

# What works in prison research?

The experience of evaluating the Together a Chance pilot project

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CASCADE



# Why is prison research important for social work?

- There are **85,193 prisoners** in England and Wales (Pact, 2023)
- Last night, **97,120 children** had a parent in prison in England and Wales (Pact, 2023)
- For children, imprisonment of a household member is a risk factor for long term negative impact (Felitti *et al.*, 1998)
- Approximately **310,000 children each year** are affected by the imprisonment of a parent (NICCO, 2023)



# Let me start with Jade ... she was 11 years old

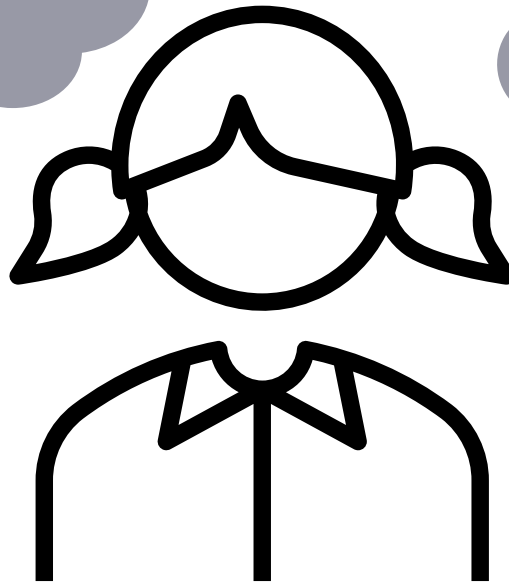
Mum had been in prison for 9 years

At home with Dad on a child protection plan (DV)

Poor school attendance

Father obstructive  
Grandparents can no longer take her to prison visits

Uncle took her to visit Mum "just before Christmas"



# What is the Together a Chance pilot project?

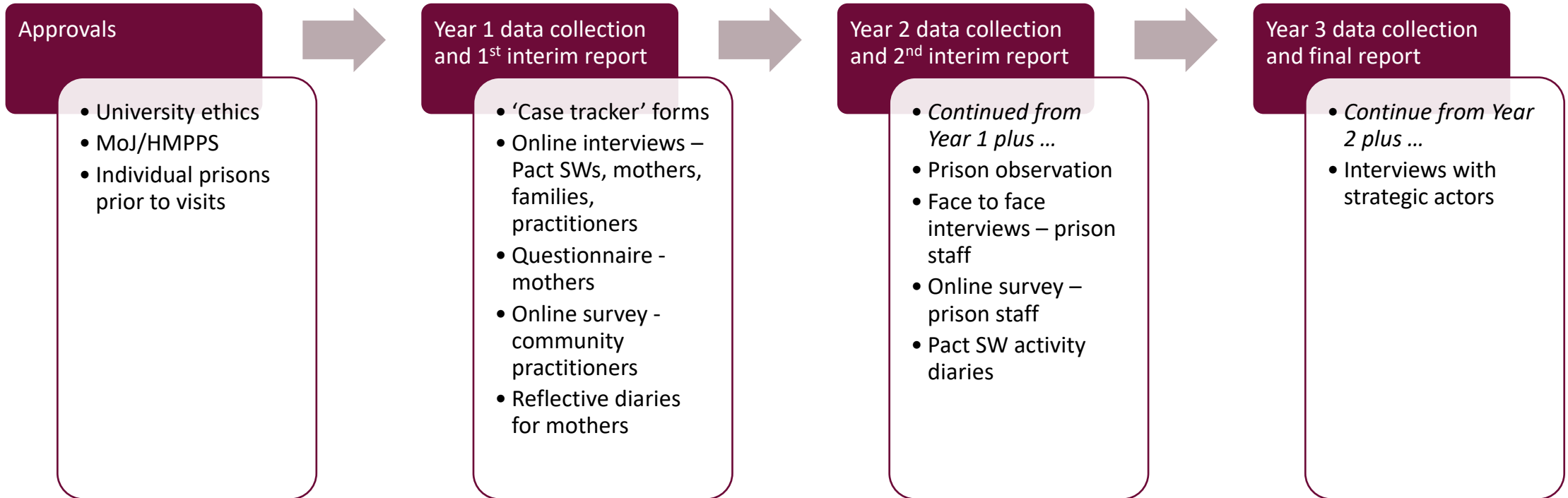
- A pilot service for mothers in prison led by Pact, the prison charity
- Prison-based social workers HMP Send and HMP Eastwood Park
- Role of the prison-based social worker is to:
  - Liaise between the mother and her children's social worker (or welfare practitioner)
  - Support mothers to exercise parental rights, e.g. participate or be represented in key meetings
  - Work as part of the multi-disciplinary team within the prison
  - Enhance contact between mothers and children if appropriate



# Questions for our evaluation



# Evaluation timeline: April 2021 – December 2023



## Data collected to the end of Year 2 (May 2023)

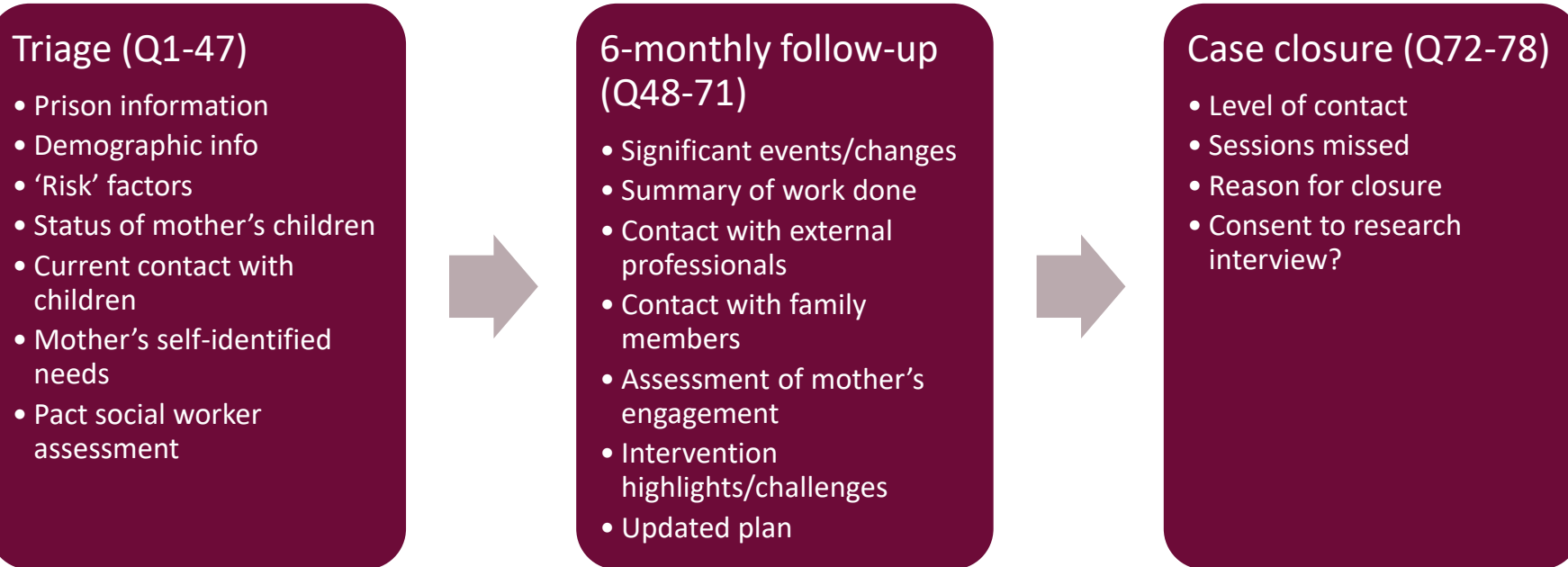
Source of data	Method	(n)
Prison-based social worker	Cases tracked via 'case tracker' forms (n=183)	81
	Activity diaries	2
	Online interviews	5
Mothers	Self-report surveys completed in prison	38 (T1) + 20 (T2)
	Online interviews with mothers in prison	8
	Online interviews with mother post-release	6
Family members	Interviews with carers and children	4
Prison staff	Online survey	11
	Interviews	8
Community-based practitioners	Online survey	9
	Interviews	7
Researchers	Prison visit observation days	2

# Prison social workers acted as gatekeepers

- Prison-based social workers sought consent
- Sometimes had to address mother's immediate distress before seeking consent
- Felt more comfortable with getting the right timing as evaluation progressed



# What do our 'case tracker' forms capture?



## Example of case tracker insights

- 27% of mothers have so far reported being known to social services or in care as a child compared to 1.15% in general population (Homes for Good, 2011)
- Mothers are often placed a long way from home:
  - 31 different local authorities (LAs) for HMP Send
  - 28 different LAs for HMP Eastwood Park
- 68% of the 56 sibling groups are separated
- 53% of mothers have at least once child placed outside of the family
- Care proceedings:
  - 70% of mothers at HMP Eastwood Park are party to care proceedings for at least 1 child
  - only 24% of mothers at HMP Send, though there are a higher proportion of historical proceedings

## Feedback on completing 'case tracker' forms

*The **tracker** definitely became easier over time. Initially it was difficult to fill out as the **questions are not necessarily things that we would ask in an initial contact/assessment and so I did not know all of the information, but over time I have gotten to know the tracker better and incorporate these questions into my contact early on where appropriate.***

# Using an 'activity diary' to explore the nature of the work

8am	00	Team briefing/check in – 10:00 meeting cancelled
	15	Admin: reading and responding to emails (CSC, probation, referrals), prepping triage forms to send out – response to referrals
	30	As above
	45	As above
9am	00	Admin: arranging FGC for March (emails with FGC coordinator and [REDACTED]) and case notes
	15	Preparation for contacts
	30	1:1 with mum for 30 mins: general wellbeing, upcoming TAF, explained TAF purpose and process
	45	As above
10am	00	1:1 for 30 mins: reviewed child contact on MBU, discussed change of CSC social worker, decline in relationship and forward planning
	15	As above
	30	Preparation for next contact: called unit to check ahead, read <u>nomis</u> case notes
	45	1:1 with mum for 1 hour: chronology of events leading up to and following child removal
11am	00	As above
	15	As above

1pm	00	
	15	Conversations w/ wing staff re. upcoming discussion
	30	w/ prisoner
	45	Conversation w/ prisoner about earlier LAC w/ prison officer
2pm	00	"
	15	Case discussion & deescalation w/ wing staff
	30	TC end of community meeting for prisoner
	45	-meeting with professionals and
3pm	00	prisoner to review their time in TC
	15	
	30	
	45	
4pm	00	Meeting with prisoner after requested
	15	(same as above)
	30	leave work
	45	

# Feedback on completing the activity diary

*I did not have a problem with completing the **diary** but it would be difficult to do for a longer period of time ... due to the **quick paced nature of my work.***

*If someone else was doing one ... **fill it in throughout the day** rather than waiting until the end of day and ... **give an overview** rather than high detail e.g. “admin: emails, calls, case notes”*

# Observation visits to understand the regime

Layout

Facilities

Proximity to  
other staff



Regime  
restrictions

Culture

Staffing levels

<https://twitter.com/HmpSend>

## Other prison social worker feedback

*[SURVEYS] were **more difficult to keep track** of due to the need to monitor who was given surveys and when, and not being able to follow up if a mum had been unexpectedly released (e.g. bail) or transferred to another establishment. I also found that **mum's lost the surveys and would request another**, and/or at times **I did not have capacity to keep returning** to deliver more.*

*[INTERVIEWS] I had no issue with this. By nature of the interviews being to discuss working with the Pact social worker, these were mum's who I have **existing working relationships with** and all were happy to **show support** or contribute to providing feedback.*



# Data collection challenges

SCHOOL: “[Child] has not arrived at school this morning. We have tried to track her down without success.”

PRISON OFFICER: “Who are you waiting for? ... She won’t be coming because she’s behind her door”

“[Mum] consented but I have no contact details for her”

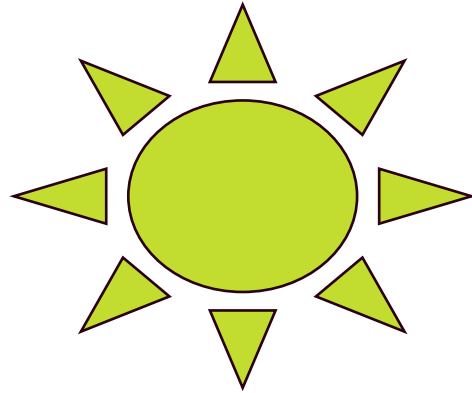
“That case wouldn’t be suitable for the evaluation”



# Researcher reflections

- Change pro forma to an online questionnaire
- Importance of collaborating with practitioners:
  - to ensure that they understand the purpose of the data
  - to understand and problem-solve around their challenges
- Triangulating the anonymised data from the beginning – applying a consistent research ID
- Reflective journals for mothers were a step too far – did not get completed
- Access to community-based social workers was really challenging

# For Jade ... Together a Chance has been transformative



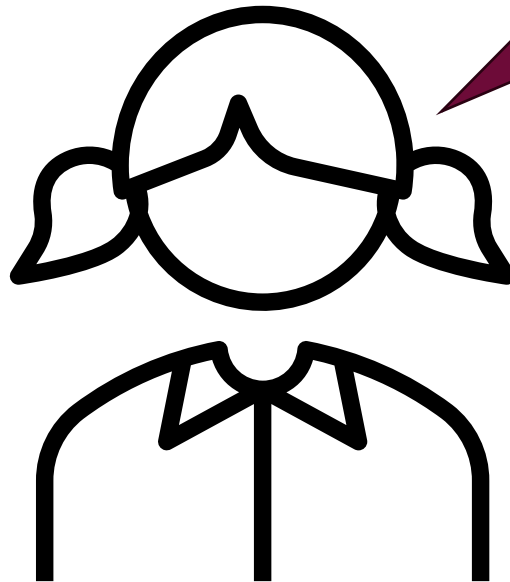
*"We are so like each other ... we look like each other for a start"*

Supporting Mum to "ask the right questions"

Supporting Mum to organise secondary school transfer

Linking with safeguarding lead at school

Facilitating weekly virtual contact at school



# References

- Felitti, V.J. et al. 1998. Relationship of Childhood Abuse and Household Dysfunction to Many of the Leading Causes of Death in Adults: The Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Study. American journal of preventive medicine 14(4), pp. 245–258. doi: 10.1016/S0749-3797(98)00017-8.
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# Thank you for listening

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