

Fact Sheet 20

Helping the families of people in prison

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

The imprisonment of a family member may have an impact on income, on housing, mobility and social integration.

Judgement and stigma are still levelled at families who have someone in prison. There is an obvious emotional impact too, with inevitable heartache, anxiety and enormous day-to-day stress.

That is especially the case for the estimated **250,000** (estimates vary) **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.

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 find the support they need. In addition, the fear of disclosure for families can make them feel very isolated.

What can we do?

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

The SVP launched in 2021 the SVP Working with Prisons Group as a 'special work' of the Society. The group encourages Members to work focusing on the needs of prisoners, ex-offenders and their families.

How do we Turn our Concern into Action?

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

- **Join the SVP Working with Prisons Group**

We are building a network of support for prisons, ex-offenders and their families. We need more volunteers to be able to support more prisons and help ex-offenders and their families.

- **Open links with Prison Chaplains**

Chaplains will know the men and women in prison and be aware of their needs and requirements. Chaplains are great points of first contact.

- **Contact specialist support organisations (Fact Sheet 21)**

They do what they do well. Develop links with them and work together. For support that you are unable to provide, contact them for help.

- **Donations and fundraising**

Austerity measures have led to cutbacks on both prison funding and on support services outside. Funding also remains a constant challenge for specialist support organisations. SVP Members can provide vital support with donations and fundraising.

- **Supporting families with food, clothing and other essentials**

Due to imprisonment, families often lose their main source of income and struggle to meet their daily needs. Unexpected expenses such as repair or replace expensive items such as washing machines and cookers, increase their financial burden.

Families with children also need support with school uniforms and sports kit, toys, and funding for school trips.

- **Help Families visit loved ones in prison**

See if you can help with transport for family members to visit their loved ones in prison, or with the cost of travel to and from prison.

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. Spend time with them and 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 prisonwork@svp.org.uk
Visit svp.org.uk

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