

## **Genesee County's Project S.E.E.K.: Longitudinal Study on Children of Incarcerated Parents**

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### **I. Project Description**

In recent years, national and local leaders have begun to recognize the issues and needs of children of incarcerated parents. Despite a rise in political will, we have very little data on what types of interventions best serve children and families impacted by incarceration. From the White House to the municipal level, government officials and service providers are clamoring for evidence-based research on best practices in this area. Fortunately, Genesee County is in a position to provide data that can enhance policy and practice not only in Michigan, but across the country. From 1989-2003, Genesee County was home to Project S.E.E.K. (Services to Enable and Empower Kids), the country's only comprehensive service provider and longitudinal study focused on children of incarcerated parents. With this project, we propose a 15-year follow up study that will ultimately provide guidelines for best practices for serving children of incarcerated parents—here in Flint and in cities and counties across the nation. The study will be designed to identify differences between S.E.E.K. participants and the control group established for the original project evaluation. Long term outcomes such as incarceration, employment, education status, health status, and mental health status will be explored.

As a first step, we propose an exploratory study of a small sample of young adults and caregivers who are included in the Project S.E.E.K longitudinal study. This study will explore risk and resilience among the service and control groups and will answer the following questions:

- 1) How did participation in Project S.E.E.K. influence the lifecourse of participants?  
What needs did the program meet, and what needs were left unmet?
- 2) What other factors influenced the lifecourse of service and control group members?  
What factors supported positive outcomes? What factors created greater risk?

Our specific aims are as follows:

- 1) **To conduct the first phase of a 15-year follow up study of Project S.E.E.K.** Current understanding of the factors that produce pro-social behavior and resiliency within this fragile population of children impacted by parental incarceration is limited. S.E.E.K. is the nation's most innovative and theoretically sound study that examines the problem of early adolescent delinquency prevention. The program was structured with the foresight to implement an experimental design that allows for strong evaluation.
- 2) **To produce preliminary guidelines for best practices in serving children of incarcerated parents.** Currently there is no single evidence-based practice that addresses the unique needs, complexities and multiple risks factors for these children. Interventions utilized are designed for other populations and used as if they were scientifically designed to impact children confronting parental incarceration.
- 3) **To disseminate findings and establish local and state partnerships to build upon lessons learned.** Partnerships are beginning to grow and strengthen among those who serve children of incarcerated parents and their caregivers. Our targets for partnerships

and dissemination include public health, prison/jail and law enforcement officials, health and human services providers, early childhood educators and providers, public schools and health care administrators. There is a need for on-going training that addresses this population from arrest through reentry and the examination of programs and policies that may impact children and youth negatively and those that promote resiliency in children.

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