

Changing a Child's Life

By Andrea Torello—Director, Mobius, The Mentoring Movement

Since receiving the grant from The Vermont Women's Fund this spring, I have made two presentations on mentoring daughters of incarcerated women. Both groups were comprised of professional women, about 50 in all. Though I am experienced and felt well-prepared to motivate and engage potential volunteers, I was, in fact, not prepared for the questions these compassionate and intelligent women put forth.

I was asked, "Are the children angry and violent?" and "Will I have to take the child to prison to see her mom?" These are honest and important questions, and I was grateful for the candor of these women in asking them. It made me reflect back on my initial experience with these children last summer at Camp Agape, a camp for children with incarcerated parents.

I was invited to Camp Agape for the final lunch and farewell ceremony. The children there were like any others – exuberant, loud, silly, affectionate and very loveable. Did they arrive at camp that way? I don't think so. From what I was told by the camp founders and counselors, they were quiet, withdrawn, scared, and yes, some were even angry when they arrived. But they experienced a week of unconditional love and undivided attention from an amazing staff of dedicated volunteers— hence, the change in them

from Monday morning to Friday afternoon.

It was that Friday afternoon that I realized that Mobius needed to recruit mentors for these young

people; they deserved to experience the ongoing love and guidance of a caring adult to help them navigate their difficult lives.

So, how did I answer the questions I didn't prepare for? From my heart and from my thirty years of experience with children, I can confidently say this: *children of incarcerated parents are still children*. Their challenges may be more than we are comfortable thinking about or seeing up close, but these children will respond to love and caring in exactly the same way as other children; they will become loving and caring in return.

It's been proven over and over again: one caring adult is all it takes to turn someone's life around. Though I wholeheartedly acknowledge our collective hesitation, mentoring the daughter of an incarcerated mom may just be the foremost opportunity that any of us could be offered to change a child's life.

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For information on the Mobius' training programs and mentoring opportunities, please contact Andrea Torello at 802.658.8888 or andrea@mobiusmentors.org

