

# Workforce development briefing

## A guide to workforce development for professionals working with families of prisoners and offenders

### Introduction

Working with prisoners' and offenders' families is an evolving discipline that requires a wide range of skills and knowledge. Research has shown that good quality family contact can both reduce reoffending and improve the health and well-being of family members. Action for Prisoners' and Offenders' Families (APOF) has consulted widely with managers and workers in its network to identify some of the skills and knowledge needed by this specialist sector.

### Background

People who work with prisoners' and offenders' families can be divided into two distinct groups: those who work specifically with prisoners' families (eg family engagement workers, visitors' centre staff, prison playworkers) and those who come into contact with prisoners' families as part of their work (eg teachers, social workers, probation staff). It is the former group that this briefing is particularly concerned with. This workforce can be seen as bridging the gap between the criminal justice sector and community support. As such, they are expected to have considerable skill in working with families as well as detailed knowledge of the criminal justice system.

In addition they must be skilled in multi-agency working and are expected to work across boundaries to forge new ways of working and to persuade colleagues to do the same. Such workers have been termed 'boundary spanners' and tend to be skilled in developing new relationships and working across traditional sectors.

Yet unlike more established professions, such as social work and teaching, working with prisoners' families lacks an initial training programme and solid communities of practice that new staff can easily slot in to. These difficulties are compounded by the fact that many family workers (especially those working in prison settings) may be situated some distance from their line managers and lack regular supervision. Operating in such conditions can be difficult, and staff have reported that they find it difficult to identify and then articulate what they don't know.

### What knowledge? Which Skills?

There is no established initial training course for this workforce despite the high levels of professionalism and wide range of skills and knowledge required. However, Hidden Sentence, a training course owned by NOMS and developed by APOF and its network,

goes some way to meet the needs of this workforce. The course raises awareness of the issues faced by prisoners' families and can lead to a Level 3 City and Guilds qualification. Appendix One gives some background to Hidden Sentence and what it can offer professionals. Although Hidden Sentence is a well-established and well-received course, it does not cover all the knowledge, skills and attitudes that are necessary for effective working with prisoners' families.

APOF has spoken extensively with its network members to find out the kinds of skills and knowledge they would like further input on. They identified areas such as safeguarding, information sharing, assertive questioning, multi-agency working, motivational skills and solid knowledge of the criminal justice system. Appendix Two shows a framework of these competencies, matching them to existing training courses.

## An Equal Workforce

The Equalities Act 2010 replaces all previous equality legislation such as the Race Relations Act and the Sex Discrimination Act. It recognises nine protected characteristics and it is illegal to discriminate against people holding these characteristics. The characteristics are: disability, sex, gender reassignment, sexual orientation, age, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race and religion and belief. Equality in terms of workforce development can be divided into two distinct areas. Firstly, organisations must ensure that they do not discriminate against employees and volunteers holding any of the protected characteristics. This will include ensuring that recruitment processes are fair and that people have equal access to ongoing support and training. It will also be useful to monitor the workforce to ensure that the community are adequately represented. There is some excellent guidance on this from the Equality

and Human Rights Commission here: [www.equalityhumanrights.com/sites/default/files/documents/EqualityAct/service\\_providers\\_guide\\_voluntary\\_and\\_community\\_sector.pdf](http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/sites/default/files/documents/EqualityAct/service_providers_guide_voluntary_and_community_sector.pdf)

Secondly, the workforce should to be made aware of the Equalities Act and how it affects their work. This is especially important because, although there is no research into how many prisoners' families hold protected characteristics, research into prisoners shows that:

- 26 per cent of prisoners come from minority ethnic groups compared to 14 per cent of the general population
- People aged over 60 are the fastest growing population in the prison estate and increased by 122 per cent between 2002 and 2012
- 20 – 30 percent of the prison estate have learning difficulties
- 49 per cent of women and 23 per cent of men in prison suffer from anxiety and depression

It is therefore important that employees have a thorough understanding of these issues and how they can avoid discriminatory practice. Organisations should offer thorough training in Equality and Diversity as part of their induction process. Suggestions on how to develop Equality and Diversity Training can be found here:

[www.equalityhumanrights.com/sites/default/files/documents/EqualityAct/service\\_providers\\_guide\\_voluntary\\_and\\_community\\_sector.pdf](http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/sites/default/files/documents/EqualityAct/service_providers_guide_voluntary_and_community_sector.pdf)

There may also be the case for more specific ongoing training and development into issues such as mental health, working with families of older prisoners and families of someone who has committed a sexual crime.

## Continuing Professional Development

A commitment to staff learning and development is key. Staff are likely to have come into post with a wide range of skills and knowledge. For example, a former probation worker will have lots of experience in the criminal justice system but may know little of services that support families.

Therefore, it is important to listen to staff about their own training and development needs and to provide opportunities for them to fill these gaps. Training naturally has cost implications, but staff development is not just about going on courses, and there are various low-cost ways of encouraging learning and development. These include encourage shadowing schemes, online learning, peer supervision, reading recommendations and Action Learning Sets.\* APOF has produced a reading list for those who are interested in furthering their knowledge in this area (Appendix Four).

Professional development flourishes in an environment in which workers are not afraid to admit that they don't know something and in which learning from mistakes is encouraged. Managers should lead by example and talk openly about gaps in knowledge.

\*Action Learning Sets are peer learning groups. When organised properly, they can be very effective in helping staff learn from each other. More can be found here: [www.actionlearningassociates.co.uk/action-learning-sets.php](http://www.actionlearningassociates.co.uk/action-learning-sets.php)

## Reflective Practice

Reflective practice should be at the heart of a learning culture. Reflective practice simply means thinking about and learning from our own and other people's experiences. Workers

who question their own ideas and learn from these reflections are in a better position to identify their learning needs. There are many ideas on how to encourage self-reflection here:

[www.open.edu/openlearn/education/learning-teach-becoming-reflective-practitioner/content-section-0](http://www.open.edu/openlearn/education/learning-teach-becoming-reflective-practitioner/content-section-0)

## Supervision

Supervision can be seen in two broad areas: line management and case supervision. Line management is about ensuring quality and standards are met, workload is effectively managed and that employees are appraised on their performance.

Case supervision is about guiding employees on their practice and gives them the chance to talk about issues that they have had difficulty with. This can be done one to one or in groups. It is important that supervisors are adequately supported and trained and supervision sessions should be planned, structured and resourced. Notes should be taken and actions agreed to be reviewed at the next meeting.

The Children's Workforce Development Council produced a useful resource on supervision which can be found here: [http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20130401151715/https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/eOrderingDownload/Providing\\_Effective\\_Supervision\\_unit.pdf](http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20130401151715/https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/eOrderingDownload/Providing_Effective_Supervision_unit.pdf)

## National Occupational Standards

The National Occupational Standards (NOS) set out what is expected of workers in terms of performance and knowledge and understanding. They are useful in drawing up job specifications and designing training. Although there are no specific standards for those who work with prisoners' families, there are related standards such as

Playwork in Prisons and Work with Parents. Appendix One lists some of the NOS that are relevant to work with prisoners' families.

## Values

So far, this briefing has looked at developing and selecting staff with the right skills and knowledge. However, values are obviously a key element of working with prisoners' families. 'Teaching' values is difficult (though not impossible) as they tend to be deep-rooted within our beliefs and are formed early in life. It is therefore important that staff with values commensurate to the role are selected in the first instance.

Values-based interviewing is a way of assessing values at the interview stage.

More on this here:

[www.nsasocialcare.co.uk/values-based-recruitment-toolkit-interview-questions](http://www.nsasocialcare.co.uk/values-based-recruitment-toolkit-interview-questions)

[www.nspcc.org.uk/Inform/research/briefings/Value-based-interviewing\\_wda95721.html](http://www.nspcc.org.uk/Inform/research/briefings/Value-based-interviewing_wda95721.html)

## Conclusions

Working with prisoners' families is a complex job which requires a highly skilled and knowledgeable workforce. Due to the emergent nature of this area of work and the lack of initial training, it is likely that employees will have gaps in their knowledge and skills. Therefore it is important that organisations foster a culture of learning and development. To summarise, organisations should:

- Use national occupational standards to draw up job descriptions and person specifications
- Investigate the possibility of values-based interviewing to ensure they are recruiting staff with attitudes commensurate to this work
- Encourage learners to identify their own learning needs

- Foster a culture in which learning from mistakes is encouraged – managers should lead by example
- Encourage reflective practice
- Investigate low-cost, flexible ways of learning such as Action Learning Sets, online training, shadowing and peer learning
- Provide regular supervision
- Provide thorough training on Equality and Diversity as part of the induction process
- Ensure that staff development costs are written into funding bids to ensure they are a valued part of any project work

## Appendix One: Hidden Sentence

The Hidden Sentence programme provides practitioners with an opportunity to consider the impact of imprisonment on children and families. It is used to increase knowledge of the prison system and families' and children's needs and to promote discussion about the relevance of this knowledge to participants' roles working with families. The programme also explores how services can be better co-ordinated in order to support children and young people affected by the imprisonment of a family member.

### Learning Outcomes

1. Understand the impact of imprisonment on prisoners' families.
2. Understand the prison system
3. Understand the support needs of prisoners' families
4. Understand the needs and wishes of prisoners' families
5. Understand how to improve the coordination of services to provide more effective support for those affected by the imprisonment of a family member
6. Understand how to improve own practice in supporting prisoners' families

The Hidden Sentence Course is now linked to a City and Guilds Qualification Understanding the Support Needs of Prisoners' Families.

## Appendix Two: National Occupational Standards

There are no National Occupational Standards (NOS) specifically for practitioners who work with prisoners' families. However, many of the existing NOS from other disciplines are relevant. We have identified some of these to help managers develop job descriptions and training needs:

- Work With Parents
- Work with Young People
- Provide effective customer service in custodial environments
- Maintain effective working relationships with families of individuals held in custody
- Carry Out Playwork in Prisons

All the NOS can be found here: <http://nos.ukces.org.uk/Pages/index.aspx>

## Appendix Three: Skills Gap Analysis

The following skills and knowledge gaps have been identified after consulting with members of APOF's training and advisory group. The list is not exhaustive. The knowledge/skills gap has been matched with an existing training course. Again, this list is by no means exhaustive and it is not an endorsement of any of the training courses mentioned.

Skills/ Knowledge Gap Identified	Existing Training/Self-directed Learning
Training on criminal justice system	Clinks Understanding the Criminal Justice System <a href="http://www.clinks.org/events/understanding-criminal-justice-system">www.clinks.org/events/understanding-criminal-justice-system</a>
Working with Families: Case management/assessments/ goal setting/ writing action plans/ exit Plans	Work With Children WP Levels 2, 3 and 4 <a href="http://www.parentinguk.org/your-work/what-is-work-with-parents/work-with-parents-course-information/">www.parentinguk.org/your-work/what-is-work-with-parents/work-with-parents-course-information/</a>  Relationship Training, Action for Children (free resource) <a href="http://www.actionforchildren.org.uk/growing-our-strengths/learning-and-sharing-zone/relationship-training">http://www.actionforchildren.org.uk/growing-our-strengths/learning-and-sharing-zone/relationship-training</a>
Mediation/ family conferencing	Family Rights Group <a href="http://www.frg.org.uk/family-group-conferences-training">www.frg.org.uk/family-group-conferences-training</a>
Working with Families of People who Commit Sexual offences	Behind the Taboo Training – APOF <a href="http://www.prisonersfamilies.org.uk">www.prisonersfamilies.org.uk</a>
Welfare Benefits Training	Citizens' Advice Bureau <a href="http://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/index/professionals/adviser_resources/advisertraining/welfare_benefits_training_courses.htm">www.citizensadvice.org.uk/index/professionals/adviser_resources/advisertraining/welfare_benefits_training_courses.htm</a>
De-escalation – ways of dealing with challenging behaviour	<a href="http://www.nntc.org.uk/index.php/http--wwwnntcorguk-indexphp-de-escalation_training-de-escalation-k58756/?k=:6::">www.nntc.org.uk/index.php/http--wwwnntcorguk-indexphp-de-escalation_training-de-escalation-k58756/?k=:6::</a>
Mental Health First Aid	<a href="http://mhfaengland.org/getting-started/find-your-course/">http://mhfaengland.org/getting-started/find-your-course/</a>
Attachment/ Child Development	Youth Justice Board have 'toolkit' for parents and training course for parents <a href="http://www.justice.gov.uk/downloads/youth-justice/yjb-toolkits/parenting/specialist-issues-attachment-disorder.pdf">www.justice.gov.uk/downloads/youth-justice/yjb-toolkits/parenting/specialist-issues-attachment-disorder.pdf</a> Young Minds – offers a range of bespoke training on attachment and child development <a href="http://www.youngminds.org.uk/training_services/bespoke_training">www.youngminds.org.uk/training_services/bespoke_training</a>



## Skills/ Knowledge Gap Identified Existing Training/Self-directed Learning

Building Resilience  
(in families and in practitioners)

The Wellbeing Project  
[www.thewellbeingproject.co.uk/resilience-training.php](http://www.thewellbeingproject.co.uk/resilience-training.php)  
Child and Family Training  
[www.childandfamilytraining.org.uk/](http://www.childandfamilytraining.org.uk/)  
Young Minds  
[www.youngminds.org.uk/training\\_services/training\\_and\\_consultancy](http://www.youngminds.org.uk/training_services/training_and_consultancy)

Playwork in a Secure Setting

Pact Prison Playworker Development Days  
[www.prisonadvice.org.uk/our-services/supporting-practitioners/training/play-worker](http://www.prisonadvice.org.uk/our-services/supporting-practitioners/training/play-worker)

Working with Families with Learning Difficulties

Foundation for People with Learning Disabilities, Awareness Training  
[www.learningdisabilities.org.uk/content/assets/pdf/publications/learning-disability-awareness-training-flyer.pdf](http://www.learningdisabilities.org.uk/content/assets/pdf/publications/learning-disability-awareness-training-flyer.pdf)

## Appendix Four: Useful reading for practitioners

A list of reports and academic essays useful for those looking to study this subject in-depth. More practical resources can be found in the Useful Information section of Hidden Sentence training materials.

Boswell, G, Poland, F and Price, A (2010) *Prison based family support* (London, Ministry of Justice)

University of Huddersfield. [www.coping-project.eu](http://www.coping-project.eu)

Condry, R *Families Shamed: The Consequences of Crime for Relatives of Serious Offenders* (Crime Ethnography)

Meek, Rosie, Lowe, Kate and McPhillips, Kate (2010) The impact of a custodial sentence on the siblings of young offenders: matching service to needs. *Prison Service Journal*, (190), 26-31.

Jacobson, J, Phillips, C and Edgar, K (2010) *'Double Trouble'? Black, Asian and minority ethnic offenders' experiences of resettlement* (London: Prison Reform Trust)

Meek, R. (2008), *Experiences of Younger Siblings of Young Men in Prison*. *Children & Society*, 22: 265–277. [onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1099-0860.2007.00108.x/abstract](http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1099-0860.2007.00108.x/abstract)

Jacobson, J and Edgar, K with Loucks, N (2007) *There when you need them most: PACTS first night in custody services* (London: Prison Reform Trust)

Meek, R (2007a) 'Parenting Education for Young Fathers in Prison', *Child and Family Social Work*, No.12, pp.239-247

Jones, A.D. & Wainaina-Wozna *COPING: Children of Prisoners, Interventions and Mitigations to Strengthen Mental Health*, A.E eds.(2013)

Meek R, (2007b) 'Experiences of Younger Siblings of Young Men in Prison', *Children and Society*

Mills, A (2005) *Settling into the Sentence: Life*

*sentence prisoners and family ties*, Paper presented to European Society of Criminology Conference, Krakow, 31st August- 3rd September 2005

Mills, A. and Codd H (2007) 'Prisoners' Families', in *Handbook on Prisons* Jewkes, Y (Devon: Willan Publishing)

Ministry of Justice/DCSF (2009) *Reducing Re-offending: Supporting families, creating better futures* (London: MOJ/DCSF)

P. Nesmith and Ruhland (2008) Children of incarcerated parents: challenges and resiliency in their own words, *Children and Youth Services Review* 1119-1130

Ormiston Trust (2012) *Risk and protective factors in the resettlement of imprisoned fathers with their families*, January 2012, Ormiston Trust <http://bit.ly/1136GpC>

Partners of Prisoners *Family Voices Report* [www.partnersofprisoners.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/EGYV-Family-Voice-Report.pdf](http://www.partnersofprisoners.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/EGYV-Family-Voice-Report.pdf)

'Parenting Education for Young Fathers in Prison' (2007a), *Child and Family Social Work*, No.12, pp.239-247

Scotland's Commissioner for Children and Young People (2008) *Not Seen. Not Heard. Not Guilty. The Rights and Status of the Children of Prisoners in Scotland* (Edinburgh: SCCYP) Available to download from [www.sccyp.org.uk](http://www.sccyp.org.uk)