

Preliminary Evaluation Report

September 2022



Making Reading Memories at The Milwaukee House of Correction



Connecting children with their parents who are incarcerated through literacy experiences

This qualitative analysis of Literacy Link's Making Reading Memories Program discusses impressions about the program on a group of fathers incarcerated at the Milwaukee House of Correction.




Report highlights:

- Participants said the program helped maintain or strengthen their connection with their children.
- Parents felt participation was a meaningfully positive experience.
- Some expressed new intentions to engage in reading and other educational activities with their children.
- Some spoke of improved knowledge of children's socioemotional development and improved knowledge of parenting behavior.
- Most shifted their perspective as a result of participating in The Literacy Link.

Perceptions about Making Reading Memories from Fathers Incarcerated at the Milwaukee House of Correction

A Preliminary Analysis of Parent Interviews

WHAT IS MAKING READING MEMORIES?

-  Extension educators guide a one-hour workshop on interactive reading techniques, book selection and reading practice.
-  Parents in jail are video recorded reading a book to their children.
-  The video recording and the book are sent to the children.



WHY MAKING READING MEMORIES MATTERS

- Reading and looking at books together helps maintain the parent/child bond
- Literacy exposure increases
- Contact between parent and child may increase a successful transition back into the child's life upon the parent's reentry
- A smooth reentry leads to better outcomes, including lower recidivism rates
- Consistent contact with parents may reduce trauma for children during this stressful time

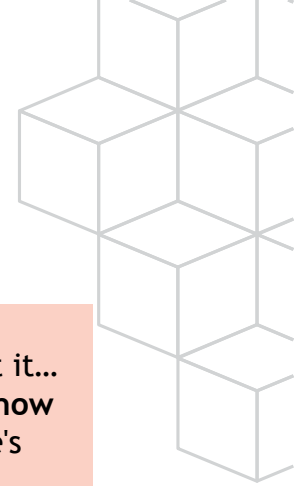
ABOUT THE INTERVIEWS

Number of interviews: Eight parent interviews were analyzed for this preliminary report. Interviews were conducted between June 2021-October 2021. All parents were fathers who were incarcerated at the House of Corrections in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

Consent: An active consent form was completed by each parent prior to the interview. Parents consented to participate in the interview and to have their quotes used anonymously.

How interviews were conducted: Interviews were conducted by the Literacy Link Coordinator over Zoom, with a jail staff member in the room with the parent.

Compensation: Parents' families were compensated with a \$25 gift card for their participation in the interview.



Parents' Recording Experience

All parents said that participation in the Making Reading Memories (MRM) program was a **meaningfully positive experience** for them. Parents mentioned that the program gave them something to be excited about and made them feel more hopeful that they could keep their parenting role and connection with their child(ren) intact.

Most parents felt that MRM helped **maintain or even strengthen their connection with their child(ren)** while incarcerated. The ability to communicate with their child in a way they weren't expecting while incarcerated was surprising and empowering for parents. Parents expressed that participating in MRM helped them feel more bonded to their child and to the outside community.

Some parents experienced **anxiety or nervousness** before and during the recording of their videos. A couple of parents called the experience "nerve-racking". Parents' experiences are summarized by their worries about performing well in the video and wanting to do their best for their child(ren).

Through the MRM process, some parents also discovered a renewed **intention to engage in reading and other education activities with their child(ren)**, both while incarcerated and when they are released back into their communities.

“I was excited about it... I really enjoyed this. I **know there's still hope**. There's ways to communicate without being there, reading and writing.”

“**[It] kind of helped me feel like I was creating a bond with [my] daughter**, even though I'm incarcerated. Helped me feel like I was still in her life, in a way, and connected where she can see me. And I can do something positive at the same time for her by reading to her.”

“**At first it was kind of like I was nervous**, even though I knew some people may think that, oh, they're just kids... But as parents, you kind of want to do things right the first time around and be your best at it.”



Before the recording, parents are coached on interactive reading strategies. Parents choose a book that speaks to them. They also consider the opening and closing statements they would like to make to their children.



Feedback from Caregivers

We asked parents if they had received feedback from their children’s caregivers about the video and book. Not all parents have access to their children or their children’s caregivers while incarcerated. If they didn’t have access to their children’s caregivers, we asked what they hoped their children would get from the video and book.

Some parents shared that they heard from their child’s caregiver, or their child directly, about the video and book. Some parents described their **child(ren)’s positive reactions to the video**, recalling that they heard from caregivers that their child loved the video, and that their child watched it multiple times. Parents shared that they picked books with content that would be meaningful to their child, with characters and stories to which their child(ren) could relate. A couple of parents reported that their younger children attempted to respond to their parent on the video or reached out towards the screen.

A few parents noticed an **improvement in the parent-child relationship** and felt like their video strengthened their bond to their child and/or family.

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“The mom, she was even excited about it... So, with me doing that video... and understanding how much [my] daughter enjoyed it, it made her want to take time ... to sit down and read... a book with her.”

“I was actually on the phone as they got it, and as they were able to... listen to it right away... I got to hear a lot of the responses. And then I called back another two days later, and they... had been watching it like three or four times a day.”

“I hope she will love the fundamental of reading, and it will teach her brain to want to read more.”

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Parents’ Hope for their Child

Parents also shared what they hoped their child would gain from receiving the video. Some parents hoped their child would feel **encouraged to read** and that it would instill a love of reading. Parents hoped that reading encouragement would also amplify their children’s interest in educational activities more generally. They shared how they learned how essential reading is to successful educational outcomes for children. In addition, parents wanted to impart to their child(ren) the importance of reading throughout life.

A few parents also felt the video and book would **support their child’s development**. Parents cited what they learned about the “child’s mind” and how early literacy experiences affect children’s brain development.

Parents' Takeaways from The Literacy Link



“ It helped me open up as a father to really understand more about literature and more importance of reading books to them...I can do more as a father to help them learn you know. And a big part of them learning is wanting to...follow in my footsteps. And if they see that I think it's cool to read they'll read also. ”

Throughout the interviews, parents spoke to the broader impact of the Literacy Link strategies on their parenting knowledge and intentions for the future.

Most parents spoke of **perspective shifting** as a result of their participation in The Literacy Link. Most felt greater confidence in their ability to parent. Parents spoke of increased awareness that they're a role model for their child(ren) and expressed their intentions to model the importance of reading and education. For many, this experience brought up feelings about the ways in which they were parented. Some parents decidedly want to parent differently and talked about specific changes they plan to make. Nearly all parents exhibited a growth-mindset towards parenting in their interviews.

Some parents spoke of **improved knowledge of child's socioemotional development**, describing what they learned about how children express emotions differently than adults, and that their feelings should be met with patience and empathy. A key point many parents referenced was that giving children the grace and space to experience their feelings benefits their development, while punishing emotional outbursts is detrimental to children and the parent-child relationship. Parents also recounted their newfound understanding of the importance of actively participating in their child(ren)'s development.

Some parents also spoke of **improved knowledge of parenting behavior**. Parents mentioned that being present and spending time with their children regularly creates lasting memories and positive outcomes for their children. Parents said that they can use reading and educational activities as tools to facilitate that consistent connection. One parent expressed his intention to use reading as an alternative to punishment.

Some parents mentioned that involvement with The Literacy Link influenced their **intentions to communicate better with their children and families**. Parents wanted to spend more time communicating with their children and be more emotionally responsive to and patient with their children. One parent mentioned that he planned to model respectful communication by speaking more lovingly to his child's mother, with hope that his child will feel safer.

“ Try to be understanding with them. And when they're crying, understand what's wrong with them instead of saying, oh, don't cry. now that I know, don't hide the emotion, that it's OK to cry. Let it out because you don't want that anger to be built up. ”

“It kind of just opened up my eyes to a better understanding of ... I guess you can call it the child's mind. And the emotion system...of a child.” ”

About the Qualitative Analysis

The analysis of the interviews closely followed the themes of the interview questions found in the appendix of this report. The interview themes are found in the red boxes below.

Themes in this report are supplemented with anonymous quotes from the parents. Quotes were slightly edited to ensure readability. Information in any quote that jeopardized the confidentiality of the parent or his child was removed.

In this report, **Parents** refer to those fathers who were incarcerated at the House of Correction. **Caregivers** are those adults with whom children lived while their parent was incarcerated.



Parents' Recording Experience

THEME	# OF PARENTS
Meaningfully Positive Experience	8
Maintain and Strengthen Connection with Child	7
Anxiety	5
Intention to Engage in Reading with Child	5



Feedback Shared from Caregivers

THEME	# OF PARENTS
Positive Reaction to Video	6
Improvement in Parent-Child Relationship	3



Parents' Hopes for their Child

Encouraged to Read	6
Support their Child's Development	3



Parents' Takeaways from The Literacy Link

THEME	# OF PARENTS
Perspective Shifting	7
Improved Knowledge about Child's Socioemotional Development	6
Improved Knowledge of Parenting Behavior	6
Intention to Communicate Better with Children and Families	5

We used the following language to describe the frequency with which themes appeared in the interviews.

Descriptions of the Interview Themes

Description	# of Interviews with Theme Present
All	8
Most	7
Some	4-6
A few	2-3

Conclusion

While this report represents a preliminary qualitative analysis, these eight interviews provided a rich and descriptive look into the perceived impacts that the Literacy Link programs have on families involved in the criminal justice system.

Children reportedly had an overwhelmingly positive response to the videos and books. Making Reading Memories provided a unique and surprising touch-point with their incarcerated parent that was meaningful and special.

The interviews also revealed how The Literacy Link content could be shared with caregivers, giving them tools to use with the children in their care, such as tips to create meaningful literacy experiences. The co-parenting workshops were also reported to be immediately beneficial for parents and caregivers to communicate more effectively during the parents' incarceration.

Parents spoke positively about MRM and shared their experiences with openness and vulnerability. Ultimately, parents felt empowered to continue or expand on their role as a parent, learned how literacy experiences can be drivers of creating a relationship with their children, and valued being present with their child - even when they can't be physically.

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“My child was like, **“Dad, that's awesome.** Like, I never thought they'd let you do that.” And I just-- I was speechless. I didn't really expect my child to be as excited as he was, how happy he was, and my wife too, it was just like, I don't know. It just **made me feel like even though I'm gone, everything will be OK. There's other ways I can connect with my family.**”

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<https://theliteracylink.extension.wisc.edu>



Appendix – Interview Questions

1. I'd like to start by asking you how many videos you recorded for your child(ren)?
Can you share a little about the child(ren) that received the video(s)?
2. Can you tell me about your experience recording the video(s)?
 - a. How did recording the video go for you?
 - b. What did you gain, if anything, from that experience?
3. Did recording the video(s) change the way you feel at all about being away from your child(ren)? If so, can you tell me a little more about that?
4. Have you heard any feedback from your child(ren)'s caregiver about the videos you recorded?
 - a. If YES: Overall, how do you think the video(s) and book(s) has/have affected your child(ren)?
 - b. If NO: What do you hope your child(ren) will gain from receiving your video(s)?
5. Did you participate in the Interactive Reading Workshop taught by Ciara? The workshop covered the topics of child development and reading with children.
 - a. If YES: Can you tell me about how the workshop helped or affected you as a parent?
 - i. Probe: Do you plan to do anything differently as a result of the workshop?
6. How do you think we can improve the recorded book reading program for future parents at House of Correction?
 - a. Probe: Is there anything you would change about the recorded book reading program based on your experience?
7. What other types of services or resources would be helpful for you and your children while you are/were in jail?
8. Is there anything I haven't asked you about that I should know to understand your experiences with The Literacy Link program?