

Notes for SASO

Intro

I'd like to introduce you to John. John is 11, (he could be in P7 or S1). He's quite quiet in class, and if you ask his teacher how John's doing, she might say something like this. What the teacher doesn't know, however, is that there is another story going on behind the scenes. You see, John's mum was arrested a couple of weeks ago and is on remand in HMP Cornton Vale. John's dad is in shock and hasn't known how to speak to John about what's happened. A couple of boys in John's class have found out about his mum and have been calling him names. Things for John are far from fine. And when things for children are not fine, and no one gets alongside to offer support, they start to show us in all sorts of other ways just how 'not fine' things are. John is just one of 27,000 children in Scotland who each year are affected by the imprisonment of a parent. And I could give you lots of other statistics that are sobering and powerful:

- 7% of children experience parental imprisonment during their time at school
- 25% of men in Young Offenders' Institutes are (or are about to be) fathers
- Around 49% of prisoners were themselves excluded from school (Scotland)
- Stories behind statistics that make the real impact – stories of children affected – I want to tell you some stories this evening and ask:
 - What about Jodie (age 10) who, since her dad went to prison, hasn't been invited to any classmates' parties. Her attendance at school is patchy, and her teacher has found it hard to make contact with Jodie's mum who is so full of shame about what has happened that she hasn't told the school. Jodie hasn't committed a crime, but she's serving a sentence.
- Then there is Josh (14) who, because his mum is in prison, is now living with his aunt and has had to change school. Josh, like, John we met earlier, has experienced bullying ("stay away from him, his mum's in prison"), and there are concerns about his use of alcohol. He can't see

his mum that often because she's in Cornton Vale, and he lives up in the highlands. Josh is innocent but is serving his own kind of sentence.

- And how about Chloe (11,) who won't sleep in her own bed since being traumatised after witnessing the arrest of her stepdad. She doesn't want to go on school camp and is withdrawing from school life. She is paying a high price for someone else's crime.
- And Sam (age 4) who told his nursery teacher last November that daddy wouldn't be home for Christmas because he'd be helping Santa. In February he asked, "Why has Santa still got daddy?" Sam's dad is in prison, and his mum is finding it hard to know how to talk to Sam about it.
- Or Savannah who was told by a teacher, "You'll end up in prison, just like your dad." She stopped going to school after that and can't see any point in trying. After all, the script of her life has already been written. Savannah hasn't done anything wrong but has been made to feel that she has.
- Isolation, bullying, attendance problems, mental health issues, self-harm, change of care-giver, being negatively labelled, carrying secrets or being lied to, travelling long distances for visits, trauma, grief – all common experiences for children with a family member (it might not be a parent – could be an older brother or sister or a stepparent) in prison. And just to expand on grief – children of prisoners feel all the same emotions you'd associate with bereavement (loss, sadness, loneliness, shock, anger, fear) but with one crucial difference - this is not the kind of grief where people gather round in support, where the class makes a card and says they are thinking of you. When it comes to imprisonment, there is stigma and shame, and so people don't reach out, ask how you are doing, and offer support.

My story

- Went to meet a prisoner and met a mother
- Hadn't thought about children experiencing stigma and shame, fleeing condemned by the crime of their parent
- How can it be that Jodie watches her dad being arrested on a Tuesday evening and is expected to learn maths on a Wednesday morning?
- A report by Scotland's Commissioner for Children and Young people published in 2008 acknowledges that the role of schools in supporting children affected by imprisonment has received little attention and is significantly under-researched and under-funded
- Schools as communities of compassion
- You are still a mum / dad

Their stories

- Spoke to prisoners, their children, carers, teachers, social workers, judges....
- Looking at good practice – what makes a difference
- Want to take you on a round the world trip
- Neering Brook Justice School Link Programme
- Families reluctant to access support (Pugh and Lanskey, 2011)
- Points in passport – prisoners, carers, children, prison staff and school staff working together
- “The points helped with uniform a lot. When our daughter was struggling for lunches, the points paid for lunches and for their swimming excursion. The kids loved it because they knew it was coming from Dad.” (Mother whose husband is in prison)
- Mums in Melbourne – learning to read their own children's school reports

- Carers and imprisoned parents may have had very negative experiences of school themselves, many of them experiencing failure and shame (Bracken, 2011)
- Voices of imprisoned mothers who have regular contact with school: “I like, no I love, the connection I have with the schools... this has opened a door for me and the school.” “I like being able to speak with my son’s teacher and be able to help with his education.” “I feel connected.”
- Support groups – children feeling they are the only ones affected / increased mental health problems (Murray and Farrington, 2008) / Parke and Clarke-Stewart, 2002 – group work is effective for children of prisoners – offers emotional support – not alone
- “One dad came to the school on his release to thank staff for running the group for his son, saying ‘It was the first time he had ever asked me about prison, and it was the most honest conversation we’d had.’”
SHINE for Kids staff member
- Speeches in San Francisco – these children have voices, let’s hear them.
- children affected feeling that things happen to them
- Judge: “I’ll never sentence in the same way again.”
- Across cyber-space – children do better at school when their parents are involved in their education – this underpins Getting it right for every child (Scotland) and Every child matters (England and Wales)
- Involving them using technology
- Role for training here
- Nuns in New York – Dad: “Prison is a bad place where bad people who do bad things go.” Son: “Where do good people who do bad things go?”
- Schools as communities of compassion – where families affected have trust
- How? Training for teachers must underpin all of the programmes I have mentioned
- Osborne Association

- “(The training) made us aware that we can and should involve parents in their children’s education, even if they are incarcerated.”
- PSE curriculum – children understanding the difference between good people and bad things

Our story

- There is so much that schools can do:
- train teachers; reach out sensitively to families and children affected; provide support and information; involve the imprisoned parent; look at issues of crime and punishment in the curriculum; deal with bullying; authorise visits to prison; consider group work...There is a lot that the police can do too - providing a safe place for children to go when houses are being searched; giving families information leaflets about the sentencing process and how organisations like FO can help; where possible arranging arrests then children are not there. There is much that health professionals can do too – being aware of mental health issues among families affected by imprisonment; encouraging family members to engage with community support; liaising with in-prison health services where appropriate. And there is much that social work and criminal justice can do as well.
- Can achieve all this - CLICK
- BUT – not alone!
- Working together – role of charities here
- Quote from Khodi:
- “My dad’s been in prison twice now, each time for 3 years. In my old school I told this one teacher, Mr S about it because I trusted him. He was pretty cool. He asked me about my dad, things like do I see him, how was I feeling, that kind of thing. It was really helpful to me. There’s another teacher in my school, Mr B, - he was always negative, putting me down. He didn’t like me and when he found out my dad was in prison he took advantage of that. He’d say, ‘you won’t be anything. You’re going to end up just like your dad.’ I think it’s better if teachers know because then they can help me if I’m (like) having a bad day or

something. I think it'd be good if teachers got a kind of lesson on how kids like me feel, and what it's like for us." Khodi (14)

And this is what teachers are saying – "I am more confident now in knowing how to reach out to families affected by imprisonment."

"Visiting the prison has given me an insight into what it's like for children." "I had never thought about this before – thank you for this unique insight."

It's all about working together – focus group of young people based in an Edinburgh High School; music project with fathers in Addiewell learning to create and play music with their children; family group conferencing with men who are in HMP Castle Huntly Open Estate approaching their release. School case conference inside Edinburgh Prison; videoconferencing with families in Aberdeen. Not about doing things to people, it's about walking alongside people. It's about saying "how can we help you turn things around?"

His story?

- Quotes up
- Play video