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Development of a Multisystemic Parent Management Training Intervention for Incarcerated Parents, Their Children and Families

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Abstract

The majority of men and women prison inmates are parents. Many lived with children prior to incarceration, and most have at least some contact with their children and families while serving their sentences. As prison populations have increased in the United States, there has been a renewed interest in finding ways not only to reduce recidivism, but also to prevent incarceration in the first place, particularly amongst the children of incarcerated parents. Positive family interaction is related to both issues. The ongoing development of a multisystemic intervention designed to increase positive family interaction for parents and families involved in the criminal justice system is described. The intervention package currently includes a prison-based parent management training program called Parenting Inside Out (PIO); a prison-based therapeutic visitation program; and complimentary versions of PIO designed for jail and probation and parole settings. Work on other components designed for justice-involved parents, children and for caregivers during reunification from prison is ongoing. Program development has occurred within the context of strong support from the state department of corrections and other key governmental and non-profit sector groups, and support systems have been established to help maintain the interventions as well as to develop complimentary interventions, policies and procedures.

The United States has the highest incarceration rate in the world, with 1 in 100 adults currently behind bars (Pew Center on the States, 2008). This has powerful implications for children and families, as approximately 60% of these incarcerated men and women are parents to minor children, and 44% of men and 64% of women lived with their children prior to incarceration (Mumola, 2000). Recent estimates are that of the 73 million minor children in the U.S. (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000), 2% have an incarcerated parent, twice the percentage of the child population in other major industrialized countries such as the United Kingdom (Murray, 2007) and Australia (Quilty, Butler, & Levy, 2005). During the past few years, the dramatic rise in the number of incarcerated women, most of whom were the primary caregivers of their children prior to incarceration (Travis, McBride, & Solomon, 2005; Gabel & Johnston, 1995), has brought the children of incarcerated parents to the attention of both U.S. policymakers (e.g., President George W. Bush in several “State of the Union” addresses) and researchers (e.g., Davies, Brazzell, La Vigne, & Shollenberger, 2008; LaLiberte & Snyder, 2008).

During a U.S. prison sentence, which typically is three to seven years (e.g., U.S. Department of Justice, 2004), most inmates continue to have some contact with their children (80% of men, 90% of women; Morton & Williams, 1998). Specifically, 62% of male and 78% of female inmates report monthly contact, with letter writing (50% of men, 66% of women) and telephone calls (42% of men, 54% of women) the most frequent communication media (Mumola, 2000). Monthly in-person visits are reported by 21% of men and 24% of women. Clearly, many

incarcerated parents are still very much an active presence not only in the minds of their children, but also in their daily lives.

The ongoing connection between many incarcerated parents and their children suggests that regardless of the traditional belief that incarcerated individuals should not be viewed either as parents or as serving in a parental role (Jeffries, Menghraj, & Hairston, 2001), many inmates are not only parents in name, but also in function. Whether or not the parenting that occurs from behind prison walls significantly shapes the life of a child, and further, whether constructive parenting from prison can mediate deleterious impacts on the child, remain critical unanswered questions. Studies of parenting before and after prison are also lacking (Van Whitlock & Lubin, 1999; Wright & Seymour, 2000). In any case, the critical demands of parenthood, such as ongoing supervision and monitoring of child behavior and whereabouts, cannot be met while incarcerated unless a parent happens to reside in one of the few U.S. programs that allow only very young children to stay with their incarcerated mother (e.g., Bedford Hills Correctional Facility in New York). Notably, however, other important aspects of parenting are possible from a distance and the families of inmates would likely benefit if these were accomplished successfully, such as positive encouragement for and emotional support of the child and the primary caregiver(s).

Another factor in the recent attention that incarcerated parents and their children have received is broadening public awareness of the increasing expenditure of public monies on incarceration. Beginning in the 1970's, the U.S. justice system has been in a "punishment" phase, where mandatory sentencing has become common across the country, particularly for repeat and/or violent offenders, and rehabilitation has become a secondary consideration (see Eddy & Swanson-Gribskov, 1997). The public expenditures required to finance this strategy have been significant, and in some states, the costs associated with incarceration now rival the cost of public education (e.g., Greenwood, Modell, Rydell, & Chiesa, 1996). Recently, state policymakers have begun to seek alternative approaches. Of keen interest has been a focus not only on finding ways to reduce recidivism, but also on preventing incarceration in the first place.

Key factors thought by many criminal justice policymakers and administrators to be related to both recidivism and prevention are positive family interaction and support. In terms of recidivism, a frequently cited survey conducted by the California Department of Corrections suggested that inmates who had more frequent contact with family members during their incarceration are less likely to return to prison (Holt & Miller, 1972). Although research is limited, family support appears to be related not only to keeping former inmates from returning from prison in the short run (Bales & Mears, 2008) but also to developing avenues that will support success in community and family life, such as finding employment (Visher, Kachnowski, La Vigne, & Travis, 2004; La Vigne & Lawrence, 2002; La Vigne, Visher, & Castro, 2004).

In terms of prevention, longitudinal studies conducted over the past 50 years have demonstrated a significant relationship between parent criminality and criminal justice involvement and later child serious and violent delinquency during late adolescence and early adulthood, with the children of the most criminal parents three to six times more likely than the children with the least criminal parents to become involved in crime (Lipsey & Derzon, 1998; Eddy & Reid, 2003). One of the most frequently hypothesized mechanisms for transmission of antisocial behavior from parent to child is inept parenting skills; conversely, positive and consistent parenting is often discussed as a key factor in breaking the intergenerational transmission of problem behaviors (Patterson, 1982; Patterson, Reid, & Dishion, 1992; Reid, Patterson, & Snyder, 2002). The link between parental incarceration and poor child outcomes is less clear (Eddy & Reid, 2003; Parke & Clarke-Stewart, 2003), but preliminary findings suggest that

parental incarceration may pose additional risk over and above parental criminality for a child displaying antisocial behavior (Murray & Farrington, 2005), at least within some judicial systems (Murray, Janson, & Farrington, 2007). One intervention with the potential to significantly impact not only the social and supportive interactions of an inmate with the adults and children in his or her family, but also the behavior of his or her children, is parenting education and skills training programs that are specifically designed to help meet the unique parenting challenges inherent in serving time in prison and in being released back into the community from prison.

Prison-Based Parenting Programs

The majority of U.S. jurisdictions appear to offer parenting programs in at least some of their correctional institutions (Clement, 1993). However, at any given time, the number of prisons within a state that operate parenting programs may be few, and the number of participating inmates likely to be small. In a survey of prison programming conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau, Morash, Haar, and Rucker (1994) found that only 4% of women and 1% of men reported participating in parenting counseling. Due to unstable funding streams, the longevity of parenting programs in prisons also may be limited. For example, Jeffries et al. (2001) identified 50 programs for incarcerated or ex-offender fathers, but several years later, we found that only 14 were still operating.

Even if prison-based parenting programs are being delivered, little is known about whether these programs make positive impacts on incarcerated parents, their children, or the caregivers of their children. Recent reviewers found only six evaluation studies of parenting programs (Young & Smith, 2000), all of which were of incarcerated mothers. Only three of these studies included a comparison group, and none employed randomization to condition (Moore & Clement, 1998; Showers, 1993; Snyder-Joy & Carlo, 1998). In a literature search, we found only five additional comparison studies (Bayse, Allgood, & Van Wyk, 1991; Block & Potthast, 1998; Harrison, 1997; Landreth & Lobaugh, 1998; Wilczak & Markstrom, 1999), four of which used randomization, and three of which focused on men. The interventions used in this collection of studies varied from generic parenting discussion groups to modifications of the sparsely studied parenting programs. All studies included the pre- and post-intervention measurement of parental cognitions, and most found at least one significant and positive effect on such. Measurement of child and parental behaviors, however, was rare. Probably most troubling of all, the interventions used in these studies were inadequately described. A related area where little systematic work has been done is the development of complimentary interventions outside of prison to support and expand any gains achieved through prison-based parenting programs. While 28% of the jurisdictions in the Clement (1993) survey reported some type of program for the caregivers of the children of incarcerated parents, these have been rarely described in the literature.

Intervention Development

It was within the context described above that we began our work eight years ago on the development of a multisystemic intervention for incarcerated parents, their children, and the caregivers of their children. This work has taken place within Oregon, a U.S. state on the Pacific Ocean rim that in 2000 had a population of 3.4 million people (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000), including nine thousand adults who were incarcerated in state prisons (Department of Administrative Services, 2008). At the time, we were focused on the development and testing of parenting interventions with other populations, but a few unexpected guideposts steered us towards work in prisons.

We were in the midst of conducting the Paths Study, a follow-up during young adulthood of a sample of high rate juvenile offending males who had participated in a randomized controlled

trial of a multisystemic program that had yielded very promising results (Chamberlain & Reid, 1998; Eddy & Chamberlain, 2000; Eddy, Whaley, & Chamberlain, 2004). Each December, one of our traditions was to send holiday well wishes via the mail to all study participants, and in the year 2000, there seemed to be an unusually high number of cards that were to be sent to young men in correctional institutions. The following week, we met with visiting colleagues from New York who had just begun a study of incarcerated fathers. While parent criminality had always been of interest in our past work (Reid et al., 2002), parental incarceration had not. Given the significant number of participants in our Paths study in prison or jail at that time, our first response after the meeting was to review how many of these incarcerated young men were parents. We found that the majority were biological parents, and that many participants had also served in parent roles with the non-biological children of their intimate partners. A few days later, we received an invitation to join a new workgroup formed by the Oregon Department of Corrections (DOC) called the Children of Incarcerated Parents Project (CIP). Suddenly, the issue of incarcerated parents and their children had come to the forefront, and we faced a set of issues that we could no longer ignore.

We joined CIP, whose members included staff from a diverse array of governmental departments and non-profit child and family service organizations throughout the state. While the membership diversity of CIP was impressive, the research and academic community at large was underrepresented, particularly in the area of child and family intervention. An area of interest that came in focus quickly was the desire and need for an evidence-based parenting program for parents in prison. At the time, funding an institution-based program through existing funding streams seemed possible in both the short and long runs, while funding other highly desirable programs, such as community based programs for men and women on probation and parole, for their children, and for their other caregivers, posed significant challenges.

Our expertise was in developing parenting programs for use in community settings. Many of the cognitive-behaviorally based “parent management training” (PMT) programs developed by researchers and clinicians at our center, the Oregon Social Learning Center (OSLC), since the 1960’s had been shown to positively impact both parents and children in the short and the long run (Reid et al., 2002). All OSLC PMT programs had a primary focus on instructing, encouraging and supporting parents in the use of effective skills with children in the areas of monitoring, positive encouragement, discipline, and family problem solving, and these areas of parenting were all of great interest to CIP members. It seemed likely that our experience with community-based programs would be helpful to CIP in terms of informing the institution-based work, but to what extent was unknown.

An initial review by CIP of existing prison-based parenting programs did not yield promising results. We found no commonly accepted best practices for parenting education and skills training with the inmate population. The programs we did find did not appear to be grounded in the recent scientific literature on parenting. It appeared that the best strategy might be to create a new program that addressed the unique needs of incarcerated parents and that was informed by existing evidence-based programs for parents such as PMT. A subcommittee of the workgroup was formed to work on this and related issues.

During the spring of 2001, the Oregon state legislature passed a bill charging CIP to formally develop recommendations to present back to the legislature concerning effective programs and policies designed to improve parent-child relationships while parents are involved in the criminal justice system (CIP, 2002). Not long after, the Director of the DOC and his leadership team visited OSLC and invited us to collaborate with DOC staff and institutions on the development of a new parenting program for incarcerated parents. We accepted, but with the caveat that the development process be conducted within the context of a partnership, with

each partner contributing significant resources towards the desired outcome from the onset. We did not want this work to be funded solely by a research grant, which from our experience often led to the delivery of the program ending when the grant ended. The DOC accepted this proposal, and we began our development work with a jointly funded team of researchers and practitioners. The team was to work under the support and guidance of the CIP and the Director of the DOC and his staff, and would be informed by the knowledge and experiences of DOC administrators, correctional officers, parenting instructors, counselors, and inmates and their families.

The initial agreements made at the outset of the collaboration were a crucial aspect of all that followed. To be successful in developing and instituting a new program within a system, definitive leadership and solid resource support are needed from both direct service delivery staff as well as from middle and top administrative staff (Heller, 1992). Maintaining a new program over time requires lines of funding that are part of the usual system budget. Defending the existence of a program in lean times requires the recognition that no single program can reasonably address all needs, but that a given program must effectively and efficiently address some needs, and should have data to demonstrate such. Fortunately, we were beginning with the existence of layered leadership and support, a commitment to seek out and develop solid long term funding streams, and the shared understanding that this particular program was just one part of what was hoped would someday be a comprehensive, multisystemic approach for improving outcomes for incarcerated parents, their children, and their families. The systems of primary interest were the family system, comprising the inmate, his or her child(ren), and the various caregivers involved; and the social service system, comprising the corrections department, nonprofit service delivery agencies, and child welfare. Development work has proceeded in two major phases, described below.

Phase 1: Developing an Evidence-Informed Parenting Program for Delivery in Prison

The first step in the development process was to complete a thorough review of the parenting programs that already were being delivered in prisons. On the national level, we conducted a literature review, gathered program lists from relevant professional organizations, and searched government and non-profit websites to find programs. If the published information we found did not adequately describe the characteristics of a program, we tried to interview a staff member from an institution or non-profit that was reportedly delivering the program, and we asked for any additional written materials that would help us understand the work that was being done. Through these methods, we found 28 programs conducted in 19 states, and subsequently interviewed 38 individuals and conducted three site visits. On the state level, we contacted each DOC institution and asked if there were any parenting programs currently being delivered. We found 13 programs, and subsequently interviewed the instructor of each program, collected any written information that instructors were willing to share, and site visited many of the programs.

The results of our review are listed in Table 1. A typical prison-based parenting program provided information about generic communication skills, parenting techniques, and child development. Special parent-child visitation opportunities and a focus on parenting in prison were a part of most programs in the national survey, findings which were similar to the findings of Clement (1993) and Jeffries et al. (2001). However, these aspects were rare in the programs within our state. An important finding that we shared with Jeffries et al. (2001) was that most of the programs we identified were developed “in-house” and in relative isolation by a parenting instructor; rarely had a program been developed through a team approach that included both scientist and practitioner members. In terms of basic delivery characteristics, the typical program in both our national and state surveys was group based, met once a week for several

hours, and lasted for several months, findings that were congruent with both Clement (1993) and Jeffries et al. (2001).

The second step was to collect information directly from potential consumers, users, and benefactors of a parenting program. We conducted focus groups with current and former men and women inmates, the caregivers of children impacted by incarceration, and prison-based parenting instructors, and we conducted two state-wide surveys of inmates. Of greatest interest during the focus groups was to learn whether current programs were failing to address important areas or to develop needed skills for incarcerated parents. We encountered great enthusiasm within all groups for the development of a parenting program specifically designed for inmates. The keenest interest across all groups focused on components related to parenting from prison, whether that meant how to write an appropriate and encouraging letter to children of various ages, or how to help make a phone call go well, or how to have a positive visit with a child given the noisy and potentially volatile circumstances of a prison visiting room. Within each of these communication modes, inmates were most interested in whether or not, as well as how to most effectively, guide, limit set, and discipline their children. The second area of highest interest for all three groups concerned how to negotiate the transition from prison back to the community in terms of family and parent-child relationships. Inmate fathers were particularly concerned about how to overcome difficult and complex relationships with the caregivers of their children both during and after prison, which often severely or completely limited parent-child contact.

The state-wide surveys were conducted through the CIP and administered by the DOC Research and Evaluation Unit. The purpose of each survey was to assess the current needs in the incarcerated parent population, and to document baseline characteristics of inmate families prior to launching the various initiatives being developed by CIP, including the new parenting program (Eddy, Martinez, Newton, Whaley Bridges, & Bellaty, 2002). Findings from the survey indicated that the Oregon inmate population appeared similar to the national population (Mumola, 2000) in terms of child and family characteristics and parent-child contact while in prison. Approximately 70% of women and 60% of men in Oregon prisons reported being parents of minor children. Extrapolating from the data and from prison census information, approximately 15,000 children in our state had parents who were serving time in prison. An important organization that assisted us in understanding the survey results as well as the various other inputs we received was the Lifers Club at the Oregon State Penitentiary, whose members not only helped us conceptualize what a parenting program should look like within a prison setting, but also helped build a strong base of support for parenting programs within the inmate population.

The third step was to share the information we had learned with CIP, develop an outline for the parenting program, and begin curriculum development and piloting. No additional potential program content areas were added by CIP. We built a preliminary outline that included the topics we found in our program search and that focus group members added; gave the new program a name: "Parenting Inside Out"; and in the fall of 2001, began to sketch out intervention sessions. The goal was to create a program that not only provided inmates with knowledge and skills that would assist them in parenting from prison, but that also would help inmates prepare for whatever role as parents they would play when they return home. As in our past group-based parenting work, each session was to include brief lectures, small and large group discussion, practice exercises, and role plays pertinent to the topic of the day. In addition, new elements needed to be created that enabled the practice of critical parenting skills in the absence of day-to-day interaction with children. Completed homework would be reviewed at the beginning of each session, and new homework would be assigned at the end of each session.

As the preliminary set of sessions was being created, the DOC was proposing to the state legislature that funds be allocated directly to support the delivery of the parenting program that we were developing. This proposal was eventually approved, which provided the DOC with two years of funding to support program delivery. A key decision at this point was whether to operate the program through our research center, or to partner with a service delivery non-profit. For sustainability reasons, we ultimately partnered with the non-profit Pathfinders of Oregon, a group which had been delivering cognitive skills training programs throughout the DOC system for over a decade. Through Pathfinders, we subsequently hired our first parenting instructors, whom we called “coaches”.

Based on past experience, to be hired, coaches had to have the ability to read and write at a high school level; had to have prior experience teaching adults; and had to be willing to view inmates as parents, to follow a structured lesson plan, to teach parents new skills as specified, to be observed while teaching, and to receive direct and specific feedback on their teaching and to modify their behavior if necessary. Ideally, coaches had some college training in human development, social work, psychology, or a related field; had extensive parenting experience; had several years experience teaching parenting; and had experience working within a prison environment. The primary duties for coaches were (1) to thoroughly prepare for each session, (2) to deliver each session with fidelity, (3) to provide feedback on homework, and (4) to refer and connect inmates to additional services on an as needed basis. Both time to thoroughly prepare for teaching, and time to read and provide feedback on homework, were compensated, which was novel for prison-based parenting instructors.

Coaches were not to serve as case managers or as counselors. This was also somewhat novel, in the sense that we found that it was relatively common for prison-based parenting instructors to be spending a great deal of time serving as advocates for their students. While an extremely important function, this tended to focus coach time on a few parents, and took time away from activities that served all parents, such as preparation to teach. We felt that counseling and case management were more appropriately carried out by another member of the team (see below). The coaches were trained by our development team, and actively supervised by the senior DOC psychologist on the team. Further, coaches would be observed monthly in the classroom by a “master” coach and receive feedback on their adherence to the curriculum and to the teaching principles in which they had been trained.

From this point on, the curriculum was developed and refined through an iterative process that included the team writing a draft of a session, the coaches delivering the session to inmates, inmates and coaches providing feedback to the writing team, and subsequent revisions by the team. Eventually, a coach was hired who had extensive experience not only in training parenting instructors in similar curricula, but also had graduate-level training in instructional design. After this coach gained experience in teaching the curriculum, she was hired to be the primary writer on the team, and her experience, skills and vision brought cohesion to the developing program.

The end result was that by 2003, we had created a 36 session parent management training program for inmates informed by both scientific and practice evidence about intervening with parents (Schiffmann, Eddy, Martinez, Leve, & Newton, 2008). Not only did the program utilize the basic elements of standard OSLC PMT (Forgatch & Martinez, 1999), but also the elements from research and from practice that were incorporated into the program met a recent “consensus viewpoint” from parent education practitioners on the integral components of parent education (Smith, Cudaback, Goddard, & Myers-Walls, 1994). The program proceeded across the course of 12 weeks, with three-hour meetings held three times per week. The major foci of the program include effective communication and parenting knowledge and skills

building, positive norm setting, parenting from a distance, and preparing for the transition home (see Table 2).

The program was grounded in adult learning theory (Galbraith, 1990; Schunk & Zimmerman, 2006) and was designed specifically for the adult student or “learner”, focusing on real-life, problem-oriented topics, skills training, and cooperative learning processes in which adult learners are encouraged to share and receive from the rich pool of knowledge and experiences each learner brings to the classroom (Brookfield, 1987). These processes include large and small group discussions of case studies, critical incident analysis, role-play practice, team projects, collaborative peer review, and ongoing exercises that provide opportunities for constant skills practice, such as the adoption of teddy bears that must be monitored, supervised, and cared for 24 hours per day throughout the duration of the program.

Congruent with adult learning theory, the program employed a learner-centered design. This meant that throughout the program, coach and learner collaborate in the development of learning goals and methods for attaining those goals. A collaborative mode of instruction has the potential to reduce attrition, lower learner resistance, and increase motivation, communication, and transfer of learning (e.g., Webster-Stratton, 1998). Finally, the program employed an outcomes-based model of instruction (Stiehl & Lewchuk, 2002). In an outcomes-based model, the focus of instruction is on what the learner needs to be able to do outside the classroom in their rest-of-life roles as prosocial parent, citizen, employee, and life-long learner. These roles drive the content and skills taught, as well as dictate performance tasks, which are designed to elicit application of the content and skills to the parent’s life. Thus the content of the curriculum takes into account that parents do not just need effective communication skills, but they need to know how to use these skills in order to talk with their child, the other caregivers of their child, their parole officer, their child welfare worker, and their child’s teacher. The performance tasks specifically elicit performance around scenarios common to the lives of justice-involved parents.

To compliment and strengthen this program, we created two additional components. The first was a weekly open support group for parents. Inmates who were taking or had graduated from the parenting course were welcome to attend the group if desired, which offered the chance to discuss individual needs and problems in a way that was not possible within the context of the delivery of a structured curriculum. This component was vital to the success of the program, for without it, coaches struggled continually with balancing time to talk and process with instruction and skill building time. With this resource available, lengthy and complex discussions that were specific to individuals could be placed in a “parking lot” for later discussion in the support group.

The second was a therapeutic visitation program available only to graduates of the 12 week program. The purpose of this component was to provide parents the opportunity to continually review and practice the skills they had learned, not only with each other during weekly meetings, but also in special visits with their children and the caregivers of their children. The coach hired to conduct the visitation program had extensive experience working both in child welfare and with women on probation and parole, and had a higher level of training in counseling and client advocacy than a typical coach. Besides preparing for and running the weekly meetings, a primary task for this coach was to contact inmate families, conduct home visits if possible, prepare for and facilitate inmate parent-family visits in prison, and serve as an advocate for inmates in a variety of contexts, including with the child welfare system. Visits were videotaped, and after the visit, the coach and inmate reviewed the video and chose examples of interactions that went well and that went not so well during the visit. These video examples were then shared during the next therapeutic visitation session, with the group serving

as a forum for positive reinforcement for what went well, and providing assistance with problem solving for what did not go well.

During the course of the development of these various components, with the strong support of the DOC, the state legislature passed a bill mandating that a significant percentage of state funded psychosocial intervention programs have a scientific evidence base that supports their use, and that this percentage would increase over time. In keeping with this legislation, as well as with our mission as a research team, while we were developing the parenting program we were simultaneously pursuing grant funding to support randomized controlled trials that would enable us to find out how well each component of the new program was working in terms of outcomes for inmates, children, and the caregivers of children. Several pilots of the final version of the 12 week program demonstrated high consumer satisfaction amongst inmates, acceptance of and strong support for the program by correctional officers and administrators, and suggested improved inmate behavior during and following the program (Eddy, 2002). In 2003, we received federal funding to launch The Parent Child Study (PCS).

PCS was designed to test the immediate and short-term impacts of the first component of our intervention, the 12 week prison-based Parenting Inside Out program. Interested incarcerated mothers ($n = 200$) and fathers ($n = 200$) with 6 to 9 months remaining on their sentences were to be randomized to receive the 12 week program or to a “services as usual” control condition. Participants would be assessed before and after the program as well as six months after release from prison. A sample of the elementary-school aged children of inmate participants and their caregivers would be invited to participate as well. Over the past few years, we have recruited 367 inmates and 151 caregivers and their children. The final follow-up data collection, at six months following inmate release from prison, was completed in early 2008, and we are currently preparing to conduct outcome analyses.

Phase 2: Developing an Intervention Support System and a Coordinated Set of Interventions

While our team was working on the development of Parenting Inside Out, other teams working under the CIP umbrella were developing recommendations for complimentary interventions, policies, and procedures designed not only to improve inmate parent-child relationships, but also to reduce the trauma experienced by children due to the involvement of their parent in the criminal justice system (CIP, 2002; 2004). The recommendations applied to one of more of the five stages that a justice-involved parent and his/her family experience: arrest, judicial proceedings, jail, prison, and probation or parole. An illustration of how the work we were involved in related to these stages is provided in Figure 1, and is further described below.

As the work of CIP was in full swing, there was a realization by members that a new group was needed within the state if the work initiated by CIP was to continue over the long run, namely an independent, non-profit advocacy group dedicated to improving the lives of the children of incarcerated parents. Thus, in 2004, the Children’s Justice Alliance (CJA) was created, with members of the policy, practitioner, and research communities in Oregon, including several authors on this paper, as well as leaders of the DOC, serving on the Board of Directors.

CJA became the nexus around which further intervention development work continued. The first major accomplishment of the group was to open a “Center for Family Success” within the largest metropolitan area in Oregon (i.e., Portland) in a former Y.M.C.A. building that had recently been renovated by DOC inmate work crews. Located in a neighborhood with a high number of returning ex-inmates, the Center functions as a service hub for families involved with the criminal justice system. Center staff members provide assistance with basic needs, such as clothing, food, and housing; find referrals for physical and mental health services, including alcohol and drug abuse treatment programs; seek out and distribute information about

job opportunities and training programs; and maintain a varied schedule of educational and recreational activities for children and families. To assist parents in fulfilling their justice system obligations, a probation and parole office was established within the Center.

The Center became a place to engage new community partners, and one of the first and most significant was the county child welfare system, a branch of the state Department of Human Services (DHS). Approximately 40% of the children in foster care in Oregon have a parent who is or has been involved in the DOC (Bellaty & DeHaan, 2002), so finding ways for these two systems to work together on issues related to the children of incarcerated parents is crucial to success. A contract from DHS to work with women inmates who had involvement in both DHS and the DOC led to the creation of a community version of the Parenting Inside Out program we developed in phase 1. Development of this version proceeded in a similar fashion to that on the first program, and included literature reviews, focus groups with pertinent constituencies, initial development, writing, piloting, and modification. Once this version existed, there was high demand for the program from agencies that worked with the caregivers of the children of incarcerated parents as well as parents on probation or parole.

The existence of the Center in a specific county, and particularly one with a dense urban population, attracted the attention of the leadership and staff of the county jail, and work on another version of Parenting Inside Out was created, for delivery in jail settings. This was a challenging version to create, due to a number of reasons, most notably the high turnover rate of the inmate population and the general lack of calm and predictability that was present in the prison settings within which we had been working. Again, we followed our basic program development model to create this version, and conducted piloting in both urban and rural jails to assist in adaptation and refinement. While this work was in progress, CJA was launching a new state-wide initiative, an interactive workshop called “And How Are the Children?” designed to actively engage leadership at the county level in issues related to the children of incarcerated parents (Ortega, 2005). Through these workshops, leadership at additional county jails became interested in a parenting program for their facilities, which led to an expansion of piloting sites for the jail program. Several counties also became interested in opening their own Center for Family Success to serve as hubs for serving local justice-involved families.

With versions of parenting programs developed for delivery within key areas of the criminal justice system, with federal funding, we have recently begun work on the creation of an intervention that directly intervenes with the children of incarcerated mothers (Shortt, 2007). We have chosen to initially target a critical time in the relationship between mother and child, the reunification period before and after release from prison. The reunification of mothers and their children after incarceration places a high demand on both parents’ and children’s emotional skills, given the distress each has experienced in life, particularly during the incarceration period.

Women are more likely than men to express fear and concern about reunification, given the lack of contact with their child(ren) (Bourdouris, 1996). Children may display negative emotions around reuniting with their mother because of minimal contact and disruption in the relationship (Poehlmann, 2005; Travis et al., 2005). Reunification calls for an adeptness in emotional skill, and both the mother and child may not have had opportunities to successfully develop these skills before or during incarceration. As such, reunification can prompt high levels of negative emotions for both mother and child, counteracting hopes of successful reunification. The negative emotions also make it extremely difficult for mothers to resume the parenting role and for children to accept and benefit from a change in parental oversight (Travis et al., 2005), particularly if the child has lived with a family caregiver who disapproves of the mother (Faith, 1993).

The program we are developing continues the work of the components developed in phase 1. New components will be added to provide incarcerated mothers with the skills necessary to help their children work through their emotions around reunification, appropriately acknowledge these emotions, and to understand their feelings and bring themselves to a calmer state. At the same time, we will be working with the child to help them become aware of, recognize, and appropriately deal with the emotional distress they are each experiencing, particularly in regard to their experience of their mother's incarceration. Caregivers to the child will also receive an intervention aimed at promoting positive emotion socialization behaviors to begin to prime the child for their mother's return. Given that successful implementation of the maternal behavior and emotion parenting skills as part of the enhanced program cannot be fully developed within the prison, we will continue to work with mother, child and caregiver following release through local Centers for Family Success. This approach provides practice and support to not only bolster mother and child to use their emotion skills to elicit a more emotionally adaptive home environment, but also within this more adaptive emotional climate, to strengthen maternal parenting skills taught in prison, particularly positive encouragement, supervision and discipline.

Closing Thoughts

The development, delivery, and maintenance of multisystemic interventions depend on the collaboration of a wide variety of leaders and staff in both the public and private sectors. Ultimately, however, the most important collaborations are between individual service providers and their clients, and between clients and their families. It is only through successful collaborations at these levels that positive impacts for children can be realized. In that spirit, we end our discussion with the presentation of an illustrative case study of an incarcerated mother.

Susan was an incarcerated 27 year-old mother of two children. A parenting coach had been working for several months with Keith, the father of Susan's children, in a Parenting Inside Out (PIO) group at a minimum security prison for men when he disclosed that his children's mother was incarcerated at the state correctional facility for women. The coach also taught in that institution, and decided to reach out to Susan directly and offer support through PIO. During an initial meeting, Susan was indignant that Keith had disclosed her personal situation, and she was unwilling to share much about her children. Susan was typical of most mothers entering PIO in that she abused substances before coming to prison, was distrusting of authority or helping figures, and was not inclined to seek help or show signs of weakness. When the coach suggested taking PIO so that she and Keith could be more connected about their approach to parenting, she declined the invitation. One month later, when she found out that completing PIO was a gateway to facilitating greater involvement in children's visitation activities at the prison, she agreed to participate.

Initially, Susan had a difficult time getting along with the PIO coach. She questioned the experience level of the coach, expressed serious suspicion that her participation was a waste of time, and was reluctant to engage with other members of the PIO group. The coach was patient, and gave Susan time and space to get more comfortable with the group and the curriculum. Eventually, Susan became engaged with the material and began to reach out to the coach individually, asking for help around her own personal challenges. Shortly into the program she decided that she needed to be in a substance use treatment program and asked the PIO program staff to help her advocate for herself. With support over a period of months, she was ultimately successful and was admitted into treatment.

In the meantime, Susan became an active participant in her PIO group, freely gave advice to others, and opened up about her sense of powerlessness in trying to support her two young

children from prison. As her affect softened, she began talking about how difficult her interactions were with her daughter during their monthly visits. Susan's daughter, Julia (age 9), was a handful during visits. She frequently cried, whined or acted out whenever Susan gave any attention to Kyle (age 5). Susan generally responded by giving in to Julia by taking Kyle off her lap, giving attention to Julia, and making promises to Julia about all the fun things they would do together once she got home. Susan wanted the visits to go well, and she was constantly wrestling with her own guilt about the life choices that led to her incarceration and separation from her children. Because of this, she had a difficult time setting limits with Julia while remaining positive and consistent, feeling instead like Julia's behavior was to be expected given her mistakes as a parent. Things came to a head during one particular visit when Julia pinched Kyle while he was on Susan's lap which caused him to cry and her mother to speak harshly to her. Julia cried and then feeling frustrated and guilty, Susan cried too.

As she discussed her visitation experiences during group sessions, the group and coach offered emotional support, but more importantly helped frame visits as an opportunity for her to try out many of the skills she had been learning during group sessions in role play activities with other parents. Susan felt particularly motivated to see each visit as a unique opportunity to utilize the parenting skills she had been learning when she realized that during their incarceration, a number of her classmates had had much less contact with their children than she had. Susan began working with the coach and other group members to strategize about how she could manage visitation differently.

During the next visit, Susan indicated to Julia that they were going to try something new during the visit. Susan explained to Julia that she understood how hard it was to share their time together with her brother. She said it was okay to feel sad and frustrated about that, and to even ask for what she wanted, but it was not okay to hit, pinch, or make such a fuss that no one enjoyed the time together. Susan said they would try something new instead. Susan would still give time and attention to both children but they would take turns sitting next to Susan or on her lap. After 10 minutes, they would switch places. Susan would use the clock on the visiting room wall to track the time. When it was Julia's turn to sit next to Susan or on her lap, she could tell Susan exactly how she felt by saying, "I feel...when I want your attention and I don't have it. What I would like now that it is my turn is..." Every time Julia used that phrase instead of crying, fussing, hitting or pinching, Susan would offer praise and encouragement, along with validation of Julia's feelings and desires, even if she couldn't give Julia exactly what she was asking for. Susan told Julia that if she could use that phrase three times during their visit together instead of crying, hitting, pinching or fussing, that she would write Julia a special story and send it to her in the mail the next week. Even though the visit wasn't perfect, by the end Julia had earned the special story and Susan had given her positive encouragement and validated her feelings while still setting limits and expectations for appropriate behavior. Because the visit ended more positively than it had in the past, Susan began to feel more in control of her parenting.

Many challenges persisted for Susan during the program, but she worked to stay engaged. When her mother, who was the primary caregiver for Susan's children during her time in prison, missed two monthly visits in a row, Susan strategized with other group members and parenting coach about how to apply her skills with her mother during phone calls and in letters. When Susan had an altercation with her cellmate about cleanliness of their shared space, she asked her classmates to help her role play how to use the effective communication skills she had been learning in class so that next time, she could have a better interaction with her cellmate. She beamed later as she told the group how she ultimately was successful at making some agreements about keeping the space clean.

As Susan neared release and completed PIO, the therapeutic visitation program helped her focus on how to further develop the skills she had learned. After release, and with help from PIO staff, she decided to connect herself with a Center for Family Success in her neighborhood. She had community service hours to perform and used her landscaping skills to complete these requirements at the Center. She was able to secure a job with her previous employer, a family member who owned a landscaping business. She was awarded grants to continue her education and enrolled in community college. Eventually, she was granted custody of her two children. She became a strong advocate for herself and her family. She was free.

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Stage of Justice Involvement	Arrest	Judicial Proceedings	Jail	Prison	Probation/Parole
Support Systems Development					
Policy and Administrative Support System	Department of Corrections Children of Incarcerated Parents Project (CIP) ¹				
Advocacy Support System	Non-Profit Children’s Justice Alliance (CJA) ³				
Community Support System	CJA Center for Family Success ⁴				
Intervention Development					
Justice-Involved Parent Management Training		PIO-J ⁶	PIO-P ² and Support Group ²	PIO-C ⁵	
			RE ⁷		
Caregiver Parent Management Training	PIO-C ⁵				
			RE ⁷		
Child Skills Training			RE ⁷		
Justice-Involved Parent-Child Visitation			Therapeutic Visitation Program ²	RE ⁷	

Note. Superscripted numbers indicate time order in which development work was initiated. PIO = Parenting Inside Out Parent Management Training Program. P = Prison version. C = Community version. J = Jail version. RE = Family Reunification Program (currently under development).

Figure 1.

Support system and intervention development by stage of parent and family involvement in the criminal justice system

Table 1

Common Components of Prison-Based Parenting Programs: National and State Survey Results

Component	National Survey (<i>n</i> = 28; 19 states)	State Survey State (<i>n</i> = 13)
Generic Communication Skills	100%	100%
Parenting Techniques	96	92
Child Development	68	62
Special Visitation Opportunities	57	23
Includes Some Focus on Parenting While in Prison	54	23
Anger and Stress Management	25	23
Parent-Child Interaction Laboratory	7	0

Table 2**Topics of Parenting Inside Out for Prison**

PIO Topics	
Week 1	Creating a Collaborative Learning Environment
Sessions: Getting Acquainted; Setting a Parenting Course for “Destination Adulthood”; The Family System	
Week 2	Communication and Problem Solving
Sessions: Effective Speaking Skills; Effective Listening Skills; Effective Problem Solving Skills	
Week 3	Connecting With Your Child
Sessions: Connecting Through Play and Reading; Connecting Through Letters, Calls and Visits; Connecting Through Emotion Coaching	
Week 4	Child Development
Sessions: Introduction to Human Development; The Child’s Job and the Parent’s Job; Age-Related Parenting Challenges	
Week 5	Healthy Families
Sessions: Adult Stage of Development; Family Meetings, Family Fun, and Family Identity; Sibling Relationships	
Week 6	Nurturing Your Child’s Individuality
Sessions: Nurturing Your Child’s Temperament; Speaking Your Child’s Love and Learning Languages; Your Legacy and Your Future	
Week 7	Individual Meetings and Graduation Preparation
One on One Meetings Between Inmates and Coach; Planning for Graduation	
Week 8	Child Guidance
Sessions: Structure Through Family Routines and Organization; Ignoring, Distracting, Redirecting, and Rules; Directions and Encouragement	
Week 9	More Child Guidance
Sessions: Natural and Logical Rewards and Consequences; Time Out With Back-Up Privilege Removal; Practice Dealing With Behavior Challenges	
Week 10	Special Needs
Sessions: Parenting Adolescents; Brain Development; Advocating for Your Child	
Week 11	Your Life in the Community
Sessions: Reintegrating into the Community; Building Healthy Adult Relationships; Guilt and Overindulgence	
Week 12	Preparing to Say Goodbye
Sessions: Catch-Up; Wrap-Up and Closure; Graduation	