

ACEs and Children of Incarcerated Parents

In Lamoille County “Resilience Beyond Incarceration” works with the children of incarcerated parents, along with their caregivers and families—a truly multigenerational approach to reduce ACEs and build resilience among this most vulnerable population. Children with an incarcerated parent experience ACEs at a much higher rate than other kids: 3.7 ACEs, versus 0.7 for children whose parents were never in prison. (ChildTrends, 2015). Incarceration serves as an indicator of other co-occurring risks and vulnerabilities that make our families particularly fragile. Most of the parents in our program experienced 8 to 10 ACEs in their own childhood. We know that, without effective intervention and support, multiple adversities are passed along through intergenerational transmission. We strive to turn that curve in a better direction.

Every year, an estimated 6,000 VT kids experience parental incarceration—that’s about 2,000 children on any given day. In Vermont, one child in every 17 has had a mom or dad in prison, and while this is marginally better than the U.S. average (1 in 14), it is sobering to note how poorly we compare with states like NY, NJ, MA, NH, and CA—where rates of parental incarceration are less than ours. These 6,000 children are Vermont’s invisible orphans of justice: experiencing ACEs at a very high rate, they are at increased risk for depression, anxiety, cognitive delay, delinquency, school failure, substance abuse, poor health outcomes, and eventual incarceration themselves. I believe we can do better, much better.

Our program, Resilience Beyond Incarceration helps to reduce ACEs, build resilience, and mitigate traumatic impacts—we believe that kids should not pay the price for their parent’s crimes. For nearly 15 years, we’ve been working together with families to make sure these children are not forgotten. We’ve been collecting data, and our results are good!

- Our kids have only a 6% conviction rate later in life, compared to similar cohorts with conviction rates ranging from 24% to 61%.
- Our kids have a high-school drop-out rate of 20%, significantly lower than would be expected
- Our parents have shown an overall gain of 44% across measureable domains on the Self-Sufficiency Matrix including: physical health (70%), mental health (63%), substance use (30%), safety in relationships (47%), housing (58%), transportation (48%), criminal justice (51%), financial stability (60%), parenting skills (23%), education (37%), community connections (49%), and social support system (64%).

Below is a link to a very short but powerful 2-minute video that speaks to the traumatic experience of parental incarceration.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9eYH0AFx6yI> (Knock Knock, Daniel Beaty)

Additional resources:

http://www.courts.ca.gov/documents/BTB_23_4K_6.pdf (Parents Behind Bars: What happens to their children? Child Trends data graph in figure 2, page 6)

<http://www.aecf.org/resources/a-shared-sentence/> (Annie E. Casey “A Shared Sentence” policy report Kids Count 2016)