

Good Job !

Congratulations to the most recent graduates at Jackson and Green Bay correctional institutions.

- 62 GED/HSED
- 6 Barber/Cosmetology (GBCI)
- 3 Electricity (GBCI)
- 18 Office Assistant (GBCI)
- 9 Masonry (GBCI)
- 9 Wood Tech (GBCI)
- 11 Computer Application Specialists (JCI)
- 12 Food Production Specialists (JCI)

How You Can Help

The Community is 100% community-funded (see p. 11 about donations). Each issue is published once we raise \$65, the minimum needed to cover costs for printing & postage for about 60-75 copies, and maintaining a P.O. box. We are currently able to mail out about 175 copies, so **most incarcerated readers will have to ask a friend/family member to get them a copy** from thecommunitywis.wix.com/home. Every additional \$50 we receive above the minimum will allow us to send copies to 60-75 additional incarcerated readers.

It is important that incarcerated readers share their copies with as many people as possible at their respective facilities. If you are absolutely unable to obtain copies any other way, write to us to be put on our mailing list for when we have the funds to send out more copies. However, we can also use help with various clerical and investigative duties, such as typing up submissions, printing material, and researching stories. If you or someone you know is willing to help in this regard, please tell them to e-mail thecommunitywis@gmail.com, or write us: The Community, P.O. Box 100392, Milwaukee WI 53210

Please inform us immediately if you become able to obtain copies another way, are moved to another facility, or are scheduled to be released soon. And if you are ever denied an issue, please let us know the "reason" you were given.

Lessons from the First Issue

Thank you to everyone who's written with their thoughts, questions, and advice, and to everyone who passed around the first issue of *The Community* to their fellow community members. Also, thank you again to the few who donated - that is the only way we can continue. Due to various obstacles, this issue was delayed about a month and a half. Many of the kinks have been worked out, and a network of solid sources and assistance is coming together. Some people are naturally hesitant to get involved, which is understandable. It's good to be cautious, especially when locked up. Eventually we hope to earn their respect and even trust. With greater involvement from readers we can produce a more consistent and informative newsletter.

Before diving into this issue, we'd like to address several important takeaways from all of the feedback we've received.

- Donations can now be written out to *The Community*, so **please do not address any more checks or letters to Ann Knoedler**.
- Because of time and financial constraints we are unable to respond to every letter. However, **if you include a self-addressed, stamped envelope, or an e-mail address, we are almost certain to respond** (snail mail response times will be about 2-3 weeks). Furthermore, read the entire issue before writing to us; we have received several letters asking about information that is in the newsletter.
- If you have received a copy of *The Community*, you are on our mailing list. However, this does

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MISSION STATEMENT

The Community is a non-profit bimonthly newsletter devoted to fostering a productive, motivating sense of community among those interested in the prison system, especially Wisconsin's, and those sympathetic to the increasingly notorious need for smarter criminal justice policies.

Robert “Silk” Sykes Wins Appeal

On December 19, Robert “Silk” Sykes was granted his plea withdrawal motion after 20 years in prison. Two months later, he was a free man.

In 1994 Sykes was sentenced to a total of 100 years in prison for party to a crime on two counts of 1st degree reckless homicide, and one count of armed robbery. Sykes originally agreed to a plea offer from the State after his attorney led him to believe he’d receive no more than 40 years, but possibly much more if he went to trial.

On appeal, Sykes contested that this plea was not entered knowingly, intelligently, and voluntarily for several reasons. Judge Jeffrey Wagner, the same judge who sentenced Sykes, agreed under the following “Findings of Fact”:

- The defendant did not understand the maximum penalties for each count.
- There is no evidence that the defendant was ever informed of the elements of the offenses.
- The defendant did not understand that he could receive more than 40 years on the counts to which he entered a guilty plea. Based on trial counsel’s stated practice, the defendant could reasonably believe that the maximum he could receive was no more than 40 years.
- The defendant would not have entered his plea if he had known the totality of the sentences could exceed 40 years.

We wish Sykes the strength to take full advantage of his second chance and we hope his appeal’s success (at the trial court level with a notoriously tough judge) encourages others, whether or not they have similar issues.



Republicans Pushing for More Work Release

As of October 2014, 1,200 incarcerated individuals were on work release in Wisconsin, earning about \$46 off of each \$100 in their paychecks - the remainder is taken out to pay for room, board, and transportation. According to a recent Wisconsin State Journal article, State Assembly Speaker Robin Vos, a Republican, said *his party not only wants to expand work release but require each of Wisconsin’s prisons to set up a system to work with private temporary employment agencies*. Vos claims that his opinion on this issue changed after experiences with currently incarcerated workers at his factory. “It made me realize that there is a better hope for redemption than some people in my party believe.”

Helping employ people with criminal records is a priority under the Forward Agenda, laid out by Assembly Republicans last fall. Of course, it may be a tough sell to voters who believe this will decrease their employment opportunities. Furthermore, expanding work release could just be a way for legislators to increase the pool of cheap labor for political donors who own factories. More likely, it’s simply a way to lower corrections costs without addressing the real cost driver: too many people in a system with too much power. This new priority by Republicans could be a good thing for the anti-mass incarceration movement, but history and good sense tell us there’s a lot more to it.

Throughout history it has been the inaction of those who could have acted, the indifference of those who should have known better, the silence of the voice of justice when it mattered most, that has made it possible for evil to triumph.
- Haile Selassie

The Lasting Impact of Brain Injury

By Drew Nagele, MJ Schmidt, and Monica Vaccaro

It is estimated that 13.5 million people - or about 4.5% of the U.S. population - are living with some type of acquired brain injury.

Recent research suggests that **about 60% of people in prison have had an acquired brain injury** sometime in their life, most often prior to becoming incarcerated. This is important, because the problems that result from a brain injury make almost all aspects of life harder. Brain injury can make a person more likely to make poor decisions, increasing their risk for getting in trouble with the law and decreasing their likelihood of being successful in everyday life. The effects of brain injuries also can make it harder for a person to succeed in prison education programs or to meet parole conditions.

What is a brain injury?

A brain injury occurs when something happens to disrupt the functioning of the brain. Brain injuries can be caused by an outside force such as a blow or jolt to the head from a fall, a car crash, or a fight - or by a disease, like a virus, stroke, or seizures. The most common causes of traumatic brain injuries - those that occur through force - are falls, vehicle crashes, assaults (including gunshot wounds), and recreation/sports injuries. Blast injuries from improvised explosive devices and other war-related experiences are also brain injuries. Some brain injuries are considered more severe than others. For example, concussions are considered "mild" brain injuries. However, the severity of the injury does not always predict how many problems a person may experience as a result. Some less severe injuries result in lifelong effects. The effect of having repeated mild brain injuries can also "add up" over time.

What problems can it cause?

People most often have changes in their

thinking skills. They notice changes in their memory (especially for new information or events) and/or their ability to set goals, plan and organize, get started doing things, and solve problems easily. They can also notice changes in their mood. Some people have trouble controlling their tempers or feel nervous and depressed. There can also be physical changes like headaches, seizures, problems with balance and coordination, and even dizziness.

After a brain injury, people often have trouble on their jobs and in their day-to-day lives. In prison, individuals may be slower to respond to directives, have trouble completing required groups or schooling, and/or have trouble getting along with other people.

Can people get better? How?

People do recover after brain injuries, but they often have some problems that don't go away completely. For these residual problems, there are treatments, but these are only available if the brain injury is diagnosed and understood. **Medications** are used to treat headaches, seizures, and some of the more serious changes in mood. **Cognitive rehabilitation therapy** involves figuring out the breakdowns in a person's thinking and creating strategies to help get around those problems. **Counseling** can be used to help a person understand and accept the changes they experience after a brain injury. This is sometimes done individually and sometimes in **support groups**.

Why are incarcerated people so much more likely to have brain injuries?

A number of the same things that put a person at risk for brain injury also put a person at risk for incarceration. These include being young and male, risk-taking behavior, being a survivor of physical abuse, and having a history of

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The individual is part of the conscious human race or he is an animal grubbing for sustenance.
- Julius K. Nyerere

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substance use/abuse. Researchers have found that children who have had brain injuries often get into trouble with the law. A brain injury also puts a person at risk for future brain injuries. People with brain injuries are also more likely to be the victim of a crime.

What is being done?

The Centers for Disease Control and the Health Resources and Services Administration are studying the problem and funding research across the country. Projects in many states, including Pennsylvania, Indiana, Minnesota, and Virginia, are focused on helping to:

- Identify and assist both adult and juvenile offenders with brain injury
- Provide training to people working in the criminal justice system
- Educate people in prison about brain injury
- Connect those with brain injury to appropriate services and supports

If you think you might have had a brain injury (or more than one) at some point in your life that is affecting you now, talk to your health care provider or counselor to find out what help may be available at your facility. **For info about brain injury**, or if you're planning for

release and looking for services in your area, write the Brain Injury Association of America, 1608 Spring Hill Road, Suite 110, Vienna VA 22182.

The Community postscript

Considering the affect brain injuries have on a person's ability to control their temper, think effectively, remember accurately, and handle negative emotions (depression, anxiety, etc.), it makes complete sense that there are significantly more incarcerated individuals with brain injuries than there are in society. Be honest with yourself about whether or not you've experienced a brain injury, and how it may be impacting your life. ***Meditation and mindfulness are additional proven-effective strategies for relieving the negative effects of brain injuries.*** Have someone go to our website (thecommunitywis.wix.com/home) to get you a copy of our meditation/mindfulness packet specifically for incarcerated individuals. (We may be able to send you one if you can't find someone else to help you.) And if you've never had a brain injury and especially if you are incarcerated, keep in mind the high number of those around you who have. As an intelligent person, show them some understanding and patience "for everyone you meet is fighting a battle you know nothing about" [Plato].

Photo Services

Nearly every incarcerated individual knows the frustration of trying to get friends and family to send a letter or some photos. And nearly every friend or family member of an incarcerated individual knows the feeling of fully intending to send a letter or photos, but somehow failing to do so because of the demands of life and the inconvenience of snail mail. Jail Send wants to help.

Friends and family can use www.jailsend.com or its mobile app to electronically send their letters and pictures to Jail Send, along with the incarcerated recipient's info, and Jail Send will take care of

physically mailing them. This, however, is not a free service. There is a \$1.49 processing fee for every shipment (no matter the size), plus 29¢ per photo or 10¢ per page. Although, they will contact up to 20 people for you for free to help them get set up. Just send them your info (including date of birth) and the names and phone numbers or e-mails of the 20 people: Jail Send LLC, Box 270828, Kansas City MO 64127. For more info, contact Lavern Vickers, 913-306-0734, lavern@jailsend.com, or go to www.jailsend.com.

Pigeon Photo is another option, but only for photos. They charge nothing for the first 5 photos, then 50¢ per photo thereafter. However, the free photos have a watermark of the company logo on them (a faint image in the background). For more info, go to www.pigeon.ly.

Call an elephant a rabbit only if it gives you comfort to feel that you are about to be trampled to death by a rabbit.
-Kenneth Kaunda

Calling for Essays by Incarcerated Americans, Prison Workers, and Prison Volunteers

The American Prison Writing Archive (APWA) is an Internet-based, non-profit archive of first-hand testimony to the living and working conditions experienced by incarcerated people, prison employees, and prison volunteers.

Anyone who lives, works, or volunteers inside American prisons or jails can contribute non-fiction essays, based on first-hand experience: 5,000 word limit (15 double-spaced pages); a signed APWA permission-questionnaire must be included in order to post work on the APWA. All posted work will be accessible to anyone in the world with Internet access. For more information and to download the permissions questionnaire, go to www.dhinitiative.org/projects/apwa, or write to: APWA, 198 College Hill Road, Clinton NY 13323-1218.

Corrections from previous issue

- In *What's Up*, in the second paragraph, the last sentence should have said "Book downloads and canteen purchasing capabilities will follow ..."
- In *Myth Buster* (page 6), in the last paragraph it was incorrectly stated that WRC doesn't have correctional officers. They do, but they don't work on the units/wings with the individuals incarcerated there. Rather, they work in the hallways and other non-living quarters of the facility.
- A reader alerted us to a statistic in the 2013-2014 Wisconsin Blue Book that states the annual per "inmate" cost in Wisconsin is \$52,833, which would contradict the \$37,994 figure we published from the Vera Institute of Justice's True Cost of Prisons survey. The lead researcher at Vera explained the discrepancy as follows: "I believe the Blue Book figure was calculated erroneously. It appears [the State] divided all corrections spending (...probation, parole, juvenile justice & other functions) by the prison population thus overstating the cost per inmate [by including things not related to prison costs]." A recent article in the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel (Wisconsin Should Stop Wasting Money on its Corrections System, 2/16/15), also used the erroneous Blue Book figure, and others surely have relied on it unwittingly.

Nursing Home Correctional Institutions

Of the many ridiculous features of mass incarceration, the wildly increasing rate of "elderly" (as defined by the National Institute of Corrections) individuals behind bars is definitely one of the clearest examples of the system's brokenness. By 2030, an estimated 400,000 incarcerated individuals will be over 55 years old, a 4,400% increase since 1981. To use a smaller example, over the past decade the prison population in New York has fallen 21%, yet the percentage of incarcerated individuals 50 or older is up 64%.

It is well known among criminologists and law enforcement that crime declines rapidly with age, regardless of sex, race, ethnicity or criminal history. A federal study found a less than 4% recidivism rate for those over 55 - in contrast to a near 50% rate for those below 50. In addition, a legislative analysis for California - one of the most "tough-on-crime" states - found that those 50 and older represent 5% of total arrests. Furthermore, those 50 and older cost nearly \$70,000 a year to incarcerate - twice the average. According to a

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DUDE !
Find him yourself

(Nursing Home - continued from page 5)

relatively recent ACLU report, even if these individuals were to need government money for healthcare, housing, etc., states would still save at least \$28,000 (and very likely more) per year for each elderly individual they release.

Of course, this issue is hardly news to anyone who's been in prison. If you're approaching or are older than 50, don't let incarceration defeat you. In Wisconsin, New York, California, Mississippi, and probably many more states efforts are underway to reduce the percentage of upper middle-aged incarcerated individuals. This is alongside a general mood in society to dismantle mass incarceration and its various evils. Opportunities are coming, and when they do you don't want to miss out on your freedom.

A note from Joyce Ellwanger: As a member of WISDOM, I chair the newly-formed Compassionate Release Committee of the 11x15 Campaign. We had our first state-wide conference phone call in December, and will be continuing the calls each month as we work on trying to make compassionate release into a viable program for incarcerated individuals who are aging and ill.

Please know that we ask and need friends and family of incarcerated individuals seeking compassionate release to join us on these conference calls and to share their stories. We need their insights to help shape our approaches to working for reform and accountability within the DOC and the Parole Commission, and in approaching legislators for their support.

Anyone interested in more info about our work or the above-mentioned calls can contact Joyce Ellwanger, 1637 N. 16th Street, Milwaukee WI 53205, 414-933-6157, joyce.ellwanger@gmail.com

Other recent articles on this topic:

- "Nursing Homes Behind Bars," The New York Times, Editorial Board (09/28/2014)
- "The High Costs of Low Risk," The Osbourne Association (07/2014)
- "Reports on Elderly Prisoner Spur Call for Reforms," Prison Legal News (05/2014)
- "Elder Abuse in Prisons," Prison Legal News (12/2013)

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not mean you are guaranteed to receive a copy of each issue because the number of copies sent out depends on how much money we have at the time of publication (every two months). Only individuals who donate are considered priority recipients on the mailing list.

- If your people have had trouble pulling up our website, tell them to make sure they use the exact web address: thecommunitywis.wix.com/home.
- We are not a good resource for legal materials or advice. We understand completely that many incarcerated individuals' main concerns are fighting their cases. However, we are more of a newspaper, a source of general info and encouragement for the anti-mass incarceration movement. *Prison Legal News* is the best source we know of for legal news and resources. If we ever come across any new legal resource or people or organizations willing to assist individuals with their cases, we will publish their contact info ASAP. Although, we are planning to begin a regular legal column concerning criminal law and/or DOC policies.
- Some readers have asked to know more about "who we are." We are not affiliated with any organization, and who we are as individuals is irrelevant. We are simply a tiny group of currently, formerly, and never-been incarcerated individuals hoping to stimulate the construction of unity and empowerment (i.e., confidence, pride, knowledge) among those who oppose the waste and selfish, small-minded spirit of mass incarceration. It is only as a community that we will overcome the purposelessness, indifference, and special interests that fuel the prison-industrial complex. ***Pay no attention to who we are, but rather to what we represent: the community.***

Lastly, be sure to read the *innervoice84* blog post on p. 8 for an explanation of why we don't use terms like *inmate* or *ex-con*.

Keep moving forward.

TEDx Event Held at Sing Sing

On December 3, 2014, the first ever TEDx event held inside a New York State Correctional Facility was conducted in Sing Sing. The event was an unparalleled success. TED (Technology, Entertainment, and Design) is a global set of conferences run by the private non-profit Sapling Foundation, under the slogan "Ideas Worth Spreading." TED was founded in 1984 as a one-off event; the annual conference series began in 1990. A TEDx event is an independently organized TED conference.

The Sing Sing event was sponsored by Hudson Link for Higher Education in Prison. Prior to 1994, there were more than 350 college programs inside U.S. prisons. In 1994, Congress abolished Pell grants for incarcerated persons, which provided nearly all of the funding for these college programs. As a result, all but 8 college programs nationwide shut their doors. Based on considerable evidence that education transforms lives, reduces recidivism, and creates a positive ripple effect in communities, Hudson Link for Higher Education in Prison was formed in 1998 as a 501(c)(3) non-profit by a consortium of college educators and community leaders to fill this incredible need. Hudson Link has awarded 388 degrees in its fifteen year history, and presently serves 784 people annually. From humble beginnings within Sing Sing, Hudson Link is now in Sullivan, Taconic, Green, and Fishkill, which just welcomed its fourth graduating class, in partnership with Nyack College (24 Bachelor of Science in Organizational Management degrees). Hudson Link has to date 293 released alumni and the recidivism rate for the program stands at an astonishing 1.4%.

Although attendance was limited to 100 attendees, a part of that number was reserved for insider presenters, so the remaining seats were highly sought after. Featuring nineteen presenters (including Sing Sing Superintendent Michael Capra), a performance by the Carnegie Hall Connections Program (Carnegie Musicians and Sing Sing Insiders), and some TED videos, the day-long event was outstanding. The theme for this event was "Building Healthy Communities." The event was held

in the former Tappan Messhall area and anyone would have been hard-pressed to recognize it. The sets and draperies served to transform the area into something Hollywood would have been proud of. The day was filmed by the Oscar-winning director of "Silence of the Lambs" and other films, Jonathan Demme, in conjunction with The Jacob Burns Film Institute. All of the afternoon's talks are currently being edited for TED approval and will then be posted online, including on *The Community's* website. Those on our e-mail list will be alerted when this occurs.

What's Up

Tablets

Unfortunately, but not unexpectedly, the wait is not quite over. Final implementation of the kiosks and tablets are still going through some bureaucratic hurdles. Everything has still been approved at all necessary levels, but contract negotiations with the vendor are holding things up. Some incarcerated individuals and even informed prison staff have commented that the Department of Corrections will never "give us" tablets. While others simply choose to remain skeptical. We don't blame them. However, we remain confident that this long-awaited tool will be introduced by year's end. We will send out an alert to those on our email list if the contract is finalized between now and the next issue.

Segregation

Despite the more punitive appearance of the new 303 policy recently passed out to incarcerated individuals in the Wisconsin Department of Corrections, there is a genuine move away from segregation in response to rule violations. At Stanley the seg population has been reduced by about half in recent months and the head psychologist there - among others - has said the state is making a concerted effort to keep individuals in seg for significantly shorter periods of time, especially those suffering from mental health issues, and to rotate seg officers more often. Some individuals surely have experienced the "same old same" in regards to seg punishment, but in time we hope the more humane approach seen at Stanley will spread to every other prison in the state, and beyond. More to come.



Computer Coding in Prison

Late last year, San Quentin State Prison in California began a “rigorous new coding boot camp called Code.7370, believed to be the first of its kind in the country.” Out of 100 applicants, 18 were chosen to take part in the inaugural class, scheduled to meet four days a week for six months. Upon graduating, the students are expected to have sufficient computer coding skills to get jobs as entry-level Web developers.

The development of Code.7370 was initiated by Chris Redlitz and Beverly Parenti, a married couple who have taught an intensive entrepreneurship program the past several years called The Last Mile (more on this innovative program next issue).

An outside computer programming boot camp called Hack Reactor was also instrumental in Code.7370’s development, particularly in making it effective without giving the students Internet access. Students share equipment, and two on-hand instructors address questions while a third instructor teaches the class virtually from a location outside the prison (similar to a tele-visit).

Code.7370 was the result of the right time, place, and people, so don’t expect to see a similar program in Wisconsin’s DOC anytime soon. However, if you see an opportunity to propose and develop a more current vocational program in any field, don’t get discouraged by the usual indifference and stubbornness of corrections staff. You’re never too powerless to improve your future or environment and, as the men in Code.7370 are demonstrating, you’re never too old to learn new skills.

We the People

From theinnervoice84.wordpress.com, posted 03/13/2013

When I began writing these posts three years ago, I struggled a bit with what term to use for us who’ve been or are going through the criminal justice system. I generally find semantics to be a complete waste of time and I very strongly believe words have no power by themselves - we give them power based on our sensitivities, insecurities, and our personal definitions of each word. However, I refused to use convict, felon, or ex-con/ex-felon, because my mind viewed these as having too negative a connotation (again, based on my sensitivity and personal definitions). Foolishly, I chose a term that was technically no different than those: ex-offender.

It’s time to fix that.

Each of the above terms brings to mind images of untrustworthy, violent men, particularly minorities. And these are not just images in the minds of whites. Studies and experiments, such as “Measuring Individual Differences in Implicit Cognition” (Journal of Personal & Social

Psychology) and the Race IAT (www.implicit.harvard.edu), demonstrate that minorities subconsciously hold stereotypes against even their own races. Then there are the ridiculous claims, by cats who’ve been in the system a while, that they aren’t offenders, they’re *convicts* (a supposedly more prideful label the DOC used to classify us as). But as damaging as these labels are to us in general - in regard to employment, housing, etc. - they’re more damaging to our individual attitudes and confidence (self-esteem). Everything done to us and everything we do influences the way we think. By using restrictive labels like felon and ex-con to describe ourselves, we are more likely to associate ourselves with the negative connotations of those words, and to accept the inferior treatment they naturally attract. It’s a subtle process. With each experience, each observation and hardship, we learn to expect less of ourselves in accordance with society’s low expectations of us. Just look at the struggles for advancement of virtually every underprivileged, oppressed group in U.S.

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The Other Side of the Story

In every issue we plan to showcase at least one of the hundreds of thousands, if not millions (yes, millions) of formerly and currently incarcerated individuals succeeding despite the social stigma of their criminal histories and mental baggage of their pasts. We've all heard the negative news reports and seen those who keep returning to prison. Here's the other side of the story.

Torre Johnson, Sr.

Only two months into this world Torre Johnson lost his birth mother; at the age of seven he lost his father. He was raised in a well-kept home with six brothers and one sister, by a special mother that he credits for most of his strength, although he admits he doesn't agree with everything that surrounded his childhood. Torre was often told that he could become anything he wanted, but disregarded it as if it was just some type of therapeutic tactic.

Torre states he skipped from first to third grade, then had to repeat third grade because of constant bad behavior. In the fifth grade he was placed at Philip Elementary in a special class with the state's best fifth graders, but was terminated for constant bad behavior.

Torre used to embrace anger and hatred, but now states that he now will not place blame on anyone or one thing. Torre's first arrest was in 1974 and last arrest in 2005. Throughout the many years of confinement he involved himself in drug usage, drug dealing, and other criminal activities. Torre has been confined in prisons in Illinois and Wisconsin.

As a father, Torre says that the physical absence in his children's lives and not understanding the importance of fatherhood at that time still causes some pain even today.

After serving a second round of confinement, Torre was transferred from Waupun Correctional to Racine Correctional and was told he had to enter a program that was highly intense and could be released in six to nine months. After reviewing the methods of programming, Torre declined but then

eventually accepted it after being persuaded by others. Transitioning through the program with top honors, Torre says that prison gave him the tools to teach himself to care for himself and others, and that respect was his key to freedom

In 2002, Torre began working at CYD, social service center, where he once was placed as a child under the leadership of Ms. Jeanetta Robinson through the Community Corrections Employment Program. Still straddling the fence after his arrest for drug possession in 2005, he now began actually taking the steps toward direct change. Torre was able to witness more support than he had ever in his life, most importantly, the support and love he received from the incarcerated brothers. At his last sentencing, the judge challenged him to grow up and recognize his strengths. He received the same advice from a previous judge when he was younger, but was not ready to hear it. Torre has done a remarkable job of turning his life around. In doing so, he has placed himself in a position to share his gifts, talents and previous experiences with youth, adults and others.

Torre states that he is now re-enrolling in Milwaukee Area Technical College at which he has completed one semester in Human Services. He prides himself in having helped enrolled hundreds of brothers with the help of Becky Quesada.

Torre is the founder of X-Men United Mentoring by Example, founder of A.N.O.T.H.E.R. (Applauding New Opportunities To Help Each other Rise) support group, was previously on the advisory board of the Milwaukee Fatherhood initiative, as well as the Executive Board of Career Youth Development, Site Manager of the Holton Youth Center, Project Liaison at WCS Community Improvement & Job Training Program. Torre has been recognized by the Milwaukee Common Council, awarded by the Milwaukee Community Journal, and featured in the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel. Torre's leadership is clearly evident: he is often asked to serve on panels at colleges/universities and in prisons, and on various task forces to examine solutions to the problems plaguing our communities. There is no doubt that given his youthful energy, desire to make a difference, his sharing of experiences, his involvement and leadership, and his passion for growth, he will continue the struggle for all human rights.

Mr. Johnson can be reached at: Torre Johnson, 510 E. Burleigh, Milwaukee WI 53212,

Don't laugh at a distant boat tossed by the waves. Your relatives may be in it.

-Lunya

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history. They changed not only the language that society used to describe them, but also changed the way they described themselves. Our progress demands we do the same.

Changing the language, of course, won't erase the stereotypes. However, it will weaken them, which will allow us to better combat them with a more positive, factual, and balanced image based on respect and redemption. The media and numerous organizations obviously play a significant part in this issue, so it is important to appeal to them about rejecting dishonest labels to describe us.

If you want to advocate for changing the language, contact the Center for NULeadership on Urban Solutions (www.centerforleadership.org, 718-484-5879, 510 Gates Avenue, 1st Floor, Brooklyn, New York 11216) to learn more about The Language Campaign. If that approach doesn't interest you, though, just focus on changing the way you define and view yourself, and therefore how you define and view all currently and formerly incarcerated individuals. For example, I see my past and my mistakes as a strength. Because of all the time I've been down, I know I can handle whatever or whomever life puts in front of me. I understand soul-deep what matters in life and I'm grateful for the uncommonly clear perspective and humility incarceration has blessed me with. In turn, this is my image of others who've been or are going through the criminal justice system. Stronger, not weaker or underprivileged.

We are not ex-cons or inmates. We are parents, loved ones, citizens. We are people on probation, people on parole, formerly or currently incarcerated people. Ultimately, we are people, with pasts, dreams and the potential to reach them, just like anyone else. We need to realize this and define ourselves accordingly.

Keep boxing temptation.

Fact or Fiction

Fiction: There's no help for formerly incarcerated individuals.

Because men and women can face so many obstacles upon release from prison, it can seem like there's little to no true help for us. However, there are literally thousands of mostly free and oftentimes connected resources for formerly and currently incarcerated individuals to take advantage of, no matter their goals.

It is well-known that libraries, chapels, and re-entry departments at each facility, in Wisconsin at least, carry information about numerous organizations and post-release programs statewide and even nationwide. Prior to release, we can reach out - on our own or through our people - to find out exactly how we can use those resources before we get out. Upon release, we can access significantly more resources via the Internet (if we don't have a computer, libraries offer free Internet access).

A great service for resources is Fair Shake (www.fairshake.net), a free web-based re-entry organization that offers individuals a variety of virtual tools and info to use/apply at our own pace. They have a Resource Directory with over 16,000 listings covering just about every race, ethnicity, gender, sexual preference, and disability. And, if we're still locked up, they'll mail any info they have, even in Spanish. (Fair Shake, P.O. Box 63, Westby WI 54667). Then there's the Internet in general, where we can find free or very cheap courses on virtually any subject, deals on virtually any good or service, and support networks and assistance on virtually any personal issue or question.

Many of these resources, of course, are underfunded and understaffed for what they're trying to do. But even the best resources are of no help if we don't genuinely try to use/apply them. If we're looking for the type of help that will solve our problems, then the original statement above is a fact: there's no help for formerly incarcerated individuals. If we're looking for effective tools and stepping stones, though, that we can use to rebuild

(Continued on page 11 - Fact or Fiction)

When a fool shakes his rattle, it should always be another fool who dances.
- Ahmadou Kourouma

I Can't Say Our Father

Author Unknown

I can't say "our" if our religion has no room for others.
 I can't say "father" if I do not show this relationship in my daily life.
 I can't say "art in heaven" if all my interests & pursuits are earthly things.
 I can't say "hallowed be thy name" if I worship other things above god.
 I can't say "thy kingdom come" if I can't accept my role in god's community on earth.
 I can't say "thy will be done" if I sit back and let others do god's work.
 I can't say "on earth as it is in heaven" unless I make earth a fit place for all to live.
 I can't say "give us this day our daily bread" without extending an honest effort for it, or by ignoring those who hunger.
 I can't say "and lead us not into temptation" if I deliberately choose to stay in a situation where I am likely to be tempted.
 I can't say "deliver us from evil" if I refuse to change things I know are wrong.
 I can't say "thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory forever" if I fear what neighbors and friends may say or do.
 I can't say "amen" unless I honestly say also "cost what it may."

(Fact or Fiction - continued from page 10)

our lives, help is all around us.

Ultimately, the question isn't *where can we find help* but rather *do we have the focus and attitude necessary to take advantage of all the help out there?* If not, let's concentrate on improving our focus and attitude - fortunately, there are many free resources for that, as well.

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Send donations, suggestions, corrections, general comments, and material for publication to:

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 P.O. Box 100392
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Keep in mind that if your submission is chosen for publication, it may be edited for length, grammar, and/or language.

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The Drug Policy Alliance (DPA) is the nation's leading organization promoting drug policies that are grounded in science, compassion, health, and human rights.

DPA (www.drugpolicy.org) is putting out a call for drug war stories. If you would like to be profiled in the media, your story would be entered in a database for possible use.

Please send the information asked for below to: Drug War Stories, Drug Policy Alliance, 131 West 33rd Street, 15th Floor, New York, NY 10018.

- Name of the incarcerated individual
- Current prison he/she is in (institution name and address)
- Ethnicity/Race
- What kind of drug was involved?
- What is the length of sentence?
- Was a weapon involved?
- Contact information (e-mail/phone number) for contact person on behalf of prisoner
- Short story of your case

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