Promoting Healthy Bonds and Literacy Among Incarcerated Fathers and Their Children: A Pilot Project

Quality of Life Council Meeting
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Nova Southeastern University

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Overview of Issues:

- Incarceration “Binge”
  - Nationwide: 1/100 and 1/31
  - FL Prison Population—47% Increase in past decade
- Males are Disproportionately Incarcerated
  - 93% of State and Federal Inmates
Offender Needs

• Criminal History
• Education/Literacy
• Employment
• Financial
• Family/Marital Relationships
• Mental Health
• Substance Abuse
• Personal/Emotional
• Attitudes
• Family Reunification
A Nationwide “Epidemic”

There are approximately 7.4 million children who have a parent in prison, in jail, or under correctional supervision

- Incarcerated men have an average of 2 children
  - Children of incarcerated fathers are roughly 9X more likely to be incarcerated--- Intergenerational pattern of incarceration

- Collateral Consequences
  - Over ½ are fathers to children under 18 years of age (Mumola, 2008)
  - Families and children are “left behind”
  - May create feelings of abandonment, loss, and weakened attachment (bonds)
Addressing the Issues

• Correctional facilities may present Inmates with opportunities to improve their capacity to serve as productive members of society and their family upon release

• Prison-based programs have the potential to:
  • Treat addictions
  • Improve literacy and education
  • Enhance parenting skills
  • Generally prepare inmates for life outside of prison
    • Goal= Utilize evidence-based programming to reduce recidivism and reintegrate inmates into the community

• Programs which seek to promote paternal involvement and responsible fatherhood are noticeably absent within many correctional facilities
Obstacles -- Parent-Child Prison Visits

- Inadequate information about visiting procedures
- Difficulty scheduling visits
- Geographic location of prison facilities
- Family’s inability to afford transportation
- Visiting procedures that are uncomfortable or humiliating
- Visiting rooms which are inhospitable to children
- Foster parents or caregivers are unwilling to facilitate visits
Research: Benefits of Contact

- Research: Prisoners who maintain family connections have lower rates of recidivism
  - Reduces strain associated with separation
  - Increases the likelihood of successful reintegration
Community Partner: Bridges of America

• Mission Statement: To provide persons with chemical dependency and/or criminal behavior problems an opportunity to experience freedom from this life threatening disease. Our program is designed to eliminate the root cause of problems and provide healing for the whole person: mind, body, and spirit.
Bridges of America, Cont.

• Located in Broward County
  • Powerline Road
• Has been serving offender populations for 30+ years
• Contract with Florida Department of Corrections
  • Offenders transferred to BOA prior to community release
  • Work to facilitate effective community reentry efforts
• Incarceration removes or severely limits the amount of interaction fathers may have with their children
• Collaboration between NSU and Bridges of America seeks to facilitate visits and provide activities which promote positive bonds and literacy
Study Design

• **Sample:**
  - Male Inmates: 8 (16)
  - Primary Caregivers/Guardian of the Children of Male Inmates: 8 (16)
  - Children of Male Inmates: 12 (24)

• **Quasi-Experiment:**
  - Random Assignment to Experimental and Control Group
    - Group A: Nurturing Parenting Only (15 weeks)
    - Group B: Nurturing Parenting, Father Read, Sit-Down Family Dinner (15 weeks)
  - Pre and Post Test
Data Collection/Tracking

- Pre and posttest surveys
- Demographic Variables
- Prior prison visits
- Number of visits facilitated via this intervention
- Release Variables
  - Date of Release
  - Days Spent in Prison
  - LSI-R Data
- Rearrest/Reincarceration Data. Whether or not the inmate reoffends within 3 years of release from Bridges of America
- If the inmates reoffends:
  - Number of times rearrested within 3 years of release
  - Date(s) offense(s) committed
  - The type of offense committed
  - Whether the inmate returned to prison as a result
Improving the Quality of Life for Broward County Residents:

• Improve the quality of life for Broward County residents by

  • Increasing public safety, by reducing recidivism among paternal inmates and decreasing the likelihood that juvenile children of incarcerated fathers will engage in delinquent/criminal behavior

  • Reducing tangible and intangible costs associated with subsequent criminal justice system involvement of fathers and their children

  • Building and/or strengthen family bonds/ties; Improve relationships between fathers and their children which will carry into post-incarceration life
Continued...

• Encouraging literacy of inmates and children; Increase the likelihood of future employment opportunities for fathers and their children

• Facilitating positive communication between incarcerated fathers and their children, and caregivers/mothers/guardians of these children

• Improving the confidence of children and fathers—increase self-esteem

• Developing positive perceptions of the quality of familial relationships between incarcerated fathers and their children
Sustainability

• Utilize positive findings to advocate for the expansion of similar initiatives in similar facilities
  • Academic Publications, Presentation of findings at local agencies
• Seek additional funding sources (Local, State, Federal)
• Maintain collaborative efforts between NSU and BOA
• Utilize Nova student volunteers and interns
  • 2 Utilities: Student internship/experience and positive impacts on Broward County Residents