

# Parenting Connection

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## Right Path Program Gives Children a Choice

The Right Path Program, an educational partnership between Milwaukee Area Technical College (MATC) and Creative Corrections Education Foundation (CCEF), helps children who have a parent or legal guardian incarcerated or on parole avoid the pitfalls of their parents by giving them educational opportunities. Established in June 2014, the Right Path's mission is to place kids who have dropped out of high school for at least four months, back in school at MATC, to obtain their GED. This program aids in breaking the cycle and reducing second generation crime by providing these kids a choice of education verses incarceration.

Creative Corrections Education Foundation, a 501(c)(3) organization based in Beaumont, Texas, provides new opportunities for at-risk kids of incarcerated parents who otherwise are extremely likely to participate in criminal activities. By providing the possibility of a better future, including academics, financial, legal and social success; they hope to empower these young men and women to change their lives.

The foundation's board currently has members from the Texas Department of Corrections, New Mexico Department of Corrections, Ohio Department of Corrections, New York Department of Corrections, Colorado Department of Corrections, and Milwaukee House of Corrections. CCEF scholarships only support those students who are enrolled full-time during the academic school year, and online courses are not permitted. Applications will be on a first come first served basis, and based on the needs of each individual applicant. Applications may be submitted continuously throughout the year.

While their parents are locked up behind bars, CCEF aims to free the minds of the children, according to Percy H. Pitzer, CCEF Founder and President of the Board. "It's a chance for them to do something for themselves and stay out of the prison system," said the former warden Pitzer.

Creative Corrections Education Foundation's partnership with Milwaukee Area Technical College aims to help these kids beat the odds, but Pitzer says the statistics are not in their favor, "50% of the kids in (continued on page 2)

### In This Issue

- 1 Right Path Program Gives Children a Choice
- 2 Echoes of Incarceration Project Gives Voice to Invisible Youth
- 4 Arkansas Voices Helps Kinship Caregivers on their Journey
- 5 Children's Adjustment to Homecoming
- 6 Incarcerated Dads Invited to Submit Stories
- 7 Dads Behaving Dadly II Book Project Guidelines
- 8 Editor's Message

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(continued from page 1)

Juvenile Detention have a parent incarcerated. So many of them are following in their parents footsteps, I think one of the reasons for this is they don't see a vision," said Pitzer.

Christine McGee, the executive director of the MATC Foundation is hoping the combined effort can help break the cycle. CCEF is offering the students in the Right Path Program \$1,000 dollar scholarships. "It's very important these students have an option or an alternative to what they may be facing," said McGee.

The original 15 original Right Path scholarships are a pilot program which hopefully will result in "developing a program that will help the children of parents who are incarcerated particularly, those who have dropped out of high school and are interested in coming back to MATC to get an adult high school diploma or GED," said Pitzer.

McGee says the goal of the foundation is to get these kids in school, whether it's college or vocational training, and get them a trade.

Pitzar says so far the partnerships like the one with MATC have provided scholarships to students in 26 states. This program relies heavily on community support and the scholarships are available mainly because of donations.

Here are the eligibility requirements to participate in the MATC Right Path Program.

Applicants must meet the following eligibility criteria:

- Have a parent/guardian currently incarcerated or on parole/probation
- Have not completed high school or a GED/HSED program
- Be between the ages of 18-25
- Have been out of school or a GED/HSED program for at least four months
- Must meet minimum academic level as determined by the pre-testing process

Participating students will receive:

- Testing and placement services
- Tuition, books and fees funded
- Monthly student stipends
- At least two occupational courses per year
- Public transportation
- Access to MATC resources such as Life Skills, Career Advising, Tutoring, Workshops, Academic Support Centers, Library

Participating students will be expected to:

- Attend 100% of classes
- Show progress toward completion of designated program
- Meet with program staff to review progress
- Complete necessary paperwork to remain in program
- Remain free of criminal behavior
- Abide by the MATC Student Code of Conduct

## **Echoes of Incarceration Project Gives Voice to Invisible Youth**

Echoes of Incarceration is an initiative that explores the issue of mass incarceration and its effects on families, and creates documentary films told from the life experiences of the filmmakers who are youth with incarcerated parents.



The project seeks to train and empower young people to tell their stories and advocate for change. *Echoes of Incarceration* creates films for general audiences as well as specific training and advocacy tools for stakeholders. The films have been screened thousands of times in universities, prisons, and national conferences and at the White House.

The project is a collaboration between filmmaker Jeremy Robins and a group of non-profit organizations and advocates around the country. The process starts with intensive filmmaking and advocacy training for youth age 16-22. The crew then launches into production of documentary films under the guidance of a team of professional filmmakers and experts in the field of criminal justice.

The ultimate goal is to give voice to one of the largest and most invisible social issues of our times, and to harness the intelligence, energy, and creativity of young people to rethink our understandings of crime and punishment.

The project's first 10-minute film, *Echoes of Incarceration*, produced in 2009 by teens with incarcerated parents, intercuts the stories of four young people with the voices of experts and advocates in the field, and creates an emotional, compelling case for the importance of ongoing parental contact.

Thanks to a grant from the Brooklyn Arts Council, the project has released another film, *Caring Through Struggle: Caregivers of Children with Incarcerated Parents*, about the grandparents and caregivers responsible for the children of incarcerated parents.

In this 11-minute film, young filmmakers with incarcerated parents set out to take an intimate look at the growing and overlooked population and understand some of the hidden consequences of our nation's approach to imprisonment.

The film-makers examine their childhoods, being brought up by grandparents, and by extension, the issues caregivers face when raising a child with an incarcerated parent. Tough questions are asked, and some surprising realizations are made when a crew member realizes he has more in common with the grandmothers than he expected. The DVD includes a 12-minute extra chapter for social workers and educators.

*Echoes of Incarceration's* next film, *Visiting - Through the Youth Lens*, is currently in post-production. It will examine visiting parents in prison — an issue which is surprisingly controversial even though research has shown that a sustained relationship with a parent in prison is one of the strongest factors in both reducing a child's trauma, and also in reducing that parent's rate of recidivism.

Yet children often face huge resistance to visiting a parent: from caregivers, schools, social workers, and even judges. This film will dig into the challenges, sorrows, and incredible joys of visiting a parent in prison, and address one of the deepest misconceptions that children with incarcerated parents face.

Also in post-production is another film, *Resiliency Stories*. This DVD will collect short documentary success stories about artists and activists who have had a parent in prison, and what it took for them to find their voice. The profiles will range from Obie-winning playwright Daniel Beaty, to celebrated hip hop artist F. Stokes, to high school-age poets, to *Echoes* crew members' own autobiographical pieces.

The *Echoes of Incarceration* project is also currently creating a series of short films to correspond to the *Bill of Rights for Children with Incarcerated Parents* created by the San Francisco Children of Incarcerated Parents Partnership.

To find out more about the *Echoes of Incarceration* project visit [www.echoesofincarceration.org](http://www.echoesofincarceration.org). To request a DVD catalog email [jeremy@ibisdocs.com](mailto:jeremy@ibisdocs.com).



# Arkansas Voices Helps Kinship Caregivers on their Journey

Historically, relatives have always stepped up to care for children in their families, when the parents are unavailable or incapacitated. In addition to parental incarceration, the reasons for the parents being unavailable may include: abandonment, parental death, economic distress, military deployment, and incapacity, such as mental illness, addiction, and physical or developmental challenges.

Arkansas Voices for the Children Left Behind has published *A Resource Guide for Kinship Caregivers in Arkansas* for these grandparents and other relatives who are making great sacrifices to keep their families together by offering these children love and support.

The authors of the resource and information guide recognize that caring for someone else's children is difficult, especially when they are in such distress and the caregiver has no time to prepare. The caregivers may not know until years later what a difference they have made in the children's lives. They may receive very little appreciation or thanks for the tremendous amount of work they do and all they give up along the way.

The guide helps to remind the caregivers of the importance of what you are doing and give them the respect they deserve. The caregivers are not only invaluable to these children, but also to the community.

Arkansas Voices hopes the information in this guide will help the caregivers understand some of the complicated choices they may face and find the resources they need and realize that they are not alone on this journey.

The resource and information guide explains what every grandparent or relative caregiver needs to know when a parent is arrested, incapacitated, or involved in a dependency-neglect proceeding. The guide helps the caregivers understand some of the complicated choices they may face and find the resources they need. At the end of the guide are examples of forms, form letters and petitions needed during the process of becoming a relative caregiver.

Topics covered in *A Resource Guide for Kinship Caregivers in Arkansas* are:

- Caring for Children in Distress
- Arkansas Voices for the Children Left Behind, Inc
- School Enrollment
- Medicaid, Supplemental Security Income, Social Security Disability, and Temporary Employment Assistance
- Juvenile Court Dependency / Neglect Proceedings
- Kinship Foster Care
- Guardianship
- Power of Attorney
- Adoption
- FINS
- State Laws
- Behavior Management Tips
- Transitional Issues for Relative Caregivers

More information about *A Resource Guide for Kinship Caregivers in Arkansas* and other services provided by Arkansas Voices for the Children Left Behind, Inc. may be found at [www.arkansasvoices.org](http://www.arkansasvoices.org) or by contacting co-founders Dee Ann Newell and Paula Pumphrey at 866-986-4237.



# Children's Adjustment to Parents' Homecoming

What happens to children when their parent is released from jail or prison? According to Ann Adalist-Estrin in her work, *Homecoming: Children's Adjustment to Parent's Parole*, it depends, in part, on the quality of the attachment to that parent before and during incarceration

Other factors affecting the children's adjustment include:

- the extent of the trauma created by the parent's offense, arrest and imprisonment
- the presence and quality of protective factors and support systems that were available during the incarceration period and upon release
- the parent's return to prison

## The Parent-Child Relationship

There are often many similarities in the histories of incarcerated parents. They report growing up with inconsistent parenting in the midst of poverty, substance abuse, addiction, physical abuse, or sexual abuse. There are however, many variations in the relationship patterns of these inmates and their children prior to incarceration. Some incarcerated parents are primary caregivers before they are imprisoned. Many are caring and involved whether or not they reside with their children. Some incarcerated parents are uninvolved, disconnected and perhaps unattached. Some parents become genuinely involved while incarcerated, but have a great deal of difficulty maintaining relationships with their children on the street.

Still others may disconnect from their children during incarceration out of fear, hurt and self-protection. It hurts to see children sad or angry, it's scary to feel unsure of what is happening to them out there, perhaps in the care of those who were hurtful to them in their own childhoods. We often do not know the true depth of attachment between a parent who is going to prison and his/her child. In fact, the child's view of the parent-child relationship often differs from that of the parent — and the child's perception of attachment has historically been positively linked to resilience self-esteem and social competence. We know then, that maintaining, strengthening or initiating such bonds can be critical to the child's overall development as well as to their adjustment after the parent's release. This adjustment is also directly related to the style of coping used by the family during the imprisonment period.

## Style of coping used by the family during the imprisonment period

- The family on hold - This type of family often visits their incarcerated member, writes or telephones. They take pictures of events, people and places to keep their loved one connected to their lives. Rarely, however, are feelings discussed. Anger about the crime or the incarceration, sadness, abandonment, confusion, loss, frustration and hurt are all real and ever present emotions that are left on hold to deal with upon release. There is often a focus on the positive commitment to make this period of separation "ok."
- The parallel family - Families in this group keep in touch by letter or phone with occasional visits. They have a "life goes on" attitude without positive or negative emotion. "This happened and we'll deal with it." These family members tend to develop their own lives, meet new people, learn new skills and grow in completely separate ways from the incarcerated person.
- The estranged family - This family is cut off from the incarcerated member. Sometimes the family has decided not to maintain contact or foster parents cannot coordinate visitation. Often, it is the inmate who is unable to cope with the feelings that come with relationships or with frustrating correctional policies.
- The turbulent family - Negative feelings are expressed in out of control ways in this family. They are never able to develop effective relationship skills. Contact during incarceration can become hurtful and abusive at worst, or simmering and unpredictable at best.



## Going Home

When the release from prison or jail finally comes, it creates a major crisis for most families. The inmate's homecoming is likely to be shrouded by joblessness, economic hardship, or continuous poverty. In addition, role changes and restructuring of responsibilities by spouses and children can cause resentment and anger in the post parole period. A child's adjustment to release is often related to or a continuation of their style of coping during incarceration.

### Child's adjustment to release

- On hold families often feel initially relieved to have weathered the storm. They are confident that the worst is behind them. When the intensity of family life combines with many years of unresolved anger and hurt, the outcome can be disastrous. This is especially true for children who need an opportunity to express those feelings in safety, but feel that doing so may cause harm to the family.
- The parallel family has to reconcile their images of themselves as "the same as before incarceration" with all of the changes that have occurred. These changes often threaten the confidence of the released prisoner and pose many challenges to the relationships. Children are often faced with the dilemma of choosing to keep their "self" and risk the relationship or give up their new roles, identity or feelings to keep the relationship.
- The estranged family must often cope with the released prisoner's attempts to "surprise" them, reconcile the relationships and pick up where they left off. For children, the conflict caused by the decision to welcome parents back versus rejecting their overtures may cause massive distress, internal conflicts, and loyalty issues with custodial caregivers.
- The turbulent family is likely to continue to operate in a volatile fashion. Children may also attempt to express feelings they were unable to during incarceration and if they fear the violent and unpredictable reactions of parents, this acting out may occur outside the family, in school or on the street.

In each of these families the parents' struggles to gain employment, adjust to freedom and navigate a world that is usually hostile to "ex-cons" have significant effects on the child's development. The children's feelings, perceptions and reactions can be experienced as rejection or disrespect to the paroled parent as well as to other adults. The parents' reactions in turn (usually hurt or angry) can interfere with the child's ability to adjust.

## Incarcerated Dads Invited to Submit Stories for *Dads Behaving Dadly II*

In 2012, stay-at-home dads Al Watts and Hogan Hilling launched a book project titled *Dads Behaving Dadly*. The mission of the book project was to reveal the truths, tears and triumphs of modern fatherhood they had heard for years to a public that had yet to completely change its opinion of dads as bumbling, incompetent parents. Hogan coined the adjective "Dadly" to describe the actions and emotions of being an involved father.

Dads of different socio-economic backgrounds, races and family structures began sending them hundreds of stories which candidly described successes they achieved as actively involved parents and how they felt about them. Their honest, heart-warming, and humorous stories provided an in-depth look into how fatherhood has changed. The dads in their book have proven the loving, tender, devoted, masculine spirit of fatherhood is alive and well!

Due to the successful debut of the book, *Dads Behaving Dadly: 67 Truths, Tears and Triumphs of Modern Fatherhood*, and subsequent articles, media appearances, blogs and workshops; Motivational Press has agreed to publish a sequel *Dads Behaving Dadly II*.



Al Watts and Hogan Hilling are inviting incarcerated and former incarcerated dads to submit stories to the *Dads Behaving Dadly II* book project. A dad may submit up to three stories.

Like *Dads Behaving Dadly*, *Dads Behaving Dadly II* will be a collection of stories from ALL types of dads in the USA with different family dynamics, income levels and ethnic backgrounds. The book will include stories from working, at-home, divorced, single, step-dads, dads of children with special needs, and incarcerated dads.

Following are instructions specifically directed for incarcerated dads. The guidelines also include a physical mailing address in case the incarcerated dads do not have access to the internet. The Deadline Date for submissions is December 31, 2014. For more information about guidelines and instructions on how to submit a story for *Dads Behaving Dadly II*, visit the Submit page of the Dadly website at [www.dadsbehavingdadly.com](http://www.dadsbehavingdadly.com) or contact Hogan Hilling at [hogan@hoganhillling.com](mailto:hogan@hoganhillling.com).

Through their campaign, Hogan Hilling and Al Watts hope to show that "Fatherhood Is Alive and Well" in America.

## ***Dads Behaving Dadly II* Book Project Guidelines**

Al Watts, and I invite incarcerated dads to submit a story for the *Dads Behaving Dadly II* book. A dad may submit up to three stories. Doing so will increase a dad's chances of publication in the book. Several dads in *Dads Behaving Dadly #1* have two stories published in the book. Here are the guidelines and instructions:

1. Write your story in Word document **double-spaced in Times New Roman font.**
2. At top of story submission, include your **full name, Correctional Facility and Prison ID #.**
3. At the bottom of the story submission, **include a short bio.**
4. Story submission should be **around 750 words, but no more than 1,500.**
5. Submit your story to ***Dads Behaving Dadly II*, P.O. Box 3763, Crestline, CA 92325.**

The stories should include as many of these as possible:

- Express in detail your emotions and feelings about being a dad.
- Describe how you interact and build relationships with your child(ren) during your incarceration
- Illustrate how you plan to make better positive decisions and/or change your behavior to be a better dad
- Explain how you and your child(ren) will benefit from your active involvement.
- Give information about your crime and sentence.

### **SUBMISSION DEADLINE IS DECEMBER 31, 2014.**

Al and I are looking for good stories, not good writers. Just write and speak from your heart. If Al and I select your story, we will edit and return it to you for approval.

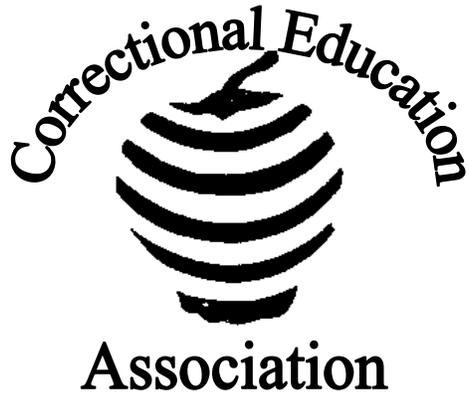
#### **Selection Process:**

- This is **ONLY** an invitation to submit your story for consideration in the "*Dads Behaving DADLY 2*" book.
- Hogan Hilling and Al Watts will judge the first round of the selection process and then submit their choices to the Publisher.
- The Publisher will choose the finalists for the book.

If you cannot submit the stories via the internet, need at deadline extension or have any questions, contact Hogan at (949) 331-8119.



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

Holidays are hard times for parents and children to be separated. Yet they can create family traditions which help bind the family together. Even though parents are incarcerated, they may play a role in family events.

Incarcerated parents should realize that the planning is an important part of the holiday to the child. To be involved the incarcerated parents must write your letters or make telephone calls before the holiday.

For most children, it is the attention and celebration that makes the day special. Incarcerated parents need to focus on ways to make the child feel special on these days. It is okay for them to let the child know they are feeling lonely during these times, but they shouldn't burden the child with worries about them. The parent needs to assure the child that he will celebrate the day and will be thinking about home. The parent can write about the meaning of the day and share memories of past holidays. At most institutions, cards are available through the Chapel. Homemade cards with the parent's own words or drawing are very special to the children.

Encourage incarcerated parents to use the holidays as an opportunity to be involved in family events.

**Jerry**

**For past issues of the Parenting Connection  
newsletter, go to [www.ceawisconsin.org](http://www.ceawisconsin.org)**

