



# Kids' Community

## Incarcerated Fathers And Their Children Find New LIFE

(NAPSA)—A group of inmates are learning how to breathe new life into their relationships with their children through a unique program at a maximum security prison.

Through the 4-H LIFE-Living Interactive Family Education program at the Potosi Correctional Center in Mineral Point, Mo., youth build relationships with their incarcerated fathers through 4-H club work. Developed jointly between the fathers and local 4-H staff, the program focuses on improving parenting skills and bettering the children's social and academic adjustment and overall well-being.

One and a half million American children have parents serving sentences in state and federal prison, according to U.S. Department of Justice statistics. These children can react negatively to the separation and develop aggressive behaviors or suffer from eating or sleeping disorders.

"Offenders join the program because they see their kids are repeating their own destructive behaviors that led to their committing crimes and they want to help break that pattern before it's too late," said Washington County 4-H Youth Extension Associate Robert Wilkerson.

In the 4-H LIFE program, children and their fathers can move freely and interact naturally in an open, unstructured setting—a sharp contrast to the restricted visitation usually granted at the maximum-security prison.

"When you meet them for a [regular] visit, you're [only] allowed a hug. In 4-H, your kid can sit there with you and lean on you," said one father. "You have a bigger bonding process between father and son."



**Incarcerated fathers and their children build better relationships through the 4-H LIFE program.**

The youth and their fathers work together on 4-H club activities that encourage goal-setting, teamwork and accomplishment. One youth said being able to work on 4-H activities with his father "created an environment for me to be with my family like a normal family."

Fathers work on their parenting skills in formal meetings and often look to each other for help working out family problems or other advice. They organize food sales and recycling programs to fund activities and adopt needy families in the community.

Families that participate in 4-H LIFE report stronger relationships, better communication, greater family unity, life skills development and improved home and school behavior for the youth.

"It's astounding and gratifying to see the changes the kids have made," said St. Francois County 4-H Youth Development Specialist Lynna Lawson.

4-H is a community of young people across America learning leadership, citizenship and life skills. To learn more, visit [4husa.org](http://4husa.org).