

## TWENTY FIVE YEARS OF COMPANIONS JOURNEYING TOGETHER



The closing of Jane Addams Hull House Social Service organization has sent a shock wave through the social service community in Illinois. When an organization that has been around for so many years closes its doors for good because of limited funding and commitment, it is a sad day. It is also a day for us still operating in the not for profit world to be grateful and work just a little harder to serve the growing number of people who need to know that they matter and someone cares. We too have had difficult times; sometimes we have not known where our next donation would come from and we wonder how we will continue to do the work that we have been called to do.

Yet through it all, we know that **persistence, purpose and passion** are never in short supply because of our donors, volunteers and friends.

As we begin to celebrate our 25<sup>th</sup> years of Companions Journeying Together, we remember the thousands of companions who have walked with this organization. We have had compan-

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#### A Prayer for the 25th Jubilee of Companions Journeying Together 1996-2011

Ever abundant God,  
You have blessed  
Companions Journeying Together  
for these past 25 years with  
generous benefactors  
and steadfast friends.

We ask a special blessing  
for our incarcerated sisters, brothers,  
their children and families.  
Keep them safe in your loving embrace.

Let us be faithful to God's specific call  
to our organization.  
Help us speak for those with little of no voice.  
Guide our feet, hands, and hearts  
to serve all those You bring to us.

Help us speak truth with compassion.  
Bring us people and the resources  
we need to flourish.  
Help us to always be grateful.  
Hold us close to your heart,  
O loving God.  
Amen!

## BOARD & PROGRAM NEWS

As a Board Member of Companions, Journeying Together, Inc., I take pleasure in being able to give back in some way to a community I spent my career with. I retired from the Illinois Department of Corrections as Deputy Director of Women and Family Services having been a former Warden of the Dwight Correctional Center. It did not take long for me to realize the many ways I missed the usefulness I felt during my career in which I could be of assistance to women in prison.

I was blessed to be able to work in faith-based environment while being able to offer women the opportunity to acquire skills, to build self-esteem and to gain courage to make decisions to change their lives. Companions Journeying Together, Inc. volunteers were always there to lend their assistance through their many ministries and faithfulness. Learning from the volunteers, offenders often were able to give back by ministering to others in the prison community and to their own families.

Many women offenders have children, and like all of us, have made mistakes. Helping them to understand forgiveness and to reach within themselves to make a difference in their children's lives is very moving.

Having been "inside", I know that my continued involvement with Companions contributes to the welfare of mothers and their children. I have seen the difference this connection to the free world makes for offenders who are often abandoned while in prison. Donations of time, money and simple items have immeasurable consequences in their lives. Offenders are often amazed by the care and concern given them by the free community, many experiencing such care for the first time. Many have never experienced the power of prayer. Through the contributions of many, offenders are often able to better meet their own needs.

I know whatever I do to minister to those in prison makes a difference because I was there and was witness to it. With God's guidance, I am hopeful my involvement with Companions will continue to make a difference in the lives of others.

With sincere gratitude,  
Donna J. Klein-Acosta

## COMING HOME....A NEW ORGANIZATION SEEKS TO HELP

*"Empowering the Ex-offender, Preventing the Next Offender"* is the motto of a community based not-for-profit organization helping released offenders transition back into society. Jana Minor and her husband recently attended a graduation for several of the participants. Each received a certificate of completion and a new winter coat. It was a wonderful event and demonstrated what a mental, emotional and practical boost this organization is giving those to whom society often has little to offer.

Roll Call is operating with very limited resources. They have indicated that they have many needs including donations, of course: 5 computers to teach computer skills and help youth with this homework; 4 tables to hold the computers; 1 large chalk board; and 15 - 20 folding chairs for their discussion groups and classes. You can contact them at 3708 W Roosevelt Rd., Chicago, IL 60624; 773-940-1552.

### OUR PROGRAM NEEDS

c/d's and c/d covers - mailing envelopes for books - postage

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## ANNIVERSARY NEWS & EVENTS

Continued from page 1

ions in prisons, jails, suburban towns, urban neighbor hoods, rural churches, and faith communities. These companions have brought us hope, resources, stories and triumphs. We have journeyed together, caring for the children of incarcerated parents. We have journeyed together in prayer and parenting classes. We have journeyed together with Aunt Mary's Storybook; with cards and letters that remind us we are connected. We have journeyed together free and unfree, black and white, young and old, working and unemployed, educated and becoming educated.

We thank all of you, our companions, for journeying with us over the years. Your support and encouragement has made it possible for us to impact the justice system, one book, one card, one toiletry bag, one parenting certificate at a time.

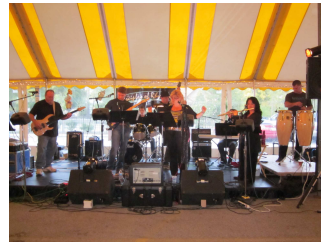
**As we celebrate these 25 years we want to invite you to participate in two major events.**

On Thursday, March 23<sup>rd</sup> at Hyde Park Union Church at 5600 S. Woodlawn in Hyde Park from 7 - 9 pm we will host *Companions Networking Night*. On this occasion, we will honor Cook County Board President Toni Preckwinkle for her initiatives to create a fairer justice system. We will show the documentary film *Once Upon A Time* about women at Dwight Correctional Center and their children. This is an opportunity to invite those who are interested to find out more about our programs and connect with other service providers working in prison ministry.

On Thursday May 17th at Unity Temple at 875 Lake Street in Oak Park, we will be hosting an Ecumenical Prayer Service to celebrate the role faith communities have had in the development and support of Companions Journeying Together. The program will feature special performance by *Disciples of Rhythm* and a special interactive homily that highlights our accomplishments over 25 years.



Carol of Disciples of Rhythm



Fall Fest

### FROM A HOSPICE VOLUNTEER AT DIXON CORRECTIONAL CENTER

"My name is Steven, and I am a hospice/adult care volunteer at Dixon Correctional Center since 2006. In my almost 30 years of incarceration, this program is, without question, one of the most beneficial I've ever been a part of. It was great to hear that the Hospice Program is up and running at Dwight.

Currently I have four patients. Thankfully, all of them only need Adult Care (laundry, cleaning duties, minor chores), but I have had patients who were terminally ill. I prayed and held the hands of two men who passed on during my watch. Nobody wants to die alone, and the staff and inmate volunteers pride themselves on their/our high standards. Even though we are convicted men, we strive to treat all of God's creatures with dignity and respect, especially those who are sick and infirm.

I have 18 months remaining on my sentence. I plan to volunteer in some capacity once I'm paroled. If I can help in any way, please feel free to contact me." —Steven

## VOLUNTEER NEWS

### JENNY WRAPS COMPANIONS A WONDERFUL GIFT

Jenny outdid herself this year. She organized our Christmas gift wrapping fundraiser which brought us over \$4600 for Aunt Mary's Storybook Project. Dozens of volunteers and staff under Jenny's direction wrapped presents for five full days at Fox Valley Mall in Aurora and two days (the 23<sup>rd</sup> & 24<sup>th</sup>) at Joliet Mall. Shoppers were so generous. We all had a lot of fun, and Jenny was present throughout the whole time. And there were stories – the man who offered a \$100 bill if we wrapped his package immediately and came back with a second package and another \$100. The woman who brought a \$100 check for us to wrap her presents and came the next day with a \$50 check and more presents. The young man who shared that he was proposing to his girl friend the next day. And the woman who was buying gifts for her six teenagers, who included quintuplets. In addition three of us worked 8 hours at a Barnes & Noble in St. Charles. Thanks to all who participated, and all who have been donating paper and bows for next year's efforts. And, Jenny, we love you.



### IT'S THE LITTLE THINGS THAT MATTER

Gertrude and her son saved their aluminum cans, redeemed them and bought postage for us. John, a dad whose wife is incarcerated, received books picked out by mom and wrapped them on Christmas eve and put them under the tree for their three children.

### VOLUNTEERS MAKE CHRISTMAS CARD PROJECT SOAR TO NEW HEIGHTS

Our volunteers outdid themselves again this year by providing and preparing Christmas cards for those we serve. The following thanks tell the story of how much they were appreciated:

"I am writing attempting to see my writing through tearful eyes because I am humbled by your nice act of selflessness. Deep down in the bottom of my heart, I don't feel like I deserve such a pure gift of thought and prayer. This was the very best card or gift I have EVER received in a number of years because it did SO much more to me and for me than what's on the surface. It caused (causes) me to look deeper within myself and find much more healing and self forgiveness than I had in previous years. And, for that, Thank you." —Mark (Mark's card came from a child.)

"Your people have been sending me Christmas cards, and every card has helped me in ways you could probably never imagine. Let's just say that I'm nothing but positive about it. I asked God for proof of his love. In every card it rained down upon me. People I've known for years can't phantom time to recall an individual and put a scribe or card in the mail. The tripped out part is that the cards were personally wrote in not typed or stamped signature. You people have really allowed God to move you and through you for the sake of another. Thank you for being open and really for God's purposes. I've climbed from a hole I could not see a way out, from a darkness that only allowed me to know misery. I talked to a guy I've known for twenty odd years about God's love. I felt overwhelmed by it all. Thank you." —Alex

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**MESSAGES OF APPRECIATION** 

**“FOR THOSE WITHOUT EMAIL, TEXTS AND CELL PHONES,  
THE MAIL STILL MATTERS.”**

“Thank you so much for the cards! I really enjoy being able to send my family cards for the holiday as well as receiving them. I hung the card you signed to me in my locker. It means a lot to know that there are people like you out there that care so much. Have a wonderful Christmas and again thank you! God bless.”

Michelle

“It is wonderful knowing that there are people out there that think about us during such a busy holiday season. Thank you so much for taking the time to help make our holidays a little better and easier.”

Kelly

“We appreciate the card that you donated to us for Christmas. They really lightened our spirits at a time that can be depressing for inmates. Thank you so very much.”

Erikka

“I just want to thank all of you guys for sending the ladies here at Greenville Federal Prison hope for the holiday season. We really appreciate your support. Keep us in your prayers! Merry Christmas and God bless.”

Taillia

**POETRY SPOTLIGHT: “Letters”**

What’s the one thing in prison that helps a prisoner feel better?  
Anyone with common sense would know that it’s a letter!  
And it doesn’t matter who or where it came from,  
Just as long as they receive a letter from someone...

Letters for me at times can be few and far in between,  
yet we all wish to receive more than the norm,  
yet that remains to be seen!  
Know that I’m grateful for all the letters that come my way,  
they bring joy into my existence,  
and brightness to my otherwise miserable day...

A line or two from the heart will go a long, long way,  
a heartfelt I miss you, I’m thinking of you, is simple to say!  
So now I’ll patiently await for my next letter,  
anticipating your kind words, which I’ll cherish forever...

---Sammy



# journeynotes



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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

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## 25 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 prepare to celebrate 25 years of service, we need your help and ideas!!!

- Can you serve on an event planning committee?
- Can you make a special 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 storybooks for children 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?