



## Balancing Will & Skill: The Changing Job Market of Texas

*In today's slower economic times and ever changing job market there is major competition for jobs and, for ex-offenders who have to overcome a criminal history, getting a job can be even more difficult.*

**E**mployers in Texas are looking for workers with the right skills and willingness to be flexible in their career moves. This means that ex-offenders have to go above and beyond in their willingness to be flexible and also in preparing themselves by developing a solid, set of technical skills. The Texas Workforce Commission has described it as a balancing and blending of will and skill. This is becoming more and more critical in finding a job and keeping a job.

Employers need workers who have the desired skills, education, and even the ability to learn new skills. The Texas Workforce Commission has divided these factors into four areas: 1) Workplace basics, 2) Will, 3) Skills, and 4) Distill what Texas employers say they want...

### Workplace basics

#### Good communications skills – Can you:

- Explain who you are
- Explain what do you do (to co-worker or customer)
- Explain what you need (from a co-worker or customer)



Have the ability to listen to instructions

- Critical thinking skills (if you are explained a sequence of events, can you determine what will probably happen next, can you understand new ideas)
- Can-do attitude/pleasant attitude (workers who can focus and are "engaged" in their work)
- Work with people who are of a different age, race, gender and education level. (Are you friendly with others? Are you efficient with others? Are you demonstrating you listen to others?)
- Focused and can follow directions
- Punctual (Will you show up early or on time?)

**Will** – Most Texas employers say them want employees who show some initiative and who demonstrate will-power, have passion. It may be that it's the education and work experience that gets a person considered for a job but it's passion, self-motivation and flexibility that gets the job.

Willpower is:

- Being flexible
- Having the ability to be patient, yet persistent
- To accept that your career path may not be perfectly linear
- Be willing to make the necessary sacrifices while addressing the challenges that shape your work life and this is particularly true for ex-offenders.

**Learned Skills** – A person does not need to have a college degree to get ahead in the Texas economy. Only half of the job openings require a degree but experience in Excel has proven critical. Formal education credentials, however, provide employers with an easy shorthand way to assess worker skills. A formal academic education, whether that is a Bachelor's degree, an Associate's degree or an Apprenticeship certificate is an important stepping stone to landing a job and a formal educational credential in a demand field definitely enhances your employability. Strong academics, high school diploma, post secondary schooling and technical's add up to 'stackable credentials'.

*Continued on page 2*

## 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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*Continued from page 1 (Balancing Will & Skill)*

**Distill** – Formal education is a great beginning, but being able to learn at work and distill information from your co-workers is becoming more critical as companies eliminate in-house training. The ability to continually learn new skills and apply them is an important and valuable attribute for any worker. Life-long learning is increasingly important as workers must shape their own career trajectory by building their skills – both formal and informal – and apply those skills in ways that match their interests, passions, life-styles expectations and career goals.

For ex-offenders in today's job market, they will have to work harder to get that job and move ahead in life and putting together workplace basics, education skills, distilled skills, and willpower in order to succeed is essential. Employers need workers who can not only get along well with co-workers and customers, but also have the desired skills, education and the ability to learn new skills and why can't that be an ex-offender?

In the end, it's up to your loved one to take responsibility for what they can control in their future. Whether they are preparing to get out of prison, currently looking for a job (in or out of prison) or trying to improve or advance in their current job, they have to balance the will with the skill in order to succeed. Everyone has to take responsibility for what they can control. Do not pass up those opportunities to learn a new skill, further an education and 'stack those credentials'.

For more information on vocational education and work in Texas visit:  
<http://www.texascaresonline.com/index.asp>. ■

## Message from the Executive Director, Jennifer Erschabek

**D**uring the last Legislative Session, Budget Rider 58 was attached to the budget bill that mandates that the Ombudsman Office provide a report each year on Dec. 1<sup>st</sup> about the number and type of inquiries it receives, and the resolution of those inquiries. This yearly report will be given to the Governor, Lieutenant Governor, Speaker of the House, and the legislative committees tasked with criminal justice and appropriations and also made available to the public.



There are two purposes to this report. The first is to ensure that state officials who oversee criminal justice policies have more information as to the nature of complaints made by members of the public to the Ombudsman about TDCJ operations so those officials can gauge how accurately, quickly, and completely TDCJ addresses the complaints. The other purpose is to increase the overall trust and confidence the public and state officials have in the Ombudsman Office and its capability of responding to complaints.

I want to encourage all TIFA members who have issues with TDCJ, and do not get resolution at the unit level, to submit these issues to the Ombudsman's Office. I believe it is very important that the report accurately reflect the on-going problems and concerns family members and their loved ones are encountering in the system. Without your input, the legislative committees who deal with criminal justice

issues will never know the full extent of the problems we face every day. Only by all of us doing this and doing this together can we hope to have our concerns addressed.

### Responsibilities of the TDCJ Ombudsman Office

- Act as a liaison between TDCJ and the general public
- Respond to informational inquiries regarding agency policies, procedures, or actions
- Respond to questions concerning a specific offender
- Facilitate problem resolution
- Make appropriate referrals to agency staff
- Act as a contact and information resource for special interest groups



## Survey on TDCJ Visitation Practices and Policies

**D**uring the 2013 Texas legislative session, the Texas Legislature passed Budget Rider 61, which requires TDCJ to conduct or commission a survey of its visitation policies, for the purpose of improving those policies.

Visitation by family and friends can make a positive difference during an offender's time in prison. Visits give offenders something to look forward to, an incentive to participate in rehabilitative programs, and a mechanism with which to cope with prison life. Studies also show that prison visitation can reduce recidivism by helping offenders maintain social ties with family members and help improve the transition

offenders make from prison back into the community. TDCJ is currently in the process of reexamining and revising existing visitation policies to make them more "visitor friendly".

If you have ever visited someone at a Texas prison this is the chance to share your experiences. TIFA and other advocacy groups are working with the Texas Criminal Justice



Coalition (TCJC) to distribute this ANONYMOUS visitation survey to as many families and friends as possible. Please forward this survey to any family members and friends who visit TDCJ and may not be on a group's distribution list.

TIFA and TCJC strongly believe that a study of visitation policies cannot be done without the input of those who visit their loved ones. The survey should take less than 30 minutes to complete. It will close on December 31, 2013.

On line you can access it at <http://www.TexasCJC.org/visitation-survey>

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 mailed copy. ■

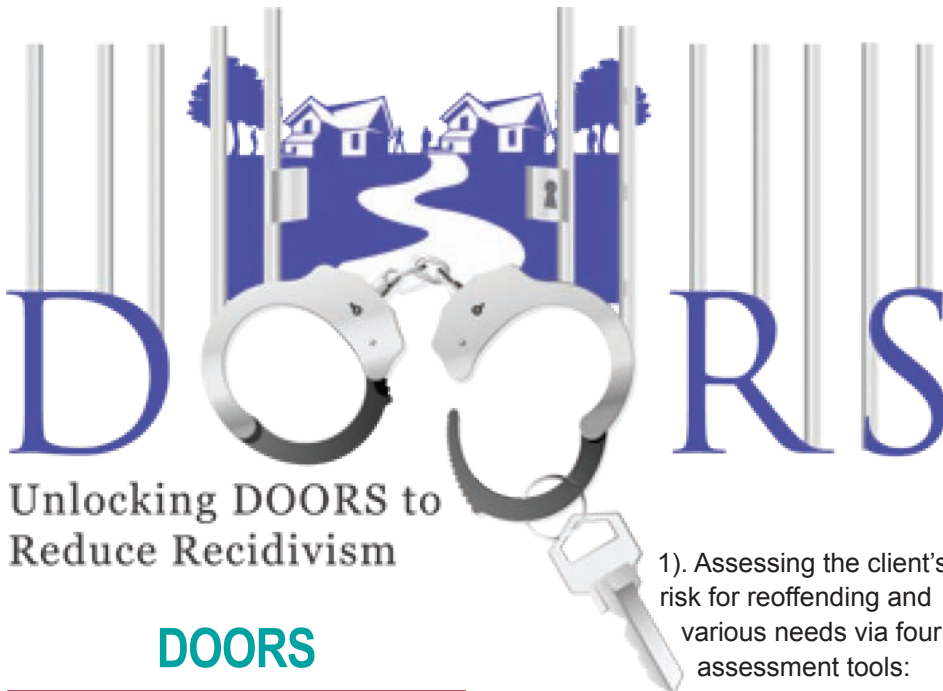


## Grievances – Part 2

### 1. What are the rules for writing grievances?

- a). The TDCJ requires inmates to first discuss the problem with the appropriate staff—sometimes that is chow-hall staff, chaplain, unit guard, supervisor— whoever is responsible for the area of the complaint.
- b). Then TDCJ requires the next step to be filling out a Step 1 Grievance. Forms are available in each unit.
- c). If the unit grievance officer turns down the grievance, then TDCJ requires someone still concerned about the problem to fill out a Step 2 explaining why the answer to the Step 1 was wrong—not repeating the whole problem, but arguing with the basis of the decision.
- d). If the Huntsville grievance officers decline to act, then the inmate has done all he can within the system. If the problem is severe enough, if the inmate is within the time frame, if the inmate can create a writ, then he might take that grievance out into the court system. ■





**A**s offenders reenter into the free-world there are many hurdles to overcome and sometimes it might seem that opportunities to succeed are unattainable and out of their reach. But DOORS in Dallas, TX, is there to help them. DOORS is not a reentry service provider or program; rather, a “hub” or “clearinghouse” of services for ex-offenders. DOORS offers the keys to a successful reentry by serving as a client advocate and a resource center, offering ex-offenders assistance with clothing, dental, medical and mental health care as well as access to educational and legal advice. Other types of assistance include housing, job readiness skills, job referral, transportation access and much more. The goal is to reduce the chances of ex-offenders returning to prison by removing barriers they may face once released. And the great thing about DOORS is they include families in the process.

DOORS accomplishes their goals by the following means:

- 1). Assessing the client's risk for reoffending and various needs via four assessment tools:
  - Level of Service/Case Management Inventory (LS/CMI) assessment tool to identify general risk and criminogenic need factors;
  - Behaviors and Experience Inventory (BEI) to measure past and present behavior;
  - Benefits Calculator to identify financial eligibility and resources for needed assistance within the community; and
  - Career Key to assess job interest and skill sets.
- 2). creating a targeted custom-plan based on the above assessments;
- 3). sending them to DOORS partnered providers for service;
- 4). and monitoring the client's progress working through his or her targeted custom-plan for a period up to four years.

DOORS serves all adults who have previously been incarcerated or those currently on parole or probation. They

do not currently serve those who are required to register as a sex offender. However, DOORS will do its best to locate a service provider for these individuals when requested.

Those interested in going through the intake process should contact Yvonne Young, DOORS Program Director, or a case manager at 214-296-9258. There is an intake fee of \$5.00 due at the initial appointment. The application can be downloaded and completed prior to the initial appointment by visiting the DOORS website and clicking “Services”.

For more information: please visit the DOORS website at <http://www.dallasdoors.org>.

*“Unlocking DOORS, Inc., known as “DOORS”, is a 501.c.3 organization that is committed to reducing recidivism (repeat offending) so as to create safer communities and healthy families.*

## Coping Strategies for Families

**F**irst and foremost, don't blame yourself. You are not responsible for the actions of your loved one.

- Follow through on your own personal goals. Don't put your personal well being on hold. Even though it is hard to do, your life has to go on.
- Find a balance in your caregiving and family responsibilities. Don't focus all of your energy on the incarcerated family member.
- Set financial and emotional limits with your loved one and set them early. Phone calls, visits and financial support for your loved one can easily

get out of hand. Decide what you have time and the finances to do and stick to those limits.

- Find close friends or other family members that you can turn to for support and understanding. Choose people you can talk to in safety.
- Take advantage of community support groups such as TIFA to gain support from others and learn ways of coping.
- Continue with family routines and traditions. Celebrate holidays and find creative ways to involve your loved one.
- Don't hold on to unnecessary obligations or responsibilities for your incarcerated loved one. If it's something that can be replaced later and adds undo burden on you, let it go.
- If you are feeling controlled or manipulated by your loved one, understand that he or she is acting out of fear of losing you. Talk about these fears and provide reassurance.
- Some of the most stressful times for your family will be right after arrest, transfer to a new facility, parole interviews and release. Be prepared. Talk about your concerns and fears openly and honestly. Try to have a back up plan in case things don't work out the way you would like.
- Media images of prison life can cause unwarranted fear for the well being of your loved one. Generally, life is only dangerous for those inmates who continue to make poor decisions for themselves and whom they associate with on the inside. ■

## For Your Children:

**A**ustin Texas – **The Seedling Foundation** provides well-trained and screened adult mentors for children whose parent(s) are in prison. The mentors visit their assigned child weekly at the child's school. Mentors receive comprehensive training by highly experienced program staff and ongoing support by a team of mental health providers. The purpose of the program is twofold: (1) to provide the children with a long-term relationship with a well trained mentor in hopes that they will better able to navigate challenges during their separation from their parent and (2) to help the children develop positive ties to school and the need for education to achieve their long term goals.

Families may contact for more information at  
[info@seedlingfoundation.org](mailto:info@seedlingfoundation.org)

The program has been implemented in the following school district in and around the Austin area:

- Austin Independent School District
- Pflugerville ISD
- KIPP Austin Public Schools
- Round Rock Independent School District
- Bastrop ISD

**Brodey's Books** is a children's book pilot program which was begun at the Stringfellow Unit in 2012. Under the guidance of the previous Director of CID, Rick Thayer and Region III's Regional Director, Lorie Davis, members of the Conroe TIFA Chapter donated children's books to the unit for the children to read during visitation. The guards as well as Warden Reescano

give the project a two thumbs up as this has helped to occupy the very young children during the visitation time in a constructive manner. Inmates also have the opportunity to read to their children if they choose to do so. TIFA is hopeful that the project will be expanded to other units.

Distribution of **Sesame Streets: LITTLE children BIG challenges: incarceration** has begun throughout all TIFA Chapters and the packets have been distributed to visitors on many of the units across Texas.

### Recommended Reading:

**ALL Alone In The World**  
*Children of the Incarcerated by Nell Bernstein*

"Chapter by chapter, Bernstein takes us through each lamentable phase of the incarceration cycle, from arrest to sentencing, to visitations and foster care and finally re-entry. She interviews scores of experts -- police officers, criminologists, sociologists and dedicated service providers, many of them reformed offenders who would never have been released from prison had they committed their crimes today. But Bernstein...derives her best expert testimony from the families themselves, whom she treats not as victims of an unjust system but rather as experts and resources, the best available analysts of their own experience and needs.

Bernstein ... lays out 18 policy suggestions [in her conclusion]. Most of them are pure common sense -- remove financial barriers to communication (like the hiked-up fee for collect calls from jail), keep prisoners near their families so they can receive visits, and of course revisit our failed drug policies.

*Continued on page 6*

Continued from page 6 (For Your Children)

What her suggestions have in common, besides being relatively easy (and cheap) to implement, is that they are focused on the basic premise that crime is reduced by keeping families together, not ripping them apart.

— *SF Chronicle* ■

## Faith Community Calls Texans to “Remembrance” of Those Who Die in Prison

November 2, 2013—



On “Dia de los Muertos,” a day when many Texans honor the dead and reflect on their own mortality, members and friends of the Texas Interfaith Center for Public Policy, TIFA, NAMI, Kairos, and Restorative Justice Ministries laid flowers at the graves of more than 3,000 individuals who have died in the state’s prisons.

Members of the faith community gathered at the Captain Joe Byrd Cemetery in Huntsville, Texas to lay flowers at the graves of those whose families

could not afford funeral costs or who had no family left to claim the body. The event provided an opportunity for people of diverse faiths to live out their foundational, shared belief that all human lives are precious. Raylene Truxton, TIFA’s SE Regional Director and Marlene Parker, a member of the Conroe TIFA Chapter were there to represent all the families of inmates. In addition, Marlene was able to locate the grave site of her son’s long time friend and honor his grave with a flower.

Long-time death row chaplain Reverend Carroll Pickett said, “When people of different religious traditions gather for any major purpose, they come with joint hearts. Today, we gather at the place where thousands of residents of Texas—men and women of all races, creeds, faiths and no faiths—are buried. Captain Joe Byrd Cemetery represents a place of compassion and concern, and of final unity in death.” Pickett is the author of an award winning book detailing his prison ministry and was featured in the documentary *At the Death House Door: No Man Should Die Alone*.

“So many of us take for granted the ability to visit the grave of someone we have lost. I believe compassion to be at the heart of human nature and here at this event you have people from various religious traditions coming together to show compassion both for those who died in prison and for their families who cannot visit their loved ones to place a simple flower on the grave,” shared Dr. Franklin T. Wilson, Professor of Criminology and Criminal Justice at Indiana State University and author of a forthcoming book on the Captain Joe Byrd Cemetery. ■

## Sixth Statewide Criminal Justice Ministry Conference

The Archdiocese of San Antonio held the sixth annual Statewide Criminal Justice Ministry Conference Oct. 25 and 26, 2013 at the Oblate School of Theology in San Antonio. This conference, entitled “Responsibility, Rehabilitation and Restoration: A Catholic Perspective on Crime and Criminal Justice,” was sponsored by the Texas Catholic Correctional Ministers.

Jennifer Erschabek, ED for TIFA attended the second day of the conference to represent TIFA and hear presentations given by Kimberly Woodall, Asst Warden at the Torres/Ney Units in Hondo, Deacon Doots Dufour, Director of the CJM, Austin Diocese and State Rep. Alma Allen who currently serves as a member of the House Corrections Committee.

Warden Woodall gave a presentation on ‘The Role of Volunteers to Assist TDCJ with Inmate Rehabilitation’. As of Sept 2013 there are 21,519 volunteers involved with TDCJ. She explained that Senate Bill 345, passed this last session, now requires TDCJ to adopt a policy that directs each warden to identify and actively encourage volunteer and faith-based organizations to provide the following programs for inmates housed in TDCJ facilities. These programs include:

- Literacy and education programs
- Life skills
- Job skills
- Parent-training
- Drug and alcohol rehabilitation
- Support group



- Arts and crafts
- Other programs to aid in transition between confinement and society and help reduce recidivism.

Deacon Doots Dufour shared that the Bishops of Texas have endorsed the Texas Catholic Action Plan for Criminal Justice and will work with the Legislature to change the culture of criminal justice – from punitive to rehabilitative and continue to push for training in the areas of leadership, supervision, and management that is focused on behavioral changes of offenders.



From left to right, Jennifer Erschabek–TIFA, Doots Dufour–Catholic Diocese and Dr. Alma Allen–Texas House of Representatives.

Rep. Alma Allen discussed some of the challenges of getting bills filed and passed during the 83rd Legislature Session. Rep. Allen also shared that she has once again been appointed to the Criminal Justice Legislative Oversight Committee. This Committee is charged with responsibility for conducting an in-depth examination of the state's criminal justice system. They will submit a report to the 84th Legislature, which begins in January, 2015, recommending strategies for solving identified problems and improving the effectiveness of the criminal justice

system. Additionally, because of legislation passed during the 83rd Regular Session this year, the committee will be appointing an independent third party to conduct a review of adult and juvenile facilities' use of administrative segregation practices for persons in confinement. Some of the other members also appointed to this Oversight Committee include:

- Rep. Tan Parker
- Rep. Toni Rose
- Sen. John Whitmire
- Rep. Ruth Jones McClendon
- Senator Juan "Chuy" Hinojosa

Rep. Allen has accepted a TIFA invitation to speak at our Conroe chapter meeting so be looking for that after the first of the year. ■

## Correspondence Courses That Change Lives

### American Community Correction Institute – Lifeskills Courses

**A**CCI offers inmate correspondence courses to offenders because while they are incarcerated, they *are much more inclined to evaluate their lives and look for ways to improve compared to when they are not in jail or prison*. In other words, this is a great time for them to be working on the issues that are limiting their happiness and preparing for parole.

ACCI's inmate life skills workbooks are easy to read and are written in story format. The workbooks are written about real people with real problems, and how they overcame their obsta-



cles. The workbooks give time-tested skills which have been proven to help people become happier and more productive. Here are some key benefits for inmates:

- The price has been reduced to \$35.00 for inmates only.
- They can work at their own pace or with a "coach" (another inmate) of their choosing.
- The workbooks are proven to successfully challenge criminal thinking,
- They focus on helping offenders conquer self-defeating thoughts and behaviors.
- The courses can be completed on their own time and don't interfere with jail or prison life.

**What will your inmate receive for \$35.00?** They will receive a workbook of choice, instructions on how to complete the course, a prepaid self addressed envelope (postage paid by ACCI), and a completion certificate

Visit the ACCI website at <http://www.inmatelifeskills.com> and select the course that best fits the needs or interest of your family member that you are sending this to. If in doubt which workbook is best, they recommend the Offender Responsibility (W119) course. It is a universal life skills workbook that addresses a wide range of issues and topics. ■



## Texas Inmate Families Association

Strengthening families through support, education, and advocacy

TIFA  
PO Box 300220  
Austin, TX 78703-0004

**CONTACT**  
**Vol.18 No.3**

## TIFA Chapters

### **Amarillo**

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

### **Austin**

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

### **Carrollton**

2nd Tuesday, 7:00 pm  
Church of the Nazarene  
1529 E. Hebron Parkway  
Carrollton, TX 75010  
(512) 371-0900

### **Conroe**

4th Monday, 6:30 pm  
Montgomery County Library  
104 IH-45 N  
Conroe, TX 77301  
(936) 228-0905

### **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  
Oak Lawn United Methodist Church  
3014 Oak Lawn Avenue  
Dallas, TX 75219  
(214) 734-9037  
Lynnies@gmail.com

### **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  
(832) 393-1700

### **Killeen**

3rd Tuesday, 7 pm  
Central Christian Church  
1301 W. Trummier Road  
Killeen, TX 76541  
(254) 690-3341

### **Pearland/South Houston**

2nd Wednesday, 6:30 pm  
Pearland Westside Library  
2803 Business Center Dr., Ste 101  
Pearland, TX 77584

### **Rio Grande Valley**

(San Benito)  
*No regular meeting, but materials and help 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  
(Frontage road - between Hwy 90 and Valley Hi exit)  
San Antonio, Texas  
(210) 680-3505

***If you are interested in starting a TIFA chapter in your area, please contact the TIFA office.***

***It only takes 3 TIFA members to organize a new chapter. We will provide chapter guidelines and support.***

***(512) 371-0900***