

# NICCO: Assisting Troubled Families professionals to support children of offenders



‘He has been going out of school, missing a few lessons and bunking off.’

**3x**

prisoner’s children are at 3x the risk of anti-social outcomes

Find out how to support offenders’ children and their families

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**[www.nicco.org.uk](http://www.nicco.org.uk)**



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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.

\*14 Murray, J. and Farrington, D.P., '*Parental imprisonment: Long-lasting effects on boys' internalizing problems through the life-course*', Development and Psychopathology

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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 met.

## **Troubled families and parental offending**

### **“She’s been in trouble on the school bus, she’s truanting and she’s been on report at school.”**

Mother

- Prisoners’ families are vulnerable to poverty, debt, housing instability and physical illness<sup>1</sup>
- 25% of prisoner’s children are at risk of poor mental health<sup>2</sup>
- Research has found that 65% of boys with a parent imprisoned before they were ten went on to offend themselves<sup>3</sup>
- Parental imprisonment is a risk factor for poor educational outcomes<sup>4</sup>

The disadvantage and stigma that these families often experience can mean that children and parents do not seek help or let professionals know when a parent goes to prison. Given this, and the lack of systematic identification, these children and families can often be left feeling isolated and without support.

### **“There is still stigma... People would think that everybody in the family [is] like that. School might think they are the same as their father.”**

Mother

Considering the Troubled Families programme’s focus on education, crime and anti-social behaviour, teams are likely to be working with many families that are affected by parental offending. Phase 2 of the programme develops the focus on parental offending, with criteria including; families where a parent is in prison and has less than 12 months on their sentence; parents serving a community sentence; and adults with a proven offence in the previous year. These criteria will mean yet more teams are working with families affected by parental offending.

Because of the impact of parental offending and the reluctance for some families to ask for help specifically around this issue, it is essential for teams to receive relevant training. This will provide an understanding of and ability to identify



the needs associated with parental offending – helping to ensure families have a non-judgmental place to disclose information and receive support.

The central role Troubled Families professionals often play in families’ lives, mean they are well placed to provide holistic support, signpost families to targeted agencies, provide specialist information and promote meaningful contact between imprisoned parents and children. Teams are also well placed to appropriately share information, and ensure effective partnership working between statutory and other services regarding the needs of these families.

### **“It’s not just the prisoner that’s punished is it? It’s the whole family.”**

Mother

There is a growing national, strategic recognition of this group of children and families. In addition to the Troubled Families programme identifying these families as part of phase 2, Ofsted in April 2013 identified children of offenders as a potential target group for Children’s Centres, with needs requiring additional support,<sup>5</sup> and *Working Together to Safeguard Children* suggests that the children in need assessment process should also be followed when a child has a parent in prison.<sup>6</sup>

## **How can NICCO support Troubled Families professionals?**

### **“All we want as a family is just to know what to do, how to go about things because we don’t know. Nobody tells you anything.”**

Mother

NICCO is a national one stop information and advice service for all professionals working with children and families of offenders. It brings together information that can support professionals in working with children affected by parental offending:

- **resources** for children and families and for professionals to use directly with children

- details of **local and national services** to signpost families to, that work specifically with children and families of offenders
- details of local **training for professionals**
- up to date, national and local **policy frameworks, government guidance and recommendations** about this group of families
- **guidelines and toolkits** to support professionals to work with these families, and to assist in developing setting-wide practice
- **research** into the impact of imprisonment on children and families

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

**Note:**

Children's and parents' 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 Rowntree Smith R, Grimshaw R, Romeo R, Knapp M, *Poverty and disadvantage among prisoner's families*, Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2007
- 2 Jones et al, (2013), *COPING, Children of Prisoners, Interventions & Mitigations to Strengthen Mental Health*, University of Huddersfield
- 3 Joseph Murray, David P. Farrington, Ivana Sekol, Rikke F. Olsen, *Effects of parental imprisonment on child antisocial behaviour and mental health: a systematic review*, Campbell Systematic Reviews 2009:4, 2009
- 4 Joseph Murray and David P. Farrington, *The Effects of Parental Imprisonment on Children*, in M Tonry (Ed.), *Crime and Justice: a review of research* (Vol 37, pp133-206). University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 2008
- 5 Ofsted, *Children's centre inspection handbook for inspections from April 2013*, March 2013
- 6 Department for Education, *Working Together to Safeguard Children: A guide to inter-agency working to safeguard and promote the welfare of children*, March 2015
- 7 Hampshire County Council, *Hampshire's Supporting Families Programme: Case Study – Spurgeons Invisible Walls*, date unknown <http://documents.hants.gov.uk/childrens-services/STFPCaseStudySpurgeons-SupportingTroubledFamiliesProgrammeHF00005797866.pdf>
- 8 Department for Communities and Local Government, *Troubled Families Case Studies*, November 2012 [www.gov.uk/government/publications/troubled-families-case-studies](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/troubled-families-case-studies)

**Examples of existing practice**

The **Supporting Troubled Families Programme in Hampshire** part funds a project run by **Spurgeons** at HMP Winchester. The Invisible Walls family project provides pre and post parenting and family support for fathers in prison as part of a multi-agency response to help fathers reintegrate into their families and communities on release. *Case study from Hampshire County Council*<sup>7</sup>

**Sheffield Early Intervention and Prevention Service** worked with a family with two children, considered to be at risk of offending and anti-social behaviour due their father's offending and family attitudes to offending. The father was currently serving a 2 year prison sentence. The worker visited the father in prison, met the agencies already involved with the family, worked with the mother and the children at home and then with the whole family on release. The worker talked to both the mother and father about their parenting, to agree consistent approaches in advance of the father returning home from prison. After release, the children were in school full time and the father gained a qualification and full-time employment and there had been no further arrests. *Case study from Department for Communities and Local Government*<sup>8</sup>

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