Families Outside is a national independent charity that works on behalf of 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 provision of 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 2013-14. 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 Chapter 6: Justice that “prevention is better than cure” and greatly appreciate the Government’s recognition “that there are underlying causes of crime that can be tackled to reduce and prevent offending, often by providing support at critical stages in people’s lives.” Chapter 6 goes on the highlight prevention of offending by young people as a priority, which is also very welcome.

At this point, our belief about the use of this money begins to diverge. While we welcome funding for sporting, cultural and community projects, and especially the ‘Whole System’ approach, 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. Preventative work for young people such as the work Apex Scotland is doing in Dunfermline with young people at risk of exclusion is something that we believe needs to be supported and extended.

We also believe that 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. For example, the Scottish Prison Service has only recently developed its crucial role in relation to child protection – something we welcome and are working to develop alongside them. More could be done in terms of developing treatment for substance misuse that involves the whole family rather than focusing purely on the person with the addiction. Substance misuse affects everyone around the person who is misusing substances – something that is address most effectively through a ‘whole family’ approach (see work by Circle; Families Outside’s

The Rebecca Project’s research into 24 residential family-based treatment programmes, for example, found significantly higher rates of completion and subsequent desistence from further substance misuse; a decline in criminal arrests and drug-related offences; an increase in the return of children from foster care; and dramatic increases in employment and enrolment in educational and vocational training.

**Focus on the offender: a missed opportunity**

Our interest in prevention of offending relates to the Budget’s next priority on reducing reoffending and the Reducing Reoffending Change Fund. Again, while welcome, we are concerned about the sole focus on one-to-one support for offenders through mentoring without the apparent inclusion of wider preventative spend, for example on work that supports the whole family. The focus on mentoring acknowledges the value of “[helping] offenders build new social networks that can support the desistence process”.

However, it fails to recognise the need that these social supports (including families) will require in their own right to provide this support. Families of offenders can provide extensive support to offenders at limited cost to the State, but this can be a difficult role to play, especially where physical barriers such as imprisonment act to break down these relationships.

Support for offenders through activities such as mentoring is important, but it does little to meet the needs of families that would enable them to provide social, financial, and emotional support. Families of offenders rarely access support in their own right,\(^1\) despite evidence of extensive need. In sum, we are concerned that interventions that focus solely on the offender miss an opportunity for wider work to support desistence through families and the community.

Finally, as we noted in our comments on last year’s Budget, we submit that prevention of offending begins outside the Criminal Justice System and is strongly linked to early years and schools, health and mental health, housing, and families and relationships. In the words of Victor Hugo, “He who opens a school door, closes a prison.” This applies in both the short and long term: investment in early years results in longer-term prevention, but equally the focus on meaningful engagement with people already in the criminal justice system will be of value in both the short and long term, both to the offenders themselves and to their children and families.

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Links with other aspects of the Budget

This wider work to prevent offending and reoffending may be covered under the Government’s budgets for Health & Wellbeing and for Education and Lifelong Learning. If so, links with the budget for Justice would benefit from being more explicit.

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

Professor Nancy Loucks
Chief Executive
Families Outside
18 October 2012