

Parenting Connection

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Helping Kids Visit Parents In Prison

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By Pat Schneider The Capital Times

Children visiting their mothers at Taycheedah Correctional Institution are allowed to have three Polaroid photos taken together in the prison's visiting room, says Sandy Lott.

"It's always a big thing for the kids and mom. Some families get their picture taken every time," said Lott, executive director of Family Connections, a local nonprofit group that transports children to visit their incarcerated mothers.

Family Connections of Wisconsin will hold a training session Saturday for volunteers to accompany and lend moral support to children as they ride from Madison to Taycheedah, outside Fond du Lac. The free session will be 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. in Madison. Call 824-9190 for information. The volunteers play a carefully defined -- and yet vital -- role in the lives of youngsters whose lives have been turned upside down.

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FLCI Starts New Parenting Class

On Monday, November 22, 2004, a new parenting class started at Fox Lake Correctional Institution. Ten men were enrolled in this first class. Fox Lake minimum camp men may attend this class as well as Fox Lake medium status men. The class meets three days a week from 2 to 2:50 p.m. and will take about 4 months to complete. The staff teaching the course are Jean Eiden, Joan Knorre and Mitzi Soldner. The topics covered are; childbirth, birth control, medical care, child development, children's literature, reading to your child, taking part in your child's education, toys and the importance of play, building self-esteem, building trust, listening, setting limits, consequences, relationship skills, conflict resolution, setting goals, making contracts, fathering from a distance, handling frustration and good communication skills. The course is divided into six units and as each unit is completed, the men will have an opportunity to review and take a quiz.

Fox Lake Correctional Institution has also been the home of a popular Family Literacy course since September of 2002. This class is taught by Barb Bath, Jeanne Samson and Jean Eiden. Inmates are introduced to phonics, the structure of story, and the workings of the library. Using a small library of donated and purchased children's books, teachers model reading children's books and the inmates practice reading to a young person. At the end of the class, each inmate makes an audio recording of himself reading appropriate books. The recording is sent to a young relative with the approval of the inmate's social worker.

Both classes will help the inmates develop important parenting tools and promote literacy of both children and parents. ❖

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"It's not unusual for a child to give that Polaroid to our volunteer for safe-keeping," Lott said. "Nor is maneuvering among siblings for who gets to be next to mom in the picture, or carry it home," she said.

Dealing with joy, pain and sibling squabbles is part of the training that volunteers receive.

Family Connections trips to Taycheedah stalled last summer after the organization lost its United Way funding when that agency revamped its criteria. A core group of volunteers has stayed on and plans are to resume trips in December, said Iris Christenson, president of the Family Connections board of directors.

With funding through Families and Students Together and Madison-area Urban Ministry, the operating budget for the current fiscal year will be about \$53,000, Christenson said.

After approval from prison authorities and the inmate, children whose caretakers agree to bring them to a Madison meeting place gather with screened volunteers one Saturday a month for the trip to Taycheedah.

The family visits are a mix of emotions, said Sylvia Jones, whose children were transported through the program to visit her while she was incarcerated at Taycheedah.

"My children didn't know what to expect. They were pretty scared," Jones said.

She was sentenced to 10 years in prison after violating probation by passing bad checks while free on an earlier child abuse conviction. Jones served six years, and was released in September 2001.

Five of Jones' eight children were cared for by her sister, who brought them to visit at Taycheedah.

"It felt great to get those visits," Jones said. But the visits brought stress -- financial and emotional -- to her sister, who was struggling with her own resentment of Jones for winding up in prison. Those tensions eased a bit after Family Connections started transporting the children.

Sometimes her children were angry with her when they came to visit, Jones recalled. Sometimes they were tearful when it was time to say goodbye in a setting where prison guards put a time limit on hugs.

Rod McLean said he was a little apprehensive about volunteering for the program, but has found his involvement "more rewarding than anything I can think of."

McLean, former deputy director for the Dane County Regional Airport, is now a member of Family Connections' board of directors.

Many of the children "take a heck of a beating in their social environment," because they have a parent in prison, he said. "We can give them a bit of hope, an opportunity to be involved with their mother."

No special background is required to be a volunteer, who may be asked to make the trip only three or four times a year, McLean said. Male volunteers would be especially welcome, since most are female, he said. "I think that boys sometimes may relate to a male figure," McLean said.

Jones says she has regained the trust of her children, although "some will never forgive me for not being in their lives."

A counselor for Project Respect, a program to help prostitutes, Jones also has participated in Madison-area Urban Ministry programs for people re-entering society from prison. She is a speaker for MUM's Voices Beyond Bars program.

While in prison, she resolved not to be "Number 197229 for the rest of my life. I'm still working on that." ❖



Helpful Parenting Resources



The Happiest Baby

videotape on the calming of crying babies (5 S's)

<http://www.thehappiestbaby.com/>

Shaken Baby Syndrome

get a free video and curriculum...plus more information

<http://aboutshakenbaby.com/?OVRW=shaken%20baby%20syndrome&OVKEY=shaken%20baby%20syndrome&OVMT=standard>

Shaken Baby Syndrome Home page

<http://www.sbsplus.com/>

I am Your Child

Excellent parenting information and videos. Popular celebrities present parenting topics such as: smoking, discipline, health, etc. Videos are also available in Spanish.

<http://www.sbsplus.com/>

Fetal Alcohol Syndrome

More information available also has links to child abuse (physical and emotional) and many other topics.

<http://www.preventchildabuse.com/fas.htm>

Wisconsin's Child Abuse Prevention program

Information can be downloaded.

<http://www.preventchildabusewi.org/packet/page1.htm>

<http://www.fcnetwork.org/>

The Children's Trust Fund of WI

Literature available free - yearly. Additional information on child issues.

<http://wctf.state.wi.us/home>

The Family and Corrections Network

The mission of Family and Corrections Network (FCN) is to uphold families of prisoners as a valued resource to themselves and their communities in order that the criminal justice system, other institutions and society become supportive of family empowerment, integrity, and self-determination.

<http://www.fcnetwork.org>

SIDs and Kids Online:

Information on SIDS. SIDS home page is good also, but I find this one a little better.

<http://www.sidsandkids.org/>

Active Parenting

Books, videos, posters, etc. (Many of the institutions used the Active Parenting Books)

<http://www.activeparenting.com/>

Parenting with Dignity

Excellent DVD/Video (Spanish available)

Drew Bledsoe Foundation. Mac Bledsoe (Drew's Father) does an excellent presentation. You can download presenter and 'parent' guides from this site. DVD/Video cost - around \$75. Mac is working on a corrections curriculum.....but many correctional facilities are using this curriculum now.

<http://www.parentingwithdignity.com/index.html>

Pampers Parenting Institute

Has information on various parenting topics. Order potty training kits (video, etc), toddler transition, etc.

http://us.pampers.com/en_US/home.do



Tell Us About Your Program

The Correctional Education Association-Wisconsin has formed a Nurturing Parents Special Interest Group whose goals are to:

- ❑ Provide a vehicle for communication among staff in various institutions who are teaching or developing similar programs
- ❑ Provide an opportunity for educators to compare their programs and share ideas
- ❑ Compile a library of curriculum outlines and lesson plans to be shared
- ❑ Compile a list of videos, books, materials, and speakers that have proven to be successful with correctional clients
- ❑ Share advice on establishing Fathers'/Mothers' Fair, Parent/Child Book Projects, and other special projects
- ❑ Share information on training opportunities for parenting educators that are geared to correctional parenting instructors
- ❑ Share information to stay current with what is being done nation-wide in corrections parenting programs
- ❑ Serve as an advocate for parenting education in corrections

- ❑ Share methods that have been successful in getting dads or moms in prison to be more "dad-like" or "mom-like" and connected with their children.
- ❑ Share ways to outreach to the families of prisoners in the community
- ❑ Publicize corrections parenting programs through newsletter/newspaper articles, presentations for community groups, and conference workshops

This newsletter is one of our attempts at reaching out to all staff involved in the many Parent related programs across DOC. We hope you enjoy reading this newsletter. Your input and feedback is encouraged and appreciated. Our goal is to print a newsletter every other month. We would like any/all of you to submit articles about your classes, special projects, or any other interesting information you'd like to share. The article can be as short as a couple of paragraphs or as long as two pages. The next newsletter will be printed mid-March. Articles are due **March 1.**■

Send your articles to:

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