Federal Probation

JOURNAL

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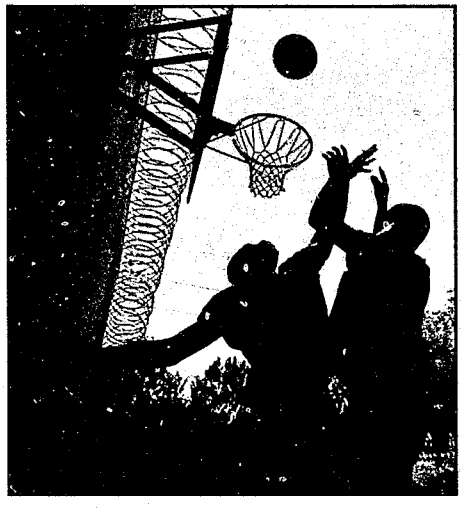

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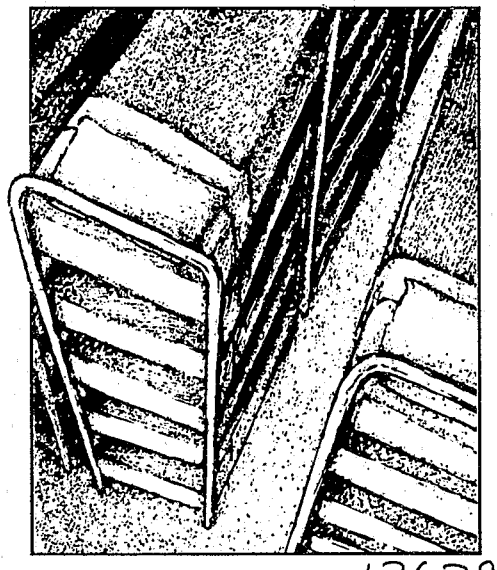

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Two Innovative Programs

Her children, their future: Learning to parent in Federal prison

Joyce Carmouche and Joretta Jones

The Federal Correctional Institution (FCI) in Lexington, Kentucky—the home of approximately 1,400 female offenders—provides a stark contrast to the beauty of the horse farms surrounding it. The corridors of this institution are filled with women from all walks of life whose offenses range from misdemeanors to calculated murder.

Their ages range from 18 to 76, they were born in many different countries, and they were raised in various cultural settings. However, from the first offender to the career criminal, the vast majority share a deep concern—their children.

Pregnancy creates special concerns both for inmates and the staff who monitor their development. In order to provide efficient services and a mutually supportive environment, most pregnant women in the Federal Bureau of Prisons (BOP) are housed in Antaeus Unit at FCI Lexington. Approximately 17 percent (35 to 40 women) of the 230 inmates on the unit are expectant mothers. The women are their own support group. They voice the same complaints about mysterious pains, inexplicable food cravings, mood swings, and constant fatigue as do other pregnant women. They are treated as "special" by other inmates of the unit, who perform heavy cleaning tasks for them and, if necessary, try to circumvent the system to see that those "inexplicable food cravings" are satisfied. After delivery at a local hospital, the birth announcement is posted on a bulletin board centrally located in the unit. Upon the mother's return, the baby's photograph is also displayed on the board. Each photograph generates genuine excitement throughout the unit.

Photo: Al Cook/Uniphoto

Seventy-three babies were born to incarcerated mothers at a local community contract hospital from October 1, 1988, to June 1, 1989. Between the time the mother arrives on the unit and the baby's birth, extensive and complicated work is performed by unit staff. The woman is immediately interviewed by her unit counselor to determine her possible due date and, most importantly, her plans for her newborn. While waiting for her pregnancy to come to term, she will spend her time engaged in a productive job and taking educational courses. When labor begins, she is taken by correctional staff to a local hospital for delivery.

Barring complications, the inmate and her baby stay at the hospital for 3 days. Often, anxious relatives (husbands, grandparents, aunts) take responsibility for the baby when the hospital issues a medical release. In other instances, the unit staff have to be creative in helping mothers find appropriate placements for their babies. Occasionally, staff are

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Day Care, *from page 22*

immediately it became apparent that few families could survive on only one income, and some found it challenging to survive on two. Employees began experiencing difficulty finding even adequate child care, and what could be found was very expensive.

A very high rate of turnover among Danbury's line staff, particularly in correctional and mechanical services, was an early indicator of just how hard it had become to survive financially in the Danbury area. The institution's younger staff members were either resigning to accept higher-paying jobs elsewhere or transferring to other institutions at an alarming rate. Over an 18-month period between January 1986 and June 1987, Danbury retained just 38 percent of its correctional officers. Only five other institutions had lower retention rates during this period. The institution applied for, and was eventually granted, special pay rates for correctional and wage board employees. This action helped slow the turnover. However, the concerns about child care remained; and out of this concern, the idea of a child care center was formulated.

The first steps: a proposal

Before such a project could be approved, Danbury had to determine the level of use child care services would actually receive. In March 1988 a survey of the institution's staff confirmed the need for such a program. This survey identified 30 employees, with a total of 50 children, who planned to use the facility. These figures were especially significant given that only half of the institution's staff was surveyed. A followup survey in April 1989 indicated that the potential enrollment was 100 children, although not every child would be enrolled for a full 5-day week (as some wanted only occasional usage). The survey further confirmed what the administration suspected; i.e., a relative lack of child care in the community at a high cost—an average of $125 per week per child.

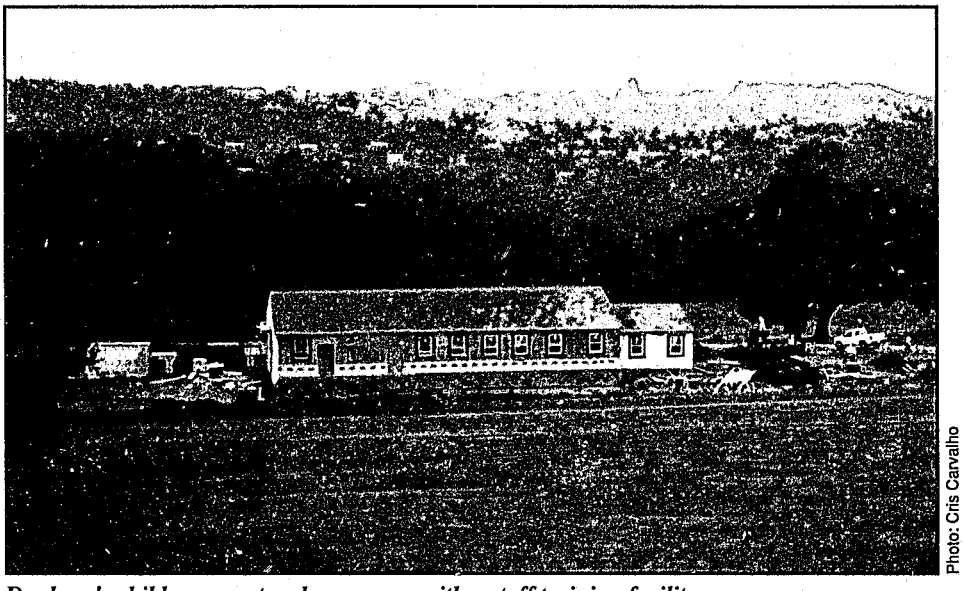

Photo: Cris Carvalho

Danbury's child care center shares space with a staff training facility.

Bolstered by these findings, a formal proposal for an onsite child care program was developed to be presented to the Bureau of Prisons' Executive Staff. As justification, Danbury administrators noted the high turnover rate due to the cost of living, the relative lack of available child care in the community, its high cost, and the need to remain competitive in a difficult job market.

A tremendous amount of research and organization went into the proposal. First it was necessary to determine if funds could legally be earmarked for onsite child care services. Public Law 99-591, 40 U.S.C., section 490b, commonly referred to as the "Trible Amendment," authorized the Government to "provide space, service and equipment for child care centers." Decision B-222989 from the Comptroller General (dated June 9, 1988) seemed to approve funds to "renovate, modify or expand" existing space for use as child care facilities but restricted expenditures for new construction. This could have been a major obstacle, as it was felt that Danbury had no existing space that could be suitably renovated, had it not been for the decision to combine the child care facility with a previously planned staff training center to be built on institution grounds.

Encouraged by early findings that the project could be legally funded, the institution contacted other Government agencies in the area to discuss their interest in such a project. The Government mandates that any child care program operated for Government employees must enroll at least 50 percent of its children from the families of Government employees. (A center can be

open to non-Government families if necessary to fill the center; however, 50 percent must be Government families). Survey results indicated that opening the center to other agencies would probably not be necessary, given the strong interest on the part of institution staff in using the center, but such a step did provide reassurance that the center would never be wanting for children.

Following guidelines offered by the General Services Administration, it was determined that the institution would provide the facility for the child care center and would be responsible for utilities, equipment, and maintenance. The institution would not, however, pay the salaries of child care staff. This would be covered by parent user fees. Nor would the staff be Bureau of Prison employees; rather, they would be hired and supervised by the director of the day care center, who in turn would work under a contract from the institution. The director would also be responsible for obtaining and maintaining liability insurance, and would work closely with an advisory committee of parents.

The proposal eventually submitted included funds for site preparation and building materials. Labor was to be provided by staff and inmates. All other costs, such as equipment and maintenance, were to be absorbed by the institution's operating budget.

As work on the proposal progressed, close communication was maintained with the Northeast Regional Office. The Regional Director made numerous suggestions and the proposal was reviewed by the Regional Counsel before it was submitted to the Bureau's Executive Staff for final consideration. Upon formal presentation to the Executive Staff, the proposal was approved as a pilot project for the Bureau.

Initial enthusiasm over having a child care center at lower costs eventually gives way to very natural questions: quality of care, prevention of abuse, and adequate programming for the kids.

The next step: construction

The Danbury facility is expected to open in February 1990. As planned, it has taken about 18 months from inception to completion of the project. Danbury staff developed an extremely useful working relationship with the director of a child care center for Internal Revenue Service (IRS) employees in Hartford, Connecticut. Drawing on the IRS's experience allowed staff to be more efficient in everything from developing the floor plan to selecting appropriate equipment and furnishing—tasks that were much more complex than expected (how many staff in adult correctional institutions have had to purchase "sinks and johns" designed specifically for 2-year-olds?).

Staff also became aware of just how important it is to work closely with State and local agencies over issues such as fire codes and licensing of child care facilities. Regulations vary from State to State, but each State has agencies that regulate child care. Although Danbury is not bound by State regulations, staff opted to follow State guidelines closely because of their thoroughness and State staff members' familiarity with the issues. Representatives of State agencies were very helpful and enthusiastic in their relations with Danbury staff.

Working it out in practice

Danbury staff learned a few lessons from their experience, and have a few concerns that won't be resolved until the child care center is up and running next year. Other institutions considering developing their own facilities should take these factors into account.

An essential concern from the beginning is building confidence with your employees regarding their child care center. Initial enthusiasm over having a child care center at lower costs eventually gives way to very natural questions: quality of care, prevention of abuse, and adequate programming for the kids. Important issues revolve around the quality of leadership to be provided by the center director, and developing a close working relationship between the director and parents, whether through a parent advisory group, as at Danbury, or through some other mechanism. Questions that still need to be resolved are the proper staff/child ratio, the staff-parent relationship, and credentials of staff and their continuing training.

Logistical issues, such as hours of operation, are an important concern. With the amount of shift work in any correctional institution, an argument could be made for a 24-hour child care operation. At Danbury, it had to be decided that not everyone would benefit

from the program—initially, hours will be established from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m.

The cost of service is also an important concern. By providing space, equipment, utilities, and maintenance, Danbury hopes to keep costs down to about $75 per week—very reasonable for the area. Whether to charge more for infants, usually defined as under 1 year of age, is another concern; this age group demands increased care and a higher staff/child ratio, as well as separate areas for programs, naps, eating, and other care.

A last reality to recognize is that any day care operation should not be expected to be financially self-supporting for a year or possibly two. Even for services such as utilities and maintenance, Danbury has developed contingency plans to cover staff salaries until user fees can meet the need.

Conclusion

Danbury staff are justifiably excited about their effort to develop a child care center. The prospect of this benefit has already improved Danbury's ability to recruit and retain new employees in one of the most expensive areas in the Nation. Additionally, Danbury is achieving another goal that other institutions could well emulate: advancing its image as a progressive, innovative employer with the local community. ■

Chip Gibson is Chief Psychologist at the Federal Correctional Institution, Danbury, Connecticut. For further information on Danbury's child care center, contact Cris Carvalho, Wellness Coordinator.

Mothers, *from page 23*

called on to transport babies to relatives who agree to provide care but are unable, due to financial or other hardships, to travel to Lexington. While this causes additional expense to the Bureau of Prisons, it is important both for the children and for effective correctional management that they be placed with their family as soon as possible. As soon as a financial or other hardship is verified, staff arrange to take the infant to involved family members.

The process of transporting a baby to the designated family member is usually accomplished with little difficulty. However, unusual situations do occur. Last year, a Bolivian woman arrived at the institution 5 months pregnant, with a 5-year, nonparolable sentence. Her family in Santa Cruz was completely destitute and unable to travel to the United States. Local authorities would not agree to a long-term foster care placement. The mother was extremely distraught, fearing she would lose her baby through forced adoption; she prevailed upon the unit staff to assist in transporting her baby to Bolivia. The staff contacted the Bolivian Embassy in Washington, D.C., and their response was immediate and positive. The baby was taken by institutional staff to Miami 6 days after its birth and was with its father in Bolivia the next day.

Although long-term foster care is not an available option in Lexington, local agencies have been extremely supportive in instances where they can assist. The local Children's Services Bureau and Kentucky's State Cabinet for Human Resources provide emergency placements, short-term foster care, and, occasionally, adoption services. Community resources have been severely stretched, due to the unanticipated demands placed upon local social service agencies by the influx of pregnant Federal inmates into the area as Lexington became the major female facility for the Bureau and more pregnant women were housed there. However, the agencies remain cooperative and have been extremely helpful, considering their limited resources.

In March 1989, FCI Lexington hosted a conference (including national and regional Bureau staff, members of local social services agencies, and staff from the local hospital) designed to address these and other needs of pregnant inmates—for instance, the expenses incurred by the Government for the infant, the added burden placed on State and local authorities, and the difficulty in making placements and arrangements for transporting infants to designated custodians. Although the conference was a helpful beginning, everyone realized that the issues are complex and no easy answers will be forthcoming.

Breaking the cycle

According to a study by the National Institute of Corrections, 70 percent of women in prison have children at home under the age of 18. To say that these mothers miss their children is an understatement. The incarcerated mother fears that her infant children will no longer need her and may not even recognize her upon release. Her older children may feel that their mother has abandoned them. Regardless of age, separation is always painful; the study concludes that their children are the primary concern of these incarcerated women. One result of the study was that, in 1986, Congress allocated funds for four pilot parenting programs. One of these is "Parents and Children Together" (P.A.C.T.) at FCI

Lexington. Many similar programs have since been developed nationally, underscoring the importance of education and parenting skills.

While pregnancy during incarceration presents many immediate needs, these programs have sought to address the larger problem of parenting.

The P.A.C.T. program at Lexington is designed to educate women in parenting skills, whether they are a parent, a grandparent, an aunt, a sister, or a friend. P.A.C.T. stresses the importance of the family unit and the critical need to enhance parenting skills, develop interpersonal communication techniques, and provide a high-quality environment for visitation. These goals support and complement the program components of Antaeus Unit. In turn, the Antaeus Unit women represent a large proportion of the classroom participants in the P.A.C.T. program.

The P.A.C.T. program consists of four parts, all of which enhance the social services programs provided in Antaeus Unit: Parenting Classes, the Children's Center, Long Distance Parenting, and Prenatal/Childbirth Classes. Parenting classes, designed to improve parenting skills, help women adjust to incarceration as well as readjust to family life upon release.

The Children's Center is a specially designed visiting area complete with toys, child-size furniture, and books and games for children at all stages of development, where incarcerated women can spend "quality time" with their children. Long-distance parenting techniques provide them with craft items, worksheets, infant stimulation games, pictures, and messages that will be sent home on a regular basis. This component of P.A.C.T. allows all mothers to participate, even those whose children are unable to visit.

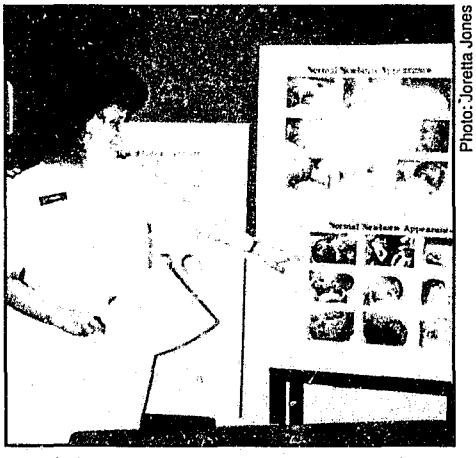

Photo: Joretta Jones

Public Health Service Nurse Deanna Mares teaches nutrition classes.

In addition to the regular P.A.C.T. prenatal classes, a series of childbirth preparation classes is offered during the last trimester of pregnancy. The P.A.C.T. coordinator was able to enlist the voluntary services of a registered nurse, Vonnie Kane, to instruct these classes, focusing on breathing techniques, stages of labor, and delivery. Since she also works part-time in the obstetric unit at the contract hospital, Mrs. Kane has been able to provide valuable support to the women when they arrive at the hospital to give birth. She gives "special attention in helping the new mother cope with separation from her newborn." One of the innovative methods that she uses is to help the mother develop an illustrated baby book that keeps vital statistics about the child, and includes a picture of the newborn baby, a lock of its hair, and a foot- or handprint.

The importance of the educational component of the P.A.C.T. program was recently illustrated when an inmate who had refused to participate in the program went to the hospital to deliver her first baby. The woman was completely ignorant of what to expect at the hospital, and was frightened and disruptive. After the birth of the baby, correctional staff on duty at the hospital had to teach her how to change the baby's diaper. On one occasion, when the 12-hour-old infant was brought into her room, she asked a staff member if she could let the baby "suck on a cookie." Such ignorance, with its accompanying maladaptive behavior, can be overcome by the strong educational aspects of the program.

The importance of educating inmates in the area of parenting has become very obvious. Over the years, second-generation inmates and second-generation drug addicts have begun to enter prison; that is, either children of former inmates are now being incarcerated, or parents and their children are serving time together. For these inmates, history is repeating itself. The only legacy they leave their children is...doing time.

The program at Lexington and others like it are relatively new. However, they have rapidly gained in popularity and acceptance among inmates and staff. If it is true, as some argue, that the real beneficiaries are the children, not the parents, then such programs are a sound investment in the future. This type of early intervention may help break the cycle that leads to the sad scenario of mothers and children doing time together. ■

Joyce Carmouche is Unit Manager of the Antaeus Unit, Federal Correctional Institution, Lexington, Kentucky. Joretta Jones coordinates the Parents and Children Together program at Lexington.