



**Justice Center**

THE COUNCIL OF STATE GOVERNMENTS

# **Supporting Children of Incarcerated Parents: Fostering Collaborative Support Systems**

Addressing the Needs of Incarcerated Parents and Their Minor Children

April 3, 2025

# Presentation Outline

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I. Welcome

II. Osborne Association

III. U.S. Dream Academy

IV. Takeaways and Next Steps

# Speakers

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- Allison Hollihan, *Director, New York Initiative for Children of Incarcerated Parents, Osborne Association*
- C. Diane Wallace Booker, Esq., *Chief Executive Officer, U.S. Dream Academy*
- Tiana Smith, *Senior Policy Analyst, Corrections and Reentry, CSG Justice Center*

# The Council of State Governments Justice Center

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We are a national nonprofit, nonpartisan organization that combines the power of a membership association, serving state officials in all three branches of government, with policy and research expertise to develop strategies that increase public safety and strengthen communities.

# Osborne Association

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The Osborne Association serves over 14,000 individuals, families, and communities in New York affected by the criminal justice system every year.

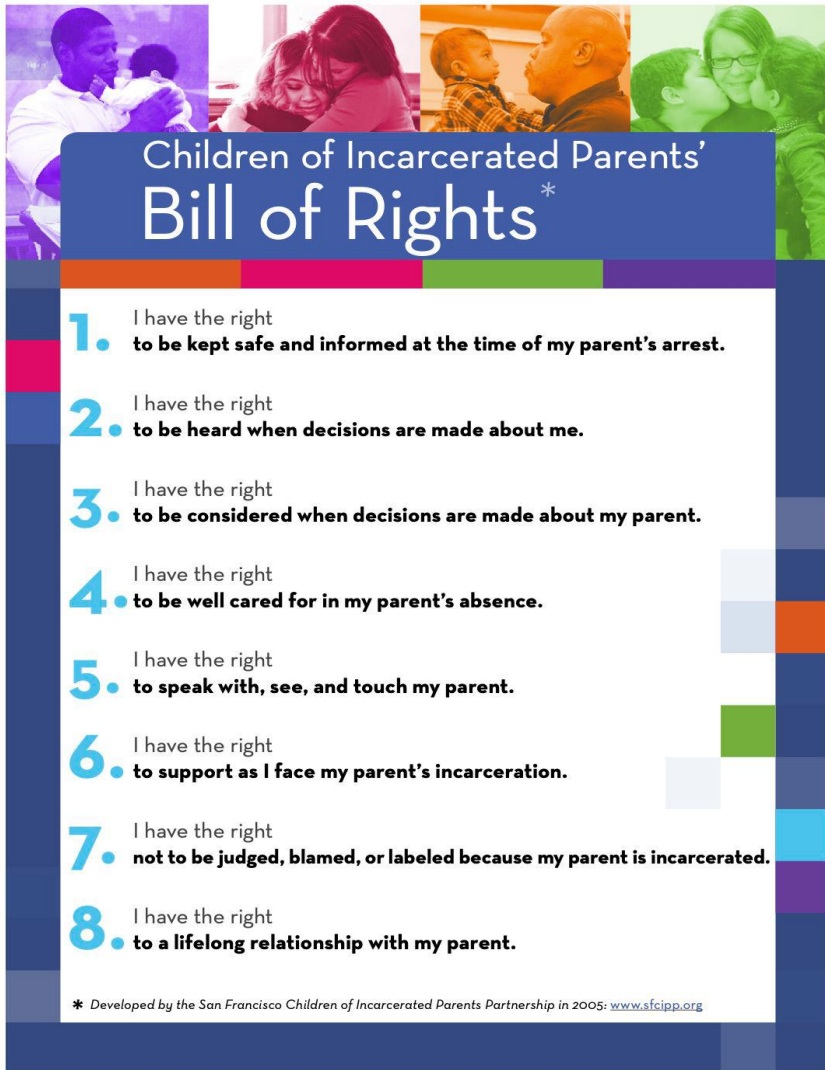
Through our programs, we offer opportunities for people affected by the criminal justice system to heal from and repair harm, restore their lives, and thrive.

# Turning the Children of Incarcerated Parents' Bill of Rights into Realities

In partnership with diverse organizations and governments agencies, NYCIP raises awareness, promotes policy and practice change, and builds partnerships to ensure that children's rights are upheld, important relationships supported, and their potential nurtured during their parent's involvement in the criminal justice system.

*The Bill of Rights was developed by the San Francisco Children of Incarcerated Parents Partnerships.*

See Us, Support Us. (n.d.). *Children of Incarcerated Parents Bill of Rights*. The Osborne Association. <https://www.susu-osborne.org/bill-of-rights>

A graphic titled "Children of Incarcerated Parents' Bill of Rights" with an asterisk. It features a list of eight rights, each preceded by a number in a colored circle. The background of the graphic is a collage of four photos: a man holding a baby, a woman hugging a child, a man and a child, and a woman and a child. The text is white on a dark blue background.

**Children of Incarcerated Parents' Bill of Rights\***

1. I have the right **to be kept safe and informed at the time of my parent's arrest.**
2. I have the right **to be heard when decisions are made about me.**
3. I have the right **to be considered when decisions are made about my parent.**
4. I have the right **to be well cared for in my parent's absence.**
5. I have the right **to speak with, see, and touch my parent.**
6. I have the right **to support as I face my parent's incarceration.**
7. I have the right **not to be judged, blamed, or labeled because my parent is incarcerated.**
8. I have the right **to a lifelong relationship with my parent.**

\* Developed by the San Francisco Children of Incarcerated Parents Partnership in 2005: [www.sfcipp.org](http://www.sfcipp.org)



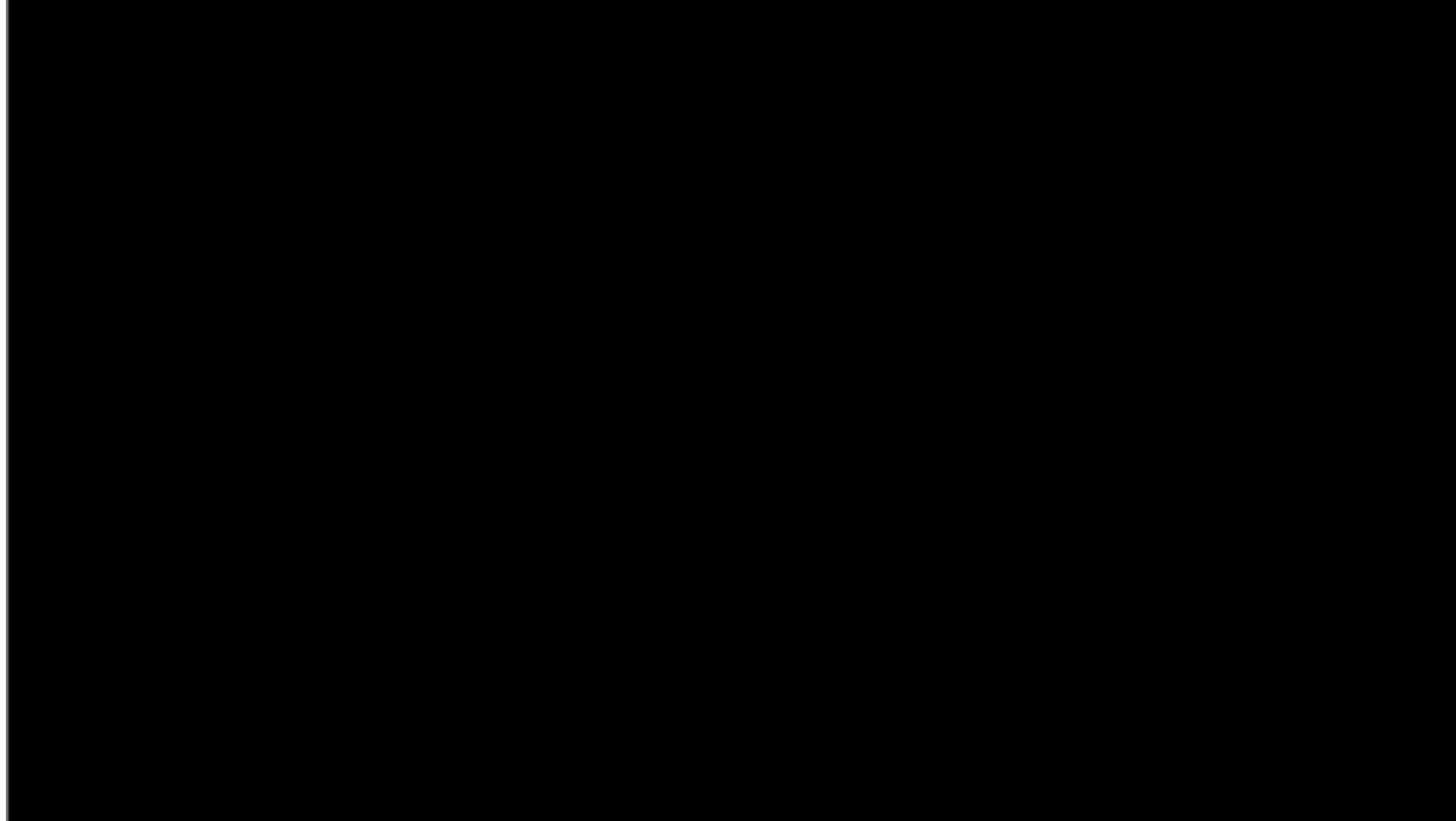
New York Initiative for  
Children of Incarcerated Parents



[www.osborneny.org/susu](http://www.osborneny.org/susu)  
[info@osborneny.org](mailto:info@osborneny.org)  
[@OsborneNY](https://twitter.com/OsborneNY)  
[/NYCIP](https://www.facebook.com/NYCIP)

# See Us, Support Us Youth Tips for Supporting Them

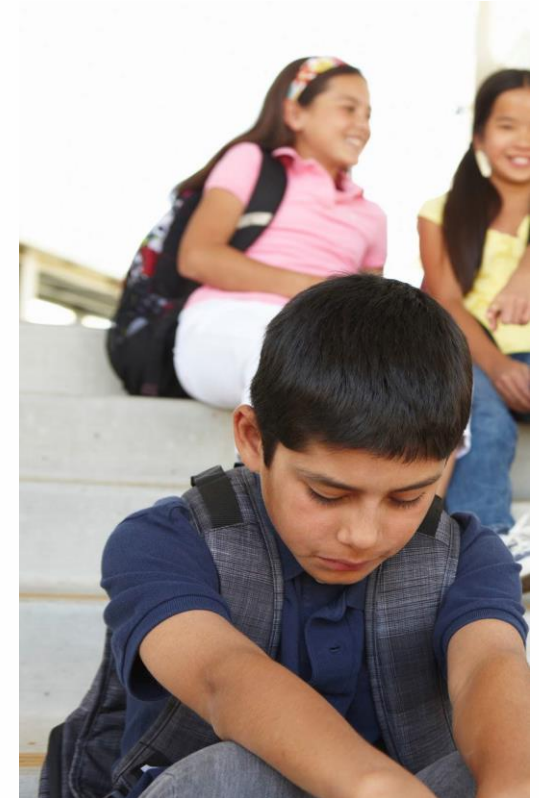
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# Children *May* Struggle in School

- Teachers may have lower expectations
- Behavioral school readiness can be compromised
- Developmental delays
- Attention deficit
- Stigma, shame, and bullying
- Instability
- Poor academic achievement may lead to social exclusion

*Source: Phillips et. Al (2006). Disentangling the risks: Parent criminal justice involvement and children's exposure to family risks; Wildeman (2014). Parental Incarceration and Wellbeing. An Annotated Bibliography*





# Partnering with Schools

- Professional development for school-based staff: understanding the experience, support, resources
- Developing Guiding Memo about how to include incarcerated parents in educational planning
- Creating affirming spaces
- Books and resources
- Curriculum: Joining Forces
- Identifying supportive point people in schools
- Data collection (aggregate recommended)

IDEA FOR SCHOOL OUTREACH

When Report cards are distributed,  
Flyers can be made asking if  
child may have or is experien-  
cing a life-altering event  
such as:

Death	} WITH info on WHO TO CONTACT in The school (may generate Feedback)
Illness	
incarceration	
Divorce	
new addition to family	

Provide a quarterly report that's more detailed  
on what the child need more help on instead  
of just a general "need improvement"

Setting up tours with more school staff  
that they can be more aware. This may  
help the limit the bias from the staff because  
of the unknown.

Rebecca, I hope this  
helps. Sorry for the rush.

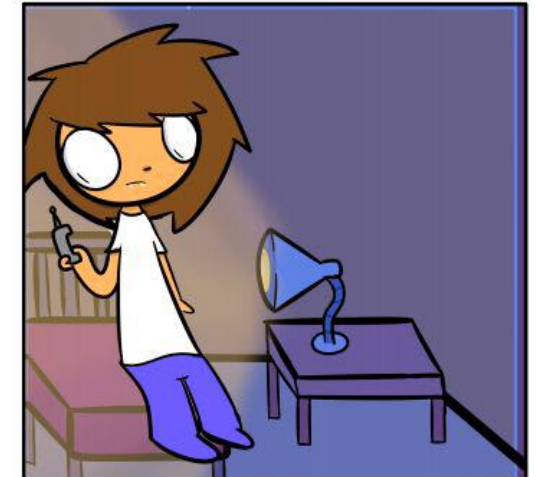
How have you learned that a student  
had an incarcerated parent?



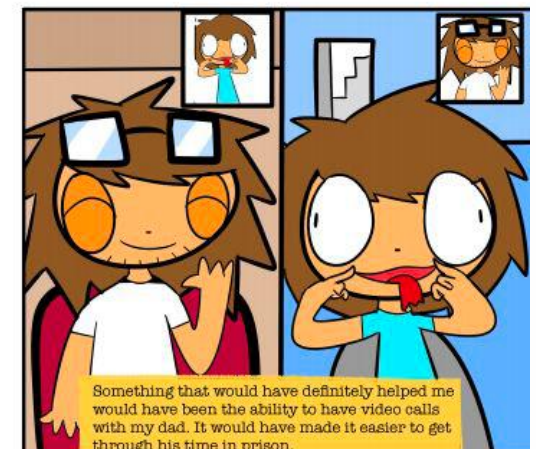
# Ask to Offer Support

- Ask non-judgmentally
- Listen for euphemisms
- Families often hesitant to disclose
- Be mindful of documentation and collect data in the aggregate

If you or a friend has a family member who has been in prison or jail, please let us know so we may share supportive resources.



When my dad was in prison, some days I really wished I could talk to him face-to-face when I was at home instead of over a phone.



Something that would have definitely helped me would have been the ability to have video calls with my dad. It would have made it easier to get through his time in prison.

*Poster available in the SUSU Educator Toolkit or Youth.gov*



The majority of children of incarcerated parents do not become incarcerated.



“When I was 15, I assumed I’d go to prison....  
But as I got older I realized I could  
re-write that story. And I HAVE re-written  
that story.” -F. Stokes, Hip Hop Artist

*Source: Wakefield and Wildeman (2013); Conway and Jones (2016)*

Children of Incarcerated Parents' Bill of Rights\*

**7.** I have the right  
**not to be judged, blamed,  
or labeled because of  
my parent's incarceration.**

\* Developed by the San Francisco Children of Incarcerated Parents Partnership in 2005

#SeeUsSupportUs

A stylized icon of a family consisting of two adults and a child, rendered in green and orange colors.

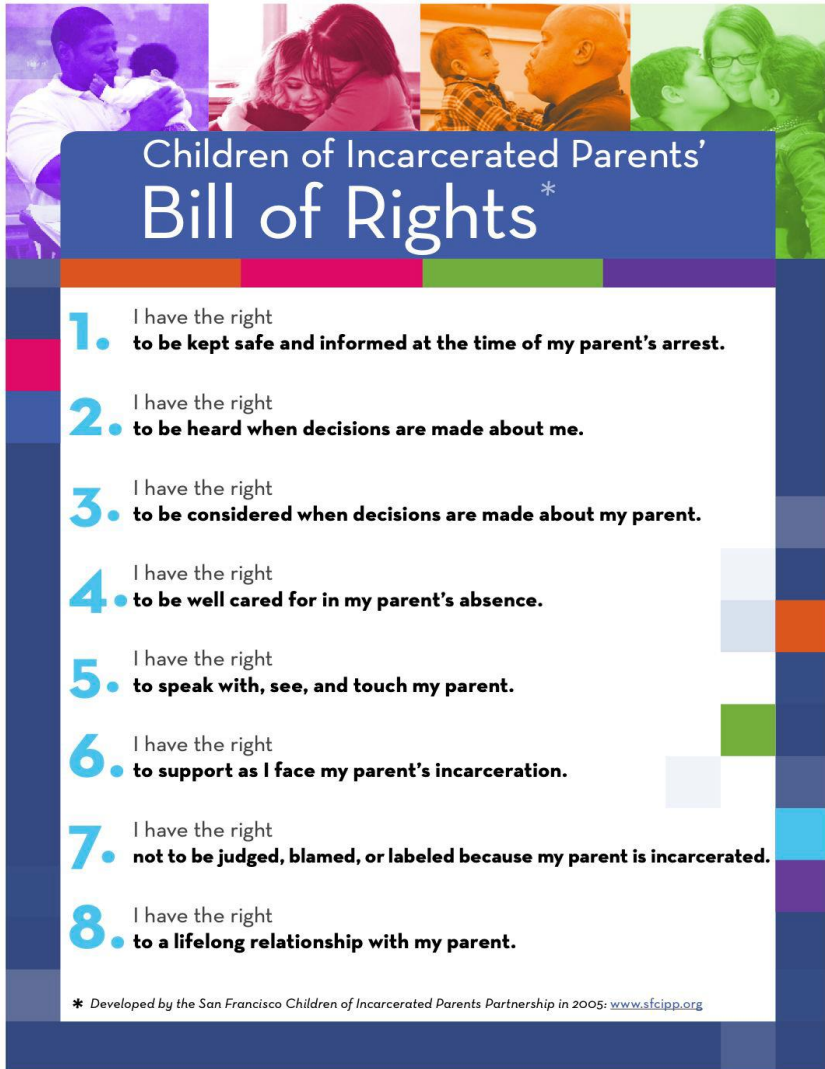
# Reducing Stigma

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- Staff training
- Assess your values & beliefs about people who are incarcerated and their families
- First step is reflection and acknowledgement
- Identify point people in your school who are comfortable speaking about incarceration
- Develop relationships with community-based organizations equipped to support families involved in the criminal justice system

Two studies found that teachers had lower expectations for students upon learning they have an incarcerated parent.  
—Dallaire et al. (2010); Turney & Haskins (Forthcoming)

# Creating Affirming Spaces

The poster features a header with four photographs of diverse families: a man holding a baby, a woman hugging a child, a man and child looking at each other, and a woman kissing a child. Below the header is a list of eight rights, each preceded by a colored number. The poster is decorated with a colorful geometric border on the left and right sides.

Children of Incarcerated Parents'  
Bill of Rights\*

1. I have the right  
to be kept safe and informed at the time of my parent's arrest.
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to be heard when decisions are made about me.
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to a lifelong relationship with my parent.

\* Developed by the San Francisco Children of Incarcerated Parents Partnership in 2005: [www.sfcipp.org](http://www.sfcipp.org)

- Advocate for books about COIP to be included in classrooms, libraries, and guidance offices
- Consider how you will support children on special days such as “bring your dad to school day”
- Include lessons about mass incarceration in curriculum
- Identify point people who children can go to for support



New York Initiative for  
Children of Incarcerated Parents



[www.osborneny.org/susu](http://www.osborneny.org/susu)  
[info@osborneny.org](mailto:info@osborneny.org)  
[@OsborneNY](https://twitter.com/OsborneNY)  
[/NYCIP](https://www.facebook.com/OSborneny)

Think about how a child may feel when people use words like “offender” and “felon” to describe their parent.



*He's not a "Convict."  
He's an incarcerated individual.  
He's also my father.*

*Instead of “felons” or “ex-cons” say...*

Formerly  
Incarcerated  
Person

Returning  
Citizen

People with  
prior criminal  
justice  
involvement

*Instead of “inmates” or “offenders” say...*

Parent

People  
who are  
incarcerated

People who  
have been in  
conflict with  
the law





# Including Incarcerated Parents in Educational Planning

- Schools should issue guidelines for how to include incarcerated parents in educational planning
- FERPA grants all parents access to their child's school records unless a legal document revokes these rights
- Work in partnership with the family to determine how best to include the incarcerated parent
- Arrange telephone conferences for parent-teacher conferences and IEP meetings. Dial x4000 to connect with counseling department in NYS prisons
- Provide Family Counseling
- More resources in the [SUSU Educator Toolkit](#)



2.

I have the right  
**to be heard when decisions  
are made about me.**



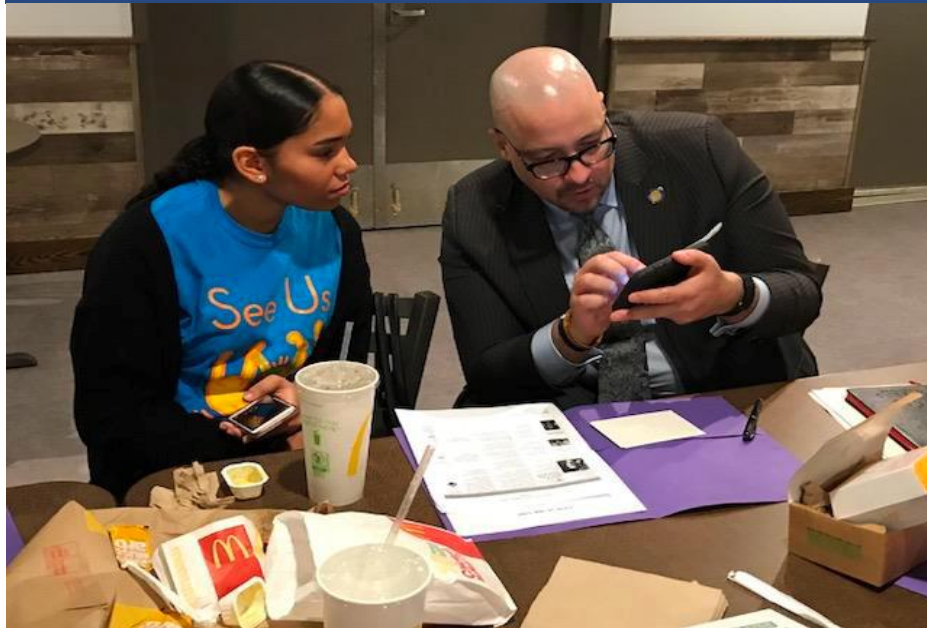
\* Developed by the San Francisco Children of Incarcerated Parents Partnership in 2005

#SeeUsSupportUs

# Nothing About Us Without Us

Young people must be co-creators  
in developing programs, policies,  
and practices that affect them.

—SUSU Principle



# Peer Support Is Empowering: You Are NOT Alone



- Social-emotional support
- Bonding with peers
- Fun activities
- Building, repairing, and maintaining relationships with caregivers and incarcerated parents
- Goal planning sessions
- Caregivers provided opportunities to build supportive relationship with each other

# Engage Youth in Developing Programming

- Ask for youth input regularly
- Compensation \$\$\$
- Measure program impact: surveys
- Not working? Get feedback from youth







## YOUTH EXPERIENCE SUCCESS!

- Peer Support
- Youth leadership development
- Independent living skills
- Relationship building
- Video Visiting for children and family member to visit with people incarcerated in NYS prisons from Osborne's offices.







# Youth Action Council Leading Advocacy Efforts

- Meet with legislators
- Hold rallies
- Write op-eds
- Host podcasts



# Youth Inspiring Legislation

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Senator Montgomery meets with YAC in 2011 and learns how hard it is to visit because prisons are far away.

The Senator writes the Proximity Bill the next day.



YAC makes a  
PSA to educate  
the public about  
visiting bills





## YOUTH ACTION COUNCIL MAKES A DIFFERENCE

Proximity is Law!

Parents now placed  
in a NYS prison  
close to home.

## See Us, Support Us Youth Team

## See Us, Support Us Led by Youth



**During 2023, SUSU focuses on children whose parent's are returning after incarceration.**

[www.susu-osborne.org](http://www.susu-osborne.org)

- SUSU Fellow advises Youth Team and is part of the national SUSU Planning Team
- Youth create content for social media and SUSU month
- Youth design SUSU website
- Youth in community



# SUSU Youth Team in Action



See Us,  
Support Us

2024

END STIGMA



PHOTO BY KENNEDY

# SEE US, SUPPORT US ART CONTEST

For youth, up to age 24, who have  
experienced parental incarceration.



**THEME: JOY!**

Accepting Art,  
Poems, Photos,  
Music and more!



[www.susu-osborne.org](http://www.susu-osborne.org)  
[SeeUsSupportUs](#)  
[SUSUyouthvoices](#)  
[@SeeUsSupportUs](#)  
[/NYCIP](#)

**Enter by October 31, 2024**



# SUSU Youth Team In Action: UnLocked Support Groups



Anna, UnLocked  
President & Founder

*"I wanted to use my adversity to support the children of incarcerated parents and create a community of like-minded advocates."*

**PEER SUPPORT  
GROUP**



RSVP

[unlockedproject.org](https://unlockedproject.org)

# Family Support Is Critical

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- Caregivers need support
  - Peer Support
  - Support Groups
- Understand there may be tension between caregiver and incarcerated parent
- Resources



## See Us, Support Us Month

▶▶▶ Join the NETWORK to  
SEE and SUPPORT children of  
incarcerated parents TODAY

[www.susu-osborne.org](http://www.susu-osborne.org)



Contact  
[ahollihan@osborneny.org](mailto:ahollihan@osborneny.org)

-  [www.susu-osborne.org](http://www.susu-osborne.org)
-  [www.osborneny.org](http://www.osborneny.org)
-  [NYInitiative@osborneny.org](mailto:NYInitiative@osborneny.org)
-  [@OsborneNY](https://twitter.com/OsborneNY)
-  [/NYCIP](https://www.facebook.com/NYCIP)







# Who Are We?

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The U.S. Dream Academy is helping our nation's children reach for their dreams. For over 26 years, we provided a transformative mentoring experience for youth to build character, skills, and dreams in a safe out of school time environment and in-school supports.

*"We are transforming children into dreamers who envision and realize their potential."*

Our research-based relationship model provides care and challenges growth in young people to achieve positive youth development outcomes. Our staff and volunteer mentors engage students in active learning through mentoring, tutoring, hands-on STEM activities, community outreach, and offer exposure to new opportunities through interactive field trips and workshops.



## Our Vision

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Lead the next generation of character-driven, global minded youth toward actualizing their full potential.



# Our Impact

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**Improved Outcomes:** After a year at the Dream Academy, students show better school attendance, higher college aspirations, and greater optimism for their future.

**Unique Experiences:** 92% of DreamKids reported engaging in activities at the Academy they couldn't access elsewhere.

**Exceptional Graduation Rates:** Orlando's high school cohort achieved a 92% on-time graduation rate, surpassing the local rate of 75.9% and the national average of 65% for students in poverty.

**Academic Success:** 82% of Dream Academy 3rd–6th graders in Indianapolis passed the Math ISTEP, compared to 68% of non-participants.

# Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)

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COIPs are recognized as experiencing **ACEs**, distinct in their trauma, shame, and stigma, which often manifest in school settings and can be disruptive to the school day environment.

# Maternal Incarceration

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## Negative educational impacts

- Higher risk of dropping out of school in the year their mother enters jail or prison
- Higher risk of grade retention and dropout rates
- Higher risk of foster care placement
- Adult children of incarcerated mothers are more likely to be incarcerated themselves

Herreros-Fraile A, Carcedo RJ, Viedma A, Ramos-Barbero V, Fernández-Rouco N, Gomiz-Pascual P, del Val C. Parental Incarceration, Development, and Well-Being: A Developmental Systematic Review. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*. 2023; 20(4):3143. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph20043143>

# Paternal Incarceration

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- Associated with lower GPA, educational attainment, and college completion
- Increased risk of **physical and sexual abuse for daughters**
- More weight gain for girls and higher infant mortality rates
- Negative behaviors (e.g., theft, aggression) increase in boys
- Greater housing instability

Herreros-Fraile A, Carcedo RJ, Viedma A, Ramos-Barbero V, Fernández-Rouco N, Gomiz-Pascual P, del Val C. Parental Incarceration, Development, and Well-Being: A Developmental Systematic Review. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*. 2023; 20(4):3143. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph20043143>

# COIP's Experience in Schools

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- Stigma and negative assumptions about COIP impact their experience:
  - **"You're going to end up just like your father"** is a common statement
  - COIP unfairly blamed in instances/not trusted
  - Teachers/admin may unintentionally cause children feel ashamed of their parent's crime
  - Teachers may fear or avoid dealing with COIP
  - Silence or lack of response from teachers
  - Student feels like the only one experiencing parental incarceration. Feels isolated, lonely, or "weird" for experiencing a range of emotions

# Parent/Caretaker's Concerns

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- Hesitant to inform schools because of:
  - Fear of retaliation against the child
  - Concern about judgment and stigma
  - Uncertainty about how schools can help
  - Fear of labeling child



# Where is U.S. Dream Academy?

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School Districts where U.S. Dream Academy Collaborates:

- Baltimore City Public Schools
  - Orange County Public Schools (Orlando)
  - Philadelphia Global Charter Schools
  - District of Columbia Public Schools
  - Houston Independent School District
  - West Valley Charter School (near Salt Lake City)
  - San Bernardino City Public Schools (CA)
- 
- Virtual mentoring options through our DreamJourney curriculum



# Why do we intervene in schools?

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- Kids spend most of their time in school and often report feeling emotionally unsupported in this environment.
- Programs in schools are easily accessible to students and families.
- Community School models can support children and families with additional resources.
- The impact of parental incarceration is not critically discussed, even in high-risk communities.
- When schools can properly support COIP, it creates a positive school culture that enables and helps to support many other young people dealing with stigma and shame.

# What We've Learned in Schools

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- **Principals** want to understand this issue and provide better support.
- **Teachers** have mixed reactions regarding their willingness and knowledge to support COIP.
- **Parents** are often hesitant to reveal their situation or participate.
- **Students** feel... relieved!
- No one-size-fits-all solution; specialized training for all school staff is essential.

# Student Perspective

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*"I did a class presentation on having an incarcerated parent. At the beginning of my presentation, I asked how many kids had a parent incarcerated, at first, 3 kids raised their hands. By the end, 15 admitted they had an incarcerated parent." —Jahnay, 16 years old*

# Structural Issues in Schools

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- No **unified approach** for supporting students and families affected by incarceration
- Lack of **data tracking** for COIP within schools
- Little infrastructure that can support assessment of immediate and long-term consequences of parental incarceration (e.g., housing, food security, school transfers)

# Administration and Teacher Focus

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- Train all teachers and admin staff to:
  - Support students exposed to trauma.
  - Understand the issues of parental incarceration with **compassion**.
  - Develop coping mechanisms for their own exposure to trauma.
  - Work with school counselor and school nurse on identifying and referring.
- Trainings on:
  - Youth work is self work
  - Impact of incarceration on young people – at various developmental ages
  - Trauma, shame, and stigma reduction
  - Role-playing exercises for supportive language and approach
  - Managing the "**teacher dilemma**" of balancing fear of a parent's crime with the child's needs



# School-wide Changes

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- Collaborate with CBOs to provide wraparound services
- Embed mentoring within your school day or afterschool programs for an additional adult in the lives of COIP
- Don't assume that if you address "at-risk" youth needs that you are addressing needs for COIP
- Focus on whole-school culture change that is SEL-based
- Invest in ongoing training and resources for your teachers
- Incorporate youth voices and genuine engagement in plannings, training, and implementation

# Questions?

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# Thank You!

Join our distribution list to receive updates and announcements:

<https://csgjusticecenter.org/resources/newsletters/>

For more information, please contact Tiana Smith at [tsmith@csg.org](mailto:tsmith@csg.org)

*This project was supported by Grant No. 15PJDP-23-GK-02655-COIP awarded by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention is a component of the Department of Justice's Office of Justice Programs, which also includes the Bureau of Justice Statistics, the National Institute of Justice, the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, the Office for Victims of Crime, and the Office of Sex Offender Sentencing, Monitoring, Apprehending, Registering, and Tracking. Points of view or opinions in this document are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the U.S. Department of Justice.*

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