



LIFE CHANGING

Children and Families; the "forgotten victims" of the offending cycle

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The VACRO Story

- Established in 1872 as the Discharged Prisoners' Aid Society, the Victorian Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders (VACRO) is a non-denominational, community-based agency.
- VACRO provides support and information for individuals charged with a criminal offence, offenders, prisoners and their **families**, as well as leadership, education, training and research on the Victorian Adult Criminal Justice System for the community.
- 2012 – VACRO turns **140** years old and launches the Children's Foundation





Victoria's CJS

Prison	Classification	Managed	Opened	Capacity	Location
Beechworth Correctional Centre	Minimum	Corrections Victoria	2005	120	Beechworth
Dame Phyllis Frost Centre	Minimum to maximum (female)	Corrections Victoria	15 August 1996	260	Deer Park
Fulham Correctional Centre (including NALU)	Minimum to maximum	GEO Group Australia	1997	777; 60 (NALU)	Sale
HM Prison Barwon (including Barwon Supermax)	Maximum; supermax	Corrections Victoria	January 1990	425	Lara
HM Prison Dhurringile	Minimum	Corrections Victoria	1965	174	Murchison
HM Prison Langi Kal Kal	Minimum	Corrections Victoria	?	110	Beaufort
HM Prison Loddon	Medium	Corrections Victoria	1990	399	Castlemaine
HM Prison Tarrengower	Minimum (female)	Corrections Victoria	?	54	Maldon
Hopkins Correctional Centre (Ararat)	Minimum to medium	Corrections Victoria	1967	397	Ararat
Mamgoneet Correctional Centre	Medium	Corrections Victoria	2006	300	Lara
Metropolitan Remand Centre	Maximum remand	Corrections Victoria	2006	600	Ravenhall
Port Phillip Prison	Medium to maximum	G4S Australia Pty. Limited	1997	744	Deer Park
MAP	Maximum	Corrections Victoria	1989	285	West Melbourne
Judy Lazarus Transition Centre	Minimum	Corrections Victoria	2007	25	West Melbourne





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Prison and Community Correctional Services Locations

May 2013



Corrections Victoria | www.corrections.vic.gov.au

Victoria Department of Justice



Programs

VACRO works with individuals & families at the time of arrest, through court, in the prison system and out in the community.

- Transitional Services
 - Link Out (men)
 - CSP (men)
 - Women's Mentoring
 - 2nd Chance Cycles
 - CCaTs
- Family & Children's Services
 - SKY Counselling
 - Mulwilla House (Beechworth)
 - Video Visits
 - Family Liaison @ Melb. Assessment Prison
 - Family Support @ Marngoneet Correctional Centre
 - Aboriginal Family Visits Program
 - Family Links – Aboriginal
 - Family Links – Geelong Magistrates Court



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What is Desistance?

In recent years we have begun looking at criminal behaviour in terms of **criminal careers.**

This suggests that offending begins at one point in time and ends at another





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Three types of Offenders:

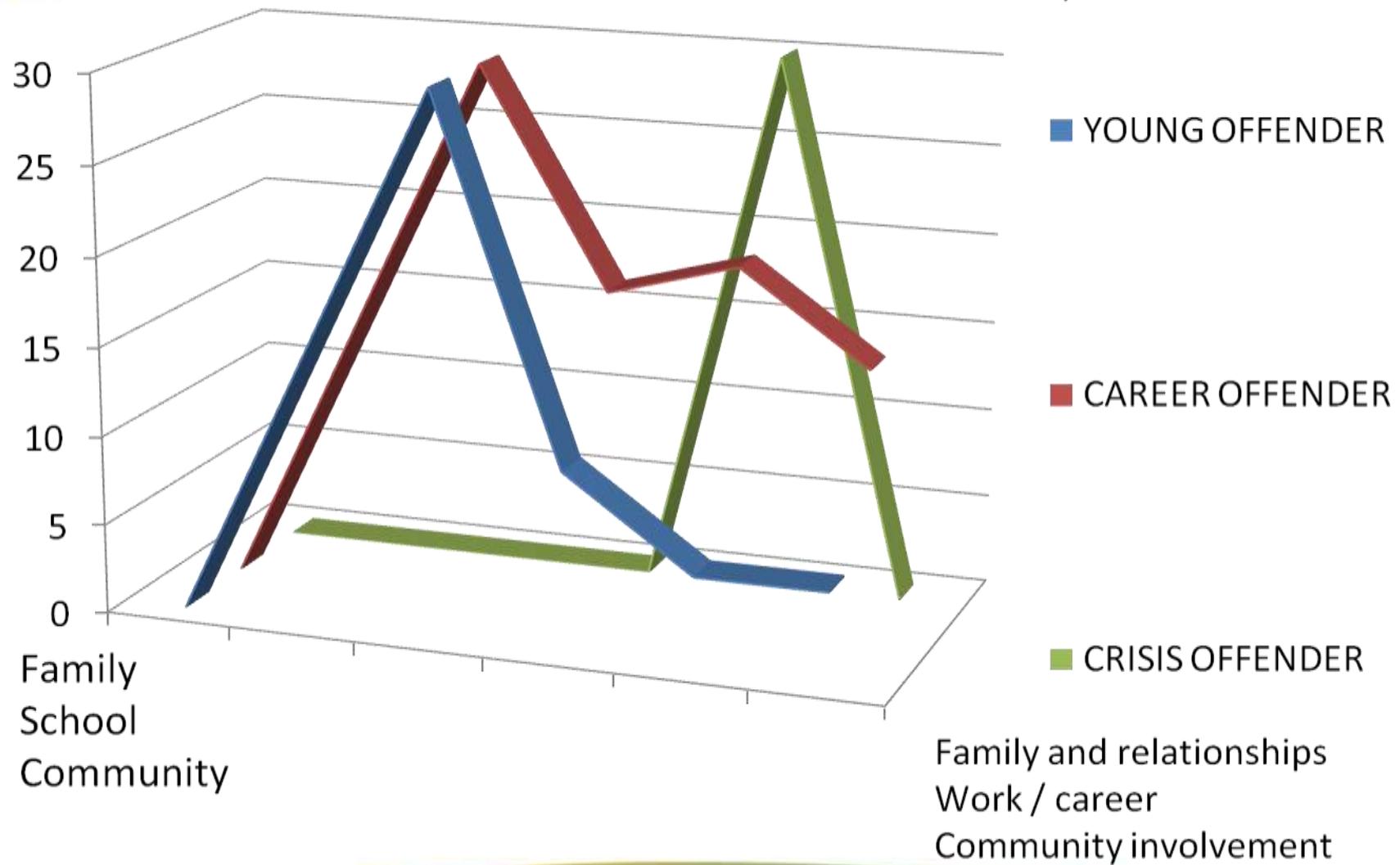
- ❖ The life-course persistent type, who start offending early in life and offend for a long period of time;
- ❖ The adolescent limited type, who offend for a short period of time mainly during adolescence.
- ❖ Crisis offender.





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Disconnected from family
Dropped out of school
Not connected with the community



Family
School
Community

Family and relationships
Work / career
Community involvement





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The Value of Understanding Desistance

Most Offending behaviour peaks in teenage years, and then starts to decline.

This is known as the 'age crime curve'.





What is Desistance?

Today's 'young offender' is more likely to become tomorrow's 'new father' than tomorrow's 'habitual criminal'.



How Can It Start?

During the life-course, different social institutions help to cement the bond between the individual and society.

- For **adolescents** school, the family and peer groups influence the nature of the bond between young people and their community.
- While employment, marriage, and parenthood operate in a similar way for **adults**.

When these bonds break down criminal activity is a likely outcome

A 'decision' to give up crime

A study of former criminals, identified the following as factors influencing desistance:

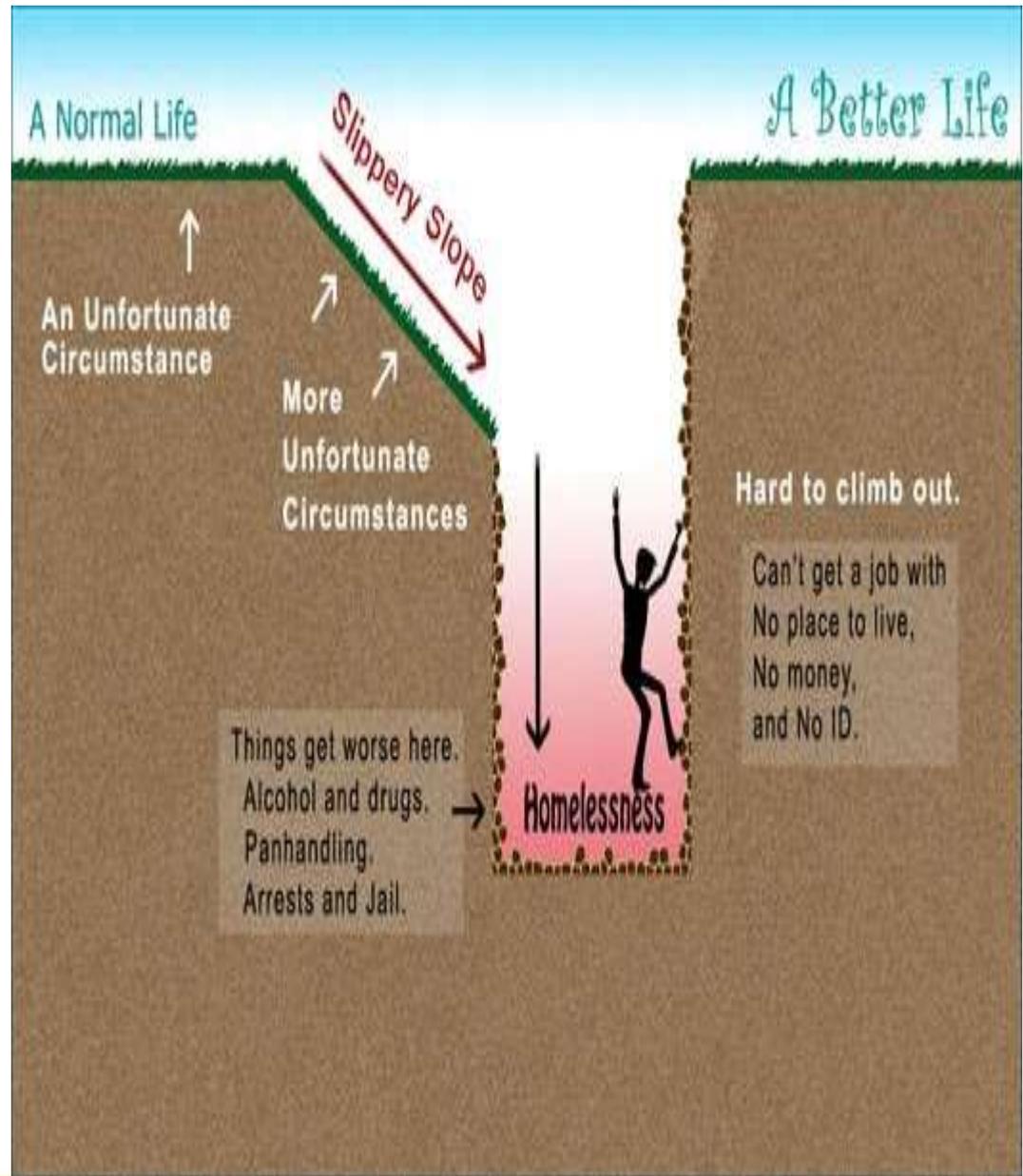
- Shock (such as being wounded during a crime);
- Growing tired of doing time in prison;
- Awareness of the possibility of longer prison terms;
- Reassessment of what is important to the individual;
- Overcoming substance, alcohol or other addiction
- Change in living arrangement or relationship

Whilst decisions may not be enough on their own for desistance, they are necessary!



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1. A decision
2. Opportunities
3. Family support is a key factor in desistance





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Why Support Families?

Last year, an estimated **67,500** children had a parent appearing as a defendant at the Magistrates court of Victoria.



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Each Step Equally Impacts Upon the Family



Arrest
Court
Bail/Remand
Prison
Orders
Community
Parole
Reintegration



Geelong Family Links Court Support

Why do families need this services?

When a parent is sent to prison, families are sometimes **left behind** in vulnerable situations.

Sometimes, being sent to prison comes as a shock, and a parent hasn't made arrangements for the care of their children. They may be with a friend or babysitter, at school, with a relative, or left alone at home

Our aim is to ensure that no child or dependant adult is **left behind**, and put at risk, because the person who looks after them has been sent to prison.



Maintaining contact with the incarcerated parent is documented as one of the most promising ways to alleviate the emotional and behavioural effects of incarceration on children.

Natural supporters of Desistance -
Family & Community

Visiting Prison

- **Contact & Non-contact Visits**
- **Residential visits**
- **Special Visits**
- **Video Visits**

I went for my first visit with my son at MAP. I checked in at reception then waited for 2 hours to be called up. That was when they asked for my identification and told me I didn't have enough identification points and couldn't see him. I was distraught.

You can be waiting for 3 hours if it is busy and then be told that visiting is closed and you are not going to be able to see him

- **Communication**

My 8 year old was excited about taking in his new school photo to his dad for his birthday. He had made a special frame for it. When we got to the prison, they had changed the rules about the size of the photos, and he wasn't allowed to take the photo in. He felt miserable that he had let his dad down



Visiting Prison with Children

- **Should children go to prison for visits?**
- **Why a child may not visit their parent?**
- **How to prepare children for visits?**

*“It’s dead boring just sitting and waiting.
It’s a bit scary being searched and having
to take your shoes off. It makes you feel horrible,
like you’re the one who’s done something wrong.
We couldn’t really talk when we saw him;
there was too many other people”*

Strategies / Approaches

- Developmental Considerations
- Trauma Frameworks
- Grief and Loss



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Grief and Loss

When your mum goes to
prison, you might feel...

Sad feelings





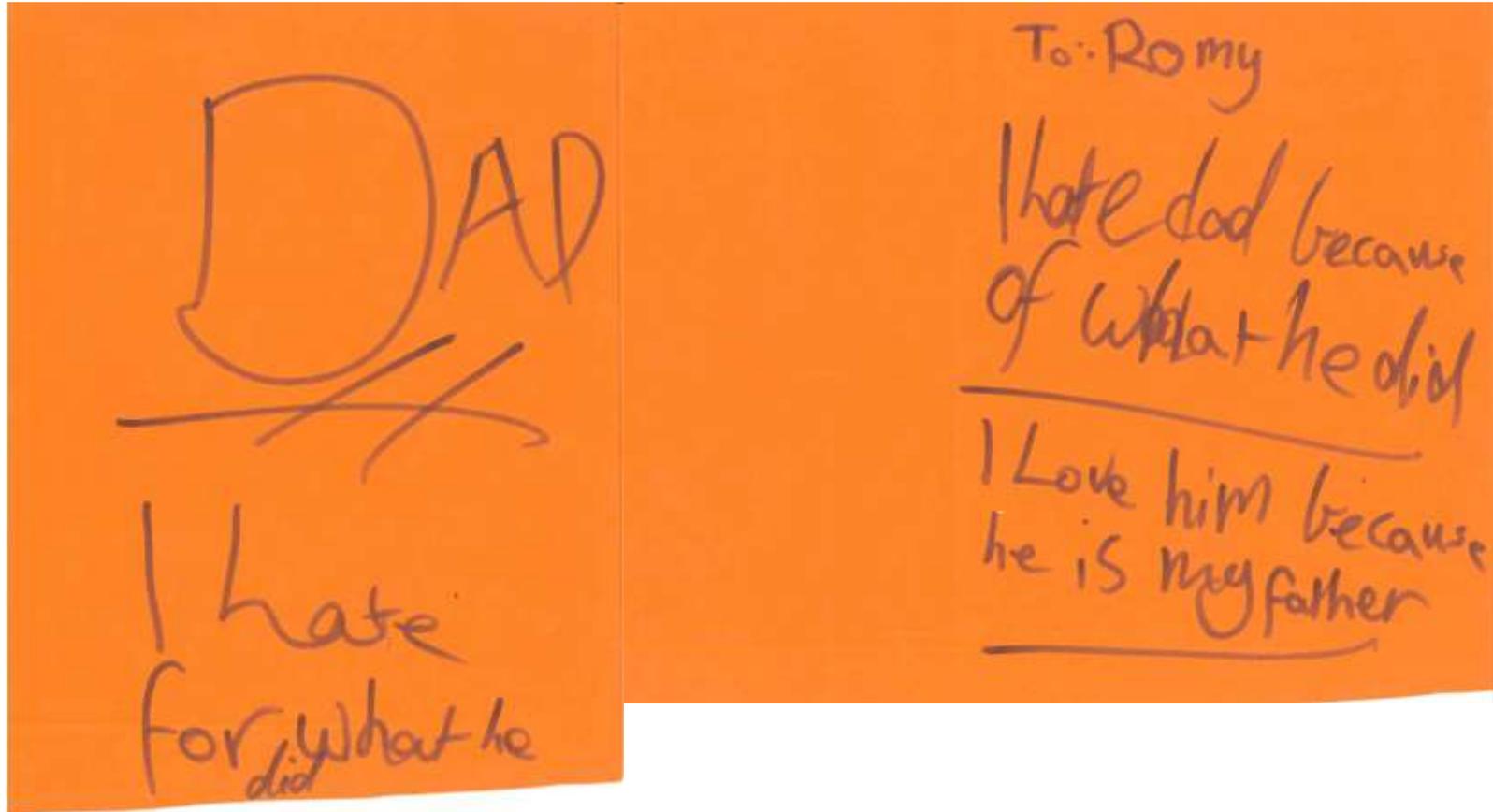
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Disenfranchised grief





Compounded Grief



You will miss...



- How much fun they had
- The great times they had
- How they went to places and bought stuff
- Hugs and kisses
- Playing with each other
- Holidays
- When mum can't come to my birthday
- The drawing is of the big cube at Northland. We went there with mum sometimes



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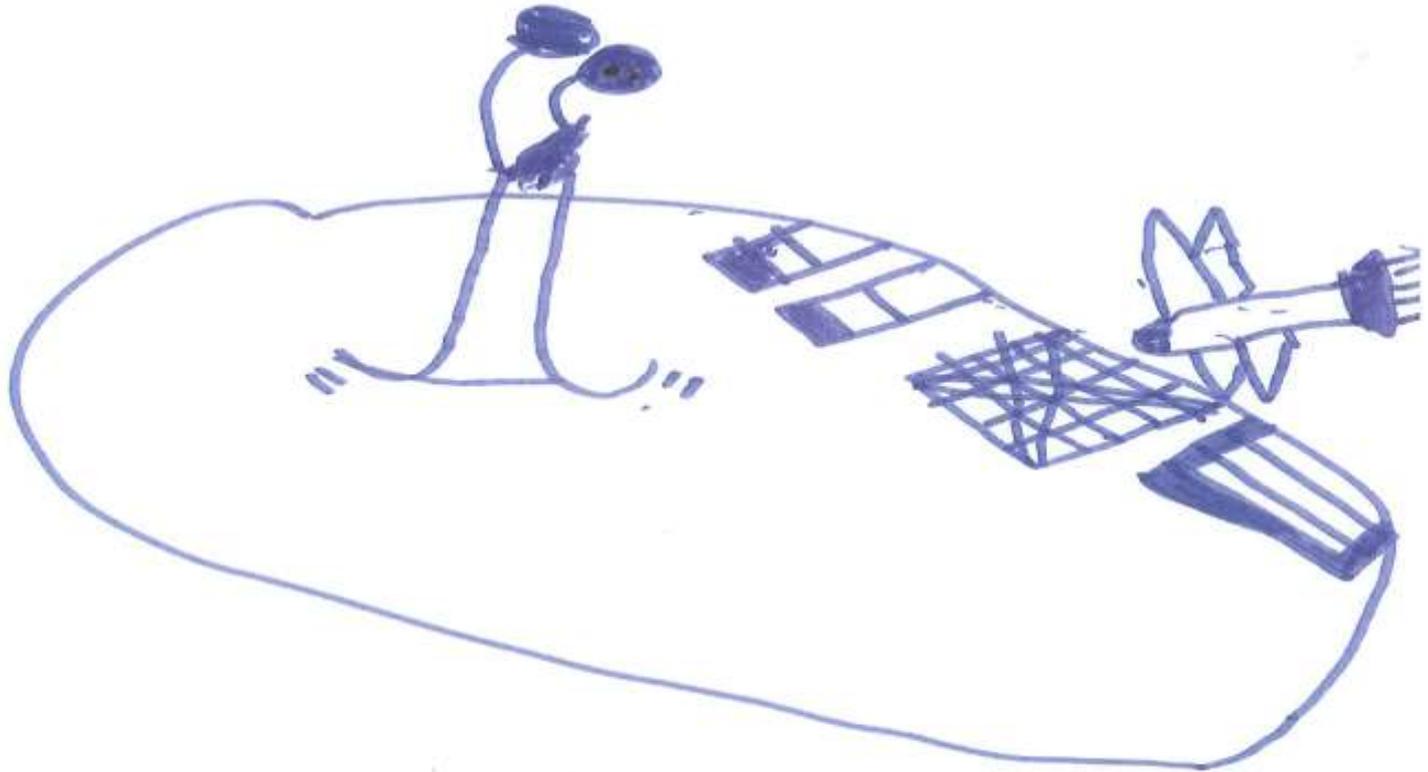
Secret Activity...



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Holding the Secret

What I tell my friends is...



"She's gone to Hollywood" or "she's on a holiday in Madagascar"



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Intergenerational Crime

A number of studies suggest that children of offenders are more likely to end up in the criminal justice system as adults

This does not mean that an offender is more likely to give birth to another offender. As if somehow crime is an infection that can be passed on.

→ It is not the imprisonment of the parent in itself, but the **response** to the imprisonment that increases the risk factor

(Social isolation and a sense of shame in addition to trauma)



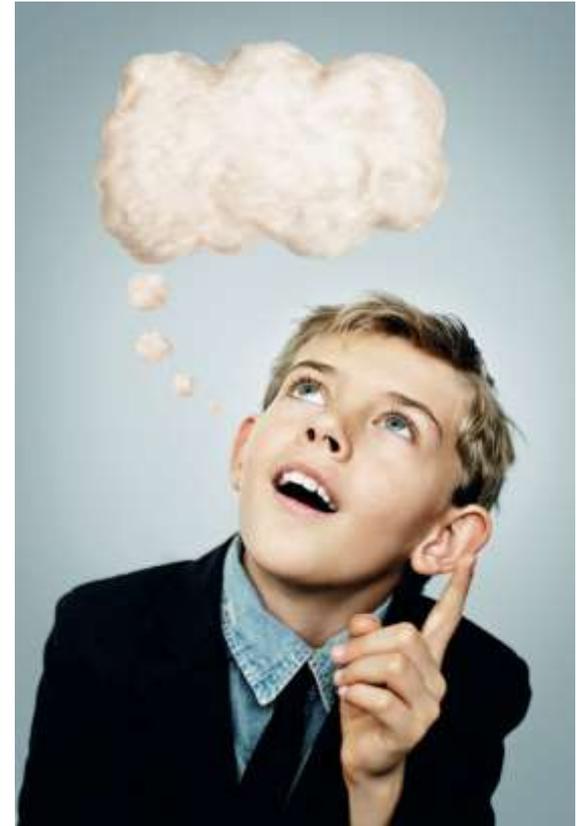
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Strategies

Worker's ability to talk knowledgably about the issues ...*It helps the kids to think, hang on, there are other kids with parents in prison.*

Supporting parents / carers to feel comfortable talking with their children about what has happened.

Parenting from the Inside.





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What we know to be Good Practice

- Awareness of our own values & judgements
- How we are impacted upon by the media coverage...
confidentiality around 'high profile' cases (not getting lost in content).
- Our personal experiences as victims of any crime
- And / or our personal experiences of law-breaking
- Building rapport with clients AND maintaining strong professional relationships with our colleagues (police, prison officers, legal etc.)
- Vicarious Traumatism / Desensitisation
- Organisational approach to information that may be related to criminal activity

More Strategies

- Balancing Boundaries with Understanding
- Awareness of Triggers
- Open the conversation if you notice distress
- Don't make assumptions - Awareness of the range of feelings the young person may have to their loved one (including resentment at what had happened as well as excitement their home, fear they may leave again)
- Separation Anxiety & Issues with trust... keep promises, be reliable
- Like other traumas & grief, balance patience (with a young person's behaviours etc.) with the need to maintain normality and routine.
- Focus on strengths and positives



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Provide Choices – helping the child regain a sense of control



Overview

- **information provision**
- **Prepare families**
- **Validate experiences**
- Be aware of the **financial impact**
- Use your existing skill base (e.g. Trauma / grief)
- **reintegration plan**
- **culture and community awareness**
- Consider other issues



We can do a lot!





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“Turn It Around”

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SGOB3QhGqtA>





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