

NC

# PRISON NEWS Today

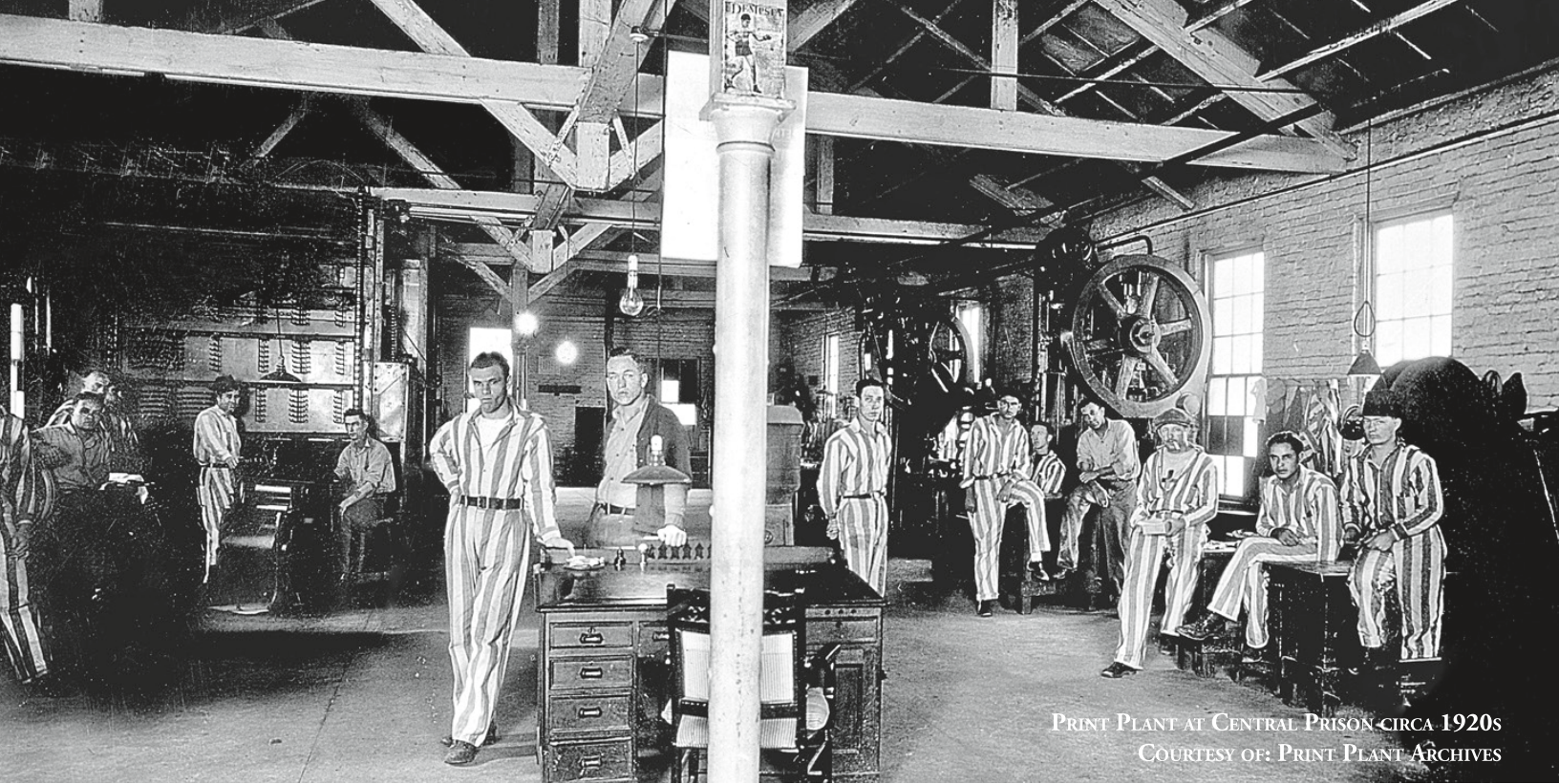
Amplifying the Voices of the Incarcerated Statewide



North Carolina's First  
Statewide Prison  
Paper since 1935

The Impact  
Of  
Hurricane  
Helene  
Page  
30

Created and Written by the Incarcerated, for the Incarcerated



PRINT PLANT AT CENTRAL PRISON CIRCA 1920s  
COURTESY OF: PRINT PLANT ARCHIVES

## NC PRISON NEWS TODAY: CONTINUING A LEGACY

By Phillip Smith

PRISON NEWSPAPERS LEAVE BEHIND A STORIED HISTORY IN THE United States. Minnesota's *The Prison Mirror* is credited as the first prison publication, originally founded in 1887 by incarcerated members of the James-Younger gang, the very gang led by the outlaw Jesse James. Under editor Wilbert Rideau, who served 44 years in Louisiana prisons, *The Angolite* became the most celebrated prison publication in history, racking up more journalism awards than many existing civilian publications. In California, *The San Quentin News* expanded to short films, a news television show, and a nationally syndicated podcast, all produced behind the wall.

North Carolina's prison newspaper history began at Central Prison (CP) in the early 1900s. Back then, CP's staff installed a refurbished printing press to give prisoners something constructive to do with their idle time. Not long after, the state created a print shop at CP where prisoners could learn a trade while producing work for state entities. Incarcerated men reported on the creation of the print shop in the inaugural issue of their own newspaper in 1926, called *The Prison News*.

Over time, *The Prison News* blossomed into a statewide publication that circulated in North Carolina's prison camps and work farms. *The Prison News* featured articles penned by the head of state institutions and the Warden of CP. Other state officials wrote opinion pieces and articles informing the prison population about new developments, policies, and laws. Articles noted the creation of Polk Correctional, North Carolina's first youth facility; statistics from baseball teams that traveled from prison to prison; and complaints about the conditions of confinement. The incarcerated at CP even published an endearing obituary about a beloved guard who had patrolled the prison for decades. *The Prison News* remained in publication until 1935, but the print shop outgrew CP and now operates as the Print Plant at Nash Correctional Institution.

In 2005, incarcerated print plant workers Brian Scott and Mark Pieczynski founded *The Nash News* in conjunction with the Correc-

tion Enterprise Print Plant and Nash Correctional's administration. *The Nash News* was designed to be a variety/lifestyle publication that centered on personal and institutional current events at Nash. Scott and Pieczynski returned to freedom years ago, but *The Nash News* thrives, publishing four issues a year. In 19 years, *The Nash News* has evolved from a two-color, eight-page newsletter to a full-length glossy magazine.

Then in late 2023, representatives from the North Carolina Department of Adult Correction, led by Mildred Spearman, asked *The Nash News* to produce a proposal and prototype for a statewide prison publication. As a staff, we didn't consider this project a stand-alone entity, but rather a continuation of the legacy started by the founders of *The Prison News* in 1926 and *The Nash News* in 2005.

Barry Mintz, then Art Reporter for *The Nash News*, suggested the name the *North Carolina Prison News Today*. A few *Nash News* staff members harbored reservations about incorporating the word *prison* in the title, but Mintz explained his reasoning: "North Carolina notes our location. *Prison News* pays homage to those who have paved the way for all North Carolina prison publications. *Today* describes the currentness of the publication's content."

Recently, the word *prison* has fallen under scrutiny as a dehumanizing term, but to us it's just a word. As a whole, *The Nash News* staff recognized that there is no shame in producing a newspaper from prison. In fact, it's an honor to be a part of something so good when we could find bad things to occupy our time. Recognizing where we are is the first step in showing how we rise above adversity with talents many of us honed while in prison.

As incarcerated people, we take pride in christening this publication the *North Carolina Prison News Today*, because it's much more than a name. The *North Carolina Prison News Today* is a continuous stride leading from a storied past into an innovative future of prison publications everywhere. **NCPNT**

# NC PRISON NEWS Today

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## Publication Info:

This is the introductory issue of NC Prison News Today (NCPNT). At the request of NC Department of Adult Correction leadership, The Nash News staff (TNN) put together this first issue of NCPNT while a publication staff is being identified. The Nash News staff will continue producing TNN while a separate team will be managing the new statewide publication going forward.

Numerous people supported and helped make this first edition possible including Warden Talena Lee and her programs and IT staff. Case manager Markell Mitchell has been a special liaison assisting throughout the creation process. Mildred Spearman, DAC, facilitated planning meetings, speaker presentations, and journalism and writing classes for TNN in preparation for the launch of the publication.

Also, a special thanks to Kris Petrie, Richard Stancil, and Gene Zboralski of the Correction Enterprises Print Plant for help with resources, research, and allowing the time to work on the project.

Thank you to everyone who submitted suggestions, story ideas, letters to the editor, poetry, and short stories. We were overwhelmed with how many tablet submissions we received in such a short time!

Since this introductory issue was largely complete and already full of information, we are going to save much of what you sent for future issues. Please do not be discouraged, as we will do as much as we possibly can with the space allowed in the NCPNT.

Keep the submissions coming!



## THE NASH NEWS CONTRIBUTORS:

*(In Order of Appearance)*



**Phillip Smith**  
*Reporting, editing*



**Mark Mercer**  
*Reporting*



**Cris Gardner**  
*Reporting, graphic design*



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*Reporting, graphics*



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**Tony Johnson**  
*Reporting*



**Jason Williford**  
*Reporting, illustrations*

# A LETTER FROM THE EDITORIAL STAFF

**W**ELCOME TO THE FIRST ISSUE OF THE *North Carolina Prison News Today* (NCPNT), a publication operated by incarcerated people in partnership with the Department of Adult Correction, and Nash Correctional Institution.

From its inception, the founders of the NCPNT envisioned a publication that would amplify the voices of incarcerated people across the state. This means that any incarcerated person can submit an article for publication in NCPNT. Each subsequent issue will feature articles by you and for you.

## WHAT WE WANT

NCPNT wants to publish true journalism. Submissions can be about functions happening at the prison where you are housed, changes in the law or policy that are important to the prison population, sports, notable accomplishments, events, or information about new programs or a graduation.

Submissions should be 600-800 words for program features, 100-200 words for event briefs. Longer submissions will not be considered.

## WHAT WE DO NOT WANT

NCPNT will not accept first-person essays. Do not write us because your favorite show isn't on TV, because you lost your third habeas corpus petition, or because medical won't give you the fancy boots they gave someone else. Don't put yourself in the article. Write about topics that affect us all.

We will not publish pieces that are defamatory to government officials or other incarcerated people. We will not publish descriptions of violence or sexual situations. Also, no profanity.

Submission of an article does not guarantee publication. The NCPNT editorial staff reserves the right to publish or not based on topic, tone, information, and the writing. All pieces will be edited.

When you submit an article, make sure to include your name, OPUS number, and location. We will let you know if your piece will be published.

Sounds simple? It isn't.

Submissions to the NCPNT should follow the basic journalism format. We recognize that most incarcerated people may not be familiar with the structure of an article, so we provide an example here. Articles that follow this format will have a higher chance of publication and will require less structural editing. So, pay attention.

## BASIC STRUCTURE OF AN ARTICLE

Reported pieces have five main components: Lede, Nut Graf, History, Reporting, and a Conclusion.

- **LEDE** (*also known as Lead*): A straight forward description of who, what, why, when, and where as the opening sentence or paragraph. **Purpose:** To immediately draw the reader in.
- **NUT GRAF:** A nut graf is a paragraph that explains the point of your article, like a thesis. It explains why the topic is important by offering specific information establishing what the story is about. Imagine a reader asking you, "Why should I care about this?" The nut graf tells the reader why they should invest their time and effort into reading the story.
- **HISTORY:** This section details the history of the article's topic to give background and context.
- **REPORTING:** This section lays out the facts, statistics, and interviews in an informative way to prove your point.
- **CONCLUSION:** You want to leave a lasting impression by wrapping things up in a way that will stick with the reader. Sometimes a powerful quote from an interviewee is good here. Also, it is best to tie the conclusion to the lede, as if to say, "I proved my point."

## CITATIONS

When quoting a person or periodical, direct quotes must be set off with quotation marks. Also, you must credit who said the quote or what publication it came from.

- Ex. "That's right! I did it!" John Doe said.
- Ex. Roger's Dictionary defines doll as "a small toy representing a human being."

Information from published periodicals (books, magazines, newspapers, etc.) must be cited for fact checking. This means that we must verify all information in your piece to make sure it is factual, not an opinion. Also, using someone else's published work without giving them credit is plagiarism. We cannot publish plagiarized work.

To cite your sources, use the following format in a list at the conclusion of your article.

- Ex. Author name (first and last), Date of publication, "Title of Article," Publication name (or book title), Page number (if available).
- Ex. Jack Jones, August 21, 1971, "Understanding the Prison Context," USA Today, page number not available.

If we cannot verify the authenticity of the information in your submission, we cannot publish it. *NCPNT*

## HOW TO SUBMIT ARTICLES

- For poetry, recipes, and letters to the editor, use the app on Edovo.
- For longer form articles or short stories — between 300-800 words — you may submit your writing to the facility liaison (see page 36). The liaisons will only accept 10 articles per month. Articles must be no longer than 800 words and must be submitted to your liaison by the 20th day of the month. Any articles longer than 800 words will not be accepted. If you don't meet the deadline or the liaison has reached the 10 article limit, you will need to wait until the next month.

# EXAMPLE OF THE PARTS OF AN ARTICLE

*When submitting an article, place the following in the upper right hand corner:* **Your name:** Mark Mercer  
**Your location:** Nash Correctional  
**Word count:** 438 words

## THE NBA'S COLORFUL EXPERIMENT

### Lede

WHETHER YOU'RE AN NBA FAN or not, it was hard to miss games being played on brightly painted basketball courts, which indicated that something different was going on.

### Nut Graf

From November 3 to December 9, the NBA held its first In-Season Tournament. The opinions about the tournament were as colorful as the courts themselves.

"It's trash," said Nash Correctional resident James Roscoe when asked about the tournament. He then questioned, "What is it really?" Like Roscoe, casual fans were left wondering why the NBA was holding this tournament and what was at stake for the teams.

### History

To international soccer fans, the tournament's format seemed familiar. The 15 teams in each conference were divided into three groups of five based on their performance from the previous season. Each team played every other team in their group once.

The winner of the six groups, determined by their record, along with one wildcard team from each conference, advanced to a single-elimination eight-team bracket.

### Reporting

Except for the finals, the tournament games, which were interspersed with regular season games, counted towards the teams' regular-season standings. And every player on the championship team, The Los Angeles Lakers, received \$500,000.

So, the question remains: why did the NBA create this tournament?

It appears that the NBA is attempting to make the early games of an 82-game season more relevant and compelling for viewers who do not begin watching until Christmas, or even during the playoffs.

Nash resident Mitku Williams, who can be seen watching almost every sporting event on TV, enjoyed the new tournament. He said, "It makes them [star players] play more. They can't sit as often." In recent years, load management has been a concern for fans, and the NBA is attempting to keep their star players on the court more frequently.

One possible unintended consequence of the tournament is that, with point differential being used as a tiebreaker in the group stage, teams were encouraged to run up the score. The Boston Celtics even used the *hack-a-Shak* strategy on Andre Drummond of The Chicago Bulls (a 46.6% free throw shooter) while leading by 30 points in a game that was essentially decided, leaving fans, coaches and players feeling something was amiss.

So, was the tournament successful? As a fan who typically only watches NBA games during the playoffs, I decided to tune in to see what it was like. I didn't notice much of a difference, but I did have trouble following the ball on the brightly-colored red court. Three days later, as I passed by the TV and saw another vibrantly-colored court, I pulled up a chair to watch. I'm still not sure why. *TNN*

### Conclusion

## REVISIONS AND HISTORY OF THE INMATE GRIEVANCE PROCEDURE

By Phillip Smith

ON OCTOBER 1, 2023, THE NORTH CAROLINA Department of Adult Correction (DAC) updated its Administrative Review Process, or grievance procedure, for the first time in a decade.

The revisions intend to eliminate the rubber-stamp review of grievances, to call attention to [the] functionality of [the] grievance process at all levels, and to provide feedback to DAC management, prisons, [and] facilities by using statistical data, as noted in documents provided by Kimberly Grande, Executive Director of the Inmate Grievance Resolution Board (IGRB).

Although the grievance procedure has operated for more than 50 years, few incarcerated people know how the process works or how it was born. The Administrative Review Process is the only formal vehicle available for the incarcerated to rectify complaints, so it is important to understand how it functions and why its creators deemed it necessary.

### WHAT IS THE GRIEVANCE BOARD?

From its inception, the IGRB was never meant to act as a watchdog group to police prison officials. The IGRB was designed as a mediation mechanism to resolve carceral complaints through communication with facility heads, as specified by Chapter G Section .0300 of the DAC Policy Manual.

Established in 1987, the IGRB exists as a separate agency within the DAC, according to NC General Statute § 148-118.6. The governor appoints five members to serve four-year terms. Three members are attorneys selected from the Council of the North Carolina State Bar. The two other members are non-attorneys with knowledge and experience in corrections.

The IGRB meets four times per year, examines statistical data regarding offender grievances, and reports to the General Assembly annually. Some reported data includes how many grievances were filed, how many lacked merit, and how many were resolved. All the IGRB meetings are open to the public. Each meeting time is posted at least two weeks in advance on the Secretary of State’s website.

### WHY HAVE A GRIEVANCE PROCESS?

In a virtual meeting with *The Nash News* staff, Executive Director Grande explained that grievance procedures are intended to keep problems internal by allowing prisons to resolve complaints that don’t require litigation. Grande added that revisions were adopted in 2023 to extend more rights and options to the incarcerated.

When asked if the IGRB would better serve the incarcerated if its board members were selected from independent advocacy groups,

### New Grievance Policies

- IGRB is working toward a solution with Viapath to allow grievances to be filed on tablets in the future.
- You can now file three grievances at one time instead of one.
- You may submit your grievances with related documents.
- Receipt of grievances shall occur every 24 hours.
- Grievant will receive notice of acceptance or rejection within three days.
- Emergency grievances must be submitted at grievant’s facility. Cannot be mailed directly to grievance board.

*The complete new policy can be found on the tablet in “Facility Information” under “North Carolina Policies”, Chapter G Section .0300, titled Administrative Remedy Procedures.*

Grande said such a process wouldn’t operate efficiently.

“Prisons wouldn’t permit access to tracking systems, OPUS, or segregation records to an external group,” Grande said. “Functionally, I don’t believe it would work. We are DAC employees in order to allow us access to staff.”

According to documents Grande provided, the adoption of the new grievance procedures offers a fair and effective review at the facility while promoting trust, legitimacy, and communication.

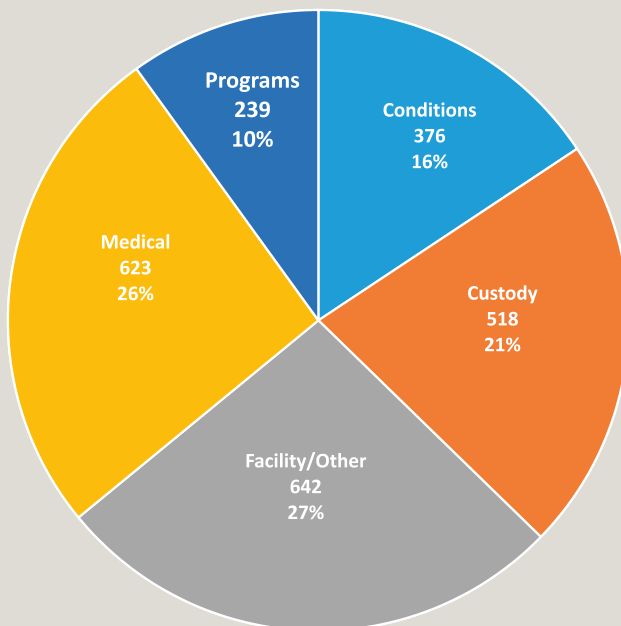
### HOW DID GRIEVANCES START?

A cursory glance at relevant case law provides the factual history of how the grievance process was born; specifically, *Jones v. North Carolina Prisoners’ Labor Union, Inc.*, 433 U.S. 119, 97 S. Ct. 2532 (1977).

*Jones* shows that in late 1974 the incarcerated in North Carolina incorporated a Prisoners’ Labor Union, in part, to serve as a vehicle for the presentation and resolution of inmate grievances. Before then, incarcerated North Carolinians were not paid for their labor and had no avenue to voice their complaints. *Jones* reports, “By early 1975, the Union had attracted some 2,000 inmate ‘members’ in 40 different prison units.”

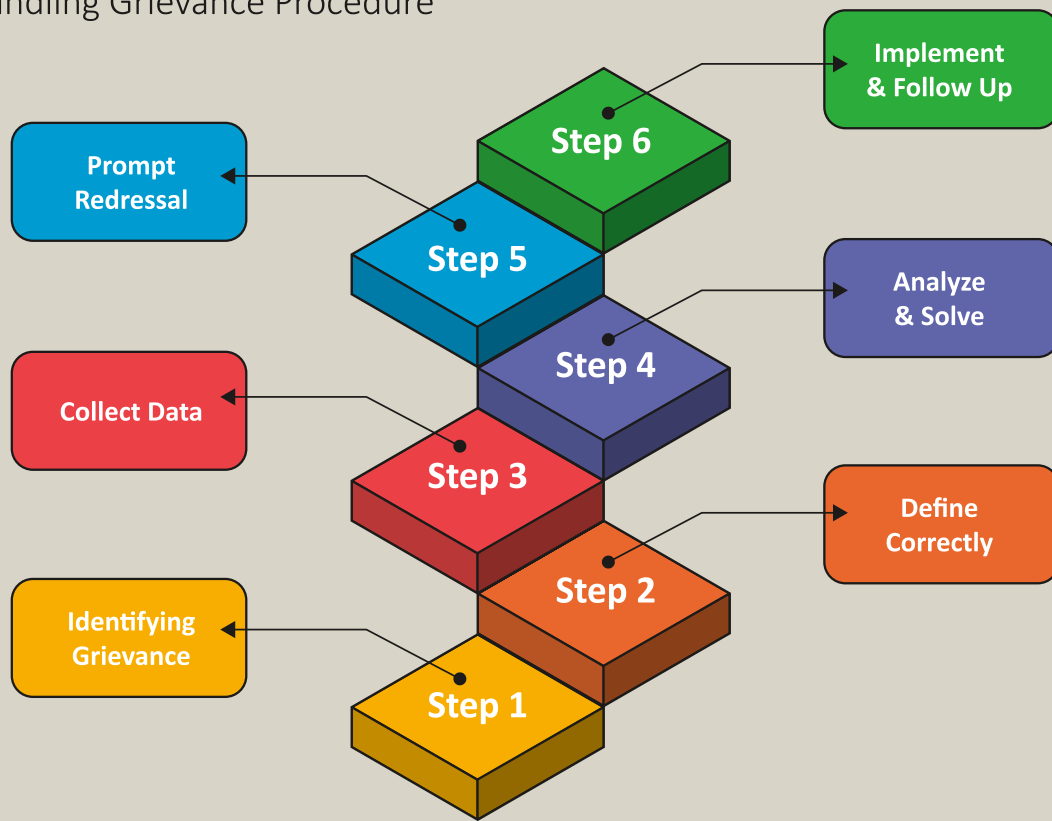
In corroboration with findings in *Jones*, executive Director Grande provided a brief history of Inmate Grievance Procedures that includes

**Grievances Resolved by IGRB At Step 3  
2nd Fiscal Quarter — FY 2024  
By Main Category**



# GRIEVANCE HANDLING PROCEDURE

## Steps in Handling Grievance Procedure



Data provided by Executive Director Grande

how courts began to permit offender lawsuits challenging prison conditions and treatment, beginning in the 1960's. These lawsuits contributed to the establishment of the Inmate Grievance Commission in 1974.

As *Jones* notes, prison officials set out to prevent inmates from forming or operating a 'union' by imposing rules prohibiting solicitation of other inmates, meetings between members of the Union, and union pamphlets mailed in from outside sources.

The Prison Labor Union filed suit and eventually lost the ability to unionize in *Jones*.

In *Jones*, the justices defended banning prison unions in favor of grievance procedures that had slowed down the rate of growth of federal prisoner petitions filed in courts.

In Executive Director Grande's history listing, she notes, "By 1983, each of the 50 states had adopted some form of grievance procedures," and in 1997, the Prison Litigation Reform Act mandated the exhaustion of the grievance process before an offender can file a lawsuit.

### A NEW HORIZON

Many incarcerated people may not consider the grievance process a legitimate method to rectify their problems. It is fact that the courts and legislatures of the past used these procedures to ban labor unions and to limit direct access to civil litigation. These facts make the

grievance process appear unfavorable.

Perhaps the revisions of 2023 can be viewed as action from the IGRB to align its functionality with its intended purpose: to act as a mediator, not a watchdog.

Regardless, opinions of legitimacy lie with the

grievant who is either satisfied or disgruntled as a result of how their complaint was addressed. If the new revisions benefit the incarcerated, they will no doubt improve life behind bars in North Carolina. *NCPNT*

## THE NUMBER OF GRIEVANCES RESOLVED BY THE BOARD

Fiscal Year 2022-2023

STEP	OUTCOME	COUNT
STEP 01	AGREED	11601
STEP 01	APPEALED	12208
STEP 01	COMPLETED	517
STEP 01	OFFENDER RELEASED	236
STEP 01	PENDING	546
STEP 01	TIME VIOLATION	762
STEP 02	AGREED	3291
STEP 02	APPEALED	9029
STEP 02	COMPLETED	34
STEP 02	OFFENDER RELEASED	122
STEP 02	PENDING	474
STEP 03	COMPLETED	8768
STEP 03	PENDING	264

## FRUSTRATION GROWS OVER TEXTBEHIND MAIL POLICY

By Cris Gardner

ONE HOT EVENING IN AUGUST 2023, AN officer at Warren Correctional handed Wilbur Day three white plastic shipping bags and told him to pack his property. Before the Covid pandemic, Day had put in a transfer request to Nash Correctional after learning both of his elderly parents had been diagnosed with cancer. The move would put him closer to his family, making visits easier. Months dragged on, then transfers were put on hold due to the pandemic. Finally, the long wait was over. Day would transfer the next morning. He packed his belongings, turned them into the night shift officer, and went to bed.

The next morning, a bus took Day to Nash. After enduring the search of his property and person, he went to his new housing location. He wanted to text his family and let them know he had arrived. Day borrowed a tablet and logged on to the Facility Messages app — an app on the Viapath tablets where his personal mail was stored. He realized something was wrong. All of the mail he had received over the past year — every letter, every picture, and every birthday card — was gone. Utterly confused, he sat on his bunk, staring at his tablet. “I was devastated,” Day said.

On September 14, 2021, Todd Ishee, now the Secretary for the Department of Adult Correction (DAC), issued a statewide memorandum explaining that the DAC would implement a new mail processing procedure to “combat the exposure and introduction of potentially fatal drugs and contraband” and “encourage family connections and increase the speed in which [the incarcerated] receive correspondence.”

The new policy began as a pilot program in the women’s facility February of 2020, then expanded statewide on October 18, 2021. Now mail from friends and families of the incarcerated is sent to a third party mail processing center, TextBehind, in Phoenix, Maryland. Mail can be sent either electronically for a fee, starting at \$1.29 for letters and cards, or through a postal service. According to the TextBehind website, “TextBehind completes service by processing and shipping all [...] orders within 24 hours Monday thru Friday.” For North Carolina facilities, after approval, the mail “is sent to the printer that is inside [the recipient’s] facility to be printed.”

The new policy was met with immediate displeasure from the prison population. Day, for one, was angry. “I knew that this policy would disproportionately affect people of color and

those on the lower socioeconomic scale,” he said. “Especially those who lack reliable, or any, internet access.” He also noted that many older people in his family held an inherent lack of trust in the internet. Day, who is 60, said his octogenarian father would only send him letters via snail-mail which would sometimes take 2-3 weeks to arrive, due to the new procedures, whereas people with internet access, and those who are willing to pay the additional costs, are able to send mail that arrives the same or next day. In some cases, mail can be delayed by another week or more while waiting for prison officials to approve its delivery. Many of the people Day corresponds with are older and on fixed-incomes. For them, sending mail electronically creates a financial burden. Day says he does not want to be a further source of hard-

“I am trying to follow the rules. Just please don’t cut me off from the courts.”

— Philip Dawkins

ship to family, but staying in touch with those on the outside helps him remain infraction-free. Instead, he is forced to wait to read his mail two to six weeks after it was sent. The mail obstacles also forced him to spend more money making phone calls to check on the condition of his ailing parents.

In October 2023, after a brief contract dispute between the DAC and TextBehind, the incarcerated population received another memo stating that as of October 20, TextBehind mail would be delivered electronically directly to the Viapath tablets using the Facility Messages app. Some institutions like Warren, where Day resided, were already using the app for this purpose as early as March of 2023. However, they were still providing a printed copy of the mail as well. After the announcement, others began using the app *in lieu* of providing a printed hard copy.

Not knowing the mail was only held on a local server, Day sent some of his mail back to his family, and threw away some, believing that if

he wanted to see it again he would have it on the tablet. Then he discovered it did not follow him to his new housing location.

Day’s family, unaware he was being transferred, sent him mail addressed to Warren, which did not arrive before he moved. His family contacted TextBehind to ask them to resend it to Nash. According to Day, TextBehind told his family they would only send the mail to Nash if Day’s family resent it to TextBehind, thereby incurring additional costs. They also would not agree to send back the pictures and letters they were holding unless Day’s family paid for the postage. Not wanting to burden his family further, Day decided to let it go. Included in that mail was a letter from Day’s father, who has since died. His final letters to Day are gone forever.

When the DAC first notified the population that they would begin using TextBehind to process the mail, a flier was posted in the prison’s common areas. The flier noted that the processing center would not process “legal mail, money orders, personal checks, gift cards, or cash.” The legal mail aspect has become problematic for some incarcerated individuals.

Philip Dawkins is one of less than 300 people who were sentenced to life without parole between the years 1994 and 1998, which makes him eligible for a judicial review of his case after serving 25 years. In late 2022, he began the process by requesting a review packet from NC Prison Legal Services. In the packet, he found a community support form. He sent the form to friends and family members not on his home plan — a plan that details where and with whom a person will reside upon release. The packet and form would be sent to the judge considering Dawkins’ case. Dawkins had sent the form to a family member to photocopy and disperse, but it would not be accepted by TextBehind as per their policy barring the processing of legal mail. Wishing to head off the problem, Dawkins filled out a request form and sent it to the mail room at Alexander informing them that legal forms would be sent in and asked if there would be a problem with receiving them. The mail room responded that there would be no problem. However, when the first form was sent to the prison, it was rejected. Dawkins brought the issue to a case manager who told him that because the mail did not come from a legal office, he could not get the forms. Dawkins was filing the review paper work *pro se*, meaning without legal representation. Neither he nor his



family had the estimated \$2,000 - 3,000 needed to hire an attorney to file the review for him. He told a friend about his situation and got the name of an attorney the friend had used to file a parole petition. The attorney graciously agreed to have Dawkins' friends and family send their forms to him. He made copies and forwarded them to the prison for no charge. Not being able to receive his legal papers without the attorney's help added two months to the process. Dawkins acknowledges that he was lucky to find an attorney who agreed to do this, much less to do it for free. But what about others?

"I'm not asking anyone to change the rules," he said. "I am asking that they take into consideration that people in here, particularly in my position, should be allowed to receive mail directly related to legal proceedings with the understanding that it may need to be copied in order for [them] to receive it."

He says he understands why the rules were put in place, but he suggests the administration needs to look at each individual's situation and review them case by case. "I am trying to follow

the rules," Dawkins said. "Just please don't cut me off from the courts."

He received an answer from the judge in March of 2024. He was denied parole, but he may reapply in two years.

The incarcerated population continues to adjust to the new policy, and individual prisons are left to decide how to handle the mail that TextBehind will not process. Some incarcerated individuals are continuing their education through correspondence courses. Enrolling in those classes requires paperwork to be filled out and sent back. Incarcerated students struggle to find staff to print out the forms. When it comes to what they will or will not print, policies of the institutions vary. After interviewing various men from other institutions, it was discovered that some institutions would only print mail for "special reasons," others would not print mail under any circumstances, or the individuals interviewed had never seen it done. Others said they had to jump through hoops or had to have a really good reason in order to have the mail printed.

Whether or not the steps the DAC has taken to curb the flow of contraband into the prisons has been effective or not is a matter of debate. What is certain is that the connection between the incarcerated and their families is vitally important to their successful reentry. The vast majority of the incarcerated population will be released one day. The steps they take to maintain those relationships and to better themselves through education will be the determining factors in how well they reintegrate to society, and whether or not they can stay there. The technology is available to help achieve both of those goals with the Viapath tablets. We need policies that recognize how many incarcerated people still have lives, loves, and legitimate businesses that continue on in their absence.

As for people like Day, not only are some of those connections already gone from his life, others are in jeopardy. His mother, sister, and a cousin are currently fighting cancer. "When they close their eyes for the last time," Day said, "I will lose them, and the correspondence that they sent forever." *NCPNT*

## FCC LOWERS PHONE RATES FOR MILLIONS OF INCARCERATED PEOPLE

By Phillip Smith

**O**N JULY 18, 2024, THE FEDERAL Communications Commission (FCC) voted to significantly lower phone and video call rates, and to eliminate ancillary fees in prisons and jails across the United States, as reported by *Prison Policy Initiative* (PPI). The new rate caps derive from the Martha Wright-Reed Fair and Just Communications Act of 2022, which was passed to make the cost of calling from prisons more affordable.

According to Charles Mautz, Director of Rehabilitation Services for the Department of Adult Correction, this change will not take effect in North Carolina until after the current contract cycle for the provider expires after December 31, 2025.

For prisons, the maximum phone rate will lower from 14¢ a minute to 6¢ a minute, greater than a 50% reduction. For county jails, calls will now cost between 6¢ and 12¢ a minute, depending on the size of the jail. The nations smallest jails will be allowed to charge more.

North Carolina does not currently utilize video visitation calls from Viapath, its tech provider, but that may happen in the future. It is important to note that under the FCC's new regulations, the maximum rate for video calls will fall from 25¢ a minute to 16¢, a 36% decrease. Reduced rates for video visiting will take effect on April 1, 2025.

In a break from the FCC's previous rules, prison phone companies will now be allowed to charge a flat rate for phone calls, meaning



consumers can pay a fixed price for a call versus paying per minute. The FCC once prohibited flat-rate calling because prison telecom companies abused the practice by charging high fees no matter the length of a call, according to PPI. Now, companies like Viapath and Securus can only charge a flat rate if it creates a cost savings for consumers, but the flat rate must be less than the per-minute rate cap. For example, if a 15-minute phone call at 6¢ a minute costs 90¢, the company must charge less than 90¢ for a flat-rate call of the same length.

The FCC's recent decision also limits how much tech companies can pay in kickbacks to

prison systems, as noted by PPI. Under the new rules, companies can only pay prisons up to 2¢ per minute, and that fee must be deducted from the capped per-minute rate of 6¢, it cannot be an extra charge.

There is no doubt that reduced phone rates will help families of the incarcerated, but some states charge nothing at all. Five states have already made phone calls for prisons and jails completely free: California, Colorado, Connecticut, Massachusetts, and Minnesota, as reported by *Prison Legal News*. Regardless, the new FCC rate caps are a move in the right direction. *NCPNT*



*GRADUATE, GRAHAM PATTERSON, TAKES THE WHEEL DURING CDL TRAINING.*

Photos courtesy of Department of Adult Correction

## CE LAUNCHES CDL TRAINING PROGRAM AT GREENE CI

By Joseph Lee

**T**HE INCARCERATED OFTEN COME ACROSS suggestions to consider opportunities in felon-friendly industries when planning reentry. Commercial driving has a reputation for being exactly such an opportunity. In March of this year, North Carolina Correction Enterprises Division (NCCE) launched the Department of Adult Correction's (DAC) new Commercial Driver's License (CDL) Training Program. The program targets incarcerated men who are seriously committed to pursuing commercial trucking as they reenter the workforce. It represents an innovative milestone for DAC and a valuable reentry opportunity for incarcerated men who qualify for the program.

### Where Rubber Meets Road

The CDL course held at Greene Correction-

al, a minimum-custody facility, is taught by TransTech Driving School, a well-established training vendor operating in nine locations. The hands-on program lasts four weeks. In fact, the curriculum fits into a 168-page manual and is covered in the first week of the program. Week two begins with the students taking the DMV Knowledge Test to earn a CDL Permit. In week two, students also learn how to perform vehicle and safety check procedures. Students practice on 18-wheelers with 45-foot trailers, initially just at the school's training range. However, by week three students begin daytime open-road training on designated road courses. Then in week four, students begin the night-driving curriculum. By the end, students need to pass the DMV Skills Test at a DMV Testing Center in the equipment they trained on. Successful stu-

dents walk out of the DMV holding a freshly minted CDL, which can either be sent home, or held at TransTech for pick up after release. That CDL is the trucking industry's most fundamental credential representing basic fitness for duty. The CDL Program graduate earns it before leaving the camp.

That experience contrasts sharply with the typical introductory courses offered by the DAC. Take, for example, the Intro to Electrical Wiring course I took several years ago. Passing it was easy. But did anyone get an electrician's license? To be clear, an electrician's license is earned by passing the test administered by the State Board of Examiners of Electrical Contractors. Did any of us take *that* test? No. Students do learn the fundamentals, but intro courses are simply exploratory. They let students discover if

they're even remotely interested in the field. To employers, passing an intro course isn't a particularly reliable indicator of anyone's readiness to earn a living in the field. Jobseekers need to take it to the next level. For instance, time working in one of NCCE's plants as a maintenance tech may demonstrate more meaningful field experience — particularly if that time is spent earning industry-respected credentials. Industry-respected credentials send a much stronger message of readiness. For those pursuing the trucking industry, NCCE's CDL Training Program is just the ticket.

Torrey Leach, Workforce Development Manager for NCCE, has been involved with developing and launching the CDL Program since early 2023. According to Leach, vendor selection benchmarks weren't typical for the industry. Some were simply institutional criteria, for instance, establishing custody requirements. However, NCCE also sets criteria specifically for the benefit of the student, for example, engaging the vendor for job assistance. "Correction Enterprises has always offered job assistance and transitional services for NCCE workers, but never to this level," Leach said. "While nobody can guarantee job offers, TransTech is contractually required to open the door with interviews." TransTech has won contracts with companies like Goodwill Industries — companies open to second-chance candidates. By engaging the vendor, NCCE helps students tap into industry relationships. That increases the possibility of meaningful employment during those crucial first few weeks of reentry, where

the rubber really meets the road.

## Who Gets to Mash the Gas

The program targets those who are committed to pursuing commercial truck driving in North Carolina. It's not for everybody. The selection process is exactly that — selective. Finding qualified candidates is what Leach identifies as their biggest challenge. "It has been hard to find candidates that meet everyone's criteria, because candidates have to pass a review by three stakeholders: NCCE, TransTech, and Greene Correctional." Candidates undergo Department of Transportation (DOT) medical screening, drug testing, and have their driving history reviewed as well. Also, home plans must be based in North Carolina. The candidate's existing driver's license must be at least a North Carolina Class-C license. It can be expired, but it must otherwise be in good standing (i.e.: no outstanding violations). For those who want to pursue the program but may have outstanding tickets, Leach encourages clearing those violations if possible. "But to be clear," Leach underscores, "the State can't help when it comes to fines." Successful candidates must be eligible for transfer to minimum custody and within one year of their release date. All these details have kept the classes small. "We've screened more than 100 candidates, and as of June 2024, we have on-boarded 16 students in three small cohorts," Leach says.

Still, the program is an asset for those who can get in. To judge its value, one might compare the alternatives. North Carolina requires

new CDL applicants to take Entry Level Driver Training (ELDT) from registered training vendors such as TransTech — even if the applicant has access to a tractor trailer to practice on. That requirement has been in place since February 7, 2022. The cost of these programs varies from several hundred dollars to over a thousand. Also, many trucking companies offer earn and learn opportunities for those who have no alternatives. However, *The New York Times* Global Economics Correspondent, Peter Goodman, warns that the industry is notorious for running training programs with inflated commitments, tying new drivers down to low-paying terms for longer than necessary — costing some drivers more in the long run. New drivers always face more challenges in the job market than experienced ones. On top of those challenges, the formerly incarcerated face additional hurdles, such as post-release terms which are not likely to accommodate every job profile. Each constraint can potentially limit chances of successful reentry. Perhaps the main benefit of the CDL Program isn't its dollar value; it's timing. The CDL Program puts at least one ace in jobseekers' hands before hitting interview tables — a Commercial Driver's License.

## If the Key Fits...

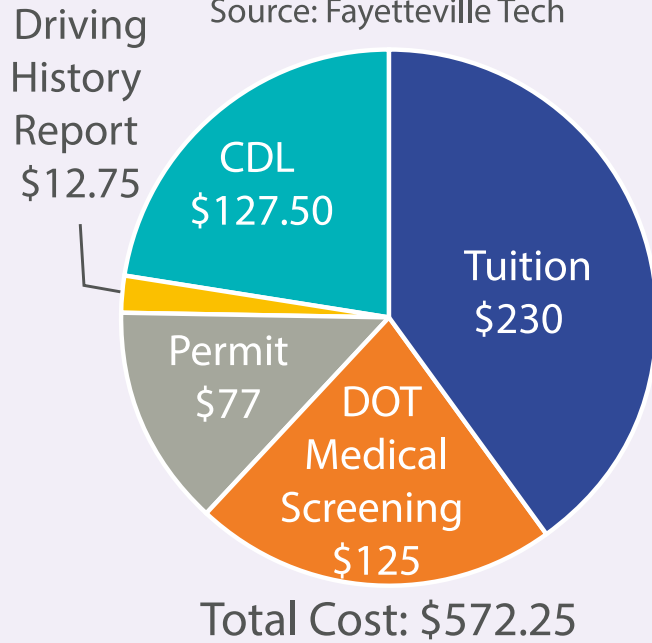
Brandon Morris is not waiting until his last year to act on his plan. He learned of the program during a Reentry Expo held at Nash Correctional, a medium custody camp. He worked with his family to clear his driving record of some longstanding violations he lost track of



*TransTech trainers congratulate the first graduates of the CDL training program. From left to right: Thomas Laird, TransTech trainer; Herman Castellu Jr., graduate; Graham Patterson, graduate; and Tyler Helton, TransTech Trainer.*

## Sample Cost of a Commercial Driver's License

Source: Fayetteville Tech



over the years. He's getting close to qualifying for minimum custody and wants to have these problems behind him before he applies to the program. Morris sees commercial driving as one of the higher-paying reentry opportunities. "It stands a chance of helping me contribute meaningfully to my family when I get out," he said.

The US Bureau of Labor Statistics reports the 2023 median wage for heavy and tractor-trailer truck drivers at \$54,320 per year. Actual wages vary significantly, though, with the lowest 10 percent earning less than \$37,440 and the highest 10 percent earning more than \$76,780. According to Morris, "For me, the biggest selling point was that the program works to set you up with job placement possibilities if you pass. You walk out the door with your CDL in hand... that's sweet."

Morris' perspective illustrates how uniquely a formerly incarcerated individual fits into the commercial trucking job description. The trucking industry has a serious problem attracting willing and able drivers from the general workforce in the US; there's a significant shortage. It is not uncommon for trucking companies to experience nearly 100% employee turnover for drivers every year. Yet, Peter Goodman reports that there are over 10 million CDL-drivers in the US — *over three times* the number of positions in the industry. So, the challenge doesn't lie in attracting people who are able to do the job; the challenge lies in finding people who are *willing* to do the job. The work is hard, the hours, long. Living out of a truck cab up to seven days a week, constantly having your progress tracked, and constantly operating under the watchful

eye of regulators at every weigh station, this level of scrutiny and control is a tough lifestyle to manage.

Morris, on the other hand, sees it differently. He's spent over 10 years fitting his life into a bunk and a locker. "Think of the constant noise you endure *here*, the control you're constantly under and all the drama — ten years of *this* environment — it makes being on the road sound downright peaceful." Morris speaks with the experience of having worked many kinds of jobs, from shrimp trawling to plumbing. He spent years working in vocations adjacent to trucking, like timber harvesting. So, he isn't daydreaming from an idealized view; he's comparing it to the life he's known — a life that's conditioned him to live light, to recognize and appreciate what freedoms he has. "I know you have to deal with customers and coworkers. I get that. But between point A and point B, I can feel like my own boss... that sounds pretty nice."

Mr. Leach said that the sixth cohort started on September 3. They expected to have graduated a total of 28 people by the end of September. Although it may be premature to judge the program based on real world track records, one graduate, Graham Patterson, completed his sentence and has since been released. He already has a job with a North Carolina packing company. Mr. Leach intends to continue keep up with tracking graduates.

### Goldilocks and the Brave New World

It is worth noting that this program is a bit

of an innovation for NCCE, DAC, and prisons in general. NCCE operates under NC General Statute Article 14, which mandates that they "develop and operate industrial...and service enterprises that employ offenders in an effort to provide them with meaningful work experiences and rehabilitative opportunities that will increase their employability." Historically, this meant NCCE operates plants — factory operations that produce widgets, whether that's a pair of eyeglasses or furniture. In the case of the CDL Program, there is no widget. The CDL Program is a 'Goldilocks' combination for DAC — an in-demand service that the public struggles to fill, and at the same time a skill set that can be trained while in an institutional setting.

However, building that program required a new framework of operation. Developing service skills backed by industry-respected credentials such as a DMV-issued license to operate required building partnerships.

"Correction Enterprises has always been kind of a solo venture," Torrey Leach explained. "But, collaborative innovation is part of DAC's new mission. We collaborated with DAC Educational Services to research vendors and develop program criteria. It's been very rewarding coming together to make this happen." And regarding the working partnership with TransTech, "they work really well with us, and have been really accommodating with everything we need."

Looking at this new framework, one can imagine what other service operations can be built on similar frameworks, addressing other services that the general workforce struggles to meet. Imagine forestry services, grounds keeping services, commercial cleaning services, even IT services. For NCCE, the CDL Program is potentially just the edge of a brave new world.

In fact, Leach adds, "There are only three or four other states in the nation, that I'm aware of that actually offer the service that we're offering."

There are people with plans based largely on leaps of faith. And there are people with plans crafted like seasoned Super-Bowl contenders. Morris' conversation highlights the qualities that differentiate someone who has good intentions from someone who's executing a good plan. The Correction Enterprises CDL Training Program fits well into the latter.

For interested candidates, a case manager is the main point of contact for applying. The NCCE points of contact, which at press time includes Torrey Leach and Shalonza Atkins, can provide them with the latest information, including details about health qualifications.

And one final note: North Carolina's CDL Handbook is now available on the tablet's Edovo app. It wouldn't hurt to brush up before that first week. NCCE plans new cohorts every five weeks. *NCPNT*

# NC FIELD MINISTERS MAKING THEIR MARK STATEWIDE

By Michael Sutton

**J**OEY DAVIDSON KNOWS THE FEELING OF being incarcerated and losing hope in a future beyond prison. The state of California charged Davidson with first-degree murder at age 14 and sentenced him to life without parole when he was 17. Davidson also knows how it feels to be granted a second chance. The governor of California granted Davidson, then 34, clemency under the state's new juvenile law. Davidson recognized his blessing and vowed to be of service to Christ. Currently, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary employs Davidson as the deployment coordinator for the men's North Carolina Field Minister Program (NCFMP).

The NCFMP at Nash Correctional Institution offers incarcerated men a chance to earn a Bachelor of Arts degree in Pastoral Ministry with a minor in Biblical Counseling awarded by The College at Southeastern. Sixty-eight incarcerated men have already graduated from the program which began in 2017. Sixty-one of these men are currently deployed at the following correctional institutions: Alexander, Albemarle, Caswell, Columbus,

Craven, Foothills, Granville, Harnett, Lumberton, Mountain View, Nash, Roanoke River, Scotland, and Warren. On February 1, 2024, The North Carolina Institution For Women started a new program with 19 students.

Dr. Rocky Wright, Director of Prison Programs for Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, cites the NCFMP's mission "to educate and equip incarcerated people of faith to serve and affect positive cultural change from the inside out." Dr. Wright adds, "We want to see teams of field ministers in every corrections facility in the state of North Carolina serving and impacting those populations and beyond. Not only do we want to see this kind of positive change in the lives of the field ministers,

but also in a thousand ways in the people, facilities, families, and even the broader community where they serve."

Davidson elaborates on how the field ministry teams [serve in] a variety of roles based on institutional allowance. These roles include community service, faith-based activities, peer counseling and mentoring, crisis intervention, and teaching. Field ministers lead orientation sessions for new arrivals, conduct Bible studies, counsel peers experiencing family and personal issues, and teach Thinking for a Change and Fatherhood Accountability classes. The field min-

istry team at Piedmont Correctional Institution was instrumental in convincing the facility to become the first to permit children to visit with their fathers during the Fatherhood Accountability program. Field ministers helped create art programs at Piedmont and Foothills Correctional Institutions, as well as various other programs at Alexander, Granville, and Caswell Correctional Institutions. They also provide academic assistance.

Dr. Wright attributes various circumstances, including lingering complications from the Covid pandemic, as being challenges to the NCFMP. He credits not being able to recruit and enroll the allowed 30 new students per semester as being the biggest challenge. However, Dr. Wright and his staff met this target for the newest class of incoming students, and he feels confident in the ability to reach and maintain the

full program capacity of 120 students. Dr. Wright advises those participating in the NCFMP to "fully embrace where you are and where God has you, seeking Him first in all things; keep taking that faithful step forward each day in your life and studies; and choose to believe the best about the program and partnership."

Other challenges to the program include overcoming shortage of staff, initiation of new programs, and field ministry assimilation at new institutions.

Davidson offers the following advice to those interested in participating: "This program is best suited for men and women who desire to live a life of selflessness and service for the impact of lives, culture, and institutions."

Current qualifications for the NCFMP are 10 or more years left on sentence, A and B charge infraction-free for a year, medium or minimum custody, and a high school diploma or its equivalent. More importantly, prospective field ministers must possess the willingness to serve others. Davidson can serve Christ in many other capacities. Yet he chooses to come back to prison after serving over 20 years himself to serve these men and mentor them as they seek to grow their relationships with Christ. **NCPNT**



Photo courtesy of the Field Minister Program at Nash Correctional

## NORTH CAROLINA FIELD MINISTERS

*Left to right (back row): Michael Sutton, Dustin Green, Dadi McNair, Stephon Goode. (Front row): Timothy Johnson, Joey Davidson, Kelvin Smith.*

ister team at Piedmont Correctional Institution was instrumental in convincing the facility to become the first to permit children to visit with their fathers during the Fatherhood Accountability program. Field ministers helped create art programs at Piedmont and Foothills Correctional Institutions, as well as various other programs at Alexander, Granville, and Caswell Correctional Institutions. They also provide academic assistance.

The field ministers deployed at Nash Correctional Institution serve as graduate assistants in addition to fulfilling other roles. These men develop and teach preparatory classes for each incoming class of field ministers. The graduate assistants also conduct tutoring sessions for 13



NORTH CAROLINA GOVERNOR ROY COOPER SIGNS EXECUTIVE ORDER 303, JANUARY 29, 2024.

## NC JOINT REENTRY 2030 COUNCIL RELEASES REENTRY PLAN

By Cris Gardner

ON AUG 7, 2024, THE JOINT REENTRY 2030 Council (JRC) approved the Reentry 2030 Strategic Plan (RSP), an outline of how the Department of Adult Correction (DAC) and other state agencies will coordinate a whole-of-government approach to improve access to reentry services needed by formally incarcerated people. Governor Roy Cooper directed the JRC to create the plan as part of Executive Order 303 (EO303), which he issued January 29, 2024. In issuing the order, Governor Cooper made North Carolina the third of five states to enroll in Reentry 2030, a nationwide initiative whose website states that their goal is to provide a “human-centered, coordinated, transparent, and equitable approach to improving success for those exiting prison.”

Approximately 18,000 people are released from North Carolina prisons every year. Forty-four percent of those return to prison within two years of release. The question of how to best help those returning to their communities is an issue that long needed to be addressed. With EO303, Governor Cooper set a series of eight specific goals to be attained by the year 2030:

- Reduce the number of incarcerated individuals who are homeless upon release by 50%.
- Provide reentry assistance to returning

citizens in every county in the state through Local Reentry Councils (LRC).

- Increase the number of High School and post-secondary credentials earned by incarcerated individuals by 75%.
- Increase the number of post-secondary degrees offered in facilities by 25%.
- Increase the number of Pell Grant partners by 30%.
- Increase the number of apprenticeships completed by incarcerated individuals by 50%.
- Ensure all eligible incarcerated individuals are offered the opportunity to apply for Medicaid before release.
- Increase the number of second chance employer partners by 30%.

The RSP took Governor Cooper’s eight goals and divided them into four overarching goals. The goals are divided into 26 detailed objectives and 133 strategies to be used by the various agencies assigned to the tasks.

According to the report, these four overarching goals represent “both the biggest barriers to successful reentry and where North Carolina has the most potential to improve services.”

Many state agencies had already been working on different aspects of improving reentry and EO303 directed each cabinet to build upon

those existing efforts.

### OVERARCHING GOAL 1

*Improve economic mobility of formerly incarcerated people by increasing the number of local reentry councils and providing access to educational, technical training, registered apprenticeship, work-based learning and employment opportunities pre- and post-release.*

In early May, 2024, Secretary of the DAC, Todd Ishee, announced a \$1.9 million investment toward supporting the creation of 11 local reentry councils (LRC). LRCs are valuable assets for returning citizens that work one on one with reentrants in collaboration with other LRCs and local agencies to provide necessary services such as housing, transportation, employment, training and more. Prior to this announcement there were 17 existing LRCs serving 19 counties. This infusion of support, along with a \$750,000 grant awarded by the Department of Commerce to develop three additional LRCs in Alamance, Warren, and Wayne counties, will see that 53 counties across the state will now have better support for reentrants by the year’s end.

## NOTABLE REENTRY ACCOMPLISHMENTS SINCE JANUARY 2024

- After an infusion of \$99 million from the General Assembly, The Department of Health and Human Services began working to support communities to improve mental & substance use services for the formerly incarcerated, including spending \$5.5 million to expand NC-FIT (North Carolina Formerly Incarcerated Transitions), a program offering psychiatric & physical health care, as well as other community support, such as housing, transportation, and phones for reentrants who have Serious Mental Illnesses.
- The Department of Transportation (DOT) signed a contract with the Center for Employment Opportunities that will work to place formerly incarcerated individuals on DOT work crews where they will gain work experience and other skills to secure meaningful employment.
- Kerwin Pittman, a Joint Reentry Council Member, founded the Recidivism Reduction Call Center, a hotline reentrants may call to find help with finding jobs, housing, and other services.
- To remove implicit bias in parole and post-release supervision decisions, The Post-Release Supervision and Parole Commission (PRS) has removed photos and racial/ethnic information of the candidates from immediate view in review files.
- The DAC and the Department of Motor Vehicles are continuing to partner to provide reentrants with state ID cards by pursuing a data sharing agreement with the Social Security Administration to verify social security numbers of reentrants prior to release, eliminating a crucial hurdle to those who may not otherwise be able to provide the necessary documentation to obtain one.
- PRS posted a reentry analyst position to support incarcerated people participating in a Mutual Agreement Parole Program (MAPP), those granted parole by the commission and those on post-release supervision.

Source: Reentry 2030 Strategic Plan

EO303 aspires to place an LRC in every county in the state by 2030.

The RSP states that individuals who enroll in educational programming while incarcerated are 28% less likely to be reincarcerated than their peers. In an effort to increase the number of education credentials earned by incarcerated individuals, the Division of Education Services issued the HiSet & Vocational Challenge. Using the historical data regarding the number of educational credentials earned at their respective facilities, Education Services assigned each facility a target goal for the next fiscal year. After the year ended, 28 of the 54 correctional institutions hit or exceeded their goals with Anson Correctional the overall winner by a mere 11 credentials over Nash Correctional. Tabor City came in third. Overall, the three facilities increased the number of credentials earned by an average of 339.33%.

The RSP aims to continue building on this success and to create further opportunities for incarcerated students to continue their education. With the expansion of Pell Grants to include those in prison, Brooke Wheeler, Superintendent of Education Services Rehabilitative and Correctional Services Division, announced in an email that she was working with several colleges to get their schools to accept Pell Grants to continue ongoing programs and to extend new programming.

Wheeler also announced a memorandum of understanding with East Carolina University that will begin offering college courses through Inside Out, a program that allows *outside* students at ECU to attend classes with *inside* students at Greene Correctional.

There are currently 140 incarcerated people who are pursuing apprenticeships. These apprenticeships provide credentials which can be shown to prospective employers to demonstrate a proficient knowledge in various fields of industry. The RSP aims to ensure that those who are enrolled in apprenticeships are not relocated to other institutions until they complete the program.

Goal 1 also has objectives that aim to increase the number of second-chance employers, expand the number of incarcerated people participating in work release, as well taking the steps necessary to ensure that citizens returning to their communities have a state issued ID or driver's license — which involves informing the individual on how to obtain a license — and verifying the social security numbers of those expected to leave prison two years prior to their release date.

### OVERARCHING GOAL 2

***Improve mental and physical health and substance use disorder services pre- and post-release and ensuring that all eligible incarcerated people obtain Medicaid upon release.***

Goal 2 focuses on improving the mental and physical well-being of those reentering society. The RSP states that 37-44% of incarcerated people have a mental illness, and around 60% have substance use disorders. In order to ensure that formerly incarcerated people have access to continuing medical care upon release, the DAC needs to get involved *prior* to release. EO303

aims to ensure that everyone leaving prison is afforded the opportunity to apply for coverage.

In December 2023, Governor Roy Cooper signed House Bill 78 which expanded Medicaid coverage to all North Carolinians between the ages of 19-64 earning up to 138% of the Federal Poverty Level. State officials estimate that 92% of those being released from prison in 2024 will now be eligible for Medicaid coverage. The DAC has hired outside contractors to work with the incarcerated to assist them in completing the necessary forms to enroll in Medicaid. Additionally, the DAC now has access to the Medicaid portal, NC Tracks, which will allow the DAC to track the applications as they make their way through the approval process.

As of July 26, 2024, the DAC had assisted more than 3,000 incarcerated people to submit applications with the number increasing daily.

Goal 2 puts special focus on helping vulnerable individuals leaving prison by providing clinical assessments of the incarcerated youth to gauge what level of care they may need when it comes to substance use disorders and mental health needs. The DAC also aims to provide special care and assistance to incarcerated adults with serious mental illnesses, substance use disorders, significant cognitive impairments, including those with intellectual or development disabilities or traumatic brain injuries.

Goal 2 also sets objectives to provide all self-identified incarcerated veterans with assistance to gaining health care specific to their needs, as well as to help everyone with a known release date to apply for food benefits through the Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP).

## OVERARCHING GOAL 3

### *Expand housing opportunities for formerly incarcerated individuals.*

Of the nearly 18,000 people released from prison in 2023, almost 3,000 were homeless. According to the RSP, the average cost of an apartment in North Carolina was \$1,200. Only 49% of reentrants were able to find employment within the first year after release, with a median annual income of only \$7,363. Those statistics only paint a partial picture of the difficulties of making a successful reentry. The RSP aims to address these roadblocks with four specific objectives.

Along with creating an on-line housing resource to identify housing opportunities for formerly incarcerated individuals, the plan also calls for hiring housing specialists to assist reentrants to find housing. The plan also calls for the DAC to collaborate with the NC Housing Finance Agency, and others, to educate potential landlords and to remove the idea that the formerly incarcerated make bad tenants.

The DAC currently has only 207 transitional beds available for reentrants. The plan calls for the development of 10 new transitional housing programs by 2030 and connecting incarcerated veterans with housing partners and peer specific reentry support programs.

Through these efforts the Governor aims to halve reentry into homelessness by 2030.

## OVERARCHING GOAL 4

### *Remove barriers to successful commu-*

### *nity reintegration, especially for those returning to historically underserved communities.*

While the plan recognizes that lack of housing, and employment are the greatest threats to reentry, it also recognizes that there are many other issues that can impede successful reentry including reliable transportation, outstanding child support, and other civil liabilities.

One way in which the RSP aims to assist is to set up a database to ensure that those who are nearing release and who have financial obligations, such as fines or restitution are aware of those obligations, and developing new resources to help reentrants to begin repaying them. The plan also calls for identifying those nearing release who may have outstanding warrants or tickets, and assisting them to clear obligations that may hinder their reentry efforts.

The plan also calls for increasing the number of successful completions of parole by 25%. This will mean a review of current policies to ensure sufficient support for those reentering their communities. The LRCs, DPS, and PRS will work in collaboration to reduce the number of technical violations that may lead to the revocation of parole or probation. The PRS will work to ensure that the decisions the various departments make are consistent with enhancing reintegration.

Goal 4 also calls for help with transportation through vouchers, coordination with LRCs, and also to ensure that every person, regardless of custody level, has access to all these services prior to leaving prison.

Governor Cooper's EO303 has already be-

gun making a huge impact on reentry efforts. However, the report issued by the Joint Reentry Council shows that there is much left to be done. Year one of the six-year goal projection is fast approaching its conclusion and there is uncertainty as to whether or not the next governor will support EO303, or if he will be able to obtain legislative funding for it.

The effort to improve reentry hits on key issues that both sides of the political aisle should be able to agree on. Both sides recognize the astronomical cost of incarceration. Governor Cooper's EO303 states that the daily cost of housing, feeding, clothing and providing medical care for a single individual averages \$134 per day. Current data shows that there are more than 31,500 people in North Carolina prisons today. That leaves the taxpayers with a \$4,221,000 bill *per day*.

The North Carolina Sentencing and Policy Advisory Commission released its latest report on projected prison populations in May. The report states that prison populations will continue to increase another 13% over the next ten years. With no immediate plans to build additional prisons, and with the DAC facing staffing shortages, it makes sense to help those who have completed their sentences to successfully reintegrate and to do so with more than the \$45 check, and paper identification the DAC had previously provided to reentrants.

However, if the state legislature funds the EO303, it will be life changing.

"North Carolina is not talking about rehabilitation and reentry, we are doing," said Secretary Ishee. "I think this is going to change generations to come for the better." *NCPNT*

## NASH CI ORGANIZES TOY DRIVE FUNDRAISER

By Kwame Teague

With the recent push for prison reform and more support for reentry, the emphasis has been on what the government and local communities can do for the incarcerated. Very few talk about what the incarcerated can do for their community. But that narrative is different at Nash Correctional (NCI).

The NCI's Men's Club and Humanist community recently collaborated to initiate NCI's First Annual Toy Drive for Homeless Children. The initiative began in September and will end October 31.

Mr. Herring, NCI's programs supervisor, was instrumental in organizing the effort. NCI partnered with The Angel Tree Foundation who will purchase and distribute the toys. Angel Tree has been providing holiday joy for the children of the incarcerated for years, so they are a known and trusted partner of the DAC.

To donate, the incarcerated community had

to go to the commissary window, where all prison purchases are made, and request that their account be debited for the donation. The minimum donation was \$1.00.

"Being incarcerated and having kids in the free world, I would want someone to give something to my children if they were ever homeless, God forbid. So, I gave what I could," said Antwan Sanders-El, an NCI resident.

This isn't the first time NCI provided the incarcerated community the opportunity to give back. In February 2024, the camp held their second annual Cosmetic Drive for the Homeless. Throughout the month, the general population donated toothpaste, deodorant, soap, and other items to the Humanist community who then donated them to The United Community Ministry (UCM) of Rocky Mount, a homeless shelter for women and children. Ms. Mitchell, facilitator of the Humanist services

stated, "I think it was a great idea because the guys are setting aside why they are here and giving back to the community."

More opportunities like cosmetic and toy drives are needed so the incarcerated can get a sense of community involvement and realize their ability to be a positive force in society.

"I don't celebrate Christmas, but to put a smile on a child's face is the right thing to do anytime of the year," said Curtis Thompson, another Nash resident.

Rehabilitation starts with the individual. Without the internal desire to change, no amount of external pressure will make a difference. But without the opportunity to exhibit that desire to change, an individual's positive potential can never be realized.

It's time for the prison and the prisoner to come together for the betterment of all. *NCPNT*



## RAPPING TOWARDS SALVATION AT GRANVILLE CORRECTIONAL

By Phillip Smith & Jesse Bracey

**G**RANVILLE CORRECTIONAL HOSTED ITS first graduation for a Christian-themed class that fuses hip hop and scripture called Read and Produce (R.A.P.) on March 7, 2024.

R.A.P. is the brainchild of Jesse Bracey, a veteran Field Minister who graduated from the North Carolina Field Minister Program (NCFMP) in 2021, its inaugural cohort. Bracey devised the idea for R.A.P. during a retreat for graduates of the NCFMP at Nash Correctional in August 2023.

In a 10-week class, R.A.P. aims to get young people interested in biblical figures through reading the Bible. Bracey teaches students critical thinking skills by helping synthesize what they read through writing a poem or hip hop verse about the scriptures. The program centers on five goals:

1. Learn to read the Bible and ask the right questions like who, what, when, where, why, and how?
2. Learn biblical terms, their meanings, and how the terms apply.
3. Learn how biblical characters were flawed

individuals who found purpose through hope and faith in God.

4. Learn how the Bible is relevant to Christians and can spark interest in God's word.

5. Learn how to write a rap song using biblical language that covers the studied material.

When Bracey envisioned R.A.P., he relied on his love of music and his desire to see a young generation of leaders cultivate a relationship with God.

"I prayed that God would give me a way to introduce the younger generation into knowledge of God's word while helping them exercise their skill of rhyming," Bracey said.

During the ceremony, the four graduates performed verses and poems they wrote about Moses, the topic of their 10-week class. One graduate rapped, "*Moses led the children of Israel through the Red Sea / and G-O-D gave His son to set us free.*" A Muslim graduate said his high respect for Bracey made him take the class.

Of all the administrative dignitaries in attendance, R.A.P. garnered the most approval from William Branch, a professor from the College at Southeastern who mentors Bracey at Granville.



Jesse Bracey

Aside from teaching college courses, Branch moonlights as a Christian hip hop artist who performs as The Ambassador. While addressing the graduates, Branch delivered a message entitled, "Which King Are You Serving?" He emphasized that everyone serves a king and that by humbling oneself, each person could have a part of God's Kingdom.

As the attendees applauded, they stood smiling, knowing that this first R.A.P. class won't be Granville's last. *NCPNT*

## CRAVEN CORRECTIONAL OFFERS MENTORSHIP TO FIRST TIMERS

By Kenneth Meeks Jr.

**C**RAVEN CORRECTIONAL INSTITUTION IS one of North Carolina's largest processing facilities. From February 2023 to February 2024, Craven processed over 7,000 people into the prison system. Most are probation or parole violations, or those reentering prison under new criminal charges. However, every group of new arrivals hosts a contingent of men entering the prison system for the first time.

Imagine when you entered a school for the first time. You felt anxiety about what to expect, confusion about the location of classrooms, restrooms, etc. But, in many cases, a friendly face appeared to guide you.

Entering prison is a magnification of these feelings. Unfortunately for many men and women, that friendly face never appears. Prisoners tend to look at new faces with suspicion or delayed judgement. Prison staff expects everyone to enter a prison facility fully informed. Prisoners are expected to know the rules, regulations, and procedures. Prisoners are expected to know the location of their appointments (medical screenings, mental health screenings, drug assessments, IQ testing, etc.). Prisoners are also expected to fit in with prison culture, knowing

how to navigate its hurdles and to avoid pitfalls.

In the courts, judges often say, "Ignorance of the law is no excuse." Craven's mission is to process people into prison, which aligns with The Department of Adult Correction's (DAC) mission to rehabilitate them. Craven recognized that rehabilitation should begin from the moment people enter prison.

Craven's administration approved for its field ministry team to lead a new arrivals' program after seeing the need and positive impact that a prison cultural education program could have on them. In July 2023, I was tasked with leading the program.

Within days of entering prison, first-time prisoners meet with me in a group session which lasts 1-2 hours. I begin each session by explaining that I too, I am a first timer; however, I'm 20 years into a life sentence that I received as a juvenile. But with 20 years of experience I understand everything they will face. I also have the ability to share and educate the group based upon what I've witnessed or personally experienced.

I provide practical advice on adapting to and the navigation of prison culture, but I implore



Kenneth Meeks Jr.

the men to seek positive change rather than becoming negatively institutionalized. I encourage the men to join educational and behavioral programs, because studies show that the more education the incarcerated receive, the lower their chances of returning to prison.

Since the program's inception, I've mentored over a thousand men. Hundreds of these men have been released, yet, to date, only one person has returned. I like to think that the program I head helped lower recidivism, if only a little bit. *NCPNT*

## THE EFFECTS OF MASS INCARCERATION ON THE CHILDREN LEFT BEHIND



Photo courtesy of the Department of Health and Human Services

By Kwame Teague

I'M NOT BLAMING MY FATHER, BUT HIS INCARCERATION kind of set the tone for my life," Sadiq Banks said. Banks, a habitual criminal, has done time in several states. Raised in

Newark, New Jersey during the 1980s, his upbringing was the rule rather than the exception. "Most of the guys I grew up with didn't have a relationship with their fathers because they were

either in prison or dead." His father was no different. James Banks committed a bank robbery where two people were killed and ended up with two life sentences when Sadiq was 12 years old.

“My father was a hustler, and he always took care of his family. So, when he went to prison, as the oldest of three I felt like I had to step up and provide for the family,” Banks said. He started stealing cars, then quickly graduated to selling drugs. His first arrest came a week shy of his fifteenth birthday. During his incarceration, his mother got hooked on drugs, and as a result, his two younger sisters were sent into the foster system. “I haven’t seen them since,” Banks said.

Mass incarceration has devastated communities. Whenever a parent is convicted, their children are sentenced as well, and, in many cases, their sentences are much harsher. Children of incarcerated parents are six times more likely to go to prison, according to James Conway, a Ph.D. in the Department of Psychological Science at Central Connecticut State University.

In North Carolina, over 20,000 children have an incarcerated parent, one-third of incarcerated North Carolinians have at least one child under 18. According to a Bureau of Justice special report, there are more children with an incarcerated parent than there are people in all American prisons. Several recent studies state the adverse effects incarceration has on children. Adverse Childhood Experiences (A.C.E), what several recent studies name the effects incarceration has on children, can vary from more aggressive behavior, delinquency, drug abuse, teen pregnancies and their own interactions with the justice system. Recognizing the problem, the North Carolina Department of Adult Correction (DAC) decided to take a proactive approach. “The DAC places a strong emphasis on offering diverse opportunities for high quality rehabilitative programming, which certainly includes opportunities for family connections and parenting programs,” says Charles Mautz, Director of Rehabilitation Services. “These programs... not only assist the incarcerated individual, but improve the life of the [children] themselves.”

The DAC offers several programs that aim to bolster the parent/child relationship including Fatheread, Motherread, Proverbs 22:6, Mothers and Their Children (MATCH), Father Accountability, Parent Day, and Family Reentry Support and Help (FRESH). The latter two are overseen by Our Children’s Place of Coastal Horizons, a non-profit program based in Durham and headed by Ms. Melissa Radcliff. Our Children’s Place focuses primarily on community support for children of the incarcerated and returning parents. Ms. Radcliff worked with crime victims for over a decade before taking over Our Children’s Place, where she learned, so much about various systems, what’s broken and what’s working.

In 2012, she took that experience and parlayed it into the program called Parent Day. “I always joke that it’s actually more like kids’ day because kids get to make all the decisions.” The

day consists of games like cornhole, ring toss, board games like Connect Four, and checkers. There are also arts and crafts such as decorating baseball caps to take home as something they created with their dad. Lastly, there is a book display, which is a great opportunity for parents to reinforce a love of learning and reading, and a way to learn more about their child. “We usually encourage the parents to write notes inside the books so that when the kids open them up when they get home, they can read it and say, my dad signed this,” Ms. Radcliff remarked. This spring, Parent Day was held at three correctional institutions: Sampson, Orange and Southern, which are all male minimum-custody facilities. While these programs are excellent opportunities to connect parents with their children, the fact remains that participation is predicated on the incarcerated individual being “infraction free,” which begs the question, is this about the parental connection or another institutional tool used to modify behavior?

The DAC Policy and Procedure Manual Chapter D. 0211 states: “[I]f a person assaults staff and it results in a physical injury, their personal visitation privileges will be suspended for a minimum of 12 months, with the possibility of a 24-month suspension. Then, after the suspension, only non-contact visits will be allowed for the remainder of a person’s incarceration.” Regarding telephone privileges, Section D. 0804 says, “Offender participation in the telephone program may be suspended through the disciplinary process as a form of punishment.” If a write up can keep me from parental programs as well as visits and even phone calls, then my child becomes just another carrot on a long, punitive stick.

The dilemma of incarcerated individuals versus parents will go a long way in defining the true purpose of the carceral state. Is incarceration predicated on rehabilitation or punishment? If it’s the former, then program eligibility should reflect that end, but if it leans toward the latter, then prison reform is nothing but hyperbole.

The North Carolina General Assembly recently passed The Parent’s Bill of Rights (SB 47), which gave parents more say over what is happening to their children in school and what they are being taught. SB 47 aligns with the view of the Supreme Court. In *Quilloin v. Walcott* (1978), the Court ruled: “We have recognized on numerous occasions that the relationships between the parent and child is constitutionally protected.”

What does this constitutional right look like in prison? What does this constitutional right look like for the child? Some may opine that people forfeit their parental rights when they commit crimes, and children are simply “collateral damage.” However, the impact reverber-

ates beyond the immediate family, in the form of more tax money spent on ballooning welfare programs, food stamps, and more subsidized government housing.

Several states have read the tea leaves and have decided to take action. The New Jersey General Assembly passed a law called The Women and Families Strengthening Act, which imposes the right for incarcerated parents to be housed near their children. In 2018, Massachusetts made in-person visits mandatory in all county jails. Illinois did the same with their Protect Prison Visits Bill which prohibited Illinois prisons from eliminating in-person visits. Even The American Corrections Association (ACA) unanimously ratified the need for in-person visits.

These measures are essential to maintaining familial bonds, but they must be fortified with a rehabilitation infrastructure that includes all stakeholders to formulate a board to examine the best practices to ensure the children of incarcerated parents are able to thrive. This board would include representatives from the DAC, community based organizations, governmental agencies like Child Protective Services, as well as the incarcerated parents themselves. These measures would give parents the opportunity to be involved with decisions that directly affect their children, as well as introduce suggestions that will help create programs within prisons for the strengthening of the parent/child relationship. With the onus of responsibility squarely on their shoulders, incarcerated parents would be forced to step up, which would ultimately place rehabilitation in their hands.

Our involvement could take the form of a Prison Parents’ Council at every facility that would operate like the Men’s Club. The Council could then use fundraisers to host events like toy drives, programs where parents get special visits with their children, and even sponsor bus rentals to bring family members to the prison for such visits. Because membership on the Council entails leadership qualities and exemplary conduct, the Council could be based on good behavior, which would give incarcerated parents the incentive to stay infraction free without punishing the children with denial of visitation. Reason being, infractions that punish children by depriving them of visitation, calls, and events has nothing to do with infractions that prevent the incarcerated from leadership positions. There’s no contradiction.

Knowing that one-third of the prison population are parents, North Carolina’s commitment to prison reform, re-entry, and re-acclimation rests solely on how the DAC structures its support for family bonding. Better parents make for better people, better people make better communities, and in the end, isn’t that what reform is all about? *NCPNT*



## A DAY WITH DAD: PROGRAM GIVES KIDS OF INCARCERATED FATHERS MEMORABLE DAY

By Timothy Johnson

**T**HE TWO GROUPS STARED AT EACH OTHER across the prison gym. The challengers sized up their rivals. They stepped to the starting line and leaned forward, their back legs thumping and hands clinching. When the signal blared, they charged, crashing into each other mid-court. The two sides embraced — hugging, kissing, and crying — in joyful reunion.

The neon green uniformed groups were not opposing teams. One group consisted of incarcerated fathers; their children formed the other group. No longer separated by security fences, prison walls, or a gym floor, the fathers and children held onto each other like a moment of non-contact would make their loved one disappear.

This scene started the main events of the One Day with God Camp at Nash Correctional Institution in Nashville, North Carolina. On Saturday, March 23, 2024, this program gave 15 incarcerated fathers and their children a day to create special memories and foster deep connection.

Scottie Barnes, founder of program-sponsor Forgiven Ministries, created the One Day with God camps to care for the needs of children with incarcerated parents. She calls these children the “silent victims” of mass incarceration. Ms. Scottie, as she is often called, knows their pain, because her father spent most of her life in prison. He missed key events, like her wedding day.

She wants to restore relationships between these fathers and their children to first break the cycle of incarceration, then facilitate life success for children and reentry success for fathers. Children of incarcerated fathers are more likely to display behavior disorders, more likely to drop out of high school, and more likely to go to prison. Strong relationships decrease these odds and increase their chances for success. These relationships also compel the fathers to continue on the rehabilitation path.

**F**OR THE DADS THE CAMP BEGAN ON FRIDAY with a fatherhood workshop and other preparations. At 8 a.m., camp coordinator Bob Calhoun welcomed the dads. Camp dads sat with volunteer dads at tables covered with forest-green plastic tablecloths. The inside and outside dads got to know each other while eating a breakfast of McDonald’s biscuits, Nature Valley granola bars, and coffee. The food and coffee lubricated the conversation for the incarcerated dads, who normally hesitate to trust outsiders.

After breakfast, Calhoun, a retired high school teacher, explained why he and the other volunteers were there. He said, “We’re here to give you hope,” calling hope “the best thing you can have.”

Next, each dad introduced himself by name, and stated the number of children and their ages, and their kids’ interests or accomplish-

ments. Every dad shared their kids’ interests or accomplishments with a raw, vulnerable tone rarely heard in prison. Interests ranged from sports and dance to marine biology, from video games to cosmetology. One dad boasted that his 10-year-old son always qualifies for his school’s good behavior party and his 9-year-old son just aced the American Colonies test. The dad of a 14-year-old praised his daughter for winning track events. Another dad commented, “My daughter loves technology and gymnastics. She is 6 going on 36.”

The dads then spent several hours engaged in the fatherhood workshop, titled, *Godly Dads: Men of Integrity, Love & Leadership*. The workshop and companion workbook included talks by volunteers, videos, reflection writing, and discussions between the incarcerated and volunteer dads.

One volunteer read from the workbook, saying, “Our children will remember our example more than our words.” He repeated the message, pausing to look each dad in the eye, emphasizing the importance of integrity.

To illustrate the point, he played the video of “Watching You” by Rodney Atkins. The country song tells the story of a little boy who is learning how to live by watching his father. The son learns how to cuss and how to pray. The father learns to live always mindful his son is watching. The camp fathers seemed to gaze beyond the video on the screen, possibly reflecting

# THIS IS MY HOPE FOR EVERY MAN HERE. I WANT YOU TO GET OUT OF HERE AND HAVE PICTURES, EXPERIENCES, AND MEMORIES WITH YOUR FAMILY.

— JOEY DAVIDSON

on the good and bad lessons they had displayed and envisioning how they want to live so their children will be successful when emulating them.

After the video, a volunteer asked the dads to share about good moments they had talking with their dads as a child. One shared about his love for his GI Joes. The GI Joes weren't just his favorite toys; they were his heroes. His dad was often absent because of his job. The GI Joe fan said he went to an air show and was mesmerized by the soldiers. Then, he heard his dad's name announced. He looked up to see his dad jump from a helicopter, fully equipped in combat gear. His dad was a real-life GI Joe. His dad was his true hero. Now, he wants to be a hero to his son.

Another camper reflected on learning to work on cars and motorcycles from his dad. He said his dad would patiently guide him through each step, telling him which tool to use and what to do with it. He uses the same deliberation to teach his teenage sons how to practice for wrestling and read the Bible.

The workshop took a break for lunch. Volunteers served fried chicken, green beans, potatoes,

hush puppies, and banana pudding, all catered by local country-cooking legend Doug Sauls. The fathers attacked the fried chicken and banana pudding with a ferocity only the deprived can exhibit.

**A**FTER LUNCH, A SPEAKER captured the full attention of all participants. In fact, he received even more attention than the food. The speaker, Joey Davidson, carried weight with listeners, because he spoke as one of them. Davidson served 20 years in prison in California. He has been out of prison for eight years.

He demonstrated his unity with a simple but resonating gesture. He shared a picture of his wife and daughter, noting staff never did this during his time in prison. The message was clear: I am one of you, so I know how you feel and I care about you.

He told his colleagues about his journey from a juvenile sentenced to life to a free man with a family. The story provided the perfect antidote to the normal post-lunch drowsiness. Pointing to the picture of his family, he declared, "This is my hope for every man here. I want you to get out of here and



WESLEY KNIGHT PREPARES A GIFT FOR A ONE DAY WITH GOD EVENT IN 2023

have pictures, experiences, and memories with your family."

The dads spent the rest of the day preparing gifts for their kids.

Each dad decorated a picture frame, selecting from a vast assortment of stick-on letters and ornaments in an array of colors. A



**BOB CALHOUN**  
**COORDINATOR FORGIVEN MINISTRIES**

girl's dad decorated his daughter's frame in pinks and purples, carefully sticking on the letters of her name, flowers, stars, a moon, and a unicorn. The dad of two boys did one in red and the other in blue, for their favorite colors. Each dad wrote a personal message of love on the back of the frame.

Then, each dad grabbed a green nylon bag with a black tie-string and stuffed it full of gifts selected based on age and gender. Basketballs, Matchbox cars, dolls, coloring books with crayons, sidewalk chalk, paint sets. Each bag also received a quilt made by incarcerated people.

With the preparations complete, the dads left for the day. Probably not many slept that night.

**T**HE DADS RETURNED TO THE gym Saturday morning at 7:30. Served a breakfast of Otis Spunkmeyer muffins, granola bars, and Welch's juice, plus coffee, some barely nibbled, their appetite smothered by thoughts of a day with their kids.

After breakfast, Scottie Barnes told the story of how the program started. More than 20 years ago, she felt called to serve God by helping prisoners and their children. She told God she had one

condition: No planes. God must have laughed: A month later she flew to the Philippines.

While there she was taken to Trash City, where a boy named Ezekiel asked her to pray that he would get to hear his father, who he had not seen in years, tell him, "I love you." She prayed with the boy but wondered how such a prayer could be answered.

The next day she visited a Philippine prison. Walking through one section, a prisoner hollered and hollered, begging her to come to his cell to talk. When she walked to his cell, he asked her to go to Trash City to find his son and tell the son his father loves him. She asked the son's name. His name: Ezekiel.

She not only found Ezekiel to deliver the message, she took the boy to visit his father. One Day with God was born. The first camp was held in North Carolina and has spread to seven other states, with thousands of volunteers across the nation donating time and money.

When Ms. Scottie finished the story, the fathers pulled on their uniforms for the day: neon green T-shirts with "One Day with God" logos on the front and back. For some it was their first time wearing clothes other than prison issued in more than a decade. A half hour

later their kids arrived wearing the same bright green shirts.

One at a time, each father's name was called. At that signal, the father and his kid, or kids, sprinted to mid-court, where they collided with hugs and kisses, laughter and tears.

Once united at mid-court, the green-shirt dads and kids were encircled by dozens of blue-shirt volunteers. Most of the volunteers came from local churches or other prison ministry organizations. Three of the volunteers traveled from Michigan, where they volunteer in prisons.

One of the dads prayed for the participants and the day. Then, to create a fun atmosphere, five volunteers led several team games. Four teams of dads and kids competed, first in a relay-race to pick up balls from center court, then in a race to put the balls back in the basket. Dads cheered for their kids, and kids cheered for their dads; from the sidelines volunteers cheered for all of them.

Next, each team formed a line. A volunteer instructed them to pass a balloon from the front to the back of the line. The last person had to sit on the balloon to pop it. First, the balloon-passing race required passing it under each person's legs.

An 8-year-old girl at the back of one line had a hard time popping the balloon. She tried sitting on it, but she bounced to the side. She tried again; the red balloon escaped behind her. She scowled at the balloon, then clutched it and jumped on it with her knees. A loud pop led to a high-pitched scream. Arms raised, she ran into her dad's arms for a victory hug. Her team finished last in that race, but she won, because she got to celebrate with her dad.

Other balloon races required passing over heads, then over-under, with the person at the back switching each time. Cheers followed each pop. High-fives and hugs accompanied the cheers.

After the games, the dads and kids sat in a big group on the court to watch a professional juggler. The juggler tossed and caught balls and bowling pins while telling stories

and jokes. He said, "I usually juggle machetes, but didn't think that was a good idea given the location."

He recruited help from his audience. One dad helped the juggler climb a six-foot unicycle. A kid tossed balls to him. The juggler appeared to lose control of the unicycle, but caught himself and the balls just before crashing into the audience. The juggler's smirk said, "I had control the whole time."

When the juggler finished, the blue-shirt crew served lunch. Actually, before serving lunch, two huge sheet cakes, one vanilla and the other chocolate, were wheeled out. A volunteer announced, "Today we celebrate everyone's birthday from the past year," then he led the crowd in singing "Happy Birthday to You."

The "Love Train" song played and blue-shirt volunteers persuaded the green-shirt campers to join their conga-line style love train to take them to their tables for lunch. Lunch was Little Caesar's pizza, with birthday cake for dessert.

During lunch, a professional photographer set up a camera, lighting, and background to take pictures of each family. The kids received a picture for their personalized frames, decorated for them by their dads the preceding day. The dads received a keepsake to motivate them daily as they strive to be the fathers their kids need.

Craft time followed lunch and photo time. Together the dads and kids constructed a small lamp decorated with beads, another memory keepsake for the kids to take home. One kid boasted he was building his fifth lamp and each was special to him.

Once the lamps were completed, Bob Calhoun led dancing for the dads, kids, and volunteers. Prison staff, wearing yellow One Day With God T-shirts, joined the dance, too. The first selection was "Cupid Shuffle," followed by "My Father's House."

Fueled by cake icing sugar, kids danced, twirled, and jumped. Fueled by love, their dads defied the prison cultural norm of acting tough and cool by dancing twirling, and jumping with their kids.



**JACK AND SCOTTIE BARNES**  
FOUNDERS OF FORGIVEN MINISTRIES

Sugar and love made for a splendid and sweet dance floor mix.

After the dancing burned off some of the sugar, a performer from Dribble Ministry entertained the crowd. She dribbled multiple basketballs, spun several at a time. She even challenged two dads and two kids to mimic her. One 9-year-old-boy showed his talent by keeping up for a while. One of the dads couldn't keep up when tasked with dribbling multiple basketballs, so he changed the game by juggling three basketballs. The crowd responded with laughs and cheers.

Next, the Dribble Ministry team organized a Dads vs. Kids basketball game, which was intended to be a 5-on-5 contest. But after the

teams were selected, a 6-year-old girl decided to join the Kids team. Other than the plus-one girl, the kids were teenagers. They took an early lead on their dads, but the dads had a big size advantage, an advantage that helped them win. All of the spectators cheered for the kids. The dads were fine with that.

The Dribble Ministry performer finished by telling the dads, "Dads, you are the guardians of your kids' dreams. It's your job to protect their dreams. Submit yourselves so you can fulfill your purpose and be there for your kids."

On that purpose-filled note, the dads and kids got by themselves to work through a book: *Sowing Seeds of Connection: Cultivating the*

*Parent to Child Relationship Workbook*. Justin Danforth created the book while incarcerated to build a relationship with his daughter. The workbook contains numerous favorites lists and questions to get kids to reveal their interests and dreams, including Three Wishes, What I Want to Be When I Grow Up, Greatest Gifts, Where I Would Go If I Could Travel Anywhere, If I Ruled the World, and Favorite Activities. The workbook and discussion time helped the dads discover their kids and develop intimacy.

Next came a Daddy-Daughter dance for the girl-dads and their daughters. Each daddy asked his daughter to dance, giving her a plastic rose. Two dads picked their small daughters up and held them close for the dance.

Then came a Father-Son walk. The fathers and sons walked around the court with their arms around each other's shoulders. Some talked while walking, others just enjoyed being close.

After those two sentimental activities, dads gave their kids the big bag of gifts they had packed for them. Several boys grabbed their new basketball and ran to the court, eager to play with their gift. One girl pleaded with her dad to open the doll package so she could play with it. Several kids were more interested in their dads than the gifts, old enough to un-

derstand they could take the gifts with them, but they would have to leave their dads.

Before walking outside for the sendoff, the crowd gathered. Calhoun invited them to share what the day meant to them. The first to grab the microphone was a girl who said, "Today means I get to be with my dad."

A dad was next, saying, "I didn't know if I would ever get to hold my kids again." His tears kept him from saying more, so he passed the mic.

Another dad thanked everyone, then spoke to his two sons and daughter: "I love y'all, and I'm proud of y'all."

A boy boasted, "My Dad is the best Dad, and I love him very much."

Cultivating these feelings of love and appreciation of kids for their dads is exactly what Scottie Barnes intended when she created Forgiven Ministries and the One Day with God camps. She knows the kids need to feel loved. Feeling loved increases their chance to break the cycle of incarceration and gives them a foundation to build on for making good life decisions.

Incarcerated fathers talk often about their kids. One Day with God gave them a chance to really be Dads for a Day. *NCPNT*





***Noun: Bodhisattva**, bo-dee sat-wa, or bo-dee-sat-va  
1. Buddhist worthy of nirvana who postpones it to help others.*

## THE SPIRIT OF GIVING: TWO BODHISATTVAS OF THE DAC

By Cris Gardner

**I**N RALEIGH, NORTH CAROLINA, André Smith and Steven Killion get in a car and drive due east on I-40 towards Nash Correctional Institution. Smith is the father of a son lost to senseless violence; Killion, a divorcee and father whose unwise decisions nearly put him on a collision course with the justice system.

Both men are scholars and teachers. They share their stories of overcoming their struggles with anger, depression and addiction with the

practice of meditation with the incarcerated.

When they arrive at Nash, an escort leads them to Unit Three, a plain red-bricked building on the yard. Inside, a room full of men have transformed the line-up room into a meditation hall. There are old red and blue gymnastic mats covering the bare floors. Upon the mats lie a dozen round pastel-colored cushions that have been haphazardly thrown. Several armless, hard plastic chairs line the walls for

those unable or unwilling to sit on the floor.

As Smith and Killion enter, students, new and returning, stand and gather around the teachers giving and receiving handshakes and heartfelt hugs.

If you are meeting Smith for the first time, he will ask your name with his bourbon-smooth baritone and look deeply into your eyes while you answer. Because of his hearing loss, you may find that you need to repeat yourself a time

or two. Yet, he will continue holding your hand until he learns your name. And the intimacy of it will not feel awkward. Instead, it will feel like a handshake from an old friend, because that's exactly what it is.

Despite the empty chair set for him at the front of the class, Smith prefers to sit on a meditation cushion on the floor. At 72 years of age and suffering from a painful disability that requires the use of a cane, he needs assistance lowering



himself. Once seated, Smith folds his legs and pulls a set of meditation chimes, called *tingshas*, from his pocket and holds them by the thin leather strap that tethers them together. He sets them on the mat and waits for the students to find their places. He pulls his sleeves up to his elbows revealing two recently inked tattoos on his bare forearms: The Buddha sitting on a lotus flower on his right, the mantra *om mani padme hum* written in Sanskrit on his left. The room settles. Smith picks up the tingshas. He strikes them against each other three times. Their clear, high tones resonate throughout the room. The students close their eyes and are transported from the confines of the prison, into the vastness of their minds.



Andrè Smith was born and raised in Raleigh. He dropped out of school in 1969 and joined the army to escape his father, an abusive alcoholic. After Basic Training and Advanced Individual Training, he deployed to Vietnam.

“The military was very difficult for me,” Smith said. “Because of my motivation for joining, I was filled with so much anger.” Instead of escaping his father’s anger, Smith found himself surrounded by mirror images of the abusive man.

In Vietnam, he saw Buddhist monks wearing brown robes and carrying alms bowls through the war-torn villages. Despite widespread devastation, Smith witnessed the kindness and humbleness of Vietnamese people. Although he was not ready to pursue his interest at the time, the Buddhist monks made a lasting impression on his mind and heart. A seed was planted.

Eventually, the military gave Smith a general discharge and sent him home from the war lost and addicted to heroin. The discharge and loss of his stripes further exacerbated his turbulent relationship with his father.

Smith eventually went back to school. He graduated from Wake Technical Community College and NC State where he majored

in psychology. While attending classes at NC State, Smith rediscovered Buddhism and meditation. Although he grew up in a Christian household, he had many questions that the church could not answer to his satisfaction. He began searching other faiths and joined the Unification Church. He did missionary work for 25 years. Although the work helped him to understand many things, there was still much that puzzled him. Plus, he still held on to a lot of anger.

“I was a Christian, but I was an angry Christian,” Smith said. “No one in my church said anything was wrong with that, or that I could change.”

He left the organization still seeking answers. It was not until 2006 that he joined the Kadampa Center in Raleigh and began to explore Tibetan Buddhism and meditation. It was there that he found the answers he was looking for.

“The catalyst for change in my life was that I became sick and tired of suffering and causing the people that I loved to suffer. My wife, my kids, and even my pets didn’t know how to be around me.”

Smith started studying meditation and working on his anger. He was still struggling with addiction, including a three-pack-a-day smoking habit. Through his diligent practice, he began letting go of his self-destructive behaviors. He learned to communicate better with his family. Instead of yelling at them to be heard, he spoke calmly. Step by step he found happiness, and those around him saw the difference.

After taking his refuge vows — a formal ceremony for becoming a Buddhist — Herb Cunningham, the director of the Kadampa Center Prison Project (KCPP), encouraged Smith to begin working in prisons. Cunningham had already been teaching at Nash CI and Caledonia CI, which is now known as Roanoke River. He told Smith that he would know if this was the right path for him after his first visit. Smith’s teacher, Robina Courtin, the founder and creator of the Liberation Prison Project in Australia, also encouraged Smith

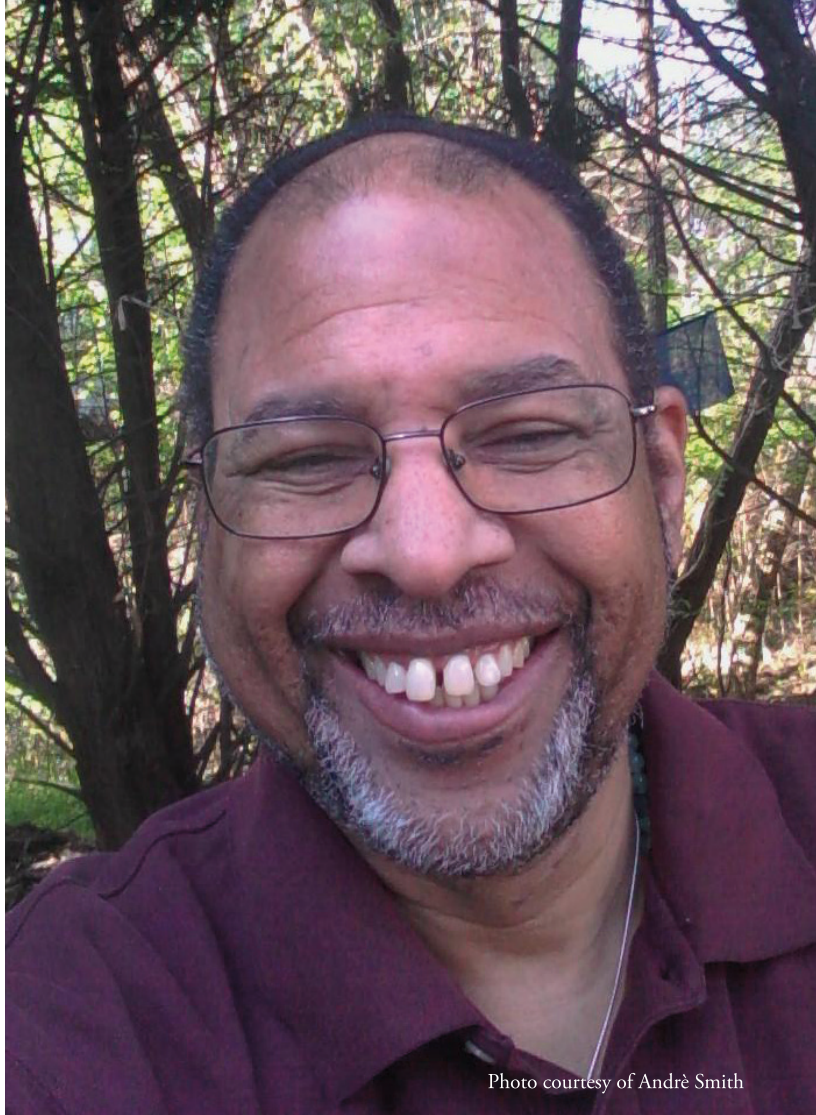


Photo courtesy of Andrè Smith

ANDRÈ SMITH  
MEDITATION TEACHER

“  
*I became sick and tired of suffering and causing the people that I loved to suffer. My wife, my kids, and even my pets didn’t know how to be around me.*

— ANDRÈ SMITH

to work with the incarcerated. When he first began, Smith was nervous and reserved, but he soon found his voice.

Then, in 2007, Smith’s 20 year-old son, Daniel, was murdered at a nightclub after Daniel bumped into another man causing him to spill his drink. He speaks with painful candor about the loss of his son with the men in his classes. “There are not adequate words to

describe the loss of a child,” says Smith. “I did not lose my son... He was taken from me.” Yet, he does not have anger towards the man who killed Daniel. Smith believes that his practice, his volunteer work with prisoners, as well as his efforts in past lives allowed him to forgive Daniel’s murderer. Only one month later, Smith found himself back in prison teaching the incarcerated, some of whom had



Photo courtesy of The Nash News

**STEVEN KILLION**  
**MEDITATION TEACHER**

admitted to Smith that they themselves had committed murder. For Smith, it helped him heal. For his students, it taught them the true meaning of forgiveness and compassion.



While Smith rolls into a room like thunder, Steven Killion glides in like a breeze. He is a keen observer with pensive eyes and a smile that could be easily mistaken as sardonic. He greets everyone in the class with genuine warmth. He is Smith's compass. But, trying to keep Smith on task is like trying to herd butterflies — difficult, and in the end, often unsuccessful.

Killion jokes that he was born at a very early age in Houston, Texas. His father's work required the family to move all over the country. Finally ending up in North Carolina, Killion graduated from Myers Park High School in Charlotte. He then started college at USC at Lancaster in South Carolina. He later transferred to UNC at Chapel Hill

where he earned a PhD in Medieval British Languages and Literature. "Which means I know mostly about heroes, lovers, and the church," Killion said. He ended up teaching Writing and Literature at UNC and then at a small liberal arts college in New York.

Killion comes from a background of mixed religious ideologies. Although he was born into a Southern Baptist family, the denomination didn't appeal to him. He now pursues a spiritual life without labeling the endeavor. If pinned down, he labels himself 'Buddh-ish.'

Killion didn't explore meditation until later in life. His first awareness of the practice came in the 70s when transcendental meditation was becoming a fad. Killion, and his now ex-wife, began meditating while living in New York. The practice continued after he moved to back to North Carolina. Killion first explored Buddhism as a historical and cultural interest in the 90s and later focused on medita-

tion. In 2013, in need of a spiritual awakening and inspiration, Killion came to the Kadampa Center. He became involved with the KCPP when his ex-wife encouraged him to start volunteering. The project's goal was to bring Buddhism and meditation into the North Carolina prison system. The KCPP was a natural fit because he was concerned how some of his "lifestyle choices had attracted the attention of the legal system." Killion met Smith while interviewing KCPP volunteers for information to be posted on the KCPP website. He began teaching with Smith a short time later.

Smith and Killion use their respective life lessons to teach the practice of meditation. Through meditation, they ask their students to take a break from the thoughts that plague them and to rest their minds in the present moment. They teach the men that they can to let go of the guilt and the shame of their crimes. "You are not what you have done," Smith teaches. "You may have done things that have hurt others. But you are not your crimes." For his students, this message is a revelation.

"What took me by surprise was it seemed he read the invisible badges of pain and anger on my sleeves," said Willie Brown, a student in the meditation class. "He began by telling us how his anger almost consumed his life. This guy was reading me without even knowing my story."

Each semester of the meditation class focuses on a different book. Each week a different student is encouraged to lead the class, which involves guiding the meditation — if the student chooses — and reading one or two chapters from the book followed by a group discussion of the topic at hand. Smith and Killion listen intently as the men describe their struggles of trying to lead a spiritual life within the confines of prison. Christians, Muslims, Buddhists, Wiccans, Humanists, and the non-affiliated are among those present. Religion, Smith and Killion insist, is irrelevant to their teachings. The point is to be aware, be present, and to let go of emotional baggage. True

happiness does not come from without, but from within. They teach that happiness is a matter of choice. As the Buddha taught: Nothing will make you happy until you choose to become happy. They also warn that the journey is not a 'one and done' endeavor. Rather, it is a lifestyle change that requires patience with oneself as much as with the difficult personalities of those the students will encounter in their daily lives. "André and Steven provide practical, compassion-driven advice," said Albert Ramos, another student and Buddhist practitioner. "Which when sincerely utilized, naturally results in a rehabilitated mind frame."

Much like housebreaking a puppy, the training must involve patience and loving kindness. Learning to be gentle and forgiving of oneself is the first step in the transformation. It will be the hardest thing students have to do, but by far the most rewarding.

In many eastern religions, there exists a symbiotic, and vitally important relationship between the teacher and the student. In the meditation classes, what the men on both sides of the fence receive is symbolic of that relationship. The yin and the yang flow together to create the whole. Each side pulling from their collective experiences and sharing them with the other broadens understanding and forgiveness. The goal of the class is to create better human beings who are capable of understanding where their feelings are coming from, and how best to handle them. The students in turn show the instructors how their love and compassion can change lives.

"[W]orking on behalf of others is the best way to help yourself," said Steven Killion. "I have benefited immensely from the example, wisdom, and fellowship of the people in our meditation group. I leave each Friday recharged socially, psychologically, and spiritually having benefited far more than I could possibly have helped anyone else."

The incarcerated men at Nash Correctional might beg to differ.

**NCPNT**

In my humble opinion...

# REHABILITATION: WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE?

By Larence Proffitt

WHEN I WAS SEVEN YEARS-OLD, I WOULD get up before school and make my own breakfast before the rest of the household arose. Despite my meal being only a bowl of cereal and a couple slices of toast, I took a measure of pride in self-sufficiency. However, one morning, I poured the last bowl out of the box and left none for my sister who got up after me. When my mom asked why I had done that, I told her that I had never thought of my sister. "That's the problem," my mom told me.

Though I had acted like a thoughtless child, I learned a profound lesson: The world is not centered on me.

Although we may all be born a human being, it takes insight and understanding to make the transition from a solitary human being into a member of humanity. One learns, on an intuitive level, that those around us are human, too. They have their own hopes, dreams, needs, and wants. They deserve to be treated well. This social contract allows individual humans to come together and form societies.

Society itself is a cooperative venture — a contract between people — to safeguard the well-being of weaker members. This venture disregards the survival of the fittest struggle of Darwinian evolution. In support of this contract, we establish customs which may evolve into laws and, eventually, prisons to house those who refuse to honor the social contract and its rules of conduct. Each of us in prison has, in some manner, been convicted of violating this contract and found ourselves incarcerated as a result.

At one time or another during our incarceration, we have all considered the concept of rehabilitation. What is it? How do we get it? More importantly for some, how do we demonstrate to the proper authorities that we have been rehabilitated?

Others focus on rehabilitation as a means to stay out of prison once they do get out. In whole, these can be elusive concepts, and the astronomical failure rates — as demonstrated by recidivism — show that most of us never accomplish the goal of rehabilitation.

In cooperative pursuit of this goal, the Department of Adult Correction offers programming and educational opportunities designed to encourage prisoners to accomplish rehabilitation. But, getting your high school equivalency, graphic design certificate, or completing anger management are not rehabilitation. These are simply tools to help us achieve success after



release. They are important tools and opportunities many of us never had, and they can offer hope for a better future. But they do not, themselves, rehabilitate a prisoner. Please don't let that prevent you from pursuing institutional programming. While success in the job market, and in our personal relationships, may provide us with opportunities we previously lacked, they are not the core changes which create rehabilitative consciousness.

Merriam-Webster defines *rehabilitate* as: "to teach [a criminal in prison] to live a normal and productive life." But in this context, what is a normal and productive life? Obviously one which avoids crime, prison, and the other consequences of that lifestyle. However, true freedom within the social contract of society comes in not being bound by it, but in coming to accept its necessity to preserve justice and freedom for everyone. We must learn to develop empathy for all those around us in order to celebrate what weaves the fabric of societies together.

For those who are unsure, *empathy* is defined as "the action of understanding, being aware of, being sensitive to, and vicariously experiencing

the feelings, thoughts, and experiences of others...also the capacity for this," according to Merriam-Webster.

Essentially, this means being able to put ourselves in another's place mentally and emotionally, thereby learning from someone else's experience of a given situation. Being able to feel their joy or pain. In learning to experience empathy, we come to realize that others are important, too, and deserving of the very same things we want for ourselves. Only in learning this lesson can it become desirable to set aside our natural selfishness for the sake of another's gain.

The truth is such behavior is not natural to humans and must be learned. Ask any parent and they will tell you that they taught their child the how and why of sharing. This then is the true basis of rehabilitation. We must come to empathize with others in order to share our society with others and live normal and productive lives. We must accept that the rules, all of them, apply equally to ourselves as well as to others, and to understand that they are necessary to the success of society as a whole.

Everyone wants to tell their children that they are special and unique to encourage them to do their very best. But, we are adults now, and it is time for adult truths. Yes, you are a unique individual, but you are no more special than the next person. You are just one among billions living on this planet with no claim to special treatment or circumstances. You are just another, mostly replaceable cog, in the vast machine of nature.

If, however, you want "all eyes on me," as the song says, then do something worthy of such attention. For it is only by our actions and achievements within the positive constraints of our society that we distinguish ourselves from the multitude. If you cannot achieve the exceptional — and many external circumstances may preclude you from doing so — you must come to understand that even an ordinary life lived to its fullest as a member of the most dominant species on the planet is still pretty special.

In any event, I encourage you to keep on striving. Rehabilitation is about changing our fundamental thinking toward society. There is nothing in the equation that says you can't achieve whatever you are willing to work hard for. After all, rags-to-riches stories are cliché because they do happen. By changing the flawed thinking, which led you to the bottom, you could be preparing to take the first steps towards the top. *NCPNT*



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# CAITLIN CLARK: CHANGING THE SCOPE OF THE WNBA

GRAPHIC EFFECTS BY DARRELL J. LAVINE, TEACHER'S AIDE AT NASH CORRECTIONAL'S GRAPHIC DESIGN PROGRAM PROVIDED THROUGH NASH COMMUNITY COLLEGE.

By Tony Johnson

THE PRISON DAY-ROOM FILLED WITH A heavy palpable tension. The clearly divided sides took turns jeering at each other or cheering animatedly. On June 1, 2024, the crowd swelled as residents of Nash Correctional Institution rushed to investigate the commotion.

The new spectators found the source. Holding court on TV was Caitlin Clark. Her Indiana Fever were battling against Angel Reese and the Chicago Sky.

Clark is a definitive, polarizing figure. Mentioning her name to residents evokes emphatic comments from opposite ends of the spectrum. "If you are not a fan of Caitlin Clark, you are not a sports fan. Period," said Clifton Batts, a self-proclaimed Clark fan.

One anti-fan took it to the extreme saying, "I hate her."

Sports greatness elicits emotions from, "WOW!" to "Can you believe she did THAT?!"

Greatness also produces love and sadly, hate.

Tom Brady had six states cheering for him, while others labeled him a "cheater." Michael Jordan became a global sensation but still faced criticism for his attitude and unwillingness to use his platform politically.

Clark has numerous points to score, rebounds to secure, and assists to distribute before she po-

tentially earns her place as a G.O.A.T. — Greatest of All Time — alongside Brady or Manning. However, she is walking, or rather driving down the lane toward etching her likeness on the Mount Rushmore of sports.

Clark seemingly sets records every time she laces up her Nike shoes. Her \$28 million endorsement deal with Nike, including a signature shoe, is the largest sponsorship for any women's basketball player.

On July 6, 2024, Clark, a six-foot guard, became the first rookie and youngest player in WNBA history to record a triple-double with 19 points, 12 rebounds, and 13 assists. Previously, the youngest player to achieve this feat was Sabrina Ionescu, whose New York Liberty Clark beat on the same record-setting day. New York currently holds the best record in the WNBA.

One fan, Marcus Hopkins, compared Clark favorably to Ionescu, calling her a more energetic and more athletic version of Ionescu.

Every hero needs an anti-hero, a villain, a rival. Brady had Manning — both of them. Jordan had...well, everyone who got in his way.

An epic rivalry can grow a sports league into the stratosphere. Selling out arenas, setting TV viewership records, and drawing in the unex-

pected fan. Playing the anti-hero in Clark's story stands Angel Reese.

The Clark-Reese rivalry began in the 2023 NCAA Women's Championship. Moments after Reese led her LSU Tigers to victory over the Iowa Hawkeyes, Reese sought out Clark to point at her ring finger. That game is the second most watched in women's tournament history.

This incident ignited the rivalry, but plenty of additional fuel has stoked the flames of their feud.

On June 3, 2024, ESPN.com quoted Reese as saying, "I know I'll go down in history. The reason why we're watching women's basketball is not because of one person. It's because of me, too."

Reese is right. She is already writing her name in the WNBA record books. The Chicago forward extended her WNBA record for consecutive double-doubles to 15 straight games on July 11.

The rivalry fire between Clark and Reese continues to heat up. The fireworks sparked quickly during their first WNBA match-up on that tension-filled June 1. In the third quarter, Chicago's Chennedy Carter knocked Clark to the ground with a shoulder check on what should have been a routine in-bounds play. Reese came

off the bench smiling and clapping in approval of the flagrant foul. When Carter reached the bench, Reese gave her a celebratory hug.

This dynamic rivalry adds to Clark's polarizing effect. Fans have a reason to pull for or against her, ultimately picking sides in an epic tale.

With Clark's arrival, women's basketball has seen an influx of fans. The growing crowds and record ratings followed her from college to the WNBA. When the prolific Clark pulls up on TV, ratings soar. The most watched women's college basketball game is the 2024 Championship game between South Carolina and Clark's Hawkeyes. The game averaged 18.7 million viewers.

After the drama of their first professional contest, the second Clark-Reese match-up, a regular season game starring the two rookies no less, became the most watched WNBA game in 23 years.

Clark isn't just in a battle with Reese, but faces criticism from current and former WNBA players. Diana Taurasi, a forward for the Phoenix Mercury who is widely considered to be the G.O.A.T. of the WNBA, said, "Reality is coming," for Clark in the form of the WNBA. Taurasi is only half right. Clark is averaging 5 turnovers a game, but she also leads the WNBA with 8 assists per game and set a WNBA record with 19 assists on July 17. Most importantly, Indiana has beaten Phoenix twice.

Some don't believe Clark, the first overall draft pick in the 2024 WNBA draft, has earned the spotlight.

"Clark is a dynamic player, but she has no titles," said Phillip Smith. "Victory is a team effort, but the greatest players invigorate their teams to win. She hasn't done that."

Even though Clark didn't win a championship in college, her overall skill set elevated her teams. Before Clark, Iowa had never competed in an NCAA Women's Championship game. She led them to back-to-back championship games. Despite losing both games, Iowa maximized their potential. Without Clark, a tourney bid would have been a lofty goal for those teams. In both, games Iowa was over-matched athletically at every position except for Clark and lacked the depth of LSU and South Carolina.

Smith's point is valid. Great players are judged by titles. At the end of her career it will be no different for Clark, but her journey is just beginning. In college, she shattered numerous records with her electrifying play, including the most points scored in NCAA history by any player, men or women. For the accomplishment, she won the 2024 ESPY for Record Breaking Performance.

Even this feat faced disapproval from a former player. "If Kelsey Plum set that record in four



Photo by John McClellan, <https://www.flickr.com/photos/johnmcclellan/27599647007461/>, CC BY-SA 2.0, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Chicago\\_Sky\\_Caitlin\\_Clark.jpg?curid=152094888](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Chicago_Sky_Caitlin_Clark.jpg?curid=152094888)

years, well, Caitlin Clark should've broke (*sic*) that record in four years," said Sheryl Swoopes, according to Sporting News. "But, because there's a COVID year ... she's already had an extra year to break that record."

If what Swoopes, a four-time WNBA champion, said was true, Clark's record would require clarification. The problem is it wasn't true. Clark took 13 less games to break Plum's scoring record, and both only played four years.

Others see Clark's attitude as an issue. She routinely offers words of "encouragement" to players attempting to guard her after swishing one of her ridiculous 30-foot three-pointers. In college, she often waved her hand in front of her face a la John Cena's WWE "You can't see me!"

At the beginning of her first WNBA season, Clark frequently argued against calls.

Clifton Batts points out, "She looks for the referees to bail her out. She can't receive what she gives."

A team leader can't take plays off because of unhappiness over a call. No matter how talented a player is, constantly arguing calls will exasperate some fans.

Clark's polarizing effect is partially due to her being a straight, white woman from Des Moines, Iowa, making her an atypical WNBA player.

"The media paints Clark as a darling because

she is different from the norm. Polarizing Black players in American sports is what we are used to," said Phillip Smith. "Clark is a unicorn. Anomalies commandeer headlines."

Marcus Hopkins feels there are other players just as talented, but do not garner the same media attention. Reese is one such player, and this sentiment fuels some of her comments.

Thanks to Clark, women's basketball and the WNBA appeals to a broader audience. A *USA Today Sports Weekly* article quoted one Fever fan as saying, "The crowd is so much more diverse. We have a lot more men, a lot more dads bringing their daughters." This injection of fans delivers a jolt of energy to the WNBA.

Although Smith isn't a Clark fan, he recognizes her ability to inspire young girls who may have thought they couldn't measure up to the typical WNBA player. Whether a Clark fan or not, inspiring young girls gives everyone a reason to cheer.

Sports fans want to be amazed. Nothing less will do. Clark wows with ludicrous three-pointers and daring passes. Her skills and rivalry with Reese provide sports fans with what they've been begging women's basketball for. Entertainment. Now sit back and enjoy the show, or as Hopkins put it, "Pay attention. You've never seen Clark's game before. Don't hate greatness." *NCPNT*

# WHAT IS IN STORE IN 2024: NFL FOOTBALL SEASON PREVIEW

By Kwame Teague

FOOTBALL SEASON IS HERE, and once again talk turns to who's going to win the Super Bowl before the first huddle has been broken. Will Mahomes and the Chiefs three-peat? Will Aaron Rodgers comeback from a season ending injury to hoist the Lombardi? And how 'bout them Cowboys? The frenzy has begun and in prison it is no different. You can see the team spirit on the sides of coffee mugs, radio decals, and banners inside of lockers, letting the world (and the yard) know just who fans are rolling with. Everybody claims to be Super Bowl bound, but only one will be right (sorry, Panther fans). So before you guys blow up the microwave with the prison version of tailgating, I thought I'd give you a run down on who really has a chance for the Big Dance. Shall we?

## AFC EAST

### Buffalo Bills

This is not the same team that won the past four AFC East titles. After releasing Stefon Diggs, center Mitch Morse, and safety Jordan Poyer, the only constant is Josh Allen. There will be new faces and rookies on both sides of the ball, so expect a steep learning curve, especially with such a challenging schedule this season.

### Miami Dolphins

The Dolphins are in the midst of revamping their defense. They let go of six defense contributors, including defensive guru Vic Fangio. Former Baltimore Ravens defensive line coach, Anthony Weaver, replaces him but can he fill Fangio's shoes? With pass rushers Jaelan Phillips and Bradley Chubb recovering from season-ending injuries, it remains to be seen where this team is headed.

### New England Patriots

Drake Maye boom or bust! Coach Mayo is hoping their top draft pick is the answer to turning things around. After going 4-13 last year, that's a heavy lift for an inexperienced QB and an inexperienced coach who happens to be standing in the shadow of Bill Belichick, one the best NFL coaches of all time. Don't expect too much for the next few years.

### New York Jets

Get ready for Rodgers Mania Part II. Jets fans drank the Kool-Aid last year, just to see their dream savior go down for the season after one play from scrimmage. Now, one year later, the 40-year-old, cigar smoking, fantasy Donald Trump VP has Jets fans believing he can still take them to the promise-land. Yeah, right.

## AFC WEST

### Denver Broncos

There is a certain individual I know who's hoping, praying, and pleading with the football gods to make the Broncos relevant again, but outside of the arrival of Bo Nix, there's nothing to see here folks. Sean Payton wants to rebuild this team in his image, and he was willing to eat Russell Wilson's contract and trade Jeudy to do it. But this ain't the 'Nola and Bo Nix is no Brees. Keep praying, Buddy.

### Kansas City Chiefs

Patrick Mahomes. Andy Reid. Three-peat. Mic Drop. That's my version of a NFL haiku.

### Las Vegas Raiders

I like Antonio Pierce. That's all.

### Los Angeles Chargers

Harbaugh's back in the NFL, and he's got his work cut out for him. He's basically starting from scratch. Ekler's gone, Kennan Allen and Mike Williams are gone, as well. The defense is heading over the hill and that's being gracious. But Harbaugh has been here before with the Niners some years back. He took them to the Super Bowl. Just sayin'...

## AFC NORTH

### Baltimore Ravens

The Ravens gave away half their defense just to land veteran running back Derrick Henry — excuse me — KING Henry. A RB's prime rarely surpasses five years. This is Henry's sixth. So good as he once was, there's no question that he's on the other side of the hill. And let's face it, Baltimore has been cursed with running back injuries over the past few years. Will Henry be the ex-factor or just ex?

### Cleveland Browns

Is this the year The Dogg Pound finally gets to celebrate? There's no question that they had a Super Bowl caliber defense, but the injury bug cursed them early and often. Sorry Cleveland, the window just closed.

### Pittsburgh Steelers

Russell Wilson still has game. He got a bum rap in Denver, and Mike Tomlin looked through muddy water and saw dry land. Tomlin's opinion matters, because he's the only coach that's never had a losing season. So if not Russell, give Mike the benefit of the doubt. As for Justin Fields, he can look forward to a long NFL career...it just won't be in Pittsburgh.

### Cincinnati Bengals

Everything is riding on Burrow's health. He lost Tyler Boyd, but he's still got Chase and Tee Higgins. The running game is suspect, and if that O-line doesn't hold up, neither will Burrow. The defense is nothing to brag about, but it shouldn't be overlooked.

*Tony's prediction: Cincinnati wins the Super Bowl.*

## AFC SOUTH

### Houston Texans

Look out AFC, there may be a new sheriff in Texas. With the high powered offense of C.J. Stroud, Nico Collins, Tank Dell, and new addition Stefon Diggs, the Texans are the biggest threat to Kansas City. Especially when factoring in a stout defense that just added several new pieces, including linebacker, Azeem Al Shaair. Winning the AFC South should be a breeze.

### Indianapolis Colts

Anthony Richardson is a dynamo, but he's young and reckless. If he can find his balance, then the Colts could be a very good team...in a few years.

### Jacksonville Jaguars

Trevor Lawrence landed one of the biggest QB contracts in history, but is he worth top dollar? With 60 — 60! — turnovers in three years, Lawrence doesn't sound like the type of franchise QB you can build a team around. Coach Pederson may be a great coach, but this team has some soul searching to do.

### Tennessee Titans

No Derrick Henry, no chance. With Will Levis at the helm, do the new arrivals Calvin Ridley and Tyler Boyd add up to one Derrick Henry? Yeah, like I said, no chance.

## NFC EAST

### Dallas Cowboys

In Jerry's World, "all in" means win or else. That goes for Dak, Mike McCarthy, and the entire coaching staff. Dak and McCarthy have a lot to prove. In three years they haven't made it past the divisional round. And what's up with CeeDee Lamb? Pay the man, because it's obvious that you need him. With Lamb off the field, Dak's QBR drops by 30 points. You've got Zeke back, or what's left of him, so if not Lamb, where are the points coming from? There's blood in the water. Cue the *Jaws* music.

### New York Giants

Ho hum. Truthfully, we should really skip the G-Men. No disrespect Giants fans, but Daniel Jones? Really? That's the best you can come up with? Saquon Barkley is gone, Darren Waller retired, and...well, there is no *and*. Defense? They played lights out for about four games last year, but 20% of a season does not a winning team make. My advice if you live in New York? Grab a Jets jersey for the next couple of years. No one will blame you.

### Philadelphia Eagles

The Eagles are still the team to beat in the NFC. Despite the nose dive in the second half of last season, Hurts and company are still tops in the NFC. With the addition of Barkley, and the fact the league didn't ban the tush-push, don't expect them to crash again. I predict the Eagles will win the NFC East easy.

### Washington Commanders

The No. 2 pick Jayden Daniels has Washington happier than the idea of a second Trump presidency. He's got the Commanders feeling great again. According to his coaches, his study habits, decision making, and accuracy has been impressive. But like Mike Tyson says, everyone's got a plan until they get hit in the mouth. With Dan Quinn at the helm, the focus should be on making a very decent defense into a very good one, which will take the pressure off of the rookie's shoulders. Nevertheless, the road to the playoffs goes through Daniels. Come September we'll see if he lives up to the hype.

## NFC NORTH

### Chicago Bears

Caleb Williams represents a fresh start for the Windy City, or at least that's what they're hoping. He's got weapons, with the addition of Kennan Allen to the tandem of Odunze and D.J. Moore, Mr. Williams could make this interesting.

### Detroit Lions

What is the world coming to when we can talk about the Detroit Lions going to the Super Bowl? They would have gone last year if it wasn't for Coach Campbell's late game gamble in the NFC Championship. Big risk takers only look good when they win. Campbell is reckless, which could be the Achilles' Heel to the Lions' chances. Look for the Lions to make a deep playoff run.

### Green Bay Packers

With a \$212-million contract, \$175 million guaranteed, who says money can't buy you Love? I'm talking about Jordan Love, the young lion under center for the Cheese Heads. He had a shaky start but came into his own last year. The team is solid on both sides of the ball, but with youth comes inexperience, and Green Bay has a ton of that. They are Detroit's only serious contender to win the NFC North.

### Minnesota Vikings

No more Cousins, no more defense. My advice to the Purple People Eaters: tank and get a high first round pick.

**Additional valued insight provided by Tony Johnson**

## NFC WEST

### Arizona Cardinals

Kyler Murray has a new target in Marvin Harrison, Jr., son of the legendary Indianapolis Colts receiver of the same name. He also has a gritty running game to back him up and a feisty defense that upset Dallas last year. Are the Cardinals for real? Not yet. But don't sleep, this is a team to keep an eye on.

### Los Angeles Rams

Remember when the Rams were relevant? When Stafford came from the dismal Detroit Lions to win a Super Bowl his first year? When Aaron Donald terrorized opposing quarterbacks? Well, those days are gone. Donald has retired and Stafford needs to. The only bright spot is their break out receiver Puka Nukua. Kupp is still a threat, but he's injury prone. If the Rams don't make the playoffs this year, Coach McVay will be looking for a new job.

### Seattle Seahawks

Geno Smith was a pleasant surprise last year. The conventional wisdom was Smith couldn't take charge. He proved his haters wrong. Was that an anomaly or are we witnessing a rebirth? Will the real Geno Smith please stand up?

### San Francisco 49ers

Shanahan can't win the big game. That's the narrative, and he has yet to disprove it. This may be his last year to do it. The Niners have too many people to pay. As of this writing, they still haven't paid Brandon Aiyuk, arguably their best receiver. The media is already talking about the mega contract Purdy could get next year. Then what about McCaffery? Debo? And we haven't even gotten to the defense yet. Bottom line, 2024-25 is Super Bowl or bust for San Fran.

**Tony's prediction: San Fran is Super Bowl bound.**

## NFC SOUTH

### Atlanta Falcons

I'm going out on a limb to say the Dirty Birds have a chance to make some noise in the NFC. Of course, they'll win the NFC South, barring injuries, and as the ol' folks say, "the creek don't rise." But I'm talking about at least one win in the playoffs. Kirk Cousins can still sling that rock, and the Falcons have a very good receiver core. Their running game, featuring Bijon Robinson, is going to carry them a long way and their defense has just the right blend of rookies and veterans, youth and experience, to make the NFC very interesting in 2024. This is my pick for a Cinderella team.

### Carolina Panthers

Bryce Young was a mistake. He isn't the new Cam Newton, but he can be developed into a proficient game manager. The Panthers traded Brian Burns, so let's call this a rebuilding year...or decade. Again, my condolences, Carolina fans.

### New Orleans Saints

Hey Saints fans, remember those paper bags you used to wear to the game? I hope you still got 'em 'cause you're gonna need them. Who Dat?

### Tampa Bay Buccaneers

Baker Mayfield, trash or treasure? His game is suspect, but not his heart. He took the Bucs to the playoffs after winning a trashy NFC South division. It won't be that easy this year. If the Falcons, Eagles, 49ers and Detroit win their respective divisions, then you can't leave Tampa Bay out of the Wild-Card conversation. *NCPNT*

# HURRICANE HELENE WASHES OUT CRITICAL NECESSITIES FOR SOME PRISONS

**H**urricane Helene was not in the forecast when this introductory edition of the North Carolina Prison News Today was produced. As the issue goes to print, North Carolina continues to assess the damage created by the storm and to respond to its impact on NCDAC facilities and operations. All of the people housed in NCDAC facilities are safe, and NCDAC is taking appropriate action to ensure continued safety and security. No prison facilities were flooded but several facilities lost critical services such as power, water, and communication.

As of October 3, 2024, NCDAC has transferred individuals from five facilities: Avery/Mitchell Correctional Institution, Black Mountain Sub-

stance Abuse Treatment Center, Craggy Correctional Center, Mountain View Correctional Center, and Western Correctional Center for Women. The people in those facilities have been moved to prison facilities in non-affected areas. The duration of the relocations will depend on the restoration of critical services to the affected areas. NCDAC All In has been orchestrating a collection drive for necessity items for the employees who have been displaced due to the massive storm.

The NCPNT news team will provide extensive coverage of Hurricane Helene in the next edition of Prison News Today. In the meantime, we encourage patience and understanding as we all navigate the challenges created by the storm. *NCPNT*



*left and below:* Aftermath of Hurricane Helene on the roads leading to Avery/Mitchell and Mountain View CI in Spruce Pine, North Carolina



Photos provided by Indyah Bryant,  
NCDAC Communications



# Arts & Entertainment Golden Movie Review

## BOB MARLEY: ONE LOVE

By Timothy Johnson

**B**OB MARLEY INTRODUCED ME TO MY FIRST new friends when I arrived at college. Obviously, he did not personally introduce me to anyone. He died in 1981, the year before my birth. On move-in day as a freshman, I announced my arrival by blasting Bob Marley's music. The sound of "Three Little Birds" attracted two coeds from the neighboring suite. Angie and Danielle liked the music and my green, yellow, and red tie-dye T-shirt, featuring Bob smoking — the iconic Wailers' album cover of *Catch a Fire*.

A lifelong Bob Marley fan, the announcement of a movie about him excited me. I just hoped I would get to see it. In June 2024, *Bob Marley: One Love* made it on the Gold Movie app on the Premium Package. Watching the biopic about Marley felt like an event, not just a movie. Before watching, I hoped his music featured prominently and hoped the film captured the spirit of a man who lives on because of his message and his magnetism.

Released on Valentine's Day 2024, *One Love* focuses on a two-year span of Marley's life, from 1976 to 1978. The movie opens with Marley, played by Kingsley Ben-Adir, doing three things

he loved — playing soccer, spending time with family, and jamming with his band — then shifts into the conflict with assassins attempting to kill him and his wife, Rita. Despite the assassination attempt, he insists on performing the Smile Jamaica concert, with the unprecedented goal of using the concert to effect peace between two political factions. Escalating violence convinces Marley to take a hiatus in London while working on the legendary *Exodus* album, an album *Time* magazine selected as the greatest of the 20th century.

*One Love* treats music fans to a long list of the choicest selections from Bob Marley and The Wailers. "Get Up Stand Up" inaugurates the musical tribute, followed by "I Shot the Sheriff" and "No More Trouble." Marley answers getting shot with "War." "Natural Mystic" sets the tone for his relationship with Rita. Other favorites include: "Turn Your Lights Down Low," "No Woman No Cry," "Redemption Song," "Exodus," "Jamming," and "Three Little Birds." According to a *Rolling Stone* article by David Browne, Ben-Adir took singing lessons so he could sing during the jam sessions and visually capture the singing Marley, but most of the mu-

sic comes from Marley's voice.

For Marley, who largely propelled reggae's rise in the 1970s, his music and message fused to become an indivisible entity. As his character declared in the film, "The music and the message are the same thing." His son, Ziggy Marley, worked as one of the producers to make sure the movie accurately portrayed the icon's message and magnetism. As quoted in a *Rolling Stone* article, Ziggy Marley describes Ben-Adir's portrayal: "He captured a deepness that is really human and is really touching. There are some scenes that might be closer than others, but overall, he did it artfully. He's interpreting Bob, not being Bob. Nobody can ever be Bob."

Nobody but Bob Marley can be Bob Marley, but *One Love* skillfully celebrates the man, the music, and the message. The movie's vibrant depiction of Marley and his music possesses the power to reward Marley fans and create new fans. The film returned this Marley fan to the excitement of being young and carefree, with a world of possibilities and college coeds at the door.

**Movie Rating: 4.5 out of 5 Little Birds**

## ARTHUR THE KING

hundreds of miles, somehow keeping up. Impressed by his regal bearing, the team names the dog Arthur — Arthur the King. He becomes not just a follower, but part of the team.

Although based on a true story, the movie changed several details, a common choice in Hollywood. The real Michael was Mikael Lindnord, who was from Sweden, not America. The race location was changed from Ecuador to the Dominican Republic due to Covid. But the movie got a few things right. The dog star, Ukai, an Australian shepherd-border collie-Bouvier mix, looked like a clone of the real Arthur. In a *USA Today* article, Bryan Alexander reports that, "Scenes like naming the dog King Arthur during his heroic trek were so realistic, it bought Lindnord to tears watching." The film also depicts the real meatball-meeting scene with precise realism.

I found several key lessons in the movie for incarcerated people. People in prison definitely know how it feels to be known for the worst moment, the biggest mistake. We know how it feels to refuse to listen and get stuck in the mud. Knowing those feelings, we also need to follow

Light's example in going for it again, persevering to overcome our mistakes. Additionally, we need to learn that life is best lived by putting others, even a smelly dog, above ourselves.

As with every dog movie, I was collared from the first bark. The movie's central themes — adventure, perseverance, family, friendship, doggie love — offer something valuable to every person. The lessons also offer value to every person, including those of us in prison.

*Arthur the King* earns a blue ribbon in the dog movie genre.

**Movie Rating: 5 out of 5 Meatballs**

**D**OG MOVIES MIGHT RANK AS MY FAVORITE movie genre. I've always loved animals, especially dogs. Then, working as a trainer of rescued shelter dogs for four years changed my life. Training 15 canines set my life on a path filled with purpose. So, from *All Dogs Go to Heaven* to *A Dog's Purpose*, a dog movie captures my attention and my heart with little effort. Yet, some great dog movies have been made, so making a top dog movie requires serious effort.

*Arthur the King* features Mark Wahlberg as American adventure racer Michael Light. When the movie begins, Light becomes famous for his worst moment — leading his team in the wrong direction, ignoring their pleas, and getting them stuck in the mud, literally and figuratively. Light tries to transition to normal family life, but cannot give up racing. Pushed by his wife to race one more time, he puts together a team for the world championship of adventure racing, a race of at least 435 miles in five days.

Biking, running, climbing and rowing through the Dominican Republic, Light feeds a stray dog meatballs. Highlighting the message in "never feed a stray," the dog follows them for

DO YOU HAVE A MOVIE, BOOK, OR GAME THAT YOU ENJOYED? WRITE A REVIEW AND SUBMIT IT TO US. REVIEWS UNDER 300 WORDS CAN BE SUBMITTED TO US THROUGH OUR APP ON EDOVO. LONGER SUBMISSIONS (300-800 WORDS) MUST BE SUBMITTED TO YOUR CAMP LIAISON.

# THE LONG AWAITED *D & D BEYOND* IS FINALLY HERE



Story & Illustration By Jason Williford

**W**ELCOME TO THE FIRST EDITION OF the RPG Lockdown. This article will inform role play gamers (RPG) about games and offer tips, tricks, and tools to use in their own games, whether player or gamemaster. Additionally, there will be reviews of games and new releases on the horizon.

For those curious about the hobby, RPGs began in the 1970's with the first edition of *Dungeons and Dragons* (D&D). The game involved creating archetypal fantasy characters, like wizards and barbarians, and going on an adventure with a few friends. One person would take the role of the Dungeon Master, or DM, and it was their job to tell the story, play the monsters, and react to the player's moves.

Later versions incorporated the 20-sided die (also known as the D20), along with other multi-sided dice. In 2014, D&D released its fifth edition of the game. The streamlined and engaging rules set reinvigorated the franchise,

which soared in popularity and sales over the next decade.

Now as D&D reaches its 50th anniversary, they are hoping to keep that fire burning with the release of *D&D: Beyond*. This comprises an updated and expanded release of the three core rulebooks: the *Player's Handbook*, the *Dungeon Master's Guide*, and the *Monster Manual*, all scheduled to be released in 2024.

The first of these releases, the *Player's Handbook*, hits shelves this September 17, and promises to be chock full of new material. Little has changed with the rules, so all of the sourcebooks from the fifth edition will still be compatible with *D&D: Beyond*. This new *Player's Handbook* is a revised edition of the 2014 release that gathers material from other sourcebooks, such as *Xanathar's Guide to Everything* and *Tasha's Cauldron of Everything*. All this is packed into a 384-page tome that is the largest *Player's Handbook* released to date. There are many new additions to the game as well.

All of the old races (now called species), like the Elf, Dwarf, and the Human, are there, but they have added three more to choose from: The Aasimar, the Goliath, and the Orc.

All 12 classes have been revised and have four subclasses to choose from, making a total of 48 possibilities. Some classes have gained totally new subclasses, like the Barbarian who gains the Path of the World Tree. The Bard has gained the College of Dance. The Druid gains the Circle of the Sea. Classes like the Monk received an update to the Way of the Four Elements sub-

class, which is now called the Elemental Monk. This plays like an entirely new subclass. The Wild Surge Sorcerer gets a new Wild Surge table, granting them a new way to handle their unpredictable magic.

The book includes 16 backgrounds, 75 feats, and over 400 spells for magic users to choose from. One of the big changes is that your background now determines your ability boosts rather than what species you are, making it more impactful than ever before. You also gain a Background Feat, which is exclusive to you at character creation.

The regular feats have seen big changes as well, along with a group of feats called Epic Boon Feats. These are available to you at higher levels and help fill out your character as he grows in power.

For equipment, each weapon now has a mastery property, which martial classes can use to give you more of an edge in combat — if you are clever enough. The Great Axe, for example, now has the Cleave property, which lets you slice through multiple enemies. If you are a Rogue looking to gain Sneak Attack, you can knock your opponent prone with the Maul's Topple property.

Of course, the book will be crammed full of new artwork from some of the greatest fantasy artists in the business.

Three core rulebooks are scheduled to be released this year and preorders are available with different packages that offer access to bonus content and an early release of the books by a couple of weeks, so those that preorder the *Player's Handbook*, which will be officially released on September 17, would receive their preordered copy on September 3 instead.

## GAME REVIEW: *MARVEL MULTIVERSE ROLE PLAYING GAME*

**A**NOTHER GAME THAT HAS CAPTURED THE attention of RPG gamers is the 2023 release of the *Marvel Multiverse RPG*. Whether you are a fan of comic books or the Marvel movies, this game has something for every fanboy out there. The unique Marvel dice system keeps the game fast paced and action oriented. The dice mechanics are based on rolling 3d6 (3 six-sided die) in order to beat a target number selected by the game master.

One of the dice is known as a Marvel die (or M). If you roll a 1 on it and pass the test, your success is known as a Fantastic Success, which gives special benefits or doubles your damage. Rolling a 616 (the number of the main Marvel

multiverse), then you get an Ultimate Success.

For playing the game, you can either choose a character from the existing Marvel Universe, or you can create a character of your own with hundreds of powers to choose from.

While this does allow you to make almost any character you can think of, the powers can get somewhat out of hand, causing some imbalance in the game. The rules try to limit this as much as possible, but players that are prone to manipulating games to their advantage will find a lot of ways to do so. The game also lacks traditional skills, with are instead handled by doing an Ability Score test, which can grow repetitive in non-combat situations.

**RATING: 7.5 OUT OF 10**

**SOURCEBOOKS AVAILABLE:**

*THE MARVEL MULTIVERSE RPG CORE RULEBOOK*

*THE CONQUEST OF KANG*

*DEADPOOL ROLEPLAYS THE MARVEL MULTIVERSE*

Overall, the game is a lot of fun, as long as you remember the immortal words of Ben Parker: "With great power must come great responsibility." **NCPNT**

## PEANUT PEANUT BUTTER CHOCOLATE CAKE

A TWIST ON THE ORIGINAL SODA CAKE RECIPE USES PEANUT BUTTER TO MAKE THE CAKE MOIST

By Tony Johnson

**P**EANUT PEANUT BUTTER CHOCOLATE CAKE was created from the original Soda Cake, a cake made of just soda and cookies that many of us have made and/or enjoyed. In the original Soda Cake, the cake portion dries out after cooking. Vegetable oil and eggs moisten most traditional cakes. Without access to vegetable oil and eggs, peanut butter is a comparable substitute because it produces an oil when heated, and this oils moistens the Peanut Peanut Butter Chocolate Cake.

When in the kitchen cooking, or at the microwave whipping, I enjoy making a recipe my own. I experiment with numerous ingredients with varying amounts, all in an effort to improve the recipe.

Peanut Peanut Butter Chocolate Cake passed the taste test when my friend, Mark Mercer, exclaimed, “this is the best dessert I’ve had in prison.” His huge smile and cake-stuffed mouth emphasized his assessment. **NCPNT**

*NC PRISON NEWS TODAY WANTS TO PRINT YOUR RECIPE. WE WILL MAKE IT AND RATE IT USING A 5-STAR RATING SYSTEM. WHEN SHARING YOUR RECIPE, WRITE A DETAILED LIST OF INGREDIENTS, SIMPLE — YET THOROUGH — INSTRUCTIONS, AND AN ANECDOTE, OR BRIEF STORY CONNECTING YOU TO THE RECIPE. BE SURE TO INCLUDE YOUR NAME, LOCATION AND AN ESTIMATE OF TOTAL COST TO MAKE THE RECIPE. SEND YOUR RECIPE THROUGH OUR APP ON EDOVO.*

### Ingredients:

- 15-oz. Duplex crème cookies (36 cookies)
- 1.5-2 oz. of salted peanuts
- 4 oz. of peanut butter
- 2 Hershey’s Milk Chocolate with Whole Almonds Bars (approx. 1.5 oz. ea.)
- 16-oz. Mountain Dew

RATING (OUT OF 5 STARS):

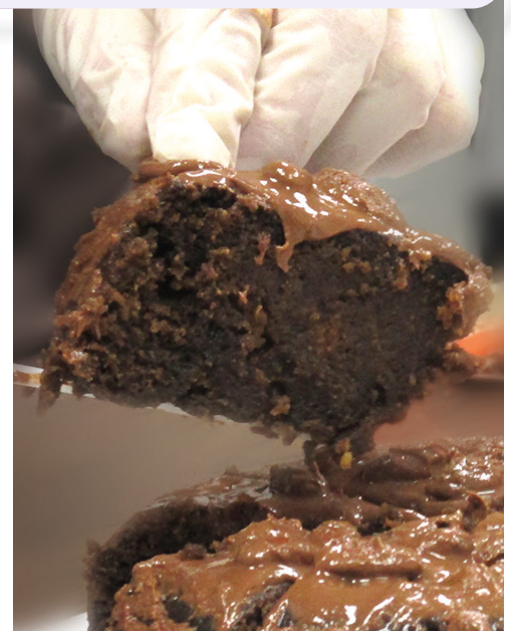
★★★★★  
EST. COST: \$7.50

### Essentials:

- Microwave
- Spoon
- 2 16 oz. Styrofoam cups
- 1.6 qt. or larger microwave safe bowl
- A pestle (Fish oil bottle or similar container)

### Instructions:

1. Separate crème from the cookies by scrapping off the crème into a cup and placing the cookies in the bowl.
2. Using your pestle, crush the cookies into a fine powder.
3. Crush the peanuts into 1/3”-1/4” sized pieces.
4. Prepare the batter: In the same bowl with the cookie powder, add 4 oz. of peanut butter, 16 oz. of Mountain Dew, and crushed peanuts. Mix thoroughly. Allow the mixture to soak for 45 minutes before proceeding.
5. Stir in half of the reserved cookie crème into the batter mixture.
6. Bake the cake: Cook on high for 6 minutes, uncovered. The center should be moist but no longer be wet. Cook for another 90 seconds, if needed. Allow the cake to cool for 45 minutes before frosting.
7. Prepare the chocolate icing: Place two Hershey’s Chocolate Almond Bars still in their wrappers into a 16 oz. cup. Fill the cup with hot water until the bars are submerged. Once the bars are melted, carefully squeeze the melted chocolate into the cup with the remaining crème filling. Mix thoroughly. Heat for an additional 10-15 seconds, then stir until the consistency of cake frosting is achieved.
8. Secure lid on bowl and flip the cake upside down onto the lid. Remove the bowl.
9. Using a spoon, frost the top and sides of the cake evenly.
10. Slice into pieces and enjoy!



## WHY DID THEY COME?

By Tyler Bowman — *(Nash CI)*

I WATCHED, MESMERIZED BY THE STARS, LISTENING to the squirrel's fat sizzle in the camp fire. Pa forced us out far enough into the middle of nowhere to warrant the luxury of a cooked meal, and it was my job to cook it. Ma and Pa were stalking the night to define a perimeter, setting traps, and making sure no one could creep upon us, just in case we weren't out far enough in the middle of nowhere.

Since the great revelation a few years ago, nothing moved around up here anymore. No planes crossed the sky. No satellites flashed or beeped. Heck, I hadn't seen any shooting stars. It's as if the entire universe came to a standstill at the same time the planet did. But still, the stars were a beauty to behold and often started me thinking about the other people who had long since disappeared.

Some argue that everything started in 1947 out at Roswell, but they're wrong. They appeared way before then. They had arrived before early man was able to scratch their encounters on cave walls. The ancients worshipped them as gods. The Egyptians built monuments in their honor. Modern man depicted them as little green beings flying in metallic saucers and convinced society — at least to some degree — that their existence was mythological or an intricate conspiracy, in hopes of masking the truth from the masses. But I can testify, right now, that not one earthly government had a dang clue as to what was really going on.

The truth, or rather, the great revelation — as the media would label it — was realized by happenstance. Maybe a little serendipity, if you will? Or, by intelligent design? Who knows?

The madness began when a little girl — eight or nine, I can't rightly recall — disobeyed her father by following him into the woods as he set out for a hunt. She trailed her father for hours snapping pictures and recording videos with her cell phone. At 2:36 p.m., her father paused beside a hulking oak as if preparing to climb into a tree stand midway up. But, instead of climbing, he stared straight up into the blue sky. Suddenly, he fell to his knees while clutching his chest. The girl's camera panned up beyond the tops of the trees surrounding her.

A solid white object, resembling a stretched egg, descended just above her father. The object was as big as a moving truck and hovered motionlessly for a long while. It had no wings, no jets, no propulsion mechanism of any discernable kind, leading the world's best physicists to argue about how it moved for months after the incident.

The object, which would come to be known as the "Tic-Tac", hovered for a few breaths before a blinding light radiated from it. The radiance gleamed so brightly that the video footage blinded all who watched, making it impossible to see exactly what happened.

The light didn't blind the little girl.

During a debriefing by anonymous government officials, she described the brightness as less than a light and more of an ethereal presence that made her feel weightless.

"I wasn't scared," she said, clutching an overstuffed teddy bear. "I saw the angel walk out of the thing and pick up my daddy. It looked at me before walking back into the thing."

All of the adults in the room leaned forward.

"And then what?" One asked.

"The light disappeared," she said. "It was just gone, and so was my daddy."

Within hours of a leaked news report detailing the girl's story, scientists determined that only children of a certain age could see through the light that blinded adults. The seers were all under 10.

Acceptance of the girl's story and her video made the world go crazy — doom and gloom everywhere anyone looked. The girl's video had captured the last UFO sighting, but the strangeness had just begun. The earth's rotation slowed, inaugurating the first snow of an eternal ice age. The soil turned infertile. War became mankind's only means of survival. Chaos became the new normal. Imagine a post-apocalyptic movie playing out in real life, except it wasn't spawned by a virus or a nuclear war, but the Bible — freaking Revelations.

Instead of partaking in the craziness, Ma and Pa fled to the mountains. No crops grew up here, but the animals were plentiful. At least for the time being.

The scent of the squirrel roasting over the fire made me smile at the stars above.

A snapping twig drew my eyes to the wood line where barren trees hulked in the darkness as slender centurions.

I paused to listen. Ma and Pa burst from the forest at a break neck pace. A small squad of dirty, vicious men leaked from the darkness into the dim firelight behind them. They wielded makeshift weapons.

I thought, "Guess we aren't out far enough in the middle of nowhere after all." *NCPNT*

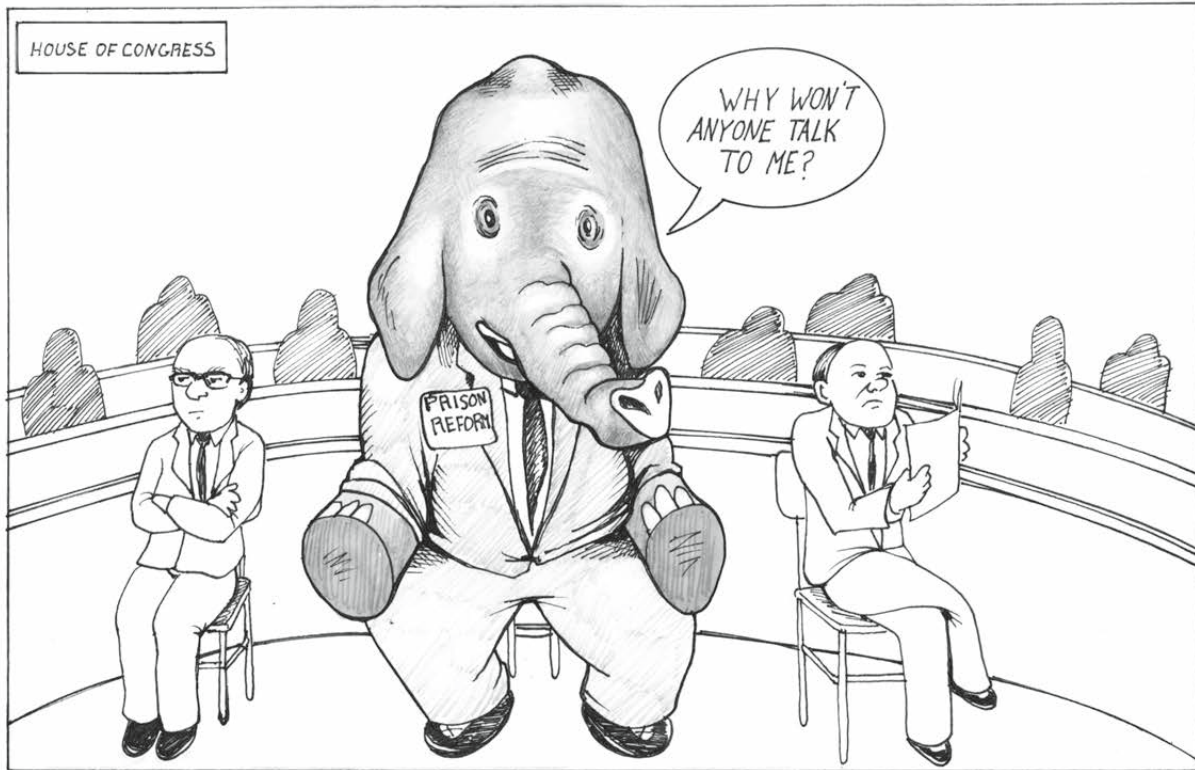
## HOW TO SUBMIT ARTICLES

- For poetry, recipes, and letters to the editor, use the app on Edovo.
- For longer form articles or short stories — between 300-800 words — you may submit your writing to the facility liaison (see page 36). The liaisons will only accept 10 articles per month. Articles must be no longer than 800 words and must be submitted to your liaison by the **20th day of the month**. Any articles longer than 800 words will not be accepted. If you don't meet the deadline, or the liaison has reached the 10 article limit, you will need to wait until the next month.

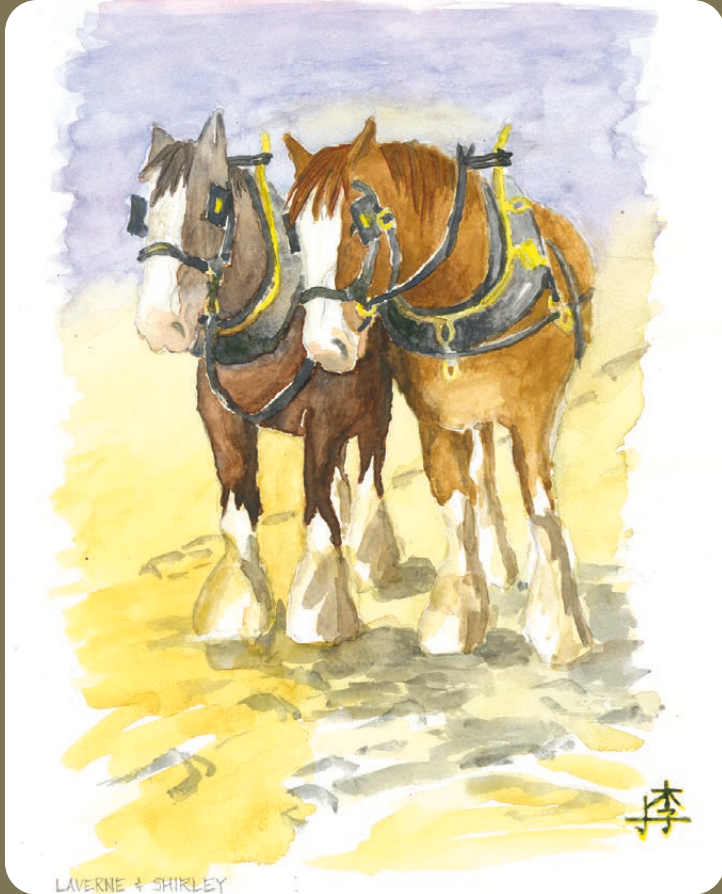
See also, "What We Want" and "What we Do Not Want" (page 2) for more guidance on what is, or is not acceptable.

# Drawn Lines

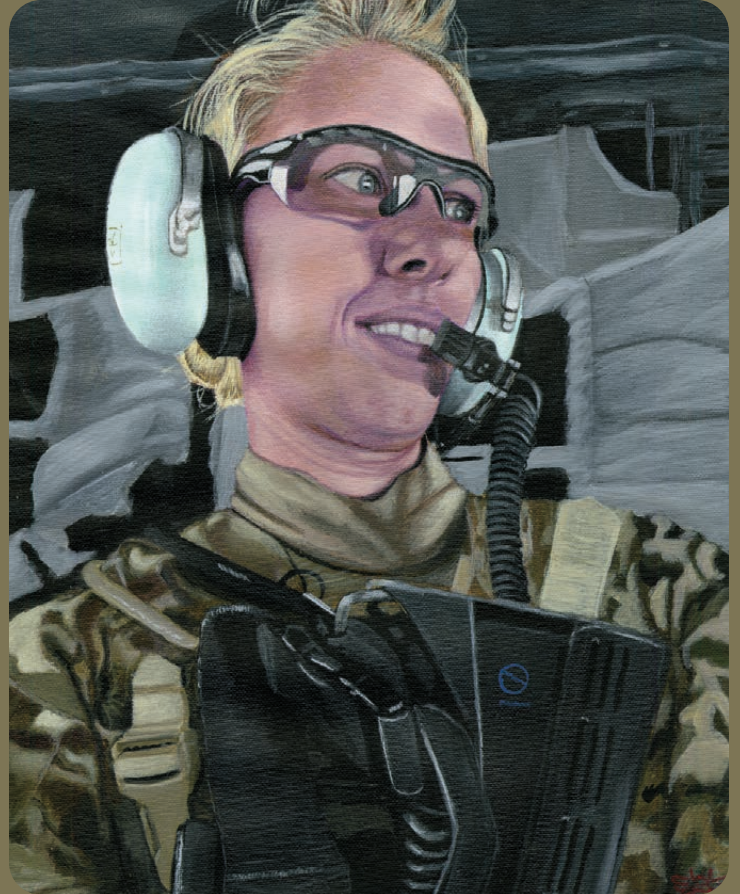
Illustration By Jason Williford



## The Artist's Studio — Nash CI



JOSEPH LEE — LAVERNE & SHIRLEY



JOEY OWENS — WARRIOR QUEEN



**DOMINIQUE GRAY— UNITED**



**JOAQUIN MELENDEZ — REMEMBERING BOSS**



**KALAB LACKEY — CONTROVERSIAL**



**DOUG HOCUTT — OLD SCHOOL**

All featured artwork was created while the artists were housed at Nash Correctional.

**Following is a list of liaisons for each prison facility. These liaisons will be collecting applications for the four NCPNT staff positions and facility reporter roles.**

Facilities	Staff Liaison(s)	Liaison Back-up
Albemarle (Medium)	Michelle Williams	Callie Lefler
Alexander Correctional Institution	Hazel Dula	Joseph Huffman
Anson Correctional Institution	Kimberly Baldwin	Kathy Deberry
Avery-Mitchell Correctional Institution (Medium)	Nina Gragg	Coleman Riddle
Bertie Correctional Institution	Shavanna Watson	Treasure Clagon
Brown Creek CI (Was Anson Min.)	Lamont Wall	Gwen Shankle
Caldwell Correctional Center	Corey Biecker	Amy Kelly
Carteret Correctional Center	Sarah Turpin	
Caswell Correctional Center (Medium)	Letitia Wells	
Catawba Correctional Center	Tia Guy	Rebecca Jonas
Central Prison	Yana Bland	
Columbus Correctional Institution (Medium)	Dawn Guinyard	Tracy Jacobs
Craggy Correctional Institution	Nikki Mahaffey	Amy Watkins
Craven Correctional Institution (Medium)	Sean Thompson	Ayonna Satterthwaite
Dan River Prison Work Farm		
Davidson Correctional Center	Rashida Reives	
Eastern Correctional Institution	Alicia Dewar	Karen Swinson
Foothills Correctional Institution	Michael Swink	Robin Joines
Forsyth Correctional Center	Tiffany Sharp	Kayla Bailey
Franklin Correctional Center (Medium)	Crystal Tant	Erin Patterson
Gaston Correctional Center	Patrick Parks	
Granville Correctional Institution	Edith Greene	Joyce Kerns
Greene Correctional Institution	Bristo Mitchell	Jonita Garner
Harnett Correctional Institution (Medium)	Elisa Whitted	Deborah Harney
Hyde Correctional Institution	Kanda Basnight	
Johnston Correctional Institution	Jessie Wallace	
Lincoln Correctional Center	Frieda Gates	Sheila Brooks
Lumberton Correctional Institution (Medium)	Sharon Burnette	Amber Parker
Marion Correctional Institution	Russell Hall	Turner South
Maury Correctional Institution	Rena Jones-Randall	
Mountain View Correctional Institution (Medium)	Kelsi Smith	Amy Jones
NC Correctional Institution for Women	Liandra Wheeler	Latasha Peters
Nash Correctional Institution (Medium)	Markel Mitchell	Keisha Smith
Neuse Correctional Institution (Medium)		
New Hanover Correctional Center	Joseph Riley	Wendy Bryant
North Piedmont CRV	Kimberly Ritter	
Orange Correctional Center	Jill Henderson	
Pamlico Correctional Institution (Medium)	Edward Becvar	Paul Montanye
Pasquotank Correctional Institution	Farrah Parks	
Pender Correctional Institution (Medium)	Michelle Emery	Cody Sholar
Piedmont Correctional Institution	Melodi Scott	
Randolph Correctional Center	Gwen Armstrong	Sonya Diaz
Richmond Correctional Institution (Medium)	Renee McNeill	Lawrence Shaw
Robeson CRV	Ashley Hunt	Anita Jacobs
Roanoke River Correctional Institution	Rhonda Lassiter	Tamecia Eason
Rutherford Correctional Center	Cynthia Brewer	Joshua Vance

Facilities	Staff Liaison(s)	Liaison Back-up
Sampson Correctional Institution (Medium)	Janet Dexter	Robert Van Gorder
Sanford Correctional Center	Tanaja Wilder	Natascha Lightfoot
Scotland Correctional Institution	Tamara Rush	Valris Parran-Jernigan
Southern Correctional Institution	Shaneese Melton	Berry Mwamba
Tabor Correctional Institution	Megan Locklear	Shauna Cox
Tyrrell Prison Work Farm	CO Ricky Smith	
Wake Correctional Center	Sarah Fletcher	Sadie Barlow-Keith
Warren Correctional Institution	Stacey Collier	
Western Correctional Center for Women	Bonnie Crump	
Wilkes Correctional Center	Ricky Seeley	Kimberly West

## A CALL FOR PUBLICATION STAFF/REPORTERS

Are you a good writer, or editor? Want to be a part of The *North Carolina Prison News Today* (NCPNT) publication team? The NCPNT is looking to fill some key roles with talented people. The following are guidelines for the two different roles managing or supporting the new statewide publication.

### Publication Staff Selection

The publication staff will be responsible for overall content for future issues of NCPNT. They will not only be writing articles for NCPNT, you will also have input on the format, layout and features included in the publication. Those wanting to apply for one of the four positions must provide a letter to your facility staff liaison. The liaison will submit your application to the warden's office. The warden's office will select qualified persons and send application letters forward to be considered for one of only four positions.

Applicants must be housed in a male/ medium custody facility. Applicants must be willing to transfer to Nash Correctional Institution where the publication will be produced. Applicants cannot have any disciplinary infractions

for the last year, and no assaultive disciplinary ever. In the letter, applicants must include each of the following:

1. Have at least a high school diploma or High School Equivalency or GED
2. Above average writing skills
3. Explain in 100 words or less why they want to work on the publication
4. Submit a writing sample on any topic
5. Any graphic design experience especially if skilled in using Adobe Creative Suite software such as InDesign and/or Illustrator (Please provide details on your experience)

Writing samples need to be at least 100 words, or more, and can be about any topic. Individuals who have graphic design skills will also be considered. Please include information on any graphic design experience you have. If you have experience working with Adobe Creative Suite products like InDesign and Illustrator that is a major plus and should be stated in your letter.

### Facility Reporter Designee (All facilities)

Designated facility reporters will write about events and other happenings at their facility. Eventually, the division will have one facility reporter per facility, per custody level. Those who want to be a facility reporter, must apply and be selected by the warden's office for one of the facility reporter roles. Applicants must have no disciplinary infractions for the last year.

Provide your letter of application to your facility staff liaison to get to the warden's office. In the letter, applicants must include each of the following:

1. Your name
2. OPUS number
3. Facility where you are currently housed
4. A writing sample that will need to be at least 100 words about any topic

These items for applying for one of the roles must be submitted to your facility liaison NO LATER THAN October 31.

If selected for one of the roles, you will receive notification about your selection, along with instructions on next steps. We look forward to seeing your applications and how many talented individuals will apply!





# NCDAC CONSTRUCTION APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAM BUILDS FUTURES

(NOW PART OF THE DIVISION OF ENGINEERING, CONSTRUCTION, AND MAINTENANCE)

Are you good with your hands? Do you want to become a journey-level construction worker? The Construction Apprenticeship Program (CAP) teaches the construction trades and skills that could lead jobs that pay well in the public and private sector or possibly even running your own business upon release.

We are looking for incarcerated persons who want to learn, want to expand their current knowledge, and want to establish a solid foundation for a real skill that can be used after release. You could be paid to work on government buildings and renovations across the state. The trades you could be trained in:

- Concrete Finishing
- Masonry
- Carpentry
- Plumbing
- Sheetrock Finishing
- Welding
- Electrical
- Electronics
- Duct Fabrication
- Heating, Ventilation, and Air Conditioning (HVAC)

To find out how you may apply to get involved in the apprenticeship program, see your case manager for a CAP application.

Trustworthy, energized, and collaborative individuals will even qualify for Temporary Solutions contract positions with NCDAC Support Services upon their re-entry back into society!



Not Just Making It Right. Making It Better.

## Correction Enterprises Wants to Help You Sew Up A Career!

*Are you looking to get paid to work and learn new skills that may lead to a career? Check out the following opportunities from Correction Enterprises.*

*Submit job request to your case manager, program supervisor, or assignment coordinator.*

### Sewing Plant Opportunities

Skills/qualifications needed to apply:

- Ability to work in a supervised environment
- Willingness to learn to operate manufacturing equipment
- Minimum computer skills required for machine operation and inventory management/offender clerk
- Physical ability to perform job requirements
- Ability to use tools required for job functions
- Ability to use personal protective equipment (PPE) properly

#### Sewing Machine Operator

North Carolina Correctional Institution for Women

Applicants for the above must also meet the following requirements:

- Female Minimum, Medium and Close Custody Level
- 30-day infraction free
- Vision (with or without corrective lenses) necessary for product inspection
- Ability to routinely stoop, bend, sit or stand for extended periods of time as required by the position

#### Sewing Machine Operator-Brio Cutting

Tabor Correctional Institution

#### Sewing Machine Operator

Columbus Correctional Institution  
Mountain View Correctional Institution  
Scotland Correctional Institution

Applicants for the above must also meet the following requirements:

- Medium Custody Level
- 30-day infraction free
- 30 years of age or older if conviction consists of assaultive crime Policy Number E .3103(J)
- Vision (with or without corrective lenses) necessary for product inspection
- Ability to routinely stoop, bend, sit or stand for extended periods of time as required by the position

#### Braille Operator

Scotland Correctional Institution &  
North Carolina Correctional Institution for Women

Skills/qualifications needed to apply:

- High School Diploma or GED
- United States Citizenship
- Test Scores of 10.00 or higher
- IQ of 92 or higher
- 6 years or more left to serve on sentence

Applicants for the above must also meet the following requirements:

- E.3103(j) Offender Assignment Procedures: No male offender under the age of 30 with a conviction of an assaultive crime (Male Offenders Only)
- Males: Medium custody
- Females: All custody levels
- 30-Day Disciplinary Clear
- Clean Drug Screens for 1 year
- Must be able to perform Essential Functions (or must follow ADA process)