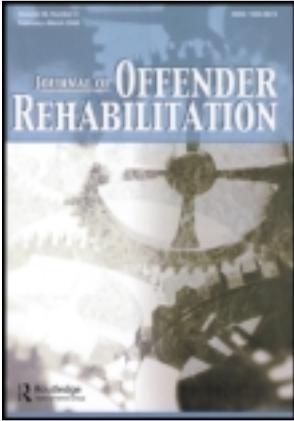


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Family Connections: The Importance of Prison Reading Programs for Incarcerated Parents and Their Children

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This article introduces a successful reading program, Family Connections, for incarcerated parents and their children. A comprehensive review of the literature supports the need to implement prison programs from an ecological perspective, in which the needs of inmates and their families are considered. More specifically, the benefits of directing resources toward the establishment of reading programs in prisons and jails for inmates and their children are discussed. The Family Connections program is aimed at improving inmates' parental skills and attributes. The article also includes the viewpoint of the commander of a sheriff's department detentions bureau, the perspective of the executive director of the nonprofit organization that operates the program, and the practical steps involved in implementing such a program.

KEYWORDS *incarcerated parents, prison reading programs, reducing recidivism*

There are two primary reasons why adult correctional facilities offer special programs for incarcerated men and women. The first reason involves maintaining safety and control within the institution. Participation in programs is used as an incentive for inmates to maintain good behavior (e.g., Phelps, 2011). Also, when inmates remain motivated to participate in programs of interest, they are less likely to become bored and disruptive. The second reason has been the focus of considerable debate over the past few decades,

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but involves a reduction in recidivism and successful reintegration of ex-offenders into the community. Prison programs that focus on education, acquisition of life skills, empathy, job training, and psychological treatment, to name a few, provide inmates with new abilities to be used upon release. It has been suggested that when inmates utilize positive, prosocial skills learned while incarcerated, they are less likely to reoffend when they return to the community (Strimple, 2003; Turner, 2007). The perspective that drives these programs is generally individualistic in that the focus is primarily on improving the inmate's behavior both while incarcerated and when released.

When one adopts an ecological perspective, the aim of prison programming and postrelease outcomes expands toward understanding the unique, often complex set of issues and circumstances that surround incarceration and any adversity and trauma experienced before, during, or after incarceration. From an ecological lens, a broader and more dynamic view of the family, children's impact of parental incarceration, policy regarding incarceration, and society's view of incarcerated persons is adopted. This ecological viewpoint lends itself to improved responses across systems (Genty, 2012; Murray & Murray, 2010). The goal is to offer programs for incarcerated men and women that improve not only their individual skills and attributes while incarcerated, but also addresses unique strengths, needs, and interactive skills directed toward their families and communities once released.¹ Such a viewpoint reflects the complex circumstances individuals' may have experienced prior to incarceration (e.g., trauma, adversity, mental health, family discourse, etc.) and those that inmates face upon reentry (e.g., stigma, attachment to family, etc.) (Bales & Mears, 2008; La Vigne, Naser, Brooks, & Castro, 2005). If while incarcerated individuals receive no services, have little contact with family/friends, and acquire no adaptive skills, they are likely to return to a community and, more specifically, a family only to continue to perpetuate the conditions that contributed to the behavior that resulted in imprisonment. Further, if the new skills are not practiced, supported, and reinforced once released it is likely old patterns of behavior will reemerge. Grounded in the notion that an individual's environment influences behavior, practice and policy demand greater attention to the heterogeneous factors associated with an inmates' environment prior to, during, and post incarceration (Genty, 2012). Here, the focus is given to inmates' postincarceration environment, particularly the families of the incarcerated individual.

Ecological perspectives recognize the impact of inmates' incarceration on their family members, particularly their children. Children of incarcerated parents are at-risk for a variety of emotional, social, and academic difficulties (Allard, 2012; Hairston, 2001; Hoffmann, Byrd, & Kightlinger, 2010; Holmes, Belmonte, Wentworth, & Tillman, 2010; Johnson & Easterling, 2012; Naudeau, 2010; Parke & Clarke-Stewart, 2001; Toth & Kazura, 2010).² Beyond the circumstances that resulted in their parents' incarceration, research has demonstrated that incarceration itself is an independent factor in children's poor

outcomes (Aaron & Dallaire, 2010; Hoffmann et al., 2010; Murray & Farrington, 2005; Murray, Farrington, & Sekol, 2012; Raeder, 2012). Additionally, children of incarcerated parents are more likely than other children to engage in future crime and delinquency and to end up incarcerated themselves (Bartlett, 2000; Dallaire, 2007; Kjellstrand & Eddy, 2011a, b; Murray & Murray, 2010; Tasca, Rodriguez, & Zatz, 2011). Although many often contradictory theories attempt to explain this dynamic, caution must be used when generalizing about the needs of specific children of incarcerated parents (Genty, 2012; Newell, 2012). Moreover, the mounting evidence of this generational pattern demands a shift in public policy such that more attention is directly focused on the needs of children of incarcerated parents. Although programs for families and children are increasing,³ there is an ongoing need for outcome data on the efficacy of these programs for all who take part in them.

Community-based services for the children of incarcerated parents provide one strategy to reduce the overwhelmingly negative impact of parental incarceration (Block & Pothast, 1998; Johnston, 2012). These programs vary depending on the age of the child and can continue through adolescence and into young adulthood. Johnston (2012) discusses many of the programs including support groups, after-school programs, mentoring, summer camps and recreational programs, teen leadership programs, and job skills training. The effectiveness of these programs varies greatly, and many have not been empirically validated (Johnston, 2012). Measurement of parental skills and attachment levels are also lacking, particularly when these skills are not practiced when a parent is incarcerated or in the case of non-custodial parents postrelease. Not surprisingly, then, funding for these programs is often difficult to obtain and to sustain. Therefore, evidence-based outcome data on programs for these children are needed, which could be used to refocus public policy and, ultimately, commit funding for effective programs designed for this especially vulnerable population.

Additionally, prison-based programs for the children of incarcerated parents are an important component of a comprehensive approach to addressing the children's various needs. Moreover, these programs also are designed to directly benefit the incarcerated parents. Because recent research has demonstrated that imprisonment itself results in greater recidivism than "non-incarcerative alternative(s)" (Bales & Piquero, 2012), it is increasingly important for correctional facilities to develop and to provide cost-effective, efficacious programs, which will: (a) safely control and manage inmates; (b) lower rates of recidivism; and, (c) provide for the needs of inmates' children.

A large number of institutions provide parenting classes for their inmates with children. However, most of the parent education programs in prison do not directly involve the children (Hoffmann et al., 2010). Many factors can influence child involvement such as lack of transportation, funds and resources of institutions, and the families themselves. Although parent

training is especially prevalent for incarcerated mothers (Hoffmann et al., 2010), Hairston (2001) wrote, "helping fathers maintain relationships with their children, however, is one of the least important considerations in policy directives and day-to-day operations" in correctional systems (p. 122). Nevertheless, positive results have been shown from parent education for incarcerated fathers (Harrison, 1997; Landreth & Lobaugh, 1998). One drawback, however, noted by Harrison (1997) is that it can be difficult to measure the long-term effects of such parent training if the skills are not practiced, which will not happen when there is little to no contact between parent and child during the parent's incarceration.

All indicators point to the widespread benefit of increasing contact between inmates and their children. Although one contraindication to increased contact would be when inmates' crimes were against the children or other family members, even in many of these situations therapeutic and reunification programs could be very helpful. Increasing contact between children and their incarcerated parents can include improving access to and procedures for telephone and mail correspondence (e.g., Poehlmann, Dallaire, Loper, & Shear, 2010). However, much of these efforts have centered on programs designed to increase face-to-face contact between parent and child (Hoffmann et al., 2010; Johnston, 2012). As Toth and Kazura (2010) wrote, "visitation between incarcerated parents and their children is important to combat childhood risk factors" (p. 163). This may be facilitated by housing inmates with children in facilities that are in close proximity to their families. However, this is often not possible, because prisons are typically situated quite far from areas with the greatest population.

The next step to foster contact involves finding ways to increase the visiting habits of inmates' children. This is often a complicated process with a host of factors that inhibit visitation including the location and layout of visiting rooms, the procedures to which visitors are subjected before and during visits, the treatment of visitors by correctional staff, and lack of or limited transportation (Parke & Clarke-Stewart, 2001; Toth & Kazura, 2010). All of these may elicit unwanted effects, such as acute stress, on the children. Nevertheless, a growing number of programs have been implemented to make it easier for children to visit their incarcerated parents and to make those visits more satisfying for parent and child (Hoffmann et al., 2010; Toth & Kazura, 2010). One of the first programs to alter the prison environments in the interest of the children visiting their parents was *Sesame Street Goes to Prison* (Johnson, 2012). Additionally, implementation of visit coaching services for incarcerated parents, their children, and the children's current caregivers can help to make the visits productive and, even, therapeutic (Beyer, Blumenthal-Guigui, & Krupat, 2010).

Efforts to increase children's visitation with their incarcerated parents seem to be successful, at least in some jurisdictions. Recent research on the importance for children to feel accepted and cared about by their parents

(Khaleque & Rohner, 2012) provides strong evidence that these endeavors should continue and should expand. Since it is common for children whose parents are incarcerated to feel abandoned and unloved (e.g., Shlafer & Poehlmann, 2010), focusing on the quality of these interactions, however, should be a more important goal than focusing only on efforts to increase the frequency of visits. And, although more attention has been given to the relationship between children and their incarcerated mothers, recent research leads to the conclusion that there should be at least as many programs for incarcerated fathers as there are for mothers. Gray (2012) quoted one of the authors of this research: “Our work should encourage dads to get really involved in the loving care of their children at an early age,” Rohner said. “Their kids will be measurably better off.” Therefore, rather than simply focusing on increasing face-to-face visitation between children and their incarcerated parents, which is typically a very expensive undertaking, greater attention should be given to the development and implementation of prison programs that focus on increasing parents’, especially fathers’, loving contact with their children.

When “loving contact” focuses directly and almost exclusively on the emotional aspects of the relationship between incarcerated parent and child, it may be very difficult for parent and child to adequately manage their level of emotional intensity before and after the visit (e.g., Beyer et al., 2010). One way for children to feel accepted and cared about by their parents is for the parents to show concern for and to participate in the children’s educational activities. Perhaps even more importantly, children’s performance at school (i.e., academic achievement and behavior), appears to be related to their perception of their parents’ level of acceptance and encouragement (Lakshmi & Arora, 2006; Melton, 2000). Beyond the children’s perception of their parents’ acceptance, research also has demonstrated that parents’ level and quality of involvement with their children are positively correlated with the children’s interest and achievement in school (Bates, 2009; Doctoroff, 2005). Therefore, evidence suggests that prison programs for children of incarcerated parents should concentrate on ways to improve (a) children’s perception of their parents’ level of acceptance and (b) the actual quality of parents’ involvement with their children. This can be accomplished by centering parent-child interactions on educational activities.

Emphasizing the child’s education may be advantageous for the parents as well. By making schoolwork, rather than the parents’ incarceration, the focus of parent-child contacts, an obvious point of awkwardness and discomfort can be avoided during their interactions. Also, emphasizing schoolwork can help to rebalance the parent-child dynamic, which provides the parents with an opportunity to feel a sense of mastery and pride they may otherwise not experience in prison. It may then be easier to maintain these appropriate family roles when the parents are released and reunited with their children. In other words, participation in academic-related activities

may enable inmates to feel as though they are not just inmates, but are parents again who are making a valuable contribution in the life of their child. Furthermore, prison programs can help to launch these roles in families where the parents were not very involved with their children prior to incarceration. This, then, becomes another mechanism in the overall efforts to reduce recidivism.

WHY READING?

Reading achievement is directly related to students' interest in and motivation for school, and their interest in and motivation for school are directly related to their academic success (Kreider, 2011; Sukhram & Hsu, 2012). Because academic success is negatively correlated with disruptive school behavior and with future incidents of juvenile offending (Christle & Yell, 2008; Williams & McGee, 1994), one solution to the problem of juvenile delinquency (a particular risk factor for children of incarcerated fathers) is to support and facilitate children's interest and achievement in reading. Parents' engagement in their children's reading motivation is encouraged for school-age children and adolescents as well as in Head Start and prekindergarten settings (Kreider, 2011). Research indicates that this can be achieved outside prison settings both through parents' reading to their children (Kellam, 1985; Sukhram & Hsu, 2012) and parents' own reading behavior (Mullan, 2010). In the study by Mullan (2010), the results were gendered: girls' reading was associated with mothers' reading and boys' reading associated with fathers' reading: "Taken together, these findings provide empirical support for the positive role that parents can play in modeling reading, and especially for fathers in relation to boys" (p. 427). Furthermore, for children in low-income families, parental involvement in their children's educational activities led to greater interest in literacy for the children whose mothers were the least educated (Dearing, McCartney, Weiss, Kreider, & Simpkins, 2004). The data provide support for the development and evaluation of prison programs to encourage parents to facilitate children's reading.

Despite the strong argument that can be made for the efficacy of reading programs for incarcerated parents, there have been almost no accounts of such programs in the literature. Hoffmann et al. (2010) and Parke and Clarke-Stewart (2001) mentioned the existence of prison reading programs for incarcerated parents and their children, but do not identify or describe any specific programs. However, in an article in the *Wall Street Journal*, Zaslow (2002) cited that "more than twenty" reading programs for incarcerated parents and their children operate in several states. He identified a program in Illinois, Aunt Mary's Storybook Project, in which incarcerated mothers read books into a tape recorder. The tapes and books are then sent to their children. This is similar to a program in Iowa. Zaslow also reported

on another program in Indiana in which a book and a videotape of the parent reading the book are sent home to the children of incarcerated parents. Although outcomes associated with these innovative programs are notable, without adequate funding and support participation will be limited.

Bartlett (2000) reported on an innovative reading program for incarcerated mothers in Florida (Florida Department of Corrections, 1999, 2002, 2000). The program includes a 14-week parent education course and weekly, 1-hour live video chat sessions with their children. During the session, the mothers read age-appropriate books to their children. The books were previously mailed home, so that the children can read along during the session and then can continue to enjoy the book while apart from the mother between sessions. According to Bartlett (2000), "these programs help reassure children that they have not been abandoned and that their mothers love them" (p. 104). This program grew out of a similar one for incarcerated fathers who were recorded reading a book to their children on an audio tape, which was then sent home to the child (Florida Department of Corrections, 2000). Justification for a \$300,000 federal grant in 1999 to create the incarcerated mother reading program was explained by a Florida State Representative: "This program will enhance family unity by allowing mothers to return to a more stable environment upon their release. It will also increase inmate literacy and reduce recidivism" (Florida Department of Corrections, 1999). Despite the reported benefits to the children who participated in these program outcomes have not been empirically demonstrated.

FAMILY CONNECTIONS

Like the program in Indiana reported by Zaslow (2002), San Diego County California has had a reading program for incarcerated parents since 2002 (Richardson, 2007) in which parents are recorded on DVD reading an age-appropriate book to their preschool to adolescent children. Although the program has had several names and has been under the administrative guidance of two different organizations, it is currently referred to as Family Connections. Reading Legacies, a nonprofit 501(c)(3) public-benefit organization, took the reins of this reading program for incarcerated parents and their children in 2010. Led by Betty J. Mohlenbrock, M.Ed., Reading Legacies' mission is, "to empower children and youth as valued family and community members through intergenerational shared-reading experiences" (Reading Legacies, 2012b, p. 1). Their Family Connections program is expressly intended to benefit children of incarcerated parents⁴ by mailing home DVDs and new books which, "provides healthy parent-child interactions at a time when this may be impossible in any other way"

(Reading Legacies, 2012b, p. 2). The theory underlying this program is that when incarcerated parents participate in the daily reading activities of their children, the parent “gains a sense of responsibility” (Reading Legacies, 2012a). While reading a book on DVD, incarcerated parents are given “a window of opportunity to reach out in a meaningful way to their children and families—a first step toward returning to roles as functioning parents and community members” (Reading Legacies, 2012a). Ms. Mohlenbrock, whose background is in primary education, understands the importance of parental reading experiences with and for children. Stating a steady decline in parental interaction with education, particularly with incarcerated parents, this program can help fill that gap in children’s education, bonding, and attachment between parent and child.

Reading Legacies currently operates in 15 county jails and state and federal prisons, and three juvenile detention facilities. Any inmate is eligible to participate as long as he or she has the approval of a correctional counselor. Participation can occur at any time during inmates’ incarceration,⁵ and many inmates request opportunities to take part on multiple occasions (i.e., record and send home DVDs reading different books). Between December 2002 and December 2011, Ms. Mohlenbrock reported that Family Connections served 32,375 “program beneficiaries,” which included 16,084 children recipients. The benefits of Reading Legacies’ Family Connections program for the children and their incarcerated parents are apparent based on reports from multiple sources. However, although outcome research is ongoing (Blumberg & Fortin, in progress), there is currently a lack of empirical data validating the efficacy of the Family Connections program. Nevertheless, considerable anecdotal evidence suggests that this program is extremely successful. The following are a sample of the poignant testimonials from participants in the program:

I would just like to give thanks for the opportunity to send my love through this program. You know, too often a man like myself feels like he’s on the outside looking in when at the same time he’s on the inside reaching out. (Incarcerated father of children ages 5 and 6)

I am sorry for the wrongs I have committed to society and most of all I am sorry for the wrongs I have committed towards my children by not being there for them. I am grateful for you allowing me to connect with my children through a DVD and a wonderful book. (Incarcerated mother of children ages 9 and 12)

He was very happy to see his father and was talking and waving to him. He is happy now because he’s been asking about him. My son is learning how to read, and he was following along page by page, listening to him read. Such a great program for kids and a good way to see our missed family member. (Mother of a 6-year-old whose father is incarcerated)

As important as it is for inmates to want to participate in a prison program, the success of any program depends on the dedication of those delivering the program as well as on the commitment of the correctional personnel to cooperate in its implementation. Commander Rich Miller of the San Diego County Sheriff's Department sees inmates who want to participate because of the marked positive changes in the behaviors of those who have participated. Moreover, he explained that the department's correctional counselors are enthusiastic about this reading program, because of the inmates' expressed desire to participate and, when they do, the positive and functional behaviors that are exhibited. When asked why a simple reading program seems to have such an impact on the inmates, he added:

They have been in and out of their children's lives. Now, they have an opportunity to connect back with the child and be part of their life in a positive way. No matter what, we all want to be thought of as a good parent. (R. Miller, personal communication, June 25, 2012)

But how practical is it to implement a program like Family Connections? It begins with the correctional counselors posting information about the program throughout the facility, along with testimonials from previous inmates who participated. Once an inmate sends a request to participate, the correctional counselors verify eligibility.⁶ On the day that they will record the DVD, inmates are escorted by correctional staff to the location in the facility where the workshop, which is described in detail next, is held. After inmates have been recorded on DVD reading their selected book to the child, the counselors inspect the material, including watching the recorded DVD, to be sent to the child to insure that nothing inappropriate or unacceptable is included, seal the envelope, and mail the package to the child's current caregiver. To date, only positive feedback has been reported by all parties; not one complaint has been received, according to Commander Miller.

Of course, making available a program such as Family Connections to correctional facilities is not an easy undertaking. However, compared to many other prison programs, a reading program like Family Connections is far less complicated or costly to implement. All costs are absorbed either through a contractual arrangement with the collaborating agency (i.e., fee-for-service), or through donations from individuals, corporations, and foundations. Additionally, the organization utilizes a large team of volunteers, many of whom are student interns from local colleges and universities. Volunteers are also utilized to conduct the workshops and to facilitate inmates' DVD recording sessions at the correctional institutions.

One of the more challenging aspects of providing cost effective prison programming is the use of volunteers within the confines of a correctional facility. Efforts are taken to ensure the volunteers are representative of cultures of the participants, to include language, representative ethnicity, gender,

and age. Each volunteer must complete comprehensive training conducted by Reading Legacies. In this training, volunteers learn about the rules and regulations associated with entering a correctional facility, including approved supplies and equipment, dress code, interacting with correctional staff, and what to say and not to say around inmates (Reading Legacies, 2012b). The remaining time during the training class is to teach volunteers how to conduct the Family Connections workshops with inmates, how to conduct the inmate reading/recording sessions, and what to do after all the participants have finished their recording sessions. Volunteers are also required to obtain the security clearance necessary to enter the facilities, and volunteers who participate in Family Connections at juvenile facilities also are required to obtain a TB test and drug screening.

Once cleared to enter the facilities, two volunteers work together at each workshop, which is conducted with a maximum of eight inmate participants. Volunteers provide participants with some background about the program and educate the inmates on the potential positive impacts of shared-reading experiences for children and their families (Reading Legacies, 2012b). Participants are asked during this group forum to share a memory they have about a shared-reading experience either as a reader or being read to. For some, this is a transformative moment as inmates often reflect on deficiencies in their own childhood (R. Miller, personal communication, June 25, 2012). After discussing challenges associated with shared-reading experiences, the group discusses solutions to those obstacles. Participants then are helped to select a developmentally and culturally appropriate book to read.

After participants select a book to read, volunteers prep the participants for the recording session. Inmates are told to read the book out loud to familiarize themselves with the story and to practice how to “create an interactive and fun experience” (Reading Legacies, 2012b, p. 9). The inmates also are encouraged to prepare closing remarks, i.e. a special message at the conclusion of the DVD, which “will leave the child with a renewed sense of security and well-being” (Reading Legacies, 2012b, p. 10). The volunteers show the participants in a demonstration how a reading could be delivered (e.g., changing the voice to match different characters in the story), and show basic techniques, such as looking into the camera as though the child was sitting right in front of them. The volunteers also help prepare the participant if they experience emotional responses such as crying during the recording, so that they can leave the child with a positive, reassuring message (e.g., “I am just so happy to have the opportunity to read this story to you”; Reading Legacies, 2012b, p. 10). Finally, the participants are allowed to write a brief personal message to their child(ren). After ensuring the appropriateness of the message, it is included with the DVD. Participants complete and return workshop surveys, certificates of completion are distributed to each participant, and the mailing envelopes are filled with the book, DVD, and a home

survey to be completed and returned to Reading Legacies by the child's current caregiver.

As mentioned previously, Reading Legacies also conducts the Family Connections program in juvenile detention facilities. The procedures are the same as those utilized in adult facilities. Although some of the juvenile participants read stories to their children, most send the DVD and book home to a younger sibling. The benefit of this extends beyond the child who receives the DVD. The parents of many of these juvenile detainees begin to see their child in a new light, which helps to establish better family dynamics when the juvenile is released. After watching the DVD sent home by her older, detained daughter to her younger sibling, a mother wrote to Reading Legacies:

We are all very happy to see and hear our daughter. It was great to see her smile. Our younger daughter is not allowed to visit due to her age, and this is her only chance to see her sister who she misses a lot. This reinforces their bond and encourages our younger daughter to read books.

In addition to the beneficial effects on the family, it appears that the more that administrators at juvenile detention facilities can promote and improve reading interest and reading skills among juvenile detainees, the more they will be doing to reduce recidivism among this population (see Vacca, 2008).

Currently the efficacy of Family Connections is being evaluated, which is a needed step before replicating this innovative program. The evaluation is looking at positive and lasting reintegration of inmates into their families and community, improved parent-child or, in some cases sibling relationships, reduction of recidivism, and the promotion of academic achievement. Such data, if positive, will provide necessary support for Family Connections as a valuable tool. Then a natural and subsequent logical progression would be to reproduce the Family Connections model across the country. In the meantime, the anecdotal success of Family Connections has led the Sheriff's Department in San Diego to request a significant expansion of the program in its facilities.

In addition to expanding this model some have suggested the reading program would benefit other inmates, including those without children. A 26-year-old incarcerated mother who participated in the program suggested the program would be of value to those children who do not have parents, for example, those in the foster care system (Doroski, Keaton, Sievers, & Burke, 2006). This would be similar to other prison programs, which are geared toward involving inmates in socially relevant, emotionally satisfying activities (e.g., training service animals; Strimple, 2003). These types of programs give inmates, while still incarcerated, the opportunity to make a direct, positive impact on the lives of others. Clearly, it is anticipated that the inmates

least likely to reoffend will be those who reenter the community equipped with both new life skills and improved confidence in their ability to be successful parents and productive members of society (Genty, 2012). This important ecological perspective and its associated components should be included in research on these promising programs.

SUMMARY

Prison programs are used as inducements to manage inmate behavior as well as to provide inmates with tangible skills for use upon their release. Acquired new skills are ideally intended to provide alternatives to the circumstances that led to the incarceration, thus reducing rates of recidivism. Programs designed from an ecological perspective look beyond the present and future behavior of inmates and also consider the inmates' past experiences, as well as the needs of the inmates' families and communities. A significant number of inmates are parents. Based on data that show a variety of risks for children of incarcerated parents, attention should be paid to providing efficacious prison programs for incarcerated parents and their children.

Positive benefits have been observed by increasing interactions between inmates and their children. Despite efforts to increase the face-to-face time that children spend with their incarcerated parents, there are numerous reasons why these efforts are somewhat misguided. Rather than focusing on the quantity of time children are able to spend with their incarcerated parents, greater attention should be paid to improving the quality of these interactions. Research has demonstrated that parents' involvement with their children's educational activities, particularly reading, translates into increased interest and, ultimately, achievement in school. For incarcerated parents, reading programs provide an opportunity to reestablish parental roles, reassure the children of their continued love, and encourage the children's reading behavior. For the children of incarcerated parents, such reading programs stimulate interest in reading, which is a necessary precursor to reading achievement and, ultimately, academic success. Thus, prison reading programs feed two birds with one seed by benefiting inmates and their children in numerous ways.

The Family Connections program offered by Reading Legacies is a popular, promising program for incarcerated parents and their children. Following a fairly brief, but comprehensive workshop facilitated by two volunteers, inmates are recorded on DVD while reading a book they selected for their child. The book and DVD are then mailed home for the child, who is able to experience "time" with their parent without enduring the ordeal of a visit to a correctional facility. The program requires virtually no resources expended by correctional facility staff and is limited only by the number of Reading Legacies' trained volunteers available to lead the workshops. Research is

needed in order for these programs to expand; a part of this research would ideally include a cost benefit analysis, longitudinal in design and embrace an ecological approach.

Developments in technology have led to changes in programs for incarcerated parents and their children. Reading programs, for example, have grown from audiotapes to videotapes to DVDs, and are likely to continue to evolve with future technological advances. Reading Legacies, however, reminds us that while technology may make it easier for incarcerated parents and their children to connect, we should not minimize the simple impact of a parent reading a storybook to a child.

NOTES

1. A discussion of community-based diversion programs and restorative justice models is beyond the scope of this article, but the reader is referred to Umbreit and Armour (2010).

2. If the parental relationship was abusive/traumatic, incarceration of the parent may reduce children's risk of future maladaptive behaviors. See Murray and Murray (2010) for a more comprehensive discussion.

3. Noted increases of incarcerated parents have led to an increase in developmentally appropriate environments for children visiting parents in prison. See Johnston for a review (2012).

4. The program operates at adult correctional and juvenile detention facilities for children whose parents and other relatives (e.g., older siblings) are incarcerated/detained.

5. Requests were recently made to increase the frequency of Family Connections programming at a facility focusing on prerelease (i.e., for inmates with less than 12 months remaining in their sentence), to emphasize the parent-child relationship even more during this point in their incarceration.

6. For example, inmates whose family has an order of protection (i.e., a temporary restraining order), against the inmate would not be permitted to participate in Family Connections.

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