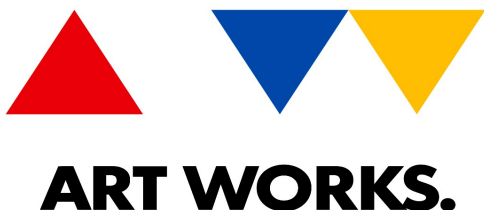


The Special Project

Art Activities

*Artmaking for families with
incarcerated loved ones*



**National
Endowment
for the Arts**
arts.gov

INTRODUCTION

This booklet documents the story of *The Special Project* and demonstrates how artmaking can increase the well-being of children with incarcerated parents. When The Special Project started more than 10 years ago, little was known about protective factors and how having an incarcerated parent can harm children's health. Now we know that parental incarceration is an Adverse Childhood Experience, and these activities can strengthen protective factors, inspire hope and self-confidence and promote problem solving. *The Special Project* offers our story and activities to families, teachers, artists and all who care for children with incarcerated loved ones.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks to the anonymous donor who initiated this work, and the Kentucky Foundation for Women for nurturing it for six years. Appreciation to Monica L. Williams for designing the artmaking program, and all the art activity leaders who show up weekly. The compilation of these activities originated with Jardana Peacock, an early team member. In most cases, the team members provided photographs of their own activities. Thanks to current team member Kasey Scarbrough for updating some of the photographs. Michelle Amos and Tricia Hart helped identify the protective factors and skills. Appreciation to Trish Salerno for editing and design of the booklet and Robert Lampman for printing.

The Special Project Story

By Judi Jennings, Director



This project is special for two reasons: 1) it supports making art with children and caregivers who have incarcerated loved ones; and 2) creating art activities incorporating protective factors and strengthening problem-solving skills. This is how *The Special Project* starts and grows:

It is 2007. A mother and her two grandchildren wait to visit her son, incarcerated in the Metro Louisville Jail. Then, as now, visitation is by video only. Families often wait an hour or more for a 20-minute visit. During their long wait, the mother imagines making art with the children in the visitors lobby. She gives an anonymous gift of \$25,000 to the Kentucky Foundation for Women to create an artmaking program in the visitors lobby.

The Kentucky Foundation for Women (KFW) is a private foundation, promoting positive social change by supporting varied expressions of feminist art. Judi Jennings, the foundation director, coordinates the development of what becomes the “KFW Special Project.” The foundation adds funds to commission an oil painting and a mural in the entrance and exit lobbies of the Louisville Metro Department of Corrections to make these public spaces more welcoming.

New York artist Monica L. Williams designs the art program. She and Jennings recruit local art leaders. Williams develops curriculum guidelines for incorporating protective factors for children with incarcerated loved ones. Together, Williams and the art leaders develop each art activity. She trains them how to present their activities to children and caregivers. The weekly artmaking in the visitors lobby begins in 2008.

From 2008 through 2011, the original donor and concerned community members provide financial support for the weekly artmaking activities in the visitors lobby. In 2011, the Kentucky Department of Corrections begins four years of funding for the weekly activities through a major grant from the US Department of Justice.

In 2013, the KFW Special Project joins the Sesame Street Network initiative *Little Children/Big Challenges: Incarceration*. The initiative includes print and media resources that address the emotional impacts of parental incarceration on children.

<http://www.sesameworkshop.org/press-room/little-children-big-challenges/>

The KFW Special Project team adds Sesame Workshop resources to their weekly activities. Team members give children and caregivers opportunities to create cards to send to their incarcerated loved ones to nurture caring relationships.

In 2015, *The Special Project* becomes an independent community-based team of art leaders. With Jennings as director and funding from the Pew Health Impact Project, the project partners with Louisville Metro Department of Public Health & Wellbeing Center for Health Equity to assess how parental incarceration harms children's health. The report finds significant racial inequity in the impact on children of color.

https://louisvilleky.gov/sites/default/files/health_and_wellness/che/parental_incarceration_childrens_health.pdf

Today, *The Special Project* continues to create weekly art activities in the visitors lobby with support from the original donor, faith-based organizations and community members. The art leaders bear witness to the significant racial disparities among the families there and strive to engage all children in more positive and supportive visitation experiences.

Protective Factors, Problem Solving Skills & Building Resilience

Since *The Special Project* began in 2008, health professionals now recognize that having an incarcerated parent is an Adverse Childhood Experience. Protective factors are especially important for the health and wellbeing of children facing these adversities. When children can express their individual strengths and engage in social interactions incorporating protective factors, the result is dynamic forms of positive adaptations, which build resilience.

<https://www.health.state.mn.us/communities/ace/resilience.html>

Research on Sesame Street's *Little Children/Big Challenges: Incarceration* initiative documents how artmaking can strengthen protective factors and build resilience for children with incarcerated parents. This research focuses on three groups of protective factors:

- 1) Circle of Care;
- 2) Sense of Self; and
- 3) Emotional Understanding and Knowledge.

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/300706665_Building_Resilience_in_Young_Children_the_Sesame_Street_Way

The Mayo Clinic Health System also identifies problem-solving skills as important individual assets enabling children facing Adverse Childhood experiences to build resilience. They describe these skills as recognizing a problem, creating and choosing action steps and producing a solution. Taken together, the protective factors and problem-solving skills embodied in *The Special Project* art activities provide concrete supports for children and caregivers with incarcerated loved ones.

<https://mayoclinichealthsystem.org/adverse-childhood-experiences/problem-solving-skills-and-self-regulation>.

Guidelines For Developing These Art Activities

Designed by Monica L. Williams
For The KFW Special Project

The visitors lobby of the jail is a challenging environment to create protective factor- based art activities for children and their caregivers. The number of children and their wait time is unpredictable, and the artmaking materials must pass through the metal detectors. The guidelines developed by Williams are essential to the success and longevity of these artmaking activities.

- Design activities that can be completed in 10 to 20 minutes.
- Activities should be flexible and able to be "built in phases" during the course of the engagement. For example, making a collage can be built on to include a poem that can then be read out loud.
- Activities should be engaging for multiple ages at the same time.
- Activities should reinforce protective factors.
- Each activity should have a clear beginning, middle and end.
- Everyone in the visitors lobby should feel welcome to participate.
- Participants should have specific take-aways from their engagement.
- For example, a piece of art they made and feelings of accomplishment for their work.
- Participants should feel empowered by their engagement in the artmaking.

The Special Project Art Activities

Individual members of the KFW Special Project Team of art leaders worked with Monica L Williams to develop the activities included in the following pages. The name of the team member who created the activity is listed at the top of the description page. Each description also includes specific examples of how the artmaking strengthens one or more groups of protective factors identified by the Sesame Street research:

1) Circle of Care. This includes incarcerated family members or friends; caregivers; neighbors, teachers and responsible adults.

2) Sense of Self. To paraphrase Elmo, Big Bird and Cookie Monster, this means children seeing themselves as important, confident, creative and capable.

3) Emotional Understanding and Knowledge. Indicators include verbal expression of emotions, working through frustration or anger and demonstrating empathy.

Some of the activities also help develop the problem-solving skills identified by the Mayo Clinic Health System. These skills include fine motor skills, spatial understanding, recognizing and creating patterns and using sequential steps to complete tasks or develop solutions.

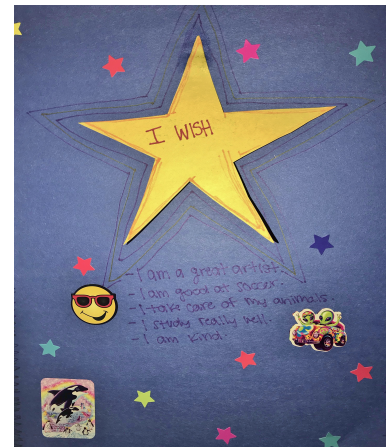
Most importantly, the children and caregivers in the Visitors Lobby love participating!

Art Activity: **Wishing Star**

Contributing Artist: Linda Murray

Background: Participants may choose from the star related activities listed below, depending upon their age, interests and abilities.

Supplies Needed: Construction Paper (various colors including dark blue and yellow), Card stock, Gold Sharpie pens, Yarn, Pencils, Crayons, Markers, Glue, Various decorative materials such as Stickers, Paper with designs, etc. Gold Star Stickers.



Instructions:

1. Write "I wish" on the front of a pre-cut star
2. Write the wish on the back of the star.
3. Glue the top point of the star on a sheet of dark blue (or color of their choice) construction paper so that it can be lifted up and read on the back.
4. Write a "star poem" and paste it below the star OR write ways that the participant is a "star" (things they are good at, etc.)
5. Decorate their stars, including making a frame.
6. Share their finished star with their caregiver, reading the poem or what they wrote if they are able.
7. Receive a gold star from the art leader or caregiver to put on their finished work.

Relationship to Protective Factors:

Emotional Understanding and Knowledge is encouraged through the exploration of the participant's feelings by naming their hopes and wishes.

Circle of Care can be nurtured when participants connect with caregivers or friends as they share their thoughts and feelings about their hopes and wishes.

Art Activity: Wish Dolls

Contributing Artist: Kate Dennis



Background: In Guatemala, many children make small dolls to tell their worries and fears. They place the dolls under their pillow. During the night while the children are asleep, the dolls absorb the worries from the child's mind. This adaptation gives children safe ways to express their wishes and hope that the wishes may come true.

Supplies: large clothespins, pipe cleaners, scraps of fabric, various colored paper, markers, tissue paper, yarn, regular and fabric glue.

Instructions:

1. Demonstrate how large clothespins can serve as the body of the doll. Show how to draw on the top of the pin to create a face. Or participants can use pipe cleaners to create the body of the doll.
2. Show how the fabric and paper can become clothes for the doll by wrapping them around the body and then decorating them.
3. Ask the participants what their wishes are and if they want to share them with others.

Relationship to Protective Factors:

Emotional Understanding is developed by giving the participant opportunities to identify their feelings, especially feelings of hope.

Sense of Self is developed through the process of choosing materials and creating characteristics for the doll



Art Activity: Door Hangers

Contributing Artist: Ashley Marshall

Overview: Participants can create a door hanger using their name, a friend's name or family member's name. The door hanger can personalize or decorate a space. Making one for a friend or family member can show love and appreciation.



Supplies Needed: Markers, crayon, Glitter pens, feathers, stickers, multicolor craft foam, Glue, Hole puncher, magazine cut-outs

Instructions:

1. Either the participant or caregiver or art leader draws name on pre-cut craft foam or cardboard/cardstock. (Bubble letters are a popular way to draw the name, so participants can color them in.)
2. The participant can then decorate the hanger with markers, glitter pens, stickers, magazine cut-outs, or other supplies etc.
3. Punch two holes in the top left and right corner of your name hanger. Then get a piece of yarn, (about the length of arm), and string it through both holes.
4. Tie the ends into a knot to create hanger.

Relationship to Protective Factors:

Sense of Self is developed through thinking about individual's personality characteristics and colors, shapes and decorations that want to display on the door hanger.

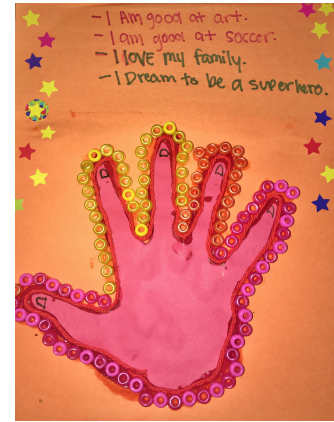
Circle of Care: By sharing a door hanger as a gift, the participant connects and shows appreciation to a family member or caregiver.



Art Activity: Good Luck Hand

Contributing Artist: Linda Murray

Background: There are many symbols for "good luck." In Morocco, Africa, a hand or *khamisa* is such a symbol. It is often made from metal such as silver, and decorated and hung on a door or wall for good luck or protection. Participants in this activity can make a "good luck" hand, decorate it, and write a wish or thought to accompany it.



Supplies Needed: Gold/silver poster board, Pre-cut card stock in different colors, Glue sticks, Hole punch, Thin ribbon, Colored markers, Gold and silver Sharpie pens, Misc. decorative paper jewels, flowers, stars, etc. Ruler, Pencils, and Construction paper.

Instructions:

1. Trace around your hand on a piece of paper. Card stock or cut up poster board may also be used for creating a wall hanging.
2. Decorate your hand with markers, paper flowers, foil, yarn; encourage people to come up with their own creative additions such as rainbows, names of friends.
3. Write a thought on the top of the paper to highlight what you feel is lucky about your life, your dreams, your family, your strengths or talents.
4. Share what you have made with others.

Relationship to Protective Factors:

Emotional Understanding and Knowledge is developed when participants to identify and name positive aspects of their life.

Circle of Care is strengthened when the participant is able to connect with parents and caregivers by sharing their thoughts and feelings identified and expressed in this activity.

Art Activity: Letter To A Loved One

Contributing Artist: Mari Mujica/Meredith Pass

Overview: Participants can create a card for a caregiver, teacher, relative, or friend, give the card to their caregiver or friend in the visitor's lobby or send it by mail to their incarcerated loved one. They can also write a thank you note to themselves and/or write a secret message. This activity can also be used in conjunction with the Sesame Street resources, which suggest that a child write a letter to their incarcerated loved one.



Supplies needed: Cardstock of different colors, Markers, Color Pencils and Crayons, Magazine pages, Catalogs, Glue sticks, Yarn, Scotch tape, Envelopes and Stamps.

Instructions:

1. Ask participants to think of someone they would like to write or send a card to thank them or just to communicate.
2. Choose a card size and draw on the outside of the card.
3. Decide if they want to make an envelope. It's okay to just make a card. If they decide to make an envelope, have them choose the materials for an envelope. Magazine pages or color cardstock.
4. Trace an envelope on magazine pages or card stock. Cut the traced envelope, fold it around the card and glue.
5. Write the name of the person they will give the card to.
6. Card and envelope are ready to be delivered.
7. Give the card to the person they made it for.

Relationship to Protective factors:

Circle of Care is nurtured through thinking about and communicating with a friend or family member. By writing to an incarcerated loved one, the participant is able to maintain communication and connection.

Emotional Understanding and Knowledge is furthered when the participant has the opportunity to express their feelings and emotions toward a friend or loved one.

Art Activity: **I am Collage**

Contributing Artist: Melissa Hutchins



Summary of Art Project: Participants will create collages to represent who they are and what is important to them. Each collage will have a theme around *I am...; I love... I wish... I believe... I will...*, etc.

If they create more than one collage, they will be given the option to "bind" them (with yarn and a hole punch). They will be able to take the project with them. If they must leave without completing it, they will be encouraged to take some supplies with them.

Supplies: Construction paper, hole punch, yarn, crayons, pencils, glitter pens, stickers, cut out magazine pictures from a diverse selection of magazines (esp. animals, playing, people, and flowers).

Instructions:

1. Ask participants to choose a piece of 4.25" x 5.5" paper for their collage. There will be multiple colors with different prompts written at the top (*I am... I wish... I will...*, etc.). Some will be blank, in case they want to write it themselves.
2. Choose pictures/words they would like to use on their collage. These images/words will be pre-cut, and sorted into categories.
3. Use markers, crayons, and stickers to decorate the collage. Provide glue (or another non-messy adhesive) to add images/words to paper.
4. Encourage participants to share their collage as they create it.
5. Ask participants to sign and date the collage.
6. Once finished with their collage, leader will encourage the participants to share with the group, ask about other people the participant can share the collage with.
7. If the participant is not interested/able to complete another collage, leader will offer to prepare the collage for hanging (hole punch and yarn).
8. If the participant is interested, they can complete another collage (choosing a different theme than before), following above steps. If more than one collage is completed, leader will offer to "bind" them in book fashion with hole punch and yarn.

Relationship to Protective Factors & Problem-Solving Skills:

Sense of Self is nurtured through self exploration and awareness when participant identify pictures that correspond with their interests and personality characteristics.

Problem Solving: The participant is strengthened when participants navigate spatial and fine motor challenges.

Art Activity: The Story of Me Picture Frame

Contributing Artist: Kate Dennis

Overview: Participants are encouraged to decorate their frame with objects and cut-outs that are indicative of their personality. The frame can be build on by encouraging participants to write or talk about why their frame is a good representation of who they are. Participants can also give their frame to a family member or friend.



Supplies Needed: Large Popsicle Sticks, Beads, Glitter, Markers, Assorted Colorful Papers, Fabric Scraps, Glue, Various Decorative Stickers and Adhesives, Magnetic tape, Magazines for cutting out pictures, Plain Paper, Pens.

Instructions:

1. Choose four (4) sticks and glue them together to make frame.
2. Decorate the frame.
3. Have individuals write a statement about themselves or draw a picture for the frame.
4. Ask participants to share their finished frame with others, and explain how it represents who they are.
5. Explain that their frame can be given away as a gift, or kept.

Relationship to Protective Factors & Problem-Solving Skills:

Sense of Self is encouraged by participant's self-reflection and verbal and creative expression of likes and personality traits.

Problem Solving is strengthened when the participants works through the necessary steps to completing this activity.

Art Activity: Recycled Treasure Boxes

Contributing Artist: Mari Mujica

Background: Participants will recycle small boxes and reshape them to create treasure boxes. Boxes need to be collected in advance, and fully opened to be re-shaped and re-glued. Examples of boxes include packaging for toothpaste, tea, crackers, granola bars, etc. The boxes can be kept by the participant or given to a friend or family member.



Supplies Needed: Recycled boxes, wall covering paper of different designs and colors, pencils, crayons, markers, magazine page pieces, catalogs, ruler to help tear paper, glue sticks, yarn and ribbon, tape, beads of different colors to use as opening knobs.

Instructions:

1. Invite participants to make a box for treasures, jewelry, messages, etc.
2. Choose a recycled packaging box, and glue the sides closed to make a box that represents the participant. Be sure there is a little hanging flap on the top so that the box can be shut completely.
3. Choose the paper to cover/decorate the box, and cut small strips to cover the entire box. Note: participants can also cover the inside of the box, as well, with the same or a different kind of paper.
4. Glue the paper to the box, then choose a bead to put on the lid of the box.
5. Decorate around the bead using markers or crayons.
6. Glue two pieces of ribbon to have a closing mechanism.
7. Ask participants to share their boxes and then answer if they are keeping their box or who they will give it to. Then participant can write a message to put inside.

Relationship to Protective Factors & Problem Solving Skills:

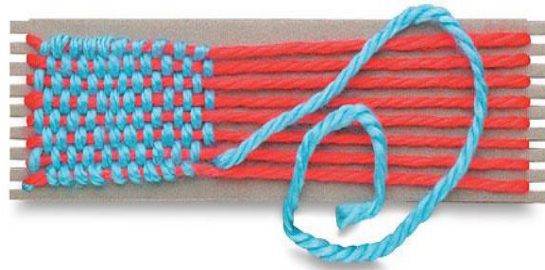
Sense of Self is nurtured through participant's self-awareness in making choices about the box size, paper design and use.

Problem Solving skills are enhanced by completing steps and navigating spatial and fine motor challenges.

Art Activity: Card Board Loom Weaving

Contributing Artist: Michelle Amos

Supplies: Cardboard (old cereal boxes, frozen pizza boxes, etc. will do); a variety of Yarn; Nail Clipper; and Plastic Needles.



Instructions:

1. Provide sample weaving, or homemade looms, in various stages (partially woven and finished).
2. Have pre-made looms ready: card board squares and rectangles, size 5"x5" for "mug rugs" or 2"x5" for bracelets, with slits at top and bottom ½ inch apart, wrap the yarn around and into each slit. Have various yarns ready, cut into one yard strips.
3. Give each participant materials. First demonstrate weaving (over, under, over under).
4. Conduct guided practice.
5. Allow participants to work independently. You can suggest they incorporate found yarn and ribbon as they go.
6. How to end, using nail clippers, clip back yarn, pull off the loom, tie each two pieces of yarn together on top and bottom.



Relationship to Protective Factors & Problem Solving Skills:

Sense of self can be strengthened through the process of choosing colors, materials and patterns for the weaving project.

Problem solving includes navigating the logistics of weaving, such as creating patterns, and practicing fine motor skills.

Art Activity: Making Art Jewelry

Contributing Artist: Shannon Garth-Rhodes

Overview: Participants can create charms that signify who they are (age, grade, middle child, etc.) and what is important to them (hobbies, interests, people, etc.).



Supplies: Yarn, String, Pipe cleaners, different types of paper, Beads, Fabric scraps, Pre-cut shapes for Charms. The charms are created from paper in any shape, common shapes, such as diamonds and circles, will be pre-cut. Or participants can make paper rolled beads.



Instructions:

1. Design/create charms
2. String the jewelry on yarn, string, or pipe cleaner.
The participants should be encouraged to create any kind of jewelry they would like, crowns, headbands, bracelets, anklets, etc.
3. It is important that the creators feel comfortable wearing their work, but they can also create it for a loved one.
4. If the participants choose to use yarn or string, beads with little knots on each side of the charm can hold it in place.



Relationship to Protective Factors & Problem Solving Skills:

Sense of Self is increased self awareness when participants choose materials, colors, and patterns that they would like to use.

Problem Solving skills are strengthened when participants figure out bead patterns, stringing, and other techniques needed to complete the activity.

Art Activity: Spirit Animal Masks

Contributing Artist: Jardana Peacock

Overview: This activity can be built in stages to include more complex creative skills and verbal expression. It can be adapted to the skills and ability levels of each participant.



Supplies Needed: Construction paper, Poster board or Card stock pre-cut in half masks, Pre-cut Paper Patterns, Glue, Yarn, Crayons, Markers, Stickers, Hole Punch, Decorative Appliqués, Sparkles, Stickers, Feathers, etc., and Popsicle sticks.

Instructions:

1. Begin by talking to participants about what they think a spirit animal could be. Invite participants to identify an animal with which they identify.
2. The following questions provide helpful guidelines:
 - What does my spirit animal look like?
 - What characteristics do we share?
 - What does my spirit animal sound like?
 - What does my voice sound like?
 - What does my spirit animal like to do?
 - What is my spirit animal afraid of?
 - What do my spirit animal and I have in common?
 - How are we different?
3. Help participants decorate a pre-cut paper mask that represents their animal.
4. Glue a popsicle stick to mask so that participants can hold the mask up to their face.
5. Encourage participants to engage in a skit to meet each other and tell each other about themselves.



NOTE: *It is VERY helpful to have sample masks for the participants to model after.*

Relationship to Protective Factors:

Sense of Self is developed as participant engages in self-reflection to identify their personal characteristics.

Emotional Understanding and Knowledge and empathy is developed in safe and creative ways when participants incorporate their feelings into their chosen animal.

Art Activity: **This is Me! Booklet**

Contributing Artist: Cara Murray

Background: This activity can be done 1 or 2 pages at a time to fit into the amount of time the participant has available. It is a good activity to do as a group in a community setting, like the art leaders shown in this picture from the Father's Day picnic for formerly incarcerated Dads.



Supplies Needed:

Pre-cut Cardboard or Card Stock, Construction paper, Newsprint paper for inside pages, Stickers, Markers, Glue, Glitter, Yarn and Hole Punch, Nail clippers to cut yarn.

Instructions:

1. Choose a color of paper to serve as the cover of their booklet
2. Decorate the outside of the booklet using crayons, markers, stickers, glitter, and other decorative materials.
3. Punch holes in the booklet sheets and stitch together with yarn.
4. Participants draw a picture of themselves on the first page of the booklet (younger participants can trace their hand instead).
5. Write and/or draw things that represent the most important things about their lives (younger participants can color the pages or decorate them with stickers)
6. Share the booklet with family, friends, and other participants.

Relationship to Protective Factors:

Sense of self is encouraged when participants think about the positive aspects of their personalities and accomplishments.

Circle of care is nurtured when the participants create art for or about their family and friends.

