

COMMON ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT CIPs

Below is background information that contributes to the beliefs of the CIP Task Force and that influenced the formation of our recommendations:

When members of the CIP Task Force gathered to discuss CIP conditions we realized that there are myths, assumptions and various beliefs that surface in the literature, conversations and reading that may be held by the public, professionals and practitioners about Children with Incarcerated Parents. We discussed and debated the common assumptions about CIPs (presented below) which shaped our thinking and ultimately influenced our recommendations for lessening the impacts to children whose parent(s) are incarcerated. Recommendations are presented later in the body of the report.

1. CIPs have an unhealthy future.

“A child’s reaction varies over time as he grieves the loss of the parent.”¹ Children’s negative outcomes and effects from conditions of separation, violence and poverty can be overcome when there is attention paid to children during the parent’s confinement and also during reunification upon release of the parent from prison. *The CIP Task Force recognizes that incarceration may put some children at risk; however, our experience leads us to believe that it is the presence of Developmental Assets and protective factors in the child’s life that will allow some children to be more resilient in response to these risks. The relationship between the CIP, his/her caregiver, and other supports significantly influences a child’s resiliency and future outcomes.*

2. CIPs are traumatized.

A parent’s arrest may be frightening to a child. However we have limited data on the more immediate impacts because neither law enforcement nor correctional agencies are required to gather information about the children of arrested or incarcerated parents.² *What CIP Task Force committee members have experienced is that some children are resilient and may not suffer unduly from a parent’s arrest and incarceration while others may experience immediate and ongoing trauma. We do believe that there are profound risks to a child after the initial arrest occurs, which may introduce conditions such as: separation from a primary caregiver; not being placed with an appropriate caregiver; and not being identified as a CIP (i.e. as a result of not being present at the arrest) and thus not being placed in a timely way with a caregiver.*

3. CIPs are future juvenile delinquents.

Among youth serving a sentence in the AZ Dept of Juvenile Corrections, as of the end of calendar year 2006, 55.3% of girls and 47.7% of boys have an adult family member who had been incarcerated in the youth’s life. ³ *However, the CIP Task Force believes that there is evidence that parental incarceration is but ONE of a number of potential risk factors for delinquency, youth criminal activity, and incarceration as an adult. There is also evidence from various criminology researchers that contradicts the presumption that CIPs are destined to be multi-generational offenders. ⁴ Each child must be understood in the context of his/her life and not stereotyped as a future delinquent child.*

4. CIPs should not have contact with the imprisoned parent.

Some people think that CIPs should not have contact with an incarcerated parent for a variety of reasons, including a parent’s possible negative influence, the frightfulness of a prison setting and negative behaviors that a CIP might display after contact with the parent. However, many programs and child development experts advocate that all children are entitled to continue a face-to-face or long distance relationship with the incarcerated parent. The CIP Task Force supports contact if it is in the best interest of the child, a conclusion based on numerous sources the group researched and its professional experience working with children and families with incarcerated parents. *The CIP Task Force recommends that more accessible forms of communication strategies such as SKYPE, letter writing, video-*

conferencing, phone cards, etc. should be made available to CIPs in order to supplement and/or replace face-to-face contact. Some communication tools, like SKYPE and video-conferencing may have the added benefit of being less costly for a child and his/her imprisoned parent and in some situations save institutional resources such as guards who supervise prison visits.

5. Local CIPs are placed by Child Protective Services (CPS).

CPS only takes custody of CIPs when there is no acceptable substitute caregiver that can be identified and located upon a parent’s arrest. According to members of the Task Force as well as state and national data, the majority of children are informally placed with relatives and friends.⁵ In a report by CPS to the Task Force in 2009, the caseworker stated that 80% of CIPs are not in the CPS system. Likewise law enforcement is not in a position in every instance to seek out appropriate caregivers, place minor children, or make placement referrals. As a result of the gap in services to identify, place and monitor CIPs, *the CIP Task Force believes that a majority of CIPs are hidden from CPS, as there is no formal process for placement, supervision, oversight or follow-up of informal caregiving situations.*

6. CIPs are often placed in foster care when parents aren’t available for caregiving.

In Arizona, according to a survey conducted in 2005, only 3% of children are placed in foster care.⁶ The few children who are placed in foster care will benefit from the greater likelihood of receiving the state-funded services that they need. *The CIP Task Force predicts that the current funding environment will contribute to greater numbers of CIPs being cared for by relatives because relative caregivers reduce state budgets since they (relative caregivers), are ineligible for state funded services.*

7. CIPs are impacted equally by either a father or mother’s imprisonment.

Both a mother’s and father’s imprisonment affect CIPs but in different ways depending upon who becomes the caregiver for the children. A father’s imprisonment, which in Arizona averages 12 years, frequently changes a family’s financial stability. A family loses a father’s wages and/or child support. When a father is incarcerated, the primary caregiver is frequently the mother. However, when the mother is incarcerated, either the father, or more frequently a relative, becomes the primary caregiver. *The growing number of female prisoners at a 10% annual rate in Arizona concerns the CIP Task Force because of the following possible impacts of a mother’s incarceration. ⁷When a mother is imprisoned and the father is not available for caregiving, the child loses her/his parental caregiver. When this happens, a child’s life may be uncertain and disrupted because the child is dependent upon who is appointed or who volunteers to be the primary caregiver. ⁸Issues about permanency planning may need attention depending upon the length of the mother’s imprisonment.*

8. CIPs placed with grandparents will experience the same unhealthy childrearing practices their parents experienced.

When a CIP's parent commits a crime, the public may reason that the prisoner's parent, (the CIP's grandparent), failed to raise their child, the CIP's parent, "properly". This may lead people to think that the CIP is doomed to fail, just like his/her parent if placed with a grandparent. Not all grandparents are suitable CIP caregivers, and some have learned from their past challenges with parenting. Financial hardships often plague and influence the care grandparents may be able to give. However, the research shows that CIPs who live with grandparents are NO MORE likely and often LESS LIKELY to experience abuse, to be neglected or to run away from a relative's home than those CIPs who are placed with non-relative caregivers.⁹ Kinship caregivers, such as grandparents, can be successful in meeting the needs of CIPs and improving the lives of these children.

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