



All Party Parliamentary Group for Parents and Families Prisoners' Families

Tuesday 24 January 2017

Committee Room 11

Meeting Minutes

Attendees

Caroline Ansell MP (Chair)	Susan Easton	Corinna Bramble
Baroness Tyler	Diane Curry	Nhung Vu
Baroness Watkins of Tavistock	Dinithi Wijedasa	Megan Jarvie
The Lord German	Paul Williams	Beth Wheaton
Rt Revd Donald Allister	Leandra Box	Nina Corbett
Lord Stone	Paul Ringer	Hannah Ruben
Baroness Hamwee of Blackheath	Richard Woolfson	Ellen Broome
Neera Sharma (speaker)	Mark Heasman	Anthony George
Nancy Loucks (speaker)	Catherine Heard	Rebecca Mistry
Kate Bulman (speaker)	Gordon Cropper	Kieran Ball
Tony Laver (speaker)	Sam Reeve	Mandy Ollis
Samantha Callan (speaker)	Rachel Condry	Rachael Stephen
Josh Richards	Rachael Biggs	Nick Woodhead
Barbara Whiting-Smith	Rachel Irving	Rebecca Farmer
Andy Keen-Downs	Sinéad Emery	Aisha Lysejko
Judith Longstreth	Judy Corlyon	Shona Minson
Trevor Single	Lynda Sandham	Richard Nicholls
Carla Garnelas	Helen McKee	Michelle Parvin
	Lucy Willoughby	Joanna Apps
	Jenny Earle	Vivienne Evans
	Chris Leeson	Katy Oglethorpe
	Michael Lewkowicz	

Minutes

Welcome and introductions from the chair, Caroline Ansell MP

Neera Sharma, from Barnardos, shared some of their key learning from 20 years working with prisoners' families:

- Children of prisoners are often invisible, and therefore neglected, by the prison and wider family support system.
- Parents can be imprisoned a long distance from home and this is a key barrier to maintaining contact with children
- Praised the use of 'custody screening tools' to identify family ties early and called for this information to be collated at a national level.

- Key calls for change: making children's visits separate from earned privileges; stopping last minute cancellations of visitations of children to their fathers; making searches of visiting children more child friendly; better systems to identify children of prisoners as soon as they are placed in custody; better information gathering to identify fathers.

Nancy Loucks, Chief Executive of Families Outside, shared their learning from work with Scottish families:

- Parent incarceration has an effect on a wide range of aspects of a child's life, and so no one agency is taking responsibility, but the biggest challenge is the stigma that accompanies imprisonment.
- Families Outside provide support to families affected, training to staff that work with them, and work to improve wider policy and practice.
- Engaging teenagers to visit parents in prison can be challenging. Music workshops and peer support groups can be a way of doing this.
- Training early years professionals and teachers to be aware of this issue is important – this is often a hidden issue. Stopping children feeling embarrassed about having a family member in prison may be easier if this is better understood and discussed more widely.
- Unlike rest of the UK, visits are a child's right in Scotland.

Kate Bulman, nurse from Oakhill Secure Training Centre who runs a Fatherhood Programme and Tony Laver, a representative from Young Dads Collective (YDC):

- Kate started a group for young dads at Oakhill when she realised that young mums in the centre were receiving lots of support, but the fathers were not
- The Fatherhood Programme gives one-to-one and group support to young dads, including support after they leave prison.
- Some of the barriers that prevent young dads from maintaining relationships with families are: long travel distances; if their girlfriend is under 18, they will need to be accompanied by an adult when visiting prison; the visiting room is not family friendly for children or younger siblings.
- Tony found the informal support network provided by Kate and peers through the Young Dads Collective is really important. It showed Tony that people cared. Educational videos and talks on issues such as domestic violence were also really helpful.
- Informal support to young dads is important to stop them from giving up when they are released and reverting to previous behaviours. Some young dads will have little family support, and significant issues, such as housing and work, which they need to manage.

Dr Samantha Callan, parliamentary adviser to Lord Farmer, outlined the remit and some of the findings from the Farmer Review:

- As part of the Prison Safety and Reform White Paper, they were commissioned to review how supporting men in prison engage with their families can reduce reoffending. It was clear that there was lots of amazing work taking place, but that it was patchy.
- The Farmer Review focuses on safety and linking safety to family issues and follows the six key themes of the white paper:
 - The right framework for improvement
 - Raising standards
 - Empowered governors
 - Safe and secure prisons
 - Developing our leaders and staff
 - Building the right estate for reform

- The review has worked with large numbers of prisons, prisoners, prison staff and academics. The findings and recommendations will be published soon.

The meeting was then opened up to questions and comments from attendees. Some of the key points from the discussion were:

- The importance of mothers as well as fathers in prison was raised, including concerns over the separation of mothers and babies born in prison. Some good practice was highlighted in this regard, but there were concerns that this was not widespread.
- Greater awareness of family imprisonment amongst staff who work with families could help families to be able to easily access the support they need and overcome stigma. It was suggested that it could be included within teaching and nursing training or built into safeguarding duties.
- A call was made to make greater use of release on temporary license and to consider reducing the use of custodial sentences for primary carers, so that bonds between families could be maintained.
- Family Engagement Workers in prisons were praised as they are able to take on the intensive case work that is needed.
- It was felt that it was important to make individual assessments for every family about whether contact was a good thing for families.
- Ofsted could be used to support good practice in overcoming stigma. Children of prisoners are recognised as a vulnerable group in the early years and this could be extended to schools.