

Lift Every Voice (LEV) Program

“See Them As Women, See Them As Mothers”

Lift Every Voice Program Mission:

- ❖ To inspire, motivate, and empower women to take constructive action to support their mental, emotional, spiritual, and physical well-being.

Lift Every Voice Program Goals & Objectives:

- ❖ Decrease the number of newborns placed in foster care so that 90% get placed with their mother or relative
- ❖ Improve the health and well-being of pregnant women, who are incarcerated, and support the mothers and caregivers by creating an individualized care plan
- ❖ Improve mother/child relationships to enhance bonding and attachment for the mothers

Lift Every Voice Program Description:

- ❖ LEV is a place-based and home visiting program. LEV provides outreach and case management services to incarcerated pregnant women prior to/after release from the county jail (West County Detention Facility). LEV links the women to prenatal care, psychosocial support services, and other home visiting programs. LEV engages and retains women until they deliver their babies.
- ❖ LEV is an innovative public health approach to addressing an often overlooked and neglected population of women. LEV clients are at high risk for adverse birth outcomes. High risk may mean experiencing for example, anxiety, depression, and other diagnosed/undiagnosed mental health issues, substance-related and addictive disorders, poverty, co-occurring medical issues, intimate partner violence, birth spacing, and homelessness. This hard-to-reach population requires a complex array of services and strategies to assure that they make healthy and positive choices and acquire successful parenting skills and practices. Through educating women and providing them with essential information, they can and do make informed decisions about their reproductive choices.

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Lift Every Voice Program Approaches & Practices:

- ❖ LEV offers trauma-informed, strength-based, family-centered and gender-specific interventions to the pregnant/parenting women, in which we serve. Motivational interviewing, a 'readiness for change' framework, and cultural humility are incorporated to engage and retain each woman. LEV's approach is comprehensive, holistic, and relational-based. LEV negotiates with detention facility health services and support services staff about women's medical and mental health care to help staff understand the biopsychosocial issues that have contributed to their incarceration.

Family, Maternal and Child Health Programs:

- ❖ Lift Every Voice (LEV) Program is a program of Contra Costa Health Services, Public Health, Family, Maternal and Child Health (FMCH) Programs. FMCH Programs include: Black Infant Health (BIH), CCS Program (California Children Services), Comprehensive Perinatal Services Program (CPSP), Fetal Infant Mortality Review Program (FIMR), Healthy Family America (HFA), Lift Every Voice Program (LEV), Nurse Family Partnership (NFP), Oral Health Program, Prenatal Care Guidance (PCG), SIDS (Sudden Infant Death) Program, and WIC (Women, Infants and Children) Program.
- ❖ FMCH works in partnership with families, community organizations, and provider networks to promote positive and healthy outcomes for women, children, and their families. We strive to serve as an inspiration in all facets of our work as we embrace and utilize strength-based practices to influence service delivery and systems of care.

Lift Every Voice Program Statement of Need:

- ❖ In the last twenty-five years the number of women in prison has doubled. As a result of criminal justice policy changes on sentencing non-violent substance using crimes, women are the fastest growing population of incarcerated individuals. As these women serve their time, they're not the only ones to pay a price. Innocent victims are undergoing the crimes of others—they are the children of mothers in prison.

As of September 12, 2011 (to date), prison officials (in CA) have released thousands of incarcerated women early. One of the intentions is that keeping children with their parents rather than in foster care, will "reduce the likelihood that inmates' children will embark on a life of crime", according to a 2010 memo from Senator Liu's office. *Several studies found that maintenance of family ties during incarceration is linked to post-release success, defined as lower rates of recidivism and fewer parole violations.

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African American women are disproportionately represented in the prison systems. They are three times as likely as Latinas to be imprisoned and six times more likely than White women to be imprisoned. With California's reentry plan underway, thousands of formerly incarcerated people - 'persons coming home', will continue to be released back into their communities of origin. This has put an additional level of burden on already marginalized communities, which experience disparate economic stress, lack of resources and instability.

Summary:

- ❖ **“See Them As Women, See Them As Mothers”**. The vast majority of 'persons coming home', the women Contra Costa Health Services serves want to be contributing citizens to society. In order for this to successfully occur, they require many resources, not limited to stable housing, vocational skills, education, employment, a medical home, mental health, alcohol and other drugs, family violence resources, mother/child dyad and parenting skills.

* Creasie Finney Hairston, "Prisoners and Their Families: Parenting Issues During Incarceration, ", in *Prisoners Once Removed: The Impact of Incarceration and Reentry on children, Families and Communities*, edited by Jeremy Travis and Michelle Waul, Washington, D.C.: The Urban Institute Press, 2003.

** Bureau of Justice Statistics, Prisoners in 2000, Department of Justice, www.ojp.usdoj.gov

LEV Fact Sheet

SYSTEMS & POLICY ISSUES

- ***Shackling Pregnant Women -***

Shackling pregnant women during Labor and Delivery in California has been illegal since January 2006. It was not being implemented at Contra Costa Regional Medical Center (CCRMC). Lift Every Voice (LEV) initiated meetings with several Lieutenants and then the Commander to implement the policy at CCRMC.

As a result of a letter written by a LEV client and LEV support and follow-up, Legal Services for Prisoners with Children and Assemblywoman Skinner (Berkeley) introduced a bill to abolish shackling of pregnant women at anytime. AB1900 passed the Assembly and the Senate, but was vetoed by the former Governor. It was re-submitted as AB568 (Skinner Bill) for the current Governor's signature and was vetoed October 9, 2011. For the third straight year, it was submitted as AB2530 and went into effect January 1, 2013.

- ***Automatic Children and Family Services (CFS) Referrals for Pregnant Women with History of Substance Use or Incarceration-***

LEV participated in a collaborative of health and social service providers addressing inequities in CFS reports to decrease the number of unnecessary CFS referrals made after labor and delivery. (CFS is CPS-Child Protective Services in Contra Costa). During intake, LEV assists clients in creating newborn plans; works with family members, hospital social workers, CFS, probation, parole, substance abuse programs, mental health and others to implement the plan. When a client goes into labor, LEV advocates on behalf of the clients during labor to assure their voices are heard.

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- ***Service Integration and Fostering Coalitions-***

LEV's efforts have successfully facilitated consistent communication among Contra Costa Health Services (CCHS) Detention Health Services and CCHS Hospital and Clinics Comprehensive Perinatal Services Programs (CPSP) regarding the care of LEV clients who are patients in the same system of care. In California, the majority of low-income pregnant women are served by CPSP providers.

Partnership within West County Detention Facility – LEV participates in case conferences and advocacy with California Corrections In-custody Drug Treatment Program, Contra Costa County Office of Education, and Parenting Classes regarding the status of pregnant women and their children, and incarcerated men at West County Detention Facility.

- ***Community Education and Collaboration-***

LEV educates the community on issues regarding incarceration and its impact on the family and community.

LEV's message "See Them as Women, See Them as Mothers" and not 'just' inmates and criminals is fundamental in addressing trauma, stigma and discrimination. More than 200 health, social and human service providers from 20 programs participated in LEV's March 2010 conference. The intent was to learn together and improve collaboration. LEV created an educational video from this conference.

On March 25, 2011 LEV took the message to the women in the West County Detention Facility. The "Moving on Up a Little Higher: Taking Care of Ourselves" workshop's objective to 1) educate and empower high-risk women, 2) challenge them to make positive changes and take personal responsibility, and 3) provide useful information and resources was well received by more than 60 women. Keynote speaker Dr. Angela Y. Davis; along with Project WHAT! and 15 other community resources (Planned Parenthood, Contra Costa College, Youth Services Bureau, STAND! Against Domestic Violence, etc.) participated in community service with the incarcerated women.

- ***Educating Providers-***

LEV's video has been used for training jail nursing staff, deputies, health and social services providers, and at a correctional facility in Sacramento. The video is of a panel of LEV clients (inspired and supported by Jeannie Cummings) who have made positive life choices and are successfully parenting their children. The video promotes a 'promising practices model' for working with at-risk women. Moreover, LEV conducts several trainings each year to community-based organizations and health care providers.

Reentry Efforts-

LEV participated in strategic planning initiatives to create the Contra Costa County reentry plan and continues to advocate for gender-specific and supportive services for pregnant incarcerated women.

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