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An Independent Evaluation of the Offenders' Families Helpline

February 2014

Kathryn Sharratt

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Executive Summary

- The University of Huddersfield was commissioned to conduct an independent evaluation of the National Offenders' Families Helpline (NOFH). The Helpline is a free and confidential service providing information, emotional support and signposting to families affected by the Criminal Justice System (CJS). Previously the Prisoners' Families Helpline, it was re-launched as the NOFH in 2010 when the scope was broadened.
- The main aims of the evaluation were: to evidence a demand for the service; to assess the quality of the service from the perspective of family members and the extent to which it meets their support needs; and to recognise the impact of the Helpline on family members. Funding to conduct the evaluation was secured from the National Offender Management Service (NOMS) and Nationwide Children's Research Centre (NCRC).
- A brief review of the literature revealed that offenders' families represent a particularly vulnerable section of society. Involvement at all stages of the CJS was found to have negative implications for families including disruption to family relationships, practical and financial challenges, deleterious consequences to emotional wellbeing, and stigma and isolation. Research evidence suggests that many offenders' families have multiple and complex support needs which might include access to information (e.g. explanations of criminal justice procedures and arrangements for contact), emotional support, and signposting to a wide variety of agencies and organisations. The literature also revealed the importance of maintaining family ties in reducing re-offending.
- The evaluation adopted a multi-stranded methodology comprising of a questionnaire survey (n=68) and interviews (n=4) with family members who had accessed the Helpline recently, interviews with the Helpline team, and case studies (n=4) based on an existing call monitoring database.
- The evaluation revealed a high demand for the Helpline; in 2013 the service received almost 10,000 telephone calls and over 145,000 unique visitors to its website. The Helpline was found to not only benefit families, but in supporting families, it invariably supports offenders too. This was particularly true with regards to supporting families to maintain contact with the offender.
- The questionnaire survey revealed very positive results in relation to service accessibility, general satisfaction, and the provision of information and support (mean scores for all 13 items were either at, or very close to, the maximum possible score of 5). In response to open-ended questions, participants reported seven times as many "good" or "useful" things about the Helpline as they did areas for improvement. Although few respondents had accessed the website (n=11), indications were that it provides a very useful service. Approximately 80% of participants indicated that there were few alternative sources of information and support for families.

- The most prominent theme to emerge from the interviews with family members was “*knowing someone is there*” – just having the opportunity to talk to the Helpline was found to make a significant difference to participants’ ability to cope with their present situation as well as the future. Another recurring theme was that participants felt that the Helpline provided a unique source of support to families affected by the CJS, and without it would have felt “*totally lost*”.
- Interviews with the Helpline team offered further explanation as to why families felt “*the Helpline is the only hope*”. It was acknowledged that prisons have limited resources to respond to families concerns and are bound by strict disclosure regulations, which can make it difficult for families to obtain information. In responding directly to families’ queries, the Helpline can reduce the need for families to contact prisons directly, and so alleviates the burden on already over-stretched prison resources. In cases where it was necessary to contact the prison, the well-established reputation of the Helpline enabled them to act as an effective catalyst between families and prisons.
- During interviews, family members reported experiencing stigma from family, friends and the local community, but said that the Helpline provided a “*refreshingly non-judgemental*” service. The Helpline team were also perceived to be genuine, approachable, kind, caring and knowledgeable. The Helpline was found to have a significant impact on the wellbeing of families, enabling them to cope with a range of emotions, especially stress.
- The Helpline team reported that several volunteers and staff had previously been affected by a friends or relatives involvement in the CJS. The ability to empathise with families’ circumstances might partly account for the high quality support provided.
- It is noteworthy that the evaluation identified no significant areas for improvement. A small number of participants (both on the questionnaire and during interviews) indicated that it would be beneficial if the Helpline’s opening hours were extended, although this might not necessarily be representative of the views of all families accessing the Helpline.
- In conclusion, the Offenders’ Families Helpline was found to make an important contribution to reducing the negative impact of the CJS on families, especially in terms of alleviating negative emotional consequences and supporting families and offenders to maintain relationships. The Helpline was also found to provide a very satisfactory service that was highly effective in meeting families’ support needs. The effectiveness of the service was partly explained by the current provider’s well-established links with criminal justice agencies, and team members’ personal experience of the CJS.
- It follows that the main recommendation of from this evaluation is that the Offenders’ Families Helpline should be sustained. Furthermore, the preferred service provider should be (a) an organisation that is dedicated to supporting offenders’ families, which (b) is run from a service-user perspective, and (c) is credible, nationally well-recognised, and has established links with criminal justice agencies.

1. Introduction

1.1. Background to the Offenders' Families Helpline

Launched in 2003, the **Prisoners' Families Helpline** was a free and confidential service providing information, emotional support and signposting to families affected by the imprisonment of a relative or close friend.

Over the past ten years the Helpline has evolved significantly. The Helpline was initially delivered by a consortium of five organisations: Action for Prisoners Families (APF); Ormiston Children and Families Trust; Partners of Prisoners and Families Support Groups (POPS); North East Prison Aftercare Society (NEPACS); and the Prison Advice and Care Trust (Pact). Following recommendations in an evaluation by the Telephones Helpline Association in 2005, the structure was re-organised so that APF co-ordinated activity at two call centres run by Ormiston and POPS. Until December 2007, the main funding was provided by the Big Lottery Fund with additional contributions from trusts and the three organisations.

In 2008/09, the National Offender Management Service (NOMS) became the primary source of funding with supplementary funds secured by all three organisations. At this time, a second evaluation conducted by M&E Consulting confirmed that the Helpline was making a considerable difference to the lives of families in a number of domains, and that levels of satisfaction were comparable at the two call centres. Despite the positive outcomes of the evaluation and the partnership remaining strong, it became increasingly difficult for the organisations to secure funding from external grants schemes. As a result, in 2009/10, NOMS further streamlined delivery and Ormiston became the sole provider.

Most recently in 2010, the contract was transferred to POPS where the Helpline experienced its most significant transformation. The service was re-launched as the **Offenders' Families Helpline** and the remit extended to families and friends of offenders at any stage of the criminal justice process (including arrest, courts, prison, release and community sentences). Some of the main values underpinning the Offenders' Families Helpline are:

- to make available information and support at the first point of contact with the Criminal Justice System (CJS), throughout the journey, and beyond the point of exit;
- to enable families to be actively involved in the offender's journey through the CJS;
- to support families to maintain relationships with offenders; and
- to provide a free confidential and non-judgemental service.

POPS also launched the comprehensive Offenders' Families Helpline website, which provides a variety of factsheets relevant to the various stages of the CJS and links to other organisations. Now, in addition to contacting the Helpline by telephone or email, families can also contact the service directly via the website.

1.2. Commissioning the Evaluation

In September 2013, the National Offender Management Service (NOMS), with the support of the Chief Executive Officer at POPS, requested that the University of Huddersfield conduct an independent evaluation of the Offenders' Families Helpline. Although the Prisoners' Families Helpline was previously evaluated, due to the significant transformation it was considered important to provide current evidence regarding the extent to which the service effectively meets families' support needs. Findings from the evaluation will also be used by NOMS to inform the re-tendering process.

The University of Huddersfield were successful in attracting funding from the Nationwide Children's Research Centre (NCRC) to undertake this work, which was matched by NOMS.

The aims of the evaluation were to:

1. demonstrate the support needs of offenders' families (by means of a brief literature review);
2. evidence a demand for the service, and briefly describe the characteristics of service users and their reasons for accessing the Helpline;
3. assess the quality of service provided by the Helpline from the perspective of family members, and the extent to which it meets their support needs;
4. recognise the outcomes and impact of the Helpline for family members; and
5. understand the perceived values of the service, and challenges associated with delivering the service, from the perspective of the Helpline provider.

It was agreed that the evaluation would commence in December 2013 and would be completed no later than February 2014.

2. Literature Review: The Support Needs of Offenders' Families

Children and families of offenders have been described as the "*forgotten victims*" of the Criminal Justice System (CJS) in the academic literature¹. Advocacy groups recognise that the main focus of the CJS is to prosecute and punish offenders, but argue that this is often done at the expense of protecting children and families' rights and best interests². Indeed, there is a growing body of literature that has demonstrated that at every stage of the criminal justice process – from arrest to release – there are a series of negative consequences for children and families.

Firstly, it is important to note that an offenders' involvement with the CJS does not necessarily signal the onset of problems for their family. Research evidence suggests that offenders and their families represent a particularly vulnerable section of society where unemployment, debt, substance misuse

¹ Cunningham, A. (2001) Forgotten families - the impacts of imprisonment. *Family Matters* 59 (Winter): 36-37

² Robertson, O. (2007) *The Impact of Parental Imprisonment on Children*. Geneva: Quaker United Nations Office

and mental health problems are disproportionately common³. It seems plausible that involvement with the CJS will only add to the difficulties and burdens that the family are already experiencing.

Research has indicated that, for family members, the offender's arrest can often be sudden and unexpected, and can be accompanied by feelings of shock and disbelief⁴. Information about the arrest, such as the offence with which the individual is charged and the police station at which they will be detained, is not necessarily made available, or properly explained to relatives⁵. The literature also suggests that for children, witnessing the arrest of a parent can be highly traumatic, difficult to comprehend, and can go unexplained for some time whilst the remaining parent/carer devises a strategy for telling the child⁶.

According to the literature, it is not uncommon for there to be considerable delays between the offender's arrest and the subsequent court proceedings⁷. During this period, family members have been reported to experience feelings of uncertainty regarding the future, stress, anxiety, and heightened family conflict. When the court trial finally arrives, family members have been found to experience difficulties understanding the proceedings and sentencing outcomes.

Although the imposition of a custodial sentence has been found to have clear benefits for some families – providing a welcome reprieve from domestic violence and substance misuse⁸ – there is considerable evidence to suggest that most families suffer following imprisonment. Breakdown of the family unit can be associated with disruption to children's care-giving arrangements, loss of income, and unwelcome adjustments to roles and responsibilities within the family⁹.

Imprisonment has also been found to place considerable strain on partner relationships, and it is not uncommon for them to end in divorce or separation¹⁰. Studies with female partners of prisoners have indicated that they experience poorer life satisfaction and an increased propensity to mental health problems¹¹. Research with children of prisoners has revealed that they experience feelings of loss, rejection, anxiety, distress and anger¹². In comparison to their counterparts, children of

³ Social Exclusion Unit (2002) Reducing re-offending by ex-prisoners. London: Social Exclusion Unit

⁴ Condry, R. (2007). *Families shamed: The consequences of crime for relatives of serious offenders*. Collumpton: Willan Publishing

⁵ Jones, A., Gallagher, B., Manby, M., Robertson, O., Schützwohl, M., Berman, A., Hirschfield, A., Ayre, L., Urban, M. and Sharratt, K. (2013) *Children of Prisoners: Interventions and mitigations to strengthen mental health*. Huddersfield: University of Huddersfield

⁶ Phillips, S. and Zhao, J. (2010) The relationship between witnessing arrests and elevated symptoms of posttraumatic stress: Findings from a national study of children involved in the child welfare system. *Children and Youth Service Review* 32 (10): 1246-1254

⁷ See n.4

⁸ Murray, J. (2005) The effects of imprisonment on families and children of prisoners. In Liebling, A. and Maruna, S. (eds) *The Effects of Imprisonment*. Devon: Willan Publishing

⁹ Robertson, O. (2007) *The impact of parental imprisonment on children*. Geneva: Quaker United Nations Office

¹⁰ Christian, J. and Kennedy, L.W. (2008) Secondary narratives in the aftermath of crime: Defining Family Members Relationships with Prisoners. *Punishment and Society* 13(4): 379-402.

¹¹ Wildeman, C.Schnittker and Turney, K. (2012) Despair by association? The Mental Health of Mothers with Children by Recently Incarcerated Fathers. *American Sociological Review* 77(2): 216-243.

¹² Nesmith A and Ruhland E (2008) Children of incarcerated parents: Challenges and resiliency, in their own words. *Children and Youth Services Review* 30(10): 1119-1130; and Bocknek EL, Sanderson J and Britner PA

prisoners have been found to have poorer school attainment and attendance¹³, and a greater likelihood of criminal convictions and mental health problems¹⁴.

Maintaining contact with the individual in prison has been found to have multiple benefits for families, including sustaining partner relationships and parent-child attachments¹⁵. Maintaining family ties has also been associated with a reduction in the likelihood of reoffending, and so has positive implications for society as a whole. Research has revealed that prisoners who receive at least one visit during their time in custody are around 39% less likely to re-offend than those who do not receive any visits¹⁶. Contact with family members has also been found to be associated with other factors demonstrated to protect against reoffending – prisoners who receive visits have been found to be significantly more likely to have accommodation and education, training or employment arranged for release than those who do not receive visits¹⁷.

Despite the positive implications of contact, it is estimated that 43% of prisoners lose touch with their families during their time in prison¹⁸. Unfortunately, research has found that the emotional strain experienced by families can diminish their willingness to sustain contact with the offender¹⁹. Studies have also demonstrated that a number of practical and financial obstacles exist to maintaining contact including long and expensive journeys to attend prison visits, difficulties understanding the arrangements for contact, inefficient systems for booking visits, difficulties accessing telephones within the prison, and expensive telephone credit²⁰.

An offenders' return to the family home – after months or perhaps even years in prison - can have dramatic and unanticipated consequences for all concerned. Evidence indicates that offenders can experience difficulties finding employment, and relapse into drug or alcohol misuse, or return to a

(2009) Ambiguous Loss and Posttraumatic Stress in School-Age Children of Prisoners. *Journal of Child and Family Studies* 18(3) 323-333.

¹³ Cho, R.M. (2009) Impact of maternal imprisonment on children's probability of grade retention. *Journal of Urban Economics* 65(1): 11-23p; and Trice, A.D. and Brewster, J. (2004) The Effects of Maternal Incarceration on Adolescent Children. *Journal of Police and Criminal Psychology* 19(1) 27-35.

¹⁴ Murray, J. and Farrington, D.P. (2005) "Parental Imprisonment: Effects on Boys' Antisocial Behaviour and Delinquency through the Life-Course". *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry* 46 (12): 1269–78; and Murray, J., Farrington, D.P., Sekol, I. and Rikke R.F. (2009) "Effects of Parental Imprisonment on Child Antisocial Behaviour and Mental Health: A Systematic Review". Norway: Campbell Systematic Reviews

¹⁵ Poehlmann, J., Dallaire, D.A., Booker Loper, A. and Shear, L.D. (2010) Children's Contact With Their Incarcerated Parents: Research Findings and Recommendations. *American Psychologist* 65 (6) 575-598

¹⁶ May, C., Sharma, N. and Stewart, D (2008) Factors linked to re-offending: a one-year follow-up of prisoners who took part in the Resettlement Surveys 2001, 2003 & 2004. Ministry of Justice Research Summary 5. London: Ministry of Justice.

¹⁷ Niven, S. and Stewart, D. (2005) Resettlement outcomes on release from prison in 2003. Home Office Findings 248. London: Home Office.

¹⁸ National Offender Management Service (2005) The National Reducing Re-offending Delivery Plan. London: Home Office

¹⁹ See n.17

²⁰ Clarke, L., O'Brien, M., Day, R.D., Godwin, H., Connolly, J., Hemmings, J. and Van Leeson, T. (2005) Fathering behind Bars in English Prisons: Imprisoned Fathers' Identity and Contact with Their Children. *Fathering* 3(3) 221-241

life of crime, which can be a major source of frustration or disappointment for families²¹. Families also report that it can be difficult to re-adjust to the offender's return to the family home, and experience problems communicating and negotiating roles and responsibilities around the home²².

Finally, research has indicated that children and families experience severe stigma, bullying, victimisation and social isolation as a result of their association with the offender²³. In order to protect themselves from negative community reactions, they have been found to adopt a policy of secrecy, but in doing so they are denied the opportunity to seek support through social networks.

In summary, research evidence confirms that an offender's involvement in the various stages of the CJS has a series of extended consequences for their family and children, and points to a need for services designed to reduce the negative impact on families. Families support needs are likely to be diverse, but services designed to enable families and offenders to maintain contact can present significant benefits in terms of protecting family relationships and the wellbeing of individual family members. Services designed to facilitate contact also have the potential to contribute to a reduction in the likelihood of reoffending. Based on the literature it seems likely that services which provide the following will support families in a number of domains, not least in terms of enabling them to maintain contact with the offender:

- information about and explanations of criminal justice procedures and arrangements for contact with the offender;
- the opportunity to receive emotional support in a confidential and non-judgemental environment;
- advice on how to support children throughout the various stages of the CJS ; and
- signposting to other agencies and organisations that can offer assistance with regards to finance, health, accommodation, etc.

²¹ May, C., Sharma, N. and Stewart, D (2008) Factors linked to re-offending: a one-year follow-up of prisoners who took part in the Resettlement Surveys 2001, 2003 & 2004. Ministry of Justice Research Summary 5. London: Ministry of Justice

²² Naser, R.L. and Visser, C.A. (2006) Family Members Experiences with Incarceration and Reentry. *Western Criminology Review* 7(2) 20-31

²³ Murray, J. (2007) The cycle of punishment: Social Exclusion of Prisoners and their children. *Criminology and Criminal Justice* 7 (1) 55-81

3. Methodology

This section describes the multi-stranded methodology that was adopted in this evaluation. The evaluation was conducted in accordance with the British Psychological Society's (2009)²⁴ Code of Ethics and Conduct, and approval was granted by the School of Human and Health Sciences Research and Ethics Council (SREP) at the University of Huddersfield.

3.1. Questionnaire Survey with Family Members

A total of 68 service users participated in a questionnaire survey designed to measure satisfaction with the service, the extent to which the Helpline meets families support needs, and the impact of the service on callers. Respondents were mostly female (77.3%) and white British (79.4%). Wives/partners/girlfriends (30.8%) and mothers (29.2%) accounted for the largest proportion of all participants. Most of the participants had contacted the Helpline for issues relating to prison (57.4%), followed by issues concerning release from prison (19.1%) and matters relating to health of family members and offenders (14.1%). When compared to call monitoring data for 2013 (see sections 4.1 and 4.2 below), it can be seen that the questionnaire participants were highly representative of all service users, as were their reasons for accessing the Helpline.

Wherever appropriate, family members who telephoned the Helpline during the evaluation period (17th December 2013 – Sunday 2nd February 2014) were invited to participate in the survey. Helpline staff and volunteers were advised to omit the invitation to participate in the survey when the caller was too distressed or appeared short of time. At the end of the call, family members were informed about the evaluation and those who agreed to take part were asked to provide their first name, contact telephone number, and consent to be called back for the purposes of administering the survey. Callers who agreed to take part received a follow-up call during the next 12-48 hours, and the survey was administered by telephone by a member of the research team.

Protocols were established to ensure that ethical guidelines were adhered to, such as ensuring that participants were properly informed about the evaluation and were able to give their informed consent. To improve efficiency, these protocols were incorporated in the questionnaire, which can be found in appendix 1.

The first section of the questionnaire requested demographic information about the participant. To minimise the time taken to administer the survey, this information was pre-completed by the Helpline team based on data that is routinely collected from family members for monitoring and evaluation purposes (see below).

In the second section of the questionnaire, participants were asked to respond to a series of 13 statements concerning satisfaction with the service (e.g. "The Helpline's opening hours are convenient for me"), and the extent to which the Helpline meets callers' support needs (e.g. "At the end of my call, I had enough information to deal with the issue better"), and the impact of the

²⁴ British Psychological Society (2009) Code of Ethics and Conduct. Leicester: British Psychological Society

service (e.g. “At the end of my call, I felt reassured”). A five-point scale was employed to indicate increasing levels of agreement. Other items concerned the availability of alternative sources of information and support, access to the internet, and the perceived usefulness of the Offenders’ Families Helpline website. In addition, four open-ended questions elicited callers’ perceptions of good aspects of the Helpline and website, and areas for improvement.

3.2. Interviews with Family Members

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with four family members; all were female and had either a son or close friend in prison. The interviews covered similar topics to the questionnaire survey but were intended to elicit more in-depth information (see appendix 2 for interview schedule).

All of the interviewees had previously participated in the questionnaire survey, and were invited to progress to interviews on the basis that they engaged most readily with the research process. Again, participants were fully informed about the purpose of the interviews, and those that agreed to take part were asked to provide their consent to be called back on a second occasion.

Interviews were conducted approximately 7 days after the participant completed the questionnaire. All participants were reminded of the purpose of the evaluation and their informed consent was obtained using the form in Appendix 3. Interviews lasted approximately 15 minutes, and all were recorded and fully transcribed.

3.3. Interviews with the Helpline Team

One interview was conducted with the Helpline Service Co-ordinator and POPS Adult Services Manager. The interview schedule (see appendix 4) covered a variety of themes including the aims and objectives of the Helpline, developments over time, perceived benefits of the Helpline to families, procedures for measuring effectiveness, and challenges associated with delivery. The interview lasted approximately one hour.

A second interview was conducted with two members of the Helpline team. The interview covered similar as above, but in addition also asked about the personal qualities, skills and training required to successfully support family members (see appendix 5 for interview schedule). The interview lasted approximately 45 minutes.

In both interviews, participants provided their informed consent using the form in appendix 6. Both interviews were recorded and fully transcribed.

3.4. Access to Existing Data

All calls to the Helpline are routinely entered into an electronic database for the purposes of monitoring and evaluation. On a quarterly basis, this is analysed by the Service Co-ordinator to provide information about the number of calls, profile of service users, and their reasons for

accessing the service. Reports for 2013 were made available to the University to supplement the independent evaluation, and are referred to in the findings section.

The electronic database also contains more in-depth descriptions of the nature of calls and the response provided. The University were permitted temporary access to the database to gain a better understanding of the variety of issues addressed the Helpline and the type of information/support provided. Four cases were purposively selected for inclusion in the findings section to better illustrate some of the main themes emerging from the interviews. Identifying information (e.g. names and locations) was altered to preserve callers' anonymity.

4. Findings

4.1. Service Demand & Beneficiaries

The number of families accessing the Helpline is far from insignificant and provides a clear indication of a demand for the service. In 2013, the Helpline received 9,932 calls, and the website received 145,628 unique visitors. Furthermore, the number of families accessing the Helpline and website remained reasonably consistent across quarters, suggesting a continuous demand for the service.

During 2013, people accessing the Helpline via telephone were mostly female (79.2%) and White British (90.1%). There were very few callers below the age of 18, but a good spread of callers across all other age categories. Callers were predominantly family and friends of offenders (91.4%), although a small number of calls were also received from offenders themselves and professionals. Mothers and partners accounted from the largest proportion of all family members (approximately one third each).

A review of the quarterly reports suggested that there was little variability in the characteristics of callers accessing the Helpline during 2013, although further statistical tests on the dataset could uncover more subtle variations that are not immediately apparent.

4.2. An Overview of Reasons for Contacting the Helpline

As displayed in Table 1 below, the most frequent reason for telephoning the Helpline in 2013 was to obtain information or support relating to prison (accounting for between 61.7 and 64.6% of calls across the four quarters). Of all calls relating to prison, those concerning visits (27.3%), other communication/contact with prisoners (12.8%), and prisoner location (11.9%) represented the largest categories.

The second most common reason for contacting the Helpline was for queries relating to release from prison (10.1% of all calls in 2013). Of these calls, those concerning Home Detention Curfew (HDC) represented the largest category (49.8%).

Reasons for contacting the Helpline appeared to remain reasonably consistent during 2013, but again, further statistical tests on the dataset could enable the identification of more subtle variations.

Table 1: Reasons for Contacting the Helpline in 2013

	Jan-Mar		Apr-Jun		Jul-Sept		Oct-Dec		Total	
Arrest	11	0.6%	17	0.8%	32	1.3%	26	1.2%	86	1.0%
Court	33	1.7%	38	1.7%	47	1.9%	53	2.4%	171	1.9%
Community Sentence	18	0.9%	27	1.2%	31	1.2%	40	1.8%	116	1.3%
Prison	1259	64.6%	1393	62.9%	1600	63.3%	1338	61.7%	5590	63.1%
Release	214	11.0%	207	9.3%	264	10.4%	211	9.7%	896	10.1%
Children	49	2.5%	64	2.9%	68	2.7%	77	3.6%	258	2.9%
Health	81	4.2%	131	5.9%	131	5.2%	129	6.0%	472	5.3%
Finance	134	6.9%	167	7.5%	159	6.3%	106	4.9%	566	6.4%
Other	149	7.6%	171	7.7%	198	7.8%	187	8.6%	705	8.0%
Total	1948	100%	2215	100%	2528	100%	2167	100%	8860	100%

4.3. Results from the Questionnaire Survey

Perceptions of the Helpline

As part of the questionnaire survey, participants were invited to respond to a series of statements concerning their general satisfaction with the service, the extent to which it met their support needs, and the impact of the service. Possible scores ranged from 1-5, with higher scores representing more positive perceptions of the Helpline. As can be seen in table 2 below, the mean score for each item was either very close to, or at 5, indicating very positive experiences of the Helpline in all domains.

Table 2: Mean scores for questionnaire items

	Mean score
Service accessibility	
My call to the Helpline was answered quickly	5.00
The Helpline's opening hours are convenient for me	4.95
It is important to me that the Helpline is open at evenings and weekends	4.85
Meeting support needs	
I had confidence that the person I spoke to could deal with my concerns	4.92
The person that answered my call seemed to understand my situation	4.97
At the end of my call, I had enough information to deal with the issue better	4.92
The information that I received was easy to understand	4.91
Overall, I was satisfied with the information that I received	4.95
Impact of the service	
At the end of my call, I felt reassured	4.91
At the end of my call, I felt more confident about my situation	4.88
General satisfaction items	
Overall, the Helpline provides a very valuable service	5.00
If the need arises, I am very likely to telephone the Helpline again	5.00
I would recommend the Helpline to someone in a similar situation	5.00

Participants were also given the opportunity to list three "good" or "useful" things about the Helpline. A total of 128 positive comments were made. The largest proportion of comments described the Helpline as being "helpful" or "useful" (n=23), or related to the provision of information (n=22). A few of these comments were more explicit and made reference to information being provided quickly (e.g. *"information provided without hesitation"*), or being unable to find relevant or up-to-date information elsewhere. A few of participants (n=3) said, *"worker knew what they were talking about"* or described them as "knowledgeable".

Comments about the Helpline being "understanding" (n=14), or "kind" or "supportive" (n=7) were also common. A few participants (n=4) made reference to the outcomes of their call, for example *"more confident to go through the criminal justice system"* and *"felt reassured after speaking to the Helpline"*. Several participants mentioned being provided with contact details for other organisations/agencies (n=15), but a similar number also said that they would contact the Helpline again (n=12).

In contrast, when provided with the opportunity to suggest areas for improvement, only 17 comments were made. Six of these comments related to longer opening hours; one of which specified longer opening hours at the weekends, and another which referred specifically to opening

later in the evenings. Two comments seemed to relate to the lines being engaged. The remaining negative comments lacked any unifying theme.

Perceptions of the Website

Approximately half of participants indicated that they had internet access (51.6%), but of these, only one third (33.3%) indicated that they had accessed the Offenders' Families Helpline website. Although based on a very limited number of responses, of the 11 people who answered the question about perceived "usefulness" of the website, 9 responded with the maximum score of 5.

Participants who had accessed the website were also given the opportunity to comment on "good" or "useful" aspects. Of the 11 comments made, 5 made reference to the website being easy to understand, and two reported that they found the required contact information. When asked about areas for improvement, no comments were made.

Alternative Sources of Support

When participants were asked whether there were lots of other places that families could seek information about the Criminal Justice System, most responded "no" (79.4%), a few responded "yes" (14.3%) and a small proportion were unsure (6.3%). Perceptions about alternative sources of emotional support for families affected by the CJS were similar (81.8% responded "no", 15.2% "yes" and 3.0% "not sure").

4.4. Themes from the Family Interviews

This section discusses the five most prominent themes to emerge from the interviews with family members. Where relevant, case studies and information from the interviews with the Helpline team have been included to better explain and illustrate the themes.

Supporting both Families and Offenders

The Helpline provides a wide variety of information and support relating to the CJS, and it would be difficult to do it justice by simply providing a description here. Nevertheless, it was apparent from the interviews that the support needs of families and offenders are heavily intertwined, and in supporting families, the Helpline invariably supports offenders too. This is particularly true for offenders who are held in custody and are less able to deal with issues themselves, in which case families often play an important role in accessing information on their behalf. As reported by one interviewee, "...with him being inside there is not a lot he can really do, so I do what I can to help him.". Case Study 1 below illustrates how information provided by the Helpline can benefit both families and offenders.

Case Study 1

Sarah emailed the Helpline saying *"I am at a loss and do not know where else to turn"*. Sarah provided a detailed account of her partner's current situation; he was serving a prison sentence and had been declined a transfer to a less secure establishment on four separate occasions, and each time was offered a different explanation. Sarah reported that she felt *"lied to"* and requested advice on how to proceed. In their reply, the Helpline demonstrated that they understood the difficult situation that Sarah and her partner were going through. The Helpline were able to provide a detailed account of the options available to Sarah and her partner, including contacting the Prison Ombudsman, the Independent Monitoring Board, and the Prisoner Advice Service, and provided the appropriate contact details.

Perhaps one of the most pertinent examples of how the Helpline supports both offenders and families, are calls from family members who are concerned about the wellbeing or safety of a relative in prison (see Case Study 2 below for an example). In contacting the prison on behalf of the family, the Helpline can help to ensure that safeguarding procedures for the prisoner are instigated, and can also report back to the family that their relative is being looked after, providing much needed reassurance.

Case Study 2

Alison reported that since her brother had been transferred to another prison, he had been receiving threats and abuse from the other inmates on his wing. Alison had spoken to the Wing Officer who assured her that her brother would be okay, but the family were still concerned for his safety and were worried that he could not cope with his situation. Alison expressed concerns that any intervention from the prison would only draw attention to her brother and make his situation worse. The Helpline contacted the prison on Alison's behalf; an Officer in the Safer Custody Department promised to speak to the prisoner in a covert and confidential manner. The Helpline relayed this information back to Alison, providing reassurance that her brother was being properly cared for.

"Knowing someone is there for support"

The importance of knowing that *"someone is there, that there is somebody that you can speak to"* was the most salient theme to emerge from the interviews with family members. Participants spoke of the relief that they experienced when they first discovered the Helpline, and said that it was comforting to know that they could access support to help them cope with their situation on their own. For one participant, the Helpline provided her with a sense of courage to deal with challenges posed by the Criminal Justice System (CJS). This reflects comments from the Helpline team about the ethos of the service, which is partly concerned with enabling families to develop coping strategies to deal with their situation on their own.

"I didn't know that there was anybody there to turn to. I thought it was just go to this jail and that was it, you were on your own, that's the end for you."

“She was strength to me, even though I don’t know the girl, at least I know that there is somebody there.”

Participants reported that, following their first call to the Helpline, it was reassuring to know that there was a service available for families should they need support again. This seemed to enable families to feel more confident about their ability to deal with issues in the future.

“It’s nice to know that there is somebody there at the other end of the line that can give you a bit of guidance whenever you might need it...”

A few of the participants spoke positively about the Helpline team encouraging them to call the Helpline whenever necessary (e.g. *“She said I was free to ring anytime I wanted to if I had any more problems”*), and another said that the attitude of the workers made her feel comfortable about contacting the Helpline regularly.

“Sometimes I’ve rang up with really silly questions like ‘What does recall even mean?’ and they just give an answer straight up. It’s just the way they are, it’s like no question is ever a stupid question. I really feel like I could ring them for anything.”

Simply knowing that a service exists for families involved in the CJS seemed to make a real difference to the family members interviewed. Indeed, the Helpline team reported that the existence of the Helpline alone helps families to feel that their support needs have been acknowledged, and that they are recognised as an important part of society. Although speculative, this might provide an important defence against some of the stigma families reported experiencing (see below).

The sense that families of offenders “mattered” seemed to be further reinforced by the style in which the Helpline team responded to calls. All of the family members interviewed were of the impression that the Helpline team genuinely cared about families and had a genuine desire to help them. This was based on the perception that the helpline team *really* listened to and understood families’ concerns, and put a considerable degree of effort into helping families resolve issues.

“They were genuine like they wanted to give you help and advice, like they really wanted to help.”

“...you know, sometimes you can talk to someone and they’re ‘um, um, um’ but you know that they’re not taking in things, they really, really do.”

During the interview with the Helpline Managers it emerged that a number of staff and volunteers had previously been affected by a friend or relatives involvement in the CJS. It was believed that personal experience enabled the team to thoroughly empathise with families, and contributed to the provision of high quality support. Support for this assertion was provided by one of the family members who said that most people struggled to understand her concerns: *“Well friends and family don’t get me because they’re not in that situation”*.

“Feeling totally lost”

Another recurring theme from the interviews was that family members could not imagine how they would have coped without the support provided by the Helpline (e.g. *“without them I don’t know what I would have done, I would have been totally lost”*). Importantly, a couple of interviewees indicated that the Helpline did not just help them to cope, but also benefitted other family members:

“I’m not just speaking for myself, I’m speaking for his mom, his grandmothers, his sisters...It’s me that makes the call but then I ring everyone else and tell them what is happening. It’s not just me, I’m speaking for his whole family, it helps us all get through it”.

Participants described the Helpline as a unique service, and said that there were few comparable sources of information and support for families affected by the CJS (e.g. *“I feel like there is nowhere else to turn”*).

“With there not being anything else like them, I don’t know what people would do. I’m quite good on the internet and I can find things, but for people who can’t, well....that would be the end for them. The Helpline is the only hope for them.”

Interviews with the Helpline team offered further insights into the perceived lack of support for families. It was reported that families often encounter difficulties obtaining information from criminal justice agencies. Prisons, for example, have limited resources to respond to families’ queries, and are also bound by strict security and data protection regulations preventing the release of certain information. The Helpline team pointed out that by responding directly to families’ queries, there is no need for them to contact the prison, and so the Helpline can reduce some of the burden on prisons’ already over-stretched resources.

Indeed, one of the family members interviewed said that despite contacting several different agencies on numerous occasions, she had been unsuccessful in obtaining information relating to prisoners’ entitlements to healthcare. The interviewee expressed her frustrations with the CJS and gratitude to the Helpline, who according to her, were *“the only people that have actually been helpful”*:

“Our experience of Probation is that they have no contact at all with the families. The prison were just like ‘confidentiality, we can’t speak to you’. We had major concerns for his health and wellbeing and they kept quoting the Data Protection Act...they weren’t helpful at all.”

The Helpline team reported that the preferred approach is to provide families with a platform from which they can resolve issues independently, but sometimes obstacles associated with obtaining information from criminal justice agencies limits the extent to which this is possible. In these cases, the Helpline can act as an effective intermediary between families and prisons, made possible by well-established links with criminal justice agencies.

With this in mind, it was clear from the interviews that the Helpline team were successful in ensuring that families were realistically informed about the possibilities of obtaining answers on their behalf (e.g. *"I'm not saying that they've got this magic wand, but at least at the end of the day they can give it a try"*). Family members seemed very appreciative that the Helpline did not give them *"false hope"* of obtaining information. Regardless of whether information could be obtained or not, families spoke very positively about the Helpline workers fulfilling promises to call them back:

"Absolutely brill, and if they can't give you an answer straight away, they say right, we're going to look into it and we'll get back to you. They have even given me a time, and they are smack on, and they will ring me on that time".

Other interviewees reported that although they had been provided with information by the CJS, they found it to be either contradictory or difficult to understand. In these circumstances the Helpline was able to provide valuable clarification and explanation.

"...I just couldn't get my head around this because I was being told one thing and then I was being told another".

"I just felt like I was in a foreign country and I didn't speak the same language at all...I suppose it was explanations in plain English really, in a language that I understood, without the legal jargon. I could just ring them and say 'what does this actually mean?'"

"Refreshingly Non-Judgemental"

As expected, interviews with family members revealed that there was a great deal of stigma and prejudice associated with involvement in the CJS. One family member reported that she was so *"embarrassed"* and *"ashamed"* of her son's imprisonment that she felt unable to confide in family or friends. Other participants reported that they had spoken to family and friends about their situation, but had found them to be very opinionated and felt that they were being *"judged"*. Interviewees reported that although family members tried to be supportive, as a result of the negative attitudes towards offending, their efforts often seemed very insincere:

"Family and friends are trying to support you but its either coming across as 'poor you', 'poor him', or they think that you are a bad parent..."

A couple of the interviewees thought that the emotional attachment to family and friends made it impossible for them to provide unbiased support. The Helpline on the other hand was perceived to be *"detached"*. According to families this enabled them to provide support in a more impartial manner and to take a *"view from the outside"*.

"Family especially are very opinionated, because the Helpline haven't got any emotional attachment, they are not judgemental....There's no 'he shouldn't have done that, he wouldn't have landed himself in prison then'. That's refreshing, you really need that."

The Impact of the Service

All of the family members who were interviewed indicated that they had primarily contacted the Helpline seeking information, but also reported that they had found it to be a very valuable source of emotional support. As highlighted by the Service Co-ordinator, families can be very conscious of the stigma associated with their situation and often receive negative reactions from family and friends, which can make them hesitant to confide in others. The Co-ordinator highlighted that although families might initially call with a question, it can become apparent that they are really seeking emotional support.

As indicated by the Helpline team, they need to be carefully attuned to how callers are feeling in order to properly recognise their support needs. The Helpline team also reported that the ability to build a sense of rapport and trust is very important in enabling family members to confide in the Helpline. Personal experience of the CJS might go some way to enabling Helpline team members to do this, but the team also said that it takes practice to develop these skills.

Although the Helpline often combines the provision of information with emotional support, some families do call primarily for emotional support. For example, Case Study 3 below describes the on-going emotional support provided to a regular service user.

Case Study 3

Victoria has struggled to cope with her daughter's imprisonment, and in the past has harmed herself in response to the stress she has been experiencing. Victoria has been a regular caller to the Helpline; on her most recent call seemed very distressed and reported that she had booked an appointment with her GP. The Helpline provided emotional support and enquired whether Victoria felt like hurting herself today, to which she replied definitely not. Victoria had been unable to visit her daughter for the last six months due to the absence of private transport. The Helpline researched public transport routes for Victoria and were able to provide her with a number of options.

The Helpline team reported that family members call the Helpline in various states of distress, despair, frustration and anger. Interviews with the family members provided evidence of how the Helpline successfully helps families to cope with a range of emotions:

"I was a bit upset on the phone, I was in a bit of a turmoil, I was all agitated before I rang, she was excellent, she helped calm me down really."

"Sometimes I even have a little laugh and a joke with them, and that's nice, it puts me in a much more positive frame of mind. I've had some horrible days, especially recently, and they've really picked me up".

Nevertheless, the emotion that family members most often associated with their involvement in the CJS was "stress". For a couple of interviewees, intense or prolonged periods of stress seemed to be having adverse implications for their health. Family members reported that the Helpline provided them with a welcome source of "relief" and "reassurance".

“Miles better because I’d had a weight lifted off my shoulder, because I’d been getting frantic with it, I’d been stressing out, making myself worse.”

Evidence from the interviews with family members suggested that the first point of contact with the CJS could be one of the most stressful times. Interviewees variously described feeling “panicked”, “lost” and “confused” at this time. One interviewee said, “I did not know where to even begin when my son was remanded in custody”, but reported that when she called the Helpline they were able to “settle her nerves”. As highlighted in Case Study 4 below; it can be difficult for families to access important information when they first come into contact with the CJS.

Case Study 4

When Katie emailed the Helpline her son had recently been remanded in custody. Despite contacting the court, police and his solicitor she was unable to find out which prison he was being held at. In a reply email, the Helpline reassured Katie that it was not uncommon that family members were not informed of an individual’s location. The Helpline advised Katie contact the “Prisoner Location Service” and were able to provide a detailed list of the information that she would need to supply.

All of the family members interviewed spoke very positively about the Helpline teams’ knowledge of the CJS and their ability to confidently answer their queries. A couple of interviewees assigned more importance to their ability to answer queries quickly, and said that delays would only exacerbate their anxieties.

“They were excellent, they were straight to the bone, anything I wanted to ask, I got an answer to, I didn’t get a ‘don’t know’ or ‘unsure’.”

“You’re stressed enough as it is, I am at the moment you know, you want the answers...you don’t want to be faffing around, waiting and waiting...”

It should be noted that this might not be entirely representative of all Helpline users, but two of the family members who were interviewed indicated that they would like the Helpline’s opening hours to be extended. One interviewee specified that she would like the Helpline to be open later in the evenings, and the other stated that she would like longer opening hours at the weekend. Both interviewees said that having a loved one in prison caused them a lot of stress, and having to wait to speak to someone could prolong and heighten this. It is noteworthy that this was the only potential area for improvement mentioned by family members during the interviews.

“...if you can’t talk to someone you just let things stew, and the more you think about it, the more worked up you get, and this is not good, you get stressed...”

“I’m not sleeping and I’m stressing, I’ve just got questions 24 hours a day. I’m not saying that they should be open 24 hours a day, but when it’s not open until 9 in the morning and you’re up and about, it’s time for me to overthink things and stress...”

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

As outlined in the literature review, families of offenders represent a vulnerable section of society and are likely to have multiple and complex support needs. Research indicates that involvement at all stages of the Criminal Justice System (CJS) has adverse implications for families, and is likely to exacerbate the challenges that they are already experiencing. Briefly, involvement in the CJS can be confusing and difficult to understand, presents practical and financial problems, places strain on family relationships and emotional wellbeing, and is associated with stigma and social isolation. Literature indicates that maintaining relationships between families and offenders has positive implications for the wellbeing of those immediately concerned, but also presents a benefit to society in terms of reducing the likelihood of reoffending. Despite this a significant proportion of relationships between offenders and their families break down as a result of the aforementioned challenges associated with involvement in the CJS.

Research evidence suggests that there is an acute need for services designed to reduce the negative effects of the CJS on families, not least in terms of supporting families and offenders to maintain relationships. It seems likely that providing access to a wide variety of information, emotional support and signposting will be crucial in effectively meeting the support needs of offenders families'. Although several specialised services exist for offender's families, they are all regionally based with the exception of the Offenders' Families Helpline (OFH). The OFH is the only telephone service dedicated to providing information and support to families affected by the CJS across the whole of England and Wales.

The evaluation revealed a high demand for the Helpline; in 2013 the service received almost 10,000 telephone calls and over 145,000 unique visitors to its website. Interviews with family members provided further evidence that the Helpline is a much-needed service. Two of the most prominent themes to emerge from the interviews were *"knowing someone is there"* and *"feeling totally lost"*. Just having the opportunity to talk to the Helpline was found to make a significant difference to families' ability to cope with their present situation as well as the future. Interviewees also perceived the Helpline to be the only source of support for families affected by the CJS and said that they would feel *"lost"* without it. In addition, the questionnaire survey revealed that approximately 80% of participants thought that there were few alternative sources of information and support for families.

These findings might reflect the difficulties that families experience obtaining relevant and clear information from criminal justice agencies. Although evidence from this evaluation related mostly to prisons, previous literature does suggest that families experience similar difficulties in relation to other agencies. It was acknowledged that prisons have limited resources to respond to families concerns and regulations prevent the disclosure of certain information. In this regard, the Helpline was found to be crucial in addressing the needs of families without adding further pressure to already over-stretched prison resources. Where necessary, the well-established reputation of the Helpline enabled them to act as a successful intermediary between families and prisons to obtain information on families' behalf.

The evaluation not only revealed the importance of the Helpline, but also found evidence that it provides an excellent service and is highly effective in meeting the support needs of offenders' families. The questionnaire survey of family members produced outstandingly positive results in respect of service accessibility, general satisfaction, and the provision of information and emotional support (possible scores on thirteen items ranged from 1-5, and the lowest score achieved was just 4.85). In response to open-ended questions, participants reported seven times as many "good" or "useful" things about the Helpline as they did areas for improvement. Although tentative due to a limited number of responses (n=11), the questionnaire survey also produced very positive results with regards to the perceived "usefulness" of the website. The Helpline team have also initiated an on-going evaluation to produce more robust evidence with regards to the value of the website.

Interviews with family members continued to reveal positive perceptions of the Helpline. Importantly, the Helpline was found to have a significant impact on the wellbeing of families, enabling them to cope with a range of emotions, and in particular provided a sense of relief from stress and anxiety. As noted above, the strain associated with involvement in the CJS can contribute to the deterioration of relationships between families and offenders, but by supporting families in this way, the Helpline has the potential to influence the likelihood that relationships are maintained. Of course, this is in addition to the provision of practical information that enables families to maintain contact with offenders (e.g. information about prison visiting arrangements).

Furthermore, family members spoke very positively about the Helpline workers, who they perceived to be genuine, approachable, kind, caring and knowledgeable. The quality of service provision could partly be attributed to some of the Helpline team having personal experience of the CJS; therefore enabling them to better empathise with families' circumstances. Interviewees also reported experiencing stigma from family, friends and the local community but said that the Helpline provided a "*refreshingly non-judgemental*" service.

The evaluation identified no significant areas for improvement. There was some suggestion from the questionnaire responses and interviews that it might be beneficial if the Helpline's opening hours were extended. However, this was only identified by a small number of participants and might not be representative of the views of all family members accessing the Helpline. Therefore, it is suggested that the suitability of the opening hours are explored further.

Overall, the Offenders' Families Helpline was found to make an important contribution to reducing the negative impact of the CJS on families, particularly in terms of alleviating negative emotional consequences and supporting families and offenders to maintain relationships. The evaluation also revealed that the Helpline provided a very satisfactory service that was effective in meeting families support needs. Well-established links with criminal justice agencies, and personal experience of the CJS might partly explain the effectiveness of the service

It follows that the main recommendation of from this evaluation is that the Offenders' Families Helpline should be sustained. Furthermore, the preferred service provider should be (a) an organisation that is dedicated to supporting offenders' families, which (b) is run from a service-user perspective, and (c) is credible, nationally well-recognised, and has established links with criminal justice agencies.

Appendix 1: Questionnaire survey for family members

Invitation to Participate in Telephone Survey

Wherever appropriate, at the end of the call, service users should be invited to participate in the Helpline evaluation. Volunteers are advised to use their discretion, and omit the invitation to participate when callers are too distressed.

Volunteers are encouraged to develop their own style to introduce the evaluation, but this must contain the following information:

- The University of Huddersfield are conducting an independent evaluation of the National Offenders' Families Helpline.
- The aim of the evaluation is to measure the effectiveness of the Helpline in meeting the needs of the families who call.
- The evaluation itself will be used to inform future service delivery, such as whether any changes can be made to improve the service.
- People who have accessed the Helpline recently are being invited to take part in a short telephone survey. The survey is being carried out by a volunteer working on behalf of the University of Huddersfield.
- People who agree to take part in the telephone survey can expect to receive a call within the next 12 - 48 hours. The call will last no longer than ten minutes.
- Participation is entirely voluntary and you should not feel obliged to take part.
- Callers who do agree to take part will be asked to provide their name and contact telephone number. A first name will suffice, and you can give a false name if you prefer.

***Remember to give the caller the opportunity to ask questions about the evaluation**

✓ **Please tick**

- The volunteer must ensure that the caller has understood the nature of the evaluation, and gives their consent to be contacted by a volunteer working on behalf of the University of Huddersfield

Name:

Contact telephone number:

Database reference number:

Consent to Participate in Telephone Survey

This guidance applies to follow-up calls with service users that have given their consent to be contacted by a volunteer working on behalf of the University of Huddersfield. Volunteers must ensure that services users are fully informed about the evaluation and give their consent to participate before proceeding to administer the survey.

Again, volunteers are encouraged to develop their own style when discussing the research, but must include the following information:

- This is [name] calling on behalf of the University of Huddersfield. Thank you for agreeing to participate in the evaluation of the National Offender's Families Helpline. Is this a convenient time to talk?
- Just to remind you, the aim of the evaluation is to gather callers' opinions on the quality of the Helpline service, and to learn more about how callers' benefit from the Helpline.
- The evaluation itself will be used to inform future service delivery, such as whether any changes can be made to improve the service.
- I would like to ask you a series of questions about your experiences of using the Helpline. This should not take any more than ten minutes.
- Just to let you know, your participation is entirely voluntary and you should not feel obliged to take part.
- You can refuse to answer any question, and can also end the call at any time without giving a reason.
- All of your responses will be confidential (with the exception of comments relating to the harm of another individual or threats to security, in which case the University of Huddersfield has an obligation to inform the appropriate authority).
- At the end of the project an evaluation report will be produced, your responses to the questions might feature in this, but your name or any other information that could be used to identify you will not.

***Remember to give the caller the opportunity to ask questions about the evaluation**

✓ **Please tick**

- The volunteer must ensure that the caller has understood the nature of the evaluation and gives their consent to take part

Survey Questions

As far as possible, these items are to be pre-completed by the volunteer using information in the call monitoring database. Missing information can be collected whilst administering the survey.

Q1. What is the caller's gender?

- Male
- Female

Q2. What is the caller's age?

- Below 18
- 18-25
- 26-35
- 36-45
- 46-55
- 56-65
- 66-70
- Above 70

Q3. What is the caller's ethnic group?

White

- English / Welsh / Scottish / Northern Irish / British
- Irish
- Gypsy or Irish Traveller
- Any other White background, please describe

Mixed / Multiple ethnic groups

- White and Black Caribbean
- White and Black African
- White and Asian
- Any other Mixed / Multiple ethnic background, please describe

Asian / Asian British

- Indian
- Pakistani
- Bangladeshi
- Chinese
- Any other Asian background, please describe

Black / African / Caribbean / Black British

- African
- Caribbean
- Any other Black / African / Caribbean background, please describe

Other ethnic group

- Arab
- Any other ethnic group, please describe

Q4. What is the caller's hometown?

Q5. What is the caller's relationship to the offender?

- Mother/father
- Step-mother/father
- Wife/husband/partner/girlfriend/boyfriend
- Ex-wife/husband/partner/girlfriend/boyfriend
- Son/daughter
- Step-son/daughter
- Brother/sister
- Aunt/uncle
- Grandmother/grandfather
- Niece/nephew
- Friend
- Other, please state:

Q7. What issues(s) did the call relate to? Please tick all that apply.

- Arrest
- Court
- Community sentence
- Prison
- Release
- Children
- Health
- Finance
- Other, please describe:

Q8. If the call related to a prison, please state which:

Q9. What was the casework level?

- Level 1
- Level 2
- Level 3
- Level 4

The volunteer should read out the remaining questions using the same wording indicated below, and complete the answers on behalf of the service user.

Q10. "I am going to read a list of statements about the Helpline. I would like you to give each one a score out of five to show how much you agree with it. One is the lowest level of agreement, and five the highest level of agreement."

Please circle:					
a. My call to the Helpline was answered quickly	1	2	3	4	5
b. The Helpline's opening hours are convenient for me	1	2	3	4	5
c. It is important to me that the Helpline is open at evenings and weekends	1	2	3	4	5
d. I had confidence that the person I spoke to could deal with my concerns	1	2	3	4	5
e. The person that answered my call seemed to understand my situation	1	2	3	4	5
f. At the end of my call, I had enough information to deal with the issue better	1	2	3	4	5
g. The information that I received was easy to understand	1	2	3	4	5
h. Overall, I was satisfied with the information that I received	1	2	3	4	5
i. At the end of my call, I felt reassured	1	2	3	4	5
j. At the end of my call, I felt more confident about my situation	1	2	3	4	5
k. If the need arises, I am very likely to telephone the Helpline again	1	2	3	4	5
l. I would recommend the Helpline to someone in a similar situation	1	2	3	4	5
m. Overall, the Helpline provides a very valuable service	1	2	3	4	5

Q11. "What did you find good or useful about the Helpline?"

a.

b.

c.

Q12. "How could the Helpline be improved?"

a.

b.

c.

Q13. "The next two questions are about other sources of information and support. Please answer either yes, no or not sure.

Please circle:			
a. Other than the Helpline, there are lots of places that families can seek information about the Criminal Justice System	Yes	No	Not sure
b. Other than the Helpline, there are lots of places that families affected by the Criminal Justice System can seek emotional support	Yes	No	Not sure

Q14. "Please can I ask whether you have internet access?"

- Yes (please answer Q15) No (end of survey)

Q15. "Have you ever looked at the National Offender's Families Helpline website?"

- Yes (please answer Q16 onwards) No (end of survey)

Q16. "On a scale of 1 to 5, please tell me how useful you found the website. One is least useful, and five is most useful".

- 1 2 3 4 5

Q17. "What did you find good or useful about the website?"

a.

b.

c.

Q18. "How could the website be improved?"

a.

b.

c.

Volunteer to thank the caller for their participation.

Appendix 2: Interview schedule for family members

Interview Schedule

1. How did you find out about the Helpline?
[How well advertised was it? Did you experience any difficulties finding an appropriate source of information/support? How could it be better advertised?]
2. When you called the Helpline, what did you think of the service that you received?
[Speed with which call was answered; confidence in call handler to help with issue; level and quality of information provided; level of understanding and empathy of call handler]
3. Please tell me about your reasons for contacting the Helpline.
4. What happened as a result of your call?
[Enough information to deal with the issue? Signposted to another organisation? If signposted, do you feel this was an appropriate service/organisation to deal with your issue?]
5. How did you feel after the call?
[Reassured? More confident about situation? How does this compare to how you felt before the call?]
6. What are the best things about the Helpline?
[Free; confidential; privacy; anonymity; non-judgmental; supportive; accessibility]
7. How could the Helpline be improved?
8. What other sources of information/support are you aware of for families and friends of offenders?
[Have you accessed them? Why/why not? How useful did you find them?]
9. Any other comments

Appendix 3: Consent form for family interviews

Consent Form

✓ Please tick

- The purpose of the evaluation and the content of the interview has been explained to me
- I have had the opportunity to ask questions
- I give my consent to participate in this research
- I agree to the interview being tape-recorded
- I understand that all of my responses will be confidential (with the exception of comments relating to the harm of another individual or threats to security, in which case the researcher has an obligation to inform the appropriate authority)
- I understand that the things I say might be used in reports and publications emerging from the evaluation, but that I will not be named and it will not be possible to identify me in any other way
- I am aware that I can refuse to answer any questions and can stop the interview at any time without giving reasons

Name/signature interviewee:

Name/signature of researcher:

Date:

*One copy to be retained by the researcher, one copy to be offered to the participant

Appendix 4: Interview schedule for Helpline managers

Interview Schedule

1. Ask the participants to introduce themselves, provide their job title, and a brief description of their roles and responsibilities in relation to the Helpline.
2. How has the Helpline developed over time?
3. What are the main aims and objectives of the Helpline?
[As specified in the NOMS contract; as developed by POPS]
4. How is the Helpline integrated with POPS' other services?
[Visitors Centres; Courts Project; Alternatives to Custody; Manchester DAT]
5. What is the relationship between the Helpline and the website?
6. What links does the Helpline have with external agencies/organisations?
[Criminal justice agencies; local authority agencies; NGOs]
7. How do you think callers benefit from the Helpline?
[Impact on families; strengths of the Helpline; advantages of being delivered by POPS; how do you measure effectiveness; strengths and limitations of the call monitoring database]
8. What are the challenges associated with delivering the Helpline?
[Advertising; funding; recruiting volunteers; maintaining up-to-date information]
9. What would happen if the Helpline contract was not extended?
[Where else could families seek information/support? What would be the implications for families if there were no appropriate services? Could the information be accessed as a web-only resource?]
10. Assuming the Helpline contract is extended, how do you see it developing in the future?
[Possible improvements; extensions to current service provision]
11. Any other comments?

Appendix 5: Interview schedule for Helpline volunteers

Interview Schedule

1. Ask the participants to introduce themselves, and say how long they have been volunteering on the Helpline.
2. Please give a brief overview of the information/support provided by the Helpline.
[Perceived aims/objectives; perceptions of most common issues; diversity of families' support needs]
3. How does the Helpline connect with other services?
[POPS' other services; the website; other NGOs; the Criminal Justice System; local authority agencies]
4. How do you think families benefit from calling the Helpline?
[Impact on families; strengths of the Helpline; advantages of being delivered by POPS]
5. What personal qualities and/or experience do the volunteers possess that enables them to successfully support families?
[Personality; interpersonal skills; work/voluntary experience; life experiences]
6. What challenges do you encounter when working on the Helpline?
[Finding/maintaining up-to-date information; most challenging calls practically and emotionally; liaising with other organisations; updating the call monitoring database]
7. What kind of training and support do Helpline volunteers receive?
[Extent to which initial training prepares volunteers for the role; ongoing training and development needs; emotional support needs; peer support; how are these effectively provided by POPS?]
8. What would happen if the Helpline did not exist?
[Where else could families seek information/support? What would be the implications for families if there were no appropriate services? Could the information be accessed as a web-only resource?]
9. How would you like to see the Helpline develop in the future?
[Possible improvements; extensions to current service provision]
10. Any other comments?

Appendix 6: Consent form for Helpline team interviews

Consent Form

✓ Please tick

- The purpose of the evaluation and the content of the focus group has been explained to me
- I have had the opportunity to ask questions
- I give my consent to participate in this research
- I agree to the focus group being tape-recorded
- I understand that all of my responses will be confidential (with the exception of comments relating to the harm of another individual or threats to security, in which case the researcher will have an obligation to inform the appropriate authority)
- I understand that the things I say might be used in reports and publications emerging from the evaluation, but that I will not be named and it will not be possible to identify me in any other way
- I am aware that I can refuse to answer any questions and can leave the focus group at any time without giving reasons

Name/signature participant:

Name/signature of researcher:

Date:

*One copy to be retained by the researcher, one copy to be offered to the participant