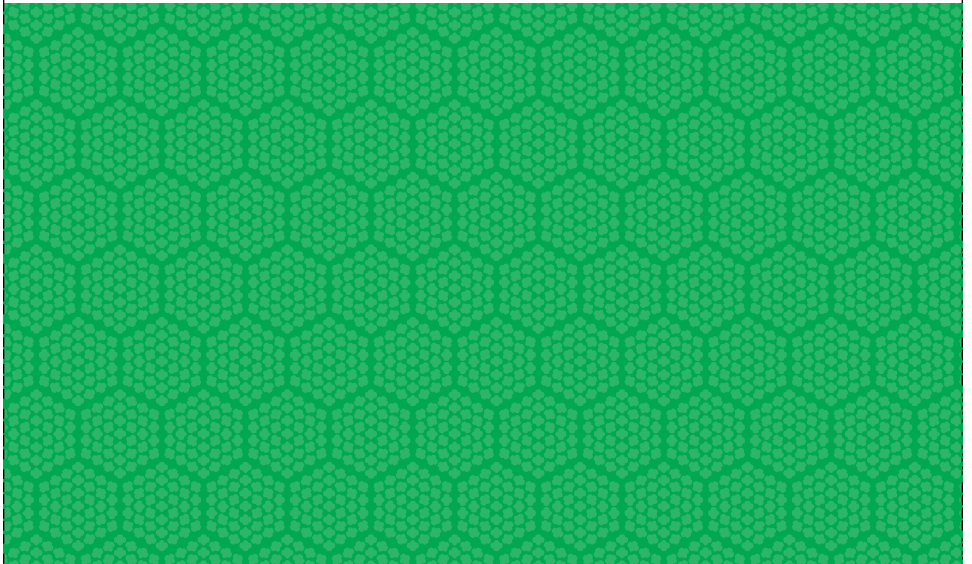




# GIRL SCOUTS BEYOND BARS

Providing a Better Path





# Girl Scouts Beyond Bars



This publication was made possible by a generous grant from the Department of Justice-Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (DOJ-OJJDP)

WRITTEN BY: Fiona Soltes

DESIGNED BY: Sondra Murphy Creative

PHOTOGRAPHY BY: John Lair

All GSBB participants photographed within participate in the Girl Scouts Beyond Bars program hosted by the Girl Scouts-Arizona Cactus-Pine Council.

© 2012 by Girl Scouts of the USA

# PROVIDING A BETTER PATH



When a girl's mother is in prison, there is something significant missing from her life: A loving embrace. An encouraging word. A lasting connection with an influential role model. These absences are only compounded by embarrassment about where Mom is—or why she is there.

And there are many such girls. Across the country, 1.7 million children—half of them under the age of 10—have a parent in prison, according to advocacy and research group The Sentencing Project.

*“We took two new girls to see their mothers after months of waiting due to state budget cuts. One girl had not seen her mother in over five years; the other girl had not seen her mother in over seven years.... The reunion was such an emotional sight—even the typically tough corrections officer was choked up. There wasn’t a dry eye in sight as we watched these girls and their mothers get to know each other again.”*

**Girl Scouts  
Spirit of Nebraska’s  
New Directions**



# The Program

When the mother is the one incarcerated, children are most likely to be raised by someone other than a parent, such as a grandparent, relative, or other caregiver. Only about a fourth remain with their fathers.

No matter what her living situation, the sad result is an environment in which the girl is more likely to withdraw, show physical aggression, abuse substances, and exhibit depression and/or anxiety. She may even repeat the cycle, following her mother into the criminal justice system, representative of the only life she's known.

The Girl Scouts Beyond Bars program (GSBB) is designed to help these girls. It began in 1992 as a partnership between the National Institute of Justice and Girl Scouts of Central Maryland, and has grown to serve thousands of girls across the country. The national program equips girls ages 5 to 17 whose mothers are incarcerated with the tools they'll need to succeed—all the while strengthening the mother/daughter bond through regular visits.

GSBB has been funded nationally through the U.S. Department of Justice's Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention since 2003. Much of that funding provides transportation to the girls, many of whom live several hundred miles away from their mother's facility. Without GSBB, many girls would be unable to see their mothers often—if at all.

*"More of these girls would end up in the judicial system if not for the intervention of the Girl Scout program.... I have been volunteering for 18 years and I know that the program makes a difference in the lives of all of us. Our children are our future—all of our children, even the powerless ones."*

**Girl Scouts of  
Central Maryland's  
Girl Scouts Beyond Bars**





# MEETINGS BEHIND BARS



**G**irls with incarcerated mothers face many obstacles, but Girl Scouts of the USA believes that the ability to develop leadership skills shouldn't be among them. GSBB allows the girls access to materials, programs, and activities that foster leadership and growth. They have the opportunity to develop self-esteem and to make sound and healthy choices for their futures.

# The Experience

Typically, mother/daughter troop meetings occur bi-monthly at the correctional facility, and when not visiting the correctional facility, the girls might meet together for troop meetings and council-wide activities. The mothers also may gather once a month to meet with a licensed social worker or Girl Scout staff member to discuss and plan future troop meetings with the girls.

To ensure the experience specifically meets the needs of the girls, GSBB delivers the Girl Scout Leadership Experience by way of the resources that constitute the National Program Portfolio. In addition, in partnership with Independent Television Services' Community Classroom, GSUSA has blended their resource **This Is a Story You Have to Tell—Women, Girls and the Criminal Justice System** with the national Girl Scout program. This facilitator's guide, which is based on lessons rooted in three documentary films, opens up discussions and personal exploration on issues such as decision-making and resiliency, as it specifically relates to girls and women impacted by the criminal justice system.

The requirements for the mother to participate are high. She cannot be serving a sentence for a crime against children. And she must remain infraction-free for a specified time period. The program not only focuses on improving the daughter's future; it also offers the mother rich opportunities to attain important life skills while maintaining a relationship with her daughter.

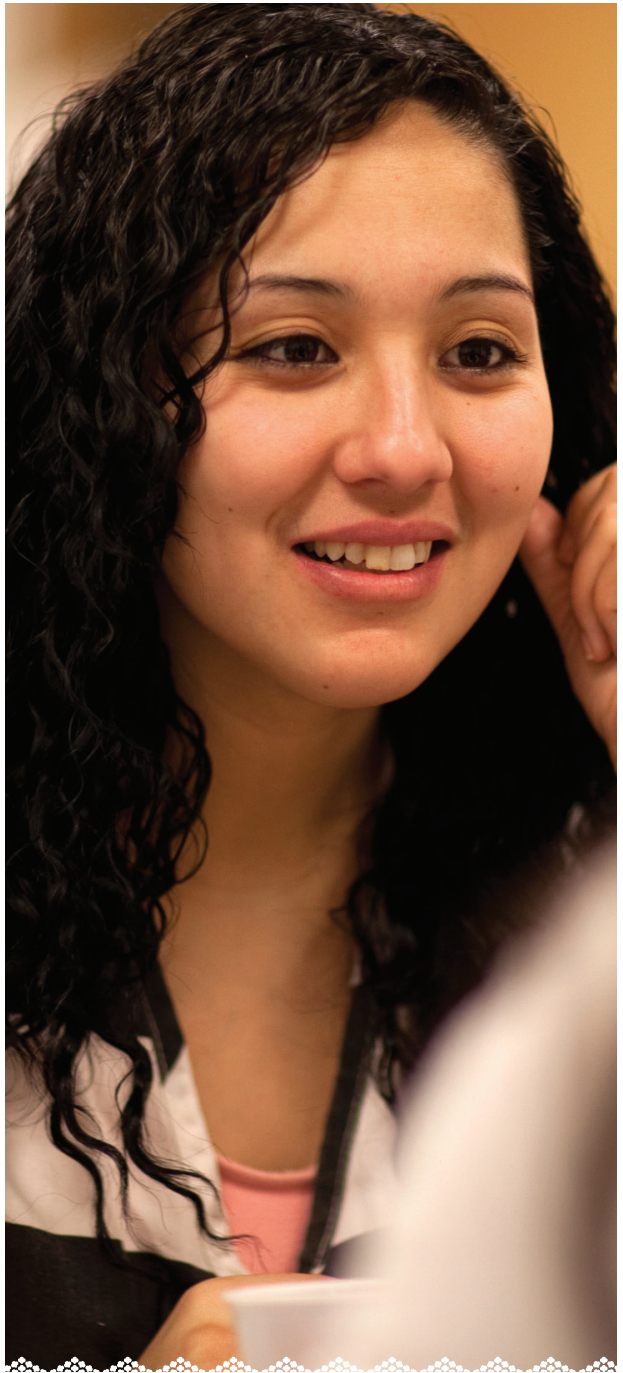
*"Being in the Girl Scout program reminds me that even though my mom and I are miles apart, when we look up in the sky, we see the same thing."*

**Girl Scouts of Central Maryland's  
Girl Scouts Beyond Bars**



*“Frances felt she was on the path to ending up incarcerated at a juvenile correctional facility, and didn’t even care about her future. But when she found out she was going to be able to see her mother for the first time in almost a year, she jumped at the chance and became a member of Girl Scouts Beyond Bars. She said it changed everything about her outlook and provided hope. She looks forward to going to school and college and visiting her mom every two weeks.”*

**Girl Scouts of Oregon  
and Southwest Washington’s  
Girl Scouts Beyond Bars**





# PROVEN SUCCESS



**T**he success of GSBB goes beyond anecdotal stories of mothers and daughters. To benchmark the program's efforts, the Girl Scout Research Institute evaluated the 2010–12 GSBB program cycle as a follow-up to an independent evaluation by CSR, Incorporated, released in 2008.

# KEY FINDINGS FROM THE 2012 EVALUATION INCLUDE:

## 1. GSBB improves the mother-daughter relationship.

- Seventy-seven percent of Girl Scout Seniors (grades 9–10) and Ambassadors (grades 11–12), and 86 percent of Girl Scout Juniors (grades 4–5) and Cadettes (grades 6–8), agree that they now have better relationships with their mothers.



## 2. GSBB helps girls develop healthy behaviors.

- Sixty-six percent of Girl Scout Juniors and Cadettes and 64 percent of Girl Scout Seniors and Ambassadors agree that since they've been in GSBB, they get in less trouble.
- Seventy-nine percent of Girl Scout Juniors and Cadettes, and 86 percent of Girl Scout Seniors and Ambassadors, agree that they are doing better in school since they've been in GSBB.
- Seventy-one percent of Girl Scout Juniors and Cadettes, and 79 percent of Girl Scout Seniors and Ambassadors, agree that since they've been in the GSBB program, they make healthier choices, such as eating better foods and quitting smoking.





### 3. GSBB promotes the development of leadership skills.

- Seventy-one percent of Girl Scout Seniors and Ambassadors, and 77 percent of Girl Scout Juniors and Cadettes, agree that since they've taken part in GSBB, they've become involved in community activities.
- Ninety-three percent of Girl Scout Seniors and Ambassadors, and 81 percent of Girl Scout Juniors and Cadettes, agree that they've had opportunities to help other people since they've been in the GSBB program.

**A**s for the mothers, they report that the program has helped them better handle stress and anxiety about their daughters, as well as learn necessary skills for functioning outside of prison—including how to parent more effectively.

Similar findings were reported in the 2008 evaluation, proving the success and impact of the GSBB program has been sustained over time.

*"I am thankful that my daughter is in this Girl Scout program, not just because I get to see her once a month, but because Girl Scouts is giving her skills she needs so that she does not follow the same path I took that got me in jail."*

**Girl Scouts of Hawai'i's Girl Scouts Beyond Bars**



## A TRUE COMMUNITY EFFORT

**G**irl Scouts of the USA, now 100 years old, has a strong legacy of community involvement and volunteer participation. Likewise, GSBB requires commitment from many angles, including cooperation from correctional facility administrations and dedication from the girls, their incarcerated mothers, their guardians, and Girl Scout staff and volunteers.



# Volunteer Support



Councils partner with local and state agencies, schools, universities, religious organizations, and local businesses; those partners might provide meeting spaces, transportation, volunteers with particular content expertise, or program supplies. But more than that, they share a passion for seeing these girls—tomorrow’s leaders—succeed.

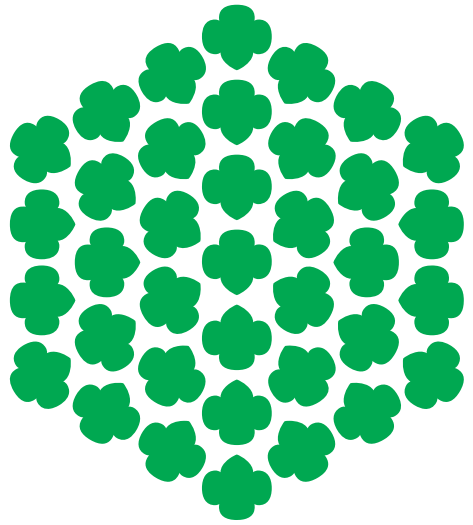
Opportunities abound for investing in Girl Scouts Beyond Bars—monetarily and otherwise. Strategic partnerships and volunteer involvement can help expand its reach, not only in the geographic areas it already serves, but in new ones. In addition, the program can continue to grow in its holistic approach with added life-skill services and offerings for mothers and guardians.

Their future—our own future—is at hand.

*“In the beginning of Girl Scouts, life skills were about how to survive in the wilderness. Now it’s about how to survive in the wilderness—the wilderness of the culture.”*

**Troop 1500,  
Girl Scouts of Central Texas**





For more information regarding the Girl Scouts Beyond Bars program, including a listing of Girl Scout councils who currently host the program, as well as access to **THIS IS A STORY YOU HAVE TO TELL: Women, Girls, and the Criminal Justice System A FACILITATOR'S GUIDE FOR GIRL SCOUTS BEYOND BARS PROGRAMS**, please visit [www.girlscouts.org](http://www.girlscouts.org) and SEARCH: Girl Scouts Beyond Bars



# Girl Scouts Beyond Bars

**Girl Scouts of the USA**  
420 Fifth Avenue  
New York, New York 10018  
[girlscouts.org](http://girlscouts.org)

