

Parenting Connection

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Parenting from Prison Made Easier

A father is searching through a pile of “gems” to find all the pink ones to glue on his daughter’s birthday card and another dad is perusing the bookshelves to find a story about sea creatures to read to his son. In another prison, a mother practices reading a story which she will record for her son. Similar scenes occur regularly at the Family Connections Center (FCC), located in all of the State Prisons in New Hampshire. Parents incarcerated in the New Hampshire State Prison system have some unique opportunities to stay involved with their children while they are separated. For some, due to distance, expense or bad feelings, this is the only way to stay connected. For other parents, participating in the Family Connections Center enhances the visits that take place in the prison visiting room. There are also some parents who have lost contact with their children, but are taking classes and educating themselves for a future time when they may reconnect with their child.

The Family Connections Center within the New Hampshire Department of Corrections is a prison based family support center located in both of the men’s facilities (Berlin and Concord) as well as the one women’s facility (Goffstown). The program originated in 1998 in the now closed Lakes Region Facility in Laconia, New Hampshire with the mission being “to strengthen the connection between incarcerated parents and their families while facilitating ties to their communities through education and support.” With recent estimates being that one in fourteen children has had a parent incarcerated, the need for this and other family support programs for families effected by incarceration seems evident.

The program works with State and community-based, non-profit agencies to provide services for incarcerated parents and their children. The FCC functions as an educational support for incarcerated parents, their children and their children’s caregivers.

The examples above are just a few of the activities which incarcerated parents can participate in when they are involved with the Family Connections Center. Participation varies from simple attendance at weekly groups to the Children of Incarcerated Parents Camp. Each inmate must first be eligible to participate in the program and then they may earn these privileges as opportunities arise. (continued on page 2)

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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

Proofreader : Laura Reisinger,

Literacy Volunteers - Chippewa Valley



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The Journey to Becoming a Better Parent

Inmates volunteer to be involved in the FCC. To start the journey, they must first complete the 18-hour FCC parenting class. This class was created in collaboration with the University of New Hampshire Cooperative Extension. It covers basic parenting topics including: child development, discipline, communication, self-esteem, stress, and reunification. Entangled with these topics are important conversations about how incarcerated parenting is a unique and sensitive situation; how parenting changes when one parent becomes incarcerated. There is also focus on the impact of the incarcerated parent's behaviors on their child, both the nature of their specific crime and their absence.

The second required course is a 10-hour Healthy Relationships class. The purpose of this class is to help individuals be successful in all of their relationships, whether it is with a romantic partner, co-parent, siblings, parents, children, or friends. Topics addressed include increasing awareness of their identity, establishing a vision for themselves as it pertains to developing and maintaining positive healthy relationships, recognizing and increasing awareness of the effects of antisocial relationships, and learning ways to rebuild and strengthen pro-social relationships.

While attending the Healthy Relationships class, participants may start attending a weekly incarcerated parent support group. The weekly support groups are not structured. Participants may bring up whatever topic they want to discuss as long as it relates to parenting or families. Staff guides these groups so one participant does not monopolize the discussion and staff always have a backup topic of discussion, but the idea is for the parents to seek advice from one another and start creating a community of caring and invested parents. The goal is to help them remember that they are parents despite their incarceration. Too often inmates say that they almost forget they are a parent. By coming to a weekly group, regardless of contact level with their child, they are amongst other incarcerated parents focusing on this life role. Participants may attend weekly or sporadically, but if they want to participate in all the perks of the program, they must attend one support group every week.

Activities to Be Part of the Child's Life

Three of the main activities which participants can take advantage of once the two core classes are complete include life skills seminars, recording books on CD, and video visits. Life skills seminars are taught by FCC staff and outside volunteers. These aim at increasing parental education. The New Hampshire Humanities Council facilitates book clubs on a quarterly basis and one professor from a local university has been volunteering on a quarterly basis for over ten years. In the past we have also had CPR instruction and recording videos of the parents reading books to their children.

The book on CD activity involves participants choosing two books from a selection of new, donated children's books. They then are able to record that book onto a CD and send it home to their child(ren). They can do this up to three times per year per child. The CDs hold about 75 minutes of reading so for the younger children they are able to fill up the remainder of the time on the CD with stories from our general library. The intentions of this activity are to promote literacy for the child who can read along with mom or dad. The CD also gives the child some control of when they can hear their parent's voice. This CD allows the child to hear mom or dad say "I love you" any time they want to! Usually caregivers will make this CD part of the child's bedtime routine so their incarcerated parent is reading them bedtime stories.

One of our most exciting activities is the internet video visiting via free Skype software. Once participants have completed their two required classes and have attended four support groups they can initiate the paperwork to have Skype visits with their children. These visits are scheduled on a bi-weekly basis for up to 20 minutes per child. Many memorable moments have been created using this technology. One father visited with his child (and his wife) on the day the child was born, some parents have been able to witness their child's first steps, shoot hoops, see new family pets and the child's newly decorated room. Almost all



parents help with homework, one father does science experiments with his daughter on a regular basis for fun! The video visits are a unique way in which incarcerated parents can visit with their child where the child feels the most safe and comfortable and the incarcerated parent truly feels, for a short time that they are a part of their child's daily life.

The FCC tries to create events which physically bring together the families in an atypical prison environment. Family Fun Days are hosted for participants who have remained disciplinary report free. Their children and the children's caregivers visit for an afternoon of fun and games in a relaxed visit setting. They also are able to sit and eat a meal together and make projects which the children can take home as a token of remembrance.

Another memory maker is the Children of Incarcerated Parent's summer camp program. Last August, six inmate's children went into the New Hampshire State Prison for Men in Concord and three children visited at the New Hampshire Correctional Facility for Women to play games, share meals and create a life-sized mural titled "The Perfect Day with Mom/Dad." The FCC collaborates with Child and Family Services of New Hampshire and the YMCA of Greater Nashua to make this happen. This will be the fifth year that this is offered. The children will attend the overnight summer camp for two weeks with the field trips to prison to visit mom or dad. The camp tuition is free for these children as a result of generous donations from people in the community. Similar to the Family Fun Day this activity is incentivized and they must be disciplinary report free for six months prior to the start of camp in August.

Community Support

Although there are pockets of concerned citizens who realize that children need their parents, no matter where they are living, there are still challenges being faced convincing community members that such a program is a necessary part of incarceration. Many look at it from the perspective of rewarding inmates, which is in part true, but more so it is providing them with an incentive to stay focused on being parents rather than inmates and it is helping children stay connected with a parent. We too often forget the silent victims of incarceration: the families and children. Luckily, there are groups of people and organizations that recognize the need for helping keep parents and their children connected during incarceration. The FCC has been very lucky to have received grants and donations to pay for part-time staff to facilitate video visits in the evening, provide new books, CD's and postage to mail the recordings home, and scholarships to send all the kids to camp for free!

There is research which support connection between children and incarcerated parent. Lee, Sansone, Swanson, and Tatum (2012) state that "societies and families appeared to benefit when incarcerated fathers were more involved in their children's lives and that more should be done to encourage these relationships". It is vital to the well-being of the children and our future generations to focus on learning how to balance holding adults who are parents responsible, while not penalizing their children. Thankfully, for those who are affected by incarceration in the State of New Hampshire, the Family Connections Center can offer some assistance with keeping incarcerated parents focused and educated as well as connected with their children.

If you have any questions and want to know more about the Family Connections Center please contact Kristina Toth, FCC Administrator at 603-271-2255 or Kristina.Toth@doc.nh.gov

by: Tiffani Arsenault, MS FCC-Berlin

For past issues of this newsletter, parenting handbooks, program resources, and more go to www.ceawisconsin.org



Free Resources from Sesame Workshop

Sesame Workshop is increasing its efforts to get their toolkits into the hands of those who are working to educate, engage, and support the incarcerated and their families. Sesame Workshop offers **FREE** resources to help you help families through difficult situations like the incarceration of a loved one.

Sesame Workshop's *Little Children, Big Challenges: Incarceration* project is designed to:

- support, comfort, and reduce anxiety, sadness and confusion that young children (ages 3-8) may experience during the incarceration of a parent.
- provide at-home caregivers with strategies, tips, and age-appropriate language they can use to help communicate with their children about incarceration.
- inform incarcerated parents that they can parent from anywhere, and provide them with simple parenting tips highlighting the importance of communication.

Each kit includes:



- **Sesame Street DVD** featuring a Muppet story, live-action films showcasing real children and families, and an animated segment
- **Guide for parents and caregivers**
- **Children's storybook**

Other resources include digital resources available at SesameStreet.org/Incarceration as well as the *Sesame Street: Incarceration* app for adults to use on tablets and phones, available on Google Play, the App Store, and Amazon Appstore for Android on Kindle Fire.

Sesame Workshop hopes that these toolkits have been helpful to you in the past, and encourages you to re-order toolkits today! Kits are available in quantities of 50.

To order, please include the following information in an email to incarceration@sesame.org.

- Shipping Point of Contact NAME
- Shipping Point of Contact TITLE
- Shipping Point of Contact Phone Number
- Shipping Point of Contact Email Address
- Shipping Address Label Facility Name
- Shipping Address Label ATTN:
- Shipping Address Label Address Line 1
- Shipping Address Label Address Line 2
- Shipping Address Label City
- Shipping Address Label State
- Shipping Address Label Zip code
- Number of Kits (MUST be a multiple of 50)

If you have any questions contact: Tara Forth, Distribution Assistant, U.S. Social Impact Sesame Workshop at 212-875-6455.

For free Sesame Street resources and tips follow Sesame Workshop on Facebook: [Sesame Street in Communities](https://www.facebook.com/SesameStreetinCommunities) and on Twitter: [@SesameCommunity](https://twitter.com/SesameCommunity).

Other toolkits that may be helpful to those working with the families of incarcerated parents include:



Little Children, Big Challenges: Divorce

www.SesameStreet.org/Divorce

Much needed resources for families with young children, ages 2 to 8, as they encounter the tough transitions that come with divorce. Digital resources include a Parent/Caregiver Guide, Children's Storybook, and tip sheet for extended family and friends. Kits are available in quantities of 50.

LCBC Divorce toolkit includes:



- **A Sesame Street DVD** featuring a Muppet story about divorce and live action films with real families sharing their experiences around divorce.
- **A parent/caregiver guide**
- **A children's storybook** called Two-Hug Day

Food for Thought: Eating Well on a Budget

www.SesameStreet.org/Food

Food for Thought provides families with young children with information so they are better equipped to cope with the impact of food insecurity, and aims to empower families with a “can-do” attitude. In addition, Food for Thought provides practical strategies to help families make healthier food choices and to creative positive experiences involving food. Kits are available in quantities of 50.

Food for Thought Toolkit includes:



- **DVD** of Growing Hope Against Hunger television special
- Sesame Street recipe cards
- **Children's Storybook**
- **Tips** for families and providers

Lead Exposure Linked to Adult Crime

“A large portion of the decline in the U.S. violent crime rate between 1992 and 2002 may be attributable to reductions in gasoline lead exposure” is the conclusion made in an article released by the National Bureau of Economic Research earlier this month.

Exposure to lead in childhood has been associated with increases in aggression, decreases in impulse control, and decreases in IQ. In the National Bureau of Economic Research Working Paper, *Environmental Policy as Social Policy? The Impact of Childhood Lead Exposure on Crime*, Jessica Wolpaw Reyes tests the hypothesis that higher childhood lead exposure is associated with adult criminality. “Her estimates suggest not only that childhood lead exposure may lead to higher violent crime rates, but that a large portion of the decline in the U.S. violent crime rate between 1992 and 2002 may be attributable to reductions in gasoline lead exposure.”

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In the late 1970s, lead was phased out of gasoline under the Clean Air Act. Reyes took advantage of the state-level variation in the phase out to identify a link between childhood lead exposure and adult crime. She concluded that lead exposure may have been an important factor in the rise and fall of violent crime over the last thirty years.

Her state-by-state analysis suggests that “a 10% increase in the grams of lead per gallon of gasoline leads to a 7.9% increase in violent crime.”

From 1992 to 2002, violent crime dropped 34%. Reyes estimates that declining lead exposure was responsible for a 56% of the decrease, legalized abortion for another 29% of the decrease, while other factors combined to produce the remaining 23% of the decrease.

The author concludes that “lead’s effect on violent crime may be just the tip of the iceberg. Increases in impulsivity, aggression, and ADHD can affect many other behaviors such as substance abuse, suicide, teenage pregnancy, poor academic performance, poor labor market performance, and divorce.”

The entire working paper article, “*Environmental Policy as Social Policy? The Impact of Childhood Lead Exposure on Crime*,” may be found at <http://www.nber.org/digest/may08/w13097.html>.

MATCH Program Marks 30 years of Transforming Lives

This year marks 30 years for Bexar County’s (Texas) Mothers and Their Children (MATCH) Program, which works to make things better for kids whose mothers are spending time behind bars. Bexar County was the first in the nation to implement MATCH, a parent-child contact visitation program for incarcerated mothers. Ten years later, Papas and Their Children (PATCH) was created for incarcerated fathers.

The MATCH Program, housed inside the confines of the Bexar County Adult Detention Center, has helped to improve the lives of thousands of incarcerated mothers whose lives have been tainted by criminal activity often prompted by alcohol or drug use. The MATCH program was created to address the trauma of separation that children of incarcerated parents experience when their mother goes to jail.

MATCH’s objective is to expose incarcerated mothers to as much life-changing information as possible. Through structured educational classes, parent-child contact visits and an e-book program, the program seeks to transform the lives of incarcerated mothers so they can become role models their children can emulate.

MATCH provides support to the incarcerated mother while maintaining the mother-child relationship through contact visits. Twice a month MATCH mothers can earn a one-hour contact visit if they attend all required educational classes. Visits occur in a daycare center type room and mother and child are allowed to hug and hold each other during the visit. Mothers are encouraged to allow their children the opportunity to vent their feelings, which can help the child emotionally. These visits have a profound effect on the emotional well-being of both mother and child, and lessen the trauma of separation. In addition to educational classes, the MATCH program also offers curriculum-based certificates for a variety of educational topics such as Domestic Violence, Parenting, Anger Management, Substance Abuse, and 12 Steps.

In the past two years, Bexar County has made some changes in the program to increase its efficacy. MATCH made headlines in March 2014, when the innovative program partnered with the first bookless



library in the nation — Bibliotech, which is also in Bexar County. The partnership offers incarcerated mothers the opportunity to learn new life skills by providing them with e-readers preloaded with parenting books.

Another development that has made MATCH more successful is that participants are housed in the same living unit, so they are able to read and discuss parenting books together and encourage one another. This change has had a profound effect upon the program participants, according to Jail Programs Manager Aida Negrón, “They needed to support one another because they were all mothers and they were all going through the same program.” Officials believe that placing the MATCH participants in separate quarters removes them from some of the influences of other inmates who will stay in jail longer, or who may have ongoing drug problems or other issues.

“But it’s also accountability,” Negrón said. “They don’t know what each other’s doing if they’re separated. So when they come together and they say, ‘Hey, you know, you’re talking like this, you’re saying that you did this, you’re saying you’re being honest but look what you’re doing in the unit.’ ”

Sheriff Susan Pamerleau, speaking at the recent celebration marking the 30th year of MATCH, said: “The average age of a child with an incarcerated parent is eight years old and 22% of these children are under the age of three.”

Pamerleau cited a cost-benefit analysis that shows MATCH graduates had a 13.5% lower re-arrest rate than those who dropped out. Pamerleau believes the introduction of e-readers will thrust the program into a higher level of success. “We’re in an electronic world. The interactive e-readers and smart phones; this is a way that a parent can help their children to not fall behind.”

Bexar County Jail Administrator/Deputy Chief Raul S. Banasco believes “In society, women offenders face unique challenges as single parents while going through the criminal justice system. That’s why programs like MATCH are important in breaking the cycle with the offenders’ children. The challenges and barriers, such as education, employment, housing, family reunification, self-esteem and parenting skills, are key ingredients that need to be fostered while inmates are participating in jail programs to give these women a positive step up once they are released from the system.”

Former MATCH women have become successful in a number of professions, including counseling. Some have become licensed professional counselors and licensed chemical dependency counselors in the community. Many have resumed their responsibilities as nurturing mothers and grandmothers. Banasco noted, “Most incarcerated mothers function as a single parent, which makes it even more difficult to establish a stable and emotionally nourished parent-child relationship. While these women are in the MATCH program, they have to ensure they are focused on positive programming, while still knowing their parental rights may have been terminated and their children may be in the custody of Child Protective Services. Mothers are the central family figure for children, so that’s why MATCH plants the seed for a productive future for both the mother and her children.”

Negrón agrees. “We are purposefully trying to interrupt the cycle of generational incarceration,” she said. “By positively affecting a mother, we affect her children and, subsequently, the family and the community.”

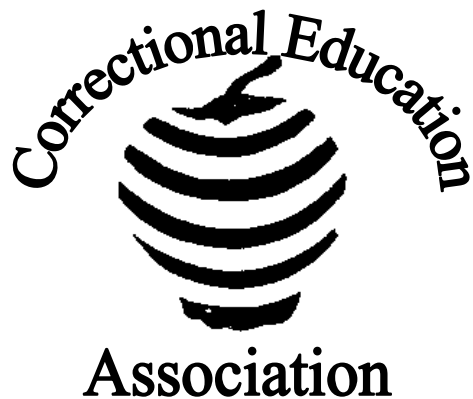
For more information about the MATCH program, contact Rosanne Hughes, Change Management Specialist, Bexar County Sheriff’s Office at: rosanne.hughes@bexarcounty.org.

Tell Us About Your Program

Email your article to: JerryBednarowski@new.rr.com



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



Editor's Message:

Examination of reentry programs shows that the most effective programs are those that involve the offender shortly after admission to the correctional system and continue throughout the offender's incarceration. Likewise, the journey to family unification should begin early and continue to and after release.

The Family Connections Center within the New Hampshire Department of Corrections described in the cover article of this newsletter is an example of an effective program which incorporates parenting and healthy relationship classes for the parent in prison that are coordinated with activities like life skills seminars, recording books on CD, and video visits. These activities that allow the parent and family to communicate at a distance are supplemented by events that physically bring together the families like Family Fun Days and the Children of Incarcerated Parent's Summer Camp.

For more examples of multi-faceted program that connect incarcerated parents with their families, check out the handbook, *Prison Parenting Programs: Resources for Prison Instructors in Prisons and Jails*, on the [www.ceawisconsin](http://www.ceawisconsin.org) website.

Jerry

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