

Visiting Day

Author: Jaime Joyce

TIME for Kids

Most kids are sound asleep at 2:45 in the morning, but on a Saturday this past summer, two sisters were up way past their bedtime. They were waiting for a bus. When it pulled up outside Saint Columba church, in Oakland, California, the girls jumped out of the SUV they were waiting in. They darted across the parking lot and confidently climbed aboard.

The girls were full of nervous energy. That's because they were on their way to visit their mom, Donisha, in prison, through a special program called Get on the Bus.

When a person is found guilty of breaking the law, he or she can be sent to jail or prison. Jail is usually for a shorter sentence, while prison is for a longer sentence.

In the United States, about 2.7 million children have a parent in jail or prison, according to a report from the Pew Charitable Trusts. That's one in 28 kids.

Experts say visiting a parent who is incarcerated can have a positive effect on a child. But prisons are often far from where families live, and travel can be expensive.

Get on the Bus takes kids to see parents at 13 prisons throughout the state of California. The program provides free transportation and food. It's run by the Center for Restorative Justice Works (CRJW), a nonprofit group based in the Los Angeles area. In 2019, Get on the Bus trips will run from April through June.

Five hours, 100 miles, a stop to pick up more passengers, and a breakfast break later, our bus pulls up to Folsom State Prison. Three more buses follow. They've been on the road since Friday night, for nine to 10 hours. In all, 120 family members have come to see 32 incarcerated loved ones

Donisha and her girls go outside to jump rope. Nearby, 13-year-old Isacc and his mom, Tasha, are playing basketball. "You've gotten so big," she says as she dribbles. Another mom cracks jokes. "It just gives us hope," her daughter Jasmine, 21, says, as Daisy, 12, and Mary Jane, 10, look on. "It makes us look forward to when she gets out and we can put our family together again."