

## **Incarcerated Fathers' Experiences in the Read to Your Child/Grandchild Program: Supporting Children's Literacy, Learning, and Education**

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**Abstract:** *In response to rising parental incarceration, some correctional facilities and outside organizations offer family literacy programs for parents in prison. However, research on these correctional education initiatives is scant. This paper uses qualitative data to analyze how 11 fathers in a rural Pennsylvania prison were involved in their children's literacy, learning, and education before and during incarceration and through the Read to Your Child/Grandchild (RYCG) program. Before RYCG, most fathers had taken steps such as reading to children, teaching reading and math, attending parent-teacher conferences, helping with homework, and singing and rhyming—and then sought to continue supporting their children's learning from within prison. Fathers used RYCG materials (video-recorded book reading, children's book, scrapbook) to emphasize the importance of education, literacies, and numeracy. They also created personalized scrapbooks that cultivated their children's literate abilities and cognitive, academic, and socio-emotional development. This research contributes to the nascent literature on family literacy for incarcerated parents.*

**Keywords:** *correctional education, family literacy, incarcerated parents, literacy, reading*

### **Introduction**

According to the most recent estimates, more than 2.7 million children in the U.S. have a parent currently in prison, and more than 5.7 million children have experienced parental incarceration during their lifetime (Gotsch, 2018). From 1991 to 2007, the number of children with mothers in state or federal prisons increased 131%, compared to 77% for children with incarcerated fathers (Glaze & Maruschak, 2008), reflecting the greater rate of maternal incarceration. In Pennsylvania, the location of this study, two-thirds of inmates in state correctional institutions (SCIs) are parents (Pennsylvania Department of Corrections [PA DOC], 2018). As more parents are imprisoned and separated from their children, correctional institutions and other organizations are increasingly offering family literacy and read-aloud programs. These programs take various forms, but generally focus on connecting parents and children through reading and other learning activities, either in person or at a distance through live video or audio or video recordings. However, empirical research on such programs is scarce.

The Read to Your Child/Grandchild (RYCG) Program offered an ideal opportunity to study fathers' perspectives of this program and how they used it to relate to their children and support their literacy, learning, and education. (We have IRB approval to use the program's real

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name.) RYCG, offered “in most facilities” in Pennsylvania (PA DOC, 2019a), was designed over a decade ago to “increase the relationship between the child and adult, enhance family literacy, enrich one’s life through reading and to make a positive influence stressing the importance of literacy development through a shared reading experience” (PA DOC, 2013, para. 2). The program also “serves to help establish and maintain a connection between the inmate and their children/grandchildren to enhance their relationship upon release” (PA DOC, 2019a, para. 6). These goals focus on strengthening parent-child relationships both in the present and future. Moreover, the educational goals are similar to those of family literacy programs in non-correctional settings, which focus on enhancing parents’ support for children’s language and literacy development (for an overview of family literacy, see e.g., Clymer, Toso, Grinder, & Sauder, 2017; Paratore, 2001; Wasik, 2012). Pennsylvania has historically provided strong funding and support for family literacy programming (Clymer et al., 2017).

RYCG participants select one or more books for their child (aged 12 or under) and are video recorded reading the book(s) aloud. Parents typically add a personal message at the beginning and/or end of the recording. The DVD and one book are sent to the child, pending the custodial caregiver’s written consent. Participants can make one video per household, but children in the same household may each receive a book. Implementation differs across SCIs (e.g., parents may or may not make a scrapbook, create an artistic backdrop for the video recording, or take group classes to learn about reading to children, practice reading the book aloud, and so on). At this SCI, fathers created a scrapbook with drawings, photos, personal notes or letters, and/or photocopied pages from coloring or activity books. Participants may re-enroll as many times as the program is offered (at this SCI, about once per year).

Drawing on interview and observational data, this paper analyzes the experiences and perspectives of 11 fathers to address the following research questions: (1) How were fathers in a rural Pennsylvania prison involved in their children’s literacy, learning, and education before and during their incarceration? (2) How did the fathers use the Read to Your Child/Grandchild program to support their children’s literacy, learning, and education?

This study contributes to the literature on family literacy in correctional institutions, illustrating the varying degrees and multiple ways that incarcerated fathers were and continue to be involved in helping their children with literacy, numeracy, schooling, and other forms of learning, even while separated geographically and physically.

## Literature Review

This section highlights relevant research on the consequences of parental incarceration for children and parents and on family literacy in correctional institutions.

### Consequences of Parental Incarceration

The consequences of parental incarceration outlined below are intertwined with multiple economic and racial disparities. For example, in 2017, there were 1.49 million people in U.S. state and federal prisons (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2019a) and 745,000 in local jails (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2019b). Of this incarcerated population, 59% were Black or Latinx, compared to 29% of the U.S. population (The Sentencing Project, 2018). Consequently, children of color are disproportionately affected by parental incarceration. For example, compared to white children, Hispanic and African American children are 2.3 times and 7.5 times more likely, respectively, to have an incarcerated parent (Martin, 2017).

Parental incarceration has a range of consequences for children, including greater likelihood of becoming justice-involved (Conway & Jones, 2015), lower high school GPA (maternal incarceration only; Hagan & Foster, 2012), increased externalizing behavioral problems (Geller et al., 2012), lower non-cognitive school readiness (Haskins, 2014), decreased reading

scores (DeHart, Shapiro, & Hardin, 2017), and lower educational attainment as adults (Mears & Siennick, 2016). Children's mental health may also suffer; depending on their gender, race, and age, children of incarcerated parents are at greater risk for depression, aggression, and antisocial behaviors (Martin, 2017).

Incarceration may permanently reduce a family's economic stability, since their income can decrease by 22% during a parent's incarceration and 15% post-incarceration (Martin, 2017). This economic impact has deep implications for children with incarcerated fathers, since just over half of fathers behind bars are their children's primary economic support (Martin, 2017).

Parents also experience innumerable consequences of incarceration, including loss of contact with children and family and termination of parental rights. Given the rural location of many correctional institutions, distance from family is a chief barrier to visitations (Rabuy & Kopf, 2015). According to 2004 data, nearly two-thirds (63%) of people in state prisons lived more than 100 miles from their families, and only 26% received any visits in the previous month (Rabuy & Kopf, 2015). As such, it is imperative to understand how incarcerated parents—particularly those who live far from family—maintain relationships with their children and support their children's education, learning, and literacy during their absence.

### **Family Literacy in Correctional Institutions**

Research on family literacy programs in non-correctional settings suggests that they can have a positive influence on children and adults. For example, family storybook reading has been found to support children's school success (Paratore, 2001); parent-child reading promotes children's writing development (Crain-Thoreson & Dale, 1999); and a meta-analysis of 29 family literacy studies (Bus, van Ijzendoorn, & Pellegrini, 1995) contended that "parent-preschooler reading is a necessary preparation for beginning reading instruction" (p. 17). Additionally, although parental involvement has the greatest effect on young children's literacy and education, it continues to influence educational and literacy outcomes in teenage and adult years (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003). Consequently, parents and caregivers are essential for nurturing children's literacy development and educational success. However, the vast majority of family literacy research focuses on non-incarcerated individuals.

There are numerous studies on the outcomes of *parenting* programs for incarcerated parents and their relationships with children (e.g., Collica-Cox & Furst, 2018; Kampter, Teyber, Rockwood, & Drzewiecki, 2017; Troy et al., 2018), but these programs do not typically focus on reading or supporting children's literacy. Further, Muth (2018) critiques the dominant perspective of research on incarcerated parenting, which suggests that fatherhood in particular becomes dormant during incarceration and only upon release does a parent "re-enter" the family as an active participant. This framing ignores how literacy-specific practices are often an important way for incarcerated parents to maintain contact with their children (Muth, 2006).

Family literacy and read-aloud programs in correctional institutions vary in their focus and design. The New York State Education Department (NYSED) integrates family literacy into the three strands of its Instructional Delivery System Model, including academic programs, transition programs, and support services (Hudson River Center for Program Development, 2001). Each strand includes varied programming and activities. For example, within the transition programs, parent-child interactions are a central component; parents may write letters or draw pictures for their children, play literacy games or other activities during visits, or, similar to RYCG, be audio-recorded while reading a children's book.

A more common approach is to offer a stand-alone family literacy program or project. For example, reading programs such as Reading Connections in San Diego County "provide an opportunity to reestablish parental roles, reassure the children of their continued love, and encourage the children's reading behavior" (Blumberg & Griffin, 2013, p. 265). Reading Unites Families in Maryland offers a "literacy Saturday" in which fathers and children participate in

literacy activities and children select, read, and keep two books (Gardner, 2015). In “Daddy and Me,” a New York Public Library Correctional Services program at Riker’s Island, fathers attended librarian-led trainings and classes on children’s literacy and were audio-recorded reading a children’s book (Higgins, 2013). Other programs involve parents in reading books for children by phone or compact disc (Quinn-Kong, 2018). All such programs link incarcerated parents with their children through reading and other family literacy practices, with the goal of nurturing parent-child relationships and fostering literacy (Zoukis, 2017). Though these programs are seemingly beneficial for parents’ and children’s literacy practices, their effectiveness varies immensely and many lack empirical validation (Johnston, 2012). Moreover, research on parents’ perceptions of these programs is limited.

This article builds on the few studies that have examined family literacy in correctional settings. Gadsden and colleagues (2005) found that attending a family literacy program helped improve fathers’ day-to-day behavior, while Genisio (1999) asserted that family literacy participants exhibited lower recidivism rates. Muth’s (2018) research shows that Hope House’s “family presence” programs (including summer camps, murals, and storybook taping) enabled fathers and children to reconnect at their own pace and to reimagine how they experience “doing time.” Moreover, storybook program participants committed fewer and less serious prison infractions than the comparison group (p. 165).

Similar findings have surfaced in international studies. Research on two men’s prisons in the United Kingdom revealed that teaching early literacy theories enhanced fathers’ involvement in their children’s literacy practices and their awareness of children’s development (Nutbrown et al., 2019). Incarcerated mothers in Canada saw a recorded read-aloud program as “the best opportunity women have to keep their families together” during incarceration; the program also promoted a love for reading and positive identity development for children, along with other positive outcomes (Brown, 2017, p. 38). Similarly, a comparative study of family literacy in U.S. and U.K. correctional institutions suggested that these programs had the potential to foster parent-child bonding and promote parents’ and children’s literacy skills (Finlay, 2014).

## Methods

We used qualitative research methods to study the RYCG program, because we wanted to gain an in-depth understanding of the fathers’ experiences in and perceptions of the program. A qualitative research design fulfilled five of the contributions outlined by Patton (2015): to illuminate participants’ meanings, to study how things work (participants’ experiences), to capture participants’ stories and perspectives, to understand how systems function (e.g., correctional setting), and to understand the context (e.g., prison regulations). Specifically, we drew upon the ethnographic tradition by using observation, detailed description, interpretive interviews, and analysis of artifacts (scrapbooks) to elicit participants’ emic meanings, while acknowledging our role in selecting and shaping how their stories are told (Wolcott, 1999).

## Research Setting

We selected the SCI because of its active RYCG program and proximity to our university, Penn State. The rural location makes visitation difficult, particularly for those fathers from cities several hours away. This geographic distance from family accentuates the importance of programs like RYCG.

The study occurred after the summer 2018 lockdown of Pennsylvania SCIs in response to staff and inmate illness caused by synthetic drugs that entered the prisons through the mail. Consequently, inmates were restricted to their cells, mail delivery was halted, and non-legal mail was forwarded to a contractor in Florida, where mail was scanned, digitally forwarded to



the prison, and copied (Rodriquez, 2019). Book shipments from family, friends, or book donation organizations were prohibited. The lockdown lasted 12 days, but due to ensuing policy changes, research participants had less access to reading materials and received photocopies of letters and photos. In addition, we could not bring paper into the prison and the children's books that we donated to the program were shipped directly from Amazon.

### **Research Team and Positionality**

Our all-female study team included two faculty with doctorates (Esther Prins and Anna Kaiper, both white) and two doctoral students (Tabitha Stickel, who is white, and Marolyn Machen, who is African American). None of us had previous research experience in corrections. Our collective experiences with the carceral system and currently or formerly incarcerated individuals included teaching GED® and ESL students who were on probation or previously incarcerated, working at a legal aid clinic, and providing technical support for community college courses in a SCI. They additionally involved advising doctoral students with professional or research experience in corrections, teaching a book on reading in women's prisons for a graduate seminar, incorporating content from adult and family literacy in correctional settings into other higher education classes, and learning from the experiences of friends previously incarcerated. From these starting points, all of us became interested in prison education as a way to enrich the lives of prisoners and their families.

Although our identities and life experiences differed from those of research participants, we built rapport by drawing on our experiences with teaching, interviewing, and interacting with racially and culturally diverse adult literacy and English language learners, a group that shares similarities with the fathers in this study (e.g., poor or working-class backgrounds). Participants' openness and their willingness to be interviewed, some twice, suggest that our efforts toward rapport were largely fruitful. For example, Jones commented, "I'm pretty much not a talkative guy. You got me talking a lot." Some fathers told us why they were incarcerated, even though we did not ask. Several participants thanked us for taking the time to do this research. At the informational session, Scho asked "why it was so important to y'all to come in here" to do the study. Reflecting on this exchange, he concluded the first interview by saying, "I appreciate y'all as well. I really do. It meant a lot."

### **Participant Recruitment and Ethical Considerations**

The SCI advertised RYCG in fall 2018 via flyers on bulletin boards in each cell block. Eleven men enrolled and were approved to participate (sex offenders and people who committed a crime against their child are ineligible). In the teacher's view, RYCG attracts fathers who "already had the positive connection with their children before [and] would like to maintain it" and those who "do it to look good for parole." The demographic data suggest that RYCG participants had higher educational levels (and thus stronger literacy abilities) than the average U.S. inmate.

After the teacher gave fathers a flyer about the study, we held an informational session to describe the study purposes and procedures, answer questions, and obtain consent forms. All 11 men volunteered to participate in the study. Since we were working with a population historically exploited through research misconduct (Gostin, Vanchieri, & Pope, 2007), we attended to ethical issues such as coercion, participants' rights and consent, and reciprocity. The recruitment process enabled fathers to volunteer for the study. We emphasized that their decision to participate had no bearing on their parole or other decisions by SCI personnel and that there was no compensation. We sought to affirm participants' dignity and self-determination by honoring their decision to use a self-chosen pseudonym or their real name or nickname. In this paper, we have chosen children's pseudonyms that reflect their family's culture (e.g., most of the children of African American fathers had names that are common among African American

families; see Lieberson & Mikelson, 1995).

To express our gratitude to fathers and SCI personnel, we donated \$100 of children's coloring and activity books to the program. We sent fathers a thank you letter and a certificate since these items are considered in parole hearings. Finally, we asked the teacher to share our conference presentations and research brief with participants who are still incarcerated.

Table 1 summarizes participants' characteristics, followed by a description of each father.

Name	Age	Race/ Ethnicity	Highest level of education	Children's ages	# of videos made	Total time incarcerat- ed (life- time)	First time in RYCG?
Antione	34	African American	Some HS	3, 16	1	9 years	Un- known
Brandon	35	White/ Native American	HS	5, 7	1	~3 years	No
Carl Jung	37	White	Some college	11, 19	1	~15 years	Yes
El Jefe	29	Multiracial	Bachelor's	1, 11	1	2 years	Yes
John	28	White	Some HS	4	1	20 months	Yes
Jones	35	Hispanic	GED®	4, 6	1	10 years	Yes
LaDiDaDi	31	African American	Some college	2, 12	2	5 years	Yes
Malik	40	African American	Some HS	2, 6, 6, 10	3	9 years	No
Ron	48	African American	HS	2; 7 adult children	1	15 years	No
Rundy	29	African American	Some college	3, 3	2	>3 years	Yes
Scho	36	African American	GED®	6, 6, 6, 14	4	~13 years	Yes

**Antione.** Antoine has two sons: a 16-year-old in a foster home and three-year-old Jaquan, who lives with his mother. Antione writes "long, deep letters" to his elder son and talks to Jaquan every day by phone. Jaquan and his mother are able to visit Antione. He made the video for Jaquan. Antione finished 11<sup>th</sup> grade before entering a juvenile detention center. He is enrolled in GED® classes and hopes to be released in 2020. Antione was the only participant who did not want to be audio-recorded. Thus, we have much less data from him compared to other participants.

**Brandon.** Brandon, a high school graduate with an automotive certificate, has two daughters, age five and seven, who live with their mother. This was Brandon's third time in RYCG; after his daughters received the first video, they were "stuck on the TV" (watching the DVD) and loved the children's books. After writing a poem for his girls, he began writing poems and rhymes for other incarcerated men to send their families. Brandon's dream is to

illustrate children's books; he showed his artistic skills by illustrating the scrapbook cover with a character he created. Brandon takes courses to work towards computer certification. He was released on parole after the study concluded.

**Carl Jung.** Carl has a 19-year-old daughter whom he has never met and an 11-year-old, Chloe, who lives in foster care in another state. He met Chloe once before and sends letters through a caseworker. For unknown reasons, Chloe's case worker did not sign the consent form to receive the DVD, but the SCI was able to send it after a judge ruled in Carl's favor. Carl has a GED® diploma and attended one year of college. He is taking a theology course through the mail. A high school teacher's encouragement sparked his interest in writing; he has published poetry in a correctional journal and a sociology professor has shared Carl's writing about prison and recidivism with students. Carl was eligible for parole in summer 2019.

**El Jefe.** El Jefe made the video for his one-year old son, Ajani, who was only two months when his father was incarcerated. El Jefe sees his wife and Ajani weekly, but has less contact with his 11-year-old son, who lives with the boy's mother. With a bachelor's degree in business management, El Jefe ran various businesses (recording studio, t-shirt screen printing studio, landscaping business) before incarceration. He attributed incarceration to his student loans and resulting "financial stress." El Jefe completed the pre-construction course required to enroll in the SCI carpentry courses and expected to take the forklift course. His expected release date is in 2020.

**John.** John and his wife have a four-year-old son, David, who attends preschool and has an Individualized Education Program (IEP). They visit John once or twice a month, but the long drive and David's young age make it difficult to visit more often. John left high school his senior year and tried attending a GED® program. He went on to manage a construction company. He is completing the Commonwealth Secondary School Diploma at the SCI and is eligible for release in summer 2020.

**Jones.** Jones made the video for his four-year-old daughter, Ajayla. He also has a six-year-old step-daughter. Jones described their mom as a great partner "in this time being behind the wall." He communicates with his children every day, mostly by phone; he also sends them letters and they occasionally visit. He left school in 11<sup>th</sup> grade and earned his GED® diploma and an Automotive Service Excellence certification at previous SCIs. He also participated in the InsideOut Dad® parenting program. Jones was released on parole before we conducted follow-up interviews.

**LaDiDaDi.** LaDiDaDi's sons Latrell (age two) and Keon (age 12) both received videos. Although the boys have different mothers, "they do a lot together" and occasionally visit their dad. LaDiDaDi graduated from a disciplinary school and later studied graphic design for a semester, drawing on his experience creating flyers for large parties. However, during his second semester he "got caught back up into the street life." He is taking a carpentry class and describes himself as a frequent reader. LaDiDaDi is eligible for parole in 2019.

**Malik.** Malik has four children with four mothers and describes his children, their mothers, and his wife (they have no children together) as a "big happy family," with the mothers, his wife, and children intermittently visiting him. Malik described himself as a fun-loving jokester and "goofball" with his kids. He made videos for two-year-old Zaniya, six-year-old DeShawn, and 10-year-old Shanice. (He previously participated in RYCG.) He is not involved in his fourth child's life. Malik left school when he was legally emancipated at 16; he is studying for the GED® exam and dreams of being a chef or baker. He was eligible for parole in summer 2019.

**Ron.** Ron has seven adult children, nine grandchildren, and a two-year old son, Omari, who lives in foster care with an aunt. Ron has never met Omari, having learned of his birth after being incarcerated, but he regularly writes him letters and previously sent him a video through RYCG. After graduating from high school, Ron attended cooking school. Although

Ron has been in jail “at least once every year since ‘91,” his older children all graduated from high school and he is involved in his grandchildren’s lives. When asked about taking courses at the SCI, Ron answered, “Nope. I just go to jail, do my time, go home.”

**Rundy.** Rundy has two three-year old sons, Akil and Deontay, born about a day apart. He calls them at least twice a week and writes letters. Deontay is “not really social” because he “is on the lower spectrum of autism,” so he typically says little on the phone. Akil has visited once, but Rundy has not seen Deontay since being incarcerated about 17 months prior. His “bond is stronger with Akil than it is with Deontay.” Rundy attended one year of trade school after graduating from high school; he is currently in a printshop class and on the carpentry class waiting list. He is eligible for release in fall 2023.

**Scho.** Scho has four children who live with their respective mothers, though the children know and see each other. Mo’nique is 14 and Deondre, Kayla, and Nyah are six. (Scho was upset that Nyah did not receive the DVD because her mother never returned the consent form, which he attributed to her “bouncing around” and living in a hotel room.) Scho was released from a “juvenile life sentence” at 19 but left the disciplinary school without a diploma. He passed the last two GED® tests during our study and was proud to be released in spring 2019 with his GED® diploma. He hoped to surprise his children by popping out of a box.

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

We collected data in three stages from November 2018 to February 2019. First, we observed while the teacher video-recorded fathers reading the book and adding a message. Our detailed notes described each father and the classroom setting, what fathers said to the child and mother (if applicable), book title and general content, reading style, tone, body language, and interactions with us and the teacher. Each researcher present (one or two) then typed and shared field notes with the team. The 18 videos lasted five to 70 minutes (22 minutes average). Although a few fathers stumbled over some pronunciation or more complex words, none had difficulty reading aloud.

Immediately after videotaping, one or two researchers interviewed each father in a classroom. Per SCI regulations, the teacher or principal were in the room or nearby. Although they were doing their own work, their comments during or after the interview indicated they were also listening. The participants appeared candid, since they shared details about their personal lives (both within and outside of interviews), though we realize that our roles as researchers may have unwittingly influenced their responses. To mitigate social desirability bias and reactivity threats (Salkind, 2010), we tried to be empathic, reassuring, and nonjudgmental. To check our understanding, we repeated to the participants what we heard and understood from our observations and their interview responses, and asked follow-up questions based on their responses (St. Jean, 2013). Moreover, we triangulated the data by using multiple data sources and asking follow-up interview questions based on video observations and initial interview responses (Mathison, 1988).

All but one interview (Antione) was audio-recorded and transcribed. (To enhance readability, we have removed false starts, repetitions, and some fillers from interview excerpts in this article.) Malik and Scho were interviewed two and three times, respectively, because they made multiple videos. The semi-structured interviews explored fathers’ pre-incarceration backgrounds, education, and literacy practices; relationships with children and involvement in their literacy, learning, and education both before and during incarceration; and experiences in the RYCG program and ensuing reflections on the program, among other topics. Although we could not photograph the scrapbooks (cameras are not allowed inside the SCI), we took extensive notes on their contents and also asked some men to read aloud the letters they wrote to their children. Interviews lasted an average of 56 minutes. We also interviewed the teacher who implemented RYCG and the SCI principal.



We conducted follow-up interviews in February 2019. During the first interview, we asked fathers to tell the teacher if they heard back from their child about the video. One father was released shortly after the video was sent. Of the remaining 10 fathers, five contacted the teacher and four were interviewed. At the scheduled interview time, the fifth father decided not to leave his cell, even though he had been enthusiastic about RYCG and our research. The main interview topics included children's responses to the DVD, book, and scrapbook, how fathers felt about their children's reaction and RYCG overall, and what they learned from the program. Follow-up interviews lasted 38 minutes on average.

Transcripts and field notes were analyzed using content analysis (Patton, 2015). We began with codes derived from interview topics (e.g., pre-incarceration involvement in children's education) and created new codes to refine these topics and to capture other data (e.g., affordances of the video format).

### **Read to Your Child/Grandchild Program Components**

To situate the findings, we describe the program process and details about the book, video recording, and scrapbook. Altogether, 18 videos, 19 scrapbooks, and 21 children's books were mailed to 19 children before the winter holidays.

#### **Choosing a Book**

At this SCI, RYCG included eight hours of classroom preparation before recording. Fathers chose one of two children's books out of about 500 options. The books were sorted according to the publisher's age range, which some fathers (like Scho) mentioned was important for choosing a book. Subject matter also helped guide fathers' choices, both for fathers who knew their children well and those who didn't. For instance, Carl, having only met his daughter once but recalling her mother's love of fairies, chose a book about magic and fairies, hoping his daughter might share this love with her mom. Brandon chose *Corduroy* because it was a cherished childhood book and because he read it to his daughters before being incarcerated. Malik selected *Ms. Beard Is Weird* because the content mirrored his daughter's descriptions of fifth grade. Similarly, some fathers chose books that modeled important behaviors for their children. After choosing their books, the fathers could practice reading in their cells.

#### **Creating the Scrapbook**

The fathers spent most of the preparation time creating a scrapbook, an activity that tapped their creativity and imagination. The scrapbooks (construction paper covers with several pieces of blank paper inside, connected with plastic binding) included a combination of the following items: written messages or letters, photocopied activity pages (e.g., coloring), participant-created activities (e.g., house-building activity), photocopied text (e.g., famous ancestors), drawings, and original or photocopied photographs (with or without captions). Scrapbooks averaged five to 10 pages, though Carl's included 35 pages of letters, photos, and information about angels, gods, goddesses, and historical figures (e.g., Uriel, Artemis, John Quincy Adams). Some fathers sent additional items they had found, made, bought, or commissioned, such as a special feather, leather pouch, candy, card, or certificate. Aside from the occasional misspelling or minor grammatical error, none of the fathers appeared to have difficulty writing the scrapbook contents. As described below, the scrapbook allowed the fathers to build on their children's educational needs and interests and to be involved in their learning and development despite the distance.

## **Making the Video**

When asked how they felt while making the video, fathers often detailed an emotional endeavor. Jones confided that he was “getting a little choked up” while reading the letter to his daughter. He and several other fathers described themselves as feeling “nervous” or awkward during the recording. Rundy rehearsed reading the book “over 20 times in the cell just to get ready,” but despite his nerves and sweating, he “couldn’t stop smiling while I was reading because I know he looking [sic] at me.”

## **Adding a Personal Message**

Fathers directly addressed their children (and sometimes the child’s mother) at the beginning and/or end of the video, ranging from a few sentences to many minutes. Some fathers read these messages verbatim from the scrapbook, whereas others spoke extemporaneously. The fathers’ messages included affirmations and encouragement; information about the family; apologies and explanations about their incarceration; advice and moral instruction; emphasis on the importance of education, literacy, and completing school; and/or assurances of their fathers’ love, support and continued presence. For example, John expressed his pride at how helpful his son David was in his preschool class and told David to tell his mom “how great she is.” Scho read a personalized letter in his four videos and offered lessons from his own life. For instance, in his teenage daughter’s video, he stated, “The love I thought that I received from the streets only turned out to be pain. Always remember that real love comes from those who have your best interests at heart.”

## **Findings**

This section first describes how fathers were involved in their children’s literacy, learning, and education outside of prison and then during incarceration (apart from RYCG). When reading these findings, recall that RYCG may attract fathers who are already more involved in their children’s lives, although two participants had little contact with their child and three other fathers had a child who was a baby (or not yet born) when they were incarcerated. The next part elucidates how fathers used RYCG to emphasize the importance of education, to convey the value of literacies, and to tailor the scrapbook to children’s educational needs and interests. The findings conclude with data on children’s responses to the RYCG materials.

## **Involvement in Children’s Literacy, Learning, and Education Outside of Prison**

Fathers’ participation in RYCG should be viewed in light of their previous involvement in their children’s literacy, learning, and education. Nine of the 11 fathers noted varying degrees of involvement when not incarcerated (some had served two or more separate sentences).

**Literacy and numeracy practices.** Before entering this SCI, participants fostered their children’s literacy practices in various ways. Three fathers—Jones, Brandon, and John—mentioned regularly reading with their children (in John’s case, even during his wife’s pregnancy). Jones noted that although he didn’t do a lot of reading on his own, “I liked to read to my girls at least...three times a week” (he worked with his daughter on writing letters and spelling her name). Brandon described reading as a nightly occurrence for him and his daughters. He also recalled, “I used to take them to the library all the time.”

Other fathers used—or eschewed—technology as a tool for supporting children’s literacy practices. For example, Malik got his children “tablets so we could interact together and stuff on certain things,” including reading. Ron had bought some of his older (now grown) daughters the Hooked on Phonics program, describing himself as: “a big kid with it...Because I get animated with the stories. Like, the voices, the sound effects. I get into the book, because it

makes them get into the book.” Conversely, Brandon insisted that TV, tablets, and video games took his children “away from the outside world.” Instead, he took his daughters to parks and libraries and played dress-up with them.

Some fathers mentioned additional modalities for supporting children’s literacy, including singing and rhyming. Jones would sing “Eensy Weensy Spider” and “Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star” with his daughter. Rundy sang to his son as an infant and toddler: “I used to rap to him because I started writing music. I used to like perform my music for him.” El Jefe used singing and rhyming to help his son in school, particularly with learning fractions, since “it seems like that’s the only way he could memorize stuff, was through repetitiveness or being associated with a rhythmic pattern.” El Jefe found that his son responded to being taught math in a “different way,” just as he had when he was a child.

Scho also helped his oldest daughter with math, but used real-world examples such as teaching her “how to count money” and the “value of each bill.” Similarly, LaDiDaDi related math questions to real-life problems to support his child’s mathematical understanding: “I would relate these equations into...real lifestyle equations and stuff like that. And that would help him.”

**Education and schooling.** Beyond these literacy and numeracy practices, some fathers explained how they were involved with their children’s schooling. Although Scho did not read books to his daughter, he helped her with school. Each day after picking her up from school, they worked on her homework, “any little curricula activities we would do.” El Jefe participated in his son’s schooling by attending parent-teacher conferences. He would also “try to read certain stories that he had from class and...show him how to break down words into different syllables...I’m always trying to constantly teach him new things.” LaDiDaDi discussed the importance of helping his son in school (including visiting the school to follow up on his son’s behavioral problems), particularly because he did not get such support from his own parents.

### **Involvement in Children’s Literacy, Learning, and Education While Incarcerated**

During incarceration, many of the fathers tried to stay involved in their children’s learning, though some struggled to do so because of distance and limited communication.

**Literacy practices.** According to participants, the SCI visiting room has a family area featuring children’s books, games and toys, and DVDs. Since his older daughter can read, Brandon would have her pick out a book and read aloud. El Jefe utilized visits with his younger son to sing songs. He noted that although there are many books in the visitation room, it is hard to concentrate on reading in the chaotic, loud environment, with “other kids running around, playing around” and DVDs playing.

As many of the men mentioned, limited transportation and the difficulty of traveling long distances with young children make visits a challenge. Some of the fathers, then, devised other ways of supporting their children’s literacy practices. Carl Jung wrote letters to his daughter, while Rundy had his sons practice their ABCs and counting on the phone. Unable to continue their pre-incarceration practice of bedtime reading, John and his family found an inventive way to support David’s literacy development: David made his own small mailbox for mail from his dad. John sent his wife a weekly letter with seven flashcards for different letters of the alphabet. Each night, she put a flashcard in David’s mailbox for him to discover the next day. In the first interview, John noted that they had covered the alphabet and would be starting with numbers.

Brandon supported his children’s literacy by creating a book character. While in a county jail, Brandon created a character based on his dog, “Buster Brown,” and drew illustrations to send his daughters. He hoped they would come up with words for his illustrations to create a book together. He expanded on this idea in RYCG by drawing Buster Brown in the scrapbook.

**Education and schooling.** Communication with the children's mothers was a common way that fathers stayed informed about their children's schooling. In several videos, fathers mentioned what they knew of their children's schooling, showcasing their interest in their school experiences and also encouraging them to work hard in school and continue learning. For example, Scho mentioned Kayla's struggles with addition and subtraction and Mo'nique's dislike of history. John stayed up to date on his son's education by talking with his wife and receiving Individualized Education (IE) reports on David's literacy and speech progress. These detailed reports helped John see his son through the school's perspective, and during visits or phone calls, John emphasized the weaker areas noted in the IE report.

Despite his efforts, El Jefe found it difficult to remain current with his children's education, given limited communication and the pace of children's education. Thus, El Jefe often found himself "behind on" his son's education and assignments. In our view, such limitations make the opportunity for involvement through RYCG all the more meaningful.

### **Supporting Children's Literacy, Learning, and Education through RYCG**

This section describes how fathers used RYCG to underscore the value of education, to convey the importance of literacies and numeracy, and to tailor the scrapbook to children's educational needs and interests. The section concludes with data on how children used and responded to the RYCG materials.

**Importance of education and doing well in school.** To varying degrees, the fathers used the video, personal messages to their child, and scrapbook to emphasize the importance of education and schooling. In the video messages, several fathers made general comments about the value of formal education. Scho told Mo'nique to protect herself with knowledge and that education is important. Without education, he said, it's going "to get dark." He told her he passed his GED® math test and that he would take the science and social studies tests that month. As promised, Scho passed these tests before his release in spring 2019 with a GED® diploma, thus modeling the pursuit of education for his children.

In his message, Ron told Omari that he needs to do well in school, even though he is only two. "I know you will do well, and I promise it will get more exciting as you get older," Ron said. He noted that he too had to go through school, since he was made to finish by his mother and grandmother. In the interview, we asked Ron to elaborate on these remarks. He reiterated his attitude toward raising his seven now-grown children, all of whom are high school graduates: "I don't care what you do in life. School—you're gonna graduate. You've got to go to school... I pushed school. Because my mom always pushed it on me." In addition, he wanted his kids to graduate because he saw his friends struggle to find work without a high school diploma.

LaDiDaDi conveyed the value of education by reading *Class President* for his son Keon, who had behavioral problems at school. The book describes how Julio becomes a school leader. LaDiDaDi explained that "education is key....So now that Keon is getting older, I want him to focus on school....So kinda like with *Class President*, my son Keon kinda used to be like the class clown." He hoped this book would help Keon "get a different approach" or "vibe" to being a student, such as being involved with classmates, solving problems together, and showing leadership. LaDiDaDi was the only participant who explicitly linked the book's *content* to sending a message about education and learning. He underscored this message in his closing video comments: "I want you to really take heed about what the student [in the book] is going through. You know I always come to your classes regularly....Also, stay on top of your vocabulary and always read." His book choice reflected his belief that reading is "one of the cool ways to put something in somebody head, especially while they young."

In addition to inspiring his son to be a class leader and "installing" ideas in his mind, LaDiDaDi emphasized that African Americans must become educated to combat the "racial



slur” that they don’t read:

It used to be...kinda like a racial slur they used to say...Like if you wanna hide stuff from a Black person, just put it in a book. Kinda like we won’t open up a book. So now it’s kinda like, to break that type of chain....You’re African American. You need to try to educate yourself and read a little bit more. Because you don’t have to always learn from somebody. Sometimes you can just have a book and get the reading and you be learning stuff. And it just be like man, I just learned all this stuff just reading this book.

Scho encouraged his children to respect and listen to their teachers. In three videos, he imparted a variation of this advice to his six-year-old children: “Work hard in school and respect your mom, grandma, and teachers.” Similarly, the message for his 14-year-old daughter stressed school, paying attention in class, and asking questions when she doesn’t understand. Scho noted that she doesn’t like her math teacher, but “the world is built on numbers....People can lie, but numbers don’t lie.” These messages and the learning activities in the scrapbooks underscored the value of learning, working hard to school, and respecting teachers.

**Vehicle to convey importance of literacies.** Some fathers used RYCG to convey the value of literacies, in part by modeling reading. LaDiDaDi articulated this point, stating that when you are reading in the video,

they see, actually, you holding a book. And those images...kinda like install in their brain and they kinda stick with they thoughts of what they was thinking about. Like “Wow, that’s crazy, he’s holding a book and that’s my dad and he was reading it for me.” So it kinda encourage them to say, “I should pick a book up and read the book.”

LaDiDaDi argued that children *see* their father reading a book and these images *stick* in their minds, which then *encourages* them to read.

John was the one father who explicitly taught writing in the video. At the time of the study, David had been writing his name vertically. At the end of the video John told David how “good” he was getting at his letters and that once he learns his letters, he can “put a bunch of letters together and that’s a word.” He then wrote D-a-v-i-d on the chalkboard, saying each letter as he wrote it. He told David that is his name and underlined it.

Finally, several fathers expressed how RYCG shaped their views and hopes for reading with their children and being involved in their education. El Jefe remarked that the program:

did open my eyes a little bit with more reading. I don’t think I ever had bedtime story time [his mom did read to him at other times]. I think those would be one of the things I would be interested in when I get home with my son.

Similarly, Jones learned that reading to your children is “important,” “good for them,” and “opens their imagination at an early age.” He appreciated the book the teacher showed them with sample letters and items they could send to their kids and teachers, such as “a letter explaining that I’m incarcerated and I would like to be updated on her progress and where she’s lacking and where she’s exceeding.” Following these examples, Jones wrote a letter to his daughter’s preschool teacher, which would help him stay informed of her progress.

LaDiDaDi viewed the program—particularly the encouragement of reading—as a “big standout” and a way to help children stay out of prison and their fathers to “stay active” in their lives:

Like, read to your child...that’s just something that’s just installed to you like, yeah, let’s read to your child. Because if you really wanna stay active in your kid life and you don’t want them— You going through a trial and tribulation like this while being incarcerated, you surely don’t want your kid to ever have to come to the extent to you know, break the laws and stuff like that and you

know, unfortunately landing here in a prison like this. So any type of step-up tool as a father that you think that you can take advantage of, especially being incarcerated, is really decent.

In a variety of ways, then, fathers used RYCG to support their children's literacy practices and to reaffirm the importance of learning and schooling, in some cases targeting specific areas where children were struggling. The scrapbook was another way to reinforce these messages.

**Tailoring the scrapbook to children's educational needs and interests.** The fathers created scrapbooks that included photos (which taught children about family stories and relationships, sometimes showing relatives they had never met or rarely saw), photocopied pages from coloring books (both blank and colored by fathers), and other items described earlier. In addition, seven fathers included activities to nurture children's cognitive, academic, and socio-emotional development, tailored to their needs and interests. These items included the alphabet; math and counting; other learning activities such as matching and mazes; and activities on self-care, manners, safety, feelings, and the like. Some of these items were fathers' original creations.

John's scrapbook for David illustrated these types of content. John explained that "it's hard to get creative with things when it comes to a child when you're in prison. Because the environment sort of dampens your imagination and your creativity" and limits "exposure to my son, playing with him and stuff like that." Thus, John was initially "worried" about making a "book" in RYCG. However, the teacher offered ideas and examples, which inspired John to alternate pages of "task" (learning activities) and "pleasure" (coloring). He remarked, "I try to see what he's into right now and use that as our benefit in teaching him." For instance, John included activities that involved writing numbers, matching, calling 911, manners, feelings, and hygiene, along with two original creations (a maze and a house-building activity). The scrapbook reflected John's intimate knowledge of his son's development, such as his need to monitor emotions, interest in building, enthusiasm for numbers, and more. To reiterate messages about conduct, John gave David a certificate for being the "best son," telling him in the video that the certificate is a "high standard" and that David can be the best son by being helpful and polite.

Scho used the scrapbook to reinforce math. For his three first-graders, he wrote 1 to 100 and 100 to 1 in calligraphy-like penmanship. He explained his rationale: "I remember speaking to her [daughter] and I asked her to count and she was stumbling on her numbers...but I don't think she never practiced counting to a hundred." Since his 14-year-old was "having trouble with her math," he included math problems. By including these activities, he was "trying to think ahead a little bit as far as, you know, how I could possibly help them in any situation where, 'You remember that book I gave you? Try to look at it and study it...whenever you're having problems.'" These comments reveal that he saw the scrapbook as a teaching tool that could continuously support his children's academic growth, especially in his absence.

Other fathers included activities to stimulate learning. For instance, for 1-year-old Ajani, El Jefe colored "ABCs" and "gave them germ glasses," adding, "Maybe he can cut those out and wear those around the house. So I did some little activity like coloring pages and stuff that he can learn and actually just have fun with." El Jefe colored some of the pages (*Paw Patrol*, *Cars*, etc.) and left others blank "so he can try to mock the coloring pages that I did. So that way he has something to do [scrapbook] and something to read [children's book] and something to watch [DVD]." These comments exemplify fathers' intention to make scrapbooks that helped their children learn while having fun, particularly when combined with the video and children's book.

Fathers adjusted the scrapbook content for older children, who would have little interest in coloring, for example. Carl used the video and scrapbook to teach 11-year-old Chloe about their family lineage and famous relatives. Four of the approximately 35 pages were devoted to family history. In the video, he showed the scrapbook and read each page. After explaining that

their family is related to a notable pilgrim on the Mayflower, Carl said, "I thought you could go to school and ask your teacher about them. You can say, 'My daddy says I'm related to [famous pilgrim]. I told you we're special. We're very special.'" He then named and described three more famous relatives. The scrapbook included photocopied pictures of these historical figures and accompanying informational text.

In the interview, Carl related that he had previously written Chloe about their family history, which he "always grew up wanting to know and nobody told me." He offered personal and educational rationales for giving his daughter this information through RYCG:

I find it important that she should know that the family tree does come from Mayflower, it does come from [name of pilgrim]. We are related to Mr. John Quincy Adams, one of the presidents who descends from [pilgrim]. And I think she should know that. Not only should she know it educationally, she should know it because what it does is, it's just gonna make her feel very, very special. And that is my job as a father, is to make her feel like the most important little girl in the world. And there's nothing else that I can do, especially with an incarceration, but to do that... Whether she takes these things and takes my advice to bring it to her fifth and sixth grade teachers is on her. But I'm giving her the fuel to burn.

Carl posited that knowing about famous ancestors would make Chloe feel special and important. Since she lives in foster care and has only met her father once, knowledge of family history is crucial for strengthening family ties and her historical and geographic rootedness. Carl tied this purpose to a second one: to provide "fuel" for her education by offering historical information that teachers could use in the classroom.

**Children's responses to and uses of the materials.** Four fathers reported how their children (10 in all) responded to and used the video, book, and scrapbook, based on what they heard from the child and/or the mother. These data provide more evidence of how RYCG supported children's learning and literacy (and strengthened father-child relationships, a topic for a future paper). Fathers characterized children's emotional responses with terms like "ecstatic," "loved it," and "excitement." The videos sparked laughter and tears: DeShawn told Malik, "Dad, you're funny!" whereas Kayla told Scho, "I cried the whole video, Dad."

Some of the children watched the video repeatedly. John's son David, for example, was sometimes "determined to watch the video":

There's days where he just is like, "I want to watch the video, I want to watch dad."...And it allows me to interact with him without interacting with him, you know what I mean? While being away here. So I mean, that's a good thing.

Rundy's son Akil (age three) said, "Mom, run it again. Run it again." His mom told Rundy that Akil "just really been wanting to really, like, talk to me and see me. Because every time she tell him I'm on the phone, he be like, 'Give me the phone.' He want to talk to me." These examples illustrate how the video allowed the fathers to "interact without interacting"—to have a visible, audible presence in their children's lives.

The remainder of this section highlights how the RYCG materials stimulated literacy practices, including emergent literacy (early attempts at and knowledge of reading and writing; Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998). Several children were especially interested in the book. Keantay's mom told Rundy, "He's walking around all the time with the book":

When she told him that I was on the phone...he went and got the book [and] was like, "Hi, dad."...Then she said when she put the DVD on for him, first he was just sitting there, then he seen me. And she said he smiled and looked and pointed at the screen. And then he ran and got the book and started looking along with it, pointing at stuff with his mom...He tries to read along with it.

Like, he'll ask her to read it to him.

Keantay (age three) "doesn't really talk too much" because of his autism, and Rundy hadn't seen him in about 17 months and had only met him a few times. Consequently, he was especially happy about Keantay's keen interest in the book—and in knowing and talking to his dad.

Other young children displayed emergent writing. For example, David now writes his name horizontally, which John attributed to his modeling of writing in the video: "My wife said he is determined on writing, you know. Like he does everything I do on the video....I also said in the video that this is stuff that he needs to know." Similarly, Ron's son drew in the scrapbook. Ron commented, "[Omari] loves the scrapbook. They said he drew in the scrapbook; they're trying to get it sent back to me....He made some drawings. He colored in the pictures....They were like, 'Yeah, he was trying to write in it and everything.'" These examples illustrate how the program fostered emergent writing for some of the younger children.

Older, school-age children were also interested in the books. Malik reported that Shaniya was inspired by it [*Ms. Beard Is Weird*], so she started going to the library and getting more books of what I got her and stuff....She said that she actually got the fourth book [in the series] now, *Goosebumps*....She's enjoying it all the way around. Although Malik was unsure how *Ms. Beard Is Weird* led Shaniya to *Goosebumps* books, he emphasized that the book piqued her interest in reading and using the library.

Several children shared the book, scrapbook, or DVD with non-family members. Malik's son, DeShawn, "put the whole collage in his book bag and took it to school with him and all that." He especially enjoyed the family pictures, some of which he had never seen. Similarly, Scho's daughter Kayla took her book to school to read aloud during class story time. Scho's son Deondre showed the scrapbook to his football coach (the scrapbook included football-related items) and they watched the DVD together.

Finally, Scho credited the video with "pushing the communication" with 14-year-old Mo'nique: "She set up her own little email thing to where now we email each other throughout the day because she has a phone now." Their email correspondence not only strengthened their relationship, but also constituted an interactive literacy practice.

The interview data show that fathers were touched by their children's enjoyment of the packages and felt a stronger bond with them. In conclusion, this quotation from Rundy offers one father's perspective about RYCG and its connection to children's literacy and learning:

It [sons' responses] made me feel like I want to do it again, like I want to keep doing it....It made me feel like it gives them the interest in books and stuff.... Especially when they [moms] saying that they [kids] keep looking through the book and want people to read them to them....It made me feel good. Made me feel real good.

## Discussion

As the first study of the RYCG program, this research contributes to the nascent literature on family literacy programming for incarcerated parents. In contrast to traditional family literacy programs, corrections-based programs also aim to help parents overcome the geographic, material, temporal, and regulatory barriers to talking and reading with children, which are key ways to cultivate learning in home and school. To be sure, such programs are not a cure-all for repairing the staggering educational, emotional, and other harms wrought by parent-child separation. Nonetheless, family literacy initiatives like RYCG offer a tangible way that parents can be present in their children's lives during incarceration.

The findings reveal multiple forms of fathers' involvement in children's literacy, learning, and education, both within and outside of prison. Before enrolling in RYCG at this SCI, most of the fathers had already taken steps such as reading to children, teaching reading and



math, attending parent-teacher conferences, helping with homework, playing word games, and singing and rhyming—and then did what they could within the constraints of prison to support their children’s learning. RYCG offered fathers a way to continue these efforts, or to initiate them with children they did not know well. As we have shown, fathers used the video, book, and scrapbook to emphasize the importance of formal education and literacies and numeracy, while also providing creative, personalized materials to nourish their children’s literacy abilities and their cognitive, academic, and socio-emotional development.

We acknowledge that due to selection bias, fathers who were already more involved and had more formal education may have been more likely to enroll in RYCG, as illustrated by the participants’ educational levels and the small number of participants compared to the prison population. Nonetheless, the findings suggest that these fathers’ participation in RYCG built on or invoked memories of their previous family literacy endeavors. For fathers who had tenuous or incipient relationships with their children, this program allowed them to use reading and literacy as an entrée to forging a closer relationship.

Although we did not hear about all the children’s responses to the packets, the available data offers compelling, preliminary evidence of how RYCG stimulated interest in literacy and practices such as emergent writing, reading, library usage, and sharing video and literacy materials with teachers, classmates, coaches, and family members. These outcomes are especially crucial for younger children, because early interest and involvement in reading and writing activities (i.e., print motivation) contribute to current and future language and literacy development (Dunst et al., 2011; Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998).

For their part, fathers emphasized that RYCG offered a way to “interact with your kids without being there,” as Malik explained. The program enabled them to be present—to provide moral, educational, and literacy support through material artifacts—despite the emotional, physical, and geographic constraints imposed by prison. These findings support Muth’s (2018) argument that reentry begins in prison: parents—and fathers in particular—do not suspend parenthood during incarceration. Rather, their role is reconfigured. As such, family literacy programs like RYCG can offer a platform for incarcerated parents to enact this role, particularly by modeling and encouraging literacy and learning.

Although the study did not focus on how fathers “do time,” the findings revealed that RYCG enabled fathers to invest their prison sentence with meaning by strengthening the parent-child bond and supporting their children’s learning in the present. That is, RYCG afforded the opportunity to punctuate their prison sentence with a real-life purpose: to send personalized, creative, literacy-rich materials to their children. In so doing, the RYCG activities gave parents and children something to look forward to. For the fathers who provided follow-up data, RYCG triggered iterative interactions, including conversations via phone or email, children’s continued use of the artifacts, and even a family visit. Although one of the program goals is to enhance parent-child relationships “upon release,” the data show that these benefits can also accrue while fathers are still in prison.

The findings and limitations suggest several avenues for future research. Direct reports from family members about how family literacy materials are used would be invaluable. Research is also needed on the shorter- and longer-term consequences of correctional family literacy programs for children’s educational and socio-emotional outcomes, parent-child relationships, incarcerated parents’ psycho-social well-being, prison behavior, literacy practices, and reentry. In addition, program outcomes may differ depending on program design (e.g., group instruction on literacy-related topics), program participants (e.g., mothers, parents with differing racial/ethnic, educational, and social class backgrounds), and geographic location (e.g., parents in urban prisons may live closer to their children and receive more visits). International comparisons with corrections-based family literacy initiatives would also be valuable, particularly in European prisons that adhere to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of

the Child, which upholds children's right to have a relationship with their parent (Muth, 2018).

We close with a quotation from Rundy that captures how fathers saw RYCG as a way to be a "positive part" of their children's lives:

I think that this is a really good program for people who are serious about being in their children's lives....If...your family can't get up here to see them and they can't bring their kids with them, I think this is one of the best programs to help people be not only just a part of their kid's life but a positive part of their kid's life and not just, you know, a burden.

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