

September 2016



CLINKS
RESPONSE

A summary of Clinks' response to the consultation on the Carers Strategy

About Clinks

Clinks is the national infrastructure organisation supporting voluntary sector organisations that work with offenders and their families. Our aim is to ensure the sector and those with whom it works are informed and engaged in order to transform the lives of people with lived experience of the Criminal Justice System and their communities.

We do this by providing specialist information and support, with a particular focus on smaller voluntary sector organisations, to inform them about changes in policy and commissioning, and to help them build effective partnerships and provide innovative services that respond directly to the needs of their users.

We have more than 500 voluntary sector members, from the sector's largest providers to its smallest, and our wider national network reaches 4,000 voluntary sector contacts. We host a project that works to give a collective voice to organisations that support the families of prisoners – this submission focuses and is based on our work with these organisations.

This is a summary based on our response to the Department of Health's online survey in July 2016. Although the survey was primarily aimed at carers, it also offered an opportunity for organisations to contribute information.

Identifying people as carers and providing information and advice

A 'carer' is defined as a friend or family member giving unpaid support to someone who cannot manage without that support. It includes caring for someone with either physical or mental poor health.

We believe it is of the utmost importance that there is better identification of carers, including among prisoners and their families, and that they are able to access relevant information and advice.

Prisoners disproportionately experience poor mental and physical health. The number of older prisoners is increasing; people aged 60 and over are the fastest growing age group in the prison estate. Nearly 60% of older prisoners report a longstanding disability or illness.¹ Post-release, family members offer key support, including unpaid care.

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Family carers can be identified through family engagement workers in prisons; information in visitor centres, visits halls and on prison landings; through trained and informed probation workers; via family forums and user voice events run by organisations working with the families of prisoners; and through organisations supporting families affected by substance abuse.

I Better information and advice is vital.

Family engagement workers in prisons work with both prisoners and their families, carrying out invaluable casework. Nepacs in north east England, Pact (England and Wales), Jigsaw (HMP Leeds), Lincoln Action Trust (HMP Lincoln) and Partners of Prisoners (POPS), based in north west England, all have expertise in delivering advice and identifying additional support. Nepacs runs an annual Visitors Voice event for families visiting prisons in north east England, an ideal opportunity for providing information and advice.

Under the Care Act 2014, when conducting a care assessment, local authorities must "involve the person in the assessment and, where appropriate, their carer or someone else they nominate". Staff conducting assessments in prisons under the Care Act have an opportunity to offer potential carers information and advice about their rights and to signpost to services. Peer support groups, for instance for families affected by substance abuse, also offer an opportunity to share information and advice.

Services and other formal support for adult carers

It is crucial to improve services and other formal support for carers affected by the Criminal Justice System.

The support required depends on individual circumstances, but the most important issue for carers is finding out what's available.

Transforming Rehabilitation is the Government's programme for managing ex-prisoners in England and Wales. Under this reform programme, 35 individual Probation Trusts have been replaced with a single National Probation Service, responsible for managing high-risk offenders, and 21 Community Rehabilitation Companies (CRCs) responsible for managing low- to medium-risk offenders in England and Wales. The CRCs will also have a new responsibility for supervising short-sentenced prisoners (those sentenced to fewer than 12 months in prison) after release.

Resettlement provision therefore varies between prisons and means that families may not be invited to participate in planning for the prisoner's release or access/know about 'formal' services. Further to this, Clinks' recent report, *Change and challenge*,² recommends that CRCs provide total transparency of supply chain partners which could help ensure carers are aware of the services available to their loved ones.

Some groups of carers may be especially marginalised. These include carers of people who misuse drugs and/or alcohol, carers of older prisoners (especially those convicted of sex offences) and prisoners who may, themselves, be caring for someone on their release. Carers supporting someone leaving prison could require practical support such as benefits checks, help ensuring temporary and permanent accommodation is suitable and accessible, liaison about ongoing medical care – as well as emotional support that is sympathetic to their specific situation. In addition, some carers may be supporting an adult child leaving prison, as well as grandchildren. Services should recognise their role as a carer and as a kinship carer.

Valuing and involving carers in services

Services supporting people needing care must improve the way they value and involve carers.

It is essential that prisons enable carers to build and maintain relationships with prisoners who may require care in the community on resettlement. Where appropriate, prisons should include carers in planning and decision-making on issues such as healthcare and resettlement. Prisons can include specific questions for carers in their visitors' surveys, acknowledge carers' contributions and seek feedback on developing services. Friends and family carers can also be included in assessments under the Care Act (in prison and in the community) and in sentence planning. It is also important that CRCs and the National Probation Service facilitate carers to provide support to their loved ones.

Supporting working carers and ensuring a life outside caring

It is vital that support for working carers improves, to enable carers to maintain employment and have a life alongside their caring role.

Carers UK³ work with employers to develop carer-friendly work practices and employers may benefit from additional awareness-raising to support carers with a loved one in/ leaving prison. These carers are likely to have additional duties such as supporting their loved one in temporary accommodation while on Home Detention Curfew (a scheme that allows certain prisoners to be released early subject to an electronically monitored curfew), helping with visits with probation staff, or supporting them with health appointments.

Release on temporary licence (ROTL) is a pivotal part of the process of resettlement and rehabilitation for many people in prison, and can help facilitate carers to maintain contact with their loved one serving a custodial sentence. As a recent joint briefing by Clinks and the Prison Reform Trust shows, the use of ROTL has declined significantly since a review of the policy was announced in 2013. We recommend that the Ministry of Justice should have an explicit objective to reverse the decline in ROTL for resettlement and rehabilitation, so that the manifest willingness of employers and other organisations to help is not squandered.⁴

There are additional challenges for working carers supporting prisoners and ex-prisoners. In addition to caring duties, carers may have to negotiate time off to visit their loved ones in prison, which may be a long distance from their home.⁵ This is especially true for carers of female prisoners, as women's prisons are likely to be further from home.

Families of prisoners have also mentioned that they experience stigma and have been advised not to mention that a family member is in prison at their workplace. There may be additional stigma if, for instance, their loved one is experiencing mental health problems, has been convicted of a sex-related offence or is recovering from drug or alcohol problems. It is important that these additional needs are taken into account to ensure that carers of people in contact with the Criminal Justice System can maintain employment and a life of their own, alongside their caring responsibilities.



Other issues not covered

There is considerable concern about the impact of New Psychoactive Substances (NPS, previously called legal highs) in prisons. According to Peter Clarke, the Chief Inspector of Prisons, in his recent *Annual Report 2015-16*,⁶ NPS are having a "dramatic and destabilising effect in many of our prisons". He argues for a clear strategy to deal with the supply of these drugs into prisons, and to care for those who suffer from their effects, which include psychotic episodes and self-harm.

I Friends and family caring for NPS users on release will need additional support.

Voluntary sector organisations such as Addaction and Adfam are exploring ways to support families affected by NPS and are partnering with organisations including Pact to develop work focused on meeting the needs of families of prisoners affected by NPS use.



Clinks supports, represents and campaigns for the voluntary sector working with offenders. Clinks aims to ensure the sector and all those with whom they work, are informed and engaged in order to transform the lives of offenders.

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Notes

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4. Clinks and Prison Reform Trust. 2016. *Inside out: the role of the voluntary and private sector in providing opportunities for rehabilitation for people on temporary release*. Online at: www.clinks.org/briefings (Last accessed 26 August 2016)
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