

TACKLING THE INTERGENERATIONAL CYCLE OF OFFENDING, BY PROMOTING PARENT-CHILD RELATIONSHIPS

A report by Bronagh Malcomson

December 2016

'Parental imprisonment is an issue which translates in all cultures, languages and nationalities...I witnessed men smile with glee at seeing their children's faces at the start of a visit and cry when they had to say good bye.'

WINSTON
CHURCHILL
MEMORIAL
TRUST



Contents	Page
1. Acknowledgements	2
2. About the Author	3
3. Executive Summary	4
4. Introduction	6
5. Findings	9
a. Relais Enfants Parents	11
b. Exodus	14
c. Bambini senza sbarre	18
6. Emerging Themes	21
7. Conclusion	26
8. Recommendations	27

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust for giving me the opportunity to complete this Fellowship, allowing me to meet some wonderful people and organisations across Europe.

I am thankful to my own organisation, Barnardo's, and my service Parenting Matters; in particular, my manager Deirdre Sloan for her support and encouragement throughout the planning and implementation stages of my Fellowship.

I wouldn't have been able to complete this adventure without the continued support from my husband, parents and extended family. Their encouragement and help is most appreciated, and my time away from home would not have been possible without them.

There are many people who have helped me along the way, from the initial planning and application stages, to the travel and reporting stage. They gave up their valuable time to help me complete my Fellowship, share their experience and skills and accompany me on my visits into prison to complete my research. Their help was invaluable and commended.

Hannah Beattie
Hannah Lynn, COPE
Liz Ayre, COPE
Paul Millar, Barnardo's
Roger Warnock, Social Foundry
Paul McMinn, Social Foundry
Amanda Wood, NIPS
Mark Goodfellow, DOJ

Relais Enfants Parents

Jean Claude Vitoux
Dalia Wexler
Yolima Blanco Morales
Marie Sepult
Anthony Garcia

Exodus

Winie Hanekamp
Marieke van Zwam
Myriam van Lin
Monique Gerrits
Ina
Janette

Bambini senza sbarre

Edoardo Fleischner
Lia Sacerdote
Nadia Zamitti
Bianca Poggi

About the author

I have been involved in the area of Criminal Justice since 2008, receiving my BSc in Psychology with Criminology and then my MSc in Forensic Psychology in 2011. Throughout my academic career I realised that I would like to pursue my interests in family work, focusing on parenting and child development. Since 2013, I have been a Parenting Support Worker with Parenting Matters, Barnardo's in Northern Ireland. I am based in Hydebank Wood College in Belfast. Hydebank Wood College is the only prison dedicated to female prisoners and young offenders in Northern Ireland. My role within Hydebank Wood College is to support parents in custody. My job entails supporting mothers and fathers through their time in custody, either as remand or sentenced prisoners. I provide group based parenting programmes and individual support, tailored to each parent's needs.

When I discovered the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust I was keen to secure a Fellowship to further develop the work with families affected by imprisonment, but also to share the excellent work which Parenting Matters is and has been doing in Northern Ireland prisons for over 20 years.

I felt it was particularly important to complete this Fellowship, focusing on children, the 'hidden victims' of imprisonment and on the inter-generational cycle of offending which unfortunately permeates the lives of many of the parents I work with on a daily basis.

This report presents my Fellowship findings during my travel to Croatia, Belgium, The Netherlands and Italy.

Please feel free to visit the blog I kept during this time at,

<https://mywinstonchurchillfellowship.wordpress.com/>

Executive summary

This report outlines the main learning points from four weeks of research in mainland Europe while completing a Winston Churchill Fellowship. The aim of this report is to investigate how to tackle the inter-generational cycle of offending by promoting parent-child relationships.

My Fellowship took me to Croatia, Belgium, The Netherlands and Italy, where I visited three family focused organisations and seven prisons. The organisations and projects I visited are regarded as examples of best practice in the field of parental imprisonment and I was able to see why. The opportunities that are afforded to the families they work with are a major asset to maintaining parent-child relationships and sustaining family links when a parent or family member is in prison. This report focuses on the facilitation of child centred visits and the resources provided by these organisations. Since returning from my travels, I have harnessed the knowledge gained and implemented additional resources into my own organisation; Parenting Matters, Barnardo's, with the hope of fostering better relationships between families affected by imprisonment in Northern Ireland and the wider UK.

My Fellowship, also cemented my view that the work facilitated by Parenting Matters in Northern Ireland prisons also makes us an example of best practice. I went on my Fellowship with the intention of learning about new services and opportunities, but also to share the work of my own service. I received positive feedback from the workshops and meetings I held with each organisation, each praising the work conducted by Parenting Matters. The ability to share our work with our European counterparts is invaluable to the continued growth of this area of work and an important factor in our aim to support families affected by parental imprisonment.

The aims and potential benefits of my Fellowship were:

1. Obtain examples of best practice applicable to the UK.
2. Develop new knowledge and skills which will be used to develop new learning, tools and resources for the Parenting Matters programme I currently deliver.
3. Disseminate this learning and resources more widely through Barnardo's UK wide work under the 'Children Affected by Parental Imprisonment' work stream.
4. Enhance the skills of prison staff involved in co-delivering such programmes through the transfer of knowledge, resources and best practice gained from the project.
5. Strengthen family relationships between those imprisoned and their families to improve well-being, reduce offending and break the intergenerational cycle of offending and disadvantage.

The recommendations from the conclusion of my report are:

1. Family focused training should be widely available for all prison staff to raise awareness of the impact of parental imprisonment.
2. As far as possible, prison staff who have received family focused training should remain in a position which allows them to build close links with external providers to provide a continuity of service to families and children.
3. More extensive use of child-centred visits in prison, to promote parent-child relationships. Including visits which cater for the imprisoned parent and their child/ren only and family-focused engagement with the parent to prepare them appropriately for contact with their child/ren.
4. Further collaboration with colleagues in other services to develop and enhance resources and interventions available to families affected by parental imprisonment to address the extensive range of issues which affect them.

Introduction

It has been reported that approximately 200,000 children are affected by parental imprisonment in the UK every year.¹ It is startling to think, that this number is higher than the number of children who are affected by divorce. Children affected by parental imprisonment are often described as 'hidden victims' or 'forgotten victims.' I believe this is a true description, especially when prisons in the UK are still failing to account for all children affected by imprisonment. My Fellowship showed me that this was a running theme in all of the countries I visited, each failing to record an accurate figure for children affected by imprisonment. The literature² continues to state that, prison services do not have a robust system in place to record the number of children who have a parent or family member in prison. Therefore, when we continue to quote 200,000 children are affected by parental imprisonment we may be vastly underestimating the true scale of the issue. It is also important to remember that "children of prisoners are not a homogenous group nor identical in their experiences of parental incarceration."³ Therefore, an intervention which works for one child or family may not work for another. By completing my Fellowship I am keen to increase the resources and interventions which family focused organisations and prisons can offer for those affected by parental imprisonment.

The HM Inspectorate⁴ (2014) cites "family and friends as the most important 'resettlement agency' for prisoners on release." However, the prison system can still fail to consider the impact that imprisonment can have on an offender's family and children. It was for this reason that I wanted to focus my Fellowship on the promotion of parent-child relationships and how this might impact upon the inter-generational cycle of offending. The research tells us that "65% of boys, who have a father in prison will also go to prison themselves,"⁵ and during my own experience of working in prisons, I have experienced this first hand. I have, on a number of occasions, worked

¹ Social Care Institute of Excellence, 2009

² Every Night You Cry, Barnardo's, 2009

³ E.M. Knudsen, Probation Journal, Volume 63 (3), 362-370

⁴ HM Inspectorate Report, 2014

⁵ Social Exclusion Unit report, 2002

with multiple generations of the same family or attempted to support parents who are struggling to stop their children from following in their footsteps. During my Fellowship, it was clear to see that this issue is not isolated to Northern Ireland or the UK. Prisons in mainland Europe are also familiar with the inter-generational cycle of offending and what was described by one of my European colleagues as 'the family business.' As a Barnardo's employee, I am always focused on achieving the best outcomes for children; in particular, maintaining their relationship with their parent in custody and breaking the cycle of offending.

During the planning stage of my Fellowship, I worked very closely with members of the Children of Prisoners Europe organisation (COPE- Liz Ayres & Hannah Lynn) who were able to advise me on some new and exciting examples of best practice for prison visits and maintaining family ties in Europe. I was also encouraged to attend the annual COPE conference to establish links with partner agencies that might be able to assist me with my Fellowship. I attended the COPE conference in May 2016 in Zagreb, Croatia and heard about fantastic projects based in mainland Europe that are supporting families and children affected by imprisonment. I was also able to introduce myself and the aims of my Fellowship to a large audience through the use of a poster presentation (see Figure 1).

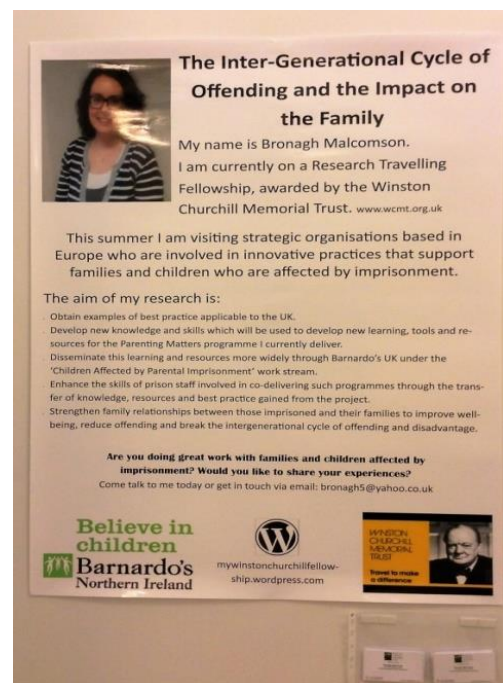


Figure 1

Poster which was displayed at the Children of Prisoners Europe conference in Zagreb, Croatia. May 2016.

My time in Croatia was valuable, not only in learning and experiencing the Croatian prison system and family interventions (see Figure 2 below), but meeting with those who would accommodate me on the main portion of my Fellowship, namely, Dalia Wexler, Edoardo Fleischner and Winie Hanekamp.



Top Left: Lepoglava Prison

Top right: Hannah Lynn, Me & Liz Ayre, COPE members

Bottom: Lepoglava Open prison

Figure 2

For the purpose of this report I will focus on the three countries I spent the majority of my time- Belgium, The Netherlands and Italy. I will start by providing information outlining the demographics, cultural differences and first hand experiences of these countries in order to provide a contextual basis to deliver my findings.

Findings

In the course of my Fellowship I visited four countries, seven prisons and three family focused organisations:

1. *Relais Enfants Parents- Belgium*
2. *Exodus- The Netherlands*
3. *Bambini senza sbarre- Italy*

The table below outlines the demographics of each country providing an overview of the differing populations, with a comparison to the UK and Northern Ireland. (Figures correct as of October 2016)

	Pop by country	Prison Population	No of Prisons
Belgium	11 million	11,071	35
Brussels	1.18 million	/	3
Netherlands	16.9 million	11,063	77
South Netherlands (incl. Sittard)	3.6 million	/	/
Italy	60 million	90,000	210
Lombardy (incl. Milan)	10 million	/	3 (City of Milan)

UK	65 million	96,616	134
England & Wales	58 million	87,000	116
Scotland	5.4 million	7775	15
Northern Ireland	1.8 million	1,841	3

Interestingly, two of the cities I visited (Brussels and Milan) have the same number of prisons as we have in the whole of Northern Ireland (NI). This is easily explained by the relative population sizes. However, it was an eye-opening experience for me to comprehend the scale of the prison population in these cities compared to what I am familiar with in NI.

This was also an interesting dynamic for those I was working with as they admired that we (Parenting Matters) could afford to focus our work in a more structured, in-depth manner, reaching the majority of families in our prisons in NI. The scale of the prison population was so high in some of the prisons I visited that it was impossible to reach all those who are separated from their families and in need of support. Nonetheless, I was continually impressed by the high standard of care and attention that each organisation invested in their work in the prisons, focusing on the child's needs and ensuring the family were receiving the correct level of support.

1. Relais Enfants Parents (REP) - Belgium



REP are a family focused organisation with an office base in Brussels. They work in 11 French speaking prisons in Belgium, 3 of which are in Brussels. With a team of 15, including 12 psychologists; 2 psychologists cover each of the 11 prisons, always working in pairs, ensuring families are always receiving a high level of support and colleagues are available for support and the exchange and communication of information. REP work with parents from sentencing to release with no restriction on type of conviction, offering individual and group parenting support and access to a 'collective visit' hosted by REP.

REP's 'collective visit' is held every two weeks (schedules can differ between prisons) on Wednesday afternoon, as schools in Belgium are not open at this time. The visit allows the parent in prison to have a child-centred visit without any other family members present. REP work in conjunction with the Belgian Red Cross and each child is accompanied to the prison either by a family member or a Red Cross volunteer. They are taken through the security and search procedures by REP staff, have access to a waiting room where they can complete arts and crafts for their parent, after which they are taken to the visiting room.

The visit which I attended was in Saint Gilles prison (Figure 3), a male prison housing 850 inmates.



Figure 3: Saint Gilles, Brussels

The visiting room in Saint Gilles is a large, bright room equipped with tables and chairs. REP had access to toys and games which the children chose to play with their fathers. The room offers enough space for families to each have a large area to themselves, allowing for privacy and intimacy. The families also have access to an outdoor space with toys and trikes.

On the day of the visit, the weather was pleasant, so the children enjoyed their time outside. Families could freely access the indoor and outdoor space. I observed that this movement, allowed the child to take responsibility over their choice of game or toy, encouraging positive development and interactive play within the parent-child relationship.

Three prison officers were present during the visit; the officers were friendly and polite, and particularly empathetic with the children and the fathers once the visit had ended.

I spoke with two fathers who attended this visit. (see profile 1 & 2).

Their accounts of their engagement with REP are testament to the positive presence REP have within a prison like Saint Gilles and the important work they conduct there.

They also provide a glimpse into the different family situations which arise from parental imprisonment and how the 'collective visit' with REP can help to sustain the bond between parent and child.



Relais Enfants Parents Team, Brussels, including myself and my interpreter, Hannah Beattie.

Profile 1

Father of 2 children- 1 year old son and 2 year old daughter.

Due to the young ages of the children, this father chose to have his children on separate visits, e.g. one week with his son and the next week with his daughter. He reported that he chose to do this to allow him to dedicate all of his time to each child individually and not be overwhelmed with the demand of such young children.

He was given a 'baby bag' from his partner; this accompanied the child into the visit. He was then able to feed and change his son and complete essential tasks which secured his bond with his son.

He spoke highly of the 'collective visits' and the assistance from REP staff and presented as a very competent and confident young father, happy to spend quality time with his children.

Profile 2

Father of 2 children- 12 year old son and 10 year old daughter.

Both children were in attendance at this visit. It was noticeable that they were vying for their father's attention, often refusing to engage in a game which the other had chosen.

At times, it was difficult for the father to dedicate his time to his children equally.

However, he was able to have a good quality visit and reported that the 'collective visits' are extremely important to him as he is no longer in a relationship with the children's mother and the 'collective visit' gave them an opportunity to spend time away from the conflict of that relationship and maintain a bond with this children.



Berkendael Female prison, Brussels.

I met with a young mother in this prison who had her 5 month old baby staying with her. In Brussels, children can stay with their parent in prison up to 3 years of age.

This mother was grateful of the work with REP, particularly with their assistance of having photographs taken with her child- a luxury which most parents take for granted but one which is limited within custody.

2. Exodus- The Netherlands



Exodus is a large organisation providing care and support to prisoners and their families in The Netherlands. Exodus work in 26 prisons in The Netherlands and in the past ten years has had significant growth in their family intervention work. Exodus provide parenting support through individual and group programmes, including the VVV (Vrij Verantwoord Vaderschap) programme focusing on 'Responsible Fatherhood'. VVV is delivered in eight prisons and has many similarities to the programmes delivered by Parenting Matters, Barnardo's, e.g. encouraging fathers to become aware of how their imprisonment affects their child and to be able to recognise this from the child's perspective. The parallels between the programmes was encouraging for me as it cemented the importance of this field of work, promoting parent-child relationships and providing parents with the skills to care for their children appropriately during and after imprisonment.

Exodus also provide Het Ouders, Kinderen en Detentieproject-The Parents, Children and Detention Project (OKD). OKD are child-centred visits between the imprisoned parent and their child/ren (similar to REP 'collective visit'). Exodus have been providing OKD since 2003 and, volunteers accompany the children to the prison, through search and security procedures and then to the main visit with their father.

I took part in an OKD visit in Sittard prison (see Figure 4). The visits space offers a games room and separate sports hall. Fathers and children chose which game they wanted to play with or drew pictures for each other. At times, they played football or practiced gymnastics in the sports hall. They had snacks and ice cream together and each family unit (father and child) spent two hours engrossed in each other's company. Two prison security officers supervised the visit with very little interaction with prisoners or children. Four Exodus staff were present at the visit, interacting with the families and ensuring their

time together was comfortable and effective. I spoke with three fathers during this visit and have included their profiles below (profiles 3, 4 & 5). Their accounts, once again, show the gratefulness of focused family intervention work from Exodus, allowing these men to maintain a relationship with their children.



Figure 4: Sittard Prison, The Netherlands



With Marieke van Zwam and Winie Hanekamp from Exodus, Netherlands.

One of the initiatives developed and used by Exodus which I found particularly useful was the 'Papa Boekje' (Dad Book). This resource is filled with questions for father and child to complete together, allowing for conversation and discovery of each other, strengthening the parent-child relationship. I have translated and developed this resource, with permission from Exodus, to use within Barnardo's and Northern Ireland Prison Service (NIPS). I hope that it will be a useful resource and exercise for parents to use during visits and as a homework task between visits, allowing parent and child to feel connected with each other.

Profile 3

Father of 1 child - 4 year old daughter

This father was serving an 18 year sentence and had already served 2 years. He reported that he had no relationship with the child's mother. Therefore, he valued OKD very much as it allowed him to have time with his daughter without worrying about the conflict with her mother. His daughter knows he is in prison and often asks if they can have a visit with just the two of them and no other families. The little girl spent time showing and teaching her father her new gymnastics tricks in the sports hall.

Profile 4

Father of 4 children- three sons and one 12 year old daughter.

Daughter participated in OKD visits. This father reported that his wife is also in prison and his daughter would visit her mother once a month in a separate prison and visit him twice a month with OKD. [Unfortunately, there and there are no inter-prison visits available to allow the child to have a visit with her mother and father collectively.] This father stated that he was grateful for Exodus and the OKD visits, especially for the volunteers who support his daughter to and from the visits.

Profile 5

Father of 2 children- 6 year old son and 1 year old son.

In Sittard prison, children have to be over 3 years of age to avail of the OKD visit. Therefore, the man's 6 year old participated in the visits. This father reported that he has been in prison for 7 years and has 6 years left to serve. He said he loves the OKD visits, which he has once a month with his son and he said they make his son feel special as they are the only times he could spend with his son separately from his partner and their younger son. The child was not amused that I was speaking with his father while he was trying to play a game with him. The father dealt with this well and drew a picture with him on which he presented to me at the end of the visit.



EXODUSHAUS

During my time in The Netherlands, I visited one of the superb interventions provided by Exodus in the community; Exodushaus.

Exodushaus provided accommodation for females as an alternative to prison, serving the remainder of their sentence or on release from prison. The Exodushaus is particularly special as it provides accommodation for mothers and their children. At the time of my visit to Exodushaus, 12 females and 5 children were living there, and I was lucky enough to have lunch with some of them. I was made to feel very welcome and provided with beautiful food, while the women shared their experiences of motherhood and imprisonment. The women spoke about their time in different prisons across Europe, some which provided excellent parenting support and others which did not recognise them as needing extra support away from their children. The women spoke of their gratitude for Exodushaus, the staff who support them and the opportunities it provides for them, e.g. the time to spend with their children, to have employment or to continue their education.

I met one mother who had spent 3 ½ years in prison, she would then spend 1 year in the Exodushaus to the end of her sentence. She has two children who live with their father and she is able to visit with them every 2 months. During her time in Exodushaus she is also working two jobs and in further education. She was particularly thankful for Exodushaus as the services and location allowed her to be closer to her children compared to any female prison she may have been placed in.

It is often argued that the maintenance of family ties is one of the main factors which reduce re-offending. Therefore, one can recommend that it would be beneficial for services in the UK and NI to provide supported accommodation for families to assist them through the difficult time of release to family life and reducing re-offending and additional negative impact upon the family.

3. Bambini senza sbarre- Italy



Bambini senza sbarre (Bambini) have been working in Italian prisons since 2002. They work in seven prisons in Italy; the three I visited were in Milan- Opera, Bollate and San Vittore. Bambini's main aim is to support children and families and help them accommodate to visiting prison. The majority of their work is conducted inside prisons in the visitor's waiting room. However, they do offer a specific project to children aged 10-14 years after school, giving them the opportunity to come together and share their experiences of parental imprisonment.

Bambini, provide a safe space for families and children in chaotic Italian prison visits waiting rooms- Yellow Space (see Figure 6).

Yellow Space is a dedicated children's area in the waiting room facilitated by Bambini staff and volunteers. Yellow Space offers a friendly face and environment in an otherwise confusing place for children and young people. It allows children to feel comfortable and secure within a prison setting by helping them manage their emotions and behaviours associated with imposing search procedures and re-connecting with their parent.



Figure 6:

Yellow Space (Spazio Giallo) in one prison in Milan.

I visited three Yellow Spaces in the three prisons in Milan. Each one adapting to the prison environment and the needs of the visitors.

For example, San Vittore remand prison (see Figure 8) with 800 prisoners and a chaotic family visiting day on Saturday is very different to Bollate prison with 1,300 male and female sentenced prisoners with a more relaxed timetable of family visits during the week.



Figure 8: San Vittore Prison, Milan

In Yellow Space, children are encouraged to play and create artwork for their parent to bring into their visit. This also allows the accompanying family member to conduct all the necessary procedures for visiting, e.g. registration and parcel delivery, while the child is safe and comfortable with Bambini volunteers. During my observation on these visits, I was continually impressed with the level of dedication from Bambini staff and volunteers, through their interaction with families, children and prison staff. The children were so happy to see the volunteers in the Yellow Space; familiar 'friendly' faces who took an interest in the child's life, asking about their family and school. The normalisation of prison which Bambini offers is imperative for a child to feel safe and not judged, allowing them to enjoy their time with their imprisoned parent and develop positive associations with their weekly routine of contact.

Two resources which have been implemented into my work with Parenting Matters are Bambini's 'Trovo Papà' maps and booklets (Figure 7).

Bambini use a map and creative booklet which a child can complete to assist them on their way to 'Find Dad.'

The resource encourages children to draw pictures of 'how they feel, where they are, and who they are going to see,' allowing a child to become aware of their surroundings and take some ownership over their journey into prison and their relationship with their imprisoned parent.

I have developed similar resources, with Bambini's permission, for use with Barnardo's and Northern Ireland prisons, with the aim of achieving the same positive engagement with children during visits as Bambini.



Figure 7: Trovo Papà (Find Dad) in visits waiting room in one prison in Milan.



With members of Bambini senza sbarre, Milan.

Emerging Themes

Two major themes have emerged during the course of my Fellowship;

1. The inconsistent nature of the 'prison system,' e.g. prison staff, population and security can create a barrier for families who are trying to maintain family ties.
2. Parental imprisonment affects all types of families. Therefore, interventions need to be flexible and adaptable, to be able to cater for all those affected by parental imprisonment.

1. Prison System

I had unique experiences in each of the prisons I visited. Not only did the environments and locations of the prisons differ greatly, there was also a contrast between the facilities, staff, security and culture. For example, in one inner city prison adjacent to a school I was welcomed by a senior officer, given a lengthy tour and introduced to parents within the prison. Contrastingly; another prison, located in an industrial area, not easily accessible from the city, staff were very suspicious of my visit and did not allow me to speak with any prisoners or families. The uncertainty of what attitude I would encounter when visiting prison is an issue I faced during a professional research trip- one can only imagine what this feeling is maybe like for families who have to experience this on a weekly basis in an attempt to maintain a bond with their parent or loved one.

Staff attitude, awareness and perception of family interventions, visits or provisions seemed to be dependent on the external organisations' position and power within the prisons. All of the organisations I visited had been working in these prisons for a number of years. In my opinion, the strength of their presence and integration into the prison system was affected by the following factors;

- prison population (e.g. low prisoner population can allow for more interaction with staff)
- level of security (e.g. low level of security can allow for more ease of access to prisoners and interventions)
- the continuity of prison officers (e.g. in many prisons, staff regularly changed and transferred, not allowing a

relationship to form between officers and external workers).

The continuity of prison staff is an issue which is also apparent in the UK as our prisons can often have a high turnover of staff and governors. I was able to observe that, the prisons with a long tenure governor were more receptive of the organisations and willing to help promote their interventions and provisions for families.

Staff attitude and awareness may also be a result of the training provided to staff on the issue of families and children affected by imprisonment. Most of the organisations I visited, offered staff training or awareness sessions in the prisons they worked in. This is a resource which Barnardo's UK believes is extremely important. I would recommend that staff training should be mandatory in order to raise awareness of the issues which affect parents in prison, and their families who are engaging in visits. Making staff aware of these issues can help them understand a prisoner's behaviour, deter unnecessary behaviour and support them in their rehabilitation.

One could argue that it is the cultural, operational and structural differences in the penal systems that lead to a disjointed provision of care for families and children affected by parental imprisonment. Having to overcome the stark contrasts between prisons in the same city was difficult for me and the staff who accompanied me. You have to imagine what a family member or child has to experience if they are also visiting more than one prison in the life course of their family member's sentence. Not surprisingly, the inconsistent nature of the prison system was an issue which affected all those I met on this Fellowship; colleagues and families alike.

2. Nature of Families & Available Interventions

'Parental imprisonment is an issue which translates in all cultures, languages and nationalities...' ⁶

During my Fellowship, I had the privilege of meeting with and speaking to parents in prison and the families and children who were visiting them. Even though, there were many cultural differences between the countries I visited and Northern Ireland, it was clear to see that the nature of families and the issues affecting them were similar. For example, I met with families who were divorced or separated as well as those who were still in a loving relationship. I met with children of all ages, some with siblings who no longer wanted to visit their parent in prison and others whose families had to come on separate visits to accommodate the large number of family members wishing to maintain a relationship with their loved one in prison. I met with mothers, grandmothers, grandfathers, aunts, uncles, brothers, sisters and foster parents, all sharing the same aim, to support the accompanying child to visit with their parent and maintain a positive relationship with them.

I was able to witness loss and separation of a newly formed single parent family trying to cope 'on the outside' and the guilt and shame of the parent who has found themselves 'on the inside.' I could observe the joy and innocence of a child embracing their parent and the relief and happiness of the parent receiving that embrace. In my observation of families, I could see that the nature of families and the issues they face are cross-cultural. The issues affecting the families I work with in Northern Ireland are the same as those affecting families in Belgium, The Netherlands and Italy. From this, one could argue that it should be easy for us to put interventions and systems in place which tackle the intergenerational cycle of offending because the nature of families and the work completed by like-minded organisations is the same. However, as discussed in the previous

⁶ An extract taken from my blog:

<https://mywinstonchurchillfellowship.wordpress.com/>

point, the 'prison system' differs so greatly across the cultural divide, that a 'one size fits all' model would fail to take into account the structural and organisational demands of different penal conditions and rules.

For example, I spoke with one mother, accompanied by her three children waiting to visit with her husband. She told me that she found it difficult to understand and follow the visiting processes, e.g. food parcels, visit timings etc. as these were different for her husband, compared to when she visited her two older sons in different prisons. My experience with this mother almost personified the action which this report seeks to tackle; the inter-generational cycle of offending. Yet, I see her as a mother trying to raise her children in a society where they were judged by their family's traits and reputation; children who were possibly too familiar with a prison visiting room at a young age. When a child grows up, knowing that a prison visit room is the one place where the whole family can be together, they learn to like this environment and what it has to offer. This, it can be argued, is a major pre-disposing factor to the intergenerational cycle of offending.

In order to provide a service which can tackle the inter-generational cycle of offending, we have to take into account the available interventions as discussed in the Findings section. Support for families and children in visiting spaces and the provision of child-centred visits is an integral part of maintaining positive family relationships.

'When a parent goes to prison, they become detached from their child, detached from their daily routine, no longer able to encourage their child on a task or discipline them when needed. The additional visits provided by these organisations enable a father to regain ownership over these actions.'⁷

Nonetheless, I believe the provision of visits should be supported by the facilitation of parenting interventions, e.g. parenting programmes.

⁷ An extract taken from my blog:

<https://mywinstonchurchillfellowship.wordpress.com/>

Parents should be offered the opportunity to learn about the affect their imprisonment is having on their families and develop an awareness of their own skills as a parent.

One of the main differences I concluded from my Fellowship is that most of the organisations were working with much larger populations and did not have the resources to provide this type of focused intervention. However, by calling on my work with Barnardo's, I would recommend that focusing on a parent's needs while they are in custody is vital to the promotion of maintaining family ties. If parents are engaging and completing interventions focusing on their responsibility as a parent, they should be better equipped to support their child during a visit, phonecall or letter and in turn work with the hope that they are promoting a positive relationship with their child and deterring them from negative life choices, e.g. offending.

Conclusions

*"The collateral costs and consequences of imprisonment may be especially consequential for children of imprisoned parents who are already at risk as a result of growing up and coming of age in disadvantaged communities."*⁸

It can be argued that a child with an imprisoned parent may be pre-disposed to prison themselves; affected by poverty, low socio-economic status, poor health and education. These are all factors which, not surprisingly, affect the majority of prisoners in the UK⁹ and, as I experienced on my Fellowship, in many other countries as well.

How can we stop this inter-generational cycle of offending?

How can we help a child to step out of the environment which pre-disposes them to this outcome?

It may seem like an impossible task but it is one which many are trying to overcome; REP, Exodus, Bambini, Barnardo's and many more organisations strive to tackle this issue and provide better outcomes for children and families affected by imprisonment.

By recognising the challenges which face children and families affected by parental imprisonment, providing focused support to those 'inside' and 'outside,' and offering a safe, comfortable space for family visits, we can support those who need it. We cannot stop the negative impact which imprisonment has on children and families. But we can work towards the provision of effective services and interventions which allow us to not only support the child who is separated from their parent but also promote family relationships and work towards breaking the cycle of offending.

⁸ Hagan & Dinovitzer (1999) as cited in Probation Journal, Vol 63 (3), 251-255.

⁹ Social Care Institute of Excellence (2008)

Recommendations

The recommendations below are intended to strengthen and enhance the work conducted by Barnardo's and Northern Ireland Prison Service to further the goal of supporting all children and families affected by imprisonment in Northern Ireland and the wider UK.

- 1.** Family focused training should be widely available for all prison staff to raise awareness of the impact of parental imprisonment.
- 2.** As far as possible, prison staff who have received family focused training should remain in a position which allows them to build close links with external providers to provide a continuity of service to families and children.
- 3.** More extensive use of child-centred visits in prison, to promote parent-child relationships. Including visits which cater for the imprisoned parent and their child/ren only and family-focused engagement with the parent to prepare them appropriately for contact with their child/ren.
- 4.** Further collaboration with colleagues in other services to develop and enhance resources and interventions available to families affected by parental imprisonment to address the extensive range of issues which affect them.