



**Project Avary (Alternative Ventures for At-Risk Youth)**

[www.projectavary.org](http://www.projectavary.org)

**Mission:** Project Avary promotes brighter futures for children with a parent in prison or otherwise involved with the criminal justice system. We build a community of support and healing, and empower children to achieve essential leadership and life skills. We strive to end cycles of generational incarceration, one child at a time.

**Demographics:** Project Avary currently has 150 children and youth enrolled in the program. They reside throughout several Bay Area counties including San Francisco, Alameda, Contra Costa, Marin and Sonoma. Nearly 50% have been suspended or expelled from school prior to their initial enrollment and up to 80% of children have experienced abandonment, neglect, or physical or sexual abuse.

**Need for Services:** Childhood Trends estimates there are over 5 million US children with a parent in prison. The California Research Bureau estimates there are 850,000 children throughout California that have parents in the criminal justice system, and approximately 300,000 of these children live in the Bay Area. Children are impacted by the shame, stigma and isolation of having a parent incarcerated. Researchers from the Urban Institute (2008) claim that children of incarcerated parents face heightened risks of realizing poor youth outcomes, including incarceration during their lives.

**Project Avary's Approach:** We provide a community of support and healing for children and family members impacted by parental incarceration. We offer a safe space where participants who share a common experience can be open and honest about their pain and grief of losing a loved one to prison. Within this container of deep trust and respect, participants join together to grieve and heal the wounds of loss and abandonment. From this foundation of real healing, participants can claim their future, free from the generational cycles of pain and incarceration. Based on 15 years of direct experience, our year-round program is tailored to meet the unique emotional needs of children of prisoners. Children develop measurable skills in emotional intelligence, communication, conflict resolution, leadership, and independent living. We intervene early in the lives of children at the ages of 8 to 11, and we make a long-term 10-year commitment to each child and family.

**Children's Program:** Summer camp provides children and teens a safe place in nature for self-discovery, reflection, and for connecting with the curative powers of the outdoors. Camp offers the time and space for children to form authentic lifelong relationships with peers and caring adults. Children under 14 participate in traditional summer camp activities (swimming, hiking, music, arts & crafts, etc.) along with therapeutic campfire discussion circles and expressive art activities about the shame, stigma, and grief of having a parent in prison. All youth receive training in stress reduction, anger management and conflict resolution through yoga, meditation, and non-violent communication. The school-year program offers weekly weekend outings and

retreats that strengthen connections to the Avary community, introduce children to a diversity of experiences and perspectives, build resilience, self-confidence, and develop basic social and life skills.

**Teen Leadership Program:** At age 14 teens go through a wilderness rites-of-passage to mark their transition from camper to teen leader. Summer camp and monthly outdoor and wilderness outings build community, leadership, and important social and emotional skills. The Junior Counselor program, beginning at age 15, empowers teen leaders to guide and counsel younger children in the program. They receive youth development and life skill training, preparing them for their junior counselor job at Avary and ultimately, the broader working world.

The Peace Makers is the teen advocacy group, which gives voice to the forgotten needs of the children of incarcerated parents and asserts the implementation of the CIP bill of rights at the local, state and national level.

**Family Unity Program:** Family unity is critical for the child, caregiver, and the incarcerated parent. We provide a number of offerings to strengthen family connectedness. Facilitated peer-to-peer monthly *Caregiver Groups* build bonds of mutual support and assistance among caregivers. *Family Unity Activities* include a spring and winter gathering for children and caregivers to strengthen family relationships and to foster connections within the Avary community. *Family Restorative Circles* are a facilitated restorative justice circle that supports ex-offenders to reconcile and reunite with children and other family members to support a positive post-incarceration reentry process. *Family Advocate* case managers provide year-round crisis support connecting families to vital community resources. And finally, pioneering prison and jail *Parenting Classes*, led by our young adult graduates, teach inmates about the impact of their incarceration on the child, and support parent inmates to build healthy relationships with their children on the outside.

**Evaluation:** Avary evaluates every child annually on key psycho-social skills including: communication skills, anger management, conflict resolution, relationship with peers and adults, goal setting, and leadership skills.

**Impact:** Since 1999, we have served over 800 children. 96% of youth show improvement in resiliency, positive attachment to caring adults and peers, communication skills, anger management, conflict resolution, goal setting, and leadership skills. 84% of surveyed graduates completed at least one year of post-secondary education. And only 6% of surveyed graduates report ever being arrested.

### **Videos about Avary's work:**

Our Story

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2IR\\_GGtflGQ&nohtml5=False](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2IR_GGtflGQ&nohtml5=False)

Isaiah's Story

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gt1KHXXKcE8Q&nohtml5=False>

A Snapshot of Camp Avary

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NBBpZeWm\\_DU&nohtml5=False](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NBBpZeWm_DU&nohtml5=False)

Project Avary

Page 2 of 3

Youth School Project:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yVL468JL2hg&nohtml5=False>

**Research about children of incarcerated parents:**

<http://www.childtrends.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/2015-42ParentsBehindBars.pdf>

[http://www.urban.org/research/publication/broken-bonds-understanding-and-addressing-needs-children-incarcerated-parents/view/full\\_report](http://www.urban.org/research/publication/broken-bonds-understanding-and-addressing-needs-children-incarcerated-parents/view/full_report)

<https://www.library.ca.gov/crb/00/notes/v7n2.pdf>