

Look Up and Hope Highlights from the first 2011 semi-annual progress report

Background and context of this report

In 2009, Volunteers of America launched, Look Up and Hope – a new strategic initiative to improve the lives of families impacted by maternal incarceration. Unlike other programs, Look Up and Hope works with the whole affected family unit simultaneously—mother, minor children, and caregivers. It offers each participant customized, coordinated services in an effort to improve family relations and ease the crisis of reentry. This report, prepared by Wilder Research, summarizes the progress of Look Up and Hope as of May 31, 2011.

Look Up and Hope implementation progress to date

Over the past 18 months the Look Up and Hope initiative has been implemented at five pilot sites:

- Volunteers of America Dakotas
- Volunteers of America Illinois
- Volunteers of America Indiana
- Volunteers of America Northern New England
- Volunteers of America Texas

To date, the program has served 221 women, children, and caregivers nationwide.

PARTICIPANTS BY SITE	Incarcerated mothers (N=67)	Caregivers (N=60)	Children (N=94)	Total (N=221)
Houston, Texas	23	18	21	62
Indianapolis, Indiana	15	13	27	55
Chicago, Illinois	10	11	14	35
Northern New England	11	13	18	42
Sioux Falls, South Dakota	8	5	14	27

Because each pilot site is responsible for raising its own fund-raising, the scope services at each site varies, but every participating family has received some traditional reentry supports (e.g. employment training and parenting classes for mothers, etc.) and home-based case management services.

Client characteristics

Incarcerated mothers

Most incarcerated women in the program are:

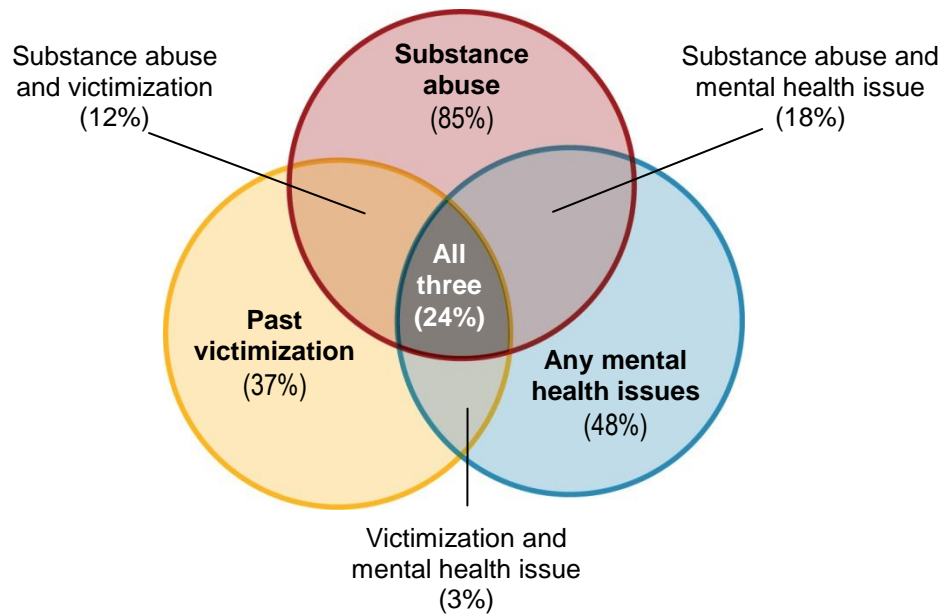
- Young (85% are under the age of 40)
- Racially and ethnically diverse (50% are African-American, American Indian, Latino, or mixed race).
- Non-violent (their most common offenses are drug-related crimes and other property crimes)
- Repeat offenders (54% have been incarcerated at least once before)
- Victims of chemical dependency, mental illness or trauma (see chart on following page)

Children

Most participating children are:

- Male (54%)
- Young (63% under age 9; median age 8)
- Non-white (59% are African-American, American-Indian, Latino, or mixed race)

INCIDENCE OF SUBSTANCE USE, MENTAL ILLNESS, AND TRAUMA AMONG MOTHERS



Caregivers

Participating caregivers are mostly female relatives (most often the child's grandmother). They also tend to be:

- Relatively young (77% are under age 60)
- Non-white (58% are African-American, Latino, or American Indian)
- Heavily burdened heads of households (49% were unmarried and/or had no adult partner to assist them with caregiving)

All caregivers were relatives (99%) or a family friend (1%) — none of the children in the program were in a formal foster care placement arranged through the child welfare system.

CAREGIVERS OF MINOR CHILDREN (At intake)	Children (N=94)
Relative/kinship caregiver (besides mother)	92%
Grandmother	44%
Parent or step-parent	29%
Other family member	19%
Non-relative caregiver	2%
(Released) Incarcerated mother	6%

Family challenges

Client intake records indicate that many of the caregivers and children face their own complex challenges:

- 42% of participating households have annual incomes under \$25,000
- Nearly half (47%) of the participating caregivers had at least one unmet basic need at intake
- Many caregivers are also suffering from chronic health problems such as heart disease and cancer
- 25% of participating children have been diagnosed with a mental health condition (e.g. attention deficit disorder)
- 31% of children have been reported as behavior problems at home or school
- 16% are victims of abuse or neglect (often at the hands of their mothers)
- Most children in the program have not lived with their mother for some time:
 - The majority (62%) of children have been with their current caregiver for more than one year
 - 42% have spent the majority of their lives with their caregiver

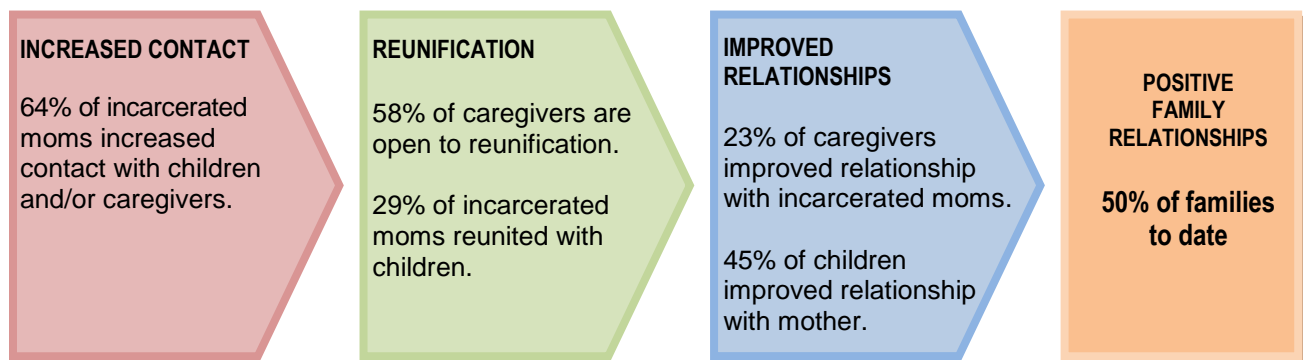
Program results

Participants enrolled in the program have entered at different times since 2009, and some have only been in the program a few months. However, at least six months of follow-up data is currently available for 83 percent of program participants. Based on this information, it appears that Look Up and Hope clients are making significant progress in several target areas.

Improvements in family relationships

Half of participating families met the evaluation’s criteria for “successfully building positive family relationships.”

INDICATORS OF FAMILY STRENGTHENING



Improvements in parenting skills

Most incarcerated women in the program demonstrated improved parenting skills.

FORMAL PARENT EDUCATION OR TRAINING	Incarcerated mothers (N=50)
Received formal parenting education or training	80%
Demonstrated improved knowledge of parenting skills (N=38)	95%
In discussion with program staff	79%
During visitation or observation interactions	53%
On pre- and post-tests	45%
During home visits by program staff	42%
In other ways	16%

Increased sources of family support

Most caregivers (60%) received some type of direct assistance with basic needs from the program. At follow-up:

- The number of caregivers with unmet basic needs was almost halved (dropping from 47% to 27%)
- Most needs related to food, clothing, and housing were completely met, while needs related to transportation or health care persisted
- Four caregivers also reported enhanced support from family or friends, and another four connected with community-based service providers

Improvements in children's school performance, extracurricular involvement, and behavior

Most school-aged children did well in school and increased their involvement in afterschool activities.

SCHOOL-BASED OUTCOMES FOR CHILDREN (6 years and older)	School-aged children (N=46)
School attendance and performance improved or stayed "good"	67%
Received mentoring services or academic tutoring	76%
Child's involvement in educational activities	
Increased	30%
Stayed the same	61%
Child's involvement in extracurricular activities	
Increased	39%
Stayed the same	41%

Some of these positive outcomes for children may have been the result of new positive relationships and social influences that emerged while the children were enrolled in the Look Up and Hope program.

BEHAVIORAL AND DEVELOPMENTAL CHANGES (6 years and older)	School-aged children (N=46)
Behavior at school or home improved or stayed "good"	38%
Increased positive relationships with <i>youth</i> (outside the family)	26%
Increased positive relationships with <i>adults</i> (outside the family)	43%

Modest gains in other areas

Incarcerated mothers also saw some gains in the areas of employment, wages, treatment of mental illness and substance use. However, most of these gains were more modest and short-lived. This may reflect a need for enhanced post-release services and more long-term planning. At follow-up:

- Less than half (46%) of the incarcerated mothers for whom follow-up information was available had created a formal reentry plan with their family coach
- Only 22 percent had plans where family and friends were also involved in the planning process

Conclusion and issues to consider

Overall, the data collected from the Look Up and Hope pilot sites between late 2009 and mid-2011 suggests that the program is having a significant positive impact on its target population. To date, the program has:

- Served 221 clients from 67 families
- Significantly improved the family relationships of most participating incarcerated mothers
- Significantly enhanced the support structures of most participating caregivers and children
- Helped most participating children and youth achieve improved outcomes in school and at home

The limited follow-up data that is available does suggest that some women and their families may need more sustained aftercare and support, and there is clearly a need for more formal family-based reentry planning among participants. However, even with these program challenges, the positive results being reported by Look Up and Hope program participants at the time of this report are significant and impressive for a program targeting such a high-risk, high-needs population.

For more information

This summary presents highlights from the *First Semi-Annual Look Up and Hope Progress Report*. For more information, contact Jessica Meyerson at 651-280-2688. Authors: Krysten Lynn Ryba, Jessica Meyerson. SEPTEMBER 2011.