

# HMP Saughton aims for welcoming environment for visiting children



The Scottish Prison Service and Police Scotland are working with the Salvation Army to ensure HMP Edinburgh is a welcoming environment for visiting children.

This initiative has been developed as part of HMP Edinburgh's community engagement strategy, which is particularly focused on building a rapport between children and police staff through interactive activities, such as arts and crafts.

The children are also given opportunities to dress-up, learn about police cars, and meet representatives from other emergency services such as fire and ambulance. Prison dogs Buck and Ollie, who work with their owner at HMP Edinburgh, are especially popular with the children.

The educational programme for children visiting HMP Edinburgh draws upon the national teaching framework for Scotland (Curriculum for Excellence) and builds upon the work already done in schools by police officers, enabling positive relationships to also be developed with parents.

The initiative has already been nominated for an award from the Butler Trust, which recognises good practice in the prison service across the UK.

PC Tracey Gunn, Prison Liaison Officer for Police Scotland, said: "This collaborative approach was designed to help children feel comfortable when visiting HMP Edinburgh and to build strong relationships between them and police staff.

"We want to ensure that they don't just see us as the people

who've taken their relative away, but as people who will act in their best interests and who they would feel comfortable approaching if they needed to."

Gerry Michie, Deputy Governor at HMP Edinburgh, said: "HMP Edinburgh are delighted to support this collaborative operation in which we are working with our Police colleagues and the Salvation Army, who provide the daily delivery of services within our Visitors Centre.

"Organised events, such as "fun days", encourage raising awareness of the police in relation to the public and breaks down barriers where the focus is firmly on children and families.

"During these events children have had the opportunity to meet the Prison Dog, where our handlers and dogs have been available to assist building positive relationship where children can interact with our dog in an non-working role. My staff and I are fully committed to supporting future meet the Police events."

The Salvation Army aim to encourage and facilitate a dialogue between those who are visiting HMP Edinburgh and police officers, and raise awareness of the rights and responsibilities of both communities.

The Salvation Army's Edinburgh Prison Visitors Centre Co-ordinator, Kerry Watson, said: "We set out to break down the barriers and that has worked really well, we are confident that the children and their families have experienced a really positive fun day with community police and our friends in the fire service.

"This important educational initiative, identified through our parenting project at the centre, has gone a long way to reverse some of the negative comments we heard about the emergency services, our aim will be to continue to invest in this work and have similar days every six weeks."