

Inmates taught to be better dads

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"It's the most important job a man can have."

Commissioner J. David Donahue

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When the door slams shut behind men in the state prison system, many leave behind more than just their freedom.

A significant number of these offenders are fathers, according to Commissioner J. David Donahue of the Indiana Department of Correction.

While some of these men have been more involved in their children's lives than others, the DOC is now offering them a second shot at being a better dad.

A \$1.25 million federal grant was used to implement the Inside/Out Dad parenting program at 15 DOC facilities, including Indiana State Prison in Michigan City and the Westville Correctional Facility also in LaPorte County.

"It's the most important job a man can have," Donahue said of parenting.

The program is part of the National Fatherhood Initiative and focuses on child development, communication and parenting skills, healthy relationships and successful re-entry from prison, he said.

The first 14 graduates were honored last week at the Plainfield Correctional Facility in Hendricks County, according to Philip Slavens, assistant superintendent of re-entry at that facility.

The program is entirely voluntary and unlike other courses, does not result in a reduced sentence.

"The only thing they get out of it is being a better dad for their kids when they get out," Slavens said.

While inmates face unique challenges due to their incarceration, he said the program deals primarily with issues facing all fathers.

"What dad hasn't made mistakes?" Slavens asked.

The inmate course is based on the National Fatherhood Initiative's successful 24/7 Dad program and begins by challenging offenders to question what type of father they have been, according to course information.

The course then moves on to address what it means to be a man, spirituality and faith, healthy ways to express emotions, love and relationships and styles of discipline.

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About The Department of Correction

The Department employs over 8,000 employees and houses 24,000 adult and juveniles in 32 facilities, ranging from minimum to maximum custody, prison camps, juvenile facilities and work release centers. The Department's home page on the Internet can be found at: <http://www.in.gov/indcorrection>. The Department's Re-entry Site can be found: <http://www.reentry.in.gov>.