

Jail Visitation Innovation

Visitation and Family Support Services at
Century Regional Detention Facility
Promote Public Safety

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*I believe that those programs which make
life better for some of our people will make
life better for all of our people.*

A rising tide lifts all the boats.

— John F. Kennedy



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I. STATEMENT OF INTEREST

The Harriett Buhai Center for Family Law (“the Center”) was founded in the 1980s to provide family law services to victims of domestic violence and low-income families in Los Angeles County. During its existence, the Center has seen a massive increase in the population of parents and children impacted by incarceration. It has developed strategies to meet and advocate for the needs of these individuals, with a particular focus on incarcerated women, 70% of whom are mothers.¹ These strategies include education, direct services, and policy advocacy.

First, the Center developed an original legal education curriculum called Mothers Behind Bars, which it taught at Century Regional Detention Facility (“CRDF”), the Los Angeles County women’s jail, through a contract with the Los Angeles Sheriff’s Department (“the Sheriff’s Department”) during various periods starting in 2004 and ending in December 2019. It covered topics such as navigating dependency court, seeking domestic violence restraining orders, and parental rights. Second, since 2010, the Center has served formerly incarcerated mothers by providing individual legal assistance with their family law cases to increase parent-child contact.

Third, the Center advocates with County policy makers, including the Board of Supervisors and Sheriff’s Department, for policies that are tailored to gender-related needs of people detained at CRDF through its Women’s Gender-Responsive Jail Project. Originally named the Mira Loma Women’s Jail Project, this project began as an effort to bring attention to the County’s plan to move the women’s jail to Mira Loma Detention Center, almost ninety miles away from the existing hub of service providers, courts, and community organizations. The Center’s seminal report, *Lynwood to Lancaster*^a, was relied upon in part by the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors in February 2019 when announcing its decisions to abandon the move, create a position for a Director of Gender Responsive Services, retain gender-responsive expert consultants, and re-establish the previously convened Gender Responsive Advisory Committee (“GRAC”). Ricca Prasad, Project Director for the Center’s Women’s Gender-Responsive Jail Project, serves as an Alternate Member for District One on the newly reconvened GRAC.

Throughout 2019, Ms. Prasad led a Visitation Workgroup created as part of the earlier GRAC and composed of county and community stakeholders dedicated to understanding CRDF visitation and family support services. While this report includes findings from the Workgroup’s efforts, *this report represents only the opinions of the Harriett Buhai Center for Family Law and the facts as it understands them based on its research*. It is not endorsed or verified by any other party. We hope that policy makers, government leaders, Sheriff’s Department officials, community members, and others find it helpful. By working together, gender-responsive reform at CRDF can and should be a success story for the County of Los Angeles.

^a Available at <https://www.hbcfl.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/HBCFL-Lynwood-to-Lancaster-Mira-Loma-Report.pdf>.

II. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

While this report is the sole responsibility and of the Harriett Buhai Center for Family Law (“the Center”) and not endorsed or verified by any other party, many stakeholders contributed information and assistance. The Center would like to thank the Los Angeles Sheriff’s Department, Board of Supervisors, and community groups who provided information for this report. We would like to give a special thank you to Claire Hoffman, second year law student at UCLA School of Law, and Imelda Padilla, Community Engagement Director for the Los Angeles County Women and Girls Initiative, for leading the Visitation Workgroup during the summer of 2019 to continue learning about jail visitation. We are also very grateful to the people who made the Visitation Workgroup’s special events possible. Thank you to Melissa Kelley, Director of Gender Responsive Services and former Educational Development Administrator; Marcia De Anda, Sergeant in Custody Services Division; and Tammy Sherman, Deputy, of the Sheriff’s Department for facilitating a site visit to the women’s jail for the Visitation Workgroup. Thank you to the wonderful speakers at a panel discussion organized by the Workgroup: April Amey, St. Joseph Center; Sutina Green, The Place 4 Grace; and Shalei Heflin, Miss Sierra Nevada 2019. We also appreciate the assistance provided by Nicole Jeong of Root and Rebound and Nicholas Reiner of the Anti-Recidivism Coalition in securing space and parking for the panel discussion. We are grateful to Yvonne Vollaire of HealthRIGHT360 for providing a tour of the Gender Responsive Rehabilitation Program at CRDF.

Thank you to the following people who participated in the Visitation Workgroup by providing program information, observations, opinions, and other input for this report:

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III. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report is intended to serve as a primer about why visitation for women in jail is important to public safety, what visitation and family support is provided at Los Angeles County's women's jail (Century Regional Detention Facility, "CRDF"), and how the newly appointed Gender Responsive Advisory Committee ("GRAC") can help support meaningful contact and visitation between people at CRDF and their loved ones. The GRAC was re-established by the County's Board of Supervisors by a motion in February 2019. Its purpose is to advise the Board on ways to improve gender-responsiveness in LA jails. It is hoped that this report is timely, as the new GRAC is considering its agenda, and that it will shed light on the central issue of visitation. It is also hoped that visitation will be a primary focus of the GRAC.

The GRAC, as constituted in late 2018, formed sub-committees, including a sub-committee on visitation. This sub-committee ("the Visitation Workgroup") was composed of volunteer County and community stakeholders who work closely with currently and formerly incarcerated women. The Workgroup continued to meet throughout 2019 while the GRAC was undergoing restructuring. During monthly meetings, participants shared program information, reviewed available data, identified visitation issues, and discussed ideas for improvements. Although this report is authored solely by the Harriett Buhai Center for Family Law ("the Center"), it also summarizes a year's worth of efforts by the Workgroup, completed with limited resources and available data, to understand visitation and family support at CRDF and identify areas for improvement.

Notably, the Center found that as few as 8% of people at CRDF are receiving visitors.² There are major impediments to visitation. The Center believes that the new GRAC needs data and case studies to help understand which barriers to visitation are most significant in order to improve the visitation rate. Also, the few specialized visitation and family support programs that exist at CRDF could be greatly expanded by reducing eligibility restrictions and increasing service capacity.

Los Angeles County is uniquely positioned to pilot innovative visitation models and protocols because of the size of CRDF. On the one hand, it is small compared with Men's Central Jail, making visitation issues solvable and allowing for smaller scale pilots and swifter implementation. On the other hand, CRDF is large enough to allow for statistically significant conclusions to be drawn from data gathered there, which can help policy makers to start understanding visitation issues specific to women and help researchers to start filling the gender gap in the body of literature about visitation in detention settings. The findings from LA could be useful to other smaller systems nationwide looking to become more gender-responsive.

IV. INTRODUCTION

Visitation can be a critical component of rehabilitation during incarceration with the appropriate structure and support, especially for individuals whose family relationships with partners and children form the core of their positive self-identity. But visitation rates among women^b incarcerated at all types of detention facilities throughout the country are reportedly low. Anecdotal accounts of visitation rates at Century Regional Detention Facility (“CRDF”) confirm that it follows this general pattern.

Recognizing the importance of visitation, the Harriett Buhai Center for Family Law (“the Center”) volunteered to chair the Visitation Workgroup, composed of county and community stakeholders, during 2019. The Workgroup’s goal was to understand CRDF visitation protocols and parental support services. Prior to the convening of the current Gender-Responsive Advisory Committee (“GRAC”) in November 2019, an earlier version of the GRAC met from 2016 to early 2019. It created sub-committees on the topics of reentry, transportation, programming, pregnant residents, and visitation in November 2018. Although the early GRAC and sub-committees stopped formally meeting after the Board of Supervisors (“the Board”) re-established the GRAC by a motion in February 2019, the Visitation Workgroup continued meeting in order to gather relevant visitation information for the new GRAC to consider once convened.

This report represents the Workgroup’s efforts throughout 2019, with additional research and recommendations made by the Center. The Workgroup met nine times, usually through hour-long conference calls. Participating stakeholders included community groups that work with currently and formerly incarcerated women, county agencies, and the Sheriff’s Department. **The unifying mission adopted by the Workgroup was: to assist people incarcerated in Los Angeles County’s women’s jail(s) in maintaining regular and meaningful contact with their external support network and children by improving the culture, environment, and policies affecting visitation and other forms of contact in order to improve family reunification and social support.** To this end, participants shared information about visitation and family support programs at CRDF, barriers their clients encounter, and available data. The Workgroup organized two special events to learn more: (1) CRDF Site Visit (tour of the visitation areas of CRDF) and (2) SKIP – Supporting Kids and Incarcerated Parents (a panel discussion among community members directly impacted by parental incarceration). After debriefing from these events, the Workgroup identified systemic, cultural, and operational barriers to visitation at CRDF. The Center used the information gathered by the Workgroup to develop ideas to address these issues, contained later in this report. The Center’s efforts concluded with an appraisal of peer-reviewed research about the impacts of visitation programs on public safety.

^b Although, this report uses the terms “women” and “mother” throughout to clearly distinguish the female jail population from men, the Center acknowledges that there are transgender and nonbinary people incarcerated at CRDF as well. The information and suggested next steps in the report are intended to benefit all people at CRDF, regardless of gender identity or sexual orientation. But any efforts to improve visitation and family support should also consider the unique needs of LGBTQ people at CRDF.

The Board's motion to re-establish the GRAC specifically noted "meaningful family visitation" as an important component of gender-responsive services. The Center agrees and believes the new GRAC, in collaboration with the new Director of Gender Responsive Services and recently retained gender-responsive expert consultants, have the expertise and tools to improve visitation at CRDF and at any future facility housing incarcerated women.

V. IMPROVING VISITATION CAN PROMOTE PUBLIC SAFETY

Many theories about why crime occurs and how it can be prevented hypothesize that positive social ties promote pro-social behavior by providing opportunities and resources, helping build a sense of identity and self-worth, bonding individuals to their community, and supporting them through stressful times.³ Visitation is associated with a host of benefits described below, including direct benefits for women, their children if they have any, and law enforcement and indirect benefits for the greater community. While there are some risks of recidivism that law enforcement cannot mitigate (e.g., age), receiving visits is a factor that law enforcement directly controls and can promote as a tool for rehabilitation.

Additionally, the jails present a unique opportunity to increase visitation beyond what may be possible at prisons because they are usually located closer to the incarcerated person's neighborhood and social network. Unlike prison visitors, jail visitors may not need to book overnight accommodations, take off from work, pay costly transportation fees, or find child care. They may even be able to visit on a weekly basis. Visitation is associated with a host of benefits described below, including benefits for women in jail, their children if they have any, law enforcement, and the greater community. Investing in visitation can be a tide that lifts all boats by promoting public safety.

A. Visitation and Social Support Help Incarcerated Women

While, this report is primarily concerned with visitation for people incarcerated at CRDF, a women's county jail, most of the published studies about the benefits of visitation emphasize men's prisons. Researchers may prefer to study men's prisons because they provide larger data sets, since more men are incarcerated, and people in prisons serve longer sentences. Though the short shrift the literature gives to specific discussions of women and jail programs is an important knowledge gap, it does not suggest that women are less likely to benefit from visitation. It also does not suggest that visitation at jails is unimportant.

Incarcerated women face many challenges in maintaining relationships with friends and family on the outside, but having these relationships promotes rehabilitation. Research about visitation in prison has generally shown that it decreases misconduct pre-release and recidivism post-release.⁴ The reduction in misconduct means that even women who do not receive visitors may indirectly benefit from an improved jail environment when robust visitation is occurring at the facility level.

Visitation and social support can take many forms, including in-person contact visits, through-the-glass visits, technology-assisted video visitation, phone calls, letters, tape recordings, and pictures. Common visitors include parents, spouses, significant others, children, relatives, friends, service providers, and clergy.

While researchers are still parsing out the magnitude of benefits incarcerated people derive from various types, frequency, and timing of visits relative to release date, multiple studies in Florida, Minnesota, and Canada suggest that the more visits someone receives, the less likely they are to recidivate.⁴ For example, one study that followed a cohort of 7,000 people, including women, who recently served twelve months or more in a Florida prison found that people who were visited had 30.7% lower odds of recidivating than people who were not. Each unique visit to an incarcerated person was associated with a 3.8% decrease in odds of recidivating within two years of release. There was also a reduction in recidivism for each additional month that a visit occurred, and visitation was correlated with a delay in onset of recidivism when recidivism did occur.³

B. Visitation and Contact Help Incarcerated Parents and Their Children

Most of the research that specifically discusses women and visitation is about mother-child visitation. The majority of children with incarcerated mothers lived with their mother at the time of arrest,^{5,6} and 70% of women in jail are mothers.¹ Maternal incarceration disrupts a child's home life and sense of security. Despite concerns that exposing a child to a jail environment could be harmful, decades of research has found that both mothers and children typically benefit from sustained contact, including visits, during incarceration.^{7,8} The best way to maximize the benefits of these visits and reduce any risks, especially for the children, is for the visits to occur in conjunction with a structured evidence-based program aimed at starting visits soon after maternal incarceration and increasing the frequency and quality of visits.⁸

Mothers commonly report that separation from their children is the hardest part of incarceration.⁸ Mothers who receive visits from their children are less likely to be depressed⁹ and less likely to engage in violence and to recidivate.¹⁰ Visits allow them to process their grief about being separated from their children, and, in turn, help their children process their feelings about the separation.⁷ Contact through phone and letter writing, even without visitation, may reduce parental stress.⁹

Children also have better behavioral outcomes when they can visit their mothers in jail. Children under five cannot yet understand the concept of incarceration and may experience the disruption as parental rejection, believing their mother chose to abandon them, or as a total loss, believing their mother died.⁶ The format of visitation should reinforce that their mother is alive and safe. For example, children speaking to their mother through a screen or a phone may not feel as reassured as children participating in contact visits. They may perceive the visit as unreal because the screen

is like seeing someone on television and the phone equipment and acoustics of jail distort their mother's familiar voice.⁷

Mother-child visitation helps children across the age spectrum to emotionally adjust to their parent's incarceration, develop a realistic understanding of the separation, and refrain from modeling their parents' criminal behavior.⁶ Visitation is also associated with healthier outcomes, like higher IQ and wellbeing scores.⁶ Older children who have more contact with their incarcerated mother through phone calls, visits, and letters experience a lower rate of drop-out and suspension. For children under the age of ten, though, face-to-face contact visits are particularly important due to their developmental stage.

Mothers who were experiencing multiple socio-economic risks at the time they became incarcerated (e.g., unemployed, young, single parent) are less likely to receive visits from their children.⁸ Additionally, service providers have observed that mothers at CRDF often mistakenly believe that their parental rights were terminated upon incarceration.¹¹ There is no rule in California allowing for a default termination of parental rights upon incarceration.¹² If a case is opened by the Department of Children and Family Services ("DCFS"), incarcerated parents are supposed to be provided with reunification services, including visitation, unless the court finds by clear and convincing evidence that those services would be detrimental to the child (e.g., based on factors such as the child's age, degree of parent-child bonding, etc).¹² Generally, any type of continued contact with a child helps with family reunification in dependency court proceedings.

Although the effects of parent-child visitation are complicated and can result in short-term affects of confusion or upset,^{8,13} children have a right to maintain their relationship with an incarcerated parent. But sometimes mothers who want to see and contact their children do not because they are concerned about their child's exposure to security protocols, hostile visiting conditions, and seeing their mom in a jail setting wearing inmate attire.⁸ Sometimes caregivers, as the gatekeepers of children's access to their incarcerated parents, may hinder contact if they are unwilling or unable to pay for collect phone calls, pass on the letters a parent sends, or take the child to visit the parent.¹⁴ Caregivers may be trying to protect the child, believing contact is harmful.

Due to the social stigmas around parental incarceration and children visiting detention facilities, some mothers prefer to pretend for their child's sake that they are away at school or some other pro-social endeavor while they are incarcerated.¹⁵ Eventually though, most children find out if they have been lied to, undermining their trust and secure attachment to the parents, caregivers, and family members that perpetuated the fantasy. Research suggests that honesty with children about where their incarcerated parent is can improve their ability to cope with the situation.¹⁶ There are, of course, parts of parental incarceration that children should be protected from, and each child is unique in their development and coping abilities. There are resources

available to help incarcerated parents navigate age-appropriate conversations with their children.^c

C. Evidence-Based Visitation Programs Can Benefit Law Enforcement and the Public

While women and their children may be the direct recipients of the behavioral and health benefits related to visitation and described above, these benefits also ripple out to the law enforcement personnel working with them. When women are able to regulate their emotions and use positive coping behaviors, they may be less likely to violate rules, including engaging in violence. Theories about misconduct in detention settings hypothesize that the strain and deprivation of incarceration tax people's coping skills, causing them to lash out at the people enforcing their detention (e.g., correctional officers). So, mitigating the differences between their life pre- and post-incarceration can reduce misconduct.¹⁷ Reducing stress for correctional officers is an important public health goal, as they have a shorter life expectancy than other people in similar occupations.¹⁵

There is, however, some evidence that visits may reduce misconduct leading up to the visit, and then result in a spike in misconduct afterwards. There are anecdotal reports that this may be an issue at CRDF.¹¹ There is also one study finding this outcome among prisoners serving long-term sentences, who may have found that maintaining relationships on the outside through visits was a painful reminder of their sentence length.¹⁷ But quality of the visits is an important variable to consider related to this pattern. The highest risk for a spike in misconduct may be when the quality of the visits is low and visits are infrequent. Regular visitation, paired with efforts to make the visits comfortable and enjoyable and with structured programming to prepare people for visits and help them process afterwards, likely yields the biggest reduction in misconduct.

The communities paying for law enforcement and the communities the women will return to may also receive indirect benefits from robust visitation. When recidivism is reduced, crime is prevented and money is saved. There is some evidence that investing in social support programming yields measurable returns.⁴ The County will directly reap any returns on its investments in visitation, since the women incarcerated at CRDF are largely from the County and will return to the County upon release. There could be additional benefits related to visitation for other reentry outcomes, like employment, but they have not yet been studied.

^c See e.g., Sesame Street's "Coping with Incarceration" resource page at <https://sesamestreetincommunities.org/topics/incarceration/>.

VI. CURRENT LANDSCAPE AT CRDF

A. CRDF Data

CRDF opened in 1994 as a high security jail for men. It began housing women in 2006.¹⁸ Roughly 2,230 women are incarcerated at CRDF today,¹⁸ the majority of whom are cisgender women^d and a minority of whom are transgender^e or nonbinary.^f About 25,000 women cycle through CRDF every year.¹⁵ The average stay is fifty-three days,¹⁸ and the median stay is just six days.¹⁹ Almost half of the women at CRDF have not been sentenced.¹⁸ Due to AB-109 and pre-trial incarceration, many women at CRDF stay a year or more. Women typically serve only 30-50% of their sentence before being released due to overcrowding, unless they are categorized as AB-109, have a serious or violent charge, or are sentenced to 120 days or more.²⁰

The proportion of women held at CRDF for violent charges or convictions is unclear, and may be notably higher than female jail populations in other states. There have been anecdotal reports that the charges of women at CRDF have become more violent, on average, over the past decade due to AB-109 and efforts to alleviate overcrowding by not booking low-level offenders. The Sheriff's Department informally quoted the approximate proportion of women at CRDF with violent charges as 70% in 2019.¹⁵ Million Dollar Hoods and the Vera Institute have reported that the five most common charges at CRDF between 2010 and 2016 were all non-violent and accounted for 41% of the charges.^{19, g} This is an important characteristic to further untangle, since security level can impact visitation eligibility. There are generally three security classifications based on risk of misconduct during incarceration: low, medium, and high.²⁰

About half of the women at CRDF are part of the Sheriff's Department's "mental health population," either in a mental health housing unit or taking psychotropic medications.^{19, 21} Twenty-seven percent struggle with mental illness, a proportion almost 1.5 times higher than among men in LA jails.¹⁹ A recent study by RAND found that 73.6% of women in the mental health population are appropriate candidates for diversion.²¹ The average age of someone at CRDF is thirty-three. There are 3,000 women over fifty years old booked into CRDF annually, mostly for low-level crimes and supervision violations.¹⁹ CRDF's population is 43% Hispanic, 30% Black, and 23% White.²⁰ Overall, 9% of women incarcerated there are homeless, but 14% of women over fifty there are homeless.¹⁹ Approximately 60% of the women at CRDF participate in educational programming each month through over fifty programs and one hundred different

^d Cisgender means that someone's sex at birth matches their gender identity.

^e Transgender people at CRDF were born female, but identify as men ("transgender men"). Transgender women (people born male who identify as female) are held at Men's Central Jail and are excluded from CRDF data.

^f Nonbinary people do not identify as solely male or female.

^g The top five most common charges, starting with the most common, were possession of a controlled substance, driving on a suspended license or without insurance, theft or larceny, failure to appear, and driving under the influence.

classes provided by dozens of organizations, many of which are there on a volunteer basis.¹⁸ In May 2019, 175 women with open DCFS cases listed CRDF as their address.²²

CRDF has approximately forty-one pregnant inmates at any given time and approximately thirty-two deliveries annually.¹⁸ In 2017 - 2018, the count of pregnant women at CRDF ranged from thirty-three to sixty-eight. Between January 2017 and August 2017, sixteen babies were delivered by women in custody, fifteen pregnancies were terminated, and three pregnancies were miscarried.²³ Roughly 50% of the babies delivered went into the care of a family member, though this was not being formally tracked.²³

Although the true rate of visitation at CRDF is unknown, the Sheriff's department created a profile of typical weekend visitors and women receiving visits through administering voluntary surveys during visits at CRDF in fall of 2018.² Less than 10% of women received visitors. Parents were the most common visitor (33 - 36%), followed by spouses (15 - 21%), friends (10 - 19%), siblings (10 - 14% each), children of any age (9 - 11%), and other family (10 - 12%). Most visitors traveled to CRDF by personal vehicle (83%). About 45% of the women who were visited were between twenty-five and thirty-five years old, about 60% of them reported receiving weekly visits, and about 75% were classified as General Population.^h More than 90% of the visits were face-to-face through glass and the others were through video screens. Visitors and the incarcerated women they were visiting came from all districts and out of county, with people in both categories coming from District One most frequently (roughly 40% for both). Notably, District Two had the lowest representation among both categories, despite CRDF being located there.²

B. Visitation and Family Support Programs and Services

Women detained at CRDF are primarily oriented in their housing module, not the Inmate Reception Center. Visitation information is not provided in writing and is not an orientation topic.¹⁵ The Sheriff's Department does provide a short five minute educational video about parental rights and programs that it shows at the Inmate Reception Center.²³ The housing module a woman is assigned to can have implications for her access to visitation and parental support programs. There are nine housing classifications used at CRDF, including school (Education Based Incarceration, or "EBI"), medical, mentally ill, and disciplinary housing.²⁰

General Visitation

(through-the-glass and video visitation)

Eligibility:

People with felony convictions, who are currently on parole or probation, or have an outstanding warrant (including for failure to appear after failure to pay a ticket) are generally barred from visiting. If someone has an outstanding warrant, the Sheriff's

^h Other classifications of women receiving visits were Moderate Observation Housing (MOH), High Observation Housing (HOH), or Administrative Segregation.

Department does its best to give a warning, rather than make an arrest, because it does not want to deter visitors. But officers are supposed to arrest anyone with a warrant for \$30,000 or more, which can accumulate over time even on low-level offenses (e.g., driving without a license).¹⁵ A person who has a restraining order against them cannot visit the victim. People with prior felonies can submit a special form via mail or in-person to the appropriate visiting center to request clearance per California Penal Code Section 4571.¹⁵

Adult visitors must be able to present state-issued identification, a U.S. passport, or a Mexican government-issued identification card so that the Sheriff's Department can run a background check every six months.ⁱ Minor visitors may present a school identification card, and infants and preschoolers may present a birth certificate. There is no minimum age requirement to visit.¹⁵ Clothing requirements generally ban revealing clothing, gang affiliated attire, sleeveless shirts, and obscene/graphic images on clothing.²⁴

Logistics:

Every visitor must also be cleared through the background check described above before they can schedule a visit. Visits are appointment-based in order to reduce wait times. They should be scheduled online after creating a user account.²⁴ User accounts do not expire. Visitors must enter the name of the person they want to visit to check if the person is eligible for visits. If eligible, the system will display the appointment schedule.^j Walk-in visits are allowed, but subject to availability.¹⁵

Visitors can call the help desk for advice about navigating the online system. As a last resort, a visitor can come in person to CRDF to receive help. Visitors must provide a current photo ID at check-in for the visit, and the Sheriff's Department also takes a digital photo of adult visitors at that time. Children ages fourteen to seventeen must present a current school photo identification.¹⁵ Disabled visitors requiring disability accommodations must contact the Help Desk to schedule a visit. Public visits are Saturday and Sunday only from 7:30AM to 12:30PM and 3:30PM to 5:30PM. They last for thirty minutes and a person can receive one visit per day. Up to two visitors (including children of all ages) can participate in a single visit.²⁴ Visitors who arrive late will have their visit canceled, and it will be treated as a walk-in.¹⁵

Accommodations:

Limited parking is available for \$4.00 in a privately owned lot on-site. All personal belongings must be stored in the visitor's car or in one of the lockers in the waiting room (only identification and a single key are permitted in the visitation area).¹⁵ The lockers require coins for rental, and there is a change machine in the lobby. There is also a snack vending machine, a water fountain, and restrooms. The waiting room has murals on the walls and a play corner for young children. There is a Family Outreach room in the

ⁱ Only certain forms of identification are compatible with the scanner.

^j There have been reports that people have showed up to CRDF after successfully scheduling an appointment, only to be told that the person they want to visit is ineligible.

waiting room provided through Chaplain Services. There are also five video visitation stations in a glass room in the waiting room.¹⁵

Video visitation is logistically treated the same as through-the-glass visitation, and can be useful when there is a long wait time for visits or if a visitor is remote. There are about thirty-five video visitation terminals throughout the county located at Sheriff's Department stations for remote visitors. The stations, which have not been updated in many years and experience connectivity issues, will likely be replaced with tablets eventually. This is a department-wide budgetary issue, not restricted to CRDF.¹⁵

Supplementary Methods of Communication

Phones:

Upon arrest and booking, women are allowed three free phone calls. Women are not allowed to look up phone numbers, so they are limited to the numbers they have memorized. The outgoing number from CRDF shows up on caller identification systems as restricted or unknown.¹⁵ After the free calls, someone must put money into the account of the person at CRDF before they can make a call. Funds from collect calls made by the women incarcerated at CRDF go to the Inmate Welfare Fund. The Inmate Welfare Commission is made of appointed members who have some level of oversight for how the fund is used.¹⁵ The fund is expected to diminish due to SB-555.²⁵ Phone call recipients do not need to be cleared by the Sheriff's Department.

Mail:

Indigent kits are available to women as needed and include stamps, envelopes, and paper.¹⁵

Email:

The Sheriff's Department is looking into setting up an email system. Some systems also allow for video visitation and sending photos by email. People may be charged per email sent. Ideally, the third-party vendor would provide tablets and/or stations free of cost within the jail so that women could access incoming emails at no cost (e.g., the JPay model used by the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation). CRDF is also hoping to add a computer room soon, or may have already, which could allow for traditional email access. Although it was undecided whether the computers would have internet access at the time this was discussed.¹⁵

Adults Bonding with Children (ABC) *(contact visitation)*

Overview:

ABC allows for contact visits between mothers and their young children. It is a Sheriff's Department program staffed by officers in the EBI unit. The visits occur weekly on Saturday mornings (8AM to 11AM). The program is run by one custody assistant.¹⁵

Eligibility Criteria:

The ABC program is open to all women housed in an EBI dorm, regardless of whether they are pre-sentence or post-sentence. Having an open DCFS case does not affect eligibility, but mothers are ineligible if they have stay away orders from their children or have had their parental rights terminated.¹⁵ Mothers must be currently enrolled in EBI parenting classes (Breakthrough Parenting) and meet other criteria related to their incarceration (e.g., mothers are disqualified for excessive bail, domestic violence charges, M-7 violent charges, and misconduct at CRDF).^{15,k} Eligibility is ultimately determined by the Custody Assistant who oversees the program. Children must be under the age of 12, and their mother must be able to provide the contact information for their caregiver.¹⁵

Capacity:

The long-term goal is to allow anyone who is participating in parent classes and who does not have visitation restrictions to join the program, but this requires sufficient space. There is typically a waiting list to join the program due to space restrictions. In January 2018, the Sheriff's Department reported that in the six months prior, thirty-six women were approved for participation and 120 were rejected. At that time, only seven women and ten children were participating.²⁶ In April 2019, ABC reported that seventeen children were enrolled, and a couple mothers were on the wait list.¹⁵

Logistics:

A caregiver must transport the child and drop them off. The caregiver is not allowed into the room.¹⁵ In order to access the visitation room, children and caregivers do not have to go through security. This is a primary reason for the strict eligibility criteria relating to criminal history and current charges. An armed officer, typically the same person each time, guards the door from the inside of the room. He tries to build rapport with the children to avoid intimidating them. The physical layout of the room does not allow for him to stand on the outside of the door.^{15,l}

Lack of space is the primary capacity limitation. The Sheriff's Department won a federal grant for \$750,000 in October 2018 to expand the program by creating more space through buying a portable modular building. The County formally accepted the grant funding in March 2019. The building has not yet been purchased, but will be placed within the borders of CRDF's secured area, unlike the current room, so the eligibility restrictions related to criminal history and charges can be loosened. Because the building will be free-standing, children will still avoid going through CRDF's regular security check. The grant will take three to five years total to implement.¹⁵

Accommodations:

The current room can only accommodate nine children at once. The space overall is geared toward younger children (children aged seven or less). It has games,

^k The Sheriff's Department denied a public records request for the exact ABA eligibility criteria.

^l There are two consecutive doors with only a small space in between.

movies, books, toys, a table, chairs, a couch, and a plastic climber with a slide for toddlers. There is an infant changing table with supplies and a bathroom.¹⁵ Once the modular building is opened, the current space might be used as a waiting room with resources for caregivers, who currently must wait in their car or off site while children are at ABC visits.¹⁵

Incarcerated Parents Program (IPP) *(through-the-glass visitation)*

Overview:

IPP provides supervised parent-child visits through glass. It is staffed and facilitated through a partnership between Friends Outside Los Angeles (FOLA) and DCFS. The current contract for IPP expires at the end of January 2023.²²

Eligibility Criteria:

Mothers must have an open DCFS case and be referred by their DCFS social worker or the FOLA case manager. The FOLA case manager circulates throughout the General Population modulations to advertise the program and make assessments for referrals. Women in the mental health unit, who are mentally unstable, or who have a stay away order from children are ineligible. Children must be twenty-one years old or younger, with the estimated average age of participants being around eleven years old.²²

Capacity:

The program serves, on average, about twenty to twenty-five mothers at CRDF each month.²²

Logistics:

IPP relies on caregivers, social workers, and placement agency staff (e.g., group home staff) to transport children to the visits. If a caregiver or foster parent of a child with an open DCFS case lives over a certain number of miles away from the jail, they are not required to transport the child for court-ordered visits that are part of the reunification plan. Support staff at the DCFS regional office closest to the child will transport children, when available, if caregivers are unable to.²² Visits typically take place on weekdays because DCFS social workers do not work on weekends. Because weekday visiting (not available to the general public) ends at 4PM, children may have to leave school early in order to arrive in time. Length and frequency of visits vary depending on the family reunification plan and range from weekly to monthly and from twenty minutes to one hour. The FOLA case manager meets with children and their caregivers in CRDF's visiting lobby before visits to explain rules and answer questions. She supervises the visits, then debriefs with the children and their caregivers afterwards. She also prepares visit reports for the DCFS social workers.²²

Accommodations:

If available, visits take place in the Attorney room. If not, the floor modules (general visitation stations) are used. With either option, visits are through glass.

Parental Support Programs

(in alphabetical order)

1. Breakthrough Parenting***Overview:***

This EBI Life Skills class is funded by the Inmate Welfare Fund and taught by EBI staff. It is built upon a Restorative Parenting framework, and combines psychological theories including attachment, cognitive behavior, and empowerment with the foundational principles of Restorative Justice. The class takes a developmental approach that emphasizes identifying strengths and increasing the capacity of parents to build, when safe, a respectful relationship with their children, to maintain safety for all family members, and to increase accountability for their own behavior.²⁷

2. Gender Responsive Rehabilitation Program (GRR Program)***Overview:***

This eight-week program has been offered by HealthRIGHT 360 in one EBI housing module (3500) since 2012. It is a trauma-informed and uses a therapeutic community model for shared group learning. Participants must complete thirty-two hours of programming per week between Monday and Saturday. Group and individual counseling is available. Ten to twelve groups are conducted per day, split among the cohorts, which meet in separate corners of the housing module. Fridays are elective days, with options for activities like creating vision boards and journaling. Participants must also help out with at least one committee to help run the program (Culture and Motivation, Environment, Orientation, or Reentry). At the end of eight weeks, participants present on what they learned and receive certificates of completion.¹¹

The GRR Program collaborates with many community organizations, like Chrysalis, and invites providers to visit and present their services through the Sheriff's Community Alliance. The California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation visits biannually to present on what women can expect if they are transferred to prison.¹¹ The Program has close relationships with Homeboy Industries and A New Way of Life, local reentry programs. Prototypes, a transitional home for women, has beds reserved for Program participants meeting certain criteria. The program also works closely with Second Chance Women's Reentry Court. For example, one program participant was facing a potential sentence of fifteen years for a robbery committed by her partner that she has no memory of due to being under the influence at the time. After the program advocated for her, Women's Reentry Court accepted her.¹¹

There are five program cohorts that run simultaneously. Women usually participate in two cohorts at once, participating in programs for one cohort in the

morning and another cohort in the afternoon. Cohort A is the trauma-focused cohort, overseen by a therapist. It follows the Pathways curriculum, developed by HealthRIGHT 360 in response to the high number of women coming through who were victims of sex trafficking. Cohort B focuses on addiction to substances and other unhealthy behaviors, including criminal thinking, eating disorders, and domestic violence. Cohort C develops leadership. Cohort S – the “Second Chance” cohort – is for women who have recidivated. It is more intensive and is supported by a Transitional Coordinator, who advocates for additional assistance, like participants’ releases to happen during business hours.¹¹

Cohort D provides family services and is overseen by a Family Services Coordinator. The Coordinator teaches parenting skills, effective communication, age-appropriate mother-child activities, and healthy family dynamics. They have piloted two projects: helping mothers record themselves reading age appropriate books to send to their children (ongoing) and a parenting program using rag dolls made in another EBI program to simulate infants (pilot lasted for two eight-week cycles). The doll project was a success, and there was a recent fundraiser to purchase electronic infant simulator dolls. The Coordinator also maintains a caseload of pregnant and postpartum participants and works with DCFS social workers and attorneys, if there is an open case, to assist them with custody issues. There is a Relationship Therapist too, and both are available on Saturdays, while ABC visits are occurring.¹¹

Eligibility Criteria:

Everyone who comes to CRDF is screened for eligibility. Generally, anyone with a history of trauma, regardless of their charges, conviction status, and sentence length, is eligible. A participant’s cohort placement is determined during screening. Some women are released before they complete the program, while others complete the program multiple times (they are not terminated after eight weeks; they can continue on to another session if they want). The main disqualifying characteristic is if someone needs a higher level of care and would be a distraction to others (e.g., classified as High Observation Housing). Women with mental illness can participate if they are effectively managing their condition with medications.¹¹

Capacity:

The GRRP module has a total of 135 beds, and Healthright 360 is contracted by the Sheriff’s Department to maintain at least 124 participants.¹¹ Because the capacity is limited by the number of beds in the housing module, there is usually a wait list.¹¹ In November 2019, there were 133 participants and a wait list. About thirty of participants were under the age of thirty and fighting life sentences. Some women had been there two to four years.¹¹ In January 2018, the Family Services Coordinator for Cohort D had a caseload of eight mothers.²⁶

3. Lactation Program

Overview:

The Sheriff's Department and Correctional Health Services implemented a lactation program in January 2016. It is offered to pregnant women during their initial prenatal or post-delivery appointments and to mothers who report that they were breastfeeding prior to incarceration. Medical Services freezes and stores the milk,¹⁸ and a pre-designated person must commit to retrieving milk from CRDF every one to two weeks.²⁶

Eligibility:

To participate, mothers must be medically cleared. Their child must be less than six months old, according to one source,²⁶ and according to another, women are allowed to pump milk for up to one-year.¹⁸

Capacity:

In January 2018, there are six participants in the program.²⁶

4. MAMA's Neighborhood

Overview:

This program is provided through the Department of Health Services (DHS) and was implemented at CRDF in early 2018. It serves pregnant and post-partum women by providing health services and referrals, assistance with postpartum depression and parenting, and help navigating the DCFS process to reunite with children upon release. Program participants receive services in the community setting for up to eighteen months post-release.²⁶

As of 2018, it was also working on a doula program to allow pregnant women to have a support person with them during labor and delivery. At that time, the doula program was encountering significant barriers to implementation, including differences in hospital protocols, lack of control over which hospital the delivery happened at, clearance for the support person from the Sheriff's Department and DCFS, and abrupt transfers of pregnant women to state prison.²³ In 2019, the Sheriff's Department described the program as active for pre-planned deliveries. The mother identifies someone to care for the baby. DCFS has to clear the caretaker, and if the caretaker does not get approved, DCFS assumes full responsibility and authority for placing the infant.¹⁸

5. MIRACLE Project

Overview:

This is an EBI program provided by Families and Criminal Justice that runs on a quarterly cycle. It offers maternal support services, including health education about reproduction, birth, and prenatal and infant development; advocacy for "baby-friendly" sentencing, newborn placement, and infant/child custody; and modified case management. Post-release, it offers home-based services and community-based group

activities for at least one year for mothers who participated in MIRACLE at CRDF. MIRACLE has also advocated for women to have labor and delivery companions/family support available, like the doula program described under MAMA's Neighborhood. MIRACLE collects data and tracks outcomes about its participants.²³ For mothers who complete the program, including the post-release community-based services, the recidivism rate is less than 5% and the long-term family reunification rate of 91%.¹¹

Eligibility:

MIRACLE is available to parents of infants (up to six months post-partum) and pregnant women. Women in non-EBI "general population" housing units are not eligible to participate but may transfer to EBI housing to become eligible. Because MIRACLE is a large group activity, it cannot be offered to women in the East Tower special housing units. Having an open DCFS case does not generally affect eligibility.¹¹

Capacity:

Since 2013, MIRACLE has served from 100 - 135 women per year but that number has recently declined as the number of pregnant women in the jail has declined. In January 2018, MIRACLE had a maximum enrollment of twenty-eight participants. In March 2018, eleven participants were enrolled. Most women in any quarterly MIRACLE cycle are released before completing the course.¹¹

6. Parents in Partnership (PIP)

Overview:

PIP is a program provided through DCFS at CRDF on the first and third Wednesday of every month. PIP utilizes a peer-help model. Parent Partners, who have previously navigated DCFS, help parents currently navigating DCFS by sharing their stories of successful reunification, providing referrals and support, and empowering parents to comply with case planning activities quickly. A Parent Orientation explains the DCFS process and provides helpful tips to assist incarcerated parents in working with DCFS, like how to contact social workers via collect call from CRDF and how to request transportation to court for dependency court hearings. Other services are tailored to meet the individual needs of the participants. Parents who comply with their case plan and court orders while receiving services from PIP are often better prepared to successfully reunify with their children. A study published in 2016 found that parents who received services from PIP in Los Angeles reunified with their children five times more often than similar parents who did not.²⁸

7. Women's Integrated Services Program (WISP)

Overview:

This collaboration between the Sheriff's Department, DHS, and Probation was piloted starting in December 2016. Probation personnel work with women to determine their post-release probation plans. Three WISP Clinical Social Workers and two deputy probation officers conduct a comprehensive assessment, provide case management, help women access services while in custody, and develop a reentry plan covering areas

including health, mental health, substance use, family/social support, housing, benefits and employment. The program emphasizes substance abuse treatment, but the social workers do not provide in-custody treatment. They continually assess clients and will refer them for substance use treatment as needed. There is also a diversion opportunity. If a client has an open DCFS case, their social work may help with post-release family reunification planning.^{23,26}

Eligibility:

It provides services to general population women with non-violent offenses. All pregnant women are evaluated for eligibility.

Capacity:

In 2017, WISP was only serving every seventh eligible woman due to capacity constraints.²³ In February 2018, there were eighty-two participants, six of whom were pregnant.²⁶

VII. RECOMMENDATIONS AND IDEAS FOR NEXT STEPS

The information gathered by the Visitation Workgroup provided the Harriett Buhai Center with a foundation for understanding the current visitation protocols and family support programs at CRDF. In reviewing of the research about impacts of visitation, the Center confirmed that visitation is essential to public safety. Based on all of the information collected, the Center has identified two high-level recommendations and possible ways to start addressing them, discussed below. It is also recommended that the GRAC continue gathering information to gain the deeper understanding of visitation issues specific to CRDF that is needed to make concrete policy recommendations.

A. Recommendation #1: Increase the Visitation Rate at CRDF.

We know that the visitation rate at CRDF is low, but it is not clear which barriers to visitation are the most common hurdles that should be prioritized to address. The 2018 Visitation Survey Data suggest that people from some LA Districts experience more barriers than people from others.² Stakeholders engaged by the Workgroup reported barriers related to (1) mothers preferring their children not visit them in jail or even know that they are there, (2) visitors frequently being barred due to their criminal records, (3) incarcerated women having dysfunctional families and little social support, (4) visitors lacking transportation, (5) visitors not being able to navigate the internet-based appointment system due to lack of internet access or technology literacy, and (6) visitors not being able to come to CRDF during the designated public visiting hours because of work or other responsibilities. Improving the overall visitation rate is important to addressing family reunification and reducing recidivism.

The Sheriff's Department and community stakeholders need a better understanding of how the barriers operate and which are the most common in order to

create an intervention that will improve the visitation rate. The Center offers the following ideas for accomplishing this objective:

- 1) **Convene meeting(s) of community and county stakeholders** (e.g., Anti-Recidivism Coalition, Los Angeles Regional Reentry Partnership, A New Way of Life, Friends Outside LA, Homeboy Industries, Prototypes, Root and Rebound, Just Leadership USA, Dignity and Power Now, DCFS, DPH, LASD) to gather input about cultural barriers to visitation.
- 2) **Use case studies** at CRDF to gain an in-depth understanding of the visitation experience from the point of view of women incarcerated at CRDF. This would require finding volunteers among people incarcerated at CRDF that are representative of different groups of people at CRDF (e.g., elderly, non-parents, parents, LGBTQ). Non-law enforcement service providers, with consent, could interview volunteers at multiple points in time, shadow their visits, and interview their visitors.
- 3) **Administer a visitation survey to women incarcerated at CRDF.** This would be best administered by peers (e.g., select women incarcerated at CRDF to be survey champions and administer the survey to their peers).
- 4) **Partner with community organizations** to survey women released from CRDF to better understand the long-term impacts of CRDF programs and services.

Although there needs to be an emphasis on gathering data to better understand the problem of the low visitation rate, while data are being gathered, the Sheriff's Department should move forward with some obvious improvements, including the following:

- 5) **Advertise visitation services:** Information can be provided to women at CRDF through posting throughout the facility (e.g., posters and resource binders available in each module). The same information could be available in a flyer format, and copies could be made available to women upon booking to send to their loved ones and/or keep for later reference. Merit Masters, who are peer leaders in the dorms, can help women with low literacy access the written information. Advertising visitation information more widely, including online to potential visitors, will also help reduce the volume of related phone inquiries.
- 6) **Support visitor transportation:** Provide transportation vouchers or contract with an organization to provide rides to qualifying visitors, like children, the elderly, and people below an income threshold (see, e.g., organizations like HopSkipDrive²⁹ that provide safe private transportation for children and programs like Get on the Bus³⁰ that transport families to prison).
- 7) **Expand visitation hours:** Expand or shift visitation hours to allow for early evening visitation on two weekdays, so people who work during weekends and school age children visiting through IPP on weekdays can have better access to visitation.

B. Recommendation #2: Increase Family Support Services for Women Incarcerated at CRDF and Their Loved Ones.

There are several beneficial family support programs at CRDF that should serve more women by expanding access (e.g., reducing eligibility restrictions). The current need for these programs is also greater than their capacity, as reflected by multiple programs' wait lists. Expanding access and capacity is hindered by the physical layout of CRDF, which was designed as a high security jail. Women are severely restricted in their movement between housing modules, so they generally eat, sleep, and attend programs in their assigned module. Their housing module assignment can determine what programs they are eligible for, since not all programs visit all modules.

The Center offers the following ideas for ways to improve visitation and family support services at CRDF:

- 1) **Utilize a standardized assessment:** Everyone should be assessed for program eligibility and need for services upon booking into CRDF. Currently, service providers have reported that some women fall through the cracks and others receive duplicative services. Sharing information among service providers is difficult. By implementing a standardized assessment, the Sheriff's Department can start sorting women into modules and programs more efficiently and begin gathering data to understand the scope of unmet need for particular services in order to build out program capacity accordingly. The County's Alternatives to Incarceration Work Group ("ATI") is also in the early stages of developing an implementation plan for a standardized assessment for people in County custody. The GRAC should coordinate with the ATI to develop an assessment for CRDF.
- 2) **ABC visitation space:** As the Sheriff's Department expands the ABC program into a new building, with the help of a federal grant, it should consider designating a portion of the space to specifically accommodate older children, ages eight to twelve (e.g., a space for parents to help with homework, age-appropriate board games, etc.), since the current space is geared toward younger children. Second, it should create semi-private spaces to reduce the noise and chaos of having all families visit in the same room (e.g. plexiglass partitions). Third, the Sheriff's Department has expressed interest in transforming the current ABC space into a waiting room for caregivers, who are currently forced to wait in their cars. The Workgroup supports this idea. The space could even be the storage and distribution site for basic children's necessities described in (4) below.
- 3) **Support for ABC staff:** The Sheriff's Department runs ABC, but law enforcement officers are not typically trained in child psychology and development. Their interactions with the children, parents, and caregivers can have a huge impact on the quality of the visits. All parties could benefit from the presence of a child development expert, a component of contact visitation programs at some other detention facilities. The expert could meet with the ABC staff once or twice per

month to talk through successes, review challenging cases, and provide general support.

- 4) **Provide free basic children's necessities:** The Sheriff's Department can partner with a community organization, such as Baby2Baby,³¹ to collect donations for children's items like diapers, clothing, and toys, and distribute them to caregivers of parents incarcerated at CRDF and visitors who have young children. This can incentivize visits and also support families impacted by incarceration.^m

VIII. CONCLUSION

Los Angeles County is home to the largest women's jail in the country.³² Visitation helps aid rehabilitation and family reunification, but the percentage of women at CRDF receiving visitors may be as low as 8%.² With limited resources and data, the Harriett Buhai Center found that there are likely several major barriers to visitation, including cultural reasons (e.g., shame), resources required (e.g., transportation), and system barriers (e.g., visitors are required to have a state-issued ID). More data, both quantitative and qualitative, is needed to understand what the biggest barriers to visitation at CRDF are, so that resources can be appropriately allocated to address the issues. While there are several programs for visitation and family support provided at CRDF, access to and participation in these programs is limited. Women are especially restricted in their access to programs due to capacity limitations and eligibility criteria. The GRAC, Director of Gender Responsive Services, and the gender-responsive expert consultants retained by the County are well positioned to help achieve these goals. Visitation is a critical topic for the GRAC to focus on, as it can help improve behavioral and health outcomes for incarcerated women and their loved ones, improve the environment at CRDF, and promote public safety by reducing recidivism.

If you have questions or comments about this report or would like to report inaccuracies, please contact:

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^m Baby2Baby has confirmed interest in such a partnership during a discussion in October 2019.

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