

Parenting Connection

Volume 7 Issue 5

March/April 2011

Strong Fathers/Strong Families Named "Promising Practice"

CASTLE (Child Abuse Services, Training, & Life Enrichment), an organization for the prevention of child abuse, operates the Strong Fathers/Strong Families program in the four Florida county jails of Martin, St. Lucie, Okeechobee and Indian River.

Based on the program's ability to demonstrate a positive impact on families, the Strong Fathers/Strong Families program was selected as a "Promising Practice" by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The CASTLE program joins an elite group of 16 chosen for this distinction out of 226 programs reviewed nationally. The review process included a thorough evaluation of the success of the program during its first two years of operation, and a site visit from a consulting team wherein program practices and outcomes were scrutinized.

The Strong Fathers/Strong Families program is designed to teach these fathers about the responsibilities of being a father and the importance to children of having a responsible father in their lives. There is no cost to the family. The program has four main components which involve the entire family:

- **Fathers' Group** – Incarcerated fathers participate in twelve weekly group sessions learning about the importance of their roles as fathers in the lives of their children. The skills of being a responsible father are taught and practiced.
 - **Mothers' Group** – Mothers participate (before the release of the father) in twelve weekly group sessions learning about responsible parenting and separation/reunification issues. Parenting skills are taught and practiced.
 - **Children's Group** – Children participate in a support group that helps them deal with separation and reunification issues that arise due to their fathers' incarceration. Children are encouraged to
- (continued on page 2)

In This Issue

- | | |
|-----|--|
| 1-2 | Strong Fathers/Strong Families Named "Promising Practice" |
| 3 | Effective Parenting Program Shows It's Never Too Late |
| 4 | New Edition of <i>Parenting from a Distance</i> Released |
| 5 | Holiday Book Project Reinforces Sense of Responsibility |
| 6 | Region III & IV CEA Conference to Include Four Parenting Workshops |
| 7 | Brain Development Basics |
| 8 | Editorial |

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:

Cheri Wontor

Milwaukee Secure Detention Facility

1015 N. 10th Street, Milwaukee, WI 53233

Cherlyn.Wontor@Wisconsin.gov

Phone: 414-225-5699

Co-Editors : Barbara E. Rasmussen, Racine
Correctional Institution

Jerry Bednarowski, CEA-Wisconsin

Proofreader : Laura Reisinger, Literacy Volunteers -
Chippewa Valley



learn about and express their feelings as well as learn about self esteem, problem solving, and anger/frustration management.

- **In-Home Parenting** – Upon the release of the fathers, families wanting to reunify receive a home based continuation of the program's services with the addition of case management services to help the family gain and keep stability.

Projected to serve 150 fathers each year, the program is seeing almost three times that number of fathers. "There is a lot of interest in this program from the men in jail. The response has been overwhelming," said Doug Borrie, Ph.D., who helps to oversee the project. "We also work concurrently with the families of these incarcerated men, so that as parents, mothers and fathers are on the same page. When these men are released, we want them to be ready to fully assume their role as fathers."

Harriet Ostertag, MA, manages the program. She sees the changes in the men first hand as a co-leader of the training groups. "As the program progresses, fathers begin to understand their roles better. We've had a dramatic increase in the number of contacts these men have with their children, as they reach out to try and establish a bond. We have men who, for the first time, are working cooperatively with the mothers of their children to provide consistency as parents."

While CASTLE takes the lead in the operation of the program, it is the partnerships with the Sheriffs' Offices and the Public Defender's Office that make the program work. "Getting access to the jails and getting time set aside to work with these men is key to the program's success," said Ms. Ostertag.

For more information on the Strong Fathers/Strong Families program contact Doug Borrie at dborrie@castle.org.

Effective Parenting Program Shows It Is Never Too Late

"It has been my experience that when you lecture inmates on the importance of being a responsible person, the best you get is a bored look. But when you talk about what it takes to be a responsible parent, they sit up and listen."

These are the words of E. Kent Hayes, an internationally recognized authority on the care of pre-delinquent, neglected and other troubled children. His award winning books, *Why Good Parents Have Bad Kids*, *Broken Promise* and *Find a Safe Place* have been translated into many languages. Two novels he wrote about at-risk kids were made into TV movies for CBS. He's traveled the world telling audiences about what he has come to know about the principles of good parenting.

Kent's 1995 video "Effective Parenting: It's Never Too Late" has been shown in prison parenting and life skills classes across America. Despite having no particular focus on offenders or their unusually complex parenting issues, Kent kept hearing positive feedback from inmates. One of the most beneficial consequences of viewing the video, many reported, was how much it helped them recognize, often for the first time, some of the most important skills they had never learned while growing up. Many seemed to "get it" that until they can put into practice in their own lives those things that were missed, they can't reasonably hope to become an effective parent.

According to Shannon Murphy, Reentry Director at the Douglas County (Kansas) Correctional Facility, since Kent Hayes came out of retirement and began conducting Parenting Groups for their inmates, "I wish to emphasize the importance of this program in our facility and the vital role it plays in our overall inmate reentry process."



Shannon goes on to say, “We knew that his original parenting tape was being used in other correctional facilities and we received input from those programs emphatically stating that the inmates not only learned parenting skills, but also real insights into their own behavior. As our parenting groups progressed, we saw this process evolve. Inmates began to realize that they grew up without the skills necessary to function appropriately in society, including being a good parent. They started to ask how they could gain these skills. They began to realize that they could not be a good parent if they didn’t fix what’s broke.”

“When we decided to create a parenting group tape specifically designed for inmates, we had two objectives: to keep it simple and to design a program that could be led by any senior officer or program specialist within any facility. The study guide for the group leader and the study guide for the participants are easy to follow, but more importantly, you will discover that each group will take on a life of its own.”

“I have discovered that this program allows inmates to let down their guard and gain new insights into their own behavior. Without that insight, inmate reentry programs have little value.”

What would motivate inmates in correctional facilities to spend four to six hours discussing ways to improve their capacity to function in this complicated world? Kent reports, “We have learned from experience that inmates want, above all else, to do whatever possible to make sure their children become productive, happy, successful citizens, and are willing to spend the time, energy and concentration to achieve this goal. This training speaks to the fact that you can’t teach what you don’t live. You cannot create healthy families if the parent does not understand and live by some basic principles that will foster a productive and responsible citizen.”

When inmates at correctional facilities viewed the initial *Effective Parenting: The Art of Teaching Life Skills* video, responses began to sound universal:

- They began to realize why they were the way they were, gaining insight into their inability to function appropriately in society.
- They wanted to know how old you can be to learn these life skills and how to begin that process.
- They understood they could not contribute to or lead the development of a healthy family without making these all important changes.

The *Effective Parenting: The Art of Teaching Life Skills* parenting curriculum was designed to answer each of these all important questions. It is designed specifically for incarcerated parents.

The curriculum is a dynamic tool for use as fits best for each individual facility. Some may incorporate an inmate group discussion into their structure; some may focus on the 13 principles only. The 80-minute videos may be presented once weekly for 13 weeks, or 2 principles may be presented at a time, twice weekly – however it fits the institution’s needs.

A 29-minute inmate group discussion segment from the Douglas County (Kansas) Correctional Facility may be utilized at your discretion. A *Group Leader Guide* has been developed to help users modify the curriculum to meet the needs of their facility and participant population.

Kent Hayes summarizes why the *Effective Parenting: The Art of Teaching Life Skills* program is effective. “When you relate how their thinking affects their children—how this thinking helps or hinders what the child will need to learn if they are going to survive in this complicated world—inmates begin to ask questions about the skills they never learned, but more importantly they ask how they can learn these life skills now.”

To find out more about the *Effective Parenting: The Art of Teaching Life Skills* curriculum, contact E. Kent Hayes at kjinhayes@sbcglobal.net. For information on how the program is used at the Douglas County Correctional Facility contact Reentry Director Shannon Murphy at smurphy@douglas-county.com.



New Edition of *Parenting from a Distance* Released

One of the pioneers of parenting education for offenders, Jan Walker, has just released the third edition of her class manual, *Parenting from a Distance: Your Rights and Responsibilities*. The previous editions of her book have been used in prisons and jails throughout the country.

Jan began teaching parenting classes in the mid 1980s at a women's prison in Gig Harbor, Washington and then taught males at McNeil Island. Since then in addition to *Parenting from a Distance*, she has written her prison teacher's memoir, *Dancing to the Concertina's Tune*, and a young adult novel, *An Inmate's Daughter*. Jan currently continues to do volunteer work with a group that mentors female offenders in two Washington state correctional centers as the women prepare to release to their families and communities.

While the previous editions have dealt with parents who were separated from their children for various reasons in addition to incarceration, the third edition is completely focused on incarcerated parents. *Parenting from a Distance: Your Rights and Responsibilities* is a valuable resource for incarcerated parents who are committed to remaining involved with their children and willing to accept the responsibilities associated with parenting from a distance.

Topics included in Jan's book are:

- Commitment and Challenge – Help your children adjust; consider their feelings
- Rights and Responsibilities – Your minimum financial responsibility; your rights
- Explanations – Keep it simple, make it real, information without gory details
- Daily Routine – Stay involved with your children; work closely with their caregivers
- Touching from a Distance – Stay in touch by phone, mail and electronic communication
- Visiting – Keep it positive, focus on each child, know your facility's rules
- Holidays and Occasions – Share special events from a distance
- The Systems – Learn laws and social services regulations governing children
- Shared Parenting – Negotiate, mediate and cooperate for the good of the children
- Reuniting – Reenter to community, reunite with family, "Contracts for Forgiveness"

For information on ordering *Parenting from a Distance: Your Rights and Responsibilities* or Jan's other books go to www.janwalker-writer.com or www.plicatapress.com. Jan Walker's email address is info@plicatapress.com.

Need Help?

Do you have any questions or need some advice on starting or improving your parenting classes, parent/child literacy program, or parent support group for offenders?

We have an email list of almost 200 parenting educators from 29 states who are eager to help. Just send an email to jerrybednarowski@new.rr.com with your question or request and I will forward it to our email list. Then wait a few days and the helping responses will be sent to you.

Or – Request a copy of the *Guide to Successful Parenting Programs in Corrections*. The *Guide* offers descriptions of over 50 parenting classes, parent/child literacy programs, parent support groups, and parent fairs. Look over the information, choose the one you like, and contact the person who teaches or supervises the program.



Holiday Book Project Reinforces Sense of Responsibility

One of the many innovative endeavors that have marked the career of 2011 Wisconsin CEA Teacher of the Year Marianna Ruprecht is her creation of the Holiday Book Project at the Marathon County Jail (MCJ) in Wisconsin. Marianna is a Northcentral Technical College (NTC) teacher who works full-time at the Marathon County Jail.

Since its founding in 1997, the Holiday Book Project has proven to be very valuable to both inmates and their families. Inmates participating in this activity are audio recorded reading books for their children. The goal of the Holiday Book Project is to reinforce inmates' sense of responsibility as parents and to develop a closer relationship between the inmates and their children.

Ronda, an NTC adjunct career instructor and a jail programs coordinator, sends out flyers to the inmates and verifies their eligibility to participate in the project. The staff works hard to ensure all inmates are aware of this unique opportunity. Besides speaking regularly of it in class and posting flyers, the project is written up in MCJ's biannual newsletter, "Hard Times . . . For Now," with articles written by inmates and published by Marianna.

The project allows children to hear their parents' voices. It fosters a love of reading and gives the children a chance to listen to good books being read by their parents. The children can listen to the CDs as often as they want. In addition, the parents are able to write a card for their children and send the book and CD home as a Christmas present.

If an inmate is a low level reader, Marianna, another basic education instructor (Mari), an instructional assistant (Jenny), and Marathon County Literacy Council volunteers practice with the inmates until they are able to read the children's books by themselves. This activity increases the reading ability of the students and improves their self-image.

In 2000, the Marathon County Jail doubled in size resulting in hiring a basic education adjunct instructor for the second classroom. This year, Marianna and Mari had 25 inmates read 39 books for their children. In 2008, the Marathon County Literacy Council (MCLC) saw the value of this project and increased their funding to cover the additional costs of children's books, CD's and postage. The increased funding strengthened the Holiday Book Project and brought public awareness to the inmates' needs.

This past year, however, the literacy council experienced reduced funding. Through discussion with the Jail Advisory Council, committee members from Probation and Parole organized a book drive for new children's books while NTC funded the purchase of the CD's and paid for the postage to help alleviate some of the costs for the MCLC council. The literacy council remains an important part of the project by providing the volunteers to help in the classes. This project also highlights the interagency connections that the Marathon County Jail has been able to establish to benefit its students and the community.

To find out more about the Holiday Book Project, contact Marianna Ruprecht at ruprecht@ntc.edu.

Tell Us About Your Program

One of the goals of the Parenting Special Interest Group is to provide a vehicle for communication among educators who are teaching or developing parenting programs in correctional facilities. You are invited to share information about your program by contributing an article for a future issue of this newsletter. Email your articles to cherlyn.wontor@wisconsin.gov or jerrybednarowski@new.rr.com.



Region III & IV CEA Conference to Include Four Parenting Workshops

One of the ways the Parenting Special Interest Group spreads the word about Parenting programs in corrections is to encourage its members to present workshops at professional conferences.

Among the 20 workshops scheduled for the Region III & IV CEA Conference held at the Osthoff Resort in Elkhart Lake, Wisconsin on May 2-3, 2011 are four workshops that will be of interest parenting educators in corrections. They are:

Effects of Alcohol & Other Drugs on the Developing Adolescent Brain

Presenter – MaryAdele Revoy

After a quick review of brain development basics, changes in the brain due to drug and alcohol use will be discussed. Sample activities will illustrate these deficits.

Helping the Adolescent Brain Recover from Trauma

Presenter – MaryAdele Revoy

Review early brain development and the effects of childhood trauma on the brain. Match the natural skills of the female brain to the successful programs and intervention methods to help girls recover from trauma. Learn how the impact of trauma is exhibited in self-destructive behaviors.

Hidden Victims of Incarceration

Presenters – Mary Pohlman and Michael Troudt

Look at what research has found regarding the effects of parental incarceration on children. Learn how re-entry programs strengthen parenting skills of inmates along with building stronger bonds with kids.

Risk Taking & Decision Making by the Adolescent Brain

Presenter – MaryAdele Revoy

Examine why youth are drawn to risks and the emotional limbic system that influences the brain. Learn what factors into their decision making process and how to meet 3 psychological needs which may enhance your cognitive behavioral programs.

Conference information and a registration form are posted on the CEA-Wisconsin website: www.ceawisconsin.org or may be found in the March/April issue of the CEA-W newsletter.

Early registration rates are \$95 for CEA members and \$160 for non-members. Lodging reservations can be made by contacting The Osthoff Resort at 1-800-876-3399.

In past years at CEA-Wisconsin State Conferences, some conference participants elected to arrive early and enjoy the beautiful Osthoff Resort. The Osthoff Resort has agreed to offer rooms at conference rates for April 30 and May 1. You may choose from a single room for \$70, a double for \$90, or a two-bedroom Woodland Suite for \$100. All rooms have beautiful lakeside or woodland views. A block of rooms will be held at these rates until April 1, 2011.

If you would like more information or have questions about the conference program contact Margaret Done at Margaret.Done@wisconsin.gov. If you have registration questions, e-mail Ray Schlesinger at Raphael.Schlesinger@wisconsin.gov

Register today to be part of a great conference for correctional educators! Hope to see you at the Osthoff!



Brain Development Basics

On her blog <http://braininsights.blogspot.com>, Deborah McNelis posts information on the importance of brain development in the early years and how easy it is to provide stimulating activities for children. With Deborah's permission, in issues of this newsletter, we are including Brain Facts from her blog. For the complete information, go to Deborah's blogspot. This issue's Brain Fact is:

Brain Insights

Making Connections

A child is born with over 100 billion neurons or brain cells. These neurons make connections with each other to make up the wiring of the brain. The brain physically grows as these connections are made. It is primarily experience that influences the creation of these connections.

Early Experiences

The brain has to have experiences to develop. After eight months of experiences, an infant may already have 1,000 trillion connections created. Because the brain adapts to the environment it is exposed to, it will make connections based on either repeated negative experiences or repeated positive experiences.

Creating Abilities

The brain develops through a "use it or lose it" process: connections that are frequently used are retained. Other connections that are not repeatedly used will be pruned or eliminated so the active connections can become stronger. Abilities are developed through this process. Opportunities to play and explore with real objects is the way strong connections and abilities are developed best. Computer games and flashcards are not ideal ways to develop healthy brains. Physical activity, time spent outdoors, good nutrition, plenty of sleep, safe environments, regular routines, and predictable loving relationships all contribute to optimal brain growth.

Learning Language

Early adult-child interactions have a dramatic impact on brain development. Researchers have shown that when parents spoke to their infants often, children learned almost 300 more words by age two than did children whose parents rarely spoke to them. Exposure to language through television or DVDs does not provide benefits. Infants need to interact directly with others. Children need to hear people talk to them about what they are seeing and experiencing for their brains to fully develop language skills.

Loving Interactions

Warm, responsive care meets an infant's basic needs. However, consistent care giving is not only comforting for an infant; but also plays a **critical** role in healthy development. The way that parents and other caregivers respond to young children **directly** affects the base of later development. Loving relationships have a positive impact on social-emotional development and learning throughout life.

For more Information on brain development or easy activities you can do with your child to promote brain development visit www.braininsightsonline.com.

Copyright © 2011 braininsights

For old issues of the *Parenting Connection* newsletter, go to www.ceawisconsin.org

Check out the Parenting Special Interest Group Discussion Forum at www.ceanational.org



Dear Readers:

This has been not quite like the springs I remember. Seems the weather, the politics and the world are in such turmoil. Yet we are still committed to teaching those who need us the most — the offenders. To me this seems like, more than ever, a time to concentrate on delivering the message of hope to those we are teaching.

I sat with several friends recently in a coffee shop only to listen to the conversations around me. You could write a book around only just a couple of those vibrant discussions. Most were wondering if we were ever going to get things right. However, as I discuss with my students, no matter what we do, we need to stay focused and do the right things and we won't be disappointed later in life.

Spring for me is a time for revitalizing my household — like cleaning closets, washing windows and so forth. Yet I am spending too much time on the non essentials and need to get back on track so my summer is not bogged down with these trivial things leftover from spring.

One would hope getting back to basics will help us get the job done. I think of my new Parenting Class and what my focus will be. Simple parenting needs to be: 1) Being truthful with our child(ren), 2) Practicing good communication, 3) Joining parent support groups and 4) Making good family time important. It seems we loose so much with all the other things in our lives that we forget about the basics.

Have a wonderful spring. Enjoy the simple things once again — like the flowers, garden and family.

Cheri Wontor, Editor

"We cannot hold a torch to light another's path without brightening our own."

Ben Sweetland

**Cheri Wontor, Teacher
Milwaukee Secure Detention Facility
1015 North 10th Street
Milwaukee, WI 53233**

