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**Jane Silfen-Goldman of Goldens Bridge**

By JANE K. DOVE

**A long road lies ahead for runner and families of incarcerated moms**

“Without our special Children’s Center program at the Bedford Hills Correctional Facility, many mothers and their children would simply lose touch with one another,” said Jane Silfen-Goldman of Goldens Bridge. “I find my work there enormously rewarding and know we are doing something very meaningful by helping to keep these families together.”



**Jane Silfen-Goldman**

Ms. Silfen-Goldman has worked at the Children’s Center as an administrative assistant for a year and a half. The Children’s Center is an agency of Catholic Charities Neighborhood Services and operates with the help of a grant from the New York State Department of Correctional Services. The center also receives donations from churches, local philanthropic organizations, private foundations, and individuals.

“In addition to working at the center, I decided to do some fund raising of my own,” Ms. Silfen-Goldman said. “I am an avid runner and on April 6, 2008, will be running in the More Marathon in Central Park.” The event, sponsored by More Magazine, will feature a full 26.2-mile marathon and a half-marathon. The event, like the magazine, focuses on women over the age of 40.

Ms. Silfen-Goldman said the money she raises on April 6 will go toward special transportation for the Children’s Center. Special transportation is a part of the program that provides private bus and car services for children to visit their incarcerated mothers. “Without this part of the program, a large proportion of children would see their mothers rarely, if at all,” she said. “It is a vital part of what we do.”

Inmates at the prison have pledged to support Ms. Silfen-Goldman on April 6 by walking in the facility “yard” for several hours. “Mothers that are able will pledge a dollar from their own inmate accounts toward the Children’s Center,” she said.  
Children’s Center programs

With its stark brick buildings surrounded by tall metal fencing topped with razor wire and searchlights, the Bedford Hills Correctional Facility looks much like other New York state prisons. But its special Children’s Center provides a welcome oasis of comfort and relief to mothers who want to foster an ongoing relationship with their offspring left behind.

The center lies within the prison walls and has one overriding mission — to sustain and rebuild parent-child bonds.

“Many children come on a regular basis to visit their mothers and manage to stay united over time,” Ms. Silfen-Goldman said. “We also reunite mothers and children that may have been separated for a while. The program is available to children from age 5 to 18.”

Ms. Silfen-Goldman said the prison program is multifaceted, and providing a way for children to get there on a regular basis is essential.

“Reliable transportation for day visits, family reunion overnight visits, and participation in our various programs for mothers and children is a key part of the program,” she said.

“Part of our grant from the Department of Corrections provides for buses from New York City, but not everyone lives there. So we have the special transportation program, financed exclusively by private

donations and serving other areas, including upstate. That is the program I will be raising funds to support.”

In addition to location-challenged families, special transportation is provided for children and families who are not able to use the regular buses because they have disabilities, are younger children traveling alone or are coming for visits from such long distances they may require help with expenses.

The special transportation program is also used for children participating in the center’s summer program and overnight program.

Ms. Silfen-Goldman said in addition to raising funds for the special transportation program, she hopes her running in the marathon will elevate awareness of the Children’s Center.

“We do a lot, and most people don’t know anything about us,” she said. “We need the support of individuals and families in this area for things like our overnight visits.”

The Children’s Center runs its overnight programs, in which children spend the day at the facility with their mothers and then stay with local “host” families in the evening, throughout the year. The center also runs a summer program in which children come for a week, some from as far away as Buffalo.

Ms. Silfen-Goldman said all the center’s programs aim to give children and their mothers real quality time together and help to strengthen and sustain the parent-child bond.

“We are always looking for more local host families, so the kids have a place to stay overnight when they come to visit,” she said. “Some come from long distances upstate, so the host families fill a very important role.”

The Children’s Center also runs a holiday program, which allows mothers to select donated new gifts for their children and give them to them when they come for a visit during the holidays. If a child cannot visit, the mother may send the child a donated gift certificate. The holiday program is also financed exclusively by private donations.

### **Marathon**

Ms. Silfen-Goldman said she has been training for the marathon for more than a year.

“I have only run in one other marathon, the 1992 New York City event,” she said.

“But around here I run every single day, through rain, snow, cold, and heat. I am well known on local roads. When my sister told me about the More Marathon, I decided to combine my love of running with doing something to help a cause that means a lot to me.”

Ms. Silfen-Goldman moved from Chappaqua with her three children, now students in the Katonah-Lewisboro schools, five years ago. She said she finds her duties at the Children’s Center very rewarding. “I feel I am making a difference in the lives of these mothers and children,” she said. “I believe there’s more to life than just making a lot of money.”

Ms. Silfen-Goldman said she hopes Ledger readers will help “spread the word” about the upcoming marathon and support her effort. “The road I will travel on April 6 is a long one but it is nothing compared to the road these children and their families have ahead of them,” she said.

Donations to Ms. Silfen-Goldman’s fund-raiser may be made payable to the “Children’s Center” and sent directly to the Bedford Hills Correctional Facility, 247 Harris Road, Bedford Hills, NY 10507. Please put “Attn: Children’s Center” on the outside of the envelope.

Anyone interested in learning more about the Children’s Center or becoming a program volunteer, including special transportation driving, may call Ms. Silfen-Goldman at 471-7897.