



CJM Connection

The quarterly newsletter of Criminal Justice Ministry – St. Louis

Issue 2

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Summer 2015

PROGRAM SPOTLIGHT

CJM's R2RVets Program develops Check-In App to keep clients safe

Fred wasn't in his apartment nor with his friends. He wasn't answering his cell phone or returning calls. CJM Coordinator for R2RVets, Aaron Laxton, was forced to physically hunt him down around St. Louis, hoping he was safe.

Although Fred had actively served in the Army during WWII, his mind was beginning to deteriorate. He was a widower from Southern Missouri who had no one but the program keeping track of him. In the days leading up to the diagnosis of dementia, Aaron had to repeatedly search for him. Ultimately this client was moved to a memory care unit in Southern Missouri that was closer to his family.

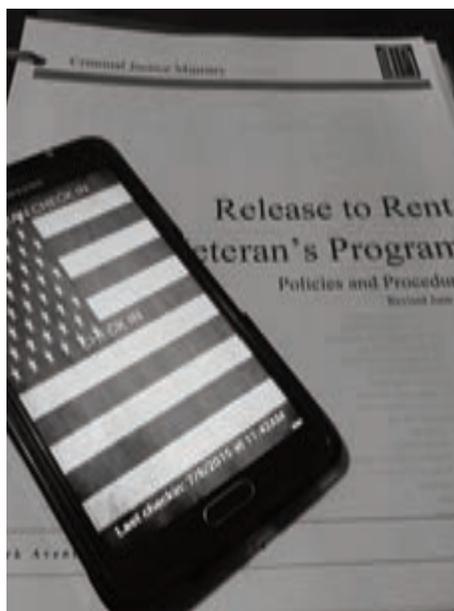
This is just one example of why a better system was needed. The Release to Rent Veteran's Transitional Living Program has been forced to deal with an issue that faces many who are aging and their caregivers. Now R2RVets has a new Veteran Check-In (VCI) application that will help to locate clients like Fred quickly.

VCI is a phone application that was developed specifically for the R2RV program by Dr. Guanyu Tian, Assistant Professor of Cyber Security at Fontbonne University. It allows easier daily check-in with the R2RV staff. Clients are required to check in with staff every 24 hours. The Program Coordinator can also manually check the location of each client should they not check in. In the case of a natural

disaster, the clients' locations can be obtained and special instructions can be sent to all users of the VCI.

R2RV is the first program to use such a cutting-edge phone application in this way. As a result, this innovation will reduce the amount of time staff spends tracking down a client. This use by CJM may also result in future study to apply such technologies to other settings in reentry and social services.

There's an app for that! Veterans who participate in CJM's Release to Rent program now have an app that allows them to easily check in with CJM staff.



From the Director

Because a CJM staff member accompanied a veteran with a criminal record to the bank, all the startup fees were dropped, and he was able to open a new account.



Because a CJM staff member personally questioned Vocational Rehabilitation about a client's eligibility, he was accepted.

Because a CJM staff member secured a bus ticket and a birth certificate for a young woman, she was able to reach a required court hearing in Jefferson City.

Sometimes money seems to be the greatest need to provide services. Here at CJM, however, paying rent would be a waste—without someone to show a participant how to be a good tenant. Giving a food voucher to someone released after decades in prison without a "how-to" shopping tour could lead to bewilderment rather than practical life skills. Telling a felon to bring a legitimate complaint to a government agency without a trusted person at his or her side will never bring results.

The greatest need of those who have made mistakes and done their time is for people who are willing to "walk with them." Although CJM needs to pay for rent, food, and transportation, even more important are the people. Some are volunteers who reach out an hour or a day each week. Some are staff members—many on call 24/7. They not only point the way; they show the way. Please invest in the people that make CJM! Thank you!

*Carleen Reek, SSND, Ph.D.
Executive Director*

"When we have the same weakness, why did they fall and I didn't? This is a mystery that makes me pray and draws me to prisoners."

— Pope Francis

Former CJM client brings empathy, experience to job

When Doug Evans walked out of Farmington Correctional Center in January 2010, he was full of apprehension. Although he knew he was accepted for CJM's Release to Rent supportive housing program, he didn't know how things would turn out—work, getting around St. Louis, people he would run into.

Because CJM took care of all his basic needs including housing, food, and a bus pass, Doug was able to start addressing the barriers that used to create problems. He had never lived by himself without getting in trouble. He had to learn how to use a cell phone, to use the bus routes, to get channels on his TV without cable. His apartment was much larger than his 6 x 9 cell. So much space!

Doug started to expand his support system—with CJM staff member Heidi Moore, the folks in his 12-Step group, and his peers in the weekly Release2Rent support group who knew exactly how he felt. Through the

sharing and his conforming to suggestions he received, he really began to see that things could work out.

Because of his criminal convictions, he could not find regular work, so he used several temp agencies. He was able to pay his portion of the rent, his utilities and phone—which was proof to him that he had the ability to live independently.

After a year of volunteering at a detox center, he was offered a job as a tech. He compiled enough hours and classes to earn certification as a recognized substance abuse counselor. He was then promoted to peer support specialist for addicted children.

Not only did Doug succeed in his own reentry. He now is in a CJM staff position that allows him to give the kind of support he was given by CJM, guiding others to independent, healthier living. He case manages veterans with a criminal record who were homeless. He is on call to help them 24/7.

He has helped clients in many ways—



Former CJM client and current staff member Doug Evans works with an R2R participant.

from showing them to work household appliances, to helping them manage their own bills and bank accounts. The goal for clients is to become independent. Doug has seen these men graduate from the R2RVets Program and begin to live stable, productive lives. For Doug, that is his greatest success.

VOLUNTEER VIEW

High school counselor taught valuable lesson outside of the classroom

Mary Ann Walker had been a high school counselor. One day she saw the picture of James, one of her former students, plastered all over the news. He had burglarized several homes in West County and was in the County Justice Center. The next day she went to see him and expressed her concern and wanted to know that he was okay. She spent an hour talking with him before leaving the jail.

After that experience realizing that someone cared for him, James went back to his cell and flushed down the toilet the razor blade that he had intended to use that night to end his life.

Mary Ann stayed in contact with James during his twenty-year sentence. As his counselor, Dr. Walker had talked with James many times in high school, but this time, later in his life, he took her advice. He said, "Dr. Walker taught me empathy, how to love, how to care, that it's okay to cry or be angry—but to do it in a positive way. But most importantly, she taught me to forgive, and forgiving myself and being able to look in the mirror again

was so so difficult... to forgive."

James knew Dr. Walker was ill and wrote his last letter to her. In it he thanked her for effecting "the miracle" in him. As Mary Ann breathed her last, her son Wayne read James' last letter to her. The letter concluded, "Thank you for being such an inspiration in my life. No one else could get through to me—neither treatment nor advice from many. You are my angel. Thank you."

Mary Ann Walker was a faithful CJM volunteer for more than 14 years. She passed away in February 2015.



Volunteer opportunities available

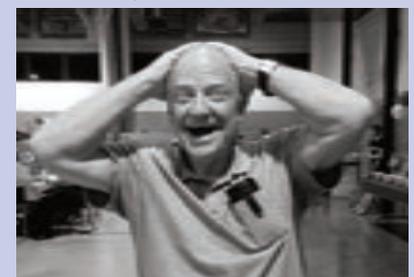
Volunteers can provide a human touch by visiting or being pen pals. Contact the CJM Volunteer Coordinator at 314-881-6019 or find more opportunities at www.cjmslouis.org.

CJM Trivia Night Saturday, August 22

Bring your family, friends, and generous spirit to a fun night of trivia to benefit CJM's work to improve the safety and well-being of people affected by crime and the criminal justice system.

This fundraiser will take place at St. James the Greater Gym in Dogtown. Doors open at 6:00 pm, and trivia gets underway at 7:00 pm. The cost is \$25 per person or \$200 per table of eight, with beer, soda, and snacks provided. For more information or to register, email info@cjmslouis.org, call (314) 881-3090 or visit cjmslouis.org.

Don't miss CJM Trivia night, and all the fun and games it brings (including the crowd favorite, Heads or Tails!)



WHY I GIVE

Reflections from Board Member Jerry Nichols

Below is an excerpt from the presentation CJM Board Member Jerry Nichols delivered at area churches as part of the 2015 Annual Catholic Appeal.

Jesus Christ was executed as a criminal. He was not guilty, but we all know that you don't have to be guilty to be convicted.

He was hung next to two men who were guilty. One stayed a tough guy. But the other one recognized that Jesus did not belong there, and he was sorry. And Jesus made him a saint that day by promising to take Dismas to heaven with him.

A long time ago the guys who killed my dad got three years. Today three marijuana convictions can get you life in prison. And we now have four prisons in the St. Louis Archdiocese plus many jails.

My name is Jerry Nichols. I am here to talk about the Criminal Justice Ministry and about how I try to make me an instrument God's peace.

I don't know whether our justice system really works or not. But I do know that Jesus wants us to work with those that are incarcerated. That is one of my ministries.

Two years ago CJM was part of the St. Vincent DePaul Society. Then we were spun off and started our own organization. I am a CPA, and they came to me and asked me to become their treasurer and to help them get set up correctly. Now we are given the highest ratings by the Better Business Bureau and Guide Star and are supported by the Annual Catholic Appeal.

But the most important thing we do, and we have been doing it for the last 36 years, is to answer God's call to work with the most neglected of society. Much of our society considers the incarcerated as out-of-sight, out-of-mind. We think it's their own fault, so just keep them away from us.

These men and women have had difficult lives before, during and after prison. I know that a lot of the stunts I pulled in my youth could have gotten me thrown in jail, so I can't look down on these people. And I know that I could not survive in a prison cell. I also know that when these people get out, no one wants to hire them or even rent them a room. So what else can they do but go back to prison.

Well, at CJM we have hundreds of

volunteers who are pen pals with the incarcerated. Many of the incarcerated have absolutely no one outside of prison to talk to, no family, no friends, no one. They need to hear about how God loves them. We don't just talk, we show them the love of God.

When we find persons who want to change and are willing to work at it, some of our small staff give them a backpack of necessities. When they get out, they have only the clothes on their back; no clean underwear, socks or a toothbrush.

In one program we subsidize their first 12 months' rent and give them bus passes so they can look for work and get there when they find it. We counsel with them very closely. All of our clients attend support group and participate in a 12-step program. We also offer free classes in anger management...

The recidivism rate for people leaving prison is 50-70%. For those in our long-term programs, it is 10%.

This is not an easy ministry, especially when befriending people who have turned their lives around but will never get out or might even be executed. But if it were easy, it would not be a ministry. And it is a ministry that Jesus himself participated in. How could we do any better?

Let's all work together to make this world a better place.



CJM in the Community

The CJM board and staff tirelessly advocate on the behalf of the incarcerated and recently released. Sometimes they are joined by program participants and graduates as they address criminal justice issues.

Board Members **Joe Burgoon**, **Jerry Nichols**, **Olivia Rasp**, and **Matt Witte**, with support from **Dr. Fred Rottnek**, spoke in various churches about CJM and other needs of the 2015 Annual Catholic Appeal.

Aaron Laxton, CJM staff, **Doug Evans**, CJM staff and Release to Rent (R2R) graduate, **Heidi Moore**, R2R Coordinator, and **Carleen Reck, SSND**, CJM Executive Director, gave a presentation about Release to Rent to the Affordable Housing Trust Fund Board.

Heidi Moore and **Andrew**, program participant, presented at the Coffee Chat sponsored by STAR (St. Louis Alliance for Reentry) on "Reentry and Faith-Based Collaborations."

Rose Rita Huelsmann, SSND, CJM staff, taught in the first Job Readiness classes at the Medium Security Institution (MSI).

Carleen Reck, SSND, gave a Spring Day of Prayer entitled "Learning from the Least Likely" to the women in the Metro-East Vicariate.

CURRENT ISSUES

CJM helps one client at a time. Changes in law, however, can assist many by removing unfair obstacles to reentry.

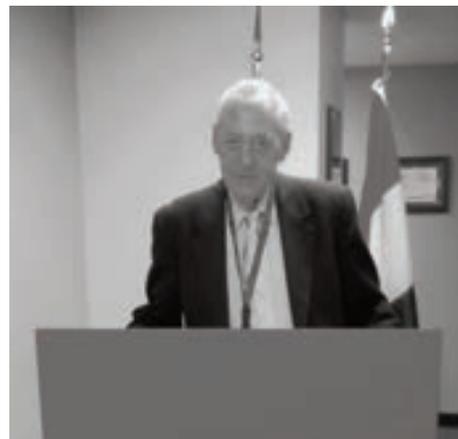
RESOLVED

- ✓ Nebraska has joined the states that have eliminated the death penalty.

TIME TO DISCUSS

A bill to address abuse in St. Louis City jails will soon be introduced to the City of St. Louis Aldermen. Community groups can now address the pattern of arrests, using extensive data in the new report, "Disparity Ratio for Consent Searches."

Board Member Joe Burgoon speaking about Criminal Justice Ministry as part of the 2015 Annual Catholic Appeal.





Criminal Justice Ministry

P.O. Box 15160
St. Louis, MO 63110

JOIN US!

CJM's Annual
Trivia Night returns
August 22.
Details inside!



Some Release to Rent participants clean up the area under the highway, providing a needed service to the LaSalle Park and Near Southside Neighborhoods near CJM.

Ways to Give

There are many ways you can help CJM improve the safety and well-being of individuals and communities:

- Use the enclosed return envelope or contribute online at cjmstlouis.org.
- Designate CJM when ordering from Amazon. Search for Amazon Smile and designate CJM or simply go to <http://smile.amazon.com/ch/462647318>, then order as usual. Amazon will donate 0.5% of all eligible purchases to CJM.
- Attend CJM's annual trivia night on Saturday, August 22 at St. James the Greater in Dogtown. Register at cjmstlouis.org.
- Volunteer to be a pen pal. Email roseh@cjmstlouis.org to learn more.

FROM THE MAILBOX

Dear Staff of CJM,

Thank you for your reply to my letter and your support. Whether I get parole or not, the support and information you offered to me is extremely appreciated. You have helped me to present a packet to the parole board that shows how willing and able the St. Louis community is help to inmates re-entering society from prison. The time and effort you put into your response shows, and I appreciate it. Please accept this donation for your organization.

– T. F.

Enclosed with this letter was a prison check for \$5.00.

WHO WE ARE

OUR MISSION

To improve the safety and well-being of individuals affected by crime and the criminal justice system, their families and their communities in the Greater St. Louis Area through person-to-person assistance rooted in Jesus Christ's message of love, reconciliation and hope.

OUR HISTORY

Since 1979, Criminal Justice Ministry has served persons in Missouri prisons and jails as well as many returning to the St. Louis area. Formerly sponsored by the Society of St. Vincent DePaul, in 2013 CJM became an independent 501(c)(3), affiliated with the Archdiocese of St. Louis.

OUR BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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