

Notes of workshop at Family Matters Conference

“Policies and Practice in Schools and Behaviour Support” led by Eileen Thompson and Nathalie Downing, Behaviour Support Teachers, Oxfordshire Behaviour Support Service

Eileen and Nathalie are teachers working directly with children in mainstream schools who have behavioural or other support needs. Following training by Family Matters they realised that they were already working with the children and families of prisoners and felt that this important but largely invisible group should be a high priority under Every Child Matters. Children affected by imprisonment might experience separation, loss or grieving. There might be a drop in family income, children may feel stigmatised in school. The school might see a regression in behaviour or an increase in absences, possibly linked with prison visits.

They recognised the importance for teaching assistants and other staff to have good materials to work directly with children and to increase the support available in school. They are particularly concerned about the lack of resources for slightly older children in secondary schools and were determined to develop a range of booklets dealing with a number of different issues which could be used in individual sessions by those working directly with young people. Workshop participants had an opportunity to comment, discuss and suggest amendments to the booklets. Their aim is to publish and make these materials available as widely as possible.

The discussion highlighted the importance of providing opportunities for children to express their experiences and feelings through mainstream activities e.g. circle time. It was recognised that some would also need to have individual support particularly at the crisis times of arrest or imprisonment. It was recognised that schools often do not become aware of imprisonment and may only hear about this through the local paper.

The work has drawn heavily on the excellent report produced by the Ormiston Children and Families Trust “Working with Children and Families of Prisoners”.