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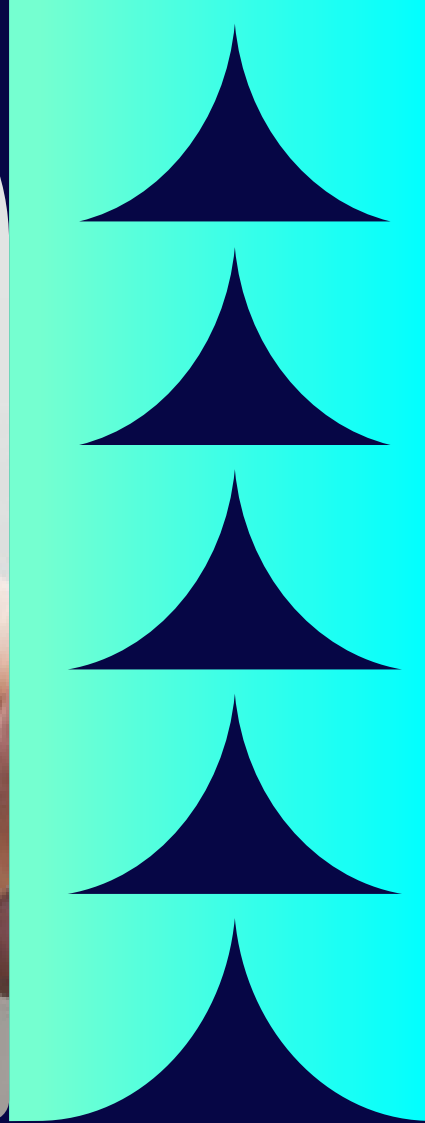
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**From arrest to release,
helping families feel less
alone: An evaluation of a
Worcestershire pilot support
project for families affected
by parental imprisonment**



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Contents

	Page
Executive summary	4
1. Introduction	8
2. Context and background	10
3. Literature review	12
4. Methodology	18
5. Findings and discussion	24
5.1 Context: RQ1 What is the extent of the issue at the outset of the YSS Families First Programme?	24
5.2 Input and process: RQ2 How does the YSS Families First Programme contribute to a multi-agency approach to supporting families with parental imprisonment?	48
5.3 Product: RQ3 How does the YSS Families First Programme support families, and what is its impact?	58
5.4 Summary	77
6. Conclusions and Recommendations	79
7. Appendices	84
Figures and tables	88

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- Shibrana Miles for supporting the project in its early stages

Foreword

Much research has been published on conditions in prisons and the effects of crime on communities. Not so much is known about the hidden victims, those who, once a crime has been committed and an arrest and conviction made, are left forgotten, with their fears, their anxieties and the stigma. I am talking about the hidden sentence served by the children of prisoners.

Very little is known about the needs of these children, their numbers (estimated at 312,00 in England and Wales, Kincaid et al., 2019), nor the effects of parental incarceration on them and their family. This is partly because no government agency is tasked with a routine identification of their needs; a fact corroborated by the lack of statistics when Freedom of Information requests were made by the authors of this report. This hidden problem is also compounded by the fact that the families carry the stigma and shame of their relative's crime and are unlikely to seek help and support from their local community.

This report is the product of a two-year journey that started in 2020 with a collaboration between YSS and the Children's Research Centre at the Open University, with the financial support of Worcestershire County Council and its Director of Public Health. Over the course of those two years, the team worked with children, their parents and many local and national agencies, some of whom refer young people to YSS for support.

I would recommend this report to any professional, practitioner, decision- and policy-maker. If there is one call for action as a result of this research, it is to ensure that every child and young person whose parent or carer is incarcerated is identified and supported. This could impact greatly on the child's life and on the rates of inter-generational anti-social behaviour.

The children and families' trust and openness have been crucial during this project. We were all moved and humbled by their individual stories of adversity and courage, and it was a privilege to work with them all.

With thanks to the research team, Victoria, Jane and Stephanie, and to my colleagues at YSS, especially Lia who has worked tirelessly since the start of this project with assistance from Michelle. Finally, a big thank you to the Worcestershire families and referral agencies who put their trust in us.

Catherine Kevis
CEO at YSS

Executive summary

A fifteen-year-old described the distress before his father went back into prison.

The last time I saw him, it was quite... quite rough... I dunno, he wasn't in the best state of mind I don't think. I don't think he was thinking well. Hopefully when he comes out, he's not going to go onto that stuff again...I wasn't here when he got arrested so I didn't even get to say goodbye...so that was...

(Matt, aged 15 years)

Introduction

YSS (a charity in Worcestershire supporting marginalised individuals) commissioned Dr Victoria Cooper, Professor Jane Payler and Dr Stephanie Jane Bennett of the Children's Research Centre at The Open University to undertake a two-year evaluation of the newly funded *Families First* project, 2020 – 2022. The aims were to: investigate the extent and nature of familial imprisonment nationally; examine how the YSS Families First (YSS FF) project was set up and implemented in Worcestershire specifically to meet the needs of families referred when a family member is in prison; explore the nature and impact of the YSS FF project through analysis of children, young people, family and practitioner experiences; raise public, media and stakeholder awareness of the scale of need nationally for supporting families with a parent in prison, and to lobby for policy change and funding to extend services.

Context and background

Services in the UK to support families when a family member is in prison are varied and dependent upon the age and status of the service user – child, young person or adult. Several organisations offer guidance, practical and emotional support for children and young people, but these are often regionally specific and dependent upon formal referral. The range of services includes limited one-to-one therapeutic support, online support, regional and nation-based support. Finding and accessing the support that organisations provide for adults, children and young people can be challenging. Without automatic referral systems nationally and without a national network of comprehensive services, many families, children, and young people find the imprisonment of their close relative very difficult.

Literature review

International research indicates that families of prisoners are more likely to be of black or minority ethnic backgrounds, to have lower socio-economic status and be dealing with related issues such as poverty, and more likely to be female. Families 'left behind' from familial imprisonment often have heightened mental health problems, with children and young people trying to shoulder extra responsibilities, and the parent at home trying to protect their children from adverse effects. The families suffer from social stigma and shame. Secrecy often surrounds parental imprisonment, leading to further isolation for children and young people, as well as for their 'at home' parent.

Methodology

This mixed-methods study adopted the CIPP Evaluation Model (see section 4.2) to consider the Context, Inputs, Process and Products of the YSS FF programme. It addressed three research questions:

RQ1 What is the extent of the issue at the outset of the YSS FF programme?

RQ2 How does YSS FF contribute to a multiagency approach to supporting families with parental imprisonment?

RQ3 How does the YSS FF programme support families and what is its impact?

Data collection methods included: an online survey (n=65 completed); Freedom of Information (FOI) requests; documentary analysis; interviews with stakeholders, practitioners and families, including multi-method interviews/activities with children and young people. All interviews (n=22) were audio-recorded and transcribed. Ethical concerns were given careful consideration given the sensitive nature of the study. Ethical approval was provided by the Open University Human Research Ethics Committee.

Findings

What is the extent of the issue at the outset of YSS FF programme?

The online survey was completed by 65 parents from 25 counties in England, two in Wales and one in Northern Ireland. Of these, 97% were female, 90% were White, and 89% had between 1-3 children. Of these children, 20% had additional needs. Of the respondents, 74% had been offered no local support and a small number (n=9) had support nationally from Children Heard and Seen. Respondents needed support relating to: Communication and Information; and Financial and Practical support. The Pandemic had impacted on Relationships with Children, and on Communication with the imprisoned parent.

FOI requests were sent to His Majesty's Prisons and Probation Service; Northern Ireland Prison Service; His Majesty's Courts and Tribunals Service; Scottish Prison Service. There were significant challenges in collecting data via a FOI route. There was some partial success, but primarily the data were either not available, or the requests were out of scope of what is typically approved. A key issue is the veracity of the data collected. Two prisons were selected from which to request more detailed data, HMP Hewell and HMP Featherstone, both near to where YSS delivers services in Worcestershire. The data collected from these requests suggest that between 50-65% of prisoners are recorded as being parents. However, radical change is needed in terms of recording and storing information about how many children are impacted by parental imprisonment in real-time.

Statistical estimates for the number of children of prisoners in England and Wales range from 200,000 within a year period to 312,000 (annual cumulative prevalence). There is a dearth of accurate, comprehensive, up-to-date statistical information.

Interviews with stakeholders (education, housing, police, charities and support organisations) and practitioners revealed consistent themes: Forgotten Families; Prison defining childhood; Secondary prisonisation; and Intersectionality. *Forgotten Families* was characterised by no formal system for tracking children and young people in such circumstances, while children encounter disrupted childhoods, face safeguarding issues and encounter barriers to support. *Prison defining childhood* described the behavioural impacts of such circumstances on children and young people and their lack of voice in the system. *Secondary prisonisation* revealed the stigma and shame felt by families and the paradox of being 'seen' regarding stigma, but 'not seen' regarding voice and available support. *Intersectionality* described the complex intersecting issues that impact upon families' experiences including mental health problems, financial difficulties, and substance dependency, exacerbated by imprisonment and by the reasons that led to imprisonment. The consequences of unmet need include social isolation, increased emotional distress and trauma, and impact on children's ability to engage in their education.

How does YSS FF contribute to a multiagency approach to supporting families with parental imprisonment?

From January to the end of July 2021, YSS FF established its multiagency approach to supporting families. Activities included: Outreach; Family support and case work; Referrals; Evaluation, planning and monitoring; Training of YSS FF team; Creating support resources; and Support or training for others. *Outreach* was prioritised during the early stages of the project. It involved amongst other things creating a stakeholder network, distributing leaflets and press release, creating a webpage, presenting to organisations, and appearing on local radio. *Referrals* involved developing a referral and support policy and ensuring organisations knew how and who to refer. Twenty-one referrals were made up to Feb 2022, though not all led to active cases. Earlier referral was more effective, but there were barriers to this including no statutory register of children needing support at the time of imprisonment. In part, this led to the creation of a Families First Handbook, an example of *Creating support resources*.

How does the YSS FF programme support families and what is its impact?

Researcher: Would it have helped to have [Families First practitioner] right from the outset when your dad was first arrested?

Matt: To be honest, it probably would have helped loads because you could discuss the issues then. But even when she did come, it still is helping loads

(Matt, aged 15 years)

Interviews with families, children and young people, and YSS FF practitioners identified the following themes: Characteristics of YSS FF; Enabling/Strength-based support; and Impact. The *Characteristics of Families First* support included relationship building with the whole family, listening, offering differentiated needs-based support, practical help, a road map to navigate support, and emotion/trauma focused support where needed. Acting as advocates to help families to access other services where necessary was an important feature, also revealing the way in which YSS FF contributed to a multi-agency approach. *Enabling/Strength-based support* meant that YSS FF practitioners built on families' strengths, helping parents to help themselves and to help their children. The theme of *Impact* revealed the many ways in which Families First made a difference. Parents, other professionals and the YSS FF practitioners all told of the ways in which support had changed how well families could cope. Most importantly, the children and young people themselves told us of the difference that YSS FF had made to their lives and how important it was.

It's helped me control my emotions. It's a good way...People don't always like to tell their parents how they're feeling. [Families First practitioner] usually asks... It's a good thing to talk to [Families First practitioner] about it. Some people don't have anyone to talk to about stuff.

(Susan aged 13 years)

Conclusion

This research study set out to evaluate the need for services such as YSS FF nationwide (the extent of the problem at the outset) and to evaluate the nature of the service and its impact. In the report, we evidence the many ways in which YSS FF met its aim and each of its objectives. However, not all parents, children and young people throughout the UK experiencing family imprisonment have access to services and support systems required to meet their complex needs. Furthermore, lack of awareness and social stigma surrounding family imprisonment threaten to perpetuate a cycle of social disengagement. Current provision within the criminal justice system focuses on supporting and rehabilitating the imprisoned adult and fails to consider much broader and intergenerational needs of families. Our

research indicates that the type and quality of support that parents, children, and young people can access from YSS FF can provide a 'lifeline' of support which can make a considerable and positive difference to their lives.

Unfortunately, however, current provision for targeted support for parents/carers, children and young people experiencing family imprisonment is both inadequate and under-funded. The children and young people of today with imprisoned parents need support to help them to deal with the trauma and distress surrounding parental imprisonment, to continue to grow, and to engage fully in their education, relationships and futures. At present nationally, we don't even know who they are.

Short term recommendations

1. **Awareness raising:** Raise public, stakeholder and government awareness as to the extent and scale of need across the UK which recognises how many children, young people and families are impacted by family imprisonment.
2. **Further research:** Seek funding for much needed large-scale in-depth longitudinal, intergenerational research in this area, incorporating: Children and young people's experiences across a range of circumstances and foregrounding children from a range of diverse backgrounds; evaluating the cost of funding much-needed support for children and young people experiencing family imprisonment against the costs to children, young people's and parents' health, wellbeing and educational outcomes if needs continue to remain unmet.
3. **Expand Families First-type support:** Consider the type and quality of needs based, responsive support that Families First provide in meeting the needs of children, young people and parents experiencing family imprisonment and explore avenues through which these services can be expanded to meet national need.
4. **Notify local authorities:** Police and courts specifically need to notify local authorities when they arrest or sentence someone who has children. The sooner the support is provided for the child and the family, the better the chance of interruption of Adverse Childhood Experience.
5. **Vulnerable children:** Education authorities should treat children of prisoners as vulnerable and ensure that in school teaching is provided during period of strikes and pandemics. They should be treated in the same way children in care are supported within the school system.

Mid-term recommendations for stakeholders and policymakers

6. **National data collection as routine:** Ensure that national data is collected on a regular basis on the number of children and young people who are affected by family imprisonment, including,
 - a. Access to support services for the parents, children and young people.
 - b. Impact on the progress and achievements of children and young people.
 - c. Sharing information with specialist support agencies to meet family needs.
7. **Multiagency policy and service review:** Review and revise national and local policies, including education, health and social care, for service provision for parents, children and young people experiencing family imprisonment from the point of sentencing and continuing throughout the period of imprisonment and beyond release. Implement associated policy, provision and practice changes, including recognising:
 - a. The need for additional educational support for children and young people.
 - b. The need for training of education, health and social care professionals with regard to understanding the needs and experiences of parents, children and young people experiencing family imprisonment.
 - c. That support services nationally need to be funded to combine responsive, needs-based face-to-face support as well as access to support through different media such as online or mobile access.
 - d. That building relationships to provide strength-based support can enable parents, children and young people to process the trauma and distress of family imprisonment and afford them the skills and strategies to nurture resilience and self-reliance.



Illustrative vignettes

Short, boxed vignettes are scattered throughout the report based on data from research participants, including stakeholders, to illustrate the nature of challenges facing families. These boxed vignettes are not all cases with which YSS FF worked.

1. Introduction

The Cooper family comprise Mum, dad and four children including Oscar who is 6, Charles who is 8, Susan who is 13 and Matt who is 15. They live in a small town in Worcestershire. Mum has been with dad for about 16 years and during that time he has been in and out of prisons around the UK multiple times. As a result of this, he has not always been around for the birth of his children and mum has had to spend a lot of time bringing up the children on her own. Dad recently went to prison again and while initially he was in a reception prison with an in-cell phone and could speak to the children almost every evening, he was then moved onto an older prison where phones were only on the prison landings. Due to the Coronavirus lockdown, he was only allowed out of his cell for an hour a day and during that time he could call his children, but this tended to be during the school day. Suddenly the children went from speaking to dad every day, to having very limited contact with him. A school referral was made as the younger boys were getting quite emotional in school and crying about how much they missed their dad.

Background

Families First (FF) is a two-year pilot service delivered by YSS and funded by Public Health at Worcestershire County Council, with oversight from Worcestershire Children First.

YSS is a local charity in Worcestershire founded in 1986 and designed to support marginalised individuals in the local community who face significant life challenges. Areas of operation include Worcestershire, Herefordshire, Shropshire, Telford & Wrekin and Warwickshire. YSS theory of change is “We enable people to develop their resilience and feel that they belong in their community”. The aim of FF is to support every child and young adult affected by parental imprisonment drawing upon a suite of services which are designed to,

- meet people at times and places that are convenient for them in their local communities.
- target to break cycles of offending and reoffending for vulnerable individuals in our local communities.
- provide targeted 1:1 support for individuals to develop emotional resilience and face unfortunate situations that are preventing them from feeling part of their local community.
- provide support with daily practical issues.
- invest in empowering service users to develop skills and competencies to face adverse life conditions.
- provide emotional support and a listening ear.
- signpost and refer service users to other relevant agencies if the service user requires more specialised support.

Purpose of report/project

YSS commissioned the Children's Research Centre at The Open University to undertake a two-year research study to evaluate the FF project from 2020 – 2022. This study's principal aims were:

- to investigate the extent and nature of familial imprisonment nationally.
- to examine how the YSS FF project was set up and implemented in Worcestershire specifically to meet the needs of families referred when a loved one is in prison.
- to explore the nature and impact of the YSS FF project through analysis of children, young people, family and practitioner experiences.

Furthermore, the study sought to raise public, media and stakeholder awareness of the scale of need nationally for supporting families when a loved one is in prison and to lobby for policy change and funding to extend services.

Research team

Data collection and analysis of the qualitative interview data were undertaken by Dr Victoria Cooper and by Professor Jane Payler. Parent survey design and analysis and collation of Freedom of Information Requests (FOI) were undertaken by Dr Stephanie Jane Bennett. Lottie Taylor carried out a review of the literature and existing services as Research Assistant to this project under the guidance of Dr Victoria Cooper, Dr Stephanie Bennett and Prof Jane Payler. Ethical approval for the study was provided by the Open University Human Research Ethics Committee. Details of ethical considerations are given in section 4.8. The project was supported by the Open University Children's Research Centre manager, Shirley Stevens.

Structure of the report

Section 2 Context and Background, locates the newly developed YSS FF service in its national context, outlining existing services and their accessibility for families facing parental imprisonment.

Section 3 Literature Review examines more broadly the existing research literature on the nature, extent and consequences of parental or familial imprisonment.

Section 4 Methodology explains the guiding research questions, the research strategy and design, and the methods of data collection and analysis employed. Ethical issues are also considered and explained.

Section 5 Findings and Discussion presents the analysed data structured around the research questions, drawing on both quantitative and qualitative aspects. The voices of those affected by parental imprisonment and the stakeholders who witness the effects are given prominence in sections 5.1 and 5.3. Section 5.2 outlines in detail the ways in which FF was set up, developed and how it contributed to creating a networked multiagency approach to supporting families in such circumstances.

The report ends with Section 6 Conclusions and Recommendations followed by appendices in Section 7.



2. Context and Background

Older adult sibling was imprisoned for drug and weapons offences. Ten-year-old brother shared a bedroom with him prior to that and witnessed his older brother becoming involved in criminality. Younger brother was still at risk of being lured into criminality from the same contacts and environment that had encouraged his older brother to break the law.

Existing services across the UK

Services that are available to support families when a family member is in prison in the UK are varied and dependent upon the age and status of the service user designated as child, young person or adult. Many of the services require formal referrals or knowledge and understanding of the range of services available and the capacity to engage with online support. Many organisations across the UK or within the UK nations provide information on what happens when a family member is incarcerated, how to make contact, and information on the prison visiting process. There is also support available for problems that families of prisoners may face such as housing issues and managing money. Whilst there are a number of organisations, including **Barnardo's** (<https://www.barnardos.org.uk/>), **YSS** (**YSS**), **Children Affected by Parental Offending** (CAPO: [Welcome to the Bristol Safeguarding in Education website.](http://www.bristol.gov.uk/safeguarding-in-education)), **Families Unite** (www.ormiston.org) and **Children Heard and Seen** (www.childrenheardandseen.co.uk), amongst others, that offer guidance, practical and emotional support for children, young people and families, these services are often regionally specific and dependent upon formal referral. Some targeted support is available for children and young people through individual prison family days which aim to strengthen relationships between prisoners and their families, as well as providing interventions targeted at intergenerational patterns of offending. One-on-one therapeutic support for children and young people is offered by a few organisations, yet these are geographically limited. Finding and accessing the support that organisations provide, whether it is information or face-to-face support, or for adults, children and young people, can be challenging.

Online support

There is a limited number of organisations that provide online services such as **Email a Prisoner** (<https://www.emailaprisoner.com>) that supports family members, friends and legal professionals to electronically write and video call prisoners. Although Email a Prisoner provides online services across the UK, they do not work with every prison. **Prison Chat UK** (<https://prisonchatuk.com/>) is an online forum aimed at connecting people with relatives or friends in prison as well as providing information on the experiences and legal processes of prisoners in the UK. **Inside Time** (<https://insidetime.org/>) publishes monthly newspapers for prisoners across the UK. However, they also offer a service called **Inside Information** (<https://insidetime.org/insideinformation-home/>) which is produced by former prisoners and aims to provide online up-to-date information regarding prisons in the UK.

Regional and nation-based support

Organisations or charities centred around helping families with a family member who is incarcerated are frequently divided into regions. Organisations in **England** offer information and advice on issues including housing, financial guidance and visiting a family member in prison. Services partnered with prisons often have child play areas or youth zones in visitor centres and animal mascots explaining the visiting process to children, incorporating activities, aiming to make it less traumatic. Family days are offered where children can have less restricted access to their incarcerated parent to do activities together, aiming to strengthen relationships and parenting skills. **Jigsaw charity** (info@jigsawcharity.org), at HMP Leeds and HMP Wealstun for example, offers relationship and parenting courses within the prison. **NEPACS** (www.nepacs.co.uk) working in the North-East of England offers homework clubs, and a youth project provides one-to-one support, trips and online group support. **Sussex Prisoners'**

Families (www.sussexprisonersfamilies.org.uk) is an organisation that provide information on what happens when a family member has been arrested, or is going to court, or is going to prison and how to contact them, as well as how to tell your children what is happening. **Partners of Prisoners** (www.partnersofprisoners.co.uk) provides support for families in the North-West and Yorkshire and also policy guidelines concerning children's rights if they have an incarcerated parent in child-friendly language. **Families and Friends of Prisoners Swansea** (www.ffops.org.uk) provide information and help through their phone service, drop-in centre and outreach service offering home visits, attending community centres, health centres and doctor's surgeries. They aim to increase family days, helping maintain relationships between parents and children. **Families outside** (www.familiesoutside.org.uk) provides training and information to professionals who work with families in Scotland, including teachers, health professionals and police, as well as conducting research to inform policy. They also have information videos for children and young people explaining the process of having an incarcerated parent and arrange one-to-one support or group support for young people. **Circle** (<https://circle.scot>) also operates in Scotland with families under many challenging circumstances, including imprisonment. However, the support is focused on the imprisoned parent and there are a very specific criteria which need to be met to allow the parent to have the support. Therapeutic interventions of one-to-one or group support and family counselling are offered by **New Directions** (<https://familiesofprisoners.ie>) in Ireland, but do not support children beyond family counselling. **Niacro's** (www.niacro.co.uk) Family Links service includes interventions for children and young people to stop offending behaviour in Northern Ireland.

Finding help

Many of the services are difficult to find through a simple Google search and even once these services are accessed, many websites are difficult to navigate. This is further complicated when individuals have limited time or accessibility to the internet, literacy difficulties, or when English is not their first language. Some families find these organisations through professionals or friends, but many find that the stigma of having a family member in prison limits their capacity to seek help. Also, many prisoners do not disclose that they have families, which can prevent many organisations from providing support where the support requires formal prisoner referrals.

Children and young people

Generally, organisations or charities working on behalf of or partnered with specific prisons, such as Jigsaw charity which only works in HMP Leeds and HMP Wealstun, offer little support for children beyond play areas in visitor centres, information about visiting a parent in prison and family days and therefore do not put emphasis on supporting the child's mental health or how having a parent in prison may affect their time at school, for example. Organisations or charities that are not directly associated with specific prisons, such as **Families Unite** (www.ormiston.org) and **Children Heard and Seen** (www.childrenheardandseen.co.uk), are more child focused and have more therapeutic interventions. They offer one-to-one support for the children aimed at talking through the child's feelings.

Whilst all these services provide valuable help to families, it is the lack of a coherent, holistic and tailored approach across the country that is easily accessible to any family with a parent in prison that results in many families struggling. Without automatic referral systems nationally and without a national network of comprehensive services, many families, children and young people find the imprisonment of their close relative very difficult to bear. The review of research literature next explores the reasons why that matters and who is impacted.

3. Literature Review

Father has been imprisoned several times owing to child protection concerns and domestic violence. On release, father cannot reside with partner and children because of safeguarding, and agencies are finding it difficult to house him elsewhere, exacerbated by antisocial behaviour.

General family/adults

Demographics

Individuals from black and minority ethnic groups are overrepresented in prison populations and therefore their families may also be from black and minority ethnic groups and will already be dealing with discrimination relating to race (Condry, 2018). Families of prisoners are more likely to be of a lower socio-economic status and be dealing with related issues; family members of prisoners are also typically female and are more susceptible to poverty and being deprived of substantive freedoms (Condry, 2018). Although females constitute only 4% of the UK prison population estimates indicate that over 17,700 children are separated from their mothers by imprisonment and 95% of these children have to leave their family home (Not Beyond Redemption Impact report, 2021). Furthermore, research reveals the significant and far-reaching impact that maternal imprisonment has on children and young people (Beresford et al., 2020; Minson, 2019) and the 'sympiotic harms' to individuals when a family member is imprisoned (Minson, 2019; Condry and Minson, 2021).

Impacts of family member imprisonment

Mental health and wellbeing

The feelings of loss that prisoners' families experience and their concern for their family member in prison can exacerbate mental health conditions and spark new worries (Condry, 2018). Besemer, Van der Weijer and Dennison (2018) used data from Household, Income, and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) which is a nationally representative study and used these findings to apply to the US context. It was found that family members of prisoners had marginally reduced social support and close family imprisonment was associated with men's mental health issues. However, there was no direct association between close family imprisonment or household imprisonment and mental health issues for women or young people, but this may have been due to mental health being measured between 0–12 months after the imprisonment despite research illustrating that mental health problems can develop years after exposure. Whilst the study was representative of the Australian population, it was not necessarily representative of family members affected by imprisonment as there were few imprisonments within the study. Furthermore, adults and children affected by imprisonment were found in the study to have heightened mental health problems, and this finding alone should be an adequate reason for increased support for these individuals.

Global research undertaken by the World Prison Research Programme at the Institute for Crime & Justice Policy Research, based at Birkbeck (Heard, 2020) revealed evidence of the negative impact of COVID-19 globally on prisoner health and wellbeing when being held in cramped, under-resourced prison conditions. Furthermore, Minson (2020) charts the enduring impact on relationships and wellbeing for UK prisoners and families following reduced prison visits and contact during the pandemic. Similarly, research in Ireland, indicates that the mental health and overall wellbeing of prisoners had declined because of the separation from their families and social workers. Although video calls were able to be used in most prisons, they typically cut out after 15 minutes due to the many other people waiting to make calls. Family members who were worried about COVID-19 in prisons and their family contracting it in prison used negative coping mechanisms such as blaming themselves, behavioural disengagement and denial, all of which do not tackle the issue and instead can make mental health issues worse (Testa & Fahmy, 2021). However, this study used a small-scale survey in Texas and therefore may not be

generalisable, as well as it being carried out at a time when the pandemic had reached a peak with no widespread vaccine rollout, meaning anxiety surrounding COVID-19 was heightened during this time.

Symbiotic harms

Family members of prisoners have to contend with changes in the relationships within the family and the quality of these relationships, changes surrounding the behaviour of any children involved and their education, as well as economic changes due to the family member in prison leaving home. Further to this, the family left behind may have to deal with social exclusion and being treated poorly due to their association with a prisoner, and in some instances, the family's citizenship can be affected (Condry & Scharff Smith, 2018).

Secondary prisonization

Comfort's (2003) theory of 'secondary prisonization' helps to explain the wide-reaching effects of imprisonment on the non-imprisoned family members; family members experience secondary stigma and are considered to be worthy of blame for the prisoner's crime and are judged for supporting their imprisoned family member (Condry & Scharff Smith, 2018). Secondary prisonization is also evident through women arranging their days around visits or calls to their imprisoned family member as well as the time taken to ensure the prison regulations are being followed regarding their clothing, and this results in their home life merging with prison life and women often become 'quasi-inmates' (Condry, 2018).

Stigma

Stigma and shame is felt by relatives of prisoners, in particular families of serious offenders, as they are deemed just as likely to commit the offence due to misinformed concepts of 'bad blood', and even families themselves can fall victim to this mindset, where mothers of serious offenders are appalled that someone from their body committed such a terrible act and similarly, sons become anxious that they will inherit their father's traits for offending (Condry, 2018).

Moderating factors

There are however some factors which can help to moderate the issues families with a loved one in prison face, which include the resilience of the family, the gender of the individuals affected as well as their ethnicity and age, the influence of social services and welfare policies affecting prisoners and their families and help from non-governmental organisations (Condry & Scharff Smith, 2018). Kincaid, Roberts and Kane (2019) found preserving family contact reduces reoffending and improves outcomes for prisoners' children, and so a whole family intervention is needed which is not currently recognised under the current criminal justice system. It was also suggested that HM courts need to be more considerate of the family left behind through informing local authorities when a parent has been sentenced in order for the families to be assessed and an intervention built to ensure that reoffending and adverse outcomes for children are reduced.

Children and young people

Whilst children and young people can be included when studies and literature refer to family members of prisoners, there is also research specifically investigating the impact of family member or parental imprisonment on children and young people. This research looks at the emotional and practical challenges children with a parent in prison face and how this can affect them during their childhood and into adulthood.

Demographics

There are clear racial and class inequalities in the incidence of parental imprisonment as illustrated by Wildeman's (2009) research in America where black children were seven times more likely to have a parent go to prison than white children born in the same year. Children were also four times more likely to have a parent in prison if they were born to high school dropouts compared to children of college educated parents. Race and class inequality related to parental imprisonment was particularly evident in black children of high school dropouts as by age 14; 50.5% of these children had a father in prison.

Impacts of family member imprisonment

Mental health and wellbeing

Interviews with children with a parent in prison, their families, school staff and prison staff illustrated how worried children were about their parent in prison and how frustrated they became that they could not ease their worries through visiting and seeing their parents very often due to visit time restrictions and how challenging it was for children to be authorised time off school for such visits (Leeson & Morgan, 2019). It also became apparent through these interviews that in many prisons prisoners would have to earn extra visits, typically as rewards for behaving well, and these privileges can be removed, which results in children and families being punished for the prisoner's behaviour. Children also have a lot to contend with while the parent is away from home and these issues can be both practical and emotional, including coping with the loss of their parent, the loss of income and in some instances, they may lose their home (Kincaid, Roberts & Kane, 2019).

Parental imprisonment is a risk factor for many adverse outcomes for children, including about three times the risk for anti-social behaviour, at least double the risk for mental health issues, future offending, drug abuse, unemployment, and poor educational attainment (Kincaid, Roberts & Kane, 2019; Murray & Farrington, 2008). In interviews, children of prisoners stated they found it challenging to be at school and did not want to keep going, they found changing schools difficult, and those who did not change schools found people knowing their mother was in prison too much to handle (Minson, 2019). Whilst there is little evidence on how parental imprisonment results in adverse outcomes for children, it has been suggested that it is due to many processes including: children being separated from their parent and the disturbance this causes; children becoming aware of their parent's criminality; financial struggles due to the imprisonment; tense parenting from caregivers; stigma and the difficulties in trying to keep in contact with the imprisoned parent (Murray & Farrington, 2008). When trying to establish causal effects it is important to measure any change in child adverse outcomes before and after parental imprisonment. In a meta-analysis by Murray et al., (2009), only two studies within the review implemented these measures in order to investigate a causal relationship and the studies had different results; one study showed a weak association between parental imprisonment and adverse outcomes in young children and the other found a strong association in adolescents. These results indicate that more research is needed into whether parental imprisonment can predict and explain adverse outcomes for children.

The predominant emotion the children experienced was grief and loss of their parent, but this also extended to loss of other family members, friends, and a sense of belonging and identity, and this was further exacerbated by the secrecy surrounding the ordeal. Often, it did not allow children time to process these emotions (McGinley & Jones, 2018; Minson, 2019). Another worry of young people, that became apparent through McGinley and Jones' (2018) interviews with six young people in Scotland with a father in prison was they felt they had to grow up too quickly and become more mature in order to look after their younger siblings, and put others needs and feelings before their own. They learnt to manage high-pressure situations at young ages when growing up in violent households. Half of the young people said they felt they were forced to become self-reliant and their experiences of having a parent in prison negatively impacted their social and emotional wellbeing. These young people felt they had no one to talk to regarding their parent's imprisonment and no one asked how they felt. More help is needed than is currently available to properly support such individuals and they emphasised the need for support to be timely.

Children's mental health and wellbeing was also very affected by changes to visitation rules which hindered communication between children and their parent in prison. COVID-19 restrictions meant that family members could no longer visit their loved ones in prison and this resulted in difficulties in communicating with the parent in prison, with these problems being attributed to prison lockdowns, shortened time for visits, limited or no access to video visits at the prison, poor communication from the prisons regarding visiting, as well as some children not wanting to communicate without being face-to-face with their parent (Flynn et al., 2021). Minson and Flynn (2021) used online surveys in the UK and Australia to assess the impact of COVID-19 on visiting and the subsequent effects on children from the breakdown in communication between parents in prison and their children. When the UK study was being carried out, no families had been able to visit or video call their loved one in prison since 13th March 2020, and instead relied on telephone calls which had been shortened and were less frequent than before. Prisoners were not allowed much time out of their cells and therefore if they did not have a phone in their cell, they were very limited in their access to the shared phones. It was not until January 2021 that all prisons in the UK made video calls available. There were many problems for children

associated with only being able to have short and infrequent phone calls with their parent in prison which included pre-verbal or non-verbal children not recognising their parent's voice and being unable to communicate with them, feelings of anger and emotional confusion directed at their parent who they thought did not want to see them and children not wanting to speak to their parent through the phone. Caregivers noted the relationship between the imprisoned parent and children was destroyed and this sometimes resulted in contact ceasing between them. Caregivers were also impacted by having less contact with the individual in prison, to contact being less frequent or stopping. This resulted in UK caregivers reporting that their mental health condition had worsened, and some were diagnosed with an additional mental health condition, which then affected their relationships with their children. The children themselves reported anxiety about their parent being in prison and concerns if they would ever see them again, which was exemplified through crying, sleeplessness, nightmares and attachment issues. Caregivers also reported children became aggressive and angry, verbally and physically abusive, destroyed property, wet their beds and conversely, some became quiet, withdrawn, and clingy. They also developed mental health issues including eating disorders, self-harm, depression and anxiety.

Minson and Flynn (2021) found that the changes to visiting that were introduced because of the pandemic did have some advantages, mainly the reduction in time and cost needed for a visit, not having to travel to prisons and therefore not needing to bring children into the prison environment, and video visits allowing greater privacy and having less distractions. Video calls also allowed children to show their parent in prison things around the house, including pets and garden activities, as well as the parent being able to be involved in their child's bedtime routine. The sampling of this study did however mean that there was an uneven representation across Australia and many participants did not report any problems visiting before COVID-19 restrictions, which contradicts previous research findings, as well as obtaining participants through NGOs may have resulted in only having participants who frequently visit their family member in prison, which is not representative of all families of prisoners.

Symbiotic harms

The Howard League for Penal Reform (2011) argues that by sending a mother to prison, the principle that the legal system is built on of punishing the law-breaking individual is disregarded. They highlight how imprisoning a mother and separating her from her child punishes the child as it can harm them emotionally, socially, psychologically and cause material damage.

Secondary prisonization

Secondary prisonization (Comfort, 2003) can affect children's lives through both physical changes, relating to the home environment, carer and education, and also through prison rules impacting the relationship between the parent and child (Minson, 2019). Robertson (2007) detailed these changes to the lives of children with an imprisoned parent and highlighted how changing home, school and caregiver can result in siblings being separated, children losing their support groups through losing friends, children becoming homeless or being in an abusive environment. This can also extend to children being approached by potentially dangerous people such as drug smugglers if their parents were involved in organised crime. The parent-child relationship can also change once the parent comes out of prison as during the time, they were imprisoned the children may have become used to living without the imprisoned parent or have a closer relationship with a different caregiver. The family dynamic also changes when a parent is in prison and children sometimes have to become a caregiver or provide income for their family. The imprisoned parent may not realise how much change will have occurred and may not be prepared for their children to be angry or clingy towards them. It may also be difficult for the parent to see their children once they come out if the children have gone into care or if the parent has had their parental rights removed. The Howard League for Penal Reform (2011) emphasised how important it is to children's coping that during these changes to their lives they had some form of stability. Instead, children of prisoners are typically isolated from their support groups and therefore stability is removed at a crucial time.

Stigma

Children of prisoners have to contend with ostracism, disapproval and scorn simply because they have a parent in prison, and children may be doubly stigmatised if they are from a minority group (Robertson, 2007). Shame and stigma were identified by children as being some of the most challenging aspects of imprisonment and being personally judged for the parent's actions was particularly painful for them which was made worse when they were told that they would become the same as their parent (McGinley & Jones, 2018). The stigma children face overshadows their grief as it is believed by others that the parent deserves to be in prison and as a result their children do not deserve to grieve (Minson, 2019). Due to the stigma these children have to deal with, the main way children coped was to keep their parent's imprisonment a secret to everyone outside the family, with some caregivers explicitly telling the children to keep it a secret. The few that did disclose any information did so only to their closest friends (Knudson, 2018; McGinley & Jones, 2018). Children said they felt they did not have openness with their friends anymore. This led to isolation, which was made worse by the children being treated differently by classmates' parents once they learnt of the imprisonment, as reported by caregivers (Minson, 2019).

Secrecy surrounding parental imprisonment isolates children from their communities and inhibits community caregivers from providing assistance to these children (Knudson, 2018). Within schools, support is still limited as children of prisoners are not a priority group for service provision, meaning that unless the children present a safeguarding or academic issue, there was little schools could do to help (Leeson & Morgan, 2019). Regardless of the evidence that children risk adverse outcomes as a result of parental imprisonment, these children are an invisible group that are rarely considered or recognised in criminal justice systems. Furthermore, there is often no information recorded about who or how many of these children there are (Kincaid, Roberts & Kane, 2019; Robertson, 2007). There is also no system to inform schools or the local authority when a parent goes into custody and responsibility falls on the children and parents to share this information, which many families resist – believing this could result in their children going into care (Kincaid, Roberts & Kane, 2019). The invisibility of these children is partly due to the absence of public political organising or advocacy for children of prisoners. Typically, parents would take on this role to help their children, but whilst they are in prison, they are unable to take on such an active role thereby exacerbating the problem (Knudson, 2018).

Children's lack of understanding

It is extremely traumatic for a child to watch their parent being arrested and taken away from the family home, but it is also very distressing for children not present to not know where their parent is or why they have left. This is made worse when the parent is not allowed to leave their children a note or to make arrangements for them, which can result in their children being left unattended. The legal process is also very confusing and upsetting for children, especially if they are not allowed to be at the trial (Robertson, 2007). The disregard for children of prisoners and how being left without a parent affects them is too often overlooked, which can be partly attributed to the invisibility of these children. Children were often not told where their parent was, which is likely one of the reasons why the majority of parents never get a visit from their children whilst in prison. However, of the 25–30% of parents that have at least monthly visits from their children, some of these children were still not told their parent was in prison, with some being told they were visiting their parent in an electrical factory where they worked (Knudson, 2018). Communication between parents and children outside of visits can often be difficult too as letters and phone calls are costly which can mean they are not a feasible option for many families. Poor literacy skills can also inhibit their use, affecting how often and how well parents in prison can communicate with their children (Robertson, 2007).

Children assuming responsibilities of adult in prison

Interviews with children, their families, school staff and prison staff by Leeson and Morgan (2019) revealed that children often take on a caring role for their non-imprisoned parent and any younger siblings, but they are not recognised as carers as they do not fit the criteria. The children support the non-imprisoned parent with chores including shopping, cooking and cleaning and help their siblings with homework, getting them to school or nursery and putting them to bed. When a parent goes to prison the other parent can experience strong feelings of loss and bereavement which can lead to drug and alcohol dependency or mental health problems.

Barriers to visits

Children visiting their parent in prison can have positive effects for both child and parent with children becoming less disruptive after a visit, as well as helping to maintain or strengthen the parent-child relationship and lessening the incidence of recidivism for the parent (Robertson, 2007). However, there are many barriers to children visiting their parent in prison which can negate any positive outcomes. Visits may not be possible for many families due to the often-remote location of prisons, particularly women's prisons. Visiting hours are typically during the day with evening and weekend visits often not offered so many are unable to attend visits as they are at school or work (The Howard League for Penal Reform, 2011). During the COVID-19 pandemic there were even more barriers to visits, with face-to-face visits being suspended and the many problems associated with video visits. For those who can visit, the time allocated is typically not sufficient to allow for meaningful contact. The intimidating environment of the prison can also hinder adequate contact, as well as intrusive searching by uniformed individuals and the threatening atmosphere can make the visit very traumatising for children (Robertson, 2007; The Howard League for Penal Reform, 2011).

Moderating factors

Stable caregiving situations, children's families getting social and economic support, and living somewhere where public perceptions of crime and the legal system are more sympathetic can shelter children from the damaging aspects of having a parent in prison (Murray & Farrington, 2008). It is also evident that visits can have positive effects on children, but when communication and contact with their parent is determined by the prison, children suffer; this was worsened by the COVID-19 pandemic when prison visits and contact with prisoners deteriorated further (Flynn et al., 2021; Minson, 2021).



4. Methodology

4.1 Introduction and research questions

The purpose of the methodology was to evaluate the YSS FF programme against its stated aims and objectives. The YSS FF programme aim and objectives were submitted to Worcestershire County Council, funder of the initial programme, in the document *YSS Families First Business Case March 2020*.

Table 4.1 Aim and objectives of Families First Programme

(From *YSS Families First Business Case March 2020*)

Aim of project

YSS FF project aims to reach out to children and their families who experience the imprisonment of a loved one.

The service will be part of a multi-agency collaboration to:

- Identify families affected by the issue
- Provide a single point of contact
- Gather data
- Liaise and advocate on behalf of families with relevant community agencies
- Provide practical help with maintaining contact with the incarcerated parent and supporting the child and family's general health and wellbeing.

The long-term outcomes and impact:

- Reduction of school exclusions, entry into Youth Justice System, children at risk/looked after
- Maintenance of housing, job and social connections for the family
- Reduction in rates of adult re-offending

Research questions were devised by the OU research team to interrogate the need for FF, and the ways in which and the extent to which FF met its aim and objectives:

RQ1 – What is the extent of the issue at the outset of the YSS Families First programme?

RQ2 – How does YSS Families First contribute to a multiagency approach to supporting families with parental imprisonment?

RQ3 – How does the YSS Families First programme support families and what is its impact?

Chapter 4 outlines the overall research strategy to address these research questions, the research design, data collection methods, sampling and participants, corpus of data, analysis methods and ethical issues.

4.2 Research strategy

The overall evaluation strategy used by the OU research team to evaluate FF and address the research questions was guided by the CIPP (Context, Inputs, Process and Products) Evaluation Model (Stufflebeam, 2000; Stufflebeam and Coryn 2014). The CIPP Evaluation Model is designed for programme evaluation and has been widely used to evaluate education initiatives, community development initiatives, welfare reform and non-profit organisation services (Stufflebeam 2007).

The research team used the categories of CIPP corresponding to the acronym to consider the Context, Inputs, Process and Products of the YSS FF programme. These four parts of the evaluation model pose the general questions: What needs to be done? How should it be done? Is it being done? Did it succeed? *Context* is taken to be the need for corrections or improvements to the pre-YSS FF situation. *Inputs* is taken to be strategies, operational plans, resources and agreements for proceeding with the YSS FF intervention. *Process* is taken to be the intervention's implementation; and *Products* are taken to be the outcomes of the programme up to the end of the evaluation period. Appendix B maps the YSS FF objectives and planned actions to our Research Questions, research methods and the CIPP evaluation model.

4.3 Research design

This mixed methods study incorporated quantitative and qualitative data collection methods, each outlined in section 4.4, to enable the research questions to be fully addressed (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie 2004). Quantitative elements included generating new data from an online survey and Freedom of Information requests as well as exploring existing data held at local and national levels. Qualitative elements included documentary analysis of records during set-up and operation of the YSS FF programme, interviews with stakeholders and YSS FF practitioners, and multi-method interviews/activities with families, children and young people affected by having a parent/carer in prison.

4.3.1 Timeline of research activities

Pilot study (Jan – June 2021)

- Gained Open University Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) ethical approval for pilot study case analysis and data collection (February 2021).
- Documentary analysis of YSS FF set-up procedures and establishing networks (Jan – July 2021)
- Literature review (March – April 2021)
- Targeted support case study analysis using existing YSS data and partnership data (April-May 2021)
- Quantitative analysis (phase 1: piloted online survey) (June 2021)
- Qualitative practitioner, family/children and young people pilot interviews (May – July 2021)

Main study Year 1 (June – December 2021)

- Gained HREC ethical approval for main study data collection and analysis. Confirmed case study setting(s) and participants through YSS contacts. Confirmed metric sources for phase 1 and 2 and survey questions/details. (June 2021)
- Online parent survey (June 2021 – September 2022)
- Qualitative stakeholder, practitioner and family/children and young people interviews (June – November 2021)
- Data analysis (December 2021 & November 2022)

Main study Year 2 (January 2022 – December 2022)

- Qualitative practitioner, family/children and young people interviews (February 2022 – July 2022)
- Interim findings presentation to YSS Stakeholders and Patron (July 2022)
- Quantitative analysis, including survey data (phase 2: August – October 2022)
- Qualitative data analysis (September – Nov 2022)
- Report writing and dissemination planning (October – November 2022)
- Dissemination (Dec 2022 – Feb 2023)

4.4 Data collection methods, sampling and participants

4.4.1 Parent online survey

The online survey was created in collaboration with YSS staff, and it was designed to be suitable for parents with a partner or ex-partner currently in prison and who was based in England, Wales, Scotland or Northern Ireland.

The online parent survey comprised 56 questions in total, some with sub-sections, and comprised a mixture of both quantitative and qualitative questions. Responses were anonymous, but some general demographic details were collected, e.g., county of residence, age and number of children in the family unit. Nearly all questions (apart from consent, confirming that they met the survey criteria, whether they resided in Worcestershire or not) were completely optional. This meant that respondents were able to skip questions and move to the next questions as required.

Country of residence routed respondents down four separate routes in the survey depending on their country, with drop down selection boxes for county. If respondents were in Worcestershire, once they reached the end of the survey, a debrief was presented which showed information about the support that FF delivered by YSS could provide them. If respondents were not in Worcestershire, they were routed to a more general debrief, with information about a wide range of support organisations.

When ethical approval for this element was approved, the final version was reviewed by both the research team and YSS staff involved with the YSS FF intervention.

The survey was then piloted with families that YSS were working with at the time in order to gather further feedback before the survey was shared widely. Following the pilot, a few minor phrasing changes were suggested, so these changes were taken on board which enabled the final version of the survey to be finalised. Please see Appendix A where a link to the full copy of the online parent/carer survey is provided.

Recruitment

Once live, the online parent survey was widely promoted and shared using social media using snowball sampling. The launch of the survey coincided with an Open University press release (Open University, 2021) regarding the project, in order to boost engagement from potential respondents. Existing networks were used to share the survey details e.g., via Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, and both the YSS and Open University websites. At the end of the survey, contact details of key and well-known charitable organisation that support families with a parent in prison were provided for survey respondents, and many of these organisations also shared the details of the survey with their networks. In addition to using these dissemination methods, the research team also received permission to share details of the online survey from a number of informal online support groups that had been set up specifically to enable peer online support for family members of prisoners.

The online parent survey was live between June 2021 and September 2022 in order to maximise the number of possible responses. As well as the initial launch in June 2021, there was a relaunch of the survey in June 2022, to boost participation which did have some success. It is noted that reaching the target group of respondents for this online parent survey was challenging, but this difficulty was in part due to the key issues as identified earlier in this report: there not being a systematic process of identifying and supporting children and families who have a parent in prison, so perhaps it was not surprising that reaching these families was a significant task.

That said, of the respondents who viewed the survey ($N = 130$), 65 (50%) completed the survey with most of the questions completed. Due to the optional nature of the survey questions, some questions have not been completed by all 65 respondents, and so for each question in the Findings section, the sample size (n) for that question is presented.

4.4.2 FOI requests

Under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA; ICO, 2000), it is possible to request information from the UK Government and other UK public bodies. However, it is important that there are limits to what can be requested. Section 12(2) of the FOIA means a public authority is not obliged to comply with a request for information if it estimates the cost of complying would exceed the appropriate limit. The appropriate limit for central government it is set at £600. This represents the estimated cost of one person spending 3.5 working days determining whether the department holds the information. As part of this research project, we made a number of FOI requests to explore what data is publicly available, to assist in indicating how many prisoners are recorded as having children.

4.4.3 Statistical estimates – how many children does this impact?

A key challenge evident from the partial success of the FOI requests is that it is not possible to request or access up to date information about the total number of children currently impacted by parental imprisonment. This short section explores and summarises what the current statistical estimates are at present. It will also discuss why the collection of this information in a structured and systematic way is vital to be able to plan and provide support for all children impacted by parental imprisonment.

4.5 Documentary analysis

Documentary analysis was carried out on 16 documents made available to the research team by YSS FF during the set-up period (January – July 2021). These included weekly team diaries of practitioners' activities, minutes of meetings, action plans, review of initial project aims and reports to funders and stakeholders. Details of YSS FF resources developed to engage and support families, the development of referral policies and documents, and the development and use of Data-lab were all considered. Documents were collated and analysed thematically using NVivo qualitative data analysis software (QSR International Pty Ltd. Version 12, 2018).

4.6 Stakeholder and Families First practitioner interviews

Staff working in organisations that had experience of working with children and young people with a parent/carer in prison were interviewed in person or using Microsoft Teams. Interviews were semi-structured and between 40–50 minutes duration. Each was audio recorded and transcribed. Interviewees were asked about their role, their connections to families with a parent/carer in prison, examples of cases including the issues families, children and young people faced, support they received from services, whether their needs were met, and what other services or systems should be in place to support them that are currently unavailable.

Stakeholder participants: Seven stakeholders were interviewed from a range of organisations and roles: police, housing, schools, early help and charities with experience of families with a parent/carer in prison. Participants were approached via networks formed by YSS FF, including people attending Stakeholders' meetings run by YSS FF and expressing a willingness to be part of the study.

The two YSS FF practitioners were interviewed at two timepoints at the beginning and towards the end of the project. These were also online, semi-structured, between 45–60 minutes duration, audio recorded and transcribed. Practitioners were asked about the individual needs of the families they were working with, their wider role in networking and advocacy, and their reflections on how the service was developing and its impact on families.

Practitioner participants: YSS FF had two practitioner posts, one of which changed to a new practitioner employee after a few months. Practitioners were experienced members of YSS staff but in new roles to set up and run the YSS FF programme including all face-to-face family support. The two established practitioners were both willing to be interviewed for the study.

4.7 Families, children, and young people interviews

Parents/carers were interviewed, some face-to-face at the family home or in a school and some via online video call. The interviews were around 45 – 60 minutes duration, semi-structured, audio recorded and transcribed. Interviewees were asked about: their circumstances relating to a partner in prison; any support or information they and their children had received and when and how they received it; how well their needs had been met by the support; what other services, systems or support they felt were needed; to what extent they felt that others were aware of the needs of families in such circumstances. In all but one case, the associated YSS FF practitioner was present during the interviews.

Parent/carer participants: 5 parents, all mothers, and 1 grandparent were interviewed. Interviewees were approached via their associated YSS FF practitioner, and the practitioner was available for support throughout the interview (excluding one parent interview who had finished her support with her YSS FF practitioner and expressed a willingness to be interviewed alone online).

Although we use the term ‘interviews’ for our data gathering with children and young people, how data were gathered varied according to the age, stage of development, needs and interests of the child (see 4.8 Ethical issues). YSS FF practitioners provided advice as to the most appropriate approaches with each child and acted as an advocate during the interviews. Methods included drawing and talking, discussing shared examples of the activities they had carried out with the YSS FF practitioners such as posters, drawings, or games. Interviews lasted around 30 minutes and were audio recorded and transcribed. Some photographs were taken of items produced by the children and young people with their permission.

Children and young people participants: 5 children and young people were interviewed ranging in age from 6 years to 15 years. Interviewees were approached via their associated YSS FF practitioner, and the practitioner was available for support throughout the interview.

4.8 Ethical issues

The study was carried out in accordance with British Educational Research Association Ethical Guidelines (BERA) (2018). Ethical scrutiny and approval for the study was provided by the Open University Human Research Ethics Committee. All participants agreed to take part in the study after receiving Project Information Sheets and completing consent forms, which in the case of families, children and young people were explained to them by YSS FF practitioners. All data were anonymised so that individuals and institutions could not be identified. Any names used are pseudonyms. Primary ethical considerations centred around safeguarding the wellbeing of families, children and young people while they participated in discussing topics that were likely to be emotional for them and could be distressing. To address such concerns, the following measures were taken:

- YSS FF practitioners advised on the best time in the support process to approach each family regarding possible inclusion in the study.
- The OU research team made short, individual, informal video clips, introducing themselves and the purpose of the study, so that these could be shown to the potential participants to begin to form a possible connection.
- Alongside these, YSS FF practitioners presented the information sheets and consent forms to the families, taking the time to explain them and listen to any concerns.
- Once a family, child or young person had agreed to participate, YSS FF practitioners advised on the interview approach and activities that would best suit the age and stage of individuals. As a range of possible approaches had been given ethical clearance, including child-friendly activities, the research team then selected those most appropriate from the suite (see section 4.7).
- The YSS FF practitioner who had been supporting the family was available to sit in on interviews and to act as an advocate if, e.g., the child showed signs of becoming upset.
- Children and young people were given choice about being interviewed individually or together within families.

Table 4.2 Corpus of data

	Number of participants	Data set
Online survey	65	65x 56 questions (optional) Data is both quantitative and qualitative.
FOI requests fulfilled	8	
Stakeholder interviews	7	280 minutes audio
Practitioner interviews	4	240 minutes audio
Parent/grandparent interviews	5	275 minutes audio
Children & young people interviews (age range 7 – 15 years)	6	175 minutes audio
Documents analysed		16

4.9 Analysis

Quantitative analysis

Quantitative data with regards to the number of prisoners recorded as parents was requested via Freedom of Information requests. This approach had limited success, often requests being rejected due to the information not being recorded, or not being available in a format that could be extracted into a FOI summary report within the cost parameters of a standard FOI report. A summary of this data collected will be presented in Section 5. Both quantitative and qualitative data was collected as part of the parent survey. The parent survey was distributed online using Qualtrics and analysed using SPSS v25.

Qualitative analysis

Analyses of qualitative data, including semi-structured participant interviews, open-ended online survey questions and documents such as work plans, minutes of meetings, case notes, artefacts produced during family case work (posters, games, drawings) involved two main methods: thematic grouping of common issues using a coding framework guided by the research questions and involving research team discussion and co-analysis; thematic analysis using NVivo qualitative data analysis software (QSR International Pty Ltd. Version 12, 2018).

4.9.1 Summary

This mixed-methods study addressed the three research questions set by the research team to evaluate the ways in which YSS FF met its originally stated aim and objectives. Appendix B summarises the YSS FF aims, objectives and planned actions against the study's research questions, sub-questions and data collection methods, all framed within the CIPP model.

Figures 5.2 and 5.3 show the general demographics of the respondents and their current/ex-partner, from these Figures, it is possible to see that the majority of the respondents were white females, who had a family member in prison who was male. Just over a third (35%) of respondents were married or in a civil partnership, and 39.7% reported never being married.

A further quarter of respondents were either divorced or separated. For just over half the family members in prison, it was their first time in prison, but the remaining 47.7% of prisoners had been in prison before.

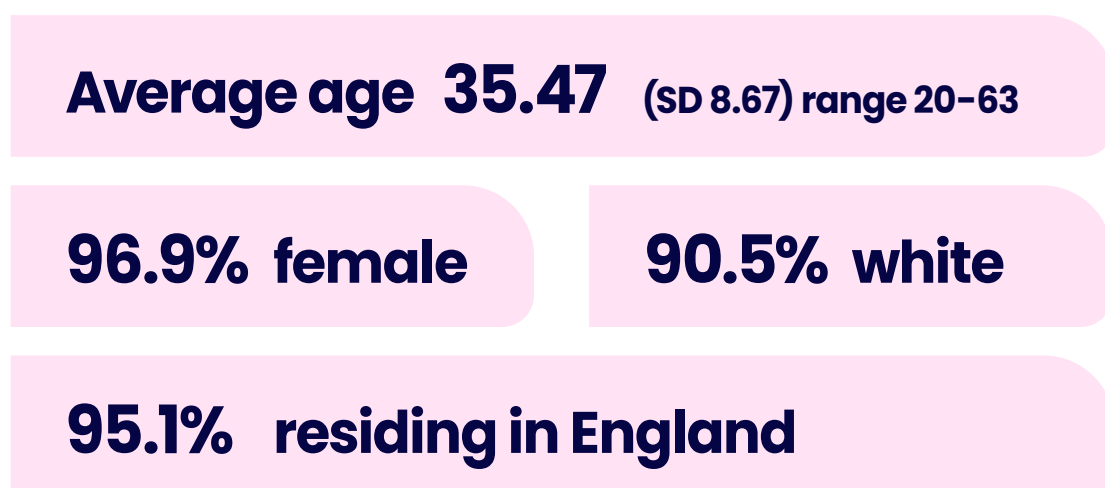


Figure 5.2 Demographics of the Respondent (n = 60-65)

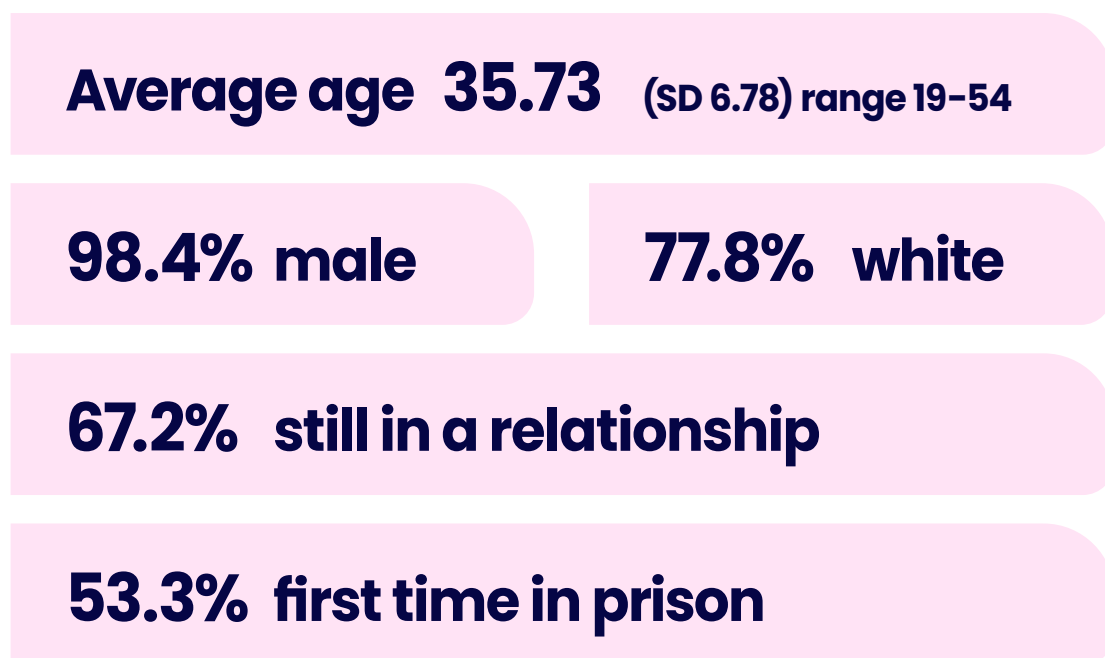


Figure 5.3 Demographics of the Respondent's family member in Prison (n = 60-65)

Figure 5.3 shows that whilst the majority of prisoners were White, just under a quarter were not; 9.5% Black, African, Caribbean or Black British; 6.3% Mixed or Multiple Ethnic groups; 4.8% Asian or Asian British and 1.6% Other Ethnic group.

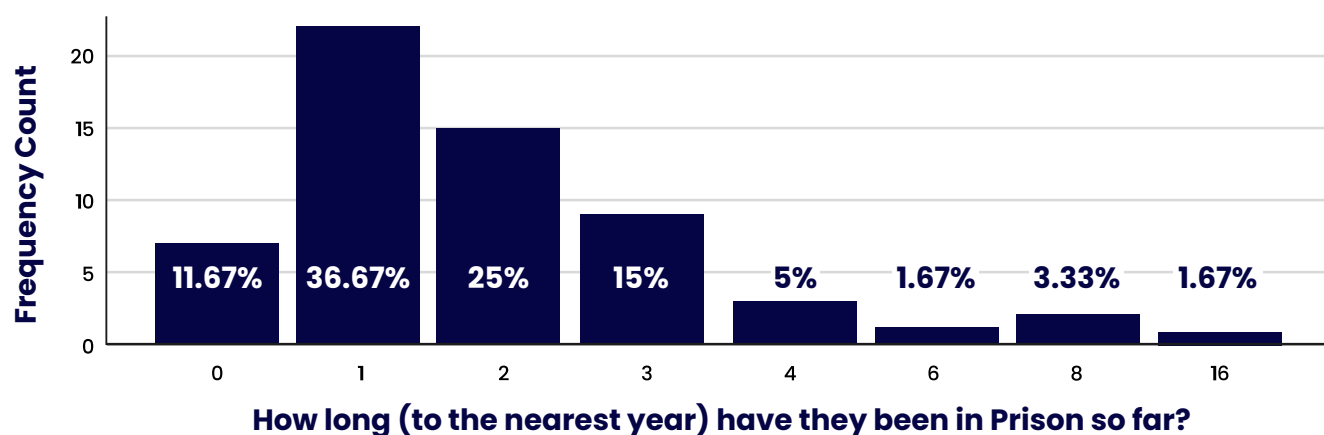


Figure 5.4 How long has the family member been in Prison so far?

Figure 5.4 above shows that the majority of the prisoners referred in this survey dataset had been in prison for between 1–3 years so far. Almost 80% of the adults in prison (79.4%) were reported to have five years or less remaining on their sentence. So very broadly speaking, the families that responded to the survey had a parent in prison on a short – medium length sentence.

Wellbeing and Health ($n = 65$)

A number of the respondents reported experiencing a serious health condition that significantly impacted their daily lives. Just over a quarter 27.7% – 18 of the 65 respondents reported a physical or mental health condition or illness expected to last 12 months or more for themselves personally. Furthermore, when speaking about the adult in prison, this number was a little higher – 35% of responses (21 of 60 responses).

Children in the Family ($n = 55$)

Of the 55 respondents who replied to this question, it was found that 89.1% had between 1–3 children. In total, the number of children corresponding to this question was 126. Recorded children's ages ranged from under 6 months – 19 years old. Of the 126 children, 43 were under the age of 5. Of the 126 children, 25 (20%) were reported to have additional needs.

Support

Local support ($n = 54$)

We asked respondents to consider how useful has the support offered by local organisations been so far. In answer to this, 40 participants (74%) said that they had been offered no support.

Some respondents outlined the support that they had been offered by local organisations. For example, one respondent said they had been offered *'Emotional and wellbeing support, signposting to other organisations, help with supporting children, activities.'*

Of the 14 participants who *had* been offered support they found the following useful:

- Taking the child out
- Peer support for both child and parent
- Children having someone to speak to
- Someone to advocate and reassure

Half of the respondents who had been offered support by local organisations reported that the support offered was either very or extremely useful. However, an overall pattern emerged where the majority of families had not been directly offered support by local organisations: *'It's been horrendous. Nothing has been useful'*. Some respondents noted that they were seeking support from other avenues, for example unofficial Facebook peer support groups as there were not offerings of support from local organisations.

National support ($n = 47$)

We asked respondents to reflect on how useful the support offered by national organisations has been so far. Most of the parents told us that like with the local support, many families also had not been offered any support by national organisations.

'No one has ever contacted me to offer support. I am not offered any assistance at visits and have never been approached to be offered any help. It is a case of you have to work it out yourself. The inmates are given no information also and it is impossible to speak to anyone at the prison as they never answer the phone you get through to a central call centre which give out incorrect information as all prisons have their own rules and guidelines as they central office are not aware of what is the correct/current rules for each place.'

However, nine respondents talked about the support offered by Children Heard and Seen (CHAS) and had found the support extremely helpful:

'I was recommended speaking to CHAS by another person in my situation. They are Oxfordshire based however they do not turn anyone down. They are like a breath of fresh air in this absolute nightmare situation. Not once have I felt judged, I feel no matter what questions I ask they always have time for me. They organise so many things for the children – my children are not alone, and they will always have the support of CHAS'

Existing support needs ($n = 36$)

We asked respondents what their existing support needs were, and typically these were around two main thematic areas; Communication and Information and Financial and Practical Support (see Figure 5.5 below). There were many comments around the theme of Communication both in terms of speed *'Communication in letters and emails to be quicker'*, but also in terms of details being provided about specific aspects of prison life and what happens on release; *'Answers on the way his last years will prepare him for life outside and how they will monitor him to stop him going back inside. What help will we have, and can he come home or to a hotel? So many unanswered questions because they do not care until a couple of weeks before you go.'*

Respondents talked about having more information, particularly in terms of being around the process of arranging visits; *'To be more informed about prison visits, I still have not been able to get a visit to see my partner and he has only met his 8-month-old son twice.'*

Many respondents also spoke of the significant financial impact of having a partner/ex-partner in prison: *'Right now I can't afford paying my bills and feeding my kids. I receive universal credit and it is not enough even paying the bills. I have too small kids that they need clothes, shoes, food etc. It is very difficult when you are alone and have no family around and no one to help.'*

Communication and Information

- Information on visits, prison life, release
- More information on booking visits, more frequent contact

Financial and practical support

- Childcare to be able to work
- Support with paying household bills

Figure 5.5 Existing support needs for families

We asked respondents ($n = 44$) if they would attend a peer support group and 50% (22) said yes, they would, a further 43.2% (19) said that they were not sure, but only 4.6% (3) said absolutely not. This suggests that broadly speaking, there is very much interest in peer support networks for families of prisoners. Furthermore, we asked respondents ($n = 44$) if they thought there should be a formal support system for families of prisoners, and the response was overwhelmingly 'Yes' with only one individual saying 'No'.

Support from personal networks and barriers to support

We were interested in exploring with respondents the extent to which they had accessed support from their personal networks, but also barriers to support. Many respondents told us that they there were people in their lives that they had not told and that they did have concerns about what people would think if they did tell them. The below Table 5.1 shows the proportion of people that the respondents had told at the point of completing the online survey.

Table 5.1 Who have respondents told that their ex/partner is in Prison?

Have you told...?	YES	% YES	NO	n
Close Family	49	96.1%	2	51
Close Friends	47	94.0%	3	50
Your Children	40	78.4%	11	51
Your Child's school	36	72.0%	14	50
Other Friends	25	53.2%	22	47
Work	24	52.2%	22	46
GP	21	42.9%	28	49
Other Professional e.g., Social Worker	19	40.4%	28	47

From Table 5.1 it is possible to note that whilst most respondents (96.1%; 94.0%) had told their close family or close friends respectively that their partner/ex-partner was in prison, only around half had shared this information with other friends, their workplace or other professionals. Whilst it is understandable that not all children were aware (due to their young age) it is particularly striking was that only 72% of children's schools were aware, meaning that additional support and understanding at school would therefore not be put in place.

We asked respondents 'how supportive the people have been that you have told so far?' and the response to this was mixed. Some respondents reported that the support that they had received was *'amazing'; 'checking on me every single day and making sure I am ok'* but others had a far different experience, often noting that acquaintances and less close friends were far less help, and even *'some go out of their way to avoid'* them. Some of the respondents also noted that whilst close friends were supportive, they didn't fully understand; *'they were sympathetic, but unable to relate or understand the impact'* and *'they tried to be understanding, but they can't really imagine how distressing and humiliating this all is'*.

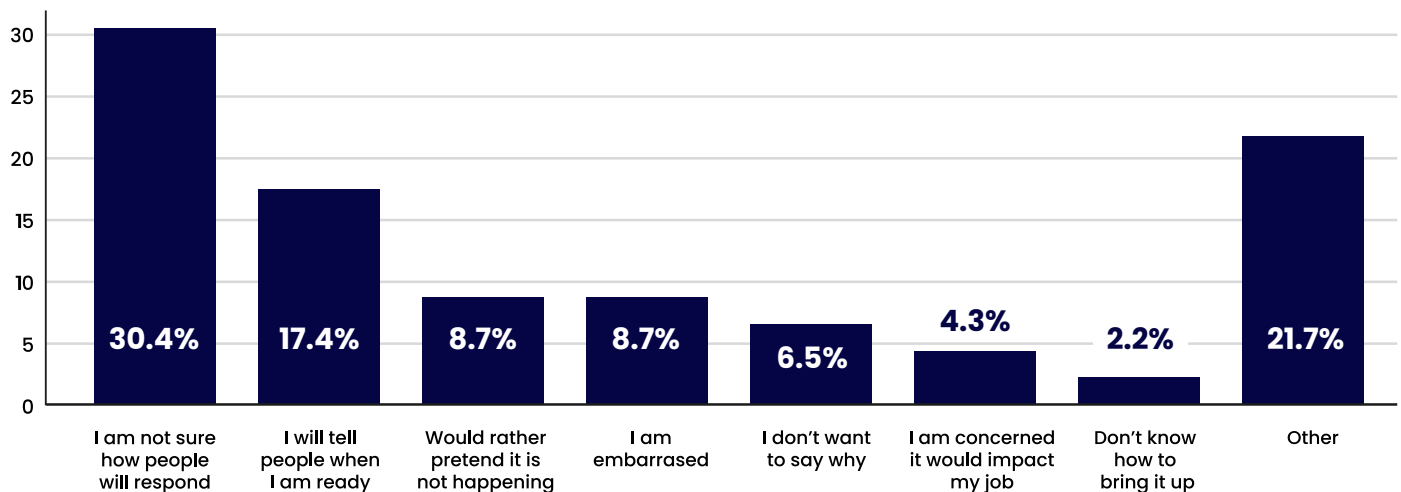


Figure 5.6 Reasons why respondents decided not to share their ex/partner is in prison (n =46)

We wanted to explore reasons and barriers to sharing with personal networks, so we asked respondents what the key reason was why they did not share, and the results from this are presented in Figure 5.6. The most often selected option was *'I am not sure how people will respond'* (30.4%), followed by *'I will tell people when I am ready'* (17.4%). Four respondents (8.7%) said they *'would rather pretend it is not happening'* and a further four selected *'I am embarrassed'*. Ten respondents selected *'other'* with a few respondents talking about reasons why they *had* shared *'Many people that are aware because of (the) media'* and *'I don't hide the truth'*.

Impact of the Pandemic

Given the timing of the survey, we felt it vital to include survey questions that directly explored the impact of the Pandemic. Responses centred around two interconnected themes: the Impact on *Relationships with the children* and the Impact on *Communication*.

Relationships with the children

One respondent talked about having a baby during the Pandemic and how it had impacted their relationship. *'Our daughter was born during Covid-19 so unfortunately the initial bond wasn't there and it's taking time for that bond to grow.'* Another respondent shared the substantial impact the Pandemic had on their children,

The children were terrified Daddy might die in prison and that they would never see him again.' and *'Before you could visit and it was a lot easier because you could keep a close contact with him, but now it is awful. The kids cannot see their dad and they are crying for him.'* Another parent further shared this experience *'Think it's been awful how little contact the children have had, considering children are not the ones transmitting the virus. My baby has only met his dad twice. I really feel things should be getting back to normal in prisons now, like they are on the outside.'*

One respondent did take a more positive viewpoint *'The pandemic has made us value each other more. We appreciate simple things more'*, but this perspective was not shared.

Communication

Communication has been a common theme through many of the responses to these survey questions, and when respondents were asked to reflect more broadly about how the Pandemic has been for them, many shared their frustrations with the mode, frequency and reliability of communication with their ex/partner in prison. One respondent suggests

It has broken down all methods of communication... it is so difficult and upsetting. One monthly visit if we can get there. Video calls are useless.

Another parent shares their frustrations with the current system in place at their local Prison,

There are no child-father visits, play area in not open and (it is) monthly visits only.

One respondent considers what they have experienced compared to what was available pre-pandemic *'On his Previous sentence I'd visit him every week sometimes two times before covid, but this time round covid makes it lot harder and is effecting our daughter not being able to see her dad.'*

Visits, staying connected and thoughts on Release

Table 5.2 How often do you and your child/ren currently communicate with your ex/partner in Prison? (n = 50)

Frequency	Parent	%	Child	%
Daily	28	56%	5	10%
Weekly	17	34%	22	56%
Monthly	1	2%	1	2%
Every few months	1	2%	4	8%
A few times a year	1	2%	2	4%
None/not allowed	2	4%	3	6%

We asked parents to consider how often they currently communicate with their ex/partner in prison. As can be seen from Table 5.2 above, most families were communicating regularly, with over half of parents having some kind of contact on a daily basis usually by telephone. One respondent talked about the cost and length of telephone calls *'daily phone calls usually but they are so expensive sometimes, it can only be for a few minutes at a time.'* What is clear to see however, is that whilst many parents are having daily phone calls, calls with the children were less frequent i.e., weekly.

Table 5.3 Type of contact the parent and the child/children currently has with the ex/partner in Prison (n = 47) - multiple options could be selected

Type of Contact	Parent	Child
Phone call	46	39
Written letters	34	28
Visit in person	34	30*
Videocall	30	27
Email	4	0
Prison voicemail	1	1
Awaiting on being accepted for visit	1	1
Not allowed direct contact	0	4

*20 of these responses relates to a supervised visit, and 10 relate to an unsupervised visit

Table 5.3 shows the variety of ways that children and parents were communicating with their ex/partner in prison. Most frequent was phone calls, but written letters were also a key mechanism of keeping children connected with their parent in prison.

We asked parents *'how do you feel about your ex/partners' release'*, and some respondents said they were excited, looking forward to it; *'It's a long time away but excited'...*and also *'We can't wait'*.

However, on balance, many more responses were around the theme of anxiety, feeling scared and apprehension.

I'm trying to be optimistic, but I am very concerned as to whether we will be able to stay together as a family. I feel so distant from him and whilst he does try to maintain contact by calling every day speaking on the phone is not the same as seeing someone face to face. ...I just wish we knew where to turn to for help as to how best to deal with this. I will probably tell their teachers once we have done this so, they can monitor their behaviour, but I am not expecting them to do anything. We are literally on our own trying to fathom things out and not knowing what to do for the best.

Summary of key findings from the online parent survey

It is clear to see that not all children and families with a parent in prison in the UK are being offered support. A small proportion of families spoke of being offered a good level of support, but this certainly is not the case nationwide, as one respondent reflects:

More services need to be made available to children who have a parent in prison, and it needs to be country wide not just (in) certain areas.

Families have told us that they need much better communication, more information about prison life for example, as well as more practical and financial support.

I feel that financially the government should put in financial support for the child/parent left behind why should they be punished for their parents' behaviour they are left with the impact of the stress afterwards.

Parents have shared with us the challenges of getting support from their own networks, e.g., family, friends and colleagues, noting the significant stigma that comes with having a family member in prison. Not all schools were aware of the family situation, therefore meaning that not all children were recognised as needing specialist support and understanding.

The pandemic has had a significant impact on how families and children communicate with their family members in prison, both in terms of how they communicate, but also in terms of the impact on family relationships. It will take time to re-establish these already fragile connections and support for this process of reconnection, particularly for the children in the family, is vital.

5.1.1.2 FOI requests

This section will display the data collected via FOI, but also discuss the challenges and limitations of collecting (or attempting to collect) data in this way for research.

Freedom of Information Requests (FOI) were sent to the following:

- His Majesty's Prison & Probation Service
- Northern Ireland Prison Service
- His Majesty's Courts and Tribunals Service
- Scottish Prison Service*

* The Scottish Prison Service did reply to our request but was unable to provide any data.

1. His Majesty's Prison & Probation Service (HMPPS)

His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service is an executive agency of the [Ministry of Justice](#) (MOJ) and it is responsible for the correctional services in [England](#) and [Wales](#).

Request 1 – How many men (in England and Wales) who were given a custodial sentence in 2019 are recorded as being parents to at least one child under the age of 18?

Request 2 – How many women (in England and Wales) who were given a custodial sentence in 2019 are recorded as being parents to at least one child under the age of 18?

Response to Request 1 and 2:

'The requested information is not recorded on a central sentencing database. In this instance to determine if all of the information requested is held, we would be required to locate and retrieve information from Court papers for all custodial sentences in 2019, which would exceed the appropriate limit. Consequently, we are not obliged to comply with your request. Although we cannot answer your request at the moment, we may be able to answer a refined request within the cost limit. You may wish to consider, for example, asking for the number of individuals who entered prison during a particular time period who have children under the age of 18 residing at home. Please be aware that we cannot guarantee at this stage that a refined request will fall within the FOIA cost limit, or that other exemptions will not apply.'

Request 3

Of a random sample of 10% of current prisoners in HMP Hewell (up to 100), how many were parents to children (under the age of 18) on arrival to HMP Hewell?

Response to Request 3

'I can confirm the MoJ holds all of the information you have requested. I can inform you that a random sample of 100 prisoners found 66 were recorded as having children.'

Please note that the method of data collecting is based on information provided by prisoners on reception into the prison and therefore subject to error and it does not define children as those under the age of 18.'

Request 4

Of a random sample of 100 of current prisoners in HMP Featherstone, how many were parents to children (under the age of 18) on arrival to HMP Featherstone?

Response to Request 4:

I can confirm the MoJ holds all of the information you have requested, and I have provided it below. I can inform you that over a random sample of 100 prisoners, at HMP Featherstone:

- 24 did not disclose if they had any dependants
- 18 disclosed they did not have any dependants
- 11 disclosed they had 1 dependant
- 14 disclosed they had 2 dependants
- 17 disclosed they had 3 dependants
- 6 disclosed they had 4 dependants
- 6 disclosed they had 6 dependants

Request 5

How many in person visits by an adult/s accompanying a child under the age of 18 to visit their dad in HMP Hewell were recorded in the first week of February 2019 (time period February 4th – 11th 2019)?

Response to Request 5:

'Your request has been handled under the FOIA. I can confirm that the MoJ holds the information that you have requested. In the first week of February 2019 (4th – 11th), there were a total of 24 in-person visits by an adult/s accompanying a child under the age of 18 to visit their father in HMP Hewell.'

2. HM Courts and Tribunals Service

Request 6:

Using data centrally collated by the MoJ relating to the 'main carer' status of prisoners received into custody upon reception as captured by the Basic Custody Screening (BCS) process in Questions B6.2 and B6.4 as per below:

- How many individuals (in England and Wales) received into custody in 2019 are recorded as being the main carer to at least one child. Can you present this number as a total and of a percentage of all individuals received into custody in 2019?
- If gender information is available for 1) above, then can this data be split by gender.

Response to Request 6:

'Your request has been handled under the FOIA. I can confirm that the MoJ holds the information that you have requested, and I have provided it below':

Table 5.4 Response to Request 6

	Fully completed BCS Part 1s	B6.5 Main Carer- Total	B6.5 Main Carer %
Male	87,496	620	0.71%
Female	9,371	690	7.36%
Total	96,867	1,310	1.35%

*'The tables show how many prisoners were recorded as the 'Main Carer' for at least 1 child who lived in the same home as the prisoner immediately prior to the prisoner entering custody where the reception date into custody for the prisoner was between 01/01/2019 to 31/12/2019 inclusive. **This data comes from the BCS Part 1 as per the prisoner's answers and is not checked for accuracy.** Although care is taken when processing and analysing the returns, the information collected is subject to the inaccuracies inherent in any large-scale recording system. While the figures shown have been checked as far as practicable, they should be regarded as approximate and not necessarily accurate to the last whole number shown in the tables.'*

3. Northern Ireland Prison Service

Request 7:

- How many male prisoners are parents of a child under 18 at: HMP Maghaberry,
- How many female prisoners are parents of a child under 18 at: HMP Maghaberry, Magilligan and Hydebank Wood?

If the specific above data is not available, we would be happy to receive instead:

- How many prisoners are parents at: HMP Maghaberry, Magilligan and Hydebank Wood?

Response to Request 7:

'The number of prisoners who have a dependent recorded (under the age of 18) as per 6 September 2021:

HMP Maghaberry 244

HMP Magilligan 130

Hydebank Wood 33

We cannot break this down further into gender, due to the low numbers involved as it may lead to identification of individuals. The exemption at Section 40 (2) Personal Information is therefore engaged. Section 40 (2) provides an absolute exemption and there is no requirement for the completion of a public interest test.'

4. Scottish Prison Service**Request 8:**

- How many male prisoners are parents of a child under 18 at: All Scottish establishments?
- How many female prisoners are parents of a child under 18 at: All Scottish establishments?

If the specific above data is not available, we would be happy to receive instead:

- How many prisoners are parents at: All Scottish establishments?

Response to Request 8:

'As you have requested the same information for all Scottish establishments, my response covers all the individual FOISA request submitted by yourself. Following a search of our paper and electronic records, I have established that the information you require is not held by the Scottish Prison Service. This is not information that SPS would routinely request as we have no requirement to collect this data. The act only requires us to provide information held by the organisation, on this occasion, we are unable to assist you with your request.'

Summary of data collected by FOI

There have been significant challenges in attempting to collect data from public bodies via a FOI route. There was some partial success for some of the requests, but we were told that the data was either not available, or that the requests were large and the amount of work it would take was out of scope beyond what they typically approve (i.e., in many cases, it would require staff to manually collate the data from physical prisoner records).

One of the other key issues is the veracity of the data collected, the data on the BCS relates to 'main carer' only, and so really this data is of limited use when exploring the actual statistics on the number of children impacted by parental imprisonment. The BCS data (as the FOI request notes) comes directly from prisoners' answers. We recognise that there are a number of reasons why a prisoner may not disclose that they have children at the point of screening.

Two prisons were selected to request more detailed data from, and this was HMP Hewell and HMP Featherstone. These two prisons were selected due to the close proximity of these prisons to where YSS primarily deliver their services in Worcestershire. The data collected from these requests could suggest that between 50-65% of prisoners are recorded as being parents. Furthermore, the statistics from HMP Featherstone indicate that of those prisoners recorded as being parents, the average number of children they had was three. However, we would not want to generalise this figure due to the fact that it is based on a random sample of 100 prisoners at just these two locations. Furthermore, it is unknown what process was decided upon to select these 100 prisoners (it is quite probable that the process was indeed not random).

Similarly, with regards to prison visits to HMP Hewell, where there was a child under the age of 18, there were 24 recorded in person visits across a 1-week period, so this could suggest that there may typically be around 100 visits a month with children visiting their dad. There are also issues with extrapolating too much from this statistic however, as it is a week of the year when many children are typically in school. It is likely that the number of visits is somewhat higher per month on average, considering school holidays.

With regards to the Northern Ireland Statistics, official governmental statistics (Justice NI, 2021), it can be seen that HMP Maghaberry, Magilligan and Hydebook Wood (male and female included) show that there 1,448 prisoners at these establishments combined in year period 2020–2021. This figure suggests that for prisons in NI the number of prisoners who are also parents of children under the age of 18 was approximately 28% of the prison population in 2001.

5.1.1.3 Statistical estimates – how many children does this impact?

Data from 2009 estimated that the number of children of prisoners in England and Wales to be 90,000 at the end of June 2009 (MOJ, 2012). Furthermore, in this report they state:

'Based on the number of unique persons estimated to have been in prison in 2009, and the average number of children reported by prisoners in the SPCR sample, it is estimated that approximately 200,000 children had a parent in prison at some point in 2009. Looking at the number of children with a parent in prison at a single point in time, approximately 90,000 children had a parent in prison at the end of June 2009.' (MOJ, 2012).

The figure of 90,000 relates to a term known as point prevalence (at that point in time), whereas 200,000 relates to annual cumulative prevalence, that it is the number of children who had a parent in prison at some point in a year period.

Children of Prisoners (COPE, 2022) provide estimates (based on a parenting rate of 1.3 children to every prisoner) that suggest the number of children currently impacted by parental imprisonment is approximately 113,000 children across England and Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland combined. Figures for England and Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland are 101,634; 1,832 and 9,673 respectively. The parenting rate was extrapolated by basing estimates on a male prisoner population in France in 2002 (Champsaur, 2002).

More comprehensive estimates have been calculated (Kincaid, Roberts & Kane, 2019) which indicate that there are likely to be significantly more children, an estimated 312,000 (annual cumulative prevalence), which is substantially more children impacted by parental imprisonment than other estimates (COPE, 2022 and MOJ, 2012). These estimates calculated by Crest (2019) are far more complex than looking simply at parenting rates, and include the proportion of prisoners with children, the number of children for each prisoner and the age distribution of the dependent children of prisoners. Their modelling also takes into account demographics such as gender and offending risk profiles.

Despite these figures, it is proposed that rather than basing our figures on estimates, radical change is needed in terms of recording and storing information about how many children are impacted by parental imprisonment in real-time. Both HMPPS, and the Scottish Prison service do not have a way of making this information readily accessible, and so it is argued that the way in which this information is initially recorded, stored and shared with partner agencies is urgently looked at. Without knowing current and up to date information about exactly how many children there are (and where they are), these children are going to be missing out on the very support that they so desperately need.

5.1.2 Interviews with stakeholders and practitioners

Although children and young people's experiences of parental imprisonment are diverse, reflecting their unique family experiences, there were consistent categories identified through analysis of interview data, which have been amalgamated into themes. The themes presented here are: *Forgotten families; Prison defining childhood; Secondary prisonisation and Intersectionality*.

Table 5.5: Themes and categories from coded interview data

Theme: With categories included in theme
Forgotten Families <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No formal system for tracking children/young people and families • Disrupted childhood • Safeguarding • Barriers to support
Prison Defining Childhood <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Behavioural impacts • No voice
Secondary Prisonisation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stigma and shame • Seen and not seen
Intersectionality <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complex intersecting issues impacting experience

5.1.2.1 Forgotten Families

Nobody was listening. (Parent)

Our research reveals that children, young people and families living in the UK are not systematically identified and recorded when a parent/carer within the family goes to prison, and there are no formal, standardised procedures for referral and support. These families remain a forgotten and largely unsupported group.

You do feel like you are the only person in the world...the statistic of children that have a parent or a close relative in prison, for me, is staggering. That really shocked me when I first looked into it, because, as I said, the schools weren't prepared for it, but Charlotte won't have been the first child to go through that.

(Parent)

All the families, practitioners and stakeholders we interviewed highlighted the impact this lack of awareness has most notably on children and young people, as a teacher who referred a family to YSS FF describes,

There's a lot of not understanding, there's a lot of worry, there's, you know, and the story doesn't end when the parent returns from prison; in fact that's really almost the second chapter of the story isn't it. These children are so vulnerable ...

Although many prison services and several charitable organisations exist nationally (see section 2) to support different aspects of parental imprisonment, this support is geographically varied.

There is very little (support) out there. I know the prisons run certain projects and they offer certain things, but there isn't a lot out there. Families First feels like something that's quite, I'm sure it's not unique but it feels quite, there's not much of that sort of thing out there... There is now solely, well Families First offers that service in the patch that we're working in. I'm not aware of a universal or nationwide process for working with or even at say local authority level...

(Practitioner)

I think families should be able to ring up and say, I think we're going to need some support, because even the day they get arrested, my kids were in, what do you do in that situation, the police are in, the kids are watching their dad be battered down the stairs because they're, and they're not nice, police, I don't care what they say, they're horrible, they're not, and they don't care if you've got kids in the house... The kids are screaming because they're hurting their dad, as far as they're concerned, I'm a mess because the kids are a mess, I'm a mess because he's going away. There they go. And we had nobody. They left with him and we just got left there and I had to to wipe all their tears away.

(Parent)

No formal system for tracking children, young people and families

With anything else, with any sort of disability or loss or any big occasion, there is a procedure or a guideline for teachers and GPs and health visitors to follow, whereas with this there's nothing, you're just left to your own devices and to figure it out yourself basically.

(Parent)

Our research has found that when an adult is sentenced, they are not necessarily asked to disclose if they have children, although many prisons do record this data.

So, a family member goes into prison because they've broken the law and they're waiting to be sentenced. At that point, there isn't really any screening done or questions asked about the family. And often some of the offenders want to protect their family so they're not volunteering. So, there's a little bit of, the system's still not quite capturing those individuals or giving them the opportunity. So, it's screened and then it's almost, it's forgotten, they've got a family, but they're an unknown...

(FF Practitioner)

The interviews also indicated that many prisoners choose not to provide this information for a variety of reasons, including fear of social service interventions, for example, or making the children more vulnerable.

It's the fear, you know, I think another reason why the families are not self-referring into us is the fear of well if I do refer into you and I appear on your radar, you know, are my children going to be taken away from me or. And the same in prison, they won't, they often don't say because they're either worried that their children might be taken away or if they let on they've got children in prison it almost makes them vulnerable. So I completely understand why sometimes it's better, it feels for them it's better to keep schtum but then that's up to us to do the work to convince them to gain their trust to convince them that actually we can offer them support. And it's not about, you know, checking up on them and seeing if their child should be in social care. So that's something that we're always fighting against is sort of that lack of trust maybe of the professionals.

(FF Practitioner)

Disrupted childhood

During most of Matt's childhood his dad has been in and out of prison. Matt found this very hard, especially after the last arrest when he was 14 as he wasn't at home and 'didn't even get to say goodbye or anything'. Matt became very anxious and withdrawn and struggled to maintain friendships at school, choosing instead to stay alone in his bedroom at home.

Children are faced with significant social, emotional and often financial challenges when a family member is in custody, as well as the incalculable trauma of being separated from a parent and often not being fully aware of why this has happened.

The school had had concerns because the child was displaying quite unusual behaviour for them within the classroom and they weren't sure what it was about, but they thought it might be connected to the fact that her dad was in prison...And as it turned out she hadn't been told at that point, she knew her dad was in prison but she didn't know what he'd done, so she'd actually been looking up information online....She was 11. So she'd looked up information and she'd actually read quite a lot of unhelpful things that had been written and didn't really know how to process that.

(Stakeholder)

The impact of separation may also be exacerbated by parental gender, with children of mothers imprisoned experiencing significant and enduring isolation and grief, as a YSS FF practitioner describes,

Another family that I'm working with, mum has gone to prison, and they are living, the two boys live with their grandparents... So, the children, I helped the grandparents tell the kids where mum is, but they don't understand why she's gone to prison. They just know she's unwell and she's gone to prison to get better.

The impact of parental gender on family separation is further compounded by the fact that there are very few women's prisons, and women are often imprisoned far away from their families, with the average distance a woman is held from her home being 64 miles (Kincaid et al., 2019), making prison visits difficult.

Stakeholder and practitioner interviews revealed that children and families of prisoners can face significant financial instability,

It's left the family in quite difficult circumstances financially and that I suppose will have an impact on just physical wellbeing, they might not be able to, we've referred families to food banks, we've had to get other services involved to try and look at benefits and getting additional financial help within that family because they've lost an income. Now whether they've lost that income through criminal means or whether they've lost that income because the person was working, they've still lost an income.

(Stakeholder)

Children often have to change homes and schools following parental imprisonment, and friendship groups and support networks, which are particularly needed at such difficult times, can be disrupted.

Unfortunately, it was on the front page of the local newspaper. And obviously because he was, his colour, he was really easily identified and they, I think they, I think she told me they even, the paper even reported the street they lived in.

(Stakeholder)

Safeguarding

There is also a risk that children whose parents are involved in organised crime may be targeted and many may experience or witness violence within the home, as practitioners working with families describe.

One of the young people in question was actually a victim of the crime that his dad was put away for. His dad and his uncle were sort of abusive to the family, violent to the family ... So he is experiencing and going through some very challenging times, particularly now that he's a teenager, he is very distrusting of authority, seriously struggles at school, gets angry, gets frustrated, arguments. It's the result of significant trauma, but equally when you speak to his mum, he's not ready to talk about it, he's not ready to open up, he's not ready to go down that path in order to hopefully get some therapy and hopefully move on.

(Practitioner)

Similarly, in a case of an older brother going to prison, the younger sibling was in a vulnerable position with regard to safeguarding.

The concern was the younger brother shared a bedroom with the older brother. He witnessed lots of the criminality work that was going on because the older brother was exploited. So in theory the younger brother's been exploited through second hand, his older brother. And there was drugs and weapons.

(Stakeholder)

There was a risk too of the mother, who was trying to cope with losing her older son to imprisonment, missing signs of a safeguarding risk to her younger son.

She wasn't safeguarding him effectively in the fact that she'd be letting him go out and play and he was accessing his phone and sharing images and, risk taking. So we've really had to keep explaining to her ..., he could end up going down the wrong route again if you're not parenting him and putting in some rules and talking and being open.

Sometimes, homes of families with a member in prison were targeted within their neighbourhood.

Currently we've got a family whose father is in prison and is a repeat offender, so he has been in prison previously. The family have suffered quite a lot of community anti-social behaviour and have recently moved house although the children are still coming to our school.

(Stakeholder)

It is important to note, however, that parental imprisonment can arouse a mixture of feelings for children, especially those where parental imprisonment provides respite from violent, insecure and unsafe environments, as explained by a stakeholder,

The main point is that importance around recognising that it's not the same for all of them. I think the easy thing is to assume that all kids miss their parent when their parent goes away, that's the easy thing to assume, and that children have a part to play around family support for incarcerated adults to prevent reoffending.

Children can often worry about what prison is like for their parent, based on media portrayals of prisons as unsafe. However, for some children, whose family member lives a difficult and unsafe life outside of prison, prison can be something of a relief.

Children..., when somebody's in prison it's a bit easier for them [the children] sometimes and they're not as worried about the person because they know they're in prison and they're [the prisoner] looked after, whereas when they come out, they're sometimes quite chaotic with their life and that can impact on them as well.

(Stakeholder)

Barriers to support

Lisa was originally referred to FF when she was seeking help for her daughter, Charlotte then aged 7. Lisa's concern about Charlotte's behaviour developed over a number of years following the imprisonment of her ex-partner (Charlotte's dad). Charlotte didn't sleep well, would bed wet, have emotional melt downs and started to struggle emotionally at nursery school and then school. Lisa found it hard to find support and approached a number of different services – unsuccessfully – before finding help with YSS FF. Lisa worked really hard to maintain contact between Charlotte and her dad. Looking back, she feels prison visits and the trauma of her dad going to prison impacted Charlotte's emotional development and robbed her of her childhood.

Families needing and seeking help are typically not aware of how and where to access support,

One mum just turned up at the prison... she was desperate for help and didn't know where to go...

(Stakeholder)

Many families also find navigating complex referral and support networks challenging, as a family support worker describes,

If you don't have a lot of confidence either in the system or in just yourself in reaching out for help, not doing it. When I first started this role and I started to, trying to look, well, what's out there locally, what other agencies could support. It's overwhelming and I still find it overwhelming. And it's not always very clear how to access the support.

Access to support is exacerbated by long waiting lists which can have a significant impact upon children and young people's capacity to process and deal with the emotional trauma of parental separation.

I think with most of our services the issue you've got is waiting lists. It's all well and good a dad being incarcerated and the kids going on a waiting list, but six months down the line you wonder if that window of opportunity has missed, don't you? Where you could have prevented this stuff because you're getting in early. Early intervention. I mean it says what it is on the tin doesn't it but often it's too late. The damage and the stigma and the scarring of it all is embedded already.

(Stakeholder)

In addition, families may find it difficult to find a route into support that deals with the multifaceted challenges that they face, tending instead to seek solutions to individual problems largely caused by the imprisonment.

I think the fact that some of our families need an advocate to get the point across for them. Often, they'd go to their GP, the GP would then diagnose based on their job and would provide medication or practical sessions in one way or another, but actually, it wasn't getting to the root of the problem. So, they'd spend a lot of time, wasted time on a waiting list, so that frustration because of lack of communication and also, being able to get the point across of what is really a very difficult situation for them, because the barrier was already there if that makes sense.

(YSS FF Practitioner)

Further to this is the professional fragmentation of the issues that families face. Our research shows that holistic, preventative support isn't provided as a matter of course at the outset, so difficulties can multiply – housing problems, financial problems, trauma and loss difficulties, anxiety and challenges to identity – leading to crisis within the family. Support, when it is finally available, isn't adequately resourced to deal with the layered and often complex needs presented. Further referrals and waiting ensue.

It's reactive. It's what's your burning issue, what's the worst burning issue on the top of your problem list? Let's deal with that. There we go, we've dealt with it. It may come back because your partner or your parent's still in prison but, you know, that's not our business. We're not qualified to deal with that. And I think a lot of families that we've seen recently have been in contact with other professionals. Other sort of charities or family support and have been told that you know, it's too complex your situation, we don't have experience around parental imprisonment. We can't help you... I'm going to refer you into CAMHS or I'm going to refer you into this service. But these services don't have capacity anymore. So, you can refer people into these mental health services of CAMHS or whatever, but they're going to be sat on a waiting list for six months.

(YSS Practitioner)

5.1.2.2 Prison Defining Childhood

For some families, having a parent or close family member who is in prison is their first brush with the criminal justice system. However, for other families, children become aware of their parent going into prison throughout their childhoods, defining the relationships they have and the problems their other parent faces.

With a family I work with where dad's been in and out of prison. I mean we did a timeline, I did a timeline with mum just to understand a bit more about her life and just weaved through that timeline was, you know, when she had her babies, when she'd had her miscarriages obviously from stress, I think. When he'd gone into prison, when her son had, she lost a son to cancer, when he was ill was the partner in prison or out of prison, and it was very much, you could see the ups and downs of where he was in and out of their life. And there was some Christmases that were great because he was there, they were all together and some that were awful. And some where she went into labour and he wasn't there and... but it's just interesting how her timeline, her lifeline was so linked to his time in and out of prison that it defined it so much.

(YSS FF Practitioner)

For many families, a parent may go in and out of prison on several occasions spanning many years and consequently for some children being separated from a parent and visiting a parent in prison can shape many aspects of their childhood and although highly traumatic, may in some respects feel quite 'normal' to them'.

That's life and they're quite used to coming in and being searched and they really enjoy that time that they get to spend with dad.

(YSS Practitioner)

Nonetheless, each time a parent goes in or comes out of prison, there is a period of adjustment, which can be difficult.

Dad's been bad, he's been in prison, he'll serve time and then he'll come out and we'll carry on. There doesn't seem a consequence, a bad consequence for his actions because he just does it and comes back and picks up where he left off. He's self-employed, he's got his own business, so he just comes out of prison and just picks up the pieces. But in between times we've got mum who's hit financial difficulty, the rent, she's had to move because the rent was being stopped paying. She's had to sell her car. So there's lots of financial ramifications for mum and all this stress and pieces to pick up whereas dad goes off, does his time and then by which time mum's sorted out a good little plan and he just jumps back in again.

(Stakeholder)

New challenges and questions can arise for these children as they mature into young people, with prison itself shaping aspects of their childhoods.

I've noticed even in the last few months or so in cases I had five years ago coming back as kids have gotten older and they've maybe had more questions or if the person's still in prison. You know, the impact seems quite long lasting in a lot of ways. Or it could be that the feeling is that as children get older, they do have more questions generally about 'why did they leave, why did they go to prison, did they choose, say, for example drugs over me?'

(Stakeholder)

Whilst each family experience is very different, our research reveals consistent themes reflecting how children and young people of prisoners typically feel when separated from a parent. Feeling 'isolated', 'sad and angry' and that there is 'no one to help', and 'like you're not being listened to', can create a sense in which everyday life is significantly influenced by a parent's imprisonment.

Trying to kind of deal with your day-to-day existence, living your normal life but at the same time actually feeling like you're in that prison with them because you're constantly worrying about them. And I would also say all of the emotional issues that come with that. So, with a lot of the children, we're seeing a lot of anger, a lot of low self-esteem, those kind of things.

(YSS FF Practitioner)

Behavioural impact

A schoolteacher became concerned about one of her pupils when he was coming into school not in his uniform. He started coming into class, where he elected to sit facing the back wall, with very little engagement with his teacher. Soon the relationship with his teacher deteriorated and he did not participate in his learning, and he withdrew from friendships.

All practitioners and stakeholders we interviewed highlighted the significant impact that parental imprisonment and its resulting separation from the family had on children and young people's behaviour, including withdrawal, disengagement with school, expressions of anger and issues related to mental health such as anxiety and depression.

A lot of children will have behavioural issues, self-harming or anger issues and things like that that does need to be dealt with from a more psychological point of view.

(Stakeholder)

If services are not aware of the reasons for a child's behaviour, then the ways in which they are dealt with can exacerbate the problems unwittingly.

I worked with a young person that, or a number of young people that had family members incarcerated and they didn't have early help and the child was lost, completely lost. Very confused. Terrible classroom behaviour etc. because, and no one understood really. And teachers were disciplining her, but didn't know, and sometimes it's the information sharing.

(Stakeholder)

Matt, who was 15 at the time of the interview reflects back over the years his dad has been in and out of prison and how it impacted his behaviour.

Matt: my confidence was definitely worse... I wouldn't speak to really anyone about anything. I wouldn't really speak to anyone about anything, only really my mum.

Researcher: *But not at school, not to friends?*

Matt: No like at school, I wouldn't, no I wouldn't even go like ask a teacher. Or like if I needed anything I just stay quiet like if I didn't know what to do, I'd just stay quiet.

No voice

The age of the children and the extent to which they can understand what is going on affects the ways in which their behaviours can be impacted.

The children as well, if they're younger it can come out behaviourally can't it. So they start wetting or they won't sleep. We've had one just recently and the little girl stopped talking and she became a bit of a selective mute...

(Stakeholder)

For many children, whilst their behaviours may speak volumes, those behaviours can be hard to interpret and deal with if full information is not held by everyone working with a withdrawn, 'difficult' child.

Dad is in prison and David, aged 10 at the time, found it exceptionally difficult to understand and talk about. David was first referred for support by FF by his primary school where his behaviour, and particularly his withdrawal, had been noted as a cause for concern. David had increasingly withdrawn from communicating in class, was distant from peers and emotional, often displaying anger and frustration. David found it very challenging to talk about his dad – retreating under his hoodie – and appearing to prefer silence.

Unless skilled support services can work effectively with such children, their ability to voice their worries and emotions can be halted. Lack of voice for children and young people can also be exacerbated by current UK systems and approaches that typically focus on preventing reoffending and providing support for offenders on release. There is also the assumption that offender families, including children and young people, are part of this support network, as a stakeholder well versed in criminal justice describes,

There's very little ... support that's actually about the children and not the adult. So I think it's based upon that pressure for a child to be a part of a protective, contextualised, network for those. Somehow, they're expected to be part of some kind of supportive network for their parent. And even if no one turns round and says it's up to you to make sure your parent doesn't offend again, everything based around prison visits, prison releases, writing letters, having phone calls... but I wonder whether or not that's even helpful for some children.

Many of the practitioners and stakeholders we interviewed talked about the hidden qualities of needs of families of prisoners, and how lack of voice is perpetuated by policy makers and adult decision makers who typically overlook the issues and concerns of children and young people.

But in theory they should be focussing on hidden harms, hidden dangers and children affected by parental imprisonment is a hidden harm, (a) because we don't statutorily care about it and (b) because we're having those conversations about the adult not the child.

(Stakeholder)

5.1.2.3 Secondary Prisonisation

As a number of practitioners working with families suggest, it is not the perpetrators who are the victims. It is the parents/carers and the children left behind.

They're the victims in all this because they're the lives who have to change, they're the people who have to move house. They're the people who have to put up with the community anti-social behaviour and the stigma attached. And then there is very little support for these families.

(Stakeholder)

Stigma and shame

I felt massively judged by everybody I reached out to with help and I fully explained that he was my ex-partner, we'd not been together for four or five years at this point and I still felt looked down at... the ones that are looked down on in society...

(Parent)

The shame and stigma are among the most difficult challenges of parental imprisonment reported by children, young people and families.

A lot of the partners don't feel that they can tell people where their partner is. Or even the children sometimes. They don't have the words. They don't want to face the stigma; even some of their close friends. So a lot of the families we were working with you'd come to them and they would say oh, you know, I tell people my partner's working away. So they feel very isolated. ...A lot of them don't have people to talk to and they talk about feeling very alone.

(YSS FF Practitioner)

He's an addict as well, people always think really bad about addicts, so it's not something you really want to go, oh yeah, my husband's an addict and he's in prison, how do you think I should do this? They look at me like, oh my God!

(Parent)

Children and young people describe how they feel they must keep their parent's imprisonment a secret, often choosing not to disclose information to people other than close family and feeling like they have no one to talk to. As 6-year-old Oscar describes when talking about his dad's imprisonment.

Oscar: *It is difficult, and I only talk to ladies about dad and grown-ups, so.*

Researcher: *Not to your friends?*

Oscar: *No. I've never told them that he's in prison.*

Many children and young people feel compelled to keep secrets that can perpetuate feelings of isolation, as a stakeholder explains,

Some parents who are protective parents who are left holding the can as it were once their partner goes away, I think there's sometimes pressure from them on the children, you know, let's not talk about it, or let's not upset anyone or, don't tell the neighbours because they

wouldn't understand, especially if there's a sexual offence or an offence that isn't deemed societally acceptable for obvious reasons, but that kind of pressure not to discuss it, because it's just embarrassing for everyone else. And of course, a kid's then holding a secret and we know how damaging secrets are when we're asking children.

Keeping secrets can be an isolating experience and can restrict how these children engage with their communities and how they seek and receive help. The perceived need for secrecy can also make it difficult for children to process their sense of loss, as a practitioner working with families describes,

People don't want to come forward ... opening up somebody's world to what's happened, what's going on at home ... things that go on behind closed doors, it can be quite difficult for people to invite professionals in to come and look at that. In times of crisis, you close up shop ... You don't want everybody coming in. And some of these kids are told ... You don't say anything at school, don't do this, don't do that... that stigma needs to be broken down I think first in order to make that successful, because at the end of the day it's about how do we find those young people? They don't walk around with caps on do they that says oh my mum's in prison. And that's always the difficulty for me, but I think that the, if we had a referral service I absolutely think it would be extremely beneficial for those young people that did come forward or those families that do come forward because they are marginalised victims at the end of the day and they deserve to be given the necessary support to hopefully thrive and live positive lifestyles.

Susan, a thirteen-year-old with a father in prison, describes how children and young people in similar circumstances might feel embarrassed.

It means some people might not want their friends to know. I just wouldn't tell my friends.

Researcher: And is that what you've done?

Yes.

Families describe how they feel isolated because of the stigma, shame and lack of co-ordinated routinely provided services.

Every family's different, but there are consistent, there are consistent themes that run through of this idea of feeling isolated, alone, sort of fighting your own battle on your own with no one to help you, feeling like you're not being listened to, trying to kind of deal with your day-to-day existence, living your normal life but at the same time actually feeling like you're in that prison with them because you're constantly worrying about them. And I would also say all of the emotional issues that come with that. So with a lot of the children we're seeing a lot of anger, a lot of low self-esteem, those kind of things. So, yeah, there's definitely patterns developing.

(YSS FF Practitioner)

The data present a picture in which children describe how they are seen and not seen; feeling judged for their parents' crime in one sense and overlooked in another.

5.1.2.4 Intersectionality

Families which have a parent or close family member in prison often face a number of other difficulties in their lives, frequently poverty, earlier emotional traumas, drug or alcohol dependence, serious family illness – either physical or mental.

When you work with the families that we work with, nine times out of ten imprisonment is not the only issue. It might be the issue that we specialise in so we would manage, but there's sometimes other things going on, whether there's been domestic abuse or drug abuse in the past or mental health issues, so it's often as not there's multiple things going on.

(Stakeholder)

For many families, imprisonment is part of the patchwork of long-standing challenges in their lives, which affects how they experience and can deal with parental imprisonment.

Their dad died of alcoholism quite a few years ago. So mum going to prison has brought up a lot of that grief again that they had with dad.

(YSS FF Practitioner)

Often, families have sought help at an earlier time as they tried to deal with things that felt beyond their control. That earlier help isn't always available and can lead to longer term more serious problems.

Most of the parents [of young offender in prison] that I speak to have said to me, from an early age we have asked at school for support with his behaviour or we've asked, we've taken them to the doctors around getting some help, mental health wise, drug and alcohol addiction and they've asked and asked and not managed to get any access to any services that have supported them until they get to the point where they end up in prison.

(Stakeholder)

Seeking help is hard enough for anyone, but the difficulties are compounded when mental ill-health reduces someone's capacity to speak out.

And if you're doing that under a normal situation without any necessarily mental health conditions, shall we say, it would be quite overwhelming. But if in addition to that you've got other mental health conditions going on, it impacts even more! Because you've got less ability to do it, because it's not there, the barrier is in your limited health, you know, that's your barrier.

(YSS FF Practitioner)

The consequences of unresolved problems earlier on in the life of families means that once (if) help is provided, the difficulties in providing support can overwhelm services.

So we should be working in partnership and collectively with families, but often we are referred into, particularly as young carers, we are referred into as the last box to be ticked on a family support action plan or a social services action plan and that troubles me, because we tend to get them, assess them and yet there's still lots and lots of issues going on and we are often left to pick up the pieces of that which inevitably means that me and my key workers kind of become jack of all trades and we're trying to do everything and we're all things to all people.

(YSS Practitioner)

Well sign-posted support early in the process and automatic referral would allow families to receive tailored help in a way that worked best for them.

So not everybody needs the same level of support and not everybody has the same questions, but it's just so they know that if anything does come up they've got somewhere they can come to, to ask those questions. And some of it might just be a one-off piece of work that we would do, they might just come in because they don't know one particular thing and they ask that question and that's all they need. And then other things will be ongoing and a lot more emotional and connected kind of support that is needed.

(Stakeholder)

5.1.2.5. What are the consequences of unmet need?

Father is in prison and is a repeat offender for drug dealing. The family have suffered quite a lot of community anti-social behaviour and have recently moved house, although the children are still attending the same school. Verbal abuse by other parents was levied at mother during drop off and pick up, leading to having to change school start and end times for the children. Children were also very unsettled after visiting their father in prison.

Although some of the families, children and young people interviewed had been referred for various types of support before finding help through YSS FF, most had not received the type of support at the time that had enabled them to effectively process and deal with a variety of challenges when a family member goes to prison. The consequences of unmet need for effective support for parents and children and young people fell into two categories: *impact on social life*; and *exacerbated emotional distress, trauma and isolation*. A further category for children and young people included *impact on educational experiences and outcomes*. Even with the support of YSS FF families, children and young people found the challenges of a family member being in prison had a profound impact on their lives.

Impact on social life

Difficulties at home and a lack of support could make it hard to maintain a social life for a variety of reasons. Friendships could be hard, as children and young people as well as adults carried the shame and stigma of family imprisonment. They described the difficulties of not feeling able to share this with others and feeling very much 'alone'.

It means some people might not want their friends to know. I just wouldn't tell my friends.

(Susan, 13 years of age)

When interviewed, 15-year-old Matt describes how hard he finds it just to be himself with other people and his tendency to 'worry too much what people think'. Parents also described their difficulties in talking to friends and family about their circumstances. Often preferring to shoulder this alone and avoiding situations where they would feel judged by others.

I felt massively judged by everybody...

(Parent)

I mean the media and social media doesn't help does it. I mean when Claire went into prison, it was in the News. And there's the usual crappy coverage of it that you get in the News, nearly always. And then there was the comments from people saying well I blame the parents, what sort of parents has she got...

(Grandparent)

Exacerbated emotional distress and trauma

YSS FF practitioners talk extensively about the emotional distress and often trauma experienced by parents, children, and young people when a family member is in prison. Without targeted support to meet the needs of parents, many remain highly vulnerable and at risk of 'unsupported trauma' and spiralling 'challenges to their mental health'.

All the parents interviewed described the significant and enduring emotional impact and often trauma that came with family imprisonment. For many children and young people, this reflected the emotional ordeal of being separated from a loved one, whilst for other children and young people this connected to the complex and often distressing experience of visiting a family member in prison.

The kids. They're the ones that suffer. Charlotte's seven now. It's been three, four long years and she's still suffering and will probably always, there will always be that time in her life where she was traumatised by what went on... if we didn't have that whole traumatic experience of being patted down, being sniffed by a dog, her nappy being checked, she'd have been alright, I think.

(Parent)

Impact on educational experiences and outcomes

Parents, practitioners, and young people explained the impact that their parental imprisonment had had on their education. A young man aged 15 at the time of interview describes the emotional impact of his dad's imprisonment on his ability to concentrate and cope with school life.

I wouldn't speak to anyone about anything, only my mum. At school I wouldn't ask a teacher if I needed anything. If I didn't know what to do, I'd just stay quiet.

Many parents described how their children were finding it 'hard to cope' at school, particularly when they were aware that their children were 'really emotional'.

For many practitioners already working with families, they were trying to stem a cycle of decline. They identified emotional overwhelm, withdrawal and possible criminality as consequences of lack of targeted and differentiated support. It is important therefore to consider the type of support that can meet the needs of families, children, and young people.

5.2 Input and process: RQ2 How does YSS Families First contribute to a multiagency approach to supporting families with parental imprisonment?

In section 5.2, we track the ways in which YSS FF was set up and developed to create, contribute to, and maintain a network of agencies and community groups who would know how to refer or support families affected by imprisonment. We track the contributions made by YSS FF, the resources that were input and the processes YSS FF developed to ensure support was available for families with a parent in prison. Much of the work set the pattern for the ways in which YSS FF supported families. However, we do not report in detail in this section on the *nature* of the approach YSS FF took with families and its impact. Rather, we deal with the family case work and the differences it makes in section [5.3 Process and product: RQ3 How does the YSS FF programme support families and what is its impact?](#)

SETTING UP A MULTIAGENCY APPROACH TO SUPPORTING FAMILIES WITH PARENTAL IMPRISONMENT (Jan – end July 2021)

Two full-time practitioner posts were created for the YSS FF project from January 2021. One of the practitioners has a background in counselling, work with offenders in prison, as a family support worker to the Fostering Agency, and has worked directly with families and vulnerable young people regarding emergency fostering placements (Interview 1, Families First Team 16.8.21). With a graduate psychology and post graduate forensic psychology background the other practitioner was already working for YSS with an extensive professional career working on the appropriate adult project and organisations

supporting survivors of sexual violence and child abuse and as a volunteer for the Samaritans and as a play volunteer in a children's hospital ward.

Led by the CEO, the practitioners appointed were responsible for:

- setting up the new service.
- developing their own skills and knowledge.
- creating links with existing networks and services.
- sourcing and managing referrals of families.
- and providing direct family support as referrals were received.

This involved shadowing existing services such as Children Heard and Seen and liaising with national organisations such as Barnardo's to explore the training they provide for professionals as well as the work that they do in prisons. Furthermore, they carried out extensive presentation of the YSS FF project including to Barnardo's, police, National Probation Service, early help partnerships, veteran's services, DWP, housing teams, homeless shelters and charities; district and school panels that have been organised by the police; public health nurses.

From January to the end July 2021, the YSS FF practitioners maintained weekly records of the activities they undertook in setting up the new service and in developing a network of agencies and community groups, which would know how to refer or support families affected by imprisonment. In general terms, the activities included:

- scoping out and setting up a stakeholders' group
- undertaking personal professional development
- creating links with other service providers
- promoting the new Families First service.

Records made available for documentary analysis during the set-up period included weekly diaries, minutes of meetings, action plans, review of initial project aims and reports to funders and stakeholders (Table 5.6).

Table 5.6: Documents recording procedures of Families First project set-up phase Jan–July 2021

2020.03.11 YSS Families First Business Case Rev. July 20
Action plan – March 2021–December 2021
Bid Highlight Report – YSS 1st Return 20 Oct 20 – 31 Jan 21 Final
Calendar highlights for OU – Nov 2020–April 2021
Families First action plan OU (1) Jan–March 2021 23.3.21
Families First progress – March–June 2021
Families First Stakeholder Meeting June 2021
Families First Stakeholder Meeting March 2021
Families First Support Overview (1)
List of stakeholders at meeting called by Families First 23.3.21
Referral process
Summary of support provided so far March 11 2021
Weekly Team Achievements (2) with roles 30.3.21
Weekly Team Achievements April 2021
Weekly Team Achievements May– 2nd July 2021
Weekly Team Achievements 5–23 July 2021

Documents were analysed using NVivo qualitative data analysis software (QSR International Pty Ltd. Version 12, 2018) whereby codes were attributed to the texts according to the activities undertaken by the YSS FF team. Themes and categories within themes were developed, drawn from the data in the documents, to reflect what was going on during the set-up period Jan-July 2021 (Table 5.7). During this period, the themes of referenced activities from the most frequently occurring to the least frequently occurring were:

- Outreach
- Family support and case work
- Referrals
- Evaluation, planning and monitoring
- Training of Families First team
- Creating support resources
- Support or training for others

Table 5.7: Themes and categories of activities during project set-up period Jan-July 2021

Themes And categories	Number of Files in which themes and categories were ascribed	Number of References ascribed to theme or category
Outreach	7	64
Other services non-YSS	4	17
Stakeholders	5	21
Family support & case work	6	25
Economic resources support	2	3
Educational support	1	2
Emotional support	2	9
Health related support	1	1
Liaison re prisoner release or wellbeing	2	4
Prison information for families	2	2
Referrals	6	23
Encouraging referrals	2	4
External referrals	5	15
Internal referrals	1	1
Planning, monitoring and evaluation	5	17
Aims at outset	1	14
Aims for July-Oct 2021	1	1
Training of FF team	3	11
Creating support resources	2	6
Support or training for others	1	2
Advice & resources for School family liaison worker	1	1

Each of the themes and categories are now considered in turn, apart from Family support and case work, which is dealt with separately in section 5.3.

5.2.1 Outreach

The YSS FF team prioritised outreach during the early stages of the project and focused on developing a network of organisations which they felt: could increase referrals to YSS FF; could offer services to families involved with YSS FF; needed to be aware of the issues and challenges faced by families with a parent in prison; could offer information and guidance to YSS FF from the organisation's own experiences of working with families with a parent in prison. The purpose of outreach was to develop, contribute to and maintain a network of agencies and community groups which would know how to refer or support families affected by imprisonment.

Between January 2021 and the end of July 2021, the YSS FF team made references to specific contact with around 50 organisations to this end. Table 5.8 lists the organisations mentioned in the documentation. YSS FF also reported having created and used 92 external contacts to which they sent referral forms and information about the project. Organisations included those which became part of the stakeholders' group (see table 5.8 below), those which provided services themselves, and those for which contact with families experiencing parental imprisonment was peripheral to their core purpose, e.g., supermarkets, local radio.

Table 5.8: Organisations contacted directly by Families First Jan–July 2021

Action for Children
Barnardo's (Invisible Lives and Children Affected by Parental Imprisonment)
BBC Hereford and Worcs
Birchen Coppice School
Bromsgrove and Wyre Forest District Police and School panels.
Bromsgrove District Housing Trust
Children Seen and Heard
Community Housing Group
Dept. for Work & Pensions
Evesham Christian Centre
Families Outside
Free Radio
Harvington First School
HM Prisons and Probation Service
HMP Hewell
Jigsaw
Morrisons supermarket
Mothers Union Diocese Worcester
National Probation Service West Mercia
NEPACS (Northeast Prison After Care Society)
Nightstop Redditch
NPS West Mercia cluster and Midlands Divisional Sexual Offending Unit
Onside Advocacy Bromsgrove Social Prescribing team
Ormiston Trust
Out There
PACT
Partners of Prisoners and Families Support Group
Platform Housing
Prison Chat UK

Prison Families Helpline
Prison Reform Trust
Redditch and Bromsgrove council
Smallwood Almshouses
St Basils
St Giles
Starting Well Partnership
Sussex Prisoner Families
Veterans High Intensity Mental Health Service
West Mercia Police Early Help Team
Worcester City Council
Worcester City Council Housing Team
Worcestershire Children First
Worcestershire Liaison and Diversion team
Worcestershire Young Carers
Wychavon District Council
Wyre Forest District Council
YMCA
Young Solutions

The YSS FF team outreach activities included the following:

- distributed leaflets,
- presented in-person to organisations,
- hosted meetings,
- visited organisations,
- featured in community and prison newsletters,
- initiated contacts via email.
- distributed a press release,
- circulated an open letter for parents via social media,
- created a webpage,
- appeared on local radio
- worked with a supermarket chain to have information about Families First posted on the supermarket Community Boards.

For example, presentations were made to housing teams:

*Families First invited to present our service to the following housing teams * Wyre Forest District Council * Community Housing Group (Housing Association) * Worcester City Council.*

(Weekly team achievements with roles 30.3.21)

Organisations shared information about YSS FF via their external-facing media, e.g.,

Evesham Christian Centre have agreed to include details of our service in their Homelessness booklet. (Weekly team achievements April 2021)

Information was exchanged between organisations and referral pathways discussed.

Met with a mental health nurse on the Veterans High Mental Health Intensity Service at the NHS to discuss both projects and how we can work together on referral pathways

(Weekly team achievements with roles w/b 22nd Feb 2021)

Such contact enabled changes to be made to the ways in which other organisations dealt with the issue of parental imprisonment. For example, a local authority representative reported greater awareness and a change in approach in a housing team.

Following the presentation from Families First, we are starting to ask families/individuals the question about parental imprisonment at Wyre Forest District Council, when they speak to the housing team.

We find that the mothers usually disclose information to us, but not the fathers as much.

(YSS FF Stakeholder meeting minutes June 2021)

Stakeholder group

The purpose of creating a professional stakeholder group was to develop a networked approach to services for families with a parent in prison and to provide external oversight to the YSS FF project. One of the YSS FF objectives was stated to be, 'Agencies work together to share knowledge and develop joint solutions', (2020.03.11 YSS FF Business Case Review, submitted by YSS to Worcestershire CC). YSS FF stated planned actions included: Promotion, engagement and capacity building of VCSE agencies, liaison with schools, courts, police, housing RPs, Family Hubs, statutory sector.

This component is focussed on building a sustainable community-based approach and developing networks of community contacts for families.

(2020.03.11 YSS Families First Business Case Review, submitted by YSS to Worcestershire CC).

As stated in the governance section of the document, the 'external lead professionals' group' would comprise 'representatives from Public Health, Early Help and Education, Criminal Justice, Housing' (2020.03.11 YSS FF Business Case Review, submitted by YSS to Worcestershire CC). A stated milestone included six quarterly stakeholder meetings to be held during the two years of the project (2020.03.11 YSS FF Business Case Review, submitted by YSS to Worcestershire CC).

To this end, the initial YSS FF professional stakeholder group meeting was held on 10th March 2021.

Preparation notes for this initial meeting (YSS FF Stakeholder Groups Initial Proposal, 9.3.21) re-stated the purpose of the project and of the stakeholder involvement:

YSS wants to co-create an effective and coordinated approach that will enable us to reach out to these "hidden" victims of the criminal justice system.

Promotion, engagement and capacity building of VCSE agencies, liaison with schools, courts, police, housing RPs, Family Hubs, statutory sector.

This component is focussed on building a sustainable community-based approach and developing networks of community contacts for families.

Promote and educate: liaison with schools, Family Hubs, criminal justice, Social services, NHS L&D, housing and community sector organisations. Hidden Victims training. (YSS FF Stakeholder Groups Initial Proposal, 9.3.21)

The aims of the meeting held on 10.3.21 were:

- *To build a referral pathway for families in Worcestershire affected by parental imprisonment to ensure that there is no wrong door.*
- *Building community knowledge*
- *Tackling the stigma that families suffer*
- *Schools are well placed to identify changes in behaviour*
- *OU research alongside the Families First project with a conference planned for the end of 2022.*

(Minutes of the YSS FF Stakeholder Meeting – 10th March 2021)

The second stakeholder meeting was held on 9th June 2021 at which the YSS FF team reported on progress from March to June 2021, providing details of referrals, support activities and outreach, together with illustrative family cases.

The third stakeholder meeting was held on 21st September 2021. At this point, the YSS FF team stated an intention to develop the stakeholder engagement into two stakeholder groups, strategic and operational.

Operational group actively engaged – links with Action for Children, Early Help Partnership, Barnardo's CAPI, Hewell Visitors Centre, Probation and Police (custody suites).

Need to engage more strategically to ensure fit with WCC other strategies i.e. Integrated Care System and wider West Mercia boundaries. (Families First Update September 2021, Stakeholder meeting).

Table 5.9: shows the organisations represented at each of the stakeholder group meetings

Represented at stakeholder group	10 th March 2021	9 th June 2021	21 st Sept 2021		27 th April 2022	
Action for Children	✓	✓	✓			
Barnardos	✓	✓	✓			
Worcestershire Children First	✓		✓		✓	
Wyre Forest District Council	✓	✓	✓			
YMCA	✓	✓	✓		✓	
Young Solutions	✓	✓	✓		✓	
DWP	✓	✓				
Liaison and Diversion, Black Country NHS Foundation Trust		✓			✓	
Bromsgrove and Redditch District Council						
Harvington First School			✓			
Birchen Coppice Academy School			✓		✓	
HMP Hewell			✓		✓	
The Bewdley School			✓			
Baxter College			✓			
Worcestershire Community Trust			✓			
Probation Service			✓			
Onside Advocacy					✓	
West Mercia Police					✓	
Platform Housing					✓	
Prison Inside					✓	
Children Heard and Seen					✓	
Thames Valley Police					✓	
G4S					✓	

New attendees

The expanding and continued reach of the YSS FF network is evidenced by the new attendees at the Stakeholder event in April 2022, highlighted in Table 5.9 above.

5.2.2 Referrals

In March 2021, YSS FF developed a Referral and Support Process policy to guide their work using early help intervention action planning (see Appendix B, table 2). By 23rd July 2021, YSS FF had 14 active referrals. Five additional referrals were received but did not proceed to active cases owing to being outside the catchment boundary, a change in circumstances (removal of child protection order) or because of family decisions not to have another agency involved. Referrals came from a range of different agencies (Table 5.10) and geographic locations.

Table 5.10 Referring agencies up to 23rd July 2021

Referring agencies (<i>Number of referrals</i>)
Worcestershire Young Carers (1)
HMP Hewell (2)
CAMHS (1)
Worcestershire Children First (2)
Grove Primary School (1)
Birchen Coppice Primary Academy (3)
St George's C of E Primary School (1)
Onside Advocacy (1)
Harvington First School (1)
Bewdley High School (1)

Later referrals include a referral from Evesham hospital in October 2021, and one from a day nursery in February 2022.

The point at which the family is referred for support has a potentially key role to play in the consequences of failing to receive early support and in the amount of support that is needed. YSS FF identified numerous contact points at which children and young people with a parent in prison could be identified and supported (YSS FF Progress March–June 2021, in Minutes from YSS FF Stakeholder Meeting 9th June 2021), replicated below Figure 5.7.



Figure 5.7 Contact points at which children and young people with a parent in prison could be identified and supported. (Adapted from YSS FF Progress March–June 2021, in Minutes from FF Stakeholder Meeting 9th June 2021)

YSS FF reported that by the time a school is aware and refers a child or young person, it is likely that more intense intervention will be necessary (Minutes from YSS FF Stakeholder Meeting 9th June 2021). However, there are barriers to earlier referral. For example, at the point of new prisoners being asked if they have children,

We often find that prisoners do not want to disclose that they have children. Some will try to detach themselves from their children because they find it easier, others will worry about the risk to their family in the community. There is also often that fear that their children will be taken into care.

(Minutes from YSS FF Stakeholder Meeting 9th June 2021)

The experiences of children and young people at the point of parental arrest may make them reluctant to engage with figures they see as representing authority.

I used to work in the CAPI team doing direct work with children affected by parental imprisonment. Many of those children were often traumatised by the arrest process itself, with some of those going on to develop PTSD. For this reason, they often hated and disconnected from authority figures.

(Minutes from YSS FF Stakeholder Meeting 9th June 2021)

Specific measures were taken by YSS FF to encourage referrals in addition to the outreach activities (section 5.2.1 above). These include:

- Referral and self-referral forms sent to all external contacts
- An open letter to families to promote the service on social media and in the press to encourage self-referrals.
- YSS FF service leaflets included in the DWP district provision tool.
- Press release to promote the Families First website

5.2.3 Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation

An essential part of setting up the new YSS FF service was to engage in planning, monitoring and evaluation activities. The aims for the YSS FF programme are set out in section 4.1, table 4.1, taken from 2020.03.11 YSS FF Business Case Rev. July 20, submitted by YSS to Worcestershire CC. Based on the aims, once appointed the YSS FF team met weekly to plan their work based on a quarterly action plan. Weekly reports of actions achieved against the action plan were made by the YSS FF team throughout the set-up period Jan – July 2021. At the end of the set-up period, the set of actions listed by the team for the period end July – October 2021 comprised:

- Make contact with food banks to promote YSS FF and develop a referral pathway
- Attend the District Schools and Police Panels for Bromsgrove and Wyre Forest to promote YSS FF and network/share knowledge
- Promote YSS FF in the custody suites across Worcestershire
- Work closer with Worcestershire Young Carers to continue to develop the profile of YSS FF across the school network – in particular, to Secondary Schools (as we are yet to receive referrals).
- Start developing a plan for community support groups for adults and activities in the summer for young people.
- Reach out to prisons nationwide to promote the service for prisoners who may have family in Worcestershire
- Reach out to charities nationwide offering a similar service to explore opportunities for the creation of a national network
- Develop sustainable methods of promotion of YSS FF to remain at the forefront of people's minds – Community Champions Raising Awareness, online presence

(YSS FF Progress March–June 2021, in Minutes from YSS Families First Stakeholder Meeting 9th June 2021).

In addition to action planning, the YSS FF team oversaw the creation of a new database for FF referrals and service records. YSS FF worked with the Open University research team to develop and distribute a pilot for the parent survey and assisted with discussions about approaches and access to qualitative interviews with families, access to stakeholders for interviews and generally promoting the OU YSS FF evaluation project.

5.2.4 Training of Families First Team

The team undertook training and professional development opportunities to enhance skills and knowledge for the new service development and delivery as well as furthering networking. Professional development activities from Jan – July 2021 included: Signs of Safety Training; Shadowing other organisations, e.g., Children Heard and Seen; Hidden Sentence Awareness Training; ABC Trauma training; Worcestershire and Herefordshire Child Exploitation Conference; Universal Credit Training session with DWP. The team took a strategic and shared approach to professional development activities, deciding together what further development or training was necessary and then sharing attendance and feedback to minimise time and maximise impact:

...spending a whole day on a training course it has to be justifiable. And what we do is we split it. So we will share the courses between us and then one of us will advocate and attend it and the other one will do the same and we will obviously train each other. So we come back and we share notes and things.

(Interview 1, YSS FF Team 16.8.21)

5.2.5 Creating Support Resources

Support resources created by the YSS FF team during the set-up period comprised:

- Contents list for the Families Support Pack
- YSS FF Support Overview information leaflet
- YSS FF information document to be published in the Worcestershire Early Help Partnership Document
- Open letter to families used to promote the service in the media for self-referrals
- Poster for YSS FF to promote the service via other agencies

Towards the end of the two-year period of initial funding, Families First adapted its model of provision based on lessons learned from the operation of the service and on the limited funding available going forward. Its new YSS FF service model launch was in February 2023.

5.2.6 Support or Training for Others

YSS FF offered information and support to other organisations during the set-up period:

- Created YSS FF presentation for the Early Help Board meeting (Early Help Partnership Development Officer)
- Provided advice and resources to a school Family Liaison Worker

YSS FF has also been [developing a Handbook](#) for use by families and professionals working with families with a parent in prison.

5.3 Product: RQ3 How does The YSS FF Programme support families and what is its impact?

Findings for sub-section 5.3 were derived from analyses of interviews with parents, grandparents, children, young people and YSS FF practitioners, together with practitioners and stakeholders who know some of the children and young people affected very well. In addition, artefacts produced by children and young people were used as prompts to generate interview data to discuss the ways in which YSS FF engaged with them. Case study notes from YSS FF were also used as sources of data for types of support given and its impact.

Table 5.11: Themes and categories from coded interview data

Theme:
With categories included in theme
CHARACTERISTICS OF FAMILIES FIRST Relationship building Listening Differentiated/responsive needs-based support Practical help A road map to navigate support Emotion/trauma focused support
ENABLING /STRENGTH-BASED SUPPORT Parents to help themselves Parents to help children
IMPACT Parents' voices on impact Children and young people's voices on impact Other professional voices on the impact Families First practitioners on impact

A family member being in prison can be a very lonely, isolating and exceptionally challenging experience for families and is particularly stressful for children and young people who often do not fully understand where their family member is and why they are no longer at home. As a YSS FF practitioner describes,

Where the children don't quite understand what has happened and they're filling in the gaps. So, for example, some children may think that mum or dad's gone to prison and it's their fault, so they did something, or they didn't love them anymore and that's why they'd disappeared. So, a lot of children are really struggling with that kind of understanding of what's happened to them, when their parent is going to come back.

In the following sections, we examine the characteristics of the support from YSS FF and its impact.

5.3.1 Characteristics of Families First

In the interviews, parents/carers, children, and young people explained the range of services that YSS FF offers and the characteristics of each. The characteristics were described in different ways and yet consistent sub themes illustrate distinct features including *relationship building*; *differentiated/responsive needs-based support*; *practical help*; *a roadmap to navigate support*; and *emotion/trauma focused support*.

Relationship building

Developing relationships built upon trust and rapport were identified as essential to providing family support, as a YSS FF practitioner explains,

Trust is absolutely essential, and I think also the big thing I've realised is when there are a lot of professionals working with families, which in a lot of cases there are, it can be very overwhelming for the families. The people that have authority, i.e. people like ... like the courts as professionals, like social workers and children's services, sometimes you have to be mindful that they're there to do their job to keep them safe or to make sure that the risk doesn't go up and I think you almost have to be able to break down what their fears and barriers are and most of it is about their children being taken away, most of it is about that, and in most of my families where I've established that rapport and relationship with them, when I ask them about, well, where's this blockage, where's this idea come from, what can I do to help you to see this, the bigger picture of this, and a lot of it does come down to that failing and fear of the children being taken.

When families are referred to YSS FF, they have the opportunity to meet with a lead practitioner who then sets out the support that they can provide as well as allowing time for families to ask questions or just to talk to 'someone who gets it'. This is an important first step in ensuring support by establishing an open context for relationship building, as a young person Matt, aged 15 describes,

We chat loads...we got on to the topic of outside socialising and she found the group. I would never have just gone...If when I first met her she'd been like, let's go here, I probably would have been like [face of refusal]. But I think it's because I've known her for nearly a year...I wouldn't just go with someone I've just met.

Researcher. So, is it the relationship you've got with [YSS FF practitioner] over time that makes that okay?

Yeah.

Set along a trajectory of experience where families have felt overlooked and forgotten (see section 5.1), YSS FF promote an ethos of listening and where parents/carers, children and young people's experiences are validated and respected. The approach is one of working with the whole family wherever possible.

I never felt that anyone listened to me before....

(Parent)

By listening, YSS FF practitioners work with parents, children and young people to explore their needs, consider strategies of support available and agree a programme of support. The extent to which YSS FF facilitates flexible support to meet individual needs is further emphasised by many of the families and reflects their focus on the importance of establishing an environment where they feel accepted without judgement and that they are understood.

Yeah, because I know she wouldn't judge my decisions, but she'd tell me if they were obviously poor choices of course, or you shouldn't really but it's up to you. So I'll go with what she thinks really. Which is what I needed, some guidance in how to go about living and looking after the kids on my own really.

(Parent)

Developing a relationship with younger children, using activities which are 'fun' but which also enables them to talk about their parent who is in prison in an environment where they feel safe is central to the work of YSS FF. Oscar (aged 6 years) for example, describes how his 'dad is in prison right now. He's been to prison like three, four times' and how much he enjoys coming out of class in school to spend time with his YSS FF practitioner (Sarah),

everything is fun with Sarah (FF practitioner) ... She's very like fun and educational... and I like to talk about dad with her.

This response is particularly poignant for Oscar who during the interview also described how he didn't talk to other people beyond his Mum and siblings about his dad. Having the opportunity to share their views and experiences about their family member who is in prison is clearly an important feature of the support YSS FF can afford families, and especially for children and young people.

Differentiated needs-based support

All the families stress that YSS FF provides flexible layers of support which parents/carers, children and young people can choose to engage with in very different ways to suit their own needs. While there are evident patterns of challenges and difficulties that many families face with a parent in prison, individual circumstances mean that support services need to be flexible and holistic and able to work with other agencies to help families with a wide range of concerns.

Why wouldn't you have a specialist worker to deal with families when they have, it's not just behaviour, it's not just financial, it's not just stigma. There's a lot of complex issues that go on isn't there. They need somebody who's specially trained really.

(Stakeholder)

In-depth interviews with parents/carers, children, and young people present YSS FF as a responsive programme in which support is tailored to meet the individual and collective needs within families and not constrained to a set period of time. Rather than having 'a one size fits all approach' to supporting families, YSS FF have developed a differentiated approach which designs support to meet specific needs, as a YSS FF practitioner describes,

We don't just tick boxes. That we very much, we tailor it to the family needs and that we look at the bigger picture of families. So it goes back to this holistic approach.

Providing support, often over an extended period of time was raised by practitioners, parents and children and young people as a distinctive feature of YSS FF which recognises that the need for support isn't always confined to the period of prison sentence but typically extends beyond, as a parent suggests,

Someone we could trust, and have around us, sort of keep us, so we're not on our own. I wish we'd have had that sooner. Because we've been here three years and it's only been the last year, we have settled down so maybe we were missing that at first. But obviously I can still look after my kids, so people think there's nothing wrong but obviously there was. So, I would have rather have got it sorted sooner, but it's done now.

(Parent)

Evaluating and then implementing the right sort of support at the right time to address individual and holistic family needs is a unique feature of YSS FF support which covers the range and variety of issues that families face. All the parents/carers talked about the differentiated, needs-based support they received from YSS FF, including *practical help*; providing a *road map* that helps them navigate complex support systems; and in-depth *emotion focused support*.

Practical help

YSS FF practitioners have taken a practical approach to providing support with whatever needs are most pressing at that time to help ease the overall burden on families. Parents/carers discussed with us the help they had received with contacting the local council and arranging for them to carryout necessary home repairs and maintenance; easing social anxiety and isolation; and accessing counselling.

The last few weeks she's took me out, because I don't like going outside, so we've been for a cup of coffee...I didn't even know you could get a cup of tea from a Cafè Nero or something like that, because I always assumed it was just coffee.

(Parent)

She's got me into counselling, that started last week.

(Parent)

She's been in touch with the council and got them to come and do repairs and stuff like that, because normally that's something [partner in prison] does, he deals with all that kind of stuff.

(Parent)

YSS FF had also provided practical support for dealing with difficult emotionally laden issues, such as purchasing a headstone for a child's grave or going to court to seek to restrict a violent father's access.

Helped with some financial stuff, my son's headstone, she's helped me organise that

(Parent)

And then contact with the kids, that always causes issues. But now that's going through court, with, I could only do that because I've got [FF practitioner] behind me, you know

(Parent)

A roadmap

For many of the families, lack of information and knowing how and where to get help was described as exceptionally stressful. Being available to talk families through where and how they could access help was recognised by all the families as central to the support provided by YSS FF.

I'd never been inside a prison, didn't know what to expect going into a prison and that whole experience ...

(Parent)

I think we're recognising that actually they need additional support, because a lot of our families are very complex in their needs, so we're finding that we are actually signposting more. I find I've been able to signpost them into women's services and work alongside them ... a lot of the young people that we come into contact with, because of the trauma, they actually need counselling intervention and we were fortunate enough to access some funding through YSS.

(YSS FF Practitioner)

Yeah, there's lots of questions at that initial stage ... Where the person's gone to for prison? What does that mean? How often can they visit? All those kinds of questions.

(Stakeholder)

Lack of information and limited understanding can be far more pronounced for children and young people many of whom are completely unaware of why their parent is no longer at home. For many families, sharing the nature of their family members crime can be very difficult, as a YSS FF practitioner explains,

Mum's gone to prison for a sexual offence which, but she's not deemed a risk to her children or young children. So the children, I helped the grandparents tell the kids where mum is, but they don't understand why she's gone to prison. They just know she's unwell and she's gone to prison to get better. But it's not been something that we've been able to touch on because they're about, they're five and 10. They're quite young. But I'm just helping them

manage their feelings around mum, their anger, the not knowing why she's in. And a lot of the work that we've been doing recently has been actually with teddy bears, because they like teddy bears. So almost just bringing two teddy bears and saying their mum's in prison and then we sort of do this thing where I'll be like what do you think they feel. What do you think, what should they do to not feel sad. And that's how some understanding of what they're feeling comes out because they feel able to talk about the teddy bears rather than themselves.

This lack of understanding can manifest in different ways with children displaying emotions and behaviours that are very similar to grief.

We'll see changes in sleeping behaviours, sort of separation anxiety where that child maybe is scared to be left alone or go to sleep for fear that another family member might disappear... and that comes out in forms of anxiety, behavioural changes at school, struggling to manage their emotions, outbursts of anger and meltdowns, very similar to maybe a trauma response.

(YSS FF Practitioner)

The emotional challenges and often trauma of being separated from a family member whilst they are in prison is a significant area that requires support provided by YSS FF.

Emotion/trauma focused support

We've done a lot of ... work around the trauma-based aspect, because what we're finding with the majority of our families that have been referred to our services is that there's an awful lot of trauma that's rippled into the whole family ...

(YSS FF Practitioner)

Helping children and young people understand what has happened to the family member who has gone to prison and to explore with them their feelings associated with this separation is a key aspect of the work of YSS FF.

We always kind of encourage family members to be honest, to be honest about where that parent has gone because children pick up on things, they hear things, and there's always that concern that they might feel further down the road when they understand what's happened that they were lied to, so we encourage honesty. So it's about sitting down with those children and explaining about prison, what prison's like, maybe doing activities with them where we talk about what do we think prison looks like, what do they think a day in prison is like. And then also helping them to maybe explore their feelings around that, so we'll do lots of different activities about sort of managing their feelings, umm exploring their feelings around it, and just trying to get them to verbalise those.

(YSS FF Practitioner)

A YSS FF practitioner describes the support she provided Charles (aged 8), who was finding it difficult to manage his extreme feelings of anger and who would often lash out at school and at home,

He really struggles to verbalise how he feels or even to say sorry when he's lashed out. So, what we do is we actually made together some small, little signs that we stuck onto cocktail sticks and they said 'I'm angry' or 'I'm sorry' with drawings on that he made and that's his first step in actually telling people how he feels because he struggles so much to actually verbalise that but it's his way of still feeling he can express his emotions.

One fifteen-year-old described how the time before his father went back into prison had been difficult, arousing feelings he needed help to adjust to,

The last time I saw him, it was quite...quite rough.. I dunno, he wasn't in the best state of mind I don't think. I don't think he was thinking well. Hopefully when he comes out, he's not going to go onto that stuff again...I wasn't here when he got arrested so I didn't even get to say goodbye...so that was...

(Matt, aged 15 years)

With his YSS FF practitioner's help, he had prepared a letter for his father for when he was released from prison.

YSS FF Practitioner: *this is the letter [you wrote] for dad – for someone to read to him]*

Matt: *I got told that I'd give him that or I'd read it and he'd listen. He wouldn't be allowed to say anything. But yeah when he comes out, this will definitely be up there, on the to dos.*

YSS FF support involves the creation of safe spaces where children, young people and adults can share their feelings and develop strategies that can assist them in dealing with complex emotions and feelings of being overwhelmed.

One of the YSS FF practitioners (Sarah) describes how she worked with a family, where mum Lisa had been referred to FF when she was seeking help for her daughter, Charlotte then aged 7. Lisa's concern about Charlotte's behaviour developed over a number of years following the imprisonment of her ex-partner (Charlotte's dad). Charlotte didn't sleep well, would bed wet, have regular emotional melt downs and outbursts and started to struggle emotionally at nursery school and then school. Lisa found it hard to find support and approached a number of different services – unsuccessfully – before finding help with YSS FF. Lisa was anxious to find ways to help her daughter in managing her 'emotional meltdowns'. Sarah worked closely with Charlotte over many months to support her in expressing her emotions and in recognising when she could find a safe space where she could 'feel angry and sad'.

Sarah talks here about some support she delivered with a young boy around recognising and labelling emotions felt in the body,

So, we have a few different things we have done in the past. One I really like is where we get the child to lay down on the floor on some big bits of paper that we've sort of taped together and we get them to draw around themselves or we draw around them. And when they stand up we then ask them to talk about where they feel anxiety on the body, how it comes across, so one child I've been working with talked about how he coloured in his knees and his elbows because that was where he wanted to fight and lash out and then some may talk about their stomach because they get a feeling of burning some may talk about their thoughts that are going on in their heads. So we just get them to start almost verbalising well what am I feeling in my body and help them to understand that this is normal and then from there we kind of start to look at triggers, get help them to talk about when do you feel angry and then we try and work on sort of techniques to help them deal with their anger, whether that's deep breathing or hawing a pillow they can punch or even just having a safe space they can take themselves to.

Charlotte's mum, Lisa describes the significant impact this type of intensive one to one support has had in helping Charlotte deal with her feelings surrounding her dad's imprisonment.

It's made such a difference and we've seen the difference in Charlotte. Like we were saying, she talks to us now about how she's feeling. Before that, she couldn't tell you if she was happy, sad, hungry, angry, there was no recognition of feelings before this and she was... it's made a big change, but not just that, she was very, when it came to her dad she was very, she kept us very separate, even though we've tried to, we've been on days out with her together, we've tried to make it so that we are a family unit to her, but she wouldn't speak about her visits, she wouldn't speak about how she felt, whereas now she will, so yeah, it's

made a massive impact on her, just herself in general, she's a lot happier than what she was I'd say at the beginning.

(Parent)

YSS FF practitioners employ a variety of approaches to work with and respond to the individual needs of children and young people. This can include drawing, game making, sharing photographs and storytelling for example.

Rachel, a YSS FF practitioner describes how she approaches her work in a way that builds upon the interests and needs of children and young people,

I think working with young people, it's very much about looking at their body language, looking at the words that they use. I do a lot of storytelling with children, because often that storytelling detaches them from it really being them and I do an awful lot of avoidance work with them, so rather than asking direct questions... It might be that we play a game. For example, one of the young people I was working with last week struggles to articulate what the feeling is that he feels, so he'll say, I don't know. So, I said to him, right, I want you to imagine, because he loves watching TV... I want you to imagine that you are in the middle of a TV screen, that you're on telly, you're actually there and I just want you to talk about anything that you're comfortable to talk about, I said, and I'm going to be the remote control and then when I put you on pause I just want you to stop. Yeah?... And, for me, that was light bulb and I just sat there, I didn't show it, but inside I was like, something has dropped in this person to actually see it, without owning it, this is your life, this is your journey, and right at the end of the session ending, he said, I can't thank you enough for what you've done, and he went home and he told his mum and mum has actually been doing this TV role-play and we're finding that the role-play is helping him to identify with the emotion of what it feels like and how it, you know, and all of that just over something that literally picking up he likes to watch TV, he's always telling me about what programmes he watches and it's just building that common ground, isn't it, really... but this was a real, yeah, it was a real moment of discovery for that young person.

YSS FF also respond to the need for support for children and young people around the time of a parent's release from prison. The time apart can seem very long for children and there are many worries and concerns to be resolved, some of them at first unforeseen.

When you haven't seen someone's face for 18 months. It's so weird, because he's obviously due out, the kids are going through all sorts of emotions at the minute, because they're excited, they're worried, they're anxious, they're like, and like, was it Oscar is worried he's [daddy] going to be really fat, he's like, is daddy going to be like really fat?

(Parent)

By drawing and articulating his worries with his YSS FF practitioner, about his dad (by drawing a picture of a hand with a good side and a bad side) and his imminent release from prison, Oscar (aged 6) describes his concerns,

Oscar: This was my worry hand about dad. Going to prison again, might argue again, everyone will steal dad from me, because everyone just steals dad from me.

Researcher: So, of course you miss him.

Oscar: Yeah, I miss him. Yeah, I miss him a lot.

YSS FF practitioners have adopted responsive approaches that allow children and young people to prepare for such times and to think through how they might find common ground again with their missing parent, sometimes by thinking through how they might help other young people in similar circumstances.

In the next sub-section, we share some examples from the study of how FF built on children and young people's strengths to help them to see their own coping mechanisms.

5.3.2 Strength Based Enabling Approach

We realise that actually we have to prepare the families that we're not always going to be there, in the nicest possible way, because that dependence is not a good thing, it's almost a way of them actually not wanting to let go of the support, not building their confidence to be empowered and to have their voice.

(YSS FF Practitioner)

YSS FF support builds upon the premise that children, young people and families have core strengths that can be developed and strengthened to help them apply strategies that they can use to deal effectively with overwhelming emotions or in facing more everyday challenges that life brings, as a YSS FF practitioner describes,

It really is individualised depending on each of the families so when we tend to go in we will speak to those families about first of all most importantly what's working well, where their strengths are, but then also what their main concerns, what are they worried about. So, for example, one family the children were struggling a bit at school but when they came home they were really happy and mum was going on about how they were anxious at school, this that and the other, but I kept trying to remind her that at home they feel safe and happy with you and that's a really important strength, that despite everything you have managed to help the children feel safe and secure at home and we can work on the school issues. So it's about reminding people that there are positives, although bad things have happened to them, they do have the strength to move forward.

Parents/carers consistently described YSS FF as a source of support which enabled them in several distinct ways; from supporting them to access support for particular needs which then enabled them to do things which might previously been seen as 'too difficult', to supporting them in talking about and processing very challenging emotions.

It's helped me process ... Dan being away. I suffer with anxiety and stuff like that... she's got me into counselling, that started last week, and the last few weeks she's took me out

(Parent)

Parents/carers also talked about the 'invaluable' support YSS FF provide in helping them to process their own emotions but also in enabling them to support their own children through very challenging circumstances.

A child's way of looking at things is different to an adult's, we can process things differently because we understand it, so, I guess, she's helped, like one of the ways she explained was, it's almost like you know when you lose a friend or you lose a mum or something like that, it's almost like another loss, like a death, because they've gone... So, I found that was a really good way of helping me understand the kids' emotions, because it probably was - to me, I speak to him every day, whereas the kids are usually at school, so they could go weeks without hearing from him or speaking to him.

(Parent)

One parent Mandy, talked about the challenges her eldest son faced when his dad was in prison, and where he 'would refuse to do anything, clubs, after school, anything like that'. Preferring to 'hide himself away at lunchtime.' She describes the acute anxiety he experienced,

He will get physically ill with his anxiety, like he'll get bellyache, he'll get headaches, he gets sick...

He also took on a sense of responsibility for his father's future behaviours, trying to find ways to help his father avoid reoffending.

I think Matt puts a lot on himself, doesn't he, so he thinks he has to worry about if daddy's going to not do things or whether, you know. I think when you've been in a situation where you have things like this go on, you grow up too quick because you've seen too much, things that you shouldn't have seen, or he's seen me cry thousands of times, when you don't want your kid to see you cry a thousand times.

(Parent)

With support from YSS FF Mandy describes the significant impact that support had in helping Matt to develop in confidence, to make more friends and to start socialising more.

Several of the children and young people described the impact of the support YSS FF had made in having someone to talk to about their family member in prison and in helping them deal with complex feelings.

For example, Susan a thirteen-year-old with a father in prison who was keen on drawing, had worked with her YSS FF practitioner to create a poster for other young people who were living through similar circumstances (Fig 5.8). During interview, she explained her thinking, her feelings and revealed, too, the way in which the YSS FF practitioner had used the exercise as a means to help her discuss her own questions and emotions.

This is questions they might ask. This is what they might feel. This is what they could do to make them get through it.

[Researcher, reading it: 'writing a letter, looking at a picture or videos'. Are these things you do?]

I haven't written a letter. I look at pictures. I don't really need to remind myself of him because we talk about him anyway. There's a few [videos] on the laptop.

['might feel']

Happy, tired, scared, sad, anxious

[Researcher: 'embarrassed' is a hard one, isn't it? Hard to talk to other people about it?]

It means some people might not want their friends to know. I just wouldn't tell my friends.

[Researcher: and is that what you've done?]

yes.

[Researcher: and 'questions you might ask'. what was that?]

Sarah (FF practitioner) was sneaky there because these are questions that I might ask.

[Researcher: what were they?]

How are they feeling? I put that because of how they...they know what they've done...

[Researcher reading it: and 'what will people think?' and 'when will they be released?']

What were they thinking? when they did it? sometimes I don't think they think about what they're doing, but other times I think they just don't care.

(Susan aged 13 years)

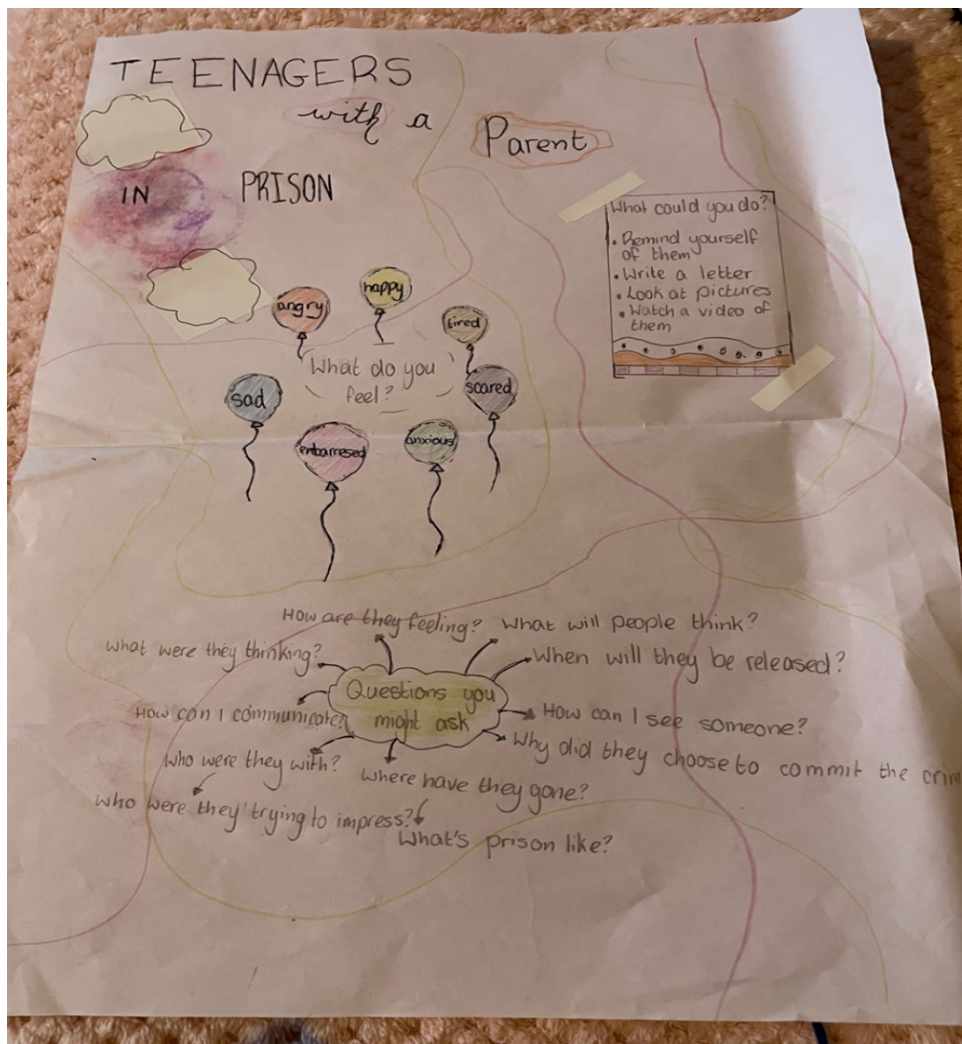


Fig 5.8: 'Who were they trying to impress?' Poster created by thirteen-year-old girl to help other young people in similar circumstances.

She had subsequently created a board game on her own initiative to play with her dad when he came out of prison, with aim of helping him to understand the consequences of making different choices in life (Fig 5.9).

She explained the purpose of the game and some of its components.

The aim of the game is to create the best life. There's like college, there's house – you could buy a house. Job, speed cameras, probation office, water mill, hairdressers, tax, train stations for different places. If you land on the train station, you can go into the bank and take whatever money you like. If you get caught, then you go to jail. Well basically, the money you get is how you can earn money, but there's also cards...

(Susan aged 13 years)

Her YSS FF practitioner had helped her to use her creativity to reflect on emotions, troubling questions, and life choices and their consequences as well as finding a creative way to prompt conversation about a difficult topic with her father.

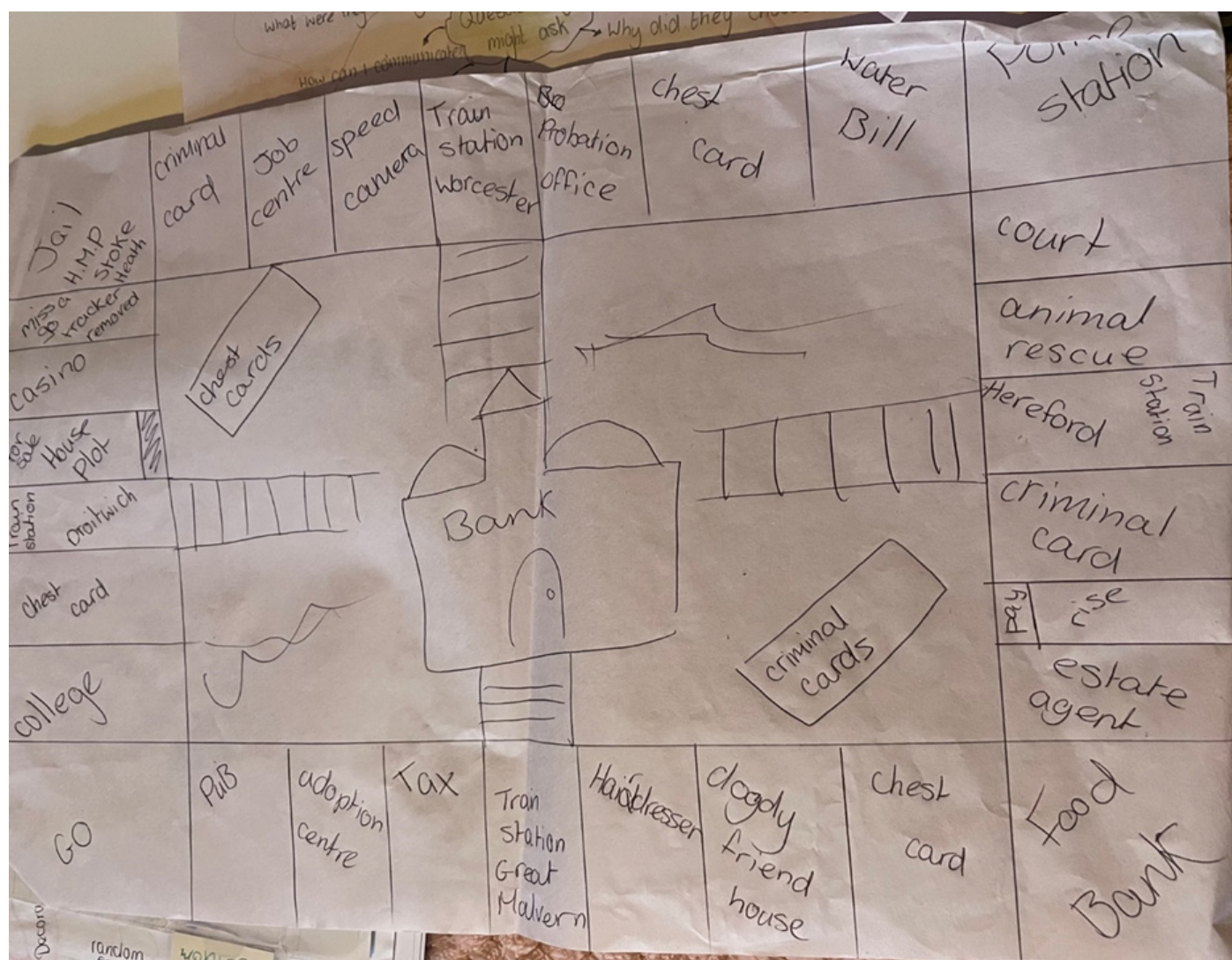


Fig 5.9: 'Life choices' Board game created by thirteen-year-old girl to play with her father on release from prison

Similarly, Figs 5.10 and 5.11 show posters created by children with the YSS FF practitioners to help the children to identify and discuss their feelings.

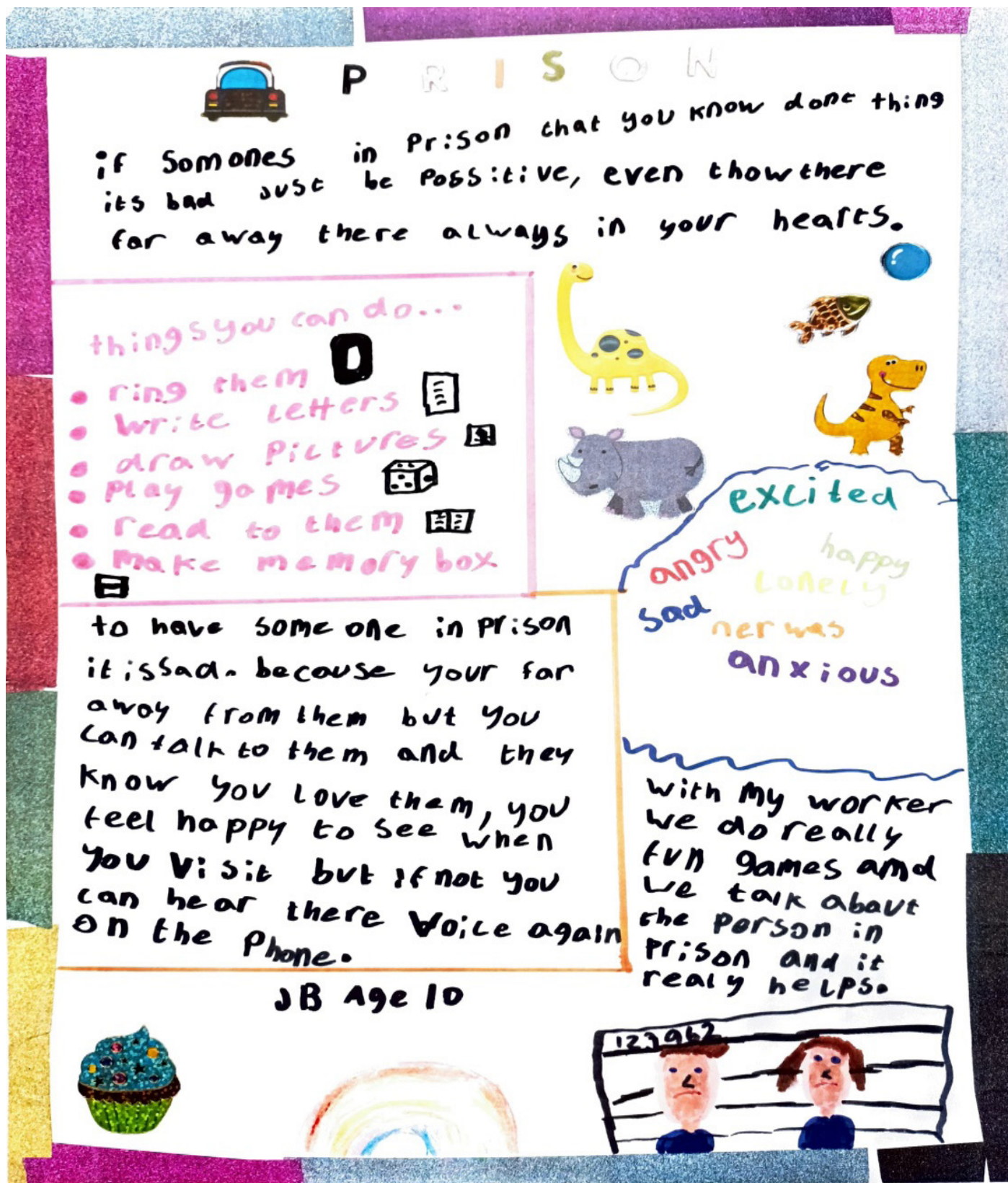


Fig 5.10 'It really helps' Poster created by ten-year-old child with parent in prison



Fig 5.11 Poster created by child with parent in prison

5.3.3 Impact

Claire was originally referred to YSS FF as she was emotionally struggling with the imprisonment of her ex-partner who had recently been moved into the VP wing of the prison due to threats against his life. Her ex-partner was in prison for a domestic violence offence committed against her while in a downward spiral of alcohol abuse. Although they had split following the incident, she was still in contact with him in prison to ensure he was able to maintain a relationship with his son (aged 2 years at the time). However, a couple of months into supporting Claire, contact was suddenly withdrawn by his future probation officer who informed the prison it should never have been allowed due to the offence. Claire went from speaking to him most days and having regular purple visit video calls with her son and him to no contact.

Her young son found it difficult to understand where dad was and why he couldn't speak to him. Claire was 'desperate' to find help but totally at a loss as to know how. YSS FF was a 'lifeline' of support and helped her to turn this challenging family circumstance into something more positive. With support from YSS FF Claire now advocates for other families facing similar challenges.

In the absence of reliable national statistics on the number of children with a parent in prison and the consequences of parental imprisonment on those children, it is difficult to track the impact of services designed to improve the situation for such children, particularly mid- to long-term. Nonetheless, the families including children and young people articulated to us the difference having contact with FF support had made to their lives. Further, key professionals who know the children well have also noted the powerful impact of FF support.

Parents' voices on impact

For parents/carers interviewed, YSS FF provided a 'lifeline' and where being 'at the end of the phone' provided the much-needed support at a time when life can feel 'really difficult'.

Knowing that there's somebody there that you can ring up if you get stuck and you don't know who to call or you're worried about something that you can ring up ...

(Grandparent)

As one parent describes,

I don't think I could have got through it without her support...

Another describes how developing a trusting relationship with YSS FF had improved her mental health such that she didn't feel the need to stay in bed throughout the day.

I feel like I've been a lot happier since I've seen [Families First practitioner], definitely. I'm one of those that I'll hide my emotions in laughter, so I would always try and make the kids laugh or I'll sing and I'll clean and I'll do all this, whereas before I had [Families First practitioner] I think that just all stopped. I just didn't want to get out of bed. I would literally take the kids to school, get back and get into bed. I still have days, but that's not as often as it was, definitely. I don't think I've had a day in bed for about four weeks.

The support had meant that her feelings of isolation and anxiety had reduced.

So, I've been a lot happier, a lot less stressed, definitely.

Researcher. So, stress and the loneliness and it's that feeling of people just not understanding?

Yeah, and I think I'm not so lonely because I know that it's only going to be a week, I'll be like, oh, [Families First practitioner]'s coming on Tuesday.

Parents/carers explained in interviews the difference that the YSS FF support over time had had for their children and the differences in emotions and behaviours that they had seen.

Researcher. Can you see any difference in the children, the way they are?

Definitely. The biggest one I would say would probably be [9-year-old] with his behaviour. He's not had a strop or a temper tantrum probably since the beginning of December, I've had nothing. The two littluns argue a little bit, so we've had that, but, to me, for me, he's not moaned at me, shouted at me, screamed at me, hit me, since probably the beginning of December

(Parent)

Parents/carers reported that confidence had increased for some of the children and young people, as well as parents/carers seeing an improvement in their children's levels of anxiety and anger.

Matt's become more confident, not brilliant, but he has attempted things that he wouldn't have attempted and, again, I don't find he's as stressed.

(Parent)

Whilst the aim for YSS FF is to avoid families becoming dependent on support by building on families' strengths, nonetheless the relationships formed through the support were keenly appreciated by the children and young people with impact deeply felt.

We were actually saying, me and the kids were talking yesterday and they were asking how long [Families First practitioner]'s going to be coming and stuff and I was like, ooh, I don't know, I think it'll just stop when she feels like or we all feel like we don't, and [nine-year-old boy] cried...'I don't ever want [Families First practitioner] to go'.

(Parent)

Parents/carers explained how resources and strategies provided by YSS FF had made a huge difference to their children's coping skills.

We managed to get resources from Families First, that's been amazing for her, not even just with the prison stuff, but she's suspected ADHD and dyspraxic, so the resources that we've had have made such a difference for her and she's just generally happier and, like I said, she could tell you how she's feeling now and school have said they are noticing a difference. We've managed to get her sleeping slightly better, so that obviously makes a big impact as well.

(Parent)

One parent also described the change in her 11-year-old son, who had struggled with the imprisonment of his father for domestic violence.

[11-year-old] ... he's took it the hardest, he was against me at first. wasn't he and, [Families First practitioner] helped him sort of understand, look at it through someone else's eyes. And now he does a lot, doesn't he, so he realises wrong behaviour, that his other avenue was wrong really. And he's understanding more now. And I couldn't do that. I'm, I'm not really

trained for that, ... so yeah it's been a big help to me as well because he doesn't shout at me no more. Then he's not angry with me, 'why are we here?' [referring to house move], he's all right now.

(Parent)

Researcher: So it's improved your relationship with him, his relationship with you?

Definitely a million percent yeah, million percent.

One mother recounted how her thirteen-year-old daughter, who had been quite closed off from her emotions but quite impatient with the rest of the family, had recently started to seem more relaxed and at ease.

Probably the last four to six weeks. She just seems to have, she's a completely different child. Like before, you couldn't make her laugh, she was like, oh.

But this morning, we were having a giggle this morning. I picked her up and I was singing Happy Birthday to Matt out the window and she's like that, oh my God!

But she laughed along this morning, whereas before she'd have been like, oh my God

(Parent)

Children and young people's voices on impact

For some of the children and young people sharing their experiences and talking about their parent who was in prison appeared too difficult, as one boy (aged 10 years) whose dad had been in prison for some time expressed,

I am not going to talk about my dad. I won't go there...

Working alongside YSS FF practitioners during our interviews enabled us to talk at length with children and young people, many of whom described how working with their YSS FF practitioner had supported them in so many different ways and impacted their everyday lives.

Oscar (aged 6) for example, described the impact of working with his YSS FF practitioner Sarah, and being able to talk about his dad,

Researcher: That's nice, isn't it, to have somebody to talk about dad to. Do you think it helps?

Oscar: Yeah, I think it really helps.

Researcher: I'm really interested in that. Are you able to say how it helps? I know that's quite a hard thing to ask but...

Oscar: No, it just helps. It just helps. It just helps. It just helps whatever.

Oscar also describes one of the activities he regularly did with his YSS FF practitioner Sarah, was to 'shake off the day' (standing up and shaking all over together) and how this helped him manage his stress,

Researcher: So, tell me more about what you and Sarah do then? I love the shaking. Why do you do all the shaking?

Oscar: Well, just to get like all like madness off or like...

Researcher: Did you say madness off?

Oscar: *Yeah, to get like stress off.*

Researcher: *Stress, yeah. Stress off.*

Researcher: *And do you find it helps?*

Oscar: *Yeah, because if there's things on our body, just shake it.*

During activity focused interviews with children and young people, we examined the distinct approaches YSS FF practitioners employed to enable the children to talk about how they felt and to develop strategies to support their mental health. Charles, aged 8 describes how working with his YSS FF practitioner, Sarah, encouraged him to explore some of his feelings about his dad's imprisonment,

Researcher: *So, anything else that you do with Sarah that you'd like to tell me about?*

Charles: *I can't remember anything.*

Sarah: *What did we do last time, do you remember, what was this with the hand (pointing to a picture of a hand Charles made and labelled with Sarah)?*

Charles: *Oh yeah, we, so I draw-ed a hand with a good side and I did this hand for a bad side.*

Researcher: *When you say good, what do you mean?*

Charles: *Like the good things I like doing with daddy.*

Researcher: *So that's watching films?*

Charles: *Or, yeah, what I like doing with daddy, but the other side is what I don't like doing, like what bad things.*

Researcher: *So, daddy going back to prison?*

Charles: *What I don't like about what daddy does. Yeah, I think that wasn't last time but the year before. He's went to jail, I don't know, I think three, five times. Well, he's coming home this month. I don't want him to go back this month.*

Charles goes on to talk about the things he enjoys doing with Sarah, such as 'drawing with her, I like playing Play-Doh with her and I like talking with her'. By sharing an example of an activity, he enjoyed, Charles demonstrates the impact YSS FF support can have in helping children navigate complex and overwhelming emotions, which he described as his monkey.

Placing a large piece of paper on the floor, Sarah drew around Charles and then encouraged him to indicate the different emotions he felt in different parts of his body.

Charles: *So, I drew around myself on a big piece of paper and I put orange where I would get angry and use when I get angry. I draw-ed orange all over my fist, on my knees, on my legs, on my head and I think that's it.*

Researcher: *So, you drew all around your body and showed all the bits where you perhaps felt angry in your body?*

Charles: *Oh yeah, I think my face because I would shout a lot and in the middle on my chest I draw-ed what was inside of me, my own version of a monkey.*

Researcher: *Is that your angry monkey?*

Charles: *I think I draw-ed someone called Flamey, because when I am calm it would sit, drink and watch TV, but when I get angry it would just take over me.*

Researcher: *And what does Flamey do when he's angry?*

Charles: *Shout, hurt and does, yeah.*

Researcher: *But when he's not angry, has a drink and...*

Charles: *I would just sit by myself...*

Researcher: *And watch telly.*

Charles: *and watch my tablet. Just sit by myself.*

(Charles, aged 8 years)

Charles then goes on to describe the impact that this work with his YSS FF practitioner has had on his ability to manage his own feelings.

Researcher: *That sounds a really interesting thing to do. Was it a hard thing to do or did you find that quite easy?*

Charles: *I found it quite easy because I get angry quite a lot, but now I'm getting a little bit better of controlling it.*

Some of the older children and young people were able to articulate the difference YSS FF support had made to them. They suggested that having someone to talk to in a safe space but outside their immediate family was important.

Researcher: *How important is this service?*

I think it's very important. I think people need someone to talk to, not necessarily their parents. Someone else. Because she's there to help you get over it.

(Matt, aged 15 years)

The timing of the support was also important for the impact it could have. One fifteen-year-old noted that although it would have been helpful to have YSS FF support near to the time of arrest, nonetheless it still made a difference having been available later.

Researcher: *would it have helped to have [Families First practitioner] right from the outset when your dad was first arrested?*

To be honest, it probably would have helped loads because you could discuss the issues then. But even when she did come, it still is helping loads

He could see that his confidence outside the family had grown since working closely with the YSS FF practitioner for several months.

It's helped with my confidence. Say now if the teachers ask a question, I can put my hand up. I never used to put my hand up, even if I knew the answer. But I've started to get better with that now.

Referring to the activities she had done with the YSS FF practitioner during their time together, thirteen-year-old Susan said that they had helped her to talk about things she found difficult to express.

Researcher: *How do you think doing these things has helped you?*

Susan: *I don't know how to say...I don't really like to talk about it [the situation with dad], but I have talked about it.*

She spoke positively about the strategies that the YSS FF practitioner had helped her to learn to use.

Researcher: *What's the best thing about having [Families First practitioner]?*

Susan: *She gave me ideas...and she brings stuff with her, like she brought me this book. And if I ever felt sad or angry, then I'd go into my first aid kit [made by FF practitioner] and it has things I like inside of it and I have to pick one out of it, like some pictures of the Earth, usually some sweets in there, and a pad and pencils because I like to draw.*

Researcher: *Has it been helpful to have that?*

Susan: *Yeah, I've used it at least 4-5 times.*

When asked how important the YSS FF service had been to her and how it could help others in similar circumstances, Susan explained,

It's helped me control my emotions. It's a good way...People don't always like to tell their parents how they're feeling. [Families First practitioner] usually asks... It's a good thing to talk to [Families First practitioner] about it. Some people don't have anyone to talk to about stuff.

Other professional voices on the impact of Families First and nature of support

A teacher, who had had long-standing and close contact with a family with a parent in prison and had referred them to YSS FF, shared her views on the impact of the support and what made it effective.

Researcher: *Features of FF that make it successful?*

How they work with school is key. The way that they work with the whole family is key. They helped build a bridge between school and mum, that was really helpful. I hadn't realised that things had got so bad. [The FF practitioner] has empowered this young lad at a time when it was absolutely critical for him.

She explained that she the whole family nature of the support had had a profound effect.

[Mum] very quickly built a very trusted relationship with [Families First practitioner], and [Families First practitioner] encouraged, set her little bite-sized tasks that mum had agreed to, of course, and mum started to move forward. She attended doctor's appointments. She sought advice on housing and, you know, [Families First practitioner] was there in the background ready to listen, ready to say that's a good idea and just helped her rebuild a trust in professionals again.

YSS FF work with the mother had had a further impact on the child.

He's got some good friendships, he's confident. He's more open, he's more respectful. He's all in all a much happier child. And I don't think it's just because of the work that [Families First practitioner]'s done with him, but I feel that because mum, [Families First practitioner]'s helped mum move forward also, I feel that the improvements in mum have really helped the improvements in [the eleven-year-old].

This teacher's assessment of what would have been the likely outcome for the eleven-year-old boy had YSS FF not been able to provide support was stark.

Researcher: *What would the consequences for [eleven-year-old] have been if [Families First practitioner] had not been involved?*

I'd love to say that school would have swept in to help...[but] there's only so much a school can do to help parents...I think for X, he would have carried on spiralling. I think possibly he would now be living with dad. ...Going into high school, there'd be truancy, if I'm honest....I think without support, David would very soon have been known to the police.

Families First practitioners reflecting on impact

In reflecting on the work, they had been doing with families, YSS FF practitioners shared their views on the impact of the service they had been providing. Two examples illustrate, one with a 16-year-old girl who had started to see her own power in making good choices for herself,

There's a 16-year-old and actually I'm coming to the end of support with her, but the work I was doing with her was to enable her to learn to trust, trust her instincts and her intuition. She's not really had a great start with dad. He's sort of drifted in and out and hasn't consistently been about, due to returning back into prison, and I think she's now coming to terms with accepting that she can make good choices and the right choices and it's down to him whether he wants to prove himself to her. So, again, career, she's really interested in joining the British Army and going into nursing, so I've been helping her get some recruitment support and we've done a CV with her and she's at the point now, quite honestly, where she's coming to the end of needing the support from us.

(YSS FF Practitioner)

The second example is of twins who were planning for their futures, more able to move on from the past difficulties.

I'm working, this'll be a new family, I'm working with twins actually... They work really well with the counsellor, and they've been going to counselling for about six weeks now and actually the way that they manage their lives is just that they're making decisions, they're planning their future, they're talking about sitting their mock exams and they really want to do well. So, again, it was all about giving them the right opportunity to say, you can change this, you don't have to be, you don't have to continue to listen to people at school that are calling you names and things like that, because they went through all of that as well.

(YSS FF practitioner)

The final word on impact and the value of the YSS FF support goes to a teacher with a safeguarding role.

These children are so vulnerable and they're so vulnerable for the mistakes of their parents. And so yeah so, I just really want to say that, you know, get your report and your findings out there as soon as possible because they need to continue, and it needs to be across the country.

5.4. Summary

We explored RQ1 – *What is the extent of the issue at the outset of the YSS FF programme?*

Described as *forgotten families*, families of prisoners' face stigma and social isolation and are at risk of significant challenges to their health and wellbeing. The needs of these families are under researched and under resourced and systematic procedures for recording prisoner family details remain inconsistent and incomplete. In the absence of current and up to date information on how many children in the UK are affected by parental imprisonment discussions continue to rely on estimates. Consequently, children of prisoners remain invisible, vulnerable and at risk of missing out on targeted support that is desperately needed.

Our data reveal the many challenges that children and their families face in accessing support. This study also indicates how the Pandemic has had a significant impact on how families and children communicate with their family members in prison and maintain family relationships. It will take time to re-establish these already fragile connections and support for this process of reconnection is vital, particularly for the children in the family.

We explored RQ2 – *How does YSS FF contribute to a multiagency approach to supporting families with parental imprisonment?*

Our study evidenced the considerable efforts YSS FF has made to find, engender, strengthen

and maintain networks to contribute to a multiagency approach to supporting families in such circumstances. Providing a trusted conduit and pivot point for families, YSS FF practitioners have been able to steer families towards other support as well as acting as advocates to help them to access and benefit from such support. At the same time, YSS FF has raised the profile of such families and the support that is available to them in the local area, helping other agencies to refer or add complementary support.

We explored RQ3 – *How does the YSS FF programme support families and what is its impact?*

This study examined the impact of YSS FF in designing and implementing a programme of targeted, responsive, need-based support, which is *enabling*, both for parents/carers and children and young people and which has made a significant difference to their lives.

Launched early in 2021 YSS FF set out to support children, young people, and their parents/carers, affected by parental imprisonment (see section 2). Our research reveals how YSS FF have designed a suite of services tailored around the individual and holistic needs of families within their local communities (Worcestershire). Providing guidance with everyday practical issues along with targeted in-depth, 1:1 support for parents/carers and their children has enabled families to develop emotional resilience and face challenging situations. Data analysis indicates that YSS FF not only support families in navigating complex referral systems for more specialist support, but which provide safe spaces to listen and acknowledge the needs and interest of families without judgement. Support is designed around the needs of the family which often extend beyond the period of sentencing, and which focuses on family adjustment when a parent is released from prison.

This need-based responsive support has provided a 'lifeline' for families. Halting cycles of emotional decline and social isolation, YSS FF have provided therapeutic and practical support for families, most of which felt they had no one to turn to. In the face of social stigma and exclusion, YSS FF practitioners have supported families in recognising their strengths as families and as individuals and afforded them opportunities to develop the skills and strategies required to move through challenging times.

6. Conclusions and Recommendations

The YSS FF project aimed to reach out to children and their families who experience the imprisonment of a loved one. As part of a multiagency collaboration, the service aimed to:

- Identify families affected by the issue
- Provide a single point of contact
- Gather data
- Liaise and advocate on behalf of families with relevant community agencies
- Provide practical help with maintaining contact with the incarcerated parent and supporting the child and family's general health and wellbeing.

This research study set out to evaluate the need for services such as FF nationwide (the extent of the problem at the outset) and to evaluate the nature of the service and its impact. In the report, we have evidenced the many ways in which YSS FF met its aim and each of its objectives, summarised in section 5.4, where we respond to the RQs.

Our data analysis indicates that a significant number of families, including children and young people throughout the UK are dealing with the complex challenges of family imprisonment. These families are hidden – a forgotten group within society whose needs are not formally identified or recorded. It is proposed that radical change is needed in terms of recording and storing information about how many children are impacted by parental imprisonment in real-time and that the way in which this information is initially recorded, stored and shared with partner agencies is urgently reformed.

This study reveals that family imprisonment can affect the left-behind parents, children, and young people in distinct ways with many experiencing trauma, elevated levels of distress and enduring anxiety. These families are subject to significant domestic upheaval and persistent social stigma and consequently are at risk of being socially isolated – with children and young people becoming disengaged from education – and vulnerable to a variety of mental health issues.

The report details that not all parents, children and young people throughout the UK experiencing family imprisonment have access to services and support systems required to meet their complex needs. Furthermore, lack of awareness and social stigma surrounding family imprisonment threaten to perpetuate a cycle of social disengagement. Current provision within the criminal justice system focuses on supporting and rehabilitating the imprisoned adult and fails to consider much broader and intergenerational needs of families.

Our research indicates that the type and quality of support that parents, children, and young people can access from FF can provide a 'lifeline' of support which can make a considerable and positive difference to their lives.

YSS FF also set out objectives for long-term outcomes and impact:

- Reduction of school exclusions, entry into Youth Justice System, children at risk/looked after
- Maintenance of housing, job and social connections for the family
- Reduction in rates of adult re-offending

Long-term impact was beyond the scope of this research study, given its two-year timeline during which YSS FF was set up from scratch. Nonetheless, the study has evidenced the impact of the service on families. Parents have been empowered to take legal action, request local authority housing support, begin studying, advocate more fully for their children and receive counselling to begin to tackle long-held difficulties. Each of the children and young people who participated in the study self-reported or were reported by parents, teachers and practitioners to be more emotionally settled, engaging well in their education, and coping better with family relationships. Some were making career plans. All of them touched us with their stoicism, concerns for the rest of their family members, and worries beyond their years.

Unfortunately, however, current provision for targeted support for parents/carers, children and young people experiencing family imprisonment is both inadequate and under-funded. While we have evidenced the success and effectiveness of the YSS FF programme, itself at threat for lack of long-term adequate funding, we have also shown that the needs nationwide are urgent and largely unmet. The children and young people of today with imprisoned parents need support to help them to deal with the trauma and distress surrounding parental imprisonment, to continue to grow, and to engage fully in their education, relationships and futures. At present, we don't even know who they are.

What needs to be done?

We propose that the following steps be taken in the **short term** to help set in place a strategic plan to address the issues raised:

1. **Awareness raising:** Raise public, stakeholder and government awareness as to the extent and scale of need across the UK which recognises how many children, young people and families are impacted by family imprisonment.
2. **Further research:** Seek funding for much needed large-scale in-depth longitudinal, intergenerational research in this area, incorporating: Children and young people's experiences across a range of circumstances and foregrounding children from a range of diverse backgrounds; evaluating the cost of funding much-needed support for children and young people experiencing family imprisonment against the costs to children, young people's and parents' health, wellbeing and educational outcomes if needs continue to remain unmet.
3. **Expand Families First-type support:** Consider the type and quality of needs based, responsive support that Families First provide in meeting the needs of children, young people and parents experiencing family imprisonment and explore avenues through which these services can be expanded to meet national need.
4. **Notify local authorities:** Police and courts specifically need to notify local authorities when they arrest or sentence someone who has children. The sooner the support is provided for the child and the family, the better the chance of interruption of Adverse Childhood Experience.
5. **Vulnerable children:** Education authorities should treat children of prisoners as vulnerable and ensure that in school teaching is provided during period of strikes and pandemics. They should be treated in the same way children in care are supported within the school system.

Recommendations for stakeholders and national and local policymakers for **mid-term action**:

1. **National data collection as routine:** Ensure that national data is collected on a regular basis on the number of children and young people who are affected by family imprisonment, including,
 - a) Access to support services for the parents, children and young people.
 - b) Impact on the progress and achievements of children and young people.
 - c) Sharing information with specialist support agencies to meet family needs.
2. **Multiagency policy and service review:** Review and revise national and local policies, including education, health and social care, for service provision for parents, children and young people experiencing family imprisonment from the point of sentencing and continuing throughout the period of imprisonment and beyond release. Implement associated policy, provision and practice changes, including recognising:
 - a) The need for additional educational support for children and young people.
 - b) The need for training of education, health and social care professionals with regard to understanding the needs and experiences of parents, children and young people experiencing family imprisonment.
 - c) That support services nationally need to be funded to combine responsive, needs-based face-to-face support as well as access to support through different media such as online or mobile access.

- d) That building relationships to provide strength-based support can enable parents, children and young people to process the trauma and distress of family imprisonment and afford them the skills and strategies to nurture resilience and self-reliance.

We end the report the report with a final quotation from a young person aged 15, describing the importance of FF support in helping him to deal with the emotional challenges when his dad went back to prison,

I think the best way to get through something is by talking about it. If you just keep it in, you're not actually going to face really anything.

Contact

You can contact our research team at the Children's Research Centre at the Open University at <http://www.open.ac.uk/researchprojects/childrens-research-centre/about-us>

To find out more about the services that Families First at YSS provide, please visit their website where contact details can be found at <https://www.yss.org.uk/>.

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7. Appendices

Appendix A

https://wels.open.ac.uk/sites/wels.open.ac.uk/files/files/Online_Parent_Survey.pdf

Table 1 Answer to survey question 'which prison are they in currently'?

Name of Prison	Number of Respondents with a family member at this location.
Belmarsh Prison	2
Berwyn Prison	3
Birmingham Prison	1
Bullingdon Prison	2
Channings Wood Prison	3
Coldingley Prison	1
Deerbolt Prison	1
Drake Hall Prison and Young Offender Institution	1
Durham Prison	2
Garth Prison	1
Gartree Prison	2
Guys Marsh Prison	1
Hatfield Prison	1
Hewell Prison	3
High Down Prison	1
Highpoint Prison	1
Holme House Prison	1
Hull Prison	1
Isle of Wight Prison	1
Kirkham Prison	1
Leeds Prison	1
Leyhill Prison	1
Liverpool Prison	1
Lowdham Grange Prison	2
Maidstone Prison	2
Maghaberry Prison	1
Northumberland Prison	1
Oakwood Prison	2
Pentonville Prison	1
Rochester Prison	6
Rye Hill Prison	2
Stafford Prison	1
Standford Hill Prison	1
Stoke Heath Prison	1
Thorn Cross Prison	1
Wakefield Prison	1
Wealstun Prison	1
Wormwood Scrubs Prison	1

Appendix B

Table 1 YSS FF OU evaluation mapping – Matching YSS FF objectives and planned actions to OU Research Questions, OU research methods and mapped to CIPP evaluation model.

*YSS FF objectives	*YSS FF planned actions	OU Evaluation RQs	OU methods/data	Mapped to CIPP evaluation model See checklist too
*Clarify the number of families affected by the issue in Worcestershire	<p>*1. A whole systems approach and establish a virtual data lab with partners for sharing of knowledge and analysis.</p> <p>*2. Promotion, engagement and capacity building of VCSE agencies, liaison with schools, courts, police, housing RPs, Family Hubs, statutory sector. This component is focussed on building a sustainable community-based approach and developing networks of community contacts for families.</p> <p>*3. One to One support: The new service will need to respond to existing families' needs and anticipate demand. To take account of this twin track approach, we will categorise the service into 2 groups:</p>	<p>RQ1 What is the extent of the issue at the outset of the YSS FF programme? How many CHYP experience parental imprisonment nationally and in Worcestershire, what services do they currently receive and what do they need? What are the consequences of unmet need?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parent online survey • National and local databases • FOI request • Lit review • Key Stakeholder interviews • Family/C&YP interviews 	<p>Context Includes needs assessment, available resources, problems to be solved, any background issues and the overall environment for the program. This is a planning phase in the cycle. The Context phase focuses primarily on the intended goals for a program</p>
<p>*Agencies work together to share knowledge and develop joint solutions</p> <p>*Worcestershire agencies and community groups know how to refer, or support families affected by imprisonment</p>	<p>*• Amber Group: Families where the parent is already incarcerated. Other community agencies may already be involved, the YSS worker will work alongside the agency to provide practical help and information on a range of issues from policy development and reporting through to available knowledge of "what works"</p> <p>*• Green Group: Families at the point of sentencing. The YSS keyworker will liaise with the courts and police to develop a referral pathway. The worker...</p>	<p>RQ2 How does YSS FF contribute to a multiagency approach to supporting families with parental imprisonment? How did FF develop, contribute to and maintain a network of agencies and community groups who know how to refer, or support families affected by imprisonment? What does FF contribute? What difference are these developments making to referral and support available for families?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Documentary analysis of YSS FF set-up and networking activities including (indicative): minutes of Stakeholder meetings; FF team diary of action planning; interim reports to WCC; FF resources developed to engage and support families; development of referral policies or documents; development and use of Data-lab. • Interviews with FF team at outset & at timepoints during evaluation; reflect on changes made since FF implementation, e.g. has communication and inter-working changed between agencies since FF developed? • Key Stakeholder interviews/focus group 	<p>Input Includes budget, research, plans, stakeholders or subject matter experts. Scheduling is another major input in developing an evaluation using CIPP. Inputs deal with the strategies to be implemented and which specific tools or resources are required to achieve programmatic goals.</p> <p>Process Includes program development and execution. Often revisited multiple times to review whether the development of the program was well-designed and whether execution is meeting expectations. Process is the phase where the inputs come together in a cohesive manner and a point where the execution of processes is examined for refinements within the program. Involves examining how well each process is serving the context and whether inputs are operating well together.</p>

*Families affected by the issue can self-refer	<p>... will act as first point of contact for families and support those who have no access to other support</p> <p>*Work with the Amber group will achieve short term outcomes for the family, whereas the work with the Green group will achieve long term sustained outcomes.</p>	<p>RQ3 How does the YSS FF programme support families and what is its impact? What are families/C&YPs' experiences of the programme? What are the outcomes for those families/C&YP by the end of the evaluation? What are the FF team's experiences of the programme? What are FF team's reflections on outcomes for families/C&YP including potential long-term outcomes? What are key stakeholders' views and experiences of the programme?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Family/C&YP interviews Interviews with FF team at outset & at timepoints during evaluation Key stakeholder interviews/focus group Documentary analysis of (indicative): FF case notes of support and activities; referral patterns into and out of programme; stakeholder meetings minutes; interim reports to WCC. 	<p>Process As above</p> <p>Product The primary question in this phase of evaluation is whether the intended goals have been met. Other areas to examine include whether the program is sustainable in terms of context, inputs and processes. How well did the program achieve outcomes and goals? Are there trends that can be gathered from analysing product information? What areas of the program can be improved? Finally, it is important to consider whether there are systemic changes that must be made to the program.</p>
*YSS planned long term outcomes:			Any data sets linked to reduction in CAMHS, ACE impacts and YJS that can be made available to OU within timescale to end Nov 2022	
Reduction in truancy/ exclusions from schools	<p>*Work with 10 families and 14 children at risk of school exclusions or truancy.</p> <p>*Approach schools to agree referral routes and mutual expectations.</p> <p>*Identify a single point of contact for schools in Worcestershire *Invite single point of contact person to the professional stakeholder group</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> FF case notes of support and activities. referral patterns into and out of programme. Key stakeholder interviews/focus group. Stakeholder meetings minutes. Interviews with FF team at outset & at timepoints during evaluation. 	
Reduction of impact of ACEs, specifically imprisonment	*Work with a total of 20 families and 28 children over the course of the project.		FF case notes of support and activities; referral patterns into and out of programme;	
Reduction in CAMHS referrals	*Engage with children and refer to community activities aimed at providing them with opportunities to engage with their peers and develop their self-confidence.		FF case notes of support and activities; referral patterns into and out of programme; Interviews with FF team at outset & at timepoints during evaluation	
Reduction in children entering the YJS/ engage in ASB	*Engage with local police, housing registered providers and the West Mercia Youth Justice Service to determine areas where the service can provide added value.		Stakeholder meetings minutes; Key stakeholder interviews/focus group	
Reduction in looked after children/children in need	<p>*Evaluate the service model after 18 months to ensure that the criteria match the families' needs and the need for children to remain safe.</p> <p>*Establish baseline figure for the safeguarding of children with a history of parental imprisonment.</p>		FF case notes of support and activities; referral patterns into and out of programme; Interviews with FF team at outset & at timepoints during evaluation	

List of Tables

	Page
Table 4.1 Aim and objectives of Families First Programme (From YSS Families First Business Case March 2020)	18
Table 4.3 Corpus of data	23
Table 5.1 Who have respondents told that their ex/partner is in Prison?	28
Table 5.2 How often do you and your child/ren currently communicate with your ex/partner in Prison? (n = 50)	30
Table 5.3 Type of contact the parent and the child/children currently has with the ex/partner in Prison (n = 47) - multiple options could be selected	30
Table 5.4 Response to Request 6	33
Table 5.5: Themes and categories from coded interview data	36
Table 5.6: Documents recording procedures of Families First project set-up phase Jan-July 2021	49
Table 5.7: Themes and categories of activities during project set-up period Jan-July 2021	50
Table 5.8: Organisations contacted directly by Families First Jan-July 2021	51
Table 5.9: shows the organisations represented at each of the stakeholder group meeting	54
Table 5.10 Referring agencies up to 23rd July 2021	55
Table 5.11: Themes and categories from coded interview data	58

List of Figures

	Page
Figure 5.1 The location of survey respondents	24
Figure 5.2 Demographics of the Respondent (n = 60-65)	25
Figure 5.3 Demographics of the Respondent's family member in Prison (n = 60-65)	25
Figure 5.4 How long has the family member been in Prison so far?	26
Figure 5.5 Existing support needs for families	27
Figure 5.6 Reasons why respondents decided to not share their ex/partner is in prison (n = 46)	29
Figure 5.7 Contact points at which children and young people with a parent in prison could be identified and supported.	55
Figure 5.8 'Who were they trying to impress?' Poster created by thirteen-year-old girl to help other young people in similar circumstances.	67
Figure 5.9 'Life choices' Board game created by thirteen-year-old girl to play with her father on release from prison	68
Figure 5.10 'It really helps' Poster created by ten-year-old child with parent in prison	69
Figure 5.11 Poster created by child with parent in prison	70

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