

Developing Mother-Child Community Corrections Programs: Issues to Consider for Planning and Implementing Successful Programs

Planning for supervision and services that fit both mothers and their children is critical for successful programming. Too often we jump to implementation without carefully considering the nature of the problem we want to address or the population we hope to serve. This document was developed to assist program planners who are considering planning and implementing programs for mothers and their children in community correctional settings. Section I. Defining the Problem, and Section II. Planning and Collaboration provide questions and worksheet space to assist with pre-planning activities. These two sections should be addressed prior to considering Section III. Preliminary Implementation Issues.

I. DEFINING THE PROBLEM

Mother-child programs indicate that there are so many problems to address when planning and implementing programs of this type that it is sometimes difficult to set priorities and identify areas to focus on that will yield successful outcomes. Often, program planners identify what is perceived to be a problem, only to find out later on that it isn't a problem at all. For example, having enough transition beds for mothers and their children is cited as a common problem among jurisdictions. But when we look more closely at this issue, we discover that it isn't the primary problem at all. We can identify adequate beds and we can even identify some funds for them, but we aren't sure of the size and exact nature of the women offender population. We may not have any support in the community for our efforts. We don't have the facilities and services to manage children in correctional settings. We focus entirely on incarcerated mothers to the exclusion of their children. Solutions to these kinds of complex problems need careful examination. Taking time up front to investigate what the "real" problems are will save much time and money later on.

1. ***What is/are the priority problem(s) you are trying to address?*** **Be as specific as you can.**

- ☐ Jail and/or prison overcrowding among female offenders
- ☐ High recidivism rates among female offenders
- ☐ No/limited programming for female offenders or mothers
- ☐ High levels of trauma among children of mothers involved in the criminal justice system
- ☐ High levels of intergenerational involvement in the criminal justice system
- ☐ Increase in probation and/or parole violations among female offenders
- ☐ High number of female offenders losing custody of their children

- ☐ ☐ High demand on foster care for children of incarcerated parents
- ☐ ☐ No/limited pretrial options for female defendants
- ☐ ☐ Visitation difficulties between mothers involved in the criminal justice system and their children
- ☐ ☐ Challenges for kinship care/families of female offenders
- ☐ ☐ Lengthy separation between mothers involved in the criminal justice system and their children
- ☐ ☐ Community re-entry and family reunification challenges for incarcerated mothers
- ☐ ☐ Lack of coordination and collaboration among agencies and fractured service delivery to female offenders and their families
- ☐ ☐ Insufficient mother-child bonding resulting in developmental problems later on in life
- ☐ ☐ OTHER _____
- ☐ ☐ OTHER _____

2. *What do you know about the problem(s) you seek to solve and the population you hope to serve? What is the scope of the problem? The size of the target population? What data do you have to inform your understanding of the problem(s)?*

Quantitative data and information can help clarify the scope and nature of the problem(s) you have identified, and help you be sure that you are focusing on areas that you can effect.

KEY QUESTIONS	YOUR ANSWERS
What data and information currently exists that will inform and support your understanding of the problem(s) stated above? Where is it? How can you get it?	
What additional data do you think you might need to clarify the nature of the problem(s)? The nature of the target population?	
Do you have access to the target population you have identified to seek input on their needs and issues? How will you do this?	

- 3. Restate your problem(s) as preliminary goal statements. For example, if the problem is high levels of trauma to children, the goal may be "to explore options to reduce the trauma that children experience when their mother is arrested or incarcerated."**

Once you are sure you have identified clear problem(s), restate them as preliminary goals for further investigation. From here, you can begin to articulate more concrete objectives and tasks to accomplish each goal.

GOAL 1: _____

GOAL 2: _____

GOAL 3: _____

- 4. It is never too early to consider a plan for monitoring and evaluation. How will you incorporate a monitoring and evaluation process into your planning and implementation efforts?**

Once you are clear on goals and objectives, list the program and offender outcomes that you expect to achieve. How will you measure these outcomes? What data and information will you use to monitor program effects on women offenders and their children?

Outcomes	Measurements	Data and Information Needed
1.	1.	1.
2.	2.	2.
3.	3.	3.
4.	4.	4.
5.	5.	5.

II. PLANNING & COLLABORATION

Mother-child community corrections programs typically require a range of expertise and resources both from within and outside of the criminal justice system. Depending on the problem(s) you are trying to address, you will likely need a variety of people involved in the planning and implementation of successful programs.

1. ***Consider the problem(s) and goals you have stated above. Now, think about who is critical to solving these problems and helping you achieve your goals?***

Having the “right” people at the table is absolutely critical to your success. Your answers to the following questions will help you identify who they are and how they should be involved.

KEY QUESTIONS	YOUR ANSWERS
Who does/should care about the problem(s) you have identified?	
Where is the pressure or interest in this effort coming from?	
Who is already doing work in this area?	
Who is/will be affected by this issue? The offender population? Policy and decisionmakers?	
Who are your allies?	

Where might opposition come from? How will you deal with this?	
Do you have a diverse list of policymakers and decision makers included in your list?	

2. *Is the timing right for an effort of this kind?*

Now that you have identified your goals and a group of people who may assist you in your efforts, consider whether the timing is “right” for an effort of this kind. Is there enough interest among policymakers for seeing this through? Are there other issues that will compete for attention, dollars, time?

KEY QUESTIONS	YOUR ANSWERS
Are there existing legal restrictions to implementing an effort of this kind? For example, will you need enabling legislation to plan and implement your effort? Do sentencing and legal parameters make it impossible to work with the population you have identified? Are there zoning requirements that will help or hinder your efforts?	
In general, what may compete with this issue for policymakers’ time? Funding? Importance?	
Are there other overarching problems or issues that the criminal justice system is dealing with that may overshadow this effort? Other children’s issues?	

III. PRELIMINARY IMPLEMENTATION ISSUES

Once you have completed your pre-planning activities, you are encouraged to use the following chart to begin to develop your program. The chart suggests a number of different issues and choices that go into the implementation of a mother-child community corrections program. The *Thoughts/Comments* column is provided to invite you to consider the pros, cons, relevance and implications of each choice.

Topic	Issues/Options to consider	Thoughts/Comments
Program Type: Basic structure What kind of program structure are you thinking about and why?	Residential <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community-based (i.e. diversion program, halfway house, alternative living environment) • On-site jail/prison (as a separate part of an institution, as a separate facility under corrections supervision, as private services/program within a facility) Non-residential <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Day reporting/day treatment • Case management only • Other non-residential program Transitional: Re-entry from prison or jail	
Program Theory What theoretical assumptions about women who commit crimes and family rehabilitation are you operating under? How do these beliefs impact the choices you make about your program?	Many of the following assumptions are not mutually exclusive nor are they necessarily empirically supported. They are presented to invite you to examine and investigate your own assumptions and their implications for programming. Family/community focused theories <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All women, children, and families have skills and experiences that can be drawn on to make positive changes in their lives. Community-based supports can be tapped to encourage appropriate behavior among ex-offenders and their children (asset or strength-based models). • Children are best served by improving the efficacy and well-being of their primary caretakers (parent-focused models). 	

Topic	Issues/Options to consider	Thoughts/Comments
<p>Program Theory (continued)</p> <p>Do you intend to base your program on an existing curriculum (for example, Moving On)? If so, which one and why? How will this address program assumptions?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Families are systems with interdependent parts that are part of larger social networks. Parents/primary caregivers are the most critical factor in youth development but all parts of the network must be examined and engaged to promote the well-being of youth (human ecology models). The goal of family interventions is to promote protective factors while decreasing risk factors (resiliency models). Parenting is a skill that can be taught (cognitive-behavioral parent focused model). The greatest risk factor for children is poor parent-child attachment and bonding. Early experiences are essential to healthy development (attachment model). <p>Woman focused theories</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> For female offenders, healing from the effects of victimization (low self-esteem, substance abuse, etc.) is the most important step for change (trauma-based model). Long-term poverty is the single most important obstacle facing female offenders and their children (structural model). Lack of skills and ingrained patterns of negative or criminal thinking is the greatest obstacle facing female offenders (cognitive-behavioral model). Female offenders suffer most from lack of self-esteem and self-efficacy (empowerment model). Women make choices based on their perceptions of opportunity and potential reward. Programming for female offenders should be about offering new opportunities (cognitive-behavioral). Women's success is based on close and nurturing relationships with family, program 	

Topic	Issues/Options to consider	Thoughts/Comments
<p>Location</p> <p>Have you considered both the physical location and fiscal implications of the program?</p> <p>Are there any restrictions based on zoning or funding sources?</p>	<p>Physical siting</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accessibility • Ease of collaboration/coordination with other services • Environment • Child-friendliness • Proximity to school/child care/employment opportunities • Appropriate zoning • Licensing requirements • Transportation options <p>Fiscal implications</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What agency will have primary fiscal responsibility? • Is there joint fiscal responsibility between public and private organizations? • Are private contractors available to provide services? 	
<p>Children/family Legal Status</p> <p>Are you going to target a population based on child location and family status? Are you going to exclude offenders who have been charged with neglect or abuse?</p>	<p>Family eligibility</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Child welfare involvement for neglect or abuse • Foster care placement before incarceration • Foster care placement during incarceration • Children in guardianship- formal • Children in kinship custody- informal • Mother threatened with/close to termination of parental rights • Mother was primary caretaker prior to arrest 	
<p>Program Design</p> <p>What range of services do you want to include in your program for mothers and for children?</p>	<p>Cultural specificity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What cultural population(s) will the program serve? <p>Service capacity</p> <p>Can the program serve those with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Physical disabilities? • Mental illness? • Learning disabilities? • Developmental disabilities? 	

Topic	Issues/Options to consider	Thoughts/Comments
<p>Program Design (continued)</p> <p>Which services are available in the community? Are they appropriate for your target population? Which services will you have to provide in house?</p> <p>What are other target population considerations?</p> <p>How will you structure participant involvement?</p> <p>How will you involved extended family and caregivers?</p>	<p>Service components</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mandatory vs. voluntary program components? • For mothers: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Substance abuse treatment (gender-specific)? • Domestic violence/sexual assault • Family programming (mother-children and/or extended family) • Legal- reunification advocacy • Medical/mental health • Child care • Job training and placement • Education: remedial/ advanced • Parenting education • Community service/restitution • Housing • Other • For children: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education/Tutoring • Reunification counseling • Reunification advocacy • Developmental screening • Medical/mental health • Peer support • Family programming • Prevention services • Substance abuse treatment and counseling • Visitation plan for older children not residing with mother • Other • For extended family: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parenting/caregiver support services • Reunification counseling • Reunification advocacy • Substance abuse treatment and counseling (Al-anon and direct) • Housing • Visitation • Other 	

Topic	Issues/Options to consider	Thoughts/Comments
<p>Program Administration: Children</p> <p>What capacity do you have to manage different size families and different aged children?</p> <p>How will the services for children who are in the program be provided and by whom? How will you strengthen family relationships with children who may not be in the program with their mothers?</p> <p>What kinds of partnerships will you need to provide the kinds of assessments and services necessary?</p>	<p>Children</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How many children can the program accommodate per Mother? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All? • Up to a certain age? • A limited number of any age? • A limited number up to a certain age? • Health care • Needs assessments • Custody issues if mother returns to jail/prison • In- and out-of-center visitation protocol for extended family members and fathers • If pre-school age: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Childcare considerations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Off site or on site? • Licensed? • Babysitters vs. Childcare? • Programmed or unstructured? • Open to community or limited to program participants? • If school age: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who provides after-school care? • Where are they going to school? • Sleeping arrangements—full time with the mother? Up to what age? Boys and girls? • Can they participate in extra curricular activities off site? • Delinquent youth—included or excluded? • What kind of special arrangements/monitoring will program do for delinquent youth? • If the children are off site during the day, what security protocols will they be subjected to as they leave and enter the program? 	
<p>Program Administration: Other</p>	<p>Program Status</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Non-profit corporation/501(c)(3) • For profit corporation • Adjunct of another public or private program 	

Topic	Issues/Options to consider	Thoughts/Comments
<p>Program Administration: Other (continued)</p> <p>Who will be making these preliminary administrative and structural decisions? What are the implications of each choice?</p>	<p>Funding</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preliminary budget • Funding for operations and programming • Funding for research and evaluation activities • Where will funding come from? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Criminal Justice • Health and Human Services • Substance Abuse • Housing/homelessness • State legislature (pilot project?) • Private foundation(s) • Local county and/or municipal funding • Who will accept primary responsibility for monitoring the budget, reporting to funding agencies, preparing proposals, etc.? <p>Staffing and leadership</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Correspondence to population served • Correctional officers • Treatment providers • Case managers • Gender-specific? • Orientation and ongoing training and professional development <p>Relation to Community</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use of volunteers • Use of formally incarcerated women • School involvement • Provide services to the community or limit to program participants? • Board of Directors and/or Community Advisory Board? <p>Cultivation of specific environment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is the program environment compatible with goals? • Is program size compatible with goals? • Is the environment correctional, institutional or homelike? • Do staff wear uniforms? Street clothes? • Is security visibly dominant? • What kind of surveillance is in place? 	

Topic	Issues/Options to consider	Thoughts/Comments
<p>Program Administration: Other (continued)</p> <p>Do you have your strategy for ongoing monitoring in place?</p>	<p>Classification/Assessment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What tool(s) will be used, if any, to evaluate and classify eligible offenders? By risk? By needs? • Who will administer the tool(s)? <p>Monitoring and Evaluation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is there a clear plan for monitoring and evaluation? • What data and information will you need to collect to inform your process? • Who will conduct monitoring and evaluation activities? How will staff participate? 	
<p>Pregnancy</p> <p>How will health care and program issues be arranged for pregnant women and newborns?</p>	<p>Health Care</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who provides pre-natal care? Where? • Where does delivery/recovery take place? • Will staff and/or other residents be involved in the delivery process? • Who provides post-partum care? Where? • Who assumes the cost of health care? <p>Program Issues</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are post-partum requirements/ timeframe? 	
<p>Security/ Surveillance</p> <p>What is the program's role in surveillance? How do security issues fit with other programmatic concerns? How will you deal with conflicts?</p>	<p>Security and Program Considerations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is the program responsible for surveillance? • Use of alarm systems/keys • Does the program work with a specific surveillance agency/agents? • Will children be subjected to the same security measures as their mothers? 	