

Parenting Connection

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Special Committee Holds Hearings on Strengthening Wisconsin Families

The Wisconsin State Legislature created a special committee to study the Wisconsin Works (W-2) Program and the child welfare system to determine methods to improve collaboration between the two systems in order to support, strengthen, and, in some cases, reunify families.

Because it is estimated that 55% of those incarcerated are parents of a dependent under 18 and 70% of women incarcerated have children, the Committee expressed a significant amount of interest in what the Wisconsin Department of Corrections is doing and attempting to do for incarcerated fathers and mothers.

On February 7, 2007, DOC Policy Initiatives Advisor Tony Strevler was asked to represent the Department and testify before the Committee.

In his testimony Tony discussed:

- Why it is important to focus on incarcerated parents and their children.
- Current DOC programs and initiatives related to incarcerated parents and their dependent children
- Challenges/barriers to establishing or maintaining strong family relations - during and following a term of incarceration... for the parent, child, and immediate family

Tony detailed how the experience of incarceration impacts both the child and the caregiver.

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The Parenting Connection is a publication of the Parenting Special Interest Group and the Wisconsin Chapter of the Correctional Education Association.

Send articles and comments to:

Mary Dahl
Green Bay Correctional Institution
2833 Riverside Drive
Green Bay, WI 54307
Mary.Dahl@wisconsin.gov



Special Committee Holds Hearings on Strengthening Wisconsin Families (cont.)

The more unstable the child's home environment is, the more likely the child will experience these negative effects:

- Separation
- Uncertainty, anger, self-blame, stigma
- More likely to engage in...
 - Depression – suicidal behavior
 - Acting out behaviors
 - Difficulty in school and relationships with peers
 - Use of drugs and alcohol
 - Consuming of local social services
- 4-5 times more likely to end up in the criminal justice system



The effects of incarceration on the caregiver are often neglected. Caregiver experiences include:

- Emotional impact
- May not be equipped to care for the child
- May lack adequate housing
- Financial impact

Tony described the myriad of parenting programs, parent/child book projects, and parent fairs offered in adult and juvenile facilities. Approximately 1,500 – 2,000 inmates go through these programs annually.

He cited the activities of the Parenting Special Interest Group of the Correctional Education Association, including the publishing of the *Parenting Connection* newsletter.

Parenting educators Mary Knox, Michele McCaughtry, Mitzi Soldner, Cherlyn Wontor, and DeNeal Eriksen provided information which Tony incorporated into his testimony.

Check out the website <http://www.legis.state.wi.us/lc/committees/study/2006/sfam/index.htm> to listen to Tony's complete testimony. Go to February 7, 2007 and click on audio. Fast forward to about 2:35:00.



In future issues of this newsletter, more information on Tony Streveler's testimony will be presented. Articles will detail the number of parents and children affected by incarceration and the barriers to maintaining parent-child relationships.



Important Reentry List Servers

Since retiring from the Wisconsin Department of Corrections some three and a half years ago, I have been operating my consulting firm which I opened in 1992 as Art Besse and Associates LLC. I do small group facilitation conducting focus groups and especially doing strategic planning and I am a grant writer and grant writing trainer. But most of my consulting work involves REENTRY training where I work with corrections professionals, workforce development professionals, employers, juveniles in Division of Juvenile Corrections schools and community and adult offenders in the Division of Adult Institutions. I regularly teach at Ethan Allen School and annually at Lincoln Hills School and Southern Oaks Girls School. I have recently done groups for Oakhill, Racine, New Lisbon, Prairie du Chein, and Jackson Correctional Institutions.

When I retired from Wisconsin DOC, one of my concerns was how to stay current in the field of corrections. I have managed to do that by continuing many fine relationships with correctional staff and especially educators. I volunteer for the DOC, including serving on one of DOC Secretary Frank's REENTRY committees and on the Badger State Industries Strategic Planning Committee.

I also serve on a number of non-profit boards of directors, including Family Connections of Wisconsin where we bring kids to see their moms at Taycheedah Correctional Institution and soon John Burke Correctional Center. Family Connections eventually has plans to also serve Robert E. Ellsworth Correctional Center and Southern Oaks Girls School.

I am also on the board of directors of Forward Service Corporations whose services include a reentry program based at Lincoln Hills School, serving boys returning to Brown County, and an anti-dropout juvenile delinquent mentoring program utilizing mentors in several central Wisconsin counties.

This leads me to the kernels of this article. They are invaluable list serves which I hope the members of CEA and the Parenting Special Interest Group will take advantage of. These four most valuable list serves provide national and Wisconsin information on grant availability, changing laws that positively or negatively effect REENTRY, demonstration programs of proven effectiveness, newsletters, upcoming conferences, training sessions, etc.

The key free list serves are:

- join.reentry@listserve.etr.org
- www.hirenetwork.org
- <http://capwiz.com/wcctmlmsignup/> (especially of interest to Division of Juvenile Corrections in Wisconsin)
- <http://peerta.act.hhs.gov/emaila.htm> (especially of interest to Fatherhood advocates)

For more information on my business or follow-up on anything in this article please contact me at artbesse@netzero.net or see my webpage at www.artbesse.4t.com.

by Art Besse



Family Literacy - The Need

Family Connections Wisconsin - The Program

On February 17, 2007 Family Connections Wisconsin (FCW) implemented a family literacy reading program at Taycheedah Correctional Institute (TCI) as an expansion of its existing child/mother visitation and relationship building program for incarcerated mothers and their children. Below is a brief synopsis stating the need for such a program, as well as, a brief description of the newly implemented Reading Connections program itself.

There are many studies and statistics documenting the correctional population's need for literacy education. Depending on the source cited, reading levels for the incarcerated are low. Generally speaking, a majority of offenders read below the 9th grade level. To the credit of many dedicated correctional education staff, much work and effort goes toward addressing the immediate educational needs of inmates. However, because of the structure and isolating nature of prisons, and through no fault or lack of effort on the part of correctional educators, education of inmates often takes place in an institutional vacuum void of physical social connections to inspirational aspects of human life, such as one's children. A literacy program that associates learning to read with the positive feelings of a mother/child's love may also help increase the motivation for learning.

The effect of this isolation on the incarcerated parent is difficult, and many people say that this is an intended function of punishment - it is prison after all and this is the price one pays for breaking the law. And so it is, but what of the unintended consequences? What effect does incarceration have on the lives of the children of the incarcerated? What becomes of them and their life chances? What happens if mom is not around to read a bed time story, to put an arm around her child's shoulder as they turn the pages together and discover the world available - the world that is possible- through reading and education?

There is little research in the area of how the incarceration of a parent affects the socialization and life chances of their children. However, what is known is that children who grow up poor and without early supportive access to reading and education (a description that fits many children of the incarcerated) tend to struggle and fall behind in school, which sets them back for life. Many children of incarcerated parents grow up poor and without the positive socializing influences that help them develop the social and educational skills needed to provide them with the life opportunities that so many others in society take for granted. This inequitable situation is akin to all America's children having to run a 100 yard "educational" dash, and most of them get to start at the starting line, but the children whose parents are incarcerated are left outside the stadium, having to struggle just to get in and get to the starting line.

Although there is no silver bullet solution for addressing the harm done to the children of the incarcerated - the "collateral damage" if you will, of our correctional system - there are strategies that may help reduce the risk of the children being "lost to the system" and becoming a part of the "revolving door" of our burgeoning criminal justice system.

In the spirit of finding such a strategy, Family Connections of Wisconsin, Inc. (FCW), a small non-profit agency based in Madison, that since 2000, has provided opportunities for children to



maintain and strengthen family relationships affected by incarceration has recently implemented a family literacy reading program.

The goals of the reading program are several: One, help develop and maintain a positive, healthy relationship between mother and child. Two, foster a life-long love for reading/learning in both the mother and child. Three, continue to build a supporting network of community resources that facilitates the efforts of dedicated correctional educational staff - helping to ensure that prison educational program efforts move beyond the prison walls and back into the communities where the mothers will be returning to live with their children/families.

On February 17, 2007 FCW began its family literacy program - Reading Connections - at Taycheedah Correctional Institute (TCI). Laurie Bibo, FCW Executive Director, along with several volunteers and supportive TCI staff, in particular the hard work of TCI Program Supervisor, Kalen Ruck, tape recorded four mothers reading children's books to their kids. These are mothers whose children are not able to visit in person. The book and tape (and tape player if needed) are sent to the children living in the Dane county area, where they are able to play the tape and read along in the book. Ms. Bibo follows up with each family to make sure the children receive the books and obtain any assistance they may need. An additional supportive component is a connection with the Dane County Library System, which, through Outreach Librarian Mary Driscoll, wrote an LSTA grant for the Reading Connections program and will facilitate connecting the kids and mothers to the literacy resources available at local libraries.

FCW hopes, as budget permits, to expand the Reading Connections program to include John Burke and Robert E. Ellsworth Correctional Centers. Many of the women at TCI are transferred to either Burke or Ellsworth and it is important to allow for the mother/child relationship reading connection to continue, especially as the mother nears release date.

Family literacy programs in a prison setting are not unique - there are many similar reading programs around the country. Wisconsin has several that are noteworthy and providing an essential service. What is unique about FCW's Reading Connections, however, is its emphasis on creating an integrated, community based program that meshes with existing correctional program efforts - ultimately bridging the difference between what is learned inside the prisons to the world where inmates will return to outside of the prisons.

FCW would like to thank the wonderful staff at the Wisconsin Department of Correction's without whose support and confidence our family literacy program and mother/child positive relationship building would not be possible. Although many staff have helped, the assistance of Warden Anna Boatwright, Program Supervisor Kalen Ruck, Library Services Coordinator Vibeke Lehman, Education Director Gary Grueter and Librarian Mary Wood are of note. Additionally, the support of Dane County Outreach Librarian, Mary Driscoll, has likewise been instrumental in making the Reading Connections program a reality.

For more information on FCW and our Reading Connections program please contact Executive Director Laurie Bibo lbibo11@gmail.com or Board Members Mike Exum mrexum@sbcglobal.net or Art Besse artbesse@netzero.net. Also, look for us at the May 7th CEA-Wisconsin State Conference - we hope to be there!

By: Mike Exum, Family Connections of Wisconsin



Guidelines for Disciplining Children Who Have Been Abused

Many offenders had been the victims of abuse when they were growing up. Many offenders have abused their children. The lack of good parental models makes it difficult for these parents achieve the right balance when disciplining their children.

The Awareness Center at the Cornell University Law School has made the following set of guidelines available in an effort to advance understanding in this area. According to the Awareness Center, this is 'fair use' material which may be distributed without profit for educational purposes.

Cheri Wontor, a teacher at the Milwaukee secure detention Facility, provided this article.

Disciplining children who have been abused can be a real challenge! And while there is no single method which has been proven to work for all children, the following tips represent what mental health professionals who work with and/or study child behavior have learned.

Using the discipline techniques outlined in this article, in combination with what you already know about your child(ren), will help you to develop the best and most effective way to set appropriate limits. Remember children learn best when you practice consistency in your discipline techniques.

Tip #1

Physical means punishments are inappropriate, ineffective, and harmful to children!

This includes spanking, hitting, pinching, whipping, slapping . . . Spanking children teaches them that violence is an acceptable way to deal with problems. There is a fine line between spanking and abuse. In addition, it simply does not work. Children, especially children who have been physical and/or sexually abused, often have learned how to dissociate themselves from pain. Basically, being hit or hurt in some way is nothing new to abused children. Spanking is also tremendously humiliating for your child. No child should be made to feel that way -- it leads to shame and low self esteem, which in turn lead to further behavior problems. Spanking kids can lead to a vicious cycle. Hitting children is a way to take out your anger on a child (this should never be the guiding emotion behind any punishment). In short, spanking benefits the spanker more than the spanked. When you feel like hitting a child, go into another room, hit a pillow instead. Once you've cooled down, then you'll be ready to go back and deal with the child.

Tip #2

Positive reinforcement works wonders. It is much easier to increase a positive behavior than it is to decrease a negative one. In simple terms, that means if you lavish praise on your children when they do well, they will continue to do the right thing. It is much easier to get a child to "keep up the good work", than to get a child to stop doing something which gives him/her lots of negative attention. But if you give lots of attention all the time, the child won't feel they need to seek it. Remember children thrive on attention (either positive or negative attention).

Tip #3

Use the time out method. If you isolate a child for a certain amount of time when he or she gets a little unruly, it gives him/her a chance to cool down. If a child is misbehaving, give a warning that he/she will need to go to a "time out", if the behavior does not stop. The most important part of the warning is following through with the warning. If the behavior does not stop, send the child to a chair or a corner for a few minutes (depending on the child's age . . . 1 minute for each year). Use a kitchen timer to make sure the



time out is exactly as long as you say it will be. One important lesson learned by giving a warning prior to "time out", is that the child learns there are choices in one's life.

If you spank a child, you teach him/her violence. If you yell at a child, you teach him/her shame. If you use choices and fair, NONVIOLENT consequences, you teach the child that he/she has power to effect his/her own life, and that he/she can make a choice to behave or not to behave (and suffer the consequences of a "time out").

Too Much Pressure?

1. Take some deep breaths. Remember, you are the adult.
2. Remember that good parenting must be learned and, at times, is very demanding. It's okay to ask for help to improve your parenting skills.
3. Close your eyes and think about what you want to say. Don't just say the first thing that comes to your mind.
4. Put your child in a 'time-out' chair (one minute for each year of age).
5. Think about why you are angry. Does the situation call for such a reaction?
6. Phone a friend.
7. Splash water on your face.
8. Turn on some music.
9. If someone can watch your child, take a short walk.

Communication Tips

1. Gently touch your child before you speak.
2. Say their name.
3. Speak in a quiet voice.
4. Look at your child in the eye so you can tell if he/she understands.
5. Bend or sit down-get on your child's level.
6. Give children the same courtesy and respect you give your adult friends.
7. Encourage talking by asking about your child's day or asking his opinion about important
8. things.
9. Children are never too young or too old to be told "I love you".

Praise

Find opportunity to praise your child, it is the best way to encourage good behavior. Be observant and you will find many.

Ways to praise your child:

1. Way to go.
2. I'm proud of the way you did that.
3. Thank you.
4. I knew you could do it.
5. Good job.
6. Excellent.
7. I trust you.
8. You mean the world to me.
9. Beautiful work.
10. I love you.
11. Well done.
12. Good for you.
13. You're terrific.
14. Great discovery.



15. Fantastic work.
16. Job well done.

Children need discipline

1. Discipline is not punishment. It is a way to teach a child appropriate behavior.
2. Set reasonable, clear and consistent rules and limits. Do not change from day to day.
3. Ignore negative behavior. Children 'act up' to get attention.
4. Let children help with your daily activities and give them responsibilities that fit their capabilities.
5. Show children how to correct what they've done wrong, by apologizing, cleaning up, etc.
6. Determine appropriate discipline for misbehavior.
7. Change the environment. Remove the child from the situation.
8. Talk to your child about self control and how to make better choice
9. Avoid yelling. Speak in a clear, serious tone of voice.
10. Rejection, Withdrawal of affection, or preferential treatment of one child over another can be as
11. damaging as physical abuse.

If you say "NO" too much, it loses impact.

1. Try words other than "no" like "stop", "oh", or "wait".
2. Call your children by name when warning them.
3. Explain the situation to them.
4. Anticipate conflicts and address them before they happen.
5. Suggest alternatives to unacceptable behavior. Explain you love them, but there are problems with
6. their behavior.
7. Listen to your children. You may change your mind.

Edited by Vicki Polin, MA, ATR, LCP

Education for All – Including Parents

The title of the Region III & IV CEA Conference to be held on April 18-20, 2007 at the Best Western Kelly Inn, Yankton, South Dakota is "Education for All". It will include a workshop "Nurturing Parents to Be Nurturing Parents that will be presented by DeNeal Ericksen, Jerry Bednarowski, and Peggy Meyers.

Nationwide, more than 2 million children have a parent incarcerated in prison or jail. In this workshop, programs that have been designed by correctional educators to teach parenting skills and encourage incarcerated parents to maintain positive relationships with their children will be described. A parenting curriculum that is adaptable to a variety of settings and effective instructional methods and resources will be presented. Projects which supplement parenting education, including Parent/Child Literacy Projects, Parent Support groups and Parent Fairs, will be also be described.



The conference planning committee has also scheduled time for Special Interest Groups to meet. During this time, the CEA Parenting Special Interest Group will detail the services it provides. Participants will have the opportunity to discuss ideas they have for the Parenting SIG and can sign-up to become part of the Parenting SIG mailing list.



InsideOut Dad Program Tackles Challenge

The challenge of fathering from behind bars is clear. Physical barriers, long absences, and deep family wounds make it difficult for men to fulfill their responsibilities to their children while incarcerated. Upon release from prison, fathers can have a difficult time readjusting to life with family and friends.

To address these challenges, the National Fatherhood Initiative has launched its InsideOut Dad curriculum.

InsideOut Dad is a curriculum for incarcerated fathers that bridges the gap between the inmate father and his children. Through the program, inmate dads deal with their past in order to discover their futures --- and the possibility that they can parent differently from their own, often absent, fathers.

InsideOut Dad consists of 12 one-hour core sessions designed to address the specific needs of incarcerated fathers. The curriculum is modeled closely after NFI's successful 24/7 Dad curriculum, and includes 24 optional sessions that coordinate with the core topic areas. These sessions allow facilitators the flexibility to add to their program --- which makes InsideOut Dad ideal for use in both short and long-stay facilities.

The 12 core topics are:

- Ground Rules
- About Me (Self-Awareness)
- Being a Man
- Spirituality
- Handling Emotions
- Relationships
- Fathering
- Parenting
- Child Development
- Discipline
- Fathering From the Inside
- Closing

An optional topic, "Reentry: Being a Dad on the Outside," is also included.

Involved fathers are important to their child's development and well-being. There is evidence that connecting fathers to their children and families reduces recidivism and helps to end the intergenerational cycle of incarceration that plagues many communities. This is the goal of the InsideOut Dad program.

NFI's fathering programs are currently operating in over 25 states.

To find out more about the InsideOut Dad curriculum, contact NFI at 301-948-0599 or corrections@fatherhood.org.



Teens' Letter to Parents

Here is the text of the letter Oshkosh Teens Speaking Out has written and is distributing to parents in that community:

Dear Mom, Dad or Guardian:

You need to know I appreciate you. I know I don't show it all the time and it's probably easier to let me get away with things, than for you to stand your ground. BUT PLEASE STAND UP FOR ME. You're right, the world has changed, and I need your help and support to be successful. So, I've gotten together with some of my friends and made a list of all the things that are really important to me. Yes, they are the very things I fight against. However, I know they are important and they will help you parent me in today's world.

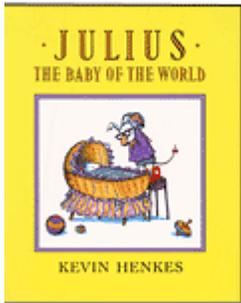
- Tell me you love me.
- My nasty comments - don't take them personally.
- Encourage or even force me to participate in one extracurricular activity.
- Make me do chores - it teaches me responsibility.
- Let's eat meals together and talk during meal time.
- If I do something wrong give me a logical consequence and don't let me off the hook.
- Set ground rules - expect me to follow them.
- Teach me how to say "NO" - by saying "NO" to me.
- Trust me most of the time ... check up on me once in a while.
- Get to know my friends and their parents too.
- Talk to me about God and faith.
- Whispering is more effective than yelling.
- Understand that I am not perfect - be patient.
- Let my dreams be different from yours.
- Continue to follow your dreams - what a great role model you'll be!
- Talk things out instead of using physical or emotional tactics.
- Talk to me, ask me questions - Create "Forced Family Time."
- Realize that times have changed, and your parenting skills are important to my success.
- Teach me how to dress with respect - don't let me out of the house looking inappropriate.
- Spend time with me and show me you care - **listen** more than you talk.
- Set high standards for me. Acknowledge that my effort is worth more than my grade - have realistic expectations.
- Don't be a workaholic - be home - please be home.
- Family time is worth more to me than a big house, vacations, and other stuff.
- Drink responsibly - remember I'm watching what you do.

Please take this seriously. I know it will be hard because I am going to rebel. It's what we do to grow up and reach our independence. But what you expect out of me - I'll expect out of life. Even if I don't seem to like it now - I'll appreciate it later and the world will be a better place because of parents like you.

Love,
Your Child



Julius is the Baby of the World **Comes to Ellsworth**



The Racine Public Library and the Racine Choral Arts Society are planning a program that will celebrate the 75th anniversary of the first preschool storytime in the United States, which was held at the Racine Public Library.

Since people began to communicate with each other, “Tell me a story” has been a request of both children and adults. Storytelling is one person telling others of something. The story can be of a real event or it can be made up. Story telling is often a part of our everyday conversations.

The book *Julius is the Baby of the World*, by Kevin Henkes, a Wisconsin children’s author, will be brought to life on October 13, 2007 for the mothers incarcerated at R. E. Ellsworth Correctional Center. What makes this event so special is that the offenders are able to share this with their children. Currently, R. E. Ellsworth and Family Connections of Madison are working together to provide transportation for the children living in the Madison area.

This event is just another in Ellsworth’s continued effort to promote family literacy. For three years, Ellsworth has offered the Motherread program to their incarcerated mothers. In Motherread participants learn to be story readers, writers, and tellers in a group structure that supports their own sense of worth and ability. These classes are appropriate for all adults, regardless of reading ability or prior educational experience. By teaching the “why” of reading rather than just emphasizing the “how”, these classes encourage incarcerated mothers to be reading role models for their children.

By: DeNeal Ericksen, Robert E. Ellsworth Correctional Center

Editorial- Mary Dahl

I wish to thank Jerry Bednarowski for all of his assistance in putting the paper together this month. I have been busy working in the kitchen due to our latest lock-down.

My year as editor is coming to an end soon. I really could not have done it without all the help of the people who have sent me articles. I know our time is busy, but when someone finds an article and shares it, it sure makes my job easier. Our mission and our viewing audience have grown considerably since the parenting newsletter was first published. It has been a real learning experience researching the internet to find out what other institutions across the country have developed to help incarcerated men and women become better parents from both behind bars and outside in the communities. I hope you have found my new findings helpful to yourselves. I am still open to suggestions on how to make this newsletter more informative or useful. There is one more paper to be done under my responsibilities, so please send me anything you wish to share.

I do hope that many of you will consider taking on the Co-Editor position for next year. The next editor, Mary Knox at the Wisconsin Resource Center, will be grateful for the help.



CEA-Wisconsin State Conference to Include Two Parenting Workshops

The Planning Committee of the CEA-Wisconsin State Conference has included two workshops focusing on parenting issues in their program. The conference which will be held at the Osthoff Resort in Elkhart Lake, Wisconsin on May 7, 2007 will include these workshops:

Incarceration from the Eyes of Children: Inside and Out

Family Connections of Wisconsin Board Members Art Besse, Laurie Bibo, and Mike Exum have the unique ability to present a workshop focusing on the life of children already incarcerated, their options now that they have chosen that pathway and how they respond given those choices. They will also present their organization's efforts to prevent children from reaching that point and what can be done to help them along a different pathway, avoiding the mistakes of their incarcerated parents.

Fresh Ideas for Parenting Classes and Support Groups

Mary Dahl, Teacher at Green Bay Correctional Institution; Mary Knox, Teacher at Wisconsin Resource Center; and Jerry Bednarowski, National Chair of CEA Parenting Special Interest Group will discuss how we all need fresh ideas for activities in our Parenting classes and support groups. The presenters will share some of the activities used in the Parenting class at Green Bay Correctional Institution and the Parenting Support Group at the Wisconsin Resource Center. They would like to hear about what other sites are doing. Participants are asked to bring ideas for speakers, activities, or materials that have been successful in their program with specific information on how to incorporate those ideas into a program. Participants will learn about the services provided by the Parenting Special Interest Group and will have a chance to sign-up to become a member of the Parenting SIG.

Anyone who would like to attend the CEA-Wisconsin State Conference may register by completing the form found in the March/April issue of the CEAW News Review newsletter or may contact CEAW President and Conference Chair DeNeal Ericksen at deneal.ericksen@wisconsin.gov. Additional details on the conference program may also be found in the March/April issue of the CEA-W newsletter

Parenting Connection
Mary Dahl – Editor
Green Bay Correctional Institution
2833 Riverside Drive
Green Bay, WI 54307

