

MOTHER LOVE AT DEKALB AND KENDALL COUNTY JAILS

We are so pleased that the counties of DeKalb and Kendall have agreed to accept our offer to provide Parenting Classes to the incarcerated mothers in their jail facilities.

With the support of Commander Jennings at Kendall County Jail and Lt. Klein at DeKalb County Jail, we are able to provide these mothers with skills, interventions and strategies to address the particular concerns unique to families who have been impacted by incarceration. Our 10 session program helps mothers develop and refine social interactional skills and citizenship behaviors they can use in all aspects of their lives and that will help them guide their children toward becoming positive, constructive adults.



TEACHABLE MOMENTS

Whether you are incarcerated or living in the White House, the process of parenting is the same. For most, you start out overconfident, adamantly rehearsing the things you will never do (especially those things your parents did) and end humbly, understanding that observing parents and actually being a parent is completely different. One of the exciting things about teaching parenting classes to the women at the DeKalb County Jail facility is the opportunity to inspire change in voluntary participants. Often the women are in a reflective, open-to-information mode and are able to experience “teachable moments”. Our main goal is to make the most of those moments by equipping each woman with best-practice information on everything from nutrition to graduation. Journal writing, reflective discussion, hands on activities, and singing (yes, singing) are also components of the ten week course. Our objective is to help each woman understand that their calling and responsibility is not just to parent--but to parent well. We also want them to appreciate that other important people have found themselves in the spot they are in now and have gone on to greatness in spite of their circumstances, just ask Martha Stewart.

Rhonda
CJT Parenting Program Instructor
DeKalb County Jail

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VOLUNTEERS FOR COOK COUNTY JAIL

We are currently looking for volunteers to assist in the Aunt Mary's Storybook Project at Cook County Jail Women's Division. You have to complete an application, pass a background check and attend a one hour orientation. You can volunteer for one Saturday a year or every month. It is up to you and your schedule. The program will begin in August. You will be assisting women in selecting books for their children and recording them. Please contact rekarenhutt@gmail.com for an application.

BREAKING THE CYCLE OF POVERTY AND VIOLENCE

On May 30th Beverly Unitarian Church's Thursday night forum, "Breaking the Cycle: Beating the Odds and Advocating for Change," provided an opportunity for over 60 people from the Morgan Park /Beverly community to have an important conversation with men and women who have been incarcerated. As speakers told their stories, the room was silent; we were feeling their pain and their frustration as we began to understand why it is that more than 50% of incarcerated individuals return to prison within a year of their release. After all, who will hire someone with a record? When will their crime be paid for in the eyes of society?



One of our speakers was James Chapman, the President of the Illinois Institute for Community Law & Affairs. James has worked hard to make a difference and he has spent years watching men and women struggle to manage the difficulties of prison life and their return to the general population after incarceration. His organization offers a place for prisoners, their families and friends to find and share information on how to improve conditions of incarceration and overcome the obstacles they face after being released from prison. James described his efforts to make positive changes and he encouraged attendees to get involved because he believes that once more people support this cause, the sooner these necessary humanitarian changes will occur.

The group ended the evening by coming together in one circle where everyone was invited to briefly summarize their feelings. Especially moving were the comments made by the speakers who were all surprised to discover that people, who don't even know them personally, care about their welfare.

It turns out that there are many things we can do to make a difference in the lives of so many who suffer. We can help raise awareness about mental health issues and get involved in the efforts of organizations dedicated to these issues. The forum certainly encouraged those who have never considered prison issues to understand the ways in which maternal incarceration and current sentencing policies impact families, both socially and economically, for generations. Many who attended the event plan to get more involved in the organizations that are working to make a difference. IF YOU ARE INTERESTED IN HAVING A FORUM WITH FORMERLY INCARCERATED PEOPLE contact revkarenhutt@gmail.com

PRAYER REQUESTS

A few years ago, we started a group of people who pledged to pray for Tamms Correctional Center, Illinois' Super Max Prison, its staff, inmates and anyone affected by that institution. You have undoubtedly learned that Tamms has been closed, so there is no longer a need there. However, we recently sent a note to that prayer group and asked them to pray for:

- Logan Correctional Center, especially the women incarcerated there and the staff. With the closing of Dwight, the women from that facility and from Lincoln CC were all transferred to Logan. Now there are 2000 women confined in that one institution. As you can imagine the adjustment has been and is very difficult.
- Menard Correctional Center, and all affected by that institution. For many months, Menard has been experiencing frequent lock-downs. Tensions are high. There have been two deaths of prisoners who were killed by their cell mates. And a fight in a chapel service caused injury to a chaplain and one or two correctional officers.

We will continue to send periodic prayer requests to this group of people who know that prayer makes a difference. Let us know if you have a prayer request.

PROGRAM NEWS & NEEDS

KANE COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE VALUES AUNT MARY'S STORYBOOK PROJECT

This year at the annual Volunteer Banquet for those serving the prisoners at the Kane County Jail, Bill Woods, Volunteer Coordinator, announced the creation of the Julius Jacob Award to be presented each year to a volunteer who has provided outstanding services to their facility. The first recipient was our Founding Director, Jana Minor. Sheriff Patrick Perez presented the award to her. Our volunteers are at the jail 4 times each month offering our popular Aunt Mary's Storybook Project to both fathers and mothers. Jana says, "This award was earned by our whole team. The sheriff and his staff like this project. That is demonstrated not only in this award, but also in the cooperation we receive at the jail by the entire staff."

NEEDED

Groups to hold a book drive for our Aunt Mary's Storybook Project. **Please soft backed new books** – chapter books – books in Spanish, story books and board books for tiny children.

WITH BOOKS IN HAND

On May 4 and 5th 85 children received their First Communion at St. Luke Parish. A wise person once told me that "We never come to Eucharist empty handed." One of the moms had the idea to have the children bring a new book in honor of Anne Smedinghoff, a Foreign Service Officer, who was killed bringing books to children in Kabul, Afghanistan. We had another special reason for honoring Anne because her mom, Mary Beth Smedinghoff, is my secretary in the Religious Education Office. She is a very special person to the children and families here at St. Luke parish.

These books will be given to the Aunt Mary Storybook Project, an organization that sends new books to children whose parents are incarcerated in some Illinois prisons and jails. Volunteers for the Storybook Project help parents select books to record their voices reading the story. Companions Journeying Together, Inc. mails the book and CD to their children to ease the pain of separation.

On this First Communion weekend, the children gifted our parish with love, excitement, and generosity on their First Communion Day.

MOTHER'S DAY

Our volunteers are faithful and wonderful. This year, we distributed thousands of packets. Donations came from far and wide; from individuals, church groups and people who just want to let people in prison know that someone cares. Then there were the faithful assemblers who worked hard to make the packets as pretty as possible.



As a result we distributed 4335 packets to women and juveniles 14 institutions. The numbers of institutions was smaller this year because of the closing of two juvenile facilities and the combining of the women from two institutions into one. Most impressive was the fact that at Logan where 2000 women are now incarcerated, the packets were distributed within a week after we delivered them.

Some thanks:

"I would like to thank you for the wonderful Mother's Day Package. It was well put together. I'm sure that this gesture touched many women in here, starting with myself. To all of you that have prayed and cared, may this day be a time that fills your heart with joy and love." Angelica

"I wanted to thank you all for the wonderful Mother's Day zip lock baggie full of stationery, greeting cards, envelopes and an ink pen. I really appreciate you all and your faithful ministry. Be assured you and yours are in my prayers." Paula

"I just received your cards, and they are lovely. I'm mailing two out tonight. So thankful for your act of kindness! I feel blessed to be a subject of your Godly kindness!" Bonnie

BOARD PROFILE

BOARD SPOTLIGHT: MARY ELLEN

Q. What made you join the board of Companions?

I knew of Companion's and Aunt Mary's Storybook project from its inception over twenty-five years ago. On morning walks with Margi, the sister of our founder, she would give me updates on her sister's project. Margi told me how when she went into the prisons to do Bible studies with the inmates, she would see the face of God in the women there. I met Jana through her sister and was impressed with her passion for her work. When Jana asked if I would be interested in being on the board, I was already hooked on the ministry. I could not have said anything but yes.

Q. What has been the greatest surprise about serving in an organization that cares about the needs of the incarcerated?

Before beginning our board meetings, Jana often brings letters from inmates. What never fails to touch me is how alone inmates feel. We often hear that the only Christmas card or birthday card someone received was from a volunteer from our organization. The inmates are so grateful for that contact. Those who are incarcerated often lose contact with the family and friends they had on the outside. That is why our ministry is so very important. Letters and cards keep those inside connected in some way to the outside world. More importantly Aunt Mary's Storybook and Fathers Read connect parents and their children in a very intimate way.

Q. What lessons have you learned?

Perhaps the biggest lesson I have learned is that it is not my place to judge. Most of those inside prison walls have made a mistake, some grievous wrongs, but all are more similar to me than they are different. Would I have made different choices if I had walked in their shoes?? Could any of us be in a situation where we might end up in prison? I believe we could.

Q. What do you think the public needs to know about those who are incarcerated?

Jails and prisons, no matter how they look are bad places to be. They dehumanize people by taking away the right of a person to choose anything for themselves. They are not rehabilitation centers. They are meant to punish. It would be far cheaper to put money into rehabilitation programs and in the end that would be better for the whole of society.

Q. What are your goals for the board in the coming year?

I am hoping that this will be the year that I am able to go inside with Aunt Mary's Storybook. My job as a family literacy instructor has taught me over and over again the power of encouraging parents as their child's first and most influential teacher. I look forward to bringing that experience into the jail in Chicago.

DO YOU WANT TO CONTINUE RECEIVING OUR CHRISTMAS CARDS?

Every year, after we mail thousands of Christmas cards to those of you who are incarcerated, and we receive dozens of letters telling us how much the recipient enjoyed receiving those cards. Over the years there have been so many stories of the powerful effect such simple gestures of caring can have. We do receive a few from folks who tell us that it is just too painful to receive a card from someone with whom they cannot enter a longer term correspondence, and we know there are others feeling this way who have not written. This year we heard from a man who talked about the great need for more evangelism work. He said there are many ripe to hear more about the Word of God.

So we ask ourselves how to meet both needs. We have two questions:

For those of you who are imprisoned, if you would prefer that we stop sending you any of our mailings, would you please write to us? We will take your name off of our mailing list.

For those of you in the free community, would you consider being a pen pal for an incarcerated man or woman? If so, please contact us so we can talk with you. 630-408-3743 or at amstorybook@sbclglobal.net

PROGRAM NEWS & HISTORY

BACK WHERE WE STARTED: COOK COUNTY JAIL

In December 1993, we received a grant from *Neediest Kids Fund* to do something for children of women at Cook County jail for Christmas. Sr. Pat Davis had an idea that the mothers should record themselves reading a book as a gift to their children. The response to AMSB at Cook County Jail was very positive from both the women who were imprisoned there and the staff. With many volunteers working for us over the years thousands of children have received book from AMSB. We had no idea that this was going to ripple into a program that is still going strong 20 years later. It was so successful; simple and powerful that we decided to take it to county jails and prisons around the state. Yet in the last ten years we have been in Cook County only a few times. Now with the leadership of the Diversion Programs staff and Sheriff Tom Dart we are returning to Cook County Jail once a month on Saturdays.

A FEW MEMORIES OF COOK COUNTY STORYBOOK FROM JANA MINOR OUR FOUNDER

The one story I remember is the woman who sent a book and tape to her child. We later learned that she was killed in an auto accident. We were grateful to know that her child had her voice on tape. I also remember the woman who recorded a story for her son. We met her several years later and learned that she realized that was a way to help him learn to read so she bought other books and tapes. She told us that he was now an honor student. It was significant that she learned from us how to promote reading and education to her son.----Jana

A LETTER FROM JERRY

Your JourneyNotes over the years has always encouraged me to think. You've kind of been the mirror causing me to reflect on myself. Page by thought provoking page, you've mentored me in such straightforward ways. Thanks for always being there and not giving up. You may not believe the tough life experiences that caused me to end up in such a dead end. I spent most of my life running from the problems. I didn't know how to deal with them as my father was an absentee father with barely a sixth grade education. Mom was as my dad missing or down at the corner bar. No one told me problems could be solved. I never knew problems could be challenged or brainstormed. I, too, was missing in action, always cutting school. Once dad died on my 13th birthday, it was a freedom ticket for me. I did as I pleased and hardly ever was told not to do anything. Well, the formula is easy to see. It was the school of hard knocks for me. I thought I had all the answers when it came to short cuts or the easy way out of situations. But as life would show me, I didn't even know the questions. I was forever distracted by a girl or a scheme of some sort to make money. Jobs were for losers. I never heard words like virtues, standards, patience nor knew how to look within myself to search for courage to do my best. My inner thought life was pretty petty and shoddy at best. I rebelled against discipline of any kind and never even thought to question my own thoughts to see if any were even mine. It took me an exceptionally long time to get tired of playing at being grown-up. I was wasting my life and would one day regret all my weak willed ways. I was a good fighter. The trouble was I was my own worst enemy. I somehow would manage to sabotage any kind of good fortune I fell into. Now to make a very long story abrupt, I'm mighty thankful to your JourneyNotes paper and weighty contents of subject matter that helps mentor others to get wise to themselves. God bless, Jerry

(When we sent JourneyNotes to prisoners the insert letter is a thoughtful inspirational piece written by Rev. Karen Hutt. Obviously those messages are making a difference)

GARAGE SALE FOR AUNT MARY'S STORYBOOK PROJECT

In June we held our annual garage sale to benefit Aunt Mary's Storybook Project. We extend our deepest thanks to all who helped and donated. We cleared \$1104.31.



SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT

"In order to rally people, governments need enemies. They want us to be afraid, to hate so we will rally behind them. And if we do not have a real enemy, they invent one in order to mobilize us." *Thich Nhat Hahn*

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

*Journeynotes is a publication of
Companions, Journeying Together, Inc.
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Search: **Companions Journeying Together, Inc**

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?