

October, 2015

Dear Wonderful Companions:

May, 2014 brought us a new gift: Scott McWilliams to be our Executive Director. He has amazed our board and staff with his hard work, his youthful energy, his knowledge of technology and social media, and his ability to find volunteers everywhere, even as far away as Norway.

For these past eighteen months, he has prodded us to try to new things, expanded programs, helped to bring us into a new age of communication and efficiency and cut costs. These are some of his accomplishments:

- Convinced Cook County Jail to restart Aunt Mary's Storybook Project (AMSB) at their facility.
- Expanded AMSB to two new jails and convinced the staff at two more jails to offer this project to more people.
- Has a system very close to operation which will allow us to send the recordings of parents participating in AMSB via digital links because we know that CD players are becoming obsolete.
- Purchased a license to teach an evidence based parenting program designed especially for prisoners and started this project at two county jails.
- Developed all sorts of more efficient cost effective ways to accomplish the administrative work that supports our projects serving prisoners and their families.
- Helped plan a summer fundraiser that promises to be a great source of financial resources for us in the future.
- Supported our efforts to start 4 pen pal clubs and helped make it possible for more than 35 more prisoners to receive regular correspondence from a pen pal/friend.
- Is now working to update our web page.

Scott has big plans for our future. Will you consider donating an extra special end of the year gift in honor of Scott's hard work and to help us continue to move forward with his dreams?

Your gift of      \$25 will allow us to purchase 5 new books.  
                          \$50 will cover the cost of postage for mailing books from one session.  
                          \$100 will provide the materials and salary for a 2 hour parenting session.  
                          \$250 will enable us to send one edition of JourneyNotes to all of the imprisoned people on our mailing list.

Thank you, Scott, and thank you to all who donate or volunteer with us,

Jana

## KINDRED SPIRITS WINE AND BEER TASTING EVENT

by: Phil, Board Member

This summer, Companions Journeying Together hosted an event at the Vino Cellar in Lombard, Illinois. A capacity crowd turned out to encourage our work and enjoy an evening of fellowship. This gathering was not merely a fundraiser, it was an opportunity to inform people about the importance of our mission and provide supporters of Companions with a chance to get to know one another.

The event was a success. It provided a forum for Companions to express who we are and convey the importance of why we do what we do. The gathering also furnished crucial material support for our work. We raised over \$3,000 dollars. These funds will help our organization to provide meaningful programming to incarcerated persons, so that they may foster stronger bonds with their children and realize the good qualities that they possess.

Men and women that are being held in jails are human beings. These people have made mistakes. Like any person, they are worthy of a chance at redemption. We of Companions Journeying Together do everything possible to facilitate this. The spiritual and financial support from everyone that contributed to the July 23<sup>rd</sup> event, and our mission is appreciated. Thank you.

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### NEEDS

- ◆ Postal Stamps.
- ◆ Large manila envelopes for mailing books to children.
- ◆ Packing tape.
- ◆ CDs
- ◆ Opportunities to speak at your civic or church group.
- ◆ People willing to organize a pen pal club of volunteers who would correspond with prisoners.

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## THANKS & HELP NEEDED



### OUR BOARD SENDS A SPECIAL THANKS TO:

The Well at the Mother House of the Sisters of St. Joseph, St. Thomas the Apostle Parish in Naperville and the Presbyterian Church of Western Springs for hosting our board meetings this year.

And a very special thank you to Mary Ellen and her husband, Jack, who provided their dining room table for our meetings for several years. It is so helpful to have a comfortable space in which to do our planning.

### FUNDRAISERS:

Thanks to many many people we had two successful fundraisers this past summer. We express our gratitude as we begin preparations for our annual Christmas Gift Wrapping Event.

### GARAGE SALE:

The saying goes that one person's junk is another person's treasure. We have been proving that truth for several years. This one was no exception. Early in May, I put out a plea for items to sale and did people ever respond. In mid-June several volunteers helped us prepare for a 3 ½ day sale. What a lot of work! But we made money. Lots of people went home with bargains and items they will treasure. And all for our Aunt Mary's Storybook Project and our Parenting Classes. Thanks so all who helped.

### CHRISTMAS GIFT WRAPPING AT CHICAGO RIDGE MALL

We will be wrapping gifts again at the Chicago Ridge Mall this Christmas season for donations for our Aunt Mary's Storybook Project. There are many ways you can help.



By donating gift boxes, tissue paper, pretty wrapping paper, bows, rolls of tape for tape dispensers, gift tags, scissors, tape dispensers.

By making copies of handouts we will be giving people.

**By volunteering a couple hours or more to help wrap.** We plan to wrap on the following dates:

Saturday, Dec, 5 & Sunday, Dec. 6<sup>th</sup>

Saturday, Dec. 12 & Sunday Dec 13

Saturday Dec 19<sup>th</sup> thru Thursday, Dec. 24 (when we will need the most help)

Some additional times may be added.

This is a great way to give to others while you participate in the Christmas season. Please contact Jenny at [auntmarysvolunteers@gmail.com](mailto:auntmarysvolunteers@gmail.com) or (630) 481-6231 if you are interested in helping.

## A CONNECTION STORY

We at Companions believe we were called to connect people: people living in prisons and jails with their children and other family members; people in the free community with those living behind bars; people who care and those who need a listening ear.

For several years, a group of women have prepared Christmas cards for us to mail always signing them “The Women of Highland Presbyterian Church.” Among the thank you notes and letters from recipients of the Christmas cards each year is always a couple addressed to these women. Last year I was able to mail back to the Highland Women a beautiful scroll that Ricky had prepared for them expressing his gratitude. One of the members of the group attached the scroll to some felt and hung the banner in the church. A picture of this banner was sent to Ricky.

Ricky recently wrote that he had lost family members so I contacted the church and asked for their prayers. The church not only answered with prayer, but they also wrote notes and signed cards for Ricky. A church has been inspired by Ricky’s words and work. They see that banner every time they come to church. I can only imagine what it is meaning to Ricky to receive all of that mail.

## IL STATE COMMISSION ON CRIMINAL JUSTICE & SENTENCING REFORM

Hats off to Governor Rauner for establishing a major initiative to look at how we can cut prison population in Illinois by establishing the IL State Commission on Criminal Justice & Sentencing Reform. This commission comprised of 28 members including state legislators, people with correctional, social service and not for profit backgrounds or positions, lawyers and college professors, have worked quite hard this year listening to anyone who wanted to contact them about concerns they have about our Criminal Justice System and seeking ideas about programs and projects that work to keep offenders out of prisons and to reduce recidivism rates. There is a growing awareness in this country of the tremendous costs of our tough on crime policies which have led to ballooning prison populations. (Did you know that our country has 5% of the world’s population and 25% of the world’s prison population?) Many are realizing that these costs hamper our abilities to fund educational, health, treatment and social service programs that could be much more effective in decreasing crime.

The mid-year report of this group gave those of us working for prison reform some hope. Join us in watching for their final report at the end of 2015. The question then will be how many of their suggestions will be implemented.

**You**

You have the seed for the fullness of life; love; light; strength; wisdom. Joy.

**You**

You are a Co-Creator.

**You**

You were created to be a child of God, loving sincere, unselfish.

- Mr. Willie, Freelance Writer

## **BOARD PROFILE: JEFF**

### **As a new Board member at CJT, can you tell us a little bit about yourself?**

I live in Oak Park with my wife and two young kids. Personally, I'm a die hard Chicago Bulls fan. I like to play music and goof around with my family and friends. Professionally, I'm an in-house attorney for a large Catholic healthcare corporation, dealing with corporate matters such as commercial litigation and intellectual property matters.

### **What inspired you to join the Board?**

CJT's mission is important. This country inappropriately incarcerates generations of families and communities. CJT's programming can help incarcerated people stay connected with their families or make a human connection outside of their current condition.

### **What do you hope to accomplish during your term as a Board member?**

I hope to be useful in supporting CJT's mission.

## **AMSB Updates**

Companions has been hard at work! For the past few months, we have been serving the women at the Will County Jail in Joliet, Illinois. We asked one of our volunteers, Joyce, to share with you her reflection:

*Volunteering with this program has so very many positive outcomes for people incarcerated, their children, and society. Aunt Mary's Storybook Project allows women in the criminal justice system to do something positive for their children while improving their own self-confidence and self image. It allows them to believe they can have a positive influence on their children and be present to them in the recorded story-telling. Some are painfully aware of their poor reading skills. The project entices them to improve themselves academically, to continue to study and learn for the sake of their children. It also encourages them to do "good" time, learn to handle their anger, sadness, negative emotions well so they can have a shorter time away from their families.*

*My observations include: the care with which each person chooses the best book for her son or daughter, the compassion each woman has for the other women helping them choose selections appropriate to the ages and interests of their children. I wish the criminal justice policy, lawmakers, employers, and other persons in society, who "write them off," could see what I have witnessed. Then stereotypes would diminish and restorative justice policy and practice would grow and bear fruit.*

## AMSB UPDATES & PARENTING



In addition to our work at the Will County Jail, we are approaching nine months of serving the women in Division 3 at the Cook County Jail. Sr. Marlene, one of our volunteers who has helped us several times at the Cook County Jail, shares her experience:

*I was first introduced to this wonderful storybook project by Jana a few years ago. I was touched by its mission to provide a way for mothers and their children to be in a closer personal relationship through reading a storybook together. My experience has been most pleasant. I stand in awe of the women who select the "perfect" book for their child and I am aware of what this does to the moms. They seem pleased, with their selection of a book, happy, to know a CD is being made, and proud, of their accomplishment. A sweet message ends their reading to the child. My favorite was, "Tamara, be a good girl, say your prayers, and remember mommy will be home to tickle your toes hopefully very soon."*

We have also recently started to expand our offering at the DuPage County Jail. In addition to serving the women, we are now serving the men twice each month.

Finally, we are making lots of progress on our online audio delivery system for the Aunt Mary's Storybook project. Because of the shift in technology, some computers are not coming with CD players anymore, and an increasing number of people are using mobile devices and tablets instead of computers. We want to make sure that these families can still receive the recording of their imprisoned parent reading to his or her children. To that end, we have engaged two volunteers - one from Norway and another from Tennessee - who have been working diligently to build an online system where families can log in and access their recording. The families will still receive the books in the mail, but instead of a CD, they will have a unique username and password where they can privately listen and download the recording that was made for them.

As always, we want to thank all who have donated and volunteered with our project. We continue to be touched by the many people who we serve, and are continually reminded by the imprisoned parents that this project is impactful. We look forward to serving more children and families in the coming months and years!

### PARENTING UPDATE

Our newly designed parenting program has been going very smoothly throughout the year. So far, we have taught three classes: One at the DeKalb County Jail in Sycamore, Illinois, and the other two at the Kane County Jail in St. Charles, Illinois. Before the end of the year, we will be offering another session at the DeKalb County Jail.

This is the first time since we started our parenting program that we have taught at the Kane County Jail, and from all accounts, the program was a great success. Likewise, our offering at the DeKalb County Jail was successful as well. An overwhelming majority of the participants agreed that their attitudes, communication style, and problem solving skills have improved since taking the class.

We wish to extend a big thank you to Rhonda and Julie, our talented instructors, and everyone who has contributed to the success of our parenting program.

# journeynotes



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.

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Visit us at [www.cjtinc.org](http://www.cjtinc.org)*

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## 25 YEARS OF COMPANIONS!

The Companions staff would like to hear from you.

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[Jana@cjtinc.org](mailto:Jana@cjtinc.org) (Founding Director)

Call at (630) 481-6231

[facebook.com/cjtinc](https://www.facebook.com/cjtinc)



An electronic version of our *JourneyNotes* publication is now available! Please visit our website at [www.cjtinc.org](http://www.cjtinc.org) to sign up!

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