



Community Service Activity Mail Kit

What is a Mail Kit?

A Mail Kit is a decorated box with writing supplies given to children of incarcerated parents. (There are 44,360 children of offenders in Missouri as of January 2009.)

Why is a Mail Kit important?

Being separated from other family members is never easy. That's why it's important for children and their incarcerated parents or family members to stay in touch. Long distance phone calls are nice but are often too expensive. Mail Kits can help families begin letter writing and stay in the letter-writing habit.

What do we need to make a Mail Kit?

Large shoebox or plastic file box, stationery, assorted note cards, postcards, envelopes, pencils and pens, colors and markers, postage stamps, small spiral bound notebook, and a copy of the sample form letter. An optional item would be a diary or journal for the older children to encourage practice in writing and for a place to write down daily activities to refer to when writing a letter.

Note: Do **NOT** include stickers. Some correctional centers will not accept a letter (even from a child) if the envelope or letter includes stickers.

How long will the Mail Kit activity take?

One to two hours to shop for supplies and time to decorate several shoe boxes.

What do we do?

1. Choose a time to introduce this activity to your 4-H club or community group by explaining why it's important for children to be able to write to an incarcerated parent.
2. Depending on the ages of the club members, ask for volunteers to shop for the needed supplies.
3. Set a date and time to assemble the Mail Kit.
4. Make copies of the sample letter to add to the Mail Kit. Some family members may not be able to think of anything to say so they can "fill in the blanks" of the copied letter until they become more comfortable with writing letters. Add a "Just for You" label to identify your club/group to the families who will be receiving the Mail Kit (Avery #5160 size labels work well). (Both available on the 4-H LIFE website at <http://extension.missouri.edu/4hlife/communityservice/mailkit.htm>)
5. Donate the completed Mail Kits by contacting Tammy Gillespie at 573-882-3316 or gillespiet@missouri.edu.

Day _____

Dear _____,

Hi! How are you? I am _____. You might like to know that

The weather here has been:

sunny rainy windy snowy cloudy

warm cold foggy hot stormy

so I have been _____

One thing that happened to me was _____

I felt really _____ about it because _____

Something you might like to know about _____

Before I go I just want to say _____

I hope you _____

Love,
