

Unique Program Connects N.H. Campers with Incarcerated Fathers

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At the Children of Incarcerated Parents program at Camp Spaulding in August, children will engage in camp activities with their fathers at the New Hampshire State Prison for Men in Concord. In this photo, fathers participating in the Family Connections program celebrate Father's Day with their children.

For three children attending Camp Spaulding in Penacook this month, activities will include classic camp fare – swimming, canoeing, archery, silly songs – as well as some not-so-traditional field trips. These children, all of whom have a father who is incarcerated in a New Hampshire state prison, will spend two days in prison with their dads.

The camp, the first of its kind in New Hampshire and one of just a few nationwide, is an initiative of the Family Connections Center, a collaborative effort of the University of New Hampshire family studies department and the New Hampshire Department of Corrections.

“The kids will be mixed in with other campers and will get a lot of your usual camp experiences, but they’ll also do activities with their fathers,” says Kerry Kazura, associate professor of family studies, who helped create the Family Connections Center and is involved in the program at Camp Spaulding, a program of Child and Family Services of New Hampshire. Campers will visit their fathers at the New Hampshire State Prison for Men in Concord on August 21 and 23, 2012, for five hours each day.

Modeled after a similar program at Hope House in Washington, D.C., the Children of Incarcerated Parents (CIP) summer camp program was created to extend the work of the Family Connections Center into a summer camp environment. Kazura and Family Connections Center director Kristina Toth '91 say the program's goals are to help the children realize they are not alone – two in every 100 children in the U.S. has an incarcerated parent – by sharing experiences with peers in a similar situation, and to strengthen the bonds between incarcerated fathers and their children.

“The program also provides a unique opportunity for campers to bond with their fathers in a way that can never be experienced in the typical visiting area of the prison. We hope that through this program, the fathers will be more motivated and the campers will grow as

well.”“That is one of the important things that camp provides, developing connections through common interests and shared experiences,” says Ed Orłowski, director of residential services for Camp Spaulding. “The program also provides a unique opportunity for campers to bond with their fathers in a way that can never be experienced in the typical visiting area of the prison. We hope that through this program, the fathers will be more motivated and the campers will grow as well.”

Campers in the CIP program will view two documentaries created by children of incarcerated parents, and counselors will lead discussion groups with those children.

Fathers and their children will participate in camp games and activities and work together to create individual, life-sized murals titled “A perfect day with dad.”

And while their children are hiking and horseback riding, the dads will be busy. “The fathers involved are anxiously preparing for this time with their children by working on a skit to perform in front of their kids and taking an additional seminar on child development,” says Toth.

The CIP program is open only to inmates and families who are active members in the Family Connections Center – a self-selecting group of men who are motivated to improve their parenting skills and connections. Donations to the program cover the cost of attending Camp Spaulding for the CIP campers. “Our goal is to get these fathers connected to their families, so they will get out and pay child support and emotionally support their kids,” Kazura says.

That goal, broadly, is what launched the creation of the Family Connections Center in 1998. “A lot of the inmates we were seeing had fathers or mothers incarcerated when they were children,” Kazura says. “The Department of Corrections wanted something to break this cycle.”

Kazura, who has done research on the program, notes that its effectiveness is encouraging: The recidivism rate for offenders who completed the program while they were incarcerated was 39.5 percent, compared to the overall recidivism rate of 49.6 percent. She’s found that inmates need just 30 to 36 hours of intervention to reduce recidivism.

There’s another benefit to the program, she adds: “We see that when inmates are involved in these programs, their behavior in prison is better.” Kazura and Toth hope to expand the program next year to run a camp for mothers incarcerated at the state prison in Goffstown who are also involved in the Family Connections Center.

For more information on the Children of Incarcerated Parents summer camp program at Camp Spaulding of Child and Family Services, go to <http://www.cfsnh.org/pages/programs/CampSpaulding/cip.html>

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