



**WELFARE PEER TA NETWORK**  
**Bringing Hope to Children of Incarcerated Parents**  
*Nashville, TN*  
*Long Report*



## **1. Background**

The number of parents in United States prisons is growing with the increasing use of incarceration as a criminal penalty. The Bureau of Justice Statistics noted that 1.5 million children had a parent in prison in 1999, and this number is up by more than 500,000 since 1991. Because most children reside with their mothers, the impact and disruption is increasing for these children as more mothers are incarcerated. While incarcerated, many parents do not have regular interaction with their children. Thus, when it is time for release, incarcerated parents do not know how to build, or rebuild meaningful relationships with their children. Incarceration can be a time for parents to learn skills and to develop bonds with their children. Many in-prison programs exist that specifically address these issues, including programs with parenting skills, relaxed visitation policies for children, and therapeutic interventions. Research has shown that positive involvement of parents in the lives of their children helps to stabilize and strengthen families, which in turn, may help to reduce recidivism, and promote self-sufficiency.

As the new millennium advances, the plight of children impacted by parental incarceration is among the most pervasive problems challenging modern corrections. Today, more than two million children in the U.S. have a parent in prison and many more minors have experienced a father or mother in jail. Research results show that when a parent is incarcerated, the lives of their children are disrupted by separation from parents, severance from siblings, and displacement to different caregivers. Other results show that children with a parent behind bars are more likely to endure poverty, parental substance abuse, and poor academic performance. Still other results show that these children disproportionately suffer aggression, anxiety, and depression. Moreover, the children of prisoners are at greater risk for alcohol and drug abuse, a variety of problem behaviors including delinquency and crime, and subsequent incarceration at some point in their lives. These findings demand that child welfare planners and policymakers rethink strategies to bring hope to children impacted by incarceration.

Mumola (2000) conducted a study that provides a snapshot of incarcerated parents and their children. Results show that State and Federal prisons held and estimated 721,500 parents of 1.5 million children in 1999. The Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) report highlights that 336,300 U.S. households with minor children were impacted by the parental imprisonment. Other results show that prior to admission, less than half of the parents in State prison reported living with their children-44% of fathers, 64% of mothers. A closer look reveals that while incarcerated fathers cite the child's mother as the current caregiver, incarcerated mothers often refer to their

parents as primary caregivers. Still other results show that over 75% of parents in State prison reported a prior conviction and 56% report having been previously incarcerated. The report concludes that a majority of parents in prison were violent offenders or drug traffickers—and that they expected to serve 6.5 years in State prison and 8.5 years in Federal prison.

Several States expressed a desire to explore successful in-prison programs that work to unite incarcerated parents and their families. Participants were interested in a program to address such issues as parenting, anger management, conflict resolution, job readiness, and relationship building, understanding that such services would benefit the children served by providing them the opportunity to rebuild and strengthen connections with their incarcerated parents, thus fostering a positive relationship that will continue following release from prison.

In response to these requests, the Welfare Peer TA network designed the *Bringing Hope to Children of Incarcerated Parents* Roundtable. The first Roundtable was held in Denver in November 2003. This second Roundtable showcased promising practices from around the country, and provided plenty of time for participants to think strategically about how to design and implement these programs as well as opportunities to learn about and discuss “what works” in serving this population. Participants included representatives from the States of Tennessee, Florida, Kansas, Missouri, and Oklahoma. Roundtable speakers included State and local government agencies, service providers, practitioners, Federal personnel, and leaders of national organizations.

## **2. National Trends in Incarceration: Implications for Families Dually Involved with TANF & Corrections**

Setting the stage for the roundtable discussion, this presentation familiarized participants with national trends and characteristics among prisoners, ex-prisoners, and their children. Roundtable participants shared perspectives from their professional experience and varied state and local communities. In addition, participants discussed the implications of incarceration for families dually involved with corrections and TANF.

### *Corrections in Crisis*

American prisons at the beginning of the twenty-first century are in crisis. Perhaps the most pervasive problem challenging modern corrections is the ominous nexus of overburdened prison systems and record numbers of prisoners returning to communities each year. Today, exponential increases in incarceration have resulted in more than two million prisoners and well over a half million ex-prisoners reentering communities each year. Other challenges include escalating confinement costs in an economic climate of increasing demand for services and declining resources. Moreover, two million children in the U.S. have a parent in prison and many more minors have a parent in jail.

### *Prisoners in 2002*

The United States incarcerated 2.1 million persons at yearend 2002. This total represents a 2.6% annual increase in the number of persons held in Federal and State prisons (1,361,258), territorial prisons (16,206), local jails (665,475), Immigration and Naturalization Service facilities (8,748), military facilities (2,377), jails in Indian country (1,912), and juvenile facilities (110,284). During the same period, the rate of incarceration in prison was 701 inmates per 100,000 U.S. residents, or 1 in every 143 U.S. residents in prison or jail. At yearend 2002, State prisons were operating at as much as 17% above capacity and Federal prisons were operating at 33% above capacity. Table 1 presents data on the number of prisoners held in Federal or State prisons or in local jails over the past several years.<sup>1</sup>

<b>Table 1.</b>					
<b>Number of Prisoners Held in State or Federal Prisons or in Local Jails: 1995-2002</b>					
Year	Total inmates in custody	Federal	State	Inmates in Jail on June 30	Incarceration Rate
1995	1,585,586	89,538	989,004	507,044	601
1996	1,646,020	95,088	1,032,440	518,492	618
1997	1,743,643	101,755	1,074,809	567,079	648
1998	1,816,931	110,793	1,113,676	592,462	669
1999	1,893,115	125,682	1,161,490	605,943	691
2000	1,937,482	133,921	1,176,269	621,149	684
2001	1,961,247	143,337	1,180,155	631,240	685
2002	2,166,260*	151,618	1,209,640	665,475	701
Percent change 2001-2002	3.7%	5.8%	2.5%	5.4%	
Average Annual Increase 1995-2002	3.6%	7.8%	2.9%	4.0%	

Source: U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics, Bulletin, *Prisoners in 2002*, July 2003. Note: \* represents the overall total.

### *Probation and Parole in 2002*

The correctional population also includes more than 4.7 million adult men and women on probation or parole at yearend 2002. This total represents a record high in the number of U.S. residents being supervised in the community. As the new millennium advances, the total Federal, State, and local adult correctional population, including those incarcerated and those being supervised in the community, has reached a new high of 6.7 million. At the end of 2002, about 3.1% of the U.S. adult population, or 1 in every 32 adults, were incarcerated or on

<sup>1</sup> U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics. *Prisoners in 2002*. Washington, DC.

probation or parole. Table 2 presents data on the number of persons under adult correctional supervision.<sup>2</sup>

<b>Table 2. Persons Under Adult Correctional Supervision</b>					
Year	Total Estimated Correctional Population	Community Supervision		Incarceration	
		Probation	Parole	Jail	Prison
1995	5,342,900	3,077,861	679,421	597,044	1,078,542
1996	5,490,700	3,164,996	679,733	518,492	1,127,528
1997	5,734,900	3,296,513	694,787	567,079	1,176,564
1998	6,134,200	3,670,441	696,385	592,462	1,224,496
1999	6,340,800	3,779,922	714,457	605,943	1,287,172
2000	6,445,100	3,826,209	723,898	621,149	1,316,333
2001	6,581,700	3,931,731	732,333	631,240	1,330,007
2002	6,732,400	3,995,165	753,141	665,475	1,367,856
Percent Change 2001-02	2.3%	1.6%	2.8%	5.4%	2.8%
Average Annual Percent Change 1995-2002	2.8%	3.1%	1.5%	4.0%	3.5%

Source: U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics, Bulletin. *Probation and Parole in the United States, 2002*. August 2003.

### *Prisoner Reentry*

Over the past two decades, exponential increases in incarceration have resulted in more than two million prisoners and over 600,000 ex-prisoners reentering communities each year. Research findings reveal a trend toward record numbers of prisoners returning home having spent longer terms behind bars. Other findings suggest that returning prisoners are less prepared for life on the outside and that assistance in their reintegration is inadequate.<sup>3</sup> Still other findings indicate that most prisoners returning home have difficulties reconnecting with families, housing, and jobs—and many remain plagued by substance abuse and health problems.<sup>4</sup>

### *Breaking the Cycle*

Today, repeat criminal behavior is among the most troublesome issues facing corrections planners and policymakers. Rising recidivism rates among returning prisoners raise public safety concerns. Langan and Levin (2002) in a study of the rearrest, reconviction, and reincarceration of prisoners tracked 272,111 former inmates for 3 years after their release in 1994. Results show that 67.5% of released prisoners were rearrested for a felony or serious

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics. *Probation and Parole in the United States, 2002*. Washington, DC.

<sup>3</sup> The Urban Institute. *From Prison to Home: The Dimensions and Consequences of Prisoner Reentry*, 2001.

<sup>4</sup> U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, National Institute of Justice. *When Prisoners Return to the Community: Political, Economic, and Social Consequences*, 2000.

misdemeanor within 3 years. Other results show that rising recidivism translates into thousands of new victimizations each year—46.9% of released prisoners were convicted of a new crime and 25.4% were resentenced to prison for a new crime. In addition, results show that 51.8% of released prisoners were back in prison, serving time for a new prison sentence or for a technical violation of their release (e.g. failing a drug test, missing an appointment with their parole officer, or being arrested for a new crime). Furthermore, the former inmates had accumulated 4.1 million arrest charges prior to their imprisonment and another 744,000 charges within 3 years of release. The authors conclude that the evidence was mixed regarding whether serving more time reduced recidivism.<sup>5</sup> The cycle of imprisonment among large numbers of individuals, mostly minority men, is increasingly concentrated in urban communities that already encounter enormous social and economic disadvantages.<sup>6</sup> Table 3 presents the most recent data on the number of persons leaving prison and returning to communities across the country.

<b>Table 3. Number of State and Federal Inmates Released</b>	
Year	Number of Inmates Released*
1990	423,800
1995	474,300
1996	488,700
1997	514,300
1998	546,600
1999 (projected)	565,700
2000 (projected)	600,000

Source: U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics. *State and Federal Prisoners Returning to the Community*. April 2000. Note: \* Inmates with sentences of > than one year only.

### *Collateral Consequences*

The increasing volume of returning prisoners has severe consequences for public safety, state budgets, and society. First, there are public safety concerns involving more than two-thirds of released prisoners rearrested for a felony or serious misdemeanor within three years of their release. Rising recidivism rates among returning prisoners translate into thousands of new victimizations each year. Second, there are fiscal implications including increasingly significant portions of state budgets invested in the criminal justice system. Exponential increases in direct expenditures for each of the major criminal justice functions (police, courts, and corrections) have resulted in States spending more on criminal justice than municipalities, counties, or the Federal government. In the current economic climate of increasing demand for services and declining resources, rising criminal justice costs have severe consequences for state budgets and

<sup>5</sup> Langan, Patrick A., and David J. Levin 2002. *Recidivism of Prisoners Released in 1994*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics. NCJ 193427

<sup>6</sup> U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, National Institute of Justice. *But They All Come Back: Rethinking Prisoner Reentry*, 2000.

social services. Research results show that during the period 1982-2001, expenditures on policing increased from \$19 billion to \$72 billion, judiciary expenditures increased from \$7 billion to \$37 billion, and corrections expenditures on corrections increased from \$9 billion to \$56 billion.<sup>7</sup> Third, there are far-reaching social costs. Prisoner reentry carries the potential for profound collateral consequences, including public health risks, disenfranchisement, homelessness, and weakened ties among families and communities.

### *Children of Prisoners*

Today, more than two million children in the U.S. have a parent in prison and many more minors have experienced a father or mother in jail. Research results show that when a parent is incarcerated, the lives of their children are disrupted by separation from parents, severance from siblings, and displacement to different caregivers. Other results show that children with a parent behind bars are more likely to endure poverty, parental substance abuse, and poor academic performance. Still other results show that these children disproportionately suffer aggression, anxiety, and depression. Moreover, the children of prisoners are at greater risk for alcohol and drug abuse, a variety of problem behaviors including delinquency and crime, and subsequent incarceration at some point in their lives.<sup>8</sup>

### *Incarcerated Parents*

Mumola (2000) conducted a study that provides a snapshot of incarcerated parents and their children. Results show that State and Federal prisons held and estimated 721,500 parents of 1.5 million children in 1999. The Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) report highlights that 336,300 U.S. households with minor children were impacted by the parental imprisonment. Other results show that prior to admission, less than half of the parents in State prison reported living with their children—44% of fathers, 64% of mothers. A closer look reveals that while incarcerated fathers cite the child's mother as the current caregiver, incarcerated mothers often refer to their parents as primary caregivers. Still other results show that over 75% of parents in State prison reported a prior conviction and 56% report having been previously incarcerated. The report concludes that a majority of parents in prison were violent offenders or drug traffickers—and that they expected to serve 6.5 years in State prison and 8.5 years in Federal prison.<sup>9</sup>

The discussion of the aforementioned findings revealed consensus among roundtable participants that among the most pervasive problems facing corrections policymakers and child welfare advocates is record numbers of children with a parent in prison. Participants concurred that the number of minor children separated by incarceration is underestimated in many state and local jurisdictions. Roundtable participants also agreed that the multiple challenges presented by

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<sup>7</sup> U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics. *Direct Expenditure on Criminal Justice by Criminal Justice Function, 1982- 2001*. Washington, DC.

<sup>8</sup> Child Welfare League of America. Federal Resource Center for Children of Prisoners. See <http://www.cwla.org/>.

<sup>9</sup> U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics. Special Report. *Incarcerated Parents and their Children, 2000*. Washington, DC.

national trends among prisoners, ex-prisoners, and their children are formidable indeed. Participants, however, shared the perspective that these challenges provide an opportunity to think more broadly about prospective partners in bringing hope to children separated by incarceration.

### **3. Spotlight on States: Promising Practices, Challenges, and Strategies for Supporting Children of Incarcerated Parents.**

During this discussion, roundtable participants focused on promising practices via identifying challenges and sharing strategies for supporting children and families impacted by parental incarceration. Roundtable participants were asked to articulate some of the primary challenges they faced when attempting to plan, fund, and provide services to support the children of incarcerated parents. The following are among the challenges and potential solutions discussed.

#### *Challenges and Solutions*

1. **Building Stable Families** – While programs supporting the children of prisoners usually focus on the reunification of families, most of these families were unstable prior to the incarceration of the parent. In reality, there is oftentimes a lack of willingness to restore interpersonal relationships among parents, and parents and children. The custodial parent has “moved on” in many instances, and continues to face many of the same challenges that the non-custodial parent will encounter upon release from prison (e.g., substance abuse, and mental health challenges). Moreover, these families in crisis typically reside in poor, urban environs plagued by the deadly nexus of guns, gangs, and drugs.
2. **Developing Parenting Skills** – Parents in prison oftentimes lack adequate interpersonal relationship and parenting skills. Moreover, parent-child relationships are often strained prior to the additional burden of incarceration is added to the mix. Developing coping, life, and parental skill sets among prisoners and ex-prisoners in preparation for family responsibilities is viewed among potential solutions. Specifically, one-on-one and family mentoring is recommended for prisoners, ex-prisoners, and their families.
3. **Child Support Enforcement** – Child support order enforcement is oftentimes a challenge even before a parental incarceration event. The accumulation of arrearages during periods of incarceration can be overwhelming for prisoners and ex-prisoners. Because non-custodial parents can request a review and adjustment of child support orders, outreach to incarcerated parents and assistance in applying for such a review is recommended. While the ultimate decision remains with the courts, some states have instituted automatic downward adjustment orders for child support providers at the point of incarceration. It is important to note that these adjustments are not an elimination of financial responsibility, but rather a temporary adjustment recognizing the limited earning capacity of the incarcerated parent.
4. **Collaboration** – The need for collaboration among agencies including corrections, child support enforcement, and other social service providers is evident. While many state and

local agencies “touch the lives” of children impacted by incarceration, bureaucracy and “turfism” are identified as barriers to data and information sharing. Effective cross-agency collaboration is viewed as a mechanism to create problem-solving partnerships.

5. Visitation – Children that grow-up without active, positive father involvement consistently rank lower on markers of child wellbeing than their peers. In cases involving parental incarceration, the location of correctional facilities can pose formidable challenges to parent-child visitation (e.g., transportation). Correctional rules and regulations that support reconnecting incarcerated parents and their children, and fostering family reunification are recommended.
6. Budget and Staff Reductions – In the current economic climate of increasing demand for services and declining resources, many states have been required to reduce both budgets and staff. A retributive justice perspective, rather than a restorative justice viewpoint, that focuses on public safety persists as a result of limited resources for prevention programs. The need for partnerships with faith- and community-based organizations is apparent. Holistic program services tailored to meet the individual needs of prisoners, ex-prisoners, and their families are recommended.
7. Grandparents as Caregivers – Parental incarceration has resulted in increasing numbers of grandparents serving as the primary caregivers. However, there is a lack of awareness among grandparents regarding available program services and benefits (e.g., housing and respite care assistance). In many instances, program requirements and paperwork are complicated and frustrate grandparent caregivers (e.g., child custody procedures). In other instances, grandparents are not aware that they qualify for program assistance in parenting today’s children (e.g., Head Start). In still other instances, grandparents are reluctant to apply for assistance because of child support enforcement requirements on the incarcerated parent (e.g., TANF). The need for outreach to grandparent caregivers concerning available program services is evident.
8. Paradigm Shift –The need for a paradigm shift toward supporting family reunification is apparent across agencies impacting the lives of incarcerated parents and their children. A cultural change required to change policies, practices, and procedures (e.g., the accumulation of child support arrearages while parents are in prison). While changes in philosophy are not expected to address all issues related to incarcerated parents, a shift in thinking can bring hope to children and families impacted by incarceration (e.g., telephone systems in correctional facilities are not cost prohibitive).
9. Public Safety Perceptions – Rising rates of recidivism among returning prisoners raise public safety concerns. While a felony conviction is a barrier to employment and housing, “doing time” is also an obstacle to reconnecting with children and families. In an effort to overcome fears related to personal safety, individual and family counseling services are recommended. Support groups for incarcerated parents and their children are also suggested. In addition, victim and child welfare advocates advise increasing in-prison and aftercare program services to develop skill sets, and the expanded use of the Federal Bonding program.

#### **4. Relationship Education: A Department of Corrections Experience**

##### *Background*

The Oklahoma Marriage Initiative (OMI) was launched in 1999 with a focus on strengthening marriage and reducing divorce in the state. The overarching goals of the initiative are to reduce the divorce rate, out-of-wedlock births, alcohol and drug addition, and child abuse and neglect. To meet these goals, Governor Keating outlined a program that includes a multi-sector approach (private, public, community, not-for-profit and religious leaders) to encouraging healthy marriages for Oklahomans that choose marriage. The comprehensive statewide program includes on-going activities to keep marriage/divorce on the public agenda, resources centers, mentoring programs, education and training programs and research and evaluation.

Oklahoma chose to fund its marriage initiative with temporary aid to needy families (TANF) dollars. The state has allocated \$10 million to its marriage initiative although they have only spent a small portion of that fund as of July 2002. OMI is open to all married and unmarried couples in the state, but is focused on serving low-income families.

A primary component of OMI is the marital and relationship training program. Studies have shown that couples can be taught critical skills that are useful for handling common relationship conflicts (e.g., money, children, chores, and sex). Oklahoma adopted the Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program (PREP curriculum) to offer free marriage and relationship counseling to Oklahomans. The program is skills-based and built on over twenty years of research. PREP is considered by many as one of the most comprehensive and well-respected programs of its kind for couples. So far, the state has trained at least 350 individuals to provide marriage and relationship education workshops all over the state.

The OMI maintains a commitment to providing participants information and skills that are pertinent to their unique situation and/or cultural background. Thus, participants can opt to attend a workshop that is designed for any number of population groups. The OMI and PREP has worked with various experts and key leaders who have contributed their specialized knowledge of specific populations to create workshop material for different groups. Additionally, since about 75 percent of marriages are conducted in a church, synagogue or other religious institutions, these entities are very much involved in OMI activities

##### *Research and Evaluation*

A second major piece of OMI is research and evaluation. The OMI spent approximately \$100,000 to contract with Oklahoma State University to conduct a survey on attitudes about marriage, divorce and family formation in Oklahoma. The survey also included the perspectives of low-income families and residents of three surrounding states (Arkansas, Kansas and Texas).

The baseline survey was released in July 2002 and reports on the attitudes and experiences of adults in Oklahoma age 18 and older. The study found that Oklahomans are more likely to have been married at some point (82%) compared to the national average (73%) and more likely to have been divorced (32%) than the national average (21%). The study also found that 85 percent of Oklahomans think a statewide marriage initiative is a good or very good idea. In addition, the baseline survey found strong support among Oklahomans to promote marriages and reduce

divorce. Results of the survey indicate that offering public education aimed at improving interactions between spouses may help couples strengthen their relationships. Results also show that respondents support strategies to encourage couples to marry at later ages. In addition, results show that respondents are in favor of premarital and pre-divorce education programs, counseling, and workshops.

### *Targeting Inmates and their Spouses*

The OMI has partnered with the Oklahoma Department of Corrections (ODOC) to promote innovative marriage and relationship-strengthening strategies among prisoners and their spouses. The ODOC adopted OMI as an important part of the continuum of services for prisoners and ex-prisoners, and children and families impacted by incarceration. The OMI/DOC partnership is a statewide public/private partnership dedicated to strengthening families and helping couples separated by incarceration gain access to services and supports to help them build and sustain healthy marriages.

The OMI/DOC Service Delivery System provides marriage and relationship education to couples and individuals, both married and unmarried. These services take the form of skills based workshops that are currently being offered by 28 chaplains in facilities across the state. The chaplains have been trained in the PREP curriculum (modified for a controlled environment) and are equipped to provide participants with a stronger, more satisfying relationship.

While the OMI/DOC workshop leaders are chaplains, it is important to note that this system is NOT about marriage counseling, but simply providing some skills to help navigate the problems and hard times that are inevitable in relationships and marriages. Skills-based marriage education provides practical tools/skills to help prisoners and their partners connect, communicate and process anger effectively. While many marriage programs are inspirational and motivational, most don't actually teach skills like active listening or offer a structure to process anger and resolve conflict. PREP Workshops, however, can help preserve the good things about a relationship as a way to prevent pitfalls.

## **5. Fathers for Life: Missouri Department of Corrections Experience**

This session highlighted Fathers for Life, a state and federally funded collaboration to strengthen connections between incarcerated fathers and their children. Roundtable participants learned about the promising demonstration program designed to help inmates in two Missouri prisons and their families gain parenting information and skills. Participants also discussed the need for similar program partnerships to promote parenting practices that both minimize harm and maximize benefits to children. In addition to increasing parenting education and support for incarcerated fathers, goals of the program include: (1) enhancing visiting experiences between incarcerated fathers and their children; (2) improving preparation of fathers for employment upon release; and (3) restoring relationships between incarcerated fathers and the mothers of their children.

### *Overview*

Nearly 12,000 fathers are incarcerated in Missouri state prisons. While 25% of fathers receive visits from their children, only 11% of those with child support orders make payments. The majority of these fathers have insufficient education and poor work histories, limiting their capacity to provide parenting, emotional, or financial support for their children upon their release. In response to the crisis, The Incarcerated Fathers Collaboration Project, Fathers for Life, was created. Fathers for Life is a Section 1115 Demonstration Grant Project funded by the Federal Office of Child Support Enforcement, Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families.

October 2001 the Missouri Division of Child Support Enforcement (DCSE) was awarded funding for the aforementioned federal demonstration project. The primary goal of Fathers For Life is to provide opportunities, resources, and supports to promote responsible fatherhood in order that fathers would assume emotional and financial responsibility of their children, both during and upon release from incarceration. Fathers currently incarcerated at the Western Reception Diagnostic and Correctional Center in St. Joseph and Central Missouri Correctional Facility in Jefferson City were offered voluntary participation opportunities. Missouri was awarded funding for the demonstration project under priority area III, Broad Collaborative Efforts and Outreach by Child Support Agencies, for programs working with incarcerated fathers. The grant amount was \$192,607, which, when added to the federal and state match, provided total project funding of \$664,164.

The Incarcerated Fathers Collaboration Project was funded as a 17-month demonstration project. An independent evaluation, provided by the University of Missouri-Kansas City, Institute for Human Development, tracked the development and implementation of all intervention components and assessed their short-term impact. The following are among the lessons learned.

### *Collaboration is the Key*

Agencies and organizations that collaborated with the Division of Child Support Enforcement in Fathers for Life included the Missouri Departments of Corrections and Elementary and Secondary Education, the Division of Workforce Development, the University of Missouri-Columbia's ParentLink, The University of Missouri-KC's School of Education, Parents as Teachers National Training Center, M.A.R.C.H., Inc., and the Missouri Area United Methodist Church.

### *Project Objectives and Components*

Fathers for Life has four principal objectives: (1) improve access to parenting information and referral for incarcerated fathers; (2) increase parenting education and support for incarcerated fathers; (3) improve short-term and long-term visitation experiences of incarcerated fathers and their children; and (4) increase the capacity of incarcerated fathers to provide financial support for their children.

Fathers for Life consists of the following components in each of the two facilities:

### *Installation of Parenting Corners in Visiting Areas and Lobbies*

Parenting Corners are tower/kiosk displays that provide parent education information as well as links to problem-solving supports and resources. ParentLink, affiliated with the University of Missouri-Columbia developed models appropriate for the target population, reviewed and selected literature, resources and information, and installed and provide upkeep for models. As a part of this component, the libraries located in each of the two facilities were enhanced with books, videotapes and audiotapes related to parenting and parental relationships.

### *Enhanced Child Visiting Area*

A graduate student from the University of Missouri-KC's School of Education provided consultation services to design and implement state-of-the-art, safe, developmentally appropriate environments for enhanced child visitation.

### *Group Parent Education Classes*

An introductory class, entitled Proud Parents, informed participants of the components of Fathers For Life, and provided information about three topics: (1) a father's rights and responsibilities; (2) communicating with his child's mother; and (3) bonding with his child. Long Distance Dads, a 12-week group parent education curriculum, developed by the National Fatherhood Initiative, was also offered. Long Distance Dads deals with topics such as communication, relationships with the other parent, anger management and role modeling. The original curriculum was revised for this project to include the topics of marriage, communication/mediation and bonding/attachment.

### *Group and Individual Sessions with a Parent Educator*

The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education worked through the Parents as Teachers National Center to hire and train staff using adapted Parents as Teachers curriculum to offer group and individual sessions to participants. When appropriate, Parents as Teachers services were also offered to the other parent and child/children through their local school district elsewhere in the state.

### *Mediation*

Prior to release, mediation between the incarcerated father and the other parent was offered, when appropriate. Mediation focuses on the development of parenting plans to address issues that include a father's parenting time with his children.

### *Parents Fair Share*

Parents Fair Share, a Division of Workforce Development non-custodial parent employment program, worked with current work readiness activities offered by Department of Corrections to enhance and expand opportunities for fathers to progress toward financial self-sufficiency upon release. Group Parent's Fair Share informational sessions were held regularly and eligible offenders were offered enrollment into the program prior to release. It was expected that this component would lead to improved financial support for their children.

### *Relationship Enrichment Skills Training*

Parents who are planning to share the same household in the future were offered an opportunity to learn and practice new ways of talking with each other. The skills they learn will allow them to be better understood and better able to solve problems. Both parents met privately with a trained marriage enrichment leader couple.

### *Transportation*

The Missouri Area United Methodist Church provided transportation to the other parent/caregiver and the children for family visits. In addition, they offered transportation for the spouse or other parent to participate in other program components, such as mediation and the relationship skills sessions.

### *Site Coordination*

A site coordinator was selected for each demonstration site. The site coordinator, contracted by ParentLink, organized the available services and publicized them to interested participants.

In general, the discussion of Fathers for Life involved the need for collaborative fatherhood initiatives that improve outcomes for the children of prisoners. Specifically, roundtable participants discussed whether and under what circumstances the provision of comprehensive parenting support during incarceration significantly improves the parenting provided by incarcerated fathers to their children. Participants concurred with results of the program evaluation reporting that the addition of individualized, multi-faceted services appear to improve the short-term capacity of incarcerated fathers to more effectively parent their children, and potentially improve long-term outcomes for both incarcerated parents and their children.

## **6. Nashville Panel: Volunteers, Faith, and Service to Improve Outcomes for Prisoners, Ex-Prisoners and their Children**

The following briefly summarizes a Roundtable session highlighting the efforts of three innovative local initiatives: (1) TDOC Volunteer Services; (2) Reconciliation Ministries; and (3) Parents in Prison. Roundtable participants learned that the TDOC Volunteer Services is committed to engaging and equipping volunteers to assist prisoners, ex-prisoners, and their families. In line with that commitment, TDOC Volunteer Services is partnering with the Amachi Program. This partnership relies on caring, adult volunteers from community- and faith-based organizations to mentor the children of prisoners.

Participants also learned that Reconciliation Ministries has historically delivered hope to children and families impacted by incarceration. Reconciliation provides overnight lodging, hospitality center, children's center in visiting area, self-help support group, information, referrals, gifts for children, public education and advocacy. *Reconciliation* also works to reduce recidivism by strengthening relationships between those who are incarcerated in the Tennessee prison system and their families. In addition, Reconciliation offers support groups for children, teens and adults who have an incarcerated parent or spouse, a guest home for individuals traveling to visit relatives in Middle Tennessee prisons, and advocacy for prisoners and their family members.

In addition, participants learned that Parents in Prison provides a variety of services to support prisoners and their children. Among these services is the provision ...

The roundtable discussion placed emphasis on the need for similar programs to improve outcomes for children impacted by incarceration.

## 7. When Mom Goes to Prison: Dwight Correctional Facility

For thirteen Saturdays between Memorial Day and Labor Day, Dwight Correctional Center, a maximum-security prison in Dwight, IL, offers a 5-hour day camp to offenders and their minor children. The goal of the program is to provide an opportunity for incarcerated mothers to either begin or continue the process of reconnecting with their children in a non-intimidating atmosphere. Mr. Dan Gibbons, Director of the Day Camp program, observes:

*It is not about the mother, it is about the kids. I am a firm believer that the kids do time as well, and I think harder time. You know by law, we have to feed these women three times a day—give them clothing, shelter, and good medical care. That's by law, and these kids don't enjoy those same amenities on the outside. So for me the program is about the kids.*

There are five steps to success for the Day Camp model:

1. **Qualification** – set criteria, take applications, read Master File to approve or deny
2. **Permission** – if accepted, caregiver must agree to allow child/children to participate
3. **Transportation** – determine whether family member can transport, or if volunteer organization should be involved (faith-based)
4. **Transition** – one phase if family transport, two phases if volunteer transport
5. **Separation** – use subtle distractions to ease the “good-bye”

Each of these steps is described below

### *Qualification*

A bulletin is posted at all housing units, with information on how to apply and staff make sure applications are available (via counselors, chaplain, Family Services Dept.) Upon receiving the application, program staff must read the Master File to determine if an applicant qualifies.

Several criteria must be met, including:

- Offender must be natural birth mother of child
- Offender's crime cannot have been committed against a child
- Offender's crime cannot have been committed in the presence of a child
- Offender cannot have a child neglect or abuse crime in her past
- Offender cannot have an open child case
- Offender must be eligible for a “contact” visit (not in segregation)

### *Permission*

Once eligibility is determined, the Day Camp Director will phone the family member or caregiver, explain the purpose and workings of the program. It is important to gain the trust and

respect of the caregiver, and to eliminate reluctance for them to allow the child to be “inside the walls”.

### *Transportation*

Determine if the family member or caregiver can transport. If yes, select a Saturday. Notify them what the child can and cannot bring with them. Find out if there are any special medication needs (i.e., asthma pump, insulin). Stress drop-off and pick-up times. If child/children need outside transportation, offender will fill out a separate application (see section on faith-based, below).

### *Transition*

Mr. Gibbons stressed the criticalness of the Program Director developing a relationship with the children and the family member immediately. There are several reasons for this, including:

- Program Director and the family have never met. The only contact has been by phone.
- Program Director is the first person families and children meet not wearing a uniform.
- Perimeter patrol met families and children in the parking lot.
- Correctional Officers in the Gatehouse sign families and children in and pat them down.
- Electronically controlled doors, high fences, and rolling razor wire surround families and children.
- The caregiver is handing their child/children over to Program Director, to enter a maximum-security facility.

The guiding principal is that this is a very intimidating environment and everything that can reasonably be done to make it easier for families and children should be done. According to Mr. Gibbons, “gain their trust and you will remove the intimidation factor.”

### *Separation*

The end of the day can be emotional for both child and mother. Use distractions to ease the separation. One tactic that has been successful is to draw children into a game of trying to figure out what the end of the day surprise treat is. These distractions should, first and foremost, prevent the child from seeing the electronic door close in front of the mother.

### *Faith-Based Organizations*

Faith-based organizations can play an important role in supporting programs like a Day Camp. At Dwight Correctional Center, Lutheran Social Services of Illinois (LSSI) is the main resource for providing drivers for families that lack transportation to the prison. Church Women United (CWU) assists in purchasing equipment, games, books, toys and other supplies that improve the quality of the program.

In addition to these types of resources, faith-based organizations can operate programs that augment current curricula. For instance, *Aunt Mary's Storybook* (a component of Companions, Inc.) provides an opportunity for the incarcerated mom to read a book to their child on audiocassette. The child can take the new book and tape home with them at the end of the day, and listen to mom's voice and message at any given time.

**8. State Action Planning** *State representatives will use this time to strategize responses to remaining challenges, based on the experiences shared at this Roundtable. Participants will share ideas and strategies for addressing challenges to serving families separated by incarceration. States will draw connections between challenges articulated at the start of the day, and new solutions.*

### **Action Planning Session**

At the conclusion of the Roundtable, participants were asked to brainstorm short-term, realistic action steps they could take to bring hope to the children of incarcerated parents. Among the items cited by the group are:

- 1. Bring together appropriate partners** – Participants expressed the need to have appropriate partners (human services, corrections, child welfare, advocates, legal community) at the table as they plan initiatives and services targeted to children with incarcerated parents. They hoped to invite these partners to their meetings.
- 2. Attend meetings/events of potential partners** – As above, participants are exploring new ways to partner to serve this vulnerable population. By inviting potential partners to join currently underway initiatives, they hope to build bridges across agencies and departments and into the community. Recognizing the value of “meeting people on their own ground,” however, participants also highlighted the importance of attending the meetings of those with whom you would like to partner, and not merely expecting them to come to you.
- 3. Host a Policy Academy on reentry** – Participants are excited about the idea of working with their partners to design and host a Policy Academy on issues around reentry (family connections, employment, emergency services).
- 4. Conduct outreach/education campaigns** – Lack of awareness and understanding of available services seemed to be at the core of many of the challenges described by Roundtable participants. As such, participants will explore different venues for outreach/education, including with the judicial community, internal agency staff, and inmates and ex-offenders and those that serve them.
- 5. Develop a resource manual** – Resource manuals have been created in the past, but are challenged by rapidly shifting information. Participants explored the possibility of developing an online manual or exploring other types of technology that might facilitate information and referral and service integration.
- 6. Learn from CCF competitive grants** – Recognizing that significant change without additional resources is often challenging, participants discussed strategies for accessing additional funding. One strategy was to develop a clear understanding of the priorities of the available funding streams, such as the Compassion Capital Fund (CCF) grants.
- 7. Access Federal resources** – Excited by Ms. Pontisso’s presentation, participants highlighted the value of accessing both Federal funding streams and Federal resource people who have unique insight and may provide additional guidance and/or inroads into programming for Federal prisons.
- 8. Think strategically at all points** – Participants noted the importance of asking strategic questions, such as: “what are the expected outcomes?” and “where can we leverage the most change for the fewest resources?”

## **Conclusion**

This Roundtable brought together many stakeholders interested in improving services and bringing hope to children with incarcerated parents. The insights offered by the presenters and the enthusiasm and dedication from the participants combined to create an interactive session with significant positive outcomes. The Welfare Peer Technical Assistance Network (<http://peerta.acf.hhs.gov>) received very strong evaluations of the event (see Appendix C), and positive anecdotal feedback as well.

Children facing the incarceration of a parent bear tremendous burdens and face significant risks for negative childhood and adult behavioral and economic outcomes. Despite these challenges however, hope is not lost. Programs and services targeted to this population are in operation and various stages of development around the country. New information is gained everyday about what works and how services can be improved. This type of event is one strategy for sharing information and working together to bring hope to the children of incarcerated parents.

