

Parenting Connection

Volume 15 Issue 2

September/October 2018

LYFE Program Supports Student Parents' Transition into Parenthood

District 79 is New York City's Alternative Schools District. District 79 helps students under 21 years old who have experienced an interruption in their studies. Some of District 79's students have experienced two interruptions in their education: early parenthood and incarceration.

District 79 is guided by the belief that all students can achieve at high levels and succeed in college and careers. District 79 helps students:

- **Stay** - Stay on track to earn a high school or high school equivalency diploma.
- **Build** - Build the skills to succeed in post-secondary opportunities including career and college.
- **Gain** - Gain the social-emotional skills necessary to become confident and productive members of society.

Under the direction of District Superintendent, Tim Lisante, Ph.D., District 79 has created these programs which directly serve incarcerated young people:

- **Re-Start Academy** provides educational services for 13-21 year old students in temporary involuntary settings, including juvenile justice, substance abuse treatment, mental/behavioral health treatment, hospitals, social services agencies, and other transitional settings. ReStart Academy has locations throughout the city and two residential sites in upstate New York where students can continue on the path to academic success.
- **Passages Academy** serves students 15 years old and younger who are incarcerated in secure and non-secure detention and placement facilities.
- **East River Academy** serves students who are incarcerated on Rikers Island, ages 16-21.
- **Court Liaisons** give help to students 21 years old and younger who are incarcerated in secure and non-secure detention and placement facilities.

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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

Proofreaders :

Margaret Done, Milwaukee Secure Detention Facility
Tim Malchow, Kettle Moraine Correctional Institution



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Complementing each of these programs is the Living for the Young Family through Education (LYFE) program. LYFE is a New York City Department of Education program that supports student parents' transition into parenthood by providing them with high-quality supportive counseling, academic guidance and advocacy services. LYFE also provides free early childhood education to children of student parents. LYFE makes it possible for student parents to stay on track toward graduating from high school or completing their high school equivalency while transitioning into parenthood.

At the core of LYFE's mission is the maintenance of healthy, high-functioning families. LYFE believes that all of its students – both student parents and their children – are capable of achieving the highest measures of success, both academically and social-emotionally. In the LYFE program, student engagement is an ongoing and collaborative process in which the student parent is an active participant and encouraged to set high expectations for themselves – from assessing students' comprehensive needs at the start of each school year, to setting long and short-term goals, to planning for graduation, and to empowering students to become advocates for themselves and their child. As a result, student parents transition from LYFE prepared to sustain healthy families and attain post-secondary success.

Find out more about New York City's Alternative Schools District 79 at <http://d-79.org> and the Living for the Young Family through Education program at <http://lyfenyc.org/> or email Superintendent Tim Lisante at tlisant@schools.nyc.gov.

Assisting Families of Inmates Provides Vital Services to Help Families Cope

Assisting Families of Inmates (AFOI) was created in 1978 as a volunteer transportation program designed to assist Richmond, Virginia area families visiting relatives in state prison. Until then, visiting was virtually impossible for low-income families as most state prisons are located in isolated, rural areas not served by public transportation. The initiative was led by Thomas A. Edmonds of Second Presbyterian Church who saw a need in the Richmond community and convinced other downtown area churches to join in by providing much-needed volunteers, personal vehicles and financial support. Within six years, the AFOI program was providing visiting day transportation to 15 state prisons, hot meals when family members returned from visiting, and supportive outreach services such as support group meetings and referrals to other community service organizations.

Last year, AFOI provided nearly 3,000 transportation visits and hundreds of video visits for individuals to Virginia's adult and juvenile correctional facilities. The visits allow friends and family members to spend time together with their loved ones as a family, discussing life events and planning for a more hopeful future. For the majority of these families, Assisting Families of Inmates is the only means by which they can maintain regular, supportive contact with their incarcerated relatives, family members and loved ones.

A visit for a mother and her incarcerated son relieves worry and concern. A visit for a child and his incarcerated parent encourages important parent-child bonding. A visit for a wife and her incarcerated husband strengthens a lifelong commitment. And, as equally important, their visits have a positive effect on the offender's behavior while in prison and after release back into the community. In fact, research has shown that inmates who receive regular visits are more likely to have a higher incidence of success after release; thereby lowering recidivism rates and increasing public safety.

In the past 40 years, the mission of AFOI has grown beyond a family visiting program to include other programming which works to prevent the breakdown of relationships among inmates and their families,



provide referrals to community resources, and offer other vital services that help families cope with incarceration and prepare for release and reunification.

Information on Assisting Families of Inmates' programs in addition to the descriptions below may be found on their website, www.afoi.org.

Milk And Cookies Children's Program

In January, 1999 Assisting Families of Inmates launched a unique school-based program that addresses the needs of children impacted by parental incarceration. Today the Milk and Cookies Children's Program (MAC) is active in several City of Richmond elementary schools.

The goal of the MAC Program is to provide assistance and support to these children and their caregivers by improving the families' access to much needed resources and encouraging their children's school success. MAC's strategies address both the needs of the children and their caregivers. A core strategy includes support groups in the school that help children better understand and cope with the parent's incarceration. Groups are organized by age and meet regularly for seventeen weeks and then decelerate to biweekly meetings for the remainder of the school year. The MAC staff works proactively with school personnel and community agencies to locate specialized programs and services that will increase children's chances of succeeding. Individualized attention to the caregivers facilitates a better understanding of the needs of their children. Many of the Milk and Cookies caregivers are single mothers or grandmothers who need supportive services to help them cope with the unexpected responsibilities of raising their children and grandchildren. The MAC Program also provides assistance with transportation, in-home counseling and support, and advocacy with other service providers.

MAC services include:

- Children's support group guided by an established, evaluated and copyrighted core curriculum
- Information and training for parents, caregivers, school personnel/administration and service providers on the unique needs of these children
- Assistance to caregivers with resources that can help with financial, housing, transportation, employment and other concerns or family and household stressors
- Support for healthy family reunification and reintegration when the incarcerated parent is released

Informational Resources

On its website, Assisting Families of Inmates provides information to help families and caregivers cope with the stress and uncertainties of having a family member incarcerated. Information sheets available include:

- Coping Strategies
- Frequently Asked Questions
- Preparing a Child for a Prison Visit
- Visiting Tips Including Process, Policies and Dress Code

2016-2017 Fiscal Year Services Overview

- Transportation Program - Provided transportation on 35 weekends for over 1,200 family members to 26 Virginia Department of Corrections facility stops, providing dinners to all participating families upon return
- Coordinated transportation, from 20 CSU's around Virginia, on 23 weekends for nearly 1,400 family members to visit youth residents incarcerated in Virginia Department of Juvenile Justice facilities and local community detention centers
- Video Visitation Program – Provided 206 visits for 379 visitors from 7 visitor centers located around the state to 25 state prisons in Virginia

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- Milk and Cookies Children's Program - Provided small group support for 79 children and 67 families in 4 City of Richmond elementary schools for 18 weeks during the school year, totaling over 1,400 service hours
- Online Application Assistance for Visitation - Provided telephone and in-person Virginia Department of Corrections online visitor application assistance, submitting more than 700 applications on behalf of individuals otherwise unable to access it
- Resource Referrals and Client Assistance - Provided information, resources, and referrals to thousands of individuals, families, professionals, non-profit and government service providers

Books Feature Stories of Amazing Incarcerated Dads and Moms

In the past year and a half, Hogan Hilling and co-authors Austin Dowd and Elise Cohen Ho have published two coffee table books that showcase the good nature, wisdom and value of fathers and mothers from different socio-economic backgrounds, races and family structures to reveal the truths, tears and triumphs of modern parenthood.

Dadly Dads: Parents of the 21st Century, published in June 2017, features 115 dads of various family dynamics from 11 different countries. The compelling photos and content in this book will inspire conversation about the refreshing, positive images of 21st century fathers as responsible, competent, active and nurturing parents.

Amazing Moms: Parents of the 21st Century, published in May 2018, features 115 moms from 12 different countries. The moms bear their souls about the challenges and joys of motherhood; and share a wealth of wisdom about their parenting journeys.

Three of the dads and moms featured in the books are incarcerated parents. Authors Hogan, Austin and Elise included stories about Darius Walker, Samantha Heiges and Sarah Elizabeth Martin to demonstrate that regardless of the crime a dad or mom commits, concrete walls should not condemn or prevent them from building a relationship with their child(ren). Although incarcerated dads and moms committed a crime and were sentenced by our legal system, Hogan, Austin and Elise feel it is not our place to judge these dads and moms while they serve their time in prison. They are still dads and moms!

Dadly Dads: Parents of the 21st Century and *Amazing Moms: Parents of the 21st Century* may be ordered by contacting Hogan at hogan@dadlyrally.com for autographed copies or purchased at Barnes and Noble or Amazon.com.

Hogan Hilling has also recently announced that Dad Marketing will be starting two Go Fund Me campaigns: *Reward for Good Dads Campaign* and *Reward for Good Moms Campaign*. In the campaigns, Dad Marketing will choose 8 dads and 8 moms who will receive a reward of \$2,500. Incarcerated parents or parents in a reentry program are eligible to be nominated. To find out how the campaigns work, donate to the funds, or nominate a good dad or good mom; go to:

<https://www.gofundme.com/34ucwr-fatherhood-is-alive-and-well>
<https://www.gofundme.com/reward-for-moms>

Here are the incarcerated moms' and dads' stories that appear in *Amazing Moms* and *Dadly Dads*:

Samantha Heiges, Minnesota

I'm the mother of a 9-year-old daughter, Taylor. Before my incarceration I was an assistant manager at a bank. I am in prison for 2nd degree murder and serving a 25-year sentence. To improve my life in prison I



have taken parenting classes, completed my A.A. Degree, and became a Conflict Resolution Coach. To demonstrate remorse for my crime I give back to the community by participating in Restorative Justice activities. I have donated hair (4X) and money, crocheted and sewn items for hospitals (cancer patients and stillborn babies), helped with fundraisers, and created cards for sick children. I have also trained 8 service dogs in 5 years and work as a Lead worker in our Textiles department. I love playing sports like basketball, softball, and volleyball. To strengthen my bond with my daughter I took up crocheting and make stuffed animals for her to cuddle, I call everyday, and see her weekly.

What I do well as a mom

I do a good job keeping connected with my daughter and accepting help from my family. During telephone correspondence and visitation I keep our conversations as normal as possible. I encourage her to keep a positive attitude and help her with homework. I also do a good job to create "Peter Pan" adventures with her on the telephone or during our visits.

What I learned from another mom

To let go of the little challenges in life. Kids go through phases. Stay focused on the bigger picture and guiding your child through life. Parenting is not a perfect science.

Lesson learned from my child

That it's okay to be silly and have fun in life. I've made some bad choices, worried too much about what other people think of me and lost my sense of having fun in life. I find it easier to just be me and that it's okay let the kid in me come out every once in a while, especially around my daughter.

Successful motherhood moment

My daughter was 10 months old when I started my prison sentence.

I was not allowed to have physical contact with her for the first 8 months of my incarceration. While I was given permission to talk to family members on the telephone and was able to hear my daughter's sounds, it hurt not to be able to see and touch her; and I was scared she would not remember me. What kept my hopes up was that my relatives told me they hung photos of me around my daughter's crib. Despite the 8 months of separation the day I was given visitation time with her, my daughter was excited to see me and gave me a hug.

Mom I admire

My mom, Chris. Chris was a hard worker and did her best to provide all the essentials we needed during my childhood years. What I admire about her are her good work ethics, how she saved money for her and her children's future and her strength and determination to overcome the daily challenges of life as a parent.

Sarah Elizabeth Martin, Oregon

I'm a mom of a twelve-year-old daughter and three-year-old son. Prior to my conviction I was a caregiver for my father and operated a home childcare service. I was also in the process of starting a photography business. In May of 2016, the court convicted me of murder and sentenced me to 25 years. To improve my life I have attended, parenting classes, a 4-month culinary training serving 900 women, a support group for veterans and the elderly. I recently have completed CADD- computer aided drafting and design program, and graduated #1 in my class. I am currently enrolled in a PSU, Inside/Out class, studying, domestic violence and abuse cycles. I am also earning my Bachelors in Criminal Justice. I enjoy music, dancing, photography, scrapbooking and interior design. Although I have accepted my fate in prison, I maintain my innocence and have filed for an appeal. I have my faith and hope in God and I see a bright future ahead of me!

What I do well as a mom

I do a great job staying connected with my children despite the prison walls and support their hobbies and interests. I am able to join in family events thru video visits, and continue to teach my children the importance of family, traditions and making memories.

What I learned from another mom

To laugh and not fear what others are thinking. To simply relax, trust my instincts and enjoy each moment. Let the kids be messy, funny, silly, loud...just be present and enjoy the journey. (continued on page 6)



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Lesson learned from my child

I learned how fragile and precious life is. Our family lost a very close family friend, Uncle G. My daughter asked, "Why can't we just bury Uncle G in the back yard like we did my hamster?" I explained why and then we made a plan. We gathered special items that reminded us of him, placed them in a special box and buried the box in the backyard. She taught me the simplicity of death and to approach it with love and logic.

Successful motherhood moment

I participated in a literacy program that provided me the opportunity to record my voice, reading a favorite story to my children. I sent the CD along with a copy of the book, and a special note to each child. They can now, listen to me reading a story to them when they can't be with me. Another moment is when my Daughter and I volunteered to lead a "Back to School" backpack campaign.

Mom I admire

Erica Watson, my mom and my best friend. I admire her for the way she does not judge or criticize people; the way she listens with an open mind, and her perseverance to always move forward.

Darius Walker, Wisconsin

I'm a dad of one twenty-five year-old son, Darius, Jr. I worked as a manager for a fast food chain before I committed a crime that dramatically changed the course of my life. In 1995 I was sentenced to life imprisonment for First Degree Intentional Homicide. I had been living a life plagued by poor choices that included criminal activity and alcohol abuse. I'm forever remorseful for the death of the victim and especially his loved ones. During my time in prison I have risen like a Phoenix from the ashes and renewed my faith in God. I am a full-time college student, pursuing a Bachelor of Ministry Degree. I've also developed my love for the arts and music. I enjoy singing, songwriting and rapping. I use music to express how much I admire and love my son, who is a gifted musician and artist. I also enjoy watching sports. I've learned to set my ego aside and also determined to continue learning how to be the best dad I can be during my incarceration.

What I do well as a dad

I don't allow the concrete prison walls to keep me from building a father-child relationship with my son. I also encourage my son to be great, remind him that he can do anything and to appreciate the many opportunities he has to live a successful and productive life.

What I learned from another dad

I learned that communication, accountability, and consistency are crucial to building a successful parent-child relationship. Even though I did not set a good example by my incarceration for my son, I still have time to serve as a better role model for him.

Lesson learned from a child

A child needs to experience a parent's love in action not in theory. My son doesn't ask me for material things. What he expects me to do is make my presence felt in his life by being open and honest when we discuss life issues, experiences and thoughts with each other. This is even more important since my incarceration. While concrete prison walls and fences keep us apart, I feel I'm still responsible for staying emotionally connected with him in ways that will offer him words of encouragement and to show him his wellbeing is my top priority.

Successful fatherhood moment

My son expressed his desire to play drums. I saved money from my prison earnings for a year to buy him a drum machine.

Dad I admire

Pastor Jerry North of Provision Ministry. I met him in prison while he worked as the chaplain for another correctional facility. He was my first pastor and became my surrogate father. I watched him humble himself to serve other people through love of God and mankind. He taught me the true meaning of unconditional love by his actions and how to endure life. He also inspired me how to love without judgment and to always be kind to people.



Family Connections in Correctional Facilities **Webinar Available for Viewing**

On August 28, 2018, *Family Connections in Correctional Facilities: Informational Webinar on TTA Opportunity* was aired. The webinar produced by the National Institute of Corrections, the Urban Institute and collaborators to help viewers learn more about the opportunity to participate and to ask questions about the site selection process for the Family Connections in Correctional Facilities Project.

The webinar may be viewed on the National Institute of Corrections or Urban Institute websites:

<https://info.nicic.gov/fsp/node/6>

<https://www.urban.org/events/family-connections-correctional-facilities-informational-webinar-tta-opportunity>

The Family Connections in Correctional Facilities Project is intended to advance practices that foster contact and communication between parents experiencing incarceration and their children and family members by: developing a set of low-cost, high-impact correctional practices to reduce barriers to family connections and contact; working with select facilities to implement these practices; documenting how these practices can be implemented and are related to parent, family, and system outcomes. Participation in the Family Connections in Correctional Facilities Project provides an opportunity for correctional facilities to receive training and technical assistance for implementing practices geared to helping parents who are incarcerated maintain communication and contact with their children.

Nearly 5 million US children have experienced the incarceration of a parent. Research demonstrates that parental incarceration contributes to emotional, financial, and residential instability among children and their caregivers, which can have significant short- and long-term ramifications for their lives. The Urban Institute has collaborated with the National Institute of Corrections, Bureau of Justice Assistance, Community Works, and subject-matter experts to develop actionable, low-cost, high-impact model practices and activities that can reduce the barriers to contact and communication between incarcerated parents and their children (Model Practices for Parents in Jail and Prison: Reducing Barriers to Family Connections).

The Family Connections in Correctional Facilities Project is selecting up to five sites to implement the model practices. Eligible sites include all US correctional facilities — including jails and prisons, in urban and rural settings, and of varying security levels and incarcerated populations — interested in implementing these model practices. Selected correctional facilities will be at the forefront of a national discussion on how to mitigate the impact of parental incarceration on children and families. As part of this project, selected sites will receive targeted training and technical assistance (TTA) from leading subject-matter experts; have access to educational webinars, trainings, and peer-learning opportunities; and be featured in the robust dissemination of reports, presentations, and webinars to fellow practitioners and researchers in the field.

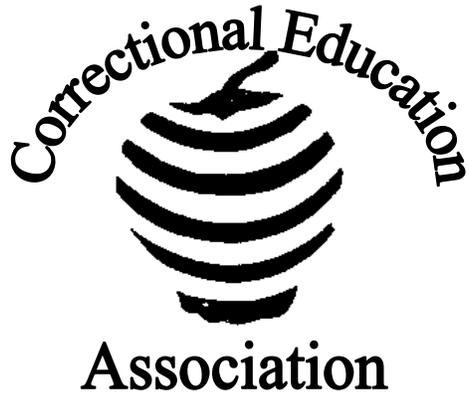
Webinar speakers included:

- Rachel Brushett, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Assistance, US Department of Justice
- Lindsey Cramer, Research Associate, Justice Policy Center, Urban Institute
- Hilary Cuthrell, National Institute of Corrections, US Department of Justice
- Jocelyn Fontaine, Senior Research Fellow, Justice Policy Center, Urban Institute
- Alina Martinez, Lead Coordinator, One Family Program, Community Works West
- Bryce Peterson, Senior Research Associate, Justice Policy Center, Urban Institute

For more information about the Family Connections in Correctional Facilities Project and its application process, visit the National Institute of Corrections microsite: <https://info.nicic.gov/fsp/>.



Jerry Bednarowski, Parenting Connection Editor
Correctional Education Association-Wisconsin
W6443 Old Highway Road
Menasha, Wisconsin 54952



Editor's Message:

In an age of instant communication through social media, the forced separation of parents from their children due to parental incarceration provides an opportunity for the rediscovery of the lost art of letter writing.

Children are always looking to their parents for unconditional love that is permanent. Because letters are tangible, they provide a real and lasting way to show support for the children left behind. Letters are a form of communication can be held in one's hands and can be read and re-read by a child throughout life.

When children need a boost of courage and resilience to overcome feelings of self-doubt, pulling out an old letter and re-reading it can reassure the children that they have a parent who accepts and loves them.

Encourage the incarcerated parents that you work with to write letters to their children to give them concrete evidence of the genuine feelings that they need. Then the child can return to the letters again and again for the comfort and soothing.

Jerry

Tell Us About Your Program

Email Your Article to: JerryBednarowski@new.rr.com

