

Inside The Osborne Association's

PREPARE PROGRAM

Victor St. John and
Kathleen A. Tomberg



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About the Authors

Victor St. John is the Director of Research and Analysis at New York City's Board of Correction. He was formerly a Senior Research Associate and Graduate Fellow at John Jay's Research and Evaluation Center. He holds a Masters of Criminal Justice from John Jay College and he is pursuing the Ph.D. in Criminal Justice at the Graduate Center of CUNY.

Kathleen A. Tomberg is the Deputy Director for Strategy and the IRB Officer (Institutional Review Board) for the Research and Evaluation Center. She earned a Masters in Forensic Mental Health Counseling from John Jay College of Criminal Justice.

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Research and Evaluation Center at John Jay College of Criminal Justice
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Research and Evaluation Center
524 59th Street, Suite 605BMW
New York, NY 10019

<http://www.JohnJayREC.nyc>

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Introduction

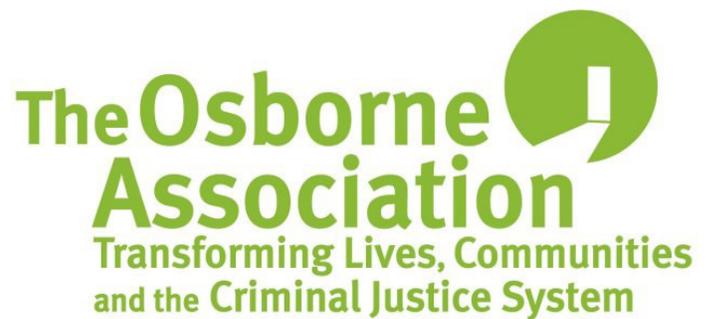
In 2016 the Osborne Association began a new reentry program called Prepare for fathers and father figures returning from prison. Prepare utilizes a dual focus on parenting skills and job readiness to increase economic and family stability and reduce the likelihood of reoffending. By helping men become better fathers and co-parents, Osborne hopes to help program participants re-integrate into society successfully and permanently. Prepare targets father and father figures who have been released from prison within the past six months. After successful completion of four weeks of group programming, Prepare provides one year of job placement and support services.

An evaluation of Prepare is currently underway and includes interviews with program staff and participants, focus groups with participants, observations of workshops, analysis of programmatic and survey data, and a thorough review of the background literature and program materials.

Background and Context

Relationships between incarcerated parents and their children are difficult to maintain, but they are important to the relief of incarceration-induced trauma. Deterioration of interactions between both child and adult can have physical, emotional, and psychological impacts (Baunach 1985; Lee 2005). Children of incarcerated parents face a higher risk of incarceration later in life (Dallaire 2007; Huebner and Gustafson 2007), greater risk for delinquency or criminal activity (Hoffman et al. 2010), mental health problems (Murray and Farrington 2008), below average academic grades (Stanton 1980), school failure and dropout (Trice and Brewster 2004), greater risks of homelessness (Wakefield and Wildeman 2014), and feelings of depression, anxiety, withdrawal, shame, and guilt (Bloom and Steinhart 1993). Hostility, aggression, and anger towards parents and siblings are also associated with having an incarcerated parent (Fishman 1983).

Healthy relationships between an incarcerated or formerly incarcerated parents and children can ameliorate many negative issues and promote positive outcomes for both parties. Research has shown that healthy parent-child relationships are associated with a decline in repeat offending among incarcerated persons (Showers 1993; La Vigne et al. 2005), improved parenting skills (Moore and Clement 1998; Harrison 1997; Wilson et al. 2010), and better communication between children and parents (Magaletta and Herbst 2001).



The Beginning of Prepare

Programs in the United States that aim to maintain social ties between incarcerated parents and children have focused on convicted or formerly convicted mothers and their children, neglecting the role of fathers (Parke and Clarke-Stewart 2002). There has been a recent increase in programs aiming to foster relationships between incarcerated or formerly incarcerated fathers and their children. Many of these programs overlook the non-relationship obstacles that impede a father's ability to develop healthy relationships with his child(ren), including lack of housing access, inadequate medical and mental health support, and economic instability (Travis 2002). The Osborne Association's Prepare program directly addresses economic stability and the maintenance of familial ties that together contribute to desistance from crime (Visher and Yahner 2008; Berg and Huebner 2011).

Prepare is an Osborne program located in both the Bronx and Brooklyn. The US Department of Health and Human Services' Office of Administration for Children and Families funds the program. It consists of four weeks of group programming that promote improved economic stability, improved relationships with participants' children, and stronger family ties for recently released fathers and their families. Participants are introduced to five core workshops: 24:7 Dad, Family Works, Strengthening Relationships, "Ready, Set, Work!", and MRT-Job Readiness. Workshops on financial literacy, child support enforcement, resume building, mock interviews, and other obstacles that may impede the reentry process supplement the five core curriculums. Participants can also take advantage of other Osborne-wide resources like free Occupational Safety and Health Association (OSHA) certification training.

Participants of the program can expect a rigorous schedule with workshops Monday through Friday from 9:00am to 3:00pm with an hour lunch break. This schedule prepares participants for full-time work by requiring daily, on-time attendance for the entire program period.

Most core workshops and supplemental sessions take place in a group setting with trained facilitators. Case-management and resume review sessions are one-on-one. Osborne provides daily metro cards and gift card incentives after 2 weeks and 4 weeks of program participation. Participants also receive gift card incentives for completing evaluation activities like surveys, interviews, and focus groups. Fathers and partners in the program have access to career coaches, family specialists and receive job placement assistance for one year following graduation.

"I think [Prepare] is working well by giving our participants a platform to make their transitions back into society. I think that the support that we give them is beneficial. I know that the discipline of coming here every day for the four weeks is helping them. Although prison is structured, to be released from that environment and then out here can be overwhelming. We've had participants tell us after the program is over that they wish that they can come back. I think that we are giving the participants the opportunity to sound off."

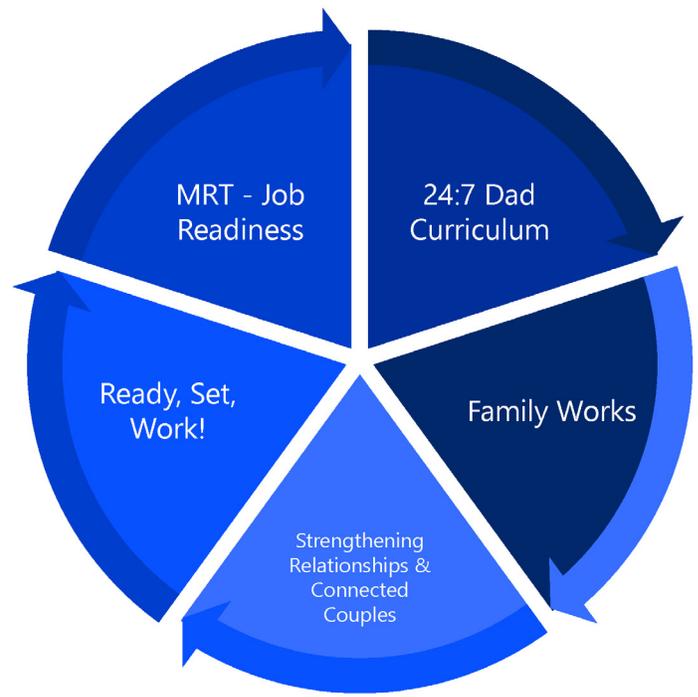
-staff member

Five Core Workshops

Prepare workshops cover development of parenting and co-parenting skills and job readiness. A supplemental workshop is included only for those men whose partner also enrolls and focuses on the relationship between them. Each workshop series is broken up over a number of class sessions. The intensive nature of the program does not leave time for make-up classes. Three curricula focus on parenting skills and relationship building (24:7 Dad, Family Works, and Strengthening Relationships/Connected Couples) and two focus on job readiness (Ready, Set, Work! and MRT-Job Readiness). Curricula utilized for these workshops were developed by the National Fatherhood Initiative (2014) and Osborne staff.

24:7 Dad Curriculum

The **24:7 Dad curriculum**, developed by the National Fatherhood Initiative, teaches men how to proactively and intentionally engage with their children. It focuses on five key attributes of a good father – knowing your strengths and weaknesses, caring for yourself, knowing how to father, developing parenting skills, and having good relationships. Individual lessons and workshops help men understand the importance of father figures in a family, their own



emotions and capabilities, how to take responsibility for their actions, and how a father contributes to his children's social, educational, and emotional development. The curriculum also supports development of parenting skills, with an emphasis on the proper use of discipline. A father's own self-care is highlighted with discussions on physical health, nutrition and relationships with family, friends, and community. This curriculum also encourages fathers to become cognizant of the unique role a mother brings to raising children, distinction between fathering and mothering, and how to develop a positive relationship with the mother of his children (24:7 Dad 2014).

Family Works

Family Works workshops, developed by Ken Bloomfield (Osborne staff), foster a supportive environment for parents to share experiences and challenges of raising their children using lectures, discussions, role plays, readings, presentations, and videos. Facilitators offer parenting theory, up-to-date research, and information on best practices that support each father's individual goal with their children. Family Works encompasses identification of tasks associated with parenting; the impact of incarceration on participants and their families; lessons dedicated to Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES); and lessons on healthy communication and problem-solving skills. The FamilyWorks curriculum was developed by Osborne and has been used for in-prison parenting courses for several decades, before it was adapted for use in reentry settings.

Strengthening Relationships & Connected Couples

The **Strengthening Relationships**, developed by Ken Bloomfield (Osborne staff), curriculum focuses on repairing weakened relationships between fathers and their children and/or partners due to incarceration. Its goal is to evoke introspection on how a father can better mitigate the effects of incarceration through development of healthy expectations, strengthening communication, and understanding the role of conflict in relationship building. Participants engage in lessons on respect, importance of empathy, domestic violence, and effects of separation.

Connected Couples, developed by Ken Bloomfield (Osborne staff), is a curriculum for fathers and significant others that supplements Strengthening Relationships. It is scheduled only when a significant other enrolls in the Prepare program with the participating father. This workshop specifically targets team parenting and relationship satisfaction. Discussions touch on the topics of communication, co-parenting, expectations, loyalty, intimacy, fidelity, finances, forgiveness, incarceration, and violence. Both parental figures are present in these sessions.

Ready, Set, Work!

Ready, Set, Work! workshops, developed in 2005 by the New York State Division of Criminal Justice Services' (DCJS) Division of Probation and Correctional Alternative (now known as the DCJS Office of Probation and Correctional Alternatives), focus on skills that are necessary to enter the job market. Lessons place emphasis on setting realistic employment goals (e.g., salary expectations or the work commute), interviewing skills (e.g., the one-minute pitch, proper language and tone), external barriers that participants face (e.g., stereotypes, technological disadvantages, drug use or halfway house regulations), and resume development.

MRT - Job Readiness

Moral Reconciliation Therapy (MRT) is a form of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy used to promote healthy moral reasoning. MRT is specifically helpful for adult and juvenile offenders and at-risk clients meeting parts of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5) criteria for one or more substance use disorders (Robinson n.d.). The treatment is expected to improve a participant's morality and identity, which this model understands as the source of a person's goals, motivations, and values (Little and Robinson 1988).

The **MRT-Job Readiness** workshop follows this same logic – behaviors change through the alteration of a person's thoughts. This workshop consists of six modules centered on job attainment and job retention. Exercises within the modules require individuals to write, draw, and speak. Facilitators utilize a manual to help instruct, organize, and focus group discussions and advance participants through the program (Little and Robinson 1994).

To supplement the job-readiness related workshops, mock interviews are also incorporated into the Prepare curriculum. These interviews help program participants practice their new skills and practice answering questions about their criminal justice background. Osborne brings in a variety of staff members to give the men ample opportunities to speak with different people through different scenarios. Osborne also equips the men with up-to-date information on what questions interviewers can legally ask and how to graciously refrain from answering illegal questions that could work against them. Finally, Osborne provides participants with free suits and interview attire for job interviews.

Prepare Facilitation

It is clear in early program observations that the program environment and the staff's facilitation style add to the receptiveness and comfort of participants. Focus group participants described a supportive environment where the participants learn both from the facilitator and one another. During evaluation observations it is clear that the participants plan to stay in contact with fellow cohort members and Osborne staff upon graduation. Some positive feelings derived from the fact that some Prepare staff members were formerly incarcerated. The support participants receive from Prepare staff is being examined in future products for the Prepare evaluation.

"This program has afforded my transition from incarceration to freedom a lot easier. Because when you come out, and I'm sure everyone can agree, you have these things on your mind. I have to get my ID. I have to put food on the table. I have to get clothing. I have to get a job. I have to get my resume in order. And you come right here and it's like, be easy just show up, we're going to do everything for you. And all that stress or whatever you were worried about is just gone because you're actually doing the work, and they don't do it all for you, you have to do something. You have to show up. You have to participate. You have to be real serious about not going back to prison."

-program participant

Example Workshop

Several participants return from their scheduled lunch break and enter an open space room equipped with a dry erase board and touch screen smartboard. Two facilitators engage the men with greetings. Two program evaluators join the session, introduce themselves, and sit off to the side. The facilitators provide several fill-in-the-blanks and questions on the dry erase board as prompts for the session: "When I was a boy, one way my father figure was involved in my life was...", and "One way I wish my dad was involved was..."

P1 responds that he remembers that on his walks to school his father would have him recite the spelling of his own name and his address. P2 recalls his father attending his wrestling matches frequently, even if it meant missing work. He continues, reminiscing about the scholarship he earned to work for a military branch that he subsequently lost when he became involved in the criminal justice system. "I was invincible when my father was around." P3 speaks about his mother homeschooling him when he was younger and P4 talks about his passion to become a janitor, stemming from his parent teaching him to sweep, mop, and clean. Lastly, P5 opens up about a memory of him and his father looking up at the sky. "What was that in the sky? Was that a bird or a plane?" his father asked in that memory. "I said a bird." He elaborates that his mother passed away and that this was the faint memory he had of his father. P6 said he inquired about his father growing up. "Who was he? I know I have his facial characteristics, maybe that's why I ended up in prison because I picked up his traits. He was in the streets."

Facilitators X and Y offer anecdotes in response to the prompt, talking about watching sports and going on fishing trips with their respective father figures. They also address the recollections of the participants, including the comment one participant made about obtaining his father's "traits" which led him to prison. X informs the group that while people with incarcerated parents have an increased likelihood of imprisonment, this is not an all-encompassing fact. The group continues, turning the pages of their workbooks.

Discussion for prompt two opens, "I wish my father was a family man, but he's dead now," P6 responds. P7 speaks for the first time: "I wish he wasn't so religious and more involved in my childhood growth," alluding to his perception that he was "raised by the Bible" more than his father. He wished that his father had offered him "real" advice and help instead of referencing scripture and verses from the Bible. Facilitators offer their own parental examples as well. Facilitator X describes his mother using sayings and phrases that he did not understand until he was older and Y describes his father's shortcomings.

As the examples from the facilitators spur discussion, P3 talks about learning "street" habits from his dad. P6 interjects, "the apple doesn't fall too far from the tree." Facilitator Y reminds the men of a prior lesson from this workshop and emphasizes that people have choices despite studies on inherited traits. A discussion commences regarding the ability to locate and incorporate these "wishes" that they have of their fathers within their own parenting.

Post Prepare

What happens to fathers upon successful completion of Prepare remains to be examined. The ongoing evaluation of the intervention (ending in 2020) will explore job placement and retention, as well as retention of the program's lessons. Administrative data will provide program engagement data, demographic data, and a one year picture of job placement and retention. Focus groups, participant interviews and follow up surveys will provide insight showing that participants retained, incorporated, and shared with their family the lessons surrounding job readiness, financial management, and parenting.

"Because here, most of your staff are fellow people who have been incarcerated, so that empathy, they feel us, they walked in our shoes. They know what it feels like to come home and struggle, so with that right there it builds a sort of kind of trust and it also shows you that if you can do it, I can too. So this is what I like about it. This is why I show up. This is why I put one foot forward every day and try and get the best I can get out of here. And it doesn't stop here. One day I'll probably be doing your job."

-program participant

Moving Forward

A combination of a dual focused curriculum, job placement services, and a supportive environment make Prepare a well-rounded reentry program for fathers and father figures newly returning to their families and communities after prison. The intensive nature of the program helps develop both hard and soft job skills men need to successfully obtain and keep a job. The ongoing evaluation of Prepare will investigate the program impact, consider what relationships exist between participant outcomes and their family relationships, and identify areas the program can be strengthened and improved.

“Osborne is teaching me, you have to be patient. I can’t step into it and say, ‘Oh I’m home, I’m your daddy, this is what you have to do.’ It doesn’t work like that. It’s a process. I have to allow [my son] to make his mistakes, support him and just be there unconditionally, and hopefully things can get greater later. It is not an easy thing to do but it’s doable and with a program like this and other programs that I attend, I am able to get the help that I need to help the journey be a little smoother.”

-program participant

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