

NICCO: Assisting professionals to work with the children of female offenders



‘I wish Mummy could come home. I wish I could see more of her.’¹

5% of children stay in their family home when their mother goes to prison

Find out how to support offenders’ children and their families

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 **Barnardo's**

Barnardo's Registered Charity
Nos. 216250 and SC037605

1 Pact (2014) *Mum's the word*

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Who are we?

NICCO is a service that supports professionals to work effectively with offenders' children and families. NICCO collates and promote examples of services, interventions, resources, policy and research around this vulnerable group.

Barnardo's was commissioned by the **Department for Education** to develop this service as an online information hub with a focus on England (www.nicco.org.uk). The service is targeted at any 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.

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“I wish Mummy could come home. I wish I could see more of her.” – 2 year old¹

It is estimated that 200,000 children a year experience the imprisonment of a parent.² Research increasingly shows the impact that parental imprisonment can have on these children—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.

Mothers in the Criminal Justice System

“The uncle drives them to visit their mother... [which]...involves an overnight stay...in the car in a motorway service area.” – Barnardo’s research interview³

- 66% of women in prison are mothers⁴
- An estimated 49,780 children were separated from their mother by imprisonment in 2012⁵
- Only 5% of children stay in their family home when their mother goes to prison⁶

Fewer children are affected by maternal than paternal offending, but when a mother goes to prison, the impact on children can be very significant. As mothers are often primary carers, their involvement in the Criminal Justice System (CJS) and imprisonment can have detrimental effects on the mother and child relationship,⁷ as well as with professionals such as health visitors and social workers.⁸ A child’s stability is likely to be affected as often they will move out of their family home. The majority are looked after by grandparents and other family members, only 9% stay with their fathers and 12% will go into care with foster or adoptive parents.⁹

“Having no control to protect my kids was scary.” – Mother in prison¹⁰

As women who offend often have complex and multiple needs, such as being victims of abuse and suffering from ill mental health,¹¹ it is likely that their children face difficulties at home. Research shows that courts often do not take due interest in female offenders’ pre-sentence reports (PSRs) thus do not properly consider the rights or best interests of their children.^{12 13} Babies up to two years old who live in secure mother and baby units are more prone to ill health¹⁴ and children separated from their imprisoned mother can suffer severe attachment problems.¹⁵ Further, visits to prisons can be long, expensive and emotionally disruptive, as women are held on average 60 miles from home. Upon release, mothers can be caught in a difficult cycle of not getting accommodation unless they are



reunited with their children and not being reunited with them unless they have accommodation.¹⁶

“My little boy’s school knew before he knew. That way the social worker could ask them to prepare him before the first visit.” – Mother in prison¹⁷

It is essential that the specific needs of female offenders and their children are considered at all stages of the CJS. In courts, PSRs and family circumstances should be considered when sentencing women. Recent policy suggests the benefits to families of non-custodial sentences for offending mothers.¹⁸ Research shows that the provision of child friendly visits and family support in prisons can ensure ties between mothers and children are maintained and strengthened.¹⁹ Multiagency working such as that from ReUnite which involves prisons, housing and children and families services can ensure women and families receive appropriate support throughout resettlement.²⁰

How can NICCO support your work with children and families affected by maternal offending?

“...[NICCO] helped me to support the young people I was working with, and improve my own knowledge.” – NICCO user supporting children whose mother is in prison

There has long been strategic recognition of the need for professionals and agencies to facilitate the rights and improve the wellbeing of the children and families of female offenders. This is evidenced through pivotal policy such as the Corston Report²¹, the MOJ’s new approach to managing female offenders²² and more recently through the DfE’s funding of NICCO.

“Easy to access, read and understand information which informs staff and the practices in place” – Prison worker, NICCO user survey

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 you in working with these children and families:

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

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

References:

- 1 Pact (2014) *Mum's the word*
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- 3 Barnardo's (2012) *Under 5's and their families affected by imprisonment*
- 4 Home Office (2008) *Women prisoners: a survey of their work and training experiences in custody and on release*. Home Office Research Study 208
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- 7 Gelsthorpe (2007) *Sentencing and gender*
- 8 Barnardo's (2012) *Under 5's and their families affected by imprisonment*
- 9 Baroness Jean Corston, (2007) *The Corston Report*, The Home Office
- 10 See footnote 1
- 11 Social Exclusion Unit (2002) *Reducing reoffending by ex-prisoners*
- 12 Shona Minson (2014), *Mitigating Motherhood: A study of the impact of motherhood on sentencing decisions in England and Wales*, The Howard league
- 13 Rona Epstien (2014) *Mothers in prison: The sentencing of mothers and the rights of the child*, Working paper, The Howard league
- 14 Susan Galloway et al (2014) *An unfair sentence*, NSPCC
- 15 Julie Poehlmann, (2005) *Representations of Attachment Relationships in Children of Incarcerated Mothers*, Child Development
- 16 Social Exclusion Unit (2002) *Reducing re-offending by ex-prisoners*
- 17 Pact (2014) *Mum's the word*
- 18 House of Commons Justice Committee, (2013) *Women offenders: after the Corston Report*
- 19 See for example: Manby et al, (2013) *The Importance of Maintaining Family Ties During Imprisonment - Perspectives of Those Involved in HMP New Hall's Family Support Project*, Prison Service Journal and Raikes et al (2011) 'Mothering from the Inside' - *A Small Scale Evaluation of Acorn House, an Overnight Child Contact Facility at HMP Askham Grange*, Prison Service Journal
- 20 See for example: Gill, (2013) *Developing pathways into children and family services for mothers involved in the criminal justice system*, Barnardo's and Domino et al (2013) *Re-unite Revisited: An Evaluation*, University of Cambridge
- 21 Corston, (2007) *The Corston Report*, The Home Office
- 22 MOJ, (2013) *A new approach to managing female offenders*

Examples of existing practice

The Anawim project in Birmingham is a **community based service** which works with surrounding prisons, social services, children's centres and housing organisations to deliver **joined up support** for women and their children.

Pact have produced an excellent **practical reference book** written in collaboration with mothers in prison. **Mum's The Word** offers tips, case studies and spaces for personal goal setting which aim to help mothers cope with serving a sentence away from their children.

Visit NICCO

Visit www.nicco.org.uk to discover resources to support professionals in work with the children of female offenders and find out more. Sign up to become a member to receive free NICCO e-newsletters.

