

SUBMISSION FROM FAMILIES OUTSIDE

Families Outside is a national independent charity that works on behalf of families affected by imprisonment in Scotland. We do this through provision of a national freephone helpline for families and for the professionals who work with them, as well as through development of policy and practice, training, and face-to-face support. While we do not claim to be experts in the field of homelessness, a number of the families we support experience such issues, and decisions regarding housing are an important part of the discussions prior to release of a family member from prison.

Families Outside is grateful for the opportunity to comment on this issue. Much of the information below comes from research conducted on behalf of Glasgow City Mission and The Robertson Trust in relation to homelessness amongst ex-prisoners.¹ Young people who were homeless were included in (though not the sole focus of) that research. The response below summarises our views, but we are happy to elaborate on any of these should the Committee require additional information.

Reasons for homelessness

A number of factors can result in someone becoming homeless. These include individual factors such as unemployment, addiction, mental health issues, domestic abuse, and breakdown in relationships, as well as wider social issues such as recession, poverty, and a shortage of employment and suitable low-cost housing.² Imprisonment is another important risk factor: older research showed that 44% of people living in hostels or sleeping rough in Glasgow in 1999 had been in prison at least once.³

Homelessness and crime are often closely related. People without proper housing or otherwise in deprived circumstances may feel forced into offending to meet even their most basic needs. Equally, people who offend and end up in custody may end up losing their accommodation due to time limits on the payment of housing benefit for people in custody (52 weeks for prisoners on remand but only 13 weeks for sentenced prisoners) or because of a lack of someone outside to maintain the tenancy.⁴ Lack of a permanent address can

¹ Loucks, N. (2007) *Housing needs of prisoners and ex-prisoners*. Glasgow: Glasgow City Mission and the Robertson Trust.

² Glasgow Street Homelessness Review Team, October 2000.

³ Homelessness Task Force (2002) *Homelessness: An Action Plan for the Prevention and Effective Response*. Report from the Homelessness Task Force to Scottish Ministers. Edinburgh: Scottish Executive. www.scotland.gov.uk/library3/society/hdff-00.asp

⁴ See for example HM Inspectorates of Social Work Services and Prisons (1998) *Women Offenders - A Safer Way: A Review of Community Disposals and the Use of Custody for Women Offenders in Scotland*. Edinburgh: Social Work Services and Prisons Inspectorate for Scotland.

lead to other problems such as difficulty finding employment⁵ or problems regaining custody of children.⁶

People in prison are more likely to reoffend if suitable housing is not available for them upon release.⁷ Research for the Home Office in England and Wales found in a long-term follow-up of prisoners after release that a third of those released to stable accommodation reoffended, but that this proportion more than doubled for those who were homeless or in unstable accommodation.⁸ The Social Exclusion Unit in England and Wales reported that having stable accommodation can reduce the risk of offending by up to 20%.⁹ Stable accommodation is also likely to reduce the risk of personal victimisation: "In whichever way safety is defined, living in homelessness is not safe."¹⁰ This is particularly a concern with regard to young people who become homeless.

The Homelessness Task Force of the (then) Scottish Executive¹¹ highlighted the issue of relationships as significant for prisoners, particularly at the point of release. Statistics collected at Glasgow City Mission on the individuals who received one-to-one support identify breakdowns in relationships as the most pressing reason contributing to homelessness among these clients.¹² A range of issues, with community ties important among them, therefore combine to perpetuate the cycle of homelessness and crime.

In our own experience at Families Outside, breakdown in relationships is a key factor in whether people are willing to accommodate their family members on release from prison. In the past, organisations such as SACRO have trained prison staff at HMP & YOI Cornton Vale and HMYOI Polmont for this reason, as positive relationships with families are an important protective factor for young people – or indeed for any prisoner - on release from custody. We have attached an appendix with some of the (anonymised) calls to our Helpline that give examples of the types of issues families raise regarding housing for young people.

The report for Glasgow City Mission and The Robertson Trust highlighted the isolation prisoners experience upon release from custody, perhaps especially amongst younger people, as another concern, which was evident in the interviews with service users. The case study below from the report shows one example of this:

Case study: Lewis

⁵ Reid-Howie Associates (2004) *The Provision of Housing Advice to Prisoners in Scotland*. Edinburgh: Scottish Executive.

⁶ Carlisle, J. (1996) *The housing needs of ex-prisoners*. York: University of York Centre for Housing Policy.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Home Office, cited in Reid-Howie Associates (2004), *op cit.*

⁹ Social Exclusion Unit (2002) *Reducing re-offending by ex-prisoners*. <http://www.socialexclusionunit.gov.uk/downloaddoc.asp?id=190>.

¹⁰ Smith, A. (2005), *Day Centre Services in Glasgow: Recommendations and Considerations for Future Development*. Glasgow Homelessness Network, p. 22.

¹¹ *Op cit.*

¹² Unpublished statistics, Glasgow City Mission.

Lewis (not his real name), an evidently intelligent and articulate 22-year old, described himself as “happy” or at least content in prison, though “institutionalised”. Prison gave him a sense of security: he had been in and out of custody for the previous five years, and prior to that had grown up in children’s homes, foster care, and eventually secure units, young offender institutions, and prison. As he described it, the pattern “becomes natural” and that prison was better than hostels because “at least you get regular meals here”

The report further noted that the most common reason people cited for their own homelessness was misuse of alcohol or other drugs (29%). Victimization was another common response (20%). This included attacks and “fleeing violence”, repeated vandalism and break-ins to property, and harassment and threats from neighbours (which in one case resulted in the death of a friend). Break-up of relationships and family conflict appeared to be equally relevant (19%), as was failure to arrange housing prior to release from prison (and in one case, from care), closely followed by eviction (17%). Reasons for eviction, according to the respondents, included rent arrears, intoxication or abusive behaviour, imprisonment, and “for being an idiot”.

Another common theme was loss of housing due to imprisonment (15%). This included loss of temporary furnished flats and loss of housing due to inability to pay for it (such as through discontinuation of housing benefits). Other reasons for homelessness included rent or mortgage arrears (12%), bereavement (8%), domestic violence (two as victims and two as perpetrators; 3% each), accommodation bans, and poor physical or mental health. Two people said they had never had their own accommodation before. Some commented that general chaotic lifestyles and anti-social behaviour due to addiction was a problem, as was loneliness, isolation, and inability to cope on their own.¹³

Past and current abuse is a particularly relevant factor in homelessness and substance misuse amongst young women.¹⁴ For example it is often a factor in decisions for young people to run away from home, leaving them without stable accommodation and vulnerable to exploitation.¹⁵

Support for young people facing homelessness

The research for Glasgow City Mission and The Robertson Trust¹⁶ reported one service provider’s concern that people in prison have no choice but to work with agencies that may not be appropriate for them. For example, specialist support for housing work with young people may be unavailable. Other reports have

¹³ See also Jones, A. and Pleace, N. (2005) *Daytime Homelessness*. York: Centre for Housing Policy, University of York.
¹⁴ See for example HM Inspectorates of Social Work Services and Prisons (1998); Corston Report (2007) *A report by Baroness Jean Corston of a review of women with particular vulnerabilities in the criminal justice system*. London: Home Office.
¹⁵ See for example Malloch, M. (2011) “Responding to Young Runaways: Problems of Risk and Responsibility”. *Youth Justice* 11(1), 61-76.
¹⁶ Loucks (2007), *op cit*.

noted concerns about the appropriateness of support for young people: in its response to the consultation document from the Glasgow Homelessness Partnership,¹⁷ the Glasgow Homelessness Network¹⁸ commented that the physical environment of the Hamish Allan Centre (housing office in Glasgow) is not always appropriate for people who are homeless and therefore vulnerable, especially for people who are homeless for the first time and for young people.

Specialist support for young people in difficulty is available, however. Includem has demonstrated very positive results in its work with young people vulnerable to homelessness, substance misuse and offending.¹⁹ Family mediation from organisations such as SACRO, Aberlour, Children 1st and Relationships Scotland also work to prevent or repair the breakdown in relationships leading to homelessness amongst young people. Families Outside, in turn, provides specialist support to families affected by imprisonment, where the risk of homelessness after a young person's release from custody is particularly high.

Identifying and engaging the young people and their families who need this support can be more of a challenge, as young people and their families facing such difficulties may not readily access or be aware of the support available. Family Justice in the USA commends the use of a Strengths-Based Genogram and ecomapping for this purpose. The strengths-based genogram identifies the other issues families might be facing and, importantly, where the strengths lie in terms of support for the service user as well as for the wider family. Ecomapping, in turn, identifies the agencies and support already engaging with the family in some form; this too identifies the positive supports as well as where there might be tensions. An explanation of these tools as well as training videos and supporting research are available at no cost under 'Tools for professionals' at <http://www.familiesoutside.org.uk/getting-involved/>.

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¹⁷ Glasgow Homelessness Partnership (2006) "Modernising the Hamish Allan Centre – Part I: Discussion Paper." Glasgow: Glasgow City Council.

¹⁸ Glasgow Homelessness Network (2006) Submission to the Glasgow Homelessness Partnership, September 2006.

¹⁹ Includem (2011) *The Evidence for A Better Life: Activity and Impact Report 2010-2011*. Glasgow: Includem.

Helpline Database Search - Housing/Young People

- Mr F is granddad to G ..., [who] is only 20 but has been in prison many times, parents wanting nothing to do with him and he has been in care or with adults (close relatives in some cases) who have simply had him for the money he has brought into the house. G is diagnosed ADHD and was on Ritalin until this was stopped when he was 15 and sent into care. He has been in trouble since that time. He has literacy difficulties and most of the problems are associated with his frustrations in not understanding. Granddad has concerns about his mental health every time he is in prison. His tenancy ... has been taken away although he is due to be released from prison in October and it is unlikely he will have this reinstated as he is more than £900 in arrears. However, difficulty in filling out forms meant that he wasn't offer the housing support he was entitled to. Mr F was also ... worried about what will happen to G when he is released from prison. He needs day to day support but granddad feels there is very little for him.
- H's son is currently in [x prison] and is nearing the end of his sentence. He has been on home leave before and while father is happy for him to come home on these occasions he doesn't want him home when he is released. His son was convicted at 21 and has spent 18 years inside; as such father does not find it appropriate for him to stay with him. Caller looking to find out how he will secure housing Expressed he was keen to buy all the necessary things to help his son e.g. furniture but would like him to stand on his own to feet.
- A's son is currently remanded in [x prison] and is losing his flat. A has spoken to council and is looking to send him council tax confirmation to be filled in by himself and stamped by prison. Explained that as he is on remand he would be entitled to claim Housing Benefit for up to 52 weeks however A explained that he had built up arrears previous to being remanded.
- V telephoned, upset about her current situation. Her older son has recently been sentenced, an alcohol induced offence, and she was keen to find out what will happen to his flat, which he has not long secured, whilst he is in prison. He is 20 years old and will be transferred to Polmont.... [Because] he is deemed to be a vulnerable young adult, he has been given priority housing. However, now anxious in case this is taken from him and he will have nowhere to go when he is released. V says that she cannot have him at her home, as she already has a 13 year old daughter and a son, currently on probation. There is 'bad blood' between the brothers, and it wouldn't be suitable for him to come back to the house. V has also recently split up from her partner and is trying to

sort out benefits for herself and her daughter and feels genuinely overwhelmed with everything that is happening. ... She is also worried about where to store all her son's property if he does have to give up his tenancy. Directed her to Shelter but also discussed the possibility of him retaining his tenancy, and housing benefits, if the sentence is for less than 13 weeks. She wasn't sure about this because her son hadn't been able to tell her.

- Godson in [x prison], following a very serious offence on his partner, serving 3 years. Prisoner, T, has been disowned by most of his family, his girlfriend is in [x town] but she was not approved for suitable accommodation due to some of her answers to SW. T's mother has Alzheimer's and father is in sheltered accommodation so not suitable for him to return there. Many issues, underlying message is that caller is uncertain now about taking T into home. However, she doesn't want to let him down.
- L's son is currently serving a sentence in [x prison] and they have received our information in relation to HDC. However, both L and her husband are in temporary accommodation because their son was a witness in the trial of someone else, and they have had to be moved because of possible repercussions. They are now in a safe house ... and are awaiting being re-housed. L has concerns that this could impact on an appropriate address for her son, if he is released on HDC.
- Mrs D's daughter is staying with her and her disabled husband, and her 14yr old son in a 2 bed flat after getting out on tag in June. She was told that if her daughter could come to her on her tag date she would be offered a flat on her liberation date in November. They have been advised and tried private lets and looked at B&B, but do not think it suitable for the young son. Mrs T is now at the point that she wishes she had refused to take her daughter when she came out on tag in June, as she would have fitted the homeless criteria more obviously.