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Date: July 28, 2017
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'Day with My Dad' Program Reconnects Inmates and Their Children

MERIDIAN – A new program uniting incarcerated fathers with their children will give inmate Kevin Brown and his son a chance to celebrate the son's first birthday early Sunday at East Mississippi Correctional Facility in Meridian.

A "Day with My Dad" will be held from 9 a.m. until 2 p.m. Fifteen (15) offenders will be allowed to interact with their children through a variety of activities.

Brown, 25, who is serving five years for burglary of vehicle in DeSoto County, said he will relish spending time with his 2-year-old daughter and son whose birthday is Aug. 9.

"My children are growing up so fast. They are beginning to be able to speak in whole sentences and I am just looking forward to being able to talk with them," Brown said. "This is a wonderful opportunity and something to look forward to."

Each inmate will be allowed one adult visitor and their children, in most cases one or two. In addition to face-painting, watching movies and enjoying refreshments, the inmates also can play games and puzzles, read to their children and have the children read back to them.

EMCF Warden Frank Shaw said he hopes a successful first outing will allow the program to continue. "It is a great opportunity for our offenders who follow all of the rules and do what they are supposed to do," Shaw said. "Our plans, if it works, include doing this more often with other offenders who meet the criteria."

The Mississippi Department of Corrections supports programs that will help offenders be successful when they are released, Commissioner Pelicia E. Hall said. "Having family support is important not only when inmates are released but also while they are incarcerated," she said. "Programs such as a 'Day with My Dad' are consistent with our vision to meet offenders' reintegration needs."

Markeshia Wells, EMCF's lead case manager, said the program is modeled after one she learned about in a correctional facility in Cleveland, Texas.

“It is a great chance to help strengthen the bond between the offenders and their children,” Wells said. “Some of them haven’t seen their children in years and when they get out, hopefully this will help them be a better parent.”

Other than being free of any disciplinary action in the past year, selected inmates also had to participate in classes and have a job at the prison, Wells said.

The adult visitors to accompany the children will include spouses, ex-spouses, grandparents, and parents of the offenders. “The adult visitors who will be participating are already on the approved and established list for visitors,” Wells said. “Additionally, we verified the paternity of all of the children who will be participating.”

The children will range in ages 18 and under, with most being under 10 years of age. A total of 21 children are expected.

Brown, #153801, whose release date is in 2021, said the opportunity to see his children has given him a more optimistic view on life.

“I felt a little overwhelmed at first when they told me, but now I am excited,” Brown said. “My children are growing and developing, changing physically and mentally, and I am inspired to have a positive mindset. This gives me motivation to change for the better and something to look forward to.”

EMCF, which opened in April 1999, is one of the state’s three private prisons operated by Utah-based Management & Training Corp. It sits on 100 acres and can house up to 1,500 inmates. –