4-H LIFE Program
“A Promising Parent Education Program”

Presentation to the
Missouri Children’s Services Commission

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4-H LIFE Overview

- Overview and partnerships
  - Program experience
  - Community connection
  - Best practice
  - Criteria and program components
- Evaluation - past and current findings
- Public value and call to action
- Contact information
What is the 4-H LIFE Program?

A nationally recognized family strengthening program that addresses the needs of children of incarcerated parents and their family members in a non-stigmatizing way.

- Started at Potosi in late 1999
- Developed in response to caregiver’s request for more meaningful parent-child interaction
- Developed prior to national interest in offender reentry; expanded to female correctional centers

Based on positive youth development research:

- Belonging
- Independence
- Mastery
- Generosity
Primary 4-H LIFE Partnerships

- Missouri Department of Corrections
- University of Missouri Extension
- Missouri 4-H Center for Youth Development
- USDA Children, Youth and Families at Risk (CYFAR) Initiative
The MU Extension 4-H LIFE Program faculty, staff and volunteers have provided over 1,600 hours of research-based education to qualified, incarcerated parents and their families.
Many 4-H LIFE youth participants attend local, regional and state 4-H educational events:

- County 4-H Clubs
- 4-H Camp/Counselor Training
- 4-H Aerospace Camp
- MU Camp Food and Fitness

Caregivers access University of Missouri Extension information and programs (e.g., nutrition classes) through one of 112 county Extension offices throughout Missouri.
Best Practice: In-person Parent Child Contact

The MU Extension 4-H LIFE Program faculty, staff and volunteers have facilitated over 2,000 enhanced, in-person parent child visits.
criteria for offenders

- Violation free behavior for at least 90 days
- Offenders without sex offense charges, child abuse or child neglect charges.
- Eligible offenders can be a parent, stepparent, grandparent, aunt or uncle – anyone who has regular, in-person visits from at least one approved family member between the 4-H age range of 5-18.
- Active involvement in 4-H LIFE Program parenting classes and planning meetings.
• Three (3) integrated components:
  – Parenting class
  – Planning/leadership
  – 4-H family club meeting
1. Parenting Class

Helps qualified offenders:

- Become more responsible for understanding and meeting their child’s developmental needs.
- Communicate and connect with their children as well as the caregivers raising the children.
- Become a positive role model and mentor during 4-H family club meetings.
Provides qualified offenders a chance to:

- Apply parenting concepts when planning the 4-H Family Club Meeting activities.
- Learn how to work as a group in setting group goals.
- Accept leadership responsibilities.
- Reflect individually and collectively on the success and challenges of 4-H family club meeting activities.
3. The 4-H Family Club Meeting

The structured, family-oriented atmosphere and age appropriate 4-H activities lead to:

• Less stress before, during and after 4-H visits.

• More positive interaction between all family members.

• Closer child-parents bonds.
• MU Extension 4-H staff provide agendas
• Youth officers lead the 4-H business meeting
• Offender parents co-lead 4-H educational activities such as:
  • Healthy food choices
  • Cake Decorating
  • Safety
  • Gardening

“I pledge my head to clearer thinking...”
The original, Potosi 4-H LIFE Program evaluation included:

- program attendance records
- a focus group with the fathers
- a life skills survey conducted three times with participating youth

Evaluation results show that 4-H LIFE Program participants and staff reported the fathers gained leadership, empathy, and self-control. See: http://extension.missouri.edu/4hlife
Current Evaluation

**Current program sites are part of a 2 year multi-method qualitative study**

- Conducted under the direction of Dr. Joyce Arditti, Virginia Tech.
- Offender and caregiver program/treatment and random selection control groups.
- 100 interviews done so far, including corrections and 4-H LIFE program staff.
- Measures parenting stress, co-parenting, social support and prison visit satisfaction.
- Data collection ends Sept. 2010; findings to be released nationally in mid-2011.
• Approximately 63 percent of 4-H LIFE participants (offenders and caregivers) felt that lack of physical contact was a problem during traditional visits; only 11 percent report lack of physical contact was a problem during 4-H Family Club meetings.

• Caregivers in the 4-H LIFE Program report more frequent and positive co-parenting behaviors.

• Approximately 80 percent of caregiver participants report that the 4-H Family Club meeting helps the youth learn and demonstrate healthy lifestyle choices.

• Approximately 85 percent of caregivers report their children are engaged in 3 out of 4 essential skills (i.e., belonging, independence and mastery) some or most of the time during 4-H Family Club meetings.
Anticipated Overall Benefits of the 4-H LIFE Family Study:

The University of Missouri Extension, the Missouri Department of Corrections and Missouri communities will benefit from the 4-H LIFE Family Study as it will provide scientific evidence about prison family relationships, contact, parenting competence, co-parenting and prison visits. These results can help guide and improve offender family and community reintegration efforts.

Public Value:

By supporting MU Extension’s 4-H LIFE Program, we anticipate children of offenders will make healthier lifestyle choices and avoid contact with the juvenile and adult criminal justice systems. The projected tax payer savings is $56,885* per child. The program served 304 youth and 230 of their adult family members (i.e., incarcerated parent, caregivers) in 2008 for a projected savings of $17,293,040. This includes $16,690 in juvenile delinquency costs & $40,195 adult crime costs (Small and O’Connor, 2007).
Where We Are Today

- Potosi’s 4-H LIFE Program is sustained through volunteer time and funds from the PCC 4-H LIFE Program Offender organization. Together, they have raised and donated funding for 4-H youth club and camp fees, program supplies and charitable donations to non-profit organizations such as St Jude’s Hospital, the Washington County Adopt a Family Program, St Louis City 4-H Afterschool, etc.

- In 2006, CYFAR began 5 year funding for 2 new sites: Chillicothe & Vandalia

- 4-H LIFE Program Staff Guide developed (online)

- Community Awareness Workshops

- Volunteer recruitment effort growing

- State and national expansion underway

- Dr Arditti, Research Presenter at National CYFAR Conference, May 2010
1. Delegate authority and support a state-level, children of offenders subcommittee
   – Include 4-H LIFE Program faculty and others who have years of experience in working with children of offenders and their families inside Missouri’s state prisons.

2. Join the MU Extension 4-H LIFE Program in kicking off community awareness workshops to raise awareness in children of offenders.
   – Pacific/Eureka, May 1st
   – Jefferson City, June 19th
   – Chillicothe and St Joseph, Fall 2010
   – Northeast and southwest Missouri, to be determined

3. Visit a 4-H LIFE Family Club meeting to see incarcerated parents apply new or improved parenting and leadership skills in a safe, supportive environment.
   Better yet, become an MU Extension 4-H LIFE Program volunteer and help prevent Missouri’s rural, suburban and urban youth from ever coming into contact with our state’s juvenile or adult justice systems.
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