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# OPINION

## Saving a Prison Program for Mothers and Kids

Please do not shut down this resource

BY LANETTA GARNER

The Family Preservation Program, located in Oregon's Coffee Creek Women's Correctional Facility, is scheduled to be shut down at the end of the year. The program is desperately needed to help women and their children. The prison claims there are other programs, but if you look closely, you will find the other programs serve very few women or children and most of them are annual events rather than on-going programs. Not a single woman who has been in this program has reoffended upon her release.

Please do not shut down this

program.

Four years ago I had a baby when I was in prison. I'd barely had time to hold my little girl in my arms before they took her from me. For three years, I didn't get to see her. I missed her first smile, her first step, her first three birthdays. I never got to hold her little hand in mind, never got a chance to dry her tears. I could only hope and pray that she was loved, that she was cared for, that if she had bad dreams at night, that somebody would be there to comfort her.

Finally, I got into a program at Coffee Creek prison that helps families. The program, called The Family Preservation Program, has been in operation for 4.5 years and served more than 100 women and children in a number of ways. Mothers learn parenting skills, something many of us

never had a chance to learn because our own parents were unable to care for us or had problems of their own that were so enormous they didn't have anything left for us.

The program made all the arrangements so our kids could visit us twice a month. Unless you've been separated from your children, you can't really imagine how much that means. Not just to us, but also to our kids. They worry about us when we're in prison. They're afraid we'll be hurt or that we don't have enough to eat or that we have to sleep on cement floors. With all these worries, kids are vulnerable to emotional problems. They might not do well at school. But when they get to see us every other week, and they can see that we're doing okay, their worries are lifted.

The time we spent with them is precious not just because of the emotional connection, but because during this time, we have activities together that build strong bonds.

In the life of the program, not a single woman who has been released from prison has reoffended. And now the program is going to be shut down because of funding issues.

I'm out of prison now. I have a job. I'm in transitional housing now, but will soon have my own place and my daughter and I will live together at last.

The issues of children of incarcerated parents are well documented and now 1 out of 8 children in the United States has a parent in prison. The problem is so huge that Sesame Street now has a character on it whose parent is in prison. This program

is helping these children stay connected to their moms. It is helping moms become good mothers, which will pay off for the mother, the child, and the community when she is released from prison.

This program helped me immeasurably and it will continue to help other women who have made serious mistakes and ended up in prison. It has given many families a second chance. It has helped children know they are loved and kept them connected with their mothers.

Please help me keep this program going by signing my petition to ask the people who made the decision to close it, to keep it open.

Lanetta Garner is from Portland. You can sign her petition by visiting the website [petitions.moveon.org/sign/keep-a-prison-program](http://petitions.moveon.org/sign/keep-a-prison-program).

## Gap Between Rich and Poor is Too Big to Ignore

Even the Fed Chair suggests it's un-American



BY EMILY SCHWARTZ GRECO AND WILLIAM A. COLLINS

Three years after the Occupy movement first directed long-overdue attention to the scourge of inequality in America, the gulf between rich and poor has gotten too big for even the Federal Reserve to ignore.

As Federal Reserve Chair Janet Yellen recently pointed out, half of us now own a mere 1 percent of America's household wealth.

On average, the lower half of all U.S. households command merely \$11,000 in net worth — that's what's left when you subtract all forms of debt from your home equity,

savings, and other investments (if you've got any).

Put another way, half of us possess next to nothing.

How about at the top? Families in the top 5 percent on average have \$6.8 million to their name — nearly twice what they possessed a quarter of a century ago.

With a contrast that stark it's hard not to agree with Yellen's suggestion that the nation's inequality could be downright un-American.

"I think it is appropriate to ask," she said at a recent conference on economic opportunity and inequality at the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston, "whether this trend is compatible with values rooted in our nation's history, among them the high value Americans have traditionally placed on equality of opportunity."

Income, while not quite as concentrated in the pockets of the few as wealth, is also getting more skewed.

After correcting for inflation, the Fed found that the income of the wealthiest 5 percent of households soared by 38 percent between 1989 and 2013, while the income of the

other 95 percent inched up by less than 10 percent.

You might expect that communities of color are suffering from more inequality than whites. You'd be right.

Demographers have documented a gaping racial wealth divide. According to the Pew Research Center, for example, black Americans are three times more likely than whites to live in poverty, and Latinos are 2.6 times more likely. Typical white and Asian-American households, meanwhile, have more than 11 times the net worth of median black and Latino households.

The numbers get even more ludicrous at the very top. The top 0.1 percent of Americans now controls 22 percent of the nation's wealth, economists Emmanuel Saez and Gabriel Zucman found. That's just about the same share as the bottom 90 percent.

Why should policymakers focus on inequality? One answer is that by crimping consumption, inequality is a key factor behind the failure of the U.S. economy to fully recover from the Great Recession.

That could explain why de-

spite sunny forecasts and sinking gas prices, the shopping frenzy at brick and mortar stores that now starts on Thanksgiving turned out to be a bit of a dud this year.

Lackluster holiday spending by the masses should surprise no one. As Brendan V. Duke and Ike Lee lamented in a recent Center for American Progress report: "When households do not

have money, retailers do not have customers."

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