

# NICCO: Assisting LSCBs 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

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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](http://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. 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 way of ensuring their needs are recognised.

## Children of offenders and Local Safeguarding Children Boards

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

More children are affected by parental imprisonment each year than are Looked After. During their time at school seven percent of children experience their father’s imprisonment.<sup>1</sup>

Although there are various negative impacts associated with parental imprisonment (such as 25% of children of prisoners being at a higher risk of **mental ill health**<sup>2</sup> and having an increased likelihood of experiencing **poverty**<sup>3</sup> 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 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

LSCBs are integral to the multi-agency support of children and families in their local community. And with their duty to promote the welfare of children as set out in the 2004 Children’s Act, LSCBs are well placed to recognise the needs of children and families of offenders. As emphasised in the recent Ofsted inspection framework, ‘outstanding’ LSCBs are strategically influential in improving the care of children with a focus on multi-disciplinary practice and provision of training for both managers and practitioners.



This is in addition to a general focus by Ofsted on the importance of early identification and response to children and families’ needs and effective information sharing.<sup>4</sup>

## How can NICCO support LSCBs?

**“I don’t really like people finding out stuff like that.”** 7 year old boy

The Department for Education (DfE) has recognised the needs of this group of children and for them to be given appropriate support, through the funding of NICCO. The DfE’s inter-agency guide *Working Together to Safeguard Children* (2015) also highlights the needs of children with a parent in prison.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, Troubled Families in 2011 and Ofsted in 2013 identified children of offenders as a target group, with needs requiring additional support.<sup>6</sup>

**“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 – who work within a children and families setting. It brings together information that can support multi-agency staff in working with and developing practice around children affected by parental offending:

- existing **strategies** for local authority-wide working
- **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
- **models and examples of practice**, including multi-agency working
- **guidelines and toolkits** to develop practice in different service settings
- details of local multi-agency **training** and **workshops** 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 environments with multiple demands on their time. NICCO puts all the resources in one place so help and information is there when it's needed.

### Examples of existing practice

**Kingston LSCB** have produced '**Families Apart Protocol: supporting the needs of prisoner families**'. This document outlines the needs of families affected by imprisonment, sets out guidance for professionals working in Kingston around identifying and engaging with these families, and highlights the reduction of risks to children resulting from multi-agency working.

**Stoke on Trent, Merton, North Tyneside, North Somerset** and **Walsall LSCBs** all provide '**Hidden Sentence**' Training for professionals that work with children and families. This training developed by the organisation Action for Prisoners' and Offenders' Families, raises awareness about the support needs of prisoners' families and how these can be met by statutory and voluntary provision and resources.

#### 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, *Framework and evaluation schedule for the inspections of services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers. Reviews of Local Safeguarding Children Boards*, November 2013
- 5 Department for Education, *Working Together to Safeguard Children: A guide to inter-agency working to safeguard and promote the welfare of children*, 2015
- 6 Ofsted, *Children's centre inspection handbook for inspections from April 2013*, March 2013

## Visit NICCO

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