



Campaign to Promote the Well-Being of Children in Allegheny County, PA When Parents are Arrested and Incarcerated January 2011

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In late 2002, the **Pittsburgh Child Guidance Foundation** initiated a County-wide campaign to address the losses children experience when their parents are arrested and incarcerated through the following activities:

1. **Asked** more than 1,200 knowledgeable County residents two questions: what happens to children and families in the County when parents are arrested and incarcerated (**first wave –2003 to 2005 -- of interviews and focus groups with 316 people living the experience and at least 200 others**); and what happens to family relationships when parents are arrested and incarcerated (**second wave – 2007 to 2009 -- of interviews and focus groups with 415 people living the experience and at least 325 others**);
2. Widely **disseminated** the words and thoughts of the respondents (publications available at www.PittsburghChildGuidanceFoundation.org, click Reports & Media):

On the website from the First Wave:

- “Parents Behind Bars Talk about their Children” – 2003 interviews with 186 parents in the Allegheny County Jail.
- “Children of Incarcerated Parents” – full summary of all 2003-2005 interviews and focus groups.
- “Advocating for Children of Prisoners: First Report to the Community – a digest of the full summary.
- “Advocating for Children of Prisoners: Second Report to the Community – details of the programs the community started in response to the First Report.

On the website from the Second Wave:

- “Steps to Home: The Importance of Family Relationships in Successful Reentry.”
- “Family Ties” - 16 minute film showing the struggles of fathers in Jail.

3. **Convened and educated** major stakeholders and much of the public about children and families of incarcerated parents resulting in **significant formal and informal action**.

- An arrest protocol for officers accepted and piloted by the Pittsburgh Police.
- A family-friendly waiting room welcoming children and caregivers visiting Jail.
- Inclusion of family decision making and services in new reentry programming.
- Redesign of Jail visiting environment and policies to build family relationships.
- Creation of a fund by 14 local grantmakers to support implementation of reentry reforms especially those supporting families and children.
- Strengthened and energized collaboration among criminal justice agencies to plan, implement, and oversee successful reentry.



Anomalies and Surprises from Two Years of Conversation about the Impact of Parental Incarceration On Parents and Their Families and Children

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From 2007 through 2009 the Pittsburgh Child Guidance Foundation assisted by 415 incarcerated and released parents, their families and children, and 325 corrections, probation, and child welfare staff, court officials, service providers, and others, conducted more than 50 focus groups and interviews about what happens to family relationships when parents are arrested and incarcerated. The resulting data are voluminous and compelling. Some of the glimpses into reality “knock your socks off.” Here are just a few of the anomalies and surprises:

- 90% of Jail residents do nothing all day.
- Everything depends on the Correctional Officer (i.e. who gets a work assignment, how residents and visitors are treated, whether residents get medical care or not).
- Different shifts are different Jails.
- Correctional Officers have little control over their schedules; get “forced overtime” same day; 16-hour shifts are not unusual.
- Releases from the Jail peak from 2 to 4 in the morning; no transportation is provided.
- Local conventional wisdom (not the literature): men get many more visits.
- Caregivers/families demonstrate amazing strength and capacity; they need, but don’t get, practical help however (\$, dishes, laundry, hair braiding, food, beds).
- Children are sturdy and knowledgeable.
- Parents not involved with child welfare may fare worse in custody proceedings.
- There is a desperate need for information - all parties all stages - and there is no point person from whom to get information regarding:
 - Arrest, arraignment, bail*
 - First time visitors have the most desperate needs*
 - Visiting rules and customs, hours, cancellations*
 - Programs going on in the jail and afterward*
 - Resident illness, birth, suicide attempt, transfer, family crises*
 - Children’s health, academics, safety, love and vice versa*
 - Court actions – timetable; Defense attorney’s activities*
 - Terms of Probation, appointments, fines, restitutions, child support*
 - Consequences of guilty plea*
 - Consequences of giving up custody*
 - Release Information and where to live, work, get benefits and ID after release*

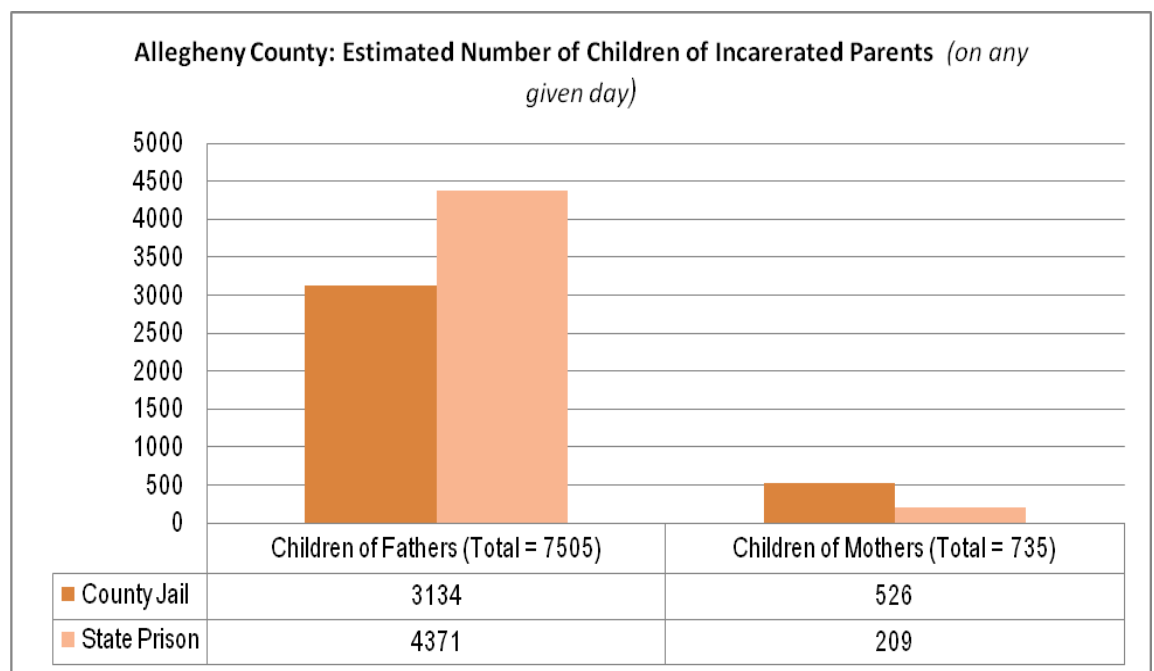
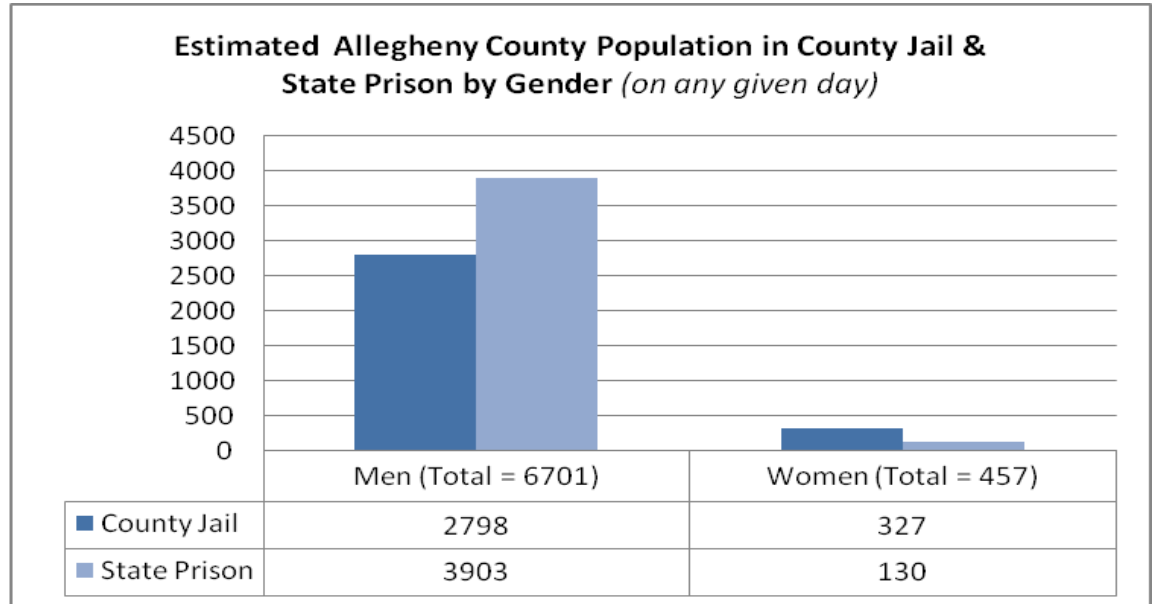
(Note: After local presentation of some of these “discoveries”, several have been addressed and other changes are in process – for example, there is now a contact person for families available by telephone from 3-11PM, and soon all releases from jail will occur between 8AM and 9PM through a formal discharge center that provides resource information and free phone calls.)



Estimated Numbers of Men and Women from Allegheny County, PA who are in Jail and Prison and the Children they Leave Behind

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Calculations based on formula. See Denise Johnston in Gabel & Johnston, Children of Incarcerated parents, 1995, P. 52.