



Preparing for life after incarceration by keeping the relationship strong between fathers and kids

By Shawn Loging
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Kewanee, Illinois - A rare interaction for dads and their kids happening behind the fences of a different kind of prison.

The Kewanee Life Skills Re-Entry Center is providing a Day with Dad.

This is the second year the Center has provided the opportunity where the men are not inmates but fathers.

About 80 children of the inmates spent the entire day with their dad to create memories and build bonds.

Those who talked with Local Four News said there is no place they would rather be than the Re-Entry Center to serve their time.

With a different approach to incarceration, the goal is to prepare the men for life after their sentence and to keep them from returning to the system.

Father and inmate Brandon Porter said, "I couldn't even imagine how good it was going to feel to be able to just hold her and kiss her and tell her I love her."

It's a day to be a proud dad.

Father and inmate Carlos Sept said, "This is Karlease, she's ten, and this is LaShay, she's eight. My baby girls."

Carlos Sept has been at the Kewanee Life Skills Re-Entry Center for 13 months and has about 50 days left before he'll be home with his girls.

That's what makes being able to play and enjoy family time with them so unique.

Sept said, "This is something awesome. This is something you don't see in the Department of Corrections. You know you get an opportunity to spend the whole day with your kids. Quality time. It's priceless."

For inmates like Brandon Porter, he said it's not the typical relationship he gets to have while incarcerated with his three-year-old daughter Wynter.

Porter said, "Time with them in a positive way instead of just in a visiting room at a table. To be able to actually interact and play games and have a positive influence on her."

The re-entry center, opening in early 2017, is focused on giving inmates a leg up when they're done with their time, not just with job skills but the tools to reintegrate into a community and with their family.

Kewanee Life Skills Re-Entry Center Warden Charles Johnson said, "That's one less thing they're going to have to worry about. How the family is going to react to them. How their kids going to react to them when they come home."

It's time these fathers aren't wasting, anticipation growing for weeks and even constructing the golf course, massive connect four and a dozen other activities and games that scatter the yard.

"What's your favorite game?" Porter said to his daughter Wynter.

She replied, "Lots."

Porter said, "All of it?" and Wynter replied, "Yeah."

"All of it," Porter reiterated.

It's all preparing them for when they truly get to spent time with their kids.

Porter said, "That way when I do come home, she doesn't have all bad memories."

To make this day possible for the dads, the warden tells Local Four News, some of the Center's correctional officers came in on their day off along with many volunteers from the community.

The warden also said because of the increasing number of inmates, he may look at making this day available twice a year.

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