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Unseen, Unheard: Developing an Irish response to promote and protect the rights of children with a parent in prison

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Presentation format

1. Children of prisoners - Ireland’s context
2. Project (IRC funded)
   i. Aims
   ii. Actions/Outcomes
   iii. Resources
   iv. Impact and Developments
3. Future action?
Children with a parent in prison - Ireland

- No official data
- Approximately 6000 children have an incarcerated parent (Irish Penal Reform Trust)
- 1 Dedicated service provider operating in 1 location (Bedford Row, Limerick - [http://www.bedfordrow.ie/](http://www.bedfordrow.ie/))
  - Other visiting room or information services also exist
- No state services
Where has there been engagement?

- Irish Prison Service (IPS)
  - Non-statutory executive agency
  - Prison population: 3927 (13 April 2018)
  - Rate of imprisonment approx. 80 per 100,000 (Feb 2018).
  - Prison population increased by 400% from 1970 to 2011.
  - Cultural and organisational issues:
    Inspector of Prisons highlighted “a disconnect between the culture which exists in the headquarters of the IPS and that in the 13 prisons in Ireland” *(Culture and Organisation in the Irish Prison Service, Office of the Inspector of Prisons, 2015)*
  - Role of the Governor and localised practice
    *I do what I do.... We’re independent serfdoms, call it what you like.* *(Governor quoted in Parkes & Donson, 2018)*
Irish Prison Service and Families

• Awareness of children of incarcerated parents – 2012
  • Changing children’s rights landscape (1990s onwards)
  • IPRT report
• Establishment of the Families and Imprisonment Group 2012 (FIG)
  “Strengthen family supports to facilitate on-going contact with prisoners while in custody and their reintegration post release, with appropriate supports and programmes.” (Strategic Plan 2012-15)
• Development of family visits as a “desistance opportunity”
• Family Links Programme – parenting courses
Unseen, Unheard Project

- Shifting the focus to the rights of children
- Collaboration between academic researchers and NGO organisations

Aims:
- To address the unfamiliarity of state bodies and NGOs re children with a parent in prison in national policy and practice
- To seek to establish a national conversation that can lead to change

Funded by: IRISH RESEARCH COUNCIL

Academic research
UCC

Aim: To develop a national advocacy and research strategy for ROI

CHILDREN’S RIGHTS ALLIANCE

IPRT
Irish Penal Reform Trust

UCC
Who was our target audience?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research</th>
<th>Policy/Practice</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Surveying current research in Ireland</td>
<td>Development of Principles of Action for Children</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Correlating potential research with practice and policy</td>
<td>• key government departments and agencies</td>
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<td>• Targeting:</td>
<td>• NGO sector</td>
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<td>• Funders (Irish Research Council)</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Academic/NGO sector</td>
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<td>• Government Departments</td>
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Build a solid knowledge base

1. Gather Data
2. Map Services
3. Increase knowledge
Principles for Action, cont.

• **Hear the voices of children with a parent in prison**

  4. Develop and effectively employ mechanisms to ensure that children with a parent in prison have their voices heard
Principles for Action, cont.

• Recognise the holistic needs of children with a parent in prison in National Policy
  
  5. State should adopt a clear statement committing to support this group of children
  6. Adopt a holistic approach to policy and service provision
  7. Establish an inter-agency working group
Principles for Action, cont.

• **Establish multi-agency partnerships at local level and national levels**
  8. Establish multi-agency partnerships at local level and national levels to coordinate services

• **Develop monitoring Frameworks**
  9. The state should formally recognise children with a parent in prison as a priority for monitoring these children’s needs and outcomes in accordance with basic children’s rights protections in Ireland
Principles for Action, cont.

• **Raise awareness**

10. Provide children with a parent in prison with clear information regarding their rights and the services and supports available to them

11. Develop and disseminate information & educational resources to challenge stigma and misunderstandings
Advocacy materials

Reversible Thinking video

I'm going to end up in prison here

Just because my dad's there

You're wrong if you think

There are other possibilities for me
Impact and developments

• Positive engagement with
  • Office of the Ombudsman for Children in Ireland
  • Child and Family Agency (Tusla)
  • Irish Prison Service
  • Irish Probation Service
  • NGO community
  • Teacher Education

• Developments
  • Recommendation CM/Rec(2018)5 of the Committee of Ministers to member States concerning children with imprisoned parents (Council of Europe)
Future developments


• Parkes, A. & Donson, F., ‘Developing a child’s right to effective contact with a father in prison – an Irish Perspective’, (2018) 24(2) Child Care in Practice 148


Thank you

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