



GRANDMOTHERS
OF THE LIGHT

Thank yous and hugs

Hello there,

I am writing to thank you for your hospitality last month when I along with four young girls were on our way to Chowchilla to visit the mom of two of the girls via the Chowchilla Family express. This was the first time we ever traveled to see their mom since she was transferred, and everything you provided for us that morning made such a difference on the trip. We had been told we were going to stop to eat breakfast provided by a wonderful group of people Grandmothers of the Light, but when they saw all the goodies, cards and pre stamped envelopes you provided, they were ecstatic.

THANK YOU SO MUCH, we really appreciate what you do for all the children and families in broken homes.

May Our Lord continue to bless you during this season when we await for the commemoration of the birth of Our Savior.

In His Love,

Martha JimÉnez

Brianna and Natalie Machado-Jimenez, and Gabriela and Angeles Jimenez

I am going to attend a NYS Kinship Care summit next month and have already emailed your site to the organizers there. I am going back in to your site to read more now. Having raised 2 children whose dad did 25 years, I am honored to know that you are doing this work for children, their caregivers and all of us.

Alison Coleman

Director

Prison Families of New York, Inc.

40 North Main Avenue

Albany, NY 12203

518-453-6659

518-453-6792 fax

alison.coleman@rcda.org

www.prisonfamiliesofnewyork.org

For more information:

Please call 1-866-484-GOTL

Or visit our website:

www.grandmothersofthelight.org

I just wanted to thank everyone for your kindness and generosity. I just went on this last trip to Chowchilla and we made a stop to have breakfast provide by the grandmothers of the light. It was such an experience it was unbelievable it was wonderful. I felt like Queen for a Day. Thank-you so much from my daughter and I. Thank-you for you time to volunteer out of your life to make ours a better one. You all are blessing from God! I just can't express how grateful I feel to have found The Family Express and everyone else that makes it what it is. Thank-you again and God Bless you all. *Juanita*

Nice to see the well due recognition spread beyond Madera. Charli Eaton and her Grandmothers of the Light, not only provide a real service for the kids riding the Chowchilla Family Express, but have been the lead in getting a Christmas Goodie Bag program instituted at Valley State Prison this year. The woman is tireless, and I can't say enough about the way she has gone bravely into fundraising to make things happen for the incarcerated and their children. I expect to be picking up several pallets of toiletries that have been donated from around the State.

Vic Abrunzo

Dear Charli:

I wanted to take a moment after reading the article in the Madera Tribune about your recent trip to the women's facilities up here. I think it is a wonderful service you provide for these children. I know what it is like to have to get up at midnight and make a 4 hour drive to visit a loved one with a child. My son and I did this ritual every month for almost 5 years. My son grew up visiting his father in prison. I know my 5 years is nothing compared to some of the men, women, and children that have years and sometimes a lifetime that they have to endeavor such a mentally, emotional toll on themselves. Our trip finally came to end this past summer with my husband coming home safely. I prayed to God everyday to watch over him and to bring home and he did and for that I am thankful. I can just imagine the criticism that your organization must come across from society. Just based on my experiences over the 5 years I did this. I was told I was wasting my time, why are you doing this, once a criminal always a criminal, he's never going to change, how can you subject your child to this, my list can go on. However what society does not understand is that unless you have walked in the same shoes or it has impacted your life then they will never understand. Your organization is doing an awesome service to these children and I hope one day that it can grow with donations so that it can not only services the mothers in prison but the fathers as well. I have sat in visiting rooms where I have seen the inmate walk through the door and just the sight of their families light up their face. We are everything to inmates. Yes some are a revolving door but we should never give up hope but then there are some inmates who were young and did a stupid thing. Whether it was their first offense or the 10th we should never give up hope. I wish financially I could contribute something to your organization, however my family is still paying and will be paying for years to come the bills we encumbered visiting our family member. The phone calls, the gas, the hotels, the food, it all adds up. But I was and I am willing to sacrifice for my family, especially if it meant my son knowing who his father is. If I had to do it over again I would.

In closing I was to say thank you and most of all God Bless you. I thank God for people like you! H. Young

Dear Charli:

I am an Associate at Savage & Savage, P.A., and I read with sincere appreciation your encouraging words for our client Sametta Heyward. Sametta is a good mother who suffered a great tragedy while struggling to make a life for her children. She is yet another example of a single mother living in poverty and struggling to make ends meet.

Oftentimes, many of us take the bare necessities of life for granted. In coming home after a day at work and flipping a light switch, we immediately expect light. In going to the refrigerator, we immediately expect to find food. In driving our cars, we immediately expect to have enough gas to get us to our destinations. Not so with Sametta and so many single mothers like her. The struggle that poor working mothers face is constant, and it is real. Not having enough money for utilities or groceries or gas is something that many single mothers face on a daily basis, and I speak from past experience, not handed-down stories.

I visited your website, and I applaud you for the work that you are doing on behalf of children and families. We need more organizations like yours to help maintain and strengthen relationships that are damaged due to incarceration. Please keep me updated on your progress and future endeavors.

I will be sure to ask Sametta if she received the items you sent to her. You can also send any correspondence for Sametta to me at the address listed below, and I will make sure that she receives it.

Thanks again for your encouragement. Blessings to you as you continue your great work!

Margie A. Pizarro, Esq.

Hello Good Friends...here is the report from this morning. To which I would only add that for me it was a absolute joy to see the stuffed animals I have been housing all year being loved and cuddled by their new owners. My heart just melted when my MOST favourite and adorable stuffed yellow duck found its way into the arms of a little boy who wouldn't let go of his new duck. From toddlers to teens, every single boy and girl had a soft, cuddly friend to carry on the bus and then home. One very engaging 10 year old girl selected a white polar bear which she promptly named "Puff"..I asked her about the name..isn't Puff the name of a certain Magic Dragon? Oh yes, but didn't I know that THAT Puff was green and a dragon, and couldn't I see that this was Puff the Polar Bear? Well, of course! She wanted to take Puff to meet her mom whom she herself had not seen in 4 years. Imagine. After having boarded the bus at midnight, she and her grandmother could hardly wait for the visit...and I imagine her mom was so happy to see her little girl, Puff or no Puff, this was a magical moment.

Best wishes to all for a wonderful week.

Nancy

Dear Charli,

The news about the lockdown was hard, because I know how it feels, especially on the little ones. You two are doing an amazing job, God bless you both and I will always be here with pen and paper to write anything that either of the two of you would like to say, good-bad, about the work you do, the prison system treating you well??? My heart is with you.

Much love and prayers,

Dee Mariano

FAN Editor

Dear Charli,

God Bless you & all your volunteers, for giving these children a full tummy and a smile on their face! No one is more deserving of this act of kindness and attention. Thanks for including our name in in y our email for our small part!

MARGIE PALERMO

Dear Charli:

An amazing, amazing day at CCWF. I arrived just after the busses (mistake on my part in terms of wait time to be processed as a visitor)...and just marveled at seeing all the kids and their companions waiting to see their mom or sister or grandmother or daughter....it was really heartwarming and I have to say that the comments I heard about their breakfast stop in Madera were just incredible. Really. I don't know if you, in the midst of all the activity, last minute millionth question, lost wallet, mismatched shoes, crying babies, homesick little boy, fussy siblings...in the midst of all this, I wonder if you know how much that breakfast stop meant? "Food for an army." "You should have seen all the food." "Boy, someone must have worked all night so everyone could have breakfast." "I was so glad they had breakfast, we didn't have anything to eat before we got the kids ready and I don't have much money with me so I wan't hungry when I got here and I can buy my daughter a nice lunch." "Sharing breakfast with some other grandmothers who are raising their kids like me was really important, I can see that I'm really not alone in this." "I met a really nice girl today and her auntie is going to invite me over to play, they don't live too far from me and my grandma." "I'm trying to remember everything we had to eat to tell my ma, cause she don't think we eat enough but we sure ate a lot today." "Those people who met us? They were real nice, like, they just seemed, you know, happy to help us out." So, even though I had to wait over an hour and a half to be processed (usually I wait about 15 to 20 minutes) it was OK because I got to see for myself how important the Chowchille Express is and how important your breakfast stop is for food and fellowship and the sense of belonging. I met a mom who was visiting her daughter for the first time in two years...Why? She doesn't have a car, she lives in LA, she doesn't have the money to take a regular bus, stay overnight in a hotel and a taxi to the prison and back...she was crying when she told me this...and here I am, a complete stranger, we just happened to be standing together in the long line to use the microwave. Her daughter has another two years to serve, so mother is hoping the bus service will contine, "next time, I'm going to bring my other children with me." "My daughter is coming home next year, after 10 years here, I've been raising her kids and I'll probably still have them, but they need to know their mother and she need to know them, this is such a good way to begin." So, for all you did to make this happen, Charli, thank you so much.

Dear Charli,

I apologize that it has taken me so long to send this heart felt **THANK YOU** to all of you who put on the wonderful breakfast for our bus to Chowchilla on June 24th. You have absolutely no idea how much that gesture and the all the wonderful gifts the children received meant to myself and my Grandchildren (5 of them) that I am caring for in my daughters absence. The children still talk about it and enjoy their gifts everyday. It was a hugh bright light in their little lives to not only receive your wonderful attention and gifts but to see their Mother. I am unable to take them on my own and if it wasn't for the Chowchilla Express, Get on the Bus and wonderful organizations like yours it would never have been possible. We didn't learn about the first bus until my daughter had already been incarcerated for 10 months with no contact with the children except the mail because I do not have a house phone only a cell phone which she can not call collect. Since first learning of the bus programs in May we have been able to see my daughter 3 times already and I can see just how much that has helped the children, as well as myself. **Thank you** and **Thank God** for your wonderful organization. I want to help in anyway I can from now on. I live in the Antelope Valley and if you need anything from this area **PLEASE** feel free to call on me at anytime and I will do whatever I can to help. I am unable to help at this time in a monetary way but I have lots of free time I can donate to help out. Once again please thank everyone that was involved that wonderful day of June 24th.

Best Regards, Gayle Gilbert