

Uniting children with their mothers and fathers in prison.

2008 Annual Report

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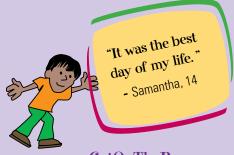
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Growing Up Without Mom

Tasmine De La Torre had kept a terrible secret from her classmates, and it haunted her every Mother's Day.

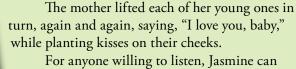
"I told them my mom was on a long vacation." In Jasmine's classroom at Most Holy Trinity School in East San Jose, the teacher asked students to write greeting cards to Get On The Bus youngsters who were going to visit their incarcerated mothers.

Jasmine burst into tears. The teacher stopped and everybody asked what was wrong.

"I stood up and told them my mother is in prison," said the brave 10-year-old. "I wasn't going to lie about it anymore. I wanted to be on that bus!"

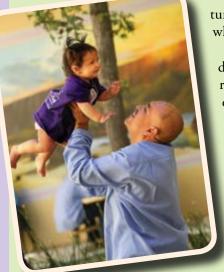
A month later, Jasmine and seven other San Jose children boarded a bus destined for the Valley State Prison for Women in Chowchilla. Jasmine sat next to three younger siblings—Angel, Chonita and Ronnie—all were ecstatic about seeing their mother. They were accompanied by their grandfather, a former Bracero Program farmworker.

As the bus rolled up to the cinder block buildings, the children pressed their noses against the windows and silently took in the razor wire, fences and guard towers. As they were led to a large cafeteria, Jasmine spotted her mother, ran toward her and jumped into her arms. As they kissed, her grandfather fought back tears.



describe how difficult it is to visit your mother on rare occasions and what it's like to speak to her only by phone for long stretches of time. "I worry about my mom."

Jasmine's mother was sentenced to 23 years, but she's hoping to be released after 13 for good behavior. Meanwhile, the children grow and miss her and wait for next year's Get On The Bus.





- Adapted from an article in The Mercury News written by Joe Rodriguez



Letter From The Executive Director

But what about the children? Unfortunately, current correctional justice policies do not consider this question when sentencing parents. Mothers and fathers are routinely sent to prisons more than 100 miles away from their families. One in five children witnesses his or her parent's arrest. The removal of a parent from a child's life has profound impacts that can create physical and mental health issues, difficulties in school and upheaval in living circumstances, such as moving in with other relatives or going into foster care.

In 2007, California "invested" a staggering \$9,776,618,000 on its prison system. In contrast, Get On The Bus, its local bus teams, volunteers and donors invested in the

wellbeing of nearly 1,000 children who are negatively impacted by that system. For the first time ever, we had a child who has both a mother and father in prison.

Our collective investment in children goes far beyond the money that we raise to send buses to prisons for Mother's and Father's Day. We invest a sense of community, compassion, love and hope for better lives for the children we serve and their families. We invest our enthusiasm as we talk about Get On The Bus with our friends and co-workers. We invest our faith in believing that uniting these families brings about greater justice and reconciliation. We invest ourselves when we open our hearts to the plight of children riding the buses

"Unless the investment in children is made, all of humanity's most fundamental long-term problems will remain fundamental long-term problems."

- Unknown

and know that we must take action.

In 2009, Get On The Bus will celebrate its 10th anniversary of uniting children with their parents in prison. Join us in this mission and see your investment returned a hundred-fold in million-dollar smiles, precious hugs and the priceless memory of a special day spent with a mother or father. God bless you for all that you do to support Get On The Bus.

Gratefully, Sr. Suzanne Jabro, CSJ

Changing The System Inside Out

et On The Bus is bringing about systemic change in the way the correctional system views families of prisoners:

- Recognizing the role that families play in successful re-entry, the San Luis Obispo Probation Peace Officers Association held a "Tip A P.O." fund raising event at local restaurants. Officers volunteered to provide table and clean-up service, with all tips being donated to Get On The Bus. This spirit of collaboration is a far cry from the resistance we experienced in earlier years.
- At the California Men's Colony, prisoners have formed an "inside" committee with a mandate of promoting Get On The Bus. As one of the committee members shared after this year's event, "We like the changes we're seeing in each other." Another prisoner reported that "for that one day the guards see us as fellow fathers instead of convicts."

The system remains broken in disturbing ways, but we capture these glimmers of new life like fireflies in a jar, hoping they will light a path for change.





Where Do All The Buses Go?

In 2008, Get On The Bus sent 43 buses filled with children to the following prisons:

Chowchilla Central California Women's Facility Valley State Prison For Women Chowchilla California Institution For Women Corona Ventura Youth Correctional Facility Ventura California Men's Colony San Luis Obispo California Correctional Institution Tehachapi Salinas Valley State Prison Soledad Correctional Training Facility Soledad

	Children	Parents	Caregivers	Volunteers	# of Buses
Mother's Day Totals	584	274	261	212	33
Father's Day Totals	154	91	81	51	10
TOTALS	738	365	342	263	43

Our Donors

Each year, Get On The Bus raises funds through its generous grassroots network that reaches across California. Each donation adds a compassionate voice to our movement to unite children with their parents in prison. Our gratitude for these contributions of time, talent and treasure is profound.

In its 2007-2008 fiscal year, Get On The Bus raised \$499,190. We steward our contributions carefully to ensure that each year more children will have the opportunity to get on the bus.

Space constraints enable us to print only the sponsor level donors, but we are grateful for every single donation, cash or in-kind, as well as for all of the prayers, good wishes and cards that we receive. Please forgive any errors or omissions.





Tribute Donations

Honor your friends and relatives or remember a departed loved one in a meaningful way.

A tribute gift honors a special occasion such as a holiday, Mother's day, Father's day, birthday, graduation, or it can be made in memory of a loved one. A beautiful card will be sent to your loved one informing them of your generous donation. IT'S EASY! Just fill out the form below, cut it out, and enclose a check made payable to Get On The Bus.

Enclosed is my tax deductible tribute donation of: PLEASE NOTE: Minimum Gift per tribute is \$75	□ \$1,500 □ \$500 □ \$300 □ \$75 □ Oth	er	
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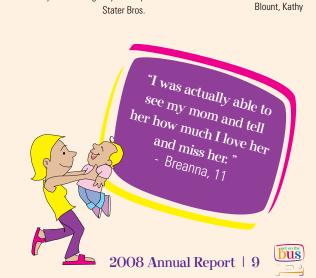
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the opportunity to talk
to my children about my
situation and to assure
them that it doesn't affect
my love for them.

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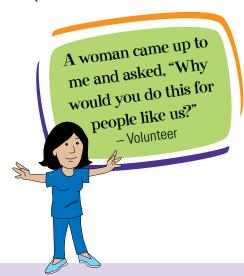
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Why Unite Children With Their Parents In Prison?

Occasionally, we are asked why we do what we do. We respond that we work to improve the lives of children with incarcerated parents and that we are convinced that they desperately hunger for contact with their mother or father—even in less than ideal circumstances. Research is now backing up our mission:

- Parent-child separation can cause irrational feelings and fears in children about their parents. Visits allow children to deal with those feelings and fears, and help them to form a more realistic understanding of their parents' circumstances.
- Children who are not able to maintain a relationship with their mother experience "insecure relationships" that result in depression, anxiety, anger, loneliness, fear, attention disorders, sleep problems, developmental regressions and poor academic performance.
- Ninety percent of grandmother caregivers thought it was important for their grandchildren to see their incarcerated parents.
- The New Mexico Court Improvement Project recommended that best practices for children with incarcerated parents requires that children are cared for and informed, have access to services, and are able to have contact with their incarcerated parent.
- A 2006 report studying the impact of parental incarceration on children developed by the Council on Crime and Justice recommended the provision of regular free bus service to transport children and caregivers to prisons during visitation times.



Get On The Bus - An Extended Family

The Get On The Bus family plans, works and prays together in order to accomplish great things. Without our extended family - an interconnected web that reaches every corner of the state—we would be a small agency with a small impact. As a grassroots movement, we create moments and miracles capable of changing the largest prison in the country. Give these folks a hand . . .

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Growing Up and Moving Out

It was time for Get On The Bus to leave home. The Archdiocese of Los Angeles provided the fledgling agency with eight years of shelter, friendship and the tools it needed to grow, but the time came for Get On The Bus to make its way in the world.

After months of searching, the staff agreed that a colorful little ranch house in North Hollywood had a soul that paired well with a mission of warmth, welcome and acceptance. On April 2, 2008, Get On The Bus invited its friends and supporters to share in a House Blessing ceremony. And like any extended family, we laughed, sang and broke bread on the patio. The new space was infused that day with the same love and unity that Get On The Bus shared with the children and families it serves.

We extend our profound gratitude to the following foundations that provided funding for renovations, equipment and moving expenses: Ahmanson Foundation; Carrie Estelle Doheny Foundation; Anonymous; and the Weingart Foundation. We are also grateful to St. Charles Borromeo Parish in Toluca Lake, our new neighbors, for generously providing the catering for the event.



"Where thou art, that is home."

- Emily Dickinson

Uniting children with their mothers and fathers in prison.

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