



REENTRY

National Media Outreach Campaign

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New Production, BRIDGING THE GAP

In 2006, The Reentry National Media Outreach Campaign began working with Vicki Lopez Lukis, former chairperson of the Florida Governor’s Ex-Offender Task Force, to develop a documentary on the BRIDGING THE GAP writing workshop. BRIDGING THE GAP is a collaborative effort among the Florida Department of Corrections and Department of Juvenile Justice: community volunteer Vicki Lopez Lukis; the Girls Advocacy Project (GAP); and Art Spring, Inc.

BRIDGING THE GAP: A WRITING WORKSHOP

Envision finding yourself in prison and wondering how to make sense of this new and unexpected journey. This is exactly where former Lee County Commissioner, Vicki Lopez Lukis found herself in 1999 when she self-surrendered to FCC Coleman, a female minimum-security federal prison. She began serving a 27-month sentence for honest services mail fraud for lying to a newspaper reporter about an affair that she was having with her then boyfriend, a lawyer lobbyist, and now husband.

Few individuals who were voted most likely to succeed by their high school class and one of the youngest persons to graduate from the University of Notre Dame would ever believe that their charmed and privileged life could take a sudden and bizarre twist. Yet this harrowing experience provided a unique opportunity for Ms. Lukis to go “inside” to see firsthand the fastest growing industry in America and experience the impact of incarceration.

On November 21, 2000, President Clinton commuted Ms. Lukis’ sentence. Since returning home to Miami-Dade County, she has worked tirelessly on behalf of women in prison, girls in detention and formerly incarcerated men and women who are released and return home to Florida’s communities. She has emerged as a well-respected authority on these issues.



Responding to a growing crisis in our country and particularly in Florida that has resulted in more and more women and girls being arrested, detained and incarcerated, often for very long periods of time, Vicki Lopez Lukis is determined to break this vicious cycle.

Her work with girls in detention highlighted the urgent need to intervene in the lives of these at-risk girls to teach them that every action has a consequence.

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New Production, BRIDGING THE GAP—Continued

Each time she told her own story about her prison experience, she saw the power of someone who had “walked the walk and talked the talk”. She invited other formerly incarcerated people to talk with the girls, bringing into detention the stories of women who had “been there, done that” and who desperately wanted to save the girls from following in their own footsteps.

In the absence of being able to bring together the women in prison and girls in detention for a series of meaningful dialogues around the negative impacts of incarceration, she developed a writing workshop to “bridge” this gap. Thus was born ***Bridging the Gap: A Writing Workshop***.

Bridging the Gap, represents a unique partnership between the Florida Departments of Corrections and Juvenile Justice; community volunteer, Vicki Lopez Lukis; the Girls Advocacy Project (GAP), an award-winning intervention program for girls detained in Juvenile Detention Centers; and ArtSpring, Inc., an arts organization whose mission is to support self-growth and effective life skills through art-making for underserved and institutionalized women and girls.

The objective of this project is to develop a published anthology of the writings of the women inmates that can be shared with the GAP girls. ArtSpring engaged its advanced *Inside Out* program participants who had been in the program at least five years at both Homestead Correctional Institution, located in Florida City, and Broward Correctional Institution, located in Pembroke Pines, in a specifically designed creative writing program that addressed, through personal narrative essays, answers to questions that were posed by the girls in GAP, including the realities of being incarcerated.

Bridging the Gap is expected to educate female juvenile offenders on the issues related to the criminal mistakes made by female adult inmates who are serving long, and in most cases, life sentences for their crimes. The life experiences shared by the women inmates will benefit the girls in detention by giving life to real stories that have ended in real tragedy. The women will be able to highlight their regrets and the losses they have experienced, such as the loss of families and freedom since their incarceration. The objective is to share experiences of the women inmates to help the girls reject unhealthy relationships, substance abuse and the temptation to become involved in future criminal activity.

Bridging the Gap directly addresses the opportunity for positive growth and development in the lives of the project’s participants. Through this innovative intervention program, the girls will be given the opportunity to learn from the mistakes of the women, which will give the girls insight to make different choices about their own lives when released from detention and/or confinement. They will have a heightened awareness that will allow them to return to their lives in the community with a more positive self-image, an expanded perspective to strengthen their family relationships, and thus be able to work toward establishing healthy lifestyles that will lead to their search for the resources they need to live productive and successful lives.

The inmates have participated in a twelve-week writing workshop with the expressed objective of providing insight on certain themes appropriate to girls involved in, or at risk of becoming involved in, the juvenile justice system. This anthology will be distributed free to girls in the Miami-Dade, Southwest Florida, Orange and Palm Beach

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***Have you missed an issue of the Reentry e-newsletter?
Past issues can be found on the Reentry National Media Outreach Campaign Web site
(<http://www.reentrymediaoutreach.org/enewsletter.htm>)!***

New Production, BRIDGING THE GAP—Continued

Regional Juvenile Detention Centers and will be used to develop an intervention/prevention curriculum for girls in or at risk of becoming involved in the criminal justice system.

An additional component of *Bridging the Gap* has involved women from the community who have volunteered to educate themselves about the shared paths of delinquency of the women and girls. Some have volunteered with GAP providing programming and mentoring services to the girls in the GAP program. The community volunteers at Broward 's workshop were Jill Ecklund, Kendall Pryles and Brenda Valencia Aldana. During the Homestead workshop two freelance journalists, Leslie Sternlieb and Bonnie Schindler joined Jill Ecklund. These extraordinary volunteers spent untold hours with the adult female inmates learning about their journeys into the criminal justice system and how incarceration has impacted their lives and that of their families.

The BGAP program at Broward culminated with a formal presentation in May 2006 for invited guests from the community, individuals and/or representatives from organizations and agencies funding the project, members of ArtSpring's Board of Directors, as well as Department of Corrections staff, including Deputy Secretary Laura Bedard. The BGAP program at Homestead hosted a similar community presentation on April 28, 2007.



The *Bridging the Gap* documentary and The Reentry National Media Outreach Campaign are funded by a generous grant from The Annie. E. Casey Foundation. Visit the Reentry National Media Outreach Campaign website at <http://www.reentrymediaoutreach.org> to view the film. A viewer's guide is also available on the site.

REENTRY PROFILE—A San Antonio Community Bands Together For Restorative Justice

In a far corner of San Antonio's West Side, the congregation of Macedonia Baptist Church affirms its belief in mankind by dedicating a large portion of its ministry to restorative justice. Their zeal for the work is contagious and has caught on with others in the community.

In 2002, Macedonia Baptist member Ann Morrison attended a training conference on restorative justice in Dallas. Her enthusiasm sparked church members to enfold the incarcerated, formerly incarcerated and their families into the arms of the church. She first approached Rev. Ernest Felder, a man who closely understands the prison system. As a former probation/parole officer, he knows many obstacles faced by those in the criminal justice system, so he willingly gave support to the fledgling effort.

"We started with five or six people whose own lives were affected by having family members incarcerated," Morrison recalls. "I was affected, having relatives who had been in prison. We started first with a pen pal ministry that soon expanded."

"Other members of the church who had people incarcerated in places like Chicago and Philadelphia began writing to them," Morrison says. "From writing, the work went to collecting love offerings. We sent stamps for them to write back around Christmas time and funds for other small needs."

"It helps them to see the love of Christ," Morrison believes. "Our basic purpose is to extend the unconditional love of God. People need to see that love before they come to know what is in a sermon. *People don't care what you know until they know that you care.*"

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REENTRY PROFILE—A San Antonio Community Bands Together For Restorative Justice—*continued*

The restoration project was strongly embraced by Macedonia Community Development Corporation, a nonprofit closely aligned with Macedonia Baptist Church. The CDC is headed by volunteer Executive Director Gloria Sterling McGill, a member of Macedonia Baptist.

The church and the CDC have moved restorative justice outside church walls, finding creative ways to help the incarcerated and the formerly incarcerated. They visit prisoners, connect with inmates' children and loved ones, shuttle families back and forth for prison visitations, prepare meals for halfway houses, and help people who are returning from prison to get reestablished in the community.

They are part of the larger Texas network of restorative justice. Macedonia partners with First Baptist Church in Huntsville in a "Welcome Home Ministry." Huntsville is the headquarters of the state prison system and home of one of the state's largest prison units. First Baptist Church in Huntsville sends names of San Antonians coming out of the system - as many as 50 a month - to the Macedonia congregation.

"We call and tell them about church," Ms. Morrison says. "We encourage them and pray with them. We mentor the ones we wrote to and some come back to Macedonia to become mentors to others."

Macedonia CDC and Macedonia Baptist Church tackle many issues that impact the larger community, like HIV/AIDS, substance abuse, homelessness and hunger. Those reentering are invited to share in these programs. One is the Overcomers Ministry - a 12-step faith-based recovery program that embraces persons impacted by divorce, substance abuse, and incarceration.



Left to Right—William "Pete" Duncan with Ann and Bill Morrison during the Reentry Summit

Children, parents and grandparents of the incarcerated become involved as well. Many grandparents are raising children whose parents are incarcerated. Some join parenting classes to learn how to deal with raising youngsters they didn't expect to parent. The youth, some of whom were even born in prison, have fun in the summer youth program managed by Macedonia CDC.

"It's hard to tell how many of the children involved in our summer program for youth have parents in prison," McGill says. "But we know it's many and that many are being raised by their grandparents."

During Christmas, the Macedonia Baptist Church Angel Tree Ministry led by Vallerie Gayden reaches out with the love of Christ to the children of inmates and their families who live within the church zip code. Church volunteers share gifts with over 100 children in their parents' names during an "Angel Tree Party" at the church. Although

the parents are absent, the children feel a parent's love through the gifts and affection they receive.

The CDC, which partners with Chuck Slaughter and the Texas Alliance of the Formerly Incarcerated (TAFI), is heavily devoted to improving chances for those who are reentering. One of their unique projects is the "Block the Box" campaign. Together with Bexar County Commissioner Tommy Adkisson, they are working to overcome the pervasive prejudice that prevents the formerly incarcerated from finding employment. The "Block the Box" effort asks employers to at least grant an interview to an applicant, even though he/she has checked the box on the applicant form that is related to felony convictions.

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REENTRY PROFILE—A San Antonio Community Bands Together For Restorative Justice—*continued*

Macedonia CDC and TAFI plan an October 2007 conference that will offer updates on policy and programs that affect the lives of the formerly incarcerated and their families.

The spirit of the church and the CDC spreads to other organizations in the community. Macedonia CDC is the lead agency in the New West Weed & Seed HIV/AIDS/Substance Abuse Prevention and Awareness Coalition which includes the Macedonia Restorative Justice Ministry, San Antonio Fighting Back and BeatAIDS.

Patrick McKinley is another closely-aligned community leader, helping many ex-offenders and parolees through the nonprofit he founded, ***We Are Making a Difference***, which operates out of a worn cinder block building that once served as the first school for African Americans in the Edge-wood School District.

McKinley and other volunteers operate a food pantry that distributes basic supplies on a “no questions asked” basis. McKinley witnessed many being turned away from food programs because of eligibility requirements, so he decided to offer food with no strings attached.

“I told God I ain’t turning away nobody. All they got to do is say, ‘I need help,’” McKinley says. The leaders of Macedonia Baptist Church, Macedonia CDC, ***We are Making a Difference*** and many others co-organized a highly successful Reentry Community Summit that was co-sponsored by KLRN and Making Connections-San Antonio. Over 250 people came together to explore how the community can better assist people who are leaving prison and reentering society. William “Pete” Duncan, who was featured in the PBS documentary, *Omar and Pete*, was guest speaker.

There is much work left to be done to improve lives for the formerly incarcerated, and the leaders of this movement have faith that the work they are doing will continue and grow.

“It’s not costing us anything but a little more time and a little more love,” says Ann Morrison.

The Reentry National Media Outreach Campaign thanks Linda Wilson, Diarist for Making Connections San Antonio for contributing this article.

Macedonia Community Development Corporation partners with the Texas Alliance of the Formerly Incarcerated (TAFI). Through this partnership, they are working on several goals:

- Building the ex-offender voting block through the “Unlock the Vote” Voter Registration, Educations and Mobilization Campaign leading up to the 2008 election.
- Developing support groups for ex-offenders and their families
- Establishing an ‘emergency fund’ for ex-offenders and their families
- Initiating the “Block the Box” campaign in San Antonio with County Commissioned Tommy Adkisson
- Developing life skills training, affordable housing and access to employment opportunities
- Planning the Second Annual Quality of Life Conference scheduled for October 2007.

REENTRY CONFERENCES AND EVENTS

Double Duty Dad™ Mentoring Program Launch Event

Join the National Fatherhood Initiative, Ted Leonsis, Alma Powell, members of Congress, and local and national organizations for the launch of this exciting new mentoring program, **Wednesday June 6, 2007, 11:00 AM**, Upper Senate Park (the “swamp” outside the Russell Senate Office Building at Delaware Ave. and Constitution Ave. in Washington, DC). Double Duty Dad™ is designed to inspire our nation’s fathers to call upon their experiences and knowledge to become mentors to children in need of a father’s guidance.

To RSVP or for more information, contact Vincent DiCaro of the National Fatherhood Initiative at 240-912-1270 or vdicaro@fatherhood.org. Find out more about Double Duty Dad at www.doubledutydad.org.

National Conference on Restorative Justice

You are invited to be part of a groundbreaking national conference on restorative justice, **June 24-27, 2007** in Kerrville, TX. The purpose for this national conference is to bring together community leaders, politicians, educators, academics, practitioners, judges, faith leaders, policymakers, and concerned citizens to promote the implementation of restorative justice practices in communities across the nation. Different approaches to restorative justice will be demonstrated, with practical solutions to today’s problems emphasized. The conference will feature workshops and panel discussions led by social service providers, researchers and educators, political leaders, judges, faith community organizers, correctional system officials, as well as first-person accounts from the victims of crime and rehabilitated former offenders. Download the registration form at <http://www.restorativejusticenow.org>.

Woman to Woman PRC Board Invites You to a Day to Address Concerns

Topics of the Day include:

- Prison Re-entry;
- Mental Illness;
- and Housing

August 4, 2007, 9:00 A.M. – 5:00 P.M., 5620 E. 21st Street, Wichita, KS 67208. Please R.S.V.P. no later than Wednesday, August 1, 2007. The conference fee is \$15.00 per person. Limited scholarships are available. For more information, contact Bernia Williams-Kelly, 316.652.0815!

REENTRY NEWS AND RESOURCES

Call to Action: How Programs in Three Cities Responded to the Prisoner Reentry Crisis

by Paul VanDeCarr

March 2007, 48 pages

Call to Action chronicles how individuals, community organizations, faith institutions, businesses and officials mobilized to build partnerships to address escalating numbers of ex-prisoners returning to their communities. The three cities highlighted in this report, Jacksonville, FL; Memphis, TN; and Washington, D.C., were pioneers in responding to the nation’s prisoner reentry crisis. They developed impressive programs and eventually joined P/PV’s [Ready4Work](#) initiative.

In the report’s foreword, P/PV President Fred Davie and Vice President for Public Policy and Community Partnerships Renata Cobbs Fletcher argue, “The collective experience of Ready4Work sites highlights the need for more collective and integrated approaches to prisoner reentry across cities, regions and states; public and private resources and funding streams need to be redirected, pooled and put to use in more strategic, cost-effective and outcomes-driven efforts. Research findings that show promise for specific program strategies must be at the center of these partnerships, guiding dialogue as well as the design of initiatives and program evaluations.” To download the full report, please visit: http://www.ppv.org/ppv/community_faith/community_faith_publications.asp?section_id=3#pub211

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REENTRY NEWS AND RESOURCES—*continued*

P/PV Preview: Mentoring Ex-Prisoners in the Ready4Work Reentry Initiative

by Wendy S. McClanahan

March 2007, 4 pages

Promoting successful reentry for ex-prisoners is a critical issue facing individuals, families, communities and governments across the country. This brief presents findings from a forthcoming report on the mentoring component of the [Ready4Work](#) prisoner reentry initiative. Ready4Work participants who met with a mentor remained in the program longer, were twice as likely to obtain a job and were more likely to stay employed than participants who did not meet with a mentor. The report's authors conclude that while mentoring alone is not enough, supportive relationships, which can be fostered through mentoring programs, should be considered a core component of any reentry strategy. To download the full brief, please visit: http://www.ppv.org/ppv/community_faith/community_faith_publications.asp?section_id=3#pub212

Hard Road Home

P/PV is pleased to announce the premiere of a new documentary, *Hard Road Home*, which explores the challenges and successes of participants and staff at the Ready4Work program site in Harlem ([Exodus Transitional Community](#)). *Hard Road Home* debuted on March 10th at the South by Southwest Film Festival in Austin. For more information, please visit www.hardroadhome.org.

Indiana Prisons Help Connect Fathers with Kids

Indianapolis, Indiana, (February 28, 2007) - Commissioner J. David Donahue joined the first graduating class from the National Fatherhood Initiative (NFI) at the Plainfield Correctional Facility today. Over 60 family members and children attended the ceremony.

"The fatherhood initiative fosters healthy relationships between fathers and their children in a safe and secure environment," said Commissioner J. David Donahue. "While these men are separated from their children, they are able to maintain a long-term relationship. The curriculum in Indiana focuses on all areas of parenting for men using a national model."

In 2006, the Department received federal funding for 1.25 million dollars over a 5-year period for four IDOC facilities, including Branchville Correctional Facility, Correctional Industrial Facility, Plainfield Re-Entry and Education Facility and Wabash Valley Correctional Facility. Overall, there are 15 facilities with fatherhood programs, four of which operate family preservation centers. The centers are funded by the Promoting Responsible Fatherhood grant.

"I am very excited about this grant. It affirms the important contribution to responsible fatherhood that the Indiana Department of Correction has already made in the past and it provides the resources to take this important work to a much higher level," says Dr. Stephen Hall, Fatherhood Project Director, IDOC.

Superintendent Wendy Knight at the Plainfield Correctional Facility commented, "These men have chosen a way to maintain a positive relationship with the people who depend on them the most. I salute them in their effort."

Indiana made headlines in 2002 by starting the first Fatherhood Program in the country at Branchville Correctional Facility, an adult male correctional facility.

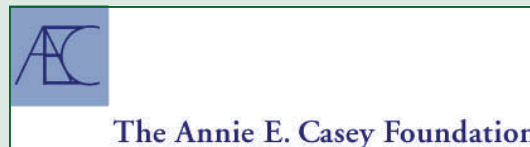
"The curriculum is designed to help inspire involved parenting, child development, communication skills, active parenting skills, healthy relationships, and successful re-entry," added Donahue. "We are always looking for ways to provide offenders a linkage with their families and communities."

About The National Fatherhood Initiative

The National Fatherhood Initiative promotes the well-being of children through responsible fatherhood campaigns and activities. Click here to read more: <http://www.fatherhood.org/>

The Annie E. Casey Foundation (AECF) is supporting the **Reentry National Media Outreach Campaign** as part of the Making Connections Media Outreach Initiative (MCMOI), which is designed and managed by Outreach Extensions. This vital effort links media broadcasters to local stakeholders and their diverse constituencies, providing outreach strategies and media resources that support their efforts to strengthen youth and families and build effective communities.

The Making Connections Media Outreach Initiative offers media support to local coalitions that are part of AECF's *Making Connections*, a multi-faceted, long-term effort to improve the life chances of vulnerable children by helping to strengthen their families and neighborhoods. The Foundation's intent is to stimulate and support a local movement that engages residents, civic groups, political leaders, grassroots groups, public and private sector leadership, and faith-based organizations in an effort to help transform tough neighborhoods into family-supportive environments.



This e-Newsletter is an electronic publication intended to keep you informed about news and events relating to the Reentry National Media Outreach Campaign. **Please let us know how we're doing through the feedback form on the Reentry Web site (<http://www.reentrymediaoutreach.org/contactus.htm>).**

For more information, please contact:
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We welcome the names/e-mail addresses of your colleagues so that we can send copies of this e-Newsletter to them as well.