

“Now I Have Someone Who Believes in Me”

Agency: Family Connection

Program: Children's Connection

Service: Provides over 180 children with parents in prison in the Sioux Empire with 28 weekly support groups with three licensed counselors.

Need: There are approximately 850 children with a parent in prison in the Sioux Empire. Children who have a parent in prison have been found to exhibit low self-esteem, anxiety, low achievement motivation, poor conscience development, poor social adjustment, depression, juvenile delinquency, aggression and drug abuse. These kids are also seven times more likely to become incarcerated themselves.

Impact: More than 180 children are able to participate in weekly sessions. The sessions provide a safe environment for the children to share as well as develop the skills, behaviors, and attitudes that will prevent them from following in their parents footsteps.

Twelve children sit around a table giggling as their teacher points to a cook book and explains a simple recipe.

“Silly question, but do you put the cheese in before or after you boil the noodles?” asks Jeri, the instructor.

“Well, once I tried to just put the cheese on the noodles and eat them,” says, Sam, a brown haired boy grinning from ear to ear. “But it didn’t taste very good. Ha, ha, ha! I guess that wasn’t the right order huh?”

The group breaks into laughter. It’s obvious he’s not the only one who’s made this mistake.

It may not be obvious, but these are not just any children in any classroom. Each of these children has a parent in prison and they are taking part in a weekly Children’s Connections group through the Family Connections program.

“With some of the things these children go through on a daily basis it’s amazing they even make it to school,” explains Mary DeJong Children’s Connection Director. “This program gives them the chance to see they are not alone. There are other children with parents in prison and that just because their parents made a bad decision it doesn’t mean they have to do the same.”

Thanks to support from Sioux Empire United Way, more than 180 children are able to take part in the Children’s Connection program, helping these children maximize their potential in spite of the difficult start they have had in life.

The program helps children like Sam feel like they belong, “It’s hard to have a parent in jail. But this makes it seem not so bad. There are other kids in the same place and now I have someone who believes in me.”