



# **Final report June 2017**

## **Evaluation of Visiting Mum Scheme**

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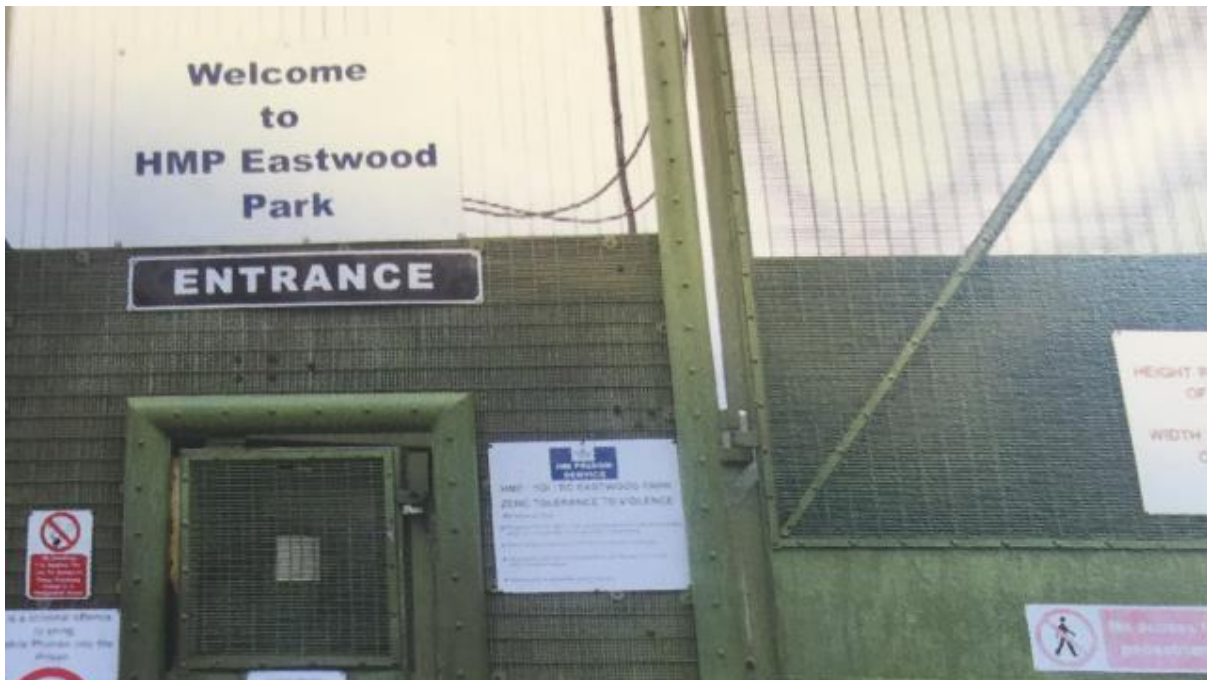
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## Executive summary

### *Introduction*

The Visiting Mum scheme is run by the Prison Advice and Care Trust (Pact), which is a national charity that provides practical and emotional support for prisoners and their families. These services include prison visitors' centres, a national helpline, mentoring and befriending services, relationship and parenting courses, advocacy and campaigning work (Pact, 2016). The charity focuses on ensuring children and families of prisoners have access to support which is tailored and responsive to their needs. Visiting Mum is operating at the female prison, HMP Eastwood Park, in Gloucestershire, the local prison for female offenders in the southern half of Wales as there is no women's prison in Wales (female offenders in the northern half of Wales are sent to HMP Styal in Cheshire). On average women prisoners are held 60 miles from their home address, but at Eastwood Park, 20% of women are held over 150 miles from home (HMP/YOI Eastwood Park, 2011). The Visiting Mum scheme works with Welsh female prisoners, to facilitate contact between them and their children during their period of incarceration.

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

Visiting Mum is a 3-year partnership project funded by the Big Lottery Innovation Fund, which has been running since October 2014. It operates using volunteers who work with individual families in the community to prepare carers and children for visiting Eastwood Park and transport children and carers to the prison. It was designed specifically to address these issues and to support families to keep in contact (where it was in the child's best interests to do so), removing barriers to contact and supporting the whole family through the process. A well-designed and unique project, Visiting Mum currently supports and provides benefits to children living across south Wales when visiting their mothers at Eastwood Park.

The volunteering organisation Sova, a charity that has been established for 40 years, working 'to help people steer clear of crime and to live healthier lives' (Sova, 2012), recruits, trains and supports the volunteers who furnish the Visiting Mum project. Volunteers support children to prepare for visits by talking about the prison regime, showing pictures of the establishment and letting children know what they can expect when they arrive. Volunteers also answer questions so that children are able to make an informed decision about whether and when to visit and provide transport for the visit. Where required, volunteers offer support to the carer and children after the visit has taken place and help to arrange future visits.

The Visiting Mum scheme aims to reduce reoffending, and reduce the emotional distress caused to women incarcerated away from their children. The scheme also aims to reduce the impact of incarceration on children, and has the potential to improve the longer-term mental health of both mothers and their children. The relationship between mental health and offending is well-known (Chitsabesan et al. 2006). Incarceration may impact on both women and their children's well-being, their propensity for holding down employment and avoiding offending in the future (Welsh Public Health Wales 2016). This evaluation of the Visiting Mum scheme, examines how it operates, captures the experiences of those involved, assesses its strengths and weaknesses and determines whether it has reached the objectives set out by Pact (below).

### ***Objectives of Visiting Mum Project***

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

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

To date, the Visiting Mum scheme has worked with 97 mothers (not all of these cases have necessitated the support of a volunteer (as some have been helped only from the prison) and 292

visits have taken place. In total, 164 children have utilised the Visiting Mum scheme in order to visit their mother in prison.

The scheme is widely appreciated and highly valued by all of the key stakeholders, including staff within the prison. Children benefit hugely from the scheme and it is clear that it should continue to operate. Visiting Mum is now embedded within the prison establishment and can be regarded as a flagship project within HMP Eastwood Park, as was noted in the recent inspection (HMIP 2017).

### ***Findings***

1. The Visiting Mum scheme reduces the anxieties of children; most children worry about how their mother is coping.
2. Children feel less intimidated by the prison environment, better supported and the Visiting Mum scheme improves the experience of visiting their mothers in prison.
3. The quality of the first visit to the prison is significant for the child as a negative first experience can result in the child not wanting to go on subsequent visits.
4. Visiting Mum does not always manage to intervene and access the child and family prior to the first visit
5. Children hugely value the Visiting Mum service and believe that it has helped to preserve and in some cases strengthen their relationship with their mother and other family members.
6. The less formal, longer visits that the Visiting Mum scheme provide facilitate a high quality, more intimate and nurturing environment for mothers, children and carers.
7. Children receive little, if any support outside of the Visiting Mum Scheme.
8. Children are very appreciative and comment favourably on the skills of both volunteers and Visiting Mum staff. Volunteers and staff provide a potential layer of support for the child.
9. Consistency of volunteer is important for children and carers.
10. Children generally enjoy meeting other young people in similar circumstances.
11. Contact should be viewed as a right of the child, not as a reward for the mother.
12. Women are very appreciative of the Visiting Mum scheme and comment favourably on the commitment and skill of the staff; the project goes some way to addressing and bridging a welfare gap within the prison.
13. Women feel less anxious about the welfare of their children and most have a minimum of monthly visits and regular telephone contact.
14. Women feel that their mental health is improved by accessing Visiting Mum services.
15. Self-harm and adjudications are reduced for those accessing Visiting Mum.
16. Most mothers maintain some of the parenting role from prison- this is seen to be helpful for family re-integration.
17. Women feel that the scheme will help them to integrate back into family and community life upon release.
18. Women feel well supported by Visiting Mum in the prison, but post-release services are minimal, particularly with regard to housing and employment support.
19. The volunteer is well-received and provides a good role model for both mothers and children.
20. Most volunteers would like to be involved in more wrap around support and post release services.

21. The carers for the children believe that the Visiting Mum scheme helps to relieve the emotional and financial pressures on them, where little other support is available.
22. The prison staff value the Visiting Mum service and feel that it is embedded in the prison establishment.
23. Schools in all cases have been helpful in giving permission for children to visit their mothers.
24. There is little knowledge about the scheme across the social care spectrum.

Further benefits of the work are that the project has designed and distributed resource packs for both schools and social workers, and is currently working on a training pack including a new film, which will be completed and launched before the end of the project in September 2017. These resources will be available to local authorities. The Visiting Mum scheme would appear to be an innovative, far-reaching programme, which improves well-being for both mothers and children; it is currently funded at £168, 216 per annum.

### ***Recommendations***

1. Preparation and support for children's and carer's first visits are vital and a review of how volunteers can become involved more quickly would be helpful. This could be via a duty rota where a volunteer is on daily stand-by and by the use of more specific Visiting Mum orderlies within the prison to pick up referrals.
2. Developing a film that guides the child through the prison visit to accompany the Visiting Mum booklet, may be helpful for the carer and child where a first visit with a volunteer has not been possible.
3. As children receive little or no support when their mother is in prison, the provision of peer group support meetings should be considered, to be held outside of the prison, where the child and family feel that it is appropriate.
4. The preparation and training programme for volunteers could be tailored more specifically for the Visiting Mum scheme, covering attachment, child development and the impact of separation, with an on-going follow-up training programme (covering addiction, domestic abuse and mental health) to help keep volunteers engaged with the scheme and to extend their role.
5. Having the volunteer co-ordinator co-located in the prison would be helpful for staff within the prison and for providing the co-ordinator with an understanding of the needs of the individual women.
6. Visiting Mum staff within the prison may benefit from both specific child law training and clinical supervision given the complexity of the cases that they work with.
7. More use of volunteers (possibly via the Women's Institute) could be made within the prison for the story book CDs (which is time consuming) and provision of food, so that the time of skilled staff is protected.

8. More thought could be given to food more generally and its importance as part of the Visiting Mum visit.
9. More activities to engage older children could be developed, e.g. quizzes and games.
10. The timings of the Visiting Mum visits could be reviewed with regard to a very early start, or indeed for those young people studying for examinations, so they do not miss any of their schooling.
11. Visiting Mum could become involved in more wraparound support for those who would like it, and in particular in post release support (at least for a short transitional period) for those who require it, drawing on the expertise of both Sova and PACT in this area; a focus on both employment and housing would be helpful.
12. More dissemination and engagement with social workers about the service that Visiting Mum provides is important. This might mean inviting social workers into the prison or going out in to the local authority teams. The annual conferences held are helpful and a specific conference for children's social care practitioners may be a way to disseminate information about the scheme.
13. Exploration of how Visiting Mum could have more of a role where social workers are involved with families.
14. Having a liaison social worker based partly in the prison might be a useful addition to the team to build bridges across services and better support women and children. Alternatively, having a designated social worker link for each south Wales local authority would facilitate communication between Visiting Mum and social workers.
15. An exploration of whether the Mother and Baby Unit (when not fully occupied) could be utilised for the Visiting Mum visits. This would provide a more private space, which would not be subject to interruptions.
16. Volunteers would like to be involved in booking the visits, which would increase contact, could help build trust and rapport with carers and would ease the staff's workload.
17. Visiting Mum could be replicated across Eastwood Park prison.



## Background

The exact numbers of children affected by maternal imprisonment are unknown but the Prison Reform Trust (2015) indicate that around 66% of women in prison have dependent children under the age of 18 and at least a fifth were lone parents before entering custody. They also estimated that, in 2010, more than 17,240 children were separated from their mother through imprisonment (Prison Reform Trust, 2015) but only 9% of these children were cared for by their father while their mother was imprisoned. This is contrasted with 90% of mothers caring for children when fathers are imprisoned.

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

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

The effects on children of parental imprisonment have been explored in a number of studies and a large review of the effects of imprisonment on children, undertaken under the New Labour Government found that there were no systems in place or consistent support offered to the children of prisoners (Ministry of Justice/DCSF 2007). The risk of anti-social behaviour is trebled (Murray and Farrington, 2008) and other long-term negative outcomes such as poor educational performance and an increase in substance misuse have been identified (Murry et al. 2012) as a result of parental imprisonment. Various other health and social disadvantages also impact children including increased levels of poverty, family breakdown, higher risks of substance abuse and mental health issues

(Convery and Moore, 2011; Welsh Adverse Childhood Experiences, 2016). Findings have shown an increased risk of the children becoming Not in Employment, Education or Training (NEET) (New Economics Foundation, 2008) if mothers are imprisoned and adult children of imprisoned mothers have been found to be more likely to be convicted of an offence than adult children from imprisoned fathers (Ministry of Justice, 2012). Further, maternal imprisonment has been shown to have more negative effects upon attachment and psychological functioning than paternal imprisonment, indicating that the impact of maternal imprisonment is more pronounced upon children (Murray and Murray, 2010).

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

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

Despite this growing body of evidence, many children of imprisoned mothers are prevented from making contact with their parent because of practical considerations such as the cost of travel, lack of transport or the availability of a suitable adult to take them. Visiting Mum was designed specifically to address these issues and to support families to keep in contact where it was in the child's best interests to do so.

## **Current Practice Model**

Visiting Mum currently consists of two prison-based Family Engagement Workers employed by Pact, and overseen by the Family Services Manager at the prison. The team identify women upon reception into custody, (usually this is done via a prison orderly) who are at risk of losing contact with their families in Wales and would like to avail themselves of the support. They work with those prisoners who require a service to establish contact with their family, to provide reassurance and to offer support. Alongside this brokering of contact, they offer parenting and relationship programmes and courses, and one to one casework support to the mother. This includes support with maintaining positive relationships with social workers, where there are child protection, fostering or adoption issues.

Sova's Volunteer Co-ordinator works to match a local volunteer who aims to provide emotional support to the family, and who prepares children and carers for the visit. This may include a session with the children and carers before a visit is arranged to ensure that it is in the child's best interest, that no pressure is being applied to visit, and that they understand what to expect from the experience. The volunteers are trained by Sova in the community and at the prison, so they are able to answer questions and provide reassurance as well as book the visit for the family. They then offer transport and accompaniment, based on the needs of the family, and potential support, which includes debriefing after the visit, assisting the carer in effective management of emotional reactions and preparing for the next visit. They can also be instrumental in encouraging families to engage with schools and other local services.

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

## **Current Service Levels**

From the start of the project to June 2017, Visiting Mum had supported 197 individual carers and children from 69 different families from 12 different local authorities. The project had also supported 97 women in prison, who will be resettling back to the given local authorities. This differs from the number of families supported as some mothers require in-prison support but do not require the assistance of a volunteer.

Local Authority	Families Supported with volunteers	Individuals Supported in the community	Mums supported in prison
Blaenau Gwent	1	4	2
Bridgend	5	15	5
Caerphilly	7	16	13
Cardiff	21	57	23
Merthyr Tydfil	2	6	2
Monmouthshire	1	4	3
Neath and Port Talbot	1	7	3
Newport	17	32	17
Pembrokeshire	2	5	3
Powys	1	2	1
Rhondda Cynon Taff	9	17	11
Swansea	11	22	11
The Vale	3	10	3
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>197</b>	<b>97</b>

Table 1: Services provided by local authority

## **Budget**

Visiting Mum was awarded a £504,649 grant by the Big Lottery for activities for a period of 3 years, equating to an average of £168,216 per annum, with a 2% annual increase.

## **The methodology and design of the study**

A group of 5 female researchers from Cascade research centre based at Cardiff University have been involved in the planning and data gathering process. We initially observed a Family Fun Day organised by Pact for a large group of children to visit their mothers, where a range of activities were undertaken with children and young people. Informal observations of Pact staff and visiting families at the prison have also taken place. In line with the requirements of ethical research, all participants were assured of anonymity, as outlined in the information provided to participants and also in the consent forms, noting that 'Every effort will be made to protect your identity in all published material, including the changing of names, locations and anything else that we feel might possibly identify you'.

## ***Ethical Approval and Access***

Researchers from Cascade (Children's social care and development centre), based at Cardiff University were commissioned in February 2016 to complete an evaluation of the Visiting Mum scheme. An application was submitted to Cardiff University Research Ethics Committee in March 2016 and approval granted; an application for ethical approval was made to NOMs in April 2016, this was granted in July 2016 when data collection commenced.

## ***Children and young people***

We interviewed and consulted with children at the prison to gain their views and experiences of the Visiting Mum scheme. We facilitated activity based focus groups (Bagnoli, 2009) with young people visiting their mothers in prison and have undertaken events with 3 different age groups: 7-11, 12-15, 16-18 years (the latter group took place outside of prison), during which we provided age appropriate activities. We utilised creative activities with the 7-11, 12-15 and 16-18 age range, asking the children to undertake a timeline collage, used miniature sandboxes for them to create a tableau representing visiting their mother in prison and the drawing of eco maps. Such a mosaic approach has previously been described as best practice in participatory research with children and young people (Clark and Moss, 2001) and the range of visual and creative methods have aimed to aid and maximise participation. We have talked to the young people as they actively created their work and asked for permission to be able to record discussions about what they were making at the table. When consent was given, we put the recorder on the table in plain sight. Once the young person had finished we asked them to talk to us about their collages, structuring discussion using some key questions. All of these focus groups and activities with the young people were transcribed. Where young people did not feel comfortable discussing these things in a group a researcher was on hand to conduct individual interviews. With the 16-18 age group, we utilised some of the same creative exercises but also conducted a more traditional focus group session (McLaughlin, 2007). We have explored the experiences and views of the young people and their involvement in the scheme, and whether they perceive that it has helped to improve their family relationships and their physical and mental health. We structured these discussions using these group activities and tasks.

We ensured that all of the young people who were approached to take part in a focus group/ activity had already visited their mother in prison at least once (so it was not their first visit to the prison). We firstly gained consent from mothers and once given, we contacted the children to let them know about the project and ask whether they would like to be involved. Once an expression of interest had been made we requested consent from the children themselves using age appropriate information and consent forms. Their mothers, workers from PACT and volunteers from Sova already known to the children were present during the events and were thus on hand to support children should any upset have been caused. In total, we ran groups with the following children: 5 young people age 7-11, plus two older children who also attended age 12 and 15 who completed a survey (n=7); 3 young people age 11-15 (n=3). The group with the older children age 16-18 was held in the community, in the SOVA offices in Cardiff; two people attended (n=2). The total number of children involved in the research was 12.

### ***Women in prison***

We have utilised semi-structured interviews with women serving a sentence in HMP Eastwood Park to discuss their experiences of the Visiting Mum scheme. We asked whether they were less anxious about their children and families as a result of accessing the service, and any associated changes to their perceived well-being in prison and whether they anticipated that the scheme would have an impact on them on release. The underpinning epistemology of this research was that offenders are well placed to act as informants for the development of rehabilitation services. This derives from standpoint theory, where the perspectives of marginalised groups are elevated to 'expert' status (Wylie and Sismondo, 2015). We interviewed 17 women whilst in custody.

### ***Women released from prison***

We also utilised semi-structured interviews with women who had accessed the Visiting Mum scheme and had been released, in order for them to reflect retrospectively on their experiences of the service, and they were able to consider whether the scheme impacted on their emotional well-being. We asked about their ability to settle back in to the family, build trusting relationships and reintegrate in the local community. This provided a longitudinal perspective (Ritchie et al. 2013) to the qualitative data collected by exploring the lasting effects of the Visiting Mum scheme. These interviews were conducted both in the Sova offices and over the telephone. We interviewed 8 women who had been released from custody.

### ***Carers***

We further utilised a semi-structured interview schedule (Alston and Bowles, 2003) with carers who looked after children whilst the mother was serving a prison sentence. We explored the support that the Visiting Mum scheme offered to them, as well as their perceptions of whether the children they cared for experienced any improved mental or physical health due to being facilitated to visit their mother. We also observed some carers whilst they accompanied the children to the data collection events. These interviews took place in the SOVA offices in the community and over the telephone. We interviewed 4 carers in total.

### ***Volunteers***

We conducted semi-structured interviews with SOVA volunteers to discuss the operationalisation of the scheme, their experiences of it and to consider and explore any suggested improvements to make it more effective or efficient. We have interviewed 4 volunteers in the Sova offices.

### ***Social workers***

Telephone interviews have been undertaken with the mother's social workers in the local community (where there is one). We have asked about their perception of how the woman has settled back into the family and community, whether they have any knowledge of the physical and mental health of the children, about any contact they have had with Visiting Mum scheme and about their current involvement with the woman. We have interviewed 5 social workers.

### ***Case studies***

We have created two case studies (Baxter and Jack, 2006; Stake, 1978 ) in the latter stages of the evaluation to demonstrate how the service has been experienced by specific families and its perceived impact. Gill (2009) developed similar case studies regarding the impact of fathers' incarceration on their children. This has aimed to illuminate the lived experiences of particular families - mothers and children. Caution has been taken in the presentation of the case studies, ensuring that none of the families are recognisable - names, ages and demographic details have been changed to preserve confidentiality.

### ***Visiting Mum staff***

We ran a focus group ( Silverman, 2014) with the Visiting Mum staff in the prison to elicit their views of the scheme, how it is operationalised, gaps in provision and areas for improvement and further development of the project.

### ***Sova Coordinator***

We have interviewed the Sova volunteer coordinator to explore her views of the project and any suggested areas for improvement.

### ***Survey of practitioners***

We have surveyed practitioners by creating an on-line survey which was disseminated by PACT. The survey was open from 15 November 2016 - 26 January 2017.

### ***Quantitative data***

We have collated and analysed Assessment, Care in Custody and Teamwork (ACCT self-harm) data for women who have utilised the Visiting Mum scheme. This will allow us to assess whether self-harm reduced during the course of the sentence. This was further triangulated (Walliman, 2011) by the qualitative data regarding how women felt the Visiting Mum scheme impacted on their well-being during the course of their sentence. We have also collated information regarding re-offending post release. We had intended to utilise the RADAR well-being forms (completed at the beginning and end of sentence) but as others have found (Dominey et al. 2016) these are rarely filled out and are difficult to complete, requiring deeply personal information to be taken from the woman at the very beginning of her period of incarceration.

We have also asked for information from the Visiting Mum project regarding the involvement of schools directly with PACT (and as a minimum whether the school granted permission for the child to be absent in order to visit the prison).

### ***Prison personnel***

We have interviewed an assistant prison governor about their experiences and perceptions of the usefulness of the scheme and how in their view the services provided to Welsh mothers have been

enhanced or otherwise. We have also interviewed a member of the re-settlement team based in the prison and a member of the chaplaincy (n=3).

### ***Analysis***

We have analysed all of the transcribed data. We have been guided by the transcripts of the interviews and focus groups in constructing a coding frame with which to analyse the data (Walliman, 2011). Themes have been cross checked between researchers undertaking the analysis. We have used inductive, qualitative, thematic analysis (Seale, 2012). Codes, categories and themes used in our analysis and written-up have been 'grounded in the data' (Bryman, 2012). The visual materials, which were photographed at the point of data production, and these acted as tools of elicitation, rather than objects of analysis per se, they were however drawn upon to illuminate and extend the relevant interview transcripts and have been used to contextualise the analysis of the transcripts.

In total, we have interviewed/consulted/surveyed 70 people for their views on the Visiting Mum project (see table 2).



<b>Data Collection</b>	<b>Completed</b>		
Visit one family day December 2015	Observational Completed December 2015	Transcribed	Analysed
<b>INTERVIEWS</b>			
Women in prison x 17	17 Completed July- Nov 2016	Transcribed	Analysed
Women released x 8	8 Completed- Sept -Nov 2016	Transcribed	Analysed
Carers x 4	Completed Nov - Jan 2017	Transcribed	Analysed
Volunteers x 4	Completed October 2016- Jan 2017	Transcribed	Analysed
Children's group 7-11	Completed July 2016	Transcribed	Analysed
Children's group 11-15	Completed October 2016	Transcribed	Analysed
Children's group 16-18	Completed March 2017	Transcribed	Analysed
Assistant prison governor	Completed June 2017	Transcribed	Analysed
Telephone interviews with social workers	Completed November 2107- February 2018	Transcribed	Analysed
SOVA staff*	Interview with Co-ordinator- Sova –January 2018	Transcribed	Analysed
Prison staff*	Resettlement worker April 2017	Transcribed	Analysed
	Chaplaincy department April 2017	Transcribed	Analysed
<b>FOCUS GROUP</b>			
Visiting Mum staff*	Visiting Mum staff in HMP Eastwood Park April 2017	Transcribed	Analysed
<b>SURVEY</b>			
Survey of network practitioners	Completed January 2017	Completed	Analysed
<b>SECONDARY DATA ANALYSIS</b>			
Re-offending data and ACCT	Collected		Analysed
<b>CASE STUDIES</b>			
Detailed case studies	Completed		Completed
<b>CONFERENCE ATTENDANCE</b>			
*Visiting Mum conference 2015	Attended		
*Visiting Mum conference 2016	Attended and presented early interim findings		
*Meeting with Sova's chief operating officer November 2016	Attended		

\* Denotes additional research activity not outlined in the original research tender.

Table 2: Data collection

## Literature Review

In order to provide some context for the evaluation, a literature review has been undertaken to provide key information about mothers in prison, their children and contact between them. The first part provides numbers and characteristics of women in prison in England and Wales, including detail about the challenging circumstances and complex and multiple needs that many women in prison experience. Part one also looks at what is known about mothers in prison, and the legal framework around sentencing mothers to custody in England and Wales. The second part maps what is known about the children of female prisoners in England and Wales and the effects of maternal imprisonment, both on mothers and children. Part three presents the research evidence around maintaining mother-child contact in prison, examining how the quality of the visit matters and benefits of contact for children and mothers. The concluding section sets out the contention that, the wellbeing and rights of imprisoned mothers and children are so intrinsically linked that quality visitation benefits both of them.

As *Visiting Mum* is focused specifically on facilitating and supporting contact between children and their imprisoned mothers, the literature review does not focus on research evidence pertaining to the children of imprisoned fathers or contact between imprisoned fathers and their children. However, there is a dearth of research on women as mothers in prison and even less is known about their children (Codd, 2008; Condry, 2006). As such, some of the studies include samples of both imprisoned mothers and fathers and these instances are clearly stated.

### **PART 1: Women and mothers in prison**

#### *Characteristics of female offenders:*

The number of female prisoners is significantly smaller than the male prison population in England and Wales. In the week of 12<sup>th</sup> May 2017 the female prison population in England and Wales was 3,945. This is to be contrasted with 81,248 male prisoners in the same week (Ministry of Justice, 2017). The number of female prisoners has slowly decreased in recent years (for example, in 2005 the female prison population was 4,467), however, the figure nearly trebled between 1993 and 2005 (Ministry of Justice, 2105c). While the total number of women in prison in England and Wales appears relatively modest, in contrast with other European countries, it is much higher. In England and Wales 6.4 women per 100,000 of the population were imprisoned in 2017, contrasted with 2.6 in Northern Ireland, 2.6 in Denmark, 3.1 in the Republic of Ireland, 3.3 in France and 4.3 in Germany (World Prison Brief, 2017).

Data about Welsh male and female prisoners is not routinely disaggregated and published, making it difficult to ascertain how many Welsh women are in prison each year. However, in the year 2012-13, 510 Welsh women had been given a custodial sentence and 1,234 women started a community order (Prison Reform Trust, 2014).

Women on remand in England and Wales make up around 16% of the female prison population (Prison Reform Trust, 2015). However, only 45% of women who enter prison on remand and are subsequently convicted receive a custodial sentence (Ministry of Justice, 2016a). Even when sentenced to custody, these sentences are often very short. A 2012 freedom of information request found that 'in 2008 3,000 women were sentenced to custody for 3 months or less of whom 176 were sentenced to 10 days or

less' (Epstein, 2012:8). The UK Government's own data shows that in the year 2015-2016, of 6,068 custodial receptions for women, almost 70% were for sentences of 6 months or less (Ministry of Justice, 2016b). The frequent use of short custodial sentences indicates that large numbers of women are sentenced for very minor offences, whilst the high numbers of women who are remanded but not given custodial sentences indicates that remand is used too frequently. For women with dependent children who are held on remand and subsequently not sentenced to custody or who receive short sentences, massive disruption is caused to their caretaking responsibilities for the sake of a short time in prison. Short sentences also cause a disproportionate amount of disruption to children's lives, causing feelings of loss, confusion and the experience of stigma. Custodial sentences jeopardise women's employment and housing opportunities which directly impact upon imprisoned mothers' ability to provide for their children (Prison Reform Trust 2015c, 2016). This is to be considered in relation to the fact that many women who offend report that their offending is motivated by being able to provide for their children (Prison Reform Trust, 2015a; Liverpool Mental Health Consortium, 2016).

The use of short sentences is not surprising given that the nature of offences committed by female prisoners are overwhelmingly non-violent. The large majority of women enter prison for a non-violent offence, in 2015 this figure stood at 85%, with 42% entering custody under sentence for theft and handling stolen goods (Ministry of Justice, 2016a). In terms of reoffending, some research shows that 56% of female prisoners will be reconvicted within a year of release (Hedderman and Joliffe, 2015) while the Prison Reform Trust states this figure is 48% (Prison Reform Trust, 2015a).

#### *Needs and vulnerabilities of women in prison:*

Despite significant numbers of women being imprisoned on the basis of non-violent and less serious property offences, a large number of women in prison have multiple, complex needs and vulnerabilities, having suffered significant hardships, including violence and harm perpetrated against them.

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

A particularly concerning recent trend in women's prisons has been the sharp increase in suicide rates. The Prisons and Probation Ombudsman (PPO) reported in April 2017 on what it described as the 'recent dramatic and depressing rise in self-inflicted deaths of women in prisons' (PPO, 2017). The ombudsman reports that in 2015, women's suicide rates in prison became higher per 1,000 than men

and that: 'overall, deaths of female prisoners more than doubled in 2016 compared to the previous calendar year, and this rise shows little sign of abating'. The report makes several recommendations to prisons, including better use of the ACCT process, having better emergency responses and identifying and dealing with mental health and bullying risks quicker and more effectively.

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

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

#### *Mothers in prison:*

Ascertaining exact figures of mothers in prison is problematic. Some women do not disclose information about their children due to fear of social care intervention. However, a large study has shown that around two thirds of women in prison are mothers of children under the age of 18 (Prison Reform Trust, 2015b). Of those women, a third had children under 5 years old and a further 40% had children aged between 5 and 10 years old. The Ministry of Justice carried out research to estimate the numbers of mothers on prison by matching the PNC (police national computer) with Department of Work and Pensions databases. It was estimated that 96% of the female prison population is eligible for a child benefit claim and matching this data to the PNC which holds a record of all convictions it was estimated that between 24% and 31% of female prisoners have one or more dependent children (Ministry of Justice, 2015e). For the vast majority of mothers (85%), imprisonment is the first time they are separated from children (Home Office, 1997).

Around 38% of women report that their offending behaviour stems from a need to support and provide for their children (Prison Reform Trust, 2015a). Women are more likely than men to be primary caretakers of children meaning that maternal imprisonment has a much more significant and far reaching effect on children than paternal imprisonment. Maruschal et al. (2010) found that most (75%) of incarcerated mothers were primary caregiver as compared 25% of fathers. At least a fifth of women are lone parents before entering custody (Prison Reform Trust, 2015). Many mothers will return to parenting on their release, and even where the child's father is involved mothers more likely to be responsible for daily care. Indeed, only 9% of children are cared for by their father in cases of maternal imprisonment, compared with 90% of children in cases of paternal imprisonment (Prison Reform Trust, 2015b).

Given the primacy of the mother-child relationship, mothers report that the separation from their children is the worst, most difficult aspect of imprisonment (Carlen and Worrall, 2004; Walker and Worrall, 2000). Aligned to this is the fact that there are particular professional and social judgements made about mothers going to prison because it demonstrates a 'failure' of what we expect from women as mothers. Baldwin notes that feelings of 'loss, shame, bewilderment and devastation' are common among mothers in prison and feelings of guilt and shame are partly related to their perceived transgressions of expected maternal behaviour (2015:165).

Being a mother in prison also exacerbates mental health and substance misuse problems (Caddle and Crisp, 1997). James and Glaze (2006) found that incarcerated mothers are more likely to have mental health problems than incarcerated fathers. Studies have also indicated that mothers in prison face additional strain compared with other female prisoners and lose confidence in their parenting ability during their imprisonment. Feelings of loss and rejection around losing their children have been found to be motivating factors in decisions of imprisoned mothers to attempt suicide (Loper and Tuerk, 2006; Borrill et al. 2005).

The preceding section detailed the complex and multiple problems that many women in prison suffer. A significant number of these women are mothers, for whom maintaining contact with children is likely to have a significant bearing on mental wellbeing.

#### *Sentencing mothers:*

Human rights legislation and case law has a role to play in relation to the imprisonment of mothers. In 2010, the UN General Assembly approved the UN Rules for the Treatment of Women Prisoners and Non-custodial Measures for Women Offenders (known as the 'Bangkok Rules'), further embedding the requirement that gender sensitive approaches are taken in policy and practice in relation to the imprisonment of women. This includes taking into account children living with mothers in prison and in the community. Further, section 10 of the Offender Rehabilitation Act 2014 specifies that women's needs must be identified in arrangements for the supervision and rehabilitation of offenders. In addition, when a mother is sentenced to custody, they are separated from their child, depriving the child of parental care. This interferes with children's Article 8 rights (the right to respect for family and private life) and has been the subject of two important recent legal authorities: *R (on the application of P and Q) v Secretary of State for the Home Department EWCA Civ 1151* and *R v Rosie Lee Petherick [2012] EWCA Crim 2214*. Human rights legislation and case law does not mean that mothers cannot be sentenced to custody because of a breach to their child's Article 8 rights. Instead, judges' sentences must balance the rights of the child with the mother's offence, taking into account the domestic circumstances of the mother and the effect imprisonment would have on the child/ren.

Custodial sentences for mothers must be proportionate to the offence committed but despite changes to sentencing guidelines, the Prison Reform Trust argues 'there is still an overuse of short custodial sentences for women' of whom a large proportion are mothers with dependant children (Prison Reform Trust 2015b:5). Section 152 (2) Criminal Justice Act 2003 states that prison must only be used in cases where an offence justifies more than a fine or community sentence. However, in 2009 1,052 women were sentenced to custody for breaching a court order, with an average sentence length for this being less than two months which supports the Prison Reform Trust's contention. Further,

Epstein's 2012 study of case transcripts where mothers were sentenced to custody found that 'in the 51 cases of immediate custody that were studied there were 7 cases where the sentencers made no mention at all of the defendant's dependent children. There was no express reference to the Article 8 rights of the child in any of the 75 cases studied' (Epstein, 2012,:4). Minson also notes that sentencers often misunderstand the gender specific and detrimental effect that maternal imprisonment has on women and children, and that there is inconsistency in using motherhood as a mitigating factor when handing down a custodial sentence (Minson, 2014). This brings into question whether, or how often, mothers are being sentenced against Sentencing Council guidance to the disproportionate detriment of their children.

In Wales, despite the Welsh Government's adoption of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) as the basis for policy making about children and young people, there is no national strategy for the children of prisoners, and no routine data collected by Local Authorities about children of prisoners (in either England or Wales), meaning that this small but vulnerable group of children are unknown.

## **PART 2: Children of women in prison**

### *Children of mothers in prison:*

The exact numbers of children in England and Wales affected by maternal imprisonment are unknown as many women are reluctant to disclose information about their children in case of intervention by children's social care. The Howard League for Penal Reform has estimated that in 2010, more than 17,240 children in England and Wales were separated from their mother through imprisonment (Wilkes-Wiffen, 2011). Of these children only 5% remain in the family home (Crisp and Caddle, 1997). Another study has estimated that around 3000 babies and toddlers under the age of two have their mothers imprisoned each year (Galloway et al. 2014). Due the lack of routine data collected about mothers and their children in relation to the criminal justice system, many children of imprisoned mothers do not become known to social care or community services (Social Care Institute for Excellence, 2008). Given that the vast majority are not cared for in the family home or by their father, they will suffer the disruption of moving home and the stigma of maternal imprisonment on top of the absence of their mother so for some children the input of community and social services could be vital for their wellbeing.

Understanding how many children of imprisoned mothers are Welsh or living in Wales is a further difficulty. Justice is not a devolved function, and Welsh Government do not routinely disaggregate and publish data on prisoners or their children to enable estimates to be made.

### *Effects of imprisonment on children:*

The effects on children of parental imprisonment have been explored in a number of studies in the US and some from the UK. However, there have been calls for more insight into the impact of imprisonment on families (Loucks, 2004, Browne, 2005, Murray, 2005, Loureiro 2009) as a large proportion of research on prisoners looks at reoffending with the families of offenders being 'forgotten victims' (Light and Campbell, 2011).

Huebner and Gustafson's (2007) longitudinal study found that 26% of children who experienced their mother's incarceration were convicted of crimes in adulthood compared to 10% of their peers. Further, adult children of imprisoned mothers have been found to be more likely to be convicted of an offence than adult children from imprisoned fathers (Ministry of Justice, 2012). Further, statistically children of imprisoned mothers are more likely to be placed in local authority care, be victims of crime and offend themselves (Reed, 2014). The risk of anti-social behaviour is trebled (Murray and Farrington, 2008) and other long term negative outcomes such as poor educational performance, poor emotional wellbeing and an increase in substance misuse have been identified (Murray et al, 2009; 2012) as a result of parental imprisonment. There has also been found to be an increased risk of the children of imprisoned mothers becoming NEET, and the risk of anti-social behaviour is trebled (NEF, 2008). Various other health and social disadvantages also impact children including increased levels of poverty, family breakdown, higher risks of substance abuse and mental health issues to the extent that Convery and Moore describe maternal imprisonment as wreaking 'havoc on family stability and children's well-being' (2011:12).

Because mothers are almost always the primary caretakers of children, they often experience at least one transition away from their mother to another caregiver. As such, children of an incarcerated mother are at an increased risk of attachment problems than children of incarcerated fathers (Poehlmann, 2005). Further, maternal imprisonment has been shown to have more negative effects upon attachment and psychological functioning than paternal imprisonment, indicating that the impact of maternal imprisonment is more pronounced upon children (Murray and Murray, 2010). In relation to children's social care involvement, Maruschak et al. (2010) found that children of incarcerated mothers are five times more likely to be placed in foster care than those of incarcerated fathers.

Brown (2005), and Pugh (2004) report harmful externalising behaviours of children of imprisoned mothers such as aggression or tantrums, as well as harmful internalising behaviours such as insomnia, crying and sadness, or children blaming themselves. Boswell (2002) reports that children describe feelings of loss, stigma, and emotional trauma, as well as having worries about finances when their mothers go to prison. Loucks (2004) also reports significant mental and emotional health detriments to children with mothers in prison.

A large review of the effects of imprisonment on children, undertaken under the New Labour Government found that there were no systems in place or consistent support offered to the children of prisoners (Moj/Department for Children, Schools and Families 2007). There have been no significant policy developments to suggest that this has changed in the past decade. Indeed prisons have become somewhat of a 'crisis issue' recently, partly due to the large decrease in frontline prison officers employed in England and Wales which dropped by 30% between 2010 and 2013 (Howard League for Penal Reform, 2014). This strain on prison resources coupled with cuts to children's social care budgets is not conducive to providing better support to mothers and children affected by imprisonment (The Children's Society, 2016).

Overall, the studies that have been undertaken which look at the effects of maternal imprisonment on children demonstrate that the disruption that maternal imprisonment causes means that those children are at a higher risk of many negative social and psychological outcomes than their peers.

### **PART 3: Mother-child contact in prison**

The large geographical spread of women's prisons mean that maintaining face to face contact with children can be challenging, and in one study only half of women had received a visit from their children whilst incarcerated (SEU, 2002). In terms of the evidence about children visiting their mothers in prison, contact has been found to have mixed effects. In some cases frequent contact has been found to mitigate against negative outcomes for incarcerated mothers and their children but some studies have reported less positive outcomes (Dallaire et al. 2009).

Mothers who have frequent contact with their children have been shown to be less likely to report low self-esteem compared with mothers who have no contact (Thompson and Harm, 2000). In terms of mental health benefits, less depression is experienced by mothers who have frequent visitation (Poehlmann, 2005b) and lower levels of depression, anxiety, and somatisation (physical ailments that have a psychological cause) have been reported in mothers who had sustained contact with their children (Houck and Loper 2002). Further, lower levels of parenting stress, including stress specific to their child visiting them in prison, and fewer depressive symptoms have been experienced by women who have frequent visits from their children (Loper et al. 2009).

However, the nature of the separation and the environment of the prison in which visits occur mean that mothers feelings about visits are complex and sometimes ambivalent. Mothers have reported mixed feelings about visitation with their children, describing visits as 'uncertain,' 'bittersweet,' and 'overwhelming' (Arditti and Few, 2008). This is exacerbated by the limited physical contact permitted with most prison visits, which can be acutely painful for both mothers and their children (Allen et al., 2010). Linked to this, the limited time allowed in typical visitation can also be upsetting, with many mothers reporting that visits are too short to connect with their children on an emotional level (Arditti and Few, 2006). Further, mothers more than fathers tend to be more sensitive to children's potential distress during visitation, thereby increasing their own feelings of guilt, embarrassment, and shame (e.g., Loper et al. 2009).

There have been some findings relating to the impact of visiting parents in prison on children, again with mixed results. One study which looked at a sample of both imprisoned mothers and fathers reported that children visiting more frequently showed more indications of attachment insecurity than children who visited less frequently (Dallaire et al. 2009). In addition, some studies report that children exhibited increased attention problems in school and behavioural issues both before and after visits to parents in prison (Poehlmann et al, 2006; Dallaire et al. 2010). Contrasted against this however, a study looking specifically at contact between imprisoned mothers and children show that children's problem behaviours decreased at home and they were less likely to drop out of school if they frequently visited their mothers (Trice and Brewer, 2004).

#### *Enhanced or special prison visitation:*

One explanation about the variation in findings about children visiting their mothers in prison is that very few studies actually examine the *quality* of the visit. Poehlmann et al's. (2010) literature review



suggests that only enhanced or specially tailored visitation schemes show benefits for mothers and children, as whether a visit is child friendly or very stressful will affect their attachment security.

The COPING study (Sharratt and Cheung, 2014) was a large multi-national study which examined the effect of parental imprisonment on children across Europe. Findings from this research suggest that special family visit days are important for the emotional wellbeing of children of prisoners. In this study, the imprisoned parent was most often the child's biological father, step-father or mother's partner (n=50), but there were also a reasonable proportion of children with a biological mother in prison (n=16). This study revealed that the first visit was very important as it dispelled myths about prison and demonstrated to children and young people that their parent was safe and well. The importance of continuing contact was also evidenced and this was equally important for both fathers and mothers to satisfy child's need for face-to-face contact. Physical visits were found to be preferable to telephone contact because they provided a more of an emotional connection and ongoing visits also showed a parent's wellbeing to the child or young person. However, whilst children looked forward to visiting it also caused them to feel anxious and nervous and a small number did not visit often because it caused them undue distress. In these cases the parent-child relationship was often fraught prior to or as a result of imprisonment or the prison environment.

One of the main features of enhanced or special family visits is that they eliminate non-contact visiting. In England and Wales this means that rather than the standard initial and parting hug allowed on normal social visits, mothers are allowed to hold their children's hands, hug them, sit their children on their knees, pick them up when they fall etc. and children and young people are similarly able to reach for and hold their mothers without limitations. It has been reported that young children find the lack of touch allowed difficult to understand, and therefore upsetting. Arguably older children and young people and others themselves may understand the reason for the lack of touch, but nevertheless find it very hard to process emotionally (Poehlman, 2005a). The centrality of touch is clear in studies which use children and young people's accounts and where there were restrictions on physical contact (both for imprisoned mothers and fathers) children and young people felt distress and anger and young children found it hard to understand (Sharratt and Cheung, 2014). The compulsion to touch your mother being denied could itself be a traumatic experience. Indeed, some mothers have been reported as stopping visits with their children as without physical contact it is too painful for them and their children (Allen et al. 2010). Many mothers report distress at their children's discomfort (Arditti and Few, 2008).

Special visits also attempt to mitigate against the un-family friendly prison environment which can be loud, sterile, hostile and alien. Standard prison procedures include walking through metal detectors, waiting around outside large gates, being patted down and sniffed by dogs. Prisons are certainly not designed for children and standard visits involve being surrounded by other inmates. All of these factors can cause children and young people fear and anxiety (Murray, 2007). Because of the connected nature of the mother-child relationship, children's anxiety is often second-guessed by mothers, the effect being that mothers are anxious about their children's real or perceived anxiety at being in the prison environment. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the more secure the prison the more intimidating visits have been found to be for children and young people. Attempts to mediate some of the severe aspects of prison surroundings included reducing security restrictions on family visit days

haven been found to be appreciated by families and resulted in better quality interactions between children and parent (Sharratt and Cheung, 2014).

In addition, the format and activities available during the visit is important. Standard visits are not child-friendly offering little or nothing in the way of opportunities to play. It is a widely understood concept in child development that emotional and behavioural regulation is a process that begins to develop in a rudimentary way in toddlerhood but is still being refined in adolescence (Zeman et al. 2006). As such, it is unsurprising that children find it difficult to sit still for an hour or more across a table from their mothers (who they are unable to touch, in itself requiring a great deal of emotional regulation). The provision of meaningful activities, which prisoners are also allowed to take part in, has been found to be an important factor in making a quality visit and be beneficial for children's emotional wellbeing, and supporting the parent-child interaction (Sharratt and Cheung, 2014). Further, the length of visit in enhanced visiting is important as longer visits allow mothers and children to go beyond the initial reaction which can be stilted, shy or awkward or indeed, overwhelmingly emotional and gain more from the experience (Sharratt and Cheung, 2014). Linked to this, a final important aspect of visiting prison to see a parent which has been highlighted by children, young people and families related to endings. Saying goodbye was challenging for children and young people but family visit days offered a less rushed goodbye and the chance for a long hug or more than one embrace.

Our findings also indicate that mothers and children value opportunities for play, entertainment or to do practical things, like make each other a hot drink. They also value the ability to show and receive affect and do this over an extended period of time.

#### *Evaluations of enhanced contact schemes for imprisoned mothers in England and Wales:*

A small number of projects set up in England and Wales to support mother-child contact when a mother is in prison have been evaluated. A small-scale evaluation of a project which facilitates overnight stays between women and their children run at HMP Askham Grange women's prison reported that the provision facilitated meaningful mother-child contact and this was valued by mothers, children and carers (Raikes and Underwood, 2011) (see page7).

In another evaluation, in the USA the pilot of the Extended Visiting (EV) prison-visiting programme for imprisoned mothers and their children was evaluated (Schubert et al. 2016). Both mothers and children preferred the EV. The pilot programme was based in one prison and provided highly structured, extended length child-centred visits on Saturday afternoons for around 4 hours. Children and young people were divided into two age groups (infant-9 years old and 10-17 years old) with one weekend for older children and other weekends for younger children. The extended visit included lunch, play in the gym and an activity organised by the mothers. These visits were purely for mothers and children, caregivers did not take part but they did arrange the visits and transport children. This was partly for security reasons but also to allow the mother-child relationship to be the focus of the visit.

EV was only offered to women who had been at that prison for 60 days and who had demonstrated exemplary behaviour so as to reside in a privileged living unit. Women had to submit a formal

application. Women, children and caregivers had to conform to policy including a 'previsit', approval by staff, drop off and pick up, appropriate attire, physical contact and healthcare of visiting children.

Mothers (n=24) and caregivers (n=19) were interviewed regarding their experiences. Benefits of the scheme included maintaining the relationship, having physical contact, motivation for mothers to adhere to prison rules and gain release as quickly as possible, privacy, peer support and personal growth. Caregivers also cited the relationship maintenance and physical contact as important. Mothers expressed a desire for overnight stays and more age-appropriate activities whilst caregivers perceived travel time and costs and children's adverse reactions as barriers. Children were not interviewed about their experiences so we do not know how they found the EV scheme and how it benefitted them, only that mother and caregiver perceptions of the children's reactions were positive. The EV scheme is not dissimilar to Visiting Mum and our findings in relation to children and young people's views can be found on page 28.

In addition to these evaluations, in November 2016 an unannounced inspection by HM Chief Inspector of Prisons took place at HMP Eastwood Park. PACT's Visiting Mum scheme was highly rated as part of the review of how the prison deals with children, families and contact with the outside world, identifying the scheme as an example of good practice under this thematic heading. It called the scheme 'excellent' and stated that 'The Visiting Mum project helped women from South Wales maintain their family links in a supportive and supervised environment' (2016:58). Visiting Mum was clearly valued by the Inspectorate and provides HMP Eastwood Park with a good practice example of how the prison supports children and families of its inmates.

#### **PART 4: Conclusion: Reconciling children's and mother's rights and wellbeing**

The disruption caused by maternal imprisonment on the lives of women and children is significant, carrying with it an increased risk of negative psychological and social outcomes for both, often for short sentences resulting from minor offences. The provision of good quality, family-friendly visits have been shown to mitigate some of these effects and our findings of the Visiting Mum evaluation echo this.

Findings from the COPING study which examined the effects of parental imprisonment on children across Europe have been used by Sharatt and Cheung (2014) to make an argument that the rights of the child enshrined in the UNCRC are being violated by using family visits as a form of reward for male prisoners. The Incentives and Earned Privileges (IEP) Scheme for adult male prisoners was introduced in 1995 as a tool of prison management, and it includes family visits as 'reward' for adhering to prison rules. The Ministry of Justice has stated that there is no intention to remove family visits from the IEP because they are highly effective at controlling behaviour of male inmates.

Currently female prisoners are detached from the IEP in recognition that incentivising family visits does not meet the needs of children (and indeed, would violate their Article 8 rights). Including mothers in the IEP would also, as reflected in our findings, be more detrimental to mothers and their children if the significance of the mother-child dyad is considered. The Visiting Mum scheme is able to work more flexibly with mothers who struggle at certain points to adhere to prison rules but for whom contact with their child would be beneficial to both child and maternal wellbeing. The case study on page reflects this exact point. It also emphasises the point that while the use of family visits as a

reward for mothers in prison would quite clearly contravene children's rights, the decoupling of mother and child's wellbeing is overly simplistic. Women and children's anxiety about imprisonment is often relational and co-constructed, as our findings demonstrate. A good quality visit can mitigate some of this anxiety and reassure women and children about each other's wellbeing. Rather than being justified as being either good for maternal wellbeing/behaviour or to uphold children's rights, the benefits and the basis of visits such as those facilitated by the Visiting Mum scheme should be understood in terms of the unique and intrinsically connected relationship between mother and child.

## Findings

### *Themes from focus groups, activities and questionnaires with children*



Permission to use this photograph granted by all participants

We have chosen to start with the views of children in order to privilege these often unheard voices. All of the children who took part in our research very much appreciated the Visiting Mum scheme and are keen that it should continue, given that they themselves have benefitted from it so much:

'I don't think the funding should stop...without PACT visits, we wouldn't you know we wouldn't have gotten through my mam being inside' (Young woman age 16).

### *Impact on children- 'we was prisoners in our own home'*

The young people made the point that children suffer as much, if not more than their mothers from both secondary prisonisation and secondary stigmatisation (Minson 2017), the following excerpt is taken from a focus group where two young women discuss how they both suffered and were stigmatised by their mother's incarceration:

'Only because it's not the parents who are suffering- as well it is the kids...[She was asked if she thought that her mother suffered] ..Yeah but she didn't get the backlash of it all, me and her did. That's our thing...We was like the prisoners in our own home....Yeah, we couldn't...when it all first kicked off- I couldn't go outside....Because like everywhere you'd go like even though it wasn't you that did it, you'd still get targeted for it.....You'd be walking down the street, 'oh your mother is a scum'....But it was like more the fact of like it being on the news and at one point in the newspapers, it was the street in which they lived in and the area, personal details when children was residing there' (Young women age 16 and 17).

These young women felt very vulnerable as a result of their mother being in prison, they felt judged by others, and very visible within their close community; this had a huge negative impact on them (Boswell 2002). It is vital that sentencers are made aware of whether a woman has children and this information is factored in to decision making (Minson et al. 2015).

When a parent goes to prison children have to undergo huge changes, not only do they have to adapt to the loss of their mother, but in 95% of cases have to move out of the family home (Caddle and Crisp, 1997) and therefore lose the support networks of their locality. They may have to move school and also have to adjust to the parenting regime and expectations of their new carer, whether this be a sibling, relative, foster carer or friend. Children are also keenly aware of the additional burden that the cost of travelling places on their carers (some of whom are elderly) and who are already under financial pressure as a result of having to look after them. Thus, young people felt both guilty and responsible for the pressures placed on carers (Pugh, 2004).

It is difficult to imagine how much upheaval the child has to cope with. In addition, they are left in a state of flux without any means of contacting their mother. For some children several members of their family went to prison, siblings had to be separated and cared for by extended family out of area, creating even more uncertainty and distress.

### *Worrying about their mothers*

Many of the children described worrying about how their mother was and how she was coping with being in prison 'alone'. In some of the exercises the children described how they felt when waiting for a visit and reported the following: 'Needing to know how mum is and just wanting to see here again', 'Anxious to see if mum is OK', 'Worried if mum is OK and not seeing her makes me sad' (Children age 11-15). There was a real sense that the young people were relieved as a result of seeing their mothers, as they spent much of their time at home worrying about them. Clearly not seeing their mothers can be damaging and create separation anxiety, particularly for younger children. Not seeing one's mother causes a lot of anxiety for children who could only imagine how their mother is coping. One young person age 17 noted:

'And then when the (Visiting Mum) visits started up and then she was like 'have a photo' and we're all there laughing and smiling and that was a lot of stress off me, because I know that she is happy that she has seen us'.

#### *First visits*

The first visit to the prison was difficult and made the children feel anxious and nervous. A bad first visit can dissuade children from continuing to visit their mother. Unfortunately, the volunteers had not always been able to visit young people in advance of their first visit or accompany them because of the time it takes for the prison orderly to take a referral, allocate a volunteer and co-ordinate a Visiting Mum visit at a time when child, carer and volunteer are all available. Whilst the Visiting Mum project have created booklets about what it is like to visit the prison, it could be helpful to make a short film of the mechanics of a visit- the main gate, the inside of the prison, the visiting room, with staff introducing themselves which could be sent out to carers via an email early after sentence and before the first visit. This could accompany the booklet and would allow carers to discuss with the child whether they would like to visit, which may further help to prepare children for whom a prior meeting with a volunteer had not been possible. It is important to consider how the volunteers could become involved more quickly, whether this be by having more orderlies in the prison working on the scheme or a volunteer 'duty' rota so that arrangements can be put in place very quickly.

#### *The Quality of the visit- space and time*

Studies have shown that the quality of the visit is vital (Poehlmann et al. 2006) and the lived experience of the child has rarely been investigated. Having both space and time was seen as vital for children to bond with their mothers and enabled mothers to become re-attuned to their children.

When preparing to visit their mothers through the Visiting Mum scheme, children noted that they felt 'Excited', 'Can't wait to see mum's beautiful face' (children age 11-15), 'I felt really good when I was going to see mum. She always used to call me a star' (Child age 7-11). One child noted how much she enjoyed this private space:

The 'ordinary' visits by comparison were experienced as very confining for both children and mothers as:

'You couldn't leave your chair or anything like that, like you couldn't give her a cwttch (Welsh word for cuddle) and that' (Young woman age 17)

'Like the PACT visit...is like more homely. And like you can like run and play and do what you want, more like you can then cwttch each other like we was doing, free-spirited really like Mam could move anywhere she wants, do what she wants, make a cup of tea when she wants' (Young woman age 16).

Young people noted that the impact of a mother not being able to move around was far greater on younger children (Allen et al. 2010):

'He was three or four at the time, and did not really understand the situation and was told that his mother 'had a bad leg....bad foot, so could not walk around..And that was a big thing

for Josh, my mother being able to walk around... It effected him really bad' (Young woman age 16)

Being able to move around, touch and hug their mother in the Visiting Mum scheme was seen as essential by the children, and this was evidenced when the young people arrived at the prison to take part in the focus groups all of whom immediately ran to hug their mothers on arrival. 'I love how intimate they are and how much freedom we have....it's so much more relaxed' (Young woman age 14). Being able to move around allowed mothers the opportunity to respond to the needs of their children and comfort them as required and as expected of a nurturing parent. One young girl noted:

'Like I just spend time with Mammy on my own'. (Girl age 7-11)

The visiting room used for the Visiting Mum visits is airy and spacious, and the range of toys and activities available extensive. The children appeared comfortable and familiar with the family visiting room environment and we observed that they knew the layout of the room and ran to get the toys and craft materials from the cupboards and drawers; this increased their sense of being valued and their confidence in an alien setting. The young people described feeling as if they were in a 'safe' environment. Time, space and 'intimacy' were important elements of the Visiting Mum family visits (Sharratt and Cheung, 2014). Both the space and availability of activities was seen as child/young person friendly which made the visit more 'relaxing' and 'normal'. Doing activities made the visits more natural and less stressful for the children 'I like doing craft and making things with mum' (Girl age 7). This is in direct contrast to the 'ordinary' visits, as is well illustrated by a young woman age 13 when describing her sand box tableau overleaf:



(Children were asked to use the sand boxes to demonstrate how they felt about both the Visiting Mum visits and the 'ordinary' visits, noting the differences between them- their explanation was recorded and transcribed) :

'The one on the **left**, the fire engine is the bus that takes us up which is really calm and which is why I left this down because it's calm, if it wasn't calm I'd put it up (ladder on top of vehicle)...And then this is like us on the visit where the people and the like hammers and things like which shows us doing activities and moving about. And freedom as here is nobody around us and it's really calm and like it's like freedom.

And then on the **right** one then represents the normal visits and the car which we have to take up and then we're in the visits then and then my mum is not allowed to move which is why I did the sticky thing because it's stuck and it's not allowed to move. And then I did loads, there's loads of people around which is what the animals (being herded) and all the things represent because there's like no space like for my mum to get up and do things because everyone is just talking and talking so there is no freedom at all by there... And yeah that's it' (girl age 13).



Similarly, a young man age 13 utilises the sand box tableau to describe how he feels about being watched by guards and subject to intense scrutiny:



'This is just like an 'ordinary' visit (on the **right**). The big orange thing in this corner is the guard, he's watching over you like a control. The pterodactyl just feels like you're always being watched and if you see the like in the corner that's just us three all close together because we can't really move around in here, we're stuck in one corner. And then all the people that are, all these little figures that are looking at us are because there's just so many people around and you always feel like you're being watched by everybody. And the spider represents as well like you don't feel as safe as you would with a PACT visit'.

### *Feeling safe*

The sense of not feeling safe in an 'ordinary' visit reverberated throughout the interviews, as the noise, crowds and the lack of space was experienced as frightening and intimidating. One young man aged 13 noted that he appreciated the Visiting Mum visit because of 'the freedom to walk around and feel safe. ... I don't like it when they are in their uniforms in there- it's horrible, it's like the police... the man sitting in there, the police'. Other young people referred to the frightening atmosphere in the prison on an 'ordinary' visit' as a young woman age 16 notes:

'...you know there's prison guards in every corner, watching exactly what we are doing....it would be like quite uncomfortable because obviously they'd be dressed up in their uniform and they just stare at you. [She goes on to say] Nobody is in uniform on PACT visits....They're in the office if they are so you don't really see them...And like if there is an incident they would all be like running away like they'd have to all run to the wings...The alarm would go off wouldn't it? And everyone will be like [gasps]. [There have been a lot of incidents happening during the time that young people have visited their mothers on an "ordinary" visit.

The young woman's sister continues with the story:

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

An incident occurred in the professional visiting rooms whilst we were running a group with the children which was quite a frightening experience for the young people, as there were a lot of raised voices and swearing. The professional visiting rooms are situated on the side of the family room. Ideally, family visits should occur when no one is using the professional visiting rooms, but given the physical space available in the prison this may not be logistically possible.

Some of the young people talked about visiting their mother whilst she was based in the mother and baby unit (MBU) (as their mother had a young baby whilst in prison) and they noted the opportunity to use the outdoor space and that it was further removed from the main body of the prison:

'Yes, it was mostly over the mother and baby unit....It was more like things for children, it was closed off from the rest of the prison. It was more homely, you could walk around there, you could sit in the garden with all toys it was, they used to have like swing ball'. (Young woman age 14)

It may be that the MBU could be considered as a facility for visiting children when it is not fully occupied, as has been the case for the past 9-10 months. MBU's are often under occupied and underutilised (Abbott 2015:203).

When asked what they would change about Visiting Mum few children were able to suggest improvements, but those that did noted that they would like access to outdoor space as is provided in the MBU and said as follows:

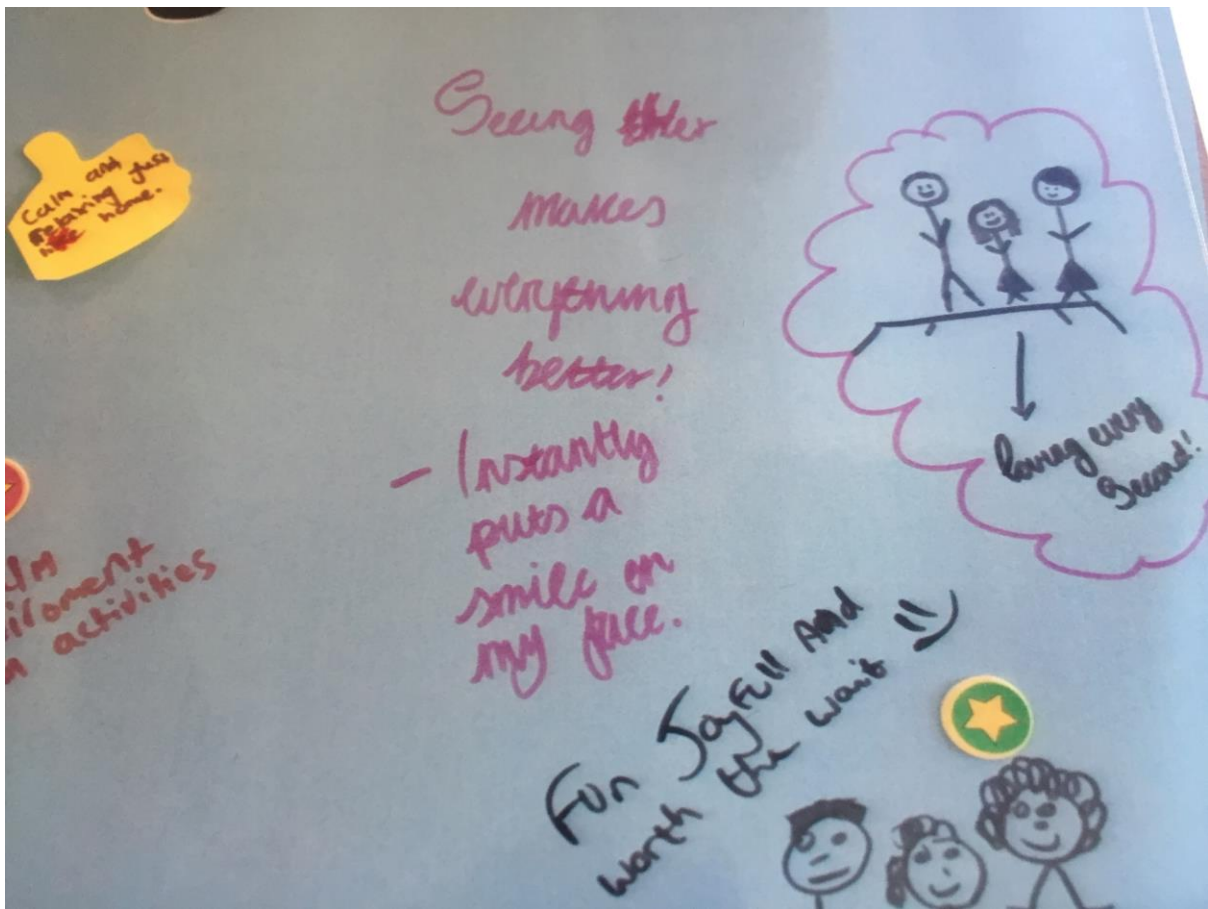
'The location to somewhere with settees, and be able to go outside to play'.

(Young man age 12)

'Ball games and things'. (Girl age 13)

All of the children described the actual Visiting Mum visits as 'calming' and 'relaxing'. The privacy of not being in a busy hall was much appreciated, as was the opportunity to meet with others:

'And it's a lot more private as well because I don't really like it when you're sitting here and there's like 30, 40 people around you, but I like it because you can get used to people on the bus, they're sitting there as well and it's like better than sitting with like loads of complete randomers'. (Young man age 14).



*Exercise with 11-15 year olds about what it feels like Visiting Mum*

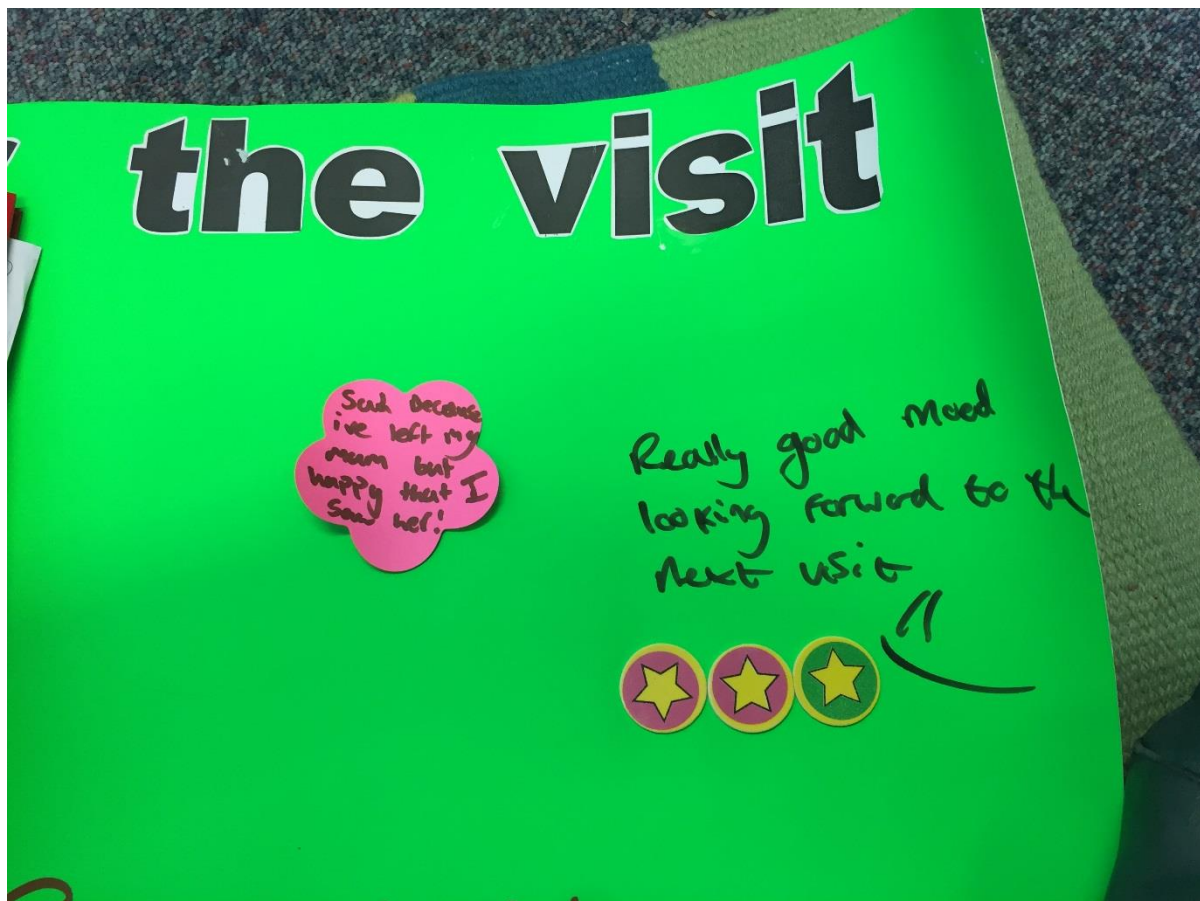
The young people also commented favourably on the joint visits which often occurred with one other family and where the children travelled together as 'You make a lot of friends as well' (Children age 11-15). The visiting room is big enough to allow two family visits to take place and still provide a degree of privacy. The young people found it very helpful and supportive to spend time with others in the same situation and their mothers also noted the benefits of this:

'They (PACT) arrange for a volunteer driver to go pick up my mum and my three girls and they come up in a mini bus with other families. So it's nice really so they know that other people are having to go through what they're going through as well, so they don't feel they are like on their own'. (Mother in Prison 1)

Children whose mothers are incarcerated feel very isolated and having other children who they could share their experiences with was seen to be de-stigmatising and supportive. Many of the children described feeling less isolated by being with other young people in a similar situation, when for example, undertaking a visit with another family or by attending Family Fun Days. In one of the focus groups the children mentioned that one of the young girl's had a beautiful voice and she promised to sing for the others in the bus on the way home- travelling together seemed to be a bonding experience. As has been noted in the literature review there are no systems are in place, nor is there any form of consistent support available to the children of prisoners (MoJ/DCSF, 2007). It may be that

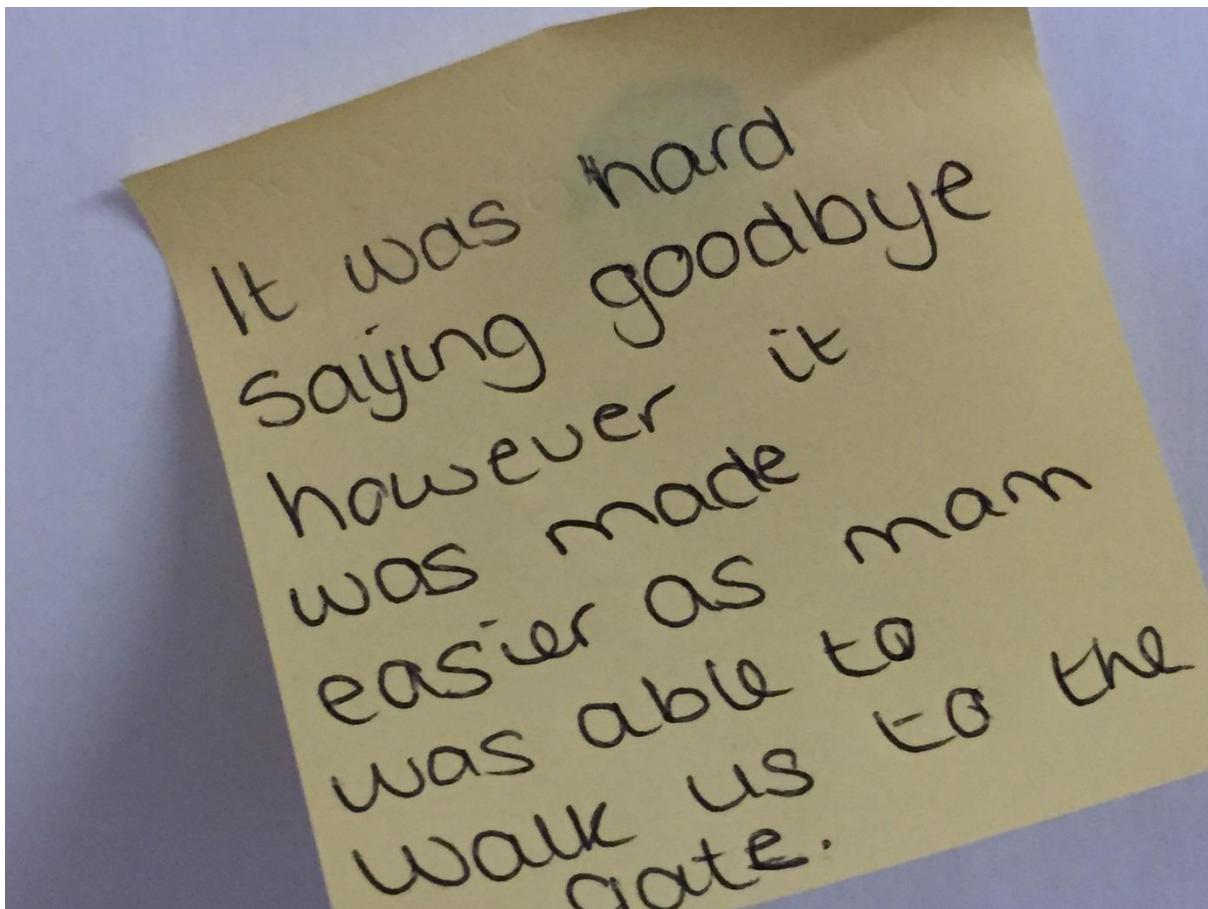
peer support groups could be facilitated by PACT outside of the prison visits for those children who would like to take part.

#### *After the visit*



Children age 11-15

After the visits all children described 'feeling sad, but happy that I saw her' (Child 11-15), 'After the visit I go home and wait until Mum rings and says when the next visits' (Child age 11-15). 'Every time I'm happy after seeing her, going home' (Child 7-11). The children coped with their sadness at leaving their mother, and this did not detract from the pleasure and reassurance they had from seeing her. Having time for the young people to say a proper good bye was important, as a one hour visit would not allow for this, and for some their mother was able to walk them to the gate which children experienced as a more civilised and reassuring departure.



*Girl age 16*

#### *Repairing relationships/bonding*

The Visiting Mum scheme has not only strengthened and maintained relationships but has helped to heal rifts and helped to build bridges between mothers and children. Two young women talked about their anger towards their mother and how they managed to overcome this and indeed the project helped bring them closer together:

'I don't think we'd have a strong relationship with mam. ...I drifted from mam a lot, but then...I still blame mam now for going down, it could have been prevented....Yeah. I don't hate them, I hate what they did. ....They didn't put their children first. They just thought...But they just thought of the money and didn't really think of the family. ...No. I probably wouldn't speak to her now. It's only through the PACT visits that I started speaking to her... Yeah. Well it brought me and you closer though haven't it?' (Discussion between 2 young women age 16 and 17)

Thus, not only did Visiting Mum bring mother and child closer together it also increased bonds between siblings. Other children too believed that their relationships with their mother had been preserved and in some cases strengthened as a result of the opportunity for longer, more personal, quality visits, as a 14 year old girl explains: 'I love Pact visits because it means I can keep the relationship with my mum. ...I love my mum unconditionally. She means so much to me'. Others noted that the scheme was a 'Great help- allowed me to get a stronger bond' (15 year old male)', 'Without

PACT I wouldn't have a relationship with my mother' (Girl 16). The Visiting Mum contact clearly helped to moderate the impact of separation and this is to the benefit of both mother and child.

### *Children navigating transitional and challenging situations*

The children we spoke to had experienced a range of challenging events during the period of their mother's incarceration, including puberty, pregnancy, birth of a child, gender reassignment and issues of sexual orientation, all of which require the attention and support of a significant adult, and usually this would be a mother (Prendergast, 2000). Many young people had successfully negotiated some of these challenges with the support of their mother and the Visiting Mum scheme.

Three and three young people had continued to successfully engage with education and were preparing for university upon their mother's release. One young person noted that the school had prepared handouts for their mother, so that she could be kept in the loop with regards to educational progress:

'In school they'd have like handout sheets so sometimes we'd take that to a visit for mam to have a look at with us'. (Young woman age 16)

Another young person who was planning to go to university had received dedicated time with her mother for consideration, deliberation and planning:

'Well we were lucky because we had them visits every month so it was kind of the thing that we could talk to her about what we, like my big thing was going to college then getting ready then preparing to go to uni. So...'. (Young woman age 17)

Thus, we can see a myriad of ways in which children felt that their mothers were able to assist and help with significant life events from prison.

### *Relationships with a volunteer*

Relationships with the volunteer were seen as important to the children. 'Volunteers are awesome' (child age 11-15). However the volunteer was not always a consistent person, and one young person described having a different volunteer every time, having experienced 3 volunteers, whereas others had built up more of a relationship with an individual, as was the original model for the Visiting Mum scheme. Another young person noted 'We have got a proper volunteer now, before we had different ones'. When asked what they valued in a volunteer 'She's just really nice.... and like she always talks to me in a nice voice', 'She makes me feel calm and welcome' (Children age 11-15). Being able to partake in the activities was also seen as an important quality in the volunteer as noted by one of the children when asked what she liked about the volunteer 'She can make frogs, paper frogs' (girl age 7-11). The volunteers served as good role models for the young people and for the mothers in prison. The volunteers featured in the eco maps that the children drew of their closest/supportive relationships and for some, volunteers were situated in the first, most important circle of support. Thus, it can be seen that volunteers are experienced as providing a layer of support for children who are often feel isolated and left to their own devices.

### *Photographs*

Photographs are routinely taken by the Visiting Mum staff during a visit. Photographs were seen as incredibly important for both mothers and children. The photographs were symbolically significant, as otherwise the mothers were fileted out of family life with no positive memories of that period. Major life events occurred and whole swathes of time passed without any markers by which to create a memory. One young woman recalls the photographic recording of her developing pregnancy and again the first time that she brought her new baby in to see her mother:

‘I used to have photos because I do now like when you were pregnant and oh god look at how much everyone has changed like. Photos of like.....‘She was amazing because on the first visit when me and my partner ..we took the baby for the first time for my mother to see the baby’.  
(Young woman age 16)

### *Food*

The Visiting Mum events were seen as more informal and the young people described them as being far more enjoyable, helped by the provision of food:

‘The visits are easy to cope with as everything is so laid back’ (Boy 15). ‘The visits are better because there’s quite a bit more time .... And because like you get chocolates and they always got like drink and things like that which is nice’ (Boy age 13).

One can see how food made a potentially very difficult experience more relaxed and ‘normal’, food is a helpful tool to mediate stress (Chamberlen, 2017). Food seemed to be an important factor for many of the children:

‘Like we had hot dogs, we had chips, sausage and beans.....it makes a big difference. Surprisingly is does, doesn’t it?...Sitting down there like not...but you know you’re sitting down and having food with your mam again like.....Like a full meal, not just like a sandwich, on a normal visit that’s what you’d have really is like a sandwich or nothing’ (Young woman age 16).

One young person mentioned that they would like ‘Better food and drink’ (Boy age 12) and another suggested that they should ‘Be allowed to bring in food’ (Girl age 14). This may be an area of consideration for further development as the ritual partaking of food is an important and symbolic family practice, which helps to bind and enact family (Pithouse and Rees, 2014). It is noted that the Women’s Institute has been working within Eastwood Park prison in 2017 (BBC Radio 4, 29 April 2017) and it may be that the Women’s Institute could become involved in preparing food and developing this aspect of the Visiting Mum scheme.

## Conclusion

The children gave a ringing endorsement of the Visiting Mum scheme and the staff therein. The young people found it difficult to imagine what it would have been like had they not received the Visiting Mum service and were distressed to think that this might not be available to other children in the future. Children's experiences of visiting their mothers in prison had been greatly enhanced. Clearly, some relationships between mothers and children had been preserved through the Visiting Mum service (Schubert et al. 2016). It is to the views of the mothers that we now move.

## Themes from the interviews with mothers in prison

### Demographic information

The women interviewed in custody ranged in age between 24 and 52 years with a mean age of 35.3 years. The women had between 1 and 6 children, with an average of 3.5. Of the 17 women, for 11 of the women this was their first custodial sentence. The length of sentence ranged between 12 months and 10 years. The women were asked to rate changes to both their emotional and physical health during their sentence using a 10 point Likert scale with 1 being extremely poor and 10 being excellent. All women perceived that their emotional health had improved since the start of their term of imprisonment and had moved from between 4 and 9 points on the scale (see Table 3).

Participant	Emotional health	Physical health
1	3-10	No change
2	3-8	No change
3	0-9	No change
4	3-10	2-9
5	1-5	Put on 4.5 stone
6	4-8	Put on weight
7	4-8	Lost weight
8	3-8	No change
9	3-8	Lost weight 2.5 stone
10	1-7	5-3 Put on 6 stone
11	3-7	No change
12	1-7	3-6
13	0-8	No change
14	1-8	No change
15	3-7	1-10
16	2-7	No change
17	1-10	No change

Table 3: Emotional and physical health

The accompanying narrative identified a range of reasons for this improvement including receiving help for contact with children, assistance with addiction, and for mental health difficulties. With regard to physical health, some felt it had remained the same, some felt it had improved, and one noted that their physical health had deteriorated: weight was a contributory factor, some women had lost weight whilst others had put large amounts of weight on, with one woman having increased by 6 stone. For those with addiction problems putting on weight may have been positive (Chamberlen,



2017), for others a weight gain was seen as less helpful and was attributed to the lack of healthy food available in prison.

#### *Accessibility and approach of Visiting Mum staff*

The findings suggest that the women were overwhelmingly grateful and appreciative of the support they had received from Visiting Mum with regard to contact with their children:

‘We have written a letter to the governor....It’s so important that like you know that this does get noticed, it is so important. And it’s not just me, it’s changing everybody in here, everybody’s life in here’. (Participant 5)

Women in prison particularly valued the holistic approach taken by the Visiting Mum staff, where they were viewed as individuals, rather than as offenders:

‘The relationship I’ve built up, especially with (two staff), for me has been wonderful. They understand, don’t get me wrong they don’t know my family but they understand how I feel. They talk to me as a, as a mum, as a woman, as a human being and not just as a prisoner, they talk to me in all of those ways’. (Participant 9)

‘Because they look at you as a mum, not just as an inmate or a prisoner.’ (Participant 12)

‘Every day, if I see them, every day or when I want contact with them. If I bump into them they never pass you or I never pass them, they always have a couple, even if it’s just hello had a good weekend, there is always conversation’. (Participant 2)

All the women talked about how warm and supportive the Visiting Mum staff were in an otherwise hostile environment:

‘If I went in there crying because I just couldn’t cope one day I know that I would get, I’d get a hug, I know I’d get the support I needed and I can always go to them for that’.  
(Participant 9)

Qualities of the staff that were highly valued were being non-judgmental, friendly, going the extra mile and being reliable (doing what they said they would). The Visiting Mum staff were described as ‘efficient’ and ‘effective’, being able to respond quickly, this is particularly important in an institution where often things do not happen at speed and are very much out of a prisoner’s control. Those involved with the Visiting Mum project also had a sense of a Welsh community of women prisoners. One woman noted:

‘It feels that the Welsh Government are helping me out you know and doing something for us Welsh people’. (Participant 10)

#### *Mothers worrying about children*

Mothers worried a great deal about their children during the separation from them. This caused women to feel anxious about the children’s welfare, feeling that everything was out of their control; this is perceived to be the worst aspect of being in prison (Caplen and Worrall, 2004). Being able to

see their children in a meaningful environment greatly reduced their worries and alleviated their anxiety:

'The only thing that's keeping me going is my visits and that's just been, [tearful], I tried to take my own life when I first come in....Yeah. I ended up in hospital, Christmas Eve, just didn't want, I just didn't want to be here anymore. I still don't, I still don't, the only thing that keeps me going is these visits and my kids'. (Participant 5)

'Yes, mental health yeah and because a lot of it was through I was getting myself worked up and upset over the children and now I know that I am seeing them regular now you know it's once a month but it's regular for me to be seeing them ...' (Participant 8)

'Much more umm relieved, at ease more than anything, at ease yeah much more at ease'. (Participant 12)

Some of the women had suffered with mental health problems in the past, and these were exacerbated by separation from children or indeed triggered by it, which for some led to suicide attempts (Loper and Tuerk, 2006), as women felt they had nothing else to lose:

'I got hold of tablets and I slit an artery in my vein so I lost a lot of blood. ...Yeah. I'm on an ACCT now as we speak like'. (Participant 5)

'We see a lot of ladies self-harming and we'll see a lot of ladies doing some dreadful things and the thing that is foremost in their mind is their kids'. (Participant 9)

As identified in the literature review, suicide and self-harm rates are especially high for female prisoners with as many as 48% attempting suicide (Department of Health, 2015).

Women described living by the visits, which kept them going and allowed them to have something to look forward to:

'Keep your head down and then behave and then like I said, and the thing is in here you don't live to your sentence, you live to your next visit'. (Participant 13)

It is important however that visits are not utilised as a reward for good behaviour as is evidenced in case study one (page 80); contact is beneficial for both children and their mothers to help them cope with separation anxiety, to preserve their relationship and to provide children with maternal support.

### *Contact and communication*

The women were receiving (on average) monthly Visiting Mum visits with their children, children were also accessing additional Family Fun Days (4-6 days per year), some children were also still accessing 'ordinary' visits.

The Visiting Mum staff facilitated phone calls to their children and carers at the beginning of a woman's prison sentence, and this was vital, especially where women had received an unexpected custodial sentence and had not been able to prepare:

'In the beginning PACT helped me with phone calls but now I phone off my own back'.  
(Participant 10)

'It's been that link between the family because you can't just pick up the phone, you can't just do anything, you can't ..The things you take for granted you can't do here in prison'.  
(Participant 2)

Women felt less anxious about their children and reported improved mental health as a result of this increased contact; other research has found that this is cumulative and the more contact that there is with children the more well-being increases (Dominey et al. 2016).

Some of the mothers were involved with social workers and solicitors and here too this facilitation of communication was seen as vital:

'Because who is going to be around to phone social services? Yeah you'd have to put an application in which takes about a week to deal with, by then the problem has either gone or got worse.....Oh my god, big, massive, literally humongous difference..., I remember when my children were in foster care, my youngest, because I had my youngest here, if it weren't for PACT how would I make phone calls to social services about visits, how would I make phone calls to courts and solicitors and you know family law solicitors, how would I do any of that?'  
(Participant 5)

Visiting Mum staff help not only with visits and phone calls, but also with a wide range of family problems (including children going missing). One woman suggested that it might be useful for a social worker to be attached to the prison or make regular visits to help advise women whose children, for example, were being adopted:

'that on many days when they have invited social services along to the days obviously social services are very busy of course they are, but sometimes I think it might be a good idea if social services were to attend.....Even if some of them were to pop in once a month, once every six weeks with queries, asking queries'. (Participant 9)

'and now I have regular phone calls with them (social worker) ...now every fortnight. ... About what's going on with Ben in himself, what's going on at school, what's going on in school, how, what is going to go on in school and what's gone on in the LAC Reviews. The PACT worker has got her to send me minutes of the LAC Reviews. (Participant 12

The need for a liaison social worker has been noted as a need by others (O'Malley, 2013; Baldwin, 2015) who would see such a development as bridging the 'welfare gap' in prison and as a potential link between inside and outside agencies (Baldwin 2015:164).

### *Impact of imprisonment on children*

Mothers were keenly aware of the impact of incarceration on their children. There was much discussion of how children were told about what was happening and their experiences of visiting the prison. One woman describes her young son's reaction to being told that she was going away:

'Harri come in to come in the bedroom and he just broke his heart, he said and 'you've got to go now', I said 'yeah I am sorry babes'. And he was running around, he run downstairs, got the kitten, brought it up so I could say goodbye and then he tried to give me his teddy bear and I was like Harri, I said 'you need to keep that as long as I know you are ok' I said 'I will be fine', I said 'but you need to be ok'. (Participant 3)

Women had many different ways of letting children know about the situation, depending on the age of the child and some chose not to tell their children. Women noted that the booklets provided by Visiting Mum were helpful to explain what it would be like :

'Yeah and they got little booklets as well PACT have and they like got like little pictures in there and it got like a picture of an officer, got keys and it's just showing you things you might see when you come in and then it just says by the officer I am the one that looks after your mother and so they've put it in a really nice way'. (Participant 3)

Women particularly noted how difficult it was for children to come to a prison, especially for the first time or to attend an 'ordinary' visit; they recognised how frightening this must be:

'But the kids are like now I think when they first came it was like, I remember their faces coming in and that upset me because I could see how nervous they were and then my first PACT visit that I had, so it took a while but I remember my youngest one coming in and he was like this (makes face)...I said 'what's the matter', he said 'they didn't search me' [laughs]. So because it's more relaxed on the PACT visit [laughs]'. (Participant 3)

### *The quality of the visit*

The Visiting Mum visits are experienced by mothers as far superior to 'ordinary' visits because there is more space, more privacy and an opportunity to play games, eat together and do arts and crafts with their children. Where a child has special needs, it is even more essential to have the Visiting Mum service. One mother, for example, had a child with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) who found the normal prison visit environment too difficult to manage:

'I get the chance to actually interact with my son and I think if I didn't have PACT, the visits would be, because my son has ADHD and Asperger's Syndrome so it's hard for him to concentrate and like he don't like sitting down for too long and so I get to interact with him and keep him amused yeah'. (Participant 11)

Another child was in the process of gender reassignment and Visiting Mum meant that the child could receive the time, care and attention without distractions so the mother could help support the child through this process (Pearlman 2006). It is difficult to see how this level of sensitivity and support could have been facilitated within an 'ordinary' visit.

Like the children, mothers enjoy the informality of the Visiting Mum visits for themselves and their children:

'Its only me the kids and my husband and normally we play games, we played Pictionary last time'. (Participant 9)

'But we have had normal time together rather than in a visit just up there, and it has made that bit of normality come back with it and they look forward to the PACT visits'.

(Participant 3)

Being able to touch their children was seen as vital and an important part of bonding with and re-attuning to their child, which the women felt was an essential element in maintaining the bonds with their child/ren. 'I can hug them whenever I want to' (participant 4)

### *Mothering at a distance*

Being involved with Visiting Mum allowed women to feel more in control of their family situation and to remain involved in parenting, albeit remotely. Many mothers talked of feeling left out and disregarded in decisions about their children's lives:

'... but I just I was forgotten about to be honest'. (Participant 12)

The facilitation of regular telephone calls helped with 'remote parenting' and many mothers spoke of regulating their children's behaviour via these calls:

'Yeah and like I don't phone in the day because my girls, I normally phone them in the morning before I go to work and before they go to school and then I will phone after I come home from work, after 6 o'clock'. (Participant 4)

The improved relationships, which the Visiting Mum visits and telephone contact facilitated meant that mothers were enabled to play their part in supporting, monitoring and providing discipline for their children from a distance:

'Yeah, oh god yeah, I ground them and everything mind, I do I ground them. I do, I try and help my mum as best as I possibly can'. (Participant 5)

By being involved in remote parenting, this helped women to remain *present* in their children's lives and involved in the decisions being made about the children and maintained their confidence in their own mothering skills:

'And my sister sent her to the shop by herself and I didn't like it so I put her straight I said if you're going to send her to the shop someone needs to go with her, I have never sent her to the shop on her own'. (Participant 7)

Remote parenting is vitally important if women are to be able to reintegrate and be accepted back into family life on release. Similarly, mothers were keen that children did not fall behind with their school work and that attendance levels and grades were maintained:

'Yeah, yeah she had a recognition of awards for her 98% of her school attendance the last two years but this year obviously because she has been coming here and they've given her authorised absence she didn't achieve it, yeah, so I was a bit gutted. And I said oh well never mind you can't help anything. But she is good with her subjects and I had the report here and

she is doing well, because I am always badgering to her it's your life Lily, it's your future, don't worry about me, I am still with you'. (Participant 7)

Such involvement allowed women to remain *present* with their children and support the carer wherever possible, as Participant 10 notes:

'That's the thing, I am there emotionally, (even though) I can't be there physically'.

The provision of objects such as photographs, memory boxes and bedtime stories kept the mother *present* in the children's lives and vice versa. Photographs of the family visits and fun days were very important for the mothers (as much as for the children). Our observations when walking around the prison was that a number of mothers asked about the photographs and whether the children had now received them (there is a very complicated procedure to get photos out of the prison). Photographs seemed to give mothers a sense that they were not fileted out of the family records and history:

'so like PACT helps there with oh I was there for that photo you know so you can remember it ...'. (Participant 13)

Memory boxes also helped women to remain *present* in their children's lives and provided both an object and means to preserve a joint record and history of their relationship together:

'They get a box and then stuff we make like we do paintings and drawing, we put them in the box and (a member of Visiting Mum staff) takes photos on each visit so she sends a copy to me and a copy home to them, they go in the box.' (Participant 9)

Similarly, the recording of bedtime stories which children could listen to, allowed for women to remain engaged in their children's lives and continue with an important every day ritual (Pisco Costa, 2012). The recordings acted as a point of discussion with children and were seen as reassuring, particularly when listened to at the end of a day, when children might reflect and potentially feel alone:

'Story CDs are brilliant.... Oh they're fab, my little boy do play them....Yeah. You just read a book. Yeah yeah, oh they're brilliant....Yeah for my little boy...there's recorders there, so you just reading a book and...I done him a Gruffalo one last time and then it was The Hungry Caterpillar. So, you know we've done them two. He asked me then what about the butterfly now, what does he do?' (Participant 13)

It may be that volunteers in the prison could become involved in the recording of bedtime CDs to alleviate the pressures on Visiting Mum staff. All of these different strategies ensured that women remained part of the life that is happening on the outside which would help with reintegration upon release. Further developments utilising technology could be simple, cost effective and helpful in keeping mothers and children in contact, such as the use of Skype and FaceTime. Madinou and Miller (2012) note the importance of such technologies for preserving meaningful contact across transnational families.

### *Complex lives*

Many of the women disclosed extremely harrowing life histories (including experience of domestic abuse, addiction, child sexual abuse and abduction) and as a result have complex needs (Prison Reform Trust 2014, 2016), which require a complex, multi-disciplinary response. For many of the women their offending in the community can be seen to be linked to coping with abuse, poverty, addiction and a range of adverse experiences as well as providing for their children. Whilst in prison women are supported with some of their difficulties:

‘Borderline Personality Disorder and post-traumatic stress ...Yeah I see a psychologist once a week. I’m doing a course now, DBT. I’ve done mindfulness.’ (Participant 5)

Whilst many of the women have experienced adverse life events, having a parent in custody is in itself an adverse childhood experience, which is linked to poor longer-term outcomes for the child (Welsh ACE’s report 2016). Thus, there is both an intergenerational cycle of cause and impact of custody. Positive contact with an incarcerated mother can help moderate the impact of separation for the child and may help to punctuate this cycle. It will be important to ensure that women receive continued support from a range of relevant services upon release.

### *Valuing Carers*

For many mothers, the Visiting Mum scheme was the only way their children could visit them. Carers did not always have the money or the means to travel and bring the children to the prison without the help of volunteers. HMP Eastwood Park is in a rural location and is not easily accessible from areas of Wales on public transport:

‘I was trying to convince her, mum bring the kids, but she thought the thought of getting on a bus with two little ones and having to find the way here, you’ve got to get to Bristol and with two little ones as well it’s hard’. (Participant 4)

Whilst finance is available via the benefits system, this can only be claimed back retrospectively which was not feasible for most carers. Women were very aware of the stresses and costs placed on carers when looking after their children. Many women spoke positively about the carers day that Visiting Mum had organised (known as a pamper day) as they appreciated the opportunity to have time to both talk to the carers (often their mothers) on their own and to demonstrate how much they valued the care they were providing for their children:

‘They done a visit for whoever is caring for your children they done a pamper day so just my mum came up on her own so we had a two hour visit just me and my mum to chat about the girls... And they done flower arrangement so I made a, it’s like flowers you stick it into and it was like a round little thing and my mum could take that home with her as well and it was really good it was. So they’re not only thinking of the children they you know, it’s to thank, it

was to thank whoever is looking after your children so in my case it was to thank my mum for all she does for my little girls.' (Participant 1)

Similarly, this was important partners to have some time together:

'And my husband and I don't really have a conversation other than, well I speak to him every night on the phone but we don't have those conversations because we haven't had chance and it was wonderful, absolutely wonderful. I think I sat holding his hand for the two hours, we had a lovely cup of coffee which PACT provided...Nothing was rushed'. (Participant 9)

This day was a chance to say 'thank you' and the mothers derived a lot from the event. It would seem to have helped to build bridges and cement relationships between mothers and carers, allowing for some sense of reciprocity, which could be helpful in creating more stable relationships for the women upon release. This pamper day was the first of its kind and had taken place just prior to our first set of interviews. This would seem to have been a very successful venture, which could helpfully be repeated. This again could be something with which the Women's Institute might become involved.

#### *Re-settlement*

Most women talked about what a huge help Visiting Mum had been, often making clear links with how the support (in visiting and maintaining contact with their children and the carers) would assist re-settlement on discharge. Some of the women worried about how they would fit back in to the practice of mothering and into family life on release:

'I can't wait but I think now because I am down to the last six weeks I've started getting a bit...anxious, not because I don't want to go, but I just keep thinking 'they probably now have got into a routine' obviously because Tom have had to take over, plus he is working, so am I going to go back in and disrupt this, I don't know- am I going to feel out of place?'

(Participant 3)

Not only do women worry about how they will fit into the routines of family life, taking back fully the reigns of mothering (having lost confidence in their role), they also have to negotiate finding accommodation from within the prison and securing welfare benefits or employment (see case study 2, page 81). It is noted that in 2011-12 only 8.7% of women released from prison successfully secured employment, compared to 27.3% of men (MoJ 2012):

'Well I have said I'm not going to rush in and say well those kids are mine I'm taking them back, I'm not going to have a home when I get out anyway so I am going to have to build everything up. And I have said, like the children have said to me a few times Mam we can't wait until you come home, we want to come back and live with you and I have always been straight with them, I've said look mammy is not going to have a home straight away, I'm going



to have to build it, you're with daddy, I can't just come in and take you back but you can come and stay with me'. (Participant 8)

This was a particularly strong theme with the women who were in prison for the first time, and for those serving longer sentences. As Participant 5 and many others noted 'In here they don't give you help with housing and stuff, they release you homeless'. It is difficult to see how women can easily reintegrate in to a community, if housing and other resettlement services are not provided in a joined up way within and beyond the prison establishment. This was picked up on by the mothers:

'You feel like when you're in here you've got them (Visiting Mum) fighting your corner for you as well, but like when I go out I know it's only going to be me, I can feel it'. (Participant 13)

It is to the views of women who have negotiated this transition back into the community that we now move.

### ***Interviews with women released from custody***

We interviewed women to gain a retrospective and longitudinal perspective on their experience of Visiting Mum, one which was not caught up with the anticipation of seeing children or in being immersed in prison life. We interviewed eight women. These women had between 1 and 4 children. Only 1 of the 8 mothers had been in custody previously and this was on a 2 week period of remand some 10 years ago. Thus, of the 25 women interviewed (both those in prison and those released), for 18 of them this was their first experience of custody. Many of the themes identified are similar to those of women in prison. However, these interviews revealed some reflection on how hard prison had been and how much difference Visiting Mum had made, the lasting effects of prison and the damage that had been caused to relationships with children because of prison sentences (Baldwin, 2015). These interviews also demonstrate the very challenging circumstances women often face when they are released from prison, both practically and emotionally.

Overall, women who had been released from custody spoke very positively about the service they had received from the Visiting Mum project; none had on-going contact with staff or volunteers. Whilst all women felt positively about their relationship with their children, some of the women released faced significant obstacles in reintegrating into the community and being able to provide for their children. One woman was living in a hostel with her children, and others were having difficulty in securing housing. Links to housing and re-settlement are important in the overall service given to women leaving prison, in addition to family preservation. There may be a role for Visiting Mum to play in providing women more volunteer support post-release. It is noted that both Sova and PACT run schemes for people leaving prison and this expertise could be drawn upon.

Many women were emotional about the time they had spent away from their children and were tearful recounting their experiences, and were keenly aware of the impact of incarceration on the family. Those we spoke to were trying hard to make amends and provide some recompense to their child/ren. This desire to make amends may well impact on the likelihood of re-offending as they did not want their children to go through the same experience again (Schubert et al, 2016; Mignon and Ransford, 2012).

### *Negative impact of imprisonment on children*

All of the women reflected on how difficult their imprisonment had been for their children. Many of the accounts of women focused more on how their sentence had negatively affected their children, with any discomfort or distress to the mother being a secondary consideration. One mother was quite honest about the fact that prison was not particularly hard for her and served instead as punishment for her children and their carer:

‘I think it’s affected other people more than it might do me. That sounds stupid I know, that probably makes me sound like hard faced or whatever but I’m not you know, it is what it is’  
(Woman in community 2)

This aligns with some of the research around sentencing mothers in the literature review, with a misunderstanding by sentencers about how difficult maternal imprisonment can be for children because of the primacy of the mother-child relationship. If women are receiving short sentences which do not allow for rehabilitation, and are not finding the sentence to be a particular punishment for themselves, it raises many questions about the efficacy of sending mothers to prison when the effects are so detrimental to their children.

The literature review set out some of the psychological and social harms that children suffer when their mothers are imprisoned and these were echoed in some of the women’s accounts. For example, one mother told us that her daughter had left higher education but had also received treatment from the doctor for mental health problems because of her mother’s imprisonment:

‘The fallout was you know was dreadful because she dropped out of university which you know devastated me...and you know she put on weight, she became very depressed and she went on anti-depressants’. (Woman in community 1)

As with our interviews with women in prison, the anxiety that children have about their mothers’ wellbeing is reciprocated by the mothers. This mother describes how ‘devastated’ she was to know that she had caused her daughter so much distress.

Other women talk about how their younger children reacted, one mother described how hard it was to explain to her daughter why her baby could stay with her (in the MBU) while her older daughter (aged 7) had to live with her grandmother:

‘Yes she did find it really hard, especially the days when she came to visit me and she had to leave, that was really hard on her to know her sister was staying with me’ (Woman in community 5)

The same mother had to wait to get her baby into the MBU due to needing to complete a detoxification first. As a result she missed a month of her baby’s life when she was just a few weeks old. She talked about how vital it was for her baby to be allowed to stay with her:

‘But when your baby is only a few weeks old and you get taken from her, if she wouldn’t have come with me she wouldn’t have had, even that month she was away me the first visit I had she couldn’t remember me you know it took her a few days to get used to me again. So I know

some people don't agree with it but if she wouldn't have been with me by the time I got out she definitely wouldn't have known who I was you know'. (Woman in community 5)

Whilst she recounted that the judge did not want to put her in prison whilst she was pregnant, and deferred the sentence until the baby was 12 weeks old, this mother served only 5 months in prison. Yet her, her baby and her older little girl endured a significant separation. In addition, her parents had to care for a newborn baby and a 7 year old, which is a major undertaking. She describes how she tried to stay connected to her very young baby and the strategies she used to mother remotely during their period of separation in very poignant terms:

'I just recorded my voice on my mum and dad's phone just singing twinkle twinkle little star and singing little songs so the baby could hear my voice down the phone and I also left like my nightie with my smell on so she could cuddle up to just so you know it would be more comforting for her so she had my voice'. (Woman in community 5)

Whilst this mother needed to access a detoxification programme, perhaps if supported in the community by drugs services her daughters would have been spared some of the harms of being separated from their mother.

Other mothers discussed missing milestone events in their children's lives because of their sentence. One mother reflected on how she had missed her daughter starting school, a significant event for most mothers, and an unsettling period for many children. After this change, and her mother's absence her daughter had started wetting herself:

'She wasn't long in school and she'd started wetting herself and things and obviously it was an impact.' (Woman in community 3)

This mother also talked about how supportive her parents had been and how lucky she felt to be able to return to a home she owned, and a business that her and her husband ran. Even in these favourable circumstances, her child displayed behaviour that demonstrated considerable anxiety and upset. An example such as this shows that even when children are cared for in the least disruptive way, the trauma of being separated from a mother is significant. According to the research in the literature review as well demonstrated from our interviews with women in prison this trauma may be more significant than sentencers understand, resulting in disproportionate strain on children when compared with the offence committed by the mother.

### *Negative aspects of 'ordinary' social visits*

Many women spoke in regretful terms about allowing their children to visit during 'ordinary' visits, either before they knew about Visiting Mum or while they were waiting for a Visiting Mum visit to take place. The issue of not being able to touch their children during 'ordinary' visits which was prominent across the accounts of the women released. All of them lamented the restrictions on touch during 'ordinary' visits, with one woman describing how her mother was shocked at the prison rules about moving around or holding children during visits:

‘...my mum said when she come in she said she couldn’t believe how it was like in the Dark Ages that I wasn’t allowed to stand up, I wasn’t allowed to touch anyone’. (Woman in community 2)

This allusion to prison being ‘in the Dark Ages’ reflects what is a very challenging aspect of ‘ordinary’ social prison visits. Many people would agree that not being able to hold your child, or a child not being able to cuddle their mother, is likely to be very traumatic and painful for both. Touch is a constituent part of mothering and being mothered. Issues of security and staffing in prisons are used to justify restrictions on touch, but the negative consequences of this on the mother and the child are clear:

‘Yeah on a normal visit yeah I’d be sat there and my daughter... if she fell over like if she went into the play area and fell over I wasn’t allowed to get up and help her, just sit there and watch somebody else help her and things’. (Woman in community 3)

In this example, the mother’s compulsion to help her child during the visit had to be reigned in. In the community not helping your child in this scenario would be at best inattentive and at worst neglectful, yet the mother had to modify her behaviour in this way to fit in with prison rules. This is clearly difficult for mothers. However the effects of this are arguably worse for children who are not able to have their emotional needs met during the face to face encounters they have with their mothers during their period of imprisonment, and who may not understand, or be able to process, the reasons for restrictions on touch.

Some of the women discuss how the visits hall during an ‘ordinary’ visit would contain all kinds of prisoners with different needs, some could be aggressive or have substance abuse problems which caused them to behave strangely or compulsively. This would frighten or cause the children distress or confusion:

‘In hindsight now, in hindsight now I...because they still go on about it now, in hindsight now I wish they’d never seen that environment... All sorts, it’s like...like you know like when oh I’m trying to put this the right way now without sounding snobby or...do you know people like who are like users, you know what I mean by that don’t you?’. (Woman in community 2)

Our interviews with children reveal that ‘ordinary’ visits do not feel safe to them, partly because of the other prisoners in the visits hall and mothers released from prison appear acutely aware of this. In addition, the visit hall is noisy which allows for very little intimacy or privacy. This is also hard for children to understand and react to, especially if they are seeing their mother for the first time for a significant period of time. Interestingly, the children and young people described how they felt under surveillance by the prison officers at ‘ordinary’ visits but this did not come up in the interviews with mothers, perhaps because they had adjusted to life in prison which involves being constantly monitored.

Women also reported that carers picked up on this lack of privacy as well as the problematic behaviour of other prisoners which meant they could be reluctant to bring children to ‘ordinary’ visits:

‘my mum didn’t want Cassie going into a big visiting room with loads of people and sometimes you know some of the prisoners kick off...she never did want to bring Cassie up to one of them, to a normal visit in the visiting room’. (Woman in community 5)

For one woman, the first visit she received was an ‘ordinary’ visit, and the consequences of that were that her son could not cope with visiting her again during her sentence, despite her partner and daughter reassuring him that the Visiting Mum visits were much less stressful.

‘My son did come once on a normal visit and he, it just upset him to the degree he didn’t want to come into prison again, not because he didn’t want to see me but he couldn’t face coming’. (Woman in community 1)

This mother’s son was traumatised by the ‘ordinary’ visit to the extent that contact between them had to continue remotely rather than in person. This is significant because the findings of the benefits of quality visitation identified in the literature review and in the findings from the children in this study. This young man missed out on these potential benefits from a fear of visiting the prison based upon an ‘ordinary’ visit. It is unlikely that this is an isolated incident and there may be many other families who have experienced similar barriers to contact because a child is too upset by an initial ‘ordinary’ visit.

#### *Positive impact of Visiting Mum on children*

Another major theme which came from interviews with women released from prison was how positive they thought Visiting Mum was for their children. One woman described it simply as ‘bringing a bit of normality into a really crazy situation’ (Woman in community 3). This sense of normality for children separated by their mothers is invaluable to them as reflected in the findings from our interviews with children and young people.

In relation to the amount of touch that is allowed during Visiting Mum visits, the women talked about how important and significant it was for their children to be held:

‘He could sit on my lap and you know we could talk and cuddle because obviously in normal visits you can’t do that, you’ve got to sit in your chair’. (Woman in community 1)

The ability for children to be mothered is something that Visiting Mum offers and touch is an important part of this. Aside from being able to be tactile with each other, mothers spoke about other aspects of mothering that Visiting Mum gave them opportunities to engage in. For example, one mother told us about how she could provide treats for her children, showing her children that she could be a normal mum and demonstrating her affection in the giving of a gift. Being able to treat children also allows them to see that their mothers are not entirely powerless and beholden to prison rules, dispelling some of the negative preconceptions that many children have about prison:

‘But the PACT ones basically I could get up, I could do different things with the kids ... I used to like buy them sweets and chocolate’. (Woman in community 2)

Being able to get up and play with their children is another constituent part of mothering, and also allows for the visit to be exciting and not boring, less strained and less stressful. As picked up in the

literature review and in our interviews with children and young people, the expectation that children sit still and talk for an hour or more is unrealistic and unfair so engaging in activities was beneficial to creating a quality visit. The provision of activities was also important in creating positive memories for both mothers and children:

‘To me it was a lot more laidback, it was a lot more relaxed and the kids had more fun. The kids are on tenterhooks on the normal visit’. (Woman in community 2)

Another positive aspect of the Visiting Mum visits was the ability of women to spend time with their children alone, creating intimacy that is difficult to sustain during an ‘ordinary’ visit. This aspect of the Visiting Mum scheme is also reflected in the literature review, which found this aspect of contact to be beneficial to children and difficult to achieve during an ‘ordinary’ visit:

‘Obviously it’s heart-breaking when they go but it’s nice to sit and spend time with them and do stuff with them, just me and them’. (Woman in community 6)

Leaving her child at the end of the visit was ‘heart-breaking’ for her and likely to be challenging for her child. However, it was qualified with a positive description of the time they spent together. The joy and the quality of the contact that was provided by Visiting Mum and the PACT staff came through more significantly in our interviews than any negative feelings of loss or sadness felt by mother or child:

‘the interaction between mother and child again was amazing you know and they made that happen you know they worked so hard you know under terribly difficult circumstances really’. (Woman in community 1)

Overall, despite the difficulty caused by endings mothers felt that they and their children benefitted significantly from the Visiting Mum visits.

### *Significance of Visiting Mum for mothers*

All of the women talked to us about how much difference Visiting Mum had made to their experience of prison, and how much better the visits were in the Visiting Mum scheme for them and their children. The impact of Visiting Mum was so significant for one woman that she described it as ‘life-saving’, for herself but also in what she had experienced and heard from other women accessing the scheme:

‘they save lives you know they do save lives because I think without their support I think a lot of women would...struggle even more into mental health depression and the consequences of that.... I don’t know if they hadn’t been there I don’t think I would have coped anywhere near as well as I did you know’. (Woman in community 1)

As women in prison identified, those released also noted the mental health benefits of the scheme. Given the sharp recent rise of suicides in women’s prisons this is a significant finding. A scheme like Visiting Mum may help prisons to keep women safe and well, by stopping anxious or depressive symptoms, caused by a sense of desperation or hopelessness related to seeing their children, from spiralling out of control:

‘And that can be the difference from going on antidepressants or not by somebody is actually fighting for me to see my children’. (Woman in community 2)

‘Got me through my sentence – couldn’t have done without this support from PACT. I suffer with anxiety and get panic attacks. I couldn’t have done it - it would have been horrendous’. (Woman in community 3)

Alongside the wellbeing aspect of this, there are cost savings to be achieved if women are not being treated for mental health problems that are caused or exacerbated by a lack of contact or quality contact with children.

Many women felt very lucky that they were able to access the scheme by virtue of where they lived, and felt acute sympathy for other women and friends in the prison who were English and could not access the service:

‘...if I wouldn’t have had them visit god knows what I would have been like... I know women who are not from South Wales and they don’t have PACT visits and it’s hard, it’s hard for them’. (Woman in community 2)

The geographical nature of the Visiting Mum scheme as it currently runs is one of its limitations. All staff we interviewed, as well as many women in prison and released, carers and volunteers agreed that it could or should be extended to include women and children across the region that HMP Eastwood Park serves.

#### *Praise for Visiting Mum staff*

As with the women in prison, there was overwhelming praise for all of the work that the PACT staff do; this appreciation remained with the women after they had left custody. Many women described instances where they felt that PACT had gone over and above their roles in facilitating contact with their children or making sure that they could mother their children from inside prison:

‘If I ever needed to get, I don’t know whether they’re meant to have done it or not I don’t know but if you ever, if I ever needed like if I didn’t know, say for instance I didn’t have enough phone credit like one week I didn’t have phone credit and I couldn’t get hold of my mum to check if there was anything I needed to tell her or they had a visit or whatever it was I can’t remember but PACT contacted her’. (Woman in community 2)

The internal processes of the prison were acknowledged to make mother-child contact difficult at times, but there was a sense that PACT staff countered this in order to make sure contact could be established or maintained. Overall, PACT staff were seen to be a crucial part of the prison and their professionalism and dedication meant that they ‘got things done’ for women, things like providing stamps for letters that ultimately benefitted children:

‘they make things happen in there...I have seen women at their lowest you know where they have had, they can’t get in contact with their children and they haven’t got money for phone credit sometimes they haven’t got money for stamps, you know PACT will let them write letters and send them’. (Woman in community 1)

As well as the notion that the Visiting Mum staff provided invaluable practical help, many women still vividly remembered the high levels of affect displayed by the PACT staff, and how they cared about women on a personal level rather than treating them as cases. This reiterates the views of those women who were interviewed in prison. For many women who have had less positive contact with social care, drugs or community services before prison, the level of care and the PACT staff's approach to the services they offered was really appreciated:

'And they cared, that was the other overwhelming thing, they really cared and women got that feeling that they weren't just you know lost in the system that they did have an organisation in there who did care and would keep the contact with the children and family for them'. (Woman in community 1)

'they remembered my daughter's name and things, a birthday coming up and things like that. So there was like a personal touch there that you weren't just a number to them, they did remember you'. (Woman in community 3)

Many women also discussed how PACT had supported their families through their prison sentences. This was an invaluable aspect of Visiting Mum because negotiating the prison system to book visits, and bringing children long distances to prison puts a great deal of strain on carers. Women often felt guilty and worried about the pressure they had put on (often their own mothers) those who were caring for their children, so this support was crucial in this regard:

'Yeah they really, really, they were really supportive, I can't thank them enough really. They were fabulous. Like I said to my mum and she said as well that without them it would have been horrendous. They just did make things so much more normal for all of us.'

(Woman in community 3)

One woman reflected on how much she valued the time and effort of the PACT staff, but that it was a part of her life that she wanted to move on from. This indicates that the staff had managed to support her throughout her sentence in the best possible way. She had been enabled to use her inner resources to reach a conclusion to end a negative part of her life and construct a more positive narrative for herself and her family that did not involve prison:

'now and again I find like a couple of things we've done in PACT, there is a couple of photos and stuff and I think oh, I think about how fantastic it was and I just think to myself maybe that chapter needs to be shut sort of thing'. (Woman in community 2)

Accounts of the energy, skill and dedication that the Visiting Mum team displayed are consistent across all of the groups of respondents that we interviewed. The women released from prison all remember the team fondly and with significant gratitude.



### *Mothering at a distance*

Along with the Visiting Mum visits, the children being transported to the prison and the provision of wraparound services by volunteers, PACT staff also enabled women to mother at distance. The provision of objects and activities such as family photographs, memory boxes and recording stories for children were all appreciated by the women released from prison because they provided clear benefits for their children:

‘the Visiting Mums CDs, the ones that I used to record the stories for her...But like that made a difference like my mum said she used to sit there for hours just rewinding it and playing it again, constantly on there... Then you’ve been there haven’t you? Reading your daughter a bedtime story then all of a sudden it stops. It was just making things as normal as possible I suppose’. (Woman in community 3)

Similarly, another mother noted:

‘Oh yes I done two CDs, two stories...Oh they loved it, they used to listen to it every night’. (Woman in community 6)

As identified in these accounts, not only is the storybook CD a comfort for the child, they enabled a level of continuity of the mother-child relationship. The sudden separation that a custodial sentence entails means that activities like bedtime stories, which form an important ritual in children’s everyday lives (Pisco Costa, 2012), can continue in a modified form. The child manages to maintain a relational connection to their mother and the mother can feel she is at least partially *present* in her child’s life.

Another crucial activity was the taking and provision of photographs at the Visiting Mum visits which documented the time that mothers and children were together during the mother’s sentence. This was also picked up on in the accounts of mothers on prison and the children and young people. They provided a sense that the mother-child relationship was still ‘real’ and valid, and that during the time that the mothers were in prison they were still able to form some happy memories with their children:

‘I think photos are important whether you’re in prison or outside I think because that’s a memory you’ll never get back you know?’ (Woman in community 5)

Alongside these activities, one woman described how PACT staff facilitated some of the practical aspects of mothering. Although mothering involves a high degree of emotional and relational activities, there are also many mundane tasks and organisational activities that mothers perform for the wellbeing of their children (Hayes, 1996). One woman told us about her daughter’s dental treatment requiring parental permission which was very difficult to provide due to prison processes:

‘...nothing could be done without me there because I am, I hadn’t signed guardianship over because I didn’t want to ... PACT were with like getting faxes sent to the GP or the dentist saying I give authority to my mum to take her on the day to have her teeth checked and stuff like that’. (Woman in community 3)

Being able to make sure her daughter had adequate dental care is an example of the way that PACT staff enabled mothering at distance, and is to the clear benefit of the child. These little encounters

allow women to maintain a sense of responsibility for their child, a presence in their life and a confidence in their mothering skills which may allow them to integrate better into their children's lives upon release. Opportunities for remote mothering in these practical ways also mean that children are not unfairly disadvantaged in comparison to their peers in receiving things like a dental check-up.

### *Volunteers*

While some women did not know any of the Visiting Mum volunteers because family members transported their children to the prison for visits, many of the women discussed the volunteers in terms of endearment:

'Oh she is lovely....Yeah they did, they (the children) got on with her really well.' (Woman in community 6)

In many cases the volunteer's help was appreciated not only because they had brought the children for the visit but because their involvement took some of the strain away from the carer. Often this was the woman's own mother and some suffered ill health or were elderly:

'they arranged for my children to be collected by a volunteer and brought to see me and because my mum, my daughter hadn't passed her test and my mum was 78 at the time and it was surprising that friends suddenly become very short on the ground so PACT brought the children to see me in prison on quite a number of occasions'. (Woman in community 1)

This woman also reflects on how her prison sentence had an impact on the social support available to her and their family. She describes how friends become absent and unwilling to provide help or support during what was a very difficult time for the family. She went on to talk about judgements about her offending behaviour and the stigma attached to a custodial sentence that made her social support fragment. This 'falling away' of social networks in reaction to imprisonment is significant for mothers in prison and their children because they rely entirely on others to ensure that their contact is maintained, and it is clear that the volunteers are filling a much needed gap in service provision.

Some of the women spoke about how they appreciated having met the volunteer prior to the visit, and prior to the transport of the children to the prison. The building of relationships with volunteers was important to the women who may have been anxious about their children being in the care of a stranger especially if the children were not being accompanied by a carer:

'so I can remember meeting her the lady and it's just nice isn't it because I wouldn't have wanted the thought of just anybody is going to pick my daughter up'.

(Woman in community 3)

Although turnover or changes to the volunteers because of commitments and time is to be expected, and while this was not always problematic for the mothers, the idea of their children having a consistent figure in their encounters with the prison visit was stressed as important:

'... it was more or less the same volunteer and they were very good to keep that I thought you know because the continuity was important'. (Woman in community 1)

It is logical that during a time of extreme upheaval women want their children to have as much routine as possible, especially given that many were anxious about their children's experience of coming to prison. Alongside this, where it had happened, the women valued the introductory visit where the prison rules were explained and a walk-through of the procedures were given to the children and carers. This did not happen in all instances that we came across, but preparation is an important aspect of the Visiting Mum scheme:

'Yes they did, they made a house visit, they explained the process and they you know tried to set you know describe the prison and what it was like going in so it wouldn't be so scary and they were a support you know they supported my daughter, was there anything they could do and how were they coping and they were you know really, really wonderful to be honest'.  
(Woman in community 1)

The findings in the literature review indicate that the experience of the first visit is important to ongoing mother-child contact and to child wellbeing. Being prepared and having prison demystified could mediate some of the fear and stress experienced by children, and indeed by carers, before and during an initial visit.

#### *Improvements in Visiting Mum services*

The feedback about Visiting Mum and the PACT staff was overwhelmingly positive, and most women could not think of any improvements that could be made. In general as is evidenced by the praise for staff by all women who participated in the research both in prison and the community, the women were simply full of gratitude that they could participate in Visiting Mum.

However, one woman thought that perhaps some of the activities, especially on the family days, were geared more towards younger children:

'probably something for the older ones there's not really very much for the older ones to do but that's about it'. (Woman in community 6)

It is difficult to provide something for all ages to enjoy. Older children and young people can be hard to engage in arts and crafts type of activities but it is important that they feel able to participate and enjoy the family days. Age appropriate activities should be given some thought and factored into further Visiting Mum family days.

Aside from feedback about the visits, one woman identified a gap in services in the community for women post-release which she felt PACT could fill:

'I think because women get very attached to PACT in there I think they build up a respect for PACT more so than other organisations so I think follow-up visits...because PACT do have a very good understanding because of the team there and of mental health issues as well so I think follow-up visits would be a very good idea and it would have helped me'. (Woman in community 1)

This demonstrates how valuable women found the Visiting Mum staff, and how much they relied upon them for support. The unique understanding that the Visiting Mum staff have in relation to life in

prison and the difficulties that women face would suit post-release support. However, the limits of the resources and remit of the Visiting Mum scheme must be acknowledged and based upon current staffing levels, support work outside of the prison is not feasible.

As an alternative to PACT staff providing follow up support, the same woman identified that the way that Visiting Mum utilises volunteers could be extended to outside of the prison:

‘I think a follow-up care maybe with PACT you know when the prisoners are released like myself perhaps you know some following up visits or something like that. Maybe some assistance with work... And maybe introducing them perhaps into workshops or things like that because I think that would help a lot of mums you know they sometimes don’t see a future because once you’ve got a criminal record it’s extremely difficult to get work’. (Woman in community 1)

A follow up visit to ‘check in’ with women post-release could offer a supportive opportunity for women to offload about any difficulties they were having or obstacles they faced, with someone who understands something about what they have experienced in prison. This kind of provision could feasibly be delivered by appropriately trained volunteers who could also signpost to services who could support with more specific services such as employment or training. Peer support parenting groups may be well received by some women.

### *Lasting effects of prison*

Finally, and in contrast to the interviews with women in prison, some women talked about how prison lingered even after release, and that it had changed the relationship they had with their children:

‘so he struggled that way being separated from me he became quite insular and totally lost a lot of his confidence, you know...the ripple effect was, you know, will always be with them and myself, you know’. (Woman in community 1)

This mother describes what she called ‘the ripple effect’ of her sentence bringing into focus the fact that maternal imprisonment is not simply hard for children and mothers during that period of absence. The stigma that had attached to her son when people found out she had been imprisoned was, in her view, lasting and it had damaged his confidence, which would not automatically repair itself upon her return to the family home. This is coupled with the knowledge and memory of the separation which may be indelible:

‘the whole, the whole kids’ lives I have been around, I have been there for more than what I haven’t been until those three months and they remember that, do you know what I mean?’ (Woman in community 2)

The ultimate goal for many women in prison is release and although some women we interviewed in prison were concerned about fitting back in to family life once they got home, few had considered that the effects of imprisonment could linger on post-release. Release can throw up many practical problems (adequate housing, welfare, employment, drugs support) but it can also create relational problems, a lack of confidence in mothering or as a worker, or a feeling stigma, which will not fade. These ‘ripple effects’ of maternal imprisonment have lifelong significance:

‘what has affected me is my confidence you know I don’t have the confidence you know and it is a struggle every day to go you know to do the job I do’. (Woman in community 1)

Women, children and their families may benefit from support to navigate these complex feelings to ensure that women can continue to reintegrate in the community, mothering their children, finding employment and not reoffending.

### ***Interviews with carers***

#### *Support for the children*

Some of the carers noted the importance of peer support for the children and the benefits of travelling together:

‘I think she stays friends with a couple of them on Snapchat or something like that. So that’s nice for them as well because they tend do sort of, I suppose they’ve got something in common you know and they have...’. (Carer 4 - father)

This feeling of isolation was not only diminished by travelling on the minibus. The same carer noted how his daughter had benefitted from time to talk to the female volunteer in her car on the way to prison:

‘great for Lola because it’s usually a lady, it’s always been a lady so I always let her sit in the front seat so they can have a good natter. And it’s funny because she is so grown up for her age (14 years) she just you know she talks about make-up and school and things like that and mum and all that sort of thing and it’s just lovely then because I just sit in the back and I just listen’. (Carer 4 – father)

These informal opportunities for his daughter to talk with an older woman were perceived as important to the carer because they filled a gap that he felt existed and could not fill. They provided an enjoyable journey to the prison and helped to meet his daughter’s emotional needs as well as letting the carer relax.

Not all carers found the minibus to be a wholly positive experience, especially the 2 grandparents interviewed. One carer who saw the minibus as party-like for the child, found being with other families on the journey up to prison less easy for her:

‘personally, I was quite happy to either drive myself or go with [name], I’ve got to be honest because there is a stigma attached to it all’. (Carer 4 - grandmother)

The stigma and sense of shame that prison elicits can be hard for families to process, and the minibus experience for this carer meant that her identity as the mother of a prisoner was revealed to others. Some carers may find having to reveal this uncomfortable, despite the fact that other families are similar situations. The complex feelings that prison can provoke in families should be kept in mind when offering Visiting Mum transport options, especially at the start of a sentence when difficult feelings are likely to be at their most intense.

It should also be noted that not all children do well in a situation such as being on a minibus with other children and young people. One carer had a difficult journey on the way home from prison with her grandchild:

‘Oh my god. When, oh my god!.... I swear to god , it was either him I was going to chuck him out of the coach or I was going to get out of the coach and walk home, on my own. I swear it was so bad, it was so bad coming home. Oh my god. That was bad...He was alright going there, but coming back oh my Jesus, Jesus. No, it was terrible’. (Carer 2 - grandmother)

The complex feelings that children are left with once they have seen their mothers may manifest themselves in problematic externalising behaviour on the journey home. This carer’s account demonstrates that individual children and families have different needs and the Visiting Mum transport options need to continue to be flexible and sensitively planned to accommodate this.

#### *Additional Visiting Mum services*

Along with visits and volunteer support for children and families, Visiting Mum offers some additional support to maintain the mother-child bond, and the relationship between the mother and the carers. One carer described how PACT staff had facilitated longer phone calls from the prison so that telephone contact could be set by the child’s pace:

‘He likes to show, he doesn’t understand, he likes to show her his bedroom, his toys with my phone, not that she can see it mind you know he doesn’t understand that you know but look mum nanny bought this, oh she’s like oh that’s lovely you know so it is important’ (Carer 2 - grandmother)

The child’s desire to talk to his mother about his toys and precious objects in order to feel connected to her was facilitated by a longer phone call that PACT staff had arranged. These smaller encounters between mother and child are important aspects of Visiting Mum and the work that it does to sustain the relationship between women in prison and their children.

Carers also spoke highly of the photographs that PACT staff took of the families during visits:

‘I’m looking at one where my son and my daughter came up and I couldn’t come up and my son and my daughter came up and I’m just looking at that photograph now, it’s lovely’. (Carer 4 - father)

This carer was so attached to the photographs, even though it had been taken in prison, that he kept it by his bed. This demonstrates the ability of Visiting Mum to create lasting positive memories for families, under very difficult circumstances. However not all carers were as attached to the photographs taken during the prison visits. Some carers who were interviewed after the release of the mother wanted to erase the memories of the period of imprisonment and that included disposing of photographs and letters:

‘Umm I don’t know actually yeah trying to forget it or like all the letters she wrote I burnt them all, we’re trying to forget that now it’s gone, let’s move on. Next chapter, get on with it’. (Carer 3 – father)

Thus, we can see that families have different reactions and need to be treated individually. Other activities that Visiting Mum staff facilitated such as making and sending crafts and cards from prison were also reported by carers as being beneficial and highly valued by children:

‘Yeah he can’t wait to get her card, she sends him cards and things she makes and everything you know and he loves it. He knows the colour of the envelopes and stuff, that’s what they set up’. (Carer 2 - grandmother)

Unfortunately the same carer also discussed how her daughter had moved to a different prison, and that the activities both during the Visiting Mum visit and contact in between visits had not been replicated there:

‘And you know my daughter and my grandson would you know paint and draw and they would take pictures in Eastwood Park you know and then I’d get copies, [name] would. But it’s different in [new prison], they don’t take pictures we don’t get any pictures... so now she’s here we’ve got nothing that shows how good she looks, how different the baby looks, how things have changed you know?’ (Carer 2 - grandmother)

This lack of photographs sent in between visits was particularly disappointing for this carer. She could not easily visit the new prison, and even though her daughter was coming to the end of three year sentence, the child was young and changing quickly. Maintaining the mother-child relationship in the final six months or so of the sentence was a difficult prospect, compounded by a lack of photographs to remind her grandchild of the image of his mother and allow her daughter to share in marking key milestones in her son’s development that she was missing.

Aside from providing support for the mother-child relationship, Visiting Mum also offered a carers pamper day which allowed carers to spend time with their loved one without children being present. This was well-received by all the carers, who enjoyed the time they had together and the activities that Visiting Mum had provided. For those whose partners were in prison, it was important to be able to reconnect as partners rather than as parents:

‘I must admit for the simple fact that I got to talk to Hazel rather than everybody talking to Hazel, I know that sounds awful but it was a little bit of quality time that we’ve had... But just being sat by her, I know that sounds silly but just being sat next to her’. (Carer 4 – father)

‘Oh yeah, we had a bit of time together just me and her to speak because obviously the boys weren’t there so it was good just to have that little bit of us time then’. (Carer 3 – father)

The extended support provided by Visiting Mum in sustaining family relationships appears to be positive for both children and carers. Activities such as the provision of photographs are inexpensive and quick but convey a great deal of benefit upon children in particular and should be a continued aspect of the scheme.

### *Support of other agencies*

The final theme from the carers interviews relates to the support that they received by agencies in the community. All carers came into contact with education because of the children attending school, and

one carer was receiving support from children's social care. All reported that the children's schools had been supportive:

'school, school are absolutely bloody fantastic do you know what they said, they told [name] to apply for different things for [name] to go full time with the playgroup because their school is wonderful'. (Carer 4 - grandmother)

'And every time [name] has needed a day off to go on a visit there has never been any issues, it's always been yeah no problem have a nice time, they'll just mark her absent, not a problem. Do you know what I mean they've been very good the school have actually yeah'. (Carer 4 - father)

It was encouraging to know that carers had good accounts of education. Schools are the only service that many carers will come into contact with and it is important that they are able to provide appropriate help, and do not create obstacles to children visiting their mothers. School also provides a point of consistency for children during difficult circumstances, so it is vital that they understand how to support children during that time.

In relation to children's social care, the one carer who had engaged with these services was extremely positive:

'Team Around the Family yeah I mean she is just amazing, she has done more for me than anybody has done in the last couple of years you know she has got everyone together, everyone is on the right page'. (Carer 2 - grandmother)

This carer had received input because of the particular needs of the child, and whilst her experience was positive, many carers would not meet thresholds for support simply on the basis of a mother's imprisonment. There is a dearth of research about carers experiences of maternal imprisonment so it is difficult to understand what sort of service provision would be appropriate for them, if any. In many of the carers' accounts, the support that Visiting Mum provided was adequate in helping them through the challenges they faced which demonstrates the vital work that the scheme does.

In conclusion, the interviews with carers provided a unique perspective on the Visiting Mum scheme. What is clear from the interviews is how significant the burden of being a carer in this situation is. While the main benefit that they perceived was in relation to the children and maintaining the mother-child relationship, they also derived many benefits themselves. Having some of the strain in relation to visiting prison lifted by the Visiting Mum volunteers and staff was invaluable, as was the feeling of having someone who understood and alleviated the sense of isolation many carers felt. The high quality Visiting Mum visits were also enjoyed by carers, who were able to relax more and create family intimacy during the short time they were together.

### ***Interviews with volunteers***

Given that volunteers very much underpin much of the Visiting Mum work we have reported their views in some detail, so that should the model could be replicated elsewhere if required.



We interviewed four volunteers, three women and one man who were aged between 20 and 53 years (mean age 41 years). The volunteers had been involved with Visiting Mum for between 1-2 years. Volunteers dedicated between 1-4 days per month to the project.

### *Motivation and experience*

Two of the volunteers were studying for psychology degrees and volunteering for Visiting Mum met the requirements of their college practice placement. One other volunteer had previously studied criminology and women studies, and thus had an interest in the 'general area'; she was also working part time with young people for a local charity:

'I just thought it sounded really interesting.. I've got an, you know, an interest in .. I studied ..of Criminology so it kind of all my interests kind of came into one. ... yeah Criminology and Women's Studies' .(Volunteer 1)

One volunteer was not working or volunteering elsewhere, but had a range of related care experience; they had applied to Sova to become a mentor and fallen into this role 'accidentally'. Their motivation was related to a general interest in the area and wanting to 'put something back', noting that his primary concern was to help the young people: '....It's all about the children' (Volunteer 4).

### *Satisfaction*

Volunteers derive a great deal of satisfaction from the role, which provides the opportunity to build longer-term relationships with carers and children, without an over bearing commitment:

'I just feel happy when the children enjoy themselves, being able to take them up to visit, especially when the carer sometimes can't. Because I have taken a woman up before who couldn't drive and she was the carer- she had two children -so things like that when you know they can't go and you are able to take them and give them that opportunity...Yeah so that makes me feel happy that I can do something like that'. (Volunteer 3)

The volunteer undoubtedly derived a great deal of satisfaction from being able to support children in this way. The volunteers feel valued by both the children and carers and recognise the importance of their role. The volunteer when talking about the importance of visits to the children, goes on to note that after a visit children were:

'So happy. ...Yeah it's like they've had a massive sugar rush when they come out of there. And especially because on the visits they get to do activities, they don't just sit there they get to do things with their mum'. (Volunteer 3)

The volunteers perceived themselves to be role models for both the young people and mothers, as it demonstrated that someone wanted to help without being paid. The male volunteer felt that many of the mothers and children may have had negative experiences of men in their life, having few positive male role models, and it is important that this is counteracted- it maybe that proactively recruiting male volunteers would be a useful strategy. Other female volunteers saw their role as mentoring and positively reinforcing young people's self-confidence:

'But then mum would tend to go to craft table with the younger two and I tended to chat, I kind of I suppose mentoring if you like with the two teenage girls. .. so I did kind of feel my role a little bit with the girls particularly was to just yeah raise them up a little bit'.

(Volunteer 2)

Here we can see how a female volunteer can provide valuable support for young women missing contact with their mother.

#### *Time commitment*

Each of the volunteers had worked with between 4-6 families over their period of involvement with the project. Volunteers dedicated between 1 and 4 days per month to the project. The person who was dedicating 4 days was not working or volunteering elsewhere. The fact that the project could accommodate people who had differing amounts time available, meant that a wide range of volunteers with differing life experiences and commitments could be involved with Visiting Mum. The visiting day often involves a very early start to collect children and transport them to the prison for morning visit- this placed pressure on both children, carers and volunteers:

'I'm Cardiff so it was sort of half an hour, 40 minutes. At 6 in the morning it felt like a really long way' (Volunteer 2)

One volunteer when asked about possible improvements to the scheme noted that the timing of the visits was not always conducive or helpful for the children:

'Maybe (there should be) different visiting times- the children have to get up at 6 or 6.30 to get there. It would be better setting off at 8am and having a visit at 11.30-2pm' (Volunteer 4).

It is difficult again to know whether changing the visiting time would be practical given the other commitments for the visiting rooms during the working day but some consideration of the visiting times might be useful.

#### *Preparation and Training*

Volunteers were broadly satisfied with the preparation and training which included Hidden Harm training and a visit to the prison, so they were prepared for their role, the penal environment and to escort children and carers. The training also covered child protection and health and safety, as Volunteer 2 explains:

'I think there was quite a bit about protecting yourself- so you know when you're in the car ..don't have documents in your glovebox, for example, ... you know you can chit chat about your family if that comes up but don't tell them where your kids go to school it was those kind of, it was kind of just you know just be aware really'.

Volunteers felt that the training could also have included issues such as domestic violence, drug abuse and mental health, so that they better understood the difficulties faced by some of the families. There was also a suggestion that professionals or even ex-prisoners could be involved in the training:

'I mean I think there were elements of you know what the experience is like for the families but I don't think there was maybe enough of that you know, so maybe I don't know, inviting some people in to talk to us'. (Volunteer 1).

Similarly, child development and attachment would be very helpful for volunteers to better understand the difficulties of the children with whom they were working, especially for those who were not parents themselves (two of these volunteers):

'Would like training on child development and attachment issues ..as I don't have children myself.. I would welcome more training' (Volunteer 4).

There was also a suggestion that basic first aid with children should be part of the initial training:

'One thing that might be good to actually put in that training, there is opportunities for me to access it now, would be a really basic First Aid. I did a First Aid thing with adults, but it's so different with children isn't it?' (Volunteer 2)

Several volunteers commented on undertaking the training with those preparing for different roles, and that they would have preferred to be trained with others undertaking the Visiting Mum role:

'also it was different projects (not specific) in there as well so stuff (was general) like how to ask them questions using like open and closed questions, not to be too direct with them otherwise they won't really want to open up with you'. (Volunteer 3)

Similarly, volunteers would prefer to be trained by those with specialist knowledge about Visiting Mum:

'There was a couple of others but the two women who were running it at the time they didn't know much about the Visiting Mums so'. (Volunteer 3)

It is difficult to see how all of these topics could be incorporated into the initial 3 day training schedule, however all of the volunteers noted that they would welcome a programme of on-going training, which would help them to develop and extend their role. Issues of child attachment may be particularly pertinent for volunteers in the Visiting Mum project as children's behaviour may regress when separated from their mother, they may be angry and suffer from separation anxiety (Mears and Siennick, 2016). Providing on-going training would also be investing in and thus helping to acknowledge and reward volunteers for their commitment.

### *Support/supervision*

All of the volunteers felt well supported by the Sova scheme co-ordinator and all felt that they could make contact at any time if they had a query, difficulty or dilemma:

'I mean she is good, she is always available really'. (Volunteer 1)

'If there is any problem she is there. I would be straight on the phone to (her)... I have supervision as and when- we run into each other every 5-6 weeks at prison as well... She is fantastic and inspirational' (Volunteer 4)

All volunteers felt that they had sufficient supervision and received sufficient guidance as and when needed.

#### *Preparation for the child*

Only one of the volunteers interviewed had been involved in preparing a child to visit prison for the first time (although they did not accompany the child on the visit), this seemed to be because of the time it takes to receive a referral, allocate a volunteer and arrange a first visit (as also noted by the children):

‘Only once I think yeah, once I did. Oh no I went to one where you know it was like that preparation kind of visit... a lot of the families, because they were kind of using Visiting Mums and did have some other mechanism for getting there even though it was maybe hit and miss’.  
(Volunteer 1)

As already suggested, it may be that given it is very difficult to meet with a family in advance of their first visit, (because of all of the practical arrangements that need to be put in place) that Visiting Mum could develop a video/ recording of information to accompany their booklet providing information about visiting the prison for the first time. This would allow carers and children to watch the recording together, so that they could be better prepared and know what to expect.

#### *Mini bus*

The carers all had experience of either driving their own car to transport children and carers, or of accompanying children to the prison when they travelled on the mini bus. The bus gave more opportunities for volunteers to engage with families, as they were not having to concentrate on the driving. This is often a time when two or more families travel together:

‘Because the carer wasn’t always going we went up in a minibus with like two volunteers but most of the time if we have a minibus we will take another family up as well... But in the minibus, you do, you get to know them better, you get to chat....The children always seem quite happy because they know what to expect when they go up there they’re just so excited...Yeah and they love, they do, they love the minibus.’ (Volunteer 3).

The volunteer went on to note how more practical engagement could take place with children during the journey, which enhanced the experience for the children and strengthened the relationship between volunteer and child:

‘In the minibus most of the time the other volunteer she takes paper and like a pencil case and I’ll always take a pencil case as well and then the children will just play something like noughts and crosses’. (Volunteer 3).

#### *Role within the prison*

All volunteers were clear about their role within the prison and made sure that they did not interrupt the families and sat away from parents and their mother. However, they were ready and on hand to be responsive as the need arose:

'Trying to make sure they've got time together- so you know get the tea,. And then I'd just kind of you know look out if the kids were playing -when you kind of thought oh the adults are getting into conversation -go and sort of keep the kids busy. You know sometimes chat with a certain family member, so that others can talk yeah. Sometimes- just sit and read a magazine and just kind of... I kind of always sit ..two tables down or something'. (Volunteer 1).

The volunteers needed to be sensitive to the situation so that they could facilitate and support family communication as and when appropriate.

#### *Supporting carers- wrap around support*

The volunteers had varied views about their role in supporting carers. One volunteer saw their role purely as a means of transport 'I just see myself as a glorified taxi driver-I pick them up, take them there, wait for them and take them home' (Volunteer 4) , however they go on to discuss the importance of making people feel comfortable and also being available to listen, should people want to talk:

'On the other hand if there is anything to be dealt with I am there to speak to. I like to make people feel comfortable'. (Volunteer 4)

None of the volunteers had been involved in on-going 'wrap around care' offering support between visits as was initially envisioned in the original architecture of the project nor had been involved after release; some felt that this additional support was not what carers are looking for. The volunteers noted that whilst they had offered more support, it is dependent on the willingness and openness of the carer as to whether this could happen:

'Well it's difficult, wraparound support in the sense ..Because it's kind of dependent on how ..how open the carer is I suppose. So my wraparound support has been offered, let's put it like that.' (Volunteer 2).

Nevertheless, the time spent in cars, as Ferguson (2010) has identified was seen as valuable and a time when some carers felt they could confide in the volunteer:

'She was embarrassed that she had a daughter that was in prison and she had a teenage son I think he was 17 living at home that she couldn't talk to about it and she didn't want to talk to her friends about it because she was embarrassed but really valued the time that she had in the car with me you know that she could actually talk to me openly without feeling like I was going to go and chat to her other friends or anything you know'. (Volunteer 2)

Whilst most volunteers had offered further support this was not always required or taken up and it would be a useful area for further consideration, as to how this could be more routinely delivered.

#### *Links with other agencies*

One volunteer noted that on return from a visit, she was the conduit of information to the school about how the visit had gone and how the child might be feeling. It is difficult to imagine a child returning to school after a prison visit and it would be important for the school to be sensitised to his needs:

'I would drop the children directly to school afterwards so I'd take them into school and just literally give a seconds of an update to the teachers, more or less it was more of how the younger boy was being you know he's had a good morning but he is really tired kind of'. (Volunteer 2).

The volunteers also noted the difficulty for children of missing school when they are studying for examinations and that Visiting Mum could really only take place on INSET days and holidays:

'She's a 15 year old girl just doing her GCSEs so she's limited to INSET days and school holidays really which of course everybody is wanting' (Volunteer 2).

Missing school might be an issue when children are coming up to an examination period- some volunteers noted that schools gave out catch up work and handouts, that children could read whilst travelling to the prison or at home. Consideration of Visiting Mum visits taking place at weekends might also be a consideration for young people who were approaching an examination period.

#### *Arranging visits*

Carers were not involved in arranging the visits, but felt that they might have had more contact and engendered greater trust and rapport had they been able to do this:

'At the moment none (Contact) really between visits because most of the time at the moment we're going up on a minibus. Sova does organise the minibus and tells them when the visit will be. ...Just for me (I would like) to be booking the visits myself because I am quite happy to do that and then that way I think I would have more contact with the families'. (Volunteer 3)

The booking of visits and letting the family know might be a way of having more contact with carers, which would increase trust and possibly facilitate the receptiveness and delivery of more wrap around support. It could also reduce the work of the volunteer co-ordinator.

#### *Post release work*

Three of the volunteers felt that post release work would be something they would be interested in becoming involved with, although they had not done any to date:

'No no. But that would I think be quite nice. I mean some people I would, I'd sort of send a text you know especially like to the grandmothers you know and they'd sort of send a text back and yeah you know and just say look you know if there is any problems make sure you contact someone yeah so'. (Volunteer 1).

Volunteers have not always had that much contact with mothers, as they mostly have contact with children and their carers. Volunteers nevertheless appreciated the difficulties for women on release and that it would not necessarily be easy to pick up the mothering reins:

'the mother she was, her biggest concern was coming out she said I haven't made a decision for a year and now I've got to come out you know and suddenly be mum to four kids, two of them teenagers' (Volunteer 2).

This volunteer could see how a mother may lose confidence in her mothering skills during the period of incarceration. It would be interesting to explore the possibilities for volunteers providing post release support for those mothers who wanted it, given that research and our post release interviews have shown that impact of a prison sentence lingers on and does not end with the sentence.

#### *Impact on re-offending*

The volunteers were asked whether they felt that involvement with Visiting Mum would have any impact on women re-offending. The volunteers all felt that involvement with Visiting Mum would reduce offending as, having built and strengthened links with their children, women would not want to risk damaging these again in the future:

‘I think, I think, it will help because obviously they are missing out with time with their children and I think when they’re getting regular visits for them, they might not want to miss out on that time again, especially when the children are so young if they’ve got like a long time in there and they’re missing all those valuable years yeah. (Volunteer 3)

#### *Suggestions for improvements*

Volunteers were broadly happy with the Visiting Mum scheme and there were not many suggestions for improvements, although the bureaucracy when visiting the prison was commented upon:

‘The project runs smoothly. It’s probably when you get the prison is the biggest problem, being on the list’. (Volunteer 3)

This is a recognisable difficulty for anyone visiting a prison and is probably not something that Visiting Mum has much control over and it is difficult to say whether this would be improved if volunteers booked the visits themselves.

Lastly, one volunteer commented on the importance of food for children when visiting their mothers noting that:

‘Food is the most important way that children relate to their mothers...I would make sure there was more food for the mothers- don’t get me wrong there are snacks and fruit but to make it more of a family event... something with a little bit of warmth, something cooked and put on a plate.. The kids would love their mother to cook for them, they’d be delighted’. (Volunteer 4)

Food was also seen as very significant factor for the children and as already identified this could be an area for further development.

#### ***Interviews with Visiting Mum and Sova staff***

All PACT staff are very positive about the Visiting Mum scheme and all that it does. They feel strongly that they are making a significant difference to the lives of children and women, as well as benefitting their wider families. All staff are very passionate about working for the project and were clearly dedicated and willing to go the extra mile to deliver the best possible service to support women and their families. They are aware that support in the community for the women they work with often falls

away once they are released, and that this is problematic in terms of reoffending.

The Visiting Mum staff are involved in complex family work, liaising with social workers on matters including child protection and adoption and accompanying women during court proceedings. They feel that although this aspect of their work is challenging, it is very rewarding and important. Staff feel well supported and part of an effective team. They do not currently receive clinical supervision as this did not work well for their team in the past. Although the staff report good support from each other, and from the prison chaplaincy, given the complex and emotionally intensive work that the staff do, this may be an area which PACT want to revisit.

The Visiting Mum staff feel that the scheme is now embedded into the prison regime, which takes time, and that it is now understood and embraced by professionals across the prison structure and in Local Authorities.

Areas for improvement were discussed regarding a greater use of volunteers to help with specific tasks in the prison, such as the prison to help with the storybook scheme (whereby mothers record a bedtime story for their children) and with serving food during visits. In addition, work outside the prison such as volunteers supporting children and families before and after visits could be extended. The staff at HMP Eastwood Park feel that greater recognition and celebration of those volunteers already involved with the service might help with retention. The co-location of the volunteer coordinator was thought to be an improvement they would like to see, where the coordinator is based part-time in the prison and part-time in the community. This would help with booking and carrying out visits and understanding the immediacy of the needs of individual women which might lessen the PACT staff's workload. The development of further specialist training for Visiting Mum staff was also identified, in particular with regard to attachment and trauma, the Children Act (1989) and legislation given the new Social Services and Well-being Act, Wales (2014). A liaison social worker located in the prison to support with some of the complex family work that the PACT staff undertake may also be beneficial.

### ***Interviews with prison personnel***

We interviewed a range of staff about Visiting Mum, all fulfilling different roles and functions within the prison. We spoke to a member of the chaplaincy team, a member of the senior management team, and someone who worked in resettlement. We aimed to explore how the scheme was understood in the prison, whether staff perceived any benefits of it and whether there were any changes that could be made to the scheme.

Those that we spoke to discussed Visiting Mum mainly in relation to the way it impacted on the women in prison, although the benefits of the scheme for children were noted by all. All of the staff were complimentary about Visiting Mum and its staff. Because some of the PACT staff do other work in the prison aside from Visiting Mum scheme, sometimes the separation between this other work and the Visiting Mum work was not a clearly defined. Below the themes of *Impact of Visiting Mum on women; Impact of Visiting Mum on children; Praise and recognition of PACT staff; and Visiting Mum going forward* are explored.

#### ***Impact of Visiting Mum on women***



The benefits of Visiting Mum on women in prison were clear to staff who could often think of concrete positive examples of women that they had encountered who had accessed the scheme. As noted in the literature review, many women in prison have suffered multiple hardships and experience difficulties in relation to being victims of physical and sexual violence, having substance misuse problems, living in poverty and suffering mental ill health. As such, many women will have come into contact with statutory services at points in their life, and often not have a positive experience of those services. One staff member pointed out that women with these experiences are likely to view PACT staff and the Visiting Mum scheme as different, and that they would be grateful and in need of the kind of support that is on offer:

‘You know those that are repeat offenders particularly, they’ve not had that kind of support before, they’ve not had anybody who has made that positive effort from that are’. (Chaplain)

Offering this kind of support has a practical consequences but it also has a symbolic importance because it opens up prison to being a potential time for change. One staff member described how orderlies told women about the scheme soon after their reception to prison and that this immediately signalled that, while prison is undoubtedly a place of punishment, it is also about supporting and rehabilitating women:

‘Straight away we are starting – actually you and your family are important to us, we want to support you. I think we’ve got a massive journey to go on but I think it’s a start and it’s a really positive start’ (Assistant governor)

In terms of practical benefits, staff discussed how Visiting Mum had changed their attitude to being in prison and made them feel more settled. Feeling more settled can help women fit in with the prison regime:

‘three of the women had been involved with Visiting Mums and were actually saying how it changed their attitude to prison, knowing they were going to see their children... And they were you know they were competent carers...so they felt even more failed, that they’d failed their children even more so it was a bit of a lifeline for them.’ (Chaplaincy)

‘Be more settled, have more confidence that they would stay here at this prison and so be able to see their kid’ (Resettlement)

We note in the literature review that family contact should not used as a reward for female prisoners, as it is with male prisoners. However, the promise of high quality contact with children may have a ‘pacifying’ effect on women in a different way. If women are not holding onto painful and intense emotions related to the separation from their children they will be more able to regulate their behaviour and feelings. This allows for better adherence to prison rules and achieving better levels of mental wellbeing:

‘Their emotional wellbeing would be increased and it could act as a tool to sort of ‘behave’ as bad as that sounds?’ They might cooperate more, not be so angry and on the defensive’. (Resettlement)

‘One woman that’s involved at the moment who is notoriously volatile and it is quite interesting how in that kind of period you know sort of a week either side of that visit, she is not volatile’. (Chaplaincy)

One of the significant ways that Visiting Mum helps women in prison is with the first visit which was expressed as being particularly challenging:

‘I think that first visit is really hard, it really is hard because that’s when all the failure and everything else comes up but once, once it is has happened and it’s felt good and it’s felt positive then they begin to look forward’. (Chaplain)

Many of the carers we spoke to had not accessed Visiting Mum for their first visit and had found it stressful and unpleasant. This, coupled with mothers own difficulties during an initial visit highlight how important it is that women in prison and families are able to access the service as soon as possible after their reception to prison.

Another aspect of Visiting Mum is about anchoring women in prison to the community. By maintaining a link to the outside world, women will be able to better integrate upon release. This was expressed in terms of allowing women to let go of their prison ‘persona’ and instead focus on being themselves:

‘...it helps women keep in touch with normality. It’s a very false environment in here, it’s a very strange environment...when the Visiting Mums Scheme is up and running and when people are meeting their children, they realise who they are, as opposed to who they have to be when they’re in prison’. (Chaplaincy)

By mentally stepping outside of prison life during the hours of contact with their children, women are reminded of what awaits them on their release. This acts both as motivator to get them through until the next visit and a chance to ‘practice’ mothering skills and behaviours that have been less in use in the prison environment and which women have lost confidence in.

Maintaining a link to the outside world, and to children, was also expressed in terms of decreasing the likelihood of reoffending:

‘In terms of family contact we know that if we can keep the link between mum and family then the chances of reoffending are reduced. If we can keep the bond between mother and child then she has’. (Assistant governor)

Visiting Mum was also viewed in terms of keeping women safe from self-inflicted injuries and suicide attempts:

‘the risk of harm is significant to women in custody and if women are having regular positive contact with their children and their family then that helps reduce the risk. If women don’t have hope then prison is a really scary place’. (Assistant governor).

The scheme was also seen as important for women who enter prison needing a medical detoxification:

‘Once they come out of that chaos there’s a feeling of hopelessness, that they’ve lost everything and they’ve got nothing work towards...having support to bring their children here helps them...to start rebuilding the blocks of their lives’. (Assistant governor)

The role of hope in all of these key ‘indicators’ (reoffending, self-harm, relapse prevention) is clear. Giving women hope is something that, as one of the staff members pointed out is hard to quantify, but it appears to be a significant benefit of Visiting Mum which is a core component of many of the more tangible benefits that staff felt the scheme offers.

Although the scheme was perceived to be overwhelmingly positive for women, it was hard to gloss over the post-release realities for women, especially in south Wales. Visiting Mum support was not felt to be matched in the community:

‘...gives a level of support that the women here haven’t been used to expecting the level of mentoring support for women on release from here to South Wales is minimal unless they’re linked in with TSS or one of the drug agencies. There is a small organisation called Transitions in Swansea who try to support women in Swansea, but there is very very little else’. (Chaplaincy)

Although housing, employment and mental health support is lacking in community for all women exiting prison, the dearth of services that support women exiting prison in south Wales appeared to be particularly problematic. Another member of staff felt that support in the community ‘fell away’ upon release and that this thwarted attempts of the prison to help mothers make long-term change, especially those who were repeat offenders:

‘the amount of support that they get in the community will need to significantly change before we can actually change their behaviours and how they see prison...whatever their triggers are, if we haven’t had the time or opportunity to make the steps to address that then the circle starts again’. (Assistant governor)

Some of the women that access Visiting Mum will continue to offend, this is not a negative reflection of the work that Visiting Mum do, as they cannot offer comprehensive community support, even if the role of volunteers is expanded. It is a reflection of the lack of family support and community services that are available to women upon their release from prison.

It should also be noted that one staff member discussed the possible negative consequences of a visit upon women who felt very intense emotions at seeing and leaving their children:

‘One woman who was incredibly upset after a visit and it was really difficult and she self-harmed quite badly. And that was just the trauma of it’. (Chaplaincy)

These incidents are very unfortunate but do occasionally happen but staff did not feel this was a reason to curtail particular women’s access to the scheme or to seeing their children. In fact the staff felt that in prison, the support that was available in these scenarios was very good and would help women to make longer term changes:

'but you know the nice thing about this prison is that the support gets put in place and three or four days later she had processed things and the self-harm wasn't that serious fortunately. And she was really grateful that she'd had that time, but it had really upset her you know and it was just kind of saying goodbye'. (Chaplaincy)

As this staff member notes, the woman was able to process the difficulties she had had with the ending of the visit and reflect positively on the experience. The professional support available in prison exceeds that in community for many women and so, while this was not what we would describe as a positive example, the outcome held positive potential.

#### *Impact of Visiting Mum on children*

The staff recognised the way the scheme provides benefits to children. One staff member talked about children having the "biggest smile that you'll ever see" (Chaplaincy) when they saw their mother at the start of Visiting Mum visits. Apart from deriving a sense of joy, and relief, upon seeing their mothers, another benefit was expressed in terms of maintaining a bond with their mother during their time in prison:

'from the kids point of view, they don't forget they've got a mum but they do forget what their mum is like. And if they're hearing you know within their own family negative things they will start to pick up on that and it's quite hard for them so I think you know the more regularly they can see mum the better because then they see her as she is and as their mum rather than as this you know ogre in the cupboard. So I think it is crucial'. (Chaplaincy)

Importantly, the contact children have with their mothers which Visiting Mum facilitates provides an opportunity for children and mothers to share a bond which is not shaped by other people's, sometimes negative, appraisals of the mothers. Hearing your mother being discussed in negative terms is difficult for children to process, given the central role mothers play in children's lifeworlds. A lack of contact due to the difficulties of carers bringing children to the prison means that these narratives about their mother are not always counteracted with actually seeing her. In addition, all contact with their mothers is mediated entirely by others when they are in prison, children have almost no control over how and when they see their mother. This is not to suggest that visits completely allay difficult and ambivalent feelings some children may have towards their mothers. However, the relaxed and supported environment of a Visiting Mum visit gives children a chance to have their emotional needs met as they have more control over the way they interact with their mother.

Another benefit to children was described in terms of providing children with support on the way to and throughout the visit. The literature review identified that some children do find visiting to be a traumatic experience, although much of the research into this is conducted in the USA where prison environments are often less child-friendly and more frightening. In any case, one staff member thought that the volunteer support and the minibus experience both worked to make the visit more enjoyable for children:

'I think it's fab. So the fact that we've got a service for the children to come and visit mum and they're bought here by somebody that they know and they are supported the whole

time...particularly if they are brought here with another family, I think for children it could be quite isolating thinking you're the only one with a mum in prison...so I think that helps to reduce their anxiety and makes it more fun'. (Assistant governor)

The sense of belonging achieved by meeting other children in the same situation is certainly beneficial for children, with the potential to create a better sense of self and reduce their anxiety. In addition, the volunteer support which is available on the journey and during the visit means that children can ask questions and receive reassurance from a neutral figure, rather than a carer who may be struggling with their own anxieties about the visit.

Another benefit of Visiting Mum for children was that the volunteers provide help with preparing children for visits by dispelling myths about prison that are commonly represented in the media and sustained in public consciousness:

'Prisons are scary places. We see a lot on the news, in the media about violence in prison...there's anxiety around that...I think the fact that we've got people in the community that are working with families and giving them reassurance is great'. (Assistant governor)

As we have touched on in the interviews with carers, staff agree that the pre-prison preparation that Visiting Mum volunteers undertake is invaluable for families who are understandably anxious about visiting prison. It can mean that children and families have a much better experience of the visit as well as easing anxiety in the days and hours leading to the visit. Some of the carers we interviewed had not received this preparation and so it is important that this aspect of the scheme continues to be a key focus.

#### *Praise and recognition for PACT staff*

All of the staff that we spoke to were very impressed with the PACT team and recognised the important contribution they made to lives of the women and their families. All staff recognised that the work that was undertaken as part of Visiting Mum was challenging and skilled:

'So many women are positive in our feedback sessions at 12 weeks especially if it's a visit that has just happened. They always tell us about how good the PACT service and the staff are...They have complex cases and high caseloads and they are good at what they do. It's so important what they do'. (Resettlement).

The particular skill and experience that the PACT team have was viewed to be unique in the prison, and vital to its healthy functioning:

'I think that the kind of expertise that the PACT team have got in terms of understanding how mothers feel and how mothers process and the kind of emotional side of that it brilliant because they are there to continue that support'. (Chaplaincy)

Aside from the key components of the Visiting Mum scheme, staff discussed and praised its other activities which helped women to stay in contact with their children. As we have highlighted in the sections on interviews with mothers and carers, the recording of bedtimes stories was also popular with staff:

'I have heard from a couple of women who, one who was very, very hesitant about reading so had actually learnt the story and told it in her own words which was really lovely actually'.  
(Chaplaincy)

This example shows how flexible this activity can be. It can be easily tailored to suit women with limited literacy and PACT staff are able and willing to support women with different needs to take part in it. Visiting Mum has potential for all mothers in prison, not only the Visiting Mum mothers. It acts as a means of mothers establishing a remote relationship with children which could combat feelings of helplessness and a loss of hope, and it can be a way of reminding children of their mother and keeping her in their life, yet it is inexpensive, especially if the recording and packaging are facilitated by volunteers. The use of volunteers in this way would also enable PACT staff to focus on other tasks.

In relation to time, the pressures on PACT staff were also acknowledged, and there was a sense that they achieved a significant amount given their resources. When speaking about the PACT family engagement services more generally, one staff member exclaimed:

'I know that PACT have a really good reputation and everyone thinks highly of what they do...I don't know how they run that service with the four of them!'. (Resettlement)

The relentless and emotional nature of the PACT team's work was recognised and valued by other staff members. It was expressed that additional funding would help make the work that they do go further:

'PACT could do with more workers in the prison you know because they are massively stretched I mean you know you watch them leave at the end of the day and they are absolutely knackered. They're probably the only other organisation similar to chaplaincy, from the minute you come in to the minute you leave it is non-stop'. (Chaplaincy)

The PACT team and the Visiting Mum scheme are clearly valued by staff who perceive benefits to women and their families which outweighed the resources available. It is important that the PACT team are able to continue their crucial work and given their unique skills, experiences and remit could benefit many other women and families if they could extend their reach through investment in additional staff and greater use of volunteers.

#### *Visiting Mum going forward*

All staff that we spoke to saw the Visiting Mum scheme as vital to the work of the prison. There was no question about whether the scheme deserved investment to continue operating but there were some suggestions about changing the accommodation currently utilised for visits, and expanding the geographical area that the scheme currently covers. The respect and recognition of the work of Visiting Mum was clear:

'It's essential...with all the talk about rehabilitation, with all the talk about reducing reoffending. Women struggle so much more than men in being separated from their families...it's reality as well that the women are the major carers. Often they're in here for crimes that they have committed because of their partners you know they're not in here because they're nasty evil people, they're in here because they have been pressured into

something or they have felt responsible for something or finances have made them desperate you know?'. (Chaplain)

Along with the acknowledgement that maternal imprisonment had more significance on the lives of children's and mothers' wellbeing, there was an emphasis on the role Visiting Mum has to play in rehabilitation. Staff felt that the scheme was pivotal in stopping the cycle of offending by maintaining family links during a mother's imprisonment:

'if we believe in the rehabilitative culture, if we believe that families are important then as a society we need to invest in that and if we don't, then were not going to change that circle'. (Assistant governor)

All staff also picked up on the geographically limited nature of Visiting Mum, and felt that expanding it to include women from the entire area that the prison serves was desirable. This was mainly because the scheme was so important in supporting children and families, as well as having positive benefits for women's mental health, wellbeing and reoffending rates:

'I think the fact that it is only south Wales, I think, so women will see that they're disadvantaged because there not living in south Wales....so expanding it that would be a real positive because I think it has real value'. (Assistant governor)

Another reason that expansion was felt to be important was to bring parity of treatment of the mothers in prison and to make sure that divisions and unrest among prisoners was not created because of the scheme:

'It shouldn't just be south Wales – it should cover all areas that we do in the south West and south Wales. It doesn't take much to start something between women in here, and also it's not really fair. I know Wales is big but Lands End isn't exactly close! It's a really emotional thing to not be with your kids and it could be perceived to be unfair and create divisions'. (Resettlement)

The fact that some women can access this scheme and others cannot, depending on where they live also means that children are limited in the same way. In effect, this means that some children are able to exercise their rights to see their mothers and some cannot contingent on their postcode.

A final suggestion for how Visiting Mum could be improved related to the accommodation that the visits took place in. All staff talked about the potential of the prison's Mother and Baby Unit (MBU) which, at the time of the evaluation, was not in use due to flood damage. Staff saw the specifically child focused nature of the building to be a good fit for Visiting Mum visits:

'I mean it's not an unpleasant environment but you know if you've got a mum and her child or children and the volunteer in that big space, so they do use the hut sometimes which is a much more intimate space. But...the beauty of the mother and baby unit was you've got a fantastic indoor space and you've got outdoor space. Much nicer, much nicer'. (Chaplaincy)

The Mother and Baby Unit is very well suited to creating a less intimidating and more relaxed visit for children which includes inside and outside space. More intimacy could be created there and more

activities could be offered for families to do. However some drawbacks were identified in using the MBU for Visiting Mum and other family visits because it could stop it from being reopened for its intended purpose of housing new mothers and their babies.

Overall, Visiting Mum, from the staff perspective, is an overwhelmingly positive asset of HMP Eastwood Park. It gives women something to look forward to both while they are serving their sentence and in terms of their life on release and this has perceived positive effects on wellbeing, behaviour and reoffending. It also offers the women an opportunity to use prison as a time to change. As we can see in Case Study One for many women having a child and becoming a mother is also a time to create a new identity providing the possibility for huge positive change (Baldwin, 2015). All staff agreed that the PACT staff and volunteers did valuable and challenging work that should continue for the benefit of women and their children and carers.



## ***Case Studies***

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### **Case Study One- Raya and Jamie**

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Raya came into custody when she was pregnant, unfortunately she received a long sentence meaning she would give birth whilst she was in prison. Raya was relatively young and a little immature, and whilst she was pregnant she did not conform to the prison rules, frequently testing boundaries. Due to the nature of her offence and behaviour whilst in custody and having been involved in previous violence within the community, this meant she was not able to have a space on the Mother and Baby Unit. This was extremely difficult for Raya, she struggled with this, but eventually came to terms with the fact she would need her mother to take care of her son, until she was released and had been assessed by social services.

Raya gave birth just before Christmas, and her son had some health issues meaning she was able to spend a little extra time in hospital with him before returning to custody. The day before Christmas Eve, Jamie was taken home by Grandmother Marilyn and had his first Christmas with 'Nanny'. The prison and PACT worked together to arrange contact for Raya and her family as they wanted to ensure they had a relationship. Unfortunately, the family lived over 130 miles away and Visiting Mum do not have any active volunteers in that area. Marilyn travelled with Jamie to the prison on public transport and this cost her over £50 and 6 hours of travelling; one of the governors kindly paid for Marilyn and Jamie to be picked up by a taxi from the train station otherwise, this would have resulted in another two bus journeys.

Since the first visit, Raya was quite aggressive to staff and her behaviour was monitored closely. PACT arranged for a mini bus to pick up the family and transport them on a visit, both to relieve the family financially and as it greatly reduced the travelling time to the prison, from 6 to 3 hours. It was envisaged that this would have a positive impact on the grandmother and child. Therefore, Visiting Mum arranged the visit and advocated for Raya, even though her behaviour had escalated, but they explained and helped other professionals to understand that this was due to the separation of her and her child. The visit went ahead and was extremely positive, Raya has a natural way with her son. Social care need to assess her a month prior to her release, but until then she is having Visiting Mum visits to increase the quality of her contact and to develop attachment with her child.

As visits have progressed, Raya's behaviour has improved and she is calmer. Raya has discussed that she had a very traumatic birth and explained her concerns about her son. As she knows visits are regular and consistent, this has led to her feeling more relaxed. Visiting Mum will continue to support Raya until she is released.

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## Case study Two-Rebecca

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Rebecca had been on bail for over two years before she came in to custody; she received a long sentence. This was a shock to Rebecca, the four children had to go and live with other relatives. On the first night, she really struggled; she had never been to prison before and did not know what to expect. Rebecca's husband and the father to her children was in prison at the same time, and this made contact with both parents difficult. Rebecca was a well-behaved prisoner, but struggled to coordinate contact with her four children who were dispersed across family members, and she was very keen to take part in the Visiting Mum scheme. There was a delay in setting up the visits due to some volunteer issues, but eventually she was allocated an excellent volunteer who brought her family to Eastwood Park once a month. Ongoing support from the PACT team, and once a week phone calls, along with access to visits helped Rebecca. The visits helped maintain her bond with her family. Whilst Rebecca was in custody, her 15 year old daughter became pregnant. Rebecca felt out of control and unable to help. Her daughters both felt angry with their mother for not being there. It was with the help of PACT in providing emotional support and discussions during the longer more intimate visits, that the situation seemed more manageable. The PACT team ensured that numerous photographs were taken on the first visit after her grandchild had been born. One of Rebecca's sons found it difficult when she was in prison and as he was staying with his grandmother and it was difficult for her to set boundaries and routine, so his behaviour was challenging. However, the visits helped with her son's behaviour, as he listened to his mother's advice whilst he was with her.

Once Rebecca started to have Release on Temporary Licence (ROTL) her son's behaviour further improved and Rebecca felt she was able to have some control over her life again. Rebecca was a very determined prisoner and got a job outside of the prison, this means she was able to go out every day to her job. She was thus able to save money for accommodation. Rebecca lost her house whilst in custody and had nowhere to live upon release, as her mother's house was too overcrowded. As Rebecca was going home (ROTL), having overnights stays and day releases for work, the Visiting Mum project stopped supporting her with visits, but continued to provide emotional support for her whilst she was going through difficulties with her children and housing. Rebecca was released and returned to a house she had rented and decorated close to her mother and she maintained her bond with her children. She also managed to secure employment. The Visiting Mum project had a direct impact on her life, and due to the contact facilitated at the beginning of her sentence, this gave her strength to work her way through the system and resettle back into the community positively.

## ***Interviews with Social Workers***

Many children's social carer researchers have found that social workers are difficult to reach and talk to. This has been the case in this project. It was anticipated that ten interviews would be conducted with social workers who had supported children to use the Visiting Mum scheme. Visiting Mum provided the research team with a list of thirteen social workers and one residential worker from seven local authorities known to them as having used this service. Thirteen of the fourteen were telephoned in the first instance. This resulted in five interviews, one of which was not with the named representative (who was no longer in employment) but with a colleague who had also supported the child. For the remaining nine contacts, attempts were made to gain email addresses but in five cases this contravened internal policies not to give out staff contact details. In these cases, contact details for the research team were left but no replies were received. Further attempts to establish telephone contact were unsuccessful. Finally, for the four whose email addresses were obtained one interview invitation and one reminder was sent resulting in one interview. This apparent non-response is probably due to the high workloads of social workers as opposed to a lack of interest in the Visiting Mum scheme. Indeed, attempts to establish contact highlighted the limited time social workers have when they are in the office and not in meetings. It is important to recognise that many social workers will not have had direct experience of working with mothers in prison or their children, and even for those who have contact with the children, their contact with mothers is likely to be very limited. Social workers are usually only involved in situations where there are child protection issues and in these circumstances would want to accompany the child when visiting the prison. In each case it was deemed necessary for a social worker to escort the child in order to observe the interaction and debrief the child immediately afterwards. Two of the five respondents noted that the child(ren) would not have lived with mum immediately prior to incarceration and would not, due to child protection issues be returned to the mum on her release. None of the five believed that the opportunity to spend time with their children would influence recidivism rates.

## ***Survey***

A survey of members of the Practitioner Network has been undertaken via Qualtrics, an online survey design tool, to gain their views of the Visiting Mum scheme. The practitioners are those who have had some involvement with the PACT 'Visiting Mum' scheme, attended their conferences and/or have received regular updates and information from them. We have aimed to find out whether people feel better informed, better educated and more aware of the issues for mothers who are serving a prison sentence as a result of their contact from the Visiting Mum scheme.

The survey was open for 5 weeks (15<sup>th</sup> November 2016 - Friday 16<sup>th</sup> December 2016) in the first instance but owing to a small sample size (n = 11) this was extended until the 26<sup>th</sup> January, 2017. However, the survey was only completed by one more respondent giving total sample size of 12 (n=12).

## ***Respondents***

Twelve people completed the survey from eight local authorities and eleven different organisations:

Local Authority	Number
Carmarthenshire	1
Gwynedd	1
Merthyr Tydfil	1
Neath Port Talbot	1
Pembrokeshire	1
Rhondda Cynon Taff	1
Swansea	3
Torfaen	1
Wrexham	1
Wales (no LA given)	1
Total	12

Table 4: Respondent Local Authority

The twelve respondents were all from different organisations, with only six having heard about the Visiting Mum scheme. Of the six, three had received information about the scheme from PACT.

Organisation	How did you hear about Visiting Mum?
Action for Children	PACT
Barnardo's Cymru	Invisible Walls Wales
Police IOM Team	Internet
Prison Advice and Care Trust (Pact)	PACT
Carmarthenshire Social Services	PACT
Social Work Student	Not stated

Table 5: Respondents who had heard about the Visiting Mum scheme

Whilst four of the six had heard about the Visiting Mum resources, only one had had used any of these resources. This respondent had reported having used the children's booklet, describing it as 'very informative' as it gave the child a better understanding of what being in prison was like for their mother and allowed the carer to be far more positive about the child visiting the prison. Receiving information prior to the visit was very helpful, and the support given by Visiting Mum at Eastwood Park was described as 'outstanding'. Whilst these comments are very positive it must be highlighted that these only represent one respondent's experience and as such, they cannot be taken as representative of all professionals.

No respondents had attended the Visiting Mum conference. For the six respondents who had not heard about Visiting Mum (Table 5), only three stated that they would like to receive information about the scheme and this has subsequently been sent to them.

Organisation	No
Children's Services	1
Families First	1
Flying Start	1
NOMS	1
Around the Family team	1
The Children's Play Team	1
Total	6

Table 6: Respondents who had not heard about the Visiting Mum scheme

### *The main benefits of the Visiting Mum scheme*

One respondent had referred one client to the scheme. Again, caution is needed as one response does not constitute a representative sample. However, the results are presented here as an illustration only.

The respondent was asked what the main benefits of the Visiting Mum scheme were for the mother, child and carer and were provided with several options to select as well as the option for free text.

In regards the setting of the visit, the respondent indicated that the main benefits included provision of a more relaxed and informal setting which was less frightening for the child which offered more privacy away from other inmates and prison guards. Further, the welcoming environment, lovely staff and provision of drinks and snacks which were, 'much appreciated after a long journey and an early start'. The Visiting Mum scheme was not perceived as encouraging increased visitation due to the distance and expense of the prison visit.

For visit quality, both the mother and child were perceived to have benefitted from the relaxed environment which gave them the opportunity to show physical affection, having an extended visit which allowed them more time to talk and do activities similar to those they would do at home. Provision of refreshments was also seen as adding to the quality of the visit.

When specifically asked about mother-child interaction, the respondent felt that the benefits were being able engage in more meaningful activities in a more naturalistic setting with no other inmates or guards present. This enabled the mother greater opportunity to be involved in the child's life. In addition, the mother and child looked forward to the longer visit and were given more time to say goodbye, this is an important point and one which appears elsewhere in the literature.

The main benefits for the child was perceived to be that Visiting Mum visits were less frightening. As the visit only included the social worker and one member of prison staff it offered a more relaxed environment where the child felt comfortable to hug their mother and/or sit on her knee. The child experienced reduced distress knowing that they would see their mother again on the next visit. There were no negative aspects of the Visiting Mum scheme.

Whilst the carer benefitted from not having to take financial responsibility for the visit, the positive impact went much further increasing placement stability as the as the child was more settled and experienced less distress before the visit. Further, the Visiting Mum scheme was seen as allowing the

mother greater involvement in the decision making for the child which led to better communication between the mother and the carer. This in turn led to better relationships between all three parties (the mother, child and the carer). The role of the volunteer was that of providing support to the child and the carer.

Finally, the respondent could not make any links to suggest that the mother would be more likely to settle back into the community as a result of the scheme, nor did they think she would be less likely to re-offend.

Overall, the one respondent who had referred a mother to the scheme was very favourable about the project. When prompted about the negative aspects of the scheme nothing was given other than the scheme could be extended to allow more visits.

The response rate to the survey was disappointing with only twelve practitioners responding from eleven different agencies. Again, knowledge of the Visiting Mum scheme is patchy and this should be an area for on-going work and development.

### **ACCT (Self-harm), adjudications and re-offending data**

The numbers of women in prison who have accessed Visiting Mum to date are as outlined in the following table and would indicate that involvement with Visiting Mum has a positive impact on ACCT and adjudication rates. It maybe that improved family relationships acted to provide hope and an investment in the future. It is difficult to comment on re-offending rates without knowing the previous histories of each woman, as this information has not been available to us:

Number of women who have been part of the Visiting Mum Project ('beneficiaries') as of 22 June 2017	97
<b>ACCTs</b>	
The number of beneficiaries who came into custody on an ACCT	21
The number who came off ACCT after engaging with the project	15
The number who have had an ACCT reinstated since being on the project	7
<b>Adjudications</b>	
The number of beneficiaries who had an adjudication before engaging with the project	23
The number of beneficiaries who have had an adjudication since being on the project	9
<b>Reoffending</b>	
The number of beneficiaries who have been released since starting the project	76
The number of those release who have come back into custody	13
Number of beneficiaries who have been released on ROTL	1
<b>Resettlement</b>	
Number of beneficiaries who completed Time to Connect parenting course	39
List of other courses/interventions that beneficiaries have accessed because of their involvement in the project	Flip Course Family Days

*Table 6: ACCT, adjudications and re-offending data*

The number of adjudications have reduced considerably for those involved with Visiting Mum. As other research has suggested, women's behaviour is greatly improved by regular contact with children. Fifteen women came off an ACCT after involvement with the project. Some women have been placed on an ACCT since engagement with the Visiting Mum scheme, details of last contact orders and adoption arrangements may have explained some of these individual cases. Thirteen women who have engaged with the programme have returned to prison, but it has not been possible to interrogate or map the individual trajectories of these women, so for example, we do not know

whether they remained in the community for a longer period than on previous release. Nor do we know what resources or support they received once in the community, but feedback from those women who we interviewed who had been released tell us that this is minimal or non-existent; this kind of mapping of post-release experiences and trajectories would be an interesting area for further research.

## **Conclusion: suggested areas for short and longer term development of Visiting Mum**

The scheme is widely appreciated and highly valued by all of the key stakeholders, including staff within the prison. Children benefit hugely from the scheme and it is clear that it should continue to operate. Visiting Mum is now embedded within the prison establishment and can be regarded as a flagship project within HMP Eastwood Park, as was noted in the recent inspection (HMIP 2017). Based on interviews with the stakeholders and recipients of the service, some suggestions for extending, honing and developing the scheme are set out below:

1. Preparation and support for children's and carer's first visits are vital and a review of how volunteers can become involved more quickly would be helpful. This could be via a duty rota where a volunteer is on stand-by and by the use of more specific Visiting Mum orderlies within the prison to pick up referrals.
2. It would be helpful to make a short film of the process of a visit- the main gate, the inside of the prison, the visiting room and staff introducing themselves. This could be sent out to carers via an email early after sentence and before the first visit. It could accompany the booklet already provided by PACT and would help both volunteers and carers to discuss with the child whether they would like to visit, and help prepare children particularly when a meeting with a volunteer prior to the first visit has not been possible.
3. Children are given little or no support when their mother is imprisoned and peer group support meetings should be considered outside of the prison, where the child and family feel that it is appropriate.
4. The preparation and training programme for volunteers could be tailored more specifically for the Visiting Mum scheme, covering attachment and child development, with an on-going follow-on training programme (covering addiction, domestic abuse and mental health) to help keep them engaged with the scheme.
5. Having the volunteer co-ordinator co-located in the prison would be helpful for staff within the prison and for providing them with an understanding of the needs of the individual women.
6. Visiting Mum staff within the prison may benefit from both specific child law training and clinical supervision given the complexity of the cases that they work with.



7. More use of volunteers (possibly via the Women's Institute) could be made within the prison for the story book CDs (which is time consuming) and provision of food, so that the time of skilled staff is protected.
8. More thought could be given to food more generally and its importance as part of the Visiting Mum visit.
9. More activities to engage older children could be developed e.g. quizzes and games.
10. The timings of the Visiting Mum visits could be reviewed with regard to a very early start or indeed for those young people studying for examinations, so that they do not miss out on education.
11. Visiting Mum could become involved in more wraparound support for those who would like it, and in particular in post release support (at least for a transitional period) for those who require it, drawing on the expertise of both Sova and PACT in this area; a focus on both employment and housing would be helpful.
12. More dissemination and engagement with social workers about the service that Visiting Mum provides is important. This might mean inviting social workers into the prison or going out in to the local authority teams. The annual conferences held are helpful and a specific conference for children's social care practitioners may be a way to disseminate information about the scheme.
13. Exploration of how Visiting Mum could have more of a role where social workers are involved with families.
18. A liaison social worker working in the prison might be a useful addition to the team to build bridges across services and better support women and children. Alternatively, having a designated social worker link for each south Wales local authority would facilitate communication between Visiting Mum and social workers.
14. An exploration of whether the Mother and Baby Unit (MBU) when not fully occupied could be a good venue for the Visiting Mum visits, which would allow for outdoor activities; it is also more private and would not be subject to interruptions.
15. Volunteers would like to be involved in booking the visits, which would increase contact, could help build trust and rapport with carers and would ease the volunteer co-ordinator's workload.
16. The scheme should be extended to include all mothers at HMP Eastwood Park, so that women and children from England benefit from the scheme; indeed the model could be replicated across the women's estate.
17. In Wales, there is no national strategy for the children of prisoners, who thus receive little support, no routine data is collected by Local Authorities about children of prisoners (in either England or Wales), and Welsh Government do not routinely disaggregate and publish data on

prisoners or their children to enable estimates of this population to be made. PACT could add pressure in these areas in order that this data is collected and made available

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