

# CSSD Chronicle

State of Connecticut Judicial Branch  
Court Support Services Division  
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## CSSD Hosts Forum on Children and Families of the Incarcerated



*Nearly 75% of women in correctional facilities are the primary, and sometimes sole, caretakers of their children at the time of their arrest. This frequently results in their children's placement in the child welfare system. Children with incarcerated moth-*

*ers—and fathers—are at greater risk for lifelong difficulties resulting from attachment disruption, which may lead to the externalization of negative behaviors. However, research also suggests that interventions which preserve and strengthen positive family connections between the incarcerated parent and their children can have positive societal benefits. These benefits can include a reduction in the parent's recidivism, less intergenerational criminal justice involvement, and the promotion of healthy child development.*

On December 5, 2014, the Court Support Services Division (CSSD), and the Institute for Municipal and Regional Policy's *Children with Incarcerated Parents* (CIP) program, provided a training forum on children with criminal justice-involved parents. More than 100 people attended the program, held at ITBD New Britain, including CSSD's Women Offender Case Management (WOCM) officers, community treatment providers, representatives from the Division of Public Defender Services, and others who work with this court-involved population.

Opening remarks were given by Erika Nowakowski, CSSD Court Planner II, who works with WOCM model officers and services, and was a key organizer of the event. Additional introductions were made by Aileen Keays, Project Manager at CIP, and Gary Roberge, CSSD Director of Adult and Bail Services. Each member of the trio described their individual involvement in programs dedicated to the success of court-involved women and their children, and encouraged the audience to be aware of how they can contribute as well.

**Morning Program**—The main presenter for the morning pro-

gram was Ann Adalist-Estrin, Director of the *National Resource Center on Children and Families of the Incarcerated* (NRCCFI) at [Rutgers University](http://Rutgers University). Adalist-Estrin, who also teaches in the Department of Sociology at Rutgers, is known nationally as a strong advocate for court-involved parents and their children. She has provided training and consultation to government and non-government agencies and community programs in 48 states, including Sesame Street's "Little Children, Big Challenges" campaign. In 2013, she was honored at the White House as a "Champion of Change" for her work as an advocate for children and families of the incarcerated.

Adalist-Estrin used an interactive program style which began by asking the audience, "What do you want to know?" Attendees generated a list of topics that Adalist-Estrin used as a guide to focus her presentation.

At one point in the program, she pushed participants to reflect on their personal biases toward court-involved parents by asking them to think about the answers to several open-ended questions, such as, "The best thing that could happen to children of incarcerated parents is..." Some responses were reactive such as, "parental rights should be terminated," while other answers focused on providing help to families to lessen the effects of a parent/child separation.

Adalist-Estrin also used other tools throughout the day—film clips, fact sheets, cartoons, scientific studies, and personal anecdotes—to facilitate small and large group discussions.



*(From L to R) Michael Hines, CSSD Asst. Director of Programs and Staff Development; Ann Adalist-Estrin, Rutgers University; Erika Nowakowski, CSSD Court Planner II; Gary Roberge, CSSD Director Adult/Bail Probation Services*

**Afternoon Program**—The afternoon program focused on the reentry challenges that are experienced by incarcerated parents and was presented by several community and CSSD criminal justice leaders.

Joyce Betts, Executive Director of Families in Crisis, Inc. (FIC) gave a lively presentation, punctuated with a good dose of humor, on women’s fears and expectations related to going home, and the ways in which FIC helps with the transition. Betts shared her own personal story of trying to help a court-involved family member reunite with a young daughter. Unfortunately, the reunification was not successful, but Betts’ experience provided a first-hand look into the problems female inmates and their families face post-incarceration.

CSSD Manager Trevor Johnson, who is also a member of NRCCFI at Rutgers, discussed some of the challenges probation officers encounter when supervising clients who still struggle with issues related to having had a parent incarcerated during their youth, or the impact of their own incarceration on their children. He also shared a personal story about the shame and stigma he felt as a young child when his own father went to prison for the first time during the 1960s. He applauded the current approaches utilized by CSSD, as well as the programs and services that are available today for parents and children impacted by incarceration, but advised attendees that “we can do better” in making interventions even more meaningful.

CSSD Probation Chief Tamara Lanier shared case stories of several women from the Norwich area who were part of the WOCM model caseload, and highlighted the efforts of one determined female client whose transition success was helped by the gender-specific probation program.

**End of Day**—Adalist-Estrin concluded the day’s forum by sharing several tools and resources including the Sesame Street Toolkit titled “Little Children, Big Challenges: Incarceration.” The toolkit includes a DVD, a guide for parents and caregivers, and a children’s storybook. The booklets are available in both English and Spanish, and each member at the forum was given a personal copy of the toolkit as part of their informational packet.

For more information on the day’s program, including a link to subject resources, please contact [Erika.Nowakowski@jud.ct.gov](mailto:Erika.Nowakowski@jud.ct.gov)

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*The **CSSD Chronicle** is a regular publication of information and news about the Court Support Services Division. Questions or comments on this edition, or suggestions for future articles, can be directed to [Linda.Grzeika@jud.ct.gov](mailto:Linda.Grzeika@jud.ct.gov)*