



“The 4-H LIFE visits are like another world. You’re able to relax, love and laugh again.”

Incarcerated Mother
4-H LIFE Program Participant

What is the University of Missouri Extension 4-H LIFE Program?

The University of Missouri (MU) Extension 4-H Living Interactive Family Education (LIFE) Program is a family strengthening program that addresses the needs of children of incarcerated parents.

The overall objective of the 4-H LIFE Program is to promote a strong, healthy, and nurturing family environment for children of incarcerated parents, while helping incarcerated parents and trained 4-H volunteers become positive role models and mentors.

The program has three, interwoven components focused on specific audiences/groups:

- Parenting skills classes and planning meetings for the incarcerated parents
- 4-H club meetings that unite children with their families inside the prison visiting room

These three components are designed to create stronger parent-child bonds, improve the quality of prison-based family visits and increase youth decision-making and communication skills. Incarcerated parents are required to participate in weekly parenting and leadership and planning meetings in order to qualify for the program. The 4-H LIFE club meeting includes an official youth-led business meeting and parent-led 4-H projects. Afterwards, program staff and parents apply lessons learned into the next month’s meeting plan. Children of offenders who are involved in 4-H LIFE are also enrolled as members of county 4-H programs and are mentored by 4-H volunteers.

How did the program start?

The Missouri 4-H LIFE program was originally developed in late 1999 at the Potosi Correctional Center in response to caregivers’ requests for meaningful family interaction during prison visits. Since that time, the founding extension faculty and small teams of volunteer mentors have adapted the pilot program for fathers to include two women’s prisons and several more male prisons.

Program Goals

Short term goals include the following:

1. Offenders and their children will improve their relationship.
2. Offenders and their children will experience increased satisfaction during prison visits.
3. Children’s short term life skills will increase.

These short-term goals lead to long term goals of improved family and community reintegration; ultimately leading to a reduction in intergenerational incarceration.



“I’ve been locked up for six years. This is the only program I have ever been in that lets me apply what I am learning in parenting class.”

**Incarcerated Father
4-H LIFE Program Participant**

Program Outcomes

The original MU Extension 4-H LIFE Program in Potosi focused its evaluation efforts on assessment of the life skills of the children of offenders. The evaluation was conducted by Dr. Elizabeth G. Dunn and J. Arbuckle. They concluded that participating youth appeared to have statistically significant life skill gains related to problem-solving, communication and self-esteem.

The MU Extension 4-H LIFE program is partnered with the Missouri Department of Corrections, the University of Missouri Campus Institutional Review Board and evaluation consultant Dr. Joyce Arditti, VA Tech, to implement a rigorous study of 4-H LIFE Program outcomes. The 30-month research study assessed the correlation between parent-child-family relationships and successful offender reentry.

Measures of parenting stress, co-parenting, social support and prison visit satisfaction data have been collected from approximately 100 subjects via:

- offender & caregiver interviews (control and program groups, male and female)
- corrections staff interviews (three data collection sites)
- 4-H program staff focus groups

Findings

Child Impact:

- Improved decision-making skills
- Increased communication skills

Parent Impact:

- Improved parent-child relationship
- Improved parenting skills and parenting competence

Caregiver Impact

- Reduced stress during prison visits; increased satisfaction with family visits
- Improved co-parenting behaviors with the incarcerated parent

The University of Missouri Extension continues to search for funding to further research family programming for families impacted by incarceration. Specific topics include impact of family relationships on reintegration, offender leadership and positive youth development opportunities for children with incarcerated family members.



“There have been 2,000 parent-child visits since the 4-H LIFE Program began... These families are getting to interact in a way that they’ve never been able to before.”

4-H Program Staff

Why Get Involved in the MU Extension 4-H LIFE Program?

With a focus on the future of America’s youth, the 4-H LIFE program is an integral part of improving public safety in rural, suburban and urban communities. In order for the program to be successful, each party involved, including incarcerated parents, children, caregivers, community members and corrections and program staff, must take ownership of their respective role.

Since the program’s inception in 1999, staff logged a total of 1,700 hours of direct service programming inside Missouri’s state correctional centers. Nearly 30% of staff time was spent facilitating 4-H and family-strengthening activities with the entire family. As the program continues to gain momentum, the number of individuals needed to serve in various roles will only increase. Here’s why you should get involved:

- Incarceration creates a significant identity interruption for parents that may result in abandonment of parenting roles and increased stress levels.
 - The 4-H LIFE Program gives incarcerated parents an opportunity to re-establish and strengthen their responsibilities to their children.
- The inability to interact regularly with their child has an impact on the offender’s own perceptions about being a parent.
 - Offenders who participate in the 4-H club meetings are better prepared to positively interact with their child and other family members in an engaged and respectful manner.
- Studies suggest prevention is cheaper than intervention.
 - A family incurs \$350,000 worth of cost during a typical drug offender’s 39 months of incarceration. Included is \$260,000 in pain and suffering.
January 2009, “New Mexico State Seminar Gives Legislators Facts on Impact to Families of Incarcerated Parents”.
- Research shows children of offenders tend to feel isolated and lack the resources needed to build healthy relationships with their parents.
 - Child participants of the 4-H LIFE program are encouraged to interact within their family unit as well as with other program participants and their communities, creating a sense of cooperation and unity.
 - Compared to traditional visitation settings, the 4-H LIFE club meeting provides an enhanced environment that is conducive to more positive, personal visits among the offender, the child and the caregiver.
 - Children who participate in 4-H LIFE tend to view their incarcerated parent in a positive leadership role.



“4-H LIFE visits are ‘normal’ and allow me to be the mother my children need.”

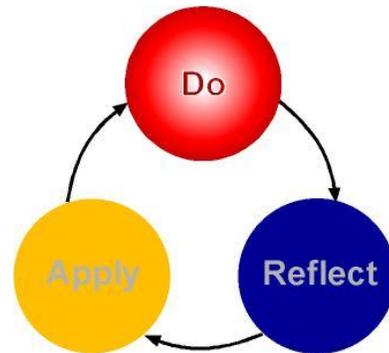
**Incarcerated Mother
4-H LIFE Program Participant**

Program Model

The 4-H LIFE model is based on the principles/foundations of positive youth development that occurs from an intentional process that promotes positive outcomes for young people by providing opportunities, relationships and the support to fully participate. Positive youth development takes place in families, peer groups, schools, neighborhoods and communities.

Experiential Learning Model

“Learning by doing” is a hallmark of all 4-H youth development programs. This hands-on approach helps youth explore new areas of inquiry, learn new concepts and develop life skills. The model is based upon the concept of “Do, Reflect, Apply.”

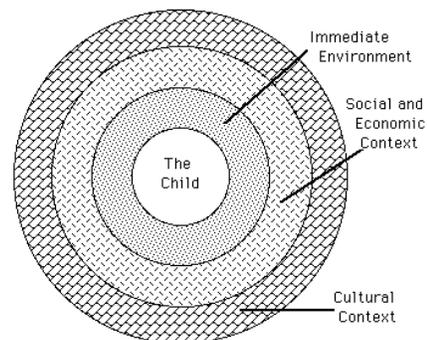


The National 4-H Council outlines four essential elements needed for youth to grow and thrive:

- **Independence:** Children in the 4-H LIFE program are given a chance to create a variety of projects, allowing them to demonstrate their motor skills and independence.
- **Belonging:** The 4-H LIFE club meeting encourages children to interact within their family and with other program participants of various ages.
- **Generosity:** Child participants in the 4-H LIFE club meetings are encouraged to share ideas, projects and leadership roles, creating attitudes and behaviors based on generosity.
- **Mastery:** Each 4-H LIFE club meeting provides new concepts, challenges and activities for youth to master.

Ecological Approach

Missouri 4-H uses Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory (1979, 1986, 2005). This model suggests that humans are impacted by multiple systems. These systems operate at the individual, family, community and societal levels. Researchers have concluded that effective positive youth development and prevention programs must operate at multiple levels of human ecology.





"I am deeply grateful for your help to our offenders and even more so to their children."

George Lombardi
 Director, Missouri
 Department of Corrections

Media Recognition

- Missourian: "4-H program helps family stay bonded despite prison bars," January 2012
- St. Joseph News-Press Now: "Break from prison," January 2011
- KOMU: "MU Extension family support program expands across Missouri," August 2011
- Missourinet: "4-H LIFE program gets grant to expand," August 2011
- Missourian and MU News Bureau: "MU Extension program given grant funding to connect children, parents in prison," August 2011
- KSDK: "Camp teaches science through space, 4-H LIFE youth participate in 4-H camps," August 2011
- 4-H National Mentoring Program Newsletter: "National mentoring program," March 2011
- Missouri AgConnection: "4-H recognized at National Mentoring Summit," 2011
- WERDCC Audrain County: "Soar Award (service over and above requirements)," 2010
- Farmington Daily Journal: "Volunteer work can add new dimensions to life," 2010
- Constitution Tribune: "4-H LIFE group helps children of incarcerated women meet challenges," 2009
- Mexico Ledger: "Vandalia 4-H LIFE club to make holiday treats for Mexico Animal Shelter dogs," 2009
- The Mexico Ledger: "Youth learn life lessons in 4-H," 2009
- University of Missouri KBIA Slideshow: "Mommy's House: A visit to Vandalia women's prison," April 2009
- University of Missouri KBIA 91.3 four-part series: "Life after prison" (part three), 2009
- Joyce A. Arditti, PhD, evaluation consultant to the 4-H LIFE Program: "Increasing our Knowledge about Parental Incarceration: A research presentation," February 2009
- The Council of State Governments Justice Center Action Plan: "Children of incarcerated parents," 2009
- The New York Times: "Missouri prison program fosters family ties behind bars," 2008
- University of Missouri 4-H Center for Youth Development Annual Report: "Rewards of 4-H LIFE surpass program boundaries," 2008
- Jefferson City News Tribune: *Family Focus*: "Algoa program teaches inmates parenting skills," October 2008
- National Children, Youth and Families at Risk (CYFAR) Parent Editorial Board Webinar: "Working with Incarcerated Parents and Their Families: It's an inside job," October 2008
- Natl. Children, Youth & Families Education and Research Network (CYFERnet) Program showcase, May 2008
- Urban Institute Justice Policy Center Report: "Broken Bonds: Understanding and addressing the needs of children with incarcerated parents," February, 2008
- Journal of Youth Development: "Addressing the needs of children of offenders," 2007
- National 4-H Council's 4-H...Power of YOUTH newsletter: "Incarcerated fathers and their children find new LIFE 4-H," winter, 2006

Awards & Honors

- **Annie E. Casey Foundation Award:** One of five programs to be awarded for innovative, exemplary and effective 4-H youth development programs that improve outcomes for rural, disadvantaged families. 2005
- **National 4-H Program of Distinction:** Accepted as a Program of Distinction, a description that reflects the high quality of 4-H youth development programs occurring in communities across the US. 2005
- **National Collaboration for Youth:** Selected for inclusion in the National Collaboration for Youth compendium showcasing programs that demonstrate benefits for youth, families and communities. 2005
- **National Priester Health Award:** Awarded the National Priester Health Award, given for positive health outcomes of program participants, by Healthy Communities National Network for Health. 2004



“I learned a lot from my volunteer experience with the 4-H LIFE Program. I am more open, and I appreciate others’ differences. I have more understanding of the mission and work of University of Missouri Extension and Corrections.”

4-H LIFE Program Volunteer
Intern

Become an MU Extension 4-H LIFE Program Volunteer Mentor

University of Missouri (MU) Extension is currently recruiting volunteer mentors for the award-winning 4-H LIFE Program, a family strengthening program that takes provides youth with 4-H learning opportunities inside correctional centers where their parent resides as well as in the community where the youth and his caregiver live.

Volunteer assistance is needed for the in these ways:

- Co-teaching research-based parenting classes with another trained volunteer.
- Assisting incarcerated parents and Extension staff plan and implement fun 4-H activities during monthly family visits held inside the correctional center visiting room.
- Serving as a caring, 4-H mentor to the youth in the community where he lives.

Qualifications:

- Sincere desire to serve as a positive, long term mentor to children of offenders.
- Willingness to attend land grant Extension 4-H Volunteer Orientation and trainings.
- Willingness and ability to become a Dept. of Corrections Volunteer in Corrections (VIC).

Benefits:

- Research-based training provided at no cost.
- Volunteer in Corrections training given by the Department of Corrections at no cost.
- Rewarding life experience in working with underserved youth in your community.

For more volunteer information contact:

Robert Wilkerson, Program Coordinator or
MO 4-H LIFE Program
Ph. 573-438-2671
Email wilkersonrc@missouri.edu

Lynna Lawson, 4-H LIFE Lead Advisor
National 4-H Council Mentoring Grant
Ph. 573-631-6467
Email lawsonl@missouri.edu



“This was one of the most wonderful, fulfilling days of my life. Do not underestimate your team’s valuable support that has kept this program going through grants, networking and pure perseverance.

Caregiver who attended the 10 year 4-H LIFE program anniversary event

4-H LIFE Program Service Expansion

Second Chance in Action – MU Extension Family Reunification Project

Through a one year subcontract with the Missouri DOC, the MU Extension 4-H LIFE Program is piloting family reunification support for female offenders returning to rural southeast Missouri.

Video Visits

Extension faculty work with the DOC reentry staff, offenders, families and regional Extension faculty to facilitate structured video visits between the offender and the adult the offender will return home to. Topics include: communication, roles, goals and finances. Participating adult and regional Extension staff connects from a local videoconference site. The whole family video visits will be the same as the offender-adult visits listed above; however, would also include age-appropriate activities for each set of approved children.

Post Release Therapeutic Reunification Family Meeting

MU Extension 4-H LIFE program part time staff and consultants provide in person family meetings upon the offender’s release into the community.

Second Chance in Action – Community Reinforcement Approach

Through a one year grant award from the Missouri DOC, the MU Extension 4-H Program staff provided District 12 (Farmington) Community Supervision clients and released Second Chance in Action participants with research-based programming. The participants learned about healthy food choices and community service through experiential nutrition lessons and participant determined projects that benefit others. Programming focused on two Extension curricula:

- Building Strong Families
- Tackling the Tough Skills

National Mentoring Program

Through an annual grant award from the National 4-H Council, the MU Extension 4-H LIFE Program provides technical assistance to land grant university 4-H Programs so that they can replicate the 4-H LIFE Program in their own states. State 4-H Programs receiving one year in National 4-H Council funds to reach children of offenders through the 4-H LIFE Program include Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, Missouri, New Hampshire and the District of Columbia.



"I wish I would have implemented 4-H LIFE sooner. It is a much more valid program... The focus is on the family and they are in a learning state."

Institutional Activities Coordinator
Missouri Department
of Corrections

Current MU Extension 4-H LIFE Program Sites

- **Potosi Men's Correctional Center; Level 5, Maximum Security**
1999 program implementation: monthly parenting, leadership and 4-H Family meetings

Robert Wilkerson, Extension Associate; MU Extension
113 N. Missouri, Suite A; Potosi, MO 63664,
Phone: 573-438-2671; Fax: 573-438-3068; wilkersonrc@missouri.edu
- **Missouri Eastern Correctional Center, Pacific**
2011 program implementation: monthly parenting, leadership; monthly 4-H Family meetings

Robert Wilkerson, Extension Associate; MU Extension (see above)
- **Women's Eastern, Reception, Diagnostic & Correctional Center, Levels 1-5**
2007 program implementation: weekly parenting, leadership; monthly 4-H Family meetings

Stephanie Femrite, 4-H Youth Specialist, MU Extension
Courthouse, Room 304, Mexico, MO 65265, Phone: 573-581-3231; femrites@missouri.edu
- **Chillicothe Correctional Center, Levels 1-5,**
2009 program implementation: weekly parenting, leadership; monthly 4-H Family meetings

Shaun Murphy, 4-H Youth Specialist; MU Extension
2881 Grand Dr, Suite 2; Chillicothe, MO 64601; Phone: 660-646-0811; murphyse@missouri.edu
- **Buchanan County Academy, for adjudicated youth**
2012 program implementation: weekly youth life skills classes; monthly 4-H Family meetings

Richard Smith, 4-H Youth Specialist, MU Extension
4125 Mitchell Ave, St Joseph, MO 64601; Phone: 816-279-1691; smithrichar@missouri.edu
- **Jefferson City Correctional Ctr., Intensive Therapeutic Community, Jefferson City**
2010 Program Implementation: Weekly parenting, leadership; monthly 4-H Family Meetings

Dr. Jenny Flatt, 4-H Youth Specialist, MU Extension
2436 Tanner Bridge Rd; Jefferson City, MO 65101
Phone: 573-634-2824; flattj@missouri.edu