

Developing pathways into children and family services for mothers involved in the criminal justice system

**Believe in
children**



Barnardo's

January 2013





Barnardo's staff involved in the work on which this briefing report is based were Tim Carter, Owen Gill, May Jacobson Deegan, Elizabeth Slade, Jendayi Serwah and Duncan Stanway. Barnardo's worked in close partnership with staff at Eden House Bristol under the leadership of Hannah Mahoney, manager of Eden House. We also benefitted from the support and advice of Ruth Power, National Offender Management Service (NOMS).

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Foreword



In Barnardo's we recognise that the children and families of prisoners are a highly vulnerable group.

Over recent years we have developed initiatives to meet the needs of this group. Our work has been based in prisons and in local communities. We have also been involved in influencing work, to ensure that other agencies effectively address the needs of this group.

This briefing report aims to disseminate the learning from an important project in our work with children of prisoners. It concentrated on women offenders and how to develop 'joined up' working between services which focus on the offender and services which focus on the child and family.

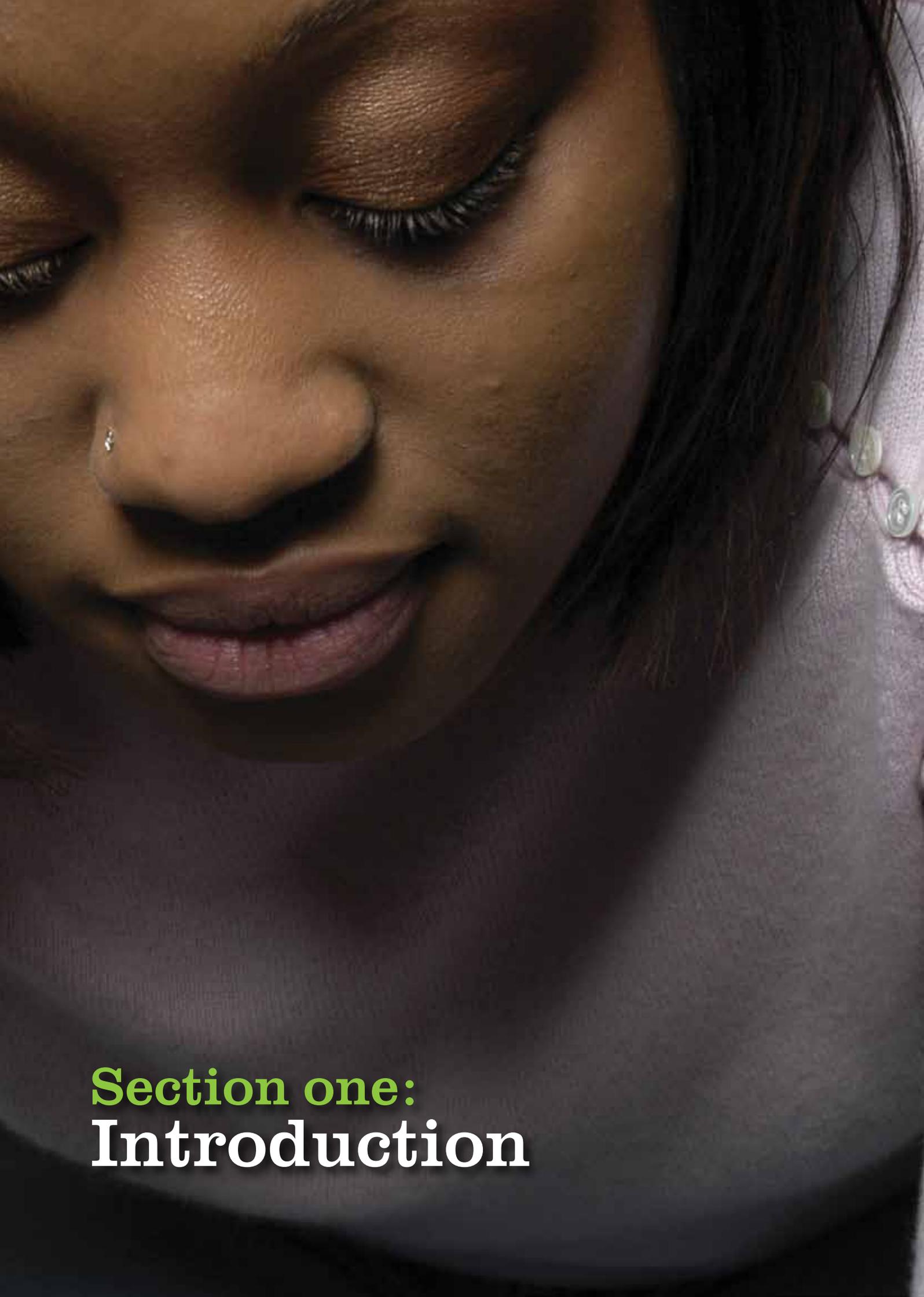
Given that we live in an era of limited resources it is crucially important that the needs of children and families affected by offending and imprisonment are addressed by mainstream services.

We are grateful for the support of the National Offender Management Service (NOMS) in funding this work and facilitating the partnership approach on which it is based.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Yvonne Rodgers". The signature is written in a cursive style.

Yvonne Rodgers
Regional Director,
Barnardo's South West

This work was facilitated by NOMS funding.



Section one:
Introduction

Section one: Introduction

The aim of this briefing document is to support links and partnership working between professionals in the criminal justice system (CJS) and professionals in children and family (C and F) services.

CJS agencies include the courts, probation and prison services and services set up to work with specific groups of offenders such as Women's Community Services. C and F services include the youth service, play services, child and adolescent health services, education psychology services and social work and children's safeguarding services.

These agencies currently have little experience of partnership working at a local level, even though research indicates the clear interdependence of the progress and support of mothers involved in the CJS and the welfare of their children. Research also indicates the positive impact of parenting and family relationship responsibilities on future offending.

The briefing highlights the learning points from Echo+, a project carried out at Eden House, a National Offender Management Service (NOMS) community service, in Bristol from November 2011 to May 2012. The project was implemented by Barnardo's South West and funded by NOMS. It focused on mothers involved in the CJS.

The project involved a Barnardo's worker being based at Eden House, which is one of 31 Women's Community Services in England funded by NOMS in 2011-12. It provides day and outreach services to women involved in the CJS. It supports women offenders to make use of services in the community such as health, education and training and drug and alcohol services. The vision of Eden

House is to be: a one-stop service that engages women in making positive changes to their lives – reducing their propensity to offend and increasing their access to mainstream services and opportunities.

Eden House was already involved in innovative work focussing on the wider support needs of women in the CJS and seeing women offenders in their family contexts. The project on which this briefing paper is based was funded to develop this innovative work and explore the more general links between CJS and C and F services at a local level.

There was a practice component to the work but its main aim was to explore ways of developing links between the services and present the knowledge gained in an accessible way so that similar links between services could be developed in other settings.

Our work in Bristol highlighted some of the issues and challenges of partnership working across these agencies. We also collected examples of good practice from other areas which we have included in the briefing.

In presenting this briefing we recognise that developing partnership working between the agencies will take time to achieve. It is likely to be more useful at this stage to identify principles of good practice to be worked towards rather than hard and fast systems to be adhered to.

Note: In this briefing there is a focus on mothers with children under five because this has been the main focus of the project. But the information and ways of developing pathways etc are relevant for work with the mothers of older children.



Section two:
Background

Section two: Background

Making links between offender management services working with mothers and children and family focused services is crucial for the following reasons:

- Children with a parent in prison are a highly vulnerable group. This is particularly the case with the children of mothers involved in the CJS. These children may face multiple disruptions and vulnerabilities. For example, just five per cent of children whose mothers go to prison remain in their own home after sentencing (Prison Reform Trust, 2010).
- The children are likely to have very poor outcomes. Their vulnerability can lead them to offend, thus perpetuating a cycle of offending. Children with a parent in prison are approximately three times more likely to be involved in delinquent activity than their peers, and are more than twice as likely to experience mental health difficulties (Social Care Institute for Excellence, 2008).

- There is evidence that maintaining and supporting family relations between mothers involved in the CJS and their children reduces the likelihood of the mother reoffending. A Ministry of Justice report states that family ties have been shown to reduce the likelihood of reoffending by 39 per cent. (Ministry of Justice, 2009).

The key message of this body of research is therefore the interdependence of support for mothers involved in the CJS and the welfare of children.

However CJS and C and F services have traditionally maintained boundaries around their areas of responsibility and expertise. Those in the CJS have focussed on risk and reoffending. Those in C and F services have focussed on particular aspects of the child's world without necessarily putting that world into a wider family and community context.





Interdependence of support for mothers involved in the CJS and the welfare of children

During the course of the work there was much evidence of the interdependence of support for mothers involved in the CJS and the welfare of their children.

This can be well-illustrated by reference to a brief case study based on ongoing work at Eden House provided by its manager.

Miss H

Miss H was referred to Eden House by The Probation Service following an appearance at Bristol Crown Court. She had a long history of suffering abuse and sexual violence and faced a range of mental health difficulties, including depression and anxiety attacks.

Miss H also experienced significant practical difficulties, including unsettled accommodation and high rates of debt. She had felt unable to care for her son when he was born and had placed him temporarily in care.

At first Miss H regularly failed to attend sessions at Eden House and was unwilling to share the difficulties she was experiencing. In the early period of her being involved with Eden House her son became the subject of a child protection plan on the grounds of neglect.

However, very gradually, Miss H engaged with activities at Eden House. She became involved in a computer skills programme and relaxation sessions. She also began to develop trust in her key worker.

As Miss H's involvement in activities increased and her trust in the staff developed, her mental health gradually improved.

The improvement in her mental health led to an improvement in Miss H's ability to care for her son, such that her son was eventually no longer the subject of a child protection plan.

The current position is that Miss H attends Eden House regularly and presents as responsive, consistent and committed to development. As a result of signposting to other agencies, her debt is being tackled and she has settled accommodation for herself and her son.

The challenges preventing women in the CJS accessing community-based services:

There are often strong challenges for women in the CJS accessing community based services. Some of the most important of these challenges are:

- highly pressurised and sometimes disorganised lifestyles
- isolation and therefore less awareness of community services
- anxiety about the reaction of other parents attending community services (such as children's centres) and therefore lack confidence to attend appointments
- some non-CJS agencies may not be ready to engage with women with an offending background.



Section three:

What the project did

Section three: What the project did

The Barnardo's project worker was based at Eden House for the duration of the Echo+ project.

Her primary purpose was to explore the opportunities and barriers to developing pathways into C and F services for mothers involved in the CJS.

This was done through discussions with staff at Eden House and in other agencies and through observing the work of Eden House. It also involved working with staff at HMP Eastwood Park and liaising with C and F services linked with Eden House.

The project worker was also engaged in direct work with women offenders at Eden House. One purpose of this direct work was to gain first-hand, case-based, experience of the challenges that women involved in the CJS face in accessing community-based services.

With research assistant support, the project worker explored:

- Developing community pathways into local C and F services, taking into account the accessibility of services to women offenders and ensuring the relevance of these services to the needs of this group.
- Developing custody pathways into local C and F services. This involved working with Prison Advice and Care Trust (Pact) at HMP Eastwood Park to ensure that pathways were identified into local C and F services for those women who are resettling in Bristol. The aim of identifying these pathways was that this approach could be replicated in other discharge areas.
- Building the capacity and expertise of NOMS staff in relation to the family/parental context of women offenders' lives and the needs of their children.
- Exploring children, families and safeguarding issues relevant to pre-sentence report (PSR) writing. This involved exploring PSR practice challenges

for Avon and Somerset Probation Trust (ASPT) staff and reviewing the relevant issues with managers.



Section four:
Learning points

The following points are based on the accumulated learning of the project.

Improving communication between CJS services and C and F services

- We need improved levels of communication between CJS staff and C and F staff. There should be established channels of communication between the agencies, including named members of staff who liaise frequently.
- CJS staff should have knowledge of and contact with local statutory and voluntary services, with established referral pathways where appropriate.
- Probation staff should be made aware of the Common Assessment Framework (CAF)¹ so they can refer on to and, where appropriate, initiate the CAF process.
- CJS teams should have training in safeguarding and CAF, and a better awareness of children and young people's service procedures and practice, in order to promote joined-up working.

Acknowledging the different professional cultures of CJS and C and F services and developing shared understanding

- C and F services and CJS services operate within different professional cultures. These professional cultures determine the outcomes they aim to achieve and the practice approaches they adopt to achieve these outcomes. It is crucial to make links between these different professional cultures so that joint outcomes and joint ways of working are identified.

- It is important that staff from offender management services and children's services move towards a joint understanding of agency perspectives on risk. For instance CJS services identify risk in terms of risk of reoffending and risk of danger to self and others, whereas C and F services identify risk in terms of likelihood of risk to the general welfare or safety of the child.
- C and F services and CJS services need to move towards joint outcomes (see Appendix 3 for suggested linked outcomes).
- We need to raise awareness of the impact of an intervention in one sphere of work on the outcomes being aimed for by another. For example, in a current Bristol probation case, children's services made non drug use a condition in a child protection plan. This has had a positive impact on the woman's offending.
- CJS staff should find out what C and F support there is in their local communities in order to be able to refer, signpost and work in partnership to support families.
- There should be a team commitment to a whole family approach.
- It may be very helpful if champions for families and children are established at a local level in probation teams.

Developing effective formal and informal partnership arrangements

- Agencies can choose to use a service level agreement (SLA) or a less formal partnership agreement. It is important to develop working arrangements between services where binding funding arrangements do not exist. It is also important to recognise that services are on a path towards good practice, which will take time to establish. Partnership agreements or principles for good practice may be more

1 The Common Assessment Framework (CAF) is the system for agencies to come together to assess the needs of children and young people, so that they can more accurately and effectively identify the most appropriate services.

appropriate initial ways of joint working. An SLA in use at Eden House is included as Appendix four.

Developing pathways from custody settings into local C and F services

- It is important to make links or set up support before women are released, in order to establish, or provide continuity of, support. It is particularly important for those women on remand who may leave the prison without notice (i.e. after a court hearing), and women on short sentences who will not have probation support on release.

The Nelson Trust

ISIS women's centre in Gloucester, run by the Nelson Trust, works with women offenders and those at risk of offending. They offer a range of support across the nine pathways of offending, and have a partnership agreement with HMP Eastwood Park to support women from Gloucestershire before they are released. This involves a project worker visiting Eastwood Park once a week, to engage with women who may want support, and also to signpost women to relevant agencies in the community. The project worker is able to draw up a support plan with women in custody, visit them fortnightly until release, collect them on release from prison and offer continuing support in the community. Their Re-Unite programme aims to reunite mothers with their children following a custodial sentence, by providing housing and support after release. The Nelson Trust also offers Family Focus, run on the same site as ISIS – an integrated substance misuse service that addresses family issues, working with the whole family.

- Local information packs should be produced which identify sources of community

support for women leaving custody. It may not be realistic or resource efficient for a prison to produce local information packs for all discharge areas, so this either needs to be for the main discharge areas or information should be tailored to individuals with identified needs.

Children's centres and other community-based services face challenges in developing community pathways to offer services to this group of mothers

- Children's centres should publicise the fact that they welcome women involved in the CJS and can address their needs. They can do this locally using posters, leaflets, word of mouth and through key professionals such as health visitors.
- Children's centres should provide continuity in the lives of children affected by the imprisonment of a mother.

A Barnardo's children's centre

A mother with children aged two and four attends her local children's centre to make use of the services on offer. Some time after starting at the centre she is sent to prison.

There is uncertainty about who is to look after the children, but eventually the children's grandmother says she will care for them.

The centre is able to support the grandmother, who at times feels overwhelmed, not just by the practical needs of the children but also by coping with her own stress and the emotional trauma of her daughter being in prison.

The grandmother feels uncertain and concerned about telling the children

Section four: Learning points

about what has happened to the mother and how long she will be away. The centre supports her to work out a plan for talking to the children.

The grandmother also feels unable to organise taking the children to visit their mother in prison. It is agreed a staff member will help her organise the first visit and go with her to help look after the children. As a result of this support the grandmother is able to organise subsequent visits.

While the mother is in prison, the grandmother takes the children to open groups at the centre and this provides continuity in their lives. This continuity is maintained when the mother eventually leaves prison and comes back to her own community and the care of her children.

- CJS staff should be aware of the role and purpose of children's centres, and how they can be beneficial to women. They should have contact with local children's centres, and knowledge of how to make referrals.
- It is important that children's centres develop direct links with prisons, probation trusts and women's community services.

Barnardo's Acorn Family Centre

Barnardo's Acorn Family Centre in Yorkshire is located on the site of HMP Askham Grange, a women's open prison. They provide a nursery service to prisoners' children, including those who are on the mother and baby unit. They also run a family support service that works with all women at HMP Askham Grange that have children in the community, and facilitates links with external agencies, such as children's social care.

For women with older children, Acorn Family Centre facilitates contact through

family visit days, and through Acorn House, where family members can stay in the grounds of the open prison.

On women's release from prison, the family centre puts mothers in contact with C and F services in their release area – for example, introducing them to a local children's centre.

- Children's centres can make services and facilities available for the formal reporting requirements of mothers.

Children's centres and probation: working together

In a pilot scheme in Swindon, offenders' appointments with probation can be undertaken in a local children's centre – providing a child-friendly environment and an opportunity to put the families of offenders in touch with the services on offer. The family of the offender can attend a play session while the offender manager and the offender meet in another room, or the child can stay with the parent during the meeting. (If the offender manager considers it appropriate in terms of what is being discussed.)

An offender manager with previous experience working in a children's centre was instrumental in setting up this scheme. This arrangement has now been extended to all children's centres in the Wiltshire probation area.

There is an understanding that if a child-appropriate setting is needed for probation to meet with an offender, a children's centre will be able to provide this. The children's centres are then able to offer support to families who are usually hard to reach.

Offender managers assess the risk that having each offender on the premises could present to children, parents and staff before

arranging the appointment. The scheme is open to both male and female offenders. One example of the benefits of this arrangement is of an offender manager who was asked to complete a pre-sentence report within 24 hours for a woman with a young baby. It was impossible to set up childcare at short notice and children are not allowed at the probation office. The offender manager met the mother at the children's centre where childcare was available. The centre staff were also able to introduce the mother to the services they provide.

The different agencies involved in the arrangement did not feel an SLA or partnership agreement was necessary, as there is no actual exchange of service and the arrangement has proved to be low in resource intensity.

Practical applications for other women's community services (WCS) based on experience of partnership between Eden House (WCS) and Barnardo's South West.

- Working in partnership with an agency focusing on the needs of children and young people raised awareness of the importance of family-centred working for Eden House staff.
- Reviewing WCS practice in conjunction with a child-focussed service can inform the approach to key-working and wider service delivery adopted by WCS.
- The opportunity for dialogue between CJS services and C and F services can inform, challenge and develop practice.
- A family focus prompted a number of developments led by Eden House, such as linking with early years

commissioners, developing further links with other children's service providers and linking with a mother and baby project to share learning.

- WCS may benefit from working in partnership with other agencies, such as specialist voluntary and community services and probation trusts, to raise the profile of their client group, for example with early years commissioners and for local strategy in relation to children and young people.²

Embedding a children, families and safeguarding perspective into pre-sentence report (PSR) report writing

- It is very important that probation staff ask questions about contact with children at the PSR stage. This should involve asking about children that the offender directly cares for but also children she is regularly in contact with (for instance as a grandmother). There is currently no requirement to collect information about children – the offender's own children, children that live with the offender or children in frequent contact with the offender. However in Avon and Somerset Probation Trust (ASPT) that direct question is asked.
- Initial PSRs are carried out under considerable time pressure. Because of this there is a danger that sometimes limited information will be collected on the children that the offender is responsible for. It is important to delete the response 'don't know' from the offender assessment system so that a specific response is required.
- Offender management staff carrying out PSRs need regularly updated information concerning C and F services particularly with regard to referral pathways for safeguarding concerns. Staff completing PSRs are likely to be the key professionals

² WCS may find the Barnardo's children's centre handbook a useful tool in working with mainstream providers of children's services to ensure their services are, in practice, both accessible and relevant to their client group. Barnardo's (2012) *Under fives and their families affected by imprisonment; a handbook for Sure Start Children's Centres*. Available from swpublications@barnardos.org.uk

Section four: Learning points

to come into contact with the family at a time of crisis and when safeguarding issues may be exacerbated.

- Guidance should be developed on the above.



Section five:
Appendices
one to four

Appendix one – Checklist for CJS agencies to work in a family appropriate way

Below are some suggested principles for good practice for CJS services working in a family appropriate way.

Note that this is not intended to be a comprehensive list, rather it is intended to give ideas about some of the areas that such a list of principles for good practice might include.

This list does not formally represent the approach of any local CJS agencies.

We recognise that involvement in the CJS also affects the children and families of offenders, who may have their own specific needs and vulnerabilities.	
We recognise the significance of children and families. We can give practical examples of how we actively utilise the children and families reducing-reoffending pathway.	
As far as is possible, we collect information about children and families. As routine, we enquire about an offender’s children and contact with children. We include questions about children and contact with children on monitoring and assessment forms.	
We consider children and families at every stage of working with an offender.	
We recognise that family circumstances may change and that enquiries about and work around children and families need to be flexible and ongoing.	
We are aware of the children and families of both male and female offenders.	
Staff receive ongoing safeguarding training. They understand how and when to report safeguarding concerns.	
A named staff member is a children and families champion. They have information about and links with children and families services.	
Staff are aware of the different levels and types of support available for children and families provided by statutory agencies, voluntary organisations and community groups, locally and nationally. There is a regularly updated resource pack with this information available for use by staff.	
We develop close working links with children and young people’s services at all levels, have regular contact and communication, and share information where appropriate.	
Staff are aware of, understand and are trained in the CAF process.	
We develop links and referral pathways with support services, and staff refer and signpost offenders to these services where appropriate.	
If appropriate, we set up partnership agreements or Service Level Agreements with children and family services and agencies.	
We encourage children and family services to have a visible presence – for example, through posters and leaflets in waiting areas.	
Where appropriate we provide risk information to other agencies and services working with offenders and their families, so that appropriate risk assessment can be carried out.	

Appendix two – Shared outcomes between offender management services and children and family services

There is growing evidence that family approaches can effect reoffending.

Below are some suggested ways of thinking about shared outcomes between C and F services and CJS services working with mothers. Note that (as in appendix one) this is not intended to be a comprehensive list, rather it is intended to give pointers to some of the areas that such a list of shared outcomes might include.

Also note that this list does not formally represent the approach of any local CJS or C and F agencies.

- Resilience of parents is likely to support resilience of children.
- Developing wider family networks is likely to be beneficial for women involved in the CJS.
- Developing residential stability is likely to be positive for the mother and her offending, It will also be positive for the children, allowing stable relations with professionals such as health visitors, teachers etc.
- Developing positive networks in the community is likely to be beneficial for women involved in the CJS and also for their children.
- Working to support mothers to talk about their offending to children will add to resilience of children.
- Supporting mothers into education and training will add to their self-esteem and help them avoid offending. It will also improve children's lives by reducing poverty etc.
- Providing support for family relationships (for instance parenting courses) will have a beneficial impact on children and may have a positive impact on reoffending.
- Drug rehabilitation work will have a positive impact on children and on reoffending.

Appendix three – Checklist for good practice for children’s centres

(This is taken from *Under fives and their families affected by imprisonment*;

A handbook for Sure Start Children’s Centres available from swpublications@barnardos.org.uk)

Suggested commitments for developing good practice within children’s centre teams include;

We recognise that children and families affected by imprisonment are a very important group for our centre to be working with.	
We recognise that in our reach area there are almost certainly children and families affected by the imprisonment of either a father or mother.	
We understand the different ways in which the imprisonment of a father or a mother may affect children. We include coverage of this in team meetings and training.	
We recognise that different services may be available to offer support to families, depending on whether it is their mother or their father that has entered custody.	
We are clear to local agencies that we welcome and work with this group of children and families.	
When considering opportunities to work with prisons and establish referral pathways, we consider both the male and female prisons.	
We develop close links with probation trusts, local integrated offender management schemes and women’s community services, encourage referrals, and if appropriate set up service level agreements about referral paths and content of work.	
We recognise the importance of health visitors in knowing the backgrounds of families in our reach area and actively encourage them to refer children and families affected by imprisonment to the centre.	
We are clear to the local community that we welcome and work with this group of children and families. (For instance publicising through posters and newsletters.)	
In our practice work we support children and families affected by imprisonment. This may be through individual or group work approaches or through signposting to other agencies.	
We recognise that a parent going into prison is often a time of crisis – particularly for children. We are ready to support children and families immediately.	
We recognise the stigma and isolation that families affected by imprisonment may experience and actively work to counter this.	
A named staff member has responsibility for being a resource for staff and families in relation to impact of imprisonment and practical information.	

Appendix four

Below is the template of a service level agreement (SLA) already in use at Eden House to develop formal links between the CJS and C and F services.

Service level agreement

Parties to the agreement

Insert relevant organisations

Purpose of agreement:

Explanation of intent

Commencement date:

Aims:

Overall purpose of agreement

Process:

Point by point explanation of how service will run on-site including monitoring and paperwork requirements

Confidentiality and information sharing:

What level of confidentiality will be offered – i.e. will all information be shared or will service maintain client privacy except in the event of concern.

Problem management:

Any concerns or problems should be raised with the appropriate member of staff as per (insert agency) complaints procedure.

Agreed duties and responsibilities

First agency will:

Cover details of when, how long and how often service will be provided including annual and sick leave – time scale for informing of A/L and S/L etc.

Second agency will:

Cover details of when, how long and how often service will be provided including A/L and S/L cover – timescale for informing of A/L and S/L etc.

Review/feedback process:

How both agencies will communicate including establishing method, i.e. weekly email contact, project workers making contact when on-site, monthly meetings etc.

Signatures for agency representatives

References

Ministry of Justice (2009) *Reducing re-offending: supporting families, creating better futures*. The Stationery Office, London.

Prison Reform Trust (2010) *Women in prison*, London.

Social Care Institute for Excellence (2008) *Guide 22: Children of prisoners; maintaining family ties*, www.scie.org.uk



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