

## Playing and Reading to Children Increases Their Chance at Success

The Phi Theta Kappa Honor Research Team at Roane State Community College interviewed both previously incarcerated participants and a control group about the activities they enjoyed as a child, differentiating between constructed and free play, as well as mental or physical preferences. We also questioned them regarding the amount of time a caregiver spent reading to them. Lastly, we asked them to contemplate the idea of their parent(s)/ guardians playing with them when they were children in the ways they preferred to play, then asked if they thought that scenario would have had influence in their behavior as a child and young adult. Sadly, 100% of the responses from previously incarcerated individuals indicated that their parents or guardians never read to them, and all of them made comments such as, "...maybe the lack of attention that I received as a child, the lack of having someone constantly play with me and be there for me, and to know confidently that somebody was there for me, probably led to me acting out as an adult, which then led to drug use which then led to suppressing issues that I've been running from which then led to incarceration....which then now led to a mentally unstable adult." This and other collected statements provided clarity during our research that play was a crucial factor in early childhood education (ECE) and development. The research suggests that any increased playtime with parents/guardians would have made a positive difference. What we discovered most was the fact that deciding what type of play is best ultimately varied by individual. The previously incarcerated group agreed that play designed specifically for them to enjoy would have made a significant difference as it would have allowed them to be recognized by their individuality and helped them to feel as if someone cared about their ideas or concerns.

In contrast to the previously incarcerated individuals, 82.5% of our successful group answered that their parents played with them in the fashion they desired and 84.9% said their parents read to them as children, strongly indicating that reading to and playing with children in their desired fashion reduces the chance of incarceration, drug use, and mental instability.

We also inquired if there was participation in team sports, fine arts, or after school programs. Noticeably, 0% of the previously incarcerated individuals took part in any fine arts activities, 0% considered themselves dedicated to any team sport, and only one respondent participated in afterschool programs. It was determined that 68.3% of our control group said they were active in fine arts as children and 61.1% admitted to participating in team sports, indicating that fine arts and team sports are also incredibly crucial factors in successful childhood development. Negative effects from the lack of preferred play, including reading time, can include:

- Mental instability
- Drug abuse
- Homelessness
- Incarceration

- The inability to interact socially or make friends.
- Poor school and work performance
- Lack of emotional maturity

In conclusion, we acknowledge that severely decreased or non-existent parental/guardian attention was noted in many of the participants' stories. And suggest that increase in playful caregiver involvement would have been an improvement to the participants' childhood experience, we further conclude that parents, educators, and doctors should also consider the personality and preferences of a child before prescribing, designing, or assigning constructed or free play environments and activities. Our research conclusion into one's role, identity, and experience of play lead to our action of getting more involved toys, games, and especially books into the hands of children of currently incarcerated individuals. Our chapter is inspired to think that changing the life of one child will result in a break in the chain of a family with reoccurring incarceration. We hope that this will improve the community with a reduction in crime, one less overdose victim, one less victim of sexual assault or trafficking. This project is a steppingstone for change.