

Parenting Connection

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KOKA Uses Hawaiian Culture to Strengthen and Educate Families

Keiki O Ka Āina Family Learning Centers' (KOKA) mission is to educate children, strengthen families, enrich communities and perpetuate Hawaiian culture. Keiki O Ka Āina's programs are based on a family engagement model that uses culture to strengthen and educate families. They believe that effectively addressing the learning and developmental needs of keiki (children) requires the active and committed participation of their families.

Since its founding as a non-profit organization in 1996, Keiki O Ka Āina Family Learning Centers have developed programs and implemented research-proven curricula in Native Hawaiian communities in three areas:

- Keiki – Children's Programs
- Ohana – Family Programs
- Nohona – Cultural Programs

KOKA's programs serve parents and preschool age children, prenatal to 5 years old, helping them to be prepared for kindergarten. These specialized services include Native Hawaiian cultural enrichment activities, development of a Hawaiian-based family literacy curriculum, and family wellness support. KOKA serves over 4,000 children and parents at over 40 different sites covering Oahu, Maui, Kauai, Molokai, and Hawaii Island.

One of KOKA's Ohana programs, Supporting Families Affected by Incarceration (SFAI), serves children and youth with a parent in prison, family members who are taking care of the children and the incarcerated parent.

(continued on page 2)

In This Issue

- 1 KOKA Uses Hawaiian Culture to Strengthen Families
- 2 Simple Idea Allows Mothers to Connect with Children
- 4 ACLU Report Examines Impact of Solitary Confinement
- 5 Tell Us About Your Program
- 6 South Dakota DOC Offers Mother/Infant Programs
- 7 Madison Area Urban Ministry Helps Prison Parents
- 8 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.rr.com

Proofreader : Laura Reisinger,
Literacy Volunteers - Chippewa Valley



(continued from page 1)

Children, caregivers and incarcerated parents interact through mentoring, parenting classes and parent-child programs designed to help families maintain bonds and children to thrive. The purpose is to strengthen families affected by incarceration so that they may become resilient to their situation by providing these services:

- Mentoring gives children and youth the opportunity to develop another positive relationship with a caring and dedicated adult
- Parenting classes for the incarcerated parent give them the basic tools of having them realize that they are their keiki's first teacher
- The incarcerated parent-child sessions support, enhance and maintain the family bonds should all parties agree to attend these sessions

More about Keiki O Ka Āina Family Learning Centers' programs may be found at www.koka.org.

Simple Idea Allows Mothers to Connect with Children

In the early years of a child's development, it is of the utmost importance they know they are loved by their mothers. The bond between mother and child is sacred and crucial to the healthy mental and emotional development of a child. The importance of preserving this most primary of family relationships becomes even more critical when the mother is a convicted felon.

The nature of incarceration makes it very difficult to maintain an intimate connection. Physical barriers such as steel bars, brick walls, razor wire fences, long distance locations, restricted visitation and limited lines of communication isolate convicted mothers from society and from their children.

Fortunately, there are those who are motivated to help these Texas families overcome those barriers.

The Women's Storybook Project (WSP) helps mothers behind bars and their children stay emotionally connected in an exceptional and constructive fashion.

WSP is a non-profit organization that records incarcerated mothers reading stories and brief messages to their children, with tapes and new books mailed to their children. Founder and director of WSP, Judith Dullnig, heard about a similar program in Louisville, Kentucky, and was moved to start one in Texas. With assistance from A. Mooney, a social worker at Texas Department of Criminal Justice's (TDCJ) Hilltop Unit, Dullnig designed the new program.

"Women's Storybook Project is a simple idea with big impact," Dullnig said. The biggest and most important impact is the one that it has on those for whom it was created — the children.

"From the beginning, there were stories about children taking the books and tapes to bed with them, playing the tape over and over, and bringing it with them to school for Show and Tell," she said. It has also been reported by the guardians of the children that they carry the tapes wherever they go an even talk back to them!

After the program was successfully implemented on the Hilltop Unit, it was implemented on the Lane Murray Unit. WSP currently exists in six of eight women's prisons — Mt. View, Woodman, Plane, Henley, Hilltop and Murray.



The heart and soul of WSP is volunteerism. WSP began in 2003 as part of the outreach program at St. Mark's Episcopal Church in Austin. In those early days, WSP had only five volunteers. Today it boasts 150 volunteers representing all faiths, ages and career paths -- from high school students to retirees.

Volunteers make approximately 68 visits to the women's units per year. In addition, they carry out the duties of storing, packaging and shipping approximately 350 books and tapes each month to children around the country.

Every prospective WSP volunteer must complete mandatory TDCJ volunteer training and periodic refresher sessions as required. Also, new volunteers must be trained in WSP's recording process. They travel to various female units up to four times before completing volunteer training.

Volunteer team leaders coordinate and oversee the challenging process of recording incarcerated mothers. There must be volunteers to facilitate the recording process and adequate security staff available.

There are many payoffs for the hard work. This project provides volunteers with a way to make a difference in the lives of others, and the positive affect on the institutions where it has been implemented cannot be denied. Mothers who wish to participate in WSP must have at least 90 days of good behavior. This has yielded a decrease in disciplinary infractions.

What happens behind prison walls is just a small part of the storytelling effort. WSP is non-profit, relying primarily on monetary donations to operate. Fundraisers and book drives are constant events. WSP partners with individuals, corporations, civic groups, churches and students and staff of major universities. It employs this multi-strand system to obtain new books, financial donations and other needed materials.

Everything that happens concerning Women's Storybook Project is relayed in its quarterly newsletter, "Book Notes", composed of contributions from volunteers, guardians and incarcerated mothers. Whether it is in the area of fundraising, conducting a book drive, instructing others on how to properly package the books, or shipping out a high volume of books from one unit, "Book Notes" lauds the exemplary achievements of volunteers who make WSP a success.

Windham School District (WSD) partners with the storybook program at several Texas prison sites, coordinating efforts with the WSD parenting program. As a result, WSP has been honored three times as a recipient of the Governor's Criminal Justice Volunteer Service Awards: twice as a WSD Judy Byrd Award recipient, and once as a TDCJ Susan Cranford Female Offender Program Award honoree.

This award-winning effort to strengthen the bond of incarcerated parents and children is continually improving.

"Women's Storybook Project has recently received approval to update its recording equipment to CD's," Dullnig said. "We are also hoping to provide an extension of WSP to the mother and child when she reenters the community. The extension will be called Storybook @ the Center."

Passionate volunteers, a vast support network of donors, and dedicated parents are connecting children with incarcerated mothers through reading and literature. Women's Storybook Project of Texas remains a simple idea with a very big impact.

reprinted from The ECHO (TDCJ's offender newspaper)

To join CEA go to: www.ceanational.org



ACLU Report Examines Impact of Solitary Confinement on Women

Across the United States female prisoners are routinely subjected to solitary confinement, yet the effects of solitary on women and their families is often overlooked. Although the negative psychological impacts of solitary confinement are well known, the unique harms and dangers of subjecting women prisoners to this practice have rarely been examined or considered in evaluating the need for reforms in law or policy.

An American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) report, *Worse than Second Class: Solitary Confinement of Women in the United States*, released in April 2014 addresses the treatment of women in prison who are subjected to solitary confinement. The report focuses on the harms and dangers that solitary confinement has on women and their families:

- Solitary confinement can exacerbate mental illness
- Solitary confinement can re-traumatize victims of past abuse — and can render incarcerated women more vulnerable to abuse by correctional officers
- Solitary confinement is sometimes used as retaliation against women who have reported sexual abuse or other harmful treatment while in prison
- Solitary confinement can jeopardize the relationship between mother and child, harming children
- Solitary confinement of pregnant women is harmful and internationally condemned

Recognizing that women in solitary are often ignored, the report examines the gendered impact of solitary and issues a series of recommendations. These recommendations assume that vulnerable populations will continue to be incarcerated and focus on ameliorating the harmful effects of solitary.

Punishing Children

Noting that the majority of incarcerated women are mothers, the ACLU report found that placing women in solitary negatively affects their children. Many women's prisons are far from the areas in which mothers and children lived before incarceration. The distance, travel time and expense make visitation difficult and infrequent.

Placement in solitary makes these visits even more difficult. Visitation for women in solitary is often limited and is often conducted through a glass partition or by video conferencing. Neither option allows a child the opportunity to hug her mother or hold hands. At other times, people in solitary are not allowed visits at all. Both undermine a mother's efforts to remain connected to her children. Restricting visitation can erode the relationship by drastically limiting a mother's opportunities to function as a supportive figure in the child's life.

Harming Pregnant Women

Pregnant women are at particularly high risk of harmful psychological effects of solitary confinement. Although the United Nations Rules for the Treatment of Women Prisoners prohibit the placement of pregnant or nursing women in solitary confinement, jails and prisons across the U.S. continue to place pregnant and postpartum women in solitary.

In addition to the psychological harms that solitary confinement can have on pregnant women, locking them in isolation can jeopardize their access to prenatal care. Solitary confinement impedes access to important health care services because providing medical services to individuals in solitary confinement requires more resources and policies and practices often do not take into account the unique medical needs of pregnant women.



Recommendations

The ACLU report, *Worse than Second Class: Solitary Confinement of Women in the United States*, concludes with these recommendations to minimize the harmful effects of solitary confinement on women and their families:

- Solitary confinement is so harsh and damaging that it should be used only when prisoners pose a current, continuing, and serious threat to their own safety or that of others
- Prisoners with mental illness should never be held in solitary confinement
- Pregnant and nursing women should never be held in solitary confinement
- Transgender women must be protected both from violence in general population and from the dangers of solitary confinement
- Solitary confinement should never be imposed as a retaliatory measure
- Women should undergo mental and medical health evaluations by competent and qualified mental and medical health practitioners to assess their condition before any placement in solitary confinement
- Contact visits with children aged 18 and under should be allowed for all prisoners, and family visitation should be encouraged
- All prisons and jails should be required to have uniform written policies controlling solitary confinement practices and procedures
- Prisoners should never be directly released to the community from solitary confinement

The complete American Civil Liberties Union report, *Worse than Second Class: Solitary Confinement of Women in the United States*, may be found at:

https://www.aclu.org/sites/default/files/assets/worse_than_second-class.pdf

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

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.



South Dakota DOC Offers Mother/Infant Programs

The majority of incarcerated women have children and most of the inmate-mothers regain the responsibility for the care and support of their children upon their release from prison. The enforced separation of the mother and child usually creates distress for both the child and the parent. Because of the importance in the parent-child bond, the South Dakota Department of Corrections has several programs in place to help the bond between female inmates and their children.

The Department of Corrections offers a parenting class to inmates. The class utilizes the Boys Town Common Sense parenting curriculum that deals with child behaviors from age 0-18 and the TOTS or Bright Start Parenting curriculum for children ages 0-3. The TOTS curriculum is designed to help parents understand their child's needs and development.

A female inmate who comes into the prison system pregnant may be eligible to participate in the Mother-Infant program. In this program, the inmate who gives birth while incarcerated is allowed to keep the child at the South Dakota Women's Prison for up to 30 days. To participate, inmates must have first completed a parenting class. The infant and mother are housed in an area away from the general prison population. Permanent placement options are evaluated for the baby with family and the Department of Social Services.

The Parent and Children Together (PACT) program at the South Dakota Women's Prison offers extended visitation for inmate mothers and their children. The primary goal of the PACT program is to enable the incarcerated mother to have her minor children with her in prison for a weekend visit once each month, in addition to the regular visiting hours. The PACT visits are intended to alleviate some of the familial stress associated with the mother's incarceration, create a better understanding of the parent role, and provide the opportunity of the inmate mother to maintain some direct responsibility for the care of her children.

The majority of incarcerated women have children and most of the inmate-mothers regain the responsibility for the care and support of their children upon their release from prison. The enforced separation of the mother and child usually creates distress for both the child and the parent. The PACT visits at the South Dakota Women's Prison help alleviate some of the stress associated with the mother's incarceration and encourage the continuation of the mother-child bond.

Inmates must apply for a PACT visit and have their application approved by the PACT coordinator in advance of the visit. A maximum of two children per weekend is allowed.

Inmates must reach a classification status of High Medium or lower to participate in the PACT program. Inmates who are classified as Maximum security status, on Room Restriction or in Administrative or Disciplinary Detention are not eligible for the PACT program. High Medium inmates may only participate in the PACT program for a 12-hour period during the day. High Medium inmates are not allowed to have overnight stays with their children.

The Mothers Making Memories program began in 1999. The Pierre Area Reading Council (PARC) assists inmates in reading books to their children onto audio tape. The books and tapes are then sent to the inmate's child so that the child can either read along or simply hear their mother read to them in an effort to reinforce the parent/child relationship. The PARC picks up the cost of the tapes, books and postage for the infant children.

reprinted from the South Dakota DOC website: doc.sd.gov/adult/facilities/wp/mip.aspx



Madison-Area Urban Ministry Helps Prison Parents Read to Their Children

In a June 15, 2014 article in the Wisconsin State Journal, reporter Nico Savidge gives his account of observing the Madison-Area Urban Ministry's Reading Connections program in action at the Waupun Correctional Institution. Madison-Area Urban Ministry travels to Waupun each month to record videos of fathers at the prison reading books to their children. Organizers say the program helps both children and their incarcerated parents by keeping their bonds strong.

Nico Savidge recounts how inmates practice for their moment to connect with their children and the feelings they experience during the process.

Nico followed Sister Ruth Poochigian as she focused a video camera on inmate Steven Reynolds and hit "record." Reynolds, a 29-year-old father, then puts his practice to work who is reading for his son, a 16-month-old named Gabe.

Because he doesn't want to make it boring, Reynolds had been working on the animal voices in preparation for the recording. Reporter Savidge writes, "He rhymes his way through the story, doing each animal's voice. As he turns the pages, Reynolds holds the book up to the camera, like he would if his son were sitting there."

Gabe was born not long after Reynolds was arrested for selling cocaine to a confidential informant in Marathon County. When authorities searched Reynolds' home, they found more cocaine, and he was charged with a number of drug and bail-jumping offenses. Last November, a judge sentenced him to 10 years in prison.

Reynolds met his son Gabe once since he has been locked up. He knows it will be a long time before Gabe sees him anywhere else. That's one of the reasons Reynolds jumped at the chance to make this video.

"He'll get a chance to know me a little bit," Reynolds said. "That's one of my biggest worries about being in prison: My son not knowing who I am. 'He'll know, 'That's my dad.' So I'm not a stranger coming home to my family."

Each month, volunteers from Madison-Area Urban Ministry make trips to Waupun and the women's prison, Taycheedah Correctional Institution in Fond du Lac, to record videos. The parents also write a letter for their child, which is sent home along with the video on a DVD and a copy of the book.

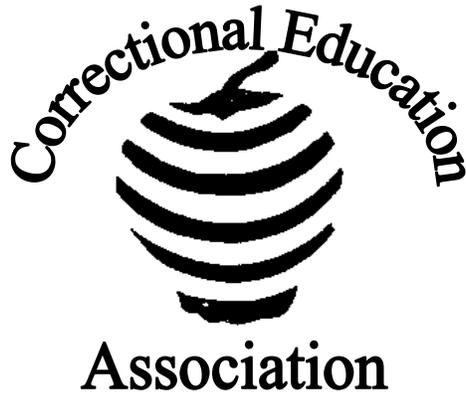
Reading Connections is one of several Madison-Area Urban Ministry initiatives designed to help families with incarcerated parents. It grew a decade ago out of another program that took the children of Taycheedah inmates on monthly bus trips to visit their moms there.

The goals of Reading Connections are to help children get through the tough process of growing up with a parent in prison and encourage reading as a way to keep the relationship with their mom or dad strong. By maintaining those relationships, Madison-Area Urban Ministry believes, ex-offenders have a better chance to stay on the right track once they get out.

To read Nico Savidge's complete account of this recording session and one made by another inmate and learn about both families' responses go to: <http://host.madison.com/news/local/program-gives-prison-parents-chance-to-read-for-children/article>.



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



Editor's Message:

The demand for parenting programs for correctional inmates continues to grow. Prison officials, legislators, community organizations, religious groups and the public are coming together in agreement that helping offenders become better parents makes sense – legally, economically and ethically.

Sometimes the request is to offer a program to those who will be quickly reintegrating into the community; sometimes it involves helping parents who are incarcerated for a long time so they can maintain a presence in their child's life while they are in prison; and sometimes it involves supporting the offenders' families.

Regardless, the requests are always there. The question usually comes down to the cost – in money, staff and institution priorities.

This newsletter is intended to serve as a start for correctional staff, community agencies and volunteers to begin thinking about what is important, what sort of program is the best fit for their setting and how to work through obstacles that are likely to arise.

Many of the experiences you have incurred as you established your parenting program can help those who are in the process of beginning a new or expanding an existing program. You can help them to overcome the initial apprehension they will encounter. Knowing that there are others who can consult will be comforting to them.

Please reach out by submitting an article on your experiences in developing, instructing or supervising a parenting program for offenders or their families. Your advice will be appreciated.

Jerry

