

QUARTERLY REPORT: March – June, 2007



“Uniting families with their loved ones in prison”



A program in support of family reunification funded by the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation

**Quarterly Report To The
California Department of
Corrections and Rehabilitation**

**Contract Period:
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Images and Stories



Senator Gloria Romero helps cut the ribbon during the inaugural March 25, 2007, CFE trip

“We haven’t been able to visit our daughter in two years. We live in San Bernardino and the last time we went we had to rent a car reliable enough for the trip, pay for food and a hotel. It ended up costing us \$700. This bus is a miracle for us.”

Executive Summary

In an effort to enhance the likelihood that female offenders will experience successful reintegration into society, as well as to decrease the negative impact of incarceration on children, **The Chowchilla Family Express (CFE)** was established in February, 2007. CFE provides free weekly bus transportation to families of women serving sentences at the Valley State Prison for Women and the Central California Women's Facility, both located at Chowchilla.

Since the contract was approved, the following program activities have been successfully completed:

- Development of program protocols, procedures, and organizational and fiscal systems
- Creation of outreach and media strategies including program print materials, web page and inaugural press conference
- Establishment of data collection methodology and database
- Hiring of program staff, including a corps of trained Hospitality Bus Leaders
- Contracting for essential program functions, including bus transportation, program development, graphic design, printing and formal external evaluation
- Free weekly transportation from cities in Northern, Central and Southern California has been successfully launched

As a result of having access to free transportation, families from all over the state are re-forming and strengthening their bonds. Prisoners who receive visitors, maintain family ties, and are released to a stable home environment are more likely to experience successful re-entry. Maintaining the child-parent relationship is also be important to a child's ability to process the separation and heal from its trauma.

Chowchilla Family Express Contract Deliverables

Since March 25, 2007 . . .

- 946 visitors have participated in these services from each of the four regions in California
- 39 CFE buses have traveled to Chowchilla from across the state
- Buses originated from: Los Angeles, Long Beach, Oakland, San Fernando Valley, San Bernardino, Oxnard/Ventura, Antelope Valley, San Jose, San Francisco, San Diego, Stockton, and Sacramento/Chico.
- 44% of visitors were children; 20% parents; 9% siblings; 17% extended family; and 10% friends, other family or spouses.
- 42% of visitors were African American and 32% were Hispanic/Latino proving that visitation access is increased for minority women who would be excluded from visiting due to transportation challenges.





Images and Stories



A tender moment between mother and daughter at VSP

A family of five from Los Angeles has only seen their loved one five times in 12 years. Now they meet the bus once a month from wherever it leaves in Southern California, and are thrilled to be able to visit regularly.

Background

Approximately 10 million children in the United States will experience the incarceration of one or both of their parents during their childhood (Simmons, 2000). For the past two decades, annual increases in the number of incarcerated women have been consistently larger than the increases in the number of incarcerated men (Beck, 2000; Beck, 2001; Harrison & Beck, 2003). Women in prison differ from their male counterparts in important ways—their crimes are different, their pathways into the criminal justice system are different, and their life histories are different.

Currently, it is estimated that 1.3 million children have mothers who are under criminal justice supervision, including incarceration in jail/prison, or under community supervision such as probation, parole, and halfway houses. In addition, it is estimated that over 850,000 children in California have a parent in the adult correctional system (Simmons, 2000). Reports show that the long-term impact on the lives of these children from parental incarceration and household dysfunction include health, legal, and social problems in adolescence and adulthood (Messina & Grella, 2006). The chaos displayed in the lives of these parents is often replicated in the lives of their children. In fact, among a sample of approximately 500 incarcerated women in California, 34% reported that they had also experienced the incarceration of a parent during their childhood (Messina & Grella, 2006).

As women in prison are often the primary caregivers to their minor children prior to incarceration, it is imperative to provide the necessary services to maintain a bond between mother and child. Attachment theorists (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978) describe the lifelong efforts to a child who experiences disruptions in parental attachment during childhood. As a result of interrupting bonding, incarceration can have many negative consequences for children, including: shame, social stigma, loss of financial support, weakened ties to the parent, changes in family composition, poor school performance, increased delinquency, and increased risk of abuse or neglect, and intergenerational involvement in the criminal justice system (Arditti, 2005). Since the majority of women in prison are mothers to minor children, it is imperative to provide the necessary services to maintain bonds between mother and children in order to alleviate the negative impacts of the separation on child development. However, it is very difficult for parents to maintain contact with their families during incarceration. More than half the incarcerated mothers do not receive any visits from their children while they are incarcerated. The most significant reason for lack of contact is the distance families must travel for a visit. In California, 60% of all female inmates are from Southern California, but

OBSTACLES TO PARENT-CHILD VISITS IN PRISON

- Difficulty scheduling visits
- Geographic location of prison facilities
- Family's inability to afford transportation
- Visiting procedures that are uncomfortable or humiliating
- Visiting rooms that are inhospitable to children
- Foster parents or caregivers who are unwilling to facilitate visits

Source: Women's Prison Association, *When A Mother Is Arrested: How the Criminal Justice and Child Welfare Systems Can Work Together More Effectively* (Baltimore: Maryland Department of Human Resources, 1996).

the two largest women's prisons, Central California Women's Facility and the Valley State Prison for Women, are located near Chowchilla, about 260 miles north of Los Angeles.

Child welfare research (Johnston, 1995) concludes that parent-child visitation produces beneficial effects for several reasons:

- Visits allow children to express their emotional reactions to the separation. The more disturbed children are by the separation, the more important it is that visitation occurs.
- Visitation helps parents to deal with separation and loss issues, increasing their ability to help their children deal with the same issues.
- 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.
- Visits allow parents to model appropriate interactions for children who react negatively to the separation.
- Visits allow parents and children to maintain their existing relationships, which leads to more successful reunification after incarceration.

Likewise, prison inmates benefit from efforts to strengthen families. Families can provide an incentive for women and men in prison to grow, learn and change. Families can help women and men in prison stay in touch with what's going on in the world and ease their transition back into the world, often providing housing and assistance in securing employment. **The family is probably this country's most valuable resource in fighting crime** (Adalist-Estrin, 2004). Visitation programs, such as **The Chowchilla Family Express** are a low-cost intervention that can potentially reduce negative impacts on children and reduce future criminality for both incarcerated parents and their children. **The Chowchilla Family Express** eliminates many of the barriers that prevent families from engaging in regular visiting.





Images and Stories



Wendy Still and Mary Lattimore welcome Senator Romero and families to the prison

“My wife’s release date is 08/02/07. Thank you so much for this wonderful service that has allowed me to visit and keep my wife’s spirits up and give her the knowledge that we’re going to be okay through this. You must get tremendous satisfaction from your work on this program. God bless you.”

Transportation Services: Report of Activities and Statistical Data

The Chowchilla Family Express (CFE) provides free weekly transportation for the families of women serving state prison sentences at two facilities in Chowchilla, California – Central California Women’s Facility (CCWF) and Valley State Prison for Women (VSPW). Services are available for children, spouses, extended family, guardians, and foster families. The bus trips originate in Northern, Central, and Southern California cities.

Transportation services began on March 25, 2007 with the inaugural CFE trip. The trip was initiated with a press conference coordinated by Margo Bach, Senator Romero’s office, and CFE Program Director Eric DeBode. Rich Williams, Administrative Assistant / Public Information Office at CCWF commented that, “This is the most media attention we’ve received in years.” We were very gratified by the amount of press for this positive event.

To date, Chowchilla Family Express has operated 39 buses and served 946 visitors. Over 76% of the registered visitors took the bus to either VSPW or CCWF during this reporting period (March 25, 2007 – June 31, 2007). The majority of visitors registered from the following departure cities:

| | |
|---------------------------------|-------|
| ➤ Long Beach | 11.5% |
| ➤ Los Angeles | 11.1% |
| ➤ San Bernardino | 10.1% |
| ➤ San Fernando/Antelope Valleys | 09.8% |
| ➤ Sacramento/Chico | 09.7% |
| ➤ San Gabriel Valley/Fresno | 08.3% |

Smaller percentages came from Orange/Visalia (6.5%), Stockton (6.4%), Oakland (6.3%), San Diego (6.3%), Oxnard/Bakersfield (5.7%), San Jose (3.0%), San Francisco (2.6%), Santa Rosa (1.9%), Ventura/Santa Barbara (0.8%).

Ninety-nine percent of those who rode the bus were admitted into the prison for their visit. The main reason a visitor was denied access to the prison was lack of appropriate approval with regard to paperwork. In a few instances, visitors reported that their incarcerated family member had been moved to another prison, and in one instance a visitor had an issue related to an old warrant.

Program Successes

Two of the goals for the Chowchilla Family Express were to bring children to see their mothers and outreach to communities of color who often experience more barriers to visiting.

We are pleased to report that :

- 44% of visitors were children
- 84% of visitors were from communities of color





Images and Stories



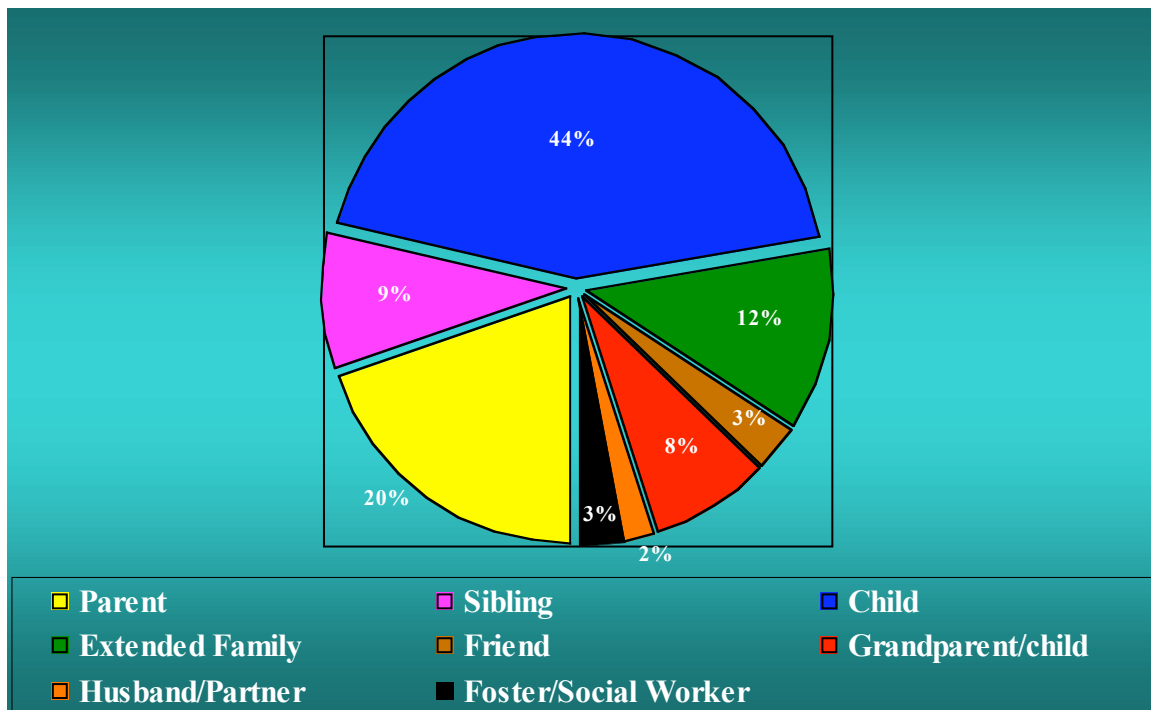
A tearful, but joyful reunion

One thing we notice is that people invariably strike up conversations and sometimes become friends on the long bus trips. On our recent trip from the San Fernando Valley, four grandmothers sat next to each other and talked the whole way home. As we neared the end of the trip, all of them exchanged phone numbers and were making plans to carpool to the bus leaving from Southern California the following month.

Relationship of Visitors to Inmates

Perhaps the most significant finding from our first report is the description of “who is visiting incarcerated women in California”? The most prevalent group of visitors on the bus are the inmate’s children (44%). This finding can be interpreted as a great success for The Chowchilla Family Express, as the primary goal of the transportation services was to enhance visitation of children with their mothers (see Figure 1). The second largest group of visitors included inmates’ parents (22%). Interestingly, 18% of the parental visitors were mothers, with only 3% of the visitors being fathers. Twelve percent of the visitors are extended family, including aunts, uncles, nieces, nephews, and in-laws. Sisters and brothers made up 9% of the visitors, 8% were grandparents or grandchildren, and 3% were friends. A very small percentage of visitors were made up of husbands or intimate partners and foster families.

Figure 1. Relationship of Visitor to Inmate



^a 18% of the visiting parents were mothers or stepmothers (3.2% were fathers).

^b Visiting children were 10 years old on average (ranging from infants to 17 years).

^c Extended family includes aunts, uncles, cousins, nieces and nephews, and in-laws.

Visitor Characteristics

Table 1 shows the percentage of female and male visitors by age group (18 and over or minor child). Not surprisingly, the majority of adult visitors were women (82%), including mothers and/or stepmothers of the inmate, followed by grandmothers, sisters, aunts, and nieces. The children who visited were more evenly distributed between girls and boys (55% and 46%). Table 2 shows the racial distribution of the visitors. Almost one-half of the visitors who registered were African American and approximately 32% were Hispanic/Latino. This finding can also be considered a success of The Chowchilla Family Express program as many minority women face transportation challenges which would exclude them from visiting incarcerated family members.

Table 1. Gender of Visitors by Age Group

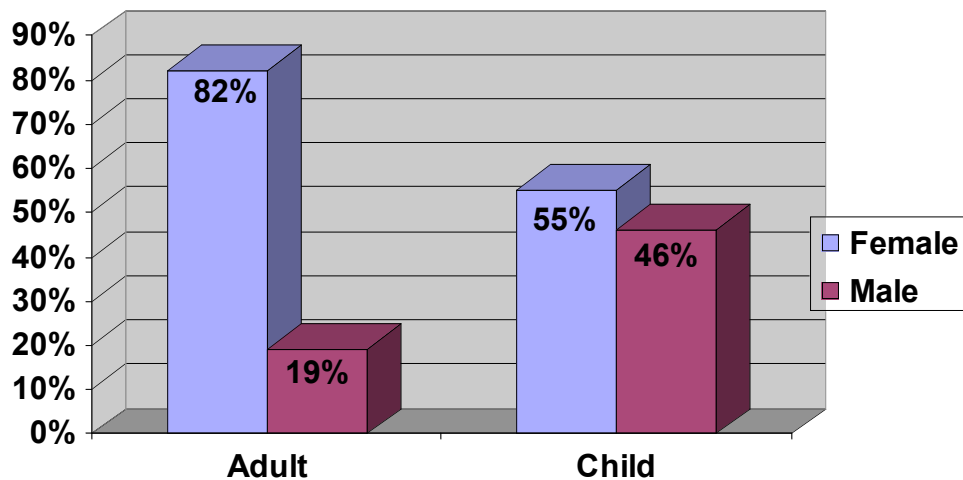
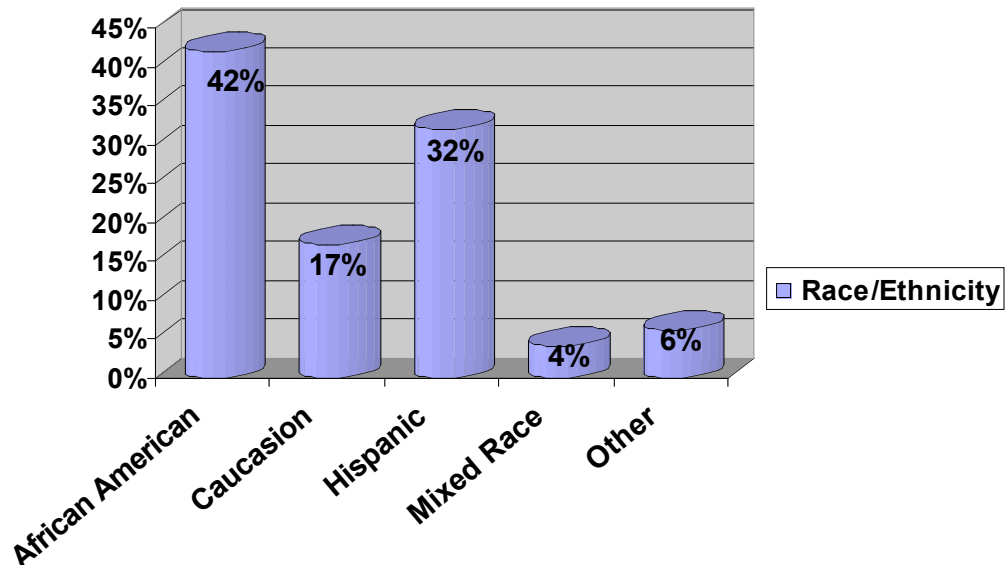


Table 2. Race/Ethnicity of Visitors





Images and Stories



The visits are wonderful, the good-byes painful

On our bus trip from San Diego, Yoshie met Asefah—who is from Ethiopia. Yoshie noticed that her new friend spoke very little English, didn't know how to do the paperwork, and was confused by the clearance process; so she offered to accompany her every step of the way. The two women have since struck up a friendship, and Yoshie will pick up Asefah at her home so they can meet the bus for the next trip together.

Commendations and Recommendations

With the first quarter of implementation completed, program staff and management conducted an informal, internal evaluation to determine program successes, as well as areas in need of improvement. The purpose of the internal evaluation is to monitor and continuously improve the quality of program operations, and is in addition to the external evaluation that is analyzing program efficacy in creating greater access to the visitation process.



As a result of the evaluation dialogue, The Chowchilla Family Express notes the following commendations:

- **Sarah Malone, Ombudsperson**—Sarah has been quick to respond to any issues that we bring to her attention. She has offered level-headed advice, and it is very clear that she is committed to performing her job at a very high level of quality.
- **Lt. Herron, VSP Visitor Processing**—We have been impressed with the demeanor that Sgt. Herron displays with the families who visit VSP. He is warm and friendly and does what he can to make the visiting experience a positive one.
- **Lt. Rangel, VSP Visitor Processing**—Our work is made easier thanks to Eva's always helpful assistance with paperwork and any questions that we may have.
- **Kathie Moon, Supervising Clinical Social Worker**—Several key issues have been resolved thanks to our collaborative working relationship with Kathie. Of particular note are her efforts to help us get clearance for one of our Hospitality Bus Leaders to accompany a developmentally disabled 18 year old woman who would otherwise not be able to make the trip. Although the county social worker decided against the visit, it shows us, again, how important it is to develop a protocol for Hospitality Bus Leaders to accompany minors to the prison.
- **Guadalupe Rios, Family Services Coordinator/Social Worker, CCWF**—We are currently exploring how we can work with Guadalupe. She has been very open and eager to work with CFE.
- **Nena Messina, Project Evaluator**—We are thrilled to be working with an expert evaluator who has provided essential assistance in creating the evaluation design, data collection methodology and data organizational systems. We look forward to contributing to the growing canon of research literature on programs serving women in prison and their children.
- **Senator Gloria Romero**—The Senator is an advocate and friend to the families we serve. She has ridden the bus once in order to gain an understanding of how the

program helps families and to learn from the families themselves the barriers that they have faced in maintaining bonds with their loved one in prison. It has been heartening to work with a legislator who sees the need, grasps the depth of the crisis families are in, and proactively connects the problems with solutions.

- **Wendy Still, Director, Gender Responsive Commission**—The Chowchilla Family Express could not have happened without Wendy’s considerable time, energy, effort and expertise. Her continuing support, assistance and vision guides the growth and development of the program.

In reviewing the development and implementation process thus far, we make the following recommendations:

- 1) As CDCR moves from old models to a new model that supports maintaining family bonds, it is very important that the people in charge of visiting understand that they are the face of that new philosophy. As such, they need to understand the value of the service that is being provided by CFE, and support that service. Prison personnel undeniably influence the quality of the visiting experience. If the CDCR is committed to supporting family relationships, then those processing the families need to be able to understand the barriers people face in visiting. As the face of the system, they need to be polite and kind. The families riding the bus are largely poor, people of color, grandmothers, aunts and uncles who have selflessly stepped in to parent somebody else’s children. They wake up, sometimes at 1:00 a.m., to catch the bus, make a very long drive, and then are too often met with coldness. The new philosophy must trickle down to those having direct contact with family members.
- 2) Visitor processing at VSPW takes 2-2 ½ hours. We understand that this is due to a staffing shortage and prison overcrowding. Staff members themselves recognize that this is a problem. It is our hope that the undue processing time can be shortened considerably through additional or creative staffing configuration. In order to expedite processing, it would be helpful if we could distribute copies of the “Visitor Pass” to bus passengers so that it could be filled out prior to the visit. We have already complied with a request to expedite the visiting approval process by including California Drivers License information on our registration form.



- 3) There is a need to develop and approve protocols around the accompaniment of minors. The Hospitality Bus Leaders on each bus are ideally positioned to assume this role, however, it is currently against regulations to have a non-family members accompany a minor into the prison unless the adult is on a visiting list. Since the Hospitality Bus Leaders are not family members and are not always scheduled in advance, asking families to include them on their visiting list seems onerous, and not

particularly helpful. We have found that there are times when it is necessary for children and teens to make a visit without having an adult family member accompany them. One

such example includes teenagers who wish to visit, but their parent or guardian can't make the trip due to work, illness, or the need to tend to other children at home. Foster children experience similar barriers when their foster parent or case worker can't or won't make the trip. We would like to work collaboratively with CDCR representatives to create a practical resolution to this issue.

- 4) In working with our evaluator, Nena Messina, we believe it would be beneficial to conduct focus groups with the women in prison. Qualitative data is an excellent way to assess program success. A series of focus groups with the women inmates at CCWF and VSPW would be a huge benefit to our program with regard to documenting the affect of visitations for the incarcerated family members.

We are humbled and gratified to share the following responses from passengers on the Chowchilla Family Express:

- This is my second trip with you, and you people have been wonderful. I thank you very much for making this experience a very special one.
- The processing was intimidating and frustrating. Officers were picky and hindered our visiting time.
- Everything is wonderful. I couldn't ask for more than to see and spend time with my daughter.
- You have absolutely no idea how much this program means to myself and my five grandchildren that I am caring for in my daughter's absence. It was a huge bright light in their little lives to see their Mother. I am unable to take them on my own, and if it wasn't for the Chowchilla Express, it would never have been possible. Since first learning of the program in May, we have been able to see my daughter three times. I can see how much this has helped the children, as well as myself. I am unable to help at this time in a monetary way, but I have lots of free time I can donate to help out.
- We received the following letter:

To Whom It May Concern:

I recently have my friend Jewel Taylor a ride to catch the bus traveling to Chowchilla Women's Prison. Jewel has been trying for 2 years to visit her grand daughter, but due to poverty she has been unable to visit.

Jewel always has a friendly smile and a cheery word, but she has had tragedy including a granddaughter that was murdered and another who is incarcerated at Chowchilla. This young woman, Simona Demergy, I don't believe has had any family visits for about 2 years as her mother and the rest of the family are in Arkansas and they are all struggling.

The day Jewel returned from seeing Simona was about the happiest I have ever seen her and I'm sure the same could be said for Simona. I want to give my thanks to all involved in providing this service. Jewel said that all the workers were so nice. I hope you all realize the tremendous good you are doing and will be blessed accordingly.



*Thank you so much,
Suzanne Wright, R.N. (retired)*

- I just pray you keep it going.

Finally, we are pleased to share the input of the prison staff:

- If there were a couple more staff to help process the large amount of visitors, plus the bus, we could get the families together in the visiting room quicker. It's getting very busy!
- Saturdays have gotten busier since we have the bus, and with the increase in inmate population. It would be great if we could get at least two extra staff members to help process. With the extra staff, the waiting process could be cut in half.
- Visitors are unprepared for a prison visit, causing delays for other visitors. Out of control children is another big problem.
- The pre-approval process needs to be more well organized.
- When the bus arrives there is often confusion and issues with people wearing the wrong clothes.





Images and Stories



Settling in for a long ride

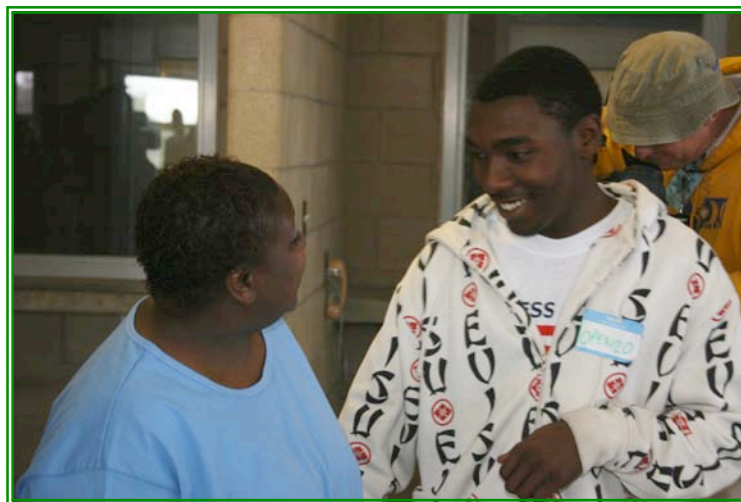
Donna brings her grand-daughter on the bus once a month. She beams with gratitude that the Chowchilla Family Express is available to her family. Her grand-daughter smiles, and although she can't articulate it, she seems to be doing better now that she sees her mother more often.

Concluding Remarks

One of the most important differences between women and men in prison is that women are most often the primary caretakers for their minor children. The nature of the relationship that incarcerated women have, or develop, with their children is an important factor in their rehabilitation and reintegration. The greater incidence of mothers' involvement in their children's lives makes parenting programs and services that maintain bonds between mothers and their children a critical part of any rehabilitation program for women. If correctional programs are going to help women break the cycle of their criminal behavior, policy-makers must recognize how women offenders are different from men (Little Hoover Commission, 2004).

The first quarter of **Chowchilla Family Express** program implementation has been successful beyond our expectations. The outreach and registration processes have yielded participation that exceeds our current service capacity. Program staff have formed key partnerships with prison staff that have led to several positive outcomes for families and women in prison. We look forward to mutually furthering these relationships in order to solve problems, work collaboratively, and continuously improve the quality of the services we are providing. We anticipate deepening our evaluation efforts and better understanding the measurable impact that visitation has on both women in prison and their families, particularly children.

We have witnessed an unquenchable hunger that the families have to see, touch and speak with their loved one in prison. This hunger fuels families to do whatever they must do to meet the bus and complete a very long day's journey. It fuels them to catch the bus every month, even though previous to CFE they had typically not been able to visit for years at a time. It fuels them to talk, heal, and strengthen the bonds that will support the woman once she is released. It is our profound privilege to accompany families on this paradoxically sad yet joyful pilgrimage to reunification. From them we have learned, even more than we knew, of the powerful need for and potential of the **Chowchilla Family Express**.





Images and Stories



Happy riders celebrate the first trip to Chowchilla.

Bob and Angelina had not seen their grand-daughter in eight long years. They weren't able to drive from San Diego to Chowchilla, and they couldn't afford the bus and accommodations to make the trip. They were beaming as they left the prison, and when asked how their visit went Angelina exclaimed, "Joyous! Absolutely joyous! My husband was like a big teddy bear. They couldn't stop hugging each other." They plan to make the trip again soon.

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