



Incarcerated Childbirth Empowerment & Children of Incarcerated Parents

Literary empowerment program for Pregnant, New and current Mothers facing short and long- term sentences.

This I.C.E. C.H.I.P.S program outline was created and developed to assist, educate and reform the parental cognitions of incarcerated mothers in the redevelopment and restructuring of parental roles, rights and responsibilities for their current and/or unborn child(ren). This 6-month, intensive program, was designed to help the inmate to innerstand the primary focus of their choice to become a parent and what that role means to societal expectations.

Program Requirements:

- Offender must be classified at a **Level 1, 2 or 3** status
- *Currently* pregnant or have children and awaiting re-unification: parental rights **CANNOT** be revoked at time of program acceptance.
- Clean and sober or *concurrently* enrolled a Substance Abuse program within the Prison or Detention Center
- *Directly* recommended and referred to the program from their counselor
- Be within one (1) year of release.

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Overview of Program's Mission

First of all, what is a Mission?

A mission is a passion. Followed closely by your purpose, a mission will come *naturally* and *innately*...without you even thinking about it; it will be something that you will not have to work at or even be educated in. It is a Divine Action (if you will) that you will have to vessel (regardless of your theological orientation) and the way will be made without effort (or sometimes, even planning) on your part.

And can I just say that I think it's important to note that The Birth Attendants are a collective and we identify as a feminist, pro-choice, reproductive justice organization because of the nature of the work that we do and the population we serve.

So, what do you hope to accomplish with The ICE CHIPS Program's Mission?

Our long-term vision is that all women have access to a powerhouse of other maternal mentors and be one, on their own accord. We are also really interested in helping other prison projects, like these, get started in other states. But in terms of what we hope to accomplish with the women we work with, we think that through having a supportive pregnancy, childbirth and parenting support and re-education and by helping women re-enforce and sustain positive parenting experiences, we are helping all women to learn how to raise a more successfully "Village", find their *own* voice and be a positive force in the world. Most times it's really the first time that these women learn they have a voice and that people will listen to them as it pertains to rearing their children. A large part of what we do is bear witness to these women's stories and we hope that their pregnancy, childbirth and parenting can be an empowering experience. The other part for us is that a lot of times, for many women, they become politically active as a result of personal experiences - they find their voice that way. The theory is that when you are able to understand your experience as part of a larger system, it can bring you to a certain level of political awareness for your tribe, Village and Community. So we really provide the resources for people to have those empowering experiences that may lead to a sense of how your experience is connected with others - simple things like learning that you deserve more, that a positive parenting experience is a human right for all women.

How were you received by other women in other Institutions of Reformation?

It tends to ebb and flow. A lot of times we have had women that we've already worked with (prior to their most recent incarceration) who are advocates for us, now that they are on the "inside". They'll tell other women, "...*You need to meet Dr. Ali...she is sooo real...*" . There are times those women will bring the new women to us or make the referral to their counselors for them to join the program. But sometimes, when we're not there as often as the women would like, there is a certain amount of self-mentoring they do to help other women, there or not in the program, once they have learned new and exciting ways to parent. It has been told to us that the women will be overheard saying, "...*she's here to provide you with resources because she understands the serious lack of resources available to women offenders, once they are home... If you have questions, see if you can come to a Friday discussion group...*" We heard it over and over again with an emphasis on what the women want in the way of helping them be better parents!

This mission has no fiscal or political agenda; we seek to empower Women inmates from the goodness that they already know and have in them, innately. They know right from wrong and have some sense of what to do and what not to do, but their experience, their decisions and their personal pains, often deter a well-thought-out birth plan into a parental reunification plan.

I have read that it is common for female offenders to be twice as likely to not re-offend once they realize that their child is a *choice* they made and one that is a motivation to do things "the right way"; how true is that?

In Georgia alone, there is evidence based data that will prove, the recidivism rate, among women offenders, that were re-united with their children, after incarceration, is 25-35% LESS than those that were just released with a home plan and re-entry skills. This says something! The mere fact that the open-ended possibilities rest in the re-rearing and the "second-chance" at parenting makes a program like this a great teaching tool (and mentoring program) for other women as well.

That sounds nice for those that are already parents, but do you connect the women with this resources when they are pregnant and/or after they give birth?

Yes, in so far as there are resources that exist. A lot of the resources are just addresses and phone numbers for treatment centers for when they get out. Sadly, there is a ridiculous lack of resources for keeping families together after a woman has a child in jail. There is a woman in Alabama, an incredible woman, who provides resources for women parenting from prisons - she helps bring kids in to the prisons. Her program picks up kids from foster care families or grandparents homes and brings them to visit their mothers. It's an amazing amount of work though and I kind of wish every prison had an organization to service it like hers. But, aside from that, there are very few resources for women wishing to keep their families together after they've given birth in prison.

Overview of Purpose for the Offender

Ok...so what's your purpose and why do you do all of this?

I'm glad you asked me. I get asked that a lot and people tell me how amazing it is that I do this for the women. But first, lets define our purpose.

Let me ask you, what is the only thing that a hospital will allow you to eat while you are birthing? (Answer) "...Ice Chips..." That's right! That is the only thing that they will allow you to digest, so in the event of an emergency you will be safe to surgically birth. Hence our name...ICE CHIPS; our purpose is to be the very program the incarcerated mom *digests*, in order to nourish herself during her *re-birthing* of her life as a parent; we strive to be that *solid form of water* that she ingests until she can 'eat again', on her own...figuratively speaking, of course.

The truth is...I get a lot out of it as well. The more you teach, the more you learn and I feel deeply inspired by each of the women. It amazes me what human beings go through and yet still remain warm and amazing, still ready and willing to learn and be better. At the end of the day, the gift to me is that I get to know a lot of souls that most people never get the chance to know....or care to know, for that matter; their judgment of their crimes most of the time is reduced to what they think the woman is...just a *criminal*, not a parent, like they are. I get to be with them at the most important time in their lives; seeing the smiles on their faces when they are awarded sole and physical custody of their children again, keeps me coming back for each 6-month program.

So why is this program more important, than say, a prison re-entry program at a woman's prison?

Inclusion of likes and dislikes of the *mother*!

Most women, fighting for a chance to win their children back, are given a set of "rules" to follow, established by the court, in the best interest of a child and parent that they only know through court records and intake assessments. The parent is then, essentially treated like that child in being TOLD what to do to rear her child. She will do these very things out of fear and not out of love; fear that she will lose the child again if she doesn't do just what they say and not as a guideline or premise to what she already knows, again, innately. She should be *asked* what she would like to do, educated and mentored to and then be helped in getting those goals accomplished.

Why this program...why now?

Why *not* now? When I speak on a panel or at a conference, people ask - what can we do to address the harm that's being done to these women and the effects it has on the children? There are a million different organizations you can join or give money to.

My answer: **Find a way to go inside.**

Just speak to the women that society wants to "forget". Share a five-minute conversation with good women that made bad choices and just feel the energy of them wanting better, that comes off of them in the end. If you find a way to go inside and get to know these women you'll never stop going; you'll begin to WANT to find your *own* way, to make an impact on their lives. It hurts in a lot of ways but you'll find that you just can't let people stay there and NOT help them...when will they get "rehabilitated"?

What are the women to expect from you in this program?

I'm glad you asked that as well...We go to the prison once a week and facilitate a two-two and a half, hour class that women can attend both before and after they've given birth. But we do "one-on-ones" as well - pre-natal and post-partum support as well as inclusive parenting 'booster' skills that work *with* what the parent already knows. We have provided some women with support *many* years after they have returned home and they are now mentoring other women as well. As long as they keep asking we'll work with them - whether it's on custody issues with children or navigating the complex web you find yourself in once you've given birth in prison. And as I mentioned earlier, the importance of bearing witness to a woman's struggle to maintain a relationship with her kids, to help them figure out how best to go about that, how to stay in contact, acknowledging that they are having an emotional experience, while incarcerated and to teach by example (the best teaching tool to date) what it looks like to better yourself in the eyes of your children. You meet so many strong women, stifled by their feelings of inadequacies, past lives and their inability to rationalize a better way to live. They have been told that there is no time to process what they *want* in life because of the need to "take care" of their children. Then, with no other tools to arm their decisions, they are forced to process all of what they are going through, what they need to do and then how to do it...RIGHT NOW! So when they do things that society tells them that is 'wrong', hence the incarceration, they are still not educated as to what is right!

Well...that's where we come in...we end up being a very important person to them, to tell their story, and their stories so desperately need to be told.

Program Evidences

The *Incarcerated Childbirth Empowerment & Children of Incarcerated Parents Project (ICE CHIPS)* served in this capacity from April 2005 to June 2012 in the local centers of detention in both Michigan and Georgia. The Program is a Midwifery Model of Care consulting organization, based now, in Atlanta Georgia, with program requests in the Denver, Colorado area. Since early 2000, the *ICE CHIPS Project* was not officially named, but has provided training in this area and technical assistance to the criminal justice and correctional field on a wide array of topics, including parental transition and reentry, and has administered and completed a number of projects of this kind, since then.

A Mother's Peace was established in 2001, as the go-to source for all your gestational needs. We offer educational service-work in Pregnancy/Gestation, Birth, Doula and Postpartum care. We discuss everything you will need to know; from prenatal to postpartum and from conception to creating your birth space! You will come away enlightened, empowered and allowed choice, each step of the way! We have Pregnancy/Childbirth Classes, Gratis and Non-gratis Doula and Doula-Locate Service, Religious and Cultural birth practices as well as Intimate Orgasmic, Water and Indigenous Midwifery Services. This was the start of learning the stories of women and the reasons that their lives need a 'nudge' in the right direction.

GRRACEE (Georgia Reproductive Resource Alliance Center for Education and Empowerment), pronounced "Grace", started officially in 1999 as "*Greater* Reproductive Resource Alliance Center..." until we moved it to Georgia in 2009 and was the umbrella of this initial mission. It still is the education, information, knowledge and wisdom to help you on your journey to prenatal, pregnancy and postpartum wellness for you and the Tribe at your command! We seek to uplift, promote and protect reproductive rights, reasons and responsibilities of health, wellness and vitality of the life of the unborn. We provide small class sizes in Childbirth Education, Doula Classes, Expos, Seminars and Continuing Education Units (CEU) for Mom, Dad and the Doula/Midwifery Student/Apprentice, that is looking to better their lives and those around them!

GRACEE/A Mother's Peace is a private, not-for-profit corporation in Georgia with a single focus of prisoner reentry help, for women, that focuses on making information accessible to incarcerated women and their support group*. Our consulting firm has extensive experience in evidence-based practices, strategic planning, community and restorative justice and re-unifying women and children.

As a part of its continual assistance after the Prison Re-entry Initiative (PRI), the organization developed a series of tools to assist offenders in specific areas of their reentry home-plans. The final product of this work comes in the data collected in the lowered recidivism rates of its attendees. We aim to offer practical value beyond the jurisdictions involved in this initiative and are available to criminal justice professionals and their partners interested in enhancing their strategies for reducing recidivism and improving offender outcomes in parental re-unification.

Each session provides an overview of specific topics as it relates to successful offender reentry, and offers tools and resources for those interested in exploring the topic in greater depth.

**Fiscal Year 2007 Prisoner Re-entry Initiative.*

FY 2007 Prisoner Reentry Initiative (PRI)

The Prisoner Reentry Initiative (PRI) – intended to support the development and implementation of institutional and community corrections-based reentry programs to help returning offenders find employment and provide other critical services – is a collaborative effort of the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ), Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Assistance and the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL). Grants were awarded to state and local corrections agencies by DOJ to provide pre-release and transition services to offenders and were “matched” by DOL grants to faith- and community-based organizations (FBCOs) to provide post-release services, focusing on employment assistance and mentoring.

Thirty-five states received grants in three cycles of the Initiative during Fiscal Years 2006, 2007, and 2008.¹ Of these, 23 FY 2007 PRI grantees received assistance under this project. FY 2007 grants were awarded in the fall of 2007 and implemented from 2008 to 2010; however, some grantees will not complete their activities until 2011.

The FY 2007 grantees provided technical assistance under this project included:

- ALASKA, Native Justice Center
- ARIZONA, Criminal Justice Commission/ Yuma County Sheriff's Office
- CALIFORNIA, Department of Community Services and Development
- COLORADO, Division of Criminal Justice Services/City of Denver
- DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA, Government
- FLORIDA, Department of Corrections
- HAWAII, Department of Public Safety
- INDIANA, Department of Corrections
- IOWA, Department of Corrections
- KANSAS, Department of Corrections
- MAINE, Department of Corrections
- MICHIGAN, Department of Corrections
- MINNESOTA, Department of Corrections
- NEVADA, Department of Corrections
- NEW JERSEY, Department of Corrections
- NORTH CAROLINA, Department of Corrections
- OHIO, Department of Rehabilitation and Correction
- PENNSYLVANIA, Department of Corrections
- RHODE ISLAND, Department of Corrections
- TENNESSEE, Department of Corrections
- VIRGINIA, Department of Criminal Justice Services
- WISCONSIN, Department of Corrections
- WYOMING, Department of Corrections

¹The PRI program will end when the FY 2007 grantees complete their activities.

The Program

This three (3) part series provides a conceptual and inclusive framework for addressing prisoner reentry at the policy level; outlines a strategic planning process to support implementation efforts and explores the establishment of successful collaborative partnerships at the policy and Offender level. Equally, this program provides guidance and tools to ensure that reentry efforts achieve their intended outcomes. This series describes methods to assess the effectiveness of reentry efforts and offers strategies for achieving continuous quality improvement.

Series 1: Creating an innerstanding of where the Mother is now **60 Days**

· The real Criminal Offense: *The day after you left them.*

What did the offender really do? Not just in the tale of the court docket, but in what that (eventual) absence really meant to the child or the un-born child, now being made to be born in a detention facility and they *did not* commit a crime. This is where we re-introduce the crime, in the eyes of the (age-appropriate) child, the pathology of the mother's mindset and the indifference their actions made to the child (short term and long term). *Role Play and Journaling letter-writing included.*

· Establishing a rational overstanding of the plight of incarceration.

Using each child developmental stage, the Offender will come away with the innerstanding of what an absence says to the child. It will define what the action of "being distance" feeds that child and what your crime says to the child's psyche.

· Engaging in dialog of the "Family Dynamic".

What is *Family*? What denotes a *Familial Sect* and what is the role of each person in it? The Offender will learn how to define what roles are meant, implied and then accepted, in their own structure and where the breakdown of responsibilities happened, in each of their family unit. *Family Tree will be illustrated*

Series 2: Creating a Blueprint of Improvement **60 Days**

· Implementing evidence-based practices of parental care and reform

This section provides an overview of the use of Community Mentoring Programs, the real role of Child Welfare and the Inclusive Parenting Model of Care with offenders. We will review its content, purpose and societal role; if the information it contains is applicable to the Offender, address an area in which they feel they need to focus their efforts in, as it pertains to recognizing, admission/acknowledgement and improvement of those skills. *Role Playing and journaling included.*

· Effective Case Management (Inclusive Parenting Program)

Self-Accountability and Peer-Mentoring will be utilized as a primary program element of the program; one strategy being to support offenders who are lacking in the supports and services necessary for successful reentry. Peer-Mentoring as a pro-social support option for offenders, will be strongly advised for Offenders who need *additional* assistance in finding employment and housing, reconnecting with their families, and navigating and mental, physical or emotional challenges they may confront as they adjust to life outside of prison, with their children. *Life Plan (Short term and Long term) created.*

· Shaping Offender's Behavior/Sober Living (*Action Planning*)

This section gains the overstanding of the difference in Peer-mentoring for adult offenders and the use of community volunteers (or previously incarcerated individuals) to provide guidance and support to offenders leaving prison. This is done either in a group setting or through one-on-one activities with local community agencies allowed in the Detention Facility. While many current efforts pair mentoring with assistance in obtaining and *sustaining* employment, the goal of mentoring, here, is to broadly focus on addressing Offenders' needs for pro-social relationships with their children and engaging those said children, in the community. This section will be the one-on-one innerstanding of what is needed to help the offender as well as Peer-mentoring, in action before they leave the Detention Facility. *Major Role Playing and Peer-to-Peer Activities Included*

- **Engaging Offenders' families/support systems in Re-entry**

Solely a Peer-to-Peer, role-playing section. The “tested” Offender will be assessed a “family” within the group. They will be given a “list” of problems in the family and will be asked how to address them the right way. However, the other “family” members will react as *their* family would react, in the attempt to see how the (tested) Offender would react to them and how they might react once they are released.

- **Building Offenders' community assets and worth**

What is your societal worth as a criminal or an ex-con? This explores the employment factor and the commercial enterprise of the Offender's personal talents and skills and what they can do to utilize them, once released. They will incorporate the community resources, their religious communities and the local social service programs, to effectively support them in their decision to work a “9-5” or make a new commodity of themselves in the private sector of self-employment. *Journaling and Goal Setting skills included*

- **Reentry considerations for Women with children**

A Half-way house, a Sober Living Home, your Aunt's house or the local group home...which will you choose to live in and what dynamic will that bring to you getting your children back and setting up a new stability for them? Do you want more children? Are you getting married or planning to move out of state and what will this mean to the children you are now going to parent? *Offenders will be asked to write their “Birth Story” and what they perceived it was like when they gave birth.*

Series 3: Ensuring Meaningful Outcomes

60 Days

- **Measuring the Impact of Re-offending (recidivism rate prior to incarceration)**

What will your child think if you leave them again? What will you feel? The Offender will assess their level of empathy, their true tolerance to Sober Living and the real possibilities of coming back to jail. They will individually assess their weak-points of being home, make an emergency plan for their children (in the event that they do return to the system) and analyze the real level of their support network to avoid such actions and their penalties.

- **Active Role Playing (w/M.O.M.M.I.E.S. Program)**

The Offender has been “released” (theoretically) and its 24 hours after they left the Detention walls...what does this look like and what do they do next in the life of their child? **M.O.M.M.I.E.S. (Mother Offenders Mentoring Moms that are Incarcerated to Encourage Sustainability)** is a pool of female, ex-Offenders that were in the same shoes that the current Offenders are in. Some come with successful stories of re-unification and some come to orate what NOT to do in the attempts of getting your children back. They come as a “Maternal Sponsors”, if you will to open the dialogue of change and to re-affirm what it is like to live “free” with your children. *Guest Speakers and ex-Offender visitation will be included (with permissions).*

- **One-on-One Plans (New Birth Plans)**

The *coup de gras* of the program; this section will deal with the truth of their individual circumstances. We will not nor cannot be able to give legal help but will put the Offenders in touch with first and second year law students that will assess their cases and pledge, some semblance of help, in their plight, in getting their children home. We will set the boundaries, based on all we have learned and what they can and cannot do, once they get to the “visitation” stage and the week-end visits (supervised and unsupervised). We will assess a working “Plan A” and “Plan B” for the care of their children, while in their care. This plan is to be submitted to the courts, along with their Certificate of completion of their Parenting Class with **ICE CHIPS/GRRACEE/A Mother’s Peace** when completed to show their effort and ability to rehabilitate their selves and the lives of their child(ren).

- **Continuous Quality Improvement upon release (M.O.M.M.I.E.S. Program w/sponsor follow-up)**

Twenty- to thirty days prior to release, the Offender will be in great communication with their Mommies Sponsor. They will also be in a forward motion with their court case, better assessed on the finer points of their new “Birth Plan” and they will be ready to act on their plans, once released. Twenty-four hours after they actually hit the streets, they are going to connect with their Mommies Sponsor who will equally have a plan of action or them to follow. Follow up will be in 30, 60 and 90 days with continuation as needed, every other month or so or sooner if needed, for the next year.

- **GLADuation Ceremony with children (if possible)**

Final day of the class and the final day they will be supervised with the ICE CHIPS program. The Offender will have a ceremony with their children (if possible) and will receive their certificates of completion with family in view. They will be made responsible and accountable for their “Birth Plan” as written out with the ICE CHIPS team and their Mommies Sponsor. Detention Officials will have full pledging as to what level this ceremony will be. Sashes will be made for the “New Moms”, embroidered with their child(ren)’s name on them in lieu of graduation caps and robes.

Conclusion

This Program was originally developed to assist grant teams that were established to manage local PRI initiatives.² The teams were composed of representatives from institutional and community corrections and faith-based or community organizations involved in the delivery of pre- and post-release services to offenders transitioning from prison to the community.³ The content of these programs has much broader application, however; the information and tools contained within this research can also be used by teams of criminal justice professionals⁴ and their partners to assess the status of their efforts in implementing evidence-based practices and effective reentry services to offenders.⁵

This Program may also serve as a resource for professionals at all levels who are interested in learning more about this topic.

FYI:

Mentoring programs were first introduced into the criminal justice arena for children of incarcerated parents and at-risk youth (i.e., those at risk of delinquency, gang affiliation, school drop out, etc.), given the preliminary research on the positive outcomes achieved through mentoring youth.⁶ For example, at-risk youth participating in Big Brother/Big Sisters mentoring efforts across the country were 46% less likely to use drugs, 27% less likely to use alcohol, 30% less likely to physically strike someone, and did better in school than youth who did not participate in the mentoring program.⁷ An evaluation of OJJDP's Juvenile Mentoring Program (JUMP) sites reported that the mentoring relationship assisted mentees in staying away from drugs and alcohol, not starting fights, and keeping away from gangs.⁸ Research on the Indiana through Mentoring (AIM) project – an aftercare program providing incarcerated youth with life skills and mentoring services – shows that, after four years of follow-up, youth receiving both services (life skills and mentoring services) were less likely to recidivate (43%) than those who received only life skills services (50%) and those who did not receive any services (62%).⁹

²A primary goal of the PRI Initiative is to “strengthen urban communities through employment-centered programs that incorporate *mentoring*, [emphasis added] job training, and other comprehensive transitional services.” See <http://www.dolleta.gov/PRI/>.

³Sabol & Couture, 2008.

⁴Bauldry et al., 2009.

⁵Hughes & Wilson, 2005.

⁶For example, see the AMACHI program in Philadelphia (Jucovy, 2003).

⁷Grossman & Garry, 1997; Herrera et al., 2007; Tierney & Grossman, 1995.

⁸Novotney et al., 2000.

⁹AIM, 2004; Jarjoura, 2003.