



Children of Prisoners:

Exploring the needs of children and young people who have a parent incarcerated in the Australian Capital Territory

SHINE for Kids

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Table of Contents

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	4
INTRODUCTION	8
Purpose and scope of the needs analysis	8
BACKGROUND	11
The ACT context	11
Impact of parental imprisonment on children.....	14
Children’s experiences of parental imprisonment	15
The need to build more collaborative responses for children and their families	18
METHODOLOGY	20
PARTICIPANTS	22
FINDINGS	23
Policy frameworks.....	23
Researcher observations.....	24
Locating children and young people in the process of criminal justice.....	25
When and how children should be informed	25
The impact of parental incarceration	29
Family relationships	30
Shame and stigma.....	32
Poor educational outcomes	34
Supports	35
Increased caring responsibilities.....	37
Emotional distress.....	37
Financial disadvantage.....	39
Instability and homelessness	41
IMPLICATIONS FOR SUPPORT.....	43
Potential strategies and approaches to better support children and young people	43
Impacts of parental incarceration.....	44
Supporting children with parental relationships	45
Providing information to children and young people.....	48
Listening and talking to children and young people	48
Supporting parents and siblings.....	49
Non-stigmatising referrals and linking to services.....	50
Stable and secure living arrangements	51
Responding to the needs of young children	51
Building on strengths	52
APPENDIX A	54
APPENDIX B	57
REFERENCES.....	60

Executive Summary

Until recently, the parenting status of Australian prisoners has been poorly considered. However, Australian and international criminological policy and research is now focusing on the role that families play in the well-being, re-offending and rehabilitation of prisoners. This growing body of research has considered family connectedness from a variety of perspectives and there is emerging evidence of its impact on a range of social, health, mental wellbeing and criminological outcomes for prisoners (Travis, McBride, et al 2003; Stanley, & Byrne, 2000; Robertson, 2007). There is also a growing interest in the reciprocal impacts of imprisonment on families, and particularly on children. This has contributed to the recognition that prisoners need to be seen in the context of their family and parenting identities if a range of preventative, restorative and rehabilitative imperatives are to be fully achieved for them and for their children.

This needs analysis commissioned by SHINE for Kids and funded by the ACT Health Directorate aims to fill an important gap in knowledge about how prisoners are constructed as parents, and the impacts of incarceration upon prisoners' families in contemporary Australian society, by exploring and highlighting children's voices. The needs analysis centres on hearing and understanding the experiences of children who have or have had an incarcerated parent.

The needs analysis aimed to:

- Deepen the understanding of the lives of children of prisoners by exploring their experiences of parental incarceration and the impact this has on them;
- Identify appropriate individual, family and community supports and interventions informed by the children themselves in the context of multiple system involvement (e.g. child protection, criminal justice, health); and,
- Inform the development of more integrated policy and practice responses to families who experience multiple and complex issues.

Findings

The findings of this study identified that the challenges experienced by children and young people were dynamic in nature, often being present at different time periods of their lives and occurring for different lengths of time. Children and young people often spoke about their experiences as a process. This process involved a series of steps beginning with their parents' arrest and ending with

their release, and frequently, commencing again when conditions were breached or new crimes were committed. They described how some issues affected them only at the time of arrest, others were linked specifically to incarceration, and new unexpected issues emerged when parents were released. However, it was also clear that many issues occurred across the duration of parental involvement within the criminal justice system.

Building on and confirming findings from the existing limited literature on children of prisoners, the study found that children and young people experienced a range of challenges, related to:

- Family relationships;
- Increased caring responsibilities;
- Education;
- Shame and stigma;
- Challenges in accessing supports;
- Emotional distress;
- Financial disadvantage; and,
- Instability and homelessness.

Implications for support

The findings of this study indicate that many children young people struggle in isolation to cope with the issues identified above and that they rarely access any support services to assist them whilst their parent is incarcerated. It appears that this is due to both the lack of recognition of their needs by the police, courts, prisons and community corrections systems, as well as children and young people's steadfast independence and need to do things on their own, often due to issues of the shame and stigma associated with asking for help when a parent is in prison.

The majority of the young people in the study expressed an urgent need to be considered by authorities such as the police, courts and prisons in relation to the provision of information about their parents' arrest, sentencing and release. They also identified that the courts and the prison need to provide better support to children and young people in order for them to be able to emotionally and practically cope with the impact of having a parent incarcerated, as well as the subsequent changes parental incarceration has on their family life.

Despite their unwavering independence and need to do things on their own, children and young people said that they wanted services that understood their needs and did not make them feel ashamed or stigmatised for having a parent in prison. Hence services provided at the prison and universal services that have been educated about the needs of children of prisoners are identified as being useful.

Many young people spoke about maintaining contact with parents and the possible effects of incarceration on parental relationships. Whilst the majority of children and young people interviewed wanted contact with their parent, a smaller number identified that they did not want contact with their incarcerated parent, or had lost contact, due to a decision to cease contact made by either the detained or non-detained parent or child protection services.

It is clear from the interviews with children and young people that this loss or change in relationship needs to be recognised by the relevant systems and when necessary, emotional or counselling support to be provided. Furthermore, access to parents for children and young people who wish to maintain contact with their detained parents, without the support of the non-detained parent, needs to be better facilitated.

Children and young people also highlighted the need for more appropriate opportunities within the prison for them to be able to maintain positive attachments to their parents. Both children and young people described the positive benefits of the SHINE for Kids family days and the art and craft activities at visits, although young people described the need for more developmentally appropriate activities to ensure that visits are meaningful and contribute to parent-child bonding.

For many of the young people, education had become a tangible issue area that they identified as being affected by their parents' incarceration. Many felt that this was because of the chaotic nature of their family life which made it hard keep up with school work, or because they were effectively homeless and were 'couch-surfing' with friends and boyfriends. This meant that they were unable to complete homework and missed a lot of school. Whilst support at school was identified as a critical area for improvement, children and young people also identified a need for schools and colleges to have a better understanding of their experiences in order for them to provide more appropriate responses.

For many of the young people who had younger siblings, or a parent with a mental health or alcohol or other drug issue, the incarceration of a parent meant that they assumed a level of caring responsibility significantly more than they had been used to. Whilst no child or young person identified themselves as a 'carer' it was apparent for some that their caring responsibilities prevented them from engaging fully in education, social activities with peers and work or employment opportunities. Young people were also more likely to take on financial responsibilities and the management of the home. Young people expressed a need to receive extra financial and practical support for themselves and their families, so as to not be disadvantaged.

It is critical that the insights gained from parents, children and young people in this study are carefully considered in order to understand how the relevant systems and service responses can better encompass and address the issues experienced by children and young people who have a parent in prison. This is fundamental to ensure that these children are better supported and not inadvertently more disadvantaged than they perhaps already are.

Introduction

SHINE for Kids was originally known as the Children of Prisoners' Support Group, and was created following the release of The Children of Imprisoned Parents Report, commissioned by the Family and Children's Services Agency in 1982. In 2004, their name was changed to SHINE for Kids.

SHINE for Kids provides support for the children of imprisoned parents and their families. A core focus of this support is belief in the power of early intervention to stem some of the negative effects of parental imprisonment. SHINE for Kids provide services in Victoria and New South Wales that include programs such as casework services, contact services, group work, mentoring and advocacy. In 2011, SHINE for Kids commenced services within the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) Alexander Maconochie Centre, providing support for prison in-visits, child and parent activity days, and a homework club.

The aim of the SHINE for Kids program is to support and strengthen the lives of children and families of prisoners through funding and implementation of early intervention and prevention support programs. In order to better understand the ACT context and the needs of children of prisoners living in the ACT, SHINE for Kids obtained funding from the ACT Health Directorate under the ACT Health Promotion Grants Program to conduct a two staged project to:

- Identify the health and well-being needs of children in the ACT whose parents are incarcerated; and,
- Develop, pilot and evaluate a program to support children of prisoners.

In 2012, SHINE for Kids commissioned the Institute of Child Protection Studies (ICPS), to undertake a needs analysis with children and young people in the ACT. This report identifies the perceived needs of children and young people as identified by themselves and parents. It provides a series of recommendations developed from the participants' insights that go towards developing support services appropriate and relevant to the ACT context, which reflect the needs of children and young people with an incarcerated parent in the ACT.

Purpose and scope of the needs analysis

Until recently, the parenting status of Australian prisoners has been poorly considered. However, Australian and international criminological policy and research is now focusing on the role that

families play in the well-being, re-offending and rehabilitation of prisoners. This growing body of research has considered family connectedness from a variety of perspectives, and there is emerging evidence of its impact on a range of social, health, mental wellbeing and criminological outcomes for prisoners (Travis, McBride, et al 2003; Stanley, & Byrne, 2000; Robertson, 2007). There is also a growing interest in the reciprocal impacts of imprisonment on families, and particularly on children. This has contributed to the recognition that prisoners need to be seen in the context of their family and parenting identities if a range of preventative, restorative and rehabilitative imperatives are to be fully achieved for them and for their children.

Incarceration also presents an opportunity to provide services to parents and their children, and to potentially address current disadvantage. At a minimum, having a parent incarcerated should not place already vulnerable children at further disadvantage. Currently, knowledge in Australia about the effects of parental imprisonment on children is derived from international studies, predominantly from the United States and Great Britain. Knowledge about children's perceptions of parental incarceration and the effect on their families is very limited. Most research conducted about children's experiences is filtered through adults (usually parents or service providers), who may or may not have spoken with children about how they experience everyday life and how they feel. There is very little known about these children or how they experience their lives, what they think are the positive and negative effects of the experience and what coping strategies they may have developed. Understanding children and young people's experiences of parental incarceration and what influences positive outcomes is critical if outcomes for the children of prisoners are to be improved.

This exploratory study aims to fill an important gap in knowledge about how prisoners are constructed as parents and the impacts of incarceration upon prisoners' families in contemporary Australian society, by exploring and highlighting the voices of children who live in the ACT. The needs analysis centres on understanding the experiences of children who have or have had an incarcerated parent.

The needs analysis aims to:

- Deepen the understanding of the lives of children of prisoners by exploring their experiences of parental incarceration and the impact this has on them;

- Identify appropriate individual, family and community supports and interventions informed by the children themselves in the context of multiple system involvement (e.g. child protection, criminal justice, health); and,
- Inform the development of more integrated policy and practice responses to families who experience multiple and complex issues.

The project was conducted from August 2012-September 2013, and involved:

- Children and young people between the ages of 6-18 years living in the ACT who have, or have had, a parent incarcerated; and,
- Parents and caregivers of the children who have a parent incarcerated.

Background

To many people in our society the impact of incarceration on prisoners and their families is inconsequential. In a society where there are competing economic and political demands, where there are communities that experience significant disadvantage through 'no fault of their own', and where health care and education are hot topics of debate, it remains that the concerns and needs of prisoners and their families are invisible or irrelevant to most Australian people (Toohey, 2012).

However, a significant and increasing number of Australians are affected by incarceration each year. During the 2013 March quarter, the average daily number of full-time prisoners in Australia was 30,456 persons (ABS, 2013). National data collection generally focuses on issues such as the types of crime committed, the length and type of sentences received (ABS, 2013), the physical and mental health issues experienced by prisoners (AIHW, 2011) and the broad characteristics of prisoners, such as age and gender (ABS, 2013b). Data are also collected about victims of crime, including characteristics of victims, types of crime and outcomes of investigations (ABS, 2012).

Whilst much attention is paid towards prisoners and victims of crime, no national data are collected about the children of prisoners, who, it can be argued, are also unintended victims of crime. What little is known about children of prisoners is often focused on the individual and social disadvantages they experience, the extent to which their parents' behaviour influences their own criminogenic factors and needs, and the risk this places on their future life chances (Morgan et al., 2013).

The ACT context

Under the federal system of government in Australia, states and territories each assume responsibility for the administration of criminal justice within their own jurisdiction, and as a result, there is no single criminal justice system operating across Australia. The eight states and territories have separate and independent systems of police, courts, prisons, community corrections systems and juvenile justice centres. The management of prisoners is the core business of all corrective service agencies; however, the scope of the responsibilities of these agencies varies widely and may be administered differently in one jurisdiction compared to another (Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision, 2012). Consequently each State and Territory government will differ in their management and response to children of prisoners.

Until 2009, the ACT has relied on New South Wales correctional facilities to provide full-time detention for prisoners from the ACT. In 2009, the ACT commissioned the Alexander Maconochie Centre (AMC), a new prison and remand centre complex designed as a multi-role facility to replace the Belconnen Remand Centre, and provide full-time detention facilities so that prisoners could be held locally.

The AMC caters to all security levels and is the first prison in the country to be purpose built to meet human rights obligations and be run in accordance with ACT Human Rights Standards. The United Nations Human Rights Committee emphasises that all prisoners should enjoy the rights set out in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), subject to “restrictions that are unavoidable in a closed environment” (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2012). This means that prisoners in the AMC have a number of rights and protections. The principal rights relevant to incarcerated people are the right to be treated with humanity and with respect for the inherent dignity of the human person (section 19 of the Human Rights Act (HRA) 2004 and paragraph 7(c) of the Corrections Management Act (CMA), 2007). There is also prohibition against torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment (section 10 of the HRA and paragraph 9(d) of the CMA). One right of special importance to prisoners and their children is the right for contact with family. This is enshrined in Article 23 of the ICCPR stating “The family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society and is entitled to protection by society and the State” (UNHRC, 1976).

Australia has ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCROC), which sets out a series of obligations to protect children and prevent harm, guided by the principle of best interests. UNCROC acknowledges the primary role of the family in caring and protecting children, but gives the State the role of protecting children from abuse or neglect and safeguarding a broad range of children’s rights, including the right to development and the right to know and be cared for by parents. Criminal justice systems in Australia can have unintentional but significant deleterious effects on families and children. By identifying and responding to each of these issues it is possible to enhance the rights of children and reduce the individual and social costs of crime that are ultimately borne by the broader community (VACRO, 2006).

ACT Prisoner Demographics

The prison has a capacity for 344 prisoners and received its first residents on 30 March 2009. All ACT prisoners were repatriated from NSW by the end of May 2009 (ACT Health, 2011). The most recent statistics about prisoners in the ACT are detailed in Table 1 (ABS, 2013).

Table 1. ACT Prison Population 2012

Population Characteristics	Number in the ACT AMC	Median Age (Years)
Males	299	30.7
Females	14	31
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander	46	
Non-Indigenous	261	
Unknown	6	
Sentenced	222	
Un-sentenced	91	
Prior imprisonment	222	
No prior imprisonment	83	
Total population	313	30.7

The ACT prison population characteristics are largely consistent with national findings. However, the following anomalies identified in the 2012 prison census include:

- The female imprisonment rate has increased in all states and territories during the last decade except for the ACT, which decreased from 12 to 10 female prisoners per 100,000 adult females;
- Male prisoners consistently had higher proportions of prior imprisonment than females, except in the ACT where females had higher prior imprisonment rates than males (79% compared to 71%);
- The proportion of female prisoners with prior imprisonment was highest in the ACT at 79%;
- The ACT recorded the largest proportional increase in sentenced prisoners between 30 June 2011 and 30 June 2012 (22% or 40 prisoners); and,
- The ACT had the youngest prisoner population (median age of 30.7 years).

Number of children of prisoners in the ACT

Due to jurisdictional differences in data collection approaches, as well as the limited data collected by key national organisations such as the Australian Bureau of Statistics or the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, the exact numbers of children affected by parental imprisonment nationally remains unknown. The most recent and extensive population modelling has been undertaken by Quilty (2005), who estimates that approximately 5% of all Australian children are affected by parental imprisonment on an annual basis. In real numbers, this equated to approximately 38,000 children per year in 2003 (but is likely to be currently approaching 50,000) who were directly or vicariously involved with Australian prisons as a result of parental incarceration. For Indigenous children, the percentage is much higher. Quilty (2005) calculates that each year, 20% of Indigenous

children had at least one parent incarcerated. In total, Quilty calculated that approximately 145,000 children at any point in time had been affected by parental incarceration. With the doubling in the prison population over the past twenty years, there is an increasing number of children affected by parental incarceration.

The most recent figures concerning children of prisoners in the ACT were provided in the 2010 'inmate health survey'. This survey was conducted at AMC, and found that a majority of participants came from a socially disadvantaged background (ACT Health, 2011). Thirty-eight per cent of participants were placed in care before 16 years of age; 19% of participants had either parent incarcerated when he/she was a child; 42% of participants had spent some time in juvenile justice when they grew up; 68% of participants were excluded from school; 47% of participants were employed six months prior to imprisonment; and 6% had never been employed (ACT Health, 2011, p. 7). Data collected in the survey about children of prisoners identified that 57% of prisoners had between one and five children. A total of 218 children were identified as being impacted by parental incarceration during the month of May 2010, though the actual number of children in the ACT who have a parent in custody is potentially over 400 (ACT Health, 2013).

Impact of parental imprisonment on children

National and international research have identified children of prisoners as a group with complex health, social and welfare disadvantages, due in part to their lives prior to their parents' incarceration. These issues include the impact of poverty, family discord, substance abuse and mental health issues (Johnson & Waldfogel, 2002; Sheehan & Levine, 2006). Children of parents who are, or have been, in prison commonly experience significant disruption to their care, often receive negligible material support, and experience difficulty maintaining family ties (Sheehan & Levine, 2006).

Previous studies highlight that maternal imprisonment is more likely to result in separation of children from their natural family and foster care placement than paternal imprisonment (cited in VACRO, Sheehan & Levine, 2006). Victorian children who have a mother in prison are likely to be placed in homes where the carer is socially and economically worse-off as a result of the child's presence, thereby increasing the risk of abuse and neglect. These children are also less likely to have contact with other members of their families, such as grandparents and siblings, due to the increased financial and time pressures placed on carers (VACRO, 2006).

Sheehan and Levine argue that children of prisoners are uniquely vulnerable; and often come into contact with child protection and welfare agencies: “The children present particular challenges to legal and welfare decision makers in relation to maintaining relationships between the children and their parents” (2006, p 4). An analysis of the files of 156 children involved in the child protection proceedings who had parents who were currently or previously in prison illustrated an uncoordinated response by the child protection and justice systems, and no involvement by a range of key stakeholders in a case planning process (i.e. broader family, school, child care services). This led to a fragmented care experience for this group of children (Sheehan & Levine, 2006).

Intergenerational effects

It has been argued that parental incarceration has considerable influence over intergenerational criminal behaviour (National Crime Prevention, 2000; Murray, 2007). For example, boys’ anti-social behaviour throughout their life is predicted by parental incarceration (Murray, Janson et al., 2007; Murray & Farrington, 2008). In Murray and Farrington’s study, 48% of boys who were separated from their parents because of parental imprisonment between birth and age 10 years were convicted as an adult, compared to 25 per cent of boys who were separated for other reasons (Murray & Farrington, 2008). Parental incarceration also has been found to predict mental health issues in males. Travis, McBride and Solomon (2003) note that traumatic separation from parents interrupts the achievement of key developmental tasks, resulting in, for example, impaired parent-child attachment, acute traumatic stress reactions, developmental regressions, rejection of limits on behaviour, and an impaired ability to overcome future trauma, amongst others. These are considered key risk factors for juvenile and adult offending (National Crime Prevention, 2000). In a NSW study, 11% of juveniles in detention had a parent in prison on the day of the survey, whilst 40% had a parent who had been in prison at some time (NSW Department of Juvenile Justice, 2003). While the mechanisms of intergenerational disadvantage are complex, understanding of the impacts of parental separation under traumatic circumstances may go some way in assisting to account for intergenerational criminal behaviour.

Children’s experiences of parental imprisonment

As noted previously, knowledge about the effects of parental imprisonment on children in Australia is limited. Knowledge about the perceptions of these children themselves, until most recently, has been non-existent. Understanding the risk factors facing children of prisoners is only one side of the story; as most of the information about children’s experiences is filtered through adults who may or may not reflect how children feel (Nesmith & Ruhland, 2008). There is very little known about these

children or how they experience their lives – what they think are positive and negative effects of the experience and what coping strategies they may have developed. The tendency to exclude children's perspectives from research is a reflection of conceptualisations of childhood as a period of preparation for adulthood, as opposed to recognition that children are social actors in their own right (Boyden & Levison, 2000).

In a review of the nascent international literature in which children are given the opportunity to voice their own experiences and needs, there are several recurring themes. These include the importance children place on the maintenance of a relationship with their imprisoned parent, children's feelings of disenfranchisement and powerlessness over the whole justice process from arrest to reunification, fears and worries based on a lack of knowledge or understanding of their parents' imprisonment, and experiences of stigmatisation and bullying, particularly in the school environment.

The importance of relationships

In an early study by Sack and Seidler (1978), parents and caregivers expressed surprise at the importance children placed on their relationship with their incarcerated parent. A later study by Boswell (2002), found that for the children they interviewed, the ability to sustain a meaningful relationship with their incarcerated parent was paramount, with contact being positive despite mixed feelings on the facilities available. Children were able to express the importance they placed on all forms of contact with their parents; including letters, phone calls, photographs and cards. Bocknek, Sanderson and Britner (2009) also stress the importance of family relationships to children with parents in prison, finding that many children viewed their incarcerated parent as being an important source of social and emotional support, even when contact with this parent was limited or unpredictable. Chui (2010) found that children who were unable to have contact with their incarcerated parent likened it to the loss of a parent through death or divorce, with Bocknek and colleagues (2009) also drawing similarities between these events.

Agency and voice

When children were asked about their experiences of having a parent in prison many participants expressed feelings of powerlessness and a desire to have their opinions and experiences heard. In a Scottish study by Loureiro (2010), children and young people who were interviewed strongly believed that their feelings and opinions were important and should be taken into account, particularly by judges during sentencing. The participants reported feeling as though the impact of

imprisonment on their lives was not being considered, and expressed the desire to have an opportunity in which they could give their opinion in situations concerning them. A Hong Kong based study by Chui (2010) also found children's experiences to be marked by a sense of powerlessness, particularly in regards to their input into decisions around contact with their incarcerated parent. Both children and their carers spoke of helplessness and loss that went unacknowledged by the legal system, teachers, schools, and the wider community (Flynn, 2011; Katz, 2002; Lösel, Pugh, Markson, Souza, & Lanskey, 2012).

Worries and fears

In interviews undertaken by Bockneck and colleagues (2009), children expressed many different worries and anxieties around their parents' incarceration. Worries included the fear that the child themselves would be arrested (Bocknek, et al., 2009), fears of prison officers, or that their parent would never be released from prison (Boswell, 2002). Many of these worries seemed to stem from a lack of knowledge and understanding of their parents' imprisonment, with carers often giving children little or no information about their incarcerated parents' situation, instead providing alternate reasons for the parents' absence: that they were away at school, in the army, or visiting a relative (Dallaire, 2007; Katz, 2002).

Rather than this reassuring children, Katz (2002) found that if children were given little information about their parents then they often imagined scenarios which were far worse than the truth: that their parent had abandoned them, was in a dungeon, a "terrible hospital or army" (p. 19). In fact, participants in Boswell's study (2002) were able to articulate their preference for being told the truth about their parents' imprisonment, and in studies by Bocknek and colleagues (2009), Sack and Seidler (1978), children and young people expressed their frustration and confusion at the lack of information provided to them. Bocknek and colleagues (2009) observed through interviews that children who were better informed about their incarcerated parents' situation were more comfortable discussing it. Furthermore, Sack and Seidler (1978) observed from speaking to both parents and children that those children who were given the opportunity to visit their parents in prison found the experience positive rather than traumatic, and had some of their worries relieved by the visit.

Bullying and stigma

Children frequently articulated experiences of stigmatisation and bullying in interviews. In a study by Bocknek and colleagues (2009), children interviewed expressed feelings of isolation; reporting few

friendships and troubled relationships at school. Children and young people in studies by Boswell (2002), Katz (2002), Lee (2005) and Chui (2010) all described experiences of bullying and shaming; most frequently from peers but also from teachers and neighbours. In Katz's study (2002), children reported being bullied by their friends about their parents' incarceration more frequently than they mentioned friends as a source of support. Perhaps due to this bullying and stigmatisation, children, when asked, were often unable to articulate support figures who they would talk to about their parents' imprisonment in times of stress or trauma (Bocknek, et al., 2009; Flynn, 2011; Lösel, et al., 2012; Loureiro, 2010). In studies by Al Gharaibeh (2008) and Chui (2010), both children and their caregivers spoke about feelings of shame and guilt. Children interviewed by Chui worried about being a burden to their caregiver and a drain on household finances, and spoke of an awareness of and sense of responsibility for their caregivers' emotional and financial distress.

The need to build more collaborative responses for children and their families

As noted above, children whose parents are imprisoned are likely to experience more complex health, social and welfare disadvantages, including poverty, family discord, substance abuse and mental health issues than their peers (Johnson & Waldfogel, 2002; Sheehan & Levine, 2006). Compelling evidence exists that these children and their families are concentrated in highly disadvantaged areas (Baldry, et al., 2006); experience multiple disadvantages and account for a much higher proportion of need and high end criminal justice system attention than their rate in the population would suggest (Vinson, 2007). The cumulative interlinked problems experienced by families such as those who experience incarceration require effective interagency and cross-sectoral collaborations to ensure that they and their children receive the services and support they require. Recent reports (Freiberg & Homel, 2007; Katz & La Placa, 2007; Vimpani, 2005) call for more ecological approaches to addressing risks for children; that is, approaches which recognise the multiple, interlinked nature of barriers confronting parenting capacity and the importance of connecting families to positive support networks. To tackle interlinked barriers and to assist in building effective social support networks for children requires a high level of collaboration across sectors and across the primary, secondary and tertiary levels of service interventions (Winkworth, McArthur, Leyton-Thompson and Thomson, 2009).

For multiple systems to intervene earlier, more effectively and more supportively to both the individual child and their family requires knowledge about their needs and their experiences of the service system. There is increasing recognition that collaboration is an essential starting point for

effective interventions which build parenting capacity and address the complexity of children's lives, especially those who are most vulnerable. However, the current service systems that surround children of prisoners continue to be fragmented and siloed (Sheehan & Levine, 2006).

Methodology

This qualitative study, conducted with the approval of Australian Catholic University's Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) was carried out between 2012 and 2013 in the ACT. It was informed by a phenomenological approach. Phenomenology is primarily concerned with the study of experience and aims to identify phenomena through how they are perceived by the actors in a situation (Lester, 1999). A phenomenological approach asks "What is this experience like?" in an attempt to unfold meanings as they are lived in everyday existence. Polkinghorne (1983) identified this focus as trying to understand or comprehend meanings of human experience as it is lived. This approach was particularly useful for this study, in that it allowed researchers to explore the subjective and complex concepts of what having a parent incarcerated means, directly with children and young people. It also assisted with developing an understanding of the subjective needs of children and young people retrospectively, as well as in the 'now'.

The qualitative method employed in this study included semi-structured interviews that were conducted with 12 children and young people who have or have had a parent incarcerated in the ACT, and 12 parents or caregivers. Only two of the parents and care-givers were related to two of the children. Whilst it was initially hoped to interview parent/child dyads, this proved to be problematic in that many of the children were too young to participate in the study, or because while parents were happy to consent to their child participating, they did not want to be interviewed themselves. The interview schedule was informed by a focused literature review and developed in consultation with our Young People's Reference Group and Project Reference Group (see Appendix A for the interview schedule).

In line with our commitment to a participatory approach, the formation of a Young People's Reference Group was an essential element of the study. The Young People's Reference Group, consisting of five young people aged between 13-16 years, advised on the language to use in regard to parental incarceration, potential issues to discuss, sensitive issues that researchers needed to be aware of, the proposed interview schedule and accompanying interview tools (see Appendix B). The Young People's Reference Group also provided feedback on ways to ensure that all young



people who participated would feel adequately supported and safe throughout the interview, and in a manner that was appropriate to them.

Data analysis was assisted by the use of NVivo. Each of the interviews was fully transcribed and the interviewing researcher conducted a thematic analysis. Themes were developed deductively, through knowledge gained from the literature review and using the interview schedule as a reference point, and inductively as themes emerged from the interviews with young people within the study (Boyatzis, 1998).

Participants

The needs analysis was advertised widely across the ACT and the project information was circulated using a range of strategies. Currently, the only specific program working with children and young people who have parents incarcerated in the ACT is SHINE for Kids at the AMC. However, this service had only recently been established at the commencement of this project, which meant that they too were in the process of identifying children and families to work with, and did not have a readily available 'sample' for the research team to access.

Recruiting the required sample was problematic, owing to the fact that services in Canberra either did not consider they had 'children and young people like this' within their programs, or identified the children and young people within their programs as being 'too vulnerable' to participate in the interviews. Most parent detainees were also unwilling to give consent for their children to participate in the needs analysis.

As a result, 12 children and young people, and 12 non-incarcerated parents and caregivers participated in interviews. One young person agreed to participate and then withdrew as the subject was difficult to discuss at that point in time. A further nine young people also indicated their interest in the project; however, two of them had parents who would not consent for them to participate; for three of them life appeared too 'chaotic' and convenient interview times could not be made in the time frame; and the remainder did not respond to phone messages and texts to arrange a time to meet.

Of the 12 children and young people who participated, 7 young people were aged 15-18 years, and five were 6-14 years. Four young people identified as Aboriginal. Three young people had also had involvement with the police or had been incarcerated in the past two years. All participants identified their father as a parent that was or had been incarcerated.

Of the 12 parents or care-givers that participated, 3 were grandparents that had taken on the care of their grandchild when their son or daughter had been incarcerated. All parents who were interviewed were mothers. Three mothers were aged 20 - 25 years old, with the remainder aged 30 - 40 years old. Two parents identified as coming from a culturally diverse background.

Findings

The findings from the children and young people's interviews will be presented together with those of the parents and care-givers. Many of the challenges identified by children and young people are similar to those identified by adults, however, the way children and young people sought to address the challenges they experienced often differed from the parents' viewpoints. This will be discussed in the latter part of this report. This section begins with a discussion of the ACT policy environment and how children and young people are constructed with this. Researcher observations are then discussed. The findings in this report include direct quotes from interviews with children and young people, and are also illustrated with some of the activities children and young people engaged in during the interviews.

Policy frameworks

In order to gain an understanding of how children and young people with a parent in prison are constructed and responded to in the ACT context, a review of relevant and available policy was undertaken. The findings of this review highlighted that no specific policy exists regarding the needs of children of prisoners in the ACT. Most ACT social policy documents that may relate to children of prisoners give broad directions for service providers and government who work with 'vulnerable' client groups. A theme throughout these documents focused on providing vulnerable groups with access to support, information and services. However, there was a failure to acknowledge the specific needs of children of prisoners in such documents.

While it is understood that strategic documents are about the broader framework, internal policy and procedure documents of the directorates within the ACT Government which work with these target groups also lacked detail about children of prisoners. The policy review conducted for this project found it difficult to publicly access documents such as policy directives. It was evident that any existing internal documents were not available publicly, unlike other jurisdictions in Australia, such as Queensland, Victoria and Western Australia, where policy directives were available on the internet.

The ACT Children's Plan proved to be the most thorough document in addressing the needs of children of prisoners. Although there was no specific mention of the target group there were several policy references and directions from the ACT Government that if implemented could directly assist these children, families and prisoners. Therefore, it is important to acknowledge that a policy

framework potentially exists within the ACT through which the issues and supports required by children of prisoners could be pinned.

In 2004, a report published by Standing Committee on Community Services and Social Equity, made a number of recommendations concerning children of prisoners. This report highlighted the lack of support children and young people experience when their parent is incarcerated as well as the lack of recognition they receive in the current regulations in ACT corrections facilities. Recommendations were made on a number of levels including the need for better data collection about children affected by parental incarceration, the need for future research and the review and development of protocols within Corrective Services regarding children of incarcerated parents. The standing committee also recommended as a matter of priority that the Government appoint a Children's Officer within ACT Corrective Services to promote the needs of children and young people when they have a parent arrested and subsequently incarcerated so that appropriate responses can be made to ensure their safety and wellbeing (Standing Committee on Community Services and Social Equity, 2004). Currently this appointment has not been made.

In 2008 during the development of the prison for the ACT the needs of children were again highlighted in a discussion paper and a series of recommendations made to influence decision makers to consider the needs of children of prisoners (ACT Government, 2008).

Researcher observations

One of the participant recruitment strategies used in this project was to approach families at AMC as they waited to go to the visitors centre. Sitting in the prison waiting room before the detainee visiting period provided the researcher with some excellent opportunities to observe the families, friends and social interactions occurring between individuals and prison staff.

The researcher attended AMC eight times over eight months. Each of these visits enabled observations to be made regarding the diversity of children and young people visiting the AMC. Observations made of interest to this needs analysis include:

- Substantial numbers of children aged five years and younger visiting AMC;
- Several pregnant mothers visiting their partner over this time period;
- A number of older children attending visits to see friends;
- Substantial numbers of young people visiting other family members; and,

- The small number of culturally and linguistically diverse groups of people with friends or family members incarcerated who were unable to speak English.

It is apparent from these observations that a diverse range of children and young people visit detainees incarcerated at AMC, though not all of them visit biological parents. What was apparent also was the number of very small children (under 5 years) that were there to see their parent, usually their father. This younger age group was not included in our sample, but it is important to highlight their numbers as currently there is no specific service addressing their needs.

Locating children and young people in the process of criminal justice

To understand the life worlds of children and young people who have experienced parental incarceration, we asked them to discuss the key issues they were experiencing or had experienced that they believed were a direct result of their parents' incarceration. Children and young people were asked both open-ended questions, as well as specific questions about whether particular issues, identified in the literature, were evident in their lives and how they coped with them. They were also asked about the types of supports they felt they needed in order to help them cope with those challenges, and how such supports might be provided.

The analysis of interviews found that the challenges that children and young people experienced were dynamic in nature, often being present at different time periods of their lives and occurring for different lengths of time. Children and young people often spoke about their experiences as a process, involving a series of steps beginning with their parents' arrest and ending with their release, and as frequently, commencing again when conditions were breached or new crimes were committed. They described that some of the issues affected them only at the time of arrest and others were linked specifically to incarceration. Other new unexpected issues were also identified when parents were released. However, it was also clear that many issues occurred across the duration of parental involvement within the criminal justice system.

When and how children should be informed

Each child and young person had different experiences of their parent being arrested and subsequently imprisoned. Five of the young people reported not knowing about the first time their parent was incarcerated. For some, this was because of their age, or because their parent (usually the father) had been in and out of prison so many times they had lost count and were unable to recollect.

My dad has been in and out since I was five. (ERIN, AGE 15YRS)¹

I can't count how many times my dad has been in and out of jail. (LIZ, AGE 14 YRS)

Others described that they had not been told about the arrest and were either left to believe that the parent had gone away, or they had found out through media or friends. The lack of information provided to children and young people about their parents arrest applied to participants of all ages.

I was young, I know that, I was early primary years. At first no one would really tell me and my brother, so we would be like I wonder what's happened to dad? (ERIN, AGED 15YRS)

Like my cousins make Facebook statuses and I'm just like you don't find out this sort of stuff over Facebook, like it's just beyond a joke. I'm just like oh my God. (JANE, AGED 15YRS)

Yeah, he wasn't there and I didn't know what to feel when he wasn't there because I didn't know he was actually in jail. I just thought he was away for a bit of a holiday. (SARAH, AGED 16YRS)

No-one told me or anyone I know. I went to my friend's house on Tuesday I think ... and I didn't hear from him or I didn't know he was in jail till Friday, I didn't see him until about a month later, yeah, a month. I found out through the internet. The Canberra Times, I didn't even get told, I had to look it up myself which I ended up finding a big article on Dad and I'd never been told by anyone, I didn't never get contacted. (MATT, AGED 14YRS)

Well the first time that I actually found out was through the school because we were reading through a newspaper and he made the second page and I was just like - oh, this is just great. (KAREN, AGED 15YRS)

Parents and care-givers described not wanting the children to know that their parent was in jail. They wanted to protect children from that knowledge for fear of frightening them or because they did not want them to know about the crimes committed. For a child whose parents were both in prison, the grandparents described what they said to the child:

¹ Participants' real names have not been used in this report.

We used to say Daddy was fishing and Mummy was at work, and then they accepted that. But now they're older they do know what jail is. (JEAN, GRANDPARENT)

Another grandparent spoke about how the children aged nine and eleven years had not been told of their father's imprisonment:

The boys really don't know what's going on. I guarantee the mother would have, hopefully didn't say too much, but the mother would have mentioned it. No I don't think they really know. (PHIL, GRANDPARENT)

Other carers believed that children should know and be aware of the fact that their parent was in prison, although did not believe they needed to know details about why they were incarcerated.

No, – she's always known where her father is and she seems to cope with it. I mean, it's not ideal, obviously. But yeah, she's excited when she goes. You just see them together and it just breaks my heart every time I take her. But yes, she loves him and he loves her. Yeah, she's fully aware of the situation. (LINDA, GRANDPARENT)

Just told them that, you know, that Daddy's gone to jail because he did something that he wasn't supposed to do, and if people do that then they would go to jail, because it was serious. And for that I didn't kind of go into details, and for a long time, and probably still won't, now they were angry at the Police. (CLAIRE, PARENT)

But yeah, she knows it's a bad place but it's not a scary place, you know what I mean. Like the reason I went to jail because I didn't wear a seat belt, that's what I tell her. She always has to wear a seat belt. Yeah. I don't tell her really what happened to us. Yeah, she doesn't need to know. (JENNY, PARENT)

Conversely, a small number of children and young people were witness to their parent being arrested.

Yeah my mum came home from work when dad was arrested, the first time we were all home, it was on a... I think it was a Friday afternoon he got arrested. We were all home, dad was working on the car out the front and they came and he just... dad just went

peacefully because he didn't want to make a scene, there's no point, he just would have got himself in more trouble, and he knew that. So he was very cooperative, yeah in that sense it was good. So it was easy... it was upsetting obviously, I didn't want my dad to go. (MEL, aged 17 YRS)

Two parents spoke about their young children witnessing their partners' arrests:

She was really a bit – I don't know I think she was too young [to know what was going on], there was no yelling or swearing going on, you know what I mean, so my mum just took her out. It didn't affect her really. (JULIE, PARENT)

Yeah, it was pretty scary... Because the police came around the whole street and everything, [the police] didn't come to the door, I think because there was a gun used but they don't know if it was real or not, you know what I mean. And yeah they [the police] wouldn't come to the door and then we'd realised that the street was surrounded and my mum just wanted out so she took the babies and left, then the police escort her out. And then me and [my partner] were in the house for a while and then he decided to come out because he didn't want drama for the kids. (JENNY, PARENT)

He was really distressed, because they [the police] came in here like he was - I don't know - like he'd just shot someone in the main street or something... they [the police] were going through my cupboards, going through the rooms. Yeah. Coppers fucking everywhere. They were going through my gate, coming in through the front door. My partner didn't let them in, but they heard me go walking past the door and they called me and I opened the door and then they just swarmed in. [My son] goes, "Never - I'll never trust the police again in my whole life". (CASEY, PARENT)

Whilst both care-givers and children and young people identified feelings of sadness and fear at witnessing the arrest of a parent, all of the children described that they were happy to at least know what was happening and where their parents were going. Being involved in their parents' arrest and subsequent incarceration, whilst unpleasant, provided them with information that those who hadn't been with their parent at the time of arrest lacked. Furthermore, parents and care-givers described witnessing the parent being arrested as far more traumatic than the young people did.

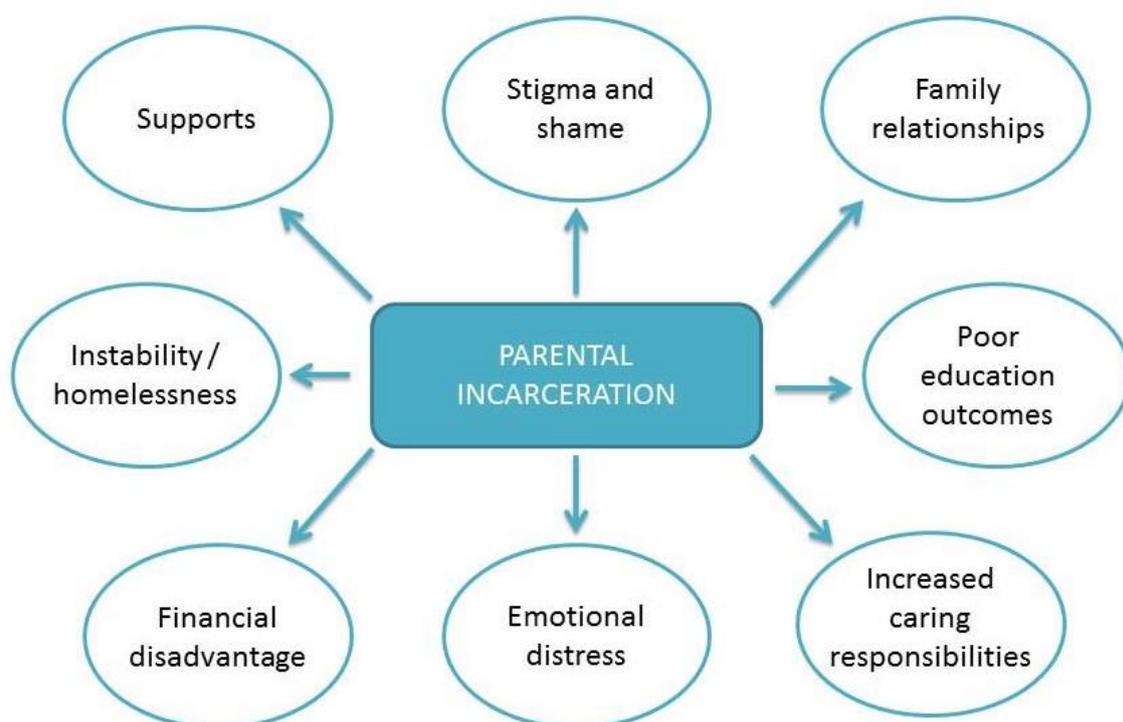
The impact of parental incarceration

Although coming from diverse backgrounds the children and young people shared a range of similar experiences. Many had been brought up by a sole parent, usually their mother, with their parents separating or divorcing at an early age. A number of the young people aged 15-18 years had experienced homelessness and were currently living in less than ideal accommodation. Four young people had had contact with child protection services. Drug and alcohol use, mental illness and domestic violence pervaded most of the children and young people's lives, and had profoundly affected the way they described their own identity and the aspirations they had for their future.

The analysis of interviews showed that young people's lives were characterised by considerable issues that they believed were linked to the impact of their parents' criminal behaviours, the arrest, and the subsequent incarceration. Parental incarceration impacted a range of life 'domains' and the issues children and young people spoke about could be located both at a family and community level (see Figure 1).

However, they also discussed the interrelated nature of these issues and described how these contributed to the development of their identity and future selves.

Figure 1. The impact of parental incarceration - children and young people's perspectives



Family relationships

Overwhelmingly, children and young people described incarceration as the “loss of their parent”, regardless as to how they felt about their parents’ criminal behaviour. Many of the young people talked about the loss of a father figure in their lives, particularly when their mother either prevented them from seeing their parent or did not facilitate them having contact.

[I miss] like the connection you should have between you and a father. There's a young girl and her father that get a bus to her school every morning from my bus stop, and just seeing them connect and hang out is pretty depressing on my part because I haven't had that. (JANE, AGED 15YRS)

Yeah, it affected all of us kids, because we wouldn't have a father to bring us up properly. (TIM, AGED 15YRS)

So over the years, instead of him coming out and me and my brother communicating with him, we lost communication for about eight years. Never saw him or anything, then a couple of months ago, it was really strange, I ran into him on a bus. It was a little, really strange, and he didn't recognise me at first and I was like you're my dad and he was like, "Oh hello" and you're like, yeah. You catch up in those five little minutes...you're like it was really good to catch up with him. You just wonder what life would be like if you didn't lose that communication with him. It's strange. (ERIN, AGED 15YRS)



However, it wasn't only the loss of a parent that young people described, but the loss of extended family relationships.

Like to this day I have met her [my sister] once in her whole entire life. It's the shittiest feeling. Just like because my dad ex-girlfriend still gets to see her, that's what gets me the most. She's [ex-girlfriend] the most, she's just not there at all in the head, and she gets to see her, she gets to have her [my sister] at her house every like once a month or something and it kills me. (JANE, AGED 15YRS)

My dad's side of the family is the last place I would go. But again I don't feel comfortable with them, I don't really associate with them anymore so it would be weird just rocking up to the door. (ERIN, AGED 15YRS)

Young people also spoke about how this loss impacted them and their other family members, particularly the other parent.

Because having both parents, like they play roles, like they'd take you to doctors and stuff, but when you've only got one parent it's really hard. So I missed out on a lot of school. (SARAH, AGED 16YRS)

The feelings of loss for children and young people often began with not knowing where their parent was or what was being planned. Similar to the time of arrest, children and young people described being 'left out' of what was happening with their incarcerated parent, or only finding out by other often inaccurate sources.

Maintaining contact and a meaningful relationship with the incarcerated parent was also identified as problematic by young people. This is not only due to the need for the family to support the young person to maintain these connections, but also for the systems around them to provide support also.

It's hard for us because we have a bond with our dad and we like wrestling and being silly, and like whacking each other, like we're rough with each other and that's how we are, and we can't be like that at the jail because the security screws look... like they frown at us, and 'what are you doing'. But my brothers love wrestling with dad, like they used to wrestle with dad all the time, that was just what we do. And we can't do that now because he's in there and it's just, yeah you know it's a hands-off policy and it's hard to keep that bond. I think that's a big part of it, even though it seems so stupid. (MEL, AGED 17YRS)

A number of parents, particularly with younger children, described that it was their responsibility to maintain contact between the children and the parent incarcerated.

He wants contact with his kids, and I guess he's probably aware that I could pull the pin on him and say, you know, "sod you, I'm not having nothing else to do with you" and stuff. But it's not about me, it's about the kids. (REGAN, PARENT)

I wasn't sure how that first visit would go with them, how it would affect them and things like that. But yeah once he went back in, I gave it a go, and it was fine, the kids came out of there, it was more of a positive thing than a negative thing. It's just fear of the unknown in a way, not knowing how the whole visiting thing is set up. (JULIE, PARENT)

Grandparents also described the added responsibility of needing to maintain contact and support their children who were in prison, whilst also care for their grandchildren.

I'll be honest. It upsets me immensely that my son is still there. First time round, I thought "yes okay, he's an idiot". But when you go back the fourth time, you start to think "there's something not right". I used to give him a lot of sympathy and I probably still do a little bit. But he now has a little person and I feel he should be out here with her. But obviously, he's still got to get his act together. Which is why I'm still there supporting him. Obviously, I'm not doing it right because we're back where we started. (LINDA, GRANDPARENT)

Shame and stigma

A theme that emerged strongly throughout the young people's interviews was stigma and shame. Young people identified that they felt unable to trust, talk to or access any person outside of their immediate family or friends that were in similar situation. This lack of trust and need for 'silence' prevented them accessing help and support as well as developing new relationships with peers.

First starting with I don't want anyone to know, and then if I started opening up to people, it was like I'd open another window like should I trust these people? Are they going to tell anyone? What are people going to think of me if they find out? (ERIN, AGED 15YRS)

Parents also recognised the feelings of shame that their children experienced.

It's just the kind of shame or inadequacy, and that's just about my own self-esteem with how much pressure my situation brings. (JACQUI, PARENT)

You don't know what schools [are] like these days, you know, if they find out one of the parents has been in jail your kid suffers because the parent don't like the other parent, you know what I mean. And yeah, so my mum usually just takes her, yeah they don't ask. They don't need to know, it's none of their business, you know what I mean. (JENNY, PARENT)

Those who had disclosed their parents' incarceration had experienced bullying and teasing from their peers, or had been singled out by adults and as a consequence been made to feel ashamed.

A *Yeah, they {teachers} were just judging me because of my Dad.*

Q *So what kind of things were they saying then?*

A *Just basically just putting it in my face that's Dad's in jail that's basically what it was. (MATT, AGED 14YRS)*

Up here the students found out, I don't know how it happened I didn't say a word and no-one I know knows about it, that's the problem. So I'm guessing a teacher might have told a student to back-off and said I've got problems in life at the moment something along those lines and that sort of put me into a bad situation because everyone sort of oh, his Dad's in jail kind of thing. Lots of kids have their parents in jail but... (JASON, AGED 11YRS)

Parents and care-givers also recognised that telling others about their child's parent being incarcerated increased their child's vulnerability and risk of being bullied.

I've only really had one kind of thing come back in regards to my son, he came home one day and I think the kids had thought, the reason why parents go into jail, or people go into jail is when they commit murder, so somebody had suggested that to him in some way, that his father had murdered somebody that's why he was in jail, and he was really upset about that. (CLAIRE, PARENT)

They don't realise when they say to their friends and stuff, "Oh, my dad's in jail" the repercussions of that. These kids go home and say, "Oh, your dad's in jail" that's it, nobody wants to play with my child anymore. (JACQUI, PARENT)

We got to the counter and she pops in front of me and says to the lady "hi my mum's in jail" and she [the waitress] totally changed her perception, her body language everything and I

just felt so – she was so innocent, she didn't understand. It was just hard and the stigma she's probably had to live with is probably more than I could ever understand. (ESTELLE, PARENT)

Poor educational outcomes

All children and young people described difficulties with school. They highlighted that the chaos at home, distress and extra responsibility they experienced severely impacted the ability to concentrate, meet deadlines and achieve the academic success they aspired to.

Since dad's been away my grades have dropped dramatically. Just trying to find time to do homework – homework's hard to do, because I never have time to do it, I'm always running around for everybody else trying to, you know, taking mum grocery shopping, taking her here, taking her there. (MEL, AGED 17YRS)

I think mostly in like education, I think that's a big thing, and it's hardest for me and my brothers at the moment to keep up with school, so I think there needs to be a lot more support at school, just for keeping up with homework, and getting those extensions, and someone communicating with the teachers for you, letting them know, 'listen this is... I'm not going to tell you but this is what's going on, round about, and this person needs help'. And getting you that little bit of leeway, to make it a little bit easier. (SARAH, AGED 16YRS)

The support that children and young people received at school was dependent on relationships children and young people had with teachers. If young people did not trust the teachers then they were unlikely to seek any assistance. Furthermore, if young people asked for help and didn't receive it, then they were unlikely to ask again.

He was kind of shocked, yeah kind of like gobsmacked, didn't really know what to say so... yeah not really, not really helpful no. Not like, 'oh if you ever need anything, just let me know.' No there was none of that, it was kind of like 'oh, okay.' I think it's a bit... It's not very common for somebody to tell you their parents are in jail, and that's why you're struggling because you've had to take on all these responsibilities. It's not very common. So when you tell somebody they kind of take a step back and think, why. Yeah. He's telling me about these children in the drug world and yeah I was just like, 'is that how you see me, is

that like what you're visualising me as?' I didn't really know how to take it so yeah, it was just awkward, very awkward. (KAREN, AGED 15YRS)

Supports

Children and young people believed that parental incarceration impacted their lives in considerable ways, including issues such as homelessness, poverty, anxiety and depression. However as identified earlier, children and young people's access to support or help for these issues was often limited. This was a result of not only the shame and stigma they experienced, but also due to a lack of knowledge about what services exist to support them, and the difficulties in accessing services because of the way that they are provided.

They (the college) don't know a lot, because I don't really like talking about it to them, because it's just... yeah it's annoying when someone's in your ear, like 'oh we'd like to help you, come have counselling', and I'm just like 'no'. I've got too much going on, yeah I'd rather not get that kind of help. (MEL, AGED 17YRS)

Young parents also identified the difficulties they had in accessing services, in that many didn't know where or how to access support when their partner had been imprisoned. Parents who had themselves been incarcerated described feeling lost and scared about accessing support.

But I'm not that good, you know what I mean, I don't really know that much, I just know enough to help myself and my daughter. (ESTELLE, PARENT)

I've been to community services actually once and that was just when I got out of jail they gave us some food but I don't go to anything usually, I don't really know where they are. (JENNY, PARENT)

When asked to identify what supports would be helpful, a number of young people highlighted that more services at the prison would be useful, partly due to the fact that it is a 'non-stigmatising environment'. Parents also highlighted the prison as a place they would feel safe to access services.

The participants who had a parent incarcerated at AMC at the time of the interview identified the SHINE for Kids program as incredibly useful in that it was non-judgmental, located at the prison, and was child friendly. The 'art lady' provided activities that children could engage in and make visiting

more enjoyable. Access to these types of opportunities for children was quite limited for some. Parents with young children and grandparents who had the care of their grandchildren identified that everyday activities, such as going to playgroup, could be incredibly challenging.

“What do I say?” I go to playgroup and there’s all these other mums and yeah “my partner is in AMC” and then suddenly doors close and it’s pretty hideous. (CLAIRE, PARENT)

Subsequently, parents and grandparents with younger children highlighted a need for support groups that either met at the prison or indicated that they were specifically for children who have a parent in prison.

Older young people however had different ideas. Many young people described not needing any extra supports because they had a strong sense of self-reliance. One of their key coping strategies was feeling good about ‘doing it on their own’. However, if they needed that bit of extra support they would turn to close friends.

Like I’m not the kind of person to really accept help. I like doing everything myself, and I’d rather struggle than ask for help from somebody else. (SARAH, AGED 16YRS)

It was pretty much just me by myself, I had to rely on myself to get food for school so I could have food for school to feed myself, look after myself. You can only really rely on yourself, you can’t blame anyone else. If you don’t get a good year ten it’s not anyone’s fault but your own. (ERIN, AGED 15YRS)

But yeah my best coping strategy is just my friends really, so yeah they’ve just been really, really supportive. And a lot of dad’s friends have been really, really supportive and helped me out a lot since he’s gone away, with like money and helping out mum get to work and stuff like that. So they’ve been really supportive, I’ve had a lot of people around me willing to help. (KAREN, AGED 15YRS)

Then I was left again, I was alone all by myself again, and then I found this one friend and she’s - her family’s very much alike, she’s Aboriginal as well and like her dad is very much the same except he doesn’t go to the extreme and I don’t think he’s on the drugs and everything. Like we are just so alike and our lives are so puzzle, like puzzle piece perfect that I fit. (JANE, AGED 15YRS)

Increased caring responsibilities

For a number of young people, parental incarceration meant taking on a caring role that they had not previously experienced. Young people were often given the added responsibility of caring for siblings, household chores, providing transport, facilitating contact between siblings and the incarcerated parent, and caring for their other parent.

This is the first time he's been in there, so it's been pretty difficult, because my mum's not very... stable. So a lot of the pressure's been put on me personally, looking after the family, and financially, yeah taking on a lot of responsibility since dad's been gone. So it's been tough, yeah. (MEL, AGED 17YRS)

It's scary, like because I don't want to go anywhere, I don't want to leave my mum at home. (JANE, AGED 15YRS)

Whilst most children and young people did not identify with being a 'carer', a large number of young people spoke about the responsibilities that they had for siblings and also how they had to take on more responsibility for themselves.

Emotional distress

The majority of children and young people described feeling 'stressed' about their lives and the issues that they were experiencing. The 'older' young people highlighted their experiences with anxiety and depression and described feeling a range of negative emotions and behaviours. Many of these feelings were associated with the incarceration of their parent but also the 'byproducts' of parental incarceration, such as homelessness, loss, instability and insecurity.

It's just tough, everything is just tough, yeah. Without having that extra partner there to help support the family – when you go from having two people supporting your family, and you halve that completely, yeah it puts a big impact on everyone's lives, and it's really hard. (ERIN, AGED 15YRS)

I don't know like sadness and shit. Like with my dad being in trouble all the time and stuff like that. Just like depression. I don't know what else. (MARK, AGED 16YRS)

His grades [young brother] have dropped dramatically, he's just been naughty at school, swearing at teachers and yeah. (MEL, AGED 17YRS)

Like I have days of, I don't know, it's the depression I guess, like I've never actually seen a doctor about it but like my aunty that suffers from it she's diagnosed with depression, and my little sister also both.(KAREN, AGED 15 YRS)

One parent summarised her view about the impact on children:

People in prison have more chaos in their life, things are more stressful and usually kids that have had a parent in prison are often harder to parent. (JASMINE, PARENT)

A number of young people also describe emotionally distancing themselves from the challenges they experienced.

I don't think I really have coped, like I don't think it's kind of like hit me yet because I've just been so busy looking after everybody else since dad's gone away, it's kind of been really, really full on. (MEL, AGED 17YRS)

I don't really think about it. (MARK, AGED 15YRS)

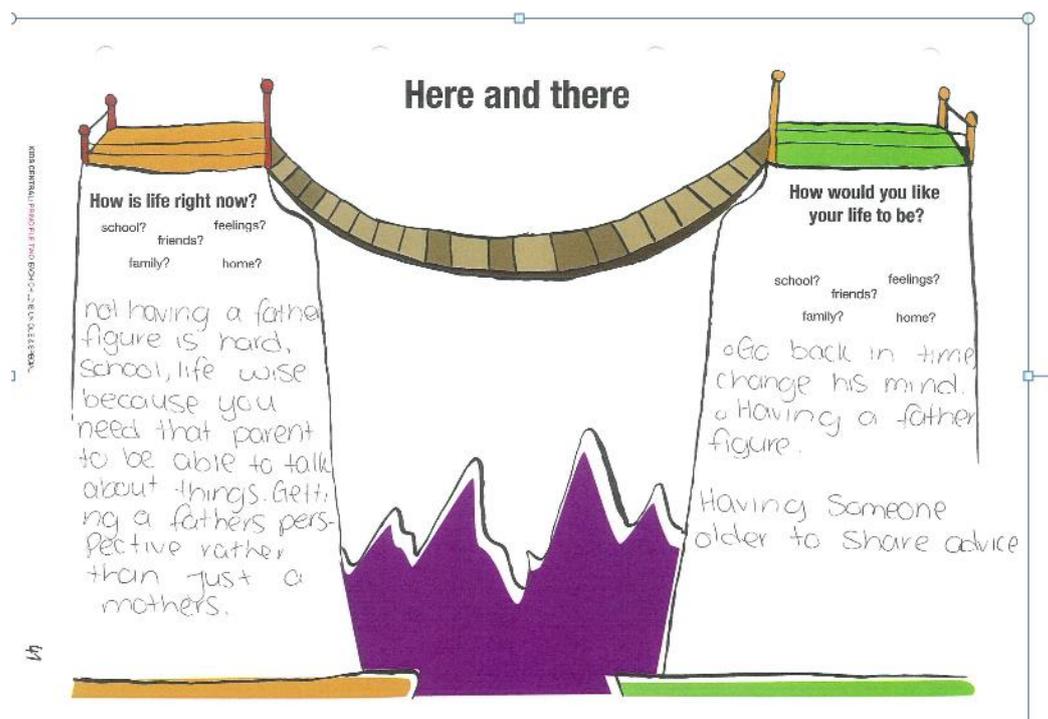
I think I just - I play a lot sport and it keeps my mind off a lot of things or I go and I get, ask for extra shifts at work so I just keep my mind off everything and then yeah. (JANE, AGED 15YRS)

One coping strategy to deal with the stress identified in the narratives of children and young people and their parents and care-givers was that of looking to a 'different future'. Children and young people spoke about how they wanted to achieve something different in their lives to what their parents had done, whilst parents spoke about how they wanted their children to have a different life from the one that they had.

His father and I said yeah, and he said, you know he kind of, he worded it better than this, but he said "look you don't want to end up being like your father, you want to be able to

grow up and have a good choice in your life so that you don't end up in jail. If daddy had this kind of opportunity to..." (CLAIRE, PARENT)

Like he's influenced me to be nothing like him. Like some of my friends smoke weed or they do drugs and I'm like that's not cool. Like I'll support you, I'll be there for you, I'll still be your friend but I won't touch weed - like someone tried to offer me a cone this afternoon. I was like, "offer me one again and see what happens" because that's just not cool. I don't ever want to touch that stuff because I've seen what it's done to like my family and everything and they were just like oh. (JANE, AGED 15YRS)



Financial disadvantage

A number of parents, children and young people reported how the imprisonment of a parent/spouse impacted significantly on family finances. Whilst a number of participants described coming from families that already had low incomes, nearly all described that the incarceration of the other parent either reduced joint incomes or inhibited the remaining parent's capacity to work.

Yeah, so I guess people like me are relying a bit more on St Vinnie's every now and again, because I find I have to call them sort of every couple of months I get to a point where I've

got no money for food so to speak, or petrol, and they'll come and kind of give me \$80 to get me through [that] sort of thing. (CLAIRE, PARENT)

The electricity – dad used to pay the electricity bill, now mum can't afford it, so our electricity is going to get shut off, so that's been pretty full on. (MEL, AGED 17YRS)

Low incomes also prevented some young people from accessing services and other social opportunities. It also meant that young people were put in the position of having to ask for financial support in order to participate in regular school activities.

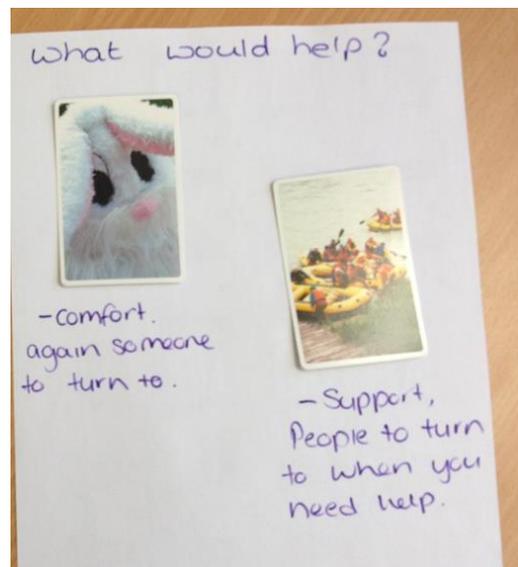
I've had to get the Principal to help me pay for my Year 10 uniform and stuff.

Q *Is that okay? The school's quite good at helping out with the finance bits?*

A *If I talk to the youth worker then yes, but I talked to my year adviser and he was like, "You can't hand in the note without a deposit, I'm going to need a deposit before I can actually order it." So I was like oh, so I had to come down here, I talked to the front office ladies and they were like no, so I came down here and talked to the youth worker about it. (ERIN, AGED 15YRS)*

So she was the only psychologist that I would talk to, and when she went private it was just way too expensive – way too expensive for me to go see her. So I tried other psychologists, but (it didn't work out)... (MEL, AGED 17 YRS)

My friend's helping me get through a lot of stuff too. She pays for my MyWay [bus] card to be topped up, she randomly just gives and gives and gives. Then when I get money I try and (pay her back), like I got my school bonus money and I went school shopping and lingerie shopping because I needed some. I was like to her "do you want this?" ... She's like, "No." She says I don't have to pay her back, but if I ever have to pay her back, it would be so much money, but I'm so grateful for her. (KAREN, AGED 15YRS)



A number of older young people and parents described how expensive it was to visit AMC and the impact that this had on day to day costs. Paying for petrol to get there and buying tokens for food and drink was identified as a huge cost for families, particularly when they were taking a number of children with them. Visiting AMC is also expensive particularly for those who do not reside in the ACT.

Yeah, it's very expensive, Petrol and tokens when we get there, yeah. But yeah it's difficult.
(TIM, AGED 15YRS)

... I suppose you can get the tea and coffee. But it can work out a bit expensive by the time you get whoever is there drinks and a munchie from the machine, or whatever. Like, my God, it's \$30 a visit every time we go. He wants a milkshake and a coffee and chocolates and chips, and oh, God. (JASMINE, PARENT)

Instability and homelessness

For many of the young people participating in this study their lives were often characterised by instability. For some young people this instability came in the form of a lack of secure housing as well as the lack of a secure adult in their lives. A number of these young people described having to live with friends, boyfriends or in refuges due to no longer being able to live with their parent. For two of the young people this was due to their parents' incarceration. For others it was because of parental drug and alcohol issues or family conflict (usually in blended families). For some, this instability began at a very young age.

I was really young. It was really difficult and then my dad, when he got out of jail... he couldn't cope....then we ended up moving to [crisis accommodation]. (SARAH, AGED 16YRS)

All the young people described how homelessness has also impacted upon their lives and compounded the issues of parental incarceration. For the two who were homeless because of parental incarceration, the 'state' of being homeless had continued to lesser or greater extent ever since.

I was just squeezing in anyway, I was living on the floor of her [mother's friend] son's bedroom...So it was very uncomfortable and squishy and I'd go out for three nights and come home for one because it was just so squishy and I couldn't take it. She [mother's

friend] kind of got sick of that too... just got sick of it and she was like, "I'm sorry but you're going to have to find somewhere else to live, we don't have the room." (ERIN, AGED 15YRS)

She [the youth worker] tried getting me into refuges but I really don't like refuges because I reckon they just bring you down again. Like the people that go to refuges and stuff and I just chose to not go to a refuge. I was couch surfing for a bit with my friends and then once I found my boyfriend we sorted something out. (SARAH, AGED 16YRS)

The need for security and stability was evident in many of these young people's narratives, both in the physical sense of stable housing but also in the need for trusting relationships that they could depend on. The clear picture to emerge from the young people's accounts of their lives was one of loneliness. This was apparent not only in their day-to-day lives, but also through a deeper lack of meaningful and enduring relationships in their lives. The result was that young people felt alone.

In all honesty I feel like I have nobody. (KAREN, AGED 15YRS)

I had no-one. Like I've pretty much been on my own the whole time... it is so hard. (MARK, AGED 16YRS)

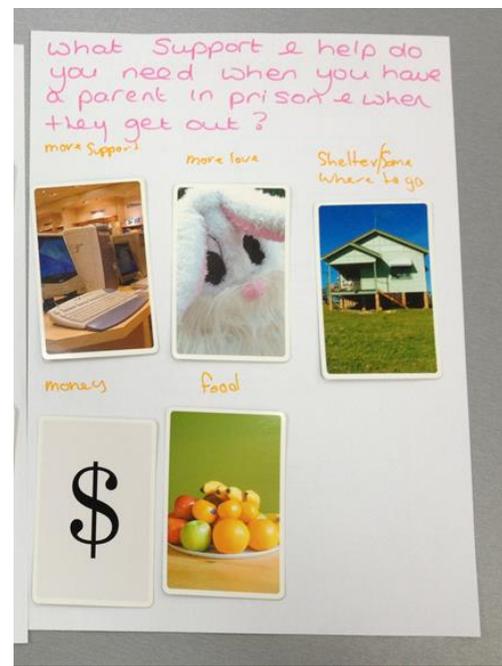
I just want my own place so if anything happens I'm not the one that has to leave. (SARAH, AGED 16YRS)

Implications for Support

The children and young people who participated in this study experience a myriad of inter-related issues including homelessness, mental health issues, family conflict and divorce, neglect, isolation and poverty. They described leading lives characterised by experiences of instability, the loss of important relationships, social exclusion, and trauma, a lack of both formal and informal supports, low educational achievement and problematic transitions into adulthood. Such issues directly impact and are impacted by parental incarceration, and combined, can make their lives both inside and outside of the family home extremely complex and challenging.

The complexity of their lived experience and the secrecy, fear and stigma, which seemed for some to characterise their existence, also created many service barriers and meant that often their needs were not being adequately addressed. The majority of children and young people in

this study had low levels of engagement with services, and of those who were engaged, most said they were not receiving the level of support that they required. The interviews highlighted that many children and young people had negotiated and survived some difficult times. Many were still trying to get through them.



Potential strategies and approaches to better support children and young people

Although small in scale and exploratory in nature, this project has highlighted some key issues experienced by children and young people who have experienced parental incarceration. This is an important first step into the investigation of an issue that has so far received little attention from policy makers and the service system. Although there is an emerging body of work that has explored this area and the impact on children, there have been few attempts to talk to children about these experiences and to understand how these experiences make sense to them.

The project also aimed to develop an understanding of the kinds of support children and young people were accessing, and what further support would be useful for them. Putting children's voices

at the forefront so that the services that surround children can hear from them, and about what they regard as important, form the core of our findings. This final section discusses the major themes that emerged from the needs analysis with regard to the possible implications for practice within the systems that impact and support children and young people who experience parental incarceration.

Impacts of parental incarceration

Children from families experiencing parental incarceration often experienced difficulties at school, with their health, and in making and retaining friends. Unsurprisingly, education and access to educational activities was an important issue for children and young people, and for many, this was what was most tangibly affected by parental incarceration.

Many young people felt that parental incarceration often resulted in them living a chaotic and unpredictable existence, which in turn made it hard to concentrate and keep up with school work. As a result a number of young people describe missing out on school and school based activities.

Others spoke about conflicts they had with teachers and/or other students. Depending on their age and developmental stage, children found it easier or harder to make new friends, experienced bullying from peers, or identified themselves as the 'bully'. Many young people stated that teachers didn't understand the difficulties they were experiencing, or they couldn't tell them because of the embarrassment or shame associated with parental incarceration. They also described how hard it was to fit in at school, and as they grew older, often made friends with other young people who had had similar experiences.

At the same time though, many young people identified that a focus on pursuing academic success was a coping strategy for them. This finding is in agreement with research from the United States (US) that also acknowledges how engagement in education increases resilience and opportunities to participate in other social activities thereby preventing further exclusion (Beck & Jones, 2007; Nesmith & Ruhland, 2008). Young people in this study further stated that getting an education differentiated them from their parents and opened up opportunities for better employment. In line with current research, children and young people highlighted the need for extra support at school which didn't stigmatise them, but that created a more understanding environment. They identified the need for flexibility to deal with issues at home and to maintain contact with parents whilst incarcerated. For this to occur, children and young people identified the importance of community

awareness programs and education for teachers and students about what it meant to have a parent in prison.

Schools have an important role not only in the education of children, but in having a key opportunity to assist vulnerable children and their families as a universal service. Recognising the impact that parental incarceration has on children's lives, schools can play an important role by providing children with a sense of security and predictability. However, it was clear from the study that primary schools, high schools and colleges in the ACT require education about the impact of parental incarceration on children and how they may be better placed to support them.

Supporting children with parental relationships

The challenges that children and young people experienced in their relationships with their incarcerated parents strongly emerged from this study. Many of the children and young people described that the expectations of the relationship they wanted with their parents differed considerably to the relationship that they actually experienced. A small number of young people had been extremely distressed about the fact that their parent had committed a crime; so much so that they actively chose not to pursue a relationship with them. However for the majority of young people the issues that were most distressing were focused around feelings of being 'let down' by their parent or not being 'cared about'. In both cases, many of the young people interviewed described how critical it was that they did not become what they perceived their parents to be, or repeat the mistakes of their parents.

Nevertheless, this realisation did not deter children and young people from wanting meaningful relationships with their incarcerated parent. In line with studies from the US (Beck & Jones, 2007; Nesmith & Ruhland, 2008; Schlafer & Poehlmann, 2010), children and young people's desire to maintain or make contact with their parent was discussed in all interviews. Mostly, children and young people expressed not wanting to lose contact with their parent despite the crimes that their parent had committed. Children and young people expressed their desire to get to know their parent and experienced significant feelings of anger, loss, and sadness when they were either prevented from seeing their parent, or when their incarcerated parent chose not to maintain contact with them. Similar to the findings of research conducted by Posley (2011) and Muhammad (2012), many children and young people stated a desire to get to know their parents despite their incarceration, and this meant that they strongly elected to see their parent in prison.

However for older children and young people, access to their parent was often problematic due to the other competing demands in their lives, such as school and sports. Young people also described their age as being an issue when it came to seeing their parent in prison. Young people described difficulty accessing the prison and seeing their parent when they were underage if they didn't have an 'adult' accompanying them. This was problematic for young people whose parents had separated or where the parent caring for the young person did not approve of the young person visiting.

Visiting times at AMC, whilst significantly better than other prisons experienced by young people, still impacted upon the frequency of visits available to young people. Young people also described that the quality of the visit further impacted upon their continued attachment and relationship with the parent. For the older boys in particular, who often did not want participate in art and craft, sitting still and just chatting was difficult and often unenjoyable.

It is important to add at this point that while one US study found that children were scared of visiting their parents in prison, and noted that the surroundings were not child friendly; all young people and parents who had experiences of visiting at other interstate prisons identified that AMC was considerably more pleasant, more child-friendly and less 'scary' to visit. Similar to Beck and Jones (2007), most of the children and young people in this study who had been able to maintain contact with their parent, articulated that this was a positive experience regardless of the crimes committed by their parent.

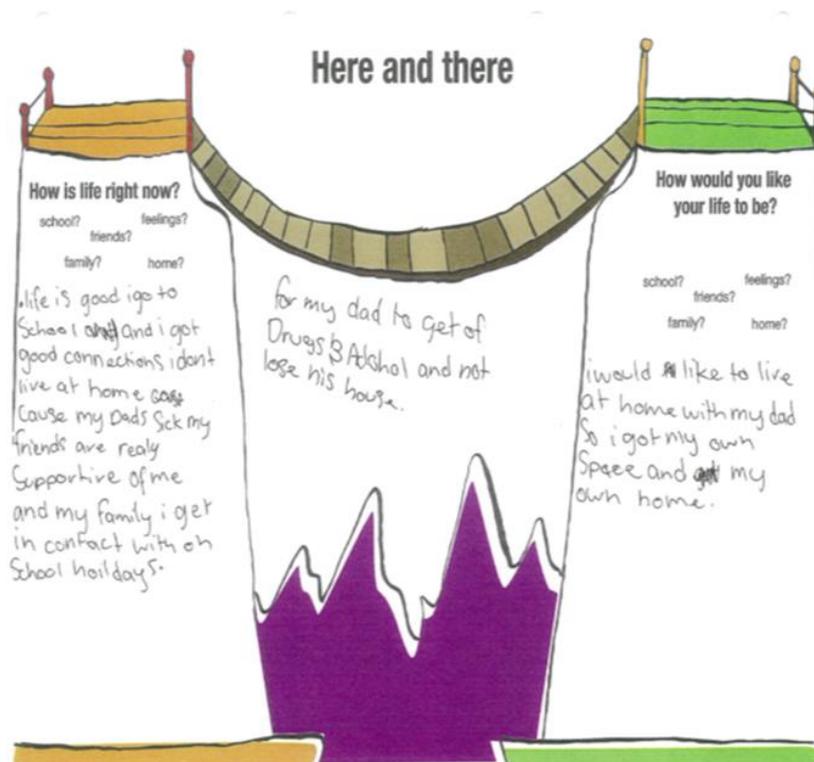
There were also a number of families in this study that had other family members incarcerated at the same time. One young person had a sibling incarcerated at the same time as their father; another young person had both parents incarcerated at the same time; and a third young person had experienced multiple members of their family being incarcerated at different times. These young people were more likely to rely on themselves and have less formal support than others. They described feeling disconnected with services and as well as with informal supports such as peers. Young people described needing support to maintain important family relationships that were not necessarily 'biologically' connected. One Aboriginal young person explained that this began with the recognition that these 'other' family relationships are of equal importance to 'biological' child-parent relationships.

These findings suggest that children and young people receive little formal support from the time of their parents' arrest and throughout the duration of their parents' incarceration at a broader

systems level, as well as at an individual level, in order to preserve or sustain their relationship with their incarcerated parent. Nor is it apparent that there are any formal supports offered to those who choose not see their parent or those who feel 'abandoned' by their incarcerated parent who stops contact. Whilst it is critical that supports be offered to assist with parent-child relationships, it is also important for workers to pursue a more 'family-focused' perspective, in the broadest sense, to ensure that children with multiple incarcerated family members are also better supported.

Children and young people identified the following specific issues that they felt could be addressed by services in order to better maintain parent-child relationships at arrest and during incarceration:

- Counselling support to address issues such as loss, shame and disappointment;
- More flexible visiting arrangements at the prison for children who attend school or who live interstate;
- Assistance for young people aged under 18 years who do not have another adult to facilitate visits;
- Providing young person as well as child focused activities at prison visiting times;
- For the prison to consider how they may support positive connections between children and parent detainees in providing types of contact, such as the use of Skype; and,
- Inclusion of children and young people in the transition/release plan of the parent detainee.



Providing information to children and young people

Many of the children and young people in this study identified that they were not privy to information concerning the arrest of their parent, planned court appearances, sentencing or timing of their parents' release. Consequently, children and young people reported feeling insecure, scared and anxious. Parents of younger children reported that they did not always tell children that their parent was in prison, preferring to say that they had just gone away. It was evident however, that older children and young people wanted to be involved in these processes and discussions and believed on reflection that they would have wanted this to occur when they were younger.

Over the past decade a range of studies in the separation and divorce literature have advocated for more child 'inclusive' practice. At its core, child-inclusive practice is a process of developmental consultation and therapeutic conversation (Macintosh, 2007). Research highlights the importance of children's participation in family separation and the on-going benefits for children when they are included in decision-making. In addition to academic literature the UNCROC Article 13 states that children have the right to get and to share information, as long as the information is not damaging to them or to others. However, from the perspectives of children and young people involved in this study, the adult correctional justice system does not include them or advocate for their participation.

Children need information about the events and processes affecting their lives but this should be given in a way that recognises their developmental and emotional needs. The children and young people in this study responded in a variety of different ways to the question of what information they needed. These views reflect the literature on child-centred practice which asserts that children should be informed about events and processes that impact on them (Winkworth & McArthur, 2006; Save the Children, 2001). The provision of information to children can and should take a variety of different forms, for example, the use of child friendly language and the use of art or storytelling. Apart from ensuring developmental and emotional appropriateness, information should be provided in a way that responds to children's interests and wishes.

Listening and talking to children and young people

It is critical to connect with children and young people in their own right, engage with them as individuals, and listen to and acknowledge their experiences. This is important in the research context, but it is also important that services which come into contact with children and young people develop the skills of listening to children. Participation by children and listening to them

achieves positive outcomes, both for individual children and for children as a group. Individually, it improves the accuracy and relevancy of decision-making about individual children. In the case of children as a group, participation helps to uphold their rights as citizens and service users, fulfils legal responsibilities, and improves the quality of services that impact on them (Winkworth & McArthur, 2006).

It is clear from what children and young people reported in this study that it is important for workers to recognise that a 'one size fits all' response is not always appropriate. Sometimes children want to know specifically what is happening, and sometimes they only want to know that 'things are going to be okay'. Workers and others who come into contact with children who are experiencing parental incarceration need to take their cues from the child, whilst providing them with opportunities and appropriate spaces to express their needs.

Children and young people may also need support to talk with parents about what is happening for them, in order to help the child and to strengthen relationships within the family. Workers have a key role in facilitating opportunities for families to raise and resolve issues, particularly when children are afraid to do so themselves. This may happen for a range of reasons, including children not wanting to add to their parents' burden.

Supporting parents and siblings

For many young people with younger siblings, or a parent with a mental health or alcohol or other drug issue, the incarceration of a parent often meant that these children and young people assumed a level of caring responsibility significantly more than they had been used to prior to parental imprisonment. Whilst no child or young person identified themselves as a 'carer' it was apparent for some that their caring responsibilities prevented them from engaging fully in education, social activities with peers, and employment opportunities. It was also apparent that for 'older' young people, the task of facilitating contact between their detained parent and their siblings also became their responsibility.

This study highlights that many children and young people assume responsibility for accessing support for their family. However, young people spoke about how they were fearful of obtaining support outside of the family, or mainstream systems such as school or their general practitioner, in case they upset their parent, or because they feared services might intervene in a way that put the family at risk. Subsequently, young people highlighted the need to make connections with workers

they could really trust and talk to, within services they were already accessing. Recognising the significant impacts that assuming caring responsibilities can have, there is an urgent need to assist young people in managing their own emotional and mental health and wellbeing, as well as checking in with young people about other family members.

There is a considerable literature concerning the needs and experiences of young carers (Becker, 2005; Cass et al., 2009, Moore et al., 2009). This literature highlights the extent to which the promotion and provision of appropriate, accessible and affordable support services would assist in removing or reducing the barriers to education, training, employment and social participation. The majority of children and young people in this study did not access support services or really identify the need for more. They did, however, identify the need to access opportunities that they felt their peers had access to. They called for better support to be provided at the prison and the institutions they were already apart of, such as schools. They also called for more financial and practical supports that could ease the burden of having a parent imprisoned and the subsequent financial losses that were often incurred.

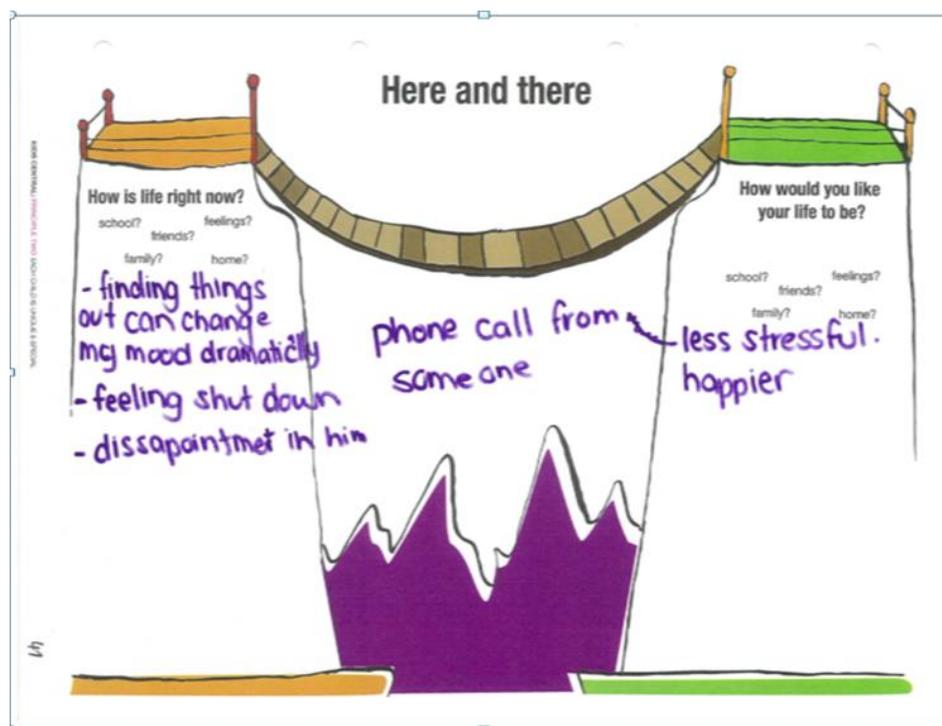
Non-stigmatising referrals and linking to services

Whilst many of the children and young people spoke about their emotional disconnection from the challenges in their life and their limited need for support (outside of financial and practical support), they also identified that any future support that was to be provided needed to be free from the stigma and embarrassment. Young people described that one way to ensure this occurred within schools and other places they accessed, was to provide education seminars so there was a better understanding in the local community about the issues children of prisoners experience.

Parents also highlighted the need for schools, playgroups and universal services to be aware that children and young people who have a parent in prison may need extra support at certain times, even if they do not recognise it. However, it was important for services to be aware that families need not be singled out in a stigmatising way. Parents described the possibility of providing services directly targeted at families with a parent in prison. Suggestions provided included advertising these directly through the prison or Centrelink. Programs would be considered more credible if people who had experienced similar situations themselves were involved in the planning and management.

Stable and secure living arrangements

Much of the fear and distress about parental incarceration reported by the young people in this study was due to the insecure and sometimes unsafe nature of their living arrangements when their parent was imprisoned. The identification of families and young people at risk of homelessness, and the planning for safe, secure and stable accommodation must be made as early as possible, when a parent is incarcerated. This reflects the key role that housing plays in enabling families to stay together during and after incarceration, and points to the need for services working with families to work in a more integrated way.



Responding to the needs of young children

Many of the families observed at AMC had children under the age of five years. Whilst we were not able to interview these children, we did interview a number of parents who had young children. It was evident from these interviews that children were already experiencing a number of challenges due to their parents' imprisonment and that these were likely to continue to further disadvantage them as they grew older. Parents' descriptions of shame and stigma, poverty and social isolation all had significant impacts on their children's development.

A large body of research demonstrates that the first few years of a child's life are considered to be the most important developmental phases in their lives. The family, social and cultural environments that are involved in and contribute to children's nurturing and education actually influence "the

nature of gene expression and functioning through the life-course” (Silburn & Walker, 2008). Given that many challenges and difficulties in the lives of vulnerable children and their families are complex and interlinked, early intervention initiatives are more likely to create benefits for children and families.

Conversely, it is also more likely that those parents, particularly those without informal supports, who potentially have the most to gain from services, are the least likely to actually access them (Ghate & Hazel, 2002 cited in Katz et al., 2007). Parents with young children highlighted the lack of opportunities they had for support for both themselves and their children. This study suggests that the provision of services at AMC for non-detained parents with young children, such as a supported playgroup, could provide important early intervention opportunities for both children and parents.

Building on strengths

Whilst much of this report focuses on the needs and challenges of young people who have experienced a parent in prison, it has to be said that many of these children and young people are extremely resourceful and have a range of coping strategies that have assisted them to survive some very difficult times. Many of the children and young people spoke about how they coped in these situations and what had helped them survive. Strategies that emerged most frequently included ‘emotionally disengaging’ from situations and ‘dreaming to be different’, ‘relying on friends in similar situations’, ‘doing well at school’ and ‘relying only on themselves’. Such coping strategies have been documented in this report where relevant.

Children and young people discussed how they and other family members did their best to ensure their safety and wellbeing when a parent was imprisoned. The views of both children and young people reflect a strengths perspective which focuses on the capacities and capabilities of people, and aims to utilise and develop opportunities for individuals and communities to express and work towards in the future. Whilst parents often felt judged and criticised by services, which sometimes impacted on their help-seeking behaviour, children and young people focused on what their parents could do rather than what they couldn’t. Parents and children reported that organisations often framed their work around the deficits in their lives, and that to implement a strengths approach with children and families means they must assume that they can, with opportunities, support and information, make decisions and plans to ensure the safety and wellbeing of their children when a parent is incarcerated.

At the broader system level, it is clear that early intervention – most often at the point of arrest - is required to identify children and young people who may be more at risk of experiencing negative impacts of incarceration such as homelessness when a parent is incarcerated (through, for example, improved communication between different areas within corrective services and human service departments, such as housing and child protection). Providing assistance to children and young people earlier is vastly less harmful for the families involved and far more efficient in terms of community resources.

Children and young people experiencing parental incarceration in the ACT deserve, and undeniably have a right to expect adequate support and assistance wherever possible, to ensure their safety and wellbeing and reduce the negative impacts they endure as a result of having a parent incarcerated. For this to eventuate, urgent and comprehensive changes need to be made to the social policy and service system landscape.

Appendix A

Interview Questions for Children and Young people

Introduction:

- About the project and aims of project
- Explanation of participant's rights
- Gift vouchers
- Ice breaker (could use 'openers' from deepspeak)

Demographic Information:

- Age
- Gender
- Who do you live with
- Siblings
- Cultural background
- Is Mum or Dad in prison?
- How long has your parent been in prison?
- How many times has your parent been in prison?
- How old were you when your parent first went to prison?
- Do you know when your parent will get out of prison?

Questions:

1. When did you first find out that Mum or Dad was going into prison?
To get an idea of how much they were told, how much warning they got, how involved they were in what was happening
2. What happened before then? Contextual information about arrest etc.
3. What or who has been helpful when Mum or Dad is in prison?
4. Why was this helpful? What was said or done that helped and supported you?
What was working well, what services are working with them effectively, what type of support helped: emotional, practical, instrumental, informational? Where help was needed the most?
5. Who or what was the most helpful, and why?
Formal (e.g. services) or informal (e.g. friends, family), what area of need is being filled?

6. What were the things that you needed more help and support with?
7. Were you offered support from anyone or anywhere else?
8. If you were able, what things would you change to make Mum or Dad being in prison easier for you?
10. What is different about the help that you need now compared to the help that you needed then? (e.g. compared to first time dad was in prison, or compared to when mum first went into prison – what people/things might you have drawn then?)
11. If you had to tell someone what it was like have Mum or Dad in prison, what words would you use?

Debrief.

Interview questions for parents and carers

Demographics:

- Name
- Number of children under their care, ages of child/children and relationship to child (e.g. mum, aunt, foster carer)
- Relationship to prisoner parent (e.g. partner/ex-partner, mother)
- Length of time child has been under their care
- Usual living arrangements of child when parent not in prison

Questions:

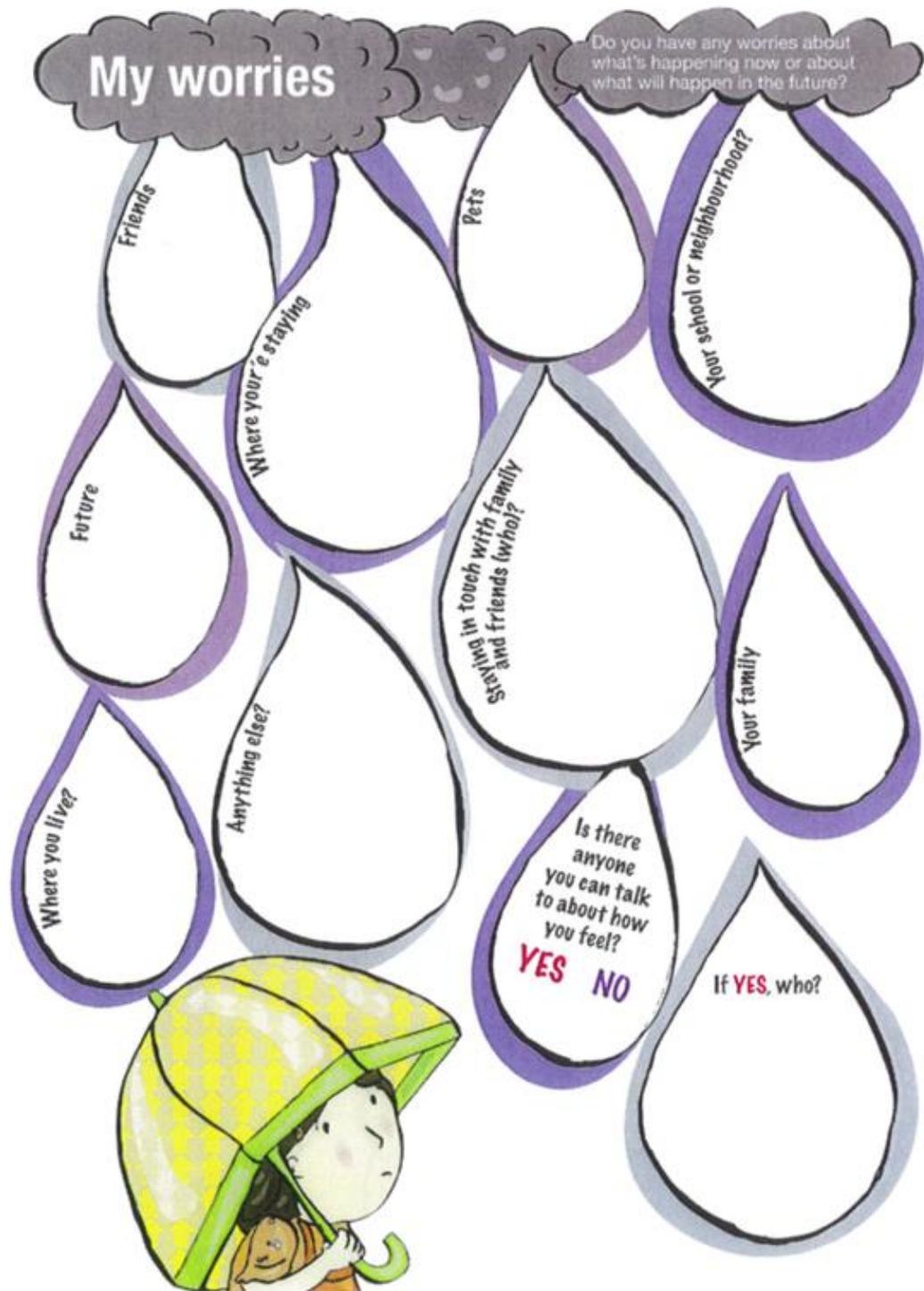
1. What happened when your child's parent went into prison? What lead up to the parent going into prison?
2. What are some of the challenges:
for your child when their Mum or Dad is in prison?
For you as their carer?
3. Were there particular times over the course of the parent's imprisonment that were especially challenging (e.g. arrest, trial, release):
For your child?
For you as a carer?
4. What was challenging about these times?
5. What sort of help were you or your child offered to make having a parent in prison less challenging? Who was the most helpful and what did they do?
6. What sort of help would you and your child like? What would it look like and who would be the best person to provide this help?

7. Has your child participated in any of the SHINE for Kids activities or programs?
Example: prison in visits program or family days. If yes, has this been helpful? If yes, why? If no, what could SHINE for Kids do to make it more helpful?

8. Is there anything else that you think is important for us to know about the needs of your child while their parent is in prison?

Appendix B

Interview tools for children and young people



Sharing my story

 <p>Who needs to know?</p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; height: 150px; width: 100%;"></div>	 <p>When is it OK to tell them?</p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; height: 150px; width: 100%;"></div>	 <p>What I don't want them to know</p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; height: 150px; width: 100%;"></div>	<p>My signature</p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; height: 150px; width: 100%;"></div>
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People in my life



- Family that lives with me?
- Family that doesn't live with me?
- Friends of the family? Teachers? Counsellors?
- Friends? Class mates?
- Anyone else?

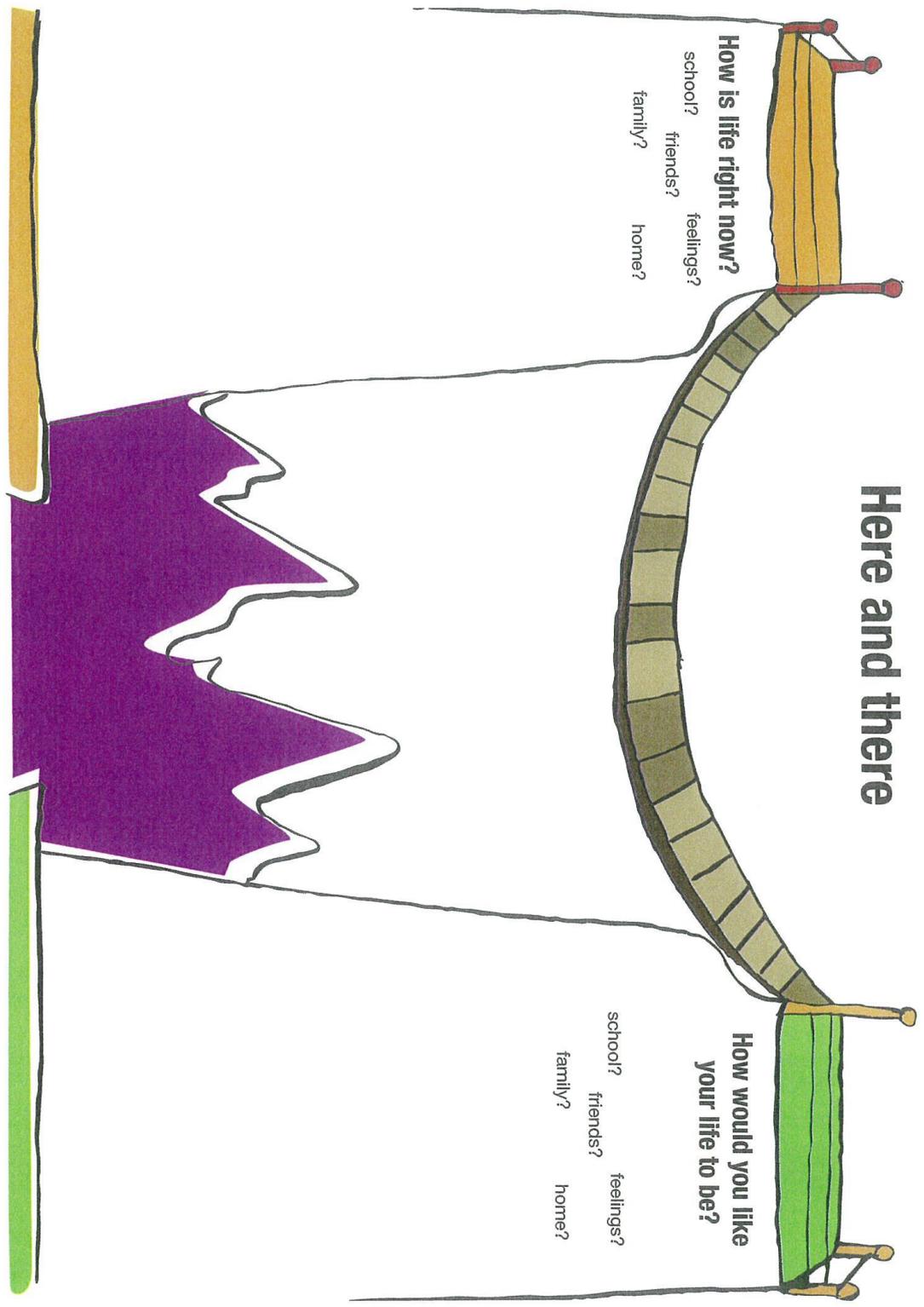
Here and there

How is life right now?

- school?
- friends?
- feelings?
- family?
- home?

How would you like your life to be?

- school?
- friends?
- feelings?
- family?
- home?



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