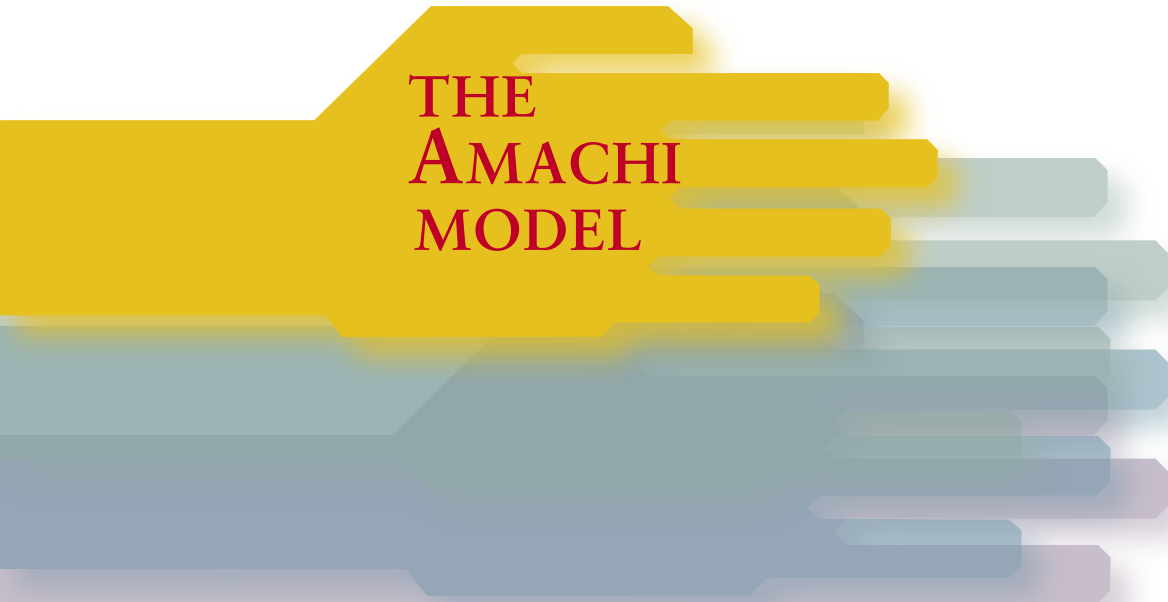# Building From the Ground Up:

Creating Effective Programs to Mentor Children of Prisoners

THE AMACHI MODEL

W. Wilson Goode, Sr.
Thomas J. Smith

"*I went to a prison and saw a grandfather, a father and a grandson, all in the same prison at the same time, and they told me that they met for the first time in prison. When I was about to leave, the grandson pulled me aside and told me that he too had a son who he had not seen, and he presumed he would meet him for the first time in prison also. In 2005, it is possible to have four generations in prison at the same time.*"

W. Wilson Goode, Sr.
National Association of Blacks in Criminal Justice
Prayer Breakfast, July 24, 2002

BUILDING FROM THE GROUND UP:

CREATING EFFECTIVE PROGRAMS TO MENTOR CHILDREN OF PRISONERS

W. WILSON GOODE, SR.
THOMAS J. SMITH

Public/Private Ventures is a national nonprofit organization that seeks to improve the effectiveness of social policies and programs. P/PV designs, tests and studies initiatives that increase supports, skills and opportunities of residents of low-income communities; works with policymakers to see that the lessons and evidence produced are reflected in policy; and provides training, technical assistance and learning opportunities to practitioners based on documented effective practices.

THE AMACHI MODEL

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Introduction: Amachi and the Children of Prisoners

Since 2000 a small but encouraging program initiative has been directed toward a population all but forgotten in American social policy. On any given day there are 7.3 million children with a parent in prison or under state or federal supervision. These children are the most at-risk in our society. Yet until recently there have been few efforts to address their needs on a national level. Statistics suggest that as many as 70 percent of these youngsters may eventually follow their parents into prison. Their risk of poor performance in school, in the labor market and in society is distressingly high.

The Amachi program, a collaborative effort established at Public/Private Ventures, aims to assist these young people through mentoring—a strategy proven to reduce risky behavior and promote achievement among disadvantaged youth.

> **Amachi is a West African word that means, "Who knows but what God has brought us through this child?"**

The Amachi program's innovative design includes three key elements:

✔ **The support and involvement of faith-based congregations from the youngsters' own or nearby neighborhoods.**

   Drawing on a sense of compassion and spiritual mission, these congregations provide the volunteer mentors for the Amachi program.

✔ **The promotion of strong personal relationships between youth and their mentors.**

   Following the one-to-one community-based model widely implemented by Big Brothers Big Sisters, Amachi mentoring "matches" require frequent and regular contact between the adult mentor and the child, in a relationship that lasts up to a year—and sometimes longer.

✔ **Professional case management and support of the mentoring matches to ensure that the "mentee," her family and the mentor can all work together harmoniously.**

   When this happens, the child benefits.

The Amachi model has been implemented in 101 cities in 38 states.

From its beginning as a demonstration operating in Philadelphia and funded by the Pew Charitable Trusts, Amachi—whose program motto is "People of Faith Mentoring Children of Promise"—has expanded considerably. The Amachi model has been brought to 101 cities in 38 states, drawing on the resources, strength and volunteers of 1,000 faith organizations. Support from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), as well as the Corporation for National and Community Service, has fueled this expansion. At present roughly 5,000 children are in Amachi mentoring matches, and more than 8,000 children have been touched by the program.

Challenges and Risks:
The National Spotlight

Amachi's impact has also reached beyond the congregations and the children who are directly involved. The program's start-up in Philadelphia coincided with President Bush's stated policy goal to stimulate faith-based initiatives as a means of addressing many social ills, thereby drawing on the unique blend of traditional community presence and compassion that are found in congregations across the U.S.

With faith-based initiatives on the public policy agenda, the Amachi program attracted national interest—because of its sound construction, its early positive results and its "faith-based" character. Indeed, President Bush, in his 2002 State of the Union address, explicitly stated the need to direct more attention to children of prisoners, and after visiting Philadelphia, he again stressed the goal of reaching these children. In response, HHS created a Mentoring Children of Prisoners (MCP) program, which supports some 220 such efforts nationally.

The federal government has established a goal of serving up to 100,000 children through these programs by 2008. In many respects this is good and positive news for a hitherto "invisible" population of youngsters. It puts the spotlight on a group whose needs have long gone unrecognized and unmet. It provides resources—and thus the impetus

"We need mentors to love children, especially children whose parents are in prison."

President George W. Bush, State of the Union Address, January 2002

"Tonight I ask Congress and the American people to focus the spirit of service and resources of government on the needs of some of our most vulnerable citizens—boys and girls trying to grow up without guidance and attention, and children who have to go through a prison gate to be hugged by their mom or dad."

President George W. Bush, State of the Union Address, January 2003

for local programs to meet some of those needs swiftly. And it may also stimulate more sustained programmatic attention and support for these children.

The notion of mentoring children of prisoners has powerful intuitive appeal both to policy leaders and program managers. It is based on an apparently simple program strategy —mentoring—which a decade and

> *"Fervor without infrastructure is dangerous. It is dangerous at the program level because it leads to disappointed mentors and youth. It is dangerous at the policy level because it plays into the unfortunate tendency to lunge at new and glossy strategies, glorify them over the short term, and discard them as they tarnish."*
>
> *Mark Freedman,*
> The Kindness of Strangers: Reflections on the Mentoring Movement, *1987*

a half ago spurred a considerable wave of policy interest. Yet the national spotlight represents both risk and challenge.

The risk is that a national push for Mentoring Children of Prisoners may lead to the rapid deployment of new programs that are not soundly planned and that will prove to be ineffective in reaching and helping the young people for whom they are intended. Local organizations, unaware of the many challenges and intricacies of programs like Amachi, may look to start new programs without the necessary tools and knowledge.

The "rush to implement," spurred by the national visibility and the availability of new funding, may prove wasteful, unhelpful and even discouraging to the children it seeks to assist, unless it is tempered by sound planning and attention to program design and operation.

And that is the challenge: to sustain the visibility and momentum of this growing initiative while also ensuring that new programs everywhere benefit from the lessons learned and best practices already achieved—meaning they have clear goals, are solidly planned and implemented, and have adequate resources and effective staff and management. The Amachi experience proves that, while the basic concept is straightforward, implementation is not.

There needs to be a careful sequence of recruiting the collaborative partners essential to the program's success; reaching out effectively to faith leaders and congregations; creating relationships with prisons and prisoners—a delicate and challenging task; and establishing a balance between the natural compassion to be found in faith congregations and the professional practices, standards and management that effective programs require.

What this Guide Does

This guide is based on nearly five years of hands-on experience gained in designing and implementing Amachi programs. It is meant to offer pragmatic, concrete, clear and usable advice about establishing "mentoring children of prisoner" programs in local communities. It provides descriptions of best practices, along with explanations and illustrations of why these have worked in creating successful Amachi programs in a wide spectrum communities.

The guidelines and lessons are provided in a framework that encompasses three critical phases of establishing the programs:

✔ Planning

The critical stage of setting clear goals, deciding on the scale of the program, identifying and recruiting the major collaborators (including faith leaders and congregations), and establishing the program's basic organizational structure.

✔ Building

Carrying through the implementation steps needed to bring together resources, people and activities in a coordinated way.

✔ Managing

Ensuring that matches are well supported and that all the key parties are kept "in the loop," and establishing management and accountability tools for the project.

The hope is that this guide will be equally useful to potential funders, to program designers and to those with day-to-day responsibility in implementing and managing programs. Using the lessons in the following pages will help programs that mentor children of prisoners achieve success—building from the ground up.

Planning the Program: Key Factors to Address

The critical first phase of a program to mentor children of prisoners—or any program—is planning. This may seem obvious, but in practice the planning phase is often handled quickly, superficially —or not at all. This is unfortunate and has undermined many initiatives that had the resources to succeed.

Often the need to respond in a timely way to funding opportunities leads to an "apply now, plan later" mentality. This can prove fatal to the application and, if funded, to the hastily conceived project itself. Careful planning is the building block that has gone furthest toward making Amachi programs successful. It requires leadership, time, attention and resources.

> If you don't know where you're going, any road will take you there.

KEY QUESTIONS

The Amachi experience suggests that eight key questions need to be addressed in the planning phase.

1. Can the program succeed here?

The most obvious question, one often not cogently addressed, is whether a given program is right for a particular city or community. Yet this is the first issue that needs to be looked at and decided upon objectively and clearheadedly.

From the outset, program designers need to have a well-grounded appraisal of whether there are enough interested congregations, support within communities, funding resources, and children of prisoners who can be successfully identified within the community to make a mentoring program worthwhile and successful.

One Amachi program was initiated by a group with great contacts in the community. Congregations quickly signed on as partners. The group was able to secure both federal and foundation funding in an amount that seemed to guarantee a successful program. But because there had been no prior planning for the recruitment of children, the program's operations came to a virtual halt for months, despite the availability of funding and congregation-based volunteers.

Another program made early contact with Prison Fellowship's Angel Tree project and received the names of several hundred children in their area. They were equally successful with fundraising. However, they had no contacts in the faith community, and no efforts were made to identify potential congregations in the planning phase of the project. Consequently, there was a two-month delay in implementation.

As you can see, there may be circumstances within a given community that could delay, complicate or even rule out a successful program to mentor children of prisoners. The whole gamut of feasibility factors needs to be scrupulously looked at before moving ahead.

> **The tasks discussed here will often be addressed early on, during a careful process in support of a grant application or proposal—which should always include a good deal of planning. But some may need to await funding support, or other developments or partnerships, before they can be completed. However, it's important that all the issues receive careful attention prior to taking "Building" steps for the program.**

2. In what neighborhoods will the program operate?

This is really two related questions, but both must be answered. First, where are the congregations that might be considered as partners in the program? To answer that, information both about potential target neighborhoods for finding children and about the geographical distribution of congregations needs to be brought together and studied. Most frequently, the decision will be whether to work in one or several neighborhoods.

The related question is: where are the children of prisoners likely to be living? Because this population is so often "invisible," which means it has not been the subject of systematic study or information-collecting, the answer to this "where" question is generally harder to determine.

In many cases, the best proxy is to target high-crime neighborhoods (using census data) as well as low-income neighbor-

hoods within the community, since many of the involved families have come from these neighborhoods, and the children frequently still live in them. This also will guide the identification of likely partner-congregations. It is usually easier to work with congregations (and their volunteers) who are physically close to the children who are to be mentored. However, this is not always true with "commuter churches," whose members may come from a distance to services. Amachi has even succeeded in involving volunteers from suburban congregations in some of its programs.

The larger lesson should be clear enough: some early analysis should be done to identify target locations both for congregations and children, to ensure that the "match" exists, and to ensure that both congregations and children can be identified in sufficiently large numbers.

It is always helpful for program planners to obtain current census and/or other information regarding their community to use in thinking about broad needs and also possible locations. The Internet, county and city offices, planning departments and community organizations are usually the best sources of such information.

3. How large should the program be?

As with the location, the scale of MCP programs depends on two factors: the number of congregations and volunteers, and the number of children who are to be mentored. Many newly implemented programs do not succeed because they start out with overly ambitious goals—in this case with unrealistic ideas about how many children can be identified, how many congregations can be recruited, or how many volunteers will come forward.

The Amachi program in Philadelphia decided to make moderate demands on the congregations—10 volunteers and matches from each—and also to recruit a relatively large number of them, about 40, in a city that had many hundreds of congregations. This would provide enough volunteers to mentor approximately 400 children. Earlier planning and research had determined that there were some 20,000 children of prisoners in the city, so program planners assumed it would be feasible to identify 400 youngsters.

These were neither minimal nor grandiose objectives; they fit comfortably within the existing numbers of children and congregations. Each individual community presents its own unique circumstances, challenges and constraints, and planners need to carefully weigh those, and set realistic objectives for the recruitment of congregations, volunteers and children.

4. Who are the organizations and people who need to be involved?

While the specific organizations vary from community to community, the following types of organizations will be important to every MCP initiative.

Congregations, naturally, are essential partners. Though the location planning described above will help to identify many of the congregations, it may also be helpful to make contact with a local faith "membership" organization—such as a local council of churches, denominational organization or other entity that represents a cluster of local congregations. That organization may help to identify more congregations and assist with contact information for the individual faith leaders.

Just as important as congregations are the advisers and information sources who help to identify the families and children of prisoners. As suggested earlier, this is a complicated search; no single source of information may provide all the answers. However, one critical partner will be the local corrections agency (or agencies), in particular the senior staff of the detention facilities where prisoners are being held. Learning how these local corrections agencies work will be important in establishing relationships with the families of the children of prisoners later on.

A third essential element is the involvement of a professional agency to provide support in creating mentoring matches, and also in supplying case management once matches are underway. Amachi programs have partnered extensively with local affiliates of Big Brothers Big Sisters (BBBS) of America, drawing on their extensive knowledge and expertise with mentoring programs. Other local community resources may have comparably strong credentials, though it should be stressed that BBBS affiliates are located near or in most communities, and they have now developed considerable experience with MCP initiatives.

Finally, local community organizations and local government also should be viewed as potential partners. Though their roles in the actual program may not be direct or extensive, their support and encouragement, as well as their value in providing guidance and information, may prove important in planning, starting up and sustaining the new program.

5. What should the program's message be?

Early on, the Amachi program in Philadelphia adopted a motto, "People of Faith Mentoring Children of Promise," which succinctly presented the key dimensions of the program. Amachi programs nationwide embraced the adage. That message helped with the task of selling the program to different audiences, sparking their enthusiasm for its aims, and helping to enlist their energies and support for the effort.

Establishing a strong and clear message for the program makes sense, and should be considered early on in the planning phase. While a single, compelling motto or catchphrase is generally useful, different audiences will need to be reached with different messages, tailored to their interests and concerns.

Explaining the program to faith leaders and congregations requires an approach very different from what would be appropriate for an incarcerated parent, or the caregiver of a prisoner's child. In each case the right points about the program need to be emphasized—the "right" points being those most likely to produce the support and buy-in needed. Illustrations from other programs emphasizing how they have succeeded, information about the value of mentoring, data about children of prisoners, as well as relevant personal anecdotes all can be blended into forceful and effective messages that will help sell the program to its partners.

P/PV's evaluation of Big Brothers Big Sisters demonstrated that children and youth in mentoring relationships lasting more than 12 months (as compared to similar youth who were not in such relationships):

- Felt more confident about doing their school work;
- Skipped fewer days of school;
- Had higher grades; and
- Were less likely to start using drugs or alcohol.

6. How will the program be structured and staffed?

FIGURE 1:
INITIAL PROGRAM STRUCTURE OF AMACHI IN PHILADELPHIA
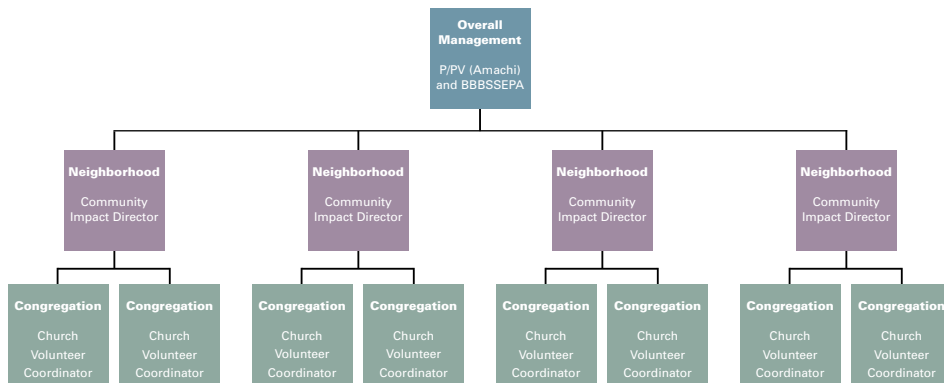
Once some basic parameters about the program have been established (principally location and overall size), attention should be turned to how the program will be structured and staffed. Operating in several neighborhoods and with a comparatively large number of congregations, when the Amachi program in Philadelphia first started, it used a structure like the one depicted in Figure 1.

Overall organization and management of the Philadelphia initiative was provided by Amachi, headquartered at Public/Private Ventures, and coordinated with Big Brothers Big Sisters of Southeastern Pennsylvania (BBBSSEPA). For each of the four neighborhoods, a community impact director coordinated the efforts of the local congregations and ensured that their volunteers were effectively supported.

In each individual congregation, a stipend was paid to a church volunteer coordinator (CVC) who was responsible for coordinating the efforts of volunteers there and also provided administrative assistance, particularly around collecting data and information regarding program activity and results. In addition, BBBSSEPA supplied one mentor support coordinator for each group of 60 volunteers—this staff person provided professional assistance with matching and case management, both essential to maintaining program quality.

The specifics for each Amachi program will of course depend on the size and characteristics of a city or community, the partnering organizations, the number of congregations and overall scale of the program. The point to be emphasized here is that a clearly articulated structure, with well-defined responsibilities, is critical to the success of an MCP program.

In addition, recruitment and training of quality program staff is a vital element. Too often, in the push to get the program up and running, the recruitment process is hurried, and the "hires" turn out not to have the skills and staying power needed to keep the program operating smoothly. The end result is that implementation, rather than being accelerated, is delayed and diluted. Over the long term, time and effort spent early in screening and selecting staff carefully, and making sure they have ample training, will repay itself in a strong and effective program.

It's important to avoid burdening faith organizations with administrative tasks, as they are often thinly staffed. As the Rev. Cean James of Bright Hope Baptist Church in Philadelphia points out, faith leaders can often be reluctant to get involved with outside organizations because "[W]hen someone from the outside comes and says, 'We'd like for you to supply volunteers to do X, Y, and Z,' they'll say in the beginning that we only need volunteers. It will turn out that it will take money, it will take space, and usually you're asked to do it and after awhile, the people who asked you to do it kind of disappear."

7. How will the program attract and sustain funding?

TABLE 1:
ORIGINAL BUDGET FOR AMACHI PROGRAM IN PHILADELPHIA

Staff
   Director ....$ 69,000
   Community Impact Directors (4)...$ 49,000 (each)
   CVCs (40) ....$ 1,500 (each)
   Support..$ 10,000
Support organization subcontract ....$ 20,000
Operating costs...$ 20,000
Other ....$ 15,000

Total..**$ 390,000**

Program planners who are responding to a request for proposals or other funding opportunities have at least part of the answer to this question: they expect their proposal to be supported. In many cases, they may already have developed preliminary or first-year budgets for their program. However, several other issues also need to be carefully explored.

First, as this discussion emphasizes, the planning period for the program is important in its own right, and needs the proper level of resources. Too often proposal planning is hasty and stops when the proposal is submitted—with no further planning after the funding is received. Clear attention to all major planning issues will head off that problem.

Second, the resources need to match up with realistic plans for organization and staffing. Trying to keep funding requests artificially low by underestimating the real costs of personnel will hamper the program's ability to reach its goals. Though costs for Amachi are comparatively modest, they do add up when one includes expenses for congregational volunteer coordinators, and possibly also community impact directors in programs where multisite efforts are envisioned. In addition, the professional services of a BBBS-like entity also need to be reflected in the funding package. Table 1 above provides a sample budget, drawn from the first year of the Amachi program in Philadelphia.

In many cases, a single funding source will not be adequate to support all the program's costs. Thus program planners need to scan the environment and identify complementary funding to cover the overall expenses.

Finally, the issue of sustainability must be realistically addressed. When a funding source comes into view, it sometimes prompts proposals that may work for a year, but that include no plans to sustain the program, hoping that "institutionalization" funding will naturally appear. Planners must be realistic. Can this program be funded over the long term? Do funding sources currently exist that will carry the effort; if not, are there realistic chances that the resources can later be identified?

8. How will the program's success be judged— and by whom?

Increasingly, at all levels of government and funding, accountability has become an important theme in social programs. Not content with supporting programs that merely promise to address serious issues, government, foundations and private sector philanthropies expect to see hard evidence that their investments are paying off.

Thus, from the outset, attention to measuring performance and results needs to have a prominent place in the planning phase. First of all, what are the reasonable measures for an MCP program? Amachi, for example, stresses number of matches, frequency of meetings, and length of matches—all in line with outcome measurement systems that have been developed by BBBS—as well as keeping track of demographics about the children served and the volunteers.

Individual funders may have different or additional reporting requirements, and these need to be carefully understood and incorporated upfront. As will be discussed below, this need is particularly important because faith leaders and congregations are quite frequently unfamiliar with the importance of "data collection." They usually need help establishing systems and using forms to handle the work. Thus it is critical to have a clear sense, from the start, of what performance data will be needed.

Up and Running:
A Timetable for Planning

How long will it take to go from first steps to program operation? A number of factors, naturally, will affect this: how much planning goes on before, as part of, or after funding proposals; the nature of a community's resources, partners, congregations; and many other variables.

Based on the experiences of Amachi programs nationwide, some broad guidelines can be suggested. Moving from the beginning of the planning phase to the start of program operation can take from two to four months; several months in addition may be needed before the program reaches full scale—that is, when the planned number of matches have been reached.

The chart in Figure 2 provides a rough timeline for the full process. It should be noted that there are some important sequencing issues program planners should be aware of: when staff should be in place; when to recruit volunteers and find the children; etc. The chart indicates this sequence in broad-brush terms. The next section of this guide discusses these issues in greater detail.

Figure 2:
A Timeline for Establishing an MCP Program

Planning Phase: 1-2 Months

Building Phase: 2-4 Months

Managing Phase: Ongoing
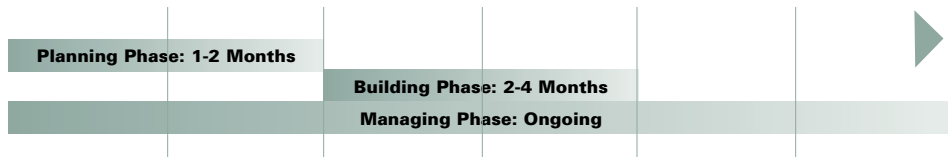
There is a difference between doing things right and doing the right things.

BUILDING THE PROGRAM

With thorough and effective planning complete, and with resources in hand, the challenges of putting the program into action can now begin. Usually this phase and the tasks of ongoing program management are discussed together under the heading "implementation." In this guide they are taken separately.

The "Building" phase comprises the following steps:

✔ Identifying and recruiting all partners.

✔ Getting their commitments and support for the program.

✔ Ensuring that all roles and responsibilities are fully understood and agreed to.

✔ Beginning program operations.

Breaking the steps down in this way emphasizes the importance of upfront discussion and agreements, of developing effective working relationships among a diverse cast of partners, and bringing all the key components (volunteers, identified children, case management and support) together simultaneously.

It is at this juncture that key staff should have been recruited and brought on board. Their skills and efforts will be needed in all the "Building" activities discussed below, and as stressed earlier, it is important that their backgrounds and qualifications match the challenges to come.

Perhaps one role that is important to describe, but not always easy to fill in practice, is that of the "Program Champion." This is the person who is deeply committed to the aims of MCP programs, who has the energy and willingness to reach out to potential partners and persuade them to come on board, and who in particular has the credentials and entrée to make the crucial contacts with faith organizations in the local community.

The Amachi program in Philadelphia was fortunate enough to have a respected former mayor and community leader who also was an ordained minister. His leadership has been instrumental in the "building" phase of Amachi in Philadelphia and elsewhere. While it is unlikely that every community will have a champion with those credentials, it is important to seek out one or more leaders who can give the program visibility and clout as it is put into place, and beyond.

The "Major Building Tasks" in the next section are described roughly in the sequence in which they should be completed. However, some tasks described separately may have substantial overlap. For instance, recruiting congregations and recruiting volunteers are described separately, but if all goes well, these two steps will flow into one another.

The Major Building Tasks

1. Connecting with congregations and faith leaders.

This task, which can be complicated and challenging, is the centerpiece of MCP programs. It is here that the program channels the enthusiasm of the faith leaders, and finds the volunteers who will be the front line of contact with the children of prisoners.

The faith leader of the congregation is the single most important point of contact. More than trustees or congregation leaders, this person is the linchpin of each faith community, and in every case needs to be the initial person the program reaches out to.

Faith leaders are not always full-time. They seldom keep regular hours, nor are they strongly bound to the "office"—if indeed the congregation has an office. If the congregation has an official phone number, it may only connect to an answering machine, which may not be regularly checked. Thus leaving a message does not always move the process forward.

"Amachi makes the church the church."
–Rev. Steve Avinger, Sr.

The Amachi experience suggests that obtaining the direct office and/or cell phone number for the faith leader is usually required if a contact is to be made. Again, this may not be a straightforward matter, and may still require a face-to-face contact. Visiting the congregation site to meet the leader in person may be necessary.

Sometimes a bit of detective work is helpful. A reconnaissance visit to the congregation site may determine when evening programs and activities are scheduled that will involve the faith leader. A subsequent visit during one of those activities will permit an introduction, exchange of contact information, and a scheduled meeting time to describe the MCP program.

For that meeting the "message" mentioned earlier becomes important. The Amachi experience suggests that faith leaders respond well to messages that:

✔ Are succinct, not exceeding five to seven minutes.

✔ Make clear why this program is important.

✔ Emphasize the link between the program and the spiritual mission of the congregation, describing participation as an extension and enrichment of what the congregation already is doing.

✔ Personalize the program by providing anecdotes and using data about local children.

✔ Make clear that the scale and demands of the program are not beyond the capabilities of the congregation and volunteers.

Faith leaders often respond enthusiastically to these messages, and frequently they wish to engage the full congregation in a discussion about the program. They may request that the program representative make a presentation. This is an important opportunity both to reach out—meet leaders and key members—and also to learn more about the congregation. In Philadelphia, Amachi representatives used "Church Overview Forms" to help keep track of each prospective faith organization.

Again, in group presentations, the program's message needs to be clear and compelling. And while it is important to be encouraging and seek to enlist the energies and support of the congregation, this is also a time to be candid about some aspects of the program that congregants may not normally think about.

For example, this is a good time to describe specifically the expectations of volunteer mentors. They will need to commit to weekly meetings—of at least an hour—with their mentees, for a minimum of a year. Being clear about this requirement upfront will help avoid misunderstandings later.

Some states have established lists of known child abuse offenders or have created other avenues for background checks. Usually the support organization will know how to carry out these checks without needing to involve the faith organization.

The Amachi mentoring model was built on these requirements:

- **A relationship that lasts at least one year.**
- **Meetings between the mentor and child at least once a week.**
- **Meetings that last at least an hour.**

In practice, meetings often last longer and occur more frequently; the relationships in many cases last longer than a year.

Likewise, this may be a good time to bring up a sensitive issue: the need for professional screening of all volunteer mentors—including an official background and child abuse check. It is important to emphasize that this procedure is required for the safety of the children; most volunteers will understand and accept this. As much as possible, the visit/presentation is a good opportunity to discuss and defuse the issue.

The sequence of interactions among program manager, faith leader and congregation may take varying paths. It is important to allow adequate time for all needed discussions to take place. The development of strong, positive relationships among all parties goes a long way toward ensuring a solid program. Patience and a personal touch help smooth over many difficulties.

Whatever the process, the objective will remain constant: reaching agreement to participate with a full understanding of the requirements, organizational framework, number of volunteers, staffing, resources, and so forth. One way of marking this formally is through a "covenant," a written partnership agreement that expresses the faith leader and congregation's readiness to participate and their acceptance of the conditions that participation will entail.

2. Finding the children.

Only when a solid base of congregation volunteers has been identified should the process of recruiting the children begin. As noted earlier, this is the least straight-forward operational dimension of the program, and the one that can be most challenging in practice, especially in large urban areas, where community member-ship often is anonymous, and tapping the bureaucracy for good information is difficult. As noted at the beginning of this guide, children of prisoners have long been an invisible population; making them visible can indeed be a challenge.

A number of possible avenues to identify-ing the children might be tried: community and human service organizations in target neighborhoods; public agencies, such as departments of children's services; sometimes even the churches themselves. Certainly, contacts with these organiza-tions are useful in learning the terrain and understanding where in the lives of these children the program may intervene.

But—based on the experiences Amachi programs nationwide have had—these avenues seldom yield appreciable results. Frequently, confidentiality guidelines make it impossible for agencies to share the information they have. The most produc-tive approach to making contact with the children has proved to be through their

Having an "equilibrium" between the number of volunteers and the number of children can be a challenge in programs of this kind. In Big Brothers Big Sisters (BBBS) mentoring pro-grams, families approach the programs and sign the children up; BBBS then recruits mentors. Amachi has always sought to have a pool of volunteers in place first, before recruiting children, because the children's family back-grounds suggested they might not be able to stay on a waiting list for an extended time. This meant that the volunteers might have to wait several weeks before a match. This, though, was far preferable to having to put off children once they had agreed to join the program.

incarcerated parents. That, in turn, has meant working directly with correctional institutions.

While initially it may seem plausible to seek entrée to those institutions through prison chaplains (following the faith con-nection), the Amachi experience sug-gests that "starting at the top"—that is, by direct contact with the director of the correctional institution or system—is most effective. Chaplains and other volunteers will surely be important to bring into the

> **The most productive approach has proved to be through their incarcerated parents. The majority of prisoners reached will be male. However, in the Amachi experience, male prisoners have been far less likely to get involved in the program than the female prisoners who were contacted.**

process, and their relationship with individual prisoners will be of considerable use. But the director (sometimes titled commissioner, sometimes warden) has the overall authority to approve presentations to incarcerated parents, the knowledge of how those visits can be arranged most effectively using program staff, and the ability to facilitate the internal arrangements necessary for one-on-one visits with prisoners to take place. In addition, the director will also be able to enlist the support of social services staff within her or his institution, which may make the process go more easily.

Once the basic relationship with the correctional institution has been established, the next step is to inform incarcerated parents about the program. Communication with the incarcerated parent will vary from state to state and institution to institution. The leadership at each institution will decide how best to communicate with the incarcerated parents. Ideally the contact will be made within the cellblock. Program staff should start with a succinct presentation to a group of inmates, emphasizing the risks facing children of incarcerated parents. Next, it is critical to highlight the

value of mentoring relationships and how children can benefit. Each presentation should include a question and answer session. It is important to allow time for all present to ask questions and to answer each question carefully and fully. Once this is done, interested inmates should be asked to complete referral forms for the children being recommended for mentoring. Such forms should always contain background information on each child (name, age and gender), as well as contact information for the caregiver.

The next step is to make contact with the caregiver. This can be a challenge in its own right. Often, the families of the children are highly mobile and may have changed addresses without leaving forwarding information behind. Even when contact is made, there may be tension and suspicion on the part of the caregiver that needs to be addressed and overcome.

An added challenge is that the caregiver may not see the potential or need for the mentor, and thus be reluctant to participate. Here again, tact, persuasiveness and a clear emphasis on the "message" —the child's needs—must be maintained. In addition, the "faith-based" nature of the program can be important in overcoming initial resistance and enlisting the caregiver's support and the child's willingness to participate.

3. The support organization.

Crucial to the operation of an effective MCP program is the involvement of an organization that brings professionalized knowledge and capability to the table. Amachi's experience has been that Big Brothers Big Sisters organizations have all the requisite experience and abilities needed to make the programs succeed. Development of a clear relationship with BBBS—or an equally qualified support organization—is an essential part of building the program.

At a minimum, the support organization needs to provide the following kinds of services:

- ✔ Assistance with screening and matching volunteers;

- ✔ Ongoing support to the matches;

- ✔ Problem resolution; and

- ✔ Provision of case management services, or assistance with organizing and carrying them out.

While the relationship with the support organization may be somewhat formal in nature, it is most useful to the program if the relationship is a close and interactive one. Since success of the one-to-one matches is central to the success of the program, open-ended communication between the MCP program sponsor and its partner organization is the best way to go.

A subcontract or subgrant agreement needs to be developed: one that specifies the kinds of services that are to be supplied, the level of services (that is, how many matches) as well as the time frame within which the services are to be available. If the earlier planning activities have been successfully completed, much of the groundwork for crafting such an agreement will already be done.

4. Bringing on the volunteers.

With the major elements now lined up, direct program operations can begin successfully. The next step, then, is to develop a pool of volunteer mentors ready to be matched with children.

This phase flows naturally from the relationships that have already been developed with the congregations and the faith leaders. With the encouragement of the faith leader, individual congregants will come forward, ready to volunteer. Having a simplified application form handy that a potential volunteer can complete in a few minutes will encourage participation, streamline the process and make sure that a paper trail gets started for each potential mentor.

A personal discussion with each potential volunteer is important. This is the right time to explain in detail the expectations (time, frequency of meetings), the help that will be available to her or him (support from the program and from the mentoring support organization), as well as some of the challenges (dealing with low-income children and their families; the need for objectivity and a nonjudgmental demeanor). At this stage some individuals who first expressed interest may decide that mentoring in this context is not for them.

The volunteer screening process will be done in close coordination with the support organization. One key criterion—occasionally a delicate issue—must be addressed: Is the congregant who has come forward going to be an appropriate and suitable mentor. It may be that, in the discussion with the congregant, it becomes clear to program staff that this individual is unlikely to establish or sustain a supportive and helpful mentoring relationship. In such a case, program staff must be diplomatic and skillful, decline the congregant's offer with thanks, but always act in the interests of the children.

Potential volunteers who have been positively screened (a process that must, as noted earlier, include an official background check) can then be matched with one of the children who have expressed a desire for a mentor. The support organization can be helpful in determining the "best" match between a mentor and a child, based on its experience with its other mentoring programs. The roles and responsibilities—who advises, who makes the final match decision—should be clearly worked out at the outset. It is important to remember that congregations will view the MCP program as the entity that has made the final choice.

With the first round of matches established, the "Building" phase has ended successfully, and program staff can look to the next round of responsibilities: managing the program effectively.

Managing the Program

One observer has noted that human service programs are like airplanes: it can be a challenge to get them off the ground, but it's only when they are flying that the important work begins.

Certainly, the Amachi experience suggests that the management phase—the set of tasks that need to be attended to on an ongoing basis once the program has started up—needs to be understood and addressed with care. At the same time, that experience has helped to identify the key responsibilities, and how they can be handled effectively.

1. Case management.

If the initial groundwork has been done well, the matching process will go smoothly. Before long, the program will have a solid number of matches underway, and each one needs to be carefully tracked and managed. That is the role of case management.

This is where the expertise and functions of the support organization come strongly to the fore. As each mentoring relationship (the "case") unfolds, the program will need to track its progress and success. Somewhat separately, it also will have to assess how the child is faring, whether the volunteer mentor is encountering any special challenges in her or his connection with the child, and whether the child's family is comfortable and accepting of this new, "outside" relationship the child is building.

As part of its agreement with Amachi in Philadelphia, BBBSSEPA provided "mentor support coordinators" who worked closely with Amachi staff (particularly the church volunteer coordinators) to keep track of these evolving issues. Their experience enabled them to identify problems early on when they could be addressed most easily, and work closely in cases where serious challenges emerged. They also supported some of the more routine yet still important functions: case files, record-keeping, written progress notes, etc. Their presence helped maintain the "professional" quality of the program while also permitting the natural strengths of the faith-based organizations to be tapped effectively.

2. Communication and relationships.

Keeping all of the stakeholders and partners "plugged in" as the program unfolds is an often-overlooked task. Frequently the day-to-day demands of operating the program take precedence, and too little effort is put to making sure everyone stays informed about progress.

Nonetheless, this is an essential management step, both for public relations value and for the smooth implementation of the program. Both the ministers and congregations of the participating faith organizations will want regular information on the success of their involvement. In particular, it is imperative that the faith leaders be kept in the loop, for their intervention and help will be needed from time to time if unexpected problems crop up.

If the program is able to deploy CVCs, the task of maintaining relationships is greatly simplified. Part of their role can be to provide informal communication to both the faith leader and congregants about the program's progress and successes. Being on site at the faith organization means they also can provide early warning about problems that congregant-volunteers may be experiencing, and deal with them quickly.

Preparing regular and frequent reports about the program should also be built into the management process. These need not be extensive or complicated. Short written summaries can easily be prepared, and shared with the faith organizations. Again, the emphasis should be on open, personal, one-to-one relationships with faith leaders; written communication should supplement but not replace this.

Finally, other partners and stakeholders in the program need to be kept informed. Funders will want to know how their investment is paying off. Public agencies and officials also should be brought into the communication circle. Their interest will be important as the program matures and new sources of support are sought. And, if the program can establish positive relationships with local media, "getting the word out" can have a measurable impact on building and enhancing the program's reputation in the local community.

3. Technical assistance and support.

Even well-designed, well-planned and well-implemented programs will sometimes need special attention and resources focused on spot problems and issues that arise. As the program moves into full operational swing, its managers must be prepared to handle the challenges that individual aspects of the program (or individual faith organizations) may pose.

The kinds of issues that arise will of course vary. CVCs at one faith organization may be asked to take on more responsibilities than they should, or may not be carrying out their stated responsibilities in a way that fits well with that organization. The right information may not be getting back to the faith leader and congregation about the program. Interactions among CVCs, program leadership and mentor support coordinators may not be occurring smoothly.

Oftentimes these problems can be addressed effectively with focused technical assistance, involving just one or two of the congregations. Sometimes, a meeting with one individual may be all that is required. In other situations, the technical support may need to be more broadly extended to all the partner organizations. Additional staff training or group meetings and discussions with all the partners may be necessary to address problems that appear more widespread or systemic in nature. The professional support organization is usually an important source of advice and resources for resolving issues and solving problems.

Maintaining positive relationships and good communication among all the actors is one of the best ways to identify issues that arise. But program managers need to be prepared to respond to those issues quickly and effectively. Ignoring problems, or responding to them slowly, only makes for larger problems later on that will require yet more time and resources to resolve.

4. Fiscal management.

Maintaining visible and high standards of integrity regarding program funds is a fundamental task of program management. And while this may seem a fairly obvious point to emphasize, the involvement of faith organizations means that special attention must be paid to fiscal issues.

Many faith organizations, especially smaller, storefront churches, may have minimal financial "control" systems in place. If they are to be involved in handling "pass-through" funds for any aspect of the program, it may be necessary, upfront, to provide technical assistance on establishing accounts, procedures for expending funds, and steps for recording transactions.

If federal funds are involved, care must be taken to ensure that all guidelines regarding their use by "faith-based" organizations are carefully observed. And the sponsoring organization, which is the direct recipient of the funds, must likewise have in place financial systems and safeguards that will satisfy any requirements regarding use of public funds.

Amachi programs usually solve the problem of fiscal controls by directly handling most disbursements, which guarantees that fiscal integrity is maintained, but also means that Amachi has to provide the extra bookkeeping and capacity for check-writing and disbursement of funds.

5. Documenting results.

Program accountability has become a byword in the human service field. Both public and philanthropic funding sources are increasingly concerned to know whether the support they give to programs produces the results that have been promised. It therefore is critical to take a results-oriented approach to MCP programs, and make sure that outcomes can be fully and carefully documented.

A strong reporting and documentation approach does more. It provides ongoing management information that permits program managers to gauge their own success, identify areas where more attention is needed, maintain high performance standards, and compile feedback and data that serve all the partner organizations well.

An approach like that used by Amachi in Philadelphia can serve as a starting point. Based in part on the reporting and data collection used by BBBS, Amachi tracked numbers of matches, frequency of contacts, and the kinds of activities mentors and mentees engaged in. Again, the role of CVCs was highly instrumental in making this work. They were able to manage much of the paperwork and ensure that reasonable standards were established and maintained in collecting the data.

Using these data, Amachi then could generate monthly reports for each of the congregations, as well as an aggregate report on the program. This permitted the work of mentors in each congregation to be assessed fairly and thoroughly, and also allowed the program to look at its overall performance and identify areas of strength and weakness.

Resource limitations are often cited as a reason why effective program accountability measurement does not take place. Experience with Amachi programs nationwide suggests that resources must be dedicated to this activity. It both provides critical and timely management information, and helps to establish a credible record of success that can help in sustaining the program over time.

Moving Ahead

This guide should make clear that creating and sustaining a viable program to mentor children of prisoners is neither an easy nor a straightforward effort. The Amachi experience to date shows that there is work and challenge in building these programs and a series of demanding tasks that must be completed carefully and successfully to achieve positive results.

The value of a deliberate and careful approach to new programs centers on the children the programs are intended to serve. Too often a good program idea is not matched with the planning, the research, the legwork, the implementation effort and the management needed to produce a successful result. In the end, it is the intended recipients—in this case the children of prisoners—who suffer when their needs are not addressed effectively.

Hopefully, this guide will provide resources, information and direction to local planners who can commit themselves to establishing sound programs of high quality. They may require more time, work and consideration in the early going; but these are the programs that will, over the long term, provide the greatest benefit to the "invisible" population of children of prisoners who so badly need them.

Resources and Information for Program Designers and Planners

Organizations

Public/Private Ventures (Amachi)

2000 Market Street, Suite 600
Philadelphia, PA 19103
215–557–4400
www.ppv.org
www.amachimentoring.org

Big Brothers Big Sisters of America

230 North 13th Street
Philadelphia, PA 19107
215–567–7000
www.bbbsa.org

The National Crime Prevention Council

1000 Connecticut Avenue, NW
13th Floor
Washington, DC 20036
202–466–6272
www.ncpc.org

Prison Fellowship

44180 Riverside Parkway
Lansdowne, VA 20176
1–877–478–0100
www.pfm.org

Child Welfare League of America

440 First Street, NW
3rd Floor
Washington, DC 20001
202–638–2952
www.cwla.org

Federal Bureau of Prisons

320 First Street, NW
Washington, DC 20534
202–307–3198
www.bop.gov

Corporation for National and Community Service

1201 New York Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20525
202–606–5000
www.nationalservice.org

United States Department of Health and Human Services

200 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20201
202–619–0257
www.hhs.gov

United States Department of Education

400 Maryland Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20202
1–800–872–5327
www.ed.gov

Community Capacity Development Office (formerly The Executive Office for Weed and Seed, EOWS)

810 Seventh Street, NW
Washington, DC 20531
202–616–1152
www.ojp.usdoj.gov/ccdo/welcome.html

PUBLICATIONS

Amachi In Brief, by Chelsea Farley, February 2004, available at www.ppv.org

Amachi: Mentoring Children of Prisoners in Philadelphia, by Linda Jucovy, June 2003, available at www.ppv.org

Making a Difference: An Impact Study of Big Brothers/Big Sisters, by Joseph P. Tierney and Jean Baldwin Grossman, with Nancy Resch, (Reissue of 1995 study) September 2000, available at www.ppv.org

Measuring the Quality of Mentor-Youth Relationships: A Tool for Mentoring Programs, by Linda Jucovy, August, 2002, available at www.ppv.org

People of Faith Mentoring Children of Promise: A Model Partnership Based on Service and Community, National Crime Prevention Council, February 2005 (Reprint of January 2004 report), available at www.ncpc.org

The Promise and Challenge of Mentoring High-Risk Youth: Findings from the National Faith-Based Initiative, by Shawn Bauldry and Tracey A. Hartmann, March 2004, available at www.ppv.org

What Happens to Children? Child Welfare League of America, Federal Resource Center for Children of Prisoners, available at www.cwla.org/programs/incarcerated/cop_whathappens.htm.

Amachi All Stars

**Big Brothers Big Sisters of
Central Maryland**

3600 Clipper Mill Road, Suite 250
Baltimore, MD 21211
410-243-4000

**Big Brothers Big Sisters of
Eastern Missouri**

4625 Lindell Boulevard, Suite 501
St. Louis, MO 63108
314–361–5900

**Big Brothers Big Sisters of
Greater Charlotte**

2424 North Davidson Street, Suite 110
Charlotte, NC 28202
704–377–3963

**Big Brothers Big Sisters of
Metro Atlanta**

100 Edgewood Avenue, Suite 710
Atlanta, GA 30303
404–601–7000

**Big Brothers Big Sisters of
Metropolitan Milwaukee**

1915 North Dr. Martin Luther King
      Drive, Suite 210
Milwaukee, WI 53212
414–258–4778

**Big Brothers Big Sisters of
North Texas**

901 Summit Avenue
Fort Worth, TX 76102
817–877–4277

**Big Brothers Big Sisters of
Southeastern Pennsylvania**

123 South Broad Street
Suite 2180
Philadelphia, PA 19109
215–790–9200

Kansas Big Brothers Big Sisters

219 North St. Francis
Wichita, KS 67202
316–263–3300

Path of Life Ministries

3340 Durahart Street
Riverside, CA 92507
909–786–9048

Pittsburgh Leadership Foundation

100 Ross Street, 4th Floor
Pittsburgh, PA 15219
412–281–3752

**Volunteers in Prevention, Probation,
and Prisons, Inc.**

Michigan Building
220 Bagley Street, Suite 1020
Detroit, MI 48226
313–964–1110

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