

Girl Scouts Beyond Bars

A DOCUMENTED NEED

An estimated 1.5 to 2 million children in the United States have a parent in prison. The trauma associated with having an incarcerated parent has been well-documented and includes poor academic performance, disruptive classroom behavior, truancy, attention disorders, depression, aggression, and a greater likelihood than children whose parents are not incarcerated of ending up in prison themselves.

Add to these outcomes the stigma that the circumstance carries, the jolting impact of disrupted care-giving, and the trauma of “losing” a parent, and the need for community engagement becomes clear.

MYTH: The number of incarcerated parents is relatively small...**FACT:** 70% of the incarcerated population are parents.

MYTH: Not many women, especially mothers, go to prison or jail...**FACT:** From 1990-2001 the number of female prisoners increased 114%.

MYTH: Most children visit their mothers in prison...**FACT:** 54% of mothers in state prisons have never had a visit from their child.

Helping girls make positive decisions for the future.

Girl Scouts Beyond Bars (GSBB) is a gender-specific prevention program for girls with incarcerated mothers that works to cultivate leadership development, increase personal growth and improve the mother-daughter relationship.

Research has shown that when daughters of incarcerated women have the opportunity for increased contact with their mothers and receive appropriate guidance from adults, they resist engaging in at-risk behavior. This reduces the likelihood of future involvement in the criminal justice system. Girls' lives are significantly disrupted by their mothers' incarceration because in most cases the mothers were the primary caregivers and the girls' sole economic and emotional support prior to incarceration.

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

The GSBB program is offered in a group setting where girls facing the same challenges do not feel alone. This safe space enables Girl Scouts to change the way these girls see the world and their place in it, helping them learn the importance of personal responsibility, the value of goal setting, the spirit of teamwork, and the joy of accomplishment. In addition to monthly meetings with their mothers at the prison and weekly peer-troop meetings or field trips in the community, girls receive one-on-one mentoring giving them additional opportunities to bond with caring adults.

These meetings and events help girls:

- › improve their social and personal skills by focusing on healthy relationships, self-esteem, educational and career goals, and leadership development
- › address risk factors through the prevention of bullying, dating violence, and substance abuse

The Girl Scouts Beyond Bars program also facilitates the transition of the mother-daughter relationship once mothers are released to the community. Through this process GSBB aims to strengthen the bond already established between mothers and daughters during incarceration and maintain the parenting skills mothers have gained in GSBB. Girls often remain connected to the supportive environment offered by GSBB after their mothers return to the community.

PROGRAM DETAILS

Created in 1999, Girl Scouts Beyond Bars serves girls in western Washington. GSBB is a year-round program in which each girl participant averages 250 hours per year. Free transportation is provided to each girl by staff and volunteers, making the GSBB program readily accessible to girls in our region. In partnership with the Washington State Department of Corrections, GSBB provides service in three women-only correctional facilities: Washington Correction Center for Women in Gig Harbor, Mission Creek Correction Center for Women in Belfair, and Pine Lodge Correction Center for Women in Spokane.

FOR MORE INFORMATION Please contact Girl Scouts of Western Washington Director of Outreach Initiatives, Anne Rhyner, at (800) 541-9852 or visit our website at www.girlscoutsww.org.