



Features

Father's Day bus trip to see dads in prison

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By Rick DeVecchio, Catholic San Francisco



BERKELEY, Calif., June 12, 2010 -- The travelers waiting to board the bus at dawn ranged in age from toddlers to teens.

Their destination: the California Men's Colony in San Luis Obispo.

The children and youth were going to the state prison for a Father's Day visit with their dads, all of whom are serving time. Some hadn't seen their dads for a long time, others never, but as they climbed on the bus they shared a positive feeling that love would break through the tears for man and boy alike.

The trip was the latest sponsored by the Get on the Bus project and Project What, Bay Area organizations dedicated to building the bonds between children and their incarcerated parents. Project What is made up of youth and young adults ages 15 to 20, all of them having experienced separation from an incarcerated father during their growing-up years. Their goal is to raise awareness of the impact of parental incarceration.

Marriah Humphrey's dad went to prison in Texas when she was a toddler. She has stayed in touch with him, but the reality of their two lives having been parted has been painful.

"When he got locked up again it was his second chance," said Humphrey, 18, who is from Hayward. "I had just been born. I'm really upset with him.

"It's bittersweet," she said. "I can respect him because he's my dad, but at the same time he could have made a better choice."

Humphrey had a good sense of what was going through the minds of the children as they anticipated meeting their dads.



"I can tell you from my personal experience," said Humphrey, who will attend George Mason University in the fall and hopes to become a child psychiatrist. "If they have a good relationship, it's going to be something exciting, cries and hugs and kisses. But if it hasn't always been a good relationship, toward the middle of the visit it'll probably become very emotional, about the 'whys' -- how come you did this to me.' But I think for the

most part most of them are excited about seeing their dads for Father's Day."

Although the prison visitation project is not Catholic-based, it reflects the Christian view of justice as restorative. At the heart of restorative justice is the difficult and sometimes painful process of honoring the offender's human dignity, a principle highlighted in Matthew 25: "for I was ... in prison and you visited me."

Doraius Lacy, 17, of Oakland knows how hard this can be. He last saw his dad more than a year ago.



"I don't really have a positive relationship with my dad," he said. "I September, around my birthday, my dad went to jail and assaulted my grandma and cousin."

Still, Lacy knows it is important to put work into the relationship and to help other children do the same with their incarcerated fathers.

"Knowing that father figure, knowing that male role model, is there helps a lot, creates some kind of stability in the lives of young men," he said.

Lauren Bell was an adult leader on the Father's Day trip.

"We just expect it's going to be a beautiful day," she said. "I have a four-year-old coming who hasn't met his dad. He's just really excited about going."

"The power of the bond between the parent and child, no matter what the circumstances, is super strong," she said. "When there's separation, that moment has to be so quality and amazing. "We expect people to love each other and care for each other as if they were in their own living room."

[Listen](#) to an interview with Marriah Humphrey, 18, as she talks about her relationship with her incarcerated dad.