A Process Evaluation of Aunt Mary’s Storybook: Seeking to Improve the Relationship between Incarcerated Parents and Their Children Through Literacy

Scott Charles Mcwilliams

Follow this and additional works at: https://ecommons.luc.edu/luc_theses

Part of the Criminology and Criminal Justice Commons

Recommended Citation
https://ecommons.luc.edu/luc_theses/4419

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Theses and Dissertations at Loyola eCommons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Master's Theses by an authorized administrator of Loyola eCommons. For more information, please contact ecommons@luc.edu.

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 License.
Copyright © 2022 Scott Charles Mcwilliams
LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO

A PROCESS EVALUATION OF AUNT MARY’S STORYBOOK: SEEKING TO IMPROVE THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN INCARCERATED PARENTS AND THEIR CHILDREN THROUGH LITERACY

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE

MASTER OF ARTS

PROGRAM IN CRIMINAL JUSTICE AND CRIMINOLOGY

BY

SCOTT C. MCWILLIAMS

CHICAGO, IL

MAY 2022
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to extend my heartfelt appreciation to a number of people who made this research possible. I would like to first extend gratitude to my parents, grandparents, and extended family for continuously supporting me. I would not be here today without their love, support, patience, and understanding.

I would also like to thank A. Scott Washington, JD and Stephanie Washington, JD for mentoring me during my undergraduate years. I would have never endeavored down this path of working with incarcerated people if it was not for their tireless commitment to social justice, restorative justice, and teaching. The many hours of working as student assistant, deep conversations, planning events, and producing their radio program were times I will never forget.

My work at Companions Journeying Together (CJT) would not have been possible without the support of Jana Minor and the late Sr. Juanita Ujcik, OSF. Jana and Sr. Juanita provided me with immense responsibility by pushing for my hiring as Interim Executive Director, then Executive Director, of CJT. I joined as Interim Executive Director just one year after completing my undergraduate studies. I will be forever grateful for entrusting me with directing CJT, and for the opportunity to help thousands of people impacted by our criminal justice system. In addition, I would like to thank lead technology volunteers John Zimmerman and Wayne Burns for their steadfast commitment to CJT by building and maintaining the custom web application used by Aunt Mary’s Storybook. Without their commitment and time, Aunt Mary’s Storybook would not have had the data to analyze for this research. I would also like to
acknowledge the countless number of volunteers who have collectively spent thousands of hours inside facilities, preparing mailings, inventorying books, and further developing the web application for Aunt Mary’s Storybook. It is astonishing what Aunt Mary’s Storybook has accomplished since 1993 with the help of the program’s thoughtful, engaging, and dedicated volunteers. I would also like to thank Jamie Nelson and Derek Potts of the DePaul University Special Collections and Archives for their assistance in providing me with the archival records needed to complete my thesis.

I would also like to acknowledge and thank Phil Whittington, Gwyn Troyer, Dan Hoffman, Maya Szilak, and Jennifer Vollen-Katz of the John Howard Association (JHA) for their support and belief in me. Aunt Mary’s Storybook’s expansion is due in large part to being in the right place at the right time through my affiliation with JHA, as an intern, volunteer, and part-time staff. The opportunity to advocate for people in prison through system-wide change, and our compelling conversations during our long drives to and from correctional facilities across Illinois, have been a highlight in my development as a practitioner in this field. I will be forever grateful for the unique experiences provided to me by JHA and their staff.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge Dr. David Olson, my advisor. His encouragement and invaluable assistance during my graduate studies has been immeasurable. I don’t believe I have met a more understanding and patient person in my life. I will be forever grateful to him for seeing the potential in me, and for giving me the “kick” I needed to finally complete my graduate studies. I would also like to extend my appreciation to Dr. Chris Donner and Dr. Don Stemen for serving on my committee and providing me with invaluable insight to improve my thesis.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS iii  
LIST OF TABLES vii  
LIST OF FIGURES viii  
ABSTRACT ix  

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION 1  
  Methods 6  

CHAPTER TWO: ORGANIZATIONAL HISTORY 9  
  Criminological Theory 20  

CHAPTER THREE: THE EVOLUTION AND PROCESS OF AUNT MARY’S STORYBOOK 27  

CHAPTER FOUR: OPERATIONS AND PROCESS OF AUNT MARY’S STORYBOOK 33  

CHAPTER FIVE: THE NUMBER AND CHARACTERISTICS OF THOSE SERVED BY AUNT MARY’S STORYBOOK 42  

CHAPTER SIX: DISTANCE FROM PRISON TO WHERE MOST CHILDREN SERVE RESIDE 49  
  Menard Correctional Center 49  
  Hill Correctional Center 51  
  Sheridan Correctional Center 53  
  Vandalia Correctional Center 54  
  Cook County Jail 56  
  Kane County Jail 56  

CHAPTER SEVEN: POTENTIAL APPROACHES TO EVALUATING PROGRAM IMPACT 58  

CHAPTER EIGHT: CONCLUSION 63  

APPENDIX A: RECORDING SHEET 68  
APPENDIX B: RECORDING PROMPT FOR MALES 70  
APPENDIX C: RECORDING PROMPT FOR FEMALES 72  
APPENDIX D: POST PARTICIPATION SURVEY 74
LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Timeline of Facilities Participating in the Aunt Mary’s Storybook Program in Chronological Order 32

Table 2. Number of Sessions of Incarcerated Individuals Participating in Aunt Mary’s Storybook Program, 2016 to 2021, by Facility 43

Table 3. Sex and Race of Incarcerated Individuals Participating in Aunt Mary’s Storybook Program, 2016 to 2021 (N=3,760) 46

Table 4. Sex and Race of Children Served by Aunt Mary’s Storybook Program, 2016 to 2021 (N=8,340) 48
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. The Two Primary Concentrations Where Recordings from the Menard Correctional Center Were Sent 51

Figure 2. The Two Primary Concentrations Where Recordings from the Hill Correctional Center Were Sent 52

Figure 3. The Two Primary Concentrations Where Recordings from the Sheridan Correctional Center Were Sent 54

Figure 4. The Two Primary Concentrations Where Recordings from the Vandalia Correctional Center Were Sent 55

Figure 5. The Two Primary Concentrations Where Recordings from the Kane County Jail Were Sent 57

Figure 6. Diffusion of the Prisons and Jails Aunt Mary’s Storybook Program Operated in Pre- and Post-2000 64
ABSTRACT

In response to the rise of incarceration in jails and prisons, and the number of children adversely impacted by their parents’ incarceration, in 1993, a nonprofit organized called Companions Journeying Together (“CJT”), created the Aunt Mary’s Storybook (AMS) program to foster positive connections between incarcerated parents to their children. What began as a Christmastime program for mothers in the Cook County Jail has grown into a year-round program operating in prisons and jails throughout Illinois. AMS provides those incarcerated with an opportunity to record themselves reading a book to their children, and AMS then mails/transmits the recording along with a copy of the book to the children of those incarcerated.

Although CJT and AMS have existed for decades and served thousands of incarcerated people and their children, never has information about the program’s history, operations, or the characteristics of those served been examined empirically. This thesis is a process evaluation of the AMS program, including how and why the program was created and evolved, the structure of operations, and the number and characteristics of those who volunteer and are served by the program. The thesis concludes with an assessment of how AMS’ impact could be evaluated.

The research utilized archival records about CJT and AMS held by DePaul University’s Special Collections and Archives. In addition to this archival information, aggregate, non-identifiable data regarding the number and characteristics (i.e., race, gender) of the population served by the program was also examined from management reports regularly maintained and generated by AMS for their Board of Directors.
CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Although the rise in incarceration during the 1990s and 2000s increased attention by policy makers and the public to those in prison in the United States, numerous programs operated by nonprofit and faith-based organizations designed to improve the conditions of confinement (Dammer, 2002) and connect family members to those incarcerated have been in existence long before the recent focus on these issues. One such organization is Companions, Inc. (which changed its name to Companions Journeying Together in 2001). Companions Journeying Together is an IRS Section 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. The organization is governed by a Board of Directors who are responsible for setting the strategic objectives for the organization, ensuring proper resources and funding, supervising the Executive Director, and monitoring the impact and effectiveness of the mission and programs. Companions Journeying Together employs one individual who serves as Executive Director. The Executive Director is responsible for the day-to-day operation of the organization, recruits, places, and oversees volunteers, and is responsible for fundraising. Companions started offering prison-based programming when it was founded in 1987. The initial programs included a Bible study program, educational tutoring, and later, in cooperation with another organization, a transportation program for children of incarcerated parents. In 1993, Companions piloted its flagship program, Aunt Mary’s Storybook, which continues to this day. In addition to operating the Aunt Mary’s Storybook program, Companions Journeying Together also operates two other programs: a pen-pal program which
connects incarcerated people with people on the outside; and a cards program which consists of sending birthday, Christmas, and Mother’s Day cards to people in prison.

Aunt Mary’s Storybook (“AMS”) started in 1993 as a Christmastime program for mothers in the Cook County Jail but has since grown into a year-round program operating in ten state prisons, six county jails, one federal prison, and one halfway house in the state. The original purpose of the program when it started in 1993 was modest, focusing exclusively on the Cook County Jail women’s division. Today, the program has a statewide reach and has evolved to include the following purposes: (1) To provide a forum for incarcerated people to express their love to the children important to them, thereby demonstrating their role as a parent or loved one, rather than as “an inmate;” (2) To either re-kindle a bond, or continue a bond, between incarcerated people and the children important to them; (3) To promote literacy and reading; and (4) To provide access to books and connections to literacy events. Within the past few years, Aunt Mary’s Storybook has included promotional materials to the families served for other organizations such as WTTW Kids, the Chicago Children’s Museum, and the Poetry Foundation so that the families may take additional steps to embrace educational and family programming offered in their community.

As a result of the rise in incarceration rates, more prisons needed to be built. At the time Companions was formed in 1987, there were a total of 17 adult prisons in Illinois, not including Adult Transition Centers (i.e., “halfway houses”). Thus, during its early period when Companions was operating programs in the Dwight Correctional Center, the Hanna City Work Camp, and the Logan Correctional Center, CJT was in three of the 17 state prisons. However, between the time Companions was formed in 1987 and 2004, the State of Illinois opened nine
new correctional facilities (IDOC Annual Report, 2005). The geographic placement of these prisons was viewed as a potential means of developing jobs to local communities, addressed the “not in my backyard” (NIMBY) issues that placement of prisons in more urban or suburban communities face, but also had implications for those incarcerated far from family. Local politicians in rural communities viewed prison hosting as a tool for economic development (King et al., 2003). Despite this view, research has shown that prisons do not create substantive economic development opportunities for the areas that host them. According to a Sentencing Project report, there were no significant employment advantages to rural counties with prisons compared to those without, and there was no economic advantage when measuring the per capita income of counties that hosted new prisons (King et al., 2003). One of the most devastating impacts of prisons being constructed and operated in rural communities is the impact on the families of incarcerated people. Aunt Mary’s Storybook has found that the majority of packages are being mailed to the greater Chicagoland area despite many of the facilities served being located several hours away. Due to the distance, it is often difficult for the family members of incarcerated people to visit. Broader evidence of the distance between where people are incarcerated versus where they and their loved ones were living was found by Loyola’s Center for Criminal Justice Research, Policy and Practice (2019), which found that only 36% of people who were returned from prison back to Cook County were incarcerated in prisons in the northern part of Illinois.

One of the collateral consequences of incarceration that has been increasingly recognized is the impact of incarceration on the children of adults in prisons and jails. It is estimated that “684,500 state and federal prisoners were the parent to at least one minor child in 2006”
(Maruschak et al., 2021, p. 1), impacting an estimated “1,473,700 minor children” (p. 1). Although women in prison were more likely than men to report being a parent (58% of females reported being a parent), almost one-half (47%) of men reported having minor children (Maruschak et al., 2021), and men account for the vast majority of those in prison. In Illinois, similar patterns are evident, with 63% of the 39,306 adults in prison being identified as parents (IDOC Annual Report, 2019). There are a myriad of issues facing children who have an incarcerated parent in maintaining meaningful relationships. When relationships between incarcerated fathers and their children were strong before the father’s incarceration, prison visits and phone calls were reported to be good; but when the relationship was strained, these modes of communication caused stress for both the incarcerated father and the child (Venema et al., 2021). Prison visits are not only expensive and require transportation, but the prison environment is not conducive to positive experiences due to the unpleasant nature of the prison environment, lack of privacy, and lack of age-appropriate activities (Venema et al., 2021). Among the incarcerated fathers, stress was associated with prison visits due to embarrassment, feelings of guilt, and the emotional nature of visits (Venema et al., 2021). Telephone calls were reported to be of low quality in maintaining relationships: the calls were difficult to conduct around the schedules of the child and the fixed telephone schedule of the facility, and the calls were short (Venema et al., 2021). However, telephone calls were also reported to be a good alternative for families that found prison visits to be too distressing, and a good way to keep up with the day-to-day activities of the incarcerated father and child (Venema et al., 2021).

Positive actions by incarcerated fathers in prison can lead to children of incarcerated fathers and the caregivers of those children to have hope for a positive outcome post-release
(Yocum & Nath, 2011). These actions include participation in educational programs, remaining free of disciplinary tickets, holding a job, and demonstrating an interest in the lives of the children and family (Yocum & Nath, 2011). As such, participation in prison-based programs that seek to address the bond between an incarcerated father and his child(ren) through a demonstratable action might contribute to a more positive relationship between the father and child.

Although Companions Journeying Together has been in existence since the late 1980s and has served thousands of incarcerated people and the children important to them, never before has information about the program’s operations, its history and evolution, or the clients served been analyzed or assembled into a single document. Thus, the goal of this thesis is to conduct a process evaluation of the Aunt Mary’s Storybook program, providing those interested with a detailed understanding of how the program was created and evolved, how the program operates, lessons learned from the recent expansion of the program’s reach into more correctional facilities across Illinois, and the number and characteristics of those who volunteer and are served by the program. Throughout these discussions, connections will be made to the extant criminal justice literature that relates to the program’s logic model (see Appendix E), including criminological theories the program is built from and research on the efficacy of prison-based programming to reduce recidivism and generational experiences of incarceration. The thesis will conclude with recommendations on how the program can design and carry out a rigorous impact evaluation to gauge the degree to which it is meeting its goals and mission, and the potential benefits and challenges with conducting such an impact evaluation.
Method

The information sources used to inform this process evaluation come from the author’s first-hand knowledge and experience of the program since becoming its executive director in May 2014, combined with historic, archival records about the program held by DePaul University’s Special Collections and Archives, including reading all of the board meeting minutes and meeting agendas between 1987 and 1998. In addition to this information, aggregate, non-identifiable data regarding the number and characteristics of the population served by the program were also obtained from internal management reports and documents maintained by Aunt Mary’s Storybook. Because the thesis research is a process evaluation, relying on existing archival documents and aggregate program data, and therefore does not involve any contact with program participants or their children, or access to identifiable records, it was considered exempt from review by Loyola’s Institutional Review Board. Further, because the research is not testing any empirical hypotheses, and is primarily a descriptive study, the statistical analyses are primarily frequency counts, percentage distributions of the participant characteristics, and therefore do not rely on inferential statistics or multivariate model testing.

Process evaluations can be important for criminology because they provide clear information about a specific criminal justice program that can be implemented by other organizations (Kirchner et al., 1994). Specifically laying out how the program operates as well as its successes and shortcomings can provide useful information for others seeking to address a specific criminological problem. In addressing these problems in a process evaluation, it allows for more complex analyses to be performed, such as program evaluations and impact evaluations, in the future. Each type of evaluation is important to ensure “that crime policies rest
on a solid empirical foundation and are cost-efficient” (Mears, 2007, p. 668). Process evaluations are also important because it is not often that they are conducted; usually, only programs that end up under the microscope of legislatures, the media, or the public at large (Mears, 2007). Even though process evaluations are seldom performed, they are crucial for criminal justice policy, as “programs that lack a solid theoretical foundation are more likely to fail . . . because of poor conceptualization” (p. 671).

To examine the number and characteristics of individuals who participate in, and benefit from the program, aggregate administrative data generated by the Aunt Mary’s Storybook program was analyzed. As part of program enrollment and participation, the incarcerated adults who participate in the program fill out a form called a “recording sheet,” (see Appendix A) which asks for the incarcerated person’s name, jail or prison identification number, ethnicity, child’s name, child’s age, child’s sex, and child’s ethnicity. The recording sheet also asks the incarcerated person to identify the caregiver of the child, their address, and their telephone number. This sheet also contains the book that was selected by the incarcerated person for their child, as well as which device their recording is on, and the recording file number. Once the session in the facility is completed, Aunt Mary’s Storybook staff or volunteers enter the information into a web application that was developed for the program. Aunt Mary’s Storybook collects additional information about each program participant through searching publicly accessible databases maintained by the county jails or the Illinois Department of Corrections, including the incarcerated person’s date of birth, admission date to the facility, conviction offense or pending charges, and projected date they will be released from custody, if applicable. This information is retained in the secure web application. Prior to these data being automated,
program staff-maintained paper records and annually tallied information regarding the number of clients and children served through the program.
CHAPTER TWO

ORGANIZATIONAL HISTORY

Companions, Inc. started as a faith-based organization in 1987 upon the passing of Mary E. Best in 1986, the aunt of founders Jana Minor, Mary Rammien, and Margaret Rudnik. Initial funding for the organization was provided by an inheritance left to the sisters by Mrs. Best. The first mission statement of the organization was (as formatted in the original archival document):

Companions, Inc. represents people, companions, of God who recognize a call by Christ to witness the “Good News” to people who are incarcerated; who have been recently released from a correctional facility; or who are involved in activities which often and easily lead to criminal behavior.

These companions, representing various Christian denominations, work with prison chaplains, prison staff, and other community leaders to provide ministries of the Word, of worship, and of service to any receptive to these ministries. Companions, Inc. will focus especially on ministries which aid and encourage personal and faith development. (Companions, Inc., 1987)

The goals of the organization were (as formatted in the original archival document, with numbers added to clarify separate goals):

(1) To provide programs which foster spiritual and personal growth for people who are incarcerated; who are recently released from penal institutions; or who are in danger of becoming involved in criminal activity.
(2) To provide an opportunity for concerned people of the Christian church to serve God by ministering to people who have been convicted of criminal behavior or who are involved in related activities.
(3) To serve the community by helping offenders reconstruct their life styles so that these offenders are enabled to live constructively in society.
(4) To provide ministry to people in extreme need. (Companions, Inc., 1987)

Based on a detailed review of archival records of the program, including reading all of the board meeting minutes and meeting agendas between 1987 and 1998, the early origins of
Companions’ programming reveal a focus on just a handful of state prisons. The initial programs of Companions were a Bible scripture program at three state-run prisons in Illinois: the Dwight Correctional Center, the Hanna City Work Camp, and the Logan Correctional Center. This Bible program was started in 1987 and was developed and facilitated by Jana Minor, the President of the Board and Co-Founder of Companions. At that time, the Dwight Correctional Center was the only adult facility run by the Illinois Department of Corrections that housed exclusively female prisoners, while the Logan Correctional Center was converted to housing both male and female prisoners in 1987 (Chicago Tribune, 2000) and the Hanna City Work Camp housed males. Although Logan Correctional Center was housing male and female prisoners, Companions only serving the women at that facility. During this early period of Companions implementation, a bible study program was also prepared for both Pontiac Correctional Center and Hill Correctional Center (both all-male facilities), but the program was never offered, and no updates or additional information was found in the archival records to explain the lack of implementation at this facility. Elaine Shotton, one of the founding board members, developed an individual educational tutoring program for Spanish speaking people incarcerated at the Dwight Correctional Center. All of these facilities were state operated prisons in the northern half of Illinois (e.g., all north of the state capital in Springfield), and therefore were within a few hours’ drive of Jana Minor’s home in Brimfield, Illinois. The Bible study program at the Dwight Correctional Center also included Joan Smith, a board member, who facilitated the program with Jana Minor.

In 1989, Companions worked with Lutheran Social Services to connect volunteers with children who are not able to visit with their mothers at Dwight, Logan, and Dixon Correctional
Centers. As mentioned earlier, the Dwight Correctional Center was an all-female facility, whereas the Logan Correctional Center was coed. The Dixon Correctional Center was also a facility that housed both male and female prisoners since 1989, converting to an all-male facility in 2000 (Chicago Tribune, 2000). Volunteers of the program transported the children for visits with their parents to each of these facilities (Companions, Inc., 1989). Companions was receiving financial support from Lutheran Social Services for this program (Companions, Inc., 1989). During the November 4, 1989, board meeting, it was discussed that Lutheran Social Services will attempt to hire two people working one day each week to support the transportation program, and that Jana Minor would be the coordinator of the program.

During the April 7, 1990, board meeting, it was reported that Lutheran Social Services hired three people: two people working one day each per week, and one person working two days each week. It was also reported that more children were being transported, but there were many unfulfilled requests. At the next board meeting dated June 2, 1990, Lutheran Social Services increased their stipend to Companions from $600 to $800 monthly. During the board meeting on September 8, 1990, Lutheran Social Services proposed driving buses to transport the families in the program instead of individual volunteers driving children to the facilities. The Companions’ board was concerned about liability issues surrounding transportation and buses. Jana Minor of Companions proposed to them that Companions would attempt to develop training for volunteers to engage the children in the program in discussing their feelings after the visits and having a network of volunteers keeping in touch with the children (Companions, Inc., 1990).

At the next board meeting, dated September 8, 1990, it was reported that Lutheran Social Services was interested in some type of program to compliment to visits the children have with
their incarcerated mothers. The board expressed that they needed to examine the liability issues surrounding transportation. It was also reported that the transportation program also helped children attend a summer “camp” program that was occurring at the Dwight Correctional Center where children would get to spend a weekend with their mothers at a camp-like setting on the facility grounds. This program, called “Camp Celebration,” allowed children under the age of 16 to spend 48 consecutive hours over a weekend with their incarcerated mothers, and was found to provide opportunities for bonding and communication (Little & Stumbo, 1990).

Companions stopped working in the Hanna City Work Camp when Jana Minor moved to Wheaton, Illinois in late 1989. It is unclear why this occurred, but it is presumed to have stopped due to the further distance from the facility. The archival records also suggest there were issues in bringing volunteers into the facility due to a then-recent change made by the Department of Corrections in fingerprinting and photographing new volunteers. The organization’s Bible study program then started a program in the Kankakee Minimum Security Unit in 1992. Highlighting the focus on serving women and mothers in prison, in 1988, 1990, and 1993, the organization provided packages of one dozen cookies to each incarcerated person at the Dwight Correctional Center for Valentine’s Day.

Companions had been thinking since the January 19, 1991, board meeting about the direction and vision of the organization (Companions Inc., 1991). Some of the short term “dreams” included publishing the bible study program’s material for other organizations to use and thus create an earned income stream for Companions and developing a strategy for how the organization could better promote itself generally. The long-range dreams included brainstorming ways to improve the Dwight/Logan/Dixon Project, namely, how to better help the
children served, the children’s caregiver, and the incarcerated people deal with “the separation caused by the incarceration and to help the children and the inmates get out of the cycles of . . . incarceration” (Companions Inc., 1991, p. 2). Other long-range dreams included spearheading Twelve Step Recovery Programs in prison, “designing and implementing” pre-release programs for incarcerated people “which adequately and realistically prepare inmates for release,” and designing a post-release program. It is mentioned that the board talked about developing an “employment program especially for women,” and that there was always “a dream of a halfway house for women” (Companions Inc., 1991, p. 2). During the November 16, 1991, board meeting, the board recognized their unique position in offering programs for incarcerated people. They noted the rise in the prison population and wondered how they could share their position and access to get other people involved in prison ministry (Companions, Inc., 1991).

During the board meeting on July 9, 1992, it was discussed that Companions was taking over the parenting classes from Lutheran Social Services. According to Jana Minor’s report, Dixon wanted the organization to offer the parenting classes to both men and women (at the time Dixon was a co-ed facility), and after she spoke with the head counselor at the Dixon Correctional Center, the men were “much more interested and committed” than the women in each class (Companions, Inc., 1992, p. 3). At the November 19, 1992, board meeting, it was reported that the first 12-week long parenting class was successful. The sessions were offered for both men and women, and while they initially met separately, the last 3-4 sessions were jointly offered to men and women together. The organization also planned to host a Christmas party with the participants and their children, with Lutheran Social Services offering the transportation (Companions, Inc., 1992). During the board meeting on March 4, 1993, it was reported that the
Dwight Correctional Center was also interested in having Companions offer parenting classes at their facility (Companions, Inc., 1993).

Although Companions had been in operation since 1987 with the goal of providing faith-based ministry to incarcerated people, and some comforts to women incarcerated in the state’s largest female prison (i.e., cookies to those at Dwight Correctional Center), it was during a board meeting on September 30, 1993, that the idea of a storybook program was first discussed. At this board meeting, a volunteer with Companions introduced the idea of having those incarcerated read books to their children, and to have a recording of the book reading provided to the child of the incarcerated parent. In keeping with the organization’s original faith-based mission, it was suggested that this effort be conducted at the Cook County Jail for Christmas. Companions received a grant from the Neediest Kids Fund to do something for the children visiting their mothers at the Cook County Jail before Christmas, and a board member came up with the idea, and the idea was executed by a Dominican volunteer who was doing a year of service to Companions. As the sessions proved to be successful, Aunt Mary’s Storybook was offered as part of the parenting classes that were being taught at Dwight.

Thus, the expansion of Companions to incorporate those incarcerated reading to their children (which would come to be called “Aunt Mary’s Storybook,” named after the founders’ Aunt Mary E. Best) started at a time when the growth of both jail and prison populations were becoming more evident, as were concerns about crowding and the conditions of confinement. For example, leading up to the idea of the reading program in the Cook County Jail, the population of the jail had almost doubled between 1985 and 1993 (Olson & Tahier, 2012). In addition, crowding at the jail had become so problematic that the Cook County Sheriff’s Office
created a new Department of Community Supervision and Intervention (DCSI) in 1992 to provide a mechanism for release from the jail onto community supervision (Martin et al., 2000). At the state level, the Governor at the time, Jim Edgar, had established the Illinois Task Force on Crime and Corrections to develop solutions to the problems with prison crowding. This Task Force released their final report and recommendations in March of 1993 (Illinois Task Force on Crime and Corrections, 1993). Within this environment of increased attention to jail and prison crowding in Illinois and specifically Cook County, what would become Aunt Mary’s Storybook program was initially discussed by the organization in September 1993 and started soon after inside the Cook County Jail. However, the increase in correctional populations was not unique to Illinois or Cook County. In the decades leading up to the creation of both Companions and Aunt Mary’s Storybook, nationally the population of incarcerated people in state prisons and jails was more than four times the population level in 1972 (National Research Council, 2014). In the decades prior to 1972, the incarceration rate of non-jail state and federal prisoners hovered around 110 per 100,000 population, but increased every year starting in 1972, reaching a rate of 506 per 100,000 population in 2007 and 2008 (National Research Council, 2014). This continual rise in the prison population caused the United States to hold 2.23 million people in prisons and jails by 2012 (National Research Council, 2014). The dramatic rise in incarceration during this time can be boiled down to two main reasons: the amount of crime and how policymakers respond to it (Raphael & Stoll, 2013). During the 1960s and through the 1980s, the United States experienced an increase in crime, which then fell in the early 1990s (National Research Council, 2014). The number of people incarcerated in prisons and jails has decreased to just under 2.08
million as of 2019 (Minton et al., 2021). This represents a roughly 1.9% annual decrease in the incarcerated population since 2009 (Minton et al., 2021).

The Aunt Mary’s Storybook program offers a collection of children’s books from which incarcerated people can choose. Aunt Mary’s Storybook staff and volunteers assist the participants in choosing books for their children, and then record the participants reading a selection of the book and a personal message from the participant to the child. On behalf of the participant, Aunt Mary’s Storybook mails the recording and the book to the caregiver of the child. Aunt Mary’s Storybook provides the children’s books, which are continuous texts, for incarcerated people to use in connection with the program. Prose literacy is described as “[t]he knowledge and skills needed to search, comprehend, and use information from continuous texts” (Greenberg et al., 2007, p. iv). A national study of 1,200 incarcerated people aged 16 and older, and 18,000 non-incarcerated people aged 16 and older, found that incarcerated people have lower levels of prose literacy levels when compared to non-incarcerated adults (Greenberg et al., 2007). However, they also found that literacy of adults in prison has improved when the findings from their 2007 study were compared to their 1992 study (Greenberg et al., 2007). In a more recent examination, Rampey et al. (2016) affirmed that people in prison have lower average literacy scores when compared to non-incarcerated people. In a study of people incarcerated in a prison in Alabama, Shippen et al., (2010) found that most of the prisoners were reading at between the fifth and seventh grade reading levels.

In Illinois, where the Aunt Mary’s Storybook program operates, the highest educational achievement for 14.6% of the prison population was a high school diploma, followed by 14.2% earning a GED (IDOC Annual Report, 2019). While lower literacy levels present problems on
occasion, the incarcerated people who participate in Aunt Mary’s Storybook are usually able to read the book they selected for their child on their own. In cases where assistance is needed, the participants usually just need help pronouncing a few words. Where incarcerated people are unable to read the book on their own at all, a volunteer or staff member from the Aunt Mary’s Storybook program will read the sentence to the participant with the recording off, then have the participant repeat the sentence when the recording has started, then pause the recording so that the next sentence can be read by the volunteer or staff member to the participant. The recording is then started again for the participant to repeat the next sentence, and this process is repeated until a substantive recording has been made for the participant’s child.

Initially, when Aunt Mary’s Storybook began in 1993, the program mailed the recording on a cassette. Throughout the years, as technology has evolved, the organization moved to sending recordings on a CD. Starting in 2016, the Executive Director of Companions started implementing plans for the organization to better collect data, provide a better experience for volunteers who help the organization mail packages, and to provide a web-based hub for caregivers to receive/access the recordings from their incarcerated loved ones electronically. The organization understood that delivering the recordings on a CD was not sustainable as CDs were increasingly becoming outdated technology. The organization worked with a volunteer based in Texas to develop a web application to set in motion the Executive Director’s plans. The volunteer worked for three months, volunteering full-time to create the custom web application for Aunt Mary’s Storybook. After making substantial progress on the web application, the volunteer decided to end their volunteer engagement as the web application was becoming too large in scale. The volunteer wanted to share his expertise in web development with other
organizations rather than focus on Aunt Mary’s Storybook exclusively. Due to issues recruiting highly skilled technology volunteers, the development of the web application did not reach its full potential until the beginning stages of the COVID-19 pandemic, as the organization went through several prospective volunteers who ended up not being up to the task. The organization has yet to finalize the testing of the electronic delivery function as facilities have not yet opened to outside programs due to the continuation of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, as the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions were eased in one of the county jails served by Aunt Mary’s Storybook, there are plans to start piloting this effort. As such, the December 2021 session at the Kane County Jail is serving as the pilot session for the electronic delivery of audio recordings. As the organization starts to fully examine the utilization of the electronic delivery model, necessary adjustments may need to be made for the organization to roll out this model to the other facilities. As such, audio delivery in the form of a CD may need to be continued as it awaits the results of the pilot session. This was the primary method of audio delivery pre-COVID-19.

Although it is likely that there are hundreds of programs run by nonprofit, volunteer-based groups to facilitate positive connections between incarcerated parents and their children, there is little known about these programs based on formal research/surveys. Searches for programs similar to Aunt Mary’s Storybook revealed a variety across the country, and even within Illinois. Some examples of these programs that seek to improve the bond between people who are incarcerated, and their children include Prison Fellowship’s Angel Tree, a national program which provides a Christmas gift to the child on behalf of the incarcerated person. The Prisoner and Family Ministry at the Lutheran Social Services of Illinois offers a program called
Visits To Mom, which offers bus transportation for families to visit their incarcerated loved one at the Decatur and Logan Correctional Centers. Similarly, a program in Florida offered by Children of Inmates offers a Bonding Visits program where it not only transports families to the facilities, but the children and incarcerated parent also sit together in secure rooms to “read books, put together puzzles, do arts-and-crafts projects, and play board games” (Children of Inmates, n.d.). However, it is different in that after the facility visit, the program transports the children to another site, such a bowling alley, in order to reduce the stress associated with the facility visit, and counselors associated with the program interact with the children for guidance and support. Since Aunt Mary’s Storybook started in 1993, the program has been replicated both nationally and internationally. For example, the nonprofit Women's Storybook Project of Texas started serving incarcerated women in the Hilltop Unit in 2003 upon learning about the idea for serving incarcerated women and their children (Women’s Storybook Project of Texas, n.d.). In Illinois, Our Lord's Lutheran Church in Maryville, Illinois has operated a similar program since 2000 in the Southwestern Illinois Correctional Center (Our Lord's Lutheran Church, n.d.).

Present-day funding for CJT originates from individuals, an annual fundraising event, and religious organizations (churches, church groups, and religious orders), particularly ones affiliated with the Catholic Church. Churches and religious groups have a shared opinion alongside Aunt Mary’s Storybook in the sense that every human life is cared for and valued, with the Biblical verse “... I was in prison, and you came to visit me” (Matthew 25:35) being a guiding principle. Religious organizations have a long history of involvement in improving conditions of prisons. In 1787, the Philadelphia Society for Alleviating the Miseries of Public Prisons (now known as the Pennsylvania Prison Society) was formed. The efforts of this group...
led to the reformation of many early correctional policies and practices, as well as the modernization of the Walnut Street Jail (Teeters, 1937). The Society believed that it was impossible for people in custody to reform their behaviors if they were confined all together, as the more “hardened” criminal would be able to intermingle with other people in custody. Thus, the Society brought into action their version of what is now referred to as solitary confinement (Teeters, 1937). The Society would visit the individuals in custody to check on their welfare, which arguably made their idea of separation more humane (Teeters, 1937).

The financial support that CJT receives from religious organizations is not conditioned on any delivery of religious service. Donations are not solicited from incarcerated people, but CJT receives donations from people in custody occasionally throughout the year. Fundraising has been a continual challenge at CJT; the budget for the organization, which is less than $100,000 (Internal Revenue Service, 2019), is not high enough for many foundations to consider supporting, and in addition, many foundations only permit letters of inquiry and grant applications on an invitation-only basis. In addition, CJT does not have a fundraising professional on staff.

**Criminology Theory**

Aunt Mary’s Storybook is rooted in social learning theory, social bond theory, and social support theory. Social learning theory was developed by Ronald Akers and is a criminological theory that evolved from Edwin Sutherland’s differential association theory. The overarching theme in differential association theory is that crime is a learned behavior from others through social interaction. Exposure to these behaviors is varied through “behavioral and normative patterns” with others (Pratt et al., 2010, p. 768). Social learning theory differs in that Akers’
position is that a person’s attitudes or meanings that are associated with a specific behavior may be approving or disapproving of crime generally or tied to a particular act or situation (Pratt et al., 2010). These attitudes or meanings can be in opposition to criminal behavior, seeing crime as desirable, or seeing criminal activity as permissible (Pratt et al., 2010). Another difference in social learning theory and differential association is that Akers believed acts that are reinforced are “likely to be repeated, whereas acts that elicit punishment are less likely to be repeated” (p. 768). Of these acts, the social reinforcement, as opposed to the physical reinforcement (e.g., bloody nose or bruised arm from engaging in fights related to criminal activity, or physical changes from drug abuse), are most important when learning about criminal behavior. In other words, “people learn from observing others’ behaviors and the outcomes of those behaviors” (Astray-Caneda et al., 2011, p. 3).

Examining the empirical evidence surrounding social learning theory leads to an issue, as identified in a Pratt et al.’s (2010) meta-analysis: the studies do not explore all four elements of social learning theory, which are “differential association, definitions, imitation, and differential reinforcement” (p. 769). Therefore, whether there is support for social learning theory must be inferred by the studies which tend to only examine how one or more are related to criminal conduct (Pratt et al., 2010). However, even with this limitation, there appears to be support for social learning theory. Overall, compared to other competing criminological theories (self-control, social bond/control, classic strain, general strain, routine activity/opportunity, rational choice/deterrence, and labeling theories), social learning theory is well supported (Pratt et al., 2010). The differential association and definitions elements of social learning theory have
received widespread attention, as well as strong empirical support, from people conducting research compared to the other elements of the theory (Pratt et al., 2010).

Aunt Mary’s Storybook is rooted in social learning theory because it provides an opportunity for incarcerated people to demonstrate a prosocial activity, namely, reading, to the children important to them. The program’s volunteers and staff explain the importance of reading, choosing a story that will properly engage the participant’s child (through topics of interest and age appropriateness), and reading the story in an engaging way. Specifically, the incarcerated participants are encouraged to read with an excited, happy tone of voice. They are also encouraged to identify and talk about the various colors, pictures, and illustrations in the story. The suggestion to the participant, in essence, is to make reading a fun and enjoyable experience for the child as a way to promote a love of reading. With this demonstration, through social reinforcement, children ideally will be able to pick up on the positive experience that was created for them by their incarcerated loved one. From there, they model that behavior on their own, or in connection with their caregiver. In addition to the social reinforcement aspect of social learning theory, the children are encouraged to imitate, or read along, with their incarcerated loved one as they listen to the recording. The child is in physical possession of the book, and the recording can be played back as many times as the child chooses. In many cases, the incarcerated participants are unable to finish reading the entire book, especially if the book is long or is meant for an older child. The incarcerated participant is always encouraged to tell the child to read the rest of the book on their own, and oftentimes, the participant asks the child to write to them with their thoughts and opinions concerning the remainder of the book that is unread by the incarcerated participant. As discussed earlier, in each package containing the book
and recording, Aunt Mary’s Storybook provides additional resources for families looking to continue a love for reading, and prosocial activities. For instance, the program currently provides a card containing a discount to the Chicago Children’s Museum. In the past, the program has provided information about WTTW’s children’s educational programming, as well as the Poetry Foundation’s children’s-focused events.

Aunt Mary’s Storybook is also rooted in social bond theory. Social bond theory, developed by Travis Hirschi, stipulates that “people do not break laws to the extent that they have internalized law-abiding normal or developed social bonds” (Brown, 2012, p. 341). If individuals start to have less ties to “conventional society,” it will increase the chance that a person will resort to motivations to commit crime (Brown, 2012). The four elements of social bond theory are attachment, commitment, involvement, and belief. The attachment element refers to an individual’s relationship with other people. Most attention in this element of social bond theory have been related to parental attachment. This element is akin to asking the person, “Do you care what your parents think?” (p. 342). A negative answer to that question would lead someone to go down the path of criminal activity (Brown, 2012). Hirschi’s attachment element contends that attachment to one parent in a single-parent household can fully meet the needs of attachment. However, one study found that in two parent households, delinquency decreased when the person was attached to both parents (Brown, 2012). The third element of social bond theory, commitment, boils down to a person being encouraged to conform to society and common order in fear of losing out on potential future opportunities, such as career and educational opportunities, one’s reputation, among other things (Brown, 2012). For example, a law student may abstain from risky behaviors in an effort to protect their future prospects as an
attorney. “Hirschi characterized commitment as ‘common sense’ because abiding by social rules helps to maintain and advance one’s status in society” (p. 344). The fourth element of social bond theory is involvement, and this element refers to the frequency of “conventional activities” an individual is involved in (Brown, 2012. Hirschi believed that if the frequency was high, the individual would not have time or the thought to act on “deviant acts” (Brown, 2012). However, it should be noted that little empirical support has been identified to substantiate this element, despite how people may feel that this element is “common sense” (Brown, 2012). The fourth and final element of social bond theory is belief. This element refers to an individual’s strength in their “believe in the conventional order;” if it is high, there is less likelihood of the individual engaging in criminal activity (p. 344). Hirschi’s social bond theory applies to Aunt Mary’s Storybook in several ways. First, program provides an important connection between incarcerated people and the children most important to them. As discussed later in this thesis, the program primarily serves the biological child(ren) of the incarcerated participants. An overarching theme in participating in Aunt Mary’s Storybook is keeping the bond strong between families impacted by incarceration. This bond can be demonstrated by the physical act of picking out a book and performing a reading of the book on a recording device so that the child can hear the voice of their incarcerated parent or loved one. The child is reminded that their incarcerated parent or loved one loves them, misses them, and wants the best for them. This is the theme of the program, and these feelings are also relayed to the child through two opportunities for the incarcerated participant to share a “personal message,” once at the beginning of the reading, and once at the end. These personal messages often include messages of love, reinforcing things happening in the life of the child (complimenting their work in school,
pictures they have created, how well they are doing in sporting activities, among other things). In addition, the commitment element of social bond theory is often reinforced during these personal messages. In addition to the other personal messages that have been described, the incarcerated participant also often encourages their child to behave for the person taking care of the child and encourages them to do well in school. Finally, as mentioned earlier, the program connects children and their caregivers with educational tools and opportunities in their community that can enhance the bond between the child and caregiver.

Finally, Aunt Mary’s Storybook is also rooted in social support theory. Social support theory was developed by Francis Cullen, and it is unique compared to other criminological theories because it identifies positive things that can be done to reduce criminal activity, as other theories tend to focus on negative things that can impact someone’s affinity for criminal activity (Kort-Butler, 2018). Social support theory is described “as a process of transmitting human, cultural, material, and social capital, whether between individuals or between larger social units (communities, states) and their members” (Kort-Butler, 2018, pp. 1-2). There are three elements of social support theory. First, “support can be conceptualized as perceived, feeling supported, or feeling that support is available” (p. 2). Second, “support can be instrumental, informational, or emotional in nature (p. 2). An example of instrumental support is an organization or individual providing physical items to individuals, or helping individuals with practical tasks, such as obtaining an ID, helping with job applications, whereas informational support is providing verbal or written tools for the individual to solve the problem on their own (Kort-Butler, 2018). “Emotional support involves the expression of sympathy, caring, esteem, value, or encouragement (p. 2). The third element of social support theory is that it can be “distinguished
by its source” (p. 2), such as family members or friends, religious organizations, schools, and others. The final element is that “social support can be distinguished by its source” (p. 2). Social support theory fits the framework of Aunt Mary’s Storybook in a few ways. First, instrumental support is provided to the children most important to the incarcerated participants, specifically, children’s books and recordings. Informational support in the form of educational tools and opportunities in their community are also provided in the packages that are sent to the family. In addition, the volunteers and staff that assist the incarcerated participants in choosing a book, encouraging them to read, and helping them pronounce words is a form of both informational and emotional support. Finally, the aspect of Aunt Mary’s Storybook being an extension of a visit fits within the context of social support theory.
CHAPTER THREE

THE EVOLUTION AND PROCESS OF AUNT MARY’S STORYBOOK

Aunt Mary’s Storybook serves facilities based primarily on interest from the facilities themselves. Prior to the examined period (1998 through 2021), the program served a small number of facilities: the Kane County Jail, DeKalb County Jail, Wayside Cross, DuPage County Jail, and the Kendall County Jail. In Table 1, readers will find a timeline of the facilities that participated in the Aunt Mary’s Storybook program, in chronological order, since its inception.

Wayside Cross Ministries operates a halfway house called Master’s Touch in Aurora, Illinois. Participants of Aunt Mary’s Storybook at Master’s Touch are individuals who are in the process of completing the Malachi Dads, which is a program offered by Wayside Cross Ministries. This is a Christian faith-based program that helps participants be better fathers. Aunt Mary’s Storybook offers its program to participants of Malachi Dads so the participants are able to put into practice the skills they have learned. The Aunt Mary’s Storybook program was first offered at Wayside Cross in 2010. The archival records of program data indicate that the program was not offered again until the 18th of June 2015. Because the Aunt Mary’s Storybook program is offered in connection with the completion of a parenting class at this facility, the scheduling of the program is sporadic.

The Dwight Correctional Center, a prison for females operated by the State of Illinois, was served by the program from 1998 until 2012, when the facility was closed by the State of Illinois. Similarly, the Sheridan Correctional Center, a prison for male prisoners that operates as
a prison-based Therapeutic Community (TC), was served by the program from 2004 (the year it opened as a TC) to 2012. The fact that the Sheridan Correctional Center included Aunt Mary’s Storybook when it opened as a TC is significant, as the Sheridan TC program has been described as one of the most comprehensive, rehabilitation-focused prisons in the state (Olson et al., 2009). In addition, the program served the Cook County Jail for a period of time, from 1993 through an unknown period, then from 1999 to 2004. However, when Companions had a change in leadership in May 2014, the new Executive Director sought to rapidly expand the program to new facilities. The Board of Companions Journeying Together, the nonprofit organization that operates the Aunt Mary’s Storybook program, tasked the new Executive Director with returning the program to the Cook County Jail. The program was able to return to that facility in February 2015. The Executive Director also approached the Sheridan Correctional Center, and after waiting for the various approvals from the facility’s administration, the program returned to that facility in July 2016.

Because the Executive Director of Companions was at first volunteering for, then later working with, another nonprofit agency involved in prison reform and oversight in Illinois (the John Howard Association), he was introduced to a broad array of prison administrators throughout the state. While visiting the Menard Correctional Center with the John Howard Association in March 2016, he learned of their interest in starting a program similar to Aunt Mary’s Storybook and was able to receive approval to bring the program to their facility. Illustrative of how Aunt Mary’s Storybook had expanded geographically, prior to this expansion to other prisons, the furthest any of the facilities served by Aunt Mary’s Storybook from Joliet, Illinois (the home of Aunt Mary's Storybook’s staff member) was roughly 70 miles (about three
hours of roundtrip driving). By comparison, Menard Correctional Center, a maximum-security prison in southwestern Illinois, is 622 miles (nearly 10 hours of roundtrip driving) to Joliet, Illinois (the home of Aunt Mary's Storybook’s staff member). As the administrators at the Menard Correctional Center moved to other facilities in the state as a result of promotions and transfers, the word spread about the Aunt Mary’s Storybook program, and requests to serve other state prison facilities were made by those administrators. The staff and Board of Directors of the program was excited to be able to elevate its positioning from primarily an effort in local jails in the greater Chicagoland area to a statewide effort that included more state prisons. The program was then invited to serve the Vandalia Correctional Center (also located in southern Illinois and approximately 213 miles from Aunt Mary’s Storybook’s staff member home) and the Western Illinois Correctional Center. Program staff approached the Randolph County Jail, located in Chester, Illinois to serve that facility. This facility was chosen because it is located close to the Menard Correctional Center, and the Randolph County Jail was flexible in being available to host the program on the evening the program staff member arrived in town. Due to the relatively significant expenses for a small nonprofit to pay of the transportation and lodging this far from Joliet (home of Aunt Mary’s Storybook’s staff member), the program staff felt serving an additional facility while in town would provide an opportunity to serve even more families impacted by incarceration in a cost-efficient manner.

The program was then invited by the Warden of the Centralia Correctional Center in November 2016 to serve that facility after hearing about the program’s success at the Vandalia Correctional Center. In 2017, an incarcerated person wrote to Aunt Mary's Storybook and asked that the program contact the Hill Correctional Center to start the program there. The program
sent a proposal to the facility and soon after, the program was adopted. Once the program was established at Hill Correctional Center, the program was considering bundling the Hill Correctional Center visits with the Illinois River Correctional Center since those two facilities are relatively close to each other. The Clinical Services Supervisor at the Hill Correctional Center introduced the program to the Clinical Services Supervisor at the Illinois River Correctional Center and the program was adopted. The program ultimately decided not to bundle the Hill Correctional Center and Illinois River Correctional Center visits together but did serve them separately.

In April 2017, the Warden of the Kewanee Life Skills Reentry Center reached out to the program and offered an opportunity to serve their facility. The Aunt Mary’s Storybook program was particularly excited to offer the program at Kewanee because it was the first facility in the state completely dedicated to reentry. In addition, Aunt Mary’s Storybook would be among the first outside programs to be able to work inside the facility. Thus, the Aunt Mary’s Storybook program was involved in the two state prisons that were most substantially and visibly focused on rehabilitation—the Sheridan Correctional Center and the Kewanee Life Skills Reentry Center.

In January 2018, the program was approached by a psychologist working at the newly created Joliet Treatment Center (JTC) who was interested in bringing the program to the facility. The Aunt Mary’s Storybook program connected with the Warden and Clinical Services Supervisor at the JTC, and it was quickly added as a facility the Aunt Mary’s Storybook program served due to the proximity of the facility to the Executive Director’s residence. In addition, it was a relatively new facility at the time, having opened in October 2017, and was the state’s
prison that was focused on working with the prison system’s mental health population, which the program found to be an exciting opportunity.

In 2020, the program was approached by two additional facilities: the Federal Prison Camp in Pekin and the Vienna Correctional Center. A teacher employed by FPC Pekin found the program through an internet search and contacted the program and inquired about starting it at their facility. Aunt Mary’s Storybook added the facility to the roster. The program was offered once at the Vienna Correctional Center, but the correctional administrator that approached the program initially has since transferred to another facility. Another program similar to Aunt Mary’s Storybook already existed within Vienna Correctional Center, which might have contributed to the initial turnout being low. From what Aunt Mary’s Storybook was told by the correctional administrator, the other program requires incarcerated participants to pay a fee in order to participate which may also have contributed to the low turnout. The final contributing factor to the low turnout was that Aunt Mary’s Storybook was first offered to the incarcerated people at Vienna Correctional Center during COVID-19, where participants were unable to record, nor were they able to choose their own books. Informal conversations with Clinical Services staff at other facilities have indicated a decrease in interest from potential participants due to the adjusted format of Aunt Mary’s Storybook.
Table 1. Timeline of Facilities Participating in the Aunt Mary’s Storybook Program in Chronological Order

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Facility</th>
<th>Year Began AMS</th>
<th>Year Ceased AMS</th>
<th>Number of prisoners at Facility</th>
<th>Number of prisoners served since year began</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cook County Jail</td>
<td>1993-Unknown, 1999-2004, 2015</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
<td>5,622 (03/25/21)</td>
<td>2,632</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dwight Correctional Center</td>
<td>1998</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>Unknown (facility closed)</td>
<td>3,663</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kane County Jail</td>
<td>2002</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
<td>468 (03/25/21)</td>
<td>3,664</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sheridan Correctional Center</td>
<td>2004-2012, 2016</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
<td>1,249 (1/1/21)</td>
<td>2,015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DuPage County Jail</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>2019</td>
<td>457 (03/25/21)</td>
<td>796</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kendall County Jail</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
<td>144 (03/25/21)</td>
<td>282</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Will County Jail</td>
<td>2015</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
<td>622 (3/25/21)</td>
<td>384</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western Illinois Correctional Center</td>
<td>2016</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
<td>1,452 (1/1/21)</td>
<td>152</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DeKalb County Jail</td>
<td>2016</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
<td>193 (03/17/2021)</td>
<td>118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vandalia Correctional Center</td>
<td>2016</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
<td>575 (1/1/21)</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Randolph County Jail</td>
<td>2016</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Menard Correctional Center</td>
<td>2016</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
<td>2,143 (1/1/21)</td>
<td>431</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Centralia Correctional Center</td>
<td>2017</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
<td>1,158 (1/1/21)</td>
<td>210</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illinois River Correctional Center</td>
<td>2017</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
<td>1,429 (1/1/21)</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kewanee Life Skills Reentry Center</td>
<td>2017</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
<td>153 (1/1/21)</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hill Correctional Center</td>
<td>2017</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
<td>1,577 (1/1/21)</td>
<td>131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joliet Treatment Center</td>
<td>2018</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
<td>214 (1/1/21)</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Federal Prison Camp, Pekin</td>
<td>2020</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
<td>189 (no date)</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vienna Correctional Center</td>
<td>2020</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
<td>687 (1/1/21)</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER FOUR
OPERATIONS AND PROCESS OF AUNT MARY’S STORYBOOK

Aunt Mary’s Storybook staff arrange sessions with a specific staff member at the facility. In most of the state prisons in Illinois, Aunt Mary’s Storybook corresponds with a staff member from the facility’s Clinical Services Department. Most of the county jails have a civilian program staff member who is assigned to the program. The coordination and frequency of sessions vastly differ across each facility the program serves. This variation is due to each facility operating somewhat differently, but primarily due to the limited resources and staff available to the Aunt Mary’s Storybook program, particularly for prisons that require long drives and overnight stays.

During a typical state prison session, the facility staff will publish an announcement informing those incarcerated at the facility that representatives from Aunt Mary’s Storybook program will be on grounds and informs them to contact the facility’s Clinical Services staff if they would like to participate. The method of publicizing the opportunity to participate in the Aunt Mary’s Storybook program varies by facility. Most of the facilities post paper flyers in the housing units. One facility relies on an incarcerated person who serves as an educational worker to invite participants, while another facility chooses participants based primarily on their attendance at a parenting class offered by the Clinical Services Department. In all the state prisons, the Clinical Services staff member will review the prospective participant’s prison file (i.e., “Master file”) and screens out individuals who have active orders of protection or convictions for child abuse, neglect, and misconduct. Thus, the facility staff try to identify
detained participants that should not have contact with their children, either due to the potential that the child is the victim(s) of their conviction offense or other situations that would make contact between the incarcerated person and the child problematic. Since participation in the Aunt Mary’s Storybook is seen as a privilege, the prospective participants are also screened out if they have had recent disciplinary incidents/action in the facility.

Once the final list of participants is identified and approved, the Clinical Services staff member sends the recording sheet to the participants through the facility paper mail system, and the participants are asked to fill out the recording sheet before the session. On occasion, this is not possible, and in those cases, the participants fill out the paperwork at the beginning of the Aunt Mary’s Storybook program session. The advantages to the paperwork being filled out ahead of time is that the participant typically has easier access to the address and telephone number of their child’s caregiver when in their cell as opposed to when they are out of their cell attending the Aunt Mary’s session. In the past, the Aunt Mary's Storybook program experienced issues with having to obtain this information at a later time through email from the Clinical Services staff member when an incarcerated person did not have the address or telephone number with them at the session. In addition, the paperwork being filled out ahead of time saves valuable time, usually at least 25 to 45 minutes, as the program is only allotted a certain number of hours to be inside the facility during each visit. The time savings allows for more participants to attend a session, and it allows the participant more time to spend choosing books.

The participant approval and selection process in county jails vary by facility, due to each jail operating under different elected county sheriff’s and therefore each jail facility having different operational procedures. For instance, in Cook County, which had the 6th largest jail
population in the United States in 2019 (Zeng & Minton, 2021), the program serves three of the six divisions of the Cook County Jail on three different Saturdays during a given month: Divisions four (women), six (men), and 11 (men). The Cook County Jail assigns a specific staff member from their Restorations Programs unit who is responsible for choosing which living units (tiers) in each division will participate in the program. The staff member goes on each tier and speaks to the detainees, explains the program, and writes down the names and identification numbers of prospective participants. That list is later typed and sent to the Strategic Intelligence Unit of the Cook County Jail, which reviews each detainee’s file to determine whether the person is able/eligible to participate. Similar to the selection process in state prisons, participants with an active order of protection, convictions, or pending charges of crimes against children are ineligible to participate. The jail also disqualifies individuals who have convictions or pending charges of aggravated kidnapping, strangulation, human trafficking, and if an individual has a lengthy history of disciplinary infractions while in custody. The escape risk of potential participants is also taken into account by the jail when determining who can participate. Once the finalized list of participants is sent to the Restorations Programs staff member, it is then sent to the Aunt Mary’s Storybook program. Due to the workload of the Restorations Programs staff member, and due to the length of time it takes to process the prospective names and return the final list to the Restorations Programs staff member, it is not possible to have the recording sheets sent ahead of time. Because of this, the participants at the Cook County Jail fill out the recording sheet during the program session. By comparison, at the Will County, Randolph County, and the Kendall County jails, the facility staff selects the participants and has the
participants fill out the recording sheets ahead of time before the Aunt Mary’s Storybook session.

The Kane County Jail and the DeKalb County Jail operate uniquely against the backdrop of the other county jails the Aunt Mary’s Storybook program serves. In Kane County this happens perhaps due to the long-term relationship that was developed between the program and the facility (Aunt Mary’s Storybook started in the Kane County Jail in 2002). In DeKalb County, the different procedure is likely due to the limited population of detainees at that facility. At the Kane County Jail, when volunteers enter the living unit (pod), the officer on duty in that pod calls out to inquire as to who would like to participate in the program. At the DeKalb County Jail, the program does not operate on the living unit, but instead in the library or in the room utilized for video bond court. There is no pre-screening of the participants at either facility, although the participants are required to confirm in writing on the recording sheet that they do not have any active orders of protection or convictions for child abuse, neglect, or misconduct. Because of the sporadic nature of how the program acquires participants, the Kane County Jail and the DeKalb County Jails do not have the participants fill out the recording sheets ahead of time.

Over the past few years, the Aunt Mary’s Storybook program has made efforts to have many of the county jail sessions conducted by volunteers, as opposed to being led by Aunt Mary’s Storybook staff. Currently, Aunt Mary’s Storybook has roughly 50 active volunteers. These volunteers arrive at Aunt Mary’s Storybook either through a response to a “help wanted” listing on the Internet, through a church or religious group affiliation, or through referrals from existing volunteers. While Aunt Mary’s Storybook staff schedule and coordinate with the facility
contact person, a team of volunteers lead the individual sessions. For instance, in the Cook County Jail, the Aunt Mary’s Storybook program visits three divisions on separate days each month; one volunteer leads the session with two to three additional volunteers helping with book selection and recording. However, in other facilities, such as the DeKalb County Jail, two volunteers conduct sessions at the jail once each month. In total, Aunt Mary Storybook’s volunteers are not utilized during the Aunt Mary’s Storybook sessions in state prisons because it is difficult to recruit volunteers for these sessions due to the prisons not being proximate to larger, more populated cities where many volunteers live. In addition, the process for prospective volunteers to serve in state prisons takes an extended period of time due to the requirement by Illinois Department of Corrections of an extensive, eleven-page application and background check, and a significant waiting period for that paperwork to be processed and approved. Because of this, Aunt Mary’s Storybook staff coordinate and conduct sessions in state prisons without the use of volunteers.

In addition to volunteers that visit facilities, help participants choose books, and record the participants reading, Aunt Mary’s Storybook also utilizes volunteers who help enter purchased or donated books into the web application’s inventory system, and also volunteers who process the selected books and recordings for mailing. Inventory volunteers receive a box of books and are responsible for entering each book title into the system, as well as adding the corresponding author, publisher, page count, suggested age level of the book, book cover thumbnail image, and quantity. The inventory volunteer also enters the price paid for each book, as well as the manufacturer’s suggested retail price. Once the volunteer has entered all of the books and corresponding information, the system will provide an inventory sticker for the
volunteer to print. Each book has its own inventory sticker, and the sticker helps the organization keep track of the books. The sticker has the suggested age range of the book. The books are organized by the suggested age range both in the storage unit the program utilizes, as well as during the program session in the facilities when the books are laid out.

Mailing volunteers at Aunt Mary’s Storybook receive all of the books that were chosen by the incarcerated participants on a given date and time in which the program was offered inside of a facility. The mailing volunteer enters the prisoner’s name, jail or prison number, and demographic information (date of birth, ethnicity, offense category, admission date, and projected parole date, if applicable) into the web application. Some of these pieces of information are identified through publicly available databases, such as the Illinois Department of Correction’s Individual in Custody Search. The mailing volunteer then enters each caregiver and child into the system as well, along with the demographic information of these individuals as provided by the incarcerated participant (age, sex, and ethnicity). From there, the volunteer “assigns” each child with the book that was chosen by their incarcerated loved one. The books are matched with the recordings and are packaged in a mailing envelope. The mailing volunteer weighs each package and enters its dimensions into the web application, which provides the mailing volunteer with a shipping label. The packages are then dropped off at the Post Office for delivery.

County jail sessions with volunteers consist of a volunteer leader who is responsible for calling the facility the morning of the session to confirm there are no operational or security issues, such as a lockdown or other disturbance. They are also responsible for coordinating the entry into the facility on the day of the session, which involves going through the facility’s
security protocol and interfacing with the facility’s security staff for the room(s) in which the program will be conducted. The volunteer leader is also responsible for explaining the program to the incarcerated participants, passing out and collecting the paperwork completed by the participants, directing the flow and order of the recordings, and supervising the other volunteers. The other volunteers are responsible for laying out the books, helping the participants choose age- and content-appropriate books, and working one-on-one with participants to record their reading and personal message.

Each incarcerated participant is permitted to choose and record themselves reading one book per child. Incarcerated participants, nor their families, are charged to partake in the Aunt Mary’s Storybook program; Companions feels strongly about the program being accessible to all. After the book(s) are chosen by the participant, they work one on one with a volunteer. The volunteer provides a prompt sheet to the participant; this sheet instructs the participant on how to properly introduce themselves for the recording (see Appendices B and C). It also encourages the participant to express their love and thoughts to the child. The volunteer operates the digital audio recorder and signals to the participant when the recording starts, when they are running out of time, and when the recording stops. The volunteer also serves an important role as a cheerleader for the participant; the recording process can invoke feelings of nervousness and sadness, and the volunteer’s role is to encourage the participant to complete the recording. In addition, the volunteer helps the participants pronounce certain words as needed. As described earlier, research has found that following visits with family, those incarcerated experience guilt and embarrassment (Venema et al., 2021). Thus, it is important to recognize that even just communicating with family (children) through the process of recording a book, readings can
invoke very emotional feelings by the participant. The participants are typically provided five to seven minutes to record their reading and personal message. The time limitation is in place because in many facilities, an intelligence unit staff person must listen to and approve each recording before it can be mailed to the child. In addition, as many participants are reading to more than one child, the limitation is in place so that all recordings can be completed within the time allotted for our program to be inside the facility.

The process in state prisons without volunteers is similar, but there are some notable differences. The program is entirely run by an Aunt Mary’s Storybook staff person. In state prisons, the Clinical Services staff person attends the session and escorts the Aunt Mary’s Storybook staff person to the area where the program will be conducted. Beyond that, the Clinical Services staff member does not participate in the program beyond checking in the participants. The Aunt Mary’s Storybook staff person explains the program, lays out the books, and directs the flow and order of the recordings. The recordings are conducted differently in state prisons because there is only one Aunt Mary’s Storybook staff person coordinating the session. Typically, each participant is provided a room where they can record by themselves. The Aunt Mary’s Storybook staff person will explain how to operate the digital audio recorder, explain the time limit, and go over the prompt sheet. Once the Aunt Mary’s Storybook staff person leaves the room, the participant starts and stops the recording themselves.

Once the Aunt Mary’s Storybook session has concluded, the books that were chosen during the session, as well as the digital audio recordings, are given to an Aunt Mary’s Storybook volunteer to prepare for mailing. Aunt Mary’s Storybook operates a web application which houses all the information related to book inventory, sessions, volunteers, incarcerated
people, and families served. The web application also allows the security staff at each facility the option to log in remotely to review the audio recordings for security reasons if necessary. The Aunt Mary’s Storybook volunteer can prepare the United States Postal Service shipping labels once the details from the session are added into the web application and after the audio recordings have been approved by the facility’s security staff. Before the web application was utilized, Aunt Mary’s Storybook volunteers had to bring the packages to the post office, pay for the postage using their own funds, and wait to be reimbursed by the Aunt Mary’s Storybook program. In addition, Aunt Mary’s Storybook did not keep track of the addresses where packages were being sent, losing out potentially being able to analyze the impact of the Aunt Mary’s Storybook program through follow-up surveys or interviews with those receiving the recordings.
CHAPTER FIVE
THE NUMBER AND CHARACTERISTICS OF THOSE SERVED BY
AUNT MARY’S STORYBOOK

Aunt Mary’s Storybook provided 11,103 sessions for 3,760 incarcerated people to record stories during the entire 2016 to 2021 period examined for this research, or an average of 2.95 sessions per participant. Annually, the number of sessions for individual people served during the period examined hovered around 3,000 people between 2016 and 2019, before COVID-19 resulted in a drop to fewer than 500 per year in 2020 and 2021. Many of the 11,103 participant sessions came from the Cook County Jail (18.1%), the Kane County Jail (15.5%), and the Will County Jail (8.8%) (see Table 2). These three facilities are those that are served by the Aunt Mary’s Storybook program more frequently than the other facilities. The program was being delivered inside three different divisions of the Cook County Jail each month and in at least two or three housing units in the Kane County Jail each month. Thus, just between the Cook County Jail and the Kane County Jail, Aunt Mary’s Storybook conducted roughly 50 housing unit sessions each year. The Aunt Mary’s Storybook program initially only served female detainees once each month in the Will County Jail when it started at that facility in early 2016, but the program was able to expand to serve male detainees in early 2019, thus bringing the program to both sexes once each month. As a result of these patterns, just over one-half (56.5%) of the sessions conducted during 2017 to 2019 were in county jails compared to 41.7% in state prisons. A small portion of the participants were from facilities other than county jails or Illinois’ state
prisons, including 1.7% of the participants residing at Wayside Cross’s halfway house. The remaining 0.10% participants were in the Federal Prison Camp in Pekin, Illinois.

Table 2: Number of Sessions of Incarcerated Individuals Participating in Aunt Mary’s Storybook Program, 2016 to 2021, by Facility

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Facility Type and Facility</th>
<th>Number of Incarcerated Individuals Participating</th>
<th>Percent of Total Served</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>County Jails</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cook County</td>
<td>2,009</td>
<td>18.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kane County Jail</td>
<td>1,726</td>
<td>15.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Will County Jail</td>
<td>973</td>
<td>8.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DuPage County</td>
<td>731</td>
<td>6.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kendall County Jail</td>
<td>452</td>
<td>4.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DeKalb County</td>
<td>414</td>
<td>3.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Randolph County Jail</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State Prisons</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Menard Correctional Center</td>
<td>1,220</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sheridan Correctional Center</td>
<td>827</td>
<td>7.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vandalia Correctional Center</td>
<td>665</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Centralia Correctional Center</td>
<td>509</td>
<td>4.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western Illinois Correctional Center</td>
<td>472</td>
<td>4.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kewanee Life Skills Reentry Center</td>
<td>284</td>
<td>2.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hill Correctional Center</td>
<td>262</td>
<td>2.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illinois River Correctional Center</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>1.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joliet Treatment Center</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>0.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vienna Correctional Center</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Halfway Houses</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wayside Cross Ministries</td>
<td>165</td>
<td>1.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Federal Prisons</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Federal Prison Camp, Pekin</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>11,103</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

One of the primary reasons why a larger number of participants in county jails were served compared to prisons has to do with how the Aunt Mary’s Storybook program is staffed, and where those volunteers live. Given that the Aunt Mary’s Storybook program is based in the
Chicagoland area, and a lot of the volunteers who go into the facilities to carry out the program reside in the Chicagoland area, the ability to serve jails more frequently in that same geographic region is easier. Specifically, access to the large jails in the Chicagoland area do not require the Aunt Mary’s Storybook program volunteers to drive far distances or for the Aunt Mary’s Storybook volunteers to incur extensive transportation or lodging expenses. As a result, these jails are easier to access than most of Illinois’ state prisons, which are located throughout the state. In addition, it is much easier for the program to recruit volunteers for county jails than it is for the state prisons served. The program found great difficulty in recruiting volunteers from the Central and Southern Illinois regions. Once prospective volunteers are identified for Aunt Mary’s Storybook sessions in a state prison, they would need to fill out an 11-page background check form and wait one to three months for approval. Given the program’s experience in recruiting volunteers for the county jail facilities, it is believed that many volunteers would be unwilling to wait such a long time. Because of the travel involved, including the cost of a rental car and lodging, and the time commitment required, state prison sessions are usually only conducted by one paid Aunt Mary’s Storybook program staff member. Some of the sessions occurring in state prisons require at least two days of travel to and from Aunt Mary’s Storybook’s staff location in Joliet and an overnight stay for the sessions conducted for the Vandalia Correctional Center, the Randolph County Jail, the Menard Correctional Center, and the Centralia Correctional Center. To reduce costs and increase efficiency, serving these multiple facilities is often done in one trip over two to three days due to the geographic clustering of these facilities in southern Illinois.
The number of participants in 2020 dropped significantly due to the global COVID-19 pandemic. Aunt Mary’s Storybook was only able to serve 364 people during this time, and most of those participants were served between January and March, prior to the stay-at-home orders and restricted access to both state and county correctional facilities in Illinois. Facilities such as jails and prisons were on administrative lockdowns and quarantines due to the rapid spread of the virus in these settings, and as such, no visitors or non-essential service providers were allowed to enter the facilities. The program started developing an alternative plan for conducting the Aunt Mary’s Storybook program during the end of 2020. This consisted of the facility staff collecting the recording sheets and a letter that the incarcerated participant wrote to their child. The Aunt Mary’s Storybook team picked a book on behalf of the incarcerated parent based on the age and sex of the child and included the letter with the book. While this adjusted format of Aunt Mary’s Storybook is not as compelling as the original version of the program, namely the lack of an audio recording to send home to the child, the goal of keeping incarcerated people connected with the children important to them was paramount. The program served an increased number of families during 2021 with the adjusted format in place, but not nearly as many as it did pre-COVID-19.

Throughout the period examined for this research, the majority of the 3,760 unique incarcerated individuals that participated in the Aunt Mary’s Storybook program were male (79.8%), while just under one-quarter were female (20.2%). As described earlier, the program serves people in custody in state prison and county jails. The state prisons that the program currently serves exclusively house males, while the county jails house both sexes.
One-half (50.2%) of the 3,760 incarcerated people who participated in the Aunt Mary’s Storybook program during the examined period described themselves as Black or African American, followed by white (25.5%) and Hispanic or Latino (17.7%). Because of the large number of Hispanic participants, individuals participating in the Aunt Mary’s Storybook program are able to choose books written in English or books written in Spanish. An additional 4.1% of participants described themselves as biracial or multiracial. Fewer than 1% of the participants served describe themselves as American Indian, Asian, or Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander. A small number of participants (1.3%) opted out of providing their ethnicity on the forms. In Table 3, readers will find sex and race of the incarcerated people who participated in Aunt Mary’s Storybook between 2016 and 2021.

Table 3. Sex and Race of Incarcerated Individuals Participating in Aunt Mary’s Storybook Program, 2016 to 2021 (N=3,760)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percent of Total Incarcerated Individuals Participating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sex</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>3,001</td>
<td>79.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>759</td>
<td>20.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>3,760</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Race</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black or African American</td>
<td>1,888</td>
<td>50.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>960</td>
<td>25.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic or Latino</td>
<td>665</td>
<td>17.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bi- or multi-Racial</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>4.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian or Alaska Native</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>0.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>0.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>3,760</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The number of unique children served by the program during the period from 2016 to 2021 totaled 8,340, and each received an average of 1.4 recorded readings through more than 11,000 recording sessions with participants. Although the majority of the incarcerated individuals participating in Aunt Mary’s Storybook program from 2016 to 2021 were male, the distribution of the sex of the children important to these individuals (as reported by the incarcerated participant) was more balanced, with just over one-half (52.5%) being female and just under one-half (47.2%) being female (sex was missing for 0.3% of the cases). The race/ethnicity of the children (as reported by the incarcerated participant) who receive books through the Aunt Mary’s Storybook program was similar: nearly half (48.1%) were Black or African American, nearly one fifth (19.2%) were white, and 17.8% were described as Hispanic or Latino. The proportion of children served categorized as biracial and multiracial was more than double (10.5%) that seen among the incarcerated participants (4.6%). In Table 4, readers will find race and sex of the children who participated in Aunt Mary’s Storybook between 2016 and 2021. Finally, the relationship between the incarcerated individual and children who received recordings were primarily biological: 32.6% of the children were the son of the incarcerated individual, while 35.8% were the daughter. Thus, 68.4% of the children served were either the son or daughter of the incarcerated individual. The remaining one-third (31.6%) of children were either stepchildren, nieces or nephews, or grandchildren of the incarcerated individual.
Table 4. Sex and Race of Children Served by Aunt Mary’s Storybook Program, 2016 to 2021 (N=8,340)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number of Children Served</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sex</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>3,937</td>
<td>47.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>4,378</td>
<td>52.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>0.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>8,340</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Race</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black or African American</td>
<td>4,013</td>
<td>48.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>1,601</td>
<td>19.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic or Latino</td>
<td>1,483</td>
<td>17.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bi- or multi-Racial</td>
<td>859</td>
<td>10.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>309</td>
<td>3.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian or Alaska Native</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>0.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>0.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>0.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>8,340</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER SIX

DISTANCE FROM PRISON TO WHERE MOST CHILDREN SERVE RESIDE

To illustrate and examine the geographic distance between where those served by the program were incarcerated and where the children they cared about lived, analyses of aggregate data using maps were developed for each facility that served more than 250 participants during the study period (Centralia Correctional Center, Cook County Jail, DeKalb County Jail, DuPage County Jail, Hill Correctional Center, Kane County Jail, Kendall County Jail, Menard Correctional Center, Sheridan Correctional Center, Vandalia Correctional Center, Western Illinois Correctional Center and the Will County Jail). For each facility/map, the location of the facility was included along with where the geographic concentrations of caregivers were within Illinois. The round-trip driving time and distance was then calculated between the facility and the two areas with the largest concentrations of caregivers using Google Maps. To provide even further detail to illustrate the differences in the distance between the participant’s prison and where the caregiver to the children they cared about lived for the different types of locations of facilities served, analyses were performed for six facilities to determine/illustrate what percent of the children benefitting from the program lived more than five hours round-trip to the facility housing the participant.

Menard Correctional Center

Of those individuals served at the Menard Correctional Center during the study period, the caregivers for the children to whom they sent a recorded book reading lived primarily in
Illinois (81%), but the remaining 19% lived in 22 other states. The state where the largest portion of caregivers lived after Illinois was Missouri, where 4.4% of the caregivers of children to the Menard participants lived. As seen in Map 1, of those caregivers that lived in Illinois, the two largest concentrations were in the Chicagoland and East St. Louis areas (identified by blue icons on the map). For example, 30.8% of the caregivers lived in the city of Chicago, which is roughly a 12-hour, 696-mile round-trip drive to Menard, Illinois (identified by the orange icon on the map). To calculate driving time and distance, the central geographic point in Chicago was selected (West Jackson Boulevard and South Federal Street) and then mapped to the address for the Menard Correctional Center, 711 E Kaskaskia St, Menard, IL. The second largest cluster of cases was in the East St. Louis area, which, while closer to Menard, is still a two and a half hour, 114-mile round-trip drive to the Menard Correctional Center from East St. Louis (intersection of Katherine Dunham Place and State Street). Overall, 64.5% of participants from the Menard Correctional Center had caregivers/children living more than a six-hour round-trip drive to Menard.
Of those individuals served at the Hill Correctional Center during the study period, the caregivers for the children to whom they sent a recorded book reading lived primarily in Illinois (75.8%), but the remaining 24.2% lived in 19 other states. The state where the largest portion of caregivers lived after Illinois was Indiana, where 6.7% of the caregivers of children to the Hill participants lived. As seen in Map 2, of those caregivers that lived in Illinois, the two largest concentrations were in the Chicagoland and Champaign areas (identified by blue icons on the map). For example, 21% of the caregivers lived in the city of Chicago, which is roughly a six-
hour, 400-mile round-trip drive to the Hill Correctional Center (identified by the orange icon on the map), located at 600 South Linwood Road, Galesburg, IL 61401 from West Jackson Boulevard and South Federal Street in Chicago. The second largest cluster of cases was in the Champaign area, which, while closer to Hill, is still a two hour and 20-minute, 274-mile round-trip drive to Hill Correctional Center from Champaign (intersection of East University Street and North Neil Street).

Figure 2. The Two Primary Concentrations Where Recordings from the Hill Correctional Center Were Sent
Sheridan Correctional Center

Of those individuals served at the Sheridan Correctional Center during the study period, the caregivers for the children to whom they sent a recorded book reading lived primarily in Illinois (90.6%), but the remaining 9.4% lived in 19 other states. The state where the largest portion of caregivers lived after Illinois was Indiana, where 2.7% of the caregivers of children to the Sheridan participants lived. As seen in Map 3, of those caregivers that lived in Illinois, the two largest concentrations were in the Chicagoland and Rockford areas (identified by blue icons on the map). For example, 25.7% of the caregivers lived in the city of Chicago, which is roughly a three-hour, 143-mile round-trip drive to the Sheridan Correctional Center (identified by the orange icon on the map), 4017 E 2603rd Rd, Sheridan, IL 60551 from Chicago (intersection of West Jackson Boulevard and South Federal Street). The second largest cluster of cases was in the Rockford area, which is roughly the same distance to the facility as from Chicago.
Of those individuals served at the Vandalia Correctional Center during the study period, the caregivers for the children to whom they sent a recorded book reading lived primarily in Illinois (90.3%), but the remaining 9.7% lived in 19 other states. The states where the largest portion of caregivers lived after Illinois were Iowa (2.3%) and Indiana (2.3%). As seen in Map 4, of those caregivers that lived in Illinois, the two largest concentrations were in the Chicagoland Area.
and Peoria areas (identified by blue icons on the map). For example, 28.2% of the caregivers lived in the city of Chicago, which is roughly a seven-hour and 20-minute, 490-mile round-trip drive to the Vandalia Correctional Center (identified by the orange icon on the map), US-51, Vandalia, IL 62471 from West Jackson Boulevard and South Federal Street in Chicago. The second largest cluster of cases was in the Peoria area, which, while closer to Vandalia, is still a four hour and 40-minute, 278-mile round-trip drive to the Vandalia Correctional Center from Peoria (intersection of Hamilton Boulevard and Northeast Jefferson Street).

Figure 4. The Two Primary Concentrations Where Recordings from the Vandalia Correctional Center Were Sent
However, unlike the prison populations served by Aunt Mary’s Storybook, who are usually housed in prisons quite distance from where they lived prior to incarceration, the jail populations served by the program tended to live and have their immediate family members living closer to the jail. Analyses similar to those just presented for the prisons were also performed for some of the jails to illustrate this pattern, including the Cook County Jail and the Kane County Jail.

**Cook County Jail**

Of those individuals served at the Cook County Jail during the study period, the caregivers for the children to whom they sent a recorded book reading lived primarily in Illinois (89.5%), but the remaining 10.5% lived in 20 other states. The state where the largest portion of caregivers lived after Illinois was Indiana, where 2.4% of the caregivers of children to the Cook County Jail participants lived. Of those caregivers that lived in Illinois, the largest concentration was in the Chicagoland area, particularly on the south side. Besides the City of Chicago, the second largest city where caregivers of the children served lived was Harvey (1.6%), followed by Chicago Heights (1.3%).

**Kane County Jail**

Of those individuals served at the Kane County Jail during the study period, the caregivers for the children to whom they sent a recorded book reading lived primarily in Illinois (91.6%), but the remaining 8.4% lived in 20 other states. The state where the largest portion of caregivers lived after Illinois was Florida, where 1.3% of the caregivers of children to the Kane County Jail participants lived. Of those caregivers that lived in Illinois, the largest concentration was in the Aurora (30.3%) and Elgin (19.6%) areas (identified by blue icons on the map). The
average distance from the caregivers/children location to the Kane County Jail (identified by the orange icon on the map) is approximately one hour and 34 minutes. Less than 1% of participants from the Kane County Jail had caregivers/children living more than a six-hour round-trip drive to Kane County Jail.

Figure 5. The Two Primary Concentrations Where Recordings from the Kane County Jail Were Sent
CHAPTER SEVEN

POTENTIAL APPROACHES TO EVALUATING PROGRAM IMPACT

As discussed earlier, although the Aunt Mary’s Storybook program has been operating for more than 26 years, it has never conducted a rigorous evaluation of the impact the program’s benefit to those detained, or their children, or how the program improves the relationship or bonds between children and those incarcerated. Aunt Mary’s Storybook has also never had an academic evaluation conducted of its programming. However, the program has attempted to evaluate the program’s effectiveness within the past few years prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. Presently, the program gauges implementation effectiveness through basic feedback from the incarcerated participants, asking them to describe what they like about the program, what they think could be improved by the program, and suggestions for children’s books that the participants believe the program should offer in future sessions.

However, the program has not been able to effectively receive feedback from the caregivers of the children. Previous efforts to solicit this type of feedback have included an insert in the packages asking for email or Facebook reviews, and the program has also mailed separate letters to the caregivers seeking feedback. When those efforts produced few responses, in 2019, the program engaged the Executive Service Corps (ESC) for assistance. CJT staff sent 600 caregivers of children served by Aunt Mary’s Storybook a letter asking them to call, text, or mail Aunt Mary’s Storybook to participate in a survey. Unfortunately, this only resulted in one response. Due to the lack of response, board members from Companions then called 111 of the
600 caregivers of the children served by the program and asked if they would be willing to
discuss their opinions with a volunteer from ESC. Those who responded affirmatively were
 telephoned separately by the ESC volunteer. Sadly, due to time limitations, as well as the lack of
affirmative answers, the volunteers were only able to interview eight caregivers. Still, all eight
caregivers provided positive feedback for the program, and noted high levels of enthusiasm by
both the child and the child’s caregiver. The limitation in interviewing eight caregivers out of the
600 that were originally solicited is that the opinions of the eight caregivers do not form a
representative sample. In addition, the only method for caregivers to participate in the survey
were through a one-on-one telephone interview, which may have prevented the caregivers from
expressing negative opinions. The caregivers also noted that the incarcerated participants did a
good job in their pace of reading, that the audio quality was good, and that the children did not
have difficulty in understanding the stories. Caregivers indicated that the children usually
listened to or engaged with the book and recording about five times before losing interest. The
program was disappointed to learn that only a few participants cited a “modest” or “slight”
improvement in the connections/relationships between the child, parent, or caregiver. A majority
of the caregivers indicated that there was no noticeable change in these connections/
relationships. With this feedback, the program could craft an insert that explains how a child’s
involvement with the program can be extended so that there could be an increased amount of
interaction and communication with their incarcerated loved one.

For future evaluation efforts, the organization has been working on sending a survey to
the caregivers electronically through the organization’s proprietary web application which
houses the audio files of the incarcerated participants reading to the children served by the
program. The web application was developed to address the increasing use of the internet to deliver content, as opposed to CDs, which are not widely used in present times. Upon receiving the book selected by the incarcerated person, the child’s caregiver can claim their account in the program’s web application. This process includes providing and validating their email address. The web application will work with an online survey software vendor to automatically send an email after a set number of days to the email address requesting that they complete the survey. A reminder system will also be built-in to account for those who do not complete the survey after the first invitation. The survey will collect the responses anonymously.

The email survey asks the caregiver of the children who received books from their incarcerated loved one 15 questions. The questions inquire as to how many times the child has listened to the recording, how many times the child has used the book, level of interest in reading after listening to the recording, and how the child’s response to receiving the recording and book. The survey also asks if the child was happy when listening to the recording, whether the connection as a family improved, whether there were any positive changes in the child observed by the caregiver. The final part of the survey asks if the family has participated in any other jail or prison programs, whether the caregiver has communicated about the Aunt Mary’s Storybook program with their incarcerated loved one, how satisfied the caregiver of the child is with the program, and whether any improvements should be made to the program.

The program has also been working on a survey instrument to evaluate incarcerated participants’ opinions on the program as well as their feelings and emotions right before and right after they have chosen their book and recorded themselves reading (see Appendix D, “Post Participation Survey”). The survey also asks the incarcerated participants about their thoughts
concerning book selection, wait time to record, whether they feel the child’s caregiver will agree to provide the book and recording to the child, and whether they see Aunt Mary’s Storybook as an extension of a visit. This survey was developed after reviewing the Urban Institute’s “Returning Home: Understanding The Challenges of Prisoner Reentry” Pre-Release Interview survey instrument. The Aunt Mary’s Storybook program already has a solicitation of feedback module implemented in the program, and most participants choose to share their feedback, so the organization should take advantage of the post-participation survey and work with a researcher to analyze the results.

More long-term and multi-year impact evaluation could be conducted on the Aunt Mary’s Storybook program as well as what has been described above. Other potential opportunities for future research could be to test whether constant communication between an incarcerated person and their child (or a child important to them) affects the child’s risk of criminality, and/or whether it affects the child’s school behavior and performance. The program could also examine whether consistent participation in the Aunt Mary’s Storybook program impacts the incarcerated person’s risk of recidivism. Another element of this more long-term impact evaluation could be to test whether consistent participation in the Aunt Mary’s Storybook program affects an incarcerated person’s institutional behavior. In all of these potential long-term and multi-year studies, a primary challenge for the organization would be funding. While incarcerated people are permitted to participate in Aunt Mary’s Storybook program on several occasions, the preference has always been to provide the opportunity to participate in the program to those who have never participated before. Providing the same group of incarcerated people, the privilege of doing the program on a monthly basis in order to test the outcomes described above would
involve significant resources, namely, travel/lodging, as well as an increase in books, mailing supplies, and postage. In addition, the organization would need to identify how the research project would continue if an incarcerated person who is participating in the research is moved to another facility that Aunt Mary’s Storybook does not serve.
CHAPTER EIGHT

CONCLUSION

Companions started out with humble and religious beginnings, serving three state prisons in Illinois. The early programs of Companions, parenting classes and transportation for children impacted by familial incarceration (the latter offered jointly alongside Lutheran Social Services) were the impetus for Companions offering the Aunt Mary’s Storybook program in the Cook County Jail as a pilot program. In offering these programs, Companions identified the challenges, and the impact incarceration has on the children of incarcerated parents. Over the years, as the organization started and cultivated its now flagship program, Aunt Mary’s Storybook. Companions is now working year-round in 17 correctional facilities throughout the state, consisting of state prisons, county jails, a federal prison, and a halfway house (see Map 6). Aunt Mary’s Storybook’s reach includes sending packages not only across Illinois, but also across the country. The expansion of Aunt Mary’s Storybook appears to be based off the good will established by the program’s staff. Correctional administrators moving between facilities as part of job reassignments propelled the program to where it is today. On the occasions when Aunt Mary’s Storybook approached a facility (specifically, the Hill Correctional Center), the history of the program in other facilities, and those facilities offering a positive testimonial of Aunt Mary’s Storybook, was crucial for the quick approval of the request.
Figure 6. Diffusion of the Prisons and Jails Aunt Mary’s Storybook Program Operated in Pre- and Post-2000

Aunt Mary’s Storybook’s rapid expansion in 2016 was beneficial for Companions because it also opened the door for the organization to serve families impacted by not only the physical separation, but the long distances between where incarcerated people reside and where
their family members reside. Before 2016, a majority of the facilities served were local county jails in which family members reside close by, and benefit from more lax visiting guidelines and procedures. As illustrated previously, the state prisons are located far away from the communities in which the family members of incarcerated people reside. With this increased distance, it is not possible for families to visit at the same frequency compared to the families of individuals detained in a county jail. For the state prison population, Aunt Mary’s Storybook serves an even more important purpose in the connection of incarcerated people and the children important to them; the program exists as an extension of a visit, and to perhaps rekindle a lost relationship between family members. Whereas for the population of people detained in a county jail, the purpose might be to keep the family connected in a situation of a more short-term separation; some of the individuals who are detained in county jails might not even end up serving a sentence in a state prison. More research on the motivations of participation in Aunt Mary’s Storybook between participants housed in a county jail versus a state prison would greatly benefit the program and provide additional insight into how the program serves families impacted by two different levels of the correctional system.

As discussed in the previous section, further research would also greatly benefit Companions in evaluating the effectiveness of the Aunt Mary’s Storybook program. The organization has been able to capture the thoughts and opinions of the incarcerated people but could expand its survey instrument to include questions about their feelings and emotions before and after the process of picking out a book and recording themselves reading from the book. However, perhaps more pressing than expanding its survey of incarcerated participants is the need for Aunt Mary’s Storybook to engage with researchers - such as a university partner - who
can evaluate the effectiveness of the program from the perspective of the family receiving the book and recording from their loved one. Aunt Mary’s Storybook attempted to do this before the piloting of the electronic delivery of recordings, and due to the low number of caregivers surveyed, the results cannot be used in any meaningful way. With the electronic delivery of recordings, Aunt Mary’s Storybook will be able to capture the email addresses of the caregivers when they log in to access the recordings. From there, Aunt Mary’s Storybook will solicit feedback by emailing the caregivers with an invitation to complete the survey electronically. These changes should allow for more responses due to the ease in responding when compared to mailing invitations to surveys through postal mail.

Another element that could benefit Aunt Mary’s Storybook is the involvement of university students in its volunteer programming. Aunt Mary’s Storybook sessions in state prisons are led by staff at the present time, due to an inability to recruit long-term recurring volunteers. University students, especially those in criminology, criminal justice, social work, and psychology programs, would greatly benefit from an experience in working directly with incarcerated people. Instead of touring a prison or jail, hearing from a few hand-picked prisoners, and leaving after walking through housing units and dietary, students could receive a more fulfilling experience knowing that their volunteer service impacts their own perspectives on what prisons look like and how they operate, but also impacts their own sense of giving back to the community. Helping the participants choose books, record, and encourage them to read on the recording for their child(ren) would provide more to students than a tour could provide. On Aunt Mary’s Storybook’s side, it is generally easier to utilize the “seasonal volunteer” status which permits volunteer to enter a state prison on a quarterly basis. IDOC only requires a name, Social
Security number, gender, and date of birth for their background check. An additional benefit is that, by using volunteers, the sessions inside facilities will run smoother since each recording area would be “staffed” by a volunteer. Presently, in sessions occurring in a state prison (with the exception of Menard Correctional Center), participants record by themselves. Volunteers could be encouraging and helping the participants and also keeping track of time, as participants only allotted a certain time to record each book.
APPENDIX A

RECORDING SHEET
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date: _____________</th>
<th>Location: Menard Correctional Center</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Please initial the statements below. If any of these statements apply to your circumstance, please let us know.

- [ ] I do not have any legal restrictions against contact with my child(ren) or their caretaker(s).
- [ ] I have never been convicted of child abuse, neglect, or misconduct.

Name: ____________________________ IDOC #: __________________

Your Ethnicity:  □ Black or African American □ Hispanic or Latino □ White □ Asian
□ American Indian or Alaska Native □ Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander

B  ___  Name of Child____________________________ Age____  F or M__________

R  ___  Name of Caretaker__________________________ Phone__________________

O  ___  Caretaker is my... ________________________ Child is my...____________

Address ___________________________________________ Unit/Apt/Floor #__________
City ____________________________ State _______________________ ZIP ___________

Title of Book __________________________________________________________________

Does this caretaker have internet access?  □ Yes □ No □ Not sure

Child’s Ethnicity: □ Black or African American □ Hispanic or Latino □ White □ Asian
□ American Indian or Alaska Native □ Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander

B  ___  Name of Child____________________________ Age____  F or M__________

R  ___  Name of Caretaker__________________________ Phone__________________

O  ___  Caretaker is my... ________________________ Child is my...____________

Address ___________________________________________ Unit/Apt/Floor #__________
City ____________________________ State _______________________ ZIP ___________

Title of Book __________________________________________________________________

Does this caretaker have internet access?  □ Yes □ No □ Not sure

Child’s Ethnicity: □ Black or African American □ Hispanic or Latino □ White □ Asian
□ American Indian or Alaska Native □ Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
APPENDIX B

RECORDING PROMPT FOR MALES
When we tell you to go, say:

Hi, __________ this is your __________
(child’s name) (dad/grandpa)

and I am going to read you a book
called ________________.
(title of the book)

[Then, say your personal message]
(I love you, I miss you, I hope you like the book, etc.)

[Then, read the book]
(If you are reading a chapter book: you will only have an opportunity to read one (1) chapter or the first five (5) minutes, whichever comes first. Our volunteer will tell you if you are getting close to 5 minutes. When your first chapter or five minutes are up, say “Now you read the rest and let me know what you think!”)

[Ending Message]
(“The End” -OR- “Now you read the rest and let me know what you think;” and ending personal message)
APPENDIX C

RECORDING PROMPT FOR FEMALES
When we tell you to go, say:

Hi, __________ this is your ________.

(child’s name) (mom/grandma)

and I am going to read you a book

called ________________.

(title of the book)

[Then, say your personal message]
(I love you, I miss you, I hope you like the book, etc.)

[Then, read the book]
(If you are reading a chapter book: you will only have an opportunity to read one (1) chapter or the first five (5) minutes, whichever comes first. Our volunteer will tell you if you are getting close to 5 minutes. When your first chapter or five minutes are up, say “Now you read the rest and let me know what you think!”)

[Ending Message]
(“The End” -OR- “Now you read the rest and let me know what you think;” and ending personal message)
APPENDIX D

POST PARTICIPATION SURVEY
Introduction: You are being asked to take part in a research study being conducted by Scott C. McWilliams and Companions Journeying Together, the organization that operates the Aunt Mary’s Storybook program. You are being asked to participate because you are participating in the Aunt Mary’s Storybook. Aunt Mary’s Storybook provides an opportunity for you to pick a new book out for your child(ren) or grandchild(ren); the project then records you reading from the book, and sends the recording and book to your child(ren) or grandchild(ren).

Purpose: The purpose of this research is for Aunt Mary’s Storybook to better understand the thoughts and feelings of the incarcerated people who participate in the program. These thoughts and feelings will better assist the program in understanding the people being served, and provides useful feedback for possible improvements to the program.

Procedures: If you agree to participate, you will be asked to complete a 5 page survey detailing your thoughts, feelings, and attitudes surrounding Aunt Mary’s Storybook. The survey will also ask about your personal family situation.

Risks/Benefits: The risks associated with completing the survey are minimal. However, you may experience discomfort or stress as the questions ask about your family situation. There are no direct benefits to you from participating in this research, but your feedback is important for the program to better understand the people who participate, and what can be done to improve Aunt Mary’s Storybook.

Confidentiality: No identifiable information is collected. You will be completely anonymous. The researcher will keep the completed surveys, and no copies will be provided to the jail or prison in which you are residing.

Voluntary Participation: Participation in this study is voluntary. If you do not want to be in this study, you do not have to participate. Even if you decide to participate, you are free not to answer any question or to withdraw from participation at any time without penalty. Your family will still receive the book and recording even if you do not wish to participate, or if you withdraw from participation.
Contacts and Questions: If you have questions about this research study, please feel free to contact Scott C. McWilliams, Companions Journeying Together PO Box 457 Western Springs IL 60558.

Statement of Consent: Your completion of the enclosed survey indicates that you have read the information provided above, have had an opportunity to ask questions, and agree to participate in this research study.
Companions Journeying Together
Aunt Mary’s Storybook Project

Post-Participation Survey

DEMOGRAPHICS AND BACKGROUND

1. How old are you?
   ___ ___ years old

   Do you consider yourself to be...
   □ Black or African American
   □ Asian
   □ White
   □ American Indian or Alaska Native
   □ Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
   □ Other □ WRITE WHICH RACE:

2. Do you consider yourself to be Hispanic?
   □ Yes
   □ No
   □ I don’t know

3. What is the highest education level you completed before entering prison this time?
   □ 6th grade or less
   □ 7th – 9th grade
   □ 10th – 11th grade
   □ High school graduate
   □ G.E.D.
   □ Some college
   □ College graduate
   □ Post-graduate study

4. What is your gender?
   □ Male
   □ Female
5. How many children did you have when you entered jail/prison this time?

- 0
- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6 or more □ WRITE HOW MANY CHILDREN:

6. How many of your children were under the age of 18 when you entered jail/prison this time?

- I didn’t have any children.
- 0
- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6 or more □ WRITE HOW MANY CHILDREN:

7. Before you were sent to jail/prison this time, did any of your children under 18 live with you?

- I didn’t have any children under 18.
- Yes
- No

8. In the 6 months before you entered jail/prison this time, how often did you provide any of your children under 18 with financial support?

- I didn’t have any children under 18.
- Daily
- Weekly
- Monthly
- A few times a year
- Never

9. In the 6 months before you entered jail/prison this time, were you required by a court to pay child support for any of your children?

- I didn’t have any children under 18.
- No
- Yes
10. **What is your current marital status?**
   - CHECK ONLY ONE BOX
   - Single, never married
   - Never married, but lived with someone as married
   - Married
   - In and out of the same relationship
   - Widowed
   - Separated
   - Divorced
   WRITE HOW LONG YOU WERE MARRIED:
   Other WRITE WHICH STATUS:

11. **How long have you been married?**
   - I am not currently married.
   - Less than three months
   - Three months to one year
   - Thirteen months to five years
   - Six to ten years
   - More than ten years
   WRITE HOW MANY YEARS:

12. **Since you have been incarcerated, has a child been born whom you were the father or mother?**
   - I don't have any children.
   - Yes
   - No

13. **How many of your children are under the age of 18?**
   - I don't have any children under 18.
   - 1
   - 2
   - 3
   - 4
   - 5
   - 6 or more
   WRITE HOW MANY:

14. **Since you have been incarcerated, have you provided any of your children under 18 with financial support?**
   - I don't have any children under 18.
   - Yes
   - No
15. How many people, other than your children under 18 and yourself, do you financially support in any way now?

☐ 0
☐ 1
☐ 2
☐ 3
☐ 4
☐ 5
☐ 6 or more □ WRITE HOW MANY:

16. During your time in jail/prison what things have made it difficult to keep in touch with your family?

☐ I do not find it difficult.
☐ I did not want to maintain contact.
☐ Jail/prison is located too far away for regular visits.
☐ Visitation rules are hard to work with.
☐ Jail/prison is not a pleasant place to visit.
☐ Lack of transportation
☐ Cost of visiting is too high.
☐ Cost of calling or receiving calls is too high.
☐ Family members did not want to maintain close contact.
☐ I am embarrassed for my family to see me here or receive mail from me here.
☐ Either my family members or I have difficulty reading or writing.
☐ Other □ WRITE WHICH REASON:

The following statements describe how you may feel about your current relationships with your family. Please respond to the following statements.

17. I feel close to my family.

☐ Strongly agree
☐ Agree
☐ Disagree
☐ Strongly disagree

18. I want my family to be involved in my life.

☐ Strongly agree
☐ Agree
☐ Disagree
☐ Strongly disagree

19. I consider myself a source of support for my family.

☐ Strongly agree
☐ Agree
☐ Disagree
☐ Strongly disagree
20. My family is a source of support for me.
   - Strongly agree
   - Agree
   - Disagree
   - Strongly disagree

21. I fight a lot with my family members.
   - Strongly agree
   - Agree
   - Disagree
   - Strongly disagree

22. I often feel like I disappoint my family.
   - Strongly agree
   - Agree
   - Disagree
   - Strongly disagree

23. I am criticized a lot by my family.
   - Strongly agree
   - Agree
   - Disagree
   - Strongly disagree

24. Other than yourself, has anyone in your family ever been convicted of a crime?
   - Yes
   - No
   - I don’t know

25. Who in your family, other than yourself, has been convicted of a crime?
   - CHECK ALL BOXES THAT APPLY
     - No one else in my family has ever been convicted of a crime.
     - I don’t know if anyone else in my family has ever been convicted of a crime.
     - Husband / wife
     - Boyfriend / girlfriend / fiancé
     - Mother / stepmother
     - Father / stepfather
     - Sister / stepsister
     - Brother / stepbrother
     - Aunt
     - Uncle
     - Cousin
     - Grandparent
     - Child / stepchild
   - Other relative(s) [ ] WRITE WHICH RELATIVE(S):
26. Other than yourself, is anyone in your family currently in jail/prison?
   □ Yes
   □ No
   □ I don’t know

27. Who in your family, other than yourself, is currently in jail/prison?
   CHECK ALL BOXES THAT APPLY
   □ No one else in my family is currently in jail or prison.
   □ I don’t know if anyone else in my family is currently in jail or prison.
   □ Husband / wife
   □ Boyfriend / girlfriend / fiancé
   □ Mother / stepmother
   □ Father / stepfather
   □ Sister / stepsister
   □ Brother / stepbrother
   □ Aunt
   □ Uncle
   □ Cousin
   □ Grandparent
   □ Child / stepchild
   □ Other relative(s) □ WRITE WHICH RELATIVE(S):

28. While you are incarcerated in jail/prison, who does your child live with?
   □ Single biological parent only
   □ Single biological parent and another adult
   □ Sister/brother
   □ Aunt/uncle
   □ Grandmother/grandfather
   □ Other relative
   □ Foster family / DCFS
   □ Other nonrelative

29. It is difficult to convince my children’s caregiver to bring my children to visitation at the jail or prison.
   □ Strongly agree
   □ Agree
   □ Disagree
   □ Strongly disagree

30. The book selection made available to me was adequate given the age of my children.
   □ Strongly agree
   □ Agree
   □ Disagree
   □ Strongly disagree

31. I felt respected by the volunteer(s) from the Aunt Mary’s Storybook.
   □ Strongly agree
   □ Agree
   □ Disagree
   □ Strongly disagree
32. The wait time to record myself reading to my child was too long.
   - Strongly agree
   - Agree
   - Disagree
   - Strongly disagree

33. I see my participation in the Aunt Mary’s Storybook as an extension of a visit with my child(ren).
   - Strongly agree
   - Agree
   - Disagree
   - Strongly disagree

34. I trust that the book I picked out and the recording I made will be mailed by the Aunt Mary’s Storybook Project within a reasonable period of time.
   - Strongly agree
   - Agree
   - Disagree
   - Strongly disagree

35. I believe that my children’s caretaker will allow my child(ren) to listen to the recording and read the book I picked out for them.
   - Strongly agree
   - Agree
   - Disagree
   - Strongly disagree

36. It was very emotional for me to read to my child(ren) given my incarceration/separation from them.
   - Strongly agree
   - Agree
   - Disagree
   - Strongly disagree

37. Please rate the three top reasons why you were motivated to participate in the Aunt Mary’s Storybook project. Put “1” next to the selection for your top reason, “2” for your second reason, and “3” for your third reason.
   - To connect with my child/children
   - To get out of my cell/unit
   - To encourage my child(ren) to read
   - To try new jail/prison programs
   - To talk or meet up with other prisoners
   - Because my child(ren)’s caretaker will not bring my child(ren) to visitation at the jail/prison.
   - To provide a gift for my child(ren)

38. How many times have you participated in the Aunt Mary’s Storybook Project at this facility?

39. How did you hear about the Aunt Mary’s Storybook project at this jail/prison?
   - Another prisoner/detainee
   - Correctional officer/guard
   - Jail/prison administrator
   - Other jail/prison staff member
   - Family member
   - Friend or acquaintance on the outside
40. Prior to reading the book you selected for your child, what were your biggest worries?

________________________________________
________________________________________
________________________________________
________________________________________

41. Please describe the emotions you felt when you read to your child through Aunt Mary’s Storybook.

________________________________________
________________________________________
________________________________________
________________________________________

42. On a scale of 0 to 10, with 10 being a high level of happiness and 0 being no happiness, how happy did it make you feel to participate in Aunt Mary’s Storybook?

________________________________________

43. As a result of my participation in Aunt Mary’s Storybook, I feel closer to my child.
   - [ ] Strongly agree
   - [ ] Agree
   - [ ] Disagree
   - [ ] Strongly disagree

44. As a result of my participation in Aunt Mary’s Storybook, I feel my relationship with my child is better.
   - [ ] Strongly agree
   - [ ] Agree
   - [ ] Disagree
   - [ ] Strongly disagree

45. My participation in Aunt Mary’s Storybook makes me feel better about the future.
   - [ ] Strongly agree
   - [ ] Agree
   - [ ] Disagree
   - [ ] Strongly disagree
46. How did you participation in Aunt Mary's Storybook make you feel about your separation from your child?

________________________________________

________________________________________

47. What did you like **most** about your experience with Aunt Mary's Storybook?

________________________________________

________________________________________

________________________________________

________________________________________

________________________________________

48. What did you **least** enjoy about your experience with Aunt Mary’s Storybook?

________________________________________

________________________________________

________________________________________

________________________________________

________________________________________

49. What advice would you give to Aunt Mary’s Storybook?

________________________________________

________________________________________

________________________________________

________________________________________

________________________________________
APPENDIX E

AUNT MARY’S STORYBOOK LOGIC MODEL
Logic Model

Program: Aunt Mary’s Storybook

Goal: Increase connections and bond between incarcerated people and the children important to them.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inputs</th>
<th>Activities</th>
<th>Outcomes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What we invest</td>
<td>What we do</td>
<td>Why this project: short-term results</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Staff and volunteers</td>
<td>• Work with incarcerated people on-site to choose book(s) and record reading(s)</td>
<td>• Incarcerated participant will feel like a parent (as opposed to an “inmate”)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Funding for books, travel/lodging, mailing supplies, recording equipment, postage</td>
<td>• Send book(s) and audio file(s) to caregiver of child(ren)</td>
<td>• Increased self-esteem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Recording equipment.</td>
<td>• Incarcerated people who have children, stepchildren, grandchildren, nieces, nephews, etc.</td>
<td>• Increase knowledge and attitudes of parenting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Technology to record and deliver audio via the Internet or CD.</td>
<td>• Children who have a loved one impacted by incarceration</td>
<td>• Children will have better/positive relationships with their incarcerated loved one</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Caregiver of the child</td>
<td>• Increased participation in education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Changes in parenting skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Child is not involved in criminal justice system.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Child becomes a lifelong reader</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Increase in parenting responsibility upon release</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Increase in incarcerated person-child’s caregiver relationship</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Assumptions

• Reading is important for early childhood development.
• Incarcerated participants love and care about their children.
• Caregivers of child(ren) impacted by incarceration are willing to share the materials with the child(ren) in their care.

External Factors

• (+) Prisons have space and a staff member to facilitate audio recordings.
• (-/+)) Prison staff attitudes can influence participation.
• (-) Limited time for on-site recordings.
REFERENCE LIST


Companions, Inc. (1987, May 2). Companions, Inc – Agenda for “I Have A Dream” Session. DePaul University Special Collections and Archives, Chicago, IL.

Companions, Inc. (1989, April 15). Board Meeting – Companions Inc. DePaul University Special Collections and Archives, Chicago, IL.

Companions, Inc. (1989, October 4). Board Meeting - Companions, Inc. DePaul University Special Collections and Archives, Chicago, IL.

Companions, Inc. (1990, September 8). Board Meeting – Conference Call – Companions Inc. DePaul University Special Collections and Archives, Chicago, IL.


Companions, Inc. (1992, July 9). *Agenda – Board Meeting – Companions Inc*. DePaul University Special Collections and Archives, Chicago, IL.

Companions, Inc. (1992, November 19). *Agenda – Companions Inc – Board*. DePaul University Special Collections and Archives, Chicago, IL.


Scott C. McWilliams earned a bachelor’s degree, cum laude, from the University of St. Francis in Criminal and Social Justice. During his undergraduate studies, he volunteered, then later worked part-time, as the student assistant for the Criminal & Social Justice program. In addition, Mr. McWilliams interned with the Joliet Police Department in Joliet, Illinois. During this internship, he observed police procedure and practice through the various divisions of the police department, including patrol, tactical, traffic, records, community policing, and the 911 Communications Center. During his undergraduate studies, Mr. McWilliams also maintained numerous leadership roles within the university’s radio station, WCSF-FM. He was awarded the USF Innovation Scholarship for his work in radio and was also a member of the university’s Educational Standards Committee’s Student Appeals Subcommittee. Outside of the university, Mr. McWilliams served on the Diocese of Joliet’s Restorative Justice Committee.

Upon graduation, Mr. McWilliams enrolled in Loyola University Chicago’s Criminal Justice and Criminology program. During his graduate studies, he interned with the John Howard Association of Illinois (JHA). His internship consisted of overseeing the development of a web application which aided JHA in better tracking, managing, and reviewing letters sent to JHA from incarcerated people. He also accompanied JHA on prison monitoring visits at a juvenile correctional facility and a myriad of adult correctional facilities throughout Illinois. After the internship, Mr. McWilliams continued to volunteer with JHA as a prison monitor. Between November 2016 and February 2018, Mr. McWilliams was employed by JHA in a grant-funded
role as the Volunteer Program Manager. He developed, promoted, and maintained volunteer opportunities, interviewed potential volunteers, and provided ongoing support and guidance to JHA’s volunteers. He also responded to letters sent to JHA by incarcerated people seeking documents, information, and clarification on Illinois Department of Corrections policy and procedures.

In addition to his graduate studies and internship, Mr. McWilliams accepted a position with Companions Journeying Together (CJT) as Interim Executive Director in May 2014. In this role, he was responsible for overseeing all operations of the organization, including fundraising, donor relations, volunteer recruitment and management, bookkeeping, and supporting the board of directors. He was later installed as the Executive Director and remains in this role as of this writing. Mr. McWilliams is credited with expanding CJT’s flagship program, Aunt Mary’s Storybook, to 17 correctional facilities throughout Illinois. He is also credited with overseeing the development of a web application to maintain the program’s records and demographics of individuals served. The web application also serves as a hub for families to receive the audio recordings electronically instead of on a CD. Through his work with CJT, Mr. McWilliams is affectionately known as “The Storybook Guy” to many incarcerated people and correctional staff throughout Illinois.

Mr. McWilliams believes strongly in promoting a more fair and humane criminal justice system.