



**Barnardo's NI Response to the
Northern Ireland Prison Service *Prisons 2020* discussion document
September 2017**

Barnardo's NI is the largest children's charity in Northern Ireland. We work with 14,000 service users across more than 40 different services and programmes and in over 200 schools. We provide a wide range of services including working with children affected by parental imprisonment, disabled children, minority ethnic families, looked after children and care leavers, to offering family support and early intervention. We believe that every child deserves the best possible start in life, and our service provision reflects that philosophy.

Barnardo's NI welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Northern Ireland Prison Service (NIPS) *Prisons 2020* discussion document. Our comments are informed by our experience of delivering the Barnardo's NI Parenting Matters service in Northern Ireland's prisons since 1996, which focuses on improving the lives of children affected by parental imprisonment by developing and maintaining links between children and their imprisoned parent.

We have provided comments on the discussion points most relevant to our work below:

Role:

Q1. Do you believe NIPS has appropriately summarised its role and defined its key strategic priorities.

In 2010, CJINI noted "the Prison Service is not a bit player in the criminal justice system, it is an essential component of the success of the system overall"¹. With this in mind, we commend NIPS for using *Prisons 2020* as a vehicle to achieve Outcome 7 of the draft

¹ Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland (CJINI), (2010) '*Northern Ireland Prison Service Corporate Governance Arrangements: An inspection of corporate governance arrangements within the Northern Ireland Prison Service*', CJINI, Belfast.

Programme for Government and the three underpinning indicators (1, 38 and 39), for which the Department of Justice has lead responsibility.

We broadly agree with how the role of NIPS is summarised in the discussion document and how the strategic priorities have been defined. However, we recommend these are expanded upon to be more meaningful and to emphasise the focus of the Prison Service as reducing (re)offending. We welcome the stated purpose “to improve public safety by reducing the risk of reoffending by supporting people to change their behaviours”, but recommend that either the wording is changed or a supporting narrative is included to highlight the importance of including families in that behaviour change process. The recent review by Lord Farmer² on the importance of strengthening families ties to reduce reoffending and intergenerational crime states:

“If prisons are truly to be places of reform, we cannot ignore the reality that a supportive relationship with at least one person is indispensable to a prisoner’s ability to get through their sentence well and achieve rehabilitation.”

In recognition of the importance of families in promoting rehabilitation and resettlement with the aim of reducing reoffending, and also in recognition of the impact of parental imprisonment on educational and life outcomes for children, we recommend that this is incorporated into the purpose and priorities of the Prison Service, for example “achieve better outcomes for people in our care, their children and their families”.

People:

Q2. What do you believe our organisational values should be?

The Barnardo’s NI Parenting Matters service has worked in Northern Ireland’s prisons and alongside the Prison Service since 1996. We know that for the past number of years the Prison Service has been on a journey of being a service rooted in security to one that seeks to prioritise improved outcomes for prisoners and their families, as evidenced in recent policy development. However in order to transpose the rhetoric of policy documents into real and meaningful practice that achieves outcomes for prisoners and their families we recommend NIPS considers the values of the ‘Healthy Prisons’ agenda. Although

² Lord Farmer (2017), *‘The Importance of Strengthening Prisoners’ Family Ties to Prevent Reoffending and Reduce Intergenerational Crime’*, Ministry of Justice, London.

focused on prisoner mental health the 'Healthy Prisons' agenda identified four core values:

- safety;
- respect;
- purposeful activity; and
- effective preparation for resettlement.

As noted in the discussion document, the new set of organisational values will underpin the culture and ethos of the Prison Service. It is therefore essential that the wording of these values captures the emphasis on reducing reoffending and indeed reducing intergenerational offending. Whilst security will inevitably be a consideration, the development of a new set of values is an opportunity to embed a culture that focuses on rehabilitation and the promotion of desistance, with meaningful recognition of the role of families in that, and the role of the voluntary sector partners working with the Prison Service.

Q4. How can we improve communication with our staff and those who work with them in the prison environment?

On behalf of Barnardo's NI, Butler et al. (2015)³ carried out a review of our Families Matter programme, which was developed in partnership with NIPS. A number of recommendations set out by Butler et al. related to improving communication between NIPS staff and Barnardo's NI. These recommendations might be also be helpful when considering ways to improve communication with NIPS staff and others working in the prison environment. The recommendations included:

- review barriers and obstacles to interdepartmental co-operation to ensure a more efficient and economical use of resources; and
- evaluate staffing, resourcing, communication and approval mechanisms currently being used.

Furthermore, it has been our experience from working alongside prison staff that they are often unaware of decisions that have been taken by governors and others within the prison structure. We would suggest that a culture fostering mentoring rather than a blame culture would encourage greater accountability, willingness to take decisions and promote job motivation and satisfaction. Clear roles of responsibility would further promote accountability. In addition, a clearer understanding of the role of the voluntary sector partners and a

³ Butler, M., Hayes, D., Devaney, J., and Percy, A. (2015) '*Strengthening Family Relations? Review of the Families Matter Programme at Maghaberry Prison*', Barnardo's NI, Belfast.

culture of partnership working would help promote communication and inter-agency team working.

Q9. In recognition of the diversity of those in our care would it be helpful to have bespoke staff training for specific prisoner groups? If so, what training would be helpful?

Barnardo's recommends that prison staff receive comprehensive training on the role of families in supporting rehabilitation, as well as the impact of imprisonment on children and families. Trainee prison officers receive about 10 to 12 weeks of training, which includes a half day session delivered by Parenting Matters dedicated to the importance of families. The session is generally well received by trainees, and feedback indicates that it is an area they haven't previously considered as important. However, this brief training session is often timetabled in if and where possible; we recommend that instead, family issues are regarded as a critical component of training for all new staff, as well as induction and ongoing training for existing staff: we believe giving this element of the training due regard would support a culture change and formal recognition of the role of staff in supporting family contact, in support of the Prison Service's aim of reducing reoffending. In his recent review, Lord Farmer⁴ stated:

"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 prisoners' lives, particularly when they leave prison."

We therefore urge that training is delivered to all staff to communicate the role of, and impact on, families and children, to improve understanding and a culture with an aim of preventing reoffending, promoting long-term desistance and reducing intergenerational offending.

Malcomson (2016)⁵ undertook a study visit of prisons in Belgium, the Netherlands, Italy and Croatia to explore how prisons in other jurisdictions compared to Northern Ireland. Coming from Barnardo's NI Parenting Matters service, Malcomson was interested in finding out how other prisons supported imprisoned parents, their children and their families in the community. Given that Malcomson's specific

⁴ Lord Farmer (2017), *'The Importance of Strengthening Prisoners' Family Ties to Prevent Reoffending and Reduce Intergenerational Crime'*, Ministry of Justice, London.

⁵ Malcomson, B. (2016), *'Tackling the intergenerational cycle of offending by promoting parent-child relationships'*, Barnardo's NI, Belfast.

interest was to consider how promoting parent-child relationships could tackle the intergenerational cycle of offending, a number of training related recommendations were put forward. In line with these recommendations Barnardo's NI recommends that NIPS provide:

- family focused training for all prison staff to raise awareness of the impact of parental imprisonment; and
- 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.

In relation to the last point above, we recommend specific training is given in relation to family visits and that this is considered a specific role. Barnardo's NI takes a family-centred approach to prison work, and family visits are a critical element of our work. In her 2015 review of the experiences of children visiting parents in prison, Evans⁶ suggests that family visits should be viewed as a family intervention rather than a security risk, and as such responsibility for visits should rest with staff experienced in engaging families, with the support of voluntary and community organisations; Evans references HMP Parc where this approach has been implemented and notes that behaviour and engagement both improved as a result. Demonstrating respect, understanding and support to those families visiting or engaging with a person in prison can therefore have far reaching positive impact: "A well-run, satisfying visit is a potential intervention in the rehabilitation of the offender as it builds 'social capital', enabling a stronger reintegration into society". We recommend that visits are family-centred, with age appropriate provisions, supported by staff trained in the role of family contact.

Whilst we recognise that security is important for prisons, and that it is also important to keep children safe whilst visiting a prison, we believe that security processes could be adapted to support children's wellbeing and respond to their needs too. Within this, we recommend that NIPS explores other practices to address the passing of drugs and other substances during visits, given the distress that can be caused to children should a dog suspect a substance in their vicinity, leading to intervention from prison staff and the immediate end to the visit. One example may be the approach taken by Mountjoy Prison in Dublin, where if 'passing' is observed, the situation is dealt with when the visit is over, showing how a family intervention approach to visits which

⁶ Evans, J. (2015) '*Locked Out: Children's experiences of visiting a parent in prison*', Barnardo's, Barking.

recognises the rights and welfare of the child does not need to compromise security.

Services:

Q10. How well do you think the Prison Service performs in prioritising resettlement and rehabilitation?

The prioritisation of resettlement and rehabilitation is an ongoing journey, with recent policy development and direction indicating a welcome greater emphasis on resettlement, rehabilitation and desistance.

However, whilst good work has been done, we believe a greater emphasis on families within the Prison Service is required to achieve meaningful resettlement and rehabilitation, in recognition of 'Children, Families and Communities' as a resettlement pathway: Lord Farmer's recent review notes "Supportive relationships with family members and significant others give meaning and all important motivation to other strands of rehabilitation and resettlement activity"⁷. Taking a family centred approach is key to this and in practice might mean visiting slots only for families with children on a particular day, a policy in Belgian prisons and also in HMP Parc in Wales. Not only does maintaining contact improve outcomes for children affected by parental imprisonment (Evans, 2015), it also reduces the risk of reoffending: research by the Ministry of Justice⁸ found that "the odds of reoffending were 39% higher for prisoners who had not received [family] visits compared to those who had". We recommend that families and children are considered more in resettlement planning procedures.

In addition to visiting, we believe there are times when there is a need to be more lenient. For example, on the Parenting Matters 'Families Matter' programme, fathers are excluded if they have failed a drugs test. We would urge that leniency is shown in this instance because participation on the programme could act as an intervention and form a critical part of their rehabilitation, rather than aggravating their situation by adding further to their isolation and reduced contact with

⁷ Lord Farmer (2017), *'The Importance of Strengthening Prisoners' Family Ties to Prevent Reoffending and Reduce Intergenerational Crime'*, Ministry of Justice, London.

⁸ 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'*, Ministry of Justice, London.

their families. Again, this is an example of where security overrides the best interests of the child and the family.

Q11. What could the Prison Service do differently to better support people's transition from custody back into the community?

We believe it is critical that rehabilitation and resettlement strategies begin from the day the prisoner enters prison, if not beforehand. For example, HMP Parc offers a progressive and challenging regime in a modern environment, with a range of activities that aim to equip offenders with the skills they need to reduce the risk of reoffending after release. The regime includes opportunities to undertake education; access to a library; gymnasium and sports; the industries complex comprising of nine workshops; a chaplaincy; dedication to healthcare; a robust drugs strategy; an emphasis on attitudes, thinking and behaviour; offender management and interventions; as well as the Parc Supporting Families initiative, which was originally modelled on Barnardo's NI Parenting Matters service.

We recommend that planning starts early, that sentence plans are better resourced to take a whole-prisoner perspective rather than focusing on narrow defined needs, and that the family is considered in this plan, both in relation to supporting rehabilitation during the period of imprisonment and in supporting the resettlement plan when the prisoner transitions back into the community. We recommend that counselling is available to prisoners to help address a range of complexities and adversities, including but not limited to separation from families. We also recommend that those on remand have access to suitable interventions and support mechanisms to promote resettlement.

Our Families Matter programme benefits prisoners. However, Families Matter is a 26 week intervention that creates and supports a better family environment, but thereafter the longer visits are removed. This is tough on children, their imprisoned fathers (Smith, 2016)⁹ and partners. A family-approach to visits would support both the prisoner and the family with the transition back into the community by maintaining contact throughout the period of imprisonment, as well as helping the family to prepare for the transition.

⁹ Smith, E. (2016) '*Parenting from inside out: psychological perspectives on parenting from prison*', unpublished doctoral thesis, Queen's University Belfast.

Lastly, a simple way for the Prison Service to take a different approach to better support people's transition from custody back into the community is to put in place mechanisms to listen to prisoners and their families. Although prisoner forums exist, much can be learned from the experience of children's participation (see the [Lundy model of child participation](#)). In this context, the voice of prisoners and children are not that dissimilar. Replacing the word 'children' with 'prisoners' in the model would enable prisoners to express their views and for their views to be given due weight.

Q12. Are there models of good practice that the Prison Service could adopt to improve its approach to resettlement and rehabilitation?

We recommend NIPS look beyond the experience of prison and to identify from the very beginning of a journey how to enable offenders to reintegrate into the community and to not reoffend. We believe a family centred approach is the best approach to reduce reoffending. We recommend NIPS put in place thematic teams, for example a Families Team with decision making authority that can be innovative and able to work within a culture of risk assessment (dynamic security) rather than one that demands static security.

Barnardo's Parenting Matters has over many years interacted with other prisons, both nationally and internationally. We consider HMP Parc to be an example of good practice, where the prison is visible in the community and it fosters relationships with schools, for example teachers bring children's school reports to imprisoned parents. HMP Parc's Parc Supporting Families (PSF) team is a group of dedicated staff and community-based workers who are committed to maintaining and developing relationships with both family and the community. PSF aims to provide support, encouragement and guidance to re-integrate prisoners and also to encourage them to be effective parents. Support is provided via a Family Link Officer.

In addition, some of the approaches adopted in the Republic of Ireland demonstrate good practice. For example, Bedford Row is an outreach visitor centre project situated close to Limerick Prison, which has the advantage of being situated close to the city centre and is therefore embedded in the community. This is not the case for prisons in Northern Ireland, however prisoners families would benefit from a Prison Resource Centre in the major population areas.

We also suggest that prisoners and their families would benefit from having voluntary and community organisations like Barnardo's NI in the courts. Court cases and sentencing can be a long and confusing, even isolating, process. Something as simple as a coffee shop within the courts where families could access support or information could help support families from the beginning of the journey.

Q13. What outcomes can the voluntary and community sector provide to assist with people's resettlement and rehabilitation?

The role of the voluntary and community sector in resettlement and rehabilitation is increasingly recognised. In 2013 CJINI carried out 'A review of the Voluntary and Community Sector's involvement in the Northern Ireland criminal justice system'; subsequent policy initiatives including the Strategic Framework for Reducing Offending (2013) and Supporting Change: A Strategic Approach to Desistance (2015) are clear that the voluntary and community sector is a key partner.

In practice the likes of Barnardo's NI Parenting Matters service aims to help families maintain and develop relationships while they are separated by imprisonment. If a prisoner wants to be a good parent and wants to achieve stable and better family relationships, they are less likely to reoffend. Families have a critical and often untapped role to play in resettlement and rehabilitation. Families should not be on the outside, they need to be included within the sentence plan process. Moreover there is a need to look at offending from a family and child perspective and to take into consideration how offending affects families. For example Smith (2016)¹⁰ examined the reality of being a father in prison and outlined the psychological pain, unresolved grief and role displacement. The 2011 Prison Review¹¹ noted: "It is...important to identify and strengthen prisoners' 'social capital': the relationships, communities and economic circumstances to which they will return. This requires partnerships with and across government, civil society, voluntary and community organisations and families."

Barnardo's NI Parenting Matters service helps and supports families, but to be certain that NIPS and others including ourselves are contributing to 'turning the curve' it is critical that resources are put in

¹⁰ Smith, E. (2016) '*Parenting from inside out: psychological perspectives on parenting from prison*', unpublished doctoral thesis, Queen's University Belfast.

¹¹ Review of the Northern Ireland Prison Service (2011)

place to track prisoners post-release so as to determine if the supports and interventions they have received while in custody and upon release have made a difference, and if so what difference.

Infrastructure:

Q14. Do you think NIPS could make better use of the facilities/accommodation available to us, if so how?

We commend the effort being made by Prisons 2020 to focus on rehabilitation and resettlement. We believe in order to achieve the best outcomes for prisoners, every opportunity must be taken to strengthen family relationships. We believe there are occasions and instances when security can be relaxed to promote family contact, prisoners can be supported to take greater responsibility, avail of education, employment and leisure opportunities, and access available pastoral care, which together can better prepare prisoners for their transition to the community and promote relationships with family. Using facilities to improve family and child-centred visits with age appropriate provisions, or to improve and maintain contact outside of visiting hours, would support the aims of reducing reoffending and promoting resettlement and rehabilitation.

Q16. How do you believe NIPS could better use technology to develop a whole prison approach, improve family connections and prepare individuals for release?

Aside from family visits, telephone conversations remain the main way that families interact during a period of imprisonment. Whilst we recognise there are security issues to be resolved, we welcome the Skype pilot and recommend that is explored further. We also recommend that consideration be given to developing an email service, or perhaps a similar alternative that is not internet enabled. It is possible to develop such a stand-alone email service and this would allow children to interact with their imprisoned parents more naturally at their choosing, rather than being restricted to a telephone call that is supposed to happen at a particular time.

In terms of preparing prisoners for transition into the community, it is important that they are up-to-date on how technology is evolving. For example a person who has been in prison for 15 years will not have encountered Facebook, Twitter or social media more generally. Even Google may be alien, and the idea of self-service checkouts in shops has changed the shopping experience. To maximise the likelihood of successful rehabilitation, and also to avoid a desire to want to take

refuge in prison, it is important that prisoners are equipped to cope with societal change and evolutions underway and are prepared for work and life in a digital world.

Partnerships:

Q17. How do you think NIPS could make better use of our partnerships?

Recent policy documents recognise the role of partnership. We urge NIPS to see partnerships and services like Barnardo's NI Parenting Matters as a positive resource. We are proud of our relationship with NIPS and we know that the many gains have been achieved by good will on both sides. We recommend that steps are put in place to foster joined-up working practices. In addition to training on the role and services of partner organisations to prison staff to ensure a culture of co-operative working, we believe that dedicated teams or members of staff e.g. a family team, as referenced above, could promote joined-up working.

Q18. How could NIPS improve communication with our partners?

As noted above Barnardo's NI Parenting Matters has been on a journey with NIPS. We know from experience that sometimes decisions are taken without consultation or communication with other prison staff or partners, though recognise a culture for communication is being fostered. However, it is difficult for staff to take responsibility and ownership of a role, to build relationships with others when they know they are likely to be moved. We suggest staff are developed to take ownership of particular areas or elements of pathways, for example Children and Families.

Q19. How do you think NIPS could make better links with the community?

The Bedford Row example, above, shows how support can be embedded in the community; an accessible resource centre could provide an avenue for links to be built with the community, whilst also providing support to families and perhaps helping to reduce stigma. We recommend that families are put at the centre of seeking to reduce reoffending, and there is also a role for schools in fostering children's academic, social and emotional wellbeing. There is a wealth of knowledge around prison work in Northern Ireland and a commitment to make life better for prisoners and their families.

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