

Parenting Connection

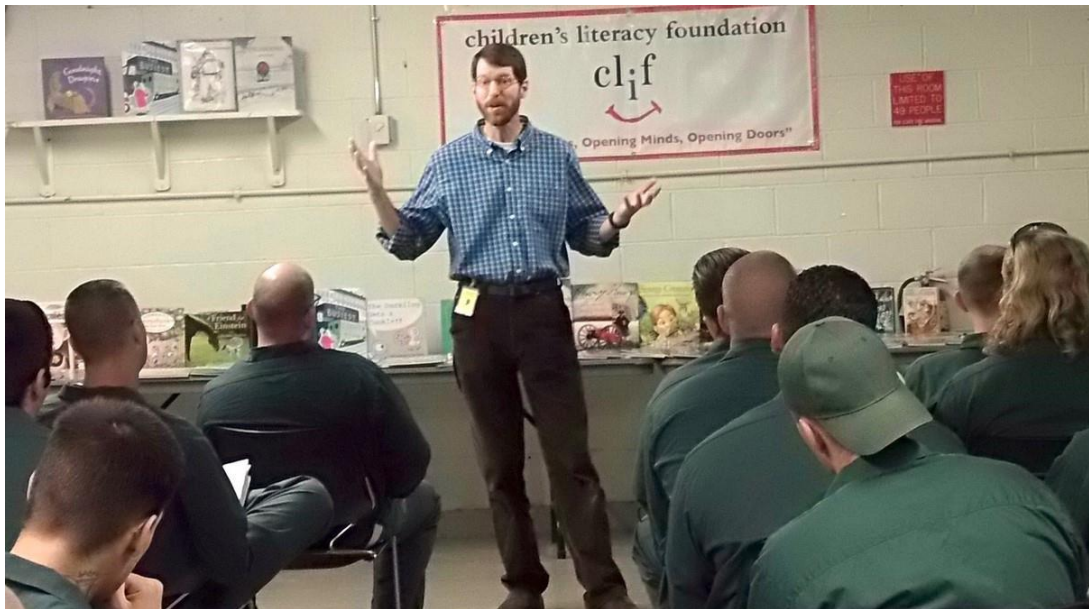
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CLiF Seeks to Spread the Word about its Programs

The Children's Literacy Foundation (CLiF) has been working in prisons across New Hampshire and Vermont for 15 years. CLiF has multi-year partnerships currently in a number of local correctional facilities.

The Children's Literacy Foundation (CLiF) is a non-profit organization whose mission is to nurture a love of reading and writing among children throughout New Hampshire and Vermont. CLiF's motto is "Opening Books, Opening Minds, Opening Doors." (continued on page 2)



CLiF's Executive Director Duncan McDougall conducts seminar with inmates who are parents on the importance of reading with their children

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Through 16 free programs, CLiF serves young readers and writers who have the greatest needs, including children in shelters or low-income housing, children of prison inmates, refugee children, migrant children, children from low-income families, children in Head Start, children in communities undergoing severe economic challenges, and many other at-risk youth.

CLiF has created a powerful program to serve children of prison inmates and their families by providing the following support to each prison and jail they sponsor:

- Books for a Family Visiting Room Library – CLiF donates new, high-quality children's books to each prison or jail for an on-site library in a facility's family visiting room for use by children on family visiting days or by family members and volunteers to read aloud with children.
- Storytelling Presentation – A CLiF representative visits the prison or jail to meet with the children of inmates and their families, delivers new books, tells stories, and talks about the joys of words and reading. The presenter also performs interactive storytelling, talks about the books being donated to the family visiting room, and reads aloud from some of them.
- Books for Children to Keep – CLiF donates a selection of new children's books for the children of inmates to take home and keep. Some children select their books at a special storytelling and book delivery event held at the correctional facility and others select their books when they come to visit their mother or father at the prison or jail.
- Storybook Program – A program offered at many of the prisons and jails gives inmates the opportunity to record a book on tape and send it along with the story home to their children.
- Seminars for Parents – A CLiF representative visits the prison or jail to conduct seminars with inmates who are parents on the importance of reading with their children and how to make reading with children fun and easy, even if an inmate has low literacy skills.
- Camp Agape – The summer camp for children who have an incarcerated parent is coordinated by the Episcopal Church, the Methodist Church and the United Church of Christ in Vermont.

A 4-minute video that profiles CLiF's programs with inmates and their children is available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0-mJRkh_S44&feature=youtu.be.



Executive Director Duncan McDougall performs interactive storytelling and talks about the books being donated to the family visiting room



CLiF's Executive Director Duncan McDougall reports that every week or two he gets a call or email from someone at a correctional facility or a nonprofit somewhere in the US asking to learn more about various aspects of CLiF's Children of Prison Inmates program. He has been contacted by individuals in more than 25 states thus far.

Duncan sends them information about how CLiF runs its programs, the materials CLiF uses, and links to their videos. While CLiF's mission is restricted to serving low-income, at-risk, and rural children in New Hampshire and Vermont, they want to do whatever they can to support similar children in other states.

Although CLiF cannot support these groups financially, Duncan wants to help them any other way he can. He thinks this type of program is extremely beneficial for inmates, their children, and their entire families, and hopes others might start similar endeavors.

Anyone who might like to start a similar initiative is invited to visit CLiF's website, www.clifonline.org, to find out more about their programs or contact Duncan McDougall at clif@clifonline.org or 802-244-0944.



Experts Speak Out on Child Separation

The separation of child migrants from their parents by U.S. immigration officials has resulted in many medical, mental health and social service experts speaking out on the long-term effects of separating children from their parents. The overwhelming majority of the researchers agree that the separation can cause serious, irreversible, lifelong damage to the children and their parents.

Researchers have pieced together the effects of childhood adversity by looking at many types of separation. The causes of separation examined range from global events like wars, famines, and mass migrations to individual separations like divorce, death of a parent, orphanages, and prisons.

Their conclusions as to the effect of child separation come from a broad body of work on childhood adversity. Child trauma like an abrupt or open-ended separation from a primary caregiver is widely thought to leave the same types of scars as child abuse and neglect, including social and emotional problems that negatively affect relationships, education and everyday functioning.

Regardless of the cause of the separation, their findings point to one unmistakable conclusion: separating kids from their parents is detrimental to their physical and mental health. Even after children are reunited with their parents, the lingering effects of their time apart may continue to put them at increased risk for a range of health problems.

In an article in the *Washington Post*, Charles Nelson, a pediatrics professor at Harvard Medical School, describes what happens inside children when they are forcibly separated from their parents. "Their heart rate goes up. Their body releases a flood of stress hormones such as cortisol and adrenaline. Those stress hormones can start killing off dendrites — the little branches in brain cells that transmit messages. In time, the stress can start killing off neurons and — especially in young children — wreaking dramatic and long-term damage, both psychologically and to the physical structure of the brain."

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Nelson's research shows that the effects can be intellectual as well as emotional, "The children, who had been separated from their parents in their first two years of life, scored significantly lower on IQ tests later in life. Their fight-or-flight response system appeared permanently broken. Stressful situations that would usually prompt physiological responses in other people — increased heart rate, sweaty palms — would provoke nothing in the children."

The reason child-parent separation has such devastating effects is because it threatens one of the most critical bonds in human biology. Lisa Fortuna, medical director for child and adolescent psychiatry at Boston Medical Center, cites research that shows, "From the time they are born, children emotionally attach to their caregiver and vice versa, skin-to-skin contact for newborns . . . is critical to their development."

"A child's sense of what safety means depends on that relationship. And without it, the parts of the brain that deal with attachment and fear — the amygdala and hippocampus — develop differently. The reason such children often develop PTSD later in life is that those neurons start firing irregularly . . . The part of their brain that sorts things into safe or dangerous does not work like it's supposed to. Things that are not threatening seem threatening," she said.

University of Alabama Students Pack Purses

Dr. Ida Johnson a professor at the University of Alabama has been supporting the Aid to Inmate Mothers (AIM) program since 2011. She has invited AIM staff to come and speak to her Criminal Justice classes for several years. Dr. Johnson also coordinates a tour at the Montgomery Women's Facility and Tutwiler for criminal justice students during the summer. The Wardens at both facilities welcome the tour groups and allow the students to hold focus groups with some of the incarcerated women.

This year AIM staff Donna Collins, Tayler and our intern Ambria went and spoke to the "Women, Law, and Incarceration" class of approximately 40 students. The students all worked in teams to make pack-a-purses for women leaving prison.

Thanks to groups like the Junior League of Montgomery, Alabama and Prince Hall Order of the Eastern Star in Atlanta, Georgia, AIM is able to deliver packed purses to women leaving prison. Each of these groups hosted huge pack-a-purse drives and delivered over 100 purses combined!

Since AIM was founded in 1987, they have provided services to Alabama's incarcerated women with emphasis on enhancing personal growth and strengthening the bonds between them and their children.

In addition to the Pack-a-Purse project, AIM's programs that address the many burdens carried by the children and families as a result of incarceration include:

- Monthly Visitation – The Monthly Visitation program gives children without means of transportation a chance to visit their mothers in prison and provides interactive activities during the visit.
- Storybook Project – The Storybook Program provides comfort to children each month by offering them a video recording of their mothers reading books to them.
- Prison Classes – Professional facilitators from the community teach 8-12 week long classes that include: Parenting, Anger Management, Domestic Violence, WHI-FI (Women's Health Information for the Incarcerated), Self-Esteem, HIV Prevention and Education, and Book Club.
- WHI-FI *Health Education* – WHI-FI holds workshops to provide basic health information on HIV/STD Prevention, Birth Control Options, Breast Cancer, Heart Health/Blood Pressure, Diabetes, Fetal Alcohol Syndrome, Pre-Natal Class, Healthy Pregnancy, and Exercise and Nutrition
- Project Reconnect – AIM holds Pre-Release classes in the prison to provide education and information on topics relating to life skills, job preparedness, STD awareness, human sexuality and



conflict resolution. After release, AIM helps women to reconnect to the community by helping them to secure jobs and housing and provide essential counseling.

- Clothing Closet – AIM has set up a small clothes closet in their office to provide women walking out of prison with clothing to land their first job and to wear to work.
- Family Outreach – AIM helps caregivers by offering much-needed financial relief to pay bills, afford childcare and purchase essentials such as school supplies and, on occasion, send children to a week-long summer camp.
- Genesis Transitional Home – The Genesis House provides women who have just left prison with an independent living environment for at least 12 months.

For more information about Aid to Inmate Mothers programs go to: www.inmatemoms.org.

Expanded Prison Parenting Programs Handbook Now Available

In addition to publishing this bi-monthly newsletter, the Parenting Special Interest Group and the Wisconsin Chapter of the Correctional Education Association publishes two handbooks – one for incarcerated parents and their families and the other for those who provide education and services for them.

The *Prison Parenting Programs: Resources for Parenting Instructors in Prisons and Jails* has been expanded in May 2018. It now contains 99 entries on programs and resources for incarcerated parents and their families. This directory has been created to help correctional educators and community agencies enhance existing or create new parenting programs in correctional facilities and the community.

Prison Parenting Programs is a "living document." This means information will continue to be added to the handbook as relevant programs and resources are identified. Corrections or updates to the listings in the directory are always welcome.

Prison Parenting Programs is designed to improve communication and cooperation among those engaged in providing parenting programs in a variety of correctional settings and the community and to encourage the development of new programming opportunities. The hope is to create a professional network, not only for the instructors of parenting classes; but also for the supervisors of children of incarcerated parent programs, coordinators of parent/child reading projects, and organizers of support groups.

The *Reaching Beyond Bars: A Handbook for Parents Incarcerated in Wisconsin and their Families* was last updated in June 2017. It contains 35 pages of information and advice for incarcerated parents.

Being in prison does not end a parent's duties . . . nor does it end all of the rewards. Being away does make it much harder to stay connected to the children. *Reaching Beyond Bars* was created to help incarcerated parents be more involved in their children's lives. It seeks to help the parent and child's caregiver to "reach beyond bars" to strengthen the bonds that keep the family together.

Those who work with incarcerated parents and their families are welcome to print the handbooks or any sections of them for use with their clients. CEA-Wisconsin has funded the printing of a limited number of hardcopies of the booklets. The hardcopies are available those to people who request them and to those attending workshops that the Parenting Special Interest Group presents.

As the handbooks are updated, they will be posted on the www.ceawisconsin.org, www.ceanational.org and www.fairshake.net websites. If you have information that you feel should be included in either of the handbooks or would like to request a hardcopy of a handbook, email jerrybednarowski@new.rr.com.



Guide Helps Parents Navigate Child Welfare System

When a parent becomes involved in the criminal justice system, the children often become subjects of the child welfare system. The child welfare system is also known as the foster care system, Child Protective Services, or the Department of Family Services.

Roughly 1 in 10 mothers and 1 in 50 fathers in state prison have a child in the child welfare system during their incarceration. To help parents involved in the criminal justice system work with the child welfare system to stay in touch with their children and stay involved in decisions about their children's well-being, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office for Planning and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Justice, and Federal Bureau of Prisons have collaborated to publish a 33 page *Guide for Incarcerated Parents Who Have Children in the Child Welfare System*.

In addition to important information on steps required by the child welfare system for reunification or having children return home to their family after foster care, this guide includes sections on:

- Child Welfare Stages
- What to Do if Your Child Is in the Child Welfare System
- What to Include in a Letter or Conversation with Your Child's Social Worker
- Other Information that May Apply to You
- Information on Termination of Parental Rights
- Who Can Help?
- State Child Welfare Agency Contact Information
- Glossary of Terms Used by Child Welfare

Involvement of a child in the Child Welfare System often progresses through four stages:

Stage I: Child Is Removed from Home and Placed in the Care of the Child Welfare Agency

A child may be removed from the home in one of three different ways: before the parent's arrest, at the time of the parent's arrest, or after the parent has been in prison or jail for a while. For example, a parent may leave their child in the care of the child's grandparent when he or she is arrested and incarcerated. However, a year or two after the arrest, the grandparent may be unable to care for the child, and the child ends up in the child welfare system.

Stage II: Child Is Placed in "Out-Of-Home Care"

After the state or local child welfare agency decides to take the child into their custody, the agency has to decide who should look after the child. Out-of-Home Care placements can include: foster care, kinship care or residential group care.

Stage III: Continued Planning and Assessment

When the child goes to live in foster care, formal kinship care, or residential group care, the social worker writes a case plan, which explains what the parent needs to do to live with the child again. The case plan describes the services provided to the family, the tasks the parent needs to complete to work towards reunification, and where the child will live permanently after he or she leaves foster care. The social worker does an ongoing assessment of the case with a formal review occurring every 6 months, to see if progress is being made on the case plan.

Stage IV: Permanency and/or Termination Permanency

Permanency is when a child is placed with a legally permanent, nurturing family. Permanency is the ultimate goal in every case plan. A child in foster care is said to have achieved permanency if:



1. The child is discharged from foster care to reunite with family, either a parent or another relative
2. The child is discharged from foster care to a legally finalized adoption
3. The child is discharged from foster care to the care of a legal guardian

If a child has been in foster care 15 out of the most recent 22 months, the child welfare agency is required by law to initiate termination of parental rights. However, there are some exceptions that may apply when a parent is incarcerated. These exceptions include:

1. If the child is being cared for by a relative (decided by the state)
2. The state agency has documented in the case plan a good reason why terminating parental rights would not be in the best interests of the child
3. The state has not provided the family with the child services necessary for the safe return of the child to the child's home, if providing state services was required.

The complete *Guide for Incarcerated Parents Who Have Children in the Child Welfare System* may be found at <https://youth.gov/sites/default/files/COIP-Parent-Guide-508.pdf>.

Indian Parents May Qualify for Certain Rights

Compared to the above article, the child welfare system is a little different for American Indian families. All state child welfare agencies must follow the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA), which is a Federal law for Indian tribes. The law gives Indian tribes the right to be involved in deciding what should happen to Indian children who may be placed in foster care or adoptive placements.

A Family's Guide to the Child Welfare System published by Georgetown University, asserts that if an incarcerated parent is a federally recognized Indian tribe or the family has connections to an Indian tribe, Indian organization, or agency like the Indian Health Service, the parent may qualify for certain rights guaranteed by ICWA.

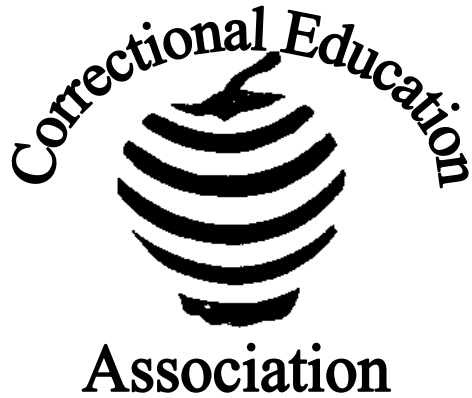
ICWA requires that state child welfare agencies assume certain responsibilities:

- Before state child welfare agencies can take children from their families, ICWA requires the child welfare agency make "active efforts" to help keep children at home. "Active efforts" means any kind of direct services and assistance that will help the family stay together. But if the situation is very dangerous, children can be removed immediately until it is safe for them to be returned.
- If an Indian child must be removed from the Indian parent's home, the state child welfare agency and state court must notify parent and child's tribe(s) by registered mail about the case. This must happen whenever a tribal member is involved in a child welfare hearing.
- If the Indian parent is not able to afford a lawyer, he/she has the right to have a lawyer appointed by the court. If the state does not provide a lawyer, the court is supposed to pay reasonable fees and expenses so that the parent will have a lawyer.
- Before removing your child from home, ICWA requires that an "expert witness" testify in court that this placement is necessary. The expert witness is a person who is American Indian or who has experience working with Indian families. If the child is placed into foster care, he or she must be placed with a relative. If a relative isn't available, he or she must be placed with a foster family who is a member of your tribe. If no foster family from your tribe is available, the child must be placed with an Indian foster family who is a member of another tribe.

The complete handbook, *A Family's Guide to the Child Welfare System*, may be accessed at https://gucchd.georgetown.edu/products/AFamilysGuide_English.pdf.



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Editor's Message:

Incarceration of a parent often negatively affects the entire family. Not only does the family have to deal with the social stigma associated with a family member being in prison, but many factors impacting the family's survival are exacerbated. Financial stability, employment, housing, medical care, education, and child care may all be threatened.

In addition to the incarcerated parent developing parenting skills and staying connected with the family, the family needs to address the issues that impact their daily lives. Two websites can be very valuable in helping the family cope with these daily issues and they are FREE.

Fair Shake's innovative nationwide website, www.fairshake.net, focuses on successful prisoner reentry. Fair Shake offers former offenders and their families a free virtual office that can be accessed from any computer. In addition to email, data storage and a personal resource directory; members can create a web page to use as a supplement to employment, housing, medical care, or community services applications.

A service provided by the Goodwill Community Foundation is its www.GCFLearnFree.org website. The website offers online learning opportunities to anyone who wants to improve the technology, literacy and math skills needed to be successful in both work and life. Hundreds of interactive lesson topics include: Everyday Life, Career, Internet Basics, Math Basics, Email Basics, Job Development, Reading, and Money.

Urge the incarcerated parents you work with and their families to use these websites before and after release to increase their chances of a successful return to their family and community.

Jerry

