

Family Justice Program Video: Audio Transcript

Narrator: The Family Justice Program helps corrections, parole, and probation staff draw on families as a positive influence for their loved ones in the justice system. Staff and family members can help motivate behavior change—and ultimately improve public safety.

A program of the Vera Institute of Justice, Family Justice tailors its tools and strategies for juvenile and adult systems throughout the country. Here's how this approach is being implemented by corrections, parole, and probation in Oklahoma City.

Teacher: So what I want you guys to do for tomorrow is write a letter to your mom and on it you would write about all the things that you wanted to tell her but have not been able to tell her.

Justin Jones, director of Oklahoma Department of Corrections: We were already doing some family-related initiatives, but it wasn't until Family Justice came in that we understood how you could formalize these processes between facilities.

John Larsen, case manager supervisor, Oklahoma Department of Corrections: In thinking about when you get out of prison, what are you most excited about?

Julie: I just wanna hold my grandkids.

John Larsen: Were your grandchildren born while you were incarcerated? [Julie nods.] So do you have any specific things that you want to do? Like you said, "Hold them; talk to them."

Julie: I want to take them to school. I want to see how they interact with other children. I mean, I see them one time a week, so I know there's so much more I'm missing.

Justin Jones: The Relational Inquiry Tool is a set of short questions that hopefully initiate dialogue that help them start thinking about and challenging their relationships and whether that's a positive influence on them in the past or will be a positive or negative influence in the future and how that relates to their overall well-being.

Susan Quigley, probation and parole supervisor, Oklahoma Department of Corrections: It's very important for people who are incarcerated to stay in contact with their family members because it gives them a reason to finish their programs, to improve themselves—so that when they do get out, they still have that contact, they haven't closed off all lines of communication.

Justin Jones: If you talk to the staff that live it every day and the offenders that live it every day, the fact that they're maintaining contact with their family has a settling effect on them. It creates less misconducts. It creates a calmer yard. And so I think it's real

important—we benefit from it and eventually, when the offender discharges, those relationships remain strong.

Susan Quigley: The first time I heard about Family Justice, I remember thinking that it was innovative, because we'd always kind of had the attitude that offenders should come on their own; they shouldn't be bringing their children, girlfriends. And if they did, those people stayed in the waiting room because they weren't the ones on probation so we didn't have to deal with them. And to be told that actually, we should be including them and incorporating them was something that I had never really heard about. Now when somebody comes with somebody, we take advantage of that—we bring all three people or whoever it is back. Whoever had enough interest in that person to come in with them is the person that we want back there with us in our corner, helping us out.

Susan Quigley: What are you doing right now as far as probation?

Malinda: Last year I got my GED, I graduated from [*inaudible*] with my GED. [*To her son:*] Huh?

Susan Quigley: What did you think when Mom got her GED?

Malinda's son: Well, I was real proud of her.

Susan Quigley [*to Malinda's mother*]: So while you were in rehab, what was your relationship with her? Were you able to talk to her?

Malinda's mother: We didn't get to spend as much time with her as we needed to back her, but I think in the long run it gave her more strength to fight harder. Because I have raised her children and now she's fighting back and I'm very happy.

Susan Quigley: Personally, for me, one of the reasons I really like the Family Justice model and some of the tools that we're using is that it just makes my job easier because I am more aware about the kind of situation that the person is in, the strengths and weaknesses that they have around them—and it just makes it easier for me to know what is appropriate for them.

Justin Jones: One of the reasons we embrace Family Justice—what options do you have when you look at something that you know works, it enhances what you're already doing, and it's not some new concept that you've gotta go research and study and get a PhD in. It's really taking what you are already doing, enhancing it with a small array of tools, and then applying things from Family Justice to that.