



## HALOW (Birmingham)

Winner of the Family Learning in the Early Years Award in partnership with CACHE Alumni

HALOW (Birmingham) support families to maintain, build, restore and strengthen relationships and wellbeing whilst separated by imprisonment.

Started in 1985 by a lifer's wife as a volunteer helpline for prisoner's wives and partners, the charity remains volunteer-led by a small Board, valuing those with lived experience as both volunteers and staff. It is dedicated to the sole purpose of helping families through the difficult and daunting process of visiting loved ones in prison.

### A chance to 'be dad'

Jolly Tots is an initiative at HMP Oakwood, aiming to provide children aged up to two with a normalised learning opportunity. Each family is allocated a bespoke area with a carpet, books, games, and toys relevant to the age and stage of their child.

Prison is a difficult environment in which to try and keep families together in a meaningful way. On a normal visit, the prisoner must always remain in his seat, and this can be very confusing for a child who wants to play and run around.

Dad is no longer required to sit fixed to the seat but is encouraged to lay on the carpet and cuddle up to his child, or to help the child colour and paint. For two hours dad can 'be dad' in as normalised a family space as possible.

Without this, prisoners would have very little opportunity to perform the role of a regular dad. It also gives partners or family members a few minutes to relax whilst dad takes the lead on active learning.

### Bringing families closer

At HMP Oakwood, HALOW (Birmingham) can promote the work it does as every new family who visits must be processed by the charity on behalf of the prison, and so staff use this opportunity to promote Jolly Tots.

The courses offered are advertised through posters and leaflets in the Visitors' Centre and they avoid taking recommendations from prisoners as they don't want the visitors to be put under pressure to take part.



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### The child's best interests

Seeing a happy smiling family playing together without the stress and restrictions of a normal visit speaks volumes. To the charity's knowledge, none of the 24 prisoners involved during 2022 returned to custody.

For one participating prisoner, although his relationship had broken down, there was still a commitment from both parties to ensure that the child's best interests were considered.

The three key outcomes for children participating in structured activities as offered in Jolly Tots include a strengthened ability to sustain the family connection; for children and families to experience a greater sense of belonging; and increased opportunities for children's choice.