

Maintaining the Bond: Niantic Parenting Programs



By
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"Saturday Afternoon at Sesame Street Visiting Area"
Illustration by Jason Glasser

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Preface

Many people helped throughout the research conducted on the Niantic Parenting Programs. I would like to thank the following: the parenting staff of Niantic including Jen Bishop, Dee Gibbs, Beverly Herbert, and Mary Kilroy; research assistants Sandy Hale, Nancy Tarkmeel, and Mary Prior; Joyce Schmidt and the staff of Creative Arts; Susan Sheffs and the staff of Families in Crisis; Patricia O'Hagen, Research Analyst of the Connecticut Department of Correction; and Marie Cerino, Warden of Connecticut Correctional Institution at Niantic.

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Maintaining the Bond: The Niantic Parenting Programs

Mary is a 43 year-old-woman who has been in prison for six years and still has two more to go. Her two children, who are now 9 and 11, were toddlers when she entered Niantic for manslaughter. She has been in most of the parenting programs of Niantic, including the extended weekend visiting in a trailer on the grounds, the parent education group, and seeing the children in the Sesame Street area. For much of her time in prison Mary has visited with her children almost every month. During the first year, she was worried about the foster home her children were in, and through the intervention of one of the parenting staff at the prison and the social worker for the state, the foster home was changed. Now that the end of Mary's incarceration is in sight, she is thinking about the unanswered questions the children still have for her, and she recently initiated counseling for herself and them.

Mary* is one of the more than five hundred women who have participated in one or more of the seven programs that comprise the Niantic Parenting Programs. These programs were federally funded from July 1, 1987, through September 30, 1990. The major goal of all of the programs was to maintain and strengthen the bond between the incarcerated mother and her children. Previous research indicates that the majority (70%) of women prisoners are mothers of children under 18 years old (Baunach 1988) and that the majority (over 80%) of the mothers intend to be reunited with their children after release (Koban 1983). Therefore, issues of mothering are central to the lives of women prisoners, and strengthening a woman's self-identity as a mother and her knowledge and skills in parenting can have lasting value for herself and her family.

This monograph describes the seven programs that comprise the Niantic Parenting Program. It also reports on research which has attempted to ascertain what effect, if any, the parenting programs have had on the women and on their ability to remain in the community once released from prison.

The Prison

The Connecticut Correctional Institution at Niantic (C.C.I.N.) is the only prison for women in the state of Connecticut. It is

*All names are pseudonyms throughout the monograph.

located in the southeastern part of Connecticut, in a shoreline community. There were 625 women in Niantic in April 1990, living in dormitory-style buildings and in smaller housing units on the approximately 720-acre grounds of the institution. The prison is one to two hours (by car) from the major cities of Connecticut, where most of the women and their families come from. Public transportation to the prison by bus or train does not exist.

Parenting Programs in the United States

Maintaining the mother-child bond is not a new idea in prison history. In discussing women's prisons in the late 1800's in the United States, Estelle B. Freedman (1981), utilizing information provided by the New York Commission on Prisons, Annual Report, 1902, notes:

In Massachusetts and New York the presence of children contributed to a domestic atmosphere. The former provided a nursery for infants born within the institution until they reached age two. The Western House of Refuge at Albion had a separate cottage for mothers and infants. Babies remained there until "suitably placed" in families, where mothers could reclaim them after their release (pp. 69).

The presence of the babies was thought to have a positive effect not only on the mothers themselves, but on the other inmates. In retelling a story printed an article entitled "The Best Woman's Prison" (New York Times 31, March 1895, part 4, p. 30), Freedman quotes:

Prisoners' maternal feelings could be aroused by the children of inmates who resided, up to the age of two, in most institutions. By allowing prisoners to visit and care for the infants, the staff both feminized the prison routine and provided an outlet for otherwise disruptive inmates, as the story of Margaret B. illustrates. A "poor old creature," for years "drunk and knocked about," Margaret complained, "I've been in every institution in the country and I'm tired of institutions. Won't you let me go home?" Prison physician Lucy Hall recalled her response: "'I can't let you go home,' I said, 'but how would you like to help take care of the babies?' I took her to the nursery, and in twenty-four hours that insane look of misery had left her face...I fully believe I saved her from insanity." (pp. 96).

By 1989 there were over one hundred family programs for adult offenders in 39 states and territories throughout the United States listed in the Directory of Programs Serving Families of Adult Offenders (Mustin and Levine 1989). This includes programs that are informational and educational as well as programs that facilitate

visiting between inmates and their children. In at least one case (the Bedford Hills Nursery) the program enables parents and children to live together. Examples of parenting programs include the PACT (Parents and Children Together) of the Federal Correctional Institution in Fort Worth Texas (Key and Eyre 1987); the Children Center of Bedford Hills Correctional Facility (Roulet); the printed materials of Aid to Imprisoned Mothers, and the parenting curriculum, Exploring Parenting (Rosauer and Karas 1986). In addition to these programs there has been scholarly work on the effects of imprisonment on both parents and children (see for example, McGowan and Blumental 1978 and Hairston and Lockett 1987).

History of Parenting Programs at Niantic

The first parenting program in recent times at Connecticut Correctional Institution at Niantic began in 1983. It was initiated by a group of institution and community representatives who served as an advisory board to the Warden. The program was designed for mothers to learn to play creatively and cooperatively with their children and was called Creative Arts. Funding for a pilot program was secured through the Department of Children and Youth Services (D.C.Y.S.) in 1984, and the program was enthusiastically received by the women and their children.

As Creative Arts was being implemented, negotiations were also underway to settle a lawsuit brought by the mothers of C.C.I.N. and their children. The suit stated that services for men and women within the Department of Corrections (D.O.C.) were not comparable and that additional services for mothers were needed. The D.O.C. agreed that in some areas programs were needed, and when the suit was settled, C.C.I.N. gained a Parent-Child Coordinator. Her job was to oversee parenting programs and to initiate several special visiting programs for women and their children. Within the next year, a special area for mother-children visiting was developed and a program for children within this area was established: it was called Sesame Street. Also, a program for overnight visits for selected long-term offenders and their families began. Each program provided another of the services needed to help offenders and their families maintain and improve relationships.

As these programs evolved, it became increasingly clear that coordination between programs and additional programs as well were needed to provide more comprehensive services. With the award of the federal parenting grant, this became a reality. The grant provided for counseling and support for mothers (Mothers' Support), education for mothers (Parent Education), community referrals specific to parenting needs (Community Services), expanded visiting for mothers and children (Sesame Street Visiting), the training of inmates to be child-care workers in the Sesame Street area (Sesame Street Care-Givers' training), coordination of the overnight visiting (Trailer Visiting), expansion of Creative Arts, and the

recruitment and training of volunteers to help support these programs.

Research Methodology

I became involved in the research in January 1989, after the parenting programs had been in operation for one year. The methodology of the research was to conduct participant observations for all of the parenting programs where observation was possible; to interview women, both inside and outside the prison, in order to discover what the programs meant to them; and to track, through Department of Corrections records, the progress of the women who participated in the programs. There were 422 women who participated in one or more parenting programs from October 1, 1987, through March 1, 1990. The records of the women were studied in regard to demographic characteristics, correctional history, parenting program participation, and experience in the community after program participation through July 1, 1990.

As an anthropologist conducting this research it was important for me to gain as much as possible the 'insider's' or 'native's' point of view of the parenting programs. Therefore, the voices of the women in the programs are allowed to be heard. The research attempts to combine the qualitative approach through observations and interviews, with the quantitative approach through the statistical tracking. In this way, statistical information is seen within a context of the women's lives.

Niantic Parenting Programs: A Description

Statistical Overview

The following tables present a brief quantitative look at the women of the parenting programs.

Table 1 presents the numbers of women in each program, the numbers of programs of each participant and the most frequent combinations of programs. The most widely used programs was Sesame Street Visiting, probably because this was immediately accessible to women whose children were visiting. The least utilized program was the Trailer Visit, since this was geared to the long-term inmate, and it involved a commitment of time on the part of the families.

Table 2 compares the population of the parenting programs with the overall population of Niantic. It appears that the two populations were almost identical in terms of age, ethnicity, offense and involvement with the Department of Children and Youth Services, the state agency in charge of protective services and foster care.

Table 3 presents the profiles of the women program by program. It should be remembered that there is some overlapping among the groups, since 26% of the women were in more than one group. It is interesting to note that the largest hispanic involvement was in Sesame Street, perhaps because that program did not require English speaking abilities to fully participate. The program with the most involvement by D.C.Y.S. involved-mothers was in Parent Education, although it is not clear why this was so. The least D.C.Y.S. involvement occurred for the Sesame Street area, probably because the social workers took the children who are in foster care to see their mothers during the week, when the area was not staffed.

Table 1
The Parenting Programs (N=422)

<u>Program</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>%</u> *
Community Services	96	23
Creative Arts	96	23
Sesame Street	154	37
S.S. Care Giver	37	8
Parent Education	70	17
Trailer Visit	29	7
Mothers' Support	107	25

*(equals more than 100% because of multiple program participation)

Number of programs per participant

Range: (1-6)

1	311	74
2	76	18
3	23	6
4	6	1
5	3	1
6	3	1

Mean number of programs: 1.3

Most frequent combination of programs:

Community Services and Mothers' Support	41
Creative Arts and Mothers' Support	21
Creative Arts and Sesame Street	17
Community Services and Creative Arts	16
Sesame Street and Mothers' Support	13

Table 2

Profile of Women in Programs and Comparison with Niantic Population

	<u>Parenting Programs</u> <u>Participants</u>	<u>Niantic Population</u> *
	(N=422)	(N=602)
<u>Age **</u>		
Range	17-57	17-65
Median	28	28
<u>Ethnicity</u>		
Black	48%	45%
White	30%	32%
Hispanic	23%	22%
<u>Offense of last charge:</u>		
Sale of drugs	11%	19%
Possession of narcotics	11%	14%
Violation of probation	9%	9%
Failure to appear	5%	6%
Larceny, sixth degree	4%	5%
<u>Involvement with D.C.Y.S. ***</u>		
	14%	12%

* The comparison statistics for the Niantic population were taken for the week of 2/1/90.

** Age refers to age at program participation.

***D.C.Y.S. is the Department of Children and Youth Services, in charge of protective services and foster care.

Table 3
Profile of Women by Program

	C.S. N=96	C.A. N=96	S.S. N=154	S.S.C.G. N=37	P.E. N=70	T.V. N=30	M.S. N=107
<u>Age</u>							
Range	17-43	19-43	17-57	17-57	18-48	20-57	19-42
Median	28	30	27	29	27	30	29
<u>Ethnicity</u>							
Black	47%	66%	43%	62%	47%	30%	40%
White	39%	22%	27%	27%	36%	43%	36%
Hispanic	15%	13%	31%	11%	17%	27%	23%
<u>Involvement with D.C.Y.S.*</u>							
	21%	20%	5%	11%	30%	7%	23%

* D.C.Y.S. is the Department of Children and Youth Services

Definitions:

C.S. Community Services
C.A. Creative Arts
S.S. Sesame Street
S.S.C.G. Sesame Street Care-Givers
P.E. Parent Education
T.V. Trailer Visit
M.S. Mother's Support

Program Descriptions

The seven parenting programs are described below, and excerpts from participant observation are given. The program descriptions were provided by the parenting staff, and the participant observation was done by me over a two-year period. In addition, there are brief descriptions of the parenting staff, the Parenting Advisory Board to the program, and method of recruitment of women into the programs.

Parenting Staff

The parenting staff consists of two full time state employees who share overall responsibility for providing services to mothers. A third state employee recruits and trains volunteers for parenting as well as for other treatment programs. In addition, several individuals and organizations have contracts with Niantic to provide parenting programs on a part time basis. All three of the state employees are women, and two are white and one is black.

Mothers' Support

The overall goal of Mothers' Support is to provide a safe environment in which to explore personal feelings about being a mother and being separated from one's children. A basic idea of the program is that incarcerated mothers face special difficulties related to their children, their families, and their own needs. For example, once mothers are in prison, communication is often disrupted or ceases between them and their children. The weekly support group helps the women continue some aspects of their role as mothers while in prison.

Mothers' Support is a weekly group session whose focus is self-help, mutual support, and information-giving. In the meetings the group members express their fear that they will lose their attachment to their children and that their children will no longer be attached to them. There is much discussion of separation, guilt, and lack of control. In addition to having an opportunity to talk about common problems, the women receive new information for developing strategies that will help them both in the prison and after release. There are usually from 8 to 15 women in the group.

In the introductory session, the co-facilitators introduce themselves to the participants and the women to each other. An exercise is conducted in which each woman can present her ideas about the program, what she expects, and what she wants to accomplish. The rules about everyone having a chance to speak, one at a time, and about confidentiality are stressed.

In sessions two and three, there is a discussion about the family. What is the definition of a family and what is its relationship to the world? The women discuss their own families of origin. Healthy

families in which the members can communicate with each other are discussed. There is a discussion of the roles (e.g., caretaker, scapegoat, lost child, mascot) they may have played in their families of origin and their importance to their present lives.

In sessions four and five, the theme is patterns and roles in the current family. The idea is introduced that each of us has a pattern of decision-making. There is a self-help exercise that defines and gives examples of types of decision-making. The exercise gives specific decision-making steps that could be helpful in reaching a more constructive outcome for various problems. The goal of this exercise is to present the idea that the process of making a decision is a learned skill, not an innate ability. There is a discussion of empowerment of the group members in order to handle conflicts and problems that will occur in life.

In sessions six and seven there is more discussion of other issues that impede family functioning. These subjects for discussion are chosen by the women. Among the topics have been how women feel about being mothers; the worry, stress, and responsibility of motherhood; the myth of the perfect mother; grief and loss issues; failure and rejection; kids with problems; what happens when what mother wants is different from what child wants; single motherhood; the effect on mothers/children of this prison experience; and coping mechanisms.

Session eight is the graduation and giving of awards. The final session includes discussion of what this group has meant to individuals and to the group as a whole, as well as the group's feelings of termination: what have we accomplished? and where do we go from here?

After two years of experience with the Mothers' Support group, it was decided to form an additional group called the Inner Circle whose members are women who have completed Mothers' Support Group. They now have an idea of what to expect in the discussions and have, in fact, indicated to staff that they wish to explore self and family issues further. The members may participate in this group until release or until they notify staff that they no longer wish to continue.

Emphasis in Inner Circle is placed on concrete, practical, real-life coping skills and techniques to enable mothers to deal with problems of re-entry into the family, problems with behavioral changes of children in their absence, dealing with family members, dealing with what they can expect from the community, alternative discipline, making a plan for the future, and setting goals for themselves.

The observations of the facilitators of the Mothers' Support group are that the women who have participated in the program have enjoyed the program and many ask to be admitted to the Inner Circle. One of the positive aspects of both groups is that women who participate are more likely to ask for other services or further counseling. They are also more likely to request advocacy from the facilitators for some time after the termination of a particular group. They request post-release services more often than women who have not participated in group activity.

February 2, 1989. Today the Mothers' Support group met from 3:30 to 4:30 p.m. at the Sesame Street play area of the Visiting Center. At the meeting were the two group leaders and four inmates (two were white and two were black). As the group began, Barbara (one of the white women) said that she had just had a visit with her daughter, who had been "hyper." Another woman said "That's not hyper, it's just being a four-year-old." The first woman said that they had put her daughter on drugs, but she didn't like that. This discussion inspired Sally to discuss her son, who had recently had a head injury and is on drugs. She said that there had been a bicycle accident and that when he was in the hospital she had not even known about it. He is in a foster home, and the social worker says that her phone calls upset him. He has said that he knows all the dealers in Central City and Old City. Sally says that is not true. Sally says that her son is ten but acts like four. Now she can only see her son in court, although her other two children can visit her. The court is trying to terminate her parental rights. She commented that she gets a lot out of the Narcotics Anonymous meetings. Another woman mentioned a former inmate who was doing well and came to their N.A. meeting. It was interesting that when I had seen Sally in Creative Arts, she was very quiet there, and I had noticed her because she was giggling over a project.

One of the women said that her family does not come to visit and that they have rejected her. A tall expressive black woman I recognized from Creative Arts said that she is one of eleven children and they all support each other. In Creative Arts I had observed her helping the other women put feathers on the front of the stage.

One of the group leaders asked, "What kind of help will you need when you leave here?" To this, people

responded that their families and N.A. could help. They then talked about the difficulty of getting to the N.A. meetings once out in the community. The meeting ended at 4:30 with everyone hugging each other.

The meeting illustrates some of the dynamics that occur when the women can focus on their lives as mothers. Although the state has initiated termination of parental rights proceedings for two of the women (Barbara and Sally), they still come to the Mothers' Support meeting seeking a place to talk about their children.

Issues and suggestions

The facilitators find that there are some problems in running the groups. Often by the sixth or seventh session, so many of the women have been released that only about 25% of the initial group actually graduate and receive a certificate. Since only one eight-week session is conducted at a time, by the time one group is finished many women who have requested services may have already been released or have lost interest. The waiting period for entering the group appears to be too long. In order to remedy this problem, a six-session group was tried. However, that group never seemed to achieve a caring and nurturing atmosphere. The longer groups seem to provide enough time for the women to develop trust among themselves and the facilitators. Also, at times there have been problems of getting the group members to the meeting areas on time.

Some of the suggestions that the facilitators have for prisons starting similar mothers' support groups are to keep in very good communication with other prison services (such as addiction services or community services) in order to maintain the accuracy of information about the women and to support all of their efforts on a continuing basis. Also, there should be aggressive information-giving and recruitment. It would also be ideal to tailor programs to various groups of women, such as those in short-term incarceration, repeat offenders, youthful offenders, and women involved with the state protective agency. It would also be helpful if the counselors had adequate information about the women's substance abuse problems and family functioning.

Since many of the mothers in these groups are victims of incest, rape, violence, racism and sexism, there should be an expansion of groups offered which address these issues. The facilitators feel that there should also be work-release programs so that the women could be taught skills that would help them survive and be successful upon release to the community.

Community Services

Community Services provides mothers in the institution with information concerning the availability of services after release. Women know about this service from a presentation at Orientation, from the Parenting Services Handout Sheet, from experience with other aspects of the parenting programs, and from other women. In order to provide effective services to a woman, the coordinator must have established a relationship with her and have provided services in a timely way before her release from prison.

Women who request services are contacted by the Community Services Coordinator for an assessment interview that identifies the needs they will have upon release. During this interview various areas are discussed: personal history, family history, relationships with children, current family circumstances (e.g. physical location of children, impending court dates), medical problems, substance abuse, and job skills, educational plans, and career choices.

After the assessment, referrals may be made to the Pre-Release program and to services available to the women in their home community or in the communities to which they are going upon release. The program has done much research about services for women throughout the state of Connecticut.

Community Services strives to provide a way of lessening the effect of the separation of the woman from her children by providing her with information and support networks that will help her successfully re-enter the community. The coordinator is an advocate on behalf of the women to the agencies they will be calling on for help.

Women who have participated in the Community Services program have contacted the coordinator after release to ask for additional or specific services. Also, as experience with community services has grown, an increasing number of women have requested community services upon their release.

Issues and suggestions

There are problems in the area of timing of community services. In order for the program to be effective, the services should be discussed with the women fairly shortly before their release from the institution. However, there are requests from unsentenced women who may be released directly from court before services have been provided. For many of the women, there have been previous experiences with outside agencies with some negative results, and some are unwilling to try again.

Another difficulty is following up to insure that the woman in fact receives the service. After a woman has left the institution with a plan to connect with the outside agencies, there is no way of monitoring her progress or helping with any crisis she may be having.

A major difficulty for Community Services is in the area of housing. The state of Connecticut has a crisis in the area of affordable housing, and this especially affects women being released from prison. Having a place to go after release is crucial to the well-being of mothers and their children. A good example of this is when children are committed to the state and are in foster care while the mother is incarcerated. It is incumbent upon the woman to provide adequate housing in order to get the children returned. However, the little help that is available to a woman is often dependent upon her having her children with her (for example, applying for city housing).

Extended Family Visits

The purpose of this program is to reinforce and strengthen relationships between inmates and their children and other family members. The program is for selected long term inmates. Eligible women are allowed a 28-hour visit with approved family members every ninety days. Family members may be spouses, parents, stepparents, children, grandparents, and grandchildren. Visits take place in a three-bedroom trailer on the grounds of the institution. Inside, the trailer provides a home-like atmosphere in which inmates and family members can feel comfortable and have a sense of being alone. The program is very important for young children, since there is freedom of movement within the trailer.

The extended family visits appear to have been very successful and relatively free of problems. However, some inmate mothers have not been able to have visits with their children because there is no available caretaker who could supervise them on the visit (all children under 18 must be supervised by an adult during the visit). As a result, this program has not been a good resource for mothers with children in foster care. This is an area where volunteers might be utilized.

Sesame Street

For young children, the incarceration of a mother is confusing and frightening, especially when it comes to visiting her in prison. In order to address these feelings, the agency Families in Crisis operates an on-site day-care program called Sesame Street Visiting. This walk-in program is educationally oriented, supervised by trained child-care professionals, and held in a cheerful, specially

decorated play area designed to make each child's visit as positive as possible. The program operates every weekend during peak visiting hours.

The Sesame Street program is designed to provide a pleasant and safe environment for young children ages three to twelve to visit with their mothers. Sesame Street provides structured play on weekends and also clean, safe toys for children to play with during weekday visits. A supervisor assisted by inmate care-givers plans activities, and they staff the area on Saturdays and Sundays. This area also provides private visiting between mothers and their children where they can touch and participate in play.

This program was designed to maintain and enhance parent-child relationships in hopes that mothers who are able to continue that relationship on the inside are more likely to stay out in the community and continue it there.

Sesame Street also reduces congestion in the visiting areas and reduces the supervision of children by correctional officers. It provides an opportunity for incarcerated mothers to have quality, natural visits with their children without having to worry about or manage their behavior in a restrictive environment. Utilization of both community and inmate volunteers is an important component of the program. In the year 1989 through 1990 there were 762 child visitations to the Sesame Street program.

On March 3, 1989, I went over to the Sesame Street area of the Visiting Center at about 1:15 p.m. There were eight children and one mother in the area. The activities were supervised by the supervisor from Families in Crisis, two inmate care-givers and a volunteer (a young man from the nearby Navy base) who sat at the entrance of the area and signed the children in. The mother, a young hispanic woman, was playing blocks with her three children. The inmate care-giver, (Betsy), and another woman seemed to be having a good time with the kids. The children in the area all seemed to be engrossed in their play.

Second observation

On October 6, 1990, at 1 p.m., I went back to the Sesame Street area. Today there were approximately ten children, ages three to twelve, along with three and sometimes four mothers. The area was supervised by the supervisor from Families in Crisis, the driver of one of the vans that had brought the children to Niantic, and one inmate care-giver. It was a beautiful day, and the

Visiting Center was crowded with families. The theme of the day was autumn, and the children were busy cutting out red construction paper in order to make apples to take home, give to their mothers, or hang on the bulletin board of the area.

At 1:30, two boys of nine or ten came to the area with their eighteen-month-old cousin. The supervisor told them to take the registration card back to their mother to fill out so they could enter the area. They came back about fifteen minutes later without the card. I asked them (in Spanish) if they understood and if their mother needed help in filling out the form. They said no, they just wanted to watch.

It appeared that the Sesame Street area, which is easily viewed from the rest of the area, was a focal point in these children's visit when they tired of sitting on a chair visiting with the inmate. The area also provided a nice contrast with the rules and regulations of the rest of the visiting center.

Issues and suggestions

There appears to be a need for supervision of the play area at the times during the week when Sesame Street is not staffed. For example, sometimes mothers may need to visit with adult visitors while the children go into the play area. When this happens there is a need for someone to be there to supervise those children in the play area. This is an area where community volunteers might be utilized.

Sesame Street Care-Givers

The Sesame Street Care-Givers program provides education for selected inmates in the areas of child care and child development. The course and follow-up training, as well as the supervision within the Sesame Street area, are conducted by Families in Crisis. Upon completion of the training, an inmate can volunteer as a care-giver in the Sesame Street Program. The training also increases and enhances the parenting skills of the inmate care-givers. The women in the training learn effective parenting skills and learn to recognize milestones in children's development.

The curriculum for the Care-Givers training is an eight-week course covering topics of child development that would be important to know when working in any child-care environment. The first week is an orientation to the philosophy of the Sesame Street Visiting and a job description; the last week there is graduation and evaluation. The topics of the training for the other weeks include working with and understanding children; fostering development

through play; building relationships; values clarification; child care and child development, with discussion of ages birth through three, three to six, six to twelve, twelve through fifteen and adolescence; activity planning, age-appropriate activities, selecting themes and preparing and planning the area; behavior management; setting limits; parenting styles; and positive reinforcement.

After the eight-week session, there are four observations of the new care-givers in the Sesame Street area. Once the inmate becomes a care-giver, there are quarterly in-service training sessions in order to continue and reinforce the education. Topics included in the follow-up sessions have been first aid, problem solving and understanding feelings. There are also monthly planning meetings for the care-givers and supervisors of the area.

On July 20, 1989, I visited the Sesame Street Care-Giver training program. The group consisted of four care-givers who were the "veterans" and two new women. The group was led by a staff member from the agency Families in Crisis. The content of the lesson as well as her British accent (she is from the West Indies) and manner (she used the term "when you mete out punishments") appeared to hold the women's interest in the training. The lesson that day had to do with approaches to discipline. A tape was played which discussed differences between the authoritarian, permissive, and democratic approaches to discipline. Three of the four veterans (two were black and two were white) seemed to understand the democratic approach very well. One of the new women said that she just gives her children everything they want because she feels sorry for them. The group leader was able to link up the ideas of discipline with both their home life parenting and their Sesame Street care-giving activities.

Three of the four veteran care-givers said that they were very attached to the kids that came there. They were especially fond of a little boy of three who comes to the area every Saturday and always wears a suit.

Issues and suggestions

One of the most persistent problems this program encounters is not having enough care-givers trained and available to work. Because of care-giver turnover and unpredicted discharges, the program has had to constantly recruit and train new women. Also, there has been

some difficulty in recruiting and maintaining an adequate number of community volunteers because of the rural location of the institution. Furthermore, the rotation of institutional staff requires constant dissemination of information about the program's purpose, rules, and procedures.

Some of the suggestions for other prisons considering starting programs similar to both Sesame Street Visiting and the Sesame Street Care-giver program are to educate institutional staff regularly to the purpose, rules, and procedures of the program; to target as potential care-givers those women who will be able to volunteer in the program for a significant length of time; and to make sure that the visiting program is easily accessible and operates during peak visiting hours.

Parent Education

Parent Education is an eight-week educational and supportive group for women inmates. It is designed to teach stages of child development, enhance parenting skills, and help the mothers maintain positive relationships with their children both while incarcerated and upon release. The program teaches and reinforces good parenting skills by increasing the mothers' awareness of themselves and the needs of their children. An overall theme is the enhancement of the self-esteem of incarcerated mothers and preparation for the assumption of parental roles upon release.

The program is divided into eight consecutive sessions held weekly. It is staffed by a counselor from Families in Crisis and parenting staff from Niantic. Inmates are made aware of the program through orientation, individual counseling, and announcements sent to the housing units. The members are then chosen based on their motivation and the probability of completing the program. There is a party toward the end of the eight weeks when the children and families of the women come for a dinner.

The first session is usually a get-acquainted session when rules are discussed and a brief outline of the course is given. The following sessions include a definition of parenting, family types, parenting from the inside, ideas about discipline, and child development.

The mothers are encouraged in the group session by reading, sharing individual ideas and information about their children, and problem solving. Visual aids and role playing are also used. Women in the group appear to develop insight about parenting roles and responsibilities that they have not previously had, and they learn techniques that will help them to raise and manage their children in a more positive manner.

February 3, 1989, Parent Education Group meeting. This was the eighth meeting of the group. A second-year graduate-student group worker from the School of Social Work facilitated the group. There were ten women present today. The leader told the group that three women had been released and one could not come because she was too busy. Sally (whom I had met in Mothers' Support Group) was talking about her kids and how D.C.Y.S. does not bring them to see her, and the parenting staff member who is the liaison person with D.C.Y.S. said that she would check into this.

The leader asked everyone to do an exercise which was to brainstorm a list of what you and your child need now (the women mentioned love, self-esteem, success); what you will need when you leave Niantic (a similar list was generated); and what would prevent you from getting what you need (the women said old friends, not enough money, family member, men, drugs).

After this discussion, two women from Connecticut Infoline came to tell the women how they could use them when they got out. Most of the women appeared not to have heard of Infoline and took the handouts with the numbers of the Infolines around the state. The group ended in a circle at 3:30.

Second observation

On August 7, 1990, I again observed Parent Education. As I entered, the four women present and the group leaders were finishing a discussion about the graduation party they were planning for August 23. They were discussing what kind of food to have (chicken, potato salad, macaroni salad, soda,). A male hispanic social worker from Families in Crisis was the group leader. He said that he has about forty dollars to spend on the party. There was some discussion of how the kids could get to Niantic. It turns out that one woman's children are in New Jersey and another woman's are in New York.

The feeling of the group today was very intimate. At first there were only three women in the group; then a fourth came. Maria, a young hispanic woman cried during much of the session, remembering her two-year-old son.

The social worker brought some sheets of paper with

him on "parenting from the inside," and he had the women take turns reading from the sheets. He had also handwritten his comments and questions (there was some laughing at the handwriting, and the sophisticated language he used). Although the exercise seemed a bit long, the ideas seemed to touch the women. For example, he got them to talk about how they felt when they were first incarcerated. Maria began to cry. Nicole, a young black woman, said she was crying, scared, upset for the first six months. Then she said she accepted "I'm here" and tried to keep as busy as possible. Then the social worker led them to talking about how they thought their children felt. Maria said her baby was only a baby so she doesn't know. Maria, like some other women I have seen, has her baby's picture on the back of her plastic prison identification card, but she wears the baby's picture to the front). Nicole spoke of her son, who at times has sat in a corner by himself and said nothing during a visit, but lately has said, "I know what you did to get in here, mommy, but I love you anyway." Nicole said that she felt good that she and her six-year-old son Michael can talk. The most quiet member of the group said that she was hurt by being here. The social worker asked her how, and she said her feelings were hurt.

Another topic that emerged was the jealousy some of the women feel towards their children's caretakers. This led Nicole to say that she thinks her mother "spoils my kids rotten." She said that she does not feel she can say much to her mother. One of the handouts for the day from Parenting from the Inside suggested that the prisoner face the jealousy and talk to the care-giver. The social worker also talked about the grief process that comes with incarceration and separation.

There followed a discussion of visiting in Niantic. Nicole said that her kids visit on nights when there is no staff in the Sesame Street area. She said that her kids go through the area and take everything apart and she then stays behind and cleans up. Also touched on was celebrating holidays and birthdays from the inside. One of the women said, "It is good to make something with your own hands for your kids." The social worker asked her how she learned that, and she said from home economics. The social worker suggested writing to their children, and if they cannot read, have someone read the letter to them. At this point, a

parenting staff member went to get the printed letter that parents can use as a guide for writing to their children. The social worker gave them each cute stationery for writing letters, with stickers. The women seemed to enjoy this and asked for more than one for each child. He ended by having each of us read one sentence of a piece called "bits and pieces." The piece was almost like a prayer and said that, as we go through life, each of us is touched by the people we meet, and we leave them with something of ourselves as well.

The social worker appeared to be successful in creating a reflective mood within the group. He had asked them to remember the feelings they had had on being arrested and separated from their children, and this brought most of the women to tears. The emphasis in the group was how to continue to parent from prison. It appeared significant for this group that the leader was a hispanic man. His Spanish language ability helped. For example, when Maria did not want to talk (partly because she was crying), he would say "nada?" and she would begin speaking again. Having experience with a man who was a professional social worker and hispanic was an important factor for the women.

Issues and suggestions

Some of the problems in parent education have been the effect of early and unpredicted discharges of group members on the group's composition from week to week. Also, the women typically have low levels of education and this limits the materials that can be presented. The women also tend to have had few successful role models as women and mothers.

The suggestion for other prisons starting a parent education group is to be sure that material presented is both educational and relevant to the group's life style and values. Also, it would be good to include presentations from outside experts. For example, an attorney might address family-law issues. Another idea would be to invite former inmates who have made a positive transition to their communities and families back to address the group. Also, try to involve the group members' children as much as possible; this would mean providing transportation. Finally, spend group time on the issues of developing positive relationships between the women and their children's caretakers.

Creative Arts Parenting Program

The goal of the Creative Arts Parenting Program is to provide inmate mothers the opportunity to develop and maintain positive relationships with their children during incarceration. It is believed that developing and maintaining a positive relationship

with their children while they are drug-free and away from the negative influences that led to their incarceration will leave the mothers with a stronger sense of family upon release. This enhanced sense of family gives inmates stronger incentives not to repeat the behavior which resulted in incarceration.

The Creative Arts Parenting Program is conducted by Creative Connections in partnership with the Connecticut Correctional Institution, Niantic, Connecticut. Creative Connections is an education, training, and consulting firm that serves corporate, social service, and other public and private organizations throughout the United States. Creative Arts has a ten week curriculum that is offered four times throughout the year. The program receives funding from D.C.Y.S., the Department of Correction, and the Parenting Grant.

Creative Arts is a program of theatre, creative drama, dance, visual arts, arts and crafts, and music. It also provides important insights and enhances personal development through experiential activities and group discussions. The arts provide fertile ground for individual expression, discipline, discovery, and intellectual and scholastic development, ultimately benefiting the inmates, their children, and other family members. Upon release, mothers return to their children equipped with stronger parenting skills, enhanced motivation, increased confidence, and healthier self-images.

Creative Arts Parenting Program is a two-part developmental program with weekly workshops for the inmate mothers and all-day family gatherings for the inmates, their children and other family members. Part One is directed at the mothers only. It includes ten one-and-a-half-hour sessions during which inmates work with Creative Arts artistic staff and focuses on the inmates' personal, social, and parenting skills. Part Two, which runs concurrently with Part One, consists of five five-hour family days which provide opportunities for the inmates/mothers to practice the techniques they have learned and the behavioral and communication skills they have gained with their visiting children and other family members.

This program appears to be a success because it fosters individual success. It makes people feel good. Inmates and their families enjoy themselves together, and the results and rewards are almost always immediate. People have fun in the program, master new skills, and discover many positive things about themselves and their families upon which to build. The special atmosphere of Family Days is a strong factor. For a few hours, the inmates are able to forget that they are incarcerated. They cherish the extended visits with their families and enjoy the activities and the homemade food.

Creative Arts Parenting Program appears to have been successful in

its mission to provide inmate mothers the opportunity to develop and maintain a bond with their children. At the end of each ten-week module, the women fill out evaluation forms. The mothers repeatedly say that they have come to know their children and themselves better. In addition, the caretaker that accompanies the children is often the mother of the inmate. In many cases, the relationship between the inmate and her mother has been strengthened through the activities of the program. Also, because of the relaxed, playful atmosphere provided during Creative Arts, much of the fear children have for their mothers while they are incarcerated is alleviated. The directors of Creative Arts have received reports from caretakers that children are happier and better adjusted both at home and in school and improve in their behavior after participation in the program.

There have been numerous mothers who would not have received any visits from their children had they not enrolled in Creative Arts, since the program provides transportation for the children to come to Niantic. Also, many caretakers and D.C.Y.S. social workers feel more comfortable allowing children to visit in the program than through regular visitation.

Creative Arts group, February 20, 1989. Today there were eight women and four group leaders-- a dancer, a visual artist, the director of Creative Arts, and the program coordinator. The program started with a dance routine, learning the cha cha. The leader put on music and taught some simple steps. Everyone began moving and seemed to enjoy it, and it seemed to wake everyone up since the room was quite overheated.

Next, the visual arts person said they were going to revive a puppet theatre stage. They brought out a big puppet theatre, which had been made on a Saturday by the children, and the arts and crafts materials. The leaders went around getting the women involved in cutting, pasting, and papering the stage. They were getting it ready for the Saturday when the kids were coming. There were some side conversations, and I heard one woman promise to show another a picture of her daughter. After approximately twenty minutes, all the women were involved. When this happened, the dancer put on a tape of a popular singer; this made the mood quiet. By 4:20, it was time to put everything away. The group ended by having the dance teacher teach and lead a sign dance in a circle. The song was "The Rose," and the words seemed to have significance for the group. People ended by holding hands, and the woman next to me gave me a hug. At the end, one of the women showed the leaders that she was

conversant with signing. The dance teacher signed to her, "You are very talented." The woman left smiling.

Saturday morning at Creative Arts, March 5, 1989. As I entered today at 10 a.m., the children had not yet arrived. A woman, Chris, began talking to me. Her children would not be coming today. Her two sons (ages 15 and 19) are doing well with her husband in Westfield. They couldn't come up today because her husband is a truck driver and is working today. Her daughter will stay in Central City with an aunt who is childless.

At 10:15, the families began to arrive. Of the eight women present, four were with their children and four were not. Those with their children were Carol (with three children and a young male relative), Hope (with two children and her mother), Jane (with three children and her mother), and Ellen (with two children and her mother). The women without their children pretty much stayed with each other, although I noticed that Sally tried to play a little with some of the kids. As the families came in, the room became quiet. The leaders broke the ice with a warm-up exercise. In one large circle everyone (including the children) gave their name with a description (for example, "I'm moody Marsha" or "I'm waiting Wendy") and a dance type of movement. The mood relaxed noticeably after that.

The women, children, and adult family members worked on puppets and put on a puppet show for each other based on an Aesop fable. At noon, lunch was served picnic-style, and the room became quiet as the families had a more private visit with each other. There were sandwiches, macaroni salad, vegetable salad, and brownies. The women remarked that the food was much better than Niantic's usual fare. The day appeared to be pleasant for everyone.

Creative Arts appears to provide an atmosphere where there is no "right or wrong" in the activities. The combination of movement activities and arts and crafts appears to create a relaxed atmosphere both for the mothers in the Monday sessions and the families in the Saturday sessions. In discussing Creative Arts with me, several women used the phrase "I learned how to play with my children" and saw the activities themselves as important to remember. It is significant, I think, that the women whose children are not able to come to Niantic often come to the Saturday morning program anyway and get something out of being around the other

women's families.

Issues and suggestions

The primary problem in the Creative Arts Program is limiting the size of the group. Many of the participants are from a culture in which there are strong ties with members of the extended family. Therefore it is difficult to decide which family members, in addition to the primary care-giver, may attend. It is important to limit the size of the group so as to not put a strain on the food and supplies budget or on the artistic staff. It appears that the maximum number of inmates that can be enrolled is twenty.

Another problem has been transportation. Private bus companies are costly, and the cost is rising. There are some areas of the state from which transportation cannot be provided because of the distance.

The size and age-range, as well as the interests and talents of the group, can change on each family day. It is important that the curriculum and the staff remain flexible so that the activities can be adapted to meet the needs of each group.

It would be advisable to hold the activities in the same space each day. This space should be as non-prison-like in appearance as possible without jeopardizing security. It should be large enough to accommodate all family members and inmates who may attend; however, if it is too large, the group tends to scatter and the program is disrupted.

Another issue is that many of the group members are released before the program ends and generally only about a third complete it.

Recently a contract was developed which spells out the rules of the program: each inmate signs it and is given a copy. This eliminates any reason for misunderstandings about what is expected of participants. Also, the women tend to take "ownership" of the program and perform better when they are allowed some input as to the activities in which they and their children will take part.

Early on, some custody staff members were suspicious. They saw inmates getting special privileges and displayed resentment in many ways. This changed rapidly as the custody staff became familiar with the program and aware of its benefits to the entire facility. Now the custody staff know the Creative Connections staff and appreciates and understands the program.

When inmates are committed and attend every session and their children don't come on Saturdays, it can be a devastating disappointment. This often happens. The women usually still come and play with the other mothers' children.

A suggestion for prisons starting a creative arts program is to work cooperatively with an experienced arts education specialist to develop and conduct the program. Also, try to build strong lines of communication between all parties within the institution. Secure adequate funding right from the start to insure that all women who want the program will have the opportunity to participate and that their children will have transportation. Also, the staff who will be working in the program require much training and orientation.

Parenting Volunteer Services

The goal of Parenting Volunteer Services is to provide volunteer assistance to existing parenting programs, expand services where possible, and provide office help to the parenting staff. Volunteers have been placed in Creative Arts and in the Sesame Street area, and they also have helped collect statistics for the evaluation process.

The basic procedure of this service involves the recruitment of potential volunteers, an application and interview session with them, and their training and placement in the programs. Also, there is follow-up contact with the volunteers and volunteer recognition.

Recruitment is always an ongoing process, but major drives are usually conducted twice a year: once in September and again after the Christmas holidays. A major volunteer recruitment drive includes publicizing the program's needs in surrounding communities. Public service announcements are sent to radio and TV stations and all area newspapers. Multiple copies of the current recruitment flyer, along with a cover letter, sent to area colleges, (individual departments and instructors if that information is known), libraries, volunteer agencies, senior citizen centers, social service agencies (especially those involved with minorities or corrections), private industrial companies where civic involvement of employees is encouraged, and many religious organizations.

Once a community person has made contact with the volunteer coordinator, an application/interview date is set. The interview includes asking how the person found out about the program, why he or she is interested in volunteering at the institution, general interests, likes and dislikes, and whatever personal and family information he or she is willing to offer. Available volunteer positions are explained at this time, and usually a program is chosen so the application can be submitted. A general "do's and don'ts" sheet is given to the volunteer, and some orientation to the procedures of the facility finishes the interview. The application must be reviewed and approved by the Department of

Correction in Hartford.

The volunteer training usually is on-the-job and/or the volunteer participates in a five-week training series. Families in Crisis provides their own training for their Sesame Street volunteers. During the last training series, "The Kid's Connection" provided an orientation to the institution and its parenting staff, and included a grounds tour; a picture of the problems women face with family members and their children; an inmate profile; and two sessions introducing creative arts. Most of the volunteers have continued with their work over a period of several years.

Issues and suggestions

The number one problem facing a volunteer coordinator is the public's preconceived and negative notions of "PRISON" and "INMATES." Recruitment can be grueling and disappointing. Other typical problems for any volunteer coordinator are the juggling of volunteer's hours with the available volunteer jobs; keeping people interested, especially when there are time gaps between programs; accommodating a training schedule that will meet the needs of the staff and volunteers alike; recruitment time that sometimes does not reap benefits; and keeping enough contact with volunteers so you know when they need a boost in morale or a change of pace.

Among the suggestions for other prisons who have volunteer recruitment and training is that the training should include at least some education on drug and alcohol addiction, AIDS, and violence against women. All of these subjects affect the lives and personalities of most of the women's prison population. Also, the volunteer coordinator should have enough time to get to know the volunteers and keep contact with them on some regular basis.

Advisory Board

The Parenting Advisory Board meets four times a year in order to give advice to the parenting staff. It is composed of the parenting staff, directors of community agencies with direct links to the inmates (e.g., the Department of Protective Services, the Connecticut Prison Association, and the local Women's Center), the chaplain, and two inmates. The meetings are convened and led by the Deputy Warden, who oversees the parenting programs.

The group hears about problems in various programs. Some examples of the issues that have been discussed and resolved are the need for more volunteers for the weekend Sesame Street area; the issue of adequate transportation for children visiting Niantic; the need for more in-depth counseling for some of the women and their children; and the problems of women with children in foster care.

having the D.C.Y.S. worker bring the children to Niantic for the scheduled monthly visit.

One of the most significant aspects of the advisory board has been the contribution of the inmate board members. For example:

Mary told the group that she had been through all of the parenting programs and appreciated them all. She said that now that she has her furloughs she sees her two children for forty eight hours. But she said that they are not as close as she thought they were. She said "In forty eight hours you begin to see things...." Also, they want to know what she has done to be in prison, and she feels she needs counseling about how to tell them. This request initiated a long discussion among the board members on how to obtain counseling for other women with long terms. Sue Sheff of Families in Crisis suggested that one of her counselors do it, and there continued a discussion of how to pay for it.

Those inmates who have been a part of the board appear to appreciate the experience. For example, in an interview in July, 1990, Carol, who had served on the board and was now out in the community, said to me:

Irene, please tell the board how I appreciated being on the advisory group and how much support I received from everyone at Niantic. Tell them that I have a full-time job as a nurse's aide. I wish I could come to the board meeting on Wednesday.

Entering the Programs

The women find out about the parenting programs from notices sent to the cottages, the orientation sessions, and of course, from other women. Although a woman might not enter a parenting program right away, she has heard about the programs at the orientation which takes place within two or three days after she enters Niantic. Orientation is an opportunity for the parenting staff to engage the woman in a brief conversation about her children.

On February 25, 1989, I arrived at 8:45 a.m. for the orientation for all of the newly sentenced women. At first there were approximately fourteen women, but more came in as the morning progressed. They were addressed and interviewed by the school and job directors, the head counselor, the orientation counselor, the addictions counselor, and two of

the parenting staff.

I sat with the parenting staff member as she interviewed a black woman who had a very large scar that went from one end of her neck to the other, as though someone had slashed her throat. She described having her first baby at the age of thirteen. She did not want it and tried to hide the pregnancy from her grandmother, who was raising her. When her grandmother found out, she said that she was going to have to keep it. But when she had the baby and saw her, with her fat little cheeks, she loved her. Her three oldest children are in a southern state with relatives (she did not seem to know the address). There are two more children in Central City. She stressed that she always checks her five-year-old to make sure that no one has "messed with him" She said that she checks his "butt and his penis" when she sees him. She has D.C.Y.S. involvement, and the parenting staff person made a note to check with the D.C.Y.S. worker about visits.

The next person interviewed was a white woman who appeared to be quite angry. She said that she has recently remarried, but the prison is "not acknowledging my married name." When she left Niantic the last time her parole officer had driven her to a drug halfway house, but she had been violated and sent back to prison. She said that the program had not liked her attitude, but that she had done nothing wrong. She said, "I can't go through life with tears in my eyes." She was raised by wealthy people who now have her son. They do not want to bring him to Niantic for a visit. The parenting staff member invited her to the parenting programs.

Although neither woman expressed immediate interest in any of the parenting programs, they were talked to as mothers of children, and they learned that there were some programs available to them.

The Evolution of a Group

During the course of the research, I had the opportunity to attend most of the sessions for mothers held during one ten-week module for Creative Arts. The mothers and staff knew that I wanted to be a participant observer of their Monday sessions. The following excerpts are from the Creative Arts sessions that occurred from January through March 1989. They illustrate the evolution of the group and some of the ways the women try to maintain a bond with their children despite their incarceration.

There were eighteen women at the first meeting of Creative Arts on January 1, 1990. At first some of them wanted to smoke in the room, but the director of the program explained that there was no smoking and they needed the women's full participation. She also explained that during the Saturday family visits, the women would have to help enforce the rules of the program with the family members. For example, no one could come to the program high or intoxicated. One of the women (Sue) had been in Creative Arts before, and she sat next to the director and helped explain the program. The director said that they had to come every time and that having your period is not a good reason not to come.

This session was to be led by two artists, Susie (dramatic arts) and Dawn (arts and crafts). Susie began the group with a name game (each participant said their name and danced a movement associated with the first letter of the name- e.g., Picky Patty). The women got into it, and there was a lot of laughing. Then there was an I spy type of game (with movement) and again a lot of laughing. I noticed that there was one, Hannah, who seemed to be a leader. Hannah seemed to be very bright and articulate, and she set the pace of the exercises. She is a large black woman who had been in Creative Arts once before. I noticed that one of the women, Sara, seemed slow to do things. She and another woman seemed to want to hover around the sides.

January 15. Today two more women joined the group so there were twenty women present today. Today there was again the name game, and much of the time was spent in making family trees and name tags for Saturday. The Creative Arts coordinator said that she would have private conversations with each of the women during the week about which members of their families were going to be participating. Sue came over to me and showed me a picture of her little girl. I asked her if she would be coming, and she said no. The Creative Arts director talked about American Sign Language in preparation for signing the song "The Rose" at the end of the meeting. At this point Hannah gave an enthusiastic account of the movie Children of a Lesser God. She said the woman was normal in bed even though she was deaf. Hannah had everyone laughing as she did an imitation of the woman cursing out her boyfriend.

By the third meeting, we can see the group members begin to relax with each other, as illustrated by the excerpt below.

January 22, the third meeting of the group. This time it was after the Saturday visits of families, and both the staff and the women appeared to be tired. There was one new white girl named Lisa. Although most of the women's families had not come, there had been seventeen family members there. The director said that the women should try to have only one care-giver come with their children. The women all seemed pleased with Saturday.

Before the group started today, someone banged the chairs out of the way. Susie said to be careful with the chairs. Hannah said that the state needs to buy new chairs. "Anyway," she continued, "these are the same chairs I've seen for the last twenty years." She said, "Now I should be ashamed of myself, being in and out of prison for the past twenty years." It sounded almost like bragging to me.

Today Susie tried to do things pertaining to circuses. First she passed around a red wooden object and had the women improvise something with it. She also had them pantomime circus themes she had written down from a list generated by the women. The women seemed to be more or less into the project. The arts and crafts seemed especially relaxing to the women.

Before the fourth session, on February 2, 1990, I met Hannah in the parenting staff's office clutching a Bible. She told us that she had been told that she was free to go on Friday, but she had decided to stay until she gets into a program.

As we entered the room for the group, I noticed that the blackboard was filled with writing about Jesus. Many of the women seemed very interested and stopped talking to look at the board.

The program began with every one getting some long flat pieces of cardboard from one of the group leader's car, which were to be used for the program. The women seemed to enjoy the change. We did some warm-up exercises, and there were a lot of smiles and laughing at these.

Susie did some mime, and the women appeared to

appreciate her talent. During arts and crafts, we made valentines for the children. I was curious as to which children had been able to come on Saturdays, but when I asked one of the women (whose children do not come), I realized what a sensitive topic it is.

Hannah showed me two snapshots of her two children (one eight years old and the other one and a half) that had been taken the previous Saturday. She said (with surprise) that the little one had called her mommy and let her play with him. Margaret told me that her mother and parenting staff had talked ("as moms do") last Saturday. Today there was a lot of bantering between Hannah, Sue, and me. Hannah was taking a leadership role even about how she cuts out her valentines, and everyone wanted her to show them how. She said that Sue just likes to play dumb and that she really knows how to do things.

During the next meeting, there is a discussion about what had been happening during the Saturday visiting sessions. The 'meaning of Saturdays' emerges during this session.

Today was February 12, 1990, and when I arrived at 3:10 there were only ten women in the group. One woman had gone home, at least one was in lock-up, and one did not come. The director said that she wanted to speak with them all seriously about some guidelines for the following Saturday's visit with the families. First, she asked for the women's reactions to the previous family visit two weekends before. They were all positive. Hannah gave a speech about how the day was for the kids and the families and what a good time she and her kids had had. She also said that even though she would have liked to push everyone away from the food for herself, she knew she had to help out all of the kids. She added that the day had made her tired, and that she now understands a bit more what her mom goes through. She also told us about a conversation she had had with the mother of one of the women; she had said how hard it was to raise her daughter's kids (the daughter is in and out of Niantic a lot). This conversation seemed to give Hannah some insight into her own situation.

The director said she was very disturbed about the women who were getting more involved with the adults who had brought the kids than with the kids themselves. She said that some of the women took many long cigarette breaks in the bathroom and that

this was not paying attention to the kids. She said that the artists were there to run the activities but not to do it all. The women took this speech well and seemed to agree with the director.

Since there was no time for the physical activities, we got right to the arts and crafts. Again this was a relaxing way to talk, while we were making things 'for the kids.'

Hannah was preoccupied with where she is going to go after Niantic. She has an interview tomorrow with a man from a rehabilitation program in a nearby town. Someone had pointed out the town to her when she was on her way to Central City with the choir from Niantic with the "chap" (the prison chaplain). Missy, one of the group members, said that she hated to say it, but she thinks the program considering Hannah only "wants white girls who are addicted to pills and alcohol." She said she does not think that the program wants women from Niantic. There was an interesting conversation about what Hannah should say. Hannah says that she has a violent history, and she hopes the program wants her. Also, there are no beds at another rehabilitation program in a near-by town. If no program wants her, Hannah will leave next Tuesday for her mother's apartment. She says she would like to stay at Niantic through next Saturday so her kids can come down again to the Creative Arts.

Today, February 19, 1990, there were only six women. Michelle, a young black woman told me that the courts are trying to terminate her parental rights. She had previously been very quiet, but she seemed to be more relaxed today. Karen, who appears a bit slow, was in the group today. There was Marcia, who wears a cross made out of a lanyard and is active in the group. Kim is a young black woman who has befriended Vicky, the only white in the group. Vicky appears to be bright, but has a perpetual frown on her face. There is Melanie a very good-looking woman, who is very creative in the theater games.

Toward the end of the group, Marcia mentioned that Hannah had been accepted by the program she applied to, and everyone there seemed genuinely pleased.

The program coordinator said that the previous Saturday had been a 'beautiful day.' Apparently director's talk had changed some things. Today the

emphasis was on aerobics, mime, and role plays. The women seemed to be more or less into it.

As the group began today, February 26, 1990, the program coordinator quietly asked me to spit out my gum (it is contraband). The group began by sitting around a table in order to look at children's fables and rhymes (Mary Had a Little Lamb, etc). The women were going to make puppets for a show about the fables. In the group today was Missy, who talked about wanting a Shoplifters Anonymous for herself. Julie told her to concentrate on staying off drugs and her shoplifting problems would be cured. Missy replied that she has the drugs under control but needs help with shoplifting. A parenting staff member came in halfway through and said she would mention a shoplifting course to Charlene. Missy also said that last summer she was in the honor cottage, and she seemed pleased about that.

Today I was able to talk with Vicky. She said that she does not know if her friend would bring her two-year-old boy up on Saturday. She said that she is having problems with D.C.Y.S. which is questioning why he is with the friend. The friend apparently is the superintendent of an apartment building. However, the friend does not answer her letters and will not call her. He says he doesn't have a phone, but she says that he can always use her other friend's. Also, she said that she wants this other friend to take her little boy for the rest of her time in Niantic. Vicky said she has been in for two years and has another two to go. Today she was friendlier but distressed. She said that she does not know what is happening with her son, and she has no control.

Michelle was off by herself making puppets (the cat and the fiddle), and Susie came over to help her. Missy and Julie were talking about being in the Mastery class. I asked them to describe it, and they said it is like an advanced Behavioral Studies (another group they have been in). Missy and Julie had a conversation about how it was to go for three hours without smoking. Marcia said that her children are coming on Saturday. Julie was doing a really good job on the lamb part of her Mary Had a Little Lamb and I asked her if she had worked with children. She said that she had worked in a day care center, and that she had liked it. Sue said that she expected her kids. Today it impressed

me again how much the women like the arts and crafts, "making things for the kids," and talking with each other.

By this time in the group, the women seem to have a good rapport with each other, and they support each other as tragedy strikes one of the group members.

As I was signing in downstairs today (March 5, 1990), the group leader Dawn told me that Karen's nine-year-old daughter Elizabeth had been killed last week. Dawn thinks it was related to drugs. The children who came on Saturday had written sympathy cards for Karen.

Karen came to the group today. She looked tired, and everyone else looked tired as well. The room was hot. The project was to make pinatas and sombreros. There was a general feeling of mourning and low energy. Michelle said that she did not "feel right," and the coordinator eventually excused her from the group. Michelle is in the middle of a court battle to prevent the termination of her parental rights and she said that coming here reminded her of her kids. Vicky said that she hopes her son comes this weekend. Marcia told me as she was making her sombrero that her two daughters and a niece will come. She said that her son does not come (he is ten) "because he is very into his name." She then explained that he is a Muslim.

Missy came halfway through, and she seemed to be in a bad mood. The guard had walked her up the stairs, and she appeared to feel humiliated by that. Julie was not there because she had a headache. The staff said later that they did not want to throw Julie out (although they did not accept her excuse) because the program means so much to her son. The staff said that she once had to throw her out and ask the son not to come any more, and they do not want to do that again.

Today, March 12, 1990, is the last day of the session, and all eight of the women who are still in Niantic came. Everyone had a visit from their family at least once in the Saturday session, except for Michelle, who is in the midst of termination of parental rights. However, she came to one of the Saturday sessions and played with other people's children.

This was evaluation day, and the women seemed to be serious and quiet in filling out their forms. The evaluations were excellent. Julie said that she now knows she has not been the kind of mother her son John needs. Karen said that Elizabeth's party was very nice and the last one she would ever have.

The last exercise of the group was "airport," a game in which someone is blindfolded and another person leads her through an obstacle course. Everyone got involved, and there was a lot of spirit to the game.

I then asked the group what happens now in terms of visiting with their families. The women said it is now back to the visiting center, with the two-hour limit and the correctional officers who watch and listen. They made it clear that the atmosphere of the visit is not the same. Kim gave an example of her daughter wanting to give her something from school. The correctional officer took it and still hasn't given it to her (there was speculation that it may be lost). They said that the new correctional officers are always scared of breaking a rule and are extra strict. Julie said that once her family had come to visit, but she was in church and they wouldn't get her out. She learned of her family's visit when they called her that night. Several also said that the families were less inclined to come for such a short time.

The major feature of Creative Arts appeared to the Saturday family visits which the women felt were very positive visits with their families in a supportive atmosphere. On Mondays, the low-key arts and crafts activities seemed to create a relaxed mood in which the women could talk about themselves, their children, and their plans for the future. Also, the group activities appeared to create some bonding between the women.

Follow-Up of Women in the Parenting Programs

Statistical Overview

In order to begin to answer the question of whether the parenting programs have had an impact on the inmates' ability to remain in the community and not return to prison, each of the 422 women was followed through the records of the Department of Corrections. Since one quarter of the women had multiple program involvement, it was the last program participation that was looked at for the follow-up. The women's record was studied from the date of her last participation through July 1, 1990. Table 5 compares the experience of the program participants with the total Niantic population. Table 6 looks at the follow-up data program by program. The tables summarize the number who have not returned since release, those who have returned, those who have not left prison, the deceased, and those who have escaped from the community. Those who came back to prison because they asked to enter another community program (return without prejudice) were not counted as having returned.

Table 4

Comparison of Rate of Return and Niantic Population*

After three months

	<u>Parenting Programs Participants</u>	<u>Niantic Population</u>
	N=354	N=144
Returned	19%	22%

After six months

	<u>Parenting Programs Participants</u>	<u>Niantic Population</u>
	N=316	N=92
Returned	36%	33%

After ten months

	<u>Parenting Programs Participants</u>	<u>Niantic Population</u>
	N=253	N=179
Returned	53%	47%

These differences between the Niantic population and the parenting population are not statistically significant.

*The comparison rates of return for the Niantic population were obtained by tracking the women released during the months 6/89 (for the three month group); 1/89 (for the six month group); and 10/89 (for the ten month group).

Table 5
Return Rate by Program

	C.S. N=96	C.A. N=96	S.S. N=154	S.S.C.G. N=37	P.E. N=70	T.V. N=30	M.S. N=107
Not returned	65%	41%	55%	47%	29%	44%	54%
Returned	33%	41%	37%	32%	54%	12%	30%
Still in	2%	12%	7%	18%	17%	40%	16%
Deceased	0%	1%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Escaped*	0%	5%	1%	3%	0%	4%	0%
Mean months before return**	4.11	4.08	4.57	3.55	5.06	3.16	4.39

Definitions:

C.S. Community Services
 C.A. Creative Arts
 S.S. Sesame Street
 S.S.C.G. Sesame Street Care-Givers
 P.E. Parent Education
 T.V. Trailer Visit
 M.S. Mother's Support

*Indicates escaped from the community.

**Of those returned, how many months was the woman in the community before

Discussion

Table 4 indicates that there are not statistically significant differences in the rate of return of the women of the programs and the Niantic population when looked at after three months, six months and ten months.

Table 5 presents data regarding the differences in the rates of return for the women when viewed program by program. However, these results must be viewed cautiously, since the women were out in the community for various lengths of time. In other words, there is no distinction made between a women who has been out for one day and one who has been out for eighteen months.

The Return to the Community

In addition to the tracking of the women through their records, I tried to assess the meaning of the programs to the women and their children. In order to understand the dynamics of the women's experiences once released to the community, I interviewed a total of forty women who had been in parenting programs. The interviews took place in the visiting center (15); in parole offices (11); in residential programs in the community (7); in home visits (5); and in community social programs (20). Four of the women had two in-depth interviews. The women had all been released since being in a parenting program, except for two who had long-term sentences and had not yet been released. Of the 15 women who were interviewed in the visiting center, 13 had come back to prison after being released.

The purpose of the interviews with the women in the community was to ask them how they were doing now and to discover problems and issues that might need to be addressed in further parenting programs. The purpose of interviewing the women who had come back was to discover what had gone wrong for them once released.

Most of the women interviewed in the community were contacted by their parole officers and asked if they would meet me at the parole office, or at some other location for the interview. The women in the residential programs were contacted by the parenting staff and asked if they could see me. I found two of the women myself and interviewed them in social programs. Two of the women contacted by their parole officers said they did not want be interviewed because they wanted to put their past life behind them. On the other hand, most of the women remembered the parenting programs fondly, and were willing to talk with me.

Turning One's Life Around

The following women who participated in a parenting program were interviewed in the community after leaving Niantic. They are now doing well and appear to be in the process of changing their lives.

Today, June 14, 1990, I went to Small City to meet with Jean, who is now in a drug rehabilitation program. She is someone I have known over the years. Jean has been in and out of Niantic since 1976. She was in during the years 76, 81, 82, 85, 86, 87, 88, and 89. Her former husband has also been in and out of prison on drug charges. I remember last talking with Jean in a soup kitchen, when she was with her husband. She was angry and unhappy at the time, and she had her eight-year-old son Robert with her. He is now fifteen and lives with her parents near the drug program.

I met Jean on the porch of the program. She and the ten or so other members of the program had just come back from a gym. Jean looks much better and healthier than I remember her. She has gained weight, and she has a simple hair-do that looks good. She has scars on her arms from her years of intravenous drug use, and several tattoos. She told me that this drug rehabilitation program is where she should be. She said she is doing "so far so good," and said that she is dealing with issues she needs to deal with. Although each day gets harder and harder, she has a lot of support. She said that last night was especially difficult. She is trying to build a relationship with her son who is a freshman in high school and is involved in juvenile court. He said to her, "How come you are so interested in me now, and want a relationship....what about all the time before?" This hurt Jean, and she said, "Don't come back to visit before you want a real relationship with me."

When Jean was last in Niantic, she was in Narcotics Anonymous, although she said that women only attend in order to see their friends. She had been in Mothers' Support and had worked through the parenting staff member who is the liaison for D.C.Y.S.; she always helped her get in touch with her son's worker. She was also in Creative Arts. She said that Creative Arts was excellent because she liked the activities they did on Saturdays. She liked Mothers' Support, but said that even

though all groups begin with a discussion of confidentiality, "nothing is confidential at Niantic."

In November of 1988, Jean went to a religiously oriented rehabilitation program. She had a "dirty urine" and got sent back to Niantic in January 1989. She then went back to the same program the next month, but escaped in May and was picked up in her home town. She was generally critical of the program. She said that it was too religious. After you deal with your problems, you are supposed to put it in God's hands. She said that would not work for her.

Once she was released again in March 1990, she came to this program which she likes very much. She is now in the second phase of the program and expects to be in for one year and then be on parole until 9/91. Then she faces five years' probation. In Niantic and in the program, she has been working on her high school equivalency diploma, and she expects to pass the test soon. She also works out in a gym four days a week and likes it.

The state (D.C.Y.S.) is still involved with her son, and her parents are the guardians. He has been with them or in foster care for most of his life. Robert is now starting to see a psychiatrist and also sees the school psychologist once a week. Jean said that they are going to be in counseling together.

Jean has high hopes of making it. She told me several times how much support she gets from the people in the program. She showed me her room, and she was about to go into a group session when I left.

Jean appears to be turning her life around with the help of a small and intensive drug rehabilitation program. Although her relationship with her son is still difficult, she sees this as a time of healing for both of them.

I interviewed Zoraida in July 1990 at a Puerto Rican social service agency, where she volunteers. She told me that she would meet me at 10 a.m., and she was a few minutes late. The director suggested that I look for her in the local welfare hotel

where she has a room. As I was walking up the block, Zoraida came running up the block to see me. She was with the director.

Zoraida had been in Niantic since the Fall of 1987 on a sale-of-narcotics charge. She had a baby daughter in the spring of 1988. The baby is now two and is in the same town she is in, living with the baby's father. He will not let Zoraida see the child. Most of our conversation had to do with the fact that while in Niantic she saw her daughter twice a week, but she has only seen her twice since she got out in February. I asked her about a lawyer to help her, and she said that she had tried lawyers. She said that she might have to bring a police officer with her to see her baby. However, she felt sure that if she had her own apartment instead of living in a room in the hotel, she could see her daughter. She has been rejected by the Housing Authority because of her drug history, and she cannot go back to the old project she was arrested from. She also has five other children who are living in Puerto Rico with her mother. Their ages are 14, 13, 11, 10, and 7.

While in Niantic, Zoraida said that she "was in everything." She was in Creative Arts, Mothers' Support, Community Services, and the Survivors group. Zoraida sent her friend Alicia (who had just gotten out of Niantic the previous Wednesday) to her room to get an envelope filled with papers from Niantic so she could show me her awards from the programs. At the end of our interview, I saw her certificates from business courses, nurse's aide training, Creative Arts, and Mothers' Support. I also saw a card from a job counselor with whom she had worked in town. Zoraida has applied to a convalescent home for a job as a nurse's aide. She does not want to go back to a maintenance job she had before. Zoraida now spends her days volunteering at an AIDS project and at a Puerto Rican agency.

During this interview, Zoraida appeared somewhat bitter. She would like a clerical job, but it would appear that she would have to demonstrate her job abilities first. She said that so far her volunteering and her classes have not done her much good.

On August 14, I saw Zoraida at registration at the local university. She had her packet of financial

aid information with her, and she wanted to take classes every day. Some other part-time students advised her to begin with a study skills course and a social problems course. Zoraida appeared very happy.

I spoke with Zoraida several time around the university in September and October. She was going to her classes and had moved out of the hotel. She still did not have her daughter back, but the Department of Children and Youth Services was coming soon to inspect the apartment to see if it would be adequate for her and her daughter. She is still volunteering at the AIDS project, and said that she likes it very much.

Although Zoraida is still not reunited with her children, her life at the moment appears to be involved with school and volunteering. She was proud of the classes she took and the groups she attended at Niantic, and has found ways to continue to be a student in the community.

On June 6, 1990, I met Katherine at the parole office in Center Town. She is a tall thirty-four-year-old black woman, who was nicely dressed. She told me that she is an administrative assistant at a community mental health agency. She has been there for four and a half months, and just got her three-month evaluation, which was excellent. She has to go into the hospital for a partial hysterectomy, but she will have her job when she gets back.

She said that her problem in the past was drugs. She has been in and out of Niantic since 1979. She has two daughters, ages eight and eighteen, who have been with her boyfriend (not their father) even while she was in Niantic. They all live together now. She has been out of Niantic since October 1989.

Katherine earned her General Equivalency Diploma in Niantic. Her agency is now talking about college courses for her. In Niantic she was in Creative Arts, Narcotics Anonymous, Alcoholics Anonymous, and a Battered Women's group. When she got out of Niantic, her parole officer helped her get into a drug education program at an outpatient clinic of a local hospital for ten weeks. She said that it was a good program. She said that she is somewhat worried about her surgery and the pain-killing drugs they will give her. She wondered if the drugs

would tempt her again.

Katherine was able to go to an outpatient drug program that appeared to serve as a transition for her from Niantic to the community. She also has job skills as a secretary which she was able to use when she returned. Furthermore, she was able to join her children and her boyfriend.

On June 15, 1990 I met Carol, a member of the Parenting Advisory Board, at the Women's Center of a community near Niantic. Carol has been a resident at their rehabilitation center for the past six months, since she was released from Niantic. When I arrived at the Women's Center, I hardly recognized her. Her hair was curled, and she was wearing bright green shorts and a shirt. She looked very sporty. This was a contrast to her rather somber look in Niantic.

Carol is a thirty-nine-year-old black woman. She has four children, ages 21, 13, 7, and 5. She has been in and out of Niantic since 1975. The last time she was in for robbery and was there from August 1987 through January 1990. She was in all of the parenting programs, including the summer camp last summer.

Carol came to the program when the program was brand new. She is the only one of the original group that is still there, since most had to be sent back to Niantic. Carol has a job as a nurse's aide which she likes. She said that she gets a lot of support from the program. For example, she said that at first she thought she could not do full-time days in nursing, but once she tried it, she asked herself why she had "been so panicked." Carol said that it is important that there are no men at her program.

Carol will be able to leave the program on July 16, and she then plans to live in a nearby town because she has some positive friends there. She also tries to stay in touch with Laurie Etter, the chaplain for Niantic. She will bring her children to live with her once she gets settled with a job.

Carol's children are now with her mother. They were once in foster care for twenty-seven-months, and she felt that they did not keep up their schoolwork then. This summer, the thirteen-and seven-year old daughters will go to summer school to try to catch

up.

Carol is very concerned about her thirteen-year-old, who has a chronic medical problem. Carol would like her to have counseling. The girl apparently wrote to a school friend about how she used to have to take care of her younger sisters when her mother was using drugs. Carol seems to feel bad about this. Carol said that her mother would be able to take her to counseling.

Carol has every other weekend off from work, and she goes to Central City to visit her children. She also goes to Narcotics Anonymous, which is a part of the rehabilitation program. She is able to save money, and she sends her children money when they want something. She is giving her daughter money for a trip to New Jersey with a youth group.

Carol asked me to get her last Creative Arts certificate from the parenting staff, and a referral from Community Services for counseling for her daughter. After we said goodbye, Carol went back into the Women's Center. I was impressed with how many women were around the Women's Center, paying attention to Carol.

Carol is making the transition to the community by spending seven months in a program supported by the Women's Center. She plans to resettle, not in her home community, but in the Southeastern part of the state where she feels she has more positive contacts. She also appears to get a lot out of the support of the Women's Center. Although Carol has many concerns about her children, she appears to be comfortable about having her children with her mother for now.

On August 28, 1990, I went to visit Debbie at a religiously oriented program in Central City. Debbie is a forty-four-year-old black woman who has six children, three of whom are adults and three of whom are teenagers. She was first in Niantic in 1987 for one month, then for seven months in 1988, for six months in 1989, and for another four months in 1990. Her last offense was possession of narcotics. She has been in the religiously oriented program since she was released in March. Debbie said that although she was first in Niantic in 1987, she has been doing drugs and has been "out on the streets" for thirty-three years.

Debbie talked about how much she likes the program.

She said that it is spiritual and that it also involves Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous. She goes to the meetings both inside the program and in the community. A part of the program is also work therapy. This involves a lot of sorting of clothes, working in the store, and working at the desk. She said that she was in the program before, but just "skated through," by which she meant telling her counselor what she wanted to hear. Debbie referred to some of the people she knows now in the program as just skating through. Debbie hopes to stay in the program for one year. She said that since she was involved with drugs for thirty three years, she wondered what three or four months could do. I was introduced to her counselor (a female) who was very enthusiastic about the program and about how Debbie is doing. She said that there are only twelve women out of more than one hundred people in the program. She said that she tries to give all of the women a lot of attention.

Debbie said that the program is about honesty and about recovery. The director and her counselor are very good; the only problem with the program, according to Debbie, is that you do not earn money in it nor do you go out to work. Therefore, housing is a great problem once you leave. She spoke of a young woman who is getting ready to leave and who is pregnant. Debbie worried that since she has no place to go when she leaves, she will "do what she knows how to do, go back to the streets." Debbie said that she would prefer not to go back to live with her sister; she feels like a stranger there.

Debbie's three children are ten, thirteen and fourteen. They are living with her brother and sister-in-law in a nearby city. She said that she had had problems with her sister-in-law about seeing her children, but she talked to a D.C.Y.S. lawyer who said that the sister-in-law could not make up her own rules about visiting. She now visits with her children weekly. During her last visit, her fourteen-year-old had said "Mom, do you know that we are almost at war in the Mid-East?" Debbie had laughed and said that she is not that out of it. She said that her kids do well in school. She said that she looks forward to completing the program and getting an apartment for them.

After the interview, Debbie took me around the center. Every one greeted her nicely, and she seemed to feel very comfortable there. Debbie was able to describe each job at the center in great detail.

For Debbie, the transition back to the community is in the form of a year-long rehabilitation program. She likes the spiritual aspect of the program as well as the emphasis on abstaining from drugs and alcohol. Unlike some of the other women, Debbie is in her home community but is within a positive atmosphere. She has frequent contact with her children.

On October 10, 1990, I went to visit Cora, whose name I had heard for the past two years as someone who could serve as a role model for other women. Cora had been released from Niantic in March of 1989, so she had been in the community for a year and a half. Cora had been in Creative Arts (twice), and in the now defunct Parents Anonymous, and she had sung with the Voices of Joy (the prison choir led by the chaplain). Since Cora had no phone, the chaplain had asked her to call me, which she did.

Cora is a forty-three-year-old black woman. Her children are now nineteen and twenty three. Her daughter, who is twenty three, lives in Westfield, and Cora calls her regularly and sees her on weekends with her grandchild. Her son now lives with her. Cora mentioned that she works hard at her relationship with her children. She said, "It is really something, restoring a family."

Cora said that she is through being guilty about how she was with her kids when she was on drugs. She said that they would wait until she fell asleep in the morning (after being out all night) and they would know that she would not want to take care of them. She would say to them, "Go take some money" so they would not bother her. Now she does not "use or abuse anyone" or let them do that to her.

Cora is now very active with the Pleasant Valley Baptist Church in East City, sometimes sings with Voices of Joy, works full-time in a convalescent home, and cooks for a fellowship. She seemed full of energy and not tired after a full day of work. She also looked healthy. She said that when she looks at pictures of herself on drugs, she sees someone who was "85 pounds soaking wet." She asks herself, "Was that fun?" She mentioned several times that God has been good to her. Even when she

was once backsliding soon after her release, her friends came looking for her, not with a lecture (they did not "beat me up with words") but just to ask her to come with them. She said that now she is filling the void left by drugs by concentrating on love and serving other people.

Cora showed me a children's fable she had written through Creative Arts. She would like to have it published. She said that she prefers to write a fable with a positive message for children rather than do a play that is directly about drugs.

Cora lives on the top floor of a frame house on a busy main road. She has no phone and no car, but she said that her friends take her places. "I don't miss money, because money has always gotten me in trouble." She says that she likes her place since she can walk to work and walk to the store. She showed me several kittens she was caring for.

Cora is rebuilding her life in a community near the prison. She is very involved with her church group, which has become the focal point of her social life. She also has much positive reinforcement at work. Her standard of living is modest, but it is one that she is able to support.

Facing Problems in the Community

In addition to those women who appear to be successful in altering their lives and staying in the community, there are women I interviewed who were having problems in the community.

I had first met Barbara during a Mothers' Support group in February 1989. She had just had a visit with two of her children in the visiting area, and she was saying that her daughter had been "hyper." I realized that this had been one of her few visits with her children in recent years. Soon after that, Barbara was released from Niantic. I met her in a soup kitchen in her home town in March 1989. She appeared to be high on drugs. I asked her how it was going with her children. She said that she was "working on getting them back." Barbara told me that she had asked the parenting staff for some Community Services so that she could be in a group similar to Mothers' Support. A parenting staff member had called the local mental health agency and tried to get her an appointment for very soon after her release. They had said, however, that Barbara should call when she got out.

I again interviewed Barbara back in Niantic on June 6, 1989. The last time I had seen her had been in April on check day at welfare. At that time she told me that she was moving to another rooming house, since "anything is better than the (welfare) hotel." She told me that soon after that she had found her boyfriend in bed with someone else. She had gotten very mad and become drunk before seeing her parole officer. She said, "I knew I had to go back to Niantic before it got even worse." I noticed that Barbara's arms were still very bruised from injecting heroin in the month that she was out. Barbara attributes a lot of her doing poorly to her housing and her friends. She does not want to live in the projects because of the drugs. She feels that she will get the children back once she is in an apartment. Two are in foster homes, and three are with her former husband. She said that D.C.Y.S. has not brought the children in foster care to visit in a long time. I noticed that during the interview Barbara kept on saying "Hi hon" to the male correctional officers who walked by.

- It appears that Barbara did not have a transition period when she re-entered the community. She went back to living in the hotel and became immersed in the drug culture once again. Going to a drug rehabilitation program might have made a difference in Barbara's life.

Not everyone who goes to a program does well, however. The situations of Betty and Pamela are illustrative of this.

On June 20, 1990, I went to a drug rehabilitation program in a neighboring town in order to see Betty, who had been there for one month. Betty had used the Sesame Street Visiting Center for visiting her nieces, with whom she is very close. Her own two daughters never visited her in prison. She had given her ex-husband custody four and a half years ago, and since then she has not been able to see her children because his new wife does not approve of her. However, she will be able to see her children on a free weekend soon.

Betty described for me how she became involved in drugs and crime. She was divorced from her husband and then found herself no longer really being interested in the kids. She said that she would feed them and bathe them, but then when they said something she would brush them off and tell them "later." At this point she gave them to her ex-

husband. She thought that once she no longer had the kids, she would have less stress and use drugs less. That was not the case. She said that at times she was late for her visiting during the first six months of this arrangement. Her former husband told the court that she was always irresponsible, and she then lost the right to see them. After that she went to Niantic for one year. There she wrote to her kids but could not see them.

Betty said that she had been close with her younger daughter who is ten, but now the younger one said that she does not want to see her (but she ends her letters by saying, "I hope you will write back"). The twelve-year-old hadn't been so close, but now, over the phone, says she wants to be close. The younger one is now acting out in school, and the stepmother says that maybe having more contact with Betty would help. Betty said that she can't help but think of the stepmother in Cinderella because the daughters seem frightened of her.

In Niantic Betty went to Narcotics Anonymous and Alcoholic Anonymous, received her General Equivalency Diploma, and got her certification as a nurse's aide. She also took a college history course at Mohegan Community College. She loved it but couldn't finish because she got out.

Last weekend, Betty went home and said it felt so good to "be around my people." She said that she called the girls but was told she couldn't see them. She hopes (prays) she can see them this weekend. She spent the day at the Midas shop, then went to Stop and Shop where she found a girl she had baby sat for. When she saw her, they hugged and cried. Betty described how good her day was, being with her sister, nephews, and baby cousin.

On September 10, 1990, I saw Betty in the Visiting Center of Niantic. She had been back since the beginning of July. I greeted her and thought that she looked less nervous than she had in June. Betty told me that she let everything go in one night. She had a weekend with her sister, and she was supposed to see her kids that Saturday. She went to find her old boyfriend in a bar. When she saw other women hanging all over him, she "went crazy." She started drinking and getting high. She had to call her former husband the next day and tell him she was "too sick" to see the kids. At

first she lied and said she couldn't come over because her sister had chores. When he confronted her with "Which is more important, chores or the children?" she finally told him she had gotten high, and she did not want her kids to see her in that condition. She went back to the program and told them what happened. They told her it was all right, but two days later two correctional officers came and got her when she was taking a nap. She told me that the program did not think she was being honest with them. For example, she had told them she would settle in Old City (a requirement of the program), but she really had no intention of doing that. She also did not tell them that she was thinking of her old boyfriend.

Betty appeared to be quite disgusted to be back in prison. She said that she is not going to work or school and does not even lie outside in the sun. She will ask for supervised home release soon in order to go home and not go to a program. Betty talked about how she had been working as a nurse's aide while in the program and had liked it. It was hard to get through all ten patients each day (she was used to fewer patients in her training), but she was getting faster. She had made \$700, and she sent \$100 to her kids and gave some to her sister for the phone bill. She also is spending a lot at the commissary on creamer, sugar, and cigarettes. She now has only \$200 left. She said she is very proud of herself for saving \$700. She had almost earned the \$1000 for her own apartment. She kept on kicking herself for messing up.

Although Betty appeared to be doing well in her rehabilitation program when I saw her in June, she told me in July that she had not been honest in the groups in the program. She did not tell them about her thoughts about her boyfriend, nor that she had no intention of settling in Old City when she was finished with the program. On the other hand, she responded well to the structure of the program, and she was proud of her ability to work and earn money.

In June, 1989, I interviewed Pamela, a woman who had been in Creative Arts, Parent Education, and Sesame Street visiting; she had left the institution and had come back. She had gone to a religiously oriented program for three and a half months. She was supposed to stay for another month (it was a four month program). Pam complained about a counselor who she said "sabotaged my sobriety" from the first day there. She finally left and went

home for two days. She was picked up and charged with an escape. She is not now in any parenting program.

In the community, Pam had been going to Narcotics Anonymous, Alcoholics Anonymous, and Cocaine Anonymous. She said that she was a member of the first CA in the Central City area, which is held at the Institute of Living. Pam told me that she comes from a black middle-class family. Her brothers are a doctor, a lawyer, and a business man. She says her parents still support her, but it has been hard for them. They have her sixteen-year-old daughter with them. The daughter refuses to visit Pam and now is not doing well in school. Her five-year-old daughter is with the child's father, and Pam can't get in touch with him. He has no phone. All calls from Niantic need to be collect, and she can only reach him at work.

Although Pam was not too communicative about her experience in the rehabilitation program, it had not been a positive one for her. Since she was in her home community, she went home and was brought back on an escape charge.

Laura had thought about changing her situation upon release by changing the town she went to. However, this was not enough for her to do well.

In June 1990, I went to Seaville to see Laura. She is living with someone named Jim who gave me directions to their apartment. Jim is in his sixties and is letting Laura stay there. She pays him her \$25 a week from city welfare, and implied that he expects sexual favors as well. His directions to me were interesting: he knew few street names until right around his house. She knew no directions, yet they go to the community I was coming from daily for her daily dose of methadone since she has not "earned bottles" yet. Jim told me he is trying to get her interested in short-wave radio (his hobby).

Laura was dressed in shorts and an over-blouse. She looked as if she were in her pajamas, yet she had already been out earlier in the day for her methadone. She told me that she started heroin at age thirteen, when her mom died. She did not get along with dad's new wife. She said that she had graduated from high school and has a degree in occupational therapy. She said that she wondered if she could get a job as an o.t. while she was on

methadone. She has worked in convalescent homes but can't stand the smell.

Throughout my time with Laura she was pacing, smoking, and saying that her town social worker does not approve of Jim. She said this a few times within Jim's hearing, and I wondered if this was not for his benefit. She also said that her counselor at the methadone clinic told her that she should do more than stay home and read and talk to her daughter on the phone. She talked vaguely about a job, but then said that she is not going to do anything for three more weeks. She said that her parole officer liked her and thought she was doing well.

Laura's daughter is eight years old. She is living with her paternal grandparents in her home town. She said that her daughter is doing well, she is bilingual and spends every summer in Puerto Rico. Laura also speaks Spanish although she is not hispanic. Her boyfriend Jose is in prison and wants to marry her when he gets out. She said that before they got arrested, they had a nice apartment and a car. She said that he never did drugs.

In Niantic, Laura was in Mothers' Support, Community Services, Narcotics Anonymous, and Alcoholics Anonymous. She said that she has gone to AA in Seaville and they are nice people. She said that one AA member saw marks on her (she implied that Jim had hit her) and asked her what had happened. She says that when she goes out on the street, people bother her and ask if she wants to buy drugs. Laura decided not to move back to her home town because she says that it is a drug town, and people there would always bother her.

Laura is thirty-four-years-old and has been in and out of Niantic since 1978 when she was twenty. She has seizures and once fell off the top bunk in Niantic (she told them not to put her there). She said that she gets headaches before a seizure and has been getting them lately. She said that the doctor who has been treating her says that he is no longer her doctor. She said that she got on methadone fast because of the seizures. Laura asked how she could get to the methadone clinic if she were to leave Jim. She is now on the waiting list at a methadone clinic closer to Seaville.

Laura moved to a town where she was not known, in hopes of making

a fresh start. However, she did not have a program or a positive support network to go to, and she ended up staying with a man she does not like. She appears to be headed toward giving up on methadone, and is in danger of returning to heroin. She also has serious health problems, and yet health care for her appears to be a problem.

Linda was on the verge of being homeless at the time of our interview. Her situation illustrates the inadequacy of services available in the community.

In August 1990, I went to see Linda at the time she was reporting to her parole officer in Old City. In Old City the parole officers use a building on the grounds of a state mental hospital. I went outside to see Linda since she had already reported. I sensed that she was in a hurry. I suggested that we sit on a bench outside, and we did for a while, but we then were asked to leave and come inside by a female security guard.

Linda is a twenty-two-year-old black woman. She was in Niantic briefly in 1988, 89, and 90. She was last in for sale of narcotics. She used the Sesame Street area for visiting with her children.

Linda was in a crisis. Her mother (with whom she had been staying) has been evicted and is now going into a one-bedroom apartment. Linda has three children, ages two, three and five, and she needs a two-bedroom apartment. She was denied housing at one shelter in Old City. The Department of Human Resources told her that she could go to a shelter in West Breeze, which is over forty miles away. She said that she does not want to go to West Breeze, and that that town is filled with drugs. She told me that she needs to get her budget sheet from AFDC for her housing application at the Housing Authority to be complete and that she would then be on the list for public housing or section 8. I suggested that we drive to DHR together. However, when we got to the parking lot, she did not want to go in. Linda also asked me, "What is a shelter anyway?" I told her what I knew about shelters from my work with the homeless.

When I got back to my office I called DHR and they repeated that Linda could go to West Breeze. I then called another shelter in a neighboring town, and they said that they were full. They suggested that Linda call back every day. Then I called another

shelter that Linda had already tried. The woman I spoke with said that she had two families ahead of Linda and said "she was familiar with the case"; she sounded as though she did not want Linda.

I then called a social worker at a Community Health Center, who said that he was most concerned about the children and was close to calling D.C.Y.S.. Linda had told me that D.C.Y.S. would take her kids if she did not find an apartment. In our discussion, the social worker said that he had run up against a brick wall in working with Linda in that no place in town wanted her. I was baffled as to how she could be refused admission to a shelter when she had never stayed in one. The shelter directors appeared to be reacting to her reputation. I suggested that the social worker be a firm advocate.

Hannah had wanted to go to a program when she left Niantic the last time, but she had gone back home instead.

In June 1990, I saw Hannah, whom I had last seen in Creative Arts. She had been returned in April of 1990 after being out for about two months. She had moved back to her mother's house with her two children, ages two and eleven. She said that there was a lot of tension in the home. Her brother was there with his girlfriend, who is pregnant and has two children. She said that her brother was getting on her nerves. She also mentioned later in the interview that her father has a chronic illness and was also abusive to her. Her mother, who is very close with the eleven-year-old, has a history of drinking. Hannah said "I fucked myself up." She went from a beer to a reefer to shooting drugs. She had track marks in her neck from injecting heroin. She also got a part of a needle (a spike) lost inside of her. She was stopped one night at gunpoint by the police. She said "I went crazy" and pulled a knife that she had under the seat in the car. They took her back to Niantic. She had had four weeks of drugs. She said that at least she hadn't been brought back in bad shape physically. She said that she always tries to watch her health. She said that she shoots up with a quart of orange juice by her side and takes vitamin pills.

When Hannah came back to Niantic she was sent to a psychiatrist who said she was addicted and the next time she should go to a program. This is what

I remember Hannah saying in Creative Arts. Hannah said that Niantic had not seen her as addicted before because "I was so bad." She said that it is fear that makes her go so crazy.

Hannah's first incarceration was when her older child was three weeks old. She said that she went to Mercy College in NY from 1981 to 1984 and got her associate's degree (I had asked her about her degree). She then told me that when she went back to Central City (which she indicated had been a mistake), she started working in a factory in maintenance, and then worked her way up to expeditor. She said that she used drugs on the job. She said that she knows that she is a capable person, but she always messes up. She said that she has been into blaming the family all along for her problems, but now she blames herself. She said that she is now 35 and it is time for her to stop coming to jail.

I asked Hannah what she enjoyed in the parenting programs. She said that she especially liked Parent Education because it teaches you about parenting. She also said that there is a lot of talk on the unit about everyone's children.

When we were talking, a little blond girl was in the Sesame Street area visiting with her mother, a D.C.Y.S. worker, and a parenting staff member. Hannah said that the child had been abused by the mother and now the child was crying and did not want to see her mother. Hannah started to cry about that and about how kids should not be abused. She said that she never hits her kids and does not believe in even yelling at them.

Hannah is someone with a long history of incarceration. She is articulate and when in Niantic speaks fondly of her children. She would appear to need a structured program sufficient in terms of time for her to change her life-style in the community.

Factors Involved in the Transition to the Community

There are several themes that transcend the individual adjustments of women once they are in the community. The three that will be discussed below are the woman's relationship with the person who has been taking care of her child while she is in prison; housing issues; and lifestyle issues that include her involvement with drugs.

Relationship with Children's Care-Givers

It appears that those women whose own mothers have their children feel most comfortable about the safety of their children while they are incarcerated. For example:

In October 1990 I was at the Visiting Center and saw Marcia there (she was mopping the floor); she greeted me warmly. I had known her from Creative Arts. She had left Niantic and had been returned on a charge of conspiracy. I asked her who had her children and asked her if she worried about them. To this she replied, "When I'm here, my mother has my kids. No, I don't worry when she has them, but I do miss them."

It would appear that, especially for those women who have close family ties, having their mothers care for their children does not present the discontinuity it may have for women without the tradition of an extended family.

In this parenting population, the white women were the most likely to be involved with D.C.Y.S., which is usually an indicator that the children are in foster care. The strongest relationship between ethnicity and foster care occurs when we contrast the D.C.Y.S. involvement of white women and hispanic women in the study.

Table 6

Ethnicity and D.C.Y.S.

	white	non-white
D.C.Y.S.	30 (18)	30 (42)
Non D.C.Y.S.	95 (107)	265 (253)

Chi square= 13.715 DF=1 Probability < .05

	white	hispanic
D.C.Y.S.	30 (19)	4 (15)
Non D.C.Y.S.	95 (106)	91 (80)

Chi square= 16.178 DF=1 Probability < .05

In the tables above, the numbers in parentheses is the expected frequency for each category. The numbers above it are the observed frequency. When there is a difference between these numbers that is large enough when looked at statistically, the difference is thought to be significant, that is, it could not have happened by chance alone.

In returning to Marcia's reply about her feelings of where her children are, another interesting aspect of the reply is that she uses the terms "when I'm here." It is as though for Marcia the experience of being in prison is more than a one-time occurrence, and that her mother is her constant back up.

However, having one's own mother take the children can have its problems. For example,

In an interview in the Visiting Center, Hope talked about how, when she was home on the electronic bracelet, her mother had treated her like a child. It was clear to Hope that her mother did not trust her, and that her child did not respect Hope's authority. This situation was so distressing for Hope that she called Niantic and asked to be returned within her first week home. She said that she would rather serve her time inside than be driven crazy by her mother.

Another issue is that although grandmothers in the black and hispanic community are doing much now to raise their childrens' children, this situation will not last forever. In an article in The New York Times, "Grandmothers Bear a Burden Sired by Drugs" (Gross 1989), the issue of these grandmothers becoming too old and sick to care for the children was raised. What happens when this generation of traditionally reared grandmothers dies off? Who will take over then?

When the woman's children are in foster care, the woman may have little or no rapport with their care-taker. It is more likely, too, that their values and child rearing practices will be different from that of their own mother's values. On the positive side, some of the women whose children are in foster care see their children more frequently than the children with the extended family member, because the D.C.Y.S. worker is obligated to bring the child to Niantic for a visit every month.

Housing as an Issue

One of the themes that came up continually with the women who were soon to be released was the lack of affordable housing in Connecticut. In discussing housing with several pre-release groups, women talked about their previous experiences in leaving Niantic. For example:

Sherry spoke of her problems in Townsville, where she was told she was not eligible for Section 8 nor for a security deposit without having her kids with her. On the other hand D.C.Y.S. told her they would

not return her kids unless she had appropriate housing. Sherry said that she was so upset in the community, she did something to bring her back to Niantic. Another woman said that her name was finally coming to the top of the list for public housing in her home community. They do not know she is in Niantic, and she would like to find a way to keep her name on the list so when she gets out she can get affordable housing.

There appears to be little real help in the area of housing for a woman who is released from Niantic. Although those who leave on supervised home release must put down someone's name with whom they will be staying, many women have let me know that they can stay with this person for only a few days.

Lifestyle Changes

It appears that those women who are now successful in the community have been able to change their lifestyle, especially as it relates to drugs (using and/or selling) and alcohol. When the women have been in a didactic situation regarding parenting, it has appeared that they are as knowledgeable about child rearing as their non-incarcerated peers of similar educational background. However, this knowledge (e.g., appropriate styles of discipline) does not function if the woman has been up all night and has no energy for her children. One supervisor at D.C.Y.S. relates the complaints of social workers about working hard to take the children to Niantic, only to see that when the mother gets out she does not visit even if she lives three blocks away. Some of the women have talked about their visits with their children in programs such as Creative Arts as being among the best times they have ever had with them.

Conclusions and Recommendations for the Future

The qualitative data presented here demonstrates that the parenting programs of Niantic were successful in offering the women and their children the opportunity for visiting and communicating with each other in a very positive way. For some of the women visiting with their children in one of the programs provided them with some of the best times they had ever had with their children. The programs that offered support and education for the women were also very positive in that the focus of the sessions was on them as mothers, a very important and positive part of their self identity. Also, the women were grateful for those times the parenting staff was able to help the woman communicate with her child, or their care-giver in the community, or the school system. Further, the women who received help from community services were appreciative of the links that people were trying to establish for them in the community.

So far it is difficult to demonstrate that these positive benefits of the parenting programs have been able to reduce her chances of coming back to prison when compared with the rest of the population. However, it is possible that the short term follow-up of this study has not been able to capture the long-term benefits of the programs. It is possible that eventually the women of the parenting programs will be able to stay out of prison in greater numbers.

Why is it that the good feelings toward their children that are so clearly seen during the group sessions and during the visiting are not enough for many of the women to turn their lives around once they are on the outside? It appears that the lure of drugs, making a lot of money illegally (usually from drugs) and associating with old friends who are involved in illegal activities is powerful for many of the women. What can the parenting programs do to sustain these women on their return to the community?

One of the suggestions that come to mind is to have the group sessions include more discussion of strategies for remaining in the community. While the group sessions were very good in focusing on the children of the women and on their love for them, they appeared less successful in discussing the ways in which the women may not do well in the community and may be unable to parent. In all of the groups there were women present who had themselves been released from Niantic and returned. They could have contributed to realistic discussions of what would interfere with parenting in the community. Another positive strategy, mentioned by some of the facilitators, would be to have women who are successful in staying out of prison come to a group session in order to discuss what has worked for them.

Another suggestion that would continue the positive feelings and relationships with the children generated by the programs, would

be to establish a telephone link with the released woman. Since the parenting staff were seen as people who were interested in the inmate and her family, she might be encouraged to call when things were not working out. Right now the woman leaves the prison and her positive relationships there behind her. A program might be established that helped the woman make phone calls for help.

Another issue raised by this research was whether the woman is now reunited with her children. The eventual goal of parenting programs is to strengthen the maintenance of the woman with her family. However, most of the women interviewed on the outside who were doing well had tried to change aspects of their life by, for example, moving to another part of the state or going to a residential program. Others had become self supporting by getting a job. The women who were doing well talked about not going back to their children immediately, until they were "back on their feet." This transition period should be acknowledged during the group sessions, and perhaps even encouraged when possible.

A further issue for the women was how the community agencies they were referred to received them. Several women mentioned to me that they had made the phone call to an agency that was supposed to help them, but were told that they would have wait three weeks for an appointment. For a woman leaving prison, three weeks is too long. Stronger relationships should be established between the community services coordinator and the key community agencies that may help the women. This may involve travelling around the state to visit these agencies. Since the turnover rate within agencies can be high, this liaison work may have to be done on a repeated basis.

Issues in research

The women of the parenting programs were a constantly changing group. Many were not in prison for the full length of the program. One of the biggest problems in conducting the research was keeping track of which women were receiving which parenting services at any one time. The research would have been made easier if each woman who was receiving any parenting programs had a central file. Also, the file could have kept track of any releases and returns from the community. It was not uncommon during the two years of the research to find a woman who had had several stays and had had parenting program involvement during only some of those stays. Much of the research time was spent on keeping track of the women.

Another problem was locating the women once they had left. It would have been advantageous to participate in the full eight-to-ten week curriculum of each group at the beginning of the research. In that way, various cohorts of the women would have been known, which, I believe, would have made finding them in the community easier. Once out, the best link to the women was the parole office. However, the women were reporting to parole offices all over the state and on different days.

The research on parenting programs leads to questions of what are the factors that help or hinder a woman's successful return to the community. Are there ways for the prison or the community agencies to help with the transition? A study that confined itself to following (in depth) a group of mothers leaving prison, could discover factors that lead to success in remaining in the community.

The research presented here is one of the first attempts to systematically describe parenting programs for women in prison, and to follow the women in their return to the community. Although the women so far appear to return to prison at the same rate as the general prison population, the programs themselves do much to help the women focus on themselves as mothers. The mothers are helped to maintain the bond with their children while they are in prison through actual visits with the children, through communication with the children and the children's care-givers on the outside, and through talking and reminiscing about the children in groups.

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