

Centerforce

Children of Incarcerated Parents:

The Missing Link of the Reentry Puzzle

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**Children of Incarcerated Parents:
The Missing Piece of the Reentry Puzzle**

On October 23, 2011, Centerforce convened a symposium of national experts in research and services for Children with Incarcerated Parents (CIP), as a part of its Pre-Conference Institute leading up to its 2011 National Inside Out Summit. The symposium was titled, Children of Incarcerated Parents, the Missing Link of the Reentry Puzzle. The purpose of the symposium was to promote thoughtful steps that can be taken to shift the framework of policies that impact children with incarcerated parents, including primarily reentry, criminal justice and community service systems.

FORMAT OF SYMPOSIUM

The format of the symposium was designed to lead participants through an understanding of the emerging research, current best practices and flagship policy initiatives for the benefit of children of incarcerated parents. The morning session included a panel discussion on emerging findings in the field of research around CIP. This was followed by a panel discussion by leaders in program services and advocates for macro systems level changes. The second half of the symposium guided break-out groups through discussions about real-world steps that could be taken in the participants' local political environments. The goal was to empower participants to promote systems changes in the reentry field that reflect an awareness of the impact of incarceration and reentry on children and families. Group discussions were summarized, reported back to the larger audience, and aggregated into a series of policy recommendations tailored specifically for practitioners in the field. The symposium was attended by 75 participants, including 18 professionals who participated in panel presentations and facilitation. Brief bios of the panelists and facilitators are included as an appendix to this report.

WELCOME MESSAGE

The day began with a welcome by Carol F. Burton, Executive Director of Centerforce. Burton has spent over 20 years working with children and families of the incarcerated, in Michigan, New York and California. Most of the attendees, panelists and moderators for the symposium also have long histories of careers dedicated to serving Children of Incarcerated Parents. Burton thanked participants for traveling for the institute and for actively sharing their expertise and their perspectives throughout the day.

PROJECT WHAT

The day proceeded with a presentation by youth members of Project WHAT!. They told their stories explaining how their relationships to their parents had shaped their lives, and how their parents' incarceration shaped those relationships. Project WHAT! is a program of Community Works, and is dedicated to raising awareness about the effects of parental incarceration on children, with the long-term goal of improving services and policies that affect these children. The program trains youth to develop their speaking skills and their personal stories, and provides a supportive community that enables youth to contribute to policies that impact children and families of the incarcerated. The program also employs former children of incarcerated parents to facilitate presentations and to develop curriculum.

***STATE OF RESEARCH, POLICY AND PRACTICE WITH
CHILDREN OF INCARCERATED PARENTS***

Ann Adalist-Estrin made a keynote speech highlighting the evolution of the resources, research and services that have been put into practice to improve the conditions and outcomes of children and families of the incarcerated. The following summary of themes set the stage for the panels and presentations that followed.

- (1) Minimal progress has been made at the policy level to improve systems approaches to Children of Incarcerated Parents (CIP) since the first wave of political awareness of the impact of parental incarceration on children.

Recommended areas of policy change have included: improved visiting systems that facilitate travel of families to the institution, enhanced and supported visiting programs that provide before and after preparation and debriefing, and provision of parenting education and communication classes inside incarcerated settings.

- (2) Children are currently not purposefully included in programming offered by most community based parenting programs tailored to the adult incarcerated population. And most social service systems are unaware of children in their systems who have incarcerated parents.

As a result, there is a lack of coordinated thought and planning whose primary focus is meeting the needs of the children with incarcerated parents, who are the unintended victims of the criminal justice system.

- (3) Trauma and PTSD related to witnessed arrest are observed by practitioners, and are just beginning to be integrated into research studies, leveraging the findings achieved in brain development, stress and child development over the last 20 years.
- (4) In the case of correctional supervision, there has been no initiative by the criminal justice system, and no coordinated response by supporting social

services, to proactively protect the interests of the child during incarceration, or during release and reunification.

THE RESEARCH PANEL

The research panel included researchers from academic institutions from across the country. Each researcher presented a brief overview of their current and pending contributions to the body of knowledge about CIP and their families. Each panelist was also asked questions by the moderator to further expose the nuances of their work.

Highlighted findings and themes from current research:

Racial Divide in Incarceration

- (1) There is growing disparity among racial groups regarding the prevalence of parental incarceration. Overall, 3% of U.S. youth have a parent in prison at any specific point in time. 10% of white children born after 1990, and 50% of African American children growing up after 1990, experience their parent being in incarcerated at some point while they are growing up.

The Impact of Parental Incarceration on Children

- (1) Parental incarceration increases the likelihood for some childhood behavioral outcomes that are themselves predictors of juvenile delinquency (anxiety, depression, aggression). These effects, though statistically significant, are not large, therefore caution needs to be used in interpreting this finding into meaningful social policy and advocacy arenas, in comparison to other risk and resiliency research and programming.
- (2) Risk factors at the family and community levels can be compounded and, when overlapping, increase negative outcomes for children.

The Impact of Incarceration on Parents' Resources, Skills, Ability to Parent

- (1) Women who have been incarcerated tend to have fewer social capital resources and social networks, including few friends, increasing their social isolation, and limiting their ability to overcome socioeconomic challenges during reentry and re-establishment of custodial roles.
- (2) Mothers returning home from prison are much more likely than fathers to have been the sole custody provider prior to prison, and when women return home, they are much more likely to be expected to resume their role as primary caregivers.
- (3) Most mothers in prison report histories of their own trauma, child abuse and domestic violence, which is not always addressed in social programming in the prisons, and is often related to substance use.
- (4) Mothers experiencing incarceration and reentry face some obstacles similar to fathers (employment, effects of separation, substance use), but mothers as a group have different social contexts for those obstacles, such

- as different roles in their families and different types of social networks outside of their families, than their incarcerated father counterparts.
- (5) Women returning home from prison are less likely to find jobs than men returning home from prison, and those women who do find jobs are paid less than their male counterparts.
 - (6) Most mothers in prison will have been dependent on public subsidies for the care of their children prior to their prison experience, and many will not have housing or other public subsidies available to them after prison. In this way, incarceration severely restricts their ability to access the limited resources that served as survival mechanisms for them prior to incarceration.

The Importance of Understanding Complex Dynamics Beneath Statistical Outcomes

- (1) Qualitative research is needed to understand the range of contextual variation in individual family histories and patterns and individual incarceration histories and patterns. This contextual dynamic is especially important in the development of advocacy agendas. Representing negative consequences and outcomes related to the effects of parental incarceration, in isolation of family and social context, and without an understanding of the social pathways that lead to disparate negative outcomes, often leads to stigmatization and indirect re-victimization of the children.
- (2) One significant challenge in research for CIP is understanding the importance of interpreting survey results collected using instruments that are not specifically validated for this population, and the ongoing importance of developing tools that are specific and sensitive to this particular population.
- (3) Another challenge in establishing a link between research and advocacy for CIP, is that non-remarkable data is difficult to get published. The advocacy field, when driven too heavily by published research, is skewed to focus on isolated negative outcomes and does not represent a true picture of whole stories.

THE PRACTICE AND POLICY PANEL

The practice and policy panel included presentations from service providers and advocates for reform from community based organizations and local agencies from across the country. Panelists presented a brief overview of their relevant work in the field of services and systems that impact CIP, and each panelist was also asked questions by the moderator to further explain the nuances of their work.

Highlighted experiences and themes from current best practices:

Adapting Public Systems to Include More Sensitive and Proactive Models for Supporting Families and Children During Incarceration and Reentry

- (1) Family impact statements are a promising vehicle for including the voice of family and children in existing sentencing and reentry systems and protocols.
- (2) Including families impacted by incarceration directly in advocacy and research coalitions greatly improves the content and the success of initiatives.
- (3) Long-term, place-based, neighborhood-specific initiatives that include coordinated wrap-around services that integrate individual, family and social services, with sensitivity to the experience of incarceration, has had some promising early results. Examples of this large-scale initiative include the Safer Return Project in the Garfield Park neighborhood of Chicago.
- (4) Working with probation departments to help families prepare for release, prior to the release, has had anecdotal success in easing the stress, emotional volatility and risk of despondency during post-release transition.
- (5) The State of Connecticut has developed an initiative to redirecting prison funding for community reinvestment in youth and juvenile services in high-risk areas. So far, this has had a promising impact on reducing the prison population in those areas, resulting in an overall net savings of public dollars spent in Connecticut.
- (6) Successful steps toward reform require the political will of leaders and stakeholders, including the will to adapt systems in response to evidence of negative consequences of mass incarceration policies beginning in the 1970's.

Supports to Respond to Family Systems During Incarceration

- (1) Every family has unique relationship communication patterns, coping mechanisms and crisis response, and every child and individual within a family has unique responses to those dynamics. There is not a one size fits all approach to individual supports for children of incarcerated parents.
- (2) While at the Osborne Association in New York, Carol F. Burton developed the 3 M's of families impacted by incarceration, as a framework for understanding how incarceration can impact families differently. This includes understanding the concept of "Making" relationships during or

after incarceration for families that were never previously connected, “Mending” relationships that experienced disruption during incarceration, and “Maintaining” existing relationships that survived the initial experience of incarceration.

- (3) The family’s and child’s experience of the arrest, sentencing and incarceration process, and the access that family and children have to information and contact during those processes, anecdotally seems to significantly impact their ability to manage the incarceration throughout the entire term.
- (4) Co-parenting agreements between the incarcerated parent and the co-parents and/or caregivers on the outside can help maintain relationships, improve perception of parental rights, and reduce feelings of abandonment.
- (5) Ensuring contact visitation during incarceration, supported by child-focused visiting programs, is one of the surest methods to protect family relationships and resiliency.
- (6) Improving connectedness during incarceration, through visitation, phone calls, letter-writing and technological modes of interaction (e.g.: video conferencing) can help to reduce both the child’s experience of abandonment and the parent’s experience of disenfranchisement, and help reduce the ongoing cycle of loss, abandonment, isolation, and rejection between parent and child.
- (7) Development of caregivers guides for families taking over custodial responsibilities during incarceration can help reduce the stress of transition in caregiving.

Parental Skills, Insights and Social Abilities to Assume, Maintain, Develop, Strengthen their Parental Roles During and After Incarceration

- (1) Progress has been made in preparing incarcerated parents to anticipate various ways that their children may experience the period of incarceration and reentry (including mixed feelings and stages of idealization, anger, loyalty, abandonment, etc.). Giving parents empathic insight into the experiences of their children reduces the disappointment and discouragement during difficult periods of adjustment.
- (2) Working with mothers during incarceration to address substance use, trauma, parenting and relationships with children, and following those women through release with long-term case management and housing support, has improved recidivism and successful reunification for some mothers, for example in the MOMS program in Alameda County and the Center for Young Women’s Development in San Francisco.
- (3) Using gender responsive and family oriented assessment and programming at the institutional and macro level in general is seen by practitioners as having a positive effect on results.

Development of Services Specifically Designed for CIP

- (1) Preparing children for the reentry of their parent, including explanation of common thoughts and feelings, changes in feelings over time, and building

skills to communicate those feelings, can help defray negative feedback cycles associated with unrecognized feelings, denial, anger and lack of communication.

- (2) Talking to the children directly about their experiences tells a lot about family patterns and family needs.

BREAKOUT DISCUSSIONS

Participants at the symposium were asked to form small groups to discuss the following questions:

- (1) Describe the services and initiatives that are available in your region to support parents and kids during reentry.
- (2) What are the missing gaps and pieces in those services, obstacles and resources that impact them, and what recommendations for next steps do you have?

After thirty minutes of group discussions, each group leader reported back to the larger audience. The following examples and themes were highlighted in the reports back to the main audience.

Observations, strategies, next steps and recommendations that breakout groups brought back to share with the larger audience:

Shifting Political Will and Increasing What We Expect from our Public Systems

- (1) Most groups noted that regional planning collaboratives with multiple stakeholders would be an essential first step toward building awareness and political will for change, and that a lack of cohesive political awareness is the first obstacle that needs to be overcome.
- (2) One first step toward engaging disparate systems in promotion of CIP friendly protocols is to train those systems in the dynamics and needs of CIP and their families.
- (3) One group indicated that law enforcement training for arrest protocols that minimize child trauma could be a first step toward building momentum for shifts in systems perspectives.
- (4) Groups noted that the perspective and developmental interests of the child can be included in reentry planning, through family impact statements at probation hearings, and through assessment of family and parental responsibilities and challenges during reentry planning. This would help our political systems develop tools to actively recognize these factors in a systematic way.
- (5) One group observed that technology could be used to facilitate contact and relationship building and maintenance with families whose incarceration separates them by great distances that make in-person visits unfeasible.

Improving Service Response to Family Systems Experiencing Crisis Due to Incarceration

- (1) Most groups noted that while there are some emerging programs on the inside to support family and parental goals for the incarcerated parent during incarceration, there are few, if any, model services for how to perform outreach directly to families on the outside and how to design services with the objective of specifically meeting their needs.
- (2) Co-parenting agreements that set out plans for decision making around parenting and family rules while the parent is incarcerated, have been very successful, especially with school-aged children, resulting in a greater sense of involvement and responsibility. This approach can be replicated in conjunction with visitation, parenting class and supportive counseling programs. However, co-parenting agreements have yet to be adapted to reflect specific stages of parenting decisions and engagement in child development processes appropriate to young children aged 0-3. In this younger age group, typical school-aged decisions, such as grade reporting, after-school activity successes and decisions, approaches to discipline and behavioral expectations of the children, and other activity based structures, are not yet applicable. Co-parenting agreements for this group would need to be adapted to reflect age appropriate modalities of parental bonding, caregiving and child development.
- (3) Caregiver resources, outreach and enrollment materials can be provided at all visiting centers, and can also be distributed at all county offices and social service centers where families with CIP may go undetected, such as unemployment departments, affordable housing agencies, and other supportive service providers.
- (4) Funding is needed for childcare for parenting caregivers on the outside during the incarceration, among other supportive services and programs to allow families to cope with transitioning obligations during the incarceration.
- (5) More funding is needed to support service-enriched transportation and visitation services, such as Get on the Bus in California, which transports children from major urban centers to prisons across the state for visitation.

Supporting Parents' Skills, Insights and Social Abilities to Assume, Maintain, Develop, Deepen, Strengthen their Parental Roles During and After Incarceration

- (1) Treatment for drug addiction, underlying unresolved trauma and other related issues, are critical to prevent parental relapse from re-traumatizing and separating child from parent after reentry. Designing family programming that includes extended recovery programs after release is very important.
- (2) Parenting classes for incarcerated parents should be more widely available and should be structured so that they can count towards child welfare requirements and lead toward reunification requirements for parents with legal separation restrictions.

- (3) Funding is needed for childcare for parents resuming custodial caregiving after release, in order to allow them to meet their parenting responsibilities safely and also work through the problem solving steps needed to move beyond obstacles to re-integration into society.
- (4) More housing is needed for returning parents after release.
- (5) More education, training and financial aid is needed for returning parents after release, to give the best possible set of socio-economic supports to allow families to succeed during reentry.
- (6) Systems should evolve to better identify mental health needs and undisclosed trauma that is related to unemployment, substance use, parental neglect, child abuse, and other factors that influence a parent's ability to successfully and responsibly care for their child.
- (7) More programs need to be modeled after San Francisco's Center for Young Women's Development, which works with young mothers in juvenile hall and provides intensive peer-based parenting, supportive services, training, education and employment programs after release.

Increasing the Depth, Breadth and Availability of Services Specifically for CIP

- (1) One group observed that while services for school-aged children are evolving, there are few services for very young children or teenagers with incarcerated parents. The field can build on initial successes with families with school-aged children, to develop more specific programs for these populations.
- (2) Visitation programs that integrate parental education on the inside and that also provide preparatory and "after-services" for kids and caregivers could help facilitate more frequent and more successful visitations with family members.
- (3) One group recommended that school based programs for CIP and their families may be one place to reach "hidden" CIP and their families.
- (4) Child trauma needs to be assessed and services delivered specifically to CIP.

SUMMARY

"There is an inherent architecture of misery in incarceration that the symposium exposed", including the effects that incarceration and separation has on children, adult relationships and communities, said Tara Regan Anderson in her closing summary statements. There is also an inverse relationship between investment in society and investment in criminal justice systems. Our society as a whole is currently investing heavily in incarceration and not enough in social and community services that could prevent the need for criminal justice spending.

The research panel reminded us that despite the increased depth of knowledge and insight we have about the effects of incarceration on children and families, we always have to be vigilant about how that information is publicized and used. We must maintain focus and funding to include community-based participation in our

research, program design and policy advocacy. We must leverage the power of emerging findings in related research fields, such as youth resiliency and child development.

The practice and policy panel reminded us that real reform will require “champions of compassion” and significant political will. We are dependent on advances in research about the negative effects of incarceration, and the solutions emerging in best practices, to develop strong political will. We also learned that there are obvious gaps in public systems coordination that could make the preservation and reunification of family and parent child bonds more likely to survive incarceration, including coordination of visitation with school calendars, transportation schedules and supportive service programming.

Most importantly, this symposium demonstrated that a coalition is building. We are in a position to be able to present our elected officials with a pathway to advocate for change. This is the threshold of great opportunity to carry the message forward to our next generation that investment in parent-child relationships and in families is important, and can be accomplished.

PANELISTS, PRESENTERS AND MODERATORS

Keynote Speaker:

Ann Adalist-Estrin is the director of the National Resource Center on Children and Families of the Incarcerated, at the Family and Corrections Network in Philadelphia. She is a Child and Family Therapist and is a trainer for the Boston University Medical School/ Healthy Steps for Young Children Pediatric Training Program.

Research Panelists:

Sara Wakefield, Ph.D. is an Assistant Professor of Criminology, Law & Society and Sociology at UC Irvine. Her research analyzes the influence of crime and incarceration on the family, social stratification and the transition to adulthood.

Nicolle Parsons-Pollard, Ph.D. is an Associate Professor in the Criminal Justice Program at Virginia State University. Her current research interests include juvenile delinquency, truancy, disproportionate minority contact, and program evaluation.

Jane A. Siegel, Ph.D. is Associate Professor of Criminal Justice and Chair of the Department of Sociology, Anthropology and Criminal Justice at Rutgers University. She is the author of “Disrupted Childhoods: Children of Women in Prison”, and her research includes child abuse, the effect of parental incarceration on children, and risk factors for victimization.

Susan D. Phillips, Ph.D. is an Assistant Professor at Jane Addams College of Social Work at the University of Illinois at Chicago. She has studied ways in which children are affected by the incarceration of parents for the last 20 years.

Nell Bernstein is the author of, "All Alone in the World: Children of Incarcerated Parents", and has continued to combine her award-winning writing and her subject matter expertise to the issue of incarceration and its impact on young people.

Moderator, Carol F. Burton, LMSW is the Executive Director of Centerforce, an agency that provides a broad spectrum of programming for incarcerated individuals, their families and communities impacted by incarceration. Prior to joining Centerforce, she managed many prison programs throughout New York State, while at the Osborne Association, and has led several major studies and program development efforts specifically for families of the incarcerated.

Policy and Practice Panelists:

Trevor Johnson, JD has worked for Connecticut's Judicial Branch for the past 16 years and is currently Regional Manager overseeing Adult Probation services in Southwest Connecticut. He is also an Adjunct Instructor in the Criminology/Criminal Justice Department at Central Connecticut State University.

Joan Johnson, Lieutenant has served over 30 years in law enforcement. During her tenure with the Alameda County Sheriff's Office, she contributed strongly to the development of the MOMS program that provides services for pregnant women and mothers with children under supervision at the Alameda County Jail and during their reentry.

Aileen Keays, MS is a Research & Policy Specialist at the Institute for Municipal & Regional Policy at Central Connecticut State University. For the last three years, Ms. Keays has been managing several projects related to parental incarceration.

Dee Ann Newell has served as a provider of services for adjudicated, disenfranchised and at-risk youth and their families for the past forty years. She has served as a consultant to the Annie E. Casey convening on children of the incarcerated, and as a consultant to the Council of State Governments in the preparation of their recommendations for children of incarcerated parents.

Emily Jenkins, Esq. is the President/ CEO of the Arizona Council of Human Service Providers, an association of 75 agencies that provide behavioral health, child welfare and juvenile justice services. Jenkins served as the chair of the Arizona Children of Incarcerated Parents' Bill of Rights Project in 2007. She also served on the national initiative supported by the Soros Foundation on the needs of children of incarcerated parents.

Claire Walker, Ph.D. is Executive Director of the Pittsburgh Child Guidance Foundation, a grant-maker devoted to promoting the emotional health of children. Since 2003 the Foundation has focused its resources on advocacy for children whose parents are arrested and incarcerated.

Jennifer Scaife is the Reentry Resources Coordinator at the San Francisco Adult Probation Department, and has provided staff support to the Reentry Council of the City & County of San Francisco since July 2010.

Jocelyn Fontaine, Ph.D. is a Research Associate in the Justice Policy Center at the Urban Institute, where her work is focused mostly on prison and jail reentry, community-based initiatives, and program evaluation. In addition, she is the Deputy Director of the District of Columbia Crime Policy Institute.

Moderator, William Eric Waters currently serves as Program Director for Jail-Based Services at the Osborne Association in New York. He previously served as a Program Director of Community-Based Services and created and spearheaded the organization's Interfaith Reentry Network.

Group Feedback Facilitator:

Yali Lincroft, MBA is a private consultant with over 15 years experience in local, state and federal policy and program planning. Her clients include First Focus, the Annie E. Casey Foundation, the American Humane Association, the San Francisco Children of Incarcerated Parents Partnership, the New York Initiative for Children of Incarcerated Parents, the Osborne Association and the San Francisco Mayor's Office of Children, Youth and Family.

Closing Impressions Facilitator:

Tara Regan Anderson, MPP is currently the Grants and Policy Manager at the Office of the San Francisco District Attorney. She has over 10 years experience working with prisoners, their families, and persons recently released from juvenile detention, jails and prisons in California and Connecticut.

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