

Parenting Connection

Volume 10 Issue 1

July/August 2013

Arkansas Organization Gives Voices to Children Left Behind

A few days before Mothers' Day, Arkansas Voices for the Children Left Behind held its 19th annual *Mothers in Prison, Children in Crisis* event at the state Capitol to raise awareness about the issue of mothers and children separated by incarceration.

To help bring attention to this matter, a group of current and formerly incarcerated moms gathered to share their experiences. The group talked about issues and needs that children whose moms are behind bars have on a daily basis.

About 26,000 Arkansas children have an incarcerated parent on any given day, with an additional 30,000 children having a parent under supervision or having been incarcerated, according to Dee Ann Newell, executive director of Arkansas Voices. "Eighty percent of incarcerated women and 61 percent of incarcerated fathers in Arkansas have minor children," she said.

"We've got to create more social support and services for them," she said. "The biggest risk factor for any child is poverty, but then you start looking at the assembly of all the other risk factors these kids have, and a new cascade of risk factors comes down when the parent's incarcerated. We get kids that are fragile and vulnerable and carry the largest volume of risk of any set of children in our society."

To address these needs, the grassroots Arkansas Voices effort was founded in 1994 with the mission: "To advocate for children left behind by incarceration or loss of a parent for any reason and to provide mentoring, services and supports for the children, their caregivers, and incarcerated parents, with the goal of strengthening and empowering the family unit."

Arkansas Voices administers to the holistic needs of children by helping them receive counseling to deal
(continued on page 2)

In This Issue

- 1 Arkansas Organization Give Voice to Children Left Behind
- 3 White House Honors Champions of Change
- 6 Professor Proponderus Answers Children's Questions
- 7 Children of Incarcerated Myth Buster Series Launched
- 8 PATCHing Together Families for Nearly 40 Years
- 9 Parenthetical Helps Parents of Adolescents
- 10 Generalizing Over-Simplifies Children's Circumstances
- 11 Tell Us About Your Program
- 12 Editor's Message

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:

Jerry Bednarowski, CEA-Wisconsin
W6443 Old Highway Road
Menasha, WI 54952

jerrybednarowskiW@new.r.com

Proofreader : Laura Reisinger,
Literacy Volunteers - Chippewa Valley



(continued from page 1)

with the trauma from witnessing their parent being taken from the home. The group is dedicated to helping children overcome the shame and stigma of having a parent incarcerated.

Toward these ends, Arkansas Voices provides the following services:

- Parenting classes in jail and at the Arkansas State Hospital Forensic Unit
- Development of co-parenting agreements between incarcerated parents and the caregivers of the children
- Support groups and services for kinship caregivers
- School-based services for children whose lives have been impacted by incarceration of a parent, relative or other significant person; children with a parent returning home; and children in the foster care system with an incarcerated parents
- Reunification and re-entry services for prisoners and their families
- Education about the consequences of risky behavior, including drug and alcohol use and unprotected sex
- Family literacy services, including financial literacy and health literacy
- Referrals to services and supports provided by the State and the community
- Advocacy for children in foster care who have an incarcerated parent
- Advocacy for relative caregivers who are caring for another family member's children and for relatives seeking to stay engaged with their relative's children lingering in foster care (Grandparents Left Behind)
- Community Resource Development and collaborations on behalf of these children, youth and families, including the Arkansas Family Re-Entry Coalition, Arkansas Bill of Rights for Children of the Incarcerated and Other Policy Initiatives, Arkansas Restorative Justice Coalition, and the Coalition to Ban the Shackling of Incarcerated, Birthing Mothers.

Thanks to a gift it received in 2010, Arkansas Voices was able to create a website that enabled it to expand beyond its original 8-county service area to have a presence statewide. The fully functioning website helps child guardians to know their rights and how to get services, and provides help for the children and the reentering parent. Dee Ann Newell says the website makes her "feel like we've given birth to something that's going to have such wide spread value to everybody."

In addition to information on the history of the Arkansas Voices for the Children Left Behind organization, the website offers:

- a listing of programs provided by Arkansas Voices
- a description of their partnerships with other stakeholders
- information on upcoming Arkansas events
- articles and guides for parents, grandparents and other caregivers
- links to national activities and resources
- information on policy issues confronting children of incarcerated parents
- a free download of their Handbook for Kinship Caregivers and the other resource directories published by Voices and online
- the Legal Handbook of the Rights and Responsibilities of Incarcerated Parents
- a Toll-Free WARM Line for families with questions, resource information, and referrals 1-866-9-VOICES
- information on volunteering or donating to Arkansas Voices

In the next issue of the Parenting Connection newsletter, we will give more details on some of the programs provided by Arkansas Voices. To get more information on your own, visit the www.arkansasvoices.org website or contact Dee Ann Newell at 1-866-9-VOICES or by email at deeann@arkansasvoices.org.



White House Honors Champions for the Children of Incarcerated Parents

On Wednesday, June 12, the White House honored twelve “Champions of Change” who have dedicated themselves to supporting children of incarcerated parents and their caregivers. These individuals have worked on the front line to ensure that innocent children, nearly 2 million of whom have a parent who is incarcerated, do not suffer as a consequence of adult decisions. The Champions have helped scores of children and their families by minimizing the potential negative impacts of having a parent who is incarcerated, including financial instability, changes in housing, and isolation due to stigma.

The Champions of Change Program was created as an opportunity for the White House to feature groups of Americans – individuals, businesses, and organizations – who are doing extraordinary things to empower and inspire members of their communities.

The twelve Champions for the Children of Incarcerated Parents are:

Elizabeth Gaynes – Osborne Association

Elizabeth Gaynes is the executive director of the Osborne Association, a multiservice nonprofit that implements and champions solutions that reduce the damage caused by crime and incarceration. During her 29-year tenure, Osborne has grown into New York’s leading provider of family-focused services to individuals affected by the criminal justice system. Using her own experience raising children whose father was incarcerated for much of their lives, she established FamilyWorks, the first comprehensive parenting program in a men’s state prison. In 2004, along with her daughter Emani Davis, she was the first American nominated for the prestigious World’s Children’s Prize for the Rights of the Child, for defending the rights of children with incarcerated parents. Ms. Gaynes has a Juris Doctor degree from Syracuse Law School.

Carol F. Burton – Centerforce

Carol F. Burton has been working with and on behalf of incarcerated parents and their children for almost 24 years. As an innovative change agent, she leads the Alameda County Children of Incarcerated Parents Partnership, serves as the Executive Director of Centerforce in Northern and Central California and is the immediate past board chair of the Family and Corrections Network. Her responsibilities at Centerforce include the operation of the nationally recognized M.O.M.S. program, a partnership with Oakland Housing Authority to provide stable housing and wraparound services for formerly incarcerated pregnant and parenting mothers and their children. She also has developed curricula and media material, served as an advisor on several initiatives including Sesame Street’s “Little Children, Big Challenges: Incarceration,” and was the Director for the country’s first comprehensive program and longitudinal study of children of incarcerated parents in Flint, Michigan. Her ability to build strong relationships across systems and translate research into practical, feasible policy recommendations has resulted in practices and policies throughout the country that support children and their families. Carol is a native of Benton Harbor, Michigan and resides in Oakland, California.

Carol Fennelly – Hope House DC

For nearly four decades, Carol Fennelly has been a voice for dispossessed and forgotten people in the nation’s capital. For 17 years, she worked and lived at the Community for Creative Non-Violence homeless shelters creating innovative programs and affecting public policy on homeless and housing issues. In 1998, as the District’s Lorton Correctional Institution was closing and thousands of DC prisoners were being shipped far from home, Carol started Hope House to help fathers in prison stay connected to their children and families. Through Hope House’s Father to Child Programs, thousands of fathers have been able to play an important role in the lives of their children, even from behind bars.



Dee Ann Newell – Arkansas Voices for the Children Left Behind

Dee Ann Newell is a native of Little Rock, Arkansas. Dee Ann attended college in New York City at Finch College and obtained a Master's Degree in Developmental Psychology from Columbia University. Twenty-five years ago, she was a volunteer, teaching parenting in prison and jail, and began serving the children and caregivers in 1994, founding the only statewide organization to serve these families, Arkansas Voices for the Children Left Behind. These services have been fine-tuned over the past two decades and have sustained the mission of justice for children and their families, including racial, social, family, economic, health, and education justice that will bring forth the safety, security and stability of these families and the children. The organization works with families from pre-entry through one year of post-release and longer. Dee Ann is the recipient of a Soros Foundation Senior Justice Fellowship of the Open Society, working with 14 state coalitions to improve practice and policies on behalf of the children of the incarcerated in these areas, serves on the National Re-Entry Resource Center on Families and Communities, coordinates the National Policy Partnership for Children of the Incarcerated, provides training at the University of California at Davis, and serves on the Central Arkansas Re-Entry Coalition Steering Committee.

Wilson Goode – Amachi Program

In 2000, Rev. Dr. W. Wilson Goode, Sr., who is known affectionately as the “father” of the Children of Prisoners Movement in the country, organized Amachi, an effective mentoring program for children of incarcerated parents. He began implementing the program in just four sections of Philadelphia, and soon thereafter it was replicated nationwide with the creation of at least 350 Amachi-modeled programs that have served more than 300,000 youth in all 50 states. Prior to Dr. Goode's work with Amachi, he served as Chairman of the Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission, Managing Director of the City of Philadelphia, two terms as Mayor of Philadelphia and Deputy Assistant Secretary of the U.S. Department of Education. Dr. Goode regularly offers his expertise through consulting and speaking engagements, for which he has received numerous awards, certificates, and honors.

Gail T. Smith – Chicago Legal Advocacy for Incarcerated Mothers

Gail T. Smith founded CLAIM (Chicago Legal Advocacy for Incarcerated Mothers) in 1985. She convened the Illinois Task Force for Children of Prisoners, Children of Promise, which won improvements including a children's visiting center at Cook County Jail. Among other initiatives, Gail has written and championed legislation to ban use of shackles on pregnant women; promoted community alternatives to prison for parents charged with nonviolent offenses to keep parents and children together; and worked to reduce termination of parental rights and to promote restorative justice practices.

Nell Bernstein – author of *All Alone in the World: Children of the Incarcerated*

Nell Bernstein is the author of *All Alone in the World: Children of the Incarcerated*, and the coordinator of the San Francisco Children of Incarcerated Parents Partnership, which advocates for a Bill of Rights that has been adopted by coalitions and legislative bodies across the country. Published by The New Press, *All Alone in the World* was selected as a pick of the week by Newsweek Magazine, a best book of the year by the San Francisco Chronicle, and a top ten book of the year by the Online Review of Books, and has been adopted into the curricula of universities across the country. Ms. Bernstein has addressed policy makers, grant makers, criminal justice professionals and the public across the country about the impact of incarceration on families, and made numerous radio and television appearances. Her writing has appeared in numerous national magazines, and she has been awarded both a media fellowship from the Open Society Institute and a Journalism Fellowship in Child and Family Policy from the University of Maryland, School of Journalism. She currently is working on a book on juvenile justice.

Sister Tesa Fitzgerald – Hour Children

Sister Tesa Fitzgerald, a Sister of Saint Joseph of Brentwood, has spent the last 26 years as the founding Executive Director of Hour Children, a nonprofit program based in Queens, NY, that provides



comprehensive support within the prison walls and in the community – including prison visitation, supportive housing, job training and placement, mentoring, mental health support, and child care – to incarcerated and formerly incarcerated women and their children. Believing, wholeheartedly, in a person’s potential to change and acknowledging every child’s right to a stable and secure family, Sister Tesa lives among and stands beside the families that she serves helping them to achieve their potential.

Yali Lincroft – First Focus and Walter S. Johnson Foundation

Yali Lincroft is a Policy Consultant for First Focus and a Program Officer with the Walter S. Johnson Foundation. In October 2012, Yali helped develop California’s “Reuniting Immigrant Families Act,” the first legislation passed in the country to address family separation issues as a consequence of immigration enforcement. The bill is being replicated in other states and in federal legislative efforts. She is also the founding member of the Migration and Child Welfare National Network, a coalition of organizations focused on helping immigrant families in the child welfare system.

Claire Walker – Pittsburgh Child Guidance Foundation

Claire Walker began her career by obtaining her PhD at Columbia University. She then spent the next 45 years organizing communities to advocate for urgent reforms to protect children and families in today’s world. She led a neighborhood movement to protect people from needlessly languishing in jail after arrest in Reading, Pennsylvania, created a successful agency to prevent and treat child abuse in Pittsburgh, and for the past decade has brought together all parts of the Pittsburgh community to address the needs of children whose parents are incarcerated. She retired as Executive Director of the Pittsburgh Child Guidance Foundation in December 2012 and continues to champion incarcerated parents’ rights to parent and their children’s rights to be parented through her recent appointment to the Allegheny County Jail Oversight Board and participation in the work of the Children’s Roundtable of the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania.

Ann Adalist-Estrin – National Resource Center on Children and Families of the Incarcerated

Ann Adalist-Estrin is Director of the National Resource Center on Children and Families of the Incarcerated in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Under Ann’s leadership, NRCCFI has provided consultation to government and non-government agencies and community programs in 47 states including Connecticut’s state wide Children of Incarcerated Parents Initiative; Sesame Street; Austin Independent School District, Prison Fellowship Ministries and The Red Heart Association of Taiwan. She is author of *The Impact of Parental Incarceration on Children in the Child Welfare System Curriculum* (New Jersey Department of Children and Families, 2011), *Mentoring Children of Prisoners Curriculum* (CWLA, 2004), *Responding to Children and Families of Prisoners: A Community Guide* (FCN, 2003), and *The Children of Incarcerated Parents Library* available online at www.fcnetwork.org. Ann is also a Child and Family Therapist at Samaritan Counseling Center in Jenkintown, Pennsylvania; a trainer for the Healthy Steps for Young Children Program at Boston University School of Medicine; and adjunct faculty at Rutgers University in Camden, New Jersey.

Susan Phillips

Dr. Susan D. Phillips is known for her seminal research on ways in which parental arrest and incarceration adversely affect children, families, and communities. A number of her studies focus on the relationship between the disproportionate representation of black parents in the criminal justice and black children in the child welfare system. Others examine how parental arrest and incarceration influence children’s mental health outcomes of children. Her work emphasizes the application of research to inform public policy and services that promote the well-being of children in families involved with criminal justice system.

To join CEA go to: www.ceanational.org



Professor Proponderus Answers Children's Common Questions

Meet Professor Proponderus. Professor Proponderus is a wise being who lives in an old tree. He answers questions from Jeter, a boy whose father has gone to prison. Other characters offer their perspectives as well.

Professor Proponderus is the creation the Inmate Services group of the Oregon Department of Corrections who are developing a series of animated videos to answer children's common questions about having an incarcerated parent. Check out the trailer at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cAWcjKCFwtc> which introduces the characters that will be in all the videos.



With the use of video, the Oregon Corrections Enterprises Multimedia Lab is hoping to help kids and family members cope with having a loved one in prison by answering their questions in a straightforward and caring way.

Bobby B., one of the inmates working on this project, comments, "The project nearest and dearest to my heart is the *Ask Professor Proponderus* series of animations. Not only does it give me an opportunity to stretch out into character animation and use great tools in fun and creative ways, but I get to do work that is meaningful and beneficial to others."

The largely hidden population of children who have a loved one in prison have many questions, mostly concerning the safety and well-being of their loved ones, but also some questions that are difficult for children to find satisfying answers to. *Ask Professor Proponderus* is intended as an aid to facilitate the process of bringing authentic answers to where they are needed in a safe and child-friendly manner.

Mindy Clark, Director of National Outreach & Marketing for the Children's Justice Alliance, a program of Pathfinders of Oregon, who is working with Randy Greer to explore how the videos might be distributed would like to get feedback from parenting educators about the concept of the videos. She says, "As corrections education specialists who work with parents, you are in a unique place see firsthand how children are impacted by parental incarceration. We would appreciate your taking time to watch this short video and give us your feedback."

You can send your thoughts to Randy Geer, whose contact information appears at the end of the video, or you can email Mindy Clark at mindy@childrensjusticealliance.org.

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



Children of Incarcerated Parents MythBuster Series Launched

Many professionals who work with incarcerated parents and their children are often frustrated by misleading or incomplete information regarding the resources available to and the rights of their clientele. Last month, to clarify federal policies that affect formerly incarcerated individuals and their families, the Federal Interagency Reentry Council National Re-entry Resource Center launched the *Reentry MythBuster: Children of Incarcerated Parents Series*.

The Reentry Myth Buster is one in a series of fact sheets intended to clarify federal policies that affect formerly incarcerated individuals and their families. On any given day, nearly two million children under 18 have a parent in prison – and many more have had an incarcerated parent at some point during their childhood. Children of incarcerated parents often face financial instability, changes in family structure, and social stigma from their community. This series is designed to help these children, their caregivers, and the service providers who work with them.

The following are the first six myths that are clarified in the series of fact sheets:

- MYTH: Child welfare agencies do not need to plan family reunification for children in foster care if they have incarcerated parents.
FACT: Child welfare agencies should make efforts to involve parents in planning for children in foster care, even if the parents are incarcerated.
- MYTH: When parents are incarcerated, their children lose eligibility for Medicaid.
FACT: Many children remain eligible or gain eligibility for Medicaid coverage while their parents are incarcerated.
- MYTH: When police arrest parents, they must call child protective services to make decisions about the children's placement.
FACT: At the time of their arrest, parents can make decisions regarding placement of their children.
- MYTH: Families of persons convicted of crime and incarcerated for more than 30 continuous days can no longer receive a portion of their social security payments.
FACT: If the family was eligible to receive a portion of the social security benefits prior to the conviction and incarceration, they should continue to receive the benefits.
- MYTH: If parents become ineligible for TANF assistance due to a felony drug conviction, their children also lose TANF assistance.
FACT: Children may be eligible for TANF assistance even if they live with ineligible parents.
- MYTH: If parents become ineligible for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits, their children also lose eligibility.
FACT: Children may be eligible for SNAP assistance even if their parents are not.

Each fact sheet includes a detailed explanation correcting the myth and refers the reader to agencies and websites that can provide more information and answer specific questions. To access the *Reentry MythBuster: Children of Incarcerated Parents Series* go to the Council of State Governments website: http://csgjusticecenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/COIP-Mythbusters_first-6.pdf.

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 800 parenting educators from 29 states who are eager to help. Just send an email to JerryBednarowski@new.rr.com with your question or request. Then wait a few days and the helpful responses will be sent to you.



PATCHing Together Families for Nearly 30 Years

“It is devastating for a mother to leave her children. The children don’t understand. They just want their mom.” These are the words from a woman who was sent to prison in 1982 when her daughter was just five years old. For the 12 years that followed, Helen Martin remained within the confines of prison walls – far from the intimate moments that a child and mother typically share.

But, through the efforts of a group of people who had the vision to keep communication open between mothers and their children, Helen became the first female offender in Missouri to reconnect with her daughter through PATCH (Parents and Their Children). PATCH is a not-for-profit organization dedicated to the children of mothers who are in prison at Chillicothe Correctional Center. PATCH provides services to help maintain the connection between the children and their mothers and strengthen the relationship while they are separated during incarceration.

Helen was housed at the women’s prison in Jefferson City when she and her daughter became the first participants in PATCH. And, since that time, she has advocated the importance of the PATCH program.

In 1986, when the Missouri Department of Corrections moved women to the Chillicothe Correctional Center, (Prison) PATCH followed, establishing a visiting center in a single-wide house trailer on the grounds. Helen continued to participate. “Without PATCH, I would not have been able to have had the vision of who my daughter was,” she said. Now living outside prison walls and having been employed in a management position with the same company for almost 20 years, she continues to promote the benefits of PATCH.

PATCH is a visiting program which allows children to visit with their parent. Although still in prison, the parents and children meet in a relaxed home-like atmosphere, in a place where the mother can fix a meal for her children, read a book, and give lots of hugs and kisses in a more intimate setting.

“It was the most wonderful experience, not just for me, but for her,” Helen said. There would be a Christmas tree at Christmas time, Easter bunnies at Easter and “all the things that make children think of home,” she said.

Space for a PATCH visiting area was included when the new Chillicothe Correctional Center was constructed and opened in December 2008.

PATCH Provides...

- Required parent education classes to increase understanding and improve the parenting skills of offender mothers
- Supervised visits in PATCH visiting rooms reserved for one mother and her children
- Transportation for children who need rides to visit their mothers in prison
- Ongoing support and encouragement to help mothers improve interactions with their children

Attendance and completion of PATCH parenting classes is the first step to participation in the PATCH program. The curriculum helps incarcerated mothers to identify their parenting style, deal with their children’s complex emotions,, discover effective ways to communicate from a distance, rebuild trust, learn positive discipline techniques, keep their children safe from harm by preventing child abuse and accidents, understand temperaments in the family, deal with children’s anger, build self esteem, and set age-appropriate expectations for behavior. A parenting support group facilitated by PATCH staff is offered weekly for the mothers to discuss, support and encourage each other.



PATCH staff members train local volunteers to assist with supervision for visits. Training is also required and provided by the Department of Corrections. PATCH recruits volunteers from across the state to provide rides for children for visits. Many children would not have an opportunity to visit their mothers in prison if transportation was not provided by PATCH volunteers.

Through the years, many people in Chillicothe and around the state have made this program possible through financial and volunteer support. Volunteers have picked up children from all over the state of Missouri and have driven them to Chillicothe for visits with their mothers. They have helped with fundraisers including recording laps at the annual walkathon, provided meals for PATCH camps and organized toy drives or fundraisers at their churches to support PATCH's work.

Several overnight PATCH camps were held in Chillicothe over the years for children of incarcerated mothers to get acquainted and offer support to each other. Eating, talking, games and a visit with mom at the prison were all part of the camp experience.

PATCH is funded from the donations of individuals, churches, organizations, foundations and the Children's Trust Fund of Missouri, Missouri's foundation for child abuse prevention. The Children's Trust Fund board of directors awarded a grant in the amount of \$36,954 for Fiscal Year 2010 to Chillicothe's PATCH program. An organization of PATCH mothers and other offenders inside the prison hold fundraisers to support PATCH. They also clean and decorate the PATCH visiting rooms.

In FY 2012, 208 PATCH visits were held for 365 children and 113 incarcerated mothers. Sixty-five volunteers drove children or supervised visits. Of the PATCH sponsored visits, 60% used PATCH transportation.

For more information about the Chillicothe Correctional Center's PATCH program, visit their website at www.chillicothepatch.org or contact PATCH Director Barb Burton at director@chillicothepatch.org or 800-284-0145.

Parentetical Helps Parents of Adolescents Meet the Challenge

Parenting an adolescent can be a daunting task. Parentetical is designed to help and support parents of tweens and teens meet that challenge. Parentetical is a blog, a website and a social network, all in one place, where parents can talk with other parents and interact with experienced parenting educators and adolescent development experts from University of Wisconsin-Madison and UW Cooperative Extension.

Parentetical can help parents:

- Understand their child better
- Improve their relationship with their child
- Decrease their stress
- Connect with a community of parents experiencing similar joys and challenges of parenting preteens and teens
- Enroll in small group events, such as video conference discussions and special presentations
- Take part in university-based research and provide feedback about their experience with Parentetical

The main facilitators for this site are:

- Steve Small – Steve is a Professor of Human Development and Family Studies at UW-Madison and a Family Relations Specialist for the UW Cooperative Extension for more than 25 years



- Becky Mather - Becky has worked with adolescents and their parents over the last 20 years, primarily as a youth director in a church setting. She recently completed her masters degree in Human Development and Family Studies at UW-Madison.
- Anne Clarkson - Anne is a doctoral student in Human Development & Family Studies at the University of Wisconsin – Madison and has a masters degree in Public Health.

Because this site is sponsored by the University of Wisconsin Cooperative Extension and the University of Wisconsin-Madison, it is free, carries no advertising and strives to be an unbiased and research-based forum for exchanging the latest knowledge.

Generalizing Over-Simplifies Children’s Complex Circumstances

Since 2009, the Children, Youth & Family Consortium at the University of Minnesota Extension has brought published research and creative practice ideas to children’s mental health professionals. Their *Children’s Mental Health eReview* addresses the gap between what is known from the literature and what those working with children and families experience. Each issue explores a specific topic area and reflects the expertise of people working in diverse research and practice settings.

The June 2013 issue, “Children with Incarcerated Parents – Considering Children's Outcomes in the Context of Complex Family Experiences,” examines the needs of children with incarcerated parents. These children are often overlooked in our schools, clinics, and social service settings. As noted in many ways throughout the issue, this is not a homogeneous group – the experiences of these children are varied and changing. Responding to their needs requires attention to their unique life circumstances.

In *Children of Incarcerated Parents: A Handbook of Researchers and Practitioners* published in 2010, J. Mark Eddy and Julie Poehlmann summarized research that showed children of incarcerated parents are at increased risk for both internalizing (e.g., depression, anxiety, withdrawal) and externalizing (e.g., delinquency, substance use) behavior problems, cognitive delays, and difficulties in school. They also found that these children are at increased risk for insecure attachment – experiencing relationships with primary caregivers who are inconsistent, insensitive, or unresponsive to children’s social and emotional needs.

The link between parental incarceration and poor developmental outcomes is complicated because incarcerated parents and their children often experience many additional challenges that place them at risk for less optimal outcomes, even before the incarceration occurs. These include the parent having the risk factors of:

- lack of education
- growing up in a household that received public assistance
- living in a foster home, agency, or institution at some point during their childhood
- a history of physical or sexual abuse
- living in a one-parent household
- chemical and mental health issues

Many scholars have questioned whether parental incarceration is the cause of children’s problematic outcomes or if it is the combination of co-occurring risk factors that result in children’s poor outcomes when a parent is incarcerated. In their meta-analysis that controlled for many sociodemographic risk factors, Murray, Farrington, and Sekol (2012) found that parental incarceration was uniquely associated with children's increased risk for antisocial behavior, but not for mental health problems, drug use, or poor educational performance.



The Adverse Childhood Experiences study (Felitti et al., 1998) provides additional insight into the impact of exposure to multiple risk factors in childhood and the long-term implications for health. Results from the study have found that participants who experienced multiple Adverse Childhood Experiences were at increased risk for a number of health problems in adulthood, including depression, suicide attempts, substance abuse, unintended pregnancy, and sexually transmitted infections. The impact of any one particular Adverse Childhood Experience, such as parental incarceration, likely depends on a number of factors, including the child and family's experiences prior to, during, and after the parent's incarceration.

Some scholars have argued that each family's circumstances are so different and so complex that generalizing "children with incarcerated parents" over-simplifies and potentially misrepresents the complexities of these families. To create a framework for understanding how children's outcomes vary by the circumstances of a parent's incarceration, the following questions must be considered regarding the many factors that influence children's adjustment when a parent is incarcerated:

- What did the child experience?
- How old is the child?
- Which parent is incarcerated?
- What is the child's living situation?
- Who is providing care for the child?
- How does incarceration affect family income and household stability?
- What is the quality of the caregiver-child relationship?
- Does the child have contact with the parent?

Like other Adverse Childhood Experiences, the incarceration of a parent often results in exposure to other risk factors that can compromise health and development across the life course. Although incarceration is likely not the cause of these compromised outcomes, it instead serves as one indicator of other co-occurring risks and vulnerabilities that make these families particularly fragile. Given the potential long-term consequences of parental incarceration for child and adult health, targeted, evidence-informed prevention and intervention efforts are sorely needed.

The June 2013 *Children's Mental Health eReview*, "Children with Incarcerated Parents - Considering Children's Outcomes in the Context of Complex Family Experiences," may be found at <http://www1.extension.umn.edu/family/cyfc/our-programs/ereview>.

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 your ideas by contributing an article for a future issue of this newsletter.

Here are some suggestions for articles:

- Share a creative lesson plan that you use in your Parenting Class
- Compile a list of books and videos you use in your Parenting Class
- Describe how your parent/child book project works
- Share advice on establishing a Fathers or Mothers Fair
- Describe a training workshop that you found useful
- Describe how you involve community organizations in your program
- Describe how you have made your institution more family-friendly

Email your articles to JerryBednarowski@new.rr.com.



Editor's Message:

For the past nine years, this section of the *Parenting Connection* newsletter has featured comments by experienced parenting educators who have served as co-editors of this newsletter. Each co-editor had served a one or two-year term and contributed editor's messages for every issue of the newsletter.

I would like to thank Diane Birch, Mary Dahl, Mary Knox, Mary Pohlman, Cheryl Wontor and Barb Rasmussen for the wisdom, creativity and humor that they contributed in their editorials; the other articles they submitted to the newsletter; and the advice and support they gave to other Parenting Special Interest Group initiatives.

Starting with the September/October issue of this newsletter, we will be trying something new. We will be including a Guest Editorial in each newsletter. The Guest Editorials may alert readers to an important development in parenting education, offer observations on effective parenting programs, advocate for cause related to incarcerated parents, or comment on some other topic related to parenting programs for offenders.

If you would like to be a Guest Editor for one of the issues of the Parenting Connection newsletter, email me at jerrybednarowski@new.rr.com and we will discuss your topic and the due date for the editorial. I look forward to hearing from you.

Jerry

**Jerry Bednarowski, Parenting SIG Chair
Correctional Education Association
W6443 Old Highway Road
Menasha, WI 54952**

