

# **POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS ON FAMILIES OF ADULT OFFENDERS**

*Proceedings of the First National Leadership Conference on*

*Families of Adult Offenders*

Waynesboro, Virginia

May 13 - 15, 1986

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## **PREFACE**

The First National, Leadership Conference on Families of Adult Offenders met in Waynesboro, Virginia, May 13 - 15, 1986. The conference was sponsored by Family and Corrections Network with the generous support of the National Institute of Corrections and the Academy for Staff Development of the Virginia Department of Corrections. Participants came from throughout the United States, from agencies in 20 states and the District of Columbia. All had a record of leadership in serving families of adult offenders. The purpose of the conference was to establish policy recommendations for positive family programs.

A working document, these recommendations only begin to define needs and suggest positive responses.

These recommendations have been endorsed by conference participants. A list of conference participants is provided in Appendix A. Concerned individuals and organizations are encouraged to consider and endorse this document as well. Any such endorsements, as well as any questions concerning the preparation of this document should be addressed to James W. Mustin, Executive Director, Family and Corrections Network, P.O. Box 2103, Waynesboro, Virginia 22980.

## INTRODUCTION

The intent of these recommendations is to strengthen the family ties of adult offenders. There are two principal reasons for being concerned with the families of prisoners and other offenders involved in the criminal justice system: 1) Stronger family ties for offenders mean safer communities. 2) The families of offenders are in crisis and deserve support.

Studies have consistently shown that prisoners who maintain family ties do significantly better on release than those who do not. These recommendations are designed to enhance this effect by helping families of offenders from the time of arrest, through incarceration until offenders are successfully reintegrated into the community.

Families of offenders deserve support not only because they can be effective allies in the fight for safer communities, but because they are innocent, unintended victims of crime. They suffer separation, economic hardship and social stigma. Suffering is especially acute for the children of prisoners, whose growth and development is jeopardized by separation from their parents. In addition, the majority of prisoners in the United States are Blacks or other minorities and almost all 'have low incomes. This means that families under social strain are the ones hardest hit by increasing rates of incarceration.

In response to both humanitarian and public safety concerns we recommend comprehensive action by government leaders, criminal justice and human service agencies and the community at large in cooperation with the families of offenders. Blacks and other minorities experiencing disproportionate incarceration rates' should have strong representation throughout this decision making and service delivery process.

These recommendations fall into four groups: government policies and procedures, the role of the criminal justice system, community support, and the role of research.

## **I. GOVERNMENT POLICIES AND PROCEDURES**

Criminal justice and human service agencies should work to maintain and strengthen the offender family unit. Such efforts should include:

- A. Using alternatives to incarceration to the greatest extent possible.
- B. Using the least restrictive methods possible when arresting or searching parents in the presence of their children.
- C. Giving family members the opportunity to participate in any hearings bearing on family relationships.
- D. Choosing new jail and prison locations that increase family access. This will usually mean locating facilities within major metropolitan areas.
- E. Routinely housing prisoners in the appropriate facility closest to their family, unless the prisoner requests otherwise.
- F. Supporting offenders' civil right to marry.
- G. Training agency staff to value and respect the families of offenders, to know their special needs, and to protect offenders' parental rights.

## **II. THE ROLE OF THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM**

Research has shown that strong prisoner-family ties reduce recidivism. Therefore, it is in the interest of the criminal justice system to maintain and strengthen family ties through the adoption of system-wide policies and programs. These policies and programs should include the following: a system of family support services, provision for information access by families, encouragement of family communication by letter and telephone, strong support for visiting activities, and special programs for incarcerated parents and their children..

### **A. FAMILY SUPPORT SERVICES**

Family support services should be available at each stage of the criminal justice process. Such services should include:

1. Marriage counseling and relationship building programs to promote adjustment and growth during separation and upon reunion.
2. Parenting skills programs for prisoners and family members.
3. Family crisis intervention services to prevent unnecessary stress and delayed problem resolution.
4. Pre-release programs which prepare prisoners for family reunification as well as employment and community re-entry.
5. Family services inside jails and prisons, provided by liaison personnel from public and private organizations, who can assist with family problems and facilitate prisoner-family communication.

## **B. INFORMATION ACCESS**

The criminal justice system should encourage information access for family members designated by offenders. Such access should include:

1. Family orientation to each stage of the criminal justice process the offender may expect to encounter - from arrest to return to the community.
2. Family notice, within the rules of confidentiality, of changes in offender status or location, especially changes affecting mail or visiting.
3. Family access to correctional counselors, probation and parole officers, and other casework personnel.
4. Clear oral and written communication to families using plain words in a language understood by the family.

## **C. FAMILY COMMUNICATION**

Criminal justice agencies should encourage communication between prisoners and their families. Such efforts should include:

1. Avoiding external identification of prison or jail origin on mail from prisoners.
2. Providing for some free long-distance telephone calls from prisoners to their families.

## **D. FAMILY VISITING**

Jails and prisons should provide a variety of programs to encourage visiting in the least restrictive environment. Such efforts should include:

1. A safe, secure and orderly visiting environment that promotes low stress, meaningful interaction between prisoners and their families.
2. Rules and regulations developed through the combined effort of institutional personnel, families and prisoners.
3. Visitor information handbooks, updated appropriately, with information on visiting rules, hours and conditions, nearby lodging, transportation, visitor service organizations and other human services.
4. Prompt notice to visitors of substantive changes in visiting rules, hours and conditions.
5. Visitor centers at or near major institutions.
6. Support for transportation services from urban centers to jails and state prisons.
7. Visiting hours that are congruent with public transportation schedules.
8. Support for frequent visiting. A minimum of one visit a week should be allowed priority over the prisoner's institutional assignment.

9. Provisions for visitors to bring packages for prisoners.
10. Assigning a single staff person ongoing responsibility for the management of visiting.

## **E. SPECIAL PROGRAMS FOR INCARCERATED PARENTS AND THEIR CHILDREN**

About half of the male prisoners and at least 70% of the female prisoners in the United States have children under 18 years of age. These children are the forgotten victims of the criminal justice system. The trauma of separation from their parents seriously threatens their growth and development. There is a special need to help them and to nurture their relationship with the incarcerated parent. This is especially critical for the single, head-of-household parent, the situation of most prison mothers. Programs for incarcerated parents and their children should include:

1. Training for all involved public agents in the appropriate care and treatment of prisoners' children.
2. Programs within jails and prisons for parent-child bonding as well as programs designed to strengthen parent-child relationships. These should include:
  - a. Contact visiting in safe, child-centered settings with weekend/overnight visiting by children wherever possible.
  - b. Parenting skills training and support for offenders.
  - c. Support services and crisis intervention for prison parents and their children.



3. Legal services for incarcerated parents which enable, them to respond effectively to issues of foster care placement, creation of guardianships, visitation, custody and other legal actions concerning their children.
4. Responsible and adequate care for pregnant prisoners. These efforts should include:
  - a. Placing pregnant prisoners in community-based alternatives to incarceration whenever possible.
  - b. Improving perinatal care within jails and prisons to meet modern medical standards. This will usually require contracting with community health care providers.
  - c. Addressing infant needs with early placement planning and mother-infant bonding programs, including live-in nursery programs for infants inside of jails and prisons.

### III. COMMUNITY SUPPORT

Offenders' families face rejection and social isolation as well as economic and emotional hardships. Community support for offenders' families should begin early in the criminal justice process, before hardship becomes overwhelming and social isolation becomes a pattern. The incarceration of a family member is a crisis touching every aspect of family life. Community response should address emotional, economic, social, and spiritual needs. Community awareness should be mobilized for positive, informed action extending through the period of incarceration until the offender's successful re-integration into the family and the community. Community support efforts should include:

- A. Local coordinating agencies linking offenders' families with community services.
- B. Advocates for families faced with discrimination.
- C. Counseling, support groups, family networking and recreation services, information and referral, and advocacy.
- D. Support from the religious community for families facing the spiritual crisis of the incarceration of a family member.
- E. Reduced cost or free transportation for prison visits.
- F. Emergency financial assistance for basic survival needs such as food, clothing and shelter.
- G. Initiatives which bring the needs and strengths of offenders' families to the attention of lawmakers and the community.

## IV. THE ROLE OF RESEARCH

Previous research has demonstrated a strong, positive relationship between the maintenance of offender-family ties and the reduction of adult repeat crime. The existing research base should be expanded and new research relating to the dynamics of offender-family relationships should be developed. Research is a necessary and important element of program development, design, and evaluation and should be a collaborative effort of the correctional, academic, and philanthropic communities.

A. Research efforts should increase the knowledge and understanding of:

1. The dynamics of family crises precipitated by arrest and/or incarceration and the means of effective recovery from such crisis.
2. The role of the personal support system of the offender, particularly the family, in the reduction of repeat adult crime.
3. The problems families experience in maintaining and strengthening family ties and in carrying out family roles and commitments.
4. The special needs and strengths of offenders' families within Black and other minority groups.

B. Researchers should also:

1. Develop an effective national data base on family characteristics and family ties of offenders. Standard procedures for informed consent, privacy and confidentiality should be followed.
2. Define a service delivery model for the families of offenders which addresses the entire course of the criminal justice experience.

3. Develop comprehensive directories which identify services and programs for the maintenance of offender family ties and personal support systems.
4. Evaluate the effectiveness of programs and services for families of offenders.

## APPENDIX A

### Participants: First National Leadership Conference on Families of Adult Offenders

**Ellen M. Barry**, Legal Services for Prisoners with Children, San Francisco CA

**Barbara Bloom**, Center-force, San Quentin CA

**Lloyd Bridges**, Riverside Residential Center, Indianapolis IN

**Nickie Carpenter**, Friends Outside, Riverside CA

**Gail Cohen**, SOLOS (Sharing Our Lives of Separation), Minneapolis MN

**Alison Coleman**, Prisoner Family Project, Albany NY

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**Kimberly Comeau**, Citizens for Humane and Effective Corrections, Inc., Richmond VA

**Bruce Cruser**, Prison Visitation Project, Richmond VA

**Susan Dansand**, W.A.I.T. II and Friends (We Are Inmates Too), Milwaukee WI

**Shirley B. Ellison**, Georgia Women's Correctional Institution, Milledgeville GA

**Judy Evans**, Friends Outside in Santa Clara County, Sunnyvale CA

**Elizabeth Gaynes**, The Osborne Association, New York NY

**Majorie G. Ginsburg**, OAR, Fairfax VA

**Creasie F. Hairston**, Ph.D. Parents in Prison/West Virginia University, Charleston WV

**Mamie Hammonds**, Project Return, Nashville TN

**Christine J. Herlinger**, Legal Assistance for Mothers in Prison, Durham NC

**Edna Hinton**, Academy for Staff Development, Waynesboro VA

**Jacqueline A. Holmes**, Oregon People for Prison Alternatives, Portland OR

**Donna M. Leone**, Middle Ground, Tempe AZ

**John T. Mavros**, The Joint Connection, Newark NJ

**Carolyn McCall**, Prison MATCH, Oakland CA

**Barbara A. Moore**, RSM Rochester Interfaith Jail Ministry, Rochester NY

**Rev. Dr. Earl B. Moore**, New York State Department of Correctional Service, Albany NY

**Jim Mustin**, Family and Corrections Network, Waynesboro VA

**Joseph D. Ossmann**, Friends Outside National Office, Salinas CA

**June Pearse**, Prison PATCH, Jefferson City MO

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**Dorothy Plocher**, FOCUS (Families and Friends of Convicts United for Support),  
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**Nancy Randall**, Department of Corrections, Niantic CT

**Ned Rollo**, OPEN, INC., Dallas TX

**Sister Elaine Roulet**, Catholic Charities, Bedford Hills NY

**Johanna Schuchert**, M.I.L.K. (Mothers/Men Inside Loving Kids), Richmond VA

**Constance Shepard**, Georgia Women's Correctional Institution, Milledgeville GA

**Gail T. Smith**, John Howard Association/Chicago Legal Aid to Incarcerated Mothers,  
Chicago IL

**Pauline Sullivan**, CURE, Washington DC

**Nancy A. Whitmore**, Terrell House, Tallahassee FL

**Dina Williams**, Parents Anonymous in the Prisons, Tallahassee FL

**Emma A. Winn**, Project IM-PACT (SCI-Muncy), SCI-Muncy PA

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#### **CONFERENCE FACILITATOR:**

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