

A Weekly FAX from the Center for Substance Abuse Research

University of Maryland at College Park*

Girl Scouts Behind Bars in Maryland

by Marie Ragghianti

The Girl Scouts of America have been around for decades. Most of us are familiar with the Brownie uniform and the Girl Scout Uniform. Who in America has not purchased at least one box of Girl Scout cookies through the years?

There is one locality, however, where Girl Scouts were *not* a familiar sight, where girl scout cookies were *not* sold. Who ever heard of Girl Scouts in prison?

But things are about to change, thanks to a nine-month-old project funded by the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) which has attracted national attention. The innovative program, conceived by NIJ's Marilyn Moses, brings Girl Scouts twice monthly to the Maryland Correctional Institution for Women (MCIW) in Jessup. The MCIW scouting troop, which meets alternate weeks in the community, includes girls whose mothers are residents at the penitentiary.

According to Maryland Deputy Commissioner of Correction Melanie Pereira, "about 80% of the women (at MCIW) are mothers. It is estimated that three children are affected for every incarcerated mother in Maryland."

At the bi-weekly meetings held at the prison, mothers and daughters address issues which are relevant to the times, including prevention of drug abuse, teen pregnancy, self-esteem, and coping in family crises.

The short term goal of the "Girl Scouts Behind Bars" program is to reduce the trauma sustained by the child as a result of separation from her mother. The long term goal is to reduce the likelihood that the daughters of mothers in prison will engage in antisocial or delinquent behavior in the future.

For more information, contact Marilyn Moses at the National Institute of Justice in Washington, D.C. (202) 514-6205.

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