

# Parenting Connection

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## LIFE Program Promotes Meaningful Connections

For more than 30 years, Centerforce has been a national leader in providing groundbreaking, evidence-based programs to improve the lives and strengthen the communities of incarcerated people and their loved ones.

Based in the San Francisco Bay area, the non-profit Centerforce organization develops and delivers innovative solutions by providing health education and family programs to this often neglected community. The aim of Centerforce's programs and services is to:

- Foster transformative experiences during incarceration
- Promote ties between incarcerated people and their families to improve quality of life, support successful re-entry, and decrease re-incarceration
- Assist individuals in gaining access to needed services before and during re-entry to support successful re-entry and decrease re-incarceration
- Recognize the impact that incarceration has on the entire family and social system, and the importance of supporting all people whose lives are impacted by incarceration
- Educate men, women, and families about important health concerns that disproportionately affect people in prison

One of Centerforce's noteworthy initiatives is its Leaders in Future Environments (LIFE) youth mentoring program. LIFE is a program for children of incarcerated parents, promoting meaningful connections between youth and caring adults in the community to increase youth potential for leadership and positive community involvement.

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During the late 1990s, a group of volunteers took on the much needed task of addressing the challenges incarcerated parents face. In the process of working with incarcerated parents, the volunteers recognized the need to celebrate the strengths and unique qualities of the children who have been impacted by parental incarceration. Jo Chapman led these volunteers as they set out to create a safe place for youth to participate in positive recreational activities. With this concept in mind, they created what is today known as the LIFE Project, a program of Centerforce.

In the California counties of Alameda, Contra-Costa, Marin, San Francisco, and San Mateo; there are approximately 27,503 children of incarcerated parents. Serving youth between the ages of 11 and 17 living in the San Francisco Bay area, the LIFE Project provides ongoing support and positive role models to youth who have been impacted by parental incarceration. The LIFE Project accomplishes this by providing one-on-one mentoring, group activities every six weeks, and an annual retreat that focuses on the special needs and unique challenges that their mentees face.

The LIFE Project focuses on helping youth develop their capacity to succeed in education and in life. By empowering youth to make good decisions and set positive goals, the LIFE Project strives to:

- Build youth self-esteem and confidence
- Encourage on-going communication and relationship building with their incarcerated parent
- Expose youth to new life enriching experiences
- Provide peer support and adult role models
- Promote healthy life choices
- Strengthen family and peer relations
- Support academic achievement and positive attitudes towards education

All program mentors and volunteers must go through a background check, reference check, and an in-person interview. To be a mentor, volunteers must be at least 21 years of age, successfully complete a 2-day mentor training, and commit to one year of mentoring. LIFE staff train mentors on the impact of incarceration on children and families and supervise the mentors as they develop one-to-one relationships with the youth they are matched with.

For more information, contact the LIFE Project Coordinator at 415-456-9980 ext.117 or e-mail [LIFEProject@Centerforce.org](mailto:LIFEProject@Centerforce.org).

## Handbook Brings Together Research on Children of Incarcerated Parents

More than 1.7 million American children are separated from an imprisoned parent. Millions more have parents in jail. For these children, the risk of behavioral problems, attachment insecurity, poverty, cognitive delays, and other negative outcomes is elevated. But by how much? How many are able to overcome these challenges? And what public policies give them the best chance of persevering?

The scholars contributing to *Children of Incarcerated Parents: A Handbook for Researchers and Practitioners* published by the Urban Institute Press say it has taken decades to accumulate a body of scientific knowledge about these children, because most practitioners and researchers who gather this information work in isolation. Further complications stem from the fact that information on these children is not systematically collected by jails, corrections departments, schools, child welfare, or other systems. The book takes a fresh, comprehensive look across disciplines – including criminology, sociology, social work, family studies, education, nursing, psychiatry, psychology, and prevention science – to present a detailed view of exactly what we have learned about these kids. And, it identifies the gaps in our knowledge base that demand further attention.



“In this volume, we have brought together key scholars from various disciplines who are experts regarding children, parents, caregivers, and systems associated with parental incarceration,” write the book’s co-editors, Julie Poehlmann and J. Mark Eddy. “There are clearly many gaps in our knowledge, both at the developmental science level and at the intervention science level. These gaps limit our ability to effectively intervene with these children and families.”

Each chapter is grounded in five central themes: the importance of a developmental perspective, risk and resilience processes, contextual factors, directions for future developmental and intervention research, and policy and practice implications.

Within the pages of *Children of Incarcerated Parents: A Handbook for Researchers and Practitioners*:

- Susan D. Phillips describes the history of criminal justice reforms and how they relate to current knowledge of children of incarcerated parents.
- Laura M. Maruschak, Lauren E. Glaze, and Christopher J. Mumola delve into the U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics’ most recent national prisoner survey.
- Joseph Murray, Julie Poehlmann, Danielle H. Dallaire, Lauren Aaron, and Rebecca J. Shlafer look at children of incarcerated parents’ relationships at home, within their schools and communities, and with their friends and peers.
- Keva M. Miller, Eleanor Gil-Kashiwabara, Harold E. Briggs, and Schnavia Smith Hatcher examine how race, ethnicity, and culture contribute to risk and resilience for these children.
- Mary W. Byrne reviews research on nursery programs available to women pregnant at the time of their incarceration.
- Ann Booker Loper and Caitlin M. Novero look at interventions that aim to improve incarcerated parents’ communications and parenting skills.
- Liza Zwiebach, Jean E. Rhodes, and Catherine Dun Rappaport examine community-based mentoring programs available to children of incarcerated parents.
- J. Mark Eddy, Jean Kjellstrand, Charles R. Martinez, Jr., and Rex Newton present a framework for multi-pronged intervention programs that aim to help prisoners be better parents.
- Benjamin de Haan examines the interactions between the corrections and child welfare systems.
- Elizabeth B. Robertson and Eve E. Reider discuss the use of preventive interventions that aim to benefit children of incarcerated parents.
- Christopher Wildeman analyzes the policy implications of research on children whose parents are in prison or jail.
- Julie Poehlmann and J. Mark Eddy tie together suggestions for future research and interventions.

*Children of Incarcerated Parents: A Handbook for Researchers and Practitioners* is edited by Julie Poehlmann and J. Mark Eddy. Poehlmann is a professor of human development and family studies at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Eddy is a senior scientist and licensed psychologist at the Oregon Social Learning Center in Eugene. The book is available from the Urban Institute Press (ISBN 978-0-87766-768-1, paperback, 384 pages, \$29.50). Order online at [www.uipress.org](http://www.uipress.org), call 410-516-6956, or dial 1-800-537-5487 toll-free.

The Urban Institute, based in Washington, D.C., is a nonprofit, nonpartisan policy research and educational organization that examines the social, economic, and governance challenges facing the nation.

## 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](mailto:cherlyn.wontor@wisconsin.gov) or [jerrybednarowski@new.rr.com](mailto:jerrybednarowski@new.rr.com).



# Fulfilling the Promise Is One of the Best

The Fulfilling the Promise Parenting Conference was held on March 16 & 17, 2011, in Wisconsin Dells, WI. Day one of the conference offered half and whole day institutes. Day two was comprised of 75-minute workshops. The conference began with a motivational speaker, Lynn Lewis, who used her background as a single teen parent to illustrate how we should make goals and fulfill them.

I was able to attend two of the 75-minute workshops facilitated by men who teach parenting groups in the Milwaukee area. Daryl Carter of Support Circle for Fathers, ABC's for Healthy Families and W. Curtis Marshall, Wisconsin Division of Public Health demonstrated circles of support. This group of the facilitators demonstrated how they explore the history of parenting using discussion circles. Alphonso Pettis and Royace Hagler of the Next Door Foundation gave a presentation on "Fathers Under Construction: The Dad's Toolbox." These groups teach many of the same skills we work on in the prison setting.

The topic I presented was "Hidden Victims of Incarceration." I spoke about the children who our inmates leave behind. During the presentation, I urged the people who work with these children help them to stay in touch with their incarcerated parents. Materials I used included Focus on Families curricula, Brain Insight cards, and sheets that show the fathers ways to stay connected with their children. We discussed the importance of the child knowing where his/her parent was. In other words, how to tell the child the parent was incarcerated. Some of the participants were home workers who escort children of inmates to a visit. The topic of toys, games, and books in visiting rooms came up. Some institutions do present a child-friendly atmosphere; many do not.

Here is the abstract of my presentation:

*The statistics in 2006 indicated that 7.5 million children in this country had a parent who was involved in the corrections system. Numbers of incarcerated adults are on the rise. The corrections system has been experiencing inter-generational incarceration for some time now. Children who are not able to stay connected with their parents become victims of their parents and the system. Inter-generational incarceration is more likely to occur when the parent child bond is either weakened or severed by parental incarceration. Children of incarcerated individuals experience additional behavioral and personality problems in school and the community.*

*Sections of the presentation described programs currently operating at the Kettle Moraine Correctional Institution. The Wisconsin Department of Corrections has a Re-Entry Program in place that attempts to strengthen parenting skills of incarcerated individuals along with building a stronger bond between parent and child. The Parenting class and Parent Read program also work on language and reading skills to help the children with reading readiness and school readiness skills.*

*Ending the session was a discussion by participants about methods they could use to help children of incarcerated parents continue to be involved in their parents' lives from a distance. Ideas were shared between our organizations on how we can work together to strengthen family bonds and keep these children out of our corrections system.*

The last day, I attended a day long presentation on "Making Connections: Dimensions of Poverty and the Impact on Development and Learning" by Jeanne Erickson, Project Babies. This was the best conference I have attended on parenting issues. I would recommend that Parenting instructors find a way to attend this yearly event.

If you are interested in presenting at next year's Fulfilling the Promise Conference, see the following page for information about the Call for Presentations.

by: Mary Pohlman  
Kettle Moraine Correctional Institution (Wisconsin)





# Call for Presentations

## Fulfilling the Promise Conference

March 21-22, 2012

Holiday Inn Hotel & Conference Center  
Stevens Point, WI

The UW Cooperative Extension is seeking proposals for full and half-day institutes and shorter workshop sessions at the 17<sup>th</sup> annual Fulfilling the Promise conference. The conference will be held Wednesday, March 21 (institutes) and Thursday, March 22 (workshops), at the Holiday Inn Hotel & Conference Center in Stevens Point, Wisconsin.

Fulfilling the Promise is an annual conference for home visitors, program managers, and parent educators who provide home-based, group-based, and center-based support and education to parents of young children. The conference draws 200-400 professionals from across the state, averaging about 320 participants annually.

It is the goal of the Fulfilling the Promise conference to provide participants with a rich learning experience covering a wide variety of issues and hot topics. The planning committee strives to ensure all presentations provide participants with evidence-based practices and programs as well as best practices within the field of parent education and family support. Presentations can cover topics such as: child maltreatment prevention strategies, child development, home visitor safety, infant mental health, working with parents with mental health or substance abuse issues, program development and sustainability, policy and advocacy, supervision, outreach to underserved populations, hands-on activities to use with families, developmental screenings, child health, nutrition, and much, much more!

Presenters are encouraged to use a variety of presentation formats including lecture with question and answers, demonstrations, or panel discussion. Institutes are 2¾ hours or 5½ hours. Workshops are 75 minutes each.

The entire Presenter Application is available at <http://www.uwex.edu/ces/flp/conference/>. Proposals must be submitted by June 6, 2011.

If you have questions, contact [michele.dickinson@ces.uwex.edu](mailto:michele.dickinson@ces.uwex.edu).

For old issues of the *Parenting Connection* newsletter, go to [www.ceawisconsin.org](http://www.ceawisconsin.org)



## Brain Initiative: The Facts about Videos

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 Initiatives from her blog. For the complete information, go to Deborah's BlogSpot.

For more Information on brain development or easy activities you can do with your child to promote brain development visit [www.braininsightsonline.com](http://www.braininsightsonline.com).

This issue's Brain Initiative is:



### Videos Are Not Good for Child Development

It is critical to our young children that the real information about brain development is known and understood. There is still too much that is not common knowledge. I am continuously amazed by the number of adults that still do not know that the AAP recommends no TV (DVD's) before the age of two. This recommendation came out in 1999!

Yesterday, I read this finding in a valuable report put together from the Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood, "56% of parents of young children believe that baby videos are good for child development."

So the BRAIN Insight to share this week is important for creating the awareness of all that really IS good for the development of young brains. Let's change this statistic to: "0% of parents believe that baby videos are good for child development."

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## Osborne Association: In the Business of Transformation

The Osborne Association (New York) offers opportunities for individuals who have been in conflict with the law to transform their lives through innovative, effective, and replicable programs that serve the community by reducing crime and its human and economic costs. The Osborne Association offers opportunities for reform and rehabilitation through public education, advocacy, and alternatives to incarceration that respect the dignity of people.

In 1913, Thomas Mott Osborne, an industrialist and former mayor of Auburn, New York, spent a week in Auburn prison as prisoner Tom Brown, #33,333x. He lived just as other prisoners did and left that harrowing experience committed to the goal of turning America's prisons from "human scrap heaps into human repair shops." Mr. Osborne went on to become a progressive warden at Sing Sing, where the majority of his prisoners did not return to prison after release. Later he founded the Mutual Welfare League and the National Society of Penal Information, Mr. Osborne became known as the "pioneer and prophet of prison reform." The Osborne Association was established in 1931 to continue his work.



Today, the Osborne Association furthers its founder's goal of a criminal justice system that "restores to society the largest number of intelligent, forceful, honest citizens" by providing a broad range of treatment, education, and vocational services to more than 5,500 people each year, including people who are currently or formerly incarcerated, their children, and other family members. Programs are offered in community sites in New York (Bronx, Brooklyn, and Dutchess County), as well as in courts, jails and state prisons.

## **Programs**

By transforming the lives of those involved in the criminal justice system, the Osborne Association's programs demonstrate that there are policies and procedures our nation can adopt that can foster a more effective and efficient criminal justice system and a safer and more just society. They believe that relying only on imprisonment as a response to crime is a costly and counterproductive approach that fails to take into account people's basic capacity to change.

The Osborne Association is in the business of transformation through promoting healthy lifestyles, working with their clients to achieve economic independence, easing the transition from prison to the community, advocating for alternatives to incarceration, reconnecting families or strengthening communities.

### **Adopting Healthy Lifestyles**

Osborne's prevention and treatment services provide a holistic approach to managing health-related challenges, including drug/alcohol/tobacco use, chronic health conditions, and mental illness. Based on a comprehensive assessment, individuals are offered services that provide an appropriate level of care and support. Osborne's services are evidence-based, utilizing cognitive behavioral interventions and approaches specific to criminal justice involvement.

### **Reconnecting Families**

Osborne's family-centered approach recognizes the central role of family and social networks in reaching the desired outcomes of all of our programs. The Reconnecting Families programs are described in the section below.

### **Achieving Economic Independence**

Osborne's Workforce Development programs offer comprehensive employment and training services to people with criminal records, including vocational and educational assessments, career counseling, job readiness workshops, resume preparation, skills enhancement (including GED prep and hard skills training), job search and placement assistance in the Green and Food Services sectors, with follow-up support to assist participants to adjust to workplace demands.

### **Reducing Reliance on Incarceration**

Currently, there are more than 2 million men and women incarcerated in the United States – the highest incarceration rate in the world! The Osborne Association believes that relying only on imprisonment as a response to crime is a costly and counter-productive approach that fails to take into account people's basic capacity to change. Osborne employs effective measures that reduce incarceration and recidivism rates. This not only benefits the individual, but also keeps communities safer.

### **Strengthening Communities**

The Osborne Association advocates for systemic reforms that divert people from incarceration to treatment, provide effective programs during incarceration that prepare people to return home, and remove barriers to community and family reintegration upon release.

## **Reconnecting Families**

### **FamilyWorks**

FamilyWorks enables incarcerated fathers to make, mend and maintain relationships with their children through a comprehensive fatherhood program including parenting education and family counseling in city and state correctional facilities, child-oriented Family Centers in prison visiting rooms, and community-based services for families. Courses in Healthy Relationships for men and Healthy Marriage for committed



couples – in prison settings or shortly after release – enhance FamilyWorks’ inclusive and proven approach to strengthening families.

### **Family Resource Center**

The Family Resource Center and Hotline offers families and friends of people in prison a toll-free hotline staffed by formerly incarcerated individuals and family members, providing information, referrals, peer support and counseling as well as support groups, during incarceration and following release.

### **Family Ties**

Family Ties facilitates visits for children and their mothers at Albion Correctional Facility, New York’s largest women’s prison, offering parenting skills courses to incarcerated mothers, visiting support for their children, and family cohesion support upon release. Family Ties also offers “tele-visiting” for children when they cannot see their mothers in person.

### **Children & Youth Services**

Children and Youth Services supports young people with incarcerated parents overcome stigma and isolation achieve their potential through counseling, support groups, mentoring, tutoring, supervised visiting, assistance in accessing higher education, and peer-led development activities. Youth benefit from the support of volunteers from faith- and community-based institutions.

### **Women’s Empowerment Project**

The Women’s Empowerment Project serves women affected by the incarceration of their intimate partners or their children and women who are caring for children with an incarcerated parent. Women are able to find peer support, receive therapeutic counseling, and reduce their stress and isolation through the Project, which offers a toll-free hotline, a unique weekend workshop (LOL – Loving Out Loud) and solutions-based counseling.

### **Queensboro Family-Focused Reentry**

Queensboro Family-Focused Reentry Project is a model approach to preparing families for the challenges of reentry and reintegration when people are released from incarceration. This pilot project at Queensboro Correctional Facility, a state prison in New York City, targets men who are within three months of release, providing transitional planning and family outreach, along with workshops and counseling designed to support them as they engage with the opportunities and barriers they find when they return home.

## **Strengthening Communities**

### **Children of Incarcerated Parents**

Osborne provides leadership to the New York Initiative for Children of Incarcerated Parents, a collaborative system reform and advocacy effort that brings together public and private agencies and individuals concerned about how incarceration of parents affect children. The Initiative examines criminal justice, child welfare, education, and other policies and recommends changes that will improve outcomes for children at each stage of the process – from their parents arrest through incarceration and reentry.

### **Dutchess ReEntry**

Dutchess ReEntry is one of many county-wide reentry initiatives in New York State. In partnership with the Dutchess County Criminal Justice Council and the Dutchess Collaborative ReEntry Project, a faith-based effort, the Osborne Association is the lead agency providing comprehensive reentry services to men and women returning to Dutchess County from state prisons. Dutchess ReEntry follows the National Institute of Correction's Transition from Prison to Community Initiative model, employing evidence-based practice along with traditional Osborne family and participant-centered programming.

For more information about the Osborne Association programs email [info@osborneny.org](mailto:info@osborneny.org).

**Check out the Parenting Special Interest Group  
Discussion Forum at [www.ceanational.org](http://www.ceanational.org)**



# A Poem from a FamilyWorks Graduate

The following is an inspiring poem on fatherhood from a FamilyWorks graduate posted on the [FamilyWorks](#) blog by Melissa Grigg. Through poetry and spoken word FamilyWorks graduate Devon Toney inspires men to deepen connections with their children who await their return from prison.

## “Daddy, I Love You”

A father is a man  
Willing to stand and deliver  
Head above water  
Even after crying a river  
A man willing to reach out  
To his child out of reach  
And willing to learn  
In order to teach

A father will climb out the hole he dug for himself  
No matter how deep  
And start climbing mountains of success  
No matter how steep  
He'd grab the root of his problem  
And turn a new leaf  
He's a man who would not make promises  
That he cannot keep

A father is a man who will correct his mistakes  
And do his best  
He'll climb obstacles in life  
And only stop to catch his breath  
He'll stay on the right path  
No matter what's left  
He'll achieve his goals  
And accept nothing less  
He'll finish the race  
And earn his respect

A father is responsible, dependable  
And someone you can trust  
He'll get high from his energy  
And make strides without a rush  
To keep a family complete  
A sober father is a must

Some families make it without a father  
Some just do okay  
But, statistics show children without fathers  
Often stray  
Some turn to drugs and crime  
Some, foster care take away

Some children grow bitter, and stop caring  
And don't care if they fail  
And like me  
Many lose direction and take the road to jail

Some men learn their lesson  
Some men never do  
Be a father to your children  
Don't let that man be you  
No child should have to take a trip upstate  
To say “Dad, I love you”

by Devon Toney

## 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](mailto: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.



**Dear Readers:**

Sadness and heartache are not just in prison, it is all around us. As I watch my neighbors face foreclosure at the end of the month, I see not only the financial troubles our neighbors are facing, but also the financial troubles we are facing as a State and Nation.

Getting our financial house in order is a big task and how we approach it is vital to our survival. We see our prison population remaining high. Families are continually affected – causing more and more children to be without their parents in the household.

Parents need to keep their children close and their survival sound. What is often needed is security and stability. Much research has been done on how to survive these turbulent times. One article that recently came across my desk was from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, *Strengthening Families Grants for Incarcerated Reentering Fathers and their Partners: Incarceration and the Family: A Review of Research and Promising Approaches for Serving Fathers and Families*. The article is available from Human Services Policy, Room 404E Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 200 Independence Avenue SW, Washington, DC 20201. Email [pic@hhs.gov](mailto:pic@hhs.gov) .

The more information we share with our student inmates, not only about reentry, but also about life is very important. As we see turbulent times ahead, share with them what works in order to strengthen our families, our State and our Nation.

Happy Spring !!!!!

**Cheri Wontor, Editor**

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