



Prison Lullabies:
Discussion and Resource Guide

Prison Lullabies contains strong language and adult themes. Mature audiences are suggested.

The ***Prison Lullabies*** documentary and this companion guide are intended to aid communities of faith and interested secular organizations in discussing what they can do to formulate a plan of action to assist the successful re-integration of mothers when they leave prison. To begin the process, they can create an understanding of addiction, abuse, and other societal issues that contributed to the incarceration of many women, and that continue to affect their lives upon release from prison.

Formerly incarcerated women return as members of our communities and attempt to lead drug-free, law-abiding lives without the necessary support systems in place. This guide is a starting point for clergy, lay leaders, and community and civic leaders to welcome and support the thousands of women who are released from jails and prisons each year. The following issues are explored in this guide:

- **Education and Employment** – How can faith communities and other supportive agencies assist former prisoners in increasing their levels of education, in securing and maintaining viable employment, and in managing their financial resources?
- **Housing/Transitional Housing** – What can be done to insure that women who were formerly incarcerated have safe, appropriate housing?
- **Substance Abuse** – How can women who were formerly incarcerated gain access to substance abuse treatment centers and support groups in order to achieve a healthy and sober lifestyle?
- **Family/Family Strengthening** – What can congregations and communities do to assist these mothers with developing their parenting skills; gaining access to safe, quality childcare; and managing psychological distress?
- **Additional Resources** – Books, Web sites, existing programs, and training create opportunities for further dialogue and provide action steps.

Suggested Uses for *Prison Lullabies*

Community forums
 Substance abuse recovery
 Prison ministries
 Halfway Houses
 Staff retreat/workshop for correctional officers, police officers, probation and parole officers

Parenting classes
 Mentoring programs
 Sermon topics
 Teen-age parenting classes
 College classes in criminal justice

The Documentary

Prison Lullabies is the first documentary to take an in-depth look at a prison nursery program and its long-term effects on the women who participate in the program. Filmed at Taconic, a medium security correctional facility in Westchester County, New York, *Prison Lullabies* follows Amy, Anne Marie, Monique, and Joann, all arrested pregnant, from their time in prison, through their release, and to their re-integration into society.

The nursery program at Taconic is one of only five prisons in the U.S. to provide a nursery program for inmates. The program provides incarcerated women with the opportunity to live with their newborns for 12 to 18 months after birth. The first part of the film documents the four women while they are in prison. They deal with life in prison, try to address the personal issues that led to their incarceration, and learn to be responsible parents. They attend counseling sessions where they reveal and discuss the mistakes they've made and the difficult lives they have led. They talk openly about their addictions, hopes, and fears.

While the women all have other children, most admit that this is the first time they have concentrated on parenting. The film shows them struggling to be good parents, but also demonstrates the bond that develops between the mother and child.

The film reveals them wanting to put the past behind them and be good mothers to their children, but the four women worry about what will happen when they are released. The documentary continues to follow them as they work to rebuild their lives and care for their children back in their communities. The women struggle to stay sober, find and maintain employment, and reconnect with their families. All of the women achieve moments of success and deal with varying degrees of failure. As the film ends, two of the women have returned to prison, one for relapsing and another for failing to maintain her employment. The other women, while continuing to struggle, remain incarceration-free and are rearing their children.

Prison Lullabies was produced and directed by Odile Isralson and Lina Matta, Brown Hats Productions.

The Women in *Prison Lullabies*

*Bring my soul out of prison,
That I may praise Your name;
The righteous shall surround me,
For You shall deal bountifully with me."*

Psalm 142:7

Amy

Amy, 28, a substance abuser who is always concerned about her weight, tries to bide her time at Taconic by distancing herself from the other inmates. She has not used drugs for a long period of time and prides herself on the fact that she hasn't "squandered her life on the street." Yet, Amy was pregnant when incarcerated and her second child, Carissa, is born in prison. The child's father, Emmanuel, is Amy's drug dealer; crack is her drug of choice. Her 12-year-old son Paulie is living with his father.



As her release date nears, Amy's already shaky confidence begins to crumble. She is wracked with doubt and anxiety about her ability to succeed on the outside. "I will not have the walls to protect me," she confides in a starkly intimate moment.

Anne Marie

In her short 34 years, Anne Marie has managed to accumulate a rap sheet of staggering length. Among her crimes: 13 years of fraud, prostitution, grand larceny, and drugs. Her first two children, taken away at birth, were born addicted to crack. A daughter is being cared for by her grandmother. The other child, a son, is adopted.



When Anne Marie talks about her past, it is as if she is talking about someone else's hard times. In a shocking revelation during group counseling, Anne Marie admits that, when she had her second baby, she was not only still using, but managed a hit of crack just before giving birth. That, she says through tears, is the past. The difference for her now is that she is clean. She brought her new son Nicholas into the world with the support and guidance of the prison nursery program. As a result of counseling and the birth of her son, Anne Marie was able to reconcile with her parents after a 13-year estrangement.

Monique

"I can't bear to be with women twenty-four-seven," 27-year-old Monique says. Even by comparison with years of hustling, dealing drugs, and living with abusive boyfriends and relatives, Monique confides that she finds prison comparatively intolerable. On the streets, she says, people feared and respected her. At Taconic, she is neither feared nor respected as the system works to break down her individual spirit. Her aggressive behavior and quick mouth bring reprimands from her counselors and warning tickets from correctional officers. Even the other women threaten her with being "written up" if she doesn't do what's required. While many wouldn't care, Monique knows that she is on dangerous ground. Any more negative reports will get her kicked off the prison nursery floor and back into the general population where she will have no hope of keeping her child.



As months pass, Monique slowly begins to adjust. She relaxes in the prison nursery program and begins to open up about her past, sharing her stories with other women

whom she grows to appreciate and care for. Kareem is Monique's fifth child, but the first that she has had the opportunity to mother. Her first baby died of SIDS and the other three are being reared by her sister.

Joann

"In prison, I have time for myself," declares 31-year old Joann. "On the outside, I was stressed out." Indeed, with four children, the offspring of four different men, and the downward spiral of her own alcoholism and life as a drug dealer, she did not have much time left to consider what she was doing to herself or her kids.



Joann's three-year sentence, the longest of the four women, creates a bitter situation that she alone has to experience. While the other women will be able to leave prison with their babies, Joann will have her son (child number five), Carmelo, taken from her on his first birthday. One of the unshakable rules of the prison nursery program is that children may only stay with their mothers for 12 months or, upon exception, 18 months, if the mother's sentence does not extend beyond that time. Carmelo will join his four half-siblings in upstate New York, where Kathy, a friend of Joann, cares for them.

Discussion Questions

- What were some commonalities among the four women? How did they end up in prison?
- Which woman's story did you find particularly compelling? Why? What experiences did she have in prison and after her release that helped or hindered her reentry?
- Discuss each of the women in turn. What do you think will happen to each of them in the next two years? What would your organization/faith community do to help each one become self-sufficient? (You may want to save this question until after you've discussed the individual issues presented below.)

Women Who Are Incarcerated

Characteristics

The number of women incarcerated in the United States has increased seven-fold since 1980. At the end of 2002, 96,099 women were under the jurisdiction of state or federal correctional authorities.¹ Seventy-five percent of incarcerated women are mothers and two-thirds have children under 18 years of age.² Six percent were pregnant at the time of their incarceration.³

In the majority of cases, women in prison are children of women who had a similar life experience; who grew up without strong parental support, in an unstable home environment. They learned that love and trust were liabilities; that the ability to manipulate any situation to their advantage was a sign of strength.

- Linda (Amy's mother): *"Now that I take a big, long look at it, my grandfather was an alcoholic. He was very abusive to his wife. My father was an alcoholic, very abusive to my mother. [Amy's] biological father, alcoholic, made many attempts to kill me."*
- The typical female offender comes from a single-parent home in which other family members have been incarcerated. One in five has lived in a family foster home or group care facility while growing up.⁴
- Most women in prison have limited education and poor employment skills and less than half have completed high school.⁵
- Ethnic minorities are over-represented in the prison and jail populations. African-American women were 2.5 times more likely than Hispanic women and five times more likely than white women to be incarcerated in 2002. These differences were consistent across all age groups.⁶
- Among African-American women, the rate of incarceration (1,024 per 100,000) was highest among those aged 30 to 34. This rate was nearly five times higher than the rate among white women in this age group (213 per 100,000).⁷

¹ Harrison & Karberg, "Prison and Jail Inmates at Midyear 2002." Bureau of Justice Statistics Bulletin. (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, April 2003. From Federal Resource Center for Children of Prisoners, An Overview of Statistics.

² T. Snell, "Women in Prison," Bureau of Statistics Special Report. (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, 1992. From Federal Resource Center for Children of Prisoners, An Overview of Statistics.

³ Beck et al, "Survey of State Prison Inmates, 1991," Bureau of Justice Statistics (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, 1992). From Federal Resource Center for Children of Prisoners, An Overview of Statistics.

⁴ D. Johnson, "Incarcerated Parents," in K. Gabel and D. Johnston (Eds.), *Children of Incarcerated Parents* (Pasadena, California, Pacific Oaks Center for Incarcerated Children and Parents, 1995) From Federal Resource Center for Children of Prisoners, An Overview of Statistics.

⁵ L. Greenfield, "Women Offenders," Bureau of Justice Statistics Special Report. (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, December 1999). From Federal Resource Center for Children of Prisoners, An Overview of Statistics.

⁶ Harrison & Karberg (original document)

⁷ Harrison & Karberg (original document)

- Eighteen percent of mothers reported homelessness in the year prior to arrest.⁸
- Nearly six in ten women in state prison report having experienced physical or sexual abuse in the past, and for many, the abuse occurred before age 18.⁹

(See additional data related to substance abuse on page 17.)

Discussion Questions

- Why do you think the numbers of women in prison and jail have been increasing? What does this mean for the stability of families?
- Discuss the differences in rates of incarceration among African-American women, Latinas, and white women. What are the statistics for your community? What can your organization/faith community do to address this issue?

Prison Nursery Program

The prison nursery program detailed in *Prison Lullabies* is one attempt to support incarcerated mothers and their young children. As noted earlier, Taconic is only one of five prisons in the U.S. to provide a nursery program for inmates. While this program affords women the opportunity to bond with their young children and learn parenting skills, the issues facing many of these women run deep. In addition to in-prison programs, community-based support systems need to be in place upon their release.

Discussion Questions

- Is the prison nursery program depicted in the film a good idea? How is it good for the mother? For the child? How could the program be improved?
- How is the prison nursery shown in the film an acceptable environment in which an infant/toddler can develop? Or is it unacceptable?
- Do you think it is conducive to child development to be reared around so many women who are struggling with a number of serious issues? Why or why not?
- What supportive programs are offered in conjunction with the prison nursery? Are parenting classes offered? Can mothers take education and/or job training classes?
- What aspects of the prison nursery program particularly help the mothers to reenter their communities successfully? How could community and faith-based organizations help to build on these program elements?

⁸ Mumola, Christopher J., "Incarcerated Parents and their Children." Bureau of Justice Statistics Special Report (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, 2000). From Federal Resource Center for Children of Prisoners, An Overview of Statistics.

⁹ Greenfield. From Federal Resource Center for Children of Prisoners, An Overview of Statistics.

Impact of Incarceration on Children

As one whom his mother comforts,
So I will comfort you;
Isaiah 66:13

More than seven million children in this country have a parent who is under some form of correctional supervision.¹⁰ A child with an incarcerated parent is much more likely to end up incarcerated him or herself. According to the Correctional Association of New York's Women in Prison Project, "The incarceration of a caretaking parent often places the children at an increased risk of involvement with the criminal justice system, substance abuse, truancy, and other anti-social behaviors. These children experience greater levels of anxiety, depression, attention disorders, aggression, and poor scholastic performance."¹¹

When a woman is incarcerated, the impact on her children is significant – their primary caretaker is abruptly removed from their lives. Any stability they may have experienced is snatched away in an instant. They are removed from their home and familiar surroundings, often to be placed with strangers and separated from their siblings. In many instances, they do not even see their mother for a long period of time.

All four women in *Prison Lullabies* have other children remaining in the community in the care of friends, relatives, or social service agencies. While Taconic offers a nursery where the mother can bond with and learn to care for her newborn child, the siblings left in the community are not afforded the same opportunity.

- Kathy (who is the caregiver of Joann's children, when asked how she is preparing the children for Joann's return): *"The only two that I know that would be willing to go back [to their mother] would be the two younger ones. You know Carmelo, he may take a while to adjust, because, like I said, he thinks I'm mommy."*

U.S. Department of Justice Department statistics on incarcerated parents and their children in 1999 provide information on current caregivers while the mother is in State prison:¹²

- 28 percent, child's father
- 53 percent, child's grandparents
- 26 percent, other relatives
- 10 percent foster care / agency / institution.

If their children have been placed in foster care, it is necessary for the mothers to become gainfully employed and secure adequate housing in order to seek custody once they are released from prison. Further, a woman whose children are in foster care

¹⁰ Mumola. From Federal Resource Center for Children of Prisoners, An Overview of Statistics.

¹¹ Correctional Association of New York. Women in Prison Fact Sheet. March 2002.

¹² Mumola (original document)

cannot seek custody unless she has housing, but cannot qualify for family shelter assistance without custody of her children.

The children of mothers who are incarcerated face numerous difficulties. A 1993 study involving children placed with caregivers during their mothers' terms in prison found that 40 percent of male teenagers had some involvement with the juvenile justice system; 60 percent of female teenagers were, or had been, pregnant; and a third of all children experienced severe school-related problems.¹³ Researchers concluded that the mothers' incarceration interfered with the children's abilities to master developmental tasks, which adversely affected bonding and their sense of security.

The impact of a mother's incarceration on her, her child/ren, and the caretaker can be devastating. The children often feel abandoned, struggle in school, have difficulty making friends, and experience acute emotional and psychological problems. The caretakers often report feeling overwhelmed and unsupported and, because most caregivers are relatives of the family, often the grandparents, they feel emotionally devastated by the incarceration of their loved one. Finally, the mothers not only struggle with the feeling that they have deserted their children, but must also deal with the trauma of incarceration and the prospect of reentering society with a criminal record and the additional emotional baggage of the incarceration experience. Given the complex and interwoven problems faced by the children, caretakers, and parents, it is important that services directed at incarcerated mothers be based on explicit knowledge of and experience with the issue of incarceration.

Discussion Questions

- What did you learn about the children in *Prison Lullabies*? What concerns do you have about any or all of them?
- How did the women choose where to place their children while they were incarcerated? Was it entirely up to them? What type of placement(s) do you think would work best for children?
- What support systems can your organization/faith community offer to assist caregivers of children whose parents are incarcerated?
- What kinds of programs does your community or faith congregation have to assist children whose mothers are incarcerated? What can you do to start a new program, if needed?

¹³ Women's Prison Association and Home (WPA), 110 2nd Avenue, New York, NY 10003, www.wpaonline.org

Issues for Secular Communities and Communities of Faith

The women profiled in *Prison Lullabies* are representative of others who are incarcerated across the country. Upon release, these women face myriad problems. Most must struggle to find safe, affordable housing, repair strained family relationships, meet parole obligations, learn parenting skills, care for their children, find and maintain employment, and live a sober lifestyle.

- Monique (on her return to prison), *“For me all of this was very new. I was not familiar with, you know, taking care of my baby, paying for the babysitter, going to work everyday. This was something I had to adjust to, especially sober. I feel like I failed myself. I feel like I failed my little boy. I know he is suffering now, because he don’t know where his mommy is. He has my mother and the babysitter taking care of him....I’m back here, yeah, ‘cause of lack of skills, but not for relapsing.”*

To be sure, it is extraordinarily difficult to meet all of these obligations without some support from community organizations and/or loved ones. Viewing *Prison Lullabies* can be the first step towards identifying what actions community groups, faith-based organizations, and service providers can take to develop necessary supports for these mothers and their children.

A. Education, Employment, and Job Readiness

The majority of the more than 96,000 women in prison in the U.S. are there for economic crimes; 80 percent reported an income of less than \$2,000 in the year before their arrest. Although women prisoners typically have needs that are different from male prisoners, they remain the most neglected and overlooked population in our prison system.¹⁴ Discharge planning for prisoners to prepare them for release into their communities is the exception rather than the norm. Nationwide, fewer offenders are now participating in educational or vocational programs that could help prepare them for reintegration.¹⁵

One of the most effective deterrents to crime is employment. However, because of the lack of discharge planning, women are all too often released to the community ill prepared to enter the workforce or resume parental responsibilities. As Monique said in the film, she had never held a “legal” job. Upon release, she loses her job because she hasn’t learned the importance of being punctual. The basic concept of being on time and prepared for work is virtually unknown to incarcerated women who do not have a history of employment. The reluctance of employers to hire persons with criminal justice histories makes it difficult to find a job to meet the requirements of parole “to seek and maintain employment.”

- Monique: *“I’m going to be faced with a lot of challenges. It’s going to be really hard trying to find a job where people are not going to want to hire me. But, I’m not going to give up. I’m not going to give up.”*

¹⁴ Correctional Association of New York. Women in Prison Fact Sheet. March 2002

¹⁵ Rand Corporation. Research Brief. Prisoner Reentry: What Are the Public Health Challenges? June 2003.

Being released from prison with \$75.00 or less in their pockets, a bus ticket if there is no family support, inadequate or no housing, and no job leads, is a recipe for failure for many women.

Education and training are important keys to lower recidivism.

To be successful in finding and maintaining economic stability once they are released, women need to take advantage of educational programs, if any, offered to them while in prison. Since a significant portion of mothers in prison have not advanced beyond sixth grade, it is critical that they work toward passing the GED and, whenever possible, engaging in higher education studies. Yet, according to the Women's Prison Association & Home, Inc., only 16% of incarcerated women receive a GED in prison and 50% of women in prison do not participate in any prison educational program.¹⁶

Likewise, the ability to learn a trade increases the chance of finding viable employment.

- Anne Marie: "I want to learn Excel (computer program) before I leave here."

Prison structure allows some women inmates to gain new skills. In *Prison Lullabies*, Amy is asked to be the captain of the nursery floor to help her give directions to others and understand how to have control. She holds the other mothers accountable and lectures them about responsibility.

In working with formerly incarcerated clients in the field of employment and job readiness, service providers encounter many problems unique to this population. What follows are descriptions of some of the difficulties. The subsequent section details some training, counseling, placement, and retention concepts that can be considered in dealing with these issues.

Challenges

1. **Attitude:** The typical formerly incarcerated client emerges from a prison environment in which attitudes antithetical to those required in the workplace help ensure daily survival and success. In what is, in essence, a "reverse job training," individuals are socialized to watch their back and not trust anyone. They learn to maintain a flat and distant affect to avoid potential challenge, or alternatively, be confrontational to enhance stature. They also avoid any unnecessary interaction with anyone in authority while simultaneously depending on these authorities for the basic necessities of survival (e.g., food, clothing, and housing). Most do only what is specifically asked of them and then only to avoid further punishment or tickets. This is demonstrated in the group discussion in *Prison Lullabies* when Amy threatens Monique with getting a ticket from the officer, and otherwise to "go along to get along" – to avoid difficulties from those that supervise them.

These attitudes present difficulties with respect to finding and maintaining employment. In job interviews, potential employers look for individuals who will "fit in" with other staff. They want to hire individuals with the ability to work collaboratively with fellow employees and supervisors. They mandate that employees be willing to learn on the job and work both entrepreneurially and

¹⁶ WPA Focus on Woman & Justice, Women's Prison Association & Home Ins. September 2003.

independently. Clearly, prisoners leave custody with an enormous set of attitudes, including feelings of entitlement, learned behind bars that must be changed if they are to succeed in the job world.

2. **Low Self Confidence**: For most formerly incarcerated individuals, the world of work is either something new or an area in which they have had limited, if any, success. They may have committed their offenses, or not pursued their own personal growth because of a feeling that they could not ensure their success through means accepted by society.

Their incarceration has further defined them as apart from mainstream society. They have emerged from an experience in which the state has, in essence, told them that they are more fit to be warehoused than worked on. Additionally, they quite often lack personal role models, to look to with respect, who have come from their neighborhoods and achieved mainstream success after incarceration.

3. **Lack of Viable Work Experience**: Quite simply, long periods on the streets and long periods of incarceration do not allow individuals to build suitable work experience for many jobs. Many individuals who were formerly incarcerated, even those who are trained and skilled, lack the formal work experience to obtain anything but entry-level positions. Employers do not want to pay for someone's learning curve; they have a hard time believing that an individual truly understands what is expected of him/her unless they have successfully done it once before. Clients' lack of experience, of course, further jeopardizes self-confidence and hampers individuals' ability to earn a living wage.
4. **Literacy/Formal Education**: Just as many members of this reintegrating population lack viable work experience, the vast majority lacks the literacy skills to perform many jobs in today's economy, and the levels of formal education necessary to qualify in the eyes of employers. According to a State of New York, Department of Corrections survey, 15 percent of incarcerated women tested scored below the 4th grade reading level. Of the 2,902 incarcerated women included in this survey, only 45 percent scored above an 8th grade reading level¹⁷. They quite often lack the basic ability to craft a cover letter or resume even to obtain an interview at a job they could successfully hold.
5. **Hard Skills**: Like literacy and work experience, employers are often not willing to train individuals in the hard skills necessary to work at their places of business. In the instance of individuals who were formerly incarcerated, most have little or no skill training or certification – some because they did not make the best use of their time, some because they were moved from institution to institution, and others because they had little or no counseling. Even those who do have certifications frequently have not retained their documentation, or have certificates that are not industry standard and clearly indicate their status as

¹⁷ Profile of NYS Female Prisoner Population, State of New York Department of Correctional Services, Profile of Inmate Population, January 1, 2003

former prisoners. They may also have been trained in out-of-date skills or in an area for which there are few openings. In some cases, they may have been prepared for professions from which they are legally barred.

6. **Lack of Salary Realism**: Some members of this reintegrating population are so committed to turning their lives around that, in a rush, they will take any job at any salary. This can create a problem when an individual takes a job that cannot support his or her family or lifestyle, which again can push them into potentially illegal ways of building income. Quite often, however, a lack of salary realism works the other way, with clients demanding wages well above what their skill set entitles them to at market rate.
7. **Employer Attitudes/Sanctioned Discrimination**: In attempting to secure employment for an individual who was formerly incarcerated, the service provider may encounter a bias against his/her client, even one who has shown growth and made a genuine change. Often the changed former prisoner must still labor under his/her “boogeyman” status and face legal state-sanctioned discrimination, in which employment policies have been crafted to keep out individuals with criminal convictions.
8. **Social Service Needs**: Employment difficulties do not exist in a vacuum. All too often, further service is needed to address and treat root causes. These can include related difficulties such as a lack of adequate clothing and housing support. Furthermore, in the case of a client who was formerly incarcerated, the reality of reentry is that many social services must be pursued at once. This may cause scheduling conflicts between, for example, an appointment to obtain benefits and a job-training program.

Program Elements / Outcome Possibilities

To help this reintegrating population to succeed in addressing these difficulties, a service provider must create a robust, holistic, and flexible program that includes soft skills and attitudinal training, hard skills training (or referral to hard skills training), one-on-one counseling, and job placement and retention. The service provider must also have the ability to make referrals for those services it cannot provide, such as substance abuse treatment or housing. Specific issues to consider in establishing such a program include:

- The manner in which individual clients’ attitudinal hurdles are identified.
- The manner in which individual clients’ skills/skill deficiencies are identified.
- Determining which problems should be addressed in-house as opposed to those that should be solved through referral to other programs.
- The extent to which written materials and other resources should be utilized.

- Whether the program should seek to make individuals comfortable and build confidence or challenge them in a safe environment.
- The length of the training and the flexibility of its schedule.
- The amount of time spent on traditional soft skills and job preparation topics and the amount of time focused on exploring and addressing attitudes.
- The extent to which clients are assisted in their job search process versus the extent to which they are empowered by their own efforts.
- The minimum qualifications for a client to participate in the program.
- The extent to which the training and job search environment focuses on the needs of the employer versus the social service needs of the client.
- The manner in which clients' skills are marketed.
- The amount of time spent identifying and targeting receptive employers as opposed to working to overcome and correct other employers' misperceptions.
- The identification of jobs that correlate with individuals' skills.
- The length of time an individual should be supported and counseled upon obtaining a job placement and how that support should be carried out.
- Which problems must be addressed before a client can seek work and which can be addressed through ongoing counseling once employment is obtained.

Discussion Questions

- Are there adequate resources in our community to support this reentering population in developing skills necessary to secure and maintain employment?
- Are there enough potential employers within our social networks and are they accessible?
- What conditions would need to be met by both the employer and the employee in order to achieve a successful outcome?
- What can concerned community advocates do to encourage business leaders to provide on-the-job-training and employment to formerly incarcerated men and women?

Additional Dialogue for Faith-Based Audiences

God – Let Me Be Aware!

God – let me be aware!
Stab my soul fiercely with others' pain.
Let me walk seeing horror and stain.
Let my hands, groping, find other hands.
Give me the heart that divines, understands,
Give me the courage, wounded, to fight.
Flood me with knowledge,
Drench me with light.
Please keep me eager to do my share.
God – let me be aware!

As Monique so poignantly states in *Prison Lullabies*, women in prison may have never held a “legal” job. Low levels of literacy, substance abuse issues, and, quite often, a history of dependency, have created a toxic mix that makes successful employment all but impossible.

The faith community can be instrumental in reversing this bleak picture. In addition to providing education and employment services, programs can offer strong mentors who can provide the support structures needed to set new goals and stick to them. In addition, programs are needed that provide support in navigating the systems and paperwork necessary to live successfully on the “outside” – such as job applications, driver’s licenses, and medical appointments.

Food for Thought

- What were some of the factors that affected Monique’s inability to remain employed?
- What mind shift may be necessary for women who were formerly incarcerated to maintain employment successfully?
- How can our faith community help to increase literacy levels, including economic literacy, as well as life skills for mothers and their children?
- In what ways can the faith community increase the number of employment or job training opportunities for women who were formerly incarcerated?

B. Housing / Transitional Housing

Housing is among the most pressing needs of individuals released from prison. Some 75 percent of the women who are released from Taconic will return to New York City to live. Some will return to supportive and stable homes and families; more will return to the same troubled and dysfunctional families that they left when incarcerated. Too many will return to no housing at all. Studies suggest that 30 to 50 percent of parolees

in New York City are homeless following their release.¹⁸ Many others live on the edge of homelessness, as they return to unstable or short-term living arrangements.

Over 75 percent of women in New York State prisons are mothers, most with two or more children. Unique programs that provide safe, drug-free, supervised transitional housing exist in several communities. The Sarah Powell Huntington House in New York City, for example, provides apartments for families and women who are working toward family reunification. Through comprehensive case management and a wide range of on-site services, such as childcare and independent living skills training, this facility helps women achieve stability and self-sufficiency.

The housing challenges encountered by women leaving Taconic are similar to those faced by prisoners who are released across the country. Affordable housing is scarce and much of what is available excludes those with recent criminal convictions. It is extraordinarily difficult to build a new life without a safe and supportive place in which to live. Yet, a substantial percentage of released prisoners must struggle to do just that.

Discussion Questions

- How stable and supportive were the housing settings to which the women in *Prison Lullabies* were returning?
- How often were they returning to the same environments in which they had previously gotten in trouble?
- What factors in their housing and immediate environment would:
 - Support their successful reentry from prison?
 - Support their reunification with their families?
 - Increase their odds of relapse into drug use and/or return to prison?
- For each of the four women, what do you think the most suitable housing environment would have been upon release from prison? How did reality compare?

Outcome Possibilities

Set up action-oriented committees to:

- Investigate the number and percentage of prisoners released to homelessness or unstable living conditions in your communities.
- Explore the options for supportive and/or affordable housing available to released prisoners. How many of them preclude individuals based on the nature of their conviction? How many of them require a track record such as months of “clean time” on the streets, thus precluding individuals who have just been released from prison?

¹⁸ Joan Petersilia. When Prisoners Return to the Community: Political, Economic, and Social Consequences. *Sentencing and Corrections*, November 2000.

- Conduct an experiment with one or more teams. Imagine that you are just out of prison, have succeeded in landing a job at \$8.50 an hour (considerably above the minimum wage), and have 30 percent of your gross annual income available for rent (the federally recommended standard). Conduct a search of the housing opportunities in your community to see what options are available for just over \$400 per month. Conduct a field trip to view the options that you find. Walk around the neighborhood at different times of day (at the time you would go to work, when your children would come home from school, when you would come home from work, and when you would go grocery shopping in the evening). What is happening in the neighborhood at those times? If you lived there as a single adult, what would your chances be of remaining free of relapse, becoming a crime victim, or returning to prison? What would work for you and what would work against you? If you were a mother with three children living in one of those options, what would living there be like for you; for your children? What challenges would your family face and what resources would you have to address them?
- What unmet housing needs do you see in your community. What recommendations would you make to address them?

Additional Dialogue for Faith-Based Audiences

"Who shall not receive a hundredfold now in this time – houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions – and in the age to come, eternal life."

Mark 10:30

In This Place

Find a sense of
Church
Community
Communion

Hear a call to
Loving Kindness
Compassion
Unity

Know a time for
Believing
Supporting
Upholding

Recognize a feeling of
Openness
Integrity
Truthfulness

Expect a movement to
Encourage
Include
Forgive

Experience a house for
Prayer
People
God

Inhabit a haven for
The weak
The Peacemakers
The Spirit

Maureen Farrell, FCJ

One of the biggest challenges for women, especially mothers, who are released from prison is finding safe and adequate housing. Whether living alone, with family or friends, or in transitional housing, formerly incarcerated women no longer have the security of prison walls and the structured environment that has informed and influenced their actions for a significant period of time. Without strong family and community supports, many women return to the lifestyles, behaviors, and relationships that contributed to their incarceration.

Both Anne Marie and Monique are placed in halfway houses when they leave prison.

- Monique: *"And I want to thank God for this house, for me to be able to be with my baby. Even though it's been a struggle lately for me, but I'm going to make it."*
- Anne Marie (walking into the halfway house): *"This is nice. This is not at all what I expected."*

Communities of faith can provide invaluable support to programs such as this.

Food for Thought

- What is the difference between providing housing and providing a home?
- How does the lack of safe and adequate housing contribute to recidivism?
- What can our congregation do to address the need for safe and adequate housing for mothers released from prison and their children?

- What support structures and resources are needed beyond available housing/transitional housing?
- How can our congregation offer light to the future?

C. Substance Abuse: Incarceration Versus Treatment

Substance abuse is the most common health issue among the prison population.¹⁹ All of the women in *Prison Lullabies* have histories of alcoholism and/or drug addiction. Here are some statistics related to substance abuse:

- In 1996, more than 1/3 of female offenders were serving time for drug-related offenses.²⁰
- From 1990 – 1996, the number of women incarcerated for drug-related offenses doubled.²¹
- Sixty-five percent of women in prison reported having used drugs regularly.²²
- Forty-three percent of mothers reported committing their crime under the influence of drugs; twenty-nine percent reported being under the influence of alcohol.²³

Substance abuse problems that are not addressed during the period of incarceration and/or upon return to the community can severely hinder the reintegration process. Connections to community-based treatment, perhaps immediately upon release, could reduce the likelihood of recidivism and the resumption of drug use.²⁴

According to the Correctional Association of New York, “female prisoners receive less than adequate services when they are incarcerated, including deficient family reunification planning...” Furthermore, according to the Correctional Association, during the mother’s incarceration, “...visitation with family and friends is the single most important factor in ensuring a prisoner’s successful return to society. Prisoners who maintain continuous, quality contact...while they are incarcerated, for example, are only one-sixth as likely as others to be back in prison a year after their release.”²⁵

Incarceration isolates the prisoner from her community and family, providing little in terms of holistic, therapeutically sound drug treatment that has the ability to incorporate children and community stakeholders in the recovery process.

¹⁹ A. Solomon et.al., *Outside the Walls: A National Snapshot of Community-Based Prisoner Reentry Programs*. Resource Guide. September 2003.

²⁰ D. Gillard & A. Beck, “Prisoners in 1997,” Bureau of Justice Statistics Bulletin. (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, August 1998). From Federal Resource Center for Children of Prisoners, *An Overview of Statistics*.

²¹ Gillard & Beck. From Federal Resource Center for Children of Prisoners, *An Overview of Statistics*.

²² T. Snell. From Federal Resource Center for Children of Prisoners, *An Overview of Statistics*.

²³ Mumola. From Federal Resource Center for Children of Prisoners, *An Overview of Statistics*.

²⁴ A. Solomon, et.al., page 44

²⁵ Correctional Association of New York. *Women in Prison Fact Sheet*. March 2002.

Discussion Questions

- Should the women portrayed *Prison Lullabies* be incarcerated or in drug treatment facilities? Consider the situation of each of the women.
- Would these mothers and (all) their children be better served within a drug treatment facility capable of working with the entire family?
- What resources exist in our communities to serve these families?
- Is there an action committee in our community advocating for Alternatives to Incarceration?

Outcome Possibilities

Set up action oriented committees to:

- Investigate the laws concerning drug offenses in your communities.
- Research the effectiveness of Alternatives to Incarceration as a means of providing community-based treatment.
- Advocate for changes in sentencing laws that punish rather than treat addiction.
- Support programs treating the entire family by volunteering as a tutor or mentor.

Additional Dialogue for Faith-Based Audiences

The Spirit of the Lord GOD *is* upon Me,
Because the LORD has anointed Me
To preach good tidings to the poor;
He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted,
To proclaim liberty to the captives,
And the opening of the prison to *those who are* bound;
Isaiah 61:1

My Soul's Healer

Keep me at evening,
Keep me at morning,
Keep me at noon.
I am tired,
astray and stumbling,
shield me from sin.

Celtic traditional

Food for Thought

- How can our faith community assist individuals who were formerly incarcerated in the recovery process, while continuing to provide spiritual support?

D. Family / Family Strengthening

Parenting is not something that comes naturally to most people. It requires commitment, control, patience, and the willingness to learn through trial and error. It also takes connections to strong social networks, like family or a faith-based community, and knowing how to access community resources, if needed. Many women who are incarcerated do not know how to be kind to themselves. The ability to be kind and caring to another human being is an even greater unknown.

Prison Lullabies demonstrates the need for ongoing parenting sessions for mothers, counseling for children, and mediation sessions with parents and caretakers. While all the women in the documentary have the opportunity to bond with their newborns, they are ill prepared to face the demands of post-prison supervision requirements and rebuild their families. This film demonstrates in numerous ways the need for ongoing substance abuse treatment, as in Amy's case, and for parenting support as is evident in Joann's case.

During a prison visit, Joann clearly exhibits her own neediness in the scene where she reminds her daughter Antonia that her birthday has just passed with no recognition from her children. Later, Antonia is obviously upset when it is time to end the visit and leave her mother. Yet, back at the caretaker's home, she says she doesn't know whether she wants to return to live with her mother. After release, Joann displays frustration and feelings of inadequacy when discussing the difficulty she experiences caring for her children. She clearly lacks effective communication skills and is in a struggle with the caretaker for the children's affection.

Safe and affordable childcare is critical to the success of mothers seeking self-sufficiency following release from prison. Caught between rent, childcare, and food, low-income families are often squeezed out of the quality early learning experiences their children need. "The high cost of childcare is an inescapable reality for many families, regardless of where they live, what type of care they use, or the age of their children. The average annual cost for a four-year-old in a childcare center exceeds \$4,750 in almost two-thirds of the 47 cities surveyed and is more than \$5,500 in over one-third of the cities. The cost for infants is even higher."²⁶ Unfortunately, families who are struggling to make ends meet cannot afford these prices, and, in many cases, have no alternative but to choose lower-priced care, which is mediocre at best and at worst could jeopardize a child's health and safety. "Good early care and education help foster each child's physical well being and social development and give them opportunities to develop their early learning skills in a safe and secure environment."²⁷

- Amy (asking her daughter Carissa's dad for money): *"I'm paying over a \$100/week for a babysitter. And I just can't afford to do it by myself. And I have a \$7.50/hour job."*

²⁶ Children's Defense Fund. The High Cost of Child Care Puts Quality Care Out of Reach for Many Families. 2000. Web site: www.cdf.org

²⁷ Ibid.

Depending on the Self-Sufficiency Standard²⁸ (measure of income adequacy), which varies among communities and states, women who were formerly incarcerated may find it difficult to secure a job that provides the necessary resources to take care of basic needs. Without that level of financial support, the temptation is strong to return to those activities that caused her to be incarcerated.

Another challenge is that mothers who are incarcerated might experience a myriad of **psychological symptoms**, such as the following. Indeed, 23 percent of mothers report indications of mental illness.²⁹

Depression – Mothers in prison may become emotionally despondent or “close up” to bury the pain of separation. This response may worsen their children’s feelings of loss of emotional support.

- Feelings of loss – Prior to incarceration, many women are poor and have very little, but the one thing they had was their children.
- Feelings of guilt and failure – Women may feel that they are inadequate as mothers.
- Fear of reunion – Mothers in prison may fear the difficulties of readjusting to family life after release.

After the mother’s release, the family situation may be worse than ever. Often, they are released from prison with no job, no housing, and little money. For women, these stressors are compounded by the difficulties encountered in regaining custody of their children and finding childcare. Clearly, without family and social supports, these families are unlikely to succeed.

- Amy: *“I wanted to work full time. I wanted to do every single little thing for her (daughter Carissa). I wanted to help my mother, you know. I wanted to have a boyfriend. I want to make a father for her. I wanted everything so fast and when you are in recovery, it just does not work like that.”*

Mentoring programs are seen by prison officials as one of the best ways to begin to address the issue of family strengthening once a woman is released from prison. In order to be most effective, it is necessary for the mentoring to begin pre-release, with a contract being signed and adhered to by both the mentor and the mentee. For many imprisoned mothers, there may be little understanding of what constitutes a strong family. The opportunity to have a strong mentor who offers advice, holds the mother accountable, and models acceptable parenting behavior can be invaluable in strengthening the bonds between mothers and their children.

Support structures and resources can make a difference. Important, too, is the willingness of individuals who were formerly incarcerated to change – to take their lives in another direction:

²⁸ State Action. “Family Self-Sufficiency Standard.” Web site: www.stateaction.org/issues/selfsufficiency/index.cfm

²⁹ Mumola. From Federal Resource Center for Children of Prisoners, An Overview of Statistics.

- Anne Marie: *“The more you work your program, the better you feel about yourself, the more things start happening in your life, for me anyway. I mean, little things, like getting in touch with my parents. I wouldn’t even have attempted a letter like that when I was in [the prison] population. I would not have had enough courage. But, it took coming here, talking about it in group, which made me realize, it’s worth a try.”*

Discussion Questions

- Joann appears indifferent to her daughter Antonia’s needs when she visits her mother in prison. How could Joann have handled this visit differently? At home, Joann laments that she reads to the children, listens, and cares for them. She may be saying, “I am doing everything I learned in parenting but my children are not responding accordingly.” What suggestions would you give Joann to gain her children’s cooperation? What suggestions would you give Joann in dealing with her frustration?
- What support services can our community provide to children left behind by a mother’s incarceration?
- What affordable quality childcare services does our community provide to women who were formerly incarcerated?
- Are there respite services in our community for overwhelmed parents or caregivers?
- Does our community have a comprehensive resource book of family and community services for newly released prisoners?

Outcome Possibilities

- Find out what support systems are available to assist mothers, when they are released, and their children. This may include parenting classes, communication skills building, mediation services, respite care, affordable family recreational activities, and support groups for parents and children, both separately and together.
- Establish an information and referral system to connect the mothers and their children to these services. Provide follow-up services to assess ongoing needs.
- Find out the Self-Sufficiency Standard (measure of income adequacy) for our community. The standard covers the cost of basic daily living including food, housing, childcare, health care, and transportation. Assist mothers who are reentering the community to create a budget, including identifying available subsidies and tax credits, such as the Earned Income Tax Credit that can help them manage their finances.
- Set up an action committee to address service gaps and determine ways to implement needed services.

Additional Dialogue for Faith-Based Audiences

Surely I have calmed and quieted my soul,
Like a weaned child with his mother;
Like a weaned child *is* my soul within me.

Psalm 131:2

Home to the Exile

You are home to the exile
touch to the frozen
daylight to the prisoner
authority to the silent
anger to the helpless
laughter to the weary
direction to the joyful:
come our Lord, come.³⁰

Janet Morley

According to Janet Schadee, director of family services at the Indiana Women's Prison, the first 72 hours is a critical time for a woman who has been released from prison. The first 24 to 48 hours are prime for relapse if a woman leaving prison cannot find security and structure. Going from a contained, highly structured environment to an open, unstructured situation can cause high levels of anxiety. Without a strong support system, accompanied by clearly articulated expectations and guidelines, the likelihood that the woman will return to the life she knows, no matter how negative, is high.

Schadee says that the six most important areas that must be addressed before, or immediately upon release, are:

- **Housing/Transitional Housing** – This ideally needs to be in an area devoid of the temptations and the people that contributed to the woman's incarceration. Faith communities can be helpful in finding homes in safe locations.
- **Normal Social Expectations** – It is critical that part of the preparation for release, as well as ongoing instruction, involves discussion about societal norms. This is a rapidly changing world, and much that those on the outside take for granted is new and frightening for a woman who has been in prison for any length of time. Help may be needed to negotiate such day-to-day activities as securing a driver's license, filling out employment forms, making and keeping doctor's appointments, and talking with their children's teachers.
- **Employment** – In order to be successful upon release, it is necessary for a woman former prisoner to become financially stable as soon as possible. This can present a challenge due to lack of skills and work history. For women such as Monique in ***Prison Lullabies***, it is critical that they be introduced to the culture of work and

³⁰ *Laughter, Silence & Shouting: An Anthology of Women's Prayers*, compiled by Kathy Keay (HarperCollins Publishers, 1994)

employer expectations, including arriving on time for work. They also need economic literacy training to understand money management and following a budget.

- **Childcare** – For those mothers who are able to receive custody of their children, safe and affordable childcare is critical to their ability to remain employed.
- **Maintaining Self Esteem** – The majority of women prisoners do not know how to be kind to themselves. When released into society, they often suffer from feelings of guilt and shame. In work situations, they are often the ones accused when anything goes wrong, even though there is no evidence to support the accusation. This further erodes their feeling of self worth.
- **Setting Limits** – It is important for women who were formerly incarcerated to have someone in their lives who holds them accountable for their actions, and helps guide them in defining the parameters of their own behaviors.

What can a community of faith do to address these issues?

- Establish a mentoring program that matches mentors and mothers pre-release; and/or provides adult mentors for children of incarcerated parents.
- Help to find safe and affordable housing for mothers and their children that is within easy reach.
- Work with employers to establish on-the-job training and work opportunities for women former inmates.
- Provide parenting classes, including classes for the fathers of children whose mothers are in prison.
- Establish literacy/GED and life skills programs for the mothers, and tutoring classes for the children.
- Provide training for mothers in economic literacy, including managing a budget, learning about Individual Development Accounts, and finding out whether or not they qualify for the Earned Income Tax Credit.
- Provide a fund to assist with paying utility bills; provide gas coupons or bus passes.
- Be willing to check value systems and attitudes at the door and meet the women where they are.

Food for Thought

- What does it take/mean to be a family?

- Why is it important for our congregation to participate in a reintegration program for mothers who have been released from prison?
- Does our congregation currently have a prison ministry focused on women inmates? To what extent do we actively become involved in their life issues?
- What are some of the ways a nurturing congregation can help strengthen the families of women while they are in prison and once they are released?
- Does our congregation find value in establishing/participating in a mentoring program?
- What support systems and resources are currently in place in our congregation to work with families in crisis?
- What support structures and resources will our congregation need in order to pursue this important ministry?

Suggested Resources

Books

Enos, Sandra. *Mothering from the Inside: Parenting in a Women's Prison* (State University of New York Press, February 2001).

Gabel, Katherine and Johnston, Denise. *Children of Incarcerated Parents* (Lexington Books, May 1995).

O'Brien, Patricia. *Making It in the "Free World": Women in Transition from Prison* (State University of New York Press, March 2001).

Wright, Lois and Seymour, Cynthia B. *Working with Children and Families Separated by Incarceration* (Child Welfare League of America, September 2000).

Programs and Training

Re-Entry Prison and Jail Ministry, PO Box 620, Chula Vista, CA 91902, www.reentry.org

U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, www.ojp.usdoj.gov/reentry

Family Services, Indiana Women's Prison, Janet Schadee, Director, 317.639.2671, x306

The Association of Programs for Female Offenders, State Correctional Institution-Chester, 500 East Fourth Street, Chester, PA 19013

Media Resources

Outside the Walls: A National Snapshot of Community-Based Prisoner Reentry Programs. Resource Guide. By Amy L. Solomon, Michelle Waul, Asheley Van Ness, and Jeremy Travis, Urban Institute. In collaboration with Outreach Extensions. September 2003. Web site: www.reentrymediaoutreach.org

Outside the Walls: A National Snapshot of Community-Based Prisoner Reentry Programs. Videotape. Produced by D.R. Lynes, Inc. in collaboration with the Urban Institute, Council of State Governments, The Annie E. Casey Foundation, and Outreach Extensions. September 2003. Web site: www.reentrymediaoutreach.org

The Family Strengthening and faith content of the **Prison Lullabies** Resource Guide was written by Maria Blake, Director of Communications and Promotions, Indianapolis-Marion County Public Library. Ms. Blake holds a master's degree in Pastoral Studies, with an emphasis on women and children. She has performed extensive work in the nonprofit and volunteer arenas, and has conducted workshops and retreats on parenting, self-esteem, and women's spirituality.

Content related to Education, Employment, and Job Readiness; Housing; and Substance Abuse in this guide was developed, in part, by a focus group of The Fortune Society conducted with Peggy Arroyo, JoAnne Page, David Nidus, Brian Robinson, Sherry Goldstein, and the Women of the *DAMAS* (gender-specific) *Alternative to Incarceration* program. The Fortune Society is a community-based organization in New York City with over 35 years experience serving and advocating for former prisoners. All the participants of the focus group have spent some time in jail and/or prison. Some of the participants are mothers; others have younger siblings or nieces or nephews that they relate to daily.



Prison Lullabies is one of the public television programs showcased in the Reentry National Media Outreach Campaign. All productions incorporate the theme of **reentry into family and community by individuals who were formerly incarcerated**. These and other programs are elements of the Making Connections Media Outreach Initiative (MCMOI), an outreach project supported by The Annie E. Casey Foundation (AECF). Launched in February 2001, MCMOI links public television stations to local stakeholders as a means to promote the Foundation's Core Results for strong and connected neighborhoods for children and families.

MCMOI campaigns are managed by Outreach Extensions, a national consulting firm that specializes in comprehensive, high-profile educational and community outreach campaigns for media projects. Please visit the MCMOI Web site at www.aecf.org/initiatives/mc/communications/mcmoi/ for more information and community-use materials for these exciting programs. Visit the Reentry Web site at: www.reentrymediaoutreach.org.

For more information on the Reentry National Media Outreach Campaign, please contact:

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[The Annie E. Casey Foundation](http://www.aecf.org)