

## 'Women and Children First'?

### Families of Female Offenders

families  
outside

making the world  
of families affected  
by imprisonment

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## Families Outside

- National Scottish independent agency
- Scottish Prisoners' Families Helpline
- Information and materials
- Impact on policy and practice
- Training and awareness raising, policy development, strategic influence
- Partnership work
- Direct service provision

## International Trends

- Increase in female prison populations without corresponding increase in offending
- Increase in women imprisoned for drug offences
- Most convicted of non-violent crime
- More likely to be victims than perpetrators
- Offending linked to material and social situation
- Experience of poverty is high

## Women and Family Life

- About two-thirds of women in prison are parents of dependent children.
- Every year in Scotland, about 16,500 children are separated from a parent through imprisonment, with about 1,850 separated from an imprisoned mother.
- Each year in Scotland, more children experience a parent's imprisonment than a parent's divorce.

## Impact of Imprisonment on Families

- Immediate effects
- Loss of income
- Loss of housing
- Impact on children
- Shame
- Victimization
- Cost and logistics of transport

## In sum: the family takes on the characteristics of single parent families

- Poverty
- Unemployment
- Isolation
- Deterioration in physical health
- Deterioration in mental health

## Children of Imprisoned Parents

- Higher risk of future imprisonment
- Higher risk of problems with physical and mental health
- Regressive behaviour/grief responses
- Multiple care arrangements
- What do you tell the children?

## What happens when a woman goes to prison?

- In Scotland, only 17% of fathers looked after their children while the mother was in custody.
- Women are more likely than men to lose housing while in custody.
- Distance from home to women's prisons is further on average.
- 'Maternal distress' can exacerbate already difficult issues for women.
- The impact on children is more extreme.

*The disruption of the inmate's position within the family unit represents one of the most distressing aspects of imprisonment.... Enabling inmates, so far as possible, to stay in close and meaningful contact with the family is therefore an essential part of humane treatment .... There is every reason to believe that the nature of a prisoner's relationship with his or her family will be an important factor in determining whether he or she will succeed in leading a useful and law-abiding life on return to the community.*

- Woolf Report

## Support & Information Line

- Specific financial/emotional concerns about caring for grandchildren
- Elderly parents being harassed by debt collectors
- Coping with daughter/grand-daughter on Home Detention Curfew (HDC)
- Concerns about daughter's addiction not being managed in prison

## Examples of positive practice: Family Support Work

- Family Support Worker, Edinburgh Prison Visitors' Centre
- Family Support Coordinator, ROOP, Wise Group in Glasgow
- Lighthouse Foundation
- HOPE Family & Addiction Project

## Examples of positive practice: Circle

- Support for women leaving Cornton Vale
- Supports *families* with a substance misuse issue
- Support for families not dependent on engagement with substance user

*In all actions concerning children, whether undertaken by public or private social welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities or legislative bodies, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration.*

UN Convention on the  
Rights of the Child, Article 3.1

**'Women and Children First'?**

*Thanks!*

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