



Hi Friends,

### “Call Me Daddy”

“Daddy, please” is music to a father’s ears when his little girl pleads for something new. “What’s up, dad” is the tone dad senses when his son is pleased with how well they play ball together. These are typical expressions for close nuclear families: father, mother, and children.

Yet Thursday, August 16, 2012 children experience these same expressions at a bonding visit with their fathers at a most unusual place, Wakulla Correctional Institution Annex, Crawfordville, Florida. Children, ages three to eighteen, waited patiently to greet their dads with smiles and hugs in the visitation park, visits usually set aside for Saturdays and Sundays.

Fifty five percent of inmates in state correctional institutions and forty five percent in federal correctional facilities have never had personal visits by their children, per the *Department of Justice, 2000*. Also current statistics states that seventy percent of children of inmates will follow their parents to prison. Living Stones, as a team member of the Service Network in Miami, Florida is making inroads to reduce the number of children following their incarcerated parent to prison by providing the opportunity for children to develop closer ties with their parents through quarterly bonding visits. The program called the Service Network: Children of Inmates has provided these visits for the last five years in state prisons within Region III. The network provided case management, mentors, and referral services to over 2,000 children throughout Broward and Miami counties. They also extend these services to caregivers and incarcerated parents.



[Link to our website!](#)

As a member of this network, Living Stones is building this same team concept here in Region I. Wakulla Correctional Institution Annex is the first state prison in Region I to have this opportunity for children to bond with their incarcerated parents. This makes one hundred and seven visits by the Service Network, but it is Living Stones' first bonding visit.

There is always talk that criminals should be locked up and the key thrown away; but we also throw away families, i.e. fathers, mothers, aunts, uncles, brothers, sisters, boyfriends, girlfriends, children, sons and daughters. *"The United States has the highest prison population rate in the world, 756 per 100,000 of the national population, followed by Russia (629), Rwanda (604), St Kitts & Nevis (588), Cuba (c.531), U.S. Virgin Island (512), and British Virgin Island (488)."* This ranking was completed by King's College London International Centre for Prison Studies and highlighted in an article appearing in the *Wall Street Journal*, October 2009. In the United States, Florida ranks number three lagging behind California and Texas.

When men and women are incarcerated, children experience immediate effects from feelings of guilt and shame, to fear of abandonment, and financial loss. Over time these effects become long term, resulting in maturation regression or inability to cope with stress and trauma, anger issues, and may become a generational occurrence. Regular contact with incarcerated parents decreases these symptoms over time.



Children in both father and mother absent homes are more likely devoid of what psychologists call, social capital, the benefits of children learning *"What is a healthy relationship."* Regular contact with their incarcerated parent is essential for their healthy development, their coping mechanisms, as well as aid parents with their own recidivism (ability not return to prison) and reentry. The benefits are measureable as it has been shown in the Miami area with a single digit recidivism rate among this inmate population, but overall may help with repairing relationships, correcting incarcerated parent's image in their children's eyes, teaching children they are not alone, preventing termination of parental rights, healing grief and loss, as well as preparing inmates for release. It gives inmates the impetus to look at completing their education for those without a high school diploma, seek out certification classes to help them with employment after they are release, and make better effort towards keeping in contact with their child by writing letters.

Back to the visit, it was a wonderful experience. Seven fathers, ten children, and assistance by twelve staff and volunteers from Living Stones, as well as countless Wakulla staff witnessed a miracle—bonding between parent and

child. What we learned August 16<sup>th</sup> is this is a worthwhile event. Children need their fathers and mothers and miss them, too. Developing deeper bonds are timely. Eric Lane, Regional Warden for Region I, stated *“we had him within the first five minutes when he saw the kids’ faces light up and eyes open wide as they saw their dads coming in for the visit.”*

What we are looking for are partners and team members to join us—Living Stones. Our goal is to extend and build the Service Network in the Big Bend area (Region I). Services include: quarterly bonding visits throughout the four county areas: Gadsden, Jefferson, Leon, and Wakulla, mentoring children, providing case management services for children and families, facilitating programs and services to fill the void of what families and children need, as well as referral services to other providers throughout the network.

[Link to our website!](#)

Unlike the Service Network in Miami, whose funding source is through the Children’s Trust Fund, Living Stones operates on one hundred percent private donations. We are looking for a consortium of funders to implement the Children of Inmates’ program within the Big Bend Region.

When we speak, it takes a village to raise a child, these words ring truer for Children of Inmates than most other populations. According to Travis, *Families Left Behind: The Hidden Costs of Incarceration and Reentry*, it will take a broad consortium of communities to embrace and support families of incarcerated parents. This includes our schools, foster care agencies, youth serving organizations, private investors, and government working hand in hand to overcome the issues that plague our Children of Inmates. Travis *“recognizes the important role that families can play in successful reintegration, to minimize the harm experienced by the children of incarcerated parents, and to promote strong and healthy families for each prisoner.”*



The Children of Inmate program is vital to keep children on a constructive rather than destructive behavioral course. Living Stones knows it works as it has for five years within Miami, Florida. Of course, we liked to say it works one hundred percent, but not always. What we believe is that it makes a difference in one life and that’s all we’re looking for is to make a difference in that one child’s life. We are looking for compassionate people and organizations willing to step up and help children of inmates and their families through this crisis by being available for much needed programs and services.

Living Stones’ Board of Directors, staff, and volunteers are excited about how this program is already having positive influence on children and

family members we are working with currently. Our post-event ended at Chucky Cheese. The best thing I saw was the ability for children to bond together feeling they are not alone in this experience of having an incarcerated parent. We, adults have some learning to do—“to be like little children.”



It takes a village. Living Stones sends a warm thank you to those that donated to our first bonding visit—Shellie Solomon, Service Network; Pepsi; Target; McDonald’s; Rhonda Smith, First Baptist Church; Bishop Philip and Violet Speights; Dave Fritz, The African Book Project; Virginia Spooner; Mattie Johnson; Lashonda Moore; Jacqueline Adams; Keisha Davis and Janice Brown, Fresh Start Day Care; and

Gospel Express Ministries South, Tallahassee, Florida; Scottie Barnes at Forgiven Ministry, Taylorville, NC; and Debbie Walsh, Child Evangelism Fellowship, St. Louis, MO.

To our volunteers, Living Stones is humbled by your attendance and staying with us to the end, even attending Chucky Cheese with the children and caregivers. You’re a blessing. A special thank you is also extended to the wardens, classification staff, and officers at Wakulla Correctional Institution for making this day very special for the inmates, their children, and Living Stones’ staff and volunteers. We believe we’re onto something to make a difference in a child’s life—***“People don’t care how much you know, until you show them how much you care!”***

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