



Neci gets her picture taken with 72nd Air Base Wing Commander Col. Kenyon Bell following her graduation last month from Airman Leadership School. (Tom Fox/Staff Photographer)

How we found them

We met the Booker sisters after their mother responded to a survey we sent to 760 women in Texas prisons, asking what had happened to their children when they were arrested.

We opted not to survey women held in jail before they were tried or sentenced, because answering our questions honestly could have resulted in additional criminal charges for them or adverse consequences in custody cases.

So we obtained permission from the Texas Department of Criminal Justice to mail surveys to women who'd been convicted and sentenced to prison from counties in the Dallas metro area.

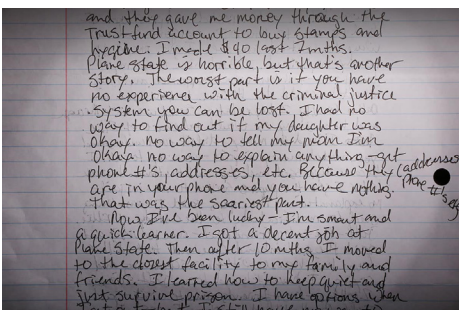
The survey was sent to women, aged 18-50, who were likely to have been primary caregivers for their children. Women convicted of child abuse or related charges were excluded from the survey, which also did not include anyone serving time for violating federal or immigration laws.

The News received more than 100 responses from mothers detailing what happened to their children during and after arrests. We reviewed criminal court records for most of these cases.

The Dallas Morning News
Investigative Team

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A letter from jailed mother Leslieann Griffin.



OVERLOOKED

AS WOMEN GO TO JAIL IN RECORD NUMBERS, WHO'S WATCHING OUT FOR THEIR KIDS? No one.

Encourage your staff to follow the investigation and create one of their own.

- First, **read the investigation** "Overlooked" carefully with your staff.
- Next, spend time **answering the Questions to Consider** below in small groups.
- Then, **brainstorm** with your staff using the questions provided with **Ready, Set ... Investigate!**
- **Look deeper** at how an investigative story is structured and compare with breaking news, features and commentary.
- Feel like you can tackle an important topic at your school with an investigative project? Look below for tips on **How to Keep Facts Straight**.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

WHEN READING OVERLOOKED:

- 1) Who are the major characters in this story?
- 2) What has happened to them?
- 3) About how many children have single mothers in jail in the state of Texas?
- 4) What percentage of women in Texas prisons are mothers?
- 5) What are some common places children sometimes end up when their mothers are imprisoned?
- 6) At its core, what did the *Dallas Morning News* investigation uncover?

HOW TO KEEP THE FACTS STRAIGHT

- Create a **chronology** that describes events (dates, places, who was there, what was said, what was done); keep this information in a consistent format so you can instantly find the facts you need
- Create a **list of sources** with their contact details (and keep this information secure)
- Create a **to-do list of people** who might know something about the project and whom you still need to contact, with their contact details
- Draw up **diagrams of the relationships** between the various people involved
- Make a list of **key documents**, indicating those you have and those you still need
- **Index** your documents, and if you work with a computer, create hypertext links to full electronic versions
- **Highlight facts** that have been firmly established
- **Note the status** of other information you have
- Always keep a notebook with you to **jot down ideas**

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A CASE STUDY

ANATOMY OF AN INVESTIGATION



The News received more than 100 responses from mothers detailing what happened to their children during and after arrests. (*Andy Jacobsohn/Staff Photographer*)

READY, SET ... INVESTIGATE!

Before you and your team take on a new investigation, ask yourselves these important questions. Your answers will dictate how an investigation should proceed.

- 1) What has been happening?
- 2) Why should your readers care?
- 3) Who are the actors involved? How did they do it?
- 4) What are the consequences?
- 5) What went wrong? How did it go wrong? Why did it go wrong?
- 6) What is the news? What is the story?
- 7) What are keywords associated with the story?
- 8) Who will benefit or suffer if the story is published?
- 9) Will the story facilitate debate about societal values or things of the public interest?
- 10) Will the story highlight faulty systems or processes?

HOW SHOULD AN INVESTIGATIVE STORY BE STRUCTURED?

While the traditional approach to a hard-news story is the inverted pyramid, investigative reporting turns the pyramid structure on its head. You have the entire story to build up to the punch, leading the readers through the discoveries you have made:

1. Introduce us to a character or set of characters that relate to the theme.
2. Summarize the story's theme briefly in clear language.
3. Foreshadow some of what you will discover
4. Walk step by step through your investigation, keeping the suspense alive and building the story towards the most shocking or dramatic discovery, just as if you were writing the story of a scientific breakthrough or a mystery novel.
5. Save the most important, dramatic information for last.

Adapted from *How to Become a Mouthpiece for the People*
An Investigative Journalism Manual Project ©2010

MYTHS ABOUT INVESTIGATIVE REPORTING

Myth 1: It will launch me and my career into fame.

Real investigative work is normally a thankless task that requires endless interviews, pouring over documents, emails and transcripts. And sometimes it can be dangerous, dirty work. So don't do it because you think it sounds cool. You'll be rudely surprised of the reality.

Myth 2: Investigative reporting is simply good reporting.

Investigations that sniff out wrongs and point fingers are ways to bring about change. But a well-executed investigation is one that looks beyond the criminals to the faulty system, identifying underlying problems and adding faces and names to both victims and those who are to blame.

Myth 3: Journalists are bigger than the stories they report.

Investigative journalism is a public service, not an ego trip. Being a journalist, of any kind, gives you no right to ignore professional ethical standards. So remember to just do the job you were trained to do, tell the story and get it right.

INTERVIEWING GROUND RULES

To ensure that you do not overstep your role as a journalist, always ask yourself:

- What if I was the person I am investigating? How would I see the world; how would I see the role of journalists?
- How accountable am I?
- Would I succumb to the same temptations that I am investigating against others?
- What would stop me?
- Where are my checks and balances?