

Through the year AIM works closely with the staff of MCI Framingham.
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FAMILY SUPPORT AND ADVOCACY PROGRAM

The Family Support and Advocacy Program provides visitation and child custody advocacy to mothers during their incarceration and upon their release to the community. The program's goal is to help a mother in prison protect her parental rights and be actively involved in her children's lives. Before AIM existed, many mothers visited with their children infrequently; did not understand their parental rights and their children's rights; and had a limited role, if any, in participating in the decisions made about their children placed in foster care homes. Through AIM's advocacy efforts mothers are directly involved in decisions made concerning their children and have regular contact with the social worker responsible for their welfare. The Family Support and Advocacy Program's goal is to provide self-help advocacy skills to mothers so they are able to exercise their rights and advocate for their children.

The preventive advocacy work of the program is supplemented by the services of the AIM Lawyer's Network. Fifty attorneys across the Commonwealth are organized by the program coordinator, Deb Filler, to step in when custody cases are litigated. Each lawyer volunteers to represent one case per year on a pro bono court appointed basis.

In addition to providing advocacy services for individual mothers, in 1985 the Family Support and Advocacy Program was involved in extensive policy work with the Department of Social Services (DSS). This Policy Task Force on Incarcerated Mothers and Their Children with the DSS was initiated in 1984 by AIM to make recommendations regarding the social work policies that effect mothers in prison and their children. Under the leadership of Deb Filler, Coordinator of the Family Support and Advocacy Project, these policy negotiations were brought to a successful conclusion. The results are described below.

INDIVIDUAL CASE ADVOCACY

The Program Coordinator, Deb Filler, was at MCI Framingham, the only State prison for women, two days a week in 1985 to meet with individual mothers who needed an advocate in family matters. Eighty per cent of the mothers requesting advocacy have children in foster care. At any one time the Family Support and Advocacy Program is assisting 50 to 60 mothers. AIM staff and mother work together on visitation, child custody issues and future planning for as long as necessary, ranging from three months to 2 years. Advocacy efforts are based on a self-help model with input and decision making from the individual mother. The program's goal is to give women the know-how to find community resources that will provide support in the transition back to their children.