

Northern Ireland Prison Service

Strengthening Family Relations Strategy 2019 - 2024



Department of
Justice
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NORTHERN IRELAND
PRISON  **SERVICE**

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...the golden thread running through the prison system should be the principle that relationships are fundamentally important if people are to change.

Section 1: Foreword

Research has shown strengthening family relationships can be crucial in addressing a number of social factors (pathways) that contribute to offending and reoffending. Strengthening family relationships and working in partnership can help to address personal needs, thus supporting offender management and reducing reoffending. The aim of this strategy is to set out how the Northern Ireland Prison Service (NIPS), working in partnership through a multi-agency approach, will strengthen family relationships.



NIPS has committed to strengthening family ties with people in our care in recognition of the importance of positive family connections and social support. Indeed the views of people in our care and their families have been instrumental in shaping this strategy.

In our *Prisons 2020, Driving continuous improvement in the Northern Ireland Prison Service*, we have highlighted the importance of families under the strand of services, with a desired outcome of rehabilitating and supporting people in our care to achieve better outcomes.

Lord Farmer in his *review*, August 2017, of the importance of family and other relational ties to prevent reoffending and reduce intergenerational crime emphasised that *the golden thread running through the prison system should be the principle that relationships are fundamentally important if people are to change*. If reform is to be achieved it is essential that family work should always be seen and referred to alongside employment and education as the third leg of the stool that brings stability and structure to an individual's life, particularly when they leave prison. Lord Farmer's review has significantly influenced this strategy.

We are committed to continuously improving how we work and respond to the needs of those in our care, and their children, families and wider support networks.

Ronnie Armour
Director General





Section 2: Introduction

This strategy sets out the approach that NIPS will adopt to improve outcomes for people in our care and their families. For those imprisoned, positive relationships and family contact are important factors in influencing how they cope with imprisonment and their rehabilitation and reintegration upon release. Therefore improvement in this area will make a contribution towards achieving a number of outcomes set by the former Executive under the Draft Programme for Government Framework 2016-2021.

We recognise that individuals have many ways of defining what constitutes a family and what being a part of a family means to them. Everyone's circumstances are unique so we must consider each individual and the make-up of their family or social network. For the purpose of this strategy we are using a broad definition of 'family' to help identify a wide range of people including extended family members and those who can create a network of support that promotes desistance from offending behaviour. In referencing 'family' we also recognise the significant impact contact and a healthy relationship with a partner or civil partner/spouse can have on people in our care. We also know that those in our care are a family member, and as such their presence in, and contribution to, the family can be missed. People who have a sense of purpose and belonging in the community, who are both enabled and able to repair damaged links with their family, friends and neighbours, are more likely to become responsible law abiding citizens.

We use an individualised and person-centred approach when assessing the needs of people in our care and their families. We recognise the important role that families can play in supporting their loved one's in relation to their mental health and this strategy is consistent with NIPS approach to safer custody.

We also recognise that some family relationships can be harmful and we must be sensitive to the needs of family members in these circumstances. Where there is an identified risk in maintaining family connections, for example where there is evidence that the family is involved in serious organised crime or has a long history of pro-criminal attitudes and behaviours, we must support those in our care who chose to desist from offending behaviour in making the required life choices which enable them to make the positive changes in transforming their lives. We also acknowledge that domestic abuse may be present in a relationship and family contact may not be beneficial for any family member, including the individual in our care. People and partnership, although not a distinct theme, permeate this strategy

This strategy sets out how NIPS will develop and deliver policies and procedures for those who have a family member in custody. We are seeking, not just to meet existing targets, but to influence and enhance current and developing plans in order to generate better overall outcomes for those in our care and their families. This strategy will only be delivered with the help and support of NIPS staff and, of course our delivery partners across the sectors.

Section 3: Policy Context

The Prison Review Team (2011) recommended that NIPS develop its family and community work to promote desistance. The DoJ 'Strategic Framework for Reducing Offending' (2013) and 'Supporting Change- a Strategic Approach to Desistance' (2015) place families at the heart of criminal justice policy.

The Report of the Joint Inspection carried out by the Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland (CJINI) and HM Chief Inspector of Prisons in England and Wales in Maghaberry Prison in November 2018 highlighted the continuing progress being made in working with families and also the range of positive family support initiatives currently on offer in the prison. Similarly, the CJINI Inspection on Resettlement Report, in May 2018, highlighted other positive initiatives carried out across all establishments. However, CJINI and the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority also highlighted the importance of embedding family support within the safer custody arrangements and recommended that this be addressed through this strategy.

We recognise that in order to reduce reoffending and work towards safer communities that we need to continually assess what is currently being delivered, to develop consistency in services and have the best mix and reach of services available across prison establishments. Finally, we need to maximise engagement opportunities with those in our care along with their families.

In the context of continuous improvement NIPS is committed to constantly enhancing how we work to respond to the needs of those in our care, children, families and wider support networks. This strategy will help us take forward that improvement, and ensure that it is aligned to wider NIPS, Department of Justice and Executive outcomes. We are also cognisant of the importance of working in partnership with other agencies such as probation, education, health, policing, housing, and voluntary and community sector (VCS) organisations and social services to support family contact between people in our care and their families.

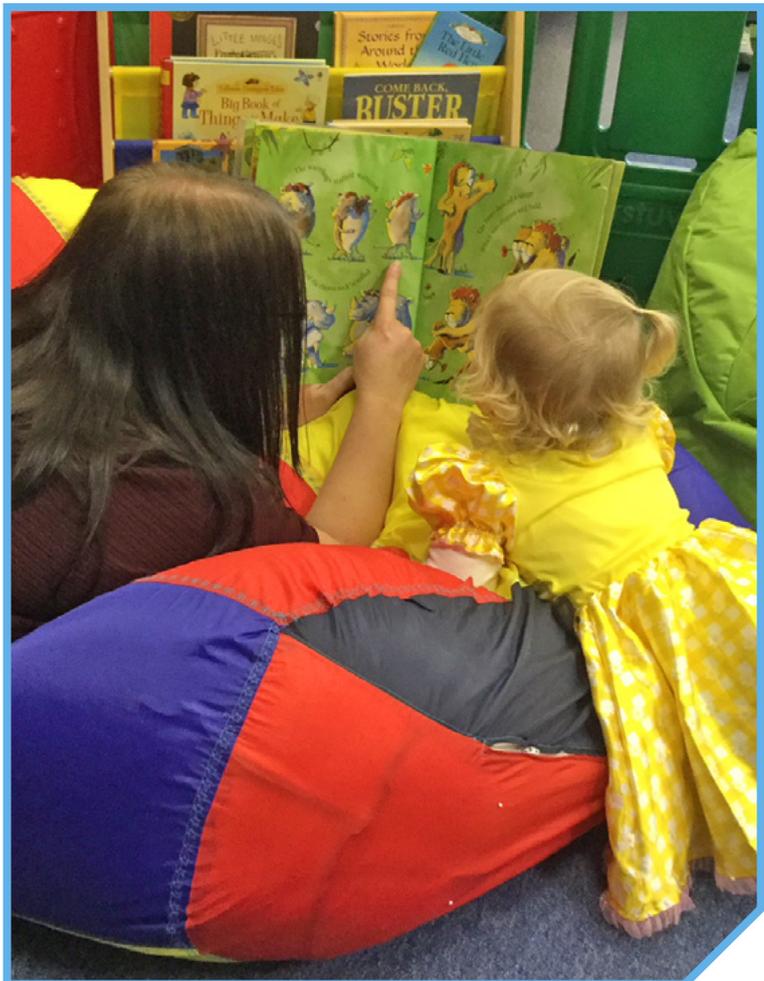


Why is it important for prisons to support and encourage contact between people in our care and their families?

Maintaining relationships between those imprisoned and their families has been identified by government policies, Her Majesty's Prison & Probation Service and academic research as being critical for encouraging desistance, reducing crime and facilitating reintegration. Ministry of Justice research shows that for a person who receives visits from a family member the chances of reoffending are 39% lower than for those who do not¹.

The review of the Families Matter Programme in Maghaberry Prison² carried out by Queen's University academics, led by Dr Michelle Butler, outlines the range of existing research into the effects of parental imprisonment. In particular, it shows that:

- Families can suffer greatly as a result of coming into contact with the criminal justice system. Families may experience: uncertainty, shame, anger, embarrassment, stigma, media attention or isolation. They may find themselves needing help in many areas, such as finances, accommodation, health, transport or childcare.
- Children may be upset and traumatised by separation from a parent. It may be difficult to sustain bonds between children and their imprisoned parent and this may affect the development of the child in terms of educational attainment, social inclusion and mental health. Parental imprisonment is recognised as a significant Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE);
- Difficulties in maintaining family contact can be associated with suicide and self-harm; and
- Constructive family contact can influence relationships and behaviours within the prison, making these more positive and settled; and thus contribute to safer custody.



1 May C., Sharma N. and Stewart D., (2008). Factors linked to reoffending: a one-year follow-up of prisoners who took part in the Resettlement Surveys 2001, 2003 and 2004. London: Ministry of Justice.

2 Butler, M., Hayes, D., Devaney, J. and Percy, A. (2015). Strengthening Family Relations? Review of the Families Matter Programme at Maghaberry Prison. Belfast: Queens University Belfast.



Potential Effects of Imprisonment on Families

Potential Effects of Imprisonment on Families

Children	Partners/Caregivers
Separation Anxiety	Loss of income
Anger	Extra childhood burdens
Worry about safety and wellbeing of imprisoned parent	Feelings of social isolation
Behavioural disturbances	Difficulty maintaining contact
Negative impact on learning	Relationships breakdown
Stigma	Stigma
Decrease in stable, quality parenting due to additional commitments by remaining parent/caregiver must take on	Added financial strain due to costs associated with imprisonment (e.g. Visiting, telephone contact, sending money into prison, etc.)
Teasing	Divorce
Bullying	Moving home
Increased probability of being involved in crime/antisocial behaviour	Psychological stress as they attempt to support themselves, imprisoned individual and children
Increased probability of being imprisoned	Poor visiting conditions
	Perceived hostile attitudes of some prison staff towards families
	Problems reuniting with partner on release from prison

(Source: Glover, 2009; Jones & Wainaina-Wozna, 2013; Murray, 2005).



A study funded by the EU and the Egmont Foundation from October 2009 - May 2011 led by the Danish Institute of Human Rights in collaboration with the University of Ulster et al³, estimated that every day, some 800,000 children across the EU live separated from their parents due to the latter's imprisonment. It highlighted that the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) states that no child should be discriminated against because of the situation or status of their parents (Art 2) yet children of imprisoned parents often feel ashamed, unsupported, and 'different' because their parent is in prison. In short - children of imprisoned parents often bear the consequences of their parents' actions in a way that no child should be expected to bear; they become "the invisible victims of crime and the penal system".

A study into Explaining Disparities in Prisoner Outcomes⁴ carried out by Dr Michelle Butler, Dominic Kelly and Dr Cate McNamee, in April 2019, highlighted that working with families and loved ones to encourage them to visit those in prison and assist with rehabilitative and treatment efforts may also be beneficial given the positive role visitations were found to play in reducing adjudication charges and increasing the probability of people being on the enhanced regime of the Progressive Regime and Enhanced Privileges Scheme.

Family contact therefore should not be underestimated in providing opportunities to sustain and improve relationships. However, it is recognised that not all family relationships are positive, and we need to be alert to those that are damaging and abusive, for instance if the imprisoned parent has been abusive to the partner or child in question. The principle of the best interest of the child should always be the primary consideration particularly as child contact with an imprisoned parent can be a complex issue.

Where there are positive relationships (or the potential to build them) our prisons need to take steps that will enable families to sustain and improve their relationships.

This strategy has been developed, taking account of policy implications and legislative provisions, as listed in Annex A. Our policies and practice will continue to be regularly reviewed and updated to comply with any changes necessary.

3 Martynowicz, A. (2011). Children of Imprisoned Parents. The Danish Institute for Human Rights, Bambinisenzasbarre, Ulster University and European Network for Children of Imprisoned Parents.

4 Butler, M., Kelly, D., & McNamee, C. (2019). Explaining Disparities in Prisoner Outcomes. Queens University Belfast.

Section 4:

Principles

The foundation of this strategy is the Farmer Review (August 2017) on the importance of family and other relational ties which acknowledged that “...*harnessing the resource of good family relationships must be a golden thread running through the processes of all prisons*”⁵

The following principles underpin this strategy and inform all practice relating to families affected by imprisonment:

- a. The best interests of children are paramount to any decision-making** - In line with the emerging Children & Young People and the Family and Parenting Support Strategies, promoting wellbeing and positive life outcomes, will be at the heart of all practice affecting people in our care, children, young people and their families.
- b. Family Members are treated with fairness, dignity and respect** - Families should never feel stigmatised, with the assumption that family members have done no wrong. We must be mindful of this principle in all our dealings with people in our care and their families.
- c. Wherever possible and appropriate, families are included in their relatives' rehabilitation** - We will work in a more holistic way with those in our care and their families to improve outcomes, including consideration of their contribution to safer custody.
- d. Every family is unique** - Different families will experience and respond in different ways to a family member's imprisonment. All decisions and actions relating to the family should be dealt with on a case-by-case basis.
- e. Effective Partnership working is key to successful outcomes** - All partner organisations must work collaboratively towards improving outcomes for people in our care and their families. We need to work collaboratively with our partners in the statutory and voluntary and community sector to build on existing and future evidence of what works.
- f. Families are supported to enable them to build capacity, strength and resilience to support their loved one's** - We will work with our partners (such as the Probation Board for Northern Ireland (PBNI)) to equip families to cope with their loved one's offending behaviours, addictions, mental health issues etc.

The importance of Respect is underpinned by an aide-memoire, at Annex B.

...*harnessing the resource of good family relationships must be a golden thread running through the processes of all prisons*

⁵ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/642244/farmer-review-report.pdf



Section 5: Themes

The principles above underpin the themes of this strategy which seek to achieve the desired outcomes for people in our care and their families. Each theme sets out NIPS priorities together with associated commitments that each establishment must implement in order to achieve the desired outcomes.

Theme 1:

Family Contact

We will actively support and enable family contact where possible and appropriate

NIPS recognise that family contact and social networks can be motivating factors that can influence behavioural change. Improved family contact can also realise wider benefits for family and society. We are committed to working with people in our care, their families, social networks, wider communities and our partners in order to maintain or develop meaningful family contact throughout a period of imprisonment. We maintain safety and security for all. However, as far as practical, we will create a welcoming, relaxed and comfortable environment to include a child-friendly space which encourages positive relations between people in, and leaving, our care and their child or children. Work is already happening in this area, we are improving, however we are seeking to do more. Therefore all establishments will seek to maximise suitable visiting opportunities for families and children through regular and constructive contact. We also recognise that technology has the potential to further enhance family contact and improve the visiting and contact experience.



NIPS will:

- a. Facilitate children's visits that take account of school hours in order to avoid disruption to education where possible, for example, after 3pm and at weekends;
- b. Encourage and promote appropriate and meaningful relationships by enhancing family contact as much as possible;
- c. Pay particular attention to the care of women in custody to ensure that their role within the family is maintained (in line with the strategy to support and challenge women who offend);
- d. Where it is not possible for families to use the standard arrangements for visits, establishments will be proactive in taking alternative steps to assist people in our care to sustain family relationships;
- e. Encourage and promote appropriate and meaningful contact through various methods including visits, letters, telephone calls and electronic means;
- f. Work with establishments and partners to develop capacity to provide facilities conducive to supporting children and families affected by imprisonment and create a welcoming environment and reception;
- g. Provide a visiting space that meets the needs of the children and families and create clean, comfortable and child-friendly spaces that encourage personal contact, and playful opportunities and positive relations between parents and their children;
- h. Provide a welcoming waiting area and visits area which offer a range of facilities;
- i. Provide opportunities for family induction sessions to take place that promote and encourage family attendance;
- j. Promote activities which encourage family interaction and learning;
- k. Provide a programme of family days and events;
- l. Display contact details of relevant staff and information about their roles for people in our care and their families;
- m. Communicate local visit processes and procedures clearly to people in our care and their families; and
- n. Utilise information on family circumstances from the PBNI pre-sentence report, in particular to identify those who have lost contact with family members.

Outcomes:

- 1.1 Families and wider social networks have the ability to maintain positive relationships with people in our custody;
- 1.2 Have a positive experience when visiting our establishments; and
- 1.3 Contribute to a reduced risk of reoffending.

Diagram: An illustration to highlight a family member's current journey:



Need



- Person enters custody
- Family requires immediate information and support



Support



- Regular information and support provided to family by NIPS and partners
- Trust builds up between family and NIPS



- Family support loved one
- NIPS involve family in person's development to promote appropriate engagement and safer custody
- Links with community strengthened



Outcomes

- Reduced risk of reoffending and positive relationships





Theme 2:

Families feel included and engaged

We will actively encourage and support meaningful engagement by acknowledging the strengths and assets that families and wider social networks have to contribute to an individual's desistance journey

When a family member has been given a period of imprisonment, it can be a stressful and confusing time for both the individual and their family. Evidence suggests that people without family support during imprisonment are up to six times more likely to reoffend in the first year after release than those with an active family interest. Therefore the central focus of the theme is on how we enable families, including children, to engage in a meaningful way and influence how we support their family member, as they are likely to have a depth of knowledge and understanding of the individual and are well-placed in making a positive contribution to reducing offending. This theme also acknowledges that the timely and lawful sharing of key information with a family about their loved one's rehabilitation and wellbeing is vital.

NIPS will:

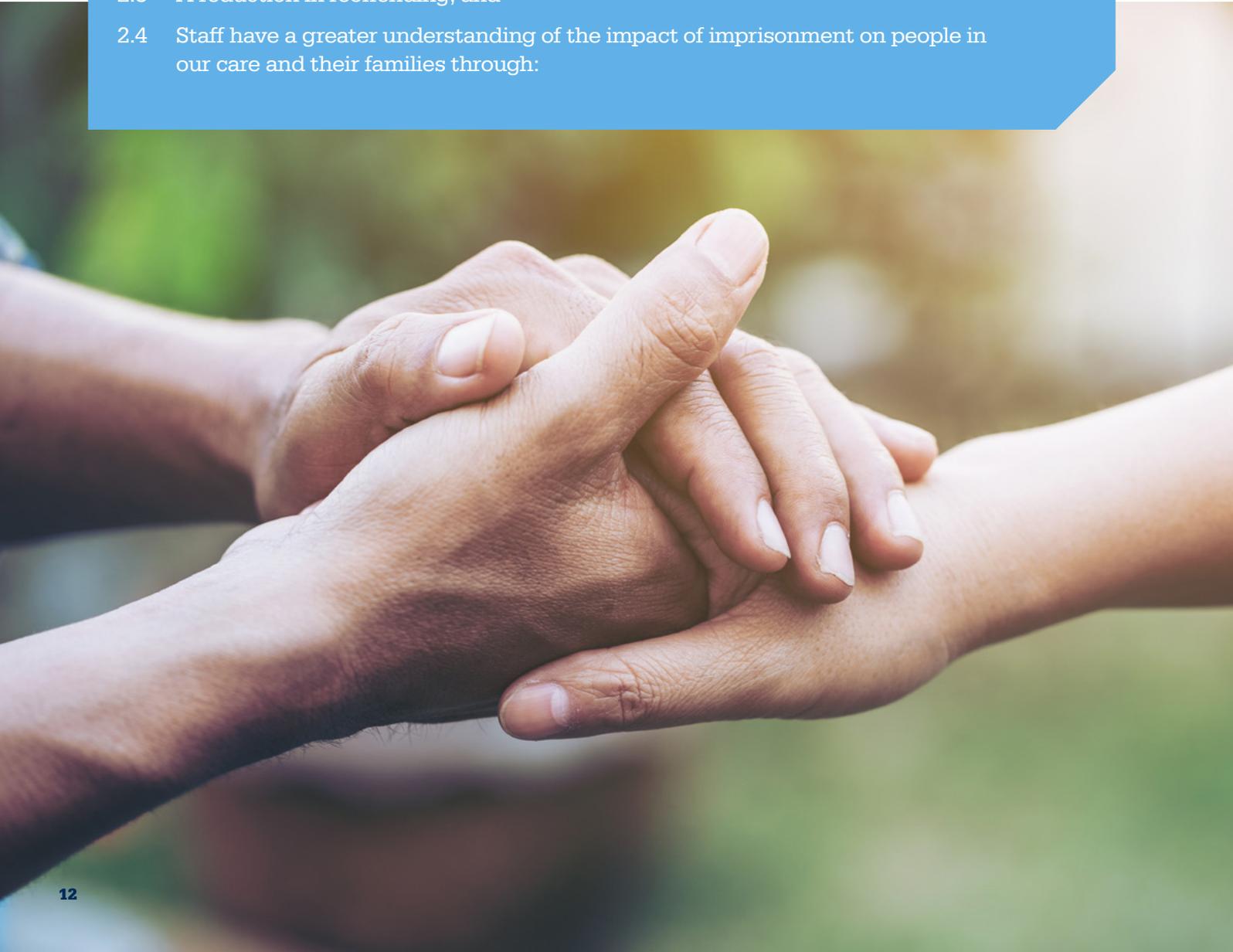
- a Be respectful, consistent and open with families and provide a welcoming environment;
- b Identify opportunities for families to access and participate in activities which promote wellbeing, in particular, embedding family support within the safer custody arrangements;
- c Take a trauma informed approach by considering the impact on children when making decisions in relation to people in custody;
- d In partnership with others, involve people in our care and their families, including children and young people, to ensure their views and any potential impact are considered in the decision-making process;
- e Work effectively with partners, particularly PBNI, wider children's services and the VCS to improve transitions and outcomes following release;
- f Provide guidance on how families gain access to information about the wellbeing of their family member, and involve them in safer custody interventions;
- g Implement local procedures for responding to family events in a consistent manner;
- h Ensure that families know how to raise complaints so that we can gather and analyse feedback to improve local practices;
- i Clearly communicate policy, procedures and expectations to enable families to engage positively;
- j Provide families and those in our care with information, as appropriate, to allow them to support family members during their time in custody; and
- k Review the provision of transport services for families of those in our care.

Where applicable and appropriate, based on individual family circumstances, NIPS will:

- l. Provide opportunities to work more holistically with families involving them in their family member's time in custody;
- m. Include families in the planning and preparation for an individual's return to the community;
- n. Share appropriate information with families;
- o. Include families in decisions that may involve or affect them; and
- p. Use information on family contact in safer custody assessments.

Outcomes:

- 2.1 Families feel included and engaged in decisions that may involve or affect them;
- 2.2 Families feel they are treated with respect and do not feel stigmatised in any dealings with our staff;
- 2.3 A reduction in reoffending; and
- 2.4 Staff have a greater understanding of the impact of imprisonment on people in our care and their families through:



Understand



- Focus on what is needed to improve outcomes for people in our care and their families.
- Consider the potential benefits: calmer landings, safer custody, reduction in tension between staff and prisoners, improved outcomes for offenders resulting in a reduction of reoffending.

Build



- Create a culture of continuous engagement with those in our care. Opportunities can be found through staff deployment to landings, classrooms, Prisoner Development Units etc.
- Recognise and develop people's strengths, including through input from family members.
- Develop opportunities for interaction with family members or other positive role models.

Continuous Improvement



- Develop a process to improve the links between individuals, families and the community.



Theme 3:**Families are safe and well**

We will support wellbeing and positive life outcomes for people in our care and their families affected by imprisonment

As part of our role NIPS will work with families and social networks to enhance wellbeing, in particular those families who are affected by imprisonment. We realise that this support is often required outside prison. People who suffer family breakdown as a result of imprisonment often experience feelings of isolation, loneliness, guilt, anger and despair and are therefore at increased risk of suicide and self-harm. We also know that the individuals in our care are uniquely placed to help and support each other.

NIPS will:

- a. Ensure people in our care and their families are supported appropriately in relation to wellbeing concerns;
- b. Support and empower people in our care and their families to access relevant services that could help them sustain improved wellbeing and crime free lives on release;
- c. Work with partners to support families to access services that improve safety and wellbeing. The Children's Services Co-operation Act (NI) 2015 and, specifically, its duty of co-operation will help to promote effective multi-agency approaches to ensure children and their families are supported;
- d. Work with partner organisations to provide services and interventions which support families;
- e. Through our processes and procedures, sensitively and effectively, seek, record and act upon information as required in order to support family wellbeing and safety; and
- f. Have clear protocols in place for how people in our care and their families can be kept informed about the wellbeing of their family members, in line with the Supporting Prisoners at Risk Policy.

**Outcomes:**

- 3.1 Staff have a good understanding of safety and wellbeing and are confident in responding to concerns appropriately and proportionately; and
- 3.2 People in our care and their families have access to a range of services and supports designed to improve their safety and wellbeing.

Theme 4:**Children****We will actively promote the wellbeing and positive life outcomes for children affected by parental imprisonment**

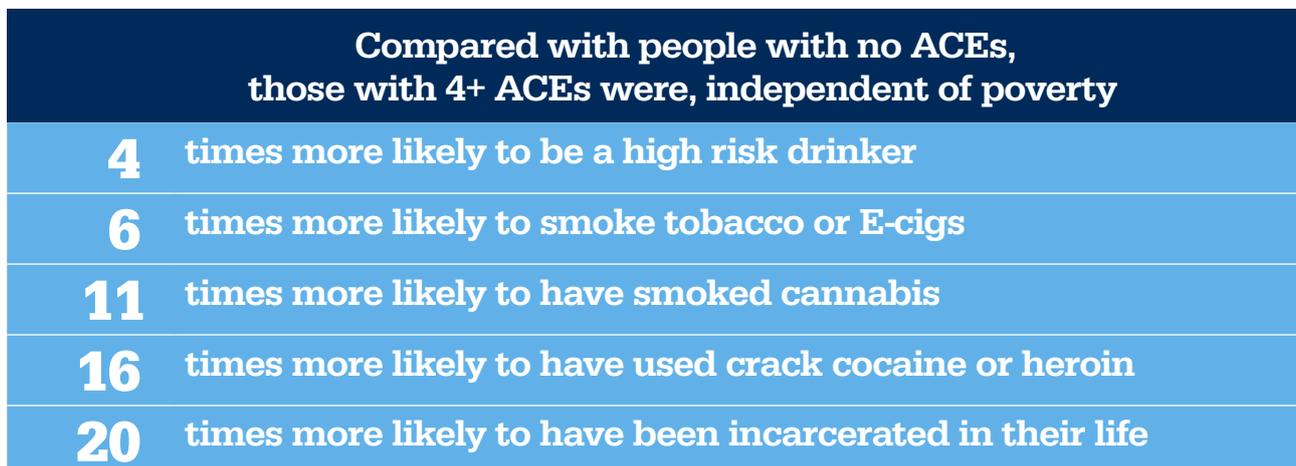
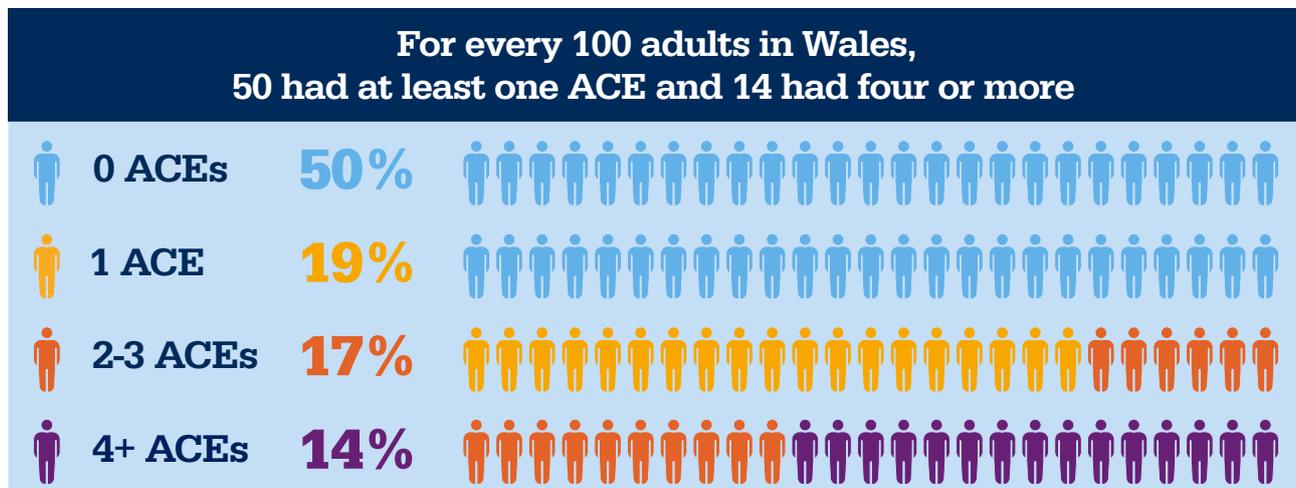
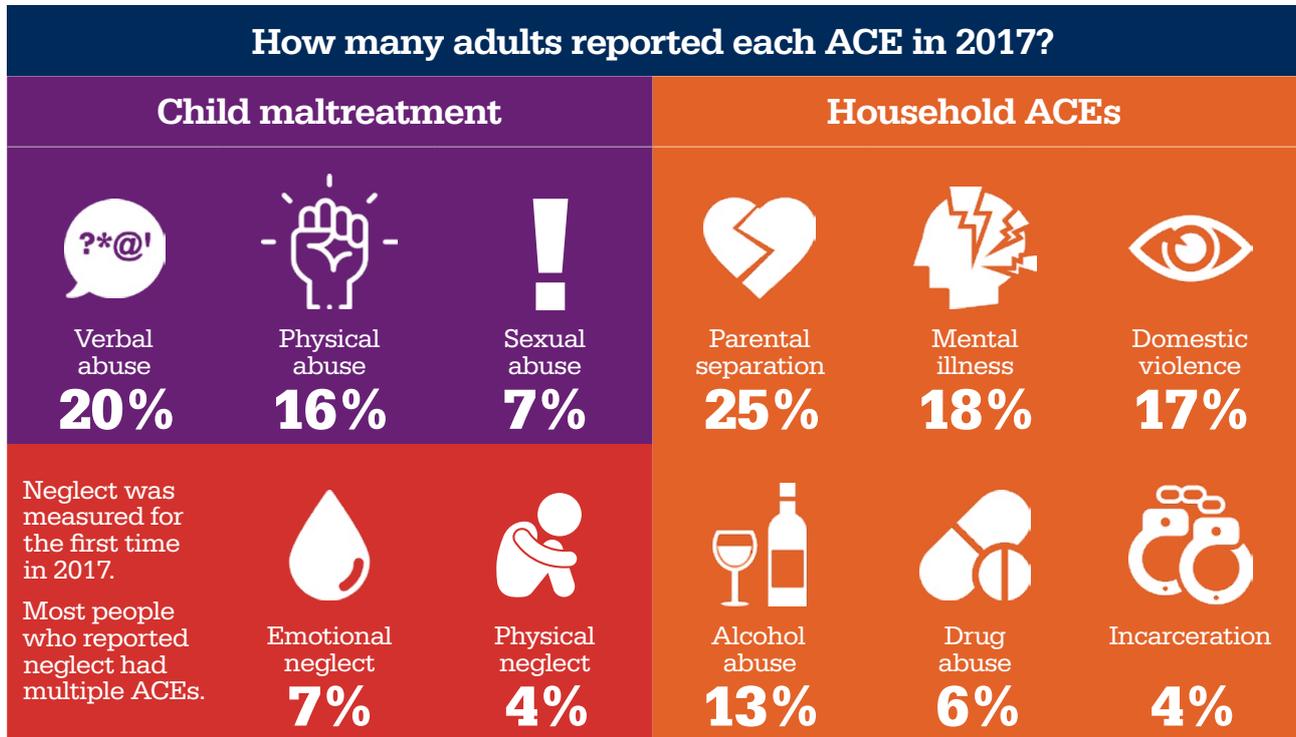
NIPS must ensure all reasonable steps are taken to protect children and young people who visit or make contact with anyone in our care from harm and abuse. Child protection is the responsibility of all who interact with children and families, regardless of whether that work brings them into direct contact with children and young people.

Children who have a parent imprisoned can be significantly affected by the experience. The impact of adversity on child development is of particular relevance and there is an increasing research evidence base demonstrating that children exposed to adversity are at increased risk of negative psychological, emotional and health outcomes in later life. This risk is cumulative in nature with Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) research demonstrating a strong relationship between the number of adversities experienced in childhood and a broad spectrum of negative outcomes in adulthood. Previous work commissioned by Barnardo's NI, the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children and the National Children's Bureau has identified eight major areas of childhood adversity that are consistently linked with negative outcomes in later life. These areas are poverty, debt, financial pressures; child abuse/child protection concerns; family violence/domestic violence; parental illness/disability; parental substance misuse; parental mental illness; and of most relevance to this strategy, parental offending/anti-social behaviour and parental separation through relationship breakdown/divorce, bereavement or parental imprisonment. Research would suggest that exposure to four or more ACEs may significantly increase the risk of long term health problems.

Children with a parent in prison also experience other risks, including significant risk of poorer educational attainment and increased chances of entering the criminal justice system at some point themselves. Effective co-operation between organisations providing children's services, including schools, is vital to support children and young people in those circumstances.



National Study of ACEs in Wales (18-69 years)



In order to support children and young people, NIPS, in collaboration with the Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland (SBNI) will seek to become a trauma informed organisation. In particular it will avail of SBNI Trauma Informed Practice Training, developed through the Early Intervention Transformation Programme, to gain a better understanding of the extent to which children and young people in Northern Ireland are impacted by ACEs.

The aim of the Trauma Informed Practice Project is that all SBNI organisations and partner agencies will:

- a. Have an awareness of the adverse childhood experiences which cause trauma in a child's life;
- b. Be aware of the impact of these adversities on the development of a child;
- c. Be able to identify what creates resilience to cope with adversity; and
- d. Be able to develop policies and practice, to embed trauma informed practice in their work.

Thus creating a system where:

The workforce recognises and responds to the impact of childhood adversity on children, caregivers and service providers;

Trauma awareness, knowledge and skills are an integral part of organisational cultures, practices and policies;

Effective practice is used to maximise the physical and psychological safety of the child, facilitate recovery of the child and family and support their ability to thrive; and

Children and families impacted by and vulnerable to trauma are more resilient and better able to cope.



As a consequence, NIPS will:

- a. Identify and respond appropriately to child protection and wellbeing issues in line with the NIPS Child Protection Policy;
- b. Ensure relevant staff are trained in child protection, wellbeing issues and on how to effectively engage children and young people;
- c. Ensure a range of age appropriate information is available for children and young people;
- d. Support people in our care to participate, where appropriate, in their child's education;
- e. Raise awareness in partnership of the impact of imprisonment on children;
- f. In partnership with SBNI, seek to become a trauma informed organisation; and
- g. Engage with partner organisations to develop and consolidate family contact.



Outcomes:

- 4.1 Effective partnership working to improve services for people in our care and their families;
- 4.2 Children are at the centre of our policy and practice; and
- 4.3 Children and young people will be given the best start in life.



Section 6:

Conclusion

As prefaced by the Director General, NIPS is committed to strengthening family ties in recognition of the importance of positive family connections and social support for people in our care. This strategy demonstrates that commitment, which will ultimately improve the outcomes for people in our care and their families.

Delivering this strategy will not be without its challenges, particularly given the stretched financial environment we are currently operating in. This strategy does not have a specific budget, so we need to examine where we can work differently and more innovatively within existing resources, whilst exploring additional funding opportunities.

Implementation will be by way of an Action Plan, to follow the publication of the strategy, and an outcomes based approach will be used to assess the impact of the actions, through a range of data measures. A governance structure will be established to monitor implementation.

Finally, NIPS would like to thank stakeholders, and in particular families who took the time to shape how NIPS will strengthen family relationships.

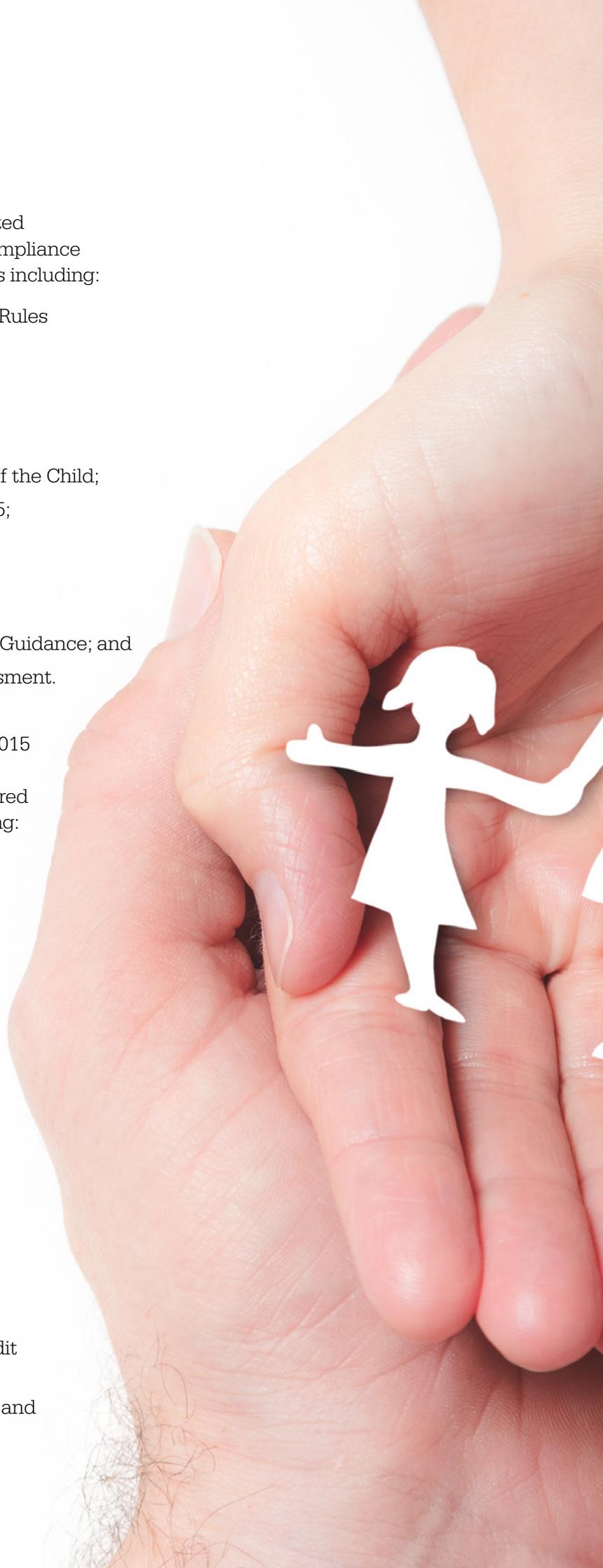
Annex A

In developing this strategy NIPS has conducted appropriate screening exercises to ensure compliance with legislation and convention requirements including:

- The Prisons and Young Offenders Centres Rules (NI) 1995;
- European Prison Rules 2006
- European Convention on Human Rights;
- The Human Rights Act 1998;
- United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child;
- The Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995;
- The Data Protection Act 1998;
- General Data Protection Regulation 2018;
- Northern Ireland Act 1998;
- NIPS safeguarding Children Framework & Guidance; and
- Equality and Human Rights Impact Assessment.
- Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016
- Children's Services Co-operation Act (NI) 2015

In developing our approach we have considered policy implications deriving from the following:

- Draft Programme for Government 2016-21;
- NICS Outcomes Delivery Plan 2018-19;
- Prisons 2020 recommendations;
- Review of the Northern Ireland Prison Service recommendations;
- Lord Farmer's Review - The importance of strengthening prisoners' family ties to prevent reoffending and reduce intergenerational crime;
- Draft Children and Young People's Strategy 2018-2028;
- Developing cross-departmental Family and Parenting Support Strategy;
- Resettlement Pathways;
- A Strategic Approach to Desistance;
- CJINI Reports;
- 2016 NIPS Professional Standards Unit Audit on NIPS Family Strategy 2010;
- 2018 NIPS Visits Experience Consultation; and
- The Corston Report 2007.



Annex B

RESPECT

Respect families

Encourage safe family contact

Support family visits

Promote positive life outcomes

Ensure safety and wellbeing

Communicate with families

Thank you for strengthening family relationships



