

Although, the Czech Helsinki Committee is concerned with the issues of imprisonment for a long time, the needs of people related to prisoners have been widely ignored by politicians and also by competent administrative bodies. To the date of 30th November 2011, there have been 23 294 imprisoned people in Czech Republic, from which 1494 were women. The numbers show that this situation includes high number of children and families. In Europe, it is approximately 800 000 children, that find themselves in this oppressive situation. The primary objective of this project is to strengthen position and rights of concerned people by individual work with clients, realization of so called assisted visits and educating activities.

The project promotes and ensures respect for human rights enshrined in the Charter of Fundamental Rights and Freedoms of the EU, with an emphasis on Title IV. Article 32 and the Convention on the Rights of the Child with an emphasis on Article 2 paragraph 1, Article 3 paragraph 1, Article 9 paragraphs 3 and 4, Article 12 paragraph 1, Article 16 paragraph 1 and Article 19 paragraph 1.

The project also meets the criterion of solidarity, as through its activities supports the poor and marginalized people in society. It is an assertive and innovative project carried out solely by our organization, the only one of its kind in the country. The project also fights through its content against discrimination of these persons in society; above all it seeks to enhance the status and rights of children of imprisoned parents. The key outcome for us is the expansion of awareness about the problems of children of imprisoned parents among the interested subjects, ie. personnel of Department of Social and Legal Protection of Children, orphanages, prison services and foster families. In specific cases, we managed to optimize the family ties and strengthen the position of children in society.

The project is concentrated on children in the age from 0 to 18, whose parents are imprisoned. The children, whose parents keep in touch with them and show interest towards them while being in prison, and did not commit crime on their children, will become part of the project. Disconnection of daily contact of children with their parents might show on their psycho-social development. Children of imprisoned parents often suffer from disconnection, intrusion of family bond, and factual loss of personal contact with their parents. Another negative consequence of imprisoned parent is a change of social environment of a child, mostly in cases where child was placed into alternative family care. These situations might also cause development disorders or deprivations, or also as a result of the change of social emplacement they might because problems related to social integration of children. Some children, but mostly people who are taking care of children of imprisoned parents find themselves often in very difficult situations. Complications are related to communication with children on topics of absence or imprisonment of their parents and decisions on whether to allow communication of these children with their parents or not. In cases, where person or institution of alternative care allows the communication, they have to take care of financial and logistic issues of transport of the child into prison.

The program is aimed on support of development of children in a sense of using the right on regular communication with their parents ensured by Convention on the Rights of a Child, on activation of mutual cooperation between imprisoned parent, social worker and other people involved in fulfilling the needs and rights of the children. Optimization of family relationships between children and their imprisoned parents is gained by support of their mutual contact and communication with help of assisted visits in prisons and psychological, social and legal consultations. The goal of assisted visits is to establish safe and friendly atmosphere and warn of the barriers, which are stopping the communication of children with their imprisoned parents and also to bring up differences of assisted and normal visits to prison.

Main Activities of the Program:

1. Appealing on and choosing new clients of the project. There is a high interest from imprisoned parents becoming part of the project. With some of them, there was cooperation arranged in form of consultations and assisted visits were promised for future. Criteria for entering the project: (criminal activity not committed on a child, parent has to be imprisoned while duration of the project- length of penalty, proved commitment of relationship of parent with a child before the start of penalty, keeping in touch with a child and interest shown while being imprisoned, age of child between 0 and 18 years, voluntary/active interest in joining the project from both sides.) From all applied people, we will pick clients in cooperation with special prison workers, with taking into consideration amount of their children who potentially joined the project.

2. Individual consultations are provided to all clients, children, imprisoned parents, alternative care and other involved people in written, telephone or personal form. They are helping to solve problems according to their usual standards, based on their individual planning and identification of clients 'problems in their natural environment (according to previous experience, it is mostly related to problems of housing, bad conditions, finance, debts, executions, employment but also to incapability of taking care of a child, truancy, drugs, criminal activity committed by children themselves, constitutional upbringing of children either ordered, proposed or based on preliminary measures of inter human or family relations.)

The consultations also provide advise related to problems of keeping the family relations between children and imprisoned parents with the aim to eliminate negative influence on children caused by cutting off the contact and ensuring mutual bonds after the release of their parents. The aim of individual work with imprisoned parents is mostly based on strengthening of their parenting competences, increasing motivation for positive approach in all forms of communication with their children by emotional support, understanding, help, where the emphasis is put on positive attributions and bringing parent to positive thinking and belief in own power- regeneration of their ability to communicate with children and support intensified written and telephone contacts, support realizing own parental role and parental rights and duties. Each newly chosen client has to attend at least 3 hours of individual consultation with psychologist or mediator of the project, in intervals of 1 hour per month. The purpose of individual consultations is also to analyse family bonds and relationships between clients (parents and their children) by controlled dialogue based on questionnaire, getting contact on a child, specification of conditions of cooperation on the project, creation of individual plan, finding out individual basic needs of children, introducing the organization and continuance of the assisted visits, psychological preparation of convicted for personal contact with their children during assisted visits.

3. Negotiation on engagement of children in the program. A child is informed about possible involvement in the project and assisted visits mainly by its parent, in cases of complications of their mutual communication, the project team will contact social worker or person of assisted care, with whom the situation of a child will be consulted as well as suitability of each case becoming part of the project.

4. We are trying to keep active relationship between a child and its family, to support it if it is in the interest of a child. All this is gained by assisted visits. The visits are ongoing in a smaller group of children and presence of child psychologist and one or two more members of the project team. In the case of interest, people who brought children into prison might become part of assisted visit. The visits

are organized in aesthetic environment friendly for children. The assisted visits are happening once in two months. From our own experience, we know that month long gaps are often becoming organizational problem, as it is very hard to find a date suitable for all parties involved in the visit as by law, there is allowed only 3 hours per month for that. Visits organized more than once a month would limit the number of children involved in the project.

The intention of the project is not only to ensure personal contact of children with their parents, but also to mobilize responsible people (social workers, nurse assistants, workers of the project and other people) to fulfil the rights of the child according to The Convention on the Rights of a Child and other intrastate regulations and motivate them to look for possible options how to ensure those rights. The visits take two hours in the groups from 6 to 10 children. Before meeting the parent, children take part in an hour long dialogue with psychologist and assistants of the visit in the club of the prison where refreshment for children is prepared and by means of games or painting activities, they are getting prepared for meeting their parents. The goal of this meeting before the first assisted visit takes place, is to meet the children, take care of their possible fears and explain them what to expect while entering the prison. The aim of the meetings after, is to find out their psychological state and their reactions to the situation. During the visit, children are provided refreshment, educational tools (games, drawing tools) and there is photo documentation arranged, where 2 or 3 pictures are afterwards sent to the clients (children and parents).

After the visit, children leave with their mothers and accompaniment for lunch to the canteen of prison employees. Lunch with parents is only allowed in the prison Světlá nad Sázavou. All the project activities are happening with the assistance of psychologist and assistant of the visits from the team of the project. When the visit itself is over, further club activities are on-going, where children, if needed, are psychologically examined and their reactions are discussed. Children, as well as parents have the opportunity to discuss their reactions and situations with the project team. At the same time, both sides are encouraged to maintain and strengthen mutual contacts and questions related to the future and present problems.

Contact between a child and its parent is inevitable and integral part of adolescence of a child. If it comes to isolation of parent from its child, it is necessary to minimize barriers which are obstacles in mutual communication, which are legal, physical, psychical, communicative and collaborative barriers. The long-term goal, which effect is possible to examine after the realization of the project, is to prevent criminality and re commitment of the crime. The long term experience of our foreign partners working in this field is proving positive outcomes.

5) Educational activities include realization of annual campaign “Invisible Children” in cooperation with European network EUROCHIPS. Further, we are propagating information related to the problematic by organizing seminars for special workers. We release thematically oriented articles on web pages, nation-wide media and so on.

The document filmed by Czech Television, TV show Family Crossroads: *When father is in prison* <http://www.ceskatelevize.cz/porady/1102412465-rodinne-krizovatky/311294340070004-kdyz-je-tata-za-mrizemi/video/> In cooperation with Czech Television we prepared a documentary, which lasts nearly 30 minutes, was screened on 8th September within the show „Family crosses“ on Czech Television Channel 2. We would like to get the English subtitles for this documentary, because it describes our work in a very good way. On the one hand, it is a story about a 5-year-old boy, whose name is Jirka and whose father is in prison while his mother died tragically. At the moment he is growing up in the foster care of his grandmother. The father has sought to see his son at prison visits regularly for more than two years, but the foster-grandmother absolutely rejects this. She says the main

reason for it is the poor relationship with the father; she also blames the father for the death of her daughter and also states unsuitable environment of the prison. CHC helps to improve these cheerless relationships and renew the family ties between the father and his son. On the second hand, the documentary describes the duration and conditions of assisted visits in the female prison of Světlá nad Sázavou. We have cooperated with this prison since the beginning of the program *Children of Imprisoned Parents* in 2007.

or

Pictographic book for children „Mommy in Prison“ <http://www.helcom.cz/image/detiOR/Maminka-ve-vezeni.pdf>

The originality of this project is mainly based on the fact that before its start in 2007, nobody was concerned with needs of children of imprisoned parents and there was hard public opinion that it is not convenient to support communication of children with “criminals”. Ever since, this situation has been rapidly changed including efforts of specialized workers and people taking care of these children.