

Evaluation of Together a Chance: How effective is it to have social workers in women's prisons?

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Together a Chance

- A pilot scheme to place a Social Worker in two women's prisons HMP Send (Surrey) & HMP Eastwood Park (Gloucestershire)
- Scheme supported by Sylvia Adams Foundation
- Scheme run by staff employed by Pact
- Evaluation April 2021- December 2023.
- Second interim report

Background

- When a mother goes into prison only 5% of children remain living in the family home (Prison Reform Trust, 2015)
- When a mother is imprisoned, children move to live with extended family, friends of family, foster care, across local areas, move school. She often loses her accommodation.
- Children find it difficult to make contact with their mother, or travel to prison to see her (distance, rural location and finance).
- Visiting rooms inhospitable (mothers can't move around).
- No Social Work provision in prisons relating to access to children/children's services
- Social Work training and probation training separated in 1980s
- In England a range of 'social work' tasks are often given to Probation Offender Managers (POMs), some of whom re probation officers, and other criminal justice staff
- Transforming Rehabilitation (2013), since then the Probation Service has become more punitive and enforcement focussed, as a result much of the 'welfare' aspect of probation work been lost (Baldwin 2022).
- Farmer report (2019) recommended having a social worker based in prisons.

Aims of Pact Social Worker

- Together a Chance aims to support best practice, by working together with other agencies in the best interests of the **children** whilst also promoting the **mother's** parental rights.
- The Pact Social Worker acts as an **advocate** for women whose children **are involved with children's social care in their originating local authority**.
- The Pact Social Worker works collaboratively with the child's Social Worker and/or other key professionals in the multi-agency group and supports the mother in prison to ensure that she has every opportunity to be:
 - * directly involved in decision making about her child/children.
 - * is represented at key meetings about her child/children.
 - * is empowered to take an active part in the planning for her family's future.

Different prisons

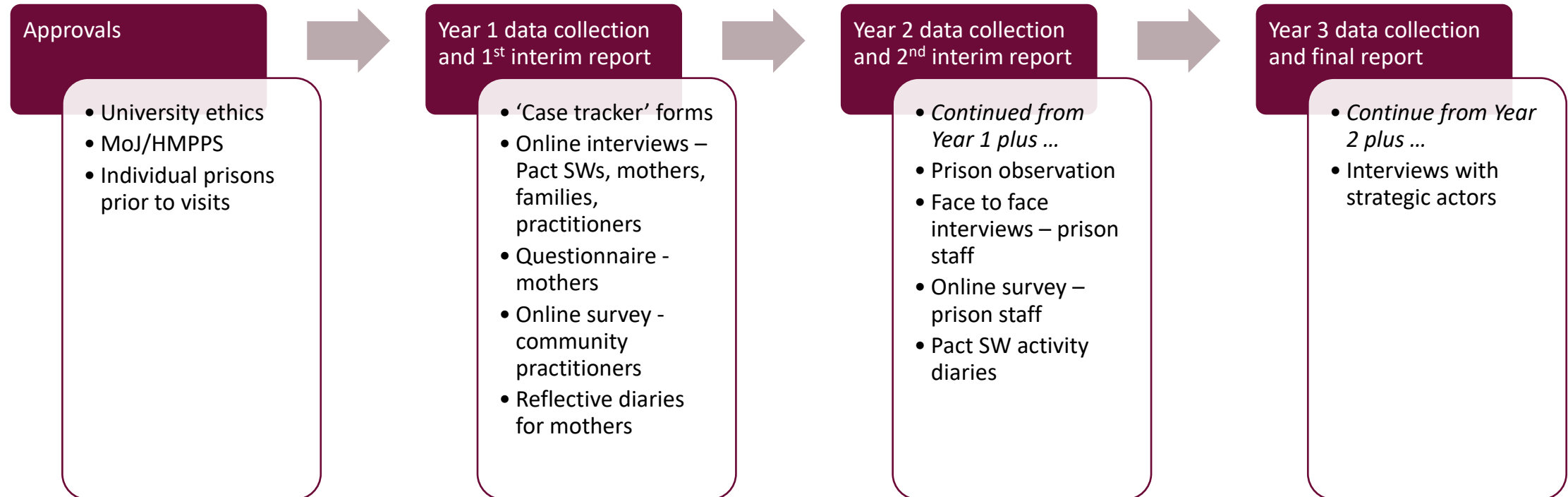
HMP Eastwood Park

- Larger 347
- Remand and shorter sentences
- Mother and baby unit
- Negative inspection report October 2022
- 'Eastwood Park received the lowest grade for safety and gaps in care, and the lack of support for the most vulnerable and distressed women were concerning.' (Inspection report 2022)
- Taking women from England, South and West Wales- no prison in Wales (Visiting Mum study highlighted this)

HMP Send

- Smaller 200
- Longer sentences
- More serious offences- some against children, therapeutic community and psychologically informed unit for personality disorder and complex needs.
- Inspection May 2021 where 'rehabilitation and release planning' was identified as an area in need of improvement.

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

What do our 'case tracker' forms capture?

Triage (Q1-47)

- Prison information
- Demographic info
- 'Risk' factors
- Status of mother's children
- Current contact with children
- Mother's self-identified needs
- Pact social worker assessment



6-monthly follow-up (Q48-71)

- Significant events/changes
- Summary of work done
- Contact with external professionals
- Contact with family members
- Assessment of mother's engagement
- Intervention highlights/challenges
- Updated plan



Case closure (Q72-78)

- Level of contact
- Sessions missed
- Reason for closure
- Consent to research interview?

Interim findings: demographics

- The Pact Social Workers have worked with 81 mothers (up to May 2023)
- Mothers are placed a long way from home. The PACT Social Workers have worked with women from 31 local authorities and have connected with 56 local authorities, both prisons link with different LAs (except Bridgend, Devon and Oxfordshire).
- 50% of mothers in Eastwood Park are either on remand or serving a sentence of less than a year.
- 7% of children in the study are living with father.
- 78% of the mothers' report being single or separated.
- 69% of mothers have more than one child.
- Where a mother has more than one child, siblings are separated whilst their mother is in prison in 68% of cases.
- 47% mothers have 3 or more children under 18.
- 27% of the mothers reported having been in care or involved with social services as children, 1.15% in general population (Home for Good, 2021)
- 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

Pact Social Worker role

- Conduit of information between (i) home Social Worker and mother, (ii) between mother and courts, and (iii) mothers and children
- Many social workers don't know where the mother is.
- When they find out:
 - Don't know how to contact her
 - Don't consult with her over parenting matters
 - Don't facilitate visitation
- Women have historically had antagonistic, fractured and non-existent relationships with home Social Workers.
- Home Social Workers are unclear what rights mothers have when they are in prison.
- The Pact Social Worker tries to ensure mothers' parental rights are realised, but only where it is in best interests of child.
- The Pact Social Worker has helped bring together and become part of the team around the child.
- Pact Social Workers are providing information and education to community practitioners and have developed resources;
 - To support professionals in explaining to children where their mothers are.
 - To inform about prison processes.

Mechanism



Community practitioners

- *She contacted myself who is the allocated Social Worker for the child of the prisoner that she's working with, and she spoke to me, and also the supervisor and Social Worker of the foster carers. So **she created a sort of like group around this meeting and contact**, which was really good and informative, and all the professionals had to be there, yeah, that was good. CP1*
- *I think that was, that **kept us on our toes**. Let us not, sometimes it often becomes the fact **that once you're out of sight, you become out of mind, but the TaC worker did not let that happen**. CP5*
- *I've come in, not having met this mum in person, and having to, you know, sort of make some important decisions. So having somebody obviously, who's a **qualified Social Worker with sort of eyes on this mum** in terms of the relationship, a working relationship and the work that she's doing, it's just been really helpful insight to have. CP3*
- ***Because she {mother} had parental responsibilities**. So that was the first. So the contact that I had came directly from the prison itself, asking me if I would facilitate parents evenings for the mother. CP4*

Coming alongside

- Pact Social Workers are building the trust of mothers by demonstrating respect and coming alongside; they are beginning to have an impact on how mothers engage with community Social Workers. In this way very much acting as a bridge.
- The Pact Social Workers are demonstrating that they can work for the benefit of the child **and** the mother, and the differing perspectives are not necessarily polarised ('Child plus', Forrester et al. 2008).
- The Pact Social Worker has been helping women to collate evidence of the extensive training and counselling they have received to demonstrate where significant change has been made, often over a long sentence.
- Instilling hope whilst managing expectations of mothers and helping them to come to terms with their situation.
- For those children where ongoing contact is not appropriate due to the nature of the mother's offence, data suggests that skilled support in educating and being transparent with mothers is having a positive impact on wellbeing, but they may still be able to contribute to the child's identity through life story work.
- Anxieties about children cause huge distress. In both prisons the Pact Social Workers play a significant role in managing self-harm and risk of suicide through the ACCT process.

Mothers

- {Pact Social Worker's} made that easier, she's took that stress away from me, because I... it, it, it makes me ill. **I have had mental breakdowns over court processes with my children**, I've tried to commit suicide over it. So that's, on a personal level that's how, how hard it is for a parent. Paula
- **We're viewed as parents, not prisoners**, and that's the important thing in this project, is that we are still parents. ...she's really good and I, **I have a really mistrust of social workers**, it... I, I've, I've had a lot of them in my life and probably only like one in five I've managed to have positive relationships with. Paula
- Like, **I didn't even know I had parental rights anymore** until she told me, and I was like, "Oh, oh right." So yeah, that was nice. ... Yeah, it was amazing, yeah. Like, being able to have an **input into the LAC reviews**, getting the reports, his school reports, everything like that. I didn't know I could do any of that until TaC worker told me. Jen
- But she definitely helped with the independent Social Worker coming to the prison. ... **If it wasn't for that ...it would have had to take place when I got home and my daughter would probably still be in the care of her dad** until that had been completed, so yes, that was a huge, huge help. Amy in the community
- No, because I didn't know... they split them up {two younger children} and put them in two different foster carers. Miriam in the community

Domestic abuse

- Domestic abuse was a significant feature in the previous lives of mothers accessing the project.
- Where children are residing with fathers and there is a history of domestic abuse, there are ongoing issues around negotiating contact with children.
- Providing or signposting training on DA for mothers is important , especially to support them with parenting through coercion and control.

Introducing Jade ... she was 11 years old

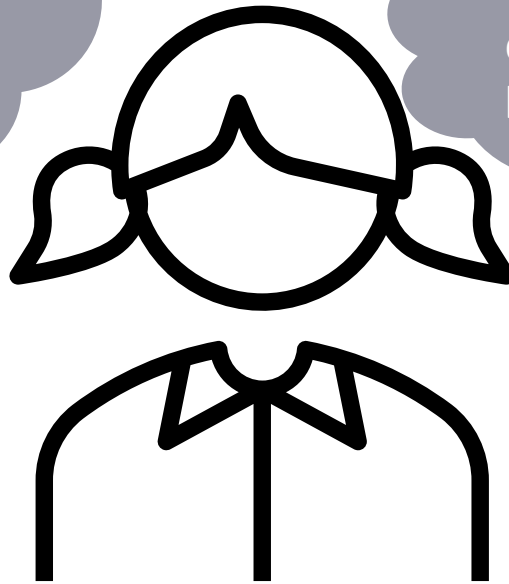
Her mother
had been in
prison for 9
years

She lives at home
with her father
and is subject to
a child protection
plan (DV)

Poor school
attendance

Her father refuses
and grandparents
can no longer take
her to prison visits

Her uncle took her
to visit her mother
“just before
Christmas”



Children

- The Pact Social Worker role has been beneficial in promoting the best interests of the child
- The Pact Social Worker can, where appropriate, help gradually increase contact at the child's pace, example.
- Pact Social Worker has facilitated contact with children, particularly over lockdown e.g. via school
- Helps mothers prepare for contact. The Social Workers advise mothers **how to better communicate with their children**, for example, by modelling topics to introduce at contact.
- Mothers are legally entitled to receive support when their children are being adopted. The Social Workers arrange final contact meetings between mothers and children prior to adoption and offer support.
- All community practitioners believed that the relationship between mother and child had improved because of the involvement of TaC. No one reported that the child was less settled, and everyone agreed that there had been no negative effects of the service for children.

Helping children understand

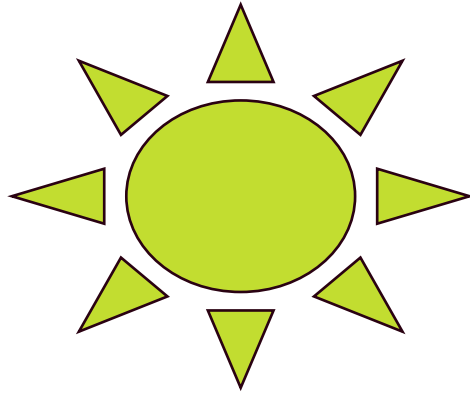
- *... they were both interested in like art and, and then following the video contact she sent him some pictures she'd drawn.. And about two weeks ago she sent over some paintings that she'd done for Tim, so I passed those on. And when I visited end of last week they were up on his wall, he'd framed them – So that's a huge thing because before he didn't want any mention of his mum*

- CP2

- *And, sort of, helping him to make sense of why he's in foster care and what happened. Cos, I think he had a tendency and he still does, but to blame himself for a lot of that, because he didn't know what happened, and his family had moved about all over, so we didn't really have a clear picture of things.....*

- CP2

For Jade ... Together a Chance has been transformative



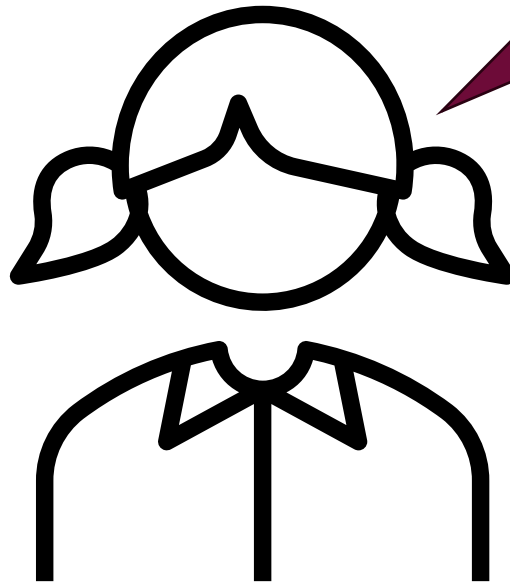
"We are so like each other ... we look like each other for a start"

Linked with the safeguarding lead at school

Facilitating weekly virtual contact for Jade at school

Supporting her mother to "ask the right questions"

Supported mother to organise secondary school transfer



Value to prison - Specialist knowledge

- The Pact Social Worker provides the prison with specialist knowledge of safeguarding
- Provides specialist knowledge of social services' processes, priorities, culture, language, and terminology which is of assistance both to mothers and to prison staff. 'Twin tracking'
- The Pact Social Worker helps to upskill staff in 'the legal landscape'.
- Provides specialist knowledge of the workings of prison system which community practitioners do not have.
- The Pact Social Workers' knowledge base does not seem to be held elsewhere within the institution and so there is little if any duplication of work between roles.
- Probation POMs have a similar knowledge base, but report having insufficient understanding of the statutory children's social care environment to meet the needs and demands of mothers in prison.

Views of prison staff

- *These roles are SO important! Although I have received safeguard training, actually having a trained Social Worker helps not only myself in my role, but the prisoners. I go to [Pact Social Worker] and her team for advice and guidance and we co-work on cases. The only gap is that there are not enough trained social workers at HMP Eastwood Park. Respondent 14*
- *And I was incredulous about that because the work that she does here is - has such an impact that I couldn't understand how this isn't already - I mean, her work is exemplary.... it just beggars' belief that it's not already rolled out and everybody has this opportunity. POM*

Role and location of Social Worker

- Need to be a qualified social worker
- The role is embedded within both prisons and valued by all prison staff
- The overriding view was that the Pact Social Workers should be based within the prison,
- The two prisons are quite different, and thus the service offered by the Social Worker project **cannot be standardised**. In HMP Eastwood Park setting up early contact, family courts and contributing to reports for MBU. In Send more about managing expectations, looking at what role can be played, self-harm and suicide .
- Difficult for role to be based in a local authority due to the number of LAs involved, access to prison staff, accessing computer recording systems, spending time with, and engaging mothers.
- Differing views about who should employ Social Worker - Ministry of Justice or third sector organisation like Pact.

Next steps

- Final report due December 2023
- Interview key informants
- Continue tracker, surveys of mothers, community practitioners and prison staff
- Analyse remaining qualitative data
- Consider models of provision

Thank you for listening

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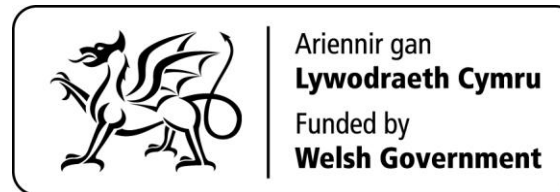
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- <https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmiprisons/our-expectations/>
- [https://www.gov.wales/written-statement-hmp-eastwood-park-report-unannounced-inspection\](https://www.gov.wales/written-statement-hmp-eastwood-park-report-unannounced-inspection)



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