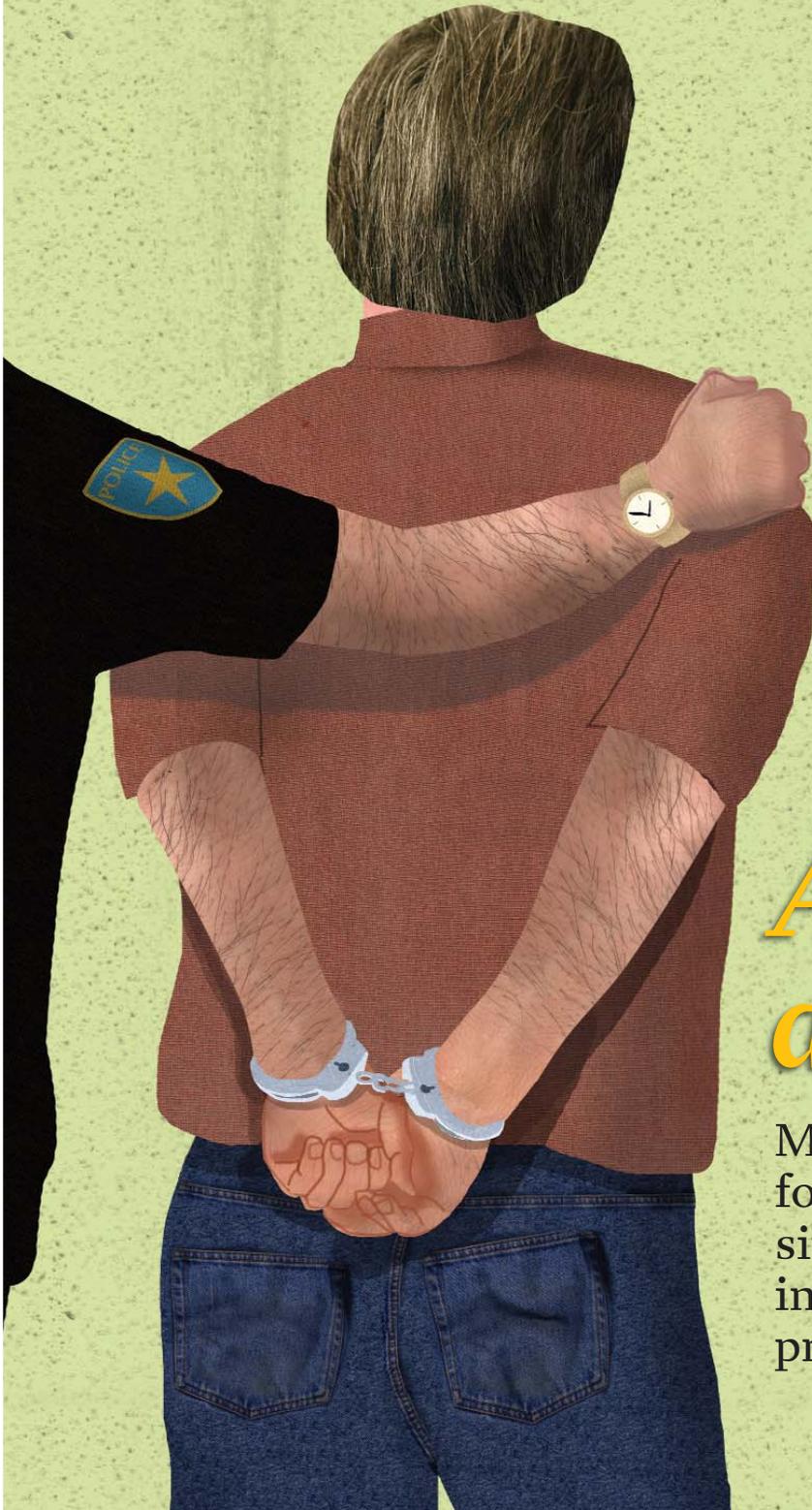


THE CHICAGO REPORTER

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Always an afterthought

More than a year after a call for statewide hearings, the situation for children with incarcerated parents remains problematic. *page 8*



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ALSO INSIDE: BUY ORGANIC—JUST NOT HERE *page 18*

THE CHICAGO REPORTER

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332 S. Michigan Ave., Suite 500
Chicago, Illinois 60604
(312) 427-4830 Fax: (312) 427-6130
editor@chicagoreporter.com

www.chicagoreporter.com

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Sherri Tillman co-owns A Natural Harvest Health Food Store & Deli, a 26-year-old South Shore grocer, cafe and one of the South Side's few places to get organic food. Photo by Vince Munyon.

On the cover

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On the cover: Illustration by Dennis Nishi

In the next issue

In its November/December issue, *The Chicago Reporter* will take a look at whether the government has made good on its promises to fallen military servicemen who enlisted as immigrants. The investigation will examine what benefits are extended to family members and whether they actually get them. The Reporter will also investigate whether area energy providers are adding to the poor health of Chicagoans, particularly those who are poor or minorities.

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WE TREAD WHERE MAINSTREAM MEDIA WON'T

IN CHILDREN'S BEST INTEREST

In many ways, children who have an incarcerated parent are like children involved in a messy divorce. Children in both situations may feel ashamed, blame themselves for their parents' situation, misbehave or struggle in school.

When children of divorce need help, there's a safety net waiting to catch them. The legal process mandates visitation with their noncustodial parent, counseling for the emotional tidal wave, money for school supplies and clothes, and the promise of a safe place to live. In some cases, the court appoints a guardian ad litem to represent the children—attorneys who aren't beholden to mom or dad but act in the best interest of the children.

But when a parent is hauled off to prison, often for a lengthy period of time, there's no parenting plan, no demands for visitation, no



Alden K. Loury
Editor and Publisher

Opinions expressed by the editor and publisher are his own.

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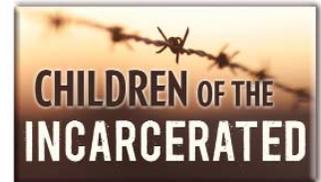
orders for financial support and no lawyers appointed to protect the children's rights. The families are often left to

figure it out on their own as reporter Jeff Kelly Lowenstein details in this issue's cover story, "Not a priority." Few institutions in the criminal justice system are proactive on behalf of these children. There is little coordination between government agencies and nonprofits that might help fill in the gaps.

As with children of divorce, the separation between a child and parent should be enough of a compelling reason for children of the incarcerated and their advocates to demand similar attention to details like visitation, financial support and therapy. Some might call taking such actions soft on crime. But ignoring those needs only serves to extend the punishment of the incarcerated parents to their innocent children.

To me, that sounds like being soft on common sense.

—Alden K. Loury



Across the nation, children of the incarcerated, as much as their parents, bear the consequences of misdeeds or mistakes. They are disproportionately poor, African American or Latino and, for many, their lives are shaped by the same cycle of poverty, violence and recidivism that ensnares their parents.

Community Renewal Society, publisher of *The Chicago Reporter*, hopes to stop this cycle by pursuing a campaign of public education, civic engagement and direct advocacy to ensure that the needs of these children are met. The reports in this issue are part of an investigative series by the Reporter and our sister publication *Catalyst Chicago* that looks at the lives of children whose parents are or have been behind bars. The articles, in turn, will inform the work of Civic Action, Community Renewal's organizing and advocacy arm, to build a broad-based regional coalition to help these children.

In its series on children with incarcerated parents, the Reporter chose to withhold the names and identifiable photographs of all children younger than 17 out of concern for their privacy. Pseudonyms are used in all cases, even though caregivers of some children gave the Reporter permission to use real names. Those who are older are also not named when they requested that their identities be protected.

Reporter News

Reporter **Fernando Díaz** has been named the 2008 Emerging Journalist of the Year by the National Association of Hispanic Journalists. Díaz was honored at the association's 23rd annual Noche de Triunfos Journalism Awards Gala on Sept. 12 at the National Press Club in Washington, D.C.

Among the reasons Díaz was selected was for his "desire to converge to other media platforms, develop [*The Chicago Reporter's*] Internet coverage, adapt stories for Spanish-language television and uncover information that the entire [Latino] community should know," according to a letter by Iván Román, executive director of the association.

Reporter **Jeff Kelly Lowenstein** has been named a 2008 Ochberg Fellow by the Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma. The fellowship allows Kelly Lowenstein, who covers health for the Reporter, to participate in a weeklong seminar this fall at the annual conference of the International Society of Traumatic Stress Studies.

Kelly Lowenstein was among just nine journalists selected from around the globe, including reporters from Colombia, the United Kingdom and New Zealand, to receive this fellowship. The Dart Center is a global network of journalists, journalism educators and health professionals dedicated to improving media coverage of trauma, conflict and tragedy.

In the coming months, the Reporter will introduce more multimedia and interactive content on its Web site. In September, the Reporter launched tcrBLOG, the official blog of the Reporter.

Visit <http://chicagoreporter.typepad.com> for insight and context on the news of the day. The Reporter will use the blog to break news and to cover this year's historic presidential election, all with its unique blend of computer-assisted, investigative reporting and focus on race and poverty. Check back often and share your comments with the Reporter and other readers.

In addition, Editor and Publisher **Alden K. Loury** has been added to *Huffington Post Chicago's* lineup of bloggers.

Nailing a job

The news:

In July, the unemployment rate for Illinois rose for the third straight month to 7.3 percent, up 2.2 percent from July of last year, according to the Illinois Department of Employment Security. The number of unemployed stood at 491,300, increasing by 27,900 between June and July.

Behind the news:

Latinos may be feeling the squeeze more than most. According to the Illinois Department of Employment Security, 10 out of 11 Illinois industries with more than 10,000 workers reported employment losses in July. Industries hit hardest during the past year were construction, manufacturing and finance—sectors which, according to census data, employed the highest percentages of Latinos.

Illinois has lost 10,000 construction, 5,500 manufacturing and 6,000 finance jobs in the last year, according to the Illinois Department of Employment Security.

Latinos represented 17 percent of those employed in construction and 23 percent in manufacturing, while they made up 9 percent in finance.

The “Latino Labor Report, 2008” by the Pew Hispanic Center, a nonpartisan research organization, reported that the recent negative trend in the construction industry has especially hurt foreign-born Latinos, who depend on the industry jobs more than native-borns.

“We found most of the impact was on foreign-born workers and Mexican workers,” said Rakesh Kochhar, associate director for research at the Pew Hispanic Center. “The construction industry is very important to foreign-born Latinos.”

—Matthew Hendrickson

Starbucks closings: grounds for concern

The news:

After weeks of rumors, Starbucks Coffee Company released an official statement this summer listing about 600 stores that the Seattle-based coffee giant will close.

Behind the news:

The departure of Starbucks in some Chicago neighborhoods means people will have to travel farther to get coffee. An analysis by *The Chicago Reporter* shows that black neighborhoods, which have fewer Starbucks to begin with, will have higher rates of closure than white, Latino or mixed neighborhoods.

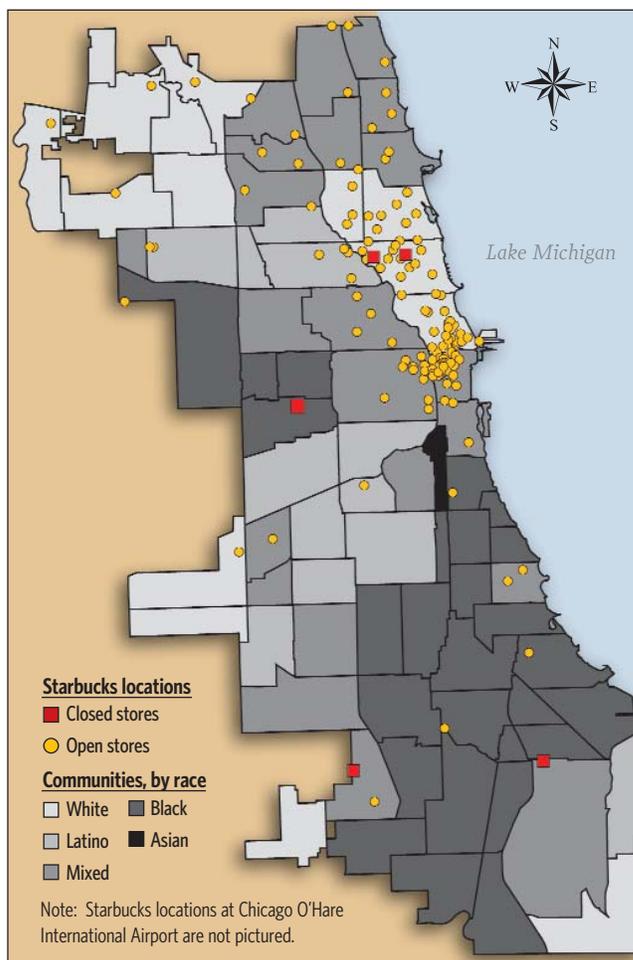
In Chicago, one of five stores in black communities will close, compared with two of 75 in white communities. In mixed neighborhoods, there will be two closures of 78 stores. None of the seven stores in Latino neighborhoods were on the list of closures. According to a statement by Starbucks, the store closures are based on several operating and contractual factors for each store.

Fifth Ward Alderman Leslie Hairston said that the stores are not closing because of the community’s racial makeup, but because of poor planning by developers. “They were looking at traffic count and median income, and that doesn’t necessarily translate into business,” Hairston said.

Hairston has one

Steeped up north

Starbucks stores tend to cluster in predominantly white North Side neighborhoods. But the rate of the stores closing is highest in black neighborhoods.



Source: Starbucks Coffee Company

Starbucks in her ward—the first one in a black community in Chicago. That store is not set to close.

Meanwhile, surrounding suburbs are also feeling the impact. West suburban Elmhurst, which is 93.4 per-

cent white, according to the Census 2000, will lose one of its four stores. Conversely, residents of South suburban Country Club Hills, which is 81.9 percent black, will lose its only Starbucks.

—Stacie Johnson

Check out **tcrBLOG**, the official blog of *The Chicago Reporter*.
www.chicagoreporter.typepad.com

Minority newsroom hires hit new low

The news:

More than 7,000 people affiliated with minority journalist associations gathered in Chicago this summer for the UNITY 08 Convention, the largest gathering of journalists nationwide.

Behind the news:

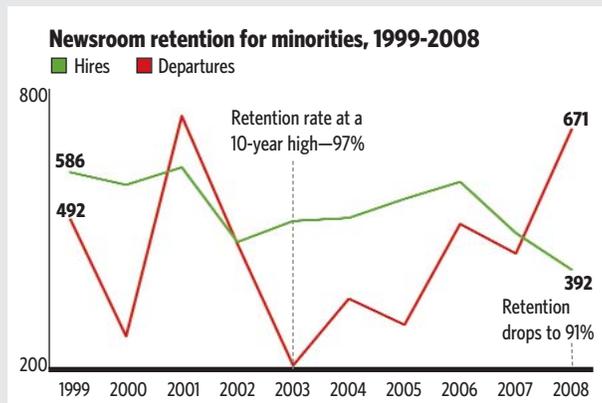
This year marks the second time in more than 20 years that the number of minorities hired by daily newspapers is fewer than the number leaving them.

Despite the anomaly, the percentage of minorities in those newsrooms increased from 13.43 to 13.52 percent between 2007 and 2008, according to the 2008 Newsroom Employment Census conducted by the American Society of Newspaper Editors.

Cristina Azocar, who at the

Hiring tailspin

For years, the numbers of minorities getting hired by daily newspapers has been on the decline. Now, for the second time in 20 years, the number of departures is greater than the number of hires.



Source: 2008 Annual Newsroom Employment Census of daily newspapers conducted by the American Society of Newspaper Editors

time of the convention was a UNITY board member and president of the Native

American Journalists Association, said that the problem is retention, which has

decreased for minorities since 2003, when it was 97 percent in the newsroom. Retention is currently at 91 percent, according to the ASNE report.

Minority journalists need to start looking for other options, Azocar said. These include working for ethnic media, minority-owned news stations and Web broadcasts, Azocar said. Some journalists need to stop working with corporate media giants because there are enough minorities in the field to change the industry, she added.

Currently, there are 7,113 minorities in daily newspaper newsrooms across the country, according to ASNE's census. "We have to unplug from this system that's never served us," Azocar said. "Stop being complacent and start being entrepreneurial."

—Tatiana Granados

Gun violence still high among blacks despite ban

The news:

The Illinois State Rifle Association sued the City of Chicago in June to end the city's gun ban after the U.S. Supreme Court overturned a law forbidding handgun possession in Washington, D.C.

Behind the news:

African Americans in Illinois were 4.5 times as likely as white people and nearly three times as likely as Latinos to die a violence-related firearm death between 2000 and 2005, according to statistics from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Gun violence killed more than 24 African Americans per 100,000 during this

period, compared with more than five per 100,000 white people. Latinos died at a rate of about 8.4 per 100,000.

No single factor causes this disparity, said John Hagedorn, professor of criminal justice at the University of Illinois at Chicago. But he pointed out that a sense of resentment—toward the police, authority and society as a whole—can lead to violent resolutions to many disputes, and this might be contributing to the high rates of gun violence among African Americans. Within black communities, he said, "people don't trust the system at all."

Chicago accounts for much of the violence in Illinois; about 65 percent of the homicides were in the

city, according to CDC and U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics data.

The Rev. Robin Hood, a Chicago community activist, said that he wants tougher state and federal laws focused on "guns that are used for nothing but killing people" and more severe penalties for so-called "straw purchasers"

who buy guns elsewhere and bring them into the city. "They've got a worse deterrent on drugs," he said.

Hagedorn said such rules will have to be adopted by all communities for them to have any impact. Until then, he said, "nobody's going to get rid of their guns."

—Alex Campbell



A pioneering environmentalist fights a culture of wastefulness.



Ken Dunn founded the Resource Center of Chicago, which promotes a sustainable way of living by, among other things, running farms in the city. “What we need to do instead is just rethink life starting with place and then think of what resources can support a quality of life.” **Photo by Joe Gallo.**

Sustaining life

By Madelaine Burkert

In 1975, long before people were familiar with the ozone hole or global warming, Ken Dunn founded the Resource Center of Chicago to introduce city dwellers to the simple values of conservation and respect for the earth he learned growing up in an Amish Mennonite farming community.

Today, the center—with the still-spry 65-year-old Dunn at its helm—has expanded into a network of nine programs with a common goal: to fight environmental and social injustice. Dunn sees these issues as two sides of the same coin, twin symptoms of a culture of wastefulness. From a food recovery project that collects unwanted items from caterers and grocery stores and distributes them to soup kitchens, to a recycling initiative that employs Chicago Housing Authority residents, the center’s programs all reflect Dunn’s belief in maximizing the resources—human and material—that others disregard.

Dunn began looking critically at industrial capitalism as a teenager, when he and his brothers were put in charge of man-

aging the family farm. The boys acquired more land and invested in new technologies to maximize their production.

They soon realized they had made a mistake. “I found it totally lacking in its satisfaction for the farmer and its responsibility to the soil,” Dunn says of his foray into industrial agriculture. Intellectually curious by nature, he saw his experience as a gateway into understanding the central conflicts of modern life. “I went for a college education to figure out why we’d made those wrong decisions.”

He landed in a doctoral program in philosophy at the University of Chicago, where he found the answer to his questions. “Our economy just is wrong,” Dunn says. “There are values that people have traditionally had that are more appropriate for how one should live one’s life.”

As an example, he points to the Mennonite mandate to do no harm to the earth or its inhabitants. “Industrial agriculture does violence to the soil, to the plants and animals, and to

communities,” Dunn explains. “We have to get back to a place where we can be true to our values.”

For Dunn, this means being better stewards of the earth by revamping the global economic system that he says strips humans of their connection to the materials they consume—starting with what they put in our stomachs. “There are few things that have built community over the ages as much as food,” he says. “Food production, harvesting, preparation, eating—it’s sort of the center, the heart of the household and the community.”

In its fight against big agriculture, the Resource Center operates two City Farms in Chicago—vacant lots that Dunn has converted, with the help of local youth, homeless and volunteers, into fully operational organic farms.

The Chicago Reporter recently met with Dunn at the City Farm at the corner of Division Street and Clybourn Avenue to talk about his work.

On what ideals is the Center based?

Fundamentally, as a nonprofit, the Resource Center is a sustainability organization. But being mindful of its place, it’s in a city whose quality of life is primarily diminished because of social inequity, lack of social justice. One of the big focuses of any responsible organization in Chicago is to bridge the gap between the haves and the have-nots. A lot of our projects locate on the boundary. We’re at the boundary between Gold Coast and Cabrini Green. Our first site was on the boundary between Hyde Park and Woodlawn. By inhabiting the boundaries, you can encourage participation of diverse populations and get started on real communication.

All of the Resource Center projects seek to find resources, both human and material, that are not valued or respected properly, and ingeniously bring them together to bring a positive outcome or better utilization of both resources.

The vacant space in our city is definitely a resource that is often despoiled by dumping and disrespect. By cleaning it up, and the cleaning being done by people [who are] unemployed or homeless, that discarded land can be brought into productivity by the discarded population.

Is the “green” lifestyle a luxury?

We have to admit that sustainability as it’s represented by the media and understood by the population is an elitist notion, and that we will not be able to sustain that for the entire population. I think a sustainability that focuses on place, that focuses on building a quality of life on local resources, would be the alternative.

Is it possible to reverse global warming?

It can’t be by waiting for the new technology. I think the dominant media is jumping on a new form of mass transportation—hydrogen cars or hybrid vehicles. None of these will be our solution because an equitable solution relies on less energy being consumed. So a private automobile is out of the question in a sustainable society. That is, if you have a private automobile for everybody on the planet, just the amount of energy consumed, no matter what form it is, will be beyond what the planet can sustain.

So our solution, to be a true one, has to be in our culture and the way we produce a quality of life. It cannot be, “How do we get each other to these mass rock concerts?” We have to learn to enjoy music and conversation in our living rooms, rather than in concert halls and concerts that we fly to or drive to. So technology has no solution because technology is the problem.

If cultural overhaul is needed, is the society’s recent focus on taking baby steps ill-advised?

Well, the baby steps are necessary, because we’re only going to alter our culture if we can continue with pleasures that we’re used to. So, instead of telling everybody, ‘All right, done with this—back on the farm and no purchasing anywhere,’ most people’s enjoyment of life would greatly decrease. They have no experience on the farm, of how to take pleasure from working on a farm.

Can baby steps lead to meaningful change before it’s too late?

I don’t think so. Climate change will eliminate a lot of species before we really get it turned around. And so the question to us is, ‘Do we turn it around before our species is one of the ones that is eliminated?’ But what does a reflective and hopefully responsible individual do with such circumstances? You do the best you can. And you just ask—whether you succeed or not—‘Was I on the right side as we went careening?’

It was a piece of graffiti that I saw in the early ‘70s on a garage door in Hyde Park that got me to my major perspective. The graffiti read: ‘The party continued as usual, as the elevator plummeted from the 96th floor.’ I kept trying to figure out, ‘What does that mean?’ And then I noticed, ‘Oh yeah, all of these things that I have as reservations [about] modern society is the modern party. And we’re plummeting from the 96th floor.’ We have a little, very little, time. So that’s what made me say, ‘Let’s quit trying to figure out how to tweak the industrial economy or switch our teaching and our focuses of our universities.’ None of that can be tweaked. We just have to say, ‘We’ve been on the wrong track, and the party we have should be not one that caused the plummeting. But let’s have a party.’

Is it possible to find environmental solutions that don’t unfairly burden the poor?

The conflict exists when the assumption is that we’re going to be able to keep our dominant economic system or remnants of that dominant economic system. As soon as you bring in how we’re going to eliminate congestion in New York City, you’ve got to be using our dominant economy, so you’ve got to find solutions that work in our dominant economy. But what we need to do instead is just rethink life starting with place and then think of what resources can support a quality of life. And that’s one of the reasons I’ve emphasized urban agriculture, in that we can eliminate a whole cycle of the dominant economy, or the dominant food system, by using the space that’s local and the resources of the rain and sun that fall on that space.

In order to pay the high price of production without exploiting either the soil or the people, we sell over half of the produce to high-end restaurants at top-tier prices, but we sell at the local farm stand to the local population at what they’d expect to pay.

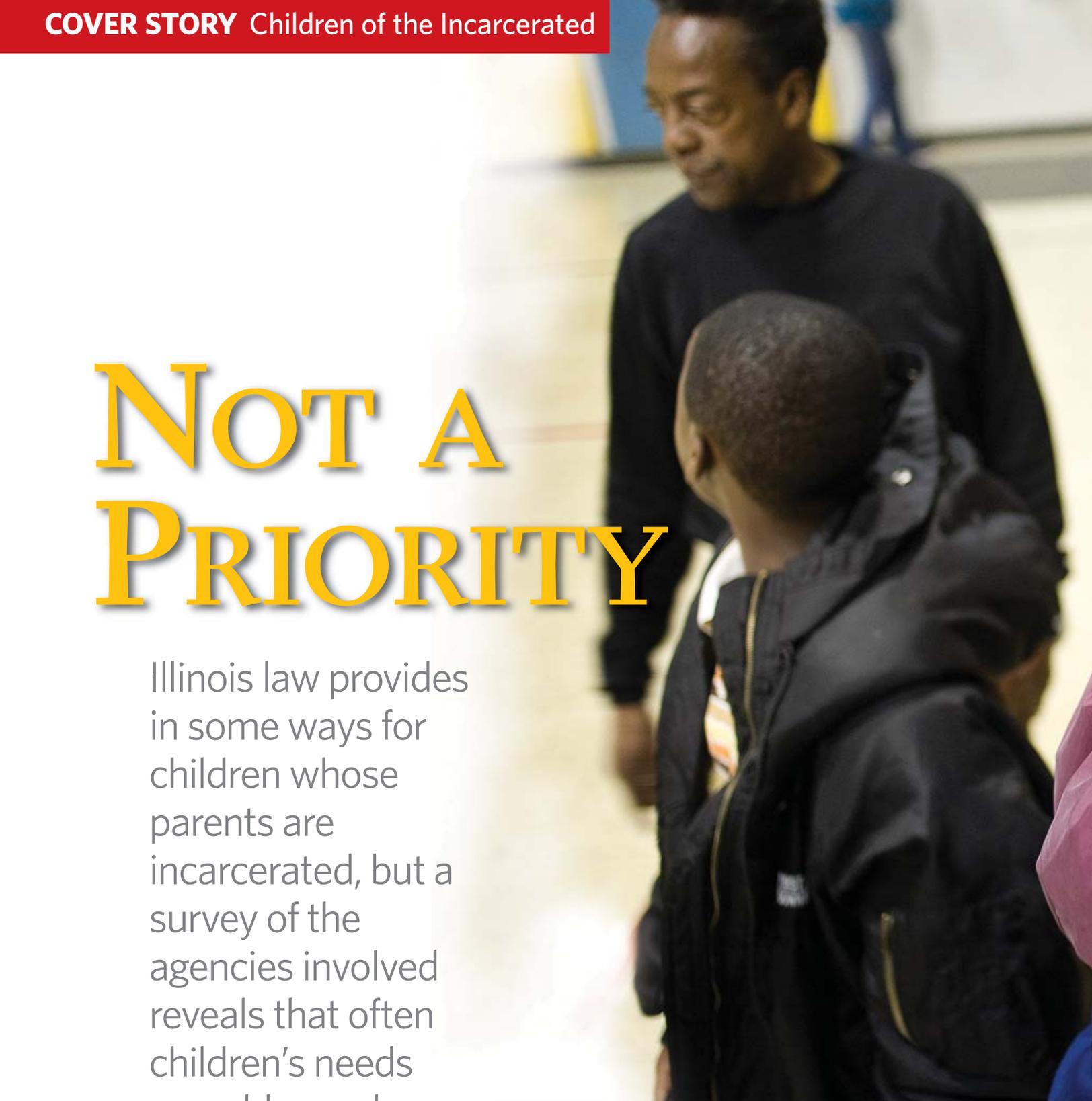
Traditional peoples have throughout the ages met most of their needs in open air markets, and many people still do. Let’s assume that quality of life and human needs can be met in open air markets. And what characterizes them is you usually exchange things with the producer. You start appreciating the item; it’s got a deeper value because you see all that’s invested in it.

Start valuing everything in your life, everything you touch, because it has deeper meaning. In looking at farmers markets, how our social needs are met there, needs for beauty, culture, enhancement—they can all be met in farmers markets. We’ve just got to start looking at the small examples of sustainable and equitable living and build something from there. ■

NOT A PRIORITY

Illinois law provides in some ways for children whose parents are incarcerated, but a survey of the agencies involved reveals that often children's needs are addressed on an individual basis.

**By Jeff Kelly Lowenstein
and Christiana Schmitz**



Z

ero seconds.

That's how much time Cynthia had to prepare before her father came home after more than four years in prison.

Planning would have made things better, she thought later, after the year during which her mother and father fought constantly, during which her father drank heavily and ended up committing another crime that got him locked up again. Talking to him on the phone before his



Denise Bailey-Gordon hugs one of her children during a visit at Lincoln Correctional Center in downstate Illinois. Contact visits are allowed at nearly all of the 28 prisons operated by the Illinois Department of Corrections. But some advocates say the department's definition of contact is too restrictive. Photo by Jon Lowenstein.

return would have helped. So would have visits to the prison to prepare her family for the change.

Instead, the moment she had thought about for years at night in her bedroom on the second floor of her family's red-brick townhouse in north suburban Niles just happened. There he was in the doorway, and things started moving way too fast.

The sheen of the visit, like the smell of a freshly cleaned room, quickly wore off. Soon her father was yelling at Cynthia, whose name has been changed to protect her identity, and her

sister about why the house wasn't clean, about taking responsibility, about being respectful.

Although she generally obeyed her parents, this time Cynthia yelled back. It all seemed so unfair to her. She told her father if he wanted her to take responsibility, he shouldn't have gotten arrested and gone to prison. Then she stormed upstairs and stayed in her room, leaving her mother standing there in helpless frustration.

In an ideal world, a social worker would have helped

Cynthia get used to her dad again long before he left prison. But for many children with incarcerated parents, Illinois is not an ideal world.

More than one year after state Senate President Emil Jones Jr. and Rep. Constance “Connie” Howard called for statewide hearings about the experiences of children with incarcerated parents, the terrain for Illinois children like Cynthia is decidedly uneven.

Although each phase of the law enforcement process—arrest, adjudication, incarceration and release—includes some aspect that addresses the needs of children like Cynthia, in practice their needs are an after-thought—typically addressed on an individual and inconsistent, rather than systematic, basis.

The Chicago Reporter found that formal arrest protocols are absent, the attention paid to children’s needs during the sentencing phase of the legal process is erratic and limited to a small percentage of cases, and no programs are specifically dedicated to reuniting families before the parents’ release.

The Reporter found:

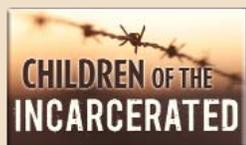
- None of the 16 police departments surveyed has formal arrest protocols or policies about how to handle an arrest scene where children are uninjured but present.
- The collection of information about an offender’s family is a required element of “presentence reports” that generally are written by probation officers and sent to judges. These reports generally are produced only when the defendant is found guilty, but there is no agreement about the imposition of a specific sentence.
- The Illinois Department of Corrections allows contact visits at all but one of the state’s 28 prisons, but they can be revoked as a disciplinary measure. Some advocates say the department’s definition of contact is far too restrictive.
- The corrections department has child-friendly visiting areas in all five of the women’s facilities. A department

Power Points

The road for children with incarcerated parents in Illinois is a rocky one. While their needs are taken into account to some degree at each step of the criminal justice system, they are met only in haphazard ways. *The Chicago Reporter* found:

- No police department surveyed has a formal policy for how to deal with arrests when children are at the scene.
- Probation officers must collect information about an offender’s children for presentence reports, but the reports are only written in certain cases.
- Some advocates say that the Illinois Department of Corrections’ definition of “contact” visit is too limited.
- The corrections department has no programming during the pre-release process specifically designed to help families reunite after the offender is released.
- Communication gaps exist between some of the agencies involved in the stages of the incarceration process.

For more information about the people and organizations we write about, go to www.chicagoreporter.com.



spokesman said “many” of the 25 men’s prisons have such areas but could not say how many. The department also has no programming during the pre-release process specifically designed to reunite families.

- Communication gaps that work against children’s needs being met exist between the different agencies involved.

Although Illinois has made some progress in talking about how to meet the needs of these children with incarcerated parents, the findings show that in many ways the state still falls short of that goal, said Dee Ann Newell, a former Open Society Institute fellow who has worked with organizations in 16 states dedicated to helping children with incarcerated parents.

“There’s a lot of incredible interest in how to serve the children in the community,” Newell said. “But in terms of actual place and policies, [Illinois] is just now on that pathway.”

The issue is a critical one as tens of thousands of children, who are disproportionately poor and African American or Latino, ultimately end up joining their parents in America’s prisons. According to a 2004 U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics survey, about 3 percent of the inmates said they have a child in the prison system.

Improving service delivery is vital, according to Gail T. Smith, executive director of Chicago Legal Advocacy for Incarcerated Mothers, a nonprofit organization that provides legal and educational services to maintain the bond between incarcerated mothers and their children.

Having a comprehensive approach can both increase service quality by highlighting best practices and reduce the negative consequences children can experience from their parents’ incarceration, Smith said, adding that the issue is particularly urgent now because the United States is the world’s largest jailer, with more than 2 million people imprisoned or in jail in 2007.

“Because of the explosion [in prisoner numbers], and because it’s clear that there is an impact on the children to the disruption, if we don’t stop and take three steps back, we risk having an even larger number of incarcerated people that will impact education budgets, infrastructure budgets, housing, jobs and all of that,” Smith said.

In many cases, children’s first glimpse at their parent’s involvement in the criminal justice system isn’t during a trial or a visit; it’s at the moment of arrest.

In some instances, advocates say, children could be forced to lie face down on the ground with a gun pointed at their head. Other children could have to watch their parents being dragged forcibly from their homes.

A survey of police departments in the state’s 10 largest cities, as well as six cities with a high rate of prisoners returning in 2005, yielded mixed results.

Law enforcement officials in 11 of the 16 police districts said their officers make an effort to minimize trauma for a child during the arrest of a parent.

Tactics include asking the arrestee to step outside so that the child does not see his or her parent being handcuffed, making the arrest when the child is not home, asking the child to leave the room, allowing the parent to hug the child goodbye or even carrying stuffed animals in squad cars.

“We don’t employ monsters,” said Sgt. Tim Curry of the Maywood Police Department. “We do take measures to safeguard kids’ physical and psychological well-being. We like to make sure the kid is safe.”

But the extent to which children can be taken into consideration depends on the individual officer’s discretion and the



A woman talks with her son in the visiting room at Cook County Jail. Opened in May, the room provides a welcoming space for parents to visit with their children. Photo by Jeff Kelly Lowenstein.

behavior of the person under arrest. While police officers talked about easing or eliminating arrests in front of children, they acknowledged that “best practice” scenarios aren’t always realistic—particularly during dangerous arrests.

“We don’t want to have to handcuff somebody in front of their children ... but it depends on the situation,” said Ann Dinges, public information officer of the Elgin Police Department.

None of the 16 departments surveyed has an explicit policy for arresting a parent while a child is present. Instead, officers said their protocol when making an arrest in front of a child is to make sure that the child is left with another parent, an appointed guardian, or the Department of Children and Family Services.

Many see this lack of policy as a shortcoming. Nell Bernstein, advocate and author of the book, “All Alone in the World: Children of the Incarcerated,” cautioned that, without intensive training and support from the top, individual protocols may have little value.

Bernstein also underscored the need for advance planning like having an extra officer available when police believe there are going to be children present during an arrest. “If you are arresting somebody on drugs, it would be great if every-

body would be beautifully behaved. Given that that’s not going to happen, does that mean that you don’t have to pay attention to children’s needs?” Bernstein said. “If we have to take some extra steps to make that happen, that’s what we need to do.”

Wayne Walles, commander of the Waukegan Police Department, said the nature of some arrests work against creating a formal policy. “An arrest situation is very fluid and very rapidly changing,” he said. “There are too many variables to dictate it by a hard-and-fast policy.”

According to state law, dependent people’s “excessive hardship” because of imprisonment is one of 13 mitigating factors that can allow judges to shorten a defendant’s sentence or to consider alternative sentencing methods.

Some advocates say a family impact statement needs to be presented as evidence of such hardship.

According to Newell, the idea of such statements was modeled on an environmental impact assessment, which is an evaluation of the likely influence a project may have on the environment. Some cities like San Francisco have moved forward with the development of a form to document such impact—but not in Illinois.

Survey results: a mixed bag

Children whose parents are incarcerated live in uneven terrain in Illinois. On the one hand, their needs are provided for in some way during their parents' arrest, trial, sentencing and incarceration. But that attention is often inconsistent and unsystematic.

POLICE

11 of 16 departments said their officers take action to ease the trauma for children who are present when their parent is being arrested. Actions include asking either the child or parent to leave the room or even giving the child a stuffed animal.

0 of 16 departments had official policies for how to deal with an arrest in which children are present when their parent is being arrested.

PUBLIC DEFENDERS & JUDGES

Illinois law cites excessive hardship on a defendant's dependents as a possible mitigating circumstance during sentencing.

8 of 10 public defenders said they present judges with either witnesses or written statements about the impact of incarceration on a defendant's children.

7 of 10 judges said they consider the impact of incarceration on children or dependents during sentencing.

5 of 10 judges and public defenders said they consider this to be a primary concern.

PROBATION OFFICERS

Illinois law requires a presentence report with information about a defendant's family, educational and work histories to be collected in certain cases.

9 of 10 probation officers said their reports contain information about the defendant's family.

5 of 10 said the information is self-reported.

4 of 10 said the information is mostly self-reported and sometimes independently verified.

Source: A *Chicago Reporter* survey of judges, public defenders and probation officers from 10 counties and police departments from 16 cities.

Methodology

The *Chicago Reporter* conducted a survey to assess the practices employed at each stage of the incarceration process: arrest, adjudication, incarceration and release. The Reporter contacted 16 police departments—10 from the state's largest cities and six communities with high rates of prisoners returning. The Reporter also called probation officers, public defenders and circuit court judges in the 10 counties that as of January 2007 had the highest number of prisoners returning. The Illinois Department of Corrections answered questions about contact visits and waiting room facilities that are friendly to children.

The state law, however, requires that the defendant's family situation and background be included as part of the presentence report, which generally is written when the defendant is found guilty, but there is no agreement about the imposition of a specific sentence.

The Reporter surveyed probation officers, as well as public defenders and circuit court judges, in the 10 Illinois counties that had the highest number of returning prisoners in 2007.

Each of the 10 counties, probation officers or officials said that information about a defendant's family is collected in presentence reports. In most cases, the information about children is self-reported and not independently verified, several officers said.

Jeffery Jefko Sr., deputy director with Kane County Court Services, said his county's presentence report includes a chance for the defendant to make a statement about the impact his or her incarceration would have on the family. "We don't edit it all," said Jefko, who has worked in the probation field for about 30 years. "As we get it, that's how it's typed into the report."

Jefko estimated that 25 percent of defendants write such a statement.

After its completion, the presentence report must be sent to a judge as well as to attorneys on both sides at least three days in advance of the presentence hearing, according to Illinois law.

Public defenders and circuit judges interviewed said they present and consider the impact of the offender's incarceration on children and other dependents during the sentencing phase.

Still, there were some who called the impact on children a "secondary concern" compared with the punishment of the person who committed a crime. "Family shouldn't be a 'get out of jail free' card," said Patrick Kelley, a Sangamon County judge.

"I wouldn't want to consider a statement by a parent or spouse and not have that person subjected to cross-examination," said Terry Gamber, resident circuit judge of Jefferson County.

For cases in which there are mandatory minimum sentences, judges have no discretion to consider the impact on a defendant's children. Nonviolent drug offenses, for example, are one type of crime that carry a mandatory sentence in Illinois.

"Sometimes the judge's hands are kind of tied," said Herman S. Haase, a public defender in Will County. "There's so much mandatory stuff right now ... that, even though it's tough on the defendant's family, the judges just don't have much of a choice."

A number of the public defenders appeared open to receiving information about the impact of incarceration on a defendant's children as a standard practice.

But others expressed strong opposition to the idea. "I resist the idea of the introduction of information about people's children being a mandatory element of the presentence investigation," Gamber said.

Even in cases when a defendant's family situation does lead to the defendant's sentence being mitigated, that same situation does not necessarily play a significant role in where that prisoner is incarcerated.

Deb Denning, deputy director of the Illinois Department of Corrections' Women and Family Services division, explained that the women's side of the department tries to place prisoners in the county where they lived before their incarceration. Derek Schnapp, a department spokesman, said that, for male prisoners, being a parent "may play" a factor in prison placement but is not the determining factor.

For his part, Steven M. Mensing, a warden at Vandalia

Dropped balls

Although Illinois law and police departments in some way provide for children with incarcerated parents, the situation for these children is far from perfect. This flow chart details the gap at each stage—during the parent’s arrest, in the court system and in prison—between how advocates say the system should function and the reality children experience.

ARREST → → → →

Ideal: Make arrest scene less traumatic

- Remove children from the scene
- Allow children to hug their parent

REALITY:
No police department surveyed has an official policy in this area.

COURT → → → → → → → → → →

Ideal: Incorporate children’s needs in sentencing

- Include them in presentence reports sent to judges
- Consider the hardship caused by parents’ absence

Ideal: Send information about families to the Illinois Department of Corrections for placement considerations

REALITY:
Presentence reports are written only in a limited number of cases.
Information about children often is not verified.
Judges’ hands are often tied by mandatory sentencing.
The corrections department often receives no information about families.

PRISON

Ideal: Facilitate visits

- Place inmates as near the families as possible
- Allow contact visits in child-friendly areas

Ideal: Set up programs designed to successfully reunite families

REALITY:
Placement is rarely based on family location.
The corrections department’s definition of contact is too restrictive, advocates say.
No programs exist for reuniting families.

Source: A *Chicago Reporter* survey of judges, public defenders and probation officers from 10 counties and police departments from 16 cities.

Correctional Center, a male facility, said placing a prisoner in the county where he lives could entice prisoners to attempt an escape. He explained that prisoners are more likely to “rabbit” when they are close to home than when they are far away from where they live.

Mensing did support the approach of alternative sentences such as drug treatment and intensive probation supervision. Under many of these sentences, defendants receive a suspended sentence and drug treatment, with the understanding that a stiffer sentence will be given for subsequent violations. These arrangements often allow the family to stay intact, to address some of the causes of the defendant’s behavior and keep the prison rolls down, said James K. Booras, chief circuit judge of Lake County.

“They are a good idea, obviously, for a few reasons,” Booras said. “They get the jail population down. We don’t receive the results of rehabilitation that we should since we are incarcerating too many people. I think it’s used more often now ... because we have no jail space.”

Twelve-year-old Jackie loves to see her father in prison and knows that he feels the same way. “He smiles a lot when he sees us,” says Jackie, who is an honors student at National Teacher’s Academy.

The visits take place in a large room with lots of families sitting around tables. Her father asks about how Jackie, whose name has been changed to protect her identity, is doing in school before spending most of the time talking with her moth-

er. Jackie always ends the visit happy that she has seen him.

According to Januari Smith, department spokeswoman, the corrections department allows “contact visits” at all but one of its 28 prisons.

Only inmates at the Tamms Correctional Center, a maximum-security facility, do not have this privilege, she said.

Smith said children visiting parents are allowed to exchange an initial and departing hug and can hold hands during the visits. But the visits can be revoked as a disciplinary measure.

Author Bernstein said labeling such an arrangement as a contact visit is a complete misnomer. “If my kids came home from school and said, ‘Hug me when I come home and hug me before ... bed,’ I would not consider it a relationship but a vicious consequence. Many prisons offer much more supportive visitation. That’s what children need and that’s what

they deserve. They didn’t do anything wrong.

“Call it what you want, but don’t call it a contact visit ... That sounds like torment advertising as a contact visit,” she said.

Denning of the corrections department’s women’s division said that the five women’s facilities practice a different brand of contact.

“We encourage moms to hold kids and sit on laps,” Denning said, adding that the prisons sometimes provide combs for mothers to comb their daughters’ hair. She explained that each of the women’s facilities also have a child area where mothers can sit down with books, read to her child, play on the floor or watch a video.

What does exist, according to Robin Riggs, re-entry pro-

‘Call it what you want, but don’t call it a contact visit. That sounds like torment advertising as a contact visit.’

Advocate and Author Nell Bernstein

Squabbles delay bills to help kids

By Jeff Kelly Lowenstein

Maxine Johnson's first day in prison in 2005 remains seared in her memory. She remembers the shackles on her legs binding her to another prisoner and the guards barking commands at inmates during the intake process.

But mostly she remembers her fear of the unexpected as she began her three-year stint and her visceral anxiety about the four grandchildren for whom she was the legal guardian. The grandchildren, ranging from 11 to 17 years old, had gone back to live with their mother, Johnson's daughter. She had a gambling addiction, and Johnson didn't think she could handle the responsibility. "It was horrible," Johnson says about the first day. "I was worried about my grandchildren."

Johnson did not hear about any services for her grandchildren that day or during the nine weeks she was in the intake unit. Not until a year later, in fact, did she learn about transportation services provided by Lutheran Social Services of Illinois, and that was by word of mouth from other prisoners.

That could be different now, as several pieces of legislation addressing the needs of children with incarcerated parents have been introduced, and, in one case, passed unanimously by both chambers of the Illinois General Assembly. These bills, along with an attempt to hold meetings with police departments across the state about how to handle arrests of adults when their children are present, indicate to some that the concerns of these children have moved to the political mainstream.

But celebrations hailing a dramatic change are premature. One bill, which needs Gov. Rod Blagojevich's signature to become law, may be stymied—not because of a lack of consensus about its importance, but to ongoing constitutional and procedural squabbling among Blagojevich, state Senate President Emil Jones Jr. and state House Speaker Michael Madigan. The other bill was still in committee in the House at the session's end in late May. And the planning between Lutheran and the police was in the early stages.

"It's gotten to be a very contentious and elaborate game where good public policy seems to be low on goals of what we're trying to do," said Kent Redfield,

professor of political science at the University of Illinois at Springfield.

Introduced as Senate Bill 2879 by state Sen. Kwame Raoul, the bill has several key points. It called for the state's human services and corrections departments to work cooperatively with community organizations to identify service providers and to develop informational materials about available social services like mentoring and family counseling programs.

In addition, the corrections department would provide the information to inmates in a sealed envelope during orientation and pay for postage to send the materials to the children's caregiver.

"The impetus for the bill is ... the fact that in many cases children follow the same pattern that led their parents to be incarcerated," Raoul said. "This is an effort to break the cycle."

In its March/April 2007 issue, *The Chicago Reporter* identified gaps in prisoners' awareness of available services such as counseling as one of several barriers to their children accessing services.

On April 17, the bill passed by a unanimous vote in the state Senate. It passed on May 21 in the state House by a 114-0 vote.

According to Raoul, the bill would cost the state between \$5,000 and \$10,000.

Blagojevich spokesman David Rudduck said the legislators have to resolve the placement of a "rulemaking authority" amendment on the bill by the Human Services Committee.

The amendment, which eliminates Blagojevich's ability to change the substance of a bill, has been placed, on Madigan's instruction, on hundreds of pieces of legislation since January.

Madigan spokesman Steve Brown said the measure is necessary because Blagojevich violated the separation of powers between the legislative and executive branches last year in his efforts to pass a health care bill and disregarded a ruling about the issue by the Joint Committee on Administrative Rules.

Brown said Blagojevich's action created a constitutional crisis. He acknowledged that the amendments have had the effect of slowing down legislation, but said it was a necessary price to pay for preserving the political process.

"To ignore that behavior, you might as well cede all authority to the executive

branch," Brown said.

Jones' spokeswoman Cindy Davidsmeyer said the current legislative process does not need improvement. This attitude has led Jones to instruct Democratic members to file nonconcurrent motions that would eliminate the rulemaking amendments. "We don't believe in the need to amend this legislation with a competing process," Davidsmeyer said.

In the case of Senate Bill 2879, rather than going to Blagojevich, the nonconcurrent order meant that legislation has not reached Blagojevich's desk.

The University of Illinois at Springfield's Redfield said the constitutional dispute is a significant one but should not take precedence over progressive legislation.

"We've been severely limited in our ability to address problems because everything has become secondary to the power struggle," he said.

Another piece of legislation that has not reached Blagojevich's desk is one introduced in January.

That bill calls for the development of policies that address the arrest of an adult in front of their children, establishes guidelines for officer training and allots two additional local telephone calls to a custodial parent.

"Once a parent is taken away from a kid, you could have the kids home alone," said state Rep. LaShawn Ford, who introduced the bill. "They will become victims of crimes themselves if they don't have correct guidance once they are incarcerated."

If the proposal becomes a statute, it would enforce the efforts of advocates like Ranjana Bhargava of Connections, a Prisoner and Family Ministry program of Lutheran Social Services. Bhargava said Connections is in the planning stages of a presentation about proper arrest protocols that would be given in police departments statewide. She said the presentation will be four-fold, asking officers to find another adult who can be with the child, make the arrest with as little trauma as possible, explain what is happening to the child and not rebuke the child—all as matters of policy.

"This is a movement that has to include children as the future investment," Bhargava said.

Christiana Schmitz helped research this article.



Craig Townsend takes a break from attending a re-entry summit at Vandalia Correctional Center, where he listened to inspirational speaker Victor Woods. Townsend is serving his second prison term. One of his daughters wishes she had more help in preparing for his first release several years ago. Townsend's current stint is slated to end in 2009. Photo by Jeff Kelly Lowenstein.

grams administrator for the department, is a plethora of programs for ex-offenders in preparation for their release. She cited programs dealing with education and lifestyle changes as well as one- or two-day “re-entry summits” for offenders.

At a recent re-entry event at Vandalia Correctional Center—the facility’s first—about 150 inmates sat in chairs on a carpeted gym floor.

Summit participants heard motivational speakers like ex-offender and author Victor Woods and found out about employment possibilities after their releases.

“The important thing to know is that there [has] never been a better time to be an offender,” Riggs said.

Programs dealing with parenting are available to offenders of all levels at all facilities, according to Smith, but none that specifically deal with family reunification. She said it was not possible to provide data about how many prisoners participate in the programs.

Denning of the women’s division said she would like to have such programs but explained that the cost prohibits it: “Do we love that idea? Absolutely. Will I say that is going to happen? It’s in our five-year goals.”

There are also gaps in communication between agencies involved. Just one of the police departments said they sometimes pass information about the children of the arrestee to the jail in which the parent is held. The content of presentence reports is not always passed onto the Illinois

Department of Corrections. Denning said that any information about prisoners’ children comes only from the parents themselves.

Roberta Fewes, deputy director of the office of programs and support services at the corrections department, said she and others are committed to closing the gaps so that more information can be transmitted and the children’s needs can be met.

Some say legitimate privacy concerns exist, and that parents, for fear of having their custody removed, should have the choice whether to disclose if they have children.

Newell said figuring out some balance is important to best meet children’s needs.

“If we are going to talk about comprehensive services, we are going to have to have comprehensive communication,” Newell said. “There are going to be layers with consents and an ethical sense [that] we don’t need to use concern for children as another layer of exploitation.”

These and other challenges notwithstanding, she sounded guardedly optimistic about the state’s treatment of these children.

“We’re taking the first steps of a very big mountain,” said Newell, a national authority on the subject of children with incarcerated parents. “I definitely think things are improving, [but] we’re not where we need to be.”

Contributing: Alex Campbell

jeffkl@chicagoreporter.com

Bringing families together

A county jail in Pittsburgh works to alleviate trauma for children

By Jeff Kelly Lowenstein

A visit to the Allegheny County jail in Pittsburgh used to be stressful for inmates' loved ones and their children.

The sounds of frustrated guards and harried parents yelling at children rebounded off the walls in the lobby of the 16-floor facility. The area resembled a 1940s Greyhound bus station; rows of steel chairs faced vending machines that provided a constant temptation during waits that stretched out for hours.

A result: Many parents chose not to bring their children to see their fathers, mothers, uncles and grandparents.

A visitor from the old lobby might not recognize the new one.

Since its opening in 2007, it has often been chockfull of children playing and waiting to see loved ones. Gone are the mold, chairs and the vending machines, replaced by bright blue and yellow walls, a wooden bench that marks a carpeted area for children to play and create artwork to hang on a wall. Volunteers and paid staffers help adults peruse resources about how to get a GED or sign up for parenting

and their families, work on arrest protocols for area police officers, change the nature of contact visits in the county and establish a safe place for children to go in the first hours after their mother or father is arrested. Underpinning these specific policies has been a commitment to rehabilitation through relationships, with the family at the center. While all involved acknowledge that much work remains to be done, significant progress has been made in creating systemic policies and paying consistent attention to the needs of children with incarcerated parents.

Susan Phillips, assistant professor at the Jane Addams College of Social Work at the University of Illinois at Chicago, said that no program in the country can yet be pointed to as a "best practice." But she praised the thoughtfulness, commitment to conversation, strategic allocation of resources and assessment of results she has seen in Allegheny County.

"Nobody has the answers ... [but] what they have is a process for learning. That's what needs to be created," said Phillips, who recently completed an evaluation of programs being developed or restructured to deal with children

in part, of interviews with inmates who stressed how important family visits were to them. The research also found that, on any given day, about 7,000 children in the county have a parent who has been arrested.

The numbers grabbed the attention of Ramon Rustin, who became warden of Allegheny County jail in October 2004. Approaching the end of his third decade in corrections, the bass-voiced Rustin had locked up plenty of people—the last jail where he had worked got a \$34 million expansion approved shortly before he left—and recognized that a different approach could yield better results.

"The numbers were pretty impressive," he said. "Claire got me thinking about the effect on kids and inmates.

"We are trying to provide really good visits rather than enforce separation between parents and kids. We are trying to facilitate that relationship," Rustin said.

Rustin was part of a collaborative that was started in 1997 by his predecessor, Calvin Lightfoot, and his counterparts at the county's human services and health departments. The collaborative attempted to provide services more seamlessly to inmates. A three-year evaluation of the collaborative published in January found that it not only saves the county more than \$5 million per year, but its inmates also had a 50 percent lower recidivism rate compared with another group of inmates who did not receive services.

The lobby became the group's first project after learning about the data generated in the foundation's study. Walker said that more than 100 individuals and organizations participated in the project, including students from area universities.

Jane Werner, executive director of the award-winning Children's Museum of Pittsburgh, played a major role in designing the space. She said that the project, which she did on a volunteer basis, educated her. "I had never talked to people who had been incarcerated," she said. "I had never been to a jail or a block where there are people in orange jumpsuits everywhere. It tests your humanity."

She added that a volunteer from the

'They've got the big picture, even though they've not instituted all the pieces. I do not know of anyone else ... who has done what they have done.'

classes. Far from the dreaded experience that used to creep at an agonizingly slow pace, waiting is now something that many children don't want to end.

The lobby's transformation, which involved hundreds of individuals and organizations volunteering their time, is just one part of an unusual, if not unique, collaboration in the country to meet the needs of children with incarcerated parents.

A pair of progressive wardens, an open-minded judge, human service agencies and a dedicated local foundation have combined to create and fund a full-time position for a county advocate for children with incarcerated parents

with incarcerated parents in 14 states.

The Pittsburgh Child Guidance Foundation has been one of the key players in creating the process Phillips describes. A comparatively small foundation—in 2007, its total assets were about \$7 million—the organization's mission is to improve the emotional health of children 12 and younger in Allegheny County by joining with a wide range of public and private organizations. In 2003, the foundation, headed by Claire A. Walker, launched a six-year initiative, "Advocating for Children of Prisoners."

As part of the initiative, the foundation conducted research that consisted,



A joint effort has made the waiting area in Pittsburgh's Allegheny County much more attractive than before. **Photos courtesy of Pittsburgh Child Guidance Foundation.**

museum worked with the children to reduce the potential trauma of visiting their parents by having them do role plays in which they practiced seeing their parent behind glass. "We wanted to make the situation less scary [and] more of a known quantity," she said.

The waiting area opened in the spring of 2007 but is far from the only aspect of the work.

Starting in 2006, the foundation funded a full-time position of an advocate for children and families of the incarcerated. Originally slated for two years, the position will be extended and paid for by the county.

Jill Brant, who has served in that position, explained that the major pur-

poses of her job were to make policies systematic and to bring the various parties involved with the children together to improve communication.

In practice, Brant says that she has focused largely on developing arrest protocols for officers. Convened by Judge Kim Berkeley Clark, the group included members of the law enforcement, medical, legal and social service communities united by a common goal of figuring out how to have the arrest of a parent create as little trauma for his or her child as possible. The group met for two years starting in mid-2006.

Training for the protocols, which involve helping officers be sensitive to needs of children witnessing their par-

ent being arrested, will begin in October, Brant said.

Brant explained that one of the goals of the protocols is to reduce the number of children who end up in the child welfare system. One way to reach that goal is the creation of a "Comfort Place," an area where children who do not have any place to go can stay for four hours while waiting for a caregiver to arrive.

The first few hours can be critical, according to Erin Dalton, deputy director for data analysis, research and evaluation at the county's Department of Human Services. "A lot of the initial trauma can be the immediacy of the jail arrest," Dalton said, adding that this was a factor in the collaborative's decision to focus on jail, rather than prison.

Walker of the Child Guidance Foundation said the average stay in jail in recent years was 41 days. She explained that a large number of prisoners are released within 48 hours, while another group can be in jail for months.

Another project has been to change the nature of contact visits by creating visitation protocols. The majority of visits currently take place with the inmate and the loved ones separated by a thick pane of glass. Brant and Rustin both said that an area has been set up to have in-person contact visits, and that they want to expand that program. For her part, Clark said the protocols also will involve the collection of data to assess the visits' impact and distributing that information to the public.

Each of the people involved said there are plenty of areas that need improvement. Brant pointed to telephone calls, which must be made collect and also have an additional county charge that renders them unaffordable, while Rustin said he would like to have more visits and an analysis of their impact on inmates and the children. Dalton of the Department of Human Services said the county can be more effective at locating the children and assessing their needs, while Walker of the Child Guidance Foundation said communication between all agencies could be better.

These challenges aside, the work has been launched and is unlikely to stop.

"They've got the big picture, even though they've not instituted all the pieces," said Dee Ann Newell, a former Open Society Institute fellow and a national authority on children with incarcerated parents. "I do not know of anyone else at the county or local [level] who has done what they have done."

Ashley Walker helped research this article.

BUY ORGANIC*

(Some restrictions and limitations apply)



Adults and youth from God's Gang work side by side to harvest a crop at a farm in Indiana. One of the goals of the Chicago nonprofit organization is to engage youth in urban agriculture. **Photo by Kelly Virella.**

Organic food is healthier and environmentally friendly—and rarely found in Chicago's black neighborhoods

By Kelly Virella

On a one-acre vegetable farm in Chicago, a bearded, 6 foot, 3 inch-tall black man squats before a bed of green, leafy radishes. Unlike most produce, these have been grown without toxic chemicals.

As he reaches into the dense foliage to harvest them, an oversized black t-shirt hangs on his thin square shoulders and red basketball shorts skim his calves.

Sunglasses shield his eyes, and a Bluetooth rests on his right ear. He sees a red, tennis ball-sized bulb and grabs its plume, plucking the radish from the ground. "That's a big boy," said Arthur King, 36, smiling as he pinches the stringy roots and threads them between his fingers to remove the dirt.

King is proud of his large radishes but prouder of what they represent. Unlike the bulk of organic, or low- to no-chemical food in Chicago,

these radishes are not headed to white neighborhoods, an upscale grocery or gourmet farmers market. Growing Home, the Chicago nonprofit that runs this organic farm, is one of the few growers who markets its organic food to people of all races and incomes.

The roughly 10 pounds King gathers—just enough to gauge buyer interest for the rest of the season—will be taken to the grand opening of the Englewood Farmers Market the next day, along

with several bunches of organic collard greens and kale.

Englewood is a predominantly black, low-income community that, like most black Chicago neighborhoods, offers residents few groceries where they can buy organic food. Organic food is healthier and environmentally friendly, but rarely found on store shelves in Chicago's black neighborhoods. "It's easier to find a semi-automatic weapon in our communities than it is to find a tomato, much less an organic tomato," said LaDonna Redmond, a food justice activist at the Frederick Blum Neighborhood Assistance Center, a Chicago State University urban planning think tank.

No one has proven that residue from the carcinogens and neurotoxins—cancer-promoting and nerve-damaging toxins—used to grow most produce in the U.S. makes healthy adults sick, according to a March report by the Organic Center, a non-profit, pro-organic research and education foundation. But a recent study suggests probable links between adult exposures to pesticides and diabetes, cancer, birth defects, premature birth and several neurological diseases associated with aging, such as Alzheimer's disease, according to the report.

The environmental benefit of organic farms is also compelling, said Jerry DeWitt, director of the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture at Iowa State University. Fertilizer that runs off into the Mississippi River has helped destroy the fish habitat in an 8,000 square-mile section of the Gulf of Mexico. The nitrogen in the runoff promotes excessive algal growth, suffocating marine life. Organic farms pollute less because their soil better traps the nitrogen, reducing the amount entering the water, DeWitt said.

"People are going organic because it is better for the soil, better for water, better

This is the second installment in a three-part series for *Chicago Matters: Growing Forward*. This year's *Chicago Matters*—the award-winning multimedia public



affairs series made possible by The Chicago Community Trust with programming from WTTW 11, Chicago Public Radio, the Chicago Public Library, and *The Chicago Reporter*—will examine how the choices we make today impact our environment and the future of our region. For more information, visit www.chicagomatters.org.

Power Points

As black population increases in a community area, the number of stores selling organics in that community decreases, according to a survey by *The Chicago Reporter* of 209 grocery stores spread across nine of the city's 77 community areas. The Reporter found that:

- The rate of stores that carried organics was higher in white neighborhoods, even though they catered to fewer people.
- A majority of the stores in white communities carry organic foods, while just 10 percent of stores in black communities do.

for animals and better for humans," DeWitt said.

But few grocery stores in black neighborhoods give residents the option to buy organic. As the black population increases, the number of stores selling organics in a community area decreases, according to a *Chicago Reporter* analysis. The Reporter surveyed 209 grocery stores spread across nine of the city's 77 community areas. They were the three most populous black, white and Latino neighborhoods:

- The population of the white neighborhoods was less than one-third of the total population of the communities examined, but were home to nearly two-thirds of the stores that carried organics.
- Ten percent of stores in black communities carry organics, compared to 24 percent in Latino communities and 63 percent in white areas.

The Midwest's largest

distributor of organic food, Goodness Greeness, is located in Englewood. The company ships organic produce to 1,200 to 1,500 grocery stores across the nation. Ironically, none of them are in Englewood. Because the company doesn't sell to the public, its neighbors can't get its food without leaving their community.

One of the company's 15 Chicago retail outlets is in a black community. One is in a Latino community, three are in mixed communities, nine are in white communities and one is accessible through the Internet. When the owners tried to interest local grocers in selling organics, the grocers in black communities said no. "African Americans are just as educated on the issues and more than willing to pay the money," said Bob Scaman, president of Goodness Greeness. "They just have to drive four miles to get it."

In West Garfield Park, a predominantly black community on Chicago's West side, access to organic food is

so limited that when a doctor diagnosed Redmond's son with severe food allergies nine years ago, the food activist resorted to growing organic produce in her backyard. The closest place she could buy organics was at Whole Foods in west suburban River Forest.

Residents of black communities who want organic food can leave their neighborhoods to get it or attend a farmers market. More than one-third of Chicago's 27 black community areas have a farmers market that sells some organics, according to a Reporter analysis of the city's list of farmers markets. There are 10 farmers markets in black communities, compared to nine found in white communities. Just one farmers market is located in a Latino neighborhood. There are 13 in mixed communities.

Another way residents of black communities can get organics is through delivery, directly from the farm to their neighborhood. But fewer organic farms deliver to Chicago's black communities. The Reporter found that there are just three drop-off points in Chicago's 27 black communities, compared to four in Latino neighborhoods, 11 in white neighborhoods and 21 in mixed neighborhoods.

What some people want is an actual organic grocery store, and not having them is inconvenient and unfair, said Inez Teemer, founder of Chicago's Black Vegetarian Society. Teemer, who lives in Chatham and has no car, said that her neighborhood Jewel carries a small selection of organics, but she travels 10 miles to get groceries. "Why do I have to travel all the way to the North Side to go to Trader Joe's?" she said.

Origins in the U.S.

Nineteenth-century American farmers didn't have man-made fertilizers, but their farms were far from organic. Many used lead and arsenic as



Orrin Williams of Growing Home takes a look at the tomatoes he's growing in Englewood. Williams has worked to provide leadership in order to create sustainable business opportunities in Englewood. **Photo by John Booz.**

Why care about organic food?

- Eating organics can reduce your consumption of pesticide residue by 350 percent.
- There's a probable link between adult exposures to pesticides and diabetes, cancer, birth defects, premature births and several neurological diseases of aging, such as Alzheimer's.
- By avoiding pesticides, fathers-to-be, children under 13 and pregnant women can improve their health, have fewer underweight babies and lower rates of birth defects.
- Organic fruits and vegetables contain higher levels of vitamin C, anti-oxidants, and polyphenols, which are anti-inflammatories that promote brain and eye health.

Source: The Organic Center.

pesticides, said Warren Belasco, professor of American Studies at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County. When a German scientist revealed the chemistry to make fertilizer in 1840, most U.S. farmers continued to use animal manure for another century. But it wasn't because they were environmentalists or health enthusiasts. Manure was cheaper. Plus, the equipment to spread man-made fertilizer didn't come into use until the 1940s, said Fred Kirschenmann, a distinguished fellow at the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture at Iowa State University.

Between the 1930s and the 1940s, U.S. commercial farms

more than doubled their average annual consumption of commercial fertilizer. Around 1947, when the U.S. Department of Agriculture argued that fertilizers would help farmers grow more food per acre, farmers began spreading it on their fields because they saw it as simple and a way to raise profits.

The widespread use of fertilizer and pesticide revolutionized the U.S. food system. Farmers started growing a single crop because the fertilizer and pesticides allowed for mechanization, which allowed them to plant, harvest and raise even more food. But without multiple species of crops and animals, the farms

lacked natural predators, fertilizers and decomposers, which healthy ecosystems require. Soils grew thin, dry and infertile. Pest outbreaks and epidemics of infectious disease emerged. Instead of diversifying the species they grew, farmers added more toxic chemicals.

A few soil scientists condemned these changes, arguing fertilizers and pesticides were harmful. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, a smattering of U.S. farmers and grocers began to listen and stopped using them. Many were hippies who moved from cities into the countryside and taught themselves to grow food without chemicals. As this agrarian reform movement materialized in Chicago, it bypassed black neighborhoods. One of the first organic grocers in Chicago, Rainbow Grocers, opened on the North Side. Orrin Williams, 59, an African American, lived at 69th and Indiana in the Park Manor neighborhood at the time and remembers carpooling to Rainbow and buying groceries in bulk to share with his friends. “Since the earliest days of organic agriculture evolved it never has paid any attention to our community,” Williams said.

Today's disparity

Organic farmers, meat and poultry packers, manufacturers and distributors said they don't discriminate. “We'll sell to anybody, as long as you have a health food store and that's your primary focus,” said Michele Raddatz, a sales representative for NOW Foods, a manufacturer of organic dietary supplements and organic dried goods. NOW Foods supplies 18 stores on Chicago's South Side, Raddatz said. Few independent grocers in black communities have expressed an interest in organics, said Raddatz and Jessica Cohen, marketing manager for Sommers Organic, an organic beef and poultry processor in Northwest suburban Wheeling.

Despite market research to the contrary, the grocers in predominantly black communities don't believe their customers will buy organics, said Wes Jarrell, a professor of sustainable agriculture and natural resources at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and co-owner of Prairie Fruit Farms in Champaign. “A big part of [the limited access to organic food in black communities] is the pre-conception by suppliers that no one will pay more, that there's no appreciation for what it takes to raise food,” Jarrell said.

It's not just a pre-conception, said Erika Allen, who manages the Chicago branch of Growing Power, a Milwaukee-based nonprofit working to establish a healthy and equitable food system. Selling organic is labor intensive, Williams said. A grocer has to go to a market, buy the food, power a freezer to store it and regularly inspect it and discard what's rotten. It can be a risky proposition with low profit margins, said Sherri Tillman, co-owner of A Natural Harvest Health Food Store & Deli, a 26-year-old South Shore grocer and café. Produce spoils easily without aggressive marketing, Tillman said. Her store sells organic vitamins, supplements, and packaged foods and plans to start selling organic produce this fall.

Major chain groceries—which carry organics in all their Chicago stores—have a larger customer base and enough staff to rotate their organic produce, said Redmond.

But they also have more stores in white neighborhoods than black ones. There are 13 Jewel food stores in predominantly white community areas, six in predominantly black communities and four in majority Latino communities. Dominick's has six stores in predominantly white communities, seven in mixed communities, two in black communities. Spokespeople for Dominick's and Jewel de-

Myth Busters

- A higher percentage of black people buy organic food than white people—54 percent of black people surveyed said they had bought organic food in the past year. Fifty percent of white people said the same.
- Black people are more willing than white people to pay a premium for organic food—28 percent of black people surveyed said they would pay 10 percent more for organic good. Twelve percent of white people said the same.

Source: The Hartman Group; Mintel

Location, location, location

White neighborhoods are home to 63 percent of stores that carry organic. Latino and black neighborhoods have the fewest—30 and 7 percent, respectively.

BLACK COMMUNITIES	Stores	% with organics
Auburn Gresham	9	0%
Austin	27	0%
South Shore	12	42%
LATINO COMMUNITIES	Stores	% with organics
Belmont Cragin	26	27%
Logan Square	31	29%
South Lawndale	32	16%
WHITE COMMUNITIES	Stores	% with organics
Lake View	26	62%
Lincoln Park	20	65%
Near North Side	26	62%

Source: A Chicago Reporter survey

Methodology

The Chicago Reporter assigned each community area a race based on the percentage of black, white, Latino and Asian residents living there, according to the 2000 census. Any community whose population was at least two-thirds black or at least two-thirds white was labeled black or white. Any community whose population was more than 50 percent Latino or Asian was labeled Latino or Asian.

From these communities, the Reporter selected the three community areas with the highest black, white and Latino populations. There were not enough Asian community areas to participate in the survey, so no data was collected on them. The Reporter surveyed the stores that have licenses to sell food or liquor in each selected community area. Researchers called or visited 209 stores spread across the nine community areas to determine whether they carried organics.

clined to explain the disparity.

David Vite, president and CEO of the Illinois Retail Merchants Association, said disposable income, not race, de-

termines which communities get grocery stores. “We acknowledge there are places in Chicago where there are issues with access to fresh food,” Vite

Organic food comes at a cost

For the last 30 years, Theresa Marquez has worked in the organic food industry. Currently, she is the chief marketing executive at the Wisconsin-based CROPP Cooperative, home to the Organic Valley and Organic Prairie food brands.

Over the years, she's learned the pros and cons of the organic industry. And one prevailing element is that people who need organic food the most can't afford it.

Organic foods have always cost more than their conventional counterparts, and the forces driving up the cost of ordinary groceries are similarly affecting the organic industry.

High-priced organic food is the result of supply and demand. In recent years, organic food sales have increased, but there are not enough organic farmers to meet that demand, leading to high prices at the grocery stores.

There are several reasons farmers aren't responding to the market opportunity, said Jim Slama, founder of FamilyFarmed.org. A few years ago, some farmers switched to organic production drawn by the opportunity to charge a premium on a product in short supply. But one major obstacle dissuaded the bulk of farmers from making the switch: the three-year transition period required for a farm to be certified as organic from the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

During the transition period, farmers improved the quality of their soil so they could sustain crops without using synthetic fertilizers or pesticides. Unfortunately, some farmers lost money while waiting the three years. While

said. For every dollar that a typical grocery store earned in 2007, 98 and 99 cents of it covered the cost of running the business, which means only one to two cents of it was profit, Vite said. With such a low profit margin, he said, grocery stores cannot afford to experiment with opening stores in locations with low disposable incomes.

African Americans don't have as much money as white people, but no one can deny that they buy groceries, even organics, Williams said.

"There's this business model afoot that said [major grocers] don't have to serve this community," he said. "I'm gonna sit back and put my store in a place where the economic and demographic profile said that I want to place my store, and then the gravy is all those black folk who show up and shop."

What is being done?

In the spring of 2009, Redmond intends to break ground on Good Food Market, a 20,000-square-foot grocery

learning new growing techniques and prepping the soil, they weren't allowed to use the old chemicals they relied on to create bountiful harvests.

The short-term threat of smaller yields and profit scared away potential organic growers, said Harriet Behar, outreach coordinator at the Midwest Organic & Sustainable Education Service, a nonprofit that offers training to farmers making the transition. "A lot of farmers say, 'Well, can I make it through those three years?'"

The lean years were worth it to some farmers, who anticipated making up their losses with the additional profits they would eventually earn with organic crops. That was changed with the current energy crisis.

Government mandates and soaring fuel costs increased demand for U.S. ethanol production and the redirection of land from growing food for consumption to food for fuel. The change was one of

the reasons that the cost of conventional food increased dramatically. From 2005 to 2007, the price of field corn rose from \$2.00 to \$4.00 per bushel, while wheat jumped from \$3.42 to \$6.65, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Suddenly, farmers were making a lot more money on the crops they were already growing. Though the price of organics also rose, it wasn't enough to tempt farmers away from the booming conventional market. In fact, some farmers who had begun the transition process went back to conventional farming production, Clarkson said.

The end result was fewer organic farmers and an even smaller domestic supply of organic food, though consumers were clamoring for more.

"The organic world has succeeded at finding a wonderful demand," Clarkson said. "What it has not found is sufficient production."

—Madelaine Burkert

Naturally expensive

From supply and demand, to the economy, to the lengthy process it takes to certify a farm as organic—there are many reasons why organic food items sometimes cost the consumer twice as much as conventional ones.

ITEM	ORGANIC	CONVENTIONAL
Milk, 2%	\$6.99/gal. (Organic Valley)	\$3.49/gal. (Country's Delight)
Bread, whole wheat	\$3.19/loaf (Healthy Life)	\$2.00/loaf (Butternut)
Grade A eggs, large	\$4.29/doz. (Eggland's Best)	2.19/doz. (Rose Acre)
Ground beef, frozen	\$6.99/lb (Sommers Organic)	3.99/lb. (no brand)

Source: Peapod.com

store at Pulaski Road and Washington Street in West Garfield Park. Redmond intends to franchise Good Food Market in cities with similar access disparities. Orrin Williams has similar aspirations for the projects he's coordinating at the Center for Urban Transformation, a nonprofit that he founded in 2000 to address food justice issues. The nonprofit plans to open a mobile grocery store, deploying street vendors with carts of produce, and supply staff to refresh and restock organics

at independent grocers.

It could be years before either project spreads. "My paternal grandmother would tell you, 'Don't shop in the black community,' because she knew that the quality in white communities was better," Williams said. Williams' grandmother would be 109 if she were alive today. "We're still in the same situation."

Contributing: Madelaine Burkert, Alex Campbell, Stacie Johnson, Beth Wang and Matt Hendrickson

kvirella@chicagoreporter.com

Extending organics' reach

Towns get creative to serve poor, urban areas

By Beth Wang

With the number of people suffering from obesity, diabetes and other chronic health conditions rising in the United States, awareness of the need to find ways to provide healthier foods, especially in communities where availability is sparse, is also increasing.

Cities like New York and Chicago have adopted different ways to bring healthier food options to neighborhoods that lack them.

A study conducted by the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene revealed East and Central Harlem have few supermarkets. Most of the stores that did exist didn't carry low-fat milk or leafy greens. In March this year, New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg signed the Green Cart Initiative. Green Cart is the term used to describe a pushcart from which people can buy fresh fruits and vegetables. The city has allocated 1,000 permits for the carts. This year, 500 full-term permits were made available. By 2009, officials expect to add 500 more.

The goal for officials is to increase fruit and vegetable consumption in neighborhoods by 75,000 people and save at least 50 lives a year, according to a city spokesperson. A 2006 study conducted by the Mari Gallagher Research and Consulting Group stated communities that have no or distant grocery stores but nearby fast food restaurants are more likely to have increased numbers of premature death, heart disease, diabetes and other chronic health conditions.

Mark Winne, director of the Community Food Security Coalitions' Food Policy Council Project and author of "Closing the Food Gap," has helped many cities throughout the country and in Canada develop food policy councils. The councils allow people in all sectors of a city, state or county's food system to convene and address food and agriculture needs. The councils also try to educate people on the benefits of fresh produce and growing food locally.

The idea of the councils is growing in popularity in the United States and the



Finding organic food in urban areas is not always easy. In Chicago, many people must shop at their farmers markets to get produce otherwise not offered at nearby stores. Photo by Joe Gallo.

number of councils have doubled in the last five years, Winne said. "For quite a while now there's been a growing awareness that the food in the country is not healthy food," Winne said. "It's produced in a way that's harmful to the environment, our bodies and communities."

Winne helped develop Chicago's Food Policy Advisory Council, which in 2002 started working with community and city government to promote community food systems. Lynn Teemoeller, one of three co-chairs for the group, says the council has come a long way in the past six years.

"The idea of a food policy council is becoming more common," Teemoeller says. "It's an idea that I think government is getting more comfortable with. In a lot of ways, there are still all the challenges. But I think our work is becoming more clear to us with what needs to be done."

The focus of the council is unity, says Teemoeller. Building community food systems and working with the government to support that is one of the main priorities. She says as a city, Chicago is slowly moving forward and admits some cities have more experience. On the other hand, Chicago is unique because of the availability of land for community gardens and urban agriculture.

"I come from New York City and land is a lot harder to access there than in Chicago," said Teemoeller, who helped the nonprofit Quad Communities Development Corporation start a farmers market in Bronzeville. The nonprofit conducted a survey of more than 200 area residents and found while 93 percent of respondents said that they prefer to purchase fresh produce, only 6 percent of them chose community area stores as their produce provider, said Executive Director Bernita Johnson-Gabriel.

Both Teemoeller and Johnson-Gabriel said that the Bronzeville market is unique not only because it is the only city-sponsored farmers market in Chicago, but also because it provides residents with the options they mentioned in the survey. The east side of Bronzeville does not have the land available to support farming so the farmers market is the only avenue currently available to bring fresh foods to the community, Johnson-Gabriel said.

"You have to be innovative and creative. Most importantly you have to go to the community to find out what they want," Johnson-Gabriel said. "We didn't sit in a vacuum to find out what should happen. We went out to the community." ■

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