

Parenting Connection

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Parenting Program begins at CVCTF



Since children are not packaged with instructions, many individuals (incarcerated or not) can benefit from a positive parenting program. A parenting program examining issues that caregivers face with children (birth through teens) began 09/27/04 at CVCTF. The program was well received with a starting group of eleven offenders and a waiting list for the next parenting group that grows weekly.

The offenders have the opportunity to be one of the group Dads for the session, by caring for a "Real II Baby Think-It Over Infant" during class. Just like real life, the computerized infants tend to interrupt the flow of discussion or the agenda of the group at times. The group Dads learn to multi-task (care and study), problem solve what the infant needs (diaper change, feeding, burping or just rocking) and receive support from the other men in the group.

The offenders vary from expectant fathers, infant to toddler dads, fathers of school age and teens; to

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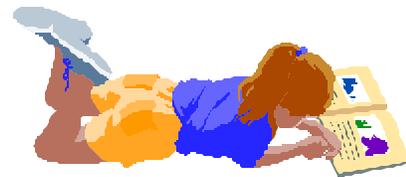
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Creating Child-Friendly Visiting

Hi, my name is Jeni Bingen and I am a Child Development and Spanish major at the University of Wisconsin- Madison. I am currently doing an internship at Oakhill Correctional Institution with the Community Connections volunteer organization. I am working with Donna Mahr, Program Coordinator and under the guidance of Jack Rice, Education Director. In 2003, Community Connections, with the leadership of a previous UW-Madison intern, assisted the Department of Corrections with the development of a child friendly environment in the visiting area. A rug, table, books, and toys were added.

Further enhancement of this area is necessary to support positive family interactions and ensure appropriate use of the existing children's corner. We also plan to make the area bilingual in English and Spanish. We are working closely with security to maintain safety while promoting family relations. Additional adult staff during visiting hours could monitor children's activities and use of supplies. Potential volunteer participation may come from university service learning students with child or family majors. We are trying to find a balance between promoting positive family engagement and providing the children with an enjoyable place to play. Please contact Jeni Bingen, jbingen@wisc.edu or Donna Mahr, ldmahr@facstaff.wisc.edu with any suggestions, resources, or insights ❖



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involved uncles. All benefit from the review of all ages and stages; from birth to teens. The effects of alcohol use by “Fathers”, not just the mothers, on the developing fetus and the long-term effects of Fetal Alcohol Syndrome on children, families and society was a real eye opener to most. The effects and prevention of alcohol and drug abuse will continue to be woven throughout the program. The program is anticipated to conclude late November, with another to follow. ❖



Ellsworth Supports Mothers

Due to the success of our first Mothers' Fair and the requests from offenders to have more activities for mothers, the education staff at Ellsworth started a Mothers' Support Group in April of 2004. The group meets on the first Wednesday of every month. Groups have been well attended. Depending on the topic, attendance at our groups range from 20 to 75 offenders (we have a population of 290).

We have covered a wide variety of topics:

April – Teenage Anatomy and Puberty – What do you need to know about your teen and sex?

Presented by Planned Parenthood

May- Keeping in Touch with Your Children While You Are Incarcerated

Presented by Barb Rasmussen

June – Making A Memory Book for Your Child – Mothers made memory books to send home to their children

Presented by Ellsworth Teachers

July – The Rights Of Parents – How can you make your child's school work for you? What rights do you have as a parent?

Presented by Donita O'Donnell

August – Kids and Books – Book selection, making reading fun, and the art of storytelling

Presented by Graham Public Library

September – Self Esteem – Learning about ways to improve self-esteem in parents and children

Presented by Ellsworth Staff

October – Community Activism – How can you help make your community a place you want to live and raise your children?

Presented by Vince Bushnell, Editor of Riverwest Currents

November – Domestic Violence and the Family – How does domestic violence effect the family and what can you do to help your kids and yourself heal?

Presented by Deborah Mejchar, Asha Family Services

Our presenters are recruited from a variety of places such as community organizations and staff from other correctional facilities, as well as, staff from Ellsworth. Reactions from all involved have been very positive.

Welcome to Our First Issue

My name is Diane Birch. I teach the Parenting Class at SCI and facilitate the Fathers Sharing Books program. I'm chairman of the Special Interest Group that compiled the "Guide to Successful Parenting Programs in Corrections". Mary Dahl from GBCI is co-chairman and Jerry Bednarowski is the education director liaison for our SIG.

This newsletter is our first attempt at reaching out to all staff involved in the many Parent related programs across DOC. We hope you enjoy reading this first 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-January. Mary, Jerry, and I look forward to hearing from you!

Diane Birch



PARENTING NEWS FROM GBCI

Presently I have 17 very interested men participating in the class. It started in early September and goes through mid December. We only meet two days a week for two hours.

We have had many exciting things happen that have not been able to be done before.

We received about 60 American Girl dolls from the Madison Children's Library for those men who are interested in sending one home. Along with that, we have started the Parenting/Books program. This has been a long time in the making here at GBCI. We have a community volunteer that is going to come in during the evening and teach the men how to read the book and then she will do the individual tapings. The hardest part now is getting books. We are looking to purchase about 150 books this year and more down the road after we get some funding. If there is anyone out there doing the Fathers and Books program that could send us a list of books or tell us where you got them from, I would greatly appreciate this.

Presently the men are making cards that they will be able to send home to their kids. The men take great pride in being able to create their own covers and sayings for the inside. Through the Parenting class they are allowed to use materials that are not otherwise available to them.

Our discussions are always very lively. So far we have covered What a Father Is? and Self-Esteem- How to Improve it. We have just begun to deal with Communication issues, our best and most controversial topic.

The men have had the opportunity to hear from several great speakers: Frank Smith from Fathers' Club in Green Bay is good because he is a former inmate and can tell them his story and tell them that they can do good on the outside. Also Herb Robinson from DOC Workforce Development provided the men

with a folder full of information about what his department could help them to do.

The men received a lot of information that they had never heard before, such as: if you were a successful worker in a BSI program while incarcerated, BSI can help you to find similar work on the outside. He also explained that there are other people like him in various parts of the state that can help them. Ex-offenders do not have to go to Milwaukee to get this help.

We also had a Child Protective lawyer come and speak to the guys. She explained how you are charged for child support along with giving them information about their paternity rights. She also met with men on some of their individual questions they might have.

We are looking forward to a social worker coming from UW-Green Bay College. She can tell the students ways to further their education when they get out. She can also give an African American's perspective on our society. She talks to the men about how they can change their thinking patterns and not necessarily return to their old neighborhoods when they are released and also about how you can raise children without having to hit or beat on them.

Another speaker that we are looking forward to is a person from the county extension that represents Family & Consumer Education. In this session she is going to talk about the growth level of children and what to expect.

When the men complete the course in December, they will be able to send to their children either a Teddy Bear made at GBCI or an American Girl doll. The only charge to the participant is the postage. The guys like this because they can actually select the item they are sending and they wrap it themselves.

The GBCI Parent Instructor is Mary Dahl, 920-432-4877- ext. 474. Contact her if you have any questions or can help me out with new ideas.



Parenting Class Helps Local Shelter

The Parenting Class students at Stanley Correctional Institution participated in a special project as part of Restorative Justice. Fourteen men in Diane Birch's class completed the artwork on sixty 12 by 12 pink and blue quilt squares. Acrylic paints were used to create the diverse designs. A number of the squares completed by the men featured original artwork, while others used stencils to create various patterns or scenes. A total of three baby quilts were made from the squares. Two of the quilts were donated to a local shelter in Eau Claire, Wisconsin. The third quilt was used as a display at the WCA Convention in Oconomowoc in September and at the GED/HSED/Literacy Conference in Appleton in October.

"If one small child is able to find comfort....the parenting class felt that they had made a difference"

The fathers in this parenting class recognized that children staying in shelters are often bewildered and frightened because of what is happening to them and their family. If one small child is able to find comfort in a nice soft quilt that they helped to make, the parenting class felt that they had made a difference.



Send Articles and Comments to:

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IMAGINE...

Imagine a place where fathers come together to read and talk about books, and through analyzing stories and characters, think through challenges that face them as fathers. **Imagine** that in this place, fathers develop better reading, writing, speaking and listening skills. **Imagine** that when they leave this place, they take with them books and ideas to share with their children by reading and talking about great children's books.

On February 10th Kettle Moraine Correctional Institution initiated its **FLORR (For the Love of Reading Relationships)** program for fathers. FLORR is a literacy program, which consists of components of reading, writing, communicating and listening. Incarcerated fathers, with children aged 1-12 years old, and on their visit, are eligible for the program.

The goals of the program are:

-  To improve fathers' literacy skills
-  To help fathers grow as parents
-  To promote family communications around important life themes
-  To increase fathers' awareness of the importance of reading to their children
-  To allow the sharing of books with children, building their emerging literacy skills
-  To serve as a preventive measure against recidivism.

It is the mission of the FLORR program to impart knowledge about children's literature in a non-threatening environment. It is hoped that fathers will gain insight into the use of literature as a tool to enhance literacy, and strengthen relationships with their children.

By: Jane Boyle, KMCI



BREAKING BARRIERS WITH BOOKS

Project Summary, 2003

OSCI Beneficiary of a Barbara Bush foundation for Family Literacy Grant

On April 27, 1996, a Barbara Bush Foundation for Family Literacy grant of \$20,283 was awarded to Dr. Margaret Genisio, a University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh, College of Education and Human Services professor, for her program to promote the sharing of books and the creation of lasting memories between OSCI (Oshkosh Correctional Institution) inmate fathers and their children. Genisio's program, "Braking Barriers with Books; A Book Sharing Program From Prison", was one of the 14 chosen from more than 450 nation-wide.

This reading program is an outgrowth of a successfully piloted Spring 1995 program at OSCI presented to seven inmate fathers and their children by the creator of the program, Dr. Margaret Genisio, a UW-Oshkosh reading instructor. The prison provided seed money and support coordinated through Ray Gielow, the OSCI Director of Education at the time.

"Common sense tells us, and the experts agree: the home is the child's first school and the parent is the child's first and most important teacher", said Mrs. Bush, honorary chair of the Barbara Bush Foundation for Family Literacy. "These 14 wonderful family literacy projects are built on that core belief, and I am very excited about their potential for making a positive impact on their communities."

The Bush Foundation grant helped purchase books for the program and video equipment that is used to produce videotapes that are sent to children when they can not make a visit.

Dr. Genisio taught the fist group of 10 inmate fathers in May and June 1996. Then Robert Bragg, OSCI Reading Teacher, and Betty Yost, OSCI Librarian, both trained by Dr. Genisio, instructed the next six groups from July 1996 through May 1997.

Specifically, seven groups consisting of 60 inmate fathers and their 129 children aged 2-11 participated in the five week, three-part program during the year that the grant was in effect (May 1996 – May 1997).

Since June 15, 1997, the program has continued to be offered at OSCI with funding from the State of Wisconsin, The Department of Corrections, and OSCI. Twenty-two more groups consisting of 168 inmate fathers and 352 children have participated in the program since June 1997. Thus, the total number of fathers and children who have participated in this program since its inception in 1995 has been 245 and 481, respectively. Only nine fathers didn't complete the program. Six of these inmates were transferred to another institution, most to partake in a class for an assessed need. This, the actual completion rate for this program is 97%. Furthermore, there is a constant "waiting list" of inmate fathers who have already applied and been accepted for the program. Currently, there are 40 inmates on the waiting list. Many of these fathers have been waiting for months to get into the next session of the class, which is offered every three months.

One other "success" of the program has been the dramatic increase of visitations with the children of the fathers who have completed this reading program, including a few from out-of-state. Several of these children have rarely seen their dads in the past. One girl had never seen her dad in person until this program. "rekindled" the relationship. And, of course, the visits always include the reading of books to the children by their incarcerated father. Thus, the "success" of strengthening the bond between the fathers and their children continues after the program is completed.

Another positive effect of the program has been the numerous comments by the fathers and by the mothers of the children about the positive changes in their children's lives, especially concerning their children's performance in school and their reading habits. Specifically, many of the

...home is the child's first school and the parent is the child's first and most important teacher....



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children are getting better grades in school and are spending a lot more time reading. The two seem to go hand-in-hand.

To maintain the bonds between our incarcerated dads and their children, each father who had taken this program in the past will be allowed to make another two-hour videotape this summer of himself reading to his children. This will re-enforce all of the lessons learned in the past as well as continue to have the fathers be seen as positive role models.

In addition, this program has been replicated at Jackson Correctional Institution in Black River Falls, WI and at Racine Correctional Institute in Racine, WI. Furthermore, many other prisons throughout the United States (Florida; Las Vegas, NV; San Quentin, CA etc.) as well as some prisons in Europe have expressed a desire to being similar programs for their inmates. Betty Yost, Bob Bragg and Dr. Genisio have had many interested prison educators from throughout the state and country either observe the program, or actually receive training in this family literacy program.

The program continues to draw interest because numerous newspapers, magazines, and television stations have featured the "Breaking Barriers With Books" program in the past few years, including Family Circle magazine (October 2002) and Readers' Digest (February 2003). We have also had segments on the ABC and NBC television affiliates in Green Bay, WI.

Betty Yost and Bob Bragg are about to being their 23rd group. The other accepted applicants will have to wait until January when the next group will begin. By then, the waiting list will be longer. The incarcerated fathers at OSCI do care about their children.

*By: Bob Bragg
OSCI Reading Teacher*

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