



TIFA Members Attend the 2015 PACT Conference

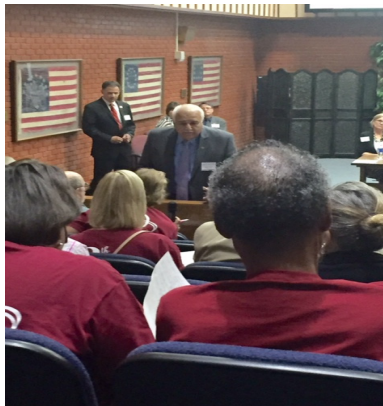
by Jeni Lyon

Hundreds of TIFA Members turned out to represent our families and incarcerated loved ones at the PACT (Public Awareness Corrections Today) conference in Huntsville on October 3, 2015. With most members wearing TIFA t-shirts or buttons, our presence was visibly impressive in every TDCJ presentation, and all the hallways and break out rooms.

At the morning general session, we heard the good news that recidivism rates have continued to decline, from a high of 80% in the 1990's down to a record low of just 21.4% in 2014. This means more of our loved ones are succeeding upon release and/or parole and not returning to prison. TDCJ attributes these falling recidivism rates to their rehabilitation programs, and to relatively new options such as ISF (Intermediate Sanction Facilities), which help people avoid revocations by treating substance abuse or providing cognitive rehabilitation if they violate the conditions of their parole.

We also learned that TDCJ supervised 81 marriages and over 5,000 visits last year. TDCJ has made some family friendly changes to the visitation rules and procedures such as relaxing the dress code to allow more comfortable summer clothing, and reducing the distance from 300 to 250 miles to automatically qualify for longer visits (special visits for those traveling over 300 miles must still be arranged through the unit in advance). TDCJ created some short videos, available on their website (<http://www.tdcj.state.tx.us/visitation/index.html>) explaining the dress code, identification requirements, and search procedures for visitors. So check out the videos and share them with all new TIFA members.

The Board of Pardons and Paroles gave two well-attended presentations outlining the parole review process. David Gutierrez, who was appointed to replace Rissie Owens as the Chairman of the Board earlier this year, explained the complex parole review process and outlined the factors Board Members consider (including the nature of the current offense, prior criminal history, substance abuse, time served, current age and health, and letters of support or protest). Many TIFA members hoped the Board would explain their highly anticipated revised reasons for denying parole, which promise to provide our families and loved ones with more insight into the Board's decisions than the old codes, such as "2D – Nature of the Offense." Mr. Gutierrez assured attendees that the new denial reasons will be announced soon and integrated by the Board in January of 2016.



Pardons and Paroles Chair, David Gutierrez gives a presentation to an attentive audience.

All of the Parole Board Members and Commissioners were in attendance and graciously addressed our individual concerns and questions after the Board's formal presentations. This is always a welcome opportunity for TIFA Members to talk directly to the people who make the decisions about our loved ones' parole.

The Reentry Division explained their role in helping to insure our loved ones' success upon release. Reentry



graphic by Center for Media Justice

We Won Prison Phone Justice!

#phonejustice

On October 22, in Washington DC, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) passed proposed rules that will substantially reduce phone rates from state and federal prison facilities. The Campaign for Prison Phone Justice was led by the Human Rights Defense Center, Center for Media Justice, and Nation Inside along with a team of allies, prisoners, and prisoner family members. The rules will reform what advocates called a broken prison and jail telephone industry that is dominated by Global Tel-Link, which controls 50 percent of the market for correctional institutions, and Securus.

The new rules will, among other things:

- Cap predatory prison phone rates at 11 cents per minute for prepaid and debit calls from state and federal facilities, and 22 cents per minute from jails.
- Rates for collect calls are slightly higher in the first year and will be phased down to these caps over a two-year transition period.
- Eliminate abusive hidden fees like connection & flat-rate calling fees
- Strongly discourage, but not directly ban, industry "commissions," or kickbacks, of vendor profits to correctional facilities.

TIFA Contact

is the official newsletter of the Texas Inmate Families Association © 1996. All rights reserved.

Opinions expressed in this publication are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent the policies of TIFA.

TIFA is a non-profit 501 (c)(3) of the U.S. Internal Revenue Code. Membership in TIFA is open to anyone. A Basic membership is \$25 per year and includes one newsletter subscription to the member address. A Basic Plus membership of \$35 per year includes all family members residing in one household and the inmate newsletter.

Board of Directors

Patti Kassel, New Braunfels
Chair

Rita Castro, San Antonio
Secretary/S Tx Regional Director
Robert Elzner, Pflugerville
Treasurer

Patt Jackson, Austin
Lucia "Sybille" Hamilton, San Antonio
Sharon Bass, Huffman
Verda Toussaint, Austin
Thomas Ann Hines, Plano

Jennifer Erschabek, Austin
Executive Director
Raylene Truxton, Spring
Deputy Director
Louise Elzner, Pflugerville
Membership

TIFA

P.O. Box 300220
Austin, Texas 78703-0004
Office: (512) 371-0900
www.tifa.org
tifa@tifa.org

And you can find us on Facebook.

Note: We read all mail that is received but cannot answer every letter. Our mission is strengthening families through support, education and advocacy.

Message from the Executive Director, Jennifer Erschabek



Today the political climate is changing and our country is becoming aware of the need for criminal justice reform and beginning to respond to it. Legislative leaders are talking openly about the need to be "smart on crime," to rely on incarceration as a last resort for offenders who are too violent to be allowed back into the community.

Work continues at the national level on the Fair Sentencing Act and the Second Chance Act. On Nov 2 President Obama signed the 'Ban the Box' Executive Order directing federal agencies to "ban the box" in their hiring decisions, prohibiting them from asking prospective government employees about their criminal histories on job applications. It's unclear how many federal agencies would be affected by Obama's action. Many agencies already delay asking about criminal history until later in the hiring process, but it's an important first step.

The alliance of people from across the political spectrum is the recipe that will work across the country and brings great hope that fundamental reforms will be passed by Texas in the year to come.

But in Texas we still have a lot of work to do. We are a growing group of Texans that are willing to come together, support each other and reshape criminal justice policy. Until there is an end to mass incarceration, families will continue to need the support and education that TIFA provides. And we'll need the help of all our families and friends to do this work.

If you are a TIFA member, thank you for your support and please plan to renew your membership.....we need you! Change is here but we need everyone working together and speaking up. We can do this only with your help. You can join by visiting our website at TIFA.org and while you are there, consider a donation to help us continue the good work. **n**

Don't Forget! As you do your Christmas shopping and when you order from Amazon use AmazonSmile and select TIFA as your charity.

Message from TIFA Chair, Patti Kassel



First, I'd like to take my hats off and thank all TIFA Board, staff and members that attended the PACT conference on October 3. We had a great turnout and successful noon session. This forum was a great opportunity to visit with the people on the front lines of TDCJ. I hope you gained a tremendous amount of knowledge and plan to attend again. If you weren't able to attend, I hope you will consider the next PACT conference in two years.

In the last newsletter I reviewed the first 3 of "7 Things to Remember When You Feel Discouraged and Defeated". Just like this article continues, so do our lives. Daily we get up and face a new day not knowing how it might end. The first item in this remaining list of 7 discusses today being priceless. Isn't it interesting that we don't see that fact sometimes until it's gone, used up and never to be seen again. What if we took each day, no matter the circumstances and treated it more gingerly? What if we made more time for ourselves, our loved ones and our neighbors? How might we change and how might the world also change at least through our eyes? **n**

4 More Things to Remember When You Feel Discouraged and Defeated

Written by Marc Chernoff

In the last newsletter we reviewed the first 3 things to remember when you are discouraged:

1. **You are not the center of the universe (stop making it all about YOU).**
2. **It is your resistance to 'what is' that causes your suffering (be present).**
3. **You are more than one thing (loosen up and stretch your identity).**

Now we continue our list:

4. **Today is still a priceless gift (make the best of it).**

I only have so many days left on Earth. I don't know how many that is, but I do know it's a very limited number. I know that each one of those limited days is a gift, a blessing... a miracle. And that squandering this miracle is a crime – a horrible lack of appreciation for what I've been given. And so, I reminded myself this morning that this day counts and that I still need to make the best of it. That doesn't mean I need to be hyper-productive or work myself into the ground, but that I should do something worthwhile.

Sometimes taking a break to nourish yourself is a worthwhile activity, because doing so allows you to regroup and do other worthwhile things. But just sitting around in self-pity isn't helpful. So get up and do something that matters with or for someone who matters. Extend yourself out and find the best in your day. Today is the first day of the rest of your life.

5. Complaining is only making matters worse (find a solution).

When I get in a funk, I have a tendency to complain out loud to everyone around who's close enough to hear me. Obviously, this doesn't help them, or me. And as soon as I catch myself doing this, I force myself to shift gears.

The bottom line is that you will never get to where you want to be by complaining about where you are now. Each step in your life is preparing you for the one that comes after it. Complaining does not work as a strategy. We all have limited time and energy. Any amount of time we spend whining is unlikely to help us achieve anything worthwhile. And it won't make us any happier either.

If you took 10% of the energy you put into complaining and applied it to solving your present problem, you'd be surprised by how well and how fast things can work out. (I forget this sometimes, which is why I'm writing it down again – to remind myself.)

Working as a life coach for the past decade with people who've suffered major trauma in their lives but found the courage to turn it around, I know we all have access to far more power, authority, and influence over our lives than we often believe. When you stop complaining, and refuse to see yourself as a helpless victim, you'll find that you are more powerful than you realized, but only if you choose to accept this reality.

6. Feeling discouraged and defeated is a sign that it's time to make a change (make that change).

It could be a change of heart, a change in your perspective, or a change in your habits. But the point in any case is that the way you are doing things is no longer working.

When we feel discouraged and defeated, typically our first instinct is to look outside of ourselves for someone or something to blame. In reality, we ought to be looking at how we're feeling, what we're thinking, and how we plan to respond.

Your life is your responsibility. While you can't always change what's outside of you, you can certainly change your perception of it. And the funny thing is, when you change the way you look at things, the things themselves change, which paves the way for positive action.

7. Even the tiniest possible step is progress. (take a tiny step NOW).

It can be hard to get moving when you're seriously stuck. This is how I felt a decade ago when I was stuck in a rut after simultaneously losing two loved ones to illness and my breadwinning job. It was really hard to motivate myself when I didn't think I had the strength to push forward – when I felt insanely horrible and sorry for myself. But I took one tiny step every day, and it felt good, and I got stronger.

That's what I did this morning too – I took the tiniest possible step. Just turning on my computer, opening up a document, and writing a single sentence. Such an action is so small as to seem insignificant, and yet so easy as to be possible when I was feeling defeated. And it showed me the next step was possible, and the next. And the end result is this blog post you're reading now.

Closing Thoughts

Yes, I'm still feeling out of it, but not defeated. I'm feeling stronger, because I took these steps.

I know some of you feel the same way from time to time, maybe more often than you'd like to admit. That's OK. We all do. We aren't machines, constantly charged up and ready to fire on all cylinders. We are human, which means we falter, we doubt, and we feel pain sometimes. And this too shall pass.

So my hurt from losing our appeal did get bigger when we ultimately lost our seven year fight recently. I was very disappointed and ached for my loved one, but surprisingly I didn't feel the anger and sadness as much as I expected. I believe I had already set myself up for the next step. Some call it Plan B. We will see this through with our loved one and be better for it. No resentment, no bitterness, just forward thinking. It's all in our attitude and gratitude. **n**

An Easy Way to Support TIFA

TIFA is connected with three companies that donate to us a small percentage of what we buy. These companies are Amazon, Kroger and Randall's/Tom Thumb. Many of you have asked how you can help to support TIFA. You can help TIFA by connecting your purchases with these programs. It does not cost you anything other than time to sign up and using your card when you make purchases. Also, ask your family and friends to connect with these companies.

AmazonSmile – Go to smile.amazon.com and sign in. You can then connect your orders with TIFA.



Randall's/Tom Thumb – Take your Randall's card to the customer service counter and fill out an application for the Good Neighbor Program. All you need is your card number and the charity number for TIFA is **13339**. It only takes a minute and you can divide your donations between up to three charities.



Kroger – Go to Kroger.com and register or go to the store for a card. If you register on line, you can choose your own ID. The number to use for Kroger's rewards program for TIFA is **82117**. **n**



Don't Forget! As you do your Christmas shopping and when you order from Amazon use AmazonSmile and select TIFA as your charity.

Phones (Continued from page 1)

"After 12-plus years, millions of friends, families and legal representatives will finally have relief from unconscionable and egregious inmate calling rates," said FCC Commissioner Mignon Clyburn. "Today, the FCC will make a real difference for the families and friends of 2.4 million inmates and their 2.7 million children. What may seem like a small step in the overall criminal justice reform effort will go a long way in enabling families to stay connected which should help to reduce our outrageous recidivism and incarceration rates, which are among the highest in the industrialized world."

"In passing the most comprehensive reforms to date to the prison phone industry, champions like Commissioner Clyburn listened to those long considered voiceless—the families of the 2.4 million people incarcerated in the United States," said Malkia A. Cyril, Executive Director at the Center for Media Justice and Co-Founder of the Media Action Grassroots Network. "While there is more work to do to ban commissions and protect the right to in-person visitation, the dozens of organizations and almost 200,000 individuals that fought long and hard for this day should be proud."

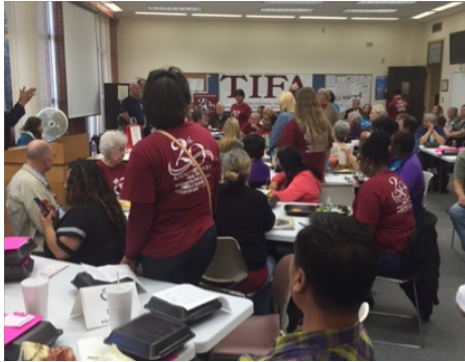
The high cost of phone calls and visitation has always presented a major barrier to families trying to remain connected during the period of incarceration. Finally, families will have some financial relief in the effort of keeping their families together. The new rates take effect 90 days after publication in the Federal Register for prisons and 6 months after publication for jails. **n**

PACT (Continued from page 1)

encouraged our loved ones to keep their TDCJ ID cards upon their release because it is an official form of identification that can be useful during re-integration. Reentry can obtain replacement Social Security Cards, and they can provide official Texas DPS ID cards for many, but not all, of our loved ones prior to their release. Reentry also assists Veterans in applying for V.A. benefits prior to release. Individual Case Managers are assigned to our loved ones for pre and post release assistance. TCOOMMI (Texas Correctional Office on Offenders with Medical and Mental Impairments) coordinates continuity of medical care upon release, including helping former offenders apply for health

insurance through Medicare or the Federal Exchange (Obamacare).

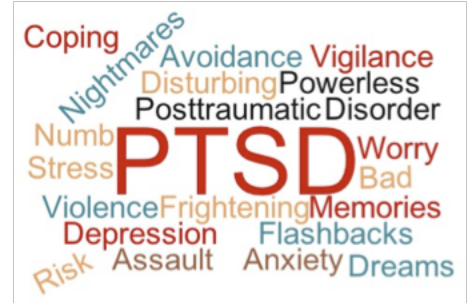
TDCJ's Rehabilitation Division outlined their services during a presentation as well. Most State rehab programs are specific to the type of offense, such as sex offences, DUI's, or anytime substance abuse was a factor. These programs are often required toward the end of our loved ones' sentences, or prior to their release on parole. The combination of the GRAD (Gang Renouncement And Disassociation) and the SVORI (Serious/Violent Offender Reentry Integration) Programs, have helped over 5,000 gang members to avoid or leave Ad Seg (Administrative Segregation, AKA solitary confinement) and join the general population. The Chaplain's Offices also oversee numerous faith-based rehab programs, which are run by over 23,000 volunteers state-wide (bless ALL those volunteers!).



TIFA members packed the TIFA Resource Room during the lunch hour to visit and hear TIFA updates.

During our lunch break, TIFA Members enjoyed the rare treat of a state-wide meeting. We discussed our burgeoning state and national campaigns to "Ban the Box" on job applications asking if the person has ever been convicted of a crime, which is a big hurdle to successful re-integration. TIFA proudly announced that we are rolling out workshops in the prisons to teach inmates how to prepare their own parole packages. TIFA is also working with TCJC (Texas Criminal Justice Coalition), among other organizations, to propose parole reforms for our Legislature to consider. We also had time to network between chapters and make new friends.

TIFA Members turned out as a powerful collective voice at the PACT Conference, and we made the most of every moment individually and together. **n**



What is Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder?

When in danger, it's natural to feel afraid. This fear triggers many split-second changes in the body to prepare to defend against the danger or to avoid it. This "fight-or-flight" response is a healthy reaction meant to protect a person from harm. But in post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), this reaction is changed or damaged. People who have PTSD may feel stressed or frightened even when they're no longer in danger.

PTSD develops after a terrifying ordeal that involved physical harm or the threat of physical harm. The person who develops PTSD may have been the one who was harmed, the harm may have happened to a loved one, or the person may have witnessed a harmful event that happened to loved ones or strangers. But not every traumatized person develops full-blown or even minor PTSD.

When someone is incarcerated, the severity of symptoms is related to the level of coping skills prior to incarceration, the length of incarceration, the restrictiveness of the incarceration environment, the number and severity of institutional episodes of abuse, the number and duration of episodes of solitary confinement, and the degree of involvement in educational, vocational, and rehabilitation programs.

Signs & Symptoms

PTSD can cause many symptoms. These symptoms can be grouped into three categories (not all may apply):

1. Re-experiencing symptoms

- Flashbacks—reliving the trauma over and over
- Bad dreams
- Frightening thoughts.

Re-experiencing symptoms may cause problems in a person's everyday routine. They can start from the person's own thoughts and feelings. Words, objects, or situations that are reminders of the event can also trigger re-experiencing.

2. Avoidance symptoms

- Staying away from places or things that are reminders of the experience
- Feeling emotionally numb
- Feeling strong guilt, depression, or worry
- Losing interest in activities that were enjoyable in the past
- Having trouble remembering the dangerous event
- Thinking the world is dangerous, no one can be trusted.

Things that remind a person of the traumatic event can trigger avoidance symptoms. These symptoms may cause a person to change his or her personal routine.

3. Hyperarousal/over alert symptoms

- Being easily startled
- Feeling tense or "on edge"
- Having difficulty sleeping,
- Having angry outbursts.

Hyperarousal symptoms are usually constant, instead of being triggered by things that remind one of the traumatic event. They can make the person feel stressed and angry. These symptoms may make it hard to do daily tasks, such as sleeping, eating, or concentrating.

It's natural to have some of these symptoms after a dangerous event. Sometimes people have very serious symptoms that go away after a few weeks. This is called acute stress disorder, or ASD. When the symptoms last more than a few weeks and become an ongoing problem, they might be PTSD. Some people with PTSD don't show any symptoms for weeks or months.

Why do some people get PTSD and other people do not?

It is important to remember that not everyone who lives through a dangerous event gets PTSD. In fact, most will not get the disorder. Women, however, are more vulnerable to PTSD than men.

Many factors play a part in whether a person will get PTSD. Some of these

are risk factors that make a person more likely to get PTSD. Other factors, called resilience factors, can help reduce the risk of the disorder. Some of these risk and resilience factors are present before the trauma and others become important during and after a traumatic event.

Risk factors for PTSD include:

- Living through dangerous events and traumas
- Having a history of mental illness
- Getting hurt
- Seeing people hurt or killed
- Feeling horror, helplessness, or extreme fear
- Having little or no social support after the event
- Dealing with extra stress after the event, such as loss of a loved one, pain and injury, or loss of a job or home.

Resilience factors that may reduce the risk of PTSD include:

- Seeking out support from other people, such as friends and family
- Finding a support group after a traumatic event
- Feeling good about one's own actions in the face of danger
- Having a coping strategy, or a way of getting through the bad event and learning from it
- Being able to act and respond effectively despite feeling fear.

Helping a Family Member Who Has PTSD

When someone has PTSD, it can change family life. The person with PTSD may act differently and get angry easily. He or she may not want to do things you used to enjoy together. You may feel scared and frustrated about the changes you see in your loved one. You also may feel angry about what's happening to your family, or wonder if things will ever go back to the way they were. These feelings and worries are common in people who have a family member with PTSD.

It is important to learn about PTSD, whether it is a mild or severe case, so you



can understand why it happened, how it is treated, and what you can do to help.

But you also need to take care of yourself. Changes in family life are stressful, and taking care of yourself will make it easier to cope. You may feel helpless, but there are many things you can do.

In our next newsletter, in Part 2 of PTSD, learn some ways you can help yourself and your family cope with PTSD. (Information from bringeveryoneinthezone.org and http://www.tgorski.com/criminal_justice/cjs_pics_&_relapse.htm) [n](#)

Ban the Box - Progress Being Made

by Raylene Truxton

Prior to the FCC reducing inmate calling rates, TIFA's Executive Director, Jennifer Erschabek and Deputy Director, Raylene Truxton traveled to Washington DC on Oct. 7, 2015 to meet with a coalition of colleagues from across the nation brought together by the Center for Community Change, a national advocacy organization. This National Cohort is drawn from a broad range of backgrounds and has been working with US Justice Department and policymakers to push the Ban the Box campaign or Fair Chance Act.

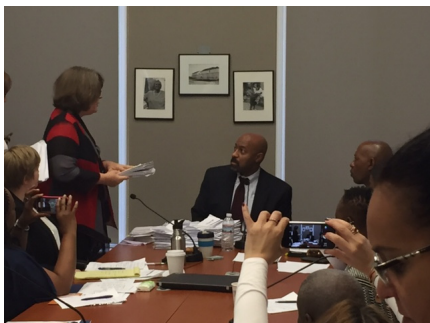
The attendees traveled to the Rayburn House Office Building on Capital Hill to meet with representatives from Elijah E. Cummings office, a ranking member of the House Committee on Oversight and Governmental Reform who introduced the House version of the bill with Rep. Darrell Issa (R-CA), and Senators Cory Booker (D-NJ) and Ron Johnson (R-WI) who introduced the Senate version. The bill would prohibit federal contractors and federal agencies from asking about the criminal history of a job applicant until the applicant receives a conditional offer of employment.

On October 7th the Senate Homeland Security and Government Affairs Committee unanimously passed the Fair Chance Act but the bill must make it through 5 committees in the House which may prove to be very difficult by December 16, 2015 which is the end of the first session of 114th Congress.

[Ban the Box \(Continued on page 6\)](#)

Ban the Box (Continued from page 5)

On Friday, October 9th, the Cohort met with Roy Austin Jr., deputy assistant to President Obama and director of the White House Office of Urban Affairs, Justice, and Opportunity, to encourage President Obama to sign an Executive Order to Ban the Box just in case the current bill, "Fair Chance Act" does not pass in Congress.



Jennifer Erschabek, presenting the first group of your Ban the Box letters to Roy Austin, Director of the White House Office of Urban Affairs, Justice, and Opportunity.

There were also approximately 2500 letters presented to Austin in support of this position from members of the cohort. The Cohort also expressed concerns to ensure that if the President issues an executive order, he will include protocols that will ensure accountability. For an executive order to have teeth, it should:

- Require an individualized assessment for every applicant that includes date of the conviction, relevance of conviction to position applied for, and evidence of rehabilitation
- Require employers to provide applicants a copy of conviction history, and an opportunity to review background check results before a denial of employment
- Include an applicant appeals process with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission and Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs
- Mandate penalties for corporations and contractors who do not comply with the directives of the executive order or the legislation.

Then on Nov. 2, President Obama issued an Executive Order instructing federal employers to delay asking about a job applicant's criminal history, embracing an initiative that promotes the hiring of people with records. However, over 60% of all federal agencies are already doing this and the order does not cover federal contractors or include oversight and

enforcement of the order.

The President did reference the Fair Chance Act that was introduced by Sen. Booker and Rep. Elijah Cummings (D-Md.) stating this congressional action is necessary to give the measure weight and avoid its being undone by an incoming administration. The Booker-Cummings bill would also prohibit federal contractors from requesting criminal history information from candidates for positions within the scope of federal contracts until the conditional offer stage.

As the campaign to "ban the box" and enact other fair-chance hiring practices gains more momentum, we need to continue to urge Congress to pass the Fair Chance Act. But we also need to continue to express our dissatisfaction with the bill as it is currently written because it does not detail enough enforcement to make employers accountable if they discriminate against those who have been incarcerated. **n**

TDCJ Warden Visits with Pearland Chapter

By Twila Dotson

On August 18, 2015 the Pearland Chapter of TIFA had the honor of having Sr Warden Frank Reescano of the Stringfellow Unit address the group. Warden Reescano's visit proved to be very informative and enlightening. His topic for this meeting was "Ethics." Leading with the Abraham Lincoln quote "If you want to test a man's character, give him power." Warden Reescano opened the conversation for loved ones and family members to give their honest opinion of the TDCJ system. He admitted that unfortunately many come into positions of authority and subscribe to the "NO" mentality. He admitted that it took him 7 years to relinquish that mentality. Once he did, he found that his unit operated more smoothly. Comments and concerns ranged from the heat conditions to the difference between "special" visits and extended visits. He seemed very interested in each of the comments and concerns of those assembled.

Warden Reescano made it a point to speak of the efforts that he makes on his unit to not only get acquainted with the offenders, but to become acquainted with the family members. It is TIFA's hope to have Warden Reescano to visit our meeting again in the very near future. **n**

Stringfellow Sr Warden Reescano



Pell Grant Pilot Program

One of the best ways to make transformative changes in a life is through education. For those who are incarcerated, education changes the way they think and how they feel about themselves. It allows them to look at their choices, their behavior, and the consequences of their actions.

On May 21, 2015, U.S. Rep. Donna F. Edwards (MD) introduced the Restoring Education and Learning (REAL) Act, H.R. 2521, which would make state and federal prisoners eligible for Pell grants – a form of federal financial aid for post-secondary education programs. Prisoners have been restricted from Pell grant eligibility since 1994, when President Bill Clinton signed the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act (VCCLEA) into law.

The Education Department has now announced the Second Chance Pell Pilot to examine whether restoring access to Pell Grants for prisoners reduces recidivism rates and leads to jobs. The three-year pilot program will make some federal and state prisoners eligible to get federal aid in the form of Pell Grants. Courses will be taught by a select number of colleges as soon as fall 2016. Colleges that are interested had to apply by Sept. 1 to participate during the 2016-17 academic year. Eligible inmates will be able to pursue an associate or bachelor's degree while incarcerated.

The eight community colleges and two universities associated with TDCJ have applied to participate in the pilot and

should learn if they will be accepted into the program sometime during November 2015. Through this pilot program, incarcerated individuals who meet Title IV eligibility requirements and are eligible for release, particularly within the next five years, could access Pell Grants to pursue post-secondary education and training. Money from the grants would directly reimburse institutions for the cost of delivering courses in prisons rather than go to prisoners and can only be used to pay for tuition, fees, books and supplies required by an individual's education program.

The Vera Institute of Justice estimates that the average annual cost of incarceration is approximately \$31,286 per prisoner. The Open Society Institute reports that it costs only \$1,400 per year to provide a prisoner with college courses, which are much more cost-effective in terms of reducing recidivism rates than incarceration alone.

According to a 2013 Department of Justice funded study from RAND Corp., inmates who participated in correctional education programs were 43% less likely to return to prison. And based on a 1993 TDCJ study, the recidivism rate for those who earn an associate degree is 13.7% and for those who obtain a bachelor's degree the rate is 5.6%. Upon earning a master's degree, the rate is effectively 0%. The chances of attaining employment are also 13% higher for inmates who receive an education behind bars, compared to those who do not.

"Giving people who have made mistakes in their lives a chance to get back on track and become contributing members of society is fundamental to who we are—it can also be a cost-saver for taxpayers," said Education Secretary Arne Duncan in a statement this summer. **n**



Healing Inside and Outside

By Jacqueline Conn

I spent three years and a handful of months in TDCJ, mostly on the Lane Murray Unit, a little on Hobby. I thought I could get through it unscathed, and in

many ways getting through it unscathed became my obsession. I became obsessive-compulsive about cleaning my cell or cubicle and not touching any surface I didn't have to. I stayed to myself and kept away from any friendship that might lead to scars, physical or emotional, determined not to let prison mark me permanently.

I spent countless hours in my cubicle looking out the window over the sinks and showers watching for birds, imagining what that car ride home would be. Then it came.

You've probably heard the term "institutionalized," a common insult we used for women in prison who had been there too long. I've used it myself. What I didn't realize was that after only three years I would come home different. It took a long time to understand what was going on with me. I was ashamed to talk about it.

My mom came to pick me up. On the ride back to Austin, I shifted focus between the world outside the window and the Jr. Whooper on my lap, as I sat in the passenger seat in a donated Goodwill t-shirt that read: "have a coke and a smile," feeling how an adoption dog must feel after they go from sharing a cage with a living being that pees the floor to owning their own midweight winter fleece and cushioned bed. There's not a word for it. Overwhelmed, maybe? It's not that I wasn't glad to be home. It's that I didn't have any words or anywhere to put the life I'd just left. The world no one out here wanted to hear about or could understand.

I tried to stuff my memories in a box and pretend they didn't exist, tried to pretend I was "normal."

But, I couldn't sleep through the night or be in large spaces with a lot of people. I would jump and sometimes cry when people came to the house unexpectedly. I know that word for that now. It's Post-Traumatic Stress. At the time, my counselor just kept saying, "it's normal you're afraid of going back." She didn't get it.

This is why I hate the term "institutionalized." It shames us. There's no perfect way to do our time. None of us knows how, and most of us do it awkwardly.

Sometimes we forget when we're inside who we are, and that's human. We are human. We all have different experiences and we all internalize them or understand them in our own way.

It would take a long time before I fully learned to readapt to being a person, and not a thing or an offender. Prison takes something from all of us, but no one tells us how long it will take to get it back. And no one tells us how.

I can say this: start small. Even while you're inside, or especially while you're inside. After prison, I punished myself for a while. I wouldn't allow myself to have a television or go on a date or fully be free. I kept trying to distance myself from my shame by over-correcting with work and school. But that's not everyone.

What I think everyone can relate to though is the idea of shame. That voice that tells us we are not ok or we do not belong. Be cautious of that voice. It is not your friend.

When I say start small, I mean start with practicing empathy on yourself. It's the first step in drawing out the roadmap back to yourself that no one else can draw but you. I learned to love and trust myself again. It didn't happen in a day or even a year. It takes however long it takes to untangle our lives and our identities from the trauma and the hurt and that prison leaves. I still find myself making lists. Two lists. One of who I am, positive words only. And the other of what my shame tells me that I am. I throw the second one away. There's no place for it in my life.

Life may not be perfect the second you go home. In fact, it won't be. Life will never be perfect and neither will you. That's not the point of it anyway, right? **n**

Don't Forget!! TIFA's new Anniversary tee shirt celebrating 20 years!! Visit our website at tifa.org for sizes, availability and ordering information.





Texas Inmate Families Association

Strengthening families through support, education, and advocacy

TIFA
PO Box 300220
Austin, TX 78703-0004

CONTACT
Vol.20 No. 4 Oct 2015

TIFA Chapters

Amarillo

1st Tuesday at 7 pm
First Christian Church
3001 Wolflin Ave.
(Snodgrass Hall)
Amarillo, TX 79107
(806) 352-6928

Austin- South

1st Monday, 6:30 pm
Sunrise Community Church
4430 Manchaca Road
Austin, TX 78745
(512) 371-0900

Austin - North

3rd Tuesday, 7:00 pm
Lord of Life Lutheran Church
9700 Neenah Avenue
Austin, TX 78717
(512) 371-0900

Beaumont

1st Tuesday, 6:30 pm
St. Jude Thaddeus Catholic
Church Family Life Center
6825 Gladys
Beaumont, TX 77726
(409) 617-8395

Conroe

Last Monday, 7:00 pm
Eagle's Nest Ministries
1450 Blake Road
Conroe, TX 77304
(281) 435-9908

Corpus Christi

2nd Tuesday, 7:00 pm
New Life Behavior Ministries
3833 S. Staples, Suite S-103
Corpus Christi, TX 78411
(361) 813-7106

Dallas

3rd Wednesday, 6:30 pm
Lover's Lane Methodist Church
9200 Inwood Rd Oxford Rm #103/105
Dallas, TX 75220
(817) 219-1628

Ft. Worth

1st Monday, 6:30 pm
St. Christopher Episcopal Church
3550 S.W. Loop 820
Fort Worth, TX 76133
(817) 798-9010

Granbury

Currently Reorganizing
Century 21 Shirley Hooks Real Estate
122 N. Crockett
Granbury, TX 76048

Houston

2nd Tuesday, 7:00 pm
Workfaith Connection
(Dacoma Location)
10120 Northwest Fwy 290 Suite 200
Houston, TX 77092
(713) 450-3972

Humble

2nd Thursday, 7:00 pm
Cavazos Insurance Agency
19333 Hwy 59 #165
Humble, TX 77338
(936) 217-0768

Killeen - Harker Heights

2nd Tuesday, 6:30 pm
Trinity Baptist Church
403 East FM 2410 Rd.
Harker Heights, TX 76548
(254) 289-9429

Nacogdoches

3rd Saturday 10:00 am
First Baptist Church
411 North Street
Nacogdoches, TX 75961
(936) 564-4546

Pearland - South Houston

3rd Tuesday, 6:30 pm
Manvel Bible Chapel
4230 FM 1128
Pearland, TX 77584
(713) 303-9785

San Antonio

2nd Tuesday, 7:00 pm
St. Vincent De Paul Catholic
Church Parish Hall
4222 Southwest Loop 410
San Antonio, TX
(210) 387-1558

San Antonio - North

3rd Thursday, 7:00 pm
St Marks Evangelist
Catholic Church
1602 Thousand Oaks Dr.
San Antonio, TX
(915) 204-5870

Tyler

2nd Saturday, 10 am
Freedom Fellowship
2915 SSE Loop 323
Tyler, Texas 75701
(903) 504-9771

***If you are interested in starting
a TIFA chapter in your area,
please contact the TIFA office.
(512) 371-0900***