

SERVICES FOR FAMILIES OF PRISON INMATES

Special Issues in Corrections

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Introduction

A variety of studies have found that increased contact between inmates and their families can contribute to an inmate's re-integration into the community after release. Successful re-integration, in turn, is an indicator of reduced risk of re-offense. Institutional programming and visitation can encourage healthier family relationships, further developing a critical element in the offender's post-release support system.

For inmates who have children under the age of 18, family programs and services can also address the forces underlying an intergenerational cycle of crime. As stated in a recent National Institute of Corrections (NIC) cooperative agreement solicitation, "Parental arrest and confinement lead to stress, trauma, stigmatization and separation problems for the children. These problems are coupled with existing problems that include poverty, violence, parental substance abuse, high crime environments, intrafamily abuse, abuse and neglect, multiple care givers and/or prior separations. As a result, these children often exhibit a broad variety of behavioral, emotional, health, and educational problems that are compounded by the pain of separation."

Children subjected to these forces are at a significantly higher risk for criminal behavior. As noted in Senate Report 106-404 from the FY2001 Department of Justice appropriations bill, ". . . children of prisoners are six times more likely than other children to be incarcerated at some point in their lives."

The challenges facing corrections agencies are reflected in the findings of an August 2000 Bureau of Justice Statistics *Special Report*, "Incarcerated Parents and Their Children":

- Interviews conducted in 1997 indicated that more than half of state and federal prisoners had a child under the age of 18.
- In 1999, an estimated 721,500 state and federal inmates were parents of minor children, compared to 452,500 in 1991—an increase of 55% within 8 years.
- State and federal inmates incarcerated in 1999 were parents to 1,498,800 children under the age of 18, 22% of them under the age of 5.
- Fewer than half of parents in state prison reported having at least weekly contact with their children—40% of fathers and 60% of mothers.
- Although 78% of mothers and 62% of fathers in state prison reported at least monthly contact with their children, only 24% of mothers and 21% of fathers reported monthly contact in the form of personal visits. A majority of both fathers (57%) and mothers (54%) reported never having had a personal visit with their children since their admission to state prison.
- More than 60% of the parents in state prisons reported being held more than 100 miles from their last place of residence.

Project Method

The need for family-oriented programs for inmates is being recognized in correctional agencies nationwide. To gather information for policy-makers and correctional administrators on the current range of family-oriented programs, NIC distributed a survey in March 2001 to state, territorial, and federal departments of corrections (DOCs). The survey addressed two separate but related issues: the degree to which agencies have specifically focused on support for family relationships and/or intervention with children of inmates, and the types of programs and assistance provided for inmates and their families or children. A copy of the survey instrument is provided as an appendix to this report.

NIC received responses from 54 agencies, including 48 state DOCs, the Federal Bureau of Prisons (BOP), corrections departments in the District of Columbia, New York City, Guam, and Saipan, and the Correctional Service of Canada. In addition to completing the survey, a number of agencies sent copies of program descriptions and policies. Selected materials have been added to the NIC Information Center library collection.

Agency Initiatives Related to Families of Inmates

Of the 54 DOCs that responded to the survey, 42 (78%) reported involvement in policy or program initiatives that are specifically intended to help inmates maintain supportive family relationships or to benefit the children of inmates. Table 1, page 3, presents a summary of DOCs' responses.

- The 42 agencies with policy or program initiatives under way include DOCs in 38 states, New York City, the BOP, Canada, and Guam.
- DOCs in an additional five (5) states—Nebraska, Nevada, North Carolina, Wisconsin, and Wyoming—are considering the development of specific initiatives in these areas. Each also

reported providing some form of family service or program in response to separate questions in the survey.

- Six other DOCs reported that they have not formally considered specific initiatives in these areas. However, each of these agencies—in the District of Columbia, Idaho, Kentucky, Michigan, Montana, and West Virginia—also reported providing at least one family service or program in response to separate questions in the survey.

Initiatives focusing on family relationships.

Although a high percentage of the DOCs reported having some type of family-related initiative under way, only half reported that their policies or programs are agency-wide. Twenty-eight (28) respondents—nearly 52%—reported formal, agency-wide policies or programs that specifically focus on helping inmates to maintain supportive relationships with their families:

- Agency-wide policies were reported by eight (8) agencies, including DOCs in Arizona, Louisiana, Minnesota (for women inmates only), Missouri, Pennsylvania, and Vermont, the BOP, and the Correctional Service of Canada.
- Agency-wide programs were reported by 20 DOCs in 16 states, New York City, and Guam, the BOP, and the Correctional Service of Canada.

Initiatives focusing on children of inmates.

Nineteen responding agencies, or 35%, reported formal, agency-wide policies or programs that specifically focus on benefiting the children of inmates:

- Agency-wide policies were reported in three (3) agencies: DOCs in Louisiana and Ohio and the Correctional Service of Canada.
- Agency-wide programs were in place in 16 agencies, including DOCs in 14 states and New York City, and the Correctional Service of Canada.

Table 1. Corrections Agency Initiatives Related to Families of Inmates

	Impetus for Initiatives			Initiatives with Specific Focus on Supportive Family Relationships		Initiatives with Specific Focus on Benefiting Children of Inmates	
	Statute	Litigation	Other	Agency-wide policy	Program	Agency-wide policy	Program
Alabama			✓		✓		
Alaska	✓	✓	✓				
Arizona			✓	✓			
Arkansas			✓		✓		
California	✓				✓		
Colorado			✓				
Connecticut	✓		✓				✓
Delaware			✓				
D.C.	Agency has not formally considered new initiatives.						
Florida	✓				✓		✓
Georgia			✓		✓		✓
Hawaii			✓				
Idaho	Agency has not formally considered new initiatives.						
Illinois			✓				✓
Indiana			✓		✓		✓
Iowa			✓				
Kansas			✓		✓		✓
Kentucky	Agency has not formally considered new initiatives.						
Louisiana			✓	✓		✓	✓
Maine			For women				
Maryland			✓				
Massachusetts	✓						
Michigan	Agency has not formally considered new initiatives.						
Minnesota			✓	For women			
Mississippi			✓				
Missouri			✓	✓			
Montana	Agency has not formally considered new initiatives.						
Nebraska	Agency is considering new initiatives.						
Nevada	Agency is considering new initiatives.						
New Hampshire			✓		✓		✓
New Jersey			✓		✓		✓
New Mexico			✓		✓		
New York	✓						✓
North Carolina					✓		✓
North Dakota			✓				
Ohio			✓			✓	
Oklahoma			✓				✓
Oregon			✓				
Pennsylvania			✓	✓			✓
Rhode Island		✓			✓		✓
South Carolina			✓				
South Dakota			✓		✓		
Tennessee			✓				
Texas			✓		✓		
Utah	(No survey response)						
Vermont			✓	✓			✓
Virginia	(No survey response)						
Washington			✓		✓		
West Virginia	Agency has not formally considered new initiatives.						
Wisconsin	Agency is considering new initiatives.						
Wyoming	Agency is considering new initiatives.						
U.S. BOP			✓	✓	✓		
New York City			✓		✓		✓

Impetus behind initiatives. Among the 42 DOCs reporting involvement in policy or program initiatives focused on supportive family relationships or benefiting the children of inmates, the majority took these actions in the absence of outside pressures such as statutory requirements or litigation. (See Table 1.)

- The 36 agencies developing initiatives for internal reasons included 33 state DOCs, DOCs in New York City and Guam, and the BOP.
- DOCs in two (2) states—Alaska and Rhode Island—developed initiatives in response to litigation or to reduce the likelihood of litigation.
- Seven (7) agencies—including six state DOCs and the Correctional Service of Canada—developed initiatives in response to statute:

Alaska's efforts are related to the 1996 passage of domestic violence legislation, as well as child abuse reporting legislation passed in 1998.

California's family-oriented initiatives were influenced by legislative actions in 1978, 1980, 1982, and most recently the 1994 Pregnant and Parenting Women's Alternative Sentencing Program Act.

The Connecticut and Florida DOCs established family-related initiatives in response to statutory requirements passed in 1999. New requirements were enacted in Massachusetts in 2001.

Respondents in New York and Canada did not indicate the dates of related legislation.

Facility Assignment and Visitation Assistance

By placing inmates in facilities near their families and assisting with family visitation, corrections agencies support inmates' relationships with their parents, spouses, and significant others, as well as their children. An inmate's ability to maintain personal contact with family members can be affected by how close

the facility is to the inmate's family and whether visitation assistance is available.

Inmate placement in facilities near families.

Responding agencies are approximately evenly split between those that make an effort to assign inmates to facilities near their families and those that do not or cannot.

- Twenty-seven (27) DOCs indicated that proximity to family is a basis for inmate assignment when possible and appropriate. They include DOCs in Alabama, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Indiana, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maine, Massachusetts, Mississippi, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Jersey, North Carolina, North Dakota, Ohio, South Carolina, Vermont, and Washington; the BOP; and the Correctional Service of Canada.
- Twenty-four (24) agencies do not, as a matter of policy or preferred practice, assign inmates to facilities on the basis of proximity to families. However, one of these agencies, the Oregon DOC, is currently working on a process to place an inmate in an institution close to his/her home community approximately 1 year prior to release.
- In three other locations, proximity to families cannot be a consideration, either because there is only one facility (Saipan) or because all facilities are located at the same site (Rhode Island and New York City).

Respondents noted a number of constraints in considering proximity to families, including limited bed space, security and classification considerations, programming priorities, and the frequent movement of inmates between facilities.

The respondent in the Kentucky DOC noted that placing inmates near their families is a priority, and the Nevada respondent noted that the department director is a strong supporter of visitation and its role in rehabilitation. Inmates in the Pennsylvania DOC can move closer to their home region with good work,

program participation, the absence of misconducts, and reduced security level.

Visitation assistance. Fewer than half of the responding DOCs—20 agencies, or 37%—reported that visitation assistance is available for the families of inmates in at least one facility. Such assistance can include, for example, transportation or lodging aid provided by either the DOC or another agency. Family visitation assistance is available to male and female inmates in roughly equal numbers of DOCs.

- Family visitation assistance is available to men in 14 states and the District of Columbia.
- Family visitation assistance is available to women in 16 states and New York City.

The Family Visiting Program in New York State provides free bus service from New York City and Buffalo to facilities across the state, with stops at some on-route locations whenever possible.

Services for Inmates with Children

Agencies can provide additional support to inmates who have children under the age of 18 through specially designed visitation spaces, parenting classes, and parent-child programs provided by the DOC or other organizations.

Women's institutions (43 agencies) are more likely than men's (31 agencies) to provide special visitation space for inmates and their children. Three agencies—in Delaware, New York, and South Dakota—reported providing space designed or designated for overnight visits. (See also "In-facility housing for newborns, infants, and young children," page 8.)

Basic parenting classes (i.e., classes without children present) are offered in at least one women's facility by 94% of the DOCs surveyed and in at least one men's facility by 85% of the DOCs. Programs involving both parents and their children are provided in fewer agencies: they are available to women in 61% of DOCs and to men in 26% of DOCs. Table 2,

page 6, presents information on programs provided in at least one men's or women's facility to inmates with children.

Parenting classes without children present.

Parenting classes without children present are the most common type of program for inmates with children. Nearly all responding agencies (51 DOCs) provide this type of program for their women inmates, and nearly as many (46 DOCs) offer them to men.

Parenting classes with children present. Only 25% of the responding DOCs provide parenting programs that include children. More than twice as many agencies (14 DOCs) offer the classes to women as offer them to men (6 DOCs).

In-facility parent-child programs provided by outside organizations.

More than half of the responding DOCs offer in-facility parent-child programs run by outside providers. Examples include 4-H and Girl Scouts Behind Bars. More than three times as many agencies (28 DOCs) offer such programs to women as offer them to men (9 DOCs).

Out-of-facility programs for parents and their children.

Very few agencies reported the availability of parent-child programs that take place outside a secure setting. Only seven (7) agencies provide out-of-facility programs to women, and fewer than half that many (3 agencies) make them available to men.

Sample programs. Program descriptions included with surveys illustrate the range of ways DOCs help inmate parents maintain meaningful relationships with their children.

- A number of agencies, including DOCs in Illinois, Iowa, Mississippi, New Hampshire, and Oregon, provide literacy programs designed to strengthen contact between parents and their young children. Mothers and fathers read a book onto audio or videotape, to mail with the book to their children. Such programs are variously called, "The Storybook Program," "M.O.T.H.E.R.S" ("Mothers of Tots Help Expand Reading Skills"), and "Dad/Mom Makes a Difference."

Table 2. Provision of Parenting and Parent-Child Programs in Men's and Women's Prisons

	Parenting Classes Without Children Present		Parenting Classes With Children Present		In-Facility Programs, Outside Providers		Out-of-Facility Programs, Outside Providers	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
Alabama	✓	✓				✓		
Alaska	✓	✓				✓		
Arizona	✓	✓						
Arkansas	✓	✓						
California	✓	✓						
Colorado	✓	✓				✓		
Connecticut	✓	✓				✓		
Delaware								
D.C.		✓						
Florida	✓	✓						
Georgia		✓						
Hawaii	✓	✓						
Idaho		✓						
Illinois	✓	✓				✓		
Indiana	✓	✓		✓		✓		
Iowa	✓	✓				✓		
Kansas	✓	✓				✓		
Kentucky	✓	✓		✓		✓		
Louisiana	✓	✓			✓	✓		
Maine	✓	✓	✓	✓				
Maryland	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓		
Massachusetts	✓	✓				✓		
Michigan	✓	✓						
Minnesota	✓	✓		✓		✓		
Mississippi	✓	✓						
Missouri	✓	✓			✓	✓		
Montana	✓	✓		✓		✓		
Nebraska	✓	✓		✓				
Nevada	✓	✓						
New Hampshire	✓	✓			✓	✓		
New Jersey	✓	✓				✓	✓	✓
New Mexico	✓	✓					✓	✓
New York	✓	✓			✓	✓		
North Carolina	✓	✓				✓		
North Dakota	✓	✓						
Ohio	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Oklahoma	✓	✓						
Oregon	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓		
Pennsylvania	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
Rhode Island	✓	✓		✓		✓		
South Carolina		✓						
South Dakota	✓	✓						✓
Tennessee	✓	✓						
Texas	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Utah	(No survey response)							
Vermont	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
Virginia	(No survey response)							
Washington	✓	✓		✓		✓		
West Virginia	✓	✓						
Wisconsin								
Wyoming	✓	✓			✓	✓		
U.S. BOP	✓	✓				✓		
New York City		✓						

■ The California DOC has a special division, Programs for Inmate Mothers, which reunites eligible women with their children aged 6 years or younger. The mothers care for their children in a highly structured residential treatment facility outside prison walls. Another initiative, the Community Prisoner Mother Program, allows eligible inmates to move from a prison setting into a community-based facility for the remainder of their sentence, an average of 9 months. The Family Foundation Program provides alternative sentencing for mothers and pregnant women.

■ Florida statute requires “. . . at a minimum, the availability of the standardized parenting curriculum for female offenders and . . . opportunities for the enhancement and continuation of mother and child relations.”

■ The Indiana DOC recently established the Family Preservation Program, which includes parenting education and support for expectant mothers and for parents of children up through their teenage years. The program also provides Outreach, which links mothers to the caregivers of their children.

■ The Kansas DOC, in partnership with the United Methodist Women, has created the Women’s Activity and Learning Center, where inmate mothers learn parenting skills to practice in extended visits with their children.

■ The Minnesota DOC operates a multi-faceted Parenting/Family Program that includes a parenting unit, parenting education and support, childcare planning, extended visitation, and liaison work between offenders and the professionals involved in the care of their children.

■ The Oklahoma DOC schedules a Playday for lunch, games, and art activities to promote communication between inmate mothers and their children. Oklahoma also offers a video-based discussion group for parents of adolescents.

■ In New Hampshire, incarcerated parents visit their children without anyone present. Staff members monitor the visits through a two-way mirror and

work with the parents afterward on their parenting skills.

■ The Vermont DOC’s privately run Family Tree Access Center facilitates parent-child contact, parent-to-parent communication, and coordination with social and other services.

■ DOCs including those in Texas, Rhode Island, and Guam have established programs designed to provide pre-release and transition services that emphasize reunification with families.

Services to Pregnant Inmates and Mothers of Infants and Young Children

DOCs that address the special needs of pregnant inmates and mothers of infants and small children focus on housing alternatives as well as parenting skills. Nine (9) DOCs, or 17% of the responding agencies, reported having the capability to place pregnant inmates in non-institutional settings. Just over 20% (11 DOCs) operate facilities in which mothers are housed with their infants or small children.

Non-institutional placement for pregnant inmates.

Only nine (9) responding DOCs reported having the authority to place a pregnant inmate in non-institutional settings, such as home detention, day reporting, or community placement facilities. For each of these agencies, non-institutional placement of pregnant inmates is based on some form of eligibility or classification. Four of these agencies, in Alaska, Connecticut, Hawaii, and Vermont, are state-unified systems with responsibility for prisons, jails, and community corrections. Four others (in Massachusetts, Nevada, North Dakota, and South Dakota) are states with relatively small prison populations. The BOP may place pregnant women in a community residential facility when they are sentenced.

In-facility housing for newborns, infants, and young children. Eleven (11) DOC respondents, or 20%, reported providing housing in at least one facility for newborns, infants, and/or small children

along with their mothers. Most commonly—in 6 of the 11 agencies—mother-child housing is provided for children from infancy to the age of 18 months.

These agencies provide a range of housing options:

- In-facility nurseries for infants born to inmates—Montana and New York City.
- In-facility nurseries, as well as special housing for mothers with their infants—up to 18 months old in Massachusetts, Nebraska, Ohio, and Washington; New York State (age limit not stated); up to 30 days from birth in South Dakota.
- In-facility nurseries and special housing for mothers with their infants as well as their young children—California (up to 6 years old); the Correctional Service of Canada (full-time residency through the third year of age, and part-time residency through the twelfth year of age).
- No nursery, but special housing for mothers with their infants and young children—Tennessee, from 6 months to 6 years of age.

Three agencies reported space designed or designated for overnight visits:

- The Delaware DOC has designated four visiting rooms for mothers who earn eligibility through treatment to stay overnight with their children, from infants up to 10 years of age.
- The New York State DOC's Family Reunion Program provides overnight visiting in specially designed areas on the grounds of 11 facilities. The areas provide private, home-like units in mobile homes, with two or three bedrooms, a kitchen, a bathroom, and a living room.
- South Dakota's PACT House (Parents and Children Together) provides mothers space for extended visits up to two weekends per month with their daughters up to age 12 and their sons up to age 11.

The North Dakota DOC is currently requesting funds to construct a new women's facility that, if approved, would include a nursery, space for overnight visitation by older children, and parenting classes with children present.

Program Evaluations

Survey respondents in the Illinois, Indiana, and Pennsylvania DOCs and the Federal Bureau of Prisons indicated that their agencies have completed evaluations of their services for families of inmates. The New Hampshire DOC had an evaluation underway at the time of the survey.

The Vermont DOC provided a year-end report from Prevent Child Abuse Vermont, a grantee conducting 17 parenting programs in community corrections as well as institutional settings. The programs serve both men and women. Pre- and post-tests using the Adult Adolescent Parenting Inventory-2 showed participants making significant positive changes in key parenting constructs. Feedback from participants indicated growth in their commitment to good parenting and mutual support. Program staff are also seeing both men and women continue program participation in the community after their release.

Conclusion

Survey responses confirm that correctional agencies are commonly providing family programs to reduce the stresses of separation and to build support systems for inmates re-entering the community after release. Though a range of parent-child programs, DOCs are encouraging the healthy relationships that are important for providing stability and breaking cycles of crime. A list of agency contacts for more information is provided in Appendix A. Descriptive materials provided with survey responses are available from the NIC Information Center. ■

Appendix A. DOC Contacts on Services for Families of Inmates

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NIC Survey: Services for Families of Inmates

U.S. Department of Justice
National Institute of Corrections
March 2001

**** Please respond by Friday, April 20, 2001 ****

Fax or mail completed survey to:

Connie Clem, Senior Communications Specialist, NIC Information Center, cclem@nicic.org
Mailing address: 1860 Industrial Circle, Suite A, Longmont, Colorado 80501
Telephone (800) 877-1461 or (303) 682-0213; fax (303) 682-0558

Agency Contact Information

Respondent name & title _____

Telephone _____ Fax _____ Email _____

Agency _____

Mailing address _____

City/state/ZIP _____

Contact person on issues related to families of inmates, if different from above:

Name & title _____

Telephone _____ Fax _____ Email _____

Survey Questions

1. Which of the following statements best describe(s) your agency's involvement in policy or program initiatives related to families of inmates? (Check all that apply.) For purposes of this survey, this can include initiatives focused on 1) helping inmates maintain supportive relationships with their families, or 2) benefitting the children of inmates. This **does not include** policies and programs addressing only narrower issues, such as family visitation or operational issues regarding pregnant inmates.

_____ We have developed/are developing initiatives in this area in response to statutory requirements.

_____ We have developed/are developing initiatives in this area in response to litigation or to reduce the likelihood of litigation.

_____ We have developed/are developing initiatives in this area for internal reasons.

_____ We are considering the development of related initiatives.

_____ We have not formally considered the development of related initiatives.

If such initiatives are required by statute in your jurisdiction, in what year was the statute passed?

_____ (year)

2. Does your agency have a formal, agency-wide policy or a program that specifically focuses on helping inmates maintain supportive relationships with their families? (For purposes of this survey, this **does not include** policies and programs addressing only narrower issues, such as family visitation or operational issues regarding pregnant inmates.)

Yes (agency policy) _____ Yes (program) _____ No _____

**** If yes, please attach a copy of the policy or program description.** If attaching a program description, please be sure it includes the facility location and/or a contact name.

3. Does your agency have a formal, agency-wide policy or a program that specifically focuses on benefitting the children of inmates? (For purposes of this survey, this **does not include** policies and programs addressing only narrower issues, such as family visitation or operational issues regarding pregnant inmates.)

Yes (agency policy) _____ Yes (program) _____ No _____

**** If yes, please attach a copy of the policy or program description.** If attaching a program description, please be sure it includes the facility location and/or a contact name.

4. Does your agency, as a matter of policy or preferred practice, make an effort to assign inmates to facilities close to their families when possible and appropriate?

Yes _____ No _____

5. When a pregnant woman or parent is sentenced to the custody of your agency, can your agency make a non-institutional placement (such as to home detention, day reporting, or a community residential facility)?

Yes _____ No _____

If yes, explain:

6. What types of family-related services, programs, or assistance does your agency make available to inmates and their families? Check appropriate boxes to indicate what assistance is available in at least one facility to male and female inmates and their families.

	Available to men/ in men's facilities	Available to women/ in women's facilities
Family visitation assistance (e.g., transportation or lodging aid provided either by the DOC or by another agency)		
Special in-facility visitation space for inmates and their children		
Parenting classes without children present		
Parenting classes with children present		
Nursery in facility for infants born to inmates	-----	
Special housing for mothers together with their infants and/or young children	-----	
In-facility parent-child programs provided by outside organizations (e.g., Girl Scouts Behind Bars)		
Out-of-facility parent-child programs provided through agreements with outside agencies or private providers		
Other (describe)		

8. Has your agency completed any evaluations of any programs intended to 1) support relationships between inmates and their families, or 2) to benefit children of inmates?

Yes (family relationships) _____ Yes (children of inmates) _____

No evaluations _____

**** If yes, please send a copy.**

Thank you very much.