

SCHSAC: Children of Incarcerated Parents Workgroup

Present: Toni Carter; Harlan Madsen; Brett Grant; John Poupart; Ryan Erdmann; Brian Kopperud; Jeanne Ayers; Day Nastrom; Dawn Beck; Laurel Davis; Joseph Shppard; Naomi Gaines Young; Bill Hutton; Kathy Hedin; Mary McGuire; Devon Gilchrist; Susan Morris; Tyler Winkelman; Tim Thompson

Staff: Anna Lynn; Megan Waltz

Meeting Objectives:

- Listen to experience of formerly incarcerated parents
- Start discussion about Promising Practices
- Compare current Minnesota activities with panel themes and research
- Identify questions for further research

Welcome

The group was asked to introduce themselves and share one hope/dream that they have for the children in their life. All in the room participated including panelists.

- Happy, healthy, college
- Connected to community and people
- A better education than I had
- Exposure to things to help have a better life
- Supported, valued, free to pursue dreams
- Safe – access to opportunity
- Respect for each other work together
- Be kind, active, engaged in working together toward solutions
- Surrounded by peace and love
- Use my resources to make their dreams reality
- Have supports
- They are truthful and equity, and opportunity is actualized
- Attain contact and transition back to community is made possible
- Sense of community and connections
- Health
- Believed, trusted, loved
- Healthy, safe, inspired to keep connections to family and community
- Continue to be unique
- Health; access to opportunity
- Health: spiritual physical and emotional
- S/he is part of and creator of inclusive communities: kindness
- Trauma informed/sensitive education

Panel Discussion of Formerly Incarcerated Parents Facilitated by Lee Buckley, Charles, Joe, Naomi

- “Our children need us.”
- “Stable housing is the key to job and family success at reentry.”

- “Still not connected to family after release. When does the healing begin?”
- “Helpful to know little things about kids (experience in school, life, etc.)”
- “Aunt is not eligible for financial assistance, like we are rewarding kids going to strangers.”
- “There was an excellent program Girl Scouts Beyond Bars” (Had activities to help parents and child bond, to help teens peer-peer. Grant ran out.
- “There was a Parenting Coordinator in the jail who really helped- to find out details about with the kids. Helped set up meetings with the schools, etc. She left and the position was never filled.”
- “There are different resources provided based on gender. In prison- cognitive skills and mental health are a priority. Availability of culturally supportive programs not available.
- Case managers in prison do not ask about children (from panelists experiences)

What is most important/ needed?

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educational/ emotional engagement and stimulation • Spiritual guidance • Extracurricular activities for kids | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transportation • Advocates to speak for children. • Parenting class helped instill how I wanted to community from prison. |
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Panel Debrief

- Acting natural with unnatural acts
- **Lack of social institutions with families (particular regarding Re-Entry)**
 - No coordinating element
 - 87 different ways of doing things
 - Can't “gin” up a model with complex system
 - Re-entry process requires preparation with adequately trained personnel
 - No public will
 - There is nothing available in release planning for how to talk with your child upon re-entry.
 - There is no career path – to support the family.
- **Current Problems or Policy Issues/ Public Understanding**
 - **We need to map inconsistencies:** federal/state/county policies against impact to make intentional strategies around building public will.
 - How do we plan to spread the message and talk about what is not working!? We need to begin to **strategize about public understanding.**
 - County needs to come out with a clear voice.
 - Where is accountability for cutting programs/personnel eg: **parenting coordinator at Shakopee Women's Prison** – Can counties take up the slack and pay for this type of position?
 - Changing perception of both system and individuals eg: worst of worst
 - Different levels – different will building strategies
- **RE-ENTRY NEEDS / HOUSING:**
 - Can we **compare transitions** from hospital and/or Military Re-Entry to prison/jail transition? Where does this thinking get us?
 - Housing seems to be more critical than, or as critical as, jobs when leaving the prison. And if you are homeless- you may be in violation of parole/probation and be sent back to prison.

- Need to help re-integrate after incarceration and need to help coordinate connection with schools/parenting responsibilities
- **STARTING POINT (FRAMING COMPLEX SET OF SYSTEMS AND PROBLEMS)**
 - Has to start at arrest with asking questions: do you have children? Where are they? What do they need? Flagging and getting people involved at point of arrest
 - Could we work with Sheriffs to ask and connect with social services?
 - Have to keep in mind- average stay in jail is 7.5 days.
 - There is also a fear about county systems- families worry about getting into the foster care system
 - How do we implement a coordinated multi-gen approach: child – parent – caregiver
 - Could case managers be the glue at visits and upon release? Does every child with a parent incarcerated qualify for a case manager?
- **Dream Big:** Family reunification starts with the end in mind
- **Treat ACE as the center** of this work. It is about building resilience and reducing ACES.

Promising Practices

Each member of the working group was asked to read one of five articles for this conversation:

1. [The Bill of Rights for Children of Incarcerated Parents technical assistance project:](#)
2. [Model Practices for Parents in Prisons and Jails, Reducing Barriers to Family Connections](#), National Institute of Corrections, Urban Institute and Community Works
3. [Parent-Child Visiting Practices in Prisons and Jails, A synthesis of research and practice](#). Urban Institute
4. [A Shared Sentence: The devastating toll of parental incarceration on kids, families and communities](#). Annie E. Casey Foundation
5. [Webinar- Promising and Innovative Practices for children of Incarcerated Parents: Arrest through Pre-Adjudication](#)

Insights

- There should be some sort of assessment at point of arrest to identify parenting role and caregiver role
- Pathways to Employment: One formerly incarcerated panelist told us explicitly that in her experience, housing is key. She said that 8-10 people in Shakopee went back to prison because of housing insecurity and the crisis that comes along with that.
- We don't ask questions re: parenting at point of arrest

Relativity –

- If we ask questions about parenting/caregiving – what comes next? How do we get from the questions to actually caring for the children?
- Is it possible to do a continuous quality improvement or mapping process around children of incarcerated parents?

What's happening in MN?

- Washington County Youth Service Group
- Reentry Assistance Program- integrated approach. (Brian K)

Questions/Recommendations

- Can we ID champions in counties to pull partners together?

- Can we link data of incarcerated parents to housing and substance use data?
- How do we have the conversation about what's not working?
- Learning Communities around promising practices
- How does Section 8 Housing policy affect recidivism? What are the rules about having a felony and how does that effect housing availability for those impacted by incarceration?
- How do we map inconsistencies in policies? Those that impact kids and incarcerated parents separately and together? Admin or programming
- What is happening with Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) around job planning for those who are incarcerated? How is MN spending this funding?
- How do we raise public understanding?
- Do counties start or continue opioid treatment in jail? Yes some jails are doing this.
- Are children automatically on MFIP/ MA?
- How do we find those kids, to offer support? Can we map the different intersections (e.g. point of arrest....)
- Can we find out what promising practices counties currently involved in?

Meeting Assessment

What worked and what didn't in this meeting?

- Folks liked dividing the articles
- People liked the external facilitation of the panel
- What didn't work well in this meeting?
- So many people left early that it effected the promising practices conversation
- Time of day