Connecting Families
One Bike at a Time
23rd Annual Community Giveback gifts bikes to children on behalf of incarcerated loved ones

by TaSin Sabir AOUON Editor/LSPC Communications Associate

The 23rd Annual Community Giveback is an event held in December where AOUON gifts bikes and other toys to children on behalf of their incarcerated loved one.

The event reminds children that they have a whole community of people who care about them, and also supports former prisoners in their efforts to positively impact their communities. It is dedicated to the memory of Robert Moody, a formerly incarcerated activist who helped initiate the project.

The Community Giveback empowers and uplifts our community, and serves as a powerful way for formerly incarcerated people to reclaim our humanity. We are motivated by love and hope, a love and hope that our community is often denied.

Over 100 children and their caretakers gathered at the Freedom and Movement Center because their loved one inside had a gift for them. Paris was one of the children who showed up with her Grandmother Kimberly. Paris is the daughter of Lance who is serving time at CA State Prison, Sacramento since Paris was 2 years old.

In an interview with Kimberly she reflects on one of the times she took Paris to visit her father.

"I asked Paris if she wanted to play in the play area and she said, 'no'. She just sat there patiently waiting to see her dad, but as soon as her dad walked out...

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Letter From Dorsey Nunn
by AOUON Co-Founder Dorsey Nunn

Dear family and friends,

Thank you for supporting Legal Services for Prisoners with Children. In a speech titled “Remaining Awake Through a Great Revolution,” Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. said, “the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice.” I believe that it is because of people like you that our struggle continues to succeed in building a more just America.

That said, we are in the Great Revolution Dr. King spoke of, and we must remain awake. Historically conservative states like Texas and Alabama have passed “progressive” California in the struggle to end slavery in America, the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice.” I believe that it is because of people like you that our struggle continues to succeed in building a more just America.

With that in mind let me share with you some of our accomplishments. We sponsored/supported statewide legislation to improve the lives of incarcerated, formerly incarcerated persons and their families. Through our aggressive litigation efforts, we are seeing prisons across California end their long-term solitary confinement units. We work to ensure our voting rights are secure and to eliminate or reduce fines and fees for Californians who are the most vulnerable. Additionally, we held our 10th annual Quest for Democracy, conducted legal webinars, and attended our national conference in Atlanta, Georgia, where we touched over 97,000 lives in advance of one of the closest elections in Georgia history. People impacted by the criminal justice system and the prison-industrial complex are able to move political mountains when we create opportunities for ourselves and our communities. Our movement springs from you—especially you who are still behind walls. Let’s keep moving together.

With deep gratitude,

[Signature]

Movement Maker

New Housing Rights in Alameda County

The last month of 2022 ended with positive news for our future housing rights. Just like we passed “ban the box” preventing criminal background checks on employment applications for larger businesses, we are doing the same for rental properties. Yesterday, Tuesday, December 20, 2022, the Wilmington Fair Chance Housing (FCH) Ordinance received a positive vote from The Alameda County Board of Supervisors, which would allow prospective tenants who are formerly incarcerated to apply for apartments in Alameda County without being asked if they have been convicted of a crime on the rental application. FCH would level the playing field by allowing us to compete for housing with non-formerly incarcerated persons based on our own merits, meaning, we must still meet the other requirements of having good credit, a good housing history, stable income, and character references, but we will no longer be screened out based on having a conviction.

The Alameda County Board will conduct a final vote in early 2023 to finalize the Ordinance. The Ordinance is scheduled to become effective upon the ending of the Executive timeout currently in place for Alameda County.

Our next step is to take Fairchance Housing statewide so that it applies throughout California! We want to remove any barriers that keep us from living our best lives after we have been released from prison and are working hard to establish living our best lives after we have been released from prison and are working hard to establish

How Fairchance Housing works: FCH does not mean we would automatically get the housing we apply for. Owners and managers select who they think will make the best tenants. FCH just ensures that we aren’t excluded based on having a past conviction. So although the rental application will no longer ask if we have been convicted of a crime, we still must qualify by having our affairs in order like anyone else. So when we get out it is important that we work to build up our credit scores, establish some positive rental histories, show we have stable incomes, and good references.

Shot out to Lee “Taqwa” Bonner who is the policy outreach leader for Alameda County for Fairchance Housing and the Housing Advocate for All of Us or None. Taqwa helped get FCH passed in the cities of Oakland and Berkeley in 2020, and is leading FCH efforts for Alameda County and state-wide.

Message: It is critical that we learn politics and not see it as something outside of ourselves. Politics means governance. Just as with anything else, there is leadership in every phase of life. In this society, the government controls the laws and public money. That means there are people in political positions (seats) who must make decisions about laws and money that affects all of us. Our aim should be to involve ourselves in a way that not only gets our voices heard, but get us into positions of power within the government ourselves so that we actually sit in the seats of power! We can do this by uniting our vote.

Prop 17 enables every California-resident over 18 the right to vote, even while on parole. This means that we, the formerly incarcerated class, are now “major constituents” of those who represent our districts. There are over one million formerly incarcerated persons living in California who have the right to vote now. If we unite our voices within our own districts into a single party of our own, we can occupy the seats from our districts, and decide who gets the seats and who does not, from related districts. With strategy and planning we can build a formerly incarcerated base of collective voices and political power and change what happens where we live, and more!

January 2023

Jesse's Corner
by Jesse Burleson LSPC/AOUON In-Custody Program Coordinator

Welcome Home

Our movement springs from you—especially you who are still behind walls. Let’s keep moving together.

Call For Art
AOUON wants to feature your original drawings or paintings!
Submit your artwork to FAM Center: AOUON News Editor 4400 Market Street Oakland, CA 94608

Comic by Jessie Milo
California State Prison - Corcoran

Letter From Jesse

AOUON News Editor
Connecting Families One Bike at a Time

(Continued from page 1)

When Paris returned home, she told her mom and grandfather with excitement, "My dad bought me this bike!"

In situations like this children’s emotions are high and outcomes are unpredictable. Through Kimberly and Lance’s quick thinking and creative parenting a visit that didn’t start off as ideal was salvaged.

In the past Lance has asked his mother, Kimberly, to buy gifts for Paris on his behalf, but those gifts were turned down by some family members telling Paris that her gifts were not from her dad, but from her grandmother. Paris, caught up in adult pettiness, had smothered away her belief in her father and his ability to provide.

But on Saturday, December 10, 2022, Paris arrived at the Freedom and Movement Center holding onto her grandmother’s hand tight, eyes low but observant, scanning the scene of families and over 100 bicycles. The event started off with families registering and then being escorted through the various stations. A testimonial area where children created thank you cards to be mailed to their loved one inside along with a photo. A helmet fitting area, face painting, food, and finally the moment when the child can select their bike.

During the event Lance called his mom Kimberly and on speaker phone I could hear Lance telling his daughter, ‘I bought you a bike. That’s why we’re here, to pick up your bike.’ He asks her, ‘Can you hear me, do you understand?’ I can only describe the look on Paris’ face as shock as she listens to her father explain to her that this gift is from him. Kimberly says, ‘I felt good going to the Giveback because I I had to submit papers and he had to put in the work and effort to get his daughter on the list to get a bike. No one can tell her that her dad didn’t get her that bike.’

Getting your first bike is a milestone and something you don’t forget. Paris will think of her dad whenever she rides that bike. Through this simple tangible gift Paris and her father are a little bit closer and hopefully when they are reunited on the outside conversations will be easier through this shared memory of when her dad gave her her first bike.

Kimberly talks about how Lance had great timing. Calling at the perfect moment during the Community Giveback.

“I said wow you called right on time. I want you to hear what Dorsey’s speaking on. And Dorsey was speaking and first he was sitting at the table and talking with me and Paris and then he stood up and got on the speaker and he was saying how he’s done 11 years and he wants to giveback and he’s been doing this for over 23 years so that lets you know how many years he’s been back. And my son was hearing, I had him on the speaker. My son was so excited and said, ‘Mom tell them you know him?’ He’s the type of person that always says thank you to someone that is doing something for his child. Every little thing I do for her. ‘Mom thank you.’ That’s why he wanted to tell Dorsey and you guys thank you. And that’s why I was like Dorsey’s on the phone and Dorsey got on the line and was explaining to him, 'man I’m about to retire, do 2-3 more years, I need some guys out to take over.’ Lance was excited. Excited to join. He was like I can do that mom.’

When the event was over Kimberly says that Paris didn’t want to leave and that when Paris returned home, she told her mom and grandfather with excitement, "My dad bought me this bike!"

A little boy proudly rides his bike.

A family spends time making cards that will be mailed to their loved one inside.

Robert Hon

How did you like the Homecoming event?

The event was well hosted. I felt comfortable and engaged and I thought the part where the staff talked about their experiences and stories was very impactful.

How has it been for you since you returned home?

It takes time, just like recovery inside it’s the same out here it takes time. I struggle on the technology side a little bit, but I have people around me that have patience and take time with me.

As far as housing there has been small issues with all the procedures that are a little overwhelming at times and adds to the challenges that are already on my plate, but I am grateful for the things they supply so I try to keep a positive perspective on everything and try to stay humble and move in a positive direction.

Tell me about your support system?

I have a good support system of 4 or 5 individuals that did time that share their experiences with me. They are further ahead than me and give me honest feedback and help me get off the ground because I didn’t get caught up in things that go on in there like peer pressure. There is a lot of pressure in there to be with the homies, to be a thing that kind of thing. I think you got to look at it like it doesn’t matter where you come from. We are from the same planet. We all live and breathe and die just like everybody else. It doesn’t matter if you are from north, south, east or west. To be honest and to be fair and truthful and do what’s right. Around 8 or 9 years in I started changing. I wanted to be successful. I have a past but I’m still focused. For the guys in there, everybody is different everybody has had a different reality. I was always the one to study and try to go to school and better myself. It’s not easy for everybody, but I know that working for me is the best way for me to go on.
January 2023

Mailbag

Flying by the Seat of my Pants

by Donald McLaurin

CTF, Solidad CA

John F. Kennedy Jr. finally got his pilot’s license so he could fly from work or the city back to his home which was across the water. One night he was flying back home and encountered a storm. He braced himself because he was new to flying and this was his first time flying in bad weather. All of a sudden the radio went out and he had no other option of communication or relaying a message. He noticed that his instruments were showing that his plane was descending but it didn’t seem like his plane was going down so he maintained his course and made no adjustments. As he continued to fly through the storm the instruments never changed its reading and he determined within himself that it was a malfunction in the panel. According to his seat the plane was not leveling down and he was flying straight; however within ten minutes his plane plunged in the water and he died in the crash. It was shocking news around the world. John F. Kennedy’s death was a tragedy and loss because he was young, possessed great potential and had a promising future. There was a major investigation to determine the cause of his death. After months of a precise and careful investigation they found that the instruments and panels were operating in perfect condition with no errors. When JFK was flying in the air he could not see anything but sky which impaired his judgement to know if he was right side up, upside down or flying at an angle. This will cause a person to think he’s flying straight because his cockpit is not moving which is commonly known as “flying by the seat of your pants.” In life we receive signals, facts and reports that tell us when we’re off course, misguided or going in the wrong direction. Even though it feels like we are okay we need to trust our instincts and our positive social networks and our higher power to protect and guide us to our destiny and purpose in life. No one can do us the worst harm but ourselves. We cannot get too comfortable and ignore universal signals that guide us to success and well-being. “We search our whole life looking around for the meaning of life when the answers have been inside of us all along”. You were born to win!

Me and My Teddy Bear

by Arnold Juarez

CTF, Solidad CA

I have a teddy bear in my cell. I don’t feel lonely. His name is Uriah and he makes me feel like a boy. I hug and kiss my soft plush teddy bear before I go to sleep. I’m playful with him. Sometimes I think he acknowledges me. He warms my heart. I offer my teddy bear Honeybun even though I don’t get an answer. When I’m away from my cell, I miss him. I read touching letter from family to Uriah One day I was weeping from sorrow in my heart and notices tears coming down my teddy bear’s eyes.
Chapter Contacts
National AOUON Headquarters
4400 Market St., Oakland, CA 94608
Phone: (415) 255-7036 x337
Fax: (415) 552-3150
AOUON National Organizer:
Oscar Flores: oscar@prisonerswithchildren.org

California
Bakersfield
Ucedrah Osby: AOUONBakersfield@gmail.com

Los Angeles/Long Beach
c/o A New Way of Life Reentry
PO Box 875288, Los Angeles, CA, 90087
Phone: (323) 563-3575
Fax: (323) 563-3445
Stephanie Jeffcoat (657) 262-0670
sjeffcoat@anewwayoflife.org

Orange County
Stephanie Jeffcoat: stephaniejeffcoat@ouon@gmail.com
Danielle Dancer: ddancertnap@gmail.com

Riverside
1390 W. 6th St.
Corona, CA 92882
Shaun Leflore: shaun@startingover-inc.org
Fidel Chagolla: fidel@startingover INC.org

Sacramento
PO Box 292967, Sacramento, CA 95829
Henry Ortiz: henry@prisonerswithchildren.org

San Bernardino
c/o A Time for Change Foundation
PO Box 25040, San Bernardino, CA 92406
Phone: (909) 886-2994
Fax: (909) 886-0218
Kim Carter: kcarterritimeforchangefoundation.org

San Diego
Curis Howard: aullouosuornonesandiego@gmail.com

Idaho
Mary Failing: maryfailing@my.cwi.edu

Illinois
Central Illinois
PO. Box 3026, Peoria, IL 61612-3026
Phone: (309) 232-8583
General Parker: centralillinoisaouon@gmail.com

Chicago
Richard Wallace: Chicago.IL.AOUON@gmail.com

Kentucky
Louisville
Savvy Shabazz: AOUONLouisville@gmail.com

Missouri
St. Louis
Patty Berger: AUONStL@gmail.com

North Carolina
Durham
Andrea "Mufflin" Hudson: AUOUNC@gmail.com

Eastern N.C.
Corey Purdie: AUOUNENC@gmail.com

Ohio
Greater Cincinnati
Zaria Davis: Cincaayouon@gmail.com

Texas
San Antonio
Steve Huerta: ALLOUUSOrNoneTexas.com

TRI-STATE
New York
Ivelisse Gilestra: AOUONNewYork@gmail.com

Northern New Jersey
PO. Box 9812, Newark, NJ 07104
Tia Ryans: AOUONNJ@gmail.com

Washington
Eastern Washington
Megan Pirie: EasternWAAOUON@gmail.com

Wisconsin
Madison
Caliph Muab-el: WIAOUON@gmail.com

Georgia
Atlanta
Walesah Wilson
(404) 860-2837

South Jersey
Ronald Pierce (732) 608-4752
r Pierce@njsj.org

South Carolina - Greenville
Angela Hurks
(864) 991-1388 (m) (854) 236-1393 (f)
stepbystephepiproject@charter.net
www.stepbystephepiproject@charter.net

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