

**A Guide to Setting  
up a Support Group  
2011**



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# A GUIDE TO SETTING UP A SUPPORT GROUP

## Introduction

These guidelines were originally written in 1999 by Russell Webster in collaboration with a steering group convened by what was then the Federation of Prisoners' Families Support Groups and is now Action for Prisoners' Families (APF).

They have been rewritten and updated in 2011 to take into account changes in support, such as the introduction of on-line forums and support networks. These guidelines are only available as an on-line resource. If you don't have facilities to print it off please contact APF offices and we can print you a copy for a small charge.

These guidelines have been supported by NOMS.

A questionnaire was sent out to our members in 2010 asking for their input on what the guidelines should contain. The contents they suggested were very similar to those in the original 1999 publication. The considerations to bear in mind, the legal requirements, good practice for working with people – the information needed is still the same, but much has changed since 1999 and that information needs updating for the people who are setting up support groups now, whether they are families or practitioners.

We would like to thank those members who responded to our survey about the contents, and those who looked at the draft, for their help and input.

## Why this guide is needed

"I felt so bewildered by everything that was happening, but I had to try and keep things together for the children when their dad went inside. It was a huge relief finding out there were people who could help me. I don't know how I would have coped without their support.'

Many families with someone in prison find a family support group – whether a drop-in at a local community centre, or an on-line forum - a great help.

As anyone who has been involved in starting up or running a support group of any description knows, a great deal of work and commitment is required. Often there is the need to learn and develop a wide range of skills which can include anything from fund-raising, to finding out about financial assistance for travelling to prisons, to negotiating with prison governors, to designing publicity posters. There are currently only a small number of support groups in England and Wales which we know of. Some have been set up only to close down again. They have closed rarely because of lack of dedication and hard work, more often because funding to pay for venues and expenses has not been available and there may be little local or other support. Our website special interest groups and forum are intended to address this problem and provide somewhere to exchange ideas, advise, and support others in similar experiences: [www.prisonersfamilies.org.uk](http://www.prisonersfamilies.org.uk). There is no reason for anyone to feel isolated when there are many others who understand the unique problems and challenges involved in running a prisoners' families support group.

It is to help new prisoners' families support groups and to strengthen existing ones that APF commissioned the original production of these good practice guidelines and also why we are now updating them. Much of the advice contained in this publication is based on the experience of those who have set up and run support groups themselves.

Examples of forms and policies are in a final appendices section. They are listed on the contents page.

# Section 1

## Thinking of Setting up a support group? Some things to consider

Below is a checklist of the sorts of issues it may be helpful to think about before deciding to go ahead.

### Personal checklist

Action for Prisoners' Families' experience is that although many people have succeeded in setting up support groups by hard work, dedication and some luck, many – with equally good intentions – have failed. The advice in this and the following chapters comes from individuals who have been successful in setting up groups. They have made mistakes along the way and have learnt from them and wish to stop others making the same mistakes.

Before deciding to go ahead and form a group, there are seven key questions to answer:

#### **Q. How much time and energy do I have to give?**

The families of prisoners can have a multitude of needs, as well as having a lot to contribute. They may make considerable demands on a support group. It is important to think how you will cope on days when your personal resources are low as well as on days when you are feeling positive and strong.

#### **Q. Do I have the support of family members and friends?**

You will find it easier to be effective and focused if your family and friends are behind you.

#### **Q. Who is going to do this with me?**

Our experience is that one person bands rarely survive in the long run. Because the service provided by support groups is so valuable, it is important that it is on offer on a consistent basis. One individual cannot be expected to provide everything 52 weeks a year without time off for re-charging their batteries.

#### **Q. If I am, or have been, a family member of someone who has been to prison, am I ready to take this on?**

As in many areas of life, it is difficult to keep providing support to others if you are still struggling to cope yourself. There is a big difference between offering mutual support and being responsible for a service on which others depend.

#### **Q. Can I cope with very upset or distraught families?**

People show they are upset in many different ways. If you are thinking about setting up a support group, you should feel able to cope with other people's emotions and not to be so overwhelmed by them that they have too much effect on your home life. Similarly, you should think about whether you could work with a family where the prisoner has committed a very serious or distressing offence such as child sexual abuse.

#### **Q. Am I prepared to work in the sometimes intimidating atmosphere of police stations, courts and prisons?**

Those working within the criminal justice system operate in pressurised and difficult environments and often expect outsiders to be able to cope with the same situation. You should ask yourself whether this is a work environment where you will feel comfortable.

#### **Q. For how long am I prepared to do this work?**

Some of the families who are most in need will be in contact with a prisoner who is serving a sentence of many years. A support group needs to have every chance of being established on a permanent basis to deliver the service required. If your motivation comes from having a family member as a serving prisoner, you should consider whether you are likely to continue to want to have involvement in a group after they are released.

## Is a support group needed in your area?

The first step is finding out whether there is a demand for a group in your area. Try the following:

- Look at what is already provided by contacting local voluntary services groups, the local authority's family information service (FIS) – and what the reach of current provision is – i.e. is it local or regional, aimed at a particular group, etc. If a service already exists you may want to see if you can work collaboratively.
- Approach APF's training and development officers for advice as they may already be in touch with family members or practitioners who are also interested in starting a support group in your area or region.
- Take a look at the Action for Prisoners' Families website: [www.prisonersfamilies.org.uk](http://www.prisonersfamilies.org.uk) and the CLINKS website [www.clinks.org](http://www.clinks.org) for groups and organisations which may be able to help you.
- Post a question to APF members via our members forums on our website [www.prisonersfamilies.org.uk](http://www.prisonersfamilies.org.uk) to see if anyone has plans to expand in your area or whether they would be interested in collaborating.
- If you are already visiting a family member at a prison with a visitors' centre you could speak to the staff running the visitors' centre when you next visit about your plans. They may be able to offer support or advice.
- If you have a relative in prison, sign up to the PrisonChat website [www.prisonchatuk.com](http://www.prisonchatuk.com) and put a post up asking if anyone knows about existing support in your area.

If you decide there is a need, you will need to decide what that need is – e.g. a helpline, self-help group, outreach service. Be realistic about your own capabilities, time, energy, commitment, etc. You will need to prioritise the needs you have identified and the range of services you might provide and set out clearly your aims and objectives, your expected outputs and outcomes. (The checklist above will help you do this.) **This will be particularly useful if you need to apply for funding.**

## What services might a support group provide?

### Common characteristics of a support group

The groups which currently exist provide a range of different services which are detailed below. However, most of the groups have four main characteristics in common:

1. They provide emotional and practical support and/or information to a sometimes vulnerable group of people who are for the most part neglected and ignored by official agencies.
2. They provide services to families at all stages of the criminal justice system – when a prisoner has just been arrested and remanded in custody, through a prison sentence, on release and, if needed, after release.
3. They prioritise the needs of prisoners' and offenders' family members - whether those members wish the prisoner to return home or not.
4. Many are run by family members.

Many people who have recently experienced the imprisonment of a family member may have a huge range of needs including feeling depressed, not knowing how to cope with distressed children or how to tell them a family member is in prison, understanding prison visits regulations, struggling to pay bills, coping with hostile neighbours, etc. It is not realistic to expect any support group, particularly a new one to be able to meet all these needs. It is often best to offer one service and do it well and to build on this as knowledge and confidence grow. A regular support group or self-help meeting or a telephone advice service are both significant first undertakings.

In order to provide a good service and not to feel that you have let people down when they get in touch, it may well be worthwhile building up your own directory of helpful services. It is much better to refer someone on to an expert rather than struggle with a new area yourself.

## Range of services

The following are some or all of the services your group may want to provide:

- **Telephone advice and information**

Many groups staff helplines which provide valuable advice and information on visiting procedures, regulations on what can be taken in on visits, travel to a prison, and a range of other subjects which might be confusing to people coming to grips with the prison system for the first time. APF has considerable experience of running a helpline and can give you advice on how and whether to do this. Contact Lucy Keenan: [lucykeenan@actionpf.org.uk](mailto:lucykeenan@actionpf.org.uk) 020 8812 3605.

- **Emotional support**

All groups provide emotional support either at the end of a helpline or in person (or maybe both). Families often liken someone going into prison to a bereavement and sometimes need similar levels of support to someone who has suffered a death in the family. Others may just need someone to talk to – and not always about the prisoners themselves.

- **Casework**

Those running family support groups frequently develop knowledge of a wide range of practical problems including financial support for prison visits, benefits, child care support, debt management and housing to name but a few. Some groups develop the expertise to advise on many of these problems themselves. Many more acquire a range of contacts to refer people on to. Many groups will be able to suggest to families how to take up issues which are concerning them.

- **Personal support**

Groups often provide personal support by accompanying family members to police stations, courts or prisons.

- **Outreach and befriending services**

Some groups provide an outreach service in courts and prison visitors' centres to offer support and first contact with prisoners' families where they most need it.

- **On-line support**

In the last decade several on-line forums and chat rooms have developed for the families of prisoners – many run by families. These enable family members to be more anonymous and are also useful where there may not be any groups nearby or for those who can't get to one because they are working, housebound, or just not keen on face to face meetings with other family members. There are many things to consider which we will deal with in [section 2](#).

- **Support group meetings**

A primary function of many support groups is to organise either formal or informal meetings (e.g. lunch clubs) so that family members can talk and provide support to others in the same situation as themselves.

- **Self-Help groups**

These would be led by members of the groups themselves, rather than facilitated by an outside group or professional such as a probation officer, family link worker, etc..

- **Children's services**

Some support groups could signpost services which provide help with children's clothing and organise free or subsidised holidays.

- **Training courses for prisoners**

Some support groups provide training courses for prisoners. These courses vary but can include preparing for release, thinking about the effects of imprisonment on those left at home, and parenting skills.

- **Training courses for prison staff**

A small number of support groups also become involved in training prison officers particularly in getting them to consider how they work with prisoners' families. They are encouraged to recognise that family

members have done no wrong and may find visiting prisons an upsetting and traumatic experience.

### • **Counselling**

A small number of support groups have also developed accredited counselling courses for workers and volunteers so that they can help family members work through the issues they are facing.

### **Remember**

**Action for Prisoners' Families is here to help you through the process. Do contact us on [info@actionpf.org.uk](mailto:info@actionpf.org.uk) 020 8812 3600 if you need support, guidance, information or advice. You may also want to visit our website: [www.prisonersfamilies.org.uk](http://www.prisonersfamilies.org.uk) where you can register as a member (it's free) and post on our forum and on our special interest groups.**

## **Setting your group's aims and objectives**

Deciding on your group's aims and objectives will help you to focus on what needs to be provided and will be useful for any fundraising applications you do. For example, your aim might be:

"To provide support, advice and information to prisoners' and offenders' families".

### **Objectives**

To achieve the aim above your objectives might include:

- The provision of well-written and accessible information on the impact of imprisonment and offending behaviour, who can help prisoners' and offenders' families, how families can help themselves.
- Providing support and self-help
- Providing opportunities for family members to talk about their experiences and share them with others in the same situation
- Befriending family members in order to combat their isolation and reduce stigma
- Enabling family members to cope better with their situation and find new ways of dealing with it.
- Signposting families to other services, resources, information, etc.

## **How often and for how long should a group meet?**

It is natural to spend long hours when first starting up any new venture and prisoners' family support groups are certainly no exception. However, it is important to be able to sustain the service you offer and it is much easier to make firm decisions at the outset that a helpline will only be staffed in office hours or that you will only accompany families to visits to prisons that are no further than two hours travel away or that a self-help group will be held once a month. You can always break your own guidelines and tell people that you are making an exception. Otherwise, once your group becomes known it can be tempting to be open 24 hours per day, 7 days per week which can be very stressful indeed.

If you are going to offer group meetings you will want to think about whether to have group meetings in the evenings and, if so, whether you are going to offer childcare, or whether to operate during the day (which excludes those who work during the day and may also necessitate childcare for those with pre-school children), during the week, at weekends, in school holidays, etc. If you are going to offer childcare, there are lots of considerations you should take into account. A children's centre will be able to give you guidance. You will also want to set a start and end time so the meetings don't overrun.\*

**\*Be clear about the starting and beginning times of group meetings so they don't lose their focus or become unmanageable.**

## Deciding on and finding a venue

You will need to think about the following for a group venue:

- Is it accessible – does it have parking facilities and public transport nearby? Is it accessible to wheelchair and pushchair users?
- Are there facilities for making refreshments?
- Are there toilet facilities?
- Is it pleasant and welcoming?
- Are people going to attract attention when they enter the venue? I.e. is it inconspicuous/private enough?
- Is there a cost and, if so, how are you going to pay for it? Is it negotiable? Could you use a local church hall, school or library, children's centre, Citizens Advice Bureau or community or voluntary sector office space. You may be able to find somewhere free or very low rental and could ask for contributions from people attending. Children's Centres recognise prisoners' families as a vulnerable group and are encouraged to support them. They may well provide a free venue along with support, childcare and resources so could be well worth approaching.
- Some venues may not welcome you and may be reluctant to accommodate you.

## Fundraising and getting money

Usually a support group needs money to operate. This section gives ideas for who you can approach for funding.

### Charitable Trusts

There are two sorts of charitable trusts which might support prisoners' families support groups. The first sort are national charitable trusts interested in such subjects as: prisoners rights, penal affairs or family or children's issues. The second sort are local trusts interested in voluntary organisations set up in their area. There are many online resources for finding out about fundraising opportunities – some free to members, such as the GRANTnet service provided by CLINKS and others free of charge, such as NCVO's. The Directory of Social Change also provides an on-line funding service and produces regular guides on large national trusts, smaller local trusts by area and companies which donate to charities. These fundraising guides should be available in local libraries. Some useful hints for approaching charitable trusts are given below. APF sends out funding news with its e-bulletin which you can sign up to on our website: [www.prisonersfamilies.org.uk](http://www.prisonersfamilies.org.uk) and you will also find funding news in Third Sector magazine (which is on-line as well as paper copy) CLINKS Light Lunch which CLINKS members can sign up to. Look at the annual reports of other organisations working in this area for ideas of sympathetic charitable trusts, Government and local authority schemes, sponsors and companies.

### Tips for approaching charitable trusts

- Don't be afraid to ask – their business is giving out money
- Many trusts appreciate you calling up or e-mailing, and discussing an application before you make it. Some are happy to meet with you.
- Do your research and make sure that the trust you are approaching funds the type of activity that you are proposing
- When writing your application, be as brief and focused as possible
- Do your applications on a computer so that you can use the same text when applying to different trusts
- Do let trusts know if you've applied elsewhere for money or raised funds yourself – they like you to be following every possible avenue and some like 'match funding'
- Before you write an application check with a trust first to see if you need to fill in their application form instead. Most trusts have websites now with information about how to apply.
- Many trusts appreciate you being specific and asking for a certain amount of money to purchase particular items
- Make sure that any budget you do is accurate and forward looking
- Make the point that there are no statutory agencies with a responsibility for prisoners' or offenders'

families and that without your work this vulnerable group will receive no help at all

- Remind funders that the Government places increasing priority on the importance of the family and its role in reducing offending and reoffending. Remind funders that prisoners are less likely to re-offend if they maintain family ties. APF's website contains facts and figures to back up your funding applications.
- Remind funders that providing support for prisoners' and offenders' children may help prevent them from becoming offenders when they grow up
- If a trust turns you down because of competition for funds and says 'try again', do try again, this is not just a polite refusal and many applications succeed on a second or third attempt.
- If you are offered the opportunity to meet funders – on a formal or informal basis - make sure to take it up. Face to face meetings are often more effective than a written application.

### **Charity registration**

Some trusts, and indeed other types of funders, may not wish to fund organisations which are not registered charities. This can make initial fund-raising very difficult. Go to the ['deciding whether to register as a charity'](#) section to look at the pros and cons. Some funders are sympathetic if an organisation can show that it has started the registration process and others are prepared to pay money to a trusted third party such as Action for Prisoners' Families as an interim measure. Indeed a number of trusts show an interest in providing development or start-up funds for new organisations.

### **Children in Need**

The BBC's annual appeal raises millions of pounds every year for children's charities. If you are seeking funds to benefit prisoners' or offenders' children, they are well worth approaching:

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/pudsey/>.

### **Local media**

Many local TV and radio companies run charity appeals and give grants to local charities – contact your local ones for grant criteria and application procedures.

### **The Big Lottery Fund**

The Big Lottery Fund <http://www.biglotteryfund.org.uk/> runs several different grants programmes. You do not have to be registered as a charity but must be set up for charitable purposes and have a constitution or set of rules.

### **Local authorities**

Local authorities and borough councils do not provide much money – if any – for the voluntary sector. However, some do have voluntary or community sections and may be appropriate places to approach to ask for help with start up funds or for items of capital expenditure.

### **Local businesses**

Although local businesses will rarely give money, they are often useful for donations in kind. So approach firms for office furniture and computers and supermarkets and grocery stores for food for a children's party. Your local Business Link (see phone book) sometimes co-ordinates contact between charities and local businesses and can put you in touch with appropriate companies. Most areas also have on-line forums where you could ask about free or cheap premises/venues and Freecycle [www.freecycle.org](http://www.freecycle.org) where you can pick up furniture and equipment for free.

Other sources to approach for core funds include local churches, Quakers, or unions, especially if the work done by union members seems relevant to prisons, offending or families.

### **Project funding**

While the funding sources listed above may usually be approached for money for a wide range of activities and items, it may be possible to approach the statutory agencies which benefit from your work for project funding – funding a particular activity such as running a helpline or providing an outreach service at a visitors' centre. This may be in the form of a contract with you to deliver relevant work.

## **Government Funding:**

### **Commissioning**

Many of the services that have been traditionally funded either centrally or locally by the prison service are being put out to tender. This means that any organisation whether private, statutory or voluntary will have an opportunity to bid for the service. If the service that you run is prison based it is likely that it will be specified and costed. This is so that you and other interested parties know what you are bidding for and have some idea of how much the commissioner will pay for it. Up to date information on the Specification, benchmarking and costings programme can be found on the NOMS website.

<http://www.justice.gov.uk/about/noms-sbc-programme.htm>.

## **Advertising and publicising your service**

Once you have done much of the hard work in organising and setting up a support group, it is important to advertise the services you provide. However, because there are very few services for prisoners' and offenders' families and only a small number of support groups across the country, it is important to target your advertising. Once you are known, a television programme, Facebook reference, or popular magazine article about prisoners' families could cause the phone to ring off the hook and you to be inundated with e-mails.

It is probably best to get some posters and information leaflets printed or photocopied. Your local volunteer centre will probably know of a cheap designer or printer or a larger charity which will charge the most reasonable rates. You can then decide whether to put them in doctor's surgeries, churches, community centres, libraries, children's centres, or even the visitors' centre of a prison you are visiting – but you will have to ask the permission of the visitors' centre first.

### **The internet**

However, you may decide to use the internet to advertise your services. For example, you could ask Action for Prisoners' Families to put something about your group in its magazine, Action News, or on its website or e-news. You could also contact other APF members via the website forums APF has set up [www.prisonersfamilies.org.uk](http://www.prisonersfamilies.org.uk), asking them to publicise your group, as well as using the services of Prison Chat UK [www.prisonchatuk.com](http://www.prisonchatuk.com) or the Prisoners' Families Voices blog [www.prisonersfamiliesvoices.blogspot.com](http://www.prisonersfamiliesvoices.blogspot.com). This method of advertising is for the most part free of charge and you may reach a larger group of people. You may also be able to find an economical way of setting up a web page to advertise your services. However, a leaflet or poster will reach the families who don't have access to the internet and could be picked up at a visitors' centre, doctor's surgery, children's centre, library, etc.

The poster should contain brief, clear information about what services you provide, when you are open and how to contact you. Make sure to get someone else to check it for spelling, grammar, etc and to look at it for style and attractiveness. Posters can be displayed in police stations, courts and prison visitors' centres in particular. Probation service and social services offices and Citizens advice bureaux are also good sites.

You should also write to your local prison(s) and local probation service, your children's centre, the local authority's family information service, churches and Citizens Advice Bureau to let them know you are setting up the service and give them copies of your publicity. More details on approaching these services are given in 'working with other agencies ...', Section 2.

You should be aware that posters get taken down and leaflets run out and that both will need re-stocking regularly and this is an expensive process. Action for Prisoners' Families will be able to advise you on the best way to do it. A leaflet or poster which can be printed off on a printer may be more economical, but you will still have the cost of printer cartridges to consider.

# Section 2

## Running the support group

### Setting up a safe means of communication

It is a sad fact of life that many people disapprove of any help being given to prisoners, offenders, or their families and that support groups have to cope with crank calls of an unpleasant nature. Also there will be times when prisoners feel that the support you have given to their families is not in their own best interests. For these reasons, it is very important that you consider your personal safety when setting up a new service. There are four golden safety rules.

#### The Four Golden Safety Rules

**1. Set up a separate dedicated phone line or e-mail address for the support group.**

This prevents people from getting your home phone number (even if the helpline is in your home), enables you to let an answerphone take a message outside opening hours and makes financial accounting easy. Remember to specify when renting the line that you do not want your address listed.

**2. Do not give your last name or address** to anyone until you have known them long enough to be sure that they can be trusted.

**3. Remind prisons, probation services and others** that you do not wish your home contact details or last name to be given out or displayed on notice boards etc.

**4. If you write letters, give an organisational address for replies.**

If this is your home, consider getting mail sent care of another organisation or you can organise a Post Office Box Number. At the time of writing it costs £95 per year to set up a PO Box (see [www.royalmail.com](http://www.royalmail.com) for details on how to do this) and an additional cost to have the mail forwarded to an address. If you decide on this option, it is best to ask for a 'sensitive' box which prevents the Post Office from giving out your address.

## Facilitation skills and tips

You may want to give an outline of how the group is going to run. Try and make sure that everyone agrees with the way things are going to be carried out.

### Ground Rules

Ground rules set out the behaviour that is expected of the group and are useful to ensure the group runs smoothly and conflicts can be dealt with fairly. Some simple ground rules may include:

- Listen to and respect each speaker
- Respect confidentiality
- Be patient towards group members
- Have constructive discussion
- Group ownership – remember it belongs to all of you
- Share responsibilities – rotate tasks and responsibilities among group members
- Mobiles off or on silent
- Contribute to group discussions
- It's fine to disagree but don't criticise other members personally

The ground rules are likely to be respected more if the group has been involved in drawing them up. You could do this as a brainstorming exercise during the first session. This may take some time, but is worth

getting right from the beginning to avoid problems later on. You may want to display the ground rules during the meeting, or give each member a copy to sign, as a form of group contract. Ground rules can be added to or altered as the group progresses. Don't forget to let new members know about the ground rules and ask if they have anything to add.

### **BE YOURSELF – be welcoming and friendly.**

**ACTIVE LISTENING** – You should listen attentively to what is being said by each participant in the group. You can show attentive listening by making eye contact, making sure your body language is positive and 'open' (e.g. not turning your back on the group, not folding your arms, etc.), making appropriate facial expressions and responding in an enthusiastic and reasoned way. Be engaged in what people say, encourage their participation and value their contribution.

**ASKING OPEN QUESTIONS** – These are the sort of questions to which there is not a 'yes' or 'no', or a right or wrong answer. They should encourage the participant to say more. For example, Why did they feel that way? What are their thoughts about what they have seen?

**SHOW EMPATHY** – This is best thought of as 'trying to understand'. The facilitator is trying to understand what the participant thinks and feels. This can be done through tone of voice, facial expression and a verbal response. The latter may be particularly useful where there is personal sharing e.g. 'My husband has been sent down and I don't want the kids to go and visit him'. Response – 'It must be hard for you to know what the right thing is for them'.

**LINKING** – It is a useful skill to be able to refer one group member's comments to another e.g. 'So what you are saying is a bit like what Marie said over there, that you would rather the children didn't know the reality of imprisonment'. This gives a quality of completeness to the discussion and helps to keep people on track.

**SUMMARISING** – During the course of a fast moving discussion when there is a natural lull in conversation it may be useful to summarise the points made so far in order to move the group forward. A final summary of points that have been made at the end of the session is very useful to round-up and bring conclusion to the proceedings.

**SHOW RESPECT** – Respect is crucial in showing your valuing of the other person. It is a key quality that is fundamental to the attitude of the facilitator. The facilitator can show this by listening to, responding to, and valuing each person's response. At the very least you could say 'thank you' or summarise feedback, ask further questions, or check out that what has been heard is correct, even if you disagree.

### **Welcoming new members**

People vary hugely in how easily or how hard they find meeting a new group of people. It might be even harder for some because of what they are going through. There is the added tension of being in a vulnerable position – of having to ask for help.

It's important to be aware too that groups can get into cliques, and members may find the 'intrusion' of new people difficult because of the level of safety that has so carefully been built up.

Sometimes a group can get stuck – happy in a kind of comfort zone. But new members can be the lifeblood of a group, and can revitalise it so that members work together to move on.

All of this makes the initial welcome really important. If it's not done well, people may not come back.

### **How to overcome these issues:**

1. Allocate a group member to look after the new person at the beginning.
2. Always do a group introduction when new people come.
3. Use group warm-ups regularly,

## Dealing with conflict/difficult behaviour

Although getting together with other people who are going through the same experiences is really useful to many prisoners' families, it is a mistake to assume that just because they have something in common, they'll automatically get on. There is a potential for problems to occur, as there is with any group of people getting together.

If a group wants to support all its members these difficulties need to be explored and some way found of dealing with them. Establishing ground rules (see above) is one way of doing this.

### Facilitator

A strong and confident facilitator can make all the difference to how difficulties are dealt with. Supervision by an outside organisation, statutory body or mentor can also really help the facilitator or leader, but this may cost money. It is essential to deal with situations which may arise otherwise they will carry on having a negative impact on the group.

### Ways of responding to difficult behaviour

- Make time to allow people to express their dissatisfactions, hopes and fears.
- Set the meeting up so everyone has the chance to speak for a certain amount of time.
- Ask the group to respond to what is happening and to talk about it to head confrontation off before it becomes a problem.
- Interrupt politely someone who might be rambling and invite others to contribute.

## Making your support group confidential

Developing a confidentiality policy is covered in detail in the [Developing sound policies](#) section. However, confidentiality can cause great difficulties in new prisoners' families support groups, so the issue is worth repetition.

The principle of confidentiality is clear – the volunteers and workers of a prisoners' families support group do not share information told to them by family members with anyone outside the support group, except where there is a suggestion that someone might harm themselves or others, evidence of child abuse, or evidence of criminal or terrorist activities. In practice, there can be strong pressure on you to share information from four main sources:

1. Prisoners
2. Other families
3. Criminal justice professionals
4. The media

It may be helpful for those new to working in this setting to think about confidentiality before starting up. The members of the group may also need or want to know how records are kept and under which circumstances they can be viewed – e.g. by police, social workers, etc.

### Pressure from prisoners

Prisoners' families support groups are quite clearly set up to do what they say and support the families of prisoners. In many cases, the interests of the family may be identical to the interests of the prisoner. However, quite often interests may clash. A worker who has been supporting a partner who wishes to talk about a prisoner's difficult behaviour may find themselves blamed for this and can receive an angry phone call or letter asking what was said and why.

### Pressure from other families

One of the ways in which families will judge the quality of your service will be your ability to keep their information confidential. This may be particularly important if details of their lives – true or false – have

been broadcast by the media in coverage of a court case. It is not uncommon for a support group to be working with two families which are in dispute with each other. They may have family members accused or convicted of the same crime who are blaming each other or may have fallen out for other reasons. It is very important not to talk to families about each other even when they make statements which you are in a position to confirm or deny.

It is also important to remember that within a family, members may have different views and want to keep information confidential. The partner of a prisoner and his mother may well have knowledge that they do not want shared with each other.

Finally, remember that the victim of a prisoner's crime may also be a member of his or her family.

### **Pressure from criminal justice professionals**

Although criminal justice professionals – police, lawyers, probation and prison officers - are well aware of the legal status of confidentiality, this may not stop them trying to get information out of you.

The best approach in all these cases is to stick to the principle of confidentiality and refuse to tell anyone anything – good news or bad – unless you have the explicit consent of the party who told it to you, or you are asked in the course of police enquiries.

### **Pressure from the media**

Once the media are aware of your group they may be in contact – if only for general case studies for features they are covering. Valuable advice from Mediawise for family members on dealing with the media is available to download from APF's website: [www.prisonersfamilies.org.uk](http://www.prisonersfamilies.org.uk).

## **Working with other agencies, including Probation, Prisons and Children's Centres**

In order to be an effective prisoners' families support group, it is important to understand how the criminal justice system and community services work. These agencies will be a good source of referrals to your group so it would be sensible to build up a good working relationship with them.

### **Prisons**

In order to be able to guide families through the prison system, you will need a thorough knowledge of how the prison system works. The Prison Reform Trust's Prisoner Information Book gives information about the location of prisons, transport, prison rules, visiting regulations and other useful information. [http://www.hmprisonservice.gov.uk/assets/documents/10003817male&YO\\_pib\\_2008.pdf](http://www.hmprisonservice.gov.uk/assets/documents/10003817male&YO_pib_2008.pdf)

You should also find out about financial support for prison visits. The Assisted Prison Visits Unit (APVU) will send you the relevant forms and information <http://www.hmprisonservice.gov.uk/adviceandsupport/keepingintouch/assistscheme/>

### **Making Contact with the Prison**

Although the families you will be supporting may well be visiting prisons all over the country it will be worth you making links with your local prison. The key people to contact are the governor, the chaplain, the family links worker (if there is one), the chair of the Independent Monitoring Board (for more details see the section on complaints below) and the children and families lead (the person with overall responsibility in the prison for children and families). Here are some points you may want to address:

- Explaining your service
- Setting out your credentials and experience
- Sorting out lines of communication with the prison (who should you ask about visits, release dates, concerns over a prisoner's physical or emotional health)
- Publicising your service (could they put posters in the visits area or could details of your group be given out during the prisoners' induction programme)
- Finding out if the prison runs family days and how prisoners qualify for them

- What are the visiting times and procedures
- Asking about any related services in the prison – Samaritans or listeners schemes

### Visitors' Centres

Many prisons have a visitors' centre – an area just outside the prison entrance where visitors can wait, sometimes sign in for visits, and sometimes receive information and advice. They will be a very useful source of support for you and again can display any leaflets and posters and refer families to your service. To find out if a prison has a visitors' centre, check the Prison Service website: <http://www.hmprisonservice.gov.uk/>

### Complaints about the prison

It is likely that you will be asked to take up complaints about the prison by family members. This is an important part of your role, but you should take any issue up in a straightforward and calm way and be prepared to appreciate the prison's point of view. The Prison Service introduced a complaints procedure in 1999 and getting a copy of this from your local prison is a good place to start. It is important to be professional and argue a case without losing your temper. Where there are serious issues on which you and the prison cannot agree, it is often best to refer the matter and the family elsewhere to a more appropriate organisation. There are four main courses of action:

1. Suggest the family approach the Independent Monitoring Board (IMB) (every prison has such a Board made up of lay members whose job is to 'satisfy themselves as to the state of the prison premises, the administration of the prison and the treatment of prisoners'). A member of the IMB goes into the prison every day and you should be able to get a message to them by phoning the main number of the prison. <http://www.imb.gov.uk/>
2. Approach the Offenders' Families Helpline: **0808 808 2003**
3. Approach the Prison Reform Trust who have an advice service for prisoners: 020 7251 5070.
4. Suggest the family approach their local MP (they can find out who this is on [www.direct.gov.uk](http://www.direct.gov.uk))

It is important to maintain the balance between supporting your clients and keeping a good working relationship with the prison.

For more on how the prison service works, please visit: <http://www.hmprisonservice.gov.uk/> or <http://www.cjsonline.gov.uk/>

### The Probation Service

The overall goal of the probation service is to protect the public and reduce re-offending. To do this the service works with offenders aged 16 years and over at every stage of the criminal justice system, supporting offenders on community orders and on release from prison (if they are serving more than a 12 month sentence). Probation officers work with offenders to identify the reasons for their offending and to change the ways in which they think and act in order to lead fulfilling and law-abiding lives.

Probation officers do not generally have direct contact with families unless they are visiting to assess whether a home is suitable for an offender to return to after a prison sentence, or if visiting a prisoner at home as part of a community sentence.

However, there are opportunities for probation to recommend or signpost prisoners' families to support services, so it will be well worth contacting them and letting them know what support you can offer. It is also the duty of probation officers to report any concerns they have about offenders' children to social services.

For more information about how the probation service works with offenders: <http://www.probation.homeoffice.gov.uk/output/Page1.asp>  
<http://www.cjsonline.gov.uk/>

### Youth Offending Teams

Every local authority has a youth offending team which works with young people to help address their offending behaviour. They also work closely with parents of young offenders, offering parenting courses and support. Parents are legally obliged to attend these courses if they are subject to a parenting order.

Consequently, youth offending teams should have strong relationships with families and may be able to refer them to your service. For details of your local YOT see:

<http://www.yjb.gov.uk/en-gb/yjs/Youthoffendingteams/Contactdetails.htm>

For details on how YOTs work with parents and families see:

<http://www.yjb.gov.uk/en-gb/yjs/Parents/Prevention/>

## **Children's Centres**

Children's Centres support families with children from 0-5 by providing a variety of services including childcare, parenting groups, health services and help with job-seeking. They recognise prisoners' families as a vulnerable group and are encouraged to support them. They have the potential to be of enormous support to your organisation either by providing a venue for meetings, a crèche for attendees and links to other services which may be of some help to your members. They should also be able to publicise your services and refer families to your group. For more about children's centres: <http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/everychildmatters/earlyyears/surestart/surestartchildrenscentres/childrenscentres/>

## **Schools**

It is important that schools understand what your service does and how you may be able to help families. Children with a prisoner in the family are at risk of truanting or disruptive behaviour in class so school staff should be interested in any sources of support for this group. You may want to make links with the head teacher in the first instance, who may refer you to specialist staff such as learning mentors, SENCOs or parent support workers. They may be able to pass information on to families and the school could display leaflets or brochures in the reception area. There may also be the opportunity to talk about your service at staff meetings or larger regional conferences.

## **Family Intervention Projects**

Family Intervention Projects (FIPs) provide support for the most 'at risk' families in order to help them change. FIPs target families responsible for antisocial behaviour or at risk of becoming involved in crime.

FIP workers may well work with families who have a family member in prison and will be able to alert them to your group – they may even attend meetings with them. It is important that you let your local FIP team know about your service.

## **Integrated Offender Management**

This system allows criminal justice agencies, including police and probation, to share skills and resources to target the most problematic offenders in the community. This is a relatively new development and works differently in different areas, but do try to reach the IOM team in your local area and let them know about your service.

# **Getting support and supervision**

This publication has already emphasised how difficult it can be to set up a support group single-handed and the importance of organising sufficient support to share the load. When setting up a group, there are four main sources of support. If possible, you should aim to get support from all of them.

## **Sources of Support**

### **1. Support of colleagues**

The most important source of support is to ensure that there are other people prepared to undertake the work of the group with you.

### **2. Support of Action for Prisoners' Families**

Our Development Director and officers will have expertise in a wide range of areas and will be able to put you in touch directly with people who have set up prisoners' families support groups.

### **3. Support of a Committee**

If you intend to register as a charity you will need a management committee. The committee will be legally

responsible for the operation of your group. It is important that there are other people involved to help you manage the group and to whom you are accountable. This is particularly important to make sure that financial accounting and other legal requirements are adhered to. Ideally, your management committee will contain people with a mix of skills of value to your support group – for example: accounting, fund-raising, knowledge of the criminal justice system, computers, HR, etc.

#### **4. Professional supervision**

All professional workers involved in caring work receive supervision as an integral part of their practice. This is to help them plan their work, decide how to sort out difficult situations and to ensure that they air and work through concerns and emotions which working with distressed people cause. It is important that those running prisoners' families support groups have access to similar supervision. This might be provided by a committee member, a mentor, or paid for out of the organisation's funds.

## **Recording, monitoring and evaluating**

### **Recording**

Amongst all the hard work in setting up a prisoners' families support group, it is important to take some time out to ensure that you record the work you do. There are seven main reasons why recording your work is necessary:

#### **Seven Reasons for Recording your Work**

1. Recording brief details of your work on each case will enable you or other workers to keep up with events and provide a good service
2. You will have an overview of who is receiving your services and make sure no group of individuals is missing out
3. You will be able to plan future work
4. The organisation will be accountable to the management committee and any outside body
5. You will be able to prove the amount and value of work you do to put in funding applications (also to prove to funders that you are doing the work they are paying you to do)
6. You will be recording the cost of work for your financial records
7. You will be logging details of work which may be important in any investigation into a serious incident (for instance one group's records were vitally important to a death in custody inquest)

In deciding on a system for recording your work, perhaps the first decision to make is whether you use a manual or computer-based system, or both. If you use a computer system to record personal details you are required to register under the Data Protection Act [www.ico.gov.uk](http://www.ico.gov.uk).

The advantages of a manual system are that it can be quickly designed and everyone can use it. The drawbacks are that then all the recording sheets have to be collated and added together. There is nothing to stop you using hand-written sheets in the first place and then transferring totals to a simple spreadsheet programme to help in your analysis.

Groups try to limit the number of forms they fill in to a minimum. However, four main types of record are normally kept: telephone monitoring forms; log books; case records and work diaries.

### **Monitoring**

#### **Telephone monitoring forms**

It is important to record phone calls, texts, and e-mails that are received and those that are made in order for you to capture all of the work your support group undertakes. Forms should be kept by the phone and in an accessible place on-line or on a computer for e-mails, and weekly totals should be transferred to a master sheet, spreadsheet, or database. A sample form is available in the [developing sound policies](#) section and illustrates the sort of information generally collected. Some funders make requirements as to what categories of data you collect about the people you provide a service to and it is important that you gather this data for them.

## Log books

Many prisoners' families support groups keep simple log books as a way of recording useful information and exchanging it between staff. The log book normally records a brief summary of a telephone call, the action requested, information and advice given and any further action which needs to be undertaken.

## Case records

For ongoing work, it is helpful to keep a brief record of work done with each individual case. This can be particularly useful if more than one person is working with a family member and is invaluable if a serious incident arises.

## Keeping information confidential

With case records, call or e-mail details etc. you should be aware of confidentiality. You should always have a lockable cupboard or drawer to keep them in and you should have a policy regarding where and who with the key should be kept. If you are keeping them on a computer you may need to introduce a password access only to them.

A [sample case record sheet](#) adapted from one used by the Offenders' Families Helpline is reproduced in the appendices.

## Work diaries

Whilst keeping telephone monitoring logs and case records can swiftly become second nature, there may be a whole range of other sorts of activity – meetings with Governors, accompanying families to prisons, distributing posters – which it is just as important, but not so easy to record. One easy way to do this is to keep a simple diary and at the end of the month count up the hours spent on different tasks. This helps you to keep track of how much time such tasks as administration and accounts take so that you can cost them accurately when you are putting in funding applications.

## Evaluation

So far this chapter has discussed recording the work your group undertakes – the prime purpose of which is monitoring that activities do get done. However, there comes a point when it is useful to evaluate the work you do. Evaluation involves examining the quality and effectiveness of the work you do with the purpose of building on best practice and weeding out what doesn't work. The Evaluation Trust do an evaluation toolkit which you may find useful: <http://www.evaluationtrust.org/tools>

In order to evaluate your work, you need to be clear about what you are setting out to achieve. Increasingly, funding bodies and funders are wanting the organisations they support to evaluate their work. There is a growing emphasis on outcome funding which simply means being able to demonstrate your effectiveness. There is a key difference between 'outputs' and 'outcomes'.

An output is a piece of work you undertook and can easily be monitored – for instance the numbers of people advised on the telephone or who attend a lunch club. An outcome is the effect of that work and is harder to measure as it needs evaluating rather than just recording. An outcome of a piece of casework with a family might be their ability to maintain contact with a prisoner because they understand the system and are entitled to assisted visits.

Perhaps the most important way of finding out whether you are achieving your goals is to ask your customers if they are satisfied with the service you give them. In this case, your customers are clearly the families and friends of prisoners. Some prisoners' families support groups ask the family members they work with to fill in '[user feedback forms](#)'. These forms provide valuable information and give families the chance to make suggestions themselves. They also often provide welcome praise and compliments to hard-working staff and can also be used in publicity materials. Some visitors' centres also have a book for comments.

You can see an example of a [user feedback form](#) in the appendices. You could also have a postcard for users which they could fill in and send back to you by Freepost.

# Section 3

## Administration, management and staffing

### Deciding whether to register as a charity

The main advantages and disadvantages of becoming a charity are:

#### Advantages

- Exemption from most forms of direct taxation (but not all forms of VAT as is sometimes thought)
- A good public image
- Eligibility for help – particularly financial – from charitable trusts

#### Disadvantages

- Charity Commissioners (in England and Wales) have controlling powers. The Charities Act 2006 contains a definition of the requirements to qualify as a charity, the establishment of a Charity Tribunal to hear appeals from decisions of the Charity Commission, and alterations to the requirements for registering charities.
- The objects of the organisation must be exclusively charitable in the legal sense (this means that although a charity may lobby, it may not campaign)
- There are restrictions on altering the organisation's objectives and winding it up

In English law, charitable status is determined by an organisation's purposes rather than its constitutional form and a number of legal structures are acceptable provided that all the basic conditions of charitable status are met. There are three basic conditions:

1. The organisation must be established for purposes which the law regards as exclusively charitable
2. All the declared objectives of the organisation must be charitable; if only some are, the organisations will not obtain the legal status of a charity
3. The organisation must benefit the public or what the law regards as a sufficient section of the public

Registering as a charity is an important issue. In the process you establish many key matters including the legal purpose and goals of the organisation and who holds power, responsibility and accountability within the organisation.

Registration can sometimes be a relatively straightforward process taking only a few weeks although on occasions it can become complex and long-winded. Prisoners' families support groups which have registered as charities have done so in different legal forms – some have become unincorporated associations, others Societies, others still companies limited by guarantee. Some, have not gone down the charity registration route. The best advice is to get as much help as you can. Help and advice can be sought from the following sources:

- A friendly solicitor - if you or anyone else have a contact who is a solicitor and would be prepared to act for you free of charge, this is invaluable
- Council or Voluntary Service (or Volunteer Bureau) – the Director of the local CVS is likely to understand the process and may be able to offer advice and support and even legal advice
- APF can help groups go through this process and is a registered charity and a company limited by guarantee itself.
- The Charity Commission can supply a registration pack which gives all the details about registering as a charity ([www.charity-commission.gov.uk](http://www.charity-commission.gov.uk) tel: 0870 300 0218)
- The National Council of Voluntary Organisations (NCVO) has a useful web site [www.ncvo-vol.org.uk](http://www.ncvo-vol.org.uk) and runs a helpdesk which can provide briefings and advice to help you think through the key issues (Freephone 0800 2 798 798).

There are three main tasks to undertake, irrespective of what legal form of organisation you decide to become - setting up a management committee, developing a constitution and opening a bank account.

## Setting up a management committee

Members of the management committee are Charity Trustees and are responsible in law for the proper, lawful operation of the charity. Members should be selected for what they can contribute to your organisation. They should be able and willing to give time and should have experience and skills relevant to the efficient administration of the charity. You are likely to want management committee members with a range of skills including the following:

- Experience of work with families (social workers etc.)
- Experience of working within the criminal justice system (probation officers, lawyers, etc.)
- Experience of having a family member in prison
- Ability to organise accounts and financial controls
- Skills and experience in fund-raising
- Managing staff
- Legal expertise

When convening a committee, try to ensure that you have a mix of members which reflects the ethnic make up of your local community and includes men and women of different ages with different perspectives.

The committee will normally elect a Chairperson, Secretary and Treasurer from amongst its members. The details of elections and how your organisation operates until it becomes a registered charity and holds its first Annual General Meeting are covered under the constitution.

**It is important to note that the trustees of a charity must not have been convicted of an offence involving deception or dishonesty, unless that conviction is spent, under the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act.**

## Developing a constitution

A constitution sets out an organisation's objectives and how it will govern itself. The Charity Commission [www.charity-commission.gov.uk](http://www.charity-commission.gov.uk) and other bodies provide model constitutions which can be adapted to fit the needs of a specific organisation. The following are the main components of a constitution:

- Name of organisation
- Objectives
- Powers of the committee
- Membership of the committee (including appointment, length of tenure)
- Honorary officers
- Meetings and procedures
- Funds and expenditure (ensuring that funds are properly spent and controlled)
- Accounts
- Annual Report
- Annual General Meeting
- Special General Meetings
- Alterations to the Constitution
- Dissolution
- Arrangements until the first Annual General Meeting

You can look at a [sample constitution](#) in the appendices.

## Opening a bank account

It is important that a bank or building society account is opened in the name of your organisation and that all donations and contributions are paid into this account. It is recommended that all cheques drawn on this account should be signed by two members of the management committee (some funders will not consider you for a grant if you do not have two cheque signatories). Many banks and building societies offer favourable deals for charities.

In order to register as a charity, you will need to be able to prove that your organisation has received at least £1,000 in income.

## Meeting your legal obligations

This section may not apply to you as the support group you are setting up may be informal and small-scale. However, it is worth having a look at the information below just in case it does apply to your group. It may also be that your group expands and takes on a more official role where you will need to be aware of your legal obligations and compliance.

As well as being aware of what legislation you need to comply with you will also need to show that you are following that legislation by having policies and procedures, keeping records of checks, and being able to show that someone is in charge of making sure the group is compliant.

There are a number of websites which can help you with this information such as NCVO's [www.ncvo-vol.org.uk](http://www.ncvo-vol.org.uk) and Knowhownonprofit [www.knowhownonprofit.org](http://www.knowhownonprofit.org).

Your group may need to show the following:

1. if you are a charity, that you are following the document which governs you – usually a constitution or memorandum and articles.
2. if you are a charity you will need to show that you are abiding by the Charity Act and the Companies Act
3. if you are employing anyone, that you are following employment legislation
4. if you are an organisation that you are complying with the policies you should have such as data protection, confidentiality, health and safety, etc.
5. that you have relevant insurance such as employers' liability and public liability insurance which covers legal action and general risks such as fire and theft.
6. that you are maintaining accurate and secure financial records and information and complying with income tax, national insurance, other tax and VAT regulations.
7. maintaining bank accounts, loans, overdrafts and investments

### Financial accounting

New accounting and reporting rules for charities came into force on 1 March 1996. The main change was the introduction of a detailed statutory framework for preparing accounts and annual reports. The requirements placed on charities differ according to the size of their income or expenditure. Full details of the regulations are available from the Charity Commission [www.charity-commission.gov.uk](http://www.charity-commission.gov.uk)

### Employment legislation

If your organisation is employing people you must comply with employment legislation. This would mean:

- providing employment contracts for employees and providing the 'terms of engagement' for non employees such as volunteers, consultants and contractors
- developing employment procedures such as disciplinary and grievance procedures, holiday and sickness pay and leave, health and safety.
- implementing equal opportunities law so that you do not infringe people's rights with regard to age, gender, race, religion or belief, disability or sexual orientation.

## Advice on keeping accounts

The Charity Commission also provides pointers on keeping accounts:

- Maintain accurate records for each of your charity's funds to show all transactions especially money received and paid
- Keep details of what your charity owns, is owed and what it owes i.e. its assets and liabilities.
- The Charity Commission website [www.charity-commission.gov.uk](http://www.charity-commission.gov.uk) explains exactly what you need to do to prepare your accounts
- Estimate small amounts, difficult to obtain exactly, for inclusion in the accounts.
- Keep your books up to date and on a regular basis so that the year end is not a major hurdle.

Perhaps the most important advice is to **ensure that your treasurer is someone with skills and experience in financial accounting.**

Finally, many organisations have drawn up a clear framework governing their handling of money and setting out clearly which members of staff are authorised to make specific payments in defined circumstances. The most important guiding principle is that there should always be two signatories on any cheque and that the payee should never be the same as one of the signatories.

## Insurance

A new prisoners' families support group is likely to need insurance the same as any new business. There are four main areas to consider:

- Insurance protecting premises from burglary or accidental damage
- car insurance – ensuring that coverage extends to families you may be driving to visits
- Public liability – mainly if you have premises, to safeguard you from anyone who has an accident on your premises and sues you
- Professional indemnity – if you advise someone on a course of action and they sue you for what they consider to be wrong advice

Not all support groups will need all these forms of cover. The National Council for Voluntary Organisations [www.ncvo.org.uk](http://www.ncvo.org.uk) should be able to advise you and may be able to suggest companies which have competitive rates for charities.

## Data protection

If your prisoners' families support group holds or controls personal data on computer, you must register with the Data Protection Registrar under the terms of the Data Protection Act 1998. Many websites provide toolkits where you can work out the level of compliance and registration required of your organisation. Try: [www.businesslink.gov.uk](http://www.businesslink.gov.uk) or [www.ico.gov.uk](http://www.ico.gov.uk) (the Information Commissioner's Office).

## Health and safety

Any organisation employing staff, recruiting volunteers or dealing with the public, as well as providing facilities, equipment or premises, needs to develop a health and safety policy and procedures.

The regulations included in the Health and Safety Act 1974 are mainly only enforceable on organisations which have five employees or more. The Act aims to protect not only people at work but also the health and safety of the general public who may be affected by work activities. In law the duties of an employer are:

- To provide a safe system of work
- To provide safe access and exit
- To provide appropriate training and instruction
- To provide a safe place of work

Perhaps the most important health and safety consideration for most prisoners' families support groups is the safety of staff or volunteers visiting families in their own homes. You may find [these guidelines](#) reproduced by kind permission of the Prisoners' Families and Friends Service helpful.

## Developing sound policies

The number of practical tasks involved in setting up and running a prisoners' families support group can be overwhelming. Although it may not seem the most urgent task, the development of a solid policy base is extremely important if the group is to offer a consistently high standard of service to family members, and if family members and staff (both paid and voluntary) are to feel they are being treated fairly. The development of policies enables both experienced and inexperienced staff to operate within clear guidelines when dilemmas arise. This can be very helpful since policies are (or should be) formulated without the immediate and pressing concerns around when a problem occurs. They offer an approach which is based on the objectively considered responsibilities of all concerned rather than the emotive pressures of a crisis.

The process of establishing a policy to which all staff members contribute is as important as the policy itself. There is little point in writing a policy and then filing it away. A good policy should inform the way in which an organisation works. This section covers four policy areas which are particularly important to prisoners' families support groups:

- Child protection
- Confidentiality
- Equal opportunities
- Media relations

### Child protection

At the end of every inquiry into why a child has been killed, one of the findings is always that different agencies did not co-operate and share information appropriately. The purpose of a child protection policy is to ensure that staff know whether, how and to whom they should share concerns about a child's well-being.

There are many types of child abuse - physical and sexual abuse, neglect and emotional abuse - and there are abusers in every section of society. This is not a new problem. Abuse of children has always occurred, the only difference now is that society is better informed, and therefore more concerned about it.

The development of the Children Act 1989 has been central to the recognition of and value given to children and their welfare. The Act provides a framework for handling all legal matters relating to children. It pulls together a whole range of legislation and creates a unified system for dealing with the welfare of children in a variety of settings. The Children Act 2004 enshrined the duty to protect children which was introduced in the 1989 Act.

It is important for your group to contact the area social services department to obtain a copy of their local guidance on child protection as they have statutory powers and are the guardians of any child protection process in law. Once this is obtained a policy and procedure can be drafted which includes:

- Principles - which are informed by your values/beliefs
- A policy - which provides overarching statements about why and how you have a responsibility to protect children, e.g. statements on safeguarding the welfare of children, roles and responsibilities, relationships to other inter-agency procedures, and implementation.
- The child protection procedures - which describe the practice to be followed in order to carry out the intentions of the policy, e.g. the recognition of abuse and neglect, the response to child abuse/ the referral process, the process of protecting children, perhaps with useful examples to aid staff and volunteers in their management of the process.
- Guidance - which gives information about aspects of implementing the child protection policy and procedures, e.g. working with different age groups, signs and indicators of abuse or concern and child protection case conferences.
- An action checklist to follow where abuse is suspected provides staff with an easy reference to the steps they should be taking, while referring to the child protection guidelines the group should have for more in depth guidance. An example of an action checklist might look like this:

#### A. In an Emergency

- Have I contacted Social Services or the Police?

- Have I contacted my line manager/management committee?
- Have I written down what happened?
- Have I made arrangements to tell the child's parents or carers unless there are powerful reasons not to?

### **B. When Other Incidents of Child Abuse Happen**

- Have I told my line manager/management committee?
- In their absence, and if I think a child is at risk, have I contacted Social Services?
- Have I told the child's parents what my concerns are, and what I intend to, or have done?
- Have I written down what happened?

### **C. When you have general concerns about the well-being of a child**

- Have you shared these concerns with your line manager/management committee and other staff?
- Have you discussed your concerns with the child's parents or carers?
- Have you written down your concerns?
- If concerns have built up over time, have you ensured that your records have been looked at in detail by your line manager?

An example of the Ormiston Children and Families Trust child protection policy is included in the appendices.

### **Confidentiality**

The importance of confidentiality as the life-blood of any prisoners' families support group has already been discussed in a previous section. No family member is likely to want to talk about personal issues if they feel they may be repeated to others. Most prisoners' families support groups operate on the basis that information received from users of the service is treated as confidential.

However, it is very important for that general assumption to be backed by a policy which details the limits of that confidentiality and the circumstances in which it may be breached. A useful starting point might be that all personal information received by staff is treated as confidential unless a life is endangered or a child is at risk.

A confidentiality policy should allow for the appropriate sharing of information within the staff team and with supervisors or Management Committee members when appropriate. Appropriate sharing of information needs to be carefully described in any policy. In general, information should only be passed on where necessary and it may be useful to give real life examples of when this might be the case.

An example confidentiality policy is reproduced in the Appendices.

### **Equality and Diversity**

Equality issues are central to any work with people and therefore need to be integrated into everyday practice. Individuals as well as groups of people in our society are discriminated against as a result of a particular prejudice. The criminal justice system can magnify discrimination and the treatment of black people is well documented. Black people are over-represented at every stage in the criminal justice system where they are accused or convicted of committing crimes. They are under-represented in most professions and jobs within the criminal justice system. According to the Bromley Briefing, published in July 2010, on 30 June 2009 just under 22% of the prison population – 22,292 prisoners was from a minority ethnic group.

The Equality Act came into effect on 1 October 2010. It is the most significant piece of equality legislation to be introduced for many years. It is there to strengthen protection, advance equality and simplify the law. Ninety per cent of the act came into force on 1 October 2010. The rest of it includes Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED), which comes into effect in April 2011. The Equality Act brings together, and significantly adds to and strengthens, a number of previous existing pieces of legislation, including race and disability. One of the key changes is that it extends the protected characteristics to encompass:

Age, disability, gender, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation.

The Act also makes explicit the concept of ‘dual discrimination’, where someone may be discriminated against or treated unfairly on the basis of a combination of two or the protected characteristics.

Equal opportunities policies normally cover two main subject areas: employment practices – ensuring that all members of society have an equal opportunity to gain work (paid or unpaid) at your organisation – and service delivery – ensuring that all members of society receive an equal service which meets their needs irrespective of age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation. It is important to emphasise that ‘equal’ does not mean ‘the same’. A service might be delivered very differently to a young muslim woman than to an older white British man. The important thing is that the service is of the same quality and is tailored to their needs. Recent changes in the law mean you can now be prosecuted for ignoring discrimination as well as being involved in discrimination. You may find these websites useful: [www.idea.gov.uk](http://www.idea.gov.uk) and the Equality and Human Rights Commission website: [www.equalityhumanrights.com](http://www.equalityhumanrights.com)

The Equal Opportunities Policy of the Partners of Prisoners and Families Support Group (POPS) is reproduced in the appendices as an example.

### **Media Relations**

Relations with the media for prisoners’ families support groups can be very difficult to manage. On the one hand, contact with the media brings the opportunity to highlight the much neglected and ignored needs of prisoners’ families. On the other hand, too often press, social networking, TV and radio are merely looking for an extra comment to go with a sensationalist prison life or crime story. You will find guidance by Media Wise, taken from an APF forum, on our website: [www.prisonersfamilies.org.uk](http://www.prisonersfamilies.org.uk)

Perhaps the most frequent request made to prisoners’ families support groups by media groups is to provide access to family members for interview for an article or show. In these cases it is best to find out as much as possible about the piece. If it seems honourable and you have heard of the newspaper/show and respect it, you might then decide to discuss the matter with some family members - advising them to be cautious – particularly about giving out their contact details - and not pressuring them in any way to participate.

There are a number of useful tips learnt by other prisoners’ families support groups in their dealings with the media which are worth remembering.

### **Eight tips for dealing with the media**

1. Designate one member of staff or committee member to handle all media calls.
2. Always find out as much as possible about the article or show – when will it be published/shown, what is the format, who else is being interviewed.
3. If possible try to find out what ‘angle’ the piece will be taking – will it be sensationalist or aggressive in tone?
4. If the piece seems responsible, give yourself time to think about it before agreeing to participate.
5. Ask for approval of anything written before it is sent out.
6. Don’t expect to be told the whole truth.
7. Under no circumstances, give out the names or contact details of family members.
8. If family members agree to participate, support them and advise them not to give out home phone numbers or addresses.

A model media policy is given as an example in the appendices.

If you feel that your organisation or a family member has been misrepresented in the media and you wish to complain, Presswise [www.mediawise.org.uk](http://www.mediawise.org.uk) tel: 0117 93 99 333 [info@mediawise.org.uk](mailto:info@mediawise.org.uk) is an extremely helpful organisation to approach.

## Conclusion

Perhaps the most important thing to remember about policy development is that it is an ongoing process. Policies should be reviewed regularly, certainly yearly, for the following main reasons:

- To ensure that the organisation is observing them and is not going to be prosecuted
- To make any changes to reflect new legislation or guidance
- To make any changes to reflect changes in the organisation

## Staffing

This section is intended to provide prisoners' families support groups with advice on establishing good HR (human relations) practice. It covers the main areas associated with managing paid workers and volunteers:

- Recruitment
- Training, support and supervision
- Appraisal
- Disciplinary and grievance procedures

### Recruitment

The recruitment of paid employees and the recruitment of volunteers are very different.

#### Recruitment timetable for paid staff

The first step is to draw up a recruitment timetable. It is advisable to allow about three weeks between the publication of the advertisement and the closing date. Set a shortlisting day as soon as possible after that and an interview date at least a week after the shortlisting. Job applicants find it helpful for the interview date to be included in the advertisement or job details so that they can keep the day free if they are shortlisted. In general all the people conducting the interviews should also be involved in the shortlisting.

### Advertising

When deciding where to place job advertisements it is important to think about who you are trying to reach as well as the costs involved. It might be worth contacting other prisoners' families support groups or other agencies employing similar staff to find out what they have done. You will need to think about whether to advertise in a national or local paper, by e-mail, on web sites, use of the minority ethnic press, or whether to advertise the post in local Job Centres. A number of prisoners' families support groups volunteers have subsequently become paid members of staff.

Advertisements should not be too long, but should give a little information about the nature of the work, the essential qualities you are looking for, the salary, closing date, interview date if possible, and whether application is by e-mail, on-line, or letter. It should also include an e-mail address, web site, or phone number from which a job description and/or person spec can be obtained. The majority of the information will be sent out electronically, which saves you a lot of time.

A job pack should include the following:

- A job description
- A person specification
- An equal opportunities monitoring form
- A letter containing clear information about the closing date and e-mail or postal address to which applications should be sent

Job descriptions may need to include a little background about the aims and functions of your support group, and should provide a clear outline of each of the tasks the staff member will be expected to perform, their responsibilities and lines of accountability or management. The conditions of service (hours of work, starting salary and holiday entitlement) should also be included.

The person specification details the qualifications, skills and experience you want applicants to have. They are usually split into two parts - essential and desirable attributes. When deciding what qualities you regard as essential it is useful to look through the job description.

Equal opportunities monitoring forms should be separate from the application form and should not include the applicant's name. Their purpose is to ensure that a cross section of people are applying for the post. Analysis of data from the forms should indicate whether the post has been advertised in such a way that it is widely accessible and that no unintended bias in relation to gender, race etc. has been suggested by the wording of the advertisement or job details.

You can look at a [sample equal opportunities monitoring form](#) in the appendices.

The covering letter should ask applicants to demonstrate their ability to do the job by stating how they meet the criteria stated in the person specification. It should also ask applicants to provide two references.

### **Shortlisting**

The person specification should form the basis for shortlisting, so that those interviewed are the applicants who meet those requirements most closely. Normal practice is to give a score for each criterion in the person specification according to how important a quality it is for the new post-holder. It is then a simple matter of adding up each applicant's scores and interviewing those that score highest.

### **Interviewing**

You may want to decide in advance how many people you intend to interview, and whether all interviews are to be conducted on one day (which makes it easier to compare interviewees). In general it is realistic to interview a maximum of about six applicants if all the interviews are to be held on one day.

It may be helpful to draw up a list of interview questions at the shortlisting meeting. To offer each candidate an equal chance, the questions need to be the same for each and should be designed in such a way that they give candidates a chance to demonstrate to you how they have used the skills you require in their previous work or other parts of their life.

It is in your interest to offer interviewees the best opportunity to present themselves to you. Thought should be given to the layout of the room, to the way in which members of the interviewing panel are introduced and by whom, and to issues such as the payment of expenses to people attending for interview.

It may be helpful to start with a relatively easy question to put candidates at their ease, so 'Can you tell us a little about your present/last job' might be a good starting point. Most interviewees are likely to have questions for the interviewing panel about conditions of service, the job, or the process of letting interviewees know the result of the interviews. You will probably find it useful to ask if they have any questions at the end of the interview and should have decided beforehand how you will let all interviewees know whether they have been successful.

In the interviews a similar marking system to that used in shortlisting can be employed. Candidates can be scored on each of the questions. It might be helpful for each panel member to use a fresh piece of paper for each candidate so that there is space for comments which can be used to help make the decision and when offering feedback after the interviews.

When coming to your decision it may be helpful to decide whether you would be prepared to offer the job to the person who comes second if the first choice refuses it. The kindest conclusion to an interview day is probably a phone call to each interviewee telling them how they have fared. You should make it clear to the successful candidate that the job offer is subject to receipt of satisfactory references.

All candidates might find the offer of feedback (probably the next day or at another time) helpful. As well as a phone call to the successful applicant, a letter should be sent formally offering the job (subject to satisfactory references) and confirming the job title, salary, hours of work, holiday entitlement and starting date if it has been negotiated. The letter should ask for a written reply confirming acceptance. This forms part of the contract of employment until a full contract is provided.

## Recruitment of volunteers

The process for recruiting volunteers is similar to that of recruiting paid staff. It is useful to draw up a task list (the equivalent of a job description) and a person specification. However, advertising and interviewing are different.

## Advertising

There are a number of different places to advertise for volunteers including the following:

- Posters in local community centres and libraries
- On community websites, e-bulletins and those of community and voluntary organisations
- Local media – perhaps combined with an article on the work that you do
- Local volunteer bureaux
- Talking to local community workers to get them to spread the word that you are looking for new volunteers
- National press
- Approaching your local Job Centre Plus to see if they are interested in developing a volunteering option with you .

## Interviewing

Before you start to interview volunteers you will need to:

- Decide what hours you will need to cover with volunteers
- Decide who and how many people will conduct the interviews (remember that some potential volunteers may not have attended an interview for many years and may be easily intimidated by the situation)
- Draw up a list of questions relating to the person specification and task description in line with your equal opportunities policy. It is important to ask each volunteer the same questions.
- Allow 15-20 minutes per interview

The interview is your opportunity to assess the volunteer's suitability. Although you may feel that you would like to offer the individual a chance, the needs of the support group and its users must be the prime concern. It is important to confirm that the volunteer has an understanding of the support group and what it is doing. Questions should be worded in an open ended way to give you the chance to find out what the volunteer has to offer. You will need to give the volunteer a chance to ask questions. You will also need to make the support group's expectations of volunteers very clear. These are likely to include:

- Commitment
- A non-judgemental approach
- The ability to maintain appropriate professional limits to relationships with family members and other workers
- The ability to work as a member of a team
- A willingness to undertake the tasks asked of them (i.e. pleasant and less pleasant)

If the volunteer seems generally satisfactory s/he should be invited in for a short trial period to start with. Time should then be set aside to review the situation when the trial period is over. Some volunteers may be quite intimidated by the prospect of working with prisoners' families and may need to explore their fears about any danger they envisage. In general good volunteers are likely to have a positive attitude to the work of the support group, be willing to learn new skills and adapt existing skills, and be prepared to offer a regular commitment.

You should also point out what your support group has to offer volunteers. This may include training and work experience, references if appropriate, travel expenses and possibly a midday meal if the volunteer works all day.

## Training, support and supervision

The quality of your training, support and supervision will have the biggest impact on the quality of work

undertaken by all staff. Although the approach will be different for paid employees and volunteers, the principles remain the same.

## Training

Training should start the minute your new member of staff walks through the door on their first day. An induction process is very important for two key reasons:

1. It demonstrates to staff that they are valued and important
2. It enables you to set out clearly the values and ways of working of your support group so that new staff become part of your team and not just another set of hands doing things in their own way

An induction process should include:

- Being introduced to all members of staff and having time to talk with them and learn about their work
- Accompanying and observing some members of staff at work
- Reading relevant literature and policies
- Visiting other agencies with whom your support group works
- A clear timetable for the first week at least

At a first supervision session (see below), it will be important to review a new staff member's knowledge and experience and identify any training needs. Most prisoners' families support groups who employ a number of volunteers have developed their own volunteer training packages – it is well worth asking Action for Prisoners' Families to put you in touch with groups that have already done this.

In addition to any training that your organisation provides or pays for, you could get in touch with Action for Prisoners' Families ([www.prisonersfamilies.org.uk](http://www.prisonersfamilies.org.uk)) which runs regular forums and training sessions, or your local probation service to see if they will allow workers to attend their training courses for free or at a reduced price. Such courses as: dealing with aggression, health and safety at work and basic drug and alcohol courses are all highly relevant. NCVO (national council for voluntary organisations) [www.ncvo-vol.org.uk](http://www.ncvo-vol.org.uk) may also know of subsidised training events.

## Support and supervision

It is important to separate out these two aspects of staff management. Support at work is an ongoing need and can be provided by a manager and team members. It may be useful to pair up a new member of staff with an established worker. It is important to be pro-active in checking up how a new worker gets on in her/his first experiences of different tasks.

Supervision is altogether a more formal and focused exercise and should take place on a regular basis – certainly not less than monthly. A clear agenda should be set and the following topics are common:

- Monitoring the amount of work done
- Evaluating the quality of work done – case discussions are often used here
- Identifying problems and barriers and seeking solutions
- Setting clear targets and expectations
- Reviewing any training or support needs

If a manager feels that a member of staff is not performing to the standard expected, the supervision session is the right place to raise this issue and look for reasons and solutions.

## Appraisal

An appraisal system is used as a way of reviewing the work of individual members of staff. It is used to foster personal and professional development and for highlighting any problems. Appraisals are normally undertaken on a yearly basis and look back on work over the year and set targets for the new year. The system normally works as follows:

- Both staff and manager fill in an appraisal form reviewing an individual's progress
- They exchange completed forms before an appraisal meeting
- They meet to discuss the forms
- The manager writes an appraisal report identifying strengths, weaknesses, strategies to identify weaknesses and work targets

Click here to see a [sample appraisal form](#).

### **Disciplinary and grievance procedures**

Disciplinary and grievance procedures are opposite sides of the same coin. Employees are disciplined if their conduct or performance does not meet acceptable standards. Employees may also take out a grievance if they feel their manager or the organisation as a whole is not treating them fairly.

Although it is right that as many issues as possible should be resolved informally without recourse to these procedures, there are times when it is important to take formal action in the interests of the support group and to ensure that all employees receive consistent and fair treatment.

You can look at a [sample disciplinary and grievance procedure](#) in the appendices section.

# Appendices

Our thanks to all our members who have so kindly allowed us to use their model policies with the proviso that at some stage they may be updated and that you should check with them first before using the policies, which were up-to-date at the time of publication.

## Model child protection policy

### Ormiston Children and Families Trust

#### Introduction

All of Ormiston's projects in East Anglia are working to promote the well-being of children. We do this in many ways through the provision of sport and play opportunities, promoting good visiting experiences for children with a parent in prison and through support and counselling to carers and parents.

Promoting the well-being of all children means all our actions must take account of children's best interests and that we must ensure that children are protected from all forms of maltreatment.

Our work involves extensive contact with children and inevitably some will be in need of protection. In these situations we all have a clear responsibility to act. This Policy sets out what each worker within Ormiston must do in those situations.

It is not Ormiston's role to investigate child abuse. We are, however, all responsible for taking action when we recognise that children may be experiencing harm or abuse. This Policy sets out for all workers within Ormiston projects what each person must do in situations where children may need protection.

#### The advocate role of the Ormiston Trust

Ormiston's Mission Statement states that we will challenge and work to remove barriers which block children's health development and growth by drawing attention, both privately and publicly, to areas where the systems fail children, both individually and collectively.

Some child protection issues prompt great public attention and debate, while other areas may have been inadequately addressed.

Ormiston projects often witness distress and suffering among children to which statutory bodies are not obliged and/or do not have the capacity to respond-this may, for example, be currently true of many children who experience emotional abuse.

While this Policy largely concentrates on ensuring that Ormiston procedures comply with current legal and regulatory frameworks, we also have a responsibility to monitor and raise awareness of situations where we believe children need protection when it is not available to them. In particular, Project Leaders are asked to ensure that records are kept of all situations where it is felt inadequate protection is available to children who need it and to draw the attention of the Director/Operations Manager to these issues.

#### Responsibilities:

##### Responsibility of the Individual:

All Ormiston personnel (paid and voluntary) have a responsibility to take action when they believe that a child may be experiencing harm or abuse.

All Ormiston personnel (paid and voluntary) must abide by the contents and procedures set out in this document.

All Ormiston personnel (paid and voluntary) must understand how this policy affects them, and the Procedures which they must follow according to their position in the organisation.

### **Notes for Project Leaders/Senior Managers:**

In addition to the above you have a responsibility to ensure that:

- workers are adequately equipped and supported to put this Policy into practice and that child protection matters are given the highest priority.
- you are aware of the detail of the regulatory framework for child protection within the relevant county as outlined in its Child Protection Guidelines, and ensure that other staff are broadly aware of these requirements, as appropriate.
- Ormiston's Child Protection Policy and best practice guidelines are made known to all agencies with whom we are working.
- that records are kept of all situations where it is felt inadequate protection is available to children who need it and to draw the attention of the Director/Operations Manager to these issues

**The Director and Operations Manager** are responsible for the overall implementation of this Policy and for ensuring that all Ormiston personnel have access to training and other developmental opportunities which will enable them to address child protection matters competently.

### **Information Sharing:**

#### **Confidentiality**

In the area of child protection the degree of confidentiality will be governed by the need to protect the child. Whilst in normal circumstances all information held within Ormiston about children will be treated as confidential, it must be made clear to all concerned that confidentiality may not be maintained if the withholding of information will prejudice the welfare of the child.

#### **Parents and Carers**

All Ormiston projects seek to work openly with parents and carers and to build relationships within which the development and well-being of children are regularly discussed. Within these continuing relationships parents should also be consulted whenever any concern about a child arises and informed of any action being proposed.

This policy requires parents and carers to be kept informed of concerns unless there are compelling grounds for believing that the outcome would be detrimental to a child.

All parents/carers must be informed that projects work within this Child Protection Policy and copies must be made available on request.

#### **Agencies and Third Parties**

Information from other agencies will remain restricted unless permission has been gained to do otherwise. The only exception is where to do so would directly threaten the safety of a child.

Any Ormiston worker receiving third party information must make it clear to that party that they cannot guarantee confidentiality if doing so would be detrimental to a child.

#### **Record Keeping**

The Children Act 1989 makes it a requirement that every agency which works with children has a policy on record keeping and that this should include giving all parents and children access to their records.

Within Ormiston record keeping is a method of ensuring good practice; it ensures that information is accessible to all appropriate parties.

Some Projects will, in the normal course of events, already keep records about children's attendance. Whenever a child is left unaccompanied a consent form must be completed which includes the minimum information necessary for staff to act in loco parentis.

Parents/carers should be told that recorded information is available to them. The only exception is where the sharing of specific information would be detrimental to the child, and a restriction may be agreed with senior managers.

Whenever there is a concern about the well-being of a child a record must be kept. It is important that the following points are adhered to:

- all records should be of a factual nature
- any opinions recorded must be clearly stated to be opinions and not facts
- no comment must be made on the views of other professionals involved.

The record should include the following:

- source and nature of information received, if applicable
- details of the concern/incident
- situation in which concern/incident occurred
- the date, place, time, those present
- advice/consultation taken and from whom
- action taken
- follow-up action agreed
- date and author of report

### **Procedures:**

**NO ORMISTON WORKER SHOULD ACT ALONE ON A CHILD PROTECTION ISSUE, UNLESS THE SITUATION IS LIFE-THREATENING.**

In the normal course of events concerns and issues about the well-being of individual children, e.g. relating to their health, development, behaviour or protection, will be discussed in supervision and in team meetings.

Project Leaders/Managers must ensure that adequate opportunity is made available to all workers to bring forward concerns about children's issues.

In the absence of their manager all workers should use the Managerial Support Line, the final decision about required action will be that of the person on-call.

### **When concerns do arise the following procedures must be strictly adhered to:**

When a worker has a general concern about the well-being of a child they must:

1. share the concern with their manager, with whom a decision about how to act must be made
2. agree how the concerns and action will be shared with the parent/carer except when it may be contrary to the best interests of the child to do so.
3. make a written record of all necessary details
4. the Project Leader/Manager must ensure that the concern is shared with appropriate colleagues

Where there are continuing concerns about a child's well-being they must:

1. regularly review the situation, at predetermined intervals, with the Project Leader/Manager.
2. agree an action plan. This may include the following:
  - continued observation
  - consultation With colleagues from other agencies
  - expression of concern to be kept on file
  - formal referral to an agency with statutory responsibilities
3. where there is uncertainty or disagreement about how to act the situation must be discussed with the Director, Operations Manager, or Management Support Line contact. The final decision rests with the senior manager involved.
4. agree how the concerns and action will be shared with the parent/carer except when it may be contrary to the best interests of the child to do so.
5. make a written record of all necessary details
6. the Project Leader/Manager must ensure that the concern is shared with appropriate colleagues

**When an incident occurs which causes a worker concern about the immediate well-being of a child they must:**

1. immediately inform the Project Leader/Manager
2. after careful consideration and consultation, agree an action plan. This may include the following:
  - consultation with colleagues from other agencies
  - expression of concern to be kept on file
  - formal referral to an agency with statutory responsibilities
3. where there is uncertainty or disagreement about how to act the situation must be discussed with the Director, Operations Manager, or Management Support Line contact. The final decision rests with the senior manager involved.
4. agree how the concerns and action taken will be shared with the parent/carer except when it may be contrary to the best interests of the child to do so.
5. make a written record of all necessary details

**NO ORMISTON WORKER SHOULD ACT ALONE ON A CHILD PROTECTION ISSUE, UNLESS THE SITUATION IS LIFE-THREATENING.**

# Model confidentiality policy

The XXXX recognises that confidentiality is of the utmost importance to its users, and is therefore essential to its effective running.

This policy is based on the principle that the user's interests, wishes and rights are of fundamental importance. Anyone using the services has the right to be confident that:

- information they give will only be used for the purpose for which it has been disclosed and will not be shared with anyone outside the group without the express consent of the user.
- every effort will be made to ensure that any records are kept in such a way that individual users are not easily identified, and all records will be securely stored.

Information received by the group will be treated as confidential. Where the group wishes, or has been requested to disclose information to a third party then the full and informed consent of the user will be requested. The user has the right to withhold consent, either with regard to a specific piece of information, or a specific agency, or more generally. If consent is withheld then information will not be shared with a third party, except in exceptional circumstances.

In some cases users will provide the agency with information in the expectation that it will be shared outside the agency, for example in the form of a referral. Nevertheless it will still be made clear to the user what information will be passed on and who will receive it.

## Statement of the Limits of the Confidentiality Offered

Information about the group's users is confidential to the group as a whole and not to individual workers.

The group does not offer a policy of absolute confidentiality. There are three main exceptions to the requirement to maintain confidentiality. These are:

- 1) When the information given raises a concern about the safety of the group's user or anyone else.
- 2) When instructed by the courts, or in certain circumstances by the police, to reveal information.
- 3) When there is a concern about the safeguarding of children, or vulnerable adults.

## Sharing information with the group

There is an expectation that certain information will be passed between group workers. Information about group users is confidential to the group as a whole, and not to individual workers.

Whilst it is essential that all workers within the group understand and support the Confidentiality Policy and accept responsibility for the security of the information they encounter, this does not mean that all workers have equal access to confidential information. Normally information will be shared on a 'need to know' basis, and good practice will limit to a minimum the sharing of information within the group. Discussion of group users must always be purposeful and sensitive.

It is important that all staff have a clear understanding of how the principles of confidentiality are embodied in practice. In order to safeguard user confidentiality the group will take reasonable practicable steps through training and instruction of staff, together with administrative arrangements, to prevent disclosure of confidential information.

It is the responsibility of the worker to ensure that group users understand the confidentiality procedures which apply at all stages of their contact with the group.

All staff whether paid employees, students, external, supervisors or volunteers, will be required to sign a confidentiality contract. Anyone working for or with the group who breaches the contract will be liable to

disciplinary action under the Staff Disciplinary Procedure.

## Sharing information outside the group

When a group user asks or agrees to referral to another agency, the group may make an initial contact and need to share some information. Obviously this is a situation where the user has given consent to the sharing of information. It is, however, essential that the user is clear how much information is being disclosed and to whom. The worker has an obligation to ensure that the user is clear about the consequences of disclosure.

## Employment Practice

A Confidentiality Policy is fundamental to the effective operation of the group. It is essential that all staff members fully understand and support the Confidentiality Policy and are aware of its limits. The group will ensure that:

- Staff are properly trained and competent to receive confidential information and deal with issues raised
- Staff induction involves familiarisation with the group's Confidentiality Policy
- Staff receive training and support in its implementation throughout their employment with the group

This will involve instruction in areas such as:

details of group policy

- communicating the policy to group users
- safe storage of data
- procedures for note-taking
- dealing with telephone enquiries, letters and e-mails
- procedures for breach of confidentiality

Staff are required not to discuss group users outside any of the group's offices or otherwise act in a manner which threatens an individual's confidentiality. Within the group offices and Visitors' Centres all discussion of users should be purposeful and not trivialising.

## Breach of Confidentiality

If it appears that confidentiality will have to be breached, the workers will make every effort to discuss the situation with the group user (unless it seems to the worker that it would make the situation worse), thus encouraging the user to take responsibility for contacting the relevant authorities. Should the user decide to disclose the required information then no breach of confidentiality will have taken place.

If the user is unwilling to take action, the decision to breach confidentiality will be taken by more than one person wherever possible. The worker proposing the breach will consult with Chair of the Management Committee or other Management Committee member if this is feasible.

Any breach of confidentiality will be minimised by restricting the information conveyed to that which is relevant to the immediate situation.

A careful note of the circumstances will be made as part of the record of the incident. The note must show:

- the extent of the disclosure
- to whom it was made
- who was consulted beforehand
- whether the group user was informed and if so, how and when

If a group user feels that their right to confidentiality was not respected by the Society then they have a right to invoke the Complaints Procedure. They may also be able to bring legal action.

Group users who wish to complain about a possible breach of confidentiality should not feel that this puts at risk the service that the group is offering them.

### **STATEMENT OF CONFIDENTIALITY**

As member of staff/student/volunteer/external supervisor/mentor at the group you are likely to have access to confidential information during your work here. Families/friends and visitors may describe details of their own and the prisoner’s lives. At the group we take our commitment to providing a confidential service very seriously, and so you are required to sign this confidentiality agreement.

Name .....

Address .....

.....

I understand that my work with the group involves working with confidential information.

I agree that I will not divulge information concerning any group member to any other group member or to anyone outside the group’s offices unless authorised to do so. This authority would come only from the person sharing the confidence or from senior staff or management committee members of the group.

Signed ..... Date .....

# Model equal opportunities policy

## PARTNERS OF PRISONERS AND FAMILIES SUPPORT GROUP (POPS)

### EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES POLICY

At POPS we are committed to promoting equality of opportunities for all staff, volunteers and visitors using the service.

We believe that no individual or family should be excluded from using our services on the grounds of age, gender, race, nationality, family status, sexuality, disability, culture, religion or lifestyle.

We aim to ensure that all those who wish to work in, or volunteer to help with our work have an equal chance to do so.

#### **Employment Procedures**

We will translate our policy into practice by -

- Appointing the best person for each job, treating fairly all people who apply and those appointed.
- Ensuring no applicant is discriminated against on the grounds stated in the policy.
- Ensuring that each member of staff appointed and volunteer recruited are committed to implementing the organisation's equal opportunities policy which will form part of their job description/person specification.

#### **Children and their families and other users of our services**

We will put our policy into practice by:

- Accepting that prisoners' families face discrimination and poverty as a result of their family circumstances. POPS must ensure that services and activities offered are at no cost or minimal charge.
- Respecting the individuality of visitors to POPS Drop-In and valuing their culture, lifestyle and experiences through provision of equipment and materials that reflect their background and cultural identity, promote their gender in a positive way and encourage an appreciation of the rich diversity of our society.
- Recognising that many different types of families make up society and reflecting this in any publicity or promotional material produced.
- Providing any opportunities for individuals to participate actively in the development of POPS and to influence policy and practice.
- Supporting individuals, children and adults in finding a voice to express their feelings and concerns.

## Model media policy - Pact

The main aim of having a media policy at pact is to ensure that we provide open and accurate information on request to the media without any unnecessary delay, where it is appropriate for us to comment. It is imperative that we deal professionally with the media. If we are professional in our dealings with the media, they are more likely to give us the 'benefit of the doubt' on controversial/emotive issues.

There are a number of different ways that journalists may become aware of information that is of media interest and they may well ring or e-mail pact asking questions, looking for a quote etc, or they may wander into a Visitors' Centre/CASS Office. It is essential that these enquiries are dealt with professionally - a mis-quote or wrong information being given out can be potentially very damaging to the charity.

### Who handles press calls or direct approaches from the media?

The following post holders will be designated as the only people in pact who will handle media enquiries or calls:

• Director - Andy Keen Downs

Mobile: xxxxxxxx e-mail: • Head of Supporter Relations - Angela Grimes, e-mail xxxxx • Communications Manager - Stephen Nash, e-mail xxxxx • PA to the Director - Sophie Newman, e-mail xxxxx.

At pact Visitors' Centres or CASS offices, if you are phoned, faxed or e-mailed by a journalist, or if a journalist comes into your centre or office, you must direct them to one of the designated pact personnel listed above or inform the Prison's/Court's Media Liaison contact.

If none of these people are available, be careful to avoid making any personal comment or comment on behalf of pact, but do make sure that you get as much information from them as possible. Here are some tips on handling enquiries:

#### *By phone*

'pact's spokesperson is unavailable at the moment - could I take your details and get them to contact you when they are free?'

'The Prison/Court Media Liaison person is unavailable at the moment - could I take your details and get them to contact you when they are free?'

#### *By fax or e-mail:*

'Thank you for your enquiry - pact's spokesperson is unavailable at the moment. Shall I get them to contact you when they are free?'

'Thank you for your enquiry - the Prison/Court Media Liaison person is unavailable at the moment. Shall I get them to contact you when they are free?'

Please then make sure that you contact one of the people who handle media enquiries at pact or the prison/court media liaison person to make them aware of the enquiry as soon as possible to enable them to respond promptly.

You should also try to find out the following:

- The name of the journalist and the newspaper or radio station or TV station
- Phone and contacts details of the journalist
- What the story or feature is about
- What the deadline or timescale is

### Communication good practice for assigned media handlers

If there is an issue that is likely to attract media attention, it is worthwhile drafting the key messages in advance to ensure that any response that might be required covers all the main aspects of the issue from pact's viewpoint. If there is a potential for negative coverage on a prison-related topic, an appropriate response should be agreed which emphasises the positive aspect of pact's work.

It is accepted that any published information that is already in the public domain can be given to journalists. By having a clearly defined media policy, pact will be in a much better position to benefit from the media in terms of creating a positive profile of the charity by journalists and reporters.

# Disciplinary and grievance procedures

## Disciplinary Procedure

### Principles

- No disciplinary action will be taken against an employee until the case has been fully investigated
- At every stage of the procedure the employee will be advised of the nature of the complaint against him or her and will be given the opportunity to state his or her case before any decision is made.
- At all stages the employee will have the right to be accompanied by a shop steward, employee representative or work colleague during the disciplinary interview.
- No employee will be dismissed for a first breach of discipline except in the case of gross misconduct when the penalty will be dismissal without notice or payment in lieu of notice.
- An employee will have the right to appeal against any disciplinary penalty imposed.
- The procedure may be implemented at any stage if the employee's alleged misconduct warrants such action.

### The Procedure

Most minor faults will be dealt with informally, but where the matter is more serious but does not constitute gross misconduct the following procedure will apply:

The employee will be given written notice of the complaint against him or her at least three days before a disciplinary hearing. At the hearing the employee, a trade union representative, colleague or representative invited by the employee (if the employee wishes), the complainant and two members of the Management Committee will be present.

The complaint will be put and the employee and his or her representative will have an opportunity to answer. After discussion, if the complaint is upheld, the following outcomes may result.

#### Stage 1 - Oral Warning

If conduct or performance does not meet acceptable standards the employee will normally be given a formal oral warning. He or she will be advised of the reason for the warning, that it is the first stage of a disciplinary procedure and of his or her right to appeal. A brief note of the oral warning will be kept but it will be spent after three months subject to satisfactory conduct and performance.

#### Stage 2 - Written Warning

If the offence is a serious one, or if a further offence occurs, a written warning will be given to the employee. This will give details of the complaint, the improvement required and the timescale. In serious cases it may warn that dismissal will be considered if there is no satisfactory improvement and will advise of the right of appeal. A copy of this written warning will be kept by the Chair of the Management Committee but it will be disregarded for disciplinary purposes after six months subject to satisfactory conduct and performance.

#### Stage 3 - Dismissal

If there is still a failure to improve, and conduct or performance is still unsatisfactory, dismissal will normally result. The employee will be provided, as soon as reasonably practicable, with written reasons for dismissal, the date on which employment will terminate and the right of appeal.

#### Gross Misconduct

The following list provides examples of offences which are normally regarded as gross misconduct:

- Theft, fraud, deliberate falsification of records Fighting, assault on another person.
- Deliberate damage to the support group's property
- Serious incapability through alcohol or being under the influence of illegal drugs
- Serious negligence which causes unacceptable loss, damage or injury
- Racial or sexual harassment or abuse

- Serious breach of confidentiality

An employee accused of an act of gross misconduct may be suspended from work on full pay, normally for no more than five working days, while the alleged offence is investigated by members of the Management Committee. If, on completion of the investigation and of the full disciplinary procedure (during which witnesses may be called) the Management Committee representatives are satisfied that gross misconduct has occurred, the result will normally be summary dismissal without notice or payment in lieu of notice.

### **Appeals**

An employee who wishes to appeal against a disciplinary decision should inform the Chair of the Management Committee within two working days. A special meeting of the Management Committee will then be convened. The employee and his/her trade union representative, colleague or other representative will be able to put his/her reasons for appeal, and the members of the Management Committee involved in the original disciplinary hearing will have the opportunity to speak about their reasons for arriving at their decision. The Management Committee will then arrive at a final decision. At the appeal any disciplinary penalty imposed will be reviewed but it cannot be increased.

### **Grievance Procedure**

In a positive working environment it should be possible to deal with most minor grievances, be they between employees or between an individual employee and the Management Committee, on an informal basis. This grievance procedure is designed to be used when a more informal approach has proved ineffective, or when relations have broken down to the extent that an informal approach is not possible.

Any grievance should be notified to the Chair of the Management Committee in writing. A meeting will then be convened within five working days at which the employee can present his/her grievance to two members of the Management Committee. If the grievance relates to another member of staff he or she will also have been notified of the grievance in writing at least three days before the meeting, and will have the right to attend and speak.

The Management Committee members present at the initial meeting will attempt to resolve the situation, but if they feel that the issue needs to be dealt with by the Management Committee as a whole they can defer the matter. The complainant may also take the matter to a full Management Committee meeting if he/she is not satisfied with the solution offered at the initial meeting. The full Management Committee meeting will hear the grievance and the views of any other employee or individual directly involved and will then reach a decision which will be final.

# Sample case record sheet

Partners of Prisoners and Families Support Group

CASE SHEET

REF. No. ....

Date .....

Name .....

Address .....

.....

..... Tel .....

Prisoner's Name ..... Prison No. ....

Prison ..... Remand/Convicted

NATURE OF CALL

ACTION TAKEN

# Model equal opportunities monitoring form

This prisoners' families support group is working to become an equal opportunities organisation. We would like to monitor the effectiveness of our equal opportunities policy on the recruitment and employment of staff and volunteers.

We would find it helpful to receive some additional information from you. You do not have to fill in this form and we would like to assure you that:

- a) the monitoring form will not be seen by anyone involved in the interview and selection processes. It will be removed from your application form before the shortlisting process begins.
- b) the information will be used for record-keeping and will be destroyed afterwards
- c) your application or employment will not be affected if you do not return the form.

Please complete the form attached. Thank you

I would describe myself as:                      Male                      Female  
(please circle as appropriate)

I am registered disabled  
I am unregistered disabled  
I do not have a disability

I would describe my ethnic origin as:

Black-Caribbean	Black-African	Black other (please specify)
White British	Irish	European
Indian	Pakistani	Bangladeshi
Chinese	Other (please describe)	

My age is between: 16-25              26-34              35-44              45-54              over 54

Post applied for: .....

# Prisoners' families helpline monitoring form

The helpline aims to provide a professional service to meet the needs and expectations of callers. We know that there is always room for improvement and therefore welcome your comments and feedback.

- Please tell us when we get it right — that makes sure that we keep doing the things that work.
- Please tell us when we get it wrong. We need to know when you are not happy about the service you have received. We will do our best to put things right straight away. If you are still not happy—you may wish to contact us about making a formal complaint.

## Please answer the following questions: -

Did you get through first time when phoning the helpline? (please circle) YES NO

Were you happy with the service provided? (please circle) YES NO

Have you called the Prisoners' Families Helpline before? (please circle) YES NO

Is this your first experience of having a relative/friend in prison? (please circle) YES NO

What is your relationship to the prisoner?

## General Comments (continue on a separate sheet if necessary)

We want to make sure that the national helpline service is available to everyone that wants to use the service, being open equally to men and women and to people of all ethnic origins. To help us monitor this information, please tick the box which best describes your ethnic origin and gender below.

Gender	Tick box
Male	
Female	

Would you describe yourself as having a disability? Please give details.

White		Mixed background		Asian or Asian British		Black or Black British		Other Ethnic Groups		Travellers	
British		White/Black Caribbean		Indian		Caribbean		Chinese		Gypsy/Roma	
Irish		White/Black African		Pakistani		African		Other		Traveller	
Other		White/Asian		Bangladeshi		Other				Irish Traveller	
		Other		Other						Other	

If you feel unable to tick a box, please describe your ethnic origin below:

**Thank you for taking the time to complete this form.**

## Health And safety guidelines for volunteers

Being a volunteer befriender with PFFS means that you will be visiting families in their own homes, often in an unfamiliar place and perhaps during the hours of darkness. It is essential that you take sensible precautions to ensure your personal safety.

- Always let someone know where you are going and when you expect to return
- Keep to lighted areas if walking home
- Distribute valuables, such as cash, mobiles, i-pods, cheque books and credit cards about your person rather than carrying them all together in a handbag
- If travelling by car, try to park in a well-lit area and make sure you secure the vehicle
- When using public transport, work out your route beforehand to avoid getting lost

When working in our office or our Family Centre, we would expect you to work in a safe manner so as not to endanger yourself or others; to take particular care in the use of machinery and office equipment and not to use any machinery or equipment without first consulting a member of staff. A copy of our health and safety policy is available on request. Fire exits are clearly marked. Please familiarise yourself with these and read the fire notices displayed in the building.

# Sample constitution

In order to register with the Charity Commission [www.charity-commission.gov.uk](http://www.charity-commission.gov.uk) the organisation's objectives (or objects) need to meet the Commission's criteria. The following example is based upon the constitution provided in the Prison Visitors' Centre good practice guidelines, which in turn was based on the Charity Commission's own Model Constitution for an Unincorporated Association.

## THE CONSTITUTION OF THE MODEL PRISONERS' FAMILIES SUPPORT GROUP

adopted on the ..... day of ..... 20 ...

### A. Name

The name of the Association is the MODEL PRISONERS' FAMILIES SUPPORT GROUP ('the Charity')

### B. Administration

Subject to the matters set out below the Charity and its property shall be administered and managed in accordance with this constitution by the members of the Executive Committee, constituted by Clause E of this Constitution ('the Executive Committee').

### C. Objects

The Charity's objects are to relieve poverty amongst, and preserve and protect the mental health of, wives, partners, families, children and dependants of persons who have suffered a legal restriction of their liberty, by the provision and maintenance of a support group offering advice and information services.

### D. Powers

In furtherance of the objects but not otherwise the Executive Committee may exercise the following powers:

- a. power to raise funds and to invite and receive contributions provided that in raising funds the Executive Committee shall not undertake any substantial permanent trading activities and shall conform to any relevant requirements of the law;
- b. power to buy, take on lease or exchange any property necessary for the achievement of the objects and to maintain and equip it for use;
- c. power subject to any consents required by law to sell, lease or dispose of all or any part of the property of the Charity;
- d. power subject to the consents required by law to borrow money and to charge all or part of any part of the property of the Charity with repayment of the money so borrowed;
- e. power to employ staff (who shall not be members of the Executive Committee) as are necessary for the proper pursuit of the objects;
- f. power to co-operate with other charities, voluntary bodies and statutory authorities operating in furtherance of the objects or of similar charitable purpose and to exchange information and advice with them;
- g. power to do all other such lawful things as are necessary for the achievement of the objects.

### E. Membership

1. Membership of the Charity shall be open to:

- a. individuals (over the age of 18 years) who are interested in furthering the work of the Charity and who have paid any annual subscription laid down from time to time by the Executive Committee, and
- b. any body corporate or unincorporated association which is interested in furthering the Charity's

work and has paid any annual subscription (any such body being called in this Constitution a 'member organisation').

2. Every member shall have one vote.
3. Each member organisation shall appoint an individual to represent it and to vote on its behalf at meetings of the Charity; and may appoint an alternate to replace its appointed representative at any meeting of the Charity if the appointed representative is unable to attend.
4. Each member organisation shall notify the name of the representative appointed by it and of any alternate to the Secretary. If the representative or alternate resigns from or otherwise leaves the member organisation, he or she shall forthwith cease to be the representative of the member organisation.
5. The Executive Committee may unanimously and for good reason terminate the membership of any individual or member organisation. Provided that the individual concerned or the appointed representative of the member organisation concerned (as the case may be) shall have a right to be heard by the Executive Committee, accompanied by a friend, before a final decision is made.

## **F. Honorary Officers**

At the Annual General Meeting of the Charity the members shall elect from amongst themselves a Chairperson, a Secretary and a Treasurer, who shall hold office from the conclusion of that meeting.

**G. Executive Committee** 1. The Executive Committee shall consist of not less than six members nor more than ten members being:

- a. the honorary officers specified in the preceding clause;
- b. not less than one and not more than four members elected at the Annual General Meeting who shall hold office from the conclusion of that meeting;

2. The Executive Committee may, in addition, appoint not more than two co-opted members but so that no-one may be appointed as a co-opted member if, as a result, more than one-third of the members of the Executive Committee would be co-opted members. Each appointment of a co-opted member shall be made at a special meeting of the Executive Committee called under Clause J (1) and shall take effect from the end of that meeting unless the appointment is to fill a place which has not then been vacated in which case the appointment shall run from the date when the post becomes vacant.

3. All members of the Executive Committee shall retire from office together at the end of the Annual General Meeting next after the date on which they came to office but they may be re-elected or re-appointed.

4. The proceedings of the Executive Committee shall not be invalidated by any vacancy among their number or by any failure to appoint or any defect in the appointment or qualification of a member.

5. Nobody shall be appointed as a member of the Executive Committee who is aged under 18 or who would, if appointed, be disqualified under the following clause.

6. No person shall be entitled to act as a member of the Executive Committee whether on a first or on any subsequent entry into office until after signing in the Minute Book of the Executive

Committee a declaration of acceptance and of willingness to act in the trusts of the Charity.

## **H. Determination of Membership of Executive Committee**

A member of the Executive Committee shall cease to hold office if he or she;

1. is disqualified from acting as a member of the Executive Committee by virtue of Section 45 of the Charities Act 1992 (or any statutory re-enactment or modification of that provision);
2. becomes incapable by reason of mental disorder, illness or injury of managing and administering his or her own affairs;
3. is absent without the permission of the Executive Committee from all their meetings held within a period of six months and the Executive Committee resolve that his or her office be vacated; or
4. notifies to the Executive Committee a wish to resign (but only if at least three members of the Executive Committee will remain in office when the resignation takes effect).

## **I. Executive Committee Members not to be personally interested**

No member of the Executive Committee shall acquire any interest in property belonging to the Charity (otherwise than as a trustee for the Charity) or receive remuneration or be interested (otherwise than as a member of the Executive Committee) in any contract entered into by the Executive Committee.

## **J. Meetings and proceedings of the Executive Committee**

1. The Executive Committee shall hold at least four ordinary meetings each year. A special meeting may be called at any time by the Chairperson or by any two members of the Executive Committee upon not less than 4 days' notice being given to the other members of the Executive Committee of the matters to be discussed but if the matters include an appointment of a co-opted member then not less than 21 days notice must be given.
2. The Chairperson shall act as Chairperson at meetings of the Executive Committee. If the Chairperson is absent from any meeting the members of the Executive Committee present shall choose one of their number to be Chairperson of the meeting before any other business is transacted.
3. There shall be a quorum when at least one-third of the number of members of the Executive Committee for the time being or three members of the Executive Committee, whichever is the greater, are present at a meeting.
4. Every matter shall be determined by a majority of votes of the members of the Executive Committee present and voting on the question but in the case of equality of votes the Chairperson of the meeting shall have a second or casting vote.
5. The Executive Committee shall keep minutes, in books kept for the purpose, of the proceedings at meetings of the Executive Committee and any sub-committee.
6. The Executive Committee may from time to time make and alter rules for the conduct of their business, the summoning and conduct of their meetings and the custody of documents. No rule may be made which is inconsistent with this Constitution.
7. The Executive Committee may appoint one or more subcommittees consisting of three or more members of the Executive Committee for the purpose of making any enquiry or supervising or performing any function or duty which in the opinion of the Executive Committee would be more conveniently undertaken or carried out by a sub-committee: provided that all acts and proceedings of any such subcommittee shall be fully and promptly reported to the Executive Committee.

## **K. Receipt and expenditure**

1. The funds of the Charity including all donations contributions and bequests shall be paid into an account operated by the Executive Committee in the name of the Charity at such bank as the Executive Committee shall from time to time decide. All cheques drawn on the account must be signed by at least

two members of the Executive Committee.

2. The funds belonging to the Charity shall be applied only in furthering the objects.

**L. Property**<sup>1</sup> . Subject to the provisions of Sub-Clause (2) of this Clause, the Executive Committee shall cause the title to all investments held by or on behalf of the Charity to be vested either in a corporation entitled to act as custodian trustee or in not less than three individuals appointed by them as holding trustees. Holding trustees may be removed by the Executive Committee at their pleasure and shall act in accordance with the lawful directions of the Executive Committee. Provided they act only in accordance with the lawful directions of the Executive Committee, the holding trustees shall not be liable for the acts and defaults of its members.

2. If a corporation entitled to act as custodian trustee has not been appointed to hold the property of the Charity, the Executive Committee may permit any investments held by or in trust for the Charity to be held in the name of a clearing bank, trust corporation or any stockbroking company which is a member of the International Stock Exchange (or any subsidiary of any such stockbroking company) as nominee for the Executive Committee, and may pay such a nominee reasonable and proper remuneration for acting as such.

### **M. Accounts**

The Executive Committee shall comply with their obligations under the Charities Act 1992 (or any statutory re-enactment or modification of that Act) with regard to:

1. the keeping of accounting records for the Charity;
2. the preparation of annual statements of account for the Charity;
3. the auditing or independent examination of the statements of account of the Charity; and
4. the transmission of the statements of account of the Charity to the Commissioners.

### **N. Annual Report**

The Executive Committee shall comply with their obligations under the Charities Act 1992 (or any statutory re-enactment or modification of that Act) with regard to the preparation of an annual report and its transmission to the Commissioners.

### **O. Annual Return**

The Executive Committee shall comply with their obligations under the Charities Act 1992 (or any statutory re-enactment or modification of that Act) with regard to the preparation of an annual return and its transmission to the Commissioners.

### **P. Annual General Meeting**

1. There shall be an Annual General Meeting of the Charity which shall be held in the month of October in each year or as soon as practicable thereafter.
2. Every Annual General Meeting shall be called by the Executive Committee. The Secretary shall give at least 21 days notice of the Annual General Meeting to all members of the Charity. All members of the Charity shall be entitled to attend and vote at the meeting.
3. Before any other business is transacted at the first Annual General Meeting the persons present shall appoint a Chairperson of that meeting. The Chairperson shall be the Chairperson of subsequent Annual General Meetings, but if he or she is not present, before any other business is transacted, the persons present shall appoint a Chairperson of the meeting.
4. The Executive Committee shall present to each Annual General Meeting the report and accounts of the Charity for the preceding year.
5. Nominations for election to the Executive Committee must be made by members of the Charity in writing and must be in the hands of the Secretary of the Executive Committee at least 14 days before the Annual General Meeting. Should nominations exceed vacancies, election shall be by ballot.

**Q. Special General Meetings** The Executive Committee may call a special general meeting of the Charity at any time. If at least ten members request such a meeting in writing stating the business to be considered the secretary shall call such a meeting. At least 21 days notice must be given. The notice must state the business to be discussed.

#### **R. Procedure at General Meetings**

1. The Secretary or other person specially appointed by the Executive Committee shall keep a full record of proceedings at every general meeting of the Charity.
2. There shall be a quorum when at least one tenth of the number of members of the Charity for the time being or ten members of the charity, whichever is the greater, are present at any general meeting.

#### **S. Notices**

Any notice required to be served on any member of the Charity shall be in writing and shall be served by the Secretary or the Executive Committee or any member either personally or by sending it through the post in a prepaid letter addressed to such member at his or her last known address in the United Kingdom, and any letter so sent shall be deemed to have been received within 10 days of posting.

#### **T. Alterations to the Constitution**

1. Subject to the following provisions of this Clause the Constitution may be altered by a resolution passed by not less than two-thirds of the members present and voting at a general meeting. The notice of the general meeting must include notice of the resolution, setting out the terms of the alteration proposed.
2. No amendment may be made to Clause A, Clause C, Clause 1, Clause U or this Clause without the prior consent in writing of the Commissioners.
3. No amendment may be made which would have the effect of making the Charity cease to be a Charity at Law.
4. The Executive Committee should promptly send to the Commissioners a copy of any amendment made under this clause.

#### **U. Dissolution**

If the Executive Committee decides that it is necessary or advisable to dissolve the Charity it shall call a meeting of all members of the Charity, of which not less than 21 days notice (stating the terms of the resolution to be proposed) shall be given. If the proposal is confirmed by a two-thirds majority of those present and voting the Executive Committee shall have power to realise any assets held by or on behalf of the Charity. Any assets remaining after the satisfaction of any proper debts and liabilities shall be given or transferred to such other charitable institution or institutions having objects similar to the objects of the Charity as the members of the Charity may determine or failing that shall be applied for some other charitable purpose. A copy of the statement of accounts, or account and statement, for the final accounting period of the Charity must be sent to the Commissioners.

#### **V. Arrangements until first Annual General Meeting**

Until the first Annual General Meeting takes place this Constitution shall take effect as if references in it to the Executive Committee were references to the persons whose signatures appear at the bottom of this document.

This Constitution was adopted on the date mentioned above by the persons whose signatures appear at the bottom of this document.

Signed:

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

# Staff appraisal form

This form offers a structure through which strengths and weaknesses, areas of achievement and obstacles to progress can be highlighted.

## 1. Present contribution to the work of the support group

Make a brief list of the main tasks you feel you have accomplished over the past year.

Which of your skills showed themselves most clearly in your work during this period? How could these strengths be better exploited in future?

What have you done least well? How can these weaknesses be overcome?

## 2. Future Contribution to the group's Work

Were there obstacles which hindered you from achieving what you intended? Are they likely to recur? If so, how can they be eliminated?

How could your skills be better utilised in future?

What action can be taken to improve your contribution?

What action can the Management Committee/ other staff take to enable you to improve your contribution?

## 3. Work plans

What do you think should be the main targets of your work in the next year?

What standards should be used to assess your performance?

## 4. Development

Do you think you need more training and/or experience to enable you to function better? If so, what kind?

What do you hope to be doing in your work in (say) two years time? Do you have any training needs for that ambition?

## 5. Other points

Are there other points you wish to raise related to your work?

# User feedback form

## Your Views on this Prisoners' Families Support Group

Dear Friend,

It is our policy to assess the quality of service we provide to family members every year. We can only do this with your help. Please be kind enough to complete the attached form and return it to this address/office. This will help us to improve or change whatever parts of our service we need to. If you would rather not give your name, we still very much want to hear your comments.

Thank you for your time.

Key

Please circle the number which applies next to each question.

1 = highly satisfied, 2 = fairly satisfied, 3 = satisfied, 4 = slightly dissatisfied, 5 = totally dissatisfied

### Questions

How do you feel about the amount of support you have received? 1 2 3 4 5

How do you feel about the quality of support you have received? 1 2 3 4 5

How do you feel about the support you have received by telephone? 1 2 3 4 5

How do you feel about the amount of correspondence you receive? 1 2 3 4 5

How do you feel about the support group newsletter? 1 2 3 4 5

How do you feel about the support group lunches? 1 2 3 4 5

Please tell us about any aspect of our service which you particularly value or would like to see changed.

.....

.....

.....

## Complaints procedure

The Management Committee take complaints seriously and attempt to deal with them promptly. We have a two stage process.

**STAGE ONE:** If you are a visitor and have a complaint about any aspect of the Centre or its work and facilities, and want something done about it, please talk to the Manager/ Deputy Manager who will issue you with a complaints form which you can complete and return to them. The matter will be dealt with either at the time or as a result of discussion at a time to be arranged. If you do not feel able to talk to the Manager/ Deputy Manager go straight to stage 2 below.

**STAGE TWO:** If you consider the matter has not been resolved at Stage 1 above, you can write to the Management Committee at the address below, requesting a special meeting:

**Bridget Cameron - Management Committee Member responsible for Human Resources, HALOW (Birmingham), PO Box 7081, Birmingham B18 4AN**

At the meeting your complaint and the actions taken to resolve it will be recorded. Both parties will sign it and you will have a copy.

**STAGE THREE:** If you are still not satisfied you should write to the Chairperson of the Management Committee:

**Jane Gallagher - Co-Chair, HALOW (Birmingham), PO Box 7081, Birmingham B18 4AN**

She will decide if it is appropriate to arrange a meeting with you or whether she can make a decision on the matter as a result of considering what has happened at the previous two stages.

The decision will be confirmed to you in writing within three weeks of the Chairperson receiving your letter.

If you are still dissatisfied you can ask to be referred to help outside HALOW (Birmingham).

**Please note: Any complaints about the prison should be directed to the prison.**

# Checklist for Setting up a Support Group

## Overall

- All prisoners' families support groups should have a constitution in which the main object prioritises the welfare of prisoners' families
- All prisoners' families support groups should be governed by a management committee convened in line with the guidance issued by the Charity Commission
- All prisoners' families support groups should prepare annual accounts in a format recognised by relevant charity law
- All prisoners' families support groups should have a dedicated separate telephone number
- All prisoners' families support groups should monitor and record their work paying particular attention to confidentiality and equal opportunity issues
- All prisoners' families support groups should regularly ask the families they support to comment on the service they receive
- All prisoners' families support groups should provide ongoing support to staff and volunteers

## Policies

All prisoners' families support groups should develop, adhere to and review the policies listed below. The possible content of these policies is set out in these Guidelines.

- **Child Protection**
  - **Confidentiality**
  - **Data protection**
  - **Disciplinary and Grievance Procedure**
  - **Equal Opportunities**
  - **Health and Safety**
  - **Media Relations**
- 

This guide will be reviewed annually and is available on-line only. The contents in this guide were to our knowledge correct at the date of publication. However, if you find any mistakes, inaccuracies, or omissions, please do contact us: [info@actionpf.org.uk](mailto:info@actionpf.org.uk) and we will aim to include them in the next revision.

**Copyright Action for Prisoners' Families, February 2011.**

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[www.prisonersfamilies.org.uk](http://www.prisonersfamilies.org.uk)