



## Teen raises funds to support prison visits

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Each year, thousands of children visit parents incarcerated in the California penal system.

Ciara Main, a senior at St. Joseph High School, can sympathize with them, and on Wednesday she helped organize a "Get on the Bus" fundraiser to make those visits a little more comfortable.

Main and her fellow club members sold bowls of rice at the school – in an Ash Wednesday "Rice Bowl Day of Fasting" – to help raise money and awareness for their cause. The students are putting together "Stay In Touch Bags" for the children who participate in the program.

The bags include note cards, pens and stamps, which allow them to write letters to their parents, along with a disposable camera and a photo frame. Each child also receives a teddy bear for the journey home.

Children from Santa Rosa to San Diego participate in the program, which covers seven prisons throughout the state, including California Men's Colony outside San Luis Obispo.

When she was very young, Main visited her father, who was in jail at the time. That experience inspired her to become president of the school's Get on the Bus Club, a small portion of a statewide effort to unite families.

"I just remember taking long trips," Main said. "I was very young at the time."

Those trips allowed her to stay close to her father, who was eventually released from jail. Main said it kept her family together and now she wants to help children in the same situation.

St. Joseph High and St. Louis de Montfort Parish are partnering to sponsor a bus. Each bus is about a \$7,000 commitment, according to Sister Theresa Harpin. Rich and Linda Antles, with St. Louis de Montforte, are coordinating the local bus.

"Four years ago we had four buses. Now we have 15 buses," Harpin said of the statewide effort. "It all started with this idea of restorative justice – reuniting children with their parents. It's something that brings healing and forgiveness."

Locally, buses from as far away as San Diego will travel to CMC on June 5 and 12, prior to Father's Day. Area students 18 or older help welcome the families when they arrive and coordinate the visits.

Main, who recently turned 18, plans to be part of the welcome for the first time.

"I do believe those kids look to us. There's a connection," she said, knowing their visits can last much longer than the four hours they are at the prison. "I was the reason (my dad) straightened out his life."

For more information on the Get On The Bus program, visit the Web site [www.getonthebus.us](http://www.getonthebus.us) or call local organizers at 544-2357, ext. 32.