

# **FROM PRISON TO HOME: THE EFFECT OF INCARCERATION AND REENTRY ON CHILDREN, FAMILIES, AND COMMUNITIES**

## **I. DAY I: Wednesday, January 30, 2002**

### **Welcome and Purpose**

Jeremy Travis, Senior Fellow at the Urban Institute, welcomed conference participants. He cited the statistic that 1700 people are leaving prison per day. He talked about the goal of the conference which was to accelerate the development of knowledge around incarceration and reentry as well as to improve outcomes for children, families, and prisoners.

### **Opening Remarks**

Don Winstead, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Human Services Policy in the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation at the Department of Health and Human Services, talked about the identification of research and policy on incarcerated parents which involves collaboration between the Department of Health and Human Services and the Department of Justice.

Mr. Winstead cited the statistic that more than two million children have parents in prison. Since 1991, the number of children with parents in prison has increased by 60%. These children often have behavioral problems. There is a need for human services programs for these children.

Mr. Winstead talked about the President's Initiative on Mentoring Children of Prisoners. The Initiative provides funding for competitive grants to faith and community-based groups for mentoring programs for children of prisoners.

### **Opening Presentation**

Eric Cadora, a community justice consultant, gave a presentation on policy maps in Brooklyn neighborhoods. In Brooklyn, there are a lot of single parent families as well as many people under the age of 18. 66% of incarcerated parents return home in less than three years. The presentation mainly focused on one area of Brooklyn, Stuyvesant-Bedford, which has a population of 150,000 people. 4% of the adult population in Stuyvesant-Bedford is incarcerated, 3% abuse drugs and 1% is mentally ill. Mr. Cadora talked about the need for new approaches to serve children with incarcerated parents. He also talked about how the criminal justice system is looking for more partners.

### **Plenary Session: Impact of Incarceration and Reentry on Children**

Ross Parke, Director of the Center for Family Studies, University of California-Riverside, talked about how throughout the last decade, the number of children with incarcerated parents has doubled. 7% of African American children and 3% of Hispanic children have parents in prison. 90% of incarcerated parents are fathers. Mr. Parke said that it is important that more attention be given to incarcerated parents because of the impact they can have on children and their development.

Mr. Parke talked about the effects of parental incarceration which include: trauma, disruption and insecurity of attachment, behavior problems, poor school performance, and problems with peers. However, there is little empirical research about the effects of parental incarceration on children.

Policy and programs for incarcerated parents should cross three levels: the family level, the institutional level and the social service agencies. At the family level, it is important to facilitate connections between incarcerated parents and children. Support should be given to non-incarcerated parents to provide quality care. At the institutional level, schoolteachers and school administrators should be cognizant of the special needs of children of incarcerated parents. Programs should be set up to help these children in school. Police need to be trained to handle arrests more sensitively. Prison officials should be aware of the importance of maintaining and allowing parent and child contact. The criminal justice system might consider alternative sentencing for parents. At the social services agencies, there should be encouragement for support programs for care givers. There is also a need for programs that promote more parental contact during incarceration as well as programs that support the transition of parents who are released from jail. More coordination among these levels is needed to effectively deliver services.

Mark Eddy, Associate Director of Research, Oregon Social Learning Center, provided statistics on children with incarcerated parents. Over 50% of incarcerated adults are parents. Most parents do not have interaction with their children on a regular basis. 30-50% percent of these children are adolescents. 10-30% of these children become offenders. Mr. Eddy spoke of the need for partnerships between the legislatures, private foundations, funding agencies, corrections departments, service providers, universities, and professional organizations.

Benjamin de Haan, Deputy Director, Oregon Department of Corrections, talked about Oregon's incarcerated parents. 60% of all inmates in Oregon have children. 25% of these inmates are minorities. 95% of these inmates have regular contact with their children after they are released from prison. 20% of the inmates in Oregon receive public assistance. Mr. Haan also talked about some of the disincentives of the prison system in terms of fostering relationships between incarcerated parents and their children. One example is the expense of collect calls that prisoners make to their families.

### **Break-out Session: Impact of Incarceration and Reentry on Young Children**

During this breakout session, Denise Johnston, Center for Children with Incarcerated parents, talked about the centers study on children of criminal offenders. The study was given to 190 randomly selected public school children as well as caregivers in Pasadena. 26% of the children surveyed had parents in jail. 34% of the children surveyed were African American. 40% of the children who had a father incarcerated had never lived

with their father. Ms. Johnson also talked about the traditional focus of defining children by the status of their parents. She said that there is too much attention given to the offender instead of children of offenders. There is also an assumption that most children live with their parents before the parent is incarcerated.

Stephen Amos, Maryland Governor's Office of Crime Control and Prevention, talked about Maryland's indicators and outcome measurement system. In 1996, Governor Glendening formed a taskforce to look at children and family issues. As a result, standards and benchmarks were set for at-risk kids. These standards and indicators include stable families which are measured by job placement and poverty. Another standard is safety which is measured by abuse and neglect, offenses, and domestic violence.

At the end of the breakout session participants were given the opportunity to ask the panelists questions. One participant asked how to re-engage fathers. Panelists responded that re-engaging fathers is sometimes difficult because many fathers have children with more than one woman. There is a need for new programs that offer supports to fathers once they are released from prison. Reentry is also not focused on reunification. Prisons are not preparing men on how to be a parent. In addition, almost all of the services for children are family and parent focused instead of focused on the child's needs.

### **Breakout Session: Caring for Children when Parents are Incarcerated**

Ellen Barry from Legal Services for Prisoners with Children talked about five issues that could have policy implications for children with incarcerated parents. First, there should be policy or programs addressing race and class issues. She also advocated for programs that help incarcerated parents with mental illness and substance abuse problems. It is also important to look at the current policy consequences that are applicable to parents who have been incarcerated. In some states incarcerated parents who have been convicted of drug related crimes cannot receive or collect public assistance, including housing, TANF, or employment benefits. Ms. Barry also suggested that policy makers look to amnesty, clemency and parole alternatives to incarceration. Funding for incarceration could also be shifted to schools, mental health centers, and substance abuse treatment centers.

Rob Geen of the Urban Institute talked about children of incarcerated parents who are living in kinship or foster care situations. In such situations, the guardians are eligible to receive a variety of support services such as TANF payments, Medicaid, food stamps, childcare, and housing subsidies. However, very few foster parents or relatives are taking advantage of these supports. Possible reasons for not applying for these supports include that they are unaware of eligibility, they are mistakenly denied because they do not have custody, and the stigma associated with applying.

## **II. Day 2: Thursday, January 31, 2002**

### **Opening Remarks**

Dr. Wade Horn, Assistant Secretary, Administration for Children and Families, Department of Health and Human Services, talked about one of the indicators of violence which is growing up in a home without a father. 72% of those convicted for murder grew up fatherless. In order to ensure the prevention of crimes, it is necessary to decrease the number of children who are growing up in homes without fathers. Dr. Horn talked about three strategies. The first strategy is to mentor children with incarcerated parents. Children who are connected to healthy role models will do better. Another strategy to reduce recidivism is to create incarcerated father programs. These programs should help incarcerated fathers resolve issues with their own father. They should also teach fatherhood skills, connect fathers to their children, and manage child support payments.

Terry Donahue, Acting Administrator of the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, U.S. Department of Justice, talked about the reentry of incarcerated parents. 63% of adults return to prison. Probation officers often have more than 100 clients and there is generally not a reentry plan. Prisoners who are released can have substance abuse problems, mental health issues, and usually can't read or hold a job. Many ex-offenders do not have a home to go to once they are released. Mr. Donohue discussed the Going Home Initiative which was developed by the Office of Justice Programs and the National Institute of Corrections in collaboration with the U.S. Departments of Labor, Human Services, Education, and Housing and Urban Development. This initiative will fund reentry programs in states that are designed to prepare ex-offenders to successfully return to their communities. Mr. Donohue encouraged states and communities who are interested in applying for funding under this initiative to refer to the following website: [www.ojp.usdoj.gov/reentry](http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/reentry).

### **Plenary Session: Profile of Returning Offenders and Implications for Families**

During the fourth session, Craig Haney (University of California-Santa Cruz), James Austin (George Washington University), Reginald Wilkinson (Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction), and Elizabeth Gaynes (Osborne Association) talked about transitioning ex-offenders from prison to home. When prisoners are released they often have serious personal problems involving substance abuse, mental health, and low education skills. These prisoners need employment and a residency which is hard to obtain given their personal problems. The prison system is ill equipped to handle their problems. Many prison budgets are too low to fund programs and services that could help prisoners with problems of mental health, substance abuse, and low education skills. Recidivism rates are highly impacted by low education skills.

There is also a lack of available supports for families who want to remain in contact with offenders. Examples of supports include transportation and the high cost of phone calls. If contact through visitations and phone calls is not made while the parents are in jail then it is harder to reconnect with them once they are released.

### **Breakout Session: Impact of Substance Abuse and Mental Illness on the Family**

During this breakout session, David Morissette (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration), Steve Belenko (Columbia University), Joan Gillece (Maryland

Department of Health and Mental Hygiene) and Helen Geysa (National Alliance for the Mentally Ill) talked about how an incarcerated fathers substance abuse and mental illness problems can effect their families. Approximately 50% of state prisoners suffer from mental health problems. Approximately 80% of state prisoners have substance abuse problems. Access to treatment services in prisons is extremely limited. 17% of state inmates receive mental health treatment services. 15% state inmates receive substance abuse treatment. Very few prisons have programs that address co-occurring disorders.

### **Plenary Session: Dynamics of Transition**

Gerlald Gaes, Chief, Office of Research and Evaluation, Federal Bureau of Prisons, talked about a study on the skill sets and health care needs of released offenders. The study showed that academic skill training, vocational training, cognitive skills, sex offender intervention, and drug abuse treatment will decrease recidivism. Literacy training, post secondary education, and job seeking skills had no effect on the rate of recidivism. In terms of policy implications, there are no consistent systematic assessments of prisoner needs. There is a need to improve the quality of evaluation studies. The study also found that many reentering inmates had mental health and substance abuse problems. The study identified internal and external barriers that interfere with the successful reentry of offenders. One of the barriers was the regimentation of security and custody versus rehabilitation.

Stephanie Covington, Co-Director, Center for Gender and Justice, talked about challenges for female offenders and their children. One million women are under the criminal justice system. These women are usually of color, in their early to mid thirties, have a highschool diploma or GED, have been convicted of substance abuse and are unmarried with children. They often have critical and interrelated issues of substance abuse and mental health. Housing, education, job training and substance abuse treatment are needed for this population and could be part of the prevention plan to keep them out of prison.

A.T. Wall, Director, Rhode Island Department of Corrections, talked about the importance of collaboration across many different departments. In Rhode Island, the Department of Corrections contracts with community based services to deliver many prison services. Collaboration also occurs between health and human services and the criminal justice systems. Rhode Island offers cross training to case workers and prison guards. The importance of intervention cutting across programs was emphasized throughout Mr. Wall's discussion.

### **Plenary Session: Incarceration and Reentry in Communities**

Shelli Rossman of the Urban Insitute talked about service integration. Service integration is defined as the coordination of policy and practice across systems and institutional domains in order to prevent families from falling through the cracks. Ms. Rossman talked about the objectives of service integration which include:

1. Identifying gaps in service delivery
2. Assigning organizational oversight and delivery
3. Decreasing barriers

4. Making efficient use of resources
5. Collaborating to be highly client focused
6. The need for good needs assessments while parents are incarcerated
7. Families and inmates involved in the design of case plans

Dina Rose from the John Jay College of Criminal Justice talked about the impact of removing offenders from a community and reentry back into the community. She identified four impacts or effects that ex-offenders face after incarceration:

1. Financial impact of incarceration
2. Incarceration and problem of identity
3. Incarceration and problem of stigma
4. Incarceration and dynamics of community