



Children of Incarcerated Caregivers

## **How a Health Clinic is Addressing Parental Incarceration: Sunrise Health Clinic’s Family First Program in Las Vegas, Nevada**

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Sunrise Health Clinics (Sunrise) in Las Vegas, Nevada, is an integrated health care clinic that provides a variety of physical and mental health care options for adults and children. In 2022, Sunrise received funding from the U.S. Department of Justice Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention to support a family-based alternative sentencing program called Family First, which Sunrise also self-funds.<sup>1</sup> This report examines the Family First program and the services it offers to support families involved in the criminal legal system.

### **I. Program History and Overview**

Prior to implementing the alternative sentencing program, Sunrise offered a variety of both medical and behavioral health solutions, including individual, couples, and family therapy, as well as psychiatry and health care medication services. As a private multispecialty health clinic, Sunrise serves a variety of clients, emphasizing a “one-stop healthcare stop” style of care where primary care, therapy, and medication are all offered at the same venue.<sup>2</sup> In 2022, the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) provided a \$750,000 grant to Sunrise to create Family First.<sup>3</sup> This program offers services that are “client centered and strength based” and provides structured programming with licensed staff; if a justice-involved parent wishes to keep their family united and intact, the program aims to provide daily guidance and the support that they need.

The Family First program is the brainchild of Sunrise’s CEO and Owner Beschelle Lockhart, along with Kayla Riley, who are responsible for developing the program’s curriculum and the program’s relationships with local agencies.<sup>4</sup> When the Family First program began, it was referred to as a “Family-Based Alternative Sentencing Program,” but it has since changed its title to a “Family Based Justice Program.” This is because the Family First program not only includes individuals facing sentencing, but also includes individuals who are pursuing

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<sup>1</sup> Family-Based Justice Center, “National Landscape, OJJDP Funded Sites,” <https://familybasedjusticecenter.org/html/ojjdp-funded-sites.html> (last visited May 21, 2025).

<sup>2</sup> Sunrise Health Clinics, Home Page, <https://www.sunriseclinics.org/> (last visited May 21, 2025).

<sup>3</sup> Family-Based Justice Center, *supra* note 1.

<sup>4</sup> Interview by Borkgren, H., with CEO Beschelle Lockhart (April 2024) (hereinafter “Interview #1”).

programming before the custody of their children is placed in jeopardy.<sup>5</sup> As Family First Senior Advisor and Grant Administrator Kayla Riley explained in an interview with CIC, expanding the program in this way allows Family First to better meet its goal of preventing a parent from entering the criminal legal system at all.

Family First’s ultimate goal is to break generational cycles of incarceration and trauma, as well as to support family reunification and reduce recidivism.<sup>6</sup> This involves addressing challenges faced by caregivers and children using therapy and behavioral intervention, intended to encourage participants to address their problems both in terms of their internal thinking, their emotional processing, and in their actions.<sup>7</sup>

## II. Program Details

As a healthcare provider, Sunrise Health Clinics approaches the relationship with program participants as “clients.”<sup>8</sup> Sunrise brings its experience with a wide variety of practice areas to counseling both the parent and the child. For example, Sunrise provides behavioral support services, which address both issues appearing on the child’s side, such as tantrums, defiance, bullying, and staying organized in school, as well as issues on the parent’s side, such as learning better parenting and coping skills, navigating involvement with Child Protective Services, and more.<sup>9</sup>

Any parent or primary caregiver is eligible to be a client in the Family First program, and Sunrise’s clients can become involved in the Family First program through referrals from various sources.<sup>10</sup> Typically, clients are referred by either their health insurance through a “justice liaison” or through the Clark County Public Defender’s office through their attorney, but the program also accepts referrals from judges, social workers, case managers, and even walk-ins.<sup>11</sup> “Justice liaisons,” employed by some local health insurance providers, such as Anthem, will refer insured individuals to be clients with the Family First program if they are aware that a client is facing difficult legal system-based circumstances.<sup>12</sup> CEO Beschelle Lockhart has fostered relationships with these individuals to make them aware of Sunrise Health Clinic’s services.<sup>13</sup> Sunrise also accepts referrals for currently incarcerated individuals, and will send

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<sup>5</sup> Interview by Borkgren, H., with Senior Advisor and Grant Administrator Kayla Riley (Nov. 2024) (hereinafter “Interview #2”).

<sup>6</sup> Sunrise Health Clinics, Family First – Children’s Services in Las Vegas, Nevada, <https://www.sunriseclinics.org/therapy-psychiatry/family-first>.

<sup>7</sup> Interview #2, *supra* note 5.

<sup>8</sup> *Id.*

<sup>9</sup> Sunrise Health Clinics, Family First – Children’s Services in Las Vegas, Nevada, <https://www.sunriseclinics.org/therapy-psychiatry/family-first>.

<sup>10</sup> Interview #2, *supra* note 5.

<sup>11</sup> *Id.*

<sup>12</sup> *Id.*

<sup>13</sup> Interview #1, *supra* note 4.

medical professionals to the jail or to prison to determine the suitability of a client for the program. Their assessment is included in a report and given to that potential client's social worker. After Family First's expansion to a "Family Based Justice Program," referrals from police officers and social workers often came earlier in the criminal legal process, when custody is first placed in jeopardy.<sup>14</sup>

Clients who enter the Family First program through the criminal legal system are all part of the same Family First program as clients who enter through other routes, and the status of their criminal case upon program entry differs case by case. Some clients with a case pending could earn a dismissal or reduction of charges if they successfully complete the program or a significant portion of it, as determined by the courts.<sup>15</sup> Other clients are on probation and involvement in Family First is a condition of that probation.<sup>16</sup> Roughly one third of all Family First participants have some form of mandated supervision, and Family First is often a condition of that supervision and was proposed at sentencing to allow the participant to receive a community-based sentence rather than incarceration.<sup>17</sup>

Additionally, while the Family First program itself specifically serves parents, Sunrise has other programs to assist individuals involved in the criminal legal system who do not necessarily meet criteria for participation; for example, justice-affected adolescents or justice-involved adults without children can receive support. When Sunrise performs intakes with incarcerated individuals, they may determine that another program is a fit for them if they do not qualify for Family First. Sunrise is only able to use the OJJDP's resources on clients who meet the OJJDP's grant criteria, which include parents facing incarceration, along with additional criteria set by OJJDP.<sup>18</sup> Sunrise also self-funds the program, as the clinic generally allocates a percentage of clinic profits to support its initiatives that help those in need.<sup>19</sup> They assess all barriers to a family's participation and will fund items such as housing, emergency placement, food, schooling/GED enrollment and expenses, clothing for a job, and more.<sup>20</sup>

Once a client is involved in the Family First Program, they receive behavioral health treatment through use of a "moral focus curriculum" in a 9 Step Program.<sup>21</sup> Moral reconnection therapy (MRT) is a cognitive behavioral technique used to enhance moral reasoning skills to reduce criminal recidivism. While MRT is known in the behavioral health field, this specific 9 Step Program is unique, and was inspired by a similar curriculum from an East Coast elementary

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<sup>14</sup> Interview #2, *supra* note 5.

<sup>15</sup> *Id.*

<sup>16</sup> *Id.*

<sup>17</sup> *Id.*

<sup>18</sup> *Id.*

<sup>19</sup> E-mail update following interview from Beschelle Lockart (September 10, 2025).

<sup>20</sup> *Id.*

<sup>21</sup> Sunrise Health Clinics, Family First – Children's Services in Las Vegas, Nevada, <https://www.sunriseclinics.org/therapy-psychiatry/family-first>

charter school and focuses on teaching specific “moral practices” to affect behavior.<sup>22</sup> This structure was chosen after Ms. Lockhart observed the curriculum in practice when her own children attended the school, and decided to adapt it for use with child abuse therapy courses, and later Family First.<sup>23</sup> This 9 Step Program draws from and adapts the National Heritage Academies’ Moral Focus program.<sup>24</sup>

At Sunrise, these moral focus practices are split into three sections, with each of the three sections having three “moral steps” within it. A client must demonstrate significant progress in all three steps within a section before they are moved into the next section.<sup>25</sup> The 9-Step Program heavily emphasizes trauma-based relational interventions (TBRI)<sup>26</sup> and a trauma-informed therapeutic model. Although directed at children experiencing trauma, environmental stressors, and a lack of trust with adults, Sunrise has found that this modified version of TBRI is critical to getting adults involved in treatment. As such, the program utilizes classes, workshops, groups, wellness and family therapy, and directly applied interventions in both office and home settings that are supervised by professionals.<sup>27</sup>

The first section is the “learning” phase, where clients are taught the skills and morals necessary to succeed in later phases. The learning phase emphasizes the values (“moral focus steps”) of wisdom, respect, and gratitude.<sup>28</sup> During this step, it is common for the client to engage in extensive observation of modeled behavior with Sunrise personnel daily or several days weekly until the clinic feels confident in the client’s ability to function on their own.<sup>29</sup> TBRI is also utilized; TBRI interventions are evidence-based practices to gain trust when new clients are guarded, frequently miss scheduled appointments, or flee due to fear of accountability.<sup>30</sup> The learning phase includes learning to trust the Family First team.

The second section is the “applying” phase, where clients are encouraged to practice the skills that they have learned in earlier phases, but are also reassured when they falter or struggle to embrace new patterns. The “applying” phase emphasizes the morals of self-control, perseverance, and courage.<sup>31</sup> These three skills are all intended to allow a client to face failure and struggle as they attempt to change their behaviors. Participants are encouraged, for example, to increase their self-discipline and follow through on their responsibilities, such as housework,

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<sup>22</sup> Interview #2, *supra* note 5.

<sup>23</sup> Interview #1, *supra* note 4.

<sup>24</sup> See National Heritage Academies, Moral Focus, <https://www.nhaschools.com/en/moral-focus> (last visited Aug. 2025).

<sup>25</sup> Interview #2, *supra* note 5.

<sup>26</sup> See Karyn B. Purvis et al., *Trust-Based Relational Intervention (TBRI): A Systemic Approach to Complex Developmental Trauma*, 34 *Child & Youth Services* 360 (2013).

<sup>27</sup> Sunrise Health Clinics, *supra* note 18.

<sup>28</sup> Interview #2, *supra* note 5.

<sup>29</sup> Interview #1, *supra* note 4.

<sup>30</sup> *Id.*; See also Purvis et al., *supra* note 24.

<sup>31</sup> Interview #2, *supra* note 5.

childcare, and employment.<sup>32</sup> Clients are still supervised by Sunrise personnel at this stage very closely based upon medical necessity and program activities appropriate for the needs of the client. Meetings between Sunrise and the client at this stage are most commonly two or three times a week, but have been known to go as low as once a week for clients who are undergoing MRT.<sup>33</sup> In this phase, staff observe the client applying skills.

The third section is the “succeeding” phase, where clients are given a higher degree of autonomy to put the skills they have learned and trained in the first two phases into practice without supervision. This phase’s moral focus steps are encouragement, compassion, and integrity.<sup>34</sup> For the “encouragement” step, the participant assumes a mentor role within the program, allowing them to both help others who started from the same place as them as well as to see how far they have come since the program began.

Currently, Sunrise has no formal graduation from the Family First program.<sup>35</sup> When the program was first developed, this was a deliberate choice to differentiate the program from other similar projects, such as the Law Enforcement Intervention for Mental Health and Addiction (LIMA) program.<sup>36</sup> Sunrise was concerned that, as clients in the program are often struggling with combined criminal legal system involvement and mental health issues, a high degree of shame is involved, and actual Family First clients communicated that a formal graduation would make it more difficult to keep the treatment private.<sup>37</sup> As one client stated, in what reflects a common theme: “A lot of my family have no idea I had trouble. I got my kids back because of the program, but I just want to put that part of my life behind me and move on.”<sup>38</sup> Additionally, clients often have ongoing behavioral and mental health needs that must be addressed with long-term therapy, so even when a client has met the goals of the Family First program, the client will often continue to attend some form of therapy or treatment with Sunrise Health Clinics.<sup>39</sup> Despite that, Sunrise is still dedicated to learning the best way to get clients to engage at the end of treatment by adding a more formal graduation for the Family First program in the future, and views this an area for improvement.<sup>40</sup>

When the program first started, Sunrise had to quickly adapt its structures to properly monitor participant progress in the program, and has now reached a place where clinic staff can

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<sup>32</sup> *Id.*

<sup>33</sup> Interview #1, *supra* note 4.

<sup>34</sup> Interview #2, *supra* note 5.

<sup>35</sup> *Id.*

<sup>36</sup> Interview #1, *supra* note 4; *see* LIMA Program Flyer, <https://www.clarkcountycourts.us/res/specialty-courts/LIMA%20Program%20Flyer%20101821.pdf> (last visited Sept. 10, 2025).

<sup>37</sup> Interview #1, *supra* note 4

<sup>38</sup> E-mail updates following interview from Kayla Riley and Beschelle Lockart (September 9, 2025).

<sup>39</sup> Interview #2, *supra* note 5; *see also* Sunrise Health Clinics, Psychiatry/Medication Management in Las Vegas, NV, <https://www.sunriseclinics.org/therapy-psychiatry/psychiatry-medication-management>.

<sup>40</sup> Interview #2, *supra* note 5.

properly determine how far along a client is in accomplishing their program goals. However, “graduation” is still determined on an individualized case-by-case basis, and involves a combination of Sunrise assessing the client’s file and communicating with the courts. At that point, Sunrise informs a participant that they have completed their justice-related goals and privately recognizes them with a certificate of completion as well as a small celebration in office with attendees of their choice.<sup>41</sup>

The Family First program involves not only treatment of the parent, but also using any evidence-based treatment necessary to bring the entire family unit together.<sup>42</sup> As such, Family First offers behavioral programs to help treat children impacted by the trauma that comes from being separated from their parent, or from the mimicry of negative behaviors within the home.<sup>43</sup> The program implements behavioral health and modification techniques to support children and further its goal of breaking patterns of intergenerational trauma and incarceration.<sup>44</sup> Clients are also free to bring any family member into behavioral health appointments, including their own parents, cousins, nephews, and so forth, who the client believes would benefit from the treatment, or whose presence would be beneficial to the client.<sup>45</sup>

Regardless of where a client is within the 9 Step Program, the mental health staff of the Family First program may decide that a client needs additional in-home support.<sup>46</sup> If a client needs this support, they are assigned a community-based worker, employed by Sunrise Health Clinics, who will offer them the support they need. There are two main types of “community outreach specialists” who reach out to the home— basic skills workers and psychosocial rehab workers.<sup>47</sup> Basic skills workers help a client meet their basic needs, such as parenting skills, basic communication and social skills, organizational and time management skills for challenges with school or jobs, and transitional housing services to prevent eviction or homelessness.<sup>48</sup> Psychosocial rehab workers help in implementing social skills, in locating clients fleeing from domestic violence, and assist to remove barriers to attending legal or court mandated appointments as well as working at home with a client to build the trust needed to accept treatment to address issues related to anger management, emotional intimacy, and forming life goals.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Email updates, *supra* note 38.

<sup>42</sup> *Id.*; see also Sunrise Health Clinics, *supra* note 4.

<sup>43</sup> Sunrise Health Clinics, *supra* note 4.

<sup>44</sup> Interview #2, *supra* note 5.

<sup>45</sup> *Id.*

<sup>46</sup> *Id.*

<sup>47</sup> *Id.*

<sup>48</sup> *Id.*

<sup>49</sup> *Id.*

### III. Conclusion

Sunrise Health Clinics' Family First program is a promising model amongst alternative sentencing structures as a combination of the private nature of the agency involved, the ambitious scope of the program, and the specialized form of MRT utilized. Sunrise Health Clinics provides a notable degree of behavioral health service expertise when it comes to its family-based alternative sentencing program, responding to needs and crises in real time to reduce burdens on the legal systems. Sunrise focuses on addressing the cycle of incarceration as a mental health issue and approaching it from a behavioral health perspective rather than a criminal justice perspective. Through Sunrise's moral focus curriculum, the clinic endeavors to teach clients skills that will allow them to break generational cycles of legal-system involvement while maintaining healthy behaviors once they have left the program. Family First is unique among many other programs because not only does it provide direct counseling and health services to a client parent, but also to the children of a parent involved in the criminal legal system.

It is also worth noting that Family First is not a public program, but a program provided for by a private healthcare clinic partnering with a federal agency.<sup>50</sup> In counties and districts that lack the funding, infrastructure, or are simply too small to have state-sponsored alternative programs, private agencies may have tools to offer that can aid in strengthening families impacted by incarceration.

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<sup>50</sup> Family-Based Justice Center, *supra* note 1.