

Supporting the Children of Offenders during Parental Incarceration and Reentry

Reentry in the State of Connecticut:
Partners in Progress
February 24 - 26, 2009

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SESSION GOALS

- Reasons for caring about children and families in the reentry process
- The impact on children of separation from incarcerated parents
- Concerns of incarcerated parents
- Children's Bill of Rights
- Connecticut's current strategies: Inside corrections and outside (human service and community partners)
- Guidance from review of national strategies
- Opportunities for Connecticut to strengthen positive connections between offenders and their children and families

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WHY SHOULD WE CARE ABOUT THE CHILDREN OF OFFENDERS?

- The rapid increase in correctional populations and the consequent growth in the number of children effected by parental incarceration.
- Concern that these children are at high risk of behavioral problems and future involvement in the juvenile and adult criminal justice systems.
- The well-being of children living in challenging life circumstances with multiple risk factors.
- The potential to improve reentry outcomes of adult offenders (reduced recidivism through stronger and more stable family connections).

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CHILDREN OF OFFENDERS: DO YOU KNOW THE FACTS?

Fill in the blanks:

- 1 in ___ adults in the United States is under some form of correctional supervision (jail, prison, probation, or parole).
- That translates into approximately ___ million children.

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CHILDREN OF OFFENDERS: THE FACTS

- **1 in 32** adults in the United States is under some form of correctional supervision (jail, prison, probation, parole). (BJS, 2003)
- That translates into approximately **7 million** children. (BJS, 2003)

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CHILDREN OF OFFENDERS: A GROWING CONCERN

- “Children of incarcerated parents have long been an almost invisible population...”
- Yet, within the past 10 years, policy makers have turned their attention to this important issue, supporting research and studies of promising practices.

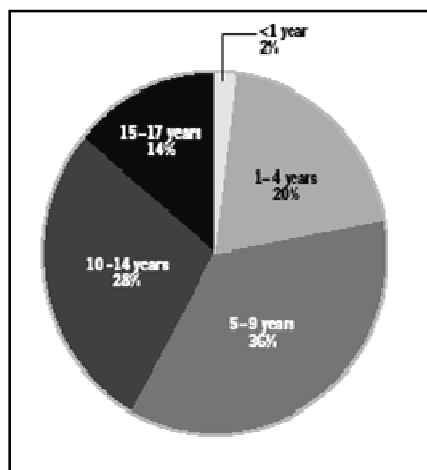
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CHILDREN OF PRISONERS: AGE PROFILE MYTH OR FACT?

Most children with
incarcerated
parents are
infants.

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CHILDREN OF PRISONERS: AGE PROFILE -- THE FACTS



- Under 1 year: 2%
- 1-4 years old: 20%
- **5-9 years old: 36%**
- 10-14 years old: 28%
- 15-17 years old: 14%

(Families Left Behind: The Hidden Costs of Incarceration and Reentry, The Urban Institute, 2003)

CHILDREN OF PRISONERS: LIVING ARRANGEMENTS -- MYTH VS. FACTS

Myth: Most children of prisoners are in foster care.

- Fact: Between 2% and 10% of the children of prisoners are in a foster home or institution. (BJS, 1992)
- Fact: 90% of children with an incarcerated father live with their mothers. (BJS, 2000)
- Fact: 50% of children with an incarcerated mother live with their grandmothers. (BJS, 2000)

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CHILDREN'S LIVING ARRANGEMENTS DURING PARENTAL INCARCERATION

| Incarcerated mothers report their children are living: | State Prisons | Incarcerated fathers report their children are living: | State Prisons |
|---|----------------------|---|----------------------|
| With fathers | 28% | With mothers | 90% |
| In foster care | 10% | In foster care | 2% |
| With grandparents | 53% | With grandparents | 13% |
| With other relatives | 26% | With other relatives | 5% |
| With friends or other | 10% | With friends or others | 4% |

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A PROFILE OF INCARCERATED PARENTS

- Parenthood is a REALITY for most incarcerated adults, male and female.
- Most mothers, but fewer than half of fathers, had one or more of their children living with them at time of arrest.
- Many other parents (not living with them at time of arrest) saw their children regularly and supported them financially.
- Non traditional family structures are common -- 75% of parents divorced or unmarried at time of arrest.

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CONCERNS OF MOST INCARCERATED PARENTS

- Dealing with the emotions of being separated
- Making decisions regarding the care and placement of their children
- Maintaining contact with their children during incarceration
- Reuniting with their children once they are released
- Termination of parental rights proceedings
- Child support payments

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STAYING IN TOUCH: PARENT-CHILD CONTACT DURING INCARCERATION

Myth or Fact?

Most children
visit their
parents in
prisons or jails.

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STAYING IN TOUCH: FACT

Percentage of parents in
State prisons who
NEVER had a visit from
their child:

- 54% of mothers
- 57% of fathers

(BJS, 2000)

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STAYING IN TOUCH

“The majority of families participating in research surveys indicate that children want and need to see their incarcerated parents and support the idea of children visiting their parents during incarceration.”

(90% of grandmother caregivers, parents in prison, and even teenagers say its important to see their parents.)

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STAYING IN TOUCH

- Gender and ethnicity make a difference
- Mothers in prison stay in touch more than fathers
- African-American parents of either gender maintain connections more than parents of other ethnicities
- Overall 31% of mothers and 42% of fathers never talked to any of their children by phone

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STAYING IN TOUCH MAIL AND PHONE CALLS

- Two-thirds of mothers and half of fathers sent or received mail from children monthly
- Phone calls were second most common means of communication (54% mothers, 42 % fathers maintained monthly phone contact).

Communication barriers --

- Exorbitant cost of collect calls
- Willingness and ability of caregivers to accept collect calls and pay for them; others have only cell phones which cannot accept collect calls.

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STAYING IN TOUCH VISITING POLICIES AND PRACTICES

“ Visitation policies, the condition of visiting rooms, and the attitudes of staff make a huge difference in the frequency and quality of visits from family, children and caregivers.”

Common concerns from children and caregivers:

- “Treating visitors like prisoners”
- Ignoring social realities of families
- Long distances from homes to correctional facilities and transportation difficulties

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CHILDREN OF PRISONERS
UNDERSTANDING THE RISKS AND THE
IMPACT

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CHILDREN OF PRISONERS:
UNDERSTANDING THE RISKS

- Incarceration is rarely the only risk factor for a child with a parent in prison or jail.
- Most have an “accumulation of risk,” multiple risk factors that occur in their families and communities.
- The children’s response will vary according to age.
- Older children are likely to act out -- sexual misconduct, truancy, and substance abuse.
- Younger children are at greatest risk because they have not developed the coping skills to deal with trauma.

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CHILDREN OF PRISONERS MULTIPLE RISKS

The trauma of separation by incarceration may be magnified by the combination of risk factors:

- Poverty
- Parental substance abuse: 85% of parents report drug use prior to incarceration and 65% of incarcerated women report using drugs regularly.
- Parental mental illness: 23% of incarcerated mothers report mental illness.
- Parental history of abuse and family instability: 60% of incarcerated mothers report past physical or sexual abuse; 17% of incarcerated men and 20% of incarcerated women spent time in foster care.
- Exposure to criminal activities
- Child maltreatment

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IMPACT ON THE CHILDREN ECONOMIC CONSEQUENCES

- Families experience financial losses and incur additional expenses. These changes directly effect the children.
- Financial problems are greatest in cases where the offender was a responsible parent and/or primary income earner prior to incarceration; or the families seek to help the prisoner, provide care for his/her children and maintain parent-child relationships.

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IMPACT ON THE CHILDREN: EMOTIONAL CONSEQUENCES

- Tremendous sense of loss, loneliness and mental health problems.
- The way adults manage the emotional issues of separation affects their children (high rates of divorce and break-ups especially for young couples, and increase stress on caregivers).
- Personal and social stigma of parents' incarceration causes shame and embarrassment
- Institutionalized stigma: access to housing, jobs

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CHILDREN OF PRISONERS THE DEVELOPMENTAL IMPACT OF TRAUMA

- While there is little direct research on children of offenders, they likely share the same symptoms as those experiencing other traumatic events
- Post traumatic stress and separation anxiety
- Children find it even more difficult to cope in situations characterized by uncertainty

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CHILDREN OF PRISONERS: DEVELOPMENTAL PROBLEMS

- Problems depend on age of child
- The home environment and influence of remaining parent or caregiver (warmth and acceptance) are crucial mitigating factors
- Externalized behaviors -- aggression, defiance and disobedience
- Internalized symptoms -- depression, anxiety and withdrawal (crying and sadness)
- School behavior: Majority are not anti-social or delinquent but studies find they need extra help to succeed

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CHILDREN OF PRISONERS LATER LIFE RISKS

- There is no solid evidence that parental incarceration predicts later-life incarceration of prisoners' children.
- "Many children experience poor outcomes, but many others are doing well."
- Children are exposed to many conditions that pose risks to their well being and healthy development -- poverty, parental substance abuse, and family violence

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**CHILDREN OF PRISONERS:
PROTECTIVE FACTORS MITIGATE RISK
AND VULNERABILITY**

- Strong family connections
- Average or better intellectual skills
- A network of friends
- Connections to positive role models
- Faith or spirituality
- Self-confidence
- A sense of humor
- Good health
- Someone who believed in them

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**REUNITING OR DRIFTING APART
DURING PARENTAL REENTRY**

- Incarceration leads to permanent severance of family ties in many situations
- Children are not prepared for parents' release
- Parents often are not adequately prepared to resume the parenting role

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CONNECTICUT: SERVICES AVAILABLE TO ALL INCARCERATED PARENTS

- Extended Family Visits
- Parenting
- Family Reentry Program
- Grief Guides
- Job Centers
- PEP – People Empowering People

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CONNECTICUT SERVICES FOR INCARCERATED FATHERS

- Embracing Fatherhood (Family, Education, Aids Transition Skills)
- Fatherhood
- Read to Your Child
- Family Matters
- Bridgeport Community Re-Entry Center (BCC only)
- Family Time Program
- Fatherhood Initiative Program
- Inside/Out Dad
- FEATS Program
- Marriage/Family Relationships
- Men's Corner (Garner CI only)
- Parenting: The Extended You
- Project Free
- Building Bridges –New Day Program

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**CONNECTICUT
SERVICES FOR INCARCERATED MOTHERS**

- Early Childhood Development
- Girl Scouts Beyond Bars
- High Risk Infant Program
- Intimate Partner Violence
- Just for Today
- Labor Coaches
- Life After Incarceration
- Mother Read
- Parent-Child Topics Group
- Parent Education Group
- Parenting & Personality
- Parenting From a Distance
- Mothers' Support Group
- Storybook Project
- The Center for Women and Families

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**CONNECTICUT: CHILDREN OF
PRISONERS STEERING COMMITTEE**

Started under the auspices of Families In Crisis and includes:

Department of Corrections
 Department of Children and Families
 Department of Education
 Department of Social Services
 Judicial Department
 Public Defenders Office
 Child Advocates Office
 Commission on Children

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CONNECTICUT: CHILDREN OF PRISONERS STEERING COMMITTEE

Families in Crisis is leading an effort to develop a Connecticut “Bill of Rights for Children” with the Steering Committee and the following community agencies:

United Way of Connecticut, United Way of the Capitol Area, United Way of Greater Waterbury, United Way of Greater New Haven, The Tow Foundation, Connecticut Voices for Children, and the Connecticut Association for Non-Profits

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CHILDREN OF PRISONERS: BILL OF RIGHTS

- 1. I have the right to be kept safe and informed at the time of my parent’s arrest.**
- 2. I have the right to be heard when decisions are made about me.**
- 3. I have the right to be considered when decisions are made about my parent.**
- 4. I have the right to be well cared for in my parent’s absence.**

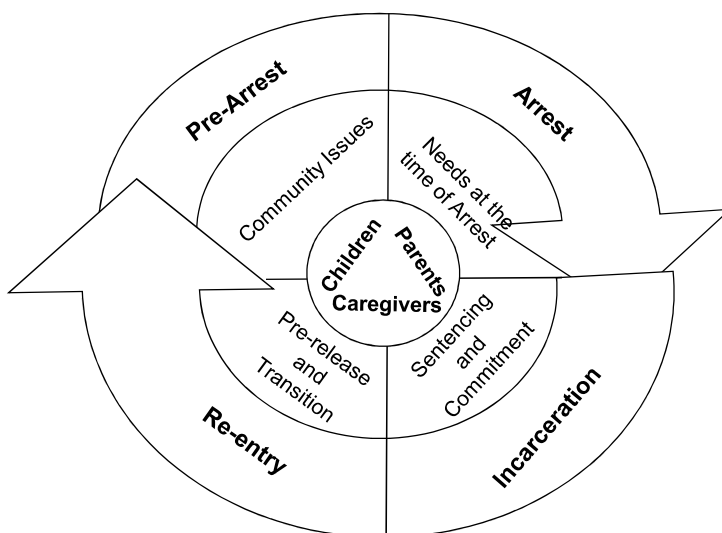
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CHILDREN OF PRISONERS BILL OF RIGHTS

- 5. I have the right to speak with, see and touch my parent.
- 6. I have the right to support as I struggle with my parent's incarceration.
- 7. I have the right not to be judged, blamed or labeled because of my parent's incarceration.
- 8. I have the right to a lifelong relationship with my parent.

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CHILDREN OF PRISONERS: EVERYONE HAS A ROLE



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CHILDREN OF PRISONERS: WHAT CAN WE DO?

There are different strategies for each criminal justice and community agency; however, the basic elements are:

- Creating family friendly policies and practices.
- Encouraging parent/child relationships.
- Reducing stigma by not blaming the child.
- Supporting the family and caregivers.

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CHILDREN OF PRISONERS: WHAT CAN WE DO?

Strategies that are showing promising results with families involve:

- Effective parenting
- Wrap-around case management
- Positive youth development

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**CHILDREN OF PRISONERS:
PARENTING PROGRAMS THAT PROVIDE:**

- Development of parenting skills specific to the developmental stage of the child.
- Mentoring and support that increase the parent's sense of mastery and confidence.
- Didactic Instruction combined with group practice.
- Individualized follow-up tailored to the specific needs of the family.
- Supervised practice with the child.
- Involvement of the whole family.

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**CHILDREN OF PRISONERS:
WRAPAROUND PROGRAMS**

- A unique system of care for children with serious emotional, behavioral, and mental health needs and their families.
- A philosophy and approach which emphasizes strength-based, highly individualized care.
- A unique partnership structure to deliver a comprehensive and flexible array of services to youth and their families.

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**CHILDREN OF PRISONERS:
POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT ELEMENTS**

- A sense of personal safety
- Structure
- A sense of belonging or membership
- A sense of self-worth that is predicated on achievement and character
- Mastery of skills
- Access to learning opportunities beyond the classroom
- Responsibility
- Spirituality
- Self-awareness
- Support and guidance from caring adults

from *Reconnecting Youth & Community A Youth Development Approach* by HHS

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**CONNECTICUT: CHALLENGES AND
OPPORTUNITIES -- WHAT CAN WE DO?**

- What are the internal DOC and Board of Pardons and Paroles' opportunities to improve outcomes for children and families?
- What are the external to the DOC and Board of Pardons and Parole' opportunities (partnering with state and community agencies)?

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RECOMMENDATIONS OF NATIONAL STUDY FOR THE ANNIE E. CASEY FOUNDATION

- Address the full range of conditions that pose risks to the children's well being and healthy development
- Review prison phone, mail and visitation policies to ensure that they are child friendly and encourage parent-child contact; review parole policies with the same lens
- Develop services that include the non-incarcerated parent or caregiver
- Build an information base in each state on the age, needs, circumstances and geographic location of the children
- Create multiple entry points for intake and case management of children, caregivers and offenders – the concrete points where children become visible

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CHILDREN OF OFFENDERS: A SHIFT IN PHILOSOPHY

“Families are not a soft service, a nice thing to do.”

Positive family relationships are markers for better outcomes for both children and offenders, and the majority of offenders go home.

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CHILDREN OF OFFENDERS: CHILDREN OF PROMISE

*“Optimism is the faith that leads to achievement.
Nothing can be done without hope and confidence.”
(Helen Keller)*

“Our job is to not only provide
programs but to focus on the
strengths of these young people
and give them hope in themselves
and confidence in their future.”
(Shay Bilchik, President/CEO,
Child Welfare League)

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