

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This evaluation of the Children of Incarcerated Parents (CIP) Program consists of two components: an evaluation of program *processes* that analyzes how the program is currently operating, and an evaluation of program *outcomes* that describes program results to date and provides a framework for how program objectives can be measured in the future.

We base this evaluation on data collected from the hard copy files maintained by the CIP social worker and from interviews with community and agency stakeholders, former clients and their families, deputy public defenders, and CIP Program staff. We use these data sources to present a picture of the CIP Program structure, reveal the characteristics of the population served by the program, and evaluate the provision of services to clients and their children. Our findings suggest that the CIP Program has positively impacted many clients and their children.

“The CIP Social Worker would come and visit me when I was locked up. She did a lot of work for me. She would mediate between my children and CPS. She put me through on three-way calls so I could talk to my family out of state. She helped me get a DNA test to establish my paternity. She was my only way of communicating with the outside world. She helped me out a lot--I’d have been lost without her.”
-“Tim,” Formerly Incarcerated Parent

Key Findings from the Process Evaluation

- In collaboration with the Sheriff’s Department, the CIP staff has achieved key changes in jail practices, resulting in the availability of breast milk to infants and expansion of access to visitation for incarcerated parents and their children.
- The majority of deputy public defenders handling felony cases requested CIP services for one or more clients during the study period.
- The CIP staff responds to the majority of service requests in less than one week.
- Case management improvements include increased emphasis on documentation of social worker activities, improvements in data collection tools, and increased training for CIP staff and advocacy on behalf of families.

Key Findings from the Outcomes Evaluation

- The CIP Program served 148 CIP clients during the study period (October 2006-December 2007), and provided over 178 distinct units of service to these clients.
- The largest share of service requests were for visits with children, followed by requests for housing, assistance with family court and assistance with legal paperwork.
- Over one-half of clients requested visits, but only one-third actually received visits due, in part, to barriers to visitation.
- Overall, the social worker attempted over 81 percent of services requests and provided over 64 percent of service requests to clients and their families.
- CIP clients are more likely to be men (72 percent) than women (28 percent).

- The average age of clients is 32, the average age of children is 5.8, and the average number of children is 1.7.
- The majority of CIP clients are African American (68 percent), while Latinos and Caucasians each make up 10 percent of the population.
- 51% of incarcerated parents have a need for Drug and/or Alcohol treatment. Within this group, 73% of mothers need treatment, compared to 43% of fathers who need treatment.
- One quarter of CIP clients are married and nearly one-half are primary caregivers.
- The majority of incarcerated fathers have children in the care of another parent (62 percent), while the majority of incarcerated mothers have children in the care of relatives (53 percent).

Key Recommendations

1. Collect case management information in an electronic format.

The use of an electronic database would allow social workers to provide services more effectively, improve the Program Director's ability to oversee caseloads, and enable program leadership to report on program outcomes. It could also help ensure that social workers never record the same information twice so that time spent on documentation can be minimized.

2. Target CIP services to clients who are likely to benefit most.

CIP Program resources are limited and cannot be provided to all incarcerated parents. Targeting services would allow program management to achieve the greatest gains given limited resources and provide guidelines for deputy public defenders when making service requests. The Program should target high-need and high-efficacy clients, including those who are primary caregivers, pregnant, engaged in CPS reunification, engaged in custody disputes, seeking residential treatment, or those who are highly motivated to strengthen their families.

3. Focus CIP resources on the provision of a limited set of intensive services.

Focusing the CIP Program on the provision of a small set of primary services would help clarify program objectives and increase the likelihood of achieving them. The Program should provide a small set of services through intensive case management, including locating children and addressing their urgent needs, facilitating visits, assisting with family court, producing family impact statements, and setting up residential treatment.

4. Implement experimental design to assess causal impacts of the Program.

The Public Defender's Office and the Zellerbach Family Foundation have made significant investments in the CIP Program pilot. A study designed to evaluate the impact of the Program on social welfare and criminal justice outcomes would allow for the realization of these investments and ground program replications in solid evidence of success.

5. Conduct cost-benefit analysis of CIP Program.

Identifying and quantifying averted taxpayer costs, including costs from the child welfare and criminal justice systems, could increase buy-in and support for the CIP Program among stakeholders and potential funders.

6. Identify and secure additional resources to expand the CIP Program.

Increasing the financial resources available for the CIP Program will allow the CIP Program to hire additional CIP social workers in order to serve more clients who would benefit from CIP services.