

Paying the Price

A Project on the Financial Impact on Families of
Imprisonment and Release

Families Outside
March 2023



Acknowledgements

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We are also grateful to the key stakeholders who are working with us to create positive change for people who experience a family member's imprisonment. They have been receptive to the recommendations so far, and we will continue to push to ensure families already under pressure have the support and information they need to combat the additional financial burdens that imprisonment imposes.



Families Outside is the only national charity that works solely to support the families of people affected by imprisonment in Scotland. Our purpose is to improve outcomes for children and families affected by imprisonment, creating and promoting opportunities for families to uphold and defend their rights. It is a company limited by guarantee registered in Scotland No. 236539 and is recognised as a Scottish charity by the Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator No. SC025366



abrdn Financial Fairness Trust funds research, policy work and campaigning activities to tackle financial problems and improve living standards for people on low-to-middle incomes in the UK. It is an independent charitable trust registered in Scotland (SC040877)

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Executive Summary

After ten years of austerity, cuts to services, a pandemic, and now the cost-of-living crisis, the research conducted for this project ([Nugent 2022](#)) shows that more families than ever who have a family member in prison are coming close to or experiencing destitution. When someone goes to prison, their family usually loses an income. The costs associated with supporting someone in prison are also high: unnecessarily so, we found.

Lack of financial support for families where someone is in prison badly affects some of Scotland's poorest children and threatens to undermine the Scottish Government's efforts to arrest Scottish child poverty. An estimated 27,000 children in Scotland experience a parent's imprisonment each year (Jardine 2019) - more than those who experience parental divorce. Parenting Across Scotland (2022) reported that nearly half of families in Scotland found it hard to manage even before the cost-of-living increases. Most families are often already living in poverty when their member goes to prison, and then feel stigmatised and 'in the shadows'.

Our research shows that these families are experiencing very serious additional financial penalties that tend to particularly impact mothers and children. Families deal with this by silently suffering, enduring, and leading a diminished life.

The Minimum Income Standard (MIS) highlights that having a life and dignity is about more than just food, shelter, and clothes, but also about being able to access opportunities, and to feel included and able to participate in society. This means that families in the UK should all be fed, clothed, warm, and able to afford some activities that are beneficial for wellbeing such as going to the cinema or swimming pool. Our research shows that covering the basics and being able to join in with normal social life is a far cry for families in Scotland where someone has gone to prison.



I still manage to visit and stay in touch – but at a cost to other areas of my life... My disposable wage basically funds prison life with nothing left for enjoyment or a break.

[Research by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation](#) has shown that in the UK, people who receive benefits are well short of what is needed to cover essentials. Many [Scottish families are experiencing difficulties](#) around the cost of living crisis, a higher proportion than in England. Third sector organisations have called for social welfare benefits to increase in line with inflation, and for the Scottish Government's Child Payment, which has become a crucial lifeline, to also be increased. But for families where someone has gone to prison, our research shows that support does not take this additional hardship into account. The financial gap is made even worse by loss of income and the costs of supporting their family member. The financial, social and health impacts – both psychological and physical – on families are profound. In our discussions for our research, we have heard that many policymakers and professionals are not aware of the additional costs for families, beyond the loss of income of the person in prison.

What we found

- Our research captured how prison creates, sustains, and entrenches poverty for the families left behind. The costs in supporting someone in prison falls disproportionately to women, affecting their physical and mental health.
- The families of people held in prison overwhelmingly live on very low incomes, even before taking the costs of prison into account. The impact of the additional costs on families is that they often experience extreme food and fuel poverty, leaving them unable to engage in any social activities that cost money.
- Remand is an especially costly and stressful time for families. Our respondents spent an average of £300 per month spent providing support to the person in custody – around half the average monthly income.
- During the prison sentence, families spent on average £180 a month (a third of the disposable monthly family income) and a day and a half per week of their time supporting the person.
- During the pandemic, families found the lack of contact stressful. Free phone contact minutes were welcomed and should continue, but posting in clothes has been a significant cost to families and should end.
- On release from prison, the costs are shouldered by families, with £300 per month (half of the average monthly income) spent in the first couple of months. Claims for benefits can and should be set up before the person leaves prison, but this does not happen, and families shoulder the burden.



Since my other half has been inside it's cost me over 3k in 18 months. That is just money for credit and to have my number linked to a local land line number... That is without clothes, books, mail, stamps, email and visits.

We hope key stakeholders such as the Scottish Government and the Scottish Prison Service will recognise and address the particularly financially vulnerable position of families supporting a person held in prison on remand. While we would like to see all families in the UK to have benefit levels that support a decent standard of living, families with a family member in prison face a 'perfect storm' of:

Uncertainty throughout the prison term



The duration of custodial remand is always uncertain but more so following the suspension of time limits for this and backlog in court business. Equally, time served for prison sentences can be difficult to calculate, and proximity to family may vary with levels of overcrowding, requirement for access to courses, health and mobility issues, and security requirements.

Lost income / benefits when someone goes to prison



Household income often decreases, the level of Universal Credit may change, and housing may become unstable if the tenancy or housing benefit was linked to the person now in prison.

Increased entitlement to visits, which may be welcome but are expensive



The cost of travel and transport, distance to the prison, subsistence, accommodation, childcare, and time off work all factor into families' ability to remain in contact.

High cost of keeping in touch



The higher cost of telephone calls, as well as the expense of visits effectively imposes a huge financial penalty for trying to be a family. Calls from mobile phones and video calls were introduced during the pandemic at no cost to families but may not remain so.

Lack of opportunity for people in prison on remand to work / earn a prison wage



People in prison on remand are not required to work, so prisons rarely provide the opportunity for them to do so.

Unacceptably high levels of remand in Scotland compared to other countries



Imprisonment is always an expensive option, and the proportion of people held in prison on remand in Scotland – often due to patchy availability and awareness of options for supported bail - must be challenged, especially in view of the numbers who end up without a custodial sentence.

Through our research and work with our community, we have compiled **evidence-based recommendations** to support the Scottish Government, the Scottish Prison Service and other support agencies that will help families living with imprisonment to cope, and even thrive, when someone goes to prison. We have looked at what other countries do to support families with someone in prison, as well as reviewing and discussing solutions for changes with families themselves. Making these changes will support families to cope and thrive, despite difficult circumstances.

Recommendations for change

1

Reduce costs to families

The Scottish Prison Service and contracted establishments need to seek out ways to reduce unnecessary costs associated with imprisonment for families, drawing on examples of positive practice from European prison services such as in Norway and Sweden.

- Contracted establishments should remove charges for electronic payments made into prison accounts.
- Allow families to hand in items rather than post them.
- Maintain free access to video calls into prisons.
- Maintain free allocation of minutes for telephone calls.
- Reduce all call costs to land lines and mobiles to wholesale cost or, at a minimum, in line with English prisons: 3.1p a minute to call landlines on a weekday 2.75p at weekends and 6.88p a minute to mobiles weekday and 4.5p at weekends.
- Provide free basic hygiene products/packs in prisons.
- Cap payments into personal accounts for people held in prison (PPC) each month, and restrict payments to established relationships only, and publish annual figures on the amount paid into these accounts in each establishment.
- Review the costs of basic items and buy these wholesale, reducing the current costs required through retail catalogues and canteen.
- Actively engage with families to review of the provision of food available at visits and in visitors' centres (e.g. is this affordable? Does this meet their needs? How could this be made cheaper?).
- Fund free or subsidised food for children.
- Promote the [Help with Prison Visits Scheme](#) and support families to claim their costs.
- Support to access video calls.
- Provide grants for / loans of necessary technology to access video calls as well as support to purchase ID to visit a prison.
- Secure funding for prison visitors' centres and expansion of premises / services where necessary.
- Identify opportunities for high quality family contact which allows families to 'make memories' and 'do family things', reducing the costs associated with visiting, such as:
 - [Storybook Dads](#) / Storybook Mums.
 - Workshops for people in custody to make and send gifts.
 - A DVD lending library (to allow the person in prison and family to watch the same programmes).
 - Allowing families to take photographs together.
 - Sharing meals.
- In keeping with the recommendation from the [Independent Review of the Response to Deaths in Prison Custody](#), 'Families should automatically be granted legal representation for Fatal Accident Inquiries, for example, just as the prison and health care staff have legal representation.'

2

Provide information

The Scottish Government, Scottish Courts & Tribunals Service, Scottish Prison Service and contracted establishments, Department of Work & Pensions, Prison Visitors' Centres, Families Outside, and other relevant organisations should focus on providing information at key points when a family member goes to prison:

... to ensure families are fully informed about prison regimes and processes, for example:

- Introduce a proactive programme of family outreach and engagement, informed by a community education / strengths-based perspective, to provide families with accurate knowledge about provision / quality of prison food, clothing, library resources etc. and steps taken by prisons to limit bullying and keep people safe.

This information should be updated regularly and available in multiple formats (e.g. website, Facebook, printed, family induction, etc.).

... to maximise financial support available to families as early in the criminal justice process as possible, for example:

- Make sure welfare rights / CAB staff or referral information is available in court.
- Information about support is available in court (e.g. Families Outside / contact information for each prison's Family Contact Officers / food bank referral).
- Travel information is available in court (e.g. Help with Prison Visits / Sacro).
- Universal / targeted benefits and supports that families affected by imprisonment can access already are shared with them proactively (especially those who are covering a tenancy/mortgage/associated costs which prevent the person in custody from being homeless on release / supports to address cost of living crisis).
- Prison visitors' centres share positive practice about financial support between them.
- Information about support to their families is available to people held in prison.

... to allow families to plan their finances when supporting someone in prison, for example:

- The costs of phone calls (landline and mobile per minute).
- The costs of video calls.
- The costs of emails (to send/receive/print in both SPS and private establishments).
- How photographs can be shared with family and the associated costs.
- Canteen costs.
- How much their family member might expect to earn.
- What personal property is likely to be accepted / rejected and when this can be handed in.
- Likely travel costs (e.g. peak train / bus fares, parking).
- How and when they can contact a Family Contact Officer.
- The supports that are available (e.g. free bus travel for under 25s and reduced rail travel with railcard).

3

Improve access to benefits and travel costs for families

The Scottish Prison Service and contracted establishments; Scottish Courts & Tribunals Service; Prison Visitors' Centres; Families Outside and other relevant organisations should recognise and address ways to improve financial support to families.

- Ensure benefits claims and travel passes are set up to be available immediately upon release from prison.
- Set up an independent Scottish system to support travel costs for prison visits in order to:
 - Advertise its existence.
 - Increase confidence in applications (local rather than England).
 - Determine and pay fair rates (e.g. increase from 13p per mile).
 - Provide information about how to appeal.
- Develop travel services to assist families to:
 - receive personal informal support on journeys.
 - access assistance with claims for financial assistance.
 - provide door to door service for older and infirm visitors and single parents with several children.

The Scottish Prison Service and contracted establishments, alongside the Scottish Courts & Tribunals Service, should empower people in prison to support and reduce expenditure for their families.

- Review and update prison wages, including the option for people on remand to take on paid work if they wish, to ensure that these are sufficient to fund:
 - a minimum level of family contact.
 - the personal care needs of a person in custody (e.g. toiletries).
 - wages high enough so that families are not needed to cover shortfalls.
 - equal levels of pay for work, education, and required courses.
- Engage proactively with men and women in custody to consult on the personal property items they see as necessary / desirable, and provide a mechanism for them to save up for these through prison wages.
- Provide a mechanism for people in custody to open bank accounts and save money for their release, and review prison wages to ensure this is financially viable.
- Review and update level of discharge grants, ensuring equitable provision regardless of mechanism of release (e.g. from prison or direct from court).

The Crown Office & Procurator Fiscal Service, Scottish Prison Service and contracted establishments, HM Inspectorate of Prisons, and Scottish Courts & Tribunals Service should embrace and promote opportunities for longer-term change that reduces the financial impact of imprisonment on the families left behind.

- Sustain efforts to reduce the number of people held in prison on remand.
- Monitor and comply with the Prison Rules requiring people to be placed in prisons close to their homes (Prison Allocation System).
- Require an assessment of the potential impact on family contact before a person is transferred to another prison for administrative reasons (e.g. to complete a course):
 - Such an assessment should be sensitive to the gendered nature of family support for people in prison, namely that single women, often with caring responsibilities, make up the vast majority of people left behind through imprisonment.
 - If the impact will be negative, appropriate remedies should be identified (e.g. addition free phone/video visit minutes; combined longer visits; additional funding for travel; furlough).
 - Details of the assessment should also be recorded and noted in the person in prison's personal plan and/or PR2 so this information isn't lost.
- Introduce peripatetic programme teams to deliver programmes required for release at every prison (to eliminate the need for people to be transferred to prisons away from their home area).

The Scottish Prison Service and contracted establishments, Families Outside, and other relevant organisations should continue to combat the stigma imprisonment casts on people who pay the price without having committed the crime.

- Remove the use of HMP prison stamps on post received from establishments.
 - Implement efforts to promote education and equalities (e.g. [training on the impact of imprisonment](#); reference to the impact of imprisonment [as part of PSE classes in school](#)).
-

To explore the role of wider systems in supporting families, the project included creation of a process map to outline where families face barriers and access support in their journeys through the criminal justice process. Key stages such as arrest, imprisonment, and release each have implications for families in claiming benefits, claiming insurance, and providing secure housing. The process map – linked to Families Outside’s [Framework for the Support of Families Affected by the Justice System](#) – therefore identifies the types of financial challenges families can expect at each stage. The map alerts families and professionals (e.g. solicitors, social workers, Citizens Advice) to these challenges so families can prepare for them and seek support and information as appropriate.

Families are Paying the Price

Navigating the possible financial costs to families when a family member is involved in the justice system



If you have a family member in prison and need information or support, call the Families Outside Support and Information Helpline: **0800 254 0088**

Text FAMOUT followed by your message to 60777

Email support@familiesoutside.org.uk

Visit www.familiesoutside.org.uk

Families Outside is a company limited by guarantee registered in Scotland No. 236539 and is recognised by OSCR as a Scottish Charity No. SC025366.

The process map can be used as a poster or as an online resource and is available to [download here](#).

The sum total of the work conducted over the past 20 months presents the stark reality families face when someone goes to prison for remand or sentence – a reality which continues after release. These families have not been convicted of an offence, yet they pay the penalty alongside their family members, some of whom themselves have not been found guilty. This situation can lead to long-term damage and a financial spiral from which they may struggle to recover. Much of this damage is wholly preventable but requires policies and practice that recognise their implications for the families left behind: implications that can blight the lives of children and parents for years, if not indefinitely.

Introduction

In August 2021, Families Outside embarked upon a 20-month project to explore and address the financial impact of imprisonment on the families left behind. Supported by an expert advisory group (see Appendix), this work consisted of:

- Literature review
- In-depth interviews with families
- Social media survey with families
- Analysis of the Families Outside and Child Poverty Action Group databases
- Collation of case studies from Families Outside
- Collation of positive practice from other jurisdictions
- Policy analysis
- Process mapping
- Discussion events (National Prison Visitor Centre conference; Families Outside national conference; Parliamentary Cross-Party Group on Women, Families, and Justice)
- Working out solutions with families impacted by the imprisonment of a family member

All of these stages involved families affected by imprisonment directly and informed all of the project's reports, resources, and recommendations.

This report summarises what the work found, our key recommendations, and next steps to reduce the financial impact of imprisonment and release, which the findings show clearly impacts families who can least afford it.

Our methods: Literature review, interviews and social media survey

Literature review

The project started with a review of the literature over the last decade to set the context and identify the issues the project would need to explore. Families Outside previously conducted research into the financial impact of imprisonment on families (Dickie [2013a](#) and [2013b](#)). The literature review aimed to identify wider social benefits to improving the accessibility of family contact alongside greater digital connectivity. This included risks to families, such as the risk of video calls replacing of face-to-face contact and the difficulties in access to technology for families who are struggling financially. Additional literature was added as the work progressed to ensure the information for the project was as current as possible. The literature review conducted for this project (Nugent 2023a) is [available here](#).

Interviews and analysis – our main source of data

The review of the literature informed the questions families were asked for the project. For this stage – the main field work for the project – the research consultant carried out semi-structured interviews with 51 family members of people in prison by telephone, video, or in person, as geography and continuing requirements for social distancing allowed. Recruitment of participants came through Families Outside's Regional Family Support Coordinators; through prison Family Contact Officers; through partner organisations such as prison visitor centres; and through social media with the support of Families Outside's External Engagement team. Participants received a £20 food or high street voucher.

The final report for the interviews (Nugent 2022a) is available [here](#), with a summary report (Nugent 2022b) available [here](#), and a one-page infographic available [here](#).

Social media survey – confirming and deepening

Finally, to verify the emerging findings with a wider reach of participants, the project included a short online survey via social media. This consisted of a small number of open and closed questions to confirm the initial findings of the field work, eliciting replies from 35 people in a slightly different context, namely after the cost-of-living crisis had fully taken hold. Unsolicited comments from families on social media regarding financial impacts underlined the need for such an approach, such as via the Twitter exchange below in April 2021:



Since my OH (other half) has been inside it's cost me over 3k in 18 months. That is just money for credit and to have my number linked to a local land line number... That is without clothes, books, mail, stamps, email and visits.



That's actually crazy when you actually sit and work it out



God I couldn't dare add mine up am 6 years in with at least another 3 to Go



Tell us about it. Some months I was going short on food to make sure OH had funds



Wow It would be interesting to see other people's costs. I have friends who's OH is always wanting money for clothes to complete with other cons, I said if he's competing in prison, then he gets out he will be completing again, only 2 be heading straight back to prison



In 20 years I dread to think what I have spent! Travel, phone credit and clothes once a year to be fair he doesn't ever ask me for anything or money I just do it



OMG I don't know how you afford it. I just don't have the money to keep my son going, it's an occasional top up, I wish I had more



This intrigued me, I just worked out if I carry on putting the amount I sent my OH every months it will work out at £5,000+ by the time he's home. That is also just on credit/canteen, hate to know how much it would be with clothes, books, emails etc



You've missed out travel costs



Some company is making a fortune out of prison phone calls.

The findings of this survey, conducted by a student intern with lived experience of a family member's imprisonment, provided a 'sense check' of the financial issues families reported in the interviews. The survey was circulated via the Families Outside website and social media accounts alongside those of key partner organisations. The final report (Gorman 2022) is [available here](#).

Database analysis and case studies – data from Scottish practice

At the start of the project, Families Outside reviewed its database over a 6-month period (1 April – 30 September 2021) for any cases indicating financial need. Specifically, this included families who had contacted our Helpline or Regional Family Support requiring assistance with benefits, travel costs for prison visits, crisis funding, debt, employment, food banks, reduced income, or other support specifically in relation to finances (e.g. not including housing or childcare). This search revealed 229 cases in which our staff provided information or support to families to address financial need.

At the same time, the Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG) in Scotland conducted a search of requests from financial advocates to their Adviceline. This search revealed 19 cases specifically related to the financial impact of imprisonment and release, primarily regarding people held in prison themselves, but also regarding families. This included:

- Resumption of tenancies when people leaving prison do not yet have access to Universal Credit
- Loss of Universal Credit / housing benefit and accrual of rent arrears due to extended periods of custodial remand (the most common issue raised, and a particular issue due to backlogs in court cases during the pandemic, with no extension made in the Emergency Covid legislation to the 6-month limit on payment of housing costs for people in prison on remand)
- Detailed and complex issues regarding assessment for and access to benefits
- Incorrect advice regarding eligibility for benefits and reduction in Council Tax (as a single occupier) when a partner goes to prison
- Delays in reinstatement of benefits
- Entitlement to backdated benefits payments
- Lack of response from prisons to DWP to confirm release date from prison

The CPAG database showed the complexities of access to benefits when someone goes to prison for remand or sentence, and again the difficulties on release. The CPAG Adviceline is also aimed at professional financial advisors; if these professionals struggled to navigate the benefits system when someone goes to prison, it is highly unlikely that families could do this without support or would even know where to go for help.

A number of case studies from Families Outside show that financial impacts are far from the only issues families face when someone goes to prison but that support for finances can make a tremendous difference to a situation that is already difficult. Addressing the financial impact makes a practical difference but also reduces isolation and improves families' connection to each other, to their family member in prison, to their peers, and to their local communities.

Case Study 1

A woman had been subject to domestic abuse whilst in late pregnancy, and her partner was held in prison on remand. She initially wanted no contact with her partner, as she had two other children from a previous relationship and was worried about the impact of her partner's behaviour on them. She relented as the birth of their child grew nearer, and she wanted to make contact with her partner and build on the relationship with him again.

There was a history of social work intervention with her previous partner (the father of her older two children). In the past, there had been substance abuse both on her side and her ex-partner's side, including domestic abuse which resulted in her children being taken into care. She responded very well to a drug treatment programme and became totally free of drugs, and her children were returned to her charge once more. Meanwhile, she had divorced her husband and built a relationship with her current partner, who also had drug misuse issues.

The woman had a childhood history of trauma as well as additional issues with her eldest child, who had Type 1 Diabetes. The child took up a lot of time for her because he deliberately mismanaged his diabetes and frequently removed his diabetic pump, putting himself in extreme danger. Meanwhile, she wanted her partner to bond with their new baby girl but, due to the pandemic, was only able to visit in person once.

The woman was in desperate need of furniture, clothes and shoes for the children, and a tumble dryer, as she was finding it very difficult in winter to dry the children's clothes, especially the new baby's. She was in considerable debt, and the service on her phone was constantly cut off because she had not paid the bills. She was worried about food for the children.

At one point, she wanted to move to another area to start a business with another family member who had a house she could move into with the children. The other family member said that her partner was welcome to join them on release, as long as he had changed his ways.

Through the Scottish Government's Winter Hardship Fund, Families Outside was able to provide new beds, bedding, clothes, and shoes for the children and curtain poles to hang curtains for privacy. The worker arranged delivery of food for the family through a food bank and connected the family with Citizens Advice to address the family's financial problems.

The financial issues were significant but made up only part of the many issues the woman faced problems with anxiety, lack of independence, self-esteem, and confidence in her abilities as a woman and mother; ongoing abuse and coercion from her partner in prison; and a need for emotional support.

Case Study 2

A mum contacted Families Outside looking for local support for her son, who was struggling to come to terms with his dad's imprisonment for seven years. Since the imprisonment, the son's behaviour had been deteriorating, further impacted by not seeing his father in person for over a year due to COVID restrictions.

The son was angry at dad, not enjoying school, and was struggling socially. He told a handful of friends about his dad, but other people in his class had been told not to speak to or play with him, as their parents seen media reports of what happened. He felt stigmatised and in the minority with no one around him that understood. He wanted to meet people in the same situation and disclosed that school is too intense and that he doesn't get time to think.

Families Outside linked the young person with peer support, video calls into prison, information on in-person visits, and support with travel costs. They also sourced a MiFi device and Chromebook to support the video calls and peer support. Support for the whole family included referral to a local food bank, access to the Winter Hardship Fund for clothing, vouchers, a new bed, and bedding alongside emotional support. Over Christmas, this extended to support with gifts through Mission Christmas. The family was struggling with food due to having a reduced income from Mum being on furlough during COVID lockdowns, so Families Outside organised food vouchers to be delivered to see them through the weekend, then arranged for them to get set up with local food bank they could apply to themselves online to request additional vouchers on a weekly basis if needed.

Families Outside supported the school as well, informing them of Families Outside training for professionals and sending them resources for them to use. In-person support for the son was on hold due to COVID restrictions, therefore our staff supported the school in their contact with him. This included sending worksheets for him to do at home relating to emotions, and information on apps the school could download to support his mental wellbeing and promote mindful activities to ground himself whenever he was feeling overwhelmed, improving his ability to cope and in turn enhance his resilience. Families Outside also had discussions with mum around the idea of him volunteering with a local sports club that supported families of people in prison and how this could be suited to him and help with confidence. They arranged for him to have an introductory and 'taster' session with the club to see about the possibility of him volunteering, which he really enjoyed, and feedback from the club was very positive.

Families Outside then sent information about prison visits to the mum, including support for travel costs, and encouraged her to request a visit for her son to help support his mental health and anxieties. She managed to book two in-person visits, and the prison visitor centre provider paid for a hotel for an overnight stay. Mum thanked Families Outside and let them know that the information was really useful. The prison's Family Contact Officer had been unaware that travel for prison visits during lockdown was permitted and deemed essential. The son had not seen his dad in 14 months, and the dad said he had forgotten what it felt like to be touched by someone else.

Case Study 3

A prison visitor centre referred a family for additional support, as the mum of two young children was quite vulnerable and isolated, further exacerbated by COVID-19 and lockdown restrictions. She also needed emotional support regarding her partner's imprisonment and in coming to terms with the offence. Families Outside worked to address the isolation, providing support for video calls, improving the children's understanding of imprisonment, and helping the mum come to terms with the situation. The mum had also been experiencing domestic abuse, and family relationships were difficult, with the family feeling torn between mum and her partner.

Financial concerns were part of this picture. Families Outside provided support through the Scottish Government's Winter Hardship Fund for carpets for bedrooms and money towards utilities. They also supported the family at Children & Family Social Work Multi-Agency Action Planning Meetings; provided information on local alcohol support services; shared up to date information on prison visits and recorded the family's views on the visits; and advocated on their behalf with the prison to ensure the mum was able to book herself, son, and step-daughter into in-person visits, as there was confusion with the prison regarding numbers and households.

For ongoing support on financial impact, Families Outside provided information about Best Start to access a card to help provide fruit and vegetables for the children. They also linked the family to a local Warm Home Discount Support, sending information to see if the family were entitled for money off their energy bills over winter; supported the mum to contact the benefits office to ensure the family was receiving its full entitlements; provided age-appropriate books about having a parent in prison for the mum to read to her young children; sourced food vouchers and referred them to a local foodbank; and provided Coats for Kids vouchers to allow the mum to buy warm clothing for both children for over the winter months, and Mission Christmas presents to reduce the financial strain of Christmas.

With financial strain came isolation, so Families Outside provided information on groups running in the area and virtually during lockdown, and sourced a digital device to allow for video calls to prison to reduce isolation, as well as activity packs to assist with engagement during video calls. The digital device also enabled peer support, including online adult Yoga sessions and local peer support (online and eventually in person) for children and young people and their families with a family member in prison. Bringing them all together as a family was invaluable, as they had not had days out together before. The children liked being able to see their siblings in a fun group setting.

Overall, the family received practical, financial, and emotional support, a listening ear, and improved family dynamics and relationships. They were now aware of what support was available and understood prison processes including in-person visiting and video calls.

Case Study 4

A clinical psychologist got in touch regarding a complex case, looking for support around the criminal justice aspect of sexual offending. The family needed emotional support and had concerns around their child and the impact of having a parent in prison. They also needed information about the prison and prison visits. The family was socially isolated and needed referral to money and debt services, specifically support with debt and money management and bankruptcy.

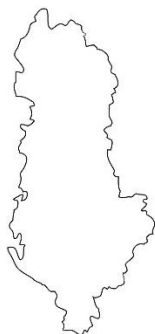
Families Outside arranged multi-agency meetings to ensure a holistic approach and provided ongoing emotional support, advocacy with the prison around visiting, information around processes for video calls to prison, and information about court processes and terminology. They applied for funding for support with electricity and gas and support for Christmas gifts for the child, also providing a letter of support towards a housing application.

The family felt listened to and is now engaging in peer support, attending yoga groups for wellbeing. The 'wrap-around' approach with other agencies helped early on to ensure no duplication of work and allocation to the best services for support moving forward.

Positive practice from prison services abroad

Early in the project, Families Outside contacted colleagues through its international networks to ask for examples of positive practice to reduce the financial impact of imprisonment on families. These networks included Children of Prisoners Europe (COPE); the International Coalition for Children with Incarcerated Parents (INCCIP); and EuroPris. This section summarises the examples provided.

Albania



[SHKBSH's](#) [Prison Fellowship Albania] Diakonia programme offers low-income families practical short-term support that is lacking due to the imprisonment of a family member and the subsequent diminished resources, as part of longer-term efforts to break cycles of poverty and offending. Examples of support from Diakonia include repairing homes, supplying seeds for crops and a greenhouse for getting them started, covering costs of bus tickets to school, donating livestock to launch a business, and other activities. The Restored Dignity initiative, a reintegration programme for people released from prison, does not focus specifically on children, yet children benefit greatly from it. During winter months, an additional 360 families of people held in prison are supplied with food, wood or electricity.

Catalonia



Two bodies can give financial support to reduce the impact of imprisonment on families, namely the Prisons' Director Board and Penitentiary Social Services. The fund is used frequently, and people in prison are told about this at the start of their sentence. Financial aid can come from the request of the person held in prison, their family, or from the social workers' own initiative, with beneficiaries being the person in prison, their families, and / or their children. The funds require a completed, signed application but also a Penitentiary Social worker's report or Health services report, depending on the type of financial aid.

The main goals of the funding are:

- Support for basic care, dignity, and personal recognition (for people held in prison and on release)
- Support for children and young people (living in and out of the prison)
- Support for preparation release
- Support for the families of people held in prison

Funding from the Prisons' Director Board covers:

- Pocket money for people in prison without sufficient means
- Telephone cards for people held in prison without sufficient means or special needs
- Clothes for people held in prison
- Medicines and health products not covered by Social Security
- Dentistry, prostheses, glasses, and orthopaedic products
- Essential non-prescription medications or personal hygiene products
- Aid of essential support for personal dignity

Funding from the Penitentiary Social Services for people held in prison supports:

- Children at school (fees, lunch, supplies / books, leisure activities)
- Essential support for optimal child development and integration
- Food, housing, daily maintenance, transport, health products essential non-prescription medications or personal hygiene products, and other essential support for the family
- Burial costs if someone dies in prison
- Support for specialised treatments for people held in prison
- Support for socio-labour and training resettlement processes for people held in prison

The respondent from Catalonia noted that "It is a must to work closely with both the Council Social Services and Specialist Services where families live, as Penitentiary Social Services aids have a supplementary character."



Cyprus

Cyprus has no legislation or policy on this, and support for the children of imprisoned parents comes purely from the initiative of the prisons. In the last eight years, prisons have provided financial assistance to people held in prison who do not have financial resources, especially those who have children. This includes free telephone cards and, without exception, free clothing, shoes, and personal hygiene products so that this burden does not fall on their families.

Cyprus introduced Skype in its prisons in January 2015 so that people who have families living a long distance from the prisons or abroad could have additional means of contact. For those with children, they organise at least six events a year (always including Christmas, New Year, and Easter) and give presents to the children according to their age. They also supply supermarket coupons to the poorest families during Christmas and Easter (50 euro for each child). The prisons also prioritise support to families for whatever problems they have with their children, i.e. for schools, facilitating their contact, resolving problems the children may have, and strengthening their relationship with their imprisoned parents.

The respondents from Cyprus noted that “We do these things the last [eight] years out of our own choice and initiative: there are no mechanisms either in prisons or outside prisons to provide the assistance these families really need. So what we do today for inmates and their kids, it does not mean that will continue if me and the Director decide to leave... and move on to another position. The point is to safeguard these issues with procedures written down in a document - as obligations of the state, but to be monitored if they meet these obligations.”



France

Many regional schemes exist to assist families financially, e.g., the [Comité d'Aide aux Détenus \(CaD\)](#) provides assistance to families for travel to prisons located at great distances from the family home. Partners include Probation and Reintegration Services (SPIP).



Norway

Every family in Norway receives approximately 100 euros per month per child (up to age 18) in monthly child benefits. If a parent is imprisoned for more than six months, the family gets an additional 100 euros per month (total, not per child). If a child aged 15 to 18 years is imprisoned, the family is eligible for funding for travel costs for one visit a month. During the pandemic, people held in prison were given 10 minutes of free phone time per week, and the scheme is likely to continue.



Republic of Ireland

The Prisoner's Wife's Allowance was a means-tested scheme introduced in 1974 to provide income support for women whose spouses were in custody or serving prison sentences greater than six months in length (Government Discussion Paper: Proposals for Supporting Lone Parents, 2006). This was ultimately mainstreamed and incorporated into the Lone Parent's Allowance scheme (LPA, 1990), and later into the One Parent Family Payment scheme, effective from January 1997.



Sweden

People in prison who have children are given free telephone calls to maintain contact. Importantly, this acts as an incentive for people held in prison to reveal that they have children who may need support.



United Kingdom

Throughout the UK, despite the devolved systems of justice, the Ministry of Justice provides a Help With Prisons Visits Scheme to support travel costs for families visiting prisons. This support is only available to people in receipt of state benefits and is generally paid in arrears. The payments cover second class public transport or 13p per mile for travel by car. Costs for taxis and overnight stays can be included in some circumstances. Prisons in Scotland outsource support for travel costs to this scheme, which is administered from Birmingham.

Concerns about the scheme are that families do not often know it's available; payments are made in arrears and may not compensate families for the full costs incurred; families do not know they can appeal the decisions made; and financial support is generally not available to people who are working but on low incomes. The Scottish Prison Service can use discretion in relation to awards, but families generally do not know this, and exercise of such discretion is exceptional.

This is not a comprehensive list but provides examples of the types of support that may be helpful to families when someone goes to prison. The examples also flag up the precarious nature of much of this support, with assistance dependant on awareness of what is available, confidence and criteria to access it, and often on the good will and discretion of officials providing the support.

Engagement with stakeholders and involving families at every stage

The project facilitated four formal external discussion events on the findings of the research to confirm these with the experience of others and to identify possible solutions. These events included:

- A workshop at the National Prison Visitor Centre Conference.
- The Families Outside national conference, with 158 people hearing the plenary presentation and approximately 50 participating in two breakout sessions on this topic.
- A discussion with the Criminal Justice Voluntary Sector Forum (CJVSF), with 15 participants.
- The Cross-Party Group on Women, Families and Justice with 10 people attending, including two Members of Scottish Parliament.

Interestingly, people working in the criminal justice field, especially from the third sector, were unsurprised by the findings and saw them reflected in their work. For professionals in other fields (teachers, other third sector, Children & Families, lawyers, police, Scottish Government), the cost of prison beyond losing the main earner's wage was not well known or understood. This group was surprised and shocked by the research.

Key themes from the discussions included the following:

- Lack of consistency between prison establishments.
- Vulnerability of families when the person is in prison but also when they are out, e.g. debts mounting up in prison and 'cuckooing'¹.
- Affects a hidden population.
- Need for a whole family approach.
- Need for a rights-based approach in which families are made aware of their rights, with increased accountability and increased information about the support available, the financial impact, costs, canteen, etc.
- Who is responsible for families and their needs?
- Risk of people being emotionally blackmailed by their family member in prison.
- Need to remove stigma.
- Recognition that people with a family member in secure care may experience similar issues.

The discussion flagged a number of more specific issues as well:

- **Women:** Women in prison ask for and receive fewer visits when they are in prison, and they often have fragile relationships and are isolated. Concerns about transport for people held in prison is being reviewed by HM Inspectorate of Prisons for Scotland following cases such as a woman having to wait 11 hours before getting to HMP & YOI Cornton Vale, and another woman who had taken her own life after not being taken to attend a Children's Hearing. Questions need to be asked about the research on the new Community Custodial Units for women.
- **Children:** The impact of poverty on children's education is lifelong.
- **Prison snacks and café:** The profits at prison cafés should be reviewed, and canteen costs have increased.
- **Help with Prison Visits / Maintaining contact:** These systems need to be reviewed and widened to include all forms of contact such as video calls and telephones. A fund for digital devices would make online contact more inclusive. Video calls have been helpful, but families are not able to book these themselves, and it is not an easy system to navigate.
- **Location of people held in prison:** People are transferred away from their local prison for required courses, damaging their ability to maintain contact with their families. Why can't these courses come to the people in prison or provide online learning? Visiting, digital access, and costs also need 'Island Proofing' for families in rural areas.

¹ 'Cuckooing' is a form of crime in which the home of a vulnerable person is taken over to deal, store or take drugs, facilitate sex work, to use as accommodation, or to take advantage of the tenant financially. The practice is associated with 'county lines' drug trafficking.

- **People held in prison:** Not enough jobs are available for people held in prison. Even with paid jobs in prison, people held there do not have their national insurance paid, which will affect their pension. Participants alleged that mobile phone use was being restricted as a punishment. They also noted the importance of personal responsibility for people in prison in thinking about family. This might include information about the impact on family, not allowing expensive trainers, but also educating families so they know what things cost in prison. Finally, participants noted the impact on job prospects both for family members (e.g. having to give up work due to caring responsibilities) and the difficulties finding longer-term job prospects for people on release from prison.
- **Ways the Scottish Prison Service and contracted establishments could help:** These included imposing a cap on payments into personal accounts in prison; setting up Universal Credit early so payments could be accessed from the point of release; and increases in discharge grants, including access when released from court.

Thankfully, alongside the problems, these discussions also identified positive practice:

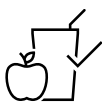
- Virtual 'walk through' prison at HMP Low Moss (though not available on the SPS website).
 - People in prison can send money out to their families.
 - Homework clubs in prison, parent evenings, Children & Family Days.
 - 'Inside Out' Days (e.g. at the Edinburgh Prison Visitor Centre) for people to learn about what their family members in prison had access to and the day-to-day experience of being in prison.
 - [Child Impact Assessments.](#)
 - Community Custodial Units.
 - Scottish Families Affected by Alcohol & Drugs is developing an information pack for families to increase awareness of the cost of items in prison canteens.
 - Sacro Travel Service, which provides volunteer drivers to take families from Edinburgh and Lothians to Scottish prisons and the State Hospital.
- Throughcare services linking people with community service.

Discussions with families

The project also included two small group discussions with families to review the findings and propose ways forward. Families identified key issues as:

- **Travel Claims System** (for financial help with cost of travel to visits): Families felt the current system was not fit for purpose. In their experience, it was complicated to apply for and wasn't widely known about. The threshold for claims was not reflective of the current time (e.g. the requirement to be on certain benefits, so families on low income don't always qualify). Finally, having a system managed in England failed to reflect Scottish geography and meant families couldn't access cheap fares in advance. Travel costs were a major issue for families, and services such as the Sacro volunteer driver scheme are not universally available.
- **Other Costs:** More clarity and consistency around these was needed. For example, some changes brought about by COVID were positive, e.g. provision of mobile phones and free minutes, and the introduction of video calls. Families wanted such positive supports to be maintained and better publicised, but other changes such as the requirement to post items into prison, and the lack of consistency between prisons for this, felt unnecessary and were unhelpful to families struggling financially. Even positive innovations such as video calls added costs, however, such as the ID requirements to use video calls that not all families could afford.
- **Communication / Raising Awareness:** Many families were unaware of the support available to them and therefore missed out on assistance and advice around finances. Families felt that targeting Solicitors and / or Courts to distribute a basic leaflet / information pack / card might be a way of increasing this reach.

Participants identified a need to improve consistency in policy & practice across different prisons used to meet people’s needs around:



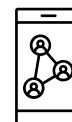
Food

Improving consistency in quality and provision in canteens. Increasing costs was also identified as an issue.



Clothing

Participants noted that schools are introducing policies around no designer labels to support families in poverty and reduce stigma. Could a similar policy be introduced in prisons?



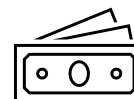
Social needs

Concerns were raised about changes in policy relating to mobile phone provision to people held in some establishments. More generally, travel costs and the costs associated with the Email-a-Prisoner scheme and digital access were also seen to be a barrier.



Health and wellbeing

Inconsistent provision of services and differing access to services to people held in prison across the prison estate were identified as an ongoing challenge. There were calls to address the ‘post code lottery’, with stronger links developed between service provision in the prison and in the community.



Financial security

For people in prison/ on leaving prison, to reduce the burden on individuals and families – e.g. ensuring consistency of in-prison wages (and opportunities to earn these), and addressing systemic challenges and providing support to enable people to return to employment when they leave prison.

Influencing policy

The report findings clearly highlight the need to drive forward wider policy change. Work has already begun to secure cross-party support for the research and its recommendations. [A Members debate was held in the Scottish Parliament](#) on 7th March 2023, led by Rona Mackay, MSP. Members raised important points in the debate highlighting the stark financial and emotional hardships facing children and families affected by imprisonment and calling for action to be taken to address the significant impacts facing them.

Concluding the debate, Minister for Community Safety, Elena Whitham, acknowledged the significant and often unseen impact imprisonment has on families, stating: “I would like to say to everyone out there today who has a family member in prison, we have heard your voices loud and clear.”

Families Outside looks forward to working with Members to take forward action to support families with the costs of imprisonment and release.

Recommendations and Conclusions

Throughout the project advisory group meetings, discussion events, internal sessions, and discussions with family members, the need for a full set of agreed, consistent, evidence-based recommendations is clear to progress discussions with decision makers such as the Scottish Prison Service and contracted establishments, the Scottish Government, and the Scottish Parliament.

['Paying the Price: The Cost to Families of Imprisonment and Release'](#) highlights clearly the role of prison in creating, sustaining, and deepening poverty amongst children and families. It recognises that women have “carried this burden and these costs silently for too long” and rightly asserts that “it is time their voices are heard”. There can be no doubt that action is urgently required to improve outcomes for families affected by imprisonment.

The project recommends action in the following areas:

- 1) Reduce costs to families**
- 2) Provide information**
- 3) Improve access to benefits and travel costs for families**
- 4) Increase opportunities for people held in prison to support themselves and their families**
- 5) Introduce and sustain systemic changes**
- 6) Reduce the stigma families affected by imprisonment face in society**

More detail on the recommendations identified above, can be seen on page 6 at the start of this report. They have also been developed into a work plan, identifying the key stakeholders, priority, and timescales for each action. Some recommendations should be straightforward to implement, whereas others require longer-term systemic change, including changes that are not fully devolved to decision-makers in Scotland.

In reviewing and implementing the recommendations, key stakeholders such as the Scottish Government and the Scottish Prison Service must recognise and address the particularly financially vulnerable position of families supporting a person held in prison on remand. These families face a ‘perfect storm’ of:

- Uncertainty throughout the prison term
- Lost income / benefits when someone goes to prison
- Increased entitlement to visits, which may be welcome but are expensive
- High cost of keeping in touch – effectively a huge financial penalty for trying to be a family
- Lack of opportunity for people in prison on remand to work / earn a prison wage
- Unacceptably high levels of remand in Scotland compared to other countries – imprisonment is always an expensive option.

The sum total of the work conducted over the past 20 months present the stark reality families face when someone goes to prison for remand or sentence – a reality which continues after release. These families have not been convicted of an offence, yet they pay the penalty alongside their family members, some of whom themselves have not been found guilty. This situation can lead to long-term damage and a financial spiral from which they may struggle to recover. Much of this damage is wholly preventable but requires policies and practice that recognise their implications for the families left behind.

This report gives a clear blueprint of how to make meaningful, lasting improvements. We look forward to working alongside families and strategic partners to create this change.

Families Outside will endeavour to carry out a report at the end of March 2024 to assess progress made towards these recommendations.

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Appendix: Project advisory group members

Karen Barker – abrdn Financial Fairness Trust (April 2022 – June 2022)

Finlay Begg – Acting Head of Social Justice, Scottish Prison Service (April 2021 – August 2022)

Gary Dewar – Head of Family Support, Families Outside (August – December 2021)

Donald Dickie – volunteer for Families Outside and Sacro; author of the original research in 2012

Alison Gillies – Child Poverty Action Group

Eilidh Graham – family member

Rebecca Graham – abrdn Financial Fairness Trust (August 2021 – March 2022)

Toni Groundwater – Head of External Engagement, Families Outside (from February 2022)

Vivienne Jackson – abrdn Financial Fairness Trust (from July 2022)

Cara Jardine – Senior Lecturer, Social Work and Social Policy, University of Strathclyde

Kerry Knox – Head of Family Support, Families Outside (from March 2022)

Nancy Loucks – Chief Executive, Families Outside (Chair and Secretariat)

Scott McLellan – Policy Manager, Scottish Prison Service (from October 2022)

Elaine Stalker – Head of Resource & Development, Families Outside

Laura van der Hoeven – Head of External Engagement, Families Outside (August 2021 – February 2022)

Lynn Young – family member

An advisory group member with lived experience of imprisonment was also invited and appointed but did not attend any of the meetings.

abrdn Financial Fairness Trust has supported this project as part of its mission to contribute towards strategic change which improves financial well-being in the UK. The Trust funds research, policy work and campaigning activities to tackle financial problems and improve living standards for people on low-to-middle incomes in the UK. It is an independent charitable foundation registered in Scotland (SC040877).