



Centre for
Child & Family
Justice Research



Learning from the Born into Care Series: why building bridges matters for everyone

5th of October 2021. Webinar: Mothers on Trial. Professor Karen Broadhurst, Lancaster University

The Born into Care Series

- Of all age groups of children – the local authority is more likely to issue care proceedings for babies aged less than 12 months of age
- Rates of new-born babies and infants in care proceedings **have escalated during the past decade** & there is wide regional variation in England and Wales
- Of all infant cases, approximately 50% are now issued at birth – many to women who have previously appeared in care proceedings
- At the close of care proceedings – **only a small percentage of all infants will return** to their parents care (12% – 15%)



* Augmented in this visualisation to prevent small number disclosure in subsequent analyses

Practice transformation

- Alongside practice pioneers and research colleagues, already seeing significant changes in frontline practice –
- Structural barriers [within and between social care and midwifery] which have historically delivered a late/fragmented response to pregnant women with complex needs are being tackled through the development of specialist pre-birth teams/ co-located multi-agency teams
- More awareness of the need for a trauma informed approach to engagement & emphasis on continuity of skilled relationship-based support during pregnancy and first year of life
- Family inclusive practice – engaging family members far earlier in pregnancy as a resource to support change
- Challenging sector-specific policies which work against family preservation – e.g. hospital discharge policies which propel women into urgent care proceedings

Women in the CJS – more needs to be done

- As practice moves forward – it is important to factor in **the specific needs of women in the Criminal Justice System (CJS)**
- Wealth of research evidence; multiple excellent reviews & policy statements – but on the ground practitioners and women tell us – more needs to be done.
- The report published 22nd of Sept by the PPO [HMP Bronzefield] is clear evidence of **the distance still to be travelled** to ensure equitable, humane and preventative practice with pregnant women in prison
- Birth Companions recent report – *Window of Opportunity* – highlights the continued barriers to effective practice for women in the community involved with CJS, who are pregnant or caring for an infant.

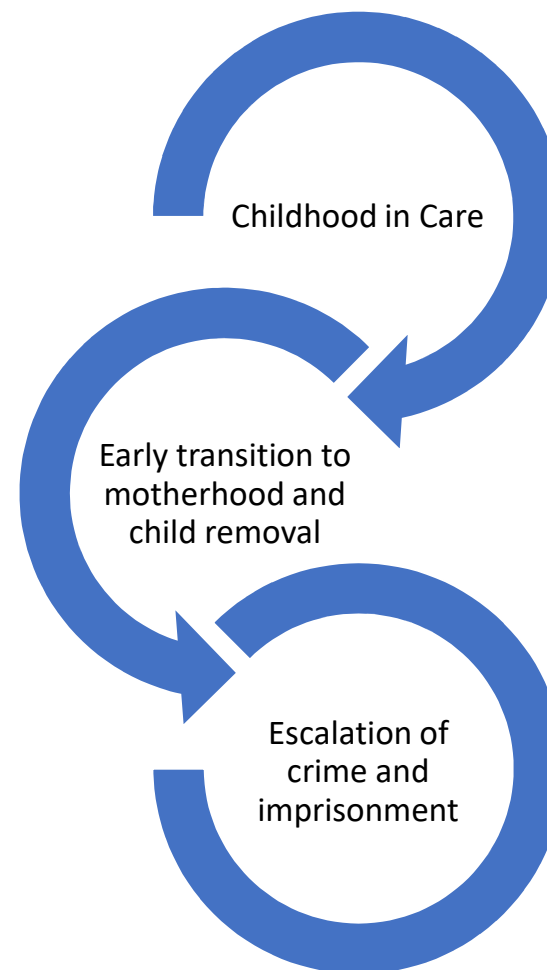
Women in the CJS - specific challenges in pregnancy & early motherhood

- More difficult for practitioners to envisage an effective preventative programme if pregnancy involves a prison sentence – albeit short-term [inside/outside boundary] - the 26 weeks deadline for care proceedings
- Conversely – women in the community are more easily overloaded with competing demands where they are involved with multiple systems – inadvertently set up to fail –
- Women in prison – difficult to contest care proceedings – odds already stacked in favour of removal [i.e. reunification rate v low]
- Child removal results in an acute psychosocial crisis – a catalyst for crime.
- Challenge of resettlement (homelessness) increases likelihood of unplanned pregnancy, risky relationships.... and infant removal

Jig-So – “Getting the contact right”

- Jig-So – Swansea - specialist pre-birth team delivering excellent preventive practice
- **Opportunity missed:** received a referral following Mum’s release from custody – held on remand but charges not proven. Too late to effect change as baby is due to be born imminently and LA plans to issue care proceedings at birth. Mum does not have settled housing and on-going concerns re substance misuse and domestic abuse. Baby is removed.
- **Opportunity seized:** Mum’s second child: Jig-So work with Mum throughout her pregnancy and following birth - she keeps the baby – both doing well and Mum has desisted from crime.
- Jig-So “*we are very happy to work with Mums in custody – we can visit to establish engagement but also help Mum virtually, in terms of parenting education; preparation for resettlement; tenancy support etc – but we need closer links with colleagues in CJS and timely referrals*”.

Sarah's story



Why building bridges matters for everyone

Mutually compatible objectives

Criminal Justice System [Corston; Farmer Review; Female Offender Strategy]

➤strengthening positive family ties to reduce re-offending and risk of intergenerational crime

Children's Social Care [IRSCSC]

➤family preservation & reduction in numbers of children entering care

BUT

At present both CSC and CJS are struggling to achieve these objectives

Aligning around women's interconnected needs in pregnancy – delivers more humane and effective services – realising cost savings across multiple sectors

