

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY REPORT
Vermont's Incarcerated Women's Initiative Study
Vermont Research Partnership
April 2, 2007

INTRODUCTION

In 2005, the Secretary of the Agency of Human Services (AHS), Mike Smith charged AHS with mobilizing its resources and providing leadership to communities to change the trend in increasing rates of incarceration for women, without compromising public safety. AHS responded by developing the Incarcerated Women's Initiative (IWI) and engaging communities in the planning process to "bend the curve" and reduce the number of women involved with the criminal justice system. In 2006, Department of Corrections' (DOC) staff and AHS leadership collaborated with the Vermont Research Partnership (VRP) to conduct an initial study designed to inform future policy, research, and practice in this area. The pilot project is briefly presented in this Executive Summary Report and fully detailed in the Complete Report.

The findings reveal a complexity of issues related to incarcerated women and the correctional system for which there are no easy answers or "quick fixes." While the data does not reveal new information, it does provide significant insight into the challenges associated with incarceration for women and suggests potential solutions to positively impact the rising rates of incarceration for this population. This study makes it clear that without additional integrated and coordinated supports and a mutually accountable model of systemic reform (from across state government, the criminal justice system, law enforcement and local communities), it is predictable that the number of women entering the criminal justice system and getting caught in its "revolving door" will worsen.

The criminal justice system has become a revolving door for women - once they get in, they have an ever-decreasing chance of productively and permanently reentering our communities. This trend leaves the women, their families and children, and the public subject to serious social and financial costs. In addition, this study suggests that diverting women from incarceration toward substance abuse prevention and treatment, and other community and relational supports will offer a more promising approach to preparing them for productive lives in the community. Vermont is in a unique position to integrate multiple stakeholders in a collaborative cross-systems effort to reduce the trend in women's incarceration and help women move towards self-sufficiency.

According to DOC, the number of women incarcerated in Vermont has increased from 15 in 1985 to 33 in 1995 to 167 on December 13, 2006. Population rates vary on a daily basis, reflective of the flow through the DOC and criminal justice systems. DOC notes that if the trend continues at this rate, Vermont's average daily count of incarcerated women will exceed 300 within the next 6 years. Currently, Vermont has exceeded its female incarcerative bed capacity.

The following sections describe the pilot project's methodology, findings from interviews with incarcerated women and focus group interviews with DOC staff; and summarizes the literature. In addition, we discuss alternatives and recommendations designed to "bend the curve" as well as present options for future research.

METHODOLOGY

UVM faculty researchers, accompanied by trained graduate students and prisoner advocates conducted individual interviews with a random sample of 16 women at two Vermont prison sites, the Southeast Correctional Facility and the Dale Facility. The inmates represented a range of ages, length of time in the corrections system and circumstances surrounding their incarceration. The interviews lasted from 60 to 90 minutes and focused on each woman's experiences related to her incarceration. The research team also interviewed approximately 65 staff members in three focus groups of 20 to 25 people each at the state offices of the Department of Corrections. The selected staff had worked with incarcerated women over the past 12 months and represented a variety of geographic regions, job titles and roles. Data from the interviews were then coded and analyzed for emerging themes. Finally, a review of the recent literature pertaining to incarcerated women was completed. A brief synopsis of the literature is presented in this Executive Summary Report and fully detailed as an appendix in the Complete Report.

FINDINGS: INTERVIEWS WITH INCARCERATED WOMEN IN VERMONT

This section describes the findings from individual interviews with 16 women who were incarcerated in two Vermont prisons. This phase of the report shares their perspectives about their relevant histories, their lives in prison, and what they believe they need to be successful when they reenter their communities. For the balance of the report, *italics* generally refer to observations from inmates or staff, “in their own words.” The findings are organized by three major themes, each with several sub-themes:

- 1) **Challenges Leading to Imprisonment**
- 2) **Experiences of Incarceration**
- 3) **Trying to Leave: The Revolving Door**

Challenges Leading to Imprisonment

- *“I feel I’ve been through a lot: sexual, physical and substance abuse when I was younger.”*
- *“Drugs. It is all because of drugs—coke, oxycotton [sic], heroin. I met my baby’s father...he sold coke and heroin. He got me started on it with taking pills like perkoset. I wrecked my brain with drugs, opiates. I started to really like them. They gave me extra energy. I could take care of the kids, clean the house, fix dinner and I would still have energy to do more. After about a year and a half, the baby’s father went to jail.”*
- *“Maybe if someone could have helped my mom give me more boundaries, it would have been different.”*
- *“When I lived with my dad, I did what I wanted.”*

Living with drug and alcohol addiction: Each of the 16 women described her own drug or alcohol addiction and often those of extended family, children, partners and friends. The addictions existed in women of upper, middle and lower levels of socioeconomic status. Some of the women or their partners sold drugs to make money. Drug and alcohol abuse had serious consequences for the women, such as brain damage, driving violations, removal of children, and even death of a partner due to overdose. Addictions were often related to crimes committed. Even for those who had completed long term treatment, addiction still held a firm grip on their lives. One woman was convicted for drug-related crimes after completing the Tapestry program.

When asked what advice they would give other women in their situation, they most often warned against doing drugs, but sounded despondent about being able to prevent someone like themselves from the behavior, once started.

Living with abuse (sexual, physical, and emotional): Most of the women described experiences with abuse in their families and other significant relationships. Some women linked their histories of physical and sexual abuse to drug and alcohol use and trafficking, as well as mental health issues. Several women landed in foster care situations. As they became teenagers and young adults, many of the women experienced abuse in their relationships and marriages and in a few cases, the women also abused their own family members.

Living without boundaries, stable families and structure: All but two of the women discussed unstable family environments during their early years. Due to the absence of fathers after a death, suicide, divorce or because of incarceration, many of the women lived with their mothers initially and then “bounced back and forth” between their fathers and mothers for a period of time during their teenage years. Several then moved in with boyfriends in their mid-teens and became pregnant. Often the boyfriends left shortly thereafter. Others were in foster care as young children, as a result of leaving home, being given up for adoption or being taken into state custody. Over time, contact with family and extended family often decreased, leading to more isolated conditions. A lack of parental limits and boundaries were often mentioned. Truancy and dropping out of school were often byproducts of the lack of stability and boundaries. Many of the women value their connection with family but seem at a loss for how to make it a positive one. Family instability continues into the women’s current lifestyles. For example, women often change partners, partners become incarcerated or die from a drug overdose or an accident, parents are evicted, trusted siblings commit suicide, or children are taken into state custody. Some discussed behavior problems and drug use in their own children.

Experiences of Incarceration

- *“Why are they incarcerating women at the rate they are now? I’m an alcoholic. Instead of treatment they chose to incarcerate me. That’s not the way to rehabilitate....Judicial system totally blows my mind. Most of the women here are drug addicts and alcoholics. There has to be another way to give women help. There has to be a better way.”*
- *“I should have more life skills, more jobs, more experience working with others and balancing things...They don’t really have programming here for life skills.”*
- *“I want to be the mother that I used to be.”*

Experiencing daily life in prison: The women discussed their day-to-day existence in jail, commenting on various institutional provisions and constraints. Many appreciated the variety of activities and services available to them but felt that health care was inadequate. Women discussed prison rules and privileges, including the difficulties of obtaining supplies for basic hygiene. They found the facilities overcrowded, cold, and unsanitary, and the general atmosphere chaotic, lonely, sad, and unempowering. Food received mixed reviews but seemed to offer healthier options for some than they would have received on the street. The women also described aspects of the social environment, such as the social hierarchies that form in jail and the importance of alliances. Several women wanted more guidance for how to communicate with staff. Visits from family, friends, and outside groups were appreciated though quite limited by prison rules and schedules. Women witnessed a range of behaviors by inmates in jail, such as

fighting, stealing, and smuggling. They bonded over experiences as parents or as addicts. Those who had jobs in jail appreciated the structure it gave to their day. Sleep was often irregular.

Recognizing the importance of meaningful work and education: Most (75%) of the women had dreams for the kinds of work they would like to do, but held low expectations for what they thought was actually attainable. Only three of the women felt confident about employability due to strong prior work histories or because of a family business that promised them work. Others knew they lacked employable skills at levels that would enable them to fulfill their dreams. They wanted more meaningful opportunities to learn employment skills and pursue higher education while in jail, beyond the current opportunities to pursue a GED or hold a prison job such as cleaning. Others worried about their criminal records and conditions of release holding them back from pursuing a career. Some wanted more opportunity to get jobs when released from jail.

Recognizing the importance of treatment: Most of the women, representing a wide range of ages, identified the need for drug and alcohol treatment. Though some acknowledged supportive on-site drug and alcohol counselors, mental health counselors, caseworkers, and other programs that distribute relapse prevention information, they continued to struggle with addictions. It seems that mental health counseling and drug and alcohol support groups are available, but the level of support does not result in treatment “strong” enough or of sufficient duration and frequency to make a lasting difference. In addition, some inmates are ambivalent about treatment and continue to use drugs and alcohol. They may not take advantage of available programs.

Losing connections with family and children: Many of the women have lost contact with or custody of one or more of their children. Some lost contact and custody before coming to jail, and some as a result of incarceration and its aftermath. For most of the women who were parents, their concerns focused primarily on their children, including how to re-establish contact, “make amends,” and provide for them. In some cases, attempts to set boundaries with their own children made it difficult to be in contact, but lack of contact was isolating and resulted in other serious complications. One inmate, however, whose marriage was still intact and whose children were living at home with their father, appeared optimistic about her continued relationship with them.

Hoping for, yet fearing release: While most of the women expressed a desire to be released from jail, they also shared concerns about being able to successfully reintegrate back into their communities. Usually this concern centered on fear of relapse, which many had already experienced following a prior release. Their other concerns involved fears about being able to meet the practical needs for work, housing, and transportation. In addition, women knew that their old social networks could lead them back to addiction.

A couple of women made comments that illustrate their sense that prison offers some structure and safety. At the same time, it seems that the prison structure may offer more of a “holding pattern” than an opportunity for making lasting change, especially in the area of substance abuse. The ambivalence expressed by the women seems to run deep, involving hopelessness, and a sense of “being up against great odds.”

Trying to Leave: The Revolving Door

- *“I could go home but it wouldn’t work. I’ve seen in the past 14 months – people come in and out like a revolving door. Without a support system in place I would do the same thing.”*
- *“You have to tell people you’ve been in jail. Who’s gonna hire you once you have told them? Who’s gonna trust you?”*
- *“You have to get a residence to get out of here. They give you up to \$1,000 to help you with your down payment but if I have to get a place and then go into rehab for a month, the money will be gone.”*
- *“Have a better connection with you and your family.... I have no idea how. We get along better when I’m in jail.”*

Failing to overcome mental health, drug and alcohol issues: Many of the women struggled with relapse after repeated attempts to overcome addictions. Some who had completed treatment programs, found them insufficient. Others left these programs early and relapsed. The women identified the need for mental health and substance abuse counseling, but felt that mental health supports in the community were lacking. One teenage inmate had already failed in rehab for the second time by her mid-teens. Women also had concerns about making money without selling drugs or fitting in 12-step meetings and treatment alongside of parenting and job demands. Many women did not leave incarceration having completed a treatment program and most of those that did, relapsed after returning to the community. Illegal drug use while in jail seemed common. Many felt longer-term options were needed for those who are seriously addicted.

Failing to meet the conditions of community based supervision: Three quarters of the women commented on difficulties they encountered, beyond relapse, when trying to meet the conditions of community based supervision. Many found their conditions for release impossible to meet. Issues included housing requirements and restrictions, too little time allotted to find a job, insufficient “gateway” funding, and transportation from remote rural areas to their Probation and Parole Office. Some women were confused about their charges and also about their conditions of parole. For example, a woman can be returned to prison by the court, the parole board, or the DOC. Others pointed out inconsistencies across the state in sentencing practices. In addition, when women committed minor infractions, which would not be grounds for incarceration without the previous record, they were returned to jail as if they had committed a serious crime.

As will be explained in the staff findings section, the fragmentation of sentencing bodies and practices that the women experienced were linked to staff’s perceptions and definitions of their work roles. For example, portions of the staff view themselves as an agent of the court, while others as an adjunct to law enforcement. Whether staff mainly sees their mission as one of ensuring public safety or as one of rehabilitating offenders appears to make a difference in the women’s experience during community based supervision.

Facing barriers to housing, employment and education: The incarcerated women clearly articulated barriers to housing, employment and education, including laws, parole restrictions, lack of trust by potential employers and landlords, no job skills, and the need to care for pre-school children. Many cited a lack of transitional support for getting these needs met. Here, the paradox, or “Catch 22,” of the revolving door became particularly apparent. Women needed these resources to successfully leave jail, and yet their situations often prevented them from being able to attain what they needed. Some lacked skills and a record of successful

employment. Most worried about the impact of their prison record on their ability to get hired. Several were particularly concerned about their potential to be hired as felons. For some, restrictions on where they could live and work after release meant trying to make ends meet in an expensive county. Several women, who could live with their mothers, said they would not be allowed to do so because their last sentences involved drug use while living with their mothers. Although some found caseworkers or drug and alcohol counselors helpful, for the most part, many of the women felt the help was too little to meet their needs. Many also said they lacked helpful parole officers or other advocates to assist with establishing these basic needs as they transitioned back into their communities.

Finding difficulty in re-uniting with family and friends: If managing family relationships were difficult before the women were sent to jail, the difficulties were exacerbated by the time they were released. For some, interrupted and/or terminated relationships with children were hard or impossible to reconcile, as the children may now be living with other family members or in foster care. In addition, women recognized that former friends and support networks might not help them develop healthier behaviors and a lifestyle that would keep them out of jail.

FINDINGS: FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEWS WITH CORRECTIONS' STAFF

- *“Women have a lot more pieces – mental health, children, sustainable living.”*
- *“We’re setting them up for failure...”*
- *“Section 8 transitional housing money requires an address.”*

This section describes the findings from focus group interviews with approximately 65 DOC staff members. Three interviews were conducted and included 20 – 25 staff per session. This phase of the report shares staff perspectives about what they view as the challenges and needs of women who are incarcerated. The findings are organized by three major themes as described below.

Women Specific Programs / Services

Unique needs and issues of women offenders: Department of Corrections’ staff reported that the needs of women are more challenging when compared to those of a male offender population. While men and women face similar barriers to locating suitable housing, adequate financial supports and sustainable employment at a livable wage, women’s experiences with incarceration and subsequent reentry into community living are fraught with additional dynamics such as a:

- presence of children for which they may or may not be the primary caregiver; and
 - need for relationships which are supportive, yet have identifiable boundaries.
- Literature and research reviewed for this report suggests that while men strive for independence, women (who also want independence) achieve it by forming networks and finding supportive relationships.

Further, the prevention and treatment models for women are limited in their ability to address the complexity and depth of issues they face. Women often enter the criminal justice system with multiple mental health challenges that are complicated by substantial drug use and abuse. Staff also spoke about the facilities, which were designed to address the needs of men, not women.

Colliding Policies and Unintended Consequences

Policies with limited integration and varied results: Staff members clearly care about their work and show genuine interest in improving the correctional system. Despite their best intentions, however, staff expressed frustration about a system that often unintentionally works against the success of the women who enter its doors. Challenges specific to women offenders, the revolving door phenomenon, and competing approaches often conflict and lack integration in a way that is effective. They spoke of a structure that does not support an integrated family perspective or approach, but rather prompts a “siloe” response to their clients’ needs.

For instance, an inability to share case information with other state entities hampered staffs’ abilities to assist the women. Furthermore, they were often conflicted about their work roles and responsibilities. Do their loyalties remain with the inmate or the public – who is the client? Dependent upon the individual staff member’s perspective, the answer to this question translated into service provisions and practices that were inconsistently applied from one area of the state to the next.

Community Capacity is Necessary, but Limited

More supports needed for success in reentering and remaining in the community: Staff recognized that more community capacity is necessary to support the successful reintegration of women into the community. Limited supports, transition barriers and an often “easier” route to re-incarceration were factors perceived by staff to be contributing to the rising rate of female offenders. They called for different alternatives to bend the curve in a positive direction. Staff discussion of limitations in the system pointed to the need for the following:

- case management services,
- integrated and interdisciplinary planning and treatment (including substance abuse treatment),
- enhanced continuum of transitional supports and care provisions,
- improved intake and assessment practices, and
- development of mentoring relationships and adoption of perspectives which value social and familial supports.

BRIEF REVIEW OF STATE AND NATIONAL RESEARCH LITERATURE ON WOMEN OFFENDERS

Vermont statistics: In 2006, The Vermont Agency of Human Services reported that the number of incarcerated women on an average daily basis had increased from 15 in 1985 to 167 on December 13, 2006. The 2006 figures indicate that 974 unique women were admitted to correctional facilities at some point during the year. Although the number of women housed in correctional facilities accounted for only approximately 8% of the total incarcerated population in 2006, their gender-specific characteristics indicate a need for gender-based programming. For example, a 2005 “snapshot” of women in Vermont’s prisons indicated that 80% are mothers and 75% were the primary caregivers at the time of arrest. In addition, women were more likely than men to be admitted for non-violent crimes, with only 24% of the admitted female population committing a serious felony or misdemeanor against a person, as compared to 56.1% for men. Rates of recidivism also continue to increase for both men and women in Vermont as reported by a 2005 AHS analysis of inmates released between 1993 and 2002. Within three years, 50% of

released women inmates re-offended, which puts women near the same status as men who showed a 54% recidivism rate, again paralleling national data.

Vermont compared to national data: Vermont data parallels national criminal justice system data for the same time period. In 1979, women offenders comprised approximately 12,700 of 300,000 inmates. By the time the U.S. Department of Justice sponsored the 1998 National Symposium of Women Offenders, Bureau of Justice Statistics reported that the U.S. female prison population had reached about 79,000 and “nearly 1 million [women] were under correctional supervision.” By 2004, that population totaled over 96,000, still comprising less than 10 per cent of the total prison population, yet demonstrating a marked increase from previous counts.

Issues unique to women prisoners: Because women historically represented a minority of the prison population, they were often subject to criminal justice policies designed for males. A series of civil court cases and feminist research of the 1970s revealed gender-biases in the criminal justice system. Although incarcerated men share similar challenges--such as staying connected to family or accessing job training programs--a disproportionate number of women in prison have:

- been victims of abuse;
- provide the primary care-giver role for their children; and
- present co-occurring problems such as a drug and other substance addiction, a diminished sense of self-esteem, and/or a mental illness.

Research also highlights reentry issues due to socio-economic factors such as:

- employment and housing,
- health care,
- family environments,
- education in the sustained and increasing female offender population, and
- isolation from friends and family coupled with difficulty in forming sustaining relationships.

To mitigate problems associated with economic disadvantages, women need strategies for reversing economic dependency.

Given that 75% to 80% of incarcerated women in the U.S. have at least one dependent child younger than eight years old, programs that help mothers improve their own educational levels might help the next-generation as well. Often impeded by the unintended consequences of social policies designed to impose harsher penalties for drug-related convictions,--and therefore limiting cash assistance for food, housing, and tuition,--women require a comprehensive system of community supports. With a lack of marketable skills and unrealistic expectations for finding jobs, women’s economic vulnerabilities might leave them at risk for re-offending.

Female offenders need knowledgeable and supportive staff to help them work through the challenges of incarceration and to emerge with a renewed sense of purpose. Women generally seemed to respond to this kind of support in ways that differed from their male counterparts and their experiences called for dramatic shifts in programming. Reported through research literature (Owen & Covington, 2004; Chesney-Lind & Pasko, 2003; Heitfield & Simon, 2002), successful strategies for operating within a gender-based framework, include components such as:

- Training staff in ways that incorporate expectations for gender-specific developmentally appropriate emotional and behavioral responses;
- Improving participants' understanding of cultural, familial, prior trauma, and other gender-specific issues;
- Designing programs that emphasize the formation of support networks and that help female offenders to acquire the skills for maintaining relationships;
- Providing practical skill-training in day-to-day institutional management;
- Attending to staff attitudes concerning the difficulties encountered with this challenging work; and
- Focusing on transitional needs for successful reentry.

DISCUSSION

Developing alternatives to incarceration: Both staff and inmates questioned that jail was an appropriate place for women, especially for first-time non-violent offenders. This leads one to question whether many of these women need to be incarcerated. Development of alternatives to incarceration would bend the curve most efficiently. This can be accomplished most successfully through integrated and coordinated supports from across state government, the criminal justice system, law enforcement and local communities. A collaborative model of policy development will be required to realize this goal.

Addressing issues contributing to substance abuse: One interviewer commented, “The press of addiction is enormous. The level of intervention needed to overcome addiction is far more than the system is currently designed to provide.” Treating addictions alone, however, is not enough without addressing the other aspects of these women’s lives, such as families lacking boundaries and stability and engaging in abusive behavior, loss of connections with family, and unmet needs for education, work and housing. At the same time, community and statewide interventions need to address broader contributing factors such as laws, media influences, and social norms; as many communities are already doing. It is interesting to note from the interview data that drinking or drug use often began after a significant family event such as a birth of a child, a suicide, or a death of a parent or step-parent. This provides some evidence that shifts in the family system may be linked to a tendency toward addiction.

Getting new perspectives on the phenomenon of incarcerated women: The findings offer a springboard for thinking about what brings women into the corrections system and what keeps the revolving door phenomenon active. Answers may emerge from thoughtful and sustained thinking about questions such as: What are the links between 1) the cycle of experiencing social, emotional and physical isolation and violence; 2) stress and its influence on criminal behavior; and 3) the tendency toward criminal and law-breaking behavior, aggression and various kinds of abuse, including substance abuse? In addition, a broad-minded perspective to the process under investigation would encompass not only the individual and the family, but also the community and the larger social context in which vulnerability to incarceration evolves.

Need for stronger supports geared toward women’s unique situations: There are many parallels between staff and inmate perspectives. Both did not appear to be convinced that jail was an appropriate place for many of these women. These women at risk generally do not have much assistance from family or the community while having many demands, such as raising children. They need much stronger supports to overcome addictions, learn important life skills, and re-

enter the community than they are receiving in the current system. In addition, preventive measures need to address what contributes to women entering jail in the first place. Conditions of community based supervision are often so restrictive that a woman cannot hope to meet them. Like a revolving door, many find themselves back in prison soon after release.

Strengthening families and other social networks so they can be part of the solution: How can research, policy, and practice encourage the strengthening of family, friendship, and mentoring connections so they can be sustainable and supportive in a woman’s life? For example, families, whether functioning well or not, exert a great deal of influence on the lives of incarcerated women. One theory associated with the removal of children from incarcerated women is the thought that this practice provides an opportunity to give children a fresh start. The long-term ramifications of this approach, however, are devastating for many of the mothers and the children. It is also expensive. Families, including the incarcerated women who are daughters, wives, partners, mothers, and grandmothers, need a better understanding of how to break the cycle of abuse and addiction and adopt better ways of relating to others and managing themselves. This calls for an integrated response such as a collaborative case management model that views family systems as part of the solution. When families are not available, friendship networks and mentors could be cultivated to support and reduce risk for these women.

Allowing the institution flexibility and resources for implementing gender-specific solutions: What gender-specific methods for assisting women will give corrections staff enough flexibility to respond to their unique needs while maintaining an appropriate amount of supports and boundaries to avoid or break the cycle of incarceration? For example, how can the corrections system move away from overcompensating for the lack of boundaries in the women’s lives while still holding them accountable for their behavior? Better options are needed than removing individuals from their families and their communities for a period of time. For most of the women who have children, the effects of incarceration on the next generation may be deleterious and profound, especially when mothers are absent during critical stages of development in their children’s lives.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This study provides significant insight into the multiple and complex challenges involved with the current design of the criminal justice system for incarcerating women. There is no single solution that will meet the challenges described herein. There are, however, several approaches to consider, which if developed in a coordinated fashion, may begin to “bend the curve” in a positive direction on the rate of incarceration of women in Vermont.

The suggestions below are based on data collected from this study and current research. The list is not intended to be hierarchical or prioritized and does not suggest one recommendation as being more important than another.

Alternative Criminal Justice System Responses

- Adopt collaborative intervention models to devise solutions aimed at bending the curve, which include all sectors of the criminal justice system
 - Ensure a functional level of mutual accountability for each sector’s contribution and role in the collaborative process

- Divert non-violent women from entering correctional facilities
 - Many non-violent women could potentially be supervised in a community setting if alterations in current sentencing practices were proposed and adopted
 - Assure that gender-specific issues are addressed
- Include judiciary, prosecution, law enforcement and criminal defense in formulating alternative policies and procedures, and sentencing practices, which support a better coordinated “interface” with the correctional, health, social and family service areas of support

Alternative Correctional System Responses

- Work with community partners to develop non-incarcerative alternatives which support women’s relational needs and familial connections in the community
- Deliver gender-based staff training, which includes developmental and family systems perspectives and involves stakeholders from state government and the criminal justice system
- Provide women with livable wage job training during their period of incarceration
- Increase options for education on parenting and strengthening family relationships
- Encourage family interaction during incarceration
- Consider gender-specific adjustments to prison facilities (use objective data to devise solutions)

Integrated / Collaborative Case Management

- Support integrated case planning and expect collaborative relationships will be maintained between Department of Corrections and Department for Children & Families staff
- Utilize a “team approach” which strengthens families and other social networks
- Train staff in interdisciplinary treatment practices
- Support AHS systemic reform which allows for a holistic, strengths-based and results oriented view of children, families and individuals and provides for the coordinated delivery of easily accessible services for women, as mandated by the criminal justice system
- Develop transitional supports which include a trained volunteer community team to assist with successful reentry into the community

Development of Community Supports

- Provide mentors for women in the facilities and in the community
- Consider longer-term drug treatment approaches
- Provide transitional housing (e.g. Northern Lights, halfway houses)
- Develop additional programs which support job skill development
- Increase job placement and educational opportunities
- Provide educational opportunities for reducing the stigma associated with incarceration
- Provide additional familial supports and self-empowerment (e.g. Rosie’s Girls) to reduce the vulnerabilities of girls at or before age 11, a critical developmental period
- Integrate community treatment interventions – currently, there are multiple, separated services which may be a “set-up” for women to fail

POSSIBILITIES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH TO EVALUATE

Potential strategies to guide future research on incarcerated women may include:

- Analyze current sentencing practices to assist with development of alternatives to incarceration.
- Identify and evaluate alternatives to incarceration. Assess outcomes in the context of program evaluations of new services and supports (e.g. Northern Lights, Tapestry II, community based DETER).
- Track the life course of the women who maintain contact with children and extended family while incarcerated and those who do not. This might provide guidance concerning the provision of family approaches and supports in the future.
- Study those women who are staying out of prison, and the factors that contributed to their success.
- Design and complete a program evaluation study about the effectiveness of the Incarcerated Women's Initiative.
- Evaluate collaborative systems of care models, which include community partnerships and are structured to hold all participants mutually accountable for their contributions and role.