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## Notes on the Collaboration Network Call – February 7, 2006

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Thank you very much to Ms. Ebony Ruhland, Council of Crime and Justice, Minneapolis, Minnesota, coordinator for the Children of Incarcerated Parents Study, who gave the February 7, 2006 presentation on the Collaboration Network Call. Ms. Ruhland has provided her e-mail address ([ruhlande@crimeandjustice.org](mailto:ruhlande@crimeandjustice.org)) and welcomes your request for the final report on the research she described on the call. Also, we have provided as an attachment the Executive Summary and background information from the Council on Crime and Justice.

**Please save the date and note the change in date: The next Collaboration Call will be on April 18, 1:30 PM CT, 2:30 PM ET.** Participants suggested several topics and interest was high for an overview and briefing on legislation and funding related to the fatherhood initiative. The announcement of the call with more specific details and information on how sign up for the call will be on the Fatherhood Listserv.

### I. Welcome and Introductions

Mike Vicars, Region V Child Support, and Kathleen Penak, Region V Management, welcomed the participants on the call and participants introduced themselves.

#### Illinois Participants:

- Gavin, Armour - Youth Network Council, Chicago
- Keene, Sharon - Springfield Urban League Head Start, Springfield
- Pargin, Shannon - Southern Illinois University Carbondale, Head Start, Carbondale
- Parkinson, Pauline - Fathers, Families in Transition, Chicago
- Reed, Cathy - Southern Illinois University Carbondale Head Start, Carbondale
- Roseborough, Alex - Fathers, Families in Transition, Chicago
- Wienecke, Jeffery - Two Rivers Head Start, Batavia

#### Indiana Participants:

- Lovell, Guy - Kokomo Center Schools Head Start, Kokomo
- Moussou, Fey Fey - CANI Head Start, Fort Wayne
- Moore, Thelzelda - Indiana Family and Social Services Administration, Indianapolis

#### Michigan Participants:

- Goorhouse, Ruth – Early Head Start, Sault Ste. Marie
- Grandi, Micki - Michigan Family Resources, Walker

#### Minnesota Participants:

- Ruhland, Ebony - Council on Crime and Justice, Minneapolis
- Whitham, Hilary - Council on Crime and Justice, Minneapolis
- Hausman, Jill - Minnesota State Child Support Enforcement, St. Paul
- Krauth, Pat - Minnesota State Child Support Enforcement, St. Paul

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- Tift, Neil - National Practitioners for Fathers & Families, Minneapolis and Washington D.C.

### Ohio Participants:

- Smith, Terry - Child Development Council of Franklin County, Inc., Columbus

### Wisconsin Participants:

- Bibo, Laurie - Family Connections, Madison
- Paredes Jose - Dane County Parent Council Head Start, Madison
- Green, Nichole - Dane County Parent Council Head Start, Madison
- Marrero, Rene - Dane County Parent Council HS/EHS, Madison

### Colorado Participant

- Griswold, Esther - Center for Policy Research, Denver

### Region V Participants:

- Allgood-Foster, Chandra - Head Start
- Bishop Geneva - Child Support
- Clair, Bill - Tribal
- Doran Mary - Child Welfare
- Erb, Heather - Head Start
- Guthrie, Chris - Child Welfare
- Krasner Steven - ACF/OFSSP
- Miller, Constance - Child Welfare
- Penak, Kathleen - Management
- Vicars, Mike - Child Support
- Weiser, Jenny - RHY

### Booz Allen Hamilton Participants:

- Rakov, Lois

\* There were other participants whose names or organization names were not captured clearly on the call and we'd like to add you to the participant list. Please e-mail Rakov\_lois@ bah.com with this information. Thank you.

Lois Rakov, Booz Allen Hamilton, introduced the presenter, Ms. Ebony Ruhland.

Ebony Ruhland is a research coordinator for the Council on Crime and Justice (Council), located in Minneapolis, and Minnesota. Ms. Ruhland has been involved in coordinating several research projects under the Council's Racial Disparity Initiative. She served as the research coordinator for the Children of Incarcerated Parents Study, which included coordinating the day to day activities of the project. Some of the other projects she is currently working on include: examining the effects of incarceration on fathers, families, and communities; examining the root causes of racial disparities in traffic stops with the Minneapolis Police Department; and assisting in conducting an

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evaluation of the Hennepin County Juvenile Detention Center. She received a B.A. in sociology of law, crime, and deviance from the University of Minnesota. She is currently receiving a master's degree from St. Mary's University in Counseling and Psychological Services. Ms. Ruhland was assisted in the presentation by Hillary Whitman, also of the Council on Crime and Justice.

Ms. Ruhland began by explaining the reasons for the two year, Minnesota-based study. The Council wanted to learn more about what happens to children and caregivers when a parent becomes incarcerated and to look at the effects of children left behind due to incarceration. The researchers interviewed 21 caregivers and 41 child participants in the study three times over the 12 month period. The children's ages were from seven to 17 years and the majority of the children who took part in the study were from 7 to 12 years of age. The children in the study tended to be from non-marital families and participated in the study on a voluntary basis. The researchers provided the information that the Bureau of Justice 1991 statistic indicated that at least 1.5 million children have an incarcerated parent and 3.5 million have a parent on parole/probation. Hilary Whitman advised that as these figures are dated and very conservative, we should reasonably assume that the actual number is much higher than report. She advises that in any event, it is apparent that millions of families are affected by the imprisonment of a parent. (Arditti, J.U.A., Smock, S.A., & Parkman, T.S. 2005 "It's Hard to Be a Father": A Qualitative Exploration of Incarcerated Fatherhood. *Fathering*, 3, 267-288.)

Ms. Ruhland stated that state Departments of Corrections do not maintain data about family structure. Available data has shown that there has been a 400% increase in prison population in the last 25 years. (Beck, IA., Kornberg, J., & Harrison, P.M. (2002). *Prison and Jail Inmates at Midyear 2001*. Washington, DC: Bureau of Justice Statistics.)

### **Social Challenges**

Ms. Ruhland spoke about the social challenges the children face. The children struggled with keeping a parent's incarceration a secret. This was a constant battle they faced. The children spoke that they felt "different" or were outsiders and had no one to whom they could talk. They felt the stigma of having a parent in prison. The children felt that having an incarcerated family member was not a normal occurrence. Some were able to speak with their families about having an incarcerated parent, but they didn't want others to know about the incarceration. The caregivers also felt very isolated because they said they had no one with whom to talk.

### **Child's Awareness of Caregiver's Challenges**

The children had great awareness of adult needs and the stresses that were placed on the caregiver. Children felt they needed to be protective of the caregiver. This was especially the case with some of the boys. The children have great appreciation of the caregiver. Many of the children were aware of their caregivers financial or health problems created by the situation. They also worried about their father who was incarcerated and they held varied perspectives of what prison was like. Caregivers also felt isolated and were in the position of playing the "gate keepers" role as to contact with the father.

### **Role Models**

Many of the children did not have a role model. The caregivers wanted to find role models for the children. Often the fathers did not want the children to see them in prison or think of them as a father or role model.

### **Coping skills**

The children felt isolated as did the caregivers. Many of the children were involved in sports and tried to establish peer relationships. They created fantasy situations as to when the incarcerated fathers would be able to visit them, go on vacation, take them to Disney World, when the father would be home for Christmas or what the incarcerated parent was doing in prison, such as going to school and playing games. Some of the children's perceptions showed their fears of what the fathers were going through. They spoke of the bars in the jail being shaken by the fathers or that people were screaming in the jails trying to get out.

### **Children's Perceptions about Prison**

The caregiver had a great deal of influence over how the children thought about the incarcerated parent and about their situation. All of the children spoke about missing their parent.

### **Prison Visits**

When dealing the issue of visitation, 95% of the parents didn't have children visit them in prison. The effect of imprisonment on the fathers came out in interviews with formerly incarcerated fathers. There were some fathers who were trying to parent behind bars. Hilary Whitham said that often it was the fathers who denied access for visitation. The fathers wanted to protect the children from the prison world. Fathers said it was painful for them to see the children while they were incarcerated. They didn't want the children to be in the prison environment, in handcuffs or in the prison uniforms. Fathers did say that the role of being a parent was important and that participation in the children's lives was very important.

The speakers pointed out that research shows that parents (fathers) do have lower rates of recidivism. The information seemed to show that the correctional/Justice system is not focused on fatherhood. Neil Tift contributed that mothers some time don't want children to visit fathers in prison. The relationship between the parents prior to the fathers going to prison is a factor in the relationships of fathers with children during stay in prison and afterwards. For some, transportation was a major barrier, though call participants mentioned groups that were facilitating visits by providing transportation. It was mentioned that some dads were involved in programs such as Mad Dads, but this was an individual effort on the part of a dad.

Jeffrey Wienecke, Two Rivers Head Start, presented information on how Two Rivers' program has been working to take the stigma out of incarceration. They are working with parents and grandparents who do incur the major expenses in getting to prison for visits. He noted that the visitors talk about the visiting facilities not being child friendly.

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It was important to provide supportive opportunities for these parents and grandparents to talk about their situations. They were more successful in their contacts with assistant wardens, than with chaplains. Some times caregivers who visited were told they could not bring all of the children to the visit. Various rules about the children and parent contacts show gender differences. For example, mothers in jail can hold children, but fathers are not allowed to do so. There is also a difference in the “child friendliness” of the facilities, in that women’s jails had children’s books and toys available for children who visit mothers in prison. Other call participants mentioned fathers reading and recording stories for the children. Mentoring connections and resources such as Big Brothers in Dane County Wisconsin, Rainbows, Angel Tree, and Mad DADS were discussed. A guide book entitled “Parenting from Prison” has dialogues and suggestions for visiting fathers in prison, but according to Esther Griswold, Center for Policy Research, the booklet is in need of updating. She referred people to the website for the Center for Policy Research.org

Hilary Whitman, Council on Crime and Justice recommended two authors, Seymour Bilchik and J. Hairston, who have conducted studies of children and incarcerated fathers. Bilchik’s study has information on the increased rates of criminal involvement for those children that have parents who are incarcerated. (Bilchik, S., Seymour, C., & Kreisher, K. (2001). Parents in Prison. *Corrections Today*, 63, 7, 108-112).

Ms. Whitman advised that Hairston is an excellent resource to refer to when studying the imprisonment of fathers.

Hairston, J. C. F. (2002). Prisoners and Families: Parenting Issues During Incarceration. *From Prison to Home*, 1, 42-54.

-----. (1998). The Forgotten Parent: Understanding the forces that influence incarcerated fathers’ relationship with their children. *Child Welfare*, 617-640.

Discussion on the call turned to questions about Child Support that may have carried over from the previous call. Call participants raised the problem of the need to modify child support orders for incarcerated fathers. Participants noted that fathers are not prepared or do not understand their child support situation and what they may be able to do with their orders when they go in prison. Participants talked about the difficulties following incarceration of creating programs to maintain earning capacity particularly with a burdensome arrearage and how difficult all of these reentry problems were in the ability of the fathers to rebuild or maintain relationships with their families. A participant from Minnesota mentioned how overwhelming it is for families who have burdensome child support debt when they leave prison. Several participants from different states mentioned that their agencies are looking for alternative ways to handle these situations.

A participant asked the speaker what they learned during the interviews about prison parenting classes. The speaker said that the prison parenting classes got mixed reviews and many felt that the classes were not helpful. Participants discussed the

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need for children to have a support group of peers. The Council on Crime and Justice Study found that children needed to talk with other children in similar situations. A call participant from the Youth Network Council, talked about mentoring training that was being held at their agency. He mentioned that a person who had been incarcerated was sharing stories and helping train mentors of children who have incarcerated parents.

Kathleen Penak concluded the meeting by asking the participants to determine the topic, date, and time for the next Collaboration Call. The participants set the date and time for the next meeting as **May 16, at 1:30 PM CT, 2:30 PM ET.**