

# CAMP CELEBRATION

*Incarcerated mothers and their children  
camping together*



*RESEARCH REPORT  
1990*

Dwight Correctional Center  
Dwight, Illinois  
Jane E. Higgins, Warden

Illinois Department of Corrections - Kenneth L. McGinnis, Director

139326

139326

# Camp Celebration

*Incarcerated Mothers and Their Children Camping Together*

Dwight Correctional Center

Research Report, 1990



*Prepared by:*  
Norma J. Stumbo  
and  
Sandra L. Little  
Illinois State University

*Published by:*  
Illinois Department of Corrections  
Kenneth L. McGinnis  
Director

Funded by U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Grant No. 90CW0927  
and National Institute of Corrections, U.S. Department of Justice.

Dwight, Illinois  
October, 1990

Printed by authority of the State of Illinois  
2,000 copies

RECEIVED  
OCT 9 1990  
ACQUISITION

139326

**U.S. Department of Justice  
National Institute of Justice**

This document has been reproduced exactly as received from the person or organization originating it. Points of view or opinions stated in this document are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the National Institute of Justice.

Permission to reproduce this [redacted] material has been granted by

Illinois Dept. of Corrections/  
US Dept. of Health & Human Services

to the National Criminal Justice Reference Service (NCJRS).

Further reproduction outside of the NCJRS system requires permission of the [redacted] owner.



ILLINOIS  
DEPARTMENT  
OF  
CORRECTIONS

KENNETH L. MCGINNIS

Director

1301 Concordia Court / P. O. Box 19277 / Springfield, IL 62794-9277 / Phone (217) 522-2666

November 1, 1990

Through a three year federal grant awarded by the U. S. Department of Health and Human Services and the National Institute of Corrections, U.S. Department of Justice, a camping program was established at Dwight Correctional Center. This facility currently houses approximately 750 adult female offenders, 64% of whom are single parents averaging 2.5 children each.

Each weekend during the summers of 1988, 1989, 1990, the camping program allowed twelve mothers the opportunity to camp at the institution with their children sixteen years of age and younger. This provided a unique opportunity for the women to become reunited with their children.

A considerable amount of time and effort was expended by researchers, staff and volunteers in securing the grant, implementing and operating the program and conducting quantitative and qualitative research to determine the effects such a program would have on the mother-child relationship.

There has been much positive feedback from those involved and research indicates that the program has been instrumental in enriching and enhancing the bond between mothers and their children.

As Director of the Illinois Department of Corrections, I am highly supportive of the program and its continuation. I encourage corrections professionals to consider the benefits of such programming for offender parents and their children.

Kenneth L. McGinnis  
Director

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## CHAPTER 1

### Why the Concern for Incarcerated Women?

- Caretaker Arrangements
- Impact on the Children
- Impact on the Women
- The Role of Corrections
- Parenting and Visitation Programs
- Dwight Correctional Center
- The Federal Grant

## CHAPTER 2

### Parenting Programs at Dwight Correctional Center

- Parenting Programs
- Against Domestic Violence Program
- Camp Celebration
- C.A.U.S.E.S. (Child Abuse Unit for Studies, Education,  
and Services)
- C.L.A.I.M. (Chicago Legal Aid to Incarcerated Mothers)
- Gateway Program
- Family Advocacy Program
- Foster Care Picnic
- Health Care Unit (for Pregnancies)
- Honors Cottages
- Huch-A-Luc Children's Corner
- Jaycees
- Lewis/Lincoln College Courses
- Lutheran Social Services
- M.E.C.C.A. (Mothers' Efforts - Child Communicative  
Aids)
- Mother's Day Program
- P.A.C.E. (Programmed Activities for Correctional  
Education)

## CHAPTER 3

### Camp Celebration

- How Camp Celebration Began
- The Program - Challenges and Successes
- Pre-Camp Activities
- The Camping Weekends
- Saturday at Camp
- Sunday: A Time for Good-byes
- Barriers to Overcome

## CHAPTER 4

### The Women

- 1988, 1989, and 1990 Comparisons Between  
Camping Women

- Race
- Marital Status
- Education
- Number of Children

- 1989 and 1990 Comparisons of Non-Camping Women

- Age
- Security Level
- Race
- Marital Status
- Education
- Number of Children

- Comparisons Between Camping and Non-Camping  
Women

- Age
- Security Level
- Race
- Marital Status
- Education
- Number of Children

## CHAPTER 5

### The Changes

Mixed Results

Contact Between Mother and Child

Contributions of Parenting Programs and Camp  
to Self-Concept

Attitudes about General Life Satisfaction

Perceived Benefits of Parenting and Camping  
Programs

Prison Environment

Comparison of Reported Outcomes by Mothers  
Over Three Years

The Camping Program

Staffing

Program Development

What Was Learned About the Program

Facilities/Equipment/Supplies

Staffing

Program Development

# Chapter 1

## Why the Concern for Incarcerated Women?

An estimated 15,000 women are incarcerated in the United States on any one day<sup>1</sup> and constitute about three to six percent of the total inmate population.<sup>2</sup> Typically, these women are young (with 70 percent being under 35) and unmarried at the time of incarceration.<sup>3</sup> Approximately 56 percent of these women are mothers who had dependent children living with them prior to incarceration.<sup>4</sup> In 1982, it was estimated that some quarter of a million children had mothers in prison.<sup>5</sup>

A review of several research studies reveals that the typical profile and living situation of the inmate mother and her children includes:

a Black mother under the age of 30; unemployed or employed in unskilled positions prior to incarceration; did not finish high school, with one-third not finishing ninth grade; was unmarried at time of conviction; lived with her children prior to incarceration; has an average of a little over two children; the majority of children are minors, with the average age being 7 to 9 years old; and following the mother's imprisonment, children live with relatives.<sup>6</sup>

While there are many incarcerated fathers, inmate mothers are far more likely to be the caretakers prior to their incarceration, so the issues related to parenting become even more critical for women than for men.<sup>7</sup>

Some of the issues that arise when the mother is incarcerated include the availability of appropriateness of caretakers for the children, the overall effects of separation on the mother and her children, the correctional institution's policies and programs regarding inmate mothers and children.

### Caretaker Arrangements

Since the majority of the women have young, dependent children, caretaker arrangements for the duration of the mother's sentence become critical. Usually anywhere from 75 to 85 percent of the children live with relatives or friends of the family.<sup>8</sup> Only approximately 5 to 24 percent live with their fathers, with this percentage reportedly declining over recent years.<sup>9</sup> In most cases, the children live with maternal grandparents, typically a maternal grandmother. The remaining children are assigned to foster care homes (under the care of the Department of Children and Family Services), are independent, or are occasionally put up for adoption.

## Impact on the Children

Additional factors impact the children when the mother is imprisoned. Among other things, siblings may be separated from one another, the children may be moved to another school system and they lose the mother as a source of financial and emotional support. In addition, following the mother's incarceration the children often display short-term behavioral problems, such as mild disruptions, expressions of sadness, withdrawal or a drop in school performance.<sup>10</sup> "The needs of the children involved are rarely considered at all. As a result, the children of inmate mothers are likely to undergo drastic life changes, trauma and stress."<sup>11</sup>



## Impact on the Women

Obviously this is also a time of great change and upheaval for the women. Not only do they feel powerless and helpless within the corrections system,<sup>12</sup> they worry about their children's health, their own behavioral adaptation to the new environment and their safety within the institution. In addition, concerns include losing their identity and influence as a mother, and missing important events in their children's lives.<sup>13</sup> Most studies show that "the longer a woman is incarcerated, the more likely it is that her family ties will disintegrate and that her children will not live with her when she is released"<sup>14</sup>

## The Role of Corrections

While it is unrealistic to expect the criminal justice system to intervene and create or strengthen family ties where none

previously existed, the system has the responsibility to prevent destruction or deterioration of family life through ignorance or indifference.<sup>15</sup> Only within the last few decades have prisons begun fully to recognize this need and establish policies and programs that reinforce the parenting process for both mother and child.

## Parenting and Visitation Programs

Most mothers plan to be reunited with their children upon release from prison, and this is especially true for mothers who were primary caregivers of their children prior to confinement. In one study nearly 90 percent of inmate mothers expected to be reunited with their children following release,<sup>16</sup> and in another study, at least 75 percent of the women were successful in their attempts to be with their children within weeks of their release.<sup>17</sup>

To aid in the transition from institution back into the free community, women's facilities often offer some type of parenting programs or classes. These options may range from college instruction to discussion groups on parenting issues, from legal aid classes to play programs for the children.

Visitation programs often play a large role in the overall scheme of mother and child reunification. Most children seem relatively unconcerned about the atmosphere of prison during these visits and researchers have reported that "the most important element of the visits seemed to be the resumption of actual contact with the parent, regardless of location or circumstances".<sup>18</sup>

While visitation policies are often a compromise between the needs of the prisoners and the need for security measures, most female institutions offer some type of daytime visitation program, with almost half offering overnight visitation programs.<sup>19</sup>



In five different studies in separate parts of the country, research has shown that anywhere from 53 to 89 percent of the incarcerated mothers receive visits from their children, with the percentage rising annually.<sup>20</sup> Some of the difficulties affecting mothers who never receive visits from their children include: the caretaker would not or could not bring them; transportation difficulties; long distances; lack of family finances; and correctional policies restricting the age or number of children allowed to visit. These same factors also seem to limit the women who do receive visits. Typically, women with longer incarceration periods who have older children living with relatives are the most likely to receive visits.<sup>21</sup>

Female correctional institutions must often be quite creative in order to provide overnight visitation programs. Due to the increasing number of female offenders and limited institutional space, non-traditional programs often must be self-contained and minimally impact the facility as a whole. Model programs include the Mother Offspring Life Development (MOLD) program at the Nebraska Center for Women at York, the Parent and Child Together (PACT) program at the Women's Correctional Facility in Yankton, South Dakota, the Second Chance program at the Minnesota Correctional Institution for Women, and two weekend programs for children at the Kentucky Correctional Institution for Women and the Correctional Institution in Clinton, New Jersey.

## Dwight Correctional Center

The last ten years have been a period of rapid program expansion at the Dwight Correctional Center in Dwight, Illinois. As the only all-women's institution in the state, they have been almost singularly responsible for meeting the needs of incarcerated mothers. Over a dozen parenting programs have been implemented to meet the needs of the approximately 700 women housed there.

Samples of these programs include the Mother's Day program, the Family Advocacy Program, college courses on parenting and child development, legal rights workshops, mothers' groups and a play program for visiting children. During the last several years, these programs have been both strengthened and streamlined to mirror the changing demographics of the female population. However until 1988 Dwight did not have any type of overnight visitation program for mothers and their children.

## The Federal Grant

In early 1987, personnel from the Dwight Correctional Center and the Illinois Department of Corrections submitted a proposal for a three-year federal grant for which they received funding in early 1988. The major purpose of the grant was to enhance the overall parenting program through the implementation of a new overnight visitation program as well as the comprehensive evaluation of the existing parenting programs.

The overnight visitation program was created in the form of a summer weekend camp, where both mothers and their children

*I was called to go up front and get my girls, that was a exciting moment for me. Tears came to my eyes because I haven't seen my children in two years*  
*-Mother's Diary*

slept outdoors in tents on the institution's grounds. The federal grant funded the program, called Camp Celebration, during the summers of 1988, 1989 and 1990.

The remainder of this report will provide an overview of the parenting programs, the Camp Celebration program, and the effects of the camping program on the mothers, their children and the institution.

### Footnotes

- 1 Glick & Neto, 1977; Koontz, 1971
- 2 Goetting & Howsen, 1983; Ryan, 1984; Sargent, 1984; Wheeler, 1974, cited in Weisheit & Mahan, 1988
- 3 United State Census Bureau, 1973
- 4 Glick & Neto, 1977
- 5 Bertram, 1982
- 6 Baunach, 1985; Figueria-McDonough, et al., 1881; Glick & Neto, 1977; Grossman, 1982; McGowan & Blumenthal, 1978; Rocheleau, 1987; Stanton, 1980; Wolfe, Cullen & Cullen, 1984
- 7 Datesman & Cales, 1983, p. 379
- 8 Baunach, 1982; Feinman, 1986; Glick & Neto, 1977; Henriques, 1982; McGowan & Blumenthal, 1978; Stanton, 1980; Zalba, 1964
- 9 McGowan & Blumenthal, 1978; Zalba, 1964
- 10 Sack, Seidler & Thomas, 1976
- 11 Weisheit & Mahan, 1988, p. 75
- 12 Gamer & Schrader, 1981
- 13 Henriques, 1982
- 14 Feinman, 1986
- 15 McGowan & Blumenthal, 1978
- 16 McGowan & Blumenthal, 1978
- 17 Stanton, 1980
- 18 Sack, Seidler & Thomas, 1976
- 19 Neto & Baimer, 1982; Boudouris, 1985
- 20 Baunach, 1985; McGowan & Blumenthal, 1978; Stanton, 1980; Zalba, 1964
- 21 McGowan & Blumenthal, 1978; Rocheleau, 1987; Stanton, 1980

## Chapter 2

# Parenting Programs at Dwight Correctional Center

Prior to the start of Camp Celebration in 1988, Dwight Correctional Center had been operating several parenting programs aimed at improving the mother-child relationship. The majority of these programs had been started in the mid-1980's as a result of concerns voiced both by the inmates and the staff. Each program was developed with a specific purpose and group of women in mind. Over the recent years, the aims and activities of each program have been modified as necessitated by the changing needs and interests of the target groups.



### Parenting Programs

Below are brief descriptions of the parenting programs offered at Dwight. These are followed by a more complete description of the Camp Celebration overnight visitation program.

### Against Domestic Violence Program

Designed as a counseling program for victims of violence, group and individual counseling sessions are provided by the Against Domestic Violence Shelter staff in Streator, Illinois. The major goal is to allow the women's maximum involvement in order to gain knowledge and understanding of domestic violence and its consequences. Services began in 1987 and have been provided to approximately 30 women who volunteer for the program.

### Camp Celebration

The next chapter will focus in depth on this program, but a brief description is provided here within the context of the overall parenting program at Dwight. Started in 1988 with funding from a federal grant, Camp Celebration is a weekend visitation program where mothers and children actually camp overnight on the institution's grounds. The weekend includes

three meals a day, either cooked over grills or camp stoves, and a day-long schedule of activities. Typical camp activities include arts and crafts, competitive games, water activities, a petting zoo and pony rides, and a Saturday night talent show featuring the women and their children. The program operates for 13 weeks each summer and serves approximately 150 women and 400 children each season.

### **C.A.U.S.E.S. (Child Abuse Unit for Studies, Education and Services)**

Affiliated with the Illinois Masonic Medical Center of Chicago, the program began in 1979 to provide comprehensive counseling and treatment to residents incarcerated for child abuse or infanticide. The voluntary program also provides assistance with visitation, with the intent of re-establishing the mother-child bond. Each year approximately 20 women are served through counseling and therapy, with 80 being helped with visits and casework assistance.

### **C.L.A.I.M. (Chicago Legal Aid to Incarcerated Mothers)**

This program began in 1985 to focus on the legal rights and responsibilities of inmates, especially those with children. Through counseling, classes and legal representation, the program focuses on topics such as foster care, legal guardianship, family custody, termination of parental rights, visitation and re-entry. C.L.A.I.M., as a contractual service program, serves approximately a dozen women per year.

### **Gateway Program**

Substance abuse intervention is provided through the Gateway Program. Living in a specially designated housing unit, women with substance abuse problems are provided with intense, structured and reinforcing treatment. Specialized counselors provide, individual, group and peer counseling sessions that reinforce a drug-free lifestyle. Under strict rules, women are required to adhere to the 12-step recovery program on a daily basis. Since 1989 the program has served about 30 inmates and is included with the parenting programs because the use of drugs permeates every aspect of the women's previous and future lifestyle.

### **Family Advocacy Program**

The Family Advocacy Program is an umbrella service which includes and coordinates various other family programs in the institution. The primary function of the program is to synchronize these services into a comprehensive package of individual and group programs which facilitate the family reunification process. Besides overseeing other parenting programs, the Family Advocacy staff provide individualized and personalized counseling and problem-solving sessions on a daily basis. Any inmate may ask for assistance; there are no qualifications for admission to services. Since its inception in 1984, the program has served nearly 4,000 women.

## Foster Care Picnic

Most women who have children in foster care do not get many opportunities for visits from their children. In order to alleviate this problem, the Foster care Picnic program was established in 1986. The day-long program includes a special meal and various recreation activities, such as a hay ride, costumes, a model airplane show, and children's games. Any woman who has children in foster care may participate and approximately 700 women have taken advantage of this opportunity to be with their children since 1986.

## Health Care Unit (for Pregnancies)

Comprehensive prenatal services are provided by the Health Care Unit at Dwight. These services include continuing medical supervision, mandatory lectures, aerobics classes, sewing classes and other specialized programs, based on the women's needs. Focusing on health, nutrition and fitness, these programs provide a holistic approach to aid in the healthy delivery of the newborns. Approximately 12 women per year participate in this specialized program.

*Oh my son, I've waited so long for the moment to show you I can be the best mom even though its only for a weekend. Will you understand by you being so small?*

*- Mother's Diary*

## Honors Cottages

Two specially designed housing units are available for those women who qualify. In addition to the roomier facilities, Honors Cottages residents enjoy special privileges and activities and are afforded a less controlled and less restrictive environment. It is believed that this type of environment encourages self-esteem, a sense of sharing and mutual respect, decision-making skills, and individuality. With only space for about 60 women, the waiting lists have often quite lengthy since its beginnings in 1984. It is included as a parenting program because of its unique on-cottage visitation opportunities where women can bring approved family members and friends back to their own "home."

## Huch-A-Luc Children's Corner

Since 1985, this program has provided visiting children with structured recreation time with their mothers in a gymnasium next to the visitation room. The service is provided by inmates and emphasizes developing and strengthening parent-child bonds through appropriate play and learning activities. The program, operated on week ends and holidays, also hopes to develop leadership skills in the inmate volunteers in the M.E.C.C.A. Program. Funding is provided through the inmates' efforts at recycling cans, video machine profits and periodic sales.

## Jaycees

Started in 1982, the Dwight Jaycees program became a chartered chapter of the local, state and national Jaycees organization in 1986. Primarily the organization strives to provide service to the immediate community (the general population of the institution) and to develop leadership skills that can be carried over after incarceration ends. The Jaycees are responsible for the inmate snack shop and photo services (provided in the day room for visitors). Funds are raised through selling "coupon books" inmates use to shop and the Jaycees Board of Directors oversees the disbursement of these funds.

## Lewis/Lincoln College Courses

Included within the college course offerings are six parenting classes. These include four levels of Child Development, Child Health Enhancement and Children's Recreational Management. These courses are taught in 8-week modules and began in 1985 in response to the increasing number of inmates with children. Serving approximately 30 women per year, the program is funded by the Correction Education Department.

*I haven't seen my son since the camp's out because I'm getting ready to go home, but I have talked to him on the phone and he seems to know my voice. He called me mom on the phone so, I know the weekend did us good together.*

*- Mother's Diary*



## Lutheran Social Services

With transportation being one of the major concerns of incarcerated women, Lutheran Social Services provides a valuable contribution to the overall parenting program. This voluntary service, under the direction of a chaplain, provides children from the Chicago area transportation to Dwight. When necessary, mediation services are also provided to resolve conflicts that may prevent children's visits from occurring. Begun in 1987, approximately 200 women per year are served by Lutheran Social Services.

### M.E.C.C.A. (Mothers' Efforts - Child Communicative Aids)

Approximately 45 women are served each year through this support group run by the Family Advocacy Program. The program offers an open exchange and discussion of ideas related to parenting and related issues, and raises funds for special projects, such as playground equipment, Christmas toys and the like. M.E.C.C.A. members also operate the Huch-A-Luc Children's Corner for visiting children. To participate in M.E.C.C.A., applicants must meet specific qualifications which have been established by the M.E.C.C.A. Board of Directors. The program has been in operation since 1986 and continues to be self-supporting.

### Mother's Day Program

This one-day special event is run by the Family Advocacy Program. It is a special day where children and families may visit the inmates and tour the cottages, have brunch, participate in chapel services and participate in various other activities. Any inmate, regardless of security level may participate with the verification of natural children and/or grandchildren under the age of seventeen. Approximately 800 people participated in the 1988 event.

### P.A.C.E. (Programmed Activities for Correctional Education)

Through a separate contractual service, women who have been transferred from the Cook County Jail (Chicago) may receive family counseling services. These services actually start for selected women during their incarceration at Cook County and is provided at Dwight as an extension/transition program. The goal is focused on the reunification of the family unit and transportation is provided so family members can come to Dwight and receive counseling together. Approximately 30 women have been served by the program since it started in 1987. The MacCarthy Foundation and the Rice Foundation provide funding for this program.

*Words cannot express my appreciation for allowing me to do this. I think I got a break through with him. I am the only one he trusts right now and he needed to hear a message of hope. He was even thinking of suicide, because he felt no one cared. This weekend and our talks have given him some real issues to consider. Lots of times the choices we make are because we are not aware of the options. I needed time to let him know that there are options available to him other than the streets!*

*- Mother's Diary*

## Chapter 3

# Camp Celebration

In early 1988, Dwight Correctional Center, the only Illinois institution exclusively for women, received a three-year federal grant to establish an overnight visitation program. The program's most innovative feature is its format of a camping experience in which children are allowed to "camp" inside the walls with their mothers. While Dwight has several types of parenting programs for its women as discussed in the previous chapter, there was no overnight visitation provided until the implementation of the camping program.

The weekend program, called "Camp Celebration," first ran in the late summer of 1988 and operated on federal funds through the summer of 1990. The federal grant provided monies to construct a pavilion/equipment shed, purchase camping and recreational supplies, hire additional staff to administer the camp, and to conduct research. With the depletion of federal funding, Camp Celebration, hopefully, will become an ongoing and permanent part of the overall parenting programs at Dwight.

### How Camp Celebration Began

The idea for the program came from the Warden, who after taking a group of about 20 minimum-security women and their children on a camping weekend in a nearby

community in 1985, decided that a similar program was needed at Dwight. Two components were considered crucial: that the institution needed an overnight visitation program and that the program should be available to women at all levels of security (minimum, medium, and maximum). The idea finally came to fruition with the acquisition of the federal grant.

With the exception of the first year, when only three weekends of camp were offered, the camping program runs for thirteen weekends each summer. Each weekend a maximum of twelve mothers are allowed to bring their children (ages 16 and under) on grounds for a 48-hour intensive visitation period. All inmates who have children 16 and under are eligible to participate, regardless of security level, infractions or outdate.

*I just hope that things continue to go smooth, that every woman here who has children, can experience what I did during camp. I thank God for giving me a chance to spend some time with my daughter, and for giving me hope.*

*- Mother's Diary*

Due to the vast amount of open space available at Dwight, Camp Celebration was designed to be self-contained under a large oak grove near the administration building, separating it from the rest of the institution. The site contains sufficient space for a sizable pavilion/storage shed, bathroom/shower facilities, food preparation and storage areas, camp sites, and activity areas.

### The Program - Challenges and Successes

During the summer of 1988, only three weekends of camp were provided, with 36 women and their children participating. Additionally, the camping program was limited to a 24-hour period, from Saturday noon to Sunday noon, because of difficulties associated with the start-up of the grant. Two part-time staff were hired as "camp interns" to develop and run the weekend program, under the direction of the Leisure Time Services Supervisor.

*Camp Celebration gave me the time to devote myself only to my children and to reassure them that I love them very much. My children took a part of me with them, as I kept a part of them with me.*

*- 1988 Mother*

During 1989, these problems were resolved and thirteen weekends of camping were offered, with over 100 women and 250 children camping. In 1990, 147 camped with 271 children. During the second and third seasons, the program was run from late Friday afternoon until Sunday noon.

Staffing also changed with a full-time camp director and two camp interns being hired, and four to five inmates being used as "camp mates." The salaried camp staff are responsible for ordering all supplies and equipment, scheduling when families will camp, orienting the mothers to the program, planning and implementing activities and the general supervision of the campground.

These changes resulted in several improvements and were noted by both the staff and inmates. The additional day was crucial in helping the mothers become better re-acquainted with their children and, since more mothers and children participated, the benefits were more widespread throughout the institution. The addition of full-time camp staff helped with the continuity of camp programs and reduced the burden on institutional program staff.

Despite its sometimes institutional flavor, Camp Celebration is a typical camping program in every other aspect. Each year, improvements have been made according to the wishes of the women, their children, and the camp personnel. Also, despite the women and children's diverse backgrounds and needs, the camp continues to function in an almost routine manner.

## Pre-Camp Activities

A bulletin about the camping program is issued in late spring, requiring inmates to complete a referral to indicate their interest. All inmates, regardless of security level and length and cause of incarceration or out-date, are eligible for participation. These referrals are compiled by the Camp Director. Almost all women who request participation are served, the exceptions being those who are transferred, released or unable to get their children to camp.

Orientation for the mothers occurs at three levels: a brief introduction during the pre-camp interviews with the researchers; a more thorough briefing by the Camp Director on the Sunday prior to their weekend; and a meeting for last-minute questions the Friday morning before their weekend starts. The orientations include a discussion of rules and regulations of camp, as well as a general overview of the camp's daily activities. The women are encouraged to ask questions and discuss special problems, such as diets,

*Every time I think about the camping trip (I think about it all through the day) or every time it's mentioned around me, I feel so happy and excited inside. . . It's hard to contain these good feelings until I look around me and remember that everyone is not participating (for various reasons. Then the joy turns from conversation to inward smiles.*  
- 1989 Mother

medications and transportation of their children. A major aspect of the orientation is to indoctrinate the women with the feeling of the campground being "sacred" and to acknowledge that any major problems (such as contraband) will bring an end to Camp Celebration. As weather permits, the women also put up their own tents prior to the arrival of their children.

*On this hot day all I could think about was will he adjust, will he be able to have a good time knowing he'll be behind bars. Will I know the right things to say, to do to make him feel like he is at home. So many things are running through my mind, I can't stay on one thought for a minute. This waiting is getting to me.*  
- 1989 Mother

Another pre-camp activity included personal interviews with a member of the research staff. These individuals were hired under the auspices of the federal grant to evaluate the program and determine the effects of the camping weekend on the mothers, their children and the institution. The latter chapters of this report outline the results of this research.

## The Camping Weekends

On Friday of each weekend, children begin to arrive around noon to mid-afternoon. The children go through a security check at the main gate, with their luggage being held for a more thorough search and being returned to them by late

afternoon. Each family is given a complete set of camping equipment, including sleeping bags, plastic moisture barrier/sleeping pads, a cooler, and a lantern. A cook stove is provided for each site on Sunday for breakfast. Each campsite also contains a five-person tent, a picnic table, and a trash can.

The late afternoon hours consist of settling in at the campsite, making introductions and participating in low organization games. The Friday dinner is prepared at barbecue grills and served cafeteria-style near the main pavilion. (All food is provided by the central dining hall and consists of typical camping food, such as salad, fruit, hotdogs, hamburgers, ribs, and baked beans.)

After dinner on Friday, there is plenty of time for games and for families to get re-acquainted before the campfire singing begins. The campfire usually concludes around 9 pm, allowing time for showers or "family time" in the tents.

*When we went to the camp site the fun began. We all kept talking, walking, eating, playing. They asked me so many questions. I asked them many questions. We sang around the campfire roasting marshmallows. It rained but it didn't spoil a thing.*

*- Mother's Diary*

pavilion, and games and activities provided throughout the day. Participation in all activities is optional and contributes to the relaxed, unstructured, and non-institutional feel of the program. Typical activities include pony rides, a "slip 'n' slide", volleyball, badminton, board games and arts and crafts. (An unusual feature of the camp is the presence of farm animals. A nearby community resident "leases" a pony, a lamb, goats, rabbits and other animals, which are kept on grounds during the summer months and taken care of by the inmates.)

*The light of the campfire made them glow and toasting marshmallows made them giddy. I've never seen them so wonderfully open to something new, but they camped like pros. . . Next year should result in a bonfire because the sparks are still being spread. . . It's great!*

*- 1988 Mother*

The big event for Saturday night is the talent show and skit night put on by the women and their children. Singing, dancing, and comedy sketches are some of the more colorful offerings. Following the entertainment, comes a central bonfire, with S'Mores (roasted marshmallows) as campfire treats and a sing-along, which usually lasts about an hour. Families then take showers and this signals the end of the day around 10 to 11 p.m.

## Saturday at Camp

Saturday repeats the pattern set on Friday, with the three meals served at the

Adequate amounts of "tent time" are allocated throughout the weekend. These opportunities allow the mothers and their children to spend special time together in

order to get re-acquainted and have private talks. Families seem to especially take advantage of "tent time" when the camp becomes quiet at night.

In the tradition of typical family camping, each family is also allowed to pose for photographs at their choice of two locations within the campgrounds. Families are then permitted to keep the two photos as a remembrance of their weekend at Camp Celebration. Photos are taken by a resident volunteer on Saturday and Sunday.

### Sunday: A Time for Good-byes

Sunday morning starts out with a home-cooked breakfast of eggs, bacon, juice and milk. Each mother cooks over the camp stove for her children at their tent and is responsible for all preparation and clean-up. For some of the women, this is the first time in many years they have cooked breakfast for their children and for the majority, their first experience with a camp stove.

Breakfast is followed by a non-denominational worship service, featuring a clown ministry miming the musical story of

*I just thank God that I had the chance to have a dream come true to be with my daughter and lie next to her. . .we even talked about the day I'll return home and what it will feel like. If it feels like a little part of this campout I know I'll feel as if I just entered heaven.*

*- 1988 Mother*



Noah or the Garden of Eden. The play and music are participatory and involve many of the women and their children as Noah's animals. The Sunday service lasts a short time and the attention of both the women and children are held as the musical evolves.

Low organization games and pony rides are again provided for the campers until noon approaches. In addition, the mothers and their children can watch a videotape of their weekend under the pavilion. During the late morning hours, campers start packing their bags and returning equipment to the staff for check-in. The completion of these duties usually signals the end of the camping weekend. As the children's transportation arrives, the mothers escort them back to the visiting room. The women then may remain on a visit or go back to their cottages. The camp staff stay at the campground until all children leave the site and are responsible for the final clean-up of camp.

## Barriers to Overcome

Fortunately, all three years of the pilot Camp Celebration program has run without any major problems occurring. Besides the beginning logistical concerns, the major setback continues to be the transportation of children. Most of the women are from the Chicago area, two hours north of Dwight, and have difficulty in getting family and friends to transport the children both Friday and Sunday. The problem was minimized in 1989, when a church group volunteered to provide transportation for some of the children.

A second problem for some was securing permission for their children to attend camp from the children's caretakers. In some instances the caretakers would not respond to the permission request form, and in others, could not be located by the start of camp. This caused problems for these women, as they had anticipated a camping experience with their children that sometimes did not occur. Women who fell in this category were offered, on a case-by-case basis, camping without their children and several did so.

*Sunday morning is last day of camp out. We get to cook breakfast for our children... (My son) is still asleep, which is a blessing to see his face. I am resting beside him. . . I think he dislikes "goodbyes," so do I. "Hellos" and "I will see you soon" are better words we have established.*

*- 1990 Mother*

The last logistic that could have been a problem was security. Prior to the start of camp, the security staff were surveyed and felt that the camp would be used as a prime opportunity to smuggle in contraband and many were fearful for the safety of the children.

Luckily, the camp ran all three years without major incident, both at the campsite and during security checks of the children. In fact, besides the initial security check for the children, correctional officers were not present or required at the campsite; however, the weekend duty wardens were present or available for each weekend experience. Typical security measures, such as counts, searches of children's belongings and program supervision, were conducted as unobtrusively as possible. It was felt this factor was important in allowing women and children to interact as naturally as possible.



# Chapter 4

## The Women

In each of the three years, women who camped were interviewed prior to and following the camping program. In addition, a "control" group of women in the institution who did not camp were also pre- and post-tested through interviews. The intent of these interviews was to determine the demographics of the women as well as to measure any changes which may have occurred due to the camping experience. This section will describe the camping and non-camping women, and a later section will focus on the impact the program had on the women and their children.

### 1988, 1989 and 1990 Comparisons Between Camping Women

The pre-camp samples in 1988, 1989 and 1990 were 40, 99 and 103, respectively. In each year, a smaller percentage of women participated in the post-test interviews (29, 46 and 37). Table 1 provides a display of the pre-camp demographics for the camping women from each of the three years.

**Age.** The average age of the camping women declined over the granting period, from approximately 33 to 30 years of age.

**Security Level.** In every year, the most highly represented security level was

minimum. However, the percentages across the levels of minimum, medium, and maximum began to become more equal in the third year. Participants from maximum security increased from five percent in 1988 to over 23 percent in 1990.

**Race.** The percentages of camping women representing various race and ethnic backgrounds remained relatively constant during the three years. Black women constituted about 65 to 70 percent of the inmate campers in all three years.

**Marital Status.** Although the percentages of marital status (single, married, separated, divorced and widowed) changed somewhat over the three year span, the position rankings of these categories remained relatively stable. For example, in all three years, the greatest majority of women were single, having never been married, with the next highest category being divorced.

**Education.** Educational level was divided into three categories: less than a high school diploma, receipt of a high school diploma, and more than a high school diploma. In each of the three years, each category held an almost even percentage of women. In 1990, a slight increase in women who held less than a high school degree was evidenced.

**Number of Children.** The average number of children per camping woman remained fairly constant from 1988 to 1990. The average number of children was 3.06 in 1988, 2.67 in 1989 and 2.69 in 1990. Each year, females and males were almost equally represented in the children.

Although the demographics of the camping women remained fairly constant over the grant period, the 1990 campers tended to be younger, from maximum security, single, and less educated than their 1988 and 1989 counterparts.

## 1989 and 1990 Comparisons of Non-Camping Women

Each year a group of non-camping women were also interviewed to act as a research "control" group for the camping women. In 1988, the non-camping women were surveyed for their opinions of the parenting programs only. These surveys were administered in groups and did not contain demographic data. In 1989, the research included personal interviews of non-camping women with almost identical forms to those administered to the camping women. The results from 1989 and 1990 allow for some comparisons between camping and non-camping women's demographics.

In 1989, 14 non-camping women volunteered to be interviewed prior to and following camp and, in 1990, 49 women were interviewed before camp (28 of these complete the post camp interview).

**Age.** The average age of the women in 1989 and 1990 was 31.8 and 32.39 years, respectively.

**Security Level.** Approximately half of the non-camping women interviewed were from minimum security in both years.

**Race.** Almost 60 percent of the non-campers were Black, with about 29 to 35 percent Whites. Five women who were Hispanic were interviewed in 1990.

**Marital Status.** The percentages for marital status across the two years was fairly similar. Nearly eighty percent of the women were either single (never having been married) or were divorced.

**Education.** Again, percentages across the three categories of education were fairly evenly distributed. More women in the 1990 non-camping group have received education beyond a high school level (14.3% in 1989 and 30.6% in 1990).

**Number of Children.** In each year, the women averaged around three children each. In 1989, the 14 women had 44 children and in 1990 the 49 women had 135 children. In 1989 the children were exactly divided between males and females; in 1990, a larger percentage (58.5%) were males.

The comparison across non-camping women is difficult due to the fact that no demographic data was collected in 1988 on this group, and a fairly small number (n=14) were interviewed on a pre-post basis in 1989. However, the non-camping control group tended to be in their early-30's, were from minimum security, were Black, were either single or divorced and averaged approximately three children. The 1990 group contained more women who either had

not finished twelfth grade or had gone beyond high school.

## Comparisons Between Camping and Non-Camping Women

One of the reasons non-camping women were interviewed was to act as a research control or comparison group for the women involved in the camping program. In this way, unusual differences in results (see the next chapter for more detailed information) can more easily be explained by examining discrepancies in the demographics of the two groups. The main question is to what degree the two groups of women were similar. The discussion here is based on simple comparisons of means and percentages between the two groups.

**Age.** All five groups (three years of camping and two years of non-camping) showed a similar mean age of between 30 and 33 years. The 1988 camping women tended to be the oldest group and the 1990 non-camping women tended to be the youngest group.

**Security Level.** For all five groups, minimum security was represented more often than medium and maximum. With the exception of the 1988 camping women, when almost 90 percent were from minimum, this security level was held by about 50 percent of both camping and non-camping women. The number of maximum security women who camped increased from five to 23 percent over the three years.

**Race.** Anywhere from 60 to 70 percent of both sample groups were Black. Caucasian women were represented 20 to 30 percent of

the time, and other minority groups combined for four to 15 percent of the study's groups.

**Marital Status.** In all groups, the vast majority of the women were either single, never having been married, or were divorced. Sixty-seven to 80 percent of the camping and non-camping women fell in either of these two categories.

**Education.** Education was examined at three different levels: completion of less than twelfth grade, receiving a high school diploma or G.E.D., and continuing education beyond high school. Typically, the five groups fell almost equally between the three categories. The 1990 non-camping group was the exception with more women who had either not finished high school or who had completed more education after the high school diploma.

**Number of Children.** The total number of children varied widely each year, as did the total number of women in each sample group. The average number of children per women in each group, however, was strikingly similar. Each group neared an average of three children per mother, with a range of 2.67 to 3.18. The children were nearly equally divided between males and females, although the 1988 camping women had a slightly greater percentage of females and the 1990 non-camping women had a slightly greater number of male children.

Simple frequency and percentage comparisons showed that the groups of women were very similar, with few differences.

**Table 1. Demographic Comparisons of 1988, 1989 and 1990 Pre-Test Results of Camping Women**

| Variable                  | 1988<br>Pre-Test<br>(n = 40) |       | 1989<br>Pre-Test<br>(n = 99) |       | 1990<br>Pre-Test<br>(n = 103) |       |
|---------------------------|------------------------------|-------|------------------------------|-------|-------------------------------|-------|
| Average Age               | 33.3                         |       | 31.02                        |       | 29.91                         |       |
| <b>Security Level</b>     |                              |       |                              |       |                               |       |
| Minimum                   | 35                           | 87.5% | 56                           | 56.6% | 52                            | 50.5% |
| Medium                    | 3                            | 7.5%  | 36                           | 36.4% | 26                            | 25.2% |
| Maximum                   | 2                            | 5.0%  | 7                            | 7.1%  | 24                            | 23.3% |
| <b>Race</b>               |                              |       |                              |       |                               |       |
| Black                     | 27                           | 67.5% | 64                           | 64.5% | 71                            | 68.9% |
| Caucasian                 | 7                            | 17.5% | 29                           | 29.3% | 26                            | 25.2% |
| Hispanic                  | 4                            | 10.0% | 6                            | 6.1%  | 2                             | 1.9%  |
| Other                     | 2                            | 5.0%  | 0                            | 0.0%  | 3                             | 2.9%  |
| <b>Marital Status</b>     |                              |       |                              |       |                               |       |
| Single                    | 15                           | 37.5% | 43                           | 43.4% | 57                            | 55.3% |
| Married                   | 4                            | 10.0% | 17                           | 17.2% | 15                            | 14.6% |
| Separated                 | 2                            | 5.0%  | 6                            | 6.1%  | 5                             | 4.9%  |
| Divorced                  | 12                           | 30.0% | 23                           | 23.2% | 20                            | 19.4% |
| Widowed                   | 7                            | 17.5% | 9                            | 9.1%  | 5                             | 4.9%  |
| Missing                   | 0                            | 00.0% | 1                            | 1.0%  | 1                             | 1.0%  |
| <b>Education</b>          |                              |       |                              |       |                               |       |
| Less than H.S.            | 12                           | 30.0% | 29                           | 29.3% | 39                            | 37.9% |
| H.S. Diploma              | 14                           | 35.0% | 33                           | 33.3% | 35                            | 33.9% |
| More than H.S.            | 11                           | 27.5% | 27                           | 27.3% | 29                            | 28.2% |
| <b>Number of Children</b> |                              |       |                              |       |                               |       |
| Total                     | 123                          |       | 266                          |       | 277                           |       |
| Average                   | 3.06                         |       | 2.67                         |       | 2.69                          |       |
| Female                    | 67                           | 54.5% | 131                          | 49.2% | 143                           | 51.6% |
| Male                      | 56                           | 45.5% | 135                          | 50.8% | 133                           | 48.0% |

**Table 2. Demographic Comparisons of 1989 and 1990  
Pre-Test Results of Non-Camping Women**

| Variable                  | 1989<br>Pre-Test<br>(n = 14) |       | 1990<br>Pre-Test<br>(n =49) |       |
|---------------------------|------------------------------|-------|-----------------------------|-------|
|                           | Average Age                  | 31.8  |                             | 32.39 |
| <b>Security Level</b>     |                              |       |                             |       |
| Minimum                   | 7                            | 50.0% | 24                          | 49.0% |
| Medium                    | 2                            | 14.3% | 17                          | 34.7% |
| Maximum                   | 3                            | 21.4% | 8                           | 16.3% |
| Missing                   | 2                            | 14.3% | 0                           | 0.0%  |
| <b>Race</b>               |                              |       |                             |       |
| Black                     | 8                            | 57.1% | 29                          | 59.2% |
| Caucasian                 | 5                            | 35.7% | 14                          | 28.6% |
| Hispanic                  | 0                            | 0.0%  | 5                           | 10.25 |
| Other                     | 0                            | 0.0%  | 1                           | 2.0%  |
| <b>Marital Status</b>     |                              |       |                             |       |
| Single                    | 5                            | 35.7% | 23                          | 46.9% |
| Married                   | 1                            | 7.1%  | 9                           | 18.4% |
| Separated                 | 2                            | 14.3% | 5                           | 10.2% |
| Divorced                  | 6                            | 42.9% | 11                          | 22.4% |
| Widowed                   | 0                            | 0.0%  | 1                           | 2.0%  |
| <b>Education</b>          |                              |       |                             |       |
| Less than H.S.            | 4                            | 28.6% | 22                          | 44.9% |
| H.S. Diploma              | 5                            | 35.7% | 12                          | 24.5% |
| More than H.S.            | 2                            | 14.3% | 15                          | 30.6% |
| Missing                   | 3                            | 21.4% | 0                           | 0.0%  |
| <b>Number of Children</b> |                              |       |                             |       |
| Total                     | 44                           |       | 135                         |       |
| Average                   | 3.18                         |       | 2.76                        |       |
| Female                    | 21                           | 50.0% | 56                          | 41.5% |
| Male                      | 21                           | 50.0% | 79                          | 58.5% |

## Chapter 5

### The Changes

One of the major purposes of the research portion of the federal grant was to examine the effects of the newly initiated camping program on the women at Dwight Correctional Center. The intent of the evaluation was to document the impact of the program as well as how the program developed and evolved over the three year span. Both quantitative and qualitative methods were used during each of the three years to gather this information. Sources of information included both women who camped and those that did not, children attending the weekend program and a variety of staff at Dwight. Data collection methods included individual interviews, group interviews, written surveys, participant observations, and archival retrieval. Multiple sources and methods were used to gain as much information as possible about the progression and impact of the weekend program.

### Mixed Results

Needless to say, a wealth of information was accumulated by the end of the 1990 season. The results showed that while the program was considered a great success by both the women and the staff, there were a number of responses that either did not change over time or fluctuated greatly between camping seasons. While many of the scores may have increased or

decreased following the camp experience, most changes were not statistically significant (that is, changes may have been due to chance alone).

Several reasons could have accounted for the wide diversity of results. First, as can be seen from the last chapter, the demographics of the women attending the camp each year differed (e.g., average age lowered over the three years, an increase in the number of women at medium and maximum security levels, etc.). These factors may have impacted the attitudes and opinions expressed by the women.

Second, in each of the three years, the women showed unexpectedly high pre-camp scores and, therefore, the post-camp scores could not show a large difference. The positive pre-camp scores could have been due to their involvement in the other parenting programs offered at Dwight or other external influences. Another explanation for high pre-camp scores also could have been the women's misconception that the initial interviews acted as a screening device for their involvement in camp.

Third, in reality, the 48-hour camping weekend may have had little measurable effect on the women and their children. Perhaps it is too much to expect a two-day experience to change more stable behaviors,

perceptions and attitudes, such as contact with children, self-concept and the like. The program was not intended to be an "intervention" program per se, but was implemented to provide the women an unprecedented opportunity to stay with their children overnight. In addition, the instruments may not have been sensitive enough to detect subtle changes even if they did indeed occur.

The above reasons helped justify the use of multiple methods and sources. Relying solely on the results of pre- and post-camp interviews would not have painted the complete picture of Camp Celebration. Below are summaries of not only the quantitative results, but also "snapshots" of the qualitative information gained in the interviews and direct observations of the family interactions during the camping experience. More complete statistical information is available upon request.

## **Contact Between Mother and Child**

The camping women were asked about the frequency of contact they had with their children prior to and after the weekend camping program. Contact with children was defined as telephone calls, letters/cards and gifts, and visits. In 1988, although the camping women perceived an increase in contact (especially by telephone), actual contact as reported by the women did not increase significantly. In 1989, the women again did not report a significant increase in contact with their children due to the camping experience.

In 1990, the women were more likely to respond that they received enough information about how their children were doing following the camping weekend, although this increase was not significant. With the three types of contact, the mothers reported that both telephone calls and visits had decreased since camp (visits significantly so), while letters and cards had significantly increased. These results may suggest that the women felt better informed about the welfare of their children after camp, therefore, telephone calls and visits were less likely to occur. The increase in letters and cards could have either been accounted for by the decrease of personal contact or by families sharing photographs and other mementos from camp.

It should be noted that the camp did serve as a catalyst for an increase in visitation contact for several long-timers. Some of these mothers had not seen their children for several years due to a variety of reasons including lack of transportation and difficulty in getting permission for the children to be with them. In some instances the permission and transportation were able to be obtained through extensive efforts of Dwight staff and volunteers.

## **Contributions of Parenting Programs and Camp to Self-Concept**

The camping women were asked to respond to a series of four questions regarding whether or not they felt participating in the camping program had helped them to learn more and feel better about themselves and their children. In 1988 and 1989, the responses following the

camping experience were more positive, although they were not statistically significant. In 1990, the women reported that they felt better and learned more about themselves by participating in camp (statistically significant). They also felt slightly better about their children following camp.

Open-ended questions on the 1990 post-camp interviews also supported the notion that the camping program did contribute positively to the mother's feelings about herself and her children. The data revealed that the process of extended communication and interaction helped a majority of the mothers to feel more confident about how their children were doing and reassured them about their relationship with their children.

*I feel closer to him; feel more confident; more enthused to go home; feel better about the whole situation; now know he loves me.*

*-1990 Mother*

## Attitudes about General Life Situations

The women were also asked a set of seven questions about perceptions of general life issues. These questions related to their perceptions of their life in total, their spare time activities, their relationship with their children, the future of their children and their own evaluation of their success as a parent. In 1988, all seven questions were

responded to more positively after the camping weekend. Two questions in particular, how they felt about their relationship with their child/ren and how they felt they got along with their children, showed the most notable increases after camp. In 1989, five questions received more favorable responses, reflecting the women felt more positively about their life in general, their spare time activities, their relationship and how they got along with their children and how they felt others treated their children. Two questions received lower overall scores on the post-test, concerning the future of their children and their own success as a parent, although these were not statistically significantly lower. In 1990, there were no significant changes shown. There were no changes in the women's perceptions of their relationship with their children, how they got along with their children or the future of their children. There were positive changes in how the women felt others treated their children. Scores for their life in general, spare time activities, and their success as a parent decreased.

## Perceived Benefits of Parenting and Camping Programs

Ten questions were included in the interview that asked the women how the camping program had affected their parenting skills, the relationship with their children, their desire for more responsibility for their children's welfare, and their plans for the future. In 1988, the post-test results showed that the women felt the camping program had increased their parenting skills, and had brought them closer to their children

and other family members. They also felt that their children had gotten a lot out of the camping program and that Dwight staff had given them assistance in keeping in contact with their children. After camp, the women reported that they wanted more responsibility for and contact with their children. One hundred percent of the women reported that they wanted to retain or regain custody of their child/ren upon their release from Dwight. Only two questions received a greater percentage of negative responses. The first concerned whether the women felt they would be better parents upon release, and the second concerned cooperation from the child/ren's caretaker. In both cases, the women seemed to feel satisfied with their pre-camp levels of parenting abilities and caretaker cooperation.

In 1989, the larger number of women resulted in a greater diversity of answers to these questions. Four items, regarding closeness to family members, staff assistance at Dwight, the need for more responsibility in child rearing, and the need for more contact with their child/ren, all received more positive responses following the camping experience. The other six questions, concerning the improvement of parenting skills, closeness to their child/ren, whether the child/ren had gotten a lot out of camp, being a better parent after release from Dwight, wanting to live with their children after release, and need for more caretaker cooperation, all received lower overall post-camp scores. Only the first three of these six were statistically significantly lower from pre- to post-test.

In 1990, eight of the scores increased, two to the level of significance. After camp, the women felt that it had increased their

parenting skills, brought them closer to their children (statistically significant) and family, been beneficial to their children, and that the staff had given them assistance in keeping in contact with their children. They also felt they wanted more responsibility for their children, wanted more contact and wanted more cooperation from their children's caretaker (statistically significant). There was no change in the women's perceptions of being better parents when released from Dwight and the women were slightly less likely to want to regain custody of their children. Open ended comments on the interviews from all three years and information from the mother's diaries collected in 1989 confirmed the belief that the camping program did bring the mothers closer to their children.

*My children I feel really  
recognized who I am now.  
They call me mommy instead  
of (my name). It's more  
"I love you, I miss you"  
everytime I see them  
-1989 Mother*

## Prison Environment

In 1989, an adapted version of the Prison Environment Scale was administered during both the pre- and post-camp interviews. Only two items were found to be significantly changed and both were more positive following the camping experience. These questions dealt with inmates being with their friends at night and inmates caring about one another. Other items that showed positive, but less, improvement included

inmates being able to talk to strangers and letting others know they cared about them, prison official helping with inmates problems, learning new skills while at the institution, and correctional officers not teasing depressed inmates. The items that moved in a slightly negative manner included correctional officers telling inmates when they do well and/or encouraging them in a new hobby or art, time spent talking to other inmates, being able to see their close friends when they want to, seeing more than three friends at a time, sharing feelings with other women, being liked for doing favors, and the use of prison programs upon release from the institution. Overall, the results seem somewhat mixed in that in some ways the camping experience tended to make the women more positive toward other inmates and prison official while in others, there was an increase in negativity. Perhaps the freedoms and latitudes found at camp made the adjustment back to the regular institutional routine more difficult.

In 1990, only two items were found to have statistically significantly changed during the post-test interviews. The women felt that others inmates cared more about one another and that correctional officers were less likely to tease depressed inmates. In general, the other 16 items reflected that the women felt slightly better about other inmates and their ability to be close and share feelings and felt slightly more negative to correctional officers and prison officials. Two items that remained unchanged included those concerning an inmate being able to learn new skills while incarcerated and using these skills upon release.

The combination of the data from the two years shows no clear cut trends. While

the 1989 data seem to suggest that the women felt less positive about other women at the institution, they were slightly more positive about prison staff. Conversely, the women in the 1990 study seemed to be more positive about their peers and less positive about correctional staff. The quantitative results within each year varied widely and provide little real insight into changes in the overall prison environment.

### **Comparison of Reported Outcomes by Mothers Over Three Years**

In addition to the quantitative information that was collected from the interviews, other methods for obtaining evaluation of the experience by the mothers were obtained through open ended questions on the pre and post interviews, group meetings with the mothers following camp, diaries from the mothers, and observations by researchers each camping weekend. When comparing the positive aspects of participating in the camping program between the first year (31 mothers, 1988) and third year (37 mothers, 1990), there was essentially no change in perception about what the outcomes of the experience were for the mothers. Although there is some overlap among the categories, the positive outcomes of camp developed into four related themes. These were, in the order of their frequency of being mentioned: (a) having time alone with children to talk without the presence of others (in visiting room); (b) feeling closer to children and being a family unit; (c) getting to know children and communicating love; and, (d) being able to watch children as they sleep and play.

With regard to negative outcomes, the responses between the 1988 and 1990 group were very different because of the change in the program from a 24 hour experience to 48 hours. In the first year, out of 30 interviewed, about 1/3 indicated that there was not enough time/private time with their children. The program was changed (extended for an additional 24 hour period in 1989, and in 1990). In both 1989 and 1990, time as a negative factor in the post interviews, mother's group evaluations, and diaries was rarely mentioned. The exception was the expressed desire to increase the frequency of overnight visits during the year.

Once the issue of time (48 hours vs. 24 hours) was resolved, the negative outcomes of the camping program developed two themes or types of response. The first, and most frequently mentioned response, was that there were no negatives to the camping experience (over 40% of the mothers). Beyond that, the difficulty and pain of separation was the primary negative feeling expressed. Almost 30% of the mothers in the post interviews in 1990 mentioned separation. In the pre-interview it was one of their basic concerns going into the camping weekend. Based upon the diary entries made after camp was over (from 1989), it appeared that the mothers, for the most part, were able to put the separation in perspective, indicating the feeling of looking forward to having something to talk about with their children based upon their shared experience when they made their next contacts.

## The Camping Program

The documentation for changes in the program came primarily from the qualitative information obtained from participant observation by the researchers, post camp evaluations by mothers in interviews and group evaluations, and by the camping staff. That the camp achieved its stated mission over the three years of the program was confirmed consistently by mothers and staff.

*The mission of Camp Celebration is to provide a quality overnight visitation program for inmate mothers and their children. The desire is that extended contact between the mother and child in a positive setting will help maintain and assist the bonding/communication of that family unit.*

The changes in the program occurred in three areas. These were (a) facility and equipment/supply development; (b) staffing; and (c) program development.

**Facility, Equipment, and Supplies.** In the first year the pavilion and campfire ring was built. Basic equipment and supplies were purchased, e.g., grills, tents, sleeping bags, lanterns, coolers, camp stoves, trash receptacles. The permanent location of the tents in a horseshoe pattern was established by the second weekend. In the second year, refinements were made which included: (a) the addition of a 10' x 40' wooden mural to establish the theme and perimeter of the camp area; (b) addition of shower facilities;

(c) expansion and organization of storage areas inside the pavilion; and (d) development of grass sport courts for volleyball and badminton.

Animals were added and shelters were built during the second year, along with construction of a sandbox next to the pavilion. Additional play, craft, and activity equipment/supplies were purchased, expanding the repertoire to include items for younger children (including amenities such as baby bath, training potties, extra diapers, etc.). In the second year, the multi-purpose building (MPB) was established as the facility back-up for inclement weather. The MPB was used only for the last weekend of camping in 1989, but several times in 1990 due to bad or threatening weather.

In 1990, a stove, washer/dryer, and portable serving cart, and a mobile phone base unit were added to the pavilion. The washer/dryer was a welcome addition as weather (rain-mud), accidents, and the presence of infants stretched the clothing resources of families. Shower doors were ordered. Food supplies related to menus were altered based upon recommendations of the staff and mothers to include more fresh fruit, fruit juice, and a hot meal on Saturday noon. Two other major changes the third year, having an impact on the program development, was the acquisition of a tv/vcr unit and a basketball backboard.

**Staffing.** For the 1988 year (3 weekends) the directorship of the camping program was shared among Dwight staff and two college interns who were hired. Volunteers came from Dwight, Department of Correction's staff and a researcher. A camp director and two interns were hired for the 1989 and

1990. The camp director and one of the interns were the same individuals the last two years. This provided continuity and added to the quality of the programming. In 1989, inmates were assigned to the camp as "camp mates". The roles of the camp mates were more clearly defined in 1990 in terms of cooking, taking care of the animals, and other maintenance activities.

**Program Development.** Several traditions were established in the first year which included the evening campfire and singing and cooking Sunday morning breakfast at the tents by the mothers for their children. Major program development, however, occurred in the second and third years. The length of the visitation (24 hours to 48 hours) and number of camping weekends (3 to 13 weekends) affected the amount and type of programming needed.

While numerous traditions and types of activities were incorporated into the program over the three year period, the most important and essential task for the Camp Director and staff was establishing a philosophy and approach to the structure of the program. The philosophy which evolved emphasized maximum involvement and choice by the mothers and children with regard to their own experience. Promotion of self-help values were a constant consideration, as the very nature of institutional life shifts control for personal decisions from internal choices to external requirements. This was carried out in such activities as having mothers cook their own Sunday morning breakfast at their campsite over a camp stove.

The structure of the program had to be established in relationship to the philosophy.

The range included high structure, with the camping staff initiating, implementing, and conducting camp activities (e.g. arts and crafts, games, meals) to low structure, where staff stepped into the background of planning, designing, and implementing activities. The participant observations by the researchers over the 1989 and 1990 period found that the amount of structure needed was dependent upon such factors as the group of mothers camping, the ages and experiences of the children, and the weather. It required that the Camp Director and interns be constantly vigilant as to whether they would be facilitators, direct planners of experience, or interventionists in situations of potential conflict or safety concerns.

One of the essential contributing factors to the success of the camp were the adjustments made in the program by camp and other staff at Dwight. These adjustments were based upon a variety of input including their own experience, feedback from camping mothers and their children, and the observations/reports provided by the researchers. These changes were documented most notably in the evaluations by mothers in their diaries and post camp evaluations. When a programming problem would arise, e.g., not enough craft activities, it would appear in the mother's or staff's post camp evaluations. The staff would make an adjustment and that concern would disappear or be replaced by another concern.

## **What Was Learned About the Program**

After three years of operation, the following observations could be made

concerning the camping program and its evolution:

**Facilities/Equipment/Supplies.** The importance of both inside storage and outside pavilion (covered) space were essential, not only for protection from the elements, but as a location for central gathering (a community living space). Self-contained living units for the mothers provided the necessary privacy for conversations and contributed to the feeling of being a self-sustaining family unit. Equipment and play supplies available had to take into consideration a wide range of ages from infants to teenagers. Amenities such as showers and a washer/dryer contributed to the overall satisfaction of the environment. For many of the families, Camp Celebration was their first camping experience.

**Staffing.** The extensive experience of the hired camping staff, particularly in the last two years, demonstrated the importance of knowledge and skill in recreational/ camping activities. Flexibility and vigilance by the staff found them using both high and low structure to programming on a situational basis. High levels of energy and good health were required to be able to sustain 13 weekends of intense responsibility. At mid-point and near the end of the summer it became apparent that there was staff fatigue.

Camp mates (inmates) were a definite asset in many maintenance areas of the program. However, care had to be taken such that ownership for caring of children and making the camping experience happen was the mother's responsibility. This included being sure they were involved with chores, meals, and other parts of camp life.

**Program Development.** The establishing of traditions was important to program development. The most often mentioned highlight of the camping weekend was Skit Night, which involved each family sharing a talent with the other campers. While this met with the most resistance by families in the planning phase, its implementation provided a source of laughter during its implementation and feelings of personal/family competence and confidence after it was over. The staff made sure that each performance by a family would be a successful one, frequently providing support to those who were hesitant. Skit Night became a vehicle for families having to work on a common goal together.

Tent Time, the quiet time for each family at their tent each evening, was also mentioned as an important tradition. Frequently this led to late night discussions in the tent or at the family's picnic table. The mothers diaries revealed the importance of extended amount of conversational time with their child or children in terms of sharing feelings and seeing how each has grown or changed since incarceration.

The inclusion of animals as part of the program added a dimension to the program which focused on the caring of something smaller and more vulnerable than oneself. The infusion of the need to be gentle and caring of life provided a unique enrichment activity for the children and their mothers. Because of the variability in experience with animals and the ages, it was important that animals provided could withstand the intense interaction with children and for the staff and mothers to constantly monitor the animals and children's well-being.

Finally, the taking of pictures (each mother was allowed two) for the three years of the program and the addition of videotaping the weekend in the third year, was an essential part of the program. The pictures provided a tangible memory of the experience for the mothers and their children. In 1990, the staff and/or a camp mate would videotape the activities for the entire weekend including meals, craft activities, pony rides, playing with the animals, water fights, active games . . . and, most importantly, the Skit Night presentations and evening campfire singing. After the Sunday non-denominational service, the videotape would be shown in the pavilion, recapping the entire weekend for the camping families. This provided a source of amusement and became an important transition in leaving the campground when the children's transportation arrived.

The amount of documentation concerning the changes in mothers, program, and the staff were extensive. What is provided here is a summary or highlight of the major elements which contributed to the success of Camp Celebration at Dwight Correctional Center for Women from 1988 through 1990.

*Do I really want to go through the agony that I went through last year when my kids left? Yes! I certainly do. Today is (daughter's) birthday and I can't wait to see her. I'm not worried like I was last year because everything is already taken care of. Thank God for  
 \_\_\_\_\_ (staff).  
 - 1989 and 1990 Mother*

**For more information about the camping program portion  
of the grant, please contact:**

Jane E. Higgins  
Warden  
Dwight Correctional Center  
P. O. Box 5001  
Dwight, IL 60420-5001  
(815) 584-2806

**For more information about the research portion of the  
grant, please contact:**

Ms. Nola Joyce  
Director, Planning and Budget  
Illinois Department of Corrections  
1301 Concordia Court  
P.O. Box 19277  
Springfield, IL 62794-9277  
(217) 522-2666 Ext. 6558