

not be considered in the current competition.

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“Across our Nation, many Americans are responding to the call to service by mentoring a child in need. By offering love, guidance, and encouragement, mentors put hope in children’s hearts, and help ensure that young people realize their full potential.”

President George W. Bush;  
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**Background on Mentoring Children of Prisoners**

Witnessing and living with the arrest and incarceration of a parent is devastating for children and families. The living conditions, family configurations, and problems faced by the parents make it likely that significant numbers of children of prisoners will suffer emotional and behavioral difficulties. Often economic, social, and emotional burdens are placed on families and caretakers, especially children. Relationships are disrupted and any existing stability is shattered. As a result, the majority of these children experience multiple changes of caregivers and/or living arrangements.

*What Are the Effects of Incarceration on the Child?*

Research has found that significant physical absence of a parent has profound effects on child development. Children of incarcerated parents are seven times more likely to become involved in the juvenile and adult criminal justice systems. Parental arrest and confinement often lead to stress, trauma, stigmatization, and separation problems which may be compounded by existing poverty, violence, substance abuse, high-crime environments, child abuse and neglect, multiple caregivers and/or prior separations. These children are more likely to develop attachment disorders and often exhibit broad varieties of behavioral, emotional, health, and educational difficulties. Many children of incarcerated parents are angry and lash out at others resulting in confrontations with law enforcement. Lacking the support of families, schools, and other community institutions, they often do not develop values and social skills leading to the formation of successful relationships.

*Who Are the Children?*

Between 1991 and 1999, the number of children with a parent in a Federal or state correctional facility increased by more than 100 percent, from approximately 900,000 to approximately 2,000,000. Like their parents, children of criminal offenders reflect the racial disparities of the justice system. Seven percent of African American children have an incarcerated parent, almost three percent of Hispanic children have an incarcerated parent, while less than one percent of white children have an incarcerated parent.

*Who Are the Parents?*

According to the national data from the Bureau of Justice Statistics, in 2001, 3.5 million parents were supervised by the correctional system. Prior to incarceration, 64 percent of female prisoners and 44 percent of male prisoners in state facilities lived with their children. During incarceration, nearly 90 percent of children of incarcerated fathers lived with their mothers and 79 percent of children of incarcerated mothers lived with a grandparent or other relative. Although research has indicated that parents and children should visit one another, less than 50 percent of prisoners receive visits from their children. In a number of cases, the caregiver may not want the child to visit the inmate and prisons are often located far away from the urban areas where most children of prisoners live. According to the Bureau of Prisons,

there is evidence to suggest that inmates who are connected to their children and families are more likely to avoid negative incidents and have reduced sentences.

*Who Are the Mentors?*

Mentors are recruited from a variety of sources including congregations, faith and community-based organizations, non-profit organizations, service organizations, and the business community. Research has shown that the health and productivity of mentors is enhanced by their connection to a child in need.

*How Can Mentoring Help?*

It has been demonstrated that mentoring is a potent force for improving youth outcomes. Mentoring increases the likelihood of regular school attendance and academic achievement. It also decreases the chances of engaging in self-destructive or violent behavior. A trusting relationship with a caring adult will provide stability and often have a profound, life-changing effect on the child. Mentoring provides the incarcerated parent with the assurance that somebody is there to look after the best interests of their child.

*What Are Possible Outcomes?*

Research confirms the societal benefits of mentoring efforts with children. Specifically, data indicates that mentoring programs have reduced first time drug use by almost fifty percent and first-time alcohol use by thirty-three percent. Also, caregiver and peer relationships are shown to improve. In addition, mentored youth displayed greater confidence in their schoolwork and improved their academic performance.

*How Are Matches Initiated and Monitored?*

Parents, incarcerated parents, caretakers, schools, courts, social service organizations, or congregations will identify children in need of a mentor and initiate the referral to a mentoring organization. The mentoring organization will facilitate and monitor the match by providing parents and other stakeholders’ opportunities to provide evaluative feedback on the match. The mentoring organization will develop and distribute status reports to appropriate stakeholders.

*What Happens When Parents Return Home From Prison?*

Mentors are not meant to be “replacement parents.” In situations where incarcerated parents are actively