Success Stories Add Up

Statistics Show Positive Outcomes & High Client Satisfaction

By Chip Partner

Every State of the Heart newsletter celebrates the stories of individual men and women served by Spiritus Christi Prison Outreach. This issue is no different, as you'll read in our reports from Nielsen House and Jennifer House.

Something we don't celebrate as often is the collective benefit of those individual success stories on our community. As you can see in the box on this page, the cumulative outcomes achieved by the clients, staff, and volunteers of Spiritus Christi Prison Outreach are worth cheering.

We visited about 400 incarcerated men and women regularly last year, and SCPO visitation groups have served many thousands of inmates over the past 31 years.

We provided transitional housing and support last year to 102 men and women. We have housed and helped more than 1,100 people released from incarceration since Jennifer House opened in 2002 and Nielsen House in 2008.

85 percent of the men and women who complete our family reunification program succeed in rebuilding relationships with their children.

High Client Satisfaction

Before residents leave Jennifer House or Nielsen House for longer-term housing, staff members ask them to complete a detailed evaluation of the services they have received. These surveys help to ensure our programs are meeting client needs and provide feedback for improvement.

continued on page 2
Success Stories Add Up continued…

Here too the numbers are impressive. In surveys taken over the past 18 months, 92 percent of the women at Jennifer House and 100 percent of the men at Nielsen House rated their overall experience as “excellent” or “very good.”

For each of 16 specific service measures tracked by both houses, a majority of respondents gave one of these top two answers. Here are some typical resident comments:

“There should be more Nielsen Houses in Rochester.”

“Jennifer House helped me in so many ways…”

“Thank you for giving me a new start.”

“I felt comfortable and accepted and loved.”

“I will be coming back, for this is my home.”

“I will miss everyone and will recommend this House to others.”

Good Return on Investment

People who return to their communities after jail or prison without support often return to incarceration, while the majority of people served by our houses succeed in making the transition to stable, permanent housing. Most of them also succeed in maintaining sobriety and achieving progress toward their vocational and educational goals.

The cost of incarceration is estimated to be about $60,000 per inmate annually in New York State, nearly double the national average. Helping people return to productive lives after jail or prison delivers an economic benefit to the community.

“So I visit her, and knock on her door, but the bars are heavy. She is guarded and will not let me in at this time. It is in moments like this I realize that I am called to be here, on this holy ground.

At the Outreach, we must rely on the power of God to heal the people we serve. We pray, we wait, and we will knock again. In the words of Mother Teresa, “We are called to be faithful, not successful.” We faithfully visit and knock on door after door, again and again, realizing and respecting that the men and women hold the key. They may open their hearts, but only when and if they are ready.

The Spiritus Christi Prison Outreach is a ministry of presence. As we journey with men and women when they reenter the community, we are often filled with pure joy for the gift of being invited to this holy ground. We also journey with them when they struggle and suffer. We do not leave them when they relapse.

This is one of the biggest challenges that we face: Seeing a man or women who has been successful—clean and sober for years, striving to reach their goals, in college, working, being responsible—and then they relapse and return to their former lifestyle. We often see firsthand the power of addiction due to the heroin epidemic in our community. Many of the men and women coming to Jennifer House and Nielsen House have been incarcerated because of their addiction to heroin and the lifestyle required to support

Privileged to Stand with Those Who Suffer

As a ministry of Spiritus Christi Church, the Prison Outreach often benefits from the liturgical calendar and seasons of the Church. Lent is a season of soul-searching and change. It is a season for reflection and taking stock. It is a time of preparation for Holy Week, when Jesus himself spent the night in jail. He was present to those who suffered, because he himself was willing to suffer rather than run from pain. This Lenten season I thought it prudent to share some thoughts about what it means to live out the mission of the Prison Outreach.

Our mission statement is succinct: “To visit men and women who are incarcerated and journey with them as they re-enter the community.” I love to share the success of the ministry and the incredible miracles that happen daily. Yet, sometimes the stories are about being with men and women as they face their pain. At these times I am mindful of the faces that Jesus may have seen as he was incarcerated. We are often invited into privileged, holy places in a person’s life, where pain runs deep.

The following is a reflection I wrote after visiting an incarcerated women some time ago:

**Incarcerated**

The beautiful face of a woman appears before me. Her tears reveal a precious, yet ever-so-guarded heart. In a self-created prison, she lives. Her bars are made of pain from the past and fear of the future. Pain too deep to share causes her to retreat to her self-imposed cell, and protect her heart.

Here, shutting people out, she is sentenced to solitary confinement. She claims she does not care and is not affected. Yet the tears that streak down her cheeks tell a different story.

We are often invited into privileged, holy places in a person’s life, where pain runs deep.

Spring/Summer 2016
Jennifer House and Nielsen House—

We have seen this cycle in the alumni of this addiction. We see how this drug can rob a person of goals, dreams, loves, and a future. Very quickly, the high of the drug seems to lose its pleasure and the addict is using not to get high, but to avoid getting sick.

_In an addicted person, withdrawal occurs within a few hours after the last use. Symptoms of withdrawal can be drug craving, restlessness, muscle and bone pain, and vomiting. The addicted person may return to using again if he or she doesn’t get treatment for withdrawal symptoms to help break the cycle of addiction._

**University of Rochester Health Encyclopedia**

We have seen this cycle in the alumni of Jennifer House and Nielsen House—people who are not living to get high, but surviving by using so they do not get sick. The face and words of one young man comes to mind. “For seven months I have been fighting the disease. I am going to beat this. I am and I can.” Same chant, different day. His desire is so real, yet the battle is so big and he is losing. No longer getting high, he just does not want to get sick, a disease with a life that must be fed. School dreams and family put on hold while the streets of Rochester and Monroe County. We pray that this young man does not become another statistic.

At the Prison Outreach we are privileged to be with men and women who have suffered greatly in their lives and whose pain reveals itself in many mysterious ways. We try to offer comfort, offer our presence, and assure them that they are not alone. To journey with men and women as they re-enter the community means we sometimes go places we would rather not go—to jail, to rehab, to a funeral. We may not want to go, but we do because we are called to this work. We gain strength from the liturgical calendar that Easter always follows Good Friday, and springtime always follows winter.

Sometimes all we can do is “just stand,” as capture in the beautiful words of a gospel song by Donnie McClurkin:

_Stand_

After you’ve done all you can, after you’ve done all you can
After you’ve gone through the hurt, after you’ve gone through the pain
After you’ve gone through the storm, after you’ve gone through the rain
Prayed and cried, prayed and cried
Prayed and cried, oh my
After you’ve done all you can you just stand.

**Gratitude for Grants:**

The Prison Outreach is grateful for the following gifts received or awarded since publication of the Fall/Winter 2015 newsletter:

**Public**

NYS Office of Temporary Disability

**Private**

Hubertus and Helmi Behria Endowment Fund

Christine Dowd/Apple Cash Match

Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Atonement

Max and Marian Farash Charitable Foundation

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**Kim and I were at an event one evening and one of the guests asked me, “What do you do at Jennifer House?”**

After a short pause, my response to her was, “We plant seeds of love and breathe life back into women. We may not be the ones to water the seeds, or provide the sun rays of hope, but the seeds are forever planted.”

I’m not really sure where that answer came from, but it sure got me reflecting. Later that night I thought about the seeds we plant in the women who come to the house. Some women leave and we see them years later as productive members of society. They often remind me that Jennifer House is where it all started. I also thought about our strong alumni who continue to come home to Jennifer House; those are the seeds we planted, watered and nourished with hope.

Kristen Kehoe is one such woman who came to mind. Kristen had participated in jail groups for over three months at the Monroe County Correctional Facility. She was transported to Jennifer House on July 17, 2014, arriving at our door in handcuffs.

Kristen entered the house shattered by life and its hardships. She suffered from both addiction and mental health challenges. Kristen had developed challenging social survival skills that made it difficult to help her; she had a negative outlook on both the world and herself. What hurt her most is that her three children refused to speak to her because of past behavior.

Kristen was so emotionally fragmented that she entered Jennifer House with a big ball of misperceptions. She was in deep denial and lacked the ability to be honest, which made her recovery process harder in the beginning. For example, she was determined to make us believe that she had four years clean. Our staff
Kristen was so excited about being able to give back. Words cannot describe the transformation we witnessed in this powerful young lady.
Here we are again, preparing for the dawn of a new spring. With the start of a new year we have begun some exciting new ventures. We hired an alum, Jon Olsen, as house manager. Some of you met Jon at the Thursday night mass in January that celebrated the opening of both houses and know that he is very excited about his job at Nielsen House. We are also excited that one of our per diem staff members, DeeAnn Magliocco, has become a part-time case manager. DeeAnn has worked for our Outreach for just about two years, and this is a great way to start the New Year.

Nielsen House turned eight on Martin Luther King’s birthday. The day came and went with no cake or fanfare, just quiet observance of the work we do and how much it is needed. Ms. Betty Monahan had a “winterfest” back in early January out at Ellison Park. She had plans for snowboarding and winter hikes through Ellison Park, but there was no snow. We had an awesome time anyway. Her husband Alan and her daughters, granddaughter and son-in-law served us hot chili, chili dogs, chips, cornbread muffins and fresh-baked cookies from Jill Nichols—mmm, mmm, good. We thought we were going to get away without shoveling at all this winter, but Mother Nature finally spoke, with a vengeance. In February we got the snow and cold that we missed during Christmas.

We would like to thank Spiritus parishioners for answering our call for coats in the church bulletin. As with all requests, we received an abundance. The initial need was for four coats. You provided warm coats, hats, gloves and scarves to more than 20 men, women, and children, and just in the nick of time as the weather got colder. When I think of the mom and kids that benefitted from your giving it warms my heart. Thank you so much! God bless all of you.

What else is new at Nielsen House? Well, we have remained consistently full for a long while. That means we have a waiting list and no empty beds. We have a couple of blow-up mattresses to use for overflow. There’s a great bunch of men at the house. This is one of the youngest groups we have served in a while, which means we have quite a few 20-something men at the house. The face of the addicted gets younger and younger.

There is one gentleman at the house I’ll call “Bob” who has been a friend of the ministry for about 20 years, dating back to the time of Roger’s House. Bob has been at the door of Nielsen House at least three times, leaving each time before the week is up. Bob showed up on January 6, 2016, and has been here over a month this time. He is broken in his body and he needs possible knee replacement surgery. I remember when we first met and he stood upright with legs strong and able to carry 20 pounds easily. The state of his being is an example of the harm we do to our mind and bodies in active addiction, often walking out of a hospital or other care facilities before healing has taken place. We return again and again with “battle wounds” that we carry into recovery—like HIV, hepatitis, or damage to our hearts from heart attacks and strokes caused by prolonged drug use.

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Nielsen House News continued…

This is sad, I know, but that is part of what happens in the daily lives of the men we serve at Nielsen House. I spoke with a mother recently who was looking for her son. The mom knew that he had been connected to Nielsen House at one time but did not know where her son is now. In an attempt to show tough love, she had asked the son to stay away from the house in which she raised him. This mom wanted so much to trust her son, but he had lied and manipulated her and his father so many times. The morning she called, she woke up yearning for the son she had borne into the world and needing a hint of where he might be. I had some knowledge of his whereabouts through the grapevine and it was accurate information. Mom was pleased to hear that he was in the Monroe County Jail and not on the streets of Rochester during winter weather. Mom cried and thanked the staff of Nielsen House for the work we do and the time spent with her son. Mom said “I can’t trust him” and I assured her that we would trust him and not turn him away should he come asking for help. We will give tough love but assured love nonetheless.

This woman’s son is one of the many “prodigal sons and lost lambs” that Father Jim often speaks of in his homilies. We are called to serve as the arms, legs, and voice of a God who’s always there and ever present. The arms and heart spread wide and tall through each of you at Spiritus Christi, through your prayers and the way you support the men at Nielsen House. It shows in the way you give unconditionally and answer the call of the needs of our ministry. We express our gratitude by attempting to share your love in the way we serve the men and each other.

This note is short but the work goes on forever. We are looking forward to the Masses for the Prison Outreach and the Gala in April. It’s time to dress up and dance the night away for a good cause! Then spring is on the horizon. We are grateful for the seasons, winter included. God’s design is like no other and the winter is no exception. We reign in our day no matter what the weather is. The changing weather, much like our feelings, is a part of life. From a grateful staff, residents, and pets (smile) we say thank you and talk to you later.

Thank you to our current 2016 Gala sponsors

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The State of the Heart
Spring/Summer 2016

Who is Seamus Roibeard?
What New Poem Has He Penned?

Freedom’s Choices
By Seamus Roibeard

Grieve the loss,
grieve the beginning,
grieve the need to grieve.
Windblown dreams staying put
give purpose to the rage...

Always was,
could be yet...
clinging to failed beliefs
as unsatisfying friends
Provide the rush,
payoff for keeping the cage...

Lives un-lived
when death is preferred,
sought, obtained out loud.
The common good drives
further down
the souls with shoe gum worth...

Let go from within
that which jails,
binds, and comforts us.
Healing let in gets
terminally deferred
as hope never openly gives birth...

Righteous claims for a better past,
blinds today and tomorrow –
Awaken, let go of the hidden bars,
embrace life’s affirming voices.
The power within
holds freedom’s key;
Celebrate freedom’s choices...

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Thanks, Team!

We gratefully acknowledge the help of Corinne St. Martin in designing and composing our newsletter, Mike Mayfield in designing and composing the email by which our newsletters are distributed, and Sharon Castronovo in getting the newsletter out to an ever-growing email distribution list. We sincerely appreciate their talent, skill and patience!

- Chip Partner Communications Chair
- Kathleen Tranelli Board Chair

United Way

If your employer participates in the United Way Donor Designation Program, you can direct your United Way contribution to the Prison Outreach by writing in the agency ID #1384 on your pledge form. Just ask your Human Resources or Payroll department for a pledge form, or call the SCPO office at 288-0504 to request a donor designation card.
The Power of Forgiveness

Book review of Picking Cotton*

By Kathleen Tranelli

Picking Cotton is a story of persistence, faith and forgiveness. It also is a study of victim psychology, eyewitness testimony, and how police procedures contributed to false identification of a rapist.

In 1984, a student at Elon University in North Carolina was raped in her bedroom by an intruder to her apartment. She vividly remembered the details of the crime, and committed to memory the physical features of her rapist. She identified her rapist from a police lineup with certainty, based on the profound nature of human grace and her fiancée and various forms of anxiety), and she hated her rapist with all of her soul.

A black man named Ronald Cotton was arrested for the rape of the white Elon student, Jennifer Thompson. Based on prior skirmishes with the law, Ronald was pulled in to the lineup for Jennifer’s rape, and she identified him as her rapist. Ronald insisted he was innocent, but after a trial in 1985 he was convicted and sentenced to life plus 50 years in prison for rape and breaking and entering. He served eleven years of that sentence, many of them believing that he knew who the real rapist was, until ultimately he was exonerated based on DNA evidence. Jennifer’s world once again was shattered when she realized she had identified the wrong man.

Jennifer and Ronald share the harrowing details of their tragedy in the book Picking Cotton. The book “challenges our ideas of memory and judgment while demonstrating the profound nature of human grace and the healing power of forgiveness.” (From the book cover). Ronald and Jennifer both are victims of the real rapist. Ronald reveals how his faith in God and support from his family enabled him to manage his anger, maintain hope, forgive Jennifer and the real rapist and ultimately find peace in prison as an innocent man. Jennifer reveals how in turn, Ronald’s peace and forgiveness of Jennifer enabled her to overcome her heartfelt guilt for identifying the wrong man, forgive the real rapist and find peace in her life. One of her particularly striking insights is “People think that when you forgive someone, you excuse what he did. That’s not what it is. It’s about power and letting go.”

Jennifer and Ronald have become friends, and they speak about their case at events around the country. The case led to the establishment of an Innocence Project in North Carolina. Several Rochesterians have been exonerated based on DNA evidence after lengthy incarcerations with help of the Innocence Project. Last year, with support of the state District Attorneys association, legislation was introduced in the New York State Senate and Assembly to provide safeguards against wrongful convictions by changing eyewitness identification procedures and recording custodial interrogations.

I heard Jennifer and Ronald speak several years ago, and have recalled their story countless times as I witness the struggles of the men and women of Nielsen and Jennifer Houses to let go of the chains of their pasts by forgiving and accepting forgiveness. Forgiveness indeed is liberating. The lyrics of Matthew West’s song “Forgiveness” express this well:

…”It flies in the face of all your pride
It moves away the mad inside
It’s always anger’s own worst enemy
Even when the jury and the judge
Say you gotta right to hold a grudge
It’s the whisper in your ear saying
‘Set It Free’

Forgiveness

‘It’ll clear the bitterness away
It can even set a prisoner free
There is no end to what its power can do
So, let it go and be amazed
By what you see through eyes of grace
The prisoner that it really frees is you…”

Winter Celebrations

While the weather turned cold outside, the residents, staff and family members of our houses enjoyed the gift of giving and warmth of each other’s company. Pictured here are scenes from recent birthday parties, Christmas celebrations and the Winterfest hosted by Ms. Betty Monahan and family at Ellison Park. We thank the Hubertus and Helmi Behrla Toy Fund, which provided a grant to help purchase gifts for 22 children of our Nielsen House fathers and Jennifer House mothers this Christmas season.
### SCPO Board of Advisors

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Check out: [www.facebook.com/SpiritusChristiPrisonOutreach](http://www.facebook.com/SpiritusChristiPrisonOutreach) where you can find links to recent media coverage and favorite reflections of residents and staff.

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**Want A Speaker?**

Are you looking for a speaker for your club, or community group? Do you know of another church or community group who might want to learn about the Prison Outreach or support its work?

We have dynamic speakers who are anxious to tell the community about the great work the Outreach is doing to help ex-offenders transform their lives. The stories are compelling and the reduced recidivism statistics are impressive.

All we need is a name and contact information; we’ll handle the rest. Contact Jim Smith at 288-0504 for details or to schedule a speaker.