

THE FORTUNE NEWS

A FORTUNE SOCIETY PUBLICATION • VOLUME XLVIII • JUNE 2016



FAMILIES

IMPACTED BY THE JUSTICE SYSTEM



The Fortune Society
BUILDING PEOPLE, NOT PRISONS

“THE DEGREE OF CIVILIZATION IN A SOCIETY CAN BE JUDGED BY
ENTERING ITS PRISONS” – DOSTOYEVSKY

Table of Contents

Introduction: A Fortunate Nineteen Years of Service	1
Eye on Fortune	2
Letters to the Editor	3
Three Faces of Fortune	4
On The Record: Notes from Our Founder	5
Family Services at The Fortune Society	6
Family Services Helped Me Rebuild Relationships After Incarceration	8
From The David Rothenberg Center for Public Policy	9
Impact of Child Support on Incarcerated Parents: Working Towards Solutions That Strengthen Families	10
Fortune’s Services Empower Clients to Go the Distance	14
NY Initiative for Children of Incarcerated Parents	15
Doing My Time on the Outside	17
NYC Department of Youth & Community Development: Fatherhood Initiative	18
STEPS to End Family Violence: What About the Women?	19
Housing and Family Reunification: Housing Alone Cannot Rectify the Consequences of Homelessness	20
Overcoming the Legal, Financial, and Emotional Obstacles of Family Court	21
Reunification in Public Housing: Reuniting Families Through the NYCHA Family Reentry Pilot	22
Employment Services and Families: Succeed? Him? It’s Possible, thanks to Fortune	23
Center Stage	25

Our Mission

The Fortune Society’s mission is to support successful reentry from prison and promote alternatives to incarceration, thus strengthening the fabric of our communities.

We do this by:

BELIEVING in the power of individuals to change;

BUILDING LIVES through service programs shaped by the needs and experience of our clients; and

CHANGING MINDS through education and advocacy to promote the creation of a fair, humane, and truly rehabilitative correctional system.

Contact Us

212.691.7554
info@fortunesociety.org

The Fortune Society
29-76 Northern Blvd
Long Island City, NY 11101

Walk-In Hours:
Monday through Friday
8:00 am - 4:00 pm



Introduction

A Fortunate Nineteen Years of Service



PEGGY ARROYO
Vice President of Programs
The Fortune Society

We once had a young man in our Alternatives to Incarceration (ATI) program whose father was serving time for drug involvement. The son’s grandmother was raising him and she urged him to go visit his father, but he refused. I encouraged the young man to visit him, even if he only went to pour out all the anger and resentment he felt— just meeting his father was all that mattered. The young man ended up not only visiting his father, but thanking me afterwards, and saying, “because of you I now have a relationship with my father.”

In fact, when his father was released, the son brought him to The Fortune Society to introduce him to our services in the hopes of finding him a job. Even after seven or eight years, one of them will occasionally check in to let me know how they are doing. The ability to form nurturing family relationships, combined with helpful community resources, allows people returning home from prison to flourish into successful individuals.

Fortune first hired me in 1997 as the Director of DAMAS, a gender-specific ATI program for women. Before this, I had worked for another

agency providing pre-release services for incarcerated mothers. At Fortune, I would now be working to prevent incarceration.

Research has shown that one of the most important ingredients to prevent recidivism is family reunification. Families often provide the moral support needed to change lives. In light of this, we initiated the Family Services unit at Fortune. To this day, Family Services continues to connect our participants with their loved ones by teaching parenting and interpersonal skills and providing them with the tools to become positive role models for their children.

“The ability to form nurturing family relationships, combined with helpful community resources, allows people returning home from prison to flourish into successful individuals.”

Children need the nurturing and support of both parents if they are to lead safe and successful lives. Family bonds provide the love and guidance needed for children to avoid crime themselves. Unfortunately, because incarceration can separate families for long periods of time, many children with criminal justice involved parents lack this crucial support.

The fathers program at Fortune addressed this very issue. Before coming to Fortune, I had worked with single parents, many of whom were previously incarcerated and separated from their children. At Fortune, I also saw that most of the young adults we worked with in our ATI program were also young fathers who came from families where their fathers were incarcerated. These

young adults were also involved with the criminal justice system that could lead to their incarceration—leaving their children without the love, support, and guidance of a positive male role model—repeating their own history. Thus, when we had the chance to obtain funding for a fathers program at Fortune, I was eager to do so.

However, starting this program meant that we would be working with dads who owed child support fees to the State of New York, and some felt that participation in this program would be the equivalent of “turning them in” to the Office of Child Support Enforcement (OCSE). To address this, we pulled together a group of fathers and asked for their insight on this issue. An outcome from these focus groups was the hiring of an attorney to represent fathers in child support, visitation, and custody cases.

Through their participation in focus groups, these fathers started our first fathers program, which we called “The Right Step.” Today, participants in Family Services continue to learn about the skills and values they need as parents. They also have opportunities to meet others who are overcoming similar obstacles at family gatherings that unite fathers with their children. Along with our partners, Fortune has truly been influential in encouraging the OCSE to understand that the fathers we work with are not “deadbeat dads,” but are fathers who are struggling to make a successful re-entry. OCSE has since instituted numerous father-friendly programs that support fathers’ engagement with their children.

Continued on page 16



Eye On Fortune

FORTUNE FALL BENEFIT OCTOBER 29, 2015



(L-R) Fortune President and CEO JoAnne Page, Former Chairperson Betty P. Rauch, Senior Vice President Stanley Richards, and Fortune Alumni Jerry Outlaw & Mel Rivers.

Nearly three-hundred supporters joined us to celebrate The Fortune Society's 2015 Annual Fall Benefit. The evening raised \$280,000 to support the critical services Fortune provides to over 6,000 formerly incarcerated persons each year.

We were thrilled to honor Bryan Stevenson, Founder and Executive Director of the Equal Justice Initiative; Francis Greenburger, Founder and President of the Greenburger Center for Social and Criminal Justice; and our client alumnus, Khalil Cumberbatch.

We were also honored to have New York City Council Speaker, Melissa Mark-Viverito, deliver special remarks.

Closing the evening, Fortune's Founder, David Rothenberg, was joined by 14 of Fortune's founding alumni. These were the men and women who had the courage, vision, tenacity, and hope nearly fifty years ago to create a space where people directly impacted by the criminal justice system could rebuild their lives.

GIFT OF THE FORTUNE SOCIETY ARCHIVES TO JOHN JAY COLLEGE APRIL 11, 2016



(L-R) Manhattan Borough President, Gale Brewer; Senior Vice President Stanley Richards; President of John Jay College, Jeremy Travis; Fortune's Founder, David Rothenberg; and President & CEO, JoAnne Page.

The Fortune Society celebrated the donation of its archives to the Special Collections of Lloyd Sealy Library of John Jay College of Criminal Justice. An extensive collection of photos, publications, and other documents were on display and chronicled Fortune's almost 50-year legacy of strengthening New York's communities through compassionate and comprehensive support for formerly incarcerated people.



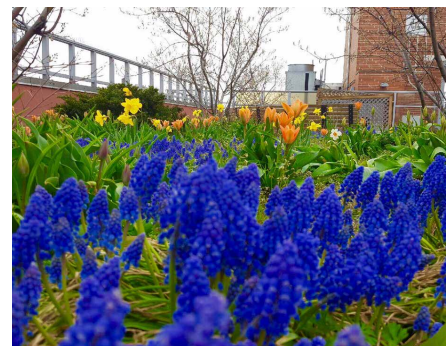
A photo of the abandoned former girl's school, St. Walburga's Academy of the Holy Child Jesus, before it was The Fortune Academy.

ANNUAL SKY BRUNCH APRIL 19, 2016



(L-R) Fortune's Manager of Food and Nutrition, Jaime McBeth, and Margaret Scherl from Just Food provided guests with a cooking demonstration where they made portabella mushrooms, chicken, and apple paninis.

Over fifty supporters, staff, and gardeners joined us for our Annual Sky Garden Brunch to celebrate the new season and long time gardeners. Brunchers were treated to breakfast paninis and special remarks by Fortune staff and Sky Gardeners Barbara Biscaino and Mya Bryant. The event wrapped up with a cooking demonstration by Margaret Scherl from Just Food and a tour of the Sky Garden. The rooftop Sky Garden is located at Castle Gardens, Fortune's green, mixed use development which provides housing and supportive services to clients and affordable apartments for the West Harlem Community.



Flowers blooming at the Sky Garden.

Letters to the Editor

THERE IS ALWAYS HOPE

Dear Editor,

I am serving a life sentence for a crime I committed while under the influence of crack cocaine. From the time I was 6 years old, it has been a rollercoaster of criminal behavior induced by one drug to another.

Now here I stand 11 years into my bid. I'm 46 now and stand proudly drug free.

I wish to acknowledge all the ones out there that feel life is over due to the tremendous weight upon them that there is always hope if you just believe it.

If you would print this letter along with this poem I've written, I would be much appreciative.

"BREATHE"

It's a given each day that passes people will shoot at you for whatever reason, what matters the most is your ability to approach the ever changing season.

If you allow adversity to cripple you along your path, you're sure to lie stagnant; for you know not yet how to do the math.

When it is time to pick up the pieces and move along, it is wise that you realize your purpose and how Jesus has set the tone.

Man it's simple life is nothing but an equation of sort, how you add, subtract and divide will determine if you're ready to face the higher court.

Michael Strickland
Baldwin State Prison
Hardwick, Georgia

SERVE MY COUNTRY WITH PRIDE ONCE AGAIN

To Whom It May Concern,

I once served my country proudly, as a navy veteran. I am now incarcerated, at High Desert State Prison. With your help, I will once again be able to serve my country with pride!

As you are aware, our country is looking for solutions to difficult problems that continue to plague our society! And therefore burden our taxpayers.

As a navy veteran and prisoner but more importantly, as a human being I have come up with a workable solution. Does it matter where the ideas come from? Here are some ideas that we can bring to the public's attention:

Cause: Pass a bill that would allow the Board of Prison Hearings, to parole an inmate from prison if he or she can present an idea to the board that would benefit society in a positive way.

Effect: Such a bill on California's large inmate population, would turn all prisons in California into "think-tanks" where some of the most "creative and innovative" minds in prison would focus on ideas that benefit society. The effect of such a bill, would also lead to an immediate drop in prison violence against staff and inmates.

Implementation: This can be done by expanding the present college and work related programs.

Regal Robinson
High Desert State Prison
Susanville, California

EXCERPT: VISITATION IS KEY TO STRONG FAMILY TIES

To Whom It May Concern,

... Both the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) and the Board of Prison Hearings (BPH) encourage and require that "inmates must have, keep, and maintain positive, strong, supportive, and productive family ties." This demand is made impossible to achieve and maintain. The main reason is that the wife is the primary support, and the way to maintain a lasting marriage is through intimacy and only through family visitation can be maintained. This rings true for us prisoners and this is why 80% to 95% of our marriages end in divorce court. Where I ask is their assistance to help us maintain the above mentioned requirement by CDCR and BPH.

First CDCR took away our family visitation rights even when the visit was with a family member such as mother, father, brother, or sons and daughters. With regular visitation being so crowded and no privacy, and not a place one can easily cry or spill one's heart to another loved one, again intimacy is key. It is only through family visitation that even a non-lifer can maintain the productive family ties one needs. The argument that drugs are brought in this way is pure deflection against the lifer since the lifer maintains as much better record while inside than that of the non-lifer.

Gary Lynn Gilbert
San Quentin State Prison
San Quentin, California



Three Faces of Fortune



DIANA CARO
Communications Intern

My name is Diana Caro and I am a Communications intern at The Fortune Society. I discovered Fortune through my Art of Social Commentary course this semester at Pace University. The objective of the course was to create a final art project that contributes to social change and comments on the issue of incarceration.

After working for a few weeks, I was inspired by Fortune's mission of wanting to "build people, not prisons." For my Arts of Social Commentary project, I wanted to focus on educating privileged people on the complexity and injustice of our prison system.



I gathered research from interviews with clients as well as anecdotes from news articles I read while working at Fortune's office. The end result led me to create an interactive board game that would represent the process of what it is like to go through the prison system while also showcasing how highly flawed and racist the system can be. ■



ASIA PORTER
Client

In July 2015, after spending one week at Rikers Island, I came to The Fortune Society through the Alternatives to Incarceration (ATI) program. Mother's Keeper, an ATI group for clients who had incarcerated mothers, helped me to start discovering my true self.

I always felt that my mother's incarceration helped lead me to Rikers, and Mother's Keeper allowed me to express my feelings about this through art. We would regularly discuss how artists and poets conveyed emotion in their works and applied these strategies to our own art. The program culminated with the creation of self-reflection masks, whose layers also symbolized our own development.

I am proud to say that Love Thyself First, an organization that supports struggling women, selected my mask for its art show. I also spoke about my mask to audiences there. Art is my passion, and I hope to attend art school and become an art teacher. But first, I am working to obtain my GED.

Without Fortune, many adolescents would be imprisoned rather than working to improve, and I am grateful that the ATI program gave me the chance to rebuild my life. ■



JONATHAN QUISHPE
Staff

Before I began working at The Fortune Society, I was homeless and surrounded by justice-involved family members. Naturally, I began following in their footsteps—until I found Fortune. I am now the manager of a residential team, helping others with their own transitions back into the community.

From the start, I was awed at how formerly incarcerated members of Fortune's staff had become role models for our clients. They judged no one for their past mistakes, creating a welcoming yet professional workplace environment.

Unlike shelters I have worked at, Fortune sees its clients as more than numbers. Fortune's staff becomes family for our clients and we consistently go above and beyond to meet their needs. We follow up with them even after they complete our programs to ensure their success.

While working at Fortune, I witnessed how our services change lives. I have worked with clients who once deviated from the right path but are now stellar Residential Aides. With our doors wide open, we welcome individuals who have hit rock bottom and guide them to become responsible, professional members of society. ■

On The Record: Notes from Our Founder

Fortune Plays The Nurturing Role of Family For Our Clients



DAVID ROTHENBERG
Founder
The Fortune Society

Three events took place during the early days of The Fortune Society that highlighted the significance of familial ties (or the lack thereof) for currently or formerly incarcerated peoples. On Christmas Eve of 1969, a man appeared at Fortune's future office. At this time, Fortune was only two years old and consisted of volunteers working from a single-room office. Everyone had already gone home and I was closing up. Prentice Williams, with a broad smile on his face, announced: "I missed all of the 1960's. There's only a week left. What can I do?"

He went on to tell me that the only letter he received during his 11-year incarceration was the "form letter" that Fortune started sending to men seeking parole. All we could offer was a handshake, moral support, and some guidance on housing and jobs. Prentice and I had dinner on that memorable Christmas Eve before he returned to the drug-infested Single Room Occupancy that Parole had provided for him.

I found it difficult to understand or even grasp the reality that Prentice was so isolated while he was incarcerated and that he didn't even receive mail. I remember thinking at the time that if I traveled all the way to, say,

Madagascar, by the time I arrived I would have had mail and packages from both grandmothers, at least three of my aunts, my sister, and my parents. In time, Prentice located a few relatives, but in those crucial first few months, it was the men and women at Fortune who played the nurturing roles of family for him.

The second event involved Bob Brown, who came to Fortune after serving 28 years in prison. Slowly, I learned his story. Born out of wedlock, he was abandoned and left at the New York Foundling Hospital. Raised in a series of state-run institutions, foster families, and orphanages, he told me that he had no memory of being hugged as a child. In his last few years at Wallkill Prison,

"How can I tell my daughter that I once killed a man?" There are no easy answers to such questions.

Bob Brown was one of a handful of men who joined a therapy group headed by a Chaplin, who was also a psychologist.

During those vital sessions, Bob opened up and discussed his fantasies of having a family. Eventually, Bob did become a husband and devoted father. He approached me and asked: "How can I tell my daughter that I once killed a man?" There are no easy answers to such questions. So I called a friend, a child psychologist named Eda Leshan, who invited Bob and me for dinner. Others at Fortune, specifically new parents with few parental guidelines, asked if they could also join us at Eda's. That first supper lasted hours and everyone insisted that the dinners become weekly sessions. To show you how vital those parenting sessions were, let me share a brief tale.



In those crucial first few months, it is the men and women at Fortune who play the nurturing roles of family.

20 years later, JoAnne Page and I hosted a party at Fortune and invited the children whose parents had participated in Eda's pot luck suppers. None of them knew how hard their parents had strived to give them something they never had. Bob, who initiated the sessions, had died. However, his daughter Phaedra, then in her 20's, told us that her father was a major positive influence in her life.

The other 20-year-olds shared that sentiment as they reflected on their parental guidance.

Bob also recalled an incident that had an enormous impact on him, which occurred in Green Haven prison. He had been locked up for 20 years straight with no outside contact. Not a single person in the world knew or cared where he was. One Sunday, a guard told him that he had a visitor. As he started to comb his hair and wash his face, he became anxious and angry that he had a visitor, interrupting his record of no outside contact.

When he reached the visitor's room, the guard led Bob (who was white) to an elderly black woman. She looked at the guard and said "that's not my boy" and Bob was told to return to his cell. He recalled standing there and thinking, but won't you visit with me even if I'm not your son? It was then he realized that he not only wanted family, but that, without one to support him in prison, he had blocked all of his feelings and emotions to survive. ■



Family Services at The Fortune Society

Helping Clients Build Stronger Families and Healthy Relationships



The majority of individuals coming home from New York State prisons (59%) have at least one living child. Given the large percentage of incarcerated individuals who have children, The Fortune Society has been working with parents coming home from prison and jail since our founding in 1967.

To meet the needs of formerly incarcerated parents, Fortune has developed an array of Family Services that allow parents to increase their financial self-sufficiency, reconnect with their children, and take steps toward becoming more deeply and meaningfully involved in their children's lives. We provide healthy relationships and parenting classes, support groups, consultations with our in-house Family Law Attorney around parental rights and child support, and case management. We also host special events for parents to enjoy with their children, including Back to School events, our "Haunted Castle" in West Harlem on Halloween, and our annual Holiday Party at our main service center in Long Island City, Queens. Our culturally competent Family Specialists offer supportive counseling, facilitate referrals, and help formerly incarcerated parents

in becoming actively engaged in the lives of their children and providing them with both emotional and financial support.

HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS & PARENTING WORKSHOPS

Our Family Specialists conduct an initial assessment of parenting strengths and needs for all parents in the program, including their history of relationships with their children and co-parents, education and work history, and a review of their support network, including family, friends and supportive services. They also



Fortune has been working with parents coming home from prison and jail since our founding in 1967.

administer parenting assessments to determine their knowledge of basic parenting concepts, and gather information on their current child support orders, child support arrears, custody, visitation, and amount of contact that they have with their children.

We then enroll parents into our Healthy Relationships and Effective Parenting training classes, based on the 24/7 Dads evidence-based curriculum. The curriculum focuses on the role of healthy co-parenting relationships; communication skills; sex, love and

relationships; showing and handling feelings; and recognizing and handling anger. They also develop nurturing skills and techniques to support their children's growth and development. Although the content is geared toward fathers, we also accept mothers into the program, and when needed, enroll them into special groups for women.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE & RELATIONSHIP WORKSHOPS

We have developed a special partnership with STEPS to End Family Violence (www.egscf.org/programs/steps) to facilitate workshops for parents to help them change their beliefs and attitudes about interacting with their partners, encourage an environment of mutual respect, and set expectations for the appropriate treatment of women in relationships. Thanks to additional support from Council Member Julissa Ferreras, we are expanding our partnership with STEPS to offer interactive presentations on youth relationship violence for our young participants.

FAMILY LAW ATTORNEY CONSULTATIONS

Fortune's in-house Family Law Attorney meets with parents one-on-one to advise them about their rights and responsibilities as parents, assist them with navigating Family Court and identify available resources. The attorney handles issues related to child support, paternity, custody and visitation, permanency hearings, and family offenses within any of the five boroughs of New York City. If needed, the attorney may also



Family Services hosts special events for parents to enjoy with their children, including Back to School events, our "Haunted Castle" on Halloween, and our annual Holiday Party.

provide legal representation for some clients in Family Court proceedings. The attorney also assists parents in resolving custody and family reunification issues. This is available to all parents actively involved in our Family Services programming.

PARTNERSHIP WITH NYC HRA OFFICE OF CHILD SUPPORT ENFORCEMENT

Fortune has established a strong partnership with the NYC Human Resources Administration (HRA) Office of Child Support Enforcement (OCSE) to provide educational workshops to parents on the rules governing the child support program and how child support helps families and children. NYC HRA/OCSE staff educate parents on how to facilitate access to their child support cases and also provides parents with information regarding the full amount of their child support obligation, current amount of child support owed under each order, and their child support payment history. NYC HRA/OCSE provides full information to participants about

child support arrears reduction options and payment plans, including the Modified DSS Order, Arrears Cap or Arrears Credit programs, which can reduce the amount owed by low-income parents who make good efforts to maintain employment and make consistent child support payments.

To learn more about NYS HRA/OCSE services, see pages 10-13, and follow these links:

- www1.nyc.gov/site/hra/help/child-support-services.page
- www1.nyc.gov/assets/hra/downloads/pdf/services/child_support/manage_your_child_support.pdf

CASE MANAGEMENT

Family Specialists at Fortune work with parents to address their unique family issues that were identified in the needs assessments, and then monitor their progress towards achieving their goals. All participants meet with their Family Specialist at least once per month for individual counseling. Through these

individual sessions, parents gain additional support in establishing and strengthening relationships with their children, increasing their financial support, and gaining tools to increase the quality of their engagement with their children. Parents with active NYC Administration for Children Services (ACS) involvement are assigned to meet with the Family Services social worker to receive specialized counseling to address these child welfare issues as needed.



FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT FORTUNE'S FAMILY SERVICES, please contact Virginia Lasoski-Nepa at vlnepa@fortunesociety.org or call 347-510-3619. ■

Fortune is extremely grateful to our funders who support our Family Services programming, including the NYC Department of Youth & Community Development (DYCD) and NYS Division of Criminal Justice Services (DCJS).



Family Services Helped Me Rebuild Relationships After Incarceration



DENZEL MENTER
Former Client
The Fortune Society

If there was one word to describe my life before coming to The Fortune Society, it's "confusion." Prior to my arrest in 2014, I was stuck in between doing good and doing bad. I was enrolled in college but still hanging out with gangs. I had a passion for the digital arts but still carried guns. My situation was contradictory and didn't make sense.

I was struggling with wanting to become a positive contributor to society, but I feared what people around me would think if I changed. Even though changing was right for me, I still did things just to fit in.

My first contact with the criminal justice system occurred for possession of a firearm in August of 2014. I was imprisoned at Rikers Island for a year. Because I was gang-affiliated, I had to follow certain rules to make sure I stayed on the right side and avoided dangerous rivalries with other gang members. I had to stay focused on my

ultimate goal of leaving prison and kept in mind that once I returned home, I'd be able to work on changing my life without interference.

After Rikers, I was denied by every other ATI program that my attorney found—except Fortune. Fortune saw a certain determination and seriousness in me. They knew that, like many of its clients, I just needed the right tools and direction to transform my life.

The Fortune Society gave me the resources to act on my desire to change and helped me choose the path that was

"Fortune's staff gave me hope and emphasized how important it was for Selena to have a father in her life."

right for me. As a parent and full-time student at Bronx Community College who successfully mended relationships with his family, I can say that Fortune was right to believe in me.

I first came to Fortune at the age of 21. One of the first services I used was



Denzel Menter and his Counselor John Cleaver.

the Family Services program. This program was especially life-changing because it helped me improve my estranged relationship with the mother of my two-year-old daughter, Selena.

When I left Rikers, Selena's mother wanted nothing to do with me. I tried using every possible means of contacting her— phone calls, texts, Facebook, visiting in person— but she wouldn't answer or let me see my child. I wanted to visit Selena, but I did not know how to go about handling the situation with her mother. I was ready to give up, but thankfully, Fortune's staff gave me hope and emphasized how important it was for Selena to have a father in her life.

Fortune's Family Services program taught me strategies to effectively communicate with Selena's mother. By the time I completed the program I learned to calmly talk matters through with her rather than responding impulsively. Angel Gonzalez from Fortune's Anger Management program also helped me communicate with Selena's mother. I used to have issues controlling my anger, but Angel taught me the importance of evaluating a situation before reacting—a strategy that I will always use.

Slowly, my relationship with Selena's mother improved, and I now see my daughter almost every weekend. When the weather is nice, Selena and I go

Continued on page 16

From The David Rothenberg Center for Public Policy

Fortune Champions Alternatives to Incarceration to Keep Families Together



RONALD DAY
Associate Vice President of Policy
The Fortune Society

The Fortune Society has a reputation for providing model services to people who come into contact with the criminal justice system. These services are essential for increasing public safety, promoting self-sufficiency, and reducing the harm associated with incarceration. While I am delighted that Fortune has come to serve over 6,000 people a year, I am also thrilled that we remain committed to the advocacy work that was the genesis of Fortune.

In 1967, David Rothenberg became inspired to advocate for people who, by virtue of having been convicted of a crime, received little in the way of government support. Drug addiction and incarceration had, in many instances, eroded job skills, severed community ties, and fractured family bonds. Thus, before he formed Fortune, David made a commitment to help address these issues. He trusted that the people who showed up at his theater office wanted and deserved another chance, and that they were worthy of jobs, unified families, safe and affordable housing, higher education, vocational training,

and adequate medical treatment. In essence, David was advocating for equality, fairness, and justice, which was rarely meted out in poor, minority communities.

This same spirit that spurred David to action in 1967 is also alive in the advocacy work done by Fortune today. As the old saying goes, "the more things change, the more they stay the same." Indeed, the need to advocate against harmful policies is as great now as it was when Fortune was conceived. As our criminal justice system has expanded, so too have the policies that increase the likelihood of people reoffending, remaining in perpetual association with the system away from their families and communities.



Fortune advocates against housing policies that infringe on the rights of people with criminal records to reside with their loved ones.

In recognition of the work done by David, Fortune named its policy center in his honor. The policy center has embraced the notion that service provision and advocacy go hand in hand. For that reason, Fortune consistently advocates against housing policies that infringe on the rights of people with criminal records to reside with their loved ones and visiting policies that curtail interaction with

people detained in jail, especially between parents and their children. Further, Fortune continues to champion alternatives to incarceration, so that people can remain in the community without stigmatizing convictions or without custodial sentences. We also advocate for those who are often denied parole because we believe they pose minimal to no risk to public safety.

The policy center, continuing the legacy that David established almost 50 years ago, challenges policies that damage families trying to recuperate after entanglement in the criminal justice system. Because the family is the most important institution in our society and no member of any family is infallible, we need to heed Mark V. Olsen's directive: "At the end of the day, a loving family should find everything forgivable."

Indeed, far too many families are struggling to be whole (or be whole again), and are having this process thwarted by ill-conceived and retributive policies. At Fortune, we assert that clients become members of the Fortune family. Thus, as we help them build their family ties, we in turn have a responsibility to serve them, support them in reaching their fullest potential, and treat them like family.

Ronald F. Day is Associate Vice President of the David Rothenberg Center for Public Policy (DRCPP) at Fortune where he oversees advocacy efforts to reduce reliance on incarceration, promote model programming for the incarcerated population, change laws and policies that create barriers for successful reintegration, and foster a just and equitable criminal justice system. ■



Impact of Child Support on Incarcerated Parents: Working Towards Solutions That Strengthen Families

PART I: The Effect of Child Support Debt on Incarcerated Noncustodial Parents and Their Families



FRANCES PARDUS-ABBADESSA
Executive Deputy Commissioner
Human Resource Administration,
Office of Child Support Enforcement

Child support is a crucial income support for families—a “hidden social safety net” that every year lifts a million children out of poverty.

The benefits noncustodial parents get from paying formal child support are less widely known but just as real. Studies suggest that fathers who pay child support are more likely to engage with their children, maintain employment, and have a healthy relationship with their child’s other parent.

Unfortunately, for many incarcerated parents, the benefits of child support can be hard to see. As we at the New York City Human Resource Administration’s Office of Child Support Enforcement (OCSE) have learned from years of working with incarcerated noncustodial parents, both directly and with partners such as The Fortune Society, child support often feels like just another barrier keeping incarcerated parents from stabilizing their lives.

Though the exact numbers are unclear, one estimate suggests that about a quarter of the prison population has an open child support order. The number of children whose mother or father is incarcerated is somewhat clearer, and the scale of the problem is staggering. A 2010 study by the Bureau of Justice Statistics estimated that 1.7 million children had an incarcerated parent, a figure that had grown by 80% between 1991 and 2007.

The trauma of having a parent who is incarcerated disproportionately affects communities of color. African-American children are over seven times more likely than white children to have a parent in prison and Latino children more than two times as likely. Research by the Annie E. Casey Foundation found that 86% of the children with incarcerated parents were under the age of 10.

“When you are in the justice system, nothing changes about your child support situation unless you make it happen. The child support you have to pay every month stays the same. Any child support debt you have gets bigger by the day.”

Often, as the federal Office of Child Support Enforcement points out, these parents had child support orders in place before being incarcerated and were already supporting their children financially. With the noncustodial parent in prison, the custodial parent loses a critical income support for the child.

Meanwhile, the noncustodial parent’s child support order continues to charge. The inevitable result is debt—and lots of it.

One study of incarcerated and formerly incarcerated noncustodial parents in Massachusetts found that the average incarcerated individual with a current child support order entered prison with over \$10,000 in child support debt. If they served the average sentence for incarcerated individuals in Massachusetts state prisons, they could expect that amount to double.

Until relatively recently, incarcerated noncustodial parents could do little to address their mounting debt. A patchwork of laws and practices meant that incarceration was widely viewed as a form of “voluntary unemployment” and therefore not sufficient grounds for changing a child support order.

That view has changed gradually over the last decade and now a majority of states allow incarcerated people to change their child support order.

New federal rules set to take effect in 2017 would take this trend further by formally recognizing incarceration as involuntary unemployment.

Even noncustodial parents who have child support orders that can be changed rarely do so, in part because of the complexity of the process, which varies from state to state. In New York, for example, child support orders are issued by the Family Court and changes to them have to go through the usual court process of filing a petition and going to a hearing with a court official (This process is simplified for noncustodial parents in New York City whose children are receiving cash assistance. For more information, see page 12-13).

To simplify this process, some advocates, policy makers, and researchers have argued that child support orders should be automatically suspended when a noncustodial parent is incarcerated. A 2012 report from the University of Wisconsin’s Institute for Research on Poverty found that when Milwaukee tried out a policy like this, not only did noncustodial parents leave prison with less debt, they ended up paying more child support.

One other bit of good news is that, according to a 2015 report to the National Institute of Justice, child support debt is actually linked to a lower rate of recidivism. But formerly incarcerated noncustodial parents still end up facing all the other barriers that child support debt can pose.

Perhaps the most crucial of these is the distance debt can put between parents and their children. Child support debt can also exacerbate or create conflicts between the noncustodial and custodial parents, introducing stress into the lives of children that are already traumatized by having an incarcerated parent.

For noncustodial parents and those who serve them, the best solution is engagement. In New York City that means contacting OCSE to get up-to-date information about the current child support program, including our debt-reduction programs (see pages 12-13 for more information) and our employment program, STEP.

For more than a decade STEP has helped connect noncustodial parents to employment and many successful STEP participants were formerly incarcerated. Community-based organizations can also help by connecting with OCSE’s Child Support Snapshot, which can give noncustodial

Lower Your Child Support Debt and Child Support Payments

Right here in Rikers

For debt owed to, and current orders payable to, the
New York City Department of Social Services

No cost No surprises Just help

When you are in the justice system, **nothing changes about your child support situation unless you make it happen.**

- The child support you have to pay every month stays the same.
- Any child support debt you have gets bigger by the day.

To date, for noncustodial parents inside and outside of Rikers, we have already:

- **Lowered** the child support debts of 3,596 noncustodial parents by a total of \$40 million, for an average of **\$11,000 less per case.**
- **Lowered** the average child support payment of 303 noncustodial parents from \$356 per month to **just \$34 per month**

We can help with other child support issues as well.

Make it happen. Talk to us today.



parents up-to-date information about their child support case and ideas for what to do next.

Addressing child support issues can benefit noncustodial parents financially

and personally. Above all else, we hope that it will help them build a strong, lifelong relationship with their children. ■



PART II: Bringing Child Support Services Directly into Criminal Justice Facilities

Our fundamental mission at the New York City Human Resource Administration’s Office of Child Support Enforcement (OCSE) is to put children first. As one of the strongest anti-poverty programs in the country, we believe that reducing child support debt and setting child support orders at a level that noncustodial parents can really pay are clear extensions of that mission. Our experience, supported by years of research, is that noncustodial parents want to support their children, financially and otherwise. What we have to do is find ways to clear away as many barriers as we can that might be keeping them from doing that.

Our strong partnership with The Fortune Society gives us invaluable opportunities to help clear those kinds of barriers. For many years OCSE outreach specialists have delivered presentations and had one-on-one consultations with parents in The Fortune Society’s Long Island City Office. These meetings not only give a chance to share information about our program and try to connect parents to our services, they also let us place child support in its proper light as a service that exists to help both mothers and fathers, whether as custodial or noncustodial parents.

OCSE has similar partnerships with other prominent criminal justice nonprofits and with city, state, and federal criminal justice facilities. In fact, every week OCSE outreach specialists visit Rikers Island to talk with incarcerated individuals about their child support cases.

Some of these parents come to us because of word of mouth. Some because we called them down after seeing that they were expected to continue to pay hundreds of dollars

“Our experience, supported by years of research, is that noncustodial parents want to support their children, financially and otherwise. What we have to do is find ways to clear away as many barriers as we can that might be keeping them from doing that. Our strong partnership with The Fortune Society gives us invaluable opportunities to help clear those kinds of barriers.”

a month in child support or had built up thousands of dollars—often tens of thousands—in child support debt. Others come to us through referrals from one of the organizations across that city that we have partnered with to serve custodial and noncustodial parents.

Between early 2012 and the end of 2015, OCSE conducted over 2,400 of these one-on-one consultations in Rikers alone. Alongside these, OCSE outreach specialists were also making regular trips to other criminal justice facilities in the New York City area, including biweekly visits to the Queensboro Correctional and Edgemcombe Residential Treatment Facilities, monthly visits to the Metropolitan Correctional Center, and quarterly visits to the Metropolitan Detention Center.

In every case we give incarcerated individuals information about how much money they are expected to be paying in child support and how much child support debt they owe. We make sure they know that child support orders keep charging during incarceration. As a poster we put up in Rikers explains: “When you are in the justice system, nothing changes about your child support situation unless you make it happen. The child support you have to pay every month stays the same. Any child support debt you have gets bigger by the day.”

The goal of these visits is more than educational. Every time we talk to an incarcerated person, we check to see whether they qualify for one of our programs to reduce child support debt or lower an ongoing child support order.

Soon those programs will include a formal process for helping noncustodial parents through the relatively complex process of filing a petition with the court to lower their child support order. For now, two programs we find especially helpful for incarcerated noncustodial parents are our Modify DSS Arrears (MDO) program and our Arrears Cap program.

- MDO allows low-income noncustodial parents who have at least one child currently receiving cash assistance in New York City to lower their child support order without going to court. To date over 330 MDO participants have had their child support orders reduced from an average of \$281 per month to an average of \$29 per month, a reduction of 90%. About one out of every six of MDO participants entered the program thanks to a consultation in Rikers.
- Without going to court, Arrears Cap participants can lower child support debt owed to the New York City Department of

How to Participate in These Programs

Visit Our Customer Service Walk-In Center with:	MDO	Arrears Cap	Arrears Credit
Photo ID	✓	✓	✓
Proof of income that falls below the New York State Self-Support Reserve. Examples include receipt of cash assistance (CA), Supplemental Security Income (SSI), Medicaid (MA), or possibly SNAP benefits	✓		
Most recent federal and state tax returns	✓		
Completed, signed, and notarized Affidavit of Net Worth (http://on.ny.gov/1PPQI5B)	✓		
Three most recent pay stubs	✓		
Proof of past income below the Federal Poverty Level (FPL). Examples include tax returns from relevant time period or proof of benefit status (CA, SSI, etc.)		✓	
Proof of dates of incarceration, if applicable. Examples include a letter from a prison or the Department of Corrections	✓	✓	

Note: For MDO, noncustodial parents currently receiving CA or SSI only need a photo ID



Social Services to as little as \$500, provided the debt built up while earning at or below the federal poverty level. Proof of incarceration can be one way that participants can demonstrate that they met the program’s income qualifications. To date Arrears Cap has helped about 3,600 noncustodial parents to eliminate about \$37 million in debt, with about \$482,000 of that total coming from participants in Rikers.

We have strong evidence that participation in both of these programs makes noncustodial parents more likely to pay their current child support—which means more children getting financial support.

Our Arrears Credit Program is targeted at people reentering the work force. Not constrained by income requirements,

Arrears Credit rewards parents who keep up with their current support payments by giving them credits on their government-owed debt of up to \$5,000 a year for as long as three years. This means they can earn a total credit of up to \$15,000 for each eligible case. To date about 700 noncustodial parents have reduced their debts by about \$1.3 million through this program.

Applications are available online for Arrears Cap (English: <http://bit.ly/ArrearsCapApp>; Spanish: <http://bit.ly/ArrearsCapSpanish>) and Arrears Credit (English: <http://bit.ly/ArrearsCreditApp>; Spanish: <http://bit.ly/ArrearsCreditSpanish>).

For a full list of OCSE programs and services, see our website at www.nyc.gov/hra/ocse or call 718-557-1399. ■

STAY CONNECTED



FACEBOOK:
facebook.com/thefortunesociety

TWITTER:
twitter.com/thefortunesoc

INSTAGRAM:
instagram.com/fortunesociety

LINKEDIN:
linkedin.com/company/the-fortune-society

YOUTUBE:
youtube.com/fortunesociety

WEBSITE:
fortunesociety.org



Fortune's Services Empower Clients to Go the Distance



ALPHONZO ELDER
Vice Chairperson, Board of Directors
The Fortune Society

Confusion, disorientation, new rules, and different customs are all issues one encounters when visiting a foreign country. Multiply these feelings by a thousand percent and you may just understand the anxiety encountered by an individual when he or she first enters prison. Prison is nothing like anything you have encountered before in your life. You must immediately adjust to new rules and customs which now govern your very existence.

Upon release from prison an individual is confronted with a new set of issues. For many they are returning to communities and families that have drastically changed during the course of their incarceration. Compounding the matter is that most individuals released from prison are still under the auspices of restrictive rules which may inhibit their reentry into society. In addition, an individual with criminal justice contact may have difficulty in obtaining employment, education, and housing due to their criminal record.

As the Vice Chairman of The Fortune Society's Board of Directors, and as someone with almost 15 years of workforce development experience with clients who have criminal records, I have personally felt the pain and frustration of many parolees as they attempt to reenter their communities. For this reason, I strongly advocate against unfair and discriminatory housing and employment policies which adversely affect people with criminal records. Restarting a life after years in exile is difficult enough; these additional barriers severely thwart their ability to successfully make that transition.



Alphonzo Elder running past Fortune's cheering squad during the New York City Marathon.

This past fall, I achieved two major goals: 1) I completed the New York City Marathon, and 2) in the process of running the marathon, I raised more than \$5,000 of unrestricted funds for the men and women who receive services from Fortune. Completing a marathon requires extensive training and hard work. I see this same dedication in Fortune's clients; they

"If we expect people to make a successful reentry into the community, they must have unfettered access to opportunities."

are determined to do everything it takes to successfully reenter into their communities.

Fortune's clients face numerous barriers every day of their lives. Their long-distance journeys require patience and resilience. We are their families and coaches in life, and it's up to us to help them keep that finish line in sight. It's our job to let them know they can go the distance no matter how frustrated their parole makes them or how tired and discouraged they get by not being employed or housed because of their criminal records.

Coming home after paying your debt shouldn't feel like you are still serving a terminal, lifelong sentence. If we expect people to

make a successful reentry into the community, they must have unfettered access to opportunities. That is our job at Fortune—to clear a path home for them and help unpack their heavy baggage so that they're not forced to carry it with them everywhere for the rest of their lives. ■

NY Initiative for Children of Incarcerated Parents Supporting Policies and Practices That Respect the Rights of Children & Youth



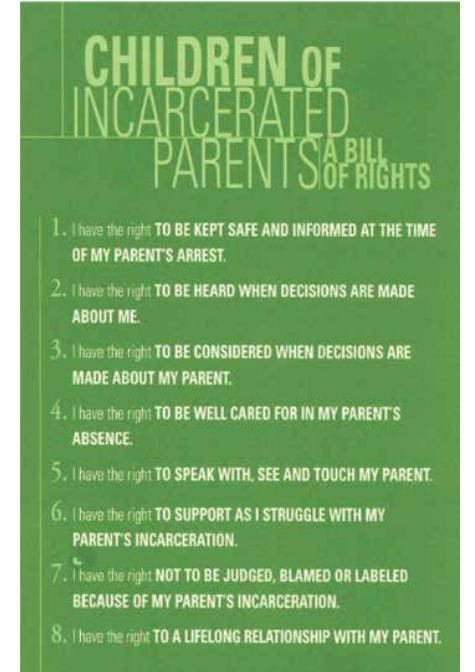
TANYA KRUPAT
Director, Center for Justice Policy
and Practice
The Osborne Association

The New York Initiative for Children of Incarcerated Parents (NYICIP) was launched in 2006 by the Osborne Association and is dedicated to supporting policies and practices that meet the needs and respect the rights of children and youth whose parents are involved in the criminal justice system. There are over 2 million children on any given day in the United States who have an incarcerated parent, and over 105,000 such children in New York State. This is an invisible crisis posing a significant challenge to children and families, and also an opportunity for professionals and community members to come together to ensure that children feel supported and have their successes nurtured during and after this difficult separation.

NYICIP, a project of the Osborne Center for Justice Policy and Practice, works in partnership with government agencies, community groups, and faith-based organizations to bring attention to the effects of a parent's criminal justice involvement on their children. It also aims to show how,

together, we can minimize the trauma of separation, support the maintenance of the parent-child relationship, listen to and learn from children and youth, and reduce the stigma and isolation that accompany having a parent arrested or incarcerated. The Children of Incarcerated Parents Bill of Rights, a document that youth created in San Francisco in 2005, guides NYICIP's actions.

The Bill of Rights calls for a transformation of the criminal justice system to consider children's needs at all points: from arrest to sentencing, jail and prison, and parole and reentry. This means implementing arrest policies that minimize trauma to children as the Albany Police Department began to do this past year; it means considering children and their parents' caretaking responsibilities at sentencing through Family Impact and Responsibility Statements; it means creating child-



should be mindful of the ways that mass incarceration affects our children and be "culturally competent" in supporting children non-judgmentally.

Thankfully, there are more resources now than in the past. Here are a few, and more are available at our website (www.osborneny.org) as well as the website of the Council on Children and Families at www.ccf.ny.gov.

Osborne offers a three-volume handbook series to help others better understand the diverse experiences and needs of children with incarcerated parents. Called *Stronger Together*, these handbooks are available on our website.

Sesame Street offers a toolkit called "Little Children, Big Challenges: Incarceration" that is helpful in



Osborne offers a three-volume handbook series to help others understand the experiences and needs of children with incarcerated parents. Called "Stronger Together," these handbooks are available at www.osborneny.org.

sensitive visiting policies and placing parents as close to their children as possible so their children can visit them. Enacting the Bill of Rights also means that all those who touch the lives of children (teachers, caseworkers, judges, pediatricians)





Continued from page 15

supporting honest, age-appropriate conversations between caregivers and children (or other adults and children) about a parent's incarceration. The toolkit consists of a DVD, guides for parents and caregivers, and a children's storybook (www.sesamestreet.org/parents/topicsandactivities/toolkits/incarceration#0).

"Echoes of Incarceration" is a group of young filmmakers who have personal experience with parental incarceration and are making poignant films about these experiences. You can view some of their films directly from their website: www.echoesofincarceration.org.

Daniel Beaty is another talented voice sharing his personal experience dealing with his father's incarceration. You can view his brilliant spoken word piece, "Knock, Knock," on YouTube at www.youtube.com/watch?v=L0jTeuBpn5s.

Additionally, the NYCIP offers two handouts. One is about creating safe spaces for children with incarcerated parents and can be found at www.osborneny.org/images/uploads/printMedia/SeeUs_SupportUs_Creating_Safe_Spaces.pdf. The other handout lists organizations, programs, and resources in the NYC and NYS area and can be found at www.ccf.ny.gov/council-initiatives/coordinating-council-children-incarcerated-parents-cc-cwip.

The New York Initiative for Children of Incarcerated Parents meets quarterly. To find out more or get involved, please email NYInitiative@osborneny.org. ■



Continued from page 1

Looking back, what is impressive about Fortune is how it develops organically. Just as we did when organizing The Right Step, Fortune grows by simply listening to its clients express their needs and responding with solutions and new programs. For instance, I remember a management meeting when housing was identified as an overwhelming issue for our clients. A year later, JoAnne Page, our Chief Executive Officer, took steps to address this issue by purchasing land and building the Fortune Academy and Castle Gardens in West Harlem.

Opening up Castle Gardens in 2010 was magnificent to watch and beyond anything we expected. It immediately became a safe haven for people coming home from prison and community members. It was a place where people could start taking the steps necessary to rebuild their lives.

It is because of Fortune's goal to help people rebuild their lives that my career at Fortune has been so fulfilling. I've been fortunate to have a job that not only gave me meaningful responsibilities, but allowed me to carry them out alongside a welcoming and warmhearted staff with a passion for helping others. We all understand that working at Fortune is more than just a job—we work here out of the genuine desire to support, nurture, and assist in rebuilding lives and welcoming participants home.

For nineteen years, I walked into Fortune everyday knowing I had the opportunity to have a positive impact on another individual and that something magical could happen.

While Fortune has changed the lives of many clients during my time here, it has also changed my own. I am honored to say that Fortune made me realize and appreciate all the blessings I've had in life, and it taught me to always be thankful, resourceful, and humble. ■



Continued from page 8

to the park or get ice cream. I try to do activities that two-year-olds enjoy, bringing her to the M&M factory or taking pictures with cartoon characters. I was absent for the first twelve months of Selena's life, so every minute I spend with her is important.

Thanks to Fortune, I not only became a responsible parent, but also a full-time student. Fortune's graphic design and photography programs guided me to pursue my longtime passion for producing films and animations. As part of these programs, we created our own characters and films on topics such as morality and issues facing the urban community. With the help of Fortune's education program, I enrolled in Bronx Community College and will major in Graphic Design and Digital Arts. One day I hope to produce my own video games, films, and even start my own company.

Fortune's services helped me develop skills that, most importantly, helped me to effectively communicate with my daughter and her mother. Its inspiring staff guided me through a turbulent period of my life and gave me the second chance I needed to make decisions that were best for me and my daughter. ■

Doing My Time on the Outside



BARBARA ALLAN
Founder
Prison Families Anonymous

When someone you love has been arrested, a feeling of helplessness and panic sets in. Society often accuses, ostracizes, and sentences a family member as well as the accused person. The family feels ashamed, embarrassed, and stigmatized. Often the person taken away is the family's sole provider. Everything around the family seems to fall apart.

It was a Sunday night in 1967. My husband was in the notorious Sing Sing prison, the reception center for all incarcerated individuals sentenced



Barbara's husband, Gene, her daughters, Tina and Brenda, and Barbara Allan at Greenhaven Prison during one of their first family days in the early 1970s.

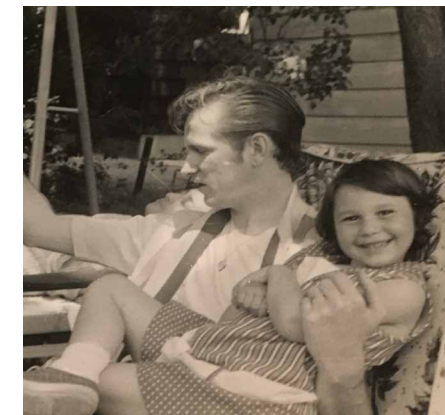
to state time. I was in my suburban home trying to raise our two young daughters, while doing my time on the outside.

The girls were sleeping, the chores were done, and I had prepared my lesson plans for the next day. I also finished my letter to my husband Gene, and it was ready for the mailbox. I took a "me" break to have a cup of tea while I scanned the newspaper. Suddenly, a caption instantly caught my eye. *The David Suskind Show* was going to host a panel of formerly incarcerated individuals disseminating information about the New York State prison system. It would air at 11 o'clock. Late for a school night.

"I was in my suburban home trying to raise our two young daughters, while doing my time on the outside."

I was so physically and emotionally drained by then. All I craved was bedtime, my chance to decompress, to escape the constant undercurrent of fear and anxiety that I endured every waking moment. But I was drawn to the TV and at 11 o'clock that Sunday night I took my cup of tea, made myself comfortable in the living room, and turned on *The David Suskind Show*— a decision that would impact the rest of my life.

I visited Gene as often as I could. Visiting Sing Sing was bearable. It wasn't far from my home in Hempstead and not only did they allow children to visit, but this was the only prison in New York State that allowed contact



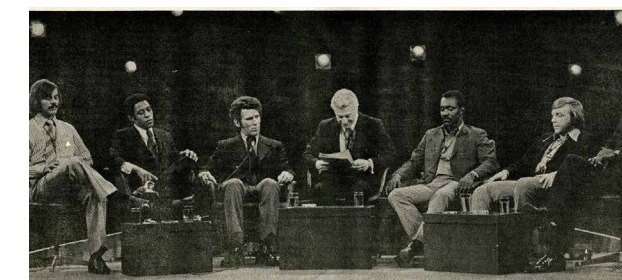
Kenny Jackson (Fortune's first counselor) and Barbara Allan's daughter in 1969.

visits. Before being sent to Sing Sing, Gene was detained in the Nassau County Jail, awaiting disposition of his case. There, if you were under 16, visiting was prohibited. After completing reception we were moved to Greenhaven. Here, families were separated by a ceiling-to-tabletop screen. Greenhaven prison only allowed fingertip contact.

I no longer allowed my children to visit. Here, they would see their father in a cage.

I found myself feeling as though I were falling into a rabbit's hole, into a world that made no sense, where nothing was as it should be.

Continued on page 24



David Rothenberg and four formerly incarcerated individuals appear on the "David Suskind Show" in 1968.



NYC Department of Youth & Community Development

Fatherhood Initiative



Since 2002, the Department of Youth & Community Development (DYCD) has been committed to enhancing young people's development through programs that encourage fathers to become personally involved with their children and relate to their co-parents. DYCD's Fatherhood Initiative helps fathers reconnect with their children and develop essential parenting skills by helping each participant (1) increase engagement and responsibility in his relationship with his child/children; and (2) provide material and financial support to his child/children. DYCD's program is informed by studies that show that children with involved fathers are less likely to get into trouble at home, school, or in the neighborhood, and that an active and nurturing style of fathering is associated with better verbal skills for infants, greater patience for toddlers, and better intellectual functioning and academic achievement among adolescents. Children with involved fathers are more likely to exhibit self-control and pro-social behavior.

The circumstances confronting non-custodial fathers must be addressed in order for them to establish positive, healthy and supportive relationships with their children. These can include: reconciling the roles of adolescence and fatherhood; surmounting challenges such as unemployment or homelessness; and addressing difficulties resulting from absence due to incarceration and reentry. To do this, DYCD has three program options to address the particular needs of the target populations: young fathers aged 16 – 24 years; fathers aged

over 24 years; and fathers with prior involvement in the criminal justice system. Programs help dads by providing them and their children with up to six months of case management, follow-up services as needed for up to one year, and service plans that address five core areas: parenting skills development, effective co-parenting with the child's guardian, employment/education, child support and child visitation/placement. Services include:

- parenting skills classes
- individual and family counseling
- assistance with child support and arranging child visitation
- mediation and conflict resolution training
- employment counseling and referrals; HSE and ESOL referrals
- father-to-father mentoring

DYCD's Fatherhood Initiative partners with the citywide fatherhood collaborative NYC DADS, and for the past several years has coordinated events to celebrate fatherhood and motherhood:

- DYCD Cornerstone and Fatherhood programs have previously collaborated at Cornerstone Community Centers to host "Mother's Day Recognition" events. Fathers and their children prepared Mother's Day cards or other gifts for the children to present to their mother or female caregiver.
- DYCD hosts Commencement Exercises every year, to recognize fathers who successfully completed their

participation at any of our funded Fatherhood programs.

- In prior years, DYCD partnered with the Brooklyn Nets and starting point guard Deron Williams' Point of Hope Foundation, to recognize Dads Take Your Child to School Day. More than 100 fathers/father-figures and their children walked from the Ingersoll Community Center (home to a Cornerstone program) to PS 67, PS 46, and PS 20 in Brooklyn. A special assembly was held at PS 67 that included commissioners, the schools chancellor, the New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) chair, Brooklyn Nets CEO, and other Nets players, after which all 300 students received school bags and supplies, courtesy of the Point of Hope Foundation.
- Every year, on the day before Father's Day, DYCD hosts an annual Father's Day event, during which program participants and their families enjoy a day of family and fun. The events have taken place at the Intrepid Sea, Air & Space Museum, SONY Wonders, Harlem Bowling Lanes, Coney Island Aquarium, New York Transit Museum and the Queens Zoo, among others.

The Fatherhood Initiative is in its ninth year, and we anticipate our 2016 Fatherhood event will host at least 500 fathers, father figures and families.

To learn more about the Fatherhood Initiative, visit www.nyc.gov/dycd. ■

STEPS to End Family Violence

"What About the Women?!"



ANNE PATTERSON
STEPS to End Family Violence
Edwin Gould Services for Children and Families

Thirty years ago, the legendary Sister Mary Nerney founded STEPS to End Family Violence (now a division of Edwin Gould Services for Children and Families). Sister Mary devoted her life to connecting with, advocating on behalf of and elevating the voices of incarcerated women. Wherever you found her, whether it was huddled around a conference table, engaged in conversation with women at Bedford Hills Correctional Facility, or standing on the steps of City Hall, you were bound to hear the question that drove her work— "What about the women?!"

In the early days of the movement to end mass incarceration, she wanted to know why the experiences of incarcerated women were being marginalized. Sister Mary honored the fact that the vast majority of people

who are targeted by law enforcement—and ultimately incarcerated—are men. While she recognized this truth, she knew it wasn't the whole story.

During her countless conversations with incarcerated women, Sister Mary listened and learned. While sitting with these women, she was struck by how many were incarcerated for acts they performed to protect themselves and/or their children from their abusive partners. "What about these women?!" she cried. This question propelled her to found STEPS.

Now, three decades after Sister Mary's outrage brought us into being, STEPS is one of the few programs in the nation focused on supporting justice-involved survivors of intimate partner violence.



A woman and her children at a holiday event at Rikers Island.
Credit: Clara Vannucci

Today, STEPS proudly offers a variety of innovative, trauma-informed, anti-oppressive programming focused on the prevention of intimate partner violence. This includes advocacy and healing for survivors; as well as

education and activist efforts designed to increase awareness of the epidemic of intimate partner violence and its intersection with the criminal legal system. Our unique justice-involved programming includes our Alternatives to Incarceration (ATI) and Reentry programs. The ATI program consists of a team of advocates and clinicians who offer holistic clinical and advocacy services to survivors of intimate partner violence who have been charged with felony-level crimes directly connected to their trauma history.

The ATI team does much of their work at the Rose M. Singer Center at Rikers Island where it is the only on-site organization that exclusively provides support to survivors of intimate partner violence at Rikers. The reentry

program provides case management and advocacy services to survivors of intimate partner violence and other women who are returning home from prison or jail.

This small but mighty program uses a peer support model and is staffed by a formerly incarcerated survivor of intimate partner violence. New York City-based survivors of intimate partner violence who have been arrested and/or incarcerated for crimes

related to their efforts to survive or resist their partner's behavior can call (646) 315-7629 to be connected to the ATI and Reentry programs at STEPS.

Through all of our work, we have learned a vital lesson— we cannot

Continued on page 22



Housing and Family Reunification

Housing Alone Cannot Rectify the Consequences of Homelessness



ELYMAR KACIN
Program Supervisor, Housing
The Fortune Society

The lack of affordable housing in New York City has reached a crisis point. Over the past few decades, New York City has lost over 250,000 affordable housing apartments. Due to this shortage of affordable housing, many individuals and families are left homeless. The consequences of being homeless are cruel, especially for children. It's hard to imagine a child growing up and never knowing what it is like to have a home of their own. Additionally, when you grow up in a shelter environment, nothing ever belongs to you and children are acutely aware that their lives can be altered at any moment. The friend they made today could be taken away tomorrow because their family has been transferred to a new shelter. This instability makes it extremely difficult for a family to function properly with the direct consequences being felt by the children.

The provision of housing to an individual or family alone does not immediately resolve the crisis. Rather,

the initial excitement that results from obtaining housing can easily disappear in the face of the stress created by the responsibility of maintaining a household. Once housed, parents can become overwhelmed by many of life's challenges. Their monthly costs have increased as they must now pay for gas, electricity, rent, cable, and telephone services. These costs eat into what is already a low income and budgeting becomes an essential part of keeping



Through its own supportive housing units, Fortune works to ease clients' anxiety about maintaining a home, thus making their first steps their best steps.

an apartment. If clients mismanage their funds, they can fall into arrears because they lack education on how to properly manage their finances in order to maintain their housing. Providing education for their children, cooking healthy meals and day-to-day expenses can become overwhelming to a parent.

The Fortune Society's supportive housing services at Castle Gardens are available to help our clients navigate

these obstacles and ease their anxieties. We provide concrete services from helping families acclimate to their new neighborhood, showing them where the grocery store is or helping them find day care and schools in the district.

In addition, case managers perform monthly home visits in which they assist clients and make suggestions about maintaining an apartment. They also provide parents with referrals for programs such as mental health services in our Better Living Center in our Long Island City location and financial counseling at our Single Stop program. Substance abuse counseling is also available on-site.

For our elderly clients, case managers make referrals based on our clients growing needs to provide support and help clients to remain in their homes. Castle Gardens also offers computer classes and weekly food distributions and demonstrations that allow individuals to learn how healthy and nutritious recipes are prepared.

Housing is the first step in a journey that can transform the life of an individual. Through its own supportive housing units, Fortune works to ease clients' anxiety about maintaining a home, thus making their first steps their best steps. ■

"Housing is the first step in a journey that can transform the life of an individual."

Overcoming the Legal, Financial, and Emotional Obstacles of Family Court



SAMANTHA YOUNG
Family Services Attorney
The Fortune Society

My name is Samantha Young and I am an attorney in the Family Services unit at The Fortune Society. In that role, I work with clients who enroll in the Family Services unit who have family court involvement. I represent clients with criminal justice history in Family Court proceedings in the five boroughs of New York City. The types of cases that Family Court normally hears involve paternity, child support, custody, visitation, abuse, and neglect cases. Through my work at The Fortune Society I have found that many clients who are currently incarcerated or are returning from incarceration face unique issues when it comes to these types of family court cases.

Child support cases present many challenging issues for incarcerated and formerly incarcerated individuals. If you are currently incarcerated and have a child support order you have the right to petition the court for a downward modification of child support. Through this petition, you are asking the Family Court to lower the amount of child support you are paying. To file a petition for the modification from

prison, you can write to the Family Court and request that they send you the forms to fill out. Unfortunately, if you do not file this petition your order will stay the same and the amount you owe (called arrears) will keep growing.

Once you are no longer incarcerated there are very few ways to eliminate or reduce these arrears. If you are released from prison owing a large amount of child support arrears, there are many consequences you can face. Arrears will not go away, even after your child turns 21. Declaring bankruptcy



Child support cases present many challenging issues for incarcerated and formerly incarcerated individuals.

will not get rid of the arrears either. Additional consequences you can face when you owe arrears include: your state or federal tax refund can be taken; money can also be directly removed from your bank account; your driver's license and or professional licenses can be suspended until you have paid the arrears; and if you owe large amounts of money you could be potentially be put in jail for up to six months.

Visitation cases also have unique issues for incarcerated and formerly incarcerated individuals. If you are

"Be a strong advocate for yourself and your children. You will face many roadblocks along the way— do not give up."

currently incarcerated and there is a visitation order, the person with custody of your children is supposed to bring them to visit you at your facility. The reality of the situation is that visitation at the facility rarely occurs. If there is no order from the court, your children do not have to be

brought to visit. In both of these cases, you have the right to file a petition with the court and to request that the judge order that the person with custody bring your children to visit. The judge will make that decision based on what is in the best interest of your children. And finally if you are currently incarcerated and are a respondent in a neglect case, it is very important for you to keep in contact with your children any way you can. Once again, you can petition the court for visitation to occur

at your facility or you also can write letters and try to speak to them on the phone. These actions can help stop a termination of parental rights petition against you.

Whether you are currently incarcerated or have a history of incarceration, the Family Court system can be difficult to navigate. The most important advice I can give you is to be proactive and to be a strong advocate for yourself and your children. You will face many roadblocks along the way— do not give up. ■



Reunification in Public Housing

Reuniting Families Through the NYCHA Family Reentry Pilot



GREGORY CIANCA
Senior Admissions Coordinator
The Fortune Society

The shortage of affordable housing in New York City is well documented. Exacerbating this problem in New York City is how individuals reentering the community from criminal justice involvement are precluded from living in public housing due to their criminal record. This prohibition, in many cases, does not allow for the reunification of families, which in turn, eliminates one of the most important factors for successful reentry— family support. Research demonstrates that family support plays a key role in decreasing recidivism.

In response to this problem, the New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA), in partnership with the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), the Vera Institute of Justice, and the Corporation for Supportive Housing, established the NYCHA Family Reentry Pilot, a groundbreaking program that allows individuals with criminal justice involvement to legally reunite with their families within NYCHA public housing.

Since its inception in 2014, The Fortune Society has actively participated in this innovative program by identifying and screening potential candidates, submitting applications on their behalf, and providing clients with the key

social services and case management necessary to ensure successful reentry.

The minimum eligibility requirements for participation in this pilot program are: (1) the individual must be at least 16 years of age (2) and must have been released from sentenced incarceration within the last 3 years; (3) the individual must desire to reside with family members who agree to participate in the program and are lease holders residing within a NYCHA apartment; (4) the individual must be willing to participate in intensive case management for at least 6 months and (5) the individual must be motivated to make positive changes in his or her life.

Participation in the NYCHA Family Re-entry Pilot will have no impact on the budget, bills, or rent of the lease holder for the two-year period in which they are enrolled. If the program is successfully completed, the individual will then be permitted to sign onto their family's lease, thus solidifying their permanent return to NYCHA housing. Participants even have the option of getting on the waiting list for their own lease, if preferred.

Fortune will be celebrating the two-year completion anniversary of our first participant this quarter, and we look forward to helping many more individuals re-establish connections with their families within NYCHA Public Housing.

IF INTERESTED, PLEASE CONTACT GREGORY CIANCA, Senior Admissions Coordinator, at (347) 510-3691 or gcianca@fortunesociety.org. ■



Continued from page 19

do this work alone. We consistently rely on the National Clearinghouse for the Defense of Battered Women (www.ncdbw.org, 1-800-903-0111 X3), and the National Resource Center for Justice Involved Women (www.cjinvolvedwomen.org) for their wisdom and guidance on the national level. Locally, we are active members of the Correctional Association's Coalition for Women Prisoners (www.correctionalassociation.org/coalition-coalition-for-women-prisoners, (212) 254-5700), where we work closely with formerly incarcerated women and their allies to encourage the criminal legal system to be more responsive to the needs and rights of women. Our work with the Coalition also includes advocacy for the passage of the Domestic Violence Survivors Justice Act (www.dvsja.org) which, if passed by the New York State legislature, would increase judges' discretion to sentence survivors to lower sentences and permit currently incarcerated survivors to apply to the courts for re-sentencing and earlier release. We also collaborate with organizations throughout New York that work tirelessly to improve the lives of justice-involved people— agencies like The Fortune Society.

As we continue to do our work with ever-dwindling funding and a constantly increasing need for us, we hear Sister Mary's words echoing in our ears and we shout another question up to the heavens: "Sister Mary! What would we have done without you?" ■

Employment Services and Families

Succeed? Him? It's Possible, thanks to Fortune



ANN TRAVERS
Director of Employment Services
The Fortune Society

Imagine it. Today's the day. You're being released from prison. You pack up all your possessions – your accruals from all your years behind bars. And you sit. You wait. You shake — anxiously anticipating the moment when the door to your room will open and someone will finally say, "It's time to go."

A guard drops you off at the local bus stop, hands you a ticket and says, "Good luck."

It's the first time your feet touch free ground in five years. Everything around you is different. The way people dress, the transportation system, the speed at which everyone seems to be moving. You immediately feel lost. You want to run back into your prison, where it's safe, where it's predictable. It's what you know.

Now here you stand, at the bus stop, waiting to be taken home. The bus finally arrives. And you look at your reflection in the door's window. You're 30 years old now. You have four kids waiting for you at the other end of this ride. You have no money, no marketable skills, and no idea how to get a job. What do you do next?

Lloyd doesn't need to imagine this impossible situation. Three years ago, it was his life.

A drug dealer since age 13, he grew up with money in his hand and power in the streets. For nearly fifteen years he was untouchable, or so he thought. In August, 2007— 24 days after the birth of his fourth child— his power was taken. He spent the next five years in prison. When he finally came home, he was utterly lost with no place to truly call "home." His family and children resented him, his old cronies turned on him and he had absolutely no way to support himself— at least not legally. He knew he didn't want to go back to prison, but he didn't know anything other than hustling.

A few months later he found The Fortune Society.

"Our Employment Services unit provides job readiness assistance to nearly 700 people annually, over 70% of whom go on to job placement at salaries that are well above minimum wage."

Lloyd enrolled in the Employment Services program, determined to find a job and get back into his children's lives. He immediately took advantage of every aspect of case management, career guidance, mentorship, and relationship development support he could get his hands on. He also accepted the recommendation to engage with Fortune's Family Services programming. Initially, he was overwhelmed. The child support arrears, alone, which accrued during his incarceration, were enough to cripple his spirit.

Still, despite his desperation for quick cash, he allowed himself to hear— and heed— all of the advice being given to him. Through his Career Advisor, he enrolled in, and was accepted into, Fortune's green training program. He gained hands-on experience in carpentry, electrical, and plumbing installation, and earned several industry-recognized certifications. His course facilitator told him he had the "goods" to succeed in this field.

Succeed? Him? Wow.

The next step, he knew, was to get real work experience – the kind you could put on a resume, with pride. His Account Manager connected him to the subsidized Transitional Work program. He was placed, part-time, at the very training facility where he had earned his construction certifications.

He apprenticed for the instructors and showed an immediate interest in the environmental field.

The facility hired him on full-time as a training assistant, starting at \$12 per hour. Paycheck in hand, he worked with the Family

Services lawyer to set up a child support payment plan, and completed all of the family-based training that Family Services offered. His reputation with both his family and his employer began to grow strong.

Today — just three years after that day at the bus stop — Lloyd is making \$35 an hour as an environmental specialist with a New York-based company. He has joint custody of his children and a stronger relationship with their mother. With the help of Fortune's wrap-around services, Lloyd is now a positive, contributing member to society and

Continued on page 24





Continued from page 23

a true role model to his four children.

He's actually quite proud of who he's become.

THE DISTINCTION

For nearly 50 years, The Fortune Society has been welcoming anyone with prior criminal justice involvement through its doors. No one is precluded from services due to the nature of their crime, the length of their incarceration or the amount of time that has elapsed since their conviction.

The quality of Fortune's services, as a whole, has been recognized by myriad organizations, from the U.S. Department of Justice to The Urban Institute, which itself has reported on the correlation between the employment of criminal justice involved individuals and a reduction in recidivism. In its 2008 report, the Institute claimed that an average of 23% of formerly incarcerated individuals recidivate when they are not gainfully employed. That rate is cut nearly in half, to 12%, when given a minimum wage job.

Fortune understands the value of employment to the formerly incarcerated. Its Employment Services unit provides job readiness assistance to nearly 700 people annually, over 70% of whom go on to job placement at salaries that are well above minimum wage. Advanced training programs, such as Environmental Remediation, Green Building Maintenance and Operation, Culinary Arts, Commercial Drivers licensing, and Job Development training yield even greater starting salaries that equate to

truly sustainable living wages.

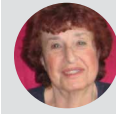
Sustainable wages yield productive members of the community. For every three months of continuous employment, at a conservative average starting salary of \$11.50 per placed participant, our Employment Services program generates a minimum of \$517,000 in taxable wages earned for every 100 participants placed. Additionally, when coupled with the average cost per incarcerated person (\$26,913.77), and a conservative recidivism rate of 6% (NYS average of 9% - Fortune's average of 3%), the total savings in re-incarceration costs to the community is approximately \$161,482 per 100 participants.

Most importantly, however, is the positive impact on our participants' children. Well over 100 participants in 2015 initiated or continued child support payments. At a conservative average of \$3,771 per child (based on data from the U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, April 1996-2012), this equates to more than \$377,000 in payment support to family members.

FINAL THOUGHTS

At Fortune, we believe in building people, not prisons. We believe in meeting people where they are in their lives and providing them with all the necessary tools and support they need to stay out of prison and care for themselves and their families in a positive way.

TO LEARN MORE, CONTACT HUBERT LILA, Career Advisor, at 347-510-3686 or at hlila@fortunesociety.org. ■



Continued from page 17

I was angry, I was frustrated and I was alone. So many of the people I thought were my friends had vanished from my life. I realized that they were uncomfortable around me and didn't know what to say. Gene's crime had made the headlines so I couldn't say that he was working on the Alaska pipeline.

The only people I felt comfortable with were people I met in the visiting rooms. And we all felt so powerless.

That was until I watched four formerly incarcerated persons on a TV show that Sunday night.

They gave an address for a new organization called "The Fortune Society." I wrote to them and said that I was doing my time on the outside. But, since I was a suburban, working mother, I would not have the time or energy to work with them.

David Rothenberg received my letter. He invited me to a meeting that was to be held as a result of the response to that TV show.

I was no longer alone and I was no longer powerless. Through my involvement with The Fortune Society, I was able to find my voice and use it to speak about the effects of incarceration on families.

With the encouragement of David, Kenny Jackson, and the Fortune team, I became an advocate and was instrumental in bringing contact visits into New York State.

I met other families on this journey. Because I knew how lonely and frightening the journey could be if you had to travel by yourself, I decided to

start a support group. We called it Prison Families Anonymous. We understood that some people were not yet ready to come out of the shadows and we promised that we would respect their anonymity and confidentiality.

At our support groups, we feel free to say whatever is in our heart or on our minds. We do not judge one another nor do we care about the crimes committed. Our only concern is that no one feels alone. We welcome anyone who has or has ever had a loved one in the criminal justice system.

Barbara Allan is the Founder of Prison Families Anonymous, a support program for families who have a loved one involved in the juvenile or criminal justice system. For more information, visit www.pfa-li.com. ■



You don't have to stop being a parent while you are incarcerated.

You have the right to:

Help find an appropriate person, such as a friend or relative, to care for your child. If this person needs financial or other assistance, he/she can apply for a "child only" temporary assistance grant or to become certified or approved as a foster parent for your child. If you are unable to make such an arrangement, your child will be placed with a foster parent or in another setting, such as a group home.

Be informed about the foster care agency responsible for your child's care, the name of your child's caseworker, and how to contact the caseworker and his/her supervisor. You should be notified in a timely manner if your child's caseworker changes.

Know how to reach your family caseworker, if that person is different from your child's caseworker.

Participate in permanency planning for your child (see reverse side).

Take advantage of services to help you address the issues that led to your child's placement in foster care (parenting classes, substance abuse treatment, etc.).

Participate in meetings about your Family Service Plan (see reverse side).

Get information about family visiting and other services that can help you build a meaningful relationship with your child while you are incarcerated and after your release.

Visit with your child unless the court orders otherwise. Ask about video/teleconferencing if in-person visits are not possible. If you are not having regular visits with your child or you are dissatisfied with your visits, contact your child's caseworker, his/her supervisor, or your attorney.

Be kept up to date on your child's health and development and his/her progress in school.

Be assigned an attorney to represent you in your child's Family Court case, if you are financially eligible. Speak with your attorney if you have any issues with the foster care agency or the court. Your attorney is your advocate and should keep you informed about your case.

Attend Family Court proceedings. If you know of an upcoming court date, talk to your attorney, caseworker, and corrections counselor about making arrangements for you to attend court.

What is termination of parental rights?

Termination of parental rights (TPR) ends the legal relationship between a parent and child and frees the child to be adopted.

A petition to terminate parental rights can be filed for a number of reasons described in New York State Social Services Law 384-b. For example, when a child has been in foster care for six months or more and the parent has had no significant contact with the child, the foster care agency, or the social services agency, the agency can file a TPR for abandonment.

If a child is in foster care for 12 consecutive months or 15 of the most recent 22 months and the parent has failed either to maintain contact with the child or to plan for the child's future, the agency can file a TPR for permanent neglect if it has made diligent efforts to work with the parent. The agency does not have to make these efforts if the parent moves and fails to provide new contact information to the agency.

The law allows the agency to decide **not** to file a TPR for a number of reasons: that the child is living with a relative foster parent, that there is a compelling reason why TPR is not in the child's best interests, and that the parent is incarcerated or in a residential substance abuse treatment program and has maintained a meaningful role in the child's life. These decisions are made on a case-by-case basis, with a focus on the best interests of the child.

You can help keep your parental rights by:

- Arranging for an appropriate friend or relative to care for your child while you are incarcerated.
- Staying in touch with your child, your child's caseworker, and your attorney.
- Attending planning meetings and court proceedings.
- Visiting with your child as often as possible.

Center Stage: Arts Festival

The Fortune Society hosted its third annual Arts Festival during the week of April 18. Eleven events showcased our clients' extraordinary musical, theatrical, and visual artistic talents. We are all proud and impressed by the talents and dedication of both Fortune clients and staff.



The Arts Festival kicked off with "Music Café." This artistic showcase allows Fortune's music students, clients, and staff to perform and express themselves.



"The Castle" play told the story of four formerly imprisoned New Yorkers and their journeys through crime, privation, and redemption.



The Fortune Society and Theater of the Oppressed partnered to create "Honorable Discharge: We Got Dissed," a forum play based on the real-life experiences of veterans with criminal justice involvement.





The Fortune Society
BUILDING PEOPLE, NOT PRISONS

The Fortune News is FREE to all incarcerated people.

To subscribe, please fill out the
information below and send to:

Fortune News Subscriptions
c/o The Fortune Society
29-76 Northern Boulevard
Long Island City, NY 11101

Subscriptions must be renewed once a year
and/or when you are transferred. Please allow
four to six weeks for processing your request,
and keep in mind that the Fortune News is
produced twice a year only.

SUBSCRIPTION FORM

Full Name:

ID Number:

Correctional Facility:

Address:

City:

State/Zip Code:

Please check one*

Renewal/Transfer

New Subscription

IN THE NEXT ISSUE

Food & Nutrition



QUESTION FOR OUR READERS

How does food insecurity affect formerly
incarcerated people and their communities?

Send responses to info@fortunesociety.org or
mail them to the address above.