

CHANGING MINDS CAMPAIGN

It is often hard for us to change our minds and even more difficult to change the minds of others. When it comes to changing the minds of the general public about people who have been incarcerated, it is even more difficult. That is why the new project from the *Illinois Institute for Community Law and Affairs Changing Minds Campaign* is so important. Check out this excerpt from their website and visit that site for more resources:

"The Campaign, in development over the last year, is intended to reduce the stigma that the public, the media, employers, legislators and too many others impose on persons released from prison and those serving their sentences with dignity. As a result of this stigma, persons released from prison face overwhelming obstacles to successful and meaningful reentry; and persons in prison are deprived of the opportunity to learn new skills to use on release; and legislators are afraid to do anything positive for prisoners and former prisoners, fearful of being labeled soft on crime. The Campaign, using a variety of approaches, is an experiment designed to learn what might change or modify the attitudes that create this terrible stigma. You will hear readings written by men in prison and former female prisoners, and read by people who served time at the prisons where the readings are set. You will participate in meaningful discussion with the readers, seeing, as others have at the 26 performances to date-that persons who have served long sentences for serious convictions can and have changed, that they are not a risk to society.

More info here: <http://illinoisinstitute.net/idea-exchange/>

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MALACHI DADS AND COMPANIONS PARTNER



Malachi Dads trains and equips inmates to become better fathers in an age when millions of children are growing up without dads who are in prison. Based on Malachi 4:6 from the Bible, the program develops inmates' skills in five key areas: fathering, spiritual, educational, moral and vocational skills. Companions has partnered with Malachi Dads at Kane County Jail. At the end of each parenting class, the men

record books for their children as part of our storybook project. As a result of this partnership, we now are able to work with male and female inmates.

LIBROS EN ESPAÑOL

While we are always in need of beautiful brand new children's books (see our website for a list of suggested books), we also need bilingual children's books in Spanish and English to assist parents who are not yet proficient in English. We feel it is important to have books in the first language of those we serve to ease their ability to communicate with their children. Thanks for your help in making this possible.



E-COMPANIONS



As we all attempt to "go green," Companions is increasing its presence on the internet. Starting with our website, we have updated our look and soon we will be adding more video and interactive opportunities. Special thanks to Mike and Neal for helping us manage our website.

Look for us on **Facebook** under "Companions Journeying Together" for updates, advocacy opportunities, thoughts from our Circle of Companions and fundraising events.

Some of you this month are receiving our first **E –JourneyNotes via e-mail**. If you would like to receive this newsletter electronically, please send us your email address and make your contribution via PayPal.

GRANT NEWS

We would like to thank the Riverboat Fund of Kane County for its generous grant of \$5,000 to upgrade our recording technology for Aunt Mary's Story Book. We will now be recording women and men reading to their children directly onto CDs that will be sent directly from prison.

WELCOME HOME BAGS

Thanks to all of you who contributed toiletries and other goodies for a women to take with them when they are released from Dwight Correctional Center. We are suspending our collection of these items until further notice because a reduction of staff has resulted in a backlog of these items at the prison.

CHRISTMAS CARDS

Now is the time to start your groups planning for our Christmas card project for 2010! We are asking that you deliver the stamped, signed cards to us by November 12th at the latest. We need to mail earlier because prison mail rooms are short staffed. These cards are really appreciated, and we are counting on your help again this year. Contact us for further directions.



STAFF AND BOARD NEWS

SEEKING NEW BOARD MEMBERS

Companions has an opening for Board Members. Our board guides the direction of the organization, raises money, networks with organizations and churches, and has a lot of fun. If you have time to meet once every six weeks, and have passion for the work that we do, please visit our web site www.cjtinc.org for an application.

A SISTER GOES TO DWIGHT

As a board member, I wanted the opportunity to visit the women at Dwight Correctional Center this June. My one-day pass allowed me to work with our Executive Director. The women loved picking books for their children. Interacting with the women was an awesome experience. They love their children and some have not seen their children for a very long time. This is one way to keep connected to their families. The Aunt Mary Storybook Project is alive and well! We were women together... strengthening connections with each other, with families, and with our wonderful donors.

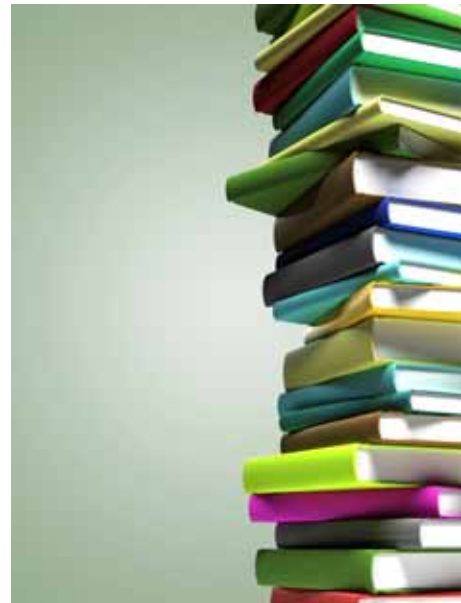
Because of YOU, the storybook project is spreading to other areas of Illinois. We are grateful for the sacrifices you make in furthering Companions Journeying Together.

God Bless You!
Sister Colleen

SPECIAL THANKS

Joleen has been with us for three years, first as a volunteer and then as a staff person working in our county jail programs. She has organized Mother's Day and Christmas Card projects, worked in the jails, and updated our book lists with the latest children's books. Joleen has moved on to work fulltime and we are so grateful for her contributions to Companions.

Jane and Peg asked for children's books for their birthdays. They received 35 of them, which were donated to our Aunt Mary's Storybook Project.



Every spring, summer and Christmas season, the CCD students from Christ the King Parish decorate and sign very cute cards which we then send to prisoners. These cards brighten the days for so many who write and ask us to thank the child whose card they received.

MORE PROGRAM NEWS

MOTHERS' DAY

This year we delivered 5,500 packets to women and juveniles in 20 institutions all across Illinois. We appreciate each of you who contributed materials, money and time to making the packets and want you to know that we have received many notes of thanks from prison & jail officials, and from those who received the packets. The most noteworthy was a very large poster board card made and signed by the youth at the Cook County Juvenile Temporary Detention.



"I was sitting alone thinking of my poor mother who is always there for me, wishing that I could send her a card for Mother's Day. I know she is at home worrying about me in prison, and that makes me all the more depressed. All of a sudden, I received this package of cards from an officer on day shift. The Lord heard me and answered me. I wanted to thank you from my heart for these wonderful cards. Know that I appreciate the time and effort you have put into this to make it happen. May God bless you."

---Valerie

"Thank you for the cards you sent to me and my cell mate. We are in intake, locked own for 24 hours with nothing to do. Thank you for the nice cards and ink pen. I thank God for you all. You kept our minds off of this little cell that we are in."

----Ernice

"Thank you very much for the Mother's Day stationery. We are not allowed to receive those types of items here so it definitely was exciting to receive your gift. I feel that we inmates are often forgotten so it's nice to know that people think about us."

---Nicole

COUNTY NEWS

Often we are asked what the differences are between a jail and a prison. Jails are local county facilities where people go when they are arrested and charged with a crime. They have not necessarily been found guilty of a crime. Many low income people are unable to make bail, and therefore remain in jail while the court proceeds with their case. Some people leave jail when charges are dropped, or they have been found not guilty in a trial or other court proceedings. Some people may be sentenced to a crime and will "do their time" in a county facility.

A prison is a state facility that is managed by the Illinois Department of Corrections. People go to prison when they have been sentenced to a crime that requires a specific amount of time be served according to state mandates and the discretion of the sentencing body and the judge.



The version of Aunt Mary's Storybook Project that we run in county facilities is extremely important--the men and women in these facilities have been recently separated from their children, and the loss is particularly acute because there is so much uncertainty about the outcome of the cases. Contact and reassurance can come in a book and a CD from a parent, and we see so clearly that while these men and women are in prison, they are also parents who love and miss their children.

OUR FOUNDING DIRECTOR HAS A BLOG!

Check out these sample post then go online:
<http://janasjourneywithprisoners.blogspot.com>

Sunday, May 30, 2010

Loving People More Than They Deserve



Joan Chittister in her May 2010 issue of *The Monastic Way* quotes Joseph Joubert as saying: "A part of kindness consists in loving people more than they deserve."

Many would say that those we serve in prison do not deserve our care and concern. We believe that whatever judgment society requires has already been proclaimed by the courts. In prison ministry, our job is to accept people where they are; loving them into becoming a bit more whole.

Monday, February 15, 2010

I Planned on Not Recording

"My name is Randi. I have a 5- and 6- year old (boy and girl). The first time I came to Aunt Mary's Storybook Project to choose books for them, I planned on not recording. These wonderful women talked me into it. The next time I called home, my grandmother told me just how thrilled my children were. She told me how they giggled when I called them by their nicknames. At every noise I made, they made the same noise. They wanted to do it over and over.

I just want to thank you so much for helping people who can't do these things. I can't begin to even thank you! This means the world to my family and I. Love, Randi"

Tuesday, December 8, 2009

A Story

From Jeffery:

"I have been in prison for almost twenty years. By the grace of God I have come into contact with my daughter. It has been all of those twenty years since I last saw her. She happened to watch a TV show called *Lockup* that was taped in the Stateville Correctional Center. I was on the show talking about how it feels to be away from my family. My daughter recognized me from my photos.

I was in my cell watching TV when the officer slid a letter under the door. I saw her name on the envelope. Tears of joy came like running water. We have been writing each other but have not yet been able to see each other. We are working on that.

What a blessing!"

Thank you God, for finding a way to bring these two back together.

Father's Eyes

*To You, My Father do I pen these words
Many a man believes it absurd*

*To write to one that I cannot see
Knowing You are keeping watch over me*

*Watching and caring both day and night
Showing me Your way showing me Your
light*

*A light unto my path a lamp unto my feet
On bended knee is where we meet*

*I offer my love and songs of praise
To He who keeps me in all Your ways*

*Lord of my life, Lord of my heart
Please stay with me and never depart*

*Your Word is true tried by fire
To be more like You is my desire*

*In Your presence here am I
The apple of my Father's eye*

Steven – Menard Correctional Center. IL

journeynotes



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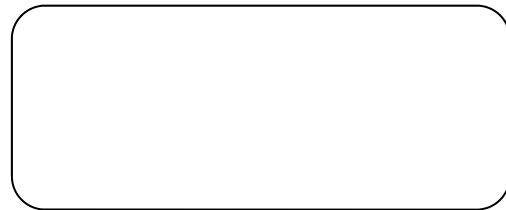
Companions, Journeying Together, Inc.

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our **goals** • our **vision** • our **commitment**

- To bridge the gaps between the free and the unfree worlds in our society
- To implement programs that foster the personal growth of incarcerated people and their families
- To promote family literacy, lifelong learning and positive parenting techniques
- To recruit and educate volunteers about the criminal justice system and restorative justice

Nonprofit org
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Call at (630) 761-3524 or (773) 406-9127

20 YEARS OF COMPANIONS!

Throughout the year we are planning many exciting events to celebrate the amazing work we have all done together to serve those on the margins of our society.

As we celebrate 20 years of service, we need your help and ideas!!!

- Can you serve on an event planning committee?
- Can you make a gift of \$1,000 to the Companions Circle Club?
- Can you suggest fundraising activities?



NEEDS

Postage stamps – if possible forever stamps - for Mother's Day Project, birthday cards and other correspondence – we need many thousands.

Do you know any businesses that would send from their mail rooms, part or all of one month's mailing of our Family Stories Project as a donation to us?

Do you know any churches or companies who would be willing to make copies of 300+ for Mother's Day or Family Stories?