

**Promoting Family Reintegration in
Intensive Reentry Programs
Virginia Department of Corrections**

FY2025 Report



Chadwick Dotson, Director

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Enabling Authority:

This report has been prepared and submitted to fulfill the requirements of the Appropriation Act Item 390.K of the Acts of Assembly of 2025. This provision requires the Virginia Department of Corrections to report information pertaining to the agency's actions to promote family integration in the correctional centers designed for intensive reentry programs. The report is due to the House Appropriations and Senate Finance and Appropriations Committees, the Secretary of Public Safety and Homeland Security, and the Department of Planning and Budget on October 15th of each year.

Background

The Virginia Department of Corrections (VADOC) is committed to public safety through its mission and operations that foster growth and development for those under our supervision, further promoting family reintegration in intensive reentry programs and throughout the Department. VADOC has numerous programs and services that are developed to assist in the successful reintegration of inmates with their families and particularly, their minor children. The VADOC recognizes that family reintegration enhances the quality of life for inmates prior to release and once the inmate has transitioned to the community. There is also a direct correlation between family reintegration, motivation for change, a decrease in recidivism, and crime victimization.

A primary focus of reentry is to reduce potential barriers for post release success. Beyond the direct impact of enhancing public safety, the Department acknowledges the positive effect these efforts have on the lives of the spouses or the caregiver of their child, and most particularly, the children of inmates. Engagement in parenting programs helps participants develop pro-fathering and pro-mothering attitudes, knowledge and skills, improve incarcerated parents' relationships with their children and the father/mother of their children (or main caregiver of their children) and develop a plan for successfully reentering the lives of their children and family upon release. In addition, reestablishing healthy family relationships helps prevent the next generation from following in their parent's footsteps into a life of criminal activity. The following provides a snapshot of the Department's efforts to enhance family integration services for those under our care.

Programs and Activities

Parenting Curriculum: Through research of evidence-based parenting curricula and pilot programs, *InsideOut Dad* remains the parenting curriculum of choice for male inmates in the Department. The *Partners in Parenting* curriculum is utilized at female facilities. Parenting classes are offered on a voluntary basis to the inmate population that meet the program criteria. These programs are designed to enhance parent-child relationships and strengthen families. The programs educate and empower those incarcerated with new techniques for interacting with their children. While participating in the program, the inmates learn basic parenting techniques, effective communication skills, realistic expectations of children,



alternative methods of discipline and co-parenting skills. Inmates also practice providing positive affirmations to their children, stress management skills, and steps to reinforce positive behaviors. During this reporting period, staff training sessions have increased the number of facilitators for both parenting programs. From January 1, 2025 to September 30, 2025, 29 VADOC staff have been trained to facilitate InsideOut Dad; bringing the total staff trained in InsideOut Dad to 161. A total of 53 VADOC staff have been trained to facilitate Partners in Parenting, with 14 of those in CY2025. A total of 34 volunteer facilitators have been trained. Parenting program trained individuals total thus far is 248.

Parenting Program Expansion: To ensure ongoing prioritization of parenting programs and family engagement within the Department, a monthly report launched in 2024 that tracks family integration related programming at VADOC facilities and Community Corrections Alternative Programs (CCAPs). The goal of the report is to provide current parenting program training and facilitation data. To scale up the volunteer network of parenting facilitators, the Department has streamlined the volunteer approval and training process. The Department has trained 34 volunteers to date to facilitate parenting programs. Acquiring additional trainers in both parenting programs has allowed more incarcerated parents access to services. To enhance faith-based parenting facilitation of *Inside Out Dad*, Christian overlays are now available for the volunteer facilitators to utilize. Where available, inmates may choose between a faith-based parenting program or a secular parenting program.

Between July 1, 2024, and June 30, 2025, the *Inside Out Dad* program yielded a remarkable 452 successful completions and 122 active enrollments. *Partners in Parenting* was offered at all four female locations during the reviewed period with 127 successful completions and 35 active enrollments. With a focus on quality assurance in data reporting for program enrollment and more emphasis on training and monitoring programs, programming numbers have increased by over 39% their output from last year. Program completions capped at 370 the previous fiscal year.

Executive Order: On August 15, 2024, Executive Order 36 was issued by Governor Youngkin: *Stand Tall - Stay Strong - Succeed Together* Reentry Initiative. Executive Order 36 focuses directly on pre-release reentry programming, job training, employment efforts, benefit enrollments, parenthood and public safety efforts. The Executive Order targets reentry services within the Virginia Department of Corrections and emphasizes the importance of ongoing collaboration and partnerships with state agencies and community partners. Parenthood efforts for this order include partnership with the State Compensation Board (SCB), Department of Social Services (DSS) and the Commonwealth's Chief Diversity Officer, implementing and scaling programming within prisons, jails and communities to help incarcerated parents be the best father or mother possible, to give them a purpose for change, and to help end generational incarceration. DSS partners with VADOC Probation and Parole to maximize family programs and related services to improve the well-being of families. DSS also partners with VADOC correctional centers to offer education regarding post-release services, and the agency is a key partner with Reentry Councils, supporting families throughout Virginia.



Circle of Parents Peer Groups: *Circle of Parents* is a national program designed to provide peer-to-peer assistance for individuals who have completed a parenting program. The peer support program is based on the principles of family support, mutual self-help, and shared ideas. This program offers 92 lesson plans for parents, as well as a separate curriculum for their children. Circle of Parents Peer Groups are present in the VADOC with plans to expand.

Caregiver Guide: A Caregiver Guide is provided to assist families in preparing for the visitation process and to better explain incarceration to children. The guide remains available to families at the time of visit, and it is on the VADOC public website. The guide was shared with over 30 community partners to ensure it was made available to more families.

Trauma-Informed Staff Training and Resources: To ensure staff working with minor children during the visitation process are properly trained in trauma-informed care practices, a specific training was designed for the VADOC. The development of a mandatory 1.5-hour Trauma-Informed Care Training for all staff working visitation in the facilities was developed to ensure staff follow best practices and to enhance the visitation experience for children and family members. Trauma-informed Care pocket size “Quick Tips” cards were developed that provide security staff working visitation to encourage and promote the use of trauma informed language and principles when monitoring visitation. Trauma Informed care laminated 1-page quick tip sheets help security staff to continue to enforce rules and stay security-minded, while using trauma-informed approaches. These sheets are available in front entry spaces and the visitation rooms. Trauma Informed Care Connection Cards are provided to inmates by correctional staff to promote healthy communication when talking to their children and family on phone calls and during visitation. Also, a child-friendly video was produced that is now played in front entry spaces during visitation, to explain the facility rules for visitation, expectations for the family and overall promote a positive visitation experience.

Child-Friendly Visitation Experiences Grant: In 2021, based on the success of the previous Building Family Bridges grant, the VADOC was awarded the Child-Friendly Visitation Experiences in Jails and Prisons grant from the Bureau of Justice (BJA) Award: 15PBJA-21-GG-03273-FAMI, which started on 8/9/2022. The Federal Funds award was for \$350,000 in which 15 correctional facilities have created child-friendly family visiting spaces, policies, and protocols. All grant locations have revamped their visitation rooms with murals that have brightened up the spaces and made the area more inviting for children, the inmate population, and their families. In addition, several items have been ordered for each site such as children’s books, bookcases, child sized table and chairs, toys and games, removable rug square mats, game systems, and television/monitors. An implementation plan has been adopted to guide objectives for program success. In turn, the grant has increased the staff’s capacity to integrate the *Model Practices for Parents in Prisons and Jails* into the day-to-day operations of correctional facilities. This grant is scheduled to come to a close October 1, 2025.

The images below display the upgraded visitation rooms.



Parenting Program Promotional Video: To support and promote participation in parenting program enrollment in correctional facilities, the Department partnered with a video production company to create a VADOC specific parenting programs promotional video. The two programs sponsored in the video are *InsideOut Dad* and *Partners in Parenting*. The target population for this project included both male and female incarcerated parents. The goal is to encourage involvement in programming that helps participants develop pro-fathering and pro-mothering attitudes, knowledge and skills, improve incarcerated parents' relationships with their children and the father/mother of their children (or main caregiver of their children) and develop a plan for successfully reentering the lives of their children and family upon release. The video will be accessible to view on the VADOC public website, and inmate tablets once finalized on October 1, 2025. Funds for the video production were provided by the Child-Friendly Visitation Experience Grant.

The Messages Project: The Messages Project is an award-winning program designed to allow both male and female inmates to prepare a video message for their children while in custody. The Messages Project won the CNN Hero Award in 2008. The recorded video link is made available through a secure platform accessible by families for the child's viewing from a laptop or phone. The video message may feature the inmate reading a children's book or delivering a heartfelt message of encouragement to their child. Inmates are afforded an opportunity to mail a book home to their children in connection with the video message. The Messages Project is available throughout VADOC facilities. This program promotes child-parent engagement while allowing inmates to creatively communicate with their kids utilizing innovative forms of communication.

VADOC Prison Nursery Program: The VADOC is actively developing a Nursery Program at Virginia Correctional Center for Women (VCCW). Expectant mothers who enter VADOC custody and meet strict eligibility criteria may choose to apply for participation in the Nursery Program. This program will give the inmate mother an opportunity to bond with her infant and be an integral part of their early childhood development, including parenting education. The mother and child will be released together, and the mother will be more equipped to parent effectively. The program will maintain a strong reentry focus; ensuring resources are made available to expectant mothers prior to release. The prison nursery program is designed to promote healthy

parent-child bonding by using an evidence-based early childhood parenting curriculum, coaching/mentorship, and wellness education that will ultimately take aim at breaking the cycle of generational crime. With only a handful of such programs operating across the country, the VADOC remains at the forefront of implementing innovative evidence-based practices and programs to improve inmate reentry success and address the needs of the population under its purview.

Family Reunification Program/House: In 2022, in partnership with Assisting Families of Inmates (AFOI), a vacant home on the property of Virginia Correctional Center for Women was remodeled with a trauma informed design. The Family Reunification Program is dedicated to guiding incarcerated mothers in a successful parenting experience that occurs in a homelike environment offering extended day visitation. Staff work alongside incarcerated mothers and their families to educate, establish, and enhance the mother and child bond.

Since the program's launch in early 2023, mothers and their children have engaged in a variety of creative and educational activities, including karaoke, tie-dye shirts, craft and jewelry making, reading, cooking, kickball, gardening, and kite-making. The participating mothers have expressed a deep sense of fulfillment and gratitude for the opportunity to reconnect with their children in a home-like environment. Family members have also voiced their appreciation for the program, highlighting how it facilitates a gradual reintegration for mothers with both their children and caregivers before release.

Photos below feature the Family Reunification House.



Wellness Program: Fluvanna Correctional Center for Women (FCCW) continues to offer a Wellness Program. This program was designed to increase self-awareness and mind-body integration, while utilizing collaborative ways to help inmates develop the skills of self-compassion and self-efficacy. This program focuses on mindfulness-based activities to include Yoga, Mindfulness Meditation, Mindful Gardening and Health Education. One of the most prominent components to the program is the “Mothering from Within” Program, which focuses on identifying pregnant inmates upon intake to offer them multiple support and educational



services to increase the chances of a healthy pregnancy, delivery, and prevent premature birth. The established services include specialized instruction in lactation and breastfeeding, on-site birth support, preparation for separation, and child custody planning. Partnership with a community-based doula (birth partner) supports these services. These programs will be replicated for those participants residing in the nursery unit.

Family Reunification Events: Since 2011, Family Reunification Seminars have occurred throughout the Commonwealth. VADOC Probation and Parole Districts collaborate with various local stakeholders to educate, engage, and empower families of inmates to be better prepared to support their loved one as they return to the community. Unique approaches have included multi-agency events where partner agencies share resources and testimonials from previously incarcerated individuals and their families offer wisdom from their experiences. Family Reunification Seminars provide inmates and their family members with engagement activities to grow and strengthen their family connections during incarceration. Inmates and their family members have the chance to learn about community stakeholders and other agencies available to support the family unit.

In addition to parenting and family engagement resources, those in attendance obtain valuable information about employment opportunities, job training skills, cognitive behavioral programming, counseling services, substance use disorders services, peer support, reentry councils, and mental health services. Senior Reentry Probation and Parole Officers are available to answer questions about the conditions of supervision to ensure success on probation/parole. Research has shown that family involvement enhances the reentry process. In the past year, 17 family reunification seminars were held in the districts and 6 within the correctional facilities. These figures reflect an increase from last year's report period. All events conducted were well received based upon surveys completed by both inmates and their families.

On-site Visitation and Video Visitation: All VADOC correctional centers provide on-site visitation for family members at predetermined days and times. Low-cost transportation is provided by non-profit organizations that enable families who cannot afford transportation to visit their loved ones. Regular contact is helpful in maintaining strong family connections; therefore, VADOC also provides video visitation opportunities at all sites, allowing eligible inmates to both talk and see family members without travel. VADOC partners with a non-profit organization, AFOI (Assisting Families of Inmates), to facilitate access to video visitation in the community. AFOI, dedicated to supporting families and children impacted by incarceration, announced that the cost of video visitation within the Virginia Department of Corrections decreased the cost to 12 cents-per-minute from the original 15 cents-per-minute, effective July 1, 2025.

Special Parenting Events: Throughout the year, the Department hosts special events to support the community, including families of inmates. Such activities include back to school drives, clothing/coat collections, national night out community events, and special holiday activities to



collect donations of toys and food for those in need. Support for youth summer camps has also been a route of community involvement for the VADOC. These events ensure that families and children are supported in communities throughout the Commonwealth.

Child Support: Pursuant to legislation passed during the 2022 General Assembly session, incarceration for 180 or more consecutive days no longer constitutes involuntary employment or underemployment. Inmates who meet the criteria are afforded the opportunity to request a review and adjustment of any active child support orders through the Division of Child Support Enforcement within the Department of Social Services. This information has been disseminated throughout VADOC facilities and is provided at initial intake. The *Incarcerated Parent Request for Child Support Information* form through the collaboration from VDSS, DCSE and VADOC enables the incarcerated parent to request information on their case. It focuses on identifying potential barriers upon release. In turn, DCSE will connect the incarcerated parent with resources based on these identified barriers.

Report Summary

The Virginia Department of Corrections remains committed to ensuring incarcerated individuals have access to meaningful opportunities that support personal growth, family reintegration and a successful transition back to the community. Through sound security practices, programs, education and reentry services, incarcerated parents are provided with resources to enhance their lives and strengthen engagement with their family support system. Through trauma informed care practices, a healing environment is created for inmates, probationers, and parolees. Enhancing collaboration with community stakeholders, faith-based partners and other state agencies has proven to be essential in expanding parenting programs and improving the incarcerated parent's readiness to establish productive bonds with their children. VADOC's ongoing efforts to expand family reintegration services create safer communities and healthier families throughout Virginia.