

Minutes
Cross-Party Group on Children and Families
Affected by Imprisonment
5 June 2019
6 – 7.30pm

Attendees

Richard Lyle MSP, Nancy Loucks (Secretariat), Daniel Cairns (Mary Fee MSP), Fulton McGregor MSP, Elyse Brown – Speaker (Family Member), Cheryl Carroll – Speaker (Family Member), Maya Cohen, Cara Jardine, Gavin Phillips, Tracey Thomson, Lexi Smart, Janice Wilson, Lisa Petterson, Sam Jelf, Michelle Lloyd, Kirsty Deacon, Catriona Gibson, Alison Bavidge, Sheila Gordon, Rosie Reid, Dawn Henderson, Linda Biggs, Anne Pinkman, Georgina Lyttle, Elaine Stalker, Chris McCulley.

Apologies

Lady Rosamond Cullen, Tina Everington, Mary Fee MSP, Fiona Jamieson, Valerie Macniven, Kate Philbrick, May Chamberlain, Karyn McCluskey, Alison Clancy, Sue Maxwell, Sara Watkin, Kirstie Freeman.

Minutes of Last Meeting and Matters Arising

Minutes were agreed by Sheila Gordon and seconded by Anne Pinkman.

- Richard Lyle to ask PQ regarding an extension of this to Scotland; this will be done
- Richard Lyle to write a letter to the Cabinet Secretary for Justice regarding difference in practice between prisons in terms of progression to national top-end facilities – still no response
- Still waiting on a response from Martin Wightman on Addiewell and Kilmarnock – NL will chase
- Link to the Crest Report forwarded by Nancy

Family-Led Presentations and Discussion

Three family members affected by imprisonment presented to the group.

Presentation by Cheryl Carroll – Children’s Visits (see attached presentation)

RL thanked Cheryl for sharing her story with the group and asked if there were any questions

RL asked whether the delayed start to a visit due to another visitor having difficulties with paperwork meant they had extra time added to the visit. CC explained that if visits are delayed for any reason, very rarely is the time given back. RL commented that this was very upsetting and that everyone is entitled to a full visit.

RL asked if visitors could take in their own games, playing cards, or toys. CC said she had asked on several occasions if she could bring these in but had been told no. She had also asked if she could bring some snacks (before they were provided) but again was told absolutely not.

RL asked whether this makes the family feel they are being criminalized. CC said that unfortunately there are the times when people try to use things such as baby food to smuggle things into the prison but that this is not everyone. As she had been visiting the prison every week for 3 years, she felt they should know by now that she can be trusted.

SG thanked Cheryl and noted her story was very emotional and enlightening. Certainly highlights the inconsistencies of the prison staff behavior during visits and the need for more consistency during

training of new staff. RL suggested that the CPG, through Mary Fee's office, would write to the prison to enquire what the standard procedures are for family visits and propose they be reviewed, though making no mention Cheryl's particular experience. CC said she was happy for that to happen and that hopefully this would make a difference to other families in the future.

Presentation by Elyse Brown – Families as Victims (see attached presentation)

Richard thanked Elyse for sharing her very emotional story with the group and understands the effect that the situation has had on her, her family, and grandson. Richard asked if anyone had any questions for Elyse.

RL asked whether she could see her son on a regular basis and how this had affected her relationship with her family. Elyse stated that she had to be careful around her grandson's mother as upsetting her could lead to her not seeing her grandson, which had happened in the past. Friends have been lost and others avoid her not knowing what to say.

DH stated that she had known Elyse for a long time and she is a very courageous lady but she does feel as though she too is a victim. Elyse has started a networking group and Dawn asked Elyse to explain to the group what it was she has done. Elyse explained that she has set up a support group on Facebook called LOOP (Loved Ones Of Prisoners), which is all about offering peer support which is what is needed when families of victims are feeling at their lowest

Fulton MacGregor MSP said that he unfortunately he could not stay but that he had attended an event tonight that he had not intended to come to and had heard probably the most powerful speech since entering the Parliament. He believed there had been no questions as Elyse could not have put her story any better and explained the crux of the matter which is that families can be victims and that he will be taking this into his work with the Justice Committee.

RL extended his thanks to Fulton. AP asked Elyse if she would be willing to share her story with perhaps the help of Families Outside and believes that the Justice Committee members should hear it. Elyse said she was passionate about sharing this as there are a lot of people affected by this. AP noted that there were many practical situations that need to be addressed, such as not being able to return to your home after the event.

RL suggested inviting the Cabinet Secretary for Justice to a CPG. NL said he had already been invited but had not yet attended, and Richard said he would invite him again. Basically they would invite the Cabinet Secretary and possibly the Shadow Secretaries to either a CPG meeting or a special meeting where both ladies could again relate their stories. Will also approach Fulton MacGregor about presenting to the Justice Committee and will see what this can do.

Both Cheryl and Elyse would like to share their story with as many people as possible, and Nancy asked for electronic copies of their speeches which we can include in the minutes as they are distributed to all MSPs as well as the GPG attendees.

Speeches could be filmed and put on the Families Outside Website and posted on LOOP.

Presentation by Liz – Information and Communication

Unfortunately Liz could not attend, but Nancy Loucks presented a statement on her behalf (see attached presentation)

CG commented that if Liz, who is an extremely articulate lady had problems communicating with the prison staff then other people would also find it impenetrable.

Richard Lyle said basically we should be writing to the Justice Committee through their clerks and asking them what is in their work programme. Asking is there a possibility of looking at what is happening as we need to get consistency and fairness in the way information is communicated to families regarding prison visits. As a CPG we need to try to get politicians to listen. Cheryl replied that the biggest problem is that, people don't listen not just in the prison service but also outside agencies.

AOCB

Report on COPE Conference by Nancy Loucks

NL thanked the Cheryl and Elyse for their presentations and noted how much more powerful it is to hearing things directly from families themselves. She also highlighted the work that Cheryl's children were doing, with the two oldest involved as Human Rights Defenders with the Children's Commissioners Office and really flourishing.

- COPE Conference (Krakow, Poland): talked a lot around child participation and how difficult it is for children and young people in particular to share their experiences, recognising that kids do not want to be defined by their experiences of dealing with family member in prison. NL mentioned the KIN video "I am not my experience" (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6iyn8gc5Lxs>)
- The conference focused on child participation, and about 10 young people addressed a conference of 250 people including prison staff.
- Also discussed was the question of data collection and privacy and how you balance identifying people to support with the right to keep information to themselves. This will be a continuing question that COPE will continue to deal with.
- COPE tends to target countries with little or no support for families.
- The Saturday was Children's Day in Poland, and the Children's Commissioner attended the conference on the Friday. As a result, the Commissioner added it as the cover story on their website for Children's Day in Poland, highlighting this specific group of children and their experience of having a parent in prison and how important it was to recognise their needs.
- Despite children of prisoners not being on the radar in Poland prior to this conference, they do already have Skype visits in prisons. Children were allowed to play outside and have food and drink with the family member in prison as a direct result of the conference delegates visiting - not something that normally happens but had a hugely positive effect within the prison and something from which they learned from.

Children's Voices in London – 14th June 2019

Aimed at young people, restricting the number of adults attending. Six young people from Scotland who are supported by both KIN and Families Outside will be attending. The conference will be run by the young people but unsure of how many Scottish MPs will be there.

Not My Crime, Still My Sentence Campaign- June 2019

- This is an annual campaign for the month of June that **Children of Prisoners Europe (COPE)** runs. This year's campaign is slightly low key, as they are working on November's celebrations for the 30th anniversary of the **UN Convention on the Rights of the Child**. They are taking the Council of Europe recommendations previously discussed at a CPG and translating them into children's versions to be launched in November.
- The Children of Prisoner Europe website has the logo for Not My Crime, Still My Sentence Campaign event which can be downloaded along with information on other things you can do to take part in the campaign

INCCIP Conference (Huddersfield) – 12-15 August 2019

This is the second bi-annual conference of the International Coalition for Children of Incarcerated Parents (INCCIP). There is still time to register, with early bird registration closing on the 15th June 2019. They are still looking for proposals for papers; this a conference with a mix of practitioners and families together. There will be speakers from the UK and China, with people speaking about having parents on death row, so quite a lot of powerful discussions. Last day of the conference will be at the women's prison at Askham Grange. Further information is on the Families Outside webpage and Facebook.

Poetry Collection Raikes and Baldwin

The poetry collection, **Seen and Heard**, has now been published and is a very powerful collection of stories from people in prison, children and families.

<https://www.watersidepress.co.uk/acatalog/Seen-Heard-Poems-Prisons-9781909976429.html>

General Discussion

There was a general discussion on ways to influence the training of prison officers, the benefits of including family experiences and the potential impact of this input to the induction and training of prison staff. Could this improve the culture within the prisons towards family visits and improve the experience for everyone?

ES replied that Families Outside is involved in the training of new officers at the SPS College at Polmont, but they are tied to what it is SPS include in their training. They could ask why families are not involved in the training and if this is something that could be considered.

EB added that the training of prison officers in the private sector is not as rigorous as that of SPS, and from personal experience from talking to staff at Addiewell, she feels that some sort of family participation in induction or future in house training would be beneficial. ES said that unfortunately there is no inroad to be involved in the training of officers in private prisons, as external involvement in this has now been withdrawn.

A member suggested that it might be a good idea for KIN to make a presentation at one of the CPG meetings and for one of the young people to present, but as a positive experience. RL said he was happy for this to happen but does not want to put anyone under any pressure to present. **[NB: KIN presented at a CPG in June 2017.]** He also reiterated that they would press for the Cabinet Secretary to attend a CPG meeting, and if a list of questions could be drawn up for him pre-meeting and also for him to answer questions on the night, Mary Fee's office will work on this.

Date and time of next meeting

Dates for September or October 2019 and going forward are to be confirmed but will be held every two months from then. No specific topics were requested, but NL reiterated that they would be trying to get the Cabinet Secretary to a CPG for a question and answer session.

Richard Lyle thanked everyone for attending and thanked those who presented

Ongoing Actions – April 2019

- Richard Lyle to ask PQ regarding an extension of in-cell telephones and skype to prisons in Scotland – will follow up

- Richard Lyle to write a letter to the Cabinet Secretary for Justice regarding difference in practice between prisons in terms of progression to national top-end facilities – still no response- will follow up
- NL will chase on a response from Martin Wightman on Addiewell and Kilmarnock

Actions CPG 5 June 2019

- Richard Lyle will contact Mary Fee's office to write to HMP Edinburgh to enquire what the standard procedures are for family visits and propose they be reviewed. There will be no mention of CC's particular experience regarding the visit being curtailed due to circumstances out with her control
- Richard Lyle – The CPG will write to the Justice Committee through their clerks requesting information on what is in their work programme regarding the way prison visits are handled to ensure consistency
- Richard Lyle – CPG will email colleagues via Mary Fee's office regarding MP's attendance at the Children's Voices conference in London – 14th June 2019
- Richard Lyle will approach Fulton MacGregor about Carol and Elyse presenting to the Justice Committee.
- Group members should contribute to a list of questions for the Cabinet Secretary pre-meeting and also for him to answer questions on the night. Mary Fee's office will work on this.