



# 4-H LIFE: A program for Children with Incarcerated Parents

*Lynna J. Lawson, M Ed  
Extension Specialist  
4-H Youth Development*

# Goals

Increase knowledge of 4-H LIFE program model & strategies used to strengthen the family unit in corrections, juvenile facilities and the community.

Opportunity to think of ways to apply existing programs with families impacted by incarceration



# What is the 4-H LIFE Program?

The 4-H LIFE (Living Interactive Family Education) Program is a holistic 4-H program designed to meet the unique needs of children of incarcerated parents and their caregivers.

It accomplishes its goals through volunteer mentors, extension faculty and community partners.

# What is the Cooperative Extension System?



# History of 4-H LIFE Program

- Started in Missouri in 2000
- National Recognition
- Exemplary Evaluation
- Replication in 5 states
- National 4-H Mentoring Program
- Started at Potosi Correctional Center March 2000



# Benefits of 4-H LIFE

## Children

- Build communication and leadership skills
- See incarcerated parent in positive role

## Caregivers

- Benefit from positive interaction between child and incarcerated parent
- Learn from caregivers with similar concerns

## Incarcerated parent

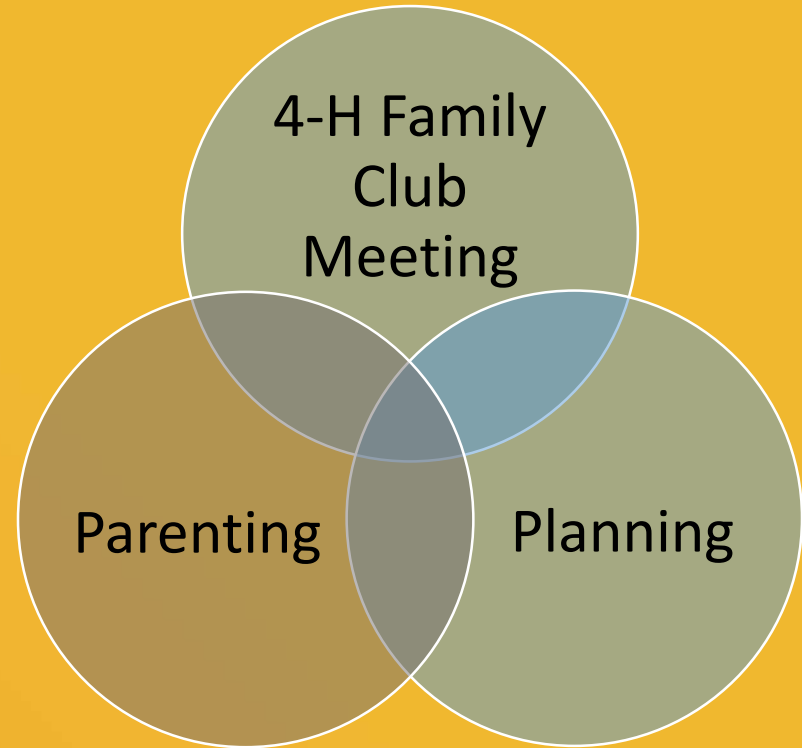
- Practice parenting skills
- Serve as role model in a safe and supportive environment



# Components of 4-H LIFE

- Three integrated components

- Parenting
  - Offender
- Planning/leadership
  - Offender
- 4-H family club meeting
  - Child
  - Caregiver
  - Offender
  - Volunteer mentors

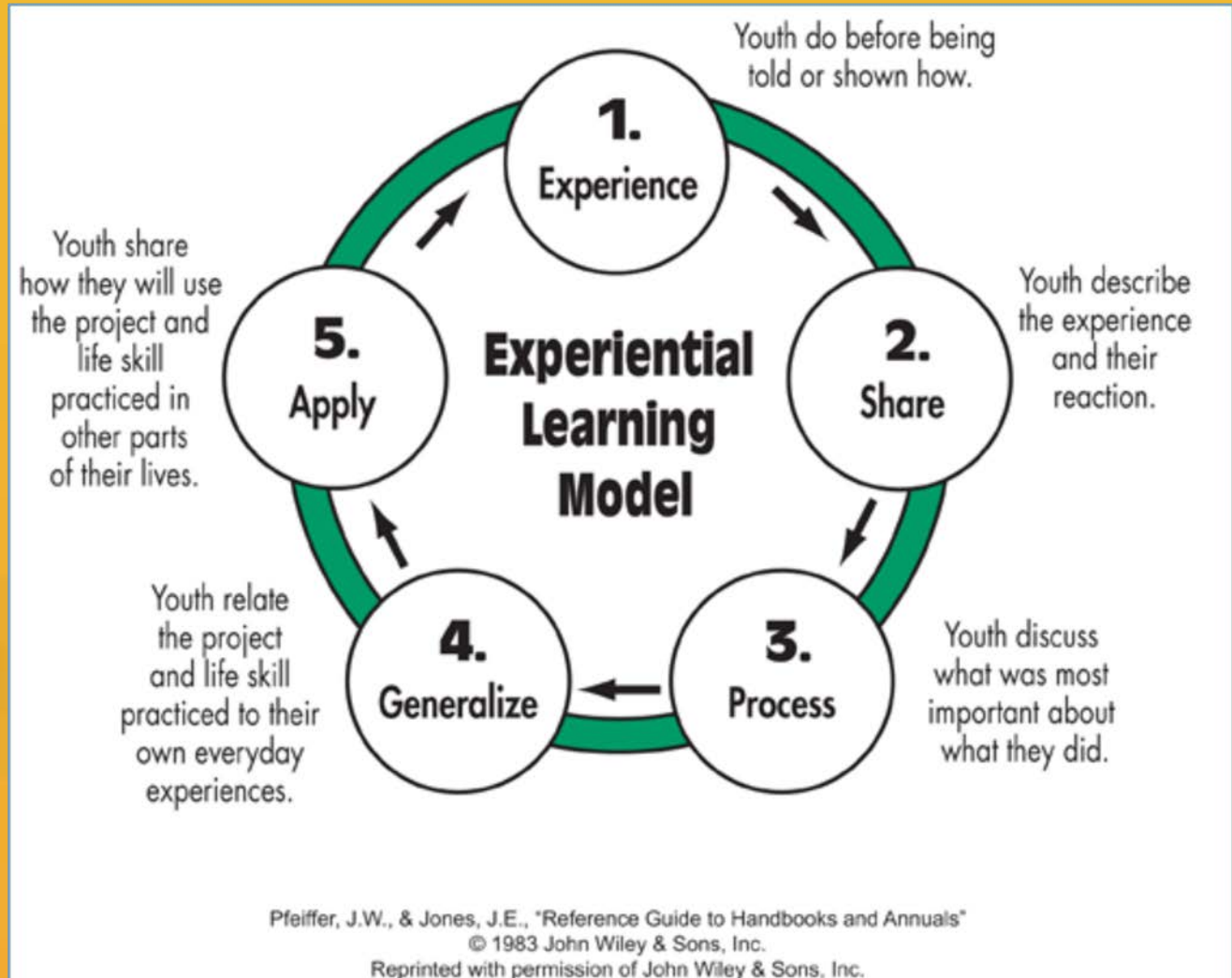




# 4-H is non formal education

## Experiential Learning

- Do
- Reflect
- Apply





# 4-H is non formal education

## Targeting Life Skills Model

Head

Managing, Thinking

Heart

Relating, Caring

Hands

Giving, Working

Health

Being, Living



# Curricula used in 4-H LIFE

## 4-H Projects

Life skills-Nutrition, Gardening, STEM

Decision Making, Leadership Development-Communication, Teamwork

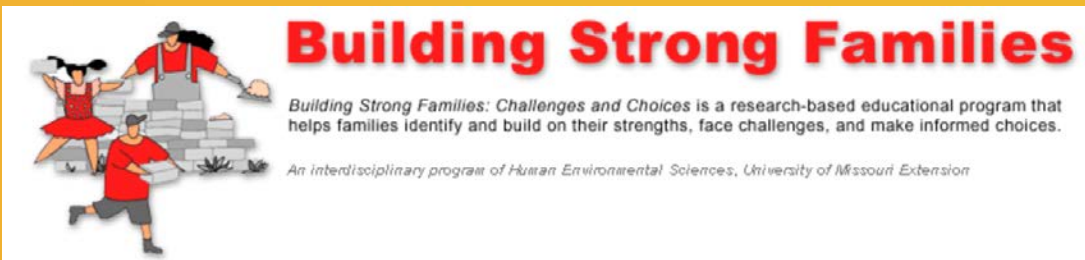
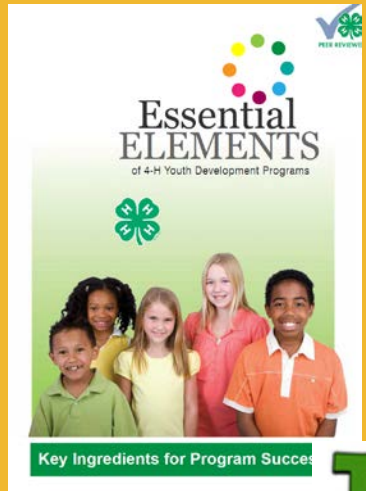
Building Strong Families: Challenges and Choices  
Adult & Youth

Tackling the Tough Skills  
Adult & Teen

Essential Elements of 4-H Youth Development

## Supplemental

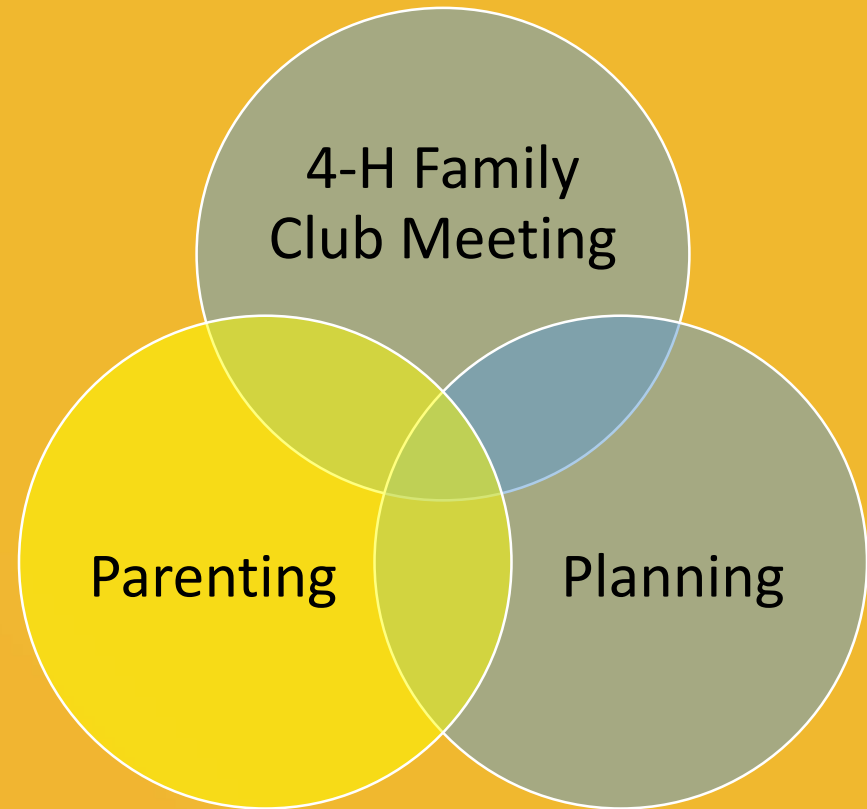
Parenting From a Distance  
Five Love Languages  
Parenting from Prison



# Parenting/Life Skills Education

## Helps qualified offenders:

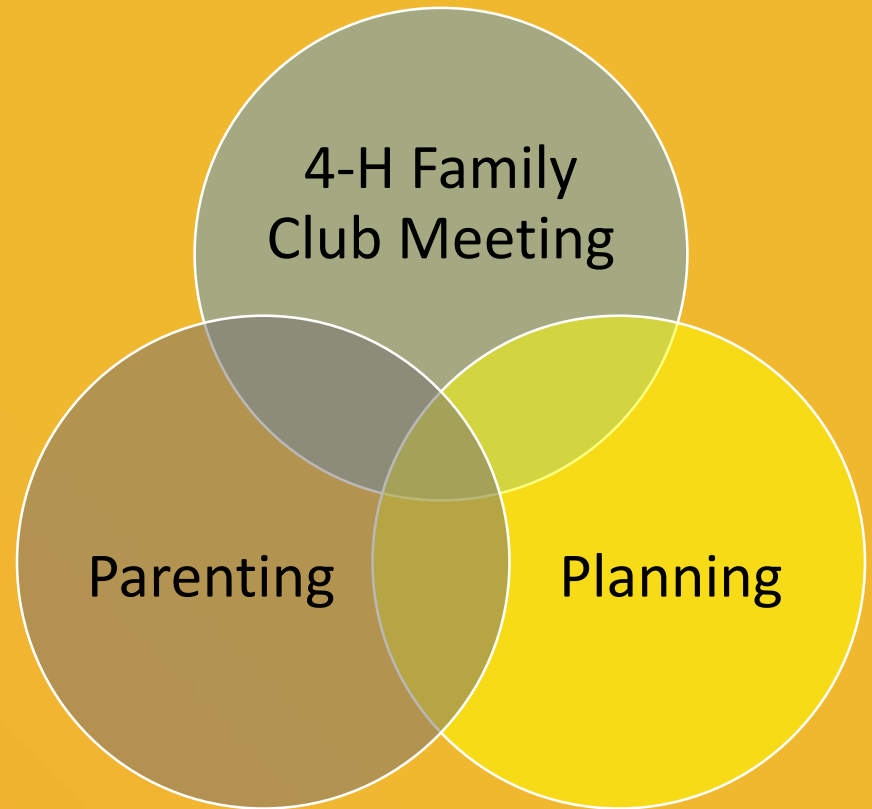
- Become more responsible for understanding and meeting their child's developmental needs
- Communicate and connect with their children as well as the caregivers raising the children
- Become a positive role model and mentor during 4-H family club meetings



# Planning/Leadership Meeting

## Helps qualified offenders :

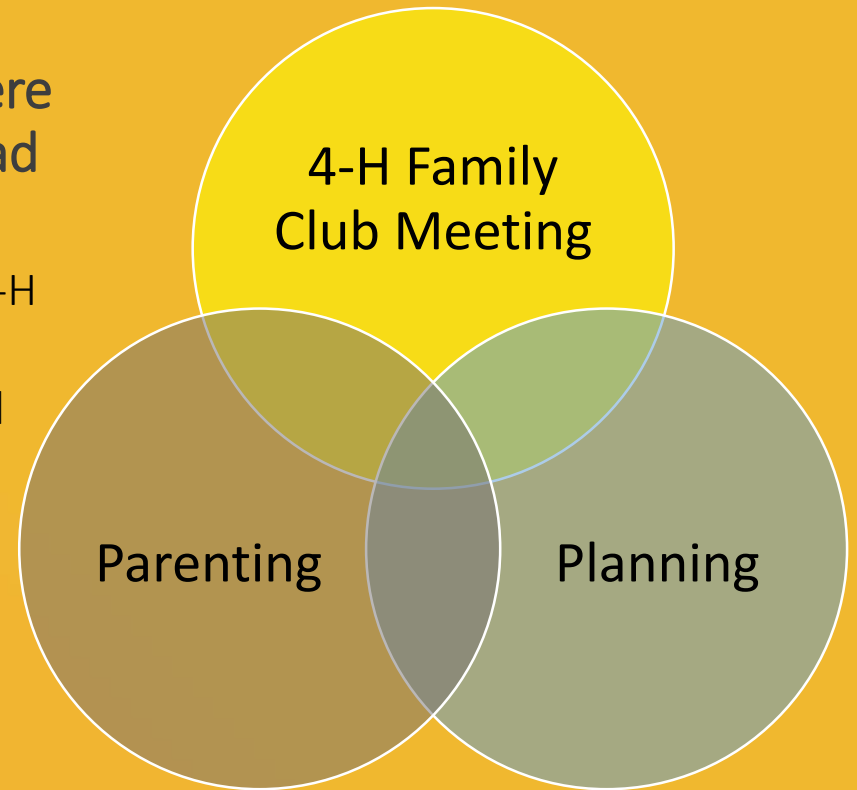
- Apply parenting concepts when planning the 4-H Family Club Meeting activities
- Learn how to work as a group in setting group goals
- Accept leadership responsibilities
- Reflect individually and collectively on the success and challenges of 4-H family club meeting activities



# 4-H Family Club Meeting

Structured, family-focused 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-parent bonds



# 4-H LIFE Program Volunteer Mentor Model

**Correctional center mentor team**

**Community mentor team**

- Extension faculty
- Community 4-H club volunteers
- 4-H LIFE community mentor





# 4-H LIFE in Juvenile Facilities



Buchanan County Academy, St. Joseph, Missouri



# Challenges with 4-H LIFE at BCA

- Revolving door
- Background/experiences/baggage
- Lack of understanding of common conventions
- Lack of family support/participation
- Lack of family understanding

# 4-H LIFE Institutions

## Missouri

- Potosi Correctional Center
- Farmington Correctional Center
- Women's Eastern Reception & Diagnostic Correctional Center
- Missouri Eastern Correctional Center
- Chillicothe Correctional Center
- Buchanan County Academy
- Cass County Drug Court

## Nation

- District of Columbia
- Louisiana
- Alabama
- New Hampshire
- Georgia
- West Virginia



# Department of Justice Federal Bureau of Prisons

4-H LIFE listed as a parent education program in BOP

Challenges:

- Distance for travel
- Lack of understanding of family issues
- Changing climate in Washington, DC



# Partnership Development

**With families, offenders and children**

**Department of Corrections**

**University of Missouri Extension**

**Missouri 4-H Youth Development Program**

**Children, Youth and Families at Risk (CYFAR) Initiative**

**OJJDP**

**Bureau of Prisons**

**Families, offenders and children**

**Department of Corrections**

**Land Grant Universities**

**Cooperative Extension**

**4-H Youth Development Program**

**Community organizations**

- Faith based
- Social service
- University departments



# Evaluation of 4-H LIFE

## Parental Incarceration

- discussion of problem, literature review, links to resources

## Evaluation Tools & Results

- program logic model, information on methods and results, focus  
group research, life skills survey

## Photos & Video Clips

<https://extension.missouri.edu/4hlife/evaluation.aspx>

# Fostering family bonds during parental incarceration: intervention, research and findings

Tammy Gillespie, Dr. Joyce Arditti, Stephanie Schindler and Yanfang Yue

University of Missouri Extension - 4-H Center for Youth Development and Human Environmental Sciences Extension

## Introduction

The University of Missouri (MU) Extension 4-H Living Interactive Family Education (LIFE) Program is a family strengthening and support program for children who have an incarcerated parent. Children of offenders are six times more likely to be incarcerated than their peers.



Figure 1. 4-H LIFE participants learn and practice leadership skills through weekly 4-H club meetings held inside the Women's State Receptioal, Detentioal and Correatioal Center's visiting room. (New York Times, September 2008)

## Program intervention

- > Led by trained MU Extension faculty and staff
- > Research-based parenting curricula is used
- > Incarcerated parents must qualify for program
- > Three interdependent program components:

1. **Weekly parenting skills** classes
2. **Monthly planning meetings** so parents can set goals and assume responsibility for leading activities with their entire family.
3. **Monthly 4-H family/club meetings** in the visiting room. The meeting is fun, structured and focused on age-appropriate 4-H activities that promote healthy family communication and problem-solving.



Figure 2. The experiential learning cycle is used with all adult and youth who participate in MU Extension's 4-H LIFE program.

## Family study research

- The 4-H LIFE Family Study was developed by:
- Dr. Joyce Arditti, 4-H LIFE consultant, VA Tech
  - University of Missouri Extension's 4-H LIFE program coordinator, faculty and staff
  - Missouri Department of Corrections
  - MU Campus Institutional Review Board

The mixed method qualitative evaluation includes:

1. Two, in-depth interviews with four waves of female and male offenders (program and control groups).
2. Two, in-depth interviews with each of the offenders' caregivers (i.e., the primary adult raising the child most likely to visit the offender).

Parenting Stress

Social Support

Parenting Competence

Quality of Prison visit

Figure 3. In-depth interviews with caregivers for analysis included the Social Support Family Visit Checklist for Female Inmate's Children's Depression Scale and the Family Reentry Scale.

Additional 4-H Family Study components include:

- Annual caregiver focus groups
- Annual 4-H LIFE staff group interviews
- One-time corrections staff interview
- Program records (e.g., class attendance, 4-H youth membership enrollment)
- Youth life skills surveys (As of May 09)
- Field notes/observation

## Preliminary impact

The 4-H LIFE Family study has just begun; therefore, analysis of trends and conclusions are not final. Important testimonials have come from the main 4-H LIFE collaborators - the corrections staff.

There appears to be a common theme: the 4-H LIFE Program is seen as an educational, family-focused program that equips incarcerated parents and their children with much needed communication skills and bonding opportunities.

*I think the 4-H LIFE program is good at providing leadership training and parenting classes. They give offenders information that is viable to them inside and outside the prison. The program focuses on the family - it doesn't only focus on the mothers. It helps them focus on relationships - the offender and the child, the offender and the caregiver - the triangle is there. It keeps the relationships in progression.*

- Corrections Employee



Figure 4. An incarcerated grandmother enjoys a group hug with her grandchild after the monthly 4-H LIFE Family/Club meeting held inside a corrections office's visiting room. (New York Times, September 2008).

## 4-H LIFE Program public value

By supporting MU Extension's 4-H LIFE Program, children of offenders make healthier choices and get along better with others, thus, saving taxpayers \$56,885\* per child by breaking the tough cycle of intergenerational incarceration.

Over 97 percent of today's offenders will be released into communities. Strengthening family ties during their incarceration increases the likelihood the offender will return to an intact family support network. The public also benefits through prevention of repeat incarceration cycles.

\*Includes \$16,690 in juvenile delinquency costs and \$40,195 adult crime costs. Source: Small and O'Connor, 2007

## Conclusion

MU Extension and the Missouri Department of Corrections will benefit from the 4-H LIFE Family Study as they will be seen as leaders in scientifically documenting the impact of family integration as an offender reentry outcome.

## Acknowledgments

Missouri Department of Corrections - Reentry Office, Research and Evaluation Department and all 4-H LIFE Program sites (Alpa, Potosi and WERDDC) MU Extension  
4-H Center for Youth Development & Human Environmental Sciences  
MU, College of Human Environmental Sciences (HES)  
Department of Human Development and Family Studies  
School of Social Work  
USDA Children, Youth and Families at Risk (CYFAR) Initiative

## For more information

Lyons, J. & Arditti, J. (2008). 4-H LIFE Program Coordinator. *Small, J. (2007). Journal of Interpersonal Violence, 22(10), 1300-1309.*  
Web: [http://jiv.sagepub.com/jiv/22/10/1300/](http://jiv.sagepub.com/jiv/22/10/1300)

UNIVERSITY OF MISSOURI  
Extension



# What lies ahead for 4-H LIFE?

- Continue evaluation of the impact of the program
- Provide a plan of implementation to be adapted by other correctional centers in
- Provide advice for other states who want to implement the program
- Expand e-mentoring





# Wrap up

**Questions?**  
**Other resources**  
**Thank you!**

