



# BUILDING STRONG FAMILIES AND MISSOURI DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS: 2007 EVALUATION YEAR END REPORT

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SPRING 2008



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In 2002, Missouri Department of Corrections began a new process known as the Missouri Re-Entry Process to prepare offenders to return to the community. The Missouri Department of Corrections decided a need existed for family strengthening programming within Missouri correctional facilities. As a result, an agreement was reached between Missouri Department of Corrections and University of Missouri Extension to offer Building Strong Families as part of the Missouri Re-Entry Process.

Research indicates that family strength and support may be a strong indicator of offender success in reintegration into society. To better prepare offenders for the challenges of re-entry, offenders are given the opportunity to participate in Building Strong Families programming. Building Strong Families (BSF) is an interactive program designed to help families identify their own strengths and learn skills to build on those strengths. The program uses a 13-module curriculum that can be adapted for families of different types and in different settings and situations.

As a result, University of Missouri Extension Faculty provided the Building Strong Families Program to over 900 Missouri Offenders. In 2007, 510 offenders participated in the program.

The following two reports are the results of evaluation conducted over the 2007 Building Strong Families programming year. The first report entitled *Building Strong Families in Missouri Department of Corrections: Initial Program Impacts* is a report listing findings from end of session reports completed by participants at the conclusion of individual BSF session. Respondents indicated a greater understanding of what it means to be a parent, role-model, and family member and improved communication skills. Participants in Building Strong Families indicated the information presented was relevant and provided them with the tools to better interact and cope with potential familial issues upon their return.

The second report entitled *Building Strong Families in Missouri Department of Corrections: Offender Value and Attitude Development towards Family Strengths* examined pre and post tests participants completed at the beginning and end of participation in Building Strong Families. Results indicated an increased ability of participants to more effectively communicate, demonstrate commitment, spend quality time with family members, and express appreciation and affection for loved ones. Quotes from the participants are included to provide a better illustration of the impact of participation in Building Strong Families programming.

Reports and instruments can also be found at <http://extension.missouri.edu/bsf/evaluation/index.htm>.

## BUILDING STRONG FAMILIES AND MISSOURI DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS: INITIAL PROGRAM IMPACTS



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June 2007



### Program Overview

*University of Missouri Extension's Building Strong Families: Challenges and Choices* Program (BSF) is a strengths-based curriculum that helps families learn their strengths, build on strengths, and learn the necessary life skills to create stronger families. Research indicates that family strengths are important to maintaining family cohesion and helping in the development and well-being of family members. Families that possess these strengths tend to fare better in times of high stress and uncertainty, which can often lead to burdens on the family structure.

Incarcerated parents face many challenges while trying to parent from inside an institution. Many offenders lack the necessary skills to interact in a positive manner with their child or loved ones. As a result of this need, Missouri Department of Corrections contacted University of Missouri Extension to provide Building Strong Families to offenders participating in the Missouri Re-Entry Process at 11 sites. As a result of this collaboration, offenders have the opportunity to develop parenting and life skills and tools to strengthen their families.

An evaluation procedure was developed to gauge the participants' attitudes, opinions, and perceived effectiveness of the BSF program. At the end of each BSF session, participants have the opportunity to give feedback. The forms were approved by both the Missouri Department of Corrections and University of Missouri Institutional Review Board.

Extension reached 652 inmates by the end of 2006. As a result of such a high participation level, a large amount of information has been gathered about overall offender attitudes, opinions, and perspectives about their experience with BSF. The participant evaluation forms show the following trends and themes:

- Increased awareness, knowledge, and skills related to family strengths
- Applicability and relevancy of the information
- Direct and concrete action steps to improve family relationships
- High quality learning environment, resources, and information

In addition to these themes, overall responses indicated a high level of satisfaction with the BSF program. Offenders appreciated the availability of the program, resources and information offered, and the time and facilitation skills of the instructors. Overall, the feedback indicates respondents viewed the BSF program as being extremely beneficial

and enjoyable. The following is a brief description of each of the categories discovered during the analysis of the feedback forms.

### **Increased Awareness, Knowledge and Skills**

Responses from the participation evaluation forms indicate an overall increase in offenders' knowledge and skills about family strengths. Many reported learning new methods and techniques to strengthen and improve the overall quality of their family relationships. Many of the participants focused on the overall importance of giving and demonstrating affection for their loved ones. Some of the comments included the following:

- “Knowing how important it’s to tell your children ‘I love you’ and [give] hugs”
- “The ways in which I express my thoughts and feelings to my child about his or her actions could/will have bearing on how they feel”
- “Let your child know he or she is lovable and capable”

In addition, many respondents indicated a better understanding of how to handle difficult situations that may arise in their families. This was especially pronounced in participant responses about discipline with their children. One commented on his or her new perspective towards discipline with the following: “Explore my options when disciplining my child and not be so quick to yell at him but instead find out why he is acting the way he is....Raising a child can be complicated but with the right tools it can be a wonderful experience.”

### **Applicability and Relevancy of the Information**

Offenders also commented about Building Strong Families' quality, applicability, and relevance. They seem to be able to take the concepts learned in the classroom setting and apply it to their real life situations. This was especially noticeable in the concept of child-self care, goal setting, and coping with stress.

One specific example was in the category of child self care; offenders mentioned how the material helped them learn to keep their children safe in the home. As a result of this information, one respondent planned to create a safety plan for his or her child. Another remarked that the session made him realize the importance of preparing for emergency situations. A third recognized the importance of “teaching ...them [children] to watch their surroundings when out playing.” The following quote summed up many of the comments about the relevancy of the information by stating he or she was planning to “...use all the skills I’ll learn about myself and apply the ways with my children.”

Another important area was that of goal setting. Participants were better able to create reachable and measurable goals. One participant mentioned that the goal setting module made an immediate impact on his or her life. The respondent stated, “...to make goals and take steps toward making [goals]... and be realistic and not to overwhelm myself.” Others commented on learning how to set achievable goals and the importance of taking realistic steps in achieving goals. Others said:

- “Make short term realistic goals”
- “Learn to take it one day at a time and set daily priorities”
- “This program has helped me realize what is important”

## **Direct and Concrete Action Steps to Improve Family Relationships**

One important effect of Building Strong Families has been the development of specific action steps of the participants. One question on the participant evaluation form asks respondents what they intend to do in their lives as a result of the workshop. In most cases, the responses to this question were extremely specific and related directly to the information presented in the corresponding workshop. This is promising because it demonstrates that participants are making specific plans to use the information.

BSF appears to help participants prepare when returning to their community and family. It also indicates that offenders are preparing for their post-release by addressing specific issues in their lives. Examples of the types of specific action steps include the following:

- “Go to more family classes for help with my family issues.”
- “No longer smoke in my house around my children.”
- “Read and investigate before [I]...invest. If it sounds too good to be true it probably is.”
- “Get ...a job and treat my children with respect. Communicate. Doing things with my children. Personal time for each one.”

Instead of just having a broad concept of family strengths, BSF provides a specific framework and plan to help offenders use these strategies. One participant summed up his feeling about the program by stating, “I honestly feel that some things raised by the questions asked [in Building Strong Families] are indeed useful to someone like myself that are about to return to their family.”

According to the participants, BSF offers several positive impacts on offenders. The respondents to the survey seem to feel the program has facilitated the discovery of family strengths. The curriculum, hands-on activities, and social interaction help participants learn about themselves and provide them with the tools to strengthen their family. BSF has given participants new skills and tools for parenting, communication, and problem solving.

## **High Quality Learning Environment, Resources, and Information**

BSF programming uses practical, relative, and research-based resources, activities, and information. The analysis of end of session forms revealed a high level of appreciation, appropriateness, and usability of the information presented during BSF. All of the sessions include hand-outs and guide sheets developed by the University of Missouri faculty and BSF team members. The provided material helps supplement the information learned during the respective BSF session and provides additional resources for participants upon their release. In addition, participants learn about the variety of resources available through their local University of Missouri Extension office and on the University of Missouri web.

Several noted the importance of information presented about financial management. One individual stated BSF information helped him or her realize “...that there are places that can help you in getting things started” when returning to the community. Several participants commented on how the information and resources better prepared them to enter the workforce.

- My favorite part of this session was...“role playing the boss/interviewee and getting the info. For the career center.”
- I now plan to “write out some resumes and be more organized and specific.”
- I learned “how to fill out applications/resume.”
- “The information is great!!!”

Participants also talked about the overall quality of the learning environment and facilitator. Throughout the end of session forms, participants repeatedly commented on their appreciation for the skill of the facilitator and the learning environment. Overall, participants seemed extremely at ease with the facilitation style and method of instruction. The comments seemed to reflect the overall comfort level and ease of learning in BSF. Statements included:

- “I enjoy learning every week.”
- “This class does help me to learn.”
- “Thanks for teaching me these things.”
- “This is a great class for me and my family.”
- “I enjoy everything I learn every session.”

### **Building Strong Families and the Missouri Re-Entry Process**

The information presented in this document seems to correlate strongly with the strategies developed as a result of the Missouri Re-Entry Process. One stated goal of the MRP is to offer evidence-based family programming to offenders. BSF seems to be meeting this need. According to the participants, BSF offers several positive impacts. The curriculum, hands-on activities and social interaction help participants learn about themselves and provide them with the tools to strengthen their family.

BSF has also exposed participants to new information and helps meet the MRP goal of developing resources for offenders. The handouts, guide-sheets, and up to date information provides participants with relevant and specific information about available resources in the community, including University of Missouri Extension resources. Because Extension offices are in almost all 114 counties in MO, offenders will have access to materials when they are released.

MRP also tries to implement evidence-based programs for enhancing offender motivation, problem solving ability and thinking process. BSF meets this goal by using a curriculum and educational strategy that goes beyond merely focusing on parenting and relationship skills. BSF helps people apply those skills to everyday life (e.g., When they get into stressful situations, how can they lower their anxiety? or When they need to talk to family members, how can they start a conversation without sounding defensive?).

In addition, topics such as working and health are covered to help the person develop as a whole. MRP has developed a strategy of expanding current employability skills/life skills (ES/LS) programs to all offenders who would benefit from it prior to release. BSF offers a wide range of activities and resources to increase both the employability (working, communication) and life skills (goal-setting, financial management, communication, stress reduction) of offenders.

## Conclusion

According to the participants, the Building Strong Families program leads to numerous positive impacts on offenders and potentially their families. The 13-topic program and hands-on activities help offenders learn about their families, themselves, and even their fellow participants. While experiencing this self-discovery, they are developing the needed life skills to successfully strengthen their family and community.

Participants gain a greater understanding of what it means to be a parent, role-model, and family member. As a whole, participation in BSF may result in positive impacts to empower the offender and take the necessary steps to successfully transition back to their family, community, and society. In the words of one participant, "This is a good class that has helped me cope with my feelings and has taught me how to have a happier loving family with lots of laughter and fun."



# BUILDING STRONG FAMILIES AND MISSOURI DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS: OFFENDER VALUE AND ATTITUDE DEVELOPMENT TOWARDS FAMILY STRENGTHS

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DECEMBER 2007



## Building Strong Families: Challenges and Choices

*Building Strong Families: Challenges and Choices (BSF)* is a strengths-based curriculum designed to help families learn their strengths, build on strengths, and learn the necessary life skills to create stronger families. Research indicates that family strengths are important to maintaining family cohesion and aiding in the development and well-being of family members (Moore, Chalk, Scarpa, Vandivere, 2002).

## Family Strengths Research

Family strengths can be defined as “characteristics that contribute to a family’s satisfaction and its perceived success as a family” (Strong, DeVault, and Cohen, 2004). It is believed that families who possess these strengths tend to fare better in times of high stress and uncertainty, which can often lead to undue burdens upon the family structure.

## Challenges of Parental Incarceration

According to the Missouri Department of Corrections, there are 103,664 offenders in the Missouri correction system (Missouri Department of Corrections Census, 2006 (<http://www.doc.mo.gov>)). Many of these incarcerated individuals will return to society.

A large number of incarcerated adults are parents. Estimates place the number of children with an incarcerated father at 2,473,300 and at 319,718 with an incarcerated mother (Center for Children of Incarcerated Parents, 2004). As a result of their incarceration, many families and children must deal with unique stressors and challenges (Block and Potthast, 2001).

## Response to the Impact of Incarceration on Families

Research indicates that family and spiritual connections may be the best indicator to successful reintegration to the community (Gadsen, 2003). Other research indicates that parenting and family strengthening education programming may have a strong impact on promoting positive social behavior development among offenders (Schippers, Maerker, and DeFuentes-Merillas, 2001).

As a result of this need to better prepare offenders to return home to their families, Missouri Department of Corrections contacted University of Missouri Extension and reached an agreement to provide Building Strong Families to offenders participating in the Missouri Re-Entry Process. As a result of this collaboration, offenders have the opportunity to develop parenting, life skills, and tools to strengthen their families.

### **Evaluation of the Building Strong Families Program: Development of Impacts and Goals**

The Building Strong Families evaluation team wanted to see what offenders learned from the workshops and created a pre-post test to evaluate the program. The evaluation focuses on offender attitudes and values regarding four family strength categories. The four categories were selected based on the short and intermediate outcomes found in the BSF Program Logic Model. In addition, focus group research conducted by Building Strong Families program staff played an important role in the selection of the four strengths.

The focus group report indicated that families participating in BSF programming reported spending more time together as a family and increased their communication (Schrader, McGarvey, and Procter, 2005). Participants in the focus groups also indicated an increased capacity to demonstrate appreciation and affection with family members and with other participants and were more committed to family and friends (Schrader, McGarvey and Procter, 2005). As a result of these findings and the stated outcomes listed in the BSF Program Logic model, the following strengths were selected for Building Strong Families-DOC evaluation:

- enjoyable time together,
- demonstrating appreciation and affection,
- communicating effectively, and
- valuing and demonstrating commitment.

### **Measuring Offender Values and Perceptions: Assessment Instrument**

An instrument was adapted from existing validated instruments (most specifically the American Family Strengths Inventory) and the body of family strengths research to assess offender values and perceptions. The instrument was designed in a pre-post test format. The assessment was administered to participants prior to participation in Building Strong Families programming to examine current family strengths awareness, attitudes, and understanding. Upon or near completion of BSF, participants were given the assessment again to see whether attitudes, understanding and capacity towards their respective family strengths had changed.

The Building Strong Families Strengths Assessment consists of 33 questions divided into 3 parts. The first part contains 8 questions related to demographics (age, sex, gender, race), family information (number of children, interaction with children), and frequency of program participation. The second part contains 20 questions related to family strengths. The third part has 5 open-ended questions related to the 4 family strengths being examined and one question in relation to participant perspective regarding Building Strong Families learning.

Questions were developed and adapted to fit into a Likert scale with the use of “smiley faces” for easier readability. In addition, the questions were written to meet literacy levels of the offender population and designed so the offender would reflect on his or her personal attitudes or perspective about his or her specific family environment and relationship. This was accomplished primarily by using “I” statements and asking the respondent to rate his or her level of agreement with the statement. The responses may range from “strongly agree” to “I don’t know” or “strongly disagree” as follows:



The assessment also contained a section with five open-ended questions which provided participants the opportunity to expand on their personal experiences with Building Strong Families.

The first four of these open-ended questions focused on respondents’ attitudes towards the four strengths being examined (enjoyable time together, appreciation and affection, communication, and commitment). The final question focused on participant learning expectations. In the pre-test, the question asked about what the offender hoped or expected to learn. The post version inquired about the most important information the participant learned or did not learn from the program.

The assessment was piloted with a group of adult learners and reviewed by offenders before being finalized. Based on the results, the wording of the assessment was clarified and simplified for respondents. The instrument was found to be written at a sixth grade reading level as measured by the Flesch-Kincaid scale.

Participation in the evaluation was completely voluntary. Both the Missouri Department of Corrections and the University of Missouri Institutional Review Board reviewed and approved the evaluation instrument and assessment. Informed written consent was gathered from inmates who wanted to participate in the evaluation. Participation in the evaluation procedure was not required to maintain enrollment status in Building Strong Families.

## Assessment Results

The following section reports on the results of the assessments from February 2007 through August 2007. Overall, the assessment examined whether attitudes and perceptions towards their families changed as a result of participation in Building Strong Families. The overall results indicate that scores increased approximately 13% between the pre-assessment and post-assessment stage. In addition, the findings indicated that many of the family strengths categories are correlated.

## Pre-Assessment Demographics and Interest Level Findings

One hundred thirteen pre-assessments were completed and returned from February through August 2007. All respondents were male. The average age of respondents during the reporting period was 28.4 years old. However, the range included participants from 21 years old to 54 years old. Ethnic or racial make up of the participants indicated that the majority of participants were either Caucasian or African-American. Specifically, 55 of the respondents were Caucasian, 48 were African-American, 6 were Multi-Racial, 3 were Hispanic, and 1 was Native American.

In order to determine the number of participants who currently were part of a child's life or anticipated being part of a child's life, respondents were asked if they would play a role in a child's life. Ninety-eight of the respondents reported that upon their release, they would be a part of a child's life in some capacity (child, foster-child, niece, nephew, grandchildren, step-child, or sibling). This indicated that over 87% of participants were active or anticipated being active in a child's life. As a follow-up to this question, respondents who indicated they would be a part of a child's life were asked to indicate the number of children with whom they would be involved. The average number of children with whom each of these individuals would be involved was approximately 6. As a result of the responses, over 588 children could be involved in the lives of these offenders.

To measure inmates' interest in the BSF topics, participants checked the three topics that interested them the most. The topics included: Family Strengths, Stress-Management, Healthy Lifestyles, Goal-Setting, Money Management, Communication, Self-Esteem in Children, Consumer Awareness, Child Self-Care, Employment Skills, Positive Discipline, Balancing Responsibilities, and Home Safety. The topics that elicited the most interest by participants were as follows:

**Table 1. Anticipated Interest Topic Interest Level by Participants**

Topic	Selected as Topic of Most Interest
Goal-Setting	67
Communication	64
Positive Discipline	59
Family Strengths	53

## Post-Assessment Demographics and Participation

Eighty-three post-assessments were returned between February 2007 and August 2007. The decreased number of post-assessments is due to a variety of factors. Participants do not always complete Building Strong Families because of being released before the classes are completed, having behavior infractions resulting in correctional actions, having work or school conflicts, dropping out due to disinterest in the program, transferring to other institutions or choosing not to complete the form.

The demographic responses on the post-test were proportional to the demographic findings on the pre-test. Of the 83 participants who returned the post test, 40 participants were Caucasian, 37 were African-American, 3 were Multi-Racial, 2 were Hispanic, and 1 was Native American. The average age of participants was similar to

the pre-assessment respondents with an average age of 30.7. Involvement in a child's life response was extremely similar to the response on the pre-assessment. Seventy-five members of the post-assessment group reported having contact or anticipating contact with a child in the near future. This resulted in approximately 90% of respondents anticipating involvement in the life of a child. In fact, this was a slightly higher percentage than the pre-assessment group (87% pre versus 90% post).

Reported participation levels were extremely high among respondents who completed the post-assessment. Of the 83 respondents, 57 reported not missing a session, 15 reported missing no more than one session, 5 reported missing no more than two sessions, 3 reported missing no more than three sessions, and 3 did not respond to the question.

**Table 2. Demographic Reporting of Pre and Post Assessment Ethnicity of Participants**

<i>Race/Ethnicity</i>	<b>Pre-Test Reporting (n=113)</b>	<b>Post-Test Reporting (n=83)</b>
Caucasian	55	40
African American	48	37
Multi-Racial	6	3
Hispanic	3	2
Native American	1	1

### **Changes in Values and Attitudes Towards Family Strengths from Pre to Post Assessment**

The maximum possible score for the assessment is 100 points, since each of the 20 questions on the Likert scale can receive between one and five points. Questions pertaining to demographic data, intensity of participation, topic interest, and open-ended questions are not assigned a point value and are not scored. This data is strictly for descriptive purposes of program participants and interest levels.

The scores on the pre-assessment provide an overall baseline picture of how participants view the concept of family strengths and their individual perceptions toward their social and family connections. Respondents answered a series of 20 mixed order questions relating to the four family strengths being examined. The average score for the participants was 72% or 72 points out of a total possible of 100.

Scores were calculated for the overall group on the pre and post tests. Statistical comparisons of these two scores (using a t-test) indicated that there was a significant difference between the two scores ( $p < .05$ ). The average score on the overall post-assessment increased to 85% or 85 points out of a possible 100. The post-assessment score for the period was 13% higher for the post-assessment score than the pre-assessment score. This would seem to indicate there has been improvement in offender attitudes and values towards family strengths among those individuals participating in the Building Strong Families program.

The scores in each category (enjoyable time together, demonstrating appreciation and affection, communicating effectively, and valuing and demonstrating commitment) help illustrate some information about how the respondents viewed the specific family strength area. The following scores were reported for each family strength area:

**Table 3. Average Score by Category from Pre to Post Assessment in Percent**

<i>Family Strength Examined</i>	<b>Average Score on Pre-Assessment (n=113)</b>	<b>Average Score on Post-Assessment (n=83)</b>	<b>Percent Change in Scores</b>
Enjoyable Time Together	74	84	+10
Appreciation/Affection	71	83	+12
Communicating Effectively	68	86	+18
Demonstrating Commitment	75	85	+10
<b>Total Score</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>83</b>	<b>+13</b>

The greatest increase came in the area of communicating effectively. This increase is extremely important as communication is one of the core strengths identified in Building Strong Families. Not only is communication a stand alone module, it is interwoven through nearly every single unit in the program. From the family strengths perspective, effective communication is extremely important in developing long lasting and meaningful relationships. In addition, it may aid in the transition to the community and enable ex-offenders to engage more effectively with community and family members.

Another major increase came in the area of demonstrating commitment. This is an extremely relevant increase between attitude and values. The increase in the values associated with commitment would seem to indicate that participants in Building Strong Families have developed an increased awareness or desire to become more active and involved in the life of their children and family. This is important to note because of the negative stereotype incarcerated fathers often experience. Incarcerated fathers are sometimes viewed as disinterested and absentee fathers who are unaffected by the time spent away from their children (Hairston, 1998).

### **Assessment Findings: Written Participant Feedback on Pre-Test**

Participants could answer open-ended questions on the pre- and post-assessment forms. The questions were designed to gather feedback from the participants on their feelings and opinions towards involvement in the program. The pre-assessment focused on what the participant hoped to learn from involvement on the program. The post-assessment focused on what the offender learned or did not learn from his or her involvement in the program.

The pre-assessment provided information about the perspective of the participant with little or no program exposure. From examination of participant responses, the evaluation team was able to gather and elaborate on two specific themes. The first theme was the overall desire to improve the quality and nature of relationships with family and society.

When asked to respond to a question about what the individual hoped to learn, some participants mentioned the following:

- “To be more supportive of family and their decisions and how to be more open”
- “How to manage time with my family and how to be a better father”
- “How to become better connected with my family and children”
- “I hope to learn how to build a strong and healthy relationship with my family”

These comments seem to indicate an audience that is interested in specific techniques and methods to improve overall relationship quality. The responses seemed to focus on the connection between parent and child.

The second theme focused on rationale for participation in the program. The majority of comments seemed to indicate involvement was due to required program participation. However, in light of this comment, many participants responded that they still hoped to learn techniques as a result of their involvement in the program. This finding also correlated with an expression of appreciation for involvement in the program in the post-assessment results.

### **Assessment Findings: Written Participant Feedback on Post-Test**

The post-assessment examination revealed two significant themes. The first theme focused on the topic of communication. Many respondents commented about the need to communicate with family members and an increased awareness of how to communicate effectively with them. These findings seemed to correlate with the increased scores on the communication section of the pre- and post-assessment. Communication was the topic with the largest increase from pre-post assessment. Sample comments about communication included the following:

- “..talk instead of argue.”
- “...talk things out and to approach things in different ways with a positive attitude.”
- “...stop and listen to what they say. Don’t just say no.”
- “...learn to think before I speak.”

The second major theme from the post-assessment examination was an increased awareness of responsibility and involvement in family life. This is an important theme since prior research indicates many fathers did not live with their children prior to incarceration (Mumola, 2000). As a result, many offenders may not have experience being active in a child’s life. Participants seemed to express a renewed commitment or increased awareness of the importance of active involvement in family life. Participants in BSF expressed a desire to become positive influences in their child’s life. Scores related to increased involvement and commitment to family life rose 10 points from pre- to post-assessment. Sample comments included:

- “...I learned spending time with your family should include sharing, thoughts, and feelings as well as activities.”
- “Families matter. It is what you help make it. Knowledge is important because what I thought I knew, I really didn’t.”
- “..to be a good father and show my son how to become a man.”
- “...to be more responsible.”
- “...your family is the most important thing you have.”

Participants who completed the program also expressed a sense of appreciation for involvement in the program. Even though many of the respondents reported being 'told' to attend the program, many reported learning vital information about reconnecting with their family. In addition, participants seemed to enjoy participation in the program even if they were unfamiliar or hesitant about the program initially.

## **Conclusion and Implications**

Incarcerated parents face a litany of challenges and obstacles to successfully reconnect with society and their family. The results from the following assessment seem to indicate that involvement in a holistic family strengthening program such as Building Strong Families empowers and motivates some offenders to make the necessary value changes to increase their capacity as a parent.

Specifically, the evaluation to date indicates that participation in BSF promotes positive value development and increased awareness of the importance of effective communication, commitment, affection, and quality time. These results have significance for offenders, family members of offenders, and correctional staff.

Potential Implications for Offenders and their Family members:

- Involvement in family strengthening program can provide the necessary skills to better reconnect with family and society.
- Offenders seem to develop skills and awareness in the importance of effective communication.
- Participation can lead to increased awareness and capacity to demonstrate and provide effective commitment to family members, loved ones, and society.
- Involvement in Building Strong Families for family members may provide increased skills and capacities to relate and reconnect with the returning offender.

Potential Implications for Educators and Correctional staff:

- Building Strong Families seems to be an effective method to help some offenders redefine their values and awareness of the importance of family and community ties.
- The development of family strength awareness and values may result in a reduced risk of recidivism.
- The programming has been most effective in increasing awareness and capacity for communication.
- The development of increased understanding towards the importance of commitment may result in offenders becoming more involved in efforts to help them successfully transition to the community.
- Improved marketing of the program within the institution could promote an increased awareness for family education programs.
- The need to develop programming designed to meet the unique needs of offenders.

Potential Implications for Policy-Makers:

- Family strengthening programs may help reconnect families and thereby help alleviate some of the societal costs of incarceration.
- More research is needed for family strengthening programming with offenders to better identify and illustrate program impacts.
- Family strengthening programs may provide life skills needed to become a more productive member of society.

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