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Bringing Families In: Recommendations of the Incarceration, Reentry and Family Roundtables

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B R I N G I N G F A M I L I E S I N :
Recommendations of the Incarceration, Reentry and
the Family Roundtables



A JOINT PROJECT OF THE
RUTGERS UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF CRIMINAL JUSTICE
& THE NEW JERSEY INSTITUTE FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE

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This document was prepared by Johnna Christian, Rutgers University School of Criminal Justice; Nancy Fishman, New Jersey Institute for Social Justice; Ann Cammett, New Jersey Institute for Social Justice; and Lori Scott-Pickens, The Police Institute, Rutgers University School of Criminal Justice. The authors wish to thank Provost Steven Diner and Dean Leslie Kennedy for supporting the Prisoner Reentry Research Planning Initiative; Mercer Sullivan, Director of the Prisoner Reentry Research Planning Initiative; Shenique Thomas, for planning, editorial, and administrative assistance; Bahiyyah Muhammad and Elaine Chernin for assistance at the roundtables; Ken Zimmerman, Allen James, Ellen Brown, Rick Greenberg, Rita Simmons, and Kelly Dougherty from the New Jersey Institute for Social Justice; and Carol Shapiro, Cecily Coleman, and John Coleman for providing opening remarks at the sessions.

INTRODUCTION

The Rutgers University School of Criminal Justice and the New Jersey Institute for Social Justice convened a series of problem-solving roundtables on “Incarceration, Reentry and the Family” over a 7 month period in 2005 and 2006. Building on the findings of the New Jersey Reentry Roundtable and a growing concern around the state about how to improve outcomes for the more than 70,000 individuals expected to return home from prison over the next five years, the roundtable examined the complex role that families – broadly defined – play in the lives of prisoners during incarceration and after their release.

Issue Background

While reentry policy and practice often focus on concerns such as employment, housing, and substance abuse treatment, there is evidence that family support is a crucial component of successful reentry, and that such support should be fostered from the beginning of the period of incarceration, through the transition home, and following release. Recent research by the Urban Institute found that prisoners expect family support to be a significant factor in successful reentry, prisoners with strong family relationships before incarceration have lower rates of recidivism, and families often provide assistance in securing employment after release from prison. Families have the potential to be a real resource for individuals before and after their release, and these strengths are often not recognized.

Barriers to maintaining contact, however, such as the distance to correctional facilities, phone surcharges, and non-contact visitation policies, can also inhibit families’ abilities to stay involved with a prisoner during incarceration.

Issues arising from family reunification, moreover, are rarely simple and straightforward. Incarceration is a crisis for family members as well, and the return of a family member can precipitate a renewed crisis or otherwise put a substantial strain on those left behind as well as those returning home. Some individuals have already used up their family members’ good will (and resources) and some may have been the perpetrators or victims of violence within the family (or both). These issues are particularly powerful when children are involved. Nationally, over 1.4 million children have a parent in prison. In New Jersey, the number has been estimated, based on the national figure, to exceed 42,000, but, notably, we actually have very little hard data to substantiate this estimation. Very little is known, in fact, about the children of New Jersey prisoners. In general, we know that these children face the substantial challenges of an

absent, incarcerated parent, a family under stress and the general absence of any resources in schools or in the community that specifically address what children of all ages in these circumstances experience.

The Roundtable Series and the Recommendations

The Incarceration, Reentry and the Family roundtables brought together a multi-disciplinary group of stakeholders and experts to address what should be done in New Jersey to better understand and respond to these challenges. Each session addressed a different facet of the topic: maintaining family connections during the period of incarceration, the challenges facing prisoners as parents, and the family’s role in reentry. During moderated panels a group of initial responders provided information and comments serving as the foundation for discussion by all roundtable participants. This document presents a set of recommendations emerging directly from the roundtable sessions and provides a road map for individual and collaborative efforts accepted by a range of key players in New Jersey, including government officials, community and faith based service agencies, advocacy groups, family members and formerly incarcerated people. These ideas were distilled from each of the discussions and reviewed in detail by participants in the final session. Representing the consensus of this diverse group, the recommendations also build from what have already been identified as best or promising practices by the Urban Institute, the Council of State Governments Reentry Policy Council, and others. Policy and practice changes may occur at multiple levels including legislation, agency based procedures and policies, pilot programs, and the day-to-day practices of individuals. This document focuses on concrete and specific practices, recognizing there are other approaches that are desirable and necessary. Recommendations are presented for individual agencies and stakeholder groups, but selected recommendations best accomplished through interagency collaboration have been designated with bold type.



INTRODUCTION

The organizers of these roundtables, and certainly the participants, have recognized that we have drawn what are essentially artificial lines around what constitutes a “family” issue for purposes of limiting the scope of our discussions. Clearly, families struggle to manage the broad range of problems and challenges that have been identified as critical to reentry success or failure, such as substance abuse, mental illness, the lack of affordable housing, and the need for employment. These are all family issues as well.

Implementation of any of these recommendations depends on the commitment of group members to initiate and follow through with new policies, partnerships and programs; there is no official mandate or body to oversee them.

Based on the roundtables, however, there is a strong commitment to considering these approaches towards increasing the likelihood individuals will return from prison with strong family ties and support systems that will lead to successful reentry.

In addition to these recommendations, each agency involved has been asked to provide a brief summary of a program, initiative, or policy that represents an accomplishment in the area of incarceration, families, and reentry. This may be a model program or partnership that encompasses and represents the outcomes discussed during the roundtable meetings. These initiatives are listed in the appendix, along with a resource list of agencies and organizations working around reentry and family issues. Brief descriptions of resources and website addresses are provided.

CENTRAL FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Department of Corrections

The Department of Corrections (DOC) is a crucial partner in facilitating the connections between prisoners and their families and in preparing both for the process of reentry. The Department faces the challenge of reconciling these goals with its responsibility to maintain security inside the institutions and manage a complex agency with multiple institutions across a broad geographical area. As part of its expanding effort to reorient prison programming and practice to focus more on improving reentry outcomes, DOC should look for ways to acknowledge and support the roles that family members play in the lives of incarcerated individuals and incorporate them during incarceration.

Examples of steps that can be taken include:

Facilitation of contact

1. **Advocate for the elimination of phone surcharges. Phone surcharges are imposed via a contract with the Department of Treasury not under the control of the DOC. The DOC can identify these surcharges as a barrier to its own mission of rehabilitation.**
2. **Create a family handbook that is disseminated in hard copy and available online detailing visitation procedures, rules, and times for each institution; programming available to inmates at various facilities; opportunities for family involvement; and other pertinent information.**
3. **Utilize video conferencing methods for family visitation as a supplement to in-person visiting, and include guarantees for prisoner privacy. Video visitation has been piloted already by the DOC, with mixed results because it may have been perceived by inmates as an alternative to in-person visitation, and there may have also been concerns about privacy, and about the location of the video sites in the community. The DOC could explore partnering with community or faith based organizations to host the video conferencing for family in the community.**
4. **Develop community advisory boards to facilitate information exchange between DOC and community members.**

5. Establish clear and consistent visitation procedures across institutions. Lack of information about visitation policies and variations in policies and hours adds to the challenge of visiting a family member during a prison stay.
6. Designate a family ombudsman within the Office of the Ombudsman to serve as a clearing house for information about individuals in the system and to facilitate the involvement of family members in counseling, discharge planning, and other activities prior to release.
7. Broaden definitions of family for purposes of bringing children to visit and supporting other family connections. Family should be broadly defined for purposes of promoting the pro-social connections that will help individuals succeed on the outside. To increase opportunities for maintaining parent-child connections, mentors and other close adults should be able to bring children to visit a parent in prison.

Quality of contact

1. **Facilitate incarcerated parents' involvement in decisions that affect their children, particularly on school and health matters. This will require collaboration between the DOC and local school systems.**
2. **Provide access for attorneys to prisoners and inmate paralegals to train them about their rights and responsibilities around child support and child protection, where appropriate. DOC can provide staff to assist prisoners with child support modifications, or at least supply updated information to Inmate Legal Advocacy to assist with requests for modifications.**
3. Provide family and child friendly visiting spaces. While this has been the tradition at Edna Mahan, this has not been available at the men's facilities.
4. Expand offerings of parenting and family relationship classes for inmates, including family and caregivers living in the community in the class work where appropriate. Responsible parenting classes are available at some halfway house facilities but should be expanded in the prisons, given that only a small percentage of individuals are released via the halfway houses.

5. Provide the family with the opportunity to be involved in the discharge planning process where appropriate. This can be important even if the returning family member is not going to be living with his or her family.
6. Expand opportunities for families to interact with inmates (i.e., monthly homework night allowing prisoners to work with children on homework, family group activities, overnight family reunification programs).
7. Expand opportunities for pre-release family counseling, and also family reunification programs. Counseling can help family members clarify expectations, share their fears, and prepare for either reunification or for reconnection if immediate reunification is not planned.

State Parole Board

Because they are responsible for supervising released individuals in the community and for helping them access the services and resources that will help them comply with their parole plans, parole officers (and the State Parole Board's community programs) play a key role in facilitating successful reintegration (as well as in deciding when reentry has not been successful). Family members often play a similar role, supporting the transition process and trying to help their loved ones stay out of trouble. They are among the most affected when a parolee fails, and may also have previously been victimized by that family member. This suggests that parole officers and family members should work in concert. Mutual mistrust, mistaken assumptions and a family's history of negative interactions with the criminal justice system can close off what could be in many cases a productive collaboration.

As it moves forward with its reforms, the State Parole Board should identify ways to improve the relationship between parole officers and family members and to integrate family members into the transition process. In addition, the State Parole Board runs "halfway back" and other community programs which present opportunities for involving family members prior to release into the community or when parolees are at risk of re-incarceration. These changes will only be of use where released individuals are actually on parole, and an increasing number of inmates are "maxing out" without any supervision or support. Including a period of community supervision in all sentences (not extending them) would provide greater opportunities to facilitate family reintegration as well.

Examples of steps that can be taken include:

1. **Provide parole officers with information about services and resources for parolees in the context of their families, including services that will help family members support parolees, and enhance existing community partnerships.**
2. **Develop strategies for higher levels of family inclusion in parole planning and supervision and for broadening techniques for family engagement. This can begin prior to release, in connection with efforts undertaken during incarceration.**

3. **Provide information for families in interviews and in user-friendly handbooks, as well as during home visits. The Juvenile Justice Commission has made strides in this area and could provide learning for Parole and for Corrections.**
4. Provide training for parole officers and other SPB employees on working productively with family members of parolees. Training can provide officers with greater options for assisting parolees in their transition and facilitate better relationships with family members.
5. Include on-going assessment of parole officer interactions with parolee family members in parole officer supervision. Supervision can reinforce the importance of positive family relationships, particularly where a parolee is living with his or her family members.
6. Include safety planning around domestic violence or past child abuse and neglect as part of institutional parole planning and supervision, where appropriate.
7. Create opportunities for family involvement in Halfway Back, day reporting centers and other community programs. Community programs provide a real opportunity for integrating families productively into the transition process.

Department of Human Services and the Department of Children and Families

The Department of Human Services (DHS) has been the largest agency in New Jersey, and in its current configuration includes a number of agencies, including the Division of Youth and Family Services (DYFS) and the Division of Family Development (DFD), which oversees the Child Support and Paternity Programs. These programs, while not directly working with prisoners, service families and children with incarcerated family members and can have a significant impact on a family's ability to remain intact during a period of incarceration and successfully reunify after release. After the roundtable sessions the governor signed a law creating a new Department of Children and Families which will change DHS's role in this area. The new agency, which will include DYFS, should incorporate a vigorous commitment to address the needs of children of incarcerated parents.

We have provided recommendations below for DYFS, or any successor division of the new department, and for DFD.

Division of Youth and Family Services (DYFS)

The potential for the termination of parental rights looms large for incarcerated parents. Under the provisions of the Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA) of 1997 a child welfare agency is required to file a petition to terminate the parental rights of a parent whose child has been in foster care for 15 out of the last 22 months — unless the agency documents a “compelling reason” why termination would not be in the “best interest of the child.” This leaves incarcerated parents, especially mothers, more vulnerable to termination because they cannot maintain regular contact to demonstrate positive relationships with their children. The agency can also terminate under similar abandonment provisions.

Some recommendations include:

1. **Establish interagency coordination and communication between DYFS and DOC regarding the individuals who are incarcerated with children and families in the DYFS system.**
2. **Increase resources to facilitate visits, where appropriate, to parents in prison. Some prisons are inaccessible to public transportation, and this makes visitation difficult.**

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- 3. Collaborate with the DOC to educate parents in prison on how to navigate the family court system in cases involving the termination of parental rights.**
- 4. Provide post-incarceration supportive services for parents of children in custody to assist with reunification. These can be coordinated with the State Parole Board and other agencies working with the family.**
5. Develop training for caseworkers on how to identify and assist children with incarcerated parents and how to provide appropriate case planning for families with an incarcerated parent. Caseworkers should have a range of approaches to pursue, depending on each family's circumstances.
6. Incorporate reunification, where applicable, into case planning for Protective Services and especially where children are in foster or para foster placements. Include visitation of an incarcerated parent as part of the service plan agreement where appropriate.
7. Provide information to parents in prison about ways that they can document parental contact, even without visits, to provide compelling reasons to forestall termination.
8. Establish data tracking capability to identify the frequency of termination based on ASFA and abandonment when there is an incarcerated parent. This data, which the Roundtable participants identified as unavailable, could help inform regulatory and policy decisions.
9. Promulgate a regulation to create a specific exception to the termination provisions of New Jersey's regulations implementing ASFA for incarcerated parents, under certain circumstances.

DFD: Office of Child Support Enforcement

While all parents should contribute to the support of their children, under current law child support debt can continue to grow during a period of incarceration, even if a prisoner cannot earn money to pay. Incarcerated parents often mount significant arrears from child support, most of which will never get to their children, because the debt is simply too large to pay and because, in addition, it may be owed to the state as reimbursement for public assistance paid to the

custodial parent. Support enforcement creates a barrage of reentry problems for parents including: being subject to significant wage garnishment; driver's license suspension; the threat of re-incarceration; and other sanctions that negatively impact the chances of successful reintegration. New Jersey has some leeway to address the issue of mounting arrears for incarcerated parents owing to the court's ability to consider modifications from prison. Nevertheless, judges only have the power to grant a modification from the day of the application (and not before), so early intervention is necessary. Other states have adopted laws automatically suspending the accrual of arrears during incarceration in most circumstances, a lead that New Jersey can follow, which would alleviate much of this problem.

The Office of Child Support Enforcement is not responsible for every part of the enforcement picture. The Administrative Office of the Courts and the family courts in each county play a significant role here as well. Addressing the problem of child support arrears will require collaboration among these different actors, as well as the Department of Corrections and Parole.

Examples of steps that can be taken are:

- 1. Work with DOC to cross-match prisoners with child support orders upon intake, and to provide information to inmates with outstanding or pending child support orders about their rights and responsibilities.**
- 2. Collaborate with attorneys and Inmate Legal Advocacy to supply accurate information to prisoners about child support enforcement. Create a user friendly handbook explaining policies and requirements.**
3. Set up arrears forgiveness programs for money owed to the state for children receiving public assistance, as permitted under federal law.
4. Support policy change allowing the suspension of arrears during incarceration or other institutionalization, where appropriate.

Juvenile Justice Commission (JJC)

The Roundtable did not focus specifically on the needs of young people involved in the juvenile justice system, and to do these complicated issues justice would require an additional series focused solely on these individuals and their families. Still, the Roundtable acknowledged the leadership taken by the JJC through its involvement with Family Justice, Inc., and through the Juvenile Justice Reentry Initiative, both of which have focused on how to engage and support families prior to and after release. As a group, young people in JJC custody experience many of the same family-related issues as the adult population, but with the additional challenges and opportunities raised by their age and developmental needs, the shorter duration of their detention, and the likelihood that they will return home to family custody after release. Many are also parents themselves. While acknowledging the need for a fuller discussion of these complex issues, we've included some recommendations here.

Some steps that can be taken include:

1. Begin involving families, where appropriate, in the initial planning phase when a juvenile is admitted to a JJC facility. Particularly given the relatively short period of time served by most young people, and probability that they will return home to live with family members (with family broadly construed), it is critical that the family be involved as early as possible.
2. Provide transportation to facilities or assist with transportation costs for families that would otherwise not be able to visit or participate in programming with young people in secure facilities. As in the adult system, juvenile secure facilities are often located far from where the families of juveniles live, and are not easily accessible to public transportation.
3. Conduct regular follow-up sessions and provide updates to family members on juveniles' activities via phone and/or, when possible, video conferencing through the regional parole office or community-based organizations.
4. Collaborate with community-based organizations to offer parent education classes and/or effective parenting programs to families prior to the juvenile's return home. Programs should also be offered to young people who are parents inside the juvenile facilities.
5. Provide aftercare services for young people and their families at least six months following discharge from parole, when requested.
6. Make available in Spanish all parent consent forms, orientation packages, and other standard forms.
7. Provide appropriate gang awareness training for parents. While there is significant concern about gang problems, particularly as they involve youth, there is not much evidence about what kinds of training or support for parents are most effective. It remains a worthy goal, however, to develop, provide and evaluate programs for parents to help them recognize and respond to potential gang involvement.
8. Provide family mentors to work with juveniles and their families while the young person is in a JJC facility.

Family Members

Family members may be the best resource for an incarcerated individual both during incarceration and after he or she is released. They have an understanding of individual and family strengths and deficits and provide emotional and financial support.

At the same time, families may feel a sense of mistrust and suspicion about state agencies such as the Department of Corrections and Parole and feel there is a lack of transparency in the decisions made about the incarcerated individual. Additionally, families experience frustration and disappointment when accurate information is not made available and appropriate resources and supports are not in place. Family members therefore face the challenge of being active participants in a variety of systems.

There are a number of models of family support and networking activities that address some of these problems and provide a basis for mobilization and inclusion. Each family situation is unique, requiring individual assessment of strengths and challenges, planning for reunification if appropriate, and safety planning.

The following steps may be taken by family members:

1. Identify or form support groups aimed at sharing information, problem solving, and increasing social

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support structure. Prison Families of New York is an existing program which provides capacity building strategies via the internet for family members forming support groups.

2. Utilize existing systems of support such as advocacy groups, schools, service agencies, and faith based institutions. This often requires diligence and patience to identify such systems. Advocacy groups may assist in making family members aware of services.
3. Increase familiarity with Department of Corrections visitation policies, procedures, and programming available inside for family members. Some information is available on the Department of Corrections website, and the DOC is actively pursuing the publication of a handbook for families.
4. Work with appropriate channels within the Department of Corrections when breaches in policies and procedures occur so that supervisory personnel may address problems and prevent them from occurring in the future. In addition, family members may partner with the DOC and advocacy groups to communicate areas needing improvement regarding the communication of policies and procedures.
5. Be an active participant in the incarcerated individual's plans for release to the community. Assist with securing necessary documents such as birth certificates, social security cards, state issued identifications, and driver's licenses.
6. Seek counseling through support and/or advocacy groups if you have concerns about a pending release and are unsure whether you should accept the formerly incarcerated person into your life.

Incarcerated Individuals

Incarcerated individuals themselves are an important and independent stakeholder group. While family members and agencies have a significant role in assisting incarcerated individuals in the reentry process, there are positive steps that prisoners can take during incarceration that can help create better outcomes when reintegrating into families, communities and society.

Examples are:

1. To the extent that it is possible, stay engaged with family and children and don't abdicate parenting responsibilities while incarcerated. Take advantage of parenting classes, family days, school conferences, or other opportunities to be a parent and involved family member.
2. In the absence of regular visits, maintain consistent contact with children in the form of letter writing.
3. At the earliest possible time engage the legal system to clarify rights and responsibilities regarding child support obligations.
4. If such potential exists, get as much information as is available regarding the possible termination of parental rights. Where possible, stay in contact with a DYFS caseworker and respond to any correspondence you receive regarding your child.
5. Explore available options within correctional institutions for pre-release counseling and support to assist in reentry.
6. Ask family members what they need during the period of incarceration and to prepare for release. Ask if they are utilizing any community based resources and supports, and help identify potential options.

Community Based Organizations

Community and faith-based organizations are well-positioned to assist the family members of incarcerated or recently released individuals. Most groups in urban communities, from food pantries and social service providers to after school programs, may already be supporting and working with this population without actually identifying them as a subgroup with particular needs, and most families are involved in multiple public and private assistance systems. Given how important families can be to successful reentry and given how stressful it can be for those families, community groups in the neighborhoods heavily impacted by incarceration and reentry can make a difference in how families manage this challenge.

The first step for community organizations that are not already working explicitly on reentry issues is to understand how the issue intersects with the population they are currently serving or the services they are currently providing. Are children in after school programs living with an absent parent because of incarceration, or dealing with the stress and excitement of having someone come home? Are families using food pantries under financial strain because of an incarcerated parent? Have students dropped out of job training programs because of a family member's incarceration?

The second step is to identify types of support community based organizations could provide for these families, based on what their needs and priorities are, and figure out if there are existing best practice models to build upon. Organizations will have to consider how best to identify families/individuals where incarceration is an issue without infringing on their privacy or communicating any kind of stigma. The third step may be identifying existing and new funding sources to support this work.

Possible activities for community based organizations include:

1. **Provide family case management services. Family case management, pioneered at La Bodega de la Familia in New York City, takes into account the whole family and all of the systems with which they interact.**
2. **Collaborate with DOC and Parole to provide assistance to the family members of returning prisoners before and after release. Services can include help re-familiarizing returning individuals with their communities and the other resources available to families in and out of their immediate neighborhoods.**
3. **Serve as an intermediary/ombudsman with the DOC for families and children. Provide on-going help on navigating the criminal justice and other government systems.**
4. Facilitate transportation to prisons for family members, children with their caregivers or mentors. Many churches and other groups have vans that could make regular trips to the facilities.
5. Provide workshops or support groups for family members. A community group can play an important role in bringing together individuals addressing similar challenges, who are unlikely to reach out to each other on their own.
6. Organize a big brother/big sister-type mentoring program for children of incarcerated parents; arrange for family-to-family mentoring.
7. Develop non-intrusive ways to identify children of incarcerated parents and/or relatives without stigmatizing them to insure that available programs are supportive and considerate of their needs.

Advocacy Groups

Advocacy groups of family members and others who support them can provide individual advocacy and assistance for those dealing with a family member in prison and help raise consciousness and promote change in systemic problems that affect those in prison, juvenile facilities and their families. In many cases, groups addressing specific problems may not realize the extent to which incarceration overlaps with their concerns (i.e. housing, child advocacy, victim services).

Groups should be conscious that not everyone who falls into the category of “families of the incarcerated” has similar interests. There is a role to be played both by victims’ groups and prisoner support organizations, and they should also look for areas of common cause.

Steps that could be taken by advocacy groups include:

1. **Identify potential issues for organizing campaigns: phone charges from prison that impact on family members; treatment of family members/visitors at correctional institutions; family/victim involvement in discharge planning/safety planning for incarcerated family members; the “Bill of Rights for Children of Prisoners”.**
2. **Explore extensions of existing programs and strategies to include the needs of incarcerated individuals and their families. Groups that provide child abuse prevention education, for example, can work with DOC to offer this program in prisons.**
3. Gather as much accurate information as possible about the systems in which you are advocating, e.g., corrections and parole, public assistance, labor and workforce development. The more groups know about these systems, the more effective they will be in advocating for individuals and on larger issues.
4. Disseminate information through websites, leaflets, hotlines, group meetings.
5. Organize around particular issues through community organizations, churches, waiting rooms in state agencies.
6. Develop working relationships with key personnel in different agencies so that advocacy groups can assist individuals with particular problems.

Universities/Educational Institutions

Understanding the ways incarceration and reentry may impact upon families is a continual challenge. Identifying and providing services and resources to populations with overlapping needs is particularly difficult. Universities and educational institutions can provide resources in identifying existing research, conducting original research and program evaluations, and collecting and analyzing needed data. In addition, agencies and stakeholder groups may view educational institutions as a neutral convener.

Universities and educational institutions can:

1. **Partner with state and private agencies to develop a research agenda around incarceration, reentry and the family. Identify existing data and develop protocols for collecting needed information.**
2. **Partner on grant applications for programmatic needs/initiatives, providing process and outcome evaluations of new programs and demonstration projects.**
3. Serve as a convener for roundtables, meetings, and forums to address related topics.
4. Train students to work with agencies in identifying areas of mutual interest and pursue them for research and programmatic purposes.
5. Expand curricula for professionals such as teachers, social workers, and health care providers to address the needs of families with incarcerated members. Law schools can provide student clinical programs to assist individuals and their families with reentry legal matters.

Department of Education/Schools

Schools can be a constant and stabilizing institution in children's lives when a parent is incarcerated, providing a safe and supportive environment for kids without stigmatizing them. Schools are faced with the challenge of identifying children with incarcerated parents, as well as servicing youth who have been incarcerated. Problems in school may be directly related to the alienation and stigma a child feels because a parent is incarcerated. Caretakers may also find it difficult to be engaged with a child's school work when a family member is incarcerated.

Steps that may be taken by schools include:

1. **Develop protocols, in coordination with DOC, for working with incarcerated parents to provide school-related information about children and to engage them in important decision-making when appropriate.**
2. **Identify ways to support the children of incarcerated parents by working with the Department of Children and Families in a more coordinated manner.**
3. **Identify ways to work with community based organizations and churches to pick up where the school leaves off to establish prison-community linkages, pen-pal programs, homemaking projects, and group events and activities.**
4. Provide resources and training for school counselors and teachers to identify and understand the experiences of children with incarcerated parents and the perspectives of their parents.
5. Include the experiences of children with incarcerated parents in the general curriculum. The issues that face children with a parent (or other relative) in prison are relevant as well to children who do not have incarcerated parents themselves. Education for the broader population can increase tolerance and understanding.
6. Establish support groups and after school programs specifically aimed at children with incarcerated parents/relatives.
7. Conduct analysis to determine what percentage of students has incarcerated parents and use such analysis to determine funding, programs and services.
8. Develop appropriate materials for kids and parents to be distributed through guidance offices providing information on issues for families with incarcerated parents.

APPENDIX A: PARTICIPANTS

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APPENDIX B: AGENCY/PROGRAM DESCRIPTIONS

Family Justice & New Jersey Juvenile Justice Commission

Program: The Bodega Model® and JJC Partnership

Family Justice strives to tap the strengths of families, the expertise of governments, and the resources of communities to break the cycle of criminal justice involvement and build a safer and healthier society. We accomplish this by forming partnerships with governments around the country, enhancing corrections policies and practices, and convening leaders in criminal and juvenile justice to implement effective, family-focused, strength-based strategies at the neighborhood, state and federal level. The Bodega Model® is an award-winning methodology developed at Family Justice's direct-service arm, La Bodega de la Familia. The model draws on four disciplines: family systems practices, strength-based models, case management principles, and literature on partnering and collaboration. The Bodega Model brings together people under community supervision, their family members, family case managers, and government and community partners, including parole and probation, to draw on family strengths.

In March 2004, Family Justice launched a partnership with the New Jersey Juvenile Justice Commission (JJC) to enhance approaches for tapping the strengths of families who have a loved one involved in the juvenile justice system. The project is working with the JJC and its government and community reentry partners to tap families as a resource. As a first step, Family Justice collected perspectives on reentry and family supports from agency staff, youth in JJC facilities, and their families. These perceptions, in addition to analysis of existing intake forms and other procedures, are informing discussions of policy, training, and practice.

My Daughter's Keeper & New Jersey State Parole

Program: A New Lease on Life

Since its inception, My Daughter's Keeper, Inc. has provided support to formerly incarcerated women that found it very challenging to transition back to normal society. These women are thrust back into society lacking both the personal and professional mindsets to reintegrate back into their families, community and the workplace.

In November 2003, My Daughter's Keeper, Inc. formed a partnership with the New Jersey State Parole Board to present a pilot program called "A New Lease on Life," which provides personal and professional development training for formerly incarcerated women reporting to various parole district offices. The New Lease on Life program provides women with both practical and professional skills to help prepare them to become productive and self-sufficient members of society. The program focuses on life skills, job skills and placement, parenting, coaching, counseling, resource support, connection to housing, substance abuse treatment, GED, ESL and literacy training and education. Participants in the program are also provided with trained volunteer mentors.

New Lease on Life is a training and support program which works to facilitate the successful re-entry of formerly incarcerated women back into society. The program's primary focus is to help women develop life skills as the basis for overcoming adversity and making positive change. The program's secondary focus is to provide and equip women on parole with professional development training skills to prepare them for successful re-entry into New Jersey's workforce.

My Daughter's Keeper is currently offering the New Lease on Life program in two locations: North Brunswick & Asbury Park, NJ. For more information, please visit www.mydaughterskeeper.org or call (732) 565-3793, ext. 1.

Department of Corrections, Department of Human Services & Department of Labor

Program: Responsible Parenting Program

The Responsible Parenting Program (RPP) is an interdepartmental initiative that seeks to encourage responsible parenting through the provision of specific services that are tailored to provide a foundation that allow incarcerated parents to assume emotional and financial responsibility for their child(ren). The primary goal of this initiative is to develop/improve relationships between child(ren) and incarcerated parent(s). The Department of Labor (DOL) is an emerging third partner in this initiative working closely with both the Departments of Corrections (DOC) and Human Services (DHS) to try to determine effective strategies to assist RPP participants in obtaining better employment and/or training/educational services.

The Responsible Parenting Program is currently provided at five New Jersey Department of Corrections contracted Residential Community Release Programs (RCRP) throughout the State of New Jersey. These are:

- The Center for Urban Education (CUE-Ogden) in Newark
- Hope Hall – Volunteers of America, Delaware Valley in Camden
- The Kintock Group, Bridgeton
- The Kintock Group, Newark, and
- The Port Program in Newark.

Guidelines for participation in the RPP program are minimal; participants with child support, parenting and/or parental custody issues are given priority and Residential Community Release Program residents within 4–12 months of Parole eligibility or completion of sentence are targeted. This provides each participant with at least the necessary time needed to participate in the 16-week parenting education/support group. It is the goal of the RPP to identify training/education opportunities for those participants with longer time in the Residential Community Release Program.

Each group/cycle consists of approximately 20 participants. Over 400 eligible candidates participate in the program annually. Pre and post evaluations are given to participants to determine/monitor the effectiveness of the program. After the participant has obtained employment, this information is provided to the Department of Human Services who begins the process for child support collection. The identification and data collection outcome measures are an ongoing process between the primary agencies, NJ DOC and DHS.

Parents Anonymous, Inc.

Program: Parenting Our Successors in Society Effectively (POSSE)

Parents Anonymous provides an educational/support group, “Parenting Our Successors in Society Effectively” (POSSE), for all RPP participants. The Department of Corrections has contracted with Parents Anonymous, Inc. to provide a 16-week parent education, self-help/mutual aid experience to identified residents at the above listed five Residential Community Release Programs. A trained professional facilitator leads the two-hour weekly group and participants are encouraged to take leadership roles in the group. In addition to the weekly group, each 16-week group participates in a Family Night and Graduation Ceremony. Certificates of participation are provided to the participants at the end of the POSSE Group. Participants are encouraged to continue attending a Parents anonymous POSSE group in the community to provide continuity of care. Parents Anonymous has groups throughout the State of New Jersey as well as throughout the Country.

Department of Human Services

Program: Educational/Informational Seminars on Child Support Issues

The Department of Human Services is an integral part of the RPP. In addition to funding this initiative, the Department of Human Services also contracts with a private vendor, Janus Solutions, to provide educational/informational seminars on child support issues for both the RPP participants and the Residential Community Release Program staff. The Office of Child Support and Paternity has assigned a central office liaison to the RPP. In addition to working closely with the Department of Corrections, Division of Programs and Community Services, Office of Drug Programs RPP staff, the assigned liaison meets monthly with the Residential Community Release Programs and is available to assist RCRP staff with specific child support questions/concerns.

Department of Labor

Program: Employment Training and Education

The Department of Labor participates on the Advisory Board for the RPP and has assigned a specific liaison from central office to work closely with both Human Services and Corrections RPP staff. In addition to working with the Departments of Corrections and Human Services to determine ways in which to provide needed training/education and assistance with obtaining viable employment, the Department of Labor has requested that the local One-Stop Career Centers support the RPP initiative through the provision of informational workshops and the assignment of a specific liaison to each participating RCRP. Workshops are provided to educate the RPP participants about the services that are available at the local One-Stop Career Centers and the ways in which to access these services.

Center for Family Services and Family Service Bureau of Newark

Program: Community Support and Aftercare Services

The Department of Corrections has contracted with two non-profit family services agencies, the Center for Family Services (CFS) in South Jersey and the Family Service Bureau of Newark (FSB), to provide community support to RPP participants returning to the community. CFS and FSB work closely with the referring entity (either Parole or the RCRP) to obtain prior background and assessment information to assist in determining the level of service each participant will require. Case management services and counseling are available as well as assistance with housing, transportation and employment related issues as needed.

Responsible Parenting Program Advisory Board/Gateway Foundation

Program: EMCF Parenting Program

The Responsible Parenting Program Advisory Board recognized the need for a parenting program for the female inmates in New Jersey and the decision was made to explore the viability of creating an additional Responsible Parenting Program for the female population. A RPP was implemented within the Therapeutic Community (TC) at the Edna Mahan Correctional Facility for Women. The TC is facilitated by an outside vendor, The Gateway Foundation and is monitored by the Department of Corrections, Office of Drug Programs. This is a 60-bed program that is separated from the general population. A proposal was submitted by Parents Anonymous to provide the parenting education/support group within the TC and a continued support group at one of the RCRPs that provides services to the female offender. This program has all of the facets of the RPP for the male offender including parenting education/support groups, assistance with understanding and navigating the child support system, assistance with training/education/employment. RPP participants will continue to participate in parenting support groups and work closely with the Department of Labor One-Stop Career Centers when they arrive at the designated Residential Community Release Program and will have community support services available when they return to their community.

Department of Health and Human Services & Youth Consultation Service

Program: Mentoring Children of Prisoners Program

The YCS Mentoring Children of Prisoners Program is a federal grant from the Department of Health and Human Services. Under the three-year grant, YCS uses the Big Brothers/Big Sisters model to train volunteer mentors and match them with youth of the incarcerated (ages 4–15) who reside in Essex County, New Jersey. All of the children have one or both parents in a state or federal prison.

The program provides volunteers to mentor youth of the incarcerated for one hour each week for one full year. The mentors provide companionship, support, guidance and social activities to their mentee. The program is designed as one-on-one, community-based mentoring. This relationship will aid the youth to recognize their interests, talents and dreams while establishing a trusting and healthy relationship with a caring adult.

All volunteer mentors are screened through a personal interview, criminal background check, drivers abstract, references and provide (2) pre-match trainings.

Prevent Child Abuse New Jersey

Program: Every Person Influences Children (EPIC)

Prevent Child Abuse New Jersey's EPIC program model joins the three most powerful influences in a child's life — home, school, and community — to help children develop self-esteem and social responsibility, while offering parents a supportive opportunity to improve parenting skills. EPIC provides comprehensive training for parents, teachers, school support staff and concerned community members through two program components: the home component, "growing and learning together;" and the school component, "growing up together." The home component provides parents, through interactive workshops, with the information and skills they need to be effective nurturers of their children at every stage of their growth and development. The school component recognizes the need for "character education" — educating the whole child by coupling academics with values and lessons of good citizenry. Participants in this component's workshops, generally teachers, learn practical ways of infusing their regular curriculum with activities which promote self-esteem, problem-solving and decision-making skills, and understanding rules, rights and responsibilities. PCA-NJ provides all training and technical assistance to communities wishing to implement EPIC. EPIC currently operates in 46 communities across New Jersey.

Police Institute

Program: Safer Cities Partnership and the Juvenile Re-Entry Initiative

The Safer Cities Partnership (formerly the Greater Newark Safer Cities Initiative) has been going strong for more than six years. Housed at the Police Institute-Rutgers Newark School of Criminal Justice, it is a unique collaboration of service and treatment providers, clergy, law enforcement at all levels, policy makers and New Jersey parole. The collaboration has owned and managed the Serious and Violent Offender Reentry Initiative for both adults and juveniles. In addition to ensuring these individuals have direct access to services, the group also works to identify the impediments to their rehabilitation. These impediments are shared at the Safer Cities Partnership table where recommendations are discussed, formalized and directed to the appropriate agency.

APPENDIX C: RESOURCE LIST

Organizations

Center for Children of Incarcerated Parents

www.e-ccip.org

The mission of The Center for Children of Incarcerated Parents (CCIP) is the prevention of intergenerational crime and incarceration. The Center's goals are the production of high quality documentation on and the development of model services for children of criminal offenders and their families.

Family and Corrections Network

www.fcnetwork.org

Family and Corrections Network (FCN) is an organization for and about families of prisoners. They offer information, training and technical assistance on children of prisoners, parenting programs for prisoners, prison visiting, incarcerated fathers and mothers, hospitality programs, keeping in touch, returning to the community, the impact of the justice system on families, and prison marriage.

Family Justice

www.familyjustice.org

Family Justice draws on the unique strengths of families and neighborhoods to break cycles of involvement with the criminal justice system. In pursuing this mission, Family Justice assists government and communities by providing direct services, testing new methodology that promotes change, delivering training and consulting to encourage use of its methods, and serving as a resource for both the criminal justice field and the general public.

Institute on Women & Criminal Justice,

Women's Prison Association

www.wpaonline.org/institute/index.htm

The Institute on Women & Criminal Justice is a national center for dialogue, research, and information about criminal justice-involved women, their families and communities. By fostering a national conversation on women and criminal justice, the Institute works to create a breakthrough in the ways in which our public systems deal with women and crime. The Institute actively promotes innovative solutions and highlights what works.

Justice Policy Center, Urban Institute

www.urban.org/center/jpc/

The Justice Policy Center (JPC) carries out nonpartisan research to inform the national dialogue on crime, justice, and community safety. JPC researchers collaborate with practitioners, public officials, and community groups to make the Center's research useful not only to decision makers and

agencies in the justice system but also to the neighborhoods and communities harmed by crime and disorder.

National Center on Fathers and Families

www.ncoff.gse.upenn.edu

The National Center on Fathers and Families (NCOFF) is an interdisciplinary policy research center, dedicated to research and practice that expands the knowledge base on father involvement and family development, and that informs policy designed to improve the well-being of children.

National Criminal Justice Reference Service

www.ncjrs.gov

National Criminal Justice Reference Service (NCJRS) is a federally funded resource offering justice and substance abuse information to support research, policy, and program development worldwide.

National Institute of Corrections

www.nicic.org

The National Institute of Corrections (NIC) is an agency within the U.S. Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Prisons. NIC provides training, technical assistance, information services, and policy/program development assistance to federal, state, and local corrections agencies.

New Jersey Institute for Social Justice

www.njisj.org

The New Jersey Institute for Social Justice is an urban research and advocacy organization dedicated to the advancement of New Jersey's urban areas and residents. In collaboration with other researchers, the Institute develops numerous policy briefs and reports related to four initiative areas—economic opportunity, regional equity, equal justice, and legal advocacy.

New York Campaign for Telephone Justice,

Center for Constitutional Rights

www.telephonejustice.org

The objectives of the New York Campaign for Telephone Justice are to achieve more equitable rates for phone calls to and from prisoners, a high level of consumer choice within the prison telephone system, and fair service without unilateral preemptive cut-offs.

Reentry National Media Outreach Campaign

www.reentrymediaoutreach.org

The Reentry National Media Outreach Campaign is designed to support the work of community and faith-based organizations through offering media resources that will facilitate community discussion and decision making about solution-based reentry programs.

Reentry Policy Council

www.reentrypolicy.org

Re-Entry Policy Council (RPC) was established to assist state government officials grappling with the increasing number of people leaving prisons and jails to return to the communities they left behind. The RPC was formed with two specific goals in mind: 1) To develop bipartisan policies and principles for elected officials and other policymakers to consider as they evaluate re-entry issues in their jurisdictions; and 2) To facilitate coordination and information-sharing among organizations implementing re-entry initiatives, researching re-entry trends, communicating about re-entry related issues, or funding re-entry projects.

The Sentencing Project

www.sentencingproject.org

The Sentencing Project is a non-profit organization which promotes reduced reliance on incarceration and increased use of more effective and humane alternatives to deal with crime. It is a nationally recognized source of criminal justice policy analysis, data, and program information.

Vera Institute of Justice

www.vera.org

The Vera Institute of Justice works closely with leaders in government and civil society to improve the services people rely on for safety and justice. Vera develops innovative, affordable programs that often grow into self-sustaining organizations, studies social problems and current responses, and provides practical advice and assistance to government officials in New York and around the world.

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