

### **The Department of Early Learning's vision for all children in Washington State**

At the Department of Early Learning (DEL), we look for ways to support healthy, loving relationships between adults and children — the key to children's development. We do this by developing, implementing and coordinating early learning policies and programs that create safe, healthy, nurturing learning experiences for all Washington children.

### **A hidden population: Children and families impacted by a parent's incarceration**

There is a hidden, vulnerable population of children and families who deal with the daily reality of a parent behind bars. About 80 percent of incarcerated offenders in Washington are parents, with about 29,000 dependent children. If federal and local jail systems were included, the number would increase.

Research indicates that offenders who build durable family relationships are less likely to reoffend, and their children are more likely to achieve success in school and life, and not become offenders themselves.

### **How does DEL support families impacted by incarceration?**

As part of an extended team with the Department of Corrections, DEL works to support children and families affected by incarceration and during the transition from prison to community by providing:

- Case review for the DOC Community Parenting Alternative (CPA) screening
- Committee to ensure families are connected to appropriate early learning resources in the community
- Child care subsidy funding during an incarcerated mother's work and training hours at the Purdy Residential Parenting Program
- Opportunities for families impacted by incarceration have input on early learning issues through representation on the DEL Parent Advisory Group
- Ongoing training and resources to the Community Corrections Officers who work with

"We have found uses for the Early Learning Guidelines with offenders, families, community folks, and staff. We've sent copies to all prison facilities visit areas, and made them available for offender use. The Purdy Residential Parenting Program was especially interested in them. We have used the Guidelines in clarifying policy with visit staff, also. For example: defining infants and toddlers for purposes of allowing baby items into the visiting area. Great resource!"

*- From DOC Visit Specialists Staff on the Early Learning Guidelines*

offenders and families in the Parenting Sentencing Alternative

- Child care and early learning materials and resources to DOC visitation facilities
- Family visitation policy review to help inform practices that strengthen family bonds

**Where should we go from here?**

Continue finding ways to collaborate and partner across public and private agencies that promote a child's healthy development, life and early learning success, and that respects and supports the interests and needs of the family and caregivers during a parent's incarceration.

