

# Supporting Children with Incarcerated Parents



## A FREE Community Guide

Developed by the Elizabeth Fry Society of Greater Vancouver in collaboration with:

The International Centre for Criminal Law Reform and Criminal Justice Policy,  
School of Criminology and Criminal Justice, University of the Fraser Valley,

With the Financial Support of Public Safety Canada and the Office of the Representative  
of Children and Youth of British Columbia.

## Purpose of This Guide

This guide is designed to help your community take a leadership role in supporting your most at-risk children to experience more stable childhoods, meet their developmental milestones, and build the skills they need to enjoy brighter futures as active members of society.

In Canada, children who experience parental incarceration are statistically more likely than any other group to one day come into conflict with the law themselves. This is due to a combination of the stress and trauma it causes, along with the impacts of other challenges these children commonly experience: poverty, unstable home environments, and family members who may be homeless, have mental health issues or struggle with addiction.

Communities have the power to make a positive difference. Not only will your support provide immediate benefits for children, it can be impactful enough to improve their life outcomes into adulthood. Helping these critically at-risk children now will help create stronger, healthier communities for everyone.

We've all heard it takes a village to raise a child. This is particularly true for children with incarcerated parents. In this guide, you will learn how your community can help by bringing together citizens with the right skills, identifying or creating resources and supports, and reaching children who need help, without stigmatizing them.

Should you have questions, contact JustKids, the Elizabeth Fry Society of Greater Vancouver's initiative that supports children with incarcerated parents, at [info@just-kids.ca](mailto:info@just-kids.ca) or call 1-888-879-9593 and ask to speak to one of our JustKids staff. There may also be other organizations in your area that can offer assistance in developing community supports for children with incarcerated parents.



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## Why Communities Should Support Children with Incarcerated Parents

Parental incarceration touches every community. Without supports, its impact is so significant that it can have an even greater effect on children than the death of a parent. We also know that by creating a protective environment for children, we can reduce the negative impacts such an adverse experience can have on their lives. A protective environment is made up of the supports children can rely on consistently, like school, relationships, and things a community can do to provide stability and safety. If your community provides early and sustained supports during childhood and into young adulthood, vulnerable children will not only experience more positive childhoods, the benefits may be lifelong.

### IMPACTS OF PARENTAL INCARCERATION & JUSTICE SYSTEM INVOLVEMENT

Children whose parents come into conflict with the law, and particularly those whose parents are incarcerated, experience tremendous stress and disruption in their lives. The impact on children is significant regardless of which parent is involved with the justice system. However, children whose mothers are incarcerated often suffer more significant disruption to their lives. When a child's father goes to prison, their mother usually continues to care for them as before. However, when a child's mother goes to prison, the child is often forced into a new living situation (which can include moving schools and losing access to friends). This is because the majority of women in prison are mothers, and a majority of those are the sole caregiver for their children.

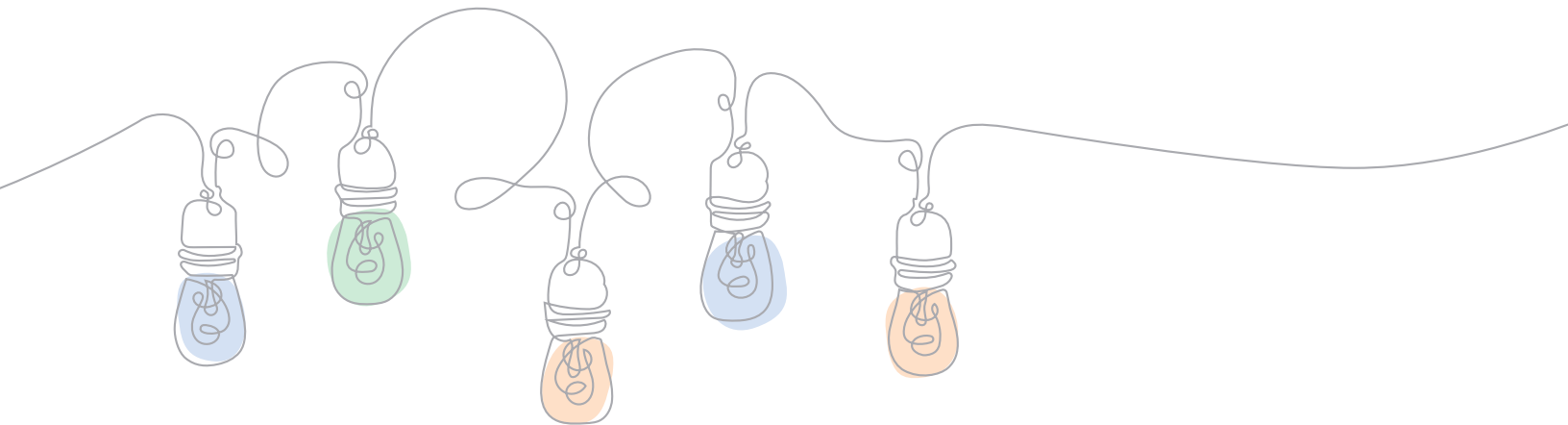
It is not uncommon for people in conflict with the law to suffer untreated mental health issues and/or struggle with addiction. It is also not uncommon for racialized groups who have experienced the effects of colonization or slavery to be significantly over represented. In BC, significant numbers of Indigenous people are involved in the justice system.

Many children with incarcerated parents have lived in chaotic, confusing and sometimes unsafe situations. It is not uncommon for family violence to be the reason a parent comes into conflict with the law. Virtually all of these children experience multiple sources of trauma. The large majority also live in deep poverty and many suffer from poor nutrition. These experiences put children at greater risk for mental and physical health issues.

The particular vulnerability and marginalization of children with incarcerated parents are not sufficiently recognized in this country and these children do not always receive the care and protection they need. While there are calls for this to change, communities have the strongest role in supporting these children and until such time as better policies and greater federal and provincial funding are available, community leadership is critical.

The cost of not supporting children who experience parental involvement with the justice system — whether at the time of arrest, during imprisonment, or while under community-based supervision — includes increased likelihood of:

- Developmental delays
- Learning difficulties
- Poor school attendance and performance, and increased likelihood of dropping out before grade 12 graduation
- Drug use and addiction
- Poor social skills and difficulty forming positive personal relationships
- Poverty
- Homelessness
- Involvement in crime and incarceration later in life
- Gang involvement.



## How Community Supports Benefit Children

By offering support to children with incarcerated parents and ensuring that existing programs and services take their special circumstances into account, we can help these children develop resiliency, and grow into healthy and resilient adults.

### DEVELOPING RESILIENCY

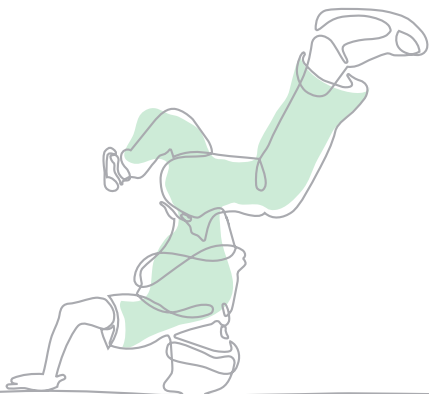
Your community can help children grow into resilient adults. Because children with parents in prison usually experience stress and trauma from more than one marginalizing experience, they become worn down and often lack the skills to deal with negative situations. Helping these children build up their resiliency will equip them to overcome challenges both now and in the future.

To become resilient, children first need to believe in their own value as people and to understand they are not responsible for the actions of others, in particular their family members. Supports that welcome children openly, treat them with respect, and encourage them to share thoughts and concerns in an environment where they feel 'normal' are valuable in building resiliency.

#### RESILIENCY: *How to help*

Your community can help enhance children's resiliency by:

- Treating them with respect and dignity
- Creating age-appropriate opportunities for them to succeed: through recreation, learning skills, social activities, becoming leaders and supporting younger children
- Offering mentorship, guidance, counseling or mental health support services
- Accepting them and making sure they are not stigmatized, rejected or excluded.



## MITIGATING STIGMA

Children who know their parents are in prison are often ashamed of this fact. Some families find this situation so shameful that they do not tell children where their parents are or explain the situation to them. This can lead to feelings of fear, confusion, abandonment and low self-worth.

It's not hard to understand why children feel ashamed of their parent's incarceration, as well as worried about what might be happening to them. Books, TV, movies and media all portray prisons as scary places and inmates as 'bad people'. Prisoner Halloween costumes, and 'cops and robbers' toys or games also contribute to stigma. Sayings like 'the apple doesn't fall far from the tree' and questions about what parents do for a living also make these children uncomfortable. They can worry that others will judge or reject them because of their parents' crimes. Indeed, some adults may tell their children not to play with friends who they learn have a parent in prison, over concerns the child doesn't come from a 'nice' family or may be a bad influence.

### **STIGMA: *How to help***

You can take steps to ensure your community programs and services offer safe, non-judgmental spaces for these children by including sensitivity training for staff and volunteers. Biases are often deeply ingrained, so training should include explicit discussion of how to respond to people who seem different and how to avoid marginalizing various people and groups. It should be made clear that it is unfair to blame, mistreat or exclude children because of the behaviour of their parents.

People are often unaware of the hurt and damage that their attitudes, comments, and behaviour cause children with a parent in prison. Community leaders must help others understand how vulnerable these children are and intervene to stop comments or actions that may cause or trigger the stigmatization of these children.

## ADDRESSING DEPRIVATION

As mentioned earlier, the majority of children with incarcerated parents live in poverty. When the incarcerated parent is the mother, poverty is often the driver that leads to her criminal involvement. Of course, poverty impacts children whose parents are not in prison as well. However, children with incarcerated parents are statistically more likely to experience extreme material deprivation than other children.

### *Nutrition and Health*

When children lack the basic necessities of life, such as housing, clothing, medical care and food, they cannot thrive. Deprivation has lifelong impacts on their development, as well as on their mental and physical health. Families in survival mode don't always have the ability to sufficiently comfort and nurture their children. This is hard on children, as they naturally seek out parental comfort when stressed.

Children without access to proper nutrition suffer decreased school performance: their constant hunger makes it hard for them to focus on learning and class activities. Poor nutrition also means they are less able to fend off or recover from colds and flus. They are more susceptible to serious illnesses that are themselves more likely to become chronic. From a mental health perspective, deprived children experience high levels of stress and anxiety, which negatively impact their energy levels, mood, and overall cognitive, emotional and social development.

While children are entitled to free medical care and poor children can also receive free basic dental care, the unfortunate reality is they often go without. Some families are unaware of the services children are entitled to receive at no cost. Even if they are, they often don't know how to access them or give up trying because of other barriers. For example, it can be extremely difficult to get to medical appointments with a sick child on public transit, particularly if there are other children at home. Families may not have a family doctor and may have been previously turned away from an overflowing drop-in clinic after a long trip to get there. Adults unable to afford over-the-counter medications or other treatments may not seek out care because they cannot follow-through with the doctor's prescription or recommendation.





### ***Housing Instability***

Children are greatly affected by housing instability. The high cost of housing impacts many in BC, and children with a parent in prison often live in unstable home situations, for a variety of reasons. Parental incarceration can push the remaining caregiver further into poverty because they no longer have access to the incarcerated parent's financial contributions. Children from single-parent households can find themselves living with grandparents, for example, who are already struggling to live on their fixed retirement income. Sometimes children have to change where they live to be closer to their incarcerated parent. Whatever the reason, families impacted by incarceration can be struggling in the margins to find and keep housing. Many of the neighborhoods where such families can find a place to live will place children at greater risk of victimization and exposure to violence.

Some families become what is termed the 'hidden homeless' where they cannot afford their own housing, so they 'couch surf' with friends and family.

When children don't have a stable home, it impacts many aspects of their lives. The twin effects of making it harder for children to regularly attend school, particularly the same school, and to form friendships are among the most difficult impacts.

#### **DEPRIVATION: *How to help***

Your community can help reduce deprivation in a number of ways, such as:

- Creating or supporting breakfast or lunch programs at school
- Reducing hunger on weekends and holidays by sending home discreet backpacks stocked with food
- Including nutritious snacks/meals in any programs or services aimed at children with incarcerated parents
- Providing free cooking classes designed to teach children about very low-cost nutrition
- Ensure families know about medical and vaccination clinics in your community through schools, community centres and bulletin boards in public spaces
- Establish and/or participate in a volunteer-operated program that offers rides to children's medical appointments
- Create or contribute to a holiday toy bank
- Create or contribute to a clothing drive for cold weather clothing
- Support the building of low-income housing
- Support the establishment of family shelters
- Encourage food bank support and clothing drives for new clothes and shoes
- Create a community resource list for distribution to families.

## Getting Started: How to Build Supports for Children in Your Community

Children whose parents are in conflict with the law have the same needs as their peers. A key reason they experience poorer life outcomes is because the protective environment most other children enjoy is weakened, either due to their parents' challenges (domestic violence, addictions, mental illness) or as a direct result of their parents' involvement with the justice system (stigmatization, separation from parents, economic impact of incarceration on the family).

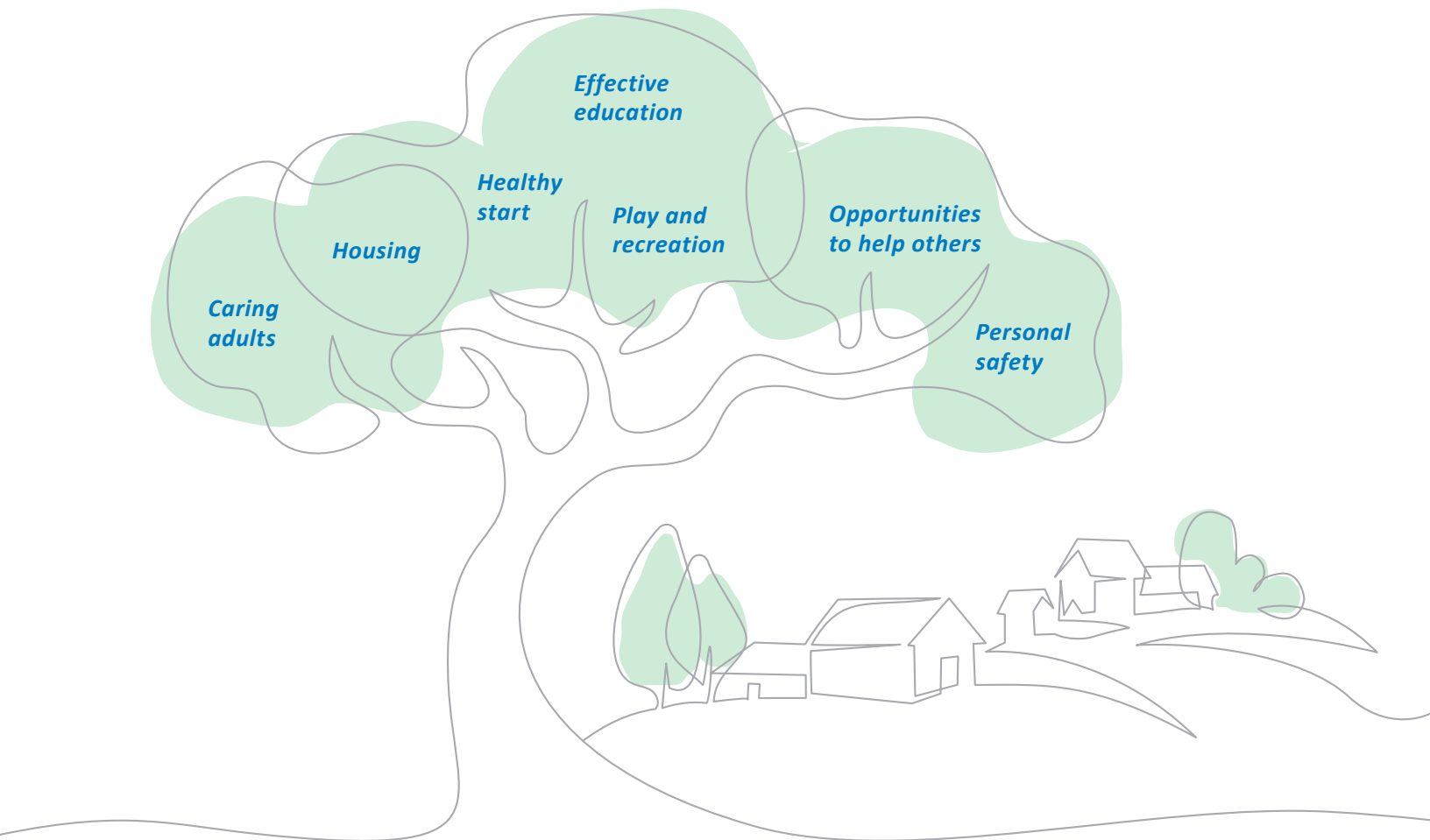
Research shows communities can help children benefit from increased resiliency, elimination of stigma, a safer environment, and reduced deprivation by creating a protective environment for children that makes sure they have:

1. Caring adults in their lives
2. Housing (safe and stable)
3. A healthy start
4. Effective education
5. Play and recreation
6. Opportunities to help others
7. Physical and emotional safety

With these areas of focus in mind, your community can begin bringing together the appropriate community members and organizations to identify the best options for local support. Every community has its own strengths, resources and facilities. Parks, libraries, community centres, schools and churches are a few examples of spaces where communities offer their members enriching experiences, either through the opportunity for social connections and inclusion, or for access to programs and services. Many communities also have social service groups or charities that serve residents in a wide variety of ways. Non-profit organizations may also offer programs and supports aimed specifically at marginalized groups and children.

All communities, no matter the size, should have access to government-mandated services that include resources for children like health authorities, and supports through the Ministry for Children and Family Development or delegated Aboriginal agencies. These agencies have responsibility for vulnerable children that include but are not limited to: services for children and youth in need of extra support or protection; counselling; in-home support; respite care; parenting programs, and services to support children who witness violence.

### A Protective Environment for Children

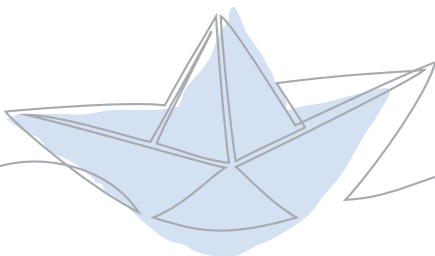


## IDENTIFYING CHILDREN IN YOUR COMMUNITY

To support children with incarcerated parents, you need to know who they are. Because they fear exclusion and stigmatization, these children or their families should not be expected to self-identify. Identifying the children who need special support is a very important task that will require careful attention. There is no list of children of incarcerated parents. Protecting the privacy of children and families is important, and privacy protection laws and policies may make it difficult for various agencies to share identifying information, even with those looking to help this group of children. As you create your own supports for children, you will need to make sure you also develop ways to protect the privacy of all involved and the confidentiality of the private information you may have access to.

There are few organizations which provide supports specifically for these children and an internet search can provide you information on what might be available in or near your community. The Elizabeth Fry Society of Greater Vancouver (EFry) offers a spectrum of services under its JustKids umbrella and it is currently the largest Canadian organization doing so. It could be a resource for your community as it offers technical support for any requests. The way EFry reaches children is through its relationships with their incarcerated parents (via in-prison programming) and through children's community caregivers. Parents are understandably protective of their children's identities and locations, so in order to reach the children in your community, it will be important to offer supports to children who match specific indicators of parental incarceration. Any children you end up supporting will either be children with parents in prison or those who are otherwise highly marginalized and in need of help, which will benefit both the children and your community at large.

While there is no sure way to determine the number of children in your community who are impacted by parental incarceration, local child protection or law enforcement authorities may be able to supply some insight on how many families may be affected. Generally speaking, the higher the community crime rate, the more children will be affected. Other indicators can be how busy local courts are and how many people work in the probation or parole office. Ask the local office what the average caseload is for one parole or probation officer and that will allow an estimate based on the number of staff working.



Your planning should be informed by an understanding of the many challenges children with an incarcerated parent tend to face. Discussions with professionals and agencies frequently in contact with these children may help you understand how these challenges present themselves in your own community. Challenges can include:

- Not attending school regularly or changing schools frequently
- Missing school for the same amount of time on specific days or intervals (prison visits only occur during the week and usually there are set visiting hours)
- Having few clothing options, clothes that are too big, too small or not suitable for the weather
- Coming to school with no lunch or snacks, or without having had breakfast. This may be related to low energy, volatile emotions, inability to focus or sleepiness
- Not having school supplies
- Frequent illness
- Being unable to participate in extra-curricular school activities requiring money
- Living with extended family members or in foster care
- Being bullied or bullying others.

Certain professionals may be able to help you reach children (through their caregivers or peers) once you have developed your supports. You can create basic materials outlining what you offer and ask them to share them with families. These people include:

- School personnel (counsellors, principals)
- Social workers
- Homeless shelters for women (with or without accompanying children)
- Charities that support women and children
- Probation or parole officers
- Police officers.

**REMEMBER:** Children from birth to 18 (and into adulthood) are impacted by parental incarceration. Your community can help children at every stage, from early childhood development through supporting teens' transition to work and adulthood.

## SURVEYING YOUR COMMUNITY

The first step in creating supports for children with incarcerated parents is determining what resources your community has (not just spaces or programs and services, but also people) that could benefit children and their families.

The effect of parental involvement in the criminal justice system upon children is not well understood, which makes it difficult for people to know how to support children — or even understand how badly they need support. When you first reach out to bring people together, it may be important to try to help everyone understand the hardship, risks, and challenges the children and their families face.

### *Providing Background Information*

Participants will likely have questions, such as:

- How many children are affected?
- Are these children that we already know?
- Where are these children living?
- What kind of problems do they have?
- Why are those problems different than other children?

While there is limited information available in Canada, Appendix A provides some answers to these questions and others.

Community mobilization is a capacity-building process that engages potential partners to develop a shared understanding of the issues, then planning, carrying out and evaluating activities together to improve or stimulate initiatives and programs in the community. While planning to enhance the protective environment for children with incarcerated parents, community members will recognize your community's unique assets and resources, and explore how these could be marshalled to better support these marginalized children and their families. In smaller communities, existing resources may be mostly informal, with people and groups relying on each other rather than on institutions and agencies for support. In larger communities, there may be more formal or institutional support available.

Whatever the size of your community, everyone who carries a formal or informal responsibility for the care, education and protection of children (including but not limited to agencies with a formal mandate to do so) has a role to play in supporting your most marginalized children to enjoy improved lives.



## WHO SHOULD PARTICIPATE

There is no hard and fast rule about who you should ask to take part in planning for or offering supports to children with incarcerated parents in your community. Anyone can provide some leadership and have something valuable to contribute.

Supports can take many forms. In some communities, support may consist of offering informal child care arrangements or discrete support to families in finding accommodation. In others, a spectrum of resources and services may be available. New supports can always be added, as your community is able to do so.

With the seven areas of focus mentioned earlier in mind, you may wish to consider inviting community leaders and elders, agencies and organizations responsible for child welfare and child protection, and representatives from some or all of the following groups to participate in planning how your community will improve how it supports children of incarcerated parents:

- Educators: teachers (preschool, elementary, high school), education assistants (who work with children who need extra support) or administrators (principals, school trustees)
- Social workers or counsellors working with the Ministry for Children and Family Development or Delegated Aboriginal Agencies
- Childhood development staff if the community has a centre
- Elders
- People who have raised or are raising children
- Members of service clubs that support children (Scouts, Girl Guides, Big Brothers/Sisters, Boys and Girls Clubs)
- Non-profit social service organizations that support children and vulnerable families such as youth group homes, family counselling programs, and daycares
- Non-profit social service organizations offering services to vulnerable women and children, such as transition houses for women fleeing violence, homeless shelters, and drug treatment programs
- Municipal or band council members
- Parks and recreation services (who can influence programs and services in city spaces and community centres)
- Librarians
- Police officers
- Medical professionals
- Businesses
- Faith groups and institutions
- Cultural groups
- Legal aid
- Students (such as high school student council or youth group participants).



## ORGANIZING A BRAINSTORMING MEETING

Once you have identified people who might be able to help identify and/or offer supports for children in your community, invite them to a meeting to discuss ideas. This kind of meeting is often called ‘brainstorming’ because all thoughts and ideas are encouraged. People usually build on each other’s thoughts or get new ideas after hearing others’ suggestions that get them thinking.

You can hold one large brainstorming meeting, or a series of smaller ones, depending on how many people you want to invite and what works for everyone’s schedule. If your invitation list is short enough, or if there are key people whose participation is particularly important, you may wish to talk to them first, so that they understand what is expected of them. A good brainstorming meeting can easily take two hours and many people will want to understand why the meeting will be a good use of their time before they attend. Try to explain the purpose of the meeting as clearly as you can and make it as relevant as possible to the people you are inviting.

At the beginning of the meeting, it is helpful to have everyone introduce themselves, particularly if they do not already know each other. Towards the end of the meeting, when people have had the benefit of brainstorming, it may be helpful to ask the group if they have any suggestions about other people who should be brought to the table.

### *You can ask questions such as:*

“Are there any potential participants missing related to where children go for ...

- fun?
- advice or emotional support?
- protection?
- health services?
- connecting with their culture, their community, their peers?”

“Is there anyone in our community we don’t see in the room who has a special role in supporting children, such as individuals, businesses, non-profits, schools, religious or faith organizations, groups, or anyone we may not have considered?”

Depending on your community and the group of people you have gathered, you can scale the discussion up or down. For example, if you live in a small, rural community and your meeting consists largely of caregivers, you may decide to focus on ensuring children have caring adults in their lives. If you are in a larger urban centre and have people with many different backgrounds at your meeting, you may want to set up eight flip charts (one for each topic area, and a separate one for the students) and collect people’s ideas for each. A child only group can offer critical insight and help steer the larger group to potentially unconsidered critical needs.



There is no one way to approach planning for or supporting children. As long as people in a community care enough to come together to seek out ways to help, the children will benefit and your community will grow stronger. If a large meeting feels overwhelming, you can start smaller. Or, if a broader meeting is held at first and it seems like some participants are not comfortable speaking out, you can break into smaller groups, either in this initial meeting or through a series of smaller, more focused meetings later on.

### ***Topics to Explore in Your Discussion***

As the first step in the planning process, you may wish to invite participants to offer their input into how the community can offer programs, services and other supports in some or all of the seven areas of focus where communities can help create a protective environment for children:

1. Caring adults in their lives
2. Housing (safe & stable)
3. A healthy start
4. Effective education
5. Play and recreation
6. Opportunities to help others
7. Physical and emotional safety.

Once the initial information has been collected, a key question for consideration is: “Are there particular individuals or agencies that are interested in working to improve on what is already being done in these areas, and are they willing to volunteer to do so?” There might also be other organizations or individuals who should be approached to contribute to the planning exercise. These should be identified.

Before the initial meeting breaks, the group should identify what action will be taken next (such as a planning meeting to hone the suggestions or follow-up with particular people). A summary of the discussion and a record of decisions made by the group should be produced and shared with all participants to make it easy to plan follow-up activities.



## CREATING A PROTECTIVE ENVIRONMENT FOR CHILDREN: BUILDING YOUR PLAN

Once your community group has explored what opportunities may exist to support children with incarcerated parents, it is time to create a plan to put those supports in place and to let families know about them if they already exist. If resources are not well known, it may be necessary to consider an awareness raising campaign to help children and families find their way to them.

Set some dates for follow-up talks with the group to finalize goals to work on. Try to make the goals as specific as possible, describing what is to be achieved for children and the community environment desired (vision). The wording should clearly explain the reason the group is working together and what it seeks to accomplish. An example of a clear vision statement might be “Children of incarcerated parents in our community will have access to opportunity, care, and love now and in the future.” The goals to achieve that vision statement will likely be linked to some or all of the areas of focus mentioned in the protective environment. An example of a goal related to an area of focus might be “A pool of volunteer drivers will be available to take children and their mother/caregiver to medical, dental, and pre-and-post natal appointments.”

As you move forward in the process, your planning will become more concrete. You may find it works to identify things your community will begin doing right away and others that you will work towards or revisit at a specific time in the future. Include information on who will do what by when, and for what reason or what the activity will achieve. Set dates to review the plan. If one of the strategies was unsuccessful, the group can consider “did we miss a step important for the plan element or initiative?” or “is there someone better placed to advance the plan item?” before continuing on with other elements of the plan.



## EXAMPLES OF IDEAS FOR COMMUNITY SUPPORTS THAT CREATE A PROTECTIVE ENVIRONMENT

There is a wide range of possible supports your community may wish to consider. Below are some examples of things communities can offer.

### 1. Ensuring children have caring adults in their lives

- **Babysitting/caregiver respite:** In small communities, this can be an informal group of people who know and trust each other, who care for each others' children. In larger centres, formal daycare or sitter programs can be offered (ideally at no cost).
- **Mentoring & role modeling programs:** Ideas include but are not limited to Big Sisters/Brothers; school-based programs where older children are matched with younger ones (this can also provide older children an opportunity to help others); community members offering to mentor teens (may be related to employment interests); adults who experienced parental incarceration can connect with children and demonstrate positive futures despite this challenge.
- **Counselling services:** For children on their own and/or with caregivers or parents.
- **After school programs and activities:** Recreational, skills development or social service programs (available at very low/no cost). Drop-in centres are another option to give children a place to be but without a scheduled commitment.
- **Parenting support:** Courses or informal support for parents and caregivers.
- **Cultural and hereditary tie programs:** Ideas include workshops with elders or leaders with links to the child's cultural, religion, language ties and can include supports like youth advisory groups, spirituality or religious groups.

### 2. Housing : Having a safe, stable place to live

Finding stable, affordable housing can be very difficult for the families and caregivers of children whose parents are in conflict with the law. Beyond working with their municipal authorities to increase the availability of affordable housing, there are a number of strategies that communities may consider using to maintain and expand affordable housing, such as:

- **Identify people in the community** that might have basement suites or unused housing capacity. Then develop ideas to connect with them to see if they can make places to live available. Some ways to do that include reaching out to religious or cultural centres such as churches, mosques, temples, and friendship or community centres.
- **Create a single list that brings together the housing vacancies in your community.** This can make housing easier to find. Consider making the list available in predictable places like a bulletin board in a laundromat or library, or a designated web location or source like craigslist.
- **Develop a list of people willing to share their housing** by reaching out to people likely to have space in their homes, such as senior citizens or people with children leaving home.

### 3. Healthy Start

- **Prenatal support:** You can help poor women deliver healthy babies by providing food banks with pre/post-natal vitamins for pregnant and nursing women.
- **Mom-and-Baby or parenting programs and services:** Poor mothers can feel uncomfortable and embarrassed to go to programs where others seem more affluent. Strategies to include them or offering different programming times or more comfortable locations (such as at Friendship Centres or drop-in centres) can help encourage mothers to take part in these programs, which strengthen parent-child attachment and help build a child's resilience. Sessions can be advertised in ways that will reach these parents, such as through posters at food banks, laundromats or band offices.
- **Emotional Support:** Many are unaware of what to expect as new parents. Since low income women often self-exclude from programming, volunteer home visiting programs can make a positive difference. Emotional support is very helpful, especially for women who are single parents. It is also very helpful to look after the baby or child while the mother gets a break to do personal care such as taking a shower or having a nap.
- **Medical and dental clinics:** Pursue having drop-in medical clinics opened in your community, ideally with multi-disciplinary care teams (doctors, nurse practitioners, social workers etc.). Your local Division of Family Practice may be able to help with this. Also, work with local dentists to establish who is willing to provide free-to-patient child dentistry referral networks. Identify who will link children in need with a dentist willing to help for no cost, or the costs of supplies. Create cards or posters with this information so that it can be promoted where families will see it.
- **Driving pool:** Develop a list of qualified drivers willing to volunteer to drive children and caregivers to health-related appointments for children.
- **School break food hampers**
- **Meal-centric holiday celebrations:** Free Santa lunches etc.
- **Free cooking classes for tweens and teens:** These would include nutrition education and meals, with a focus on eating well on a small budget
- **Reducing unintentional stress and trauma.** Appendix C lists resources for government workers like police, social workers, and others on modifications to reduce negative effects on children and ensure their healthy starts.



#### 4. Education

- **Tutoring:** Volunteer tutors or remedial programs can provide academic support to help improve school performance and self-esteem.
- **Access to school counsellors or Indigenous liaison workers**
- **Indigenous education curriculum and classroom resources**
- **School meal programs:** Children learn better when they are not hungry. Breakfast and lunch programs will also contribute to overall nutrition and long-term health.
- **Leadership opportunities:** Provide opportunities for children to contribute to their school through service-related activities. These may be student-led ideas or school priorities. Ideas can cross-support other areas. For example: Planting a school community garden, nurturing it and harvesting the vegetables to eat.
- **Job preparation:** Help teens become job ready with free support in building a resume, tips on looking for work, an overview of expectations employers have, employee rights, and interview practice. Communities may also be able to offer job training or work experience opportunities.

#### 5. Play and Recreation

Recreation is very important to children. Your community can make a big difference in children's health and well-being by making recreation opportunities readily available at little or no cost.

- **Free passes to recreation centres** — Many cities in BC offer Leisure Access Passes, which provide free access to recreational activities like swimming and skating (including skate and helmet rentals) for low income families. If your community has a recreation centre but does not offer such a pass, you can explore making this available and then letting social workers, local schools, newspapers and radio stations know so that they can promote it.
- **Skills programs and camps** — If your community offers programs and camps at your recreation centre through Parks and Recreation, it may be possible to offer these free to low income children, which will capture children with incarcerated parents. Programs that link children to nature can be particularly important for children.

Also, some charities offer such programs. Connect with charities in your community to find out what might be available. For example, in Greater Vancouver's Lower Mainland, EFry operates Blue Sky summer and spring break sleep away camps for children ages six to sixteen. These camps are very low cost or can be free in exchange for volunteer work by caregivers. EFry also offers day camps on Saturdays when school is in session. These are called Saturday Club and like the other EFry camps, no child is turned away because their family cannot afford to pay. The camps all offer fun experiences, supportive adults to supervise and nutritious meals. For information on the EFry camps or how to start one in your own community, call 604-520-1166 and ask for JustKids. If the number is long distance, you can call EFry free at 1-888-879-9593.

- **Youth lounges** — If your community has a recreation centre or a library, by operating a drop-in youth lounge, you can provide a free, safe place for children and youth to gather. If possible, provide some recreation choices, like a ping pong table or computer gaming system. A TV with cable or satellite service could also be welcome, as could a source of music. If it's affordable, offer nutritious snacks, so that young people can access food after school.

## 6. Opportunities to Help Others

Being successful and having something to offer other people is an important part of self-esteem. Creating opportunities for children to offer help or show leadership are important. Some examples include:

- **School and community leadership and volunteer opportunities** such as recreation or art programs.
- **Social events and cultural practices** such as helping organize events or helping an Elder gathering medicinal plants.
- **Older teens can babysit or mentor younger children.**

## 7. Physical and Emotional Safety

Many children of incarcerated parents will have seen violence and experienced severe parenting styles or punishment. Caregivers coping with the difficulties described in this handbook have a greater likelihood themselves of responding in the same way. As well, they can be at increased risk of victimization in their neighborhood. It is not uncommon for children to respond by being distrustful of adults, having trouble forming close personal relationships, or isolating themselves. Creating opportunities for children to develop healthy relationships, develop friends and peer supports, and increase their social inclusion are crucial to helping them overcome the damaging effects of violence and victimization. Some examples include:

- **Structuring recreational or sport activities to model behaviours that lead to likeability and give children the opportunity to practice behaviours related to making friends** such as 1) a friendly greeting involving making eye contact, smiling warmly, speaking loudly enough to be heard and using the other person's name (if known) when team players greet the opposing team; 2) offering a compliment such as "nice shot", and 3) small acts of kindness such as sharing food or helping the other team load their gear.
- **Structure activities into small groups** such as children working in twos on scavenger hunts.
- **Develop a Trusted Adult Policy that individuals, groups, or organizations working with children can implement** such as "Listen carefully. Look for what's going on under what is said (the context). Look interested and use eye contact with the child when they speak. Respond by acknowledging what was said and offer to help when there is a problem. Keep promises made. Tell the truth. Set clear boundaries on expectations of behaviour and maintain them consistently. Establish routine ways of dealing with problems. Be open and acknowledge mistakes."

- **Collect old cell phones to be available for safety planning.** Old cell phones, even without a SIM chip or cell carrier, will dial 911 for emergencies. Youth may feel safer returning home later in the evening knowing that they can call for help.
- **Schools can develop a proximity “parent phone tree” registration program** so that parents can arrange after school pick-ups or “walking trains” for children. New or isolated parents may not have the network or relationships to draw upon the informal care giving that parents and caregivers in a neighbourhood often offer each other.
- **Develop a school counsellor outreach strategy.** Have school counsellors periodically visit classes during less structured time such as art classes, PE or after school activity clubs. Involve them in opportunities to speak with and build rapport with children. Children are more likely to ask for help from those they know and feel comfortable with.

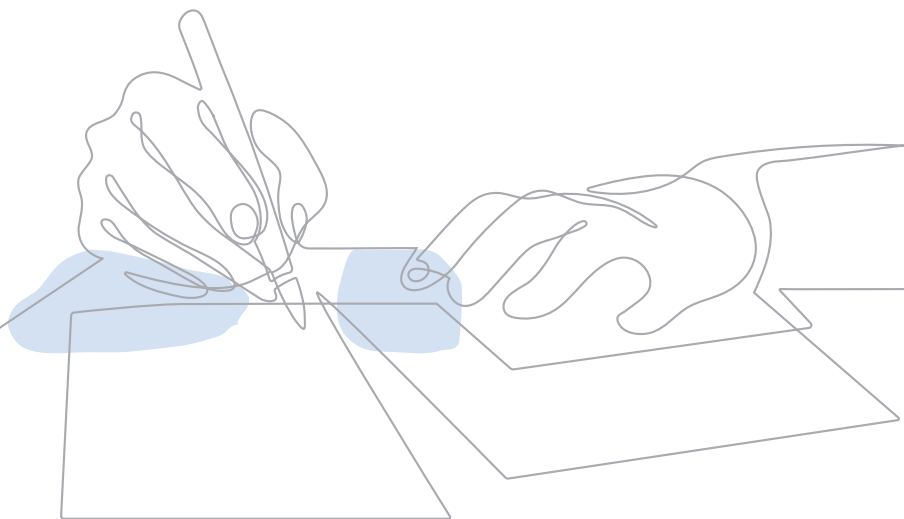
**NOTE:** To ensure you do not perpetuate stigma, you will want to take care with how you market your supports. Children old enough to understand may be sensitive to participating in programs branded as only for children with parents in prison. In most instances, it will be counterproductive to develop programs that openly target only those children whose parents are in conflict with the law. For some activities, it will be helpful for the adults leading them to have some basic training on trauma-informed, gender appropriate, and culturally sensitive approaches to dealing with vulnerable children. Investigate resources in your community for training, such as a local college or through your health authority, or look online.



## Funding

Some of the supports your community may put into place will likely be operated by volunteers. Others will require financial support. Depending on the type of support, the potential funder will be obvious. For example, your municipality's Parks and Recreation budget would most likely absorb waived admission fees to the community centre resources and existing programs. They may also be who you ask to cover some or all of the costs associated with new programming to be held in their facilities. However, if funds are needed to create and manage programs you can apply to sources such as:

- BC Community Gaming Grants
- Community foundations
- First Nations and Inuit Youth Employment Strategy
- Government of Canada – Canada Summer Jobs
- Telus Community Board grants
- Rotary Clubs
- The Royal Bank of Canada Charitable Foundation
- The Vancouver Foundation (BC wide).





## Monitoring and Assessment

By planning for ongoing monitoring and evaluation of the supports your community creates for children, you make it possible to make sure what you are doing is working. It will also make it easier to see if there are things that should be changed or added. And, if your programs are run by volunteers, being able to demonstrate that they are truly helping children can inspire people to want to continue what they are doing or even to expand it.

It is helpful if your monitoring system can keep track of a least two things:

1. The **outputs** of the initiative, for example by answering the questions: Have we created more opportunities for the children to participate in recreational activities? Are we better at working together, at sharing information, or at identifying the children in need of support?
2. The **outcomes** of the initiatives, for example by answering the questions: Are the children adapting better to the school environment? Do the children feel that help is available if they need it? Have we been able to mitigate the negative impact of parental incarceration on the children?

As members of your community will be working together to support children, it's important for everyone involved in leading those supports to agree as early as possible how they will measure success. It can be as simple as creating a grid that lists what activities you want to take place, then assessing whether the planned activities are happening (outputs) and if they are achieving results for children (outcomes).

There are a lot of ways this information can be collected and assessed. Often, it is easiest for the people working with children to assess the effectiveness of a particular activity in a discreet way that won't make children or their caregivers uncomfortable. If there are many different supportive activities taking place, it can be helpful for the people leading those to get together periodically (every four to six months) to review the information gathered and decide if the supports are working as they are or if it would be helpful to change anything — and if there are gaps in the support available to the children and families.

# Appendices

## APPENDIX A — QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ABOUT CHILDREN OF INCARCERATED PARENTS

### **1. How many children are affected by parental incarceration?**

Unfortunately, we don't know for sure because they are not counted. Estimates for the number of children of the men in Canadian prisons sit around 350,000 per year. That doesn't account for children of incarcerated women, more than two-thirds of whom are mothers. There may be as many as 460,000 children with incarcerated parents in Canada during any given year.

It's not possible to know for sure how many impacted children live in our community, though we can look for indicators to locate them.

### **2. Are these children that we already know?**

Some children will be easier to identify than others. Those that are known because of perhaps struggling with school attendance and performance, or who are accessing social workers or charity supports in our community, will be easier to reach.

### **3. Where are these children living?**

These children live in foster care or with family members and sometimes even with family friends. As they nearly all live in poverty, they often live in less stable housing: illegal suites, temporarily in the homes of other family members etc. Sometimes, they live in family homes or affordable housing developments.

### **4. What kind of problems do they have?**

Most have experienced great trauma. Some have watched their parent get arrested and taken away. Some lived with illegal drugs in their home and parents who have mental illness or addictions. Some will have experienced homelessness and have had to stay in a shelter or a tent in a park. Some have experienced all of those things. The majority live in poverty so face a state of constant deprivation which harms their development and physical and mental health. The impacts of these traumas particularly bundled with parental incarceration can affect children their whole lives. Unsupported, they are likely to come into conflict with the law themselves, as well as struggle with chronic ill health and have higher than average rates of mental health and addiction struggles.

### **5. Why are those problems different than other children?**

Mostly, it comes down to two things: trauma and deprivation. Children do not have the physical or mental maturity to cope with their situation or to change anything about how or where they live. They have suffered great instability at a young age. They need help. If they don't get it, the negative impacts are lifelong. If they do, studies from other countries show that they are able to become resilient and live positive lives.

### **6. How do we know we can improve the lives of children with an incarcerated parent?**

Research clearly shows that children who receive supports experience better life outcomes than those that don't. By creating a protective environment for children, communities can help provide benefits not just during childhood but will help those children enjoy improved lives as adults, with lower instances of justice system involvement, better health, improved work opportunities and employment stability, and greater housing stability.

### **7. What is the role of community versus a parent in supporting children of incarcerated parents?**

Protecting and supporting vulnerable children is something that every community does all of the time. The challenge when it comes to children of incarcerated parents is to be able to identify them without stigmatizing them, to understand the challenges they face and the specific needs they have, and to reach out to them and accompany them through this difficult time for them.

## APPENDIX B — CHILD PROTECTION SUPPORT

### *Indigenous Children*

#### **Jurisdictional Disputes**

When it comes to children, there is significant overlap in jurisdiction between provincial and federal governments. Questions about which body is responsible should not interfere with the care of children under Jordan's Principle. Advocates for children can refer to this principle.

Jordan's Principle refers to when there is disagreement about which government should pay for the care of a child between governments, such as an Indigenous child, the government that had first contact with the child will pay and then work out the disagreement later. In 2017, the principle was expanded to address the differential levels of care provided for Indigenous children between provincial and federal governments. The Canadian Human Rights Tribunal ruled that there is a requirement for "substantive equality" for Indigenous children. This means if Indigenous children need extra help to achieve equal opportunity to thrive on reserve, they should receive it.

#### **Special Protections in Caring for Indigenous Children**

Indigenous people have an inherent right to care for and protect their children recognized in the United Nations in the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People Canada's Constitution. BC has recognized this right and designated Indigenous agencies to do so in virtually every community. These agencies must comply, as must the Ministry for Children and Family Development, with BC's Child, Family and Community Care Act which sets out how the government cares for children in need of protection.

BC's Child, Family and Community Services Act (CFCSA) sets specific requirements to ensure that determinations of the best interests of Indigenous children considers their cultural identity and the need to preserve and protect it; including their relationship with their extended family and community. Indigenous people should be involved in the planning and delivery of services to the family and their children, and services provided should be sensitive to the needs, and cultural, racial, linguistic and religious heritage of service recipients. Where possible the voice of the child should be heard.

Family and community members, and where possible, the child (over 12) should be heard when determining the development of a plan for the child. Their views are important in developing the care plan, which should include how continuity will be maintained in the child's life, including their cultural heritage and identity, religion, language, and social and recreational activities.

In planning placements for Indigenous children, the legislation prioritizes placements within the child's extended family or within the child's Indigenous cultural community. If that is not possible or safe, priority is with another Indigenous family. When neither of those options are possible, the placement should be where the child remains in contact with relatives and friends, with their siblings, or where they can stay in the same school. The greatest degree for continuity and protection of cultural heritage and identity is to be provided, including when the child is in care, and to encourage and to guide the child to maintain their cultural identity and heritage.

### *All Children*

#### **Parental/Caregiver Responsibilities for Children**

Anyone responsible for taking care of a child must make sure to:

- Keep the children safe, healthy, and happy
- Safeguard the children from injuries, illness, and other harm
- Get proper medical and dental attention for the children as soon as needed
- Send the children to school and make sure that they get all the help they need to succeed there
- Do their best to provide the children with healthy food, clothing for all kinds of weather, friends to play with, and a happy home
- Teach the children how to keep themselves safe
- Seek help for themselves or the children when needed
- Protect the children from neglect; emotional, physical, and sexual abuse; or from the emotional harm of witnessing domestic violence by or against someone they live with.

Anyone who believes that a child is, or likely will be, abused or neglected must report this to the Ministry of Children and Family Development (1-800-663-7867). The only exception is if a person asks a lawyer to help them and that information between the lawyer and client is protected.

#### **Supporting Parents involved in the Child Welfare System**

Children fare best when they are connected to their family, their community, and their greater identity as individuals with a sense of connection to their history, their culture and their identity. Even when children cannot live with their parents, a relationship can be extremely affirming and important to a child. Programs that enable parents to be their best selves are important because they can offer benefits not only to the individual but also to the child. Parent support or mutual aid groups that support parents who have lost children into care, or that address particular challenges like addiction, can play an important role in helping children thrive.

Information for Parents is listed in Appendix C.

## APPENDIX C — RESOURCES

### *How to Find Help or Contact Government*

#### **Service BC (Info: 1-800-663-7867)**

Information for any BC government program, service, employee or representative. Callers are assisted to identify what program, service or person to speak with to get help.

### *Support for Parents and Families Dealing with Family Law and Child Protection Matters*

#### **Parents Legal Centres**

Parents Legal Centres are available to help parents, guardians or caregivers with child protection matters. Centres are available in six BC communities, with more planned, so check with your local Legal Aid office. Current locations are:

- Campbell River
- Duncan
- Prince George
- Smithers
- Surrey
- Vancouver

Parents Legal Centres provide:

- Information and advice on options for resolving child protection issues out of court
- Legal advice and representation, where appropriate, for collaborative processes such as mediation and family case planning conference
- Legal advice and representation at uncontested hearings
- An advocate who will support you and go with you to meetings and appointments
- Referrals to other services, including online resources and other public agencies.

To be eligible for these services, you must:

- Have income and assets that fall within a qualifying range
- Be a parent, guardian, or a person standing in the place of a parent
- Be involved in a case that can be resolved consensually.

#### **Legal Aid Services (Info: 1-866-577-2525/604-408-2172)**

- Legal aid services are available in-person or over the phone throughout the province. For locations: [https://lss.bc.ca/legal\\_aid/legalAidLocations.php#familyAdviceClinics](https://lss.bc.ca/legal_aid/legalAidLocations.php#familyAdviceClinics)

#### **Aboriginal Community Legal Workers (Info: 250-748-1160)**

- Indigenous community legal workers are available in Duncan and Nanaimo: [https://lss.bc.ca/legal\\_aid/IndigenousCommunityLegalWorker.php](https://lss.bc.ca/legal_aid/IndigenousCommunityLegalWorker.php)

### *Additional Resources*

#### **Adults who support children**

- Science of Childhood Trauma is the name of a brief video just over one minute long that tells adults about trauma in children and five behaviours they can do to help children heal and increase their resilience. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WZif\\_4Eg7\\_Y](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WZif_4Eg7_Y)

#### **Caregivers of Children with Incarcerated Parents**

- *Raising a Relative's Child: A Guide for Caregivers of Children with Incarcerated Parents* by the Elizabeth Fry Society of

Greater Vancouver. Available by calling 1-888-879-9593 or through an email request to [info@just-kids.ca](mailto:info@just-kids.ca).

- [www.just-kids.ca](http://www.just-kids.ca) is EFry Vancouver's website for our programming to support children with incarcerated parents. It includes online resources that may be helpful.
- Online Resources for younger children are available at <https://sesamestreetincommunities.org/topics/incarceration/>

#### **Mentoring Children of Incarcerated Parents**

- The National Mentoring Centre in the United States has a webpage dedicated to the children of incarcerated parents and provides information on American mentoring program models, research related to them and key considerations. <https://nationalmentoringresourcecenter.org/index.php/component/k2/item/149-children-of-incarcerated-parents.html>

#### **Police Departments**

- The International Association of Chiefs of Police with the Bureau of Justice Assistance in the United States developed Safeguarding Children of Arrested Parents. It provides a model protocol and training on protecting the physical and emotional well-being of children when their parents are arrested. [https://www.theiacp.org/sites/default/files/pdf/Safeguarding-Children-of-Arrested-Parents-Final\\_Web\\_v3.pdf](https://www.theiacp.org/sites/default/files/pdf/Safeguarding-Children-of-Arrested-Parents-Final_Web_v3.pdf)

#### **Professionals Working with Trauma Affected Children and Adults (info: 1-844-491-5890)**

- The Nova Scotia Health Authority wrote a brief guide for professionals in various settings to understand the impact of trauma and effective responses for various professionals. [https://novascotia.ca/dhw/addictions/documents/TIP\\_Discussion\\_Guide\\_3.pdf](https://novascotia.ca/dhw/addictions/documents/TIP_Discussion_Guide_3.pdf)

#### **Providers Working in First Nations Communities (Info: 1-800-463-1763, ext. 146516)**

- Saint Elizabeth Foundation provides free training for providers working in First Nations communities with health issues and accredited fee based vocational online training for Indigenous peoples. They offer a self-paced learning course on Trauma Informed Relationships: Building Trust and Safety. <https://www.saintelizabeth.com/FNIM/SE-Learning/@YourSide-Colleague-reg;.aspx>

#### **Teachers**

- The Alberta Department of Education has a webpage of resources available for schools and educators on being trauma informed and how to adapt school processes and teaching methodologies. <https://education.alberta.ca/trauma-informed-practice/what-is-trauma-informed-practice/>
- The BC Department of Education has a webpage of resources available for schools and educators to equip them to help Indigenous students succeed. <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/education-training/administration/kindergarten-to-grade-12/aboriginal-education>

## APPENDIX D — ADMINISTRATIVE FAIRNESS

In Canada, people have the right to make decisions for themselves, as long as those decisions are lawful. This is included in the Canadian Bill of Rights and Freedoms (sometimes known as the Charter). Where decision-makers are choosing whether and how to restrict a person's freedoms, they must follow three rules, called the principles of administrative fairness.

As your community works to help children with incarcerated parents and their families, you can use these same principles to identify any problems with the procedures used or the decisions made and use government's commitment to adhere to those to effect change.

When decision makers make decisions that can negatively affect a person there are 3 principles that decision makers must adhere to:

1. They must stick within the legal authority (jurisdiction) they have to act and cannot go outside that authority. Their authority is set out in the legislation that gives them

the right to make those decisions (like social workers under the Child, Family and Community Services Act; or financial assistance workers under the Employment and Assistance Act)<sup>1</sup>.

2. When the decisions they need to make are not set out clearly in law, the decision-maker is to use their judgment in a reasonable manner. Often the direction that these decision-makers receive is set out in regulation.<sup>2</sup>
3. The decision maker must follow fair procedures when making decisions that affect a person's rights or interests.

The legislation and regulation are key to reviewing any decisions made and understanding if there are grounds to be concerned about; or grounds for reconsideration.

Government has clear policy that protects people making a complaint and it forbids retaliation. People have a right to participate in the process affecting them and to complain if the process does not seem fair.

| Tool for Documenting Decision Making and Identifying Potential Concerns in Administrative Fairness  |                            |                          |   |
|---|----------------------------|--------------------------|---|
| <b>Before the decision was made</b>   | <b>When did they know?</b> | <b>Who advised them?</b> | <b>How were they told? (ie. Verbally, in writing)</b> |
| <b>Did the affected person understand:</b>  |                            |                          |   |
| a) That a decision would be made?   |                            |                          |   |
| b) Why the decision was required?   |                            |                          |   |
| c) How the decision would affect the person?  |                            |                          |   |
| d) Told what information would be considered?   |                            |                          |   |
| e) Told of any specific criteria that will be used to make a decision or review the information?  |                            |                          |   |
| f) The rules that apply in making a decision?   |                            |                          |   |
| <b>Did the affected person receive:</b>   | <b>When did they know?</b> | <b>Who advised them?</b> | <b>How were they told? (ie. Verbally, in writing)</b> |
| g) The opportunity to present their information on the matter?  |                            |                          |   |
| h) The opportunity to respond to information collected from others that will be considered by the decision maker?   |                            |                          |   |
| <b>Did the decision making process (hearing, review) have:</b>  | <b>Yes</b>                 | <b>If No why not?</b>    |   |
| a) An adequate & proper review of all the relevant information (all important facts collected, documented & considered prior)?  |                            |                          |   |
| b) An objectively made decision with respect for all relevant facts and no bias?  |                            |                          |   |
| c) Accommodation for any changed circumstances since the information was collected/ or new information available during a period of delay or while the decision was being made? |                            |                          |   |

<sup>1</sup> An Act can only be passed by Parliament like the BC Legislature or House of Commons and requires an extensive process.

<sup>2</sup> The regulations for Acts are usually the exact name of the piece of legislation such as the Employment and Assistance Act Regulation. Regulations are set by the executive authority of the department or ministry and therefore easier to change than legislation.

## Tool for Documenting Decision Making and Identifying Potential Concerns in Administrative Fairness

|  |            |                       |
|--|------------|-----------------------|
| d) A visible process to ensure only information relevant to the decision was considered?   |            |                       |
| e) Generate a decision that is consistent with previous decisions on similar matters, by relying on existing policies, guidelines, procedures and rules? |            |                       |
| f) Discretion exercised where any inconsistency with previous decisions on similar matters can be justified and explained?                               |            |                       |
| <b>After the decision is made?</b>   | <b>Yes</b> | <b>If No why not?</b> |
| a) Provide adequate reasons to explain how and why the decision was made directly to those affected?   |            |                       |
| b) Was it communicated in writing, in plain language?  |            |                       |
| c) Was the decision provided to everyone affected by it?   |            |                       |
| d) Has a proper record of the full process been kept that will remain on file for a reasonable period of time?   |            |                       |
| e) Were all those affected provided information on any potential grievance or redress process?   |            |                       |

If something does not seem right ask about it, say why and ask it be fixed. The checklist can help identify where something may have gone wrong. If a decision is sound there should be no concerns. Six questions help identify what could be wrong:

1. What legislation gave the decision maker the power to make a decision and what are the limits of that power? Are there regulations or written material that advise individuals of a complaint process? Determine the stages in the process and the deadlines.
2. Were all time lines followed? Did communication occur in the way required? Did the decision maker make any commitments that she or he failed to keep?
3. Was the affected person given a full and fair opportunity to present their information and viewpoint to the decision maker? Did the affected person receive full disclosure of the information that the decision maker had received? Were they given the opportunity to dispute it?
4. Did the review checklist above identify any areas of concern for a fair process? Was there a potential conflict of interest between the decision-maker and the parties involved (such as ministry case workers; the affected parties or those involved with them)? Do the reasons stated for the decision appear to be free of bias?
5. Did the decision maker make an error in exercising discretion such as bad faith, acting for an improper purpose, failing to consider relevant factors, taking irrelevant factors into account; acting on no evidence; discrimination, fettering discretion (not genuinely exercising independent judgment in a matter), retroactivity (unless expressly stated, applying the jurisdiction to act before the legislation gave it), uncertainty (any rule should be sufficient to enable a person to know what it means and to have clear guidelines for enforcement) or unreasonableness (the linking of how the decision maker considered and assessed the arguments and evidence).

If the answer to any question is yes, there are grounds to present an argument for why a decision should be set aside and reconsidered. Certain representatives<sup>3</sup> in government are provided authority for particularly vulnerable individuals and have the authority to review government decisions and documents used to make decisions based upon administrative fairness. The responsibility of these representatives and their offices is to ensure government bodies and decision makers operate in a fair legal manner and that they give people a way to address feeling wronged and have their concerns heard and reconsidered.

If no government representative is charged with the authority to review a decision, then:

1. Determine if there is a government complaint process for the affected Ministry or department. If there is, follow that process. If you cannot respond in the time set in the complaint process respond in writing and explain why. Ask for an extension.
2. In the absence of identifying a complaint/grievance process, contact the appropriate Ministry or department to request it. Determine the timelines and stages the grievance process sets out. Timeliness is important. Often complaints can only be made within 30 days of something happening, or the information being known. If the person contacted cannot answer the question about a grievance process, send a letter to the unit supervisor. Send the letter as soon as possible of the intention to make a complaint. Outline the complaint in as plain and unbiased language as possible.
3. Prepare a written brief of the information and facts regarding the identified breach of the principles and the remedy requested.

<sup>3</sup> BC Representative of Child and Youth; The Ombudsman; The Inspection and Standards Office of the Auditor General.

## APPENDIX E — ADVOCATING FOR CHANGE

### Charting a Course for Government Change

1. Identify how the government service or a particular process is affecting one group of people more than another (such as not getting service, or having more barriers to service).
2. Document the problem in clear, plain, factual language as objective as possible. Try to have instances that demonstrate the problem (specifics include the person, date, time, who else was there, what was said, what was done, what happened as a result). Consider if there are third party sources of information to estimate how big the problem is<sup>4</sup>. Reference Librarians at the Public Library can serve as a valuable resource to locate information about the issue.
3. Analyze the program. Does it affect an individual or is it systemic?  
A systemic issue is one inherent in the overall system (systemic) rather than a specific, individual isolated case (individual).  
If it is individual:
  - a. Is the problem one so grievous that there are grounds for legal action?
    - i. Potential help could be available through Prisoners Legal Aid, BC Civil Liberties, or Pivot Legal Aid Society.
  - b. Is the problem one where legislative entitlement has not been met?
    - i. Consider legislative advocates such as the Ombudsman, Representative for Children, Human Rights Tribunal, or Correctional Investigator.
  - c. Is there a formal grievance process for that Ministry or government program? There should also be grievance processes for programs delivered by social service agencies funded by government.  
If it is systemic:
  - a. Identify the placement of the problem.  
Consider which arm of government is responsible for the problem that is identified for change — Federal, Provincial or Municipal, and the Ministry or Department it falls under. Identify any issues related to fairness, consistency or equity of all individuals.
  - b. Identify the desired change.
    - i. Is there a specific piece of legislation under which the problem falls?
    - ii. Is there a specific Regulation, or Policy that applies?
    - iii. What specific change is being sought?
  - c. Look for others with overlapping interests.
    - i. Who might want to collaborate for the change identified? Consider a meeting to discuss working together.
    - ii. Does the level of government identified have a party platform that overlaps with the issue? Is there a Mandate Letter for a Minister that speaks to the issue?
- d. Steps to getting change accomplished.
  - i. Determine whether the change sought is an incremental change or end result. It will determine the way the problem is approached.
  - ii. Determine if there are any external supports for change such as other governments in Canada or the Commonwealth.
  - iii. Include in the brief what the issue is from a risk management perspective utilizing four sections: the issue; the rationale for change; the recommendations; and the impact of the changes. Include any evidence in support of the scope of the problem, or facts given in end notes or footnotes.
  - iv. Identify the intervention point for change. The elected political master of a department is the Minister who is responsible for the effectiveness and efficiency of the department. The highest political servant for a department is the deputy minister who is responsible for the department's day to day operations, budget and programs development.
  - v. Contact the identified individuals and ask to meet. Be prepared to send either the brief or a description of what the request to speak about is and who will be attending.
  - vi. If the request to meet with a senior bureaucrat is not successful in gaining a meeting consider a strategy of influence and bridge building with senior bureaucrats. Is there anyone who can help set up the meeting.
  - vii. Prepare for the meeting. Identify questions to ask that can help build rapport in the meeting, and identify any joint needs. Practice a description of the request that can be made in no more than 8 minutes (about 1200 words). Be prepared to answer questions related to the size of the problem — how many people are affected.
- e. Maintain the focus.
  - i. Follow up after the meeting and confirm any commitments made such as follow discussions up; or further investigation into the matter.
  - ii. Consider how to support the call for change. Potential support could come through building awareness of the issue through media, such as newspaper stories or editorials; continued enlisting of supporters calling for change through the collaboration inclusive of meeting with elected representatives.
  - iii. Continue to meet with civil servants and political representatives that have any relevance to the issue. Look at an organization chart and meet with other officials. Ask for their support and enlist them in suggestions to bring about change or alternative solutions for what could be done.
- f. Acknowledge support and success.
  - i. Acknowledge and credit any change makers and ministries for their exercise of good governance and to record the precedence.

<sup>4</sup> Potential sources include StatsCan, BC Stats, Ministry Annual Service Plans or Performance Reports, Auditor General Reports, special reports by the Representative for Children, or other commissioned reports.



**For more information, please contact:**

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