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About the author

I am a senior lecturer at Cardiff University where I have worked since 2000. I undertake research within CASCADE Research Centre (Children’s Social Care Research and Development Centre) based in the University. I teach mainly within the MA in Social Work. I am a qualified and registered social worker and worked as a probation officer for 14 years between 1986-2000. I have also worked in a domestic violence team for the NSPCC. I thus have both a practice and an academic knowledge base. I have a keen interest in issues affecting children, looked after children, domestic violence and criminal justice.

About CASCADE Research Centre

CASCADE is concerned with all aspects of community-based responses to social need in children and families, including family support services, children in need services, child protection, looked after children and adoption. It aims first and foremost to improve the well-being and safety of children and their families by:

- Generating primary research evidence of an internationally recognised high quality.
- Making the results of this research, and research produced elsewhere, available in an accessible form for children and families who receive social care services, professionals and policy-makers.
- Engaging a range of collaborators in research, including children and young people, parents and carers, practitioners, policy-makers and social care providers from the public, private and third sectors.

Introduction

I welcome the opportunity to submit evidence to the House of Commons Welsh Affairs Select Committee regarding prison provision in Wales, with a focus on women prisoners, cross-border issues and the potential for new prisons in Wales more widely. I undertook a piece of research to evaluate a pilot scheme called Visiting Mum formerly running from the female prison, HMP Eastwood Park. The final report was written in 2017 and I mainly draw on this for my evidence.

Background- women in prison

The number of female prisoners is significantly smaller than the male prison population in England and Wales. In the week of 12th May 2017 the female prison population in England and Wales was 3,945. This is to be contrasted with 81,248 male prisoners in the same week (Ministry of Justice, 2017). While the total number of women in prison in England and Wales appears relatively modest, in contrast with other European countries, it is much higher. In England and Wales 6.4 women per 100,000 of the population were imprisoned in 2017, contrasted with 2.6 in Northern Ireland, 2.6 in Denmark, 3.1 in the Republic of Ireland, 3.3 in France and 4.3 in Germany (World Prison Brief, 2017).

Women are often sent to prison for short sentences for offences of repeated shoplifting and fraud (Baldwin 2015). Despite significant numbers of women being imprisoned on the basis of non-violent
and less serious property offences, a large number of women in prison have multiple, complex needs and vulnerabilities, having suffered significant hardships, including violence and harm perpetrated against them.

Between a half and two thirds of female prisoners have depression, with 48% having attempted suicide at some point (Department of Health, 2015). In 2014 female prisoners made up 23% of all self-harm incidents despite representing only 5% of the total prison population (Prison Reform Trust, 2016). In 2015, 87 incidents were male and 292 were female (Ministry of Justice, 2015). A public health study of 500 female prisoners found that they were ‘five times more likely to have a mental health concern than women in the general population, with 78% exhibiting some level of psychological disturbance when measured on reception to prison’ (Plugge et al. 2006). In a study conducted in 2013, it was reported that 49% of women in prison suffer from anxiety and depression while 25% reported symptoms that indicate psychosis (Light et al. 2013). Drug and alcohol misuse is also a significant problem amongst female offenders, with the majority of women (70%) entering prison requiring some form of clinical detoxification support (Prison Reform Trust, 2014).

A particularly concerning recent trend in women’s prisons has been the sharp increase in suicide rates. The Prisons and Probation Ombudsman (PPO) reported in April 2017 on what it described as the ‘recent dramatic and depressing rise in self-inflicted deaths of women in prisons’ (PPO, 2017). The ombudsman reports that in 2015, women’s suicide rates in prison became higher per 1,000 than men and that: ‘overall, deaths of female prisoners more than doubled in 2016 compared to the previous calendar year, and this rise shows little sign of abating’. The report makes several recommendations to prisons, including better use of the ACCT process, having better emergency responses and identifying and dealing with mental health and bullying risks quicker and more effectively.

A very high number of female prisoners have suffered violence against them. The Corston review into female imprisonment found that half of women in prison reported suffering domestic violence and one in three experienced sexual abuse (Corston, 2007). The Prison Reform Trust (2015) echoes these findings, reporting that 46% have suffered domestic violence and 53% have experienced physical or sexual abuse as a child. Over a quarter of women in prison report being in local authority care as child (Prison Reform Trust, 2016).

In terms of women resisting crime, a study conducted in the Liverpool area found that women often do not have the right support networks, social capital, or financial resources to avoid engaging in crime particularly where they are attempting to support and provide for children (Liverpool Mental Health Consortium, 2016). Despite the complex needs of these women, and the high social and economic costs of imprisonment, many do not meet individual community service thresholds for support and as a result end up coming into contact with criminal justice services and prison (Prison Reform Trust/ADASS, 2016).

**Children of mothers in prison**

The exact numbers of children affected by maternal imprisonment are unknown but the Prison Reform Trust (2015) indicate that around 66% of women in prison have dependent children under the age of 18 and at least a fifth were lone parents before entering custody. They also estimated that, in 2010, more than 17,240 children were separated from their mother through imprisonment
(Prison Reform Trust, 2015), but only 9% of these children were cared for by their father while their mother was imprisoned. This is contrasted with 90% of mothers caring for children when fathers are imprisoned. Thus, we can see the problems are very different for children when a mother goes to prison, rather than a father. Yet much of the research that has been undertaken has focused on fathering, to some extent this is understandable as men form the vast majority of the prison population. The recent Farmer report entitled ‘The Importance of Strengthening Prisoners’ Family Ties to Prevent Re-offending and Reduce Intergenerational Crime’ (2017) again focused on men and only visited men’s prisons, with a view that any findings might be applicable to the women’s estate. The women’s estate requires consideration and services, which are tailored and specific to women. Farmer (2017) highlights the importance of family ties in reducing future offending by fathers (and their children) and community integration.

Previous research suggests that mothers report that the separation from children is the worst and most difficult aspect of imprisonment (Carlen and Worrall, 2004), exacerbating mental health and substance misuse problems (Caddle and Crisp, 1997). Studies have also indicated that mothers in prison face additional strain compared with other female prisoners and lose confidence in their parenting ability during their imprisonment. Feelings of loss and rejection around losing their children motivate decisions to attempt suicide (Loper and Tuerk, 2006; Borrill et al. 2005).

The impact on children of the imprisonment of their primary carer is ‘often nothing short of catastrophic’ (Baroness Corston 2007). Human rights legislation and case law has a role to play in relation to the imprisonment of mothers. When a mother is sentenced to custody, they are separated from their child which deprives the child of parental care and thus interferes with their Article 8 rights (right to respect for family and private life). A child’s Article 8 rights are engaged once their mother is imprisoned, (supported by the case of R (on the application of P and Q) v Secretary of State for the Home Department (2001). As a result sentencers should obtain information about any dependent children the woman may have and balance the Article 8 rights of the child with the seriousness of the woman’s offence. Research has indicated that this does not routinely happen (Epstein, 2012) and more research in this area is needed to understand how decisions are made about sentencing of women with dependent children and whether children’s Article 8 rights are considered in the sentencing process. In addition, in 2010 the UN General Assembly approved the UN Rules for the Treatment of Women Prisoners and Non-custodial Measures for Women Offenders (known as the ‘Bangkok Rules’), further embedding the requirement that gender sensitive approaches are taken in policy and practice in relation to the imprisonment of women, including taking into account children living with mothers in prison and outside in the community. Despite the legal requirements for women to be able to maintain contact and the recognition that contact with children can reduce reoffending and assist with women’s resettlement (Caddle and Crisp, 2005) upon release, in one study, only half of the women who had lived, or were in contact with their children before being imprisoned had received a visit from their children since going to prison (SEU, 2002).

The effects on children of parental imprisonment have been explored in a number of studies and a large review of the effects of imprisonment on children, undertaken under the New Labour Government found that there were no systems in place or consistent support offered to the children of prisoners (Ministry of Justice/DCSF 2007). This is still the case today. The risk of anti-social behaviour is trebled (Murray and Farrington, 2008) and other long-term negative outcomes such as
poor educational performance and an increase in substance misuse have been identified (Murry et al. 2012) as a result of parental imprisonment. Various other health and social disadvantages also impact children including increased levels of poverty, family breakdown, higher risks of substance abuse and mental health issues (Convery and Moore, 2011; Welsh Adverse Childhood Experiences, 2016). Findings have shown an increased risk of the children becoming Not in Employment, Education or Training (NEET) (New Economics Foundation, 2008) if mothers are imprisoned and adult children of imprisoned mothers have been found to be more likely to be convicted of an offence than adult children from imprisoned fathers (Ministry of Justice, 2012). Further, maternal imprisonment has been shown to have more negative effects upon attachment and psychological functioning than paternal imprisonment, indicating that the impact of maternal imprisonment is more pronounced upon children (Murray and Murray, 2010).

A small-scale evaluation of a project which facilitates overnight stays between women and their children run at Askham Grange women’s open prison reported that the project enabled meaningful contact to take place and this was valued by mothers, children and carers (Raikes and Kelly, 2011). The project allows children and mothers to stay in ‘Acorn house’ for up to 48 hours, there is no set criteria for inclusion but all visits are approved by the Local Safeguarding Children Boards (LSCB). The visit is largely uninterrupted by prison staff apart from the provision of meals. Children felt that, in comparison to visits to closed prisons, Askham Grange was much more relaxed and informal and that the overnight contact at Acorn House allowed them to have valuable private time, time to hug their mothers and talk properly without regulating the topic of conversation which would normally happen due to the presence of prison guards at ‘ordinary’ visits. Mothers reported that they were able to ‘mother’ their children in Acorn house, and felt more confident about doing this mothering work. They also felt more able to spend time solely with their child, whereas at normal visits they recognised the sacrifices that family/friends who were caring for their children had made in getting the children there and felt obliged to talk to them as well. Carers reflected that the additional contact allowed mothers to maintain a key role in children’s lives and that longer, less frequent contact helped with children’s moods and behaviour after visits. The prison staff interviewed in the study were also very positive and committed to the scheme and were happy to offer their support to women after the visit was over. The scheme was clearly valued by all, though it should be recognised that it was situated in an open prison, and a similar scheme may not be acceptable or practicable in a closed institution.

Over the past 15 years, there has been mounting evidence that maintaining positive family contact is not only crucial for reducing the likelihood of reoffending on release, reducing anxiety in prisons, reducing self-harm and contributing to good order and discipline, but is also a significant protective factor in reducing the risk of children developing mental health problems. This has also been recently highlighted by the Adverse Childhood Experiences report in Wales (2016), which recognises that having a parent in prison has a great impact on future life chances.

Despite this growing body of evidence, many children of imprisoned mothers are prevented from making contact with their parent because of practical considerations such as the cost of travel, lack of transport or the availability of a suitable adult to take them.

Welsh context
Wales does not have a women’s prison and children and families therefore travel across the border to England. In the south this is to HMP Eastwood Park which is in a rural setting, with no access to public transport. Data about Welsh male and female prisoners is not routinely disaggregated and published, making it difficult to ascertain how many Welsh women are in prison each year. However, in the year 2012-13, 510 Welsh women had been given a custodial sentence and 1,234 women started a community order (Prison Reform Trust, 2014).

In Wales, despite the Welsh Government’s adoption of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child as the basis for policy making about children and young people, there is no national strategy for the children of prisoners, who thus receive little support. No routine data is collected by Local Authorities about children of prisoners (in either England or Wales), meaning that this small but vulnerable group of children are unknown. Justice is not a devolved function, and Welsh Government do not routinely disaggregate and publish data on prisoners or their children to enable estimates of this population to be made.

Visiting Mum

Visiting Mum was a pilot scheme operating at the female prison, HMP Eastwood Park, in Gloucestershire, the local prison for female offenders in the southern half of Wales (female offenders in the northern half of Wales are sent to HMP Styal in Cheshire). On average women prisoners are held 60 miles from their home address, but at Eastwood Park, 20% of women are held over 150 miles from home (HMP/YOI Eastwood Park, 2011). Visiting Mum was designed specifically to address these travel issues and to support Welsh families to keep in contact where it was in the child’s best interests to do so, removing barriers to contact and supporting the whole family through the process. The Visiting Mum scheme worked with Welsh female prisoners, to facilitate contact between them and their children during their period of incarceration.

Visiting Mum was a 3-year partnership project funded by the Big Lottery Innovation Fund, which ran between October 2014 and October 2017. It operated using volunteers who worked with individual families in the community to prepare carers and children for visiting Eastwood Park and vitally transported children and carers to the prison. A well-designed and unique project, Visiting Mum supported and provided benefits to children living across south Wales when visiting their mothers at Eastwood Park.

The volunteering organisation Sova, a charity that has been established for 40 years, working ‘to help people steer clear of crime and to live healthier lives’ (Sova, 2012), recruited, trained and supported the volunteers who furnished the Visiting Mum project. Volunteers supported children to prepare for visits by talking about the prison regime, showing pictures of the establishment and letting children know what they could expect when they arrive. Volunteers also answered questions so that children are able to make an informed decision about whether and when to visit and provide transport for the visit. Where required, volunteers offer support to the carer and children after the visit has taken place and help to arrange future visits. The evaluation of the Visiting Mum scheme, examined how it operated, captured the experiences of those involved, assessed its strengths and weaknesses and determines whether it has reached the objectives set out by Pact (below).

Families utilising this scheme did not need to attend usual social visits at the prison, unless they chose to do so. The regular, usual visiting model involves being in a crowded and often noisy room
of prisoners, with each prisoner seated at a small table with their visitor/s and children; the mother is not allowed to get up or move about. The visits are time limited and scheduled for one hour. Using a partnership approach, Visiting Mum visits were private, of better quality due to the low numbers on a visit (one or two families at a time), the work undertaken preparing each party for the visit (helping the mother to prepare appropriate activities for the children), the space allocated for the visit in a large, airy room with access to play equipment, relaxed visiting rules (mothers are able to leave the formal visits table, interact with their children, eat and drink together, cuddle and provide reassurance, undertake activities and play together).

**Objectives of Visiting Mum Project**

The objectives of the Visiting Mum scheme formerly based in HMP Eastwood Park are as follows:

1. The children of Welsh mothers imprisoned at HMP Eastwood Park experience improved mental and physical health through involvement with the project.
2. There is increased community safety as a result of reduced offending by mothers taking part in the programme.
3. Imprisoned mothers experience less anxiety about issues relating to children and families, leading to fewer incidents of self-harm.
4. Learning from the project leads to improved policy and practice at both local authority Welsh Government and UK Government level.

The Visiting Mum scheme worked with 97 mothers (not all of these cases have necessitated the support of a volunteer, as some have been helped only from the prison), 197 individual carers and 292 visits took place. In total, 164 children from 69 families in 12 different local authorities (see Table 1 below) utilised the Visiting Mum scheme in order to visit their mother in prison.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Local Authority</th>
<th>Families Supported with volunteers</th>
<th>Individuals Supported in the community</th>
<th>Mums supported in prison</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Blaenau Gwent</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bridgend</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caerphilly</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cardiff</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Merthyr Tydfil</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monmouthshire</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neath and Port Talbot</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newport</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pembrokeshire</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Powys</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhondda Cynon Taff</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swansea</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 1: Services provided by local authority

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Vale</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>10</th>
<th>3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>197</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Budget for Visiting Mum**

Visiting Mum was awarded a £504,649 grant by the Big Lottery for activities for a period of 3 years (October 2014-October 2017), equating to an average of £168,216 per annum, with a 2% annual increase. This would seem to have provided good value for money when considering the reach of the project (see Table 1).

**The methodology and design of the study**

A group of 5 female researchers from CASCADE research centre were involved in the data gathering process. We interviewed and consulted with children at the prison to gain their views and experiences of the Visiting Mum scheme. We facilitated activity based focus groups with young people visiting their mothers in prison with 3 age groups to determine impact of maternal incarceration on children of differing ages: 7-11, 12-15, 16-18 years. We ensured that all of the young people who were approached had already visited their mother in prison at least once (so it was not their first visit to the prison). The total number of children involved in the research was 12.

We interviewed 17 women in prison and 8 who had been released in order for them to reflect retrospectively on their experiences of the service, and they were able to consider whether the scheme impacted on their emotional well-being. We asked about their ability to settle back into the family, build trusting relationships and reintegrate in the local community. This provided a longitudinal perspective. We further interviewed 4 carers who looked after children whilst the mother was serving a prison sentence. We conducted 4 semi-structured interviews with volunteers to discuss the operationalisation of the scheme and their experiences of it. Telephone interviews were undertaken with the mother’s social workers in the local community (where there was one); we interviewed 5 social workers. We ran a focus group with the Visiting Mum staff in the prison. We also interviewed the Sova volunteer coordinator. We surveyed practitioners by creating an online survey which was disseminated by PACT.

We also collated and analysed Assessment, Care in Custody and Teamwork (ACCT self-harm) data for women who have utilised the Visiting Mum scheme. We collated information regarding re-offending post release. We had intended to utilise the RADAR well-being forms (completed at the beginning and end of sentence) but as others have found (Dominey et al. 2016) these are rarely filled out and are difficult to complete, requiring deeply personal information to be taken from the woman at the very beginning of her period of incarceration.

We interviewed an assistant prison governor about their experiences and perceptions of the usefulness of the scheme and how in their view the services provided to Welsh mothers have been enhanced or otherwise. We have also interviewed a member of the re-settlement team based in the prison and a member of the chaplaincy.

In total, we interviewed 70 people about the Visiting Mum pilot project.
Findings
The scheme would appear to have been embedded into the prison and was commended by the Inspectorate in 2017 as a flagship project. The project was highly valued by women, children and staff. However, no funding was found to continue the project after the 3 year pilot. This is partly to confusion as to who is responsibility it is.

One of the most significant findings from the study was how difficult and traumatic it is for children who have a mother in prison. Many of the children were separated from siblings and went to live with friends or family, often outside of their local area, and no one (except for those involved with Visiting Mum) tracked where they went. Children feel a burden on their new carers who are often in financial difficulties and there is no money readily available to support children to travel to see their mothers. Booking visits is difficult and bureaucratic. For carers who are elderly or who are caring for several children it is virtually impossible to accompany children to travel distances without public transport. Travel took a great deal of time, often the whole day leading to children missing school.

When children did get to the prison, it was frightening and they were searched by uniformed prison personnel, sometimes with sniffer. The visiting halls in ‘ordinary visits’ were busy and noisy with many people sitting at tables and mothers not allowed to take their arms off their chair to hug or cuddle their children. Some children described incidents in ‘ordinary visits’ where a siren was sounded and the officers had to run out and everyone was cleared out of the hall—this was very frightening, particularly for younger children:

‘There was incidents on the wings it was and the guards would because they would be really short-staffed, the guards would have to clear the visiting hall. Sometimes the visits would be cancelled’...[It was very upsetting] ‘Not so much for us but Josh would be questioning it then, Josh would get scared from the alarm... He was three or four then’. (Young woman age 17).

An overall list of the findings is itemised below:

1. The Visiting Mum scheme reduced the anxieties of children; most children worried about how their mother is ‘coping alone’. This worry does not go away until they see their mother.
2. Children felt less intimidated by the prison environment than when having an ‘ordinary visit’, better supported and the scheme improved the experience of visiting their mothers in prison.
3. The quality of the first visit to the prison is significant for the child as a negative first experience can result in the child not wanting to go on subsequent visits.
4. Children hugely valued the Visiting Mum service and believe that it has helped to preserve and in some cases strengthen their relationship with their mother and other family members.
5. The less formal, longer visits that the Visiting Mum scheme provide facilitated a high quality, more intimate and nurturing environment for mothers, children and carers.
6. Children received little, if any formal support outside of the Visiting Mum Scheme.
7. Children were very appreciative and commented favourably on the skills of both volunteers and Visiting Mum staff. Volunteers and staff provide a potential layer of support for the child.
8. Consistency of volunteer was important for children and carers.
9. Children generally enjoy meeting other young people in similar circumstances and felt less isolated. Children were very stigmatised by their mother being in prison.

10. Contact should be viewed as a right of the child, not as a reward for the mother.

11. Women were very appreciative of the Visiting Mum scheme and commented favourably on the commitment and skill of the staff; the project went some way to addressing and bridging a welfare gap within the prison. The women felt the small size of the project meant they were treated as individuals rather than as prisoners or cases. This was still mentioned after release from prison.

12. Women felt less anxious about the welfare of their children and most have a minimum of monthly visits and regular telephone contact.

13. Women felt that their mental health had improved by accessing Visiting Mum services.

14. Self-harm and adjudications were reduced for those accessing Visiting Mum.

15. Most mothers maintained some of the parenting role from prison—this was seen to be helpful for family re-integration upon release.

16. Women felt that the scheme helped them to integrate back into family and community life upon release.

17. Women felt well supported by Visiting Mum in the prison, but post-release services were minimal, particularly with regard to housing and employment support. One mother was living in a hostel with her children some 8 months after having been released.

18. The volunteer was well-received and provided a good role model for both mothers and children.

19. Most volunteers would like to have been involved in more wraparound support and post-release services.

20. The carers for the children felt that the Visiting Mum scheme helped to relieve the emotional and financial pressures on them, where little other support was available.

21. The prison staff valued the Visiting Mum service and felt it was embedded within the prison establishment.

22. Schools in all cases had been helpful in giving permission for children to visit their mothers.

Further benefits of the work were that the project has designed and distributed resource packs for both schools and social workers, including a film, completed and launched before the end of the project in September 2017.

**Some recommendations from the evaluation of Visiting Mum**

1. More use of volunteers (possibly via the Women’s Institute) could be made within the prison for the bedtime story book CDs (which was time consuming) and provision of food, so that the time of skilled staff was protected.

2. The timings of the Visiting Mum visits could have been reviewed with regard to a very early start, or indeed for those young people studying for examinations, so they do not miss any of their schooling.

3. Visiting Mum could have become involved in more wraparound support for those who would like it, and in particular in post-release support (at least for a short transitional period).
for those who required it, drawing on the expertise of both Sova and PACT in this area; a focus on both employment and housing would have been helpful.

4. Having a liaison social worker based partly in the prison might have been a useful addition to the team to build bridges across services and better support women and children. Alternatively, having a designated social worker link for each south Wales local authority could facilitate communication between Visiting Mum and social workers.

5. Visiting Mum could be replicated across the women’s estate.

Overall summary

Alternatives to custody

It is important to recognise that there is a clear need to develop alternatives to custody for women as opposed to simply constructing a prison in Wales and expanding the prison estate. There are few alternatives to custody for women, especially for those with young children. However, day centres, with available crèche facilities, for example, could offer a rigorous yet therapeutic sentence for women where a range of their difficulties might be addressed. By providing a realistic range of alternatives to custody and all sentencers giving explicit consideration to the needs of children, the number of women in custody in Wales could be reduced. Visiting Mum worked with 97 mothers over the 3 years of the project.

Short sentences and housing

Many women are serving short sentences for non violent offences (Baldwin 2015) and when going to prison lose their housing. This means that they have no home to return to, so their children cannot return to live with them on release. The mothers then cannot get housing to accommodate their children because they are not living with them. This becomes a vicious circle which the Reunited Housing Association have long campaigned about. Serving a short sentence for a non violent offence could thus and does lead to the long term break up of families and intergenerational problems (Farmer 2017).

The prison environment

For those women where custody is the only option then the fabric of the prison and the visiting facilities are of vital importance. There is a need for light airy, child friendly accommodation which is well stocked with play and creative resources, where children have ease of access, can visit for meaningful periods of time and are not surveilled by uniformed staff. Homework clubs, cooking clubs are innovative aspects of this type of provision. The visiting hours need to be flexible so that children are not missing school by visiting their parents. There are numerous projects running for fathers in prison, for example, in Parc prison (Clancy and Maguire 2017) and far less for women, but these projects whilst innovative are ad hoc and should be available to all parents, particularly women: it should not be a postcode lottery. Further it is important that such facilities are not used as a reward or bargaining tool for prisoners but more that they are seen as the right of the child. The impact of having a parent in prison is known to be huge (Welsh Adverse Childhood Experiences, 2016) and anything that can ameliorate this could help to reduce the intergenerational patterns of behaviour and indeed offending by both mother and child (Lord Farmer 2017). Young people whose
mother in prison should be known about and offered support (in the Visiting Mum scheme this was via a volunteer), bringing children together might also be helpful so they feel less isolated and stigmatised.

Transport and location

The Visiting Mum model of using volunteers to transport children is a unique feature which addresses the difficulties and negative financial impact on families of children travelling to visit their mothers. Whether or not there is a women's prison in Wales, few families would live in the immediate vicinity and would therefore still have to travel long distances, especially if the prison covered the whole of Wales. Those families in North Wales may have to travel even further or for longer should a prison be situated in South Wales (and vice versa). Providing support with transport will remain important.

Size of prison

Research has shown the relationship between prison size and performance is significant, with smaller prisons performing far better (Lord Woolf 1999; Prison Reform Trust 2007). Much of this will be about better relationships made between smaller staff groups and inmates (Johnsen et al. 2011) and it is difficult to see that economies of scale can be derived from placing a female and male prison together. Both need to be tailored to their individual populations and will be dealing with different difficulties (for women those difficulties are outlined above), will have different approaches, ethos and personnel. It would be better to have several smaller units for women, which work closely with local community resources. When placed a long way from home, not only is it difficult for family to visit (Farmer 2017), it is also difficult for local home agencies to visit a woman in order to plan for her release and support her with the transition back into her community. Engagement with services is less likely if women have not been visited by staff whilst in prison; this could further jeopardise her reintegration into the community.

Alyson Rees

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