

MID-YEAR UPDATE – JUNE 2024

Dear CJT Friends,

We are pleased to share this mid-year update with you and thank you for your faithful support and interest! As we finalized this update to send you, we celebrate the life and service of Joyce Dempsy who recently passed away. Joyce made room in her schedule, as all of you do too, for the work of Companions Journeying Together! We are truly grateful to join with each of you, in so many different ways, to fulfill the mission of CJT!



Because of our amazing volunteers, generous donors, small but mighty staff, and faithful board, 2023 was a year of excitement and rebuilding! 2024 continues with the same sense of expansion too!

We are pleased to share that all of our major programs, Aunt Mary's Storybook, Pen Pals, and Card Ministry, grew, allowing us to serve and support more people who are in custody and their families.

We are also most grateful for the many volunteers and donors who have stayed committed to our work and mission through some difficult pandemic times. The last few years have shown the resiliency of our supporters! Thank you for your gifts of time, talents, and gifts (in-kind and financial).

We have some exciting news to share about our funding. During the pandemic we received some PPP money and also had to take a \$25k SBA loan to keep CJT going. Because of your commitments and the especially strong financial year we had in 2023, our board voted to pay off the loan in full! We feel so grateful to have that weight removed.

As we look ahead, we have plans to keep expanding into more prisons and jails as we're able to build our volunteer and financial base. We hope you will be able to continue to support us so we can further our work and we encourage you to invite others that may be able to stand with us to serve and support, showing love, to those who are in custody and their families.

With all our best to you,

Jana

Jana Minor
Board Chair and Founder

Scott

Scott McWilliams
Director of Aunt Mary's Storybook

Marv

Marv Baldwin
Executive Director



Board of Directors: Jana Minor, Founding Director & Board Chair • Dennis Kitchen, Vice Chair • Ashley Downing, Secretary • Sr. Carolyn Croft OP • Tom Drieffen • Monica Halloran • Michele Rammien • Paula Sims

Thank you to those who served and left the board in 2023: Marcy Darin, former Co-Chair • Mike Plamondon • Jake Bucher

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Our **Mother's Day Project** supported more than 5,000 people in custody and their families this past year. Packet of cards and stationery were provided to those in custody that they could use to send notes and cards to their loved ones. Hundreds of people from churches and other groups from all over Illinois and Florida donate the materials we need each year. Scores of other people gather at church halls or around home dining room tables to assemble the packets. Many thanks for all of you who have supported the Mother's Day Project!

"I have discovered that we can uplift people (persons in custody) and bring them simple joys through the writing of letters" –pen pal

More than 100 **Pen Pals** have joined in efforts to regularly reach out through mail or email to people in custody. Many of CJT's Pen Pals have joined a club which meets regularly to support one another in this important connection they provide. The Pen Pal program was established prior to the founding of CJT when Jana began writing to people in custody almost 50 years ago! We are deeply aware of the hunger among our confined brothers and sisters for contact with people living outside the walls. Each person makes a difference in the life of the person they write. In the process, our volunteers are learning and opening to new awareness.

2023 and the first part of 2024 have been a good time for the expansion of **Aunt Mary's Storybook (AMS)**, currently in 12 Illinois State Prisons and County Jails! During the last few years the re-establishment of **AMS** has been challenging but because of the quality and consistency of the program, outreach to the institutions, committed volunteers, and increased donations (in-kind and financial), we have been able to grow **AMS** to include Illinois state prisons: Joliet Treatment Center, Sheridan Correctional Center, Menard Correctional Center and Medium Security Unit, Centralia Correctional Center, Kewanee Life Skills, Decatur, and Lawrence. Supported county jails include: Cook, Dekalb, Kane, Kendall, and Will.



Events of many kinds spread the word about CJT and our work together. We are most grateful for the creativity lovingly shared to support our work! People organized and led packing events, bake sales, Christmas in July card signing events – (more than **12,000 Christmas cards** were sent to those in custody in 2023!) , fun runs, Christmas wrapping events, book sales, card-signing groups, alternative gift markets, and more! Please feel free to use your creativity to lead your own CJT event so together we might raise more awareness and funding for the work and reach of CJT programs!

Financial: During 2023, CJT raised more than \$90,000 (in-kind and financial support). We are on track for an equally strong year in 2024 and look to you for your support! As we continue to expand into more prisons and jails, add pen pals and send more cards and Mother's Day packets to people in custody, our need for additional volunteers, in-kind donations and financial support also increase. If you'd like to make a **donation on line, please use the QR code here.** Because of our volunteerism, we are able to really stretch the dollars given to support people in custody and their families. We hope you'll be able to join us this year as we work to provide, a caring presence, tangible connections, loving reminders and affirmation to those who may feel lonely, isolated, and or even forgotten due to incarceration.

