

Parenting Programs Minnesota Correctional Facility (MCF)-Shakopee

One of the most difficult aspects of prison life for mothers is the separation from their children. It is also a difficult time for the children. According to U.S. government statistics, when a man goes to prison, over 89 percent of their children stay with the other parent. When a woman goes to prison, less than 28 percent go to the other parent. The philosophy of the parenting programs at the MCF-Shakopee, the state's only prison for adult women, is that the family unit is important and should be maintained and enhanced, whenever possible, for the sake of both parents and children. The MCF-Shakopee has various parenting programs to support this philosophy.

Parenting programs are necessary to promote and maintain healthy families. Parental incarceration has a profound impact on children. Study after study finds children with an incarcerated parent are perhaps the most at-risk group of children in society.

“Children of parents under some form of criminal justice control are among the most at risk, yet least visible, populations of children.”
(Reed and Reed 1997)

“Children whose parents have been arrested and incarcerated face unique difficulties. Many have experienced the trauma of sudden separation from their sole caregiver, and most are vulnerable to feelings of fear, anxiety, anger, sadness, depression and guilt. They may be moved from caretaker to caretaker. The behavioral consequences can be severe, absent positive intervention—emotional withdrawal, failure in school, delinquency and risk of intergenerational incarceration. Yet these children seem to fall through the cracks.”
(California Research Bureau 2000)

“Youth with parents who have been arrested as adults are at much greater risk to be arrested two or more times during adolescence, particularly if the parent arrested was the mother.”
(Eddy, Reid 2001)

Safety and security is absolutely paramount while facilitating the mother/children visitation programs inside facility programming. The MCF-Shakopee

has regulated movement times for groups of offenders. In order to minimize contact between the children and general population, the mothers and children move between locations while other movement is stopped. Mothers are also responsible for ensuring that their children do not interact with general population. Mothers and their children are supervised by a parent and family coordinator whose job it is to facilitate programming.

It is with these facts in mind that the MCF-Shakopee moves forward in providing and developing programming for not only incarcerated mothers, but their children as well.

Parenting the Future with Purpose (PFWP)

PFWP is a parenting education and support group for moms who would like to learn more about parenting while they are in Shakopee, as well as when they leave. This group offers support in areas of discipline, communication with children, empowering children to reach their goals as well as many other topics. Participants are welcome to attend and find out how to parent from prison successfully. Participants may also receive transportation for their children to visit (within the metro area) from the organization's volunteers. PFWP is also offered upon release to moms who need furniture, jobs, reunification support and many other services.

New Mother's Support Group

The New Mother's Support Group is an education and support group for incarcerated women who are either pregnant or have children under the age of three. The group discusses parenting from a holistic perspective, including the emotional, physical, and spiritual well-being of pregnant women, mothers, and their families. Some examples of the topics covered include: childbirth education, child development, discipline, communication, health, self-care, and how to create positive family memories. Each session includes an education component as well as time for group-based support.

Anthony Parenting Program

The Anthony Living Unit is dedicated to developing and maintaining an environment focused on creating parenting and family skills. This is a privileged living unit meaning that all offenders present adhere to strict discipline standards, ensuring the unit houses offenders that will contribute positively to the overall environment. All offenders living in the unit participated in an interview with staff before relocating to the Anthony unit. Mothers with children ages newborn-11 are eligible to have one of their children participate in an extended visit within the facility one at a time. There are two types of visits that occur in the Anthony Parenting Program. The first are overnight visits – where the child spends the night in the Anthony Living Unit with their mother. There are also day visits that consist of an extended visit during the day, but do not include an overnight stay. The overnight visits begin Friday evening and can go as long as Saturday afternoon. The day visits begin Saturday mornings through the afternoon hours. Before an overnight visit can occur, a child must first complete a day visit. This ensures the child is able to acclimate to the facility before they spend an entire day within it. In order to receive a visit, the mother must first be occupying a single room so there are no other offenders in the room with mother and child.

Teen Group

When the children “age out” of the Anthony program the mothers can participate in Teen Group. This is a support group for mothers with children ages 12-17 that meets weekly. Mothers share with one another the difficulties they are having with their children and their circumstances in a supportive environment. Once a month, the teens come to the facility for an extended visit with their mother. These visits happen during daytime hours Saturdays. The mothers and teens participate in games and programming directly supervised by a Shakopee staff aimed at developing healthy family bonds.

Girl Scouts

The Girl Scouts of River Valley facilitate a program within the MCF-Shakopee. Daughters of offenders form a Girl Scout troop. Quarterly, they come to the facility for an extended visit with programming and activities. The girls also meet once a month outside of the facility for regular scout activities. It is important for the children to have the normalizing experience of seeing and playing with other children that have an incarcerated parent. Children are able to see that they are not isolated or alone in their experiences. Free transportation to all activities is provided by Girl Scouts.

651/361-7200
TTY 800/627-3529
www.doc.state.mn.us
August 2010