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August 16, 2013



Happy 1st Anniversary

LIVING STONES INTERNATIONAL

OP-ED— Happy 1st Anniversary: Children of Inmates

One year, 12 months, 52 weeks, 365 days, 8700 hours, 525,600 months, and 31,536,000 seconds have gone by since Living Stones took their first twenty children to visit their incarcerated fathers at Wakulla Correctional Institution Annex. The mission, which our organization so gladly accepted is helping parents raise their children regardless of where they are in life. And it's about the CHILDREN. So one year later the program has been extended to two other camps—the Main Unit and Work Camp; the number of children has grown to fifty-five, with proven benefits that the program works, to the incarcerated parents reconnecting to their children, to mothers, aunts, grandmothers, and caregivers, whom now feel they are not alone in raising their children. The caregivers now want their children to participate in such a program—to stay connected to dad.

It doesn't appear that this much time has evolved from that first visit, but as an organization we have learn so much about ourselves, the community, and the families and children we serve. As a non-profit and faith-based organization, the services we provide are for everyone regardless of whether they may donate or not. Usually, many families desire to volunteer where they can to give back to the organization. We are so blessed that way. The community has responded to lending a helping hand. We first want to thank The Service Network, our umbrella organization, which makes a lot of what we do easy by assisting us with the forms, the protocol for operating with the Florida Department of Corrections, and just to hear our feedback; secondly, we are grateful to First Baptist Church and Jacob Chapel Baptist Church for their keeping our arms lifted through volunteering their staff's time, vehicles for transportation and a staging area to meet our families and children; and thirdly, we give thanks to the many givers in this region, whether through donation of books, stuffed animals, and money. Our interns and volunteers are invaluable and they assist us as do the others to keep this program running.

Our greatest gift; though, are the Children of Inmates; the ones that are forgotten about, hidden in the corner, and have a secret that they're not openly wanting to discuss. That they have a parent incarcerated in prison or jail. They have been such an awesome group, all of

our tutored children passed to the next grade level, FCATS, too, are more willing to learn new things, and most of all so grateful for the program.

The testimonies are endless—*“how this program is the only way to see my dad; wow—after visiting my dad whom I haven’t seen in 10 years made my decision to attend college easier; and without this program we couldn’t afford to spend gas money to see him.”*

August 16, 2013 marks our First Anniversary for the Children of Inmates’ Program. The Service Network’s research proves that ***“70% of children of incarcerated parents will not follow their parents to prison,”*** which is the very opposite of what the actual statistics illustrates. Through a program like ours, we are lowering these stats. With the continued support of this community, our neighbors, other businesses and organizations, and any of you who feel compelled to support us, the Children of Inmates’ Program is here to stay.

The Service Network has almost six years of research, a network of thirteen organizations, assisted over 2,000 children with bonding visits and other needs, marked over 110 visits, and motivated caregivers with new opportunities, like education, careers, and learning how to be a better caregiver. We’ll keep you posted on our next stop. Helping us is helping the children through a variety of things, i.e. transportation, providing mentors, tutors, volunteers, clothing, and school supplies. Living Stones believes that ***“people don’t care how much you know, until you show them how much you care.”***

Facts are this program has proven itself. The next major hurdle is finding the right mix of funding to keep it going. Did we say we have no contracts, no grants, and funding is 100% privately donated through fantastic givers like yourself. Do contact us to find out more information – (850) 765-0320 and visit our website to find out more about this and other programs — www.welivingstones.org. The Children of Inmates’ program is the start of a new era and we want to be responsible for part of the solution, and you may also be a part of the solution. Living Stones trusts that others like yourself will stand with us in this endeavor, bringing families together and making certain children of incarcerated parents reach their life goals—achieving success in every area of their life.



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