

Strengthening families through support, education, and advocacy

PO Box 300220 Austin, TX 78703-0004

CONTACT Vol.21 No. 3 July 2016

TIFA Chapters

Amarillo

Currently Reorganizing Check our website www.tifa.org for meeting information

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 Call for information (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

Check our website and calendar for new TIFA Chapters starting near you. www.tifa.org

If you are interested in starting a TIFA chapter in your area, please contact the TIFA office. (512) 371-0900 or send an email to tifa@tifa.org

2nd Tuesday, 7:00 pm Workfaith Connection (Dacoma Location) 10120 Northwest Fwy 290 Suite 200 Houston, TX 77092 (281) 435-4143

Humble

2nd Thursday, 7:00 pm First United Methodist Church 800 E Main St Humble, Texas 77355 (936) 217-0768

Killeen - Harker Heights 2nd Thursday, 6:00 pm VFW (Ladies Auxiliary) 201 VFW Dr Harker Heights, TX 76548 (254) 289-9429

Nacogdoches

3rd Saturday 10:00 am First Baptist Church 411 North Street Nacogdoches, TX 65961 (936) 564-4546

Pearland - South Houston

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

Rio Grande Valley

3rd Friday, 6:00 Calvary Baptist Church Slayton Building 2nd Floor 1600 Harvey Drive McAllen Texas, Texas 78501 (956) 280-0951

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

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

TELEBRATING CELEBRATING TIFA'S SIR



HEAT Kills



Although people who are incarcerated have been deprived of their right to liberty. they still retain most of their fundamental human rights, most notably the rights to dignity, life, security of person, the right to be free of inhumane or degrading treatment, and the right to protection of prisoners' rights.

In July 2015 in Louisiana, the 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals accepted "the district court's conclusion that housing prisoners in very hot cells without sufficient access to heat-relief measures, while knowing that each suffers from conditions that render him extremely vulnerable to serious heat-related injury, violates the Eighth Amendment."

"The Constitution does not mandate comfortable prisons, but neither does it permit inhumane ones," Judge Edith Jones wrote for the three-judge appellate panel.

The ruling by the 5th Circuit, which also has jurisdiction over Texas, could prove important for similar legal challenges in the Texas — particularly a lawsuit that claims at least 12 inmates have died from heat stroke since 2011, while hundreds of others experienced heat-related illnesses. The lawsuit was filed on behalf of seven inmates in the Pack Unit near Navasota.

In June of 2016, a Texas district court judge in Houston ruled that the TDCJ must provide safe drinking water to inmates at the Pack Unit. In a lawsuit over that unit's super-heated conditions. the

inmates were demanding cooler conditions and safe water. The inmates alleged that the water officials gave them to cool off with was contaminated with hazardous levels of arsenic. The Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) has issued a notice of violation to the Pack Unit every year for the past 10 years for unacceptable levels of arsenic in the water. The federal judge ordered TDCJ to find an immediate alternative to arsenicladen drinking water that "violates contemporary standards of decency." He also wrote that TDCJ knows that heat is a risk and is "deliberately indifferent to that risk."

The judge, who has yet to decide on the question of heat in the Pack Unit. has agreed to allow other inmates at the prison to join the lawsuit as a class action.

"He has not yet heard the case on the constitutionality of the heat but may have tipped his hand by indicating the potentially cancer-causing water and unmitigated heat are unacceptable," said Jeff Edwards, one of the attorneys representing the Pack Unit inmates.

A ruling in that case would only directly affect the Pack Unit. but Scott Medlock. another attorney for the inmates, said he hoped a decision favoring the prisoners would send a message to the TDCJ.

Texas prison officials insist that ice, fans and cold showers are enough to protect inmates from dangerous heat and humidity. But as the number of deaths due to heat in Texas continue to rise, there are still questions as to the effectiveness of the prison's current heat-control measures. There have been many complaints from inmates and family members that cool water is not being provided, water dispensers are running dry, showers are not working, and exhaust fans are broken. Inside the brick and metal buildings, the internal heat index is reaching almost 150 degrees and temperatures are not cooling below 90 degrees until the early morning hours making sleep impossible.

TDCJ can no longer afford to be

indifferent and must take action to stop violating the human rights of prisoners. TIFA believes that independent oversight has to be provided so that Texas can be assured that TDCJ is treating all inmates humanely and with dignity.

> To sign TIFA's Heat Petition go to www.tifa.org and click on the link.

A Second Chance and the Pell Grant

n June, the Obama administration announced the 67 colleges and universities that were selected for a pilot program that will offer Pell Grants to nearly 12,000 incarcerated students. The institutions that were selected in Texas include Alvin, Clarendon, Lamar State, Lee, Mountain View Colleges, and the University of Houston - Clear Lake.

John King Jr., the education secretary, said that the institutions "were reviewed holistically: student recruitment, student success and compliance with student aid programs all played a role in the decision process." King stated "The belief in second chances is fundamental to who we are as Americans." But the Education Department's argument is also financial: "investing in prisoner education saves money in incarceration costs." King cited a study from the RAND Corporation that prisoner education advocates emphasize: "for every dollar invested in prison education, four to five dollars are saved on reincarceration costs." And education gives the graduates a better chance to obtain good jobs.

The program is geared toward prisoners likely to be released within the next five years. Students or their family members will have to submit a FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) application that can be printed, completed and submitted by mail or completed and submitted on line. There will be other restrictions to the aid that will be shared when more information is available.

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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TIFA

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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.



From Board Chair Patti Kassel

How Labels Hurt



appy Summer to All! This newsletter includes an article by Mary Sue Molnar, Executive Director of Texas Voices, describing the effects a label they have on a person charged as a "sex offender". Society in general has put labels on various categories of people. As family members and friends of the incarcerated, we might be more sensitive to this topic because of the stereotypes or "labels" that are put on offenders, ex-offenders and their families.

Rachel Naomi Remen, M.D. writes: "Labeling sets up an expectation of life that is often so compelling we can no longer see things as they really are. The expectation often gives us a false sense of familiarity toward something that is really new and unprecedented. We are in relationship with our expectations and not with life itself.

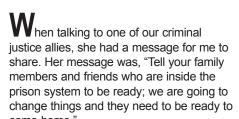
... a label is an attempt to assert control and manage uncertainty. It may allow us the security and comfort of a mental closure and encourage us not to think about things again. But life is known only by those who have found a way to be comfortable with change and the unknown. Given the nature of life, there may be no security, but only adventure."

How many times have we been labeled – 'slow', 'fat', 'bad', 'selfish', 'lazy', 'incompetent'? How has it felt? How has it held us back, kept us down? Have those labels – and countless more – made us feel unworthy, insignificant, ashamed, disregarded, suspect? Have they made us feel restricted, inauthentic, imprisoned?

In the article by Mary Sue Molnar, she explains that labeling all convicted "sex offenders," no matter the story behind the offense, can cause destruction to all, not just the few that are truly incapable of rehabilitation and are dangerous to society. Can we remove the labels and discover the real person in front of us? It starts with you and me.

From the Executive Director Jennifer Erschabek

Seize the Moments!



TIFA also needs to be ready as things happen and be ready to seize the opportunities that occur and leverage them into building our organization and achieving our ultimate goals.

While fighting for criminal justice reform, we need to reach out to more families who struggle to work their way through the criminal justice system. We need to continue to build supportive alliances to help our members as they struggle to organize chapters......But the scale of what we do and the pace at which we do it will also need to change. To win legislative votes, we will need legislative allies from rural, mostly Republican districts. Our grassroots mobilization needs to counter the rhetoric of 'tough on crime' that people with power have supported for too long.

This is where the important work of our chapters will come in. It will be our chapters holding meetings, talking to the media in their area, educating their neighbors and meeting with their Representatives and Senators all across the State that will make the difference.

Success will require continued pressure for public policy change at all levels, electing public officials who not only support us but are warriors for Texas families. Officials who will help put into place the necessary rehabilitative resources and skill training for our returning family members, paroling them when they are ready and eliminating the barriers so our families can survive and thrive.

Now we have opportunities to educate Texas through our work on the work time credit petition and through our heat campaign. What this work will do is educate, activate and build our base in

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- When using fans, air should be drawn through the structure and exhausted outside. Take full advantage of the fresh air exchange system or prevailing winds to assist in the movement of air.
- Increase air flow by using blowers, normally used to move hot air in the winter, when appropriate. Attach ribbons to vents to ensure blowers are used appropriately. Make sure window screens are clean so air flow is not restricted.
- Posters must be placed in housing areas reminding offenders of heat precautions and the importance of water intake.

PRECAUTIONS AND ACTIONS RELATED TO OFFENDER FANS:

- Offender fans must not be confiscated due to property restriction during this time.
- Fans may only be confiscated if they are altered or stolen.
- All offenders may purchase a fan if they do not already have one.
- Fans are allowed to all custody levels, to include administrative segregation and disciplinary status. Offenders with fans stored based on these restrictions must have their fans re-issued for the time period specified in this posting.
- Ensure the fan programs are in place allowing the permanent issue of a fan to an indigent offender, on a first come first serve basis. An offender who has a significant medical need, based on a condition or medication that is negatively impacted by heat, must be given priority.

TX-CURE Fan Project

Please remember those in prison who are indigent and have no way to escape the summer heat. Consider sending a \$20.00 donation to the Texas C.U.R.E. Free Fan Project. This project makes sure that indigent inmates in TDCJ are provided a chance to apply for a free fan. The summer months are here and we all know what a difference a fan can make in the terrible heat of the summer in the hot Texas prisons.

Please remember, it takes everyone's



help to ensure the Free Fan Project continues to be a success. Send your \$20.00 donation to:

Texas CURE Fan Program PO Box 38381 Dallas, TX 75238-0381 ■

Phone Rate Update: July 2016

he FCC is proposing a new set of caps for the rates prison phone companies can charge. The former cap on phone calls set last fall was at 11 cents per minute. The new cap will be 13 cents/minute for debit/prepaid calls, instate or federal prisons. The rates would apply to both interstate and local calls; the current interim rates apply only to interstate calls. County jails will be allowed higher rates based on their size.

The FCC's new decision is a compromise, to account for jails' and prisons' legitimate ICS costs and it gets the caps finally put in place after years of struggle.

FCC representatives said that the new proposal comes up for a vote by the FCC at an open meeting on August 4, 2016. If the changes are voted in, it will take about 3 months for the laws to take effect. ■



"Choose This Day"

By Karen Keith
Austin Reentry Advocacy Project member

In 2013 when I stepped into Plane State, I was terrified. Age 56, my first time in and I just knew that this place was filled with really bad people – or at least that is what I had always been told, so I believed that to be true. Yet, here I was standing at intake and I knew that I wasn't a bad person; I was a person who had made a bad choice.

How many of us have made bad choices

over the years? Purchased a lemon of a car, bought into that fad diet that failed miserably, acquired those too-tight jeans and no one told you how bad you looked? How about that hair color that turned your hair a color that you just weren't looking for or worse, burned your hair so it broke off? Cooked that meal that sounded so good in the recipe, but definitely wasn't when you made it! Ignored the quiet person, only to find out they are the most successful person you've ever met? Drank and drove home – you made it safely, but what if you hadn't?

Choices are a daily occurrence – gala or granny smith apples? Ketchup or mustard? Coffee or tea? Drive or call a cab? Walk or sit on the couch? Meth or sobriety? Leave an abusive relationship or stay? Buy that bottle or buy my kids dinner? Be productive and give back or sit in the day room and do nothing?

While incarcerated, I chose to be a teacher's aide and wound up teaching GED math at my unit. I chose to get up each day, whether I really wanted to crawl out of bed at 4am or not and go do something, anything. What I got in return, was a lot of laughter, smiles that lit up a room when they "got it" and graduates galore. Yes, there were those individuals that jumped hard and often on my last nerve, but they were there, they showed up and tried each day and I was thankful for that small gift. I learned that real people, people who were innately good, had made some bad choices and they were now in prison.

After 3 years inside, I was released on December 15, 2015 – YAY for freedom! I had to make a lot of choices then, how to get around a brand new city, to cope with meeting all these new people, deal with the loss of my children and grandchildren, the reality of the death of my best friend while I was incarcerated, face my shame and guilt, find a job.

Each day I choose to get along, get up and keep trying. I choose to get involved in organizations that are working hard on reentry issues. I choose to find like-minded individuals who want to affect a change, not only in society, but in those we left behind.

Today, choose to do what is right, just, fair, kind. Choose today to look someone in the eye and smile. ■



Excerpts from TDCJ's 2016 Heat Directive

"Due to the potential for extreme heat conditions in the coming months, it is imperative that everyone take precautions to help prevent or reduce heat-related illnesses." Lorie Davis, Di-

WELLNESS CHECKS AND RESPITE AREAS:

- TDCJ staff and medical providers must work closely together to identify each offender who may be susceptible to heat
- A list of offenders identified as heat sensitive must be provided to officers assigned to housing areas.
- During normal security checks, officers must conduct wellness checks and seek assistance for offenders as needed.
- During the extreme temperature months, offenders must be allowed access to respite areas in late afternoon and early evening hours or, if necessary, more frequently.

PRECAUTIONS AND ACTIONS RELATED TO OFFENDER INTAKE:

- As each offender arrives on an intake facility a staff member from the medical department must conduct an initial screening to ascertain if the offender has any conditions or is on any medication that would make him/her more susceptible to the heat.
- If the medical department determines an offender has a condition or is on a medication

which makes him/her more susceptible to the heat, medical staff must communicate such to correctional staff and the offender will be temporarily placed on the wellness checklist until a full medical examination can be conducted.

PRECAUTIONS AND ACTIONS RELATED TO OFFENDER TRANSPORT:

- Transport offenders during the coolest hours of the day, when possible.
- Only transport psychiatric inpatient offenders to another facility via air conditioned transfer vehicles.
- Prioritize the use of air conditioned buses for transporting offenders with medical conditions.
- Ensure transfer officers are provided a list of offenders with heat sensitivity. Transfer officers must monitor these offenders for signs of heat-related illness.
- Allow offenders to take fans when being transported off the unit for a medical appointment. Transfer vehicles without functional fans, parked for more than 15 minutes, must place a previously purchased fan on the vehicle. Units must ensure fans, extension cords, etc., are in place and available when needed.
- Load and unload transfer vehicles as quickly as possible.
- Security is the first priority at every backgate; however, heat-related issues may arise when buses occupied by offenders are stationary for any length of time (buses may circle the perimeter if the unit foresees an extended wait time). Every reasonable effort must be made to ensure buses get into and out of the backgate in a safe and expedient manner.
- Water coolers on buses must be refilled at various times during the trip to ensure water remains at the appropriate temperature (transportation). Cups must be available to offenders on buses.
- Store paper towels that may be saturated with water and used during emergency situations when transporting offenders.

PRECAUTIONS AND ACTIONS RELATED TO OUTSIDE ACTIVITY:

- Restrict outside activity (work hours) in accordance with AD-10.64, Extreme Temperature Conditions in TDCJ."
- Restrict outside recreation in accordance with SM-06.07 "Inclement Weather."
- Ensure all staff and offenders working in areas of extreme heat, such as, field, maintenance and yard squads, are provided frequent
- Provide additional water, including ice if available, to employees and offenders in work areas; units must coordinate with Maintenance and Food Service.

PRECAUTIONS AND ACTIONS RELATED TO OFFENDER HOUSING ASSIGNMENTS:

- Medical staff must ensure that all HSM-18 medical restrictions on the IMF Medical Screen or HSIN Sensitive Medical Restrictions, including but not limited to an offender on psychotropic medications, are current to facilitate the appropriate methods of transportation and housing assignment for each offender.
- Heat sensitive restrictions must be considered when making housing assignments.

PRECAUTIONS AND ACTIONS RELATED TO OFFENDER HOUSING AREAS:

- Water and cups must be available at all times, to include during meal times.
- Ensure each offender has a cup when distributing water. In the event an offender does not have a personal cup, a cup must be provided. The Food Service Department will provide items as needed.
- Provide additional water, including ice if available, to employees and offenders in the housing areas.
- Allow offenders access to cold water showers.
- Allow additional showers for offenders when feasible. Lower the water temperature for single-temperature showers in offender

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- Allow offenders to wear t-shirts and shorts in dayrooms and recreational areas.

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Continued from page 2 (Message) support of a declared agenda of bringing change to the criminal justice system. These campaigns increase our membership, the number of TIFA chapters, helps us educate our political allies and also build our media allies. Together these all result in families having a bigger voice.

We can take pride in our accomplishments; while at the same time acknowledge that they are not sufficient. This level of growth is still not at a scale large enough to build the kind of movement that our families and loved ones deserve and need. We must do more. Working together, our criminal justice movement can and must seize the moment to build a better life for Texas families.

A Quote from Theodore Roosevelt:

"It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood: who strives valiantly: who errs, who comes short again and again, because there is no effort without error and shortcoming; but who does actually strive to do the deeds; who knows great enthusiasms, the great devotions; who spends himself in a worthy cause; who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who neither know victory nor defeat."

The Relationship **Between Reading and Inmate Education Imprisoned?**By Terri LeClercq, Ph.D.

I ou are of course familiar with studies that reveal the national reading level of inmates: 4th grade.

How can we hope and expect our Loved Ones to lead productive life in the Real World if they have low literacy? And what can we, out in the Real World, do to help those Loved Ones emerge better

prepared, better able to meet the world's new expectations of not only reading/writing literacy, but also computer literacy?

Sometimes, inmates sign up for GED classes and improve on their own. In my experience, many, many people are reluctant to admit they don't know how to read, or have number dyslexia. Others have severe learning disabilities that poor old Wyndham School District is not equipped to overcome. Others are quite simply lazy! As their outside advocate, you need to step in, and soon. As their support system, you have a huge stake in getting them ready to achieve. Do not let their excuses form a barrier to success. Ask. Probe. Be a (gentle) nag.

- 1. Be realistic about the Loved One's current literacy level. Where did he/she stop paying attention in school? (This answers differs significantly from where the person left school, right? Usually students leave because they fall behind, or are bored, or have life problems outside the classroom that interfere with the learning process.)
- **2.** Go to a library, or browse the ACT/ SAT section of a nearby book store. What should students at that level know? What will they learn by buying this study guide? What area might your Loved one have earned the worse grades in, have the more negative attitude about, fears about? Should you begin there or first offer to help with something easier, more associated with better grades or experiences?
- 3. Stop and concentrate on that topic, or area of study. What can you do to help motivate inmates to take a step toward mastery of that area? Occasionally you can find, on line, some fun lessons that you can send inside. Send Inside maybe 4-5 pages, and say you'll send the answers to any quiz or open-ended questions the next time you write. This has such a terrific double benefit, doesn't it? Your Loved one knows you care enough to supply what he/she needs right now. Plus there's the marvelous connection over a topic that is not needy children, unpaid bills, your anxieties in life—rather, it is a positive communication about a step toward a goal. Oh, and plus it's a promise for another letter from you soon: a triple
- 4. In a perfect world, these constant little lessons will give your Loved One the motivation to sign up for that GED class.

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5. If you meet resistance at first, why not find a novel that is on the appropriate reading level? Or a book about his/ her favorite topic. At Inside Books, we get numerous requests for how-to books: how to repair toilets and sinks, how to begin computer training, how to become a chef. We are always excited by those requests—the person is looking forward, preparing skills for release. So if your Loved One repairs motorcycles, or ties and sells fishing lures, or cuts meat but wants to be certified as a meat cutter. you might send a book about that specific topic through Amazon or other recognized

This month on KPFT's The Prison Show.

Daniel James Brown

I recommended that listeners find a copy of *The Boys* in the Boat: Nine Americans and Their Epic Quest for Gold at the 1936 Olympics, by the award-winning Daniel James Brown.

Here's the plot: 9 kids from the West

struggle to win the American slot at the 1936 Olympics (they do) and then beat Hitler's Nazi team (they do!). Here's the theme: overcoming pain, fear of failure, loneliness, personal struggles, and even The All-Nazi winning machine of rowers. This book is a fabulous read; perhaps you can send one copy Inside and read one yourself also. That way, you can discuss these heroic kids' path to overcoming so many obstacles. You and your Loved One should eniov both the read and the resulting conversation. Please let other TIFA members know what happens!

> Terri LeClercq, Ph.D., is the author of Prison **Grievances:** when to write, how to write

This fabulous graphic novel offers in cartoon form all sorts of hints. artwork, and check-lists for writing a successful grievance. You can order it through AmazonSmile. ■



News from the Chapters

Mr. Joe Miles, TDCJ Communications Visits Humble Chapter

By Arielle Kirkland

he Humble Chapter had an informative July meeting with Mr. Joe Miles, Director of Communications with TDCJ as the guest speaker. Mr. Miles provided general information about the Offender Phone System and how it operates.

A brief overview of the phone system was given, which only started back in 2008 and was limited to US landlines and calls could only be made to those on the visitation list. Now offenders are able to call up to 20 registered US numbers and they can be to US cell phones as well. It was also explained that Century Link is the company that manages the offender phone system; they are contracted by TDCJ. Century Link provides the services, equipment and contracts with Securus to provide the service for it all to work. In order for all companies to be held accountable for their services, they have signed a service level agreement with TDCJ, basically meaning when proper services are not provided they will be penalized in funds that will be collected back. It is up to the offender to inform his or her family on how to go about setting up a phone to receive calls.

When it comes to registering a phone, family and friends need to call 866-806-7804 or visit www.texasprisonphone.com. To add funds to the phone account, an offender can buy minutes at commissary, or family and friends can add money to a Securus account. Rates vary for calls but having your loved one inside TDCJ purchase the minutes is the cheapest route.

Many people have asked why there is only one company, Securus via CenturyLink, contracted to provide these services when there is a possibility others could offer families a cheaper call rate. Mr. Miles stated that CenturyLink is the only provider because they won the investor contract with TDCJ and have invested the majority of the funds to install, set up and provide the services and equipment at the units. CenturyLink provided the network

they work with Securus, who provided the phone service. It was also stated that TDCJ does not receive a profit from these companies since they do not run the system for the phones. If TDCJ wanted to, they could switch investors if the current one, CenturyLink, fails to follow through on their contract agreement.

I also want to note that there is a profit made to the State from CenturyLink or a "kickback", about 40%. The majority goes to Crime Victims Services and the rest goes into the General Revenue. Mr. Miles wanted to point out that the contract requires some specific things for CenturyLink to follow: one phone per 30 inmates; offenders are to be registered within 20 days after becoming eligible to use the phone; a person is required to rotate to each unit to physically register inmates in a timely manner; and all calls are recorded and saved for 3 years, with the exception of attorney calls,

The phone system runs by voice biometrics to recognize each person using it, and there are currently 49000 offenders registered to use the phone. Year to date, June 2016, a total of 12 million and 197 calls have been made, and a total of 141 million minutes used to talk to love ones.

Mr. Joe Miles believes the phone system is important to TDCJ offenders to help keep them in contact with family and friends- it can be healthy and therapeutic for them. He encourages family members whose phone issues are not resolved by Securus or CenturyLink to contact him by email at Joe.Miles@tdcj.texas.gov.

Speakers Explain Grievances at the Fort Worth Chapter

By Darlene Mathis

at Prophitt, Fort Worth Chapter Chair, introduced Carol Gene Monroe, Deputy Director, Administrative Review and Risk Management(ARRM); Kelli Ward, Program Supervisor Offender Grievances; Misti Sorenson, Resolution Support Manager. They spoke and answered questions at the Fort Worth July meeting with 24 attendees

Members presented questions that LOs had shared:

- It is a waste of time to file a grievance.
- The guards do not return the grievance back to the inmate.
- The guard confronts the inmate about the grievance.
- The grievances are not handled through the proper channels and time frame.
- Retaliation is taken on the inmate for filing grievances.
- It is a joke nothing happens.



Left to Right - Mr. Monroe, Ms. Ward & Ms. Sorensor

Mr. Monroe, Ms. Ward and Ms. Sorenson explained the grievance program. It was stated 154,000 Step 1 grievances were filed in 2015. Medical grievances are handled through the Medical/Health Care Department, Because of the HIPPA law there was no discussion about medical grievances. The Offender Grievance Program promotes awareness and positive intervention between staff and offenders to identify and resolve issues at the lowest possible level, and to facilitate the flow of information between the units and agency leaders. This program also provides supportive and protective functions by giving the offender an alternative to confrontation and an outlet for frustration and aggression. The program offers the offender a less formal alternative to litigation, thus saving taxpayers the cost of defending the agency in court. How to write and submit grievances may be obtained from any staff member or from the unit law library. Each unit has a Unit Grievance Investigator UGI. It is a violation of policy to subject any offender to harassment, retaliation or reprisal for using the grievance procedure. So, no offender should be afraid to file.

The current offender grievance process facilitates problem resolution at two distinct administrative levels. The first, commonly referred to as Step 1, allows the UGI, Warden, and department heads to identify and resolve issues at the unit level. The second level, known as Step 2, affords an offender the opportunity to appeal the Step 1 grievance decision by submitting a Step

2 grievance. These are sent off the unit to the Central Grievance Office in Huntsville, Texas for review. Once the two-step process has been completed, the offender's administrative remedies within the TDCJ have been exhausted.

Step 1 is investigation and response step. Only one issue can be filed per grievance and filed within the 15-day time limit. The offender needs to write as legibly as possible and fill in all blanks. It needs to be filled in with specifics – who, what, when, and where. The offended then places the grievance into a locked box on the unit. There are several boxes on the unit. At this point it is confidential. The UGI collects the grievances from the box first thing in the morning Monday thru Friday. The grievance form is assigned a number. The UGI then investigates at the unit. The guard will pass the paper back through regular mail with a Response of Action taken. If a guard was involved in the grievance, he will receive a synopsis of the grievance. At no time is the guard to talk to the offender about the problem nor pull him aside to discuss it.

There has to be a Step 1 reply before a Step 2 can be filed- unless it is an emergency or if it has not been timely returned. The UGI/staff has a limited number of days to read, sign, and return a Step 1. If an inmate makes a mistake of fact, the UGI can return it.

Step 2 is invested in the ARRM Department (off the unit). For this step, the paper work from Step 1 has to be included with the filing of the second grievance. Step 2 it will be filed under the same grievance number as the first filing. Step 2 grievances will be forwarded to the Central Grievance Office by the UGI for processing. Central administration, regional directors, as well as many other departmental specialists are available to review the appeal and take additional corrective action. There are only 6 investigators for all 109 units. This is the final TDCJ process.

After Step 1 and 2 have been exhausted, offenders may contact family or friends on the outside to help resolve the grievance or problems they encounter. For inquiries and concerns contact the TDCJ Ombudsman Office at 936-437-4927, Ombudsman@tdcj.texas.gov or by writing Administrative Review & Risk Management, PO Box 99, Huntsville, TX 77342 ■



The Label

By Mary Sue Molnar

What comes to mind when you hear the term 'sex offender'..... monster, serial rapist, pedophile who preys on young children? Chances are your assumptions are incorrect. Texas paints with a very broad brush when it labels someone a 'sex offender'

Currently, there are over 87,000 people listed on the Texas Public Sex Offender registry including children as young as 12 years old. A blanket label against evervone who has committed a sex offense encompasses sexually active and sexting teens, those whose behavior falls in the "public nuisance" or 'college boy stupidity' categories. Also included are the young men (and women) who fell into a relationship with someone slightly under the age of consent, some who believed the person to be older (in Texas, mistaken age is not a defense). There are also those who made the mistake of chatting online with a police officer posing as a teenaged girl, viewing pictures on the internet, or drinking too much and not realizing that the girl sitting at the bar was only 16. And of course, there are those who were innocent and falsely convicted or forced to take a plea deal because there seemed to be no other options. The terms 'sex offense' and 'sex crime' encompass a wide variety of sexual acts

Have you ever made a bad choice or a regrettable mistake? Should we all bear a label of some sort- a label that does not necessarily define who we are as a person? Should our mistakes label us for the rest of our life even though we are not that person anymore? If we are all honest, there is probably something in the past that could have landed many of us on the sex offender registry.

There is no denying that there are those who have committed horrible sex crimes that have caused great harm to their victims. In fact, media and political conversations tend to focus on the most heinous offenses. They fail to differentiate between different cases and the different types of offenses. They fail to mention that most

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people convicted of sex offenses will not reoffend. Studies show that acroos-theboard re-offense rates for sex offenders are barely over five percent, making sex offenders among the least likely criminals to reoffend.

As the Executive Director of Texas Voices for Reason and Justice, I personally know many people who are required to register and carry the label 'sex offender.' They are good husbands and fathers, good neighbors and employees, employers, and fellow church members. They are as far from being dangerous as I am from flying to the moon.

Although passing judgement is a normal and necessary part of life, Scripture warns us that we have a natural tendency to judge others in a wrong way and at times, we are prone to look for the worst in people. Theology scholar and author Johnathan Corey says it best:

'If not bad enough to judge people we actually do know, we often judge people we do not know— and we use labels to do it. Instead of a navigational tool, a label becomes a way to determine who is in and who is out. Who is good and who is evil. Who is worthy of our self-sacrificial love, and who is not.

On any given day I may be on the giving end of this type of judging, or on the receiving end— as are you. Such is the overwhelming power of the desire to judge others.' Visit Texas Voices' website at http://texasvoices.org/

Last TIFA Parole Workshop of 2016

The last parole packet workshop for 2016 will be held Oct 15 in Dallas. For registration and more information visit our website at TIFA.org/events or you can call the TIFA phone line at 512-371-0900 and leave a message. The cost to attend is \$50 for members and \$85 for nonmembers (which includes a membership).

Sat Oct 15, 2016 8-12 **Dallas**Lover's Lane Methodist Church ■