

# SPOTLIGHT: Moms and Babies Program



*Allowing Infants and Incarcerated Mothers to Bond During Crucial Beginning of Life*

## Summary

The Moms and Babies program at the Decatur Correctional Center in Illinois is a prison nursery and community reentry program that allows incarcerated mothers to keep their newborn infants with them for a specified amount of time, and supports these women in developing and nurturing bonds with their babies through a supportive living environment and effective programming.

Post-release community reentry services are integral to the program. Following release from prison, Treatment Alternatives for Safe Communities (TASC) provides ongoing case management, home visits, and linkages to services in the community. Using a combination of pre-release services and post-release case management, the program builds solid foundations for strong family structures to continue upon release.

## Context

As of 2014, U.S. state and federal prisons held 106,232 women.<sup>1</sup> One in 25 women in state prisons and one in 33 in federal prisons were pregnant when admitted to prison.<sup>2</sup> The overwhelming majority of children born to incarcerated mothers are separated from them immediately after birth and placed with relatives or into foster care.<sup>3</sup> This separation disrupts opportunities for mothers and children to develop emotional bonds, with the likely result that the children will have emotional and behavioral problems.<sup>4</sup>

## How it works

The *Moms and Babies* program at the Illinois Decatur Correctional Center is a prison nursery and community reentry program that allows mothers and babies to bond during the crucial period of time at the beginning of a child's life, helps incarcerated mothers learn to care for their babies, and promotes successful community reentry following incarceration. The program is based on established research showing that the infant/caregiver

"Our role is to help moms become good mothers to their children... Many of the women have been victims of domestic violence and have never had healthy emotional relationships. We start by teaching them to value and take care of themselves."

– Deana Elmore,  
TASC Program Administrator

bonds in a baby's first year are essential for developing the emotional connections that foretell a child's social competencies in later life.

## Demonstrating Success

Between 2007 and 2016, only three of 78 participants in the Moms and Babies program returned to prison on a new charge within three years following program participation.

Women who participate in prison nursery programs show lower rates of recidivism, and their children show no adverse effects as a result of their participation.<sup>5</sup>

## Benefits of Moms and Babies Program

- Allows mothers and children to bond during the crucial period at the beginning of life
- Supports the building of strong families structures
- Helps mothers become healthier and more confident parents

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One of only a handful of such programs nationwide, the program incorporates both in-prison services for incarcerated mothers and their babies, and community-based services following release from prison. In-prison services include the facilitation of support networks, parenting classes, training on communication and relationships, healing of trauma, and preparation for parenting outside of the prison. As mothers are released from incarceration, TASC provides ongoing case management, home visits, and referrals to services and support in the community.

A key aim of the program is to provide mothers with training and hands-on experience that will help them parent their children in healthy ways when they return to the community.

### Eligibility

Women must meet criteria set by the Illinois Department of Corrections, including non-violent offenses only, no history as a parent with the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services, and being mentally and physically fit for the program. Women must be within two years of release and they cannot participate if there are objections from the biological father or immediate family members.

### Partners

The Moms and Babies program is a partnership between the Illinois Department of Corrections, TASC, and a team of community-based partners who work together to provide both in-prison and community-based services for mothers and their babies.

### About TASC and Its Center for Health and Justice

The name “TASC” refers both a program model and an organization. The TASC model (originally “Treatment Alternatives to Street Crime”) came about in 1972 with demonstration programs established to divert people with non-violent offenses out of court systems and into supervised drug treatment in the community. Building on the original model, currently there are numerous entities across the United States called “TASC,” operating independently of one other. They provide similar services in terms of assessment and case management services that link the criminal justice system to community-based treatment and recovery.

**TASC, Inc. of Illinois**, featured in this document, is a statewide, independent nonprofit organization, and the largest TASC program in the nation. Across Illinois and nationally, TASC promotes public health, examines the impact of sentencing policies, and advocates for alternatives to incarceration.

For information on TASC’s direct services, please visit [www.tasc.org](http://www.tasc.org). For information on TASC’s consulting, training, and public policy services, visit the Center for Health and Justice at [www.centerforhealthandjustice.org](http://www.centerforhealthandjustice.org).

Funding to offer free community programs comes from gifts, grants and donations. Many local foundations support Phoenix Multisport in their mission to help individuals rise from the ashes of their addiction and live a full life in recovery.

### Resources & References

1. The Sentencing Project (2015). *Incarcerated Women and Girls*. Downloaded from <http://www.sentencingproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Incarcerated-Women-and-Girls.pdf>.
2. Bureau of Justice Statistics (2004). *Medical problems of prisoners*. Downloaded from <https://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/mpp.pdf>.
3. Institute on Women & Criminal Justice (2009). *Mothers, Infants and Imprisonment: A National Look at Prison Nurseries and Community-Based Alternatives*. May 2009: Author.
4. U.S. Department of Health & Human Services (2001). *Effects of Incarceration on Young Children*. Downloaded from <https://aspe.hhs.gov/basic-report/effects-parental-incarceration-young-children>.
5. Institute on Women & Criminal Justice (2009). *Mothers, Infants and Imprisonment: A National Look at Prison Nurseries and Community-Based Alternatives*. May 2009: Author.