



PROJECT WHAT!

A program of Community Works

Project WHAT! (PW) raises awareness about the effects of parental incarceration on children, with the long-term goal of improving services and policies that affect these children. *WHAT!* stands for *We're Here And Talking* and refers to the youth who make up the Project WHAT! team, as well as the 2.7 million children nationwide who have a parent incarcerated. The program employs young people who have had a parent incarcerated as training facilitators. The perspectives of the youth are central to this project. One participant says,

“Being in Project WHAT! is providing energy that I need. It’s providing a space where there is always a shoulder to lean on and where there is ongoing support. It’s like a FAMILY. It’s also teaching me that I’m not alone and that instead of holding on to all our anger we should channel it into positive change.”

PW was launched in 2006 by Community Works. In the first year of the program, the youth researched, created, and piloted a training curriculum for teachers and social workers. The interactive training provides participants with tools to more effectively serve children who have or have had a parent incarcerated. Since its founding year, PW expanded its trainings tailoring them to each of our audiences, including police officers, probation officers, doctors, therapists, CASA workers, attorneys, elected officials, agency leadership, families, caregivers, incarcerated parents, and other youth impacted by incarceration. Since 2006, we have reached 9,000 service providers at over 300 conferences and trainings in California and across the United States.

In 2007, the PW team developed the *Resource Guide for Teens with a Parent in Prison or Jail*. The 80-page guide answers common questions that children have when a parent is incarcerated. The guide includes an explanation of complex jail and prison visiting procedures in plain language, compelling stories written by youth, and a CD of the stories read aloud. More than 5,000 copies of the guide have been distributed. The resource guide is free for youth. To order a copy or download it for free, visit us online at www.communityworkswest.org/ProjectWHAT.

In 2013, Project WHAT! launched its second cohort, expanding to two program sites: Alameda County and San Francisco. With the expansion of the program, youth advocates decided to launch a campaign to improve services and policies for local youth with incarcerated parents. Before launching the campaign, participants started a Youth-led Participatory Action Research Project (Y-PAR) to explore and document the greatest needs facing the population. Youth advocates turned their data into policy recommendations, launching a campaign to improve services and policies for Bay Area youth with incarcerated parents in June, 2015. Stay tuned for campaign results and more information by following us on social media (twitter [@ProjectWHAT__](https://twitter.com/ProjectWHAT__) Instagram [@Project_WHAT](https://www.instagram.com/Project_WHAT) and www.facebook.com/CWProjectWHAT) [#WereHereAndTalking](https://twitter.com/ProjectWHAT__).

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Project WHAT! is a program of Community Works, a non-profit that engages youth and adults in arts, education and restorative justice programs that interrupt and heal the far reaching impacts of incarceration and violence by strengthening individuals, families, and communities.