



TURNING POINT

The Newsletter of Missouri CURE
Citizens United for Rehabilitation of Errants

Missouri CURE ♦ P.O. Box 6034 ♦ Chesterfield MO 63006

missouricure@hotmail.com

www.mocure.org

From the Chair

by Michelle Dodson

Summer 2010

Historic NAACP Conference at Crossroads

On July 10, 2010 the NAACP held its first ever prison conference as an official adjunct site to its National Convention being held in Kansas City. I had the privilege of attending this history-making event as one of three Missouri CURE members who traveled to Crossroads Correctional Center located in Cameron MO. The theme of the 8-hour conference was "Prison Branches: the Untapped Resource."

Prisoners, NAACP leaders and members of other organizations came together to discuss criminal justice issues. Peter Wagner, Executive Director of Prison Policy, spoke about gerrymandering.

The U.S. Census currently counts incarcerated people as residents of the prison location. When states use Census counts to draw legislative districts, this enhances the weight of a vote cast in districts that contain prisons at the expense of other districts in the state. Maryland and Delaware have passed legislation to correct this problem and adjust Census data to count incarcerated persons at their home address. Similar legislation is pending in New York.

Despite a significant downsizing in NAACP staff, Director Benjamin Jealous has formed a national program to look into Criminal Justice reform. The NAACP is asking for help in reporting police brutality. They have created a reporting system on their website. You can e-mail, text or tweet information on police brutality that that you may have witnessed. The web address is www.naacp.org.

We also talked about how funding over the years has decreased in providing programs and education within the Missouri

prison system. An amendment in the federal Second Chance Act could provide states with funding to bring back Pell grants and education to their prison systems.

Another project is the "Ban the Box" campaign, which calls for elimination of questions about past convictions on initial public employment applications. The aim is to win policy change through grassroots mobilizations and build a political movement of formerly-incarcerated activists.

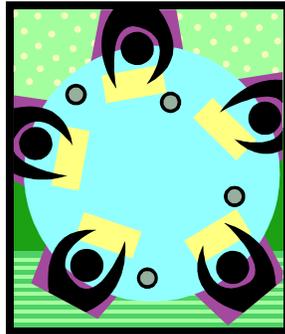
These "boxes" on a variety of applications such as employment, housing, and social services support structural discrimination against formerly incarcerated people. This campaign allows us to target and

challenge the many "boxes" we are now required to check.

Banning the box on public employment applications will contribute to public safety because it will promote stable employment in our communities. Communities of color and poor communities already are targeted by mass imprisonment, racial profiling, school closures, and low employment rates. People coming out of prison or county jails need to reunite with their families and return to their lives as productive members of society. They must be able to feed their families and pay rent and other bills. People with jobs and stable community lives are much less likely to return to crime in order to survive.

Paula Skillicorn of Missouri CURE gave a speech on how organizations can work together to achieve greater results — see article and picture on page 4.

Several speakers discussed the need to evaluate how our prison system is being run. We need to stop warehousing and start to rehabilitate people during incarceration.



Missouri CURE Officers:

- Michelle Dodson, Chair*
- Lisa Harrison, Vice Chair*
- Dolores Owen, Secretary*
- Maria Rubin, Treasurer*
- Hedy (Edna) Harden, Public Relations*

Turning Point Editor:

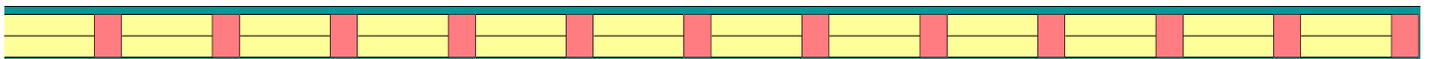
Hedy Harden

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Millions of people in our prison systems have been over-sentenced with long prison terms, speakers noted. We have created a society that likes to lock them up and throw away the key, but that is not a good response.

There are currently 2.3 million prisoners in the United States. Many states are struggling financially and looking for ways to reduce state budgets. A good way to balance state budgets is to reduce prison populations. ❖



A Look Back: Missouri Prisoners in Brazoria TX

by David Tripp

Intro by Dolores Owen: Some of the worst days of my life occurred in 1996 while I was preparing for a food visit with my son at Cameron (WMCC). He was just getting out of the hole after 30 days of discipline for making cherry hooch. Roughly five days before the scheduled food visit, I received a phone call from my agitated son. The connection was so bad I couldn't hear him. All I could understand was that he was somewhere in Texas. I became agitated myself and told him to write me ASAP. A couple of days later, I learned what had happened and I became angry enough to get involved in groups like Missouri CURE. I was determined that no other mother would suffer what I went through. I am sure that it was worse for my son, as I saw it in his eyes and in his face when he was back in Missouri. He looked like a wild animal and he had a hard time trusting anyone. I wondered if he would ever be the same again. What follows is a small sampling of what happened to him.

Back in 1996, I was serving four years in a Missouri prison on a drug conviction. One night that summer, I did something that changed my reality into a nightmare. I had kitchen duty on the night shift and had made some hooch. There was enough to get about 15 of us drunk. I was caught, of course, and sent to the hole for 30 days. I knew I was on the short end of my bit—less than a year—and I kept my chin up the best I could.

At about 8:00 a.m. on my last day of “hole” time, suddenly the wing filled up with prison guards dressed in full riot gear. They took me out of my cell, and one guard with a plastic shield pinned me to the wall while two others cuffed me.

Then the three guards took me to where a bunch of other cons were held and made us strip while a woman guard videotaped everything. I had been in many jails but never had to strip in front of a woman holding a camera.

They chained about 20 of us together and led us to the waiting bus out front. All in all, there were about 50 prisoners in one large school bus and two large vans.

We were being taken to a prison in Brazoria TX. It was an 18-hour ride in mid-summer, handcuffed and shackled, with a pee break somewhere in Oklahoma – by the side of the highway, chained together, with our backs to the road. For nourishment we were given an apple or an orange, a 2-liter bottle of water, and 2 peanut butter & jelly sandwiches. That was all during those 18 hours.

I'd never seen Texas before. When we got to Dallas, I thought it was a most beautiful city. Houston reminded me of my home (Kansas City), only larger. But

little did I know what awaited me in Brazoria.

When I first met the Texas guards, I did not consider them a threat. Then the “White Shirt,” holding a shotgun, made a short speech about shooting anyone who attempted escape. Needless to say, I



believed him.

The massive jail was situated approximately 40 minutes south of Houston. Upon intake the guards made a little speech. When addressing officers, we were told not to look the guard in the eye. I found this confusing, and it should have been my first clue that things were going to be bad.

On the way down, the prisoners had asked questions about Brazoria—most of the answers were lies. They told us we'd all have jobs down there and that it was just like the place we left. The reality was that it was a county jail, and there were no jobs. We weren't even allowed to leave the pod. There was no place for 20 to 30 cons to go every day – no jobs, no legal library of use for Missouri prisoners, no leaving the pod but once a week (if you're lucky) to see the sun for an hour. The place was small and crowded. We had five toilets – three didn't work. The smell was terrible.

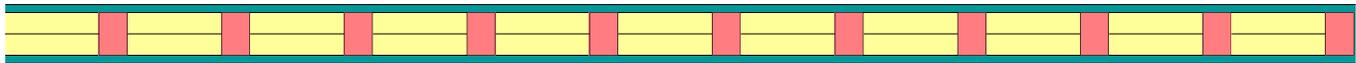
You can't lock people up like that and not expect problems. The food was all right, but not nearly enough. For lunch every day you got an apple or an orange and a fruit drink. The law library was full of Texas law books (which did us Missourians no good) and computers that we were told not to touch. This is where just one of our Constitutional rights was violated. Prisoners must have access to a law library.

I was only there about 2 or 3 months and never saw the attack dogs that made Brazoria famous, but I heard stories of men getting on the bad side of a screw and spending a week in the hole without food or water. We were also told by the other prisoners that just before we arrived, the water had been shut off for a couple of weeks as punishment. It was like a game of torture. They did their best to scare us to death. There were times I wondered if I'd ever be heard from again.

We all saw the news, just like the rest of America, of the “training” video with dogs attacking and biting prisoners who were already cuffed and passive. I had heard a rumor that this was in retaliation for some Missouri cons burning another county jail in Texas, then being transferred to Brazoria.

That last week in Brazoria was the best week. Missouri guards were there to “oversee” proper treatment of Missouri prisoners. A lot of us put up “Help Wanted” signs for all the guards who were about to lose their jobs because of that famous video—a small dig for the crappy way Texas treats its prisoners.

We saw the videotape of abuse on a Friday, and by the following Friday all of us were back in Missouri. I've never



Behind the Scenes

by Dolores Owen

For 20 years Missouri CURE has worked and struggled to be a vital support for prisoners and their loved ones and a catalyst for change. As you may know, we are all volunteers with jobs and families and other responsibilities. Our most pressing issues seem to be a skeleton staff and low memberships. One thing seems true: Prisoners need us and most of them are grateful for our dedication. Another thing is clear: We have too few families joining our ranks.

To enhance our efforts and effectiveness, we are attempting to reach more families of the thousands incarcerated in Missouri prisons. We need to convince them that Missouri CURE can be as strong as its numbers and that they can indeed make a difference!



Recently, Missouri CURE board members had an ongoing e-mail discussion regarding this topic: How do we get others to join and become active? Individual board members had theories. Some felt that most people feel helpless and do not think they have the ability or the power to bring about change.

Another member thought we should be striving to develop more relationships with people of color in our daily lives and working in coalition with other groups—"Out of these relationships will come our future leaders and members."

We asked ourselves: Are there black-led groups that share similar interests with CURE? What about other prison family organizations? Is there a way to hook up with them?

Our ongoing work with the KCMO Jaws of Justice radio program is an example of coalition-building. Through our participation in the historic Crossroads NAACP conference we found common ground with the country's large-

est organization of black and other people of color.

We have decided to re-establish the Prison Liaison program started by Becky Williams when she stepped into Missouri CURE leadership several years ago. It was a great idea that helped to involve others and benefited everyone!

Another issue is that many people still do not know we are out here. We can advertise our presence by sending out news releases and offering to speak to other groups. For example, Hedy spoke July 7 on a panel at a forum sponsored by the Black & Green Alliance in St. Louis.

Maybe the best way to find support and new members is by asking ourselves the question: If I were a family member of an incarcerated loved one, how would CURE membership benefit me?

Many great suggestions come from prisoners, and we value their ideas. We are asking our members and supporters for ideas on how we can get more families involved. We will be discussing this issue further in a workshop during our upcoming statewide conference September 18 in Columbia.

Join us if you can. Help us grow! ❖

Brazoria—from page 2

been so happy to see Missouri.

I was a lot younger then, and I shrugged off most of what I saw in Texas. I may be older and wiser now, but I look back and I am still confused. Why was I sent to Texas when I never committed a crime there? Why couldn't we look a man in the eye when he was talking to us? There were lots of piddly little rules that made no sense. It confused me that they were treating people so badly down there. I'd never seen that before and never thought it could happen in America.

That was my first trip to Texas, and I have no intention of returning.

These events serve as a small example of a larger problem. What baffles me is that you put a man in a cage and poke him with a stick and then wonder why he bites.

What happened to treating a man like a man? Give a man hope that he can be something better, and I think most will respond like a man, not an animal.

Double Victory in Washington DC

July 27: The U.S. House of Representatives passed legislation authored by Senator Jim Webb and Representative Bill Delahunt creating a blue-ribbon, bipartisan commission charged with undertaking a top-to-bottom review of the nation's criminal justice system.

This legislation has been a long-term focus of efforts by National CURE.

July 28: Congress passed a bill already passed by the Senate in March which would reduce the sentencing disparity between crack and powder cocaine. The bill now awaits President Obama's signature.

Remarkably, these 2 hard-fought major victories occurred in 2 consecutive days!

A Note on Private Prisons

by Hedy Harden

Prisoners from Missouri were sent to private prisons in Texas such as Brazoria during the mid-1990s to ease overcrowding while the State of Missouri engaged in a massive prison-building boom in response to the war on drugs and other mandatory sentencing. Private prison corporations' only incentive is profit, not the welfare of human beings in their care. Although these corporations are currently suffering from the recession, they survive by expanding overseas and by increased housing of federal prisoners and incarcerated immigrants in this country.

A Poignant Return to Prison

by Paula Skillicorn

In June and July, I was privileged to go to prison. While that is certainly an odd statement to make, for me it is true. In June, I returned to Potosi Correctional Center to cover the 10th anniversary of 4-H LIFE. I was unsure what kind of emotional impact being back at PCC would have on me. For 13 years, it had been my weekend home where I spent time with my beloved husband, Dennis. Sure, there were frustrations and irritations from having to spend our time in a prison, but we had so many wonderful times together; they greatly outweighed the bad ones.

But what would it be like without Dennis there?

The fact that I was there on business helped, because I was too busy covering the event to dwell on the huge hole I felt in that large crowd. I was so impressed with the meeting that my thoughts were not on my loss, but the wish that Dennis could see what a wonderful job his friends were doing.

In 4-H LIFE, the incarcerated parents not only learn parenting skills, they serve as the leaders of the organization and they plan the family meetings. Steve Gifford, the institutional activities director, explained that the men had planned the entire anniversary celebration, down to the set-up of the visiting room and the decorations. They kept things on schedule and led a traditional 4-H meeting – including the PCC Club’s customary “best thing that happened to me since last meeting,” educational activities, and lunch served by the men.

There was a lot of love in that room, not only among the men and their families, but for the staff and volunteers who

made this program possible. And while I was busy videotaping and shooting photos, they surprised me with the most wonderful honor for the role Dennis and I had played in starting 4-H LIFE.

Their kind words and warm reception reminded me I was with friends who cared about Dennis and cared about me.



For a moment, Dennis was there with us all.

These men and their families, along with my former Extension coworkers, are so special to me. I count them among my truest friends.

Soon after, I received a call from Jon Marc Taylor, a member of the NAACP in Crossroads Correctional Center. I had heard a lot about Jon, and he had been supportive while the state was trying to kill Dennis, but I had never spoken with him.

Jon surprised me with an invitation to speak at a historical event scheduled July 10 during the 2010 NAACP convention to be held in Kansas City. For the first time in history, part of the convention would be held in prison. How could I resist making history?

I was awed by the work these men had put into this event. Visitors were treated like royalty. We each had an escort who made sure we had everything we needed. Bill Herron was my escort. He knew Dennis in Jefferson City and in Potosi, which immediately made me feel at home. I recognized several other faces from PCC. Once again, men in gray

made stepping back into a prison feel like coming home. And while the reality of prison remained outside the door, inside was a gathering of forward thinking, articulate and passionate people who work toward positive change.

This all-day conference was jam-packed with information, speakers, and enthusiasm. I had been asked to speak about cooperation, but I was preaching to the choir. The NAACP members in Crossroads write resolutions that are passed by the larger

NAACP without so much as a word of change because they are so well written. The men at CRCC worked at least two years to hold an event like no other in this country, and they pulled it off magnificently. These men write successful grants, investigate free educational opportunities to partially compensate for the loss of Pell grants and GED programs, and they know how to get to the heart of a problem and find a solution.

The only criticism I have of this event was that it was too short. Jon literally had to herd some of us out at the end because we were so energized we didn’t want to stop.

A focus of this event was the need for groups to work together, inside prison and out. There are many talented, intelligent men and women inside Missouri prisons who want to be productive, involved citizens. Even within the confines of prison life, they can work together on the inside to effect change and they can share that with those of us on the outside.

The early colonists knew what we all need to be reminded: United we stand – divided we fall. Let’s all work together to improve the system. ❖

Family Liaison Program

by **Becky Williams**

In an effort to support families, Missouri CURE is re-establishing the Family Liaison Program. Since losing several liaisons to prison changes or release, there is a need to revitalize the program.

We are lining up one liaison for each Missouri prison who would be our main contact for information. Not only is this helpful when our loved one gets moved

to a new prison, but if one prison changes a policy or implements a new one, we can quickly check with the liaison from each prison to see if this is across the board or just with one prison.

Please let us know if you can help us out! No personal information will be shared without your permission. The only responsibility is to fill out a sheet of information for your facility such as vis-

iting hours, food visit procedures, programs offered, etc. We will keep these on file and, as a new family needs one, we can just share the information sheet. Occasionally we will ask you to verify or update these forms.

If you are willing to participate in this program, please contact me at beckywilliams13@charter.net or call 816-807-2187. ❖

CURE Speaks in St. Louis on Prison Industrial Complex

On July 7 MO CURE board member Hedy Harden was a featured speaker at the Black & Green forum co-sponsored by the Universal African Peoples Organization and the Gateway Green Alliance. The theme was the Prison Industrial Complex.

In 1980 there were approximately 500,000 prisoners in the United States. This number has grown exponentially to the present 2.3 million, driven by punitive federal drug laws and mandatory sentencing. The 1986 "Drug-free America" act specifically targeted inner cities. A black

male became 14 times as likely to be incarcerated as a white male.

Harden spoke to a packed crowd of mostly young people about the exorbitant cost to society of the death penalty, long sentences and aging prisoners, and how true rehabilitation and community corrections can make society safer. She



detailed the rights of prisoners contained in the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights.

"Imagine a society," said Harden, "where the vast majority of offenders remain in their communities receiving education, job training and life skills to make them able to compete and thrive in the work world, to pay taxes and live with dignity." She

called it "a formula for a better, safer, and more humane society." ❖

Missouri CURE

Annual Statewide Conference

Saturday, September 18, 2010 - 10:00 A.M. to 4:00 P.M.

Boone County Government Center, 801 East Walnut, Columbia MO

Speakers: Nelson Hopkins Sr., Missouri Ex-Offender
Director, Operation Promise Land
Director, Pardon & Parole Negotiations LLC, KCMO

Paula Skillicorn, Widow of Dennis Skillicorn
Co-founder, 4-H LIFE Prison Parenting Program
Co-founder, The Family Information Center website

**Lunch Provided • Workshops • Election of Officers • Official kick-off of fund-raiser:
Prize is a Beautiful Flag Afghan crocheted by MO CURE Secretary Dolores Owen**

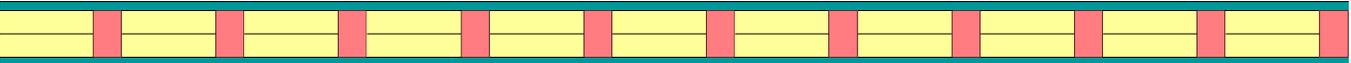
All are welcome — we hope to see you there!

For questions, contact Dolores Owen at 816-807-2187 or doloresmocure@yahoo.com.

1990

Celebrating 20 years of struggle!

2010

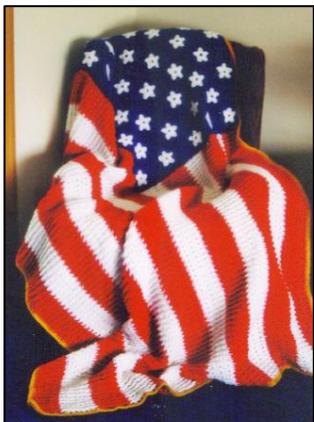


Missouri 85 Percent Law

You can help repeal Missouri's law requiring offenders to serve at least 85 percent of their sentences before parole consideration. Go to: <http://www.thepetitionsite.com/4/help-get-rid-of-the-85>.

Under Search Petitions, type in "Missouri 85 percent Law." One thousand signers are needed. Thanks to Mark Burnett at WMCC for sharing this information. ❖

No one is free when others are oppressed.



CURE Fundraiser

Restore "Old Glory" to its rightful position in America—Help MO CURE support prisoners' constitutional rights. Donation is \$1.00 or 6 tickets for \$5.00. Winner receives this beautiful crocheted flag! Size is approximately 86" by 53". Drawing is December 4. You need not be present to win. For further information, e-mail doloresmocure@yahoo.com or call 816-807-2187. ❖

Join Missouri CURE!

Date _____

Name/ID# _____

Facility _____

Address _____

City _____

State _____ Zip _____

Phone _____

E-mail _____

Please check the annual membership type:

- Prisoner \$2.00 *
- Individual \$10.00
- Lifetime \$100.00
- Donation \$ _____

* Stamps from prisoners are welcome if permitted by your institution.

CURE is NOT a service organization. We are an all-volunteer non-profit criminal justice advocacy organization. CURE has NO legal services. We advocate for criminal justice reform, but cannot take on individual cases.

Missouri CURE
P.O. Box 6034
Chesterfield MO 63006



MEMBERSHIP EXPIRES



Missouri CURE – Celebrating 20 Years of Struggle!