Prison Fellowship Northern Ireland (PFNI) is a Christian ministry responding to the spiritual, emotional, social and physical needs of prisoners, released prisoners and their families. The organisation seeks to offer hope and a new beginning to all the men, women and children whom we serve.

PFNI welcomes the opportunity to respond to the NI Prison Service Consultation Document ‘Strengthening Family Relations 2019-2024’, in preparing this response we have drawn on nearly forty years of experience of providing support and care to:

- people who are under criminal investigation,
- people who are in lawful custody,
- people who have been released from lawful custody, and
- the families of people who have experience of the NI justice system.

A summary of the family related work undertaken by PFNI is set out in Appendix 1.

**PFNI Response to Question 1:**

*Do you agree that positive relationships and family contact are important factors in influencing how people cope with imprisonment and their reintegration and rehabilitation upon release?*

PFNI advocates that in order to ensure ‘Strengthening Family Relations 2019-2024’ (SFR 2019-2024) has a positive, meaningful and enduring impact on the relevant outcomes as set out in the Draft Programme for Government Framework 2016-2021 (DPfG) the above wording would be strengthened by replacing the word ‘important’ with the word ‘critical’. This change would demonstrate a stronger commitment to the value placed on family relationships. This stronger commitment is consistent with ‘The Importance of Strengthening Prisoners’ Family Ties to Prevent Reoffending and Reduce Intergenerational Crime’ report August 2017. In this report it states: ‘As one prisoner told me, ‘If I don’t see my family I will lose them, if I lose them what have I got left?’ Yet the unacceptable inconsistency of work that helps prisoners to maintain and strengthen these relationships across the estate shows it is not yet mainstream in offender management in the same way as employment and education. Family work should always be seen and referred to alongside these two rehabilitation activities as the third leg of the stool that brings stability and structure to prisoners’ lives, particularly when they leave prison.’

Further in the report it is recognised that ‘…harnessing the resource of good family relationships must be a golden thread running through the processes of all prisons…’ PFNI welcomes the acknowledgment of this ‘golden thread’ in the SFR 2019-2024 Consultation Document.
PFNI Response to Question 2

Do you agree that the overall outcome of the strategic approach to strengthening family relations should seek to support and encourage family engagement, leading to positive outcomes for people in our care?

PFNI agrees with the overall outcome of the strategic approach to strengthening family relations, however, it is important to remain cognisant of the inter-relationship between the three legs of education, employment and ‘harnessing the resource of good family relationships’, as cited in ‘The Importance of Strengthening Prisoners’ Family Ties to Prevent Reoffending and Reduce Intergenerational Crime’ report. It is the view of PFNI that these three elements should be viewed as a ‘gestalt’, i.e. the outcomes for the people in custody, their families and wider society are greater than the sum of the parts, which in this case are education, employment and family engagement. In turn this requires that the SFR 2019-2024 needs to be resourced as a ‘must do’ rather than a ‘nice to do’ component of NIPS strategic and operational corporate plans.

Furthermore, in line with wording on page 5, second paragraph, penultimate sentence PFNI requests that NIPS include an explicit undertaking to be consistent, committed and continuous in its engagement with families. This mirrors the Partners Of Prisoners ‘continuum of care’, a model which support offenders’ families.

PFNI Response to Question 3

To what extent do you think the current NIPS processes and procedures facilitate quality family engagement and what improvements could be made?

Below we have set out:

- the current NIPS processes and procedures which facilitate quality family engagement,
- comments on the quality of this engagement and
- improvements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Processes and Procedures</th>
<th>Comments on quality of this engagement and/or improvements</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Information provided to families:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Help &amp; Advice For Those Visiting A Prison In Northern Ireland’,</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Visitors Compliant Booklet’,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Family Induction Visits’, and</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>‘Child Centred Visits’</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Quality of this engagement:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>• This information is freely available in each of the establishments within the areas accessed by Visitors</td>
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<tr>
<td>• The leaflets are easy to ‘pick up’ and for the most part provide relevant information, and</td>
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<td>• Staff, usually, but not exclusively those employed in the Visitors Centres are on hand to answer queries.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Improvements:</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• The booklet ‘Help &amp; Advice For Those Visiting A Prison In Northern Ireland’ needs to be updated to ensure the information is: accurate e.g. the phone number for booking visits to Hydebank Wood College &amp; Women’s prison are now made via the Prison Visits Booking Service, and relevant e.g. there is no...</td>
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</table>
mention of the services and support provided by PFNI as a result families are unaware of additional support they can access. In the spirit of NIPS commitment to partnership working and to strengthening family relations we request that information about PFNI be included in this leaflet.
- All printed information to be made available on line.

**Booking Visits**

**Quality of engagement:**
- Where available visitors welcome booking visits at the prison they are visiting
- It is usual that visitors are able to make a booking for day and a time which they can facilitate, although for some this may entail making ‘herculean efforts’ (Ref: Lord Farmer Report)
- Some visitors expressed frustration with the ‘call back’ arrangements as it may not always be possible to answer the phone due to being at work, in company or in a location which does not afford adequate privacy. This may be heightened by the sensitivities of transacting such conversations in a ‘public’ environment.

**Improvements:**
- The booking service to be available during some evening hours

**Transport provide by NIPS:**

**Please note: due to the limited time available we only received feedback in respect of HMP Magilligan**

**Quality of engagement:**
- The mini bus service to and from the train station at Magilligan is a valued service for some families. The process works well when the bus is on time.
- The drivers: it is reported that over the last year the attitude and behaviour of the staff members towards family members has on the whole been pleasant, courteous and respectful.

**Improvement:**
- In respect of the bus being on time PFNI understand that there are times when this duty has not been allocated to a staff member, which has resulted in family members having to wait for periods of up to 45 minutes for the bus to arrive. This is exacerbated by exposed nature of the car park at Bellarena Station especially in the winter and visitors arrive to Magilligan later than planned thus disadvantaging their place in the queuing system
- Provide feedback on the information gathered as part of the ‘Visitors Experience Focus Groups’ held in early 2018
- Currently the service at Maghaberry is provided by a taxi service up to the main prison from Moria train station. This method replaced the previous bus service. It has been the experience of some families that they are embarrassed about having to inquire of Translink staff when they arrive at the station especially on the first visit as they feel it reinforces the stigma of having a loved one in prison. Equally they are finding that there is limited information available especially for those
families who are new to the system.

- Coming to the prison with no previous experience of this environment is already very daunting and if more readily available information was provided would help alleviate the fear and frustration of what is already a difficult experience for a family member only to be further exacerbated if the visitor is bringing children on the visit.
- Concern has also been expressed around the provision of the visitors centre. While some of the visitors know nothing else than the current provision, others regularly comment on the benefit of having a warm, welcoming environment to either commence the visit or indeed have sometime following the visit to prepare for the return journey home. This has been mentioned by several families especially if the visit didn’t go quite as expected - a closed visit or a difficult time with their loved one.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Weekly visits</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Quality of engagement:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Importance of NIPS staff consistently following processes and procedures e.g. management of items being left into the prison and the management of the ‘ticket system’ at Magilligan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• IT infrastructure has in the experience of some as inadequate e.g. index finger checks and printing visitors passes</td>
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<tr>
<td>• The in-prison WC facilities are inadequate</td>
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<tr>
<td>• New seating in the visiting rooms means that in effect visits have become ‘No contact’ experiences</td>
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<tr>
<td>• The catering service is welcomed and provides an opportunity to share a simple meal together as a family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The crèche facilities are an important component of the visiting experience</td>
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**Improvement:**

- In relation to the first three bullet points above PFNI appreciate that these are relevant to the ‘Our Infrastructure’ section of Prisons 2020
- In respect of the seating, which has in effect created a ‘no contact’ visiting experience, NIPS should consider the unintended negative impact of these arrangements and seek to find solutions, which manage security requirements while at the same time allowing opportunities for appropriate tactile contact. In respect of family members who have relatives in lawful custody anecdotal evidence tells us that family members and the people in the care of NIPS are highly likely to experience touch deprivation. The symptoms of touch deprivation are: increase in aggressive verbal and physical behaviour; body image issues; high stress levels; loneliness; mental health issues such as depression; sexual dysfunction and fear of attachment and unsatisfying relationships.
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Family Induction Visits</th>
<th>Quality of engagement:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• In general terms these are helpful opportunities for relatives to develop their understanding of life in custody and the effort made by staff to facilitate these visits is welcome</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Barnardo’s staff are helpful in how they arrange these sessions.</td>
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**Improvement:**

• It may be helpful if the exchanges between Visitors and NIPS staff could be more open, however Visitors can be reticent in asking certain questions as there may be a caution that this may have an negative impact for their loved one,
• Dependant on the family and friendship network it would be helpful to have more than one of these visits

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Child Centred Visits (CCVs)</th>
<th>Quality of engagement</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• For those children who attend the CCVs there is usually great excitement about being able to have playtime with daddy and being able to bring a special toy to show daddy adds to the excitement.</td>
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</table>

**Improvement:**

• It has been commented by some mothers that they lose out on being together as a family in this more relaxed setting, extending these visits to include mum would be welcomed, this is consistent with the acknowledgement in SFR 2019-2024 that ‘Everyone’s circumstances are unique’.
• For some families grandparent and grandchild(ren) CCVs may be welcomed and would have benefits for the entire family
• We would suggest the ring fencing of these visits as an essential part of the family visiting experience in the prison and would ask that priority be given to visits of this nature.
• We would ask for greater consideration to be given before the withdrawal of CCV’s as a form of punishment as it is clear that this places a greater strain on the family unit than on the person in the prison.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Leaving and collection of items</th>
<th>Quality of engagement</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• The majority of staff understand the process and manage it in a competent way, however when a staff member is new to the process there can be an increase in frustration as the queue builds up and the time taken to get into the visiting room is lengthened</td>
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**Improvements**

• Staff new to this duty should have opportunities to practice this process rather than ‘learning on the job’, which appears to be the practice.
• Where money and clothing are handed in at the same ‘station’ at busy times and to aid the flow of people through the visitor’s process it would be helpful to have two staff members on duty one accepting money and the other clothing.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phone Calls</th>
<th>Quality of engagement</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PFNI welcomes the initiative to introduce ‘in cell’ phones</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Not all phones are in sound proof booths meaning personal calls can be overheard by other prisoners, this lack of privacy is further impacted by the general noise level which happens during times of ‘free association’</td>
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<tr>
<td>The quality of the ‘phone line’ at times, can be very poor with echoing/bounce back and/or crackling, meaning the person who is calling needs to hang up and call again</td>
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<tr>
<td>Phones can be out of order for extended periods</td>
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<tr>
<td>The result of items 2 - 4 above is: increased levels of frustration for both the person making the call and the person they are calling, and the phone conversation can end up being a negative rather than a positive experience.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Access to common phones is in line with times of free association and these times will vary dependant on the: ‘wing’, the prison, weekday and weekend regimes and any operational reasons which occur.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Improvement:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Phone contact is the only way families can have daily contact and the availability of an effective phone service is vital, the remedies to the items 2-4 above are:</td>
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<tr>
<td>I. the provision of sound proof booths;</td>
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<tr>
<td>II. improving the quality of the ‘lines’ and</td>
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<tr>
<td>III. for those sections of each prison, which have the least ‘free association’ time the installation of ‘in cell’ phones should be prioritised, with access to making calls to loved ones being in line with the latest lockup time. This would mean bedtime calls to children and other loved ones could be made.</td>
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<tr>
<td>The above works are in line with Prisons 2020 i.e. ‘Our Infrastructure - by ensuring we develop our estate and use of technology to facilitate rehabilitation’</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Receiving and sending mail</th>
<th>Quality of engagement</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Writing to love ones can be important and PFNI appreciates that at times a ‘letter home’ can be the first step in rebuilding strained/broken relationships</td>
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<tr>
<td>The provision of envelopes and the allowance of postal stamps is important</td>
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<tr>
<td>Improvement:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provision of white standard sized i.e. 11 cm X 22 cm rather than the small brown envelopes would mean that the letter looks like an everyday item of post. This small act would help towards reducing the stigma that families feel, as set out in the principle ‘Family Members are treated with fairness, dignity and respect’.</td>
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</table>

| Moving Home | Quality of engagement |
It is not uncommon that families move home during the period their loved one is in custody. PFNI appreciates that it is only when the person in custody is nearing the end of their sentence that the suitability of the new address will be assessed by PBNI. This can create a high degree of uncertainty for some families.

**Improvement**

- PBNI to have the facility to engage with families to provide guidance on the location and suitability of a new home.

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**PFNI Response to Question 4**

*Do you agree with the principles outlined, which will underpin the strategic approach to strengthening family relations?*

PFNI supports the five principles set out in SFR 2019-2024, and believe the principles would be further strengthened with some changes in wording and emphasis, please note text which has been scored out means it is deleted and text in blue means it should be added:

**Principle 1: Family Members are treated with fairness, dignity and respect** - Families should never feel stigmatised, with the assumption that family members have done no wrong. We must be mindful of ensure the implementation of this principle in all our dealings with people in our care and their families.

**Principle 2: Wherever and whenever possible families are included in their relatives’ rehabilitation** - We will work in a more holistic way with those in our care and their families to improve outcomes, including consideration of their contribution to safer custody. We will ensure that families are provided with the support they need to contribute to this process.

**Principle 4: The best interests of children are paramount to any decision making** - In line with the emerging Children & Young Persons and the Family and Parent Support Strategies, comprehending the ascertainable wishes and feelings of the child, promoting wellbeing and positive life outcomes, will be at the heart of all practice affecting people in our care, children, young people and their families.

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**PFNI Response to Question 5**

*Would you like to see additional principles applied?*

PFNI requests that an additional principle is included:

**Principle 6: Strengthening Family Relations is central to successful rehabilitation of people in our care and to promoting community safety.** We will ensure our partnership working with families is recognised as equal to education and
employment, the other two rehabilitation activities. It is positive family relations that brings stability and structure to prisoners’ lives, particularly when they leave prison.

**PFNI Response to Question 6**  
*Do you agree with the outcomes / themes outlined?*

In general terms the answer is ‘yes’.

There are two other comments:

In the response to Question 7 below, how NIPS staff engage with the people in their care and their families is relevant to the themes and outcomes.

In respect of Theme 1 ‘Family Contact’ and in particular ‘An illustration to highlight a family member’s journey’ in the ‘Support’ box the second bullet point states, ‘Trust builds up between family and NIPS’ and in the ‘Outcomes’ box it goes on to state ‘Family support prisoner’. PFNI appreciates that this is ‘an illustration’ however it has prompted the need for SFR 2019-2024 to reflect the symbiotic nature of family relationships e.g. a family’s trust in NIPS is informed by: the family’s previous knowledge and/or experience of the Criminal Justice system, their loved one’s experience while being in custody, as well as the family’s direct contact with NIPS. It will also be influenced by the effects the family experiences of having a loved one in custody, as referred to in page 7 of SFR 2019-2024. Accordingly, PFNI advocates that is it essential that NIPS approach to Family Relations is predicated on an understanding of the complexities of how trust is build up.

**PFNI Response to Question 7**  
*What additional themes would you like to see explored?*

PFNI requests that a separate theme in respect of ‘Our People’ needs to underpin the implementation of SFR 2019-2024. ‘Our People’ was one of the four topics within Prisons 2020. PFNI believes how NIPS staff engages with the people in their care and that families are central to success of SFR 2019-2024. In practice there is a wide range of approaches, at one end of the continuum an emphases on control and containment and at the other an emphases on rehabilitation. To ensure the success of this strategic approach Governors, Managers and Staff need to further embrace the ‘rehabilitation’ end of the continuum.

This additional theme is in line with the underpinning principles set out in Section 3 of SFR 2019-2024.
PFNI Response to Question 8
*Do you think the NIPS priorities are aligned to the themes identified?*

In general terms the priorities as set out in the ‘NIPS will:’ sections of the consultation document are about ‘the what’ and in this regard appear to be aligned to the themes identified. May we request, if this is not already the case that these priorities take cognisance of the ‘Visitors Experience’ focus groups held during 2018.

In addition PFNI requests that the priorities also includes:

- ‘How’ NIPS will deliver on the successful implementation of SFR 2019-2024, this point has been referred to in the PFNI response to Question 7 above
- A commitment to ensure the success of SFR 2019-2024 by including mechanisms to measure progress and to review and revise priorities. On the latter point of priorities PFNI asks that prior to the publication of the agreed document that the priorities cited in the Consultation Document be reviewed to ensure they are relevant.
- An undertaking to utilise PREPS as a vehicle to deliver on SFR 2019-2024 e.g. ‘The Governor of each NIPS establishment to review and revise the local practice with regards to PREPS to promote SFR 2019 -2014 thereby facilitating family contact through e.g. additional phone calls and visits’

PFNI Response to Question 9
*Outline how best NIPS could work with partner organisations to achieve the overall outcome of supporting and encouraging family engagement, leading to positive outcomes for people in our care?*

PFNI requests that NIPS:

- Undertakes a scoping exercise to ensure all relevant partner organisations have been identified and are aware of SFR 2019-2024 and facilitate the connection of the services and support to implementation of the NIPS strategic approach to family engagement.
- Ring-fence resources to ensure the ‘case-by-case’ approach set out in Section 3 of the Consultation Document are delivered.
- Establish mechanisms to receive feedback from families and partner organisations about the experience of the implementation of the NIPS strategic approach to families
- At an appropriate juncture to commission an independent assessment of SFR 2019 -2024 with Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland undertaking an investigation into the effectiveness of NIPS engagement with families.
A SUMMARY OF PFNI’S WORK WITH FAMILIES  

One of the six Charitable Objects of PFNI is: ‘Help to maintain and strengthen the links between those who are, or have been, in lawful custody and their spouses, partners, parents, children, siblings and other family members and to help and support those family members where desirable and possible, through practical help, advice and other measures;’

The encouragement and support PFNI provides to families was recently examined as part of a wider review commissioned by the organisation. The key findings were:

Support to Family members

The vast majority of family work is carried out on a 1:1 basis. PFNI employs 3 part time Family Workers. This area of the work of the organisation is also supported by volunteers.

All those involved in family work demonstrate sensitivity to the difficult circumstances, which families can face when a loved one is in prison. One staff member reflected “Families are also impacted; it is as if a train has been driven through their front living rooms. There are victims, perpetrators and families.” Another member of staff said, “…families can feel that they have been ‘plunged into darkness’”

Family Workers have the scope to respond to the specific individual needs. When an exceptional response is required staff seek the approval of the Chief Executive Officer. This is an extremely important quality of the work of PFNI. By allowing calculated risks to be taken, staff can in confidence journey with family members through their ‘desert place’.

1:1 Support

Individual support is available to families from the initial stages of contact with the Criminal Justice system through to post release. Usually the staff member works “with a key family member” as “People can be isolated in the family structure and can’t talk about the impact of having a loved one in prison. 9 times out of 10, staff work on a 1:1 bases”

Support provided includes:

- Pastoral care: listening, providing opportunities to share their story, providing opportunities for people to off load, “we are not Social Services and for some folk this saves their sanity”
- Practical support:
  - The importance of practical support was emphasised in the approach of a staff member: “I always ask if there is anything, I can do …any ways I can be practical e.g. issue re child with mental health issues and got the Mother’s permission to follow up”.
  - Provision of food including meals provided through the PFNI Hands Up Ministry, bedding, clothing, furniture, going out shopping, transport to prison.
In respect of the provision of transport it was acknowledged that “time travelling in the car can open up conversations”
- Christmas Hope providing food hampers to families and gifts to children PFNI encourages fathers and mothers who are in custody to request food hampers and children’s gifts. This can be a powerful demonstration of love and concern for their families e.g. one Mum reported that her youngest child a toddler had wanted a ‘onesie’ for Christmas and was overjoyed that not only did he receive this simple and inexpensive gift but that ‘His daddy got it for him!’
- Responding to telephone enquiries.

- Child support “through play and outings, as often children have been exposed to many difficulties and challenges”.
- Parenting e.g.
  - “support with home management e.g. cooking and cleaning”,
  - “marriage support, during the loved one’s time in custody being and post-release”

- Relationships which can include: Intergenerational work e.g. “supporting a lady, her children and her mother whilst the lady’s husband, brother and brother in law were in 3 different prisons.” and “Due to the range of presenting issues within the family working separately with the parents, the fiancée and sister of a prisoner.”

Furthermore, in circumstances where Family Workers have specialised training they are able to use this as appropriate within their work e.g. a staff member has been trained with Care for the Family and has a counselling background. As a result, additional help is provided e.g. with behavioural issues.

During 2017-2018:

- 426 family visits were conducted across Northern Ireland offering on-going support to 234 families, this included 118 new families.
- ‘Hands Up’ Food Ministry provided 472 meals for 189 families and men living in the community.
- As part of Christmas Hope, 412 food hampers and 482 toys were distributed to 412 families

Support Group:
- A group for female family members had been meeting monthly in the Belfast centre, however this group ceased to meet in May 2018 and in Autumn 2018 a support group was set up in Newtownards and Bangor. A family worker is responsible for organising these meetings and is seeking to promote members’ “ownership of the group e.g. inviting ideas of what organisations they would like to come along to meetings” During 2017-2018 on average 8 women attend these meetings.
- As part of Christmas Hope a Christmas Dinner for female family members was hosted at the Belfast Centre, with 26 women attending. All the ladies present received a Christmas present.