



A scene from Brian Lindstrom's documentary, "Mothering Inside."

IMAGE COURTESY OF BRIAN LINDSTROM

Family Preservation Project a vital, lifechanging program

The Family Preservation Project is a parenting program at Coffee Creek Correctional Facility in Wilsonville. The program is a partnership between Portland Community College, the Oregon Department of Corrections, and children and families who are incarcerated.

In reality, the program does so much more.

The program provides adult and child education opportunities for parents and their families – inside and outside the prison. In short, the program offers mothers and their children a chance at some relief from the cycle of poverty and incarceration through building and

maintaining deep bonds within the family unit.

"I was able to form deep bonds with my children that offer our family a chance to rebuild our lives and for my children to have a fighting chance," says Katrina Going, who was recently released from prison. "I have accepted the responsibility for the crime I committed and done my time. I don't want my children following in my footsteps. Today, I'm working and back on my feet. Our family has a chance at a better life and hope for a brighter future. None of that would have been possible without the Family Preservation Project."

The program is featured in Brian Lindstrom's latest documentary, "Mothering Inside."

Some may know Lindstrom's work from "Alien Boy," a documentary film about the life and death of James Chasse, among other works.

Lindstrom's latest documentary is a timely one. "Mothering Inside" not only gives viewers a peek inside the minds of mothers in prison, but it reminds us all of the importance of relationships, especially between a mother and a child. It also reminds us at the end of the day that we are all human.

Sounds great, right? Not so much.

The Oregon Department of Corrections says the program is too costly, and is ending the program this year. To serve 11 participants and their families the program costs Oregon less than \$300,000 annually. Never mind that the program has shown a zero – that's correct: a zero recidivism rate during its tenure. Not one woman, more than 30 in all, who has taken part in the program has ever returned to prison.

Instead of offering the Family Preservation Program,

a spokesperson for the Oregon Department of Corrections told Street Roots it is maintaining a relationship between families and loved ones by employing electronic messaging and video visiting systems, and expanding visiting hours, including hosting events such as barbecues, meals and other family gatherings. The jails hope to increase the number of inmates receiving visits from 40 to 60 percent.

By all means, visitation is great. Street Roots believes that maintaining a relationship with loved ones helps individuals and families cope with the harsh realities of prison time. Saying that, you can't replace something like the Family Preservation Project with broad sweeping policies and expect real outcomes.

"We shouldn't be talking about taking this program away because of costs. We should be talking about expanding this program, regardless of the costs," says Going, who recently graduated from the program. "This program isn't just about a mother or her children. It's about going through an extensive process that allows both myself and my children to change and to have a better life. If I can do it, anyone can do it."

Going also noted that other programs for women inside the jail are great, but don't come close to comparing to the Family Preservation Project. "It's night and day."

"I believe government's role is to protect the most vulnerable among us, and to help end human suffering," says Lindstrom. "By nurturing the sacred bond between mother and child, The Family Preservation Project transforms the lives of inmate moms and their children. Graduates of the Family Preservation Project have a zero recidivism rate. Think about that, and think about the huge savings and benefits society enjoys as these rehabilitated women bravely create new lives for themselves and their children. By keeping this vital, life-changing program alive, we all benefit."

I would have to agree.

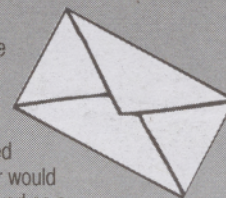
It's my understanding after talking to legislators that the only way this program will survive is through Gov. Kate Brown's office – or action in the Legislature.

Here's to hoping for a smart decision in Salem. It would be the right thing to do.

A screening of "Mothering Inside," hosted by Oregon Film will take place at 7 p.m. Tuesday, March 3 at Level B Theater Pub, 445 High St. SE, Salem.

Write in

If you would like to have something that you've written published in our pages, or would like to get involved as a member of our reporting staff, contact Managing Editor Joanne Zuhl at 503-228-5657, joanne@streetroots.org. We ask that all submissions include the author's name and contact information, if available.



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By Israel Bayer

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