

# **CLEVELAND COMMUNITY FORUM**

**Developing Healthy Community  
Responses for Children of  
Incarcerated Parents**

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# An Overview of National Initiatives for Children of the Incarcerated and Families

- Federal Interagency Task Force at White House
- Legislative Initiatives underway in various states
- “Promising Practices”
- Innovative Programs
- Innovative Trainings
- Tools being used for efficacy in services

# To Help the Children, Must Engage their Parents

- Inside the Walls:  
Improved visit practices; “run-away” from tele-video- conferencing in place of contact visits; promote contact visits in jails and prisons; use only as a supplement or when prisons are too far away

Child-centered visiting with activities for parents to share with children  
List of books on incarceration in visiting room (and outside in school classrooms and libraries to normalize parental incarceration)

# Support in Schools and Communities

- School-based support groups in the schools
- Sensitivity training of school staff
- Cross-train someone at the school to provide resources and referrals for the children and families
- Peer sensitivity is badly needed to diminish shame and stigma, taunting and bullying
- Community leaders need the same kind of sensitivity training as the school staff
- Destigmatizing activities in the community about the children, the caregivers and their parents returning

# Schools

- Schools can hold phone conferences with the incarcerated parent, and in many instances, school decisions are required to engage the parent regardless of their incarceration to be within the legal bounds
- BE aware of visiting weekends and suggest teachers provide lots of errands for the child who may be tired from the travel
- Schools can be welcoming to re-entering parents, making referrals and knowing resources
- Send child's work to the parent in prison
- Be positive whenever possible with the parents about their child
- Signage in counselor's office indicating the lack of stigma and willingness to support the children and families

# Families MATTER

- Sensitivity to family members, such as grandparent caregivers who do not wish to share for fear of stigmatizing child
- Community Signage which declares the school and the community are safe places to share these family matters.
- Some children have books read on tape from their incarcerated parent; permit the child to share the reading in class.
- Home visiting or collaborate with home visiting programs in your area-can focus on family literacy efforts with everyone, because family literacy benefits everyone

# Communities Learn about the Bill of Rights for Children of the Incarcerated

- 8 rights, if honored, keep our children of the incarcerated safe and secure
- These are:
- **1. The right to be informed at the time of my parent's arrest**
- **2. The right to be engaged when decisions are made about me, or 3. right to be considered when decisions are made about my parent**
- **4. The right to support in my parent's absence**
- **5. The right for my caregiver to be supported**
- **6. The right not to be judged, labeled or stigmatized because my parent is incarcerated**
- **7. The right to see, feel, touch my parent in prison.**
- **8. The right to a lifelong relationship with my parent, just like any other child.**
- **Put these rights as signage in your faith homes and public and community spaces. Have the city and county pass resolution to uphold these rights.**



# Services offered in my program are:

- Family mentoring during the incarceration, beginning at arrest, sentencing, incarceration, and re-entry for an extended period based on family's request
- Child-friendly visiting programs inside with activities for children and parents,
- Transportation to prisons, needed expenses
- Family Re-entry planning, to involve the older children
- Art Camp for the children
- Family and child counseling
- Parent counseling
- Relapse prevention for parents with history of addiction
- Family Conferencing and Co-Parenting plan during incarceration and plans for re-entry and perhaps reunification
- Family literacy with caregivers and children, bringing in parents to share the books read
- Focus on letter-writing, also a literacy skill for children and parents
- Peer support groups for children, their caregivers, and returning parents
- Employment services, housing, bus passes, micro-credit for entrepreneurial activities, financial literacy for the parents
- Parent –Child Reunification Services after Release

# Public Awareness Activities

- Children of Prisoners Day in our faith communities
- Public recognition of our relative caregivers who save the state so many dollars in foster care
- Second Chance Day on the Hill-a public forum to hear from successful parents returning
- Project WHAT programming
- Publications such as resource directories, legal support for parents reuniting, for caregivers
- Radio interviews, Television PSAs, public panels, legislative initiatives

Thank you for your respectful attention and interest shown by being here.

- I am available by phone at 501-366-3647.
- Review our website at [www.arkansasvoices.com](http://www.arkansasvoices.com)
- See the website of the National Resource Center for Children and Families of the Incarcerated at Rutgers University
- [www.nrccfi@rutgersuniversity.edu](mailto:www.nrccfi@rutgersuniversity.edu)