



## Families and the Effects of TDCJ Visitation Policies

*Incarceration causes a traumatic separation for families and some have said that the loss of a family member to prison is even more demoralizing to wives (or husbands) and children than a loss resulting from death.*

And it is equally hard on other extended family members. This makes the contact between family members through visitations, phone calls, letters, and emotional support an important, significant, and beneficial factor for both parties.

However as important as maintaining family relationships are, these supportive relationships are strained by the challenges of staying in touch with offenders during incarceration. For example, family members must travel significant distances, perhaps during work or school hours, to visit their family members. Often security requirements to get into the prisons are scary, confusing and burdensome to families, especially those with small children. Additionally, visits take place in crowded areas and in conditions not conducive to positive parent-child interactions. Personal searches, waiting times, restricted visiting hours, and other issues serve as barriers to ongoing connections between offenders and their families. Another significant barrier is the expense of phone calls; family members accepting collect calls must accept higher-than-market rates per minutes, even when their incarcerated family member is dialing locally. And the



complexity of setting up phone lines to receive phone calls can also be perplexing to families especially for those families that share phone plans with multiple households.

During 2012-2013 TiFA conducted a survey of family members and one of the issues explored was the expense of visitation for families. Many families did not realize how much they were spending on visitation until they documented the costs in the survey. Below are some selected results from that survey.

In the results of the studies it was clear that the distance traveled directly impacted the cost of the visit. Over 30% of the families who visited traveled more than 200 miles, one way, and 30% of the families surveyed reported spending more than \$200 per visit. Another 22% reported spending between \$100 and \$200 per visit.

### How far do families travel to visit (one-way)

0-100 miles – 17%  
100 - 200 miles – 37%  
200-300 miles – 15%  
> 300 miles – 17%  
Blank – 13%

### Estimated cost of a single visit (includes gas, meals, hotels, and quarters for visitation)

< \$99 – 44%  
\$100 - \$149 – 14%  
\$150 - \$199 – 8%  
> \$200 – 30%  
Blank – 4%

The most common factors that prevented visiting were the ones that were expected to be barriers. There was a clear break between the top three and the remaining three responses. The top three responses included distance, health and money. These responses were followed by transportation, nothing prevents visiting and work.

### Estimates on monthly phone calls:

How many families who were surveyed accepted phone calls? 81%  
(Blank – 9%)

### How much is spent per month on phone bills:

\$0-\$100 – 64%  
\$101 - \$200 – 25%  
\$201-\$425 – 11%

Mean - \$109 Median - \$80  
Range - \$15 - \$425

Visitors often represent the only contact offenders have with the world

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## TIFA Contact

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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.

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outside the prison walls, to which they will most likely return after serving out their sentences. And the strength of the connections offenders maintain with their families and communities may depend substantially on visitation policies set by administrators and how these policies are enforced.

Now is your chance to have some input into these policies. Currently there are two visitation surveys being conducted, one by TDCJ and the other by Texas Criminal Justice Coalition (TCJC).

The TDCJ survey is online in at [http://www.tdcj.state.tx.us/php/visitation\\_survey/index.php](http://www.tdcj.state.tx.us/php/visitation_survey/index.php) and will remain open until March 31, 2014.

The TCJC survey is online at <http://www.TexasCJC.org/visitation-survey> and will close on March 1, 2014. If you would like a hard copy of the survey to complete, please email [jrenaud@texascjc.org](mailto:jrenaud@texascjc.org), or call (512) 441-8123, ext. 102, to request a copy. **n**

**If you are  
interested in  
starting a TIFA  
Chapter in Tyler,  
please call us at  
(512)-371-0900 or  
send an email to  
[tifa@tifa.org](mailto:tifa@tifa.org)**

**Reminder:** If your loved one has changed units please let TIFA know so we can make sure they get their newsletter. Send an email to [membership@tifa.org](mailto:membership@tifa.org)

## Message from the Executive Director, Jennifer Erschabek

**A**s we begin our New Year, we can look back on 2013 and count the positive accomplishments in criminal justice. On the national level, families can be grateful that the FCC voted to substantially



reduce the cost of interstate phone calls. This should make the next step of reducing in-state calls easier. Attorney General Eric Holder announced that the Justice Department will no longer pursue "draconian mandatory minimum sentences" for certain drug offenses. There have been some successes with the litigation for better climate control in the prison system. Target, a major employer, has banned the box from its job applications. And the Second Chance Reauthorization Bill was passed which is designed to improve the outcomes for offenders returning to their communities, thereby reducing rates of recidivism and achieving successful re-entry into society upon release.

At the State level, TIFA along with our partners, are celebrating the closing of two private prison facilities. And this year we will be making major push to increase our membership, educate Texans about criminal justice issues and energize everyone to get the vote out and support the issues that are important to us.

I am looking forward to a very motivated, energized, and busy New Year with TIFA and wishing all will be sharing my enthusiasm. **n**

## Grievances – Part 3

### Official Reasons for Being Turned Down - Terri LeClerc, Ph.D.

We've heard as many conspiracy theories about grievances as there are TDCJ inmates. Some may be true. But let's study ways to avoid violating rules that will automatically allow readers to turn down a grievance.

1. Your time has expired. In Texas, inmates have 15 days from the incident or when you should have been aware of the improper condition. This rule encourages inmates to file while the System has a chance to investigate witnesses, etc.
2. You are repeating a grievance within 7 days. Officials need time to read the grievance and respond to it. We have seen the stacks of



grievances; you'll be amused to learn that yours is not the only one sitting on the UGI's desk.

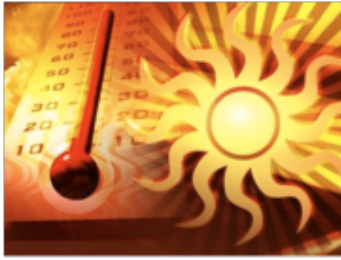
3. You have submitted more than 1 grievance within 7 days. Unless one of the grievances involves inmate disciplinary or emergencies, TDCJ isn't equipped to review more than 1 complaint a week. Even 1 a week is overwhelming. Remember that you are preparing to re-enter the Outside World. Bosses—heck, even mothers—do not process repeated complaints with much joy.

4. You didn't turn in originals. Even a carbon with new signature won't be processed (unless the UGI lost/didn't process the first one). Keep track of any returned grievance, especially if you plan on advancing to the next step of reader (Step 2, the courts).
5. You added wrong or excessive attachments. Use the form's spaces. You can mention that you have proof, documents, etc., that they can request from you. But attachments can get lost easily. Hang onto them; make copies of them.
6. You didn't mention that you have attempted to talk over the problem with staff first. Give the name, position, and date of the person you first discussed the problem with. Exception: If you are protesting the outcome of a disciplinary problem, you may go straight to a Step 1 without talking it over with yet more staff.
7. You filed a Step 2 that duplicates your original Step 1. That's not what Step 2 readers need. In a Step 2, explain why the Step 1 decision was wrong. Offer additional evidence; emphasize the fact that the UGI overlooked or misread.
8. You complained about a condition the System cannot fix. It cannot control your ex-spouse. It cannot appeal to a court on your behalf. It has no control over ICE or INS.
9. You have to explain what the System can do to correct the wrong. Recently I read about a loss of personal pictures during a shake-down. Both Step 1 and 2 were denied; although the loss is heart-rending and regrettable, the UGI and Huntsville staff cannot replace personal photos. They also didn't step right up and fire the staff...
10. You used vulgar or indecent language. Why would a reader step forward and grant a grievance that is insulting? If the reader is a saint, maybe. But, generally, your readers will be tired UGIs who don't need to be insulted yet again. Instead, practice skills that will also help you Outside; be diplomatic and polite. Remember your dear old Grandma's advice: You can catch more flies with sugar than vinegar. Still true!
11. You ask for money. TDCJ will compensate for lost property if proven, and when possible. But we've never heard of TDCJ paying someone because breakfast wasn't nutritious, etc.
12. You ask the prison system to discipline its own staff. Personnel might later get moved, might even be replaced. But asking for these actions will simply result in a returned grievance.
13. Your writing is too hard to read, period. If you cannot write so that someone can easily skim it, ask someone else for help. Type it. Print it. Always remember your tired (and cranky) reading audience, and help make reading as easy as you can.

Next issue: Writing Tips for Persuasion

Terri LeClerc, Ph.D., author: *Prison Grievances: When to Write, How to Write*, a graphic novel with worksheets.  
\$9 through Amazon.com [n](#)





## Heat Litigation and TDCJ

At least 14 inmates have allegedly died in recent years from heat-related causes in TDCJ. But when the story broke this summer that TDCJ was constructing climate-controlled facilities for its hogs, even though most buildings for guards and inmates lack air conditioning, the Texas prison guards joined inmate families in litigation against TDCJ over the heat and the indifference of the State regarding people's well-being in these extreme weather situations.

In August of 2012 a federal judge ruled that a former inmate may sue the state claiming a Texas prison reached dangerously high temperatures and he was given no relief. The U.S. Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals found that there was evidence "sufficient to allow a jury to conclude that [prison officials] were deliberately indifferent to significant risk to the inmate's health."

At its worst, the heat index inside some of the South Texas prisons that held inmates soared to as high as 130 degrees, according to court documents.

By stating that exposure to extreme heat possibly violates the Eighth Amendment's protection against cruel and unusual punishment, the appeals court reversed a lower court decision which had dismissed the suit in February of 2012.

And then in December of 2013, a federal judge ruled that the steaming hot conditions on Louisiana's death row prison constituted "cruel and unusual punishment" and ordered corrections officials to draft plans by February to cool the Louisiana State Penitentiary at Angola to safer temperatures.

With the recent ruling by a federal judge in Louisiana and after the 5th Circuit Court of Appeals allowed litigation to go forward over excessive summer heat inside Texas prison units, most of which lack climate control, 2014 will be a very interesting year to watch what will happen in Texas' prisons with the eminent heat lawsuits. [n](#)

## The 4<sup>th</sup> Annual Statewide Reentry Council Coalition Conference

The Bexar County Reentry Council hosted the 4<sup>th</sup> Annual Statewide Reentry Conference in San Antonio on Friday, December 13, 2013 at the St. Anthony Hotel. This yearly conference brings together local reentry councils from around the state to share successes and information.

Dr. Ana Yanez-Correa was one of the speakers in the morning and she updated the group on the successes and challenges of the last legislative session concerning criminal justice. Dr. Correa also gave the group a hint about what issues the Texas Criminal Justice Coalition will be working on for the next session. Some of these issues include:

- Prohibiting discrimination because of background
- Making sure people can find suitable housing
- Protecting landlords if they rent to

ex-offenders

- Banning the 'Box' on employment applications.

April Zamora, the Director for the TDCJ Reentry and Integration Division shared what was happening with the Statewide Reentry Task Force.

The 25 member TDCJ Task Force has five workgroups that focus on reentry issues related to housing, employment, women's issues, family, and community services. Within this Task Force TIFA is working on the Family and Faith Workgroup that has the following goals.

- Identify current programs or resources available to promote family reunification, and advance faith-based and other community-based entities that focus on family reunification.
- Identify strategies to improve the family's involvement in the offender's reentry efforts, and identify gaps currently found in the family unification process.
- Identify strategies to enhance the pre- and post-release support provided by community-based groups (including faith-based and nonprofit groups), and identify gaps or barriers currently preventing these entities from providing services.
- Identify barriers that impact an effective collaboration with family and other support service groups, including those caused by :
  - statutory barriers
  - regulatory barriers
  - programmatic barriers
  - resource barriers
  - implementation barriers
- Develop recommendations that will address the gaps and barriers, and report the findings and recommendations to the Reentry Task Force.



TDCJ Reentry and Integration Division Director April Zamora and TIFA Executive Director Jennifer Erschabek at the San Antonio Reentry Conference.

The Reentry Division has also announced that it is launching a voluntary Reentry Program that will be implemented in three phases.

Phase I will provide offenders with identification documents before they are released. They will be given a birth certificate, a social security card and a State ID if needed.

Phase II of the implementation will be the use the Texas Risk Assessment System – Reentry Screening Tool (TRAS-SRT) to assess offender risk of re-offending, with program enrollment offered to moderate and high risk offenders. The case managers will develop a reentry plan in cooperation with the offender, community providers and family support systems, designed to address offender needs in nine areas that have been identified as keys to successful reentry, including: identification, housing, employment and education, health care, substance abuse, transportation, clothing and food, financial resources, and support systems.

Phase III is the provision of Community Reentry Services. Community Reentry Specialists will work with moderate and high risk offenders who were enrolled in pre-release Reentry Planning services. The Community Reentry Specialists will provide case management and reentry engagement in the following areas: identification, housing, employment and education,

health care, substance abuse, transportation, clothing and food, financial resources, support systems and family reunification.

Eligibility criteria for the Reentry Program include:

- Must have an FI 1, FI 2, or FI 3R vote with a target release date within 6 months, or sentence maximum expiration date within six months
- No active ICE or felony detainers (excludes State Jail detainers)
- Must plan to reside in Texas upon release from TDCJ.

The afternoon was spent in breakout groups and planning for next year's conference. **n**

## Learn About Your New Affordable Health Insurance Options!

– Caitlin Dunklee

As a TIFA member, you already know about the hardships that incarceration creates for you and your loved ones. Many TIFA members live through great emotional and financial stress. Today I'd like to share with you some information that might help ease one financial burden: taking care of your health, and the health of those you love.

Since October 1, 2013, millions of Americans who currently lack affordable and adequate health insurance have been eligible to enroll in coverage under the Affordable Care Act (ACA). The ACA includes several reforms to our nation's health care laws, and makes health insurance more accessible.

Here are some of the basics:

In the past, preexisting conditions prevented many Texans from enrolling in health insurance, or caused their monthly payments to be far too high. Under the ACA, a health insurance company cannot deny you or charge you more if you have a preexisting condition.

Every health insurance company participating in the ACA must offer ten essential benefits including emergency services, preventative and rehabilitative care, lab services, and preventative health, which means you stay healthy and out of the emergency room. In addition, every plan must offer substance abuse and mental health treatment, a service that will be particularly helpful for our friends and family during reentry.

As you may know, the Affordable Care Act requires that everyone get health insurance, or pay a fine. There are some exemptions, including incarceration or if you make less than 100% of the federal poverty level, that help individuals so that they will not have to pay the fine.

You can sign up for health insurance under the ACA until March 31, 2014. The application is online [www.health-care.gov](http://www.health-care.gov) or you can attend one of the free centers around the state that are offering help. Here, a trained volunteer will walk you through the application process, determine if you are eligible for financial assistance to pay for insurance, and help you compare different health insurance plans. If you find a plan you like, you can enroll right then.

What is the saying – in order to help someone else, you must take care of yourself first! **n**



## 6<sup>th</sup> Annual Prisoner's Family Conference

**For Those Who Care and Wish to Do More**

**February 19-21, 2014  
Dallas, Texas  
Night Hotel – Dallas, Texas**

[www.prisonersfamilyconference.org](http://www.prisonersfamilyconference.org)

**THE NEED** The United States incarcerates more of its citizens than any other country in the world. With only 5% of the world's population the U.S. incarcerates 25% of the world's prisoners. Over 2.5 million people are incarcerated in the United States, leaving behind 2.7+ million children and countless family members and friends traumatized by the experience. Unfortunately, history tells us that as many as 70% of children of prisoners will one day become prisoners themselves and at least 65% of prisoners returning to our communities will recidivate within 3 years after being released from prison. These unacceptable and tragic facts diminish the quality of life and safety of our communities for all of us and call for effective resolution.

**THE GOAL** Credible research finds that strong family support during and following a loved one's incarceration is crucial to the prisoner's successful community reentry and family reunification. The conference goal is to strengthen the prison family and promote successful reentry and reunifica-

tion, ultimately reducing the recidivism rate in the country. To that end, the National Prisoner's Family Conference provides critical connections and information to improve the quality of life for the entire prison family and offers ample networking opportunities with those from across the country serving prisoners and their families.

Regular Registration \$245 begins December 16

At The Door Registration Fee \$300 begins February 12

The registration fee includes morning coffee service, light lunch and afternoon break refreshments each day; all general sessions; selection from multiple diverse workshops and 2 evening networking discussion and advocacy sessions with refreshments. **n**

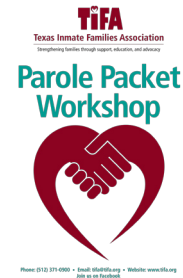


## NEW TIFA WEBSITE

[tifa.org](http://tifa.org)

Please be patient!! We have moved to our new TIFA website. It will take us a little time to get all the tabs, documents and calendars completely up to date but we are working on it. We are so excited that we will have an easier website to work with and therefore provide better services for our members. **n**

## TIFA Announces the Parole Packet Workshop Schedule for 2014



January 25 – Killeen  
April – Pearland  
July – San Antonio  
Sept – Dallas

These workshops are for family members and friends who have loved ones in a Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ) unit and would like to learn more about the parole process and how to put together a parole packet. The workshop provides information about the parole process and the Texas Board of Pardons and Parole, a workbook and parole packet example, and a question and answer session afterward.

TIFA will provide a packet that includes information on:

- Good Time, Work Time and Flat Time
- Parole and Mandatory Supervision Eligibility Time frames
- The Parole Timeline
- The Risk Assessment Instrument and the Offender Severity Class
- Voting Options
- Parole Board, Prison Units and Contact Information
- Helpful Phone Numbers and Web Sites
- A sample parole packet

Be sure and tell your family and friends to visit the TIFA website at [tifa.org](http://tifa.org) for more information and to register or you can call the TIFA phone line at 512-371-0900 and leave a message. Registration is \$50 for members and \$85 for nonmembers (which includes a membership). [n](#)

## Grief: The Silenced Emotion (Part 1)

(adapted from *The Houses of Healing* by Robin Casarjian)

The scope and depth of loss for offenders is enormous. Just think about some of the most obvious losses that have occurred because of prison:

- The loss of freedom
- The inability to make decisions about what you can do
- The loss of choice in medical and dental care
- The loss of privacy
- The loss of the last remnants of self-esteem and the sense that you matter.

However, when someone goes to prison losses are not only suffered by the offender. The family that is left behind in the free world also shares these losses with the offender.

- The loss of family and friends because of stigma
- Children not being with their parent
- The loss of sharing special occasions and holidays
- The loss of a shared sexual life
- The loss of dreams

Getting in touch with the profound loss and sadness that results from some-

one going to prison, especially if the offender will be in for a long period of time, is hard in a culture that has little compassion for the pain and suffering of offenders. In many circumstances, someone going to prison is often met with an angry public reaction, "He deserved it." Or "He should have thought about this before," leading to the stigma that most families close to the offender feel.

Like many of the issues involved in emotional healing, just looking at the issues of grief and loss takes courage. Rather than facing the sadness or sorrow that comes with many losses, we often mask these feelings. Denying grief, acting like nothing much has happened when loss occurs, is learned in all dysfunctional families. Instead of dealing with the real feeling about what is happening, the pain is swallowed, and life goes on "as usual." The grief is absent. And, as a result, healing becomes impossible.

Dr. William Worden, a specialist on grief counseling, identified four "tasks of mourning" to deal with loss. Consider how each of these fits into your own life. You may find these steps useful in your own healing.

### First Task: Accepting the Fact of Loss

The first task of dealing with loss is acknowledging your losses and accepting the fact of the loss. To name your losses and speak about them makes the losses "real". It means they are happening or have actually occurred. In many cases this may be extremely painful to deal with. In other cases, like the death of a person who has created a lot of aggravation or suffering for you, the loss may feel like a relief.

If it is a painful loss, we may get lost

in anger and denial and run from the truth to shield the part of us that doesn't want to feel or believe that the loss is real.

In order to move forward with life we all have to come to accept the fact of loss, the meaning of it, and in many instances, its irreversibility. Then we can deal with the truth of our situation as best we can, and with patience and intention, work through at least some, and (depending on the circumstances) perhaps all of the pain.

### Second Task: Mourning

To mourn our losses means to identify the feelings that are associated with the loss and to face our feelings openly, honestly, and with gentleness. All healing requires some compassion for ourself, truth-telling, and self-acceptance.

Grieving or mourning may ask us to accept a range of deep feelings. Sadness is just one. In mourning our losses we may experience feelings of helplessness. It can be painful and frightening to acknowledge how many things we have had (and have) little or no control over. Anger, guilt, shame, despair, love, compassion and passion may also arise. Author Clarisa Pinkola Estes writes of "Letting the heart break --- not break down --- but break open." If it opens, you will feel pain. And you find relief and renewal.

Crying is not always a part of grieving or mourning our losses, but if we are open and in touch with our deepest feelings of loss, there will, in all likelihood, be tears. [n](#)

(In the next newsletter [Grief: The Silenced Emotion \(Part 2\)](#)  
[Third Task: Adjusting to the New Situation](#)  
[Fourth Task: Investing Your Energy in Something New](#))





## Texas Inmate Families Association

Strengthening families through support, education, and advocacy

TIFA  
PO Box 300220  
Austin, TX 78703-0004

**CONTACT**  
**Vol.19 No.1**

## TIFA Chapters

### **Amarillo**

1st Friday, 7:00 pm  
Buchanan Street United Methodist Church  
617 N. Buchanan  
Amarillo, TX 79107  
(806) 626-7728

### **Austin- South**

1st Monday, 6:30 pm  
Sunrise Community Church  
4430 Manchaca Road  
(just south of Ben White Blvd.)  
Austin, Texas 78745  
(512) 371-0900

### **Austin - North**

3rd Monday, 6:30 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, Texas 77726  
(409) 246-8146

### **Conroe**

4th Monday, 6:30 pm  
Montgomery County Library  
104 IH-45 N  
Conroe, TX 77301  
(214) 766-5603

### **Corpus Christi**

1st Monday, 7:00 pm  
Molina Neighborhood Center  
614 Horne Road  
Corpus Christi, TX 78416  
(361) 461-4954

### **Dallas**

3rd Wednesday, 6:30 pm  
Lover's Lane Methodist Church  
9200 Inwood Rd Oxford Rm #200  
Dallas, TX 75220  
Phone: (817) 798-9010 or  
(817) 219-1628

### **Ft. Worth**

1st Monday, 6:30 p.m  
Ol' South Pancake House  
1507 S. University Drive  
Fort Worth, TX 76107  
(817) 798-9010

### **Houston**

2nd Tuesday, 6:30 pm  
Acres Home Branch Library  
8501 West Montgomery  
Houston, TX 77088  
(903) 360-4697

### **Killeen**

2nd Tuesday, 7:00 pm  
American Legion J.Q. Adams  
Post 223  
208 South Park St.  
Killeen, TX 76541  
(254) 449-5050

### **Pearland/South Houston**

3rd Tuesday, 6:30 pm  
Pearland Westside Library  
2803 Business Center Dr., Ste 101  
Pearland, TX 77584  
(832) 748-8990

### **Rio Grande Valley** (San Benito)

No regular meeting, but materials are available at:  
START Center  
743 N. Sam Houston  
San Benito, Texas 78586  
(956) 399-7818

### **San Antonio**

2nd Tuesday, 7:00 pm  
St. Vincent De Paul Catholic Church Parish Hall  
4222 Southwest Loop 410  
San Antonio, Texas  
(210) 680-3505

### **San Antonio - North**

3rd Thursday, 7:00 pm  
St Marks Evangelist Catholic Church  
1602 Thousand Oaks Dr.  
San Antonio, TX  
Phone: 210-387-1558

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