

NICCO: Assisting Local Authorities to support children of offenders

'I miss my mum. One day she went out and didn't come back'

2.5x
more children experience parental imprisonment than are in care.

Find out how to support offenders' children and their families

Visit our professionals' website

www.nicco.org.uk



Barnardo's Registered Charity
Nos. 216250 and SC037605

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Who are we?

The National Information Centre on Children of Offenders – NICCO (formerly i-HOP) is a service that supports professionals to work effectively with offenders' children and families. NICCO collates and promotes examples of services, interventions, resources, policy and research around this vulnerable group.

Barnardo's was originally commissioned by the **Department for Education** in 2013 to develop this service as an online information hub with a focus on England (www.nicco.org.uk). The service is targeted at all professionals who come into contact with offenders' children and their families, from various sectors including education, health and social care as well as the criminal justice system.

* It is estimated that there are 200,000 children affected by parental imprisonment in England and Wales (MoJ, 2012). In 2012 it was reported that there were 72,775 children in care in England and Wales (NSPCC, 2012).

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“We was there when he got locked up.”

7 year old girl

It is estimated that there are **200,000 children a year** that experience the imprisonment of a parent – more than are Looked After. Research increasingly shows the impact that parental imprisonment can have on these children – **poorer outcomes, stigma, isolation, health and financial difficulties**. Currently there is no routine identification of who these children are and therefore no ways of ensuring their needs are recognised.

Children of offenders and Local Authorities

“Mum doesn’t want me to tell.” 12 year old girl

During their time at school seven percent of children experience their father’s imprisonment.¹

Although there are various negative impacts associated with parental imprisonment (such as children being twice as likely to suffer from **mental health problems**² and having an increased likelihood of experiencing **poverty**³ compared to their peers), many of these **children will remain invisible with their needs unmet**. Some of these children and families will be amongst the most vulnerable, and therefore may already be engaged with services – however it is likely that this will be without the recognition of their needs specifically in relation to parental imprisonment.

Stigma and bullying can mean that children and parents do not want to let services and professionals know they are facing these particular challenges. Services that are unaware of the scale of parental imprisonment, will not know to ask families if they face this challenge and need support.

“There is still stigma... People would think that everybody in the family [is] like that.” Mother

There is **growing national recognition** that the needs of these children must be identified and met to ensure that they achieve the best possible outcomes. Along with the Department for Education funding the NICCO service to support professionals to provide effective support, **Ofsted have identified children of offenders as a target group** for Children’s Centres with needs potentially requiring additional support.⁴ *Working Together to Safeguard Children* highlights the statutory responsibilities of Local Authorities to undertake needs assessments for individual



children, and **suggests that the children in need assessment process is also followed when a child has a parent in prison.**⁵

Local Authorities, along with their strategic groups such as Safeguarding Children Boards, Children and Young People’s Partnership Boards and Children’s Trusts are integral to the multi-agency support of children and families in their local community. With their **duty to promote multi-agency co-operation** for the purpose of improving children’s wellbeing (as set out in the 2004 Children’s Act), **Local Authorities are well placed to recognise the specific needs** of children and families of offenders and identify them as a target reach group for local agencies. Because there are no formal identification systems in place, **it is essential for Local Authorities to develop protocols and guidelines** in order to ensure a co-ordinated, multi-agency response.

How can NICCO support Local Authorities?

“I would have liked to have had more help in people talking to me and telling me what to expect.” Mother

NICCO is a national one stop information and advice service for all professionals – including frontline staff, strategic managers and commissioners – that work within a children and families setting. It brings together information that can support multi-agency professionals and services in developing

practice around and working with children affected by parental offending:

- existing **strategies** for local authority-wide working
- **models and examples of practice**, including multi-agency working
- **guidelines and toolkits** to develop practice in different service settings
- **resources** for frontline staff to use directly with children
- details of local and national **services** that work specifically with children and families of offenders, to signpost children and families to
- details of local multi-agency **training** for professionals
- **research, evidence based practice, and evaluations** to inform the development or commissioning of joined-up and partnership working

NICCO recognises that children and families' professionals work in busy environment with multiple demands on their time. NICCO puts all the resources in one place so help and information is there when it's needed.

Please contact us directly if you would like NICCO to support you in developing this area of work: nicco@barnardos.org.uk

Note:

Children's and parent's quotes are taken from interviews with children and families in two Barnardo's reports:

Owen Gill, *Every night you cry: Case studies of 15 Bristol families with a father in prison*, Barnardo's, 2009

Owen Gill, *She just cries and cries: Case studies of Devon families with a father in prison*, Barnardo's, 2010

References:

- 1 Department for Education and Skills, *Every Child Matters*, London: The Stationery Office, 2003
- 2 Social Care Institute for Excellence, *Guide 22 Children of Prisoners; Maintaining Family Ties*, 2008
- 3 Rowntree Smith R, Grimshaw R, Romeo R, Knapp M, *Poverty and disadvantage among prisoner's families*, Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2007
- 4 Ofsted, *Children's Centre Inspection Handbook for Inspections from April 2013*, March 2013
- 5 Department for Education, *Working Together to Safeguard Children: A guide to inter-agency working to safeguard and promote the welfare of children*, March 2013

Examples of existing practice

Oxfordshire Council have produced '**Guidelines for Working with Children who have a 'Family Member in Prison'**'. The guidelines aim to develop a consistent approach and good practice across Oxfordshire Local Authority, outline the needs of children and families affected by imprisonment and set out guidance for how schools in the local authority should respond to these needs.

Calderdale Council and **Stockport Council** both provide '**Hidden Sentence' Training** for professionals that work with children and families. This training developed by the organisation Action for Prisoners' Families, raises awareness about the support needs of prisoners' families and how these can be met by statutory and voluntary provision and resources.

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