

Children of Incarcerated Parents

THE ADVISORY COMMITTEE FULLY ENDORSES THE 2017 RECOMMENDATIONS OF GOVERNOR FALLIN'S OKLAHOMA JUSTICE REFORM TASK FORCE

A SNAPSHOT OF THE DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS POPULATION ON JANUARY 30, 2017

- **In State and Private Prisons:** 26,650
- **Awaiting transfer to prison:** 1,627
- **Under community supervision:** 33,137



According to Child Trends' analysis of the 2011-12 National Survey of Children's Health, 96,000 children in Oklahoma have experienced parental incarceration in their lives.

OKLAHOMA'S CHILDREN WHO HAVE A PARENT IN PRISON ARE THE INVISIBLE VICTIMS OF CRIME

Oklahoma's children who have a parent in prison are the invisible victims of crime. Only ten percent of these children are cared for through the Department of Human Services, while the remaining ninety percent are cared for by friends or family, often without adequate knowledge of available resources to help these little ones cope with losing the presence of the most important person in their world.

Over 30,000 Oklahoma children each year face life with a parent in prison. Often, they don't live close to the prison where their parent is held, visits are complicated and don't happen regularly.

Breaking the cycle of intergenerational imprisonment is key to creating healthy families and

a prosperous state. Current data from the Institute for Municipal and Regional Policy shows that children of incarcerated parents are three times more likely to be involved with the justice system than children whose parents have not been incarcerated.

The Advisory Committee recognizes that there has to be accountability within the criminal justice system, however, it only makes good sense to offer treatment with evidence-based programs that facilitate sure and swift consequences. Not only should these services be offered to parents who commit offenses, but they must be offered to children to serve as a protective barrier in order to end the cycle of incarceration.

In these days of diminished

state monies, wise investing in the future of Oklahoma's children is essential. Dollars spent now help children with an incarcerated parent grow up healthy and focused on becoming the productive citizens who will be the strength of Oklahoma by holding jobs, raising healthy families and paying taxes.

The Children of Incarcerated Parents (CIP) Advisory Committee serves as a clearing house where available resources, both private and public, are identified and shared so that Oklahoma's children can have the benefits of whatever services and opportunities are available.

The Honorable April Sellers White (retired)

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MENTORING CHILDREN OF INCARCERATED PARENTS

Providing children with mentors is a proactive way to influence a child's life in a positive manner. The Oklahoma Children of Incarcerated Parents Mentoring Program is a partnership of the Office of Juvenile Affairs (OJA)

and the Oklahoma Commission on Children and Youth (OCCY), and provides grants to nonprofit organizations that provide one-on-one mentoring for children with incarcerated parents. The Big Brothers Big

Sisters (BBBS) of Oklahoma's Amachi program had a goal to match 37 children of incarcerated parents to mentors during Fiscal Year 2017, which began July 1, 2016. The program succeeded by matching 38 children

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with mentors by the end of December 2016. The Amachi program also provided one-on-one mentoring during Calendar Year 2016, serving 510 children across the state, which accounts for 41% of BBBS' overall goal of serving 1,230 children during the calendar year. Reportedly, 119 of the participants live in the Oklahoma City area, 28 in Shawnee, 29 in Bartlesville, 121 in Norman, 36 in Stillwater, and 117 in Tulsa. The retention rates for matches lasted at least 12 months 79% of the time for the community-based programs, and 75% for the school-based programs.

OCCY also contracted with Marie Detty Youth and Family Services to provide an after school program for children of incar-

cerated parents attending the Lawton Public Schools. The "Life Skills Rock" program began in September 2016, at B.R.I.D.G.E. Academy, and in Gateway Success Center; two alternative school programs in the Lawton Public School System. The program utilized the Life Skills Training; an evidence based curriculum developed by Dr. Gilbert Botvin, Ph.D., Professor Emeritus of Psychology in Public Health at Cornell University. The curriculum provided a comprehensive approach to prevent substance abuse and enhance life skills needed for a successful future. A total of 26 children participated in the program with 17 identified as having a parent who was previously or currently incarcerated.

The 5th Annual At Risk Youth Challenges Conference for Lawton Middle School students was held in May 2016. The conference was hosted by and in partnership with Marie Detty Youth and Family Services; Lawton Public Schools; Delta Sigma Theta Sorority; the Oklahoma Department of Corrections; and the City of Lawton. Overall, 100 students attended the conference, along with teachers, school counselors, and community leaders. Students were selected based on justice involvement of their family members, at-risk lifestyle, negative behavioral issues, and/or low academic success. Since its inception in 2012, a total of 500 middle school students have attended the conference.

MAKING A POSITIVE IMPACT



A major CIP Advisory Committee recommendation is to facilitate a child's ability to maintain contact with their incarcerated parent, including using technology. The Oklahoma Messages Project video records parents in prison reading a book and providing words of

encouragement to their children. The book and DVD are then sent to their children to watch and read along.

In 2016, the Oklahoma Messages Project has delivered DVD messages and books from incarcerated parents to 2,741 children in 56 counties. The Messages Project also held an Outdoor Adventure Day

Camp at Shiloh Camp in July 2016, where over 140 children attended. The results of the Messages Project show that 85% of children were happier, more at peace, had improved reading skills, and a stronger or continued bond with their parents.

OKLAHOMA JUSTICE REFORM TASK FORCE FINAL REPORT FEBRUARY 2017

The Oklahoma Justice Reform Task Force is to be commended for their commitment and effort in tackling such a significant issue impacting all Oklahomans. Their work resulted in recommendations that, if implemented, will help move the state toward improvements in many ways. The Oklahoma Children of Incarcerated Parents Advisory Committee is in support of all twenty-seven recommendations in the Final Report. The following are highlights of recommendations that are expected to have a direct effect on Oklahoma's children and families.

- Minimizing financial barriers to successful re-entry.
- Establish a certificate of rehabilitation and expungement process for offenders who successfully complete supervision.
- Revise drug penalties to focus the most severe punishments on higher level drug offenders.
- Expand access to alternatives to incarceration.
- Reserve 85% of crime requirements for violent offenses.
- Establish a risk reduction/re-entry fund.
- Provide enhanced training for decision makers and criminal justice decision makers.
- Enhance programming and treatment options for incarcerated individuals and those under supervision.
- Provide better support to victims of crime.



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