

Parenting Connection

Volume 11 Issue 2

September/October 2014

Ex-Offender's Organization Assists Children of Prison Parents

Hakee Mitchell is an ex-drug dealer and gang member who knows what it is like to be a part of the violent streets of Metropolitan St. Louis, Missouri. He served over eight years in prison. During his prison sentence he realized it was not cool being incarcerated and separated from his children, Akeeya and Darion. He was devastated that he could not see his children grow up the first half of their childhood. Hakee began to pray diligently that God reveal the mission that he wanted him to accomplish. His prayers were answered with a vision to establish Assisting Children of Prison Parents (ACOPP) and write Spoken Word poetry during the latter years of his prison sentence.

After his release from prison, Hakee put all motivation into serving God, being a good father to his children, and supporting as many youth as he could through the ACOPP program. He founded and became President of Assisting Children of Prison Parents, a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit organization on July 2, 2008.

ACOPP's mission is to establish or re-establish relationships between children and their incarcerated parents by opening lines of communication, transporting them to visit their parents and providing creative-writing workshops.

ACOPP partners with a variety of agencies to provide quality social, psychological, developmental and educational services to children of incarcerated parents, as well as restoring communities to an environmentally safe status. All of ACOPP's seminars and workshops are facilitated by skilled professionals with experience and knowledge of the subject matter. Supervision of all youth sessions are conducted by experienced staff. Program participants are accepted via referrals from educational institutions, social service agencies, courts, outreach and self-enrollment. Groups average 10-15 children, grouped according to age and needs. ACOPP works closely with referral agents in terms of assessment and evaluation of the children.

(continued on page 2)

In This Issue

- 1 Ex-Offender Assists Children of Prison Parents
- 2 Brochure Gives Ideas for Staying Connected
- 4 Videos Show Portraits of Parents Returning Home
- 5 Documentary Takes Viewers Within a Prison Nursery
- 6 Philly Prisons to Try Video Visits for Inmates
- 7 Prison Parenting Programs Directory Continues to Grow
- 7 Tell Us About Your Program
- 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.r.com

Proofreader : Laura Reisinger,
Literacy Volunteers - Chippewa Valley



(continued from page 1)

ACOPP works with the children, as well as parents that are incarcerated, in order to strengthen family ties. The groups of children are engaged in tutoring, home-work sessions, study sessions, arts classes, physical activities, field trips, trips to visit their parents and other programs that afford the children opportunities to be successful while their parents are incarcerated.

ACOPP strives to maintain consistent lines of communication between the children and their incarcerated parents until they are released. They do this in three phases: letter writing, phone calls and transportation to and from the prison.

In 2013, Hakee founded a second organization called Second Chance of St. Louis to provide job training and employment for parents of the children in the ACOPP program. ACOPP partners with Mothers Being Mothers and Fathers Being Fathers to provide monthly support groups created to equip the parent or guardian of the children in the ACOPP program with information and resources in order to take care of their children and deter recidivism after they are released.

For more information about ACOPP, go to www.acopp4change.org or email acopporg@gmail.com. Also visit www.avadeworld.com to learn more about the HEARD youth program that Hakee has created and the affiliating organizations that he works with.

Brochure Gives Ideas for Staying Connected While Incarcerated

Incarcerated parents often ask:

How can I parent from prison?

How can I stay connected with my child while I am in prison?

How can I help them with the changes that have happened because of my incarceration?

Jackie Reilly, M.S., Youth Development Specialist, and Mara Lea Wright at the University of Nevada Cooperative Extension, Reno, Nevada have created a two-page brochure that may give incarcerated parents some ideas for communicating with their child while they are away.

Parenting From Prison gives special ideas for staying connected with children of all ages:

Young children (under 6 years of age):

- Make a placemat for your child – Place mats can be made from 11" x 17" colored paper or any stiff paper or even a file folder. Laminating it will help it be strong and keep it from being ruined by spills. The place mat can have a special message on it or you can draw their favorite animal or sport.
- Make a mobile for your child – A young child might like a mobile or a hanging sign. You could make pictures of special things they might like. Again, laminate them if you can. You can punch a hole in the top of the paper and then it can be hung from string or yarn.

School age children (ages 6 to 12):

- Make a grow chart for your child – You could mark special times on the chart that you remember or know about from their earlier childhood. You can mark their birth size on it and then they can mark it with help from an adult as they grow.
- Make a calendar for your child – If you have an idea about when you might be coming home, you may want to make a calendar for your child. You could make a calendar marking special occasions, such as birthdays, holidays, the first day of school, or summer vacation.
- Write a poem for your child – Write a poem about how special your child is and why you love him or her. Or, parents can write a name poem about their child using the letters of their child's name. For



example: "I love you Derek, because you are Delightful, Energetic, Rambunctious, Entertaining and Knowledgeable". The poem could be put on a card or poster for the child.

- Make a bookmark for your child – A bookmark is one way to remind children to read and let children know the parent values reading. Draw a picture or write a special message on a strip of 3" by 8" paper. Decorate it with stencils, stickers, markers, and colored pencils. Firm, stiff paper works well for this or, if possible, laminate your bookmark.
- Send a note – The note may be put in their lunch box or under their pillow or by their toothbrush. Just a small note that says "I love you. Have a great day! Love, Mom or Dad."

Teens (ages 12 to 18):

- Tell them stories about their childhood – Teens will like to hear stories about themselves, such as when they learned to walk, what their first words were, or about their birth.
- Make a journal for your teen – Teens may also like to write in a journal. You may want to include some blank pages or some thoughtful or fun questions for your teen.

Ideas for children of all ages:

- Encourage your child to read – Reading with children is something that helps them do well in school. You may want to try some creative ways to read with your child while you are incarcerated. Some ideas might include:
 - If there are children's books available at the prison, you can read to your children when they come for a visit.
 - Ask the person who brings your children for a visit to bring their favorite book so that you can read with them while you are together.
 - If you are earning money, you could ask the person caring for your child to purchase a book for you to give to your child. Even picture books can be fun for children and adults.
- Make a book for your child – The book can be a story that you write about them. You could tell a story about something fun they did when they were young or perhaps a story about how much you love them. For younger children you will want to be sure to use simple words and some pictures. The book can be put on several pages and you can staple the book to bind it.
- Write letters to your child – Children love to get mail. Sending them a simple letter as often as you can is a great way to let them know you are thinking of them. In your first letter you may want to ask what they are learning in school or if they are playing soccer or football or doing gymnastics. Then you can write to them about their interests. You may be able to find out about their favorite television show. You can watch an episode and write to them about the show. Ask what part they liked best or what they thought about what happened on the show.
- Make a hug for your child – You can trace your arm and hand on an 11" x 17" paper. Cut out two copies and tape or glue the arms together. You can decorate the hug. Some have drawn rings or a bracelet or a watch on their hands and arms. You can write a special message on the hug to send to your child. Mail your hug to your child. You can send more than one hug to your child while you are gone – maybe even send one each month. The paper hug is a tangible way to show your love.
- Make a card for your child – A card can be as simple as a folded piece of paper with something special written in it. You can make a card for your child's birthday, for any other special day, or just to tell them you love them.

The *Parenting From Prison* brochure may be found at www.unce.unr.edu/publications/child.htm. Scroll to "Children, Youth and Families: Parenting," and click on Parenting From Prison.

To join CEA go to: www.ceanational.org



Videos Show Portraits of Parents Returning Home

The single most accurate predictor for successful re-entry is strong family bonds. And no group has a stronger vested interest in re-establishing relations with ex-prisoners than their children. Like children of divorce, they bear the brunt of separation and yearn for an integrated family life.

New America Media has compiled a *Children of Re-Entry* series of short videos which show of portraits of parents returning home from incarceration through the eyes of their children. Produced by young reporters at Richmond Pulse and Silicon Valley De-Bug, these videos tell the evolving stories of families adjusting to life changes.

These videos may be viewed at <http://newamericamedia.org/special/children-of-reentry.php>.

***I Can't Just Be Done With My Mom* by David Meza**

When Alisha's drug-addicted mom was preparing for her release from state prison, she asked her daughter Alisha to be her caretaker. Alisha said "no." Alisha spent the first nine years of her mother's incarceration, release, and re-incarceration cycle as a child, and as she enters into her own adulthood, she is finding her mom's absence and chaotic lifestyle a bitterer pill to swallow.

***I Want to be Like Him When I Grow Up* by Daniel Zapian**

Greg was just released after a being incarcerated most of his life. To his great surprise, his son has taken him under his wing, looking after him while his other sons won't even talk with him. Greg is so grateful for his son's support, he says, "I want to be like him when I grow up."

***Baby Quintero* by Valerie Klinker**

The one thing that Suzie couldn't handle while in prison was not being able to protect her daughter, Baby. Baby spent two months in juvenile hall while her mom was incarcerated. But now that her mom has returned home with a new job and a newfound sense of self-worth, Baby considers herself her mom's backbone.

***Life Lost, Family Found* by Anthony May**

Ever since Nate's dad left his family when he was eight years old, Nate has never fully recovered. Nate went on to join a gang and spent 20 years in state prison for a murder charge. But after his first year behind bars, something special happened in his life. He had a baby girl. Now that Nate's released, he is piecing together the relationship with his daughter that for 20 years has been limited to letters, and a few visits to the state penitentiary.

***A Reentry to Motherhood* by Jean Melesaine**

Steeda is finding life with her two young girls to be not exactly what she had envisioned from behind bars. Transitioning from prison life to the responsibilities of motherhood is a struggle that Stacy faces daily – but she doesn't do it alone. Steeda stands with other mothers in similar situations through the organization she founded, Sisters That Been There, which is a peer support group for women reentering society after incarceration.

***Joey Visits Lisa* by Jean Melesaine**

Joey hadn't seen her mother Lisa since she was incarcerated 18 years ago. Joey and Lisa's attorney make the drive to visit Lisa for the first time in 20 years, causing everyone in the car to reflect on their relationship to Lisa, even the attorney.

***Joshua & Kenny – A Father Lost, and Found* by Sean Shavers**

Joshua Davis was four years old when his father Kenny was sent to prison. But instead of returning to the blissful times of Joshua's childhood when his father came home five years later, Joshua and his father began to resent each other. Today, it has been nine years since Kenny's release and Joshua has lost interest in his father and building a relationship with him. But despite



the distance between Joshua and Kenny in their relationship, they actually live on the same block, seeing each other only on holidays and at the local corner store.

Angela Birts by Fernando Perez

Angela says she has a positive relationship with her father, despite the fact that for 18 years he's been behind bars. The physical barrier erected between Angela and her father has become even more painful as her life presents more and more opportunities that she wants to enjoy with her father. As she prepares for a potential new life with her dad, she realizes that she too will need help with the transition.

Documentary Takes Viewers Within a Prison Nursery

"Purdy" is an intimate portrait of five offender mothers and their infants. Originally aired by Washington PBS station KBTC on October 15, 2010, the documentary explores the struggles of raising a child at the Washington Corrections Center for Women (WCCW) in Purdy; the challenges that the women face as they prepare to re-enter the community; and the joy that these women experience as the bond develops between their infants and them.

The program, "Purdy," is a look at the Residential Parenting Program inside the women's prison. The parenting program allows minimum-security inmates serving less than three years in prison to live with their babies in a designated unit. The women learn about parenting and are able to support healthy attachments to their newborns.

Some women get pregnant, then become incarcerated, and then give birth and become mothers. Significantly, the majority of women entering prison pregnant, even for relatively short prison sentences, are separated from their babies after giving birth. Or from the babies' point of view, they are separated from their mother for a crime they did not commit at a critical time of development. Incarcerated women in the state of Washington have an average sentence of fifteen and a half months, which means that half the women currently in prison will be back in the community next year.

In an effort to be proactive in its support of the early childhood development of these infants, the Washington's Correction Center for women has created a unique program that allows minimum-security inmates serving less than three years the opportunity to live with their babies in a designated unit. The mother and baby pair share a room during her sentence and have the support of volunteer doulas and inmate caregivers. The Residential Parenting Program collaborates with the on-grounds Early Head Start to teach the women about parenting and to support healthy attachment, which is critical to an infant's ability to learn. Conditions for healthy maternal-infant attachment are available in a safe, enriched and protective environment: protective custody.

Incarcerated women's issues differ from those of incarcerated men. Most minimum security women offenders are incarcerated for non-violent offenses related to substance abuse. Many of these women, though not all, have experienced traumatic events in childhood where a safety net was either not available or not utilized. One major issue differentiating women from men in prison is that most of the women who are mothers have been the primary caretakers of the children prior to incarceration.

Purdy is streamed on the www.kbtc.org website. For more information about the Residential Parenting Program visit www.residentialparenting.com.



Philly Prisons to Try Video Visits for Inmates

The Philadelphia Prison System is planning to set up "video visits" at one of the city's jails in hopes of increasing convenience and cutting costs, but the project is garnering mixed reviews from advocates for inmates.

Prisons Commissioner Louis Giorla says inmates will be able to see their loved ones on a video screen at the jail, a remote site or perhaps even a personal iPhone one day, depending on several different factors that are still being worked out. He expects the video visits to start as part of a pilot program at the Curran-Fromhold Correctional Facility in a few months.

Giorla says the virtual visitations would be especially beneficial for families who live several hours away from an incarcerated person or find it difficult to get to there for other reasons. "We know that it would be convenient for some visitors to visit via video from an off-site location," he said. "It may provide a way for somebody who can't come here, somebody who's disabled or somebody who is far away."

He also says it could cut down on the waiting times for in-person visitors, which range from a half-hour to several hours. He's also hoping it will save taxpayer dollars.

Ann Schwartzman, executive director of the Pennsylvania Prison Society, worries that video visits may replace face-to-face ones. Other prisons in the country have eliminated or reduced in-person visits after introducing video alternatives, and she says they simply aren't the same.

"The connection between family and the person who's incarcerated is critical. It's critical for the family," she said, "but it's also critical for our neighborhoods because this is a public safety issue. We know that family contact can help reduce recidivism."

Giorla says he believes in-person visits are valuable, and is not planning to scrap them. However, he says their availability may be tied to inmate behavior in the future.

by: Holly Otterbein

reprinted with permission from Newsworks,

Smart, Local News for the Philly Region, www.newsworks.org

Upcoming Events

University of Wisconsin-Extension

Fulfilling the Promise Conference

February 24-25, 2015

Chula Vista Resort, Wisconsin Dells, WI

Region III & IV Correctional Education Association Conference

May 4-5, 2015

The Madison Concourse Hotel & Governor's Club, Madison, WI

7th Annual National Prisoner's Family Conference

For Those Who Care and Wish to DO More

May 6-8, 2015

Night Hotel North Dallas, Dallas, TX



Prison Parenting Programs Directory Continues to Grow

In February of this year, the Parenting Special Interest Group (SIG) of the Correctional Education Association published a directory of resources to help correctional educators enhance existing or create new parenting programs in their correctional facilities. *Prison Parenting Programs: Resources for Parenting Instructors Prisons and Jails* was originally sent to everyone receiving the electronic version of this issue of the *Parenting Connections* newsletter and was posted on the www.ceawisconsin.org, www.ceanational.org and www.fairshake.net websites. A generous donation from Goodwill Industries of North Central Wisconsin made it possible for hardcopies of the directory to be printed for distribution at conferences and training events.

Prison Parenting Programs contains information on 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. Each entry includes a short description of the resource and, most importantly, a contact person, email address, and/or website so users of the directory have a specific contact for more information.

Since its creation, *Prison Parenting Programs* was intended to be a living document. Since February, information on parenting programs in Alabama, Arkansas, Hawaii, Kansas, New York, Missouri, South Dakota, Texas, and Washington has been added to the directory. So check out the recently expanded *Prison Parenting Programs: Resources for Parenting Instructors Prisons and Jails* that is now available on the www.ceawisconsin.org, www.ceanational.org and www.fairshake.net websites.

If you would like 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.

**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.

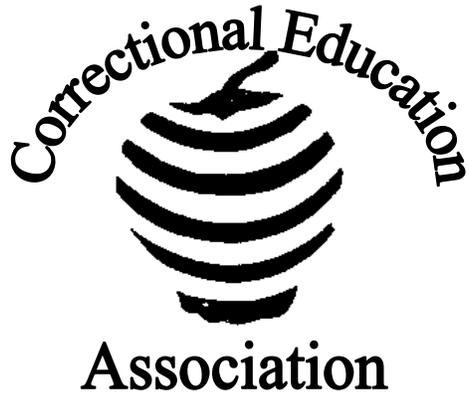
Here are some suggestions for articles:

- 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.



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



Editor's Message:

The Correctional Education Association (CEA) has partnered with JPay to develop and implement an open, digital education platform for use by educators, inmates and correctional staff. An article on this partnership is in the September/October 2014 issue of the CEA-Wisconsin newsletter.

Some correctional facilities already have technology in place that allows families to video visit with their incarcerated family members, send them emails, and transmit money to their accounts. An article on video visits in the Philadelphia jails is in this newsletter.

I would like to include descriptions of how these technology innovations are working in this newsletter:

Is the technology readily accessible to inmates and their families?

Is it easy to use?

Do the inmates and families like using it?

Is it affordable?

Are the security restrictions reasonable and understood by the inmates and families?

Please send me your comments or, even better, write an article on your facility's use of technology to promote communication between inmates and their families.

Jerry

