

Valerie Carpico:

Hello everyone. Thank you for joining us. We'll get started in just a moment.

I'd like to welcome everyone today. We'll get started in just a few seconds.

Hello everyone. I'd like to officially welcome you to our webinar today for Strengthening and Maintaining Family Connections: Best Practices for Child-Friendly Video Visiting. I'd also like to welcome you to officially the kickoff of Second Chance Month and hope you have some wonderful activities planned within your communities and organizations to support Second Chance Month.

Emily:

Okay. Thank you everyone. Just want to let you know that we are recording this session and we have provided all the information on this slide for your comfort. And we also wanted to just let you know a few technical things before we move into the presentation. Please submit any content questions throughout the session in the Q&A, and they will be responded to throughout as well as at the end of the session. Also, if you are experiencing any technical difficulties, please also submit through the Q&A feature and myself, Emily Vestiga will reach out and assist, and please reach out to me for any questions or needs throughout the session. And I will turn it back to Val.

Valerie Carpico:

Thank you.

So again, as I mentioned, if you have some activities going on within your organizations and communities, feel free to track your news and updates on social media, #ReentryMatters, #SecondChanceMonth or #SecondChanceMonth23. Also, I'd like to refer you to the National Reentry Resource Center website to see a full list of activities that will be happening during Second Chance month.

Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention provides national leadership, coordination, and resources to prevent and respond to youth delinquency and victimization. The office helps states, localities and tribes develop effective and equitable juvenile justice systems that create safer communities and empower youth to lead productive lives. We'd also like to welcome today to the webinar our program manager from OJJDP Ransom Washington is on the call today. And just like to thank OJJDP for their continued work with us regarding children of incarcerated parents and the important work that many states, counties, and jurisdictions are doing now to really support families with incarceration and then really reentry back into our community.

The Council of State Government's Justice Center is a national nonprofit, nonpartisan organization that combines the power of a membership association, serving state officials in all three branches of government, with policy and research expertise to develop strategies that increase public safety and strengthen communities.

The National Resource Center on Children and Families of the Incarcerated is the oldest and largest organization in the United States focused on children and families of the incarcerated and programs that serve them. Some of the things that they do are dissemination accurate and relevant information, guiding and development of family-strengthening policy and practice, training, preparing and inspiring those who work in the field, including the families in defining the issues and designing solutions.

Today for our agenda, I'll be introducing you soon to some of the speakers for today's webinar. We're going to discuss 12 best practices of video visiting. Also, we're going to hear from a very dynamic group will be presenting Pennsylvania Department of Corrections and what they've been doing to really

support video visiting within their facilities. We'll have time then for questions and then we'll have our closing.

Today, our presenters, we have Ann Adalist-Estrin. She's the director of the National Resource Center on Children and Families of the Incarcerated at Rutgers University, Camden, New Jersey. We have Deb Sahd with us, special assistant to the secretary, Pennsylvania Department of Corrections. We have my colleague Megan Pfeiffer, senior policy analyst with the Corrections and Reentry team here at the CSG Justice Center. And then myself, Valerie Carpico. I'm a project manager with the Corrections and Reentry team at the CSG Justice Center. And with that being said, I am going to go ahead and turn it over to Megan.

Megan Pfeiffer:

Thank you so much, Val, and so happy to have you all here to join us today. So a little bit about what is the current climate of video visiting. The first thing I want to just make a note of is on language. So throughout this presentation and in any accompanying documents, we always use the terms visit and visiting over visitation just to be mindful of the fact that families visit with each other and we spend time visiting and not visitation.

So this chart that you see here is from a survey that was conducted with SCA addressing the needs of incarcerated parents and their minor children grantees in September of 2022. And so, of all the jurisdictions, as you see here, only one jurisdiction noted that they do not currently offer video visiting, but that 96.2% of respondents do offer video visiting currently. This survey was part of a survey that asked about capabilities for visiting and related challenges that they experienced. And so a lot of that information will be shared throughout this presentation today. One of the things to note about the current climate of video visiting is we have seen a spike in the amount of video visiting that's offered throughout the nation, really due to some of the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on families and having to be responsive to some of the challenges that that presents. So with that, I'm going to pass it to my colleague Ann, who's going to give us a little bit of an overview of the importance of visiting.

Ann Adalist-Estrin:

All right. So if any of you have ever had long distance relationships of any kind, you know how important being in-person with people really is. There's so much that can happen in terms of a range of relationship skills that can only happen face-to-face and in-person. I think COVID-19, as Megan said, really challenged us about that. I think that it isolated and raised fears and made people have to deal with being separate. And it has left us with the sense that, and I see this with my students all over the place, a wide range of people who prefer remote and those who hate it, people who want to be in-person, face-to-face, people who really like the whole technology of relationships. And so, I think that's something we have to consider here, I think. But we have long been advocating in this field of working with families impacted by incarceration to talk about in-person visiting and the importance of visiting in general.

And if we could move forward to look at the Bill of Rights for children with incarcerated parents, in 2003, Nell Bernstein, a journalist wrote All Alone in the World, which catapulted children with incarcerated parents into the media in a really good way. And so, that resulted in this list of eight rights. "I have the right to be kept safe and informed at the time of my parent's arrest, to be heard when decisions are made about me, to be considered when decisions are made about my parent, to be well cared for in my parent's absence." And then here's the important one, "To speak with, see and touch my parent, to support as I face my parent's incarceration, not to be blamed or judged, and the right to a lifelong

relationship." These rights, what's really important is that they're not rights in the sense of the Bill of Rights constitutionally, they're not enforceable, but they are actionable.

So if we can go back for a minute, Megan, these actionable rights have been looked at in almost nine states now in terms of how to operationalize them. And part of that is to talk about combining the importance of in-person visiting to see, speak with and touch and balancing that, embracing the "and", if you will, and including the video visiting part so that they enhance each other. And I just want to say as we launch this webinar, there is an advocacy dilemma here because as we try really hard to say we need to do child-friendly video visiting and child-friendly barrier visits as well with plexiglass, and at the same time uphold the massive importance of maintaining in-person visits. And so, sometimes we get pushback. It's like, "Well, how do you say let's do these wonderful child-friendly video visits without promoting the notion that we could do away with in-person visits?" And we really are starting this webinar off with saying "and" in-person, face-to-face and video as enhancement.

So the value of video visiting as we say let's hold them both equally, it mitigates difficulties associated with in-person visiting if it is done well. It limits long distance travel if people don't have to travel to the facility to do the video visiting. It facilitates consistent communication if a timeframe is allowed that is consistent. It allows for convenience and flexibility if it is convenient and flexible. And most importantly, I think it offers incarcerated parents the ability to be a part of their child's home life. I have been in video visits where young teens show off their prom dress to their dad or their mom, where people get to introduce the new baby of a cousin or grandma gets to visit on a video visit, people who can't get to an in-person visit. And we'll talk a little bit more about the everyday things of home life that can include the incarcerated parent in ways that we're really now the researchers just understanding the importance of rental identity and how parents can really feel the identity of a parent when they can be part of those everyday activities.

Megan Pfeiffer:

So that leads us to our 12 best practices for video visiting. And so, with that, today, we are also announcing the release of a publication that will detail these 12 best practices in addition to some of the information around the value and importance of video visiting that we will link to in the chat and also can email out after the webinar as well for folks to share widely. So you don't have to take as many notes today because it will all be available for you in a beautiful publication form.

So one thing to just add, I think to what Ann was saying as well is when we're thinking about the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on our own lives and our own abilities to visit with our loved ones, we found the need for video and ways to connect by FaceTime that allow us to communicate and connect with families when we're separated. And so, just the real unique importance of video visiting to maintain those connections. So we are going to ask a question in the poll, and as you're thinking about this question, I'll read it for you. I want you to think about how it's worded and really to be able to answer honestly. So agree or disagree, the benefits of video visiting outweigh the benefits of in-person visiting for children and families.

Emily:

We're just going to give it just another minute.

Megan Pfeiffer:

Thanks, Emily.

Emily:

Okay. Now I just shared the results. Are you able to see them, Megan?

Megan Pfeiffer:

I can. So it looks like 22% of people agree and 78% disagree. And so, I think the reason why we asked this poll question in this way is that this issue raises a lot of different viewpoints from people. I think a lot of people have shared challenges that exist for in-person visiting both staffing challenges from the facilities' perspective, and there exists a lot of assumptions and biases about family connections during incarceration. I think a lot of families have also presented challenges to in-person visiting related to the costs, if it's long distance travel, transportation, childcare, having to take time off of work. And also, as Ann mentioned, some policies that might limit in-person contact, as well as incarcerated parents have shared challenges to in-person visiting, and whether that's not wanting their children to know that they're incarcerated, maybe feelings of guilt or shame or wanting to protect their children from the environment of incarceration.

And so with that, that brings us to our first best practice, which we will say again, and what Ann had shared is really embracing the power of "and." So to offer video visits as a supplement to in-person visits, not as a replacement. And what's shared here is actually a photo that was made by an incarcerated parent detained at the Rose M. Singer Center in New York City. And just really for this parent video visiting allowed her to visit with her children in a way that she would never be able to visit previously because they lived in a different country. And so, when you think about the immense power that video visiting can have to connect families, especially when there are really deep geographical barriers that allows them to connect and maintain that relationship during incarceration.

Another thing as Ann mentioned about the ability as a supplement for video visits to in-person visits is it offers an opportunity for the incarcerated parent to really be intimately involved in their child's lives in ways that you can't be in-person in a facility. So whether that's trying on prom dresses, attending parent teacher conferences, attending dancer recitals or graduations. And so, it allows opportunities for parents to be involved in their child's lives in the community.

Another important factor about the supplemental piece too is that a lot of research, particularly around child welfare that discusses the frequency of contact or best practice around frequency of contact really ranges based on the age of the child, but can be anywhere from one to five contacts per week. And so, when you think about the importance of offering supplemental opportunities, if that's not available for families now with in-person visit, it allows families to have that frequency of contact too.

Our second-best practice is that we want to provide video visiting options that are free to families. So this is another chart that's based off of that survey that we conducted, and it's about 50/50, that 52% of sites currently offer video visiting with a fee for visitors and 44% do not have a fee and one offered N/A, and that's because of a partnership that they have with the community provider, and so it's really about 50/50 there. And so I'm going to pass it to Ann who will talk a little bit about some of the options for pricing.

Ann Adalist-Estrin:

So the cost is a number one issue to families. When we've done focus groups and town hall meetings with families across the country, the cost of video visiting has been exorbitant. So providing video visiting options that are free to families is a really important best practice. When you think about all the ifs that I was saying earlier that video visiting is an important supplement if, and this is one of them. Some facilities, some departments, some agencies can include the cost in their operating budget.

Sometimes agencies and tech companies can collaborate to relieve some of the costs. Often that's around a specific number of visits though, maybe a specific number of hours. And we also have to be very cautious about the fact that sometimes those relationships have strings attached. Sometimes the tech companies will require that there not be any in-person visits in order to provide that kind of support and assistance, and that's really going to be counterproductive to the best practices that we're talking about.

I think a lot of nonprofits in the community have stepped up to provide technology and provide other costs supports to families. And I think grants like the OJJBP grants and other state, federal, local and foundation grants are popping up all over the place where people are looking for support for the cost reduction to families as well as some of the technology. I think part of the other piece for families, in addition to the cost itself, are some of the issues that are related to the cost, like having to have a credit card or families being reluctant to use their debit cards, or if you don't have a debit card or a credit card, you can't participate. And lots of families are concerned about how the procedures and the process and the regulations that are not about the actual cost, but about the process of deducting from credit cards or upfronting a certain amount of money in order to be able to participate in the video visiting.

Megan Pfeiffer:

Best practice number three is offer families flexibility in the location of video visits. And so, really what that's talking about is giving families the option to either video visit from home, on a personal device, which can definitely offer comfort, convenience, flexibility for families and children especially, but also to offer a secondary location, which might be a library, a partner organization that can offer support with the technology or with emotional processing during the visits. And so, again, from our survey, 60% of jurisdictions offer video visiting from a home or personal device. 12% offer families video visiting from the jail or prison, so families actually have to go in either to the facility, some have a location across the street that families can video visit from there, or 28% currently offer both home or facility, that also includes a partner organization. And so sometimes that means that families will go to a organization that the facility partners with to offer free video visiting.

Ann Adalist-Estrin:

I think this is something that really changed because of COVID. I think pre-COVID, there was a lot more requirement, there were more requirements that families have to go to the facility to a building outside of the gate or to a secure building inside the gate, a secure room to do the video visiting. And so, that was the number two complaint that families had was it doesn't eliminate the travel time or the cost of travel time, and then you have to pay for the technology on top of that. So offering families this flexibility in the location is really, really critical. The main issues that families bring up about the positives of this are the actual idea that if it's from your own home, that's where all of this can happen. Being able to see pets for incarcerated parents has been high on their list, being able to cook together, bake things where the child is cooking or baking, and the incarcerated parent is watching is also something that is on the list of families and incarcerated parents.

Bureau of Prisons, federal facilities, state facilities and local jails have all reported that incarcerated parents and the families have a higher level of involvement of parental identity when they can actually get in there and be part of the lives of kids. This also means seeing the family warts and all, it means the brothers and sisters scrapping in the background, it means seeing a messy house when it makes you worried if you're an incarcerated parent, it means jumping in and possibly doing some disciplining or mom and dad or grandma and mom having a conversation about something about the home like, "Wait, I didn't know you got a new TV." And so there will be family dynamics issues that occur as part of having

the location of the video visit be in the home, but the benefits of that are really immense for the child and for the incarcerated parent. I think one more thing I want to say about that is the issue of the privacy that it provides.

PART 1 OF 4 ENDS [00:24:04]

Ann Adalist-Estrin:

... the privacy that it provides, that some of those family dynamic issues that occur have more privacy when they're done from the family's home than from a center, a community center or a building that's part of the correctional facility.

Megan Pfeiffer:

I know one way that a lot of jurisdictions have tackled this issue too is just making sure that folks are reporting who is going to be attending the video visit from the community, and making sure that all family members are listed on that request too, so that they can make sure they know who's in the household. I know that that's a big piece of this process for the jurisdictions that are already currently allow this.

Our best practice number four is to be responsive to children's and families' schedules. According to a national survey of incarcerated parents, 33% of children are ages five to nine and 31% are ages 10 to 14. When we think about the need to have options that are after school is incredibly important when you think about the average age of children is really within that school age for children needing to accommodate school schedules. The other thing to really note is that kids rely on either their other parent or their caregiver in the community to help caregivers become the gatekeepers of that parent-child relationship. And so really need to be mindful of caregivers and parents work schedules, which is why oftentimes, offering choices around weekend, after school hours are really, really important.

It's also important, I think, inside of each of your correctional facilities to be talking to incarcerated parents about their needs and about their families' needs and also communicating with the families about what it is that they need and what is their best times for visiting. A note here too about working with child welfare agencies. Oftentimes, when children are in foster care, visiting has to happen during the times that child welfare workers are working, which is often Monday to Friday, 9:00 to 5:00. It's really important for your agency to be really mindful of which children you're working with that are currently in foster care and how can you best support those families so that visiting can happen easily for those families as well.

Ann Adalist-Estrin:

I just want to jump in for a second and say that the other part of the age issue is that we know that more than half of the kids are under eight. We also have to consider that there's lots of infants, toddlers, and preschoolers out there, and that leads me to my next point about being responsive to the kids and the families is that, there is some research that says that the very young children do have a hard time with the technology and they need specific supports. They're going to be much better off in their own home with their caregivers in terms of being able to access the technology.

Speaking of research, there is so little research on the needs of caregivers and there's so little research on the needs and wants of families and kids in terms of visiting. The little bit that we have is what has lent itself to this webinar and the issues that have been raised by families in the research. Yes the cost, and yes the place that where it is, and yes the time. But this one, embrace, expand and support

technological capacity for the incarcerated parents and their families. We chose this little guy with the tablet because it is really high on the list of frustrations for families that the technology fails.

There is research that the youngest of kids have a really hard time with that. They get really frustrated and it is a huge problem. It also is one of those issues where when I talk about all the ifs, this is really fantastic supplement for visit, if, well yes, relationships need to have an opportunity to be in real time and really engage with each other. You have a little guy and the technology is failing, and he's really upset. Who would be in the best position to be able to manage all of this and talk to him and talk it through? But now that can't happen because the WiFi drops or either the video drops or the sound drops.

Expanding the support can mean having a point person inside the facility, which is really helpful. Also, that is one of the helpful tools of having to go somewhere. If a family goes to the community center and someone is helping monitor and run the technology, then that is helpful. If they're in their own homes, that's a little bit more difficult. But often the technology difficulties are from the correctional facility side and occasionally from the home side. We can't forget also that for many families, they don't have home WiFi. They're doing it on their phones. That can also be problematic. Again, looking for both funding to support the technological capacity and the technology itself.

I also think that it's really important to understand that this will exacerbate any other family dynamics or relationship issues. We have this little guy, he's frustrated. Grandma or a mom gets really frustrated, gets frustrated at the incarcerated parent. And so having this technology support to expand and support it, it is part of supporting the relationships. It's really an important part of supporting the relationship. I just want to say also that this one is really one of the most difficult ones for families because they don't really know what to do when the technology isn't available or when everything just shuts down.

Megan Pfeiffer:

I was going to add one note about that, too, Ann. I think one of the hardest things about technology is those abrupt endings to the visit sometimes where families then can't reengage in the visit. We know how important goodbyes can be to relationships and to attachment. Knowing that that can be a really important time of the visit, that when done right can help build attachment. Yet sometimes, when the calls can drop and then you can't re-sign in to that video visit, it's a really abrupt ending for families. That's really challenging.

Ann Adalist-Estrin:

Yeah. One more thing about this is that in some facilities, the incarcerated parents have to actually get in line and wait for a kiosk. Sometimes they're things that can't be helped like a lockdown. Sometimes they can be helped, but then they get there and then that kiosk breaks down. I'm remembering that there are those technological glitches from the inside as well as just the WiFi and the equipment itself. More and more facilities are providing tablets that are preloaded and that really are creating an incredible potential for this video visit enhancement.

Megan Pfeiffer:

Our next best practice is to engage families in activities and play. First, I just want to note this photo here is from a correctional facility in New Hampshire, which is one of the grantees under the SCA Co-OD Grant track. As you can see here, you have an incarcerated father playing with puppets with his daughter. I just love this photo so much because I think it really encapsulates what we mean when we talk about engaging families in play. Providing both the incarcerated parent and with the families in the

community activities and games to use during the video visits helps them both to shape the structure of the visit, but also to make sure that the child's needs are met during that visit and that they're having fun while they're doing it. In addition to puppets, some other ways that folks do this currently is that they play games together.

It might be giving both the incarcerated parent or the family in the community a connect force set, and one person's telling the other to where to play and how to put their pieces. Sometimes this might mean allowing families or allowing the incarcerated parent to watch their child play video games and leading them through what that activity looks like, especially some of the games that kids really like to play now. It also might mean working with parents, whether that's through a parenting group inside or some other forum, to create a list of questions and topics that they can go over together and whether that's would you rather questions or conversation starters, but ways to engage their child during the visit.

This is also an opportunity that many places have had with partnering with the community organization or in some places a children's museum to create activity kits that are either given to the family and the community and to the incarcerated parent where they can work through art activities together or different writing prompts together that they can do while on video. This is also a time that is not always a fun activity, but could be a time to engage in homework together, but other things that kids might need some support with that also allows the incarcerated parent the ability to be part of their child's life. Ann, do you have anything you want to add about the engaging families and activities?

Ann Adalist-Estrin:

Yeah, I want to say that again, it's about balance. So much of this is balance. Families all want these visits to be fun and they want them to be positive. There's a quote that I always think of that a mom said, "Why ruin a visit that we worked so hard to get by dealing with difficult topics?" On the other hand, dealing with family dynamics and difficult issues are also a part of everyday life and in many ways, the best preparation for reentry. Having activities that also say, "What's the rose in the thorn of your week," is one. "What was the best thing or the worst thing?" "The rose and the thorn of this visit," maybe or "Of my being here." And people are reluctant to say, "Let's not do too many difficult topics," and families need support around that. But I think having activities that are both really fun but also providing support that says, sometimes having hard conversations is really, really also as important as having a good one.

Megan Pfeiffer:

Yeah, thanks for mentioning that, Ann. The organization I'm going to show you on the next slide, too, has these social emotional kits that they give to families that talk about topics like anger management, both for the child and the incarcerated parent, as well as forgiveness and love. So, how do you work through those topics together through art activities and writing prompts that you can do together on the video visits? One note I want to make about the space in this photo, too, which we'll talk about in the next best practice as well, when we're thinking about creating child-friendly spaces, it's not always just about creating really beautiful murals, which is important, too. But it's also about having easy access for the incarcerated parent during that video visit. As you can see in this video, this parent has a bunch of activities right behind him that he can easily access and engage his young child based off of the direction that child is taking during that call.

And then, this is a photo of an organization in New York City, The Osborne Association that does incredible work. But they offer video visiting for parents or they offer support on video visiting both in the city and at the state level as well. They've set up their video visiting locations like a living room, to make sure that families feel welcome and supported in that space. And so that kind of allowing the child to gear where they're going with their play. You can't see in this photo, but some of their spaces also

have a kitchen. A play kitchen so kids can go and make play food and oftentimes, you can have a parent direct their child of what to make. So, "Make me some spaghetti," and "I want a side of apple sauce." Really trying to help guide that child through play is really important, especially as Ann mentioned earlier, given that young age of children that might be coming on the visit, too.

Ann Adalist-Estrin:

It's interesting that you're saying that Megan, because we got a request today from a state that wants to create parenting from prison curriculum. One of the modules they want is healthy eating. The question they asked was, could we use anything in video visiting to promote the healthy eating component? I think new things are going to come up that can connect in with video visiting projects.

Megan Pfeiffer:

Search for those plastic vegetables that they can use on the video visits, too. But I think that's such a wonderful opportunity to both include play on the video visits, too, and have some really important conversations, especially about for families, too. I think this is true for families in foster care. Incarcerated parents have a lot of feelings about how their children are eating and not just for children in foster care, it can be whoever the caregiver of that child is. That can always be a conversation starter to be able to ask about foods and different ways that they're living, too. Or even asking their child to make them their normal breakfast meal as a way to engage and learn about what their child's daily routine looks like.

As you can see from this photo, too, there's a beautiful bookshelf. One of the things that a lot of jurisdictions also do is provide a book to both the incarcerated parent and to the child so that they can either read it together. For older kids, those can be chapter books that they can read individually and then talk about it together on the visits. But really just thinking creatively about the ways that families can connect. With that, too, oftentimes families are more than just one child. Making sure that the spaces that you're creating have activities for kids that of different age ranges from 0 to 18 or older, even sometimes when you're thinking about older children that also might have younger children and grandchildren, and for the incarcerated parent, too.

Our next best practice is about creating spaces in the correctional facility that are conducive to parents' virtual engagement with children. As mentioned earlier, and this is a photo from the Virginia Department of Corrections of a really beautiful mural and that the spaces that we video visit from are really important. Look, right now, I have a beautiful background on my screen and it's something that we're all really mindful of in this Zoom era and age of COVID. I think it's something just to be really mindful of, too, for the incarcerated parents and sad at the facility, what does their background look like? Is it child friendly? Is it something that is happy and colorful for kids to be able to see? Oftentimes, this can be a space for your facility to partner with an outside organization of artists to be able to come in and do this work, but really making sure that that's done in connection and collaboration with your incarcerated parents.

Whether they can help design the space, to help think of ideas for this space, I think this is a really great opportunity to be able to include them in that process. When we're thinking about spaces though, it's not just about murals and artwork. It's also thinking about what does that space actually look like and where is it located? Is their privacy in that space? What does the background noise look like? How far away are they from somebody else on a video visit? How easy is it for them to access from their unit, so a lot of things as we're thinking about environment and space to be mindful of. This is also sometimes a space that organizations will post their children of incarcerated parents' Bill of Rights, just trying to make

sure that everyone's mindful of the needs of children in this space, and really keeping that front and center.

Ann Adalist-Estrin:

I want to say that we've had people reporting not a little bit either, quite a bit, that some of the kids with these beautiful backgrounds will ask, because they can do it from home they'll say, "Can you take your tablet and show me where your body is or where the kitchen is?" Especially younger children, they really do have a need to see that you're okay in your every day as the incarcerated parent. Some facilities are now doing sort of little booklets that can go home to kids about, "This is what I eat and this is where I sleep." Because young children will have that and then they ask them, and of course, they can't do it. Some of the things that they're used to in virtual engaging with relatives, they can't do with their incarcerated parent and they have these beautiful backgrounds, and then they're asking, "I want to see where you eat."

Megan Pfeiffer:

Yeah. I love that, Ann and that reminded me, some places, too, will actually allow for artwork that kids have drawn to actually go up behind where they're behind where the parents' video visit from. It's so special when a child can actually see, "Oh, my goodness. That's my artwork. I drew that," that they can see in the background behind their parent, too. I love thinking about that of opportunities, too, of children being able to engage in that process as well.

Ann Adalist-Estrin:

I've been mentioning along the way that this is an opportunity to engage in ways that normal families engage and typical families engage. Number eight, best practice is developed humanizing policies for how families are permitted to engage during video visits. We chose this picture because everybody will see something a little different here, but mostly everybody sees an adult who's had it with two kids who are probably tussling in the background. Although I had someone in the training recently say, "No, no, no, no. My mom paid a lot of money when I was a kid for us to have dancing lessons. This reminds me of my mom just saying, 'You've got to practice,' not that we're fighting." People see different things. That means that correctional officers who are monitoring visits will see different things.

That means that there will be judgments made about how people behave. It's very important for us to consider this as a very significant best practice. Typical child development, understanding what is with typical child development for reactants, that little guy with the tablet that we showed earlier that was upset, he might have been upset because there was technological glitches, but he might have just been upset seeing mom and being sad. Do we say, "Oh, wow. He shouldn't have a visit because he got too upset." Or do we say, "This is a typical reaction and we need this support everybody involved so that the child can cope."

This also means things like perhaps allowing incarcerated parents to wear their different clothes, regular clothes or a plain colored shirt, perhaps allowing for pictures to be shared on both sides. Other kinds of things that we hear about are certain words that aren't be allowed to use. We understand that there will be monitoring for security. That is absolutely understood. But the discretionary decision-making that is made about what is a typical behavior for both children, for caregivers on their side, and for the incarcerated parent. Recognizing also that this is going to be where, for instance, people who are incarcerated are going to get upset if they see things on the video visit and that we really, really, really recommend that there'd be very little visit ending that'd be very clear about what are the criteria for, and the rule breaking that would end a video visit.

But it wouldn't be if a two-year-old was running around the room crying or screaming or smacking his mom. It's a little less of a concern for video visits than it is in-person visits because there are lots of in-person visits that get ended because two-year-olds act like two-year-old or a teenager curses out somebody in a typical teenager way. But I think it's this idea that we look at the typical behaviors that are going to happen when we have this connecting in, especially at home, and that we actually encourage facilities to develop a very short list of what would be policies for ending a video visit. And that would not include the typical things that kids would do in reaction to an emotional reaction. Do you want to add anything, Megan?

Megan Pfeiffer:

No, I think it's a great segue into our next best practice, which is give families easy access to policies about video visiting. Thinking about those policies and that list of policies that you're developing, where can families access them? I think these tip sheets that include the roles of video visiting, including who can be present on the call, guidelines for signing up, what folks can and can't wear, can and can't show, need to be clearly posted online that are easily accessible. It needs to be in a place that families can easily access online and not buried deep within underneath certain tabs. And that it also is available in the primary language of families. I think that that's a really important piece to recognize. We just included here, the Virginia Department of Corrections has a really great caregiver guide that talks about both. I think some of those big feelings that Ann mentioned that kids might have, and so for families to expect to deal with, and how they can process through that, as well as all those guidelines and policies that they have for the visit.

Ann Adalist-Estrin:

I think it's important, I mean, as a professor, we had to put these guidelines out for students during all of the early COVID times because they thought nothing of going to the bathroom, holding their phone while they were on Zoom or wearing underwear under the desk and then all of a sudden standing up. We had to actually spell out what they should and shouldn't wear and where they could and couldn't go with their cameras. I think that part of that is just what we have to do for this remote technology. And part of it is specific to corrections and security.

Megan Pfeiffer:

Our next best practice is to provide support before, during, and after visits. We know that even when best practices are implemented, all visits including video visits can be stressful for the incarcerated parent, for children, and for families. I think when we're talking about providing support, it can look different for different people and in different ways. For incarcerated-

PART 2 OF 4 ENDS [00:48:04]

Megan Pfeiffer:

... different for different people and in different ways, and so for incarcerated parents, the support before might be prepping for the visits, and that might be on a one-on-one basis if you have staff inside or this is oftentimes where some community partnerships are really important for that preparation. This is often also a space that is really valuable to have parenting programming inside. This is something that is uniquely part of parenting classes and curriculums, that's really about prepping for these visits and what to discuss and how to engage your child on visits too.

Visit coaching during the visit can be something that can be really helpful for parents that might need some additional support, particularly for parents that might have had longer periods of separation from their children that are trying to rebuild relationships with their children. Or sometimes that might have some contentious relationships with the caregiver who'd be bringing the child on the visit as well. Then after the visits, I think being able to have the ability to debrief tough conversations or emotional reactions is incredibly important. We'll talk a little bit later about training as well, but really thinking about sometimes how emotional these visits can be for families as they go back ... or for families, particularly the parents that are incarcerated, as they go back to their units, they might have a lot of big feelings too that the kids might also be experiencing, and so really making sure that that's something that your staff are mindful of.

Ann Adalist-Estrin:

And also being sure that the normal developmental behaviors of kids are included in some of that support before for the caregivers especially and for the incarcerated parents.

Megan Pfeiffer:

Yeah, super good point, Ann. I think that support before, during, and after can also be for families and children, and so really being able to walk families and caregivers through the visit process. I know Ann mentioned earlier some folks have developed some really great resources around a photo book to show children the visiting process or what to expect on a video visit and also to kind of provide support. This kind of goes back to the previous one around access online, but even access to how you sign up for a video visit. But all of that support is really important for families to know. As we know with Zoom, sometimes you need to be walked through how to do certain things before understanding how to really engage in that process.

During the visit is so critical for children and families too. This can oftentimes be an opportunity to also engage with caregivers separate from the incarcerated parent and child. Sometimes having staff present to be able to pull that caregiver away and maybe talk about some support that they might need, especially for organizations that are providing community support, this is a great opportunity to be able to do that and provide that incarcerated parent some one-on-one time with their child too, knowing that sometimes kids have a hard time separated from their primary caregiver when that person's present as well. Then after the visit, this is a great time to even debrief and provide that emotional support to children and families as well, and also providing access to resources or follow up referrals. This can also be done online, and so this might be after a visit providing some links to resources, whether that's the Sesame Street resources or other really great resources that we're happy to share and that are in the publication as well.

Ann Adalist-Estrin:

How do we know all this? The surveys that Megan talked about were really critical. Our work, we use the saying nothing about us without us. I've been using that saying for many years because including the children with incarcerated people, their caregivers, the incarcerated parents, formerly incarcerated parents and defining the problem and designing the solution is really essential to getting at these best practices. They need to be a part of this process. They're the ones who tell us what they need before, during, and after the visits for support. They're the ones who tell us what's working and what isn't working and what they want. There are a few really good surveys out there that have really sort of blown us all away where we ask what caregivers and families say they need versus what the program providers think they need and they're never the same because the families always need something

that's very important and basic like these kinds of supports and information rather than parenting classes and navigation systems, which is what often providers think.

So ask yourself, is there a way that you can include formerly incarcerated, incarcerated parents in the process? When Megan was showing the slide of the Virginia Department of Corrections environment, they used COVID so beautifully to include the incarcerated parents in designing that mural and that space. They couldn't do anything else. They couldn't bring people in. They were already in there. So they included them in the entire design of the process and I just think that that's a fabulous example of nothing about us without us. The same thing with including caregivers, because the number one problem that everyone is going to have with any of this is how do you engage the caregiver in getting them to visit. Including them in the process as early as possible in program and policy design is one of the really important solutions.

Do you include children and families as advisors to your program in some way? This never used to be a question, but now more and more we're asking and people are, so let's see.

Speaker 1:

I'm just going to give it a few more seconds.

Ann Adalist-Estrin:

Yep. Nope, I was just going to read it, but it's fine.

Speaker 1:

Oh no, go ahead. I apologize.

Ann Adalist-Estrin:

Do you include children and families impacted by incarceration as advisors to your program?

Speaker 1:

We'll just give another second.

Okay, and I went ahead and shared the results.

Ann Adalist-Estrin:

All right. Wow. 70% said yes and 30% said no. That is just improving, that number, exponentially over time, which I love. Be aware that the importance of this is we can't even emphasize it enough and including them early on in a process, I've noticed that a couple of comments and things people were saying, "We don't have in-person visits, we don't have child-friendly visits." If you're beginning to think about designing video visits because of this webinar, begin by saying, "Who could we bring in as advisors from those with this lived experience?" Because if you don't and you design it and then you maybe get funding and then you build it and then you say, "Well, will you come in and see if you like this?," if they weren't involved in the beginning in the initial design of it, it's much more difficult to get buy-in. So involving people as early as possible, incarcerated parents and the caregivers and children if you can, but possibly and probably more likely will be adults who experience incarceration as children.

Establishing strong feedback mechanisms with incarcerated parents and their families. They have to define the need. They have to identify the challenges and design the solution. Bring them in early, as I just said, continue to establish ways that they can give you feedback across the life of a grant, across the

life of a program, across the life of the project. Not always easy. Getting people together who, for instance, come from different priorities and points of view, the kids are not always going to have the same priorities and feelings and points of view as the caregivers, as the formerly incarcerated parents, and so sometimes we're, "Okay, I have all of this information and I have to decide how to use it since I've involved nothing about us without us", but you can begin by bringing people together and then establishing a system for how to get that feedback.

Then I think finally all of this requires training. Training correctional staff on all of the above practices and this one too, we're seeing more and more people requesting information about training, training in everything from data collection to visiting room supervision to specifics around parenting, parenting from prison, and how to support incarcerated parents. So training correctional staff on all of these 11 other best practices is something that it's our last best practice, but it is sort of woven through all of the others, that without training, the others are not going to work as well. So think about that in terms of what training do you already have? Do you have shortened trainings that you could add in a piece or two about one best practice? Could you sort of design a whole training on best practices for video visiting? Could it be sort of what we call the online training that they can go on and do on their own? Although the best kinds of trainings are interactive, either remote or in person, but whatever form of correctional training you can provide in whatever amount of time.

I get requests for everything from 15 minutes to six hours. So think about it, think about what you need, think about how it could be provided because these best practices need correctional officers to understand it. Also, they need to understand from their own point of view what their feelings are about it and how their reactions are colored by their own life and their own experiences.

I just want to say that I think the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections has done just an awesome job of taking all of this information we've just been talking about and operationalizing it, so I'm really excited to turn this back to Megan and over to Deb.

Valerie Carpico:

I'm actually going to hop in real quick here. Sorry, I'm going to hop in real quick before I turn over to Deb. I have been answering some questions in the chat. I just want to throw that in. I know there's one or two questions still looming there, and we will get to those at the end. Also want to say, too, if we don't have time to answer your questions, our information will be provided on the last slide as well, so feel free to follow up with us. We don't want to leave you hanging because I'm hoping that we're getting your wheels turning on just being creative. But if we haven't done that yet, I know Deb is 100% going to do that because the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections, I am always in awe when I hear them talk about what they've done and what they're doing and how they keep being so progressive. So without further ado, I'm just going to go ahead and turn it over to Deb Sahd to present on her topic today.

Emily:

Thanks, Valerie. It's a real pleasure to be here, appreciate the work we've been able to do with Valerie and Megan and Ann, and it's always a journey when you put these things together and we're really grateful for the grant. I want to give you a little background on how we managed our video visits and how we got to over a million. The path started because many years ago, it might have been around 2016, we decided to start end of life and funeral visits remotely. Little background, something that is completely unfair to families by our policy is the family would have to pay for the transport to the funeral, the officer's salary. I mean, it was an exorbitant amount of money that most people couldn't afford to do. Then there's a security component to it from our side.

So we thought, "Why don't we start to do Zooms?" We can connect that to our video conference Polycom systems, and we're not going to charge anybody to do this. That's what we started and they were wildly successful, and the bonus to that is just like video visits, we also have the component during a funeral or end of life where we have staff who can surround that person to address their needs. There's psychologists, chaplains, things like that. It could be very difficult for them emotionally, but we have people there to support them, and that's important to us. Quickly, I'll tell you, one of our first end of life visits was at SCI Chester. His mom was in the hospital and she was comatose and had not moved or said anything, but she was near the end. A nurse had a phone, I gave her the Zoom link and they connected and she heard her son's voice and she moved. It was moving for our staff, for her son, for the hospital staff.

So those things, those connections that are not in person, they're vitally important because everything can't be in person. We understand that, but it's on us to try to make it work for people remotely for our staff and for those in our care. The value of visits. I have a graph there that came from our planning research department. This comes from a report out of 2022. Understand that we have been doing video visits. Initially we did it from several institutions prior to COVID but then we were also doing end of life in funeral and in person. The value that they're showing is when folks leave us, and we use the term reentrant, we have a reduction in recidivism based on the number of visits. You'll see on that chart ... just this is one component. Obviously there's more things involved with recidivism, but this is one component to think about, that as we're providing visits in different capacities, the impact of that for reduction of recidivism, because there's a connection.

Currently we offer six video visits a month, and we offer four in-person visits a month, so we understand that value. A little bit about how we began to expand during COVID. We already had the foundation set and in it was March of 2020, we had our first case at SDI Phoenix. It's a brand new facility, it's huge and it's near Philadelphia. So we hear about an institution, a correctional facility in Italy, and they stopped the visits. Subsequently, there was a riot, an outbreak. They were very upset and immediately our team said, "We can't let this happen. How do we move forward based on what we already have been doing?" So that resulted in an expansion of our server to the cost of \$250,000, which we paid for, and we were able to implement a process replicating some of the things that we already did, also utilizing a vendor that we worked with before that could help us put this together on a massive level.

One of the things that will be very important is whenever you do something like this, how do you schedule? How do you manage things like if somebody moves and we have a visit? So we incorporate a scheduling system. That's what we have been using for the courts for years. I work with the court since 1996 working on video conferencing, and eventually we went into an automated system, which we replicated for our video visits now. If someone has a visit scheduled and they're moved to another institution, that visit is canceled and the family's notified, and then they have the opportunity to reschedule and our court system, that system automatically reschedules. But that's a different animal, but at least we're able to manage with some automation that also helps to support the family and those who are supposed to get the visit.

Eventually, we expand to put a kiosk on every block at all of our facilities. We have 24. This includes our restricted housing units so that we can do the video visits on the kiosk. I will say that we have a pending tablet RFP request for proposal, and that would include video visits on those tablets. We'd be expanding into an in cell video visit in the future. Some of the benefits that we know that people feel through video visits is just, as Ann said, we have a feeling at being at home. They see families who are in other states they haven't seen in ages, and then it's an opportunity that we didn't think about, like what's on the refrigerator, what are the pictures on the refrigerator? Just the smallest of things we didn't think about.

The other thing, as Ann was talking, I would not underestimate the value of what's called mirror neurons, and that is what we see we feel. So if their child is trying to make food and playing while they're on the video visit, what they're seeing, they're feeling. Mirror neurons are very important. It's not in person, but they're very critical. I'll move on to some of the things we've done through our grant. I like to say It's Not Easy Being Green by Kermit the frog, because yellow and blue make green, yellow and blue are the parents, green are the children. It's not easy being green, and we understand that. So we talk about how we've tried to address that.

We were awarded in October of 2020 a grant for \$680,486. It's a three-year grant connecting children to their incarcerated parents and we're doing this ... one component of it, we're doing it through Zoom with virtual reality adventures and games loaded on an Oculus headset. These can be done in person or remote, but primarily cause of COVID, we have done it remote. Now, when we wrote this grant, we had really planned on more in person with the support of the providers, but we, as Megan said, pivoted. So we really focused on the visits occurring in the Philadelphia and the Pittsburgh area, again, which was the focus of the grant as well for support, but we were able to do this through the Zoom. The grant also provided evidence-based female parenting program. We have never had evidence-based, and it updated all of our male parenting programs.

The other component, I was exposed to a lot of some things with virtual reality avatars, and I thought, "Boy, this is really interesting to see how could we do an avatar embedded in our programming?" So we came up with the idea to do role playing, and we create this child in different ethnicities for the role playing. We take three lessons from the male program and we take two lessons from the female, and we allow our parents to interact with that avatar as our staff manager to have conversations for role playing, for things like discipline or communication. Our providers, our PHMC in Philadelphia and Amachi in Pittsburgh and Penn State University measures both the virtual reality components involved with the grant.

Yellow and blue makes green. As I said earlier, this is how, this is our concept for how we see the children and we understand that we need to invest in the parents to impact the children. We are imprinted, we are influenced by parenting as we grow up and in our environment, and so how do we impact with the lives of these children in an innovative way? I know there's a lot of discussion about mitigating generational incarceration and a reduction of recidivism, and those things are really valid and important. I feel the overarching part to that is how do we develop a successful and fulfilling life for people through these interactions with their families that hopefully can help to mitigate those things.

I always say the devil's in the details and it's like working with minions sometimes and we put these things together. There's lots of different things that come up and you always have to have a great team of people. You can have a great idea, it's nothing if you don't have a great team of people and a lot of ability to strategize to make the changes that are needed. You have to have a passion about what you're doing. We want to enhance the lives of the incarcerated parents and the children through our innovative connections and so what fires together, wires together. That's Hebb's Rule. So I thought, "Well, if we could give them both the same experience on a headset for an adventure, maybe they would start to bond in a different way."

This is how it works. We have an Oculus headset. It's the same thing you can buy out on the street and we contracted with a vendor and we have about 11 different virtual reality adventures that are loaded onto that headset. The minor child is in the community at one of the two providers, and they also provide the professional level of support to the children and the family, which is critically important. What happens is we schedule a Zoom and we also give our parents two extra visits per month on top of what they already have if they're in the parenting program. If all the stars align, then they get these two

extra visits a month by Zoom. We put them in a different room. It's completely private, we don't want other people to see them or to make this visit difficult in any way.

Our parenting staff are with them and they helped to facilitate the visit. So they put the headset on, they have 45 minutes to be with each other, and what we found is it has been phenomenal and it has allowed them to open up and have different conversations and have a lot of fun.

PART 3 OF 4 ENDS [01:12:04]

Emily:

Different conversations and have a lot of fun. Here are some pictures of what's on the headset. The space station is one. There's a 360 coloring book. There is Bogo who is a pet dinosaur, and I've done several of these. You throw the stick and it's just like a dog, and the dinosaur comes back and it's really sweet. We're doing this for children who are eight to 16 years old. On the headset, there are a variety of different things that they can choose.

I want to share some testimonials that we had, and this would be an example of what happened at our Philadelphia provider. This came from the staff member who was viewing it, so these are anecdotal. It just shows that it was just beautiful for her to witness what had happened. They had not seen each other face-to-face since the pandemic. While it wasn't in person, this was the first time and it was beautiful. This is an example of a location. This is Amachi, and this is the room where the video visit would occur. The caregiver and the child or children would show up there and they would be acclimated to how to use it. We've done it, if they have two children, they can both put the oculus on and have the interaction with their parent, and that's their location.

In terms of the child avatar role playing, we developed that from scratch. The conversations based on parenting inside out and inside out Dads, we determine the modules that we would be using working with our planning and research department, and they emphasize communication, discipline, and just general interactions. Then here, you'll see we have five avatars. We tried to choose an age range that it's hard to choose eight to 16, but we really worked hard as a team to do that. The first young young girl is Hispanic, and then we have a Caucasian male and an African American young man. Even some of the dialect can have a little bit of an accent, and actors were hired to do that. We really worked hard to try to make this as authentic as we could for the parents.

The other thing that came up, we did not anticipate this pre-covid, we knew we could use some alcohol wipes and we could manage that through security. Once Covid hit, I thought, "My goodness, this cannot mitigate this grant." Did a little research, talked to some people, and we bought the UV virus cleaning box. It cleans 99.9% of the viruses, and you just pop the headset and the handles in there, less than 60 seconds it is completely clean. We provide that to our two community providers as well as our four institutions that are part of the grant.

Some outcome measures. It's really important to measure everything and often. If you don't measure, it's hard to ask for support, especially financially. But in this case, the outcome measures with Penn State, they are measuring the virtual reality parenting program and the child avatar role playing. They're gathering the data on the VR adventure visits. Anecdotally, they know they're innovative, they're thoroughly enjoyed. When it works, it works incredibly well. The first parent felt as if they were experiencing it as a pioneer. The assessment of their program outcomes can help with regard to program replication, which I will talk about that because we're really excited about some of our expansion that we're doing next, even anecdotally.

Some of the things that we've already done with virtual reality, so reentry, acclimation for youth sentenced to life. Pennsylvania was a state where we had the highest amount of youthful offenders who were incarcerated, and Supreme Court said they needed to be released. Part of that plan was to use virtual reality to acclimate these folks who had been with us for 40 years who didn't know how to cross the street or use an ATM machine. That was our first launch into reentry.

The next one, I was in a meeting and there was a lot of discussion about how do we help people who have suicidal ideations and people who are seriously mentally ill. There are officers doing rounds, there is medication. I thought, "Well, why don't we create hope?" I thought, "Let's take the outside in." One of the things we do for ourselves if we're not in the best upstate is we find something that makes us happy. I thought, "Let's do that with virtual reality." That's what we did. We used BetaGo, which is a national organization funded by NYU that provides free randomized controlled trials and surveys for different projects.

They did that with the seriously mentally ill. We loaded the headsets with adventures. I went to our forensic facility and watched, and these gentlemen were thrilled to be able doing race cars or on a hot air balloon or walking on the beach. It incentivized them. They were more medication compliant, and also the unit was calmer. That really helped with our staff. It became a staff wellness effort as well.

Another interesting opportunity was our officer dining room at one of our facilities that was being remodeled, and the designer was in Georgia. I said, "Why don't we just take a 360 camera, take it into the dining room, film it, put it on a headset and ship it to her?" When we did that, it worked. She was able to help design that with the staff's inclusion and she didn't have to travel from Georgia to the coal region of Pennsylvania.

We're still using it for reentry. Two things that are going on right now, one that was just approved. We're going to use virtual reality loaded with 360, meaning that's real video. Just like you went outside with your iPhone, we're doing 360 videos, buying those, loading them into the Oculus. That, we piloted that at one facility for use of force, post use of force, and critical incident for staff deescalation. Also, we have our CISM staff, and they're the people who work with critical incidents. They will also utilize it following debriefing. Then, BetaGo has already agreed to do surveys following that. It's a very low cost if you can buy a headset for \$400 at Best Buy and you can buy some videos for \$1,800, five of them. It's nothing if you can do some positive things for our staff as well. We're really excited about that.

The last thing that I want to share with you, it's really exciting. As we were rolling out these visits, and we found that the interactions from utilizing the headsets was phenomenal. We have one most recently where the parent and the child were actually dancing on the Zoom and it was phenomenal. It has just been a positive experience. Our current secretary has agreed to expanding this to, I think, 20 other institutions for in-person only. This will be utilized to incentivize our parenting program. Anybody who's in that who is permitted to have a visit with a minor child will be utilizing the Oculus once that rolls out. That's extremely exciting to us. We know anecdotally that this works really well. Penn State will continue to evaluate that for us in focus groups which are private. We have no access to that info at this point, but we are incredibly excited about that to roll it out.

The last thing I did want to mention really quickly when we talked about video visits, in 2022, we had almost 790,000 visits in person, we're 76,709. If we break that down into the first quarter, we had 185,000 video visits in 2022, and in 2023 we had 205,000 video visits in person. In 2022, we had 8,900 in person. In 2023, we had 23,000, and that's because we started to open up again post-covid. But, you'll see the difference. In 2023, we had 205,000 video visits in the first quarter and we have 23,000 in person. Thank you for the opportunity. I really appreciate it. I'm really proud of our team. I'm really honored that we were offered this opportunity to try something really new and innovative that's never been done, and it's just been really exciting for all of us. Thank you.

Valerie Carpico:

Thanks, Deb, so much for your hard work and all of your team's hard work. With that being said, I'm going to turn it over to Megan to do some questions and then I'll go into our closing. Megan, I will give you the first question too, just because I know I was answering a few things in the chat. Then, if you want to piggyback off this. There was a question asked, how do we get funding to do these things? One of the big things is Deb spoke to, Deb, they were recipients of a Second Chance Act grant addressing the needs of incarcerated parents and their minor children. There are many opportunities for other grants, but really, and there's many ways to get creative with other providers, share that wealth, work with community providers. There are many ways to do things, even systems you work with, IC Solutions, Securus, there are ways to have things happen. You just really have to think outside the box. Megan, I don't know if you wanted to add to that or go to any other questions, but I will turn it over to you.

Megan Pfeiffer:

Sure, thanks Val. Just adding to that, I think really important is the conversation that Anne was having, and that was that photo of the different buckets too. Thinking about, how do you pay for video visiting in particular, but then in addition, how do you get funding, I think, more broadly for programming and development? There could be a really great space to look for some grants, both state and federal as mentioned.

The first question, or I will say string of questions that were asked, so many of you were asking for the Virginia DOC caregiver guide. Emily is going to be kind enough to drop it in the chat for you all too. Thank you, Emily, because it's a really great resource and definitely would love for you all to be able to see it. Emily's also going to drop into the chat the link to the publication that goes over all of these best practices together more succinctly than Anne and I spoke about. Thank you for doing that, too.

There was another question, and I'm going to actually have us answer it in two parts because I think it's important to think about both pieces of it. But, the first part asks, how can I best advocate for video participation by an incarcerated parent in case planning and coordination for their children in foster care? I'll answer that first part of the question giving you two examples of jurisdictions that do this work really well. The first one I'm going to give an example of is New York City. What we know is, for families that are involved in child welfare, it is incredibly important for them for the incarcerated parent to continue to participate in the case planning process, to contribute to decision making for their children, and for them to have regular contact with their children and engage in services.

One example I'll give in New York City is the creation of a program called the Children of Incarcerated Parents Program, CHIP, which is a partnership between the New York City Administration for Children's Services and the Department of Corrections, both state and local here in New York City. Really, it provides services, support, and technical assistance to any cases involving a parent or youth who is incarcerated. What they do is have specific parent-child visiting days, provide support for phone contact, especially before phone contact in New York City was made free for incarcerated individuals.

They also have a dedicated agency liaison. It's a specific person that's within the Administration for Children's Services that is a resource for folks from any foster care agency, for families, for community partners, and for DOC staff. Really, having that person as a dedicated liaison is incredibly important. Then there's also a work group that involves different players, defense agencies for family court that are involved in helping to make those processes better. Just giving that as an example of ways that collaboration can be incredibly important to be able to advocate for that participation. But, it's really bigger than just a one thing piece. One, one, yeah.

The other example I will give is Allegheny County. One of the things that they've also done really, really importantly in terms of a lot of the other really great work that they do is they do trainings with judges. When you think about the importance of people and players that are involved in the family court process, actually understanding the video visiting process as well as the in-person visiting process at any of the jails or prisons that your families are incarcerated at. I think that training piece can be incredibly important to even help in the advocacy process, too.

I'm going to ask the next part of the question, and I'm going to pass that over to Anne actually to answer. Then Anne, feel free to jump in at that beginning part too. But the next part of the question I guess really talks about maybe kids that don't want visits. What is somebody supposed to really do if you're working for that foster care agency? Or really, for any staff in that situation, what should they do in those scenarios?

Ann Adalist-Estrin:

Great, thanks Megan. That's a great question. I mean, I think the first thing is that you have to understand, what's the boundary here? More and more we're getting court orders that there are visits. Then there's no wiggle room, and that's a different way of dealing with kids that say they don't want to go, if it isn't their choice than if it is their choice. The other part of that is that kids don't want to go for a whole host of reasons. They want to see their friends, they want to play baseball, a whole host of reasons, and they don't want to go because they're upset and have issues with the parent.

A lot of times I think that staff has to examine their immediate reaction, and often the reaction is that they don't want to go because the visit is traumatizing or the parent isn't behaving appropriately, may be true, but may not be true. Understanding the combination of why is the child not wanting to visit and what is there really going on in the relationship. Is there a way to work together on that relationship?

Then the third part of that is, if they say no and if the agency wants to honor that no, that's beautiful. Remember to keep asking, because a lot of times child welfare folks and caregivers as well will just shut down. They don't want to go anyway. They don't really want to take the child. If the child says, "I don't want to go to visit," or, "I don't want to even do the video visit," then they say, "Okay." But, it's important to ask again and again, because if they say no once, that doesn't mean they're going to say no every time. Support around that, support around why they don't want to go.

I also want to go back to what Megan said about training. Training for the judges is really critical. We did that early, early, early on in Pennsylvania. The training for child welfare is also really critical, because New Jersey has an ongoing training for child welfare on children with incarcerated parents. We have seen over the last 11 years that they've been doing that training changes in the way that the visiting process is handled. Everything that I just said, more comfort from the workers, more scheduling, more ability to do it in ways that support the child, the caregiver, and the incarcerated parent and the child welfare worker.

One thing I want to say about the funding thing real quick is that more and more people are adding this piece of video visiting, like tablets for instance, into other funding. A couple jails that I just heard from are getting funding to do data collection. Totally separate, but they added into their budget for the funding application tablets so that they could do the data collection on who has kids, and give those kids resources and give those families resources through the tablet, and use the tablet to do video visiting. There are some creative ways to add in video visiting paraphernalia, et cetera, to other types of funding.

Megan Pfeiffer:

Thanks for that, Anne. I'm going to answer three questions rapid fire, 10 seconds. There's one question that just asks about if video visits can address the married couple too. What I will say is that when these best practices are adopted, they can support every part of the family. There's a lot of pieces, I think, about partnership with additional organizations for that, too, that we can definitely talk more about and feel free to reach out to us too.

There was another question about if you don't currently have video visiting at your facility, and that's a space if we work already together that we can definitely talk more about. The publication might be a good place to start even trying to work with some of your agencies, or you can always reach out to us and we can talk offline about that. Then the final question is, will there be a recorded copy of this webinar? Yes, there will be. It'll be sent out as follow up once it's made available. I will kick it over to Val.

Valerie Carpico:

Thank you very much. I want to thank everyone for joining us today. I know we are a few seconds over. Just want to wrap it up to, again in closing, to really have you think about what was discussed today. Don't get discouraged thinking, "Well, I'm a small jail and I don't have this kind of money to do this." Reach out, let us know. I think there's a lot of opportunities. Again, at the end of the day, this helps families, and family reunification is important to work on while they're incarcerated because we know that reduces recidivism in the long run.

Also, it's going to make conditions within your facility most likely better, as Deb mentioned, with less incidents between folks who are incarcerated, less incidents between staff. With staffing shortages, whatever we can do to help strengthen our staff too and keep them and wanting them to come to work every day is so important right now. Again, thank you very much. I am a minute over. Again, any questions, please reach out to us. But, really, thank you for spending your afternoon or morning with us today. Have a wonderful day, and thank you again.

PART 4 OF 4 ENDS [01:32:29]