

Residential Parenting Program

Teaching Parenting, Infant-child bonding to Incarcerated Mothers



NUMBERS AT A GLANCE

20

Number of mother-infant pairs that can reside in the residential parenting unit at one time.

30 months

Maximum amount of time children can live with their mothers in the Residential Parenting Program post-birth

FAST FACTS

- Washington has one of only 12 residential parenting programs in the country, and is the only one with an Early Head Start

GOALS

- Provide a safe residential setting that will allow infants and their incarcerated mothers remain united
- Ensure a secure, healthy attachment is formed between mother and child
- Maximize infant's healthy growth and child development
- Educate mother in skills to effectively parent and work toward self-sufficiency and

About

The Residential Parenting Program, RPP, allows pregnant, minimum security inmates with sentences shorter than 30 months the opportunity to keep their babies with them after giving birth. The mothers and babies live together in J-unit and receive support and education from experienced early childhood educators. It gives mothers the chance to bond with her child and learn parenting skills to enhance her child's development and their successful reentry into society.

History

The RPP began in August 1999 through a partnership with the Puget Sound Education Service District Early Head Start (PSESD). Early Head Start provides infant and toddler care while mothers fulfil required institution care such as work, education and training. The program is made possible through a \$1.2 million grant from PSESD for low income infants, toddlers and their families in Pierce County.

Eligibility & Mandatory Requirements

Only women who are pregnant upon arrival at Washington Corrections Center for Women may be eligible for the RPP. Inmates are screened carefully and participation criteria includes type of offense committed, sentence structure, judgement and sentence conditions, behavior, previous interactions with child protective service agents and overall institution judgement.

The major emphasis of the program is to get the child ready for transition with the mother into work release so there will be no separation. Inmates must be eligible for work release into the community before their child reaches 30 months of age.

Participants Are Required To:

- Get involved in pre-and-postnatal programs, such as parenting skills, child development, self-care and self-esteem, positive discipline, nutrition and family life skills
- Structure their various commitments to accommodate the needs of their children, utilize the child development center and approved inmate caregivers.
- Work with facility staff to develop a case plan to address their programming needs to include program requirements
- Participate in educational components that teach positive and effective parenting skills, give children care that focuses on their developmental and educational needs

Frequently Asked Questions

How long can a mother live with her child while she is incarcerated? Where does the child go after this period?

Only pregnant women who have 30 months or fewer left on their sentences can participate in RPP. The goal is to have the child leave prison with the mother as she reenters the community through work release.

Why is Washington one of the only states in the country with a program like this?

The DOC has made the RPP part of its strategy to reduce recidivism and break the intergenerational cycle of incarceration. As a group, children of incarcerated parents experience lack of quality care and support, thus putting them at higher risk for emotional and relationship problems, academic difficulties and incarceration later in life.

The RPP gives inmate mothers the chance to be accountable for her child and grow into motherhood while she's in prison, rather than taking on the role after leaving the institution. Mothers learn effective parenting skills while facilitating bonds with their children.

PARTNERSHIPS

The Residential Parenting Program is made possible with the department's partnerships with the following organizations:

- Puget Sound Education Service District Early Head Start
- Harbor Pediatrics
- Women, Infant, Children Food Supplement Program (WIC)
- St. Joseph's Medical Center, Tacoma
- DSHS Child Protective Services



What Incarcerated Mothers Say About The Program

"When I found out I was pregnant, it didn't really dawn on me that I was going to be able to be a parent. This program has been life-changing. I guarantee you that if you would have met me a year and a half ago, the person I am today and the person I was then are two different people."

—Kathryn H., an inmate mother in the Residential Parenting Program

What the Research Says

- Keeping mothers and children is the best possible scenario. When adequate resources are available, women who participate show lower rates of recidivism, and their children show no adverse affects as a result of their participation. By keeping mothers and infants together, these programs prevent foster care placement and allow formation of maternal/child bonds during a critical period of development.

Source: *Women's Prison Association Institute on Women and Criminal Justice, 2009*

- Mothers in a prison nursery setting can raise infants who are securely attached to them at rates comparable to healthy community children.

Source: *Intergenerational Transmission of Attachment for Infants Raised in a Prison Nursery 2011 study by Mary W Pyrne, Ph.D., Columbia School of Nursing*

— For More Information —

Sonja Alley, Correctional Unit Supervisor, Washington Corrections Center for Women
Washington State Department of Corrections
(253) 858-4200 X 8274 | smalley@doc1.wa.gov