Parents on a Mission Empowers Parents

Richard Ramos, Founder of Parents on a Mission (POM), believes “Parents are in the biggest competition of their lives. It’s the competition for the heart, mind, and soul of their children. But whether it’s against the negative influences of pop culture or the threat of gangs, drugs, and violence, that competition isn’t won or lost on the streets or through community programs — it’s won in the home.”

Overcoming the obstacles of barrio youth gangs, drugs and violence, Richard Ramos has devoted his career to serving high-risk Latino youth & families.

Richard spent his early career as a correctional officer, a juvenile hall instructor, at-risk junior high and high school counselor, and a co-founder and director of a gang intervention and prevention coalition.

But it wasn’t until he started making home visits that his eyes were opened to the levels of dysfunction, disrespect, and lack of trust the youth he served were going home to every day. It was then where he realized that no matter how much time, attention, and resources were spent on the youth, both the problems and solutions started with the parents. Since then, Richard has devoted a large part of his career to serving youth by empowering their parents to play a more positive, meaningful role in their lives.

Parents on a Mission is a parent leadership program, Richard authored years ago as a gang prevention resource. It has evolved to the general audience of parents around the country. POM now operates inside all the State and private prisons in the State of Colorado, one jail and prison in California, and numerous non-
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Parents on a Mission is a parent leadership movement that aims to equip parents and parent mentors to win the love, respect, and loyalty of their children. POM asserts that raising children is a lot easier when you have the tools and resources you need to be successful. When parents become stronger and more emotionally mature as individuals, they’re more likely to nurture strong, healthy relationships with their children. That’s why the POM curriculum and trainings get to the root of the issues that equip and empower parents to become respected leaders in their household — things like self-esteem, confidence, and forgiveness from past hurts.

Parents on a Mission believes:

- Parents still have the biggest influence in their child’s life
- More empowered parents — not more community programs or interventions — are the key to building strong kids, loving families, and safe communities
- Safe communities are a byproduct of loving homes
- When children feel safe, loved, and encouraged at home, communities typically see a decline in gang activity, drugs and violence
- Great parents are developed from the inside out
- Emotional maturity is one of the most important aspects of parenting. When we find internal peace and forgiveness through dealing with our own past, we become stronger individuals and better parents
- Anyone has the ability to become a great parent
- No matter your past or present circumstances, it’s never too late or too far away to become the leader your child needs

While most parenting programs and curriculums put a heavy emphasis on changing child behavior, POM focuses on the parent’s personal and emotional growth. Parents on a Mission is a step-by-step parent leadership program helping parents to win the respect, love and loyalty of their children so they can make a positive impact on their communities.
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The key lessons taught in the Parents on a Mission curriculum are:

- How to become more emotionally stable and mature as a parent
- The proven principles of raising happy, healthy and productive children
- How to win the trust, loyalty, and respect of your children
- The proper role and use of child discipline
- How to become a strong, confident, loving leader in your home
- The three secrets to raising children who say “no” to negative peer pressure

The POM course is comprised of six audio modules and six hours of teaching:

**SESSION 1 - POM Orientation**

- Learn about the core values and concepts of Parents on a Mission
- Why parents are the number one assets in the community
- Why parents must understand that programs cannot replace them
- Why parents need to embrace their responsibility in raising productive children that ultimately make positive contributions to their community
- How single parents, step-parents and grandparents can overcome their own challenges

**SESSION 2 - Parental Personal Growth**

- Increase your self-esteem and feel more aware of your thoughts
- Learn about the power of our choices and how to positively choose how we view or respond to past or present circumstances
- Experience the power of forgiveness in restoring peace and reconciling broken relationships

**SESSION 3 - Earning Respect for Parental Authority**

- Learn how to earn the respect for your authority as a leader in the home
- Discover why you must win battle of child obedience early and often and how to do it
- Learn how to prepare your children to deal with peer pressure and make positive contributions to the community
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SESSION 4 - The Proper Use of Discipline
- Discover the true meaning and definition of discipline
- Understand how and when to properly use discipline
- Build the confidence you need to exercise your parental authority

SESSION 5 - Community Building
- Learn how the family unit is a microcosm of society
- Understand how to give your children a sense of purpose at home and in the community
- Find ways to inspire your children to use and share their talents
- Get ideas and activities to build a close feeling of community in your home

SESSION 6 - Trust & Loyalty
- Learn how to win (and keep) the loyalty of your child above everything else
- Discover new ways to build a sense of trust and openness with your child
- Become more aware of the “Four M’s” of competition (Movies, Music, Magazines and Media) and how to guard against their influence

For more information on the Parents on a Mission Curriculum, the three-day trainings for POM Mentors, and the free five minute Parenting Transformation Video Series, check out the Parents on a Mission website at www.parentsonamission.org or email Richard Ramos at richard@parentsonamission.org.
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Daily Strength for Families of Prisoners

DailyStrength is a website that serves as a social network centered on support groups, where users provide one another with emotional support by discussing their struggles and successes with each other. DailyStrength is a subsidiary of Sharecare, created by WebMD founder and Discovery Communications' Chief of Global Digital Strategy Jeff Arnold, along with Dr. Mehmet Oz.

The DailyStrength site contains over 500 online communities that deal with different medical conditions or life challenges. Each of the support groups focuses on a specific issue such as depression, divorce, parenting, or a specific medical condition.

One of the online DailyStrength communities is the Families of Prisoners Support Group. A last count, the Families of Prisoners Support Group had 1280 registered members.

This community is dedicated to families that have been disrupted by prison. Having a loved one incarcerated or having been incarcerated comes with its own unique challenges that require support and understanding. Families of prisoners are encouraged to join the group to find others who know what they are going through, and to seek advice or share their experiences.

The site is free for members and the members are encouraged to remain anonymous. The site provides members with continual support as someone is always available to talk.

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Free Storybooks Available from Safer Society Foundation

Fay Honey Knopp’s work as a prison volunteer in the 1970’s convinced her that major changes were needed in the criminal justice system. In 1975, she founded the Prison Research Education/Action Project (PREAP) to advocate for research and action on non-repressive alternatives to incarceration for offenders, remedies for victims, and abuse prevention strategies. As organization’s mission began to focus on working to end sexual abuse and its devastating effects on society, PREAP evolved into the Safer Society Foundation.

The mission of Safer Society Foundation, Inc. is to provide services and resources for preventive and restorative responses to sexual and social violence. The Safer Society Foundation has become a pioneer in the publication of the tools to help professionals prevent violence and treat victims. Over the years, Safer Society Press has added many books, pamphlets, workbooks, and DVDs to its catalog.

Safer Society Foundation has created a series of illustrated storybooks for counseling children of incarcerated parents. Each of these short stories is told from the point of view of one child who has a particular family situation and challenge to overcome. At the end of the 12-page story, are two coloring pages for the child reader to write and illustrate his or her own story. In the back of the book, a note to the caregiver suggests ways to engage children in reading and talking about the story and helping them draw parallels to their own situations and challenges.

Each storybook is available as a free download in the Safer Society Press online bookstore at www.safersociety.org/press. You may also purchase copies of the storybooks in bundles of ten.

Free Publications
Meet the Characters

Jasmine is an eight-year-old girl whose mother is incarcerated in a federal prison far from where Jasmine and her two siblings now reside with their maternal grandmother. Because she was close to her mother, Jasmine struggles with not being able to visit her mother. She becomes engaged with a counselor who teaches her how to write letters to her mother and she learns that writing and receiving letters from her mother is a special way to stay connected with her. (For children ages 4 – 8)

The father of 11-year-old Kenny Junior, or KJ as everyone calls him, is serving a life sentence in prison. KJ always wanted to be just like his dad. Now he worries that he is going to make the same mistakes his dad made and end up in prison too. KJ struggles with his identity and self-esteem. With the help of his Big Brother, he learns that he is capable of making his own decisions and is worthy of determining his own outcome. (For children 8 – 12)

Six-year-old Bailey and her younger brother are living with a foster family while their mother is in prison. Bailey likes to visit her mom but is fearful about her release from prison. Life at home with her mother was very chaotic and at times scary. With the foster family, she feels safe. Bailey works through her fears with a counselor as she prepares for her mother’s release from prison. (For children ages 7 - 10)
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Film Depicts Life with a Parent in Prison

As part of their 2019 Independent Lens series, PBS premiered the film *Tre Maison Dasan: Life with a Parent in Prison through the Eyes of their Sons* on April 1, 2019. Directed by Denali Tiller, *Tre Maison Dasan* is an intimate portrait of three boys growing up, each with a parent in prison. Directly told through the child’s perspective, the film is an exploration of relationships and separation, masculinity, and coming of age in America when a parent is behind bars.

The film documents the pressure, stigma, and trauma they face due to the absence of a parent, as well as their resilience and moments of joy. The children face growing up in a society that often demonizes their parents, provides little support for their families, and assumes “the apple doesn’t fall far from the tree.” The film shows how society writes the parents off as criminals, but in their hearts their children still see them as Mom and Dad.

Tre, Maison and Dasan are three very different boys. Tre is a spirited 13-year old who hides his emotions behind a mask of tough talk and hard edges. Maison is a bright-eyed 11-year old with an encyclopedic mind and deep love for those around him. Dasan is a sensitive 6-year old with an incredible capacity for empathy and curiosity.

Although their parents are incarcerated for serious crimes, the strong and caring relationships they maintain with their kids shatter stereotypes about those behind bars.

The film shows the many layers of the boys’ experiences and the importance of maintaining their relationship and connections with their parents, as well as the systemic, social, racial, economic, and mental health injustices they face.
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The PBS Independent lens website, [www.pbs.org/independentlens/films/](http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/films/), provides two short clips from the film. The entire *Tre Maison Dasan* film is available for purchase or screening from the Director’s website, [www.tremaisondasan.com](http://www.tremaisondasan.com).

Also available on the [www.tremaisondasan.com](http://www.tremaisondasan.com) website are two viewing guides: Classroom and Prison and Re-entry. These guides have been designed to supply facilitators both with suggested guidelines for leading discussions around the film and issues presented, and also critical information on how to best acknowledge, work with, and support children of incarcerated parents and their families.

The Classroom Viewing Guide can be used with multiple audiences in an educational setting: educators, students, and the larger school community.

The Prison and Re-Entry Viewing Guide has been designed to use with audiences of incarcerated and formerly incarcerated people, and people in re-entry.

The website for the director also has a page for Social Engagement to help those screening to:
- Empower kids to communicate with their parents and caregivers in new, transformative ways that can reshape their relationships and give them agency in their experience; and erase the stigma that surrounds children whose families are affected by incarceration.

- Improve support systems for families and to implement new programming that emphasizes the need for access and meaningful contact between parents and children.

- Begin therapeutic healing for incarcerated and formerly incarcerated people that can strengthen family bonds, promote reconnection and responsibility, and provide tools with which to re-enter their families and communities as empowered agents of their own outcomes.

Family Transportation to Prisons

Maintaining contact between incarcerated parents and their families is important in their efforts to keep their morale and prepare for reentry. The Fair Shake website offers a list of links available that direct you to transportation programs in 13 states that take children and families to visit their loved ones in prison. Some of the ride programs are free, some are reduced cost. Go to [https://www.fairshake.net/public-transportation-to-prisons/](https://www.fairshake.net/public-transportation-to-prisons/) for the list.
Editor’s Message

On September 3, we lost a tireless, determined leader who believed deeply in the power of second chances. John Linton, former Director of the Office of Correctional Education at the U.S. Department of Education, passed away after a battle with pancreatic cancer.

In 2014, John was asked to join an interagency work group convened to address the needs of children of the incarcerated and what federal agencies could do to coordinate efforts to improve outcomes for these children. John advocated that a focus on the incarcerated parent be included in the deliberations and I was honored when John asked for my input on efforts to develop the capabilities of incarcerated persons to be effective parents—both during incarceration and after release.

John had a long run as Director, Office of Correctional Education from January 2001 until his retirement in 2015 and continued to advocate for “second chances” until his death. Some of his achievements are highlighted in an article in the November/December issue of the CEA-Wisconsin newsletter. His legacy will live on.

The Parenting Connection newsletter is a publication of the Wisconsin Chapter of the Correctional Education Association. The opinions herein are entirely those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the CEA-Wisconsin executive officers or the CEA-Wisconsin membership as a whole.

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