



families
outside

supporting
families affected
by imprisonment



HIDDEN IN PLAIN SIGHT

The cost of
imprisonment to
families

FAMILIES OUTSIDE
NATIONAL CONFERENCE 2022

Families Outside National Conference 2022

Families Outside hosted a national conference at The Studio in Glasgow on 16th November 2022. We had 158 delegates join us on the day from a wide range of areas including from the perspective of their own personal experiences, the third sector, Scottish Prison Service, Scottish Government, local authorities, education, health, community justice, public bodies, and colleagues from the legal profession were all in attendance.

Our focus for the conference was to highlight families who are affected by imprisonment and the costs they endure as a result. Our aim was to engage a wide audience to highlight these costs and pose the question of what they might be able to do to support in their own areas.

We heard from an array of speakers throughout the day. Delegates engaged in cost-related workshops, and in the afternoon an expert discussion panel highlighted solutions and suggested calls to action for many of the issues raised.

Introductions

- Wendy Sinclair-Giebin, HM Chief Inspector of Prisons for Scotland



Our conference Chair, Wendy Sinclair-Giebin, HM Chief Inspector of Prisons for Scotland, welcomed us all to Glasgow and highlighted a powerful day of discussions ahead.

Jodie, a family member supported by Families Outside who is now working to influence change in this area, shared some thoughts to set the context for the day. She reminded everyone that families are *'not seen, not heard, and not guilty'* and that the costs to families when someone goes to prison are far-reaching. Jodie shared she felt alone, judged, and feared for her safety. She highlighted that families are forgotten about and that many more are struggling right now, just like she and her family have, that do not have the help and support they need and deserve.

Jodie challenged us all to consider these hidden families as we progressed through the conference *"...please stop for a moment and think about the true impact imprisonment has on families, and consider what you can do to help."*

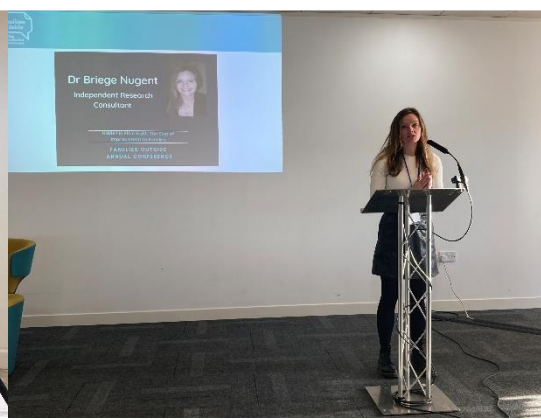
Nancy Loucks

- OBE, CEO, Families Outside



Nancy talked about Families Outside, why we exist and what we do. Families Outside exists **"To improve outcomes for children and families affected by imprisonment, creating and promoting opportunities for families to uphold and defend their rights."**

Following on from Jodie, Nancy reminded us that we still have much to do in Scotland, and we all have a part to play in identifying those children and families who are hidden.



At What Cost? Support for Children when a Parent Goes to Prison

- Sarah Beresford, Prison Reform Trust Associate



Sarah's talk focussed on the emotional cost to children when a parent goes to prison and the role of [Child Impact Assessments](#) in supporting them.

Sarah highlighted key findings of a 15-month consultation looking at the use of Child Impact Assessments for children with a mother (and now adapted for those with fathers) in the criminal justice system. It highlighted the importance of listening to children and young people with lived experience at every stage of their parent's journey. It reminded us of the need to understand the impacts on individual children properly, which can differ even within the same family, to listen to what they want and to remember to create space for them to *"change their mind"*. The talk also emphasised that there are often harmful ways in which children are viewed, where they are often seen as *"responsible for their parent's rehab"* or labelled as *"future criminals"*.

Sarah made the case for us all to re-imagine the criminal justice system to ensure children are recognised sensitively and supported appropriately, from arrest right through to release, with maintaining relationships of trust within systems and processes being a key factor.

The Cost to Children



TRAUMA

ANXIETY

ISOLATION AND LONELINESS

POOR MENTAL HEALTH

GRIEF

SELF-HARM

GUILT

SEPARATION FROM SIBLINGS

LOSS OF THE FAMILY HOME

CHANGE OF SCHOOLS

FRACTURED RELATIONSHIPS

What Children Want

- "I want someone to ask how I am doing."
- "I want to be listened to."
- "I want a say in what decisions are made about me."
- "I want to be able to change my mind."
- "I want to be seen as me."



Paying the Price: The Cost to Families of Imprisonment and Release

- Dr Brieghe Nugent, Independent Research Consultant



Brieghe highlighted key findings and recommendations from the [Paying the Price](#) research report released in October this year, which is a study to understand the costs to families of supporting someone in prison and after they have been released.

Brieghe noted that financial hardship brought about by a potential loss of income is further compounded by the significant financial costs associated with imprisonment. Such costs include prison visits which can incur expenses for travel, subsistence, and accommodation, as well as the provision of financial support for the person in prison.

Remand was an especially stressful and costly time for families, with some spending 60% of their income supporting someone in prison and on average a third of their income during a sentence. Brieghe also noted that *"...even 10 minutes of phone contact a day is more than what some prisoners earn in a week."*, calling for an urgent review into these areas.

The findings show that families already in poverty are being squeezed financially, *"to the point of being crushed"*, and highlight the role of imprisonment in creating, sustaining, and deepening poverty amongst children and families.

Brieghe emphasised the need to act now to implement changes to support these children and families who are in great need and are not considered across the justice system and beyond. Suggestions for changes include:

- To review travel costs and claiming system
- Increase prison wages
- Make visits family friendly
- Reduce rates of imprisonment
- More support for release
- Clearer information specific to the establishment, to be given to families at Court so they know what they can do, what they are entitled to and how to access it
- Remove stigma
- Provide free toiletries and clothes to people in prison, reduce costs of canteen, and Email a Prisoner and paying into accounts to be free
- Keep people local to where they live
- Provide more funding for families throughout the year



61%

of people in prison have a child



1 in 6

UK households are in serious financial difficulties



71%

of families reported reducing the quality of food they ate



60%

of families have avoided turning on their heating

*Stats from [Paying the Price: The Cost to Families Imprisonment and Release](#)

The Cost to Human Rights for People in Prison and Families Affected

- Ian Duddy, Chair of the Scottish Human Rights Commission



Ian began by reminding delegates that every one of us has human rights, from the cradle to the grave. This includes people in prison and their families, who are often a marginalised group facing the biggest barriers to human rights. It is the Government, the State, that is ultimately responsible for protecting everyone's human rights. And in Scotland, under devolution, the justice sector and prisons are the responsibility of the Scottish Government, not Westminster.

Ian highlighted concerning issues around prison conditions and the “*remand crisis*” with nearly 30% of all prisoners in Scotland on remand. He said:

“Scotland also continues to imprison more people per capita than anywhere else in the UK, and most other countries in Europe, which contributes to that overcrowding. For every 100,000 of its population, Scotland imprisons 146 people, against a Europe average of 103. Is prison really the best place for people with mental health problems or addiction?”

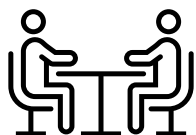
The “*...unacceptable numbers of deaths in custody*” was talked about, emphasising the right to life as a fundamental human right, yet we still see deaths occurring, including of young people. Ian mentioned the work on the Independent Review of the Response to Deaths in Prison Custody and the forthcoming anniversary of the publication of that report. The lack of action and progress from Scottish Government on the recommendations in the report was highlighted as a concern.

Ian stressed that a major call of the Independent Review was for an independent investigation to be carried out into every death in prison custody, and for families or next of kin to be involved at every stage. The Review found that current practices in Scotland were letting families down and failing to provide bereaved families with a voice. It also stated that families and next of kin should have access to full, non-means tested, legal aid funding throughout any investigations. Ian stated that not all recommendations from that Review were about spending more money: some recommendations required a change in behaviour and attitude and could be implemented straight away, such as ensuring that the Governor in charge be in touch with a family as soon as possible following a death, and the SPS providing a single point of contact for families.

Ian concluded with a plea to Scottish Government and those in power to “*...now apply energy and focus to implementing the commitments they have made, so that the rights of all Scots can be upheld.*”

Panel Discussion

The panel consisted of:



- Catherine Haley – Senior Inspector, Healthcare Improvement Scotland
- Jodie Gorman – Family Member
- Kerry Knox – Head of Family Support Families Outside
- Alison Gillies – Welfare Rights Worker, Child Poverty Action Group in Scotland
- David Logan – Family Member
- Eilidh – Family Member

Each panel member was invited to give a short opening statement about what they felt could be a solution to reduce the cost of imprisonment to families. The panel passionately highlighted and called for action on many things from Scottish Prison Service policies to public stigma. The full panel discussion provided the space to hear more ideas from experts, delegates, and more family members from across Scotland. Here are some of the key things raised as part of the discussion:



Consistency of Prison Policy and Practice

Family members called for action on consistency across the prison estate on policy and practice on many things such as the issue around being able to hand in items to a person in prison instead of having to incur high costs in postage. They emphasised the high price of snacks during visits and noted that SPS and contracted establishments could reduce this cost to families by reinstating cafes in visit halls and having them run as 'not for profit'.

Families also stressed that the 310 free minutes each month, currently given to people held in prison to phone on prison issued mobiles, has been a literal lifeline to many and should stay. If this were to be withdrawn, it would mean further costs to families.



Healthcare

The need for clearer communication with families in relation to the health of a person in prison was raised, noting that consent forms to share health information should be made available to families and people held in prison. Clear processes should ensure that Next of Kin and consent forms are registered with healthcare teams and reviewed regularly.

There was a call to the Cabinet Secretary for Justice to make electronic prescribing available across all prisons in Scotland. Currently, nurses can spend up to 6 hours a day handing out medications, limiting the time they have to provide 1-1 care for their patients and hindering recruitment to prisons.



Meaningful Visits and Contact

Prisons could do more to ensure that visits are as normal as possible, with the aim being that families and their loved ones in prison can have positive time together. There were suggestions for visits outside the prison grounds, and for visit halls routinely to have games or cards for people held in prison to enjoy with their families.

There was also a call for more meaningful connection to family life where possible, like being able to participate in events important to a family, such as, parents' nights, consultations with a doctor, or family birthdays. Prisons already have a system for video call for visits, so there was an ask for that system to be extended to include these types of events.



End Stigma and Discrimination

Panellists noted that the stigma facing people in prison and their families is huge and requires addressing. Everything from media portrayal to how families are treated by SPS staff and even people from their own communities was noted to be a significant cost. More understanding and information to the public and professionals about the impacts on families is needed.

The lack of action to support families was challenged as structural discrimination and systems must begin to address the support required for families affected.



Benefits

The panel highlighted many aspects of the benefits system that don't work well for people affected by imprisonment and their families and could be improved. They felt that the system as it relates to people in prison and their families is punitive, complex, and inconsistent across different benefits.

They called for two changes that would make a difference. One key solution would be to extend the 6-month rule for people remanded in custody to gain help with rent via universal credit. With longer remand times, extending this would mean fewer people would face homelessness on release from remand.

Another key call to action that wouldn't require a change in the current law - just a change in DWP policy - is the issue around advanced claims for universal credit in the month prior to release from prison. If advance claims were enabled then, for some people at least, the transition back into the community, in financial or practical terms, would be easier.



Final Points

The discussion emphasised tangible actions that can be taken forward now that will make a difference for children and families across Scotland who are affected by imprisonment.

Strongly agreed across the board for all issues was that accurate, timely, accessible advice and support for families affected by imprisonment is crucial. There was a strong call for the needs of families to be considered at each point in the justice system.

Workshops

Five different workshops running throughout the day focussed on the different costs of imprisonment to families. They concentrated on the **emotional** and **social** cost, the cost to **children and young people**, the **financial** cost and the **health** cost. This gave delegates the chance to engage in deeper discussions about the issues and explore what the potential solutions might be to make things better.

Key themes coming out of the discussions

- Families are often forgotten/dismissed.
- How families are treated is inconsistent.
- Some prison staff are as equally frustrated with some prison policies/ways of working. They acknowledge that some things need to change and are trying to influence change (they spoke about how this could take time).
- Some families feel judged or ignored by people in their community.
- Some families have felt well supported by their close neighbours.
- Statistics and sound bites about children being more likely to go on and offend because of parental imprisonment are unhelpful and can feel disrespectful. They are not a positive or encouraging message for children and young people.
- Language used by wider society about people in custody and their families is often inflammatory and unhelpful.
- Families are not able to book times for video calls and it is not an easy system to access.
- People in prison do not have their National Insurance paid, which will affect their pension.
- Concerns were expressed over lack of appropriate health care being delivered to families.
- Release can be a worrying and negative time for families in many ways, including rebuilding the relationship, a change in routine and the added financial impact they may incur.
- Breaking down stigma is crucial to improve experiences for children and young people.
- There needs to be increased awareness of the issues facing children and young people affected by imprisonment.
- Schools and others working with children and young people might not know if these children and young people are affected by the imprisonment of a family member.
- Listening to children and young people directly is crucial – each one is unique, and it is not for professionals to ‘impose’ what support they think is best.
- Children and young people need to access support when they need it and from someone they trust/want to engage with. This will look different for each child.



A word cloud of key themes from the discussions. The words are arranged in a cluster, with some appearing larger than others. The words include: children, justice, emotional, human, negative, prison, relationships, financial, judgement, discrimination, stigma, social, excluded, health, young, hidden, rights, employment, and unemployment.

What is already happening that is supportive in reducing the cost of imprisonment for families?

- Mobile phones in prison make communication much easier for families.
- Family visits are appreciated – designed to be more relaxed and particularly benefits children and young people.
- Family Contact Officers are helpful as long as families know who they are, and when they can be contacted (families often get through to a voicemail).
- Online payments into prison accounts are helpful.
- Breakfast/lunch packs for family visits create a relaxed mood and a bit of normality.
- Communicating with families where possible is important (and also what needs to change).
- Virtual 'walk through' prison at HMP Low Moss was seen as good practice.
- Family members in prison can also send money back to families.
- Homework clubs in prison, parent evenings, Children and Family Days.
- The throughcare programme (New Routes) can ease pressure on families.

What is missing and needs to change/improve to reduce the cost of imprisonment for families?

- Lack of consistency across establishments is a real problem.
- Identification of children and families affected needs to improve.
- Families need support to look after children through kinship arrangements so that children don't have to go into care.
- Some establishments are sticking with policies that were created as a consequence of Covid as they are 'easier for staff,' - for example, posting in items (this came up many times).
- Inconsistency - each establishment 'does things differently' and this is confusing and frustrating for families. If a new Governor comes in, things automatically change – they would welcome some stability.
- False and negative information shared in the press is both damaging and commonplace.
- The challenges for families affected by imprisonment often have to be explained, and there is very little natural empathy for this group - although attitudes often change when levels of understanding increase. We all need to do more to educate others.
- Throughcare Support Officer service is missed (by families and SPS staff), now leaving very little support available at release. There were requests for something in its place.
- How families are treated/supported following a death in custody remains problematic. Prison processes and lack of communication can add to the trauma.
- Advance Universal Credit Payment is needed.
- Discharge Grants need to be increased.
- A cap on personal accounts payments would help families under pressure to pay more.
- Reduce the costs of visiting.
- Review travel assistance scheme.



Hidden in Plain Sight – A Call to Action

- Linda Bendle, Chair, Families Outside



Linda closed the conference by reminding us all to never assume that people are not affected by this issue, and that many families are indeed *'Hidden in Plain Sight'*.

She concluded by challenging everyone to consider what they will do to improve outcomes for families affected by imprisonment.

Here are what some had to say:



Here are some other comments from the conference:

"A moving and passionate start to the #FOconf22. "We [families] are not seen, we are not heard, we are not guilty." All being encouraged to consider what we can do for families impacted by a relative in prison. Not being judged was flagged as being vital."

"We can't 'GIVE' children a voice, they already HAVE voices, but we need to give their voices space and really hear them, and we must fully include them in decision making about them #FOconf22"

Thank you from the team at Families Outside to all of our family members, speakers, delegates and workshop facilitators who made our conference possible.

For more information, please contact Toni, our Head of External Engagement:
toni.groundwater@familiesoutside.org.uk



Families Outside Services



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- Training and Awareness-Raising
- Development of Policy and Practice

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