

Overview about the Family Connections Initiative at Dane County Jail

Background

- Over the last few years, DCJ has been making a concerted effort to support the family connections of inmates
- As part of this, DCJ was selected by the National Institute of Corrections for a training and technical assistance award to strengthen family support and connections:
 - ✓ <https://nicic.gov/news-media/media-releases/pilot-sites-family-connections-correctional-facilities-project>
- Drawing from the best practice models, DCJ is focusing efforts in the following areas: 1) Intake and Assessment 2) Parenting Classes (Parenting Inside Out or PIO) 3) Staff Training 4) Visiting Area Enhancements
 - ✓ [Model Practices for Parents in Prisons and Jails: Reducing Barriers to Family Connections](#)
- DCJ is focusing on these strategies because research suggests that both the risk for recidivism and the challenges individuals face when reintegrating into the community are reduced among those with strong family connections and traditional family roles¹

Partnerships

- The Sheriff's Office partnered with the UW Extension and UW School of Social Work to pilot Parenting Inside Out (<http://www.parentinginsideout.org/welcome-to-parenting-inside-out/>)
 - ✓ PIO is considered a leading evidence-based model that promotes skills and parenting knowledge among criminal justice-involved parents
- Our partnership with UW Extension has allowed us to make substantial improvements to our visiting room environment to foster child, parent, and family interactions through literacy activities
 - ✓ Examples include reading activities, interactive learning, educational wall paintings, and a book vending machine
- A project with the Sheriff's Office and UW-M 2020, allows us to offer enhanced visitation with inmates and family members from an area library or their own home using video visits
- Through our work with NIC, BJA and Community Works, we have gained a number of contacts to further support our efforts with these initiatives

Moving Forward

- Inmate, family, and staff response to the Family Connections Initiative has been positive so far
- Continue to provide PIO, as it fills a gap in DCJ programming as there is not any parenting education available to jail inmates
- Move forward with training staff members about family interaction, de-escalation and the purpose behind the Family Connections Initiative
- As we learn about the fit of PIO, Literacy Link, training needs, and other family connections activities at DCJ, the goal is to stabilize funding and to build capacity in order to sustain the work that is currently underway
- Coordinating all the Family Connections activities and providing dedicated staff to support the work will position Dane County as a leader in jail policies and approaches. These initiatives will allow for further support by NIC and BJA.
- The Sheriff's Office can serve as a model for other jails (in WI and across the country) on developing Family Connections strategies to improve outcomes for inmates and their family members.

¹Naser, R. L., & La Vigne, N. G. (2006). Family support in the prisoner reentry process: Expectations and realities. *Journal of Offender Rehabilitation*, 43, 93–106; Visher, C. A. (2013). Incarcerated fathers: Pathways from prison to home. *Criminal Justice Policy Review*, 24(1), 9–26.