CHILDREN AND FAMILIES WITH INCARCERATED PARENTS

Exploring Development in the Field and Opportunities for Growth

A Report Prepared for the Annie E. Casey Foundation

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The Annie E. Casey Foundation

About the Author

Stacey Bouchet is a Senior Consultant at the Annie E. Casey Foundation where she uses her research background in family systems and policy, as well as her commitment to community-based change, to provide strategic consulting to the Foundation.

Of particular relevance to this paper is that Stacey is the child of a formerly incarcerated parent, which provides her with firsthand knowledge and experience of the circumstances of children whose parents are incarcerated.

About The Annie E. Casey Foundation

The Annie E. Casey Foundation is a private charitable organization dedicated to helping build better futures for vulnerable children and families in the United States. Jim Casey, one of the founders of United Parcel Service, and his siblings, who named the Foundation in honor of their mother, established the Foundation in 1948.

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The Magnitude of the Problem

On any given day in America, it is estimated that more than 1.5 million children have a parent incarcerated in a state or federal prison. And more than 10 million children are living with a parent who has come under some form of criminal justice supervision at some point in the child's life.

The challenges that children and families with incarcerated parents face are significant. Not only do they face the trauma of loss, but also a range of economic and social challenges that result from incarceration. Concerned about the vulnerability of this population, the Annie E. Casey Foundation began an exploration of the nature and scope of this issue, the current state of the field, the gaps that need to be filled, and where it, and other foundations, may most effectively help fill those gaps.

This report provides a summary of the Foundation's findings, which result, primarily, from bringing together a group of leading researchers, practitioners, advocates, policymakers and funders to discuss the issues and opportunities. The report also offers a summary of the Foundation's recent investments in this area and synthesizes what we have learned into potential opportunities for the field at large.

Building Knowledge

Many of the Foundation's activities and investments have focused on educating itself on the circumstances and needs of children and families with incarcerated parents.

In 2007, the Foundation:

- Convened and consulted with local and national experts in the field
- Surveyed, convened and consulted with local and national funders
- Interviewed department of corrections, child welfare, mentoring children of prisoners administrators and children's services representatives
- Commissioned a review of literature and research on children with incarcerated parents
- Supported a knowledge-development agenda
- Mined Foundation knowledge and lessons on promising policies and practices
- Invested in strategic opportunities to influence policy and practice.

What We've Learned

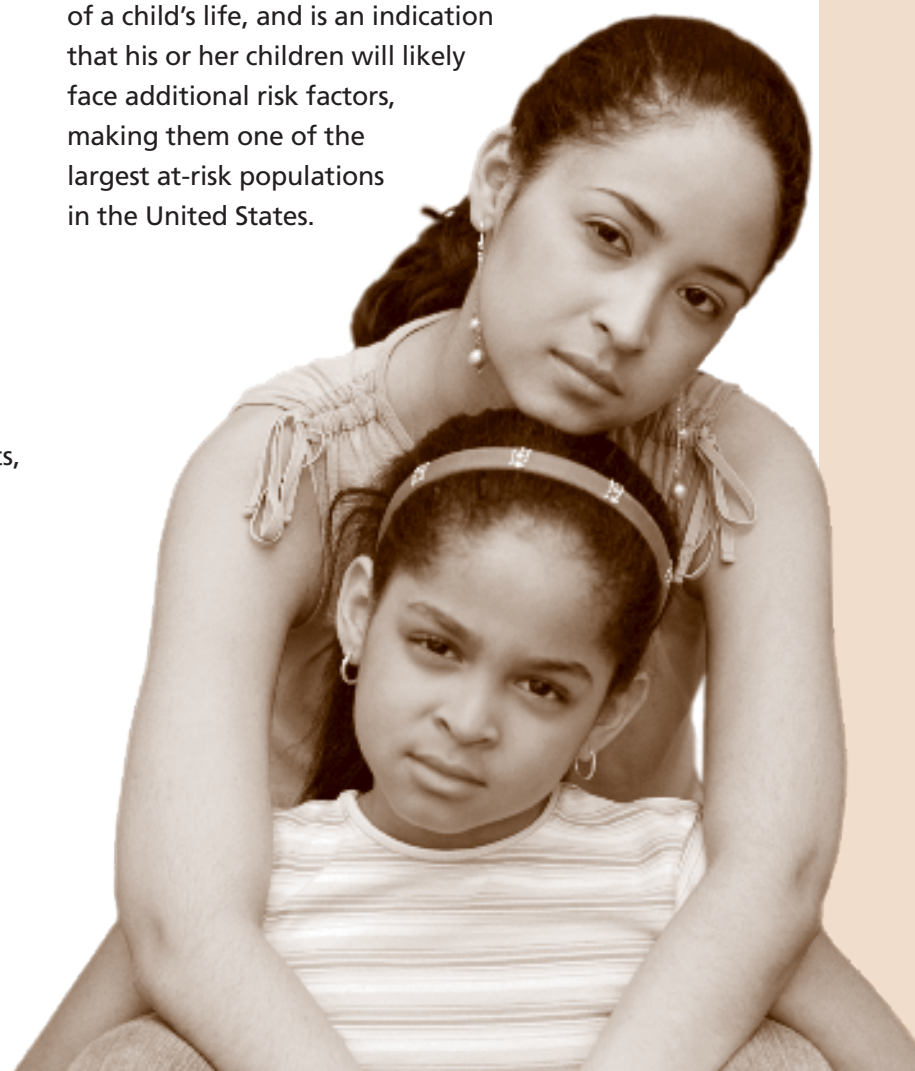
The knowledge gathered from the Foundation's activities and investments revealed tireless advocates, researchers, grantmakers and practitioners who have been committed to understanding and improving outcomes for children and families with incarcerated parents and building this field for over 20 years.

The Foundation also discovered the compelling needs and circumstances of children with incarcerated parents, such as:

- Since 1990, the number of female prisoners has grown by nearly 50 percent; three-quarters of incarcerated women are mothers, and two-thirds have children under age 18.
- Most law enforcement agencies lack training and protocols on where to place children when a parent is arrested and, often, ultimately incarcerated.
- Approximately 10 percent of children with incarcerated mothers and 2 percent of children with incarcerated fathers are in foster care.
- There is a disparate impact on minorities, with African-American children nine times more likely and Hispanic children three times more likely than white children to have a parent in prison.
- Despite widespread statements that children with incarcerated parents are many times more likely than other children to be incarcerated as adults, there is no reliable research evidence to support this assertion.

- Risk factors such as parental mental illness, parental substance abuse, family violence and poverty were present in many children's homes and lives prior to their parents' incarceration.
- Maintaining contact with an incarcerated family member or parent through visitation and phone calls is extremely costly and serves as a barrier to family connections.
- Visitation policies and procedures vary widely from facility to facility, and many family members often encounter intimidating, uncomfortable and humiliating conditions that may deter future contact.
- Many programs and services for children whose parents are incarcerated offer promise in meeting some aspect of children's needs, but have not been empirically validated as having either short- or long-term impacts on children's well-being.
- Despite a strong desire and willingness to reunite with their children, the plans many incarcerated parents make for family reunification upon their release may not materialize, with separations becoming permanent.
- In addition to lowering the likelihood of recidivism among incarcerated parents, some evidence exists that maintaining contact with an incarcerated parent improves a child's emotional response to the incarceration and supports parent-child attachment.
- Parental incarceration creates additional challenges for children and families resulting in:
  - Instability in family relationships and structure, and residential mobility
  - Financial instability and material hardship, with financial problems the most severe for already vulnerable families and families that try to maintain the incarcerated parent-child relationship
  - School performance problems
  - Shame, social and institutional stigma

This brief synopsis of the research literature paints a sobering picture of how the lives of children and families are often affected by parental incarceration. To be sure, the incarceration of a parent is associated with great change and uncertainty in many aspects of a child's life, and is an indication that his or her children will likely face additional risk factors, making them one of the largest at-risk populations in the United States.



Bringing Experts Together

To explore the issue of children with incarcerated parents further, the Foundation convened two expert gatherings in April and June 2007.

The first session brought together a group of 24 field leaders and Foundation staff to discuss key challenges, opportunities and resources for addressing issues of data and research, practice/service delivery, and policy/system reform that affect outcomes among children with incarcerated parents. The second session engaged a group of 15 foundations to share and refine what was learned from experts in the field, and to discuss the work other foundations are doing, and what they need to advance this agenda within their own organizations.

As a result of the two sessions, participants reported they built a stronger sense of community and collaboration, strengthened their collective knowledge, and valued the opportunity to share progress, perspectives, perceived gaps and pertinent new directions. Participants identified strategic opportunities for growth and evolution of the field and articulated the need for the voice of the Annie E. Casey Foundation to support children whose parents are incarcerated.

Data, Research and Evaluation

Two primary questions emerged in discussions with participants related to data, research and evaluation. First, is parental incarceration a causal factor that produces predictable consequences among children? And, is there a faulty assumption that the field needs complete, reliable data on children whose parents are incarcerated before it can adequately address their needs? That is, how can the field not "sacrifice the good in search of the perfect" regarding data and research as to not overlook service and practice opportunities to support this population?

Challenges

Consultative session participants identified six fundamental challenges that make data collection, research and evaluation in this field a complex undertaking, including:

1. Collecting information about children and families with incarcerated parents is difficult because the population is "invisible" for several reasons:
   - The U.S. criminal justice system has traditionally not considered inmates' familial relationships
   - Poor communication among prisons, child welfare agencies and other social service entities
   - Lack of data and overlapping databases
   - The stigma and implications associated with incarceration (for parents, children and caregivers)
2. Studies estimating the size and characteristics of this population are largely based on information provided by correctional agencies obtained from the incarcerated parents, and others are small or outdated.
3. Data on the number, characteristics, experiences and needs of children with incarcerated parents and their caregivers are not consistently collected or maintained by any one entity.
4. Data sources that do exist are not connected or efficiently shared to improve circumstances for children with incarcerated parents.
5. Clear, easily translated, relevant research and educational materials are needed to raise public awareness and engage in policy advocacy.
6. Research has been unable to isolate the causal relationship, if any, between parental incarceration and child outcomes.

Recommendations

- Create a central place to locate data on this issue and develop a user-friendly, compatible data source linked to a useful case management system(s).
- Encourage State Departments of Correction to collect data on children with incarcerated parents. Rhode Island serves as a good example.
- Use data and research to inform and address the disproportionate impacts of race on incarcerated parents and their children.

Practice and Service Delivery

During the discussion of practice and service delivery, participants identified two strong, overarching themes. First, participants emphasized the importance of directly involving those affected by this issue, especially children, youth, parents, family members and caregivers, representing as many different types of family structures as possible. Second, participants concurred that a critical need exists for better collaboration and communication among organizations serving this population.

Challenges

1. Providing a comprehensive range of interventions is essential, but "keeping one's own work going" can produce financial and professional barriers to collaboration within the field in light of the limited funding on this issue.

2. Many providers do not have information on how to deliver services in culturally competent ways.

3. Many parents and caregivers do not seek services for fear the child will enter child welfare or because of shame and stigma.

4. The immigration status of children with incarcerated parents is gaining significance because it affects both caregivers/ guardians and the children in their care.

Recommendations

- Address the child, parent, and caregiver relationship systems, not just the child, when responding to the needs of children whose parents are incarcerated.
- Support a national repository, clearinghouse or database of promising and effective practices, programs and service-delivery strategies.
- Provide an opportunity for practitioners and agency providers to engage in professional development, peer learning and technical assistance that would enhance high-quality practices nationwide.
- Develop programs that raise awareness and help train groups of professionals who interact with children and families with incarcerated parents, such as those in mental health, education, corrections, juvenile justice and child welfare.
- Address the culture, policies and practices within corrections that make family strengthening and contact difficult.

Public Policy and System Reform

The discussion of policy and system reform highlighted the need to increase public awareness and build public will to address issues affecting children with incarcerated parents. At the same time, within the field, established organizations wield significant power and resources to promote the perspective of correctional institutions in ways that influence policies affecting incarcerated parents and their children. For example, in California, the prison guards' union has "over 33,000 members supported by an administrative staff of 91, including 20 attorneys, five lobbyists, and a public relations firm," as well as millions of dollars available to them. This is a very powerful group that advocates policy positions based on the interests and priorities of the corrections system. In contrast, advocates working with children whose parents are incarcerated do not have sufficient resources to mount a significant, sustained policy advocacy campaign at the state or national level.

Challenges

1. Lack of public awareness has hampered efforts to promote effective policy and systems change.
2. Drug sentencing and the role drug use plays before and after incarceration.
3. The risk of termination of parental rights under the 1997 Adoption and Safe Families Act.
4. Difficulty gaining the partnership of unlikely collaborators; e.g., prison guard union.
5. Difficulty determining the best entry point for addressing policy and system reform—federal, state or local?

Recommendations

- Address public will through a public education campaign.
- Build capacity and collaboration among providers that will lead to policy change so many can "win rather than fight."
- Address practices and arrangements within the corrections system that make family communication difficult and expensive.
- Use local, county and state governments as untapped resources and potential partners.
- Address the risk to incarcerated mothers of losing their parental rights to child welfare under the Federal Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997.
- Support a national forum or other infrastructure to enable advocates, practitioners and people directly affected by this issue to gather and develop a common policy agenda whose implementation would be supported with sustained resources.
- Take advantage of timely federal policy opportunities to maximize the potential of benefiting children and families with incarcerated parents (or at least do minimal harm).

Overall, participants agreed there was a significant lack of resources to address the needs of this population, which has resulted in a lack of collaboration among advocates and practitioners.

All participants agreed that the Annie E. Casey Foundation's involvement would encourage them to continue to advocate for and focus on children and families with incarcerated parents, and would increase the effectiveness of their own efforts because of the weight carried by the Foundation.

Family Connections – A Support Framework

The Foundation presented a framework developed to guide work done on behalf of children and families with incarcerated parents and asked participants to provide input and feedback on it. Participants provided specific comments on elements of the framework; the principles that appear below incorporate their feedback.

Family Connections Framework Principles

- Incarcerated parents often experience strained relationships with their children, families, communities and society. They can benefit from strategies that reduce tension and conflict in their relationships and that help then develop positive, healthy ways of relating to one another.
- Family members need support to reconcile their feelings about their family member's incarceration, and to heal the loss, hurt, confusion and damage incarceration has on family members.
- The family should be a central focus of corrections and reentry policies and interventions because children do best when their families do well. These policies should help to facilitate healthy connections among all family members using safe and appropriate methods.
- Visitation and communication between the child and his or her incarcerated parent can strengthen the parent-child relationship, which can result in lower recidivism.
- Public policies and systems should adopt a *Family Connections* framework that supports positive family relationships and reduces the many barriers to visitation and contact.
- Children with incarcerated parents and their caregivers need systems and supports in place that help to facilitate family stability and reduce the economic strain caused by incarceration.
- Incarcerated parents and their families benefit from services provided to parents before, during and after incarceration that help them build stronger family relationships, constructively manage conflict, strengthen parenting skills and prepare them to be responsible parents and members of their community.
- Children with incarcerated parents benefit from services and supports that reduce the stigma, shame and trauma of parental incarceration, bolster healthy child and adolescent development and increase their likelihood of school success.
- The developmental level and age of the child, as well as the parent's gender, prior family connections and length of incarceration need to be taken into consideration when developing policies and programs for this population.
- The wishes and concerns of caregivers and children, along with the incarcerated parent, need to be carefully considered and balanced with the best interests of the child and the recommendations of public and private systems responsible for the care of that child prior to facilitating family connections, care and placement of the child.

Private Sector Support

Recognizing that one foundation cannot shift the landscape for children with incarcerated parents on its own, the Annie E. Casey Foundation set out to learn what other foundations were doing in this area and what participants saw as an appropriate role for the Annie E. Casey Foundation to contribute to the field.

In light of the Foundation's long-standing commitment to improving outcomes for vulnerable children and families, participants identified a clear fit between the Foundation's mission and work and its potential influence in this field. The following recommendations to the Foundation were offered:

- Integrate the needs of children with incarcerated parents internally through the Foundation's community change initiatives and system reform work using the lens of the *Family Connections* framework.
- Raise the visibility of, and build a stronger national voice for, children and families with incarcerated parents, using the Foundation's credibility and expertise in other areas to build public interest in the issue.
- Influence research, practice and advocacy, connecting services and systems already serving these children.
- Invest in sound data and research to influence policy and practice.
- Support regular gatherings of advocates, practitioners and researchers to share knowledge and build the field.
- Encourage and support annual national and regional gatherings of funders to discuss the connectivity to work being done on issues related to children and families with incarcerated parents, and to identify areas in need of development.

Investing in the Field

The Foundation's investment areas include collecting data and research, cultivating co-investors, exploring Casey-developed work and practices and identifying strategic opportunities to influence policy, practice and key stakeholders.

Feedback the Foundation received through all of its investigations helped shape a knowledge-development investment strategy moving forward. This multi-level focus will build a critical nexus:

1. Building a knowledge base through the support and dissemination of reliable data and research to better inform policy and practice.
2. Serving as a catalyst and convener, as well as a cultivator of co-investors among other foundations.
3. Mining, from our own policy and practice investments, strategies that advance this work.
4. Seizing select, strategic opportunities to influence policy and practice by working in partnership with other foundations.

Collecting Data and Research

Angel Tree, A Ministry of Prison Fellowship Angel Tree is using a grant to review and analyze Maryland Angel Tree data obtained from the prisoner participation forms collected from 2004 – 2006, and to produce and disseminate a report on these findings that describes the characteristics of the prisoners, caregivers, and children and the neighborhoods in which they reside. The primary result of this grant will be to use the knowledge contained in this report to identify and influence potential growth and outreach areas for Angel Tree and for Maryland policymakers and service providers.

Big Brothers Big Sisters of America Big Brothers Big Sisters of America (BBBS) will use this capacity-building grant to refine their data collection systems, related specifically to their mentoring children of prisoners (MCP) program, but ultimately to all children served by the organization. By expanding reliable data collection on a national level, BBBS agencies will have the capacity to track and analyze key demographics for all newly enrolled MCP matches, thereby better informing data driven solutions, performance and practice. In providing better data collection, this grant will serve to influence the field of mentoring through valid, measurable results in tracking youth and services across the United States.

Columbia University Columbia University will use the funding to examine the relationship between parental incarceration and child well-being using a relatively new data set ideally suited for the study – the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study. Researchers will use the data to describe the nature of the incarceration epidemic among the surveyed parents, and the economic, health, and behavioral characteristics of their children at ages three, five and nine. They will also assess differences in these well-being measures between children whose parents have been incarcerated, and those whose parents have not, and apply quasi-experimental research strategies to assess the causal nature of the incarceration/child well-being relationship. Research briefs summarizing

key findings will be published and disseminated broadly. The proposed research stands to significantly contribute to the state of knowledge about children with incarcerated parents.

Creasie Finney Hairston Hairston is producing a literature review on children of incarcerated parents that describes 1) the state of the research regarding parental incarceration and children's and families' well being; 2) factors and forces that promote and hinder the well being of children and families whose parents are incarcerated; 3) research-based answers to questions often posed about parent-child relationships and outcomes for children; 4) resources, informed by research that can be used to support family decision-making and policy and program development; and 5) what we know and don't know about this topic. This grant will result in a product that will influence thinking about children of incarcerated parents by informing the field and strengthening the reputation of the Annie E. Casey Foundation as a thought and practice leader in this area.

Urban Institute Urban Institute is conducting research designed to quantify and describe the number and experiences of children with incarcerated parents through 1) a policy-relevant review of existing literature on the topic of children of incarcerated parents designed to be accessible to non-academic policy, service provider and advocacy audiences, summarizing existing knowledge and identifying research gaps; 2) a report highlighting case studies of children of incarcerated parents and how their needs and issues may differ from their peers who do not have incarcerated parents; and 3) reports from each of the three data merge sites on human services contact by children of incarcerated parents and what those contacts tell us about the needs and challenges of these children. The products of this grant will inform and influence policy and practice work on this issue by prompting further inquiry into this topic, and it will help inform those who are already working with this population.

Women's Foundation of California The Women's Foundation of California seeks to conduct research and to convene community-based partners and funders in order to develop interventions that address the challenges women face following their incarceration and to address the impact on their children. The ultimate goal is to develop an initiative in California that engages women, particularly incarcerated and formerly incarcerated mothers, in policy reforms that remove the barriers they face to release and reentry. This grant will leverage $1 million toward a new funding initiative in California that will serve as a national model.

Cultivating Co-investors

Grant Makers for Children, Youth and Families By launching the children of incarcerated parents learning area, Grant Makers for Children, Youth and Families (GCYF) intends to increase the number of foundations that support programs serving this vulnerable population. With support from The Annie E. Casey Foundation, GCYF will provide leadership to work toward the overall goal of increasing investments in grantmaking initiatives for children of incarcerated parents by engaging CYF grantmakers in a learning initiative focused on children with incarcerated parents, conducting three regional meetings to educate grantmakers about the challenges faced by children of incarcerated parents and the current and emerging strategies to meet their needs, and facilitating networking and partnerships among foundations concerned about this population. This grant will influence the field by building partnerships, reaching and engaging grantmakers, and leveraging additional private funds for this issue.

Vermont Children's Aid Society In partnership with Casey Family Services, the AECF supported Vermont Children's Aid Society and Vermont Agency of Human Services' Incarcerated Women's Initiative in planning the first-ever statewide conference in September 2007. This conference focused on the needs of children impacted by parental incarceration. The attendance far exceeded expectations, with more than 500 participants from social service providers, Department of Corrections staff, leaders from the Agency of Human Services, school guidance counselors, etc., as well as formerly incarcerated parents, grandparents caring for children, and youth with incarcerated parents. It also resulted in the first-ever state-level convening of funders and key stakeholders in Vermont.

Funder Consultative Session The Annie E Casey Foundation convened current and potential co-investors from June 4-5, 2007, to share and document the knowledge and experience of national and local funders in the field of children and families with incarcerated parents. As a result, relationships were forged with Casey cousins and other national and place-based private foundations around this issue, and feedback was obtained that influenced the potential role AECF can play in this field.

Exploring Casey-Developed Work and Practices

San Francisco Department of Human Services The San Francisco Department of Human Services is supporting efforts in the *San Francisco Family-to-Family* Anchor site to address improving outcomes for children in the San Francisco dependency system who have an incarcerated parent or parents. AECF is leveraging resources from the San Francisco Human Services Agency in collaboration with The Zellerbach Family Foundation and the Family-to-Family anchor site to address barriers at the system, community, family and individual levels to improve outcomes for children and families in the dual systems of child welfare and adult corrections by the development of a replicable model for serving dual system-involved families.

Healing Communities This work brings together support and expertise from AECF's Reentry, Faith and Families, and Children whose Parents are Incarcerated portfolios to support efforts in building alliances and public will with faith leaders on addressing the need for services for children with incarcerated parents, including mentoring, reentry support for the parent, and the community engagement to receive, forgive and support the parent. As a result of this work, the Progressive National Baptist Convention (PNBC) has adopted *Healing Communities* for their Social Justice and Prison Ministry Commissioner. The three portfolios are now supporting PNBC in their implementation of *Healing Communities* through the publication and dissemination of a congregational toolkit on the topic to further influence other congregations to adopt this model.

Identifying Strategic Opportunities to Influence Policy and Practice

Angel Tree, A Ministry of Prison Fellowship Angel Tree is using funding to 1) recruit and equip Spanish speaking churches to engage in year-round ministry to the Hispanic children and families with incarcerated parents in their community, fostering transformation in the lives of these families and reconciliation between incarcerated parents and their children; 2) create a

video-based training tool that equips all Prison Fellowship volunteers to understand who the children and families of incarcerated parents are, the unique challenges they face and how to effectively minister to them. This tool will help in-prison/TDR volunteers better understand the inmate's family and how Angel Tree works collaboratively with in-prison and aftercare ministry. This tool will include a DVD, Facilitator's Guide and Participant's Guide.

Council of State Governments Justice Center In partnership with Casey Family Programs, the AECF is supporting the Council of State Governments Justice Center (Justice Center) to develop for Congress and federal government agencies an action plan, which would improve outcomes for incarcerated parents and their families and reflect a bipartisan consensus among state and local government officials responsible for supervising people sentenced to jail, prison, or community supervision and those agencies responsible for protecting and serving children and families ("human services"). In addition, this grant will leverage AECF funding to garner additional support from Casey Family Programs, the Pew Charitable Trusts and other funders.

Eastern Mennonite University Through qualitative interviews and photographs, this photo documentary project, *When a Parent is in Prison*, will raise awareness among the general public about the problems and challenges these children face and the implications for society. The primary result of this grant will be to reach and engage multiple audiences on this issue including, the general public, the religious community, and justice officials.

Public/Private Ventures Public/Private Ventures is providing support for Rev. Dr. W. Wilson Goode Sr., Amachi Director. Dr. Goode, through the Amachi Training Institute, will provide on-site and remote training and technical assistance to mentoring programs for children with incarcerated parents nationwide, thereby improving outcomes for these vulnerable children.

Rhode Islanders Sponsoring Education Rhode Islanders Sponsoring Education (RISE) supported the April 10, 2008, conference, *Interrupted Life: A Conversation About the Children of Incarcerated Parents*, in collaboration with Bryant University; the City of Providence; *Making Connections* Providence; the Rhode Island Department of Corrections; the Rhode Island Family Life Center; and Rhode Island Kids Count. The event will bring together policymakers, service providers, caregivers and parents to engage in dialogue about the challenges faced by children of incarcerated parents and the supports for these children that are and should be made available in the Providence, Rhode Island community.

River of Life-Line Ministries, Inc. The River of Life-Line Ministries, Inc., identified through AECF's work with *Making Connections* Providence, is using a grant to help provide transitional services to mothers and their children engaged in the reentry process. The grant will support a programmatic structure offering transitional services within a residential setting that will help participants achieve a greater sense of awareness, positive self image and self-determination, increase skills and generate income and obtain and remain in permanent housing.

University of Maryland School of Social Work This grant, part of AECF's commitment to Baltimore as a Civic Site, will support a Spring 2008 seminar that will explore the issue of children with incarcerated parents. This seminar will examine how children are affected by parental incarceration, look at the specific issues that emerge when mothers and fathers are incarcerated and provide a range of potential program and policy options that can be implemented across systems by individuals and agencies in Maryland.

Opportunities for the Field

Recommendations

Children and families with incarcerated parents have been a relatively invisible population to the public, to policymakers and to funders. Programs and policies, which have traditionally focused on the offender, his or her victims and the public safety of the community, ignore the vast and growing number of other victims — children. Lack of focus on children and their families has resulted in little research and knowledge, and little action.

We have learned, however, that children and families affected by the incarceration of a parent face a multitude of risk factors, such as poverty, family instability and limited access to sources of social and economic support.

To be sure, there is a wave of growing concern about children and families with incarcerated parents. Increasing activity by researchers, journalists and public officials that address the life experiences of these children, an unprecedented amount of federal funding targeted at mentoring this population, combined with several key policy opportunities on the horizon, present a unique opportunity in time to advocate for these vulnerable families.

Based on a synthesis of themes emerging from the Foundation's activities and investments, the following set of recommended actions for growth and evolution of the field were identified:

Support a National Network or Clearinghouse:

Currently, there is no central, coordinated mechanism for leaders and members of the field from across the country to gather and work together to advance the field. The establishment of a national clearinghouse would provide an infrastructure for the ongoing exchange of ideas and coordination of joint activities aimed at strengthening the field. The clearinghouse could serve as a central repository for disseminating information; provide a formal structure and mechanism for contributors to the field to convene regularly to exchange information; create a collective voice for advocacy and efforts to influence system and policy reform; and assure leaders in the field an opportunity for ongoing support of collective work to improve research, practice and policies affecting children whose parents are incarcerated.

Develop a Research and Evaluation Agenda:

Multiple unresolved research issues are relevant within the field at this time, so it is necessary to convene a group of lead researchers, evaluators, practitioners, agency representatives and others for the purpose of developing a research agenda. Part of the focus should be on cultivating local, county, and state government data and opportunities for cross-system collaboration. In addition, the group might suggest ways of coordinating with federal agencies to improve data and research.

Test, Promote and Sustain High Quality Practice:

There is a need within the field to overcome competition and cultivate a concerted effort to promote high-quality, sustainable practice. A national network might determine how to promote high-quality practice through activities such as professional development, peer learning, technical assistance and cross training opportunities among organizations. The network would need to also address cultural competence within the field, including tools and resources that address diversity, race/racism and related issues affecting children with incarcerated parents.

Engage in Public Policy Advocacy:

Participants identified the need for funders to support the development and implementation of a major public education campaign that makes the issue of children with incarcerated parents "everyone's issue." In conjunction with this, encouraging more focused attention on policy and system reform opportunities within specific localities and states is a logical strategy. Specific examples of nascent policy and system reform efforts in California and Vermont serve as potential models of local, county, and state leadership of public policy advocacy and reform.

Create New Strategies to Address Crosscutting Issues and Dual System Families:

Many children whose parents are incarcerated are being served by other systems, but have yet to be identified. A conservative estimate indicates that at least 25 percent of the children served by the child welfare system have also been impacted by parental incarceration. Child welfare and corrections have a shared interest in bolstering outcomes for families involved with both systems, yet few jurisdictions have developed system-wide child welfare/criminal justice partnerships or collaborations. A coordinated action plan is needed to influence existing policies and system reform that would afford public agencies, corrections, mental health providers and educators to communicate and collaborate as a network to address the unique needs of children whose parents are incarcerated.

Use a Child and Family Focus in System and Policy Reform:

If the Annie E. Casey Foundation focuses attention on children and families as the center of criminal justice policies and systems, others will listen. If there is a way to interject families in the discussion of issues affecting children with incarcerated parents, a family-centered approach could lead to more substantial and positive changes in terms of public will, courts, judges, corrections and faith communities. In addition, a major public education campaign that would lay the groundwork for a family-centered approach in the field would likely enhance public will around this cause.

The information and knowledge gathered from the Foundation's activities and investments presents a compelling case of the need for continued involvement of the Annie E. Casey Foundation, along with other private and public organizations. Obtaining support for the recommended activities would greatly reduce the fragmentation of programs and resources across the country, strengthening the sustainability, infrastructure and capacity of programs serving children and families with incarcerated parents, thereby improving outcomes for this vulnerable population.

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