



Foreverfamily Organizational Overview

Our Purpose:

Foreverfamily works to ensure that, no matter what the circumstances, all children have the opportunity to be surrounded by the love of family. We focus our efforts on some of the most marginalized children in our society—those with an incarcerated parent or parents—and support them as they, their parents, caregivers and extended families work to remain a family.



Our Beginnings:

Foreverfamily began in 1987 when our Executive Director/CEO, Sandra Barnhill, left her job as a public interest lawyer after becoming frustrated by the lack of support given to mothers sentenced to prison, not to mention the children and families left behind.

The organization she founded to address this need was originally known as Aid to Imprisoned Mothers, or AIM. Our initial programmatic focus was providing information directly to imprisoned mothers, and we published two handbooks on parenting and the criminal justice system for them.

But the more we worked with our mothers, the more they kept telling us “If you want to help me, help my children.” We decided to take on that challenge. We began by expanding our programmatic focus to include meeting the unique needs of their children—children who, if the statistics are to be believed, are seven times more likely to go to jail themselves.



Our Response:

One of the first challenges we undertook was one of the most vexing for the families we serve: transportation. Most children in Atlanta with an incarcerated parent need to travel almost 100 miles to see them. Not surprisingly, this is the primary reason children don't get to regularly see their incarcerated parents. Our response was seemingly simple but required a great deal of planning and resources. We secured a van and started transporting children from Atlanta to visit their mothers in prisons throughout the state, a service that continues today.

We also moved quickly to launch the Children's Counseling Project, the first program of its kind in the nation. An After-School Program was established to help children to cope psychologically with the effects of having their mothers imprisoned by providing them with a safe place to interact with other children in similar situations. We created the Teen Leadership Program, an empowering forum for teens to further develop their skills and help their younger “brothers” and “sisters” in our Foreverfamily. Each summer, our week-long camp serves 60 children.



On an ongoing basis, we provide academic tutoring, Saturday programs, emergency assistance and referral services—all focused on the needs of children of incarcerated parents. We also provide support to caregivers through referrals for resources and organized social activities, where they can share their experiences and support one another.

Even as we have focused more of our programming on their children, we have continued our work with the mothers in prison. We help more than one hundred mothers in our Foreverfamily stay informed and in touch with their families through our publications and Prisoner Correspondence Project. We also support their efforts to raise their children through parenting education workshops and post-release support services.

In addition to providing direct services, we also advocate for the interests of imprisoned mothers and their children. Because of our efforts, all Georgia Department of Corrections facilities for women have created children's centers where mothers can touch, hold and read to their children during visits.

We also spearheaded the Children and Family Networks (CFN), a national coalition of community groups and government agencies, to provide resources and information to families with incarcerated parents. We continue one of CFN's elements, an emergency hotline, as part of our programming in our first neighborhood-based project. Located in the Pittsburgh community of Atlanta, it is a direct result of our partnership with the Pittsburgh Community Improvement Association (PCIA), an economic development agency, and United Way 211, an information and referral center. Through this project, our children and their families have access to a toll-free, 24-hour, 7-day-a-week bilingual hotline to help them locate emergency services in the Atlanta area. In addition, this unique collaboration allows us to place a family advocate directly in the Pittsburgh neighborhood so that families can easily access much-needed resources.



Where We Are Now:

During our 20th anniversary year, we further expanded our programming to include working with imprisoned fathers and their children. This was a major shift for us, and was the impetus for us to re-think many things about our organization and the way we operate, including our name. After a deliberative process, we all came together and embraced "Foreverfamily" as our new name.

Based on our success and national reputation in providing targeted services to this special population, foundations like the Annie E. Casey Foundation—along with a number of churches, faith-based organizations, local nonprofits and community residents—have committed to helping Foreverfamily take its programming model to other cities across the nation, including Louisville, KY, San Antonio, TX, and Seattle, WA. Within our home state of Georgia, we are also working with the communities of Augusta, Savannah, and Albany (which has the next-largest concentration of families with incarcerated parents in Georgia after Atlanta).



Our Results:

There are many possible ways to track our success and impact, but this is the one we find most meaningful. Where, generally, children of imprisoned parents are seven times more likely to end up in prison themselves, 97% of our Foreverfamily children do not.

How are we able to achieve this remarkable result? We surround all our children with the love of family.