



PROJECT WHAT!

A program of Community Works

Project WHAT! (PW) raises awareness about the effects of parental incarceration on children, with the long-term goal of improving services and policies that affect these children. *WHAT!* stands for *We're Here And Talking* and refers to the youth who make up the Project WHAT! team, as well as the millions of other children in the nation that have a parent incarcerated. The program employs young people who have had a parent incarcerated as training facilitators. The perspectives of the youth are central to this project. One participant says,

“What I remember most is just missing [mom] tremendously. On days like my first day of kindergarten or my birthday it was always sad because she couldn't be there for me. Mother's Day was the hardest, because I remember buying her flowers, and then my dad telling me that I couldn't give them to her. It was these little things that affected me the most. Throughout her incarceration, I was fortunate enough to visit her and stay in close touch, but it is important to understand that most people don't have that. When a parent is taken away from you, there is nothing in the world that can replace them.”

PW was launched in 2006 by Community Works. In the first year of the program, the youth researched, created, and piloted a training curriculum for teachers and social workers. The interactive training provides participants with tools to more effectively serve children who have or have had a parent incarcerated. The PW team had reached over 5,500 people through 100+ presentations and trainings. Participants in our workshops are primarily social workers, family outreach workers, and teachers. The team has also presented to public officials, agency leadership, probation officers, attorneys, doctors, foster parents, CASA volunteers, incarcerated parents, and other youth. A few of the places we have presented include the San Francisco Department of Children, Youth and their Families Children's Summit; Casey Family Programs Annual “It's My Life” Conferences; Oakland Children's Hospital (during grand rounds); Teachers 4 Social Justice Annual Conferences; and Alameda County First 5. For a full list of past and future presentations, see our Calendar.

The PW team developed the Resource Guide for Teens with a Parent in Prison or Jail. The 80-page guide answers common questions that children have when a parent is incarcerated. It has an entire section that explains complex jail and prison visiting procedures in plain language. It also includes compelling stories written by youth, along with a CD of the stories read aloud. More than 4,500 copies of the guide have been distributed since May 2007. It is available by contacting Community Works. It's also available through other community agencies, via free download on our website, and at conferences. Youth who want a free copy should contact the Community Works office.

Project WHAT! was launched with a generous grant from the Zellerbach Family Foundation. We have also received support from the June & Julian Foss Foundation, Youth Funding Youth Ideas, San Francisco Department of Children, Youth and Their Families, East Bay Community Foundation, Alameda County Health Care Services Agency, Youth Grants 4 Youth Action, Bank of the West, GGS Foundation, Morris Stulsaft Foundation, Sill Family Foundation, and generous individuals.

Community Works engages youth and adults in arts, education and restorative justice programs that interrupt and heal the far reaching impacts of incarceration and violence by strengthening individuals, families, and communities. (*Last updated: January 2012*)