



Consultation on the Information Needs of those with a Family Member Involved in the Criminal Justice System

Glasgow Community Justice Authority

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Executive Summary

This study was commissioned by the Glasgow Community Justice Authority (GCJA) to inform its plans to produce an information pack for families of those involved in the criminal justice system.

The study team consulted with 26 principal family members; ten offenders; and key agencies which support or advocate for offenders' families.

The family members consulted were visiting remand and convicted offenders in prisons across Scotland and also England.

The study focused on:

- the information families receive; at what points; views on its usefulness and gaps;
- good practice in content and dissemination;
- suggestions for improving content and format;
- information needs about transport and prison visiting.

The study found that families receive little information at any point in the criminal justice process. Whether they receive it at all is often a matter of luck.

Information is not available or provided consistently. Families find it difficult to get the information they need and spoke of being passed from pillar to post.

They often rely on the offender inside prison to tell them what they need to know. This has advantages and disadvantages for both offender and families.

Voluntary agencies, which support families, play an important role in providing information as do prison officers, the police and lawyers.

Although information is available on paper and online, there are issues about how effectively it is getting to people and how accessible it is given their circumstances, for example literacy issues, age, ethnicity, relationship to the offender.

Information materials tend to focus on practical issues. But families would also welcome awareness-raising such as that 'life goes on' and information on emotional issues such as how to cope.

Lack of good information has negative consequences for families, both practically and emotionally. Conversely, good information can make them feel more in control and better supported at times of great stress.

The families of Glasgow offenders require much the same information as families elsewhere in Scotland. This suggests that a national approach is necessary. It would also be more cost effective.

Many agencies are involved in supporting and providing information to the families of offenders. This suggests that a multi-agency approach will be most effective.

Individual prisons are keen to improve web and paper-based information provided to families and are keen to work with partners on this.

There is a clear need for information. The volume and complexity of the issues point to the need for attractive, basic information with good signposting to detailed information for people who want this.

The report gives a comprehensive list of the information which families are looking for including information about prison visiting and transport.

Families of offenders are not a homogenous group. They have different information requirements and like to receive it in different ways. This suggests the importance of a variety of dissemination methods and targeted content, for example families involved in the criminal justice process for the first time.

The report makes a series of recommendations suggesting next steps for the GCJA. Locally, this includes working with constituent partners and voluntary agencies to build on existing material and the findings of this study to develop new information materials for Glasgow families; ensuring that any material developed is accessible, attractive and targeted; and that it takes, as its starting point, the needs of families and the need for consistency at whatever point of contact.

It also recommends that GCJA should encourage a national approach to ensuring that families receive consistent and high quality information wherever they live and wherever the offender is imprisoned. This could include exploring the Northern Ireland multi-agency model of providing information and support immediately after sentence. A national approach would require the involvement of the Association of Directors of Social Work, COSLA and the Scottish Prison Service.

GCJA should also work with the Scottish Prison Service to improve information provided through the SPS website and individual prisons.

1 Introduction

Background

- 1.1 Glasgow Community Justice Authority (GCJA) is one of eight such authorities in Scotland established by the Scottish Executive in April 2006 to reduce re-offending, improve the management of offenders and create safer communities by delivering the National Strategy on the Management of Offenders in local areas. The CJAs encourage partnership working between key agencies working with offenders and their families, including Criminal Justice Social Work and the Scottish Prison Service.
- 1.2 GCJA commissioned Blake Stevenson to undertake this consultation to inform actions outlined in the Area Plan 2008-2011.
- 1.3 The plan includes the priority, “to address improved information for victims and the community, providing a generic pack of information that all partners can use”.
- 1.4 The plan states that organisations which represent families have “identified that there is a lack of clear, consistent information on the criminal justice system. This includes information on sentencing, the criminal justice process and the prison system.” GCJA has also identified that there are particular issues about transport to prisons and information on support available to families for visits.
- 1.5 Victims of crime have similar information issues and so GCJA is working separately with Victim Support Scotland to consult with them.

The Research Brief

- 1.6 The brief specified a “consultation with families of those involved in the criminal justice system to establish their particular information needs in relation to the criminal justice system and process and prisons, including transport and access issues”.
- 1.7 In addition, GCJA asked Blake Stevenson to undertake a brief consultation with offenders in prison about their views of their families’ information needs.
- 1.8 GCJA plans, with voluntary sector partners, to produce an information pack for families and victims on general criminal justice processes. The brief specified that this consultation “should inform the content of the pack and the formats and delivery points that are seen as most useful by families. Views on essential information on

transport will be fed into this, as well as informing a wider review of prison transport issues being undertaken by the CJA and families.”

Research Aims and Objectives

- 1.9 GCJA asked Blake Stevenson to identify the key information needs of families of those involved in the criminal justice system, and the most helpful methods for delivering that information.
- 1.10 The research objectives were to:
- identify what information families receive, at what points, and their views on the usefulness of this information;
 - identify any particular instances of good practice in either information content or dissemination;
 - identify where families feel there are gaps in information provision and make suggestions on particular content and format;
 - identify what information is received and required particularly in relation to transport and prison visiting issues.

Research Advisory Group

- 1.11 A research advisory group provided guidance and helped identify families for the consultation exercise. Group members were Anne Connolly and Gillian Little, GCJA; Marnie Hodge, Turning Point Scotland; and Shona Hamilton, Sacro.

Methodology

- 1.12 The research was qualitative in nature and was based on the following activities:
- Desk-based research
 - Interviews with key contacts
 - Interviews and focus groups with family members
 - Focus group with offenders in HMP Barlinnie
 - Data analysis and report writing

Desk-based Research

- 1.13 We reviewed information on families' information needs already gathered by organisations such as Families Outside, Action for Prisoners' Families, and Sacro; searched for examples of good practice already developed; and reviewed information materials currently given to families at different stages in the process.

Interviews with Key Contacts

- 1.14 We conducted brief telephone and face-to-face interviews with key personnel in organisations which represent or are involved with families of prisoners and those in other parts of the criminal justice system. These interviews focused on:
- What information do families typically ask for or about?
 - Is there anything that families typically get confused about or don't know?
 - Is there anything that families typically find difficult to understand?
 - Is there anything that is particularly sensitive that families might not ask about but should know?
 - Is there anything that children and young people would benefit from knowing?
 - What information is given to families and any feedback on this?
- 1.15 We interviewed:

Social Work Staff

- Operations Manager, Glasgow Sheriff Court, GCC Social Work
- Court Support Worker, Glasgow Sheriff Court, GCC Social Work
- Operations Manager, Criminal Justice, GCC Social Work Department, Prison Throughcare
- Principal Officer Criminal Justice Services, GCC Social Work

Voluntary Organisations

- Service Manager and Throughcare Worker, Sacro
- Coordinator and Support Worker, Hope (Bridgeton project)
- Addiction Counsellor, Glasgow Association of Family Support Groups
- Coordinator of Family and Addiction Project, Hope (The Support Worker, also took part in the focus group)
- Support and Development Manager, Families Outside

Prison Staff

- Family Contact Officer, HMP Cornton Vale
 - Family Contact Officer, HMP Barlinnie
 - Operations Manager, HMP Greenock
 - Head of Operations, Polmont YOI
- 1.16 Family Contact Officer at HMP Barlinnie attended the focus group with prisoners in Barlinnie and contributed his views. We had hoped to interview the Wise Group's ROOP project and Project Happy but staff were unavailable.
- 1.17 We also spoke to prison officers on duty on visit days, Action for Prisoners' Families, and Northern Ireland Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders (NIACRO).

Consultation with Family Members

- 1.18 We interviewed 26 principal family members with a Glasgow family member in the criminal justice system. Table 1 gives an overview of how they were consulted.

Table 1: Consultation with Family Members

Source	Number consulted and method
Sacro	1 face-to-face interview 4 telephone interviews
Hope	3 focus group participants (Bridgeton support group) 2 focus group participants (East End Family and Addiction Project)
Cornton Vale	4 telephone interviews
Barlinnie	5 face-to-face interviews
Polmont	6 face-to-face interviews (inc a couple)
Glasgow Association of Family Support Groups	1 focus group organiser (plus 1 participant)
Total	26

- 1.19 We spoke to families in prison waiting rooms before visits.
- 1.20 We spoke to families in small focus groups organised by Hope, Sacro and the Glasgow Association of Family Support Groups.
- 1.21 We interviewed some family members by telephone. These were referred to us by HMP Cornton Vale and Sacro.
- 1.22 We conducted one focus group with ten short-term prisoners in HMP Barlinnie.

Prison Interviews

- 1.23 We knew from research and experience that many families find visits to prison extremely stressful, especially if it is their first time. We did not want to add to any feeling of stress so interviews were kept brief and focused.
- 1.24 We arrived much earlier than visiting time to ensure that we met with family contact officers to discuss the usual format and get ourselves set up for visitors arriving. In Polmont, we used the family contact officer's room for interviews; and spoke to people in the waiting room. In Barlinnie, we had a desk at the back of the waiting room. We laid out colouring pens and paper so that young children were occupied while we spoke to their parent/carer.

Focus Groups with Families

- 1.25 Sacro, the Glasgow Association of Family Support Groups and Hope organised focus groups. The Sacro and GAFSG groups were only attended by one person, but there was useful discussion as other support staff were present.

Content of Focus Groups and Telephone Interviews with Families

- 1.26 We asked families about their information needs at different points ranging from arrest through to leaving prison. We also asked what information they had been given and what they had found useful.

Focus Group with Offenders

- 1.27 HMP Barlinnie organised a focus group with ten short-term offenders. Two officers also attended. We asked offenders about the information needs of their families at different stages in the process and what they had found or would find useful.

Ethical Issues

- 1.28 Face-to-face interviewees were given a consent form to sign which explained the purpose of the research. They were given a shop voucher and travel costs where relevant. The researcher also signposted interviewees to support if required, including prison family contact officers, Families Outside and the Assisted Prison Visit Scheme (APVS) which helps with transport costs for visiting.

Data Analysis and Report Writing

- 1.29 We used the chart in Appendix 1 to develop interview schedules and topic guides for focus groups.
- 1.30 There was considerable consensus and the report which follows summarises the key findings and is set out according to the four research objectives.

2 Research Background

- 2.1 There is a considerable body of research which shows that supporting families can increase the likelihood of positive outcomes for offenders and reduce the likelihood of re-offending.
- 2.2 Recent research by the Prison Reform Trust¹ indicates that both first-time and experienced prisoners are more worried about life in the outside world than life inside prison. Two thirds of the 91 prisoners interviewed said that what they most worried about when they entered prison was their families. This suggests that anything (such as good information and support) that can improve the situation for families will have a positive effect on offenders.
- 2.3 There is also significant evidence that the imprisonment of a family member has an impact on families, including the estimated 13,500² children every year whose parents are imprisoned. This also includes losing a partner or parent; reduction in income; housing and debt problems; and the shame and stigma of having a family member in prison.

Supporting families and offenders through information

- 2.4 A literature review³ conducted by Nancy Loucks for Tayside Criminal Justice Partnership and Families Outside states: "The profile of these families that has emerged so far from research and from the experience of agencies that work in this area is:
- the experience of imprisonment of a relative is traumatic for the rest of the family and carries huge emotional and financial costs, including the cost of maintaining contact through prison visits;
 - all need emotional and practical help to cope;
 - most live in deprived areas, are poor, and have childcare responsibilities. Families living in rural areas face pressures due to greater exposure in their communities and difficulties in accessing support services and maintaining contact with their relative;

¹ Prison Reform Trust, 2007, There when you need them most.

² Considered an underestimate in Marshall, K. Scotland's Commissioner for Children and Young People. 2008. Not seen. Not heard. Not guilty. The rights and status of children of prisoners in Scotland.

³ Loucks, N. 2004. Prison Without Bars: needs, support and good practice for work with prisoners' families. Tayside Community Justice Partnership and Families Outside.

- for many, the experience of imprisonment aggravates underlying problems that are already putting strains on family life including financial hardship, social isolation, poor self-esteem, childcare problems, health problems, relationship difficulties, domestic violence, substance misuse, and the threat of homelessness; and
 - the impact on children and teenage members of the family is significant and enduring.”
- 2.5 This suggests that providing high quality information to families is important for them in their own right, as well as for the long term outcomes of any offender whom they may be supporting.

Engaging effectively

- 2.6 It also points to the need for finding ways to engage with people who are excluded through poverty, low educational attainment, lone parenthood and social stigma. A report by Roger Houchin indicates that 60% of prisoners from Glasgow come from “the poorest council estates”, with a “near absolute correlation” between the level of social deprivation of local government wards and the imprisonment rate.⁴ What holds true for prisoners, holds true for their families.
- 2.7 Given the relationship between exclusion, deprivation and low levels of literacy, effective engagement goes beyond written information. A conservative estimate places 40% of prisoners in the UK as non-readers⁵.
- 2.8 It is difficult to separate out the information needs of families from their support needs as the two are so closely entwined. Good information can help people feel less anxious and more in control and can also point them to support services. Various recent studies and surveys give an indication of the kind of information that families are lacking or are looking for.

Difficulties in sourcing information

- 2.9 Research with families in Tayside in 2005⁶ indicates that families lack information rather than support, “families did not know who to turn to at initial custody, during imprisonment, and in preparation

⁴ Houchin, R. 2005. Social Exclusion and Imprisonment in Scotland. Glasgow Caledonian University.

⁵ Source: National Literacy Trust www.literacytrust.org.uk.

⁶ Loucks, N. 2005. Prison Without Bars: the experiences of families affected by imprisonment. Tayside Criminal Justice Partnership and Families Outside.

for release. The quest for information seemed to be a constant battle for them.”

- 2.10 The report goes on to say that families “just needed to know where they could go for information, at which point they could decide for themselves what they wanted to do.”
- 2.11 The report concludes that age appropriate information is required for families at all stages of the criminal justice process including “factual information on criminal justice processes and procedures; access to specific information on the relative; access to information relating to the family situation, for example benefits, housing, social welfare issues.”
- 2.12 A survey of eight family members facilitated by Sacro⁷ indicated that they lacked information about support available and that there was no standard way for families to get information about this. The report concludes that families’ psychological and practical difficulties could be alleviated were they to be given “precise instruction as to the location of prisons, visiting times, directions and costs of visits immediately after sentence as well as information about support services.”

Specific information needs

- 2.13 A consultation with families⁸ conducted by South West Scotland CJA in partnership with HMP Kilmarnock, Serco and Families Outside in 2007 indicates that families need, “as essential provision”:

Information:

- Contact list
- How to visit information
- Consistent and accurate information pre-court, court to prison and prison to release
- Information provided by people, not just leaflets
- Information and advice presented in an easy to use manner
- Practical advice for first time visitors
- More meaningful information sharing among all agencies

⁷ Boyd, A. 2006. Out of Reach: a qualitative investigation into the lives of those with a loved one in prison. A dissertation for the completion of an MSc in forensic psychology at Glasgow Caledonian University.

⁸ Focus on Families in South West Scotland, August 2007

- Specific information from the Scottish Prison Service, the police, criminal justice social work, local authorities, the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service⁹.

Information about travel costs

- 2.14 Research by Families Outside on travel links to Scottish prisons¹⁰ highlights families' lack of awareness of the Assisted Prison Visits Scheme which helps with travel costs for visits for people on low incomes. It reports that a 2007 survey of 63 visitors to HMP Glenochil had never heard of the scheme. While highlighted in the report as an example of good practice in helping families on low incomes travel to visits, the lack of awareness at Glenochil is consistent with evidence gathered by the Families Outside helpline.

Information about visits

- 2.15 The research also highlights families' confusion about the variations in visit arrangements across the SPS. The report recommends, inter alia, that the SPS website should have a visiting template to provide consistent information to families on prison visits, including transport. It refers to 2003 research by Families Outside which recommended that the SPS should produce a standard leaflet with details of each prison and travel information for families.
- 2.16 A survey conducted by Families Outside in the Visitor Centre at HMP Edinburgh¹¹ gathered data over an eight-week period at seven remand and one convicted visit sessions. This indicated that many visitors had felt unprepared for their first visit or had been unable to get information about the prison; visiting parents were not given enough information about their son's care while in prison; visitors would benefit from more information about benefits, counselling and health for themselves; and many were unaware of the APVS or the role of prison family support staff. The report recommends that visitors to prisons need accessible information, particularly those with literacy issues but also those for whom English is not their first language. It urges recognition of the visitors centre's potential for reaching vulnerable and traditionally "hard to reach" families; and involvement of support agencies to improve access to health information (including mental health and addiction services).

⁹ Extracted from point one of the report.

¹⁰ Higgenbotham, M. 2007. Do Not Pass Go...Travel Links to Scottish Prisons. Families Outside.

¹¹ Stalker, E. 2006. "What can I do to get into the jail to be with my dad?" Edinburgh Prison Visitors Centre Survey. Families Outside.

Information for young people

- 2.17 A briefing paper by Families Outside to support a DVD about the experiences of young people affected by imprisonment¹² indicates that it is possible to reduce stress on young people by giving information in the right way. The young people involved in the initiative highlight that not being given information makes it difficult for them to make sense of what is happening. It concludes that professionals need to “recognise and address the support, information and signposting needs” of young people.

Requests for information

- 2.18 An indication of information needs and gaps can be gleaned from the statistics gathered by some of the organisations working directly with the families of offenders.
- 2.19 Families Outside runs the Scottish Prisoners Families Helpline. The Families Outside annual report for 2006/7 indicates that the helpline received over 1800 contacts by phone and email asking for support and information on “more than 3000 issues”. It is difficult to extract information needs alone but main issues are concern about how the prisoner will cope; and worry about practical issues including how to get to the prison, what to tell the children, and how they will cope with separation. Many calls are about non-prison based issues such as housing, benefits, health, childcare and finances. There has been an increase in calls about mental health; and calls about newly introduced Home Detention Curfew and Extended Home Release.
- 2.20 A significant number of callers wanted information about prison generally, visits, travel and transport with the issue most frequently raised being APVS information. Emotional support, concern for the prison and social welfare issues were also common. As well as providing telephone support, the helpline sent out leaflets and factsheets and signposted families to relevant services.
- 2.21 Calls to the Scottish Prisoners Families Helpline over the past two years from Glasgow area codes account for 10% of overall calls. In March 2008, main themes in Glasgow calls were Home Detention Curfew (17%); travel and transport/APVS (6%) and emotional support (11%). Families Outside comment that issues specific to Glasgow callers appear, over a period of time, to be no different from other geographical areas.
- 2.22 Action for Prisoners’ Families based in London runs the Prisoners’ Families Helpline. The most recent analysis (2006) of helpline

¹² Families Outside. 2006. “It’s No Holiday” – the experiences of young people affected by imprisonment.

statistics indicates that the main issues for callers are general enquiries about visiting, the prison system, contacting prisoners and emotional support. This is consistent with the Scottish helpline.

- 2.23 Information sheets which receive most hits on their website are: transfers; visiting someone in prison; keeping in touch; categorisation; sentence calculation; Home Detention Curfew and benefit entitlements. The helpline most frequently sends out information on APVS, contacting prisoners and who can help.
- 2.24 The Sacro Glasgow Throughcare Service provides information and support to families of Glasgow offenders. The annual report for 2007/8 (unpublished) indicates that 76 families contacted the service for “voluntary assistance” looking for information about funding for travel to prison visits, travel arrangements and emotional support.
- 2.25 A report by the Children’s Commissioner on the rights and status of the children of prisoners in Scotland¹³ indicates that children and young people want information and support. She cites calls to Childline from 2002 to 2006 where reference is made to a relative in prison. This indicates that children phone about a wide range of issues, some of which are linked to information needs. She recommends that Community Justice Authorities should look at how to take sensitive account of the views of children in developing services. This has implications for any materials which are developed for children and young people.

Conclusions

- 2.26 These findings suggest that there are significant numbers of families looking for information about a wide range of issues. The families of Glasgow offenders are looking for the same information as families in other areas.

¹³ Marshall, K. Scotland’s Commissioner for Children and Young People. 2008. Not seen. Not heard. Not guilty. The rights and status of children of prisoners in Scotland.

3 Research Findings

3.1 We have set out the findings under the following four headings consistent with the research objectives:

- Information families receive, at what points, and their views on the usefulness of this information
- Particular instances of good practice in either information content or dissemination
- Where families feel there are gaps in information provision and suggestions on particular content and format
- What information is received and required particularly in relation to transport and prison visiting issues

Profile of Interviewees (family members)

3.2 We spoke to 26 principal family members, 23 women and three men (as well as additional adult family members accompanying prison visitors). Table 2 shows their relationship to the offender. Half were mothers but other relationships were also represented.

Table 2: Relationship of Family Member to the Offender

Relationship to offender	Number
Mother	13
Partner	6
Father	3
Daughter	3
Sister	1
Total	26

3.3 Family members were visiting Glasgow offenders across Scotland and also in England. Table 3 shows which prison offenders were in at the time of the interviews. Families had previous experience of visiting HMP Greenock, Shotts, Inverness, Kilmarnock and Castle Huntly so were able to make comparisons. One couple was visiting their son for the first time.

Table 3: Where Offender was at time of Interview with Family Member

Establishment	Number
Cornton Vale	5
Barlinnie	8
Polmont	6
Peterhead	3
Lincoln	1
London	1
Recently released from Barlinnie	1
Total	25

- 3.4 Seven of the 25 offenders were on remand and one had recently been released.

Information families receive, at what points, and their views on its usefulness

- 3.5 The general sense from families interviewed is that they receive very little information at any point in the process and what they do get is rather hit or miss.

a) Information Families Receive Immediately after Sentence/Conviction

- 3.6 Families said that they were often left in the dark immediately after sentence/conviction, not knowing who to ask. Comments included:

"It's hard to find out information."

"It's not like there's anyone in court. You've just to go home and wait for a phone call. There's no one number. You can't just go and look up the yellow pages."

"You've just to leave the court and wait for a phone call from your son. And then you try to phone and you wait ten minutes on the phone and then you get cut off or you phone back and it's shut."

"The lack of information is ridiculous. We get papped about from one person to the next. When you love someone and



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you are worried about where he is and how he is it's terrible."

"It was a nightmare. I didn't know where he was and what was happening for six to eight weeks and I couldn't find out what jail he was in."

"I didn't get anything. It was just a case of going up to the prison and trying to find out."

"I found it hard to find out. I phoned loads of people and they just passed me on to someone else."

"I got nothing. It would have been good to know what to expect of visits and how to get here."

"I got little to none. My son doesn't have a good relationship with me so it's been hard to keep up to date on where he is."

"At the beginning we were very unsure – there wasn't much contact and we didn't know the system but after we looked into it, there is good help."

"It took us two weeks to book a visit. We didn't realise that we had to do it – we thought that my son would arrange it."

"I didn't get any information. She got three weeks remand and we didn't get told anything. I didn't even have the number of Cornton Vale."

"You don't just go to court and they say 'he is going to Barlinnie for six months and this is the visiting'. People come out and they don't know what's happening or who to ask. The courts are really busy places and they just assume you'll know what to do. So people are totally helpless. They are really embarrassed as well. They don't want to have to say to a stranger what their son has done. When they phone up they don't want too much information at once because it's information overload."

- 3.7 Families' comments were reflected by prisoners who said that when they were first placed in custody, their families were not told anything. The exception to this was if the prisoners had asked their lawyers to get in touch with their family for them.

b) The first visit/prison visits

- 3.8 Families tended to find out information about prison visiting once they were already in the visit system by which time they said it was too late. Although Cornton Vale sends out an information pack to all families and invites them to an information session before their first visit; and Polmont holds an induction session for families at which it gives out an information booklet, this seems to have less impact than might be expected as many families were not aware of the information contained in the packs/booklet or did not attend the inductions. One person said they had received information through the post from Barlinnie. Several families commented on the need for information for first time visitors which sets out what to expect at a first visit and details about proforms (forms which prisoners send to visitors requesting the items they need – from an allowed list) and money.

“When he first got put into prison, his friends told me how to go there.”

“It was just a case of going up to the prison and trying to find out.”

“The Family Contact Development Officer [at Cornton Vale] gave us lots of stuff and told us what to expect and about visit times. She told us about the subsidy to get to the prison and gave us a map. But what you could take up wasn’t explained enough. We took up stuff that wasn’t allowed and that was difficult to understand.”

- 3.9 Very few of those consulted had heard of the APVS and almost all had trouble finding out where the prison was, how to visit, what they could take to the visit, how long it would last and how they could get to the prison. Some of this information is on the Scottish Prison Service website but there are questions about accessibility and content. Some had no idea where their family member was and it took them some time to find out. Several had never been involved in the criminal justice process before. They found this very stressful at a time of great anxiety.

“A friend of a friend told me about [the APVS]. If I’d known about it I could have visited far sooner.”

“I found out about the travel expenses by accident [from a neighbour] after I’d made several visits [to Peterhead] and I haven’t kept the evidence so can’t claim.”



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"I didn't get told anything and I was scared of coming here. I'm terrified of the place. I don't know who to ask for information."

"It was a complete shock to the system. This has never happened in our family and we needed to know everything. We didn't know what to expect. He is being transferred and we don't know what to ask. We are really worried about what the prison will be like and the violence and bullying."

3.10 Some families had received information but had not taken it in. For example, Cornton Vale sends out an information pack to families with information about the APVS but the families interviewed did not know about it or had not claimed it.

3.11 Families also mentioned finding it difficult to understand information or not feeling able to ask for it.

"It was too difficult to understand. It scared the hell out of me. A pile of leaflets doesn't make sense to me and makes me feel even more inadequate."

"If I felt more confident I would ask lots of questions but it's terrifying being here [Barlinnie] and I don't know who to talk to."

3.12 Some had information but this was not integrated with support or was not enough. As one worker commented, *"She had all the information but she needed someone to talk to outside the family."*

"Sometimes the last thing you need is a list of numbers. You need someone to talk to."

c) Sources of Information

3.13 There was no consistent way of families getting information. This lack of consistency was raised by families and by key contacts. Some of the sources mentioned were the police; the offender's lawyer; the offender's interpreter; friends; prison staff and the offender themselves. It was often a matter of luck in seeing a poster or picking up a leaflet or coming across an individual willing to help. Those who took part in the research through a voluntary organisation found information through them, for example Hope and Sacro. Few families talked to others in prison or court waiting rooms, and there was a strong sense of families wanting to keep to themselves. Many did not want to identify themselves to others as the family of an offender. Comments included:

"I had to phone up the lawyer for information but he wasn't much help so I phoned the interpreter."



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"I could never get the solicitor on the phone but there was a woman who worked in the solicitor's office and she told me what I needed to know."

"His lawyer kept me informed. He was quite good so I knew what was happening."

"People phone up the lawyer and even if he's the best lawyer in the world, his job's finished."

"I got information from the social worker face-to-face and since being involved in Polmont have had good information from the prison staff."

"It was just luck, I saw a poster in the doctor's surgery about Hope."

"I've had to find it out for myself. It's very hard to get information. There's plenty of information about prisons up here. Because he's in England, there's no one to help."

"The first time I went to prison it was the scariest thing I've had to do in my life. I asked prison staff at reception and they were very good. I said, 'Listen, I've never been to one of these places before'."

"The prisons are all different so even if you know about one it changes if the person goes to another and you've got to start all over again. There's no set rule. And it does depend on who you get if you'll get information."

d) Reliance on the Offender

- 3.14 Several families relied on their family member to give them information. This had advantages and disadvantages. The information an offender gives may be inaccurate or can be used as a method of control. On the other hand, it can strengthen the bond between people.

"I didn't know what was going on and was relying on my partner for information. It's hard to say whether this was good information as his head was a total mess."

"A lot of guys will phone and say I can only phone you at ten o'clock at night so you've got to stay in and wait for the call. Also, a lot of guys don't want their wives or mothers phoning up the prison."



Blake Stevenson

Creative Research **Creating** Action

"The big one he often says don't worry about the debt, it gets written off when you're inside. There should be a big note in the visitor room saying that's a lie. The debt is still there."

"Some guys will say you've got to put in £25 a week. You don't. He's skinning you."

"I had to write to her [mother] to find out what was happening and then she booked a visit. Although I'd been in court myself I didn't know what would happen about prison and it was my mum who had to tell me everything."

"I had to rely on him for information and he was finding it very difficult to get information inside. People were telling him things and then he was telling me things and then I was realising that that's not right."

"Throughout this whole time I've relied on my partner for information. We've had to work it out ourselves. My partner has been really good at explaining. We are very close."

"If it wasn't for him I wouldn't have known what to do [about visiting]."

- 3.15 Similarly, offenders in the focus group said that the first time they were placed in custody it was up to them to keep their families informed of what was happening to them. However, this can be limited. For example, one noted that whilst they could use a mobile on remand, once sentenced, they do not have this right. Instead, the prison gives them 30p to make a payphone call after their first night in prison. Several said that this does not last long, particularly if calling a mobile phone.
- 3.16 According to prisoners, the most common questions related to prison visit and what was happening next with the trial.
- 3.17 Data protection and security issues restrict the flow of information between offenders and their families. Examples of this included:
- some offenders choose not to communicate with their families whilst they are in prison and do not wish any information to be passed on;
 - any requests for information by families must be in writing and on legal letterhead. This must then be posted or faxed to the prison and the family contact officer will check with the offender;

- an offender's partner who rang to say that their daughter was in hospital had to leave a message, which took a couple of days to reach him.
- 3.18 The family contact officer noted that this leads to frustration for both offenders and their families. Officers also feel frustrated by the red tape.
- 3.19 The focus group with prisoners also indicated that they might not be reliable informants. For example, while there appears to be plenty of information in Barlinnie in the form of leaflets and posters and while staff are clear that the prisoner induction is comprehensive, prisoners do not seem to be picking this up. One prisoner said that he had never seen any leaflets or posters, while there were dozens on the wall right in front of him. As with families, there seem to be issues about how best to engage with prisoners.
- 3.20 Families also needed information so they could pass this onto the offender.

"It's very hard if you are on the outside to get information. I had to get information to give to him on his entitlements. He didn't get a probation officer as he was being moved about as the prisons are so full. It was up to me to find out for him."

"The prisoner gets told one thing and we get told something different, for example you can only get money for certain things."

e) *The Points at which Families Receive Information*

- 3.21 There is no pattern to when families receive information. According to families, the key transition points when they would have welcomed information are:
- when the offender is sentenced'
 - if the offender moves from remand to convicted'
 - if the offender transfers to another prison; and
 - at crisis times.
- 3.22 Key contacts said that families would benefit from information at the very early stages of the process, on arrest and when going to court; and also on release.

- 3.23 Families generally did not receive information about the early stages of the criminal justice process, for example how the courts work, sentencing and so on. Although the Scottish Court Service, the Crown Office and others produce literature, the desk-based review and consultation with practitioners indicates that this tends to be aimed at offenders, witnesses and victims. While there may be overlap, there seems to be nothing aimed directly at families.
- 3.24 Key contacts commented that different prisons have different rules and cultures so when offenders transfer, families have to adapt to a new set of rules and this can be confusing. For example at Glenochil families are permitted to bring clothing and footwear for prisoners whereas Barlinnie supplies all clothing. One prisoner said that when he was “downgraded” from Castle Huntly to Barlinnie, his family needed information about the stricter rules at the latter.
- 3.25 Whilst families might become familiar with one prison system, when an offender is moved they need different information. Given the transience in the prison population, particularly Barlinnie which has a high throughput and high number of short-term prisoners, this was a common occurrence. Similarly, if the offender moves from remand to convicted, a different set of rules applies.

“A lot of people don’t know that if the person goes from remand to convicted it changes or they maybe get moved to another hall and the visit changes.”

“There are different conditions for money in different prisons. In some you can hand it in. In others you’ve got to post it in. You don’t get any information from anyone.”

“If they move say from Glasgow to Edinburgh, it’s not just a matter of getting on a different bus, you’ve got to know what’s happening so you can make arrangements. The visits might be on different days and if you’re at work and you’ve arranged to get every Tuesday off and it changes to a Thursday visit you need to know these things.”

“It can cause conflict because maybe she doesn’t know and all he’s got to do is sit there 24 hours a day and think hee haw and how come she’s not making that visit.”

- 3.26 Both prisoners and families commented that transfers between prisons often happened at very short notice. Families were often particularly stressed at these times trying to find out what was happening. Prisoners said that it was often up to them to tell families where they were going.

- 3.27 Prisoners also said that it was up to them to inform their families when moving from remand to convicted and the different rules which apply.
- 3.28 Information about leaving prison seemed to be provided ad hoc. One key contact commented "We get a lot of lassies phoning up about the tag. It's always the women who have to deal with this. One woman said her man had told her that they would be coming up to see her to check the tag on certain days and she had to wait in in case they were coming. Now that wasn't right but she had no one to check the information with. And the lassie's taken time off work to stay in and there's no one at the prison she can phone to say 'he's told me this'."

"Sacro gave me information about home leave along with a brochure which I found really helpful."

"It was just through him that I found out."

"I was just talking on the phone to him at night that I found out what was happening and when he'd get libbed."

"I don't know what's to happen but it's my address and I'm looking after her daughter. So I should know. I should be part of it too."

"I didn't get told about the licence. It's all about the prisoners. The social worker explained bits and pieces to me but they tell them more than you. But you're living with someone so you need to know too."

f) Views on the Usefulness of Information

- 3.29 Few families had seen or received information which they had found particularly useful. They tended to rely heavily on word of mouth, especially those who felt distrustful of prison or social work staff. (Many of the offenders in the focus group said that their families had negative experiences of staff because of the conditions around visiting, such as being searched or being treated with suspicion.)
- 3.30 There is no standard approach by the Scottish Prison Service (SPS). Each prison produces its own information and there is information on the SPS website but, generally, this tends to start from the perspective of the prison rather than the family. However, there is some indication that this may improve. Barlinnie is drafting a new information pack for families (supported by a pilot phone line to Family Contact Officers); Cornton Vale has a pack which it sends out to families and is discussing with Families Outside how to improve its web page. Polmont has an information booklet for

visitors. However, these are printed or photocopied in poor quality black and white; feature photos of the outside of the prison building; and good information tends to get lost in small type and densely printed pages. Some of the information is overly complex and unlikely to be accessible.

- 3.31 The information given to families by individual prisons, looks rather uninviting and the format makes it difficult to read and understand. Although people were (probably) given the APVS leaflet by prisons many had not heard of the scheme. Similarly, although many would have been given information about Families Outside as this is included in prison packs, most said that they had never heard of the organisation.
- 3.32 Comments from family members, key contacts and the desk-based review indicate that the SPS website is not user friendly for families; each prison has its own page and these vary in content and quality. One person said that he had received incorrect information from the website, *"It told me that there was visiting time at 6.15 so I came here and there was no one. I waited for one and a quarter hours before I got to visit him."*
- 3.33 Few families could comment on the information they had received from prisons as it had made little impression. There are clearly issues about accessibility but also what kind of message is being given to families.
- 3.34 Given what we know about the literacy needs of prisoners, families are also likely to have problems with reading. This suggests that a presumption of literacy problems should be built into the provision of information. This is clearly not the case with the current materials.
- 3.35 A few had picked up a leaflet in a prison waiting room or had seen a poster on the wall (for example for Sacro bus service).

"I saw a poster in the waiting room about help with costs but didn't take it further."

- 3.36 The impression of both Barlinnie and Polmont is that while there is literature around it is not well displayed or inviting. If someone wanted to read the pages of information for families in the Barlinnie waiting room, they would need to stand in the corner, exposed, where it is attached to a stand, going through the small type.

g) Examples of Useful Information

3.37 Nevertheless, a few families found some information useful. They mentioned:

- leaflets on home leave given out by Sacro;
- literature produced by Families Outside; and
- information given out by Polmont YOI and Cornton Vale.

3.38 But face-to-face information seemed to make more impact.

“The Family Contact Liaison Officer gave us some leaflets about the prison and kept us up to date.”

“The social workers gave us information about what to expect and what it would be like [court appearance].”

“I got information from the social worker. Since being involved in Polmont, I have had good information from the prison staff (family support officer) and have found it helpful to get brief verbal information and get stuff on paper as I can't take it all in.”

h) Consequences of Lack of Information

3.39 Lack of information had a profound effect on families at a very stressful time. They said they felt distressed, bewildered, confused, upset and angry. Several commented on the fact that they had done nothing wrong but they felt like outcasts. Others felt embarrassed and ashamed and did not like to come forward to ask for information. Not knowing what seem like simple facts or rules could have huge consequences. For example, one family member had made a long journey to visit her son but was not allowed into the visit because she was a couple of minutes late. Had she known the tight restrictions she would have been much earlier. Some of the comments made by families indicate the humiliation which can result from lack of information and this can do little for relationships between families, offenders and prison staff.

“I felt embarrassed and I'd never been in a prison before. How would I know?”

“I felt terrible, I went all the way down to England and then found out I had to give him a postal order not cash. And it was the weekend and I couldn't get a postal order.”



"I felt silly. I didn't realise you couldn't wear a top with a hood so I had to take my top off in the visit room and I just had to sit there in my strappy top."

"I was upset. He had on the proform '7 pairs of boxers' and I bought two packs of three thinking that would be fine. It wasn't, they sent the lot back."

"If I'd known about the money [APVS] I could have visited."

"You feel like you are to blame and you are the criminal."

i) Value of Good Information

- 3.40 When good quality information is provided, this makes a significant difference to families.

"It is a worry when people go in at first. At the beginning it was like a death in the family. But as you get to know how things work you begin to handle it better. It puts your mind at rest."

"I wish I'd known what to expect on a first visit. Even small stuff like there is a canteen and if that's shut there are vending machines but you need change for that and the officers have no change. And to be told you will be scanned. All that stuff settles your nerves."

4 Instances of good practice in information content and dissemination

Content

- 4.1 There is some good quality information, largely produced by voluntary organisations, notably Families Outside. There are no formal evaluations of this information so it is not possible to say whether or not it represents good practice.
- 4.2 However, few people were aware of seeing or receiving it so this suggests that it is not getting to families effectively.
- 4.3 Key contacts mentioned Families Outside literature as being helpful and well produced. Its website is clear and has downloadable fact sheets. It continues to develop its information and has received funding from the Scottish Government to produce leaflets for children and young people.
- 4.4 Families Outside mentioned publications for children and young people produced by Barnardos in Northern Ireland as being helpful for young people.
- 4.5 Action for Prisoners' Families, the Ministry of Justice and Thames Valley Partnership have funded a leaflet 'Custody – What Now' aimed at families. Published in May, the leaflet is aimed at families in court and gives addresses and phone numbers of local prisons. This is similar to, but more detailed than the Families Outside 'At Court' leaflet.
- 4.6 Cornton Vale is working with Families Outside to improve the information on its page on the SPS website.
- 4.7 Barlinnie is currently drafting an information pack and has sent it to a range of organisations for comment. Linked to this, it is piloting a phone line to FCOs. Barlinnie intends to post the information to the families of all remand prisoners, first offenders and those transferring from other prisons, as well as making it available in the prison forecourt.

Dissemination

- 4.8 Families Outside say that court liaison officers are good at handing out cards. Families liked getting information from someone verbally and a few said it was also useful to have something written down to refer to later. This underlines previous comments about likely literacy needs

- 4.9 The Families Outside free telephone helpline provides telephone information which it can follow up by posting out information/or referring callers to its website and other sources of support and information. However, the helpline is only available on weekday afternoons. (Families Outside piloted a telephone line linked directly from Edinburgh Sheriff Court but there was little take up.)
- 4.10 The families who took part in the research through Hope and Sacro clearly relied on these projects to give them information and found this invaluable.
- 4.11 Polmont YOI provides an induction session for new families at which it gives verbal and written information and introduce the family liaison officer. A couple of interviewees found this helpful but another commented that the induction session had taken place some time after her family member had been imprisoned.
- 4.12 Cornton Vale FCDO sends out an information pack to every family. This includes information about visiting; the Families Outside details; and the APVS details. Cornton Vale also invites families to an induction session and asks them to come with questions.
- 4.13 NIACRO Family Links programme contacts every family within 48 hours of an offender entering prison or the Juvenile Justice Centre. Every prisoner who comes into custody goes through a committal interview. At this interview, the prisoner is asked if there is any family member who requires support or information. If so, the prisoner gives the address and phone number of the family member and signs a consent to contact form. The probation officer faxes this information to NIACRO which then sends out an information pack to families. The Family Links team follows this up by phone to ask if the family member wants to take up any support such as: one to one support; telephone support; home visits; information on other agencies; advice and info on benefits, housing, debt; transport to the three prisons or the Juvenile Justice Centre; help with childcare and links to visitors' centres and prison visit staff. The scheme is funded by the Probation Board, the Youth Justice Agency and others. This is a good example of paper-based information backed up by personal (telephone) contact and information linked to support.
- 4.14 A new 'Custody – What Now' leaflet is being disseminated through the courts in South East England. This leaflet tells families what will happen immediately after sentence and provides details of all local prisons and sources of help.



5 Where families think there are gaps in information provision and suggestions on particular content and format

Gaps in Provision

- 5.1 The desk research indicated that there are significant gaps evidenced by the volume and types of calls to helplines from families. This evidence is consistent with what families involved in this consultation said.

Gaps identified by families

- 5.2 The information needs highlighted by families during the consultation included:

a) Court

- About court
- When they can see the family member after sentence
- Sentences and what they mean

b) Prison

- How to stay in contact with the offender
- Prison visits
- Assisted Prison Visit Scheme (APVS)
- Family liaison staff
- Release
- What to expect when the offender leaves prison

c) Children

- How and what to tell children
- Impact on children



d) Practical issues

- Legal and financial support for family
- Money
- Housing

e) Emotional issues

- Feelings
- Dealing with stigma
- Coping with change

f) Other

- Sources of help and advice

- 5.3 Gaps in information provision are considerable and often complex.
- 5.4 Some information needs are straightforward for example where the prison is.
- 5.5 Others are more complicated for example what to tell the children; how to cope financially; hope to cope with the feelings and stigma; what will happen when the offender is released.
- 5.6 Many of the families consulted had told their children that their mum or dad was at college or away at work and offenders were very reluctant to disabuse their children but were finding the pretence difficult to maintain as children grew older. This suggests that families and offenders badly need information and support in communicating with children and about the long-term implications of not being open with them.
- 5.7 There is no targeted information, for example for children and young people (although Families Outside have now been funded to produce this); for elderly parents of offenders; for grandparents who are looking after grandchildren while their son or daughter is in prison; or for the range of other circumstances including people from minority ethnic populations and same sex couples.
- 5.8 There is nothing aimed specifically at families which gives information on the prosecution and sentencing processes.

- 5.9 There is little information in plain English and none in easy-read. This is a concern given the likely prevalence of low literacy.
- 5.10 There is no systematic way of getting information to families. Most families interviewed found it hard to find the information they needed or chanced upon it through word of mouth or luck. Many did not know who to ask or relied on offenders or friends for information which could be unreliable.
- 5.11 The materials which are available tend to focus on practicalities rather than on feelings or awareness raising. But it is very important for families to know for example that life goes on or that their feelings and emotions are a natural response to what may be a traumatic experience.
- 5.12 Echoing this, most families in this study concentrated on the practical details of the criminal justice process and the prison system rather than their feelings. Offenders were also uncomfortable about the notion that families might have information needs about such topics.
- 5.13 Many families interviewed did not have basic information which would have benefited them such as the Families Outside helpline number or how to claim travel expenses for prison visits.

“Short term prisoners don’t have same access to information. For long-term prisoners there is more social work involvement so more likely for families to get information too.”

“Everyone is unique and we need to recognise individual needs. People want different things. Some are more needy than others.”

- 5.14 The views of families were echoed by the key contacts who took part in interviews who said that families typically wanted information about:

Gaps identified by key contacts

For Glasgow Families

a) Court

- Glasgow courts very busy so it may be a long day waiting at court



- The different courts – district, sheriff, high, stipendiary magistrates

b) Prisons

- Sacro transport service
- Addiction services and access to treatment/care
- Remand prisons (Barlinnie, Polmont and Cornton Vale)
- Transfers

General Information Needs

a) Court

- Structured information on the criminal justice system
- Social enquiry reports
- Key disposals and sentencing policy
- Court jargon
- Court timescales and delays
- Bail supervision and bail curfew

b) Prisons

- Rights of prisoner
- How the offender will be treated
- APVS
- Visiting: where the prison is, how they get there, what they can take in, what they can't take in, when they can visit, ID, how soon will they be allowed a visit, the proform
- Prisons: where the offender is, what will happen to them, what the day is like, how the prison works, the difference between remand and convicted



- Remand prisons
 - Release including extended home leave, home detention curfew
- c) *Children***
- What to tell the children
 - If there are problems with children
 - If there is concern that children might be 'taken away'
 - Prison visits and children
 - What happens to juveniles
- d) *Practical Issues***
- Rights of family members
 - If the family member wants to break up with partner
 - If the family member was abused by partner
 - Practical information about money, housing, work and other welfare issues
 - What to do about the offenders' 'assets', for example mortgage, rent, debt
- e) *Emotional Issues***
- Reassurance
 - Key messages such as that the family is not to blame
 - Impact on the family
 - How to cope
- f) *Other***
- There are organisations which can help
 - Role of different agencies involved, for example throughcare



- Same sex relationships
- If there are health, mental health or addiction concerns

Gaps identified by offenders

5.15 Prisoners consulted said that an information pack would be useful to their families. When asked what this should include, they said:

- Visiting
- Money and housing
- Role of family liaison staff
- What to expect when a family member leaves prison
- Extended home leave
- Sources of help and advice

5.16 They were less comfortable about including:

- How and what to tell children
- Handling media attention
- Family members' feelings
- Dealing with stigma
- Sentences and what they mean
- Coping with change

5.17 These topics seemed to touch a raw nerve with participants and they did not want to discuss them. These may be topics which they avoid discussing with their families also.

Addressing the Gaps

5.18 The consultation with families and interviews with key contacts indicate that addressing the gaps is complicated because:

- Each family and family member has different information needs

- Prisons are all different
- The population of prisons is transient (particularly Barlinnie which is Glasgow's main prison) and offenders may be moved several times
- Families of long-term prisoners may be more likely to be linked into social work and hence receive more information than families of short-term prisoners (sentence less than four years)
- People like to get information in different ways
- There is huge reliance on verbal communication and word of mouth
- Not all family members want to be visible (huge issues of stigma) but many need reassurance
- There may be literacy and language issues
- Increasing numbers of offenders and families are not aware of UK systems
- There may be many people who are very excluded and hard to reach (for example families of serious sexual offenders or families who do not want to maintain contact with the offender but who need information on his whereabouts or release)
- Mistrust of some agencies

Suggestions on Content

- 5.19 Families found it difficult to make concrete suggestions about what might be included in an information pack. Comments included:

"[I'd want] phone numbers, basic knowledge of prisons, visiting times, how long visits last, what to take in – they don't tell you that until you get there."

"Just the basics – 'I'm here and you can come and see me'."

"How my mum will be helped. I need to know there's help for her."

"Legal rights, rights of the prisoner and what to do if someone is falsely imprisoned."

5.20 The following points on content, including style emerged. Any information should:

- Be simple (plain English) and easy to read
- Be in large font
- Be brief
- Be targeted (for example first time involvement; older parents; young people; young offender; families who don't want close contact with the offender)
- Include clear signposting to agencies which can give verbal information/support and/or more detailed written information
- Build on existing material rather than reinvent the wheel

5.21 There is a need for information which raises awareness and provides reassurance that 'life goes on' and that families of offenders have not committed a crime.

5.22 Families want to know why certain rules and procedures exist. Knowing the reasons would help them feel more in control and less like criminals themselves.

5.23 There is an assumption in much of the information that families want to maintain contact with offenders who may be referred to as the family's 'loved one'. Families may want information for their own safety and security. Or to know that it can be natural and understandable not to miss the offender.

"I loved it when he was inside."

"You get used to being on your own."

"I knew where he was when he was inside."

5.24 Key contacts said that short and simple information would be most beneficial.

"Families need standard, basic information with signposting to the places that will help. It needs to be properly and professionally done and be readily available in the right places."

"Families need someone who will tell them what to expect, what they might feel and what will happen next."

"Families need to know about travel services and travel costs."

- 5.25 But there also has to be a way of informing people about likely feelings and emotions.

"He used to get out for the weekend and the kids were all excited but she would go mental because he would move the sauce bottles. There she was, she had survived for six years and now he was coming back and upsetting everything. It would help to know to expect this."

"The mum or woman is out here and she's got to survive. He goes in at 16 and ten years later he's still 16. Meanwhile, she's changing. There should be information about this."

Suggestions on Format

- 5.26 The consultation indicated that there is no one particular format as people get information in different ways but families would prefer something which is discreet. Comments included:

"The best thing would be short leaflets and information in waiting rooms with phone numbers."

"A short letter posted out to the family explaining it all so it gives light at the end of the tunnel and some hope. That can help the prisoner and the family and the family can reinforce with the prisoner that they need to behave."

"Something small – a card with who to contact."

- 5.27 Suggestions emerging as a result of the study include:

- One page leaflet with signposting to agencies/a helpline and a website
- Detailed website with fact sheets for individuals and agencies to download
- Large poster with the same branding as the leaflet and website which would be visible from the back of the prison/court waiting room
- Colourful, attractive and appealing information rather than 'worthy' so that it can compete with other material but also so that it gives the sense that families deserve good information and a positive message

Suggestions on Dissemination

5.28 The consultation indicates that there is no one way to ensure that families receive the information they require. But some methods may work better than others.

5.29 Post - families are disinclined to pick up literature, for example in prison waiting rooms as they cannot take it into the visit room. Some families said they had been sent information by post and some prisons routinely send out information. Standardising this through the SPS might mean that first time families would be guaranteed information about prisons and prison visits.

"If I get anything by post I would read it. The more information you get the better."

"Post works best. I haven't seen any posters or leaflets in the prison."

5.30 Through intermediaries such as lawyers, court officers, police family liaison officers, GPs, health visitors, ministers/priests and voluntary sector organisations. There is value in using intermediaries who are not directly connected to the criminal justice system; some families clearly distrusted social workers and prison staff.

"Speaking to someone works best. The Family Liaison Officer is good for information."

"Someone telling me, for example the minister."

5.31 Materials which can be looked at unobtrusively such as large posters may help get key messages or a telephone helpline across. Families may be able to memorise the information.

"I sometimes read stuff in prison waiting rooms."

5.32 Materials which can be referred to in private, for example websites may also be attractive to those who do not want to ask for information or pick up literature.

5.33 Families would benefit from receiving information at the earliest stage in the process (for example when offenders are involved with lawyers, court social workers and the Scottish Court Service) and then at key transition points.

5.34 Not everyone will go through the whole criminal justice process from arrest to release or they may go through it differently. So,

families do not need information about the end of a process when they are at the first stage.

- 5.35 Different communication methods appeal to different people. For example, the men consulted with in the course of this study had found information on websites. Few women had used the internet, but one woman who had used it was the partner of a serious sexual offender. The nature of the crime meant that she was reluctant to identify herself to services, and the internet afforded her the privacy and discretion she desired. Most people now have mobiles, and younger people may prefer to get information by text.
- 5.36 There may be other models, such as the NIACRO model which takes a multi-agency approach to ensuring that every family receives information by post within 48 hours of sentence and the offer of support shortly thereafter. This model depends on the willingness (and appropriateness) of the offender to give contact details for family members. There are also resource and practice issues which require national and local commitment.

“Maybe the prisoner should be given the information pack and told they can send it to a family member.”

The need for an Information Pack

- 5.37 While families clearly need information, the consultation with families raised questions about the value of an information pack and this was reinforced by some key contacts.
- 5.38 There was a general sense that an information pack could mean a duplication of materials and efforts. There was also a view that there is information available but there is a problem in making it accessible (for example because it is unappealing and difficult) or getting it to people.
- 5.39 Key contacts suggested that any information produced or provided should be:
- Brief
 - Include good signposting
 - Clear and cogent
 - Up to date
 - Available



- Suitable for those with literacy issues
- Target families who are involved for the first time
- Distributed at induction visits

5.40 Comments included:

“Can the CJA get the name of every family to send information direct?”

“The information is already there – the issue is how to make it accessible.”

“There is no need for this to be duplicated by every CJA. There should be one national leaflet with signposting.”

6 What information is received and required on transport and prison visiting

- 6.1 The previous chapters give some indication of the information received and required on transport and prison visiting.
- 6.2 Generally, families said they had received no information on transport and prison visits when they needed it. This was reinforced by voluntary agencies.
- 6.3 Offenders participating in the focus group said that, initially, they had to inform their families about visits. This included details of what was or was not allowed, times and where to go.
- 6.4 Most of those who took part said they did not know that they could get help with transport costs and had not heard of the APVS despite the fact that some would have been sent the APVS leaflet and the leaflet and posters were in prison waiting rooms. However, unless families are familiar with the acronym 'APVS', the leaflet and poster do not make it clear that they are about help with travel costs.

"I didn't know I could claim for travel costs. I was paying for it out of my own pocket [travel from Glasgow to Cornton Vale]. I had to go to Buchanan Street bus station to find out how to get there."

- 6.5 Most found it hard to find out about the detail of prison visiting and learned through experience and word of mouth rather from formal sources.

Information Received

- 6.6 If families received information at all, this tended to be the materials sent out by the prison or given out at an induction session for first time visitors. This typically comprises information about the particular prison, the APVS leaflet and the Families Outside card. As discussed above, there are limitations with the information materials prepared by prisons. A few families had looked on the SPS site for information on transport and visits.
- 6.7 Some families had obviously been given information but had not taken it in. Prisoners had the same experience. This may be a reflection of stress and trauma. For example, the Family Contact Officer in the Barlinnie focus group said that on arriving in prison, all prisoners have a comprehensive induction covering the wide range of issues that the prisoners or their families need to know,

including details of prison visits. However, some prisoners disputed this, stating that they had not received any information and had to rely instead on other prisoners to find out about visits.

- 6.8 Prison staff noted that prisoners often do not pay attention during induction and are not very responsive during their first few days in prison.

Samples

- 6.9 Samples of information for families are provided with this report and include:

- Cornton Vale pack for families
- Barlinnie draft pack for families
- Polmont information for visitors
- Greenock Family Contact Officer leaflet
- Scottish Prison Service web pages
- Families Outside publications
- NIACRO publications
- Sacro publications
- Barnardo's Northern Ireland publications
- Action for Prisoners' Families publications
- Leaflet produced by the South East Children and Families Support Networks Board

Information Required

- 6.10 Families said they wanted information on:

Transport

- Where the prison is: address, telephone number and map
- How to get there by public transport



- How to get there by car
- How to get from the station/bus stop to the prison
- How long the journey takes
- Bus and train times
- Bus, train and taxi numbers
- Transport services (for example Sacro bus)

Prison Visits

6.11 For each prison as all are different:

- Where the prisoner is (what prison)
- How to get a visit (and the difference between systems for visiting remand and convicted prisoners)
- The differences between 'halls'
- How to phone the prison
- Who to ask for if you want to talk to a member of staff while you're visiting
- When you can visit (visiting times)
- How long the visit lasts
- An explanation of the rules and why the set-up is the way it is - people said they could accept the rules if they understood why they were there – also it would mean they would be less likely to 'do the wrong thing' or feel embarrassed or upset
- What you can and cannot take to a visit (people talked about being very upset when they couldn't take in birthday cards or a birthday cake)
- What you can and cannot wear to a visit (people talked about having to remove their boots, or tops with zips or hoods)
- How much money you can take (what is the maximum and also what things cost as some people said they their family member demanded a lot) and what form this should take, for example coins, notes, postal order



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- Information about the 'proform' (form which prisoner sends to visitor requesting items needed against an allowed list)
- The need for picture ID and how to get this if you don't have a passport or new driving licence
- Where you can put your possessions when you visit
- That you may need small change for lockers and for the drinks machine
- Letters and phone calls
- Who to speak to if you are concerned about the family member's physical or mental health or if you are worried about addiction issues
- What the facilities are like in the waiting room and visit room, for example what refreshments are available in the waiting or visit area, how much these are and how to pay for them
- Facilities for babies and children
- That if you are late, you won't get in
- The process for searching
- What a closed visit means
- Whether you can touch your family member
- What if your family member doesn't book visits for you (who can you speak to – one woman talked about her son keeping power over her by withholding information)
- How you will be treated by staff and who to speak to if you want to ask anything
- That certain visit times are quieter than others

"Obviously the clothing is for drugs, but birthday cards, photos, I don't know why you can't take them in."

"People are visiting, they haven't done anything, they are not to blame."

"It would help if they told you you can't get back into the visit room if you leave. Kids need to go to the toilet but if



they leave the room to go to the toilet they can't get back in."

6.12 According to offenders, families commonly asked whether they would be searched. They also said their families had had negative experiences when visiting the prison (linked to lack of information) such as:

- Arriving a couple of minutes late for a visit and being told they would not be admitted
- Unknowingly bringing banned items in for prisoners and having these confiscated

7 Conclusions

- 7.1 This consultation with families indicates that people lack vital information which could help them deal practically and emotionally with the fact that a family member is involved in the criminal justice system.
- 7.2 Families of offenders are not a homogenous group but those consulted found it hard to say what they would like, suggesting that they are not used to having the right to express an opinion or say what they need.
- 7.3 Families of offenders already struggle with the trauma of the offence and the sentence; the stress of coping with loss (for example their partner, the father/mother of their children, their status in the community; income); the expense and strain of prison visits; the need to keep life going for children and grandchildren; and the stigma of being the family member of an offender (especially if it involves a serious offence). The lack of information and the lack of respect for their information needs exacerbate the stress, the trauma and feelings of worthlessness.
- 7.4 There are families which are extremely excluded and may not be in contact with agencies. These include families who want information but who do not visit or have contact with the family offender or who are already excluded through ethnic background, sexual orientation, their own offending background or for other reasons. Families of serious sexual offenders face particular stigma and may be reluctant to come forward.
- 7.5 The fact that families are not aware of information which is around suggests that there are problems with getting it to them or making it accessible.
- 7.6 There are likely to be issues with low literacy which suggests that written information, even in simple language and large font will never be as effective as giving information face-to-face or by phone.
- 7.7 Information needs are closely linked to support needs and it was difficult for families to talk about information needs in isolation. This suggests that providing information to families in Glasgow is scratching the surface and a first step towards providing them with more support.
- 7.8 The fact that many different agencies are involved in informing and supporting families suggests the importance of a multi-agency response to providing information, and generating or improving

content and distribution. This needs to include voluntary sector partners with which families in this study had good relationships.

- 7.9 It is important for GCJA to take account of good work in information provision in Scotland and further afield. There is no point in re-inventing the wheel. GCJA can build on the information already available and work with SPS and voluntary organisations to improve it and ensure that people receive it. There is information already in print which could be adapted or improved. The literature produced by Families Outside is consistently high quality and is based directly on what families want to know, rather than what Families Outside think families should know. The combination of support and targeted information provided through a helpline are a good practice example of what can be achieved, although there is an issue of awareness in Glasgow.
- 7.10 There is clearly enthusiasm within some prisons to improve their current information, and staff at HMP Barlinnie are keen to collaborate with GCJA on this. However, given that offenders from Glasgow may be dispersed anywhere in Scotland, GCJA needs to take a broad approach.
- 7.11 There is little evidence to suggest that the information needs of families of Glasgow's offenders differ significantly from those of any other offenders' families. This suggests that this is a national issue and that a partnership approach with other Community Justice Authorities would be of most benefit both to families and to the public purse.
- 7.12 There is clearly a need for information, although it is less clear what form that should take.
- 7.13 Given the volume and complexity of issues it makes most sense for GCJA to develop and provide good basic information specifically for Glasgow families with signposting backed up by more detailed information which is available to those who want it.
- 7.14 There are some examples of publications and distribution methods which GCJA may wish to explore including the new leaflet by the South East Children and Families Support Board which is distributed to families at court; and the NIACRO initiative which posts information to families within 48 hours of sentence.

8 Recommendations

Glasgow

- 8.1 GCJA should work with its constituent partners and voluntary agencies, and build on good materials already developed and the findings of this study to develop any new information materials for Glasgow families.
- 8.2 This should take account of literacy issues and families' need for short, targeted and simple information which includes proper signposting.
- 8.3 It should also take account of the different needs of different families. Key target groups are first time families and families of offenders whose circumstances change, for example transferring between prisons or from remand.
- 8.4 Any organisations signposted to in GCJA publications should have the capacity and be prepared to provide correct information and support to help families find out what they need to know at first point of contact.
- 8.5 GCJA should develop a dissemination strategy to ensure that materials get to families. This requires a partnership approach to ensure a consistent response.

National

- 8.6 GCJA should take the lead in encouraging a national approach to providing consistent, high quality and standard information to families of offenders. This should involve the Association of Directors of Social Work, COSLA and the SPS.
- 8.7 GCJA should encourage SPS to set up a working group involving interested parties to improve information provided to families through the SPS website and individual prisons.

Key Transition Points and Need for information

Appendix 1

Transition point	Examples of type of information needed	Information currently available? If yes, where from and how accessed?	Gaps in materials - content	Optimum methods for giving information
Initial involvement in criminal justice system	Information about criminal justice process; when can you see family member; feelings; dealing with stigma; how to tell children; impact on children; legal and financial support available; if domestic abuse is an issue, how to handle media attention			
Court appearance	Information about court, where it is, and what to expect; when you can see family member; feelings; support available; if domestic abuse is an issue			
Sentence	Information about sentences and what they mean, early release; support available			
Pre-prison	Advice about money, housing and other practical matters; how to stay in contact with family member; support available			
Prison visit	Where is the prison, how to get there, type of prison, whether can take children, assisted prison visit scheme; what to expect; family liaison staff; dealing with stigma; support available			
Leaving prison	What to expect, coping with change, extended home leave, preparing children, if domestic abuse is an issue, sources of help and advice			

Questions for focus groups with families

Topic 1: information for families about criminal justice system

Prompts

When your family member was first in custody, were you told what was happening or what to expect?
 What sort of information did you want to know about how the cjs system works or what would happen next?
 What did you get?
 Looking back, were you given any information which was particularly useful?

Topic 2: information for families about prison visits

Prompts

How did you find out about prison visits? for example booking, what you could take, visiting times etc
 Was it up to the person in prison to tell you about procedures for visits?
 What sort of questions did you ask (or need to know) about visits?
 What sort of questions did you ask (or need to know) about getting to the prison?
 What sort of questions did your kids ask?

Topic 3: information for families about 'transition' points

Prompts

How did you find out if your family member was moving from one prison to another?
 What about if they moved from being in remand to convicted – how did you find out about changes in visiting arrangements etc
 What sort of problems arose for you at these times?

Topic 4: information for families about leaving prison

Prompts

What information did you get about leaving prison?
 How did you get the information?
 What sort of questions did you ask about leaving?
 Do you discuss with your family member what would happen next such as release dates, tagging etc?

Topic 5: helping families find out what they need to know

Prompts

How easy (or otherwise) has it been for you to find out the information you've wanted to know?

What sort of information has been difficult for you to get hold of?

Do you talk to your family member about your difficulties when you visit, for example getting to prison, money matters or problems at home?

How much (or little) was your family member able to help you get the information and help you needed?

Topic 6: access to information

Prompts

Where did you get information and help?

How has info, for example prisons been given to you?

What information or organisation have you found helpful?

Have you seen any useful posters or information in the visit room?

What's the best way for you to get info?

Topic 7: your children

Prompts

What info did you get about what to say to your kids about prison or visits or what it will be like when the family member gets home (or anything else)?

Who gave it to you?

What would you like?

Topic 8: info pack

Prompt

If Glasgow CJA were to produce an info pack for families, what would you like to see in it?

Is there any information which would be useful for families of Glasgow prisoners to get (as opposed to families from other areas)?

Any other comments?

Appendix 3

Questions for focus group with prisoners

Topic 1: information for families about criminal justice system

Prompts

When you were first in custody, do you know if your family was told what was happening or what to expect?

Was it up to you to keep your family member informed?

What sort of questions were your families asking you about how the cjs system works or what would happen next?

Were they given any useful information which they then passed onto you?

Topic 2: information for families about prison visits

Prompts

How did your families find out about prison visits? for example booking, what they could bring you, visiting times etc

Was it up to you to tell your families about procedures for visits?

What sort of questions did they ask you (or need to know) about visits?

What sort of questions did they ask you (or need to know) about getting to the prison?

What sort of questions did your kids ask?

Topic 3: information for families about 'transition' points

Prompts

How did your families find out if you were moving from one prison to another?

What about if you moved from being in remand to convicted – how did your families find out about changes in visiting arrangements etc

What sort of problems arose for your families at these times?

Topic 4: information for families about leaving prison

Prompts

Do you know what information your families have had about leaving prison?

How have they got the information?

What sort of questions do they ask you about leaving?

Do you discuss with your families what will happen next such as release dates, tagging etc?

Topic 5: helping families find out what they need to know

Prompts

How easy (or otherwise) has it been for your families to find out the information they've wanted to know?

What sort of information has been difficult for them to get hold of?

Do they talk to you about their difficulties, for example getting to prison, money matters or problems at home when they visit?

How much (or little) can you help them get the information and help they need?

Topic 6: access to information

Prompts

Where do you think your families get information and help?

Have your families mentioned any information or organisation which they've found helpful?

Have you seen any useful posters or information in the visit room?

Have you been given any leaflets which you've passed onto them (not sure if this is possible)?

Topic 7: your children

Prompts

What info did you get about what to say to your kids about going into prison or visits or what it will be like when you get home (or anything else)?

Topic 8: info pack

Prompt

If Glasgow CJA were to produce an info pack for families, what would you like to see in it?

Is there any information which would be useful for families of Glasgow prisoners to get (as opposed to families from other areas)?

Any other comments?