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ACQUISITIONS

Incarcerated Women
With Their Children:
*A National Survey of
"Boarding - In" Programs*

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Massachusetts Department of Correction

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INTRODUCTION

In 1992, as reported in the Corrections Handbook, there were approximately 52,000 women incarcerated in the United States. In the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, seven percent of the inmate population are women. The majority of these female incarcerants have children that must be placed in the care of relatives or in the foster care system while the mother is not present in the home. The increasing concern is over the effect this forced separation has on the social and emotional development of these children. Accordingly, Massachusetts is exploring other options, including programs that would allow children to remain with the mother during all or some period of their incarceration time.

The Commissioner of the Department of Correction of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Larry Dubois, has requested the Research Division to investigate the programs that other states may have developed in response to this issue. A short survey was mailed to the Department's of Correction in all fifty states and the District of Columbia, asking for descriptions of programs currently in place and of those that may be in the planning stage.

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SURVEY RESPONSE

All fifty states and the District of Columbia responded to the survey; forty-two via the written survey provided and nine by telephone. All expressed concern for and interest in resolving the questions that arise around incarcerated women and their children.

In the Summer of 1992, there were twelve states (24% of the respondents) that have programming for women that allowed some "boarding-in" of infants and children. Seven more states (14% of respondents) had plans for initiating such a program, although some were in the rudimentary stages of planning. Three other states, (Hawaii, Idaho and Wyoming) had previously had such programs but had abandoned them due to financial concerns.

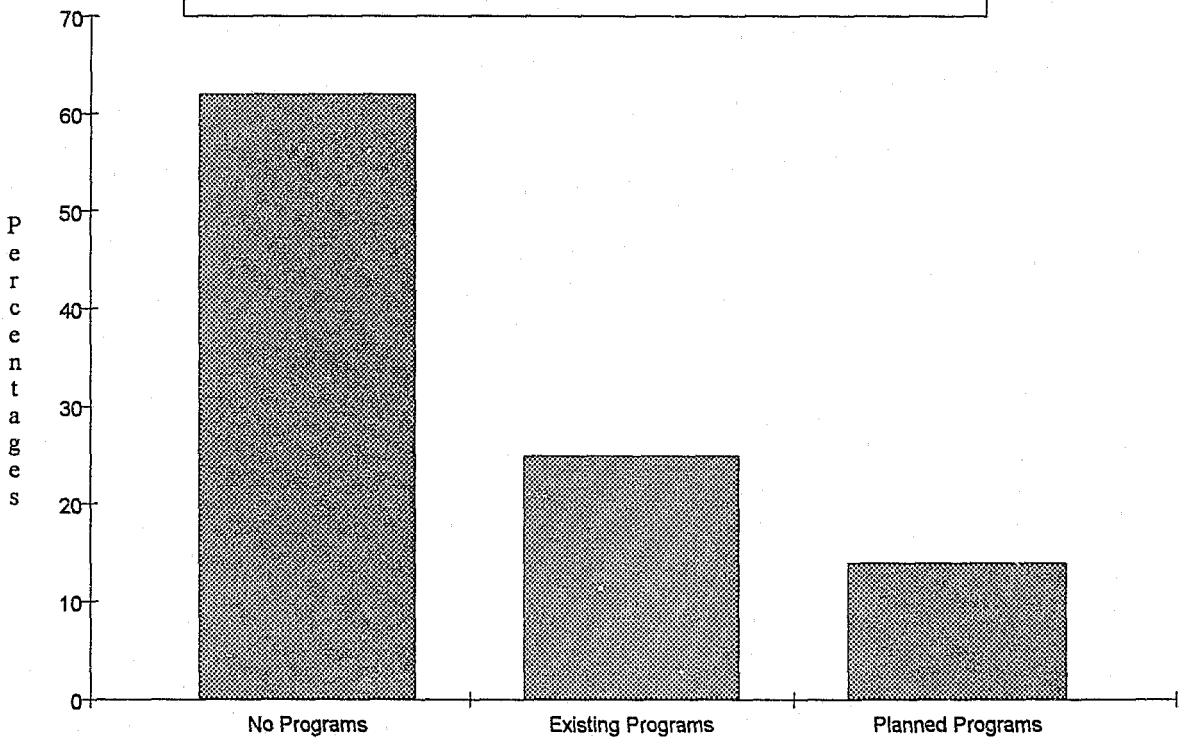
The states with current programs are:

- | | |
|---------------|--------------|
| California | Minnesota |
| Connecticut | Nebraska |
| Delaware | New York |
| Illinois | South Dakota |
| Kansas | Tennessee |
| Massachussets | Wisconsin |

Planning are:

- | | |
|--------------|--------------|
| Georgia | Rhode Island |
| Missouri | Vermont |
| Oregon | Washington |
| Pennsylvania | |

Figure 1. Proportions of States with Boarding - In Programs



50 States and District of Columbia

CURRENT PROGRAMMING

Characteristics of the current programs are reported in the following Table. Several models for such programs have been derived from this information. They are:

I. NURSERY PROGRAMS

These programs, which are situated in either the community/contract houses or in the prison setting, intend to keep a mother and her newborn together for some period of time in order for bonding or recognition to occur. Although a few programs will take the mother prior to the birth, in most cases the mother and child enter the program following hospital discharge. The mother will be responsible for the care of the infant and remain in the program for four to twelve months, depending on anticipated release date.

II. EXTENDED VISITS/OVERNIGHTS/WEEKENDS

Women who have no disciplinary actions against them and who have children under the age of twelve are allowed to bring them into the prisons (usually in a special building or cell block) for over-night and weekend visits. The frequency runs from one weekend a month to five overnights a month. These prearranged and supervised visits are intended to maintain family relationship and to assure both mother and children that "all is well".

A variation on the Overnight visits is the Camping experience. In Illinois there is weekend camping on the prison grounds all summer for sixteen mothers and their children. In Kansas, women who are taking part in a parenting class are taken to a camp for three days with their children. This camp is sponsored by the Methodist Women of Kansas.

There are several programs that extend the visiting time between mothers and children, but they do not include overnight visits.

III. REINTEGRATION PROGRAMS

These programs are situated in Pre-release half-way houses or contract homes in the community and attempt to reunite the mother and child before release to the community in order to lessen the strain of readjustment. These are for infants and/or older children.

Figure 2. Number of Programs by Type

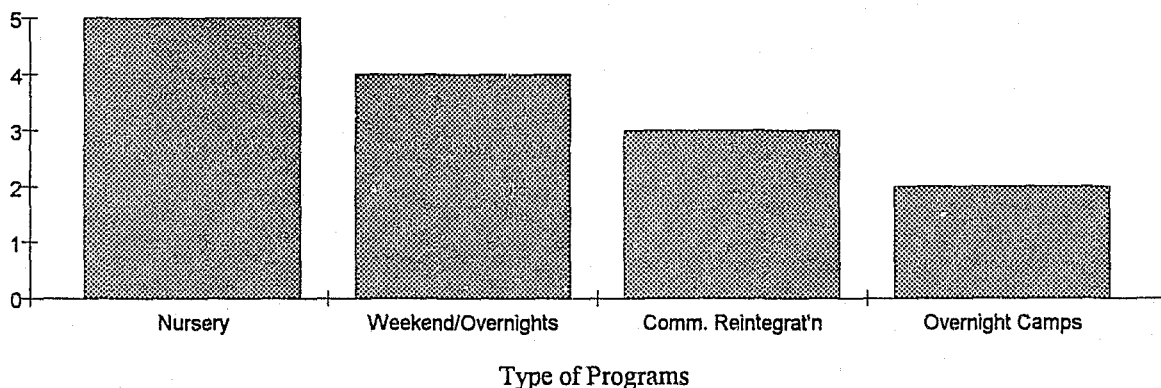


Table 1.
Characteristics of "Boarding - In" Programs
for Incarcerated Mothers and Children

State	Program Setting	Program Type	Age of Children	Length of Program	Time In Place
California	Community Setting	Reintegration	Below age 6	D.K.	13 years
Connecticut	Community Setting	Halfway Houses- last 18 mos. of sentence 3 separate locations	0-5 years	12 mos.	18 yrs. (4 beds) 3 yrs. (40 beds)
Delaware	Prison	Overnight visits Extended day visits	"Dependent"	Throughout the period	2.5 yrs.
Illinois	Prison Grounds	Weekend Camping	0-16	Fri - Sun a.m. all summer	5 years (16 women)
Kansas	Community Visiting Center (Methodist women)	Women who participate in Parenting Class are taken to a "camp" for 3 days w/ their children	under 12	3 times a year	3 years
Massachusetts	Community Pre-Release	Substance Abusing Pregnant Women-Nursery Program	Pre-Post Partum	6-12 mos.	5 years (15 beds)
Minnesota	Community Prison	A. Nursery B. Re-entry	Newborn/Moms below 12 yrs	4 mos., weekend visits	5 years
Nebraska	Prison	Overnight Visits	Females Boys	5 overnights a month	17 years
New York	Prison - Medium Security	Nursery-2 locations. All children services organized into the Children Center.	Babies to 1 year	Up to 12 months	Started 1901
South Dakota	Prison	A. Nursery B. Overnight visits	A. Mother/Infants B. One weekend a month	A. 30 days B. Indefinite	15 years
Tennessee	Prison	Weekend visits, mothers/ grandmothers	3 mos to 9 years	indefinite	10 years
Wisconsin	Community/ Min. Sec., Halfwy Hse	Nursery	Up to 1 year	12 months	D.K.

SERVICES PROVIDED

All of the programs described above and in the Table are part of a service delivery effort that attempts to improve the ability of each woman to care for her child and herself. The following services were most commonly mentioned as important to that goal.

- Child Development Classes
- Parenting Skills
- Family Outreach
- Counseling; Individual and Family
- Substance Abuse Counseling and Education
- Independent Living Skills
- Job Readiness Skills
- Vocational / Educational Training
- Health / Nutrition Education
- Employment Placement Assistance
- Discharge Referrals
- Medical Assistance Referrals
- Self-esteem Enhancement Activities
- Foster Care Counseling

Program Directors across the country spoke of incarceration as the "opportunity" to reach the mother and to teach and strengthen child care skills.

DISCUSSION

Although the concept of residential programs for incarcerated mothers and children sounds like a perfect solution, there are negative consequences that need to be considered. Attached to this document are policies from programs that have been operational for many years. They note that to enter and leave a prison, the child must be thoroughly searched, which may not be a good experience for a small child. These policies also state that the woman who "does not feed her child" will not be allowed to participate next time. The thought that the mother would forget to take the child to the cafeteria doesn't ordinarily occur and provides some insight into the magnitude of the parenting deficit.

From the survey and other literature, these are the main positive and negative aspects of the programs:

POSITIVE

- * Allows bonding with new-born infants. This appears to comfort both mother and child and prevents having a discharged mother caring for a child she doesn't know upon release.
- * Establishes/Maintains the family bonds with older children.
- * Provides the opportunity to teach parenting skills, nutrition, normal growth and development.
- * Provides motivation for the mother to cooperate with prison rules and to participate in rehabilitation programming.
- * These programs are successful due to the extraordinary effort of outside groups, such as the Catholic Archdiocese in New York. The experience of knowing these dedicated people as role models is valuable for the inmate.

NEGATIVE

- * The children see the mother and are themselves in what may be a frightening place, a prison.
- * Children may be disruptive to others in the environment. They may also interfere with the mother's recovery and learning particularly in Substance Abuse Programming.
- * If the mother has a long sentence, she must still place the child in the care of others or give it up, regardless of the learning that may have occurred.
- * The programs are very labor intensive and expensive.
- * Aside from New York, most programs accommodate relative small numbers of women.

SUGGESTIONS

- * No real outcome evaluation has been undertaken that can guide new program development. Start-up programs should include an evaluation component.
- * There needs to be a cost efficiency study as part of this effort.
- * The programs should be part of a comprehensive plan for women offenders, or women and their children may be given piece-meal services rather than matching mother and child with the best and most appropriate programs.