

# OREGON CURE

Citizens United for the Rehabilitation of Errants

A Newsletter for Incarcerated People and their Families and Friends

P.O. Box 80193 – Portland, OR 97280 (503) 977-9979



Fall 2020, Volume 62

## MEET THE OREGON CURE BOARD OF DIRECTORS

**Have you wondered who works on Oregon CURE projects? Well, we thought you might like to know, so we're going to introduce ourselves!**

Our board includes the following- President and Correspondence Manager: Karen, Vice-President and Secretary: Terry, Treasurer and Webmaster: Paul, Assistant Treasurer and Postmaster: Steve, Newsletter Editor: Kate, and the following contributors and members at large: Cheryl, Randy, Kym and Patty.

**We are attempting to give you a little background on each of us this year, so in this newsletter we are sharing from Randy and Kym:**

**From Randy:** Robert (Randy) Geer worked for the Oregon Department of Corrections for nearly thirty-three years. He began his career as a Correctional Officer in 1983 at the Oregon State Penitentiary. He ended his career as the Administrator of Inmate Services statewide at the ODOC central office. Among the different positions he held in between were Recreational Specialist, Recreation Yard Supervisor, Activities Manager, Operations Coordinator for New Prison Construction, statewide Emergency Preparedness Coordinator, and statewide Administrator of Mail and Libraries. Among the more noteworthy projects Randy worked on over the years were in-cell televisions, distance visiting, phone calls between Adults-in-Custody and their families, cultural celebrations, music concerts, music players, the PRAS rule, Breaking Barriers, Pathfinders, and visitation. Randy retired in April of 2016. Randy spent his formative years working directly with prison populations and he continued to endorse and practice a cooperative approach to corrections throughout his career.

What makes Randy's story unique is that he is a second generation correctional professional. His father was killed by an inmate at the Oregon State Penitentiary in April 1972. Like Randy, Bob Geer believed in the efficacy and the humanity of allowing Adults-in-Custody to practice self-determination and social interaction. Both he and Randy believed in a model of dynamic security where inmates are engaged in positive and approved social interaction with one another and with the public. Randy originally became involved with CURE while trying to fine tune the concept of distance visiting. He is a strong believer in the CURE mission.

**From Kym:** My name is Kym and I became involved with CURE five years ago when my ordinary but wonderful life blew apart after my husband was arrested for killing a man during an altercation. I received a crash course on the justice system in Oregon. Though friends and family were supportive, those I met in the CURE support group were the only ones that really understood what I was going through because they were living it. I found the only thing that gives meaning to this experience is helping others going through it and that eventually led me to facilitating the Beaverton support group. I also began attending board meetings as my work schedule allowed. Through this experience, I was struck by how many people feel they have to hide the fact that someone they love is in prison. They are afraid of losing friendships, community standing, and even their livelihood. That isolation saddened me, and I decided doing the opposite is right for me. I tell my story; I talk about my husband and our experience. Everyone at work knows; church friends know. Many people have come to me with their stories after hearing mine. I appreciate everyone who serves on the CURE board, leads and attends support groups, supports adults in custody, and works for a fair justice system with any organization. AIC's and their family need that support at every level. I encourage people to become involved. It is comforting. It is enlightening. It is empowering. It has helped to make my life wonderful again even if it is no longer ordinary.

**Marshall Project Newsletter:** Subscribe to the free “News Inside” newsletter published by The Marshall Project specifically for incarcerated individuals. Please contact “News Inside” for your printed copy at: 156 W. 56<sup>th</sup>, Suite 701, New York City, NY 10019. For any questions you may call: 212-803-5200.

**YOU CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE BY  
contacting your legislators about issues that are important to you.**

Find your legislators at [www.oregonlegislature.gov/FindYourLegislator/](http://www.oregonlegislature.gov/FindYourLegislator/)  
It's never too late, your legislators will be back in session again before you know it.

**HELP SUPPORT OREGON CURE WHEN YOU SHOP**

**Amazon:** Help us earn .05% for all of your Amazon purchases by selecting Oregon CURE on Amazon Smile. Visit [smile.amazon.com](http://smile.amazon.com) and search for Oregon CURE. Select Oregon CURE and start shopping using the [smile.amazon.com](http://smile.amazon.com) URL every time!

**Fred Meyer:** Link your Fred Meyer rewards card with Oregon CURE and Fred Meyer's will send us a quarterly donation. It's easy! Visit [FredMeyer.com/community\\_rewards](http://FredMeyer.com/community_rewards) then Link Your Rewards Card Now. Login to your account or sign up and then search for Oregon CURE (Org # BN477).

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**Member donation form:**

**Please note:** We have now added your membership renewal date on the address label of this newsletter. If your renewal date is expired, we ask that you please renew today to continue to receive this newsletter and to continue to support our organization.

Send your membership renewal or donation to: **Oregon CURE, PO Box 80193, Portland, OR 97280.** We also accept donations through mail or through our website **[www.oregoncure.org](http://www.oregoncure.org)**!

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_ City/State/Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

(Optional):

Name of incarcerated loved one/ SID & facility: \_\_\_\_\_

I would like to volunteer my services! My skills are: \_\_\_\_\_

# OPEN HEARTS OPEN MINDS: ARTS AND DIALOG WITH INMATES

Open Hearts Open Minds (OHOM) aims to nurture and support individuals serving prison sentences through arts and dialogue to help facilitate personal transformation and growth while embedding feelings of self-respect, resiliency and personal empowerment.

Since 2007, OHOM has played a unique role inside the three prisons we work with: Two Rivers Correctional, Coffee Creek, and Columbia River. Pre-COVID, our volunteers would visit the prisons each week to lead theater, writing, or music programs, working toward an event—which are often open to the public. The success of these programs is based on the empathetic ways we engage *with* our program participants. The learning that happens in our classes extends to everyone—including the program leads, and because of this collaborative, open mindset we're able to foster enduring, authentic relationships with and among the Adults in Custody that we work with. Listening to those participating in our programs, understanding their needs and wants, and validating their humanity has positioned us as key strategic partners in the inmate's life trajectory.

Our work also supports the inmates successful launch into the outside world as they try to navigate the complexities of a return to public life. We have seen the huge impact these programs have on the individual inmates, and work to collect data to make a strong case for continued and expanded program engagement and funding.

We are working to grow OHOM to reach additional prisons across the state – attempting to build key partnerships in those places so there is a local support system in place for the prison programs as well as for returning citizens. We look to expand our role in advocating for restorative justice, the dignified and respectful treatment of inmates and support for additional programming to assist in their transition to becoming actualized citizens.

The descent of the global pandemic and ongoing wildfires have effectively brought our programs to a standstill, and until we're able to work with inmates directly again, we've been working tirelessly to execute on our 5-year strategy and think up creative ways to engage with our community, both inside and outside prison walls.

We at Open Hearts Open Minds envision a future where individuals who are going through Oregon's correctional system and those recently returning to life outside are given the respect and humanity that they deserve and the tools and support they need to survive and thrive. Partnerships are integral to this vision, and we're always eager to speak with people who are interested in supporting our cause. If you'd like to learn more, please visit our website ([openheartsoopenminds.net](http://openheartsoopenminds.net)) or email our executive director Carla Grant ([carla@openheartsoopenminds.net](mailto:carla@openheartsoopenminds.net)).

"I never knew how fun Shakespeare could be. We do things we wouldn't normally do. We learn to trust one another. We build relationships, a family, a sense of belonging, a love for the arts, a place to feel safe and work on ourselves." Amanda G., on Theatre at Coffee Creek's performance of Shakespeare's Twelfth Night 2018

## DID YOU KNOW THAT CURE IS AN ALL VOLUNTEER ORGANIZATION?

Your membership donations pay for the printing and mailing of our newsletter, our website fees, our phone line fees and our post office box fees.

Your funds go directly to pursue our mission, we do not have any paid employees, we are strictly a 501(c) 3 organization.

**Would you like to see something added to our newsletter?**

**Just let us know!**

**WE LOVE FEEDBACK** and we are always open to suggestions.

Please send us your suggestions via email at [oregoncure@gmail.com](mailto:oregoncure@gmail.com)  
or write to us at P.O. Box 80193, Portland OR 97280

# **It's time to divest from prison and invest in communities**

**By Shannon Wight and Amy Davidson**

The racism inherent in our criminal justice system is finally being widely recognized — for centuries, Black, Indigenous, Latinx and other people of color have been denied true public safety.

But this is only one of the crises that Oregon faces today. We are also dealing with the coronavirus, which has found its way into eight of our 14 prisons, thrusting a third of incarcerated Oregonians into quarantines that feel like solitary confinement, as Street Roots reported in April.

And the pandemic has also triggered a massive \$4.4 billion state budget shortfall, leaving lawmakers scrambling to preserve education, housing, Medicaid and other vital services.

All three emergencies can be addressed with the same approach that Oregon has been successfully using since 2013: We must divest from prisons and invest in communities.

We can no longer squander scarce dollars on long prison sentences that don't work. To advance safety, equity and healing, Oregon must:

- 1. Reduce the spread of COVID in prisons by safely transitioning people out early**
- 2. Close two prisons**
- 3. Pass sentencing reforms that reduce mass incarceration**
- 4. Invest in communities of color, rural communities and local public safety solutions**

Substantial early transitions from prison can preserve public safety while alleviating COVID spread.

Social distancing is the most basic coronavirus prevention strategy, but it's nearly impossible in prisons. Despite Oregon Gov. Kate Brown's incremental releases, people who are held in, work in, and live around prisons remain at serious risk.

Oregon officials said that safeguarding against COVID means lowering the prison population from 14,500 to 8,700, as reported by The Oregonian. This 40% reduction would be safe, reasonable and achievable; however, our communities would first need to strengthen community supports for crime survivors as well as for services that help system-involved people be successful. That infrastructure takes time to create.

In the meantime, we can realistically reduce the prison population significantly over the next six months by increasing the number of early transitions for people convicted of drug and property crimes or who are determined to be safe to transition and have served at least 50% of their sentence.

This approach would save taxpayer dollars, reduce coronavirus spread and stop incarcerating people who don't pose a significant safety risk.

## **Close two Oregon prisons**

Oregon's sprawling and expensive network of 14 prisons stands in the way of aligning our state's budget with our state's values.

Smaller prisons should be prioritized for closure, because that would free up more dollars and still keep the coronavirus risk down in the remaining 12 prisons.

We should also focus on closing rural prisons for public safety reasons. They have fewer programs and culturally specific services that foster rehabilitation and reduce crime. Also, people housed in rural prisons disproportionately come from the state's most populous areas, and the increased distance from home dramatically reduces family connections and hinders post-incarceration success.

Opponents of closing rural prisons argue that the local communities would suffer profound economic loss, but we can't tear some families apart to support the incomes of others. Surely our state can create a prison closure plan with economic solutions that don't rely on imprisoning people who are more wounded than helped by harsh prison sentences.

## **Reform prison sentences in the 2021 legislative session**

Oregon disproportionately polices, charges and incarcerates Black Oregonians to the point where one out of every 21 Black Oregonians is held in prison, according to 2016 data from The Sentencing Project. This, as The Oregonian reported, places Oregon seventh in the nation for our rate of incarcerating African Americans. This is not public safety.

But, Oregon has the experience we need to safely and equitably reform prison sentences. Since 2013, Oregon has kept two prisons closed, is averting \$527 million in prison spending, and is projected to reduce our prison use by 15% over 10 years.

It's a meaningful start, but we must continue reforming sentencing laws and systemically divesting from this expensive, ineffective and racist system.

## **Invest in communities of color, rural communities and local public safety services**

Shrinking prisons isn't enough to transform our response to crime. We must also invest averted prison costs into communities that have historically been underserved.

Crime survivors, particularly survivors of color, continue to have little access to culturally specific services. These limitations add greater barriers to getting help for trauma, which often results in higher rates of victimization and criminalization.

To equitably support communities that have been most harmed and least helped by our public safety system, we must invest equitably in local, culturally specific programs. We can deliver prevention, treatment, and supportive services that our communities need to be safe, strong and successful.

## **Join the fight**

Now is the time for Oregon to advance equity and healing. These proposals are bold, but we can transform our system together. Add your name at [safetyandjustice.org/petition](https://safetyandjustice.org/petition). We must divest from prisons, invest in communities and transform our response to crime and violence.

***Shannon Wight is deputy director and Amy Davidson is crime survivor program director at Partnership for Safety Justice, Oregon's leading public safety and criminal justice policy reform organization, transforming society's response to crime with innovative solutions that ensure accountability, equity and healing***

## Introducing the Oregon Pheonix Foundation

There was a movement a couple of years ago towards "Normalization" in the prison system. That means working to bring prison life as close as possible to life outside of the prison. It almost sounds like an impossible task.

One of the dynamics that would help this goal become a reality is the expanded availability of volunteer services and resources for incarcerated folks to use to further their skillsets, art, music, and theater or a host of other opportunities to provide some potential life-changing opportunities. These opportunities, along with education, offer the incarcerated individual a chance to come to a better understanding of who they are and, more importantly, who they may have the potential to become — rather than defining oneself as a "criminal" or worse, a loser.

There are many challenges with moving towards a normalization model, not the least of which is the tremendous cultural entrenchment both the incarcerated and correctional staff have in maintaining the status quo. It's safe, familiar, and comfortable. Another significant challenge is resources.

We believe that everyone who "does time" in Oregon's adult correctional system, Adults in Custody or Correctional team members, are of intrinsic value and have unlimited potential to "make a difference." Further, we affirm that these individuals want to grow as humans, personally, and professionally and share their skills and gifts. Early last year, a couple of DOC staff folks and I got together and brainstormed a foundation. We expanded our brainstorming to the leadership of The McKenzie River Gathering Foundation, along with the Oregon Community Foundation seeking advice and insight on getting this venture up and running. We started a contest for Adults in Custody to suggest a name. After hundreds of submissions from around the State, we collaboratively decided on "The Pheonix Foundation" as most representative of what we wanted to do.

The Pheonix Foundation, modeled on the Parks Department Foundation, will solicit and coordinate contributions of time, materials, and other resources to Oregon's prison system. We want to create partnerships between Oregon philanthropic and corporate communities - and Adults in Custody and staff, to promote, organize, and fund projects to benefit the prison community.

We're in the early stages of making this happen. We have Bi-laws and the initial organizational documents ready for filing. We will keep you apprised of our status and what we are doing. If you have specific questions about The Phoenix Foundation, please feel free to contact Scott Spencer-Wolff, 9837 Peppertree Lane, Tigard, OR 97224, [drscott\\_ac@iCloud.com](mailto:drscott_ac@iCloud.com) or my office number at 503-844-9145.

**OREGON CURE President and Vice-President recently met virtually with Director Peters to address some of Oregon CURE's key concerns. Here is one of the six questions we asked and the answers we were given. We hope to have space in our next newsletter for the remaining five topics we brought up for discussion.**

### **1. Reclassifying "Minimum Security" to be or at least to include house arrest.**

At least some minimum custody AIC should be considered for house arrest instead of facility housing. This would be in accordance with "normalization". Since DOC already classifies Level I and Level II minimum distinction, it should be easy to reclassify what qualifies as minimum custody to include this. Because it could be done through changing the OAR, it would not require legislative or voter approval. This would be a huge cost savings as the number of housed AIC could be reduced drastically, and it would likely reduce recidivism by providing a form of transition that would allow AIC to get their life started (working, paying bills, etc.) while still under a more rigorous supervision than post-prison supervision.

Is this being considered and what can we do to help? \_\_\_\_\_

**DOCs Response:** DOC does not have statutory authority to release adults in custody (AICs) prior to their scheduled release date; only the Governor of Oregon and the Parole Board have that authority. DOC's rulemaking authority is limited to the authority given to us by the legislature through statute (ORS 423.020), thus we cannot reclassify "minimum security" to include house arrest through a rule change. Adding "house arrest" to the minimum-security classification will require action by the Oregon State Legislature.

### **ORS 423.020 Department of Corrections duties and powers**

(1)The Department of Corrections is created. The department shall... (c)Exercise custody over those persons sentenced to a period of incarceration until such time as a lawful release authority authorizes their release.

**Due to COVID-19, meetings may be cancelled. Please call before attending.**

## RELEASE ORIENTATIONS

Release Orientations are co-facilitated by Community Corrections and Oregon CURE. Find out how you can help your recently or soon to be released loved one successfully re-enter our communities. Before attending, please phone one of the county coordinators / department listed below to confirm the date, time and location.

### **Washington County Dates**

Contact: Marcus Ford (503) 846-3494

Held Quarterly: 1st Wednesday of February, May, August, November

Time: 5:30 pm – 7:00 pm

Location: Call to Confirm (503) 977-9979 or email oregoncure@gmail.com

### **Multnomah County Dates**

Contact: (503) 988-3081 press “0” for TSU

This orientation is for family and friends of prisoners who will be released within 6 months to Multnomah County.

Time: 3rd Thursdays, 3:30 – 5:00PM

Location: Mead Building

First Floor Conference Room

421 SW 5th Avenue, Portland

### **Marion County Dates**

Contact: Kayla Thompson

(503) 540-8017 (call to confirm)

Meetings are held each January, April, July and October from 6:30-8:30 PM.

Marion County Probation and Parole

Location: Marion County Transition Center

3950 Aumsville Hwy SE, Salem, OR 97317

## INTAKE ORIENTATIONS

Intake Orientations are co-facilitated by Oregon Department of Corrections and Oregon CURE. Find out about Oregon’s prison system, the intake process, phones, mail, and visiting requirements. You will receive a packet of informational brochures. There will be opportunities to ask questions and learn how you can get through your loved one’s incarceration. Maintaining family contact is vital to your loved one’s time in prison and upon release.

### **Portland Metro Dates**

Held Quarterly: 1st Wednesdays of March, June, September, and December

Time: 5:30pm to 7:00pm

Location: Varies, please call Oregon CURE to confirm: (503) 977-9979 or email oregoncure@gmail.com

### **Salem Dates**

Held Quarterly: 3rd Thursdays of February, May, August, and November

Time: 6:30pm to 8:30pm

Location:

First Christian Church

685 Marion Street NE

Salem, OR 97301

Parlor Room

(503) 378-0050 (call to confirm)

Corner of Marion and Church streets, on the north side of downtown. There is parking on the street or in the Dept. of Energy parking lot next door. The entrance is on the west side of the building, in the parking lot.

## **Support Groups**

Oregon CURE support groups are intended for adult family members and friends only. Some topics of discussion may not be suitable for small children or pre-teens. Attend a support group and network with family members who have “been there”.

### **Beaverton Support Group**

1st Wednesdays: 7:00-8:30pm

Please call to confirm the location.

(503)977-9979

or email oregoncure@gmail.com

### **Salem Support Group**

1st Saturdays: 9:30-11:30am

The Keizer Senior Center

930 Plymouth Drive NE

Keizer, OR 97303

(503)409-3329 (Wayne)

### **Portland East Side Support Group**

Currently in the process of working with a new group leader for this support group. Details in our next newsletter.

### **Eugene Support Groups**

1st Thursdays and 3rd Tuesdays: 7:00-9:00pm

Please call to confirm location.

(541)344-7612 Dave (541)342-6817 (Don)

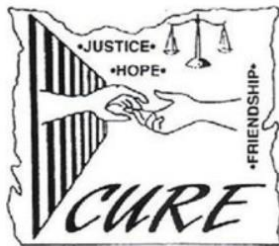
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The opinion and statements contained in this newsletter are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of Oregon CURE.

Contributions of articles, letters to the editor, notices, etc. are welcome, but may be edited or rejected for space. Articles may be copied in their entirety with credit to the author or to the publication.

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Send your member donation to: Oregon CURE, PO Box 80193, Portland, OR 97280

Website: **www.oregoncure.org** Email: **oregoncure@gmail.com**

Please fill out the member donation form in this newsletter.

Type of donation: Adult in custody: \$3/ Individual: \$15/ Family: \$25/ Sustaining: \$50-\$100/

Sponsor: \$100-\$250/ Benefactor: \$250

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