

Parenting Connection

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Prison Parenting Programs: Resources for Parenting Instructors in Prisons and Jails

Each month, the co-editors of this newsletter receive a few requests for information regarding parenting programs and materials that can be used in correctional facilities. We have responded by writing individual emails and attaching descriptions of resources. To make the dispensing of information more efficient and available to more people, the Parenting Special Interest Group (SIG) of the Correctional Education Association and the Correctional Education Association-Wisconsin have decided to create a directory of resources to help correctional educators enhance existing or create new parenting programs in their correctional facilities.

To create the directory, *Resources for Parenting Instructors Prisons and Jails*, we combed all of the issues of the bi-monthly *Parenting Connections* newsletter that have been published since it began in November 2004. We selected innovative parenting programs, organizations that provide programs in prisons, educational resources, handbooks published for correctional populations, and books dealing with incarcerated parents and their families to be highlighted in the directory. To this we added suggestions from educators currently instructing parenting programs in correctional facilities. We then wrote a short description of each resource and, most importantly, included a contact person, email address, and/or website so users of the directory have a specific contact for more information. The initial issue of the *Prison Parenting Programs* directory will be sent to everyone receiving the electronic version of this issue of the *Parenting Connections* newsletter.

Prison Parenting Programs is intended to be a living document. It will be continually updated, posted on the www.ceawisconsin.org website, and emailed to those requesting copies. Everyone is encouraged to suggest additions to this directory. You may do so by sending the information to jerrybednarowski@new.rr.com. Corrections or updates to existing listings in the directory are also welcome.

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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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Even though *Prison Parenting Programs: Resources for Parenting Instructors Prisons and Jails* is now available, the co-editors of the *Parenting Connections* newsletter still welcome specific requests for information and advice on developing or enhancing a parenting program at your facility. You may contact us at jerrybednarowski@new.rr.com or barbara.rasmussen@wisconsin.gov. We will do our best to answer your question or connect you with people who can help.

Camp Agape Helps Children Feel Accepted

A group of around 30 kids at Camp Agape in Cabot, Vermont sat captivated as Duncan McDougall read them a story about a pig outsmarting a fox. McDougall is the executive director of the Children's Literacy Foundation, a nonprofit that encourages children in Vermont and New Hampshire to read.

After the story, McDougall had the kids come up and pick two brand new books they could keep. He said this time of year is crucial for literacy in children. "Every summer students often lose some ability to read and write. It's called the 'summer slide,'" McDougall said. "This is our way to try and make sure kids still have books and reading involved in their lives over the summertime."

He said his foundation has visited almost 400 communities around the two states since it was started 15 years ago and has served more than 130,000 children, currently averaging some 17,000 a year. The foundation receives no federal or state funding, relying solely on donors, companies, organizations and book drives for the 45 sessions it is putting on this summer. It also gives away around \$250,000 worth of new books a year, with \$3,000 worth of books given away at Camp Agape.

"Our goal is to have kids feel that books and reading and writing are exciting, fun and adventurous things to do," McDougall said. "If I can leave these kids wanting to read more and reading more often ... then we have succeeded."

Camp Agape is a summer camp in Cabot for Vermont children who have an incarcerated parent. "There are over 4,000 children in Vermont who have a parent in prison, said Beth Ann Maier, acting camp director and board member of the camp.

The camp has been in operation for seven years and is coordinated by the Episcopal Church, the Methodist Church and the United Church of Christ in Vermont. This summer the camp will serve 64 youngsters.

"Our sole mission is to leave (the children) feel accepted and totally loved for who they are," Maier said. "They don't have to be branded by who their parents are. They are who they are, and we love them for that."

Maier said McDougall has been coming to the camp for five years, and his visits are something that all the children get excited about. Encouraging children to read is very, important, more so if they have a parent in prison, according to Maier.

"If a third-grader can't read then there is more than a 59 percent chance of a child being incarcerated," she said. "If you make a reader out of a kid, you greatly improve (the) chances of success."

For more information, go to www.clifonline.org and www.youareneveralonefoundation.org.

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SPLC Examines the School-to-Prison Pipeline

Separation from parents by prison can be devastating to children, resulting in feelings of abandonment, sadness, and anger that can lead to attachment insecurity, poverty, poor school performance, and disruptive and aggressive behavior. According to the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC), they are at risk of being pushed out of school and are more likely to become entangled in the juvenile justice system. Once there, they are far more likely to become incarcerated as adults. It's called the "school-to-prison pipeline." Children who are caught up in this devastating cycle are disproportionately youth of color and living in poverty.

The Southern Poverty Law Center does work in four areas: Children at Risk, Hate and Extremism, Immigrant Justice and Teaching Tolerance. In addition to its legal activities, SPLC is one of the nation's leading providers of anti-bias education resources. They reach hundreds of thousands of educators and millions of students annually through their award-winning *Teaching Tolerance* magazine, multimedia teaching kits, online curricula, professional development resources like their Teaching Diverse Students Initiative and special projects like Mix It Up at Lunch Day. These materials are provided to educators at no cost.

Recently, SPLC has been supplying resource materials on "Improving Life Opportunities for Children at Risk." SPLC's advocates keeping children in school and out of the juvenile justice system by (a) reforming public school discipline policies; (b) ensuring that at-risk children receive individualized support to increase their chances of graduating; and (c) reducing the number of children who are imprisoned.

The cover story of the Spring 2013 issue of *Teaching Tolerance* magazine examines school-to-prison pipeline and offers tips on how a teacher's daily decisions can help prevent students from being pushed into the criminal justice system. It also offers several scenarios that show how a teacher can effectively respond to a discipline problem in class without it leading to a needless arrest.

Who's in the Pipeline? Students from two groups—racial minorities and children with disabilities—are disproportionately represented in the school-to-prison pipeline. African-American students, for instance, are 3.5 times more likely than their white classmates to be suspended or expelled, according to a nationwide study by the U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights. Black children constitute 18 percent of students, but they account for 35 percent of those suspended once and 46 percent of those suspended more than once.

For students with disabilities, the numbers are equally troubling. One report found that while 8.6 percent of public school children have been identified as having disabilities that affect their ability to learn, these students make up 32 percent of youth in juvenile detention centers.

The racial disparities are even starker for students with disabilities. About 1 in 4 black children with disabilities were suspended at least once, versus 1 in 11 white students, according to an analysis of the government report by Daniel J. Losen, Director of the Center for Civil Rights Remedies of the Civil Rights Project at UCLA.

Instead of pushing children out, SPLC says, "teachers need a lot more support and training for effective discipline, and schools need to use best practices for behavior modification to keep these kids in school where they belong."

If you would like a free subscription to *Teaching Tolerance* magazine and other education resources provided by the Southern Poverty Law Center, go to www.splcenter.org.



Keeping FAITH Heals Broken Families

When a parent is incarcerated it puts many families into a crisis that they cannot survive. As families shatter, it is the children that pay the highest price. Statistics show that these children have a much higher chance of committing a crime.

However, a unique program of teaching and healing can intervene in these crisis situations, helping keep families together. And if a parent can successfully re-enter the family and keep the family together, then that parent can successfully re-enter society. This program is part of The RIDGE Project, founded in 2000 by co-executive directors Ron and Catherine Tijerina. The RIDGE Project is a Christian, 501(c)(3) non-profit organization dedicated to serving youth and families in need throughout Ohio.

The centerpiece of The RIDGE Project is their innovative Keeping FAITH (Families and Inmates Together in Harmony) program, one of a handful of programs nationwide recognized by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services*. Innovative parenting programs that focused on incarcerated and re-entering fathers and their families, funded by Marriage and Family Strengthening Grants for Incarcerated and Reentering Fathers and Their Partners, were described and evaluated in a brief published in 2010. The RIDGE Project's Keeping FAITH program was one of the grantees recognized.

Keeping FAITH features an original in-house parenting curricula, TYRO Dads, as part of its grant-funded work. The program focuses on teaching men to be men of honor and conviction, to learn skills to effectively father while still in prison, build healthy relationships, and communicate effectively. Topics also include offering advice to children without being controlling and coping with children who have difficulty communicating. The programming was developed from the unique perspective of Ron and Catherine Tijerina, who held their family together for 15 years while Ron was incarcerated.

The intensive and interactive program is a fatherhood, marriage, and family strengthening initiative developed specifically to address the unique obstacles families face when the father/husband is incarcerated. Effective communication is critical in maintaining healthy relationships, and most, if not all, of incarcerated fathers lack even basic healthy communication skills.

Keeping FAITH's unique fatherhood strategy begins the healing process with an 18-week program involving both the incarcerated father and his partner. Unlike other family programs, Keeping FAITH attacks the cultural barriers of incarceration to produce responsible, healthy fathers, families, and citizens. Where possible, they involve the children of offenders in their youth program, to prevent them from following their parent's negative behavior, and to truly rehabilitate and heal the entire family.

For the first 10 weeks of the program, incarcerated fathers focus on intensive character development in the TYRO Dads part of the program. TYRO Dads are taught to own responsibility for their actions. They are prepared to overcome the obstacles unique to incarceration as they transition back to their homes and communities permanently. A father earns the title of TYRO following completion of the 10-week training. TYRO means a warrior, or someone learning something new and these fathers now stand as warriors for their families. They defend their children and their legacies, embracing the role of father as the highest calling of their life.

A four-week course then follows, entitled Couple Communication I. This teaches fathers and their respective partner collaborative marriage and basic communication skills. The RIDGE Project is the only organization to offer classes where the incarcerated father's partner can take a class with him during incarceration.

After the initial four-weeks, the spouses return for a four-week advanced communication class, Couple Communication II, where they learn conflict resolution, anger management and relationship stability.



The final stage of healing features peer leadership where incarcerated fathers surround themselves with others who share their goals, and are committed to holding one another accountable to their new lifestyle.

Keeping FAITH is the only program developed by a formerly incarcerated father who successfully kept his family intact through incarceration, and the only one to include regular family participation in the programs inside prisons.

The success of the Keeping FAITH program is supported by statistically significant changes among program participants. Program families show increases in healthy communication, stronger and healthier family relationships, and a low 4.8% recidivism rate at 12 months (and only 12.5% recidivism rate at three years among men who complete the program). There is increased positive behavior overall among program participants. Keeping FAITH programming is also fiscally efficient. The cost to administer the program is \$2,000 per father for a year of service.

By serving incarcerated fathers, The RIDGE Project creates a new breed of fathers who are committed to halting the cycles of welfare dependency and incarceration that have plagued their families for generations. When fathers stay out of prison, they help keep their children out of prison. This is especially transformative to minority and traditionally under-served communities, as they represent a higher percentage of prison populations.

For more information on the Keeping FAITH program, please check out The RIDGE Project at facebook.com/theridgeproject, twitter.com/theridgeproject, or www.theridgeproject.com.

*Information on all twelve grant recipients in the 2010 research brief, *Responsible Fatherhood, Marriage, and Family Strengthening Grants for Incarcerated and Reentering Fathers and Their Partners* may be found at aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/08/MFS-IP/Partners/rb.shtml.

by: Bruce D. Purdy, Communications Specialist
The RIDGE Project, Inc.

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. Email your articles to Barbara.Rasmussen@Wisconsin.gov or JerryBednarowski@new.rr.com

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

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



Daddy and Me Program Encourages Rikers Island Men to Be Good Dads

The New York City Department of Correction (DOC) is the second largest municipal jail system in the United States. It provides for the care, custody and control of adolescents, 16 to 18 years of age, and adults, 19 years of age and older, accused of crimes or convicted and sentenced to incarceration for one year or less. The Department consists of 14 jails, including ten detention centers on Rikers Island and four borough houses of detention, and in addition, two hospital prison wards and court detention facilities in the city's five boroughs. The Department handles approximately 100,000 admissions and releases each year and manages an average daily population of 13,000-plus inmates.

The Department understands the complex nature of the impact incarceration has on families. Children and their incarcerated fathers are able to access services that enable them to maintain and strengthen their relationships during their incarceration and upon re-entry to the community. DOC has advanced initiatives to create opportunities for positive family engagement that includes fathers.

The Department of Correction has implemented a Daddy and Me program, a five-week literacy course at several jails on Rikers Island. Daddy and Me is the first program of its kind to be tried at Rikers, though there have been many similar efforts, most focusing on female inmates in prisons across the country.

"People are multidimensional," said Dora B. Schriro, the city's Correction Department Commissioner. "Part of being a man is being a dad, and part of being a good man is being a good dad, in the most fundamental sense of the word."

Implemented in conjunction with the Administration for Children's Services and financed with about \$3,800 from a New York State Library's Family Literacy Library Services grant, the Daddy and Me program initiative encourages incarcerated fathers to connect to their children through reading.

The program at the Taylor Center is run by Nick Higgins, supervising librarian at the New York Public Library's correctional services program. On the first day, Mr. Higgins tells the inmates, "Our objective is to hopefully change the attitude that some of you might have about reading to children, that reading is Mom's job."

After two workshops on the importance of early literacy and storytelling skills, the dads involved record stories for their children. There were eight men in the program at a time, most of them with more than one young child. After reading their children's favorite books, they present the finished CDs with the books to their kids, so that their sons and daughters are able to hear their fathers read bedtime stories.

The program's fifth and final session is a special reading time in which the children visit their fathers in jail. Each of the program participants is escorted to the jail's visiting room. Each of them gathers a set of colorful chairs arranged in a circle to welcome their families. They are then able to answer their children's request of "Daddy read to me."

Daddy and Me is a pioneer program which DOC plans to expand, along with its fatherhood workshops and parenting classes for young fathers detained in Department of Juvenile Justice facilities.

For more information on the Daddy and Me program, go to <http://www.nyc.gov/html/hra/nycdads> or contact Angela Tolosa, Assistant Commissioner at the New York City DOC, at Angela.Tolosa@doc.nyc.gov.

To join CEA go to: www.ceanational.org



Brain Blog: Play Is the Development of the Human Mind

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 Blogs 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.

This issue's Brain Blog is:

It is quite frequent that I ask the question... "Why is it that we know what a developing brain needs, but with increasing frequency too many children are experiencing the opposite?"

There are numerous studies that provide evidence of what is needed for a child's healthy development. These, of course, are things I write and speak about every day. I, along with many other professionals, share information about the importance of play, nutrition, sleep, time in nature, and physical activity.

Today, I picked up a book that I have had on my bookshelf for awhile. In flipping through it, I found the following statements: "Play, is the development of the human mind, its first effort to make acquaintance with the outside world. The child indeed sees no purpose in it, sees not the end that is to be reached; but it expresses its own nature, and that is human nature in its playful activity."

Additionally, it goes on to say... "It is the duty of every teacher, whether in city or country, to impress upon pupils, by emphatic iteration, the laws of health in relation to food, air, sleep, rest, exercise, play, work and personal habits in general. Teachers should give attention to the encouragement of games, play and amusement."

"It is a mistaken notion of some pedagogues that the chief end of children is to go to school and study lessons from books. It is painful to witness, in many schools, how the plastic, growing bodies are cramped, how natural impulses are repressed, how the laws of nature are systematically violated. Physicians know this, though teachers and parents shut their eyes to the painful facts."

Are you surprised to find out that these statements were published in, *Methods of Teaching* by John SwettIn 1883!!!!!!

We have known what is best for children's healthy development and learning for at least 130 years. And, now due to technological advances, we even have scientific evidence to show us what is best for young growing bodies and brains. It is no longer only based on theory and behavioral studies, and we are still having to promote, educate and advocate for children to get all of what they need most!!....Why?

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 and I will forward it to our email list. Then wait a few days and the helpful responses will be sent to you.



Editor's Musings:

I read an article in the Parade magazine (2/17/13) called "One Big Happy Family" by Bruce Feiler. It consisted of a quiz and the first question was, "When a team of psychologists measured children's resilience, they found that the kids who _____ were best able to handle stress." The answer: knew the most about their family's history. The explanation centered on understanding they belong to something bigger than themselves, and that families naturally have highs and lows. It gives kids a stronger sense of control over their lives and helps their self-esteem.

Fast forward to an Inside Out Dads class. The students were asked what they would change about the way they were parented. Eleven out of the 16 respondents wished they had known their dads. Think of it. One whole side of a family was missing, along with that sense of belonging and connectedness.

That brought to mind my sense of family. I recall being a college freshman, and calling my dad after a bad day saying, "Daddy, come get me! I can't do this!"

His response was "We don't quit. Nobody in our family quits, no matter what."

I thought of the family stories. My grandparents had lost everything in a fire, had been forced off leased land at gunpoint during the Depression, and had lost a son in WWII. They just kept going. I grew up on a farm, and we experienced late frosts, storms, bad prices, sick hogs, but I remember my dad making plans for the next year despite it all.

That's resilience. That's what many of our students lack — and now it's our job to teach that concept so they avoid the "easy" way out.

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