



“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.