

Dascha Polanco's Fight For Incarcerated Women Of Color Is Something You Should Know

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On and off screen, Dascha Polanco is steadily creating a movement for social justice issues. The actress, best known for her role as Dayanara Diaz in Netflix's stellar *Orange Is The New Black*, is shining a light on the mass incarceration of women—particularly those of color.

At press time, it's estimated that women make up the **fastest growing number of inmates at jails**. Ultimately, most of these women are black or Latino. In 2014, the jail population rose to 110,000 compared to the approximate 8,000 women jailed in 1970. Most of these women are mothers.

READ: Dascha Polanco: "If I'm Not American Or Latina Enough, Then What Am I?"

Polanco has taken the initiative to raise awareness for the mass incarceration of women, and the reunification of their families in the process. Recently, the Dominican-American actress visited **Hour Children**, a non-profit organization based in Queens, New York, which caters to helping incarcerated and former convict mothers re-establish their lives with their children. *VIBE* chatted with Polanco about her experience and what's next in her fight for women behind bars.



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How has playing Dayanara Diaz on *OITNB* changed your perspective incarcerated women?

Dascha Polanco: The fact is that a show like *OITNB* opens your eyes to knowing that people make mistakes and there are real stories. Every narrative shared on *OITNB* is part of reality and things that happen in life. Our show brings this matter to life as it's been an issue that has been placed under the radar.

Have you used the experience you have helping Dominican prisoners with this new initiative?

Honestly, I do this not to obtain notoriety. It's simply to help others to obtain the right resources and educate them on their rights.

What do you think are some of the public's misconceptions about incarcerated mothers?

I think it's an issue that people see it more in a male dominated light. But, the case is we have mothers with families in the same situation and those cases are tough to battle.

Do you hope to make this a national movement? Can these housing facilities be something that can spread through-out the country?

Right now, I am starting with the basics, which is lending my voice on this matter and help Hour Children to bring to light to these real-life issues. I think if it turns into a movement it will be organically.

What did you learn once you toured Hour?

I truly felt the love in a four block radius. A love that was genuine to help their community and the women, and families in it. It was impressive to me how a community like Queensbridge has come together to help these women instead of judging them.

They have placed judgement to the side and have fought for them, and have helped these women start their lives again. They have provided hope to those who lost it at one point. I truly celebrate organizations like **Delivering Good**, who have the power muscle and join forces with smaller organizations like Hour Children. It's all about uniting.



CREDIT: Dynamic Theories

What was surprising about it? Is there anything you would do to improve the organization?

The surprising part is the true love placed into every detail. They have daycares, food pantries, clothing shops, apartments, job centers, training and fitness facilities for these women and their families. Each component was well thought out and funded for by a small community. I am not working with them to improve their model. I am joining forces with them to spread the word and continue their work.

What do you hope to do to end mass incarceration?

I'm starting simple and it's help educate those incarcerated of their rights with the right teams, and show they are not alone. Educating and sharing information goes along way, and provide hope for their families and after they are released.