Families Outside is a national independent charity that works on behalf of children and families affected by imprisonment in Scotland. We do this through provision of a national freephone helpline for families and for the professionals who work with them, as well as through development of policy and practice, delivery of training, and face-to-face support.

Families Outside is grateful for the opportunity to comment on the Justice Committee’s Scrutiny of the Scottish Government’s Draft Budget for 2014-15. We do not feel we are in a position to comment on the Budget as a whole but will highlight the issues most relevant to our work and expertise. We are happy to elaborate on any of these should the Committee require additional information or specific references.

Focus on prevention

We welcome the opening comments in the Draft Budget that note the Government’s “decisive shift to prevention” (p. 11). The subsequent chapter on Health and Wellbeing reinforces this shift with its “focus on prevention” (p. 19), targeting of the most deprived areas; preventative measures on alcohol; funding to tackle domestic abuse and violence against women; and a continued “focus on activities that support early intervention and prevention” (p. 23). Similarly Chapter 5 on Education and Lifelong Learning refers to “Our decision to shift spend towards prevention and early intervention” (p. 55) and a continued prioritisation of “investment in the first years of life” (p. 59).

Chapter 6 on Justice also opens with reference to “preventative approaches to tackle the root causes of crime and help communities and individuals to achieve their potential” (p. 69). It follows with reference to work “to deter high risk and vulnerable groups from committing crime at an early stage” and a “focus on early intervention [and] prevention” as well as “work to prevent offending by young people” (p. 71).

We were surprised, therefore, that the draft Budget made little mention of support for diversion schemes, referring only once to investment in “positive opportunities for young people helping to divert them from crime and antisocial behaviour” (p. 82). We would commend wider support for early intervention in schools (e.g. through Apex Scotland’s Inclusion Unit at Dunfermline), arrest referral, and diversion from prosecution to enable people to address the reasons behind antisocial behaviour and offending.

The role of families

We are grateful for the reference in the draft Budget to children and families in this regard, noting preventative work “with children and families as a priority” as well as “action to tackle domestic abuse and violence against women” (p. 71); reducing
“problem drug use by supporting people, families and communities to recover and to sustain recovery” (p. 82); and support for the continued efforts of the Scottish Prison Service to support the families of people in their care.

Commensurate with the earlier chapters in the Budget, however, we believe more emphasis could be placed on young people at risk through poverty, parental substance misuse, parental mental health problems, and (often consequently) parental offending and imprisonment. More could usefully be done to encourage adult-focused systems to recognise and develop their roles and responsibilities in support for the children and young people their services affect.

We are seeing movements towards this through the work of the Early Years Collaboratives, but the Budget as a whole could usefully link these areas of policy and practice more explicitly. For example, prison visitors’ centres (or family ‘help hubs’, as the Scottish Prison Service calls them) provide ready access to vulnerable groups who tend not to access universal services in the community. Funding for such a resource would facilitate reductions in health inequalities, support for women in abusive relationships, increased information about substance misuse, and improvements in child dental health (Chapter 3); improve opportunities for family learning, benefitting children and adults alike (Chapter 5); and increase engagement with families in efforts to reducing reoffending (Chapter 6).

Women who offend and the Angiolini Commission

Finally, Families Outside welcomes the Budget’s continued support for the implementation of the recommendations in the Angiolini Commission. We were concerned however, that the Budget made reference solely to recommendations “to support the female prison population” (p. 75). Central to the Commission’s recommendations was the reduction of imprisonment for women, again using a preventative approach and addressing the reasons behind women’s offending. As such, the recommendations extend well beyond “the female prison population”; the priority in the Budget should equally be on efforts to reduce the number of girls and women entering prison.

We appreciate the opportunity to comment on the draft budget and are happy to provide additional information should the Justice Committee request it.

Prof Nancy Loucks
Chief Executive
11 October 2013