on it. We visited and met the staff etc. I have had on-going support from social work services and they have been good.”

Following placement to a secure unit (or a young offenders institution in the case of 16- and 17-year olds<sup>6</sup>), a 72-hour review will take place with social work, with family attendance wherever possible. Workers in secure units provide information about the unit and what to expect. Most units will provide booklets with information for families and young people, and generally parents/carers will be shown around areas of the secure unit and introduced to the workers who will be caring for the young person. Secure unit workers emphasised their role as being to reassure the family that the child would be looked after/cared for and that they (the family) should be part of the care plan/package.

Meeting with secure unit staff and seeing where their child would be living appeared to help families to some extent, although one parent described the information she had received initially as “overwhelming”. Another parent who described the process where her son was admitted to secure accommodation emphasised the importance of secure unit staff in allaying her anxiety:

“So it was actually the police that got hold of him and had to take him up in the end. And he was quite upset and I was quite upset so I went up to visit him that night so...the staff explained you know and I was shown about the place, they explained what would be happening so they kept me up to date.”

One secure unit worker noted however: “you can never prepare a family for it. (...) I mean, even families that have been through the process, it’s a horrendous experience for them which is often not seen...” To try and help with this, one secure unit has set up a comprehensive webpage, for families where they can access a ‘virtual’ tour of the unit. Questions and answers drawn from families’ previous experiences are included on the webpage providing the kind of information that is likely to be useful – and which may not immediately occur to workers. While some of the information provided relates to visiting arrangements and regulations, the section which families contributed to is:

“real heartfelt stuff that they really want to know, ‘is my boy going to be okay?’ ‘is my girl going to be alright at night time? is she going to be upset? is she going to be frightened?, will there be someone there to comfort her?’ so it was all that kind of thing that people were really interested in” (family support worker, secure unit).

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<sup>6</sup> Under the WSA, a criminal justice social worker will be assigned to 16- and 17-year olds sentenced to a YOI.

One family respondent reinforced this point by outlining concerns about how their son would cope in secure accommodation and how the rest of the family would feel about him going, noting that they would miss him.

#### *During custody*

During the time that a young person is in secure accommodation, families are often worried and anxious. They may be uncertain about what is happening to their child and concerned for the young person's safety in the unit, the stigma of association with social work or the criminal justice system, and fear for their child's future. They may experience trauma surrounding the events leading to the secure admission and experience a process akin to grieving following the young person's removal from the home. They may also experience feelings of relief that their child is now in a safe place, but this can also be underpinned by feelings of guilt:

“And there is the guilt – no doubt most parents feel guilty, is this my fault why this happened? But there's a plus side sometimes too – it can be about relief. If your child is placed in secure care because of fighting or offending or involved in drugs, and all of a sudden they are not doing that now. It's not ideal, but you might be able to sleep at night thinking you know my son or daughter is not out taking drugs or alcohol, they're not fighting...” (youth justice social worker)

This was echoed by a parent:

“While I knew he was safe and I knew that he wasn't taking what he was taking, it was like a weight off my shoulders as bad as it might sound, you know? Nobody wants to see their child in secure, but he needed to be there.”

Another parent indicated:

“Although heartbroken, I believe it was the right decision for my child to be placed there. He is having an opportunity to reflect, and through counselling it will help re-educate him back into the community.”

Another parent reiterated:

“We all miss him terribly but know it's for the best for all of us. It has got a bit easier because we've had a few years to get used to it, and we know he's ok where he is.”

#### *Contact and visits*

Opportunities to visit the units and/or to have regular contact with the young person and workers could reduce families' anxiety. However, a number of barriers were identified for families including childcare responsibilities, transport difficulties, and travel for parents with mental health problems or physical difficulties. Secure units are located across the country

and, while local authorities will try to place a young person near to home, this is not always possible, and families may have to travel a significant distance to visit.

Interviewees noted that attendance at reviews or other 'official' events will often be facilitated by the local authority social work department, both practically and financially. Local authorities will provide financial support for family travel to secure units, something that can be less problematic in local authorities where the number of admissions to secure units is small. Secure unit workers will, where necessary, also facilitate family visits and often arrange to pick families up at the local train or bus station, or in some circumstances, will arrange travel warrants. However, only one out of the seven family respondents in this study had been offered, or received, any help with transport – and most indicated that they tried to visit several times a week, as well as keeping in touch by phone and/or letters. Where help had been offered, and accepted, the secure unit had provided the family with a travel warrant to visit the unit fortnightly and provided additional support to pay for the family to go to the cinema.

When families were linked into social work or third sector services, generally where a young person had been placed in a secure unit on the authorisation of the Children's Hearing, they were more likely to be informed of the support available (primarily financial) should they require it to visit the units. Families who were **not** involved with social work services, more frequently families of young people remanded or sentenced to a secure unit, were less likely to know what support they may be entitled to.

Secure unit staff noted that siblings were often encouraged to visit the unit too, if that was appropriate, but interviewees noted that brothers and/or sisters may not know where a young person had been placed (i.e. in a secure unit) or may feel guilty or ashamed about their family circumstances. One worker commented: "lack of support for siblings is massive". Where workers did refer to siblings, it was often in terms of their participation in 'programmes' aimed at breaking 'cycles of offending' rather than in relation to brothers' and sisters' own need for support. One mother noted, of a sibling:

"It was hard because he kept asking to see his brother and I didn't ...I just didn't want him going into a place like that! ... He doesn't like to really speak about it, but you know he does miss his big brother. I have explained things to him though like why he's in there".

A sister who took part in this study also noted: "I was worried about when I would see him (her brother) and what it would be like to visit". A parent commented (about their son's placement in a secure unit): "his sisters are very upset and find visiting the unit difficult and restricting".

A social worker gave an example where a young person from the east of Scotland was placed in a secure unit in the west and, during a six month placement, never saw his older

brother or grandmother (primary carer) while he was there due to financial implications of travel and times of visits. While in some ways it was considered good for him to be moved outside his local area, according to the social worker, it was also acknowledged as being harder for his family.

Visits are of significant importance to families and young people. Who Cares? Scotland identified that contact with families was the biggest advocacy issue requested by young people across Scotland since 2008 (across all accommodated sectors). Who Cares? Scotland's report on young people's perceptions and experiences of secure care (2008) highlighted that young people felt that contact time with family and friends was limited. Procedures were considered unnecessarily bureaucratic by the young people in relation to contact lists<sup>7</sup>, monitoring of phone calls and restrictions on visitor numbers. Stopping mobility<sup>8</sup> as a sanction was seen to limit the emphasis on its use as a throughcare measure and young people could be frustrated and disappointed if time outside the unit was stopped due to staff shortages.

Between 1 April 2012 and 31 March 2013, Who Cares? Scotland responded to 1,947 calls for advocacy services. The majority of requests related to contact arrangements (180 regarding contact with parents; 78 with siblings; 39 with extended family contact issues; 25 with friends, 37 other contacts; 24 with social workers) – accounting for almost 20% of all advocacy requests (compared to 22% of all requests between 2011-12) (Who Cares? Scotland database, information provided by interviewee).

Similarly, the Families Outside helpline (which, notably, supports families affected by imprisonment rather than secure care) recorded 15 calls between January 2010 and April 2013 in relation to secure care. Those recorded as relating to secure units were predominantly in relation to inquiries for financial support for visits.

#### *Someone to talk to or ask for help*

During the period of custody, the involvement of a good social worker or a voluntary organisation could make a big difference to families, providing someone to talk to and get advice from. There was evidence from this scoping study that, in many cases, families would benefit from an 'independent' person to seek advice from and generally talk to. This was also clear from families' responses. One mother noted:

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<sup>7</sup> Social workers are required to monitor and authorise, in conjunction with secure units, who can visit young people.

<sup>8</sup> 'Mobility' is the term used to describe the process where a young person is able to leave the secure unit to spend time outside, usually consisting of visits and time spent at the family home. This begins with short visits accompanied by a worker and develops into overnight/weekend stays with the family.

“I just needed somebody to talk to.... Just to kind of rant at basically just to get things out in the open that you can’t really say to people that are close to you, ... I just felt as if I had nobody to talk to....”

When families did not approach services for help, it seemed that “no one outside the family ever even asked how we were coping” (sibling respondent). But families clearly had real anxiety and worries, indeed often lived in fear, for the young person prior to and during their placement in custody:

“I was worried about my brother getting into fights. I was worried he would try to run away from there too. I was worried that this meant that he would end up in prison one day, and I worried about other people finding out.”

A young person noted that she would have liked to have someone to talk to about her brother’s behaviour (which resulted in his admission to secure accommodation) as neither she, nor her parents, could understand it. Having someone to discuss things with may, in her view, have helped the family communicate with each other. As it was, she notes: “My parents would argue in the kitchen a lot, and I never really understood what was going on”.

One parent described the difficulty she experienced in her dealings with social work services:

“That was hard, I really didn’t have anybody to speak to then, I would say that was the hardest because it took a lot for me to go to them and say that I couldn’t have him in my house. He couldn’t live with me any longer and I just felt I was being ignored; I was ignored quite a few times. I wasn’t offered anybody to speak to. It was horrible.”

A grandmother indicated that she had not been offered any information on what was happening to her grandson either prior to, or at the point of, admission to secure accommodation. Her only contact with social work was at the Children’s Hearing or when she phoned social work services directly herself. She said no one suggested any organisation that she could contact for help, although she would have appreciated someone to speak with about her concerns. Despite visiting the secure unit several times per week, she did not receive any financial support. When asked what was most difficult about her grandson’s placement in secure accommodation, she noted: “I am scared for him and have been ill since he went away.”

Similar to the findings of Brutus (2012), family interviewees highlighted the impact of the anxiety they experienced on their health and wellbeing. One parent noted that the thing that had helped her most was the antidepressants she was prescribed by her doctor. This had longer-term consequences, as she had struggled to come off them.

Family members outlined their concerns about how their young person would cope in the secure unit, and perhaps more so, at the point where they left the secure unit. The importance for families of having an independent person to talk with was noted by workers from all agencies. One youth justice worker noted:

“I think there can be a lack of support there for parents, and just having someone to offload to and talk to, and unfortunately our workers are really, really busy, and they can’t always be there for that. But also I don’t think that families would want to be doing that to us, because they know that that’s going towards assessments and a certain extent they are going to feel that they’re being watched.”

Parents suggested that the opportunity to speak with other parents would be helpful. One interviewee commented:

“It would be good to talk to other families that are in the same situation, because a lot of people don’t understand what you’re going through. You know it’s...it’s...I don’t know it’s...there are not many people out there that would know what it feels like. It would be good to talk to somebody that was in the same situation.”

The importance for families of ‘a listening ear’ was evident in the extent to which families reported that they would contact the secure unit for support, and often continued to phone secure unit staff for advice after the young person had left the unit. While secure unit staff tried to provide this on-going support, it clearly had an impact on their resources and did appear to indicate the absence of other provisions for these families when the young person has returned to the community<sup>9</sup>.

While any project working with the young person can and will provide support to the families, and all workers indicated their willingness to help families in any way they could, none of the interviewees were aware of any *specific* support for families to address their direct needs, other than in relation to the needs of the young person.

Although the number of interviewees who participated in this study is small, the scoping study has highlighted three main perspectives held by workers across all agencies (see Figure 1). They are not definitive; overlapping and intersecting, with different views being more influential depending on individual worker and the circumstances of individual families. However, the data collected from interviews is sufficiently clear to determine the ways in which these dominant perspectives influenced responses to family members across professional agencies.

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<sup>9</sup> While other services such as Includem will offer this follow-up support, it is only available to young people and families who access their services.



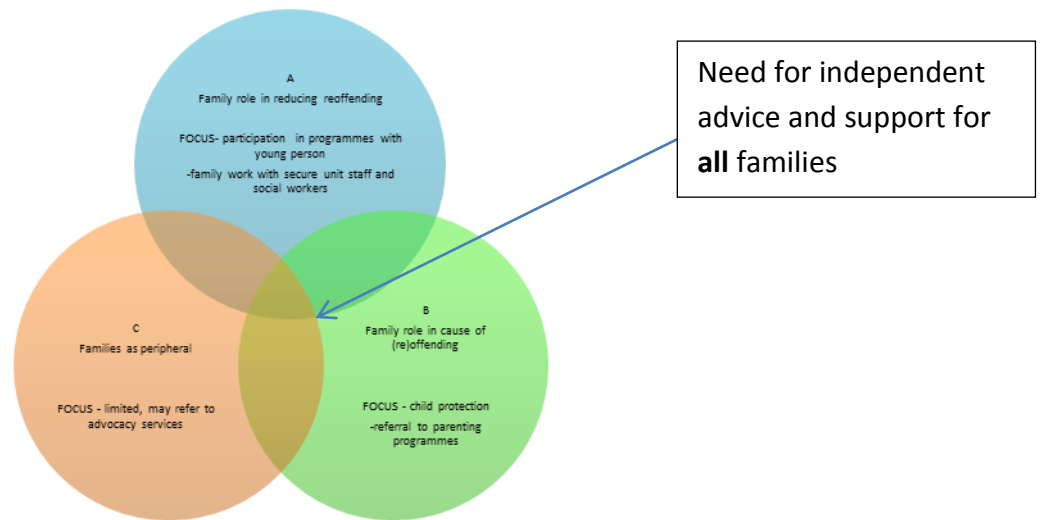


Figure 1: Dominant views of workers on role of families

These dominant views, albeit intersecting and fluid depending on situations and circumstances, can be seen as influencing the extent to which families were offered support by workers.

Figure 2: Influence of workers' views on provisions offered to families

Views of workers	Action
<p>View A</p> <p>Families have an important role in work carried out with the young person</p>	<p>Encouraged and supported to participate in work undertaken with young person in units and/or community</p> <p>Family Group conferencing or family therapy may be suggested</p>
<p>View B</p> <p>Family situation may have contributed to young person's circumstances and needs to change prior to young person's return home</p>	<p>Family referred to parenting programmes either to address family difficulties or to support families to 'manage' young person's behaviour</p> <p>Expectation that families will have own supports i.e. addiction worker, support for mental health</p> <p>Child protection issues forefront interventions</p>
<p>View C</p> <p>Family are peripheral to interventions</p> <p>(may be due to young person's age, where they were living prior to admission, or placement in adult justice system)</p>	<p>Family may be referred to advocacy services</p>

The figures above simplify what is, in reality, a complex set of responses, but help to illustrate the ways in which families are generally viewed, going some way to identify the key gaps in provision for families. While workers from all agencies do their best to ensure that families are informed and involved in work with the young person, there is no specific agency with a remit to provide information and advice to families across all three sets of circumstances set out above. Family interviewees and respondents also indicated their awareness that workers viewed them in a particular way, and in some cases this was perceived by family members as unhelpful. It often meant that they were unsure who to ask for help in the first instance, particularly if they did not have contact with social work services or involvement with a third sector agency. Secure unit workers were often the key contact for families in these circumstances, and their support was appreciated.

The gap in provision is identified in Figure 1, at the central point where, regardless of circumstances, families need independent advice and information. The remaining discussion illustrates this further.

### *Family involvement in programmes and interventions*

For many interviewees, when asked about family support, they had difficulty identifying support for the family and often referred to 'family work' with the young person. Reference was made to anger management courses or work focused around developing better communication and family coping strategies. In this respect, there was a view that getting families to engage could be a challenge for various reasons:

"You get the families who don't seem to want to be on board completely..., some families think 'it's time for us to breathe now' cause they're all over the place, they're so chaotic and they're safe now, but you have to get by that safe bit and say 'right, well, what's the plan now to move forward?' and that is sometimes the bit where you can get stuck, and it depends how the family will engage with you, you know."  
(secure unit manager)

Where secure units had attempted to get parents involved in provisions, this was not always seen as successful (i.e. setting up a parents' group, participating in parenting programmes through the unit). This perceived reluctance of families to get involved in 'parenting' programmes was seen as indicative of their commitment or ability to take responsibility for the young person's difficulties. However, it may also be a reflection of the stigma attached to 'parenting programmes'. One secure unit worker commented: "You can imagine it's hard to hear that maybe the way you've done something or the way that things have happened has resulted in your child being in secure."

One worker noted: "the family might not ever be a safe place for them (young person), so building up that resilience in them that will help them cope with that is quite important". The emphasis placed, very appropriately, by workers on the young people could mean that the needs of other family members were overlooked, however. One worker commented: "There's a massive amount of stigma for families, and they don't know what to do, how to deal with it, they've got that attitude 'I'm damned if I do and I'm damned if I don't'."

However, apprehension and fear could also get misconstrued as lack of motivation or as not wanting to do anything about problems in the family, while the reality, according to one worker, could be that "no one has sat down and listened to them".

In situations where a parent was struggling with his/her own 'issues' (such as mental illness, addiction, financial difficulties), workers could refer them onto other agencies, and interviewees from all agencies indicated they would do this if appropriate. One secure unit had, until recently, provided a counselling service for families to allow parents to address 'their own issues' with an external (to the secure unit) agency, providing a confidential

service. This had been considered a useful way of avoiding such issues from interfering with family work involving the young person. This service, which was available to families who participated in the family support service at the unit, had been viewed as beneficial by families who had accessed it, and it was noted that if resources were available, this model of support would be used again.

The extent to which families were involved in programmes across secure units appeared to vary. For example, one secure unit had only one family involved in young persons' programme work: "working with families is something we really want to get into, and we're putting our toe in the water but that's about it", while another unit had dedicated family workers and a Family Support Intervention Service in place. This service would identify families' own needs and provided a five-tiered service that was needs-led and flexible and could involve workers going out to families in the community to provide a service<sup>10</sup>.

Families could be referred to family mediation or family group decision-making/family group conferencing where these services existed in local authority areas. Systemic family therapy was referred to as a specific resource, for example Edinburgh City Council has just recruited two new teams to deliver multi-systemic family therapy. Family conferencing was considered helpful, particularly where a young person was about to leave secure accommodation, where the worker could help establish a 'contract' between the family and young person.

The Family Therapy Training Network has been funded by the Scottish Government to provide professionally accredited training in systemic family therapy over three years to train workers to work with families, and more recently (2012) has included training for youth justice workers. This was viewed as effective by social work interviewees, some of whom considered it a useful way of starting to address the needs of the family as a whole. However, social workers pointed out that providing training for social workers in family therapy was good but would only work if families engaged with this. Often those families with the most entrenched problems would be least likely to do so.

Several interviewees referred specifically to the Triple P parenting programme and indicated that this would be accessed where appropriate or would be used by workers who had received training, both in the community and in at least one secure unit, where it was considered to be an option that would help parents 'parent properly'. However, it was not considered to be universally successful, and the challenges of engaging with older children were noted:

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<sup>10</sup>Importantly, families accessing this service wanted to be referred to as a 'group' (i.e. families doing 'group-work') rather than as 'parenting programme', highlighting the stigma of some of the terms currently applied to intervention with families.

“The first thing we’ve had was the Triple P strategy – we’ve tried that a few times, and we think probably it’s been largely unsuccessful. But I think this is because the young people we’ve got are aged between 12 and 14. When they get to aged 14 or 15, my view is that it is extremely difficult to harness a teen Triple P programme with a child who is so far out of control.”

Similarly, one worker noted:

“You have to be careful with this. For some families it is much better to just have one person (the social worker) involved and supporting them and working with them (...). For some families it is too much to have another stranger become involved – or attending a group would be too difficult.”

Nevertheless, social work respondents in particular, when asked about family support, referred to ‘parenting programmes’ and highlighted the need for consistency in provisions across the country. Contradictions in the views of workers were evident. On the one hand, some indicated that there was a definite gap in support for families – in terms of emotional, practical, and financial support. Others, specifically workers who identified ‘family support’ as referring to family participation in programmes or interventions, were of the view that families were often reluctant to engage. This fundamental dichotomy appears to depend on how family support is defined (see Figures 1 and 2 above).

There was however, acknowledgement that families are often desperate for help. This can reflect the lack of appropriate services in the community, for example mental health support for young people, which can leave parents to deal with difficult behaviour and where the family may be traumatised before the young person is admitted to a secure unit. It can also reflect this lack of support for families themselves, with general advocacy<sup>11</sup> services often the only resource to which they are directed.

Families who have had on-going social work involvement, it was suggested, may have a certain ‘confidence’ in dealing with social work; whereas others who have not had this experience tend to be less familiar or confident with the system and, as one worker commented: “they don’t like asking for help” (a point also evident in Goldson and Jamieson, 2002, and Pugh and Lanskey, 2011). The involvement of an external agency could be helpful in such cases to ‘offer a different insight’ and ensure the family was fully supported. As one social worker commented: “We focus on the young person, and at times you can lose sight of the wider picture and the impact that it’s having on the family...”

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<sup>11</sup> Services offering independent advocacy vary across local authority areas, however their general purpose is to help people have a stronger voice and to have as much control as possible over their own lives. An independent advocate will not make decisions on behalf of the person/group they are supporting but will help them get the information they need to make choices about their circumstances and will support the person/group to put their choices across to others.

Within the current system, families who seek practical and/or emotional support are required to seek this help from workers with responsibility for their children and who may view them (parents and families) as the root cause of the young person's problems. This was a view reflected throughout the scoping study, and many workers indicated that most of the issues that brought a young person into the secure system were family-related. One worker commented: "it may be a traumatic experience for them when you mention the word 'family'," while another commented: "I think a number of our parents have their own needs and their own issues that makes it very difficult for them to prioritise the needs of their children".

Nevertheless, families can often feel that they are seen as at fault, and again, this makes it less likely they will approach services involved with the young person for help:

"Even when all these agencies are involved – children's hearing, social services etc. no one ever sits down and helps you understand your relative's behaviour, instead you are just made to feel that it's your fault, that (you) raised him wrong or didn't do enough" (family interviewee).

A worker in a secure unit noted:

"Proportionately, most of our kids will go home, or they'll go to another resource, but most of them that go home will still have some of the issues that brought them here with their families, and they won't have been resolved.... a lot of their problems, a lot of the behaviour is related to the family letting them down."

But secure units and social workers are focused upon the young person, and their family's involvement is directly related to that. One worker from a third sector organisation stated:

"Sometimes families may feel as though they are not involved enough in the care plan while the young person is in secure, however sometimes this is necessary, particularly if many of the problems stem from the familial situation. Perhaps there could be more support in explaining this to the family members; however it is a very sensitive situation."

### *Transitions: going home*

Secure units will work 'in partnership' with families to identify what support they need when the young person is due to leave the unit. However, this depends on community-based services actually having/putting things in place. As one secure unit manager noted: "sometimes that becomes very, very difficult and that's where some of the time is taken up (...)". Successful transition can also depend on available resources.

A system of 'mobility' is in place to allow young people and their families to start the reintegration process back into community life by being 'tested' in the community. Workers will facilitate this process by taking young people to the family home and spending some time there. It also provides a useful way of developing further contact with families prior to the young person's release from secure accommodation.

A number of difficulties were identified for families when a young person is due to leave secure accommodation. One of the key problems, according to workers, was the assumption that it was appropriate for a young person go home after being in secure accommodation. One worker noted:

"... if that care environment has been so poor for so many years that it's got to the point where they've had to enter the secure estate, why after three months or six months would you return them back to that environment? No matter how much support you give that family, changing within three months is going to be challenging for anybody. It's unrealistic on the family, it's not fair, it's setting them up to fail."

This view reflects the problems that workers anticipated could arise if, in their view, families had not changed. Alternatively, there may be some recognition that the difficulties the young person experienced may not have altered. One social worker commented:

"They (families) might think that secure care will 'fix' their child which can be a problem... (...) often the underlying reasons aren't 'fixed' through secure care, which the families can find difficult sometimes. In that situation it's all about building up coping strategies to help the young person transition back into the community."

However, families could often feel unsupported at the point of transition. One family member indicated:

"I am led to believe his stay will be short and his social worker suggested that I look into possible children's homes for my child. I feel this is something that I am unqualified to do and would not know where to start."

#### *Support from third sector agencies at point of transition*

A number of third sector organisations provide support to young people to assist their return back to communities from secure accommodation (including Includem, Time for Change, Action for Children), generally building on relationships established either prior to the young person's admission to secure accommodation or during their placement as a precursor to their return to the community. When third sector agencies are involved with a young person, they will also do what they can to provide support for families.

Time for Change, for example, works with young women and will provide encouragement and support to families at the point of transition. However, for some of the young women they work with, there is little family involvement, and it may be inappropriate to pursue

this, in which case their work with the young person will focus on establishing a future community placement. The service operates on an outreach basis and provides support, partnership, one-to-one focused work, and a 24-hour on-call helpline. Time for Change adopts a gender-specific, holistic service provision and has developed a professional working partnership with HMP & YOI Cornton Vale (now HMYOI Polmont) and the Good Shepherd Centre in particular (previously dedicated to girls).

Action for Children also provides an out-of-hours service which can be used by both young people and their families. In addition to work with the young person, Action for Children can offer family group conferencing to develop a safe plan for the young person's reintegration to the family. This provides the support of a trained coordinator to assist the family to design and implement the plan. The service will also provide practical support to families such as transport to the secure unit to visit the young person, help with any other areas of need (such as housing, training or work placements), and help for families to cope with the pressures they can experience as a result of the young person's behaviour.

Includem also provides a range of services to young people and their families and can continue to support a young person, if appropriate, during their stay in secure accommodation or at the point of transition to the community. Includem also emphasise the importance they attach to working with families as a central element of all aspects of their work with a young person.

Some local authorities use Intensive Support and Monitoring Services (ISMS) delivered by voluntary organisations as part of an exit strategy/transition process from secure accommodation (see Boyle, 2008)<sup>12</sup>. The family will often talk to workers (i.e. Includem/Care Scotland) and ask them for help and/or advice, often seeing them as quite distinct from social workers but also as agencies that can pass on appropriate information to social work.

### *Going to prison*

For a small number of young people serving a sentence in secure accommodation, they will be required to move into a Young Offenders Institution, either when they turn 18 or when it is considered more appropriate that they enter the adult prison system, for example if a decision is taken to move them into prison at a review meeting as a result of their behaviour in the secure unit. Work between secure units and the Scottish Prison Service is ongoing to ensure improvements in transitions for young people between institutions under the Preventing Offending by Young People, Framework for Action (2012).

Interviewees identified that this transition from secure accommodation can be difficult for both the young person and their family (if engaged with the secure unit) and, if appropriate,

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<sup>12</sup> ISMS aims to provide a direct community-based alternative to secure accommodation and operates via an intensive, multi-agency service package co-ordinated around each young person according to their individual needs and risks.



workers in the secure unit will take both young person and their family to the prison prior to the actual transition to prepare them for this move as far as possible.

There can be considerable communication between the secure unit and the prisons when a young person is going to be transferred, often based on the links that have been established between workers in each institution. Secure unit workers indicated that they would often visit the young person in prison until they had settled in. Plan B is a Barnardo's project that works with 16-17 year old boys and 16-21 year old girls in prison on a sentence of between four months and four years, all of whom are currently accommodated at YOI Polmont. Plan B will undertake any work with the family, as appropriate. Their remit is to coordinate the young person's personal plan within the prison and to facilitate the coordination of their transition back into the community. This may not be necessary if the young person already has an allocated social worker who can coordinate this. A recent aim of Plan B has been to have more contact with families, and Plan B workers will often contact families when they are working with a young person, sometimes just to let families know where the young person is. One Plan B worker noted the difference for young men and women, commenting that: "most of the boys have houses to go to; most of the girls are homeless".

For families, the transition from secure accommodation to prison can be difficult: in secure accommodation, families are very involved in the process of Looked After and Accommodated Children (LAAC) reviews and on-going progress meetings, whereas in prison, it can be viewed as 'disempowering' for the young person to have their parents at reviews. One Plan B worker commented:

"most boys don't want their mum contacted (when in Polmont), but perhaps three months prior their mum would have been there and been involved in every single part of decision-making in some way or another. So, yeah I can imagine it can feel quite alienating for parents."

For families with a young person in prison, workers noted that many families are reluctant to ask for help. It was noted that families often need information: how to get to the prison, visit regulations, what they can bring into the prison, how to phone, how to write, the young person's prison number, etc. In prison, families can often be 'penalised' when misbehaviour by the prisoner leads to loss of privileges which, in the prison context, can include phone calls and visits. Families may not be told about this and, unless someone tells them, may make the journey to the prison only to find they cannot see the young person<sup>13</sup>.

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<sup>13</sup> The development of visitors' centres and 'help hubs' across the penal estate (currently being developed in HMP & YOI Cornton Vale and expected in HMP & YOI Grampian when it opens in March 2014) should mean that families will receive more appropriate support when visiting family members in prison.

## Discussion

Families can face a number of difficulties when a young person is admitted to secure accommodation. In addition to the trauma of separation and disruption to family life, there are a number of costs for families in maintaining social ties which can be emotional and practical, including direct and indirect financial costs.

The main difficulties families may experience include:

- Practical difficulties of access to secure units, which are often some distance from their homes
- Loss of control over decision-making in relation to the young person
- Stigma and a general lack of understanding of their needs
- Separation issues for siblings
- Challenges for support agencies in terms of time and resources to meet everyone's needs (i.e. child and families)
- Lack of awareness of the supports available

Similarly, the needs of families and young people were often viewed as an exercise that required some degree of balancing. For example, one third sector worker noted:

“I think if any support was to become involved specifically with the families of young people in secure, they would have to be sensitive to the fact that secure accommodation can often serve as giving the young person a ‘break’ from the family situation. Often this time apart is essential to addressing the risks and needs of the young person, although of course any support network – family or otherwise – should be supported and encouraged positively.”

Support was generally understood to mean the provision of advice and information, practical assistance (generally in relation to visits to secure units), and the opportunity to talk with someone who understood the difficulties that families could be experiencing. Gaps in current provision were evident in the absence of independent support for families (distinct from support services for young people), and it appears that the same workers are attempting to provide support to both families and young people (with their remit intervention with the young person being increasingly expanded, in the absence of other dedicated family support, to include the wider family). This appears to be why family support and family intervention were so often confused. What does appear to be the key gap in provision is the existence of an impartial agency that is knowledgeable about the secure care and YOI system and can pass on information to families while also providing a ‘listening ear’. Practical and financial resources appear to be available, but families are often unaware who to contact to access this. As this support is often drawn from the ‘discretionary’ budgets of local authorities or secure units, it may not be offered to families, requiring families themselves to ask for help. Not knowing who to ask or what support is available undoubtedly precludes families who may require support from accessing it.

One secure unit worker commented:

“If it was my son or daughter who was heading off to secure care because something had happened, it would be very difficult. I’d like someone to spend time with me and reassure me and all those sorts of things. I would have thought social workers try to the best of their ability to do that, and so do we, but there is nothing dedicated to it.”

Some families may not require additional support but may require advice and information about what is available when a young person leaves secure accommodation. Third sector agencies may have an important role here, in terms of the provision of independent advice, information, and advocacy if necessary.

Lack of resources in the community is also likely to have an impact on the family, who are increasingly required to deal with difficult situations. For example, one secure unit indicated that, in the past, they would be involved in commissioning specialist psychologist/psychiatric reports/assessments if appropriate – but given the cost of this, they no longer do this. Particular difficulties appear to be evident for young women, who may be less likely to have consistent and ongoing family support.

The difficulties facing young people and families ‘known’ to social work confirms the welfare needs and family problems which characterise experiences of young people who end up in secure units and those who offend more generally. Goldson (2000) notes the circumstances of disadvantage which characterise the experiences of many young people in the youth justice system. More recently, Jacobson et al (2010) similarly found significant levels of disadvantage among children who entered the youth justice system in England and Wales. The emphasis on ‘parental deficit’ which has underpinned developments throughout the 1990s appears to be less evident in Scotland in the current context, and considerable emphasis has been placed (in policies discourse) to involve and support families. However, this wider political agenda and general mistrust of statutory services may help explain the reluctance of many families in trouble to approach or engage with youth justice services.

## Conclusions and recommendations

While workers from social work services, secure units, and third sector organisations will do their best to support families as appropriate, gaps in provision result from the absence of any dedicated agency with responsibility for ensuring that families are able to access both practical and emotional support, should they require or desire it.

On a practical level, families should be given clear information about the secure unit and process of admission, where possible, prior to the young person's admission. This is particularly important where a young person does not have an allocated social worker at the point of admission to secure accommodation (generally if admitted on sentence or remand from court). Lawyers and Sheriffs may benefit from being more informed about secure units and the provision of information at court i.e. providing information and details of an appropriate contact person/ agency would be beneficial.

Where financial support is available for families who require it to visit the units, information should be explicit to make eligibility criteria clear in terms of who families should apply to for support and how to apply. For example, information on the assisted visits scheme for families in receipt of benefits in England and Wales can be accessed on the Gov.uk website e.g. <https://www.gov.uk/young-people-in-custody/visiting-young-people-in-custody>. [Easy access to practical information may, of itself, help reduce stress for families.](#)

The provision of independent family support would be useful to help families understand what is going on, but opportunities to speak with other families or an independent support agency would be useful. Current examples of initiatives in individual secure units (in terms of the provision of information and family participation in the unit) could usefully be shared across the sector to support the development of best practice and ensure some consistency of support across Scotland.

Provision of support for siblings requires further consideration, and although some secure units were aware of the importance of this need, the concerns and anxieties experienced by brothers and sisters is not fully addressed across the secure sector. The particular needs of young women and their families could also be usefully explored, given the concerns of some interviewees that this group of young people were often particularly isolated from family members.

Families often appeared to rely on support from secure unit staff after a young person had left secure accommodation, where there was no third sector support in place. While supporting the young person's transition into the community is the responsibility of local authority social workers, the Whole System Approach may, in the future, provide opportunities to ensure increased support for families as well as identifying additional ways to involve them in care plans.

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