

# THE GREATER CLEVELAND STRATEGY FOR CHILDREN OF INCARCERATED PARENTS

A community response to the needs of  
children of incarcerated parents and  
their family members and caregivers

Cuyahoga County Family  
and Children First Council  
Community Release

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

It is estimated that over 1.7 million children nationally have an incarcerated parent. These children may experience a range of negative consequences due to their parent's incarceration including financial hardship, behavioral issues, social stigma, and poor academic performance. Key Cuyahoga County agencies have been meeting since 2013 to identify strategies to establish a coordinated, comprehensive service system to address the unique needs of children of incarcerated parents (CIP) in Cuyahoga County. Oriana House, Inc. (Oriana) convened University Hospitals' Rainbow Babies and Children's Hospital (RB&C), Cuyahoga County Office of Reentry, Community Endeavors Foundation-Healthy Fathering Collaborative, and Case Western Reserve University's Schubert Center for Child Studies to discuss the needs of children of incarcerated parents locally and to determine whether there was an interest in working together to better understand the nature and magnitude of needs and effective strategies to address these needs. All agencies committed to continuing to work together and Oriana assigned a consultant and one staff member to coordinate the development of the Greater Cleveland Strategy for Children of Incarcerated Parents (Strategy). The 18-month planning process included an extensive number of structured small-group planning meetings, research and information-gathering, three public educational sessions, and one focus group.

The guiding principles in the development and implementation of the Strategy are as follows:

- Engage those personally impacted by incarceration
- Conduct research and evaluation
- Inform and engage organizations that serve children in their natural environment
- Enhance agencies' existing structures/funding that address CIP
- Utilize successful, evidence-based approaches
- Implement a comprehensive, expanded, and improved system of supports and services

There are five components to the Strategy which are described below.

1. AGENCIES THAT IDENTIFY, SCREEN, & ENACT SUPPORTIVE POLICIES & PROCEDURES
2. A SYSTEM OF SUPPORTS & SERVICES
3. COMMUNICATIONS & TRAINING THAT ENHANCE UNDERSTANDING & RESPONSES
4. RESEARCH & EVALUATION THAT INFORM IMPROVEMENTS IN THE STRATEGY
5. A GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE & FUNDING THAT SUSTAIN NECESSARY ACTIVITIES

Successful implementation of the Strategy includes a priority level response, an open and inclusive process, an appropriate balancing of improved identification of the population and capacity to provide supports and services.

## UNDERSTANDING THE NEED

It is estimated that over 1.7 million children nationally have an incarcerated parent. These children may experience a range of negative consequences due to their parent's incarceration including financial hardship, behavioral issues, social stigma, and poor academic performance. In October 2014 the Schubert Center for Child Studies (Schubert Center) prepared the Issue Brief "Children of Incarcerated

Parents: An Overview” to assist with the development of the Greater Cleveland Strategy for Children of Incarcerated Parents (Strategy). Key statements in the brief are as follows:

- Reflecting long-standing racial disparities in the United States prison population, similar racial disparities exist for children with incarcerated parents
- Throughout the experience of parental arrest and incarceration, children may experience compounded trauma as a result
- The negative effects of parental incarceration may be mediated by other factors, such as social advantage, effective parenting and children’s empathy, suggesting potential points for intervention
- High quality, stable care of children of incarcerated parents is an important way to mitigate the trauma of parental incarceration

Selected data on the magnitude and nature of the impact on children of incarcerated parents is provided below.

- Bureau of Justice Statistic Special Report (revised 3/10/10): “Parents in Prison and Their Minor Children”
  - 809,800 prisoners of the 1,518,535 held in prisons midyear 2007 were parents of minor children
  - 52% of state and 63% of federal inmates reported having an estimated 1,706,600 minor children
  - Between 1991 and 2007, children of incarcerated parents increased by 80%; since 1991, the number of children with a mother in prison more than doubled, up 131% and with a father in prison grown by 77%
  - Black children were 7.5 times more likely than white children to have a parent in prison; Hispanic children were 2.5 times more likely than white children to have a parent in prison
  - 22% of children of state & 16% of children of federal inmates were age 4 or younger; about half of both children of state and federal inmates were age 9 or younger
  - About half of parents in state prison provided the primary financial support for their minor child prior to incarceration
- The Pew Charitable Trust Report “Collateral Costs: Incarcerations Effect on Economic Mobility” (2010)
  - 54 percent of inmates are parents with minor children (ages 0-17), including more than 120,000 mothers and 1.1 million fathers
  - 2.7 million children have a parent behind bars—1 in every 28 children (3.6 percent) has a parent incarcerated, up from 1 in 125 just 25 years ago
  - Two-thirds of these children’s parents were incarcerated for non-violent offenses
  - One in 9 African American children (11.4 percent); 1 in 28 Hispanic children (3.5 percent); 1 in 57 white children (1.8 percent) have an incarcerated parent
  - Previous research has shown that having a parent incarcerated hurts children, both educationally and financially
  - Children with fathers who have been incarcerated are significantly more likely

than other children to be expelled or suspended from school (23 percent compared with 4 percent)

- Family income averaged over the years a father is incarcerated is 22 percent lower than family income was the year before a father is incarcerated
- Both education and parental income are strong indicators of children's future economic mobility

Local and state data on children of incarcerated parents has not been gathered in a coordinated and consistent manner.

## PLANNING PROCESS

Key Cuyahoga County agencies have been meeting since 2013 to identify strategies to establish a coordinated, comprehensive service system to address the unique needs of children of incarcerated parents (CIP) in Cuyahoga County. Oriana House, Inc. (Oriana) convened University Hospitals' Rainbow Babies and Children's Hospital (RB&C), Cuyahoga County Office of Reentry, Community Endeavors Foundation-Healthy Fathering Collaborative, and Case Western Reserve University's Schubert Center to discuss the needs of children of incarcerated parents locally and to determine whether there was an interest in working together to better understand the nature and magnitude of needs and effective strategies to address these needs. All agencies committed to continuing to work together and Oriana assigned a consultant and one staff member to coordinate the development of the Greater Cleveland Strategy for Children of Incarcerated Parents (Strategy). The 18-month planning process included an extensive number of structured small-group planning meetings, research and information-gathering (which included interviews with nationally renowned CIP experts), three public educational sessions, and one focus group.

### Planning Meetings:

The original agencies agreed to pursue the following activities:

- Identify key stakeholders required to plan, develop, and implement the Strategy
- Define the full range of populations affected and gather relevant data (consider the developmental levels of children and how that impacts needs/responses)
- Solicit input from the target populations and other stakeholders on needs/responses
- Conduct a literature search on nature/magnitude of the problem and best practices
- Determine what resources currently exist in Cuyahoga County and gaps in service
- Develop additional interventions to address identified needs
- Develop/circulate information on the service system/resources and how to access them

Representatives from additional agencies (Cuyahoga County Division of Children and Family Services, St. Luke's Foundation, Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction, the Alcohol and Drug Addiction and Mental Health Services Board of Cuyahoga County, and the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Northern District of Ohio) were invited to join the planning committee to further define organizational structure, goals and objectives, and target populations. Over time, additional agencies joined the planning meetings. The ultimate goal of the planning meetings was to reach consensus on key components of the Strategy that addresses the most pressing needs of this population, using best practices, and

incorporating the perspective of various stakeholders. Meetings were held from the summer 2013 through January 2015.

### **Research & Information-Gathering:**

Participants in the planning meetings agreed that Strategy recommendations should be grounded in the most current information available, including pursuing the following activities:

- Obtaining data from local agencies on the magnitude of their population of children of incarcerated parents and available local services
- Conducting a literature review
- Conducting interviews of staff at organizations around the country that have been recognized for their leadership in serving and/or advocating for children of incarcerated parents
- Producing written reports

Data from local agencies on the magnitude and nature of the population was limited, since the majority of agencies did not have a consistent mechanism for identification. Rainbow Babies and Children's Hospital prepared a summary of practices locally and nationally and Schubert Center produced an issue briefing publication.

### **Community Education & Engagement:**

Though the planning group included a broad range of stakeholders, it was determined that a larger number of stakeholders should be engaged in educational sessions and a focus group. Based on the recommendation of the planning group, Schubert Center agreed to conduct a session on October 17, 2013, "Children of Incarcerated Parents: The Role of Pediatricians and the Community" in their 2013-2014 Conversation Series "Overcoming Adversity in Childhood" in conjunction with UH RB&C Pediatric Ground Rounds. The planning group also conducted community forums with nationally recognized experts on October 21 and 22, 2014, with a 190 people in attendance. Finally, one focus group was held with parents who were returning citizens in halfway houses after their incarceration in state or federal prisons. Suggestions from the forum attendees and focus group participants were incorporated into the final Strategy.

## **GUIDING PRINCIPLES**

The guiding principles in the development and implementation of the Strategy are as follows:

- Engage those personally impacted by incarceration to understand their needs and effective strategies to address these needs throughout the development and implementation of the Strategy
- Conduct research and evaluation that increases our understanding of the needs of the affected populations and responses that address these needs
- Inform and engage agencies/organizations/professionals that serve children in their natural environment (i.e. schools, recreation centers, medical providers, etc.).
- Enhance agencies' existing structures/funding that address CIP and their family members/caregivers
- Utilize successful, evidence-based approaches from other communities to design interventions
- Implement a comprehensive, expanded, and improved system of supports and services that address a carefully selected target population that is both manageable and large enough to

apply lessons learned to a system that eventually addresses the entire population affected by the incarceration of a parent

## STRATEGIES

There are five components to the Strategy which are described below.

### 1. AGENCIES THAT IDENTIFY, SCREEN, & ENACT SUPPORTIVE POLICIES & PROCEDURES

- a. Selected agencies have agreed to pilot a new system of identification and screening of CIP.
  - 1) Help Me Grow (*only agency that has submitted a Letter of Intent*)
  - 2) Healthy Fathering Collaborative
  - 3) Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction Northeast Reintegration Center
  - 4) Nubian Link
- b. Each agency will do the following:
  - 1) Identify a champion who will participate in the CIP Collaborative & provide leadership within their organization to ensure all requirements are met
  - 2) Document current policies and procedures related to CIP
  - 3) Utilize standard CIP identification and screening questions; provide CIP information; and connect to appropriate services
  - 4) Collect agreed upon data on CIP
  - 5) Enact policies that are supportive of CIP in keeping with the San Francisco Children of Incarcerated Parents Partnership's Bill of Rights for Children of Incarcerated Parents:
    - a) I have the right to be kept safe and informed at the time of my parent's arrest
    - b) I have the right to be heard when decisions are made about me
    - c) I have the right to be considered when decisions are made about my parent
    - d) I have the right to be well cared for in my parent's absence
    - e) I have the right to speak with, see and touch my parent
    - f) I have the right to support as I face my parent's incarceration
    - g) I have the right not to be judged, blamed or labeled because my parent is incarcerated
    - h) I have the right to a lifelong relationship with my parent
  - 6) Provide CIP orientation and training to agency staff

### 2. A SYSTEM OF SUPPORTS & SERVICES

The system of supports and services will begin by building off of existing programming, expanding where appropriate and possible; and adding new services with additional financial resources. The first steps in establishing a comprehensive system for children of incarcerated parents and their family members/caregivers includes the following:

- a. Expedite access to services
- b. Connect to existing resources (treatment, faith-based, child care, etc.)
- c. Establish welcoming, comfortable, accepting places (to minimize the stigma associated with having an incarcerated parent) - a central location and/or multiple locations - that offer fun activities, supportive programming, and resource information that addresses the range of needs presented by children of incarcerated parents and their caregivers

- d. Expand opportunities to interact with the incarcerated parent (letter writing, video & in-person visitation, e-mailing, phone calling, story-telling, etc.)
  - e. Establish youth advocacy/support group programming (obtain testimonials for marketing & education), including on-going sessions, a targeted youth camp program, and expanded mentoring services (i.e. Big Brothers Big Sisters)
  - f. Offer incarcerated parent/caregiver education sessions on the effects on children and strategies to assist and incarcerated parent/caregiver support groups
  - g. Establish family specialist staff at corrections agencies dedicated to strengthening family relationships, when appropriate
3. COMMUNICATIONS & TRAINING THAT ENHANCE UNDERSTANDING & RESPONSES
- The following activities are designed to address the information needs of the general public, service providers, and consumers:
- a. Develop materials explaining available resources
  - b. Conduct training for professionals on the effects on children of incarcerated parents and strategies/techniques to assist
  - c. Provide evidence-based practice training
  - d. Conduct an orientation on the new system of supports/services
  - e. Conduct a working conference every other year (October 2014 & 2016, etc.)
  - f. Provide general community awareness activities/campaign utilizing testimonials of CIP and a cost benefit analysis
4. RESEARCH & EVALUATION THAT INFORM IMPROVEMENTS IN THE STRATEGY
- a. Conduct on-going literature review on CIP
  - b. Collect baseline data
  - c. Conduct a process and outcome evaluation of system of services
  - d. Conduct basic research
5. A GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE & FUNDING THAT SUSTAIN NECESSARY ACTIVITIES
- a. Oriana led the development of the Strategy
  - b. Cuyahoga County Family Children First Council serves as the convener/organizer for implementation of the Strategy adopting this issue as a priority and pursuing the following approach:
    - 1) Designate staff that have the knowledge, skills, and commitment to coordinate and advance the initiative with a sense of urgency
    - 2) Motivate and engage other key stakeholders in a collaborative approach
    - 3) Obtain financial resources to fully implement the Strategy
  - c. The collaborative community board includes the following:
    - 1) Membership of 31 stakeholders representing diverse viewpoints whose purpose is to oversee implementation, annual reviews, and updates to the Strategy and advocacy for system change in relation to children of incarcerated parents
    - 2) Three co-chairpersons representing a public and private organization and young adult who had/has an incarcerated parent
    - 3) Meetings to occur monthly throughout the first year of operation

## IMPLEMENTATION

Successful implementation of the Strategy includes the following:

- A priority level response, resulting in timely implementation, minimizing bureaucratic limitations and delays
- An open and inclusive approach, engaging all stakeholders needed to make progress
- An appropriate balancing of improved identification of the population and capacity to provide supports and services

Proper sequencing of steps for implementation is essential including the following year one activities.

GOALS
Convene Collaborative Board with clearly defined roles and responsibilities
Obtain baseline information from pilot agencies
Establish goals and objectives and indicators of success
Release Strategy at large community session
Establish 3-year budget and potential funding sources
Obtain initial commitment of funds
Develop database
Finalize identification process for pilot sites
Develop educational/resources materials
Orient and train staff of pilot agencies
Obtain additional funding for 2015 budget
Develop and implement services and supports
Implement new identification process
Conduct quarterly training for stakeholders
Begin community awareness activities
Obtain full funding for 2016 budget
Report on progress
Review and update Strategy