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Improving wellbeing and educational outcomes for children in Wales affected by parental imprisonment: scoping study

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This document is also available in Welsh.

The ASPIRE Project:

Improving wellbeing and educational outcomes for children in Wales affected by parental imprisonment: scoping study

To give the project a clear identity for stakeholders, the acronym 'ASPIRE' (Actioning a Schools and Prisons Independent Research Evaluation) was used throughout the project.

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Views expressed in this report are those of the researchers and not necessarily those of the Welsh Government.

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Glossary

ACE

Adverse Childhood Experience

ASPIRE

Actioning a Schools and Prisons Independent Research Evaluation

COPE

Children of Prisoners Europe

EOTAS

Education Otherwise Than at School

ESTYN

Estyn is the education and training inspectorate in Wales

EWO

Education Welfare Officer

FABI

Families Affected by Imprisonment

FFOPs

Families and Friends of Prisoners

HMPPS

His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service

IWW

Invisible Walls Wales

IW CIC

Invisible Walls Community Interest Company

NEET

Not in Education, Employment or Training

NICCO

National Information Centre on Children of Offenders

PACT

Prison Advice and Care Trust

POPS

Partners of Prisoners Support group

PRU

Pupil Referral Unit

SHRN

The School Health Research Network

UNCRC

United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

YOI

Young Offender Institution

Acknowledgements

This report is informed throughout by the views and experiences of children and young people with experience of parental imprisonment, parents and carers in the community, and parents in prison. The ASPIRE team is extremely grateful for their input and that of the expert advisory group (see Annex B), as well as practitioners and policy leads from education, social work, criminal justice, and the third sector. To preserve anonymity, names have not been used.

The ASPIRE Team

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Sylvia Stevenson (Research Assistant) is a PhD student at Cardiff University.

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1. Introduction and background

1.1 In July 2023, the Welsh Government commissioned the ASPIRE team for a period of 12 months to:

- review existing literature and practices relating to support for children affected by parental imprisonment
- consider the extent to which the 'school zone' model in HMP and YOI Parc represents good practices and how it operates
- consider what a national model of support for children affected by parental imprisonment in Wales could look like.

1.2 To support positive change for those at risk of offending in Wales, the joint [Welsh Government and HM Prison and Probation Service \(HMPPS\) Framework \(2018-2023\)](#) includes as a priority the need to support the families left behind following sentencing. The framework recognises the potential impact of imprisonment on families, referred to by Lord Farmer (2017) as the 'hidden sentence' for partners, parents, and children with imprisoned parents.

1.3 Imprisonment of a household member is recognised as an Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE), proven to increase the risk of significant effects on health and wellbeing throughout life (Felitti et al., 1998). One area where parental imprisonment may present challenges for children and is of particular interest for this project is within their school and education.

1.4 As detailed in this report, support for children with a parent in prison is currently varied, with pockets of good practice but no strategic or national model. The Invisible Walls Project, identified as an example of good practice by Lord Farmer, has been running at His Majesty's Prison and Young Offender Institution (HMP and YOI) Parc since 2012. One element of this project, the School Zone initiative, facilitates contact between the prison and schools, supporting parents in engaging with their child's education and helping schools support children affected by imprisonment more effectively.

1.5 The ASPIRE team reviewed existing evidence and literature about support models for children affected by parental imprisonment. It then produced a case study of the School Zone model and established (through collaboration with families, prisons, schools, public health, third sector services, and key policymakers) whether a

similar model could (or indeed should) be extended to children and families across Wales.

1.6 ASPIRE was delivered over five key phases from July 2023 to June 2024. These included:

- scene setting, including a review of the literature, policy, and practice related to children with a parent in prison and a baseline survey of the provision of support for children in Wales with a parent in prison
- a case study of HMP and YOI Parc's School Zone model
- a pan-Wales multi-agency stakeholder event at Cardiff University
- consultation with key stakeholders: children and families, education staff, prison staff from all prisons in Wales and HMPs Styal and Eastwood Park (women's prisons, where a high proportion of women from Wales are held), parents in prison, local authorities, and government decision-makers
- a final report summarising key findings and options for possible models of support for children and young people who have a parent in prison

1.7 An expert advisory group representing key stakeholders, including His Majesty's Prison & Probation Service (HMPPS), third-sector organisations delivering specialist support, and family members with experience of imprisonment, supported and informed the project throughout.

1.8 This report presents the context of support for children with a parent in prison in Wales. It summarises the literature, policy, and practice in the UK and abroad, included in the full [literature review appendix](#). It then explains the methodology for the project, with research tools included as annexes.

1.9 The report presents the project findings via nine themes that emerged as the work progressed. These were:

- a strengths-based, children's rights approach to support
- effective policy and resourcing to support practice
- centralised information and resources
- multi-agency working
- training for policy leads and practitioners across all sectors
- sensitive identification of children affected by parental imprisonment
- including all children in support
- safeguarding

- monitoring and evaluation: how do we measure impact?

1.10 The ASPIRE project provides the Welsh Government with core considerations and suggested actions for a collaborative, pan-Wales model of support for children when a parent goes to prison.

Background: a summary of the literature¹

The impact of parental imprisonment on children

- 1.11 While numerous studies have highlighted the potentially devastating impact of parental imprisonment on children (Condry and Scharff Smith, 2018; Jones et al., 2013; Kincaid, Roberts, and Kane, 2019; Robertson, 2011), limited literature is available regarding what works in improving outcomes for children.
- 1.12 As well as a significant sense of loss, many children experience stigma, social isolation, shame, and fear (Jones et al., 2013). Parental imprisonment can negatively impact children's short-term emotional wellbeing and their long-term health and social prospects (McGillivray, 2016). A major pan-European study, 'The Children of Prisoners: Interventions and Mitigations to Strengthen Mental Health', concluded that children impacted by parental imprisonment are at a significantly greater risk of suffering mental health difficulties than children who have not had parents in prison (Jones et al., 2013).
- 1.13 Children often face greater disruption when a mother, compared to a father, goes to prison, for example, having to move to live with relatives or friends, challenges at school or having to change schools (Minson, 2017 and 2020; Beresford, 2018), and potentially being separated from siblings (Rees, Waits, and Bezeczký, 2023). As Wales has no prison for women, children whose mother is imprisoned must travel greater distances to visit their mothers in custody (Rees et al., 2022).

Parental imprisonment as an Adverse Childhood Experience

- 1.14 ACEs are traumatic events that can significantly affect people's future health and wellbeing. Research generally identifies ten ACEs including experiences of domestic violence, abuse, parental drug and alcohol misuse, and imprisonment of a household member (Felitti et al., 1998; Kincaid et al., 2019; Brown, 2020).

¹ For more detail see the [literature review appendix](#).

Furthermore, children of parents in prison are more likely already to be experiencing other ACEs, which in turn can be exacerbated by parental imprisonment (Turney, 2018).

Identification and data collection

- 1.15 Between 1 October 2021 and 1 October 2022, an estimated 192,912 children in England and Wales had a parent in prison (Ministry of Justice, 2024). This figure is based on linked data rather than through any systematic data collection. Globally, almost no systematic collection of data takes place regarding the number of children left behind when a parent goes to prison (The Centre for Social Justice, 2022).
- 1.16 Gathering and sharing information to support children when a close family member goes to prison responds to a child's right to special care and assistance when deprived of their family environment, as per Article 20 of the [UN Convention on the Rights of the Child](#) (UNCRC); their right to information, as per Articles 9, 13, and 17 of the UNCRC; and their right to receipt of support under Article 6 of the [Council of Europe \(2018\) Recommendations](#) regarding children with imprisoned parents.
- 1.17 The collection of data should be used to highlight issues surrounding the impact of the imprisonment of parents and must not become a barrier to families when accessing support (Prison Reform Trust, 2022). Even for children who are known to be impacted by parental imprisonment, very few local authorities have developed plans to support children with a parent in prison (Raikes, 2021; Kincaid, Roberts, and Kane, 2019). The stigma of imprisonment can make families difficult to identify, and families in this position rarely seek support or draw attention to themselves when they are struggling (Weaver and Nolan, 2015).

The role of schools in supporting children affected by parental imprisonment

- 1.18 Children spend a significant amount of time in school. Schools provide regularity and structure and can ameliorate the difficulties children face. Schools are where they can be supported and feel safe (Mannay et al., 2015). Schools can, therefore, be a lifeline for children impacted by parental imprisonment, and they have the potential to provide an important community of compassion for families (Roberts, 2012; Children of Prisoners Europe (COPE), 2022a). A collective, multidisciplinary approach between schools, prisons, and third sector organisations is crucial in providing holistic support to children (COPE, 2022b).

1.19 However, schools can be a ‘locus of manifestation of stigma, in the form of bullying and ostracism’ (McGillivray (2016:31). Children with a parent in prison are often viewed differently from their peers, with classmates and teachers alike associating the actions of the parent with the children themselves (Warren, Coker, and Collins, 2019; Roberts, 2012). Pilotto (2024) states that prison-school initiatives alone are insufficient to improve relationships between schools and families affected by imprisonment and that training and preparation are essential.

A multi-agency approach

1.20 COPE’s briefing paper (2022b) emphasises how a collective multidisciplinary approach between schools, prisons, and community-based organisations is the strongest way of ensuring children receive the support they need. Similarly, research by Kincaid, Roberts, and Kane (2019) highlights the need for joined-up, whole-family, cross-sectoral support to benefit the diverse needs of children and their families. They suggest that joint protocols between local authorities, prisons, and probation services would help address the needs of the families of people held in prison based on an assessment of the needs of children.

Safeguarding

1.21 Parental imprisonment does not automatically equate to a safeguarding issue, as many children have appropriate care in place whilst their parent is in prison. Practitioners commonly, but falsely, assume that by going to prison, parents (and especially mothers) no longer have parental rights and that it will be damaging for children to visit their parent in prison (Rees, Waits, and Bezeczký, 2024). Many children wish to retain contact with their parent (Rees, Staples, and Maxwell, 2017), and their views must be considered in line with Article 2 of the UNCRC (regarding non-discrimination).

Recognising the needs of all children

1.22 Children with a parent in prison are not a homogenous group: they come from a wide range of social, economic, and ethnic communities, and there is diversity within the experience itself of having a parent in prison. Not all children with a parent in prison will be attending school. The literature emphasises the need to consider the **individual** needs of children affected by parental imprisonment (Sutherland and Wright, 2017). Child Impact Assessments help identify the needs of each child (Prison Reform Trust, 2022).

Background: a summary of relevant policy²

- 1.23 The review of Welsh legislation and policy showed that Wales already has policies that support a trauma-informed, ACE-responsive children's rights approach (such as [The Right Way](#), [The Children's Rights Scheme](#), and [Children First](#)). Children with imprisoned parents need to be recognised, and their needs should be embedded within these policies. Keeping children safe must also be central to any policy and practice supporting children with a parent in prison and be included in the Welsh Government's Code of Safeguarding Practice and All Wales Practice Guides.
- 1.24 The UK does not currently comply with international rules regarding the systematic recording of information on children and young people with a parent in prison. Collecting, aggregating, and publishing data would provide the necessary information to assess and respond to the needs of children affected by parental imprisonment through policies and resources. However, how this is done and how the information is used can be highly sensitive.
- 1.25 The education and training inspectorate in Wales (Estyn) already focuses on improving the quality of education, training, and outcomes for all learners in Wales. It highlights the importance of effective collaboration between education and other public services in supporting children, which has informed the ASPIRE project throughout. The Welsh Government's framework to embed a whole-school approach, which includes the four purposes of the curriculum (see [literature review](#)), is part of a broader whole-system approach to meeting the wellbeing needs of all children and young people. This must include the needs of children whose parents are in prison. Similarly, the Welsh Government's [Children and Young People's Plan](#) (2024) commits the Government to improve care and support for children and young people who cannot stay with their families, which, by definition, includes children with a parent in prison.
- 1.26 Welsh policies such as [A Framework to Support Positive Change for Those at Risk of Offending in Wales](#) (Welsh Government and HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS), 2018), the [Family and Significant Other Strategy](#) (HMPPS, 2019), and the [Women's Justice Blueprint](#) (Ministry of Justice and Welsh Government, 2019) sit within justice policy and consequently focus on the adult in the justice system.

² For more detail see the [literature review appendix](#).

Whilst Lord Farmer's reviews were seminal in recognising the important role of strong family relationships in reducing reoffending, children and their families must be recognised as rights bearers rather than conduits to improving outcomes for others. Rather, the need to support children when a parent goes to prison fits better within education and health policy areas, and children with imprisoned parents should be recognised explicitly in the code of practice in the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014. This is of particular concern for children with a mother in prison, as there are currently no women's prisons in Wales.

Background: practice review³

- 1.27 Alongside the literature and policy reviews, the ASPIRE team reviewed existing practice designed to support children affected by imprisonment across Wales, the UK, and further afield to inform the development of considerations for a pan-Wales model. This included prison-based family support, in-school support and resources, community-based support, and training. A detailed list of the UK-based organisations which support children affected by parental imprisonment can be found in Annex A. The services and resources that exist in Wales to support children impacted by parental imprisonment are summarised here:

³ For more detail see the [literature review appendix](#).

Table 1: Welsh services and resources for children affected by parental imprisonment

Type of service/resource	Provision
Prison-based family support and visiting services	<p>Invisible Walls Wales: HMPs Cardiff, HMP Usk, HMP Prescoed, and HMP and YOI Parc</p> <p>Pact (Prison Advice and Care Trust): HMP Swansea, HMP Eastwood Park, HMP Styal, and Visiting Mums programme</p> <p>Barnardo's: HMP Berwyn</p> <p>Families and Friends of Prisoners (FFOPs): HMP Swansea family peer support</p> <p>Y Bont: HMP Styal Cwlwm project</p> <p>Storybook Dads</p>
School and community-based support for children and young people	<p>Pact: Reach Out project, school outreach and peer support and befriending services for adults.</p> <p>Barnardo's: partnership work with schools and links with community-based services, including online parent-teacher meetings.</p> <p>Invisible Walls Wales: School Zone</p>
Strategic development work	<p>FABI North Wales Families Affected by Imprisonment: a multi-agency strategic approach to supporting children and families affected by imprisonment in North Wales. Funding for this programme ceased in August 2024.</p>
Training for professionals	<p>Pact</p> <p>Barnardo's</p> <p>Invisible Walls Wales</p>
Welsh resources and toolkits	<p>Pact Welsh Schools Handbook (2023)</p> <p>Barnardo's Family support for children and families affected by imprisonment - A handbook for Families First services in Wales (2012)</p> <p>Barnardo's Invisible Walls Accord Resource Toolkit (2024)</p> <p>Barnardo's Wales School's Handbook (2014)</p> <p>Welsh Government's Tips for Parents, Supporting your children when a parent goes to prison (2023)</p>

2. Methodology

2.1 The ASPIRE project was commissioned to provide options and considerations for a national model of support to improve the wellbeing and educational outcomes of children in Wales affected by parental imprisonment. The project utilised a mixed methodology, drawing on primary and secondary sources and gathering qualitative and quantitative data. The team aimed to engage with various stakeholders, including prison staff, teachers, policymakers, and families with personal experience, to gain a broad perspective of potential models. The methodology identified the potential needs of all participants and the possible risks associated with their engagement. The aim was to create inclusive methodologies that responded to these needs and mitigated any risks, informed throughout by a children's rights approach, as highlighted by the Children's Commissioner for Wales, and a trauma-informed approach, highlighted in the Estyn report (see [policy review](#)). The ASPIRE Wales project was shaped by The Right Way (Children's Commissioner for Wales, 2022). It adheres to its principles, particularly that children have meaningful opportunities to influence decisions about their lives. The project was granted ethical approval from the HMPPS National Research Council⁴ and the University of Huddersfield. The ASPIRE team was supported and guided by an expert advisory group of key stakeholders from prisons and probation services, education, child and family policy, health, third sector practitioners, and people with lived experience (see Annex B).

2.2 The ASPIRE project was delivered across five key phases over a 12-month delivery period:

- phase one: scene setting and foundations
- phase two: review of HMP and YOI Parc School Zone model
- phase three: foundation-building for a comprehensive model of support
- phase four: final gathering of evidence to develop the model
- phase five: presentation of the model within the final report

⁴ [Research at HMPPS - HM Prison and Probation Service - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

Phase one: scene setting and foundations

- 2.3 A review of the literature, policy, and practice considered the following questions:
- what is the policy context (across all departments, including criminal justice and education) in which support for children and families affected by imprisonment is being developed?
 - what is the impact of parental imprisonment on children's wellbeing and education, and what are their needs?
 - what models exist (in Wales, in the UK, and internationally) to support children with a parent in prison to receive the best support from their school and community and to encourage their parent in prison to engage with school?
 - what outcomes are evident for those children and parents supported through these models, and to what extent are they attributable to a particular school, prison, or community-based intervention?
 - what are the key policies, practices, guidelines, and resources necessary to achieve these outcomes?
 - what barriers prevent children with parents in prison from receiving support from their school or community?
 - what data currently exist in assessing outcomes for children with parents in prison in relation to the support they receive from school, and what are the key data gaps?
- 2.4 The ASPIRE team used keyword searches to update existing literature reviews conducted during their previous work. Searches focused primarily on English language literature from western countries, including combinations of search terms such as 'children/parent/prison/incarcerated/support/school' as well as searches of relevant databases such as JSTOR, Google Scholar, Sage, Pro Quest, and academic hubs from Cardiff University, the University of Huddersfield, and the University of Law. The team also sent out a 'call for evidence' to the expert advisory group and to members of the ASPIRE team's own networks (for example, via the International Coalition for Children with Incarcerated Parents, COPE network, and family service provider charities), to ensure that any relevant literature was also included in the review. Additional sources were gleaned from the bibliographies of the publications identified through this process.
- 2.5 The final part of phase one was a baseline assessment that would shape activities for the latter phases of the project, clarifying the prison and education landscape in

Wales, including baseline data capture. The intention had been to analyse this data before phase two; however, permissions to conduct this research element were delayed, so the baseline assessment took place later in the project, with the final data being gathered just before the stakeholder event (phase three). This online survey was sent to relevant stakeholders identified by the advisory group to gather information about the participants' knowledge of:

- relevant policies, frameworks, guidance, and resources
- how prisons in Wales support fathers in prison and their children
- how the women's prisons in England support mothers from Wales and their children
- how schools in Wales support children with a parent in prison
- any forms of support that are not school- or prison-related

In addition, the survey asked respondents to comment on their approach when working with either a parent in prison or a child with a parent in prison and to reflect on the key issues and challenges in developing a pan-Wales model.

- 2.6 The baseline survey received responses from 28 of an anticipated 30 key stakeholders. These included prison-based staff (eight, including a social worker), education (eight), probation (four), third sector (three), young people with lived experience (two), and one each from Welsh Government, Health, and local authorities. See Annex C for a copy of the survey questions.

Phase two: Review of HMP and YOI Parc's School Zone model

- 2.7 A comprehensive evaluation of the Invisible Walls scheme delivered in HMP and YOI Parc was published in 2017 (Clancy and Maguire, 2017) and contains pertinent findings relating to both outcomes for the parent in prison and, importantly for this project, the wellbeing and educational progress of the children whose parents were held in HMP and YOI Parc. The ASPIRE project did not replicate this evaluation but instead used a cross-sectional, case study-based review to:

- create a case study of the HMP and YOI Parc School Zone model
- identify key 'lessons learned' from the School Zone model used to inform the development of a national model for Wales
- explore how the School Zone model relates to the evidence gathered through the literature review and baseline assessment

2.8 The review of the School Zone model sought to answer the following questions:

- to what extent is the activity offered through HMP and YOI Parc’s scheme consistent with ‘what works’ evidence-based practice?
- what outcomes does the intervention achieve for children and their parents?
- how has HMP and YOI Parc’s work with schools changed since the 2017 evaluation?
- what are the key elements of the model?
- what are the experiences of education providers, and what ‘good practice’ can they share?
- what outcomes are being achieved for the participating children regarding their wellbeing and education, and how are they measured?
- what are the key enablers, limitations, and barriers in the model?
- does it meet the baseline needs identified in phase one?

2.9 To answer these questions, the team made a two-day site visit to HMP and YOI Parc, keeping the time frame deliberately short to reduce the burden on prison staff and the Invisible Walls team. The visit, which coincided with a School Zone event, allowed the team to develop a case study using the following methodology:

Table 2: Number of participants and how they were involved in the research

Participant group	Number of participants	Consultation method (see Annex D for research instruments)
Children	Ten, aged 3-15 years	<p>Focus group</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Three ASPIRE team members facilitated the focus group to enable children of different ages to engage in various ways depending on their age. For example, older children were supported to complete activity sheets, while younger children took part in discussion activities using flip chart paper, storytelling, and a fictional character with a father in prison. • The group took place in the visits hall, adjacent to the play area. • Invisible Walls Wales staff were available to supervise younger children who wanted to play after participating in the focus group. • Data gathered via facilitators’ handwritten notes, children’s completed worksheets, and annotated flip charts.

Fathers in custody	Eight	<p>Focus group</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitated by two ASPIRE team members and recorded by an additional member of the team. • The group took place in a lounge room adjacent to the visits hall. • The focus group was recorded digitally and transcribed.
Parents/carers	Six carers (four mothers and two grandmothers)	<p>Focus group</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitated by two ASPIRE team members. • The group took place in a lounge room adjacent to the visits hall. • Data gathered via facilitators' handwritten notes. <p>Follow-on online survey</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Due to time limitations in the focus group, participants were offered an opportunity to share further information via an online survey which asked the same questions as posed in the focus group. • Four parents/carers completed a Microsoft Forms online survey.
Teachers	23 (including nine in leadership roles)	<p>Semi-structured interviews</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interviews were conducted with school staff around the perimeter of the visits hall while families shared food together following the showcase event. • Interviews conducted by individual members of the ASPIRE team with teachers in school groups. Some interviews were one-to-one, while others were with two or three teachers together. • Data gathered via facilitators' handwritten notes.
Prison staff	Four (from a range of designations)	<p>Semi-structured interviews</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interviews conducted one-to-one and in small groups of no more than three individuals. • Data gathered via facilitators' handwritten notes.
Invisible Walls Wales staff	Three	<p>Semi-structured interviews</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interviews conducted one-to-one and in small groups of no more than three individuals. • Data gathered via facilitators' handwritten notes.
Showcase event participants	16 fathers and their families.	<p>Observation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All ASPIRE team members observed the delivery of the showcase event from the perimeter of

		<p>the visits hall and recorded their observations by hand.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Observations focused on how the event was delivered and interaction between teachers, prison staff, and families.
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2.10 The G4S Schools and Prisons Coordinator contacted all family and school participants in the School Zone event in advance to provide information about the research and to ensure they were content for the event to be observed and consulted. The ASPIRE team then gathered written consent from all participants prior to their engagement. All interviews and focus groups were anonymous, so no list of roles or organisations beyond the designations above is available to the public.

2.11 The findings from the first two phases and feedback from the expert advisory group informed phases three to five. The short timescale and small numbers of participants necessitated by the timeframe and available funding invariably limit the robustness of the findings but nevertheless elicited a valuable framework of topics to explore in the later phases.

Phase three: foundation-building for a comprehensive model of support

2.12 This phase of the project consisted of a pan-Wales multi-agency stakeholder event hosted by Cardiff University and facilitated by the ASPIRE team. The purpose of the event was to:

- inform phase four consultation activities (whom to consult, what questions to ask)
- ‘temperature check’ motivation and willingness to deliver a pan-Wales model of support for children affected by imprisonment
- identify any additional models of support
- identify the key issues to consider in developing a pan-Wales model

2.13 The event engaged with 44 key stakeholders (prison officers and governors, teachers and headteachers (mainly from primary schools), policymakers, third sector service providers, and people with lived experience of imprisonment (or of having a parent in prison). Participants sat at round tables arranged to mix people with different areas of expertise at each, with discussions facilitated and recorded (in writing) at each table by a member of the ASPIRE team. The team conducted

two one-hour rounds of discussion, with participant groups changing between rounds to facilitate differing discussions. The ASPIRE team introduced the research project, shared findings from the literature review and the visit to HMP and YOI Parc School Zone, and provided an opportunity for delegates to discuss the following questions:

- what is most important to you about the support schools offer to children impacted by parental imprisonment?
- what are the barriers that most concern you?
- what is your vision for support for children in Wales with a parent in prison?
- what shape could a 'blue sky' national approach to supporting children and their parents in prison take as part of a Wales-wide scheme?

2.14 The event also aimed to:

- raise awareness of the impact on children of parental imprisonment
- encourage multi-agency collaboration
- create fertile ground for the co-development of a proposed model
- increase understanding of what stakeholders need from the model
- add value to the project, recognising and supporting longer-term outcomes
- create joint ownership of the project so that stakeholders feel included and heard

Phase four: final gathering of evidence to develop the model

2.15 Phase four built on the knowledge garnered through the previous phases and aimed to develop a more detailed understanding of how a pan-Wales model could meet the needs of all key stakeholders. This consisted of several methods.

2.16 First, a further online survey was planned to engage 20 practitioners who support parents in custody and their children in school who have not been involved in the HMP and YOI Parc School Zone model. However, given the detailed nature of the findings from the baseline survey and the delay in the completion of the survey, the team decided not to conduct a further online call for information to avoid duplication and instead spoke with seven service delivery practitioners directly.

2.17 In addition, semi-structured interviews were conducted online or in person with a range of participants selected as a cross-section of personal and professional perspectives and geography. These included:

- twelve prison staff from a range of designations from prisons not currently operating the School Zone model⁵ (Heads of Operations, Head of Skills and Learning, Reducing Reoffending, two Governors, an education practitioner, and wing and visits staff)
- four education staff from different roles (primary school teacher, secondary school teacher, pupil referral unit (PRU) headteacher, education welfare officer (EWO), and a Thrive practitioner)⁶
- five Welsh Government policy stakeholders (social work, education, ACEs and trauma-informed practice, criminal justice)
- four children and young people with experience of a parent's imprisonment other than in HMP and YOI Parc
- three carers of children and young people with a parent in prison other than HMP and YOI Parc
- three parents (two fathers and a mother) in a prison other than HMP and YOI Parc, plus two written responses from Welsh-speaking fathers in prison

For the questions used in the interviews, please see Annex E.

2.18 Finally, an online survey was circulated to young people who have experienced a parent's imprisonment and had not received support via HMP and YOI Parc. To encourage participation, they were invited to share their views online. This method elicited the intended target of ten responses that was set in light of time and budget restrictions. The survey questions can be found in Annex F.

Phase five: creation of a new model of support

2.19 The final stage of the project involved collation and analysis of the findings from phases three and four. The expert advisory group met to consider the following questions:

- has the ASPIRE team overlooked anything?
- which emerging themes are most important?
- what should the priorities of the proposed model be?
- what does the group see as the main barriers and mitigating factors?

⁵ As the project progressed, more prisons introduced the Invisible Walls School Zone model, which meant that some prison staff we interviewed were now familiar with that model in their prisons.

⁶ Considerable efforts were made to include additional education staff, but these did not come to fruition during the timescale for the project.

2.20 This report presents the findings from all phases alongside a set of recommendations and suggested actions. Decisions regarding the implementation and resourcing of these actions lie with the Welsh Government. All research participants were updated on how their views shaped this report and were given an accessible summary of the project.

Further notes on the methodology

2.21 Limitations on time and funding for the ASPIRE project meant that participation throughout all phases was opportunistic rather than randomly selected. Participants were targeted to garner cross-sector responses, but the small number of participants means that responses are not representative and should not be generalised. Rather, the research gives a rough overview of the levels of awareness and types of challenges faced in providing support to children in Wales when a parent goes to prison. The findings, therefore, draw heavily on the expertise of the research team and advisory group, the policy context, and previous research, as well as on the responses of participants in the online surveys, site visits, and interviews.

2.22 Throughout the project, the ASPIRE team recognised that the current climate is challenging for those working within prisons and schools due to staffing difficulties and limited resources. The methodology considered how the education and wellbeing of children affected by parental imprisonment in Wales could be supported, provided recommendations on what a national model of support could look like, and aimed to place the least possible demands on staff time to produce the best results. Whenever possible, existing meetings and events were used to consult with professionals. Virtual communication was used to minimise the time and costs involved in travelling.

2.23 A lack of cooperation between different sectors and stakeholders can limit innovative practice. ASPIRE's methodology fostered connections between sectors (prisons, schools, and community-based statutory and non-statutory providers of support for children with parents in prison). The recommendations and suggested actions in this report take account of the realities faced by those in front-line services as well as the policy context in Wales. They also take account of existing resources and models that promote multi-agency working in Wales, such as the Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Hub Wales.

3. Findings: HMP and YOI Parc case study

3.1 The following case study is based on the ASPIRE team's two-day site visit to HMP and YOI Parc in November 2023. This was not intended to be a robust evaluation of the model or its impact but rather an information-gathering exercise to inform the questions for the subsequent phases of the project.

Overview of School Zone and showcase event

3.2 School Zone is an initiative run by Invisible Walls Community Interest Company (IW CIC). Its inception was within the original Invisible Walls Wales (IWW) project, which introduced initiatives including:

- HMP and YOI Parc's Family Interventions Unit
- interventions-led visits in family-friendly facilities
- through-the-gate casework by Family Integration Mentors
- partnership with community-based agencies

The stated aims of the IWW initiative were to reduce reoffending and the risk of intergenerational offending. The University of South Wales carried out an [evaluation of IWW](#) in 2017 (Clancy and Maguire, 2017). The evaluation highlighted the success of the teacher awareness sessions and the positive aspects of the school showcase event, noting the engagement of schools as a key factor in its success. More broadly, the evaluation found that the IWW project, as a whole, had a positive impact on children's attendance, behaviour, attainment, and peer relationships in school.

3.3 School Zone's vision is to innovate and expand on the services currently provided while ensuring that the family remains at the heart of all practice. Its stated mission is to:

- derail intergenerational crime and reoffending
- help families reconnect with their communities
- work with families to improve family relationships during and after custody
- help make the visiting experience positive and engaging for all involved
- provide support during and after custody to help people build better futures

3.4 Since 2014, 14 showcases have engaged a total of 16 local authorities. The showcase, which currently takes place twice a year, creates the environment of a

school parents' evening within the prison visits hall, bringing imprisoned fathers, their children, the children's teachers, and the children's mother or carer together to discuss the child's progress at school. The teachers share the children's schoolwork, just as they would during any parents' evening, often providing the father in prison with photocopies of their children's work to keep and read at their leisure after the event. The prison provides food for the event.

- 3.5 The school showcase event is part of a wider programme of family support at HMP Parc, which includes the Family Interventions Unit, which is a residential hall in the prison designated for fathers who want to focus on their parenting. All fathers at HMP Parc are entitled to put themselves forward to participate in the showcase, and anyone can refer a family to the Prisons and Schools Coordinator. On the day of the ASPIRE team site visit, 16 fathers were taking part in the showcase (from a prison population of over 1,600 men). Once a referral is received, the carer is approached first, and then, with the carer's permission, the Coordinator speaks to the school Headteacher. If the Headteacher agrees to their school participating, the Coordinator will conduct awareness-raising sessions at the school prior to the next showcase event. This initiative is now being run in other prisons, including HMPS Cardiff, Usk, and Prescoed in Wales, and HMPS Bedford, Littlehey, Five Wells, Oakwood, and Rye Hill in England.

Strengths and benefits

- 3.6 As reported in the original evaluation (Clancy and Maguire, 2017) and confirmed during the ASPIRE team's observations, the passion, knowledge, and commitment of the staff involved in School Zone clearly facilitates good collaboration between schools and prisons. This is a significant strength of the School Zone project and the showcase event, and benefits children, parents, and carers in the community, parents in prison, teachers, and prison staff.
- 3.7 Based on the ASPIRE team's observations, discussions, and workshops, the showcase event demonstrated clear benefits for the children attending at that time. Children were able to meet others who have had the same experience, which is something each child felt was an important element of the initiative. Children felt the showcase has helped to strengthen their bond with their fathers. One child commented that the school showcase and other interventions 'personally saved me', and their message to the Welsh Government was that 'this type of support should be carried out through all the prisons'. There was a strong element of the

showcase providing a normalised experience for children, (attending a parents' evening with both parents as other children do), and this is something that appeared important to the children.

3.8 Children talked about the benefits of their fathers and teachers meeting together:

'If the teachers get to see your dad, the teachers and your dad get to know more about you. When the teachers know more, they understand why you are sad, and Dad knows that I am doing lots of work at school.'

3.9 Participating in the showcase event can increase children's confidence in school and at home and enable them to engage more in school. One teacher said, 'School Zone has really helped him [child] – he's much more relaxed at school and can concentrate better.' For children, this increased confidence in school was underpinned by knowing that people in school understand them better:

'It helps me feel more comfortable in school as my teachers know the seriousness of what's going on with Dad, so when I have a bad day, they have a better understanding.'

3.10 The showcase event has helped parents and carers in the community feel less isolated. One parent said:

'I have joined the family forum⁷ and attend coffee mornings with other wives, mothers, grandmothers who are going through the same. I can't even begin to explain how beneficial this has been for me. Nobody in the outside world seems to understand the continual stress, devastation, emotions and daily obstacles that we go through more than they do.'

3.11 Being involved in the showcase helped parents and carers in the community see that their child's educational progress is not just their responsibility, and it provided parents with an opportunity to have conversations with teachers that they may not have been able to have before, thus reducing the stigma of having a partner in prison. One parent said:

'They support us as a family completely and without an ounce of judgement ... this has had a profound effect on me as I haven't been leaving the house much this year ... through fear of reprisals and judgement from the wider community ... it really makes you feel you have a wall of support around you.'

⁷ The family forum was an opportunity for families to meet face to face at the prison before or after their visit.

- 3.12 When discussing the showcase in focus groups, fathers in HMP and YOI Parc again highlighted how the showcase can 'normalise' things for their children. Additionally, they felt more involved in their child's education and enjoyed seeing their child's progress, for example, in handwriting. They said it gave them confidence that they have a role to play in encouraging and supporting their child. One father said that for the child, it was like 'two separate bits of life coming together.'
- 3.13 Fathers talked about their own schooling and the negative experiences they had had in education. They said the showcase helped to build up their trust and confidence in the school. Two fathers who have children in Welsh-speaking schools were very pleased that their children could teach them Welsh, and two other fathers said that seeing their children do well at school motivated them to want to do well too. Fathers said that the showcase had helped them let go of the worries and preconceptions they had held before, for example, worrying about being judged by the teachers.
- 3.14 For teachers, the benefits centred around increased knowledge and awareness. They said the showcase had given them more awareness of the issues and challenges children face and a wider insight into specific children's needs. One teacher said, 'We just have no idea about the impact that all of this is having on [child's] mental health.' Another said, 'We will understand their behaviour more now, and it will help us to provide consistent support.'
- 3.15 In meeting both parents together, teachers can see that the parent in prison can still be a good parent. One teacher said, 'It was lovely, it was my first time meeting dad, and it was lovely to see [child] with her dad. I've never seen a parent look at their child's work in so much detail or take such interest.' And by seeing the whole family together, teachers can gain a better understanding of the children:
- 'This has really opened my eyes to what children and families go through – even the cost of getting here [the prison], never mind the emotional cost.'
- 3.16 As with the teachers, the showcase event helps prison staff see the parent in prison as a parent who has a role to play in their children's lives. One staff member said, 'The dads are buzzing - the pride you can see on their faces ... they loved getting the awards at the end... their certificates went straight up on the walls in their cells when they got back.'

3.17 Again, increased awareness is a key benefit to prison staff, helping staff to understand the issues facing children and families when a family member is in prison. One staff member said, 'Teachers have told us that they punish a child for their behaviour and then feel guilty when they realise why that child is behaving that way.'

Considerations for a pan-Wales model

3.18 While the showcase event clearly has wide-ranging benefits for all stakeholders involved, certain factors need to be considered in the development of a pan-Wales model of support for children:

3.19 A children's rights approach: some fathers in HMP and YOI Parc noted barriers to participation in the showcase event and that some prison staff perceived it as a reward for fathers rather than as a right for children. In line with Article 9 of the UNCRC, children should be allowed to have contact with their parents unless this is contrary to their best interest. Restricting contact as a tool for prison discipline and control, rather than on the grounds of the child's best interest, does not uphold this right. Children should also have a voice in decisions that affect them (Article 12), but one child in the showcase event was upset that her headteacher had attended rather than her class teacher. A child's rights approach within a pan-Wales model would ensure children's views are listened to, and their wellbeing considered, when making such decisions.

3.20 Effective policy and resourcing: it was beyond the remit of this project to carry out a detailed cost analysis of the showcase event; however, cost is a major consideration for the Welsh Government for a pan-Wales model. Any cost analysis undertaken needs to be comprehensive and consider the full range of costs involved from all the agencies, many of which are already constrained by limited time and resources, namely prison (staffing in preparation, staffing to run event refreshments, additional security, e.g. sniffer dogs); schools (supply teachers, transport), and families (transport, loss of salary, food for travel).

3.21 Centralised access to information and resources: one of the barriers to participation in events such as the showcase is that not all stakeholders know about it. This includes parents in prison, families, and teachers. A pan-Wales model must consider how everyone can be reached and how the long-term sustainability of the model can be achieved.

- 3.22 Multi-agency working: while a key strength of the School Zone model is the collaboration between agencies, that collaboration relies on the prison and does not reach children who do not visit, are not in school, or need additional support outside of visiting. A pan-Wales model must consider how agencies can work effectively together to benefit the whole family, particularly the child, and must include community support.
- 3.23 Training: this is vital for prison staff and for teachers, not least to alleviate the anxieties teachers expressed to the ASPIRE team about visiting a prison for the first time. Not all prison staff attending the showcase had undergone training on the impact of imprisonment on children, and school staff did not always feel prepared for what to expect in visiting the prison and meeting with the families. A pan-Wales model must consider the training needs of all stakeholders and the way that training is delivered and disseminated (building on training already being delivered in Wales, see Table 1).
- 3.24 Including all children: a relatively small number of children are involved in School Zone and the showcase event (which only takes place twice a year and with a fraction of fathers in prison). How can **all** children in Wales with a parent in prison be reached, including those who do not visit prison (either through choice or because they are unable to), those who are not attending school, and those who have additional needs? Any pan-Wales model must ensure support is available to all children, for example, by considering how online parent-teacher-child meetings can be utilised.
- 3.25 Monitoring and evaluation: a pan-Wales model must be monitored and evaluated to ensure it is achieving good outcomes for all children.
- 3.26 Reflecting on the visit, the ASPIRE team noted additional considerations beyond the findings from the case study that would also be relevant for a pan-Wales model, namely sensitive identification of which children had a parent in prison so they could receive support and take part in opportunities such as School Zone if they wished, and safeguarding as a vital component underpinning any model developed.

Summary

3.27 The Invisible Walls School Zone model developed at HMP and YOI Parc provided the impetus for the Welsh Government's commissioning of the ASPIRE project and consideration of a pan-Wales model of support. The site visit highlighted the many benefits of such an approach for all involved and created a framework for exploration towards a pan-Wales model. It also flagged potential gaps to consider, namely an approach that focuses on the child rather than on rehabilitation; that it reaches all children in Wales, regardless of where their parent is held or whether they visit the prison; and that garners the infrastructure it needs in terms of training, collaboration, and funding to ensure the work is accessible and sustained.

4. Findings: Nine priorities

4.1 Analysis of the findings from phases one to four of the ASPIRE project identified nine priorities for the development of a pan-Wales model:

- a strengths-based, children's rights approach to support
- effective policy and resourcing
- centralised access to information and resources
- multi-agency working
- training
- identification of children affected by parental imprisonment
- including all children in support
- safeguarding
- monitoring and evaluation

The following sections explore each of these nine priorities in turn. To preserve anonymity, all stakeholders are referred to within their broad field of expertise.

A strengths-based, children's rights approach to support

Context

4.2 Both schools and prisons can play a unique role in upholding the rights of children impacted by parental imprisonment and recognising their potential. Children affected by parental imprisonment have been described as the 'forgotten victims' of the justice system and often become defined within a deficit model. Rights-based and strengths-based practice empowers children as 'human beings with a distinct set of rights instead of passive objects of care and charity' (UNICEF, no date) as a means of countering the challenges they experience and instilling a sense of hope for the future. Every child is different and will have different needs, even within sibling groups. Whatever level of support a child requires, the support should be rooted in children's rights, trauma-informed, and centred on their views and needs.

Findings from the ASPIRE project

4.3 Clear from the focus group in HMP and YOI Parc, the online survey for children, and the interviews with young people was that having a parent in prison evokes a range of complex emotions in children: shame, anxiety, frustration, anger, loss, grief (though not grief that brings support and understanding – rather, one that leads to social isolation; Doka, 1989), and sometimes relief. Despite the emotional turmoil

children experienced, support was patchy at best and often lacking altogether. Most children felt very alone, particularly at the start of their parent's journey through the justice system. The case study, 'Megan's story', which will be presented in the next chapter (para 5.2), highlights a systematic lack of support and violation of children's rights.

4.4 For most of the children, their main source of support came from the other parent or caregiver (e.g. a grandparent). Some children said that other adults and practitioners already in their lives (e.g. teachers, youth workers, social workers) were supportive. Most young people interviewed had not been offered specialist support (e.g. counselling or support from a specialist organisation that supports families affected by imprisonment), even though this is something in hindsight they felt would have been helpful.

4.5 Children attending the HMP and YOI Parc showcase event said they want to be heard and understood:

'Listen to us.'

'Talk to us and find out what we want.'

'The Government should listen.'

'I am just a kid, and you need to help us because we feel alone, especially in school.'

4.6 Children felt that peer support is helpful; knowing they are not alone can build resilience:

'If I had known other young people in a similar position, it would have helped me to feel better about myself and I would have known I wasn't unique in my position.' (Young person, phase four interview)

4.7 Throughout the project, stakeholders were clear that children's rights and their voices should be at the centre of and embedded into any model of support and should be used to inform policy and practice:

'The child should be at the centre, no one else.' (Social work manager, phase four interview)

'Children and young people need to be empowered to take up their rights. And there needs to be an equality of opportunity; all children should [have] the same access to the same principles.' (Children's policy lead, phase four interview)

- 4.8 Stakeholders felt that children's rights should be embedded into practitioner and policy maker training regarding children affected by parental imprisonment. Training should address unconscious bias (e.g. that children are better off not having contact with a parent in prison) and unhelpful narratives, such as children being seen as a means of reducing reoffending or that they are more likely to end up in the justice system if they have a parent in prison:
- 'People paint you with the same brush as your parent. I used to feel like I was the prisoner. I just wanted help.' (Young person, phase four interview)
- 4.9 Clear from the stakeholder event and phase four interviews was that children's rights must not be a 'tick-box' exercise: children should be meaningfully included in decisions about them. This is something that young people also highlighted:
- 'Decisions have been made about me, but no one has asked what I need.'
(Young person, phase four interview)
- 4.10 Practitioners from third sector organisations supporting children affected by imprisonment mentioned tools such as the Child Impact Assessment framework, published by the Prison Reform Trust (2022), as a practical way of ensuring children's voices are heard, their views considered, and their needs addressed from the outset. Tools such as this that give children opportunities to express their feelings and change their minds about the support they are receiving were viewed as important by children and parents alike. Children themselves were clear that their views should not just be heard but be acted upon. Furthermore, both parents in prison and those caring for them at home were clear that a child is a child first and foremost and should not be defined by having a parent in prison; other factors in the child's life should also be considered when it comes to support.
- 4.11 Young people reported that trusting and positive relationships are important for them to feel safe, share their feelings, and grow in confidence:
- 'They [people offering support] should be really caring and understanding where you are coming from and not judgemental. They need to be kind and respect what you say.' (Young person, phase four interview)
- 4.12 Clear from children and young people, practitioners, and policy leads was that schools have a key role in ensuring children receive support when their parent goes to prison and that their rights are upheld. The reality, however, is often far from this:

‘At school there was very little advertised in terms of wellbeing support – you had to seek it, and it felt more challenging to access it. It is difficult to ask for support, and therefore it is important that support is pro-actively offered to young people so that they know that it is available when they decide they need it.’ (Young person, phase four interview)

- 4.13 Stakeholders throughout the project highlighted practical ways in which school communities can embed a child-focused approach, including:
- authorising absences when a child is visiting a prison during the school day
 - sending reports and schoolwork to the parent in prison
 - meeting the parent in prison (on the phone, online, or in person)
 - offering support to children in preparation for and following a visit.
- 4.14 The stakeholder event and phase four interviews flagged that training on the impact of imprisonment on children is essential for teachers if schools are to uphold children’s rights in any decision concerning them. Teachers attending the HMP and YOI Parc showcase event felt that understanding challenging behaviours that may relate to trauma (e.g. witnessing the arrest or visiting the prison) or anxiety (e.g. about a parent being released or unhelpful media attention) leads to better support for children.
- 4.15 Respondents noted that primary schools may be able to offer support more easily, as they often have stronger relationships with families. Stakeholders recognised communication between primary and secondary schools as very important.
- 4.16 With knowledge, understanding, and a compassionate approach, school staff can initiate referrals to specialist support for children (such as counselling) and wider support for families (for example, financial and emotional support for caregivers and Family Group Conferences). Teachers may not have the capacity to provide more in-depth support themselves, so external support that can be accessed when needed was thought to be helpful. In addition to support for the child, practitioners and young people considered support for parents and caregivers to be very important:
- ‘It’s nice to see nan speaking to someone, having a laugh and smiling... it is hard, not just for children, but for the adults as well.’ (Young person, phase four interview)

4.17 Stakeholders identified important considerations regarding support for children with a parent in prison to ensure a strengths-based, children's rights approach:

- support at school should be sensitive (children do not want to be spotlighted, for example, by being pulled out of class to talk to someone or by being asked about their parent in front of others)
- rather than a problem that needs to be solved, young people should be seen as people who have aspirations and the potential to succeed
- support needs to be offered at the earliest opportunity
- referral routes for support must be made clear to children and families; self-referral is helpful where possible
- children and their caregivers often need time to think about the support being offered

In addition, considerations for how prisons can take account of children's rights were identified throughout the project. Children said it was important to them to know that their parent in prison was safe:

'I wanted to know where my dad was and how he was being treated.' (Young person, phase four interview)

Some of the children at the HMP and YOI Parc showcase event felt excluded from criminal justice terminology and processes:

'I didn't know what him 'being on a tag' meant.'

4.18 Stakeholders identified several ways in which prisons can ensure a child-centred approach:

- ensuring that any prison-based model of support is a right for children rather than an incentive for parents in prison
- offering free video calls shortly after a parent's arrival into custody
- producing a booklet for children showing pictures of areas of the prison and describing their parent's daily routine
- ensuring the visiting process is child-friendly
- offering special visits (e.g. where there are age-appropriate activities, and children and their parent can interact more freely); this can include creative initiatives such as outdoor barbeques or using gentle music in the visits hall

4.19 Stakeholders felt that consistency is important: every prison and school across Wales should be part of the same model. Any model of support for children with a parent in prison should be integrated, holistic, and flexible.

Developing policy and resourcing that supports a pan-Wales model

Context

4.20 Any pan-Wales model to support children with a parent in prison will operate in the context of devolved systems for education and health, but a justice system that falls under the auspices of Westminster and HMPPS. With an issue that crosses all these remits, the nature and responsibility of support for children in Wales with imprisoned parents will depend on how this support is framed.

4.21 While several Welsh Education and UK Criminal Justice policies mention children affected by parental imprisonment, few consider their needs or how these needs should be supported. As highlighted in the background section, policy and guidance can play an integral role in:

- ensuring the rights of children affected by parental imprisonment are protected
- supporting the identification of children affected by parental imprisonment
- ensuring services are aware of the potential impact of parental imprisonment on children
- challenging stigma and instigating cultural change
- promoting the wellbeing of children affected by parental imprisonment
- providing a framework for monitoring the outcomes of children affected by parental imprisonment
- informing commissioning intentions

4.22 How services are commissioned and resourced impacts the nature, availability, sustainability, consistency, and quality of support available to children affected by imprisonment. With much support for families provided by third sector organisations when someone goes to prison, services risk being patchy, as funding is short-term and often restricted to certain geographical areas, age groups, or other circumstances defined by the funders. It also places organisations in positions of competition rather than collaboration, which is counterproductive for a sustainable, pan-Wales model of support.

Findings from the ASPIRE project

- 4.23 The baseline survey, stakeholder event, and interviews with policy leads identified that policy and guidance influence support for children affected by parental imprisonment in Wales by:
- protecting their rights via The Rights of Children and Young Persons (Wales Measure) (2011) and The Right Way framework (Children’s Commissioner for Wales, 2022)
 - identifying them as potentially in need of additional support via Families First Programmes Guidance (2017a), Estyn’s guidance on ‘Supporting pupils with adverse childhood experiences (ACEs)’ (2020), and the HMPPS Family and Significant Other strategy (2019)
 - ensuring their wellbeing needs are met via Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and the Framework on embedding a whole-school approach to emotional and mental wellbeing (2021)
 - supporting the sharing of information and identification via the Wales accord on the sharing of personal information (2018), as well as Estyn’s guidance on supporting pupils with ACEs (2020)
- 4.24 In addition, while the Welsh Government’s Children and Young People’s Plan (2024) does not specifically identify the impact of parental imprisonment on children, it prioritises giving all children and young people support to have a fair chance in life, particularly those who need additional help to overcome barriers and fulfil their potential (which would apply to children affected by parental imprisonment), and ensuring that all children have the support they need to stay together or come back together with their family (critical for many children with a parent in prison).
- 4.25 As identified in the policy review, the [school curriculum for Wales](#) is underpinned by four key purposes which are the ‘starting point and aspiration for every child and young person in Wales’ (Welsh Government and Education Wales). The aim of every school’s curriculum in Wales should be to support its learners to become:
- ambitious, capable learners, ready to learn throughout their lives
 - enterprising, creative contributors, ready to play a full part in life and work
 - ethical, informed citizens of Wales and the world
 - healthy, confident individuals, ready to lead fulfilling lives as valued members of society

- 4.26 Therefore, in line with the purposes of the curriculum, children who have a parent in prison should be supported to be ambitious, enterprising, informed, and healthy, and the impact of imprisonment mitigated to ensure this potential can be realised.
- 4.27 Most of the targeted support for families affected by imprisonment in Wales has been funded within the criminal justice system via HMPPS (or G4S, in the case of HMP and YOI Parc) family support contracts or initiatives (such as Visiting Mum, previously funded by the Big Lottery). As a result, support for children in Wales has been predominantly focused on children who are visiting prisons and tends to be framed as a means of reducing the risk of future offending.
- 4.28 The Wales Families First guidance for local authorities (2017a: 23) states:
- ‘We expect you to actively work to identify families who may be affected by parental imprisonment as part of the assessment process. Very often, these families may not volunteer this information due to embarrassment or concerns about stigmatisation but may be more likely to respond if they are asked the question directly. You will need to ensure families who are affected by parental imprisonment are provided with relevant support and information, for example, through links with other organisations which provide services for these families. You may also wish to consider whether it is necessary to commission specific services through Families First.’
- 4.29 Welsh Government Parenting Engagement and Support Guidance for Providers (2017b) also refers to families with a parent in prison. This, too, mentions the stigma and related desire for families to hide this information, consequently stating that ‘Initial health visitor engagement and relationship building with families and a non-judgemental attitude may help families feel more confident about seeking support and information about their situation’ (2017b: 64), with parenting support for children’s emotional and behavioural problems being given as an example. The guidance notes the value of training for practitioners and gives examples of these. Both the Families First and Parenting Guidance were under review at the time of writing.
- 4.30 A number of local authorities in Wales target support for families affected by imprisonment within their local delivery plans, though some of these do so via activities addressing Adverse Childhood Experiences more broadly or include this within the Team Around the Family element of Families First. The ASPIRE project

has not identified any targeted support from third sector services funded via Families First specifically for children affected by parental imprisonment in Wales. Local, grant, or voluntary-funded projects have existed, such as Pact's development of the Welsh Schools Toolkit, Invisible Walls Wales School Zone model, training programmes delivered by third sector providers, and strategic work undertaken by [North Wales Families Affected by Imprisonment \(FABI\)](#). However, none of these models provide national support, and funding arrangements for third sector providers have proved difficult to sustain (funding for FABI, for example, came to an end in August 2024). Stakeholders suggested the lack of provision in the community may be due to competing priorities within local authorities, a lack of awareness regarding the impact of parental imprisonment, and a 'fear of public perception' associated with supporting families involved in the criminal justice system:

'We are relying on the third sector... at what point does the state step in to resource it when we know that that practice is effective and achieving outcomes?'
(Criminal justice policy lead, phase four interview)

4.31 Stakeholders in the baseline survey highlighted the need to ensure that any model of support for children affected by imprisonment in Wales is integrated into the existing policy landscape:

'This [model]... needs to interact and align with the Blueprints⁸ work in Wales, the Wales National Trauma-Informed Framework and the need to involve and include young people themselves to ask them what they need.' (Baseline survey participant)

4.32 Consultation with stakeholders across Wales identified challenges associated with the policy and commissioning landscape in Wales. First, any multi-agency model bridging the criminal justice system and community-based services faces the complexities associated with working across devolved and non-devolved services and legislation.

4.33 Second, localised funding and service provision has created a 'postcode lottery' for families and children in Wales. One family who had family members in two different local authorities reported a disparity in service provision: while one individual received proactive support in their locality, their sibling in another locality said:

⁸ Women's Justice Blueprint (MoJ and Welsh Government, 2019) and Youth Justice Blueprint (MoJ and Welsh Government)

‘I wasn’t offered anything, nobody approached me, nobody asked if I needed any support.’ (Young person, phase four interview)

4.34 Third, existing commissioning models within the criminal justice system have placed agencies in competition with one another, negatively impacting collaborative working, shared practice, and joined-up approaches to influencing policy development. Scotland has attempted to address this challenge by utilising a [national third sector partnership model](#) to commission throughcare support for people leaving prison, encouraging third sector providers to work together to provide a national delivery model.

4.35 Fourth, numerous policies, guidelines, and frameworks influence support for children affected by parental imprisonment, creating repetition, complexity, and a lack of clarity for both commissioners and practitioners:

‘There are too many frameworks and approaches all saying the same thing; we need streamlined policies that offer clarity and consistency.’ (Children’s policy lead, phase four interview)

4.36 Fifth, the focus of policy and commissioning intentions within the criminal justice sector (Ministry of Justice and HM Prison and Probation Service, 2019), refers to ‘families’ and family relationships as a tool for reducing reoffending (HMPS Family and Significant Other policy) or as leverage/reward for good behaviour (HMPPS Incentives and Earned Privileges Scheme), as opposed to focusing on outcomes for children and young people:

‘How is it going to benefit [children with a parent in custody]? Children are not a rehabilitative tool of the state.’ (Criminal justice lead, phase four interview)

Some policies, guidance, and commissioning intentions (and therefore interventions) continue to perpetuate the negative framing and misuse of statistics surrounding a child’s future risk of offending when a parent goes to prison and ‘intergenerational transmission’ of offending as a key reason to intervene – serving to stigmatise children and young people further and undermining strengths-based practices.

4.37 Further, both policy and commissioning currently focus only on the impact of imprisonment on children, disregarding the support often required by children in the immediate period following their parent’s arrest or during the period of resettlement following release.

- 4.38 Next, while the Rights of Children and Young Persons (Wales) Measure 2011 requires Ministers to consider the UNCRC when developing legislation and policy (that is, to give appropriate weight to the UNCRC requirements, balancing them against all the other factors relevant to the decision in question), the lack of legal obligation to uphold the UNCRC can challenge decisions regarding funding priorities.
- 4.39 Finally, funding for specialist services to support children affected by imprisonment has often been short-term. Services are not always sustained, and as new services are commissioned, there is a risk of re-inventing the wheel rather than building on previous practice. For example, one stakeholder identified the well-received Schools Accord developed by Barnardo's at HMP and YOI Parc as 'dying a death' once funding had ended:
- 'There is a continuous narrative that there is not enough money. This becomes a barrier to making change now where we can.' (Children's policy lead, phase four interview)
- 4.40 When considering which Government department should be responsible for funding a model of support for children affected by parental imprisonment, stakeholders suggested that a move away from funding solely from HMPPS would ensure:
- access to support for all children (not just those visiting prisons)
 - access to support for children throughout their parents' journey through the criminal justice system (i.e. support dictated by when the child needs support, as opposed to when their parent is in custody)
 - a focus on the child, as opposed to the parent in prison
- 4.41 Stakeholders suggested that this could be achieved via Department of Education funding or a co-commissioned model that could cut across devolved and non-devolved departments, supporting multi-agency working and potentially increasing the available budget:
- 'It needs to be a joint initiative from Government.' (Criminal justice lead, phase four interviews)
- 'Support for children with a parent in prison shouldn't sit within criminal justice, nor should it start and end with schools. We need a national whole system approach.' (Children's policy lead, phase four interview)

A co-commissioned model by Public Health Wales (linked to the ACEs agenda) and Education Wales may be best placed to fund a pan-Wales model that ensures a child-focused approach, promoting the wellbeing of all children in Wales who experience a parent's imprisonment.

4.42 To mitigate some of the key challenges within the policy and commissioning environment, stakeholders suggested that both policies and commissioning models align with the strengths-based, child rights-focused approach outlined previously; respond to children's needs throughout their parents' journey through the criminal justice system, including pre- and post- imprisonment; and are commissioned for five plus two years, in line with HMPPS family and significant other services. This would enable the work to become embedded, instigate cultural/institutional change, and create opportunities for sustainability (such as developing capacity and awareness within universal services).

4.43 In addition, stakeholders emphasised the need for commissioning to recognise the wider resource implications of any support model on families and existing services, particularly given the current resource pressures within education, health, and criminal justice. For example, they suggested that any model like School Zone needs to consider:

- the financial impact on families of travelling to and from a prison for additional visits
- the costs of supply teachers to enable school staff to attend prison-based events
- the resource implications for prisons in providing staff for additional visits/events

Centralised access to information and resources

Context

4.44 The needs of children affected by parental imprisonment are frequently overlooked in policy and practice within both schools and prisons. While examples of localised strategies and initiatives exist, there are few examples of coordinated, nationwide approaches to support for children with a parent in prison. While the National Information Centre on Children of Offenders [NICCO] (see Annex A) provides an online information hub for practitioners across England and Wales, limited

information is available regarding Welsh policy and practice, and no centralised source for information is aimed at children and families.

Findings from the ASPIRE project

4.45 Parents, carers, children, and young people highlighted a lack of information to support their journey through the criminal justice system. Professionals echoed this in the baseline survey, HMP and YOI Parc showcase event, stakeholder event, and phase four interviews, reporting limited knowledge and awareness about available support services, policies, toolkits, or resources:

‘It should be in every school... I didn’t know any of this [School Zone] even existed.’ (Teacher, HMP and YOI Parc showcase event)

4.46 Stakeholders suggested that this lack of a centralised resource in Wales had contributed to:

- children, young people, and families having limited access to child-friendly information about the criminal justice system, what to expect, and how to access support
- children feeling isolated in their experiences
- families and professionals struggling to identify the ‘right’ person to speak with to access appropriate support or information
- limited awareness amongst practitioners about existing services, training, and resources to support work with children affected by parental imprisonment
- replication and ‘reinventing the wheel’ (particularly in terms of training delivery)
- lack of a resource to inform a pan-Wales, joined-up, multi-agency, strategic approach to support for children affected by parental imprisonment
- lack of consistency in resources and services available across Wales
- practitioners struggling to have the time to search for the most up-to-date and relevant resources to inform and support their practice

4.47 All stakeholders, at every stage of the research, agreed on the need for a coordinated, centralised approach to support children affected by parental imprisonment. They suggested that this could be achieved by developing a Welsh centre for children affected by parental imprisonment that could serve two functions:

- a centralised online hub to share resources, practice, information, and support services

- a central coordinating role for supporting children and young people affected by parental imprisonment across Wales and managing the online hub

‘A Hub would be massive for schools and education welfare officers – education welfare officers could use this with young people at home if the young person feels safer there.’ (Education Welfare Officer, phase four interview)

‘Give us tools to support pupils... like how we might be able to respond to their questions. A list of frequently asked questions would be really helpful.’ (Teacher, HMP and YOI Parc showcase event)

4.48 All but one of the young people consulted in the phase four online survey agreed that an online information hub would be a valuable source of support for children with a parent in custody. Rather than building a standalone website that would require significant resource to develop a new brand, domain, and publicity, a number of stakeholders suggested creating a new area on an existing website. Both the [Wales Hwb](#) and the [Adverse Childhood Experiences](#) (ACE) Hub Wales website were identified as potential host sites.

4.49 Stakeholders suggested that the online hub could include the following two areas:

An area for children and young people

- informed and developed in partnership with children and young people
- blogs, vlogs, and articles developed by young people for young people, focusing on topics such as what to expect on your first visit, emotions associated with a parent going to prison, and information about what it is like for their parent in custody
- photographs and short films about prison life
- signposts to support services (both targeted and universal)
- opportunity to join online peer support groups
- live chat function to respond to concerns/questions
- answers to ‘frequently asked questions’
- support and guidance about how to manage your feelings
- age-appropriate resources and information
- information and support for parents and carers

‘[Communicating online] is our way of communicating now and it can let you speak to people anonymously if you want to.’ (Young person, phase four interview)

An area for professionals

- information about the impact of parental imprisonment on children and young people
- information about why it is important to provide support for children affected by parental imprisonment
- contact details and description of the specialist organisations providing support to families affected by imprisonment in Wales
- contact details and description of both in-prison and community-based services that can support families affected by imprisonment (such as Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services, Families First services, housing, social care, prison safer custody etc.)
- links to relevant policies, frameworks, and guidance relating to support for children affected by parental imprisonment
- answers to 'frequently asked questions'
- tools and resource packs to support work with children and young people
- details of training and development opportunities
- clear protocols about the roles and responsibilities of different people and how they collate and share concerns
- opportunities for online practice forums enabling practitioners to come together quarterly and share practice/encourage reflective practice/share resources/inform policy and practice development
- potential to develop a Wales Charter for Supporting Children Affected by Parental Imprisonment, with agencies who sign up to the Charter and evidence their effective practice, listed on the webpage

'If I was a teacher, I would be wanting to think I'd be thinking what are the signs? What should I be looking out for, who's sharing what intelligence with me? So, I'm aware that that child could be going through a difficult situation because their parent is in prison. What tools and techniques are being given to me to support that child? What information do I have to signpost to other agencies, and how do I do that if I have concerns about that young person, either about their... mental well wellbeing or ... mental health?' (Social work policy lead, phase four interview)

4.50 Stakeholders were clear that an individual agency or role would need to be responsible for overseeing and keeping the online hub up to date. They suggested

that this centralised, coordinating role could also include the following responsibilities:

- coordinating multi-agency working groups on key themes such as identification
- providing a single point of contact for both families and professionals, signposting them to relevant services, information, and support
- instigating cultural change across Wales by ensuring the needs of children affected by parental imprisonment are recognised and responded to in policy and practice, challenging stigma and discrimination
- mapping existing service provision and identifying ‘gaps’
- listening and responding to the views of children and young people affected by imprisonment
- facilitating online professional practice forums
- building relationships between prisons and schools across Wales
- facilitating online peer support forums for children, young people, parents, and carers
- ensuring consistency in messaging across all services, policies, and training provision, emphasising children’s rights and strengths-based approaches
- coordinating a champions network, delivering specialist training to identified ‘champions’ in organisations across Wales⁹

4.51 While some stakeholders were apprehensive about the development of a centrally coordinated ‘champions’ network (as they were concerned that staff may move on and the champion role may not be replaced, and such a role may encourage other practitioners to absolve their responsibilities with regard to supporting children affected by parental imprisonment), the majority of respondents recognised the potential benefits, including:

- the creation of a sustainable model that utilises and develops capacity within existing support services for children and young people in Wales
- the development of multi-agency support for children affected by imprisonment
- raising awareness and capacity building across agencies in Wales
- creating cultural change and raising awareness within their own organisations

⁹ Champions are trained individuals who champion the rights and needs of children affected by parental imprisonment within their organisations. See the [practice review](#) for examples in practice.

- identifying single points of contact within agencies who have specialist knowledge and understanding about the impact of parental imprisonment

4.52 Stakeholders suggested that the delivery of a coordinated, centralised resource, such as the one described above, needed to be undertaken by an agency that:

- places children at the centre of their practice
- is committed to and effective at collaborative working
- has staff with the skills, knowledge, experience, and relationships to work across both the criminal justice and education/community sectors
- is passionate and dedicated to the agenda

Multi-agency working

Context

4.53 Children with a parent in prison have contact with multiple agencies, including those in the education and criminal justice sectors. As detailed in the literature and policy reviews, an integrated, coordinated approach is key to ensuring children receive the support they need in a timely way. Support is best promoted and delivered within multi-agency partnerships that acknowledge a collective responsibility for the welfare of children with a parent in the justice system. Schools, education welfare, public health, Specialist Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services, police, prisons, probation, courts, social care, Safeguarding Children Boards, and third sector providers are well placed to champion children impacted by parental imprisonment. By working within existing partnerships, these groups can develop innovative and creative solutions to improve the lives of any child with a parent in the justice system. However, for this to be successful, all agencies need to understand the issues and challenges associated with parental imprisonment, including the impact of stigma on families and how this may be a barrier to them seeking help.

Findings from the ASPIRE project

4.54 In all phases of the project, stakeholders recognised that working collaboratively is fundamental to ensuring effective support for children with a parent in prison. Participants at the stakeholder event, which included staff from education (including education welfare), prison, probation, social care, specialist third sector organisations, policy leads, and family members with lived experience, valued the opportunity to discuss challenges and propose solutions in cross-sectoral groups. Positive outcomes noted from the event were:

‘Working in a multi-agency group and hearing different perspectives.’

‘Bringing together family service providers and experts by experience along with key figures in government/HMPPS to remind them of the importance of the issue and keep families/children high on the agenda.’

4.55 Participants noted that secondary schools were underrepresented and that the event would have benefitted from input from the police and the judiciary to reflect fully a parent’s journey through the justice system and children’s experiences and support needs at each stage. Participants at the event felt unanimously that opportunities such as these are essential to foster positive interagency relationships, improve communication between agencies, and strengthen a culture of collaboration.

4.56 As described in the HMP and YOI Parc School Zone case study, a key element of the initiative is the collaboration between prison and school staff. Understanding each other’s environments is crucial to effective partnership. The fact that prison staff visit schools to discuss children’s needs prior to a showcase event and that teachers can experience the visiting process in the prison helps school and prison staff to find collective solutions to challenges:

‘It creates a connection between schools, prisons and the community.’ (Prison officer, HMP and YOI Parc showcase event)

This was also a key strength noted in phase four of the project: Barnardo’s staff based at HMP Berwyn regularly visit schools and invite teachers into the prison to gain an insight into children’s experiences, and Pact staff based in HMP Swansea bring school and prison staff together when supporting individual children. Clear from the school-prison initiatives was that excellent communication is a fundamental element of any model of support for children:

‘It’s great to have communication between the prison and the school if possible. He [grandson] wants his mum involved, especially when it comes to his wellbeing.’ (Grandmother, phase four interview)

4.57 Several barriers to multi-agency working were identified throughout the project. Education and prison-based practitioners interviewed in phase four acknowledged that effective communication can be difficult in a climate of understaffing, where resources are limited at best. Collaboration between agencies often requires staff to work above and beyond their core activities rather than this being embedded into routine practice. Children who have a parent in a prison that is geographically remote from their school are likely to be excluded from the benefits of such collaboration unless creative opportunities for remote connections are created.

4.58 Stakeholders interviewed in phase four described a siloed approach between prisons, schools, and third sector organisations. Relationships were sometimes challenging, and knowledge was limited about what different organisations were offering to families within the same geographical area:

‘There is too much siloed working – we focus on the bits that suit us, rather than on the bigger picture.’ (Children’s policy lead, phase four interview)

4.59 Stakeholders felt strongly that the commissioning process is not conducive to fostering collaboration and that when contracts transition from one provider to another, handover is limited or non-existent. Staff from third sector organisations felt that families are disadvantaged by a commissioning process that pits organisations against each other rather than encouraging an integrated approach to sharing information, expertise, and resources.

4.60 A major barrier to effective communication identified by stakeholders was that information systems do not correspond. Data sharing and information flow between schools, prisons, and third sector organisations are limited. The breakdown of communication between agencies impacts partnership working and, in turn, may disadvantage a child. This can happen even within the same sector: during the HMP and YOI Parc site visit, for example, a father due to participate in the showcase event was moved to another prison without warning on the day of the event to facilitate his undertaking courses in his sentence plan (without prior notice to the Invisible Walls team, who were coordinating the event and liaising with the family and school). This inevitably had a significant impact on the emotional

wellbeing of the child involved, who was unable to attend the event or visit his father as planned.

- 4.61 Stakeholders and family members acknowledged throughout the project that children's needs and rights should be at the centre of all collaboration. For example, a well-coordinated multi-agency approach should avoid the need for children to tell their stories repeatedly:

'Making sure the child remains at the centre of all collaboration and asking, What is best for this child? That's really important.' (Third sector practitioner, phase four interview)

Megan's story (para. 5.2) lays bare the consequences of a lack of coordination and collaboration.

- 4.62 Existing models such as Team Around the Family, Joint Assessment Family Framework, and family group conferences can be helpful in promoting a holistic children's rights approach to collaboration. These interventions should include the parent in prison where appropriate:

'Everyone has always given us our place in making decisions about [my grandson]. I have always felt included.' (Grandmother, phase four interview)

'It is very important for me to be involved in decisions about my son... I'm his dad, I want a say as well.' (Parent in custody, phase four interview)

- 4.63 Throughout the project, stakeholders mentioned the value of a single point of contact within schools and prisons to aid collaboration and interagency working. Respondents to the baseline survey highlighted the need for a designated staff member within schools to be 'beacons' and facilitate collaboration. This can provide clarification on whom to contact about an individual child with a parent in prison but must not dilute the need for all staff to have a knowledge and understanding of the impact of imprisonment on children, as laid out in the 'Training' section below.

- 4.64 Parents in the community, those in prison, and children all recognised the key role that third sector organisations play in coordinating effective multi-agency working. Specialist third sector organisations often have good relationships with families, local authorities, schools, and prisons. Furthermore, third sector organisations can draw on other resources and expertise within the wider organisation, for example

referring children and parents to other services. Parents in custody and carers in the community described these organisations as:

‘Fair and honest.’ (Parent in custody, phase four interview)

‘Amazing, so kind. We felt so safe with them.’ (Grandmother, phase four interview)

- 4.65 Stakeholders recognised at all stages of the project that families are often nervous about statutory intervention and that this can be a barrier to children receiving the support they need. Parents looking after children at home reported that third sector organisations are helpful in brokering relationships with social services if required. This was evident in discussions with prison-based social workers involved in Pact’s Together a Chance initiative in HMP Eastwood Park. In this project, staff can offer training and insight to social workers in the community responsible for children with mothers in the prison, which in turn fosters positive relationships between children and their mothers. This underpins the need for an integrated approach between statutory services, universal services, and third sector organisations.
- 4.66 Effective multi-agency working must be at the core of any model of support for children impacted by parental imprisonment. Organisations need to know and be confident of their scope and limitations and liaise with other sectors and organisations to ensure improved outcomes for children. Ultimately, a collaborative approach must lead to action that supports children.

Training

Context

- 4.67 The literature review identified that practitioners and policymakers might lack knowledge and understanding about the impact on children of having a parent in prison, and training and awareness-raising amongst both school and prison staff is important. Training plays an integral role in challenging stigma and discrimination, creating communities of compassion where families feel able to ask for help, and increasing skills and confidence in all staff.

Findings from the ASPIRE project

- 4.68 As identified in the background section, various training programmes are already being delivered across Wales to raise awareness about the impact of parental imprisonment and develop skills in supporting children with a parent in prison. Most

training is being delivered by non-statutory agencies such as Pact, Invisible Walls Wales, Barnardo's, and the North Wales Families Affected by Imprisonment programme¹⁰. Most of the training regarding parental imprisonment has been delivered to school-based staff, although it has been extended in some areas to other agencies working with children and young people, such as social care.

4.69 Interviews throughout the project highlighted that prison staff have limited training regarding the impact of imprisonment on children and young people and how to support them effectively. HMPPS has developed an online learning programme focused on families and significant others, and the new HMPPS Families and Significant Other Measurement Tool asks that all prison staff who are directly working with families, such as staff working on visits, complete the online module. With it being an online tool, HMPPS can collate data regarding the uptake of this training.

4.70 All stakeholders agreed that training was an important element of any pan-Wales model of support and contributed to:

- raising awareness about how many children and young people are affected by parental imprisonment
- raising awareness about the policies and practices currently in place regarding children affected by parental imprisonment
- increasing understanding about the impact of parental imprisonment
- creating cultures that challenge stigma and discrimination
- motivating practitioners to support children affected by parental imprisonment
- developing empathy and compassion for children affected by parental imprisonment
- developing knowledge and skills in how to support children with a parent in prison effectively

One young person described the value of training for professionals to understand the experience: 'It's not too dissimilar to losing a parent, just not quite as severe, but it definitely feels very similar to grief... so teachers should take a similar approach to dealing with bereavement and have similar training.' (Young person, phase four interview)

¹⁰ Funding for this service ceased at the end of August 2024.

- 4.71 Prison-based stakeholders interviewed at both HMP and YOI Parc and in phase four highlighted that, while training was valuable, experience and organisational culture also played important roles in enabling staff to develop the skills, knowledge, and understanding necessary to support children and families effectively:
- ‘It needs to be led from the top in prisons... it is crucial that Governors are developing a culture of relational practice.’ (Criminal justice lead, phase four interview)
- 4.72 Consultation with stakeholders and the review of current practice highlighted some potential challenges with delivering training regarding children affected by parental imprisonment. For example, staff shortages and demands on statutory services can result in practitioners having limited capacity to attend training:
- ‘There is no capacity within the prison estate to attend any additional training... the priority is mandatory training, and that is a challenge.’ (Criminal justice lead, phase four interview)
- 4.73 Online training may not be as effective as face-to-face learning opportunities. While stakeholders identified that online training modules were helpful in reducing resources required to deliver or attend training, practitioners in phase four interviews felt that they were often less effective in engaging participants and achieving learning outcomes:
- ‘...people love a face to face. I find things are a lot more impactful if people go to something. I find they invest in a bit more... a lot of people get a bit distracted on Teams and everything.’ (Prison officer, phase four interview)
- 4.74 Existing training programmes being delivered across Wales have been developed independently by a range of agencies, and while some commonalities exist, there are also inconsistencies regarding content and key messages. Some training risks perpetuating negative stereotypes about children affected by parental imprisonment by emphasising messages regarding the likelihood of intergenerational offending rather than drawing on strengths-based models of support. Stakeholders also spoke about a lack of sustainable funding across all sectors and that ‘changing hearts and minds’ would be needed for funding to be directed in this area.
- 4.75 Throughout the consultation, stakeholders felt that all practitioners working with children and families should have access to consistent and effective training about

the impact of parental imprisonment. They noted the importance of including both frontline staff and strategic and/or senior staff in training programmes.

- 4.76 Stakeholders identified a wide range of agencies/practitioners that would require access to training on supporting children with a parent in prison. These included education staff from nurseries, schools, pupil referral units, and colleges, including staff with expertise in additional learning needs and education welfare; prison staff; police; social workers; Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service; court-based staff; probation staff; practitioners involved in NEET (not in education, employment or training) and Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference meetings; youth support organisations such as those supporting young carers; health providers, such as Specialist Child and Adolescent Mental Health services; housing agencies; practitioners involved in Team Around the Family; family engagement officers and local area coordinators; and undergraduate students on courses such as social work, education, criminal justice, or healthcare. Stakeholders felt that multi-disciplinary training sessions, available to a wide range of practitioners would serve to support collaborative working, consistent understanding, and shared learning.
- 4.77 While participants demonstrated widespread support for training taking place in schools, they highlighted that prison-based training for practitioners who work in the community was particularly impactful. Having the opportunity to ‘walk through’ the prison visiting experience reportedly provided practitioners both with an improved and more memorable understanding of prison systems, as well as equipping them with the knowledge to say to children, ‘I’ve seen it, you’ll be okay’ (Teacher, HMP and YOI Parc showcase event). Stakeholders emphasised, however, that if the training is prison-based, consideration must be given to ensuring that the focus of the training remains on the child and the impact on them rather than on the prison itself.
- 4.78 Participants in the stakeholder event and in the phase four interviews emphasised the importance of involving children and their parents in both the development and delivery of training programmes:
- ‘You need to listen to people’s experiences.’ (Young person, phase four interview)

'They [children] should feel included and not just spoken about. They should have a say in the training.' (Parent in prison, phase four interview)

'First-hand case studies, first-hand stories about young people that are in their 20s or their 30s that reflect upon that time how they felt and what support worked for them as well as what didn't work for them at that time to really understand the complexity of it.' (Headteacher, phase four interview)

Both parents and practitioners, however, emphasised the importance of considering the most appropriate way in which to engage children and young people in the development of training, placing the wellbeing of children at the heart of any practice.

4.79 In considering the content of any training programme regarding children affected by parental imprisonment, stakeholders suggested that it should aim to achieve the following learning outcomes amongst participants:

- increased understanding of the criminal justice system, including sentencing, custody (and prison visits), release and resettlement, and how each stage can impact children and young people
- increased understanding about the impact of parental imprisonment on children and young people, how this can vary across age groups/circumstances/types of offence, and what this impact may look like in terms of children's emotional wellbeing and behaviour
- increased understanding of the stigma attached to parental imprisonment and how to challenge discrimination
- heightened confidence in supporting children affected by parental imprisonment and answering any questions they might have
- expanded knowledge of the tools and resources available to support practice with children affected by parental imprisonment

'[Professionals need to] understand where the kids are coming from... like if you did get upset at school... so they understand what is happening for you.' (Young person, phase four interview)

'Give us tools to support pupils, like how we might be able to respond to their questions.' (Teacher, HMP and YOI Parc showcase event)

4.80 Stakeholders reflecting on training for prison staff felt that additional learning outcomes should include:

- increased understanding of how in-prison decisions affect children (e.g. contact being cancelled, not allowing phone calls, moving parent from one prison to another at short notice)
- increased understanding about the importance of recognising the role of individuals in custody as parents
- increased understanding about how to ensure visiting procedures are child-friendly
- increased understanding of child safeguarding

4.81 In summary, stakeholders felt that any pan-Wales training programme should be informed by the lived experiences of children and families and underpinned by trauma-informed, destigmatising, child rights-centred, and strengths-based principles. They should be tailored to the specific Welsh policy and practice context and supported by a commitment from senior leaders across all agencies. Training should be accompanied by resources and tools to support practice in both Welsh and English and delivered by skilled, personable, and dedicated individuals with specialist knowledge about supporting children affected by parental imprisonment. It should be monitored effectively and evaluated to map who has received training and the learning outcomes achieved. Finally, messaging and content should be consistent across Wales and made available to, and be appropriate for, a multi-agency audience, including strategic/policy leads, frontline practitioners, and ‘champions’ or practice leads.

Identification of children when a parent goes to prison

Context

4.82 As highlighted in the literature review, the identification of children and young people who have a parent in prison is an important but complex issue. No systematic process currently exists to inform schools when a child’s parent or carer is imprisoned. While identification is key in planning and providing support for children, careful consideration is necessary to ensure that families are not further stigmatised and isolated.

Findings from the ASPIRE project

4.83 Throughout the consultation, stakeholders confirmed that no systems are currently in place in Wales to identify children who have a parent in prison. While participants recognised the importance of identification in providing support for children, they

also highlighted the tension between communication, identification, and privacy. Some parents do not want their children to know the truth of the situation, and families will have varying levels of communication with the person held in prison. Every situation and family are unique, including the offence type and appropriateness/safety of contact. Respondents agreed that all children who want and need support should receive it but that a reporting system is needed to know who these children are.

- 4.84 The focus groups with carers and imprisoned parents at HMP and YOI Parc revealed differing opinions about the identification of children and the sharing of information when a parent goes to prison. This included comments that schools have a right to know for the purpose of safeguarding but also that schools should not know automatically to prevent a child from being stigmatised. Some families wanted the school to know, as a bad visit could cause a child's behaviour to change, so the school being aware would be helpful. However, the preference was that this information should be for the parent to share with the school rather than it happening automatically:

'When the teachers know more, they understand why you are sad.' (Child at HMP and YOI Parc showcase event)

'We will understand their behaviour more now, and it will help us to provide consistent support.' (Teacher, HMP and YOI Parc showcase event)

'Support should be targeted at encouraging families to engage with schools for support, not forcing their issues into the light against their or their child's wishes. Where schools are trusted and issues disclosed, the importance of this trust in school staff needs to be respected and valued.' (Baseline survey participant)

A young person with lived experience felt that everyone (young person, family, school) 'should all work as a team and decide what they (the school) need to know.' (Young person, phase four interview)

- 4.85 Participants at the stakeholder event concluded that a school-based system of identifying children affected by imprisonment would be helpful, particularly from the start of the criminal justice journey, such as when a parent is arrested or is in court. Several issues must be considered, including how information is best communicated with schools, how families are involved in communicating the information, and where information should be held so the records follow children to

their next school. A consistent approach across all schools is key. Several schools in Wales already use 'My Concern' forms to record any issues on a child's case file, so this could be used for children when a parent goes to prison: 'My Concern' records follow a child throughout their education, so consideration should be given to removing this information once the parent is no longer in prison.

4.86 Currently, information on children who have a parent in prison is largely anecdotal. In the phase four interviews, stakeholders highlighted that this is especially the case when children reach secondary school, as connections with parents at the school gate largely disappear, along with the relationships between parents and teachers. Prisons and prison visitors' centre providers collect raw data on the number of children who visit, but this only applies to children who visit and is not collated, shared, or used to inform wider policy or practice.

4.87 All participants flagged the importance of considering the identification of children at the earliest opportunity to ensure early intervention from the point of arrest, court, and during remand. Some participants noted that courts should already be collecting data about which people have children at the time of sentencing. Young people interviewed emphasised the importance of support from the start:

'At the beginning, you are not 100% sure what is happening, you are just really confused... I wanted to know where my dad was and how he was being treated... all the things you see on TV makes you think everyone in prison are bad people, are the guards bad?' (Young person, phase four interview)

Young people also highlighted, however, that they would like to be offered support throughout their parent's criminal justice journey, even after their parent has left prison, as the stress and anxiety related to a parent's imprisonment can last well beyond release:

'Dad has been quite isolated living in prison, and it's going to be weird for him coming home and getting used to his life again... I'm worried if people say he's done something wrong again and he will have to go back, and we will have to go back to what it was like at the beginning again.' (Young person, phase four interview)

4.88 Throughout the consultation, participants felt that in addition to schools, other key agencies may need to know that a child has a parent in custody, including youth organisations, the medical profession, and social services. Collection of this

information requires trust and an understanding of why the information is being collected and how it will be used. Exposure of families through other means, such as word of mouth and the media, can be highly damaging and prevent families from being willing to be identified. One participant with lived experience queried:

‘Why are you still allowing the names and addresses of children to be printed in reporting about crimes adults have committed? Stop this now.’ (Third sector practitioner, phase four interview)

- 4.89 No consensus emerged about the automatic disclosure of information about parental imprisonment to schools. Practitioners suggested that existing systems could be utilised (such as Operation Encompass¹¹ or Public Protection Notices¹²), where safeguarding leads or headteachers of schools are informed so that adjustments can be made. However, in any case of automatic disclosure, unintended consequences must be considered.
- 4.90 In the online survey of young people, nine out of ten respondents felt the school should be told automatically, six said anyone working with the child should know, and only three said the child should decide. However, young people who took part in focus groups and interviews had apprehensions about how information is shared in schools and with whom. When children and young people say, ‘the school should know’, they may mean a certain teacher rather than everyone in the school. One young person attending the showcase event at HMP and YOI Parc had wanted a say in which teacher was invited to the event. Another young person interviewed in phase four recounted that her college had been told without her knowledge. She found out when one of her teachers said, ‘I heard what happened with your mum’. She felt schools should know so they can provide support but also felt very strongly that children should have an opportunity to be involved in decision-making about who knows. One parent in prison said that schools should not be told unless there is a matter of high security.
- 4.91 The findings identified benefits to children when schools are informed that their parent is in prison. These included:
- schools can offer support proactively and at specific times, for example, pre- and post-prison visits

¹¹ Operation Encompass is a police and education early information safeguarding partnership enabling schools to offer immediate support to children experiencing domestic abuse.

¹² PPN is an information sharing document that records safeguarding concerns about an adult or a child.

- absences to visit a parent in prison can be authorised, and therefore there would be fewer unauthorised absences that come to the attention of education welfare
- teachers can be more compassionate, for example, if a child forgets their PE kit, or if a child's behaviour changes, they can understand why, and children are more likely to be supported rather than punished. (However, one policy respondent noted that children have a right to be supported without anyone knowing the specific details and that trauma-informed approaches can be implemented without anyone knowing about the child's situation)
- schools can manage the sharing of information to ensure that it remains confidential

4.92 Family members and practitioners alike felt that the family should be encouraged to tell schools themselves. This might be the parent in prison, the carer, or the young person themselves (although respondents recognised that young people have a tendency not to disclose the information). To support families to disclose that a parent is in custody, respondents said the following must be considered:

- to encourage disclosure of any difficult issue, or if information is known (e.g. through the media) or suspected, education professionals need to approach families sensitively and in a way that makes them feel included
- families need to know that they will not be judged or discriminated against
- families need to know that support is available and how to access that support
- agencies need to work effectively and collaboratively
- practitioners need to know how to provide support and/or information

4.93 In considering identification, stakeholders identified several barriers that require consideration:

- many parents in prison may be reluctant to disclose they have children due to a fear of involvement from social services (approximately 60 per cent of men in one of the prisons visited by the ASPIRE team were reported to be care-experienced). One practitioner in prison said that asking men about their children can be a good conversation starter if it is done in the right way
- the Education Welfare Officers may not have contact details for, or established relationships with, grandparents or other kinship carers who care for children while their parents are in prison

- parents are not confident to tell the school, as they are worried about information being shared with others.
- some school staff may respond with judgement; identification could result in a child being seen and treated differently
- some young people do not want to talk about what has happened

4.94 Throughout all discussions regarding identification, respondents highlighted that relationships are key: families must feel confident that the motive is to offer support rather than punish or further discriminate. A balance must always be in place between the need for support and the right to non-disclosure.

Including all children in support

Context

4.95 Children in Wales are not a homogenous group: they come from a wide range of social, economic, and ethnic communities with diverse needs and experiences. Not all children in Wales with a parent in prison are in school or are visiting their parent. Therefore, a 'one-size fits all' approach will not work. Development of a pan-Wales model must recognise that not all imprisoned Welsh parents reside in Wales: all mothers, and a significant proportion of fathers, are in custody in English prisons. Whatever their background, circumstance, experience, age, and characteristics, all children need a kind, sensitive, and trauma-informed approach and tailored care and support.

Findings from the ASPIRE project activities

4.96 People attending the stakeholder event and those interviewed during phase four highlighted the diverse range of children across Wales who are impacted by parental imprisonment as something that must be considered when developing a model of support. A policy lead interviewed in phase four felt that support for all children impacted by parental imprisonment should be underpinned by the Welsh Government's Children and Young People's Plan (2024), which prioritises giving all children and young people support to have a fair chance in life, particularly those who need additional help to overcome barriers and fulfil their potential:

'We need to be aware of children's wider needs with regard to their religion, ethnicity, and any visible, or unseen, disabilities they may have.' (Social worker, phase four interview)

4.97 Both consultation with stakeholders and a review of practice in Wales highlighted that children who visit prisons generally have greater access to support than those who are not visiting. All prisons in England and Wales provide visitor support services, family visits, and information and advice. They also enable children to be in an environment amongst other families who have had similar experiences:

‘On arrival at a warm and cosy visiting centre, I was greeted by the lovely Invisible Walls staff... They were so kind to me and took the time to listen, understand and advise me on the processes and what they had available to help me and my children... In times of complete devastation and despair, the staff make you feel so comfortable, supported, reassured and understood. My children are so comfortable also in the [visit centre] environment, and they have gotten to know the staff also; it really does make an incredible difference to all of us. It makes you feel that you are not alone.’ (Mother, HMP and YOI Parc showcase event)

4.98 Teachers and prison staff who were interviewed during the HMP and YOI Parc showcase event acknowledged that, while initiatives like School Zone can be beneficial for children and their families, this only reaches a very small proportion of children in Wales who are visiting a parent in prison. While children visiting prisons still require support regarding the impact of imprisonment, those who are not visiting their parent require specific consideration to ensure their support needs are being met.

4.99 Stakeholders acknowledged that prison visiting services could be developed further to provide more inclusive support to children and young people, which could be supported by additional equality and diversity training for prison staff. Specific groups of children included:

Children from different cultural and/or religious backgrounds and those for whom English is not their first language

4.100 Stakeholders were unaware of support in Wales for specific ethnic groups of children with a parent in prison, although plans are underway to facilitate an event at HMP Berwyn for children from Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller communities. A criminal justice policy lead interviewed in phase four felt that special visits that acknowledge children’s cultural and religious practices (e.g. Diwali) could help children feel more included and supported and may encourage families to visit but

recognised that provision for this in prisons in Wales is currently limited. Fieldwork in both HMPs Parc and Berwyn noted evidence of information for families being translated into Welsh but not in other languages; this may be a barrier to some families visiting the prison.

Older children and young people

- 4.101 Families and stakeholders felt that prisons are better equipped to offer child-friendly visits to younger children and that lack of provision for older children and teenagers may be a barrier to them attending visits.

Neurodivergent children and children with additional needs

- 4.102 Teachers participating in the HMP and YOI Parc showcase event and prison staff who were interviewed during phase four commented that prison visits for neurodivergent children can be difficult; they find the security search process frightening (particularly the sniffer dogs) and the noise in the visits' hall stressful. Initiatives such as the sensory room in HMP Berwyn can alleviate children's anxieties and facilitate a calmer visit. Training for prison staff is key and preparing children prior to the visit is helpful. Practitioners supporting children impacted by imprisonment who took part in phase four interviews commented that neurodivergent children find telephone calls to the prison and video visits challenging. Some neurodivergent children may prefer online visits, though not all families have access to the internet.
- 4.103 A respondent in phase four emphasised the need for careful thought to be given to how to include the views of children with learning difficulties and those who are non-verbal, engaging specialist services if necessary:

'In the past, we've had a young person who had a disability and, with our coordinator, made a PowerPoint presentation on [her thoughts] and then presented that to her family group conference so that her family and extended family could understand [her wishes and feelings] a bit more.' (Third sector practitioner, phase four interview)

Children from families with low incomes

- 4.104 Throughout the project, parents, carers, and stakeholders highlighted the financial cost and the time involved in travelling to a prison visit and the additional challenges of doing this on public transport. This is a significant barrier to ensuring all children

with a parent in prison receive support, as many families are unable to visit due to financial restraints:

‘Why should the child get a detriment because mum or dad can’t afford to drive them outside of Wales? It’s about making it a fair system for all.’ (Prison officer, phase four interview)

Children with a parent in custody outside Wales

- 4.105 Stakeholders highlighted the need for additional support for children who are travelling significant distances to visit their parent in prison, as this can increase the emotional, financial and practical toll of visiting a parent (see Annex G for the numbers of individuals in Wales in custody in England). Stakeholders emphasised the need for initiatives such as Visiting Mum to be funded sustainably to support all children in Wales who have a parent in prison outside Wales.

Children whose parents have committed a high-profile, sexual, or inter-familial offence

- 4.106 Children may face additional isolation, stigma, and discrimination as a result of their parent’s offence. This needs to be considered in terms of the support and information they require.

Support outside of the prison context

- 4.107 Widely accepted at all stages of the project was that support for children cannot solely be linked to prison visits, as this will exclude a significant number of children from receiving the support they need. Professionals, children, and their parents recognised the valuable role that schools and education services can play in ensuring all children affected by parental imprisonment receive support. For children not attending school, stakeholders throughout the project recognised the important role that Education Welfare Officers (EWOs) have in providing emotional support and practical strategies to children and their families. Suggestions of how EWOs can support children impacted by imprisonment included:

- providing a listening ear and an empathetic approach
- authorising absences when prison visits occur during the school day
- facilitating virtual schools and flexible timetables for children who are not able to attend school due, for example, to stigma, shame, and bullying

An EWO interviewed in phase four felt she had received little to no training on the impact of imprisonment on children and had 'just picked things up as I've gone along.' This underpins the need for training for a range of stakeholders, as outlined in the section above on training.

- 4.108 Participants in the stakeholder event felt that more support for children tends to be offered through primary schools, where relationships between a family and the school are often stronger, but that secondary schools need to be included in considerations of a pan-Wales model.
- 4.109 Common to all children is the need to ensure that they have parents or carers who can provide the care and support they need. Interviews with parents in custody, parents and carers in the community, and children and young people all highlighted the need for a pan-Wales model to include support for parents and carers in the community. It is vital that parents and carers are supported in their own right, with their own needs (emotional, practical, financial, social), so they can provide the day-to-day support, care, and guidance that their children will need:

'This has had a profound effect on me as I haven't been leaving the house much this year through fear of reprisals and judgement from the wider community...

This has absolutely and utterly turned our lives upside down and devastated us beyond belief.' (Mother, HMP and YOI Parc showcase event)

- 4.110 While parents visiting prisons were grateful for the peer support they received from other families, as well as from visitors' centre staff, stigma, isolation, and a lack of specialist services limited the support and information they received in the community. Fathers at HMP and YOI Parc were keen to highlight the lack of support for their partners in the community, with one describing this as a 'black hole' for parents and another sharing that, 'At 8pm, when the door shuts and the kids are in bed, she's lonely, and that's when I'd usually be there'. While services such as Pact's telephone befriending service and the Prisoners' Families Helpline exist (see Annex A for details), no peer support groups are currently delivered in the community in Wales for parents and carers.

Safeguarding

Context

- 4.111 Safeguarding is integral to all work with families and must be a priority in collaboration between schools and prisons. Any model of support should have the

wellbeing of children at its heart and should not cause any unintended harm.

Safeguarding is not a one-off exercise but rather a dynamic process that relies on a child-centred approach within a whole-family focus, effective multi-agency working, and transparent information sharing (HM Government, 2023). Also important to recognise is that having a parent in prison is not a safeguarding concern in and of itself. It is essential that all agencies ensure effective safeguarding whilst upholding a child's right to maintain parental contact.

Findings from the ASPIRE project

- 4.112 While contact between a child and parent in custody will occasionally not be permitted due to safeguarding concerns, respondents contributing to phase four interviews and the stakeholder event suggested that parental imprisonment can lead professionals to assume a level of risk or deficit that may not necessarily be accurate. A third sector practitioner providing in-prison family support services reported that some fathers in custody had been discouraged by family court advisory services from making child contact applications, with the presumption that, as they were in custody, their application would be viewed unfavourably. Equally, another respondent in phase four referred to how prison visits in and of themselves can sometimes be seen as having a negative impact on child wellbeing. An example was given of a child in foster care not being supported to visit their imprisoned parent, showing a lack of consideration for the child's wishes or the strengths of maintaining parental contact. In addition, respondents in both the stakeholder event and phase four interviews highlighted that the perceived propensity for parental imprisonment to be viewed as a safeguarding risk inhibited parents (both in the community and in custody) from disclosing that their child had been affected by parental imprisonment, potentially limiting access to support. Stakeholders emphasised that, while safeguarding was essential, parents in custody should also be viewed as a potential strength and asset to children and their families rather than solely through the lens of 'risk'.
- 4.113 Third sector organisations working with children and families in prisons were reported to provide a valuable source of safeguarding knowledge, expertise, and support for prisons and for parents in custody. While prison staff identified the role of Offender Management Units and public protection teams in identifying risks associated with parent-child contact, they generally reported that they had limited knowledge of child safeguarding practice:

'I think in general [prison] staff would always benefit from more training across the board, but even on child safeguarding, they need a lot more understanding.'
(Prison officer, phase four interview)

- 4.114 Stakeholders suggested that they frequently relied on the knowledge and expertise of their local family services provider (Pact, Barnardo's, or Invisible Walls Wales), should they have child safeguarding concerns. Consultation in phase four also identified examples of how prison-based family service providers had supported parents in custody regarding safeguarding and parent-child contact:
- at HMP Berwyn, Barnardo's had been involved in supporting parents attending meetings with the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service
 - at HMP Eastwood Park, Pact had supported mothers to raise safeguarding concerns when they were concerned about their child's welfare in the community
- 4.115 One respondent identified the potential to develop prison-based programmes and interventions for parents in custody to address potential risk and safeguarding concerns in the future, particularly associated with domestic violence. A disparity in skills, knowledge, policy, and expertise in child safeguarding was evident across different agencies, and a coherent, collaborative approach is important to establish in any multi-agency model of support for children affected by parental imprisonment.
- 4.116 A common theme at both the stakeholder event and during phase four interviews was the need to consider child safeguarding at every stage of a parent's journey through the criminal justice system, not just when the parent is in custody. Participants highlighted the important role that the police play in ensuring the welfare of children when their parent is arrested. Stakeholders also identified that children may be particularly vulnerable when their parent is being released from prison. They described the potential confusion and upset for children when they can visit their parent in custody in a supervised, safe environment in contrast to when their parent is released, and contact is no longer permitted or is only allowed under supervision due to the perceived level of risk. Effective communication between prisons, probation, social care, education, and family support agencies was considered imperative to mitigate the impact on children and young people. Two practitioners mentioned that whilst professionals may presume that children will want to see their parent upon release, this should not be assumed, and 'not all

children are excited' to do so. A parent's release from prison can be a huge adjustment for children and young people, and they may need emotional support at this time. An interview with a young person echoed this, saying that despite looking forward to the release of his parent, he also felt anxious:

'I'm worried about how he is going to cope coming home.' (Young person, phase four interview)

4.117 Respondents also highlighted the impact of release and resettlement on parents and the importance of providing them with support so that they can cope with the practical and emotional impacts of resettlement and be able to support their children. None of the in-prison family support agencies in Wales provide through-the-gate support to families as part of an HMPPS Family Service contract.

4.118 Safeguarding practice can only be effective when the child's voice is heard. Providing children and young people with child-friendly, appropriate information at every stage regarding all decisions that affect them, along with ongoing opportunities to have their voices heard, is essential. As discussed in the literature review, the Child Impact Assessment tool (Prison Reform Trust, 2022) provides a helpful resource to support practitioners in regularly supporting children and young people to identify their own needs:

'I guess the major, major thing I'd be thinking if I was working with a child would be, do they actually want contact with this parent? And if they haven't got capacity, is it in their best interest? So, it's sort of upholding their views and choices...I guess the major difference in my role is the individual lacks capacity, so it's relying on their carers, those most involved in how they view the situation, impacts on them, or what they feel the child is getting out of this.' (Social worker, phase four interview)

Monitoring and evaluation

Context

4.119 The background section demonstrates a wealth of UK-based and international research about the impact of parental imprisonment on children and young people. However, a significant gap in evidence exists about what works to improve their outcomes, particularly in terms of their education and wellbeing. Furthermore, limited evidence is available about the impact on and what works for specific groups of children. Quality assurance and inspection frameworks across criminal justice,

education, and public health do not recognise children affected by parental imprisonment as a distinct group.

Findings from the ASPIRE project

- 4.120 Welsh systems lack data about children affected by parental imprisonment. For example, limited information is available regarding how many children in Wales are impacted by having a parent in prison, who they are, where they are, their demographic characteristics, their wellbeing, and the impact of support on their outcomes. No universal service in Wales, for example, neither education (via Estyn's inspection framework) nor health, record data on the number of children with a parent in prison or the support they receive. The [School Health Research Network](#) (SHRN) collects annual school data on children's health and wellbeing, and while it monitors children in care, it does not monitor children with a parent in prison. The SHRN could provide a useful way of identifying the number of children affected and their demographic characteristics, as well as their current health and wellbeing and changes over time. There may be value to considering other datasets relating to education in Wales and how they may be used to inform knowledge and understanding of the experiences of children affected by parental imprisonment in Wales. In addition, interviews with social services management in phase four suggest they do not have a record of all the children with a parent in prison across the local authority, nor do they monitor their outcomes, but they 'would be aware of who these children are within individual teams'.
- 4.121 Within the prison system, the Basic Custody Screening Tool is used to gather data when individuals first arrive in custody and record whether someone in prison has children. However, as stakeholders in phase four interviews identified, the reliability of this data depends on whether the individual discloses this information, how the question is asked, and by whom. Prisons and family support providers delivering visitor centre services also record data about how many and which children are visiting, as well as who they are visiting, but this information is not shared with other agencies. Stakeholders in phase four interviews also highlighted the potential of Resettlement Passports (GovNet Justice, 2020) in providing information about children affected by parental imprisonment. Resettlement Passports are part of the HMPPS Reducing Reoffending Programme and are designed to support people in prison when they are released by gathering the critical information and services needed for them to reintegrate successfully into their communities. Work is currently

underway to establish where information about parental responsibility and children can sit.

- 4.122 Limited consolidated data is available in Wales regarding the effectiveness of support on children and young people with a parent in prison. The HMPPS Family and Significant Other Measurement Tool is a mandatory assessment process that all prisons must undertake to monitor their work with families. However, as one stakeholder in phase four highlighted, ‘they are marking their own homework’, as it is a self-assessment tool. Once the assessment is completed, prisons should develop an action plan to demonstrate how they are meeting the recommendations from the assessment tool findings. Stakeholders noted, however, that this assessment does not monitor the impact of services on children and young people and instead focuses on interventions delivered (i.e. outputs) and outcomes for individuals in custody.
- 4.123 Consultation undertaken with third sector providers delivering family support in prisons identified that service-specific monitoring and evaluation are being undertaken to monitor their impact on children with a parent in prison. Barnardo’s, Pact, Invisible Walls Wales, and Family and Friends of Prisoners Service all stated that they undertake outcome-focused monitoring and evaluation activities, for example, reviewing children’s experiences of visiting services and family days and monitoring children’s progression during one-to-one support programmes. Wider evaluations of specific interventions delivered in Wales have also been conducted, such as the Visiting Mum service (see Rees et al., 2017 and 2022, and Clancy and Maguire, 2017). However, these have not focused on outcomes achieved for individual children.
- 4.124 The review of legislation and policy highlighted that no inspection framework in Wales currently requires services to address the specific needs of children affected by parental imprisonment. Neither the HMPPS Family and Significant Other Measurement Tool, HM Inspectorate of Prisons, nor the Estyn inspection framework reviews the outcomes for children affected by imprisonment.
- 4.125 In considering what outcomes should be considered when monitoring the impact of support and interventions, stakeholders from phase four interviews suggested focusing on outcomes relating to the child’s:
- relationships with family and friends

- school attendance
- educational attainment
- ability to articulate and manage their emotions
- confidence
- behaviour
- health
- participation in hobbies and leisure activities
- feeling of 'safety'

'Look at safety and stability. Does the young person feel safe? Is the child worried they are going to be out on the streets or going to have to move and move school; all factors that are involved in a child feeling safe and secure.'
(Social work policy lead, phase four interview)

- 4.126 Interestingly, all these suggested outcome areas align with the protective and compensatory experiences shown to mitigate the impact of ACEs, such as the imprisonment of a household member.
- 4.127 Participants in the phase four interviews also suggested outcomes should be 'appropriate and measured on an individual basis', not against others. One respondent suggested taking a qualitative approach by 'delving deeper by asking the child what the turning point was for them or asking how working in that particular way helped'. Others noted that 'soft outcomes are the ones that are needed to be measured. However, it is difficult with these types of outcomes, as with quantitative data, to demonstrate causality'. In addition, stakeholders recommended that both short- and long-term outcomes be measured, as 'impact can often only be seen in years, not months'. Stakeholders emphasised throughout the consultation, however, that each child has their own unique needs, and that individual approaches, and therefore monitoring, should be tailored to each child.
- 4.128 While consultation with stakeholders identified no consistent tools or outcome frameworks to monitor the impact of services on children affected by parental imprisonment, the review of literature and practice identified some potentially valuable resources, including:
- The Child Impact Assessment Tool developed by the Prison Reform Trust (Prison Reform Trust, 2022), which is a useful resource to support practitioners to listen without judgement to children's feelings, views, and

concerns, ensuring that any proposed outcomes are informed by what the child feels they need

- Outcome Stars, which are evidence-based tools for supporting and measuring change; and while no Star is available specifically for children affected by parental imprisonment, a range of child- and young person-specific Stars may provide a useful framework (Triangle Consulting Social Enterprise Ltd., 2024)
- The Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (Child Outcomes Research Consortium), which may provide a useful gauge of progress
- The Quality Statements and Toolkit (Barnardo's), which was developed to support organisations to set targets, create action plans, and monitor their progress in terms of providing support to children affected by parental imprisonment ([Barnardo's i-HOP Quality Statements and Toolkit - NICCO](#))

5. Findings: Illustrative case studies, Megan and Evan¹³

5.1 The following case studies, based on interviews conducted as part of phase four, provide a stark illustration of how vital each of these areas is in delivering effective support for children with a parent in custody. Megan's story illustrates the devastating impact on young people when these elements are not considered. By contrast, Evan's story shows what can be achieved when these are integrated into practice.

5.2 Megan's Story

Megan was 17 when her mother first went to prison. Although still a child, her needs were not considered in any of the criminal justice decisions regarding her mother: 'I remember someone at court saying to my mum, 'You're living with your daughter', but that was the only time I was ever mentioned.' Megan was left alone in the house with no money to buy food or essentials such as toiletries: 'I had a social worker at the time, but I was just left in my house with no food. I couldn't eat. I had no money for food or anything. The social worker was not with it at all, he didn't understand what I was going through. He used to walk round with his briefcase and not do much.'

The housing association that provided Megan's mother's flat took back the lease and said that Megan did not qualify for housing, as she was under 18. She felt judged by her mother's crime: 'These two ladies who worked there spoke to me as if I was nothing. They did everything they could to undermine me. One of them said to me, 'I wouldn't do to my daughter what your mum has done to you.'" Megan was rendered homeless and was offered a place in a homeless shelter where she felt very unsafe. Over the last two years, Megan's mother has been in and out of prison 11 times. Megan has spent that time sofa-surfing at friends' houses, sleeping in her boyfriend's car, and occasionally staying with extended family.

The first time Megan's mother was arrested (which did not lead to a custodial sentence), she was at school. Megan was aware that some staff knew, but she was not sure how they knew or what they knew: 'The social care person in school found out mum had been arrested... the police or my social worker maybe told her. I wasn't told they'd told her... it would've been better to tell me that school had been

¹³ Names have been changed to preserve anonymity.

told.' No one at school asked her how she was or offered her support: '[A teacher] just said, 'I heard about what happened with your mum.'"

Megan's experiences have left her with a clear sense of what would have made a difference at school and college: 'They [teachers] should ... have compassion and understanding... you need to actually understand what they're going through... listen to people's experiences... listen to everyone's situation. Decisions have been made about me, but no one has ever asked me... schools could ask me what I need.' While she feels that information sharing is important ('It is good that college knows so that they can try and support you. '), she is clear that, 'children and young people need to know who's being told [and] asked their opinions about who should be told. The person who works with you should say, 'Would you like the school or college to know?'"

When her mother first went to prison, Megan approached the job centre for support with accessing universal credit: 'This woman was really unhelpful. She said, 'Get out, we can't help you'. She didn't listen to me or anything... I said, 'Look I'm struggling, my mum's gone to prison', and she said, 'You're not 18, we can't help you.' She seemed in a bad mood. There was animosity from her, like she was judging me.' There were meetings about her: 'My social worker, mum's probation worker, and someone from college had a joint meeting... but there was nothing in the meeting about housing.', but Megan felt no one actually listened to her, far less acted: 'I felt nobody cared about me. They're being paid, all these workers who were meant to help me, but nobody did anything.'

Megan found visiting her mother in prison frightening: 'It was very blunt. it was straightforward blunt – they should make it less scary. I saw tables with colouring books and stuff, but the general vibe was scary... it wasn't welcoming' Prison staff did not help alleviate these fears: 'They didn't even speak to me, they treated us like an army: 'Walk there, do this, don't do that.'" She is clear what would help: 'Prison staff should get training on what it's like for kids... it would definitely help to hear from young people like me in training.'

Megan has experienced small acts of kindness over the last two years: 'College did help [a bit] ... they gave me toiletries (shampoo/shower gel and stuff... I'm not sure how they knew, but college just knew [that mum was in prison].' Her mother's probation practitioner showed compassion: 'Before my mum's release, my mum's probation officer texted me to say, 'Your mum's coming out, call me if you need me.'

She is really nice and really understanding. She understood my situation.’ And two neighbours each provided a meal for Megan (which she still remembers in detail two years later).

These isolated incidents of compassion are not enough to ensure children and young people like Megan receive the support they need and deserve. As Megan says, ‘There should be more support from schools, social workers, and prisons – more overall support emotionally, being truly understood and practical help and support.’ Megan is clear that the practical help must include housing for young people like her: ‘The housing people need to understand – housing is a massive part... your mum’s been taken away from you, but how can you live independently now? You will need support with housing and stuff because you’re just left out... you look at all your friends’ mums and you realise you’re left out.’ And while a collaborative approach is essential, ‘When people come into teams [around a child] and when they gather organisations together, they should actually do [something] instead of making it the child’s responsibility. They say they’re going to help but they don’t – that really lets the child down.’

Megan’s story provides an insight into the devastating impact of parental imprisonment on children, when their needs are not considered and support is not provided. This report is an opportunity to ensure that those with the power to make changes listen to the children and young people impacted by their decisions. As Megan says, ‘The government should listen to people like me. I have literally had no help. I am homeless right now. I have seen the worst things. I’ve watched my life fade away. All I’ve ever had is to be shut down. I wouldn’t wish what’s happened to me on my worst enemy.’

5.3 Evan’s story

Evan was 13 when his mother went to prison. He was looked after by his grandmother who found the experience difficult and frightening: ‘We’re a normal, everyday family. We were in shock. It is absolutely petrifying for families.’ In contrast to Megan, who was left alone and unsupported, Evan’s story is one that demonstrates the difference that all agencies can make by having a kind and compassionate approach. This was evident right from the arrest, as Evan’s grandmother explains: ‘The police brought [Evan] round to ours after they’d arrested his mum. They phoned me and said they’re bringing him round to me in a normal

car, not a police car. The police were lovely – their priority was [Evan]. They really were wonderful.’

Following the arrest and subsequent imprisonment, Evan and his grandmother connected with [Pact](#), a third sector organisation that supports people in prison and their families in England and Wales. Evan’s grandmother is clear what difference this support has made to the family: ‘The Pact staff have been kind and gentle. They’ve held our hands through all of this and have given us amazing help and support.’ In the early days of Evan’s mother’s imprisonment, the family did not know what to do: ‘We were petrified about the thought of going into a prison.’ Pact staff offered practical advice about arranging a visit, including accompanying Evan and his grandmother on an initial visit. Evan’s grandmother was struck by the kindness they experienced in the prison: ‘The prison staff were amazing with the children – they could see we were nervous. We were so scared. They [prison staff] just put us at ease and explained everything, like what to expect when we got in [to the visits’ room].’

As well as practical help, Pact provided vital emotional support. Evan’s grandmother is clear about the importance of this: ‘We felt safe with Pact. Knowing we are not the only ones has made a huge difference.’ Pact staff liaised with Evan’s teachers about the support he may need at school. School staff were also invited to undertake Pact’s training on the impact of parental imprisonment on young people and their families. Evan’s teachers told Pact why this is so important: ‘The link with Pact was really helpful to improve our knowledge, and therefore support, of [students impacted by parental imprisonment].’ Evan’s grandmother agrees that support from organisations like Pact is key: ‘Pact helped the school to support us – they [the school] were doing that already but it was better when Pact got involved.’

It is clear from Evan’s story that training and understanding for practitioners at all stages of the justice system are key to ensuring families feel listened to and receive the support they need. As Evan’s grandmother says, ‘We’ve been very fortunate – the teachers, police, prison staff have all been so kind. You could tell they had a heart. I was imagining all sorts, but they were all very kind. I think they have all had an understanding of what it is like for children to have a parent in prison.’

When asked what has made the most difference to Evan and her family, Evan’s grandmother is in no doubt: ‘Being kind is really important. And listening to what the

children are saying. Everyone has always given us our place in making decisions about [Evan]. I have always felt included.'

6. Conclusions

6.1 The ASPIRE project team was tasked to provide options and considerations for a national model of support to improve the wellbeing and educational outcomes of children affected by parental imprisonment in Wales. The specification for the work highlighted the Invisible Walls School Zone project at HMP and YOI Parc as a model potentially worth emulating for a pan-Wales model of collaboration between prisons and schools to support children when a parent goes to prison. The five-phase review of desktop research, site visit to the School Zone at HMP and YOI Parc, baseline survey, stakeholder event, interviews, online call for evidence from young people, and expert advisory group discussions all identified and informed the key issues relevant to develop a pan-Wales model of support for children when a parent goes to prison. The conclusions represent a summary of these key issues, with recommendations and associated actions outlined in Chapter 7 suggesting ways in which these could be addressed within Wales.

Literature and policy

6.2 The background review of the [literature and policy](#) revealed a disconnect between prison-focused policies promoting family contact and policies relating to the needs and rights of children. Few UK policies refer to the needs of children with a parent in prison, and the rhetoric remains focused on the prevention of reoffending or on 'breaking the cycle' of offending and imprisonment within families. As recently as June 2024, the UK Government published a revised estimate of the number of children who experience a parent's imprisonment each year, justifying this calculation on the basis that 'Previous research suggests that children who experience parental imprisonment are at an increased risk of offending themselves.' (Ministry of Justice, 2024). However well-meaning the intent of identification and data collection, the focus must be on the needs and rights of the child and not on the likelihood of future offending.

Current practice

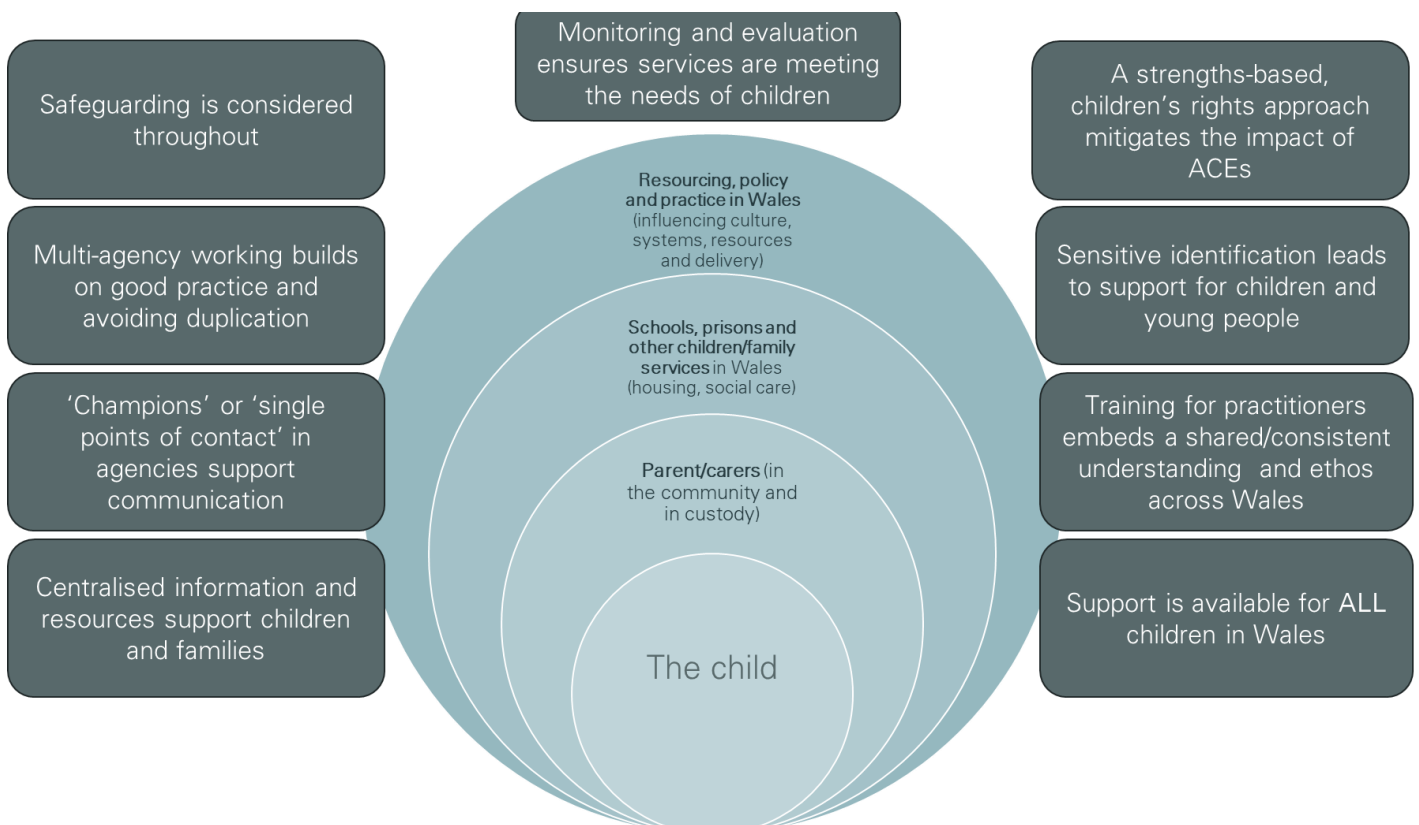
6.3 The [review of practice in Wales](#) also showed positive pockets of support in prisons, schools, and communities. The Invisible Walls School Zone model, for example, provided the impetus for the Welsh Government's commissioning of the ASPIRE project and consideration of a pan-Wales model of support. The site visit highlighted the many benefits of such an approach for all involved and created a framework for

exploration towards a pan-Wales model. However, it also flagged potential gaps to consider, namely an approach that focuses on the child rather than on rehabilitation; that reaches all children in Wales, regardless of where their parent is held or whether they visit the prison; and that garners the infrastructure it needs in terms of training, collaboration, and funding to ensure the work is accessible and sustained.

6.4 Further, the illustrative case study presented in paragraph 5.2 showed clearly that current models of support reach only a fraction of children in Wales who experience a parent’s imprisonment, with potentially devastating consequences.

6.5 Through this learning and context, the project identified nine key priorities that provide a clear roadmap to developing a more comprehensive, pan-Wales model of support, outlined in Figure 1:

Figure 1: Nine key priorities developed from the ASPIRE project findings



6.6 The findings from the ASPIRE project reached the following conclusions:

A strengths-based, children’s rights approach to support [\(recommendation 7.2\)](#)

- 6.7 Both schools and prisons can play a unique role in upholding the rights of children impacted by parental imprisonment and recognising their potential. Children affected by parental imprisonment often become defined within a deficit model; a strengths-based approach focuses on a child’s abilities, positive characteristics and relationships, and potential. Rights-based practice recognises children as having a distinct set of rights rather than passive objects subject solely to decisions made about their parents. Every child is different, and whatever support a child requires, the support should be rooted in children’s rights and trauma-informed practice and centred on their views and needs.
- 6.8 Throughout the project, respondents were clear that children’s rights and voices should be at the centre of any model of support and training and used to inform policy and practice.
- 6.9 While there was a need for support to be responsive to children’s needs, preferences and circumstances, stakeholders emphasised the need for consistency: every prison and school across Wales should be part of the same integrated, holistic, and flexible model.

Policy and resourcing that supports a pan-Wales model [\(recommendation 7.3\)](#)

- 6.10 While some education and criminal justice policies mention children affected by parental imprisonment, few consider their needs or how these needs should be supported. How services are commissioned and resourced impacts on the nature, availability, sustainability, consistency, and quality of support available to children affected by imprisonment.
- 6.11 The findings showed that relevant policy and guidance for children in Wales with a parent in prison must include measures for:
- protecting their rights
 - identifying them as potentially in need of additional support
 - ensuring their wellbeing needs are met
 - supporting the sharing of information and identification
- 6.12 The Welsh Government’s Children and Young People’s Plan and the four purposes in the school curriculum for Wales are well-placed to recognise this group of children.

6.13 No targeted support from third sector services for children affected by parental imprisonment in Wales was funded via Families First, though some local authorities include this as part of their Families First delivery plans. Respondents suggested that a move away from funding solely from HMPPS would ensure access to support for all children throughout their parents' journey through the criminal justice system, with a focus on the child, as opposed to the parent in prison. This could be achieved via Welsh Government funding for education or health or via a co-commissioned model that cuts across devolved and non-devolved departments. Commissioning should also recognise the wider resource implications of any support models on families and existing services. For example, stakeholders suggested that a model like School Zone needs to consider:

- the financial impact on families of travelling to and from a prison for additional visits
- the costs of supply teachers to enable school staff to attend prison-based events
- the resource implications for prisons in providing staff for additional visits/events

Centralised access to information and resources [\(recommendation 7.4\)](#)

6.14 Throughout the research, participants identified the lack of consistent knowledge and awareness about the impact of parental imprisonment, available resources, and targeted services. Given this, participants repeatedly suggested that a centralised hub of information and resources would provide valuable support for professionals, children, young people, and families.

Multi-agency working [\(recommendation 7.5\)](#)

6.15 Participants in the research believed comprehensive, pan-Wales support requires full collaboration between prisons and schools, as well as a wide range of agencies supporting children and families, including public health, social care, and third sector organisations.

Training [\(recommendations 7.6-7.7\)](#)

6.16 All stakeholders agreed that training was an important element of any pan-Wales model of support. Multi-disciplinary training sessions available to a wide range of practitioners would support collaborative working, consistent understanding, and shared learning.

6.17 Any pan-Wales training programme should be informed by the lived experiences of children and families, tailored to the specific Welsh policy and practice context, and consistent in its messaging across Wales. Training must be delivered by skilled professionals, supported by senior managers, and monitored and evaluated to ensure it has achieved its desired outcome. All training should be underpinned by the common principles of a trauma-informed, destigmatising, child rights-centred, and strengths-based approach.

Sensitive identification of children when a parent goes to prison
[\(recommendations 7.8-7.10\)](#)

6.18 Throughout all discussions regarding identification, respondents highlighted that relationships are key: families must feel confident that the motive is to offer support rather than punish or further discriminate. A balance must always be in place between the need for support and the right to non-disclosure.

Including all children in support [\(recommendations 7.11-7.13\)](#)

6.19 Children in Wales are not a homogenous group, and not all children in Wales with a parent in prison attend school or are visiting that parent. Therefore, a 'one-size fits all' approach will not work. Development of a pan-Wales model must also recognise that not all imprisoned Welsh parents reside in Wales: all mothers, and a significant proportion of fathers, are in custody in English prisons. Whatever their circumstances, all children need a kind, sensitive, and trauma-informed approach and tailored care and support that recognises them as children first.

Safeguarding [\(recommendation 7.14\)](#)

6.20 Safeguarding is integral to all work with families and must be a priority in collaboration between schools and prisons. Any model of support should have the wellbeing of children at its heart and should not cause any unintended harm. Safeguarding is a dynamic and ongoing process that relies on a child-centred approach with a whole-family focus, effective multi-agency working, and transparent information sharing.

6.21 Having a parent in prison is not a safeguarding concern in and of itself. All agencies must ensure effective safeguarding while upholding children's rights to maintain parental contact. Child safeguarding must also be considered at every stage of a parent's journey through the criminal justice system, not just when the parent is in custody.

Monitoring and evaluation [\(recommendations 7.15-7.17\)](#)

- 6.22 Both UK-based and international research describes the significant and ongoing impact of parental imprisonment on children and young people. However, evidence about what works to improve outcomes for children and young people remains patchy, particularly in terms of their education and wellbeing. Furthermore, limited evidence is available about the impact on and what works for specific groups of children. Consideration should be given as to whether the quality assurance and inspection frameworks across criminal justice, education, and public health should recognise children affected by parental imprisonment as a distinct group.

7. Recommendations

7.1 In developing a pan-Wales model of support for children with a parent in prison, ASPIRE recommends that the considerations and related actions set out below are taken into account. Where the term 'school' is used, this includes primary and secondary schools, PRUs, special schools, and Education Otherwise Than at School (EOTAS).

A strengths-based, children's rights approach ([findings 4.2-4.19](#))

7.2 Recommendation 1: ensure the rights of children and young people are considered at all stages of a parent's journey through the justice system, recognising that children with a parent in the criminal justice system deserve support in and of their own right and not as a means of influencing their parent's rehabilitation.

Suggested action: incorporate the UNCRC fully into domestic law in Wales.

Suggested action: support the facilitation of a Children and Young People's Forum to inform the design of a pan-Wales model and related policy and practice.

Suggested action: support the use of Child Impact Assessments at all stages of a parent's journey through the criminal justice system to ensure children get the support they need.

Policy and resourcing ([findings 4.20-4.43](#))

7.3 Recommendation 2: establish a consistent, visible, pan-Wales commitment to children affected by parental imprisonment, including a Welsh Government commissioning model for the provision of support for children affected by parental imprisonment that promotes collaboration, sustainability, and nation-wide support.

Suggested action: develop a pan-Wales strategy for children affected by parental imprisonment, co-developed with children and young people with experience of having a parent in custody.

Suggested action: require cross-departmental Commissioners, such as Children's Commissioner for Wales, Future Generations Commissioner, and the Domestic Abuse Commissioner, to recognise and make efforts to address the needs of children affected by parental imprisonment.

Suggested action: review existing policies, guidance, and frameworks (as identified in the background section) to consider how they recognise and support the needs of children affected by parental imprisonment.

Suggested action: fund a national third sector partnership model to mitigate competition between third sector providers, support collaboration, and build on existing good practice across Wales.

Suggested action: fund a model of support for 'five plus two years'¹⁴ (to mirror the HMPPS family support contracts).

Centralised access to information and resources ([findings 4.44-4.52](#))

7.4 Recommendation 3: ensure that all children and families in Wales affected by imprisonment have access to consistent and appropriate support.

Suggested action: identify a Ministerial lead for children affected by parental imprisonment to ensure that the needs of children with a parent in prison remain on the political agenda and are recognised and responded to in legislation across Welsh Government departments.

Suggested action: commission the development of a centralised, pan-Wales resource hub for children affected by parental imprisonment that includes:

- the development and delivery of an online information hub (integrated into an existing Wales information hub such as the Wales Hwb)
- the roll-out and facilitation of a multi-agency champions' network

Suggested action: undertake a review of existing targeted services for children affected by parental imprisonment to ensure a flexible but consistent approach and that children's rights, trauma informed practice, and strengths-based approaches are central.

Multi-agency working ([findings 4.53-4.66](#))

7.5 Recommendation 4: encourage a culture of collaboration for support for children affected by parental imprisonment.

¹⁴ A contracted term

Suggested action: coordinate regular meetings for multi-agency stakeholders to come together to share practice, address common challenges and identify opportunities for collaboration and multi-disciplinary training.

Suggested action: provide funding for school/prison initiatives that provide positive contact between children and their parents in prison and improve educational and wellbeing outcomes for children.

Training ([findings 4.67-4.81](#))

7.6 Recommendation 5: develop a detailed understanding of the current training landscape in Wales around children affected by parental imprisonment.

Suggested action: undertake a mapping exercise of current training delivery about children affected by parental imprisonment. Mapping should include a review of:

- Who has received training: which sectors, in which areas of Wales, how many individuals, which organisations/schools?
- Training delivery type: online or face to face, and in which locations?
- Training content: including underpinning principles and learning outcomes
- Voice of the child: how have children been involved in development/delivery?
- Training evaluation and feedback: is there evidence of what works?

7.7 Recommendation 6: raise awareness about the impact of parental imprisonment across all agencies working with children and families in Wales, ensuring that all Welsh Government-funded or Welsh Government approved training programmes regarding children affected by parental imprisonment provide consistent messaging; are underpinned by common principles (trauma-informed, destigmatising, children's rights-centred, and strengths-based); are accessible to all professionals working with children and families across Wales; and are evidence-based, monitored against a common set of learning outcomes.

Suggested action: integrate the impact of parental imprisonment into existing pan-Wales training models (such as ACEs and trauma-informed training packages).

Suggested action: develop a Charter¹⁵, in collaboration with children and young people, to enable practitioners to demonstrate how they are meeting the needs of children and young people with a parent in prison.

¹⁵ A Charter could be underpinned by the [guiding principles](#) outlined in Prison Reform Trust's Child Impact Assessment Toolkit

Suggested action: develop a core set of principles for any pan-Wales training programme about children affected by parental imprisonment, aligned with the Charter and informed by children and young people.

Suggested action: ensure that all Welsh Government-commissioned or Welsh Government approved training providers review their training programmes and demonstrate that they meet pan-Wales principles.

Suggested action: link all training offers to central Wales hub on children affected by parental imprisonment so that all training is accompanied by a consistent set of resources and tools.

Suggested action: ensure that a central Wales hub on children affected by parental imprisonment includes a coordinated pan-Wales training offer.

Suggested action: establish a common set of learning outcomes (informed by children and young people) and associated evaluation forms across all training programmes.

Identification ([findings 4.82-4.94](#))

- 7.8 Recommendation 7: ensure that ongoing discussions about the identification of children with a parent in prison avoid perpetuating stigma and do not negate the six key elements of safety, trust, choice, collaboration, empowerment, and cultural consideration crucial to trauma-responsive practice (Welsh Government, 2022). Sensitivity to the methods, purpose, and use of identification is paramount.

Suggested action: establish a multi-agency working group, including family members with lived experience, to respond to the findings from the ASPIRE project and agree pan-Wales guidelines for identification of children when a parent goes to prison.

- 7.9 Recommendation 8: support schools to create environments in which families and children feel safe to disclose and staff feel confident in knowing how to respond to that disclosure and provide appropriate support.

Suggested action: develop, as per Recommendation 6, a Charter¹⁶, in collaboration with children and young people, to enable practitioners to demonstrate how they are meeting the needs of children and young people with a parent in prison.

¹⁶ A Charter could be underpinned by the [guiding principles](#) outlined in Prison Reform Trust's Child Impact Assessment Toolkit

7.10 Recommendation 9: support prisons to create environments in which parents in custody feel safe to disclose that they have children and staff feel confident in knowing how to support parents in prison to engage with their child's school if that is appropriate.

Suggested action: ensure that prisons and prison visitors' centre providers are signatories to the above Charter and demonstrate that they are meeting the needs of children and young people.

Including all children in support ([findings 4.95-4.110](#))

7.11 Recommendation 10: ensure that the support offered to children with a parent in prison is consistent across Wales, but flexible enough to allow for a diverse range of needs.

Suggested action: appoint a cross-governmental lead for children impacted by imprisonment who has oversight of the policy, practice, challenges, and opportunities related to children impacted by parental imprisonment.

Suggested action: ensure that the pan-Wales strategy for children affected by parental imprisonment responds to the needs of all children.

7.12 Recommendation 11: recognise that support for children with a parent in prison cannot rely solely on in-prison provision and that schools, nurseries, PRUs, EOTAS providers, youth services, and colleges, as well as other universal, statutory and third sector services, have a vital role to play in supporting children.

Suggested action: encourage (and, where possible, require) staff from all services that support children (whether universal, statutory, or third sector) to receive training on the impact of imprisonment on children and families that includes a focus on equality, diversity, and inclusion.

Suggested action: build partnerships between schools and prisons by implementing a model such as School Zone in all prisons in Wales (utilising online technology to support partnerships in other prisons where parents of children living in Wales are held), while being cognisant of the considerations identified in the HMP and YOI Parc case study (paras. 3.18-3.25).

7.13 Recommendation 12: ensure that any pan-Wales model provides support for parents and carers of children affected by parental imprisonment.

Suggested action: include funding for services (such as peer support groups) for parents/carers in the community in any pan-Wales model of support for children affected by parental imprisonment.

Safeguarding ([findings 4.111-4.118](#))

- 7.14 Recommendation 13: ensure that all agencies working to support children with a parent in prison have robust child safeguarding policies in place and that these are clearly communicated to all partner organisations.

Suggested action: include safeguarding as a key standard within the Charter for children impacted by parental imprisonment.

Suggested action: include child safeguarding as a standing agenda item within a multi-agency national steering group for children affected by parental imprisonment.

Suggested action: include child safeguarding in all training related to children affected by parental imprisonment.

Monitoring and evaluation ([findings 4.119-4.128](#))

- 7.15 Recommendation 14: develop an improved understanding of the number and needs of children affected by parental imprisonment across Wales.

Suggested action: collaborate with the SHRN (School Health Research Network, 2024) to explore collecting data on children who have a parent in prison as a specific category¹⁷.

Suggested action: consider other datasets relating to education in Wales and how they may be used to inform knowledge and understanding of the experiences of children affected by parental imprisonment in Wales.

- 7.16 Recommendation 15: ensure that outcomes are central to any pan-Wales model of support for children affected by parental imprisonment.

Suggested action: work with children and key multi-agency stakeholders to identify SMART outcomes for a pan-Wales strategy, underpinned by children's rights, against which services and interventions can be designed and monitored.

¹⁷ The SHRN has indicated that they would welcome further conversations about including children affected by imprisonment in their data set. Applications for new data must be made at the start of the survey cycle year (by January 2025). Further information is available from: shrn@cardiff.ac.uk.

7.17 Recommendation 16: ensure that children and young people have the opportunity to define what their needs are, so that progress is monitored against outcomes that are informed by their unique needs.

Suggested action: support practitioners working with children and young people to use Child Impact Assessments (Prison Reform Trust, 2022) in their practice by integrating this into training programmes and providing a link on a central hub of resources for practitioners in Wales.

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Annex A: UK-based organisations supporting children affected by imprisonment

Organisations currently delivering services in Wales are highlighted in blue

Name of organisation	Description	Website
Action for Children	UK-wide charity supporting children and young people, which includes provision of a prison Visitors' centre at HMP Grampian	Home – Action for Children
Apex Scotland	National Scottish criminal justice charity with services that include running a visitor centre service at HMP Inverness	Apex Highland
Barnardo's	UK-wide charity supporting children and families including specialist work focused on children with a parent in prison: delivering training programmes, prison visitors' centres (HMP Berwyn, HMP Isle of Wight, HMP Edinburgh) and support in the community and online	Children with a parent or relative in prison Barnardo's (barnardos.org.uk)
Children Heard and Seen	A charity working across England supporting children impacted by parental imprisonment. Offering 1-1 support, volunteer mentoring, parent support, peer support groups for children, online activities for children, and activity days	Home - Children Heard and Seen
Corona Kids	A London-based organisation that delivers Hidden Sentence training and prison-visit experience training for practitioners working with children. Also runs support projects to strengthen family ties and equip schools.	Corona Kids
The Croft	Set up specifically for prison visits to HMP Barlinnie to welcome visitors, provide information, and link to support	The Croft Prison Visitors' Centre
CrossReach	Delivery arm of the Church of Scotland's Social Care Council, contracted by Scottish Government Community Justice to provide visitors' centres at HMP Perth and HMP & YOI Polmont.	Perth Visitors Support & Advice Centre Polmont Prison Visitors' Centre

Cyrenians	Scottish organisation focused on prevention of homelessness and runs the prison visitors' centre at HMP Addiewell	HMP Addiewell Visitor Centre
Early Years Scotland	Scottish charity that runs the Young Children Affected by Parental Imprisonment Programme (Fathers' Programme and Learning Together Through Play sessions) in six Scottish prisons as well as prison visitors' services at HMPs Greenock and Low Moss.	Early Years Scotland Prison Services
The Ebb	Leicester-based support for families of prisoners	The Ebb
Every Family	Commissioned by Bristol City Council and South Gloucestershire Council develop a strategic approach to supporting children affected by parental offending	Children Affected By Parental Offending everyFAMILY
North Wales Families Affected by Imprisonment Programme (FABI)	Multi-agency, strategic programme to improve support for children affected by parental imprisonment, including training for professionals	North Wales Families Affected by Imprisonment (FABI) Programme 2023 Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner North Wales (northwales-pcc.gov.uk)
South West Wales Families and Friends of Prisoners (FFOPS)	Delivering support to families affected by the criminal justice system in southwest Wales via a drop-in centre	About Us — FFOPS
Families First, YSS	Provides support to children in Worcestershire with a close family member (parent, grandparent, sibling) currently going through the criminal justice system, from the point of arrest to prison release	Families First YSS
Families Outside	The only national charity in Scotland that works solely to support children and families affected by imprisonment, providing professional training, peer support, 1-1 support, a national helpline and strategic development	Help, information, and support for families affected by imprisonment Families Outside

Forth Valley Inclusion	Faith-based charitable organisation that provides support for people in prison and their visitors at HMP & YOI Stirling and HMP Glenochil	Home – Forth Valley Inclusion
Getting Better Together Ltd	Community-based health initiative which promotes the education, health, and wellbeing of North Lanarkshire residents, including running a prison visitors' centre at HMP Shotts	HMP Shotts Family Time Project
Himaya Haven	A Birmingham-based organisation that focuses on working with Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic communities	Himaya Haven
Invisible Walls Wales	A Community Interest Company providing family support, training, visit centre services (at HMP Parc, HMP Cardiff, HMP Usk, and HMP Prescoed) and school-based support	Home - Invisible Walls
Jigsaw	Delivering visitor centre and family support services at HMP Leeds and HMP Wealstun	HOME Jigsawcharity
Lincolnshire Action Trust	Delivering visitor centre and family support services in prisons across Lincolnshire	Family & Significant Other Support - Lincolnshire Action Trust (latcharity.org.uk)
National Information Centre on Children of Offenders (NICCO)	An online directory for professionals in England and Wales to support work with children affected by parental imprisonment	NICCO
NEPACS	Working in north-east England, the charity delivers prison visit centre services and 1-1 and group support for children and families affected by the criminal justice system	Nepacs
NIACRO	Working across Northern Ireland the charity aims to reduce crime and the impact on families, delivering visit centre services, 1-1 and group work support	NIACRO
One Small Thing	A London-based organisation that delivers training to practitioners in the community and justice-based sectors on the impact of trauma	One Small Thing

Ormiston	Provides a range of services for to support families affected by the imprisonment or offending behaviour of a relative, including visit centres in 8 prisons in south-east England and the Breaking Barriers service offering 1-1 support to children and young people	Working with families affected by offending - Ormiston Families
Out There	Charity providing emotional and practical support and an information service for families of prisoners in Greater Manchester.	Out There (SFOP) Charity - Manchester 0161 232 8986 (outtherecharity.org)
Pact	A national charity working across England and Wales that delivers a significant range of services supporting children affected by parental imprisonment including school-based support, professional training, 1-1 and group work support and visit centres in over 60 prisons (including, HMP Swansea, HMP Style and HMP Eastwood Parc)	Home - Prison Advice and Care Trust
POPS (Partners of Prisoners Support group)	Delivering visitor centre and family support services in eleven prisons across north-west England	Partners of Prisoners POPS provide information and support for offenders' families from the point of arrest through to release and beyond.
Prison Reform Trust	An independent UK charity working to create a just, humane and effective penal system. They have produced resources to support work with children affected by parental imprisonment and campaigned on their behalf	‘This is Me’: A Child Impact Assessment toolkit Prison Reform Trust
Prisoners’ Families Helpline	Delivered by Pact, this service operates across England and Wales providing a free helpline and online information hub for families	Prisoners' Families Helpline (prisonersfamilies.org)
Spurgeons	A national children’s charity working across England, they deliver visitor centre and family support services at HMP Winchester as well as a through the gate resettlement service to support families	BTWB TG Help for Released Prisoners UK (spurgeons.org)
Summerhill Community Centre	Local charity in Dumfries with a Community Learning and Development commitment to improve the conditions of life and relief of poverty for all ages in	Summerhill Prison Visitors’ Service

	the wider community. Includes personal development in Education, Recreation, Sport, Health & Wellbeing, social gatherings, and environmental activities	
Sussex Prisoners Families	Local charity working in Sussex to support children and families affected by the criminal justice system including 1-1, group work and activities	Home - Sussex Prisoners' Families (sussexprisonersfamilies.org.uk)
Time Matters UK	Merseyside charity that supports children who are impacted by parental imprisonment, both in groups and individually, face to face and online. They have developed a range of resources in collaboration with young people to support professionals, children and their families	Home - Time-Matters UK (timemattersuk.com)
Y Bont	A charity based in Wales which supports children and young people who, for whatever reason are separated, or are at risk of being separated, from their families (including those affected by parental imprisonment). The organisation offers counselling, group programmes and 1-1 support	Y Bont Helping children, young people and families

Annex B: Expert Advisory Group membership

Pact

HMPPS - Women's Justice Blueprint for Wales

HMPPS – Reducing Reoffending

CLINKS

Education welfare - Blaenau Gwent

HMPPS - Women's Justice Blueprint for Wales

Expert by Experience - Young person with a mother formerly in prison

Expert by Experience - Mother formerly in prison

Education welfare - Swansea

Public Health Wales

G4S – Invisible Walls Wales

Wrexham Council FABI programme

Barnardo's

Pact

Education welfare - Neath Port Talbot

Welsh Government - Education

HMPPS – Family Services

HMPPS Wales

Annex C: Baseline survey questions

1. Which sector do you work in?

Prison Probation Education Social Work Health Voluntary Sector

Other: _____

2. What is your role within this sector? (Can be generic)

3. What current policies, framework or guidance are you aware of that inform work with children/families affected by imprisonment in Wales?

4. What resources are available to support children/families affected by imprisonment in Wales?

5. What do Welsh prisons do to support fathers in prison and their children?

6. What do HMPs Styal and Eastwood Park do to support mothers from Wales and their children?

7. What do Welsh schools do to support children with a parent in prison?

8. What other forms of support for children with a parent in prison, that are not school or prison-related, are you aware of?

9. What is your approach when working with a child with a parent in prison or with a parent in custody? (For example, you might use certain support materials, refer children to certain agencies, or hold regular team meetings where support for children is discussed)

10. a) What do you think are the key issues that the ASPIRE team needs to consider in developing options for a pan-Wales model for improving outcomes for children affected by parental imprisonment? b) In what ways could a school/prison collaboration support this?

11. Please identify any potential challenges the ASPIRE team needs to be aware of in developing options for a national model for improving outcomes for children affected by parental imprisonment in Wales.

12. Please identify any potential challenges the ASPIRE team needs to be aware of in developing options for a national model for improving outcomes for children affected by parental imprisonment in Wales.

13. Is there anything you would like the ASPIRE team to know/be aware of at this stage of the project?

Annex D: Interview and focus group questions in HMP and YOI Parc

Phase two: Semi-structured interview questions

1. Which sector/organisation do you work for?
2. What is your role?
3. How has HMP and YOI Parc's work with schools changed since the 2017 evaluation?
4. In what way have you engaged with the School Zone initiative?
5. What do you understand to be the primary outcomes that the School Zone initiative aims to achieve?
6. What impact (if any) have you seen the School Zone initiative achieve for prisoners, children, their carers and/or organisations (for example, schools, prisons)?
7. In your view, what key elements of the School Zone initiative (if any) enable it to meet the needs of parents in prison and families affected by imprisonment effectively? (e.g. staff skills and experience, format, approaches, partnership relationships etc.)
8. What are the barriers to the School Zone working effectively?
9. a) For HMPPS staff: What are the experiences of prison staff involved in School Zone, and what good practice does their involvement encourage?
b) For education staff: What are the experiences of education providers involved in School Zone, and what good practice does their involvement in encourage?
10. What outcomes (if any) are being achieved for the children participating in School Zone in terms of their wellbeing and education?
11. How are these outcomes measured?
12. a) For HMPPS staff: In your view, has the School Zone initiative had an impact on the 'Strengthening Family Relations' agenda in the criminal justice system? If so, in what way? (Are people more aware of the needs of prisoners' families? Has there been a shift in how prisoners' families are viewed? Has there been a shift in policy/practice?)
b) For education staff: In your view, has the School Zone initiative increased awareness about the needs of families affected by imprisonment and influenced policy/practice? (Please explain.)
13. What are the key strengths of the School Zone initiative?
14. What are the limitations and barriers to its success?
15. What challenges the School Zone's ability to meet the needs of families affected by imprisonment effectively? (e.g. cultures, awareness, referral processes, limited funding etc.)
16. How does the School Zone work in partnership with other organisations? (consider referrals processes, information sharing, joint assessments, collaboration, strategy/policy development etc.)
17. What challenges effective partnership working between the prison and schools (if anything), and how might partnership working be further developed?

18. How might the School Zone initiative have a greater impact on influencing policy and practice within criminal justice/education?
19. Can you recommend any ways in which the School Zone initiative could change or be developed further to ensure that the needs of families affected by imprisonment are being met across Wales?
20. Is there anything else you would like us to know about the School Zone initiative?

Focus group questions for parents/carers:

Alma is a figure drawn on flipchart paper. Alma is the mother of Eric (participants can choose how old Eric is). Eric's father is in prison, and the family has recently got involved in School Zone. The researchers would like some help in understanding what Alma's experience has been of School Zone. This is the basis of the activities that follow.

These questions will prompt participants to consider what Alma's relationship with Eric's school may have been like before Eric's father came to HMP Parc:

- What kind of contact might Alma have had with Eric's school?
- What kind of support (if any) might Eric have received at school (i.e. learning support, emotional support, etc.)?
- What might Alma's relationship with Eric's teachers have been like?

These questions will prompt participants to consider the support Eric might have received when his father first went to prison:

- Did Alma inform the school when Eric's father first went to prison? If not, why not? If so, what was the response?
- What kind of support might Eric have received from school when his father first went to prison?
- Was there anything that might have made it difficult for Alma to have contact with Eric's school? (e.g. Has Alma's own experience of school affected how she feels about Eric's schooling?)
- How involved was Alma in what Eric was learning at school before School Zone?
- What was Alma's relationship like with Eric's teachers before School Zone?

These questions will prompt participants to consider the difference being involved in School Zone has made to Alma, Eric and his father:

- What kind of contact does Alma have with Eric's school through School Zone?
- What kind of support does Eric receive from school now?
- How involved is Alma in what Eric is learning at school now?
- What is Alma's relationship like with Eric's teachers now?
- What difference has School Zone made to Alma?
- What barriers has involvement in School Zone helped Alma to overcome?
- What is the most helpful aspect of School Zone?
- Has School Zone changed the relationship between Eric and his father? In what ways?

- How has School Zone helped Eric?
- How has School Zone helped Eric's father?
- Has School Zone changed Eric's experience of education? In what ways?
- In what ways does School Zone help Alma to improve Eric's experience of education (e.g. through regular contact with his teachers)?
- What would it be like for Alma if the family wasn't involved in School Zone?
- Do you think participation in School Zone will change things at home and at school when Eric's father is released? In what ways? (NB – facilitators will acknowledge that some fathers' children may have left school before they are released)

These questions will prompt participants to consider ways in which School Zone could be developed:

- How do you think School Zone could be developed to include children who do not have a relationship with their fathers?
- Is there anything about School Zone that could be better?
- Is there anything else you would like to tell us about School Zone that we have not covered?

Facilitators remind participants that the Welsh Government has asked for this project to happen because they really want to understand what support children need to feel good about themselves and do well at school. Participants are invited to give one simple message that they want the ASPIRE team to pass on to the Welsh Government.

Focus group questions for children and young people

Facilitators introduce Eric (or Erica – the group can decide). Eric is a figure drawn on flipchart paper. The group can decide how old Eric/ERICA is. Eric's father is in prison. There is no School Zone in the prison where Eric's father is. Eric has asked the group to tell him about School Zone, and that is what the activities are about.

The first question Eric asks is, 'What's good about School Zone?' Participants are invited to respond freely. There will also be prompt cards available to help those who may find it hard to talk in a group or are not sure how to begin. Prompt cards will be visible around the flipchart drawing of Eric. Participants can pick up a prompt card and finish the sentence. Prompts will include: 'School Zone is good because...'; 'School Zone helps me to...'; 'Because of School Zone, I can...'; and 'I like School Zone because...'. 'Before I was in School Zone, things were...'; 'Since being in School Zone, I have....'

Facilitators explain that Eric wants to know what is not so good about School Zone, what could be different about School Zone, and if the young people have any questions about anything to do with School Zone. There will be some card thought bubbles and question marks around the flipchart drawing of Eric. Participants are invited to pick up a thought bubble and say something they wonder or a question mark and voice their question (for example, 'I wonder why School Zone isn't ...' or 'Why can't we have more time together as

a family during School Zone?' When it comes to wonders, participants will be encouraged to have a 'magic wand' and 'blue-sky' thinking approach.

Participants are invited to pick up a card with the role of a professional they have (or may have) contact with (teacher, prison officer, someone from a charity that supports children with a parent in prison, social worker) and then say whatever they feel that person needs to hear from someone with a parent in prison.

Facilitators explain that the Welsh Government has asked for this project to happen because they really want to understand what support children need to feel good about themselves and do well at school. Participants are invited to give one simple message that they want the ASPIRE team to pass on to the Welsh Government.

Focus group questions for fathers in prison

Morgan is a figure drawn on flipchart paper. Morgan is the father of Eric (participants can choose how old Eric is). Morgan is in prison, and the family has recently become involved in School Zone. The researchers would like some help in understanding what Morgan's experience has been of School Zone, and that is what the activities that follow are about.

Questions will prompt participants to consider what Morgan's relationship was like with Eric's school prior to being in HMP Parc:

- Did Morgan have any contact with Eric's school(s)? If so, what was this like?
- Was there anything that made it difficult for Morgan to have contact with Eric's school? (e.g. Has Morgan's own experience of school affected how he feels about Eric's schooling?)
- How involved was Morgan in what Eric was learning at school?

Questions will prompt participants to consider Morgan's involvement in Eric's education from prison prior to School Zone:

- Once Morgan came into custody, did he have any contact with Eric's school?
- If so, what was this like?
- If not, what contact might Morgan have liked and how could this have happened?

Questions will prompt participants to consider the difference being involved in School Zone has made to Morgan, Eric, and his mum (Alma):

- What kind of contact does Morgan have with Eric's school through School Zone?
- How involved is Morgan in what Eric is learning at school?
- What is Morgan's relationship like with Eric's teachers?
- What difference has School Zone made to Morgan?
- What barriers has involvement in School Zone helped Morgan to overcome?
- What is the most helpful aspect of School Zone?
- How has School Zone made a difference to Morgan's relationship with Eric?

- How has School Zone helped Eric?
- How has School Zone helped Eric's mum?
- Has School Zone changed Eric's experience of education?
- In what ways does School Zone help Morgan to help Eric do well at school (i.e. doing homework together)?
- Is it a different experience for fathers participating in School Zone from the Family Interventions Unit compared to the other wings?
- Will participation in School Zone change the way Morgan is involved with Eric's school after he is released? (NB – facilitators will acknowledge that some fathers' children may have left school before they are released)

Questions will prompt participants to consider ways in which School Zone could be developed:

- How do you think School Zone could be developed to include children who do not have a relationship with their fathers?
- Is there anything about School Zone that could be better?
- Is there anything else you would like to tell us about School Zone that we have not covered?

Facilitators remind participants that the Welsh Government has asked for this project to happen because they really want to understand what support children need to feel good about themselves and do well at school. Participants are invited to give one simple message that they want the ASPIRE team to pass on to the Welsh Government.

Annex E: Phase four interview questions

Semi-structured interview for children and young people

- a) General model of support
 - What are the most important things for you when it comes to support?
 - If you have had support about your mum or dad being in prison, which bits would you recommend to other young people? Why?
 - People need different types of support at different times. When mum or dad is coming out of prison, what support is helpful?
- b) Information sharing
 - Who needs to know about what has happened?
 - What do they need to know?
 - How should any information about you be shared?
- c) Training and understanding
 - What should people who support you (teachers, doctors, social workers, specialist support, e.g. counsellors) know about what it is like for children with a parent in prison?
 - What should prison staff know about what it is like for children with a parent in prison?
 - What kind of training should people supporting you get?
 - What kind of training should prison staff get?
 - Is it a good idea to involve children themselves in training? Why? Why not?
- d) Working together
 - How can organisations work well together to support you? For example, can schools and prison work together? What could they do?
 - How important is it for you to be involved in decision-making about you?
 - How can organisations involve you when it comes to sharing information/making decisions about you?
 - In what ways could people who support you involve you in decision-making?
- e) Support for all children
 - What are the best ways of making sure every child with a parent in prison gets the support they need (e.g. children who don't visit the prison, children with additional needs, children with a mum in prison, children with a parent in prison not in Wales, children not in school)?
 - Is it a good idea to help children and young people with a parent in prison to support one another? Why? Why not? Could this be online, or is face-to-face better?
 - Is it a good idea to make sure the people who make decisions (policymakers) hear directly from children with a parent in prison? Why? Why not?

Semi-structured interview for parents/carers

- a) General model of support

- What do you think are the most important things to consider or include in support for your child?
 - People need different types of support at different times. What kind of support do children need when a parent is released from prison?
- b) Information sharing
- Who in your child's life needs to know about what has happened?
 - What do they need to know?
 - How should any information about your child be shared?
- c) Training and understanding
- What should people who support children (teachers, doctors, social workers, specialist support, e.g. counsellors) know about what it is like for children with a parent in prison?
 - What should prison staff know about what it is like for children with a parent in prison?
 - What kind of training should people supporting children get?
 - What kind of training should prison staff get?
 - Is it a good idea to involve children themselves in training? Why? Why not?
- d) Working together
- How can organisations work well together when it comes to supporting your child? For example, is there any good communication between the prison and the school or the school and the social worker/specialist organisation?
 - How important is it for you to be involved in decision-making about your child?
 - How can organisations involve you when it comes to sharing information/making decisions about your child?
 - In what ways could people who support your child involve your child in decision-making?
- e) Support for all children
- What are the best ways of making sure every child with a parent in prison gets the support they need (e.g. children who don't visit the prison, children with additional needs, children with a mum in prison, children with a parent in prison not in Wales, children not in school)?
 - Is it a good idea to help children and young people with a parent in prison to support one another? Why? Why not? Could this be online, or is face-to-face better?
 - Is it a good idea to make sure the people who make decisions (policymakers) hear directly from children with a parent in prison? Why? Why not?

Semi-structured interviews for practitioners/policy leads

Introduction to participants

These questions are based on phases one to three of the ASPIRE Wales project (literature review, baseline survey and stakeholder event in Cardiff) and on input from our Expert


Advisory Group. Your responses will inform our proposal to the Welsh Government about what they should consider in a model of support for children with a parent in prison.

1. What we know: Wales comprises diverse communities with differing needs; therefore, any model of support for children with a parent in prison needs to accommodate this.
 - What are the most important elements of a model of support for children and young people with a parent in prison?
 - How can we ensure that any model of support is informed by a children's rights approach?
 - What key messages/underlying principles are essential in a model of support?
 - People need different types of support at different times. What kind of support might be particularly helpful for families when a parent is released from prison?
2. What we know: It can be challenging to identify children with a parent in prison, and the sharing of information about children is sensitive; families want to know who knows what and what they are going to do with that information.
 - Do you know how many children are being supported in your organisation/sector? Are there systems already in place to gather this information?
 - How can data be collected in a way that includes families and leads to support being offered?
 - How can data be sensitively shared between organisations/sectors?
3. What we know: It is important to know that the support being provided is improving outcomes for children.
 - Does your organisation/sector gather any information to demonstrate improved outcomes for children with a parent in prison?
 - What are the key considerations when it comes to monitoring and evaluating support for children with a parent in prison?
4. What we know: Practitioners and policy makers may lack knowledge and understanding of the impact on children of having a parent in prison.
 - What kind of training would support you/your colleagues?
 - What key messages are essential to convey in training?
 - What would make training accessible for you/your colleagues? (Online? Length of training? Incorporated into existing training? Venue – in a prison?)
 - How can children with lived experience inform training for practitioners?
 - A 'champion' model (someone who has in-depth training on the impact of imprisonment on children whom others could ask for advice and guidance) was proposed at our round table event; in what ways would a champion support you in your work?
 - Who would be best placed to be the 'champion' in your context (e.g. the safeguarding lead/head of reducing reoffending/child wellbeing/welfare lead)?
5. What we know: Effective inter-agency collaboration is essential when developing a model of support for children with a parent in prison.
 - What do we need to consider in a model to support effective collaboration between organisations and sectors?


- What can your organisation/sector offer other organisations / sectors to enhance their understanding of children/prison / the impact on children with a parent in prison?
 - Our round table event thought a central hub (of training, resources, and details of organisations that offer support) would be helpful. Would you agree? In what ways (if at all) would a central hub benefit your organisation/sector?
 - If a central hub were created, what kind of information should it include?
 - Who should oversee/update this information?
 - Would an online multi-agency forum (to share good practice and policy around support for children with a parent in prison and to address challenges) be of benefit to your organisation/sector?
 - Should this be regional or national?
 - Who should facilitate this?
6. What we know: Short-term and insufficient funding is a barrier to sustained change in the sector.
- Who is best placed to fund a model of support for children in Wales with a parent in prison?
 - How can funding ensure work is sustainable?
7. What we know: Children in Wales with a parent in prison are a diverse group. Some do not visit (or have contact with) their parent in prison; some have a parent (all mothers and some fathers) who is not in a prison in Wales; some are not in mainstream education; some are from minoritised groups.
- How can a model ensure that support is available to all children in Wales?
 - Which agencies are integral to ensure all children are included?
 - What are the barriers to reaching all children with a parent in prison?
 - What would help mitigate these barriers?
 - Could a national forum of children/young people with lived experience of a parent in prison inform policy and practice to ensure support for all children? If so, who would facilitate this?

Annex F: Recruitment flyer and survey questions for young people

The ASPIRE Project: share your views!



What is the ASPIRE Project?



If you have a parent in prison, it can be hard. The people who are in charge of Wales want children with a parent in prison to get the right support when they need it. They want all children and young people to feel good about themselves and do well at school. The Welsh Government has asked the ASPIRE team to help them understand what they need to do.

What will the ASPIRE project do?


We are going to find out how best to help children in Wales when a parent is in prison. We will do this by speaking to lots of people like teachers, people who work in prisons, parents and people who help families.

But the most important people to speak to are children and young people - you are the experts!

Share your views

We want to hear your views about what will help children and young people with a parent in prison.


Scan the QR code on your phone or i-Pad using your camera and fill in the short survey. We will not ask for your name - it is anonymous.



Get in touch with the ASPIRE team

Sarah Beresford, ASPIRE Deputy Project Manager

Sarah.Beresford@prisonreformtrust.org.uk



ASPIRE Project: helping to make sure children with a parent in prison get the right support when they need it.

Survey questions for young people:

Have you got experience of having a parent in prison (multiple choice)

Are you in education? (multiple choice)

How old are you?

What support do you think children need when a parent goes to prison?

When a child's Mum or Dad goes to prison, who do you think should be told?

How would you score the following types of support for young people with a parent in prison - where '1 star' is 'not a good idea' and '5 stars' is 'great idea!'? Any other ideas for support for children with a parent in prison?

Do you have any other ideas about what type of support would be good for children and young people with a parent in prison?

Some people have suggested that a website or an app for young people with a parent in prison might be helpful. Do you think a website or app with information, support and advice is a good idea?

If a website or app was developed for young people with a parent in prison, what would it be useful for it to include?

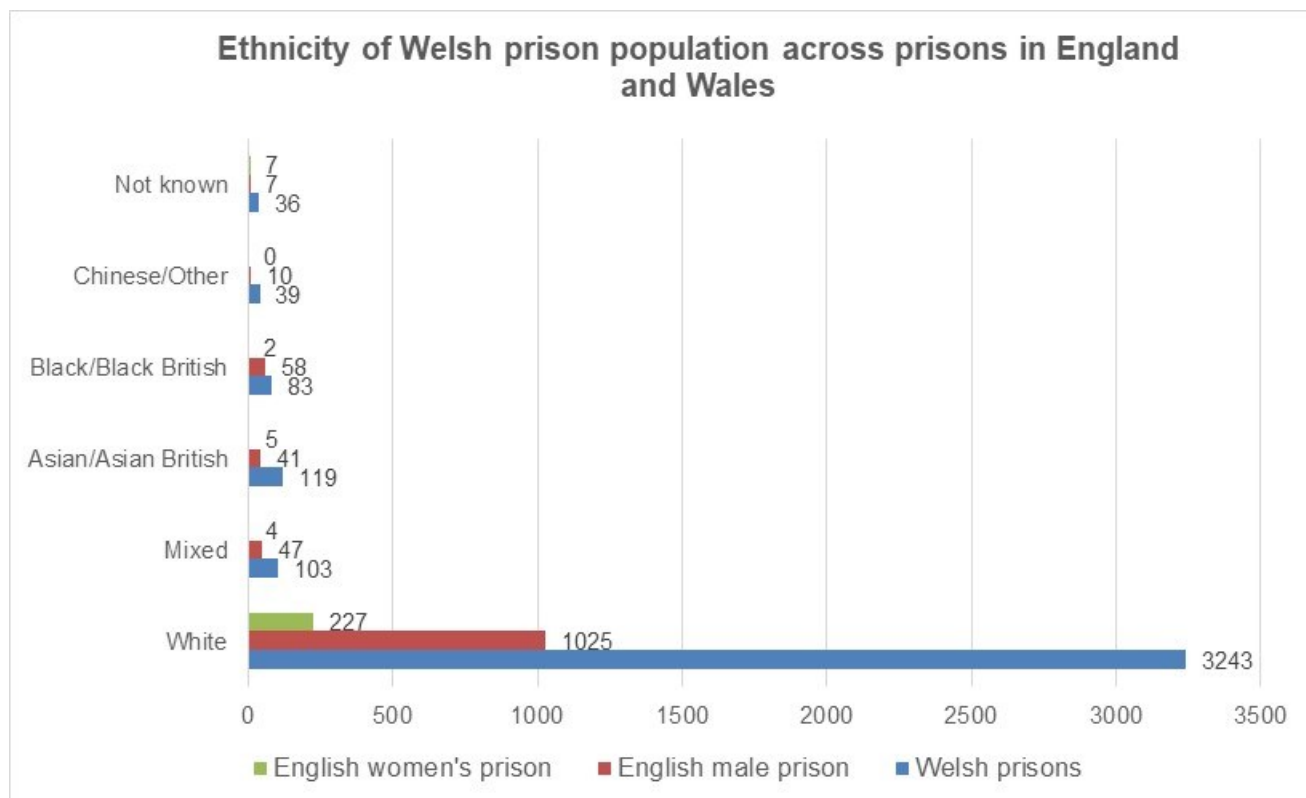
It is important for people who work with children (teachers, social workers, youth workers) to know how to support children who have a parent in prison. What are the most important things that workers need to know about having a parent in prison?

If you could say one thing to the Welsh Government about how they should support young people with a parent in prison, what would you say?

Annex G: Welsh prison population

The following data were taken from a Freedom of Information Request submitted to the Ministry of Justice in 2023¹⁸. It represents a snapshot of the number of Welsh people in custody on 1st September 2023.

4,811 Welsh men and 245 Welsh women were in custody in England and Wales on 1st September 2023.



¹⁸ Freedom of Information Request 230831045 Welsh people in prison by Ethnicity 2023, cited on: [Welsh people in Prison - a Freedom of Information request to Ministry of Justice - WhatDoTheyKnow](#)