Girl Scouts Beyond Bars - Incarcerated Mothers, Empowered Daughters - A Better Future for All

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What Is the Impact of My Decisions? | Women & Girls in the Criminal Justice System | Lesson 4

https://youtu.be/DtAzFuL_ijS
According to the ACLU, women are the fastest growing segment of the incarcerated population increasing at nearly double the rate of men since 1985. Approximately 62% of these women are mothers of children under 18.

Parental incarceration is now recognized as an “adverse childhood experience” (ACE); it is distinguished from other adverse childhood experiences by the unique combination of trauma, shame, and stigma.

Girls with incarcerated mothers face many obstacles, and access to leadership programming should not be one of them.

Girl Scouts wants to give girls access to programming that gives them a platform to share their voices and enhance confidence, all while fostering a positive parent-child relationship.

By developing their strengths together, girls and mothers are empowered to make positive decisions in the future. In fact, GSUSA’s 2012 National Evaluation of the program found that 84 percent of girls agree that they have a better relationship with their mother since participating in GSBB.
Background

The number of children with parents in prison increased 80% between 1991 and 2007.

The Sentencing Project

• GSBB was started in 1992 in Maryland. At one point there were 40 Girl Scout councils offering GSBB. Now there are only 17 active programs. Critical DOJ funding was cut and many councils could no longer support the programs.

• Arizona leads the Western states in the rate of incarceration, resulting in more than 175,000 Arizona children with a parent in jail or prison, or on probation or parole.

• GSBB was established in Arizona in 1994 as a partnership between Girl Scouts Arizona Cactus Pine (GSACPC) and the Maricopa County Sherriff’s Office (MCSO). In 2004, the program expanded to Arizona Department of Corrections Perryville Prison, and in 2010, Girl Scouts of Southern Arizona (GSSoAZ) joined to create a statewide initiative.
What We Do

• Our GSBB program focuses on preserving and even enhancing the connection between daughters and their mothers who have been incarcerated.

• Twice a month, our staff bring girls into prison to visit their mothers and work side-by-side on Girl Scouting activities in STEM, the creative arts, life skills, and more.

• Unlike traditional visitation, these meetings take place in a classroom-like setting where girls and mothers are better able to build and sustain their relationship.

• By developing their strengths together, girls and mothers are empowered to make positive decisions in the future. In fact, GSUSA’s 2012 National Evaluation of the program found that 84 percent of girls agree that they have a better relationship with their mother since participating in GSBB.
Building Community – The Girl Scout Leadership Experience: Discover, Connect and Take Action

“"This group gives girls the chance to be a part of something, no questions asked. They benefit from belonging to a group. They learn about being a friend and how to be a good citizen.""

Guardian of participant

Through Girl Scouts Beyond Bars, we support girls and families in Arizona who are experiencing the impact of incarceration, by providing resources, community connections, and powerful programming that unlocks each girl's potential. Central to our mission is giving girls a safe space to express who they are — including their response to the trauma of incarceration and family separation.

In addition to visiting their mothers, girls meet twice a month in the community as a troop. Participants also take part in the annual cookie program and summer camp. The troop experience is integral to the GSBB program because it provides opportunities to build supportive friendships and a sense of belonging. Girl Scouting incorporates being girl led, with experiential, and cooperative learning around life skills, STEM, entrepreneurship, and outdoor experiences. The programming addresses developing a strong sense of self, healthy relationships, and community problem solving.
In order to address the multifaceted impact of incarceration on our community, our GSBB programs are expanding in order to meet the needs of the girls in our communities. We will be partnering with re-entry services, men’s prisons, and other community based programs.

These new programs will provide opportunities for girls across the criminal justice spectrum, dealing with newly-incarcerated family members to girls with family members re-entering the community after incarceration.

We want girls to recognize and feel empowered by their resilience and to truly know that they are girls of courage, confidence, and character who make the world a better place.
Questions?

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