Inmates: Their Children and Families

Women in Recovery

Dr. Peg Bortner, Principal Investigator
Dr. Andy Hall, Co-principal Investigator
Center for Urban Inquiry

ASU College of Public Programs
Arizona State University
Interim Process Evaluation: July 2005

Women in Recovery
Inmates: Their Children and Families

Program Evaluation of
Gender-specific Substance Abuse Treatment and
Family-focused Transition Services for Female Offenders

Submitted to
Division for Substance Abuse Policy
Arizona Governor’s Office for
Children, Youth and Families

Funded by
Arizona Parents Commission on
Drug Education and Prevention
Contract # AD040517-A3

Submitted by
Dr. Peg Bortner, Principal Investigator
Director, Center for Urban Inquiry

Dr. Andy Hall, Co-principal Investigator
Ms. Josellin Thomas and Ms. Helena Valenzuela

College of Public Programs
Arizona State University
## Contents

Acknowledgments .......................................................... vi

Executive Summary ......................................................... 1

Program History and Components ................................. 4
  Program Goals and Eligibility Criteria ........................ 4
  Recruitment ................................................................. 5
  WIR Phases ................................................................. 5

Program Beginnings: Initial Observations ....................... 7
  Centrality of Children and Connections with Caregivers .... 7
  Participant Expectations ............................................. 8

Strengthening Families Program ................................... 10

Organizational Challenges ............................................ 13

Innovation in Confines of Prison .................................. 14

The Program Evaluation ................................................. 15
  Developing and Maintaining the Outcome Evaluation Database ........ 15

BOX A. WIR Outcome Evaluation Database ...................... 17
Acknowledgments

The Women in Recovery (WIR) participants, the substance abuse counselors and case managers responsible for direct delivery of the program, and the administrative staff who support their efforts have welcomed evaluators into their sessions and spoken candidly in confidential interviews. Their openness makes this analysis possible and we are deeply grateful.

In particular, the following Arizona Department of Corrections (ADC) personnel have played major roles in facilitating the program evaluation: administrative support personnel Steven Ickes, Ellen Kirschbaum, Kim O’Connor, Nancy Bolton, and Tom Litwicki; and program staff Terese Griffin, Karen Hellman, Ed Hernandez, Deana Johnson, Debra Pachnowski, and Rhonda Pruitt. Dr. Daryl Fischer, ADC Research Manager, has provided valuable advice on the construction of the project statistical database, and Allison Blanchard, Co-Deputy Director of the Governor’s Office for Children, Youth and Families, has provided extensive support as the liaison with the Division for Substance Abuse Policy and the Arizona Parents Commission on Drug Education and Prevention.

For sustaining our day-to-day efforts, we are indebted to colleagues in ASU’s College of Public Programs, especially Cyndee Coin of the Center for Urban Inquiry and Janet Soper of the Publication Assistance Center.
Executive Summary

The Arizona Parents Commission on Drug Education and Prevention and the Division for Substance Abuse Policy, Arizona Governor’s Office for Children, Youth and Families, have provided $1.5 million to the Arizona Department of Corrections (ADC) to provide gender-specific substance abuse treatment and family-focused transition services to female inmates. The funds will support Women in Recovery (WIR) programming over a three-year period, July 1, 2004–June 30, 2007, at the Arizona State Prison Complex–Perryville in Goodyear, a Phoenix suburb, and the Southern Arizona Correctional Release Center (SACRC) in Tucson.

The primary objective of the Parents Commission initiative is to impact the futures of children of imprisoned mothers by supporting women’s attempts to combat substance abuse and addiction and to prepare for a successful return to their families and society. A formal substance abuse therapy program, WIR includes intensive group therapy, family programming with children and current caregivers, educational and informational workshops on multiple aspects of reentry into society (housing, employment and education), transitional housing assistance, relapse prevention, and postrelease case management. (Part two of this report discusses WIR history and components.)

This three-year program evaluation is an integral part of Commission efforts to assess the efficacy of the WIR program by scrutinizing its design and implementation and to establish systematic measures of program outcomes. (Part three of this report presents the evaluation design.) During the initial six-month evaluation period, all but the most recent WIR groups funded by the Parents Commission have completed their program introduction focused on creating coherent therapy groups based on trust and mutual support. They have progressed to the examination of specific issues of substance abuse and aspects of release from prison, and are preparing for the upcoming intensive interactions and “family labs” that will bring participants’ children, family members and other caregivers to the prisons on a regular and extended basis.

This interim analysis is based on:

- review of program design, including principles, components and objectives as expressed in ADC’s Women in Recovery Program Manual and Relapse Prevention Workbook, Stephanie Covington’s Helping Women Recover, Karol Kumpfer’s Strengthening Families Program Manuals, and An Epidemiological Study of the Prevalence and Needs of Children of Incarcerated Parents within the State of Arizona, prepared by Applied Behavioral Health Policy, University of Arizona, and funded by the Arizona Parents Commission (herein the report is referred to as CIPS);
- observation of 37 treatment sessions, including continual observation of three treatment groups at Perryville and observation of four sessions of two treatment groups at SACRC;
- in-depth interviews with 54 program participants;
- in-depth discussions with key ADC personnel, including substance abuse counselors and administrators;
- seven evaluation advisory committee meetings;
- observation of the two-day training for ADC and community college personnel conducted by Strengthening Families Program (SFP) creators;
- observation of Arizona Parents Commission meeting with ADC WIR program administrators and staff;
- participation in weeklong ADC-sponsored National Institute of Corrections workshop for criminal justice, health services and educational personnel; and
• discussions with ADC’s Research Manager and project advisory committee members regarding construction of the statistical database for outcome evaluation.

Even at this early point in the evaluation, the following are abundantly clear:

1. There is an enormous need and demand for this intensified focus on incarcerated women’s relationships with their children and their transition to society.

2. The substance abuse counselors who deliver the program and the administrative staff who support their efforts are deeply committed to the WIR program and view it as essential to achieving the pivotal goals of reducing substance abuse, promoting better parenting skills, and reducing relapse, revocation, and recidivism.

3. The Parents Commission’s initiative and investment have enhanced and reenergized ADC efforts to positively impact the lives of children by providing meaningful programs for their incarcerated mothers and realistic preparation for reentry into society.

Throughout this initial evaluation period, ADC personnel have expended much time and energy to expand the WIR program to 12 new groups supporting 154 additional women. The program has reached 62.1 percent of its 248-bed capacity. In particular, the four substance abuse counselors who form the keystone of the program to date have extended their responsibilities and increased their obligations significantly. It would be difficult to overstate what has been accomplished in terms of transforming the prison environment at least in this sphere. For most of the participants, the program has provided a safe, confidential and supportive space for dealing with important questions of their histories and their futures and, especially important, an opportunity for dealing with the preeminent issues of their relationships with their children and families, combatting substance abuse and addiction, and taking concrete steps to increase the possibility of change.

The high levels of competence and commitment of the substance abuse counselors delivering the initial aspects of the WIR program have been firmly established, as has the direct relevance and considerable promise of the program to improve the lives of WIR participants’ children. Nevertheless, important questions have also emerged during this initial evaluation period and they will command our continuing attention.

One such question relates to the considerable challenges of creating and implementing a child-centered and rehabilitation-based program within a prison setting that routinely prioritizes control and discipline. Traditional prison culture mitigates against the innovation and transformation necessary for the efficient and effective delivery of the WIR program.

Staff members are committed to the principles of the program, especially prioritizing family and children. The vision is strong, but the details are far less certain. Basic issues are problematic, including willingness and ability of children’s current caregivers to cooperate with and support the program, logistical problems such as visitation approval and transportation to the prisons, successful adaptation of a family program never before used in the prison environment, informing and gaining the support of ADC correctional line staff, and adequate postrelease case management services. Those program components most immediately related to women’s release from prison require further development, including the family sessions and resources to deal with the fundamental needs for housing and employment.

Equally important as questions regarding the organizational capacity of the prison system are the unanswered questions about the program’s efficacy in the face of forces beyond the control of the prison. While some of the women are returning to relatively stable and supportive environments where adequate housing and constructive family relations await them, many are extremely apprehensive about what is going to
happen when they are released. They know that,
“It’s going to be extremely difficult no matter
what,” and some are dismayed, making state-
ments such as, “The deck is stacked against me.
I will need all the help I can get and then some.
And still, this is the life that I’m going to go back
to.”

It is one of the WIR program’s greatest
strengths that it acknowledges these forces, which
include the importance of employment, educa-
tion, housing and WIR staff support. ADC’s part-
nerships with community organizations, such as
Our Common Welfare and Arizona’s Women’s
Education and Employment, enhance these ef-
forts. The program emphasizes family stability
and women’s abilities to rebuild, or build for the
first time, their relationships with their families
and to successfully assume the monumental re-
sponsibilities that face them. Likewise, the pro-
gram’s acknowledgment of the crucial link be-
tween life in prison, and what does or does not
happen there to prepare women for what is to
come, is a realistic approach that engenders hope
as well as serious preparation for release.
The history of the Women in Recovery program within the Arizona Department of Corrections has been characterized by extraordinary staff commitment and effort. The program began in March 2002, with no special funding, and was sustained by a small staff. In April 2002, ADC applied for funding through the U.S. Department of Justice’s Residential Substance Abuse Treatment (RSAT) grant program and received funding for staffing and the inclusion of more comprehensive approaches, including family programming. The program was fully staffed, with three substance abuse counselors and one administrator, by midyear 2003.

In 2003 several factors converged to strengthen the WIR program’s potential to impact the lives of the children of incarcerated women. These included Governor Napolitano’s longstanding interest in the issue; the mutual work of staff members of the Arizona Department of Corrections and staff members of the Division for Substance Abuse Policy of the Governor’s Office for Children, Youth and Families; and support from the Arizona Parents Commission on Drug Education and Prevention for efforts to positively affect the lives of the children of incarcerated parents (COIP). In January 2004, the Commission allocated $1.5 million to their COIP initiative that includes an expansion of the WIR program as a preventative strategy focused on helping parents change or avoid behaviors that might contribute to their children abusing drugs and/or alcohol.

In February 2004, ADC staff drafted and submitted a formal proposal to the Parents Commission. In July 2004, WIR administrators submitted formal requests to establish the newly funded counselor positions, and in August 2004, ADC created an Administrator of Family Services. After extended discussions and revisions, including the July 2004 notification to change the existing Family Reunification Program to the Strengthening Families Program, the Governor’s Office approved the proposal for formal presentation to the Parents Commission on November 9, 2004.

Program Goals and Eligibility Criteria

The WIR Program Manual states that the five primary program goals are to:

- clinically assess all incoming program participants,
- train all program staff in substance abuse and addiction as well as how to work with female offenders,
- have at least 90 percent of the program participants drug and alcohol free,
- provide program participants with opportunities that focus on family reunification and will assist them in community reentry, and
- have Phase IV participants remain drug free for at least 90 days after release.

WIR is a formal substance abuse treatment program that emphasizes the creation of a therapeutic environment in which licensed substance abuse counselors employ a holistic approach to reducing substance abuse and dependence. The program uses a gender-specific curriculum that highlights intrafamilial communication and the prevention of substance use and abuse among the children of incarcerated women. Child-focused program enhancements include books and materials for children, playground equipment, and special visits and activities, such as family meals and group sessions.

Any female inmate may apply for the program, but eligibility and selection criteria are designed to maximize the potential benefits of program involvement. Eligibility criteria focus on time-to-release date, alcohol/drug treatment needs scores, and detainer scores. Mental health scores and security level are also considered.
WIR participants at SACRC must have 6 to 9 months to their earliest release dates and participants at Perryville must have from 15 to 18 months to release. All applicants must have an alcohol/drug treatment need score of two or greater and a mental health score of two or lower (with case-by-case consideration of individuals with scores of 3). The program also prioritizes applicants who do not have detainers that would preclude their participation in aftercare services on community supervision with Arizona (detainer scores of 2 or lower).

### Recruitment

The high demand for the program is clear, and word-of-mouth communication throughout the institutions generates greater demand than can be accommodated. The women learn of WIR from many sources in addition to WIR staff recruitment such as information provided during reception and orientation, circulated on units by program clerks, and broadcast on the prison television, as well as direct recruitment by correctional officers. For example, one woman was urged to join the program by her husband who is also in prison and has been through the Men in Recovery program.

A major factor in the program’s attractiveness is the widespread, frequently cited belief that the recidivism rate for WIR graduates is far less than that for other women. Women volunteer for the program because they simply do not want to return to prison and think the program will help them realize their goal. Records maintained by the case manager at Perryville indicate that only 15 of the 124 San Pedro Unit program graduates have returned for parole/probation violations or new convictions. This 12.1 percent return rate compares favorably with the 35.9 percent recidivism (for any reason) within three years of release for the 7,969 women released to the streets of Arizona over the period 1990–2001 (as reported by the ADC research unit).

### WIR Phases

Women in Recovery is comprised of four phases. Phases I through III are delivered during incarceration: At Perryville in Goodyear, a suburb of Phoenix, the program runs for the last twelve months of incarceration; at SACRC in Tucson, the program runs double sessions for the last six months of incarceration. Phase IV begins upon the participant’s release from prison. In Phase I, the WIR program and treatment process is introduced to participants, necessary paperwork (such as group ground rules and treatment consent forms) is completed, and the Addiction Severity Index (ASI) is completed and reviewed with the group substance abuse counselor. A copy of the ASI is placed in each participant’s treatment file, which is maintained by the substance abuse counselor and used as a basis for the WIR treatment plan. However, Phase I is primarily devoted to familiarizing participants with the group therapy process, which is new to many, building a sense of trust and bonding among the members, and preparing participants for substance abuse treatment. This initial program stage is generally completed over eight sessions.

Phase II is delivered over 32 sessions totaling 128 hours of group therapy. It covers a gender-specific treatment curriculum aimed at substance abuse treatment and family unification. This stage uses Stephanie Covington’s *Helping Women Recover*, a woman-centered approach to treatment. A variety of topics are covered, including self-definition, family relations, sexuality, and spirituality. In addition to weekly group therapy sessions, participants attend 14 weeks of *Strengthening Families*, in which participants’ children and other family members are involved in weekend “family labs” led by Rio Salado and Pima Community College faculty. Also during Phase II, WIR case managers begin preparing participant-specific informational release packets, based on an individual needs survey and on information maintained in each participant’s treatment file.
Prerelease planning is the focus of Phase III, with WIR case managers working with each participant to facilitate her successful transition to the community. The case manager assures coordination between the WIR treatment program and community-based services and treatment, with concentration on an individualized relapse prevention plan. This program stage is delivered over 12 sessions. When release dates occur some time after completion of Phase III, participants continue to work with WIR case managers during that period to prepare for release.

Phase IV consists of the delivery of after-care services and structured case management. This aspect of the program begins upon the participant’s release from prison and includes formal tracking for 90 days and informal tracking for six months. Major concerns include critical services such as housing, employment, and substance abuse treatment. For those released to community supervision, case managers may collaborate with parole/probation officers. Phase IV also includes 30-day transitional housing for those needing such assistance.
Program Beginnings: Initial Observations

Centrality of Children and Connections with Caregivers

The Commission’s initiative to intensify ADC’s focus on the children of imprisoned women resonates with the preeminent concern of those who have volunteered to participate in the WIR program. The women’s opinions and experiences are wide-ranging—some see their children every weekend while others have not been in contact for years—but the importance of their children is a strong commonality for the vast majority. Consistent with the CIPS findings, this is a constant theme both in the therapy groups and individual women’s confidential interviews with evaluators. Many women volunteer because they believe the program will help them to not return to prison. They also say that figuring out how to succeed as mothers is crucial because they are “doing the program for their children.”

The group sessions that dominate the beginning of the program provide the foundation for improved family communication and strengthening, the heart of the program essential to family futures. The majority of WIR participants who do not have children also feel that the Strengthening Families Program (SFP) and corollary group discussions on family relations will be important for them in building relationships with other family members, such as brothers and sisters or significant others, and for improving their interactions with children in general and within their extended families. Even those women who will be released prior to the SFP (because their release dates have changed since they joined the program) say they would like to have been a part of those activities. One of the program’s major strengths is the capacity for the group sessions to spark hope for the future and to give the women a desire for the next step out.

Some WIR participants talk about how they have disappointed their children and are uncertain how to rebuild their relationships. Family cohesiveness seems particularly daunting for the women with teenagers, some of whom experience difficulty even speaking with their children on the telephone. They say they can sense the anger in the voices of their teenagers and feel helpless to repair the damage at such a physical and emotional distance. The prospect of disciplining teens is especially troublesome and the women fear that their children will not listen to or respect them. For example, one person questioned, “How will I build that respect when they can say, ‘You’re in there [prison]. Why should I listen to you?’”

This resonates strongly with the conclusions of the CIPS report regarding parental effectiveness. Imprisonment greatly magnifies the tremendous challenge faced by all parents of teenagers, but the WIR program strengthens their determination to confront the problems and accept responsibility.

For other program participants, especially those whose children are in the custody of Child Protective Services or have lived with other family members for extended periods of time, it is not a matter of rebuilding relationships with their children, because there is little from the past to reconstruct. These women are at the very beginning of creating “a real family,” and many face a personal legacy of profound guilt and regret.

A significant portion of the WIR participants, perhaps as much as one-third, has no contact with their children. Some do not know where their children are and see no avenues for reconnection. Others receive few visits due to a lack of transportation (“there’s little money for gas”), while some of the women say the current caretakers do not want to bring the children to prison or do not want them to have any contact unless their mothers “can prove they are going to go straight.” They want proof that the problems of the past are truly past.
The Commission’s advocacy of positive relationships and interactions between women and their children’s caregivers is a pivotal issue. The ultimate effectiveness of the program may hinge on the degree to which the forthcoming Strengthening Families Program and corresponding Phase II group therapy discussions are able to engender caregiver participation and nurture communication and cooperation. The Commission’s focus on this issue, including results from the CIPS report on incarcerated parents, has reinforced ADC’s acknowledgment that much effort is needed to facilitate regular contact and communication between imprisoned women and those who care for their children in the mothers’ absence.

Those relationships range widely, from women who say, “I owe everything to my mother who is taking care of my kids,” to those who make statements such as, “I have no clue where their father’s girlfriend is keeping them or what they’re doing. For all I know my kids are in a drug house somewhere.” Regardless of where each woman is on this continuum of connection with their children’s caregivers, the emphasis on the cultivation of productive and cooperative relationships is simultaneously one of the program’s most significant innovations and greatest challenges. ADC’s efforts to impact the lives of the children of incarcerated women by encouraging more productive interactions between mothers and caregivers will remain a major focus of the evaluation.

**Participant Expectations**

When asked about what they expected of the WIR program, the 54 participants who spoke with evaluators in confidential interviews discussed a wide range of issues that revolved around self-transformation, alcohol- and drug-related problems, children and families, and the return to society. Many volunteered for the program because they believed they had exhausted or played out many options and, of necessity, were ready and committed to “moving on.” One participant said, “I hope to gain... I want to be a better mom, and I hope to gain, through talking about some issues that have gone on in my past, to gain some release from those issues, and be able to move forward.” Another woman said:

> I’m open for anything. Everything they’re [the group is] talking about now is stuff I done already laid out on the table, and I’m willing to empty my pockets about it in front of everybody. I done cried all out about it and, you know, hey, I’m looking for the next step. I’m looking for what’s next, what’s next? ‘Cause after I do all this, I’m jumping off ledges and hitting rock bottom.

Perhaps because the groups are in the initial stage that emphasizes self-reflection and disclosure, virtually all those interviewed said they expected the program to provide an avenue for self-understanding (“understand what makes me tick and why I feel the way I feel”), dealing successfully with the past, or gaining the strength and skills necessary to create a better future. The women who volunteered for the program described their expectations in a variety of ways, but they shared a common hope that this experience would **really** make a difference. They said they hoped to learn ways to “deal with myself,” “straighten myself out,” and “figure out what I need.”

The women wanted to examine how they ended up where they are and to resolve lifelong struggles as one important step to replacing past failures with future possibilities. The women expected the program to help them “heal emotional wounds,” change their mindsets, help them to gain self-discipline and control, and build self-assurance and self-esteem. Several women who were young when first imprisoned stated that, frankly, they “need to grow up.” One such woman who has been in prison for four years said it is “a big gap from being young … Now I’m an adult and I’m gonna go out … I’ve never really lived as an adult. [WIR] is gonna help
me grow up, change my habits...because I'm used to having a little attitude.”

Other women said that the time had come to face the experiences and emotions that have contributed to past decisions and behavior. The following two quotes illustrate these expectations. The first participant feels she has spent her entire life running from herself and the second feels this may be her opportunity to initiate change.

I hope to be able to learn more about myself, learn who I am today. I've probably spent the last 27 years of my life avoiding dealing with who I was and what I am through drugs and alcohol... I need to learn to be OK with me, so that I don't have to feel like, next year when I get outta here, that that's my only option, going back to drugs and alcohol and the insanity... If I don't learn a new way of doing things I'm not gonna have a chance.

Let me blossom. There's a lot of things I keep to myself, I don't like to talk about. I just hope to get to, I don't know, find myself a little bit more. If people are finding themselves, why can't I?

The vast majority of women focused on repairing the consequences of past decisions and preparing for a different future. About 15 percent of the women mentioned that they joined the program because they expected it to improve their immediate lives, that is, to provide a very different kind of space and experience within the prison environment. They spoke of general support and mutual respect found in the therapy groups, learning about others' experiences, and learning how to “put time inside to good use.”

Unlike the general prison atmosphere, one woman spoke about the “privacy” afforded by the WIR program: “I look forward to coming because it’s so private.” The same woman was one of those who commented upon the anticipation of graduation and accomplishment. Succeeding at something was a major expectation and attraction, as expressed by another participant:

“Success. I want to be able to succeed at something without quitting or without failing at it. I want to complete the program.”

For many participants, the program was about dealing with drug and alcohol problems, about learning how to stay sober and drug-free. Others spoke about dealing with addictions to drugs, alcohol and, for at least one, addiction to gambling. Another participant wanted to deal with the fact she is “addicted to the dope game,” especially the fast money and power from selling drugs. And, although she expected the group to help in this regard, she held herself ultimately responsible for change:

Regardless of what they teach me in the group, if I don't want to change or I still have that mindset, I'm gonna do what I did before, you know. So I want to get my mind frame changed... Okay, you gotta do this, regardless of all the benefits you got from that, you can't go back to that because you're gonna end up losing this, this, and this.

The expectations of other participants focused on their children and families. Although the Strengthening Families Program does not begin until later, the participants clearly expected the program to help them become better mothers. The women also looked to WIR to help them “rebuild relationships,” “deal,” “reconcile,” and “communicate” with family members, including those using illicit drugs. One woman said anything that would start the process of reconciliation with her parents and “remedy the things that have come between us” would be good.

Although many of the women’s conversations were tinged with regret about the past, many also focused on their expectation that the WIR program would help them prepare for a different future, for “dealing with life out there” and “living in a right way when I get out.” The following quotes illustrate these sentiments:

I just wanna get back on my feet, you know, because I'll have been locked up for so long and I just
wanna know how it is to deal with society. 'cause the attitude I have in here, I can’t take it out.

I don’t want it to end here … Out there’s where the hard part starts … going back out there and not getting involved with the same people, not taking the easy way out of everything … I know people that come in, go out, come in, go out … I’m just learning the life I lived wasn’t life at all … I have a friend, that’s going out in two months, and her mom does drugs, her family, and I’m worried about her … she walks out of her house and it’s there.

At first, I wanted to realize how to act again in society. One thing about doing drugs, for me, I can’t speak for everybody, but I know from experience that the way I did it, you start to live a life that it’s like that’s all it is [doing drugs]. I totally separated myself from any kind of normal life … Some people just come home from work and stay home, just things you would do everyday in your life … When you’re constantly doing drugs you don’t do anything like that. When I got out the first couple times, it was like a weird feeling, like this empty kind of … I always felt like, “Okay, what do I do with myself right now?” I didn’t know what to do. Because all I knew how to do was run around and try to find drugs and try to find dope and go somewhere and get high … So that was one of the things I thought I could try to get out of this group, but now that I’m in here, that’s just something I’m gonna have to learn how to figure out myself.

Many of the women discussed specific issues about returning to society that they hoped the program would address, especially finding meaningful employment and achieving economic independence, obtaining independent housing or succeeding in a halfway house. Others hoped the program would provide a wide array of resources and information, such as referrals to AA and NA meetings, information on finding a job despite their criminal records, and help with applying to have criminal records expunged. Some of the participants sought advice and new skills in dealing with abusive relationships, while others sought help in facing the stark realization that, if they succeeded in remaining sober and drug-free, they would reenter a world with few or no friends. One woman said “I have no sober friends” and another feared her best friend would desert her:

I don’t know if she’s going to like me anymore … It’s like, I’m different; I’m not the same … With the WIR program, like I am saying, there’s that mutual respect that everybody has for each other. If only everybody could have this respect for everybody all the time.

The vast majority had well-defined images of the potential benefits of program participation, but, at the beginning, a few explicitly chose not to have expectations, making statements such as, “Whatever I get out of it, I get out it,” and “In here if you ask for anything you’re going to get rejected, so if I don’t really ask for a whole lot I can’t be rejected a whole lot … In here, there’s limits on what can be done.” At least one participant became impatient with the in-depth self-disclosures that characterize the initial portions of the group therapy and feared that the program’s promises might be empty, like those she has heard in former juvenile and adult corrections programs: “Once you’re out, you’re forgotten.”

Strengthening Families Program

Less than two-thirds (30 of 48 or 62.5%) of the women who discussed the Strengthening Families Program in their interviews with evaluators said that they anticipated being able to participate fully in this aspect of the WIR program. Almost one-third (15 of 48 or 31.3%) said that, although family-focused programming was important to them, the participation of their children and
families was highly problematic and almost certainly impossible. An additional six percent, 3 of 48, will not participate because their release date has changed since joining the program and they will leave before that portion begins.

About half of those who anticipated participating in the family programming did not specify which family members would be joining them for the sessions, while the others were expecting specific individuals to attend. These included their mothers with their children, both parents with their children, one of their parents, one of their children, their children and grandchildren, sisters or brothers (some with spouses and some with nieces and nephews), their boyfriends, and their boyfriends with family members. A few women said they planned to participate fully even though no family members would be present. One such woman said she anticipated that the SFP content will apply to “relationships throughout our lives.”

Several of the women have not seen their family members since they entered prison and are looking forward to their involvement in the program. The family sessions are a tangible way to demonstrate their resolve to change their lives: “I want my kids to know that I’m trying to make a change and I wanna make a change and have them be a part of it, you know, be able to know that I’m trying to interact with them in a right way.”

For several, changes have already taken place in their interactions with their families. One woman said the WIR therapy group has made her realize she “talks at” her children rather than communicating with them, and, as a result, she has tried to make changes in her letters, phone calls and visits in order to encourage her children to talk with her “on a more real level.”

The new, less forbidding prison setting holds great promise for many of the women, as evidenced in one woman’s exclamation that, “It’s very important. Everyone is anticipating it.” The fact that the sessions are scheduled for the evening seemed especially significant and contributed to her excitement that she and her young daughter will begin to build happier memories and “It will be a different environment for my daughter to see me in.”

Several women mentioned that they were looking forward to their parents and boyfriends seeing them sober, knowing that they are different and what they are “really like.” One woman said that her boyfriend has never seen her sober except when she was in jail and that her mother has only seen her as a child and when she was “cracked out.” Another was eager to be part of SFP with her boyfriend, and for him to see her sober, because they plan to marry and have children.

For many of the women, sharing the program with their families symbolizes a new beginning and a rewarding opportunity to address previous problems or to give back to those who have supported them despite their troubled histories. For example, one woman said that the family sessions were very important to her:

Because my family is my life, and they want me to be a functioning part of society and they want me to be off drugs. I mean, they’ve been through it with me, and what better way to have them be a part of it? I mean, I dragged them through the dirt, why not take them through the better side?

One woman’s experiences reflected many women’s simultaneous openness and caution. Reuniting with her family and children was her major concern and “a big part of the reason why I was so interested … One of my biggest fears is being away from my kids and them not remembering me or thinking bad or negative about me.” Her fears are accentuated by her early memories:

I remember as a child going to visit my mother in prison, and it was more like punishment … we didn’t have good visits. I just remember having awful feelings, awful thoughts, and I don’t want my kids to have that when they come to see me. I feel like they will enjoy it better and I would also enjoy it better doing the activities in the group with the other families.
Several women noted that they believed interactions with other families would improve their family’s relationships. One woman was pleased that her family would learn that her drug-related experiences were not unique to her:

*Yes, like I said, I want other people to interact with my family so they can hear it from someone else … No matter how many times I say it, they might think that’s just the way I look at things, and when they hear someone else say it, they could say, “Wow! That’s exactly what she said.”*

Almost one-third of the women stated that they were uncertain whether their children or family members would participate; some were certain it was impossible. The most commonly cited reason for nonparticipation was the unwillingness of caretakers to participate or permit the children to participate. This was the situation for over half of those in this category, and it was most likely to arise when fathers or the fathers’ families had custody of the children. For example, one of the women has occasional visits with her sons but said their new stepmother was “resistant to allowing” her sons to participate in the family sessions. Several have no contact with their children’s fathers and have little hope of effecting change. One woman was especially distraught and said she is “trying to make amends” with her son’s father so she can see her son but she doubts if she will succeed: “It breaks my heart, because I do want to talk to them and see them and have them be a part of this program, because the program has helped me.”

Women’s mothers seemed particularly central to their hopes for successful participation; however, some feared that such participation would not be possible. One woman said her mother was physically unable to bring her daughter, and another was concerned that, although her mother was willing to participate, the logistics might prove insurmountable because her mother must come from out of state and take time off work. One woman believed her mother would not be permitted to come to the prison because she is an ex-felon and therefore considered “a threat to the institution,” while another had not asked her mother to participate because she did not want her to be subjected to “what you have to go through” to have visits and especially “can’t stand” the idea of her mother being searched or having to say goodbye at the end of the visit.

It is clear that SFP faces a major challenge in the attempt to establish a new way for women to be with their families within the prison. The visitation setting as they now know it is “extremely noisy,” potentially degrading, and does not fit the bond-inducing environment envisioned by the program. One woman put it succinctly: “I just want to know what’s going to be different … What are they going to do different?”

Another woman said that, although she has sent her family the information about the program and she feels they are being as supportive as they can, she doubts that they will get involved because of the cost of transportation and because they have “run to her rescue” so many times in the past that no one is confident that she won’t go back to “the same old mess.” She says her children have been hurt deeply by her imprisonment, and WIR has helped her realize she must stop and listen to her children and let them get their anger out (“I have two angry [young teenage] daughters”).

One woman said that she really did not want to participate in the family programming aspect of WIR because her family is “closed” and she does not think they will come to the prison or speak about family issues in front of others. Personally, she does not think she would be comfortable in the setting either: “It’s not my thing, I guess.” A final woman said that her family would not be participating in the family sessions because none of them—her child or her mother or father—know that she is in prison. She would rather have them think she “just up and left” than confront the disappointment of her imprisonment.
There is still time before the family component of the WIR program begins for most of the women. It is possible that the situation will improve for some and their families will become willing or able to participate. Regardless of whether they are able to take full advantage of family sessions in terms of their own families, the great majority of women believe this aspect of the program is crucial if lasting change is to be achieved in their lives. Even those women who will leave prison before the family program is established express this sentiment. One such woman said that it is extremely important because many people in prison have lost their families or lost people they loved or care about “because of the situation they have gotten themselves into.” She concluded by saying that, if she were there for this part, she would invite her mother and father.

Organizational Challenges

The expanded and enhanced WIR program is being implemented within an organizational structure undergoing extensive change. Especially important is the innovative vision of corrections endorsed by ADC Director Dr. Dora Shriro. This philosophy prioritizes preparing inmates for their return to society while maintaining institutional security and societal safety. The obstacles and challenges to such transformation are considerable and have been evident in the implementation of the commission-funded WIR program. Both bureaucratic logistics and professional ideology figure prominently in this process.

Although it is beyond the scope of this evaluation to assess the complete ADC organizational context, it is important to acknowledge the inextricable links between efforts to positively impact the lives of children of incarcerated parents and the myriad demands upon ADC staff members. The individuals responsible for effecting the Commission-funded WIR changes have extensive responsibility for multiple dimensions of the overall ADC transformation. For example, the Administrator of Addiction Treatment Services was transferred to a new position in August 2004, but continued to fulfill those responsibilities and those of her new role until an addiction treatment services administrator was hired in January 2005. Equally important, those leading the WIR implementation effort have also played key roles in responding to major time- and resource-consuming events such as the high-profile hostage situation. This “larger picture” is crucial to understanding the full context in which the WIR program is being implemented.

This initial period of WIR implementation has been characterized by organizational difficulties that compete with and threaten to undermine staff commitment and dedication to realize their goals. Delay in program implementation has been a major concern, as evidenced by the fact that funding was allocated and transferred to ADC January 2004, while the first therapy groups funded through this initiative began 11 months later on December 16, 2004. Several factors contributed to these delays, including logistical requirements of expanding the program, bureaucratic inertia, and communication uncertainties.

To expand the WIR program, it was essential for ADC to hire new staff, allocate and renovate additional space, and effect significant program changes such as adapting content to permit inclusion of participants with more serious mental health problems (higher risk scores) and implementing the specialized Strengthening Families Program curriculum advocated by the Parents Commission. From the outset, the hiring of additional, highly qualified staff has presented an obstacle to this endeavor. Bureaucratic inertia has plagued attempts to expedite approval of new positions, expanded advertising, and movement from applicant pools to hired, trained staff. Authority to hire was obtained only by November 1, 2004, and the full level of staffing funded by the Commission’s initiative was achieved in June 2005.
Staff members have experienced similar problems in obtaining and renovating appropriate space, especially for the family workshops and gatherings. Permission to use inmate-generated funds (through commissary purchases/profits) to renovate space formerly used as unit kitchens was not finalized until November 9, 2004, and renovation has not been completed although the space will be needed as soon as July.

The negative impact on the quality of program delivery has been evident. For example, the professional and skillful leadership provided by the substance abuse counselors has steadily increased the confidence program participants have that their discussions are confidential. Women have tested confidentiality guidelines and have concluded that, “What happens in group, stays in group.” Only one participant has reported inappropriate disclosure of sensitive personal information and, after candid discussions with those who had violated the guideline, she decided to continue participating in the program. This significant progress toward creating a confidential milieu amenable to treatment efforts has been undermined by the fact that, due to the lack of private space, several groups meet in highly visible physical locations. The proximity to ongoing activities of other inmates not committed to WIR precepts has restrained several group members because confidentiality cannot be assured.

Communication ambiguities and the challenges of coordinating the efforts of three entities—ADC, the Governor’s Office, and the Arizona Parents Commission—have contributed to implementation delays. Although the monies had been transferred to ADC accounts and considerable good faith assurances and understandings were in place, key ADC administrators perceived that final approval of the program design was not certain until four months later. Due to continuing refinement of the program proposal, ADC staff members did not implement policy and program changes for which they did not feel certain they had final authorization.

**Innovation in Confines of Prison**

The Strengthening Families Program curriculum and workshop sessions, coupled with Phase II group discussion topics, are prominent in the program design and the potential for success in terms of impacting families and children. As discussed above, the program holds much promise due to the emphasis on family communication and prevention of substance abuse among young people, but ADC staff members are faced with major unanswered questions. Empirical assessments cited by the program creators strongly suggest that the program content and approach have considerable potential to impact children and families, but SFP has never been used within a secure prison environment.

The creators of the program provided a basic introduction to the general program and facilitated experience with and discussion of the recommended exercises and interactions with families. While the program creators evidenced much interest in the ADC experiment (and appeared intrigued at how this will be accomplished), they did not assume responsibility for adapting the program to the prison environment. An ADC administrator is currently providing an introduction to the program for the therapy groups. Subsequently, substance abuse counselors conducting the weekday group sessions have full responsibility for developing the underlying philosophy and approach of the weekend program, and community college instructors will be responsible for actual implementation of the program.
The Program Evaluation

There are two major evaluation components: the first examines the process through which the WIR program has been designed and is being implemented, and the second focuses on program outcomes, specifically the rates at which participants complete the program and successfully return to society. Both aspects of the evaluation scrutinize the program’s impact on women’s interactions with their children and their children’s caregivers and, especially, the potential impact on the children’s current and future lives.

As requested by the Parents Commission, during this first year evaluators are focusing on the process through which the WIR program is delivered. As detailed in the report’s Executive Summary, the process evaluation relies heavily upon direct observation of program activities and in-depth interviews with program participants and ADC staff members. It includes review of the program design and modifications and encompasses all dimensions of the program, especially the structured therapy sessions guided by Stephanie Covington’s *Helping Women Recover* and the Strengthening Families Program.

During the first six months, evaluators have documented and assessed WIR program activities centered primarily on the establishment of the Commission-funded groups, including staffing and logistics, and the implementation of the initial phases of the formal substance abuse treatment program. Throughout the second six months, evaluators will scrutinize the later phases of the substance abuse therapy program; the interactions of program participants with their children, caregivers and family members; prerelease planning activities; and after-care case management.

Throughout this period attention will be focused on the “family labs” conducted within the prisons, with particular emphasis on assessing program efforts to improve intrafamilial communication and prevent substance use and abuse among the children of program participants. In addition to ongoing conversations with program participants and program staff, evaluators will interview community college personnel leading the family labs and conduct focus groups with participating family members.

Developing and Maintaining the Outcome Evaluation Database

While the first year of the evaluation focuses on program design and the implementation process, it is also essential to establish the foundation for the outcome evaluation that will be central during the second and third years. The major objective, in consort with ADC, is to create a database that will facilitate the examination of the short- and long-term outcomes of the WIR program. This includes the establishment of valid measures of outcomes, such as program completion and successful return to society, and the combining of data elements gathered by program staff and the ADC research unit. (See BOX A for the list of data elements under consideration for inclusion in the outcome dataset.)

It is essential that the database include all available information relevant to the program philosophy and design, as well as information that prior research suggests may be related to program success. These include factors such as family composition, severity of drug problem, demographic variables (age, race/ethnicity, education), offense histories, and measures of program participation and achievement (including pretest and posttest scores when available).

Evaluators will review potentially important factors that are more difficult to quantify, and seek to construct variables to reflect the complexities of the issue. Examples of such factors are the strength of bonds between mothers and children, the degree to which a desire for family unity and stability motivates program
participants, and preparation for community re-
integration through job training and education.

To explore the program’s full impact it will be essential to gather data on a comparison (“control”) group as well as program participants. The comparison group can be comprised of a concurrent group of individuals who qualify for the program, based on established criteria, but do not become participants. Because their histories make them appropriate for the program, comparison group members will be similar to program participants in many respects, thus highlighting the impact of program participation. The assessment of short- and long-term recidi-
ivism will be enhanced greatly by the use of a comparison group.

The statistical database will be maintained in Excel and SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences). Textual data, such as observation notes and interview transcriptions, will be maintained through NVivo, a software program designed to manage extensive “word datasets.” The large sample size will make it possible to provide de-
scriptive findings (a statistical portrait of percent-
ages and patterns), as well as conduct multivariate analyses to examine factors that in-
crease program success while controlling for other possible influences. All findings will be presented in accessible graphs and tables, as well as full statistical detail. During the data gathering, data entry, and analysis, continual verification and multiple-stage checking will provide quality assurance.

We will take all precautions to ensure data confidentiality. Research reports/findings will be presented in the aggregate. Evaluators will never release information linked to a specific individual and individuals will not be identifiable. Once original data have been gathered, we will create a name-code index for program participants and program staff. Files linking names with assigned research numbers (“codes”) will be maintained in a separate and secure location. Data will be maintained in secure computer files and (for paper records) in locked filing cabinets. Access will be strictly limited to primary research personnel.

The research has been reviewed by ASU Institutional Review Board and all human subject safeguards will be employed throughout the project.

The database quality and comprehensiveness is essential to maximize the evaluation’s capacity to analyze for whom the program is working and why. This will contribute to program efforts to strengthen its effectiveness for groups who have not completed the program, including consider-
ation of program strategy changes.
BOX A. WIR Outcome Evaluation Database

**Dependent Variables**
- Program completion
- Recidivism

**Participant Characteristics**
- Age
- Race/ethnicity
- Education
- Reading level
- Family structure
- Children—number and ages
- Level of communication with children—type, frequency
- Frequency of visits with children
- Contact/communication with caregiver for children—type, date
- Most recent employment (outside prison)
- Additional items to parallel parent survey, e.g., physical and/or sexual abuse; involvement with juvenile justice system

**Problem Severity Information**
- Public/Institutional Risk Scores
- Alcohol/Drug, Mental Health, and Detainer (time to release) Scores
- Addiction Severity Index (ASI) MV
  - Family/social severity rating
  - Legal severity rating
  - Psychiatric severity rating
  - Medical severity rating
  - Employment severity rating
  - Alcohol severity rating
  - Drug severity rating
- Clinical impressions
- Drug(s) of choice, ranked

**WIR Program Participation**
- Stated reason for application to WIR
- Attendance
- Completion of specific program phases
- Completion of program
- Related AIMS Documentation: program start, voluntary drop, program termination, and program completion
- Number of individual therapy sessions
- Pre- and posttests administered by WIR staff
- Urinalysis tests: dates, results

**Strengthening Families**
- Caregiver(s)—demographics, relationship to WIR participant
- Children—demographics
- Program provider assessments
- Strengthening Families pre- and posttests

**Release Conditions/Services**
- Needs survey/release information
- Housing
- Employment
- AHCCCS, food stamps
- Counseling services
- Recovery groups
- Case manager 90-day tracking
- Written relapse prevention plan
- Participant program evaluation

**Current ADC Stay**
- Conviction
- Present unit
- Release type
- Work assignment
- Disciplinary actions (“tickets”): type, disposition

**ADC and Criminal Justice Case Histories**
- Number of prison terms
- Number of staff assaults and dates
- STG affiliation
- COIII comments
- Pre-WIR offenses and dispositions
- Postrelease offenses and dispositions