



## Supporting Visitors

Supporting families affected  
by imprisonment (West Yorkshire &  
The Dales and others)

It is widely acknowledged that maintaining family relationships whilst a prisoner is serving their sentence reduces reoffending, but the process of visiting family members in prison can be intimidating and difficult.



As a response Mothers' Union in the diocese of West Yorkshire & the Dales (Ripon & Leeds) volunteer in the Jigsaw visitors centre at HMP Armley. Here members often chat to partners of prisoners over a cup of tea or coffee, giving visitors a chance to unwind and talk about their problems. Throughout the year volunteers provide programmes and themed visits such as Christmas, Easter, Eid, Gardening, Bonfire, Gym, Drama, Music and Healthy Eating. Sometimes they provide four sessions in two days to fit in as many families as possible.

Three members also sit on the Management Committee of the Jigsaw centre. One volunteer shared that *"no two days are the same, I never get bored. I help with the booking in of visitors, answering phones, making tea, talking to first time visitors, explaining procedures, or interviewing for new staff."*

For general guidelines about setting up and developing outreach initiatives, go to the members' section of the Mothers' Union website [www.mothersunion.org](http://www.mothersunion.org)

During a day visit for partners girls visiting their boyfriends were told they are not allowed to come in tops and short skirts to their session when they showed up dressed like that. In response they decided to come in onesies the following week instead. The prison staff thought this was very amusing since it was very hot on that particular day. Volunteer Maggie highlights that volunteers say about themselves: *"We're non-threatening, non judgemental. We are the face of normality for those men in prison."*

