



Oregon CURE

Citizens United for the Rehabilitation of Errants
A Newsletter for Families and Friends of Incarcerated Individuals

1631 NE Broadway, #460 Portland, OR 97232
(503) 977-9979 (Portland Area) 1-877-357-CURE (Outside Portland)

USA CURE Board Meeting

Early May found Gretchen Vala, chair of Oregon CURE and Michele Esser, recently elected vice-chair of Oregon CURE, in Washington DC to attend the annual Board Meeting for USA state and issue chapters. The weekend began with Michele attending the "Leadership Training Workshop" and although Oregon CURE has been incorporated in Oregon since the early 90's, as a grass roots, nonprofit advocacy group, we have guidelines to help us conduct our chapters in accordance with the goals of the parent organization. USA CURE is a non-denominational, totally inclusive, organization with a passion for altering the course of our criminal justice system from harsh, retributive sentences to prevention, intervention and rehabilitation.

The meeting opened with self introductions and chapter reports from all of the representatives from state and issue chapters present. It is extremely encouraging to hear the progress that other states have made at the legislative level. We have some work to do in Oregon! However, the majority of states present have not yet been able to build a relationship with their DOC administration - and they look to Oregon for assistance on how to open that door.

The business meeting began with a review of our organizational by-laws. USA CURE is incorporated in Washington DC, and there have been recent changes to DC non-profit laws. Gretchen Vala was a member of this committee and put in untold hours over the last year with the other by-laws committee members to bring USA CURE into compliance. We devoted a substantial amount of time at the board meeting to review the recommendations, make changes - and within the next two days - we completed the evaluation - and passed the bylaws! Hurrah!

The best part of the meeting began on Monday, May 5 with the guest speakers invited in by CURE's founders, Charlie and Pauline Sullivan. If you ever have an opportunity to meet these two open minded and compassionate people, I urge you to do so! They have devoted their lives to the causes of CURE - and they never - ever - ever give up! The guest speakers provided information and updates on: The Clemency Project, The Campaign for Fair Sentencing of Youth, The FCC prisoner phone victory (see the article in this issue about CURE's eTc campaign), the American Correctional Association, PREA (Prison Rape Elimination Act) and the Americans with Disabilities Act (relative to jails and prisons).

When in DC, one must visit Oregon's lawmakers on the Hill! Our time was limited, but we did manage to fit in a visit with Adrian Anderson in Representative Suzanne Bonamici's office who is the state representative for both Gretchen and Michele. Representative Bonamici has signed on as a co-sponsor for HR1318, the Youth PROMISE act, which is an acronym for Prison Reduction through Opportunities, Mentoring, Intervention, Support and Education. The Youth PROMISE Act is focused on evidence-based community prevention and intervention efforts that prevent and address youth violence, juvenile delinquency, illegal drugs and gang crime. Basically - it will help keep youth OUT of prison and stop that cycle before it starts.

We then proceeded to the offices of Senators Jeff Merkely and Ron Wyden, where we met with their legislative assistants, Bethany Miller and Thomas Brunett, respectively. We were extremely impressed - because - do you know what? They did their homework! They looked up information about S1307 and promised to meet with the senators to discuss the importance of passing this preventative legislation.

The 3 days were over - we were exhausted yet infused with a desire to spread the word - and move this work forward!

Publication Notice

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Contributions and Inquiries can be directed to:

Oregon CURE
1631 NE Broadway, #460
Portland, OR 97232
Telephone: (503) 977-9979
(Portland area)
1-877-357-CURE (2873) (Outside Portland)

Website: www.oregoncure.org

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Oregon CURE is not a service organization. Do not send us any legal documents. We are not a legal service. We are not qualified to assist you in legal matters.

From the Editor:

This month's newsletter is jam packed with news and articles. Our front page article gives you an idea of the busy weekend Gretchen and Michele spent in Washington D.C. at the CURE National Convention in May. Kay Perry from Michigan CURE updates us on prison telephone issues.

Check out the article "Removing Barriers" which tells about the campaign across the country to "ban the box" on employment applications. Rebecca's article on women in prison is enlightening.

Do check out our website at www.oregoncure.org. We have the latest on Support Groups and Intake and Release Orientations. You will also find CURE Newsletters through 2013 and Prison Newsletters from Coffee Creek Correctional Facility, Deer Ridge, OSP, Powder River, Shutter Creek, Snake River and Two Rivers.

Our board of directors have undergone changes. See the list of officers and directors in the column to the left.

We are grateful for your continued support.
Bonnie

Recommended Reading by Kris Vala

"Keeping the Peace - Mindfulness and Public Service" written by Thich Nhat Hanh, a Vietnamese Buddhist monk nominated for a Nobel Peace Prize by Martin Luther King, Jr., begins with a forward by Cheri Maples, Administrator of Community Corrections for Wisconsin.

Ms. Maples attended a retreat that this book was based on where public safety professionals shared the fears and suffering they deal with on a daily basis. She learned that we can transform ourselves and our communities, including our workplaces, by using mindfulness to bring peace and compassion. Ms. Maples found that being effective did not depend on her authority, but on this power of community.

Thich Nhat Hanh dedicated this book "to those whose job it is to keep the peace". This means not only for people in law enforcement, but for all of us. He shares insights on how to achieve compassion and calmness and practice these in our lives through walking meditation, mindful breathing, and mindful consumption.

To prevent violence, we need to heal the violence within us and learn to transform situations towards peaceful resolutions.

Thich Nhat Hanh offers us the tools and guidance to learn these skills. He shows us how to build a code of ethics to create safe environments that ease the suffering rather than increase the pain.

Renew your Membership to Oregon CURE Today!!

Send your Member donation to:

Oregon CURE 1631 NE Broadway #460, Portland, OR 97232

Be sure to include: Your Name, Address, City, State and Zip, Phone/Email, Name of Adult in Custody with SID# and Facility

Type of Donation: Adult in Custody: \$3 Individual: \$15
Sustaining: \$50 - \$100

Family: \$25

US Incarceration Rates of Women on the Rise, by Rebecca Read

Over 200 people from around the region attended the April 23rd panel discussion featuring Piper Kerman, best-selling author of *Orange is the New Black*, now a Netflix television series. This event was sponsored by the Partnership for Safety and Justice, an organization that advocates for more effective and just public safety policies in Oregon by working with those who are victims of crimes, those convicted of crimes, and the families of both. Since leaving prison Kerman has been an activist spreading awareness about the increase in incarceration of women and the impact it has on them, and on their communities.

Joining Kerman on the panel was Fariborz Pakseresht, Director of the Oregon Youth Authority, Alverda McCoy, Re-Entry Navigator at the Re-Entry Transition Center (a Mercy Corps NW project), and State Representative Jennifer Williams, who served as moderator.

The panel began with statistics. In the past 30 years, in the US, there has been an 800 percent increase in the incarceration of women, a majority of which are serving sentences for non-violent and drug offenses. A major factor in this increase is that courts are required to use mandatory minimum sentencing guidelines, which sends more women to prison than to probation for their crimes.

Oregon currently houses nearly 1,300 women. Of these women over a third enter without a high school education, 64% experience mental health issues, 87% have drug addictions, and 21% have had suicidal tendencies. In addition, forty percent of incarcerated women have been the victims of sexual abuse. These are formidable challenges for any woman. For incarcerated women, and those newly released, it is daunting. Some experts equate the effects of abuse, drug addiction and chronic mental illness to be similar to PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder), and believe women and youth would be better served with treatment not correctional institutionalization.

The Oregon Youth Authority has as its mission to find ways to reconnect youth to themselves and to the community. Problems arise when youth are disconnected and don't have supports at home, school, among peers, or in the greater community. Research shows that foster children have a higher risk of entering the correctional system because of the inconsistency they may experience in their lives, and lack of supports. Therefore, skill building is an important aspect of OYA programs, which help build emotional stability, improve communication skills, building empathy, and coping and resiliency skills. Girls may have an edge over boys in some of these skills that rely on verbal communications.

Transitional services are an important factor in the successful re-entry of former adults in custody. In many communities more transitional housing is needed for women. The Re-Entry Transitional Center reports that the current 90-days to transition allotment is insufficient for women to get a foothold on employment, treatment schedules, parole requirements, and re-establishing family responsibilities. What's needed is outreach in order to connect women with services. Mercy Corps Preservation Program helps women and kids stay together, and the Department of Human Services and other agencies work together to help women get their kids back.

In this country, we are witnessing "mass incarceration", said Piper Kerman, and intervention not incarceration is what she believes will get us out of this crisis. Women need early intervention help. Programs in the community can help them "find their feet" in work, family, housing and health. And the price tag, Kerman said, would be cheaper than prisons. Kerman explained that throughout US history prisons have been used as a control mechanism, to marginalize portions of society. Today, looking at the racial breakdown of prison populations, one questions the disproportionately high number of blacks, Latinos, and Native Americans as being a result of this control. Poverty, racism, mental illness, and addiction contribute to the marginalization of people.

The panel agreed that early intervention and rehabilitation programs will be a more effective way to reduce prison populations and strengthen communities. Attendees were encouraged to look at how local and state funding is allocated for public safety. In 2013, the Oregon legislature passed HB 3194 a provision to flatline prison growth for the next five years. They created the Justice Reinvestment Grants, which distributes savings from averted prison growth into community-based programs. These programs are supposed to help people succeed outside of prison, such as community corrections, re-entry programs, addiction treatment and mental health services. In addition, access to victim services is another resource in this strategy. Please check to see how these funds are being used in your community, and speak up if you do not feel these funds are hitting the right targets. Panelists also cautioned that legislators are not always educated about good practices. Your voice and input are valuable.

Removing Barriers: A Fair Chance for All

It's time to provide a fair chance for all who work, and ban "the box" - the section of employment applications where applicants must disclose arrest or conviction. We need to reduce the number of barriers that stand between people with records and finding stable housing, employment and the promise of a sustainable future.

By removing this barrier to employment, we can give a fair chance to thousands of Oregonians who just want to support their families. A recent study found that 65% of women with felonies on their record rely on family members for support. For men, it's 83%.

Employment and housing are the most important influences for decreasing recidivism. Two years after release, twice as many employed people with records had avoided running into trouble with the law, compared to their unemployed counterparts. A steady job provides not just financial resource, but also connections to a new community that can help reduce the risk of recidivism.

People of color are often disproportionately represented in prison populations. This is a systemic problem that can only be addressed entirely by systemic change, but "banning the box" is one step we can take to ensure our communities have a fair chance at contributing positively to our city.

Finding and securing adequate housing is one of the most difficult challenges faced by formerly incarcerated people, and homelessness is very prevalent. One-tenth of individuals entering prisons have recently been homeless, and at least as many of those who leave prison end up homeless as well. Passing Fair Chance Policies is so critical to creating a more equitable community.

Who has 'Banned the Box?'

The Facts

More than 32,354 people in Oregon are currently incarcerated or on community supervision and consequently face employment and housing discrimination. Nearly 11% of those under Department of Corrections supervision in Oregon are African American while the states as whole is only 2% African American, creating greater barriers to employment and housing stability for this population and their families.

Removing questions about criminal history from job and housing applications is an effective policy to ease hiring barriers and to create fair chances for all people with previous arrests or conviction records to compete for jobs.

The Problem

Employers are not hiring people with previous convictions. In Oregon, even as the economy is improving, it is still difficult for people with records to find work. Research affirms that a criminal record reduces the likelihood of a job callback by nearly 50%. Blanket exclusions on housing applications for people with previous convictions creates barriers to housing and leads to homelessness.

Employment and stable housing is the most effective tool to reduce recidivism (returning to prison), resulting in a safer community and lower cost to tax payers.

What is The Box?

The "box" is that spot on many employment and housing applications that asks whether the applicant has been convicted of a crime or been incarcerated. Some employment applications may even inquire into arrests.

In one city, prior to the ordinance, only 6% of people with tarnished records were able to find work. After the Ban the Box measure was passed, this figure jumped to 60%, without any increase in theft or violence in the workplace.

What the Fair Chance for All ordinance in the City of Portland will do:

This Ordinance, removes the question "Have you ever been convicted of a felony or a misdemeanor?" from job and housing applications and provides basic protections from discrimination for people with records. In doing so, the Fair Chance for All ordinance creates an opportunity for job applicants with criminal records to present themselves and their qualifications as a whole package, and provide opportunities for fair housing selection.

All across the country, people are recognizing the importance of Ban the Box. In the past few years alone, Ban the Box legislation has been passed in more than 50 jurisdictions and 10 states, including Massachusetts, Connecticut, California, Minnesota, Hawaii, New Mexico, and Colorado, as well as in cities such as, Jacksonville, Memphis, Richmond and Atlanta. This is the year to pass Ban the Box in the City of Portland!

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Removing Barriers (continued from page 4)

What it WILL do

- Allow applicants to explain their previous convictions at the interview stage, if they have been deemed otherwise qualified for the job;
- Require employers and landlords to only deny applicants based on their criminal histories IF the employer determines that there is a direct relationship between a job and an applicant's criminal history; or if an applicant poses a threat to other tenants
- Clear employers and landlords of liability if they hire people with records, to encourage employers to feel comfortable giving hiring people with criminal records

What it WON'T do

- Will not prevent employers from asking for a criminal background check;
- Will not override any law that mandates people with certain convictions from working in particular occupations- (children, elderly, financial, etc.);

Get Involved

Take action, and bring Fair Chance to Portland and start building equitable communities.

Personal Endorsements

State Senator Chip Shields (SD 22)

Endorsing Organizations

Better People
Bridges to Change
Constructing Hope
Fair Share Research and Education fund
Hands Across the Bridge
Iron Tribe
Multnomah County
Northwest Oregon Labor Council
Oregon Action
Oregon AFL-CIO
Oregon Cure
Oregon Opportunity Network
Oregon Tradeswomen, Inc
Partnership for Safety and Justice
PHOENIX Rising
Roofers Union local 49
Rosewood Endowment
United Food and Commercial Workers local 555
Urban League of Portland
Voz

Sponsors

The Oregon AFL-CIO
Oregon Action
The Urban League of Portland

Coffee Creek Family Day Short But Sweet, by Rebecca Read

Mother Nature was working overtime in Wilsonville on July 13th when a localized lightning storm just wouldn't move on. Attendees at day-two of the annual Coffee Creek Correctional Facility TACE event (Through the Eyes of a Child) were delayed in getting out to the yard for the activities because of lightning strikes, and then dismissed early for safety reasons.

This two-day event (created and sponsored by the Wilsonville Rotary Club since 2003) is a much-anticipated day of fun, where women adults in custody and their families enjoy crafts and games for the kids, and a BBQ. Before the cancellation I got a chance to meet and talk with some of the Coffee Creek volunteers. I was impressed with their hospitality and enthusiasm. One woman said she's witnessed the positive effect this event has on the moms who get to see their kids, and the uplifted spirits that are felt throughout the prison afterwards.

Volunteers who attended day-one on Saturday reported being treated to sweltering-hot temperatures in the 90s. What a difference a day makes. On Sunday we did get about an hour into the event and saw kids dashing around with their loved ones enjoying the clowns, getting their faces painted, playing games, and getting creative at the craft tables. This is a wonderful event and I encourage people to volunteer at TACE next year, or find another volunteer opportunity to make a difference. For more information contact the Wilsonville Rotary Club at www.wilsonvillerotary.com

Lifer's Club Welcomes Board

On July 10th the CURE Board of Directors shared an evening with the OSP Lifer's Club in Salem. After brief presentations by Club President Trevor W and CURE President Gretchen V, and introductions by CURE board members, a lively discussion was held on important issues such as parole and review hearings, health care at the prison, and visitation policies to name a few. The CURE Board appreciates the valuable input and plans to meet with the club twice yearly to build the partnership.

Honoring CURE's Telephone Heroes by Kay Perry, Michigan CURE

eTc Campaign Coordinator May 5, 2014

Charlie's recent search of CURE official documents revealed that the board of CURE first discussed prison telephone issues in its meeting in Philadelphia in 1989. Coincidentally, that was the first CURE board meeting I ever attended. It is worth noting that 25 years later, we are still talking about prison phones - but now with a possible light at the end of the tunnel.

When we first began focusing on this issue, nearly all calls from prisons were collect. (Nebraska was the exception.) There were very high charges just to connect a call (over \$3.00 in some cases.) Interstate rates were almost universally much higher than intrastate rates.

One of our first efforts was to push for a Billed Party Preference System, which would have allowed anyone receiving a call to select a carrier of their choice. We argued that that was the only way to introduce competition into the market and that competition was essential to lowering the prices. We were eventually convinced to abandon that approach, because the technology would not support it.

In 2000, CURE launched the eTc Campaign, modeled after a pilot campaign in Michigan the year before. Working in an abandoned meat packing plant, over 100 volunteers worked for several months to assemble 32,912 customized packets of materials that included over 750,000 pieces of paper and required 343 mailbags. We delivered them to the post office in several pickup trucks to be mailed to individuals in each of the 50 states. The packets, with holiday-themed advocacy materials argued that we needed debit calling (Nebraska was our only model) and lower rates.

Slowly - oh so slowly - we began to see states introduce debit calling or lower the prices. A few more states began offering debit calling. We began to see lower rates and a flattening of rates (i.e. less disparity between intra- and inter-state rates).

By 2002, we were aware of litigation in 16 states. None of it resulted in success. We also saw quite a bit of legislation; most of it was never enacted. CURE became part of one of a class action lawsuit that was ultimately referred to the Federal Communications Commission on August 22, 2001. That resulted in what is called a Petition for Rulemaking that was filed with the FCC on October 31, 2003.

The challenge in discussing this phase of the campaign is not leaving out the many people who helped. In addition to our honorees, ~~we~~ had help from pro bono attorney Chris Bjornson, Nation Inside, Prison Legal News, and Cheryl Leanza. We are now receiving assistance from Professor Angela Campbell at Georgetown Law School and her associates Mr. Mackey and Mr. Schwartzman. Many people have assisted. We are going to focus on two individuals. Attorney Frank Krogh presented data to the FCC that demonstrated that the actual cost of providing phone services was far less than what was being charged. He argued that the FCC should set benchmark rates of \$0.21 per minute for debit and prepaid calls and \$0.25 per minute for collect calls. The concept of benchmark rates is a critical aspect of the eventual ruling by the FCC. Despite the protracted time lines, there were numerous documents to be filed and always deadlines. Frank was there, he was on point, and he was quick enough to allow time for all of us to read and respond to those filings. At one point, he reached me when I was in Europe with Charlie, planning for an International CURE Conference. Despite differences in time zones, we connected in time to meet the FCC deadline.

When changes in Frank's employment status made it impossible for him to continue, he recruited Lee Petro. (Recruiting might be too kind a word as I understand there may have been some serious arm-twisting.) Working with the great groundwork laid by Frank, Lee argued that the \$0.21 and \$0.25 rates were actually too high, based upon the changing market. (By 2008 or 2009, New York was offering all calls from prison for less than \$0.04 per minute!) Lee argued for rates of 7¢ per minute. Lee also took up the challenge of ancillary charges, i.e. fees charged for making a deposit to a phone account, for closing an account, or for an inactive account.

Finally, when the FCC did take action (in 2013 - 10 years after the initial filing), they set benchmark rates of \$0.21 and \$0.25 per minute for interstate rates. They required phone companies to cost-justify any rates higher than the safe-harbor rates of \$0.12 and \$0.14 per minute (recognition that the benchmarks were likely too high). And, they required phone companies to cost-justify ancillary charges. Everything our terrific attorneys asked for! And, the changes applied to all jails and prisons.

It is important to note that the safe harbor rates and associated cost justification as well as the cost justification for the ancillary charges are now stayed by the Circuit Court in DC. And, the FCC is still looking into the issue of the costs for intrastate calls. We now have more hope for relief than we have had in 25 years. The FCC has validated our claims, and we are hopeful that the courts will support those rulings.

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Honoring CURE's Telephone Heroes (continued from page 6)

This has been a long journey. The success would not be possible were it not for the dedicated and tenacious attorneys who hung in there despite the frustrations and with many other demands on their time. We would be remiss if we did not also mention Mignon Clyburn, acting Chair of the Federal Communications Commission who played a key role in the FCC decision. Please join me in showing CURE's appreciation for their efforts!

SUPPORT GROUP NEWS

Beaverton Latinos Support Group (formerly Hillsboro Support Group) - This group now meets at the Tualatin Valley Fire and Rescue (TVFR) Fire Station #67, 13810 SW Farmington Road, Beaverton 97005 (between Cedar Hills Blvd and Murray Rd). It is a bi-lingual, Spanish-speakers meeting to serve the Latino community. Please help spread the word about the group.

Beaverton Support Group - In July, the group hosted guest speaker Dawnell Meyer, DOC Administrator for Education and Training.

Salem Support Group - In June, the group hosted Kim Brockamp, DOC Assistant Director for Offender Management and Rehabilitation.

Eugene Support Group - The group has been conducting meetings "potluck-style" which sounds like a great way to gather together and support one another!

Affordable Care Act (ACA) and Medicaid for the Reentry Populations

The Department of Corrections is assisting adults in custody nearing their release date to acquire health care benefits. Reentry Benefits Coordinator Shawn Cost-Streety will be contacting those inmates to aid in enrolling them in either Cover Oregon or Medicaid, depending on their age.

For Adults Who Will be Age 64 or Younger at the Time of Release from Prison:

Beginning late February 2014, the Oregon Department of Corrections began assisting persons age 64 and under who are releasing from a DOC prison to enroll for health care benefits through Cover Oregon. Cover Oregon is the statewide entity responsible for implementing the new Affordable Health Care Act.

If the adult will be age 64 or under when they release from prison, Ms. Cost-Streety, DOC's Reentry Benefits Coordinator will contact the release counselor to schedule a call-out so she can meet with the person a few weeks before they release from prison. Ms. Cost-Streety will provide a 'checklist' of information that they will need to have available (or know the answers to) for the meeting with her.

The adults in custody do NOT need to do anything prior to being contacted close to their release from prison date.

For Adults Who Will be Age 65 or Older at the Time of Release from Prison:

The Oregon Department of Corrections assists persons age 65 and older who are releasing from a DOC prison to enroll for Medicaid benefits prior to their release from prison.

To be eligible, the person must be age 65 or older at time of release from prison. They must have been born in the United States and have a Certified Birth Certificate that indicates proof of U.S. citizenship or a Consular Report of Birth Abroad, and their assets cannot exceed \$2,000 (cash, property, automobiles, life insurance, and such).

The Coordinator will work with each individual to complete the application process. She will contact the release counselor to schedule a call-out approximately 75 days prior to the individual's release date.

Individuals must have the following information in their DOC release packet/file:

- Certified Birth Certificate or Consular Report of Birth Abroad
- Social Security Card (or replacement card)

Questions can be directed to Shawn Cost-Streety, Reentry Benefits Coordinator.

Important Notes:

"Release from prison date" equals:

- Short-term Transitional Leave" date, AIP Non-Prison Leave (Transitional Leave) date
- The Parole Board's "firm release date"

Talking to Telmate

We are very grateful for the opportunity to have video calls with our loved one; we wish that it would be "as easy as 123" claimed by TELMATE in their recorded message when one phones for information.

It was anything but easy when we attempted our first effort, it was impossible! After purchasing a new computer with a web cam and making several phone calls to help set up the account and confirm that everything was in working order for our first video call, the scheduled day and time arrived. The pre test went well and the family gathered around the computer for the long awaited connection. One of the family members is 92 years old, has a heart condition, and unable to travel. She was so happy to be able to see and hear her grandson without leaving her own home. Another family member is her caretaker and also unable to make the 740 mile round trip. The video phone call was much anticipated!

Unfortunately, 7:30 a.m. Pacific Standard Time on a Sunday was chosen for an unscheduled maintenance and not even TELMATE's own operators could access their system, it was completely shut down. Between the family members who had gathered for the call we tried on three separate phones to reach TELMATE for assistance. The first person to originate a call finally hung up after 49 minutes. Another family member was able to speak to someone sooner, only to be told that there was nothing they could do, that they were not aware of the maintenance either. We would have to reschedule another day and would have to make further efforts to have our loved one's account credited for the missed visit.

It was complicated, frustrating, and heartbreaking, and we can only imagine how frustrating for our loved one, but we set up another call and tried again another day. Was it as easy as 123? Not yet! The website was changed the day before and our call did not go thru, we were not allowed a connection. This time however, we were able to speak to a TELMATE representative within a few minutes and he was able to connect us to the facility and our loved one finally appeared on the screen.

Is the technology working to help families and friends be better connected? If you are very lucky, very patient, handle frustration well, and have the extra time and money, yes. Perhaps if an unscheduled maintenance is required it could be done during the night when no visits are possible, rather than taking away the most opportune call time.