

Calicinto Ranch's BGGPF offers children of prisoners' new hope

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Rebuild Thrift Store located 723 W. Main St. in San Jacinto provides funding for the Boys and Girls of Prisoner's Foundation Calicinto Ranch and is operated by the ranch family and volunteers. Tony Ault photo

There isn't anything much more devastating for a young child to see, than policemen, who they are often taught to respect and turn too in case of an emergency, suddenly come into their home and take their parent or parents away in handcuffs.

Unfortunately, this scene happens all too often as crime continues to increase in our nation. In fact, the Department of Justice recently reported there are 2.3 million children of prisoners. 7.3 million children have a parent under some form of correctional supervision.

Then of those, 22 percent of children with a parent in prison are under 5-years-old; 58 percent of children are under 10; the average age is 8-years-old.

One in five children is present at their mother's arrest. Children of prisoners are labeled the most "at risk" children in the nation. There are an estimated 70,000 children with one of more parents incarcerated in Southern California alone.



Sophia Perilli tends one of the BGPF's Calicinto Ranch's Karakul lambs raised at the historic sheep ranch in San Jacinto. Children of incarcerated parents and foster children are invited to the ranch through churches, law enforcement agencies, DPSS, and other groups to have some time for peace and understanding. Tony Ault photo

The Pirelli family, founders of the Boys and Girls of Prisoner's Foundation's Calicinto Ranch in San Jacinto, chose to do something about this problem because of a

child's cry to God in a Sunday School classroom for his daddy that was taken away to prison in 2002.

Sunday school teacher Sophia Pirelli shared with her family how this little boy's tears and pain touched her heart. That day the family

said the Lord but a desire and passion in their hearts to serve and minister to the vulnerable children of incarcerated parents. At that point the family chose to dedicate the family ranch to the high-risk forgotten hurting and needy young victims.

The family had been hosting and serving Riverside County's Department of Social Services as a foster family group home for teens since 1995. Pirelli said the all agreed the Lord was directing their steps to continue to use this historic Karakul Sheep ranch to minister to the motherless and fatherless children of prisoners and foster children. The sheep and lambs raised at the ranch are from the Holy Lands in the Middle East.

Sophia said as the family began to research what services, ministries and programs were available for these children, they came across some staggering statistics. According to the justice system found these children were seven times more likely to become involved in the juvenile justice system and their peers.



Joanne Pirelli, right, manager of Rebuild Thrift Store, shows customer Shirley Molina some items for Valentine's Day for sale at the thrift store. All proceeds from the Thrift store are donated to the nonprofit BGPF Calicinto Ranch in San Jacinto that provide a place for children of prisoners to find some fun and peace with caring volunteers. Tony Ault photo



A highlight for the children staying at the ranch is this trail ride in the foothills surrounding the ranch. Tony Ault photo

"Our hope is to redirect children's lives so they will start new traditions and will break the cycle of crime that was set before



Sophia Pirilli helps this little girl saddle up for a ride around the historic Calcinto sheep ranch in San Jacinto. Tony Ault photo

them,” said Pirelli. “To give them hope for a fulfilled, productive life so they can make a difference in their families, schools and communities. These children are shown `remodeling through modeling.”

Today, BFPF Calcinto Ranch welcomes children from any and all cities in the 10 Southern California counties. The majority of the children visiting the ranch come from Riverside, San Bernardino, San Diego and Orange counties. The ranch offers a western setting with horses, hayrides, campfires, archery, swimming, and farm animals that takes the children out of their city environment and allows them the relax, have fun and experience encouragement, said Sophia.

In the years since the family began the children’s ministry, thousands of “Apple Seed Kids,” and “Achiever Leadership Teens,” as they like to call them, have found peace and happiness in their visit to the ranch and year around follow up events and activities. “Staying connected is very key to the success of the program,” added Pirelli.

The ranch is Biblically based and its program is designed to help meet the children’s specific needs to build the children’s character and trust. It includes the following.

Anger Resolution: The children and lavishes with love, kindness, respect and positive words. They are encouraged to be forgiving and merciful. The program Mentors pave the way for the children by being good examples and giving up their rights to have their way. The ranch uses the nationally known second Step program to teach problem-solving and anger resolution.



Bill Cramer, president of Star Milling Inc., acts as mentor with one of the children enjoying the Boys and Girls of Prisoners Foundation’s Calcinto Ranch. Cramer is also on the board of directors at the ranch. Tony Ault photo



Children, like this boy at the BGPF ranch, are encouraged to write letters to their incarcerated

Character Building: The children are taught Character Counts (International Accredited Program) and use many of the animal stories from Character First (Nationally Recognized Program. As the children hear how a deer shows attentiveness, they begin to learn how they too can demonstrate attentiveness.

Authority Restoration: Law enforcement officers from Southern California come and speak to the children about their responsibility to protect and serve them and the community. He or she shares how to be good citizens, and explain the importance of obeying the

parents by their mentors, sometimes breaking a barrier between them. Tony Ault photo

laws and knowing the consequences. For some of the children it will be the first time they are able to approach and officer without hate or fear.

Direction and Motivation: The fun of moving from one exciting activity to another from petting and holding young farm animals, to riding horses, playing volleyball, making crafts and playing country games helps them regain good attitudes. They are also encouraged to write letter of gratefulness, keeping things clean and tidy and just to make the right choices. The Mentors provide them with a meaningful relationship and the value of wholesome friends, and the importance of staying "on the right path."

The children are invited to the ranch through churches, prison fellowship Angel Tree Program, law enforcement officers, probation officers and public agencies. They spend three to five days at the ranch where they are greeted by a big "HOWDY" and "YEEE HAW!" from their assigned Mentors. The Mentors are volunteers from Christian churches in their neighborhoods from throughout Southern California. The boys are given their own bunks in the ranch bunkhouse and the girls have comfortable bedding in the main ranch house. Staff and volunteer cooks prepare delicious meals throughout their stay. Some say it is the best ranch food in the country.

Each day begins with singing and skits put on by the staff, wranglers and mentors. A big country breakfast follows.

After breakfast the children have opportunities to visit, pet and feed the ranches goats, lambs, chickens and other animals. Also planned for the day is horseback riding, arts and crafts projects. More singing and testimonies follow and the children are given some private time with their assigned mentors who are pleased to lend an ear to their deepest concerns, mostly about their parents. Campfires and s'mores are on the activity list in the evenings. The children are provided Bible stories for reading and study through the day and have Bible verse competitions for fun and surprises.

While at the camp members of the Hemet, San Jacinto, Murrieta Police Departments, Riverside County Sheriff's deputies, the Posse Team and Highway Patrolmen, some with their canine companions, may meet with the children to show law enforcement officers are concerned and caring for their life situations. "This is a very important and healing time for many of the children," Pirelli said.

Just before Christmas the success of this ministry was evident with more than 850 children and their families receiving Christmas gifts on behalf of the incarcerated parent(s). Red Robin Restaurants provided hamburgers and homemade chili, all the fixings and goodies for the event.

"They (Red Robin) have been a tremendous source of encouragement and hands on help for the ranch, the families really get to see there are a lot of people who care and give to make a difference in their lives," Pirelli added.

"Organizations such as Red Robin, CHiPs for children, CBS2/KCAL9, NRG Energy, CR&R, Pacific Dental, Century 21 Preferred, SCE, Star Milling, Control Air, Color Spot Nursery, Law Enforcement and Government agencies, the DA's Office, Service Clubs, Family Foundations, Prison Fellowship Ministries, and numerous Churches and Individuals make this all possible for so many (thousands) of children. she continued.

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