



No Time Like Now!

Re-Entry Re-Imagined!

The Newsletter of Alternative Directions, Inc. Fall/Winter, 2018

Female Incarceration

Women's level of incarceration stands at over seven times higher than in 1980, with over 200,000 women in U.S. prisons and jails. An additional 1,000,000 are under community supervision. Women in state prisons are more likely than men to be incarcerated for drug or property offenses (non-violent crime).

Also, 60% of women in state prisons have a child under the age of 18. States have wildly different imprisonment rates with Oklahoma having 149 women per 100,000 in prison and Rhode Island and Massachusetts having the lowest at 13 women per 100,000 in prison. African American women were imprisoned at rates twice that of white women in 2016. *Sentencing Times, Fall, 2018*

Women incarceration in Maryland parallel these statistics. What we find compelling is that many women are imprisoned for longer periods of time than men, when they are, in essence, co-conspirators in crime, rather than the actual perpetrator. If you would like more information or would like to help win this battle, just let us know what you can do, and we will provide you with information.



Paradigm Shift

Walter Lomax, Executive Director of the Maryland Restorative Justice Initiative, has acknowledged a paradigm shift in the criminal justice system may be beginning. We are in complete agreement. Describing parole reform as moving at a snail's pace would be an understatement for most of us. But things may be changing, although not rapidly.

Parris Glendenning, Maryland governor in the mid-1990's, took a philosophy of "Life is Life" and did not parole anyone who had a life sentence. There have been a few paroles since then. But, as the Bob Dylan song says, "the times they are a'changin'."

In 2013, the Maryland Court of Appeals supported what has become known as the Unger Decision, a court order that released 188 people from prison at that time, who were in their later years of life and did not present as a danger to themselves or others. 183 of those people successfully remain in our communities, meaning the recidivism rate for this group after five years is less than 3%. We believe most people would agree this has been a successful experience. Incidentally, one of those individuals successfully completed our Turn About Program (TAP) and now advocates for releasing more people like her.

The time may not be far away in which lifers have hope that one day they could possibly be paroled and have the chance at a new life. Our successful TAP has been assisting women re-enter society for many years. We are further proof that re-entry re-imagined, helps people successfully return to society.

Credit to Walter Lomax, Executive Director, Maryland Restorative Justice Initiative for factual information in this article.



No Time Like Now???

Maybe you are wondering about the name we have chosen for our newsletter - *No Time Like Now*. We hoped you would ask. One of ADI's functions is advocacy. So what better name and philosophy could we have selected for our newsletter than *No Time Like Now*?

There is no time like now for us to support the thousands of people who are literally sitting behind bars and who are there for no other reason than antiquated laws and politics that keep them there (see Paradigm Shift to the right).

There is NO TIME LIKE NOW!

Testimonial

My name is Carol Hartman. I am a 62 year old mother of two sons, former teacher and homemaker. I have spent the past 22 years in prison, and if not for the efforts of ADI, I would still be there today. Fortunately, the laws pertaining to battered women who strike back have changed. Through ADI, I was admitted into a transitional housing program. My case manager Rachel Kirby meets with me every week to assess my progress. She and Roger Larson give me friendly encouragement every week as I work towards my goals. I recently gained employment and through the generous donations of clothing and related items given to ADI, have acquired a wardrobe of business dresses, suits, shoes and a winter coat so I will be properly attired for my job. I was daunted upon my release by the challenges before me, but today, through the support and encouragement of the ADI team, I am confident that I can and will meet those challenges as I re-enter society and once again become a productive member of my community.

Civil Legal Program

These are evolutionary times for the Civil Legal Program. We continue to provide assistance to our clients in their pro se filing of family civil legal matters and accessing community re-entry resources. For many years child support modifications were at the heart of our services to inmates. A change in child support law in 2012 has resulted in gradually more and more cases that qualify for automatic child support suspension without the need to file a motion with the court. Last year ~22% of inmate child support requests qualified for automatic suspension. This percent will continue to rise in coming years. This trend caused us to look for what other services we could provide our clients.

The confluence of two things provided us a big opportunity. The legislature has been slowly but surely liberalizing expungement law. In addition, there is now a publicly available computer program (MDEXPUNGEMENT.COM¹) that can determine if a particular criminal case is likely expungeable. With training and guidance from our supervising attorney, our paralegals have become quite adept at generating expungement petitions for our client's pro se filings.

Expungements have become the number one service request from our clients. In FY2018, we assisted our clients to file 4,336 petitions. All but a handful of these petitions were granted. The demand is now such that we are prioritizing processing based on expected prison release date. Our clients expect this reduction in the size of their criminal record will assist at parole hearings and on re-entry the ability to access housing, education and employment. We would like to find additional resources in order to expand our services to meet the demand.

Jay Sherr

¹ Made available by Maryland Volunteer Lawyers Service

Executive Update!

My life has been forever blessed and changed since the Board of Directors asked me to take over the operation of Alternative Directions, Inc. last January. I have learned a great deal in these 11 months since that cool, January day I first climbed the long staircase in this building.



I have learned that our Civil Legal program provides the most comprehensive pro se civil legal services to men and women in prisons around the state. Our dedicated paralegals' efforts have impacted the lives of people generally forgotten about by the majority of people on the outside. But the people behind bars are people too, and they have as many needs and wants as anyone else. The majority of their work focuses on expunging records that are eligible for expungements, assisting with child custody and child support modifications, as well as assisting with uncontested divorces. In total over 6,000 such cases were processed during fiscal year 2018.

I have learned that our Turn About Program (TAP) provides successful re-entry assistance to women who were given a plastic garbage bag for their possessions, a \$50 gift card, a handshake (maybe) and well wishes upon their discharge from prison. If not for our program, a significant number of these women would likely have re-offended and been back in prison within a short period of time. Statistics reveal that re-arrests occurs in at least 76.6% of the women discharged from prison without such a program during the first five years following release.

Our program results indicate that 9.8% of our clients return to prison within five years of admission to the program. We assist with finding housing, physical and mental health services, drug and alcohol treatment and support groups if the woman needs it and ultimately, assistance with finding employment. This program services as many women each year as our Program Director can assist in being released from the women prison.

And lastly, I have learned that our Children Having Incarcerated Parents (CHIP) mentoring program puts smiles and joy on children's faces, as well as their parent and grandparents' faces. We are re-imagining this program utilizing an evidence-based model supported by the folks at www.mentoring.org. These are exciting times for the children, their families and the mentors. Is it any wonder that I feel blessed and changed?

Roger D. Larson



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Turn About Program

Fall is the time of year when the weather is colder and the holidays are near. If everyone could know the feeling of reuniting with family following incarceration and enjoying the holidays or not being homeless, then that would be a great contribution to our society. To be able to help someone, that one person who served their time and is now re-entering society with a clean slate, would be an extraordinary experience and relief to a woman and her child. That is what I get to do.



This year, 97% of the women of the TAP program did not return to prison. Most of the TAP women had long histories of drug abuse as well as multiple incarcerations. We believe that part of the success of our program is due to the requirement that women enter inpatient drug treatment immediately upon their release from prison. The Parole and Probation staff also have influence because of their cooperation with the TAP program. Many agencies provide resources for the women and encourage their spirits too, such as structured residential housing with groups in life skills, job readiness, GED, counseling, family counseling, computer courses, etc. My counseling and managing the women and showing them that all ADI staff are here to support them helps to reinforce the women's motivation to succeed and help them on the right path to recovery; that there is a way to live without resorting to criminal behavior.

Rachel Kirby

CHIP Program

In the few months since I began my position as Program Coordinator, the CHIP Mentoring Program has restructured and seen many positive changes; implementing a new evidence-based model, following www.mentoring.org model. The CHIP Program had few active children following the summer camp, so the first step was to develop recruitment materials and literature for the revised program.



In order to spread the word and gain more referrals, I have met with several school social workers in different neighborhoods in the city. Many of our active mentees (children) were in the program that focused on the summer camp. Our new mentors are passionate about the program and are very compatible with their mentees. Both parents of the mentees and mentors have a mutual understanding of the expectations and boundaries.

Due to the popularity of the program within the children's communities, we hope to start group mentoring once a week, for children in queue for individual mentoring. This after school program will be used to increase literacy skills, homework help, sports practice and arts and crafts. We also hope to implement many other programs to support the children's needs and to provide them opportunities for growth. We currently have 9 successful matches, but the numbers are growing quickly.

Anjali Tallapragada



Donations Welcomed

Alternative Directions is a 501(c) (3) non-profit organization, serving citizens incarcerated in one of the many Maryland prisons, women re-entering society from prison and children having incarcerated parents. These various sub-groups of our population tend to have very low or no income whatsoever when they are released from prison. Hence, they become dependent upon organizations such as ADI to provide services for them in order to have a reasonably successful lifestyle. Any assistance offered by private individuals goes directly to providing services to our clients.

We must always come to the general population with humility because the people we serve do not have much and our organization never seems to be able to secure enough grant support to cover everyone we'd like to serve.

Please consider a donation of any size (really). Our clients will be so grateful for your blessing.



Hattie C. is one of our November, 2018 TAP graduates. She attended culinary school during her time with us and now is employed at Nick's Fish House Restaurant. Check out her testimonial and video on our website.

Her greatest desire is to spread the word about what ADI has done for her since her release last year and acceptance into our TAP program. She wants to show her appreciation by asking others to support ADI's programs, "so they can help others just like me."



We Need You!

Many times when people see an impressive list of foundations as appears to the right, they think that we have all the financial support we need. Wrong! Most foundations do not fund us every year. They have other important non-profits to help, too. Plus, they typically only support certain programs.

We need individuals, churches and small businesses to support our efforts with both financial help and their time. The CHIP program would not exist were it not for the dozens of volunteer mentors who spend their valuable time making a significant difference in the lives of their mentees.

Your dollars provide us with support for mentor's activities such as tickets to sporting events (Towson, Loyola, Johns Hopkins, UB, UMBC, etc.), concerts, museum visits and many other events. It helps us pay for mileage to send our paralegal staff to eastern shore and western Maryland prisons. We use your dollars to purchase clothing for women exiting prison with nothing but the clothes on their backs.

No dollar amount is too small. Every dollar helps! All gifts are tax deductible. Please visit our new website to make your donations, or send checks to the address below.

Foundation Supporters

We are forever indebted to the various foundations that support us. Thank you from the bottom of our hearts.

- Maryland Legal Services Corporation
- Annie E. Casey Foundation
- Harry & Jeannette Weinberg Foundation
- The Abell Foundation
- The Krieger Fund
- Charles Crane Family Foundation
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- Winters Fund
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