

# Parenting Connection

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## AIM Helps Moms and Children with their Many Burdens

About 3,000 children in Alabama have a mother incarcerated. Aid to Inmate Mothers (AIM) helps support these children and reunite separated families. AIM provides services to Alabama's incarcerated women with emphasis on enhancing growth and strengthening the bonds between inmate mothers and their children.

AIM's programs recognize and help to address the many burdens carried by the children and families as a result of incarceration by:

- Providing emotional interaction between inmate mother and child
- Improving inmate mother's life skills
- Helping mothers make a successful transition to community life
- Supporting the children of inmates

### Monthly Visitation

A central part of AIM's mission, the Monthly Visitation program gives children without means of transportation a chance to visit their mothers in prison. More than 100 children participate in the visitation program each month. Children up to the age of 19 are eligible to participate in the AIM visiting program. Children under the age of 8 must be accompanied by an approved adult/caregiver.

During this interactive visit, children are allowed to hug and kiss their mother as much as they want, and they can also move to a quiet place and spend some quality time together. This is a great opportunity for moms to find out what's going on at home and at school.

AIM provides toys, board games, educational worksheets and books for the families to enjoy. There's also a meal for the families to share during this time and even a birthday celebration, complete with cake!

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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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Through a small grant from the Alabama Arts and Education License Tag Grant, digital photos are taken of each family during the visit and printed on the spot. One picture is given to the children and the mother is allowed one.

The visitation program is made possible by churches across the state that provide transportation and volunteers who give their time to assist and provide support for families.

## **Storybook Project**

Even though their mothers can't be with them to read bedtime stories, the children who are part of AIM outreach can still hear special messages thanks to the Storybook Program. The program provides comfort to children each month by offering them a video recording of their mothers reading books.

Volunteers go to the prison one Saturday a month and help the mothers prepare a DVD recording of a book to send to their children. The children's books are donated by local churches, businesses, organizations and individuals. If a mother doesn't read well, a volunteer assists by reading the book to the mother and letting her repeat the words into the camera. The DVD and children's book, are then mailed to the children.

Each month, more than 350 children eagerly await these packages. Often the mothers will also record a message or song to personalize the recording for their child. For some children, who perhaps have a guardian unwilling or unable to take them for visits, these DVDs may be their only contact with their mothers.

## **Prison Classes**

AIM understands that the best way to help incarcerated women be better mothers and citizens is to give them opportunities to learn essential life skills. Prison classes and the Health Education program help these women learn information on parenting, job readiness and personal health. By teaching women in prison important life skills, AIM helps them become better mothers and transition more successfully back into the community upon release.

A professional facilitator from the community teaches each class, and participants receive certificates upon completion. These classes are open to all women in the prisons served and range from 8-12 weeks long.

- Parenting – A variety of parenting issues are discussed, including the importance of nurturing, encouragement and positive discipline. “Specialty Parenting” classes are also taught, including Parenting Teens and Parenting Young Children (under 5).
- Anger Management – This class helps the women take an introspective look at their own patterns of anger and discover what makes them angry and why they communicate the way that they do.
- Domestic Violence – This group meets to discuss the dynamics of domestic violence, how to recognize abusive behavior in a partner as well as resources for victims of domestic violence. Group members also discuss personal experiences.
- WHI-FI (Women's Health Information for the Incarcerated) – WHI-FI, a program supported by the Urban Initiative for Reproductive Health, is a series of general health education workshops covering topics such as breast cancer, ovarian cancer, birth control, healthy pregnancies, STD prevention, among many other topics. In addition, women are linked up with their local county health departments for ongoing health care when they return home.
- Self-Esteem – This class is designed to help build up the self-image of each participant by providing a chance to work through problems, and to participate in exercises and discussions that promote positive feedback and encouragement.
- HIV Prevention and Education – These classes teach HIV+ inmates and staff how to live with and treat their HIV. Educational and therapeutic groups and aftercare planning is also provided to help



link the women to medical and supportive services that will help them maintain their regimen and their health. Prevention Education is also provided to the general population.

- Book Club – Two groups meet each month at the Montgomery Women’s Facility to discuss a book. The group is conducted in a similar way to book clubs in the community. Books are financed by the Episcopal Church of the Ascension in Montgomery, a private woman’s book club, and volunteers from community.

## **WHI-FI Health Education**

Women in prison often don’t have access to basic health information and often have health problems that could have been prevented. Women’s Health Initiative for the Incarcerated (WHI-FI) was the brainchild of Jessica Hardy of the Alabama Department of Public Health’s Office on Women’s Health and Aid to Inmate Mothers.

WHI-FI holds monthly workshops at the two main prisons in the Montgomery area, Tutwiler and the Montgomery Women’s Facility, and quarterly at the Birmingham Work Release. Health Workshop topics include:

- HIV/STD Prevention
- Birth Control Options
- Breast Cancer
- Heart Health/Blood Pressure
- Diabetes
- Fetal Alcohol Syndrome
- Pre-Natal Class
- Healthy Pregnancy
- Exercise and Nutrition

AIM has also been involved in starting a pilot program designed to give women leaving prison access to health care when they return home. This second phase of the program makes appointments for the women at the county health departments for annual exams. Currently, the second phase of the program includes three counties: Montgomery, Madison and Calhoun.

## **Project Reconnect**

Women leaving prison in Alabama walk out the door with \$10 in their pocket, a bus ticket, and little more than the clothes on their back, only to face obstacles in every aspect of daily living. Care doesn’t just stop once the mothers are released from prison. Re-entry can be especially hard, and this transition puts the women at risk for relapsing into old routines.

Aid to Inmate Mothers created an aftercare program, Project Reconnect, to prepare the women for release and help them successfully transition back into the community. The program is coordinated by Karen Carr, a former inmate who has gained the respect of the prison administration and inmates alike. It is designed for inmate mothers who are within one year of the end of their sentences.

Each week, AIM holds a Pre-Release class in the prison to provide education and information to help ensure a successful transition. Facilitators teach courses on topics relating to life skills, job preparedness, STD awareness, human sexuality and conflict resolution. Periodically, Karen also brings in guests to speak on topics such as domestic violence, sentencing laws, Pell grants, social service benefits available to women when they leave prison and how to be a successful parolee.



After release, AIM steps in to reconnect the women to the community by helping them secure jobs and housing as well as providing essential counseling. At a minimum, participants receive follow-up support for one year.

More than 150 women released from Tutwiler in the last year are still under AIM's wing. Karen works tirelessly to help each of the women overcome challenges. Sometimes, all they need is a sympathetic ear to listen to the frustrations they encounter as they make their transition and negotiate through family problems. Other times, more serious intervention is necessary.

## **Clothing Closet**

Walking out of prison in ill fitting clothing is demoralizing – many wonder what they will do to find someone to help them collect a few pieces of clothing that actually fit. Most women lack the most basic supplies when they return home. In order to look for a job, it is essential that the women have an outfit that will help them land that first job – and basic clothing to wear to work. AIM has set up a small clothes closet in the office, and accepts donations of clean gently used clothing.

## **Family Outreach**

When mothers become incarcerated, the burden of raising their children often falls to family members or other guardians. Financially and emotionally supporting the children of inmate mothers puts additional strain on families. The caregivers make many sacrifices to ensure that the children are well taken care of while their mothers are away.

AIM helps caregivers by offering much-needed financial relief, as well as providing a strong support system. As funds allow, AIM helps caregivers pay bills, afford childcare and purchase essentials such as school supplies. They have even been able to, on occasion, send children to a week-long summer camp. They also use in-kind donations to provide children with birthday and Christmas gifts.

## **Genesis Transitional Home**

The Genesis House is a transitional home that provides women who have just left prison with an independent living environment for at least 12 months. The goal of the center is to help women restore dignity into their lives, learn skills that will allow them to function well and become healthy productive members of community by overcoming addictions, setting goals and becoming self-sufficient.

Admission into the center is for women between the ages of 21 to 59, with the mental capacity sufficient to participate in transitional activities, including a sincere desire to change negative behavior. There are mentoring, drug treatment and counseling, and employment readiness programs. The women also receive assistance in employment placement. These activities prepare them for the challenges they will face in the general society.

For more information about Aid to Inmate Mothers, visit their website at [www.inmatemoms.org](http://www.inmatemoms.org) or email:

- Carol Potok: [carol@inmatemoms.org](mailto:carol@inmatemoms.org)
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**For past issues of the Parenting Connection newsletter, go to [www.ceawisconsin.org](http://www.ceawisconsin.org)**



# SDC to Host Spring Job and Resource Fair

CEA's Parenting Special Interest Group will be an exhibitor at the Social Development Commission's (SDC) Spring Job and Resource Fair. The May 31, 2014 event which is free and open to the public will be held from 10 am to 3 pm at Journey House located at 2110 W. Scott Street in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. The fair will have employment, job training, driver's license recovery, child support debt reduction, healthcare awareness, financial education, educational, housing and public safety resources. There will also be a number of free on-site health screenings. Several groups that work with people who have been incarcerated will be participating at the fair.

The Social Development Commission's mission is: "Empowering Milwaukee County residents with the resources to move beyond poverty." For the past 50 years, SDC has served as a planner, coordinator, and provider of human service programs for low-income individuals and families in Milwaukee County. SDC operates more than 25 programs designed to improve the overall quality of life for low-income residents. Through the five core service areas of asset development, family strengthening, employment, education and training/support services; SDC provides the services to over 80,000 people annually.

In addition to providing information and answering questions about the Wisconsin correctional system and staying connected with incarcerated family members, the Parenting Special Interest Group representatives will have the following materials available to participants:

- Reaching In: A Handbook for the Families of Parents Incarcerated in Wisconsin
- Reaching Out: A Handbook for Parents Incarcerated in Wisconsin
- Prison Parenting Programs: Resources for Parenting Instructors
- Little Children, Big Challenges: Incarceration – A Sesame Workshop toolkit
- Mommies and Daddies in Jail booklets
- Parenting Connection newsletters
- CEA-Wisconsin newsletters
- Fair Shake website information

If you would like more information on the Spring Job and Resource Fair, please contact Diane Robinson at [drobinson@cr-sdc.org](mailto:drobinson@cr-sdc.org).

## Tell Us about Your Program

One of the goals of the Parenting Special Interest Group is to be 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. You can email your articles to [jerrybednarowski@new.rr.com](mailto:jerrybednarowski@new.rr.com).

Here are some suggestions to get you started:

- 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
- Explain how you involve community organizations in your program
- Illustrate how you have made your institution more family-friendly

**To join CEA go to: [www.ceanational.org](http://www.ceanational.org)**



# Tips from a Father in Prison

Child Welfare Information Gateway promotes the safety, permanency, and well-being of children, youth, and families by connecting child welfare, adoption, and related professionals as well as the general public to information, resources, and tools covering topics on child welfare, child abuse and neglect, out-of-home care, adoption, and more.

A service of the Children's Bureau, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Child Welfare Information Gateway provides access to print and electronic publications, websites, databases, and online learning tools for improving child welfare practice, including resources that can be shared with families.

Child Welfare Information Gateway consolidates and builds upon the services formerly provided by the National Clearinghouse on Child Abuse and Neglect Information and the National Adoption Information Clearinghouse.

On the Child Welfare Information Gateway website, [www.childwelfare.gov/pubs](http://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs), is a list of suggestions that can be used to help maintain the attachment between a father inside a prison and his children.

## Tips from a Father in Prison

1. Even if your relationship with the mother of your children is over, you need to establish and maintain a positive relationship with her. Especially for the sake of your children, find ways to respectfully connect with her.
2. Do not expect big changes right away from your family members. Take your time.
3. Find out about policies regarding how you can connect with your child — visitation, letters, telephone calls, and audiotapes. Ask your prison chaplain, counselor, or other staff.
4. Develop a plan on how often you will connect with your child and follow it.
5. When explaining to your children why you are not living with them, be honest, but respect their ability to understand it according to their age.
6. When telling your children how important they are to you, do not be surprised if they do not respond the way you want them to. Children are often angry that you did something wrong that prevents you from being with them.
7. To establish and maintain your family relationships, be ready to make amends and apologize.
8. Find ways to support your children emotionally, financially, and spiritually as much as possible.
9. Your family and children need to be able to rely on you. If you say you will call or write, be consistent in your approach and contact schedule.
10. Be realistic about goals and expectations. Do not expect too much, too soon from them.
11. Remember family celebrations, special occasions, and cultural events. If you have a hobby or crafts at prison, make gifts or draw pictures and make them into a coloring book.
12. If at all possible, purchase small items for your children through the commissary or mail order catalogs.
13. Use your time constructively. Get your GED, or take parenting classes, anger management, and adult continuing education classes — anything that better yourself.
14. Some prisons allow you to purchase and make videos or audiotapes. Use these to share memories and tell them stories, including bedtime stories. Have your children listen to it when they miss you.
15. Before your release date, clear up any legal problems that may be pending such as your driving record, credit problems, or child support.
16. Your children might not know how to say exactly what they are feeling and thinking, so be patient with them.
17. Make a realistic plan when re-connecting with your children after you are released from jail and follow through — no matter how bad things get.



18. While you are still in prison, research programs that might help you reach your goals once released. Seek out programs about parenting, housing, jobs, legal problems, or credit problems.
19. Work with other prison fathers trying to connect with their children from inside prison.
20. Get some counseling from the appropriate staff (psychologist, chaplain, case manager, correctional counselor).
21. Think about how you want to be a parent and your future as a dad and make decisions about that future. Look at your own relationship with your dad to learn what was good and bad.
22. Go to the prison library, take the time to read what you can to learn about being a better dad. Try to read as much as you can about father/child relationships.
23. Check out some of the other resources in the Incarcerated Fathers Library.

## **Prison Parenting Programs Booklet Available to Instructors**

The Parenting Special Interest Group of the Correctional Education Association and the Correctional Education Association-Wisconsin has created a directory of almost 70 resources to help correctional educators enhance existing or create new parenting programs in their correctional facilities. *Prison Parenting Programs: Resources for Parenting Instructors in Prisons and Jails* is now available on the [www.ceawisconsin.org](http://www.ceawisconsin.org) website or will be emailed to those requesting copies. If you like to request a hardcopy of the booklet, email [jerrybednarowski@new.rr.com](mailto:jerrybednarowski@new.rr.com).

Each listing includes a website or email address where more detailed information may be obtained. The resources are grouped according to the predominant focus of the program. Programs categories include:

- Multi-Faceted Programs
- Parenting Skills Programs
- Family Support and Mentoring Programs
- Parent/Child Book Reading Programs
- Re-Entry Programs
- Handbooks for Incarcerated Parents and their Families
- Books on Incarcerated Parents and their Families
- Videos on Incarcerated Parents and their Families
- Newsletters for Parenting Educators in Correctional Facilities

The *Prison Parenting Programs* booklet is intended to be a "living document." That means information will continue to be added as relevant programs and resources are identified. The booklet will be updated approximately every two months and will be posted on the [www.ceawisconsin.org](http://www.ceawisconsin.org) website. Anyone wishing to suggest additions to this directory may do so by sending them to [jerrybednarowski@new.rr.com](mailto:jerrybednarowski@new.rr.com). Corrections or updates to the listings in the directory are also welcome.

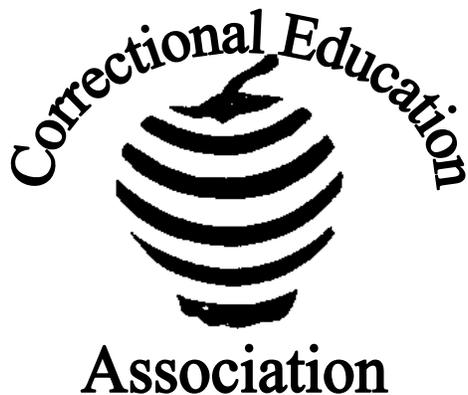
## **Need Help?**

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 experienced parenting educators who are eager to help. Just send an email to [jerrybednarowski@new.rr.com](mailto:jerrybednarowski@new.rr.com) with your question or request and I will forward it to our email list. Then wait a few days and the helping responses will be sent to you.



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### **Editor's Message:**

In late February, Mary Pohlman, teacher at Kettle Moraine Institution; Andrea Uherka, social worker at Taycheedah Correctional Institution; and I had the opportunity to present a workshop and host an exhibitor's table at the Fulfilling the Promise Conference sponsored by the University of Wisconsin-Extension. The conference was for parent educators, home visitors, early childhood staff and anyone who works with families with young children. Our *Connecting Incarcerated Parents and their Families* workshop was attended by about 20 people, over 100 visited our exhibitor's table, and 31 people signed up for our Parenting Special Interest Group email list.

Almost everyone we met at the conference commented that had worked with children who had an incarcerated parent. As a result of our participation in the conference, we were invited to present workshops and host an exhibitor's tables at two other conferences later this year.

Helping professionals in social service agencies and schools want to learn more about correctional policies, parenting programs available to offenders and ways to help families stay connected with incarcerated parents.

If you have the opportunity, please consider expanding your impact by presenting workshops at professional conferences outside of corrections or speaking at meetings of community organization. You will be heartened by the reception you will receive.

**Jerry**

