

## BEYOND THE BARS:

### THE VOICES OF CHILDREN WITH INCARCERATED PARENTS

#### ISSUE 1: MAINTAINING CONTACT

#### MYTH OR TRUTH?

**Children with incarcerated parents are better off not having contact with their incarcerated parent.**

#### MYTH!

Most research studies state that maintaining regular contact with an incarcerated parent:

- Increases child's self esteem
- Helps child to better cope with separation from their parent
- Promotes healthy brain development in children, leading to "the ability...to achieve self-control"<sup>1</sup>



#### MEET NISHKA

*Nishka is a 21-year-old senior at CCSU studying Criminology and Spanish. When Nishka graduates college she hopes to work in youth services.*

#### INTERVIEW WITH NISHKA

**Q: Which one of your parents has been incarcerated?**

**A: Dad.**

**Q: How long was his incarceration?**

**A: Nine years.**

**Q: Do you have brothers or sisters? If so, how was your relationship with them or other family members affected by the incarceration?**

**A: My older brother took on a father role and he became really overprotective, which would cause conflict. Especially in terms of dating.**

- Failure to continually foster bonds with an incarcerated parent heightens risk of depression and anxiety as well as hinders academic achievement.
- When an infant or toddler experiences separation from a primary caregiver, the risk of social, emotional, and health issues increase.
- Direct contact visits — where touch is honored — promotes healthy parent-child attachment, necessary to child development.

**Q: How often did you communicate with your parent?**

**A: Every two weeks we had phone calls and we visited about five times a year. We also wrote letters but I don't really remember the letters. I didn't really like the letters. When my dad wrote letters they would be about three pages and say the same thing: apologizing. It got overwhelming.**

#### Did you know...?

**According to a study conducted at the Bedford Hills Prison in New York, "71% of infants who lived with their mothers in a prison nursery developed secure attachment."**

**Q: Was visiting important to you? Why?**

**A: Because I could actually touch my dad and hug him. When talking in person you can express yourself more and it's totally different from talking on the phone or writing a letter. When we'd go visit I would try to look really pretty, my mom would do my hair the night before and I would get all dressed up. We would take pictures during visits and then I really looked forward to receiving it in the mail a few weeks later. Not sure if Dad had to pay for the photos or earn them in some way.**

<sup>1</sup>Reckman, L., & Rothstein, D. (2012). "A Voice for the Young Child with an Incarcerated Parent." Children's Rights Litigation.

#### TO LEARN MORE...

Adalist-Estrin, A. "Visiting Mom or Dad: The Child's Perspective." Children of Prisoners Library via fcnetwork.org.

Christian, S. "Children of Incarcerated Parents." National Conference of State Legislatures via ncsf.org.

Diamond, S. "Prison Nursery Programs: Literature Review and Fact Sheet for CT" via cga.ct.gov.

Reckman, L. & Rothstein, D. "A Voice for the Young Child with an Incarcerated Parent." Children's Rights Litigation via americanbar.org