ENGAGING FATHERS

FOR SUCCESSFUL REENTRY

National Fatherhood Initiative®

www.fatherhood.org

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Introduction

Successful reentry is one of the greatest challenges facing America today, especially the future of our children. The greatest predictor of whether a child will wind up in prison is whether his parent(s)—namely, the father—was in prison.[1] Despite the many daunting challenges that fathers face upon their release, connecting them with their children and family is perhaps the most strategic one to address because it breaks the generational nature of crime and incarceration.

Research shows that family connections are central to reducing recidivism and yet the national recidivism rate is over 50% and the re-arrest rate is over 67% just three years after release.[1] One of the best ways in which to help fathers connect with their families is through programming that includes wrap-around services that address the many challenges they face as well as helping them to be better dads. After all reentry is complex business. Connecting with children and family is just one important card in a deck that often seems stacked against successful reentry.

The following fact sheets connect the dots between eight of the most significant reentry challenges and the need to engage incarcerated and reentering fathers to be better dads.

- Housing
- Employment
- Marriage and Relationships
- Substance Abuse
- Mentoring and Community Support
- Child Support
- Involving Moms
- Domestic Violence

The fact sheets provide data on the connection between each challenge and fatherhood programming. They also include best practices and "quick tips" gleaned from The Connections Project of National Fatherhood Initiative®, one of the most comprehensive efforts to date on gathering knowledge of and

examples of how these issues are addressed across the country. (For information on The Connections Project, visit www.connectionsproject.org.) Use the data and best practices to support the need for fatherhood programming as central to reentry efforts in your organization, community, and state. We hope you will be inspired by the vision in these pages, what's possible from a practical perspective, and by the incredible work going on across the country as you enhance your efforts to engage offenders for successful reentry.

Housing

"I want to make a satisfying life for me and my children . . . that's my sole motive now."

— Nelson Hernandez, ex-offender and resident of UCount Family Home (Georgetown, DE)

"It is common knowledge in corrections that housing, transportation, and a job are the three most critical and immediate needs. They are linked together. How can you hold down a job if you don't have a place to live?"

— Dr. Steven Hall, Director of Religious Services and Community Involvement for the Indiana Department of Corrections

Data:

The first 72 hours after release are decisive for the parolee because they represent the first opportunity for the parolee to make the choices that will determine whether he or she succeeds with reentry. The community to which a parolee returns might have changed dramatically since he or she entered prison. The parolee might not find much help in navigating the way to the services for housing needed to make reentry a success.[2]

People released from prison and jail to parole who entered homeless shelters in New York City were seven times more likely to abscond during the first month after release than those who had some form of housing.[3]

More than 10 percent of those entering prisons and jails are homeless in the months before their incarceration. For those with mental illness, the rates are even higher — about 20 percent. Released prisoners with a history of shelter use were almost five times as likely to have a post-release shelter stay.[4]

Best Practice Spotlight:

UCount Family Home in Georgetown, Delaware, led by founder and Executive Director Patricia Walp, is a new three-quarter (3/4)[5] recovery house with a focus on dads in recovery. The typical resident is homeless or comes from prison or rehabilitation program, and wants to reunify with his children. Informed by the Oxford House model (oxfordhouse.org), they encourage sobriety, accountability, and provide housing in a good neighborhood. Fathers are required to participate in National Fatherhood Initiative's *24/7 Dad*™ (http://www.fatherhood.org/247dad), and UCount Family Home has a special room dads can use for child visitation that takes place overnight or during the day.

Quick Tips:

1 If you start a similar housing model as mentioned above, use strong accountability, daily chores, positions of responsibility, and good neighborhoods as ways of helping ex-offenders and fathers reclaim their lives, self-respect, and identity as a viable citizen.

2 Educate the community about the link between engaging fathers and incarceration, reentry, and reunification.

Help them understand the need for ex-offenders to change people, places, and things to succeed. Help them see how fathers are motivated to make these kinds of changes when they learn through fatherhood programming that they have an irreplaceable role in their child's life.

3 Remember ideally this is transitional housing and not a place of permanence for dads with children. At the appropriate time, introduce single fathers to National Fatherhood Initiative's *Why Knot*™*: A Marriage-Readiness Program for Men* (http://www.fatherhood.org/whyknot). This program addresses the myths and misconceptions single men and fathers have about marriage. Consider relationship education curriculum like PREP's (Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program—see www.prepinc.com) *Within My Reach*™ for individuals or *Within Our Reach*™ for couples. Programs like these will help them create healthy, long-term relationships that will lead to increased access and permanence for their children and, avoiding harmful relationships that could derail successful reentry. Fathers getting involved in harmful female relationships is the primary catalyst UCount Family Home has observed derailing successful reentry.

4 For fathers who may take up residence with their biological family, try to integrate your efforts with services that help prepare and inform the family of origin about the types of issues/barriers ex-offenders face (stigma, inability to access many federal human/social service programs, potential PTSD*, depression, emotional disengagement, and potential fear of intimacy). Consequently, the family may be more understanding and patient—less likely to harbor feelings of anger, disappointment, and abandonment—making a stability and success more likely.

* PSTD stands for post traumatic stress disorder and refers to a severe anxiety disorder that can develop after exposure to any event that results in psychological trauma.

Employment

"You have so much stress when you come out, stress of finding a job and stress of following the rules of parole. You feel everything is against you. [My daughter] has brought a lot of meaning and purpose to my life. She keeps me on the right track."

— Jose Sanchez, ex-offender who received services from The Family Connections Center (Laconia, NH)

Data:

- *Only two-thirds of inmates were employed during the month before they were arrested for their current offense.*[6]
- *An unemployed ex-offender is three times more likely to return to prison than an employed ex-offender.*[7]
- *There is strong evidence that criminal behavior is responsive to changes in employment status.*[8]
- *Positive job experiences that are associated with positive changes in parenting behavior improve a child's self-efficacy (e.g. beliefs that provide the foundation for human motivation, well-being, and personal accomplishment).*

Best Practice Spotlight:

Responding to the research that shows character as the most important attribute that companies look for in employees, Jobs for Life (www.jobsforlife.org) and Prison Fellowship's H.I.R.E. (Here is a

Responsible Employee) have engaged one of the most important sectors that teaches character: the faith-based community. Through classes and one-to-one mentoring, H.I.R.E. has mobilized these networks to teach ex-offenders character, connect them to a community and support network, give them an opportunity to prove they are ready for work, and give them access to a personal and professional network that can connect them with jobs.

Quick Tips:

1. Utilize the character formation and networks associated with the faith-based or community organizations.
2. Contact employers in the community and introduce them to fathers you believe in, encouraging them to employ your dads. Build relationships and a network.
3. Build relationships and work with the staff at local workforce centers as well. They have access to large databases and can refer your clients** when jobs come up.
4. Begin or develop your own database of local employers with good track records for hiring ex-offenders.
5. Try to get Chambers of Commerce involved in changing perceptions in the business community.
6. Ask employers to give a fair salary, chance of advancement, and mentorship.
7. Align your efforts with organizations that are active in lobbying or advocating for policy initiatives that aim to provide tax incentives for businesses—particularly small businesses that hire ex-offenders attempting to re-enter their communities.

** Parolees released with a sex charge may have additional obstacles to finding legal employment.

Marriage and Relationships

"This class has taught me how to communicate with my children and the value of being a part of their lives, even while being locked up. I have been in and out of correctional facilities all of my life and had not spoken with my children about being in custody. As a result of this training [on National Fatherhood Initiative's InsideOut Dad™], I have reconnected with my family."

— Jose Banda, Pinal County Sheriff's Office, Adult Detention Center Inmate (Florence, AZ)

Data:

Incarcerated men and women face substantial challenges to maintaining their marriages, relationships with their children, and other intimate relationships while incarcerated and when they reenter society. The marriage of an incarcerated man is about three times more likely to fail than that of one who is not incarcerated, and the likelihood of divorce increases with time served.[10]

A study of prisoners' reentry found that men with closer family relationships, stronger family support, and fewer negative dynamics in their relationships with intimate partners were more likely to have worked after release, and less likely to have used drugs.[11]

Qualitative, longitudinal, and now intervention research indicate that a man's capacity to fulfill his role(s) as father is embedded in his relationship with the child's mother. Programs that are effective at strengthening the relationship between parents who live together have been found to increase fathers' involvement in parenting. For parents who are no longer together, the link is even stronger.[12]

Best Practice Spotlight:

The Ridge Project in Defiance, Ohio (www.theridgeproject.com) uses a combination of pre-release programs on fatherhood and relationship education to build and rebuild relationships between fathers and their children and between fathers and their wives and mothers of their children. The Ridge Project delivers these programs in approximately a dozen state prisons. The Ridge Project addresses several powerful dynamics at play when working with reentering fathers that include:

- They are often treated as if they don't exist and their families are ostracized.
- Upon release, they will return to their family connections whether or not they are skilled in how to manage them.
- Pre-release fatherhood and marriage and relationship-education programs give a context to coach them in an atmosphere that is healthy and safe.
- They need a strong support network in the first six months after release.

Co-Executive Directors Ron and Cathy Tijerina point to the ability of the organization to create bridges between their pre-release programs and community-based organizations as critical to the success of reentering fathers. These bridges include those between the Department of Corrections and two large networks that ease the transition back into the community: state run Community-based Corrections Facilities (26 throughout state) and Transformation Network in eastern Ohio that includes faith-based organizations.

Quick Tips:

1. Make sure your efforts to build or rebuild relationships and marriages between fathers and mothers include coaching on the following areas: negotiation of roles, power and control, communication, handling negative emotions (e.g. resentment), potential return to criminal activity, and domestic violence.

2. Prepare men to face the following challenges related to reestablishing a parenting relationship:
   - Simply living again with children can bring unrealistic expectations
   - Effects of prison negatively affect characteristics of close bonds between fathers and children (e.g. emotional intimacy)
   - The stress introduced when another decision-maker (the father) enters the home
   - Interference from the mother and family members who act as gatekeepers in terms of a father's access to his children
   - Other males (father figures) who became involved with the mother since the father's incarceration.

Substance Abuse

"It's easy to have kids. I have nine. [I] didn't care much about being a father. I was more into drugs. Then something happened that changed everything. My 4-year-old daughter, Liberty, was put into foster care. I was close to losing my rights as a father. I knew I had to get clean and sober. I started with inpatient treatment. On a day when I was planning to drop out, Libby's mom came with a message from Libby that she missed me. She looked me in the eye and told me, 'For once, just finish something!' After inpatient treatment, I completed outpatient. Then I learned about the 24/7 Dad™ group... I stayed with it for the 24 weeks. Then other things started to change. I got to see Libby more and more, now she is home for good. I married her mother, and we're really happy."

- Dave Nogart, participant in Lifetime Dads a program of Upper Des Moines Opportunity, Inc. (Fort Dodge, IA)

Data:

The connection between drug abuse and crime is well known—one half to two-thirds of inmates in jails and state and federal prisons meet standard diagnostic criteria (DSM-IV) for alcohol/drug dependence or abuse. Yet only 7 to 17 percent of these prisoners receive treatment in jail or prison, so that most of the over 650,000 inmates released back into the community each year have not received the treatment they need. Left untreated, ex-offenders can relapse and return to criminal behavior.[13]

Eighty percent of state prisoners report a history of drug or alcohol use.[14]

More than half (55 percent) of state prisoners report using drugs or alcohol during the commission of the crime that resulted in their incarceration. The statistics are similar for those exiting our nation's jails: two-thirds of this population was actively involved in drugs prior to admission, and 36 percent used drugs or alcohol at the time of their offense.[15]

Best Practice Spotlight:

South Jersey Aftercare runs homes in Camden, New Jersey for ex-offenders wrestling with addictions. They use National Fatherhood Initiative's InsideOut Dad™ program to address the father wound—something they see at the root of many addictions. In helping men and fathers stay sober, they have found that there is truth in the saying, "Idleness is the devil's workshop." Executive Director Bill Antinore gets men and fathers hustling to get a job right off the bat. For men and fathers who can't get a job, they try to do whatever is in their power to get them to persevere at a temporary employment service like Labor Ready (www.laborready.com) where they can get paid quickly, feel good about themselves, and come home tired. When they come home tired, they have less energy to stay out late and get into trouble. Staff at South Jersey Aftercare also does whatever they can to get men and fathers plugged in with other men and fathers who are trying to walk the right way. They have found that it is critical that these men and fathers have people and support groups with whom to talk through their stress—including stressors that trigger their addictions.

Quick Tips:

1. Substance abuse is probably the greatest challenge to successful reentry because of its potential to exacerbate the other challenges. Excellence is doing the best you can with what you have in your community. Consequently, best practices in dealing with substance abuse include low-cost, accessible treatment programs like Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) (www.aa.org) and other similar support groups (including groups built on the AA model like Narcotics Anonymous, Crystal Meth Anonymous or Cocaine Anonymous).
2. Additionally, one can glean from or look into replicating seasoned and holistic residential models such as the Delancey House Foundation (www.delanceystreetfoundation.org), especially in how they surround emotional pain—the root of so many addictions—with a sense of shared community and family.
3. In light of the tip above, start an alumni support group for fathers who have completed your program.

Mentoring and Community Support

"I just wanted to let you know that since we started sending people to [this] program, my case load is at 0% re-incarcerated! I realize that it's not the 'magic pill' but [that] number is amazing!"

— Steve Walker, probation and parole officer commenting on he Dedicated Dads program sponsored by Early Education Services (Brattleboro, VT)

Data:

A person's companions might be the greatest predictor of criminal behavior. If they lack healthy attachments (i.e. to friends, family, employment, etc.), there is little to constrain them from risky or criminal behavior.[16]

The process of desistance is fundamentally about staying straight—the day in and day out process of avoiding old habits and choosing to act in a new way.[17]

The process of constructing new patterns is often the most difficult part of reentry—old networks need to be abandoned and entirely new networks of friends and social supports need to be constructed. The caseworker appears to serve as a "designated friend/ cheerleader" as the ex-offender deals with the day to day struggles of life in the work force.[18]

Best Practice Spotlight:

The mission of Taos MEN (Men Engaged in Nonviolence, Inc.) in Taos, New Mexico is to inspire, train, and empower men and boys to lead lives of nonviolence. They have found that a key ingredient in working with dads in recovery is helping them practice fathering by getting involved as a mentor. Some of the best mentors are dads who have struggled or encountered roadblocks (legal or otherwise) in connecting with their children. Taos MEN encourages these dads to serve as mentors to dads with similar struggles. Acting as a mentor had the added benefit of helping these mentors continue to regain the confidence and relational skills they need to be there for their children.

Quick Tips:

1. Before release, teach offenders the concepts of humility—seeing yourself as needing help—and accountability—a helping hand or a kick in the pants. Be real about how they are not going to like someone getting in their face or confronting them but that is what they will need. It is essential to build this foundation on the inside so they will seek it out upon release.

2. Understand that mentoring alone (mentoring the ex-offender and/or giving him an opportunity to mentor others) is insufficient and needs to be paired with intensive case management and employment services.

3. Engage offenders more one-on-one. Find out why they withdrew from programs and try to address those barriers.

Child Support

"I was in prison and then in a half-way house when I first came to the fathering program. I saw my kids once a week. I am out of the half-way house and attending school now. I have joint custody of my children and will soon be a single parent. The program helped me get my parenting skills on track and reconnect with my kids. I know who I am as a father and want my kids to trust me to be there for them and to be a role model for them."

— anonymous father from the Family Center (Minneapolis, MN)

Data:

People released from prisons and jails typically must make payments to a host of agencies, including probation departments, courts, and child support enforcement offices. Three-fourths of those owing child support, restitution, and supervision fees have difficulty paying these debts.[19]

Child support enforcement can garnish as much as 65 percent of a noncustodial parent's wages toward the payment of child support debt. For parents released from prisons and jails, this practice can increase the difficulty of securing and maintaining the housing, transportation, and employment that are necessary for making child support payments.[20]

About half of all fathers in State and Federal prisons had a personal income of less than $1,000 a month prior to incarceration.[21]

Best Practice Spotlight:

An increasing number of child support enforcement (CSE) agencies across the country are working more intentionally with incarcerated or recently-released dads and programs that support them. In Colorado, for example, a key part of the state's 2011-2013 Strategic Plan is to work with community agencies—including fatherhood programs—to emphasize the prevention of arrears and early intervention. Many states are able to forgive state arrears (i.e. past support owed) but review and adjustment education for fathers is crucial as modification of child support is not retroactive, but rather only to the date of the modification request. The Colorado CSE has some helpful community resources including a handbook that is designed to help fathers understand how child support works. Visit the Colorado CSE website at www.childsupport.state.co.us for publications and other helpful resources on working with incarcerated and reentering fathers on child support. These resources also include the following pamphlets on paternity and modification: *The Parent Guide to Child Support* and *The Parent Guide to Visitation.*

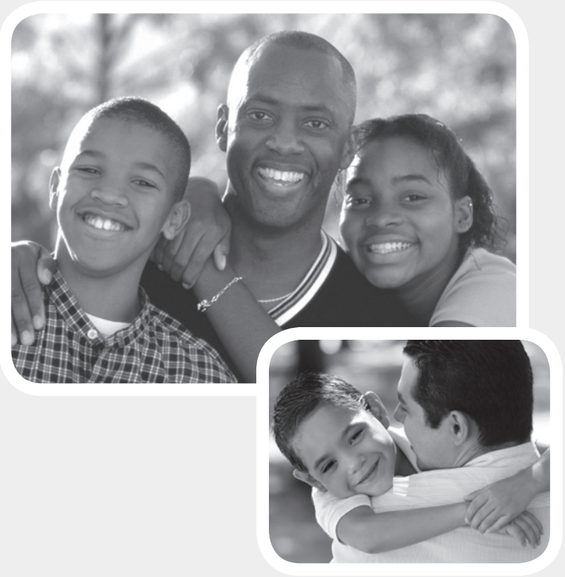
Quick Tips:

1. Be clear about the distinction between fathers who are "dead-broke" versus fathers who are "dead-beat." There is a clear difference in circumstance between fathers who are **able but unwilling** compared to fathers who are **unable but willing**.

2. Help dads to not put their head in the sand—child support does not go away. Help dads understand that their CSE agency wants children to have both parents involved in their lives.

3 Contact the local CSE office and explain your interest in working with them. When meeting with them:

- Mention that the father(s) you help is in a fatherhood program and wants to be a part of his child's life.
- Request one person at the CSE office with whom you can communicate on a regular basis about the father(s).
- Help them understand what they can do to help a father (e.g. reinstate licenses, negotiate arrears, etc. if the father makes regular monthly payments).
- Offer to help CSE by educating fathers about paternity—giving out guidelines, and helping them keep the father's contact information up-to-date.



Involving Moms

"He apparently has had conversations with your staff as to growth development and children's abilities at different stages in their lives. This was huge for him and it was clear to me he listened and understood. I recognized a definite change in him."

— mom of the child of an inmate father participating in the Fathers Bridging the Miles program sponsored by Read to Me International (Honolulu, HI

Data:

Conflict between husbands and wives and with former partners was a central subject in most of the inmates' descriptions of their current family relations.[22]

A mother's perceptions of the paternal role are often better predictors of father involvement than fathers' own perceptions of the paternal role.[23]

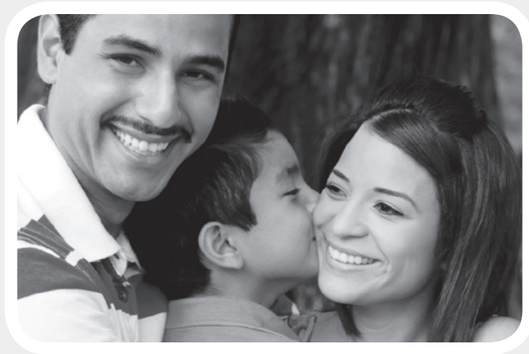
Relationships with children and children's mothers represent another common source of conflict for incarcerated men. For many, such conflict arises from the fear of being replaced by another man as a father figure.[24]

Best Practice Spotlight:

Read to Me International's Fathers Bridging the Miles program in Honolulu, Hawaii uses video conferencing and a literacy program where fathers record themselves reading from a book to their children. They burn recordings onto a CD and send it to the children along with the book. Inmates must apply to Read to Me International to be part of the program, be approved by the facility, and then be interviewed by the program's administrator before being allowed to participate. Finally, the mother or legal guardian of the father's children must give permission for the father to participate. She must also agree to support and facilitate his involvement (e.g. read his notes to the child) and a follow-up survey is sent to her later to measure impact. They also gave Pizza Hut® Literacy Cards to the first 50 mothers to return their survey.

Quick Tips:

1. If your program requires an application, create simple, clear, and attractive forms for the application and follow-up process. The forms used in the Fathers Bridging the Miles program can be accessed at the website of The Connections Project (www.connectionsproject.org).



2. Work with moms to increase access of fathers to their children. (Unless there is an issue of safety with a father's access.) Use resources that raise moms' awareness of the importance of father involvement such as National Fatherhood Initiative's Mom As Gateway™ Workshop (www.fatherhood.org/fatherhoodworkshops).

3. Educate moms on gender and parenting differences between moms and dads.

Domestic Violence

"It's done behind closed doors. It's done where the results are hidden away from friends, family, others. This is why it is imperative that I do what I can, when I can, where I can, to stop the violence."

— John Jorza from the Wellspring Family Services' Domestic Violence Intervention Program (Seattle, WA)

Data:

Domestic Violence (DV) refers to the use of physical, sexual, verbal, psychological, or economic abuse or coercion by an individual against a current or former partner. Also know as intimate partner violence, it can occur between spouses, former spouses, or girlfriends and boyfriends. Though men are more often the perpetrators, domestic violence may be committed by men or by women, and both men and women can be victims.[25]

According to a number of widely accepted theories of domestic violence, intimate partner conflict that results in violence is often rooted in men's efforts to control their partner's behavior.[26]

Among the other identified sources of conflict are men's efforts to monitor and control their partners from inside prison; a wife or girlfriend's inability to satisfy an incarcerated man's emotional and economic needs; men's inability to meet a wife or girlfriend's economic expectations after leaving prison; and men returning to "fast living" or street life upon release.[27]

Best Practice Spotlight:

The mission of the Women's Center & Shelter of Greater Pittsburgh's is to end intimate partner violence in the lives of women and children. It was founded in 1974 and was one of the first six shelters in the United States for battered women. Associate Executive Director Janet Shott-Mace offers this realistic advice and caution to organizations and individuals who work with fathers: "If they have

children, co-parenting without abuse is the ideal whether or not they continue with an intimate relationship themselves. There's still a connection with children even if he was abusive. That's why we have a men's group. We can't just help the women. Women can't, however, put their complete trust in a Batterer Intervention Program and think that just because he's gone through this that they are completely safe. That can only happen after he's shown continual and consistent change in behavior and is able to rebuild that trust."

Quick Tips:

1. Have a DV protocol in place that guides staff on how to handle this sensitive challenge. Visit the National Resource Center on Domestic Violence (www.nrcdv.org) for more information and guidance on creating a protocol.

2. Add a DV component to your program for inmates and ex-offenders. Consider a Batterer Intervention Program (BIP) for fathers who have committed domestic violence or a domestic violence awareness program to educate fathers who have not committed domestic violence about the issue. An excellent awareness (but not intervention) resource is National Fatherhood Initiative's Understanding Domestic Violence™ Workshop (www.fatherhood.org/fatherhoodworkshops).

3. Encourage probation and parole officers to educate parolees that violating their parole by committing DV can cause them to go back to jail.

4. Encourage fathers to get counseling after their BIP experience to ensure that they can catch themselves slipping into old behaviors and make changes before it escalates to DV.

5. Learn the following red flags that indicate some might be at risk or already committing DV[28]:
   - Comments that indicate possible physical, sexual, verbal, or psychological violence
   - Disclosure of a generational history of family violence/abuse
   - Perspective that women are objects and subservient to men
   - Belief in male supremacy and rigid sex-role stereotypes
   - Comments that reflect a high level of possessiveness
   - No sense of empathy for others

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