



Get On The Bus

Uniting Children with their Mothers and Fathers in Prison

Annual Report 2005-2006

A Child's Companion

Much food for thought and prayer!

Families Served 2006

Children	587
Mothers/Fathers	309
Buses	31
Prisons	7
Guardians	307
Bus Volunteers	254

As the number of children participating in *Get On The Bus* continues to grow, we are seeing a new phenomenon—children without adult companions. This year over 100 children traveled with volunteers who gave a day of service to companion a child as they visit their parent in prison.

The most common reason that children arrive alone is that their guardian cannot miss a day of work. Some guardians have other children to supervise or are too elderly or ill to make the trip. Yet other guardians want to allow older children to have private time with the parent.

This year we provided transportation to four children who had **never met their parent**. One girl had a treasured photo of the man she had never met but whom she desperately wanted to see and spend time with.

Due to liability and a sense of security for the children, **GOTB** assigns each unaccompanied child a companion for the day to attend to their needs, wait with them through the prison entry process, and make sure that they do not feel alone.

Do you have a day to spend with a child? Please consider being one of our volunteer companions. It is sure to be a day



that will provide much food for thought and prayers (*please see An Experience of Accompaniment on page 3*).

*Mom, it was so great seeing you. We have enough joy and happiness to share with the whole world. We slept in our **Get On The Bus** t-shirts, you signed, just to be close to you.*

John and Sheila



Letter From The Executive Director

Kasserian ingera?
(And how are the children?)
Traditional African greeting of the Maasai tribe



This greeting above illustrates the high value that the Maasai culture places on the wellbeing of its children. In California, I'm afraid that our honest response to this greeting would have to be, "Our children are not well."

California has the largest prison system in the country and, therefore, the largest number of children affected by incarceration. In this state there are 200,000 children with at least one parent in prison AND sixty percent of prisoners report being held more than 100 miles away from their children.

Get On The Bus is driven (no pun intended) to create systemic change within the systems that unjustly separate children from their parents as a result of imprisonment.

The passion of every single member of our staff, as well as our remarkably generous corps of volunteer teams throughout the state, is to reunite children with their parents. We live for the smiles, the hugs, and even the tears that we witness and hold in our hearts.

If this Annual Report does nothing else, my hope is that it somehow communicates the ***deep need of children to see, touch and spend time with their parents***. A mother is still a mother to her child even though they are separated by miles and prison walls. Thank you for supporting ***Get On The Bus*** with your time, talent, and treasure. Our gratitude is without measure. We continue to find our greatest inspiration in the unconditional love of the children we serve. We strive for a time when we can honestly say, "***All*** of the children are doing well."

In gratitude,
Sr. Suzanne Jabro, CSJ
Executive Director

Picture Perfect... many thanks to Sister Teresa Lynch, csj, for the heartwarming photographs used throughout this publication.

Special gratitude to Sister Therese Denham, csj, for the design of this beautiful publication.

I feel overwhelmed with excitement and I have enough joy and happiness to share with the entire world. This is one of the happiest days I've had in about four years.
Monique, age 19



An Experience of Accompaniment

A Reflection on Get On The Bus

by Kathy Curran

Faculty member, Mercy High School, Burlingame

One week ago I was sitting among children and their incarcerated mothers at Valley State Prison in Chowchilla. My experience of accompaniment was as powerful, tragic, hope-filled and disturbing as I had anticipated.

I have filed in my brain a stat which reads, “64% of prison inmates come from extremely low-income families.” That reality glaringly confronted me as I heard story after story of the affects of poverty and prison:

● Ricardo was bringing his 4 nieces and nephews to see their mother for the first time in nearly five years. They lacked dependable care and couldn’t afford the bus fare, motel and restaurant bills required for a visit. So, instead, those kids, ages 6 – 12, did not lay their eyes upon their mother, did not touch her skin, did not directly hear her voice since the morning she was handcuffed and led onto the sheriff’s bus in 2001.

● Geri was traveling with her grandson to visit his mom. She told me they could no longer talk with her on the phone because they couldn’t afford the bills. At first, the daughter called frequently to speak with her son, but the first month’s bill was \$2,100. They attempted to talk only every other day for just five minutes, but even that became

too expensive and, “how do you ask a 7 year old to limit his life experiences to five minutes?” (*Inmates cannot receive incoming calls and can only make collect calls. Phone companies have negotiated exclusive contracts with the state charging inmates up to 20 times the normal rate for calls. California reaps the benefits of this deal gaining an extra \$35 million annually for its general fund.*)

● I sat with a beautiful young woman, Sheree. She was the guardian of her 16 year old niece (already a mother of a 3

month old) and her 9 year old nephew. Sheree told me that of her 14 siblings, 12 had been in jail or prison at some point during their lives.

● I think of Jevon; no, I don’t just think about him, I’m worried for him. Fourteen years old, living in a group home, an undependable aunt who’s supposed to be “looking out for him,” oversized winter jacket with hood pulled over his head and jeans with waistband sagging below his hips. . .who’s kidding themselves to think that Jevon isn’t at risk of being behind bars himself within the next five years?

I don’t have a word to describe this experience of accompaniment—nor can I articulate how being with these children and these mothers behind those walls affected me. I entered a system that is begging to be overhauled. I returned to a world that is crying for all of us to stand up and say, “No more!”





Many Hands Make

Creative Competition . . .

Students at Carondelet High School selected to support **Get On The Bus** for their Lenten service project. With a goal of \$4,000 to provide for one bus and additional funds for backpacks for each child, they started a friendly competition on Ash Wednesday between all of the 4th period classes. The Campus Ministry Committee made a huge poster of a bus with each teacher's picture in a window. Every Friday the funds were tallied and the winning class's teacher got moved to the "driver's seat."

On the last day of school before Easter vacation, the pictures were arranged one last time to reveal the winning class. Far surpassing their goal, CHS presented **Get On The Bus** with an amazing \$10,000 and 100 backpacks. The Cougars outdid themselves and proved that they have hearts, literally, as big as a bus.

The Teddy Bear Table . . .

All Saints Episcopal Church in Beverly Hills advertised in its bulletin that there would be a Teddy Bear Table in the vestibule following services each Sunday. The table was filled with bears that each represented a child's sponsorship for **Get On The Bus**. Many families had their own children pick the bear for a child on the bus then bears were tagged with the sponsoring family's name. All Saint's raised \$2,800 and gave families a tangible way to teach their children about giving.



Light-HEARTED Work

Leaving On A Jet Plane . . .

Southwest Airlines donated six plane tickets enabling children from Oakland and Sacramento to travel to the Ontario airport so that they could visit their mothers in southern California. By car, the trip from Sacramento would be approximately nine hours one way. We are thrilled by this partnership, and grateful to Southwest Airlines. In the future we hope that we can effect systemic change in the policies that allow parents to be housed closer to their children.

An E-mail from Devan Dickerson . . .

My mom showed me the e-mail about *Get On The Bus*. It made me sad that some kids don't see their moms. I wanted to do something on my own for all the kids. My mom told me to remember something I liked to have with me on my trips since I started traveling by myself when I was really little to see my relatives. I used to like to have my travel pillow. My grandmother made it for me out of a Cinderella t-shirt. I don't carry it anymore, but I did for a long time. I know it

meant a lot to me because it was fluffy and I could use it to go to sleep. I made mini-travel pillows for each of the bus kids. I worked on them all weekend and after homework at night. It doesn't feel like work because I enjoy doing it. The pillows are cool. I think even the older kids will like them.

Devan Dickerson is a fourteen year old Girl Scout from Granada Hills. Her e-mail was edited for space considerations.



With Gratitude

The following listing includes event, bus, family and child sponsors, as well as grants from foundations. Due to space limitations, we were not able to include donations of less than \$75, however, we are extremely grateful for each gift that we receive and for the positive impact we are able to make collectively in the lives of children. Thank you all for your generous support. *In the event of any omissions, please accept our apologies.*

Many individuals, groups, foundations and businesses responded to the expansion of our program with tremendous generosity and compassion. This outpouring is a sign of hope, solidarity and support for families who so often feel despair, isolation and shame. It is with deep gratitude that we once again recognize those who made the 2006 **Get On The Bus** possible.

FOUNDATIONS

\$5,000 +

Carrie Estelle Doheny Foundation
 Conrad N Hilton Fund for Sisters
 Marisla Foundation
 Peter Norton Family Foundation
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 Sisters of St Joseph of Carondelet
 The Klehn Family Foundation
 The Rose Hills Foundation

EVENT SPONSORS

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 Sisters of Mercy
 Sisters of St Joseph of Carondelet
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 - Santa Sophia Conference
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 St Elizabeth Ann Seton Church
 St Euphrasia Church
 St Francis of Assisi Catholic Church
 St Genevieve Elementary School
 St Ignatius Church
 St James School
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 St Joseph Heritage Healthcare
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 St Mary Magdalen Church
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 St Nicholas Conference
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 St Thomas Moore Church
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 Rosario, Carolam
 Ryder, Elliot
 Simon, Leonard
 Society of St Vincent de Paul
 - St Louise De Marillac
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 St Bernardine of Siena School
 St Cyril School
 St David School
 St Francis of Assisi Catholic Church
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 St Jerome Church
 St John Chrysostom School
 St Lawrence of Brindisi Church
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Boone, Veronica
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Moore, Marc
Moore, Peggy Ann
Moreland, Gordon

Introduction

We received this letter from a grandmother who traveled with her grandchildren to visit their mother (her daughter) in Chowchilla.

Dear Mrs. Arnold

(The San Diego area Bus Coordinator):

My daughter, my granddaughter and I wish to express our sincere appreciation for the **Get On The Bus** trip to the Central California Women's Facility on May 12th. It was wonderful to be a part of such an extraordinary experience. The kindness and compassion exceeded anything I've seen in a long time.

Thank you for all the meals, toys, books, teddy bears, blankets, etc. I was so surprised with all the items that were donated for the children and even for us as adults. I noticed there were quite a few major contributors listed on the back of the t-shirts and I hope you can express our appreciation to them as well. But, mostly, my appreciation is for the ladies who put together the meals, toy/activity bags, blankets, etc. for the kids, and for those who coordinated this effort and those who volunteered to go with us and who served us so extensively.

If there is anything we can do to assist with your program next year, please let me know. My daughter will be released from CCWF this July, so we won't be "getting on the bus" next year!

Sincerely,

April Washburn

Shayla Sanders

Lindsey Sanders



Did You Know?

- The Bureau of Justice Statistics estimates that 2.3 million children are affected by the 1.1 million parents incarcerated in prisons or jails, up from 500,000 children in 1991.

- More than half of children with incarcerated mothers are living with their grandparents.

- Approximately 10 percent of the children of female prisoners and 2 percent of the children of male prisoners are in a foster home or institution.

- Fifty-eight percent of children are younger than 10. Their average age is 8.

- Six percent of women entering prison are pregnant.

Sources:

Federal Resource Center for Children of Prisoners; Dep. of Justice Mumola, C.J. (2000). *Incarcerated Parents and their Children, Bureau of Justice Statistics Special Report. Washington, DC: U.S. Dep. of Justice.*

Morris, J. Brendan and Victoria
 Morris, Karen and Maren
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 Walter, Robert and Rita
 Wat, Pamela
 Watson, Marion
 Wauthy, Guy and Helene
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 Wei, Christine
 Weiner, Jamien
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Martinez, Sue
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McDermott, Eileen
McElhill, Betty
McNean, Barbara
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Mendez, Cristina
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Morrow, Pam
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Mutti, Ruth
Myers, Irene
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Niedfelt, Pat
Norman, Barbara
North, Sharou
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Oguin, Cathy
Oliver, Sara
Ordac, Beverly
Ordaz, Placid
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Padilla, Eva
Pangelina, Diane
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Piazza, Giovanna
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9 Rocha, Merjo
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Yerena, Cecilia
Yerena, Marcela
Zapor, Mary Anne



DADS Get On The Bus, too!

Historic Father's Day trips to San Luis Obispo, Techachapi, Ventura

On Friday, June 16th, two buses of *Get On The Bus* pioneers opened new doors and forged new relationships between children and their fathers. For the first time ever, the program was extended to men's prisons, specifically the California Men's Colony in San Luis Obispo and the California Correctional Institution at Tehachapi (located in the mountains between Bakersfield and Mojave). In addition, the families and children of the young men at Ventura Fire Camp were given gas cards to help in the transportation costs.

"In many ways, children are even more isolated from their fathers than their mothers," explains Sr. Suzanne. "With women inmates, it is generally a grandmother or sister who is caring for the children. With male inmates, it's often difficult to coordinate with an ex-wife or girlfriend who may have a new family now."

But as Debbie McDermott who accompanied the Tehachapi bus observed, "Regardless of their relationship with

the children's fathers, these mothers put their own feelings aside and put their children's needs first. I wondered if I could be so unselfish and so courageous if I was in their position."

Inmates chosen to participate were all from Level II minimum security prisons with sentences of one to eight years, primarily for drug-related charges. They were selected according to the length of time in which they had not seen their children.

One eleven year-old girl met her father for the first time. One preteen boy and his father wept through the entire visit. A four year old girl misses her daddy so much that she cries for him every night. Yet, when she saw him she just continued coloring her picture as if nothing fazed her and he'd never gone away. She was with him now and, for that moment, everything was OK.

Children need their parents, both mothers and fathers. The mistakes that adults make along the way do not invalidate that need or the importance of the child-parent bond.

LOCAL AREA COORDINATORS- 2006

Each year, many kind and generous people champion *Get On The Bus* in their local areas and coordinate every detail from raising funds and visiting families to wrangling teddy bears. Theologian Frederick Beuchner provides us with powerful words to describe our call to ministry, "The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet." We hope that each and every one of the very dedicated people below found that special place through their work with *Get On The Bus*.

- Rae & Ron Arnold, San Diego
—St. Francis of Assisi
- Darlene Boucher, Long Beach
—St. Bartholomew
- Patricia Galinda-Brown, Stockton
—Catholic Charities,
Diocese of Stockton
- Sr. Carmel Crimmins, San Bernardino
—Diocese of San Bernardino
- Sr. Anne Joseph Crookston,
Orange County
—Diocese of Orange
- Sr. RayMonda DuVall, San Diego
—Catholic Charities
- Sam Spicer and Tony Fadale,
South Los Angeles
Friends Outside & Mathew
25, American Martyrs
- Robert & Penny Fargo
Ventura/Santa Barbara,
—Padre Serra Church
- Roger & Mary Ellen Faubert,
Long Beach
—Our Lady of Refuge
- Dennis Flannery, Oakland
- Debbie Gauer, Clyde Beswick,
Lauren Greenwade & Henry Taliaferro,*
Central Los Angeles
—All Saints Episcopal,
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- Sr. Theresa Harpin*, San Luis Obispo
—Nativity of Our Lady
- Josita Hartman, San Jose—St. Nicolas
- Alejandra Holmes, Santa Rosa
- Jo Kaye & Amalia Molina,*
San Fernando Valley
—St. Euphrasia Women and
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- Gloria Killian, Pasadena
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—Diocese of Fresno
- Rev. Jenell Mahoney & Jan Thomsen,
Bakersfield
—United Church of Christ
- Jay Reiser, San Gabriel Valley
—St. James the Less, Peace &
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- Tory Riihimaki, Antelope Valley
—Christ the King Episcopal
- Catherine Conneally Salazar*
Ventura/Santa Barbara
—Ventura Youth
Correctional Facility
- Jean Favreau-Sorvillo, San Bernardino
/Redlands
—United Church of Christ
- Marsha & Gaston Turcotte
San Gabriel Valley
—St. Dorothy Church
- Elizabeth White, Sacramento
—Diocese of Sacramento,
Catholic Charities

* Coordinated
Father's Day Event





Chowchilla Family Express

Get On The Bus Awarded First-Ever State Contract For Monthly Transportation

The goal of *Get On The Bus* has always been to raise awareness regarding the plight of children separated from their mothers due to the unjust policies inherent in our current system of criminal justice. *Get On The Bus* is now being given an awesome opportunity and responsibility to implement a measure of systemic change by coordinating regular, ongoing, monthly visits to the women's prisons at Chowchilla.

The Chowchilla Family Express will provide free monthly transportation to families of women in prisons in Chowchilla, including children, spouses, siblings, parents and other family members. The Express will send six buses each month from both northern and southern California providing families with the opportunity to visit their loved one approximately once every three months.

Once established, this program will serve nearly 4,000 family members per year and represent a critical shift in the perspective of the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation. Through this program,

state officials are recognizing the significance of maintaining family bonds which research has proven to increase the likelihood of successful family reunification and re-entry.

The Chowchilla Family Express program will be directed by Eric Debode, a long-time restorative justice advocate who founded the California People of Faith and a Victim/Offender Reconciliation Program in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles.

While we will still advocate to see a more complete transformation of the correctional system through alternative sentencing for mothers, changes in mandatory drug-sentencing laws, and the insistence that parents be sent to rehabilitative facilities as close to home as possible, we are honored to be a part of this historic opportunity to improve the lives and family bonds of children with incarcerated parents.

We Need Your Help

Rally Your Church, School or Group

- Collect bears and snacks
- Assemble Travel Bags or Keep In Touch Kits (stationery sets with stamps enabling children to correspond by mail)
- Crafty? Make blankets or travel pillows for children on the bus

Support Your Local Bus

There are many ways that you can volunteer to support buses from your area:

- Volunteer to visit a family to complete paperwork and answer questions
- Serve as a Child Companion accompanying a child without a guardian
- Help to serve breakfast and see the bus off

Raise Funds

There are simple ways that you can have fun AND raise money:

- Host a dinner at your house and ask guests to make a contribution to GOTB
- Have a neighborhood car wash
- Donate proceeds from a yard or bake sale
- Talk together as a family and be a sponsor
- In lieu of a personal gift ask your friends to sponsor a child in your name or give the gift of sponsorship

Call Get On The Bus at 213.637.7456 or e-mail us at getonthebus@earthlink.net for more information.



UCLA Photographer Volunteers



GOTB is a sponsored project of Sisters of St. Joseph, Ministerial Services (SSJMS), a 501(c)3 tax-deductible organization.

Contact information:

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getonthebus@earthlink.net
www.gotb.net

• Northern CA Office
1125 Ferry Street
Martinez, CA 94533
1. 925.335.9314
1.925.395.6193
cmwilliamscsj@earthlink.net

• Please make checks payable to **Get On The Bus.**

We received the following letter from Rob Hewitt, a professional photographer who teaches his craft at UCLA. Mr. Hewitt generously donated his time and talents to take family photographs at the women’s facility in Norco. We were so touched that we wanted to share his letter and one of his very powerful photographs.

*Dear Sr. Suzanne,
I wanted to thank you for allowing me to be a part of the “Get On The Bus” program. The events of that day at the Norco Women’s Facility were extremely emotional not only for the inmates and the children, but also for me. As a professional photographer for more than 30 years, I was sure that this event would be on the same level as*

*the wedding days I’m used to covering. I was wrong. The overflowing levels of excitement, love and joy were unlike anything I have experienced in my life. That single day changed my life. Thank you.
Sincerely,
Rob Hewitt
UCLA Campus Photo Studio*

Get On The Bus

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Los Angeles, CA 90049

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