



Request for Proposals

Release Date: December 16, 2009

Child Well-being and the Impact of Parental Incarceration

Background

In 2007, over 1.7 million children had a parent who was incarcerated in a federal, state or county facility, an 80 percent increase from 1991. The number of female prisoners is also growing rapidly—two-thirds of these women are mothers and the primary caregivers for their children. Fifteen to twenty percent of children entering the child welfare system have incarcerated parents. Children are suffering as a result of these trends. Research has found that children of incarcerated parents have significantly more mental health issues, which if left untreated, can lead to school failure, substance abuse and delinquency. They are more likely to be exposed to parental substance abuse, extreme poverty and domestic violence. They are seven times more likely to become involved in the juvenile and adult criminal justice systems themselves.

Increasingly, attention is being paid to the needs of these children and families *during* parental incarceration, particularly in the area of mentoring services for children. A notable gap in attention, however, is to the needs of families *once a parent is released* from prison. To help fill this gap, Stoneleigh Center is interested in three specific areas that need attention from policymakers, researchers and practitioners.

A Lack of Family-Focused Services: Families reunifying after the incarceration of a parent face many challenges, including unemployment, substance abuse and broken relationships. Research, though limited, has demonstrated the importance of family-strengthening programs and other social services for families upon re-entry. However, parents are often released from prison without ties to community services, and human services agencies often lack formal mechanisms for sharing information about families impacted by incarceration. These problems are compounded by a lack of sufficient rigorous research documenting the supports needed by these families and effective ways of delivering them; uncoordinated funding streams; cumbersome paperwork; and a lack of service coordination between community- and prison-based services.

Challenges for Reunification When a Child is in Foster Care While a Parent is Incarcerated: The problems experienced by families during reunification are compounded when a child is in the foster care system while the parent is incarcerated. A county may house a parent in prison and their child in foster care, but these systems are often unaware of the connection and are not considering family ramifications, opportunities to leverage assistance, and how to stabilize the family unit reuniting after parent *and* child have been out of the home. A recent report issued by The Council of State Governments Justice Center recommends that state agencies establish and support cross-system reentry programs for incarcerated parents to help address the problem.

Policy Changes to Improve Child Well-Being and Family Stability: Some current federal, state and local policies have a direct, negative impact on children and their families trying to reunite after parental incarceration. Policies that limit parents' eligibility for public housing upon release, for example, make it difficult for children to live in stable housing with their parents, which impacts educational attainment as well as family relationships. Federal foster care policy placing time limits on how long children can remain in foster care may be leading to the termination of parental rights for incarcerated parents when there are better options. Other policies limit parents who have been incarcerated from obtaining public benefits like food stamps, an impediment to healthy family functioning.

These barriers to the successful reunification of families and improving child well-being following the incarceration of a parent are substantial, but not insurmountable. To address these barriers, Stoneleigh Center is interested in supporting the following kinds of projects to improve the well-being of children and their families after a parent is incarcerated:

- *Research to help us better understand the issues children and families face upon reunification after a parent is incarcerated and how best to address them.*

- *Efforts to develop or change policies that better support these children and families as they attempt to rebuild their lives and relationships.*
- *Efforts to develop effective programs for improving family functioning when a parent returns from prison.*
- *Cross-system strategies that improve coordination of information and services among the child welfare, juvenile justice and adult correctional systems to support family reunification.*

Youth Returning from Delinquent Placement: Youth returning from delinquent placement and their families face problems similar to those of families re-unifying with a parent who has been incarcerated. Families can play a crucial role in helping youth successfully reintegrate into the community upon release from detention or incarceration. If they can provide economic and social supports, they may help prevent relapse to criminal activity and/or illegal drug use. Existing research, though limited, shows programming that helps improve or preserve family relationships is likely to give young offenders a better chance of becoming healthy and productive adults—and avoid reoffending. However, most programming for youth currently focuses on job training and coursework, rather than supporting family reunification. *We would also welcome proposals that address the types of projects listed above for families reunifying following a juvenile delinquency placement.*

Conclusion

Families are small but very complex social systems with strong cultural values and beliefs, rituals and routines, forms of expression and behavior that are passed from generation to generation. Families experiencing the disruption and trauma of an incarcerated parent or child are often experiencing other considerable stressors on the family system such as domestic violence, substance abuse and poverty. Policies and programs to help families reunify must take into account the individual family dynamic and any pre-existing stressors.

As a foundation focused on improving the well-being of vulnerable children and youth, we are welcoming proposals addressing these issues in order to fill a gap in existing research and programming, and to improve policies impacting these families. By better addressing the needs of children and families impacted by incarceration, we can help to prevent school failure, substance abuse and further involvement in the child welfare and justice systems.

 * Resources used in the development of this Request for Proposals include:

-*Back on Track: Supporting Youth Reentry from Out-of-Home Placement to the Community.* Youth Reentry Task Force of the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Coalition (National Alliance to End Homelessness and The Sentencing Project, Fall 2009) http://www.sentencingproject.org/doc/publications/CC_youthreentryfall09report.pdf retrieved December 2, 2009.

-*Incarceration and the Family: A Review of Research and Promising Approaches for Serving Father and Families.* U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, September 2008.

-Glaze, Lauren E. and Laura M. Marushack. *Parents in Prison and Their Minor Children.* U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 2008).

-Nickel, Jessica, Crystal Garland and Leah Kane. *Children of Incarcerated Parents: An Action Plan for Federal Policymakers* (New York: Council of State Governments Justice Center, 2009).

-Osgood, D. Wayne, E. Michael Foster, Constance Flanagan and Ruth R. Gretchen, eds. *On Your Own Without a Net.* The University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 2005.

-*They're Coming Back: An Action Plan for Successful Reintegration of Offenders that Works for Everyone.* Philadelphia Consensus Group on Reentry and Reintegration of Adjudicated Offenders (<http://www.fcnetwork.org/reading/philadelphiareentry.pdf>) retrieved November 13, 2009.

The Stoneleigh Center Fellowship: Program Information, Requirements and Selection Criteria

About Stoneleigh Center

Stoneleigh Center is a Philadelphia-based foundation established to help improve the well-being of vulnerable children and youth. Focused on work that promotes change in our country's youth serving systems, we meet our mission through fellowship awards that support outstanding individuals whose work unites research, policy and practice. For more information on our goals, programs and work, please visit our Web site at www.stoneleighcenter.org.

Fellowship Awards

Stoneleigh Center fellowship awards are unusually flexible and tailored to the needs of each successful applicant. The amount of the financial award will depend on the personal circumstances of each fellow. Awardees are expected to devote full time to the Stoneleigh fellowship. Therefore, each award typically includes salary (current salary + 4%), benefits, and a stipend to cover project-related travel and if applicable, other expenses related to successful accomplishment of fellowship goals.

The general length of fellowships is two to three years, depending on the project. (Under certain circumstance, Fellowships may be renewed for up to five years if early results from the project are promising, project benchmarks are met or exceeded, and additional time is deemed necessary to expand on the work.)

Stoneleigh Center provides fellows with other support designed to enrich the fellowship experience and facilitate achievement of both the candidate's and Stoneleigh Center's goals. For example:

- Opportunities to develop a network of peers and cross-fertilization of ideas among fellows;
- Opportunities to interact with experts and decision makers in related fields;
- General support for project development and management, and other support targeted at the particular needs of each fellow and their project;
- Attendance at conferences and other meetings to provide professional development, as well as generate interest in topics and ideas related to funded projects and the broader field;
- Support for the dissemination of project results; and
- Ongoing affiliation with Stoneleigh Center and inclusion in center activities after the fellowship.

Partnering Organization

Candidates must apply in partnership with an organization that can act as host for the fellow and funded project. A strong and effective partner organization is a critical component to our fellowship model because individual fellows draw on their partner organization for support with research, project management, access to practitioners and policymakers, fundraising, dissemination of findings and other important elements of the project.

The proposal must identify the partner organization, a contact person at the organization, and the ways in which the organization will support the fellow and the project. The partner organization can be the candidate's current employer or another organization central to the proposed work.

Institutional Support

Candidates should also have the support of organizations and systems targeted by the proposal. Therefore, whenever possible, when specific programs or agencies are the subject of an applicant's research, policy change or practice improvement, the application should include detailed letters of commitment from the relevant program or agency as well as contact information.

Geographic Focus

In this RFP, our main interest is to have an impact in the City of Philadelphia and the surrounding five-county metropolitan area. We will, however, consider projects in the mid-Atlantic region from New York City, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware and Washington D.C.

Who Should Apply?

Accomplished practitioners, policymakers, and researchers who have demonstrated leadership in juvenile justice, child welfare or allied fields (e.g. education, health and behavioral health as they relate to dependent and delinquent populations) are encouraged to apply. Candidates might be senior level practitioners in youth- or family-serving organizations or systems, or seasoned policymakers, analysts or researchers working in non-profit, governmental or academic institutions. Candidates should have a track record of advocating for change in one or more of the above areas, as well as the knowledge, contacts and institutional support to bring about changes in policy and practice.

Selection Criteria

In addition to candidates' professional qualifications, Stoneleigh Center selects fellows based on the quality of proposed ideas, the fit of proposed projects with the foundation's focus and goals, and the likelihood that the proposed work can be carried out effectively. A diverse selection committee with representatives from the child welfare, juvenile justice and allied fields (i.e. education, health and behavioral health as they relate to delinquent and dependent populations) evaluate each proposal. Specific criteria to be used in judging proposals include:

- **Significance:** The proposed work effectively addresses critical program, policy or research issues in child welfare, juvenile justice or allied systems. As outlined in the RFP, we are particularly interested in proposals to improve how systems in the above areas work to improve child well-being as it is impacted by parental incarceration.
- **Effectiveness:** Proposal specifically indicates how the project will effectively promote systems change and how it has the potential to improve youth outcomes. Candidates indicate clearly their personal effectiveness in being able to carry out the work.
- **Feasibility:** The scope of the project fits within the time and resources allotted by the fellowship. Candidates indicate that they have the support of a strong partner organization and representatives the public systems necessary to achieve the project goals have already committed to cooperating with the applicant.
- **Innovation:** The proposed project clearly advances strategies that represent a departure from standard practice. If a candidate is applying for funds to continue an ongoing project, the proposal shows how this fellowship will substantially improve standard practice and why Stoneleigh Center support is critical to advancing the work.

- **Multi-Disciplinary Impact/Breadth:** The proposed work has the potential to be applied broadly and improve youth policy and practice across a number of systems and disciplines.
- **Fit:** The proposal and candidate contribute to our goal of building a community of fellows and a body of work that will, in aggregate, advance the field. The project clearly meets our overall goals (as outlined in the RFP).

We are interested in new ways to solve old problems, but we will also consider proposals to address emerging problems or provide support for projects that have been through a development phase and need additional support for subsequent phases. These different stages of problem solving may be characterized as:

- **Seeding:** Support and visibility for work or ideas that show great promise, thereby contributing to the development of viable new solutions;
- **Tipping:** Support and visibility for current work that effectively addresses critical issues, thereby contributing to the sustainability and/or expansion of viable strategies for improvement; and
- **Dissemination:** Providing resources that bring visibility and usage to promising research and/or practice, and help build more effective linkages between research, policy and practice.

Funding Exclusions

Stoneleigh Center currently funds individuals through our fellowship program. We do not make grants to organizations for any purpose. We do not fund permanent staff positions.

How is a fellowship different from a staff position?

Our fellowships are distinct from staff positions in that fellows relinquish their day-to-day job duties and are free to pursue their fellowship projects full-time with the support of their partner organization. There is a discrete start and end date to the fellowship, unlike a staff position which is on-going.

In some cases an applicant might be a current employee of the partner organization, in which case the fellow would relinquish all work associated with their position in order to pursue the fellowship. In other cases, an applicant might not be an employee of the partner organization, in which case the fellow would relinquish all work associated with their employment (if currently employed) and join the partner organization as a fellow.

To Apply

The complete application information is available in two documents available on our Web site. The application instructions and questions are in Microsoft Word format for ease of electronic submission. The required budget worksheet is available in Microsoft Excel format. These documents are available at www.stoneleighcenter.org/fellowship_program.