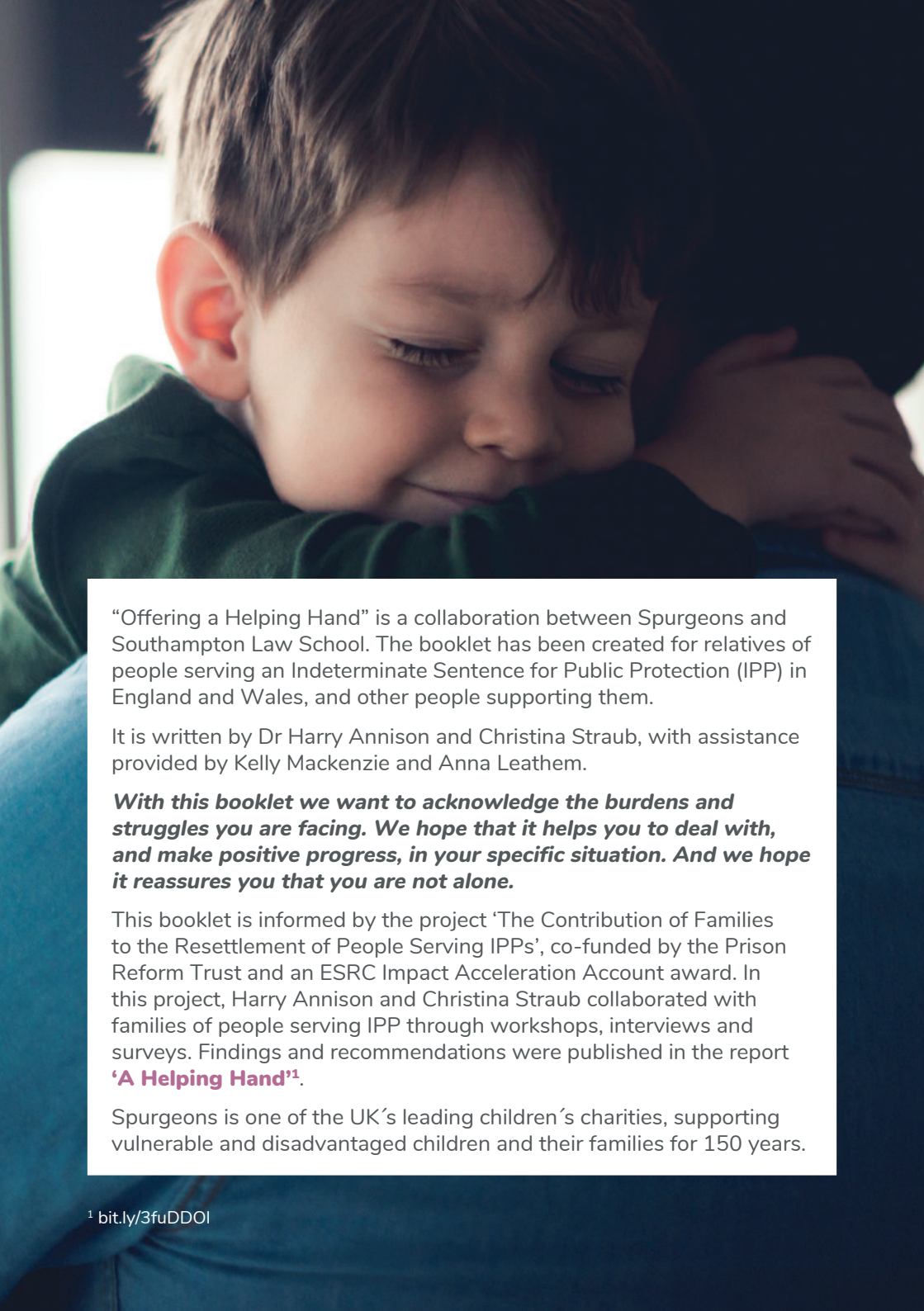


# Offering A Helping Hand

Resources and guidance for families and others  
supporting people serving IPP





“Offering a Helping Hand” is a collaboration between Spurgeons and Southampton Law School. The booklet has been created for relatives of people serving an Indeterminate Sentence for Public Protection (IPP) in England and Wales, and other people supporting them.

It is written by Dr Harry Annison and Christina Straub, with assistance provided by Kelly Mackenzie and Anna Leathem.

***With this booklet we want to acknowledge the burdens and struggles you are facing. We hope that it helps you to deal with, and make positive progress, in your specific situation. And we hope it reassures you that you are not alone.***

This booklet is informed by the project ‘The Contribution of Families to the Resettlement of People Serving IPPs’, co-funded by the Prison Reform Trust and an ESRC Impact Acceleration Account award. In this project, Harry Annison and Christina Straub collaborated with families of people serving IPP through workshops, interviews and surveys. Findings and recommendations were published in the report ‘**A Helping Hand**’<sup>1</sup>.

Spurgeons is one of the UK’s leading children’s charities, supporting vulnerable and disadvantaged children and their families for 150 years.

<sup>1</sup> [bit.ly/3fuDDOI](https://bit.ly/3fuDDOI)

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## Context:

# The legacy of the IPP sentence

The Imprisonment for Public Protection sentence (IPP) was implemented in 2005 and applied to England and Wales. Justified as a way to protect the public from people who were likely to commit a further serious offence, over 8,000 IPP sentences were imposed in total. Initially, expectations were that those sentenced to IPP would be released in a reasonable timeframe; this generally did not happen.

Critics argue that IPPs have proven difficult to understand and have created uncertainty for everyone affected: including victims, those sentenced and their families. People serving IPP often found themselves staying in prison a long time after their tariff period ended; and longer than some determinate-sentenced prisoners who had committed more serious offences, but had a fixed release date.

These problems led to its abolition in 2012 but at time of writing over 2,000 people serving an IPP remain in the prison system, and a growing number (over 1,200) have additionally been recalled to prison. Those released remain under supervision. Our research with families of people serving IPPs showed that many feel stuck in a system that is unfair and that was publicly recognised by the government of the time to be unfit for purpose. Many feel that they often do not have the support and information that they need.



## An Injustice?

[IPPs were] unclear, inconsistent and have been used far more than was ever intended ... That is unjust to the people in question and completely inconsistent with the policy of punishment, reform and rehabilitation.

*Rt Hon Ken Clarke MP, Justice Secretary speaking at the time the IPP was abolished in 2012*

A 'seriously flawed system' and 'introduced without sufficient funding to cope with it.'

*Supreme Court of England and Wales*

In 2016, the Chair of the Parole Board was asked by the Justice Secretary to identify ways to accelerate the release of people serving IPP. Suggestions included changing the test for release or converting some IPPs to determinate sentences. Unfortunately, these suggestions for fundamental legislative changes were not taken forward by the government and it is unlikely that they will be in the foreseeable future.

That's such an injustice. If you're in for 18 months and then a post-2012 guy comes in for a similar offence, for his 18 months. He comes and goes and you're still there.

Where's the justice in that?

*Quotes are from interviews with family members of people serving IPP, unless otherwise stated.*



## Supporting your loved one through the IPP sentence

Separation can cause a great deal of pain. Relationships might be under strain and some may have broken down. Visits may be difficult, perhaps because your relative is moved from prison to prison. Supporting a family member can be much more than “just” a waiting game, with no set release date, and the initial tariff date may have been well exceeded.

The IPP sentence may feel like a never-ending struggle as loved ones have to meet numerous criteria to be considered lower risk and eligible for parole. Even after release the worry may not go, since recall is always a possibility. It would be natural to feel like you are at the end of your tether at times.

It is very difficult to juggle everything. I'm at work, I study and I'm also dealing with this. It affects me massively. He's worth it, and I'm worth it, but it's horrible ... I suffer from severe anxiety and depression, and this certainly doesn't help

## Stress, loss, and uncertainty

Many families of people serving an IPP sentence experience feelings of loss, bereavement for the person they have been separated from. They can feel stuck. The constant “not knowing when it will end” can contribute significantly to severe stress. Families have also reported a sense of isolation as others struggle to understand what they are going through. This can lead to mental and physical health effects.

It's a loss, a constant bereavement really. I think, if it wasn't for having a good partner I probably would have had a nervous breakdown.

I've gone grey! My heart's pumping fast, I throw things, you know. I sit there and I have a drink and I start crying, and I start smashing things. And it's affecting my daughters.



## Dealing with mental and physical health issues

The toll of supporting someone serving an IPP sentence can be severe. As much as those serving the IPP sentence suffer from mental and physical health issues connected to the effects of imprisonment, those on the outside can suffer the secondary effects of imprisonment.

One morning, I just woke up full of dread, shaking from head to foot, I didn't know what on earth was happening to me and I phoned my doctor straight away, and she said, "You're suffering anxiety and stress"

I've been losing weight for the last couple of years. In January, my doctor gave me tablets. Then I got counselling with mental health charity Mind. After I'd offloaded, she said, "You're suffering post-traumatic stress disorder."

This strain may mean that families, or other people providing support, are less likely to be able to cope on their own. It is also natural to feel like you might want to "take a break" from supporting a loved one, while also feeling a duty to help them.

- Reach out to trusted friends or relatives to alleviate stress
- It is okay to put yourself first and take care of your needs

I was saying to [him] all the time, "I hope I've done enough. I hope I've done enough. Could I do more?" He was like, "I don't think anyone has ever done more than you". It batters me though. It really, really did batter me, my mental health.

## IPP Information and Support

Recently, HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) and the Parole Board have been working on IPP-specific information material, and support for their staff, that may be helpful.

### HM Prison and Probation Service

- HMPPS will publish 'A guide for the families & significant others of those serving Indeterminate Sentences in prisons' by autumn 2020
- The staff training course 'Life and IPP Prisoners' is being updated in 2020. HMPPS is now looking to include information for staff about the importance of families of people serving IPP.

### Parole Board for England and Wales

- The booklet 'Information for Families or Friends of Prisoners Having a Parole Review' has useful general information and some IPP-specific information.
- The guide 'Getting Ready for a Parole Review Without a Lawyer' is for prisoners, but families might find a helpful way to learn more about the parole process.
- A new supplementary information sheet on the experiences of families of people serving IPP is now available to Parole Board members.

These publications will be available on the **Parole Board**<sup>1</sup> website from summer 2020.

<sup>1</sup> [bit.ly/3dd1AIE](https://bit.ly/3dd1AIE)

## Questions about Parole

The Parole Board are independent of Government and are responsible for reviewing indeterminate (Life and IPP), and some determinate, cases for release. For indeterminate sentence prisoners only, they also consider applications for a transfer to open prisons. To make release decisions, they review a range of documents. For indeterminate sentence prisoners, they will usually hold an oral hearing where they listen to evidence from staff and others.

Families may have questions such as:

- What is the release test?
- Can families attend a hearing? If so, can they speak or submit a written document?
- Can they obtain a summary of the decision?

The Parole Board's [website<sup>1</sup>](#), and the publications listed on the previous page, provides up-to-date answers to these questions.

## Questions about Licence

'Licence' refers to the conditions imposed on a person when they are released from prison. This might include limits on where they can go, and what they can do. Everyone sentenced to IPP who is released from prison, is released 'on licence'. A released prisoner must comply with the conditions imposed.

- Who sets conditions?
- What does 'being on licence' mean in practice?
- Can the licence period be brought to an end?

<sup>1</sup> [bit.ly/3dd1AIE](https://bit.ly/3dd1AIE)



## Questions about Recall

Where someone does not comply with the conditions of their licence, and their risk of harm is considered to have increased, they may be recalled to prison. This can occur at any point during the licence period.

- Why might someone released on an IPP license be recalled?
- How does the relationship between licence conditions and risk-oriented recall considerations work in practice?

The Prison Reform Trust [website<sup>2</sup>](#) offers a helpful overview of recall and licence conditions for IPP and other sentences.

## Questions about Probation

Probation officers help prisoners to prepare for release from prison and supervise them upon release. They also prepare reports for the parole hearing. A number of titles for probation staff are used, including 'offender supervisor' and 'offender manager'.

Some basic information is available on this government [website<sup>3</sup>](#). The HMPPS families information (see p9) should also help.

<sup>2</sup> [bit.ly/2zGKjtC](https://bit.ly/2zGKjtC)

<sup>3</sup> [bit.ly/2UOk6ke](https://bit.ly/2UOk6ke)

# General Information and Support for families and others supporting people sentenced to IPP

## HM Prison and Probation Service

There has been an increased focus on families of those serving a prison sentence at a national level after the publication of the **Farmer Review**<sup>1</sup>.

All prisons are required to develop and implement its own 'family strategy' which sets out the support and services each prison commits to provide for prisoners and their families. You may find it helpful to read the one specific to the prison your relative is in.

You can find contact details for prisons at the government's **Prison Finder**<sup>2</sup>. If you have an urgent concern about a loved one in prison, you should call the 'Safer Custody hotline' (note that this term is not used by all prisons).

If prison visits have become difficult for you, because your relative was moved, or if you are experiencing financial difficulties, the **Assisted Visits Scheme**<sup>3</sup> may be able to offer some help.

Useful information booklets covering this and other relevant topics for families and those serving an IPP sentence can be found on the Prison Reform Trust's **website**<sup>4</sup> and in particular this **booklet**<sup>5</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> [bit.ly/2Bcbn4n](https://bit.ly/2Bcbn4n)

<sup>2</sup> [bit.ly/2Y43hn6](https://bit.ly/2Y43hn6)

<sup>3</sup> [bit.ly/2AJ5Thk](https://bit.ly/2AJ5Thk)

<sup>4</sup> [bit.ly/2YLiG1q](https://bit.ly/2YLiG1q)

<sup>5</sup> [bit.ly/2Y5USj9](https://bit.ly/2Y5USj9)

## Connecting with Others

Some families find it helpful to connect with others in a similar situation. There are informal groups of people affected by IPP, who use social media (mainly Facebook, but also blogs and Twitter). Becoming part of these networks can build a sense of solidarity and provide mutual support.

Some people choose to campaign publicly against the IPP sentence. If you consider getting more actively involved in campaigning or in trying to influence parliamentary decision making, you could write to your local MP, for example. You could also consider following the ongoing work of the **Justice Select Committee**<sup>1</sup>.

Taking these sorts of actions may lessen feelings of powerlessness and provide an understanding of what is currently being done. However, it can also become overwhelming, requiring a lot of time and energy. It can also feel very frustrating, since your efforts may not result in visible change or deliver the outcomes you hoped for.

<sup>1</sup> [bit.ly/2Y5Ob0r](https://bit.ly/2Y5Ob0r)



## Where can I get help?

A list of community organisations providing help can be accessed at <https://www.gov.uk/support-for-families-friends-of-prisoners>

Nationwide services specifically dedicated to supporting and working with families and children of offenders: <https://www.nicco.org.uk/directory-of-services>

**Spurgeons:** <https://www.spurgeons.org/our-services/families-criminal-justice/>

**Prison Advice and Care Trust (PACT)**

<https://www.prisonadvice.org.uk>

Phone: +44 2077359535

Email: [info@prisonadvice.org.uk](mailto:info@prisonadvice.org.uk)

**Prisoners Families Helpline:** 0808 808 2003 (freephone)

**Partners of Prisoners (POPs)**

<http://www.partnersofprisoners.co.uk>

Phone: +44161 702 1000

Email: [mail@partnersofprisoners.co.uk](mailto:mail@partnersofprisoners.co.uk)

**Other sources of general support that families often find useful include:**

**Citizens Advice Board:**

[www.citizensadvice.org.uk](http://www.citizensadvice.org.uk)

Adviceline: 03444 111 444

**Mind UK – The Mental Health Charity:**

[www.mind.org.uk](http://www.mind.org.uk)

Phone: 0300 123 3393

Email: [info@mind.org.uk](mailto:info@mind.org.uk)

Text: 86463

**Samaritans:**

[www.samaritans.org](http://www.samaritans.org)

Phone: 116 123 (free of charge)

Email: [jo@samaritans.org](mailto:jo@samaritans.org)

**Family Action**

[www.family-action.org.uk](http://www.family-action.org.uk)

Phone: 0808 802 6666

Text: 07537 404 282

Email: [familyline@family-action.org.uk](mailto:familyline@family-action.org.uk)

**Addaction UK:**

[addaction.org.uk](http://addaction.org.uk)

**Adfam UK:**

[adfam.org.uk](http://adfam.org.uk)

Phone: 020 3817 9410

Email: [admin@adfam.org.uk](mailto:admin@adfam.org.uk)

## Looking for more information?

The House of Commons Library produces briefing papers on important issues, including the IPP sentence. The latest version at time of writing is available **here**<sup>1</sup>.

The Prison Reform Trust website provides information on latest policy developments on IPP in their **news section**<sup>2</sup>.

Recent **policy changes**<sup>3</sup> by the Parole Board are often also relevant.

The Indeterminate Sentence Operational Support (ISOS) team within HMPPS focuses on bringing together relevant organisations to try to deal with some of the problems preventing those serving the IPP sentence from progressing. ISOS does this through an 'IPP Action Plan'. Updated plans are published from time to time. The most recent published documents at time of writing are available **here**<sup>4</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> [bit.ly/2MYCyCi](https://bit.ly/2MYCyCi)

<sup>2</sup> [bit.ly/30MINBI](https://bit.ly/30MINBI)

<sup>3</sup> [bit.ly/3e5nqyM](https://bit.ly/3e5nqyM)

<sup>4</sup> [bit.ly/3fwx9yi](https://bit.ly/3fwx9yi)



This booklet tells you about information and support that is available for families of people serving IPP.

The booklet also includes some information about the issues with the IPP sentence, and the experiences and difficulties that families (and others) supporting people serving IPP often face.



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