

# Parenting Connection

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# PROJECT WHAT!

Community Works West, founded in 1997 in Oakland, California, interrupts and heals the far-reaching impact of incarceration and violence by empowering individuals, families and communities. Through programs in the jails and community, youth-led advocacy efforts, and public exhibits and performances, they

- Enable individuals to break the cycle of incarceration and violence and establish productive, violence-free lives
- Help families and communities heal from the impact of incarceration and the behaviors leading up to it
- Create social and institutional change to better meet the needs of incarcerated individuals, their children and their families

Their work is guided by the principles of restorative justice and a belief in the power of the arts to educate and heal. They work closely with the criminal and juvenile justice systems, the public school system and other community-based organizations providing services in the San Francisco Bay Area and across the state.

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Project WHAT! (We're Here And Talking) is one of Community Works' programs that is led by youth who have had a parent incarcerated, Project WHAT! raises awareness about children with incarcerated parents with the long-term goal of improving services and policies that affect these children. The program employs young people who have experienced parental incarceration as the primary curriculum content developers and facilitators for trainings.

Since it was launched in 2006, Project WHAT! has delivered nearly 100 trainings to 5,500 people in 14 counties throughout California and seven states. The youth-led trainings provide audiences with tools to more effectively serve children who have or have had a parent incarcerated.

These offerings are designed and delivered by the Community Works' team of trained youth:

- **Youth-led Trainings:** Tailored to meet your needs, these trainings enhance conferences, workshops and staff in-service trainings.
- **Co-Facilitation and Presentations:** These trained facilitators and speakers can add a unique perspective to organizations' programs and events.
- **Educational Resources:**
  - ✓ *Project WHAT! Resource Guide for Teens with a Parent in Prison or Jail* was developed by Project WHAT! youth, this 80-page workbook answers common questions that children have when a parent is incarcerated. It has an entire section that explains complex jail and prison visiting procedures in plain language.
  - ✓ *A Sentence Apart* is a 12-minute DVD that features two youth from Project WHAT! and a grandmother as they cope with a family member in prison, attempting to bridge broken relationships and diligently working to break the generational cycle of incarceration.
  - ✓ *The Bill of Rights for Children of Incarcerated Parents* pamphlet, outlining the central principles of the Children of Incarcerated Parents (CIP) advocacy movement, is distributed at our presentations.

Community Works' hires youth who after completing a training program provide many of the services. In order to work with Project WHAT!, the youth must have at least one of parent incarcerated at some point in his/her life, and must be willing to speak publicly about how the parents' incarceration affected his/her life. These are paid part-time positions.

Additionally, *Community Works Youth Theater Ensemble* hires youth interested specifically in writing and performing about what it's like to have a parent incarcerated. No theater is experience necessary, just a passion for acting and social justice.

Recent graduates of the Project WHAT! curriculum are eligible to receive a scholarship to further their studies at college and beyond.

Community Works' provides technical assistance to organizations wanting to replicate their programs. More information and a training request form are available on the <http://communityworkswest.org/programs> website.

## Advice to Parents in Prison: Write

In her January 23, 2015 entry on *Kars4Kids: An Educational Blog for Parents*, Merle Huerta writes that incarcerated parents have a choice. "You can choose to do nothing, to avoid contact with your child. Or, you can take measures to improve yourself and to maintain a presence in your child's life."



She feels that a parent's influence does matter, even from prison. The parent in prison can still be a mentor for his child and can find ways to mitigate the impact of incarceration on his child, even if access is limited.

To be an effective parent while in prison and after reuniting with the family, the parent must use his prison time to take measures to improve himself. This may include enrolling in parenting skills programs, continuing his education, participating in individual or group therapy, or having a regular meditation or exercise routine.

A means of self-improvement usually not considered by inmates and correctional staff is narrative writing and the arts.

Merle Huerta cites examples of prisoners who used writing to make positive use of their incarceration. "Did you know that some of the most famous authors served time in prison and wrote while incarcerated? O'Henry wrote 14 short stories while imprisoned for embezzlement. E.E. Cummings, author of *Winnie the Pooh* wrote an autobiographical novel while imprisoned in a French prison during WWI. Some reported that writing alleviated the boredom and kept insanity at bay. Others wrote because the isolation served as material for countless stories."

Her advice to prisoners is: "You should write. Write letters. Religiously write in a journal ten minutes every day. Don't have a paper? Write on toilet paper (no joke)."

Huerta asserts that "Writing is a form of expressive language and research shows that writing, especially narrative writing where you talk about your own stories, can do much to reduce stress, mood disorders, depression, despair, and boredom. Expressive writing helps us to make sense of the world, of our own emotions and our actions. It can help us with old traumas."

Huerta believes that narrative writing or any participation in the arts reduces boredom, improves quality of prison life, and has therapeutic benefits. She writes, "For some prisoners, writing a personal narrative (even through poetry) provided a sense of meaning. Life mattered. Their stories mattered and one day their stories would serve as a legacy for others. Most of all, writing gives prisoners a voice, a means by which to feel heard."

Merle Huerta's complete blog may be found at <http://www.kars4kids.org/blog/parenting-prison/>

## 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 <mailto:JerryBednarowski@new.rr.com>.



# AIM Spotlights Programs for Incarcerated Women

Aid to Inmate Mothers (AIM) is a non-profit organization that provides services to Alabama's incarcerated women with emphasis on enhancing personal growth and strengthening the bonds between inmate mothers and their children.

AIM has established programs to:

- Provide emotional interaction between inmate mother and child.
  - ✓ Monthly Visitation
  - ✓ Storybook Project
- Improve inmate mother's life skills.
  - ✓ Prison classes
  - ✓ Women's Health Initiative for the Incarcerated
- Help the mothers make a successful transition to community life.
  - ✓ Project Reconnect
  - ✓ Clothing closet
- Support the children of inmates
  - ✓ Family Outreach

You can learn more about Aid to Inmate Mothers Parenting programs and other projects on their Facebook Page, Aid to Inmate Mothers or their Website: [www.inmatemoms.org](http://www.inmatemoms.org). If you would like to get more information or get involved, contact Carol Potok at [carol@inmatemoms.org](mailto:carol@inmatemoms.org).

In its newsletter each month, AIM spotlights one of these programs. Here are the programs spotlighted in September and October.

## Parenting Class

Part of our mission at AIM is to foster growth and strong bonds between incarcerated mothers and their children. One way that we are able to do that is through our parenting curriculum. Overseen by Assistant Director Larnetta Moncrief, (funded by Children's Trust Fund) parenting classes happen in both Tutwiler and the Montgomery Women's facility every one or two months. A facilitator is brought in to host a 3-4 week class about parenting and improving stress management skills. Our summer intern, Megan Skipper, facilitated a 4 week class in July.

Here's what she had to say about the experience:

### ***Why do you think these classes are so important?***

"I like to explain it to the women like this: having a child without any education on what to expect at certain ages or how to handle the stress of parenting is like being hired onto a job with no job description. You do what you can to get things done and to look busy, but you're still not sure if what you're doing is right. This causes a lot of stress and 'unhealthy' parenting practices. Parent education really alleviates that. These classes give parents a "job description" of sorts. It also really helps with handling stressful situations and complex dynamics that families can often have."

### ***What was your favorite part of facilitating these classes?***

"I love having a group of mothers in a room, all coming from different experiences and backgrounds, and sharing their parenting skills and experiences with each other. There is no perfect parent, and I love to watch them learn from each other's parenting styles. Sometimes I think that's more important than some of the information I can offer them."



## Storybook Program

Once a month, AIM Assistant Director Larnetta Moncrief, travels to both the Montgomery Women's Facility and Tutwiler Prison for Women to conduct our Storybook Program. Mothers come to the program, choose one of our hundreds of donated books, and are recorded by volunteers reading the book to their children. After all of that is done, Larnetta spends the next couple of days burning the videos to DVDs, packaging them with their respective books, and mailing them out to each mother's children free of cost to them. This program provides children with a way to connect with their mothers while also encouraging them to read.

Here's what Larnetta has to say about Storybook:

### ***What is your favorite thing about Storybook?***

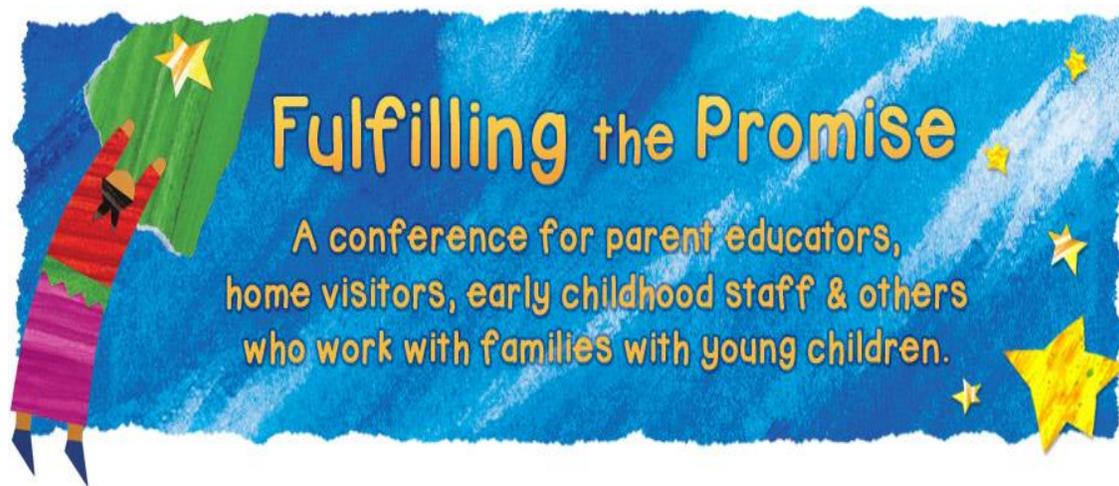
"One of the amazing things is to see the mothers light up when they read to their children or to hear them sing a lullaby. The connection that they are making with their children is powerful—and although a bedtime story is a simple thing, the mothers are grateful to be allowed to read to their children. Most of the moms use a part of their video time to make sure that their children know that they are loved, hoping that sound of their voices can be a source of comfort and warmth."

### ***Why is it so important?***

"For some mothers, this may be the only contact they have with their children — since some of the children live out of state and can never visit. For mothers with very young children, Storybook helps them bond with their toddlers and become a more familiar presence — adding to the time spent together at visits. We know that reading is important to the developing mind of a young child, and Storybook helps encourage children to be interested in books. Many of the children are desperate for more contact with their mothers. Through Storybook program, the mothers give their children the message that they still love them even if they can't be home right now."

### ***How can others get involved?***

"If you are interested, give us a call at (334) 262-2245 or email us at [larnetta@inmatemoms.org](mailto:larnetta@inmatemoms.org) We are also always looking for gently used children's books and will gladly take donations towards the program."



**February 23-25, 2016**  
**Radisson Paper Valley Hotel**  
**Appleton, WI**



# Incarcerated Parent Information to Be Available at Esther Banquet

Esther is a grassroots and non-profit interfaith social-justice organization. Esther aims to bring together people of faith and communities of faith in the Fox Valley region of Wisconsin together to build community and to identify and act on issues of injustice. Faith communities covenanting with Esther are united based on shared values such as equality and human dignity.



On Sunday, December 6<sup>th</sup>, Esther will hold its 11<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Banquet: *Building the Beloved Community* at the Grand Meridian in Appleton, Wisconsin. The keynote speaker will be Douglas Walker, criminal justice reform coordinator, United Methodist Church.

CEA-Wisconsin will have a table at the conference with information and materials available relating to incarcerated parents and their children. Materials to be distributed to banquet attendees include:

- *Reaching Out: A Handbook for Parents Incarcerated in Wisconsin*
- *Reaching In: A Handbook for the Families of Parents Incarcerated in Wisconsin*
- *Prison Parenting Programs: Resources for Parenting Instructors in Prisons and Jails*
- Sesame Workshop toolkits, *Little Children, Big Challenges: Incarceration*.
- *Parenting Connections* newsletters
- CEA-Wisconsin newsletters
- Fair Shake brochures

CEA-Wisconsin will also provide an exhibit of artwork created by inmates at the Wisconsin Resource Center. The display of approximately 25 paintings created by inmates in Ken VanMieghem's classes will be part of a silent auction, with the proceeds going to support Esther's projects.

The public is welcome to attend the Esther Anniversary Banquet. More information may be found at <http://esther-foxvalley.org/>

## Adverse Childhood Experiences Linked to Health Risks

It is important for incarcerated parents to recognize how their parents' behavior affected their physical and mental health — and in turn, how their behavior may influence their children's physical and mental health. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and Kaiser Permanente health maintenance organization have created a questionnaire to help parents become aware of behavior which may impact their children.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and Kaiser Permanente conducted the *Adverse Childhood Experiences Study* (ACE Study) in which over 17,000 volunteer participants were recruited between 1995 and 1997 and have been in long-term follow up for health outcomes. Although the study group was not representative of the general population in that the majority attended college and all had jobs and good health care, a link between Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and health and social problems as an adult was demonstrated.



## What Was Asked?

In the ACE Quiz, participants were asked about 10 types of childhood trauma that had been identified in earlier research literature.

### Abuse

- Physical abuse
- Sexual abuse
- Emotional abuse

### Neglect

- Physical neglect
- Emotional neglect

### Household Dysfunction

- Mother treated violently
- Household substance abuse
- Household mental illness
- Parental separation or divorce
- Incarcerated household member

## What Was Learned?

According to the Adverse Childhood Experiences study, the rougher your childhood, the higher your score on their questionnaire is likely to be, and the higher your risk for various health problems later.

ACEs seem to account for one-half to two-thirds of the serious problems with drug use. They increase the likelihood that girls will have sex before reaching 15 years of age, and that boys or young men will be more likely to impregnate a teenage girl. Adversity in childhood causes mental health disorders such as depression, hallucinations and post-traumatic stress disorders.

The more categories of trauma experienced in childhood, the greater the likelihood of experiencing:

- alcoholism and alcohol abuse
- chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD)
- depression
- fetal death
- poor health-related quality of life
- illicit drug use
- ischemic heart disease (IHD)
- liver disease
- risk for intimate partner violence
- multiple sexual partners
- sexually transmitted diseases (STDs)
- smoking
- obesity
- suicide attempts
- unintended pregnancies

## What the ACE Quiz Score Tells You?

The ACE score isn't a crystal ball; it's just meant as guidance. It tells you about one type of risk factor among many. It doesn't directly take into account your diet or genes, or whether you smoke or drink excessively — to name just a few of the other major influences on health.

Also remember that ACE scores don't tally the positive experiences in early life that can help build resilience and protect a child from the effects of trauma. Having a grandparent who loves you, a teacher who understands and believes in you, or a trusted friend you can confide in may mitigate the long-term



effects of early trauma, "There are people with high ACE scores who do remarkably well," says Jack Shonkoff, a pediatrician and director of the Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University. Resilience, he says, builds throughout life, and close relationships are key. Recent research also suggests that for adults, "trauma informed" therapy — which can center on art, yoga or mindfulness training — can help.

The Ace Quiz follows this article. You can use it to help the incarcerated parents you work with to become aware of how their parents' behavior affected their physical and mental health and how their behavior may influence their children's physical and mental health.

The ACE Score attributes one point for each category of exposure to child abuse and/or neglect included in the Study. Add up the points for a Score of 0 to 10. The higher the score is, the greater the exposure, and therefore the greater the risk of negative consequences. These consequences are discussed in the publications available for download from the <http://www.cestudy.org/> website.

## **How Best to Help Kids Who Are Experiencing Abuse and Neglect Right Now?**

Child psychologist Hilit Kletter, of Stanford University's School of Medicine, says that to spot these children, she looks for visible signs of stress to understand what might have happened to them and how best to intervene. Some kids have nightmares or recurring thoughts of a stressful event, she says, or may re-enact the trauma through play. Or the child may seem distracted or withdrawn. "This will come out at school," Kletter says. "Teachers will tell parents their child seems to be in a daze in the classroom, not paying attention."

Kletter says reactions to trauma are sometimes misdiagnosed as symptoms of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, because kids dealing with adverse experiences may be impulsive — acting out with anger or other strong emotions. "It's something that's very common in trauma: difficulty in regulating emotions and behavior," she explains. "That's why a lot of these kids get in trouble with the classroom."

Shonkoff's research center at Harvard tests interventions that can build resilience in kids who are growing up with adverse experiences — not just problems in the family, such as those the ACE study investigated, but also trauma stemming from poverty or from the chronic stress of racial or gender discrimination.

Shonkoff says early interactions have been shown to help children with later learning and literacy. Even more important, they boost kids' resilience, by helping them build secure attachments with caring adults. Research suggests that just one caring, safe relationship early in life gives any child a much better shot at growing up healthy.

## **What Is the Impact of the ACE Study?**

The ACE Study has produced more than 50 articles that look at the prevalence and consequences of ACEs. Subsequent studies have confirmed the high frequency of adverse childhood experiences or found even higher incidences in urban or youth populations.

As knowledge about the prevalence and consequences of adverse childhood experiences increases, trauma-informed and resilience-building practices based on the research are being implemented in communities, education, public health departments, social services, faith-based organizations and criminal justice.

Since research suggests that incarcerated individuals are much more likely to have been exposed to violence and suffer from PTSD, a trauma-informed approach may better help to address some of these criminogenic risk factors and can create a less traumatizing criminal justice experience.



- Programs, like Seeking Safety, are often used to help individuals in the criminal justice system learn how to better cope with trauma, PTSD, and substance abuse
- Juvenile courts better help deter children from crime and delinquency when they understand the trauma many of these children have experienced.
- The retraumatizing of individuals by the criminal justice system itself can be prevented by creating safer facilities where correctional and police officers are properly trained to keep incidents from escalating.
- Partnerships between police and mental health providers can also reduce the possible traumatizing effects of police intervention and help provide families with the proper mental health and social services.
- Restorative justice programs, like Resolve to Stop the Violence, can also help to bring offenders together with victims and those affected in the community to stop the cycle of violence.

## Take the ACE Quiz

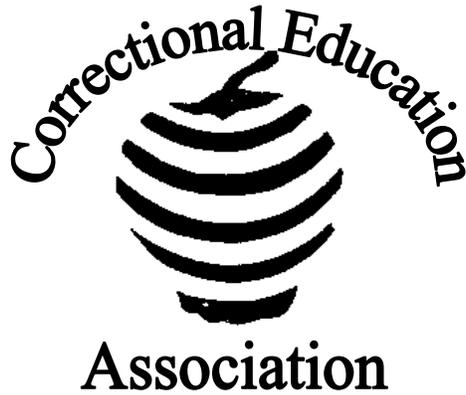
While you were growing up, during your first 18 years of life:

1. Did a parent or other adult in the household often or very often ... Swear at you, insult you, put you down, or humiliate you? or Act in a way that made you afraid that you might be physically hurt?  
Yes No If yes enter 1 \_\_\_\_\_
2. Did a parent or other adult in the household often or very often ... Push, grab, slap, or throw something at you? or Ever hit you so hard that you had marks or were injured?  
Yes No If yes enter 1 \_\_\_\_\_
3. Did an adult or person at least 5 years older than you ever ... Touch or fondle you or have you touch their body in a sexual way? or Attempt or actually have oral, anal, or vaginal intercourse with you?  
Yes No If yes enter 1 \_\_\_\_\_
4. Did you often or very often feel that ... No one in your family loved you or thought you were important or special? or Your family didn't look out for each other, feel close to each other, or support each other?  
Yes No If yes enter 1 \_\_\_\_\_
5. Did you often or very often feel that ... You didn't have enough to eat, had to wear dirty clothes, and had no one to protect you? or Your parents were too drunk or high to take care of you or take you to the doctor if you needed it?  
Yes No If yes enter 1 \_\_\_\_\_
6. Were your parents ever separated or divorced?  
Yes No If yes enter 1 \_\_\_\_\_
7. Was your mother or stepmother ... Often or very often pushed, grabbed, slapped, or had something thrown at her? or Sometimes, often, or very often kicked, bitten, hit with a fist, or hit with something hard? or Ever repeatedly hit at least a few minutes or threatened with a gun or knife?  
Yes No If yes enter 1 \_\_\_\_\_
8. Did you live with anyone who was a problem drinker or alcoholic or who used street drugs?  
Yes No If yes enter 1 \_\_\_\_\_
9. Was a household member depressed or mentally ill, or did a household member attempt suicide?  
Yes No If yes enter 1 \_\_\_\_\_
10. Did a household member go to prison?  
Yes No If yes enter 1 \_\_\_\_\_

Now add up your "Yes" answers: \_\_\_\_\_ This is your ACE Score.



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### Editor's Message:

The Correctional Education Association-Wisconsin is continually updating and posting resources for those working with incarcerated parents and their families. Those resources include:

- *Reaching Out: A Handbook for Parents Incarcerated in Wisconsin*
- *Reaching In: A Handbook for the Families of Parents Incarcerated in Wisconsin*
- *Prison Parenting Programs: Resources for Parenting Instructors in Prisons and Jails*
- *Parenting Connections* newsletters
- CEA-Wisconsin newsletters

All of these resources are available on the CEA-Wisconsin website: [www.ceawisconsin.org](http://www.ceawisconsin.org). These materials are also posted on the [www.ceanational.org](http://www.ceanational.org) and [www.fairshake.net](http://www.fairshake.net) websites:

Jerry

For past issues of this newsletter, parenting handbooks, program resources, and more go to [www.ceawisconsin.org](http://www.ceawisconsin.org)

