

Christian Heritage Sheds Light on Successful Work in Corrections & Reentry



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By Ave Mulhern

Several years ago, in a site visit to a Milwaukee Jail, I sat in on a fathers' group and heard a father complain fervently that he had been excluded from an important school meeting involving his son. Good for him because he knew his incarceration did not negate his role as a parent. He claimed "I am still my son's father!" but he had no say in his son's future, and his son lost out on his father's input. He wanted to be "Inside".

In contrast, I often hear of fathers who just give up on their relationship with their child because of a number of barriers; incarceration, fractured relationship with the mom, lack of skills, financial woes, etc. I recently heard an incarcerated dad, when asked if he would like to join an **InsideOut Dad®** fatherhood program and try reconnecting with his child and family and he said "no, why would I? I don't want to burden them with me." Sadly, he thinks he is replaceable. He wanted to be "Outside".

In this post, I want to highlight an exemplary organization that is addressing both of these scenarios, as well as the holistic reach it has not only inside of the correction facilities, but outside to the families of the incarcerated as well.

Destination Dads™ is a program launched in 2009 by Christian Heritage of Walton, Nebraska. I recently conducted an informal interview with Christian Heritage's Family Outreach Program Supervisor, Larry Crippen, who oversees the *Destination Dads™* program and its partnerships.

(Larry also shared their [2018 Destination Dad™ Program Summary](#) with me which clearly communicates what they do, why they do it, how they do it, and what their future goals are—a great sustainability tool).

Destination Dads™ uses NFI's [InsideOut Dad®](#) curriculum as the gateway program for incarcerated fathers to start understanding their irreplaceable role in their child's life and how to pursue it—whether they are inside of jail or prison—or out.

During our interview, I asked Larry to share his best tips that has led to their continued success in corrections and reentry work.

- **Answer your own “Why”** in regards to providing this curriculum. Christian Heritage's purpose is to “Offer hope to children and families.”
- **Start small and do it well!** They started out by offering/doing the [InsideOut Dad®](#) program for free! They did a fundraiser to purchase the curriculum and used volunteer facilitators.
- Develop **good relationships** within facility, government agencies, legislature, community agencies, partners. Christian Heritage met with legislators and eventually a bill was created requiring Corrections to fund this.
- Because Christian Heritage is faith based, their staff must understand Christian principals and live by them. Your organization **should have clear standards, principals and policies in place.**
- Get the **best and the right people.** Many of staff came from life experiences that the inmates can relate too. This can be a rough crowd to serve but the staff feel comfortable.
- **Get and maintain a good reputation** - this is extremely important! If volunteers are naïve, do not understand proper boundaries, do not understand or acknowledge rules, or use poor judgement, they can do more damage than good to the mission.
- **Abide strictly to prison rules and regulations.** One staff/volunteer went from one prison to the next to conduct the program classes and he was wearing khaki's that were not allowed in the 2nd. Although he had been there doing classes for quite some time, and the guards knew him, he left the facility and went to Walmart to purchase a new pair of pants in order to get to the program class! This is the kind of reputation that the prison values in the volunteers and Christian Heritage staff.
- **Willing to attend special trainings** that may be required from the prison as well as get all necessary clearances.

- **Solid partnerships with the ‘outside’ community** have been developed with local agencies that provide services for the families and churches play a big part. They have 4 major church communities that support them and each church takes a season:
 - Winter: Christmas party for families, including gifts for the family and kids.
 - Spring: great party with food and collected household supplies are provided.
 - Summer: Another great get together with food and providing school supplies.
 - Fall: They host a pizza party and provide coats for winter.

The Incarcerated parent is advised of these services and he has to request the outreach to his family. If there are other specific needs, Christian Heritage can connect the family to the needed resources but the inmate would need to ask.

- **Track! Measure! Assess!** Most corrections facilities are concerned with recidivism and facility safety.
 - Christian Heritage is **tracking** misconduct reports or MR’s because if dads get any in the weeks before an event, they are not allowed to attend the event. They measure MR’s before, during, and after the program showing impact inmate ‘behaviors’ as it impacts safety in the facility.
 - Following up with released inmates via Facebook and other ways to keep connected after release.
 - They do not administer the pre-assessment at the beginning of the program because dads come into program thinking they are already ‘good dads’ or ‘good spouses’ but once into the program in retrospect, they see the changes in themselves more realistically.
 - Larry includes an extra session using the **A. C. E. Test** (Adverse Childhood Experiences), a simple free 10 question test that measures childhood trauma experiences helping them understand themselves and their impact on their children. Most of the dads score about 6 in the 1-10 range and see the fact that their child automatically scores a 1 for an incarcerated parent really resonates with the men and they always ask for more info on this!

In closing, I hope these tips are helpful to your work with fathers. Whether the dads you work with are incarcerated or not, it's crucial for them to not stand on the outside of their child’s life but, that they learn from the start, the irreplaceable role they play inside the life of their child!

For more information on **InsideOut Dad®** and Christian Heritage, go to http://www.chne.org/who_we_are/