



Helping the families of people in prison

The impact on households of having a family member in prison is huge.

Thankfully it is a subject receiving increasing attention, particularly following the work of Conservative peer, Lord Farmer, who was commissioned by the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) to carry out a review of people in prisons' family relationships.

Lord Farmer found that good familial relations were of vital importance to the rehabilitation of the people in prisons.

But also that the families of men and women in prison were themselves in urgent and dire need of care and practical support.

The issues that families face on the outside are wide and various. The imprisonment of a family member may have an impact on income, on housing, mobility and social integration. Judgement and stigma is often still levelled at families who have someone in prison.

There is obvious emotional impact too, with inevitable heartache, anxiety and enormous day-to-day stress. That is especially the case for the estimated 200,000 children that experience parental imprisonment every year. The sense of loss, confusion and vulnerability can be particularly difficult for children and young people to cope with.

So, what can we do?

It is worth us reflecting for a moment, and trying to step into the shoes of a Wife, Mother, Son or Daughter of someone in prison, and trying to envisage the widespread difficulties they face, and feelings of powerlessness to do anything about the situation.



Austerity measures have led to cutbacks to support services outside. This can mean it is difficult for families to source the support they need. Add to this the fear of disclosure for families, and the situation can be very isolating.

The SVP has always reached out to the poor – and the poor include prisoners and their families, of course; St Vincent de Paul was himself imprisoned for two years.

Recently, the SVP has set up: **SVP Working with Prisons**. This is a new area of special work, aimed at focusing on the needs of people in prison, ex-offenders and their families. Under the leadership of SVP Board Member and Trustee, Ian Kempzell, the group is making contact with Central and District Councils and also with individual Conferences throughout the country, to encourage them to visit their local prisons, to make contact with prison Chaplains and also with the many support organisations already working in prisons, and to find out what they need.

How do we Turn our Concern into Action?

SVP Fact Sheet 21 lists many of the specialist support organisations that are currently working with prisons, ex-offenders and families, and provides contact details.

For example, in the north west there is 'Out There' (outtherecharity.org) which operates in the Greater Manchester area, and PACT (pact.co.uk), which also covers a number of areas nationally. SVP is currently working with these organisations in a number of prisons including HMP Berwyn, HMP Hindley and the women's prisons, HMP Styal.

These specialist support organisations have a clear understanding of exactly what the families of people in prison really need and they can often advise SVP Members on the best way to help.

What kinds of support are we talking about?

Even small acts of kindness can make a big difference, so there are many ways that SVP Members can help to provide support.

- **Open links with Prison Chaplains**
Chaplains will know the men and women in prison and will have an acute appreciation of their needs and requirements. Chaplains are great points of first contact.
- **Contact specialist support organisations**
They do what they do well, so make contact with them and try and complement their work with our unique SVP offering – spending time with people is our greatest gift!
- **Listening and Befriending**
Sitting alongside those who feel lonely or isolated, listening to them – their hopes, dreams, worries and fears – and letting them know that we care and are there for them.
- **Donations and fundraising**
Austerity measures have led to cutbacks on both prison funding and on support services outside. Funding remains a consistent challenge

for specialist support organisations so there is significant opportunity for SVP Members to make an impact with donations and fundraising.

- **Help with travelling to visit loved ones in prison**
Help could be offered with transport for family members, or with the cost of travel to and from prison.
- **Providing essential items of furniture and white goods**
Families often struggle when faced with costly repairs or the need to replace expensive items such as beds and mattresses, through normal wear and tear or breakdown.
- **Items that are expensive for any family**
Including school uniforms, school trips, sports kit or toys.

SVP Working with Prisons – Top tips

- **Families of people in prison are often marginalised or ostracised and struggle to get their needs met or voices heard. Don't take this approach. Instead listen, offer advice only if they want it and leave the decision-making to them.**
- **Offer help through the specialist organisations which know the families' needs best.**
- **The lives of people in prisons' families can be improved by simple acts of kindness that don't have to cost much.**
- **Always remember that SVP Safeguarding requires that we protect ourselves and protect those people in prison.**

For more information about the SVP:

Call 0207 703 3030
Email info@svp.org.uk
Visit svp.org.uk

John O'Sullivan | August 2022

Find out more

For more information about 'SVP Working with Prisons' look at our Factsheets:

- **Factsheet 19: Helping people in prison and ex-offenders**
- **Factsheet 20: Helping the families of people in prison**
- **Factsheet 21: Specialist support organisations working with people in prison, ex-offenders and families**

Together with our various Newsletters and Videos. Or email one of the lead contacts or advisors:

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Working 
with Prisons
Supporting men and women in prison, ex-offenders and families