

Parenting Connection

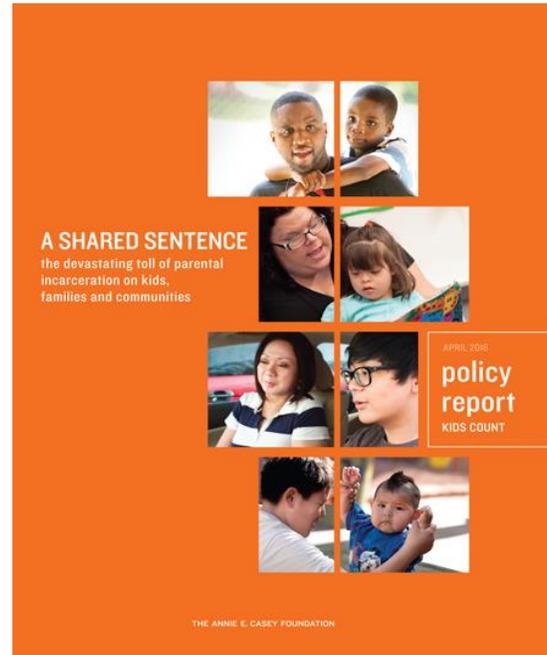
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Kids Count Report Examines the Devastating Toll of Parental Incarceration

More than 5 million U.S. children have had a parent in jail or prison at some point in their lives. The incarceration of a parent can have as much impact on a child's well-being as abuse or domestic violence. But according to a report released by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, while states spend heavily on corrections, few resources exist to support those left behind. The report, *A Shared Sentence: The Devastating Toll of Parental Incarceration on Kids, Families and Communities* offers common sense proposals to address the increased poverty and stress children of incarcerated parents experience.

The report stresses, "For children and families, incarceration is not a one-time event but a daily reality that lasts well beyond a jail sentence or prison term. Without links between and among the criminal justice system and schools, neighborhood health centers and other community- and faith-based agencies and programs, families have little to guide them through this time."



"Losing a parent to prison has profound effects on children, communities and the nation as a whole," the report notes, "with society bearing the cost of supporting a huge population of poorly educated, economically challenged and in many cases mentally scarred adults emerging from the chaotic life of poverty and social stigma that result from having an incarcerated parent." (Continued on page 2)

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“Incarceration breaks up families, the building blocks of our communities and nation,” says the report. “It creates an unstable environment for kids that can have lasting effects on their development and well-being.”

And the effect of having an incarcerated mother is even more profound, creating a greater likelihood that the children will be placed with relatives, friends or foster care and that they will more likely drop out of school.

An Added Financial Burden

The report details how incarceration creates an added financial burden, pushing families teetering on the edge into financial disaster. Losing a parent who is the breadwinner leaves families scrambling to cover basic needs. Families who already relied on public assistance programs become increasingly dependent on them. As they shoulder more responsibilities to fill the breach, parents and other relatives can struggle to manage their finances and face reduced earning potential. Parents left behind are more likely to cite problems with child care as a reason for quitting or not taking a job. They also report being unable to pay for necessities such as food, utilities, rent and medical care for their children.

In addition, children of incarcerated parents move more frequently than their peers. Kids with fathers in prison, particularly African-American children, are at greater risk of ending up homeless. Housing instability disrupts connections with family, friends, schools and other support networks.

A Blow to Child and Family Health and Well-Being

A Shared Sentence describes how having a parent incarcerated can potentially have a lasting negative impact on a child’s well-being of the same magnitude as abuse, domestic violence and divorce. The bonds of young children to the incarcerated parent are weakened, or sometimes never formed. The loss of that bond is especially devastating for children with incarcerated mothers. The trauma of being separated from a parent, along with a lack of sympathy or support from others, can increase children’s mental health issues, such as depression and anxiety, and hamper educational achievement. Kids of incarcerated mothers, in particular, are at greater risk of dropping out of school. Teachers can further undermine children’s performance and self-esteem by lowering their academic expectations. And when these kids grow up, they are more likely to contend with poor mental and physical health.

Single mothers left to take on unexpected financial responsibilities may also suffer from poor health, addiction, depression or anxiety, or they may be dealing with their own traumatic experiences. Bearing those conflicted emotions and stress makes it all the more challenging to be a source of comfort for their children.

A Drain on Community Resources and Opportunity

The report shows how the effects of incarceration exacerbate problems already existing in the communities where children live. “Many are mired in poverty and contend with crime, poor quality housing, low-performing schools and a dearth of resources that further prevent families from creating a safe and nurturing home environment. In areas where a sizable portion of residents are behind bars, the effect is cumulative: The sheer number of absent people depletes available workers and providers, while constraining the entire community’s access to opportunity — including individuals who have never been incarcerated. The continual cycle of residents going to and returning from prison makes for places, and faces, constantly in flux. Just living in a neighborhood with a high incarceration rate increases residents’ chances of suffering from depression and anxiety. Even for residents who have had no contact with the criminal justice system, heightened police vigilance can cast a shadow over their children, families and homes. And the absence of parents, most of them fathers, weakens neighborhoods and tears apart social



networks, which, in turn, affects the local economy. Parents' inability to find work when they return home further destabilizes their communities and increases their likelihood of reverting to criminal activity."

New Obstacles for Families When Parents Return

Time behind bars creates barriers to parents' steady employment that pays well enough to support their kids. According to the report, "Their lack of training or work experience and an interrupted or illegitimate employment history, combined with typically low literacy levels and educational attainment, close the doors to most family-supporting jobs. Having to check the box on a job application that confirms their criminal record seals those doors tight."

Returning parents also often struggle to find or maintain safe, stable housing for their families or just for themselves.

The report concludes. "All of these challenges . . . are a minefield nearly impossible for kids to traverse without incident. Changes in state and federal policies, as well as targeted reinvestment of funds saved from recent criminal justice reform efforts, can significantly change the trajectory of children with a parent in prison, helping them navigate choppy waters with greater ease."

Several states are putting in place prison reform measures in an effort to reduce the staggering cost of locking up a large percentage of its citizenry, but the Casey Foundation urges more immediate action to help today's children of incarcerated parents. "While momentum for criminal justice reform continues to build, we know progress will take time. But we also know children can't wait — nor can we as a nation afford to let them and their parents flounder, perpetuating poverty from one generation to the next."

The Casey Foundation has made three comprehensive recommendations hoping to spark a discussion on how to give kids of incarcerated parents a better chance to succeed in life.

Recommendation One — Ensure children are supported while parents are incarcerated and after they return

Children need permanent family connections and stability to do well, and their families need the financial and emotional wherewithal to support their well-being. The foundation's first recommendation is to address the traumatic effects on children of having an incarcerated parent by providing mental health and counseling programs to family members who step up as caregivers during incarceration, preserving the relationship between the child and the imprisoned parent, and directing judges to consider the impact on kids when sentencing parents.

The report urges early education centers, schools, child welfare and faith-based organizations to offer programs focused children's mental and emotional well-being. They are also urge providing mentoring and support groups for kids and teens whose parents are in prison, as well as for their families.

To support appropriate and safe family reunification, prisons and community organizations are urged to provide family counseling and parenting courses while parents are incarcerated and after they return. If children enter foster care, child welfare agencies and courts should prioritize placements with other family members or friends who can care for them in the absence of both parents. The report also calls on states to facilitate access for caregivers to financial, legal, childcare, health and housing assistance.

Recommendation Two — Connect parents who have returned to the community with pathways to employment

To provide family stability upon a parent's release, the report recommends that States take advantage of newly raised thresholds under the federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act to direct more funds
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toward education and training for incarcerated individuals to prepare them for work in high-demand sectors.

The report urges States to minimize the effects of a criminal record through by enacting ban-the-box policies that postpone questions about a job applicant's criminal record until late in the hiring process. The report also urges States to take steps to enable families to achieve self-sufficiency by providing access public programs and suspending child support orders until the recently released parents are able to gain financial stability.

Recommendation Three — Strengthen communities, particularly those disproportionately affected by incarceration and reentry, to promote family stability and opportunity

The high-poverty neighborhoods that are home to many kids and families dealing with incarceration lack quality affordable housing, access to jobs, good schools and key resources. Lastly, the report calls for targeting troubled communities where high levels of arrests have taken a toll on neighborhoods and the local economy. The Casey Foundation recommends that State and local governments provide incentives for housing authorities and private landlords to lift restrictions on people with records so that families can remain in or access safe, affordable housing. They also should offer training for property managers and caseworkers to ensure they properly interpret housing policies to enable formerly incarcerated parents to live with their families.

To create additional pathways to jobs and careers, the report urges city governments and private employers to take advantage of universities, hospitals and other institutions that are rooted in communities and promote economic inclusion strategies.

Read the full report, *A Shared Sentence: The Devastating Toll of Parental Incarceration on Kids, Families and Communities* at: www.aecf.org/resources/a-shared-sentence.

Council on Crime and Justice Closes Its Doors

After nearly 60 years, the Council on Crime and Justice has closed its doors. The Minneapolis-based nonprofit started in 1957 focused on helping people involved in the criminal justice system with the mission to “seek a criminal justice system that is equitable and just.”

The council helped criminal offenders get their records expunged and find jobs and housing. It offered a hot line for crime victims seeking reparations and counseling, and worked with prisoners to be better parents once they were released. Since 1999, the council also conducted more than three dozen research projects centered on criminal justice.

More recently, the council helped to pass the “ban the box” law in Minnesota, which prohibits employers from asking about criminal histories when people first apply for jobs.

The Council on Crime and Justice's handbook, *Staying Connected and Staying Strong: A Handbook for Families and Friends of Those Incarcerated in Minnesota State Correctional Facilities* was a valuable resource for incarcerated parents and their families and served as a model for other states in the creation of their own handbooks.

The handbook and other resources are still available on the Minnesota Department of Corrections website. Also under “Partners and Staff/Community Reentry and Non-Profits” there is now a newsletter and other resources available.



Mentoring Programs Research Examined

Having a parent in prison can have an impact on a child's mental health, social behavior, and educational prospects. The emotional trauma that may occur and the practical difficulties of a disrupted family life can be compounded by the social stigma that children may face as a result of having a parent in prison or jail. Children who have an incarcerated parent may experience financial hardship that results from the loss of that parent's income. Further, some incarcerated parents face termination of parental rights because their children have been in the foster care system beyond the time allowed by law. These children require support from local, state, and federal systems to serve their needs.

Children of incarcerated parents may also face a number of other challenging circumstances. They may have experienced trauma related to their parent's arrest. Children of incarcerated parents are more likely to have faced other adverse childhood experiences, including witnessing violence in their communities or in their household or exposure to drug and alcohol abuse. Mentoring programs for children of incarcerated parents are often viewed as an antidote to these hardships.

In his February 2016 review, *Mentoring Programs for Children of Incarcerated Parents*, G. Roger Jarjoura of the American Institutes for Research examined research on mentoring for children of incarcerated parents. The review is organized around four questions:

1. What is the demonstrated effectiveness of mentoring for children of incarcerated parents?
2. What factors condition or shape the effectiveness of mentoring for this population?
3. What are the intervening processes that are most important in linking mentoring to outcomes for children of incarcerated parents?
4. To what extent have efforts to provide mentoring to this population reached and engaged targeted youth, been implemented with high quality, and been adopted and sustained by host organizations?

Although rigorous research on mentoring for children of incarcerated parents is scarce, combining the available evidence with the larger body of literature on the nature and experiences of this youth population suggests a number of possible answers to each of the above questions. These include:

- Program-arranged mentoring for the children of incarcerated parents has the potential to contribute to observable improvements in their behavior, relationships, and their emotional well-being.
- Positive outcomes from mentoring may be more evident while the youth are actively engaged with their mentors, although sustaining the length of the mentoring relationship for the children of incarcerated parents is apparently difficult for programs.
- The benefits of mentoring for this population may be influenced by the child's capacity for trust and resilience, the strength of the relationship between child and the incarcerated caregiver, and whether this person is the child's biological parent.
- Processes involving positive youth development, resilience and coping skills, and self-esteem may be pathways through which mentoring is beneficial for children of incarcerated parents.
- As with mentoring programs in general, for those serving higher-risk youth it is critically important to provide mentors with high-quality pre-match training and ongoing support from agency staff.

The review concludes with recommendations including taking a "networked" approach to supporting the child with an emphasis on parent involvement, providing more robust mentor training, emphasizing youth development principles in relationship activities, and planning for extending these relationships or transitioning the youth from one mentor to another to sustain program impacts over longer periods of time.

Practitioners looking to serve children of incarcerated parents through mentoring may find additional information and insights in the Resources section of the www.nationalmentoringresourcecenter.org website or may request National Mentoring Resource Center technical assistance to help start or improve a group mentoring program.



Guide Balances Benefits and Challenges of Video Visiting

To inform the development of video visiting programs within correctional settings, the National Institute of Corrections (NIC) awarded a cooperative agreement to the Osborne Association in New York. The Osborne Association is a well-established agency that has on-the-ground experience with both in-person and video visiting and a long history of working to strengthen families affected by incarceration. In the document “Video Visiting in Corrections: Benefits, Limitations, and Implementation Considerations,” authors Allison Hollihan and Michelle Portlock examine this important national trend from a variety of perspectives including the needs of children and families of the incarcerated.

NIC Acting Director Robert M. Brown, Jr. recognizes, “Visits from family members, children and other sources of support can be a lifeline in the lives of incarcerated men and women. Visits provide an opportunity to maintain connection, re-build relationships and actively begin to form links to the community both for support and to assist in the reentry process. . . The advent of video visiting has enhanced traditional methods of building and sustaining those critical connections for incarcerated individual. . . It is also an industry which is expanding exponentially. Little replaces the opportunities for families to see one another in person, but in those situations where that is not possible, video visiting is a viable option.”

This guide was created to address the importance of visitation and introduce video visiting as a resource, ideally in concert with in-person visitation. The implementation process for video visiting is discussed and a set of resources for agencies is provided.

The document recognizes that while the benefits of visiting with family and other supportive individuals are well documented, visiting policies vary among the over 1,000 prisons and 3,300 plus jail systems across the country.

As video visiting software and equipment continues to become more affordable and accessible, video visiting is likely to become very common in corrections in the near future. The authors caution that “It must be noted that video visiting should not be deemed as an invitation to discontinue in-person visiting. With video visiting come great opportunities as well as cautions and challenges. . . video visiting may benefit corrections by reducing costs, improving safety and security, and allowing for more flexibility in designating visiting hours. The value of video visiting can be maximized when the goals of the facility are balanced with the needs of incarcerated individuals and their families.”

The “Video Visiting in Corrections” document is designed to assist correctional administrators, commissioners, sheriffs, and other key decision makers in:

- Determining whether video visiting is appropriate for a particular setting or jurisdiction
- Preparing for and implementing video visiting
- Conducting a process evaluation and preparing for an outcome evaluation.

Each chapter of the guide builds upon the preceding chapter and the research, practical examples, and tools that are provided throughout the guide will benefit correctional leadership in enhancing current visiting practices.

- Chapter One provides a brief overview of the benefits known to be associated with in-person visiting and discusses the benefits and limitations of video visiting.
- Chapter Two focuses on how to assess whether video visiting is an appropriate fit for a particular setting and discusses issues that should be considered upon implementation.
- Chapter Three provides tools for conducting a process evaluation and preparing for an outcome evaluation.



- An implementation toolkit and sample evaluation tools are included in the appendices. The appendices also include information about other uses for video conferencing in a correctional setting, video visiting with children, and a listing of relevant resources.

The entire NIC document “Video Visiting in Corrections: Benefits, Limitations, and Implementation Considerations” can be found at <http://nicic.gov/library/029609>.

Incarcerated Dads Invited to Make Submissions for *Dadly Dads*

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

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

Building on the success of *Dads Behaving Dadly* and subsequent articles, media appearances, blogs and workshops and a stamp of approval from Oprah, Hogan Hilling is inviting incarcerated and former incarcerated dads to participate in the first comprehensive dad’s coffee table book that he will co-author with photographer Austin Dowd.

The title of the book is *DADLY Dads: Fathers of the 21st Century*. Each page will include a photo/self-portrait and answers to short questions like:

- What do I do well as a dad?
- What have I learned from another dad?
- What have I learned from my child?
- Who is a dad you admire?

Hogan has collected about 80 photos and forms from dads of different family dynamics in the US, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, UK, Scotland, Netherlands, South Africa and other countries. He needs 20 more dads to complete the book. The sooner he collects the 100 dads, the sooner his publisher will debut the book — possibly in September or October.

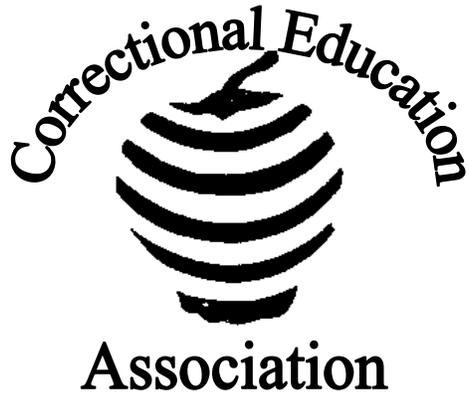
The deadline date for submissions is August 7th. However, if a dad communicates with Hogan by that date, he may be able to extend the deadline under strict criteria.

If you’d like more information about the book and how to submit, contact Hogan Hilling at hogan@dadlyrally.com.

Tell Us About Your Program
Email your article to: JerryBednarowski@new.rr.com



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Editor's Message:

Gun violence impacts not only those immediately involved, but profoundly changes the lives of family members and the culture of the entire community. To raise awareness of Milwaukee gun crime, documentary company 371 Productions has collaborated with the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, WUWM Milwaukee Public Radio, WNOV The Voice, and Wisconsin Center for Investigative Journalism to create *Precious Lives*, a radio series that gives a voice to the many Milwaukeeans living under the threat of daily violence. The two-year, 100-episode radio series digs deep into the issue of gun violence to widen the circle of people who care about the issue and to unite the city around solutions.

Precious Lives aims to frame gun violence among young people, both homicide and suicide, as a public health problem. The stories explore multiple perspectives, seeking to understand the victims and the shooters, learning about the weapons and their pathways to crime, and examining factors behind the tragedies.

Episodes from the *Precious Lives* series may be used to stimulate discussion in communities throughout the nation as they try to reduce gun violence and heal the wounds suffered by the families and the community.

The *Precious Lives* episodes may be found at www.preciouslivesproject.org.

Jerry

