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Soledad prisons get visit from 250 'Get On the Bus' children for Father's Day

Children throughout California to visit Soledad's CTF, SVSP

BY KIMBER SOLANA • ksolana@thecalifornian.com • June 18, 2010

Come Saturday, Soledad's two prisons are set to host hundreds of children visiting their fathers who are serving time.

All of the children, coming from several California cities, will hop on a bus and travel for several hours to spend four hours at the prisons during Father's Day weekend.

"A lot of these kids haven't seen their dads in years," said Jennifer Doyle, program assistant for "Get On the Bus," the Los Angeles-based nonprofit organizing the event.

"Some of them have never met their fathers," Doyle added.

On Saturday, 229 children will come in 11 buses to the California Training Facility. Another 23 will go to the Salinas Valley State Prison.

CTF has participated in the program since 2008, said spokesman Lt. Darren Chamberlain. This will be SVSP's first year.

"It's just an excellent opportunity for them to get contact with their kids and strengthen their bonds," said SVSP spokesman Lt. Eric Moore. "That is something the [California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation] believes in."

Doyle said children from several cities, including Oakland, San Diego, and Bakersfield, will hop on a bus early Saturday morning for the ride to Soledad. The California State Prison in Solano will also take part in Saturday's program.

Inmates and their families have to apply to take part in the program. When approved by CDCR, Get On the Bus is notified and the nonprofit informs the families. Get On the Bus has been organizing the

Father's Day and Mother's Day visits for a decade.

During the visits, Doyle said, children will have arts and crafts and portrait photo opportunities, along with sponsors and chaperones. The meetings are also conducted in the visitation area.

CTF will have two sessions — one in the morning, another in the afternoon, Chamberlain said.

Along with the free rides, counselors will be present, she said, and the children will receive a bag of toys and meals.

But more important, Doyle said, is that the children will meet others in the same family situation.

"It's about keeping relationships alive and forging new ones," she said. "These children will learn that they're not alone."

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In this file photo from 2009, Shawn Miller Jr. cries as he hugs his father, Shawn Miller Sr., an inmate at CTF Soledad, as his daughters, Charity, 16, Laura Miller, 18, and Esther Miller, 16, look on. The visit was part of the Get on the Bus program, which comes back to Soledad this Saturday. (File photo by Richard Green)

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