

KEEP UP HOPE

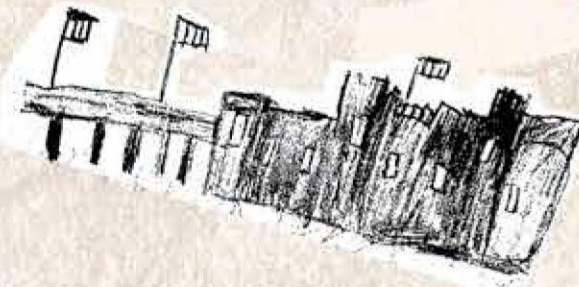
"People don't realise that there are a lot of children who have someone they love in prison. It can be hard to talk about it, but we'd like other people to know what it's like and what helps us."

This book shares the experiences, voices, and artwork of children and young people who have experience of having a parent in prison. This project was developed by Kids' Own Publishing Partnership in partnership with the Irish Penal Reform Trust's Children and Families Initiative. The book was created by children and young people from Bedford Row Family Project, Limerick, with additional input from families and children attending visitation hours at Shelton Abbey open prison in Wicklow.

Kids' Own Publishing Partnership is a children's arts organisation and publishing house, and Ireland's only dedicated publisher of books by children, for children. Kids' Own offers a space for children and young people's real experiences, voices, and artwork to be shared through publishing and the arts.



KEEP UP HOPE



stories and artwork
by children and young people
with a parent in prison

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a parent in prison

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40 Wolfe Tone Street, Sligo, F91 R231, Ireland
(+)353-719170759
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Registered charity number:

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Project Artist:

Maree Hensey

Design:

Leo Kellenberger

Project Writer:

Mary Branley

Print:

W&G Baird

Kids’ Own Board of Directors

Naomi Feely (Chair), Michael Kirby, Liz Coman, Tommy Flavin, Sinead Maguire

foreword

The Irish Penal Reform Trust (IPRT) was delighted to support Kids’ Own in developing this first-of-a-kind book in Ireland written by children with a family member in prison. In IPRT, we understand how important it is for children to keep up a strong connection with their parent in prison and how difficult that can sometimes be because of how far away the prison is or how little time you get to speak to your parent on the phone or how short and noisy visiting times are, surrounded by lots of other visitors.

In 2022, we set up the Children and Families Initiative, a three-year project, to focus on reducing the negative impact of imprisonment on children and families who have a loved one in prison. The initiative – led by our Coordinator Ashling Tobin – publishes research, organises events and brings together a network of organisations dedicated to supporting families of people in prison, all to highlight the reality for them and call for improvements to the system. This book clearly shows how prison can disrupt family life, how security during visits to their mam or dad in a closed prison make them feel and how a parent may often miss out on big occasions in their child’s life. But it is so heartening to see the young people provide words of wisdom and advice for anyone else going through the same thing, so they know they’re not the only ones and to give them a sense of hope. We’d like to thank all of the children, young people and families who took part to make this such a beautiful book.

Saoirse Brady, IPRT Executive Director

In the most unexpected of places, creativity finds a way to flourish. Such was the case in Shelton Abbey, an open prison, where a collaborative book project was undertaken with children who have experienced having a parent in prison. I witnessed the gentle process and saw how art can transcend the confines of a prison. This initiative brought joy and learning not only to the children but also to the men and their families.

What particularly impressed me was the role of the facilitators. They supported and encouraged the children, ensuring their stories were heard. They provided entertainment and inspiration, giving the children a voice in a non-threatening way. This platform allowed the children to see their thoughts, dreams, and feelings reflected in the pages of the book. This initiative demonstrated that the voices and stories of children need to be heard. Let's continue to advocate for and uplift these young voices.

Debbie Moore Borland, Chaplain, Shelton Abbey



About the project how

we made the book

The best thing so far is getting out of the house, off the screens, meeting new people, and having fun. The best part was meeting new people, the best thing was doing the plates with the paint. My favourite part was rolling the paint onto the glass.

I enjoyed everyone being open and honest and us all working together. And I'm over the moon there wasn't much red in the drawing. One of the best parts was when I gave my sister a tattoo with paint.

who we are



We are a group of Traveller and settled people, some of us have experience coming to Bedford Row Family Project in Limerick, and some of us have experience visiting Shelton Abbey, an open prison in County Wicklow.

We are nice people and we get a lot of support in visiting the prison where our loved ones are. We all have a back story, someone in prison. It's hard going on the visits because of the searches and the security and they think you are bringing in stuff.

Bedford Row Family Project in Limerick helps us in so many ways for visits to prison. Bedford Row is knowing other kids, knowing that you're not alone, and sharing stories. Bedford Row always has toast for us, with butter, and tea, breakfast and lunch, so many good activities, like the art this week, and tearing paper. I made a load of flowers. And we had a ride on the Ferris Wheel.

There's very nice people here for us, great support for family visits. Katie here is a very nice woman, so helpful. She's on holiday this week.

Creative engagement families at Shelton

An open prison in County Wicklow

When making this book, we wanted to hear and listen to the voices of children and families who had different experiences of having a loved one in prison. As well as working in partnership with some children and young people at Bedford Row Family Project in Limerick, Kids' Own Associate Artist Maree Hensey and Associate Writer Mary Branley also spent some time with families during visiting hours over a couple of days in Shelton Abbey, an open prison in County Wicklow, with the support and guidance of Chaplain Debbie Moore Borland. An open prison is different to a traditional prison because you don't go through the same security for visits and there are no walls, locks or bars on windows. There are fewer prisoners and they may have keys to their own rooms and work out in the community. Open prisons help people prepare for life on the outside when they are released so they may even get to have visits home with their family, sometimes overnight.

These pages give an insight into this experience through the artistic voices of the children, some of the conversations held with family members, and reflections from those involved in facilitating the creative sessions.

about us and our families

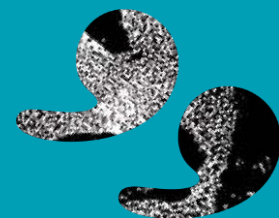
(MEMORIES)

My favourite memory was in Donegal and we were down by the beach. There was a beautiful sunset. We brang a load of blankets, and had a picnic. I was there with my Mam and Dad, my brother and my sister, and my dog Missy. We used to go to Donegal every summer, we loved it. We had such a good time the first year we said we'd have to go back for two weeks the next year.

There's a pier in Port Salon that we used to go to every night.



We rented out a house on Carrowkeel. We'd go crab fishing, my Dad brought us. He got rashers in Aldi and I caught a crab. I was scared to pick it up, but Carol did. We took a picture of it. And we put it back in with his friends. There's a little shop beside the pier and Dad used to buy us honeycomb. It's the only place where you can get it. Our Dad went in every night to get it for us. We'd bring the dog for a walk and the dog went swimming. She's a miniature Jack Russell terrier.



So they are the happy memories we have when we were all together, but now that our family is separated those memories help to make us feel happy and strong. We look forward to having those times again. We are not going to dwell on the past, but what we have to look forward to.

“

I THINK
THE ART IS
VERY GOOD
ESPECIALLY
MY DRAWING.

ABOUT
US & OUR
FAMILIES

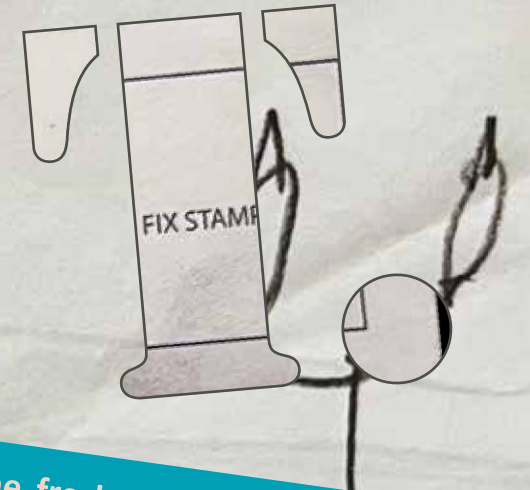
I have a very nice teacher and my favourite part of school is break time, and going to the big hall for PE. It's all basketball now, and I'm good at it, but I'm not a fan of it. I like soccer and hurling better.



Limerick is going for the hurling five times in a row. My life is boxing, soccer and video games.

”

I have about twenty cousins, ten aunties, and six uncles but half of them are dead. I love dancing, gymnastics and I love doing art. I've two brothers, one is five and the other is twelve and they are both annoying.



You get a fine
for breathing

£000,000,000,000

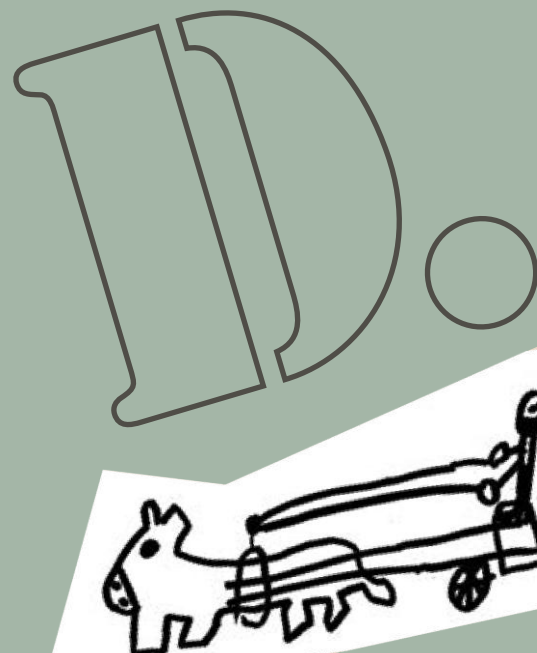
I like getting out in the fresh air and I love doing projects and I love helping people, like a poor person on the street. Instead of giving them money, I went and got them a sandwich and a drink. I'd like to be helping people when I'm older. I'll follow my imagination.



JJC is famous because he's called the boss and he's Tik Tok famous and I drive horses. I go out on the sulky every day, fillies and cobs.

ABOUT US & OUR FAMILIES

My cousin is called big X, he was my Da and he died. He was putting a horse into the stable and he fainted. It happened years ago. I go to the swimming pool in the summer and play with my cousins



Depression is very bad for Travellers. Sometimes you need medication and help.

Imagine just jumping into the river and lying back on your back and getting taken off. It might be a bit cold, but you'll have your clothes on. The water is peaceful.

My Nana works in the community and she goes to a place where she gets training, she talks to other people about Travellers, about their lives, tough lives and good things about Traveller culture. My Grandmother is from Sligo and she talks the Cant.



It's hard for Travellers to get a house, some people thinks that Travellers want a site, like a halting site, but no, some Travellers want a house that they can raise their children in. I grew up in a halting site for a while until I was five and my Ma got a house and we are there to this day. We are out on the main road and my baby brother can open the door, so that's dangerous. We'd like to get a new house away from the main road.

KK

When I grow up I'm going to be a business man. Boss K. I wasn't scared on the Ferris Wheel. I liked the paintings, King John's Castle. I played with my friends.

ABOUT US & OUR FAMILIES

K was the best because she brought us to the carnival and the swimming. It's nice to get away from the house. My Nanny just got her knees done, but last year she had cancer, and mental health and depression.

BOSS

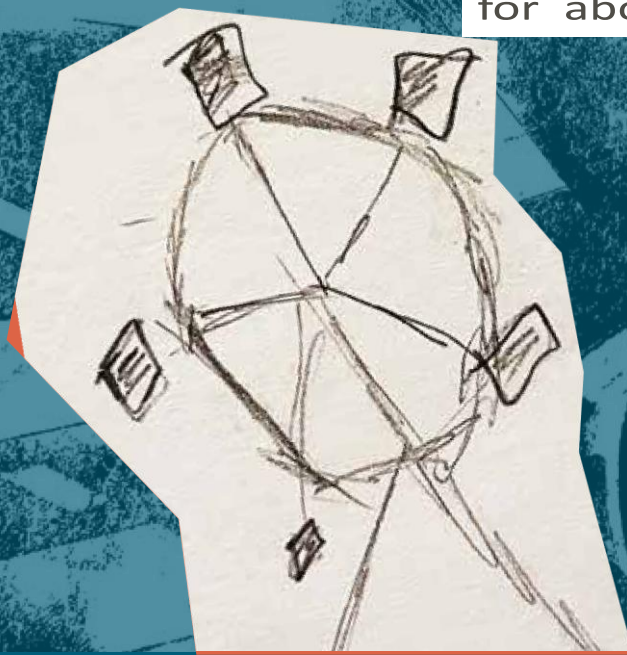


66

The big light reminds me of my Nana at night time when I see the stars.

GO

It reminds me of all my family up in heaven, my Nana and my uncles, and my cousin. I call it a big light because it's always big, the starlight. If I'm outside I look up for about thirty minutes.



My granda gets his blanket and his chair and we sit outside and look up, even if it's cold. We find the brightest light and we say its Nana with us in our hearts.

33

“
My Nana passed away because of cancer, I’m not sure what stage or what kind of cancer, but she was very sick. They said she had six months or six weeks. Before she died my Mam went out to see her every night until 1 o’clock, when she went to sleep.

My aunty went out after that from 1 till 5, another aunty took over until 8 o’clock, then my Mam went back. So she had someone with her all the time. The doctors told us I’m not sure how long she has left. So everyone came and we were saying our goodbyes. I was holding her hand and crying and then she woke up from her death sleep. She said my two uncles that had passed away were in the back waving at her. On the windowsill my aunty who passed away as a baby was crawling. RIP to my Nana.

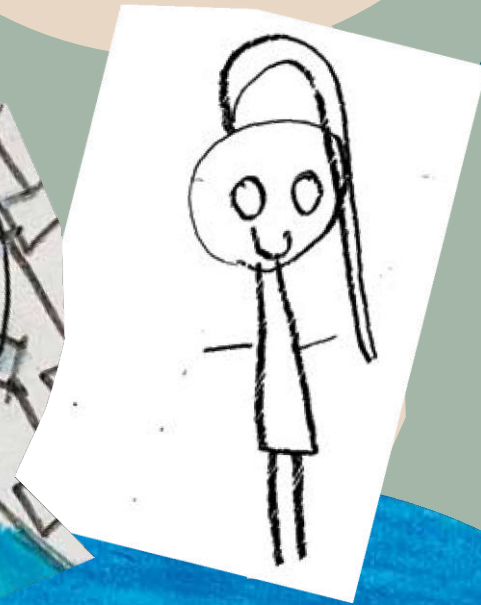
A storm is coming, it’s called **Storm Kathleen**, it’s making me think of Nana. It’s going to be a big one: wind, rain, **she’s returning to earth.**
”

“

My Gran used to live in a wagon, and she lived all over the country. She had sixteen children, six boys and ten girls. They all grew up and got married. They used to send the children out for milk. “Geig the breoir for alamach.” It means ask the woman for milk.

ABOUT
US & OUR
FAMILIES

“GEIG THE
BREOIR FOR
ALAMACH”
”





Our
experiences
of having
someone
we love
in prison



My mother was in jail and I was upset, I didn't like it. I used to pray for her at night time. She always did say to me that she'd be getting out. I used to go and visit but I was upset. One day she rang me that she was getting out. When she first got out I was so happy. She went to court and got out after nine months and she got out a week later. I stayed with my dad. I went in to see her with my aunties in my communion dress.

I was so happy to see her getting out. I got my life back, cos mostly it's your mum who makes your home happy. My dad did good, he used to put us to school every day and he really tried hard to make us happy, bring us to beaches and stuff. It did work.

My experience of my Dad going to prison.

It's different like, I still get to talk to my Dad twice a day, a video call once a week. But I haven't seen him in prison for seventeen months, but I think I'm going this Friday.

The first time we seen him was in a big room, the family room, we could hug him and touch him. A normal visit is behind screens now, even though that was for Covid, and you can hardly hear him, so he has to shout over and its harder if there are other people there.

Before you go in, you have to hope you get past the dog, and the metal detector. My mother got caught and she didn't even know why. There's a big security thing. Family visits are an hour, and normal time is half an hour. You get twenty mins on the Zoom, and you talk away for twenty minutes and get a chance to tell all the news, and hear Dad's news.

EXPERIENCE
WITH SOMEONE
IN PRISON

I keep it to myself why my Dad is in prison, it was an accident, he didn't mean to do it. He was an alcoholic, and my Mam needs a new house, with no main roads in front of us.

My Dad phones, and I go in and see him now and again. He's ok, but I don't like the security going in, it makes us upset.

My Mam never touched drugs in her life, but it keeps happening us. They told my Mam before that if she doesn't pass the dogs or the metal detector she won't get back for six months.

MY MAM IS
THE BEST
MAM IN
THE WHOLE
WORLD

My Dad is in and out of jail our whole lives. My Mam is the best Mam in the whole world and she's raising us on her own, and she's making sure she's there for us, feeding us, and washing us, and catching us up on our injections, or if we have to go to hospital. I've a cough now and she gives me cough medicine, and paracetamol.

If I go into a shop I get followed round by a security man, thinking that I'm going to rob or steal. But they give us a hard time.

Our teacher talks about the Traveller community, but I don't want to hear that. I can't tell her stop, but I'm just a child and I'll wait until I'm an adult.



EXPERIENCE
WITH SOMEONE
IN PRISON

My Prison Visit



Today I went in to see my Dad in prison, it was my third time in seventeen months. We got to talk for half an hour and he bought me sweets and I'll eat them when I get home. The last time I went in we had a family room, but today was the screen up and it got very noisy at the end with two other prisoners.

I got to give him a hug at the end. My sister hates the screen, because she likes to be able to touch him the whole time. He looks better than when he first went in.

The door makes a very weird noise when you go in, through a metal detector and usually there's a dog that smells you as well. I feel good after today, very nice seeing him.





REFLECTIONs on the river

When we were making this book, we spent a lot of time outside looking at the river and making art outside



I drew the dock and the bridge, the jetty and railings and houses.

Today the river was a lot different than yesterday.

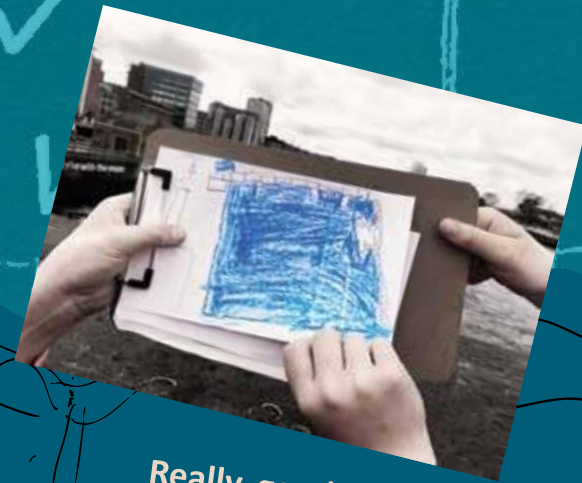
The left side was slower than the right.

The river is energetic.

I see a church that's very old.

I see Thomond Gate where we go for matches.

St John's castle is down the river as well.



I liked my drawing today more.

The weather was dry and we were in a better spot.

White bubbles flowing underneath us.

That line is showing you where the current ends.

Dark underneath us.

White bubbles and the dark water.

Changing colours further away.

Depends on the weather.

The tides rise with the moon, so do our moods.

Really good view for my drawing.

I don't practise drawing.

I'm not surprised how good I am.

I changed the way I draw a river.

I liked a walk with my school and a fella told us a story about the bullets at the barracks during the War of Independence.

I liked the way the bridge came out 3D because of all the details.

From what
I learned
first days:

the

THE RIVER
& PROJECT
REFLECTIONS

YOU LEARN FROM
YOUR MISTAKES.

FAILURE IS BASICALLY
ANOTHER CHANCE.

IT'S RELAXING.

MY BEST ADVICE IS TO
KEEP ON DRAWING AND
PRACTISING.

I LOVED GOING OUT TO
THE RIVER, AND DRAWING.

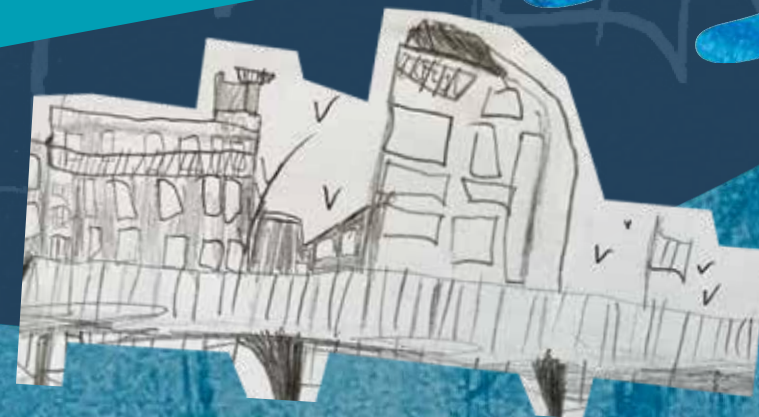
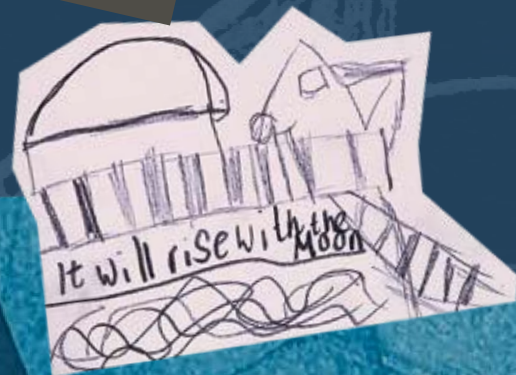
I LIKED BEING ON THE
BRIDGE, AND CAN LOOK
STRAIGHT OUT AT THE
WATER AND YOU CAN SEE.

I DON'T PUT COLOUR ON THE
RIVER BECAUSE YOU CAN
NEVER KNOW WHAT COLOUR
IT IS.

WHEN YOU STOP TALKING
YOU CAN HEAR THE WAVES,
YOU CAN SEE THE SWIRLING
WATER, ON BEACHES IT CAN
TEAR PEOPLE DOWN.

Failure is another chance

YOU GET DIZZY LOOKING
DOWN, IT GOES AROUND AND
AROUND.



The big wheel



Walking around

Meeting the river

Getting fresh air

Looking at the Ferris wheel

The bridge and the castle

Reflection and light

The river is not too deep, you can wade in to fish

Happy

It's not calm its energetic.

THE RIVER
& PROJECT
REFLECTIONS

WORDS THAT DESCRIBE THE WALK BY THE RIVER



Delightful

Sunshine

Fun

Happy, happy, happy

I'd like to draw bigger

Talking together

I like the hotel by the green bridge

Watching the water

The church, the castle

Go, flow looking at the water

Look at the castle

JOKES

WHAT DID THE FISH SAY WHEN
HE BUMPED INTO A WALL IN
THE RIVER?
DAMN

WHY DID THE SWAN NOT CROSS
THE RIVER?
BECAUSE THE FORCE WAS
TOO STRONG.

WHAT DID THE CAR SAY
TO THE CHICKEN?
NOTHING, COS A CAR
CAN'T TALK.

THE STATUE OF TERRY WOGAN
P GAVE TERRY WOGAN A FINE
FOR NOT SPEAKING TO US
FOR €3000.

APRIL FOOL'S JOKE
LAST NIGHT AROUND 10 O'CLOCK,
I WENT INTO MY MOTHER
AND I SAYS ME BROTHER'S
GONE DOWN STAIRS AND HE'S
SLEEPWALKING. SHE GOT UP
OFF THE BED AND I STILL
DIDN'T TELL HER IT WAS
APRIL FOOLS.

KNOCK KNOCK
WHO'S THERE?
MARY.
MARY WHO?
MARY CHRISTMAS.

TERRY WOGAN

26 SWANS AND
MILLIONS OF
SEAGULLS.

AN OLD TOFFEE
FACTORY

THE HOTEL THAT'S
A FUNNY SHAPE.

WHAT WE SAW BY THE RIVER



WHAT HELPS US

and

ADVICE FOR OTHER
CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE



Prison is ugly and mad. My advice to people if you hear the news that someone you love has to go to prison:

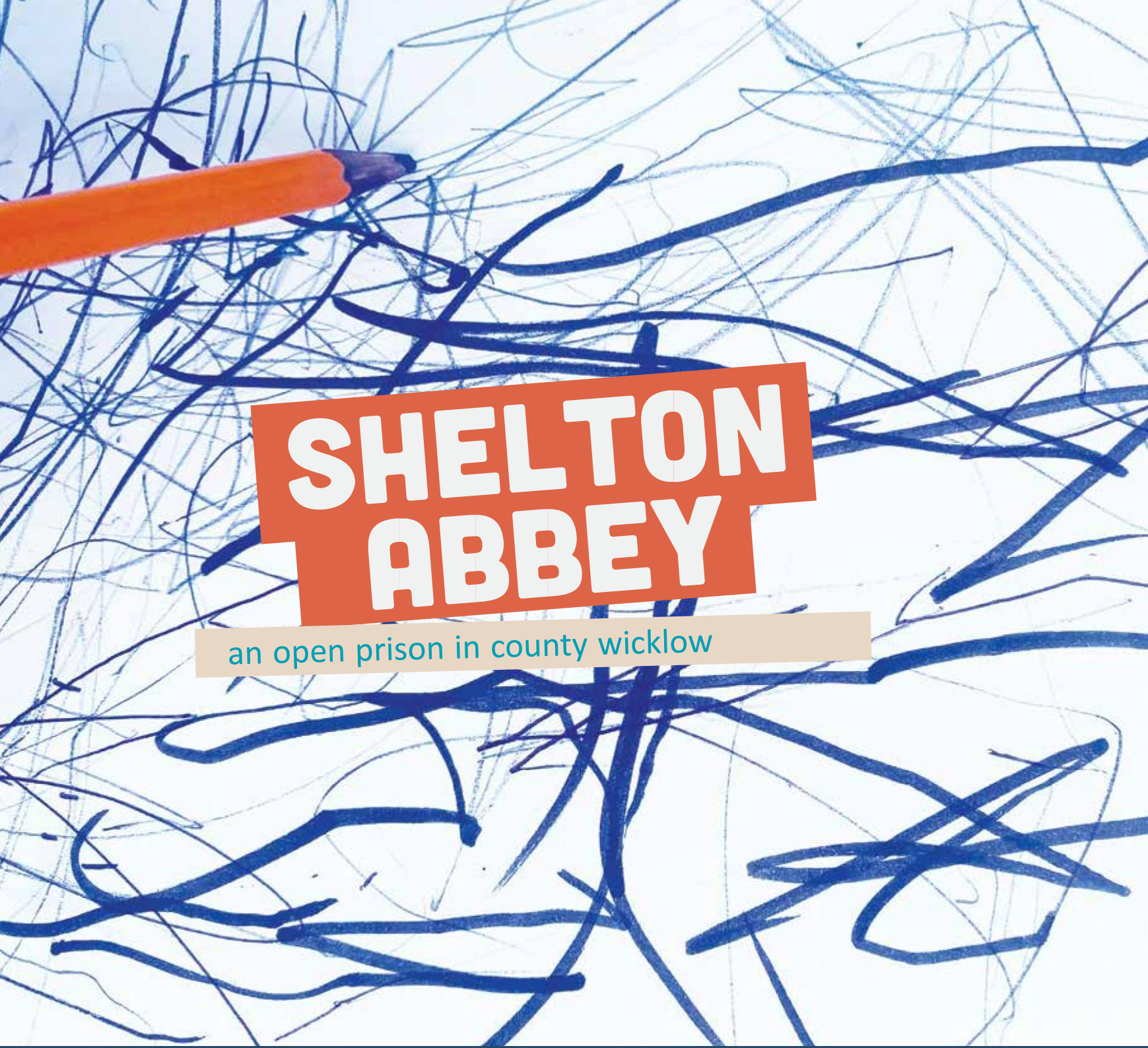
"JUST DON'T THINK ABOUT IT TOO MUCH THEY'LL GET OUT SOON, THAT'S WHAT I SAY TO OTHER CHILDREN IN THE SAME SITUATION."



A few years ago for Christmas, my Dad got me a huge bear, it's my height. "If you ever miss me or anything happens and you feel upset, you can hug the bear," he told me at the time. I got one of his jerseys that he always wears and put it on the bear so it smelled like Dad, and we got the aftershave and sprayed that on as well. But you always get a bit upset when you get the smell, because you think

he's round the house, and he's not. But it does comfort us in a kind of way. We have a really big family and we all stick together.

People don't realise that there are a lot of children who have someone they love in prison. It can be hard to talk about it, but we'd like other people to know what it's like and what helps us.



SHELTON ABBEY

an open prison in county wicklow

We set up creative materials on picnic tables—paper, mark-making tools, and a mandolin to add a mellow touch to the scenic surroundings. But the July weather turned, and we dashed indoors to the boardroom with its enormous table and glass wall. Families wandered in, sometimes with children leading the way, other times with parents or grandparents in tow.

The next day brought sunshine and a breeze. We set up again outside, helped cheerfully by some of the men. One young man even tried the mandolin. Families spread out across the garden, children drifting over curiously. We handed out materials on clipboards so they could move freely between us and their families. All ages joined in—from toddlers to teens.

Mary Branley, Kids' Own Associate Writer



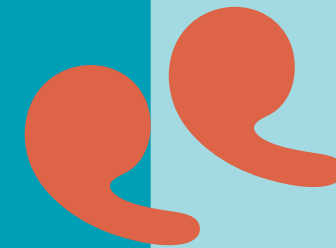
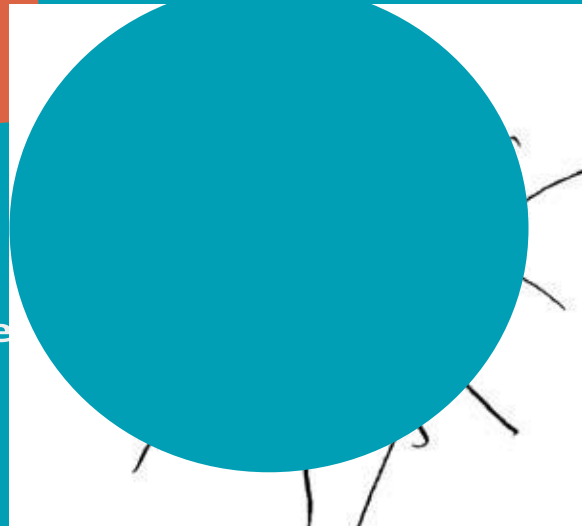
St Philomena's cords

We had a long chat with a Traveller family who had come to visit their loved one in Shelton Abbey. Grandmother, mother, and daughters.

Grandmother: "You will always know a Traveller when you see the Philomena's Cord on their arm, no matter what other jewellery they wear. Everyone wears the Philomena chains. You get them down in Knock, and Philomena used to wear a red and white cord around her waist for protection. What it means is when they break you get your wishes, your wish comes true."

Granddaughter: "My wish would be that my Daddy comes home out of jail."

Grandmother: You don't mess with faith, you have to wait till they break.



MY WISH WOULD BE
THAT MY DADDY COMES
HOME OUT OF JAIL





OUR DRAWINGS WENT
SWIMMING IN THE DOG
BOWL OUTSIDE.

THERE ARE LOVELY
DOGS HERE BEING
TRAINED TO BE
GUIDE DOGS.

SATURDAY WE WERE
INSIDE BECAUSE OF
THE RAIN.

It was a gentle, authentic experience—for us as much as the children. We weren't sure how much interaction there'd be, but we simply offered an open invitation to explore and play. There was no start or finish, just quiet movement in and out of the space.

Children were free to take their time—engaging with the materials, noticing beauty, having fun, and being playful. It was a safe, open environment where they could be heard, be creative, and simply “just be.”

Maree Hensey, Kids' Own Associate Artist



Advice
tootherchildreN

"DON'T WORRY."

"IT'S NOT THE END
OF THE WORLD."

"GET BEDFORD ROW TO
HELP YOU ORGANISE
THE VISITS."

"KEEP UP
HOPE."



List of support services for children and families impacted by imprisonment

General family support services

BARNARDO'S	01 453 0355	info@barnardos.ie
LOCAL TUSLA OFFICE	01 771 8500	info@tusla.ie
LOCAL FAMILY RESOURCE CENTRE		Contact the Family Resource Centres (FRC) National Forum
ST VINCENT DE PAUL	01 884 8200	info@svp.ie

Traveller Specific Support services

PAVEE POINT	01 878 0255	info@pavee.ie
EXCHANGE HOUSE	01 872 1094	info@exchangehouse.ie
LOCAL IRISH TRAVELLER MOVEMENTS	01 679 6577	info@itmtrav.ie
BARNARDOS TRAVELLER MOTHERS IN THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM	01 453 0355	heather.oshea@barnardos.ie

Supports for children in Care

EPIC	01 872 7661	info@epiconline.ie
KINSHIP CARE	087 148 7124	info@kinshipcare.ie
BARNARDOS PARENTAL ADVOCACY & INFORMATION SERVICE	1800 333 355	parent.advocacy@barnardos.ie

Support services for families and people in prison

BEDFORD ROW	061 315 332	info@bedfordrow.ie
NEW DIRECTIONS	087 609 7686	info@newdirections.ie
FUSION CPL	01 623 1499	info@fusioncpl.ie
CARE AFTER PRISON	1800 839 970	info@careafterprison.ie
DILLON'S CROSS PROJECT	086 045 3015	eibhlin.davitt@corketb.ie
CORK ALLIANCE	021 455 7878	Sinead@corkalliancecentre.com
SAOL PROJECT	01 855 3391	brio@saolproject.ie
FOCUS IRELAND WOMEN'S OUTLOOK PROGRAMME	01 881 5900	help@focusireland.ie

Support service for families of prisoners overseas

IRISH COUNCIL FOR PRISONERS OVERSEAS	01 505 3156	info@icpo.ie
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Mental Health Support Services

MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT SERVICES	116 123	jo@samaritans.ie
ISPCC	01 234 2000	info@ispcc.ie
PIETA HOUSE	1800 247 247	info@pieta.ie

