



Families Outside Strategic Plan 2021 – 2024

17 Gayfield Square, Edinburgh EH1 3NX
T: 0131 557 9800
E: admin@familiesoutside.org.uk
W: www.familiesoutside.org.uk

Summary

Imprisonment is a traumatic experience for families, and its impact is often significant and enduring. The imprisonment of a relative has an impact on the social, emotional, financial and, especially for children and young people, educational development of the remaining family members.

Families Outside is the only national organisation that works exclusively on behalf of families affected by imprisonment in Scotland.

Families Outside is recognised as a national Scottish charity by the Inland Revenue and is constituted as a Company Limited by Guarantee.

Vision

Our vision is for families affected by imprisonment to be treated with justice and fairness so that they can live lives free from stigma and disadvantage.

Mission Statement

Families Outside works to improve outcomes for children and families affected by imprisonment.

Core Values, Principles, and Beliefs

At Families Outside, our core values are to be Responsive, Accessible, Independent, and Knowledgeable.

Families Outside is committed to equality and diversity in its employment and support practices.

Family members should not be judged or discriminated against because a member of their family has been imprisoned.

The definition of 'family' is self-defined rather than prescriptive. 'Family' is not limited to close blood relations but to whomever a person considers to be significant in their lives for whatever reason.

The responsibility for ensuring that families are not disadvantaged due to imprisonment of a family member lies with agencies in the social justice, inclusion (e.g. housing, employment, benefits), education, health, and care sectors as well as with agencies within community justice. We therefore develop and promote partnerships with such organisations in order to achieve our goals. Where competition for funding is unavoidable, we will maintain open and honest dialogue with the other parties in order to maintain positive relationships.

The needs of families affected by imprisonment in Scotland should be researched, acknowledged, and reflected in public policy and sustainable, accessible, and empowering services made available to meet these needs.

Where appropriate to the families' best interests, relationships with their relative in prison should be actively supported and maintained and recognised as a significant contribution to reducing reoffending. Children separated from a parent due to imprisonment have the right to maintain their relationship with an imprisoned parent (as determined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child).

Our effectiveness will be measured by outcomes for individual families (e.g. through the Helpline, regional family support, and peer support groups) and in our impact on the responses of other agencies to families affected by imprisonment (e.g. through influencing policy and practice, through partnership work, and support of other organisations that work with families).

Collaboration with other organisations is key to achieving our aims and to ensuring families have the best possible support, where and when they need it.

We are committed to developing and maintaining high standards of financial and management practice in order to ensure efficiency and accountability to the people we support, stakeholders, and funders.

Brief History

The Scottish Forum on Prisons and Families was established in 1991 by professionals in criminal justice and childcare organisations who recognised that the needs of families affected by imprisonment were overlooked by all parts of the system. Initially hosted by Save the Children, the Forum initiated research into the impact of imprisonment on family members, which led to the Scottish Prison Service (SPS) establishing the role of Family Contact Development Officer (now FCOs) within prisons. The SPS also provided continued support through chairmanship of the Forum, the secondment of an officer to the Forum as the base from which to develop the FCDO role, and, until June 2015, a financial contribution to the Scottish Prisoners' Families Information Line (now the Families Outside Support & Information Helpline), set up in 1998, which provides a national confidential freephone service.

During 2001/02, the Management Committee of the Forum reviewed the progress of the organisation and subsequently implemented a change of name (to Families Outside) and constitutional status, appointed a Board of Directors with an independent chair, and recruited a full time Director who joined the organisation in January 2003. The organisation has continued to grow ever since, taking an active role in the development of policy and practice nationally and in supporting locally-based family services. In October 2008, Families Outside entered into direct service provision for the first time through the recruitment of full-time family support workers.

In 2009/10, the Board restructured its Constitution, streamlining membership of the Board to create a smaller, more strategic group. Significant amongst these changes was that Board members would now be selected for the expertise they could contribute rather than automatically including people from particular organisations.

Following significant growth in both provision and demand, a further restructuring of the organisation began in 2019, aligning its work more clearly to its three Strategic Aims of Direct Support, Training and Policy Development, and Organisational Sustainability.

Current Challenges

A number of developments have an ongoing impact on the work of Families Outside. These include the following:

Global pandemic and economic impact: The outbreak of Coronavirus worldwide in 2019/20 led to a global lockdown in an attempt to contain the spread of the virus, including suspension of prison visits. Lockdown measures in Scotland required an immediate change in our methods of operation, moving the entire staff team to home-based working, while facing a dramatic increase in contact from families to the Helpline in particular from families anxious about maintaining contact and justifiably worried about the health and wellbeing of loved ones in prison. It also added a more urgent requirement for digital inclusion amongst the families we support. Emergency funding assisted with the increased demand, but the extent of the economic fallout of the pandemic over the longer-term is not yet clear. This puts us in the difficult position of supporting growing demand for our support while knowing that the finances to underpin this are likely to reduce.

Models of community justice: Scotland's eight Community Justice Authorities ceased to operate on 31 March 2017, with Community Justice Scotland coming into force on 1 April 2017, alongside greater responsibility for community justice at local authority (Community Planning Partnership) level. In practice, local authorities have since dominated in responsibility for community justice, and funders too are prioritising local rather than national models of support. This has required us to engage more actively at local levels, having to apply directly to each of the 32 local councils for funding and to demonstrate local engagement to non-statutory funders. Our Regional Family Support Coordinators have become more embedded in their local communities, but in-depth involvement in the work of local authorities remains challenging for a relatively small national organisation such as ours, especially where interest and uptake from the local authorities remains highly variable.

Financial hardship and welfare reform: At a time when the demand for our work is increasing, continuing financial austerity means that funding for our work, especially over the longer term, remains uncertain. Meanwhile, the families we work with have been facing inconsistent access to support and services across the country. Families Outside has the benefit of working towards preventative policies over both the short and long term, which is appealing to funders in times of financial hardship. The reality, however, is that many voluntary organisations and businesses are losing their funding, and both Government and Trust funds have less money to distribute.

Incorporation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child: Families Outside welcomes the commitment from the Scottish Government to incorporate the UNCRC into domestic law. Incorporation is a significant opportunity to ensure that children's rights are taken into account and respected within adult criminal courts. Families Outside welcomes the ongoing commitment of both the Scottish and UK Governments to international bodies such as the Council of Europe and the United Nations. However, we will continue to lobby both Governments to follow recommendations from both bodies that would drastically help to improve the lives of the families we support. At present, we face resistance to implementing Council of Europe and UN recommendations. UNCRC Incorporation in Scotland is in progress; we hope this will be followed by UK-wide implementation and further action to secure the human rights of families affected by the criminal justice system.

Key Aims for 2021 – 2024

Based on this context, vision, and core values, the Key Aims for Families Outside for the period of 2021 – 2024 are as follows:

- Developed with their input, families affected by imprisonment can readily access appropriate information and support at the time they need it. This in turn will improve their experience with the criminal justice system and mitigate its impact on them.
- Policy makers, decision makers, and relevant service providers will be well-informed about the issues facing families affected by imprisonment. They will recognise these families within their remit and take the needs of these families into account in the decisions they make and the services they provide.
- Families Outside will provide a sustainable and viable service as long as the demand for its work is evident.

Objectives for 2021 – 2024

In order to achieve these aims, our objectives include the following actions:

- Provide and increase direct support and information to families;
- Raise awareness and influence policy and practice regarding families affected by imprisonment; and
- Ensure viability, effectiveness and impact of the organisation

These objectives are essential and ongoing. Methods of and progress towards achieving these objectives are detailed in the Families Outside Operational Plan and are updated annually.