

Parenting Connection

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Interagency Work Group to Address Needs of Children of the Incarcerated

In 2004, the Correctional Education Association established its Parenting Special Interest Group. The goal of the Parenting SIG is to help incarcerated parents to become “more caring, concerned, and informed” and to minimize the intergenerational cycle of incarceration by improving communication and cooperation among correctional educators providing Parenting programs in a variety of correctional settings and encouraging the development of new programming opportunities. Since its onset the Parenting SIG has sought to create a professional network not only for the instructors of Parenting classes; but also for the supervisors of Parent Support Groups, coordinators of Parent/Child Reading Projects, and organizers of Parents’ Fairs.

In 2008, Fair Shake was founded. Fair Shake is an innovative website focused on successful prisoner reentry nationwide. Through an interactive blend of electronic tools, reentry awareness, and community building; Fair Shake encourages all stakeholders to participate in the successful reintegration of formerly incarcerated people back into society. Fair Shake provides information, resources and skills to help the offender face overwhelming challenges ranging from finding employment and securing housing, to paying restitution or fines, and to developing and restoring relationships. Central to all of that, and too often overlooked, is developing and sustaining self-confidence and a positive outlook.

Recently, John Linton, Director of the Office of Correctional Education at the U.S. Department of Education was asked to join an interagency work group convened to address the needs of children of the incarcerated and what federal agencies could do to coordinate efforts to improve outcomes for these children. John has been advocating that a focus on the incarcerated parent be included in these deliberations, and is seeking information on efforts to develop the capabilities of incarcerated persons to be effective parents – both during incarceration and after release.

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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.

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The Parenting Special Interest Group and Fair Shake have already provided information to John on Parenting Classes, Parent/Child Literacy Projects, and other programs which help connect incarcerated parents with their children.

The Parenting Special Interest Group and Fair Shake are partnering to gather information on programs which focus on the children on the outside and their caregivers. We are asking for your help in this effort.

The first step in this process is to create directories of services already being provided in three areas:

- 1) Mentoring programs for the children of incarcerated parents
- 2) Programs that provide transportation specifically for children to visit their incarcerated parent
- 3) Handbooks which provide information to help incarcerated parents and their children stay connected

After this information is gathered, the directories will be posted on the Fair Shake website and articles will be included in the Parenting Special Interest Group's newsletter to highlight some of the programs. "Model" programs will be selected and that information will be forwarded to John Linton for consideration by the interagency work group.

To start this process, we need your help. If any of the above services are being provided at your facility or in your area, please send the following information to jerrybednarowski@new.rr.com:

- Name of program
- Type of service provided (one or two sentences)
- Agency providing program
- Facility/City/State served
- Name of agency contact person
- Email address, website address, or phone number

Thanks for your help in contributing information for this important initiative. We will keep you posted as things develop.

Destination...Dad Targets Fatherlessness

Christian Heritage of Nebraska's mission is to improve the lives of children by equipping families, promoting responsible fatherhood, and strengthening marriages — because they believe every child deserves a family. Christian Heritage launched its Fatherhood Initiative in 2007 when they determined that a major contributing factor to children entering the foster care system is fatherlessness. After hosting a Leadership Summit on Fatherhood in 2008, Christian Heritage was asked by the Nebraska Department of Correctional Services (NDCS) to work with incarcerated dads to teach them parenting skills and help prepare them to reunite with their children upon their release.

Christian Heritage established its three-phase Destination...Dad program to create better futures for children by coaching and supporting their incarcerated fathers. The three-phases are:

- **Learning** - Through a proven parenting curriculum, incarcerated dads learn how to be involved and responsible fathers when released.
- **Connecting** - Through letters and visits, incarcerated dads connect with their children. Video book reading, based on the Messages Project model, strengthens connections. These programs foster dad-child relationships.
- **Living** - Through coaching and support, fathers recently released from prison become involved in their children's lives, while building a better future for their families and themselves.



Destination...Dad helps to break the devastating cycle of fatherlessness due to incarceration. By mentoring incarcerated dads to develop positive relationships with their kids, Destination...Dad is strengthening families and creating brighter futures for children in Nebraska.

The key to the success of the Destination...Dad initiative is its caring and compassionate volunteers. After completing a training program, volunteers and Christian Heritage staff work together in focused, supportive teams. Volunteer opportunities include:

- **Destination...Dad Mentor**

Each mentor is matched with an incarcerated dad. They begin communicating through letter writing and then, as time progresses, have the option to meet inside the institution. Upon release, the mentor assists the dad in connecting with his children, following the Reentry Plan prepared, and introducing him to positive social networks.

- **InsideOut Dad Volunteer**

Volunteers co-facilitate a 12-session curriculum created by the National Fatherhood Initiative in one of six Nebraska Department of Correctional Services facilities. Duties include working directly with the primary instructor from the NDCS, assisting in classroom administration and instruction of curriculum.

- **Messages Project Volunteer**

Volunteers videotape messages from inmates to their children in one of six NDCS facilities. Duties include working with Christian Heritage staff, using videotaping as well as production skills and working with inmates to prepare documents to enable Destination...Dad to complete the Messages Project.

- **Day Visit Volunteer**

Day Visit volunteers provide supervision and transportation for children to and from NDCS facilities to visit their fathers. In addition, these volunteers co-facilitate the visits and provide documentation of the interaction between inmates and their children. Training is given in the use of the assessment tool for the visitation observation. Volunteers may work as a husband-wife team, but will always work with another volunteer.

For more information about the Destination...Dad program visit the website at www.chne.org or contact Larry Wayne, Deputy Director of Programs and Community Services for the Nebraska Department of Correctional Services at larry.wayne@nebraska.gov or the Christian Heritage Co-CEOs Gregg Nicklas at gregg.nicklas@chne.org and Lisa Nicklas at lisan@chne.org.

Attention All Fathers — Save this Date!

7th Annual Fatherhood Summit

“Empowering Fathers to Create a Healthy Milwaukee”

October 12 & 13, 2012

Destiny Youth Plaza — Milwaukee, Wisconsin

Milwaukee Fatherhood Initiative in partnership with the Social Development Commission is holding its 7th Annual Fatherhood Summit on Friday and Saturday, October 12 & 13, 2012 at the Destiny Youth Plaza, 7210 North 76th Street, Milwaukee, WI 53223.

The event is free and open to the public! Registration is now open. For more information, contact the Milwaukee Fatherhood Initiative office at 414-286-5653 or visit the Milwaukee Fatherhood Initiative at www.milwaukeefatherhood.com or the Social Development Commission at www.cr-sdc.org.



Girl Scouts Go “Beyond Bars”

In 1992, in partnership with the National Institute of Justice, the Girl Scout Council of Central Maryland embarked on a project targeting girls whose mothers were incarcerated. Since then, Maryland’s initial Girl Scouts Beyond Bars (GSBB) program has spread to approximately 40 programs throughout the nation.

Lessening the impact of parental separation is the primary goal of GSBB. Through these three core components, the program aims to foster the personal and social development of girls and their mothers:

- Mother/daughter troop meetings at the correctional facility
- Girl-only troop meetings and council-wide activities
- In-prison enrichment activities for the incarcerated mothers

The child of an incarcerated parent often has little support. While the incarceration of either parent can foreshadow a breakdown in healthy family functioning, the incarceration of a mother brings unique issues and problems. Traumatic for both boys and girls, girls are especially affected by:

- Loss of the primary caretaker
- Desertion of the closest female role model
- Feelings of anger and pain associated with a mother’s incarceration

Girl Scouts Beyond Bars is a vehicle for addressing the unique family needs of girls and their incarcerated mothers. It is designed to help mothers and daughters deal with the many sensitive issues that arise as they attempt to maintain or rebuild those ties. For mothers, the chief concern is “doing time” in a way that makes them better people, and parents, once they are released. For girls, the top priority is not repeating their mother’s mistakes so that they can become responsible, productive adults.

The GSBB program relies heavily on volunteer advisors who act as mentors, teachers, counselors, and mediators. GSBB created a resource guide to assist Girl Scout councils to develop programs in their areas. *Beyond Bars: A Curriculum for Life* begins with a section that provides GSBB staff and volunteers with tips and tools to appreciate and overcome some of the challenges that may arise throughout the course of the program. The Beyond Bars curriculum is divided into four sections:

- **Building Healthy Relationships** — The key to a successful life is the ability to establish and maintain mutually enriching relationships with other people. Today, skills such as communicating feelings, valuing diversity, and expressing empathy, often collectively referred to as emotional intelligence, are considered as important as academic learning.
- **Making Decisions** — Because young people often lack maturity and measured thinking, making sound decisions and solving complex problems are skills that are part of life skills teaching. A child with a parent in prison has observed the most important person in her life suffer the consequences of many damaging decisions, thus the need for this skill set becomes particularly important.
- **Understanding You** — Strong ideas about girls and women are expressed in both the media and through familial and social traditions. Girls need to develop a clear sense of who they are and what they believe in and value. Being able to define one’s self, apart from common external influences, is not easy. One of the barriers to self-affirmation for girls with incarcerated mothers is the identification they feel with their mothers. Natural and healthy in other circumstances, this tendency to identify as an extension of one’s parents can be detrimental to the healthy development of girls in GSBB.
- **Healthy You** — While many of the girls participating in the GSBB program are cared for by loving adults who provide the guidance necessary for mastering day-to-day routines that lead to healthy lifestyles, others find these lessons intermittent or missing entirely. This section offers activities and suggestions for introducing or reinforcing self-care skills in three basic areas: maintaining good mental health by reducing stress, identifying healthy habits, and avoiding violence.



The goals of GSBB are to lessen the impact of parental separation due to incarceration, to foster the personal and social development of girls and their mothers, and to provide girls with the opportunity to participate with their parents in the Girl Scout Leadership Experience. Parents and their daughters take an active leadership role in the planning and implementation of Girl Scout program activities and also participate in facilitated discussions about family life, conflict resolution, and the prevention of violence and drug abuse. After release, parents and daughters can continue to participate in troop meetings in their communities, making Girl Scouting a consistent presence in their lives.

In 2008 the Girl Scouts completed an evaluation of their program. The primary objective of the *Third-Year Evaluation of the Girl Scouts Beyond Bars Program* was to examine whether the programs were meeting three basic goals:

1. Strengthening the mother–daughter bond
2. Promoting the girls’ personal growth and development
3. Promoting leadership development among the girls

The qualitative and quantitative study results showed that participation in GSBB was clearly helping the girls to strengthen their relationships with their mothers, build self-esteem and improve in other areas of personal growth, and develop leadership skills. Girls’ responses to items that measured affective and attitudinal constructs within these three outcome domains showed very high ratings.

Outcome 1: Strengthening of the Mother–Daughter Bond

- Over three-fourths of the girls with incarcerated mothers (85 %) reported feeling “a lot” closer to their mothers since joining GSBB. More than 81% endorsed “a lot” for items reflecting increased feelings of safety, 84% hoped that their relationships would continue to improve, and 78% reported an increased ability to get along with their mothers.
- Approximately 69% of the girls endorsed “a lot” for improvement in communications with their mothers about feelings or about other areas of their lives.
- Similarly, 71% of the girls endorsed “a lot” for the item on trust.
- In considering the results for girls with incarcerated mothers, the items that reflect affective and perceptual dimensions are positively skewed.

Outcome 2: Personal Growth and Development

- Close to three-quarters of the girls indicated that they had learned to avoid smoking, drugs, and alcohol, and 65% had understood the effects of drugs and alcohol on their lives “a lot.”
- Over 70% of girls reported having learned respect for themselves and others.
- 73% felt more hopeful about their future “most of the time.”
- Almost 90% thought “most of the time” that they would finish high school, and 77% reported that they thought they would go to college.
- Mothers perceived the effects of the program on their daughters somewhat less positively and with somewhat greater variability than they viewed the effects for themselves. The two items with the strongest positive endorsements were that the daughter had learned how to take pride in her abilities and accomplishments and the daughter took a more positive attitude toward the future.
- Less than half of the mothers believed that their daughters had shown “a lot” of change for life skills such as learning to plan and organize one’s time and leading other girls in Girl Scout activities.
- Almost three-fourths of the mothers (72%) strongly believed that their daughters had developed positive relationships with other girls in the program.

Outcome 3: Leadership Development

- The results do show that participation in GSBB is helping girls develop leadership skills.
- Close to three-quarters of the girls (77%) reported that they had learned “a lot” about leading other girls in Girl Scout activities and 64% reported that they have had “a lot” of opportunities to lead.

More information about the Girl Scouts Beyond Bars program, *Beyond Bars: A Curriculum for Life*, and the *Third-Year Evaluation of the Girl Scouts Beyond Bars Program* report are available at www.girlscouts.org.



Books Beyond Makes Kids Count

According to the *2009 Rhode Island Kids Count Factbook*, "Maintaining positive and healthy familial bonds between children and their incarcerated parents is crucial to the children's emotional well-being because it can reduce the negative effects children experience as a result of the parent's absence. Preservation of this bond can also have positive effects on the rehabilitation of incarcerated parents."

A survey of inmate awaiting trial or serving a sentence conducted in 2008 by Rhode Island Kids found that the 2,003 inmates who answered the question on number of children reported having 4,355 children.

According to Rhode Island Kids Count, "Having an incarcerated parent can damage the quality of a young child's attachment to his or her parent, which can lead to anxiety, withdrawal, hypervigilance, and depression. As a result of parental incarceration, children may face disruptions in their homes, temporary placements in foster care, financial hardship, and an increased risk of child abuse and neglect. Compared to other children, children of incarcerated parents are at greater risk for poor academic achievement, impaired emotional and behavioral development, depression, criminal behavior, and incarceration."

To help maintain positive familial ties, with support from the state of Rhode Island, the federal *Reading Is Fundamental* program, and *Reach Out and Read Rhode Island*; the Rhode Island Department of Corrections established the *Books Beyond* program. *Books Beyond* at the Cranston facilities helps strengthen the bond between inmates and their children through books.

Books Beyond creates a much-needed tie between parent and child. With the help and supervision of volunteers, inmates are able to provide messages of love, reassurance, and connection to their children. The children have a constant reminder of their mothers and fathers, that is, books and recordings that may be re-read and replayed over and over. This all-volunteer program provides a regular and essential link between incarcerated parents and their families, providing an opportunity for healthy contact.

All work of the *Books Beyond* program is conducted by volunteers. Volunteers help inmates choose new, age-appropriate books for their children from a large selection of children's books. Under the guidance of the volunteer, the inmates read and record the books onto audiotape or CD. The volunteer then mails the books and the tapes or CDs home to the children to keep.

One volunteer commented, "The work of *Books Beyond* is important because it allows a very real connection between inmates and their children. It is both educational and personal for both the parent and their children. It helps build a sense of responsibility toward their families, sometimes including the other parent, if the children are living with her or him, as well as a sense of actually *being* a parent."

Another said, "I enjoy volunteering for *Books Beyond* because of what it brings to the inmate. I also enjoy the interaction with the inmates, both male and female. Although I think these kinds of parent/child experiences are important for both mothers and fathers, I usually choose the men because there is so little emphasis in general on their role as parents.

For more information about *Books Beyond*, contact Ken Findlay, Professional Services Coordinator, at ken.findlay@doc.ri.gov.

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



Creative Family Projects Launches Website

In the March/April 2012 issue of this newsletter, we gave an account of how the booklet, *Mommies and Daddies in Jail*, was created by Judi Goozh and Sue Jeweler of Creative Family Projects for use in Montgomery County, Maryland.

The booklet, *Mommies and Daddies in Jail*, clearly and concisely provides children of incarcerated parents with some of the answers they deserve in order to understand the events in which they find themselves. A scenario about a child who witnesses the arrest of a parent is followed by questions that are asked by the child and answered throughout the process from arrest to incarceration. The booklets are available in English and Spanish and are to be distributed as a free resource.

Judi and Sue are thrilled to announce their brand-new website: <http://www.creativefamilyprojects.org>. You will find their project, *Mommies and Daddies in Jail*, highlighted under Current Project. If you know any individual, agency or organization that would benefit from information on this site, please think of sharing our new website with them.

Another Jan Walker Novel Released

Jan Walker taught inside adult female and male prisons for 18 years. She is the author of a text for offender parents, *Parenting from a Distance: Your Rights and Responsibilities*, which has been used in prisons for 25 years and has recently been updated in its Third Edition. She has also published adult fiction and young adult fiction, including *An Inmate's Daughter*, set in Tacoma, WA and at McNeil Island Corrections Center and *Dancing to the Concertina's Tune: A Prison Teacher's Memoir*. She facilitates programs inside women's prisons, and assists new writers in getting published.

Jan's new young adult novel, *Romar Jones Takes a Hike*, has been recently released to great reviews. It deals with loss, grief, meth addictions, and the struggles so many children of incarcerated parents face. Romar, an Oregon 9th grader, is having a troubled day when his teacher tells him to pay attention or take a hike. He opts for the hike and begins a journey to find his mother. He knows she's in prison in Washington.

This review appeared in the Spring 2012 *ForeWord Reviews*:

This poignant tale about a boy looking for his incarcerated mother is well timed, given today's growing conversation about America's prison population of over two million. Grieving the loss of both his father and grandmother, Romar has just learned that his relatives with whom he has been living intend to ship him out as cheap labor to an aunt who owns an orchard. Although numbed by grief and rejection, Romar snaps when he becomes the butt of his English teacher's ire. He walks out of school and takes off, planning to camp and sustain himself on the dehydrated camping food that remains in his father's backpack. He resolves to scatter Granny's ashes at Smelt Sands Beach and to find his mother, even though he has on the vaguest idea of where she might be imprisoned.

Already past six foot two and still growing, Romar is perpetually hungry, and his grumbling stomach renders him vulnerable to the kindness of strangers. When he follows his nose to Vesta's By the Sea, soup as good as Granny's prompts honesty instead of cautious prevarications from the exhausted boy.

This novel is that quintessential rarity in YA fiction: a realistic coming-of-age story that is not depressing. Romar is sweet, earnest, and eminently genuine, and young readers will find the story of his quest an accessible and worthy read.

Information on Jan Walker's other prison related books may be found at www.janwalker-writer.com.



Editor's Musings:

It is very interesting to see what comes out of our classes sometimes. We may talk about a parenting issue, but other things crop up that are related in some way. In one of our Inside Out Dads classes, keeping yourself healthy was a topic. The teacher for that subject brought up some of the men's health issues that they should be aware of so that they keep themselves able to parent in the best way. A young man approached the teacher after class and told him that he was having some of the symptoms that signaled some serious prostate issues. While that isn't exactly parenting related, it does bring up the notion of how education affects everyone differently — and how our very presence may literally affect someone in a life-and-death way. Wow. Pat yourselves on the back. Do a little dance. Make a little difference. That's what we do — everyday.

Barb Rasmussen

To join CEA go to: www.ceanational.org

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