

# Parenting Connection

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## Incarcerated Parents Speak about Participating in CLiF Seminars

Children of inmates are at special risk for growing up with low literacy skills. The Children's Literacy Foundation (CLiF) lead seminars in prisons to demonstrate to inmates the importance of sharing books and stories with their kids even from behind bars. CLiF volunteers model how to make it fun and easy.

Because nationally 70% of incarcerated people have low literacy skills, the program centers around seminars on the importance of sharing books with children and strategies for parents who aren't strong readers themselves. Parents then select books and send them home to their kids. Some inmates may record themselves reading the stories aloud and send both book and recording home. On visiting days, CLiF gives a special storytelling presentation.

The Children's Literacy Foundation is currently in effect at the New Hampshire State Prison for Men in Concord, New Hampshire and the Marble Valley Regional Correctional Facility in Rutland, Vermont through their Children of Prison Inmates grant program.

The following notes that CLiF has received from inmates demonstrate how the program strengthens families and introduces books, reading and storytelling as positive experiences in kids' lives:

*"To all those who were involved in putting together the storytelling event on June 23 thank you... My son and I and everyone loved it. It's a great program for the kids. My son loves to read books, we read every night to him... I loved how the gentleman providing the event reads to the kids and how he gets right into the story and gets the kids involved in the book he reads, as I try and do the same thing."*

Inmate, Rutland

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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. Send articles and comments to:

Jerry Bednarowski, CEA-Wisconsin  
W6443 Old Highway Road  
Menasha, WI 54952

[jerrybednarowski@new.rr.com](mailto:jerrybednarowski@new.rr.com)

Proofreader : Laura Reisinger,  
Literacy Volunteers - Chippewa Valley



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*“The books I send [my kids] give us another avenue of interaction and they get so excited when they get the opportunity to share what they’ve read with me.”*

Inmate, Concord

*“We have turned the seminars into an exciting time for us. When I know there is one coming I talk it up for a few weeks before, then the day of the seminar I tell [my daughters] that the books are coming. I never tell them what they are, so it is always a surprise. I love it and they do as well. This really all started because of CLiF. Thank you. They will be waiting very impatiently for their new books.”*

Inmate, Concord

*I am not able to actually read them books. Since I started attending the CLiF seminars, we have started storytelling at night on the phone. Either I will tell one or they may, but there is always a story.*

Inmate, Rutland



## **Incarcerated Parents Reconnect with Their Children**

While incarcerated, and in some cases even before incarceration, inmates become separated from their children. The Federal Bureau of Prisons recognizes that creating a successful parent-child relationship is important to the inmate's reentry success, as well as the child's success.

For those inmates wishing to enhance their parenting skills, parenting classes and activities are available to assist parents in becoming a more effective parent. These programs provide a range of parenting skills to assist them in managing their growing child's emotional and intellectual needs.

At FCI Cumberland 10 inmates and their children reconnected during a parenting program this past summer. For the last 12 years, at no cost to the government, FCI Cumberland has hosted this program that brings community organizers, volunteers, and children of incarcerated parents to this five-day event conducted in the visiting room. Inmates participate in a variety of visiting room activities, designed to bring father and child closer together. During the week, they construct a family mural, write and perform skits, complete several craft projects together and share their thoughts and feelings through journaling.

Inmates begin planning months in advance for this program. They are carefully screened for participation in this weeklong event and must not have committed any disciplinary infractions during the previous year. When they're not at the institution, the children and community organizers stay at a local area campground where they enjoy typical camp activities like hayrides, scavenger hunts, arts and crafts, volleyball, swimming and games.

taken from Federal Bureau of Prisons website

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# Study Shows Turning Points Curriculum Makes Real Difference

A study published in the January 2015 issue of the *Journal of Correctional Education* provides additional positive support for parenting programs for incarcerated mothers. In their article, *Evaluating the Turning Points Curriculum: A Three-Year Study to Assess Parenting Knowledge in a Sample of Incarcerated Women*, Lynn Urban and Barb Burton evaluated the Turning Points parenting curriculum specially designed for use with incarcerated populations.



The Parents and Their Children (PATCH) program at Chillicothe Correctional Center (CCC) in Missouri facilitates the project that combines intensive parent education with supervised offender mother/child visits in special family visiting rooms as well as ongoing offender support groups to help offender mothers become more effective parents. The project requires offender mothers to complete five weeks of parent education classes (two per week) using Turning Points, a promising practice parent training program adapted for offenders from Practical Parent Education. The full Turning Points curriculum includes 15 lessons, but due to time and institutional constraints, the following ten lessons are offered at CCC:

- Understanding your parenting style
- Dealing with complex emotions of children
- How to communicate from a distance with children and their caregivers
- Rebuilding trust that has been broken
- Dealing with children's anger
- Learning positive discipline techniques
- Self-esteem in children and their parents
- Keeping children safe from harm: Preventing child abuse and accidents
- Setting developmentally appropriate expectations for children
- Understanding temperaments within the family

After successfully completing the ten lessons, the offender is eligible to apply for a more private four-hour visit (PATCH visit) held in a special area at CCC away from the general visiting area. PATCH visits give the mothers an opportunity to apply their newly acquired knowledge and skill from the parenting classes during interactions with their children.

Offenders then must attend three support group sessions before being eligible for another PATCH visit. There is no limit to how many PATCH visits one offender may have during the year, as long as the eligibility requirements are met.

The study reports results from three years of parenting classes with 204 participants. In addition, longitudinal data was collected on a select group of 18 women who participated in the program over multiple years. A pretest was administered to every participant at the beginning of each of the ten parenting lessons and a posttest was administered at the end of each parenting lesson to assess knowledge gained. Results revealed that mean posttest scores were consistently higher for all lessons and all years. Results also showed an increase in parenting confidence during the class.

The complete *Evaluating the Turning Points Curriculum: A Three-Year Study to Assess Parenting Knowledge in a Sample of Incarcerated Women* article may be found in the January 2015 issue of the *Journal of Correctional Education*. More information about the Parents and Their Children (PATCH) programs at Chillicothe Correctional Center may be found at [www.chillicothepatch.org](http://www.chillicothepatch.org).



# Family Matters Course Improves Family Relationships

Research supports the value of maintaining the family ties of people in prison. Family healing work will likely affect multiple relationships within the family, especially for the children of prisoners, as well as increase the possibility of healthy and productive life choices for all family members.

In their article, *Evaluation of a Family Wellness Course for Persons in Prison*, published in the January 2015 issue of the *Journal of Correctional Education*, Linda Bell and Connie Cornwell examined the effect that participation in a Family Matters course had on 47 male and 26 female inmates in the Indiana correctional system.

The Family Matters course is grounded in family systems and attachment theories. It is designed to be used with people in prison. The overall focus of the course is on the family as a system with unique history, roles, rules, strengths, and challenges. The course teaches participants communication skills and how to manage conflict, change destructive behavior patterns by strengthening action over reaction, and heal relationships. Included is a focus on connection with family members, particularly children, and parenting from prison. Participants are asked to focus on improving one or two family relationships as part of the course. Experiential exercises, role-plays, letter writing and telephone calls are used to support this work.

The course is divided into four main units with two or three classes per unit:

1. Family Systems introduces the strengths and challenges represented by different family cultures and ethnicity. It explains the importance of family history, family life cycle and family rules and roles.
2. Action and Reaction introduces the thinking and feeling brain and supports the concept of taking responsibility for positive action rather than being reactive to one's environment.
3. Healing and Hope offers a way to break destructive patterns identified in the Family systems unit using skills such as effective listening, gratitude and forgiveness.
4. Precious Child focuses on attachment patterns, how to nurture secure attachment, and the importance of staying connected with family while in prison. It includes an extensive section on parenting from prison.

Results suggest that the participants had a better understanding of themselves and their families at the end of the course, and showed an increase in self-competence and self-esteem. Many participants reported more contact with family members and an improvement in important relationships, particularly relationships with children.

The complete *Evaluation of a Family Wellness Course for Persons in Prison* article may be found in the January 2015 issue of the *Journal of Correctional Education*. The Family Matters course is not copyrighted; material may be selected or adapted as needed. A free download of the Workbook & Leader's Manual is available at: <http://www.familymatterscourse.com>.

## Upcoming Event

**Region III/IV Correctional Education Association Conference**

**May 4-5, 2015**

**The Madison Concourse Hotel**

**Madison, WI**



# MDC Brooklyn Holds Night of Hopes and Dreams

On Friday, January 23, 2015, Metropolitan Detention Center Brooklyn held an overnight visit for several female offenders, their children, and grandchildren. The "Mother-Child Night of Hopes and Dreams" was held in the institution's visiting room that staff and inmates decorated in a child-friendly fashion. A large cardboard train and life-sized drawings of popular characters adorned the walls. A number of community organizations participated in the event and helped provide fun activities for the mothers and children. For some of the children it was the first night they spent with their mother in months or even years; they expressed their appreciation to the staff for creating special childhood memories.

Eight children, ages 5 – 11, spent the evening coloring, dancing, playing games, and watching movies. The women performed an interactive puppet show where they celebrated all the birthdays and holidays they have missed during their incarceration. After a bedtime story, the women slept in cots next to the children. The Bureau of Prisons recognizes that supporting positive connections between children and their incarcerated parents facilitates reentry, improves the lives of the children and strengthens our communities. We continuously seek opportunities to strengthen family ties through events and innovative programs for parents in our custody.

taken from Federal Bureau of Prisons website

## Song Seeks to Change People's Hearts

Can a song change people's hearts? Felix Latham believes that his song, "Wake Me Up When My Father's Home Again," will help incarcerated parents imagine what their children are feeling. He believes that if his song can make it, not only to people on the street, but also to those who are incarcerated, it could help parents to be and parents that are have a change of heart.

Sung by his daughters, Kiyah, Khadijah, Kendra, and Khaleigha Latham, his song is a message to help children by reaching out to parents that are making choices that could take them away from their children. As they sing, they want to be that parent's child – so the parents can hear how their child feels or would feel if this was to happen, because it happened to them.



The Lathams hope and pray to touch the hearts of future parents so it will be in their mind to make good choices, not just for themselves, but also for their future children.

The video of "Wake Me Up When my Father's Home Again" may be found on You Tube at [www.youtube.com/watch?v=MbS-31aNZH0](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MbS-31aNZH0). For information on the Voice of Children, email the Lathams at: [voiceofchildrenthelatham@gmail.com](mailto:voiceofchildrenthelatham@gmail.com).

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



# Crafts Serve as a Reminder of Love

When a parent is absent, children often yearn for a tangible reminder of their love. Simple craft projects may be an answer.

Here are some craft ideas that Jackie Reilly, Youth Development Specialist with the University of Nevada Cooperative Extension made in her article, *Parenting from Prison: What Can Extension Educators Do?* These craft projects can be made with materials that are allowed in most correctional facilities. The finished projects can then be given to the child on a visit or mailed home.

**Make-a-hug:** Parents trace their hand and arm on an 11" x 17" paper. Parents cut out the traced arms and glue them together. Parents can write a special message on the hug and mail it to their child. The paper hug is a tangible way to show their love. For prison settings that do not allow scissors, the parent educator may need to pre-cut the traced arms.

**Bookmarks:** In class we talk about the importance of reading with children. A bookmark is one way to remind children to read and let children know the parent values reading. Parents decorate a strip of 3" by 8" paper. We provide stencils, stickers, markers, and colored pencils. We laminate the bookmarks.

**Place-mats:** Parents put a positive message and pictures on an 11" x 17" colored paper. We laminate the place mat so that it can be cleaned with a damp cloth.

**Name Poem:** Parents can write a 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.

## Revisiting the Children's Bill of Rights

Over ten years ago, the San Francisco Partnership for Incarcerated Parents published the Bill of Rights for Children of Incarcerated Parents. As policies relating to arrests, child custody and communication and visiting the incarcerated continue to evolve, it is a good time to revisit this Bill of Rights.

The Bill of Rights recognizes that children's needs extend well beyond physical comfort and security. This bill of rights is based on work originally done by Gretchen Newby of Friends Outside, a California organization that addresses the special needs of families affected by incarceration. The following are excerpted from *Children of Incarcerated Parents: A Bill of Rights*.

### 1. I have the right to be kept safe and informed at the time of my parent's arrest.

Many children of offenders are introduced to the criminal justice system when their parent is arrested and they see him/her taken away in handcuffs. The majority of police and sheriff's departments do not have protocols for dealing with the children of arrested parents; in too many cases, the resulting experience is terrifying and confusing for the children left behind.

### 2. I have the right to be heard when decisions are made about me.

When a parent is arrested, children whose chaotic lives may already have left them with little sense of control often feel even more alienated from the events that swirl around them. Adults they have never met remove their parents with little explanation, then decide where the children will go without consulting them.

### 3. I have the right to be considered when decisions are made about my parent.

Ask the child of an incarcerated mother what might have improved his life and his prospects and you're likely to hear some version of this answer: "Help for my mom." Even after years of trauma and



abandonment, young people are likely to see their parents as troubled and in need of support, rather than as bad and in need of punishment.

**4. I have the right to be well cared for in my parent's absence.**

When a child loses a single parent to incarceration, she also loses a home. In the most extreme cases, children may wind up fending for themselves in a parent's absence.

**5. I have the right to speak with, see and touch my parent.**

Visiting an incarcerated parent can be difficult and confusing for children. If the parent is in a county jail, the child may have to talk to him on a staticky telephone and look at him through scratched Plexiglas. If he is in prison, the child may have to travel a long distance to spend a few hours in a visiting room full of other prisoners and their families.

**6. I have the right to support as I struggle with my parent's incarceration.**

Children whose parents are imprisoned carry tremendous burdens. No only do they lose the company and care of a parent, they also must deal with the stigma of parental incarceration and fear for their parent's safety and well-being. Researchers who have interviewed offenders' children have found them prone to depression, anger and shame. Many young children experience a parent's arrest as simple abandonment.

**7. I have the right not to be judged, blamed or labeled because of my parent's incarceration.**

Incarceration carries with it a tremendous stigma. Because young children identify with their parents, they are likely to internalize this stigma, associating themselves with the labels placed upon their parents and blaming themselves for their parents' absence.

**8. I have the right to a lifelong relationship with my parent.**

Separation is hard on families — but paradoxically, so is reunion. Recently-released prisoners face an obstacle course of challenges and obligations. They must maintain a relationship with a parole or probation officer; find work and housing despite a criminal record; and struggle to rebuild relationships with friends and family.

Losing a parent to incarceration is a life-changing event. Those who work with children impacted by incarceration can use this Bill of Rights to guide policies and procedures that can help to mitigate some of the trauma as well as help children develop the resilience to live positive, prosocial lives.

## 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.

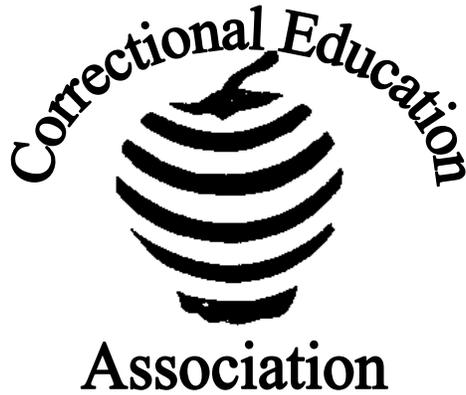
Here are some suggestions for articles:

- 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](mailto:JerryBednarowski@new.rr.com).



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



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

If you are planning to enhance an existing program for incarcerated parents and their families or create a new parenting program, our directory, *Prison Parenting Programs: Resources for Parenting Instructors Prisons and Jails*, may be a source of ideas.

To create the directory, we combed all of the issues of the bi-monthly *Parenting Connections* newsletter since it was first published in November 2004. Highlighted in the directory are innovative parenting skills programs in prisons, family support and mentoring organizations, parent/child book reading projects, re-entry programs, handbooks for incarcerated parents and their families, and books and videos dealing with incarcerated parents and their families. We then wrote a short description of each resource and, most importantly, included a contact person, email address, and/or website so users of the directory have a specific contact for more information.

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

**Jerry**

