

# CLICC MENTORING FOR CHILDREN WITH INCARCERATED PARENTS



UNIVERSITY OF CONNECTICUT

## PROGRAM EVALUATION REPORT

# CLICC Mentoring for Children with Incarcerated Parents: Program Evaluation Report

James Conway, Ph.D. (conwayj@ccsu.edu) on Behalf of the University of  
Connecticut's Institute for Municipal and Regional Policy

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## Table of Contents

<b>Abstract.....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Introduction .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Evaluation of the CLICC Mentoring Program for CIP .....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Results.....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Conclusion .....</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>References.....</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>Appendix: Descriptive Statistics for Youth Baseline Survey Items .....</b>	<b>21</b>

## Abstract

A three-year evaluation study was conducted by the University of Connecticut's Institute for Municipal and Regional Policy (IMRP) to examine changes in children with incarcerated parents who participated in the CLICC mentoring and literacy program. CLICC uses reading books, one-on-one mentoring for children, and group mentoring for incarcerated parents to increase communication and strengthen relationships between incarcerated parents and their children. Based on surveys completed by the children's caregivers at the start of the program and 12 months later, the evaluation study found that children served by CLICC experienced a reduction in emotional, behavioral, attentional, and relationship difficulties. Examples of these difficulties include fighting, being unhappy or depressed, problems staying still, and preferring to be alone instead of with their peers. This is consistent with CLICC's goal of supporting and benefiting children who have parents in prison. Four other outcome measures did not show significant change over time. One limitation of the study is that it did not include a comparison group of children who did not participate in CLICC. Therefore, we cannot state definitively that the reduction in difficulties was due to the children's participation in the CLICC program. Another limitation was small sample size (27 children), and a third limitation was unknown effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite these limitations and corresponding uncertainty about interpretation of results, the study showed promising results regarding the CLICC program.

## Introduction

Many children nationwide and in Connecticut have had a parent incarcerated. In 2016 the Bureau of Justice Statistics estimated that in the U.S. close to 1.5 million U.S. children had a parent incarcerated at that time (Maruschak et al., 2021); the number would be much larger if children who had ever had an incarcerated parent were included. In Connecticut, 2018-2019 data indicate almost 43,000 children whose parent had been incarcerated (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2023). It is important to note racial and ethnic differences -- rates of parental incarceration are particularly high for Black and Indigenous children (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2023; Murphey & Cooper, 2015). These high numbers are the result of a large increase in U.S. and Connecticut incarceration rates. While incarceration has declined (Carson, 2022), incarceration rates are still high, and the effects of parental incarceration can be long-lasting for the cohort of affected youths (e.g., Provencher & Conway, 2019).

Parental incarceration has several potentially negative effects on children. These effects include the trauma of separation from a parent with disrupted attachment (Murray & Murray, 2010), a loss of social and financial support (deVuono-powell et al., 2015), the stigma associated with family incarceration (Phillips & Gates, 2011), pressure to avoid discussing the incarceration (the “conspiracy of silence,” Kampfner, 1995) and uncertainty about the process and outcomes of the criminal legal system. Children with incarcerated parents (CIP) have shown higher rates of a number of outcomes including mental health and behavioral problems (e.g., Murray et al., 2012; Wildeman et al., 2018).

While negative outcomes such as mental health problems are relatively high among CIP, many are well adjusted (Kremer et al., 2020). Research indicates that family support can act as a protective factor, promoting resilience (Arditti & Johnson, 2022). For example, maintaining a connection with the incarcerated parent has been found to be associated with less depression (Kremer et al., 2021). This report describes an evaluation of a mentoring program in which nurturing the relationship between the child and incarcerated parent is an important goal.

### Mentoring for Children with Incarcerated Parents: Background and Prior Evaluation Evidence

Mentoring is a type of intervention that can support youths in positive development and avoiding behavioral, mental health, and other problems. Meta-analyses of outcome studies have shown modest benefits for children and adolescents (DuBois et al., 2011; Raposa et al., 2019). For over two decades there has been interest in mentoring for children with incarcerated parents. Goode (2013) described the 1999 creation of the Amachi program, and promotion by the U.S. federal government of mentoring for CIP beginning in the early 2000s. In 2013 the White House and U.S. Department of Justice convened a listening session to “advance the availability and effectiveness of mentoring for children of incarcerated parents” (Jarjoura et al., 2014, p. 2).

Three studies have examined the effects of mentoring for CIP with a comparison group (Herrera et al., 2013; ICF International, 2022; Stetler et al., 2023). ICF International (2011) evaluated the Amachi Texas program using random assignment of CIP to either receive a mentor or remain on the waiting list. The Amachi Texas program was available only to CIP, but ICF International did not specify whether the program they evaluated included design elements targeting CIP (e.g., training for mentors in understanding family incarceration). Results of the “main impact analysis” showed that mentored youths were better off on some outcome variables. Specifically, CIP had better results for two of five family relationship outcomes and two out of three child well-being outcomes. There were no significant differences on any of five school outcomes.

The second evaluation study examining CIP outcomes was by Herrera et al. (2013). The mentoring program was intended for “higher-risk youth” and the evaluation study did not specifically target CIP. Herrera et al. did report some findings for participants who were CIP. There were some positive effects for youths overall, but the authors stated that

For each outcome, youth with [an incarcerated] family member (about one quarter of our sample) did *not* seem to benefit from mentoring, whereas significant program benefits were evident for youth who did not have a family member incarcerated. Having an incarcerated *parent* in particular (which was likely the case for many of these youth) may be especially challenging as a context for mentors and programs to make significant inroads with youth...” (Herrera et al., 2013, pp. 59-60).

A third relevant study by Shlafer et al. (2009) did not examine change over time for their entire sample of 57 CIP (only 18 youths had outcome data after 6 months), but did find that for the 18 youths with 6-month follow-up data, youths who met with mentors more frequently had fewer internalizing and externalizing problems. (It is not possible to know whether the lower rate of problems was due to the mentoring; those who met more frequently may have had fewer internalizing/externalizing problems at baseline.) One note is that it was not clear whether the mentoring program was designed specifically for CIP.

Most recently, Stelter et al. (2023) reported an evaluation of an “enhanced” mentoring program for CIP. The enhancements described in their Table 1 were designed using a positive youth development framework. Some of the enhancements include a focus on parental incarceration, including professional development for program staff and training for mentors, and all enhancements were implemented for the first 12 months of a match. The study involved random assignment of CIP to either the enhanced program or “business-as-usual” mentoring program. The business-as-usual program varied because the evaluation involved 20 different mentoring programs (each one provided an enhanced program and a business-as-usual program). The sample size was 1,334 (668 in enhanced and 666 in business-as-usual mentoring). Parents and CIP completed surveys at baseline, with follow-up surveys at 6, 12, and 18 months. Results comparing the two mentoring conditions showed small effects favoring enhanced mentoring at 12 months for positive self-cognitions and internalizing symptoms, though at 18 months the difference had faded. Substance use showed a medium effect favoring enhanced mentoring at 12 months, and substance use intentions showed a large effect (18-month results were not reported). Lastly, no evidence of differences on delinquency or criminal legal system involvement was found.

To summarize the literature, there is substantial evidence that mentoring has a number of benefits for youth in general, and some evidence of benefits specifically for CIP. The CIP-related evidence is not as strong – not only are there few studies involving CIP with a comparison group, but the findings of those studies are mixed; one study (Herrera et al., 2013) found no evidence of benefits and two studies (ICF International, 2011; Stetler et al., 2023) found evidence of benefits on some outcomes but not others.

It is possible that effective mentoring for CIP requires an approach that recognizes CIPs’ unique challenges. Among the potential challenges is a disrupted attachment relationship with the incarcerated parent (Murray & Murray, 2010). Another possible example is feeling a stigma associated with the incarceration (Phillips & Gates, 2011). There may also be an unwillingness to talk about the incarceration,

either due to pressure from family or concern about peers' reactions (Adalist-Estrin, 2006; Brooks et al., 2013). Brooks et al. (2013) note that adults or other youths may not know what to say about the incarceration and avoid the topic, or unwittingly say things that are unhelpful (e.g., referring to the parent as a "convict"). These issues may be challenging for mentors to navigate and it may be critical to design mentoring programs with these challenges in mind. Examples might include having substantial training around incarceration of family members and structuring programs to avoid premature termination of matches (Jarjoura et al., 2014). It is noteworthy that in only one of the studies reviewed earlier was it clear that the mentoring program was intentionally focused on CIP (Stetler et al., 2023).

### CLICC's Mentoring for CIP: Program Elements

The current evaluation study concerns a mentoring program provided by *Connecting Through Literacy – Incarcerated Parents, Their Children, and Caregivers* (CLICC) – see <https://www.connectingfamilies.org/>. The CLICC mentoring model was explicitly designed to address parental incarceration and is different in important ways from the models represented by prior evaluation research described earlier. Differences include:

- A focus on fostering the child-incarcerated parent connection. According to CLICC's website, "We use mentoring and literacy activities to strengthen communication and deepen bonds between children and their incarcerated parents."
- The use of literacy noted in the prior bullet point.
- Goals focusing on both the child (reducing shame and stigma) and the incarcerated parent (reducing recidivism and preparing to rejoin their family and community).

Elements of the CLICC model include (based on the CLICC website and their submitted proposal):

- Children ages 5-17 with a parent in a Connecticut correctional facility are eligible for the program (as long as the correctional facility participates in the CLICC program). A child must know the parent is incarcerated in order to participate, and all program activities are conducted in English.
- Weekly meetings with trained mentors for both the child and the incarcerated parent. There are different mentors for child and parent; child mentors are volunteers and parent mentors are either CLICC staff or volunteers. Parents typically have group meetings with a mentor in a correctional facility and in the community following release (the same mentor pre- and post-release), whereas the child and mentor meet one-on-one at a convenient community site, usually a library, for one year.
- The child selects books from a Scholastic catalog that the child and incarcerated parent each receive at the beginning of the program. Books are ordered as needed, and as many as six can be ordered at a time. Options include classic books such as the "Clifford" series and "The Grapes of Wrath" as well as new titles. In recent years Scholastic has added books on themes such as empowerment and kindness, as well as graphic novels and game-oriented titles such as the "Minecraft" series. The books provide a way to facilitate communication and connection, as they are read by both the child and incarcerated parent. The child and parent read approximately one book per month while the parent is incarcerated.
- CLICC mentors receive training regarding family incarceration, mentoring knowledge and skills, and the history of CLICC and the CLICC mentoring model. Family incarceration topics include incarceration and recidivism trends in Connecticut; the conspiracy of silence; the potential roles of Adverse Childhood Experiences and resilience for CIPs; sources of stigma and shame for children; challenges faced by CIP caregivers and returning parents; and the Children of

Incarcerated Parents' Bill of Rights. Mentoring knowledge and skills include what mentoring is, why it is valuable, and red flags to look out for; child development; active listening; what empathy is and why it is valuable; and cultural awareness.

- Mentors work with the child and parent on literacy exercises, using a curriculum designed for CLICC. The exercises are intended to build the child's literacy-based interest and skills, to promote communication between the child and parent, and to facilitate opportunities for the parent to continue in their parenting role while incarcerated.
- Children and mentors also engage in other activities such as writing letters to the incarcerated parent, creating art and craft projects, doing homework, playing games, and exploring the library. CLICC mentors are trained to listen and be supportive when children talk about their feelings surrounding the incarceration and/or the incarcerated parent.
- Ideally, mentors meet with the child and parent for approximately six months prior to the parent's release, and continue meeting post-release for the rest of the one-year program period. While pre-release parent meetings are generally in groups, post-release parent meetings are individual.
- CLICC staff provide monitoring and support for mentors and families on a weekly basis.

### Contract Between CLICC and IMRP

As part of its Children with Incarcerated Parents Initiative (<https://ctcip.org>), the University of Connecticut's Institute for Municipal and Regional Policy (IMRP) contracted CLICC to provide mentoring to children with incarcerated parents in Connecticut. Recruitment took place from 2018 to 2021 and evaluation data collection ended in 2022 (one year after recruitment ended). The contract included CLICC's participation in an evaluation study. It is important to note that CLICC's contract with IMRP involved only funding for working with children, and it did not support work done with the incarcerated parents.

### The COVID-19 Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic began during the contract period (spring 2020) and was very disruptive to mentoring activities. CLICC provided the following information on pandemic-related effects: (a) difficulty recruiting new families from March 2020 through the fall of 2022 due to inability of CLICC staff to be admitted to Connecticut correctional facilities (families are primarily recruited through incarcerated parents); (b) CLICC parent mentors were not admitted to facilities for weekly CLICC group meetings during this time, eliminating opportunities to work in person with incarcerated participants on communication and parenting skills and upending a key component of CLICC; (c) meetings between mentors and children were initially canceled (later offered via online meeting applications) and some families withdrew from the program as mentors and families dealt with loss of loved ones, as well as jobs, housing and other critical resources; (d) while families were grateful to have the option of conducting CLICC child mentoring through online meeting software, home-based equipment and internet access were unreliable for some families; (e) privacy was compromised for some children meeting online with mentors as siblings, caregivers and others passed through the child's room or meeting space; and (f) CLICC child mentors faced unanticipated significant need for support by children experiencing the deaths of loved ones, loss of family income and/or housing, fears that their incarcerated parent would die of COVID-19 in prison, and other family mental health crises including suicide threats.



## How CLICC Responded to Pandemic-Related Changes

**Responses judged by CLICC to be successful or somewhat successful.** CLICC judged the following responses to be successful: (a) coordinated recruitment efforts with DOC staff in some facilities, who circulated applications and emailed completed forms to CLICC, giving CLICC the critical information it needed to contact and enroll new families; and (b) with in-person contact discouraged during the pandemic, CLICC moved child mentoring online from April 2020 to October 2022 (mostly via Zoom meeting software), making it possible for mentors and CLICC staff to connect every week with children and caregivers and enabling continuation of a key component of the program. Somewhat-successful responses included: (a) rescheduled child-mentoring sessions where possible during times of family difficulty and holding sessions when mentors and families were ready; (b) encouraged caregivers to create quiet space so that children meeting online could have at least some privacy with their mentors; and (c) encouraged mentors to reach out to CLICC staff for support as needed and CLICC staff connected with 2-1-1, contacts within DOC, local counseling resources, United Ways and other agencies.

**Unsuccessful responses.** CLICC judged the following responses to be unsuccessful: (a) held virtual information sessions through Connecticut's public libraries to recruit caregivers to enroll their families in CLICC; sessions were poorly attended; (b) mailed handouts on talking with your children about the pandemic, self-care tips, and basic information about COVID-19 to parent participants in facilities; CLICC did not receive feedback from all intended recipients so it is not possible to know how many received the material and (c) tried to access what little virtual technology existed in prisons for group meetings, but this was either impractical for DOC or requests were denied by colleges and universities that owned the technology.

## Evaluation of the CLICC Mentoring Program for CIP

### Evaluation Study Design

The purpose of the quantitative outcome evaluation was to assess change in a sample of children with an incarcerated parent or caregiver (CIP) who have participated in CLICC's mentoring program with funding from the IMRP. The evaluation study used a one-group pretest-posttest design. Families participated for 12 months. The data reported here to assess change over time involved surveys by custodial caregivers at baseline and at 12 months. Several quantitative measures (described later) were included on surveys at both time points, allowing pretest-posttest comparison. Data are also reported from youth surveys at baseline to provide information and context about the children in the program.

### Sample

Caregivers completed valid baseline surveys for 51 mentored children. Thirty of those children were eligible to complete youth baseline surveys (i.e., they were at least 8 years old); 21 children completed a baseline survey.

Twenty-seven children had valid caregiver surveys for both baseline and 12-month measurements; this group will be referred to as the "main analysis sample." For two of the children in the analysis sample, caregivers left many items blank on the SDQ. The preset standard was that any scale with more than 20% of items left blank would be excluded from analyses, so these two children were excluded from SDQ analyses (but included in other analyses). Twenty-four children had valid caregiver surveys only

at baseline (the “baseline-only sample”). Potential differences were assessed between the main analysis and baseline-only samples as described later.

See Table 1 for information on child and family demographics for the main analysis sample. Note that demographic comparisons showed that the main analysis sample and baseline-only sample were generally very similar, with only family income showing a statistically significant difference.

**Table 1**

*CIP and Family Baseline Demographics for the Analysis Sample (27 Children) and Baseline-Only Sample (24 Children)*

Variable	Main Analysis Sample		Baseline Only Sample	
Child Age in Years				
Mean (SD)		9.6 (3.2)		9.5 (2.3)
Range		5 - 15		6 - 13
% Age 10 or Below		66.7%		54.2%
Child Gender	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Male	10	37.0%	14	58.3%
Female	16	59.3%	9	37.5%
Left Blank	1	3.7%	1	4.2%
Family Monthly Income <sup>a</sup>				
Less than \$1,000	1	3.7%	3	12.5%
\$1,000 to \$1,499	1	3.7%	6	25.0%
\$1,500 to \$1,999	10	37.0%	3	12.5%
\$2,000 to 2,499	3	11.1%	7	29.2%
\$2,500 to \$2,999	3	11.1%	2	8.3%
\$3,000 to \$3,499	3	11.1%	1	4.2%
\$4,000 or more	3	11.1%	0	0%
Left Blank	3	11.1%	2	8.3%
Length of Parent’s Incarceration				
At least 6 mo./less than 1 year	3	11.1%	4	16.7%
At least 1 year/less than 2	7	25.9%	2	8.3%
At least 2 years/less than 3	2	7.4%	4	16.7%
3 years or more	12	44.4%	12	50.0%
Left Blank	3	11.1%	2	8.3%

Table 1 (Continued)

Variable	Main Analysis Sample		Baseline Only Sample	
Child's Race/Ethnicity (percents sum to more than 100 because respondents could check all that applied)				
Black/African American	15	55.6%	17	70.8%
Latin American/Hispanic	8	29.6%	7	29.2%
White	5	18.5%	5	20.8%
Other Race/Ethnicity	0	0%	2	8.3%
Incarcerated Parent/Caregiver <sup>b</sup>				
Father	19	70.4%	13	54.2%
Mother	3	11.1%	6	25.0%
Stepfather	3	11.1%	4	16.7%
Brother or Sister	0	0%	1	4.2%
Grandparent	1	3.7%	0	0%
Other relative	1	3.7%	2	8.3%
Parent Released by 12 Mo.				
Released	15	55.6%		
Not Released	12	44.4%		

<sup>a</sup>Statistically significant difference between main analysis sample and baseline-only sample based on chi-square test.

<sup>b</sup>Percentages may sum to more than 100 because respondents could indicate more than one relative incarcerated.

## Data Collection

**Informed consent and baseline surveys.** Surveys were completed by children's caregivers and by the children themselves (if age 8 or above). All aspects of survey administration were handled by CLICC staff. Staff were trained in the administration process including introducing the project, informed consent, and how to administer surveys. The process began with informed consent (and youth assent for eligible children). A CLICC staff member worked with the caregiver and children to make sure the informed consent and assent forms, as well as participation in the evaluation study, were understood. This was originally done in-person but when the COVID-19 pandemic began, contact was done via phone or virtual meeting. Following the consent/assent process, CLICC staff worked with caregivers and children to complete the baseline surveys. Respondents had the choice of doing surveys on paper or online; either way, CLICC staff were available to answer questions or, if a respondent preferred, to read survey items to the respondent. If a respondent gave responses out loud, the staff member made sure there was enough privacy so that responses were not overheard. Caregivers received retail gift cards for the completion of each baseline survey. For the caregiver survey the gift card was for \$20 (or \$25 if completing surveys for 3 or more children), and for the youth survey the amount was \$10 (lesser amount because the survey was shorter than the caregiver survey).

**Follow-up surveys.** Follow-up surveys were conducted 6 months and 12 months after the baseline surveys. CLICC staff contacted caregivers to set up meeting times. To be considered valid, the follow-up survey must have been completed within 15 days of the 6- or 12-month anniversary of the baseline survey. Gift card amounts for 6-month surveys were the same as for baseline surveys; 12-month survey amounts were increased by \$5 for youth surveys and \$10 for caregiver surveys.

The main analyses presented later focus on the 27 children for whom there were matching baseline and 12-month surveys. Six-month surveys were excluded due to a low completion rate; baseline and 6-month surveys could be matched for only 17 children, and 6-month and 12-month surveys could be matched for only 12 children.

### Caregiver-Reported Outcome Variables

Five quantitative outcome measures included in baseline and 12-month caregiver surveys were used to examine change. These measures were chosen based on the background provided earlier. Two measures dealt with mental health, an important issue for CIP (Kremer et al., 2021; Wildeman et al., 2018); one concerned willingness to talk about the incarcerated parent (Adalist-Estrin, 2006; Brooks et al., 2013); and two measures dealt with reading because the program was literacy-based.

Unless otherwise noted the response options for items were ‘Yes’ (scored a 2), ‘Sometimes’ (scored a 1), or ‘No’ (scored a 0). Table 2 provides Cronbach’s alpha internal consistency reliabilities for each scale. The five measures were:

- **Reading Motivation.** The 6-item reading motivation scale was adapted from Baker and Scher (2002). It was adapted for the current study by (a) shortening the scale from 16 items to six, (b) using a three-point response scale (Yes/Sometimes/No), and (c) by changing it from a self-report to a caregiver-report format. Sample items include “My child thinks reading is a good way to spend time” and “My child likes to get books from the library or school.” Coefficient alpha reliability shown in Table 2 was high at .86.
- **Family Reading.** The 12-item family reading scale was adapted from YouGov (n.d.) by shortening the scale slightly. Sample items included “Have print books in my home available for him/her” and “Give books to him/her as gifts.” Reliability was reasonably good at alpha = .69.
- **Child’s Willingness to Talk About Incarcerated Parent.** A 6-item “willingness to talk about the incarcerated parent” scale was created for the present study. The scale was based on literature regarding the “conspiracy of silence” (e.g., Kampfner, 1995). Sample items included “My child does not seem to want to discuss the parent/caregiver’s incarceration with me” (reverse-scored) and “My child has somebody he/she can talk to about the parent/caregiver’s incarceration.” Reliability was low with an alpha of only .54.
- **Emotions (Internalizing) and Behavior (Externalizing) Difficulties.** The Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ; Aarø et al., 2022; Goodman, 1997) was used as a measure of internalizing and externalizing difficulties. The SDQ comes in several versions; the ‘parent or teacher’ version was used in the current study. There are also versions for different age groups. The current study used both the version for ages 4-10 and 11-17, which have slightly different wording. There are 25 items, 20 of which focus on difficulties including emotional symptoms (5 items, e.g., “Many worries or often seems worried”), conduct problems (5 items, e.g., “Often loses temper”), hyperactivity/inattention (5 items, e.g., “Restless, overactive, cannot stay still for long”), and peer relationship problems (5 items, e.g., “Would rather be alone than with other youth”). Response options included ‘Certainly true’ (2), ‘Somewhat true’ (1), and ‘Not true’ (0). The problems scale showed good reliability, alpha = .76.
- **Prosocial Behavior.** The SDQ included a 5-item prosocial behavior scale with items such as “Considerate of other people’s feelings.” Prosocial behavior scale showed good reliability with alpha = .83.

## Youth-Reported Scales

The youth baseline survey included four scales, two of which were similar to caregiver-reported measures (reading motivation and willingness to talk). The other two scales were based on background literature discussed earlier including feeling stigmatized (Phillips & Gates, 2011) and feelings of attachment to the incarcerated parent (Murray & Murray, 2010).

Response options for items were ‘Yes’ (scored a 2), ‘Sometimes’ (scored a 1), or ‘No’ (scored a 0). All items are shown in the Appendix along with descriptive statistics for each item (scale scores are not reported).

- **Reading Motivation.** The 6-item reading motivation scale was essentially the same as the caregiver-report version but phrased in the first person (e.g., “I think reading is a good way to spend time”).
- **Willingness to Talk About Incarcerated Parent.** Youths responded to nine items regarding talking about the incarcerated parent. Three items concerned the family’s expectations, e.g., “My family is Ok with it if I talk to others about my parent.” Another three items dealt with self-protection, e.g., “I worry that if I talk to other kids about my parent they’ll be mean or use it against me,” and the final three items focused on availability of someone to talk to, e.g., “I have friends who I can talk to about my parent if I want to.”
- **Stigmatization.** The stigmatization measure included 15 items. Nine items focused on devaluation, e.g., “Kids with parents in jail or prison will probably end up in prison too.” These items did not ask the youth to report feelings about themselves, but rather about children with an incarcerated parent in general. There were six items on how the youth coped with stigmatization and all included the stem “Because my parent is in jail or prison...”. Two items concerned avoidant coping, e.g., “I avoid getting too friendly with other kids.” Four items dealt with detachment from the incarcerated parent, e.g., “I want to be different from my parent.”
- **Attachment to Incarcerated Parent.** Nine items measured the youth’s attachment to the incarcerated parent, including three items on secure attachment (e.g., “When I think about my parent I feel good”), three on insecure-avoidant attachment (e.g., “I try to avoid thinking about my parent”), and three on insecure-ambivalent attachment (e.g., “Sometimes I worry that my parent will leave me for good”).

## Results

### Youth Baseline Survey Results

Descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations) appear in the Appendix for each item in the youth baseline survey. Results are based on 21 youth respondents who were age 8 or higher, had parental consent, and who assented to participate. Items indicating negative thoughts or feelings appear in the Appendix in italics. This distinction is important because low mean scores for these items would show a lack of negative thoughts/feelings.

**Reading.** Means generally show youths had positive feelings toward books and reading (or lack of negative thoughts and feelings). Means for positive items are generally well above 1.0 (the scale midpoint) and the one negative item had a mean of only 0.48.

**Table 2***Outcome Variable Scales*

Scale	# Items	Reliability <sup>a</sup>
Reading Motivation	6	.86
Family Reading	12	.69
Child's Willingness to Talk about the Incarcerated Parent/Caregiver	6	.54
Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ); two scores:		
Difficulties (emotional, conduct, hyperactivity/inattentive, and peer difficulties)	20	.76
Prosocial Behavior	5	.83

<sup>a</sup>Cronbach's alpha internal consistency reliabilities were based on the 51 responses from the main analysis sample and baseline-only sample combined.

**Stigma.** For *devaluation*, means indicate that youths did not feel devalued by the parent's incarceration; means were very high for positive items and very low for negative items. Responses also indicated low levels of *avoidant coping*. Results for items focusing on *detachment from the incarcerated parent* are mixed. One item showed lack of detachment (mean of 0.29 for "I try not to think about my parent"). Youths did indicate wanting to be different from the parent (mean of 1.19) and seeing the parent's situation as something to avoid (mean of 1.62). While these items were written with the intention of tapping detachment, the instrument is only being used for the first time in this study. The two items may reflect more about a healthy focus on avoiding incarceration than on psychologically detaching from the parent.

**Attachment.** Means indicate youths' mixed feelings about secure attachment to the incarcerated parent. For example, results showed a high mean of 1.57 for "When I think about my parent I feel good" vs. a relatively low mean of 0.84 for "I know my parent loves me." Regarding *insecure attachment – avoidant*, feelings were mixed with means indicating a degree of avoidance (the item, *I can get along alright without my parent's help or advice* had a mean of 1.24). Lastly, regarding *insecure attachment – ambivalent*, youths did not indicate ambivalence, showing consistently low mean scores for items.

**Silence/Willingness to talk about incarcerated parent.** Means for two of the three items about *family expectations* are near the middle ("Sometimes") of the scale, suggesting some hesitance within families to discuss the parent's incarceration. For *self-protection* items, means are similar to those for family expectations, suggesting some hesitance for others to know about the parent's incarceration. Lastly, means for the three items about *availability of someone to talk to* indicate that youths generally said they have people they can talk to about the parent's incarceration.

#### Caregiver-Reported Outcomes: Baseline Results

Exploratory comparisons were done for baseline scores between the main analysis sample and the baseline-only sample using independent-samples *t*-tests; see Table 3. If there are substantial differences between samples, it would suggest that findings regarding change in the main analysis sample may not generalize to the broader group of children served.

Baseline scores were generally similar for the two groups. The only variable showing a statistically significant difference was SDQ Prosocial Behavior; the baseline-only sample had significantly higher prosocial behavior at baseline than did the analysis sample). In combination with the demographic similarity shown earlier (see Table 1), these comparisons suggest relatively little difference between the children for which change is assessed (main analysis sample) and children whose families did not complete the study. This similarity, in combination with relatively similar demographics shown in Table 1, supports the potential for generalizability from the main analysis sample to the larger group of children served by CLICC.

**Table 3**

*Baseline Survey Comparisons Between Main Analysis Sample (N = 27) and Baseline-Only Sample (N = 24)*

Variable	Possible Range	Main-Analysis Mean (SD)	Baseline-Only Mean (SD)	Effect Size <sup>a</sup>	Sig.
Reading Motivation/Interest	0-2	1.52 (.49)	1.34 (.59)	.33	n.s.
Family Reading	0-2	1.45 (.33)	1.59 (.32)	-.42	n.s.
Child's Willingness to Talk	0-2	1.57 (.38)	1.57 (.32)	.01	n.s.
SDQ Difficulties	0-40	9.71 (5.79)	9.46 (5.32)	.01	n.s.
SDQ Prosocial Behavior	0-10	7.83 (2.02)	8.96 (1.78)	-.58	*

**Note.** 'n.s.' = statistically nonsignificant change based on an independent-samples *t*-test.

<sup>a</sup>Effect size indexed by Hedge's *g* (correction of Cohen's *d*), a standardized mean difference. Positive values indicate higher means for the main-analysis sample, whereas negative values indicate higher scores for the baseline-only sample.

\**p* < .05

### Main Analysis: Change from Baseline to 12 Months on Caregiver-Reported Outcomes

The main analysis sample was used to assess change from baseline to 12 months on the five outcome measures described in Table 2 (total scores were created for each outcome). Means for each outcome were computed at baseline and at 12 months, and the difference was used as a measure of change. Some children may change more than others, and the difference in means tells whether the group changed on average over one year. The means are shown in Table 4. Repeated-measures *t*-tests were conducted to test for significant differences with  $\alpha = .05$ .

One of the five outcomes, SDQ Difficulties, showed a statistically significant ( $p < .05$ ) change. The mean Difficulties score at 12 months was significantly lower than at baseline, as shown in Table 4.

It is important to note that for three of the scales (Reading Motivation/Interest, Family Reading, and Child's Willingness to Talk about the Incarcerated Parent/Caregiver) the mean baseline scores were quite high. Those three scales all had a maximum possible score of 2 (minimum possible score was 0), and all three scales showed baseline means around 1.5, well above the scale midpoint of 1. This finding



suggests that for those scales there was not much room for improvement from baseline, making it relatively unlikely that a significant change would be found.

**Table 4**

*Longitudinal Mean Comparisons on Outcome Variables Using the Main Analysis Sample (N = 27) – Change from Baseline to 12 Months*

Variable	N	Possible Range	Baseline Mean (SD)	12-Month Mean (SD)	Effect Size <sup>a</sup>	Sig.
Reading Motivation/Interest	27	0-2	1.52 (.49)	1.57 (.36)	.12	n.s.
Family Reading	27	0-2	1.45 (.33)	1.52 (.35)	.28	n.s.
Child's Willingness to Talk	27	0-2	1.57 (.38)	1.57 (.38)	-.02	n.s.
SDQ Difficulties	25	0-40	9.71 (5.79)	7.83 (6.03)	-.43	*
SDQ Prosocial Behavior	25	0-10	7.83 (2.02)	8.35 (1.72)	.34	n.s.

**Note.** 'n.s.' = statistically nonsignificant change based on a repeated-measures *t*-test.

<sup>a</sup>Effect size indexed by Hedge's *g* (correction of Cohen's *d*), a standardized mean difference. Positive values indicate a higher mean at 12 months, whereas negative values indicate a lower mean at 12 months.

\**p* < .05

## Conclusion

The current evaluation study focused on the CLICC mentoring program for CIP. There are previous evaluation studies of mentoring programs, at least one of which was designed to address issues around parental incarceration (Stelter et al., 2023). These evaluation studies have shown some evidence that mentoring can have positive effects on children with incarcerated parents (ICF International, 2011; Stelter et al., 2023).

CLICC's program is different from other programs described in previous evaluations in that (a) it focuses on fostering the connection between the child and the incarcerated parent by explicitly including the parent in the program and (b) it uses literacy, having both the child and parent read the same books as a focal point for communication.

Results from the pretest-posttest analysis are promising despite uncertainties discussed in the next paragraph. The analyses reported here show evidence of positive change in CIP served by CLICC's mentoring program – the CIPs' difficulties, on average, decreased over the 12-month study period. Specific types of difficulties measured by the SDQ include emotional (e.g., unhappy, depressed or tearful), conduct (e.g., fighting), hyperactivity/inattentive (e.g., difficulty staying still), and peer difficulties (e.g., prefers being alone than with other youth). Results for the SDQ Difficulties score indicate that children served by CLICC declined significantly in a total score of their difficulties. This finding is consistent with the



idea that CLICC's mentoring program benefited the youths. Other outcomes such as reading motivation and prosocial behavior did not show significant change.

Several limitations should be considered when interpreting the evaluation study's results. First, an important limitation is the lack of a control group. Studies with control groups provide the strongest evidence because they allow researchers to see what happens with people who do not get a program. It is always possible that, for a variety of reasons, there might be some change in average scores over time even without the program, and a control group would show that. If so, having a control group allows a researcher to see whether the program group changed more than the control group. Second, while only one of five outcome variables showed a significant change, a limiting factor noted earlier for some of the outcomes is that scores were relatively high to begin with, making it difficult to demonstrate positive change. It is also unclear whether these high average scores are representative of CIPs outside the sample for this study. Finally, the COVID-19 pandemic occurred during the evaluation study. Response to the pandemic made it more difficult to carry out mentoring activities, but there is no way to know how it might have affected the evaluation study findings; for example, it is possible that inability to meet in-person with caregivers reduced the amount of data collected making it harder to show significant positive effects.

Despite the limitations of the present study, the positive result for the SDQ Difficulties scale supports the continued funding and evaluation of the CLICC mentoring model. The CLICC model's focus on the child-incarcerated parent relationship is consistent with the Bill of Rights for Children with Incarcerated Parents (San Francisco Children of Incarcerated Parents Partnership [SFCIPP], n.d., <https://www.baycipp.com/bill-of-rights>) which includes "I have the right to a lifelong relationship with my parent" (also note that IMRP's CTCIP initiative has a set of guiding principles, one of which is "The relationship between the child and the incarcerated parent should be supported" – see <https://imrp.dpp.uconn.edu/ctcip/>). The child-parent relationship has the potential to provide support to children which can promote resilience in the face of stressful and traumatic experiences. There is evidence that having a higher quality relationship with an incarcerated parent is associated with greater life purpose and lower depression and loneliness (Kremer et al., 2021). It is possible that the reduction in difficulties found in the current sample was due to fostering of relationships with parents. Other features of CLICC's model might also be beneficial. The mentors themselves can provide support, and the literacy component can help to build academic skills (note that increases in reading-related outcomes were not shown in the current evaluation, but that may be because baseline scores on these variables were quite high).

Future work should be undertaken to more fully evaluate the CLICC mentoring model. One focus of additional evaluation should be to improve on outcome evaluation by addressing the limitations of the current study. Improvements could include a control group and a larger sample of children. The control group (with random assignment) would allow a causal analysis of whether changes over time can be attributed with greater certainty to the mentoring. A second focus should be on formative evaluation, which might use qualitative methods such as interviewing children, parents, and mentors about their experiences, what they find helpful, and what might be improved. A third focus of future work should address a part of the mentoring model not considered in the current evaluation – effects on the incarcerated parents. Reduced recidivism of parents is an explicit goal of the CLICC model (CLICC, 2022). There is evidence that connection to family and children while in prison and after release is associated with reduced recidivism (e.g., Barrick et al., 2014). While the current study focused only on children, additional work should evaluate whether involvement in mentoring and connection to their children results in better outcomes for parents.

## Summary

The purpose of the quantitative outcome evaluation was to assess change in a sample of children with an incarcerated parent or caregiver (CIP) who have participated in CLICC's mentoring program with funding from the IMRP. CLICC's model is unique among CIP mentoring models in the existing literature in that it includes the incarcerated parent, using literacy to foster communication and the parent-child relationship.

One of five outcome measures, SDQ difficulties (e.g., including emotional, behavioral, attentional, and relationship problems), showed a statistically significant change. Mean difficulties at 12 months were significantly lower than at baseline. Limitations of the current evaluation study include the lack of a control group, small sample size, and unknown effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. While there is uncertainty about interpretation due to limitations, results are promising and support additional funding and evaluation of the CLICC mentoring model for CIP.

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## Appendix: Descriptive Statistics for Youth Baseline Survey Items

Results in the Appendix are based on a sample size of 21.

Items below used a three-point rating scale:

- 2 = Yes
- 1 = Sometimes
- 0 = No

Note: *Italicized items indicate negative feelings.*

### Reading Scale

Please tell us how you feel about reading.

	<b>Mean (SD)</b>
1. I like to read	1.52 (0.68)
2. I think reading is a good way to spend time.	1.38 (0.67)
3. I would like to get books for presents.	1.10 (0.77)
4. I would like to get books from the library or school.	1.76 (0.54)
5. <i>I think reading is boring.</i>	0.48 (0.68)
6. Reading is easy for me.	1.43 (0.51)

### Stigma - Devaluation

1. Kids with a parent in jail or prison are just as good as other kids.	1.43 (0.75)
2. <i>Kids with parents in jail or prison will probably end up in prison too.</i>	0.10 (0.30)
3. I feel Ok being around people who know my parent is in jail or prison.	1.76 (0.44)
4. <i>I feel bad about myself because my parent is in jail or prison.</i>	0.29 (0.64)
5. I am a good person.	1.95 (0.22)
6. There are a lot of things I am good at.	1.76 (0.54)

### Stigma – Avoidant Coping

Because my parent is in jail or prison:

<i>...I avoid getting too friendly with other kids.</i>	0.29 (0.64)
<i>...I avoid situations where people might talk about me and my parent.</i>	0.71 (0.78)

### Stigma – Detachment from Incarcerated Parent

	<b>Mean (SD)</b>
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Because my parent is in jail or prison: ... <i>I want to be different from my parent.</i>	1.19 (0.87)
... I have learned some positive lessons.	1.90 (0.30)
... <i>I try not to think about my parent.</i>	0.29 (0.64)
... I see my parent's situation as something I will avoid.	1.62 (0.81)

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### **Attachment - Secure**

1. When I think about my parent I feel good.	1.57 (0.75)
2. I know my parent loves me.	2.00 (0.00)
3. When I'm worried, it helps to think about or talk to my parent.	1.38 (0.67)

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### **Attachment – Insecure-Avoidant**

4. <i>I try to avoid thinking about my parent.</i>	0.52 (0.81)
5. <i>I have learned not to depend on my parent.</i>	0.84 (0.90)
6. <i>I can get along alright without my parent's help or advice.</i>	1.24 (0.77)

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### **Attachment – Insecure-Ambivalent**

7. <i>Thinking about being around my parent makes me feel a little uncomfortable.</i>	0.29 (0.64)
8. <i>I doubt my parent can do a good job of parenting.</i>	0.48 (0.87)
9. <i>Sometimes I worry that my parent will leave me for good.</i>	0.20 (0.62)

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## Silence/Willingness to Talk about Incarcerated Parent – Family Expectations

Some families talk about things to other people, and some families don't. Think about how adults in your family feel about talking about your parent who is in jail or prison.

	<b>Mean (SD)</b>
My family is Ok with it if I talk to others about my parent.	1.00 (0.84)
In my family we talk to each other about my parent.	1.19 (0.75)
<i>My family tells me not to talk to anyone about my parent being in jail or prison.</i>	<i>0.55 (0.76)</i>

## Silence/Willingness to Talk about Incarcerated Parent – Self-Protection

Now think about how you feel about talking about your parent who is in jail or prison.

<i>I worry that if I talk to other kids about my parent they'll be mean or use it against me.</i>	<i>0.33 (0.66)</i>
I would be Ok with my teachers knowing about my parent being in jail or prison.	1.10 (0.94)
I'm Ok with talking to people about my parent.	1.10 (0.83)

## Silence/Willingness to Talk about Incarcerated Parent – Availability of Someone to Talk To

These questions are about having people you can talk to about your parent in jail or prison.

I have friends who I can talk to about my parent if I want to.	1.19 (0.93)
There are adults I feel Ok talking to about my parent.	1.57 (0.68)
I have somebody to talk to who understands how I feel about my parent.	1.71 (0.56)