

# Uniting children with their mothers and fathers in prison.

## 2009 Annual Report

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GOTB and Kodak Make A Thousand Memories

back cover

Best-practice requires that children of incarcerated parents are cared for and informed, have access to services, and are able to have contact with their parent. Visitation programs, such as **Get On The Bus,** are low-cost interventions that strengthen family bonds, potentially reducing negative impacts on children and recidivism rates of released parents.

New Mexico Courts Improvement, Child Protection Best Practices Bulletin: Connecting Children With Incarcerated Parents, 2006.

## 1,106 Stories

This year, 1,106 children got on the bus, each with his or her own story, and with palpable anticipation at seeing Mom or Dad - often for the first time in years, and often for the first time ever. Their 1,106 stories deeply move and motivate us to reach more families, to fill more buses, and to visit more prisons every year.

We share these few stories hoping to provide a glimpse of what it's like to accompany families on this meaningful journey. Each time, we are inspired by their strength.



Last year, eight year old Devine got to meet her mother for the very first time thanks to Get On The Bus. When her father observed how happy that visit made her, he changed his mind about keeping Devine away from her mother and now believes that she will benefit from an ongoing relationship. At this year's Get On The Bus, Devine's mother shared that she will be released soon and can't wait to reunify with her family. Devine was thrilled beyond words.

At 15 years old, Roberto did not show much emotion during the visit. However, a volunteer noticed that on the way home he carefully unfolded the letter he received from his mother and slowly read it, not once but two times.



One family was visiting their father who is dying of terminal cancer. The Father's Day Get On The Bus trip was likely the last time they will be together in this life. The oldest son, 24, initially didn't want to come, but the volunteers begged him to go. Not only did he sign up for the trip, but he also brought his one year old daughter to meet her grandfather. When they got back on the bus after the visit, he thanked the volunteers for making him go. And that 24 year old "kid" hugged his teddy bear on the way home like there was no tomorrow.

A conversation among four brothers and sisters, ages 12 to 17, who hadn't seen their father in 10 years:

"Daddy was the tallest and most handsome one there." "Yeah, but did you see the gray hair?!"

"He didn't have any gray hair."

"Yes, he did. On his chin."
"That don't count!"
The brothers and sisters
went on to recount that the
only sibling who recognized
her father was the oldest
daughter. She walked right
up to him and said, "Hello,
Daddy!"

How priceless the hellos, how emotional the good-byes, how important everything in between.



"Get On The Bus helps families stay connected and that's especially important when parents are released from prison. We're happy to see this program expand."

> -Matthew Cate, Secretary, California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation.

## Letter From The Executive Director

A fter ten years, I am still deeply touched by the power of Get On The Bus to unite children with their parents in prison. And every year, the smiles, tears and hugs are etched into my heart indelibly--each child and each family a unique story of strength and perseverance in the face of much struggle.

California has approximately 200,000 children living with the loss and social stigma of having a parent in prison. Depending upon the age of a child at the time of a parent's imprisonment, the loss of a central parent figure can have a serious and long-lasting impact on childhood and social development. Unfortunately, the correctional justice system does not take the needs of children into account when sentencing a parent, thereby creating a voiceless group who become the hidden victims of crime.

Get On The Bus works year-round to recruit supporters and bus teams who respond compassionately and enthusiastically to the children we serve. In 2009, we met our 10th Anniversary goal by providing more than 1,000 children with the opportunity to exercise their right to see, speak with and touch their parent during a visit to one of five prisons. We are thrilled with this landmark, but know that we are just reaching the tip of the iceberg--there are 33 prisons in California and 199,000 more children needing our help to maintain a relationship with their parents.

I offer my gratitude to all of you who join us in mission to make Get On The Bus possible. Whether a volunteer or donor, host church or Bus Sponsor, you are an invaluable part of what we do. Help us to throw the net wide and invite others into the Get On The Bus family. Together, we can create a positive childhood memory for children, unify families together and take tangible steps to bring about systemic change in the way that children of prisoners are treated.

Gratefully, Sr. Suzanne Jabro, CSJ Executive Director "Thank you Get
On The Bus for
giving me back
my family."
- Sharon, Mom at
CCWF



## We do it for the children, but everyone is blessed

was for a faith-community from San Luis Obispo:

I want to take a moment to thank you for getting our church involved with Get On The Bus. It was a wonderful experience for us, and I am hoping and praying that we will continue to participate in it for many years to come. The day was especially meaningful for me. Watching the men with their families was a special privilege that I will not soon forget. When I went home Friday night, I hugged my own children a little tighter, not wanting to take my time with them for granted. The site reception was a powerful experience for many from our church, too. We were blessed by serving alongside you.

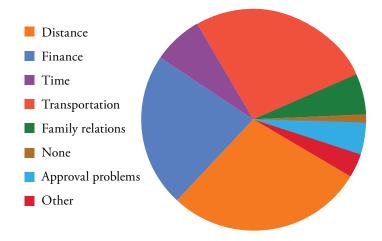
#### So Thank You! Thank You! Thank You!

In Christ, Brian Farone Associate Pastor of Adults and Families Grace Bible Church

In addition to Grace Bible Church, we are grateful for the participation of dozens of communities from many traditions and a variety of affinity groups. Consider asking your church, temple, mosque, school, service group, or place of business if Get On The Bus is a volunteer opportunity that would enliven your service to the community and esprit de corps within your organization. Please call Maria Palmer, Program Director, for more information at (818) 980-7714 ext. 12.



Get On The Bus surveyed its participants who identified the following factors that prevent them from visiting. Providing free transportation eliminates the most significant barriers.



Barriers keeping children from visiting more often

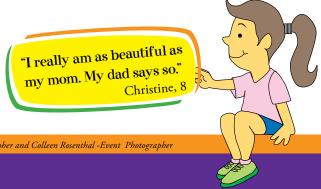


Photo credits: The beautiful photos in this publication were taken by Sr. Teresa Lynch, CSJ, Amy Levinsohn - Event Photographer and Colleen Rosenthal -Event Photographer

	Children	Parents	Caregivers	Volunteers	# of Buses
Mother's Day Totals	613	333	388	206	27 + 2 planes
Father's Day Totals	493	244	187	75	17
TOTALS	1,106	577	575	281	44 + 2 planes

## GOTB Receives International Attention

et On The Bus was featured in the May edition of *Good Housekeeping* magazine. We learned that the need for our program resonates around the world as we received notes of affirmation and requests for information from ten different states, the Canadian province of Novia Scotia and from as far away as South Korea.

### Check Out GOTB's New Website!

In an effort to more effectively promote Get On The Bus and use technology to improve communications and efficiency, we have completely overhauled our website with YOU in mind.

Go to www.getonthebus.us to find:

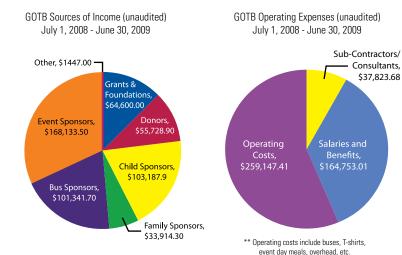
- Stories and photos
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- FAQ's
- Promotional Materials
- Upcoming Events
- Easy on-line donation button

## www.GetOnTheBus.us

### 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. We are grateful for each person and organization that chooses to join us in our mission.

In its 2008-2009 fiscal year, Get On The Bus raised \$526.353.60. We are particularly grateful for your support during this financially challenging year when so many are struggling and the families we serve have been hit the hardest.



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:	□ \$1,500 □ \$500 □ \$300 □ \$75 □ Othe	er
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## Going The Extra Mile

Every once a while you come across people who have such beautiful hearts that you are humbled in their presence. Get On The Bus would like to recognize the talents and generosity of one special family that furthers the Get On The Bus mission in extraordinary ways.

As a Bus Coordinator, Scott Thorshov wrangled the considerable paperwork involved in getting families on his bus, and realized there had to be a better way. A talented software designer, he spent a year working with the staff to develop a registration program for families that saves time, money for postage and paperwork, and virtually eliminates the possibility of error. Everything needed for the Get On The Bus trips is generated from this one powerful program from nametags to t-shirt orders to lists of cleared participants and volunteers for the prison. The program tested so successfully that we will be implementing it across all regions in 2010. But the Thorshov family's commitment didn't stop there. Scott and his wife Daisy organized a dinner dance at their church to raise funds for their bus. Their children, Grant and Ashley hand-crafted favors



and decorations for the event. The Thorshov's even recruited other families and friends to support their efforts in the Central Coast area.

Families helping families. That's what the extended Get On The Bus family is all about.

## It all happens at the grassroots

et On The Bus has created a statewide network of local bus teams that work with Regional Coordinators. Each bus team coordinates every aspect of "their" bus, including: raising funds, visiting families prior to the event, coordinating volunteers, getting families to the bus, and working with the Get On The Bus staff to plan and evaluate the program. Get On The Bus could not serve nearly 500 families from every corner of the state without this wellspring of grassroots ownership. Each of these volunteers has our gratitude and admiration for a job very well done (names and organizations are listed alphabetically).

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Charlene Heuer, Nancy Turk, Visalia Seventh-Day Adventist Church

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Jacci Abram, Lola Alatorre, Lesley Dierks, Carol Fitzgerald, Cece Lane, Nancy Priddy, Sr. Therese Randolph, RSM., N. Sue Reddy, Mary Romero, Mary Kay Stratton, Scott Thorshov, Central Coast Area Churches, Community Church of Atascadero, Congregation Beth David - SLO, First Presbyterian Church - SLO, Grace Bible Church of Arroyo Grande, Mt. Carmel Lutheran Church - SLO, Nativity of Our Lady Church - SLO, Newman Catholic Center - SLO, Old Mission Church - SLO, Santa Rosa Church -Cambria, St. Elizabeth Ann Seton - Los Osos, St. Joseph's Church - Cayucos, St. Joseph's Church - Nipomo, St. Patrick's Catholic Church - AG, St. Rose of Lima -Paso Robles, St. Stephen's Episcopal Church - SLO, St. Timothy's Church - Morro Bay, St. William Church -Atascadero, United Methodist Church Atascadero & SLO, Zion Lutheran Church - SLO

#### Monterey/Soledad

Juanita Carrillo, Joseph Crescente, Sharon Crescente, Sheilah Lynch, Vivian Moore, Connie Sapien, Carmel Mission Basilica, Diocese of Monterey, Our Lady of Soledad Church, Resurrection Church Aptos, St. Theodores Church





## GOTB and Kodak Make a Thousand Memories

If a picture is worth a thousand words, then Kodak helped Get On The Bus to write a book about bringing families together.

Get On The Bus provides each participant with a family photograph—the most treasured keepsake of the day. In the past, we used instant film that was expensive and didn't offer the best quality photos. This year, Kodak solved our photo dilemma through a generous corporate donation of five digital cameras with memory cards, 4 photo printers, ink and photo paper for 1,000 photographs, and 1,000 one-time use cameras which we included in the Stay Connected bags given to the children to support ongoing communication with their parent in prison. Thanks to this wonderful donation, we can now print high

quality photos right in the prison at great savings of money and time.

Get On The Bus thanks the Kodak Corporation and especially Antoine Dreyfus and Erin Foster who advocated on our behalf from Paris, France, and Rochester, NY. We thank Kodak for joining our mission in this particularly appropriate way and assure them that we will put this wonderful equipment to good use for many years to come.

## Uniting children with their mothers and fathers in prison.

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