

kept open through the child's placement in foster care.

Certain family situations need intensive services and advocacy if reunification is to be a viable option. Incarcerated mothers who have a sentence of 1 1/2 years or longer are at a higher risk of losing the custody of their children. Mothers with a history of serious substance abuse and/or who have had children in foster care prior to their incarceration often need extensive support and advocacy to establish a post-release plan that will include reuniting with their children. AIM has been successful in helping mothers develop post-release plans ranging from employment, job training, welfare, treatment services, housing, day care and emergency assistance. Given that 75% of mothers in prison are the sole support of their children, housing and jobs are two key issues. With a source of support and advocacy, the period of incarceration can be a time when a mother is actively involved in her children's lives and is developing concrete post-release plans.

TASK FORCE ON INCARCERATED MOTHERS AND THEIR CHILDREN WITH THE DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICE

October of 1985 marked the culmination of two years of efforts of the Family Support and Advocacy on behalf of mothers in prison and their children with the Department of Social Services. The results are some significant changes in the written DSS policies regarding intervention with families with a mother in prison. The results of these negotiations include:

- * Written policy changes are being incorporated into varying levels of DSS documents. AIM has managed to achieve some short, but significant additions to DSS's new legal regulations. These regulations are the level of DSS policy statements and casework rules which are most legally enforceable in court. It is notable that DSS has added a new section to the legal regulations entitled: "Special Provisions Relating to Incarcerated Mothers." This section helps to establish the perspective which DSS social workers are now expected to adopt in cases involving mothers who are in prison. As a direct result of AIM's advocacy, DSS now recognizes incarcerated mothers as a special group of clients in need of special efforts and services.
- * A second addition to the legal regulation is that DSS has now added a separate clause into the regulations indentifying open adoption as a recognized option for permanency planning for children of mothers in prison where circumstances are appropriate. (Open adoption allows mothers and children to maintain a relationship, although the child is legally adopted) This is a very important development for a significant number of mothers in prison, particularly mothers who may be serving long sentences, and mothers whose children may already have been in foster care for long periods of time. This regulation can be utilized on behalf of mothers who are interested in this arrangement through strong advocacy efforts.
- * The most comprehensive and useful set of written policy changes will be documented in the new DSS Case Practice Manual. This is the manual which is most widely used by DSS social workers statewide, and which details casework policy mandates, and specific day-to-day casework instructions for all aspects of DSS social work practice. In the newly revised manual, there will be a lengthy section on cases involving incarcerated mothers and their children. AIM advocates will be able to make extensive use of these written mandates in holding social workers accountable to these policies which have been approved by the highest level of DSS administration.