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The COPING Project

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COPING

Children of Prisoners, Interventions and Mitigations to Strengthen Mental Health



NEPACS Conference
“Coping with custody – supporting families through a prison sentence and beyond”

Friday 12th July 2013



The COPING project has received funding from the European Community's Seventh Framework Programme (FP7/2007-2013) under Grant Agreement no 241988



COPING



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COPING

COPING PROJECT

- One of the **largest** studies of children of prisoners
- **Child focused**
- **Six countries** = UK, Sweden, Romania, Germany, France, Switzerland
- **Ten partners** = Universities & NGOs
- **UK** = University of Huddersfield and Partners of Prisoners & Families Support Group (POPS)



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Kathryn Sharratt – July 2013



COPING

METHODOLOGY

**Children aged 7- 17
with a parent in prison**

**Over 700
questionnaires
completed across 4
countries**

**In-depth interviews
with 135 families**



**Stakeholder
consultations with
NGOs, prison staff,
social workers &
policy makers**

**Mapping of
services and
interventions**



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MENTAL HEALTH OF CHILDREN OF PRISONERS



- 25% of children at *heightened risk* of mental health problems (approx. 50% Romania)
- When compared with country norms, children of prisoners experience considerably more difficulties in terms of emotions and peer relations (in particular) and conduct and hyperactivity

**Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) parents reports of children aged 11+*

**Caution with Swedish findings – low numbers*



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CHILDREN'S RESILIENCE

Initial period of destabilisation and trauma, followed by children and families adjusting and emphasising being 'normal'.



“For me coping has meant getting through a tough time in life. The tough time has been from the moment my Father was sentenced, as I have continually adapted to changes in my life.” **Young Person**

“My sister and me – we are real masters at suppressing things.” **14 year old girl, Sweden**

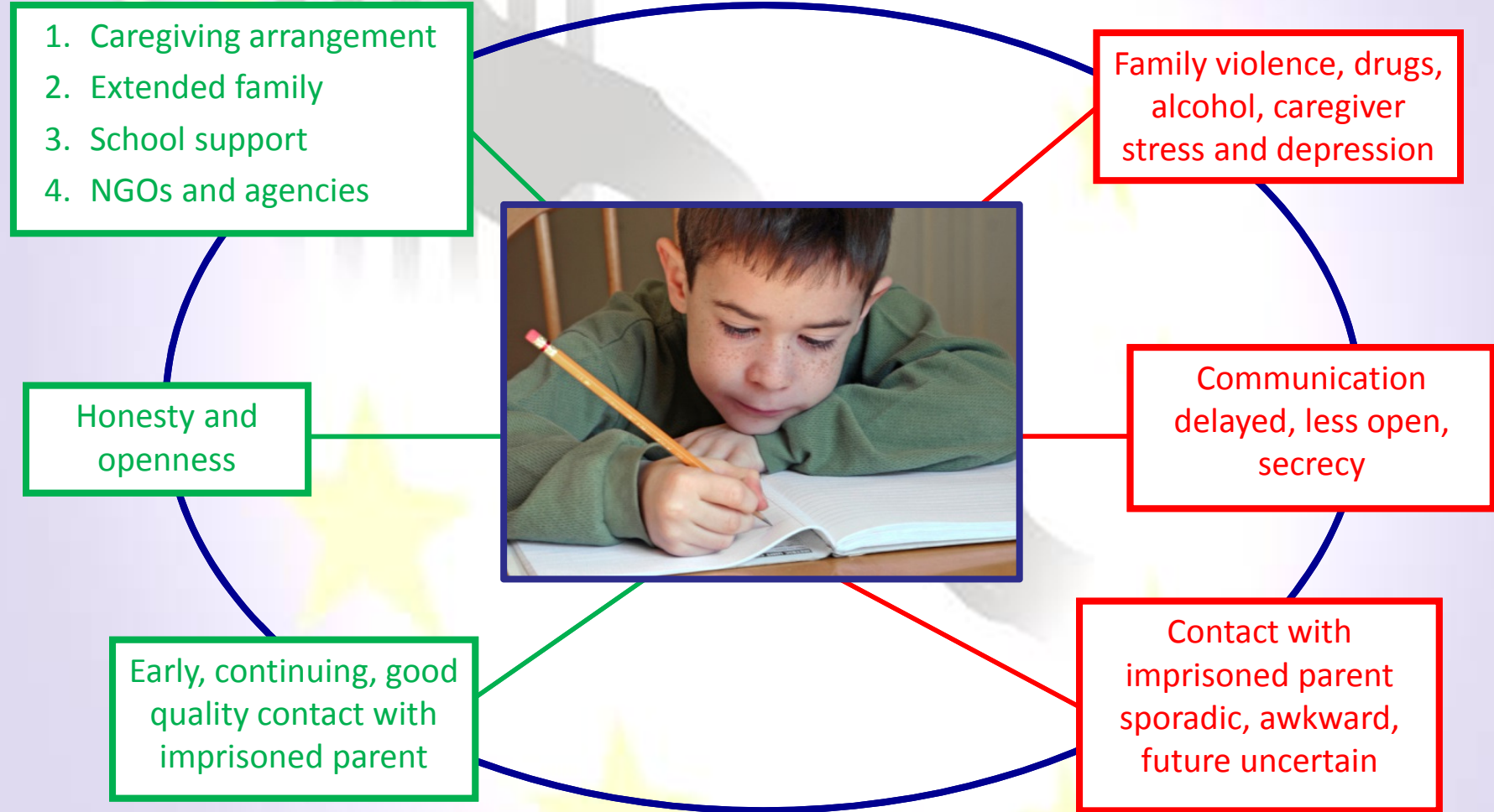


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RESILIENCE FACTORS



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SUPPORT FROM SCHOOLS

“I was nervous telling them. I told them and the head teacher said ‘I am glad you came straight away and didn’t leave it for ages...we care [about] what’s happened, and we are there for your kids and to make sure if they are upset we are aware why they are crying.’”

Mother of boys (10 & 11)

“Say if I wanted my mum, they (teachers) would probably say: ‘Calm down and go and wash your face because you have been crying, and sit down and calm down and carry on with your work. There is nothing to worry about’. The teachers, they aren’t nasty, they are nice.”

Girl aged 9



“They understood him with this built up anger and frustration when he lashed out. They used to take him aside and let him calm down and give him that time out. Then they would talk to him about obviously that wasn’t right for him to do that”.

Mother of boy aged 13



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INFORMATION SHARING

"We children are good at imagining when we are not told the truth. The grown ups always say that they don't know, but...they know more than what we do and that is what we want to know."

13 year old girl, Sweden

"...but everything came out in time...my middle son told me once 'Dad, you killed someone and you didn't say anything about this', and I could not respond. I was speechless".

Imprisoned Father, Romania

"We had to be honest. We explained everything. Dad had to go because he had been naughty so he has gone to prison. People say he has gone to work. He has not gone to work. He has gone to the jail house because he has done something wrong."

Mother of 8 year old boy



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CONTACT WITH IMPRISONED PARENTS

- 88% of imprisoned parents were fathers
- Overwhelming majority of children had contact (85% Romania)
- Importance of early visits
- Mixed feelings about visiting prison
- Key role of telephone for day-to-day contact



“You could just see the relief. The heavens opened. There were tears all round. All the kids were crying”.
Imprisoned father of boys (8 & 11)



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Changing Focus

Rebecca Cheung
Communications Officer



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Rebecca Cheung – July 2013



What NGOs brought to COPING



Expertise of working with offenders families for over 20 years

Our 'user ethos' and our ability to engage with families

Our knowledge of working with the prison service





The Process

- Identification of Children
- Nurturing Relationships with Parents
- Initial Consultation
- Interview: POPS staff member and Researcher
- Responsible Ethical Footprint
- Two way process
- Dissemination and Promotion



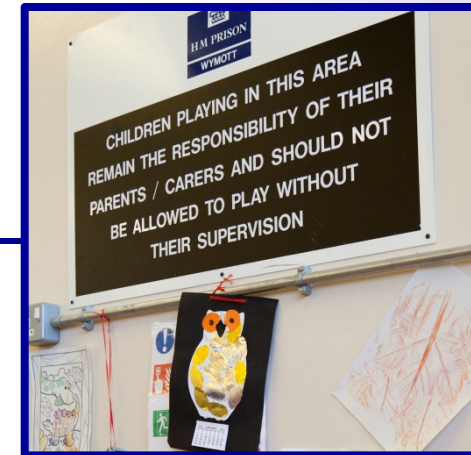
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What COPING brought to POPS

- Child Centred Approach
- Shared Knowledge: Strong Partnerships
- Academic practice, rigour and knowledge
- A European perspective



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Legacy

- Child Friendly Services
- Children & Young People department within POPS
- Evidence
- European Partnership
- Recommendations
- Child's rights agenda



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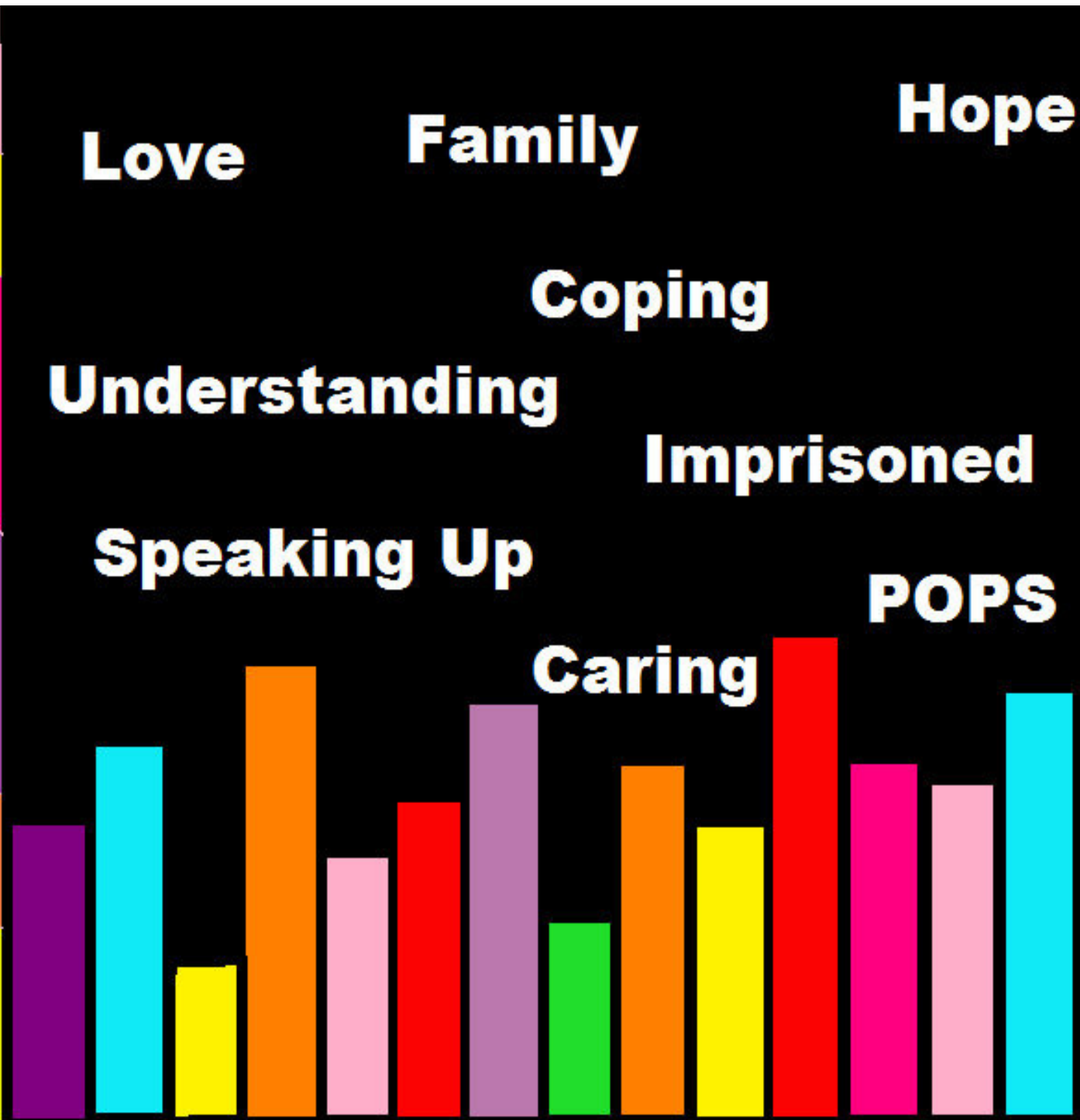
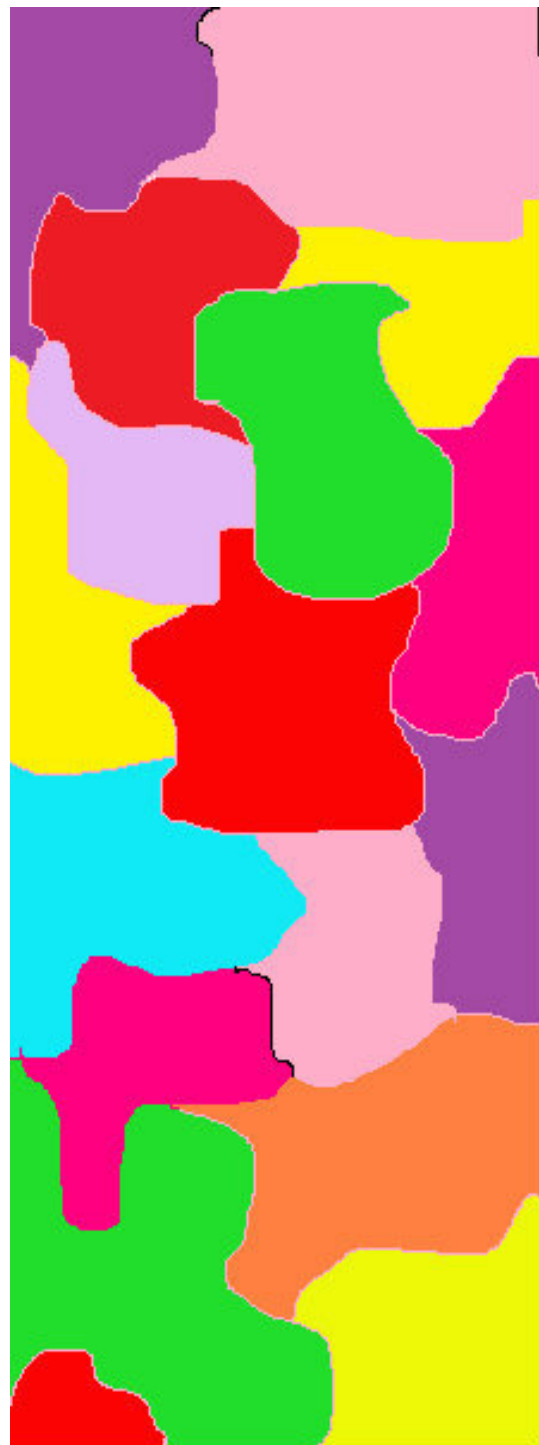
Child Centred Promotion

- “My COPING” web pages developed for **Young People by Young People**
- **UN Committee on the Rights of the Child** Day of General Discussion
- 2 young people involved in COPING addressed **over 200 policy makers** from around the world!
- Final dissemination event in Brussels Young People presented their **recommendations**
- POPS and PSS child-led seminars ‘In My Own Words’



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Small Changes.. **BIG IMPACT!**



Recently, the prison where my dad is has incorporated some sofas, this makes the visit feel more comfortable and homely. It also makes the visits less restricted.