

Parenting Connection

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Willy Is Doing “Medium-Alright” and Doing a Good Deed

Karl “Willy” Winsness was #15926 in the Utah State Prison

Back in 1988, he was convicted of a First Degree attempted criminal homicide of a police officer. He was sentenced to 5 years to Life.

During his 17 years in prison, Willy witnessed the impact his incarceration had on his two daughters. Through no fault of their own, his one daughter was struggling with the costs for college and his other daughter was struggling with her options, until college was no longer a priority or practical.

While Willy was working on his Post Conviction Relief legal action and seeking some kind of Wrongful Conviction compensation, he initially came up with his “scholarship idea.” When he won his case, he was going to set up a scholarship for children of inmates with part of that money.

Willy never won his case or got any money, so he was relieved of any self-imposed obligations for creating that scholarship. But Willy thought “I’m doing medium-alright” and “A good idea or good deed is still good.” He also thought of the many kids who have lost out, or society may have lost out, by not giving those kids a shot and a better education.

After his release from prison, Willy re-established his plumbing credentials and started his business, Karl’s Affordable Plumbing. With money from his own \$30,000 a year income and donations from inmates and local businesses, he started the Willy the Plumber Scholarship program to help children of current and former Utah inmates pay for college expenses.

After saving up some money and doing a lot of leg-work and computer and email work to get everything set
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up and ready to go, Willy partnered with the Community Foundation of Utah to manage the money and legalities of a 501.c.3.

By offering the scholarship to students in this difficult situation, Willy hoped they would be motivated to not only succeed in their education, but in all aspects of life.

Since 2013, the Willy the Plumber Scholarship program has awarded 18 scholarships totaling \$13,000. In addition, businesses donated swag bags or gift certificates worth hundreds of dollars to help students with their living necessities.

The Willy the Plumber Scholarship program's underlying philosophy is: "We recognize that these children themselves haven't done anything wrong, Basically they are also victims of their parents bad choices; the "Forgotten Victims of Crime." We want to break that cycle, with a way out of prison visiting rooms, with an incentive to do better and also some financial help towards them getting a higher education."

Willy's efforts have been the subject of stories on CBS News, BYU TV, People.com and several Utah newspapers and television stations. The stories are available on the www.willytheplumberscholarship.net website.

If you want to help or donate to the Willy the Plumber Scholarship program, you can email Karl Winsness at kwwinsness54@hotmail.com or visit the www.willytheplumberscholarship.net or www.utahcf.org websites.

Willy hopes that his idea to create a scholarship program can be a prototype for other states. To get others started thinking about establishing a scholarship program, Willy suggests the following basic criteria:

To be eligible for the scholarship, students must:

- Be a state resident
- Have graduated or are about to graduate from an accredited high school
- Have a grade point average of 2.0 or higher; preference is given to students with a 3.0 gpa or higher
- Be attending or planning to attend an accredited two or four-year college, university or technical school; online or for-profit schools are ineligible
- Demonstrate financial need
- Show proof that one or more parents or guardians are currently incarcerated or have a history of being incarcerated

Other guidelines include:

- Students should try to have two or three Letters of Recommendation from teachers, counselors, administrators, community leaders, or current or former employers
- Students should submit their transcripts of their grades and a personal statement
- Students not coming straight from high school must also pass college entrance tests and have a letter from the college they are planning to attend saying they are competent and capable of succeeding in that college
- Students are entitled to only one scholarship at time, this one or someone else's (Pell grants are not considered scholarships)
- Students can only receive two years' worth of scholarships
- Scholarship monies must be used for tuition and books, any reminding monies can be applied to the next semesters/quarter the student is attending

Recipients will be chosen by a scholarship committee in March and notified the following month. The scholarships will be given directly to the institution of the winning students' choice in August



Mother Wit Helps Parents Cope

Dr. Stacey Patton created Spare the Kids, an online anti-spanking website in 2010. The mission of the website is to combine digital technology, social media, and the basic science of early child development to educate parents and caretakers about the risks and harms of hitting, and to encourage practical peaceful alternatives to aggressive and humiliating punishment.



An article on Dr. Stacey's book and website is in the September/October 2017 issue of this newsletter. The newsletter is available on the www.ceawisconsin.org website.

One of the features on the www.sparethekids.com website is the "Ask Mother Wit" link.

Mother Wit is defined as "Natural or practical intelligence, wit or common sense. The ability to cope with everyday matters."

"Ask Mother Wit" is a parenting advice blog. If you need advice on how to handle a problem situation, you can email Mother Wit at MotherWit@sparethekids.com. Selected questions and Mother Wit responses are then posted on the blog.

In addition to the parenting advice blog, Dr. Stacey Patton in collaboration with artist Aubrey Harding created a series of Mother Wit comics that appear on the website.

Dr. Patton describes the comics in this way: "Mother Wit knows the daily struggles of parenting all too well. To keep herself sane and bond with other parents, she decided to create straightforward comic strips. She often appears in the nick of time when frustrated parents are at the end of their rope. The wisdom and practical tips she shares in these episodes will help parents keep from turning a moment of frustration into a physical strike against their child's body."

Titles in the 10 Mother Wit episode series are:

1. The Switch
2. "Don't Hit Mommy"
3. The Hot Stove
4. I Don't Want to Hug Uncle Pookey
5. Don't Bite Mommy
6. Parenting In the Pew
7. A Helping Hand
8. "I'll Slap the Black Off You"
9. Stealing Hurts Everybody
10. Next Step

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



AIM Celebrates 30 Years of Service

Aid to Inmate Mothers (AIM) is celebrating 30 years of service to Inmate Mothers this November.

AIM was founded in 1987 by Church Women United, The Alabama Prison Project, the Alabama Department of Corrections and a group of committed volunteers who discovered that there were many women in prison who never see their children. AIM's founders recognized that children of incarcerated parents needed regular contact with their mothers, yet often couldn't visit because their guardians were unwilling or unable to take them. In 1990, AIM separated from the Alabama Prison Project and became an independent nonprofit agency.

AIM's vision is to create:

- A criminal justice model that demonstrates respect for and understands the rights of the children effected by their mothers' imprisonment and recognizes and helps to address the many burdens carried by the children and families as a result of incarceration
- A criminal justice system that only incarcerates women who are a danger to society
- A prison and an aftercare system that will truly help the mothers reestablish themselves and reunite them with their children

AIM provides services to Alabama's incarcerated women with emphasis on enhancing personal growth and strengthening the bonds between inmate mothers and their children. AIM's programs are designed to:

- **Provide emotional interaction between inmate mother and child**
 - Monthly Visitation
 - Storybook Project
- **Improve inmate mother's life skills**
 - Prison classes
 - WHIFI - Health education
- **Help mothers make a successful transition to community life**
 - Project Reconnect
 - Clothing closet
- **Support the children of inmates**
 - Family outreach

To find out more about the Aid to Inmate Mothers organization or to help support its programs, go to: www.inmatemoms.org/donate.aspx.



Fly Me to the Moon!

Benefitting Aid to Inmate Mothers

AIM
AID TO INMATE MOTHERS
Celebrating Our
30 Year Anniversary

W.A. Gayle Planetarium
1010 Forest Ave, Montgomery, AL 36106

November 14, 2018 • 6:00 - 8:00 pm • Tickets \$30

To purchase tickets or make a donation to AIM call 334.262.2245
or visit our website www.inmatemoms.org

Make checks payable to: AIM, P.O. Box 986 - Montgomery, Alabama 36101

AIM is a non-profit organization that holds families together by providing visitation with children during the difficult years of incarceration.



Tip Sheet Helps Mentors Support Children of Incarcerated Parents

youth.gov is U.S. government website created by the Interagency Working Group on Youth Programs (IWGYP), which is composed of representatives from 20 federal agencies that support programs and services focusing on youth. One of the ways IWGYP promotes positive and healthy outcomes for youth is through its youth.gov website.

The youth.gov website provides information and resources to help its users:

- Engage with youth to promote change
- Implement evidence-based and innovative programs
- Locate program funding in their community

youth.gov helps users create, maintain, and strengthen effective youth programs. Included are youth facts, funding information, and tools to help them assess community assets, generate maps of local and federal resources, search for evidence-based youth programs, and keep up-to-date on the youth-related news.

Among the 27 areas of Youth Topics on the website is information relating to Children of Incarcerated Parents. In that section of the youth.gov website is the Tip Sheet for Mentors that is reprinted here:

Tip Sheet for Mentors:

Supporting Children Who Have an Incarcerated Parent

Mentors can play an important role in addressing the needs of children of incarcerated parents. Mentors are caring adults who work with youth as positive role models in a formal or informal way, offering consistent guidance and support. Youth connect with mentors through youth-serving organizations, including community-based organizations, faith-based organizations, businesses, and after-school programs. Mentors can help improve outcomes for the children of incarcerated parents by using research-based practices and effective supports.

Reminders

- Every family's experience is different. Some children lived with their incarcerated parent before their parent's incarceration and others did not. Some children had a close relationship with that parent (regardless of whether they lived together) and others may not have. It is important not to make any assumptions.
- Be aware of what researchers call the "conspiracy of silence." Sometimes caregivers instruct children not to discuss the situation with anyone, for fear of the stigma and shame associated with incarceration. Children, too, may worry about people judging their parent. However, not understanding or not being able to talk about the situation can also be a source of stress for children. Sometimes the silence around the situation can become an inadvertent cause of shame. It is important for mentors to understand this dynamic and to signal to their mentees that they can be trusted and will not judge the child or their parent.
- Keep in mind that a parent's crime or the fact that he or she is incarcerated does not indicate what kind of parent that individual was before incarceration, nor does it necessarily speak to a child's relationship with that parent. Further, it is not a sign of the type of parent someone will be after release.

How Can Mentors Support Children Who Have an Incarcerated Parent?

Mentors can build a trusting relationship by participating in various activities with the child of an incarcerated parent. (continued on page 6)



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Establish Understanding

- Recognize that children of incarcerated parents may have difficulty trusting new adults. Because many have suffered a traumatic and sudden separation from their parent, they may be slow to trust new adults in their lives for fear that these people could also leave.
- Sign up for a mentoring commitment only if you know you can stay involved for the designated period of time. You may want to establish clear expectations with your mentee for how frequently you will see him or her.
- Learn from your mentor organization, the family, or the caregiver, whether the child knows the parent is incarcerated, how the child is coping with the parent's incarceration, and what the status of the relationship is between the child and the caregiver.
- Recognize that young people who have an incarcerated parent face different realities regarding their situation, ranging from not knowing about the incarceration to having witnessed an arrest, and wondering whether it is their fault. Reinforce that the incarceration is not their fault.
- Understand that it is the youth's decision to share details about their parent's absence. It is best not to ask. They may choose to tell you, but it is not important to the mentor/mentee relationship.

Develop the Relationship

- Take the time to learn about each other by talking about interests, family, and other topics based on your mentee's comfort level. While getting to know the youth, be aware of potential sensitivities when talking about families. It is not necessary to avoid the topic of having an incarcerated parent, but be sensitive and avoid making assumptions.
- Identify objectives for the mentoring relationship, preferably focused on the mentee's goals and growth, possibly through shared interests.
- Spend time doing activities that interest the child and expose him or her to new things and places (e.g., sports, games, arts, crafts, field trips to museums) while being sensitive to how your mentee might feel when out of his or her comfort zone and in unfamiliar surroundings.
- Share stories and information about your own life experiences, including successes and challenges experienced along the way. If relevant, you may share your own experiences with having an absent parent, but keep in mind that having an incarcerated parent may be a different experience than other kinds of absence.

Mentors can help youth maintain their relationship with their incarcerated parent after learning the mentee's, parent's, and caregiver's wishes regarding communication and the relationship.

- Help your mentee understand that a parent's incarceration does not have to be the end of the relationship between him or her and the absent parent.
- Understand the barriers your mentee may face in maintaining or building a relationship with their incarcerated parent. These may include finances, communication, visitation/transportation, time commitments such as education and employment, and the desires of the incarcerated parent and/or caregiver.
- Facilitate simple and inexpensive ways to foster the relationship.
 - Help youth coordinate with their parent specific days and times for phone calls, given facility rules and policies.
 - Help your mentee communicate with the incarcerated parent through letters, cards, or creative activities to keep the parent informed about the mentee's life (e.g., drawings, photos, a collage of pictures about academic and extracurricular achievements that can be mailed or emailed to the parent). Provide the child with a box of stationery or notecards and postage, as allowed.
 - Become informed about the visitation process so you can help your mentee prepare for any potential visits to the incarcerated parent by sharing what to expect (e.g., going through security procedures, long drives and long waits, talking through a window or via videoconferencing, leaving food and personal items in the waiting area, dress codes, and lists of contraband).



- Anticipate that visits may be difficult for the youth, even if they were looking forward to the trip. Expect that your mentee may have heightened emotions in the days following a visit. Mentors can help youth express their thoughts and emotions and explain that what they are feeling is normal. Help your mentee talk about the positive aspects of the visit.

Mentors can help the youth cope with having an incarcerated parent by understanding the situation without judgment and then providing assistance, education, and information.

- If necessary and when appropriate, help the child understand the parent's incarceration while honoring the wishes of the parent and/or caregiver. This may include providing or suggesting informative, age-appropriate literature. A variety of books on the topic of parental incarceration have been written for children at different age levels. You can find these books for sale online or at your public library. There are also free resources such as *Sesame Street's Little Children, Big Challenges: Incarceration*.
- Conduct informal networking in which the young person has opportunities to meet others who can contribute to his or her growth or serve as an inspiration, including other young people with incarcerated parents so youth know they are not alone.
- Bring your concerns to the caregiver and/or the mentoring organization if you feel you have reached your capacity to address a mentee's needs, and consider advocating and researching options for opportunities for the child to speak with a professional counselor about any challenges they might be experiencing.

Mentors can support and help youth prepare for and adjust to their parent's reentry into their lives, family, and community.

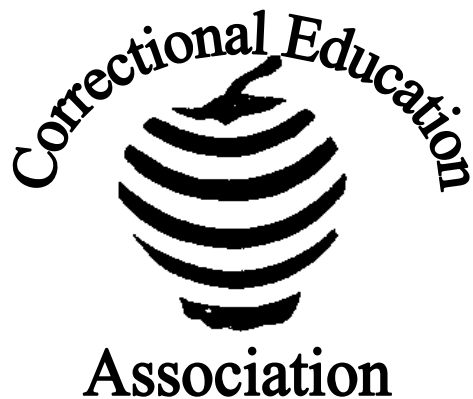
- Recognize and acknowledge that there will be a transition period and the new circumstances may present challenges for the youth, parent, and caregiver. Keep in mind that:
 - A youth might have to adapt to having both parents as caregivers. Differences in parenting philosophies and choices can be sources of stress and conflict for the whole family.
 - A caregiver might have to adjust to co-parenting, which can be challenging after long periods of parenting alone.
 - Possible custody hearings or other proceedings may be difficult.
 - The homecoming may not live up to expectations. The recently released parent may not want a child to have a mentor.
 - The current caretaker may no longer be a child's guardian after a parent's release. This transition could be hard on everyone.

Reminders

- Children who have an incarcerated parent are at heightened risk for exposure to substance abuse, mental illness, and inadequate education before their parent's incarceration.
- The risk of children living in poverty or experiencing household instability increases with parental incarceration.
- Parental incarceration is recognized as an adverse childhood experience (ACE); it is distinguished from other ACEs by the combination of trauma, shame, and stigma.
- Youth developmental stages influence the experiences and effects of incarceration on children who have a parent in prison.
 - Ages 2 to 6: separation anxiety, impaired social-emotional development, traumatic stress, and survivor guilt.
 - Ages 7 to 10: developmental regression, poor self-concepts, acute traumatic stress reactions, and impaired ability to overcome future trauma.
 - Ages 11 to 14: rejection of limits to behavior and trauma-reactive behaviors.
 - Ages 15 to 18: premature termination of dependency relationship with parent.



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Editor's Message:

Holidays are hard times for parents and children to be separated. Yet they can create family traditions which help bind the family together. Even though parents are incarcerated, they may play a role in family events.

Incarcerated parents should realize that the planning is an important part of the holiday to the child. To be involved, the incarcerated parents must write letters or make telephone calls before the holiday.

For most children, it is the attention and celebration that makes the day special. Incarcerated parents need to focus on ways to make the child feel special on these days. It is okay for them to let the child know they are feeling lonely during these times, but they shouldn't burden the child with worries about them. The parent needs to assure the child that he will celebrate the day and will be thinking about home. The parent can write about the meaning of the day and share memories of past holidays. At most institutions, cards are available through the Chapel. Homemade cards with the parent's own words or drawing are very special to the children.

Encourage incarcerated parents to use the holidays as an opportunity to be involved in family events.

Jerry

**Tell Us About Your Program --- Email Your
Article to: JerryBednarowski@new.rr.com**

