

FRAMING THE WORLD:  
TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING EXPERIENCES OF WOMEN OFFENDERS IN  
THE 4-H LIFE PROGRAM

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A Dissertation  
presented to  
the Faculty of the Graduate School  
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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Education

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by  
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The undersigned, appointed by the dean of the Graduate School, have examined the dissertation entitled

FRAMING THE WORLD:  
TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING EXPERIENCES OF WOMEN OFFENDERS IN  
THE 4-H LIFE PROGRAM

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presented by Jenny Norell,

a candidate for the degree of doctor of education,

and hereby certify that, in their opinion, it is worthy of acceptance.

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## DEDICATION

In my high school yearbook, my parents submitted a picture of me on a green John Deere pedal tractor. The cutline read, “Jenny, we are proud of you, keep on peddling.” While my dad did not always understand what I was doing over here in Columbia (as he would say), he was always supportive.

During my entire college career, I would have moments of despair, and I would call my Grandma Rosemary and she would say, “Jenny, it is like climbing a mountain, sometimes you cannot see the top and there are a lot of rocks in the way to trip you up, but you must persist and keep moving knowing that the top is up there somewhere.” Mahatma Gandhi said, “Be the change you wish to see in the world.” While my dad and my grandma are not Gandhi, their continuous advice and support are the voices in my head.

When I started college my dad said, “Jenny, your job is to be a student; you must treat it like a job. I expect you to do your very best at all times, do not disappoint me.” This has largely driven me to push and work through the toughest of obstacles to complete my dream.

My dad has always been a visionary and has inspired me. I will never forget when he brought me to my very first campus visit at the University of Missouri. We were sitting outside of the old Brady Bookstore between Brady and GCB just watching people walk by. He said to me, “Jenny, I would give **anything** to have this opportunity.”

So I say to you dad: “you breathed life into my journey; I would be nothing without you. This dissertation and the person I am today are largely due to the influence, wisdom, passion, integrity, and true grit instilled in me by your example.

No matter what happens to you dad, you will live in me forever. I will carry on your memory, your passion, your persistence, and your innate moral compass.

I love you, Dad, and I love you Grandma Rosemary.

Dad, I didn't need to dance with you at my wedding; we have been dancing through life together forever. Garth Brooks said it best, "I could have missed the pain but I'd a had to miss the dance." Words cannot express my gratitude, Daddy.

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Now get out there and chase your dreams; I did it and you can too!

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to understand the experience of offenders and their transformative learning process as it relates to shifts in their understanding of parental roles within the context of the 4-H Living Interactive Family Education (LIFE) program. Brock (2010) noted ten precursor steps that could lead to transformative learning. These steps were (1) experiencing disorienting dilemmas, (2) reflecting on assumptions, (3) recognizing discontent that is publicly shared, (4) exploring new roles, (5) examining feelings of guilt or shame, (6) trying on new roles, (7) planning a course of action, (8) acquiring knowledge/skills to implement the plan, (9) building confidence, and/or (10) reintegrating the experience to life.

Phenomenology provided a research methodology for collecting data on the transformative learning experiences of offenders in the 4-H LIFE program. This qualitative study utilized data collected over a two-year period at two correctional facilities with participation in the 4-H LIFE program. Data were analyzed using phenomenological research methods to understand the experience of offenders in the program as it relates to the transformative learning theory (Mezirow, 1991). Four participant groups included: (1) offenders, (2) Department of Corrections staff, (3) Volunteers in Corrections, and (4) 4-H program staff.

The findings supported the research questions: (1) offender women did experience transformative learning as evidenced through the ten precursor steps, (2) participants experienced a shift in their perceptions of parenting, (3) traditional visits were more

structured events with specific rules and regulations, (4) 4-H LIFE visits were more flexible with structured programs for families to engage with one another.

This research created an impetus for codifying an advanced curriculum for offenders in the 4-H LIFE program. Further, empowering offenders to elevate the program to the advanced level, would allow participants to help construct relevant activities based upon their needs. Future research is needed to provide depth of understanding for the ways in which 4-H LIFE transforms the participants to include mixed methods research for the purpose of creating an intentional structure for developing the capacity for offenders to transform their lives.

# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

### Background

Offender rehabilitation is a salient topic as the confines of prisons can create environments that can negatively impact offenders. Haney (2006) indicated correctional institutions can create an environment that encourages aggressive behavior among offenders that could lead to increased criminal behavior. However, rehabilitation programs targeted to improve the lives of prisoners have been touted. Cheliotis (2006) noted correctional professionals continue to support prison programs as a rehabilitative tool and as an organizing principle for good inmate management.

Lynch (2000) provided a definition of rehabilitation as any practices that transform the offender into a non-deviant citizen. This author included any programs focusing on psychological treatment, drug treatment, education, work training, work and housing placement, and halfway houses. Correctional rehabilitation has taken on many forms with an effort to reform the behaviors of offenders.

A recent cultural shift to implement correctional rehabilitative programs has occurred as a result of a national trend for repeat offenders to re-enter correctional facilities (Nickel et al., 2009). The impact of offender recidivism on pre-existing external structures is telling. A large number of offenders entering correctional facilities have families waiting for them at home. Arditti, Lambert-Shute, and Joest (2003) noted families of offenders are disrupted when they enter a correctional facility. However, efforts to rehabilitate offenders have focused on leadership or family reunification but not synthesizing both. Arditti, Lambert-Shute, and Joest (2003) indicated imprisonment

results in significant situational and family process alterations that result in emotional, social, and economic losses.

The growth in the number of children of incarcerated men and women between 1991 and 2007 has increased by 80%, to more than 1.7 million minor children (Murray & Farrington, 2008). Sabol & Couture (2008) found 62% of female prisoners and 51% of male prisoners have children under the age of 18 and many parents will remain in prison while their children reach adulthood.

On any given day, over 1.5 million children in the United States, or 2% of the minor population, have an incarcerated parent (Mumola, 2000). With this increase in incarceration, there are greater risk factors experienced by the children and families left behind in the home (Phillips, Burns, & Wagner, 2004). Children experience both immediate and long-term impacts due to the arrest and incarceration of a parent.

Often, traditional prison visits attempt to re-establish family bonds. Approximately 79% of parents in prison reported having some form of contact with their children while incarcerated, including phone calls, letters, and visits (Glaze & Maruschak, 2008). While these numbers are large for the quantity of visits, maintaining the quality of the family visit is important in reconstituting family relationships.

There is evidence children maintaining close ties with their incarcerated parents experience less emotional distress and exhibit fewer problematic behaviors than children who do not have contact with their parents. Maintaining contact has been shown to be particularly beneficial in cases where the parent had a significant presence in the child's life prior to being incarcerated (Margolies & Kraft-Stolar, 2006). Maintaining consistent presence in the lives of children during incarceration is critical to reduce negative

stressors on children. Strong parent-child relationships may aid in children's adjustment to their parents' incarceration and help to mitigate many of the negative outcomes for children who are associated with parental incarceration (Parke & Clarke-Stewart, 2001).

While there is a positive influence on children, incarcerated parents are often impacted and transformed by their participation in prison rehabilitation programs. van Wormer (2010) noted correctional rehabilitation programming should be responsive to the connection between an offender's marginalized status and their criminal activity. Thus, programming implemented with the understanding of the background of the offender in terms of poverty, abuse, sex, and race or ethnicity helps connect the experiences of offenders to the content of the program. Some programs have helped to prepare female offenders to return to their role as a mother through parenting visitation programs (Pace, 2006).

The 4-H Living Interactive Family Education (LIFE) program allowed the offenders to re-establish connections with their family members through in-person intensive visits. Through skills development courses, offenders developed core-parenting skills that were translated and practiced with their family members through the family visits. Relationships were developed among teaching staff, offenders, and their families. Brasswell and Wells (2009) indicated true correctional rehabilitation is centered on the development of effective and meaningful relationships, which help model the possibility for the offender to learn self-discipline.

The 4-H Living Interactive Family Education (LIFE) program provided an application or context for understanding the transformative learning theory. Mezirow (1991) developed the transformative learning theory, explaining the frame of reference

shift that occurs as an individual engages with environmental stimuli. These stimuli call the learner to question their assumptions to potentially revise their internal understanding of the world.

Experiencing transformative learning is typically the culmination of a variety of internal or mental shifts as a result of external or environmental factors. Brock (2010) noted ten precursor steps that could lead to transformative learning. These steps were (1) experiencing disorienting dilemmas, (2) reflecting on assumptions, (3) recognizing discontent that is publicly shared, (4) exploring new roles, (5) examining feelings of guilt or shame, (6) trying on new roles, (7) planning a course of action, (8) acquiring knowledge/skills to implement the plan, (9) building confidence, and/or (10) reintegrating the experience to life.

An external experience can often become the catalyst for transformative learning which contextualizes the mental shifts. These shifts collectively revolve around breaking with original thought patterns, taking in new information and reframing thought patterns, or engaging with the external stimuli to develop new ways of integrating the information (Mezirow, 2000). The processes for understanding these mental shifts are usefully categorized through a deeper understanding of the experiences of offenders. The correctional rehabilitation program known as 4-H Living Interactive Family Education (LIFE) provided an external context to examine the appearance of the ten precursor steps for the development of transformative learning among program participants.

Through a phenomenological study of interviews and reflections, the themes and contexts of offender experiences in the 4-H LIFE program were examined to understand the transformative learning experience of the offender participants. This study provided

an opportunity to take a strategic approach to data analysis in a largely practice-based program, while positioning the results in the context of two women's facilities.

The research problem of practice was the examination of a correctional rehabilitation program. The 4-H LIFE program provided a context for both the development of parenting and leadership skills through application of the skill sets within a family visit. The research purpose was to understand the experience of offenders, and their transformative learning process as it relates to shifts in their understanding of parental roles.

Through the phenomenological method, this study provided a foundation for offenders to personally frame their experiences. The commonality of experiences of offenders in the 4-H LIFE program provided an application for the theoretical background. The experiences were examined using a conceptual framework of transformative learning utilizing the ten precursor elements (Mezirow, 1991).

### Conceptual Underpinnings for the Study

Mezirow (1991) noted transformative learning is a constructivist theory of adult learning. Learners actively create meaning as a result of experiencing a reality with which they must confront. Through the process of interpreting an experience, learners build new meaning or provide a frame of reference for an old understanding.

#### *Frame of Reference*

These frames of reference are the assumptions through which learners understand experiences, shape expectations, and motivate actions (Mezirow, 1997). Actions or behaviors are influenced based upon phases of meaning making or reaction to stimuli. Brock (2010) and Mezirow (1978; 2000) claimed these phases include: a disorienting

dilemma, self-examination, a critical assessment of assumptions, awareness that others share this experience, exploration of options, planning a course of action, acquisition of knowledge and skills to implement plans, provisionally trying new roles, building self-confidence and competence, and a reintegration into one's life on new terms.

Two types of transformative learning can occur: transformation through content and through structure (Kasl & Elias, 2000). Content transformation occurs through the critical analysis of assumptions and discerning symbolic content. Structural transformation occurs when a learner is confronted with a complex cultural environment. This calls into question specific thought process mechanisms. The process through which the external environment affects internal patterns of thinking is important for understanding the learner ability to transform.

Effective engagement with this environment leads to a shift in the learner's relationship with oneself or the group. Learners actively create meaning as a result of experiencing a reality with which they must confront through disorienting dilemmas (Mezirow, 1991). Frames of reference are the assumptions through which learners understand experiences, shape expectations, and motivate actions (Mezirow, 1997).

Frames of reference have two dimensions: a habit of mind or set of assumptions that orient and act as a filter for interpreting the meaning of experiences, and the resulting point of view from this process (Mezirow, 2000). Disorienting dilemmas are a triggering event that occurs externally and a resulting consciousness develops in response to demands from the environment. Awareness of the field of forces in which the learner exists ecologically, socially, and culturally leads to paradigm shifts in learning (Kasl & Elias, 2000).

### *Disorienting Dilemmas*

Mezirow (1991) indicated a disorienting dilemma is triggered by a life change, crisis (epoch), or an accumulation of these changes over time. The disorienting dilemma ultimately leads to a perspective change or a shift in the frame of reference. The frame of reference shift occurs due to a critical reflection of assumptions and beliefs and a conscious creation of plans in a unique way to frame the world.

The development of a new perception of the world is manifested through the possible experience of ten precursor steps (Brock, 2010; Mezirow, 1978; 2000). Transformative learning occurs when external stimuli challenge existing assumptions, notions, and meanings (Dirkx, Mezirow, and Cranton, 2006). Another requisite element of transformative learning is individual assent or choice and internal drive to cognitively change (Cranton, 1994). Further, once an individual experiences a shift in their worldview, it is impossible to break with this understanding, thus it becomes permanent and irreversible (Mezirow, 2000).

The learner must have the ability to “let go” of their pre-existing belief structures to transform their thinking. This occurs in the critical reflection process when the learner uses their pre-existing skills and knowledge to break with their former understanding (Mezirow, 1991). Typically, the period of critical reflection is experienced in conjunction with trusted allies, colleagues, and friends, and the learner sorts through the redevelopment of their worldview (Cranton, 1994). A new perspective is then developed that allows the learner to broaden their worldview to the new external stimuli to reintegrate into pre-existing perspectives (Mezirow, 1991).

While the learner engages in the internal process of renegotiating their understanding of external stimuli, their process for constructing meaning perspectives shifts. Kegan (2000) asserted the learner enlarges their form or framework used for constructing meaning perspectives and increases their capacity for understanding the world. The process of arrest and incarceration provides a drastic shift for offenders in terms of life context. External or environmental control factors create a new way of thinking and operating within the world.

#### Statement of the Problem

Incarceration provides a particularly intense environment within which learning can occur. As a result, rehabilitative programs have been established with the specific purpose of engaging in reconstructing families through parenting classes and maintaining positive relationships among offenders and their families outside of the facility (Cecil et al, 2008). The 4-H Living Interactive Family Education (LIFE) Program strengthened families of incarcerated individuals through holistic intervention for offenders, children ages 5 to 18, and their caregivers.

The 4-H LIFE program provided structure for offenders to become positive role models and mentors for their target child (ages 5 to 18) through parenting skills classes, planning/leadership meetings, and 4-H Family/Club meetings. Unlike other rehabilitation programs, the 4-H Living Interactive Family Education (LIFE) Program addressed systemic losses through a holistic approach (Cecil et al., 2008; Nickel et al., 2009). This program provided offenders with direct or concrete experiences through parenting and planning classes. Offenders then had the opportunity to operationalize these experiences in the 4-H Family Club meetings.

Engagement with external parenting programs helps mothers reframe or regain their identity and role within a prison environment (Thompson & Harm, 2000). Prison breaks the daily or routine contact between mothers and their children which can cause women to shift their understanding of their purpose in the world. Glaze and Maruschak (2008) indicated parenting programs are more often found in women's facilities which helps sustain and maintain these bonds.

The 4-H LIFE program provided a context for strengthening pre-existing family bonds among incarcerated parents or grandparents, the child, and the child's caregiver. The goals of the program were to develop offender parenting skills, encourage and promote planning and leadership skills of the offenders through planning family visits, and provide an environment for positive family interactions through a family visit.

Qualitative and quantitative data have been collected to determine the positive impact of the program on the development of parenting skills and the impact on youth and caregivers (Arditti, Lambert-Schute, & Joest, 2003). Previous studies on the 4-H LIFE program have examined offender perceptions of visiting room problems among offenders and family members. Further, visiting quality and visiting frequency among incarcerated individuals and their family members have been studied. Other measures have considered offender closeness with their child and childrearing stress. Researchers have examined parenting self-efficacy, co-parenting cooperation, and offender depression among 4-H LIFE and non-program participants (Arditti, Lambert-Schute, & Joest, 2003).

However, there has not been any description of the experience of the learning process shifts or the meaning made for offenders as a result of experiencing the 4-H Living Interactive Family Education (LIFE) program. The opportunity to better

understand the impact of the program on the offender participants was facilitated through this phenomenological study. Through an examination of offender experience in the 4-H LIFE program, an understanding of patterns related to Mezirow's ten precursor steps to transformative learning was observed.

#### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe the precursor experiences to transformative learning described by Brock (2010) for offenders in the 4-H Living Interactive Family Education (LIFE) Program in two female correctional facilities in the state of Missouri. At this stage in the research, the learning process was generally understood through a lens of transformative learning. Specifically, the study described the meaning offenders make of their learning experiences within the context of the ten precursor steps for transformative learning (Brock, 2010).

#### Research Questions

Within the context of this phenomenological study the following research questions were addressed:

1. What responses indicate women offenders in the Women's Eastern Reception and Diagnostic Correctional Center (WERDCC) and Chillicothe Correctional Center in the 4-H LIFE program experienced one of the ten precursor steps for transformative learning?
2. How have perceptions of offender parenting shifted as a result of participation in the 4-H LIFE program?
3. What are the experiences of offenders during traditional visits with their family?
4. What are the experiences of offenders during 4-H LIFE visits with their family?

## Limitations, Assumptions, and Design Controls

The process of understanding the transformative learning experiences of offenders in the 4-H LIFE program was limited by the sample, data collection methods, and the role of the researcher. The assumptions of the study include commonality of participant experience and bracketing of researcher personal understandings.

Nieswiadomy (1993) indicated researchers engaging in phenomenological procedures must bracket or set aside personal experiences and biases to understand those of the study participants. While researchers will maintain a vast amount of experience and knowledge of the phenomenon, an understanding of the way in which this experience could affect the research outcome is realized through bracketing. This particular study focused on the experiences of women offenders, as the researcher works in a professional capacity with the program in a male facility.

### *Limitations*

This study was limited in that it included a sample of female offenders at two correctional facilities in the state of Missouri. A consideration of the transformative experiences of male offenders in the 4-H LIFE program would have provided more depth to this study. Further, an understanding of experiences of offenders in the 4-H LIFE program in other states would have been an interesting addition.

The use of preexisting interview data provided a limitation to the study as it only allowed for data that was asked in the questions. Questions constructed specifically with the transformative learning phenomenon would have provided more clarity for the experiences of the offenders in the study. Further, the study was done over a two-year

period and would have been more interesting to add consistent data from the entirety of the ten year program in each facility.

The original data were collected by an external researcher, which could challenge the reliability of the data. This study must assume the original researcher maintained professionalism with the interview script and stayed on task during the interviews. The analysis of the data became the point of derivation for the application of transformative learning to this context, thus the researcher became the instrument.

### *Assumptions*

Phenomenological research presents some challenges for the researcher according to Creswell (2007). Specifically, the participants in the study must all experience the same phenomenon so that a common understanding will emerge. Also, the researcher must decide how their personal understandings of the phenomenon through the process of bracketing will be incorporated.

Researchers must bracket their understanding of the phenomenon of the study; this process can be especially difficult to derive researcher bias relative to true experiences of participants (Creswell, 2007). Moustakas (1994) indicated through the major processes of epoche, phenomenological reduction, imaginative variation, and synthesis of meanings and essences the researcher is able to set aside their biases and derive knowledge from a state of pure consciousness. This author noted the researcher learns to see naively, to value conscious experience, to respect the evidence of one's senses, and to move toward intersubjective knowing of participant experiences.

Creswell (2007) further asserted phenomenological research bracketing of researcher biases and experiences must be done to indicate which part of the analysis

came from researcher perception relative to the experience of the participants. Thus, the bias of the researcher was considered in the analysis and data collection procedures of this study and bracketed out when appropriate. Important steps were taken to ensure trustworthiness of this study.

### *Design Controls*

While there were some limitations within the context of the present study, reasonable steps were taken to ensure that the data were reliable and valid. The current study considered the experience of female offenders in the 4-H LIFE program within two facilities in the state of Missouri. Gibbs (2007) noted the intent of qualitative research is not to generalize findings to individuals, sites, or places outside of the study. The goal of this study was to find evidence of transformative learning within the program at these two sites (Greene & Caracelli, 1997).

This study relied heavily on archival data collected by an external researcher. Creswell (2009) suggested the researcher triangulate different data sources of information. This study established common themes by converging archival interviews, monthly reflections from the 4-H LIFE family visits, staff focus groups, and interviews with Department of Corrections staff. This process of combining data sources added to the validity of the current study (Creswell, 2009).

While the present study relied upon an external researcher to collect the bulk of the data, the researcher did have a script they consistently followed throughout the data collection process. Eisner (1991) indicated the researcher is the primary instrument in data collection for qualitative research. Thus, the interview script provided consistency, but the researcher did play a role in defining the original context of the study.

While only covering two years of the program, the data that emerged were highly descriptive and derived from multiple data sources. Fraenkel and Wallen (1990) noted that qualitative data are descriptive and focus on the perceptions and experiences of the participants. The research participants frame their lives through specific lenses, and this study collected the words of the participants as they emerged through various methods over the course of the program.

### Definition of Key Terms

This study included key terms relevant to the experience of female offenders in two correctional facilities in the state of Missouri. These terms are defined and examined in the following sections. The key terms are differentiated by correctional facility terms and terms related to the 4-H program.

#### *Correctional Facility Terms*

Several terms specific to language utilized within correctional facilities are described in this section. The defined terms in this section include: offenders, corrections, rehabilitation programs, and incarceration.

#### *Offenders*

Offenders are persons convicted of a crime. The offenders in this study must not have been convicted of a sex crime. Offenders in the 4-H LIFE program have been selected by their case managers to participate in the program, fulfilling institutional requirements for educational program participation. The offender participant must also remain free of conduct violations for specific durations during the program (Arditti, Lambert-Shute, & Joest, 2003).

#### *Corrections*

Corrections are the chastisement by one having authority of a person who has committed an offense. Offenders in the study are housed in facilities specifically designed to administer corrections (Arditti et al., 2003).

### *Rehabilitation Programs*

Rehabilitation programs provide the impetus for improving the character of an offender so he or she will become a productive member of society. The 4-H LIFE program is considered an approved rehabilitation program in the state of Missouri (Cecil et al, 2008).

### *Incarceration*

Incarceration implies confinement in a jail or prison for persons suspected of committing a crime. Typically offenders in the 4-H LIFE program are incarcerated for sentences of a considerable length. The program aided in the facilitation of relationship development among offenders and their children (Cecil et al, 2008).

### *4-H Program*

The terms in this section help the reader better understand the 4-H program. Definitions are provided for the meaning of 4-H, the 4-H LIFE program, program participants, caregivers, family club meetings, and project meetings.

### *4-H*

4-H is a youth development organization committed to building the skills, competencies, and capabilities of youth. The organization enacts this principle through volunteer led experience-based learning. The 4 H's include head, heart, hands, and health (Wessel & Wessel, 1982).

### *4-H LIFE*

This program is the 4-H Living Interactive Family Education program. This program takes the organizational structure, form, and philosophy of the 4-H program and adapted it for correctional facilities (Gillespie, Beckmeyer, & Arditti, 2010).

#### *Program Participants*

Program participants are members of 4-H who are within the age range of five to 18. These participants have paid dues to the 4-H organization to participate in the program. Program participants are also on the approved visitor list of the offenders inside of the correctional facilities (Wessel & Wessel, 1982).

#### *Caregivers*

These individuals are the adult guardians who bring the program participants into the correctional facility to experience the 4-H LIFE program. Caregivers must be over the age of 18 (Gillespie, Beckmeyer, & Arditti, 2010).

#### *Family Club Meetings*

Family club meetings occur monthly or bi-monthly to bring families of offenders into the facility. During these meetings, offenders lead portions of the activities and facilitate discussion among their kids. Typically, a business meeting and project based activity occurred at these meetings (Gillespie, Beckmeyer, & Arditti, 2010).

#### *Project Meetings*

Project meetings encompass the minimum six hours youth must engage in for the purpose of developing project and life skills. These meetings typically co-occur with the family club meetings during the 4-H LIFE visit due to the length that families travel to attend the meetings (Wessel & Wessel, 1982).

## Summary

Typically offender rehabilitation efforts have focused either on improving parenting skills or developing leadership skills. The benefit of the 4-H LIFE program was the combination of these two skills and their application within the context of the 4-H family visit. Data have been collected over the life of the program; however, a strategic analysis of this data relative to offender transformative learning has not been examined.

This study provided a framework for applying the transformative learning theory within the context of an offender population. Specifically observed was the occurrence of the ten precursor steps to transformative learning. A phenomenological study allowed for an understanding of lived experiences of offenders within the program. The resulting meaning that offenders make of their parenting experience within the 4-H LIFE program relative to transformative learning was observed.

The transformative learning theory has been applied to various settings and experiences; however, this study provided a vulnerable population within a program of practice to observe learning. The analysis of a two-year program period provided evidence for program effectiveness to local program implementation and funding stakeholders. One goal of the 4-H LIFE program is replication of best practices to other correctional facilities. This study provided evidence for transferability of program practices and impact on offender learning.

Chapter One provided a background for the study, which framed the purpose to describe the experience that resulted in transformative learning for offenders in the 4-H LIFE program. Limitations, assumptions, definitions of key terms, and significance were discussed. Chapter Two provides a literature review of the conceptual framework for

transformative learning, research regarding literature on correctional rehabilitation, background of the 4-H LIFE program, and literature on phenomenological methodology.

## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Incarceration creates challenges for offenders that can either promote growth or lead to increased stress upon the family. Chapter Two provides a research base to frame the current study of offenders and their experience with transformative learning. This literature review has four main sections: reviewing literature on the conceptual framework, the research problem, the background of the 4-H LIFE program, and the design.

The theoretical framework for the study was grounded in Mezirow's transformative learning theory. Mezirow (1991) indicated transformative learning occurs when a learner shifts his or her thinking as a result of interaction with an outside idea or experience. One particularly life-altering experience for an individual and their family is the process of incarceration. Change associated with the impact of incarceration on the offender, is often mediated by correctional rehabilitation programs.

The effectiveness of correctional rehabilitation programs provided a context for situating the conceptual framework in practice. Specifically, the 4-H LIFE program was the program of study within two female correctional centers in the state of Missouri. The programmatic elements of this rehabilitation setting provided a common experience for offenders as they developed appropriate parenting and leadership skills, and practiced them in a family visiting session. The crux of phenomenological research is common experience among participants.

Phenomenology provided a research methodology for collecting data on the transformative learning experiences of offenders in the 4-H LIFE program. Creswell (2009) noted phenomenological research is a qualitative research methodology employed to understand the experience of humans surrounding a common phenomenon. Understanding the program through the lens of transformative learning provided a new picture of the experience of offenders in rehabilitation settings.

### *Conceptual Framework*

Mezirow (1991) developed the transformative learning theory that explained the change in the frame of reference a learner experiences when engaging with external stimuli. Life experiences of individuals define the frame of reference that typically includes assumptions, associations, values, feelings, concepts, and conditioned responses to external stimuli (Mezirow, 1997). Mezirow (1996) noted learning is a process of using prior understandings to define a new or revised understanding of the meaning of an experience to guide future action.

Brock (2010) operationalized ten precursor steps leading to transformative learning. The steps included: disorienting dilemma, critical reflection on assumptions, recognized discontent shared, explored new roles, self examination with feelings of guilt or shame, tried on new role, planned course of action, acquired knowledge/skills to implement plan, built confidence/competence, and reintegrated to life. Transformative learning has the potential to occur when one of these precursor steps are experienced (Brock, 2010).

Learners are transformed through the expansion of consciousness. The mechanisms for transformative learning include the development of new frames of

reference, points of view, or habits of mind. Further a new structure for identity is formed as a result of engagement with external stimuli (Kasl & Elias, 2000). Mezirow (1997) noted truly transformative learners grow toward utilizing a frame of reference that is inclusive, self-reflective, discriminating, and draws on experiences. Thus, when external stimuli lead the learner to question their pre-existing frame of reference, the transformative learner is amenable to consideration of new concepts.

### *Frame of Reference*

Frames of reference are the assumptions through which learners understand experiences, shape expectations, and motivate actions (Mezirow, 1997). Learners who have transformative experiences utilize internal processes to frame external experiences. Frames of reference have two dimensions, a habit of mind or set of assumptions that orient and act as a filter for interpreting the meaning of experiences, and the resulting point of view from this process (Mezirow, 1991; 2000).

Habits of mind include the ways in which one thinks, feels, and acts. The framework for this assumption is typically embedded in cultural, social, educational, economic, political, or psychological norms (Mezirow, 1991). The vehicle for expression of these habits or assumptions is the point of view. The point of view typically surrounds a specific belief or attitude that defines the way in which a learner interprets external stimuli (Mezirow, 1991).

As the learner engages with external stimuli, they bring a particular point of view based upon their background embedded in their habits of mind. These shape the frame of reference of the learner as they take in new information to assimilate or accommodate the information into their existing schema (Mezirow, 2000). Mezirow (1991) noted habits of

mind are more durable than points of view. As the learner engages with others in the learning process, they have an opportunity to try on their point of view as applied to a problem. A process of modification of learner assumptions occurs so that learner point of view shifts. However, the habit of mind of the learner is more fixed and less available to the awareness of the learner.

Davis-Manigaulte, et al. (2006) noted transformative paradigms allow learners to create a relationship with their external environment that is significant. Henderson and Murdock (2011) utilized guided imagery exercises as a tool for shifting and challenging preconceived ideologies of undergraduate students. Their purpose was to lead students to shift their pre-existing frames of reference regarding applicable course content. They found when students had an opportunity to situate their thinking as the “other” through guided exercises the students had an increase in empathy for the alternative group. The authors provided an opportunity for students to question their points of view and habits of mind related to the “other” by imagining the experiences through role-play.

The perspective shift leads to a more developed frame of reference that is inclusive, open to other viewpoints, critically reflective, and capable of changing as a result of the integration of experiences. Thus, the learner develops a way of thinking that could lead them to be compelled to take alternative action when confronted with similar future external experiences. Learner amenability to newly experienced stimuli provides an opportunity to develop a better understanding of themselves and their counterparts.

Pugh (2002) found an application of this process when students engage with a concept, actively use it to see how the world is different through this lens, and develop an understanding of personal value based on the engagement. This perspective

transformation could lead to meaning scheme changes or a shift in immediate beliefs and expectations while learners retain their worldview or frame of reference (Carter, 2002). Henderson and Murdock (2011) asserted that social institutions (i.e. collective habits of mind) are created by an accumulation of individually held beliefs that can be altered through a dialogic process.

### *Critical Reflection*

The process by which the learner has the opportunity to shift points of view occurs through discourse. Through a dialogue, learners examine evidence and argue the point of view with other learners. Bruffee (1999) noted learners have discussions at the boundaries of discourse to create a common language or understanding of content. Mezirow (1991) called this phenomenon “learning” as individuals share insights and arguments to explain their positions.

During these interactions, learners transform their frames of reference as they question assumptions that provide the foundation for habits of mind or points of view (Mezirow, 1991). Transformations in frames of reference can occur from a shifting habit of mind or through the accumulation of shifts in points of view. Brock (2010) found critical reflection is one of the most important steps to a transformative learning experience. Comparing the external world with internal ideas was the most important step in experiencing a continuous frame of reference shift (Brock, 2010).

Kasl and Elias (2000) noted content transformation occurs through the critical analysis of assumptions and discerning symbolic content. Structural transformation occurs when a learner is confronted with a complex cultural environment. Effective

engagement with this environment leads to a shift in the learner's relationship with oneself or the group.

Discernment begins with an attitude of openness to content. The learner sees patterns of relationships in content through sorting, relating, and being aware of these patterns; old frames of reference are overlooked while new frames of reference emerge (Kasl & Elias, 2000; Cranton, 2000). Critical reflection causes the learner to recognize and challenge uncritically the assumptions one has about oneself and one's world (Mezirow, 1991). Discernment and critical reflection are the processes by which people learn from their experiences. Apprehension is often experienced as a learner undergoes the process of discernment, where a learner is transformed by appreciation of new content. Critical reflection engenders comprehension in which a learner is transformed by interpreting content through criticism with external individuals. These two mechanisms of learning/knowing are complementary (Kolb, 1984).

### *Processes for Learning*

Mezirow (1991) described four processes for learning: elaborating an existing point of view, establishing new points of view, transforming existing points of view, and transforming habits of mind. Elaborating an existing point of view can occur when finding additional evidence for an existing point of view. New points of view can be established when the learner engages with external stimuli, and forms assumptions about these interactions. Transformation of existing points of view can occur when previous assumptions are called into question based upon an experience with external stimuli and a shift in point of view can occur leading to alternative reactions and manifested behaviors. Finally, habit of mind transformation occurs as the learner adopts a socially accepted bias

or process of learning gained from an external stimulus. Mezirow (1997) indicated these “epochal transformations” (p.7), are less common, because changing the way learners learn will not change if what learners learn fit neatly into existing frames of reference.

Snyder (2008) noted there are three pre-requisite requirements for the process of transformative learning to occur in a learner. First, the learner must engage with a context that allows for transformative learning. Second, a process of self-reflection must take place within the learner. Finally, the learner must engage in critical discourse or discussion about the experience.

Contextual spaces include both external and environmental stimuli from the life experiences of a learner and also the internal processes that consist within the mind of the learner (Cranton & Carusetta, 2004). As the learner engages with other people surrounding various topics, they begin to call their assumptions into question. These external worldviews frame the way in which the learner creates their frame of reference.

The learner then experiences a process of self-reflection during which they become aware of their perceptions. Self-reflection allows individuals to consider the fleeting viability and subjectivity of their individual viewpoints when compared in relation to external sources of information. Cranton and Carusetta (2004) framed this element of transformative learning as an awareness of a broadening perspective with an understanding of the impact of context on frame of reference.

The third requirement for transformative learning to occur is the discussion between the learner and others to help frame and assess pre-existing assumptions (Cranton & Carusetta, 2004). Snyder (2008) further indicated the learner tests and validates their new ideas through a process of role-playing. The learner needs a forum for

trying on and trying out their new belief systems. Reintegration of these ideas can then take place within the meaning schemes of the learner (Snyder, 2008).

### *Disorienting Dilemmas*

Learners actively create meaning as a result of experiencing a reality with which they must confront through disorienting dilemmas (Mezirow, 1991). One mechanism for experiencing transformative learning was role examination. Learners experiencing disorienting dilemmas about social roles went through a process of trying on new roles (Brock, 2010). Disorienting dilemmas are triggering events that occur to develop consciousness in response to demands from the environment.

When a disorienting dilemma occurs there is a need to learn something new from the perspective of the learner. Thus, the learner experiences an occurrence of new learning and a reintegration of pre-existing information. Awareness of the field of forces in which the learner exists ecologically, socially, and culturally leads to paradigm shifts in learning (Kasl & Elias, 2000). Mezirow (2000) indicated the importance of these external environmental events leading to a change in perspective or shift in frame of reference. This frame of reference shift causes the learner to change their way of knowing or habit of mind.

### *Context and Transformative Learning*

Mezirow (1991) asserted for an adult to experience a shift in their perspective, they must be intentional about their learning. This mental process allows the learner to embrace a new way of thinking through a synthesis of current and pre-existing knowledge and/or a dismissal of previous patterns of thought. Through an internal mental process shift the learner can alter immediate ideas or long term patterns of behavior.

Further evidence for epistemological change in the process of perspective transformation indicated that while learners shifted their immediate beliefs they sometimes also shifted their habits of mind or way in which they related to the world. Lange (2004) found when learners engaged in understanding about citizen action toward creating a sustainable society, they often found tangible ways to alter the way in which they engaged with their environment to enact social and environmental responsibility. Externalizing or applying the internal mental shift provides a manifestation of transformative learning.

Kroth and Boverie (2000) similarly found adults on a life mission found a sense of self when they were inquiring into their purpose or taking action into their community. This is a practice of shifting the way in which adults related with external stimuli in the world. The result is an internal frame of reference or a meaning scheme shift with the occurrence of learning or environmental stimuli.

Kegan (1982) noted after an adult experiences transformative learning, they are then ready to experience interpersonal balance. This process is the ability to recognize that a learner exists within a larger social context. The theory of developmental consciousness framed the process that adult learners engaged in for learning as a transformational process. Once the learner understands their role in a larger society, they find their agency within the world or institutional balance (Kegan, 1994).

### *Measuring Transformative Learning*

Five assumptions for measuring transformative learning using qualitative methodology were: (1) transformative learning involved a shift in understanding of knowledge, the world, and the self; (2) reflection was the key to achieving

transformation; (3) experiences or information disrupt current understanding which leads to the transformative process; (4) to guide transformation the teacher must create space for critical engagement and dialogue; and (5) transformative learning resonates with an education for conflict transformation (Snyder, 2008). The assumptions provide an educator or facilitator with the background to undertake the transformative learning process. Measuring or operationalizing transformative learning has taken on many forms from assessing the ten phases of transformative learning to the four ways of knowing.

One consideration is the context as applied to creation of transformative learning, some focusing specifically on the role of the facilitator in the process of creating a transformative experience (Snyder, 2008). Studies have focused on the process of transformation or achieving transformation as the final goal. Snyder (2008) noted if a learner does not enter a study with disorienting dilemma and the program does not illicit one, the participant may not be primed for a transformation. If the adult does not have the motivation to engage in a process for shifting their thinking, meaning perspective shift may not manifest.

Featherston and Kelly (2007) indicated the difficulty of creating a context for transformative learning to occur. Further, the process of measuring the level of transformation when it is occurring as a final process of end state is hard to assess. Snyder (2008) questioned the tangibility of a goal to document the occurrence of transformation in a final state, relative to assessing the process of transforming thinking.

Constructing studies to assess the process of transformation have occurred to some success. Taylor (2003) inquired about the acquisition of new meaning schemes among participants. He was interested in the way in which teacher education programs

shift student expectations and views about their subsequent professional practice. Cranton and Carusetta (2004) created a five-category scheme of self, other, relationship, context, and critical reflection to identify transformation. The authors found participants can coexist within the various categories at the same time.

Mezirow's transformative learning theory provides a lens for understanding phenomenon from various levels. However, each study embeds an application of the theory to a specific external or environmental context. The context of the current study is concerned with correctional rehabilitation or education programs.

#### *Literature Related to the Problem*

Incarceration is a particularly stressful external environmental shift for offenders. The impact on their families and children is far-reaching. This section will address the scope of the problem for women who are incarcerated and outline correctional rehabilitation programs targeted to address the problems. Specifically highlighted are parenting rehabilitation programs and their impact on transforming the woman offender participant.

#### *Scope of the Problem*

A dramatic increase in the number of persons incarcerated in the U.S. who also identify as parents, has been a cause for correctional rehabilitation shifts. Wildeman (2009) found one in 40 Caucasian children born in 1978 and one in 25 Caucasian children born in 1990 had a parent imprisoned. Alternatively, one in seven African-American children born in 1978 and one in four African-American children born in 1990 had a parent imprisoned. Further, 50.5% of African-American children by age 14 born in 1990 to parents who dropped out of high school had a father in prison. This author

indicated the phenomenon of childhood risk associated with parental imprisonment is uniquely American, and particularly experienced among children who are African-American and have parents with low-education.

West and Sabol (2009) found nationwide women are only 7.5% of the inmate population; however, they are the fastest growing group in America's prisons. Further, from 1977 to 2008, the rate of women in prison grew by 943% where the rate for men in prison increased by 520%. Women's incarceration rates since 2000 have annually increased by an average of 4.6%. Many of these women are mothers and have the sole responsibility of providing care for their children. Children with a mother in prison have seen a 131% increase since 1991.

Many women, while they are imprisoned, make an effort to maintain a positive relationship with their children. Women offenders attempt to present their identity as a "good mother" (Enos, 2001). Kazura (2001) found women are particularly concerned with the effects that their imprisonment has on their children's lives and development.

With the increasing number of incarcerated parents, an impact on children is clearly felt. This increase affects system-wide changes for society beyond the impact on individual families. Foster care, social service providers, and criminal justice systems bear the burden of loss of parental care (Swann & Sylvester, 2006). Some studies have suggested children of incarcerated parents have an increased risk of future crime and potential incarceration (Glueck & Glueck, 1950; Murray & Farrington, 2005).

Rehabilitation programs have been established with the specific purpose of engaging in reconstructing families through parenting classes and maintaining positive relationships among offenders and their families outside of the facility (Cecil, et al., 2008).

### *Correctional Rehabilitation Programs*

Correctional rehabilitation programs have been implemented to connect families, but many are targeted toward the offender. The aim of a responsive service is to engage the offender in working towards change that necessitates a focus on them as an individual (Farrow, Kelly, & Wilkinson, 2007). Tertiary prevention is addressed to offenders already convicted of crimes, with the objective of reducing rates of recidivism (Gendreau & Andrews, 1990).

Wexler (1998) indicated the combination of “likely-to-succeed” intervention elements of programs, can lead to reduction in recidivism greater than 50% (Andrews et al., 1990). These elements include: explicit model of causes of crimes and criminal acts; assess risk of reoffending based on criminal history and allocate offenders to different levels of service according to this information; assess criminogenic needs such as attitudes, influence of criminal companions, skills deficits, or self-control problems linking to offending behavior; apply active, focused, and participatory learning and change styles encountered in many offenders; adapt services to individual differences in offenders; and possess clear objectives, and structured engagement by staff in tasks relevant to individual offender needs. The combination of the elements of intervention programs provides a forum for internal change in an offender.

Implementing models that focus on dynamic interactions between individuals’ thoughts, feelings, and behaviors can drive personal change. Personnel delivering service must be trained and possess resources to carry out objectives through suitable methods and undertake systematic evaluation of individual offender progress (Wexler, 1998).

These personnel become the front line of program implementation for offender rehabilitation.

Coercion-theory based intervention techniques help offenders develop, refine and consistently apply positive involvement and encouragement within their external environment. These traditional rehabilitation programs are implemented within correctional facilities. Appropriate programs provide supervision and monitoring, appropriate discipline, and family problem solving (Eddy, et al., 2010). Skill development empowers parents to effectively manage social interactions within their family.

#### *Parenting Rehabilitation Programs*

Institutions have begun to provide parenting training programs for inmates to ameliorate some of the negative effects of parental incarceration (Hughes & Harrison-Thompson, 2002). Loper and Novero (2010) indicated the benchmarks of successful parenting classes in correctional facilities include: knowledge and attitude change, coping strategies for mental well-being, and parenting stress. Behavioral change regarding contact and communication patterns and family strengthening are inclusive in this context.

Loper and Novero (2010) asserted a need for more family-friendly visitation policies to include: extended time with children, provision of child-centric materials, opportunity to plan child activities, promotion of child-parent contact that allows inmates to practice skills learned during parenting class, better opportunities for telephone contact between offenders and families, and linking in-prison parenting training with therapeutic visitation experiences that allow supervised parenting practice (Eddy, et al., 2008).

Expanding the visitation policies for offenders helps offenders and their families maintain connections while they exist within the correctional facility. Support continues to be maintained for rehabilitation programs designed to develop parenting skills.

Parenting programs have lasting appeal within corrections (Eddy, et al., 2010). These programs increase the likelihood of positive contact between inmates and their families that may increase family support after release, may increase probability of pro-social success in the community, and reduce offender recidivism. However, parenting programs are thought to decrease the likelihood of transmission of antisocial behavior from inmate to child, and thus decrease the risk of the next generation becoming incarcerated.

Prinsloo (2007) indicated the human element of rehabilitation and family relationships could not be ignored within correctional facilities. Offenders continue to have roles and responsibilities in their families while in prison settings. Specific interventions targeting the development of parenting skills and strengthening family ties provide closer relationships among offenders and their families.

### *Prison and Transformation*

Hughes (2009) found prison could serve a potentially transformative role. Through educational experiences, offenders create a new positive “student” identity and begin to reassess their personal attributes. As offenders engage with educational rehabilitation programs they begin to change their sense of self through an increased confidence in their mental and personal abilities.

Further, offenders engaging in educational rehabilitation programs see a positive impact on other areas of their prison life. These programs help offenders reconnect with

positive identities they had prior to incarceration. However, the role of others in the process of self-identification is important for this growth (Hughes, 2009).

External forces and individuals can either reinforce or undermine the changing identities of offenders. Positive external reinforcement helps to develop a pro-social identity surrounding the educational rehabilitation experience. Hughes (2009) further indicated education is a sign that change has taken place in an offender.

Often rehabilitative education programs in prisons develop and reinforce an identity that is positive and does not revolve around a “prisoner” or criminal identity. These programs create an environment for sustained commitment to identity development.

Correctional officers can play a role in the offender pursuit of transformation. Der Pan, Deng, Hua Chang, and Jiang (2011) found almost all offenders within the correctional facility in the study had suffered from a “transitional life event.” Correctional officers in the study asserted that if someone is concerned and treats offenders well, prison could be a time for offenders to change. Often, offenders are alienated from personal relations while in prison.

Educational rehabilitation programs can be a positive influence for change because offenders are isolated from the “complicated relations” with people outside of the facility. Correctional officers in this study believed prison rehabilitation provides a chance to help offenders make appropriate changes (Der Pan, Deng, Hua Chang, & Jiang, 2011). Particularly important to guide change is empathetic understanding among facilitators of prison education programs.

One particular rehabilitation program that has had some success in shifting perceptions and pre-existing frameworks is the Alternatives to Violence Program. Novek (2011) documented the Alternatives to Violence Program (AVP) and the impact it had on transforming the lives of the participants. The philosophy of the program was transforming notions of power. This power becomes a shift in the attitude of mind in which the offender begins to value and identify with all of humanity. Experiential methodology provided a framework for offender participants to practice solving problems and confrontations.

These workshops provided a tangible encounter with possible lived experiences. Through the workshops, offenders practiced trust and cooperation. However, these offenders often come into the experience without the skills to engage in a peaceful dialogue or discourse (Novek, 2011). Correctional rehabilitation programs have often been targeted specifically to women in prison settings. These programs have an impact on both the women offenders and their children visitors.

#### *Women and Correctional Rehabilitation Programs*

Hoffmann, Byrd, and Kightlinger (2010) in a national study of prison parenting programs, found women's facilities are more likely than male and co-gender facilities to offer supervised play activities for children. The facilities with policies that are more amenable to family and youth visitation include: sending policies of the facility and dress code to families, distributing policies to the offenders, and providing policies to potential visitors when they complete a visitation application.

Several respondents indicated they were motivated by internal reasons to develop programs for offenders and their children. These reasons included improving/maintaining

family relationships during incarceration, reducing recidivism, facilitating reentry transition for offenders, and breaking the cycle of crime (Hoffman, Byrd, & Kightlinger, 2010). The impact of parenting programs can be beneficial for offenders, but also help develop relationships between offenders and their children.

Dinkmeyer and McKay (1982) found offenders in parenting programs have experienced improved bonding with their child, increased knowledge of child development, development of strategies for managing behavior, and the appropriate use of discipline. Further, some parent participants had a lower recidivism rate. Programs for parents exist within male and female facilities.

Glaze and Maruschak (2008) found parenting programs occurred more frequently in women's facilities for various reasons. The authors found women are more likely than men to be the primary caregiver prior to prison. Alternatively, women are more likely to have weekly contact with their children through mail and phone calls. However, as a result of the distance and cost, isolation continues among offenders and their families as face-to-face interactions decrease over time (Hoffman, Byrd, & Kightlinger, 2010).

Thompson and Harm (2000) found as a result of parenting programs, 75% of women increasingly viewed themselves positively as persons and 85% felt a more positive impact as parents. The significant improvement in self-esteem was related to the positive visits between the women and their children. Women offenders became more empathetic for the needs of their children. Further, attitudes were shifted in their approval for hitting, spanking, and slapping children. As a result of the parenting programs, female offenders developed more nurturing attitudes.

Other attitude shifts occurred in a decrease among women to seek fulfillment of their needs from their children. As a result of the program, the offender women indicated a desire for receiving future parenting help and experienced an improved relationship with their children. Further, a shift in the increase in voluntary contact and improved quality among the youth and their mothers increased in terms of phone calls and letters as a result of the parenting program (Thompson & Harm, 2000).

Loper, Carlson, Levitt, and Scheffel (2009) found among mothers and their children, the higher levels of contact through letter writing reduced parenting stress. When women experienced a high level of stress from broken bonds with their children, they were more aggressive or exhibited depressive symptoms. While in prison, female offenders have a desire to maintain a relationship with their children (Bruns, 2006). The venue for maintaining these bonds are through parenting education courses and extended visits with their children.

Poehlmann, Dallaire, Loper, and Shear (2010) found offenders who have lost contact with their children experience parental identity confusion. However, when offenders do have contact with their children, the visits might also create emotional problems. Casey-Acevedo, Bakken, and Karle (2004) found when mothers had visits from their children they were more likely to manifest violent behaviors leading to major disciplinary actions. The authors suggested the visits lead to anger and upset feelings among mothers due to lack of control.

Offender parents engage in an adjustment period from the loss and separation with their youth. Rehabilitation programs can empathize with children and caregivers, help develop a child-centric framework, and create strategies for alternative contact

between offenders and their youth. Poehlmann, Dallaire, Loper, and Shear (2010) suggested incarcerated parents learn healthy possibilities for interacting with their children, productively prepare for the interactive visits, and provide a space to deal with painful feelings so offenders can focus on the needs of their children.

Women in prison have a specific way of constructing and experiencing motherhood. Sharnai and Kochal (2008) found five main themes for the experience of offender mothers: motherhood in prison as a motive for survival, the sense of failure experienced by mothers in prison, coping versus avoidance in the mother-child relationship during imprisonment, motherhood in prison as a motive for change, and the transition from questioning the right to be a mother to redeeming motherhood. The authors found prison changes mothers and focused on the specific aspects of prisons that shifted this perception of self.

The prison experience can be detrimental for the relationship between mothers and their children; however, this study found the experience contributed to an improvement in maternal function (Sharnai and Kochal, 2008). The experience of separation through imprisonment was found to shift motherhood. Devlin, Turney, Straw, and Tumin (1999) asserted that a framework shift among mothers in prisons occurred due to a specific experience that created a turning point in the offender's life, the fear of the loss of a family member, and a special relationship with a titled or significant person in the prison.

Martin (1997), however, found that a shift occurs for women and their perception of their motherhood because it played an essential role in their daily routine prior to incarceration. Further, while prison tends to be a place where offenders have lost control,

mothers can maintain command over their relationship with their children. Enos (2001) noted when women who admit their motherhood in prison receive particular privileges from the role.

Prison does fulfill particular basic needs among the offenders who reside within the context. Thus, mothers may feel an element of safety and structure that their otherwise ambiguous lives omit (Sharmai & Kochal, 2008). Finally, these authors indicated prison parenting programs help offenders develop and improve their sense of motherhood. These programs helped the mothers experience growth and a “mental reorganization” that helped to redefine their tendencies, feelings, fears, and expectations. Thus, women began to observe and consider their personal perceptions of who they are in society as women and as mothers (Sharmai & Kochal, 2008). One such program for developing an understanding of parenting skills is the 4-H LIFE program.

#### *Background on the 4-H LIFE Program*

The 4-H Living Interactive Family Education (LIFE) Program is a correctional parenting program designed to facilitate the continuous interaction among offenders, their children, and the caregivers of the children (Arditti, Lambert-Schute, & Joest, 2003). The program included a three-pronged approach for developing the offender: parenting classes, leadership development, and family strengthening. The goal of the 4-H LIFE program was the development of a strong, healthy, and nurturing family environment within the context of the prison visitation setting.

Walsh (1998) and Lowenstein (1986) indicated individual and family resilience, support networks, and solidarity among family helped to serve as a protective factor for those who are incarcerated. Through three seminal experiences, offenders had an

opportunity to develop personal life skills that were translated to their families. Typically, offenders engaged in a bi-weekly parenting class that utilized the University of Missouri Extension's Building Strong Families curriculum. Through the intervening weeks, offenders engaged in leadership development and planning sessions for the family visit. The third cornerstone of the program was the monthly family visit.

Nickel, Garland, and Kane (2009) indicated correctional rehabilitation programs often do not provide opportunities for offenders to apply their learning. The 4-H LIFE program provided a context for offenders to safely practice their parenting and leadership skills through the family visits. Offenders were responsible for planning the activities, practicing parenting skills, facilitating activities in the meeting, and evaluating the success of the program after each family visit.

#### *Missouri Department of Corrections*

According to the Missouri State Audit report (2009), the Missouri Division of Corrections and the Board of Probation and Parole were transferred to the Department of Social Services in July 1974. However, in September 1981, the Missouri Department of Corrections and Human Resources became a cabinet-level department of state government. In August 1989, the department was renamed, the Department of Corrections.

George Lombardi was appointed by the governor as Director of the Department of Corrections on January 29, 2009 (Missouri State Auditor, 2009). The role and responsibility of the Department of Corrections is to supervise and manage all of the correctional facilities and the probation and parole departments throughout the state of Missouri. As of June 2008, the Department of Corrections employed approximately

10,900 employees in the following divisions: Human Services, Adult Institutions, Offender Rehabilitative Services, and Probation and Parole (Missouri State Auditor, 2009).

The Director shapes legislation and formulates policy and procedures for public safety. This office oversees the above four divisions and the following specialized areas: Legal Services, Public Information, Inspector General, Legislative and Constituent Services, Restorative Justice, and Victims' Services. Each of the divisions have statewide responsibilities.

The Human Services Division primarily coordinates human resources, staff training, employee health/safety, budget and research, fiscal management, general services, strategic planning, religious/spiritual programs, and volunteer services. There are 21 correctional centers within the State of Missouri. The Division of Adult Institutions manages these centers and the care, custody, and control of the incarcerated offenders (State of Missouri Auditor, 2009). As of June 2008, the prison population in the State of Missouri was approximately 30,500 inmates.

Within the state of Missouri Department of Corrections, the Division of Offender Rehabilitative Services develops and delivers interventions and services for offenders. These services include programs targeted to correct offender criminal behavior, increase productivity of offenders, and move them through the Department of Corrections processes and procedures. Within the state of Missouri, the following rehabilitation programs are available for offenders: education, workforce readiness, and substance abuse treatment services (State of Missouri Auditor, 2009).

The Missouri Vocational Enterprises (MVE) is responsible for workforce readiness programs for correctional facilities statewide. There were 27 industries, services, and agribusiness operations located in 15 correctional institutions as of 2009 (State of Missouri Auditor, 2009). Civilian department supervisors and administrative staff employ offender labor to produce and provide products and services to state agencies, political subdivisions, state employees, and not-for-profit organizations. The financial activity is subcontracted through the Working Capital Revolving Fund. Goods and services include the production of furniture, license plates, metal outdoor equipment, clothing, dry cleaning, and furniture restoration (State of Missouri Auditor, 2009).

#### *Literature Related to Design*

The Missouri Department of Corrections provided a context for this study. Correctional rehabilitation programs became the common phenomenon experienced by all study participants. This section will provide literature related to the evaluation of rehabilitation programs and phenomenological methodology.

#### *Evaluating Rehabilitation Programs*

While prison rehabilitation programs have shown positive benefits to offenders, there are often limitations in evaluating correctional programs. No specific protocol or program has been effectively shown to work in correctional facilities. Thus, offenders receive varying services and programs from complex interventions to simple activities, and it is difficult to assess which service enacted intended effects (Losel, 2001). Further, it is difficult to derive control groups for legal and therapeutic reasons; one cannot leave a group out of a service they need simply for research sake (Losel, 2001).

Dropout among offender participants is approximately one-quarter of participant population who leave voluntarily because they had other expectations, found treatment too strenuous, or no longer believed that participation would lead to early release or other advantages, lack of cooperation, violence, drug use, and other institutional misconduct (Losel, 2001). The efficacy of a program may depend heavily on the wider context and the community within which the treated offender lives. This includes the professional services of the facility, protective or risk factors in the social context of the client, and general features of the community in the facility (Losel, 2001).

Gendreau and Andrews (1996) developed implementation guidelines for corrections using the Correctional Program Assessment Inventory (CPAI). These authors suggested creating a standard for evaluation assessments. The assessment of how well various aspects of an offender treatment program (client risk assessment, treatment targets, etc.) correspond with known principles of effective programming for offenders (Gendreau & Goggin, 1997). These authors asserted appropriate rehabilitation programs included the following important defining characteristics.

Program implementation must include previous experience of program initiators and a community-needs assessment. Client pre-service assessment must understand the types of offenders and presenting problems for those accepted into program, including assessment of risk, need, and responsivity. Program characteristics should be responsive to the types of treatment and their delivery and quality of collateral program documentation. Staff must possess the characteristics of professional discipline, training, and experience. Finally, types of evaluation include quality assurance mechanisms,

program follow-ups, and process and outcome measures. However, ethical guidelines, funding and community support issues often drive correctional rehabilitation evaluation.

### *Phenomenology*

Phenomenology is used to study the patterns of developing meaning that people develop as they experience a specific phenomenon over time. The goal of this methodology is to understand a deeper experience, essence, or meaning for an individual related to a phenomenon (Moustakas, 1990). The researcher in this method is not fully objective or removed from assumptions of the study (Schreiber & Asner-Self, 2011).

Creswell (2007) indicated phenomenological studies describe the meaning individuals make from a set of shared lived experiences. The emphasis is upon the individual subjective experience to understand an event or experience from the perspective of the participant (Mertens, 2005). This subjective experience is the primary focus of the phenomenological study.

Phenomenology is rooted in the interpretive paradigm to gain an in-depth understanding and interpretation of a particular phenomenon (Parry, 2001). The phenomenon is the main interest for the researcher with a coupled understanding of the meaning of that phenomenon to an individual or groups of individuals. Luborsky and Lysack (2006) noted the intent of phenomenology is to capture the essence of the lived experience that is embedded in individual events with the purpose of communicating this to others.

These lived experiences are often implicit in the actions of participants, and the role of the researcher is to explain the meanings that participant actions are making as they interact with the phenomenon (van Manen, 1997). Colaizzi (1978) asserted that the

phenomenological approach relies upon dialogue to understand processes. The researcher becomes an active part of the research as the participant and researcher develop a trusting relationship. Moustakas (1990) developed the idea that the depictions of the phenomenon reside at the depths of a person's experience.

The primary purpose of the phenomenological study is to understand how individuals create and understand their own life spaces (Moustakas, 1990). The researcher discovers the meaning of the world as experienced by the individual. Sharing a set of experiences helps to understand and embed these conscious experiences into an essence.

Reinharz (1992) emphasized the importance of utilizing the human narrative or storytelling to explain meaning making for the human condition. Moustakas (1994) asserted transcendental phenomenology is a process of identifying a specific phenomenon experienced by several individuals and combining statements into themes. Through prolonged engagement with the participants, phenomenologists develop patterns and relationships of meanings bracketed by the experiences of the researcher. Creswell (2009) noted an analysis of significant statements, generation of meaning units, and the development of essence description comprise the data of phenomenological research.

#### *Data Analysis Using Phenomenology*

Moustakas (1990) developed the steps in phenomenological inquiry. The first step is the "epoch" in which the researcher refrains from judging as they bracket their perception of the phenomenon. A reflection and analysis of the understanding of the researcher has an impact and influence on the data collection and analysis.

Wolcott (1994) suggested writing field notes or an accurate record of events and perceptions about the events can lessen the impact the researcher has on the data. The researcher could potentially selectively reconstruct the data instead of providing an accurate portrayal of the essence of the phenomenon from the participant perspective. Another requirement of data validity is the selection of appropriate research participants.

Participants should be selected in a qualitative study for the following three criteria: using their knowledge of the phenomenon of interest, possessing differing backgrounds and perspectives, and willingness to participate (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). Patton (1990) added participants should be selected purposefully to include diverse voices racially and ethnically and with varying familial backgrounds. Further, the number of participants selected for phenomenological research can vary from 5 to 25 with a purposeful number that would become a minimum sample retained through the entire study (Polkinghorne, 1989).

Kupers (2008) criticized phenomenological methodology for disengaging the subject or participant from the particular nature of their experience with the phenomenon. Husserl (1970), however, indicated all individuals involved in their lives embody their experience. Participants can never experience an event independent of their lived experiences.

Human behavior must be understood within the context of a relationship to things, people, events, and situations or embodiment (Merleau-Ponty, 1989). Perception includes the thoughts, mind, and body to generate individual experience. For women who are incarcerated, an understanding of spatial, corporeal, temporal, and relational contexts must be considered (Munhall, 2007). Spatial phenomenon include exploring the

environment and that relationship to lived experience. Corporeal phenomenon meant experiencing the phenomenon through one's body. Temporal understandings are related to time. Finally, relational contexts surround the connection of self to others and the world.

### *Limitations of Phenomenology*

The art of the phenomenological research method lies within the process of capturing the experience of the research participant. Dukes (1984) noted the logic behind human experience is a structural property of that experience. The task of the researcher is to understand rather than explain the phenomenon. Common experiences of humans tend to have a structural pattern of similarity, such as the experience of those who experience jealousy or the loss of a loved one (Dukes, 1984). Further, this research indicated the process of bracketing allows the researcher to set aside any attempt to ascertain what caused a phenomenon, but to actually understand the process or experience of the phenomenon.

One limitation of phenomenological research is that to truly understand the experience of an individual within a particular set of occurrences one must spend an extensive and prolonged period of time with the subject. Dukes (1984) suggested a few alternatives such as conducting open-ended interviews with each subject over a period of time to capture the various phases of the experience.

Spradley (1979) utilized a participant observation technique that allowed the researcher to be with the participants as they experienced a particular phenomenon. As the researcher engages with the subject and the resulting data specific themes emerge that frame the experience (Creswell, 2009).

Researcher bias is also a potential limitation when engaging in phenomenological methods. Spradley (1979) suggested the researcher think of the participant group as an “alien culture” to help disqualify all that is “known” about the experiences of the group. Then, utilizing semantic analysis, patterns can be found in the language and actions of the group relevant to the experience (Dukes, 1984).

Member checking provides an important method for ensuring researcher bias does not disqualify the data (Creswell, 2007). A second set of eyes can help verify if there is a pattern in the data removed from the desired pattern sought by the researcher (Dukes, 1984). This author also suggested utilizing the “eureka factor” during which the outside reader spontaneously finds the pattern in the experiences of the respondents. Automatic identification with the pattern would indicate the researcher has achieved the task of explaining the logic in the experiences.

Dukes (1984) further noted two important limitations of phenomenological research: there is not a clear cut method or recipe for doing the research, and there is no capability to indicate causation in phenomenological research. This author indicated researchers must be flexible in their process for undertaking phenomenology and continue to find ways to check their data among their participants and other member checks. Further, because factual statements are bracketed, the study cannot indicate any relationship between phenomena, simply indicate the logic and patterns found within experiences.

The hope for the phenomenological researcher is that through the process of finding patterns in the data, an understanding of common human experiences can emerge (Creswell, 2009). Further studies can provide empirical explanation based upon a

common understanding of a phenomenon. This study utilized the common experience of correctional rehabilitation programs for women to understand the potential for transformative learning.

### Summary

Transformative learning is known to occur through several internal mental processes. Typically these mental processes are shaped and driven through interaction with context or external environment. Offenders in correctional facilities are confronted with a particularly stressful environmental shift upon arrival into prison.

Once incarcerated, offenders are often provided the opportunity to engage in correctional rehabilitation opportunities. These opportunities have increased in recent years and have become more responsive to the needs of families. Rehabilitation programs that hold the express purpose of developing parenting skills have particularly targeted women offenders.

The 4-H Living Interactive Family Education (LIFE) program is no exception. Through a holistic approach, offenders have the opportunity to both learn and develop skill sets and manifest or practice these processes. Parenting and leadership classes focus on the development of skills that offenders utilize with their families. Unlike many prison programs, 4-H LIFE provides a positive environment for practicing the learned behaviors. This is a particular shared phenomenon among women offenders in two correctional facilities in the state of Missouri.

The two women's facilities in the state of Missouri, Chillicothe Correctional Center (CCC) and Women's Eastern Reception and Diagnostic Correctional Center (WERDCC), house women offenders who have been classified as level 1 minimum to

level 2 maximum security offenders. However, WERDCC houses level 3 to level 5 maximum-security female offenders. This facility has a larger bed capacity and greater budget for the facility than the Chillicothe Correctional Center. Each facility provides basic needs to women offenders, as well as correctional rehabilitation programs.

Phenomenology provided a particular lens to analyze the experience of offenders in the context of the 4-H LIFE program. The ability of the researcher to find patterns and trends in the experiences of a group of people, allowed a common understanding of the program to emerge.

Chapter Three provides a background for the specific population of offenders from the Chillicothe Correctional Center (CCC) and the Women's Eastern Reception, Diagnostic & Corrections Center (WERDCC) in Vandalia, Missouri. The sampling procedures are addressed. Further a discussion of the data collection, analysis, and instrumentation is provided for the reader.

## CHAPTER THREE

### RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The 4-H Living Interactive Family Education (LIFE) program was developed to address a correctional rehabilitation need of parenting and leadership skills. One major difference between this program and other efforts in correctional facilities is the forum for application of the parenting and leadership skills in the 4-H family visit. While data have been collected on family relationships, communications, and life skills, the data have not been analyzed for the impact of the program on transformative learning.

This qualitative study utilized data collected over a two-year period at two correctional facilities with participation in the 4-H LIFE program. Data were analyzed using phenomenological research methods to understand the experience of offenders in the program as it relates to the transformative learning theory (Mezirow, 1991). Textural and structural analysis was employed in this study to understand the essence of the experience of offenders (Moustakas, 1994).

#### Research Problem

Incarceration provides a particularly intense environment within which learning can occur. As a result, rehabilitative programs have been established with the specific purpose of engaging in reconstructing families through parenting classes and maintaining positive relationships among offenders and their families outside of the facility (Cecil et al, 2008). The 4-H Living Interactive Family Education (LIFE) Program strengthened families of incarcerated individuals through holistic intervention for offenders, children ages 5 to 18, and their caregivers.

The program provided structure for offenders to become positive role models and mentors for their target child (ages 5 to 18) through parenting skills classes, planning/leadership meetings, and 4-H Family/Club meetings. Unlike other rehabilitation programs, the 4-H Living Interactive Family Education (LIFE) Program addressed systemic losses through a holistic approach (Cecil et al., 2008; Nickel et al., 2009). This program provided offenders with direct or concrete experiences through parenting and planning classes. Offenders then had the opportunity to operationalize these experiences in the 4-H Family Club meetings.

Engagement with external parenting programs helps mothers reframe or regain their identity and role within a prison environment (Thompson & Harm, 2000). Prison breaks the daily or routine contact between mothers and their children which can cause women to shift their understanding of their purpose in the world. Glaze & Maruschak (2008) indicated parenting programs are more often found in women's facilities, which helps sustain and maintain these bonds.

The 4-H LIFE program provided a context for strengthening pre-existing family bonds among incarcerated parents or grandparents, the child, and the child's caregiver. The goals of the program were to develop offender parenting skills, encourage and promote planning and leadership skills of the offenders through planning family visits, and provide an environment for positive family interactions through a family visit.

Qualitative and quantitative data have been collected to determine the positive impact of the program on the development of parenting skills and the impact on youth and caregivers (Arditti, Lambert-Schute, & Joest, 2003). Previous studies on the 4-H LIFE program have examined offender perceptions of visiting room problems among

offenders and family members. Further, visiting quality and visiting frequency among incarcerated individuals and their family members have been studied. Other measures have considered offender closeness with their child and childrearing stress. Researchers have examined parenting self-efficacy, co-parenting cooperation, and offender depression among 4-H LIFE and non-program participants (Arditti, Lambert-Schute, & Joest, 2003).

However, there has not been any description of the experience of the learning process shifts or the meaning made for offenders as a result of experiencing the 4-H Living Interactive Family Education (LIFE) program. Through an examination of offender experience in the 4-H LIFE program, an understanding of patterns related to Mezirow's ten precursor steps to transformative learning was observed.

#### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe the precursor experiences to transformative learning described by Brock (2010), for offenders in the 4-H Living Interactive Family Education (LIFE) Program in two female correctional facilities in the state of Missouri. At this stage in the research, the learning process was generally understood through a lens of transformative learning. Specifically, the study described the meaning offenders make of their learning experiences within the context of the ten precursor steps for transformative learning (Brock, 2010).

#### Research Questions

Within the context of this phenomenological study the following research questions were addressed:

1. What responses indicate women offenders in the Women's Eastern Reception and Diagnostic Correctional Center (WERDCC) and Chillicothe Correctional Center in the

4-H LIFE program experienced one of the ten precursor steps for transformative learning?

2. How have perceptions of offender parenting shifted as a result of participation in the 4-H LIFE program?
3. What are the experiences of offenders during traditional visits with their family?
4. What are the experiences of offenders during 4-H LIFE visits with their family?

### Design of the Study

The approach of this study was to describe the transformative learning experience of participants in the 4-H LIFE program in Missouri. This qualitative study utilized a phenomenological design aimed at describing the statements, themes, and contexts that indicate transformative learning experiences. Analysis of in-depth experiences of 28 female offenders in the 4-H LIFE family study program in the state of Missouri highlighted the learning process developed through the program.

Phenomenology is used to study the patterns people develop to frame their understanding as they experience a specific phenomenon over time. The goal of this methodology is to understand a deeper experience, essence or meaning for an individual related to a phenomenon. The researcher in this method is not fully objective or removed from assumptions of the study (Schreiber & Asner-Self, 2011).

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#### *Population and Sample*

Participants were involved with the 4-H LIFE program from 2008-2010 at the only two female correctional centers in Missouri, Chillicothe Correctional Center and the Women's Eastern, Reception, Diagnostic and Correctional Center in Vandalia. The two correctional centers examined in this study were the only two female facilities in the State of Missouri. The Chillicothe Correctional Center is located in the northwestern region of Missouri. The Women's Eastern Reception and Diagnostic Correctional Center is located in the northeastern region of Missouri. These facilities both house women offenders who are level 1 minimum to level 2 maximum-security offenders. Additionally, WERDCC houses women who are level 3 to level 5 maximum-security offenders.

#### *Chillicothe Correctional Center*

The Chillicothe Correctional Center (CCC) is housed in Chillicothe, Missouri. The first correctional center in Chillicothe was constructed in 1887 as a juvenile facility

for females and was known as the State Industrial Home for Girls. The original site of the State Industrial Home for Girls is on the National Register of Historic Places (National Register of Historic Places, 2011).

In 1981, the General Assembly established the Chillicothe Correctional Center, and adult females first arrived later that year. This facility was transferred from the Department of Social Services, Division of Youth Services (Missouri State Auditor, 2009). Officials and residents of Chillicothe began to value this facility as an important employer for local residents. Further, the correctional center became a replacement economy for the ailing agricultural economy and a population boost (Danner, 2008).

The local community became actively engaged in the correctional facility. Churches and volunteer organizations provide counseling, teaching, and social outreach to offenders at the correctional center. In 2004, the Chillicothe Correctional Center nearly closed the doors due to state budgets and the expense of necessary repairs to the facility. This closure would have eliminated 200 workers. However, the mayor of the small community and local leaders convened to save the facility with the assistance of a lobbyist (Danner, 2008).

The community approved a one-half cent extension of the capital improvement sales tax to fund a new prison site at an alternative location. The city proposed a land-swap with the state to donate a place for the new prison in exchange for the old location. Due to the efforts of this community group, in 2006 the governor provided support for a new prison. The new Chillicothe Correctional Center facility opened in 2008 and added 250 new employees to double the payroll and insert \$10 million into the local economy (Danner, 2008).

The Chillicothe Correctional Center is built to house 1,636 offenders and is one of only two women's correctional centers in the state of Missouri. On Friday, December 5, 2008, the Department of Corrections moved 481 female offenders from the old Chillicothe Correctional Center (CCC) to the new facility. According to Director of the Missouri Department of Corrections, George Lombardi (2008), the facility houses a segment of the state's female offender population. This facility also provides substance abuse treatment, academic education, and re-entry services.

According to the Missouri 4-H LIFE website (2011), Chillicothe Correctional Center (CCC) is located in Livingston County, Missouri, and is a level 1 minimum to level 2 maximum security correctional center. The 4-H LIFE program started at this facility in August 2009 as a part of the program expansion plan with National Children, Youth and Families at Risk (CYFAR) Sustainable Communities Project funding. A paid 4-H youth program associate works with the correctional center to plan, implement, and evaluate the program.

*Women's Eastern Reception, Diagnostic & Corrections Center (WERDCC)*

The Women's Eastern Reception, Diagnostic & Corrections Center (WERDCC) is located in Vandalia, Missouri. The first offenders were assigned to this correctional facility in January 1998. According to the Missouri Department of Corrections (2011), the facility houses 2,076 minimum- to maximum-security female inmates and certified juvenile offenders. The center is both an intake facility for female offenders entering the system and houses permanent incarcerated individuals.

The center is the only reception and diagnostic center for women in the state of Missouri. The process for admission into this facility includes any new offenders or

offenders who have had their probation or parole revoked. These women must pass through the reception and orientation unit housing up to 200 offenders. WERDCC also maintains four general-population housing units, an administrative and disciplinary segregation unit, a substance abuse treatment center, a mental health treatment unit, and a juvenile unit for under-age females who have been adjudicated as an adult (Missouri State Auditor, 2003).

The correctional center in Vandalia, Missouri, is located in Audrain County. This facility is a level 1 minimum to level 5 maximum-security facility for women. The 4-H LIFE program began in January 2007 at the Women's Eastern Reception, Diagnostic & Corrections Center (WERDCC) with funding from the National Children, Youth and Families at Risk (CYFAR) Sustainable Communities Project. This program was also part of an expansion plan for the program. Volunteers in corrections (VIC) currently direct the 4-H LIFE program at this facility. These individuals work with offenders in the facility to plan, implement, and evaluate the program (Missouri 4-H LIFE, 2011).

The physical structure of the facility includes an administrative building with the business office, central custody offices, armory, employee exercise room, records department, visiting area, medical facilities, and a 20-bed nurse facility. Offenders are received and oriented in this building. The central services building houses dining rooms, food storage, and a kitchen (Missouri State Auditor, 2003). According to the Missouri State Audit report (2003), over 1.5 million meals were prepared in fiscal year 2002. Offender services housed in this building are the inmate canteen, laundry, educational classrooms, offender library, chapel, clothing issue, clothing factory, vocational classrooms, maintenance department, warehousing, and the offender gymnasium.

Recreation areas, a ball field, two-lane track, and a greenhouse are housed on the outside of the facilities (Missouri State Auditor, 2003).

WERDCC is enclosed by a 12-foot high arched fence system with an electronic motion detection system and an additional microwave motion detection system in certain areas. The correctional facility lies on 117 acres with 47 acres inside of the fencing system. A private road surrounds the facility with two vehicular patrols adding security (Missouri State Auditor, 2003).

According to the Missouri State Audit report (2003), two main services are provided offenders through a substance abuse treatment facility and an academic education program. These services are provided in addition to the basic needs services provided to all women offenders in the facility listed above. Additional services to offenders are unique to the WERDCC facility.

The substance abuse treatment services maintain an 84-day short-term treatment program, a 120-day treatment program, and a long-term treatment program that lasts 2 years in length. A substance abuse assessment and education program is also provided for general population offenders. According to the Missouri State Audit report (2003), the substance abuse treatment services are contracted through the Gateway Foundation. A maximum of 240 offenders can participate in the substance abuse treatment, while 30 offenders are in the assessment and education programs. During 2001, 636 offenders were successfully discharged from this treatment program (Missouri State Audit, 2003).

Two agencies coordinate the academic education program at the Department of Corrections, Division of Offender Rehabilitation education program, and the adult basic education program of the Van-Far School District provide classes for offenders at

WERDCC. The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education provides funding for the Van-Far operated program. According to the Missouri State Audit report (2003), 529 offenders were participating in academic education as of March 1, 2002. Many offenders complete the program; during 2001, 131 offenders received their GED.

Women offenders at WERDCC are employed through the Missouri Vocational Enterprise (MVE). At this correctional facility, the MVE houses a clothing factory. This factory produces inmate clothing, sheets, and towels used by the Department of Corrections. In fiscal year 2002, the clothing factory employed 105 offenders with sales exceeding \$1.1 million (Missouri State Auditor, 2003).

In addition to maintaining employment, women offenders receive vocational education. The vocational education program is funded by the Working Capital Revolving Fund. WERDCC vocational education programs include cosmetology, building trades, industrial technology, sewing, and computer repair (Missouri State Auditor, 2003).

The WERDCC provides a major source of employment for the Vandalia, Missouri, community and surrounding area. In June 2002, the correctional facility employed 452 workers in administrative, service, academic and vocational education, and security. The Missouri Vocational Education program had four civilian employees in the clothing factory. The facility subcontracts with Correctional Medical Services who employed 56 workers. The substance abuse treatment contractor Gateway Foundation employed 21 workers. Finally, the adult basic education program contractor Van-Far School District employed eight full time and 55 part time workers.

The structure of the WERDCC includes a superintendent who oversees the overall facility functioning. The Associate Superintendent of Operations and the Associate Superintendent of Inmate Management oversee their respective departments. The superintendent directly manages the following departments: business officer, personnel, policy and procedure, and treatment. The Associate Superintendent of Operations oversees the following departments: inmate activities coordinator, chaplain, recreation, food service, maintenance, mail room, fire and safety, and laundry. The Associate Superintendent of Inmate Management oversees the following departments: training, inmate grievance, library, custody, records, and reception and diagnostic (Missouri State Auditor, 2003).

#### *Sampling Procedures*

The critical cases in the research were two women's state prisons in Missouri. The Women's Eastern Reception, Diagnostic, and Correctional Center (WERDCC) was an all level security prison (minimum, C1, to maximum, C5 security levels) located in Vandalia, Missouri. The WERDCC, which houses 2,076 female inmates, also serves as the intake center for females entering the state prison system. The second data collection site was another C1 to C2 female facility, the Chillicothe Correctional Center, which has a capacity for 1,636 offenders, located in Chillicothe, Missouri.

Criterion for inclusion in the archival data was: a) the female offender had a biological, step, adoptive child or grandchild under the age of 18 they define as "having in person visits with;" b) the offender received at least 3 visits in the 12 months prior to the study start; c) the offender had a release date at least two years away.

Currently assessment data have been collected from 14 female participants in the 4 H LIFE enhanced visitation and 14 female nonparticipants from the WERDCC and CCC. Program participants are on average 42 years old, with 50% 35 years or younger. Most participants were White (71%) and 29% were African-American. Of the program participants, 7% have less than a high school education, 36% completed high school or GED program, and 57% have completed at least some post-secondary education.

For the program/intervention group, the DOC supplied program staff with a list of offenders who had received three or more visits from at least one of their children ages 5-18 in the preceding six months. Program participants who met eligibility were then chosen by the Project Field Coordinator (PFC) via convenience sampling and recruited to enroll in the 4-H LIFE program. Concerns about ensuring an adequate sample size was the basis for recruiting program participants in this manner. This list was then shared with the corrections staff who then reviewed, approved, and scheduled a time for the program offenders to meet with PFC. The PFC talked/met at scheduled times with each offender and used an IRB approved verbal and written consent process to recruit subjects into the study prior to interviewing.

Purposeful sampling involves planning and focused objectives whereby the logic and power of the approach “lie in selecting information-rich cases for study in depth” (Patton, 2002, p. 230). The use of information rich cases “yields insights and in-depth understanding rather than empirical generalizations” (Patton, p. 230). While not necessarily population based, purposeful studies are systematic, intentional, and yield findings that are credible and permit logical generalization to like cases (Patton, 2002). Worth noting is the fact that in a number of parental incarceration studies utilizing

purposeful sampling, participant characteristics were similar to those of state or national populations (Arditti et al., 2003).

This study employed a combination of criterion, emergent, and critical case purposeful sampling strategies aimed at optimizing sample size and achieving a deeper understanding of offender experience. It is not uncommon in extended fieldwork such as that undertaken in the proposed research, to utilize a combination of strategies (Patton, 2002). In an effort to select offenders who have all experienced a particular phenomenon, criterion sampling was undertaken.

First, the 4-H LIFE evaluation was initially designed utilizing a criterion sampling strategy which specifically involved “studying all cases that meet some predetermined criterion of importance” (Patton, p. 232). The researcher then utilized criterion sampling when selecting offenders for the research. The criteria for selection was offender status receiving visits at Missouri correctional facilities in which the 4-H LIFE program was being implemented. As the study progressed, the researcher found a site that was operating in Missouri that fit the criteria. A second site was added to the research study during August 2009. Patton specifies this as opportunistic or emergent sampling, a second purposeful strategy utilized in the study.

The two research sites were chosen due to their 4-H LIFE program participation and similar security classification. A critical case allows for transferability in that “if it happens there, it will happen anywhere” or “if it doesn’t happen there, it won’t happen anywhere” (Patton, p. 236). The population was selected due to their similarity in criterion, having the 4-H LIFE program implemented in their facilities. The second

facility emerged as having the similar criteria as the first facility. The two facilities taken together became the critical case for the study.

### *Data Collection*

The data were collected from offender participants in the 4-H LIFE program in the Chillicothe Correctional Center and the Women's Eastern, Reception, Diagnostic and Correctional Center in Vandalia from 2008-2010. The data included in-depth interviews (time one and time two) from 28 female participants, over 100 participant reflection sheets from the family visits, and three annual focus group interviews from 9 program staff. This data were collected through an IRB approved study begun in 2008 and was used in this study as archival data.

The following section includes the data collection procedures for the pre-existing or archival data and the human subjects considerations for this highly vulnerable prison population. Through an informed consent process, offenders provided this information to ensure confidentiality and participation in the interviews were completely voluntary. The researcher provided additional support to participants by providing the consent form with advanced time for them to digest the information.

### *Human Subjects Protection and Other Ethical Considerations*

The researcher utilized a C-IRB approved recruitment script which summarized the study, identified the risks, benefits, voluntary nature, and other required statements, identified the sampling methodology, and requested the offenders' participation (Appendix A). The offender had two opportunities to express interest or disinterest in the study. If the offender expressed interest in participating in the study, the researcher made a copy of the informed consent and would commence the interview.

A proposal was submitted to the IRB in the original study which allowed the consent form to suffice for appropriate interactions with human subjects. A proposal was also submitted to the Missouri Department of Corrections Research Division for approval to work with human subjects in the two correctional facilities.

A research transfer agreement was completed and submitted to the Department of Corrections Office of Research. This agreement included information about the primary data collection plan. The agreement followed the protocol for engaging in data collection with the Department of Corrections (Appendix E).

### *Instrumentation*

The current research study used a combination of archival data sources from offenders, volunteers, Department of Corrections staff, and University of Missouri Extension 4-H LIFE staff. The primary data collected during this study included a modified phone interview (from the archival interview script with DOC staff) including an open-ended questionnaire with eight Department of Corrections staff and eight Volunteers in Corrections from the Chillicothe Correctional Center and the Women's Eastern Reception and Diagnostic Correctional Center.

*Semi-structured interview.* The first archival data source was a semi-structured interview. Through a semi-structured interview process, offenders were administered the Family Assessment Questionnaire by researcher Tammy Gillespie. This questionnaire was adapted on September 30, 2010, from a pre-existing instrument utilized by J. Arditti. The Family Assessment Questionnaire (Appendix B) was implemented at both time one and time two (the wave spanned from September 2008-2010) for participants. This questionnaire included 53 closed-itemed questions including experiences about family

relationships, offender-family contact, and visitation. Demographic information included conduct violations, sentence length, and incarceration type (court commitment or parole violation). The qualitative portion of the Family Assessment Questionnaire provided further insight of the visitation process.

The original researcher read each question of the Family Assessment Questionnaire to each of the research participants in a semi-structured interview process. Thirteen female offenders from the Women's Eastern Reception and Diagnostic Correctional Center participated in the semi-structured interview process. Offenders participating in this program also had an opportunity to provide feedback on their experiences after each encounter with their family in the 4-H LIFE program.

*Offender reflection sheets.* The second archival data source utilized for this study was the offender reflection sheets. The offender reflection sheets were designed by program staff in the 4-H LIFE program (Appendix C). The purpose of the reflection sheets was to gain information using open-ended questions from the offender participants in the 4-H LIFE program about the family visits. Offenders who participated in the monthly family visit completed the written reflection sheets in a debriefing meeting that occurred after the 4-H LIFE family visit. This instrument has not been tested for reliability or validity.

Reflection sheets were collected monthly from the Chillicothe Correctional Center and the Women's Eastern Reception and Diagnostic Correctional Center from each program participant. The sheets were collected from WERDCC 2008-2011 and from CCC 2009-2011. The WERDCC 4-H LIFE program has an average of 25 offender participants and the CCC 4-H LIFE program has an average of 20 offender participants

who complete the offender reflection sheets after each monthly family visit. These sheets were distributed by local Volunteers in Corrections (VIC) or University of Missouri Extension 4-H LIFE staff. The reflection sheets were mailed to the State 4-H Office and were compiled by a staff member and coded for each facility removing any personal data.

*Focus group with staff.* The third archival data source was a focus group with program staff. A focus group was administered by the 4-H LIFE program leader to the staff of the program working in the female correctional facility. The participants in the focus groups were paid 4-H youth specialists and associates. These individuals had worked with the 4-H LIFE program throughout the state at various sites. The focus group script is found in Appendix D.

The focus group for the female correctional facilities was facilitated by an external moderator in August 2008. This group included the two University of Missouri Extension 4-H LIFE staff working with female correctional facilities in the state of Missouri. The focus group process lasted one hour and three minutes and took place at the State 4-H Office in Columbia, Missouri. The focus group was recorded and transcribed by a student in the State 4-H Office. Participants were given code names to ensure confidentiality of data.

*Phone interviews with DOC staff.* The fourth archival data source was a phone interview with Department of Corrections staff. A short 10-15 minute phone interview was undertaken with correctional personnel in the WERDCC facility regarding visitation benefits and inmate behavior. These phone interviews took place with ten participants including five correctional officers, three institutional activities coordinators, one associate warden, and the warden.

The open-ended survey, DOC Research Transfer Agreement, and consent forms were sent to staff via email. Staff were requested to read and sign consent forms and fax back to researcher Tammy Gillespie at the State 4-H Office. Interviews were scheduled via email with each of the Department of Corrections staff members. A follow-up thank you message was sent via email after the completion of the phone surveys. Tammy Gillespie, program director, called each staff member over the phone and administered the open ended survey (Appendix F), taking notes on their feedback. A student worker from the State 4-H Office transcribed the data from the phone surveys.

The current study used a modified open-ended phone survey (Appendix G) from the original archival data. The researcher retained questions relevant to the goal of the study to understand the transformative learning experience of women offenders in the 4-H LIFE program at Chillicothe Correctional Center and the Women's Eastern Reception and Diagnostic Correctional Center in Vandalia.

The phone interview occurred with eight Department of Corrections Staff and eight volunteers in corrections (four University of Missouri VICs and four internal volunteers). Four Department of Corrections staff were from WERDCC and four were from CCC. Four VICs were from WERDCC and four were from CCC.

#### *Data Collection Procedures*

The project represented a multiple cohort control group design with pretests and repeated measures for each cohort spanning four waves of data collection; time one represented assessment at the time of project enrollment and was ongoing at one site from September 2008-March 2010 and the second site from 2009-2010. The study utilized a longitudinal design and incorporated data collection for female inmates from two

corrections sites in two visitation conditions: enhanced (i.e., participating in the 4-H LIFE program) and traditional visitation (regular institutional visiting room rules apply).

Data collection for time one occurred at six to nine month intervals during confinement through ongoing enrollment for both the intervention and control groups at both sites. Several strategies were implemented to maintain response rate including direct contact with offenders and collaboration with corrections personnel to maintain access. The time one and time two in-person interviews took approximately 60-80 minutes. Short interviews with key corrections staff took approximately 15-25 minutes. 4-H LIFE program staff focus group meetings lasted approximately 90 minutes.

The following archival data sources were utilized: (a) in-depth qualitative interviews from offenders in the program, the control group, and key correctional staff, (b) offender reflection sheets based on monthly 4-H family visit experiences, (c) one annual program staff focus group, (d) open-ended phone interviews with ten Department of Corrections staff.

In this study, the primary data collection occurred through 16 20-minute phone interviews. Eight phone interviews were undertaken with individuals affiliated with the 4-H LIFE program at the WERDCC in Vandalia. Eight phone interviews took place with CCC 4-H LIFE staff. Half of these staff were employed with the Missouri Department of Corrections and were engaged with the program more than three times. The other staff were volunteers in corrections and University of Missouri Extension 4-H LIFE paid staff.

Each participant was emailed the open-ended survey questions, consent form, invitation email to participate, and Department of Corrections Research Transfer Agreement. The participants faxed back their intent to participate in the study to the

researcher. The researcher scheduled the phone interviews via email with each of the study participants. The phone interviews lasted an average of 20 minutes with each participant.

### *Data Analysis*

An analysis of this data helped to create a foundation for descriptions of the essence transformative learning through the 4-H LIFE program. Moustakas (1994) indicated phenomenological data analysis includes horizontalization or building on the research questions through highlighting significant statements or quotations that describe how the participants experienced transformative learning. The research questions helped to frame the experiences of offender transformative learning that were coded into various categories. The data themes were generated from the ten precursor steps for transformative learning (Brock, 2010).

After the significant statements were highlighted, clusters of meaning were developed into themes. The themes provided a description of what the participants experienced or the textural description and the context of how they experienced the phenomenon or the structural description. A final composite description presented the essential structure of the phenomenon of transformative learning in the context of the 4-H LIFE program.

The analysis of phenomenological research is typically performed in three phases. Initially, the researcher engaged in epoche, questioning his or her assumptions about the phenomenon. Next, was phenomenological reduction or bracketing which allowed the researcher to remove the phenomenon from the environment in which it occurred, take it apart, and analyze it in its purest form. Finally, the researcher engaged in structural

synthesis to understand the true essence of the experience for the participants (Schreiber & Asner-Self, 2011).

Moustakas (1994) indicated themes are collected into textural and structural descriptions of the experience. Textural descriptions provided a collection of what individuals experienced. Structural descriptions illuminated how participants experienced the phenomenon through conditions, situations, and context. The combination of these descriptions provided an essence of the experience.

Phenomenologists used open-ended questions to allow participants to choose the dimensions of the question they would like to answer. The dimensions participants choose reveal an aspect of the individuals' relevance structure. Another phase of analysis was a selection procedure based upon criteria of relevance of utterances and how those appear in context of the question. Then the body of quotes was taken together to understand the meaning embedded in the quotes at the level of the group. Utterances were then brought into categories that were differentiated based upon their differences. The meanings were developed in the process of bringing quotes together and comparing them (Marton, 1988).

This study utilized the seven-step outline of individual textural-structural descriptions to develop a composite description of the meanings and essences of the transformative learning experience of the offender group as a whole (Moustakas, 1994). First, the analysis included horizontalization or a listing and preliminary grouping of every expression relevant to the transformative learning experience. Second, reduction and elimination was performed to determine the inconsistencies in statements. This process was undertaken asking two questions: 1. Does it contain a moment of the

experience that was necessary and sufficient constituent for understanding? 2. Is it possible to abstract and label it? If the answer is yes to both they qualify as a horizon of the experience. Any expressions not meeting these criteria were eliminated.

Third, the analysis included clustering and thematizing the invariant constituents or meaning units of the experience. The items were clustered based upon their relationship into a thematic label. The labels were derived from the ten precursor steps to transformative learning (Brock, 2010). The clustered and labeled constituents were considered the core themes of the experience.

Fourth, a final identification of the invariant constituents and themes was performed by validation. The process included finding patterns and eliminating statements that did not follow the pattern. Fifth, the invariant constituents and their accompanying theme were checked against the complete record of the research participant to determine if they were expressed explicitly in the transcription, if they were compatible, or if they were not relevant to the participant's experience and should be deleted (Moustakas, 1994).

The sixth step included using the relevant validated invariant constituents and their accompanying themes an individual textural description was compiled of the experience using examples from the interview. The seventh and final step included an individual structural description was compiled based on the textural description and imaginative variation constructing a description of the structures of their experience (Moustakas, 1994). In phenomenological research, the researcher plays a critical role and must be considered from a positionality standpoint.

*Role of Researcher*

Researchers must bracket their understanding of the phenomenon of a study that can be especially difficult to derive researcher bias relative to true experiences of participants (Creswell, 2007). Moustakas (1994) indicated through the major processes of epoche, phenomenological reduction, imaginative variation, and synthesis of meanings and essences, the researcher is able to set aside their biases and derive knowledge from a state of pure consciousness. This author noted the researcher learns to see naively, to value conscious experience, to respect the evidence of one's senses, and to move toward intersubjective knowing of experiences.

Creswell (2007) further asserted that with phenomenological research bracketing of researcher biases and experiences must be done to indicate which part of the analysis comes from researcher perception relative to the experience of the participants. Thus, the bias of the researcher was considered in the analysis and data collection procedures of this study and bracketed out when appropriate.

The bias for the researcher in this study was that the researcher is the program director for a 4-H LIFE site at a male institution. This researcher has intimate knowledge of the process for creating, planning, and conducting the program. Further, the researcher believes the program has an impact on the participants, after engaging with the population on the programmatic level.

However, archival and primary data utilized in the current study did not include participants from the facility that the researcher currently engages in program administration. Further, the current study included only female offender experience and omits male offender experience in the attempt to avoid biases the researcher experiences within the male 4-H LIFE program. The bracketing process occurred to indicate

researcher perception of the experience of offenders (Moustakas, 1994). Important steps were taken to ensure trustworthiness of this study.

### *Trustworthiness*

The quality of this research was ensured through methods of credibility, confirmability, and transferability. Guba and Lincoln (1989) indicated credibility indicates the correspondence between the participant perception of social constructs and the way in which the researcher conveys the participant perception. Mertens (2005) noted confirmability ensures the data is real and can be tracked to a source. Further there is logic to the interpretation of the data ensures confirmability. Finally, Guba and Lincoln (1989) indicated transferability is the extent to which you can determine the similarity of the study site and the receiving context. This is typically done through thick description.

Strategies for addressing credibility of this phenomenological study included the use of triangulation, external checks, negative case analysis, and clarifying researcher bias (Creswell, 2007). The use of interview data and reflection sheets from the visits provided corroborating evidence for the appearance of transformative learning. Further, peer reviews with the 4-H program director and the 4-H LIFE program director asked hard questions about methods, meanings, and interpretations. The working hypothesis was refined until all cases fit late in the data analysis to ensure credibility. Finally, an understanding of the researcher position as a project leader at Jefferson City Correctional Center was addressed, potentially with this data not included to minimize bias.

Further, confirmability was achieved through the development of a codebook of codes derived for drawing out themes among the data for transformative learning in this

study. Also, having a peer reviewer inside and outside of the project helped to check that the themes were truly emerging consistently.

Finally, transferability was applicable to the extent that offenders experience the elements of the 4-H LIFE program consistently across all sites. The foundation of the 4-H LIFE program is a three-pronged approach of parenting, leadership, and application of skills in a family visit. Thus, the findings of transformative learning could be transferable to other 4-H LIFE programs incorporating this general structure. An extensive and careful description of time, place, context, and culture was undertaken to aid in the process of transferability.

### Summary

The selection of offenders to be interviewed in the 4-H LIFE program at Chillicothe and Vandalia was based upon their participation in prison visits with approved children ages 5-18. Reflection sheets were collected from all participants written from their experience with the monthly family visit during the two-year period. Taken together, these data sources were analyzed using a qualitative phenomenological research methodology to understand the experiences as described by participants in the program.

The data were coded based upon the transformative learning experiences of offenders. The role of the researcher was acknowledged through a bracketing process. Steps were taken to ensure credibility, confirmability, and transferability. However, the study was limited in that the phenomenon experienced might have slight variations based upon the experiences women and in different correctional facilities.

The first section included the purpose and research questions for this study to help provide background for the research problem. The research problem included background regarding correctional rehabilitation generally and the specific 4-H LIFE program. Detailed information about the research design and rationale followed to create a framework for the study. Following these sections was information about participants, research design, and research analysis. Finally, the role of the researcher and anticipated study limitations was addressed. The purpose of this study was to describe the experiences of offenders in the 4-H LIFE program as they related to transformative learning.

Chapter Four describes the results of the phenomenological study on transformative learning in the 4-H LIFE program. Chapter Five provides a discussion of the findings with an additional section on directions for future research.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

#### *Introduction*

The 4-H Living Interactive Family Education (LIFE) program was developed to address a correctional rehabilitation need of parenting and leadership skills. One major difference between this program and other efforts in correctional facilities is the forum for application of the parenting and leadership skills in the 4-H family visit. While data have been collected on family relationships, communications, and life skills, the data have not been analyzed for the impact of the program on transformative learning.

This qualitative study utilized data collected over a two-year period at two correctional facilities with participation in the 4-H LIFE program. Data were analyzed using phenomenological research methods to understand the experience of offenders in the program as it relates to the transformative learning theory (Mezirow, 1991). Textural and structural analysis was employed in this study to understand the essence of the experience of offenders (Moustakas, 1994).

The research design and methodology utilized to answer the research questions was presented in Chapter Three. The research purpose of this study was to understand the experience of offenders and their transformative learning process as it relates to shifts in their understanding of parental roles. The literature illustrated the importance of therapeutic prison programs (van Wormer, 2010).

While there is a positive influence on children, incarcerated parents are often impacted and transformed by their participation in prison rehabilitation programs (van Wormer, 2010). The 4-H Living Interactive Family Education (LIFE) program allowed

the offenders to re-establish connections with their family members through in-person intensive visits (Arditti, Lambert-Shute, & Joest, 2003). The data collection and analysis were driven by the following research questions:

1. What responses indicate women offenders in the Women's Eastern Reception and Diagnostic Correctional Center (WERDCC) and Chillicothe Correctional Center in the 4-H LIFE program experienced one of the ten precursor steps for transformative learning?
2. How have perceptions of offender parenting shifted as a result of participation in the 4-H LIFE program?
3. What are the experiences of offenders during traditional visits with their family?
4. What are the experiences of offenders during 4-H LIFE visits with their family?

This chapter presents the findings of the data collected from primary and secondary interviews with Volunteers in Corrections, Department of Corrections Employees, 4-H Program Staff, and Offender Reflection Sheets. The study was a phenomenological qualitative design utilizing convenience sampling methods.

#### *Data Sources*

The current research study used a combination of archival data sources (see Figure 1) from offenders, volunteers, Department of Corrections staff, and University of Missouri Extension 4-H LIFE staff. The primary data collected during this study included a modified phone interview (from the archival interview script with DOC staff) including an open-ended questionnaire with eight Department of Corrections staff and eight Volunteers in Corrections from the Chillicothe Correctional Center and the Women's Eastern Reception and Diagnostic Correctional Center.

<b>Participants</b>	Written Reflection	Face to Face:	Phone Interview
Offenders	X	Semi-Structured Interview	
DOC Staff			X
Volunteers			X
4-H Staff		Focus Group	X

*Figure 1.* Participant and data collection method

*Semi-structured interview.* The first archival data source was a semi-structured interview. Through a semi-structured interview process, offenders were administered the Family Assessment Questionnaire by researcher Tammy Gillespie. This questionnaire was adapted on September 30, 2010, from a pre-existing instrument utilized by J. Arditti. The Family Assessment Questionnaire (Appendix B) was implemented at both time one and time two (the wave spanned from September 2008-2010) for participants. This questionnaire included 53 closed-itemed questions including experiences about family relationships, offender-family contact, and visitation. Demographic information included conduct violations, sentence length, and incarceration type (court commitment or parole violation). The qualitative portion of the Family Assessment Questionnaire provided further insight of the visitation process.

The original researcher read each question of the Family Assessment Questionnaire to each of the research participants in a semi-structured interview process. Thirteen female offenders from the Women’s Eastern Reception and Diagnostic Correctional Center participated in the semi-structured interview process. Offenders participating in this program also had an opportunity to provide feedback on their experiences after each encounter with their family in the 4-H LIFE program.

*Offender reflection sheets.* The second archival data source utilized for this study was the offender reflection sheets. The offender reflection sheets were designed by program staff in the 4-H LIFE program (Appendix C). The purpose of the reflection sheets was to gain information using open-ended questions from the offender participants in the 4-H LIFE program about the family visits. Offenders who participated in the monthly family visit completed the written reflection sheets in a debriefing meeting that occurred after the 4-H LIFE family visit. This instrument has not been tested for reliability or validity.

Reflection sheets were collected monthly from the Chillicothe Correctional Center and the Women's Eastern Reception and Diagnostic Correctional Center from each program participant. The sheets were collected from WERDCC 2008-2011 and from CCC 2009-2011. The WERDCC 4-H LIFE program has an average of 25 offender participants and the CCC 4-H LIFE program has an average of 20 offender participants who complete the offender reflection sheets after each monthly family visit. These sheets were distributed by local Volunteers in Corrections (VIC) or University of Missouri Extension 4-H LIFE staff. The reflection sheets were mailed to the State 4-H Office and were compiled by a staff member and coded for each facility removing any personal data.

*Focus group with staff.* The third archival data source was a focus group with program staff. A focus group was administered by the 4-H LIFE program leader to the staff of the program working in the female correctional facility. The participants in the focus groups were paid 4-H youth specialists and associates. These individuals had worked with the 4-H LIFE program throughout the state at various sites. The focus group script is found in Appendix D.

The focus group for the female correctional facilities was facilitated by an external moderator in August 2008. This group included the two University of Missouri Extension 4-H LIFE staff working with female correctional facilities in the state of Missouri. The focus group process lasted one hour and three minutes and took place at the State 4-H Office in Columbia, Missouri. The focus group was recorded and transcribed by a student in the State 4-H Office. Participants were given code names to ensure confidentiality of data.

*Phone interviews with DOC staff.* The fourth archival data source was a phone interview with Department of Corrections staff. A short 10-15 minute phone interview was undertaken with correctional personnel in the WERDCC facility regarding visitation benefits and inmate behavior. These phone interviews took place with ten participants including five correctional officers, three institutional activities coordinators, one associate warden, and the warden.

*Primary data.* The current study used a modified open-ended phone survey (Appendix G) from the original archival data. The researcher retained questions relevant to the goal of the study to understand the transformative learning experience of women offenders in the 4-H LIFE program at Chillicothe Correctional Center and the Women's Eastern Reception and Diagnostic Correctional Center in Vandalia.

The phone interview occurred with two Department of Corrections Staff and ten volunteers in corrections (five University of Missouri VICs and five internal volunteers). One Department of Corrections staff was from WERDCC and one was from CCC. Five VICs were from WERDCC and five were from CCC.

### *Demographics*

The populations sampled in this study, included offenders, Department of Corrections Staff members, Volunteers in Corrections, and 4-H Program Staff members. The primary data collection occurred with Department of Corrections staff, Volunteers in Corrections, and 4-H Program Staff. Secondary data collection was derived from all population groups listed above. The following sections provide further detail about each population group.

#### Offenders

Participants were involved with the 4-H LIFE program from 2008-2010 at the only two female correctional centers in Missouri, Chillicothe Correctional Center and the Women's Eastern, Reception, Diagnostic and Correctional Center in Vandalia. The two correctional centers examined in this study were the only two female facilities in the State of Missouri.

Currently assessment data have been collected from 14 female participants in the 4 H LIFE enhanced visitation and 14 female nonparticipants from the WERDCC and CCC. Program participants are on average 42 years old, with 50% 35 years or younger. Most participants were White (71%) and 29% were African-American. Of the program participants, 7% have less than a high school education, 36% completed high school or GED program, and 57% have completed at least some post-secondary education.

The data were collected from offender participants in the 4-H LIFE program in the Chillicothe Correctional Center and the Women's Eastern, Reception, Diagnostic and Correctional Center in Vandalia from 2008-2010. The data included in-depth interviews (time one and time two) from 28 female participants, over 100 participant reflection sheets from the family visits, and three annual focus group interviews from 9 program

staff. This data were collected through an IRB approved study begun in 2008 and was used in this study as archival data.

#### *Department of Corrections Staff*

The data in this section were derived from two interviews with the Department of Corrections Staff members. The first interviews were undertaken by Tammy Gillespie in 2009 via phone in 20 minute increments with staff members at WERDCC. These interviews were considered secondary data; there were eleven participants in this data collection. Eight of these participants were female, and three of the participants were male.

The second set of interviews were the primary data collected in February 2012; there were two participants in a series of phone interviews that lasted approximately 40 minutes in length. Both of these participants were higher-ranking females within the Department of Corrections at WERDCC and CCC.

#### *Volunteers in Corrections*

Volunteers in Corrections or VIC's are volunteers who undergo specific training with the Department of Corrections to work in facilities throughout Missouri engaging in educational programming. Five volunteers were interviewed in this study. Three volunteers were interviewed from CCC, two females and one male. Two volunteers were interviewed from WERDCC, both were females. Each interview was collected via the phone in approximately 20 minute segments.

#### *4-H Program Staff*

4-H Program Staff group were individuals employed by the University of Missouri Extension who worked directly with the program or supervised front-line

personnel involved in the correctional centers. The staff focus group was a secondary source collected by Tammy Gillespie with all staff members who worked with female correctional facilities in the state of Missouri in 2009. Five phone interviews were collected as a part of the primary data collection in this study occurring approximately 20 minutes in length. Two of participants were from CCC, both were male. Three of the interviewees were from WERDCC, all were female.

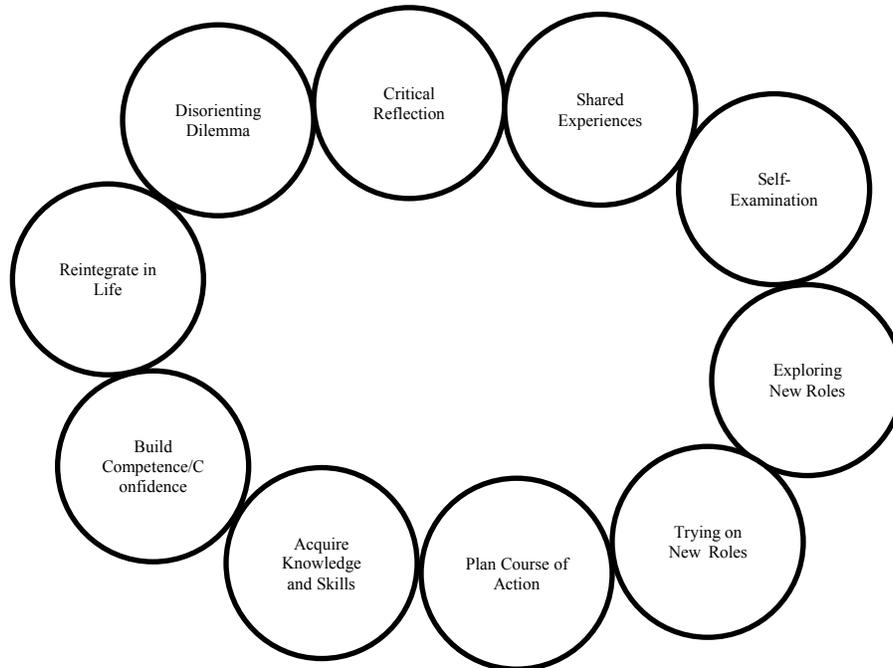
### *Data Results*

An analysis of this data helped to create a foundation for descriptions of the essence transformative learning through the 4-H LIFE program. Moustakas (1994) indicated phenomenological data analysis includes horizontalization or building on the research questions through highlighting significant statements or quotations that describe how the participants experienced transformative learning. The research questions helped to frame the experiences of offender transformative learning that were coded into various categories. The data themes were generated from the ten precursor steps for transformative learning (Brock, 2010).

After the significant statements were highlighted, clusters of meaning were developed into themes. The themes provided a description of what the participants experienced or the textural description and the context of how they experienced the phenomenon or the structural description.

Several of the themes for this study were predetermined. These themes included the ten precursor steps for transformative learning, (see Figure 2) (Brock, 2010), perceptions of offender parenting, traditional visits, and 4-H LIFE visits. As the data analysis process evolved, several themes emerged within each section. The first research

question utilized an application of the transformative learning theory within the 4-H LIFE program in female correctional facilities in the state of Missouri.



*Figure 2.* Precursor steps toward transformative learning (Mezirow, 2000)

#### *Data Results:*

##### *Research Question One: Transformative Learning*

Research question one asked: What responses indicate women offenders in the Women’s Eastern Reception and Diagnostic Correctional Center (WERDCC) and Chillicothe Correctional Center in the 4-H LIFE program experienced one of the ten precursor steps for transformative learning? The data for research question one were derived from all study participants: Department of Corrections Officers, Offenders, 4-H Program Staff, and Volunteers in Corrections. The methods for data collection included: focus groups, in-person interviews, phone interviews, and completion of open-ended

offender reflection sheets. Brock (2010) indicated ten precursor steps potentially leading toward transformative learning: disorienting dilemma, critical reflection, self-examination, shared experiences, exploring new roles, trying on new roles, planning a course of action, acquiring knowledge and skills, building competence/confidence, and reintegration into life. The following subsections will explore the data collected from each of the four participant groups and then a synthesis of responses at the end of each section.

### *Disorienting Dilemma*

Brock (2010) classified disorienting dilemmas through the following statements: “I had an experience that caused me to question the way I normally act,” and “I had an experience that caused me to question my ideas about social roles.” The following section outlines the statements that indicate the four populations experiences of disorienting dilemma. The populations include: Offenders, Department of Corrections Staff, 4-H Program Staff, and Volunteers in Corrections. The emergent sub-themes in this section included: personal development, epochal change over time, command and control, program model, and 4-H LIFE family.

*Personal Development Theme.* Many of the offenders experienced a transformation in their understanding of self as a result of engaging with a specific activity or experience. “Trying to help our families building their kites made me understand that it’s okay to come out of my comfort zone because I’m sort of shy but everyone responded well to me which was nice” (WERDCC, 2010). “Yes that engaging with my children and explaining the activity has brought me out of a slight social

disorder, I have (social anxiety). I so enjoyed everything and was pretty happy with the outcome or finished product” (WERDCC, 2010).

Frequently the understanding of the women evolved as a result of their participation as a facilitator of an activity. “I learned that from the feedback of our kids during the activity that if you put your heart and soul much will be given in return, I’m able to keep and maintain the attention of the audience” (CCC, 2011). The facilitation specifically occurred as women stood in front of the group. “When I had to stand in front of the group to give instructions on the art project I realized I’m not as confident as I thought I’d be once” (CCC, 2011). “I got to lead a game, I learned that I can step up to the plate and explain how to play the game and made sure I was clear on my instructions. I can relax and be myself” (CCC, 2011).

Based on the feedback from women offenders, the 4-H LIFE program had an impact on their personal development and growth. “I really don’t know where I would be without 4-H and the other classes I have taken to better myself. Because of what I have learned myself and my family will continue to grow and become productive members of society. Thank you for the tools you have given me” (CCC, 2011). Specifically these tools came in the form of communication techniques. “4-H has given me the tools to communicate healthy with my family. It’s given me the chance to teach my child values while incarcerated. To be an asset to my community. And give back what others have give me. God bless 4-H LIFE family!” (CCC, 2011).

*Epochal Change Over Time.* Volunteers in Corrections noted that while behavior and attitude changes did occur they often took place over the course of several meetings. “Some of the women don’t look they would at first glance they look standoffish, maybe a

scowl or arms crossed during class. Barely participate but not to the level that they would stand out in their mind as excellent meeting, but they get into the meeting with the child and after a few minutes of warming up and the room being a buzz with giggles and hugs and laughs. You would see that same member bent over with a crayon in her hand with a smile on her face. You never know what's going to be important in someone's life" (VIC7, 2012).

Specific experiences with their families helped to motivate women offenders to be better. "Over the time I particularly remember going from very stoic, very uncomfortable having her kids there to having a smile on her face by the end, she wore makeup by the end and so she really kind of dressed up for her kids to see her there. She went from very stoic to at least a bit more emotion, able to express emotions a little more, let their hair down. You could see the tension off their face, and sometimes you could see it right back on as their kids were leaving as they were going back to their cells. They became more emotional and able to show their emotions" (VIC9, 2012).

The 4-H LIFE program had an impact on the way in which offenders interacted with one another and their family members. "We had a lady that began in the program and was withdrawn and wouldn't talk a whole lot. She continued through the program and she got more comfortable in the group and started to come out of her shell and take more positive risks. One time she decided to lead an activity but was terrified, she stumbled through the activity. When we came back to reflect she was beaming because she was able to do that and lead an activity with her daughter, I saw the transformation with the visits and her daughter when she would articulate and engage more" (VIC2, 2012).

The nature of the traditional visit script is drastically different from the 4-H LIFE visit model, which takes time for transition for women participants. “I think particularly among the ones when they first participate, I notice that there is a reserve or holding back and then as the activities get going they seem more free to get in and interact and participate with the others. Because it is a different type of visit than they are used to, it takes them some time to warm up and get up and do things” (VIC1, 2012).

The offenders and the Department of Corrections staff negotiate the new rules in the 4-H LIFE visits. “Usually the first visit they are not real sure what the limitations are or how relaxed they can be. They are still learning boundaries, they are not real sure how their children will respond to them. They often come in with very low self-esteem, embarrassed or ashamed and after three or four visits they become more outgoing, take leadership roles, offer help and assistance to anyone who looks like they need help doing a project” (VIC3, 2012).

The program elements allow women offenders to engage in roles they would not normally undertake which provides a powerful disorienting dilemma. “I think that the most meaningful change is to see how the offenders and this happens in several of them, go from being almost withdraw and a depression about the situation, not that happy to be in prison, you can kind of see them through the program empower an ability to lead, it is important to every parent to feel like a leader, when they are able to lead an activity it empowers them to be the parent they need to be for their child” (VIC8, 2012).

*Command and Control.* Department of Corrections staff found that offender behaviors were changed as a result of the program, which tended to make their job easier. “I think they come out of 4-H LIFE with a better attitude than a regular visit because they

have something to look forward to; it is an important incentive. The parenting class holds them accountable and the visit is a reward and I think that is important, they can work for and it is a reward system. Then they can say look what I've done" (DOC1, 2012). "For the most it helps them because they want to continue doing it so they make sure their behavior is good the rest of the time. She got in trouble so her kids didn't get to come to the visit" (DOC2, 2012).

*Program Model.* Where Department of Corrections staff members found the program beneficial to shift offender behavior, volunteers felt the program elements impacted a greater sense of personal responsibility in the offenders. "I think it's good that there are rules that the offenders have to live by, I know that it was heartbreaking for one of the offenders; she smoked and kept her butane lighter in her bra. They all get searched when they come in and she forgot and left the lighter in her bra. She broke a rule and was not able to attend the next month. They know that there are rules and I think it is good they are held accountable" (VIC5, 2012).

Paid 4-H employees also found specific elements of the program as motivating factors for women offenders. "They could see a change in the offenders that worked with it in the fact that because they have to be offense free for 90 days that they became model prisoners for a long time and that to me was a big impression" (VIC1, 2012).

Participants had to engage in the program, or they would be removed from the experience. "I think that one of the key values of the program is that it requires an investment from the offenders, the incentive for them to be involved is a higher quality of visit. The value is the active participation requirement and investing some of their own time" (VIC2, 2012).

The specific design of the program was intentional to encourage and influence participation. “In class a lot of the curriculum are interactive and it requires active participation from the offenders, they can’t just sit there and listen they have to provide feedback and engage. I’ve seen offenders lacking skills and confidence and ability to articulate and be confrontational in a healthy way” (VIC2, 2012).

*4-H LIFE Family.* 4-H program staff felt the disorienting dilemmas typically occurred from the specific interactions women offenders had with their families and the ‘program family’ or the sharing among multiple families. “On our last family visit, one woman’s family had to leave early. She said she guessed she would go back and at about that time another offender whose family was still there said ‘hey come and sit with us and you can help our son and she couldn’t believe it.’ It was the first time where someone had extended a welcome to her that she didn’t expect it, she was just flabbergasted” (VIC3, 2012).

The visits were often the impetus for the disorienting dilemma in offender women, it made them realize the value of a role reversal. “One of the incarcerated grandmothers at CCC told me once that she was not a good mother to her daughter who is now an adult. She felt she was not a good mother when her daughter was 13, and the mother was in drugs and running with the wrong crowd. Now that same grandmother has enhanced visits (4-H LIFE visits) with her adult daughter and grandchildren. The grandmother has stated she feels she is getting a new chance to be a mother figure to her granddaughter. She is now drug free and feels she can be a positive influence to her granddaughter. Her mom was incarcerated the day before her 13<sup>th</sup> birthday, through the years of prison visits, 4-H LIFE visits make the family very united with the grandmother being the positive role

model” (VIC6, 2012). Many offenders had specific epochal experiences that transformed their families as a result of their participation in the program. All participant groups indicated that women offenders experienced some type of disorienting dilemma (see Figure 3).

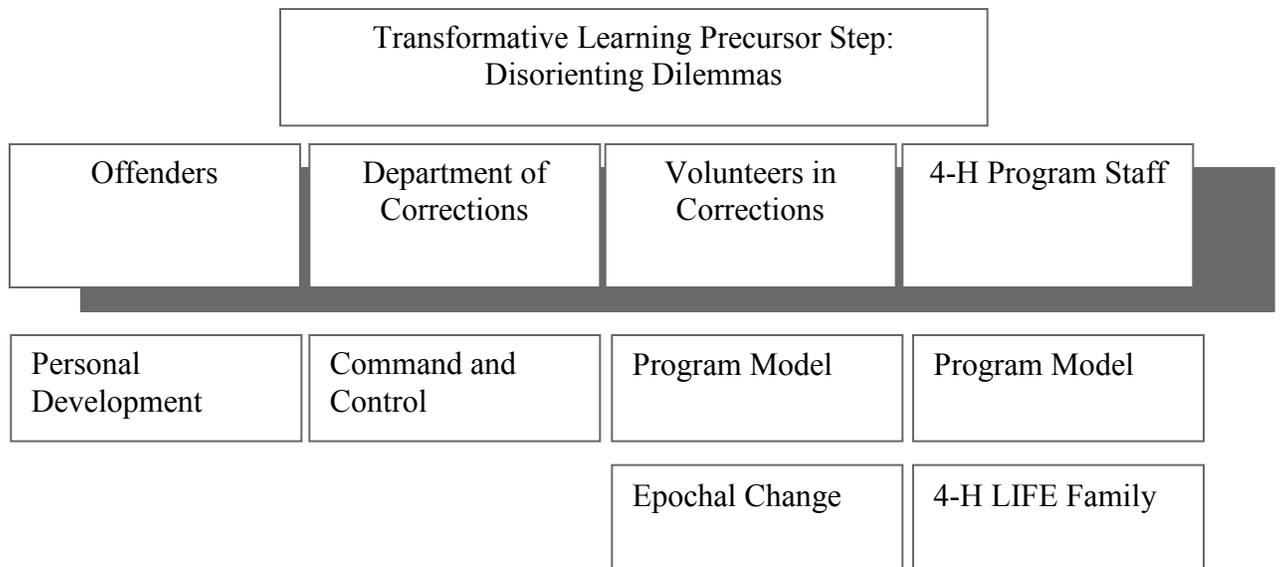


Figure 3. Integration of findings: Disorienting dilemmas

*Participant Synthesis.* The offenders, volunteers, and paid 4-H staff consistently mentioned the impact the program had on the personal transformation of women offenders. Each group mentioned the way in which increased engagement in the program over time afforded women an opportunity to experience an epochal transformation. Many of the participants echoed that the impetus for the transformation or the specific event that caused the disorienting dilemma was embedded and made intentional in the facilitation program elements.

Department of Corrections staff had a different understanding of the cause for the disorienting dilemma for women offenders. This group indicated the requirements of the

program provided an incentive for women to maintain positive behavior and remain violation free. This group took the approach that the rule-based elements of the program caused women to change. While specific events did cause women to transform their existing mode of thinking, often the way in which they framed their thoughts provided a personal shift for these offenders.

### *Critical Reflection*

Brock (2010) indicated that critical reflection on assumptions was measured through these statements: “As I question my ideas, I realized I no longer agreed with my previous beliefs or role expectations,” and “Or instead, as I questioned my ideas, I realized I still agreed with my beliefs or role expectations.” The sub-themes in this section included: 4-H LIFE Family, personal development through facilitation, the development of personal life philosophies to guide offenders, and command and control elements of the program.

*4-H LIFE Family.* Much of the offender mental reflections revolved around shifts in their understanding of interaction with their family. “That I really do have a lot of patience with pre-teen and teenage daughters that are spitting with each other all day” (CCC, 2009). “That I enjoy showing people new things and especially when my children can help me” (CCC, 2010). “The other children really look up to me and some of them cling to me” (CCC, 2010).

Often, traditional visits are very confining which shape the mental script for women offenders. When they begin engaging in 4-H LIFE visits their framework for behavior with their family undergoes a shift. “An adult doesn’t always have to be an adult. It’s okay to be playful and energetic with children and help them to see that you

can be understanding and that they can trust you, that they have to have something new they can share with you to bring out the better you!” (CCC, 2010).

Residing in a correctional facility often changes the way in which family members view their incarcerated loved one, influencing offender self-perception. “That they have good days and bad days. That they love me no matter how long I’ve been gone” (CCC, 2011). “I am able to stand my ground and not allow the kids to guilt me into doing things the way they wanted” (CCC, 2011).

The result for women offenders is they realize that their actions, behaviors, and words are being followed by their family and they must shift. “Children follow and learn from everything adults do and say around them” (CCC, 2011). “Working on a project together as a family grows you all closer and respect to a higher level” (CCC, 2011).

The 4-H LIFE program elements tend to be the impetus for creating the mental cohesion among family members and their offender loved one. “That this is a really positive experience for all the families involved and the women are really lucky to have such supportive families” (CCC, 2011). “I really appreciate this 4-H program and those visits are very important to mothers and children” (CCC, 2011).

*Personal Development through Facilitation.* Often women engaging in the program had low self-esteem and felt impotent by their perceived lack of qualifications to facilitate. “Even though I don’t have a college degree, I am still able to teach the children things that they need to know, life skills” (WERDCC, 2009). “That it doesn’t take education to be a leader in everything, it takes stepping up and doing what needs to be done,” (WERDCC, 2010). “Just keep learning and teaching as well as we can. Nothing

has to be perfect as long as we keep making the most of things. Strive to make the best better” (WERDCC, 2010).

Many women have never had responsibilities to facilitate programs outside of the facility, much less dealing with the challenges of these roles inside a correctional facility. “I learned that things can come together regardless the environment we are in and the circumstances” (WERDCC, 2008). “Even with distractions I can stay focused and facilitate the activity. I learned that I can delegate well, something I used to not do. I always carried everything myself” (CCC, 2011).

The resulting self-esteem boost from critically reflecting on the ability to undertake facilitation is apparent in women offenders. “I can talk in front of a large group of people and be okay. A little nervous, but I overcame that after a few seconds” (CCC, 2011). “I can stand my ground and not allow my guilt to control me” (CCC, 2011). “I am getting better people skills and realizing that if I just be myself-things go smoother” (CCC, 2011). “I learned that it shouldn’t be so intimidating to speak in front of a group of people” (WERDCC, 2009).

Volunteers tended to focus on the critical reflection of women offenders as they navigated the program and discovered positive traits. The sub-theme in this section focused on personal development. The volunteers viewed offenders as finding strength as a result of their participation in the program.

“They come to the decision that they are going to make the best of what they’ve got. That impresses me because they could be angry and could make life miserable. When they finally come to terms with what they are facing almost all have a positive

outlook” (VIC4, 2012). “A determination to not let their surroundings bring them down” (VIC7, 2012).

Many offenders had self-esteem boosts from their families. “I think that it increases the offenders’ value of herself that she is important to someone even while she is in prison she is important to many people, but that fact is sometimes lost if it is not brought to their attention through the classes and the Saturday visits” (VIC7, 2012).

4-H program staff outlined the way in which specific program elements helped women offenders critically reflect on their experiences with the program. “The goal setting that 4-H promoted and decision making it was like they became more aware of the influence that they could have on their children even though they weren’t around their children all the time” (VIC1, 2012). “The most objective thing is that their awareness is raised. At the end of the class session I will do an opportunity to give feedback and more often than not offenders will make statements like: ‘I hadn’t really thought about this before,’ or ‘I really need to work on this area” (VIC2, 2012).

One major element of the program required women to obtain facilitation skills. This practice provided an opportunity for women to shift their self understanding. “Recognizing they have a sense of power but not in a negative way but a freedom of choice, they are responsible for what they do” (VIC3, 2012).

*Personal Life Philosophies.* Often women offenders found strength and a set of mental mantras to guide their lives from their participation in the program. “To be able to rise above the circumstances and don’t let it affect the bigger picture. Which is something I believed I was able to do” (WERDCC, 2008). “Stay focused and don’t let the future hold you back. Keep stepping forward” (WERDCC, 2009).

These very powerful philosophies translated into a revitalization of the positive internal understanding of self. “I ran one of the games and was able to interact with everyone. I was expected by everyone as an adult not an inmate and it felt great! I realized I am no different than I was at home; I just have on different clothes! I’m still the girl my mom raised I just had to find myself again” (CCC, 2010).

Often women were simply afraid to shift from another number in the prison to a facilitator in a program. “That it wasn’t scary standing and talking in front of everyone it was as if they weren’t strangers” (WERDCC, 2010). “I get nervous in front of people but can work well with others children and can be a good influence on anyone” (WERDCC, 2009). “I am not as shy as I thought I was and I do work well with children” (CCC, 2010). “Always push yourself to step out of your comfort zone. Push to do a little more, to grow and learn about yourself and others” (CCC, 2011).

As women continued to engage in the program they began to critically reflect and view themselves as a leader. “We should not keep the fact hidden that we are in prison, instead act on the situation with life events when the opportunity presents itself” (CCC, 2011). “Everyday activities involve being a leader, a person’s actions truly do affect someone else looks up to them or not. Leaders actions matter more than one would think” (CCC, 2011). “Team work is so much enjoyable than one person trying to do everything” (WERDCC, 2009). Department of Corrections staff members did find that women were critically reflecting on their experiences; however, they couched these shifts in attention to rules.

*Command and Control-Critical Reflection.* Department of Corrections staff indicated offenders were critically reflective because they wanted to maintain their status

in the program. Thus, the staff noted offenders would not make mistakes so they could see their children. “Overall, most of them that were really sincere, they didn’t want to get violations...they stayed out of trouble...A lot of them you could see their self-esteem improve” (DOCStaff Interviews, 2009). Each participant group found offenders engaged in critical reflection (see Figure 4).

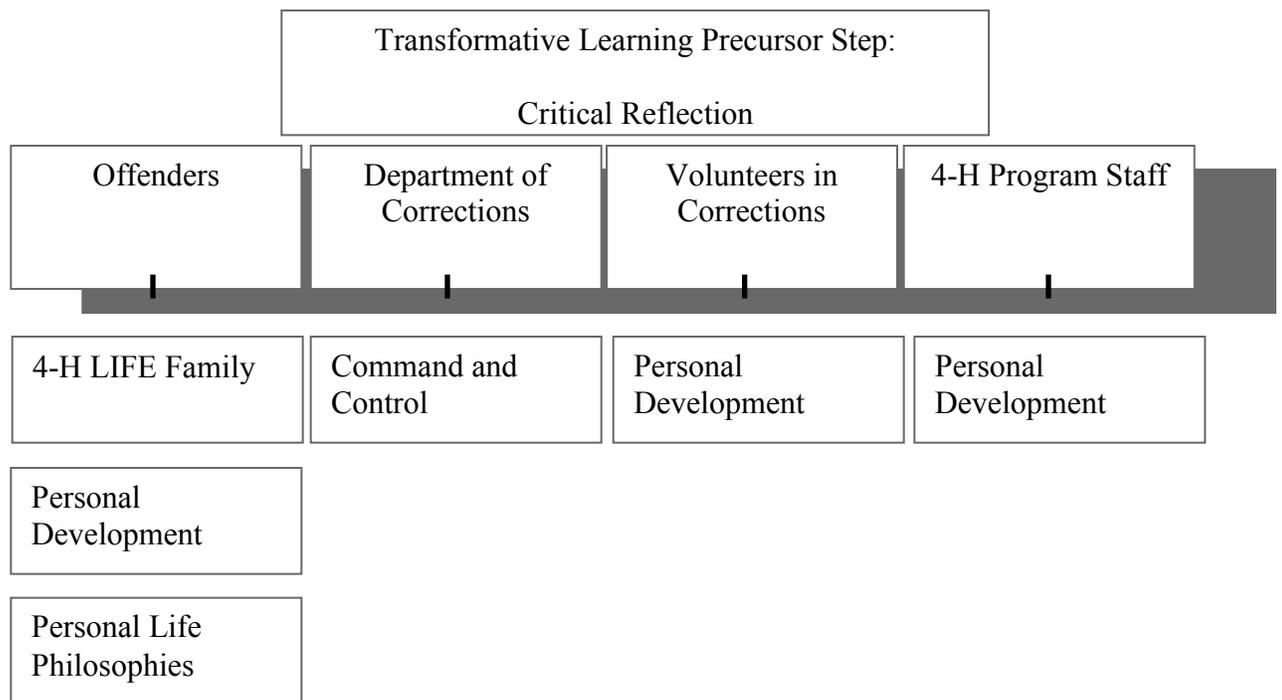


Figure 4. Integration of findings: Critical reflection

*Participant Synthesis.* Each population indicated the way in which programmatic elements influenced critical reflection in offenders. However, Department of Corrections staff adhered more to the duty of women engaging in the program to help them reflect on their role. Offenders and volunteers tended to focus on the way in which women developed personal skills such as facilitation and internal confidences such as self-esteem

boosts. Paid 4-H program staff took the opportunity to tout the elements of the program that helped women critically reflect on their experiences, leading to valued outcomes.

Often women found their disorienting dilemmas led to an opportunity to critically reflect through an internal process. However, other times women shared their experiences to transform their lives. Brock (2010) indicated women shared a discontent toward transformation. An emergent theme from this research was a contentment with life that women experienced as a result of sharing within the context of the program.

### *Shared Experiences*

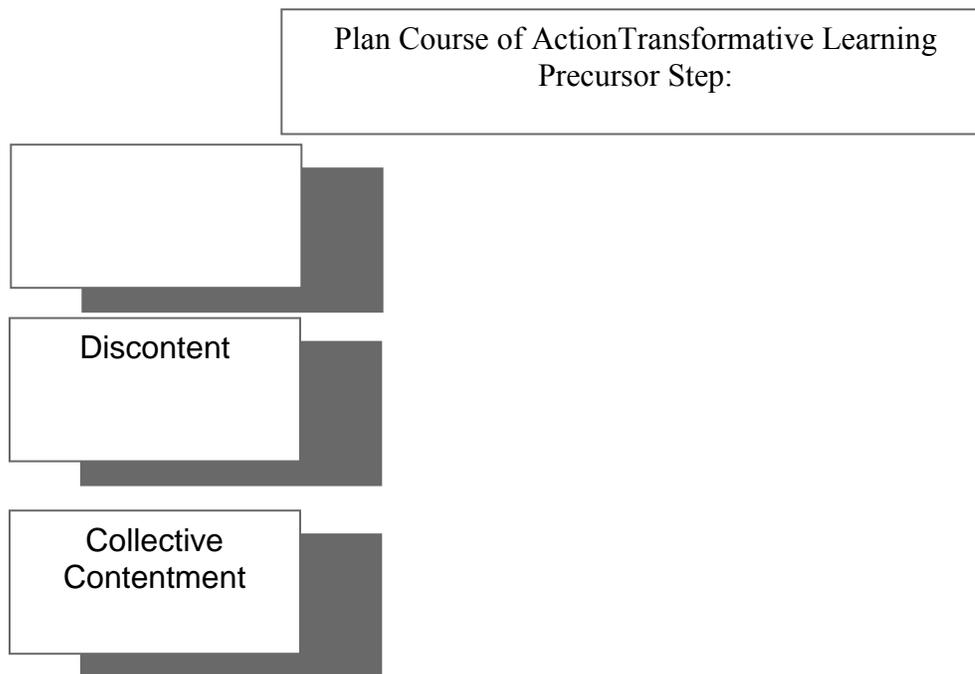
Brock (2010) noted participants indicated recognized shared discontent stating, “I realized that other people also questioned their beliefs.” This study found patterns of both shared discontent and collective contentment. Sub-themes in this section were discontent and collective contentment.

*Discontent.* The nature of incarceration tends to bring up issues of fairness among offenders leading to dissatisfaction. “I felt left out on a few things my family didn’t get their picture taken at the table with their completed turkeys. I believe that most everyone else did” (CCC, 2009). However, many offenders remarked about their shared experiences that helped them build understanding.

*Collective Contentment.* The feeling of contentment was procured when women felt the program ran smoothly as a result of people working together. “I can help others without arguing and things go much more smoothly if there is communication amongst us” (CCC, 2010). “I think everyone reached out to each other and helped with everything that was planned and it is the fact that we work together that helps things run as smoothly” (CCC, 2010). “It is nice how we all worked together and when someone

needed something one would just jump right in and help where help was needed” (WERDCC, 2010). “My children and grandchildren are always ready to jump in and help. If things don’t go as planned everyone is willing to step up and help out” (WERDCC, 2010).

*Participant Synthesis.* The sole participant group to mention shared experiences was the offender population (see Figure 5). Merely seven references were procured from the data to support this category. The sub-theme with the most notations was that of a sense of collectivity in experiences.



*Figure 5.* Integration of findings: Shared experiences

### *Exploring New Roles*

While participants might have been limited in their understanding of sharing experiences, the 4-H LIFE program provided continuous opportunities for offenders to

explore new roles. Brock (2010) indicated participants marked affirmatively to this statement: “I thought about acting in a different way from my usual beliefs and roles.” The data were coded in this section to understand projection into the future about roles and responsibilities, but not necessarily undertaking future plans or actions. The sub-themes in this section included: personal development, program development, and 4-H LIFE family.

*Personal Development-Exploring New Roles.* Incarcerated women were often inspired by the 4-H LIFE program and began thinking about their goals and impact on the organization. “How to just listen to them and observe them and take control of the projects” (CCC, 2009). “Take the initiative to be a leader instead of standing in the background” (WERDCC, 2009).

The women often found that exploration often denoted the beginning stages of implementation, or the mental shift in understanding roles. “Need to step outside of my comfort zone more often” (CCC, 2009). “The interacting. I’m usually very quiet since I’ve been here. I got to open up more and enjoy myself” (WERDCC, 2010). “I am practicing getting up and speaking in front of my peers” (WERDCC, 2010). “I can be artistically creative when necessary” (CCC, 2011). “Just keep working in it and understand that not everyone moves on the level I do” (CCC, 2011).

The volunteer comments surrounded the personal development of women offenders. These participants were also concerned with the impact that the program had on the families of the incarcerated individuals. The pains of incarceration on all family members helped provide impetus for shifting roles.

“Sometimes the women themselves haven’t joked around like that in their own life. Much of their youth has been lost. It is a win-win situation, they get to experience what it has been like as a child” (VIC7, 2012). While the women experienced a personal sense of change, they were exploring a shifting role due to incarceration.

Paid University of Missouri Extension 4-H Program staff was concerned with the personal development of women offenders as they explored new roles. They also indicated the program often provided the context for women offenders to think about new roles. An understanding of increasing personal value for women offenders became obvious through participation in the program.

“I think in addition to that being able to help these mothers, grandmothers, whomever segue into this leadership role, encouraging them to take on leadership roles, encouraging some of the youth to take on leadership roles” (Focus Group, 2009). “I think it helps them see themselves in a more positive light and to be able to visualize themselves as going back and being a parent to their children” (VIC1, 2012).

While leadership roles in terms of program facilitation and activity guidance were important, the offenders also experienced life skill development. “People come out of their shell, they start speaking up, start sharing their thoughts, become assertive and recognize the difference between assertiveness and aggressiveness” (VIC3, 2012). “The second way they have changed is they have realized that even though they are incarcerated they do have skills and talents that they love sharing and the third way that they have changed is they have changed as a group” (VIC6, 2012).

*Program Development.* As women offenders began to understand the program elements, they were encouraged to take leadership roles and expand the program. “Maybe

I could show people how productive 4-H is and maybe encourage someone to join” (WERDCC, 2009). “Be a project leader next time” (WERDCC, 2009). “To lead the family visit and project if help is needed” (WERDCC, 2009).

The 4-H LIFE program helped women find a trajectory for their lives either in the long- or short-term. “I have learned that I definitely want to continue to be a part of 4-H on the streets” (WERDCC, 2009). “I am helping by moving tables even though I am in a wheelchair” (CCC, 2010).

Involvement in the program helped push the women to explore new roles. “Keep being positive and keep focused on being a positive team leader” (CCC, 2010). “I am still a little nervous about getting in front of a lot of people but my son and I are working on it together” (WERDCC, 2010).

4-H program staff reflected while women have internally experienced change due to the exploration of new roles, they manifest this change through their programmatic actions over time. “So we have the three generations there, but what I have heard the women say is that they really want to become project leaders. They want to be the ones who put on the show, so to speak” (Focus Group, 2009). “Their ability to go with the flow is a skill that is necessary in order for the program to be successful and in order for the women to be successful” (VIC6, 2012).

*4-H LIFE Family.* Beyond the personal impact that exploring new roles had on women offenders, their understanding of family roles began to shift. “I am letting the kids do their own projects they don’t always need my help” (WERDCC, 2009). “My kids weren’t there but I am trying to do that when I act with others that is what I get back from them,” (CCC, 2010).

The process of exploring new roles helped women become empowered in their understanding of family within their blood relatives and their programmatic family. “I’ve learned I kept the kids excited and encouraged and I’ve also decided to do a bible study with kids instead of adults” (CCC, 2010). “Jamie informed me that I am great with kids and that they always want to be around me and talk to me” (CCC, 2011).

The volunteer participants also reflected on the impact the 4-H program had on the family members. “The members of 4-H LIFE they have little ones, young ones that will not benefit from their wisdom, their knowledge, their experiences if there is not a level of communication developed there. The young ones can learn so much goodness from the woman who has experienced so much” (VIC7, 2012). “For the kids to see parents in a new life, more than likely they have not been able to see them in a long time, got to see them as responsible, caring, in charge, get to share things” (VIC9, 2012).

*Participant Synthesis.* The voices of Department of Corrections staff were silent in the section processing the impact of role exploration with offenders (see Figure 6). However, the offenders, volunteers, and 4-H staff outlined the clear benefits that incarcerated individuals internally experience as a result of their participation in the program. Volunteers and offenders recognized how the program facilitated a shift in family roles. These three participant groups found that an internal shift in role experiences typically manifested in an empowerment of role assumption in the 4-H LIFE program. Thus, women offenders began experiencing self-examination of the new roles that they only were only exploring in the previous section.

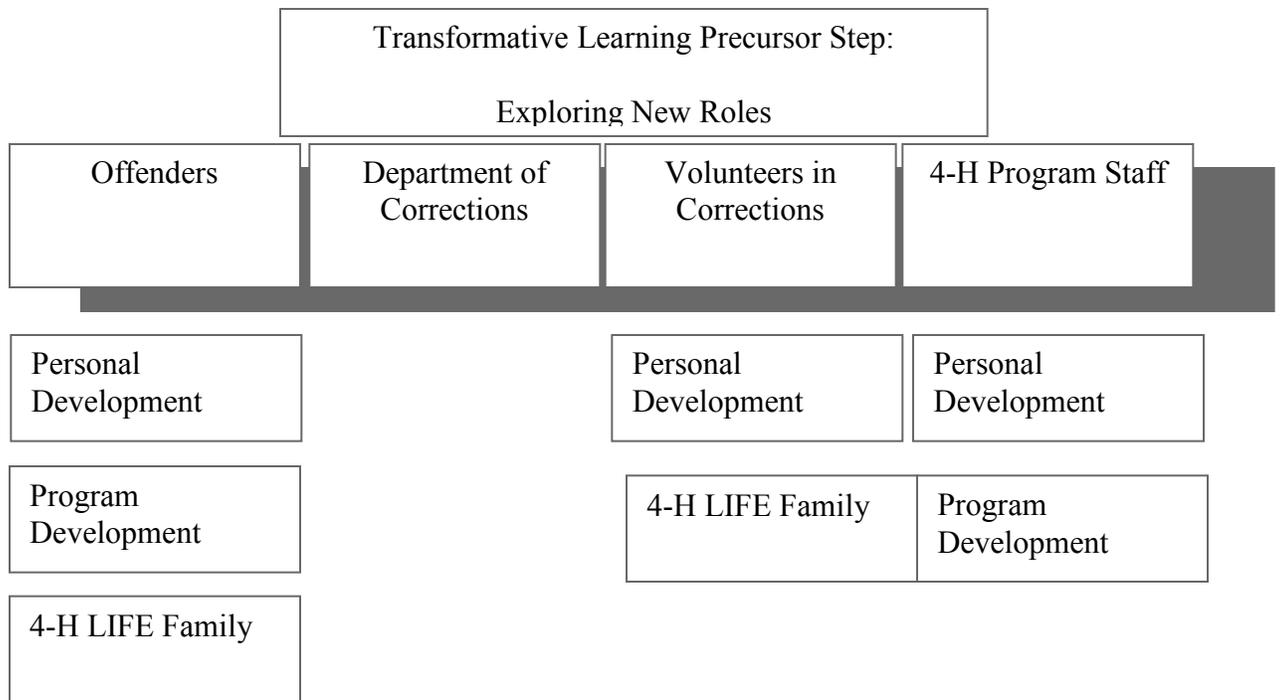


Figure 6. Integration of findings: Exploring new roles

*Self-Examination*

Brock (2010) found that participants who experienced self-examination with feelings of guilt or shame reacted positively to this statement: “I felt uncomfortable with traditional social expectations.” A striking emergent theme for this precursor step to transformative learning, was the offender self-examination toward the end of personal growth. The other sub-theme in this section was guilt and shame.

*Personal Growth.* As the offender women engaged in the program they found particular areas of growth to work toward. “All the kids voted for each other’s cookies so that no one was left out. Good lesson for we competitive adults” (WERDCC, 2009). “We need better communication and everyone needs to slow down, breathe deep and work

together! I was rushed and I didn't even get to see any of the bags or pumpkins" (CCC, 2009).

Often these lessons were learned from experiences with their children and families. "How much fun it was doing projects with my grandchildren and what I have missed all these years" (CCC, 2009). "Even though we were rushed I still made time for all the kids to participate but I would like to have been able to do it much better than I was actually able to and not rush through it with the kids" (CCC, 2009). "I work well with children that are not mine" (WERDCC, 2009).

Self-examination continued to be examined within the specific context of the 4-H LIFE program elements. "The 4-H organization keeps me busy and goal oriented and focused on my kids" (WERDCC, 2008). "Listening to each other we can make things work as a team" (CCC, 2011).

The 4-H program staff indicated the way in which the program had an effect on the personal growth of the offenders. "It challenges them to evaluate themselves and some of the thinking that ended them up where they are. I think the topics we discuss in classes bring that forward and cause them to do that self-reflection and self-evaluation and decide how do I want to do things differently when I leave here" (VIC2, 2012). The 4-H LIFE program provided an intentional space for women to reflect after each family visit.

*Guilt and Shame.* When offenders interacted with their families, they began to understand the impact of their incarceration on their children. "My son has shy qualities like me and doesn't like to speak in crowds" (WERDCC, 2009). "How much my kids miss family time" (WERDCC, 2010).

Often, women personally berated themselves in their examination process. “Don’t be exclusionary or cliquish-open up to everyone” (WERDCC, 2009). “I am a little standoffish” (WERDCC, 2011). “I can stop thinking I can’t be myself” (WERDCC, 2011). “I was on the serving line with my daughter and was only uncomfortable when I thought that people were waiting too long on me-I might have taken on a bit too much with the meat and all the condiments” (CCC, 2010).

The stress of facilitation for women offenders became a source of guilt and shame. “I can only hope something I said helped someone and I certainly hope I didn’t hurt my son’s feelings talking about this subject” (CCC, 2010). “Sometimes I get really aggravated when I think some of the things I’m leading will go smooth and don’t: when I over plan and stress out there’s not a need to” (CCC, 2010). “Yes, I helped with the cupcake decorating and should’ve explained more about St. Patrick’s Day, but I got shy. I will do better next time” (WERDCC, 2010).

For women offenders, family expectation became a source of frustration as they examined and reflected. “Tonight this is a hard question due to the fact-my grandma, I’m not meeting her standards” (CCC, 2010). “It’s hard trying to meet your families’ standards, when you, yourself are making every improvement taught and worthwhile to be a better parent” (CCC, 2010). “My family doesn’t really work well together which is upsetting. Still working on it” (WERDCC, 2010).

Offenders tended to internalize the negative occurrences experienced with facilitation. “I learned that teaching can be somewhat frustrating! I need to work on that, I’ve gotten better, I’m just not all the way there yet” (WERDCC, 2010). “I don’t know about leadership, but I was a volunteer and truthfully felt kind of useless. It was no one’s

fault but my own. (I can not seem to quit being shy around a lot of people I don't know real well)" (CCC, 2011). "I tried in the group, but I still need to work on being relaxed when doing a reflection" (CCC, 2011).

The Department of Corrections staff members continued to view the transformations in offenders through the impact that the program had on their ability to do their job. Their specific context or lens was through ease and facilitation of behavior and control within the facility. Coded phrases surrounded only the sub-theme of guilt and shame.

"The offender had 2-3 visits and got in trouble, don't know if she was out of the program but missed the last one because she was in segregation and in trouble. This is hard on the kids because they are just getting used to the program and it's not the kids' fault it is the mothers' fault. Not their fault that the mothers are in prison. For the kids it is even more important" (DOC2, 2012). "When there is a setback it is upsetting and you think, she was doing better, sometimes they want to talk about it and sometimes they kind of look at it and say I know I messed up" (DOC2, 2012).

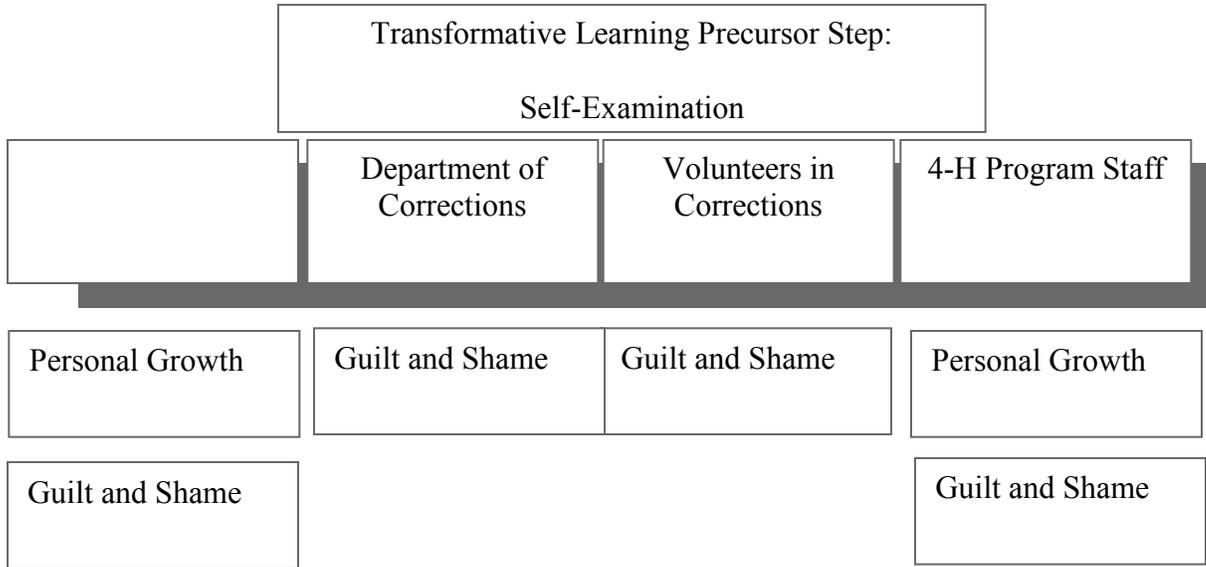
A singular phrase was shared concerning self-examination among volunteers. Volunteers did not focus on the impact offenders had on their role in this case; they externalized the self-examination process to the offender. This phrase focused around the sub-theme of guilt and shame.

"There is some guilt there, myriad feelings and emotion and guilt" (VIC7, 2012). 4-H Program Staff briefly touched upon the impact offenders had through the program as it related to self-examination. Merely, two data points were directed toward this category, one within guilt and shame and one within growth.

The 4-H Program Staff realized the personal growth moments for the offender women. “The women make comments like: ‘I never knew I could speak in front of a group, I never realized how shy I was, I am still nervous but I am going to keep on trying to become a better parent/teacher’ and that is also when learning seems to happen as far as I never knew that my nine year old was so interested in dinosaurs or rocks” (VIC6, 2012).

*Participant Synthesis.* Many statements were reflective of self-examination from the perspective of offenders. Incarcerated women in this study made thirty-six separate references, as they reflected on the precursor step of self-examination (see Figure 7). While many of the statements were couched in guilt and shame, seven examples were given of women reflecting on their experiences through personal growth.

However, only five data points were discovered in this category among Department of Corrections Staff, Volunteers in Corrections, and 4-H Program Staff. Many of these statements surrounded projected feelings of guilt and shame. While women spent a significant amount of effort discussing self-examination, the tangible category of trying on new roles was even more pervasive in the data pool.



*Figure 7. Integration of findings: Self-examination*

*Trying on New Roles*

Brock (2010) noted participants indicated the following as it relates to trying on new roles: “I tried out new roles so that I would become more comfortable or confident in them.” Thirty-six references were made among the four participant groups to the theme of trying on new roles. The sub-themes for this section included: family leadership, program leadership, personal development, and 4-H LIFE Family.

*Family Leadership.* A salient new role offenders experienced through the program was leading or facilitating program content with their family members and the program family at large. “I lead my children to be leaders by volunteering to be president and reporter” (CCC, 2009). “Keep my son as well as myself involved” (WERDCC, 2009).

At times incarcerated members reflected on their role as it relates to their family through application in the program. “I learned that I can control myself in any situation

that occurs with my girls” (CCC, 2010). “I lead my nephews while putting together a picture project and realized my creativity is not as good as my mom and sisters but it was fun working together with my nephews” (WERDCC, 2010).

*Program Leadership.* Family visits provided the application for lessons learned for offenders through facilitation. “I practiced more equality than anything because I was a volunteer and I wanted to help make the visit special for everyone” (CCC, 2009). “I practice leadership by explaining the get to know you game” (CCC, 2009).

Facilitation within the program often provided an opportunity for offenders to learn about group process and personal development. “I think that we learned to work together to get things done. We stepped back to let other people participate in leading and also we made sure that there was visiting time with others and families. We have to give and take, we should be consistent” (CCC, 2009). “I didn’t participate in a leadership position, but was more of a helper. And I still learned that by adhering to examples given, it contributes to leadership qualities” (WERDCC, 2009).

Specific involvement in leadership activities provided women an opportunity to understand the personal impact of trying on new roles. “I helped to run a station-ball race. I myself am able to get up in front of people now and really put myself out there. I’m a bit more comfortable with change now” (CCC, 2010). “I ran the bean bag station. I’ve never had a problem in any role once I know what I am doing and what is expected of me” (CCC, 2010). “I’m more comfortable leading than following. I felt lost without a set role or job to carry out” (CCC, 2010).

Often there is transference among the offenders and youth as the group together shares information and experiments with new roles in the context of the family visit. “I

did something different, I lead the activity and processing with the younger group. It was fun to challenge them and receive their intellect. I learned that I don't want a single child to feel that someone is excluding them" (CCC, 2010). "I stepped out of my bubble/comfort zone a bit more and was song leader-I enjoyed it but was rushed-I took the reins a couple of days before the visit-if I were to do it again I would like more time to work on it and figure out what to do" (CCC, 2010). "I did the song and led it but it was a group thing but I feel once I get to know people and even if not the next time, I will be able to come out of my shell to talk and meeting children and family I was a little nervous" (CCC, 2011).

Specific roles and responsibilities were often talked about with a sense of pride. "I learned in building the gingerbread house that I'm not a decorator with food but had a blast doing it," (CCC, 2011). "In serving the lettuce, tomatoes, and chips I learned that I can take responsibility and take charge of my duties," (CCC, 2011). "I can be flexible and let the kids help take their drinks to their table," (CCC, 2011).

Volunteers indicated women offenders increasingly experimented with new roles in the 4-H LIFE program. "We've always had leaders to begin with but other ladies are stepping up and filling roles and when they see something needs to be done they do it," (VIC4, 2012). "I have noticed them stepping outside of their comfort zone" (VIC5, 2012).

4-H program staff further indicated a willingness among women offenders to undertake program leadership. "They start sharing responsibilities amongst themselves in order to see that the next family visit is well planned that it has structure to it while at the same time the families are able to relax and interact naturally" (VIC3, 2012). "There is a

relaxed affect of the people who have been doing it a while and recognize the benefits of the program. They lose the fear of being around other people, they maintain the respect they need to have for rules/regulations that exist in the visiting room. They start going to other people for help and advice and at the same time offering assistance. They become more involved with everyone rather than being reclusive, sitting back and just watching” (VIC3, 2012).

*Personal Development.* One Department of Corrections staff member reflected upon the possibility for offenders to utilize their experiences in the program to try on new roles. “During their everyday lives they don’t have the same interaction of course, they cannot share emotions openly with anybody else on camp because they can speak about things but they can’t hug people because it is not allowed. So during the 4-H they have their kids and they open up and are happy about it, it gives them some hope and they just go with the program and have an enjoyable time” (DOC2, 2012).

University of Missouri Extension paid staff members responded with six data points in the theme of trying on new roles. The emergent sub-themes in this section were personal development, 4-H LIFE Family, and program development. Specific tendency for women offenders to experience the impact of the program on skill development is outlined. “It requires them to work together, because you have conflict that comes up any time you work with people, conflict will naturally arise and it provides a great learning opportunity to practice communication” (VIC2, 2012). “They see that they are able to be a positive role model. That they can be productive and do good things with their family and with other people in prison” (VIC3, 2012). The experiences of incarcerated women are often translated into other areas of their prison lives. “Several of them live in the same

housing unit but over the course of time they learned how to communicate as a group, work as a group, struggle as a group, and then come back together and become a community group that benefits all the children there for the visits” (VIC6, 2012).

*4-H LIFE Family.* There were a limited number of statements from Department of Corrections Officers on the theme of trying on new roles. However, volunteers shared statements about trying on new roles with the sub-themes of 4-H LIFE Family and the impact of role sharing within the context of program development. Five statements referenced this theme.

The particular ability for women offenders to experiment with their role as a parent was discussed in these statements. “The offenders are very happy to be having the visits, usually they are exhibiting good parenting skills” (VIC10, 2012). Within the context of improved parenting skills, volunteers noted offenders began to share their skills and love with their children.

“I think they use their improved personal skills to interact and they try to get their children to understand why it is important to improve their own personal skills. They try to be role models where they didn’t use to try to do so or know how to be a role model. I think as time passes they become better role models” (VIC5, 2012). As women experimented with new roles, they were increasingly able to become comfortable with giving affection. “I think that the thing that comes to mind first with the women is that they learn pretty quickly that within the 4-H LIFE visits they can be more demonstrative with affection” (VIC6, 2012).

4-H program staff noted the 4-H LIFE program provided a training ground for women to experience being a parent in a safe context. “Being able to visit with people

that they normally wouldn't be able to visit with, develop relationships that otherwise wouldn't exist" (VIC3, 2012). This experimentation led to increased investment in the program, and a demonstration of trying on new roles within that context.

*Participant Synthesis.* The bulk of the statements in this section came from offenders explaining their attempts to try on new roles within the context of the program and manifesting with their families (see Figure 8). Department of Corrections staff, Volunteers, and 4-H staff considered the resulting impact of this experimentation on the offenders themselves as they tried on new roles. The empowerment women experienced when trying on new roles often led offenders to plan future action.

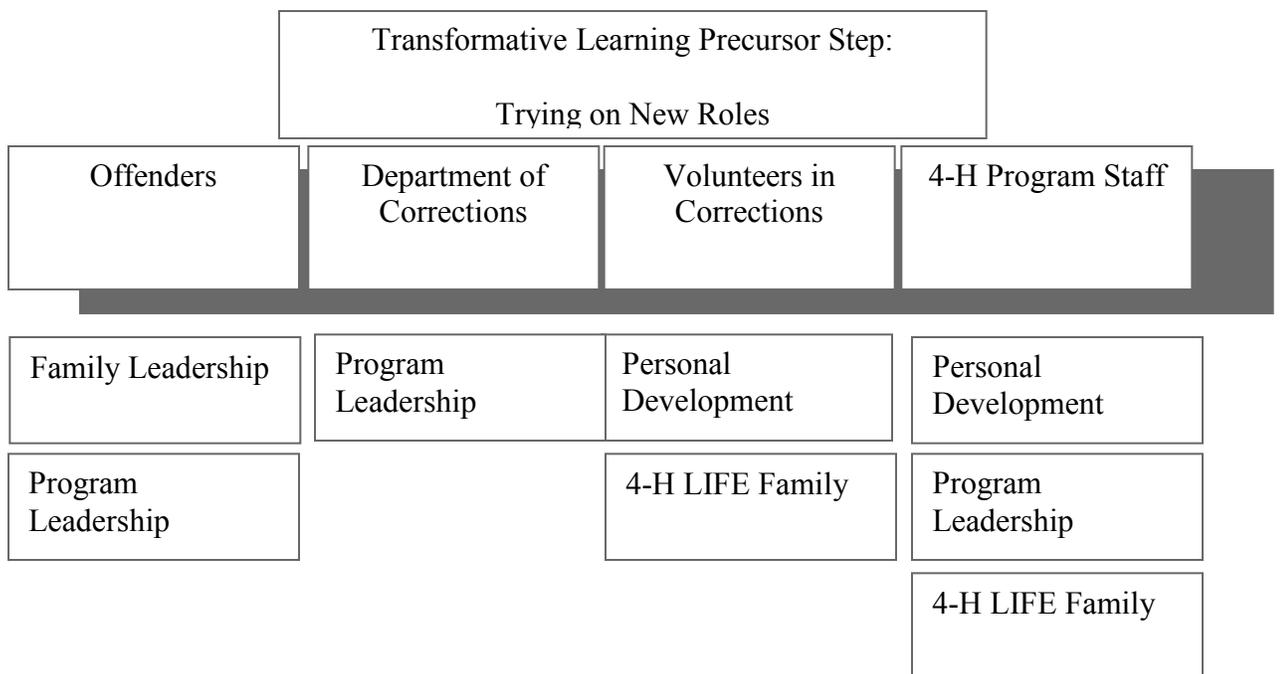


Figure 8. Integration of findings: Trying on new roles

### *Plan Course of Action*

Brock (2010) stated that planning a course of action was defined by the following statement, “I tried to figure out a way to adopt these new ways of acting.” Fifty-three references were made in this major theme. The sub-themes in this category were: 4-H LIFE Family, personal development, and program development.

*4-H LIFE Family.* The transformation offenders experienced as they accumulated disorienting dilemmas, critically reflected on their actions, personally reflected, sharing discontent, exploring and trying on new roles, led them to an ability to plan their actions. Notably, only the offender participant group made statements referring to planning a course of action. Their plans often surrounded specific actions they hoped to take with their family members.

“To cherish each and every visit I have with my family and allowing them to just be who they are” (CCC, 2009). The development of skills was an important idea among women offenders as they aided their family members. “Getting kids (my nephew) involved in good projects where they learn to lead and speak publicly on the topic” (WERDCC, 2011).

Many women referred to the hope they experienced through their engagement with the program as they dreamed about the application of this transformative learning to their home lives. “By doing some of the same projects once I get home” (WERDCC, 2010). “I am going to get crafts and stuff to do at home and I’m going to help them with being shy by continuing 4-H in my community and helping with public speaking” (WERDCC, 2010). “The activities and organization skills will benefit us once we are at home” (WERDCC, 2008).

Reflections on personal development as they related to the family were pervasive. “To keep more motivated to keep busy with things to do with my grandchildren and my grown children” (WERDCC, 2008). “To show the people I love that I love them and to communicate my thoughts and feelings clearly” (WERDCC, 2008). “Spend more time together and discuss our feelings with one another” (WERDCC, 2008).

Incarcerated mothers indicated their reflection of lost time was very painful, this frequently factored into their future plans. “Every minute I spend with my grandkids, I learn something and I can only pray to one day go home to them” (WERDCC, 2008). “Oh yea, she’ll be 26 and I want to make up for lost time...make amends...spend as much time as possible...she’ll probably get tired of me” (Family Assessment, 2009).

Often specific activities women could engage in with their children emerged. “Yea I want Jamelle and my granddaughters and me to get in a big bed and just stay there. We’ll all watch t.v. together. When I was home I would tell them, ‘come up with me and get off the floor or futon” (Family Assessment, 2009). “Well yes, I talked with her yesterday about braiding her hair, reading to her, watching t.v., snuggling with her...she is my little snugglebear” (Family Assessment, 2009).

Planning for the return to the traditional roles of motherhood was outlined. “Spend more time together, do things, cook together, do hair a lot more quality time. Do everything!” (Family Assessment, 2009). “Everything, cooking for him, feeding him, playing with him, taking him places, birthday parties...showing him I won’t go away no more” (Family Assessment, 2009).

Incarcerated mothers discussed their desire to increase their external focus on their children. “We plan on taking the kids to Disney, just getting the closeness back, I

want to do counseling with both kids but my main focus is her. I want to find out what she wants to do with her life and what I can do to help her. She clams up” (Family Assessment, 2009).

*Personal Development.* Often, these planning projections for offenders related to personal goals and desires. “Keep having the same attitude and applying ourselves and it will only get better” (CCC, 2009). “To have better time management, take the lead, and be a self starter” (CCC, 2010). “Have more patience and continue to be more of a leader in the other things I do” (CCC, 2010). “If you set a plan in life, the transitions of life will go smoothly” (CCC, 2010).

In many instances, women offenders had developed personal development goals for improving their facilitation skills within the program. “I ran a project and I need to learn some different leadership skills to keep and get kids’ attention” (WERDCC, 2010). “By stepping out and volunteering, practicing speaking in front of people and becoming a leader” (WERDCC, 2010). “To become more involved so I can be more comfortable” (WERDCC, 2010). “Quit being shy around people. Take risks! Open up!” (CCC, 2011). “I just have to quit being so shy and become a part of it. The more I assert myself, the easier it becomes” (CCC, 2011).

As a result of their involvement in the 4-H LIFE program, women offenders began to project future plans about their involvement beyond the program. “I would love to take what I’ve learned to a community center and do projects with children” (WERDCC, 2010). “Do it more after, not only on the visit, but every day” (CCC, 2011). “To be more opinionated in passing on a message to others” (WERDCC, 2008). “Be a

leader not a follower and stay positive in life and volunteer within the community” (WERDCC, 2008).

*Program Development.* While women projected their personal development goals, they also expressed the plans they had for the 4-H LIFE Program. “To encourage more mothers and children to get involved in the 4-H program in here and on the outside” (CCC, 2009). “Maybe try to get the kids working on some things together so they can work on their skills as a group” (CCC, 2010).

The plans for action relative to application that women offenders suggested were related to their life within the prison. “I can take my multi-tasking in daily living to accomplish more” (CCC, 2010). “Get some more people to step out of their comfort zones-they might find they really enjoy something or are really good at something that they wouldn’t normally try” (CCC, 2010).

Specific program activities were explored in the plans for action that women outlined. “I think we should make something, build it from scratch, etc. like modeling clay, the marshmallow blusters again-something like that. I think we should have that book brought in and see games out of there. I also think maybe we should have fruit trays for desert” (CCC, 2010). “We need to all work together on how many different subjects are to be talked about so we can get all the subjects talked about. We had lots of safety things to talk about and some of them were not talked about enough” (WERDCC, 2010). “My kids came late so they barely got to interact but I do think if the families come late for whatever reason not like thing should stop but the kids should be introduced not like a one on one but stop everything and acknowledge that there is new faces” (CCC, 2011). “I feel we should have one fun craft and the others be more educational and 4-H-based.

Seems like at planning sessions we are focused on fun things which is good. I just feel we should be teaching our children what the values of 4-H really is” (WERDCC, 2008).

While women offenders in previous section explored and tried on new roles, they also are planning for future specific actions within the context of the 4-H LIFE program. “May take charge of the next visit more, get up and speak more in front of people” (WERDCC, 2010). “Continue with the goal setting and focus. Don’t be discouraged if it takes longer to achieve them” (WERDCC, 2008).

*Participant Synthesis.* The planning for action precursor theme to transformative learning inspired only offender responses (see Figure 9). The women offenders were supremely interested in the manifestation of their plans to their families both within the facility and upon their return to the community. Programmatic plans and personal development goals were addressed; however, planning for future action implies that women will embark on the journey of skill and knowledge acquisition.

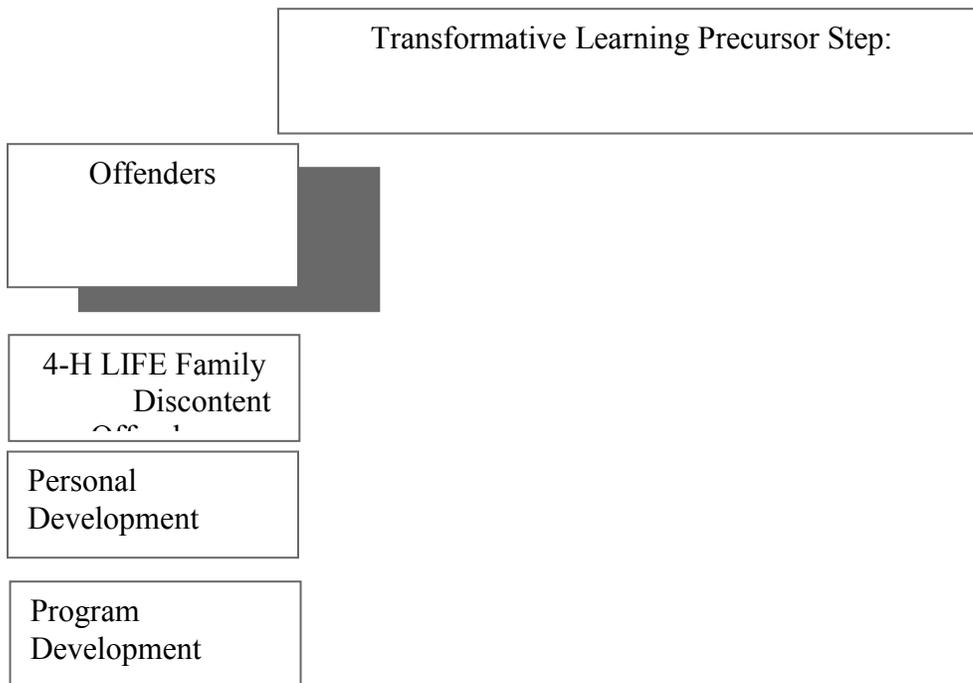


Figure 9. Integration of findings: Plan course of action

### *Acquire Knowledge and Skills*

Brock (2010) found participants indicated the acquisition of knowledge and skills to implement their plan and stated, “I gathered the information I needed to adopt these new ways of acting.” Thirty-nine references were made to the precursor step toward transformative learning of knowledge and skill acquisition. The emergent sub-themes in this section were: 4-H LIFE Family, personal development, and program development.

*4-H LIFE Family.* Women offenders reflected on the knowledge and skills they had the ability to experience as a result of their participation in the program. Their understanding of this skill acquisition was couched within the context of their families, their personal journey, and their programmatic experiences. Often, the skills discussed were those derived from 4-H projects and activities.

“New ways to make ornaments for our Christmas tree every year” (CCC, 2010). “I learned really good projects to do with my children” (CCC, 2010). “My granddaughter and I had fun with the fruit kabobs project. I was able to help her cut the pieces of apples and other fruits so they could all fit on a pretzel stick. She cut different pieces and I told her cut it bigger or smaller. She loved it” (WERDCC, 2010).

The 4-H program staff participant group referenced the sub-themes of 4-H LIFE Family, personal development, and program development. Twelve references were made among 4-H LIFE program staff within the skill and knowledge acquisition precursor step to transformative learning. A common thread among participants was to reference the planning and parenting courses for skill and knowledge acquisition is outlined in this section.

“It provides them with education to increase their knowledge of how to be a family and help a family be strong, stay connected” (VIC3, 2012). “They learn about warning signs to watch out for with their kids, they in terms of behaviors-risky behaviors, they learn about health, several come in addicted to various things and I think they learn the importance of that, if that sticks on the outside not sure but I am sure that it helps for sure. There’s lots of parenting things, spending time with the kids, the importance of letting the child know you care and checking on them, knowing you need to know who friends are of kids, issues like that are at the forefront where as in the prior life they may not have asked the questions” (VIC8, 2012).

*Personal Development.* Incarcerated women experienced the ability to build skills in a variety of areas. “I am doing better at being a leader because at every visit I learn something about myself and how to improve myself,” (WERDCC, 2009). “How to be assertive by actions, non-verbal” (CCC, 2010). “It helps in all parts of your life your character, personality management positions working with children” (CCC, 2010).

The acquired skills were often translated into mantras or life philosophies. “To always be compassionate and considerate of others. I can do anything I put my mind to” (CCC, 2010). “Learn to listen and be accepting and positive in what you say” (CCC, 2010).

Women offenders recognized that their skill acquisition was developmental and evolutionary. “Yes I practiced leadership but I feel that I need a little more coaching in areas due to me being nervous in front of people” (CCC, 2011). “I have learned to set goals that are attainable and to keep focused until I have achieved them” (WERDCC,

2008). “Work with others as a team, avoid others’ negativity and look at the positive aspect” (WERDCC, 2008).

In two instances, Department of Corrections staff members reflected on the skills and knowledge offenders developed through their participation in the 4-H LIFE program. The sub-themes included in this section were personal and program development. Both themes were derived from primary source data through interviews.

DOC members emphasized the collective process behind knowledge and skill development. This high-level group functioning was an intentional component of the 4-H LIFE program. “Teaching them how to work with others, be a team and share their emotions and feelings with the other children and other adults there” (DOC2, 2012).

4-H staff indicated program staff referenced specific life skills learned through participation in the program. “It gives the offenders an opportunity to develop life skills or at least work on some life skills to help them as a parent and in other relationships that they have in their lives” (VIC2, 2012). “Some of the topics we cover like communication, anger management, it helps them raise their awareness for areas they need to improve on. It gives them an opportunity to invest in their children” (VIC2, 2012).

Building Strong Families curriculum activities were referenced as a perceived contribution to offender development. “They can use what they learned like the ‘I’ statements” (VIC2, 2012). “That they are given the opportunity to express their concerns and to learn from their experiences, to see that others have been in the same situation and have succeeded and become successful in their lives. That they are given the opportunity to make decisions that they can choose how they lead their life even though they are in a

very constrained living situation” (VIC3, 2012). “By the incarcerated parent observing and recognizing the changes it pushes them to learn more” (VIC6, 2012).

*Program Development.* The 4-H LIFE program provided a context for women offenders to learn life and project skills. “By sharing through discussion with others here what went on on the visit” (WERDCC, 2009). “I led the chapstick making project and I learned that the messier projects are more difficult to teach. I made a mess but it was fun!” (WERDCC, 2011). “I learned that sometimes you have to be nice about how you want the children to act and you’ll get more out of them” (CCC, 2010).

Several statements indicated that a major life skill learned was listening. “I did help with the lotion making and it was fun to explain to other kids how to make it and to explain the way oil and water don’t mix until you add the emulsifier, very cool!” (WERDCC, 2010). “I learned that kids are more apt to listen to an adult when you give them choices” (CCC, 2011).

Department of Corrections staff noted that one element of the 4-H LIFE program is community service. The DOC staff member was excited by the impact of service projects engaged within the correctional facility. “Also doing stuff to help the community, making blankets at the nursing home and learning to help beyond their own group, they are learning to help people in the community and that’s a good thing. Think about other people besides themselves” (DOC2, 2012).

Volunteers emphasized the impact of skill building within the programmatic contexts. Three references of offender transformation in skill building were explored in this section. The process of parenting courses prior to the family visit had an impact on the experiential nature of the program.

“Well the parents involved were learning things as they went, it gave them time to ask questions they may not have been able to ask any other presenter and get a non-biased answer toward it,” (VIC9, 2012). “I think that requirement is essential for them to learn even public speaking skills, how to sequence topics in a meeting, how to communicate with each other, how to discuss what they are going to do at a meeting, how they will lead the meeting, who will go first,” (VIC5, 2012). “Organization, changes in organization or the ability to organize or the desire to organize,” (VIC5, 2012).

The application of knowledge and skills acquisition was the 4-H LIFE Family Visit. Program staff referred to the ability of incarcerated women to utilize their knowledge and skills in this context. “It appears that the education and training that the women have gotten has improved their interaction with the kids,” (Focus Group, 2009). “I also think that through the parenting classes there are certain traits they are lacking so they learn traits and things to ask their kids and you see it in the visits and the interactions they have with their kids,” (VIC8, 2012).

Parenting and planning classes facilitated by 4-H program staff provided specific content by which offenders learned skills. “They loved the Ages and Stages when I did that one, and it was something that, although I think all of them were familiar with the ideas, I don’t know that they’d ever had any specific instructions like that on, you know, what children, how children respond at different ages,” (Focus Group, 2009). “Anything that focused a little bit more on 4-H and leadership skills is what they have been particularly interested in, responsive to,” (Focus Group, 2009). “Have some ownership of what we’re doing and if we can bring in projects that they are able to lead their children

through during the enhanced visits, that is something that has really appealed to them,” (Focus Group, 2009).

*Participant Synthesis.* Within the acquisition of skills and knowledge precursor step to transformative learning, there were references made by all four participant groups (see Figure 10). Each group referred to the way in which knowledge and skills were applied to personal and program development. Each group was able to find a specific tangible skill that offenders had learned and manifested within themselves and their families. As incarcerated women progressed through the program, the women began to internalize the acquired knowledge and skills to build their confidence.

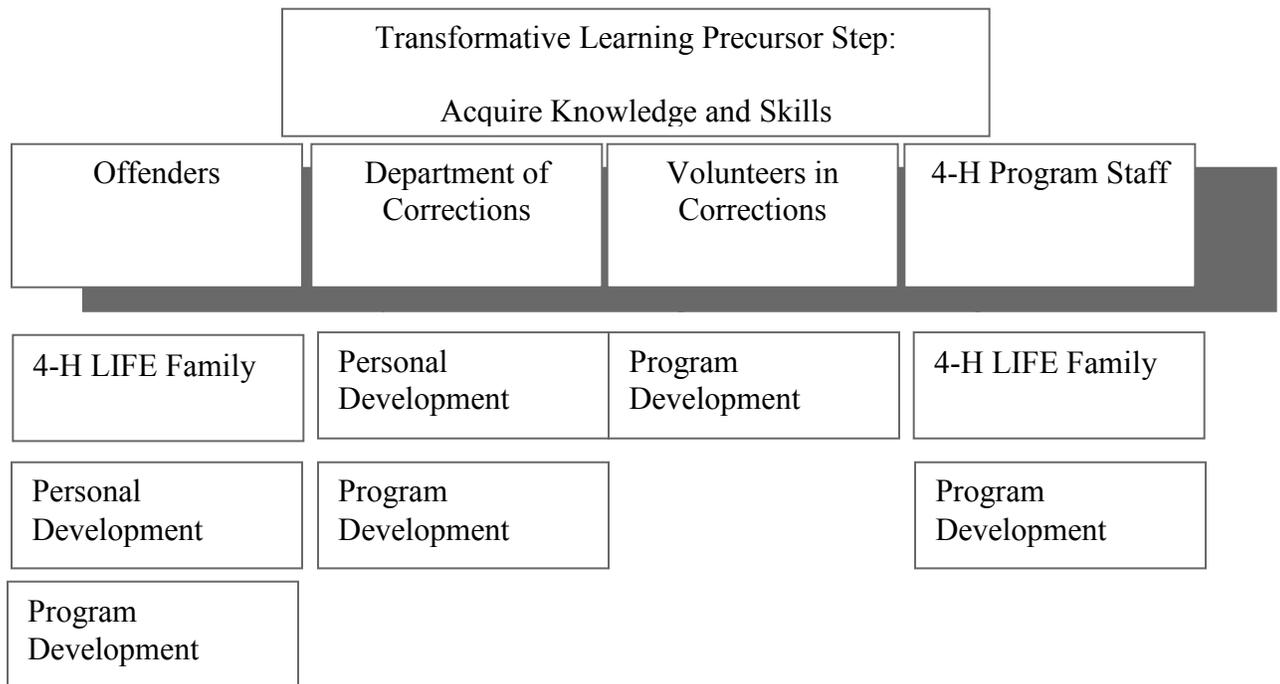


Figure 10. Integration of findings: Acquire knowledge and skills

### *Build Competence/Confidence*

Brock (2010) indicated that participants experienced increased competence/confidence and noted, “I began to think about reactions and feedback from my new behavior.” Fifty-three references were made within confidence building precursor step to transformative learning. The emergent sub-themes included: 4-H LIFE Family, personal development, and program development.

*4-H LIFE Family.* Twenty-three statements indicated offenders experienced confidence and competence building from their participation in the 4-H LIFE program. All three of the sub-themes were referenced in this section including: family, personal, and program development.

Incarcerated women commented frequently about the impact their confidence had on their ability to guide their children. “I have a good way of relating with the children” (CCC, 2010). “It will help me to be better myself around other offenders and their children/child” (CCC, 2010).

Two references to the effects of offender self-confidence occurred among paid University of Missouri Extension personnel. 4-H program staff commented about the growth experienced by offenders through the sub-themes of 4-H LIFE family, personal development, and program development. A specific focus on programmatic improvements within the context of offender competence building was explored.

“We reach the kids through the families and we reach the families through the offenders so I think in summary that the offenders have change because they know they are individually and collectively important” (VIC6, 2012). 4-H program staff focused on the context developed for all of those participants in the program. The references in the

following section provided an understanding about the impact offenders have on their families when they feel positive internally.

*Personal Development.* Many statements, numbering sixteen in total, were referenced by women offenders about the personal confidence they had gained as a result of the program. “My patience is getting better, I was born to lead, and I work well with the kids” (CCC, 2009). “I am very good and get better each time with leading” (WERDCC, 2009).

Specific evidence of confidence and competence building were examined through facilitation experiences. “I just learned that it’s easier for me to be in front of a group of people that I don’t know” (CCC, 2010). “I work well with people and I noticed everyone kind of looked to me for answers so it made me feel important” (CCC, 2010). “I always enjoy working with all, makes your self-esteem feel high” (CCC, 2010). “It’s getting easier, I lost my train of thought a couple of times, but wasn’t hard to get back on track, I really enjoy working with my kids” (CCC, 2010).

Women offenders discussed the personal confidence they had gained as a result of the program. “I can stand up and take charge when need to be” (CCC, 2010). “I was song leader again, I really enjoyed myself, I have gained a lot of confidence” (CCC, 2010). “No matter what the leadership job, I can do the job and have a good time interacting with families” (CCC, 2010).

Often, women developed mantras or life philosophies as a result of their increased confidence. “Being a part of the group and having a responsibility to do makes you feel really important and makes you feel like a part of the team” (CCC, 2010). “Just do it and not worry cause I can do it” (CCC, 2010). “I feel I can do anything I put my mind to-it

might be a little scary but I've got this (my mantra)" (CCC, 2010). "Never doubt yourself and your feelings" (CCC, 2010).

Overall, women offenders expressed surprise at their newly found confidence. "Yes WOW!! I am so proud of myself. I learned that I work well with children and that my leadership is respected and valued. It boosted my self-esteem. And so I felt confident in my actions. They made me feel good about myself" (WERDCC, 2010). "I learned I have good ideas and suggestions to work with others on projects" (WERDCC, 2010). "I learned I am becoming a little more outgoing around a lot of people, it takes me a while of hanging around to be comfortable" (CCC, 2011).

Department of Corrections Staff focused on the impact the program had on women offenders personally. "I think it helps their self-esteem" (DOC Interviews, 2009). "They have a better outlook on things, something to be proud of that they've accomplished. It's good for them to know a sense of accomplishment. Often their self-esteem is not that great, so anything to help them be more of a family together I think that is helping them. Even the workers that come in-4 to 5 offender helpers are glad it gives them something to look forward to" (DOC2, 2012).

Volunteers similarly explored the way in which offenders experienced an increase in confidence. Five references to the process of competence building occurred. These references centered on offender personal development.

Frequently, the process of building self-confidence led to an empowerment on the part of women to become more involved in the program. "How the ladies have developed their self-confidence has really grown to step forward and take care of things" (VIC4, 2012). "You have offenders that are very involved, they want to participate, eager to

participate, they are vocal but not bashful, but you have others that are introverts, reluctant to participate. From that perspective I have seen reluctant introverts that as the months go by they are eager and willing to participate and lead an activity” (VIC5, 2012).

“Gives the offenders something to look forward to month to month and even helps them throw themselves into the class time even more because the classes are geared toward understanding and being good role models for the children, etc” (VIC7, 2012). Offender self-confidence improved as a result of feeling success at a task well done, and the ability to see the impact their presence had on their children. “4-H LIFE is a wonderful great tool to increase that level of self-worth and for the children and the offenders,” (VIC7, 2012). “There was an obvious change in some of them, not all of them, some of them you saw a change. The ones that wanted to be better and better their lives and their children’s lives. Not everyone of them changed but the ones wanted to be there had a good attitude and you could really see” (VIC9, 2012).

4-H program staff explained the impact the program had on the empowerment of women offenders. “I would say that when I think about incarcerated women in the program for a long time, I mean I hear them say they’ve changed because now they are comfortable speaking in front of a group and leading an activity with kids and families including in areas with no experience” (VIC6, 2012). The experience offenders are able to build for their families due to an increased feeling of confidence is unparalleled within a prison. The culture developed due to an increased confidence among offenders has an impact on the 4-H LIFE program.

*Program Development.* The logistics of the program provided an application of women to explore and build their confidence levels. “I can work well with others while

pitching in to get things ready” (WERDCC, 2009). “I done the dog grooming and I can talk in front of people” (WERDCC, 2009). “Not everyone has the same opinion. Each to his own, listen to others and reach out to help others” (WERDCC, 2009). “I can speak in front of everyone even if I am not prepared and they are okay with it. Everyone is so understanding, this has helped me since I’ve been in 4-H” (WERDCC, 2009).

4-H program staff noted the way in which the program changed the environment for families. “There is a lot of altruism during the 4-H visits and that doesn’t come easy inside a correctional center” (VIC6, 2012). 4-H program staff referred to the resulting growth of 4-H Family relationships, personal development, and program development through increased offender confidence. The other participant categories spent less energy examining impacts as a result of offender competence.

*Participant Synthesis.* Volunteers and Department of Corrections Staff remarked solely on the personal development growth experienced by offenders as they gained confidence from the program (see Figure 11). Offenders made the bulk of the statements in this section. The incarcerated women commented in each sub-theme including 4-H LIFE family, program development, and personal development.

Offender examination was largely internally focused, where the 4-H Program staff explored the effect that built confidence had on the program as a whole. The final precursor step to transformative learning was reintegration into life. This theme provided closure to the understanding of research question one.

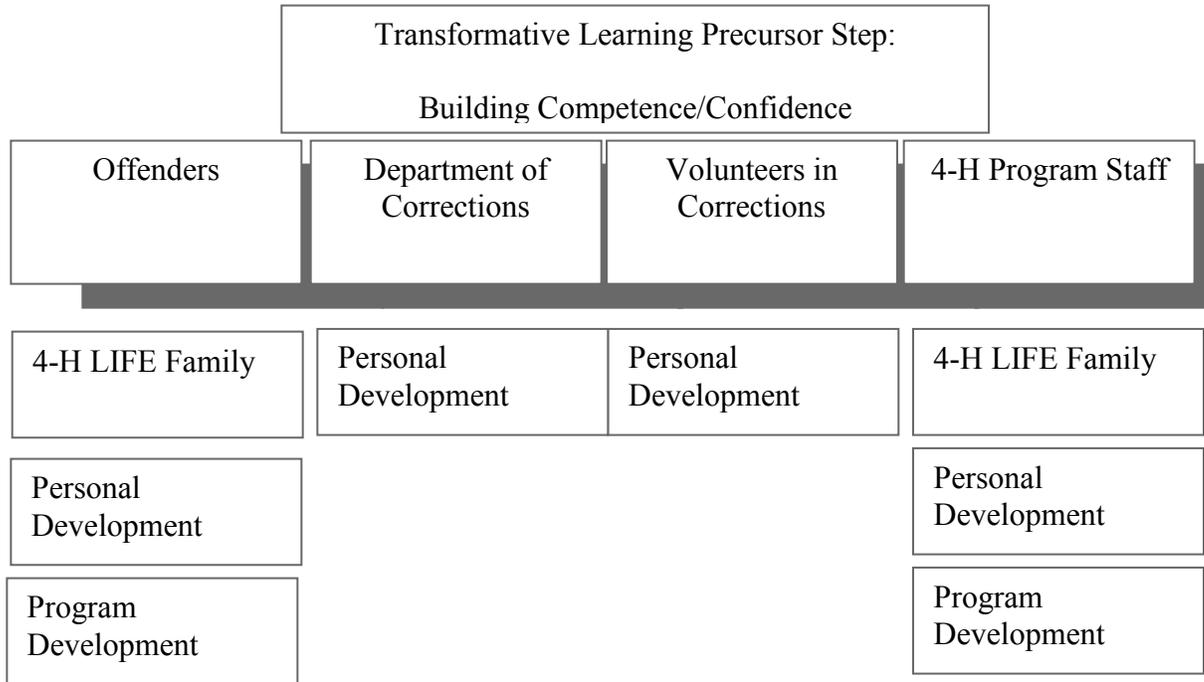


Figure 11. Integration of findings: Building competence/confidence

*Reintegrate in Life*

Brock (2010) asserted that participants reintegrate to life their experiences and stated, “I took action and adopted these new ways of acting.” Forty statements appeared to paint the picture of offender application of lessons learned in the program for offenders. The sub-themes present among the four participant groups in this section were: 4-H LIFE family, personal development, and program development.

*4-H LIFE Family.* Among the references made by the offender participant group, sixteen statements indicated this participant population felt an ability to apply concepts learned. Often, offenders found the program a venue for externalizing their lessons to family members. The focus shifted away from self and centered on the potential for offender impact on their loved ones.

“It’s important to me to put others needs above my own. Making sure everything is done so that the families can sit back and enjoy themselves” (CCC, 2009). Involvement in a youth organization provided an opportunity among incarcerated women to see a path for their children in the program outside of the prison. “I have learned how interested my children are in the 4-H. This is something we will want to continue upon my release” (WERDCC, 2009). “Staying with 4-H for life” (WERDCC, 2009).

Offenders began to examine the way in which they could translate the lessons learned through 4-H to other areas of impact for their families. “By doing special activities with family and friends” (WERDCC, 2009). “Rather than just take over the project with my daughter and do it so it would be done right, I actually let her go and give instructions to assist her. She did quite well and is so much more intelligent and capable than I give her credit for” (WERDCC, 2010). “I can apply what I saw that my children enjoyed doing and do it at home with them” (WERDCC, 2010).

While the women were increasingly able to minimize the focus on self and translate the learning to other life contexts, a deep impact was made on the relationship development between offenders and 4-H LIFE visitors. “It brought me and a lot of the kids closer, they all wanted to hug me “bye” (CCC, 2011). These statements are further reflected and echoed through offender personal development experiences.

Six references were made by Department of Corrections Staff of the offender learning transformation through reintegration to their life. The sub-themes explored among this participant group were 4-H LIFE family and personal development. Within the context of the family, Department of Corrections Staff noticed the incentivizing impact of the 4-H LIFE program.

“They were so happy to take what their child made...they were so happy to look forward to the next visit so a lot of times they would stay out of trouble and go the extra mile to have that visit” (DOC Interviews, 2009). This participant group reflected the way in which offenders integrated lessons learned into their daily routines and behavior within the correctional facility. The bulk of their statements occurred in the personal development sub-theme.

Finally, 4-H Program staff made thirteen references to the transformative learning potential for offenders as they reintegrated lessons learned from the program to their lives. The sub-themes explored in this section were 4-H LIFE family, personal development, and program development. Whether the women were projecting the possible impact they could have upon the return to their family or the immediate difference they can make on their loved ones, the skills and lessons learned in the 4-H LIFE program were translated and reintegrated among offender participants to encourage growth in their family dynamic.

“Hope and believe possibly that upon release of the women from the prison that there will be an improved family function at home” (Focus Group, 2009). “They may go directly back to the home where their children live and I think that the kids may not want to listen to the mom they may spill things they may not want to share. I think that if the mother who is formerly incarcerated hasn’t had to deal with that even in a short time frame, I think we (meaning society) are setting ourselves up for a potential parent-child conflict or even family tension that is the result of the woman going from 0-90 in her parenting experience” (VIC6, 2012). In one case, the 4-H Program staff member referenced a specific application situation of a released offender.

“I use an example of an offender that recently released from prison and she had said that before the program that her family didn’t spend time together, eat meals together, and through the program she learned traits like the importance of family meal time, driving questions to get to what teens and youth are dealing with, she is a better parent on the outside because of the skills she learned” (VIC8, 2012). While not all offenders will have an opportunity to return to their families, there was a plethora of opportunities for this group to reintegrate their learning with family members. The 4-H LIFE program provided an intentional space for practicing their new parenting skills through the family visit, and phone calls became a more private demonstration of offender reintegration.

“I think that as they learn about their child’s needs in the classes they are more able to apply that while visiting and through phone conversations” (VIC2, 2012).

“Another observation in the classes, I’ve had the ladies tell me ‘I called my daughter about this topic.’ They shared what they learned in class maybe through something that went on at home” (VIC2, 2012). The care, of which offenders took for their family, was an important integrating concept.

“They have a serious respect for family relationships hoping that the children don’t follow in their footsteps that they are able to lead a good life and feel good about themselves” (VIC3, 2012). While women explored the application of lessons learned within the context of their family, they became empowered to make a personal impact on the program. “So learning how to work within the correctional system, specifically time constraints, different interests, and limited resources, creates good group learning experiences I think. Hopefully that experience month after month can be transferred to

other group situations such as planning things with the family when the woman is on the outside,” (VIC6, 2012). Attitudinal changes and reintegration of positive youth development concepts were explored among 4-H program staff for the women offender population.

*Personal Development.* Offenders made four references about their internal experience reintegration. The group discussed the short-term impact of their ability to share learning within their current reality. “Take some of the things I learn back to the general prison population and share them with others” (WERDCC, 2009). “Practice it in daily living in this community” (CCC, 2010). “I am a tutor too it helps me interact with people in general” (CCC, 2010).

A recurring theme of personal development frameworks or mantras was translated in this reintegration section. “As long as I give good honest advice, I can continue to lead by example and explain things in a way people understand” (CCC, 2011). Personal development often provided an impetus for offenders to become engaged in the act of program development.

Personal hygiene was a trending theme referenced as corrections staff reflected on the application of program lessons. “The following week they would send notices/request papers and they knew that they had to have good conduct. And you saw a lot of the women taking an interest in their appearance, even if they were seeing their children” (DOC Interviews, 2009). “You’d see their hair crazy all through the week, but they looked good on the 4-H Saturday” (DOC Interviews, 2009).

This participant group specifically noticed behavior changes within the correctional facility proper and the housing unit. “I’ve noticed changes in how they act

towards each other over time especially if they have a 4-H visit they look forward to that visit more than a regular visit” (DOC1, 2012). “They talk about 4-H LIFE when out there, they will say ‘hey I will see you at 4-H LIFE so I know they are looking forward to it” (DOC1, 2012). “Improving their attitude in the housing unit. They are taking it back to the housing unit-the stuff they learned here. They are proud they are in that so it is giving better attitudes, better to handle because they are following rules, it is an incentive” (DOC2, 2012).

Scant evidence of reintegration into life among offenders was discovered through statements made by volunteers. This group focused on the personal development of offenders. Two references were coded within this precursor step to transformative learning.

Volunteers understood a level of recognition of the impact that women carry to other prison organizations, as well as the integration of personal empowerment among offender participants. “They join organizations and help other women have the same outlook. I would probably go crazy if I was in that position, I admire them. I am used to the freedom. They don’t have these options so I admire” (VIC4, 2012). “A lot of them in going from the stoic to more emotional a lot also started using the skills being taught” (VIC9, 2012).

4-H program staff further mused that offender women improved their self-care as they had more visits. “And they just develop a more positive attitude, they start caring about taking care of themselves” (VIC3, 2012). “But I feel I have observed seeing change in women is that initially they were a participant and now they are role models and leaders to the newer participants that are in the program and by that I mean the newer

incarcerated grandmothers, mothers and aunts. Now there are more aunts joining the program which I think is great” (VIC6, 2012). The shifts in behavior also become translated to offender housing units and prison life.

“They are more respectful of their roommates, recognizing that the program can be good for anybody if they want to improve their situation. They actually advertise the program to get more people involved” (VIC3, 2012). “I hear them discuss at times that when people complain about the food they might say yeah it’s not the best but it is better than what I had when I was living on the street. They might talk about irritations with roommates but they’ve learned how to deal with it. They understand that sometimes they have to let things roll off their back that there is more important things in life” (VIC3, 2012). A personal empowerment and realization of translatable skills for family members and personal development increases the power and impact of an engaged program.

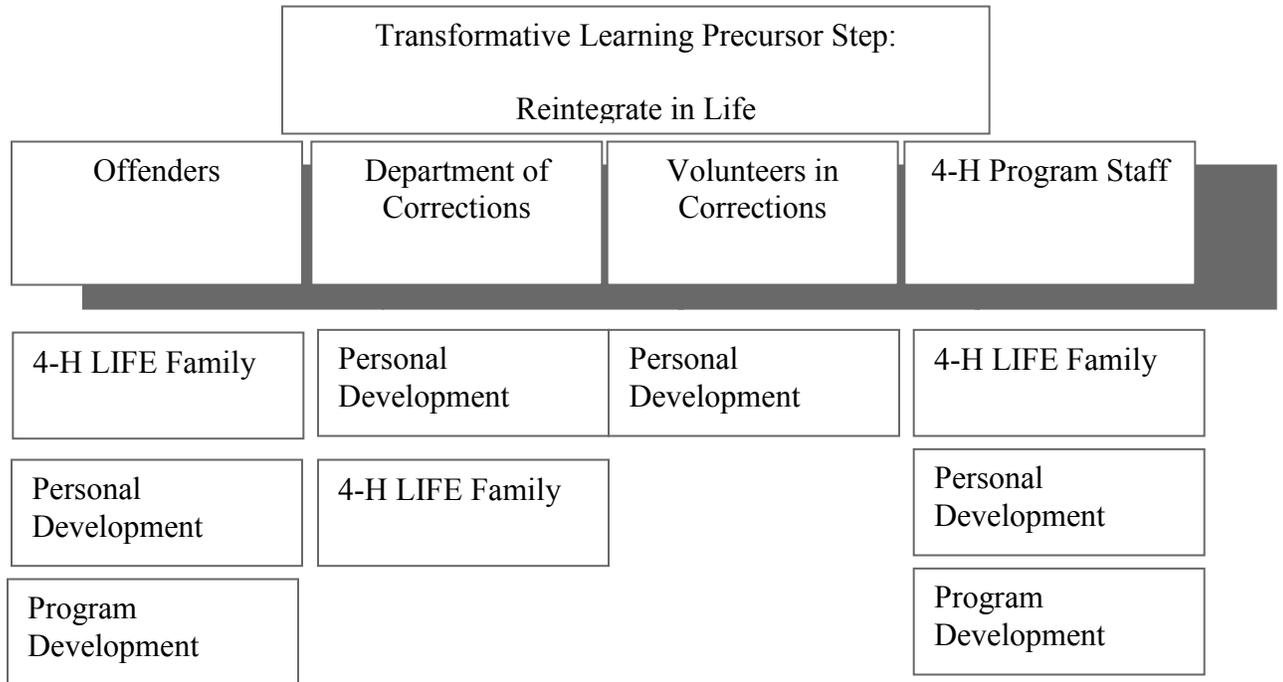
*Program Development.* Some of the statements in this sub-theme reflected transformation in facilitation skills reintegrated in the program. “I led a song and helped with the photography project” (WERDCC, 2009). “I read and discussed a book and enjoyed getting the kids involved with discussion” (WERDCC, 2009). “Go back re-evaluate and apply the 4-H rules/etc” (CCC, 2010).

Reintegration also led to offender reflection on the trajectory of the 4-H LIFE program. “I think the program has moved to another level. I think it is great since new families have arrived and participate in the activities. Its been refreshing and it makes it fun and exciting all over again” (CCC, 2011). Personal engagement and buy-in provided an opportunity for women to feel empowered to translate the lessons learned to an

external audience. “Keep it going on the outside at the different 4-H clubs as well as at home” (WERDCC, 2009).

4-H program staff statements were indicative of an understanding that the offenders might potentially be released back into society, creating a real-world ability for incarcerated women to translate parenting and planning skills. “There have been a few ladies that have been on the outside for a little while and I know several active in 4-H still and keeping the positive connections alive. I have seen it help that 4-H allows the mom to be more easily restarted once they get out, because you have a child living with someone else and sometimes 4-H bridges that gap and gets those bonds restarted and keep them on a more narrow straight path” (VIC8, 2012). “I like how it works to rehabilitate the offenders, we know that offenders are going to be our neighbors and re-enter our society. They will be moms and dads and I like how it gives them a chance to rehabilitate and connect to a positive influence” (VIC8, 2012).

*Participant Synthesis.* A large number of statements were referenced within the final precursor theme of reintegration into life (see Figure 12). The personal development sub-theme received the most citations, as each participant group reflected on the way in which behavior and attitude shifts were translated into other areas of offender existence. Three of the four participant groups outlined the particular application of learning tools to the immediate context of family dynamics. However, many of the participant groups referred to the potential for future reintegration as incarcerated individuals are released into society.



*Figure 12. Integration of findings: Reintegrate in life*

*Research Question One Summary*

The ten precursor steps to transformative learning were: disorienting dilemmas, self-examination, shared experiences, exploration of new roles, critical reflection, trying on new roles, planning a course of action, acquisition of knowledge and skills, confidence and competence building, and reintegration into life (Mezirow, 2000). Brock (2010) provided specific contextual statements to guide the current analysis. The four participant groups reflected on the application of the 4-H LIFE program to the transformation among offenders. These participant groups included: Offenders, Department of Corrections Staff, Volunteers in Corrections, and 4-H LIFE program staff. The second research question referred to the specific impact the 4-H LIFE program had on offender parenting perception.

## *Data Results:*

### *Research Question Two: Parenting Perception*

Research question two asked: How have perceptions of offender parenting shifted as a result of participation in the 4-H LIFE program? The data for research question two were derived from all study participants: Department of Corrections Officers, Offenders, 4-H Program Staff, and Volunteers in Corrections. The methods for data collection included: focus groups, in-person interviews, phone interviews, and completion of open-ended offender reflection sheets. The emergent sub-themes for this research question were: offender-centered and youth-centered.

#### *Offender-Centered*

The offender population included women participants from WERDCC and CCC in the state of Missouri. After each family visit, women were asked to complete an offender reflection sheet of their experiences. The Family Assessment Questionnaire was also gleaned for relevant quotations. The emergent sub-themes that flowed from the parenting perception shifts for offenders were: offender-centered and youth-centered.

The statements in this section included shifts in the internal understanding of what it means to be a parent for the offenders, as a result of the 4-H LIFE program. The quotes that follow surround the personal perceptions that offenders felt as a result of parenting from a correctional center. Often parenting from a distance required a balance but provided an opportunity to reflect between each visit and phone call. “Try to keep my kids (Kota and Tay) involved and give them equal attention” (CCC, 2009). “Yes- I learned that I love showing children how to achieve their goals” (WERDCC, 2009).

### *Leadership toward Children*

Parenting from prison is not without hardships; many women offenders have the opportunity to be self-reflective as a result of engaging in the 4-H LIFE parenting class. “Yes, I learned that being a mom-we do make mistakes and our kids forgive us. They still want to be a family” (WERDCC, 2009). “I apply everything I learn to my life- to grow & become a better mother and grandmother” (WERDCC, 2009). Many parents indicated they wanted to grow personally in their capacity as a parent.

“Be a leader to my child and be a better example/role model for my son” (WERDCC, 2009). Further, reflecting on previous choices, women indicated they would like to grow and develop their familial relationships. “It made me realize I need to spend more time doing things as a family” (WERDCC, 2009). “To keep in touch with the children and send them letters – talk to them if possible” (WERDCC, 2009).

### *Constructive Parenting Techniques*

Learning constructive parenting techniques was a main theme among women offender participants in the program. “I can expect more from my child without feeling that I’m pushing her to hard, thinking that she’s too young to do it” (WERDCC, 2009). One recurrent theme was the development of communication. “I would have a family discussion on working together and communicating more” (WERDCC, 2009).

4-H LIFE requires offender participants and their families to be engaged and hands-on in the program; women often reflected on their role as a facilitator within the programmatic context. “To remember how much the children like to learn and help. They like to be involved. To teach them better” (WERDCC, 2009). Often women were

surprised by the skills that their children learned and developed while the offenders were away. “Never underestimate the abilities of my child” (WERDCC, 2009). “Both my girls are growing up so incredibly fast and I’ve missed out on a lot. I can’t wait to be home so that our relationships can continue to grow” (CCC, 2010).

### *Empowerment as Parent*

Offender parents became empowered in their parenting role as they were pushed to facilitate elements of the program; they learned a lot about their parenting techniques. “I learned which activity they were least best @ as far as coordination, try a different way to get a better result and how they were not angry” (CCC, 2010). Many were surprised their children trusted them to open up and communicate. “I had time to talk with my grandchildren about school and other things going on in their life. They were very open with me” (CCC, 2010). The 4-H program helped to renew bonds among parents separated by prison; often women realized their children did need them on a daily basis. “That they really miss me and upset with me not being there” (CCC, 2010).

Further, women offenders began to realize their role modeling capacity and the expectation of their children for fulfillment of that responsibility. “Yes, our children are looking up to us. They enjoyed to candy cane legend, I believe I taught them something that will stay with them forever” (CCC, 2010). “I can practice being more patient and understanding when it comes to different situations with my girls. I learned that no matter the relationship, children look up to the adults in their lives, including me” (CCC, 2010). “I learned the children really enjoy everything about it, being with their mothers before Christmas” (CCC, 2010).

### *Parenting to Maintain Status*

Importantly, engaging with their children encouraged women offenders to remain hopeful about their current status. “How I could relate to their level of thinking and how energized I felt being physical with them” (CCC, 2010). “Regardless of an adults age you still have that child within you that, if you allow it, your children, grandchildren, niece, nephews, etc, can bring it out of you and a better bond is formed of friendship and trust” (CCC, 2010).

### *Communication Techniques*

A repetitive element of communication was the need for developing listening skills, and the impact that those listening skills had on relationships. “To listen to my grandchildren with an open mind and earn their trust and respect” (CCC, 2010). “To teach my children and niece and nephew how to listen and step up when someone else can’t be there” (CCC, 2010). “I learned that my children truly listen and respect what I have to say, especially when it’s constructive. And I learned that I don’t have to be afraid of them rebelling because I am incarcerated. Also that I can stand firm on what I talk about with them” (WERDCC, 2010).

### *Family Reconnection*

The 4-H LIFE family visits provided a venue for family reconnection; parents realized they could develop relationships with their children despite the context. “Families come together and it doesn’t matter what you are doing- could be our 4H visit or a day at Disney World, All that matters is spending time together- it means so much” (CCC, 2010). “My children love coming up here and participating- this gives me a chance to not feel so left out of their lives and can see how they’ve processed” (CCC,

2010). “I loved all the family interacting and to see how proud my “Fellow inmates” are of their families and how much they enjoyed the family time” (CCC, 2010). “Family contact is very critical during long separations. I only hope that we can find a way to keep this program going” (WERDCC, 2010).

Navigating new parental roles was frequently a challenge and a source of growth for offender women. “Having the “game plan” and directing them of what we would do let me feel like “Mom” again” (WERDCC, 2010). “I was able to serve my family. I haven’t been able to do that for a while and I learned that I’m still able to” (WERDCC, 2010). “What I learned about myself is that I as a parent need to step back a bit and let me children cultivate their own ideas because they actually had really good ideas for their projects on their own. I was proud!” (WERDCC, 2010). “I think differently about my family and therefore communicate differently (better) with them” (WERDCC, 2010).

Women offenders were often surprised by the realization that they could have fun and “let loose” within the correctional facility. “I was a song leader and so was my mother and it was fun to embarrass or have my family see me act funny- just having good clean fun! Of course, the boys were ‘Oh my God’ - but they need to see me have fun!” (WERDCC, 2010). “By participating in the activities. Learned, you’re never too old to act out like a kid with your grandkids. We shared so much laughter and hugs we were almost in tears” (CCC, 2011).

### *Caregivers and Families*

Another element of parenting from prison is navigating the relationships with the caregivers of the children. “Everything will require teamwork in our family and we are a #1 team even while I’m here thanks to 4-H Life!!” (WERDCC, 2010). While some

offenders were revitalized and felt connected to the caregivers, others had difficulties and struggled. “That the abuse is ongoing and my husband blames everyone and everything except who’s actually responsible” (CCC, 2011). “Yes, I stopped an argument from escalating. By not siding with my Grandkids and agreeing to concede to my husband’s decisions concerning where they live” (CCC, 2011).

Finally, maintaining positive relationships was always a challenge for women offenders. “I learned that in some situations I have to step- up with my grandchildren. I also learned that we need to praise my grandchildren for the all right things they do and discuss instead of judge, the things we don’t agree with they do” (CCC, 2011). Trust continued to be a common theme and element for concern. “First don’t make promises we can’t keep & always try to lead by a good example because they look up to us” (CCC, 2011). However, the entire group became a family, and women offenders felt empowered to call non-blood related participants their kin. “I apply all I learn about parenting to the kids who are locked up here- besides my blood kin” (WERDCC, 2010).

The data in this section were derived from two interviews with the Department of Corrections Staff members. The first interviews were undertaken by Tammy Gillespie in 2009 via phone in 20 minute increments. These interviews were considered secondary data; there were eleven participants in this data collection. The second set of interviews were the primary data collected in February 2012; there were two participants in a series of phone interviews that lasted approximately 40 minutes in length. The two sub-categories of offender-centered and youth-centered were carried through this section.

### *Family-Oriented Behavior*

Department of Corrections staff mentioned in two instances their recognition of the parenting shifts they found in offenders due to participation in the program. “Even tho' they are offenders, they still love their children. We just didn't have a lot of volunteers that supported us. You see the mothers cry. The separation time was very hard on them” (DOC, 2009). “I think they’ve become as far as their families are concerned, I think they’ve become more family oriented” (DOC1, 2012). However, many statements from this participant population surround the impact of the program on youth as it relates to parenting perception shifts.

Volunteers in Corrections or VIC’s are volunteers who undergo specific training with the Department of Corrections to work in facilities throughout Missouri engaging in educational programming. Five volunteers were interviewed in this study. Each interview was collected via the phone in approximately 20 minute segments. The sub-themes of Offender-Centered and Youth-Centered are carried throughout this section.

Volunteers were often struck by the growth and development of parenting skills among offenders. “Everybody wants to be a good parent and some people don’t know and are just uncomfortable and especially if they are away from parenting for a long time especially if don’t know what to say or do things” (VIC4, 2012). Often this growth was channeled through the offender role as a facilitator. “I think they are eager to interact with their families, they are always eager. Now again the change that I’ve seen is maybe their willingness to take charge of their families during an activity. It seems like they may coach more where before they would not get directly involved but they might be passive about an activity but now they begin to actively begin to participate and take an active

role instead of a passive. And I think as their children age, they want their children to participate and understand so I think I have seen them try to engage in their children more” (VIC5, 2012).

### *Social Norms of the Visit*

The process of navigating the logistics and new social norms of the 4-H visit shifts the parental role and frames of reference. “Instead of sitting down and trying to do something without reading instructions/listening, they realized that doesn’t work they cannot do it without instructions and now they sit down with their child and spouse and say let’s figure this out and they kind of structure it instead of just saying ok let’s just try to muddle our way through it” (VIC5, 2012).

The offender parent often reconnected with their family members and practices parenting skills that are developed from their realization of past mistakes. “I think it’s a wonderful way to restore a relationship between women and their children, grandchildren, nieces, nephews and just the children in their life” (VIC7, 2012). “In many cases they realize that they can become so much better for that child than they have ever been before and opens up their minds to the importance of nurturing that relationship so that hopefully that child won’t end up going to prison and that child will feel free to talk to the mother, grandmother, aunt, sister that is incarcerated if the bonds of communication are tightened between the child and the offender” (VIC7, 2012).

### *Mothering Identity*

The 4-H LIFE program afforded women an opportunity to re-establish the mothering or parent identity. “There is many times when others inside the prison have made them feel like they’re unworthy and then that Saturday visit comes up and they are

so excited and for that few hours they are the big person in that child's life" (VIC7, 2012). "I just think for somebody to join the 4-H LIFE program and stick with it and give it their all, takes a person who is sincerely interested in their child. That quality in the women shines through, you can separate them out on the camp. They just stand out" (VIC7, 2012).

However, re-establishing trust and broken bonds is not always easy. "Well there is sometimes an awkwardness when the visit would first begin getting some of that junk out of the way like yes we are in prison and yes I did this crime and I am sorry you have to come so far to come see me and a lot of humility, humbleness and tears. Then as the day would progress, good ol' fun and interaction and having a commonality there, like we're here to watch the child in a little meeting and we're here to get to know a little bit about each other and then the mood would lighten up, shoulders would drop and it would be the next best thing those women would find at having Sunday dinner at grandma's house" (VIC7, 2012).

### *Caregivers and Offenders*

Caregivers also play an instrumental role in the success of the offender and their ability to parent from prison. "Caretakers got to see that parents have gotten to be a parent, everybody learned something that was the best part of it" (VIC9, 2012). "Using the parenting skills, a couple you could see were really trying to let caretaker making all the calls to the parenting taking charge that this is my child and willing to do that and take a part and becoming more in their role. Caretakers backed off saying it is your time, a learning experience for them. Parents becoming a parent again, getting up and taking a child to vending machine, helping the child with the project, the child actually coming to

the parent when they had a question or a problem. It sounds so easy but for some of them it had been so long it took some learning experience and for some never experienced it and for the kids it was new too” (VIC9, 2012).

4-H Program Staff were individuals employed by the University of Missouri Extension who worked directly with the program or supervised front-line personnel involved in the correctional centers. The staff focus group was a secondary source collected by Tammy Gillespie with all staff members who worked with female correctional facilities in the state of Missouri in 2009. Five phone interviews were collected as a part of the primary data collection in this study occurring approximately 20 minutes in length. The emergent sub-themes of offender-centered and youth-centered were used in this section.

4-H program staff re-iterated the special challenges and dynamics among offenders and caregivers. “I think a lot of times there is tension between the caregivers and the offender and in some cases resentment so the 4-H life visit allows the ice to broken and some bonds to be restored” (VIC8, 2012). “You see how the offender in their prior role a lot of times the offender feels like a bystander in the lives of their children and the caregiver is primary for emotional and physical needs. They have gone from being a bystander to an active participant in their child’s live in the 4-H life club visit setting” (VIC8, 2012).

#### *Maintaining Parental Role*

The offenders were dealing with separation and a need to maintain their parenting role while in prison. “That is hard, it is a reminder that her kids are growing up without her but also hard because the incarcerated parenting is growing older and time is passing,

it is a good nudge in the direction that I need to grow up and be more responsible and learn where they are at in their life to remain connected” (VIC6, 2012).

Shifts in offender facilitation skills are striking as parents begin to see the program as a model for helping understand offender roles and responsibilities. “I have seen that the women who have been in the program for some time are more comfortable being the guide on the side rather than the sage on the stage. Learned about experiential learning and reflection process with their kids. Rather than being the one up front telling them how to do it, not doing it so much anymore, more relaxed and more tuned in to the process of letting their kids learn and asking the questions to help their kids learn more about the activity whether indoor gardening, craft project or whatever, and that is pretty awesome to see” (VIC6, 2012).

The 4-H LIFE program is specifically designed to help offenders develop parenting and facilitation skills and not be the dictatorial parent. “It is interesting to me because really it may look like they are less engaged because not a flurry of verbalization, in fact they are more engaged more relaxed and quieter. More engaged in the process rather than the project or presentation” (VIC6, 2012).

### *Offender Personality*

The intentionality of the more opened visit affords incarcerated participants to maintain their personality with their children. “I have noticed that the women become more comfortable with giving their family members physical affection” (VIC6, 2012). “It helps them communicate to their family in a different way than what they probably have in the past. It’s a very sharing relationship” (Focus Group, 2009).

Parent participants began to develop empathy among their kids and caregivers, and role solidity as the increasing number of children began to visit. “I have, yeah, I have heard from some of the women that they approach things differently, that they are having different expectations from family members, that they realize that their children are capable of doing more than what they maybe thought they could, and are allowing the caretakers to have, maybe not so much more responsibility, but more acceptance of what the care taker is doing, really having more appreciation for what the care taker role is because the care taker often is involved in the enhanced visits; and they all get to see the various roles being played” (Focus Group, 2009). “They became more aware of the importance of their role even though they saw them only once a month. Saw an increased interest in wanting to communicate with their children better, to influence their children to not follow their footsteps. That was the growth—the awareness that even though they weren’t around they had more of an influence on their children. The one on one type of visitation helps them to see themselves as a parent more” (VIC1, 2012).

A recurrent theme across sections was that of offenders as role models. “Awareness of how their decisions and how their behavior affects the entire family system is raised” (VIC2, 2012). Offenders began to realize that their responsibility as a parent came with a need to shift life details to be a better parent (according to their understanding of the meaning). “Get them to reflect on parenting techniques or philosophies they did not realize were unhealthy. Raises their awareness to make healthy decisions and what is good for their children” (VIC2, 2012).

### *Communication and Offenders*

Women offenders often expressed self-doubts for the mistakes they made in the past, as well as communication, and selfishness. “So I can help my child from making the same mistakes I had in this area. Understanding that while they may be absent from the home they still are a huge influence in the child’s life” (VIC2, 2012). “Changed their approach and how they’ve handled the situations. They are able to communicate better with their child” (VIC2, 2012). “They didn’t realize how selfish they were in some areas of their life and how they need to be better role models for their children. It’s kind of hard to say from my perspective, they articulate that they get a lot out of it and you would hope that they put that into practice” (VIC2, 2012).

Engaging the caregivers and providing them scaffolding was a salient topic. “One of the biggest things is being able to share their concerns with family members and let people know that they appreciate the help that they are getting” (VIC3, 2012). “Yes, becoming more involved in doing projects together with their children and other family members. Other than trying to talk only to another offender or caregiver, they want to be involved as a family unit with other families” (VIC3, 2012). “Also the connection made between offender and child, important for child to have a parent figure, regardless of the wrongs kids still look up to them and they can see the parent in a positive light” (VIC8, 2012).

### *Youth-Centered*

While many offenders spoke about their internal parental perceptions shifting, many discussed the impact that parenting from prison had on their children. Thus, their thinking about parenting was less about their personal development and more about the

way in which they shifted for the benefit of their children. The data in this section include parenting shifts as they relate to perception changes from the perspective of the offender of their children as a result of participation in the 4-H LIFE program.

The ability for women offenders to understand and put the needs of their children ahead of their own desires was striking. “I need to break through that barrier when my oldest is here and help her through it as well – she might actually be better at it than me – she has been co-captain of the cheer squad – last year” (CCC, 2009). Women participants began really “seeing” their children and noticing their feelings and emotions. “They are more amazing every month – so smart and social and perceptive and eager to participate” (WERDCC, 2009). “He’s more depressed than I realize. He did not get involved as much” (WERDCC, 2009).

Particularly women offenders began to key in on specific skills and talents their family members possessed. “I’ve learned much more about my grandchildren and how out-going they can be if given the chance. How smart they are and interested they are in different subjects” (WERDCC, 2009). “My child can read comprehensively now. She could read the words to the Groundhog song while singing it to the tune of Frere Jacques. I didn’t know that she was that advanced” (WERDCC, 2009). “I learned how important the visits I have with my son are to him. I also learned he like to draw more than paint” (CCC, 2010).

#### *Impact of Incarceration on Family*

Embedded within the context of understanding their children, women began to see the external impact that their absence had on their children. At times it mobilized the children to be more engaged, and other times they exhibited less healthy behaviors. “I

was actually surprised that my son wanted to help serve the food. Maybe it was because I was serving and he wanted to be next to me. Just the fact that he wanted to help was great to me” (CCC, 2010). “That I’ve been gone too long. She’s becoming very clinging. She misses me. She has great leadership roles and enjoys being center stage” (CCC, 2010).

This absence often translated into children reflecting on the importance of the connection with their parent. “I learned that no matter if the children are away from them, they still love their mother. It really gave me hope about mine” (CCC, 2011). “That no matter what my son knows his mommy loves him and no matter how far away we are we still have such a strong bond and a great communication” (CCC, 2011).

Incarcerated parents often felt a special bond and reconnection to their child with an element of surprise by the way in which their kids responded to them. “How much fun just he and I had doing the activities together. That he enjoyed and wanted to do things with his grandmother (me). How he was inquisitive about the other kids and their misfortune of not having their parents at home with them as he does. I could tell it touched him emotionally” (CCC, 2010). “I learned that my nephews really watch what I’m doing in the 4-H visits and that their self-esteem is getting much better with each and every visit” (WERDCC, 2010). “I learned that the bond between my nephew and I is getting so much more strong since we have been members of 4-H and attending the visit” (WERDCC, 2010).

Youth of offender parents often have more responsibility than their counterparts with parents at home. “My oldest is taking on a lot of responsibility and worrying about bills” (CCC, 2010). The 4-H LIFE program allowed offenders to implement parenting skills and they reflected on the response they received from their children as a result.

“That my grandchildren will listen to me, may not agree, but yet listen and tell me how they feel” (WERDCC, 2010). “I learned that my son does care what I think, and does want me to help him with stuff” (WERDCC, 2010). “Basically with my own family. I learned that my kids have good manners and they really pay attention to my actions towards others” (WERDCC, 2010). “Give more suggestions to my child over the phone” (WERDCC, 2008).

In some cases, youth afforded an opportunity for their parents to grow, but there was always an element of transference and development between parents and youth. “I learned I can persuade my granddaughter to step in and take part of some situations where she might otherwise be too shy” (WERDCC, 2010). “My son has grown so much and is now encouraging me to get up in front of a room full of people” (WERDCC, 2008).

#### *New Family Dynamic*

A recurrent theme is the impact that caregivers have on the dynamic between youth and their incarcerated parent. The response of youth to this stressful situation is highlighted in several statements. “That they still love to play me and their dad against each other” (CCC, 2011). “I have to support my husband whether I agree with him or not. This shows the kids they can’t make and watch us argue” (CCC, 2011). “I did but only in the bounds of my own family. I learned that even when my children believe they are being treated unjustly by their dad, my job is to support him as their co-parent and let him handle it” (CCC, 2011).

While women felt empowered to provide constructive parenting roles, the response of youth was to reciprocate and engage in the discussions. “I had a great talk

with her about her choices, behaviors, and the fact that her sisters want to model after her and be just like her” (CCC, 2011). “I would like to think I did in constructing the girls and discussing their goals and dreams with them” (CCC, 2011).

### *Trust*

Finally, an important characteristic for children of offenders is trust. Once the trust is broken it is very difficult to be rekindled from the perspective of the youth. “I learned that Malaina for sure is hurt about the promises I have broke with her especially with regards to me being back here” (CCC, 2011). However, often the nature of the program provided a venue for youth and parents to open up to one another. “What I thought was perhaps going to be a disaster ended up opening hearts as parents dealt with their painful emotions and how easy our children, grandchildren can be talked into situations” (CCC, 2011). Department of Corrections staff also reflected on the parenting shifts women offenders experienced as a result of their participation in the program.

The Department of Corrections staff members noticed the way in which offenders and caregivers collaborated to work with the youth. “Do you remember one visit when there was one lady, it was really special to her and her daughter had been writing about her cycle....Anyway, her mother was so excited b/c the girl lived with her Uncle. They both cried and hugged and bonded b/c they had been worried and they were able to talk w/ each other on something that mothers and daughters talk about. Most girls don't talk to their fathers” (DOC, 2009).

However, many admitted that they observed the growth of the offender-child relationship as they saw the children reconnect their bonds. “Well, starting in 2004 and I stopped in 2007, I've seen a lot of them grow in their relationships. Some of the kids, not

a lot, were disconnected from their mother. So they were able to reestablish their connection with their parent. That bond is special, you know, and they were able to identify with other kids with an incarcerated parent. I guess, you know, if you never had a parent incarcerated you don't know what they're feeling" (DOC, 2009).

The nature of the visit provided a shifting frame of reference for women offenders and their parenting perceptions. "They all look forward to that visit because it is a lot more fun, they can open up to their mother and to the other people so it goes back to the same thing. It is all about group participation that makes a difference as opposed to visiting only their mother" (DOC2, 2012). Volunteers in Corrections further reflected on the nature of the parenting perception shifts from the internal processing and external observations of youth.

Many volunteers understood the purpose of the program was to help develop the youth who attended the visits. This often occurred through practicing parenting, and the children responded positively. "I have noticed the communication, how the mom is trying more positive ways of talking to the kids, or her kids. So it seems like the communication is improved and the parenting skills even when their kids are living with someone else right now, I know that they are talking about curfews and boundaries and all those things that parents should be doing when they are home, it is important they continue that role when not there" (VIC6).

Specifically developing communication skills to increase the level of comfort for the youth was tantamount to offender women. "Yes, I have noticed how they talk to them and they spend more time interacting. There are several mothers who have been there for a while. When it was the mother-child visit I can see a lot of difference in the way

relating and talking and spending time with them. Before just spending time talking to adult that brought them and now spending more time with children” (VIC4, 2012). “He seemed to be shy but he and his mom had such a good relationship that it’s like they were just joined at the hip and so I have the pleasure of still talking to her. Because I got to know her in 4-H LIFE I can sincerely ask sincere questions about she and her son and her mother and I know quite a bit about her past. We can laugh together, cry together, talk about serious issues, raising a teenage boy is not easy and especially if in prison” (VIC7, 2012).

Through the program, offender women had the opportunity to share in the praiseworthy moments in the lives of their children. “When one little boy got a medal in an event the officers let him wear it in and mom was thrilled to death where it is more about the kid and not about the mom” (VIC4, 2012). When incarcerated participants express praise of their children, gratitude and positive reception occur. “Children are eager to receive that love they need it, the women in the prison need it and it’s a positive interaction back and forth” (VIC7, 2012). 4-H Program staff further commented on the parenting perception shifts among offenders and with their children.

4-H Program Staff made nine references to the youth reflection that is utilized statewide. Several positive benefits occurred for youth as a result of their participation in the program. “I guess one thing I might not have mentioned I do know in several cases where the children’s grades improved as a result of parent taking a more active role in the lives of their kids and I think it is the setting that encourages it and the parenting skills. That kid kind of rebels on the outside and so the offender is aware of the struggles going on and still a parent and even though messed up still empowered to be a parent, makes a

big difference to be a positive influence has made a difference in several cases” (VIC8, 2012).

The emphasis of the program was not to seek perfection, but to be a presence to all those readers and to the audience. “Not perfect parenting skills but to maintain their parenting skills and to remain plugged in to the changes that happen so rapidly with kids because the kids change so fast. There is no way that a parent who is incarcerated is able to fully grasp the changes going on with their children when incarcerated it is hard enough being on the outside keeping up with my daughter’s changes physical, emotional, social and I am with her every day” (VIC6, 2012).

The 4-H LIFE family visit afforded families to have a higher quality of interaction. “Yes, from my observation it seems like they, it’s more the quality of the type of visit because they are focused on the child and I think that facilitates them to a stronger relationship or at least” (VIC2, 2012). “The ability to remain “other-centered” is striking new terror for me. I think that the biggest thing is that they are more intuned to their child’s need” (VIC2, 2012).

#### *Offender-Child Family Relations*

Particularly, offenders began paying closer attention to their children. “They start recognizing things in their children they had never noticed before. Little things like I had no idea he’d be able to make a sandwich himself” (VIC3, 2012).

Practicing facilitation techniques was highly important to offender groups. “They encourage their children to start interacting with other children. Husbands and wives start sharing information more afterwards, their phone conversations and letters start showing a positive perspective on what the situation is” (VIC3, 2012). “They start letting the

children do for themselves. Initially they might want to get in there and show child exactly how to do things and they start seeing the need to let the child make their own decisions and if the project doesn't turn out exactly the way they wanted they can do it again" (VIC3, 2012).

*Participant Synthesis.* Every participant group included a reflection of parental perception shifts from the perspective of the offender and their internal mental shifts and from the response of the child (see Figure 13). 4-H Program staff and offenders had the most evidence for the internal parental shift. However, Department of Corrections staff and Volunteers in Corrections also discussed both sub-themes. Often all groups discussed the separation difficulty on maintaining offender-child relationships.

A consistent theme of discussing offender self-esteem occurred for the participant groups. The offenders and 4-H program staff discussed the parenting shifts for incarcerated women as they navigate a shared role of parenting with caregivers. These two groups further discussed the way in which the program provided intentionality for the participants related to parenting skills developments. One of the striking comments above was the way in which women offenders slowly began opening up toward the group over time. The boundaries and trust discussions tend to translate into the 4-H LIFE program as participants attempt to reconnect with their youth in the shadow of traditional prison visits.

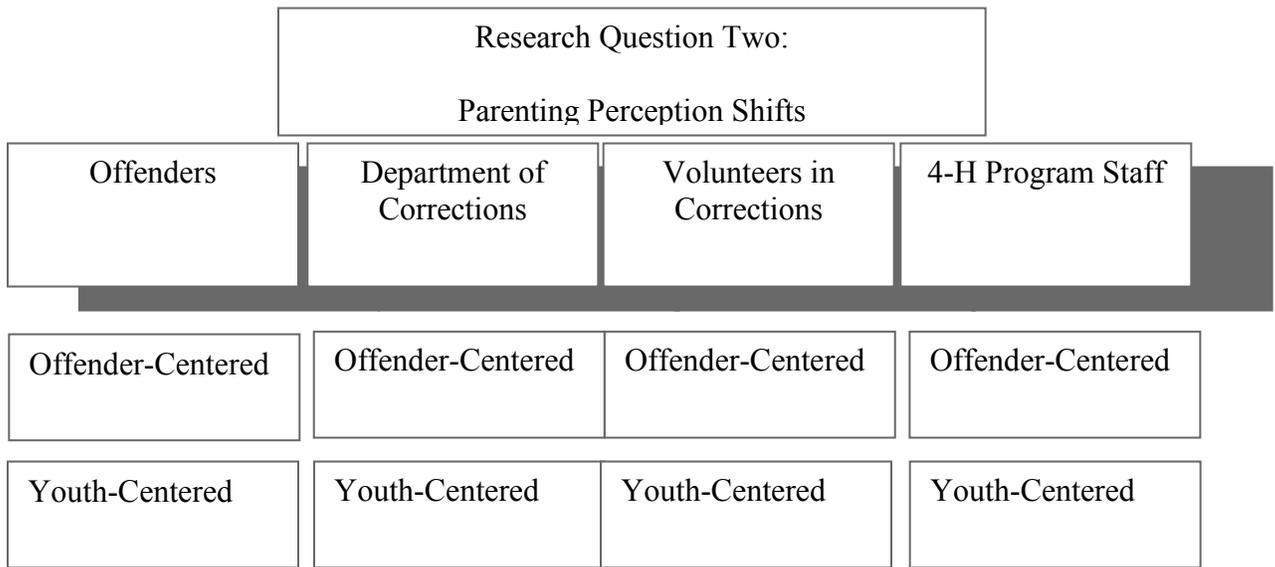


Figure 13. Integration of findings: Research question two: Parenting perception shifts

*Summary of Findings:*

*Research Question Three: Traditional Visits*

Research question three asked: What are the experiences of offenders during traditional visits with their family? The data for research question three were derived from all study participants: Department of Corrections Officers, Offenders, 4-H Program Staff, and Volunteers in Corrections. The methods for data collection included: focus groups, in-person interviews, phone interviews, and completion of open-ended offender reflection sheets. A scant 18 references were made describing traditional prison visits. Offenders did not have any description of their perception of a traditional correctional center visit. The emergent sub-themes in this section were: offender-centered, youth-centered, and visit structure.

### *Offender-Centered*

The data in this section were derived from two interviews with the Department of Corrections Staff members. Tammy Gillespie conducted the initial interview in 2009 via phone in 20-minute increments. These interviews were considered secondary data; there were eleven participants in this data collection. The second set of interviews was the primary data collected in February 2012; there were two participants in a series of phone interviews that lasted approximately 40 minutes in length. The two sub-categories included Offender-Centered and Youth-Centered.

The emphasis on the rules and regulations within this section suggests traditional visits have more structured social norms than 4-H LIFE visits. “Because it is different than a regular visit because on a regular visit they cannot interact with other families” (DOC1, 2012). “The other visits visitors cannot talk to anyone except the people at the table. Offender only allowed to visit with their family” (DOC1, 2012). “On regular visits they have to be strict, they cannot sing” (DOC2, 2012). “On a regular visit they can only visit with their family” (DOC2, 2012).

The motivation of offender women is questioned, as to their true intent in participating in traditional visits. “On regular visits I really hate to say this but it’s so true, when you see them on a regular visit they are there to eat, they are focused on the vending machines, they want to come in get their food, eat and leave” (DOC1, 2012). However, a select number of comments were indicative of the response of youth to traditional visits.

### *Youth-Centered*

Department of Corrections Staff noted that youth were often highly constricted when they participated in the regular prison visits. “In the traditional visits, kids can't play, do a lot of fun activities. They have to be kind of quiet. Some visitors didn't have enough money to buy a snack for the children and you all provided snacks” (DOCInterviews, 2009). “The kids, they don't get to interact with other kids in traditional visits,” (DOCInterviews, 2009). However, some of the possibilities of offender interaction includes a mentoring process to help develop themselves prior to camp. “I would see kids on (traditional) visits and they would say, "I can't visit my Momma." I would respond, "Yes you can, it will just take time." It was a change that had to happen” (DOCInterviews, 2009).

#### *Visit Structure*

Volunteers in Corrections or VIC's are volunteers who undergo specific training with the Department of Corrections to work in facilities throughout Missouri engaging in educational programming. Five volunteers were interviewed in this study. Each interview was collected via the phone in approximately 20 minute segments. This participant group briefly commented on the traditional 4-H LIFE visit. “As opposed to regular offender visit 2 hours and only 2 people can visit” (VIC5, 2012). “A normal offender family visit is 2 hours or maybe only 1 hours and only 2 family members at a time could meet with the offender. So two would have to go in and then one would have to leave, they would not be able to meet as a family unit there were restrictions” (VIC5, 2012).

The 4-H program staff group was comprised of individuals employed by the University of Missouri Extension who worked directly with the program or supervised front-line personnel involved in the correctional centers. The staff focus group was a

secondary source collected by Tammy Gillespie with all staff members who worked with female correctional facilities in the state of Missouri in 2009. Five phone interviews were collected as a part of the primary data collection in this study occurring approximately 20 minutes in length. The emergent sub-themes are structure of the visit and experiences that families have in the visit.

Paid program staff discovered data that indicated the visit structure did not provide for timeliness and cost effectiveness. “The traditional visits the offenders are limited to the number of visitors they can have. They can only have 4 visitors at a time. If the offender has 4 kids and they need a caregiver to bring a child then somebody wouldn’t be able to come” (VIC2, 2012). “The structure of the traditional visits are pretty rigid. They have regulations and policies they enforce as far as physical interaction an offender can have with child, the activities have to sit at the table and cannot interact with other families. For example could have two families that rode together but once in the visiting room they could be 5 feet away from each other but not allowed to interact with other visitors” (VIC2, 2012).

### *Rules and Regulations*

Frequently offenders expect the traditional visit rules and regulations. “When they first get there they expect the traditional visit with the officers enforcing rules and regulations and the officers interpret things differently” (VIC2, 2012). Physical contact provided a barrier for offenders in traditional 4-H visits. “Not like it’s a big hug fest, they can seriously get in trouble during a traditional visit for touching the elderly mother’s hair or squeezing their son’s bicep even if not a sex offender” (VIC6, 2012). “Again the

traditional visit requires no interaction among separate family members even young children” (VIC6, 2012).

### *Family Issues*

4-H Program Staff noted that while the visit structure can be a challenge, the issues manifested among family members can have an impact on willingness to be maintained in the program. These issues can add stress for the caregiver. “So for the caregivers it seems like that they are getting picked on or it wasn’t like this last time why are they making it this way this time. That adds stress to the visits” (VIC2, 2012).

However, women offenders are also experiencing stress from their participation in traditional visits. “But I think that the incarcerated mothers have so much fear and also they have lost the understanding of where their child’s development is at when they are incarcerated that not having the in-person visits where the family does normal everyday activities together like crafts or eating, so not having those visits does create a parenting gap when the woman is released back to her family” (VIC6, 2012). Overall, the traditional visit vastly differs relative to the 4-H LIFE visits. “I think they differ greatly, I don’t know how many times I have heard offenders say how sad the traditional visits were. I know that lots of the children wouldn’t enjoy coming, would be lots of tears” (VIC8, 2012).

### *Participant Synthesis*

Offenders did not comment on their experiences with the traditional visits (see Figure 14). The Department of Corrections personnel focused on rules and regulations within the traditional visits. However, the Volunteers in Corrections considered the more

humanistic side of the visits. Finally, the 4-H Program staff remarked about the content of the visit structure and the resulting impact on the families. The final research question explores the experience of offenders in the 4-H LIFE visits.

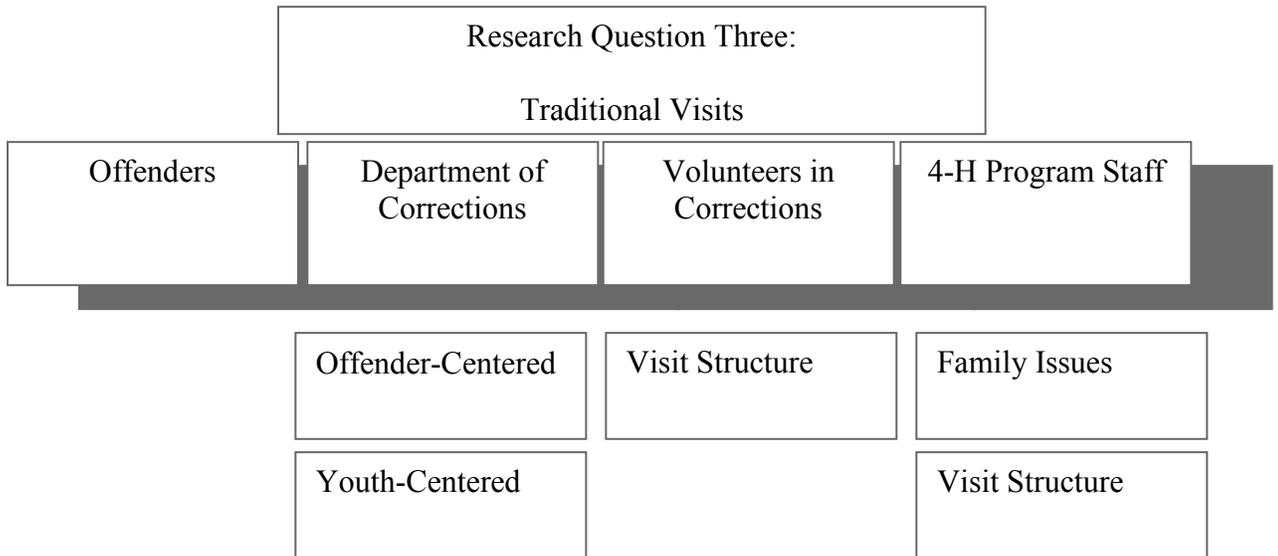


Figure 14. Integration of findings: Research question three: Traditional visits

*Data Results:*

*Research Question Four: 4-H LIFE VISITS*

Research question four asked: What are the experiences of the offenders in the 4-H LIFE visits? The data for research question four were derived from all study participants: Department of Corrections Officers, Offenders, 4-H Program Staff, and Volunteers in Corrections. The methods for data collection included: focus groups, in-person interviews, phone interviews, and completion of open-ended offender reflection sheets. The emergent sub-themes in this section were: visit structure and family issues.

*Visit Rules and Regulations*

The offender population included women participants from WERDCC and CCC in the state of Missouri. After each family visit, women were asked to complete an

offender reflection sheet of their experiences. The Family Assessment Questionnaire was also gleaned for relevant quotations. The emergent sub-themes that flowed from the parenting perception shifts for offenders were structure of the visits and family-related issues.

The structure of the 4-H LIFE visits was very different from the traditional visits. “I personally enjoyed the activities and involvement with my family. We had quality “fun” time together. The atmosphere was calm and relaxed. We had more time to focus on working together” (WERDCC, 2009). “The visit was like being at a family function and my family and I loved it! Thank You for this experience!” (WERDCC, 2010). A part of the visit structure is engaging in pre-planned projects as a group. “I learned that I can be ready to talk about our projects at a moment’s notice. It’s very easy to talk in front of the children. It’s because the environment is so much more comfortable” (WERDCC, 2008). When offenders and their families engage with a different visit structure, there was a different impact on their family than experienced in the traditional visit.

The data in this section were derived from two interviews with the Department of Corrections Staff members. Tammy Gillespie undertook the first interviews in 2009 via phone in 20 minute increments. These interviews were considered secondary data; there were eleven participants in this data collection. The second set of interviews was the primary data collected in February 2012; there were two participants in a series of phone interviews that lasted approximately 40 minutes in length. The two sub-categories were visit structure, family-related issues, and benefits to correctional facilities.

Often, Department of Corrections Staff reflected about the organization and structure of the program relative to other educational opportunities. “Well I think the

program is nice and it offers something different than the mother-child program because it expands beyond the institution. It has a lot of structure. It has a lot of specific goals. I thought the bonding within mother-child was good, but the bonding that 4-H gave, extends on the outside. It was a hope that the children would not follow their parent's footsteps and that was a plus to me” (DOCInterviews, 2009).

This population spoke about specific programmatic elements they appreciated. “You know, the pledge reiterated the positive aspects of the program” (DOCInterviews, 2009). The Department of Corrections Staff appreciated the volunteer coordination. “We knew a week ahead what was going to go on. Without your ideas and your volunteers, I don't think we would have been as successful” (DOCInterviews, 2009). “Oh, the way you had the curriculum set up in advance, you told me the activities you wanted to do and we could incorporate it and it could run smoothly. I think you always communicated with staff and we always made sure safety and security was upheld and there were no problems with stuff like that. If there is not a way for something to come in, we made alternatives to get approval so it was it wasn't last minute” (DOCInterviews, 2009).

The Department of Corrections Staff reflected on the shift in rules and regulations for families during the visit. “The mom could hug and kiss their child. The child could sit on their lap, do the (flag) saluting, you could sing, raise the flags and color things” (DOCInterviews, 2009).

#### *Interaction Among Family Members*

Specifically noted was the interaction among family members that was unique to the 4-H LIFE visit. “The atmosphere is more relaxed and it allows for more activities with offenders and their families. It also keeps the kids occupied” (DOCInterviews,

2009). “Just that they do get to interact with other families, it is not as strict as the other visits” (DOC1, 2012). “It is like the whole room is a visit. The visiting room rules still apply as far as brief hug/brief kiss at beginning and end of visit and sharing food. Have to open the bag of chips and no sharing drinks, all that still applies but they can interact with the other offenders and families and that opens up a whole new world with the kids” (DOC1, 2012).

The Department of Corrections Staff reflected on the way in which the visit provided an opportunity for children to create relationships with one another. “With the 4-H program the offender takes a class and then whenever they are in there together, the kids all participate in the program together so it gives them kids a lot better chance to get involved with the other kids and get involved with other kids in the program. The kids have changed get more open and be more involved” (DOC2, 2012).

Volunteers in Corrections or VIC’s are volunteers who undergo specific training with the Department of Corrections to work in facilities throughout Missouri engaging in educational programming. Five volunteers were interviewed in this study. Each interview was collected via the phone in approximately 20 minute segments. The sub-themes in this section were visit structure and family issues.

Volunteers in Corrections noted the length of the 4-H LIFE family visit is different than the traditional visit in some cases. “But my understanding is they are lot longer and allowed to have contact with the children, they have a meal and then they have all these activities provided for them” (VIC10, 2012). The volunteers indicated they appreciated the classes offenders engaged in prior to the family visit. “I think the program is good, they have a parenting class that ladies/mothers take” (VIC4, 2012). “I think it’s

the classes. They meet every week and I know that they have done role play and watched videos. The parenting class that they're using and probably even actual discussion where they share their feelings and what has worked and different viewpoints and they are open to listening to one another and they actually support one another which is a biggie" (VIC4, 2012). "It's my understanding that there are weekly meetings associated with this program. The official 4-H meeting is once a month but offenders have to attend training that requires them to successfully complete certain objectives and I don't know what the objectives are. They have to meet criteria before they eligible to participate. That provides the offenders with structure that they may not have ever been involved with before, they may not have ever had some kinds of real structure that encouraged/required them to participate. Required them to complete this training that would enable them to participate in the 4-H family meetings" (VIC5, 2012). The structured activities often included learning about meal preparation and planning.

"The 4-H meetings also provide an opportunity for families to see get involved with a healthy meal as opposed to sweets and snack foods" (VIC5, 2012). Offenders, volunteers, and paid extension staff planned structured activities for the group. "There are structured activities in the meetings that encourage the families to get involved with those activities and then I try to create activities where family members can take them home and continue to utilize what they made and they can talk about" (VIC5, 2012).

The volunteers in corrections reflected upon physical contact rules. "They are allowed to unless the rules have changed, in traditional visits they couldn't it was harder for any bonding to go on, the physical hug and they can get down on the floor and play

with them if they want, the rules are less strict about you know the children can walk around, move around in the visiting room” (VIC7, 2012).

In addition to the parenting, planning, and family visit classes, offenders met to reflect and debrief their experiences in the program. “I know though that after the meetings, after the Saturday visits the next time we meet we debrief and talk about how the visit went and discuss the successes in light of some of the material that we have covered and talk about this really worked or I really noticed little so and so responding when I did this or that. We just not only prepared for the next meeting but debrief afterwards. There is definite progress there” (VIC7, 2012).

The physical layout or intentionality of the environment is different for 4-H LIFE visits. “Of course it is the interaction that they have, it is not every type of visit they get to do craft, learn something, parents and kids are learning and doing, interaction is totally different, not sitting across the table, touch and interact, much more like going to visit mom’s house not going to visit the prison, made the kids feel more welcome and the parents feel a little more at ease for the kids seeing them in this situation” (VIC9, 2012). “Just the way the rooms were set up it wasn’t may have been a large visiting area but only a certain group of people, a smaller group, it was a more intimate, let the kids run around a little bit more and just enjoy the time more, the parents were not as uptight about it and they were relaxed and willing to interact” (VIC9, 2012).

4-H Program Staff group included individuals employed by the University of Missouri Extension who worked directly with the program or supervised front-line personnel involved in the correctional centers. The staff focus group was a secondary source collected by Tammy Gillespie with all staff members who worked with female

correctional facilities in the state of Missouri in 2009. Five phone interviews were collected as a part of the primary data collection in this study occurring approximately 20 minutes in length. The emergent sub-themes in this category were visit structure, program elements, and family issues.

A recurrent theme across all participant groups, and specifically noted among 4-H program staff, was the vast difference between 4-H LIFE and traditional visits in terms of structure and rules. “To be able to witness the happiness, hugs and smiles kind of speaks to the stuff of the program with 4-H LIFE. The looser environment and activities that it brings opens the doors for family to talk about homework or issues at home and lets the offender be a parent from the inside more easily, more real or more natural than a traditional visit might feel” (VIC8, 2012). Specific guidelines and rules looked slightly different in these visits.

“So it is kind of a relaxation so we are allowed to talk to this family we are seeing in the visiting room. More than just relaxing the rules, not just about our family but about getting up and helping other people or being part of an active learning environment” (VIC6, 2012). “With 4-H LIFE visits they do not enforce that guideline so it is a whole family type of atmosphere” (VIC2, 2012). Program staff remarked on the varying roles of correctional officers. “With our program officers are not as rigid. They still enforce things that are important for safety and security of institution but not as rigid on some of the policies” (VIC2, 2012).

Further, offenders were not required to share the visiting room with non-program participants. “The offenders are allowed to be the, this is at WERDCC are allowed to be the only ones in the visiting room. They are allowed to communicate and interact with

their family members in a more natural way with basic limitations on touching. They are allowed more hugs, allowed children on laps and allowed to interact with other families. Children get to know other children and see they are not the only one with a mom in prison, I get to see other normal people in prison. I get to see my parent enjoying life. They get to see that it's not a real scary place often depicted on t.v. and in movies," (VIC3, 2012). The 4-H LIFE program provided an opportunity for parents and their children to practice parenting and existing together again.

### *Family Issues*

Offenders were struck by the impact the family visit had upon their lives in the correctional facility. "I thought it was really nice for the girls without a visit to be able to come. It gave them the opportunity to involved in something positive and uplifting when days like that are hard to come by around here" (CCC, 2010). Offenders often discussed the fear children feel when they engage in a traditional visit. "My children were much more comfortable with the 4-H visits rather than the regular visits" (WERDCC, 2010).

The 4-H LIFE visit was intentional about allowing offenders to practice parenting, communication, and teamwork strategies, with a resulting impact on their family. "This was a good visit. As my family always enjoys these visits. It has brought my family so much closer through these visits, the regular visits do not give us the opportunity to interact and bond as do the 4-H Life visits. My family and I are so very thankful for the opportunity to be a part of this wonderful organization" (WERDCC, 2010). The stress of being separated from family members is mediated through structured visits. "I think it is good for families and gives them something positive to look forward to" (WERDCC, 2010). "I love those visits and the time it gives me with boys and family. My family now

only comes to 4-H visit. The setting is so much better and it is a learning environment. I always learn so much about my kids through the activities that we do and they learn about me and their Grandma and Uncles as well. These visit and classes have brought my family closer together. Thank you” (CCC, 2011). The experience for Department of Corrections Staff is also different as they manage a 4-H LIFE visit and reflect on the offender impact.

### *Building Family Bonds*

Department of Corrections Staff referred to the way in which the 4-H LIFE program helped families. “I think the program helps build strong families and bonds to the community for many offenders that otherwise wouldn't have those bonds” (DOCInterviews, 2009). “This more of a family setting, the kids have a common bond with other children of offenders and that's a good thing for them to know there are other kids going through similar things. They are very peer-oriented” (DOC Interviews, 2009).

The cohesion the 4-H LIFE program brought to the group helped increase positive behavior among families. “They are more well-behaved in the visiting room. In the traditional visits, they are wild, not in a bad way, there just isn't enough for them to do. When there are more activities, it is better” (DOCInterviews, 2009).

### *Maintaining Normalcy*

4-H LIFE provided offenders an ability to seek conditions similar to interactions they would have on the outside. “The other big difference is, I think, is the offenders can more freely express themselves. They are more comfortable in 4-H visits. They are not with a bunch of strangers and just staying at their own table. You're in the room with the same purpose, it's more like a community-type of meeting, not just one on one visits

within the family. It's like when you see people on the street you say, "Hey, how are you doing?" (DOCInterviews, 2009).

Offender women had the opportunity to experience a less restrictive environment. "It seems more like a home setting what home should be like get to play with the other kids and I like that because it is less evasive to the kids and it is less, I don't really know how to put it, it is less stressful for the kids to come in and be restricted to sitting and talking only to the people at that table" (DOC1, 2012).

The visiting room is focused around family and community-wide interactions. "They're allowed to talk about things more easily. To discuss more. And they're in a learning state, not just discussing things that happen in everyday life. I'm sure they do that still, but that is not the focus...The focus is on the family. For the family it is a learning state" (DOC Interviews, 2009). "During the 4-H program they interact together, they are all helping eachother working/playing together and it gives them a sense of togetherness and achievement" (DOC2, 2012).

#### *Peer-to-Peer Relationships*

Often, children of the offenders are able to create relationships with other youth in the process. "To meet with kids that are going through the same things they are going through. Helps offenders know that their kids have someone to connect with on the outside, and this does happen, I see the kids when they walk into the building on 4-H visits I see them walk up together and they are talking and excited about the visits and they know they are going to get to interact and they look forward to that" (DOC1, 2012). "At 4-H they have to be focused on the program because that is what the visit is about. It is more about the family. It is more family oriented and they have to participate that way.

So I have noticed that they have to become more involved in their families” (DOC1, 2012). Volunteers in Corrections reflected on the visit structure and changing family dynamics as a result of the 4-H LIFE program.

### *Physical Contact*

The volunteers examined the value of increased physical contact between offenders and parents. “I know the touching, I think small children are allowed so many hugs. During 4-H they can hug their kids when the kids come a caregiver has to come in as well if kids get sick/need to go to bathroom. More personal contact with caregivers. Visits are more relaxed because there are prison rules in visiting room. Officers have talked about how it is much more relaxed” (VIC4, 2012).

### *Caregivers*

Further, the caregiver dynamic shifted in the 4-H LIFE family visits. “I think it is beneficial for family members to be able to go visit with either the grandparent, parent, or sibling or a spouse. Because it provides visitation for longer than normal offender visitation. It allows the family to meet as a unit” (VIC5, 2012).

### *Parenting*

The 4-H LIFE program created the space for family members to deal with the parenting strategies from the correctional facility. "This program provides an opportunity for offenders and family an opportunity to sit down and discuss family issues and really anything they want to discuss. Plus it provides a structured an opportunity to see a structured meeting and to participate in the meeting. As leaders, it allows kids to participate as a leader to lead the meeting (ask for volunteers) if no volunteer we say we really would like you to do this” (VIC5, 2012). These parenting strategies provide solace

for incarcerated offenders. “The mothers, grandmothers, aunts can do a variety of activities with the children and it takes them away, takes their mind off the fact that they are actually in a prison for a few hours and I believe it creates memories that money just can’t buy” (VIC7, 2012). 4-H Program staff focused on program elements, visit structure, and family dynamics.

4-H program staff noted a common theme was the ability for women offenders to have physical contact with their children to re-establish bonds. “I would say for women in particular, the 4-H LIFE visits allow them an opportunity to touch their children and their family members in a maternal way and give them an opportunity to practice appropriate parenting skills prior to release” (VIC6, 2012).

The improved relationship and parenting application allowed families to better understand their realities. “I think the enhanced visit really help the incarcerated parent learn about the changes child is going through, therefore they learn about themselves thinking back to their own childhood and how they behaved at that age” (VIC6, 2012).

The atmosphere of the 4-H LIFE visit was appropriate for children. “The participants said the fact they can interact more naturally with their children, allowed to have physical contact and actually do something with their children. The projects/activities associated with 4-H LIFE gives them a whole different relationship with their children rather than just looking across the table at their kids” (VIC1, 2012). “The enhanced visit creates a great atmosphere for kids to have meaningful contact. I think it helps alleviate a lot of the stresses of coming to the institution. Visiting a correctional facility is intimidating. For a child being separated from their parent for a long period of time and other emotional scars and values can be an overwhelming

experience. Having an enhanced visit that focuses on the kids and allows the offender/parents be in a positive role by leading groups/activities. It heightens the child self-esteem and creates an opportunity to reconnect” (VIC2, 2012).

Relationships could be built across family lines; 4-H LIFE became a community of people. “In 4-H LIFE the kids can interact with other kids who are experiencing the same challenges they are experiencing and they get to interact in different learning activities that are led by offenders. This doesn’t happen in traditional visits. The program is centered around the children and creates a nurturing environment” (VIC2, 2012).

However, many families do not initially trust the structure of the program. “That first time a family usually comes they are checking things out. Just them becoming more relaxed through the visit. When they come in they are just kind of tense and then once we do the pledges and songs you can just see them relax and just kind of enjoy themselves a little bit more and are able to have more of an actual interaction” (VIC2, 2012). “What I like about it is seeing the interactions between the mothers, care takers and the children, realizing that it’s obviously different from what it would be without the intervention of the 4-H Program” (FocusGroup, 2009).

Finally, 4-H Program staff reflected on the engagement a family member is willing to undertake in order to participate in the program and the realities those participants face. “A lot of these families have a long ways to come, and a lot of them don’t have a lot of money to deal with. If they have car trouble, if there’s an illness, you may end up losing and it’s, it’s kind of discouraging when you’re planning for seven or eight families and you end up with three there, and that’s happened several times; and it

makes it difficult to, to plan because you really don't know how many you're going to have. And it's things that they don't have control over and we don't have control over. So there's not really, it's not that somebody is not following through or anything like that. I don't know that there's any real good way" (FocusGroup, 2009). "I have not seen anybody sitting there and not being involved. They enjoy the visits, they participate in the activities, they do the things" (FocusGroup, 2009).

### *Benefits to Correctional Facilities*

Department of Corrections Staff expressed pride and appreciation for the 4-H LIFE program. "I feel this program allows me to be more involved in the rehabilitative aspect of the criminal justice system. It does because I can interact with them on a different level. They see us more as people. It is about looking at the correctional center as part of the big picture of the criminal justice system. A lot of times, we get the bad rap, enforcing the rules" (DOC Interviews, 2009).

Many staff members indicated the therapeutic nature of the program was beneficial to offenders. "I would say that beneficial programs are helpful and necessary here. Not just filling time, but providing education. As far as being helpful, I'm able to tap into your (Extension) resources if I need something. If I'm presented with a thought or idea, I can come to you guys.....general information, parenting, leadership and career" (DOC Interviews, 2009). Consequently, the ability of the 4-H LIFE program to train offenders in leadership skills is an important aspect from the perspective of Department of Corrections staff population. "We have come before and asked for leadership training, parenting classes (BSF)..that is where we got that one from. We come and asked before about career ideas, job sourcing for offenders for when they leave, schools...You guys are

another resource - a good resource. You have very good resources because you are ...in the community” (DOC Interviews, 2009).

The 4-H LIFE program further provides parenting courses for offenders, a valued element on the part of Department of Corrections staff. “I think the program is good as far providing leadership training, parenting classes. It is information that is viable that applies to them inside and outside the prison. I think as far as 4-H goes, since it focuses on the family - it doesn't only focus on the mothers. It also focuses on the family. It helps focus on relationships - the offender and the child, the offender and the caregiver - the triangle is there. It keeps the relationships in progression. You guys do a good job of educating the (whole) family, not only the individual members. That is what I like” (DOC Interviews, 2009).

A final benefit to offenders and the facility is the programmatic incentives for good behavior. “Have to be 90 days violation free to participate it is a rewards system a checks and balances system, if they behave and do what they are told then they can participate in fun things like 4-H. It is open to people who are willing to work hard to rehabilitate themselves” (DOC1, 2012).

### *Program Elements*

4-H program staff was moved by the coverage of the program to fulfill needs of the clientele population. “It serves an audience that otherwise would go unreached is not the term but and I think that providing them and them meaning the offender, the children, the caregiver, providing them with research based programs is very valuable. I like the fact that the program embraces the idea that families can and are different, whether you have a loved one who is incarcerated or not. And I like that the program gives youth an

opportunity to reinvent or change their destiny so they are not entering into a life of crime like their incarcerated parent” (VIC6, 2012).

The family visit was the main component and application of skills process for offenders and their families. “I would definitely say that I think that the greatest learning happens during the family visit and more importantly after that family visit because that is when the processing begins in the minds of the women and on my drive away from the prison for an hour. It is when the women come together as a group having individually and collectively thought about/talked about how the visit with families went and that is when I’ve heard about the a-ha’s” (VIC6, 2012).

One component that resulted in growth among offenders is the reflection process. “So I think and honestly the painful lessons I think happen during and immediately after the club meetings too because the 4-H LIFE visits require that the offenders and the volunteers work together as a team inside of a very structured environment with limited time changing variables and sometimes the offenders plans have to change and that can be frustrating and it’s only in the reflection process” (VIC6, 2012).

The program was not affiliated with a religious or other educational organization. “We don’t promote any particular creed, but it is very strong on the goal setting, making decisions, all these things that I think across the board whatever you do these are important skills. And it is done in a way, not a preachy way but fun and interactive and I think that is the strength of the program. Not just talking to them but showing through interactive things that these skills can be built. I think that is unique” (VIC1, 2012).

4-H LIFE is predicated upon research-based, experiential education. “We use the curriculum. I use a variety of things Building Strong Families. I will use the research

based curriculum as a spring board into the topic. Will do an experiential learning activity. Mostly I facilitate the discussion and as things come up just using that an opportunity to teach on the area. A lot of the topics on anger management and life skills is a perfect segue into that” (VIC2, 2012). “The structure primarily comes from 4-H and University research practices, staying within the boundary lines of confidentiality, treating all people equally and flexibility being that we can bring in other materials other ways of thinking that as long as its’ research oriented that we can still use that so that they can see this information coming from a variety of resources” (VIC3, 2012).

Prior to the family visits, offenders engaged in parenting and leadership classes. “That it treats them fairly that they get to have visits from their family members in a more of a real world situation for comfortable interaction between family members and from family to family not just having to stay within their own family. I like the flexibility as well as the structure in the program. The primary structure being that we want to help build family strengths and improve parenting skills and at the same time have a flexibility to use other curricula or teaching materials and share openly with the offenders, give them an opportunity to be totally honest with themselves with the 4-H LIFE staff and help them understand better ways to communicate with people” (VIC3, 2012).

Finally, the participants and their families influenced the structure of the program. “Particularly in Vandalia where most of the families have a fairly long travel distance to come for the family meetings, and because of that a lot of them are only able to come every other month or maybe every third month, and it would be nice if all of them could be there every month” (FocusGroup, 2009). “It’s a real struggle to have consistency, to be able to because so many of the families are not able to make all of the visits. You just

don't have the kind of consistency that I would like to see" (FocusGroup, 2009). 4-H Program staff reflected on the impact that the 4-H LIFE program had on family relationships.

*Participant Synthesis.* Each of the four participant groups reflected on the experiences that offenders had due to the 4-H LIFE program (see Figure 15). Their comments surrounded the structure of the visit, family issues and dynamics, and program elements. Each of the four groups discussed visit structure and family dynamics.

The three groups agreed the 4-H LIFE program was beneficial because it provided training to the offenders ahead of time. Further the ability to utilize the skills the groups learned with their children provides a "real-life" application within a certain comfort zone. The 4-H Program staff added comments about the elements of the program and the specific structure.

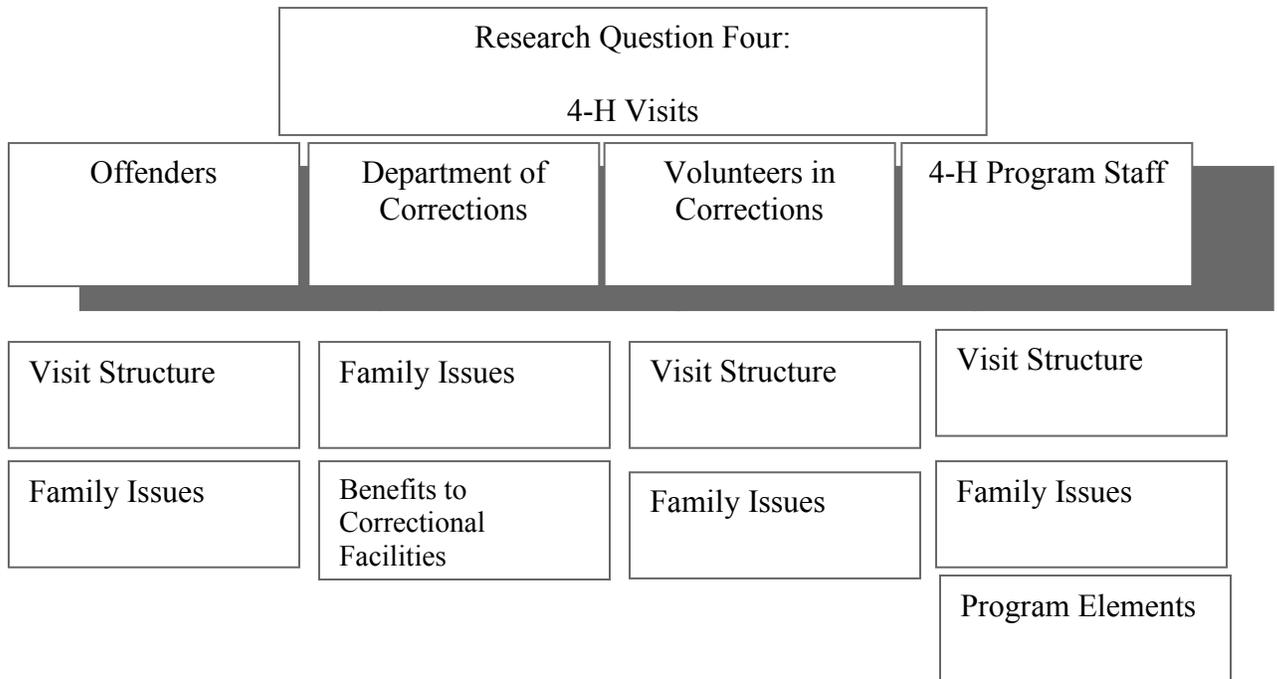


Figure 15. Integration of findings: Research question four: 4-H visits

### *Summary*

Research question one asked what precursor steps to transformative learning offender women experienced as a result of the 4-H LIFE program. The four participant groups were: offenders, Department of Corrections Staff Members, Volunteers in Corrections, and 4-H program staff. The Department of Corrections staff focused on rules and regulations. The Volunteers and 4-H Program staff members reflected on the personal growth and development of the offender and their families.

The offenders had a diverse array of reflections. However, they provided responses within each of the coding themes. Chapter Five will extend these ideas and embed them in the larger academic discussion of transformative learning, as well as the application to practice.

Chapter Five provides a summary of findings and a discussion of the findings within the context of the literature review. This chapter further provides discussions of limitations and implications for practice. Implications for future study are explored in Chapter Five.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

#### *Introduction*

The 4-H Living Interactive Family Education (LIFE) program was developed to address a correctional rehabilitation need of parenting and leadership skills. One major difference between this program and other efforts in correctional facilities is the forum for application of the parenting and leadership skills in the 4-H family visit. While data have been collected on family relationships, communications, and life skills, the data have not been analyzed for the impact of the program on transformative learning.

This qualitative study utilized data collected over a two-year period at two correctional facilities with participation in the 4-H LIFE program. Data were analyzed using phenomenological research methods to understand the experience of offenders in the program as it relates to the transformative learning theory (Mezirow, 1991). Textural and structural analysis was employed in this study to understand the essence of the experience of offenders (Moustakas, 1994).

The research design and methodology utilized to answer the research questions were presented in Chapter Three. The research purpose of this study was to understand the experience of offenders; and their transformative learning process as it relates to shifts in their understanding of parental roles. The literature illustrated the importance of therapeutic prison programs (van Wormer, 2010).

While there is a positive influence on children, incarcerated parents are often impacted and transformed by their participation in prison rehabilitation programs (van Wormer, 2010). The 4-H Living Interactive Family Education (LIFE) program allowed

the offenders to re-establish connections with their family members through in-person intensive visits (Arditti, Lambert-Shute, & Joest, 2003). The data collection and analysis were driven by the following research questions:

1. What responses indicate women offenders in the Women's Eastern Reception and Diagnostic Correctional Center (WERDCC) and Chillicothe Correctional Center in the 4-H LIFE program experienced one of the ten precursor steps for transformative learning?
2. How have perceptions of offender parenting shifted as a result of participation in the 4-H LIFE program?
3. What are the experiences of offenders during traditional visits with their family?
4. What are the experiences of offenders during 4-H LIFE visits with their family?

#### Data Collection and Methods

The current research study used a combination of archival data sources (see Figure 1) from offenders, volunteers, Department of Corrections staff, and University of Missouri Extension 4-H LIFE staff. The primary data collected during this study included a modified phone interview (from the archival interview script with DOC staff) including an open-ended questionnaire with eight Department of Corrections staff and eight Volunteers in Corrections from the Chillicothe Correctional Center and the Women's Eastern Reception and Diagnostic Correctional Center.

An analysis of this data helped to create a foundation for descriptions of the essence transformative learning through the 4-H LIFE program. Moustakas (1994) indicated phenomenological data analysis includes horizontalization or building on the research questions through highlighting significant statements or quotations that describe

how the participants experienced transformative learning. The research questions helped to frame the experiences of offender transformative learning that were coded into various categories. The data themes were generated from the ten precursor steps for transformative learning (Brock, 2010).

After the significant statements were highlighted, clusters of meaning were developed into themes. The themes provided a description of what the participants experienced or the textural description and the context of how they experienced the phenomenon or the structural description.

Several of the themes for this study were predetermined. These themes included the ten precursor steps for transformative learning (see Figure 2) (Brock, 2010), perceptions of offender parenting, traditional visits, and 4-H LIFE visits. As the data analysis process evolved, several themes emerged within each section. The first research question utilized an application of the transformative learning theory within the 4-H LIFE program in female correctional facilities in the state of Missouri.

Chapter Five includes five sections. The summary of findings reviews the qualitative approach outlining the pre-determined and emergent themes and subthemes from the data. A discussion section situates the findings within the context of the literature review. Sections regarding the limitations and implications for practice follow the discussion. Finally, a section is included on the implications for future study.

### *Summary of Findings*

#### *Research Question One: Transformative Learning*

Research question one asked: What responses indicate women offenders in the Women's Eastern Reception and Diagnostic Correctional Center (WERDCC) and

Chillicothe Correctional Center in the 4-H LIFE program experienced one of the ten precursor steps for transformative learning? Brock (2010) indicated ten precursor steps potentially leading toward transformative learning: disorienting dilemma, critical reflection, self-examination, shared experiences, exploring new roles, trying on new roles, planning a course of action, acquiring knowledge and skills, building competence/confidence, and reintegration into life. The following subsections will explore the data collected from each of the four participant groups and then a synthesis of responses at the end of each section.

### *Disorienting Dilemma*

The emergent sub-themes in this section included: personal development, epochal change over time, command and control, program model, and 4-H LIFE family.

*Personal Development Theme.* Many of the offenders experienced a transformation in their understanding of self as a result of engaging with a specific activity or experience. Frequently the understanding of the women evolved as a result of their participation as a facilitator of an activity. Based on the feedback from women offenders, the 4-H LIFE program had an impact on their personal development and growth.

*Epochal Change Over Time.* Volunteers in Corrections noted that while behavior and attitude changes did occur they often took place over the course of several meetings. Specific experiences with their families helped to motivate women offenders to be better. The 4-H LIFE program had an impact on the way in which offenders interacted with one another and their family members. The nature of the traditional visit script was drastically different from the 4-H LIFE visit model, which took time for transition for women

participants. The offenders and the Department of Corrections staff negotiated the new rules in the 4-H LIFE visits. The program elements allowed women offenders to engage in roles they would not normally have undertaken which provided a powerful disorienting dilemma.

*Command and Control.* Department of Corrections staff found offender behaviors were changed as a result of the program, which tended to make their job easier.

*Program Model.* Where Department of Corrections staff members found the program beneficial to shift offender behavior, volunteers felt the program elements impacted a greater sense of personal responsibility in the offenders. Paid 4-H employees also found specific elements of the program as motivating factors for women offenders. The specific design of the program was intentional to encourage and influence participation.

*4-H LIFE Family.* 4-H program staff felt the disorienting dilemmas typically occurred from the specific interactions women offenders had with their families and the ‘program family’ or the sharing among multiple families. The visits were often the impetus for the disorienting dilemma in offender women; it made them realize the value of a role reversal.

*Participant Synthesis.* The offenders focused their statements regarding disorienting dilemmas around personal development. Department of Corrections staff discussed command and control practices and reflections. Volunteers in Corrections spoke about the program model and epochal change. Finally, 4-H program staff reflected on program model and 4-H LIFE Family.

The offenders, volunteers, and paid 4-H staff consistently mentioned the impact the program had on the personal transformation of women offenders. Each group mentioned the way in which increased engagement in the program over time afforded women an opportunity to experience an epochal transformation. Many of the participants echoed that the impetus for the transformation or the specific event that caused the disorienting dilemma was embedded and made intentional in the facilitation program elements.

Department of Corrections staff had a different understanding of the cause for the disorienting dilemma for women offenders. This group indicated the requirements of the program provided an incentive for women to maintain positive behavior and remain violation free. This group took the approach that the rule-based elements of the program caused women to change. While specific events did cause women to transform their existing mode of thinking, often the way in which they framed their thoughts provided a personal shift for these offenders.

### *Critical Reflection*

The sub-themes in this section included: 4-H LIFE Family, personal development through facilitation, the development of personal life philosophies to guide offenders, and command and control elements of the program.

*4-H LIFE Family.* Much of the offender mental reflections revolved around shifts in their understanding of interaction with their family. Often, traditional visits are very confining which shape the mental script for women offenders. When they begin engaging in 4-H LIFE visits, their framework for behavior with their family undergoes a shift. Residing in a correctional facility often changes the way in which family members view

their incarcerated loved one, influencing offender self-perception. The result for women offenders is they realize their actions, behaviors, and words are being followed by their family and they must shift. The 4-H LIFE program elements tend to be the impetus for creating the mental cohesion among family members and their offender loved one.

*Personal Development through Facilitation.* Often women engaging in the program had low self-esteem and felt impotent by their perceived lack of qualifications to facilitate. Many women have never had responsibilities to facilitate programs outside of the facility, much less dealing with the challenges of these roles inside a correctional facility. The resulting self-esteem boost from critically reflecting on the ability to undertake facilitation is apparent in women offenders. Volunteers tended to focus on the critical reflection of women offenders as they navigated the program and discovered positive traits. The sub-theme in this section focused on personal development. The volunteers viewed offenders as finding strength as a result of their participation in the program. Many offenders had self-esteem boosts from their families. 4-H program staff outlined the way in which specific program elements helped women offenders critically reflect on their experiences with the program. One major element of the program required women to obtain facilitation skills. This practice provided an opportunity for women to shift their self understanding.

*Personal Life Philosophies.* Often, women offenders found strength and a set of mental mantras to guide their lives from their participation in the program. These very powerful philosophies translated into a revitalization of the positive internal understanding of self. Often women were simply afraid to shift from another number in the prison to a facilitator in a program. As women continued to engage in the program,

they began to critically reflect and view themselves as a leader. Department of Corrections staff members did find that women were critically reflecting on their experiences; however, they couched these shifts in attention to rules.

*Command and Control-Critical Reflection.* Department of Corrections staff indicated offenders were critically reflective because they wanted to maintain their status in the program. Thus, the staff noted offenders would not make mistakes, so they could see their children. Each participant group found offenders engaged in critical reflection.

*Participant Synthesis.* Offenders discussed their critical thought about their 4-H LIFE Family, personal development, and personal life philosophies. Department of Corrections Staff indicated the presence of critical thinking within the context of command and control language. Volunteers and 4-H Program staff both remarked about personal development among offenders through critical reflection.

Each population indicated the way in which programmatic elements influenced critical reflection in offenders. However, Department of Corrections staff adhered more to the duty of women engaging in the program to help them reflect on their role. Offenders and volunteers tended to focus on the way in which women developed personal skills such as facilitation and internal confidences such as self-esteem boosts. Paid 4-H program staff took the opportunity to tout the elements of the program that helped women critically reflect on their experiences, leading to valued outcomes. Often, women found their disorienting dilemmas led to an opportunity to critically reflect through an internal process. However, other times women shared their experiences to transform their lives. Other times women shared their experiences to transform their lives.

### *Shared Experiences*

*Shared Discontent and Collective Contentment.* This study found patterns of both shared discontent and collective contentment. Sub-themes in this section were: discontent and collective contentment. The nature of incarceration tends to bring up issues of fairness among offenders leading to dissatisfaction. However, many offenders remarked about their shared experiences that helped them build understanding. The feeling of contentment was procured when women felt the program ran smoothly as a result of people working together.

*Participant Synthesis.* The sole participant group to mention shared experiences was the offender population. Merely seven references were procured from the data to support this category. The sub-theme with the most notations was that of a sense of collectivity in experiences. This collectivity of experiences was manifested in both contentment and discontent.

### *Exploring New Roles*

While participants might have been limited in their understanding of sharing experiences, the 4-H LIFE program provided continuous opportunities for offenders to explore new roles. The data were coded in this section to understand projection into the future about roles and responsibilities but not necessarily undertaking future plans or actions. The sub-themes in this section included: personal development, program development, and 4-H LIFE family.

*Personal Development-Exploring New Roles.* Incarcerated women were often inspired by the 4-H LIFE program and began thinking about their goals and impact on the organization. The women often found that exploration often denoted the beginning stages

of implementation or the mental shift in understanding roles. The volunteer comments surrounded the personal development of women offenders. These participants were also concerned with the impact the program had on the families of the incarcerated individuals. The pains of incarceration on all family members helped provide impetus for shifting roles. While the women experienced a personal sense of change, they were exploring a shifting role due to incarceration.

Paid University of Missouri Extension 4-H Program staff was concerned with the personal development of women offenders as they explored new roles. They also indicated the program often provided the context for women offenders to think about new roles. An understanding of increasing personal value for women offenders became obvious through participation in the program. While leadership roles in terms of program facilitation and activity guidance were important, the offenders also experienced life skill development.

*Program Development.* As women offenders began to understand the program elements, they were encouraged to take leadership roles and expand the program. The 4-H LIFE program helped women find a trajectory for their lives either in the long- or short-term. Involvement in the program helped push the women to explore new roles. 4-H program staff reflected while women have internally experienced change due to the exploration of new roles; they manifest this change through their programmatic actions over time.

*4-H LIFE Family.* Beyond the personal impact that exploring new roles had on women offenders, their understanding of family roles began to shift. The process of exploring new roles helped women become empowered in their understanding of family

within their blood relatives and their programmatic family. The volunteer participants also reflected on the impact the 4-H program had on the family members.

*Participant Synthesis.* The voices of Department of Corrections staff were silent in the section processing the impact of role exploration with offenders. However, the offenders, volunteers, and 4-H staff outlined the clear benefits incarcerated individuals internally experience as a result of their participation in the program. Volunteers and offenders recognized how the program facilitated a shift in family roles. These three participant groups found that an internal shift in role experiences typically manifested in an empowerment of role assumption in the 4-H LIFE program. Thus, women offenders began experiencing self-examination of the new roles they were only exploring in the previous section.

Offenders focused on the exploration of new roles as that theme related to the following sub-themes: personal development, program development, and 4-H LIFE family. Volunteers in Corrections similarly focused on personal development and 4-H LIFE family. 4-H program staff considered personal and program development as they defined the exploration of new roles for offenders.

### *Self-Examination*

A striking emergent theme for this precursor step to transformative learning was the offender self-examination toward the end of personal growth. The other sub-theme in this section was guilt and shame.

*Personal Growth.* As the offender women engaged in the program, they found particular areas of growth to work toward. Often these lessons were learned from experiences with their children and families. Self-examination continued to be examined

within the specific context of the 4-H LIFE program elements. The 4-H program staff indicated the way in which the program had an effect on the personal growth of the offenders. The 4-H LIFE program provided an intentional space for women to reflect after each family visit.

*Guilt and Shame.* When offenders interacted with their families, they began to understand the impact of their incarceration on their children. Often, women personally berated themselves in their examination process. The stress of facilitation for women offenders became a source of guilt and shame. For women offenders, family expectation became a source of frustration as they examined and reflected. Offenders tended to internalize the negative occurrences experienced with facilitation.

The Department of Corrections staff members continued to view the transformations in offenders through the impact the program had on their ability to do their job. Their specific context or lens was through ease and facilitation of behavior and control within the facility. Coded phrases surrounded only the sub-theme of guilt and shame.

A singular phrase was shared concerning self-examination among volunteers. Volunteers did not focus on the impact offenders had on their role in this case; they externalized the self-examination process to the offender. This phrase focused around the sub-theme of guilt and shame. 4-H Program Staff briefly touched upon the impact offenders had through the program as it related to self-examination. Merely, two data points were directed toward this category, one within guilt and shame and one within growth. The 4-H program staff realized the personal growth moments for the offender women.

*Participant Synthesis.* Many statements were reflective of self-examination from the perspective of offenders. Incarcerated women in this study made thirty-six separate references, as they reflected on the precursor step of self-examination. While many of the statements were couched in guilt and shame, seven examples were given of women reflecting on their experiences through personal growth.

However, only five data points were discovered in this category among Department of Corrections Staff, Volunteers in Corrections, and 4-H Program Staff. Many of these statements surrounded projected feelings of guilt and shame. While women spent a significant amount of effort discussing self-examination, the tangible category of trying on new roles was even more pervasive in the data pool.

Offenders practiced self-examination in the sub-themes of personal growth, guilt, and shame. The other three participant groups focused on the way in which offenders processed self-examination through guilt and shame. Finally, 4-H program staff reflected on the examination process through personal growth.

#### *Trying on New Roles*

Thirty-six references were made among the four participant groups to the theme of trying on new roles. The sub-themes for this section included: family leadership, program leadership, personal development, and 4-H LIFE Family.

*Family Leadership.* A salient new role offenders experienced through the program was leading or facilitating program content with their family members and the program family at large. At times, incarcerated members reflected on their role as it relates to their family through application in the program.

*Program Leadership.* Family visits provided the application for lessons learned for offenders through facilitation. Facilitation within the program often provided an opportunity for offenders to learn about group process and personal development. Specific involvement in leadership activities provided women an opportunity to understand the personal impact of trying on new roles.

Often there is transference among the offenders and youth as the group together shares information and experiments with new roles in the context of the family visit. Specific roles and responsibilities were often talked about with a sense of pride. Volunteers indicated women offenders increasingly experimented with new roles in the 4-H LIFE program. 4-H Program staff further indicated a willingness among women offenders to undertake program leadership.

*Personal Development.* One Department of Corrections staff member reflected upon the possibility for offenders to utilize their experiences in the program to try on new roles. University of Missouri Extension paid staff members responded with six data points in the theme of trying on new roles. The emergent sub-themes in this section were personal development, 4-H LIFE Family, and program development. Specific tendency for women offenders to experience the impact of the program on skill development is outlined. The experiences of incarcerated women are often translated into other areas of their prison lives.

*4-H LIFE Family.* There were a limited number of statements from Department of Corrections Officers on the theme of trying on new roles. However, volunteers shared statements about trying on new roles with the sub-themes of 4-H LIFE Family and the

impact of role sharing within the context of program development. Five statements referenced this theme.

The particular ability for women offenders to experiment with their role as a parent was discussed. Within the context of improved parenting skills, volunteers noted offenders began to share their skills and love with their children. As women experimented with new roles, they were increasingly able to become comfortable with giving affection. 4-H program staff noted the 4-H LIFE program provided a training ground for women to experience being a parent in a safe context.

*Participant Synthesis.* The bulk of the statements in this section came from offenders explaining their attempts to try on new roles within the context of the program and manifesting with their families. Department of Corrections staff, Volunteers, and 4-H staff considered the resulting impact of this experimentation on the offenders themselves as they tried on new roles. The empowerment women experienced when trying on new roles, often lead offenders to plan future action.

Offenders focused on trying new roles within the context of family and program leadership. Department of Corrections staff was specifically concerned with offenders trying on new roles in program leadership. Volunteers in Corrections indicated offenders tried on new roles within the context of personal development and 4-H LIFE family. 4-H Program staff indicated offenders tried on new roles through personal development, program leadership, and their 4-H LIFE family.

#### *Plan Course of Action*

Fifty-three references were made in this major theme. The sub-themes in this category were: 4-H LIFE Family, personal development, and program development.

*4-H LIFE Family.* The transformation that offenders experienced as they accumulated disorienting dilemmas, critically reflected on their actions, personally reflected, sharing discontent, exploring and trying on new roles, led them to an ability to plan their actions. Notably, only the offender participant group made statements referring to planning a course of action. Their plans often surrounded specific actions they hoped to take with their family members.

The development of skills was an important idea among women offenders as they aided their family members. Many women referred to the hope they experienced through their engagement with the program as they dreamed about the application of this transformative learning to their home lives. Reflections on personal development as they related to the family were pervasive.

Incarcerated mothers indicated their reflection of lost time was very painful, this frequently factored into their future plans. Often specific activities women could engage in with their children emerged. Planning for the return to the traditional roles of motherhood was outlined. Incarcerated mothers discussed their desire to increase their external focus on their children.

*Personal Development.* Often, these planning projections for offenders related to personal goals and desires. In many instances, women offenders had developed personal development goals for improving their facilitation skills within the program. As a result of their involvement in the 4-H LIFE program, women offenders began to project future plans about their involvement beyond the program.

*Program Development.* While women projected their personal development goals, they also expressed the plans they had for the 4-H LIFE Program. The plans for action

relative to application that women offenders suggested were related to their life within the prison. Specific program activities were explored in the plans for action that women outlined. While women offenders in the previous section explored and tried on new roles, they also are planning for future specific actions within the context of the 4-H LIFE program.

*Participant Synthesis.* The planning for action precursor theme to transformative learning inspired only offender responses. The women offenders were supremely interested in the manifestation of their plans to their families both within the facility and upon their return to the community. Programmatic plans and personal development goals were addressed; however, planning for future action implies that women will embark on the journey of skill and knowledge acquisition.

#### *Acquire Knowledge and Skills*

Thirty-nine references were made to the precursor step toward transformative learning of knowledge and skill acquisition. The emergent sub-themes in this section were: 4-H LIFE Family, personal development, and program development.

*4-H LIFE Family.* Women offenders reflected on the knowledge and skills they had the ability to experience as a result of their participation in the program. Their understanding of this skill acquisition was couched within the context of their families, their personal journey, and their programmatic experiences. Often, the skills discussed were those derived from 4-H projects and activities.

The 4-H program staff participant group referenced the sub-themes of 4-H LIFE Family, personal development, and program development. Twelve references were made among 4-H LIFE program staff within the skill and knowledge acquisition precursor step

to transformative learning. A common thread among participants was to reference the planning and parenting courses for skill and knowledge acquisition outlined in this section.

*Personal Development.* Incarcerated women experienced the ability to build skills in a variety of areas. The acquired skills were often translated into mantras or life philosophies. Women offenders recognized their skill acquisition was developmental and evolutionary.

In two instances Department of Corrections staff members reflected on the skills and knowledge offenders developed through their participation in the 4-H LIFE program. The sub-themes included in this section were personal and program development. Both themes were derived from primary source data through interviews. DOC members emphasized the collective process behind knowledge and skill development. This high-level group functioning was an intentional component of the 4-H LIFE program.

4-H staff indicated program staff referenced specific life skills learned through participation in the program. Building Strong Families curriculum activities were referenced as a perceived contribution to offender development.

*Program Development.* The 4-H LIFE program provided a context for women offenders to learn life and project skills. Several statements indicated that a major life skill learned was listening. Department of Corrections staff noted one element of the 4-H LIFE program is community service. The DOC staff member was excited by the impact of service projects engaged within the correctional facility.

Volunteers emphasized the impact of skill building within the programmatic contexts. Three references of offender transformation in skill building were explored in

this section. The process of parenting courses prior to the family visit had an impact on the experiential nature of the program.

The application of knowledge and skills acquisition was the 4-H LIFE Family Visit. Program staff referred to the ability of incarcerated women to utilize their knowledge and skills in this context. Parenting and planning classes facilitated by 4-H program staff provided specific content by which offenders learned skills.

*Participant Synthesis.* Within the acquisition of skills and knowledge precursor step to transformative learning, there were references made by all four participant groups. Each group referred to the way in which knowledge and skills were applied to personal and program development. Each group was able to find a specific tangible skill that offenders had learned and manifested within themselves and their families. As incarcerated women progressed through the program, the women began to internalize the acquired knowledge and skills to build their confidence.

Offenders indicated they acquired knowledge through the context of their 4-H LIFE Family, personal development, and program development. Program development was a consistent theme among the Department of Corrections staff, Volunteers, and 4-H program staff. DOC staff also indicated offenders acquired knowledge through personal development. Finally, 4-H program staff noted offenders connected to 4-H LIFE Family members to acquire knowledge and skills.

#### *Build Competence/Confidence*

Fifty-three references were made within confidence building pre-cursor step to transformative learning. The emergent sub-themes included: 4-H LIFE Family, personal development, and program development.

*4-H LIFE Family.* Twenty-three statements indicated offenders experienced confidence and competence building from their participation in the 4-H LIFE program. All three of the sub-themes were referenced in this section including: family, personal development, and program development. Incarcerated women commented frequently about the impact their confidence had on their ability to guide their children.

Two references to the effects of offender self-confidence occurred among paid University of Missouri Extension personnel. 4-H program staff commented about the growth experienced by offenders through the sub-themes of 4-H LIFE family, personal development, and program development. A specific focus on programmatic improvements within the context of offender competence building was explored. 4-H program staff focused on the context developed for all of those participants in the program. The references in the following section provided an understanding about the impact offenders have on their families when they feel positive internally.

*Personal Development.* Women offenders discussed the personal confidence they had gained as a result of the program referenced many statements, numbering sixteen in total. Specific evidence of confidence and competence building were examined through facilitation experiences. Women offenders explored their confidence through leadership roles in the program.

Often, women developed mantras or life philosophies as a result of their increased confidence. Overall, women offenders expressed surprise at their newly found confidence. Department of Corrections Staff focused on the impact that the program had on women offenders personally. Volunteers similarly explored the way in which offenders experienced an increase in confidence.

Five references relevant to the process of competence building occurred. These references centered on offender personal development. Frequently, the process of building self-confidence led to an empowerment on the part of women to become more involved in the program. Offender self-confidence improved as a result of feeling success at a task well done and the ability to see the impact their presence had on their children.

4-H program staff explained the impact the program had on the empowerment of women offenders. The experience offenders are able to build for their families due to an increased feeling of confidence is unparalleled within a prison. The culture that is developed due to an increased confidence among offenders has an impact on the 4-H LIFE program.

#### *Program Development*

The logistics of the program provided an application of women to explore and build their confidence levels. 4-H program staff noted the way in which the program changed the environment for families. 4-H program staff referred to the resulting growth of 4-H Family relationships, personal development, and program development through increased offender confidence. The other participant categories spent less energy examining impacts as a result of offender competence.

*Participant Synthesis.* Volunteers and Department of Corrections Staff remarked solely on the personal development growth experienced by offenders as they gained confidence from the program. Offenders made the bulk of the statements in this section. The incarcerated women commented in each sub-theme including 4-H LIFE family, program development, and personal development.

Offender examination was largely internally focused where the 4-H Program staff explored the effect that built confidence had on the program as a whole. The final precursor step to transformative learning was reintegration into life. This theme provided closure to the understanding of research question one.

### *Reintegrate in Life*

Forty statements appeared to paint the picture of offender application of lessons learned in the program for offenders. The sub-themes present among the four participant groups in this section were: 4-H LIFE family, personal development, and program development.

*4-H LIFE Family.* Among the references made by the offender participant group, sixteen statements indicated this participant population felt an ability to apply concepts learned. Often, offenders found the program a venue for externalizing their lessons to family members. The focus shifted away from self and centered on the potential for offender impact on their loved ones.

Involvement in a youth organization provided an opportunity among incarcerated women to see a path for their children in the program outside of the prison. Offenders began to examine the way in which they could translate the lessons learned through 4-H to other areas of impact for their families. While the women were increasingly able to minimize the focus on self and translate the learning to other life contexts, a deep impact was made on the relationship development between offenders and 4-H LIFE visitors. These statements are further reflected and echoed through offender personal development experiences.

Six references were made by Department of Corrections Staff of the offender learning transformation through reintegration to their life. The sub-themes explored among this participant group were 4-H LIFE family and personal development. Within the context of the family, Department of Corrections Staff noticed the incentivizing impact of the 4-H LIFE program. This participant group reflected the way in which offenders integrated lessons learned into their daily routines and behavior within the correctional facility. The bulk of their statements occurred in the personal development sub-theme.

Finally, 4-H Program staff made thirteen references to the transformative learning potential for offenders as they reintegrated lessons learned from the program to their lives. The sub-themes explored in this section were 4-H LIFE family personal development, and program development. Whether the women were projecting the possible impact they could have upon the return to their family, or the immediate difference they can make on their loved ones, the skills and lessons learned in the 4-H LIFE program were translated and reintegrated among offender participants to encourage growth in their family dynamic.

In one case, the 4-H Program staff member referenced a specific application situation of a released offender. While not all offenders will have an opportunity to return to their families, there were a plethora of opportunities for this group to reintegrate their learning with family members. The 4-H LIFE program provided an intentional space for practicing their new parenting skills through the family visit, and phone calls became a more private demonstration of offender reintegration.

The care, of which offenders took for their family, was an important integrating concept. Attitudinal changes and reintegration of positive youth development concepts were explored among 4-H program staff for the women offender population.

*Personal Development.* Offenders made four references about their internal experience reintegration. The group discussed the short-term impact of their ability to share learning within their current reality. A recurring theme of personal development frameworks or mantras was translated in this reintegration section.

Personal development often provided an impetus for offenders to become engaged in the act of program development. Personal hygiene was a trending theme referenced as corrections staff reflected on the application of program lessons. This participant group specifically noticed behavior changes within the correctional facility proper and the housing unit.

Scant evidence of reintegration into life among offenders was discovered through statements made by volunteers. This group focused on the personal development of offenders. Two references were coded within this precursor step to transformative learning. Volunteers understood a level of recognition of the impact women carry to other prison organizations, as well as the integration of personal empowerment among offender participants.

4-H program staff further mused that offender women improved their self care as they had more visits. The shifts in behavior also become translated to offender housing units and prison life. A personal empowerment and realization of translatable skills for family members and personal development increase the power and impact of an engaged program.

*Program Development.* Some of the statements in this sub-theme reflected transformation in facilitation skills reintegrated in the program. Reintegration also led to offender reflection on the trajectory of the 4-H LIFE program. Personal engagement and buy-in provided an opportunity for women to feel empowered to translate the lessons learned to an external audience. 4-H program staff statements were indicative of an understanding that the offenders might potentially be released back into society, creating a real-world ability for incarcerated women to translate parenting and planning skills.

#### *Participant Synthesis*

A large number of statements were referenced within the final precursor theme of reintegration into life. The personal development sub-theme received the most citations, as each participant group reflected on the way in which behavior and attitude shifts were translated into other areas of offender existence. Three of the four participant groups outlined the particular application of learning tools to the immediate context of family dynamics. However, many of the participant groups referred to the potential for future reintegration as incarcerated individuals are released into society.

#### *Research Question One Summary*

The ten precursor steps to transformative learning were: disorienting dilemmas, self-examination, shared experiences, exploration of new roles, critical reflection, trying on new roles, planning a course of action, acquisition of knowledge and skills, confidence and competence building, and reintegration into life (Mezirow, 2000). Brock (2010) provided specific contextual statements to guide the current analysis. The four participant groups reflected on the application of the 4-H LIFE program to the transformation among offenders. These participant groups included: Offenders, Department of Corrections

Staff, Volunteers in Corrections, and 4-H LIFE program staff. The second research question referred to the specific impact the 4-H LIFE program had on offender parenting perception.

*Summary of Findings:*

*Research Question Two: Parenting Perception*

Research question two asked: How have perceptions of offender parenting shifted as a result of participation in the 4-H LIFE program? The data for research question two were derived from all study participants: Department of Corrections Officers, Offenders, 4-H Program Staff, and Volunteers in Corrections. The methods for data collection included: focus groups, in-person interviews, phone interviews, and completion of open-ended offender reflection sheets. The emergent sub-themes for this research question were: offender-centered and youth-centered.

*Offender-Centered*

The offender population included women participants from WERDCC and CCC in the state of Missouri. After each family visit, women were asked to complete an offender reflection sheet of their experiences. The Family Assessment Questionnaire was also gleaned for relevant quotations. The emergent sub-themes that flowed from the parenting perception shifts for offenders were: offender-centered and youth-centered.

The statements in this section included shifts in the internal understanding of what it means to be a parent for the offenders, as a result of the 4-H LIFE program. The statements in this section included shifts in the internal understanding of what it means to be a parent for the offenders, as a result of the 4-H LIFE program. The quotes that follow surround the personal perceptions that offenders felt as a result of parenting from a

correctional center. Often parenting from a distance required a balance but provided an opportunity to reflect between each visit and phone call.

Parenting from prison is not without hardships; many women offenders have the opportunity to be self-reflective as a result of engaging in the 4-H LIFE parenting class. Many parents indicated they wanted to grow personally in their capacity as a parent. Further, reflecting on previous choices, women indicated they would like to grow and develop their familial relationships.

Learning constructive parenting techniques was a main theme among women offender participants in the program. One recurrent theme was the development of communication. 4-H LIFE requires offender participants and their families be engaged and hands-on in the program; women often reflected on their role as a facilitator within the programmatic context. Often women were surprised by the skills their children learned and developed while the offenders were away.

Offender parents became empowered in their parenting role as they were pushed to facilitate elements of the program; they learned a lot about their parenting techniques. Many were surprised their children trusted them to open up and communicate. The 4-H program helped to renew bonds among parents separated by prison; often women realized their children did need them on a daily basis.

Further, women offenders began to realize their role modeling capacity and the expectation of their children for fulfillment of that responsibility. Importantly, engaging with their children encouraged women offenders to remain hopeful about their current status. A repetitive element of communication was the need for developing listening skills and the impact those listening skills had on relationships.

The 4-H LIFE family visits provided a venue for family reconnection; parents realized they could develop relationships with their children despite the context. Navigating new parental roles was frequently a challenge and a source of growth for offender women. Women offenders were often surprised by the realization they could have fun and “let loose” within the correctional facility.

Another element of parenting from prison is navigating the relationships with the caregivers of the children. While some offenders were revitalized and felt connected to the caregivers, others had difficulties and struggled. Finally, maintaining positive relationships was always a challenge for women offenders. Trust continued to be a common theme and element for concern. However, the entire group became a family, and women offenders felt empowered to call non-blood related participants their kin.

Department of Corrections staff mentioned in two instances their recognition of the parenting shifts they found in offenders due to participation in the program. However, many statements from this participant population surround the impact of the program on youth as it relates to parenting perception shifts.

Volunteers were often struck by the growth and development of parenting skills among offenders. Often this growth was channeled through the offender role as a facilitator. The process of navigating the logistics and new social norms of the 4-H visit shifts the parental role and frames of reference. The offender parent often reconnected with their family members and practices parenting skills that are developed from their realization of past mistakes.

The 4-H LIFE program afforded women an opportunity to re-establish the mothering or parent identity. However, re-establishing trust and broken bonds is not

always easy. Caregivers also play an instrumental role in the success of the offender and their ability to parent from prison.

4-H Program Staff were individuals employed by the University of Missouri Extension who worked directly with the program or supervised front-line personnel involved in the correctional centers. 4-H program staff re-iterated the special challenges and dynamics between offenders and caregivers. The offenders were dealing with separation and a need to maintain their parenting role while in prison.

Shifts in offender facilitation skills are striking as parents begin to see the program as a model for helping understand offender roles and responsibilities. The 4-H LIFE program is specifically designed to help offenders develop parenting and facilitation skills and not be the dictatorial parent. The intentionality of the more opened visit affords incarcerated participants to maintain their personality with their children. Parent participants began to develop empathy among their kids and caregivers and role solidity as the increasing number of children began to visit.

A recurrent theme across sections was that of offenders as role models. Offenders began to realize their responsibility as a parent came with a need to shift life details to be a better parent (according to their understanding of the meaning). Women offenders often expressed self-doubts for the mistakes they made in the past, as well as communication and selfishness. Engaging the caregivers and providing them scaffolding was a salient topic.

#### *Youth-Centered*

While many offenders spoke about their internal parental perceptions shifting, many discussed the impact parenting from prison had on their children. Thus, their

thinking about parenting was less about their personal development and more about the way in which they shifted for the benefit of their children. The data in this section include parenting shifts as they relate to perception changes from the perspective of the offender of their children as a result of participation in the 4-H LIFE program.

The ability for women offenders to understand and put the needs of their children ahead of their own desires was striking. Women participants began really “seeing” their children and noticing their feelings and emotions. Particularly, women offenders began to key in on specific skills and talents their family members possessed.

Embedded within the context of understanding their children, women began to see the external impact their absence had on their children. At times it mobilized the children to be more engaged, and other times they exhibited less healthy behaviors. This absence often translated into children reflecting on the importance of the connection with their parent. Incarcerated parents often felt a special bond and reconnection to their child with an element of surprise by the way in which their kids responded to them.

Youth of offender parents often have more responsibility than their counterparts with parents at home. The 4-H LIFE program allowed offenders to implement parenting skills, and they reflected on the response they received from their children as a result. In some cases, youth afforded an opportunity for their parents to grow, but there was always an element of transference and development between parents and youth.

A recurrent theme is the impact caregivers have on the dynamic between youth and their incarcerated parent. The response of youth to this stressful situation is highlighted in several statements. While women felt empowered to provide constructive parenting roles, the response of youth was to reciprocate and engage in the discussions.

Finally, an important characteristic for children of offenders is trust. Once the trust is broken, it is very difficult to be rekindled from the perspective of the youth. However, often the nature of the program provided a venue for youth and parents to open up to one another.

Department of Corrections staff also reflected on the parenting shifts women offenders experienced as a result of their participation in the program. However, many admitted they observed the growth of the offender-child relationship as they saw the children reconnect their bonds. The nature of the visit provided a shifting frame of reference for women offenders and their parenting perceptions. Volunteers in Corrections further reflected on the nature of the parenting perception shifts from the internal processing and external observations of youth.

Many volunteers understood the purpose of the program was to help develop the youth who attended the visits. This often occurred through practicing parenting, and the children responded positively. Specifically developing communication skills to increase the level of comfort for the youth was tantamount to offender women.

Through the program, offender women had the opportunity to share in the praiseworthy moments in the lives of their children. When incarcerated participants express praise of their children, gratitude and positive reception occur. 4-H Program Staff made nine references to the youth reflection that is utilized statewide. Several positive benefits occurred for youth as a result of their participation in the program.

The emphasis of the program was not to seek perfection but to be a presence to all those readers and to the audience. The 4-H LIFE family visit afforded families to have a

higher quality of interaction. Particularly, offenders began paying closer attention to their children. Practicing facilitation techniques was highly important to offender groups.

### *Participant Synthesis*

Every participant group included a reflection of parental perception shifts from the perspective of the offender and their internal mental shifts and from the response of the child. 4-H Program staff and offenders had the most evidence for the internal parental shift. However, Department of Corrections staff and Volunteers in Corrections also discussed both sub-themes. Often all groups discussed the separation difficulty on maintaining offender-child relationships.

A consistent theme of discussing offender self-esteem occurred for the participant groups. The offenders and 4-H program staff discussed the parenting shifts for incarcerated women as they navigate a shared role of parenting with caregivers. These two groups further discussed the way in which the program provided intentionality for the participants, related to parenting skills developments. One of the striking comments above was the way in which women offenders slowly began opening up toward the group over time. The boundaries and trust discussions tend to translate into the 4-H LIFE program as participants attempt to reconnect with their youth in the shadow of traditional prison visits.

### *Data Results:*

#### *Research Question Three: Traditional Visits*

Research question three asked: What are the experiences of offenders during traditional visits with their family? The data for research question three were derived from all study participants: Department of Corrections Officers, Offenders, 4-H Program

Staff, and Volunteers in Corrections. The methods for data collection included: focus groups, in-person interviews, phone interviews, and completion of open-ended offender reflection sheets. A scant 18 references were made describing traditional prison visits. Offenders did not have any description of their perception of a traditional correctional center visit. The emergent sub-themes in this section were: offender-centered, youth-centered, and visit structure.

#### *Offender-Centered*

The data in this section were derived from two interviews with the Department of Corrections Staff members. The two sub-categories included Offender-Centered and Youth-Centered. The emphasis on the rules and regulations within this section suggests traditional visits have more structured social norms than 4-H LIFE visits. The motivation of offender women is questioned as to their true intent in participating in traditional visits. However, a select number of comments were indicative of the response of youth to traditional visits.

#### *Youth-Centered*

Department of Corrections Staff noted youth were often highly constricted when they participated in the regular prison visits. However, some of the possibilities of offender interaction included a mentoring process to help develop themselves prior to camp.

#### *Visit Structure*

Paid program staff discovered data that indicated the visit structure does not provide for timeliness and cost effectiveness. Frequently offenders expect the traditional

visit rules and regulations. Physical contact provided a barrier for offenders in traditional 4-H visits.

### *Family Issues*

4-H Program Staff noted that while the visit structure can be a challenge, the issues manifested among family members can have an impact on willingness to be maintained in the program. These issues can add stress for the caregiver. However, women offenders are also experiencing stress from their participation in traditional visits. Overall, the traditional visit vastly differs relative to the 4-H LIFE visits.

### *Participant Synthesis*

Offenders did not comment on their experiences with the traditional visits. The Department of Corrections personnel focused on rules and regulations within the traditional visits. However, the Volunteers in Corrections considered the more humanistic side of the visits. Finally, the 4-H Program staff remarked about the content of the visit structure and the resulting impact on the families. The final research question explores the experience of offenders in the 4-H LIFE visits.

### *Data Results:*

#### *Research Question Four: 4-H LIFE VISITS*

Research question four asked: What are the experiences of the offenders in the 4-H LIFE visits? The data for research question four were derived from all study participants: Department of Corrections Officers, Offenders, 4-H Program Staff, and Volunteers in Corrections. The methods for data collection included: focus groups, in-person interviews, phone interviews, and completion of open-ended offender reflection sheets. The emergent sub-themes in this section were: visit structure and family issues.

### *Visit Structure*

The structure of the 4-H LIFE visits was very different from the traditional visits. When offenders and their families engage with a different visit structure, there was a different impact on their family than experienced in the traditional visit. The emergent sub-themes that flowed from the parenting perception shifts for offenders were structure of the visits and family-related issues.

Often Department of Corrections Staff reflected about the organization and structure of the program relative to other educational opportunities. This population spoke about specific programmatic elements they appreciated. The Department of Corrections Staff reflected on a focus on the shift in rules and regulations for families. Specifically noted was the interaction among family members that was unique to the 4-H LIFE visit. The Department of Corrections Staff reflected on the way in which the visit provided an opportunity for children to create relationships with one another.

Volunteers in Corrections noted the length of the 4-H LIFE family visit is different than the traditional visit in some cases. The volunteers indicated they appreciated the classes offenders engaged in prior to the family visit. The structured activities often included learning about meal preparation and planning.

Offenders, volunteers, and paid extension staff planned structured activities for the group. The volunteers in corrections reflected upon physical contact rules. In addition to the parenting, planning, and family visit classes, offenders met to reflect and debrief their experiences in the program. The physical layout or intentionality of the environment is different for 4-H LIFE visits.

A recurrent theme across all participant groups, and specifically noted among 4-H program staff, was the vast difference between 4-H LIFE and traditional visits in terms of structure and rules. Specific guidelines and rules looked slightly different in these visits. Program staff remarked on the varying roles of correctional officers. Further, offenders were not required to share the visiting room with non-program participants. The 4-H LIFE program provided an opportunity for parents and their children to practice parenting and existing together again.

### *Family Issues*

Offenders were struck by the impact the family visit had upon their lives in the correctional facility. This participant group often discussed the fear children feel when they engage in a traditional visit. The 4-H LIFE visit was intentional about allowing offenders to practice parenting, communication, and teamwork strategies, with a resulting impact on their family. The stress of being separated from family members is mediated through structured visits. The experience for Department of Corrections Staff is also different as they manage a 4-H LIFE visit and reflect on the offender impact.

Department of Corrections Staff referred to the way in which the 4-H LIFE program helped families. The cohesion the 4-H LIFE program brought to the group helped increase positive behavior among families. 4-H LIFE provided offenders an ability to seek conditions similar to interactions they would have on the outside.

Offender women had the opportunity to experience a less restrictive environment. The visiting room is focused around family and community-wide interactions. Often, children of the offenders are able to create relationships with other youth in the process.

Volunteers in Corrections reflected on the visit structure and changing family dynamics as a result of the 4-H LIFE program.

The volunteers examined the value of increased physical contact between offenders and parents. Further, the caregiver dynamic shifted in the 4-H LIFE family visits. The 4-H LIFE program created the space for family members to deal with the parenting strategies from the correctional facility. These parenting strategies provide solace for incarcerated offenders.

4-H program staff focused on program elements, visit structure, and family dynamics. The improved relationship and parenting application allowed families to better understand their realities. 4-H program staff noted a common theme was the ability for women offenders to have physical contact with their children to re-establish bonds. The atmosphere of the 4-H LIFE visit was appropriate for children.

Relationships could be built across family lines; 4-H LIFE became a community of people. However, many families do not initially trust the structure of the program. Finally, 4-H Program staff reflected on the engagement a family member is willing to undertake in order to participate in the program and the realities those participants face.

#### *Benefits to Correctional Facilities*

Department of Corrections Staff expressed pride and appreciation for the 4-H LIFE program. Many staff members indicated the therapeutic nature of the program was beneficial to offenders. Consequently, the ability of the 4-H LIFE program to train offenders in leadership skills is an important aspect from the perspective of Department of Corrections staff population. The 4-H LIFE program further provides parenting courses for offenders, a valued element on the part of Department of Corrections staff. A

final benefit to offenders and the facility is the programmatic incentives for good behavior.

### *Program Elements*

4-H program staff was moved by the coverage of the program to fulfill needs of the clientele population. The family visit was the main component and application of skills process for offenders and their families. One component that resulted in growth among offenders was the reflection process. The program was not affiliated with a religious or other educational organization.

4-H LIFE is predicated upon research-based, experiential education. Prior to the family visits, offenders engaged in parenting and leadership classes. Finally, the participants and their families influenced the structure of the program.

### *Participant Synthesis*

Each of the four participant groups reflected on the experiences offenders had due to the 4-H LIFE program. Their comments surrounded the structure of the visit, family issues and dynamics and program elements. Each of the four groups discussed visit structure and family dynamics.

The three groups agreed the 4-H LIFE program was beneficial because it provided training to the offenders ahead of time. Further the ability to utilize the skills the groups learned with their children provides a “real-life” application within a certain comfort zone. The 4-H Program staff added comments about the elements of the program and the specific structure. While the participant groups were candid in their feedback about the program and moved by their experiences, this study was not without limitations.

## Limitations and Assumptions

The process of understanding the transformative learning experiences of offenders in the 4-H LIFE program was limited by the sample, data collection methods, and the role of the researcher. The assumptions of the study include commonality of participant experience and bracketing of researcher personal understandings.

Nieswiadomy (1993) indicated researchers engaging in phenomenological procedures must bracket or set aside personal experiences and biases to understand those of the study participants. While researchers will maintain a vast amount of experience and knowledge of the phenomenon, an understanding of the way in which this experience could affect the research outcome is realized through bracketing. This particular study focused on the experiences of women offenders, as the researcher works in a professional capacity with the program in a male facility.

### *Limitations*

This study was limited in that it included a sample of female offenders at two correctional facilities in the state of Missouri. A consideration of the transformative experiences of male offenders in the 4-H LIFE program would have provided more depth to this study. Further, an understanding of experiences of offenders in the 4-H LIFE program in other states would have been an interesting addition.

The use of preexisting interview data provided a limitation to the study as it only allowed for data that was asked in the questions. Questions constructed specifically with the transformative learning phenomenon would have provided more clarity for the experiences of the offenders in the study. Further, the study was done over a two-year

period and would have been more interesting to add consistent data from the entirety of the ten year program in each facility.

The original data were collected by an external researcher, which could challenge the reliability of the data. This study must assume the original researcher maintained professionalism with the interview script and stayed on task during the interviews. The analysis of the data became the point of derivation for the application of transformative learning to this context, thus the researcher became the instrument.

As the study was conducted, there were several emergent limitations. While the researcher intended to interview eight Department of Corrections staff members, the information was presented to staff in both facilities and merely two members responded to participate. While there were more data collected from Volunteers in Corrections to provide adequate coverage of constructs, an increased number of DOC staff could have provided a diversity of perspectives potentially moving beyond command and control.

### *Assumptions*

Phenomenological research presents some challenges for the researcher according to Creswell (2007). Specifically, the participants in the study must all experience the same phenomenon so a common understanding will emerge. Also, the researcher must decide how their personal understandings of the phenomenon through the process of bracketing will be incorporated.

Researchers must bracket their understanding of the phenomenon of the study; this process can be especially difficult to derive researcher bias relative to true experiences of participants (Creswell, 2007). Moustakas (1994) indicated through the major processes of epoche, phenomenological reduction, imaginative variation, and

synthesis of meanings and essences the researcher is able to set aside their biases and derive knowledge from a state of pure consciousness. This author noted the researcher learns to see naively, to value conscious experience, to respect the evidence of one's senses, and to move toward intersubjective knowing of participant experiences. Creswell (2007) further asserted phenomenological research bracketing of researcher biases and experiences must be done to indicate which part of the analysis came from researcher perception relative to the experience of the participants. Thus, the bias of the researcher was considered in the analysis and data collection procedures of this study and bracketed out when appropriate. The data collected in this study provided a rich description of the experiences of women offenders in correctional facilities in the state of Missouri. Much of the data aligned with previous research.

### *Discussion*

The experience of women offenders in the 4-H LIFE program in correctional facilities within the state of Missouri were similar to those of their contemporaries and of other individuals undergoing major life-changes. This section included an alignment between the literature and the data collected in the current study. An understanding of the present data as it related to pre-existing codified knowledge follows within the context of transformative learning, correctional rehabilitation, and the 4-H LIFE program.

### *Conceptual Framework*

Mezirow (1991) developed the transformative learning theory that explained the change in the frame of reference a learner experiences when engaging with external stimuli. The 4-H LIFE program provided an impetus for women offenders to find an alternative path or vision for their lives as they explored and tried on new roles as a

leader in the program. Life experiences of individuals define the frame of reference that typically includes assumptions, associations, values, feelings, concepts, and conditioned responses to external stimuli (Mezirow, 1997). As women engaged in the programmatic elements, they were struck by the way in which their family members and the broader 4-H family responded to them. This created a culture of empowerment for the women offenders.

Mezirow (1996) noted learning is a process of using prior understandings to define a new or revised understanding of the meaning of an experience to guide future action. Powerfully, women came into the family visit with the pre-existing conception of the way in which a visit manifests. However, once they engaged in the program over time, they began to see a path for themselves that included a shift from their current understanding of self to a new vision or view. The current study utilized ten precursor steps for transformative learning.

Brock (2010) operationalized ten precursor steps leading to transformative learning. The steps included: disorienting dilemma, critical reflection on assumptions, recognized discontent shared, explored new roles, self examination with feelings of guilt or shame, tried on new role, planned course of action, acquired knowledge/skills to implement plan, built confidence/competence, and reintegrated to life. Transformative learning has the potential to occur when one of these precursor steps are experienced (Brock, 2010). The four participant groups included offenders, Department of Corrections staff, Volunteers in Corrections, and 4-H Program Staff; they each responded to questions and their responses were coded within the framework of the precursor steps.

*Frame of Reference.* Frames of reference are the assumptions through which learners understand experiences, shape expectations, and motivate actions (Mezirow, 1997). Learners who have transformative experiences utilize internal processes to frame external experiences. The 4-H LIFE program often provided a powerful external experience for women to make the mental leap necessary for change. Particularly, once women began empowering themselves to take on a leadership role within the club, they were motivated to make personal changes to elevate themselves and their families, shifting their entire mental image of self.

*Critical Reflection.* The process by which the learner has the opportunity to shift points of view occurs through discourse. A built-in component of the 4-H LIFE program was the parenting and leadership classes. Through these classes offenders discussed or normalized their views of positive parenting techniques and ultimately what it meant to be their best self.

Through a dialogue, learners examine evidence and argue the point of view with other learners. Bruffee (1999) noted learners have discussions at the boundaries of discourse to create a common language or understanding of content. Interestingly, offenders, as people who are not imprisoned, have varied backgrounds. Some women came from urban areas and other from farmland; some were educated beyond high school, some had advanced degrees.

The women also discussed concepts at the beginning from their situated experiences, often mired in conflict. However, as they engaged in the program over time they began to understand the vision of the program and developed a collective understanding of what 4-H LIFE meant within their particular facility. Mezirow (1991)

called this phenomenon “learning” as individuals share insights and arguments to explain their positions.

*Processes for Learning.* Mezirow (1991) described four processes for learning: elaborating an existing point of view, establishing new points of view, transforming existing points of view, and transforming habits of mind. Elaborating an existing point of view can occur when finding additional evidence for an existing point of view. As women worked together through the program, they initially came in with baggage from their lives and other traditional visits. They were often very withdrawn and cold at times.

However, as the women gradually developed trust, they allowed themselves to learn content at the parenting and leadership classes which created alternative ways of conceptualizing their reality. Mezirow (1991) indicated new points of view can be established when the learner engages with external stimuli and forms assumptions about these interactions. Transformation of existing points of view can occur when previous assumptions are called into question based upon an experience with external stimuli and a shift in point of view can occur leading to alternative reactions and manifested behaviors.

Hearing and watching women discuss the meaning of the 4-H LIFE family visits created an obvious impression that the external stimuli of the programmatic elements changes the lives of women offenders through a powerful point of view shift. This shift occurred among their self-concept/self-esteem and for their role as a mother within the caregiver-led home structure. Gradually, women felt empowered to engage in leadership roles that often included leading an activity at the 4-H LIFE family visit.

Finally, habit of mind transformation occurs as the learner adopts a socially accepted bias or process of learning gained from an external stimulus. The act of standing

in front of a group of people changed the lives of these women offenders. The confidence they manifested was also transferred to their youth. Youth were empowered to stand up and become 4-H club officers leading the business portion of the meeting.

For most women, their transformations occurred through a gradual process of engaging in the program over time. However, other women were struck by specific experiences of moments in which they finally were able to “see” their children for the talents they had. Conversely, some women were empowered to transfer their leadership skills to the way in which they interacted with the acting caregivers to mediate the caregiver-child relationship. Mezirow (1997) indicated these “epochal transformations” (p.7), are less common, because changing the way learners learn will not change if what learners learn fit neatly into existing frames of reference.

*Disorienting Dilemmas.* Learners actively create meaning as a result of experiencing a reality with which they must confront through disorienting dilemmas (Mezirow, 1991). One mechanism for experiencing transformative learning was role examination. Women offenders in the 4-H LIFE program often joined desiring an opportunity to reconnect with their children. They examined their previous experiences as parents and found themselves lacking. They desired an opportunity to have a second chance.

The act of engaging in a second chance provided the impetus for the disorienting dilemma. Learners experiencing disorienting dilemmas about social roles went through a process of trying on new roles (Brock, 2010). Disorienting dilemmas are triggering events that occur to develop consciousness in response to demands from the environment.

*Context and Transformative Learning.* Mezirow (1991) asserted for an adult to experience a shift in their perspective, they must be intentional about their learning. Most offender participants in the program gradually shifted from being withdrawn to elevating the program to the level of leadership. Often, the program had a waiting list of women who wanted to join the program but could not because it was full. Many women began changing their behavior and hygiene habits to show their commitment to the program.

This mental process allows the learner to embrace a new way of thinking through a synthesis of current and pre-existing knowledge and/or a dismissal of previous patterns of thought. Through an internal mental process shift, the learner can alter immediate ideas or long-term patterns of behavior. Thus, women began implementing their newly learned strategies with their family members in the family visits and with their children over the phone. Incarceration can be very stressful; however, the 4-H LIFE program provided a trajectory or path for women to find hope in their relationships with their children.

#### *Literature Related to the Problem*

Incarceration is a particularly stressful external environmental shift for offenders. The impact on their families and children is far-reaching. This section will address the scope of the problem for women who are incarcerated and outline correctional rehabilitation programs targeted to address the problems. Specifically highlighted are parenting rehabilitation programs and their impact on transforming the woman offender participant.

*Correctional Rehabilitation Programs.* Correctional rehabilitation programs have been implemented to connect families, but many are targeted toward the offender. The

aim of a responsive service is to engage the offender in working towards change that necessitates a focus on them as an individual (Farrow, Kelly, & Wilkinson, 2007). The 4-H LIFE program is unique in that it affords offenders the opportunity to develop their skills in the parenting and planning classes; however, it extends learning in an applied setting through the 4-H LIFE family visit. Thus, the 4-H LIFE program allows offenders an opportunity to learn about behaviors and then practice them in an applied setting through the family visit.

*Parenting Rehabilitation Programs.* Institutions have begun to provide parenting training programs for inmates to ameliorate some of the negative effects of parental incarceration (Hughes & Harrison-Thompson, 2002). Loper and Novero (2010) indicated the benchmarks of successful parenting classes in correctional facilities include: knowledge and attitude change, coping strategies for mental well-being, and parenting stress. The 4-H LIFE program provided offenders with parenting and leadership classes which allowed them to enact strategies for self-development and understanding how to cope with the stressors of parenting.

Behavioral change regarding contact and communication patterns and family strengthening are inclusive in this context. Further, the 4-H LIFE program allowed offenders an opportunity to practice their newly learned behaviors within the context of a safe environment with family members in the prison. The experience of women offenders in prison changed them particularly due to their participation in the 4-H LIFE program.

*Prison and Transformation.* Hughes (2009) found prison could serve a potentially transformative role. Through educational experiences, offenders create a new positive “student” identity and begin to reassess their personal attributes. Women repeatedly

indicated areas they wanted to elevate to make the program better for their families. Their student context lent itself to shifting their personal attributes. As offenders engaged with educational rehabilitation programs, they began to change their sense of self through an increased confidence in their mental and personal abilities. One of the precursor steps afforded women an opportunity to acquire new skills and abilities. The participants felt the 4-H LIFE program allowed them to realize and then develop these strategies.

Further, offenders engaging in educational rehabilitation programs see a positive impact on other areas of their prison life. These programs help offenders reconnect with positive identities they had prior to incarceration. Department of Corrections officers and volunteers saw the change women underwent as they engaged in the program. Many women began taking better care of their personal hygiene and improving their behavior. However, the role of others in the process of self-identification is important for this growth (Hughes, 2009). Thus, the volunteers who lead the program had an impact on the lives of the offenders because they believed in the mission of the program.

*Women and Correctional Rehabilitation Programs.* Hoffmann, Byrd, and Kightlinger (2010) in a national study of prison parenting programs, found women's facilities are more likely than male and co-gender facilities to offer supervised play activities for children. The facilities with policies that are more amenable to family and youth visitation include: sending policies of the facility and dress code to families, distributing policies to the offenders, and providing policies to potential visitors when they complete a visitation application.

Several respondents indicated they were motivated by internal reasons to develop programs for offenders and their children. These reasons included improving/maintaining

family relationships during incarceration, reducing recidivism, facilitating reentry transition for offenders, and breaking the cycle of crime (Hoffman, Byrd, & Kightlinger, 2010). The impact of parenting programs can be beneficial for offenders but also help develop relationships between offenders and their children. Dinkmeyer and McKay (1982) found offenders in parenting programs have experienced improved bonding with their child, increased knowledge of child development, development of strategies for managing behavior, and the appropriate use of discipline.

The 4-H LIFE program participants indicated in numerous statements that they found a path through the program to connect with their youth. All of the training courses that occurred prior to the family visit helped prepare these offender facilitators to be the best parent. The 4-H LIFE program elevated the status of offenders personally, as well as aided offender women in their parenting pursuits.

#### *Implications for Practice*

The culminating pursuit of data collection for the 4-H LIFE program within correctional facilities in the state of Missouri clearly showcased the value of the program for children of offenders. The current study extended the existing body of research to include the impact that the 4-H LIFE program had on the offenders. The collected data illuminated a clear trajectory for the program which includes expansion to future sites, intentionality for the development of offender leadership/facilitation skills, and an opportunity for developing a second level of curriculum for the program as offenders advance past the Building Strong Families model.

The data were compelling about the impact the program had on the behavior shifts of offenders. Qualitative evidence indicated women were changing themselves to

match the decorum of the program. However, the ultimate motivation for these participants was the privilege to see their children in an expanded visit format. Motivating women offenders externally was often not necessary past the first 4-H LIFE family visit in which they taught their child new skills.

The 4-H LIFE program empowers participants to channel their skills, knowledge, and intellectual capabilities into a positive venture. While the 4-H LIFE program has expanded to many correctional facilities in the state of Missouri, there are many other facilities that could benefit from the program within and across state lines. One important collaboration for expansion is a partnership between the 4-H LIFE program and systems of higher education in correctional facilities.

In the state of Missouri and beyond there is an impetus for creating opportunities for offenders to seek certifications or degrees. Specifically, as offenders engage in higher educational pursuits, they begin to develop a trajectory or clear vision for their lives. Finding a way to mobilize their intelligence for positive pursuits can help reduce the likelihood that they will recidivate, which their children will be incarcerated, and that public perception will change for the better toward offenders.

However, the program must increase the intentionality of incorporating offenders in leadership and facilitation positions. Specifically, the leadership class can be altered slightly to provide offenders an opportunity to reflect on the learning they experienced from the parenting classes, with the intent to apply this reflection as manifested through activities in the 4-H LIFE family visit. Empowering offenders to see themselves as the leader of the program provides the right amount of pressure to stretch them beyond their comfort zone to really make an impact on the lives of their children.

As offenders increasingly become involved in the program and intrinsic motivation is exhibited, the opportunity for involving them in program development must occur. Offenders truly understand the experience of parenting from prison; however, program staff developing curriculum may not always have the most personalized understanding. Thus, in order to continue expanding the 4-H LIFE program, we must mobilize the offenders to help create a second level of curriculum that can be used as participants transition beyond the Building Strong Families modules.

Understanding the life experiences of offenders can be gained through an intentional program of research, which will help add to the larger body of correctional rehabilitation programmatic understanding, as well as improve the nuts and bolts of the program on the local level.

#### *Future Research*

Future research is needed to fully understand the transformative learning experience of all offenders within the program. While phenomenology is powerful to understand the perspectives of offenders within a given context, the depth is not as present as desired. For increased depth of understanding, a research agenda of case studies among program participants will help to understand how offenders are changing.

This understanding would contribute to the larger scope of research but would also help to design a better program that meet the localized needs of participant offenders, in the true extension fashion. However, an expansion of understanding the experience of offenders as they transition into the program through the lens of intercultural development would be useful. Understanding where an offender lies on a spectrum of compassion for those “other” than them will help to design programs that teach diversity

and concern. This mixed-methods approach would provide further evidence for the strength of the 4-H LIFE program on the women offenders.

Specifically, an addition of tolerance for ambiguity should be added to the ten precursor steps. Understanding the way in which participants respond to ambiguous events can help to better understand the way in which the participants can be changed. Particularly, studying the 4-H program in other settings that are not prison settings could be very helpful to isolate the way in which youth are changed in general.

Another important direction for future research is to understand the impact of the program on the children of offenders. What impact does the program have on the likelihood of youth getting into trouble at school? Further, it would be interesting to understand the way in which participation in the program over time impacts grades, test scores, and graduation rates.

Understanding the way the program impacts offenders over time would be interesting. How do the program impact recidivism rates for offenders released back into the community? Is there a differential impact for women than men offenders? What is the impact upon release on the family?

More studies should be conducted to understand the impact of the 4-H LIFE program on the family unit. Specifically, what role do caregivers play in family connectedness while a member is incarcerated? What is the multigenerational impact across families once incarcerated? Do offenders improve their parenting skills as they engage in the program and can translate to their grandkids?

An interesting direction for future research would be to study the culture of the Department of Corrections. Further, understanding the openness of the Department of Corrections to external therapeutic or rehabilitative programs would be important. Does the Department of Corrections have a distinctive culture of command and control?

Finally, what is the impact of hope that is encouraged and facilitated as a result of the program? Does the program improve the lives of the offenders in other areas of the prison setting? Can the 4-H LIFE program provide a sense of hope and positive self-efficacy to offenders?

## Appendix A

### Sample Script for Informed Consent

#### **What is this about?**

The 4-H LIFE Program is doing research to better understand prison visits between incarcerated parents and their family members. This research is called the 4-H LIFE Family Study.

#### **What do I have to do?**

If you decide to be part of this voluntary study we want to talk with you twice. Mrs. Gillespie, 4-H LIFE Program Coordinator, will ask you about your family and your prison visits both times:

1. The first meeting will last about 45 minutes.
2. The second meeting is done six (6) months later. It will last about 30 minutes. Mrs. Gillespie will call you if you are already released.

#### **What will I get out of the voluntary study?**

This voluntary study may help us understand if there are benefits of prison visits between incarcerated parents and their families. You can ask for information about family resources. After the study, you can ask for a copy of the report to read. *Being part of this study will NOT affect any part of your parole.*

#### **Can I change my mind?**

You can stop being part of this voluntary study any time. You do not have to answer questions that make you feel bad. This is voluntary. No matter what you decide, you can still have visits with your family and be part of programs in this facility.

#### **Are there any risks?**

There are very few risks in this voluntary study. You might feel uneasy talking about your family. The interviewer has worked with incarcerated parents and their families. If you become upset during either meeting, she is ready to refer you to someone to help you inside and/or outside the correctional center.

#### **What will happen to the information I share?**

Your information is **confidential to the extent allowed by Missouri law**. Ms. Gillespie will type your answers into a secure and password protected computer. Anything on paper will be kept in a locked cabinet at the University of Missouri. Your paperwork will be given a unique number and your name will not be listed on any of the written materials. No reports will show anyone's name or families. Your feedback will not be shared with any of your family members. *In rare instances, confidentiality will be broken if we feel you show signs of harming yourself or others. The interviewer is obligated by law to report this information to the authorities.*

#### **Payment for participation**

There is no payment for being part of this study. Caregivers will be given a Wal-Mart gift card for each one of the two meetings they participate in.

**What if I have questions?**

If you have any questions, send a letter to your Institutional Activities Coordinator (IAC). Ask him/her to deliver it to Tammy Gillespie. If you have questions about your rights as a human subject or this project (#1110297), send a letter to MU's Campus Institutional Review Board at 843 McReynolds Hall, Columbia, MO 65211. We will give you two blank envelopes for your use if you need them..

**Check your understanding.**

- Can you say - in your own words – the goal of this family study?
- What else would you like to know?
- What do you think we are going to ask you to do?

**Participant's Permission**

I agree to participate in two interviews for this family study.

I understand that being part of this study does not affect my parole.

**I have read this Informed Consent Form and understand:**

*(Initial each one below)*

the benefits and risks of being part of this study

my right to ask questions and be given answers

that I will receive a copy of this form

that I can stop being part of this study at any time without penalty

**I give my voluntary consent.**

**Signature of Participant** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date** \_\_\_\_\_

**Signature of Researcher** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date** \_\_\_\_\_

Appendix B

**4-H LIFE Program  
Script and Family Assessment Offender – Enhanced and Traditional  
(FAOE, FAOX)**



**September 30, 2010**

**[Prior to going through script, the interviewer has worked with the Institutional Activities Coordinator, IAC, and records office to obtain a list and scheduled meetings for eligible offenders.]**

**Offenders will be asked to meet researcher (Tammy Gillespie) in a designated meeting location (e.g., chapel, classroom or other quiet location). No corrections officer will be present. There should be two chairs and a table so that the offender can view a copy of the participant enrollment survey throughout the interview.**

**Researcher should give the offender a 4-H LIFE Program brochure that explains the 4-H LIFE program.]**

*Hello, I'm \_\_\_\_\_, the \_\_\_\_\_ (title) for the "4-H LIFE Program." This program is sponsored by University of Missouri Extension and involves a study about the effects of incarceration on families. Have you seen one of our brochures before?*

**[Make sure participant has seen brochure.]**

*I asked to speak with you because we are looking for incarcerated parents who have regular visits with their approved family members who are 18 years of age or younger. Do you receive visits by younger family members (e.g., children, stepchildren, siblings, nephews) in this facility?*

**[If no, thank potential participant and explain that the study is open only to offenders who receive contact (in-person) visits.**

**[If yes, continue.]**

*I would like to invite you to participate in the 4-H LIFE family study. This involves being available for two, in-person meetings that last about 30 minutes each. If you are released in the next six months I would make an appointment to phone you for the second interview.*

*Would you be interested in participating?*

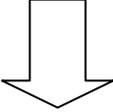
**[If yes, continue]**

*I would like to briefly explain what the study is about, what the benefits and risks are and what your rights are. This is all written down in the paper called an Informed Consent.*

**[Give participant an Informed Consent document.]**

*Like I said, this document describes the reason we want to do this study. Most importantly, the informed consent was created to inform you of your rights as a study participant. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary, and will not affect your parole, your family visits, or your ability to participate in programs inside this correctional center.*

*May I take a few minutes of your time to go over this with you? Please stop me at any time to ask any questions that you might have as I go over this document.*

<b>[If yes, review each section of the informed consent and then continue script below.]</b>	<b>[If no, say, Thank you for your time and consideration anyway. Please feel free to keep the 4-H LIFE Program brochure and contact your Institutional Activities Coordinator if you have any questions about enrolling your family in that program. Have a good day.” Make notation that offender did not want to participate in study.]</b>
	

**[After you have read the informed consent and/or the caregiver has had a chance to review it say, “I would really like to talk with you to hear your thoughts about family relationships and what it is like for you dealing with your family member’s incarceration. During our meeting I would like to ask you the questions on this survey. I won’t ask you**

*to write anything on this survey, but I would like to give you time to think about your participation in this study so you don't feel pressured to make a decision right now.*

**[Hand participant enrollment survey to offender.]**

*I have some paperwork I can work on, so you will have 15 minutes or so to think about your decision. If you need more time to think about it, that is fine. Feel free to ask me questions at any time while you are looking at the form.*

**[Do other paperwork, allowing offender an opportunity to review form in a relaxed manner.]**

**After 15 minutes ask, “Would you be willing to voluntary participate in this study?”.]**

<p><b>[If yes, tell the participant,</b></p> <p><i>“Thank you.”</i></p> <p><b>[Begin the interview, allowing plenty of time for the offender to ask questions.</b></p> <p><b>Be sure to note discomfort, agitation or strong emotions. Offer to refer offender to IAC, the chaplain or his/her assigned caseworker].</b></p> <p><i>Thank you so much for your time today. I look forward to hearing your thoughts six months from now. I will be in contact with you.”</i></p>	<p><b>[If no, say, Thank you for your time and consideration anyway. Please feel free to keep the 4-H LIFE Program brochure and contact your IAC if you have any questions about enrolling your family in the 4-H LIFE program. Have a good day.”]</b></p>
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**4-H LIFE Program  
Family Assessment - Offender**

**FOR STAFF ONLY**

1. **Today's Date** (mm/dd/yyyy) \_\_\_\_\_
  2. **Assigned number for participant** \_\_\_\_\_
  3. **Facility:** ACC WERDCC CCC
  4. **Anticipated release date** (mm/dd/yyyy) \_\_\_\_\_
- TAP assessment available:** No Yes Don't Know
5. **DOC admission type** \_\_\_ Court Committed \_\_\_ Parole Violation \_\_\_ Other
  6. **Total conduct violations in the last 12 months** \_\_\_\_\_
  7. **Race** \_\_\_ Black \_\_\_ White \_\_\_ Multi-racial \_\_\_ Other
  8. **Staff initials** \_\_\_\_\_

**Demographic and background information**

9. **In what year were you born?** \_\_\_\_\_
10. **What is your highest level of education?**
  - 1 \_\_\_\_\_ Less than high school
  - 2 \_\_\_\_\_ Some high school
  - 3 \_\_\_\_\_ High school graduate/GED
  - 4 \_\_\_\_\_ Some college or technical training
  - 5 \_\_\_\_\_ Technical or Associates degree
  - 6 \_\_\_\_\_ Bachelor's degree
  - 7 \_\_\_\_\_ Graduate degree
11. **Are you currently married?** \_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_ No
12. **How many months have you been incarcerated at this facility?** \_\_\_\_\_
13. **Are the children (between 5-18) who are most likely to visit you, your...**
  - \_\_\_ Biological children
  - \_\_\_ Stepchildren
  - \_\_\_ Grandchildren

**14. Who is primarily raising (target caregiver) the children that you are MOST LIKELY to have in person visits with? (one person)**

- 1 Biological Mother
- 2 Biological Father
- 3 Adoptive Mother
- 4 Adoptive Father
- 5 Stepmother
- 6 Stepfather
- 7 Maternal Grandmother
- 8 Maternal Grandfather
- 9 Paternal Grandmother
- 10 Paternal Grandfather
- 11 Other (e.g., Other Relative; Foster Parent)

**15. What is your relationship to this person? If caregiver is a relative just select "relative" for each time point.**

when you first entered this facility.....	Now
1 <input type="checkbox"/> Married	1 <input type="checkbox"/> Married
2 <input type="checkbox"/> Divorced	2 <input type="checkbox"/> Divorced
3 <input type="checkbox"/> Separated	3 <input type="checkbox"/> Separated
4 <input type="checkbox"/> Living together	4 <input type="checkbox"/> Living together
5 <input type="checkbox"/> Dating	5 <input type="checkbox"/> Dating
6 <input type="checkbox"/> Friends	6 <input type="checkbox"/> Friends
7 <input type="checkbox"/> Relative	7 <input type="checkbox"/> Relative
8 <input type="checkbox"/> N/A did not know primary caregiver before incarceration	

**16. Did you share a residence with (primary caregiver) in the three months before your incarceration?**

No  Yes

For how long? \_\_\_\_\_

**17. Rate the quality of your relationship with (primary caregiver)**

before your incarceration...	Now
<input type="checkbox"/> 0 very poor	<input type="checkbox"/> 0 very poor
<input type="checkbox"/> 1 poor	<input type="checkbox"/> 1 poor
<input type="checkbox"/> 2 fair	<input type="checkbox"/> 2 fair
<input type="checkbox"/> 3 good	<input type="checkbox"/> 3 good
<input type="checkbox"/> 4 excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> 4 excellent
<input type="checkbox"/> 5 N/A	

**18. Do you have any children with this person?**

\_\_\_ No \_\_\_ Yes

**19. Interviewer:** *I want to make a list of the people who were living in your household before you were incarcerated. I don't need to know their names but I would like to know their relationship to you, their age, and their gender.*

#	Relationship	Gender	Current Age
1		M F	
2		M F	
3		M F	
4		M F	
5		M F	

**20. Do you have any children (biological or step) between 5 and 18 years old?**

\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_ No

*If yes complete the table below*

Child #	Gender	Age	Bio/Step	Residence before Incarceration	Residence after Incarceration	Current Primary Caregiver
	M F					
	M F					
	M F					
	M F					
	M F					

**Interviewer:**

*For caregiver use the same codes for whoever brings the child  
Residence*

- *With offender*
- *With other biological parent*
- *With Grandparent*
- *With other relative*
- *With foster care*
- *With stepparent*

**Family Involvement**

**Interviewer:** *I will ask you a number of questions about your past and current involvement with your family members. When I ask you questions about the caregiver of your children, if there is more than one, please respond about the one who is the caregiver of the child you are **MOST** likely to have contact (in person) visits with. If*

there is more than one child, please respond about the child you are **MOST** concerned about.

**21. What is the first name of the child/grandchild (between 5-18) you are most likely to have contact with?** \_\_\_\_\_

**22. Who will be bringing the (target child) to visit you?**

- 1 Biological Mother
- 2 Biological Father
- 3 Adoptive Mother
- 4 Adoptive Father
- 5 Stepmother
- 6 Stepfather
- 7 Maternal Grandmother
- 8 Maternal Grandfather
- 9 Paternal Grandmother
- 10 Paternal Grandfather
- 11 Other (e.g., Other Relative; Foster Parent)

**23. Communication – Check the response that best describes the contact**

	<b>Phone calls I make</b>	<b>Letters/cards I send</b>	<b>Letters/cards I receive</b>
<b>Target Child's Biological Mom/Dad</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> None <input type="checkbox"/> Less than once a month <input type="checkbox"/> Once a month <input type="checkbox"/> 2 or 3 times a month <input type="checkbox"/> 4+ times a month	<input type="checkbox"/> None <input type="checkbox"/> Less than once a month <input type="checkbox"/> Once a month <input type="checkbox"/> 2 or 3 times a month <input type="checkbox"/> 4+ times a month	<input type="checkbox"/> None <input type="checkbox"/> Less than once a month <input type="checkbox"/> Once a month <input type="checkbox"/> 2 or 3 times a month <input type="checkbox"/> 4+ times a month
<b>Target Child</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> None <input type="checkbox"/> Less than once a month <input type="checkbox"/> Once a month <input type="checkbox"/> 2 or 3 times a month <input type="checkbox"/> 4+ times a month	<input type="checkbox"/> None <input type="checkbox"/> Less than once a month <input type="checkbox"/> Once a month <input type="checkbox"/> 2 or 3 times a month <input type="checkbox"/> 4+ times a month	<input type="checkbox"/> None <input type="checkbox"/> Less than once a month <input type="checkbox"/> Once a month <input type="checkbox"/> 2 or 3 times a month <input type="checkbox"/> 4+ times a month
<i>If biological parent brings the target child to visit skip next section</i>			
<b>Adult bringing child to visit</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> None <input type="checkbox"/> Less than once a month <input type="checkbox"/> Once a month <input type="checkbox"/> 2 or 3 times a month <input type="checkbox"/> 4+ times a month <input type="checkbox"/> N/A Bio Parent	<input type="checkbox"/> None <input type="checkbox"/> Less than once a month <input type="checkbox"/> Once a month <input type="checkbox"/> 2 or 3 times a month <input type="checkbox"/> 4+ times a month <input type="checkbox"/> N/A Bio Parent	<input type="checkbox"/> None <input type="checkbox"/> Less than once a month <input type="checkbox"/> Once a month <input type="checkbox"/> 2 or 3 times a month <input type="checkbox"/> 4+ times a month <input type="checkbox"/> N/A Bio Parent

Comments \_\_\_\_\_

**Interviewer:** I will ask you questions about two different kinds of contact (in person) visits. The first type of visit is called an enhanced visit. This is an informal visit that allows offenders and their visitors to move around the correctional center's visiting room freely, work on craft projects together, play board games, and generally experience fewer rules and restrictions than traditional contact (in person) visits. The more common type

*of visit is a traditional contact (in person) visits. Traditional visits have more rules; movement and conversations between offenders, caregivers and children is usually limited as well.*

**24. Could you please tell us the number of in person contact visits you have with (the target child's) biological mom/dad.**

- None
- Less than once a month
- Once a month
- 2 or 3 times a month
- 4+ times a month

**25. Overall, during traditional visits, how well would you say the visits go with (the target child's) biological mom/dad when...**

	Very Badly			Very Well		
<b>He/she brings your children</b>	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
<b>He/she visits alone</b>	1	2	3	4	5	N/A

**26. How many traditional visits do you typically have with the target child?**

- None
- Less than once a month
- Once each month
- 2 or 3 times a month
- 4+ times a month

**27. Overall, during traditional visits, how well would you say the visits go with (target child) and you when he/she visits?**

Very Badly    1       2       3       4       5    Very Well    N/A

**Notes/Comments** \_\_\_\_\_

*Only complete 28 if adult bringing child is not the biological parent*

**28. How many traditional visits do you typically have with the adult who brings the child to visit?**

- None
- Less than once a month
- Once each month
- 2 or 3 times a month
- 4+ times a month

**29. Overall, during traditional visits, how well would you say the visits go with the adult bringing the target child...**

	Very Badly			Very Well		
<b>He/she brings your children</b>	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
<b>He/she visits alone</b>	1	2	3	4	5	N/A

**30. Do you ever avoid in person visits with (target caregiver) and children?**

No  Yes

Notes/Comments \_\_\_\_\_

**31. Typical days/times you participate in traditional visits:**

Sun. Mon. Tues. Wed. Thur. Fri. Sat.  
Mornings Afternoons Evenings

**32. Please rate any of the following issues you might have had regarding visiting with your children at this facility during traditional contact (in person) visits.**

Traditional visits have more rules; movement and conversations between offenders, caregivers and children is usually limited as well.

**Staff: Put a check mark under the column that best describes the experience or understanding.**

Issue related to traditional prison visits	A serious problem	A slight problem	Not a problem	I'm not sure
a. Transporting children to and from visits				
b. Visits create scheduling conflicts (for caregiver/children)				
c. Visits too short				
d. Not enough visits				
e. Child(ren) do not want to come to visits				
f. Waiting to see my family members				
g. Hard to care for children adequately during visits				
h. Child(ren) behave(s) badly during visits				
i. Visiting room staff harsh or disrespectful to you				
j. Lack of privacy during visits				
k. Lack of physical contact and affection during visits				
l. Child(ren) reported to behave badly after visits				

Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

**33. Please explain any of the issues that you feel are serious problems during traditional visits.**

**34. Have you ever participated in the 4-H LIFE Program at this facility?**

\_\_\_\_\_ No (If no, skip to question 37.)

\_\_\_\_\_ Yes

Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

**35. Overall, during the 4-H LIFE Program, how well would you say the visits go with**

	<b>Very Badly</b>					<b>Very Well</b>
<b>Target caregiver</b>	1	2	3	4	5	N/A

<b>Target child</b>	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
---------------------	---	---	---	---	---	-----

**35. Please describe the main differences between traditional and 4-H LIFE Program visits:** \_\_\_\_\_

**36. Please rate the following statements.**

<i>During 4-H LIFE Program, the children do activities that help them...</i>	<b>None of the time</b>	<b>Rarely</b>	<b>Some of the time</b>	<b>Most of the time</b>	<b>Not sure</b>
a. Experience a sense of BELONGING					
b. Experience a sense of INDEPENDENCE					
c. Learn and MASTER skills					
d. Demonstrate skills					
e. Learn about GENEROSITY to others					
f. Demonstrate generosity to others					
g. Learn about communication skills					
h. Practice communication skills					
i. Learn about making healthy lifestyle choices					
j. Practice making healthy lifestyle choices					

Notes: \_\_\_\_\_

**37. Please rate any of the following issues you might have had regarding visiting with (target child) at this facility during 4-H LIFE Program Family/Club meetings/visits.** These visits are informal, contact visits that allow offenders and their families to move around the correctional center’s visiting room freely, work on craft projects together, play board games, and experience fewer rules and restrictions than traditional contact visits.

<b>Issues related to 4-H LIFE Program Family/Club Meeting</b>	A serious problem	A slight problem	Not a problem	I am not sure
a. Transporting children to and from visits				
b. Visits create scheduling conflicts (for caregiver/children)				
c. Visits too short				
d. Not enough visits				
e. Child(ren) do not want to come to visits				
f. Waiting to see the family members				
g. Hard to care for children adequately during visits				
h. Child(ren) behave(s) badly during visits				
i. Visiting room staff harsh or disrespectful to you				
j. Lack of privacy during visits				
k. Lack of physical contact and affection during visits				
l. Child(ren) reported to behave badly after visits				

**38. Please explain any of the issues that you feel are serious problems during the 4-H LIFE Program.**

\_\_\_\_\_

**39. My (target child) travels \_\_\_\_\_ (hours) \_\_\_\_\_ (minutes) each way to visit me at this facility.**

**40. Notes** \_\_\_\_\_

**Parenting**

*In this section, the term “parenting” refers to issues of parenting or raising children, even if you are not the child’s biological parent.*

**41. Before your incarceration, how much of your free time did you spend with (target child) during a normal week?**

- 0-10 hours
- 11-20 hours
- 21-30 hours
- 31+ hours
- Not sure
- N/A

Notes \_\_\_\_\_

**42. Before your incarceration, how close to (target child) do you feel you were?**

Not close at all      1      2      3      4      5      Very close

**43. Since your incarceration, how close are you to (target child)?**

Not close at all      1      2      3      4      5      Very close

**44. Before your incarceration, would you say you were**

- Not very good at parenting
- A person who has trouble parenting
- An average parent
- A better than average parent
- A very good parent
- Not sure
- N/A

**44. Notes** \_\_\_\_\_

**45. During this incarceration, would you say that you are:**

- Not very good at parenting
- A person who has trouble parenting
- An average parent
- A better than average parent
- A very good parent
- Not sure

Notes:

**46. Feelings about (target child) during incarceration**

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
a. Most times I feel like my child likes me and wants to be close to me.					
b. My child does things that make me feel good.					
c. When I do things for my child, I get the feeling that my efforts are appreciated.					
d. My child seems easier to care for than most children.					

Notes:

**47. What concerns you most about (target child)?**

**48. Do you have plans for reuniting with your (*target child*) after you are released?  
If yes, what are your plans?**

**Co-parenting with Primary Caregiver Raising Child**

**49. Please check the one that best answers the following questions.**

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Frequently	Not Sure
a. How often do you talk about DAILY decisions in your child's life?						
b. How often do you talk about MAJOR decisions in your child's life?						
c. When you and (target caregiver) talk about parenting issues, how often does an argument happen?						
d. How often are the talks about parenting stressful and tense?						
e. Do you and the (target caregiver) have basic differences of opinion about how to raise children?						

f. When you need help regarding (target child), do you seek it from (target caregiver)?						
g. How often would you say that (target caregiver) is a help to you in dealing with (target child)?						
h. How often would you say that you are a help to (target caregiver) in raising the children?						
i. How often do you feel that (target caregiver) understands and is supportive of your needs as a parent?						

Comments

**CESD**

**50. The following questions concern how you have felt in the last 7 days.**

	None of the time	Rarely	Some of the time	Most of the time	Not sure Wave 1
a. I was bothered by things that don't usually bother me.					
b. I did not feel like eating, my appetite was poor.					
c. I felt I could not shake the blues even with help from my family or friends.					
d. I felt that I was just as good as other people.					
e. I had trouble keeping my mind on what I was doing.					
f. I felt depressed.					
g. I felt that everything I did was an effort.					
h. I thought my life has been a failure.					
i. I felt fearful.					
j. My sleep was restless.					
k. I was happy.					
l. I talked less than usual.					
m. I felt lonely.					
n. People were unfriendly.					
o. I enjoyed life.					
p. I had crying spells.					
q. I felt sad.					

r. I felt people disliked me.					
s. I could not get along.					

**51. Have you been or are you currently involved in any family strengthening or reentry programs?**

No  
 Yes (If no, skip to question 54.)

**52. How many total programs have you participated in at this facility, in the last 6 months**

---

**53. Are you currently or have you ever been involved with the 4-H LIFE Program?**

No  
 Yes (If yes, number of months \_\_\_\_\_)

**54. Please rate how helpful the following 4-H LIFE Program parenting and leadership classes have been...**

**4-H LIFE Parenting**                      Not at all      1      2      3      4      5  
Very helpful

**4-H LIFE Planning/Leadership**      Not at all      1      2      3      4      5  
Very helpful

**55. Briefly explain how each part of the 4-H LIFE Program was or wasn't helpful**

**4-LIFE Parenting Classes**

---

**4-H LIFE Planning/Leadership Classes**

---

**Community Resources**

**56. Do you have any unpaid fines?**     No     Yes     I don't know

If yes, please explain

---

**57. Do you owe any child support?** \_\_\_ No \_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_ I don't know

If yes, please explain? \_\_\_\_\_

Notes

---

**Staff:** *Thank you very much for sharing your thoughts. Your time is appreciated.*

**[Provide debriefing handout]**

*If you would like to talk to someone about some of the issues discussed today, feel free to contact your chaplain located in the chapel, the Institutional Activities Coordinator located in \_\_\_\_\_ (office location) or your assigned caseworker. You may also call the toll-free Parentlink Warm Line at 1-800-552-8522 or the United Way's free, 211 Call Center at 1-800-427-4626.*

**[Provide blank postcard to obtain caregiver contact information]**

*As I mentioned earlier, this is a family study, so I am wondering if you would write down your caregiver's name and address on this card. I can not and will not share the feedback you shared today with \_\_\_\_\_ (name), but I would like to talk to him/her about the same questions I asked you today. We are able to provide a small incentive for caregivers who participate in the Family Study. We want to talk with you and your caregiver two times. The second and final interview will be in about six months.*

**Is the enrollment form completed?** \_\_\_ No \_\_\_ Yes If no, please indicate the number of question at which the survey stopped. \_\_\_\_\_

**Please list any skipped questions**

---

**Interview Notes/Comments**

**FOR STAFF USE ONLY**  
**STAFF OBSERVATION FORM**

**Offender** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Interview** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date of**

\_\_\_ **No abnormal or adverse reactions to questions were noted.**

**Staff Observations (e.g., adverse reactions to questions, unique questions):**

**Staff Response/Action:**

\_\_\_/\_\_\_ (Date) Photocopy of **Staff Observations Form** given to \_\_\_\_\_ (DOC staff/title)

**FOR STAFF USE ONLY**

**Community Resource Contacts Made**

<b>Contact made this date</b>	<b>Community resource</b>	<b>Name and phone</b>
-------------------------------	---------------------------	-----------------------

\_\_\_/\_\_\_ **Date resource information given to participant**

\_\_\_/\_\_\_ **Date copy of resource information given to \_\_\_\_\_ (DOC staff name/title)**

**University of Missouri Extension  
Community Resource Information**

**TO:** \_\_\_\_\_ **DATE:** \_\_\_\_\_

# \_\_\_\_\_

**FM:** \_\_\_\_\_, **University of Missouri Extension 4-H LIFE Program**

**RE: Community Resources for** \_\_\_\_\_ **town/city,**  
\_\_\_\_\_ **county, \_\_\_\_\_ state**

**\*University of Missouri Extension programs, information and contacts:**

\_\_\_ Child development

\_\_\_ Family matters (e.g., parenting, grandparents raising grandkids, domestic violence)

\_\_\_ Home/Housing (e.g., renting)

\_\_\_ Money management

\_\_\_ Youth programs (afterschool, 4-H clubs, projects)

\_\_\_ Other (e.g., mental health services) \_\_\_\_\_

**\*Caregiver support programs, information and contacts:**

Kairos Outside

Missouri CURE

**\*Other:**

Community Action Program

Parents as Teachers

Other:



5. What did you learn about your children?

6. Did you practice leadership? If yes, what did you learn about yourself?

7. How can you/we apply what you have learned?

## Appendix D

### **4-H LIFE Program PROGRAM STAFF FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL**

This research centers on the University of Missouri Extension's (UE) 4-H Living Interactive Family Education (LIFE) program at the Chillicothe, Potosi or Women's Eastern Correctional Center. The objective of this study is to assess staff perceptions of implementation of the 4-H LIFE program, including discussion about and key implementation and programming strategies that seem to have worked with 4-H LIFE program stakeholders (e.g., corrections staff, offenders, caregivers, and the children/youth).

**Objectives:** The focus group will elicit discussion of the 4-H LIFE Program, including program implementation challenges and strengths. Staff will be encouraged to discuss their experiences working within the correctional center and their perceptions on how these experiences have developed and changed over the course of program implementation. Specific discussion areas will include:

- Key implementation and programming strategies with
  1. correctional center staff
  2. offenders
  3. the caregivers
  4. the children and youth

**Description of the participants:** The focus group will be conducted with all of the 4-H LIFE youth program associate staff who consent to participate. Their supervisors will not be present. Aside from the three participants, only the facilitator will be present.

**Informed consent:** Informed consent forms will be distributed and collected by the facilitator prior to the focus group.

**Description of the focus group:** The participants and the facilitator will sit in a circle or around a table for the discussion. The facilitator will begin the meeting by introducing herself and explaining that the purpose of the focus group session will be to learn about replication of the pilot 4-H LIFE program. The focus group meeting will last between 60 and 90 minutes. It will be tape-recorded.

**Scheduling the focus group:** The focus group will be held either during the time in which the staff normally work. Thus, participating staff may miss some or all of a scheduled program. The facilitator will work with the youth program associates' site directors to select a time that is convenient for the participants.

**Focus Group Discussion Guide:** The following questions will provide the framework for the focus group discussion. While questions that are not listed here may be asked in order to follow up on participant responses, the focus group discussion will center on these main questions. The introduction and debriefing statements will be read to participants.

### ***Introduction***

The purpose of this study is to determine key issues in implementation of the 4-H LIFE Program, including program challenges and strengths. We would like you to share your honest feelings about working within a correctional center as well as your thoughts about conducting programs with offenders, the caregivers, and the child/youth participants. Everything that you say here will be kept confidential as per the informed consent, and your names, the names of your correctional center partners, and the families you work with will not be used in any report coming from this research.

We have a limited amount of time, so I might have to interrupt from time-to-time to keep things moving. You will be encouraged to discuss how your relationships with their partnering correctional center staff and participants have changed, and explain how these changes came about.

### ***Opening question***

Could each of you tell me your name and tell me how long you have been employed by the 4-H LIFE program?

### ***Introductory question***

What do you think of the 4-H LIFE program?  
Please describe your likes and dislikes about the program?

### ***Transition question***

Describe your relationships with correctional staff since implementing the program?

**Key questions**

What kinds of things have been particularly helpful to you in your work with this program?

What difficulties have you encountered in your work implementing this program?

Knowing what you know now, what (if anything) would you do differently in terms of implementing this program here? Probe: in what ways would you change the program at your correctional center?

Do you think that there are certain topics, instructional methods, activities, or curricula that program participants are more responsive to? If so, what are they?

**Ending question**

What are the most important aspects of the 4-H LIFE program as implemented at your correctional center? In other words, what do you think that the program does "right."?

*Follow-up questions* will be asked, when appropriate, to gather further information on perceived changes. If staff state that changes have taken place, the facilitator will ask them *how* they think the program has contributed to those changes.

**Debriefing**

I would like to thank you for your participation. I also want to restate that what you have shared with me is confidential. No part of our discussion that includes names or other identifying information will be used in any reports, displays, or other publicly accessible media coming from this research. Finally, I want to provide you with a chance to ask any questions that you might have about this research. Do you have any questions for me?

## Appendix E

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P.2

### MISSOURI DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS PLANNING, RESEARCH AND EVALUATION UNIT

#### TRANSFER AGREEMENT FOR RESEARCH PURPOSES

The Missouri Department of Corrections views correctional research activity as an important and worthwhile endeavor and a vital means of improving correctional management practices. Cooperative research projects, which involve outside researchers, are encouraged so long as the projects conform to recognized professional standards, including those relating to privacy, confidentiality and the protection of human rights.

The purpose of this transfer agreement is to ensure that research and evaluation projects conducted by non-agency researchers is carried out with the highest regard for individual and organizational concerns related to privacy, confidentiality, human rights, security and professionalism. The undersigned agree to abide by all current and relevant department policies and procedures governing research and evaluation activities in the Department of Corrections and any other related state or federal statutes, requirements or regulations.

#### PROJECT NAME AND PURPOSE:

Brief Program Model Description – MU Extension's 4-H Living Interactive Family Education (LIFE) Program is a research-based initiative patterned after the original, successful 4-H LIFE program at the Potosi Correctional Center, a maximum security prison for men. The LIFE model is an enhanced visitation program that helps families overcome the challenges of parental incarceration. The LIFE program 1) provides an enhanced visit setting that helps incarcerated parents and their families develop stronger and healthier relationships and 2) helps participating family members by involving them in 4-H programs designed to help youth develop the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that will allow them to become responsible adults. The incarcerated parents serve as 4-H volunteers and lead the activities during a monthly family meeting held in the visiting room. The family meeting includes the incarcerated parent, the children, and the caregivers. During the month, the incarcerated parent attends weekly parenting skills classes and monthly planning meetings where they set goals and determine shared responsibilities for the family meeting.

As in the original 4-H LIFE program, 4-H LIFE faculty have worked with critical internal and external program partners across disciplines (e.g., youth development, human development) to develop strong parent/family outcomes. The *quantity* of original 4-H LIFE programs has been increased as a result of the development and implementation of 4-H LIFE at Chillicothe and Women's Eastern Reception, Diagnostic and Correctional Center or WERDCC.

The *quality* of the original 4-H LIFE model is evidenced in the improved life skills (i.e., communication and problem-solving skills) and more positive relationships with the incarcerated parent.

DOC Research Agreement  
11/08/2011

I

In the 4-H LIFE program, we continue to provide research-based programs for the entire family during the monthly family meetings, parent education and planning sessions for the incarcerated parents and leadership opportunities for the youth through 4-H club family activities. In addition, we continue to improve the quality of programming by incorporating two additional components specifically geared to the family in the home/community setting. The 4-H LIFE faculty provide caregivers with pertinent, research-based parenting and social/human services resource information in an ongoing fashion.

Purpose – The purpose of the 4-H LIFE program is to improve the *quality and quantity* of the 4-H LIFE model for enhanced visitation through new partnerships with the Missouri DOC and MU HES Extension. The long-term outcomes of the 4-H LIFE program include the following:

- improving the children’s self-esteem and life skills (e.g., communication, decision-making),
- helping incarcerated parents and their child maintain long-term relationships, and
- reducing the caregiver’s stress level

This study is trying to better understand the impact of the 4-H LIFE program on the offender from the perspective of key correctional officer staff. Specifically, this study is aimed at understanding the potential transformative learning or change that offenders have experienced as a result of their participation in the 4-H LIFE program and subsequent family visits. The evaluation methodology proposed is a phenomenological study with the following data collection activity:

- A 20 minute phone interview with key correctional center staff (e.g., Institutional Activities Coordinator, visiting room corrections officers).

The open-ended interviews with correctional officers are intended to take place over the phone with staff at two women’s facilities: Chillicothe Correctional Center and the Women’s Eastern Reception, Diagnostic and Correctional Center or WERDCC. Four officers from each facility including the Institutional Activities Coordinator will be asked to participate in the open-ended phone interviews.

The researcher is planning to collect data from February 1-March 30, 2012. If the data has been collected from the 8 participants prior to March 30, the data collection will cease earlier.

This research study is planning to utilize data that has been collected by Tammy Gillespie who sought DOC Research Agreement approval for a study in May, 2008.

**IS DATA REQUIRED IN IDENTIFIABLE FORM? IF SO, PLEASE EXPLAIN.**

Data will be collected from correctional officers from the two women’s facilities and will be coded to maintain confidentiality of the participants.

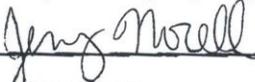
WHY IDENTIFIABLE DATA IS REQUIRED. – Not applicable.

**HOW WILL PRIVACY AND CONFIDENTIALITY OF THE DATA BE SAFEGUARDED?** All correctional officers will be given an opportunity to have the Informed Consent form read to them and sent to them via email prior to the phone interview. The participants will be asked to give verbal consent via phone and written consent to be mailed to the researcher.

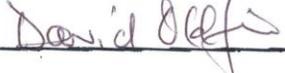
**HOW WILL THE IDENTIFIABLE DATA BE DISPOSED OF UPON COMPLETION OF THE PROJECT?** The signed consent forms and completed surveys will be sent to Jenny Norell at 2436 Tanner Bridge Road, Jefferson City, MO 65101 who will keep all documents indefinitely in a locked filing cabinet in a secure University of Missouri Extension office. Ms. Norell is the only individual with direct access to the keys to the filing cabinet. Ms. Norell has active IRB training certification through the University of Missouri C-IRB training system.

**FINAL REPORT REVIEW AND DISSEMINATION**  
One (1) copy of the resulting dissertation will be provided to the Director of Planning, Research and Evaluation. The Director of Planning, Research and Evaluation will be notified of subsequent publication of the research finding. .

The undersigned agree that data transferred under this agreement is to be used strictly for research and statistical purposes and that they are aware that violation of federal or state laws or regulations governing privacy and confidentiality are punishable as such. The Department of Corrections reserves the right to withdraw from any cooperative research or evaluation project agreed to under this arrangement if departmental policy and procedures are not strictly followed.

 _____	_____	_____
Jenny Norell	Student	University of Missouri
 _____	_____	_____
Robert Watson	Professor	Missouri State University

**PROJECT REVIEWED AND TRANSFER APPROVED**

BY: 	TITLE: <u>Director</u> <u>PRC</u>	DATE: <u>1/16/11</u>
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## 4-H LIFE Program Family Study

### CORRECTIONAL STAFF SHORT INTERVIEW

**Date:**

**Facility:**

**Sex:**

1. Please tell me your current position and how long you have worked for the Missouri Department of Corrections.

How long have you been employed in this position?

2. How did you become involved in working with the 4-H LIFE program?

3. What do you think about the program? Please describe general dis/likes of the program.

4. Do you think 4-H program visits differ for families and offenders in any way (s) from traditional visiting (i.e. not enrolled in a program) at this facility?

If so, please describe these differences. (If responses are not forthcoming, explore specific areas - atmosphere, physical interaction, treatment by corrections staff, and communication)

5. What changes, if any, have you noticed in the offenders who participate in the 4-H LIFE program? Note: Interviewer to explore answers to clarify a) what specific change, or impact, they are talking about and b) what were the processes, or sequence that led to that change.)

6. What changes, if any, have you noticed in the *children of the offenders* who participate in the 4-H LIFE program, if any?

7. What kinds of things have been particularly helpful to you in your work with the 4-H LIFE program?

8. What difficulties have you encountered in your work with the 4-H LIFE program?

9. Knowing what you know now, what (if anything) would you do differently in terms of implementing this program here if you were a program manager? Explore: In what ways would you change the program at your correctional center?

**“Staff:** *“Thank you for your time and ideas. This discussion has been very helpful.”*

Appendix G

**4-H LIFE Program Offender Study**

**CORRECTIONAL STAFF SHORT INTERVIEW**

**Date:**

**Facility:**

**Sex:**

1. Please tell me your current position and how long you have worked with the Missouri Department of Corrections.
  
2. How long have you been employed or volunteered in this position?
  
3. How did you become involved in working with the 4-H LIFE program?
  
3. What do you think about the program? Please describe general dis/likes of the program.
  
4. How do the 4-H LIFE program visits differ from traditional visits?
  
5. How have the offenders changed as a result of their participation in the 4-H LIFE program?
  - Have you noticed any changes for offenders during their visits with their family?
  
  - Have you noticed any changes for offenders in their housing units, on the yard, or during meal times?
  
6. Have you noticed any changes in the interaction they have with their children (their parenting style) and their caregivers while visiting?

**“Staff:** *“Thank you for your time and ideas. This discussion has been very helpful.”*

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## VITA

### *EDUCATION:*

2001-2005	Sociology, Psychology, BA UNIVERSITY OF MISSOURI-COLUMBIA, Columbia, Missouri APA Approved Program
2005-2007	Curriculum and Instruction, MA UNIVERSITY OF MISSOURI-COLUMBIA, Columbia, Missouri
2009-2012	Educational Leadership, Ed.D. UNIVERSITY OF MISSOURI-COLUMBIA, Columbia, Missouri

### *PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE:*

- 2007-Present **4-H Youth Development Specialist**, University of Missouri Extension
- Provide educational leadership in the development, implementation and evaluation of high priority, long-term programs based on research related to community-focused programs that promote positive youth development, including work with 4-H clubs, schools, youth-serving agencies and community collaborations.
  - Keep up to date on research, current and future trends and local and state demographic information and apply this to the area of volunteerism, child and adolescent development, parenting, family support, teaching/learning methodologies, prevention of high-risk behaviors, community collaboration and social issues impacting youth and families.
  - Counsel with regional director, extension program directors, program leaders and other specialists on overall program design and priorities identified in County, Regional and State Program Plans.
  - Market programs to all types of audiences and promote the total mission of University of Missouri Extension using mass media, information technology and other forums reaching a variety of groups and individuals.
  - Create an awareness of University of Missouri Extension programs among civic organizations, public agencies and key leaders.
  - Assess personal assets and needs to plan and participate in appropriate professional development, regional and program staff conferences and professional meetings.
  - Participate in interdisciplinary program planning and program development teams, committees and task forces.
  - Prepare and submit timely, clear and concise reports that indicate program progress and impact including knowledge, skills and behavior change of learners, and maintain records to support these reports.

- Pursue and develop sources of funding both internally and externally and manage financial and human resources needed to deliver and sustain programs.
- Develop and coordinate volunteer management systems for youth and adult volunteers who work with University of Missouri Extension /4-H youth development programs. Provide training and support for professionals and volunteers from other youth-serving agencies, schools and community organizations. Serve as a resource and develop positive relationships with 4-H councils, university extension councils, and other advisory groups.

## RESEARCH EXPERIENCE

### *Focus Groups on Youth Experiences with Global Village Camp*

Was the primary researcher on this project. Collected focus group data on the way in which youth experienced a global village camp and were transformed. Submitted this project to the National Association for Extension 4-H Association Conference.

### *Framing the World: Transformative Learning Experiences of Women Offenders in the 4-H LIFE Program* University of Missouri-Columbia

Dr. Robert Watson

Doctoral dissertation, qualitative phenomenological research study to understand the transformative learning experiences of women offenders in two correctional facilities in the state of Missouri.

## PRESENTATIONS

Flatt, J.L. (2010). Program Evaluation for Results. In-Service Education Experience, 4-H Workers with University of Missouri Extension, May 2010.

Flatt, J.L. (2011). Program Evaluation for Results Part Two. In-Service Education Experience, 4-H Workers with University of Missouri Extension, November 2011.

Flatt, J.L. & Gillespie, T. (2011). Understanding the 4-H LIFE program. Children's Trust Fund Conference, Jefferson City, Missouri. April 2011.

Flatt, J.L. (2012). Framing the World: Transformative Learning Experiences of Women Offenders in the 4-H LIFE Program. Missouri State University, April 2012.

