



***“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.