

EVERY FAMILY MATTERS

Things to consider when setting up Family Link Support Services and organising Family Focused Visits in prisons.



WHO WE ARE AND WHAT WE DO

POPS is a registered charity set up twenty years ago by families who were experiencing having a loved one in custody. At this time a group of families formed a support structure for each other when there was nothing else available. Today, POPS have grown to become an organisation that employs over seventy-five full and part-time staff, has an annual turnover of over one million pounds and delivers a range of services to families at various stages of the Criminal Justice process. We operate services locally, regionally and nationally. We influence a number of policy and practice steering groups, working parties and strategic boards and provide both an offenders' family and Voluntary and Community Sector perspective at all of the above.

POPS' core services can be broken down into these key areas:-

- Visitor Centres
- Family Link Workers
- Prisoners Families National Telephone Helpline
- Black Prisoner Support Project

POPS recognises that families influence behaviour, and if appropriate, can take on the role of the "offender supporter". This role can assist in the positive progression of the offender through their sentence.



‘We aim to provide a variety of services to support anyone who has a link with someone in prison, prisoners and other agencies. Partners of Prisoner and Families Support Group provides assistance to these groups for the purpose of enabling them to cope with the stress of arrest, imprisonment and release.’

POPS Mission Statement



WHY WE DO IT

Family ties are acknowledged as a protective factor and as such this document sets out to offer guidance and basic principles on how to assist the maintenance of such relationships whilst an offender is in custody.

The five year strategy plan for Protecting the Public and Reducing Re-offending recognises that supporting offenders' social and family links is at the "heart of offender management" (Home Office, 2005).

Children of offenders are also a particularly "at risk" group. Research suggests that prisoners' children are more at risk of being the next generation of prisoners. In fact, the Elizabeth Fry Society claims that 6 out of every 10 children of prisoners or ex-prisoners will become involved in crime and/or experience prison.

Children are affected by the characteristics of the areas in which they live, their school, their parents' values and local customs. The influence of family is an important factor in child development. Family conflict and inappropriate modelling behaviours such as parent involvement in criminal activities may affect whether a child becomes involved in delinquent and/or anti-social behaviour (McCarthy, Laing, Walker).

Information regarding the family responsibilities of prisoners is still not collated centrally. However, from a survey of 1,945 prisoners in 2003 the following information is drawn (Gerry Sutcliffe – Parliamentary under Secretary, Home Office):

- 45% of all prisoners had dependent children (aged 17 and under)
- 50% of female prisoners had dependent children
- 20% of young offenders had dependent children
- 48% of adult males had dependent children

FAMILY LINK SUPPORT SERVICES

POPS promote the concept of Family Link Workers attached to prisons to act as a conduit between families and prisoners.

Family Link Workers aim to assist prisoners' families develop their confidence and knowledge of the system by offering advice and support through guidance, advocacy and mediation.

Family Link Workers can act as a broker between the prison establishment and the family ensuring that they are as effective as possible in supporting the progression of a loved one through the custodial process. Signposting families to other prison or community based services is also a vital part of the Family Link Worker role.

Families are sometimes not aware of the support that prisoners can receive in preparing them for release. The Family Link Worker can inform them about the programmes, educational courses and work experience that is available for prisoners.

POPS currently has 7 Family Link Workers based in 5 establishments in the North West region. These Family Link Worker posts have been resourced by various funding routes including charitable trusts, Local Authority Drug Service Commissioners, Prison Service establishments and Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF).



Ten point plan

This guide will give you ten questions you should ask yourself before considering setting up a Family Link Worker service in your prison.

We have provided examples of how we have answered these questions, but remember every prison establishment is different and unique, therefore you must use our guide as a rule of thumb. One size does not fit all, so adapt it to fit your situation.

How to set up a Family Link Worker Service

1. What is required and why?
2. Should it be an “in house” prison led service or will you use an external agency?
3. If the service is to be provided by an external agency; should you procure this service via the HMPS Regional Procurement Unit?
4. How will this service be integrated into other prison departments?
5. Will it feed into the Reducing Re-offending Delivery Plan?
6. What will the management structure consist of?
7. How will you monitor and evaluate the service?
8. Does the service meet the needs of a diverse service user group?
9. How will the Family Link Worker post be funded?
10. Remember... every family matters.



THE 10 POINT PLAN

1. What is required and why?

We believe that you must always start with asking the service users what they want and need. Set up a focus group and ask the prisoners and their families "Is a Family Link Worker what they want and if so, what do they see as their role?". Then compare this to what prison staff want and need. Prison staff are sometimes inundated with requests from or about families that they are often unable or ill-equipped to deal with. The results of this consultation will give you evidence of the need and will start to build a picture of the specification for the post required.

2. Should it be an "in house" prison led service or will you use an external agency?

There is something to be said for both. We feel that utilising an outside agency can often bring another perspective to the situation. It also shows that the service is independent of the prison and the prisoner. If it is not possible to use an outside agency try to ensure that the prison officer is a plain clothed worker and completely dedicated to the role i.e. if there is an incident in the prison, they do not have to stop their duties and get caught up with the prison '1st response' system of reporting to the Governor for re-allocation of role. If this does happen we fear that the families needs are not a priority for this worker and may get forgotten in the case of an emergency.

Location, location, location!

POPS as a Voluntary Sector agency initially based the Family Link Worker within the prison establishment in order to integrate them into the internal mechanism of support services and to have access to the offenders themselves. However, via constant evaluation of the services we have recognised that being based in external visitor/resettlement centres can refocus the emphasis primarily on the needs of the family and not solely on the needs of the offender, which may often be in conflict.

Sentence planning

When based in a prison Visitor Centre, the Family Link Worker can encourage the family to be involved in the decision making process and can assist them to make a positive contribution toward sentence planning. The Offender Assessment System (OASys) has a relationship section that relates to the offenders present relationship with their families and also past family experiences. This can be updated with relevant information that is available to the Family Link Worker. Families can grow in confidence as their knowledge of the Criminal Justice and Prison Systems increase; as a result they can give the prisoners positive support in working towards their rehabilitation.

Safeguarding

Families are often the first to notice when a prisoners' behaviour changes, i.e. mental health deterioration, and can alert prison staff appropriately via the Family Link Worker. Families often feel more comfortable to raise sensitive issues with a worker attached to an external agency. The Family Link Worker can offer support to the family during this process and inform them of the prisoners' well being. The same might apply if a prisoner is experiencing bullying, substance misuse and other such issues.

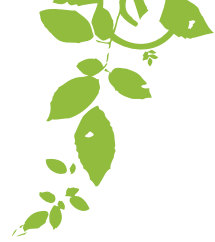
3. If the service is to be provided by an external agency; should you procure this service via the HMPS Regional Procurement Unit?

If the service is to be funded fully by the Prison Service, depending on the cost (over £10,000) the service will have to be tendered out by the Regional Procurement Unit.

There are a lot of positives attached to procuring a Family Link Work Service via Regional Procurement Units. We feel that a service procured in this way will:-

- Have a specification that will have been thought about and agreed beforehand
- Demonstrate an open and transparent process
- Have a contract and/or service level agreement drawn up in consultation with the provider
- Encourage contestability amongst agencies
- Promote partnership working between different agencies.





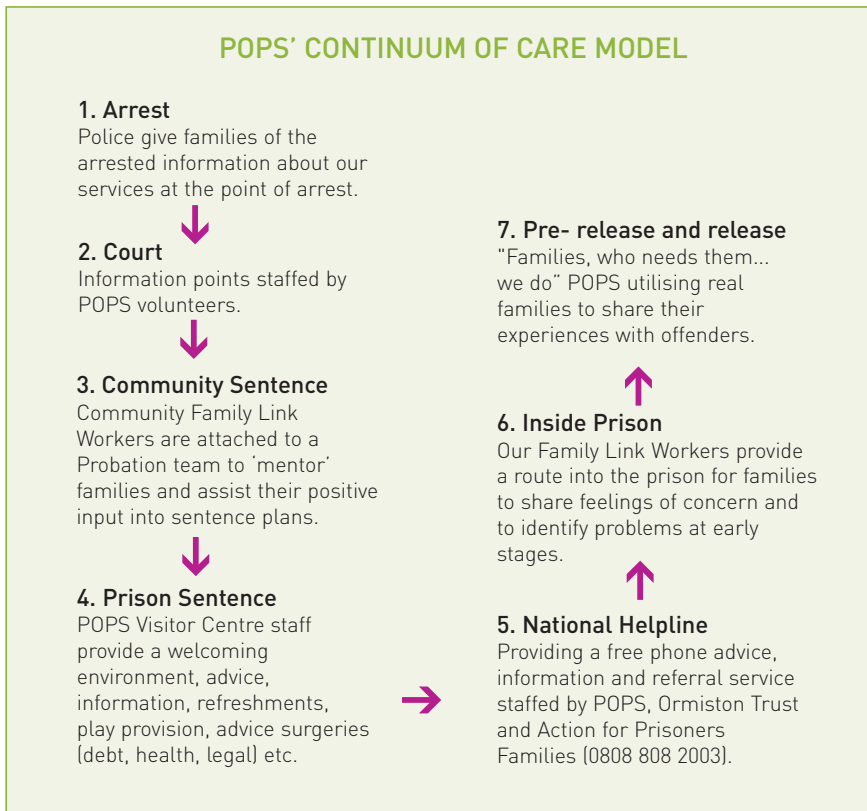
4. How will this service be integrated into other prison departments?

It is vital to ensure that your service is linked to and known by other agencies working in the prison. For example link the services to Safeguarding Teams, CARATs, Housing Projects, Chaplaincy Team, Resettlement Team and the Offender Management Unit etc.

Advertising and encouraging referrals to the service is also extremely important. The best forms of referrals are those made

by the family. You should also consider how to ensure that you don't miss anyone out. You can do this by promoting your service to other agencies both in the prison and in the community.

POPS as a Voluntary Sector agency identify Family Link Workers as an integral part of our continuum of care model which is a model where families can access the support of other POPS services at various stages of the Criminal Justice System i.e. Link Worker to Link Worker in different establishments.



These services are based on a continuum of care model, managed by one agency in a 'one stop shop' concept. Families are then familiar with the support agency (i.e. POPS) providing services at every step of the process. Trust is established and positive relationships are formed.

Consistency in method is effective in the delivery of pro social messages to offenders and their families need to be aware of what those messages are and what the offender manager is trying to achieve in mapping out supervision and interventions for the offender. If families, where appropriate, are included in the process, they can re-inforce the message and influence behaviour. POPS advocates that families need to understand the situation and the terminology used to ensure real communication is happening between all parties.

However, if the Family Link Worker is employed by an agency that does not operate such a process it is important that they are aware of other support networks that they may wish to inform the family of.

5. Will it feed into the Reducing Re-offending Delivery Plan?

We believe that the issues for prisoners' children and families cut across all pathways. With this in mind we believe that is vital to ensure that the work being carried out by the Family Link Worker is fed into this Children, Families and Community Support Pathway so it is both recognised and supported by NOMS, the prison and the region. If your prison has a Children, Families and Community Support Pathway then make sure your worker is linked to it. There also may be regional meetings taking place, these are usually hosted by a Regional Offender Management appointed Chair, try to feed your work into this too.





6. What will the management structure consist of?

External agency providing the service

It is always important to make sure that you have figured out the management protocol for the Family Link Worker before you assign them to work with the prison. This is extremely important for external agencies and satellite management systems. You should consider identifying a link manager in the prison that can support the worker on a day-to-day basis. But it is also very important to remember to ensure that your staff member is fully aware of what the partnership consists of, who they are employed by and what the support/management structure is on a day-to-day and long arm basis. This will avoid any confusion and isolation that may develop for the worker.

Prison is providing the service "in house"

It is important to remember that this is a family focused service even though it is provided by prison staff. A balance needs to be found with regards where the service sits within the establishment i.e. whose needs are at the forefront of the delivery? It is vital to promote the service to prisoners but also very necessary to make sure that families access the service directly in order to address their needs, which may sometimes conflict with those of the prisoner. Support systems need to be in place for prison staff to be able to identify issues and relay relevant information.

7. How will you monitor and evaluate the service?

Monitoring

We monitor the demographics of all our service users. For example ages, sex, ethnicity, disability, residence etc. We also log how they were referred to the service and what their issues were when they first presented themselves to our workers. This information is easily collated in a database as quantitative information of which reports can be created. It is vital to monitor your service to ensure that it is meeting the needs of a diverse range of families. Monitoring will also highlight if there are any trends in the type of issues families are experiencing. Also funders progressively want more evidence to prove that the service is meeting the need and in some way reduces re-offending. Keep up-to-date monitoring and analyse your data regularly to demonstrate what you are doing works and that funders should continue to support the work.

Evaluating

Evaluating your services is a good way to ensure that you are constantly developing and improving your practice methods. We would suggest that evaluations of the Family Link Work cases should take place at the end of each case via a number of different methods i.e. evaluation forms, focus groups, one-to-one interviews. We would also recommend that once a year you conduct a full service evaluation which includes getting feedback from all stakeholders and analysing

the impact of external influences i.e. governmental policy changes.

8. Does the service meet the needs of a diverse service user group?

Recruitment and training is key to the success of your service. Ensuring that your worker is both understanding and reflective of the service user group is vital when trying to make sure that the service reaches a diverse group. Your monitoring information will tell you if your service users are from a diverse background and if you find that you are struggling to reach certain groups you may need to re-think where you are promoting the service and who you are promoting it to.

9. How will the Family Link Worker post be funded?

POPS as a Voluntary Sector agency have been able to secure funding from a variety of different streams to ensure we have adequate resources to manage our Family Link Workers. It is important to remember that with each donor comes a different set of funding criteria. Therefore this may change the remit of the Family Link Worker and the monitoring information required. Our workers are currently funded by the following agencies (see table below).

10. Remember... every family matters!



DONOR NAME	SPECIFIC REMIT	FUNDING LENGTH	MONITORING
Local Authority Drug & Alcohol Strategy Team	Drug misuse amongst Manchester residents	12 months	Quarterly
DCSF (formerly DFES)	Strengthening families and relationships	3 years	Annual
IMPACT	Prisoners' returning to employment	2 years	Annual
Youth Justice Board	Young people (18-21 years old)	12 months	Quarterly
HM Prison Service	Generic	12 months	Quarterly
Tudor Trust	Generic	12 months	Annual

THE POPS METHOD

...GOOD PRACTICE

Safeguarding issue

A family were concerned about the well being of their loved one in prison (young person – under 18). They informed the Family Link Worker that it was the prisoners' first prison sentence and he was talking about committing suicide due to a recent bereavement. He was also having difficulties with his relationship as he had just separated from his partner and was not having access to his child. He was finding the whole experience very traumatic. Family Link Worker advocated on the family's behalf and an ACCT document was opened. This document meant that the individual was at risk of self harm and would be carefully monitored by the prison.

The Family Link Worker was able to get him a place on the "Dads' Visit". This gave him the opportunity to spend some time with his son and develop a mutually beneficial relationship with his ex-partner. He is now much more settled and coping with his prison sentence and his ACCT document has been closed. The family have been kept regularly informed and updated on his well being.

Multi-agency working

A Prison Officer made a referral to the Family Link Worker regarding a remand prisoner who was the sole carer for his disabled mother. He was extremely distressed and worried that she would struggle to cope alone.

The Family Link Worker contacted the prisoner and met him on a legal visit to assess the level of support required by his mother. They then contacted his mother to inform her of his welfare and his concerns for her. The Family Link Worker later supported his mother on her first visit. With her agreement they contacted a Voluntary Sector Family Welfare organisation to help her to access some local community support.

The prisoner is now much more relaxed knowing his mother is being supported and she is able to contact the Family Link Worker directly by phone for practical advice. At the first meeting between the mother and the Family Link Worker it was highlighted that the prisoner had a severe drug misuse problem. With his permission the Family Link Worker relayed this information to the relevant prison department and he has now gone through a full detox programme. The mother feels more positive about his resettlement upon release.

Involvement in Sentence planning

The Family Link Worker met the sister of a prolific offender in the Visitor Centre. She was the only member of the family prepared to visit him during this sentence, as the others found the visiting experience very draining and had given up on him. The Family Link Worker gave her support and practical advice on how to support him during his time in prison. She encouraged the sister to help and support him to complete his programmes. They worked together to prove to each other and the rest of the family that he was trying to change and worth supporting.



FAMILY FOCUSED VISITS

Even when families strive to maintain contact with their loved one in prison, visits can be experienced as stressful and upsetting, especially by children and can be exacerbated by the environment and lack of facilities. In light of this some prisons have special arrangements that enable prisoners to spend more quality time with their families in a more relaxed and informal setting. These visits are different from normal domestic visits in as much as the prisoner is free to move around the room and play with their children. These visits bring some normality to an otherwise sterile situation. Food is usually provided at these events so families can eat together and having a family photograph taken is also an option. This is often an important factor for longer term prisoners.

Family visits can be utilised to enable imprisoned parents to re-establish links with their children. They can allow for parents to prepare for release by allowing quality time with their children and to develop their confidence as parents once again.

Children often find it very difficult to understand why their parent can not move from their seat on a normal domestic visit and physical contact may also be frowned upon for reasons of security. However, dedicated Family Focused Visits will allow children the benefit of more physical contact and interaction.

“Just seeing my partner playing with his children made it all seem normal for a while.”

Family member after a Family Focused Visit



Ideally family visits should be available to all prisoners, however the reality is somewhat different. The numbers of prisoners accessing such visits is quite low in comparison to the overall number within each establishment and these visits normally take place every 6 weeks.

There are also security and child protection issues to be considered and in some establishments it is only those prisoners on the enhanced regime who can participate. This type of criteria means that some prisoners never get access to such a service e.g. Remand, Standard, Basic regime prisoners.

It is also worth considering the timing of the Family Focused Visit (i.e. afternoon) in order that families are able to travel in time to attend the visits.

Ten point plan

There is no one model of good practice only a desire to encourage strong family ties and the decency agenda. This guide will give you ten questions you should ask yourself before considering organising Family Focused Visits in your prison.

We have provided examples of how we have answered these questions, but remember every prison establishment is different and unique, therefore you must use our guide as a rule of thumb. One size does not fit all, so adapt it to fit your situation.

How to organise a Family Focused Visit

1. What is required, why and for whom?
2. How will you manage, steer and evaluate the Family Focused Visits?
3. How will you promote it and to whom?
4. Will it be themed?
5. What is your budget and who will resource it?
6. Who will provide refreshments?
7. Will photographs be taken and by whom?
8. Who will send out pre-event information?
9. What activities will be available at the event?
10. Remember... have fun!



THE 10 POINT PLAN

1. What is required, why and for whom?

You need to acknowledge that although there are different prisoner communities within prisons i.e. Enhanced, Lifers etc, it may be worth considering standard regime prisoners being eligible for Family Focused Visits too. Also have you thought about whether these visits will be counted as part of the prisoners' normal visiting allowance or is in addition to those visits?

2. How will you manage, steer and evaluate the Family Focused Visits?

It is important that the prison and/or agency that run the Visitor Centre are on board with the concept and take part in the planning and organisation of the Family Focused Visit. You should consider setting up a steering group that consists of all key stakeholders such as Resettlement Governor, Security Governor, Voluntary Sector agencies, Visitor Centre staff, Chaplaincy, Education staff, Visits Senior Officer, Prisoner and/or a family representative. Each meeting should be minuted, tasks should be allocated and an action plan formulated with distinct items to be delivered on and timescales for them to be completed by.

It is important to monitor who has access to Family Focused Visits. You should be making them available to a diverse group of families from a wide geographical range.

Evaluating the success of the event is beneficial. It helps you to improve the next one. Following up the event by speaking to each family and prisoner individually is a good way of getting their feedback and improving things for the future.

3. How will you promote it and to whom?

The promotion of the event is key to its success. Information needs to be clearly set out and easily accessible. The promotional materials need to state the prisoners' and/or families' criteria for application to attend the Family Focused Visit.

4. Will it be themed?

Have you considered having a themed event to coincide with festivals such as Christmas, Eid, Halloween or Black History Month? This way it will give families a chance to celebrate occasions together as they would if they were at home.

5. What is your budget and who will resource it?

The budget needs to be agreed from the onset of organising these kind of visits. Some establishments will provide funding from their own internal budgets whilst others may partner with Voluntary Sector Agencies to draw down grant funding from Trusts and Foundations. Remember that community agencies like local Children Centres and Libraries etc do have resources and a remit to reach children and offer learning opportunities. Utilise volunteers where appropriate.



6. Who will provide refreshments?

This aspect of the day may sound obvious but is a very important part of the event. The family and the prisoner rarely get to eat a meal together and the prisoner will never be allowed to feed his/her children or interact with them physically on a normal visit. Therefore it has to be right both in terms of quality and quantity and also taking into consideration special requirements and cultural needs. If you are unsure about what to do and what to provide, ask! The families and prisoners will tell you what they need. If you normally have access to a refreshment area, consider having it open at the event. In order to encourage multi-agency working utilise the support of the prison canteen to provide refreshments and lunch. If this is not a possibility and you are going to use an external caterer, make sure the company has been approved by the prison and meets all security requirements.

7. Will photographs be taken and by whom?

Having a photograph to mark the occasion can make the occasion even more special. But consider who will take the photos and how will they be distributed to the prisoners and families after the visit. Prisoners often look forward to receiving the photograph from their visit and it is a memento of the day that they will want to keep.

8. Who will send out pre-event information?

Someone needs to take responsibility for informing the families and the prisoners of the arrangements for the day. They need to know, when it is, where it will take place, how to get there, what time to be there and what to expect when they get there. Make sure you have all the family contact details and they have yours, just in case they are delayed or can't make it. It is vital to inform a prisoner if their family is delayed or will not be there, don't leave them to find out on the day. It will be traumatic for them and they will be disappointed.



“I felt like a proper Dad... just helping my daughter eat her lunch was really special.”

9. What activities will be available at the event?

Think about how you will get the families to bond and play together. This can be more creative than a normal visit so think 'outside the box'. How about games, arts and crafts, watching videos, reading and listening to story books, face painting etc?

It is important to try to make sure that there is both practical and emotional support available to families and prisoners both before and after the event. Visits don't always go well and arguments or disagreements can take place, especially when under stress. Be prepared and make sure someone is available to help.

10. Remember... have fun!



THE POPS METHOD ...GOOD PRACTICE

Dad's Visits

Child focused visits for young Dads are a great way of supporting young fathers to build up relationships with their children and encourage them to be interactive.

At HMYOI Hindley a multi-agency steering group meets to plan each event and a theme for the visit. The Learning and Skills department provided a Dads reading/story tape activity. This involved each dad reading a story to their child(ren). Prison IT staff operated the whiteboard display, so that the children could read along with the story. Staff and young people from the prison catering course prepared and served refreshments as part of their coursework.

The POPS Playworkers assisted with activities for the children and Dads, such as face painting, playing games and cake decorating. One of the prison managers took photographs.

The afternoon went extremely well and all families and children invited to the event managed to attend. The feedback from families, prisoners and prison staff was very positive.

EID Event

HMP&YOI Forest Bank and POPS run family focused visits every three months with different themes such as Halloween, Easter or Christmas. The last one we organised had an Eid focus.

The Eid family visit at Forest Bank was a great success, the forward planning included consultation with prisoners and families and joint working between POPS, the prison visits team, the Imam and catering department.

“It was really great to celebrate Eid with our son... it was important to us to be together as a family.”

There was a Halal buffet and lots of activities for parents and children including arts and crafts, face painting. We even invited one of our talented members of POPS staff from another prison to provide henna painting for people's hands and feet. Salford Book Start attended and the children were given Treasure packs containing books and reading folders. Sure Start also provided the Visits Hall and the event with new play equipment.



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Partners of Prisoners and Families Support Group

Valentine House
1079 Rochdale Road
Blackley
Manchester
M9 8AJ

T/F 0161 702 1000
E mail@partnersofprisoners.co.uk
W www.partnersofprisoners.org.uk

Registered Charity Number: 1048152
Company Registration Number: 3067385
VAT Number: 883303130



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