



Thames Valley Partnership and
Revolving Doors Agency

The Support Needs of Offenders and their Families

Sam Wright and Sajida Khan
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Executive Summary

Introduction

In November 2009, Revolving Doors Agency commissioned Thames Valley Partnership to undertake a small-scale research project examining the unmet support needs of offenders and their families and to explore potential methods of addressing these needs. The main aims of this work are thus to highlight the difficulties facing families of offenders and to examine the potential for the improved integration of work to address the complex needs of these vulnerable families.

The policy background

The support needs of offenders' families has been a neglected area of social policy – although recognition of the crucial role that children and families can play in supporting an offender to reduce re-offending is beginning to grow. In addition to this 'reducing re-offending' driver for policy change, there is also an acknowledgement that the stressed and/or fragmented nature of many offenders' family relationships results in an increased likelihood of inter-generational transmission of offending behaviours. As such, offenders' families need support in their own right – as part of an early intervention effort to reduce social exclusion and the potential for future offending.

The scale and range of support needs

A 2007 joint priority review on the children of offenders¹ revealed that approximately 160,000 children have a parent in prison each year - a figure two and a half times the number of children in care. These children are three times more likely to have mental health problems or to engage in antisocial behaviour than their peers and nearly two thirds of boys who have a parent in prison will go on to commit some kind of crime themselves. Relatively little is known about the situation of offenders' families and the true scale and breadth of their support needs remains largely hidden. But commonly, support needs relate to: financial/debt issues, health problems, domestic violence, substance misuse, mental health difficulties, feelings of stigma and social exclusion.

The four case studies developed for this research cast some light on the types of hidden support need that exist and highlight:

1. How an individual's imprisonment impacts upon their family.
2. The pre-existing support needs of these families and how they are exacerbated by the criminal justice system.

¹ DCSF and MoJ 2007 Joint priority review on the children of offenders.
http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/social_exclusion_task_force/families_at_risk/review_analysis.aspx

Provision of support across Thames Valley

Like the 2004 Family Matters report, the interviews conducted for this research identified pockets of good practice being delivered by some organisations across the Thames Valley – not just by visitor centres and prisons, but also by schools, children’s centres and the probation service. But provision remains hugely variable, with significant delivery gaps and little collaboration or shared learning between practitioners. This patchy service provision arises because of a lack of joined-up working between the resettlement and Every Child Matters agendas. This results in inequality of access to support for families and strategic coordination is required to drive this area of social policy forward.

Implications – potential to develop Family Matters

The Family Matters project supports the resettlement of offenders across Thames Valley and seeks to break the cycle of offending within families by:

- Improving access to information for offenders’ families;
- Integrating the work of the criminal justice agencies and family and children’s services in support of vulnerable families; and
- Strengthening family ties to aid prisoner re-integration into their family and community (where appropriate).

The work of Family Matters was described in very positive terms – identifying a range of beneficial impacts in terms of raising awareness, producing useful information materials for families, spearheading change and helping to develop good practice.

However, the research also found a small number of barriers to the development of Family Matters:

- The ‘invisibility’ of prisoners’ families means that their support needs remain largely hidden - and a systematic method of identifying these families, assessing their needs and putting support packages in place is required at point of sentencing.
- It is critical that Social Services, CAMHS and Family Matters work together due to the real need for family support and child protection.
- There is a continuous need to roll Family Matters training out systematically across statutory, voluntary and faith sectors, targeting frontline staff through to senior management. One priority group should be Headteachers, SENCOs and Home-School Link Workers. Every age group of child/young person should be able to access support – throughout the whole year and during weekends.

The stakeholder interviews uncovered numerous recommendations about how to develop approaches to address offenders' families support needs more effectively. These recommendations relate to:

- Identifying families in need of support
- Providing support to vulnerable families
- Developing interagency coordination
- Policy development
- Building the evidence base

Summary and conclusions

The potential scope for positive family relationships to contribute to the reducing re-offending agenda is slowly being acknowledged. Family circumstances – whether providing the informal support and security that facilitate desistance from offending, or causing the chaos, stress and trauma that foster further offending behaviour – need examining as part of any strategy to address both re-offending and child welfare.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Executive Summary.....	ii
1. Introduction.....	6
1.1. Research design.....	7
1.2. Report structure.....	8
2. The policy background.....	9
2.1. Every Child Matters and the Children Act 2004	9
2.2. Think Family.....	9
2.3. Reducing Re-Offending.....	11
2.4. New community safety and criminal justice duties.....	12
2.5. Summary: developing integrated practice	12
3. The scale and range of support needs.....	14
3.1. Existing evidence	14
3.2. Findings from Thames Valley stakeholder interviews	18
3.3. Identifying and engaging families in need of support	21
3.4. Thames Valley case studies	23
3.5. Summary	28
4. Provision of support across Thames Valley.....	30
4.1 The criminal justice system.....	30
4.2 Children’s services.....	34
4.3 Health and social care.....	37
4.4 Strategic oversight	40
4.5 Summary	41
5. Implications: developing the work of Family Matters	42
5.1 Family Matters’ achievements	42
5.2 Barriers facing Family Matters	43
5.3 Meeting the needs of offenders’ families	45
6. Summary and conclusions.....	50

1. Introduction

In November 2009, Revolving Doors Agency² commissioned Thames Valley Partnership³ to undertake a small-scale research project to examine the unmet support needs of offenders and their families across Thames Valley and to explore potential methods of addressing these needs. This research project arises from a desire to inform and share understanding of the difficulties facing families of offenders, and to help develop integrated working to support such vulnerable families and address their complex needs.

This report presents the findings from this research – and specifically examines whether models of work similar to that used by the Family Matters project⁴ operating across Thames Valley could be extended to address unmet complex support needs.

Family Matters

Family Matters is a project that seeks to break the cycle of offending within families by supporting the resettlement of offenders across Thames Valley. It aims to:

- Improve offenders' families access to information;
- Integrate the work of the criminal justice agencies and family and children's services in support of vulnerable families; and
- Strengthen family ties to aid prisoner re-integration into their family and community (where appropriate).

Family Matters also seeks to develop:

- Integrated working between the criminal justice agencies and the statutory and voluntary agencies working with families and children to ensure that the needs of offenders and their families are met.
- Increased understanding of the needs of families and children of offenders and better access to relevant support.
- More help to parents with a family member in prison to strengthen protective factors and reduce the likelihood of future offending by their children.

² A national charity concerned with mental health and the criminal justice system. www.revolving-doors.co.uk/

³ A charity seeking to build and sustain safer communities across Thames Valley. <http://www.thamesvalleypartnership.org/>

⁴ Details of the Family Matters project can be found on: www.thamesvalleypartnership.org.uk

- Improved access to services for both agencies and families.
- A diverse and flexible range of support services for families who wish to stay together and help to devise their own solutions including family group conferencing, and self-help/peer support.
- Successful reintegration of offenders to their families where this is in the interests of both offenders and their families.
- A more realistic appraisal of the challenges of returning home after imprisonment and support to the families to make decisions in the interests of children.

Specific strands of work include:

- The piloting of more appropriate assessment of prisoners' and priority offenders' family circumstances - both in the community and upon reception into custody;
- Work with NOMS to improve their understanding of the complex reality of the family circumstances of offenders;
- Brokering dialogue and understanding between criminal justice agencies and support agencies working with families and children;
- Piloting multi-agency work and information sharing across the criminal justice and children's support agencies in areas of deprivation with high concentrations of offenders;
- Providing multi-agency training and practical information packs for use across children's centres and prison visitor centres and developing a cascade model for training;
- Promoting community based/self-help initiatives within family centres, Sure Start/children's centres and extended schools; and
- Piloting ways of using visitors' centres in prisons as open accessible sources of practical help and family learning.

Further details about the Family Matters project can be found at:
www.thamesvalleypartnership.org.uk

1.1. Research design

This research examined the key issues around accessing support services for offenders and their families, through:

- Detailed interviews with key stakeholders working in the fields of resettlement, reducing re-offending and Every Child Matters; and
- Interviews with a small number of offenders and their families.

The interview schedules used in this project are included as appendices to this report.

Stakeholders were initially identified by the Family Matters project – and initial discussions with these individuals also led onto further contacts for interview. A small number of stakeholders also provided access to families of offenders for interview. Each participating family received a gift voucher in recognition of their time that they contributed to the research.

Interviews with offenders and their families were all recorded and transcribed. Interviews with stakeholders were partially transcribed for thematic analysis.

1.2. Report structure

Section 2 of this report provides a brief description of the national policy context in relation to offenders' families support needs. Section 3 explores the scale and range of support needs – using case studies generated as part of this research to expand upon what is currently known about these issues. Section 4 describes the provision and accessibility of support across Thames Valley – with section 5 examining the implications of this service framework for the developing role of Family Matters. The issues raised throughout the report are summarised in section 6.

2. The policy background

The issue of the support needs of offenders' families has in the recent past been a neglected area of social policy. With probation service reforms requiring offender management approaches that increase the focus on the individual offender and their criminogenic needs, the capacity to address their wider, family support needs has diminished. However, the crucial role that children and families can play in supporting an offender to reduce re-offending is beginning to be recognised by policy makers. In addition to this 'reducing re-offending' driver for policy change, there is also an acknowledgement that the stressed and/or fragmented nature of many offenders' family relationships results in an increased likelihood of inter-generational transmission of offending behaviours. As such, offenders' families need support in their own right – as part of an early intervention effort to reduce social exclusion and the potential for future offending.

This area of social policy sits at the convergence of the child welfare and reducing reoffending agendas – also influenced by policies and practice relating to antisocial behaviour, social exclusion, mental health and community safety. This brief section highlights key recent policy developments in order to explain the context against which this research exists.

2.1. Every Child Matters and the Children Act 2004

In September 2003, the *Every Child Matters* Green Paper was published, leading to the 2004 *Children Act* which heralded a programme of reform in children's services to safeguard children and promote their welfare. The Act identified five components of well-being for children:

- Being healthy (physical/mental health and emotional well-being)
- Staying safe (protection from harm and neglect)
- Enjoying and achieving (education, training and recreation)
- Making a positive contribution (the contribution made by children/young people to society)
- Achieving economic well-being (social and economic well-being).

2.2. Think Family

The Every Child Matters agenda has recently begun to consider the impact that family member involvement in the criminal justice system can have upon families – particularly upon children. 'Think Family' is a cross-Departmental programme jointly funded by the Department for Education⁵, the Home Office, Ministry of Justice and the Department of Health and supported by the Department of Communities and Local Government. It aims to help local authorities (working with partners) to ensure more vulnerable families receive targeted family and parenting support.

⁵ Formerly known as the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF).

In 2009, the Ministry of Justice and the Department for Children, Schools and Families published *Reducing re-offending: supporting families, creating better futures: a framework for improving the local delivery of support for the families of offenders*⁶. This framework aims to develop a coherent system to support offenders' children and families by ensuring⁷:

- Strong national, regional and local partnerships working together on the Every Child Matters and Reducing Re-offending agendas.
- Greater consistency in meeting the needs of offenders' families and clear routes for them to be able to access support.
- Families are supported within local communities at each stage of the criminal justice system, ensuring that the children are in receipt of relevant universal services and linking them with relevant targeted services to support them through the process.
- That all parts of the system 'Think Family' and local authorities offer targeted parenting and family support for children and families of offenders with additional needs.
- Children who are suffering, or are likely to suffer, harm are identified and safeguarded.
- A diverse Third Sector, working with offenders' families and making the case for investing in these families as part of a wider agenda to tackle social exclusion.

Since April 2009 all local authorities have received funding to support the introduction of:

- 'Think Family' practice – making sure that the support provided by children's, adults' and family services is coordinated and responds to individual problems that affect the whole family.
- Targeted support for parents and families - such as Family Intervention Projects and Parenting Early Intervention Programmes designed to provide support to families experiencing problems.

For 2010/11, funding⁸ has been made available to:

- Coordinate children, adult and family services;
- Provide a Youth Crime Intervention Project – providing help with parenting, life skills, housing, mental health, drug and alcohol problems and getting children back into school to families 'in the greatest difficulty' with children at risk of offending; and
- Offer a Parenting Early Intervention Programme (PEIP) to improve parenting skills through delivery of parenting programmes to parents of children aged 8 to 13 at risk of negative outcomes.

⁶ MoJ and DCSF 2009 *Reducing re-offending: supporting families, creating better futures: A Framework for improving the local delivery of support for the families of offenders*. This framework highlights the North Oxon network as an example of good practice (p28) and Family Matters were invited to run a workshop the framework's launch event - to disseminate the Reading inside-out/outside-in approach.

⁷ The framework also lists the role of local services and agencies in supporting the children and families of offenders.

⁸ This funding replaces the Parenting Support Strategy grant, the Respect Parenting Practitioner grant and the Family Intervention Project grants.

The grant also provides continuing funding for:

- Parenting experts and Respect Parenting Practitioners to deliver parenting programmes on a one-to-one and group basis targeting parents of children and young people whom local agencies agree to be 'at risk';
- 67 Family Intervention Projects to work with the most challenging families to tackle anti-social behaviour and prevent homelessness;
- 32 Family Intervention Projects to work with families living in poverty who have significant barriers to work such as drug and alcohol misuse, poor housing and mental health problems; and
- 15 family pathfinders to test the Think Family approach.

2.3. Reducing Re-Offending

In 2004, the Home Office published its *National Action Plan on Reducing Re-Offending* - setting out a strategy for rehabilitating offenders and accompanied in 2005 by the *National Reducing Re-offending Delivery Plan* that linked directly with the Children Act approach by promoting support for children and families of offenders.

The Reducing Re-offending agenda focuses on seven 'pathways' – the penultimate pathway being of most relevance to this research:

- Accommodation;
- Education, training and employment;
- Health;
- Drugs and alcohol;
- Finance, benefit and debt;
- Children and families; and
- Attitudes, thinking and behaviour.

The role of the National Offender Management Service

Fundamental reforms have been introduced to the criminal justice system over the past five years – particularly to the strategic management of prison and probation services which is now jointly overseen by the National Offender Management Service (NOMS), and to the commissioning of resettlement services. In relation to the Children and Families Pathway, NOMS aims to support offenders' family relationships by:

- Ensuring that life skills, including parenting and relationship skills, are provided for offenders through mainstream support;
- Engaging with the voluntary and community sector and faith communities in supporting children and families;
- Developing better advice and guidance for offenders' children and families;
- Ensuring that the needs of offenders' children and families are considered within the implementation of *Every Child Matters*;
- Recognising that the most prolific offenders are often those with the most challenging lifestyles who require additional help to maintain their family ties.

2.4. New community safety and criminal justice duties

From 1 April 2010⁹, Community Safety Partnerships (CSPs) in England¹⁰:

- Have a new duty to implement a strategy to reduce re-offending by adult and young offenders;
- Have the probation service as a responsible authority¹¹; and
- Have an expanded section 17 remit (under the Crime and Disorder Act 1998) such that the existing duty (to consider crime and disorder reduction when exercising their functions) now also includes consideration of reducing re-offending.

Other changes in policy and practice that will impact upon the experiences of families involved in the criminal justice system include:

- The development of Integrated Offender Management (IOM);
- The growing accountability of local partners for reducing re-offending; and
- Attempts to improve probation's engagement with Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) and CSPs in order to improve equality of access to mainstream services and the joint commissioning of services for offenders.

2.5. Summary: developing integrated practice

Whilst the development of integrated working between criminal justice agencies and family and children's services is extremely challenging, alongside PACT and Action for Prisoners' Families providing support for prisoners' families, additional examples of developing practice are emerging, including:

- ADFAM working with the Prison Service to improve support for families of drug misusing offenders.
- VCS initiatives to support family learning, such as: Family Man/Fathers Inside (funded by DfES).
- Time For Families (in the East of England) - a seven year collaboration to improve family ties between offenders and their children.
- In the West Midlands, NOMS has funded a regional pathfinder¹² 'Families Do Matter' that aims to strengthen family ties, support children and families and reduce re-offending¹³.

⁹ Under the Policing and Crime Act 2009.

¹⁰ Formerly known as Crime and Disorder Partnerships (CDRPs).

¹¹ Having previously been a cooperating body.

¹² Through a £2m grant over three years, from the Invest To Save initiative.

¹³ Led by the Regional Offender Manager, this partnership with mainstream agencies and key national and local voluntary organisations aims to reduce re-offending by three per cent over three years, through the development of prison and community based interventions and information, including:

- Increased opportunities for families to support rehabilitation
- Developing local community family support and advice service

- The Parenting Fund has supported three projects (whose target group includes offenders) that aim to improve young parents' life skills, and help them to develop an understanding of parenting roles and responsibilities.

The recent history of policy development around the support needs of offenders' families, combined with new offender management approaches for priority groups of offenders means that the important role that families can play in supporting offenders to reduce re-offending is re-emerging as worthy of attention. Recognition of the impact that stressed and fragmented family relationships can have upon children – their social exclusion and their future propensity to become involved in offending – evidence the need to support offenders' families in their own right. However, this area of social policy sits at the convergence of child welfare and reducing reoffending agendas and also overlaps with issues such as antisocial behaviour, social exclusion, mental health, substance misuse and community safety. In such complex areas of social policy, it is all too easy for those focusing on one particular issue to assume mistakenly that other strands of policy work are making provisions for this client group – with the result that resources diminish and support atrophies. Unless carefully coordinated and actively developed, what look like exciting policy developments can quickly wither.

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- Providing practical support for families in maintaining contact and visiting prisoners
 - Other measures to reduce family breakdown, such as family learning and parenting skills
 - Raising awareness by mainstream services of the needs of this group.

3. The scale and range of support needs

3.1. Existing evidence

In 2007, the Department for Children, Schools and Families and the Ministry of Justice carried out a joint priority review on the children of offenders¹⁴. Key findings were that:

- Approximately 160,000 children have a parent in prison each year (2.5 times the number of children in care).
- These children are three times more likely to have mental health problems or to engage in anti-social behaviour than their peers – meaning that one in three will suffer a significant mental health problem.
- Nearly two thirds of boys who have a parent in prison will go on to commit some kind of crime themselves.
- Local authorities have no picture of demand in their area and support nationally is patchy and fragmented.

The review identified that:

'Parental imprisonment is a good trigger for reviewing these children's circumstances: a timely opportunity to identify children at risk of poor outcomes and to offer support to the family and children, to mitigate the effects of both parental imprisonment and family circumstance.'

Because of the complex (and multi-directional) nature of impacts between family life and individual offending behaviour, it is difficult to conceptualise all the different aspects to this issue – they can perhaps best be summarised in three key questions:

1. How does an individual's offending and involvement in the criminal justice system impact upon the rest of their family?
2. What pre-existing support needs do these families have and how are these expanded/exacerbated by the criminal justice system?
3. How does one family member's involvement in the criminal justice system impact upon the likelihood of future offending for other family members?

Very little is known in relation to these questions – although there is some evidence around offenders' support needs, the benefits that supporting family relationships can have in reducing re-offending and the impact of multiple social disadvantage upon families and children. This is briefly summarised below:

¹⁴ DCSF and MoJ 2007 Joint priority review on the children of offenders.
http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/social_exclusion_task_force/families_at_risk/review_analysis.aspx

Offenders

Research with offenders reveals the complex, disjointed and dysfunctional family relationships of many prisoners¹⁵. The mental health needs of prisoners are similarly extensive. Around 70% of prisoners have two or more mental health problems and 20% of male and 15% of female prisoners have previously experienced a psychiatric acute admission to hospital¹⁶. Rates of self-harm and attempted suicide in prison are high – with the greatest risk of suicide or self harm among newly arrived prisoners (in their first seven days in prison) and among newly released prisoners. Some groups, such as women and young people, suffer disproportionately from mental health problems in prison.

Research with young offenders has also revealed high levels of support need¹⁷, including those relating to:

- Social relationships (48%)
- Education/work (36%)
- Mental health (31%)
- Learning disability¹⁸ (20%).

This research found that young offenders in the community had significantly more support needs than those in secure care and that their needs were often unmet – highlighting the necessity of implementing a structured needs assessment within custody and community settings in conjunction with provision of a continuous care programme¹⁹.

Whilst serious mental illness may be identified at court²⁰, undiagnosed or underlying mental health problems are likely to go unnoticed. Most of the research conducted with mentally ill offenders focuses primarily upon psychological and psychiatric questions – but findings rarely filter through to criminal justice policy and practice²¹ - perhaps because of the scale of resources that would be required to implement intensive case management approaches to address the needs of offenders with mental

¹⁵ Clarke L. and Burton J. 2006 Maintaining and Supporting Family Ties: Research with Prolific and Priority Offenders in HMP Bullingdon. Thames Valley Partnership.

¹⁶ Sainsbury Centre for Mental Health *Commissioning mental health care in the criminal justice system: 10 top tips for PCT Boards*.

¹⁷ Chitsabesan P., Kroll L., Bailey S., Kenning C., Sneider S., MacDonald W. and Theodosiou L. 2006 *Mental health needs of young offenders in custody and in the community*. British Journal of Psychiatry, 188, 534-40. A nationally representative survey of 301 young offenders (151 in custody and 150 in the community) conducted in six areas across England and Wales.

¹⁸ IQ < 70.

¹⁹ Chitsabesan P., Kroll L., Bailey S., Kenning C., Sneider S., MacDonald W. and Theodosiou L. 2006 *Mental health needs of young offenders in custody and in the community*. British Journal of Psychiatry, 188, 534-40. A nationally representative survey of 301 young offenders (151 in custody and 150 in the community) conducted in six areas across England and Wales.

²⁰ Shaw J., Tomenson B. and Creed F. 2003 A screening questionnaire for the detection of serious mental illness in the criminal justice system. *Journal of Forensic Psychiatry & Psychology*. 14, 1, 138-150. Of 1,306 court attendees interviewed using SCAN, 113 had an ICD 10 diagnosis with an index of definition (ID) of 5 or more. Of these, 38 had a diagnosis of schizophrenia or other psychoses and 68 of depression or bipolar affective disorder.

²¹ Roesch R., Ogloff J.R. and Eaves D. 1995 Mental health research in the criminal justice system: The need for common approaches and international perspectives. *International Journal of Law and Psychiatry*. 1995 Winter; 18, 1, 1-14.

health and other multiple problems. Yet high rates of substance misuse among offenders (including mentally ill offenders)²² reveal the degree of overlap between these different support needs – and the critical importance of considering these issues within the criminal justice system.

Comparing suicide rates among recently released²³ prisoners in England and Wales with those of the general population reveals a much greater risk of suicide among recently released prisoners - especially in the first few weeks after release²⁴. Indeed, the risk of suicide in recently released prisoners is approaching that seen in discharged psychiatric patients – highlighting the real need for prison, probation, health, and social services to develop more collaborative practices in providing support for this high-risk group.

In summary, whilst some research has been conducted on the prevalence and needs of offenders, there is a need to build a body of evidence that helps to identify the factors that may help prevent the "revolving door phenomenon" whereby individuals with complex and multiple support needs continuously rebound through different elements of the criminal justice and social support system.

The short-term benefits of family relationships in reducing re-offending

Evidence is beginning to emerge about the positive impact that family relationships can have in reducing re-offending. Ex-prisoners who are visited by a family member have a significantly lower re-offending rate – with the odds that they will re-offend within a year being 39 per cent higher if they have received no visits²⁵. Furthermore, prisoners with family ties are far more likely to report having both housing and a job to go to on release, thus reducing the problems which housing, employment and other services face when working with them in the community²⁶. However, whilst 'Children and Families' have been identified as one of the seven pathways to reducing re-offending, this aspect of social policy remains less developed than the others.

The impact of multiple disadvantage upon children's outcomes

The *Think Family* evidence-base describes how parents are the most significant influence on their children's prospects – with effective, warm, authoritative parenting giving children confidence, a sense of wellbeing

²² Roesch R., Ogloff J.R. and Eaves D. 1995 Mental health research in the criminal justice system: The need for common approaches and international perspectives. *International Journal of Law and Psychiatry*. 1995 Winter; 18, 1, 1-14.

²³ Up to 12 months.

²⁴ Pratt D., Piper M., Appleby L., Webb R. and Shaw J. 2006 *Suicide in recently released prisoners: a population-based cohort study*. *Lancet*. 368, 9530, 119-123. A suicide rate of 156 per 100 000 person-years was found for individuals within 1 year of release from prison. 79 (21%) suicides occurred within the first 28 days after release. In all age groups, suicide rates were higher in recently released prisoners than in the general population. The overall age-standardised mortality ratio for recently released prisoners was 8.3 (95% CI 7.5-9.3) for men and 35.8 (25.4-50.2) for women.

²⁵ MoJ 2008 *Factors linked to re-offending: a one year follow-up of prisoners who took part in the Resettlement Surveys 2001, 2003, 2004*. MoJ Research Summary 5.

²⁶ MoJ and DCSF 2009 *Reducing re-offending: supporting families, creating better futures: A Framework for improving the local delivery of support for the families of offenders*.

and self worth. Effective parenting can also stimulate a child's capacity to learn and is a hugely protective factor for children's outcomes. On the other hand, parental problems (such as mental and long-term physical ill health, offending, substance misuse and domestic violence) limit the capacity to parent positively and can have a long-term negative impact upon children's lives²⁷.

Thus, family problems such as substance dependency or poor mental health can mean that consistent and effective parenting is hard to achieve. Lack of effective relationships at home can lead to the development of aggression and behavioural problems in children. This can result in poor attainment in school, peer exclusion and socialisation with other disaffected young people, with whom young people often start to offend. More specifically:

- 63 per cent of boys whose fathers go to prison are eventually convicted themselves²⁸.
- Harsh, negative or inconsistent discipline, lack of emotional warmth or supervision and parental conflict all increase the risk that children will develop emotional and behavioural problems that can lead to anti-social behaviour, substance misuse and crime²⁹.
- Children who go on to become prolific young offenders typically suffer from harsh or neglectful parenting from parents and develop behaviour difficulties at an early age³⁰.
- Having a persistent conduct disorder as a child increases the risk of a police recorded violent act a hundredfold³¹.
- Children who have witnessed domestic violence are 2.5 times more likely to develop serious social and behavioural problems than other children³², and they are more likely to be perpetrators or victims of domestic violence as adults³³.

Thus, key risk factors that have been associated with offending have been identified as³⁴:

- Mental ill health
- Domestic violence
- Offending/having a parent in prison
- Substance misuse

²⁷ Ghate, D. and Hazel, N., 2004 Parenting in poor environments: stress, support and coping, London, Policy Research Bureau.

²⁸ Ref Think Families evidence base.

²⁹ Ghate, D. and Hazel, N., Parenting in poor environments: stress, support and coping, Policy Research Bureau: London, 2004.

³⁰ Chang, J. J., Halpern, C.T., and Kaufman, J.S., 2007 *Maternal Depressive Symptoms, Father's Involvement, and the Trajectories of Child Problem Behaviours in a US National Sample*, Archives of Paediatrics & Adolescent Medicine, 161, 697–703.

³¹ Odgers, C.L., Caspi A., Broadbent J.M., Dickson N., Hancox R.J., Harrington H., Poulton R., Sears M.R., Murray T.W. and Moffitt T.E. 2007 Prediction of Differential Adult Health Burden by Conduct Problem Subtypes in Males. *Arch Gen Psychiatry*. 64: 476–48.

³² Wolfe, D., Zak, L., Wilson, S., and Jaffe, P. 1986 *Child Witnesses to Violence between Parents: Critical Issues in Behavioural and Social Adjustment*. Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology. 14, 1, 95–104.

³³ Whitfield, C., Anda, R., Dube, S., and Felitti V., 2003 Violent Childhood Experiences and the Risk of Intimate Partner Violence as Adults. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*. 18, 2, 166–185.

³⁴ Reference Think Family evidence

- Child abuse and neglect
- Poor parenting (harsh, inconsistent parenting, lack of supervision)
- Family conflict/breakdown
- Deprivation and unemployment
- Behaviour problems, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, conduct disorder, anti-social behaviour
- Truancy and exclusion
- Low achievement at school
- Teenage pregnancy
- Taken into care of local authority

The Social Exclusion Taskforce estimated that 2 per cent of families with children (equating to 140,000 families) experience five or more disadvantages³⁵. For 13-14 year olds in these families, the consequences can be startling:

- They are 36 times more likely to be excluded from school than children in families with no problems³⁶.
- They are six times more likely to have been in care or to have contact with the police³⁷.

3.2. Findings from Thames Valley stakeholder interviews

A consistent finding from the stakeholder interviews was that there is relatively little direct local or national research about the support needs of offenders' families – apart from the emerging Think Family evidence. Until very recently, offenders' family support needs have largely been ignored. With the Home Office not having any precise figures for the number of families affected by the imprisonment of a family member, the scale of this issue is unknown. Without some kind of baseline assessment to examine the prevalence and breadth of families' support needs, it is impossible to know how many families and children are affected.

However, the range of support needs experienced by different families is likely to be enormous, including – substance misuse, financial/debt issues, health problems, domestic violence, mental health difficulties, feelings of stigma and exclusion. To a certain extent, the hidden nature of family support need may have been exacerbated because the probation service's engagement with families is limited, focusing more on dealing with offenders as individuals.

Despite a relative lack of research, stakeholders interviewed for this research described their personal knowledge and experience arising from

³⁵ Social Exclusion Taskforce 2007 *Families at Risk: Background on families with multiple disadvantages*, Cabinet Office.

www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/social_exclusion_task_force/families_at_risk.aspx

³⁶ Social Exclusion Taskforce 2007 *Families at Risk: Background on families with multiple disadvantages*, Cabinet Office.

www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/social_exclusion_task_force/families_at_risk.aspx

³⁷ Social Exclusion Taskforce 2007 *Families at Risk: Background on families with multiple disadvantages*, Cabinet Office.

www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/social_exclusion_task_force/families_at_risk.aspx

work across a variety of fields (including: criminal justice, education, child welfare). As would be expected, they identified a wide variety of support needs that families would experience, including: financial; accommodation; emotional/psychological, physical and mental health; learning difficulties; parenting skills and communication/relationship support needs. It was identified that there will be enormous variety in the number and depth of support needs – in particular, some families will have been involved with the criminal justice system for many years, others will be new to it.

The overlaps between family involvement in the criminal justice system and child welfare are clear. Indeed, much child protection work (either children in local authority care or on the Child Protection Register) often involve families already known to the police – with histories of a parent or other family member being in prison.

Within Thames Valley, some work is being developed to explore the impact upon children of having a family member in prison – but it is difficult to research. Attempts at undertaking a school survey have been unsuccessful because children (and parents) are reluctant to talk about this issue – often trying to keep anonymous because they do not want to be judged. However, informal exploration within the education system reveals a substantial number of families affected – with one school estimating that at least two children in every class have a family member who has been through the criminal justice system.

It is important to think about the ‘family journey’ through the criminal justice system – from court appearance and sentencing, to imprisonment and then finally release³⁸:

Sentencing Having a family member sent into custody can be devastating – many families are unprepared and sometimes other family members attending at court do not even have the means to get home (because the offender drove them all to court). Families need immediate support at this point – it is crucial that a way of identifying family members of those sentenced to prison and assessing what their support needs are, is developed.

During custody Immediate support needs often relate to benefits, finances and tenancy issues. Many families need emergency funds and foodbank vouchers because it can take 6 weeks to sort benefits out. Many families will need support in sorting out their benefits (particularly if they have learning/ literacy difficulties). A wide range of issues may need addressing at this stage – many of which will have specialist services

³⁸ For further information about the ‘journey through the criminal justice system, see: *Workbooks to support children with a family member in prison* (by Eileen Thompson) and other materials available on the Social Care Institute for Excellence website: www.scie.org.uk .

that can assist, including:

- Tenancy, finances / debt – Floating Support services can be very helpful as can Homestart;
- Mental health needs – MIND offers a befriending service;
- Substance misuse – SMART provides help for alcohol and drug misusers.

The family is also likely to need information about how to make a first prison visit.

However, the family will also need to help any children to come to terms with the imprisonment of their relative (sometimes they need to decide what the children should be told) and how they should best be supported.

Over the longer term, support for what has perhaps temporarily become a lone parent family may also be needed (Including help with: the reassignment of parenting roles/tasks; the development of new routines, the need for low cost crèche care; subsidies for school holiday activities and respite care).

Returning home Both the individual released from prison and the rest of the family need to readjust to family life again after release. The transition back to family life can be difficult – and ideally should be addressed pre-release as well as supported afterwards. However, this aspect of resettlement is often overlooked, and families are unsupported unless either the probation or police services (for PPOs) are involved with them.

In particular, for families where there has been a history of domestic violence, there is a clear need for preparation before they are reunited – especially if a previously abusive partner is returning to the family home.

Supporting children

Having a family member sent to prison can have an enormous emotional impact upon children – often affecting them like bereavement, but sometimes carrying additional stigma and fear of judgemental attitudes. Sometimes adults do not tell children what has happened – blaming the family member's absence on hospitalisation, a new job located far away, or travel. Sometimes the story may be in the media before the children have been told directly – or they may hear it from outside the family.

Many parents need advice on how best to handle the situation with children – in a way that takes account of the different types of relationships that may be affected and the varying needs of children at different ages. Parents also need to be encouraged to spend time with their children to explore and identify their feelings – this may need to cover issues such as shame, anxiety, not knowing how to react, not knowing what they should tell others³⁹.

Schools witness the negative impact in child behaviour – with some children ‘acting out’ and becoming disruptive, whilst others may become withdrawn and depressed. Often, schools may be unaware of what has happened to the family – and may dismiss the child’s behaviour as being naughty. Parents need to be encouraged to inform key school staff about what has happened, so that the child(ren) can be supported at school as well as at home. Staff working within schools need training about the impact upon children of having a family member in prison – and need to ensure that they are supportive and considerate about the sharing of information, rather than being judgemental or discriminatory⁴⁰.

3.3. Identifying and engaging families in need of support

As the arrangements for interviewing offenders and their families have testified, it is very challenging to identify and engage with families who wish to remain unidentified and out of external scrutiny. In North Oxon, those sentenced to prison for over 12 months will have a pre-sentence report (PSR) written that should trigger the identification of any relevant children to their local Children’s Centre. However, for those living outside of North Oxon, and for **all** offenders receiving short sentences, there is no current method of identifying the families affected – although their needs can be equally great.

‘Hard to reach’ families may not be distinguishable in terms of particular demographic or social characteristics. Rather they are merely families who wish to avoid support services due to their negative attitudes towards external agencies and their low expectations about what can be achieved. If a family feels marginalised, they are less likely to access support or engage with services. Family support work undertaken by the Priority and Prolific Offender scheme has revealed that some extended families create very strong internal networks, which can act to exclude external input – sometimes reinforced by cultural barriers as well. Those enmeshed in extended families with long histories of offending can be highly dependent on those relationships and unlikely to access external support. There can also be high levels of resistance to the input of external agencies among families where there is domestic abuse.

³⁹ For further information about the ‘journey through the criminal justice system, see: *Workbooks to support children with a family member in prison* (by Eileen Thompson) and other materials available on the Social Care Institute for Excellence website: www.scie.org.uk.

⁴⁰ Sharon Evans 2009 *Guidelines for working with children who have a ‘family member’ in prison*. Oxfordshire County Council.

Nevertheless, sometimes when agencies have been able to identify and engage a family, the adults experience an enormous sense of relief in being able finally to talk about the issues being experienced. There is often a variety of support services and informal networks that a family can tap into – although it can be difficult to get support for families of sex offenders.

Another important consideration is that of the community – families living in more affluent areas may feel particularly isolated by the experience of having a relative in prison. In more deprived communities, whilst there may be more commonality of this experience, there is also likely to be a higher incidence of multiple problems and support needs. In very deprived areas, it is perhaps necessary to start redefining the role of key agencies. For example, schools may need to fundamentally expand their core activities, maximising the welfare of both the children and their families, rather than focusing mainly on educating children. Community police and housing services may both have good information sources about the support needs of particular families – and need to share this with other agencies to ensure that they address any welfare issues for children. Encouraging all relevant agencies to take such broad perspective in their interaction with communities requires awareness raising and training in relation to the vision, role and potential to institute change for each service.

In terms of the content and style of delivery of support to parents and families, services need to befriend parents and spend time building up trust with them, working in small groups so that parents are not deterred from attending (with careful management of the 'mix' of families so that the content of work remains focused and confidentiality can be assured). There is a real need for a focus on demonstrating play and a need to bring in other services, including: adult education, basic skills, crèche, counselling, life skills, coping skills etc.

The physical location of support services in the most deprived communities is also an important consideration because unless very accessible, families tend not to use them. However, few agencies have the resources to run satellite services. Locating services within schools can sometimes be a barrier to access as some parents hold negative attitudes towards the education system. Maximising service accessibility is not solely about location and awareness-raising, however. Services need to promote themselves so that there is a strong motivator for families to engage. Leaflets have been developed to raise awareness of the work of children's centres, but there is a pressing need to increase awareness and acceptability of such services and reach into 'hard-to-reach' groups. It is difficult however to let people know about specialist services targeting offenders' families, without potentially stigmatising other clients.

Whilst the needs of prisoners are often considered by those working in the criminal justice system, it is the relatives left in the community who struggle with keeping family life together at home – whereas at least a prisoner's basic needs are catered for. Prison visiting can be particularly

stressful – not only the long and intimidating process of entering the prison, but then sometimes the difficulty of responding to their imprisoned loved one's demands – Why are you late?; Why aren't the children with you? Can you get some money / belongings sent into prison for me? The parent in the community is likely to be struggling with childcare; perhaps worrying about school finding out about what has happened; feeling stressed, stigmatised, powerless and unable to cope. The following case studies are presented in great detail – to try to reveal the difficulties and complexity of managing family life with a loved one in prison.

3.4. Thames Valley case studies

Four case studies have been developed in this research to inform our understanding of the range and nature of support needs among the families of prisoners. They are presented in brief here – with the full case studies contained in the appendix to this report.

Case Study 1: Steve and Rachel

Steve and Rachel live together with their four children. Steve has been using drugs and offending from a very early age - at 9 he was smoking cannabis and using LSD; he started thieving, and by 14 had committed an armed robbery; at 17 he was addicted to heroin. Rachel and Steve have both stolen goods to fund their drug dependence and have both been prosecuted for theft, violence and drugs possession with intent to supply. Steve also has a history of self-harming, and has in the past had to be sectioned once.

Steve has had four custodial sentences – the first being sent to a Young Offenders' Institution for 10 months when he was 15. The second time Steve was sent to prison, Rachel was also remanded in custody. This severely disrupted family life, but fortunately Rachel's mother was able to look after the children to prevent them having to go into local authority care. Rachel was eventually sentenced to a three year suspended sentence and probation.

During Steve's three prison sentences, his grandparents (who brought him up) both passed away and he was unable to attend their funerals; he also missed the birth of his youngest child. Rachel describes the day he was last sentenced:

When Steve got sent down the last time I was heavily pregnant. He went to court saying 'Don't worry, I will come home.' Even his barrister ... said 'Don't worry, he will be home.' And all of a sudden he is sentenced and that's it - bang, I completely lose it. ... I didn't even get a chance to speak to Steve until the first visit. I was stuck, had kids, on my own and pregnant as well.

She would also have liked support at court to make it easier to cope with the shock of Steve being given a custodial sentence: *'At least that way I would have been able to understand what was going on and what I should prepare*

myself for.' Rachel gave birth to their child prematurely whilst Steve was in prison - but he was not able to visit them in hospital.

Both Rachel and Steve are currently in treatment for drug dependence and being prescribed methadone. Steve is currently involved with a peer support project at the local drug team, but Rachel feels that her fortnightly appointments with her drug worker do not give her the level of support that she really needs. She has sought help from her GP in the past, but felt that he looked down on drug users and did not make the necessary referrals.

The family is under an enormous degree of stress, but Rachel and Steve are striving to protect their children from the harms related to parental drug use and involvement in the criminal justice system. Rachel, Steve and their family have been receiving support from a local children's centre:

The [children's] centre are complete godsend. I can just turn up and talk to [two workers] and they will make a cup of tea and just listen to what I have got to say.

Case Study 2: Julia and her son Anthony

Julia lives with her partner and four young children. She also has two grown-up children: a son and daughter. Her eldest son (Anthony) has a history of self-harming, substance misuse and offending and has been diagnosed with the early stages of schizophrenia and paranoia. He is currently living with his girlfriend in supported housing and they are expecting their first child.

Anthony's first arrest, when he was 13 years old, was related to arson:

When Anthony was first arrested it was traumatic. It was like 'Oh my God!' and we were first introduced to the whole system. It was quite daunting at first. What next? And there were big [time] gaps in between everything as well: from being assessed and being referred to Youth Offending Service. That was even worse because you were waiting for the letter to come through. That was awful.

The Youth Offending Service had a positive impact upon Anthony's behaviour for a short time – but then his offending escalated to bicycle theft, street robbery and burglary as he started socialising with other young offenders and started taking heavier drugs. Anthony was sent to a Youth Offending Institution and upon release, he was on a curfew and under the Intensive Supervision and Surveillance Programme (ISSP). However, he started committing street robberies again and his behaviour became more and more violent – then, when he was 18, he was caught in possession of an offensive weapon. He was sentenced to a community supervision order – but the family itself received no information or support during his involvement with the probation service:

We didn't get any information whatsoever ... The Youth Offending Service is definitely more hands on and involves the parents and the family. They will tell you what is going on to a certain extent but again they are held back. Probation just don't tell you anything. He was a really seriously vulnerable young person with mental health issues, he was not mentally his right age, and I think we should have been involved but you know you are left out of the loop big time.

Anthony's parents are concerned about the impact his behaviour could have upon his younger siblings. They try to shield the younger children from what was happening, but are worried that their emotional needs are overlooked because of all the attention that has to be given to Anthony. Their 10 year-old son is on the autistic spectrum and becomes stressed very easily. As a result, when Anthony was sent to the YOI, his younger siblings were not told that he had been imprisoned, but rather that he was away because he was ill. However, his elder sister knew the truth, and was very upset. Her history of self-harming and depression, made her reaction to Anthony's imprisonment especially difficult to deal with.

Other family members reacted differently to Anthony's behaviour – exacerbating the tension within the family:

My Dad just didn't want anything to do with him at all. My partner didn't want anything to do with him at all and I think it was quite strange because they are the two main male figures in his life. It made it harder for him as well.

Julia has had contact with mental health services for over a year now, but feels let down by them. Involvement with other support services has been equally frustrating because they just refer her on. Julia is stressed and anxious and has been diagnosed with depression. She has used alcohol in the past to try to blot the stress out, and would welcome family therapy and intensive emotional support for all the family. The ideal would be a dedicated support worker who could assess what their individual needs are and provide tailored support.

Case Study 3: Angela

Angela lives with her partner Nick and two children: Nathan (aged 12) and Tegan (15 months). Nick has recently been released from prison, but Angela had not been aware of Nick's offending – nor the extent of his debt - and so his arrest came as a complete shock to the whole family:

They just raided us in the early hours of the morning. Nathan was in bed at the time. ... I was eight and a half months pregnant, didn't know what was going on. We had armed police, there were sniffer dogs in the house and they just searched the whole house. ... Nick was arrested and taken away.

Nick was remanded in custody and eventually sentenced to 27 months in a prison 40 miles away. Angela spent the week before Christmas sorting

out housing benefit and income support. She was left without any money over Christmas and found the whole experience quite humiliating:

I hated having to explain everything to every person I spoke to. I had to keep saying 'My partner has been arrested and has been taken to prison.' With a week before Christmas and three weeks before I was due to give birth. ... It was an all round difficult situation. I was heavily pregnant. I had to get the house organised for the baby coming along and things like that. It was an absolute nightmare to be perfectly honest.

Angela gave birth to their baby whilst Nick was in prison and fortunately had a lot of help from her friends:

I had an emergency caesarean, so I couldn't do an awful lot. Luckily for me I have got some fantastic friends and neighbours. And they were doing meals on wheels and coming round and doing my Hoovering. They were brilliant. The first six months was very difficult.

However, Nathan, their eldest son was 11 at the time of the arrest and was drastically affected by Nick's imprisonment:

My eldest was absolutely devastated ... We had problems with his school. ... but it wasn't him misbehaving to start off with. It was other children picking on him and saying things about what was going on. Because it was all in the local papers everybody knew about it. As soon as it happened I went up to his primary school he was in at the time and told them everything. They were fantastic they were really good. They had a liaison lady that used to speak to him because he wouldn't speak to me at the time about it. Which I could understand, he told them that he didn't want to upset me.

Over the next few months, Nathan's behaviour revealed the extent to which his Dad's imprisonment was upsetting him:

His attitude just completely changed. He wouldn't listen to me, but then on the other hand he was very clingy towards me. He didn't want to go to school because he didn't want to come home and nobody be there. I don't know where he thought I was going to go, but then again you don't know how a child's mind is working in that situation. ... That was when all the court case was going ahead – it kept being cancelled and re-scheduled then cancelled again. Nathan was just really confused. There was a slim chance that Nick would come home when he was sentenced. But it was just the suspense.

Angela found the prison visiting process very daunting and did not know what to expect. She describes the visits as:

Horrible, horrible, horrible. It wasn't too bad with Nathan because he was that little bit older. But with Tegan when you have to take their coats off and then you have them searched. ... We were told they [check babies' nappies]. ... Which is why I wasn't going to go in in the first place - because I wasn't having my baby son put through that. I didn't want to do that. ... it is a big shock to the system. The first visit was just unbelievable. We didn't know what we were doing or where we had to go.

Nathan also found visiting his Dad in prison to be traumatic:

He found it really, really difficult. I mean he hated Nick to start off with, didn't want anything to do with him. He wouldn't see him or anything.

Nick has recently been released from prison. When he first returned home, Tegan found it difficult to adapt to him being in the house:

For the first few days he wouldn't go anywhere near Nick. He used to scream. I used to take him to go visit him once a week but when you are in those surroundings, in a prison visits hall, you can't bond – it is totally different to being at home.

Nick is currently under probation supervision – attending appointments once a week. He has also started volunteering for a local drug service and would like to train to become a counsellor. Angela continues to feel stressed and anxious and is still taking anti-depressants. Her parents refuse to speak to Nick and will not enter the house if he is about – so that Nathan and Tegan are not seeing their grandparents as much as they would usually do. Angela is finding this difficult to deal with:

I don't want to be one of those statistics where the parents and grandparents don't talk.

Case study 4: Mark

Mark is in his mid-thirties, recently released from prison and currently living with his Mother. He has a brother and a sister who live nearby and his father is living abroad. He also has a three-year old daughter who lives hundreds of miles away (with her Mother and her new husband). He is struggling to be able to visit her whilst on licence because the four hour journey each way means that he has to stay away overnight or else he has very limited time to spend with her.

Mark started smoking cannabis when he was 11 years old, and then progressed onto harder drugs. His first offence was shoplifting when he was 12 years old – and he continued to shoplift on and off over the years whenever his drug use got to the level that he needed more money. Occasionally he was involved in the criminal justice system for fighting as well. Whilst being arrested for possession of drugs, he fought the police officers and ended up having to live in a bail hostel for six months. His first and only prison sentence was three years for grievous bodily harm – committed shortly after he and his partner split up:

... because when I split up with my ex, because she moved away I couldn't see my daughter and I went off the rails. The drugs indirectly led to me getting into a fight and this got me three years in prison.

Mark tried to use his time in prison positively by participating in courses, but he found it difficult being away from his family and suffered from

panic attacks and depression. His family visited him, but could not attend as often as he would have liked, because they all work.

They are supportive, but over the years with my history of drugs they are always a little bit – like they don't know if they can fully trust me. ... But they are supportive. They won't turn their backs on me.

His mother suffers from stress and Mark is well aware of the impact that his offending has had upon three generations of his family:

My daughter hasn't had contact with her father. I personally don't have contact with my daughter. We can't meet very well and my mum, brother, sister and dad – I have put them through a lot of stress over the years. It has caused a lot of guilt on my behalf and they still worry now that something might happen.

Mark no longer uses illegal drugs, but is being prescribed diazepam, methadone and codeine. He attends the local substance misuse treatment service that has recently started requiring him to do daily, supervised methadone consumption – which makes it difficult for him to work or visit his daughter.

However, he is determined to stop offending and keep out of prison:

I don't want to go back there. I need to get my life back on track including my criminal record. I have been in prison for such a long time. I need to look for work and sort my life out.

Mark is clear about how much he needs to achieve and how important maintaining his relationship with his daughter is to his plans:

I would like some more support to be able to see my daughter but I don't know how realistic that is ... I just can't see my daughter as often as I would like to. ... It would help me greatly if I could see my daughter a lot more. It is not so much about family support. If I could see my daughter more often it would make me feel a lot better about myself. She isn't going to support me because she is only three, but I could be a dad to her. It would give me something to focus on and that would help me. It is just so difficult you know - with the distance and everything and I don't know what to do about it. It does play on my mind a hell of a lot and it affected me when I split up with my baby's mother.

3.5. Summary

This section has presented evidence on the harmful impact upon families of having a family member sent to prison. For children, this can be particularly damaging, frequently adding to other multiple disadvantages that they already face and ultimately resulting in long-term negative outcomes for them. The need for effective family support throughout the whole criminal justice 'journey' is clear – not only because of its potential to reduce future offending, but also because these families are likely to have complex, unmet support needs that need addressing in their own right.

What these case studies tell us about the nature of 'hidden need' is really important. Whilst practitioners can comment on their experiences of working with clients' multiple support needs, the Thames Valley case studies reveal the extent of families' unmet and hidden support needs. They show how pregnancy, childbirth, potential risk to other children, family stress/anxiety and the seeking of medical help all fail to instigate the types of support that would actually assist families of offenders.

Whilst the youth offending service is designed to address the complexity of family life and assist parents in dealing with young offenders, the adult criminal justice system operates largely as though families do not exist. Yet, it provides a crucial mechanism for potentially identifying and engaging families with extremely high support needs.

Children's behaviour often deteriorates as a result of the stress that involvement with the criminal justice system places on families. This is particularly noticeable at the key times of sentencing, prison visits and resettlement. In some cases extended family and friends can be a crucial source of practical and emotional support – but equally, they can sometimes generate many additional stresses and problems that need to be resolved. It is not sufficient to merely acknowledge the positive impact that families can make in reducing re-offending – but rather, concrete steps need to be taken to support these vulnerable families in building and maintaining positive relationships.

4. Provision of support across Thames Valley

The 2004 Family Matters report⁴¹ identified pockets of good practice being delivered by some visitor centres and prisons across the Thames Valley⁴² - but provision was found to vary hugely, such that access to support was patchy, significant delivery gaps existed and little collaboration or shared learning existed between practitioners. The report also described how the lack of shared knowledge and understanding across the resettlement and Every Child Matters agendas resulted in only minimal levels of (and sometimes completely non-existent) integrated working.

This section summarises what has been learnt from the stakeholder interviews about the mosaic of support for offenders and their families across Thames Valley – describing practice on an agency by agency basis and briefly examining current strategic oversight.

4.1 The criminal justice system

Court

Whilst not yet a systematic process, in North Oxon, when a court officer either interviews an offender for their Crown Court pre-sentence report, or talks with an offender who has been sentenced to over 12 months in prison, they use this opportunity to find out about the existence of any children and fax either Bicester or Banbury Children's Centres to let them know what has happened. If the Children's Centre then identifies any other key professionals already working with the children, they pass this information on to them as well.

One limitation to this is that offenders who (1) attend Magistrates' Courts, (2) are sentenced to less than 12 months, or (3) are sentenced at first appearance in court, are not similarly identified. Consequently their families are not offered support – yet their needs may be just as great.

More fundamentally, there is no similar referral pathway for the rest of Thames Valley (although a similar system is currently under development for Reading). However, Family Matters has sought to raise awareness among all probation court staff throughout Thames Valley⁴³ – so that they understand families' support needs immediately post sentence. The Thames Valley Partnership 'Custody What Now?' leaflet has also been developed to meet families' immediate information needs⁴⁴. This leaflet is available on Thames Valley Probation Service's intranet and is part of the electronic PSR packs – so that officers are starting to use it at the pre-sentence report stage, where custody is likely. But the systematic identification of children who have a parent sent to prison is lacking – and

⁴¹ Family Matters 2004 *Report of a conference held in November 2004*. Thames Valley Partnership.

⁴² For example: StoryDads, Family Links nurturing programme etc.

⁴³ In autumn 2009, Family Matters delivered five tranches of training to the probation service.

⁴⁴ The 'Custody-What Now?' leaflet - designed by Thames Valley Partnership to be given to families at the point when an offender has been sentenced to prison. The National Offender Management Service (NOMS) distributed this leaflet to court clerks nationally (although anecdotal feedback suggests that court staff are not aware of its existence).

prevents not only the ability to provide timely support to families, but also the potential to identify the scale and depth of their needs.

Prison

Prison practice varies enormously – with priorities dependent upon individual prison resource levels and targets, and frequent staff turnover that makes it difficult for external agencies to develop and sustain joint working. Work to help prisoners maintain community and family links has to compete against other priorities that prison are assessed on – which, as a result, take precedence. With no key performance indicators (KPIs) or minimum standards in relation to either prison or Visitor Centre work with children and families, good practice is likely to remain ‘patchy’. However, the regional NOMS lead for Children and Families is currently working to develop some minimum standards for Visitor Centres – so some progress may be made.

There are, nevertheless, individual examples of good practice:

HMP and YOI Reading

Reading Prison and Youth Offending Institution is actively examining how it can more effectively support young offenders and their families. Aspects of this work include:

- The screening of young offenders (once parental consent is gained) which reveals whether they have a child - triggering a single agency Common Assessment Framework (CAF) referral to establish any support required.
- An ‘in-reach’ mental health service to promote safer custody – with any parental concerns or issues raised at induction resulting in a visit the following day.
- Cross-training of prison staff in Children’s Centres to raise awareness, and opening up of the prison to visits from Children’s Centre staff so that they can understand how visits run.
- An explicit programme to keep the relationship going between the young person and their family⁴⁵, including ‘Family days’ where the partner is invited in with children, and the usual visiting rules are relaxed – they spend whole day together and the young offender can change baby’s nappy etc. Play workers from Reading Borough Council come into the prison on family days to support and lead play activity with the children. These days are particularly valued by the young offenders who often write thank you notes afterwards. Such work also helps to break down the macho / gang culture of the YOI, as family visits open them up more and help to avoid the upset of relationship breakdown.
- Joint work with Reading Borough Council to develop and improve Safeguarding practice within the prison – including policy work and staff training.

⁴⁵ However, the Family Link Officer is not a resourced post, but rather is dependent upon a member of staff working outside contracted hours.

Prison Visitors Centres

Prison visiting is widely recognised as important to keep family relationships in tact and promote smoother resettlement back into the community upon release from prison. However, it is very difficult for adults to understand and negotiate the prison visiting system, and even more difficult for children. First-time visitors can find the whole process very disorientating and dehumanising - particularly the search procedures, the intimidating atmosphere and the lengthy process involved in entering the prison (often with a large distance to travel there and back). Some visitors start queuing at about 10.30 in the morning, whilst the Visitors' Centre does not open until 12.30 and first visits take place at 1.50.

Visitors can often feel worried about the prisoner – particularly in relation to bullying, finances and general welfare. They are sometimes also concerned about the prisoner's health – but wary of highlighting this, for fear of unwelcome attention being paid to the prisoner. Other concerns can include: discomfort over a lack of awareness of the procedures for getting into prison; feeling anxious about telling the prisoner bad news – or sometimes feeling worried that they will have nothing to say to their loved one during their visit.

Prison visiting is thus a very stressful time for families and children. Some children decide that they do not want to go into the prison, which can be difficult for both parents to deal with. Young children can be very demanding and may misbehave under the stress and boredom of the visit.

It is clear that further improvements are needed in relation to prison visiting. Visitor Centre staff try to be available to support families and do receive lots of queries about visiting procedures, prison rules and assisted visits⁴⁶. However, some families just want to see their loved one and leave the prison environment as quickly as possible – making it difficult for Visitor Centre staff to be able to engage them. Other families can be wary about accessing support in case it alerts the prison to 'issues' and gets the prisoner into trouble (over disclosures of substance misuse/ domestic violence etc.). Support is more likely to be sought by longstanding and/or regular visitors.

Greater clarity over Visitor Centre staff independence from the prison system might be beneficial in increasing visitors' feelings of trust. Equally important is transparency on the circumstances under which confidentiality would have to be breached – and the types of information that would have to be forwarded to the prison staff. Making dedicated family workers available in Visitor Centres could be another positive development.

Several Visitor Centres have tried to improve the environment for children - some have playworkers, and those Visitor Centres that contain a play

⁴⁶ Visitor Centres record the numbers of adults and children attending; the number of 'no-shows' – but do not record the nature or range of support needs among those using the centre.

area report how they are beneficial to children – providing a more relaxed atmosphere and giving the parents/carer brief respite from bored or demanding children. But other prisons have few facilities – limited to a prison information telephone line (which will be very focused on prison-based information, not providing support to an offender's family). Bullingdon prison does let the relevant Children's Centres know if an imprisoned parent has been moved there – but other prisons do not share such information. Bullingdon prison Visitor Centre is also developing a dedicated helpline for families of prisoners, available to respond to any enquiries for a few hours every day (This is a pilot for 6 months, initially).

Some Visitor Centres try to provide access to a variety of support services - but this is mainly through signposting to community services. Many centres will have a history of short-term initiatives that have been set up at one time, only to cease to exist after a while because resources dry up. For example, Woodhill Visitor Centre used to have a support group for visitors – but it dwindled away. It also had a health visitor who used to attend, an education worker who used to run some activities with the women and children, and a substance misuse worker - all with varying degrees of take-up – all now ceased. MIND provided support in the Visitor Centre in Bullingdon prison – but the funding stopped, just as they were beginning to be able to engage visitors – and a similar experience happened with an Outreach worker from Bicester Children's Centre.

Resettlement

The prison routine and the isolation of being in custody mean that prisoners – especially those who have served long sentences – are likely to face substantial readjustments when they return to family life. This transition back to the family can be difficult – but is generally unsupported unless the probation/police service is involved under the Priority and Prolific Offender (PPO) scheme. Whilst the importance of a smooth resettlement back into the community is beginning to be recognised as an important contributing factor towards reducing re-offending, there are few resources devoted to this – and in fact, prisoners and their families often need support prior to release, as well as afterwards. In particular, for families where there has been a history of domestic violence, the future safety of family members needs addressing. Such issues should be picked up through the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) – but this is only possible if the family has been identified and assessed. The Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) is currently considering developing adult CAFs – and perhaps this might result in prisoner's families finally being recognised as a priority group.

There is a potential avenue for developing (or piloting) some positive practice. The manager at Woodhill Prison Visitor Centre would like to provide prisoners with advice on the morning of their release⁴⁷. Furthermore, the 'Homeward Bound' video (Action for Prisoners Families) which Family Matters use in their training portrays a family preparing for

⁴⁷ Previously the prison resettlement team and Citizens' Advice Bureau were involved in delivering this type of work – but not now.

the release of the father and is an excellent tool for discussing with offenders about the impact of their imprisonment on the family and how best to prepare for release and resettlement.

Probation

The Probation Service is under a statutory duty to work with offenders – but over the past ten years, service reforms have restricted the work that can be undertaken with the wider family. Thus, the support needs of offenders' families often remain hidden - even from the probation service, which now only works with families in terms of how they can help the offender – not the support needs that they have themselves.

The one exception to this is the Priority and Prolific Offender (PPO) scheme that does involve working closely with families. These schemes are beginning to provide evidence about the benefits of working intensively with families. Moreover, the development of Integrated Offender Management (IOM) will increase the need for such work to be undertaken – involving partner agencies and firming up multi-agency support pathways⁴⁸. For the future, there is a clear need to join up the Family Matters and IOM agendas and collect relevant data.

In 2009, Thames Valley Partnership Family Matters team trained nearly 100 probation staff - providing resources and information to enable them to work more effectively and in a more integrated way with their local family support services. But unfortunately, no performance targets exist for the probation service in relation to working with other agencies - and so current targets take priority over this crucial aspect of offender management. Without either a performance management system or a statutory requirement that explicitly identifies inter-agency working as a priority, sufficient resources are not likely to be devoted to this aspect of probation work – and in such a situation, it will remain difficult to get enough probation practitioners committed to partnership work.

Youth Offending Team / Service

Each Youth Offending Team / Service employs a Parenting Worker – a crucial resource designed to address family support needs and set up a multi-agency, holistic response.

4.2 Children's services

Schools

Individual staff within different schools will have highly divergent levels of awareness of the issues facing families with a loved one in prison. Some schools will not be aware that a particular family is dealing with this issue – they may be aware that a child is upset and is having time off school regularly – but it may be unexplained, and the school staff may not feel

⁴⁸ IOM will target non-statutory cases – ie: offenders not under probation supervision, but rather those involved in antisocial behaviour, petty crime etc.

confident in asking about the cause or addressing any suspicions that it may be related to the imprisonment of a family member. They are likely however to witness a dramatic negative impact upon the child – children can become very quiet, unhappy, anxious, shaken and angry. They often fall behind with their schoolwork, become introverted, depressed and withdrawn from friends. This can be particularly pronounced around the time of sentencing, visiting prison and in the run up to release from custody. School staff need the confidence to explore these issues with parents and to help provide the support that can help to turn this around.

School staff may be ignorant of the child's 'grieving' process for parents in custody. Thus it is important that headteachers, their leadership team and Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCOs) recognise the importance of this issue – and develop their staff's skills and understanding. Educational practice needs developing in this field – to identify the number of children affected by the imprisonment of a family member, and to train staff in how to better support children and their families⁴⁹. Behaviour Support Teachers should have activities that have been designed for children who have a relative in prison – but delivering this support is dependent upon being able to identify those children/families who need it.

Equally, parents need encouragement to feel confident in alerting schools to what has happened. Some parents have very negative attitudes towards schools and so are unlikely to communicate with them about their situation. Education Welfare Officers may be aware of parents taking children out of school on a regular basis for prison visits (although they may not know the reason!) – but their enforcement approach means that little concrete assistance may be offered to address the hardship, additional support needs and emotional damage caused by the imprisonment of a loved one.

Home-school link workers operate within primary schools to identify children in need of support – addressing issues such as family stress, changing circumstances, grieving etc⁵⁰. They try to provide a balance of proactive and reactive support – but only work with children living within families⁵¹. They undertake home and one-to-one visits, assessing for family problems such as domestic violence and other support needs. They can provide play therapy and seek to actively foster good relations between parents and the school. By developing good relationships, they build parental confidence in communicating issues with school.

One example of good practice within the primary education system in Oxford:

⁴⁹ See further: Eileen Thompson *Workbooks to support children with a family member in prison* and other materials available on the Social Care Institute for Excellence website: www.scie.org.uk. Also: Sharon Evans 2009 *Guidelines for working with children who have a 'family member' in prison*. Oxfordshire County Council.

⁵⁰ Similar issues commonly arise for refugees and asylum seekers.

⁵¹ I.e: not children living in local authority care.

Pegasus school

Pegasus school is located in a deprived area of Oxford, and has a high percentage of children eligible for free school meals and proportions of children with special educational needs and/or disabilities (many with moderate learning difficulties) that are well above the average. The school is noted for its contribution to community cohesion – reaching out to parents and carers through activities such as family learning events and developing its role at the hub of the local community through its community café - where adults can meet and eat healthily and cheaply.

The school's headteacher is very aware of the impact that the imprisonment of a family member has upon children. She estimates that at least two children in every class are affected by this issue. In order to recognise this, the school is developing an arts project with the theme of 'Behind bars'. This gives all the children an opportunity to learn about the pain and impact of being locked up. The children are also creating an animated film about being behind bars.

The onsite community café is a great way of trying to overcome the barriers between the school and some parents – creating an informal environment where parents are encouraged to see the school as a resource for them and their families to draw on. The café offers informal support to parents and has been very effective in developing links with the community.

Children's Centres

Children's Centres work with families with children under five years of age (and may also be able to assist older siblings). They provide access to midwife, health visitor and mental health services. A wide variety of support programmes are delivered, as Children's Centres cater for broad range of families with different needs – a feature that enables them to deliver services to families without identifying them specifically as families of offenders. But whilst Children's Centres do work with the families of offenders, this is only one small aspect of their work (one of nineteen operational objectives). Each Children's Centre develops its own individual approach to working with families in general – and so the level of support that offenders' families will be able to access will also vary. However, there is evidence of them having quite a positive impact in their intensive work with prolific offenders.

Some Children's Centres have outreach teams – which may focus on different aspects of support need or specific social groups (ie: families not accessing services), and some will actively seek to engage parents, through activities like 'road-shows' to primary schools and nurseries.

Local examples of specific work that is very helpful for families of offenders include the following:

North Oxon Children's Centre

The Children's Centre in North Oxon has worked with families of offenders - holding family meetings in prison, identifying how to integrate the family more in the community, supporting them in accessing local services etc. A recent Team Around the Child (TAC) meeting held at HMP Bullingdon was very successful in terms of bringing all practitioners alongside the prisoners' partner into the prison to focus on the needs and plans for the children. It also enabled the prisoner to contribute to these discussions and to focus on his plans for resettlement.

Prison-based meetings are particularly helpful to initiate change for families where there has been a history of domestic violence – and are followed up with work to ensure that appropriate support is available to the whole family. This requires very intensive, long-term support – to build up good, trustful working relationships. Unfortunately, the potential to develop more support for young offenders and their children is limited by resource and time constraints.

Reading Children's Centre

As part of a developing focus on early intervention, the Children's Centre in Reading runs a 'healthy relationships programme'. This group work focuses on adults' early life experiences and the impact they have upon their own parenting behaviour. This is quite sensitive work as some parents can be defensive and trust needs to be built up.

Family Intervention Programme (FIP)

FIPs are intended to intervene with families involved in antisocial behaviour – and so the age criteria for the children they will work is around the 10-16 year old age group. The Family Intervention Programme is in different stages of development across the Thames Valley - and each one has different structures and priorities. In Oxon, the FIP is managed by the Youth Offending Service and one of its priority areas is families with young people who have a family member in prison. This is potentially valuable source of assistance for young people in need of support – and had been a priority under the previous government, but, like all public services currently, future funding levels are uncertain.

4.3 Health and social care

Mental Health

The stakeholders interviewed for this research all reported experiencing difficulties in gaining access to mental health services for clients whom they worked with. They also described situations where they had found out that mental health services were working with their clients, but that

there had been no liaison between the two agencies. Whilst practitioners working externally to mental health services find it difficult to engage with them, they do report that once accessed the support of mental health services can be extremely valuable (although the issue of dual diagnosis remains problematic – see below).

Currently, there is little linking in of mental health support for people exiting prison and only a very slow development of dual approaches. External agencies can feel as though the mental health system is working to a different agenda – sometimes good interagency working is developed, but this is developed solely on the basis on individual worker commitment – as the organisational systems and workplace cultures within the mental health service do not seem to nurture such practice. The lack of transparency/predictability of decision-making also makes it difficult for external agencies to work in partnership with mental health services.

The introduction of PCAMHS⁵² merely seems to have added another barrier to accessing mental health support for children. Some agencies report trying to avoid working with PCAMHS because their experience of approaching them has suggested that they are ineffective, in that the provision of only 6 sessions is insufficient to achieve any positive progress. Several Children's Centres reported having made lots of referrals into PCAMHS, but they receive no feedback, and so never find out whether families actually receive any support. Indeed, most families seem to be rejected because they 'don't meet the criteria' – PCAMHS can reject families because they too high a level of support need – but these needs then remain unmet.

For adults, in order to access community mental health services, a referral is needed from a GP. This is cumbersome and some offenders (particularly homeless offenders) do not have a GP. For adults below the cusp of being acutely mentally ill, GPs remain the sole source of support – and but often have insufficient resources to meet this need. In Oxford there is a service called Oxpip (a mental health project working with parents and children aged under two years on attachment issues) and an Adult Learning Difficulties Team - but whilst a substantial proportion of offenders have low learning / educational experiences, they may not meet the formal learning disability criteria – and so are excluded from much needed help. If adults with mental health problems misuse alcohol and/or drugs (often as a means of self medicating – and referred to as 'dual diagnosis'), mental health services refuse to work with them. There is thus a real need to develop low-threshold emotional and social support services that includes good quality play therapy for young children and good counselling services for older children.

There is a court diversion scheme – designed to keep low-level offenders with mental health problems out of the criminal justice system. This is commissioned by the Primary Care Trust – with the Community Mental Health Team providing the service at the pre-sentence stage. This perhaps offers a potential resource for being able to assess family/children's

⁵² Primary Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services

support needs – although as yet it is unclear whether the scheme assesses all those involved in the criminal justice system, or whether it focuses on just certain offences.

Substance misuse

Unless involved in the criminal justice system, it is notoriously difficult to access substance misuse services – due to long waiting lists. In some areas, voluntary sector providers are able to increase support capacity, and alcohol issues are gradually becoming a higher priority within substance misuse strategies and plans. In Oxon the Drug and Alcohol Action Team (DAAT) has commissioned SMART (a third sector drugs service provider) to provide an arrest referral service for alcohol abusers. Other than this one route, however, undiagnosed alcohol-dependent offenders are highly unlikely to access services for their drinking.

Floating Support

Floating (Housing) Support can be a very valuable source of assistance in relation to benefits, financial management, tenancy problems and a wide range of practical issues. Stonham Floating Support has been particularly helpful in helping the families of those sent to prison to sort out changes in benefits, tenancies etc.

Social Care

Whilst the *Every Child Matters* agenda continues to develop practice, there is still no organisation with a statutory duty to assure the welfare of all children. Social Services provide support to specific groups of 'children in need', but families of offenders are not one of these identified groups. Moreover, Social Services is only resourced to work with the most critical cases – and has neither the funding nor the required infrastructure to be able to deliver the kind of intensive support that many families of offenders need⁵³.

The developing Team Around the Child approach to working with children should provide holistic responses to children's support needs, with a wide range of services supporting them. But in reality, the ability to refer into a wide network of services is limited and some agencies struggle even to undertake CAFs (Common Assessment Framework) with children – finding them too demanding on limited staff time⁵⁴. With statutory services prioritising their work to those families 'most at need', many families who do not reach this threshold, but who nevertheless have substantial support needs are not having their needs met by any statutory services.

⁵³ Indeed, Social Services have only spasmodically linked in with Family Matters – although several social workers from the Children's Looked After team attended one of the Family Matters workshops recently.

⁵⁴ Including the police and probation services in Thames Valley which have a policy not to instigate or lead on a CAF.

4.4 Strategic oversight

As mentioned earlier, this area of social policy lies at the conjunction of the reducing re-offending, child welfare, social inclusion and health agendas. The risk is that each strategic group assumes that the needs of offenders' families are being met by another partnership whose responsibilities overlap with this area of policy – and so these families 'fall between two stools'. This section provides a brief snapshot of regional, strategic partnership or key new strategic input into the field of offenders' families (rather than the strategic level of each individual agency listed above).

NOMS South East

In the South East, The children, families and support networks Pathway Board is currently chaired by the GOSE lead for Childrens Services. The aims of the pathway are to:

- Maximise the positive impact strong family, social and community networks can have on reducing re-offending; and
- Ensure that the increased risk of social exclusion the families of offenders often face is managed in the south east, and that the risk of offending behaviour being perpetuated through the generations is minimised - this links the work of the pathway into the wider government agenda around the wellbeing of children and young people.

Community Safety Partnerships and Local Criminal Justice Boards

Community Safety Partnerships have a relatively new formal role in reducing offending – but it is perhaps too early to see any evidence of a change in their priorities as yet. They should also be linking in more with Local Criminal Justice Boards, which should help to keep the issue of reducing re-offending higher on their list of priorities.

Children's Trusts

The Children's Trust priority list does not explicitly mention the children of offenders, and the Children's Services Improvement Support for local authorities and Children's Trusts (*South East Supplement to the National Prospectus 2009-10*)⁵⁵ makes no mention of the children of offenders either.

PCTs

Since 2006, all Primary Care Trusts (PCTs) have had the lead role for commissioning health services in the criminal justice system. The Sainsbury Centre for Mental Health estimates that at any one time, the average PCT is responsible for the health care of approximately 500

⁵⁵ 2009 Children's Services Improvement Support for local authorities and Children's Trusts (*South East Supplement to the National Prospectus 2009-10*).

prisoners and more than 1,000 community sentenced offenders⁵⁶. In addition, nearly 10,000 people are arrested per PCT area each year. All of the people in these groups have a very high risk of mental ill health. The Health Inequalities agenda is an important priority within PCTs and is a key driver for this area of work. Local Offender Health Policies should be developing the provision and coordination of health services for offenders.

4.5 Summary

This section has described key aspects of service provision across the Thames Valley, and has highlighted some pockets of good practice – but at the same time, this reveals the lack of consistency from one area to the next and the degree of inequality of access to support faced by families. Strategic coordination to drive forward this aspect of social policy is currently lacking – although key bodies have recently gained responsibility for dealing with overlapping issues (ie: reducing re-offending), and this may improve the situation in years to come.

⁵⁶ Sainsbury Centre for Mental Health *Commissioning mental health care in the criminal justice system: 10 top tips for PCT Boards*.

5. Implications: developing the work of Family Matters

The Family Matters project supports the resettlement of offenders across Thames Valley and seeks to break the cycle of offending within families by:

- Improving access to information for offenders' families;
- Integrating the work of the criminal justice agencies and family and children's services in support of vulnerable families; and
- Strengthening family ties to aid prisoner re-integration into their family and community (where appropriate).

5.1 Family Matters' achievements

The work of Family Matters was described in very positive terms by the vast majority of interviewees – identifying a range of beneficial impacts that include:

Raising awareness

- Extremely good work in raising awareness of children's and families' support needs – particularly the DVD showing a prison visit from a child's perspective – this is described as *'the single most important piece of training ... not sensationalist, but a jolt to realise what children go through'*.
- Delivery of *'amazing'* training – that engages recipients in the issues and gives them the 'lightbulb moment' about how children are affected by the imprisonment of a family member.

Developing materials for families

- Development of a pack of very helpful materials for both families and practitioners. The leaflets can be used to show families that they are not alone, and gives them ways of communicating with each other and with agencies at a time when they feel very vulnerable.

Developing good practice

- Delivery of training that has been helpful in creating better links between the probation service and Children's Centres – enabling shared perspectives over child and adult support needs to begin developing and promoting awareness of the Think Family agenda.
- Similarly, getting prison and probation staff to work together which has been very useful – although staff turnover levels mean that training needs to be repeated regularly.
- Very supportive of prison Visitors' Centres – in particular, it was noted how Family Matters had provided valuable play equipment and toys for family days at Bullingdon prison Visitors' Centre..

Spearheading change

- Family Matters has been described as a catalyst to developing family-based work across the Thames Valley. Its work raises

awareness and generates interest across a wide variety of relevant stakeholders. It has identified service delivery gaps and evidenced good practice – giving practitioners the tools to embed this new family approach in their existing work. Thus, it has an important role in leading change in family-based work across Thames Valley – developing fruitful partnerships between prison, probation, voluntary sector and Local Authority stakeholders.

5.2 Barriers facing Family Matters

However, Family Matters had already identified that it has experienced a number of difficulties, including that:

- Work undertaken with the Prison Service has had mixed success;
- Some excellent working relationships are overly dependent on key individuals (rather than embedded within organisational structures);
- Poor communication between departments of large organisations constrain further development;
- Reliance on the goodwill of staff to give up their own time to deliver aspects of family work;
- Patchy and fragile influence due to the absence of minimum standards for service delivery and the relative lack of profile for staff from small third sector organisations.

This research also found a small number of additional barriers to the development of Family Matters:

- The 'invisibility' of families with a loved one in prison means that their support needs remain largely hidden. There is a critical need to develop a systematic method of identifying these families, assessing their needs and putting support packages in place – at point of sentencing (if not before). Only by introducing such a system can we be confident that appropriate support is being delivered to all those families that need it – including families of short-term prisoners. Essentially, there needs to be some method of identifying and screening families at court. Reliance on leaflets to disseminate information is a barrier for families who (1) feel they have too much to contend with to read about service provision; (2) have low levels of literacy; and (3) fear engaging with unknown services.
- Related to the above, the current referral process is not being used sufficiently – partly because not enough families are identified in the first place, but perhaps also because stakeholders are unclear about the scale of Family Matters' resources for providing direct support to families. There may also be concerns about protecting the anonymity of families – so perhaps joint information sharing/data protection protocols need further development – or perhaps stakeholders would benefit from a clearer understanding of the referral process. The question was raised about whether the lack of referrals resulted in Social Services and CAMHS losing

interest in joint working with Family Matters (although the reverse could equally be true). It is critical that all three agencies work together – as except in one case, all of the families that Family Matters has supported have had to be referred to Social Services – evidencing the real need for family support (and sometimes child protection).

- So, whilst there is a course designed for families to participate in, to date there has not been a sufficient number of families to attend it at one time. Moreover, there are difficulties in maintaining family confidentiality when delivering group-work and/or using volunteers.
- There is a continuous need to roll Family Matters training out systematically across statutory, voluntary and faith sectors, targeting frontline staff through to senior management. In order for learning from the Family Matters training to be fully implemented, it needs to be linked into agencies' strategic planning and have senior management commitment to its delivery. One priority group should be Headteachers, SENCO⁵⁷s and Home-School Link Workers. An attempt is being made currently to try to engage the education system more, but there has been hardly any school take-up⁵⁸. Home School Link Workers need to be involved more centrally on the Family Matters network – and each school (or perhaps even each agency) should be asked to identify its in-house champion for 'Think Family' approaches. With high rates of staff turnover, training needs to be delivered continuously, and has to be embedded in everyday practice. The development of case studies as a training aid would help schools to think in real terms about the impact of imprisonment upon children – improving staff understanding about their reality in order to better respond to their needs. It is important to ensure that every age group of child/young person can access support – throughout the year (Home School Link Workers cover 5-18 year olds – but term time only, and many children are likely to need support during the school holidays as well).
- Like many other organisations, Family Matters has found the experience of trying to develop support services through prison Visitor Centres to be challenging. Some activities that Family Matters would like to host (eg: arts and crafts activities for children) are sometimes thought to be too disruptive – with insufficient space available within busy Visitor Centres. Prison staff and management change so regularly that it is difficult to establish links and develop new initiatives. Nonetheless, there have been some significant achievements, for example: holding Team Around the Child meetings in prison; and helping pre-release prisoners to understand any changes in their home-life that have taken place during their sentence.

⁵⁷ Special Educational Needs Coordinators.

⁵⁸ Family Matters recently participated in a Headteachers' forum in Reading – a potentially effective method of engaging Headteachers in this agenda – but this forum only exists in Reading.

5.3 Meeting the needs of offenders' families

This research also gathered stakeholders' ideas about the priorities for meeting offenders' families support needs more effectively – and the role that Family Matters could have in this. In brief:

Identifying families in need of support

- The handing down of a custodial sentence needs to trigger the provision of support to families (if appropriate). A systematic process is required that pro-actively identifies families at court, screens them for any support needs and establishes the likely impact that the custodial sentence will have upon them. Whilst probation Court Officers could identify some families' support needs during the PSR process, this will not cover all families affected by the imprisonment of a loved one⁵⁹. The implementation of such a process also needs developing for Magistrates Courts.
- Support needs to be made immediately accessible at sentencing (and also again at prison release). It may be that some families need assistance to get home from court – and this could provide a helpful opportunity to talk to them about their support needs, the practical considerations that need dealing with, and how prison visits are organised. At moment, the sole concern is child protection – but a broader consideration of family welfare needs to be addressed.
- It might be worthwhile examining Thames Valley Probation Service's use of Family Matters materials and referral process within the PSR process – to see if any implementation lessons can be learnt.
- Another potential avenue for development is to examine whether the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) picks up on the impact of having a family member imprisoned. This would be complementary method of identifying the scale of the issue and of targeting support to those who most need it. It may be that the CAF does not sufficiently address the issue of offending – and that universal services (particularly health visitors and mental health practitioners) would benefit from training to help them develop a consistent and sensitive way of asking these difficult questions.

Providing support to families

A number of key gaps in service provision have been identified in the course of this research, revealing a need for:

⁵⁹ Some people are sentenced before a PSR is completed; sometimes the court duty officer is unavailable; and if they are aged over 21 and the sentence is less than 12 months, probation do not get involved.

- The educational psychology and behaviour support services to include examination of the imprisonment of a family member when undertaking any assessments for pupils who are referred to them⁶⁰. These services, along with Personal, Social and Health Education need to develop a role in making it acceptable and easier to talk about difficult issues within families – promoting informal opportunities for families to share experiences and support each other. Specialist training resources are needed for schools – so that all staff have the confidence to deal with issue of imprisonment of a family member.
- Provision of low-level parenting support – with a focus on healthy relationships, managing change within families; communication skills and practical assistance. The Probation Service would like to deliver a rolling programme for prisoners’ partners – so that they can learn everything that they need to know about the criminal justice system. Current proposals are for a three week programme, covering: (Week 1:) prison visits; (Week 2:) Children’s support needs; and (Week 3:) Resettlement – what the prisoner’s licence conditions need to include (eg: substance misuse, domestic violence accommodation). Emergency funds for families; Lack of weekend support.
- The further development of Prison Visitor Centres to maximise the support they provide to families. This may include a dedicated telephone advice line; sending an information pack out to families before they make their first visit; and an induction meeting during the first visit, to explain the prison service and the particular features of the prison they are visiting. Such an induction meeting could take place in the half hour prior to their first visit - so that the Visitor Centre manager can talk them about their family situation and signpost to relevant services. Childcare could be made available for prison visits – to help keep small children occupied, and provide care for any children who decide they do not want to attend the visit at the last minute. A more ambitious proposal would be the use of web-cam technology to facilitate contact between prisoners and their children – avoiding the stress of having to travel to and negotiate the prison system – but this may be some way off.
- The second aspect of developing the role of Prison Visitor Centres would involve them in more focused input to help the offender prepare for reintegrating into family life – in the run up to their release. A dedicated Family Support role to emphasise the importance of continuing and supporting family relationships may be required to support ongoing communication between the offender and their family - preventing what could be rapid breakdown of relationships due to the stigma of imprisonment. This

⁶⁰ Some work is being developed on this theme, see: Eileen Thompson *Workbooks to support children with a family member in prison* and other materials available on the Social Care Institute for Excellence website: www.scie.org.uk . Also: Sharon Evans 2009 *Guidelines for working with children who have a 'family member' in prison*. Oxfordshire County Council.

could involve facilitating structured meetings between partners to discuss specific aspects of family life, and encouraging the offender to face up to the impact that their imprisonment has had upon their family. It might be at this stage that prisoners could use some of the materials available on this issue (eg: a video of what families go through to visit them in prison; the 'Homeward Bound' video by Action for Prisoners Families which portrays a family preparing for the release of the father and is an excellent tool for discussing with offenders about the impact of their imprisonment on the family and how best to prepare for release and resettlement). These may be useful in strengthening and consolidating motivation to desist from offending.

- More coordinated delivery of adult and children's services (and of combined 'family' services). Multi-agency teams are needed to support children and families, that include co-ordinated input from child and adult mental health, drug and alcohol services, police, probation, adult learning, the job centre and benefits agency and education. Specialists with forensic and mental health understanding are required to ensure that families get the right support. Health services also need to have a more active role, helping to provide pathways of support – particularly for parents with mental health problems and/or substance misuse problems. There needs to be lower threshold access to mental health support for children and young people⁶¹. Currently there is no support to children who have been sexually abused if the perpetrator is in prison - victim liaison work only takes place when in court ends upon imprisonment of the perpetrator⁶². Therapeutic support needs to be available to those who need it (particularly children who have been neglected or abused), and provision of practical help to parents with learning difficulties (that perhaps have not been diagnosed) also needs to be put in place. The Family Intervention Programme (FIP) provides a potentially valuable model for supporting families with high support needs – but a similar approach may be needed specifically for families involved in the criminal justice system. Perhaps there is some potential for FIP and the probation service to support such families together.

Interagency coordination

- Family Matters has made an important contribution to developing interagency cooperation on the issue of families of offenders and raising awareness of the Think Family agenda⁶³. There is now a need to get more resources allocated to this work and ensure that all appropriate agencies are consistently adopting this way of working. This is challenging, because agencies are all coming to this

⁶¹ At the moment, YOS clients can get into CAMHS, but other children would not be able to access it for comparable mental health needs.

⁶² There was a service in Oxon that offered counselling to child victims of sexual abuse, but it closed due to a lack of funding.

⁶³ Family Matters also has a multi-agency advisory group that meets twice a year to review and inform the development of the programme.

work from different stages of development and all have slightly different perspectives on what work needs prioritising. Several stakeholders interviewed for this research commented that the Family Matters training needs rolling out again to a wider group of agencies – if only to promote the Family Matters information packs that have been extremely helpful. The cross-over between offender resettlement and domestic abuse is perhaps a priority area, and more interagency training on how the legal system impacts upon families is also required.

- The work of children's and adult services needs better coordination – to identify and address family support needs, and make better use of the variety of resources available for children⁶⁴. Comparable resources are likely to be needed to meet the needs of the carer/parent at home. Government investment is required to fund joint working between parenting commissioners and the voluntary and faith sectors, to enable some of these proposed initiatives to develop – which otherwise are likely to be stifled by organisation overload and the prioritisation of current workloads. In some circumstances, it may be that the role of key agencies (eg: schools) in deprived areas needs redefining – to include an emphasis on building community cohesion and proactively developing positive relationships with all parents. In such cases, training may be required to facilitate the changes in vision, role development and service delivery that are necessary. All agencies need to recognise their responsibility to maximise child welfare and protection – and this is perhaps a key priority for oversight by the Children's Trust – using the recent guidance⁶⁵.
- A formal communication structure is required to facilitate the sharing of information about children with a parent in custody - so that all children are identified and have their support needs assessed. At minimum, the family should be contacted, receive a home visit and be offered support that links into any probation service case management with the prisoner. Agencies need to be quicker to liaise with each other and react to families' needs. In particular, improved communication between key statutory services (social care, probation, Community Mental Health Teams, learning disability teams, and Vulnerable Adults). Better communication between prisons and children's services is also required – with new procedures required to overcome the difficulties that prisons face in sharing information – clarifying what information can be shared. It is important to develop a more systematic application of all these approaches - building collective responsibility across all relevant stakeholder agencies. Clear referral pathways and support networks need to be built up – with more information sharing between Health Visitors, Social Services, Children's Centres and the Probation

⁶⁴ Eg: IDFS, SENCOs and School Home Link Workers.

⁶⁵ Ministry of Justice and Department for Children, Schools and Families 2009 *Reducing re-offending: supporting families, creating better futures: A Framework for improving the local delivery of support for the families of offenders.*

Service – and a clear understanding of the referral process to Family Matters.

Building evidence

- This research has revealed the need to develop the evidence base on the support needs of offenders' families. At minimum, thorough information management is required to identify the scale of the problem and the range and severity of support needs involved. Only by having a clear understanding of this, can robust arguments be made about the resources required by this area of work. Further evidence would be valuable about the positive impact that good support can have with families – in terms of children's welfare and educational attainment and in terms of general family well-being. Over the longer term, it would be useful for research to examine how such early intervention reduces (1) the need to (and cost of) delivering more intensive support further down the line (eg: substance misuse and social services input); (2) re-offending rates and associated criminal justice costs and (3) the intergenerational transmission of offending.

6. Summary and conclusions

The potential scope for positive family relationships to contribute to the reducing re-offending agenda is slowly being acknowledged. Family circumstances – whether providing the informal support and security that facilitate desistance from offending, or causing the chaos, stress and trauma that foster further offending behaviour – need examining as part of any strategy to address both re-offending and child welfare. However, little is known widely about the support needs of offenders' families – although to summarise some of the key issues highlighted within this report:

1. Having a family member sent into custody is frequently a devastating event for families – yet no support is provided to them at this point, and no assessment of the consequences for child welfare takes place.
2. There is no information about the scale or needs profile of families affected by having a loved one sent to prison.
3. Whilst the probation service provides some support to families of those sentenced to over 12 months in custody, those receiving short-term custodial sentences receive no help.
4. The criminal justice system exacerbates the already fragile and stressed relationships between offenders and their families – communication is limited; prison visiting can be traumatic; prisoners can be moved to a different institution without letting a family know; and little consideration is given to resettlement back into family life after prison release. As a minimum, prisoners could be provided with advice on readjusting into family life on the morning of their release⁶⁶.
5. All prisoners' families should be provided with a checklist / information pack to help them prepare for their first visit into prison. They need to know about the visiting process and perhaps should be encouraged to attend the Visitor Centre for an induction meeting. Perhaps first visits should be adults only so that they get a chance to understand the prison visiting procedure without having to look after children at the same time. Crèche facilities are provided in some prisons – and can be particularly useful in cases where children decide at the last minute that they do not want to meet the prisoner.
6. Court diversion schemes (designed to keep low-level offenders with mental health problems out of the criminal justice system) could be one way of identifying families in need of support – and perhaps offer a potential resource for being able to assess family/children's support needs. There is a clear need to join up the Think Family and Integrated Offender Management agendas and perhaps Family Matters could have

⁶⁶ The 'Homeward Bound' video (Action for Prisoners Families) which Family Matters use in their training portrays a family preparing for the release of the father and is an excellent tool for discussing with offenders about the impact of their imprisonment on the family and how best to prepare for release and resettlement.

a role in undertaking this for the Thames Valley – and in linking this in with the work of Local Authority parenting experts and community mental health support.

The key message, at this time of public sector cutbacks, is that many agencies are already concentrating their resources on those adults and children in severe need. Families with slightly lower levels of need may not reach the threshold of being able to access the required level of support from any agency – but they often have chaotic lifestyles, resulting in chronic, multiple support needs. Work with these vulnerable families is therefore very important – if only to prevent their needs escalating to a point where more intensive action is required. The Think Family agenda seeks to address this aspect of social policy whilst also narrowing the division between child and adult services.

APPENDIX: Full Case Studies

Case study 1

Current situation

Steve and Rachel live together with their four children. They have recently moved within Oxfordshire, but have begun to have problems with their neighbours – to the extent that they now fear leaving the house empty. Rachel has been prescribed anti-depressants and often feels stressed and paranoid because of this situation.

Their own childhoods

Steve was raised by his grandparents because his father was absent for most of his childhood and he did not have a stable relationship with his mother who often had abusive partners. This led to situations where, from a young age, Steve was violent in order to protect his mother and his sister - and at times he had to take food from shop bins to feed himself, his mother and his sister. By the time he was fifteen, he had had a number of foster placements and ended up being sent to a Young Offender Institution - where he was beaten badly several times. Steve found his time in Feltham YOI to be very traumatic and tried to hang himself in his cell at one point.

Rachel was sexually abused by her father and other men from the age of 12 to 16. She has never received any counselling or support in relation to this.

Offending histories and involvement in the criminal justice system

Steve's drug use began from a very early age – at 9 he was smoking cannabis and using LSD. By the time he was 17 he was addicted to heroin. His offending began equally early, progressing from theft to violence and onto armed robbery (aged 14), conspiracy and possession of drugs with intent to supply.

Steve has had four custodial sentences – he was first sent to a Young Offenders' Institution for 10 months shortly after turning 15, and has since served three prison sentences. His last custodial sentence was for breaching his licence (a sentence originally arising from an assault) by failing to attend two community service sessions. During these sentences, he missed out on several important life events. His grandparents both passed away and he was unable to attend their funerals. He also missed the birth of his youngest child.

Rachel's offending history began later – with her and Steve thieving to fund their drug dependence. She was charged with theft in 2001 and has also been charged with actual bodily harm and drugs possession with intent to supply. Rachel was sent to prison on remand in 2005. This severely disrupted family life, but fortunately Rachel's mother was able to look after the children to prevent them having to go into local authority care. Rachel was then sentenced to a three year suspended sentence, probation supervision and costs.

The children's experiences

Due to their drug use, Rachel's Probation Officer referred the family to Social Services and the children were placed on the Child Protection Register because there was a fear that the children were being neglected.

The kids have seen some of the violence. I mean I would like to say that we have to try to shield our drug use from them as much as possible, but as a parent I know that they have probably seen and heard things that they don't want to see.

Whilst at their previous address, a neighbour sexually abused their eldest son. The neighbour was subsequently convicted and imprisoned. Their son was later himself accused of sexually abusing a younger child and he was then referred to a specialist counselling service. He attended this service for some time, although this support has recently ceased because his counsellor left.

In 2007 a man assaulted their 8 year old son and both Steve and Rachel got into a fight with him. Steve was given a suspended sentence with community service. Shortly afterwards Rachel had health problems, so Steve missed his community service appointments for 3 weeks and ended up being breached. Both Steve and Rachel had been told that a custodial sentence was unlikely, and so were both unprepared when he was sentenced to 10 months in prison.

When Steve got sent down the last time I was heavily pregnant. He went to court saying 'Don't worry, I will come home.' Even his barrister - because it was the Crown Court - said 'Don't worry, he will be home.' And all of a sudden he is sentenced and that's it - bang, I completely lose it. The barrister says sorry to me. I had a right go at her and said 'It's alright for you. You can go home to your swanky home and I have to deal with this.' I didn't even get a chance to speak to Steve until the first visit. I was stuck, had kids, on my own and pregnant as well.

This was Steve's last custodial sentence. Rachel gave birth to their child prematurely whilst Steve was in prison - but he was not able to visit them in hospital. Rachel had to visit him in prison with their newborn child (once they were discharged from hospital), so that Steve could see his son. As Steve recognises, this was a difficult time for Rachel:

That time I was away from the kids it's been hard for Rachel having to cope with 4 boys on her own. I mean the eldest can be a handful when I am not there. He thinks he has got to take on my role in a way.

Partly because of the sexual abuse perpetrated on their son, and partly because of the community's reaction to Steve's violent attack, the family felt it was best to move:

We had so much history in [original home town]. [Town name] isn't very big and the next day my door got put through and half an hour later the whole town knows - do you know what I mean?

However, their eldest son was not accepted to attend the local secondary school (an Academy) closest to their new home – but was sent to another school with a high proportion of pupils with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. He started to mix with other disaffected young people and on his birthday, whilst walking home from the cinema with his parents, four young people from his school assaulted Steve and Rachel. This went to court and the young people were taken into custody. Since then, several local people have harassed the family - the windows in their home have been smashed and Steve has been chased up the street and approached by one of the boys (now released from prison) who was carrying a knife.

We are known as grasses now, so we have been terrorised to be honest.

We are always worried about who we are going to bump into. We are always planning our routes to take to avoid people.

Rachel recently kept her eldest son off school for two weeks because he has been getting threatening texts from other boys and her second eldest has been victimised too:

We just want to get away from [town name] now. My 11 year old now gets harassed by one of the lads in the gang. ... He has been in the school and terrorised him and the police had to be called.

Support needs

In the past Steve has self-harmed and at one point had to be sectioned. Rachel and Steve are currently both in treatment for drug dependence - both on a methadone prescription. Steve is currently working on a peer support project with the local drug team – but Rachel feels that she is not able to get the level of support that she really needs from her drug worker, whom she sees once a fortnight:

Well he checks if I have been using anything and then asks if I have any questions or anything I want to talk about. I sometimes want to just tell him everything about my life. But he is just watching the clock waiting for me to go, so that puts me off. I don't want to tell anyone anything if they aren't interested. I don't want to waste their time and mine. Do you know what I mean?

Rachel, Steve and their family have been receiving support from a local children's centre:

The [children's] centre are complete godsend. I can just turn up and talk to [two workers] and they will make a cup of tea and just listen to what I have got to say.

Rachel has sought support from her GP in the past, but she felt that he looked down on drug users and did not make the necessary referrals. She would also have liked support at court to make it easier to cope when Steve was given a custodial sentence:

At least that way I would have been able to understand what was going on and what I should prepare myself for.

When asked if the criminal justice system could have provided her with more effective help, she responded:

I don't think they can, they are all about targets we are just a number to them, they just process us and that is it.

The family is under an enormous degree of stress, but Rachel and Steve are striving to protect their children from the harms related to parental drug use and involvement in the criminal justice system:

I don't want my younger two to go through what my older two went through - seeing the police come through the door.

But the long history of trauma and current harassment from local residents is seriously damaging the quality of life of the whole family and the potential socialisation of their eldest son:

My eldest won't go far. To be honest he doesn't go out after he comes home from school. It does get a bit tense in the house. I just want him to live his life. He is 15 and he clashes a lot with the 11 year old.

Case study 2

Current situation

Julia lives with her partner and her four young children – one of whom is on the autistic spectrum. She also has two grown-up children: a son and daughter who do not live with them.

Julia's eldest son (Anthony) lives with his girlfriend in supported housing and they are expecting their first child imminently. He has been diagnosed with the early stages of schizophrenia (and paranoia) and has a history of substance misuse and offending.

Involvement in the criminal justice system

Anthony's first arrest, when he was 13 years old, was related to arson:

When Anthony was first arrested it was traumatic. It was like 'Oh my God!' and we were first introduced to the whole system. It was quite daunting at first. What next? And there were big [time] gaps in between everything as well: from being assessed and being referred to Youth Offending Service. That was even worse because you were waiting for the letter to come through. That was awful.

Intervention from the Youth Offending Service at this early stage had a positive impact upon Anthony's behaviour for a short time – but then his offending escalated to bicycle theft, street robbery and burglary as he started socialising with other young offenders and started taking heavier drugs (aged 14):

When we got involved with the Youth Offending Service they were really good. We had a really good worker and they did some good work with him. We did see a change for a little while but then he went back onto the drugs heavier. He got in with wrong crowd and he was bullied.

Anthony received his first custodial sentence as a young offender. However, there were fears that his previous history of self-harming would be difficult to manage in the YOI,

The prison [Young Offenders' Institution] was very good because there was a lot of self-harming going on anyway. They picked up on him and his self-harming and his behaviour with drugs. They supported him. They were quite good.

Upon release from the YOI, he was a changed person:

He was off drugs, clean, eating, put on weight, put muscle on, he was a different child. He still had a split personality where he would flip at the slightest thing, but generally he was positive, he always wanted to do things.

There was a brief lull in his offending – partly linked to him being on a curfew and under Intensive Supervision and Surveillance Programme (ISSP). But key elements of support that could have been helpful for Anthony were missed: he never received any anger management support and had insufficient help with his drug use. He started committing street robberies again and his behaviour became more and more violent. His mother believed that he was offending at least every other day and when he was 18 he was caught in possession of an offensive weapon.

At court he was sentenced to a community supervision order – but the family itself received no information or support during his involvement with the probation service:

We didn't get any information whatsoever ... The Youth Offending Service is definitely more hands on and involves the parents and the family. They will tell you what is going on to a certain extent but again they are held back. Probation just don't tell you anything. He was a really seriously vulnerable young person with mental health issues, he was not mentally his right age, and I think we should have been involved but you know you are left out of the loop big time.

Impact upon the family

As well as having to deal with the debt that Anthony had run up, his parents were more concerned about the impact his behaviour could have upon his younger siblings:

He [Anthony] was sharing a room with two younger brothers. I felt that it caused a lot of stress because he had weapons and drugs.

Although he tried to hide them we always found them. If we could find them, then the kids could have.

Julia and her partner tried to shield the younger children from what was happening and hoped that they were unaware of what was happening. However, Julia is worried that their emotional needs are not being fully met – because of all the attention that has had to be given to Anthony. She feels sad about the poor relationship they have with their elder brother:

They try to look up to him and they want him to do things with them but he just gives them broken promises basically. He lets them down a lot.

Her 10 year old son is on the autistic spectrum and easily becomes very anxious. As a result, the family have to be careful what they say in front of him and how they handle stressful events. However, his school is very helpful and has put lots of support measures in place for him.

Thus, when Anthony was sent to the YOI, his younger siblings were not told that he had been imprisoned, but rather that he was away because he was ill. However, his elder sister knew the truth, and was very upset. She also has a history of self-harming and has had serious problems in the past with depression, so her reaction to Anthony's imprisonment was especially difficult to contend with.

Other family members reacted differently to Anthony's behaviour – exacerbating the tension within the family:

My Dad just didn't want anything to do with him at all. My partner didn't want anything to do with him at all and I think it was quite strange because they are the two main male figures in his life. It made it harder for him as well.

Support needs

It is very stressful. You go one step forward and then take ten steps back.

Julia has felt stressed and anxious about what has been happening to her son and the rest of the family. She has been diagnosed with depression and admits to having used alcohol in the past to try to blot the stress out. The only support that she has received throughout the time that Anthony has been involved in the criminal justice system was from a YOT Family Worker, and whilst valued, this support was limited as the Family Worker was not able to provide the family therapy and intensive emotional support that Julia felt they all needed:

She didn't say 'Shall we tell the children because this is what is going to happen if we don't tell them?' It was all up to me. I did feel quite alone sometimes.

Julia has had contact with mental health services for over a year now – ever since Anthony’s release from the YOI. She had thought that they were going to be helpful. The worker said that they were going to put a plan in place but it was never followed through, and so Julia feels let down by that service, particularly as Anthony nearly had to be sectioned for his own safety.

Julia has also found her involvement with other support services to be frustrating because they just refer her on – stating that her family problems are outside of their remit. Julia feels that her whole family needed intensive support – particularly to help her children to understand what was happening. The ideal would have been a dedicated support worker who could assess what their individual needs were, able to deal with different family structures, and provide tailored support.

Case study 3

Current situation

Angela lives with her partner Nick and two children: Nathan (aged 12) and Tegan (15 months).

Involvement in the criminal justice system

Apart from having been cautioned for drunk and disorderly behaviour when much younger and occasional use of recreational drugs, Angela had not been aware of Nick’s offending at all – nor the extent of debt that he was in. Nick’s arrest came as a complete shock to the whole family:

They just raided us in the early hours of the morning. Nathan was in bed at the time. We didn’t get any support from them. They wouldn’t even let me phone my friend round the corner just to come round and sit with us. It was just me and Nathan. I was eight and a half months pregnant, didn’t know what was going on. We had armed police, there were sniffer dogs in the house and they just searched the whole house. We had to be moved from one room to the other. ... Nick was arrested and then taken away.

The family were not told where Nick was being taken, and so could not make their way to the police station where he was. He was held on remand and before the trial, Nick’s probation officer contacted Angela to try to keep her informed about the case:

She has always kept in contact as to what’s going on. Because like I said the court case was adjourned so many times she didn’t even know what was going on. We didn’t know whether he was going to get out on a tag and they messed about with it for so long. She had to keep phoning the prison and they got cheesed off with her phoning up. ... I couldn’t phone up and ask because I wouldn’t get any response. So it was down to her or Nick at the end of the day. But nobody would tell Nick what was going on. So it was a bit difficult.

Nick was sentenced to 27 months and was sent to a prison 40 miles away from their home.

I didn't know what to do. I didn't know where he was going – we knew he wasn't going to [local prison]. I asked his solicitor where he was going and he said 'I can't tell you that because we don't even know for sure yet.' I was like 'When can I find out?' It was when Nick rung his mum and told her that was the first we knew about it.

Impact on the family

Because of the timing of Nick's imprisonment, Angela had to spend the week before Christmas getting their housing benefit put into her name and claiming for income support. She was left without any money over Christmas and found the whole experience quite humiliating:

I hated having to explain everything to every person I spoke to. I had to keep saying 'My partner has been arrested and has been taken to prison.' With a week before Christmas and three weeks before I was due to give birth. ... It was an all round difficult situation. I was heavily pregnant. I had to get the house organised for the baby coming along and things like that. It was an absolute nightmare to be perfectly honest.

Angela gave birth to their baby whilst Nick was in prison, and whilst it was difficult being a lone parent to a newborn baby, she had a lot of help from all her friends:

I had an emergency caesarean so I couldn't do an awful lot. Luckily for me I have got some fantastic friends and neighbours. And they were doing meals on wheels and coming round and doing my Hoovering. They were brilliant. The first six months was very difficult.

However, Nathan, their eldest son was 11 at the time of the arrest and was drastically affected by Nick's imprisonment:

My eldest was absolutely devastated. Which in turn affected me. We had problems with his school. ... but it wasn't him misbehaving to start off with. It was other children picking on him and saying things about what was going on. Because it was all in the local papers everybody knew about it. As soon as it happened I went up to his primary school he was in at the time and told them everything. They were fantastic they were really good. They had a liaison lady that used to speak to him because he wouldn't speak to me at the time about it. Which I could understand, he told them that he didn't want to upset me.

Over the next few months, Nathan's behaviour revealed the extent to which his Dad's imprisonment was upsetting him:

His attitude just completely changed. He wouldn't listen to me, but then on the other hand he was very clingy towards me. He didn't want to go to school because he didn't want to come home and nobody be there. I don't know where he thought I was going to go,

but then again you don't know how a child's mind is working in that situation. I think it was because his dad had disappeared overnight. ... But Nathan's behaviour was bad, he started getting into fights at school. Not so much primary school, but it was a bit later on when he started secondary school – September, which was sort of two months before Nick came home. That was when all the court case was going ahead – it kept being cancelled and re-scheduled then cancelled again. Nathan was just really confused. There was a slim chance that Nick would come home when he was sentenced. But it was just the suspense. We did have a few hiccups at school where I had to go because he was upset.

Prison visiting

Angela found the visiting process very daunting and would have benefited from knowing what to expect prior to visiting Nick in prison – someone to explain the process or a video to show what to expect.

One thing which probably would have helped was speaking to someone who had already done prison visits. Because that was so daunting. It was really scary you didn't know what you were doing. ... you weren't allowed to wear your watches, you had to take your belt off. You weren't allowed certain necklaces or bits of jewellery. It was quite scary. Its not something I would like to do again anyway.

Because of the distance to travel, Nick's mum would drive Angela and the children to the prison:

So every visit we had it was me, his mum and the kids. Either one child or both of them. Which was a bit difficult because there are things I want to say to him without his mum being there. So it was awkward. But I had no other way of getting up there really.

Angela describes the visits as:

Horrible, horrible, horrible. It wasn't too bad with Nathan because he was that little bit older. But with Tegan when you have to take their coats off and then you have them searched. ... We were told they [check babies' nappies]. ... Which is why I wasn't going to go in in the first place - because I wasn't having my baby son put through that. I didn't want to do that. But no they didn't do that in the end. [The drugs dog], well that didn't bother me either. If you have got nothing to hide from them, its okay - you shouldn't have a problem with it. It was very... when you see things on the telly and then you see it in real life, it is a big shock to the system. The first visit was just unbelievable. We didn't know what we were doing or where we had to go.

Nathan also found visiting his Dad in prison to be traumatic:

He found it really, really difficult. I mean he hated Nick to start off with, didn't want anything to do with him. He wouldn't see him or anything. It took me a little while to go and see him myself. I wasn't prepared. But then Nathan gradually came round and started going to visit.

Support needs

Nathan's Mum was a source of enormous support – helping to pay bills, sort out Nick's debt and drive the family to prison:

If it hadn't been for Nick' mum we wouldn't have got by at all.

But Angela also needed support from an objective person to whom she could speak openly about her feelings about what Nick had done – her friends were too critical about him for her to be able to talk to them freely. During Nick's time in prison Angela started to drink more alcohol as she often felt lonely and bored.

It is just hard, finding ways of coping. I used to think that [smoking cannabis] would help me but it doesn't. I also turned to alcohol at one point and was drinking heavier than I would have done before. But then, waking up at silly o'clock in the morning to sort a newborn baby out with a hangover just doesn't work. The evenings were the worst, being sat in on my own every evening. You can't leave the house because of the kids and then there is only so much TV and rubbish like that you can watch.

This reliance on alcohol was short-lived however, as her friends pointed out to Angela how she needed to control her drinking:

But then a couple of my friends just said to me you need to calm it down. ... You need to calm it down otherwise you will have the kids taken off you. They have already lost one parent and they don't want to loose another one.

Following a visit to her GP, Angela was prescribed anti-depressants, which she continues to take now. She was reluctant to seek support formally, but eventually approached a local drop-in centre offering support for mental health problems:

A friend took me down to the [drop-in centre]. It's a Mind centre – for mental illnesses. I spoke to a lady down there and it was mainly for Nathan's sake because she had contacts at [local secondary school] that could help with the situation like someone at school could look out for him and give me any other information I needed to help with Nathan. She also gave me a few leaflets for Courtyard – they do activities for kids just to give him something to focus on and give him something to do. She was pretty good down there as well. Other than that I am not one of these people that go out and ask for help. I like to try to do things on my own.

Resettlement and the future

Nick has recently been released from prison. When he first returned home, Tegan found it difficult to adapt to him being in the house:

For the first few days he wouldn't go anywhere near Nick. He used to scream. I used to take him to go visit him once a week but when you are in those surroundings, in a prison visits hall, you can't bond

– it is totally different to being at home. It was Tegan’s home and he has only ever been used to me and Nathan being there. Then all of a sudden Nick is there. He didn’t take it very well to start off with but then it took him a few days to adjust with Nick and then he settled down.

Nick is currently under probation supervision – attending appointments once a week. He has also started volunteering for a local drug service and would like to train to become a counsellor. Angela continues to feel stressed and anxious and is still taking anti-depressants. However, she admits that their relationship has improved – partly as a result of the courses that Nick participated in whilst in prison:

It has been a lot better since he came out. He has done a lot of anger management courses inside, thinking skills and stuff while he was in prison and it has helped and it seems to have opened his eyes to his attitude before. He was like ‘I go out and work so I shouldn’t have to do anything else.’ But now he has taken that responsibility he is a full-on dad he is really good with the kids. If I say to him can you take the kids just so I can have some time out he will. We do talk a lot more than what we used to.

Angela’s parents are still not speaking to Nick however, as they feel he has let their daughter and their grandchildren down. They will not come into the house if Nick is there and so are limited in the amount of contact they can have with their grandchildren.

I feel awful. Like Christmas’ and birthdays we usually do something as a family together. Like my parents want to see Tegan and Nathan. Tegan has recently started walking but my parents haven’t seen him walking yet. And they only live a few minutes away. My mums been about four times to the house and she used to come in have a chat have a coffee. But the last four times she has been on the doorstep saying I’m not stopping I’ve got things to do.

This is a difficult situation for Angela to manage:

For the sake of the kids – they will sense tension and they will be the ones missing out. Nathan knows what my mum thinks of Nick. But Tegan doesn’t – he is 15 months old so he don’t know. And I don’t want to be like that. I don’t want to be one of those statistics where the parents and grandparents don’t talk.

Case study 4

Current situation

Mark is in his mid-thirties and has recently been released from prison. He currently lives with his Mother – a temporary arrangement as he is hoping to move into his own accommodation shortly. He has a brother and a sister who both live nearby and his father is living abroad.

Mark has a three year old daughter who lives hundreds of miles away (with her Mother and her new husband). He is struggling to be able to visit her whilst on licence because the four hour journey each way means that he has to stay away overnight or else he has very limited time with her. Prior to this, he had to either let people know when he was planning to visit his daughter (when he was tagged) or to apply for permission from the courts (when on bail).

Obviously the only time I see her, she is so young, only three, she remembers me but it is like starting from scratch when I see her.

Involvement in the criminal justice system

Mark started smoking cannabis when he was 11 years old, and then progressed onto harder drugs. His first offence was shoplifting when he was 12 years old – and he continued to shoplift on and off over the years whenever his drug use got to the level that he needed more money. Occasionally he was involved in the criminal justice system for fighting as well.

He was then arrested for possession of drugs and fought the arresting police officers. He was remanded on bail and had to live in a bail hostel for six months. In the end, he was sentenced to six months on a Community Rehabilitation Order. His first and only prison sentence was three years for grievous bodily harm – committed shortly after he and his partner split up:

... because when I split up with my ex, because she moved away I couldn't see my daughter and I went off the rails. The drugs indirectly led to me getting into a fight and this got me three years in prison.

Mark tried to use his time in prison positively – participating in courses – but he found it difficult being away from his family and suffered from panic attacks and depression. His family visited him, but could not attend as often as he would have liked, because they all work.

Impact on the family and support needs

Mark borrowed a lot of money from his parents in the past to fund his drug use. Although he has stopped using illegal drugs for a long time, they still worry about him.

They are supportive, but over the years with my history of drugs they are always a little bit – like they don't know if they can fully trust me. Do you know what I mean? But they are supportive. They won't turn their backs on me.

Mark is well aware of the impact that his offending has had upon three generations of his family:

My daughter hasn't had contact with her father. I personally don't have contact with my daughter. We can't meet very well and my mum, brother, sister and dad – I have put them through a lot of

stress over the years. It has caused a lot of guilt on my behalf and they still worry now that something might happen.

And the impact it had upon his ex-partner and his ability to maintain a relationship with his daughter:

I put her [ex-partner] through a lot of stress and stuff. Obviously that is why she moved away in the end. I had been with her for eight years but we are on talking terms now. We get along fine, which is good for my daughter's sake. It is just the distance. If she lived round the corner it wouldn't be a problem. I have got over the fact that we split up. It is just my daughter I want contact with.

His mother has suffered from stress as a result of Mark's offending and substance misuse and Mark suffers from anxiety and has health symptoms that his doctor says are stressed-related.

Current situation

Mark no longer uses illegal drugs, but is being prescribed diazepam, methadone and codeine. He attends the local substance misuse treatment service that urine tests him and has recently started requiring him to do daily supervised methadone consumption. (Previously he was on weekly pick-up which allowed him to work part-time and visit his daughter.)

I was on daily pick-up when I first got out. So after getting negative tests all the way through they very quickly put me back on weekly. It gave me much more leeway to go and see my daughter if I wanted to without me having to leave early. Also to be able to get up early and do whatever I wanted to do. I could do a couple of days work because I am allowed to work 16 hours a week even being on sick pay. But now they have put me on daily supervised because I am on painkillers it is stupid. I said 'Can't you just give me a urine test?' and they said that they didn't know if they could do that anymore.

Mark is determined to stop offending and keep out of prison:

I don't want to go back there. I need to get my life back on track including my criminal record. I have been in prison for such a long time. I need to look for work and sort my life out. Not only that I have cut all of my associates in prison and I just want a new group of friends and I am not going to find that easy at my age until I get a job. I want the kind of job that gets me a social life. I don't want to work in a warehouse where I just go and do the job and come home. I worked at [local supermarket] before and I hope they will take me back with a criminal record. But I don't know.

He is clear about how much he needs to achieve and how important maintaining his relationship with his daughter is to his plans:

I would like some more support to be able to see my daughter but I don't know how realistic that is because of my situation and the fact that there is no work out there. I am trying to find work and I am on

sickness benefit anyway. I just can't see my daughter as often as I would like to. It would really help me if I could because that would be my focus rather than let my mind wonder onto other things.

It would help me greatly if I could see my daughter a lot more. It is not so much about family support. If I could see my daughter more often it would make me feel a lot better about myself. She isn't going to support me because she is only three but I could be a dad to her. It would give me something to focus on and that would help me. It is just is so difficult you know - with the distance and everything and I don't know what to do about it. It does play on my mind a hell of a lot and it affected me when I split up with my baby's mother. ... So now I can have a bit more contact with her - I am allowed contact with her, there is no problems there. It's the distance. So it would really help me a great deal if I could but I don't know what the answer is, not in the short term anyway. In the long term I can get a job, a car, even maybe move down there. It is not realistic at the moment though.